



## The PostureFit™ Design Story

In November of 2000, Herman Miller North America President Brian Walker placed a phone call to Dr. Brock Walker (no relation), a back care specialist and holder of multiple patents in fields including biomechanics and ergonomics.

Herman Miller wanted to know more about Dr. Walker's research and insights. Meetings were scheduled at the company's West Michigan headquarters, and it didn't take long for both sides to realize they were following similar paths.

"I discovered we had a lot in common, in terms of our respective interests," Brock Walker says. "I recognized a genuine passion and enthusiasm on Herman Miller's part in exploring emerging seating technologies for its customer base."

A former competitive downhill skier, Dr. Walker went on to run a successful chiropractic and inter-professional back pain clinic. He soon turned his knowledge of spinal care into the full-time study of human performance, seating, and seating environments. Dr. Walker eventually established a successful consulting business with a client list of leading corporations, along with U.S. and foreign military assignments, and projects in the marine, aerospace, and motorsport industries.

Dr. Walker's expertise in medically engineered seating technology had helped create safer seating environments in jet plane cockpits and racecars, yet until Herman Miller came calling, he had never worked directly with the office furniture industry. His growing relationship with the company proved to be a revelation. "At Herman Miller I saw a genuine interest in working together to better help the customers who use their products," he explains, "and that hasn't changed."

Dr. Walker began working with Herman Miller engineers as well as Bill Stumpf, co-designer of the Aeron chair, to explore their common vision of a seating solution that could maximize human performance, fit, and comfort in the work environment. Walker shared his experience, concepts, and prototypes, Herman Miller its research findings and ergonomic knowledge, Stumpf his considerable design expertise. From these collaborative efforts, the PostureFit concept began to evolve.

"Brock's experience synced up nicely with our own observations," says Bill Dowell, Product Research lead at Herman Miller. "Our research shows that workers tend sit in a forward-leaning position, that is, slouch, during much of their day. This contributes to



fatigue, backaches, headaches, and sometimes more serious health problems on the job. Until we met Brock, I hadn't seen a solution that promotes a healthy posture and addresses what we call the 'void,' that area behind the beltline between the person and the chair back. Brock's automotive and aerospace work in seating confirmed how critical it is to support this area."

Dr. Walker and Herman Miller understood that whether looping the Indianapolis Motor Speedway at 230 miles per hour, breaking the sound barrier at 30,000 feet, or simply racing a deadline at the computer, everyone needs the proper lower back support for optimal concentration, endurance, and good health. They developed PostureFit to work with the body's biomechanics to support the natural forward tilt of the pelvis; this in turn enables the spine to maintain its alignment for a healthier posture and improved lower back comfort.

Wedding Dr. Walker's ideas and Herman Miller's ergonomic expertise to Bill Stumpf's design finesse, the Aeron chair became the obvious focus for the first application of the PostureFit technology. The chair that rewrote the book on healthy, comfortable seating once again was poised to introduce a new ergonomic standard.

"Aeron's Pellicle material surprised a lot of people who were sure that foam and fabric would always set the comfort benchmark," says Herman Miller Product Manager Randy Brown. "We are convinced that PostureFit will do the same for lower back comfort in a chair, even among devotees of lumbar support. Rather than trying to address the symptoms of poor posture—the bending outward of the lumbar region—PostureFit goes right to the root cause, allowing the pelvis and base of the spine to sustain a forward position."

PostureFit's relatively modest profile lends credence to the old saying that big things come in small packages. The design, reminiscent of a butterfly silhouette, sits comfortably within the Aeron's familiar contours. "Like Aeron, PostureFit's design reflects what we are learning about the human torso," says Bill Stumpf, who, with Jeff Weber of Stumpf/Weber + Associates, designed PostureFit's application to Aeron. "In and of itself, I think PostureFit represents a positive, evolutionary, and exciting step forward. It's leading the next wave of ergonomics."

A fundamental Herman Miller principle holds that great design lives on a human scale and is best judged by how effectively it makes people more comfortable and capable. In that respect, PostureFit succeeds on both counts.