

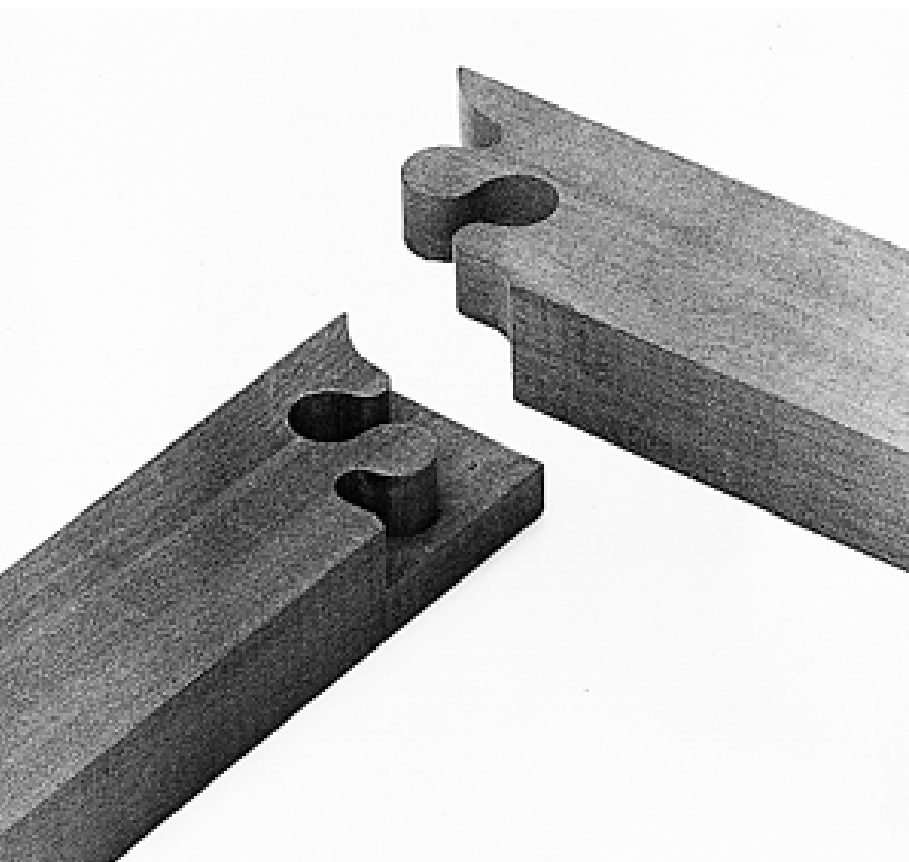


## Companies - virtual?!

from: dds 9/95

### Product design in the digital age

The project group “online.produkt“ at the Hochschule für Gestaltung in Offenbach (Offenbach Design School) proved that again and again universities give vital impulses for future developments, also in the craft trade.

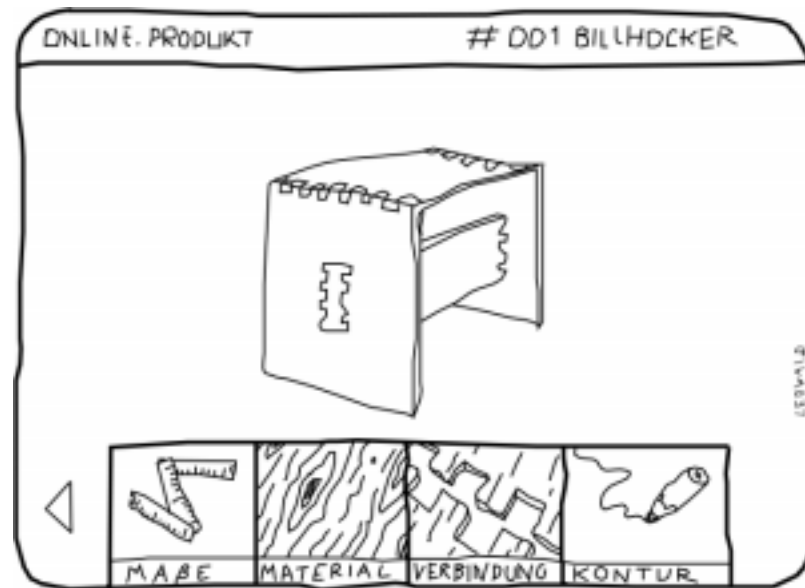


Flexible computer data as the  
basis for furniture design  
according to the customers'  
wishes - the future of the  
cabinet maker's craft?



## Companies - virtual?!

from: dds 9/95



In the course of a seminar during the summer term '95, 15 designer and design students initiated the project "Virtual Company" at the Offenbach Design School. The group which calls itself "online.produkt - Product-Publisher for digital Furniture", introduced itself to the public in the halls of the university during the conference C...-Lab on 13 and 14 July 1995.

They presented completely new types of technical and logistical possibilities, which will be available in the future to companies and customers via CNC-technology and data networks.

The designers asked themselves how the outlook on the new computer-integrated or so-called virtual production might look in detail. How will it change the design process? Who will produce the design projects? And what influence will all of it have on the form? In the course of the seminar various possibilities of future developments were sketched using theoretical models and scenarios. Their central point was a simulated founding of a virtual company, a company that only existed in the data network, without geographical reference. The virtual company publishes and sells digital furniture and communicates exclusively on-line, that means via data networks. The transfer of products and services takes place in the form of data.



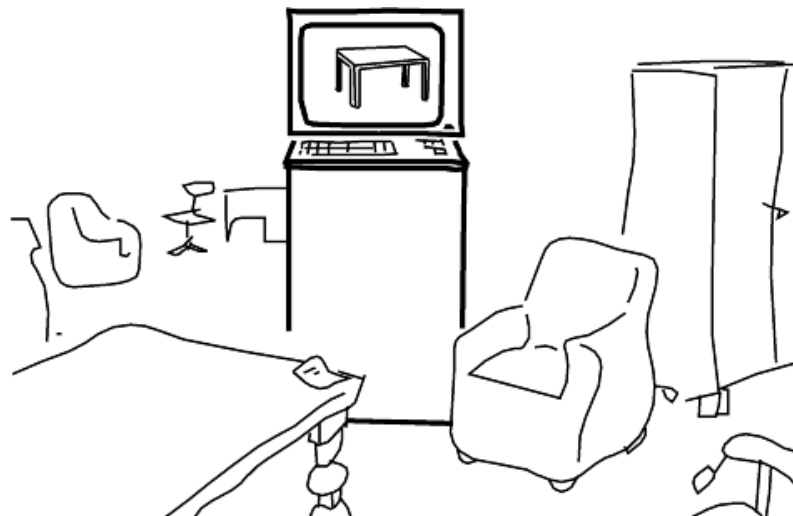
## Companies - virtual?!

from: dds 9/95

The project group which called itself “online.pro-  
dukt“ elaborated the way everything flows and  
functions in a virtual company, the so-called Pro-  
duct-Publisher. The Product-Publisher, which could  
be a design studio, offers basic furniture types to  
its customers. A software, the Product-Finder, not  
only helps select from the products of the publis-  
her, but also gives access to sample libraries and  
provides tools which allow to customize the basic



Buying furniture via data  
highway and screen - the  
project by the Offenbach  
students might perhaps be  
compared to the first flight  
to the moon.





## Companies - virtual?!

from: dds 9/95

furniture types to one's needs and vary them according to one's taste. This customer input can be used to optimize products and can even be developed into a participation in the design process - the customer becomes co-designer. The product range can be called upon by any household connected to the network - this group chose the Internet for its project. Consequently sales can be worldwide.

The Product-Publisher offers technical advice on various levels: advice on the user interface, via on-line dialogue and personal sales consulting in a Product-Gallery.



## Companies - virtual?!

from: dds 9/95

Prof. Jochen Gros, Offenbach  
Design School and initiator  
of the project group.

Foto: Erika Sulzer-Kleinemeier,  
Gleisweiler



### Virtual company, what does it mean for the designer?

There will be design studios which will develop into virtual companies, that means they will offer products which are virtual, i.e. they could become real. The production program for the products is already developed in the design studios, and there will be studios which will only deal with and sell information and programs.

### Is this already reality today?

The infrastructure has not been expanded sufficiently for this development. That is to say there are not enough producers with the corresponding machines. The second problem is that there are not enough furniture designs which can be produced according to the developed flow chart. The idea of the project was therefore mainly to develop furniture types suitable for this kind of production.



## Companies - virtual?!

from: dds 9/95

According to the members of “online.produkt“ a Product-Gallery is a place, a furniture store for example, where selected furniture variants are exhibited and where staff is available for personal sales consultation on the computer. Only after the design is sold, which could be on-line or via a disc, the production process starts: The customer chooses a local Techno-Factory, a company which is able to produce one-off furniture with CNC-technology. There his individually customized design is materialized. The Techno-Factory is the link between the virtual the real world. The data transfer to the Techno-Factory also happens on-line or via disc. Therefore long and expensive travel of stock can be avoided.

A Techno-Factory could also be a specialized department of an industrial enterprise or a craftsman's workshop that added CNC-machines to its machinery. Over a longer period of time a “techno-factory“-standard will develop. This standard includes norms for quality, software as well as hardware. Techno-Factories which fulfill this standard will be added to a database which will help the customer to find the right partner for the materialization of the design which he has bought.

## Companies - virtual?!

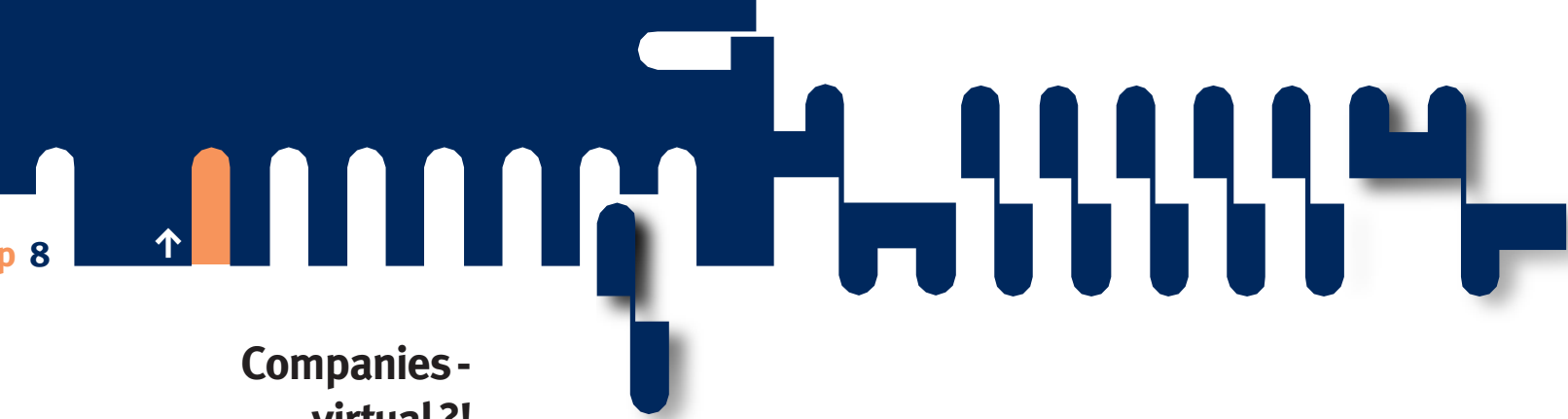
from: dds 9/95

Klaus Rebholz,  
master cabinet maker,  
möbel + design, Rust,  
Germany



## Virtual company - a horror vision for the cabinet maker?

No. Motivation, as it will be rather advantageous for the joiner in the future when he receives ready-made data by architects and designers and will thus be able to concentrate on what he has learnt, which is construction and realization of ideas. The cabinet maker needs to be open to new ideas, to new developments and techniques, to be prepared for the future as there is no need to fear the death of the joiner's craft despite new technologies.



p 8

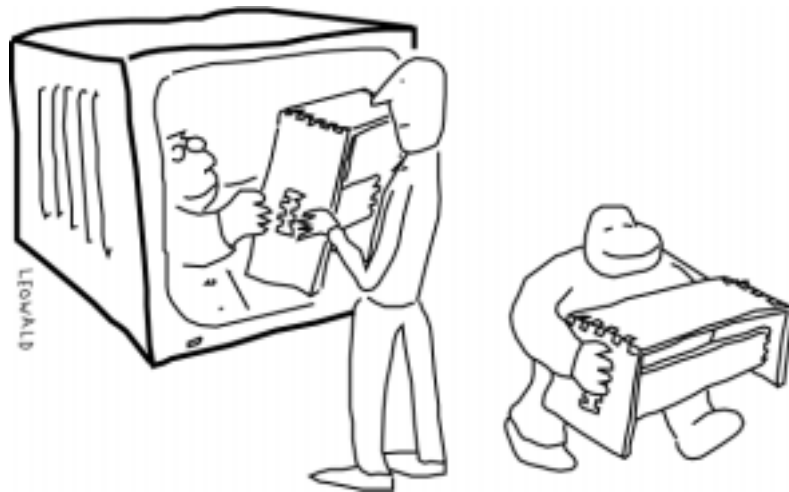


## Companies - virtual?!

from: dds 9/95

### FROM VISION TO REALITY

In order to avoid talking theoretically about all these visions and ideas, the project group presented an introductory action in which all visitors could participate on the occasion of the exhibition C...Lab. The Offenbach Design School and the furniture store Magazin in Stuttgart featured as Product-Galleries. At both venues interested people could get an insight into the variation of designs on a monitor, demonstrated by students who took part in the project. The participants of the seminar had chosen the Ulm Stool, which had been modified, as a basic design. The Ulm Stool is a design classic which was produced with traditional joining techniques.







## Companies - virtual?!

from: dds 9/95

Those customers who wanted their customized Ulm Stool materialized, could adapt the basic design on screen to their wishes and then send the data on-line to the Techno-Factories Wissner in Offenbach or from Stuttgart to Harich company in Albstadt. The stool can be manufactured in one operation from board material with a CNC-router; the individual pieces are put together and the stool is ready.

Where the development will go from here, the students in Offenbach can not tell either. Maybe in the future we will buy furniture designs on-line from product publishers or go to product galleries to inspect the newest design variations, and the cabinet maker's workshop with the well-equipped machinery will only be called Techno-Factory. It is imaginable.

