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A CONTEMPORARY HOUSE
BY KAA DESIGN

Richard FRINIER

A PIONEERING FURNITURE DESIGNER REFLECTS ON
A CAREER PROMOTING THE OUTDOOR STATE OF MIND

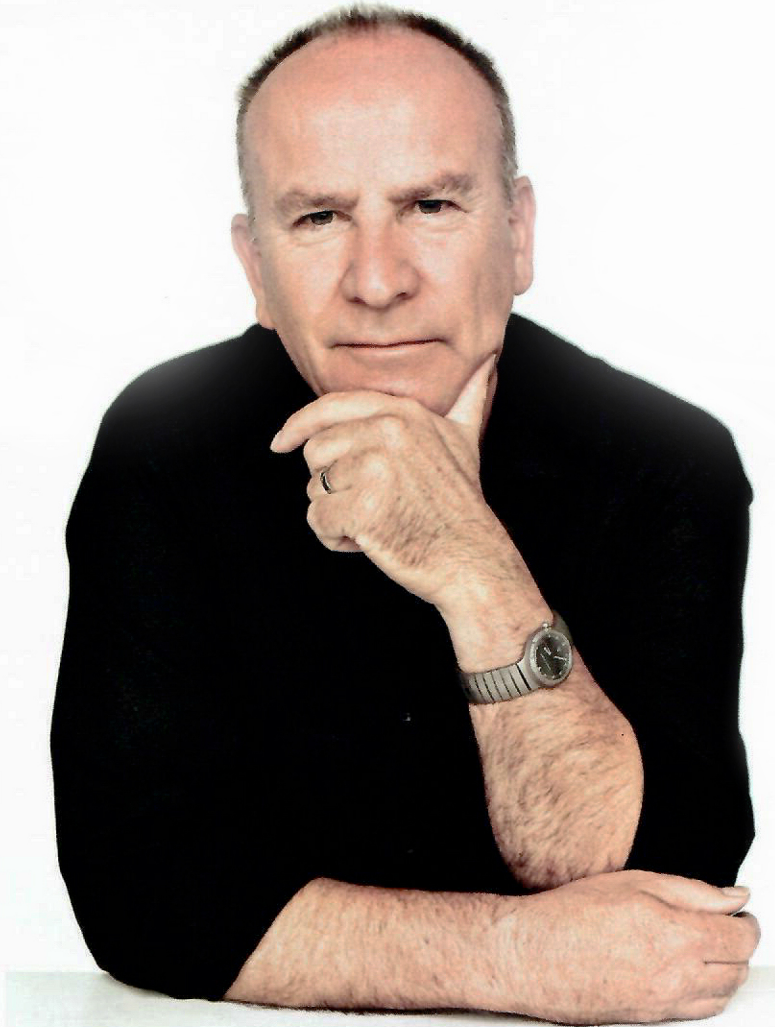
For more than 35 years, the celebrated Southern California furniture and textile designer Richard Frinier has designed and licensed his cobranded collections to the leading global outdoor-living brands, including Dedon, Brown Jordan and Sunbrella. A pioneer in bringing indoor comfort and design style to the outdoor arena, Frinier is known for exploring new materials and construction methods while using traditional materials in compelling ways. He recently spoke with DesignLA about the evolution of the indoor-outdoor market, and the role of Southern California in spurring its world-wide growth.

DLA: What was your entree into the design world?

RF: In my youth I was fascinated by materials and the ways in which things were made and how they looked. I seemed to have an awareness of how things made me feel, and I liked to take objects apart and put them back together in more interesting ways. I started my design career as a sculptor, lighting designer and freelance artist, and I also enjoyed creating original commissioned works while teaching advanced furniture manufacturing at the college level. My first commercial furniture design was a collection of bedroom furnishings for a California manufacturer that remarkably sold over nine thousand sets during a five-year production run. A much earlier pottery design that I made for the Anton Lang pottery studio in Oberammergau sold out at the Ambiente Fair in Germany. I then had to sit at the potter's wheel and make a lot of them, striving to make them as alike as possible, because at that time people were less interested in the artisanal nature of handmade design—they demanded consistency!

DLA: What made you focus on outdoor furnishings?

RF: After my success in designing interior furniture, I experienced an epiphany when I saw a picture of a chaise lounge made by Brown Jordan on the cover of the Los Angeles Times Magazine. I immediately made a connection between my ability to design, my passion for materials and sculpture, and the desire to make an emotional connection with others, just as I had when I saw that chaise lounge for the first time. I was also taken by the outdoor nature of design and my interest in being outdoors, having been



born and raised in California and surfing along the coast. I wanted to be a part of designing something that would be used outdoors. I was driven to contact Brown Jordan as a freelance designer, and soon after I went to work for them as an in-house entry-level designer. I ended up staying on for over twenty years! So you could say that it was the Los Angeles Times that raised my level of awareness of the outdoor sector of the furniture industry.

Hit parade: Some of Frinier's most popular designs include (top to bottom) the 1982 Quantum chair for Brown Jordan, which is still in production; Brown Jordan's Still chairs; and the Orbit collection for Dedon.



DLA: What were the early brands you worked with?

RF: Brown Jordan and Sunbrella, to name a few, and later Dedon on the more modern and exotic side. Also Century Furniture for more traditional and transitional designs with a sense of place. Since 2002 I've also had my own creative consultancy, where I collaborate with partnering brands and license my furniture and textile collections as cobranded and exclusive designs. Some of my designs have now been in continuous production for ten, twenty and thirty years, and some are sold in more than eighty countries around the world.

DLA: What was the outdoor marketplace like when you started?

RF: Though the outdoor furniture and textile industries have existed for many decades, they have each gone through tremendous evolution over the past twenty years. There were far fewer brands involved thirty or forty years ago, and the overall design, execution and performance now far exceeds what was expected or accepted in earlier years. Today perceptions and boundaries about outdoor furniture and textiles have changed. Outdoor pieces are recognized today as "performance" furniture, and the fabrics can be used anywhere in the homescape, whether indoors or outside. Good design should find its place easily no matter where it may be. Many of my designs are used for residential, contract, hospitality, resort and spa environments, so there's really no limitation, as all of these areas of design have crossed over and converged.

DLA: What did you want to bring to the marketplace that wasn't already there?

RF: I'm always looking for what's missing and what can be. My focus has been to design furniture, textiles, lighting and accessories that conform to my design mantra: they must be authentic, relevant and memorable. My designs have a restrained, quiet aesthetic, yet they're approachable. I use reductive detailing and edit what does not need to be there, so the eye can rest on the architectural design itself, its frame, construction, texture and colors. Good design at its best intuitively makes an emotional connection with others. The level of awareness that our surroundings either contribute to or take away from our sense of well-being is growing. Design is all around us, but it is the quiet and not-so-often-talked-about impact that it actually has on our daily lives that interests me.

DLA: What mistakes do people make when thinking about outdoor projects?

RF: People should be able to enjoy the process of creating their outdoor living, entertaining and even work spaces. It's important to give thought to how the spaces will be used and then be certain to select elements of design—furniture, textiles, lighting and accessories—to use in those same spaces in

different ways over time. This can lead to a thoughtful and more diverse selection of furnishings that may be arranged and rearranged over time to inspire daily use or changed and refreshed for special occasions, more like how furnishings are used in interior spaces. It's no longer about buying a set of furniture, it's in the mix that the interesting personality and unique lifestyle of a person or family should become evident.

DLA: Are there some basic principles for success for creating an outdoor living space?

RF: Consider all of the spaces across your outdoor living areas. Expand your thinking to include not only the obvious areas for dining and lounging but also the different kinds of entertaining situations and times of day they will be happening. And look for areas to retreat, including areas for yoga or tai chi, or an area for an outdoor daybed for luxurious escapism. Or a particularly small area with filtered sunlight coming through trees to add a beautiful lounge chair, ottoman and cappuccino table, a place to do the reading you've been wanting to do. It's not just about having one or two outdoor areas, it's about creating multiple spaces to fully enjoy living seamlessly between indoors and out. I also recommend that people consider a great modular collection. It really gives you amazing flexibility to either group and arrange the individual pieces into infinitely different shapes and functions and then just as easily separate the pieces to create more intimate sitting places.

DLA: What are some of your favorite pieces you've designed over the years?

RF: My first design for Brown Jordan in 1982, Quantum, was acknowledged with multiple awards for its classic modern lines and for being a favorite of architects and interior designers. It's remained in continuous production at Brown Jordan for well over thirty years. My original Orbit design has been taken all over the world as part of Dedon's Tour du Monde, an immersive and ongoing adventure where they visit people and places around the globe, bringing their furniture designs with them. Interior Design magazine recently named Orbit the best outdoor design of the decade. I was inspired by the docking-station scene in Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey when I created the Orbit. It rotates three hundred and sixty degrees on recessed inline skate wheels and has a retractable and removable canopy, so you can relax under the sun or the stars. More recently for Brown Jordan would be Still and Connexion. I like their quiet modernity, and they can be used throughout the exterior and interior homescape. I also love my design collaborations with Sunbrella, because I enjoy the creative process itself and the innovation involved in designing materials. Materials are often the jumping-off point for my future creations. And my Andalusia Royal Canopy Lounge Chairs and Chaises for Century are incredibly comfortable.

DLA: Who were some of your influences?

RF: I worked under the tutelage of midcentury-modern designer Hall Bradley during my very early years at Brown Jordan. Throughout the industry at large and over time, I respect and admire the creative minds and work of people like Mies van der Rohe, Antonio Citterio, Richard Schultz, Paola Lenti, Jean-Ma-



rie Massuad, and because I work with my wife and partner, Catherine, I have a special appreciation for design couples like Massimo and Leila Vignelli and Charles and Ray Eames.

Above: For Sunbrella, Frinier designed the new Architexture collection, drawing on his interest in structural patterns and forms.

DLA: Has the outdoor market become more international?

RF: Yes, of course, because outdoor living is not a trend. It's a conscious lifestyle choice to spend more time living and experiencing our lives outside. It brings balance to us in so many ways. It's a very sensory experience. This is a universal movement that is definitely global. I design furniture and textiles with an emotional appeal, personality, persuasiveness and attitude, inviting people to relax and take the time to enjoy life more. This can be indoors or outside, it's just that I design using performance materials that are intriguing, beautiful and lasting.

DLA: How do you stay on top of new materials available for outdoor design?

RF: I'm always looking at other industries for new possibilities. In my own design work, I'm continuously working on something new for upcoming launches. We will continue to see materials evolve, morph and change over time. They will increasingly become more planet friendly, and the popularity of mixing materials will continue to grow.

DLA: Does the international design community now look to Los Angeles for leadership?

RF: My work is global, yet it is based in California, where I was born and raised and where I still reside. The design community at large has come to recognize California and more specifically Los Angeles as a creative center and important influencer. As for outdoor, there has always been the appeal and the mystique of the California lifestyle, which has a broad appeal. This is a very big state with just about every conceivable terrain and weather extreme. It's this diversity in our landscape and especially in our multicultural society that inspires people around the world. ●