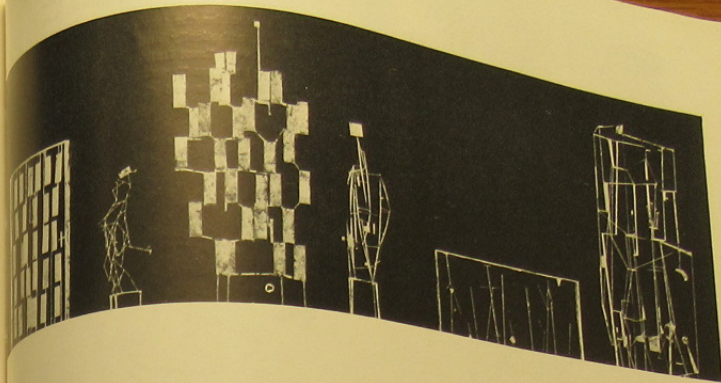
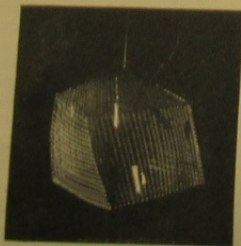


herbert matter



Bertoia: his sculpture his kind of wire chair

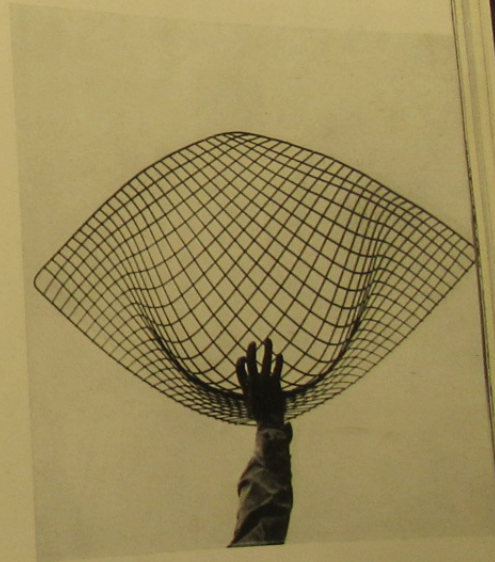
It has often been noted that furniture is becoming either an integral part of the architectural shell or else sculpture, and that the chair in particular, no longer at the inconspicuous periphery but in the center of a space cleared of distracting clutter, now claims the eye from every angle. Function demands that it be as satisfactory to look at as to sit in. Another recognized tendency is for it to become lighter and more transparent because of the ever higher premium on space.

Which is simply a way of saying that no one should be surprised at sculptors' designing chairs, or using materials which can be twined into strong meshes—for example wire.

The sculpture of Harry Bertoia has been seen at the Knoll showrooms for some years. Cages of sticks or wire high on the walls, they wove choreographic designs through the air without confining it. The three-dimensional nettings were sometimes jewelled with smooth stones or bits of metal weightlessly transfixed within.

In some weeks the Knoll showrooms will be cleared of everything except sculpture and chairs by Bertoia, the result of a few years' work at the Knoll experimental workshop in New Hope, Pennsylvania.

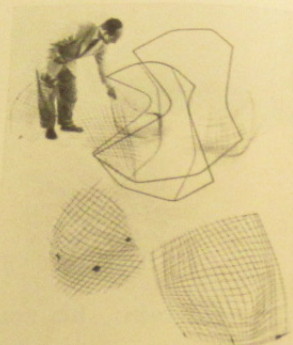
The chairs will inevitably invite comparison with Charles Eames' wire chairs launched last



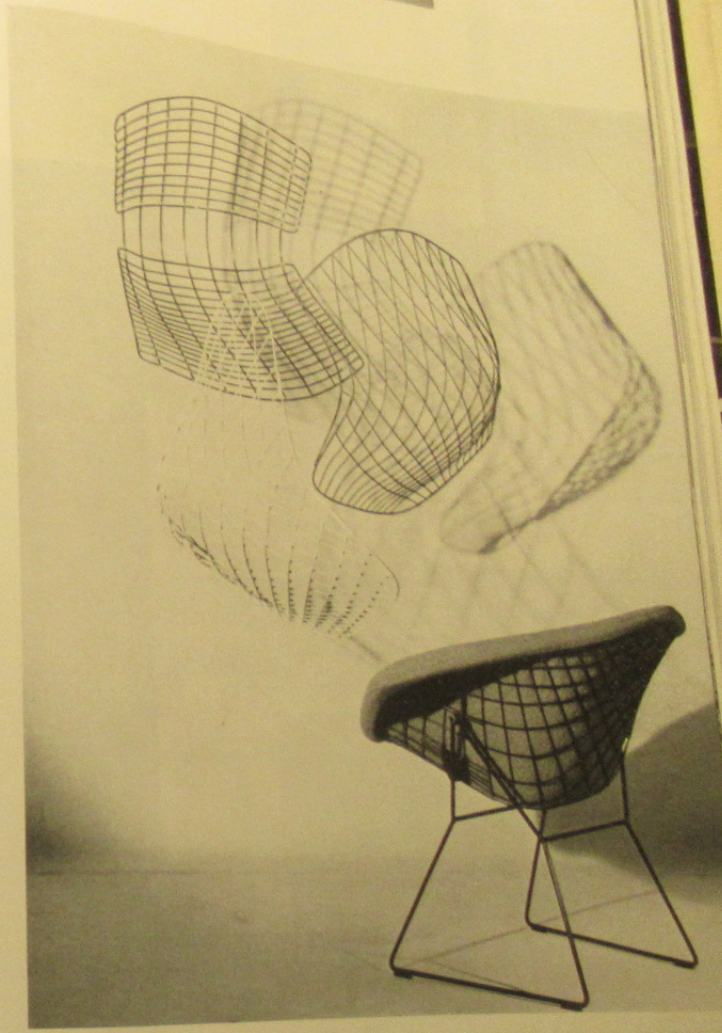


The four models will be the side chair, the "armchair" with low back, the "armchair" with high back, the stool or ottoman. The "arms" are winglike extensions of the seat cradle suspended from side hinges springing above the base. All models except the stool, of course, have this feature. Suspension of the seat cradle gives the chair flexibility, automatic adjustability to two positions by means of an effortless shift of body weight.

year by the Herman Miller Furniture Company (April 1952 *Interiors*), especially when Bertola was a member of the design group collaborating on the original Eames plywood chair. Let it be immediately understood that, despite superficial similarities the two designs are basically unlike, esthetically and functionally. Bertola, born in Northern Italy but educated in Detroit, studied at Cass Technical High School, Detroit School of Arts and Crafts, and Cran-



brook, where he taught metal craft and became known for his jewelry. One of his jobs with the U. S. Navy Electronics Laboratory at Point Loma was on a human engineering manual—the human being as a functioning mechanism. Bertola's new sculptures clarify the esthetic concept of the chairs. Bushes on tiny, firm feet, they consist of brilliant copper, silver, or gilt "leaves"—geometric leaves—all turned the same way as if blown by the wind, on stiff twigs of metal. The structures have a cellular regularity, organic like honeycombs, chemical like crystals. With neither a beginning or an end, they lace through space without enclosing it, are jagged, unfinished, with a magical suggestion of continued movement. The bees might at any moment add new cells to these frozen mobiles, the wind could blow the leaves another way, or a little more solution might be poured from the test tube and more of the mysterious snowflakes instantaneously appear, or recede without warning, as chemical fairylands do when the air dries or the temperature rises. Ephemeral movement exists also as one walks around them, as each change of angle changes the reflections from the parallel planes of the leaves. Without going into detail we will only state the obvious fact that Eames' wire cage is an enclosed, centrally focussed design. Functionally the unusual features are the angling of the graceful wings on the two armchairs, which support the weight of the arm at the armpit rather than at the forearm, and the movable hinge at the side attachment between seat cage and legs, which gives each chair two positions, a more upright and more relaxed one. The Eames seat cage is supported on the legs; Bertola's cradle is suspended by triangular side braces over the base.—O. G.



Many kinds of legs and bases were experimented with before the final decision to use this one, fully braced for the suspension hinge, under all models.

