



15 MINUTES WITH...

Ini Archibong

by JESSICA RITZ

Ini Archibong's complex creative world is geographically far removed from and yet still connected to his original hometown of Pasadena. The Neuchâtel, Switzerland-based multidisciplinary designer draws from his formal education at ArtCenter College of Design and the École cantonale d'art de Lausanne, resulting in a genre-defying output that encompasses furniture, luxury accessories and collectable design, as well as music. From his watch project with Hermès to his association with the Friedman Benda gallery, Archibong bridges technical expertise and an ethereal sensibility that's nonetheless deeply historically rooted. In 2021, his Pavilion of the African Diaspora earned the

Best Design Medal at the London Design Biennale, and in 2022 Archibong became the second Black designer to add to the hallowed Knoll furniture catalog with the launch of his Iquo seating and table collection. We spoke with the Nigerian American creative at the Knoll Home Design Shop in West Hollywood during what was his first visit back to Southern California since he received the Distinguished Alumni Award from both ArtCenter and his high school alma mater, Polytechnic School, in 2019.

Tell us about the Iquo chair.

The brief was pretty straightforward: figuring how to make an outdoor chair that's beautiful and stackable,

with or without arms. Something that is identifiably Knoll but also identifiably me. The ergonomics of the seat in the back were really important. Another part of the brief was taking the opportunity to make something that would work in both the U.S. and Europe.

What was it like designing for this iconic brand?

I try to only design for heritage brands. It's a large responsibility. The way you respect that is by creating furniture that when somebody sees it, they know it comes from that brand.

What's that process like with Knoll?

A lot of conversations with [Design

Director] Benjamin Pardo. I knew that I wanted to design for Knoll long ago. Knoll's connection to art, their involvement with Cranbrook, and having designs that came from sculptors made it a perfect fit. I knew they would do a good job but it was beyond. There's nothing comparable to having a team of top-tier engineers at your disposal.

Did being from Southern California make designing an outdoor chair even more exciting?

I can't wait to see it at every school that I attended. ArtCenter is going to have the orange backs. That's the coolest thing because I remember we'd have class outdoors.

What do you carry with you daily?

I keep a sketchbook and a pen with me all the time. I always have my music. A pair of glasses just in case. Mostly important stuff for staying alive. My mask. And my laptop.

What are your favorite pieces you have in your own home?

Probably my Hästens bed. My Saarinen table. My stuff is a mixture of my prototypes, things that I think are cool, and it's very functional and whimsical. I also collect art.

How do you set goals that are compatible with the legacy you hope to create?

Most designers want to spread out. I like to focus. If there's a company where I jell with the furniture, that's where my furniture ideas are going to come from. If there's a company I do luxury with, that's where my luxury ideas are going to come from. If there's a gallery that I jell with, that's where all my collectible works are going to come from. And if people remember me after I'm dead, then it will be really easy to find the stuff. "Where's Ini's luxury furniture? Oh, that was Sé. Where's all the practical furniture that's still beautiful? That's with Knoll."