

Art with a Purpose

The *Art of Seating: 200 Years of American Design* explores chairs as art - functional and sculptural. Each chair tells a story. Some stories are about our nation's history; others are about changes in American design.

Chair designers use geometric shapes and organic shapes. Circles, squares, rectangles, triangles, and other shapes with straight edges are geometric.

Shapes inspired by forms found in nature are organic or biomorphic. These shapes usually have curvy lines.

Use both types of shapes to design two chairs for a specific purpose meaningful to you. Look at the chairs in the galleries to find geometric shapes and biomorphic shapes.



Geometric Shapes



Biomorphic Shapes



A Presentation Point to Ponder:

In the galleries, chairs are presented on pedestals or risers. Three-dimensional artworks or sculptures are typically displayed this way. How is a chair like a sculpture?

Who Sat in Brady's Chair?



Photo by Anthony Berger at the Mathew Brady Studio, *Abraham Lincoln*, 1864, albumen silver print



Front, from left: designed by Thomas E. Warren (active with American Chair Co. 1849-52), manufactured by the American Chair Co., Troy, NY, *Centripetal Spring Arm Chair*, ca. 1850, photo by Michael Koryta and Andrew VanStyn; designed and manufactured by Vivian Beer, Penland, NC, *Current*, 2004, photo by Douglas J. Eng

This page: designed by Thomas Ustick Walter, manufactured by Hammitt Desk Manufacturing Company, Philadelphia, *House of Representatives Chamber Arm Chair*, 1857, photo by Michael Koryta and Andrew VanStyn

Mathew Brady gained fame for his impactful Civil War battlefield photos. Mathew Brady's Studio became a favorite of presidents like Abraham Lincoln and other prominent Americans, including Mark Twain and John James Audubon.

President Lincoln is seated – in the photograph – on a *House of Representatives Chamber Arm Chair*, similar to the one included in *The Art of Seating*. The oak chair was given to Mathew Brady by Lincoln and was used in photographs of four subsequent presidents.

Use the clues to put these presidents in chronological order:

- A James A. Garfield
- B Andrew Johnson
- C Abraham Lincoln
- D Rutherford B. Hayes
- E Ulysses S. Grant

Write the letter of the matching president in the box:

1. He was the first president to wear a beard.
2. He is one of five “unelected” presidents.
3. This general's first name is actually Hiram.
4. This president's middle name is Birchard
5. The only ordained minister elected president is also one of two – on this list – killed by an assassin's bullet.

Story Time Think about a favorite chair. Who typically sits in it? In which room is it used? Is it covered in fabric? Is it made of wood or metal? When do you or someone else sit in this chair? What memories come to mind when you think about this chair? Share your chair story with a friend.

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