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## Integrating Body/Mind Awareness with Interior Design--Part I

by Patrick Clark

It has been known for centuries by meditators that sitting in a certain way brings the best results. For some reason or reasons, this 'meditation posture' brings on the 'relaxation response'-- decreased muscle tension, lowered heart rate and blood pressure, a deeper breathing pattern, calming of the belly, and a peaceful, pleasant mood. In America we are taught to sit this way during meditation, but *only* during meditation. In Asian countries where Buddhism is mainstream, so is autonomous sitting (sitting without a chair). Traditionally, the zafu and zabuton were not reserved for spiritual uses, but were used as everyday furniture.



*The floor makes a great desk-- plenty of room to spread papers! Here, a zafu is used to prevent collapsing of the shoulders. This is me working on this article.*

*For your back to be truly free and unkinked, regular stretching is a requirement. In this technique, the zafu is placed on the floor then leaned back onto. Hold the stretch for 30 seconds on each area (lower back, middle, and upper). This is a great stretch before a period of sitting or anytime throughout the day.*



With all the research into somatics and mind/body healing, a growing group of Westerners are discovering that most of the built environment in our homes, work places, and public spaces is harmful to the body. These spaces are designed around a flawed paradigm: that the chair is necessary and the human body cannot support itself without one. Instead, we suffer physical degeneration, back pain, blocked breathing and vitality. This offers a continuous stream of patients to chiropractors, massage therapists, surgeons and pharmaceutical companies.



*Galan Cranz, author of The Chair, lounging at her home. This chair adjusts on its tracks for multiple positions. For reading or computer work she uses a specially designed book holder. Dr. Cranz has an interesting assortment of alternatives-to-the-chair.*

Combining the healing arts with anthropology, we can for the first time question basic assumptions about why we do what we do.

*Linsi Deyo, founder of Carolina Morning Designs, trying out our own "Yoga Lounge" which she designed. This assortment of cushions provides an incredibly comfortable position--using principles from restorative yoga--for relaxing, visiting, or reading. For reading, she would place a zafu or yoga block under each elbow.*



*Cushions above include: yoga mat, yoga bolster cylindrical (under knees), yoga bolster rectangular (behind back), buckwheat pillow cylindrical (under neck), and four yoga blocks to hold up the yoga bolster.*

Indigenous people (the majority of the world's population) continue to live comfortably without using the chair. Even in countries without adequate nutrition, back problems are not as rampant as they are in America. Look at babies and young children. They sit beautifully without chairs. So where-- or when-- or how-- or why-- do we lose our ability to sit without a chair?



If you are aware of this, you will now face several challenges, probably the biggest is finding how to fit in with social norms and still be comfortable. Dr. Galan Cranz author of The Chair -- offers solutions for contemporary architecture and interior design

*Who says I have to sit down? I do most of my computer work standing. In fact, I rarely sit all day besides for meditation. This is great especially for people who get interrupted a lot and have to get up and down. It is also a remedy for a sedentary job. Currently I am experimenting with proper height and placement of keyboard, monitor, etc, using temporary props. I angle the keyboard backwards to avoid bending at the wrist.*

Autonomous sitting can be on the floor or off of it using standard -height built furniture. Sitting on the floor, like walking and bicycling, is playful, vulnerable, freeing, puts us closer to the earth and natural rhythms. Sitting on the floor encourages movement and flexibility. Most of us only have the opportunity at the meditation hall, yoga studio, at the beach or when playing with kids. It takes careful planning and the willingness to shirk centuries of cultural (Western) conditioning--to create a more relaxed, natural, movement-friendly environment. This little step, of redesigning spaces in our homes, offices, and studios, is the beginning of this cultural revolution. It is the first outward manifestation of the need to free the body from the confines of the table-and-chair-culture.

*However, when I do sit at the computer. this zafu seat is my newly discovered favorite method. The zafu can convert most any chair into a tilt seat. There are two basic positions here. One with feet on the floor and one with knees bent and feet on rung of stool. These positions are variations of "perching".*



## Carolina Morning Designs news

### From Meditation To the New Ergonomics

From 1985 until 2000, CMD made *only* meditation cushions and benches. We gradually realized-- from personal experimentation and customer feedback-- that these very same cushions *can also be used for other activities*. In fact, we investigated and found that these cushions were originally--for centuries--used for everyday sitting. They were standard household furniture, instead of the tables and chairs that we know today. The language in the Asian countries where the zafu and zabuton originate is translated "seat" or "mat" without the *meditation* in front of it.

With investigation and research, we found testimonies and evidence that this way of sitting is the body's natural state and provides the best ergonomics for the body. We have since been experimenting with new product designs and educating people about what we call "Natural Sitting". There is a big need for this, as many people come to us with back problems. Some companies respond by designing expensive seats. We want to offer alternatives that are simple, affordable for the whole family, and can be used in many various situations.

### CMD Interviewed for Green Business website.

On Dec. 22, 2006, Patrick Clark and Linsi Deyo were interviewed by Anne Alexander of Be Real Revolution, about their philosophy and practices relating to Green Business. This is an in depth look at what goes behind the cushions. What vision prompted Linsi to begin sewing zafus in her home 20 years ago, in rural Spring Creek, North Carolina? How did CMD grow from Linsi's living room to it's current state-of-the-art LEAN manufacturing facility in Celo, North Carolina? How can products be manufactured in the US in a way that is least polluting and still makes a profit? What does 'Green Business' mean and how can it help people and the planet? [Find out this and more by clicking here to download a one-hour MP3.](#)



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This newsletter is interactive. Send us your comments, ideas, stories and photos of things you have done to create body/mind friendly spaces. This is new to all of us and by sharing we can help each other.

The information in this article is not meant to diagnose, treat or cure any disease. Please see a knowledgeable health care practitioner for your particular needs.

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