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SUGGESTIONS FOR COVERING THE DESIGN NEEDS
OF THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES [1]

by

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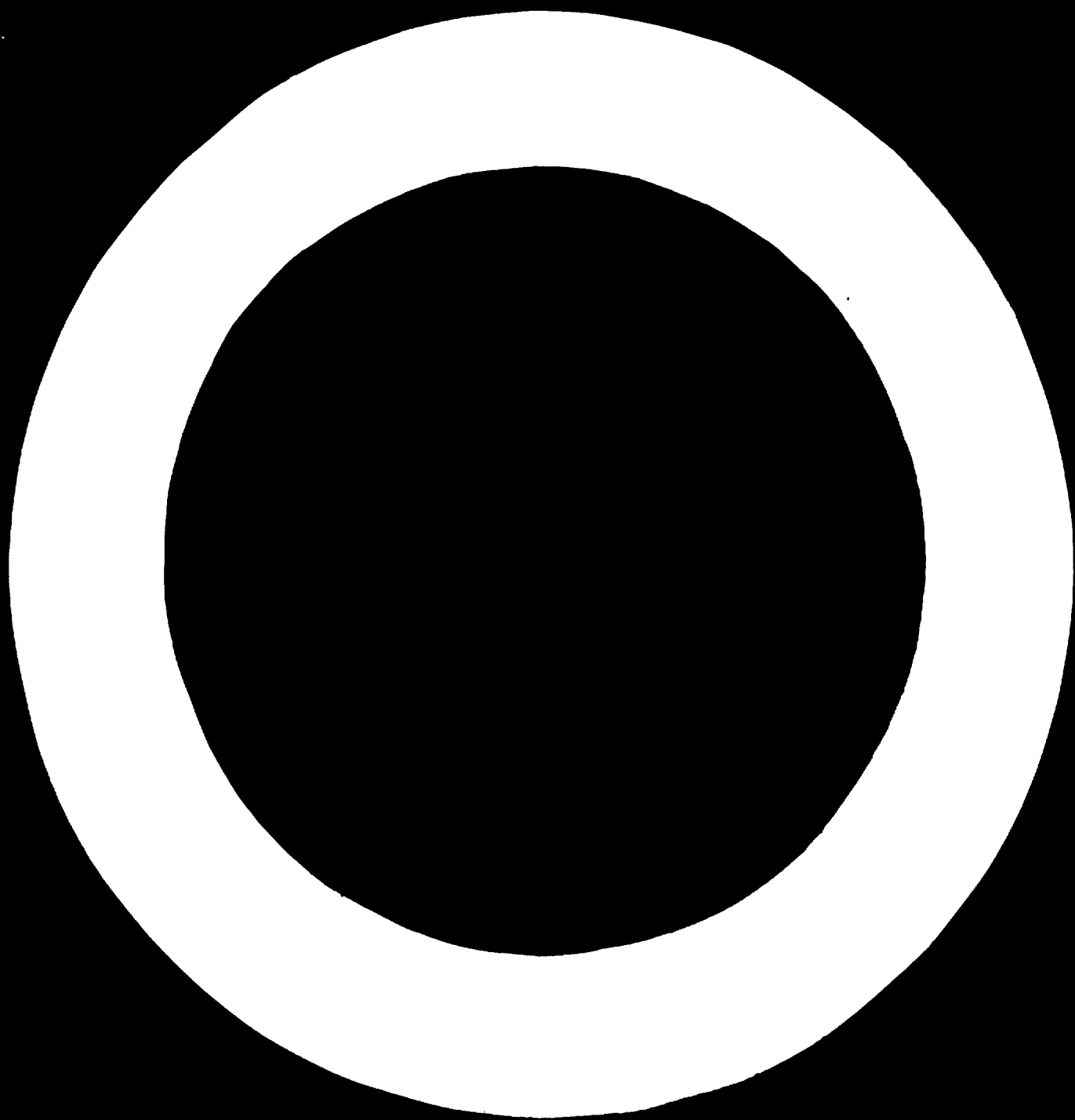
SUGGESTIONS FOR COVERING THE DESIGN NEEDS
OF THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY IN DEVELOPING COUNTRIES

The growtn of industry in a country where there are no industrial
traditions always brings new demands. The more developed one
branch of industry is and the more the product is sold to retail
consumers, the more need there is for good design. The more
necessary export markets are, the greater role the good designs
play.
The increasing demand of consumers in the future will cause new
demand on industry.
In many developing countries there is a great interest in good
design among producers. To co-operate with capable designers
is difficult for two reasons, they are not avaible, and if they
were, paying them adequately is not economic because of fear
of competitors copying the models. Mass production would be a
solution to cover design expenses, when one starts to develop
an original collection. Unfortunately in many developing
countries local consumers are very individualistic and somehow
they do not like to buy mass produced furniture. This is one
main obstacle and the second is that the existing factories
often have lack of storage space.
Mass production furniture is always cheaper than ones made
piece by piece. Yet, in most developing countries furniture
is still production a one by one basis. I believe that local
people would accept mass produced furniture because cars,
radios and other everyday items are known by them to be mass
produced and yet accepted. Both in the case of mass produced
as well as individually produced furniture.
Design and designers have to play a very important role in the
development of the furniture industry of any developing country.
There are several ways to cover design needs. The following
survey shows different possibilities and will describe each
illustrating positive and negative aspects of each point.

1. Education of local designers

Almost all industrial countries have their own national
design education. The tradition in several countries reach
into the last century. Usually the institutes serve several
branches of industry, producing industrial designers of all
standards. In many countries industry itself plays a remarkable
part in this education and often institutes work under the
Ministry of Industry (or Commerce), not under the Ministry
of Education.
The ability to think creatively and artistic aptitudes are
the main criteria when selecting applicants, who must have
at least graduated from high school. A two weeks' special
selection course is usually used.

Positive aspects

i) Local education of design will guarantee the future needs of the industry.

ii) The tightening competition in the world markets is demanding better design standards and if products could have the "exotic touch" that only designers knowing tradition can give, perhaps there would be better possibilities of products selling in foreign markets. Consumers are becoming more and more critical of design selecting goods.

iii) The institute should serve other local countries if possible.

Negative aspects

i) Though there are now, and will in the future be more need for designers, the institute could produce too many.

ii) If the industry could not give enough work and salaries were too low, it is possible that talented designers would move to work in other countries where their designs were more appreciated. If this happens, the investment in educating them, is partly wasted. This phenomenon is not new in some European countries.

iii) There will be difficulty finding really good, capable and up-to-date teachers. Strange conditions, defective knowledge and perhaps political factors could be obstacles to procuring them. Even higher salaries would not attract them.

iv) The establishment and operating costs would be expensive.

v) It would be 12 years before the results were apparent.

2. Overseas education

To send talented people overseas to get their education is highly recommended. The countries, concerned, all have a high level of design education, especially the U.S.A. and most industrialized European countries. Teaching is usually given in English as well as the local language. Selection of applicants could be in the same way as mentioned in point I.

Positive aspects

i) As in the case of local schooling, this will guarantee to fill design needs in the future, if enough students are sent abroad.

ii) There will be no danger of over production, because it would be easy to control and limit the number of designers educated, to cover needs of the Industry.

iii) As I A (ii)

iv) The level of designers finishing their
education, would be noticeably higher than
those educated locally because of the better
teaching given in developed and experienced
schools. It is very important that designers
can closely follow today's development of
industry and to get international contacts
to the markets and see the competition of
markets. During college vacation student
designers could gain experience in modern
industry. This is very important.

v) Transmitting experiences and knowledge of
designers to local industry would be very
positive.

Negative aspects

i) If the financing of education is by the
Government, as it usually is, the designer
undertakes to stay for a certain time in
the service of the state. In my opinion,
the state very seldom is able to offer work
commensurate with their education, and it
is a danger that the designer becomes a mere
official and not a creative designer. It
is very important that designer can get
active work immediately after finishing his
schooling in the service of industry. The
best encouragement is to let him see the
results of his work and its succes in the
markets.

ii) The failure of industry to hire capable
designers may cause the designers to remain
in the country where they were trained if
they see better earning possibilities, unless
the state demands their return. If this
happens usefulness of their knowledge and
ability is lost to their own country.

iii) Education abroad needs the same time as it
takes when taught locally. The results in
industry would take several years to be
seen, but the quality of the designers
would be better.

iv) This is very expensive operation because of
long residence abroad, the average time
being 3 to 4 years.

3. To import designers

International designers' movements from one country to
another have been very common for a long time. One reason for
this is the internationalization of products. National
characteristics will disappear because of large scale production,
the product must be as profitable and appropriate for use as
possible.

Several factories are willing to co-operate with foreign designers and results are mostly positive. For example: the co-operation between one designer from Thailand and a European furniture company has been for a long time a target of interest to international furniture people, and it is very succesful.

Positive aspects

i) This way gives new saleable collections in moderate short time.

ii) With new designe you need to modernize factory production and production methods, in other words; increase "know-how".

iii) It will be very informative to local industry when touching modern markets' quality demands.

Negative aspects

i) Most designers will have difficulty understanding local mentality.

ii) Trying to accustom himself to local customs may take a long time and slow progress may remove his interest from the whole design dev lopment.

iii) If local salaries are relatively lower than in the designer's country of origin, it may effect how quickly he returns home.

iv) If the salary is paid on a royalty basis, there must be really large mass production, before the designer could earn the same amount for his work as he could in his own country, because the factory prices here are much lower. If it is a questopm pf only few years work of contract, it hardly covers the exprnses of travel returning and new starting after returning. Also staying several years out of international progress will effect a decline.

v) Being in a different climate and the break off the normal sociale life, will cause a decline in working capacity.

vi) To find really capable designers from abroad is difficult.

4. To import plans and designs

This is a very commonly used method. It is based on earlier relationship or turning towards internationally famous designers.

Positive aspects

i) The collection is made in a reasonably short time, if information about production possibilities is known and the forms of payments accepted.

    ii) Technical progress will grow with new
        requirements.

    iii) The industry improves when the distance
        between international and local designs
        narrows.

Negative aspects

    i) Long distances and lack of personal contacts
       may cause a decline of interest and design,
       especially if a fee has not been strictly
       defined.

    ii) Lack of co-operation between the parties
       may cause poor results and the end of the
       business relationship.

5. Production under licence

Production under licence has been very common and it will be growing method and still more common in international industry. This way is an economical way of working to acquire good-known products and get industrial "know how". This is natural way in modern marketing development.

Positive aspects

    i) This way we get good and famous model

    ii) Because products selected are already
       successful in other markets, there is
       less uncertainty of success.

    iii) It helps the effort to modernize and stream-
       line production, and possibly installing new
       machines which remarkably enlarge production
       capacity.

    iv) It gives new possibilities to export to the
       countries where there is not already a
       licency.

    v) It is a most economic way to get really good
       designs if a fair play is adopted by the
       factory of origin.

Negative aspects

    i) Every factory should have its own target of
       design development. Continuously successful
       production under licence with long runs will
       probably kill a factory's own future design
       plans. The factories independence and
       originality will be in danger of disappearing.

    ii) If the company hasn't its own design policy
       and the foreign factory stops co-operating,
       there will be difficulties replacing them.

    iii) It is a duty of a business to its community
       not to make too many of its products under
       foreign licence. The industry must support
       own designers and under licence production
       never will do that.

iv) Unless guaranteed quantities are maintained it will be difficult to achieve co-operation with licence holders. It is difficult for the licence holder to control local quality.

6. To manufacture from plans of foreign customers

Several big furniture sales chains and interior service firms have their own designers. The chains purchase their own collection from factories who complete orders most economically. Local industry could compete successfully, though there are problems in transportation, if production costs are comparably and quality acceptable. Also design offices may be in trouble sometimes, when trying to serve their customers by using specially designed models, for quick delivery. Big factories have planned the production for years ahead, and small ones if delivery is urgent, fix the price unprofitably high. Local factories could help if the quality is acceptable by customers.

Positive aspects

i) This sets an international quality standards to the local furniture industry.

ii) It saves marketing investiments in overseas countries.

iii) This gives work to industry and develops better production methods. It also may influence purchasing new machines to replace the old ones.

Negative aspects

i) If the deliveries are supposed to be completed in a certain time, it may give troubles to factory's own programme.

ii) Local production possibilities are not always known by customers, and it may happen that only a part of an order can be made here. When this happens customers usually cancel the whole order of the factory may refuse to make the order.

7. International furniture competition

To find new collection, this way is often used, especially, when some new thought outside of the factories' own ideas are needed. In this case it is important that the jury is internationally respected. The contest could consist of several parts; home furniture, hotel furniture etc. The programme of competition should give very strict descriptions of production facilities and material which may be used.

Positive aspects

i) The competition should give the results in comparatively short time.

ii) The collection should be new and valid to international markets if there is a real interest among designers.

iii) It may give new hints to modernize the
production.

iv) It will bring up-to-date designs closer
to local producers.

Negative aspects

i) Comparatively c stly operation

ii) The influence of contest on production is
usually short-term and in that way it may
be unprofitable.

iii) If the prizes are lower than the international
level, the common interest towards the
contest will decrease, and as result, will
receive old drawings which are proved to be
useless in other factories.

vi) If description of production possibilities
are not clearly specified, the results could
be uncertain, because designers have no
experience of local industry.

v) Long distances and costs of travels prevent
succesful co-operation between designers
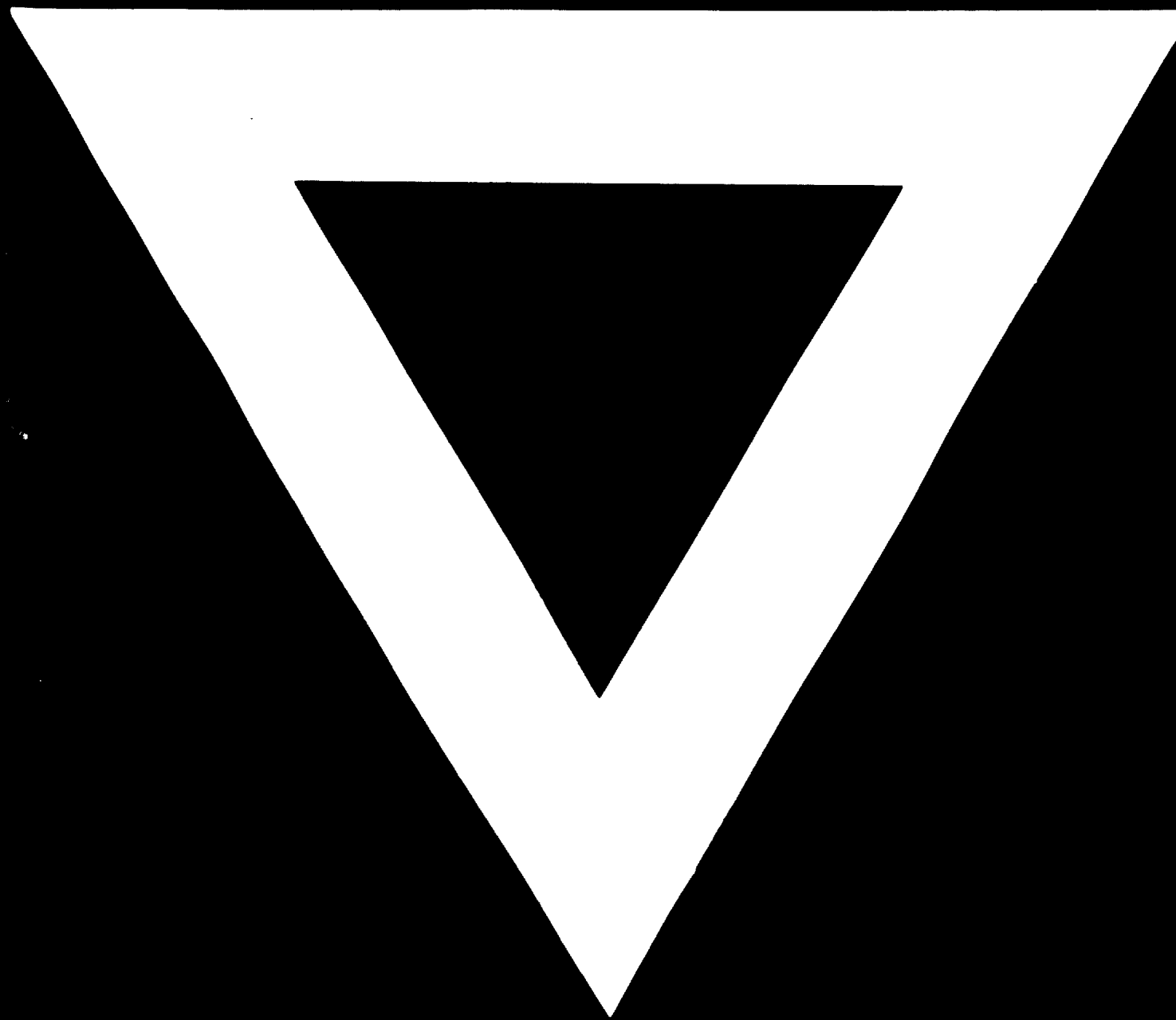and factory representatives.

Conclusion

Surveying all above mentioned points, I present the following as
my personal conclusion.
In my opinion the proposal of point 2 would be best when thinking
far into the future, if the industry seriously wants really
capable designers. The progress, at enormous speed, also sets own
requirements to industry to follow the development. It is not
enough that the factory gives work to its designers, its task
is also to keep its designers on same footing as other countries.
This should be happen by sending them regularly to follow up
international e ents of its own Br ich, at fairs, designer-
meetings etc. It is also ve.y impo. tant to get international
contacts continuously if production is to compete successfully
in already difficult markets. Discussions and contacts with
buyers are always useful for designers.
Thinking about the near future, point 5 should be the best
way to get fast and common useful solution. Numerous projects,
well known among factories, need new modern furniture. Because
local industry for the present is incapable of offering its own
design products, this way seems to give a very natural solution,
in addition, production under licence is "fair play" and costs
are very reasonable.

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