

# FRAMES

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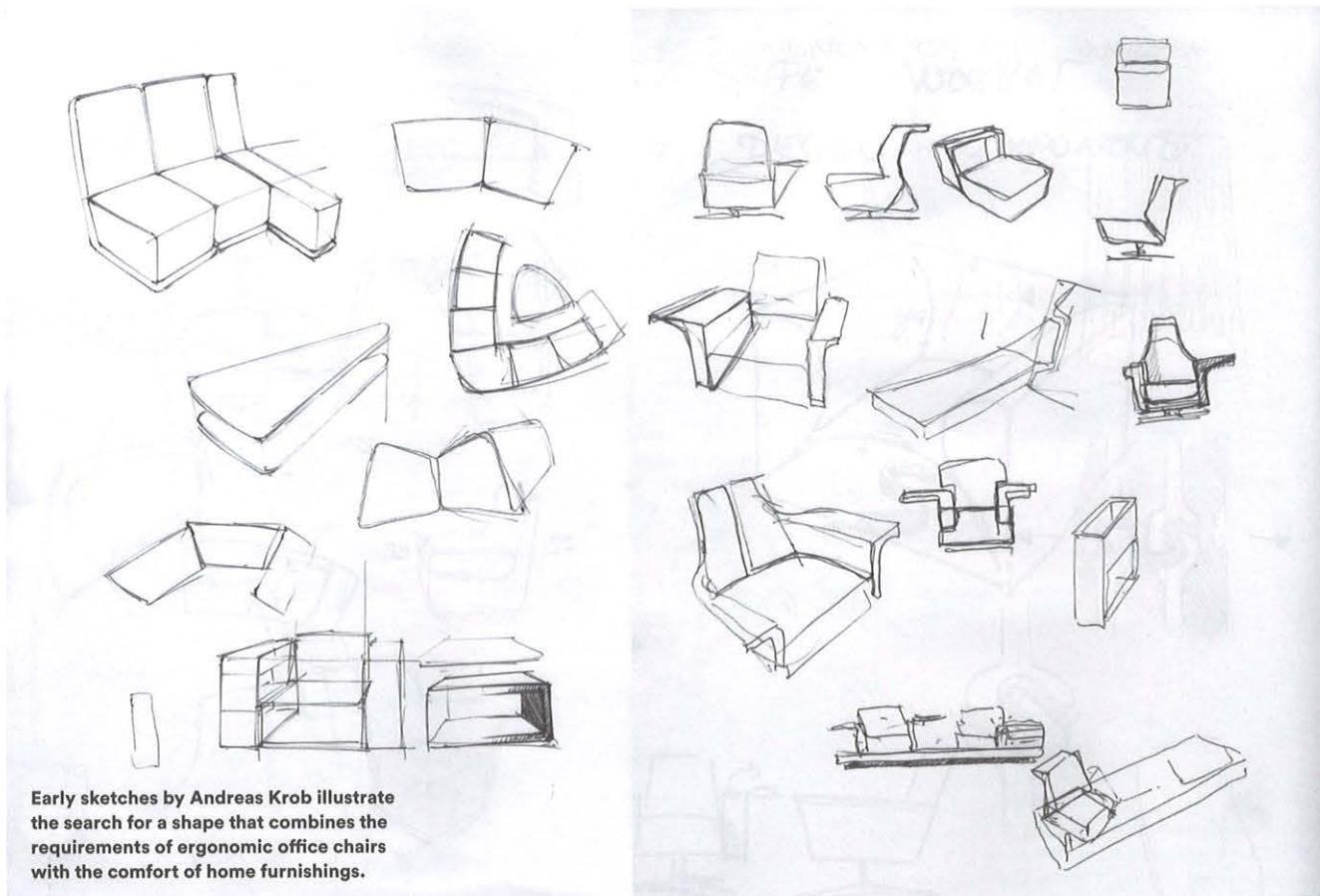
THE GREAT INDOORS

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# *Shaping Communication*



Asked to come up with a seating programme for Interstuhl, designer Andreas Krob quickly envisioned a concept based on modular elements.



Early sketches by Andreas Krob illustrate the search for a shape that combines the requirements of ergonomic office chairs with the comfort of home furnishings.

## ‘Communication is the key to success’: a maxim that Interstuhl demonstrates with TANGRAM<sup>is5</sup>, a furniture solution that triggers (inter)action.

WORDS *Gerrit Terstiege*

**CAN** furniture design shape the way we communicate? A recent example of a modular seating unit designed for the professional business environment shows how subtle changes in the typology of a traditional piece of furniture can make a big difference. Its name is TANGRAM<sup>is5</sup>, and it’s produced by Interstuhl, a German manufacturer of quality seating for the working environment. The design is by Swiss-based German native Andreas Krob, who runs a studio together with his wife Uta Krob. But what triggered the idea for TANGRAM<sup>is5</sup>, and how did the design process develop?

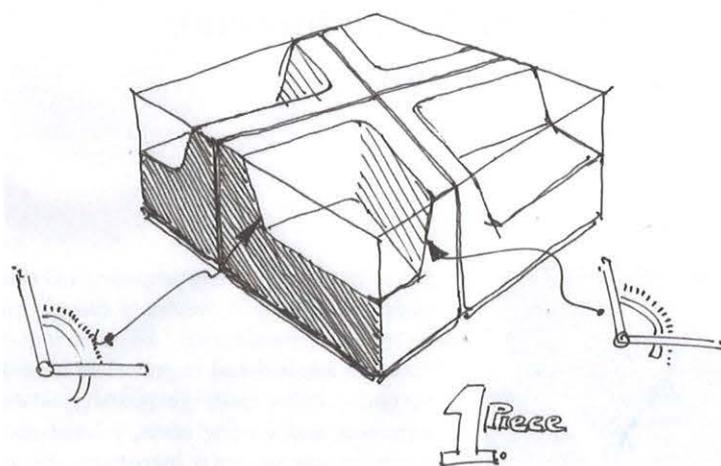
Andreas Krob, who studied structural engineering and industrial design at the Muthesius Academy of Fine Arts and Design in Kiel, Germany, smiles: ‘It all started in 2012 at the Orgatec fair in Cologne, where Interstuhl presented a concept for a business lounge sofa programme. By that time, I had already worked on four projects with Interstuhl and was in close contact with the owners of the company, so we could share our thoughts freely. I was intrigued



Industrial designer Andreas Krob (left) and Helmut Link (right), CEO sales and marketing, discuss the final design of TANGRAM<sup>is5</sup>.

by the concept they were proposing and saw an opportunity to develop it further. I thought the original design had potential, but I also saw ways in which it could be adapted and improved to allow for greater versatility. Office space is expensive, and even in large entrances and waiting areas, volume and size, like flexibility, are essential ingredients for an effective and dynamic working environment.’ Krob suggested adding to Interstuhl’s original design by developing a more compact seating family. The discussions that followed led to a design pitch that brought about yet another collaboration.

Krob’s initial idea can be traced to the first pencil sketches he made after returning from Orgatec in 2012. They show the start of the design development on paper: a creative process that was to evolve step by step. Krob’s first sketches are of lounge chairs with wide armrests and seating modules that could be arranged to form boomerang-shaped curves or segments of circles. ‘I arrived at a more modular solution pretty quickly – one in which the backrest is not straight ↵



Andreas Krob's drawing illustrates the 15-degree angle at which the backrest is positioned.



By dividing a simple square into four equal parts, Krob created a cross, which he rotated 15 degrees to generate his asymmetric designs.

## *Modular Mode*

Produced by Interstuhl, TANGRAM<sup>is5</sup> is a modular sofa system designed for office, lounge and waiting areas. Adaptable to any type of meeting, the asymmetric seating elements can be rearranged easily and combined in a surprising number of ways, allowing the user to 'shape' a personalized conference area.



**TANGRAM<sup>ISS</sup> is completed with a foldable screen that Krob designed for the sake of privacy and 'to reduce acoustic and visual disruptions'.**

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*'This is all about creating a compact and flexible communication zone'*

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and is not at right angles to the seating cushion,' he says. Krob built a full-size model to determine the right angle for the backrest: he experimented with angles of 10, 15 and 25 degrees. In the end, 15 turned out to be the best in terms of both comfort and aesthetics. 'The definitive backrest is positioned at a 15-degree angle, which enables the user to lean back comfortably or to use the high armrests on either side. The design allows for a variety of seating positions that are suitable for a business environment - ideal for both casual conversation and professional meetings.'

The same angle is used to define the corpus of a TANGRAM<sup>ISS</sup> module. Picture this configuration, as seen from above: four cubes arranged to form a larger cube with, at its centre, a cross. Now rotate that cross 15 degrees, and you have an idea of the strong identity that Krob created for TANGRAM<sup>ISS</sup>. Viewing his actual modules from above, you can also envision the countless configurations offered by the furniture programme he designed for Interstuhl.

Krob uses various rendering programs to visualize his ideas, including formZ, which provides a precise but somewhat abstract representation of a



**A cushion with integrated electrical sockets is included in the TANGRAM<sup>ISS</sup> series**

specific design concept. The other is Cinema, which produces a highly complex and realistic view of a three-dimensional object from every angle, but takes a lot of time to program and does not suit all his projects. 'In this case I chose formZ, because I prefer a rough but authentic way of showing what I have in mind. With Cinema, you can do all kinds of digital tricks that make almost anything look good, but when it comes to furniture design, I believe simple ways of communicating ideas are best.'

The number of possible configurations is even more evident in the final design: two modules form a classic sofa, four form a compact unit with seating for four, and various arrangements combine single modules with a purpose-designed height-adjustable table. Krob summarizes: 'This is all about creating a compact and flexible communication zone. The design functions as a place to wait for the arrival of your business partner, an area for professional meetings or a spot for informal conversation.' Whatever your needs, TANGRAM<sup>ISS</sup> covers all the bases. X

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