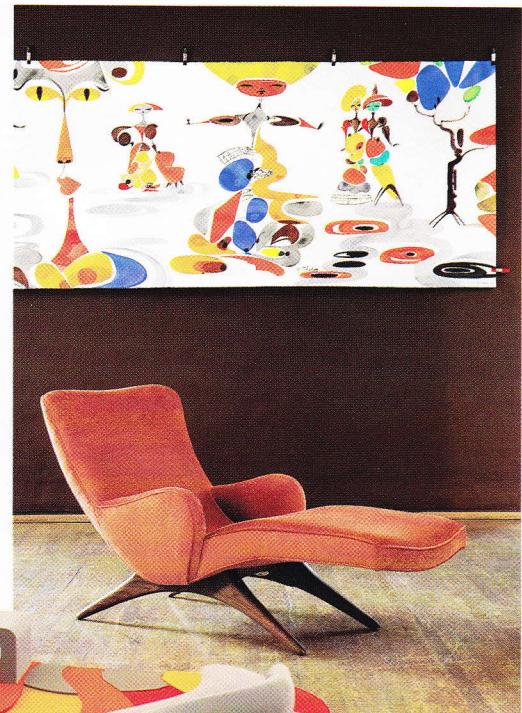
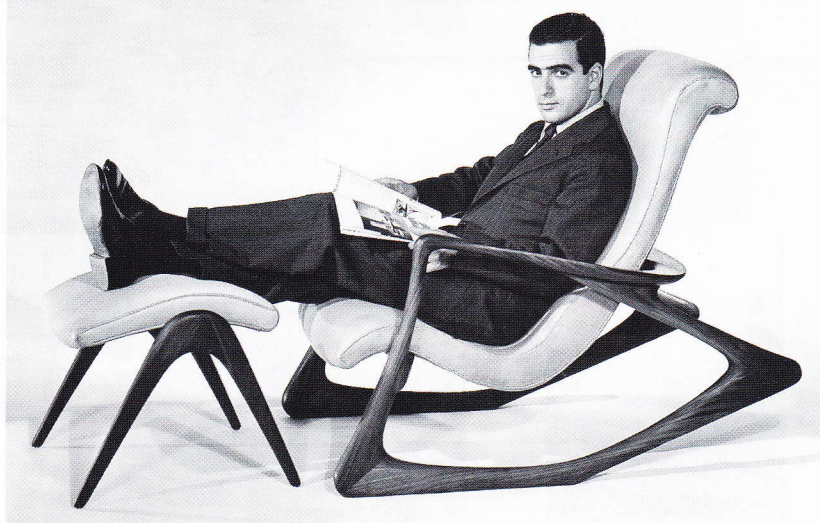


His sculptural room-filling sofas responded to the needs of collector customers when monumental canvases bumped furnishings away from the walls



apartment. Once he's dead, he suggests puckishly, people may finally decide that he was "pretty good."

Of course, he's bending reality to make his point. We all know that he's been vastly better than "pretty good" for longer than many of us have even been alive. As a testament to that, Ralph Pucci International, which had never repped Kagan furniture in all his decades of designing it, just launched a fiberglass chair based on one of his sketches from the 1950's.

Free-form seating has become a Kagan signature. He's not only about curves, however. As fashion designer Tom Ford notes in his introduction to *The Complete Kagan*, his architecture

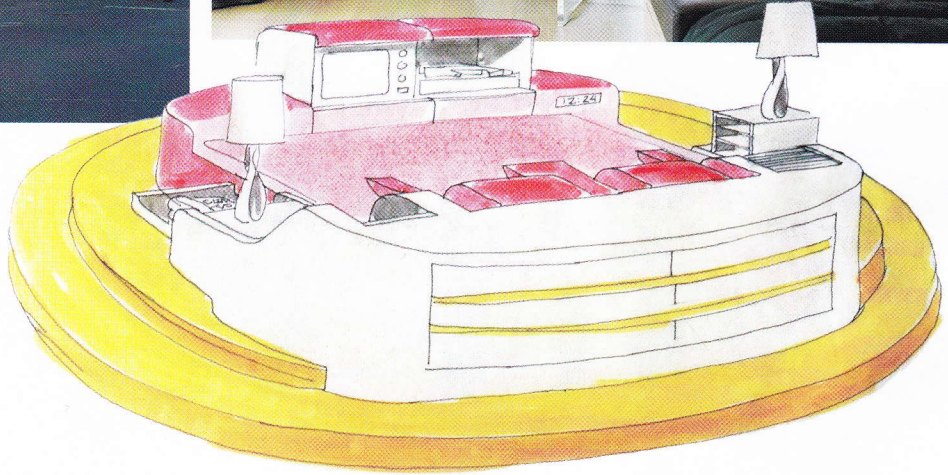
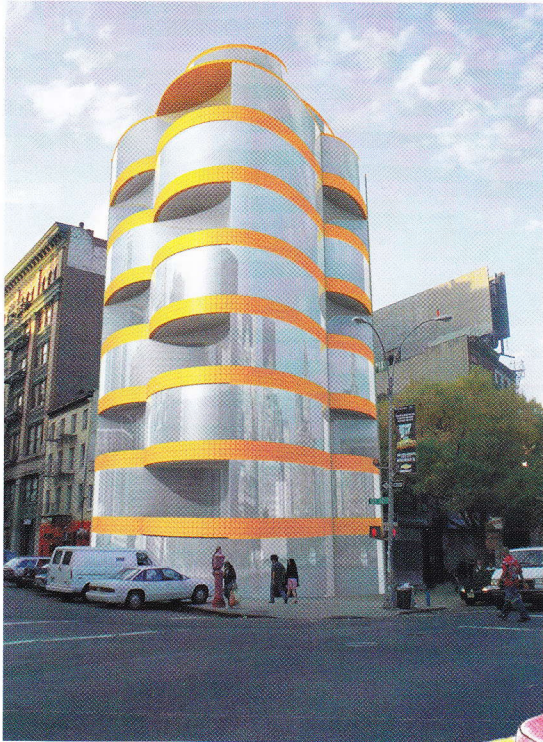
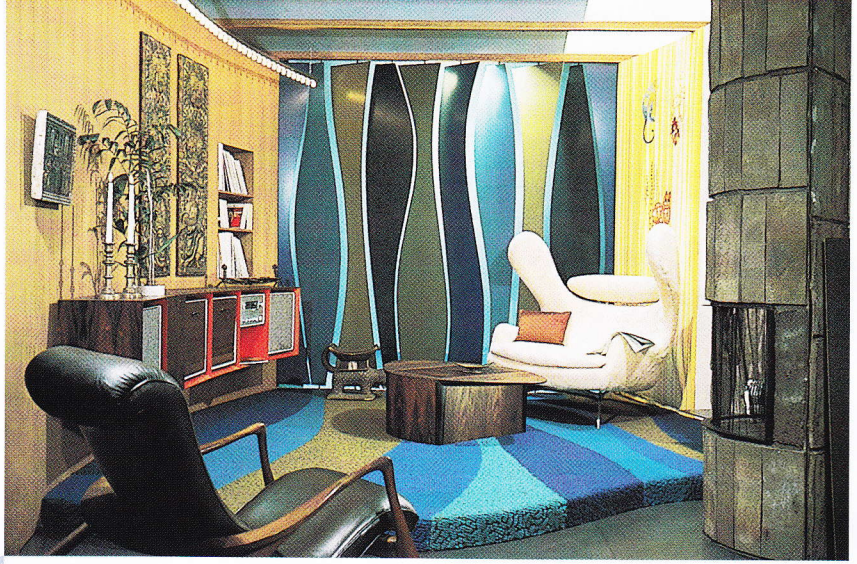
training partly explains the straight lines and cantilevers of the Cubist chairs, used by Gabellini Associates for the Nobu restaurant at the Giorgio Armani flagship in Milan. And then there's the Omnibus modular seating, which Ford bought for his own New Mexico ➤

Top, from left: A 28-year-old Kagan in his Two Position rocker and ottoman, 1955; photography: Hans van Ness. Omnibus seating in a Los Angeles Gucci boutique by Studio Sofield, 1992; photography: courtesy of Gucci. **Center, from left:** The Omnibus with a Frank Stella painting in Kagan's living room; photography: Jean-François Jaussaud/Luxproductions. A chaise longue, 1950, and a painting by Ruben Toledo; photography: courtesy of Ralph Pucci International. **Bottom:** A rendering of Multi Level seating, the Back to Back sofa, and a custom rug, 2008. Image: courtesy of Vladimir Kagan.

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house and Studio Sofield installed at 360 worldwide Gucci stores. Set on Kagan's characteristically transparent acrylic legs, the Omnibus seating appears to float, an effect enhanced by the tiny lightbulbs mounted on the underside of the frame—as soon as the sofa's power cord is plugged into an outlet.

Kagan has an entertaining 1990's snapshot of an unfinished Omnibus for the lobby of the Standard Downtown LA hotel. The rain-soaked maple frame is sitting behind his factory in



rural upstate New York, near Binghamton, as free-range chickens peck at the damp gravel beneath. Omnibus installations, it seems, are not so much seating as landscape. Kagan compares the multi-height platforms to the stony outcroppings where he used to sit with friends, overlooking a waterfall in the woods. ■

Top: Custom furnishings at the General Electric exhibit at the Armory Show, 1965. Photography: Hans van Ness. **Center, from left:** A proposed apartment building in New York, 2004; image: courtesy of Vladimir Kagan. An Erica chaise at Switzerland's Omnia hotel by Parallel Design; photography: Bruno Augsburger. **Bottom:** An ink drawing of a custom revolving platform bed, 1975; image: courtesy of Vladimir Kagan.

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It was his Russian father, an accomplished furniture-maker and sculptor, who insisted that Vladimir Kagan learn to draw and thus to design. Instead of English country-house seating with “down cushions that you slush into,” he says, he sketched “female shapes” to envelop the body. He exposed and streamlined chair frames, choosing walnut because he found that the grain looked “delicious” when massaged with steel wool and tung oil—and also because walnut is strong enough to arc like a slender tree branch.

Spry at 82, Vladi, as he is known, has always worshipped both nature and art. Scraps from making the walnut frames of 1953’s Contour chairs were passed along to his friend Louise Nevelson, who used the pieces to fill cubbies in her sculptures. Meanwhile, his sculptural room-filling sofas responded to the needs of collector customers when monumental abstract canvases bumped furnishings away from the walls.

Kagan says he hates seeing friends sitting on long sofas “like sparrows on a telephone line.” Introducing curves let him pack 20 feet of casual seating

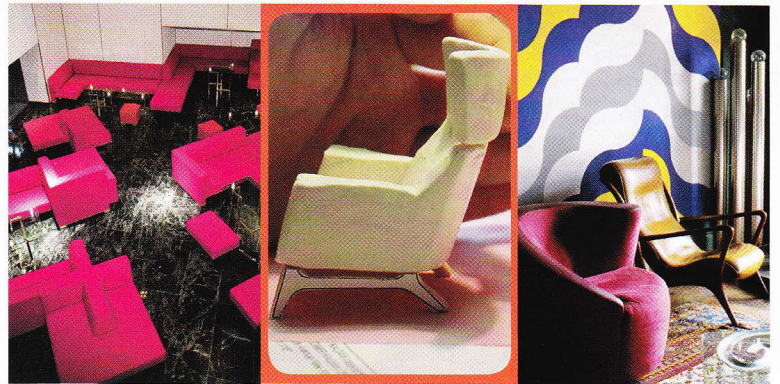
into a 6-by-8-foot footprint. The resulting heft required piano movers and mechanical hoists for some deliveries. One mammoth free-form sofa for a Massachusetts house by Walter Gropius was hoisted up and through the living area’s window.

When the Gropius house sold to a traditionalist, Kagan took the sofa back. Its next stop was Museum of Modern Art patron Barbara Jacobson’s New York town house. Finally, Jacobson put the sofa up for sale at auction at Christie’s, and cosmetics scion Ronald Lauder paid what Kagan calls the drop-dead price of \$192,000. (Reproductions sell for \$40,000 to \$50,000 today.)

Kagan is responsible for countless classics, including a line of much-coveted outdoor furniture. He even designed a high-rise apartment building that may someday rise a few miles downtown from his own New York ➤

Vladimir Kagan

text: **craig kellogg**



Top: Vladimir Kagan in 2003 in his New York living room. Photography: Jean-François Jaussaud/Luxproductions.

Bottom, from left: Omnibus seating, 1970, at the Standard Downtown LA hotel by Koning Eizenberg Architecture and Shawn Hausman Design; photography: Tim Street-Porter. A clay maquette for a prototype chair, 2000; photography: courtesy of Vladimir Kagan. A Corkscrew chair, 1995, a High Back Contour chair, 1950, and a Stalagmite floor lamp, 1971, in Kagan’s living room; photography: Jean-François Jaussaud/Luxproductions.

Opposite top: A custom Serpentine sofa, 2007, in a New York town house by Julie Hillman Design. Photography: Bärbel Miebach. **Opposite bottom:** A Floating Back Seat sofa, 1958, and a Branch table, 1950, in a private residence. Photography: courtesy of Vladimir Kagan.

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