

Conversations with Michael Young: How the LessThanFive Collection Supports On-the-Fly Transitions in the Workplace

Designer Michael Young shares the inspiration behind the LT5 chair, lounge, and stool.

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In the modern office, people want more options. They want unprecedented levels of agility to respond to evolving needs on a daily, monthly, and yearly basis. They need to quickly transition between focus work, collaboration, and socialization. Products need to adapt and remain relevant as times change and workstyles and workplaces evolve.

Big expectations require big, innovative solutions. And the hand-made, carbon fiber LessThanFive (LT5) Collection delivers on all fronts. The Chair, launched in 2017, was the first creation in this collection, followed by the new Stool and Lounge added this year. Work Better connected with Michael Young to learn the story behind the LessThanFive collection he designed in collaboration with Coalesse.

WB: How do the LessThanFive chair, stool, and lounge support the new era of hybrid work?

MY: Across the three solutions, there is optimal versatility. Today people have the choice and agency to work anywhere – whether that’s at their kitchen counter, in a hybrid meeting room, at a desk, or in a casual social setting. The collection’s ultra-light weight lends itself to flexibility – the Chair, Stool and Lounge each weigh less than 5 pounds (2.2 kg). They are easy to move and arrange according to your needs. People are intrigued by the fact that you can easily pick up 6 chairs and carry them across the room in seconds. This kind of ease of movement is very appealing to people and companies around the world.

WB: Where did the idea come from? How did LessThanFive start and how did it evolve to include the Stool and Lounge?

MY: I had a massive interest in carbon fiber, and was working on designing bikes, luggage, and other products. Then, I began working on a prototype carbon fiber chair, and it started sparking conversations and gaining momentum. People expressed interest in commercializing it, because it checked all the boxes that are required of evolving work styles and emerging markets. And it really brought something new to the table in terms of materiality.

Carbon fiber is a very ergonomically productive material and offers so much potential for different postures. The Stool and Lounge build on this, to bring even more options and versatility to the workplace. The Stool is perfect for working at higher surfaces, whether at a bar area or in a project room as an agile seating option. The Lounge supports a comfortable and relaxed posture without padding, which creates so much more depth in the product. You can easily move the lounge from a casual social area to a desk or table for collaboration.

WB: Why is the materiality of LessThanFive so unique?

MY: The structure of the LessThanFive products is unique to carbon fiber material and the manufacturing process. To create the form of the LessThanFive products, carbon fiber is put into a mold. An airbladder is then used to expand the material to fit the mold, and the structure hardens. It's impossible to recreate the same designs using plastic, wood, or any other material.

Plus, carbon fiber can stand the test of time, which is particularly important for sustainability. A carbon fiber chair has a very long lifecycle, eliminating the need to buy more products and use up more materials.

WB: What was the intent behind the design of LessThanFive?

MY: We were really focused on achieving maximum comfort with minimal materials. The goal was to strip away as much material as possible and avoid overdesigning the collection. The aesthetic of the products is embedded in its functionality and performance. For example, the Stool has a light but extremely strong structure, with an overhanging seat balanced over the cross bar of the legs. It's designed through the functionality in the structure and its performance. It's a completely new kind of typology for a bar stool. The Stool in particular is my favorite, because it showcases what can be done in design work through materiality.

WB: What is the greatest strength of the LessThanFive Collection?

MY: The functionality, aesthetic, and material have the fortitude to last through the ages and adapt to changing times. Its design is effective on a massive sociographic global scale. The LessThanFive solutions are designed to be timeless, addressing people's needs as the years go by and hybrid work continues to evolve.

Michael Young, Designer

Michael Young was born in 1966 in Sunderland, a small industrial city in the North-East of England, and over the last 20 years has established himself as one of the leading international figures in his field.

Since forming his studio, revered retailers and institutions such as The Conran Shop and the Pompidou Museum quickly began demanding his work. He became known in the industry as a sophisticated minimalist acclaimed for his elegant, pared-down aesthetic design.

After nearly a decade working across the U.K. and Iceland, Michael was enticed to Asia by his passion for pioneering technology, and in 2006 set up a studio in Hong Kong. Today the Michael Young Studio is considered to be one of the most exciting and formidable design companies operating in Asia, responsible for designing icons for its clients that last a lifetime, have won awards and are presented in museums globally.

Michael Young continues to push the boundaries of experimental design. The studio specializes in creating modern design through exploring the endless possibilities Asia's technological ingenuity provides. The result is work that transcends design by harnessing some of the highest and most innovative manufacturing skills to create Industrial Art.
