

WIGGLE SIDE CHAIR

Once an innovative example of frugal design, this playful piece now sits in museums.



If things had gone to plan, Frank Gehry's whimsical cardboard Wiggle side chair may only have been found in trailer parks and college dorms across the United States. Originally conceived as a cost-conscious design, it came out in 1972 as part of the Los Angeles-based architect's 17-piece Easy Edges series. *The New York Times* labelled it "paper furniture for penny pinchers" and predicted that the then US\$37 chair would ultimately end up in low-income housing. Instead, the fanciful furniture-art combo landed in New York's Museum of Modern Art and the homes of discerning design-lovers around the world.

With its unconventional material and curvy form, the Wiggle encapsulates Gehry's design genius. Born in Canada in 1929, the Pritzker-winning architect is perhaps best known for such blockbusters as the titanium-clad Guggenheim Museum Bilbao in Spain and the wavy stainless-steel Walt Disney Concert Hall in downtown LA.

The Wiggle is fashioned from layers of corrugated cardboard glued together in alternate directions, making it so strong Gehry said it could "support a small car", and was designed as an antidote to what he called the "ponderous, overpriced and tyrannical" furniture of the time. It proved so popular, however, that Gehry stopped production after only three months, fearing its success would dwarf his reputation as an architect. The chair is now produced under licence by the Swiss design firm Vitra and is available in Australia for \$2215 at Living Edge (livingedge.com.au).

"It's exactly how Frank Gehry designs buildings – it has that curve and sway to it," says Melbourne interior designer and stylist Zoë Murphy, who owns a Wiggle side chair and stool. She notes that the 1970s aesthetic is growing in popularity, including hero pieces such as the Wiggle. "That era of furniture was a little bit outrageous." Just as Gehry aimed to "humanise" his buildings, he created the Wiggle with its own character, as big on comfort as it is on quirkiness. ●