

EMMA CHOROSTECKI

Throughout her childhood, Emma Chorostecki's parents placed their daughter in lots of different activities, an approach to learning that the artist calls "cross training." A willing participant, Chorostecki adopted a fluidity of movement across fields of study and practice, and a restless ethic of ongoing learning that informs her creative and professional path today.

In high school Chorostecki attended a well-rounded contemporary dance program that offered students opportunities not only to dance, but to choreograph other bodies moving in space and to conceptualize and design stage sets. Nearing graduation, she understood that having waited to pursue dance until high school, relatively late for a professional in the field, the paths open to her would be more narrow and more demanding. So without knowing quite where it would lead, Chorostecki enrolled in the furniture craft and design program at Sheridan College, a school known for its emphasis on making.

Emerging from Sheridan, Chorostecki found work doing exhibit fabrication at the Ontario Museum, but hoped for more design opportunities. These were harder to come by because of Sheridan's reputation as a maker school, but thanks in part to her childhood cross training, and a millennial belief that she can learn a thing once inside the door, she found design work, bridging digital design strategies and tools with treasured opportunities for shop-based prototyping. Like her peers, Chorostecki trusts her internal compass, and when something feels right and promising, she's willing to embark without knowing what will emerge. Woodworking in the shop at Sheridan didn't come easily at first; instead of being daunted, she worked that much harder at it. She trusts the process, knowing that things will become clearer as time progresses.

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Furniture shapes our movements in space, constraining and catalyzing, informing and reflecting relationships of estrangement, intimacy, and power. An individual chair has legs, arms, and a back, a furniture metonym for the human body. Chorostecki's background bridging dance and furniture-making ignites her imagination, bringing her on a journey from questions of universal design and accessibility to more playful imaginings of how one might choreograph movement for a particular chair or table. Now in architecture school in Vancouver, one of the first classes she enrolled in took students to a site, inviting them to focus on the experience of the place. This, she thought, is just like a dance class! *What do you smell? What do you hear? What do you know?* "Architecture right now feels like the missing piece that's actually connecting the ephemeral moments of dance to the permanent moments of building." By contrast to the furniturer maker, the architect or designer is invited to imagine the space in which we begin, speculatively, responding to environmental conditions but freed from the material constraints of grain, wood movement, or joinery choices.

What can you do if you have no limitations?

During the school year Chorostecki is embedded deeply in architecture courses with access to only a small shop so she's using the time to explore histories of design, particularly movements with strong social ethics. She's balancing a personal desire to think without limitations, with a fascination for the rigorous and

structured aesthetic language of De Stijl, a principled design movement from the first decades of the 20th century with fingers in painting, furniture, and architecture. The makers of the movement escaped the religious rigor of Dutch Calvinism only to emerge with a design vocabulary with its own streak of principled morality, Chorostecki observes. “Here is *how* you do things and here’s *why* you do things.”

In the shop in Philadelphia, Chorostecki has been exploring the work of De Stijl furniture designer and architect Garret Rietveld. “So now I’m going, okay, what are my colors? What are my shapes? What are my applications?” She shares with Rietveld not only the desire to move across spatial and material scales and between architecture and furniture, but an interest in how one integrates a design philosophy with one’s ethical compass. Rietveld embraced the democratic values of industrial production and furthermore made his designs readily and publicly available. He was among a group of early 20th century furniture designers to follow in the footsteps of Louise Brigham, whose late 19th century designs could be made from then ubiquitous wooden factory crates. Today you can easily download dimensions and instructions for Rietveld’s 1930s Crate Chair.

Chorostecki shares with Rietveld and the DeStijl makers an interest in small scale production, which for her reflects both an embrace of digital design and fabrication tools, and a pragmatic theory of economic accessibility. So much design, she argues, makes a sacrifice, whether in material quality, availability, or accessibility. Is there another choice? She has a strong belief that the best solutions emerge from the grassroots; might there be wisdom in the collective that invites us to redefine those sacrifices? In this research of precedents, Chorostecki is gathering data that will inform the boundaries she creates for herself. What will *her* doctrine be?