



MASTERCLASS

David Savage's expert comment from his own furniture training workshop

A question of quality

This month, David Savage muses at length on the subject of quality, and the effect that it has on our everyday lives



I want something shorter," he said. "A bit less like a chapter in a book and more like a magazine article, more pithy."

"I can do pithy," I said. "It's all about quality."

But what is quality? Each of us here in this workshop has different levels of experience in attempting to make objects of quality. So it's something that concerns every one of us. But attempt to pin it down, to define it, and it becomes a bit more slippery.

We know where quality might reside; it might be on the sports field – people like David Beckham or Pete Sampras are undoubtedly quality sportsmen. "That," we say, "was a quality goal."

Quality, it is said, may reside in the detail, in the small, careful stuff, but depending on where you find your quote, both God and the Devil also reside in the detail.

Quality is said to reside in the last 10 per cent of effort required to manufacture or realise any object. So, by that, we can understand that it requires effort, sometimes superhuman effort, to realise the quality.

Beckham Free Kick

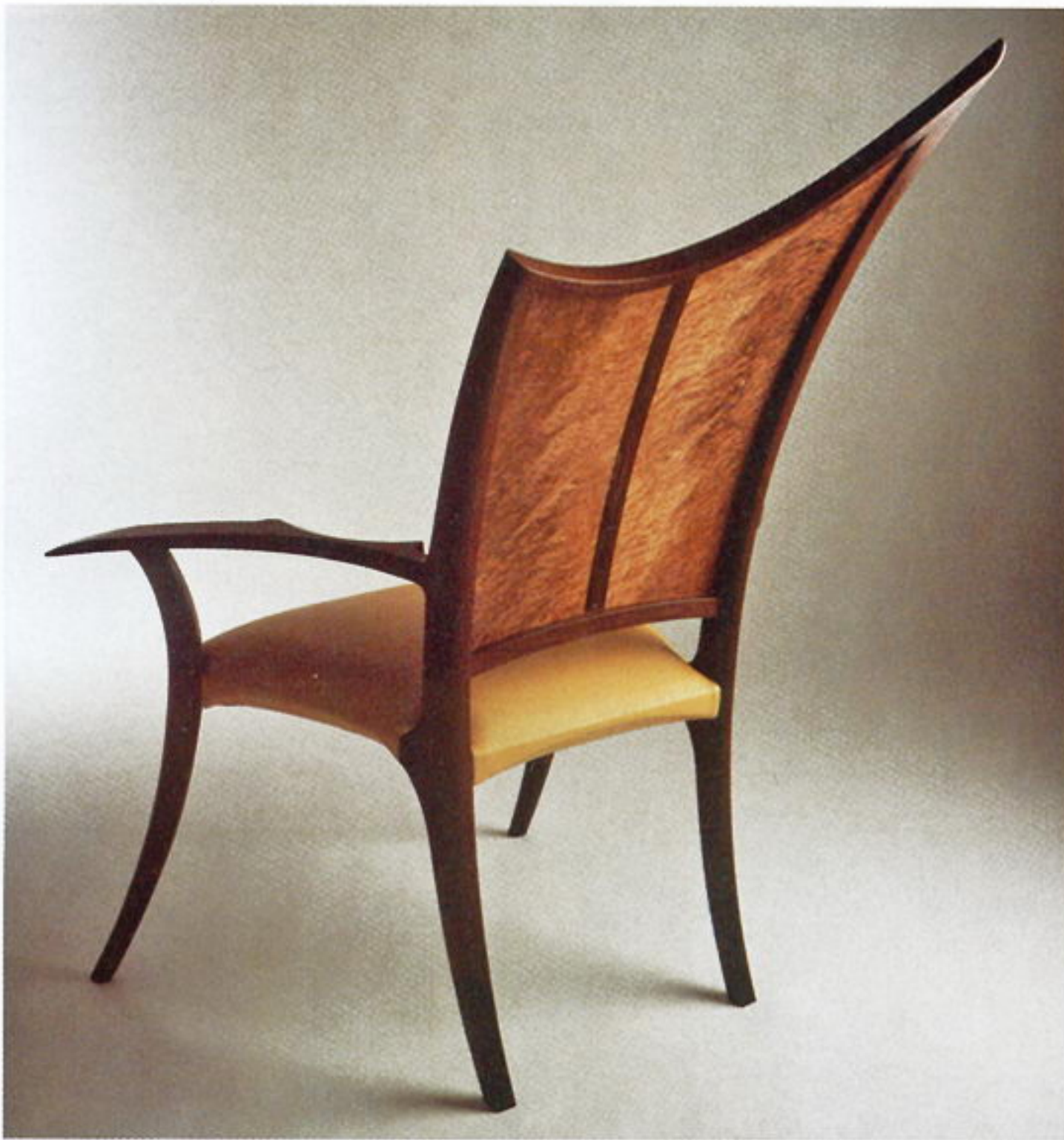
It can be quality either in an object or a performance. Beckham's 30 yard pass or direct free kick into the top left hand corner of the goal may be done with consummate ease, grace and effortlessness, but it will have

been the result of years of grinding practice.

It reminds me of the story about a tennis pro who was sharing a room with another buddy on the circuit. His buddy woke up to see this guy skipping in the corner of the hotel room. "What are you doing?" he asked. "It's okay, I just want to be the best, you go back to sleep." And he carried on skipping.

Now that's what I call work rate. Yet the paradox is that what he's wanting is an effortless performance, a game where his head is in the zone and he's barely conscious of even hitting the ball.

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years ago I was judging an exhibition staged by one of the magazines, in which amateur woodworkers had submitted pieces of work.

Many were beautifully made. One was a low coffee table in which, inlaid into the surface of the table, was a Monopoly board. The board was the creation of many hours of careful, painstaking work, but the question that occurred to me was not, “wow, what an object of quality,” but, “why?” Why had this guy spent so long and displayed so much skill making an object that meant so little. Showing off, the consummate display of skill, is not enough without a good reason for doing it; the object has to be worthy of the effort.

It’s easy to suggest that here I’m just being subjective and snotty and should never be allowed near amateur woodworkers, though that maybe a good idea.

But it seems to me that the quality of the design and its realisation combine together to make something more powerful than each of these elements in isolation.

Conversely, you can have good design being used to elevate the product in the market, yet a failure in terms of creating a quality object because the quality of manufacture is still missing. It all has to fit together.

Leach Pot

It’s easy to suggest that quality is a subjective judgment, an emotional response, but I’d suggest that it is this. The emotional response gives us a clue to not just where quality might reside, but what quality might actually be.

For it is the nature of quality that we enjoy it. It’s wonderful watching Sampras or Beckham strike a ball. I love to bits my quality motor car; it’s great just shutting the door of an Audi A6. We enjoy quality, it makes us feel good.

I have a simple hand made pot on my studio shelf. It was made by the late David Leach about 20 years ago when he was at the height of his powers. It’s a simple pot; I use it to hold water for my paintings and I also use the central point in



David’s well-known *Love Chair* largely laminated from Swiss pear wood. It has plywood seats upholstered in leather



This chair in maple and leather upholstery was commissioned to be low level and non-intrusive for a drawing room environment