



Liberty Chair

Often likened to menswear tailoring, the seamed mesh panels on the back of Humanscale's Liberty chair (designed by Niels Diffrient, in fabric that also won an I.D. award; see page 140) stand up to the slouchiest lumbar regions. The foam seat looks potato-chip thin compared to most upholstered peers. Gel toppings for seats and arms are optional, as is a pneumatic control for conference rooms that automatically restores seats to standard heights after 10 minutes of nonuse. (That is, it won't irritatingly pop back up whenever a petite user steps out for a coffee refill.) The jurors found the counterbalances held steady at any leaning position and even seemed a little prescient: "I love the way it pushes you up when you get out," Somerson said. The translucent polyurethane wheels also drew raves, though the squared-off legs were deemed a rather jarring contrast with the seat and back curves. Sitters viewed from the rear looked, as McFadden put it, "kind of droopy-drawerred." Liberty ranks as an important step forward but not a giant one, Somerson concluded: "It's not a whole new way of thinking, it's in a lineage of chairs."

Design Niels Diffrient, designer, Niels Diffrient Product Design (Ridgefield, CT), Tom Latone, industrial designer, Shea & Latone (East Greenville, PA), Mark McKenna, computer developer
Client Humanscale (New York)
Materials Aluminum; injection-molded plastic; Luminesce textile
Software Alias; SolidWorks