A creative portfolio
of the work entitled

Studio 05D

Created by Gabriel Consiglio for the Stamps Integrative Project over the course of the Fall 2022 and Winter 2023 terms.

1 THE TWO PIECES OF FURNITURE PROVIDED IN EACH IP STUDIO

II. Introduction

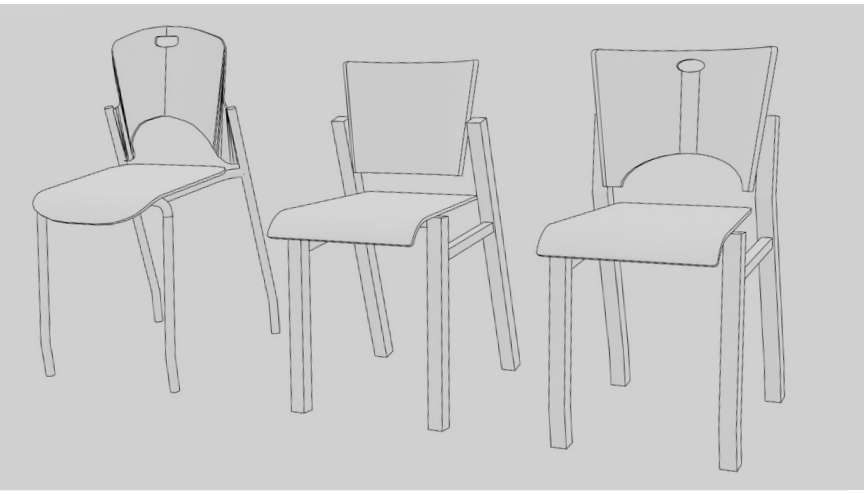
Perhaps the most familiar word to the student of art and design, putting aside fundamental principles like line and form or background and foreground, is context. Our work should always look to its periphery, to the sociopolitical and cultural landscapes it occurs within and to the canon that has preceded it. Our work should never be devoid—or worse, ignorant—of context, as it would have nowhere from which to derive meaning. Though we study and dissect the artists who came before us and how they engaged with the world around them, I found myself wondering throughout my five years of art education why we, as students of art and design, rarely look to our immediate contexts to inform our work. We don't often study the works of great artists during their education; it is usually later that we begin to regard their work as monumental. Perhaps this is why we glaze over the institution we work within when we stop to take in our surroundings. As I iterated on the concepts that would eventually be erected in the senior studios of the Stamps School of Art & Design, I realized that I could not wait to make something monumental. In "Studio 05D," I aimed to create a monument to my time spent in undergraduate art education: a piece rooted wholly in its immediate context, whose effects are most potent exhibited in the same place it was made, the works of countless contemporaries serving as its frame.

III. The Work

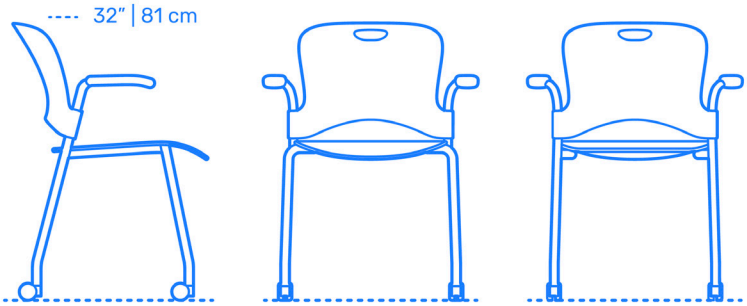
At the beginning of the Integrative Project, each student is provided with a cubicle of studio space, furnished with a simple folding table and Herman Miller 'Caper' stacking desk chair. "Studio 05D" is a recreation of these original furnishings, named for the number assigned to the specific studio that I occupied. The table, chair, and even the walls of the studio are reinterpreted in the medium of hardwood. Angular metal forms are translated into laminated curves, and structural materials like oriented strand board are laid bare in recognition of departures from the originals. A new built space is nestled into the studio where it was conceived, as the finale of a year-long project takes the form of its beginning.

The concept of "Studio 05D" lies in its rejection of concept. Taking cues from ready-made sculptures and modernist works of furniture, there are no symbols or hidden meanings to the objects presented within its installation. The forms that comprise them are constructed with simplicity in mind, remaining as close as possible to their original source while being adjusted to function in their new medium of hardwood. After months of meticulous work, what is ultimately shown in the studio space is nothing: an empty room with a table and chair, in the same state as it was given to me—and every other student of the Integrative Project—nearly a year ago, with the implication that I fill it with something of value. Yet nothing of the sort exists here. There is nothing new to be found in the plywood room I have erected, no innovation in concept or in form, yet every component has been made completely anew, emerging from solid boards wood. The work is depersonalized—depicting objects of no more significance to myself than any of the other graduating seniors exhibiting next to me—yet contradictorily intimate. Each piece of furniture presented in the work has been shaped by hand, the likenesses of mundane objects recreated from scratch in a new medium.

The writings that follow will be separated into two main sections: "How the Work Came to be" and "Why the Work Stands." The former will closely trace the making process of the installation and the furniture within it, while the latter will dig deeper into its underlying concepts and backing research.



2 EARLY ITERATIONS ON THE FORM OF THE 'CAPER' CHAIR



3 PLAN DRAWINGS OF THE 'CAPER' CHAIR, JEFF WEBER FOR HERMANN MILLER

4 ASSEMBLY OF A PROTOTYPICAL SIMPLIFIED 'CAPER' CHAIR

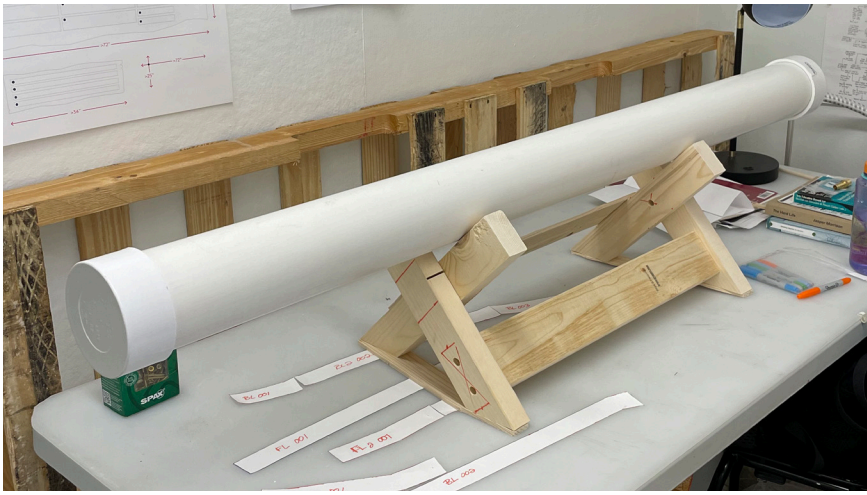
IV. How the Work Came to be

The actual design process of the objects presented in this exhibition began mostly digitally. In the earliest incarnations of Studio 05D, the Herman Miller 'Caper' chair retained its significance to my work. Then titled "The Studio of an Undergraduate Design Student," the project's intentions remained similar but its goals were to innovate and develop upon the forms given to me, rather than to present them largely unchanged. This thought process gave rise to a fair amount of dissonance, however. Questions of my goals were asked: why was this chair that I was given the pinnacle of seating design? How do I create the ultimate chair? What is a chair, anyways? These questions, after all, were not ones that primarily concerned me. I was not interested in interrogating the nature of seating but rather in using the object of this mundane, ordinary chair to interrogate the nature of the educational systems around me. If I had been provided with a Hans Wegner or a Haas Brothers piece in my studio, I would have sought to faithfully recreate that as well.

After abandoning designs that took steps too far from the 'Caper' chair, I returned to the digital design space to more accurately learn from the form. Tracing and redimensioning specs sheets from Herman Miller, I worked out where extra supports might need to be installed where they would no longer be forms of rigid metal. I took these designs into low-fidelity physical prototypes, constructing frames from strand board and investigating where they lacked stability.

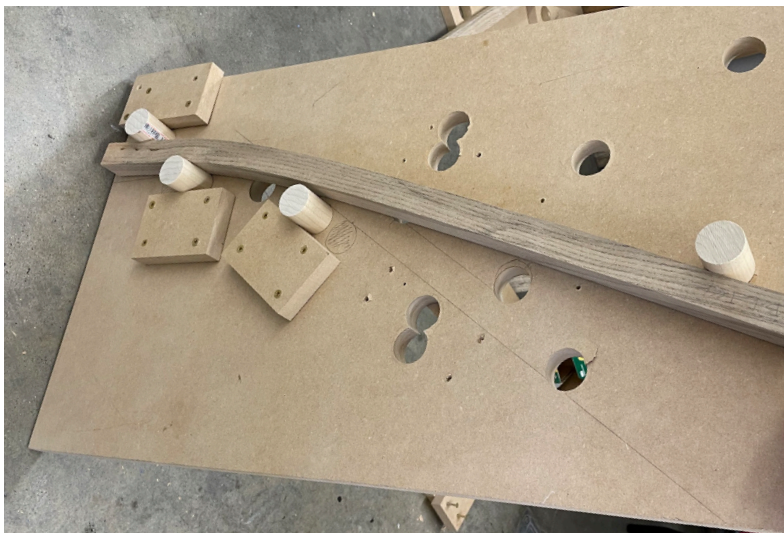
A. Steam Bending

From here, I moved into the materials that would comprise my final pieces. I broke down solid boards of ash into 1.5" by 1.5" pieces, which I intended to bend with steam. My steam bending set-up was fairly simple: a 5-foot PVC pipe was fed with steam generated by a garment steamer, with small vent holes drilled into each end and wooden dowels threading through the pipe to lift the wood placed inside away from the heated plastic. As I was attempting to bend with kiln-dried lumber, I opted to soak each piece of wood overnight to absorb moisture before steaming. The wood was steamed for an hour per inch of thickness, so my 1.5" square pieces saw 90-minute steam baths before they were placed on the bending forms. To create the shapes that these pieces would bend around, I built forms from layers of MDF. The straight portions of these forms were cut into separate pieces from the curved segments, which would allow me to alter the degree of the curves I was bending to account for springback without creating entirely new molds. Initial attempts at bending with these MDF forms can be seen here. Test bends with ¾" stock worked well, but 1" stock proved to create too much tension for the molds, with the MDF splintering around the holes drilled for attaching clamps. I failed to generate enough pressure by hand to bend 1-½" stock at all, despite an increased steam time.



5 PVC STEAMING CHAMBER

6 BENDING A TEST PIECE ON AN MDF BENDING FORM



7 BENDING A TEST PIECE ON A DOWEL-PIN BENDING FORM

8 DETAIL OF A DIMPLE LEFT FROM A DOWEL-PIN BENDING FORM

9 STRIPS BEING PASSED THROUGH THE PLANER ON AN MDF SLED

B. Strip Lamination

After difficulties bending thicker stock with my initial setup, I modified my MDF forms to suit a new method. I removed the built up layers and drilled holes for large dowel pins to be inserted along the path of the original curves. The steamed wood would be sandwiched between two dowel pins to anchor it on one end, and then bent by hand and secured with a third dowel pin to create the desired curve. With this method, I had a bit more success with bending thicker stock, but not to the extent that I needed. I was able to bend 1" stock to my desired curve, but not past it, which I would have needed to give the pieces tolerance for their inevitable springback. The wood, having softened enough to bend, also became soft enough to be dented by the hardwood dowels that held it in place. In favor of predictability and clean edges, I decided at this point to forgo further attempts at steam-bending.

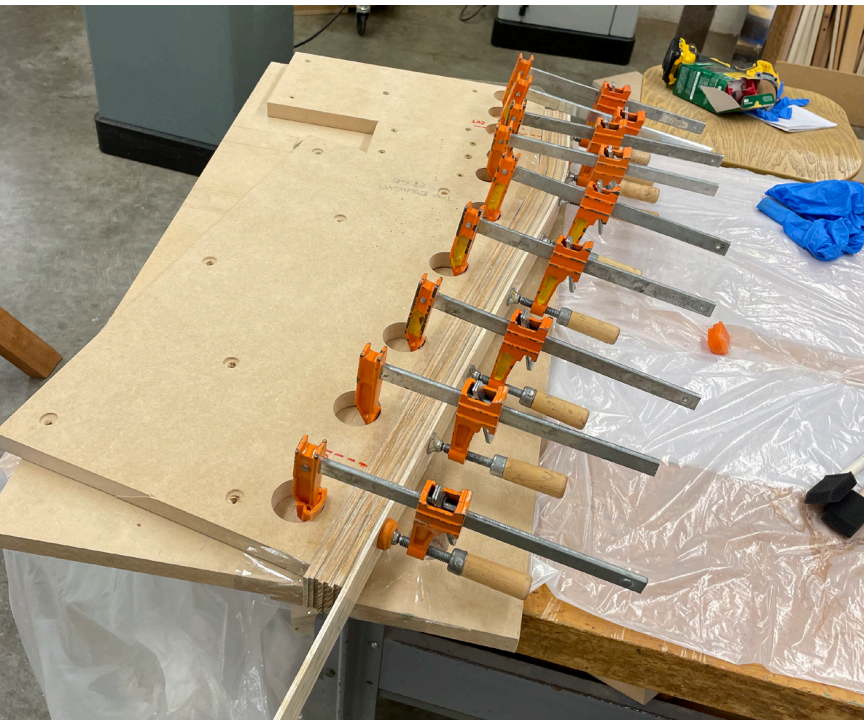
Preserving the MDF bending forms and reinforcing them with a second layer of material, I moved into my first fallback technique: strip lamination. I was able to salvage much of the stock that I had attempted to steam bend; the 1½" pieces that were not able to bend much simply needed a few passes through a planer to become square again. This stock was resawn on a table saw into ¼" strips, which then were passed through a planer on an MDF sled to reach a final thickness of 1⁄8". Ten of these strips would be laminated together to form each chair and table leg for a final thickness of 1¼", with 80 used in total and an additional 25 for test pieces and clamping strips. An advantage to using this fallback bending technique was my ability to reach a thickness much closer

to my originally intended dimensions than I would have been able to with stream bent stock; even 1" stock had difficulties bending reliably, whereas reaching thicknesses much larger than 1¼" would have been a non-issue with strip lamination if it weren't for my concerns about material use.

After many passes through the table saw and planer, the MDF bending forms were taken apart, covered in packing tape to prevent glue from adhering to them, and reassembled. Clamping strips of the same thickness as each piece of laminate were also covered in packing tape and would be used to apply even pressure across the whole laminated form. The strips were then laid out in groups of ten, spread with a urea-formaldehyde resin glue, and stacked together before being clamped to the bending form. Here, they cured overnight and were unmolded the next morning. In the case of the table legs, which were forms with both convex and concave bends, a two-part bending form had to be used. My original design for this bending form had to be much more drastically altered than the one-part bending forms were, as attempting to squeeze the two forms together caused them to slide along the angle of the piece being laminated and thus create a curve much shallower than intended. After the failed lamination of the first table leg, I set about making major adjustments to these forms. I built a large MDF sled, to which one part of the being form was permanently mounted, and two sleds that would prevent the mobile part of the bending form from sliding in any direction other than the intended one. From here, the curve created by the forms would be perfectly reproducible. Due to some low spots in the bending forms, long wedges were

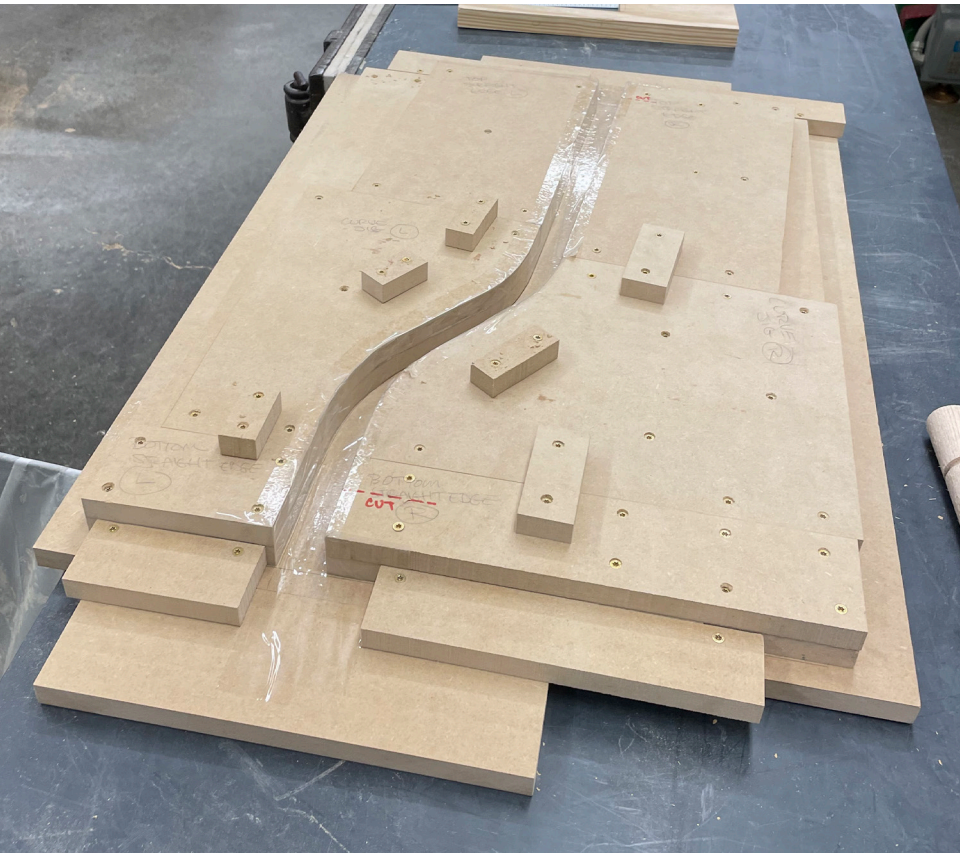
10 A TWO-PART MDF BENDING FORM

11 A ONE-PART MDF BENDING FORM

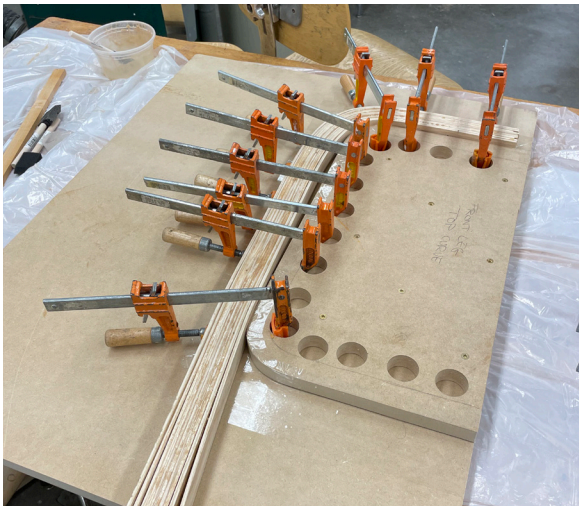


12 STRIP LAMINATION ON A ONE-PART BENDING FORM

added during the first lamination to discourage any delamination that might occur from uneven pressure, but from the second lamination onward much more highly powered clamps were used to compensate for this. The construction of these bent forms was perhaps the most time-consuming process of my entire project. Not only did resawing dozens of strips consume a lot of time and resources, but I was working with singular molds, which meant that the day-long process of lamination had to be repeated twice for each front and back chair leg, and four times for each table leg. After unmolding, each piece had its glue squeeze-out scraped away before it was passed through the joiner and planer to even out the strips of laminate and create flat edges. The pieces were then marked and cut to size before having joinery added and a round-over put on their edges.



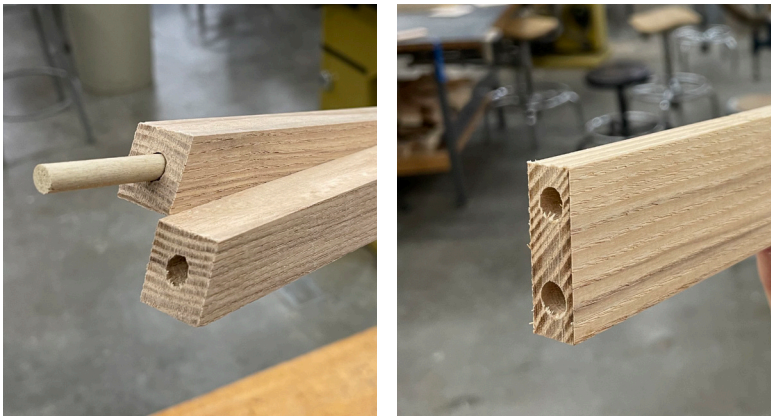
13 A MODIFIED TWO-PART BENDING FORM



14 A FAILED LAMINATION OF A CROSSBAR WITH TWO 90° BENDS

15 PREPARATION OF STRIPS BEFORE GLUE-UP

16 FINISHED STRIP LAMINATED PIECES



18 STRETCHERS WITH ANGLED POPLAR DOWELING FOR THE CHAIR (LEFT) AND TABLE FRAMES (RIGHT)

19 TEST FITTING AN OSB STRECTHER INTO A HALF-LAP JOINT

20 ROUTED TENON ON A SOLID TABLETOP

C. Joinery & Turning

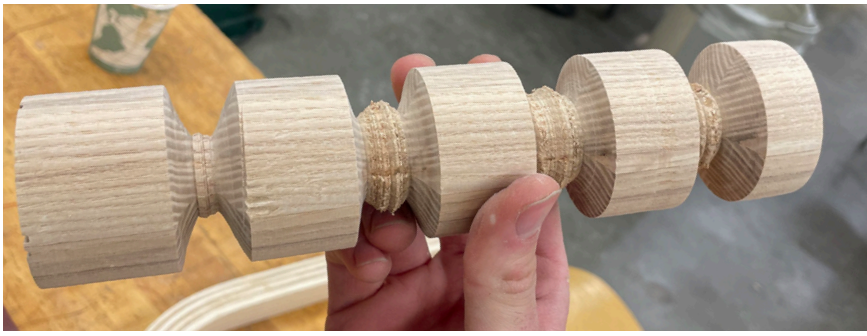
Laminated chair and table legs were connected to horizontal stretchers using poplar dowel joinery. In order to have the curves of each piece align correctly, most of the dowels entered the pieces they joined together at slight angles depending on the point at which they were affixed. Angled mortices were cut into the tops of each table leg to allow for the horizontal aprons that connected them to be completely level, while straight mortices were cut into each front leg of the chair. Any connecting stretchers that were not originally present in the 'Caper' chair or folding table were created in oriented strand board, calling back to the first prototype of the final chair and calling attention to necessary structural additions. Though this material choice appeared to clash at first, the areas where it seamlessly integrates with solid ash (particularly noticeable in the half lap joints that connect the backrest support to each back leg) brings the two materials into harmony. Other notable joinery techniques were half laps that connected each table frame to a long stabilizing stretcher, also present in the connections between the table aprons and the strand board crossbars that served to lift the solid tabletop above the visible joinery.

The solid ash tabletop was assembled using long bridle joint that affixed endcaps to the perpendicular pieces at the center of the table. The middle section of the tabletop was passed through the planer after being glued to ensure total flatness, and then had a half-inch tenon cut on each end using a palm router. The corresponding grooves in each endcap were cut on the table saw, and

the pieces were fit together and secured with the addition of small wedges. Once glued, a small roundover was applied to the edges on each side with the palm router. On the underside, holes for dowel pins were drilled halfway through the tabletop so that it would rest straight and solidly on the frame of the table. These holes are the only instance between both the table and chair where the joinery components are not completely visible.

Casters were turned from solid ash on the lathe to replicate the metal ones present on the original 'Caper' chair. Scrap pieces were squared and glued together to create an X-shaped pattern in the end-grain that would ultimately show in the finished wheels. Angular beads were then carved and later cut apart and sanded to size after they were taken off the lathe. These casters were then affixed to each end of an enlarged poplar dowel, which remained free to rotate where it threaded through each chair leg, allowing the casters to actually function.

21 BRIDLE GROOVE CUT INTO A TABLETOP ENDCAP



22 TURNED BEADS BEFORE BEING CUT INTO CASTERS

23 TEST FITTING TWO TABLE FRAMES WITH THEIR STRETCHERS

24 A MOLDED PLASTIC SEAT REMOVED FROM A 'CAPER' CHAIR

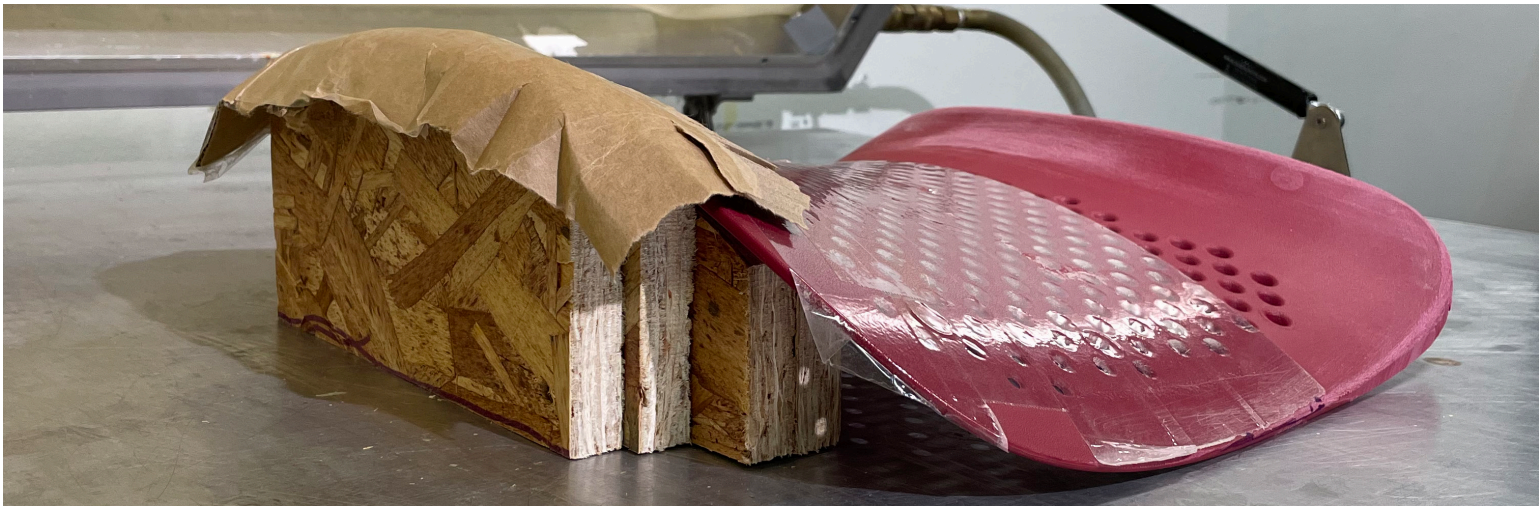
25 VACUUM PRESSED LAMINATION BEFORE BEING TRIMMED

26 DRILLING HOLES IN THE TRIMMED FORM

D. Vacuum Forming

Before beginning this project, I had worked with mold-making and veneer lamination both in the medium of hardwood and outside of it. Lamination using a vacuum press seemed like a logical culmination of the techniques I had been using in this project and in other works leading up to it, though it ended up posing the biggest risks and issues of the entire process. To prepare for vacuum forming, the backrest and seat were cut off of an actual 'Caper' chair and sanded so that I would not capture any of the elements built to contain the joinery of the original piece. In single-veneer dry tests on both of these pieces, I experienced a lot of splitting and cracking due to the compound nature of the curves that I was trying to achieve. Through careful seeming and wetting of the veneers before glue-up, I was able to largely mitigate this in my lamination of the seat, but the much greater curve of the backrest produced significant wrinkling in the resulting laminate. Both pieces were laminated using ten layers of cross-grained raw ash veneer.

Using the vacuum press was certainly a learning experience. I found it was necessary to tweak the pressure of the vacuum, raising it slowly at the very beginning of the press to prevent wrinkling and cracking from the quick change in pressure and then reducing it once fully pressurized to minimize the deformation of the original piece. Because the pieces cut from the original 'Caper' chair were made of molded plastic, they were able to flex by a fairly large amount under the pressure of the vacuum, even though bending them by hand was difficult. This meant that additional support was needed to preserve their forms,



27 PREPARATIONS FOR VACUUM PRESSING; A 'CAPER' CHAIR BACKREST NEGATIVE WITH A SUPPORTING OSB FORM

and since I was not able to produce digital negatives of these pieces with a CNC, I hand-built support structures with strand board to resist key areas of deformation. Some warping where the original forms were able to sink in between the support structures is still visible, but it is minimal in the seat relative to the backrest.

The wrinkle in the backrest was evident almost immediately upon pressurizing the vacuum chamber. Due to the way that these wrinkles formed, I suspect that no amount of care would have been able to prevent them, and that I would have needed to devise an entirely new molding form to avoid them entirely. Due to material and time constraints, I decided to exhibit the wrinkled piece as an embrace of the qualities of the natural material, and as evidence that my experimentation could not be expected to have perfect results each time. My decision to preserve this wrinkle necessitated the redesign of the backrest support stretcher, which now would need to echo the undulations of the veneer rather than follow the smooth curve of the original form. I scribed the wrinkle onto a piece of strand board and cut its profile, adding ¾" of thickness to bring the piece in line with the other stretchers of the chair, then cutting half-laps and adding a round-over to the edges.

Once the vacuum formed pieces were unmolded, I marked and cut away the excess material. 1" gridlines were traced onto the surface of the seat and the backrest to mark the position of where holes would be drilled through them. These holes mimic the ones present in the original forms. Final holes were drilled to allow the pieces to be fixed to their supporting stretchers with poplar dowels, and a hole in the backrest was threaded onto a scroll saw in order to be cut into the shape of the handle of the 'Caper' chair. To finish, the veneered forms were sanded to remove any material that chipped away during drilling.

28 DRILLING HOLES IN THE BACKREST, WRINKLE VISIBLE AT LEFT

29 FRAMES BEFIORE BEING COVERED WITH PLYWOOD

30 FLOOR & WALLS ERECTED IN THE EXHIBITION SPACE

E. Stud Framing & Installation

The framing of the room that contains the recreated 'Caper' chair and folding table, meant to appear as a recreation of the original studio walls in the same medium as the pieces made within it, was accomplished by building stud frames and affixing them to a pallet floor. Two large pallets were positioned on the floor and secured to each other before being covered with two sheets of plywood, with their seams running perpendicular to the seam of the pallets for stability. 1½" by 2½" studs were then cut to size in batches—different lengths for vertical, horizontal, and supporting studs ensured squareness and uniformity in the frames—and affixed with construction screws. Oversized plywood sheets were then screwed onto each frame before the excess was removed with a flush trim bit on a palm router, leaving the plywood edges flush with those of the frames. Each wall was carted separately into the exhibition space, where it was uprighted and attached to the pallet floor with more construction screws. A third wall was nested in between the two side frames to close off the space and to prevent the walls from leaning toward the center of the floor, and two small pieces of stud offcuts were cut to size and attached to the existing studio walls to prevent the same effect on the viewer's side of the structure. These two points are the only points of attachment to the original studio space; every other component of the installation is free-standing.

F. Finishing & a Lack Thereof

I intentionally decided to leave both the works and the plywood room that contained them without a finishing treatment. Everything was sanded with a fine grit sanding block by hand to unify their surface textures, but nothing was applied beyond that. I wanted to spotlight the natural properties of the wood that I had been working with for months, without obscuring the dings, chips, or knot present on its surface. Whether these imperfections were due to the naivety of my own hand or the conditions that affected the wood as it grew, I wanted to ensure that they were visible. The beauty of this furniture is intended to grow from the forms that it is composed of and how they intersect, rather than how their surfaces are treated. It is for this same reason that I have left joinery bare wherever it occurs, with the end-grain of poplar dowels and strand board sanded flush against solid ash, and bridles and tenons extending past their corresponding mortices.

Just as they lack finish, these pieces of furniture also lack names. Though we can recognize them by the names of the pieces that served as their inspiration, these objects have become something new entirely. They are not complete, however, unless they are coupled, nor unless they appear in the plywood studio that has been erected around them. Alone, neither the folding table nor the Herman Miller desk chair that I was provided with at the beginning of this project would have inspired me enough to recreate it. But as a whole, in the studio I inhabited for two terms, they became something that I could not pull myself away from.

31 ASSEMBLED REPLICA 'CAPER' CHAIR

32 ASSEMBLED REPLICA FOLDING TABLE

V. Why the Work Stands

Though the studio space I occupied over the course of my fifth year at Stamps served as the basis for my most ambitious work to date, I spent very little time actually using the space as intended. While early ideation and digital iteration found me sitting at the plastic folding table I had been provided with, my time spent in the space decreased steeply as I began to produce physical work. The studio that I have painstakingly recreated in "Studio 05D" functioned mostly as a storage unit for the past two terms.

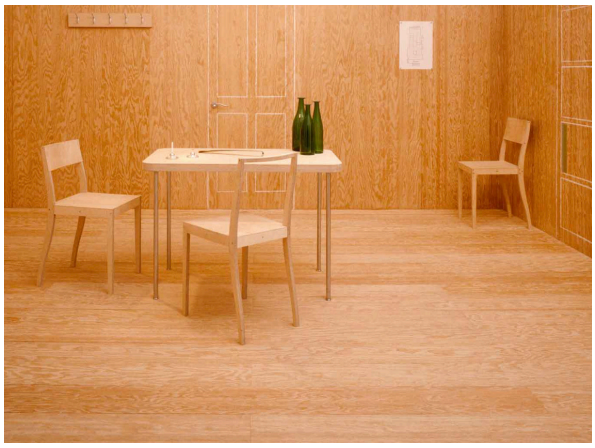
My formal infatuation with my studio did not stem from any significant time spent there, nor from any particular emotional attachment to the space. To me, it served more as a symbol of the independence I was being given—and asked to utilize—in the Integrative Project. Empty—a complete blank canvas, objects waiting for me to use them to create something great. The IP was the first time I was faced with such freedom in making, and I felt empowered yet overwhelmed. While excited to make use of this new opportunity, I couldn't drag myself through the ideological mud enough to actually begin making something. I found myself thinking about how I wished the entirety of my art education could have been structured in this way; maybe then I would be prepared to make something truly great at the end of my time here. This circular reasoning paralyzed me for the beginning of my work on this project. When would I stop preparing and truly begin—not only at the scale of the IP, but of my own artistic career? It was here where I left behind half-hearted attempts at improving the form of the 'Caper' chair, at trying to fit institutional critique into a plywood box. I decided that my form had already been decided for me and began to make. The chair and the table that I was presented with functioned simply as low-intervention objects to facilitate thinking. Nothing about these forms was particularly creatively stimulating, but the chair provided a place to sit and think, and the table provided a place at which I could write the ideas that I thought of. In a way, this furniture facilitated my ideological paralysis as much as they could have enabled my creative development. Instead of letting them stop me in my tracks, I would force them to become something new.

The work of Jasper Morrisson has been perhaps the most influential to me in this project. Morrisson's book *The Hard Life*, a collection of objects fabricated by rural Portugese artisans, puts forth the idea that beauty emerges from intuitive knowledge of function and immersed practice rather than formal education. While his commentary is not always the most careful, the works presented in his book show how daily use can birth elegance of form. Looking at the tools and vessels collected in the work helped me understand how to engage with the forms I was aiming to recreate, as well as what parts of them that I wanted to remain most faithful to.

The work of Børge Mogensen, as well as larger trends in the world of Danish modernist furniture, have also been influential to my own methods. Mogensen's *J39 Chair*, designed in 1947, iterates subtly on ideas present in Shaker furniture and rustic Italian dining chairs while bringing purity to their forms. This method—of making small changes to designs rather than

distilling something completely new from them—is one practiced by other Danish modernists as well. It is a tradition, for example, to redesign Kaare Klint's 1930 *Propeller Stool* as a Danish professor of design—one that I unknowingly stumbled into in the design of my *Sotiri Stool* last year. I carried these practices into my work on "Studio 05D" by turning harsh angles into smooth curves and simplifying structures that would not serve the medium I was making them in.

Play and experimentation, as stressed in the works of Baren van Heusden, Pascal Gielen, and Paul De Bruyne (*Arts Education Beyond Art: Teaching Art in Times of Change* is edited by the two former and *Teaching Art in the Neoliberal Realm: Realism versus Cynicism* by the two latter) serve important functions in "Studio 05D." The two essay collections stress the role of free and independent experimentation in breaking from the "catering regime" of the modern educational institution which seeks to produce "calculated mediocrity" rather than excellence. There is play at work both literally, in the experimentations in forms and technique that ultimately led to the pieces on view, and figuratively, in the contents of the exhibition itself. The decision to have the final objects of my work take the form of what I was given at the beginning of this project, with little to no innovation on their concepts, is meant to playfully call out to the structure of the Integrative Project that paralyzed me at the beginning. The room within a room calls out in my voice: "Look what I made with a year of formulation and independent experimentation! Nothing more than what I started with!" The works of Gielen, van Heusden, and De Bruyne also stress the significance of failure to creative development—an



33 JASPER MORRISSON, SOME NEW ITEMS FOR THE HOME, PART I

34 JASPER MORRISSON, PAGE SPREAD FROM *THE HARD LIFE*

35 MIA CULLIN, *ORKESTER 082*

36 BORGE MOGENSEN, *J39 CHAIR*

37 TOM SACHS, *MODEL SEVENTY SIX*

idea which I have also taken to heart in this work as I exhibit wrinkled laminations and wooden impurities in an unobstructed state.

Bruce and Stephanie Tharp's *Discursive Design: Critical, Speculative and Alternative Things* has helped me to make sense of the dissonance I sought to create by exhibiting what I purport to be a conceptual nothing. Other artists like Tom Bonamici (*Counter*, 2013), Tom Sachs, (*Model Seventy Six*, 2021), and Mia Cullin (*Orkester 082, 2019*), have influenced me with their ideas of demarcating space, elevating mundane objects, and making play serious. It would also be remiss not to mention Joseph Kosuth's "One and Three Chairs" and Samuel Mockbee's Rural Studio.

"Studio 05D" is about bending materials to their limits—sometimes past them, and figuring out solutions to new problems that arise as a result. Though perfection is what I set out for, it is not what I acheived. From its first steam bath, the material I had immersed myself in told me that it was unpredictable, that it had memory and would bend the way it wanted to, and that I had to coerce it to follow my lead. I moved from steam to strip lamination to avoid this fate, and ironically, as I pushed lamination to its limits—a trajectory that should have let me achieve any shape I set out to—the wood reminded me of its qualities, warping and wrinkling and moving how it wanted to. I embraced these wrinkles, crafting new pieces not to hide them but to accentuate them, sanding smooth curves into warped forms to reveal irregular patterns of grain.

Perfection is not what I achieved, but it would be misrepresentative of my pieces' context if I had. To create a monument to art education, to ex-

perimentation and play and growth, would be thoughtless if the monument was perfect. “Studio 05D” began as an indictment of an educational system that only provided the opportunity to play when its students were poised to graduate, but it ended as a love letter. The mundane forms that had once led me into paralyzing thought have become objects of beauty—even if not by their visual qualities. The blood, sweat, and callouses contained within the laminations of a chair leg make it beautiful, and so do the wrinkles in a backrest or a sander burn on a wooden caster.

38 KAARE KLINT, *PROPELLER STOOL*

39 MYSELF, *SOTIRI STOOL*

VI. Acknowledgements

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