



Vitra and the Eames Office

The Eames Office in Venice, California, which has now taken on a practically mythical status, functioned as a point of contact for the Fehlbauts in many design issues during the first years. The prevailing atmosphere in the Eames Office, which has since attained nearly mythical status, had a fundamental influence on the direction of Vitra's development.

At the outset of a project, Charles and Ray always asked themselves: „Does this problem interest us, and is there the promise of pleasure in solving it?“ What inspired the Eameses was not the desire to make things different, but to make them better. In contrast, the commercial motives of marketing are too often satisfied by conspicuous superficial differentiation. The Eameses' desire to make things better was so strong that they recognised a moral component to design. Many different aspects of an object must be considered as part of the development process, including its social context and ramifications: from manufacturing methods and materials to communicative and functional uses, from the satisfaction of need to the question of cost. The Eameses embraced the spirit of modernism in their work, including the optimistic and even idealistic belief that industrial rationalisation and mass production were basic prerequisites for social and cultural progress. Since these early encounters with the Eames Office, this viewpoint has endured at Vitra.

Under the aegis of Charles Eames' contagious enthusiasm, people with many different skills and experiences came together in a place where there was no fixed or pre-determined divisi-

on of labour. The expansive Los Angeles studio had a utopian character: seemingly immutable distinctions between work and play, collecting and research, art and science, curiosity and responsibility were dissolved in a continual process of experimentation. The underlying principle and inspirational source of this environment was the collage concept, which as a working method is evident – in one way or another – in every Eames product. It was not grounded in a purely aesthetic desire to make ‚beautiful‘ things, but was an approach to problem solving. In reference to a famous quotation by Charles, the first major monographic exhibition on the work of the Eameses, which was mounted in the 1970s, was entitled „Connections“. It alluded to the same characteristics as the collage: organised diversity and an intentional convergence of disparate materials, images, genres, disciplines, tasks and talents as a source of learning and insight. These characteristics are constant leitmotifs in the Eames oeuvre.

The collage concept became an essential and enduring impulse for the approach to work at Vitra. It was a guiding theme that shaped the development of the company in many ways: Both the seamless co-existence of twentieth-century furniture classics and innovative contemporary pieces in the product line, as well as Vitra's synchronous engagement with public and private interiors, with the topics of living and working, can be explained by the collage concept. This transversal approach to different genres has its origins in the work approach of the Eames Office. Technology and aesthetics meet in a process of reciprocal justification, which alters both groups of products and invests them with qualities that they would not achieve separately. Today, the Eames Office foundation and archive is headed by Charles' grandson Eames Demetrios. The friendship between Rolf Fehlbaum and the Eames Family has remained vital, and Vitra continues to consult with the Eames Office on all questions related to the authenticity of Eames products.

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