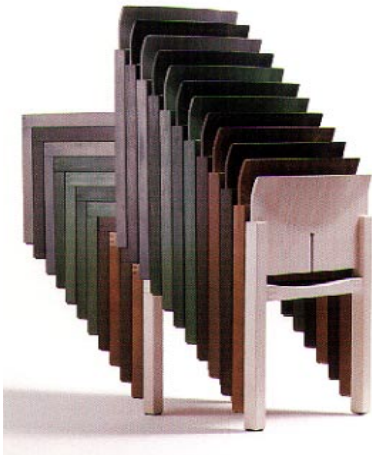


Product case studies: Bisterfeld + Weiss



Age-friendly interiors

Bisterfeld und Weiss is a well known German manufacturer of quality contract furniture which has specialised in mainstream products, tables and chairs. With an emphasis on wood-based materials and fine detailing, B+W furniture combines functionality with the warm tactile qualities of wood and fabric. With very little attractive yet ergonomically functional furniture available for older people, the company identified a clear need, and market opportunity, for furniture for the home and for more institutional settings.

The company first developed an easy chair, with a foot rest, arms that fold down to make it easier to get in and out of, and a side panel-cum-pocket for books, knitting or other personal items. This chair preserved the material and high-quality detailing of the contract furniture, reinterpreting it in a more sedate and visually stable form, and including ergonomic features to improve comfort, especially for people who spend most of their day sitting in the same place, making it ideal for use in homes and institutional care settings.

The success and appropriateness of this product speak for themselves, but the company, and their designer, Arno Votteler, were aware of an equally important gap in the market, this time for furniture which functions well for older people but is completely domestic in appearance and styling, and does away completely with the stigma associated with furniture designed specifically for the elderly. The overall concept was to produce a range which included all the elements needed to furnish a room—tables, chairs, cupboards—and make it possible to create an attractive personal environment, especially for people who live predominantly in one room, or in a small space. The range was designed to bring functionality to the domestic environment, without compromising on appearance, and to bring the warmth and taste of a domestic environment into institutional settings and sheltered housing.

The product specification was developed on the basis of market research, consultation with end users and care professionals, and with attention given to manufacturing processes and volumes, quality and appropriateness of materials and detailing, and value for money features. Design and development was carried out over a two year period; professional advice was taken on ergonomic elements; all items were given practical tests in hospitals and other settings, and user-tested for functionality and acceptability. Styling and detailing were coordinated to

produce a coherent range which offers a complete solution and convincing market proposition—a mix of durability, functionality, appearance and value that could form the basis for volume production and a good market share. The appearance of the furniture is restful which is important for older people, with attention given to the hygiene issues which are important for care managers.

The intention was to achieve a formal unity and a clear and simple product language which would integrate well into a wide range of settings; form, colour and material were carefully harmonised to communicate safety, stability and comfort, without compromising the objective of breaking the institutional mould.

