

object lesson

THE STORY BEHIND AN ICONIC DESIGN



1. ONE OF MARIA PERGAY'S STAINLESS-STEEL RING CHAIRS AT HER RESIDENCE IN BÉZIERS, FRANCE. 2. BETH RUDIN DEWOODY AND FIROOZ ZAHEDI'S NEW YORK APARTMENT. 3. BILL STEWART'S PALM SPRINGS HOME. 4. PERGAY'S RING CHAIR.

Right on Target

Maria Pergay's swirling Ring chair brought stainless steel into all the most mod living rooms

France's leading steel manufacturer, Ugine-Gueugnon, wanted to up the glam factor on stainless steel back in 1968. At its invitation, the Paris designer Maria Pergay—already known for her exquisite way with silver—considered transmuting some of her signature objects and accessories into Uginox, the company's brand of the industrial material. But then she had a better idea: How about furniture? Unveiled at Galerie Maison et Jardin amid the heated political riots known as May 68, the line included the Wave desk, Flying Carpet daybed, and Ring chair. The presentation was a hit, reports gallerist Suzanne Demisch, who represents Pergay's work at Demisch Danant in Manhattan: "Pierre Cardin bought everything."

"It is the fruit, if you will, of my first artistic success," Pergay, now 90, told *AD* in 2018 of the chair, which was inspired by an orange peel. *Maison Française* called stainless steel "the material of the future," and a few years later it was, thanks to the Ring chair's appearance in Rainer Werner Fassbinder's 1973 sci-fi film *World on a Wire*. Pergay pledged her allegiance to the metal in the *New York Times* in 1970, when her works were shown at Air France's Fifth Avenue gallery: "Copper is too fragile, aluminum too light, gold too symbolic, silver too weak; bronze is out of fashion and platinum inaccessible. Nothing is more beautiful than steel."

Today, two of the 50-some original Ring chairs grace Pergay's house in the South of France. Others have landed in major collections across the globe, including that of Beth Rudin DeWoody, who lives with one in New York City. "I love to look at it," she says, adding, "I rarely sit in it, but it's comfortable enough to do so." —HANNAH MARTIN



1. FRANÇOIS HALARD 2. FIROOZ ZAHEDI 3. LANCE GERBER 4. COURTESY OF DEMISCH DANANT.



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