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T O M E D W A R D S

by Beverly Russell

Cover and portrait photography by Bill Tucker

Educating the Industry

Founded 70 years ago by David Kendall, a prominent Grand Rapids, MI, furniture designer, Kendall College of Art and Design has long maintained a leading position as an industry resource. More than 90 percent of its graduates find jobs in the furniture industry in West Michigan; thus Kendall's influence in establishing an industry standard of creativity and innovation is formidable.

Under the present leadership of its president, Dr. Oliver Evans, Kendall has made important strides during the five years since Evans took office. A merger with Ferris State University in Big Rapids (which allowed Kendall to retain its autonomy while offering Ferris a profile for continuing education programs in Grand Rapids) funneled increased financial ballast to the budget, resulting in a major \$6 million addition to the Kendall institution to house an increasing number of students and provide better facilities for them in their studies. (See sidebar on page 46.)

Of the six major fields of study that Kendall offers, the industrial design department under the direction of Tom Edwards has established a strong identity within the contract furniture industry, due in part to the fact that Edwards both practices and teaches. Kendall ranks in the top dozen national art and design schools, along with Art Center, Pasadena; Rhode Island School of Design; Center for Creative Studies, Detroit; the University of Cincinnati; and the New York academies, including Parsons, Pratt Institute and the School of Visual Arts. But if a student wants to concentrate on contract furniture design, Kendall is the uncontested first place college.

Winner of more than a dozen product awards, Edwards has designed products for 14 major manufacturers, including Herman Miller, Meridian, Knoll, Wieland, Teknion, Harter, Haworth, United Chair, Nucraft, Blackpointe and Trendway. His Improv stacking chair for Haworth (winner of a 1995 IDEA award) is one of the company's best selling products. In addition, pull mechanisms for Meridian's filing cabinets helped to make them a unique product on the market, and the Tympani™ occasional table collection for Nucraft has the potential of becoming an all-time favorite in this particular market segment.

By understanding the realities of the marketplace—price, performance and innovation being the three necessary guiding principles to ensure product success—Edwards has an inside track on which to platform his programs. The result is that currently 15 of his former students are enjoying jobs at Steelcase, Haworth, Herman Miller, Chesser Schacht, Synergy, Smart Forms and American Seating. (See sidebar on page 45.)

Edwards came to Kendall in 1992 after a seven-year career with Herman Miller

Tom Edwards, shown on the cover with his latest stacking chair for Teknion, and Dr. Oliver Evans, president of Kendall College of Art and Design, have worked together to strengthen the industrial design department and its ties with the professional world.

Edwards' Improv stack chair for Haworth won a 1994 Best of NeoCon silver award and 1995 IDEA award.



where he rose to design planning and administration manager with significant responsibility in worldwide product development. Since joining the faculty, Edwards has held a position of quiet authority in an academic situation which was ripe for dissension. Like many other design schools entering the era of cybertech, Kendall had to adjust to a changing business world. During the past 20 years, the furniture market has moved into two distinct segments: residential (mostly based in North Carolina) and contract (mostly based in West Michigan). The exponential expansion of the office furniture industry required specialization. The Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association (BIFMA) became the monitor of the contract industry, establishing standards and regulations appropriate to furniture being used in the workplace—standards way beyond the norms used by David Kendall and subsequent leaders who pioneered furniture design earlier in this century.

It was Edwards' job to bring this distinction to Kendall's industrial design department, which was spun out of the traditional furniture design department under professor Max Schangle.

The complexities of task office chairs, for example, with high-tech bells and whistles to adjust the seat and back to innumerable positions to fit the user, clearly gave a new definition to the challenge of designing seating—a far cry from the fine curve of a cherry wood leg embellished with ornamental carving details that is a more familiar specification in residential furniture. Still, despite the obvious differences, creating an

entirely new department from nowhere required consummate perseverance and ingenuity. Edwards brought both to the table.

The industrial design department, as its name suggests, has in fact expanded in scope far beyond the narrow confines of the contract furniture market. Projects that

Edwards has introduced into the program include scooters, snow bikes, hospital gurneys, clocks, home media systems, golf shoes, mountain boots,

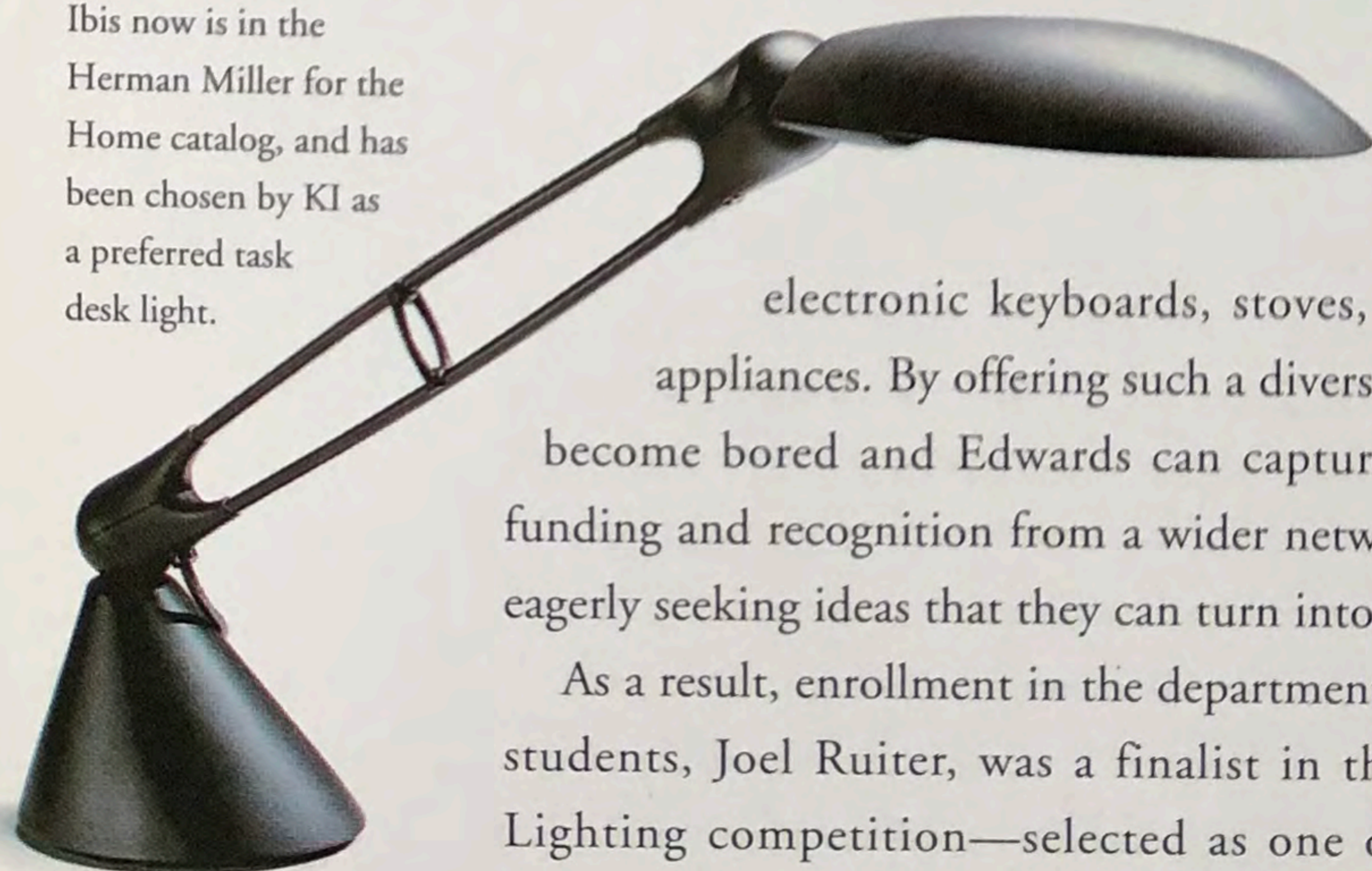
electronic keyboards, stoves, vacuum cleaners and other household appliances. By offering such a diverse group of projects, no student is likely to become bored and Edwards can capture both motivation in-house along with funding and recognition from a wider network of manufacturers outside campus, all eagerly seeking ideas that they can turn into profit centers.

As a result, enrollment in the department has tripled and recently one of Edwards' students, Joel Ruiter, was a finalist in the 11th Annual Koizumi International Lighting competition—selected as one of 25 finalists from the 3,000 entries.



For Nucraft, Edwards' Tympani Collection of occasional tables is a contemporary interpretation of the classic French Moderne style.

In 1996, Edwards designed the Ibis light for Light Corp. that incorporates a U-shaped fluorescent fixture. It has been such a success that Ibis now is in the Herman Miller for the Home catalog, and has been chosen by KI as a preferred task desk light.



"I learned that I was not only a designer but a business person. Clients expect you to be a business person. This requirement must reflect the structure of design education."

Moreover, as Edwards points out, learning to be a versatile problem-solver means that a student is not locked into one industry and can play a significant role in any situation that requires attention.

The broad approach to industrial design reflects early influences on Edwards, who grew up, as he describes it, "in a very handy family who liked to make things." Although his father was a salesman in Cleveland, OH, and had no formal instruction in handcraftsmanship, Edwards learned a lot by



For Blackpointe, Edwards designed a lounge chair collection in 1998 featuring a unique U-shaped frame with pillow options.



Fleetwood mobile training and computer tables demonstrate how Edwards can produce viable product for many different markets.

watching him work in the shop in the family basement.

"I was always taking things apart much to my parents' displeasure and not putting them back together so well," he recalls. By his sophomore year in high school he had designed and built models for everything from treehouses to race cars, but he lacked one important skill—drawing. Art was not offered at high school, a common omission still in evidence today, which reflects the traditional ingrained pursuit of linear left-brain academic instruction rather than an alternative, right-brain, artistic and intuitive educational development for which many students are more fitted.

Pursuing a Bachelor of Science degree, Edwards chose Kent State University because it was close to home, and enrolled in the Aero Space Technology program.

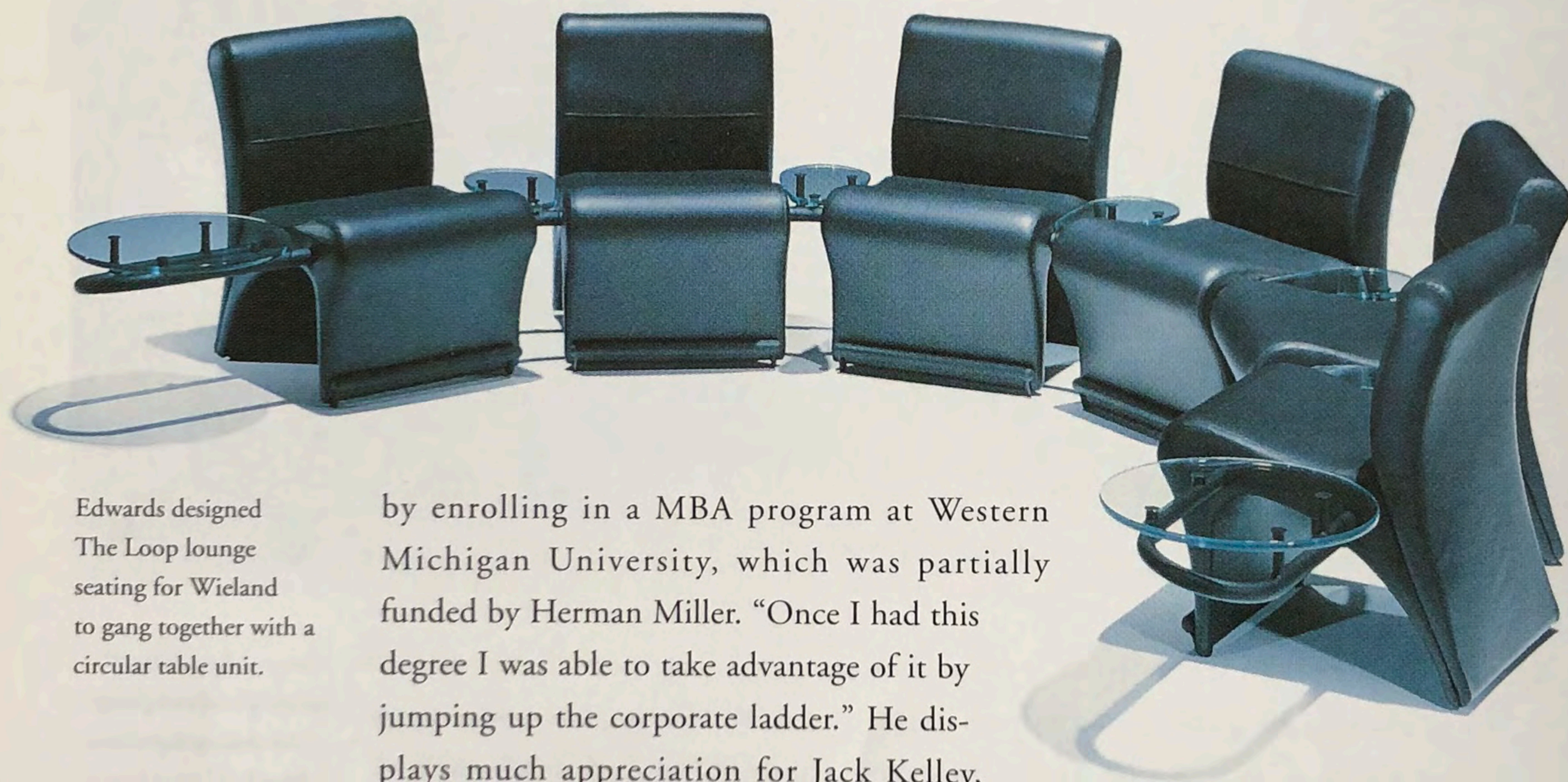
"Many industrial designers start off as being something else," he notes, adding that most students think engineering or architecture is the way into "creating things." Industrial designers do a "bad job at p.r.," he says, citing the field's poor job at clarifying its profession. When he discovered that model making went on down the hall in Kent State's industrial design department, he quickly switched to the five-year program taught by two instructors who were "extreme opposites." One was a glorified

engineer and reveled in manufacturing screws; the other a blue sky person who subsequently became his mentor, Robert Schimel.

Edwards' first job, in 1975, was at SunarHauserman, where he was the principal designer of the DO III component system. It was at this company that he discovered, "You had to surround yourself with beauty to make beauty." His mentor there was Luc Pagnier, the extremely sophisticated French Canadian director of design, who set a stylish image in everything from the company's graphics to its product line. By 1979, after a brief month in New York working with Niels Diffrient at Dreyfuss Associates, Edwards was recruited by Herman Miller.

Many learning experiences at Herman Miller helped his career to prosper, Edwards notes. "I learned that I was not only a designer but a business person. Clients expect you to be a business person," adding, "This requirement must reflect the structure of design education."

Unschooling in business in his undergraduate training, he learned to "talk the talk"



Edwards designed The Loop lounge seating for Wieland to gang together with a circular table unit.

by enrolling in a MBA program at Western Michigan University, which was partially funded by Herman Miller. "Once I had this degree I was able to take advantage of it by jumping up the corporate ladder." He displays much appreciation for Jack Kelley, the director of design at Herman Miller, who taught him "a research-based, user-oriented design process" that he continues to use today as the basis of his curriculum at Kendall.

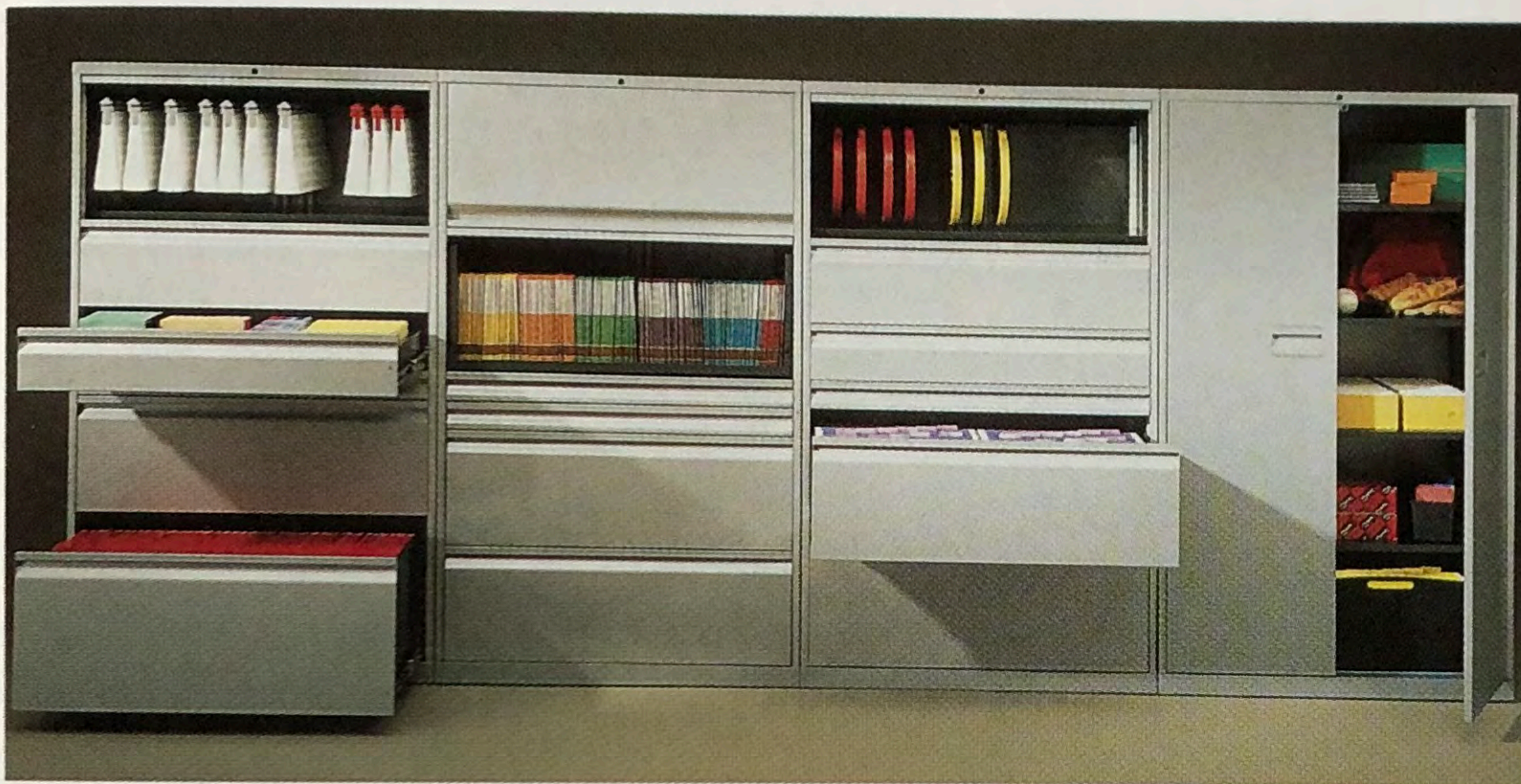
Once up the ladder, Edwards discovered the difference between being a doer versus an administrator. Like many designers who have prospered at Herman Miller—including Bill Stumpf, Bill Raftery and Tom Newhouse—Edwards elected to open his own design firm "to be more connected to the creative act" and to continue with the company as a consultant. In 1986, Design Allegro was launched in the lower level of his spacious house on the shore of Spring Lake, MI. Edwards notes that the firm is not in the telephone book and he never advertises. Clients come to him solely by word-of-mouth and from people who have worked with him in the past.

“Perhaps the biggest strength of Edwards’ program is that students are introduced to a world beyond just design. ‘This is not about the designer as a technician, but about the transition to designer as leader.’

Edwards has established a dynamic relationship with numerous manufacturers to bring marketplace needs to the college. He believes farsighted companies see rewards in such a threefold relationship: having a chance to give back to academia, having young ambitious minds work on current corporate projects and to meet emerging talent.

“It is essential for the students to have credible projects in their portfolios,” Edwards says. Kendall president Evans agrees.

“There is a real challenge in integrating good design with solid preparation in



Calibre Files, designed by Edwards for Knoll in 1991, received a Best of NeoCon silver award.

business and marketing. It makes for very strong connections with the school and the real professional world,” Evans says.

And as more top flight design firms move into the Grand Rapids area—IDEO and Chesser Schacht, for example—the stakes are being raised in terms of international excellence. Kendall is fortunate in being in the right place at the right time to form the creative minds of the future in a multitude of endeavors.

Perhaps the biggest strength of Edwards’ program at Kendall is that its students are introduced to a world beyond just design. They learn about the nature of worth or value and how design has to change with that. As Edwards explains, “This is not about the designer as a technician, but about the transition to designer as leader.”

An idea which promises to be an ongoing subject for reflection and action in the post 20th-century arena. ¶

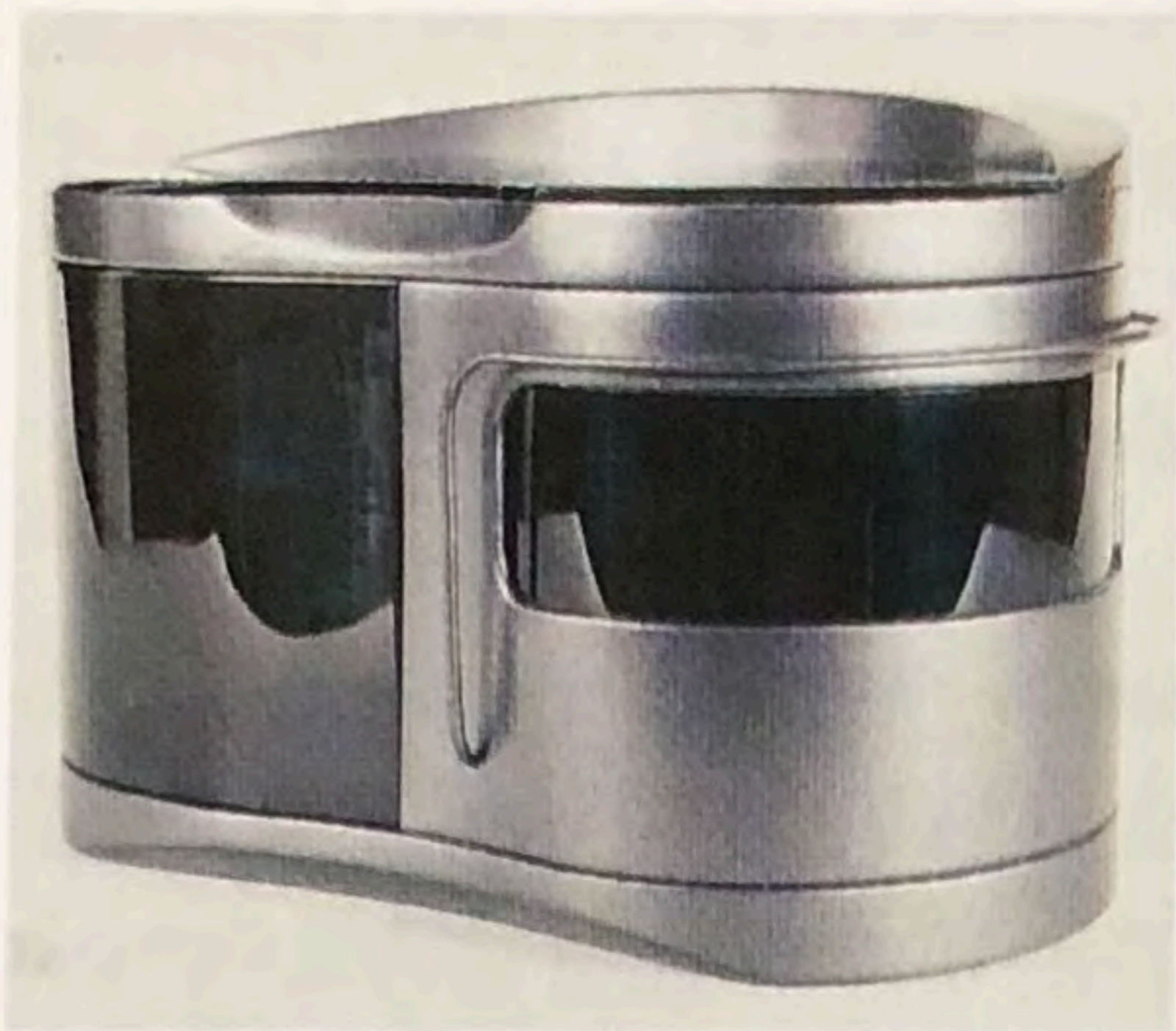
Edwards designed the Enhanced Access pulls for Meridian file cabinets, which subsequently won an Apex Award.

Kendall College of Art and Design is located at 111 N. Division St., Grand Rapids, MI 49503-3194; (616) 451-2787; fax: (616) 451-9867; www.kcad.edu.

STUDENTS AT WORK

Believing that students need credible work in their portfolios, Edwards proudly showcases some of the work his students have accomplished during their industrial design studies.

Photography by Tom Edwards



Jeff Fershun Whirlpool stove



Steven Bell Caterpillar boot



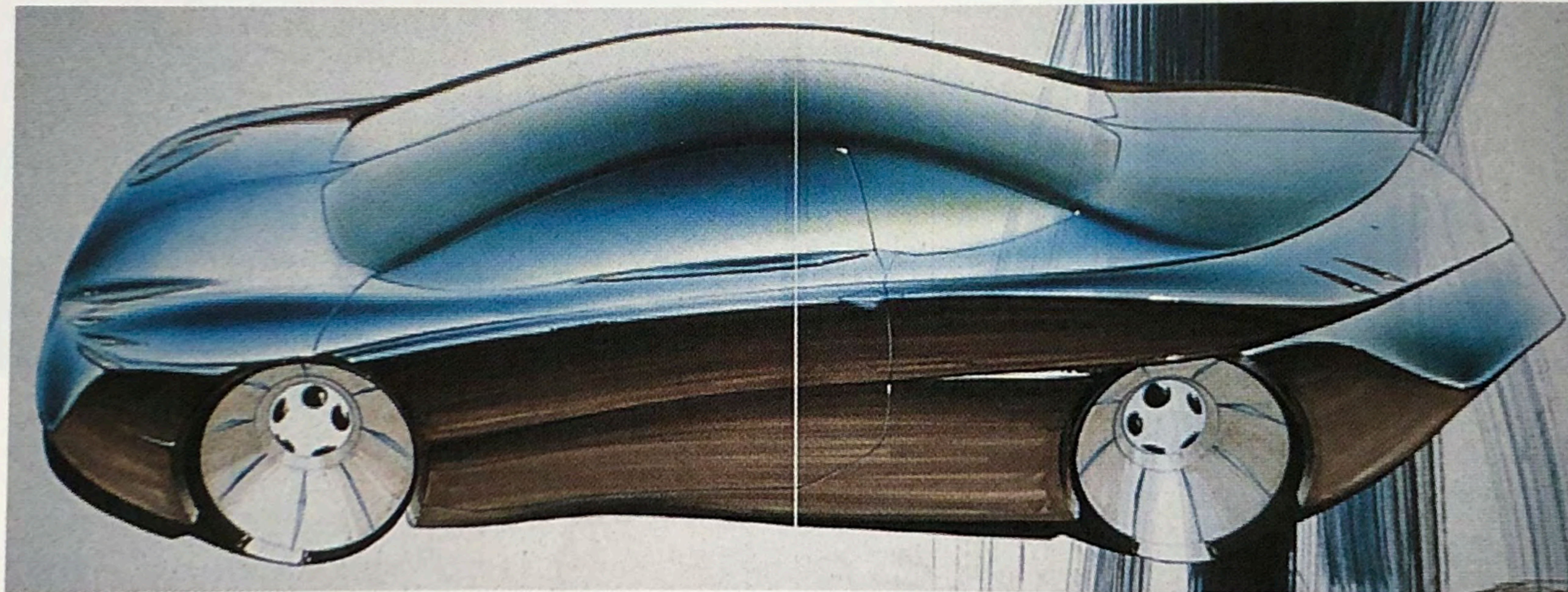
Bryan Goodpaster Stryker stretcher



Pete Howard Virtual reality headpiece



Christ Doll Meridian desk



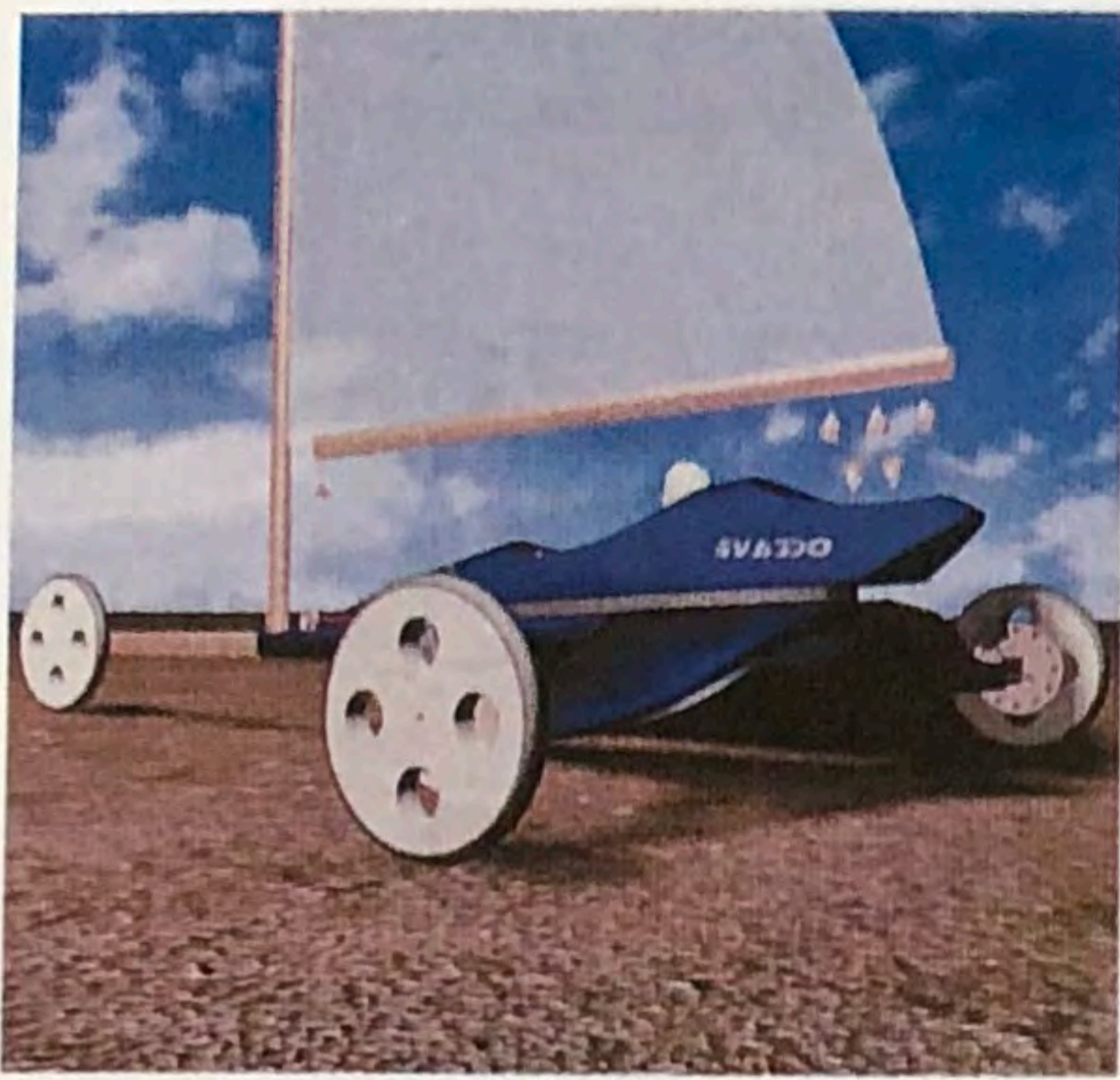
James Owen Concept car



Kirt Martin Scooter



Jason Begin Meridian work station



Jason Begin Wind sailer



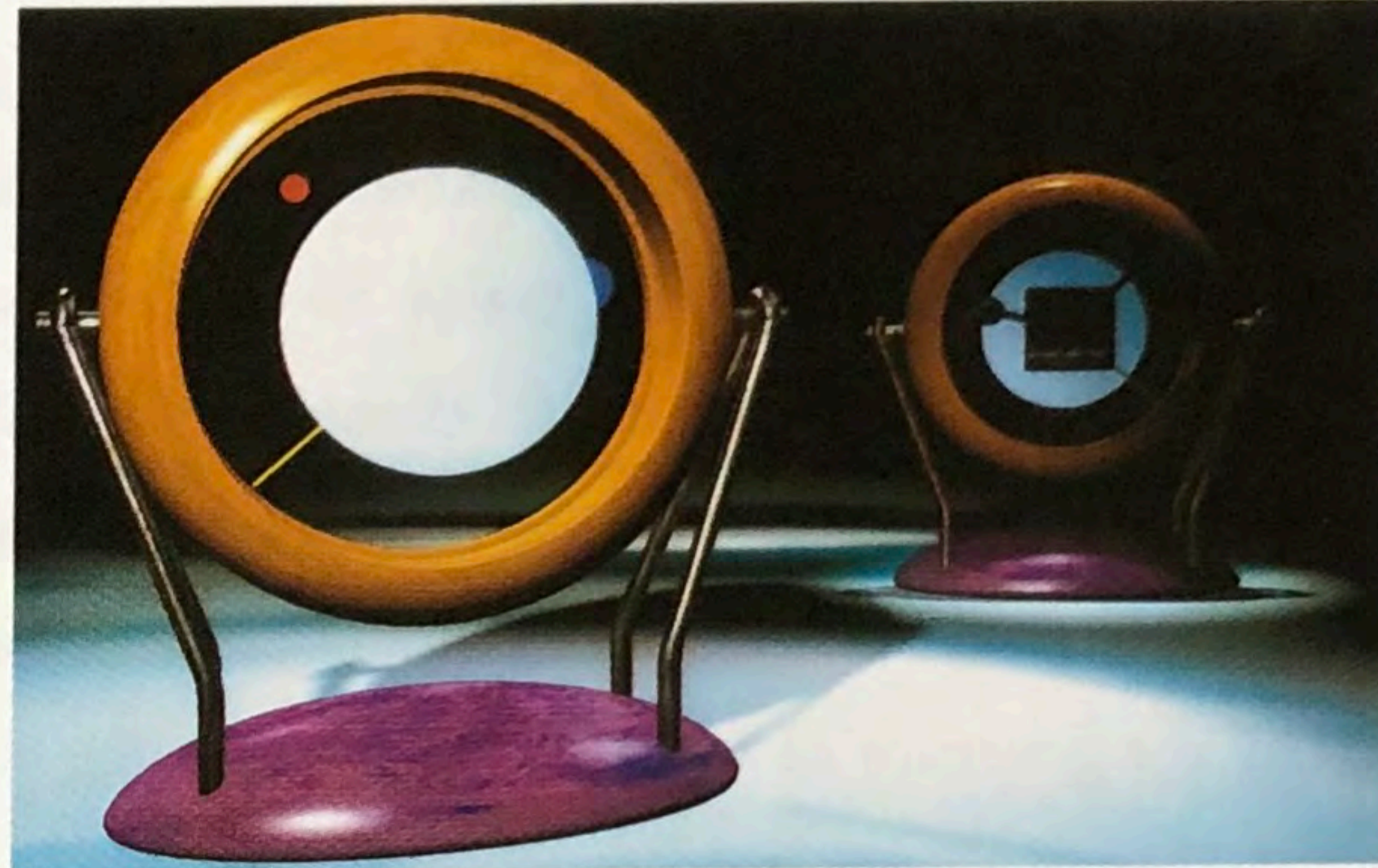
Edmund Farmer Bissell vacuum



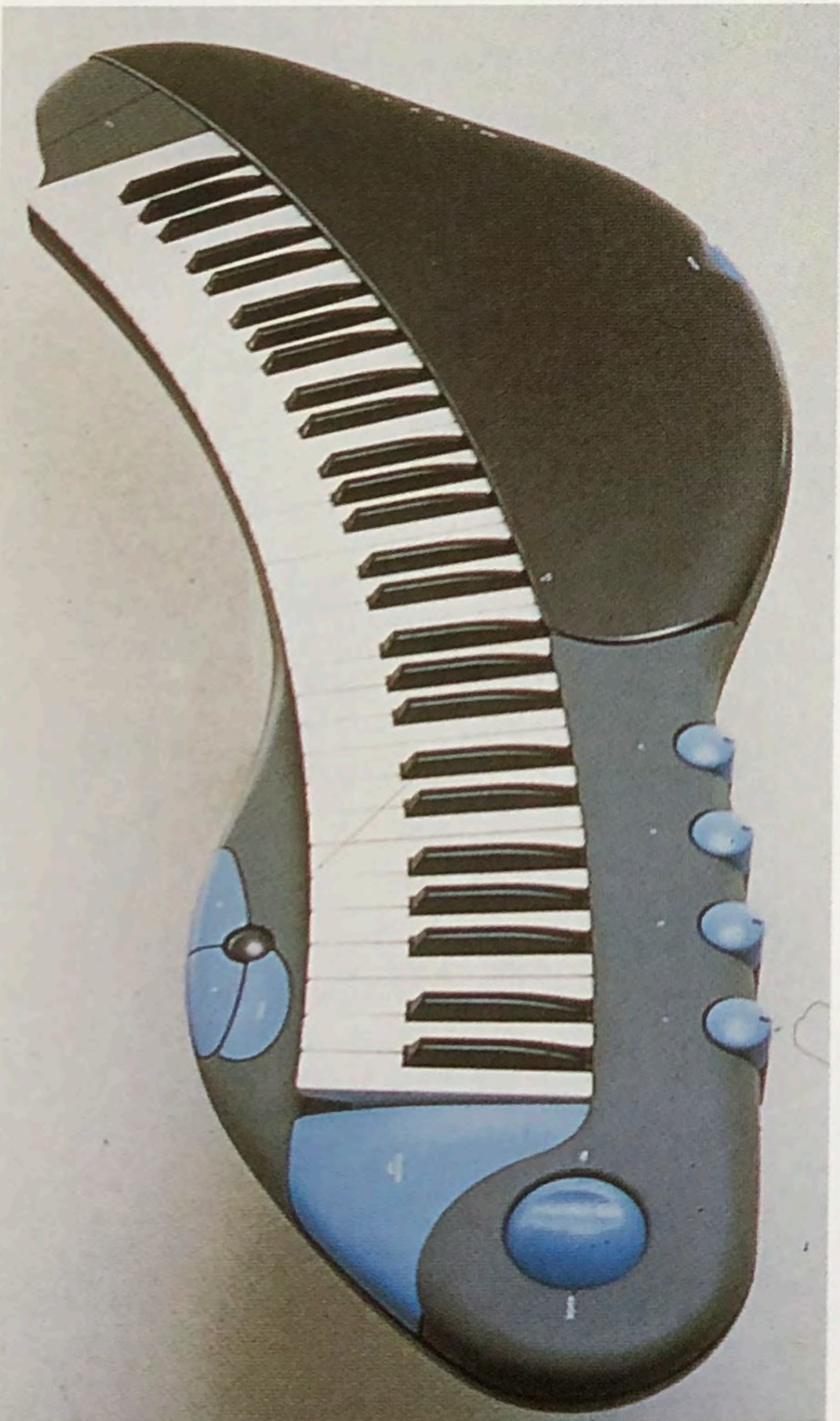
Trent Eekhoff Snow bike



Trevor Haney Wieland Chair



Seth Alquire Howard Miller bathroom clock



Trevor Haney Electronic keyboard



Myra De La Cruz Wolverine golf shoe



Kenji Hirata Steelcase chair

Edwards's understanding of the realities of the marketplace—and his ability to translate these concepts into a successful academic platform—has resulted in many recent Kendall graduates and students working in the contract furniture industry:

Steelcase:

Kirt Martin, Brian Knapp, Pete Howard, Bryan Goodpaster, Casey Gerkin (intern), Joel Ruitter (intern)

Haworth:

Roque Corpus, Ralph Redding, Clark Thorp, Jeff Wernette (intern)

Herman Miller:

Steven Krause (intern)

Chesser Schacht:

Lisa Miller, Shawn Melton

Synergy (Zoey Chu):

Gary Bacon

Smart Forms:

Jason Begin, Trent Eekhoff, Jeff Gershune, Kevin Downey (intern)

American Seating:

Trevor Haney

Mito Product Development:

Errol Pearsons

Photography by Hedrich/Blessing

Kendall's Grand Expansion

Desperately in need of additional painting studios, gathering places for students, reception areas for visiting groups and guests, additional gallery display areas and more classroom space, Kendall College of Art and Design embarked on a major \$6 million facility expansion plan three years ago. Turning to the forward-thinking Grand Rapids architectural firm of Integrated Architects, headed by John Dickinson, AIA, and Michael Corby, AIA, the school proceeded to realize an ambitious addition which was officially dedicated by the governor of Michigan in May 1998.



The resulting three-story building, planned around a lofty metal and glass atrium which penetrates the entire space, carefully blends a new, modernistic wing to a former early 20th-century industrial warehouse building which has served the school for 20 years.

The architectural team demolished an adjacent 1920 brick building, and cut through floors in another adjacent 20-story office tower (both acquired by the school for this expansion program) to achieve the transformation. It won a regional AIA award for design excellence.



Dedicated to Educational Excellence and Innovation

Kendall College of Art and Design is a major presence in the area of fine arts education. Known far and wide for its high percentage of graduates who go on to work in the furniture industry, approximately 95%, Kendall offers the BFA degree in six areas: fine arts, furniture design, illustration, industrial design and visual communications. Students can also earn a Bachelor's degree in art history.

Through Kendall, the entire West Michigan region benefits from one of the richest and most varied continuing studies programs in the United States. The college is an active partner with the local community and on an annual basis provides more than 2,000 children and adults with the opportunity to pursue courses in art and design.

In 1996, Kendall's Board of Trustees voted to merge Kendall with Ferris State University, a major public institution based in Big Rapids, MI. The combined student body will be provided with unequaled educational opportunities as the result of this union. At the same time, the Boards of both institutions are committed to sustaining Kendall's individual reputation, identity and location in downtown Grand Rapids. Sharing a dedication to educational excellence and innovation, Kendall and Ferris will build upon and expand the uniqueness of this collaboration as they offer world-class programs in art, design and technology.



Kendall College of Art and Design was established in 1928 and named in memory of David Wolcott Kendall, the Dean of American Furniture Design. Kendall is accredited by the National Association of Schools of Art and Design.

Kendall College of Art and Design

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