

## Outstanding Lifetime Contribution to Design

Winner

### Niels Diffrient

In a career spanning more than half a century, industrial designer Niels Diffrient has applied his talents to a diverse range of products including sewing machines, tractor seats and aeroplane interiors, but it is for his pioneering work with ergonomics and the office task chair that he is held in greatest esteem.

Chairs including the Freedom Chair, Diffrient World Chair and Liberty Chair, all designed for Humanscale, and the Diffrient Chair for Knoll, did much to define the notion of the modern ergonomic task chair and earned Diffrient the nickname 'granddaddy of the ergonomic revolution', from Forbes magazine. A huge amount of knowledge and research underpins his design work, and the seminal three-volume publication Humanscale, which Diffrient co-authored, fundamentally changed the way we relate the design of office furniture to the function of the human body.

Born in Mississippi and raised in Detroit, Diffrient studied painting and then architecture at Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, which counts Charles Eames, Harry Bertoia and Eero Saarinen among its alumni, and he worked with the latter in the Forties. His passion was for aircraft design, and he worked for a while in aeronautical engineering, but realising that he would never actually get to design a plane he moved on to work in the office of industrial designer Henry Dreyfuss. He set up his own practice in 1980.

He has worked with Humanscale for well over a decade, designing the company's most successful task chairs, of which he has said: 'I won't say they're perfect, but they are closer to perfection than most other work chairs.'

In addition to the many honours he has received, Diffrient is an Honorary Royal Designer for Industry, awarded by the Royal Society of Arts and Industry in 1987.

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