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**Affirm'ed**  
Chairs seem to be born in one of two ways: The manufacturer is responding to market demand with customers asking for something new to fill a gap. The second way is when the manufacturer identifies the need through observations and research. p16

### Dealer Continental Office Environments Turns 75

Continental Office Environments' Pittsburgh studio is being finished up now. And, the company announced plans to do the same to its Columbus headquarters at a recent party to celebrate the dealership's 75th anniversary. More than 500 designers, architects, customers and employees attended the event. **p6**

### PRODUCTS: More Egg

Fritz Hansen, in wanting to retain the new release's exclusivity, is only producing 999 of these Choice Eggs for dealers and the general public combined. **p12**

### AHEAD: NeoCon East

Government sales is certainly important for NeoCon East, but it is not everything at this year's show. **p22**

### Configura's CET Designer

With their latest version of CET Designer, Configura is able to not only simplify the overall design process, but is also streamlining the learning curve for young interior designers by moving their software into college classrooms. **p24**

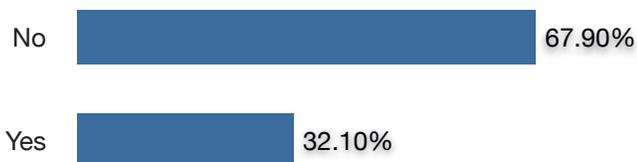
### Sound And Architectural Vision

Some designers, musicians and artists are using software like Ableton, Max/mpx, Mechanical Turk and Mind Mixer to create sound installations that intentionally evoke specific emotions in new ways for people as they travel through buildings, parks and cityscapes. **p26**

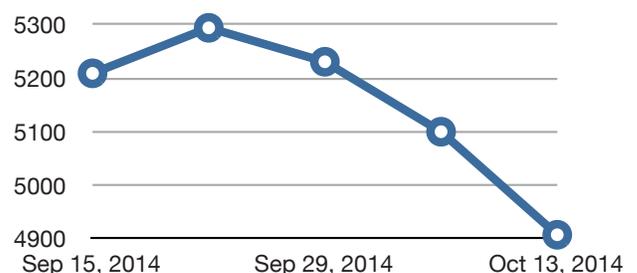
### Industry Briefing

Kimball hits the road **p28**

**MMQB Online Poll** With the unemployment rate dropping to 2008 levels, are you optimistic that business will soon ramp up their purchasing of office furniture?



**MMQB Industry Index** YTD gain or loss: -7.09%  
(2013 finished with a year-over-year gain of +30.54%)





# Changing Seats

Wilson Chow, 37, is taking the reins of the company after years of mentoring from Wallace Hwang, who is retiring.

By **ROB KIRKBRIDE**

**W**ilson Chow is 37 years old, but often mistaken for someone much younger, something he calls a blessing and a curse. The same could be said for the company he now serves as president: Though Office Master is a 28-year-old mid-market seating manufacturer, it acts a lot younger. Responsive, nimble and innovative for its segment, the company continues to make strides and carve out what Chow calls “a genuine place in our industry.”

Chow is taking the reins of the company after years of mentoring from Wallace Hwang, who is retiring. Though Chow is relatively young to lead an office furniture company, he has been around furniture all his life. His father was an executive at a large Los Angeles furniture retailer and later joined Hwang in the creation of Office Master.

Chow took a round-about path to make it to Office Master. He went to school at UCLA and USC and worked in IT before being asked to come to Office Master to help with some projects. That led to a permanent position — and this week, in taking over for Hwang as president.

Still, titles mean little to Wilson, who at 37 straddles Generation X and Generation Y, which he considers a distinct advantage. He still remembers using White Out to fix typing errors, but embraces and easily acclimates to new technology. He is young enough to recognize changes to the way people work, but old enough to appreciate inheriting a company that is completely debt free.

“Wallace was very generous to me in terms of mentoring me and letting me prove myself and earn my way into his trust,” Chow said. “I was involved in pretty much every major decision (in the last few years), so much so that it almost isn’t a transition at all. I feel my responsibility is still the same. We are still going to follow the successful path Office Master has been on for years. The goal is to take us to the next level and to better tell our story.”

Chow understands the culture and position of the company; he knows there are many competitors on different levels. “There are a lot of seating providers out there; a lot of companies have chairs and there are a lot of great chairs out there,” he said. “I come to the market from a position of respect. I respect the relationship we have with everybody — customers, architects and designers, vendors, competitors and sales reps.”

Mostly of all, Chow said Office Master wants to listen instead of talk. He said it would be arrogant to think just because Office Master is a seating company, it knows everything about its customers and push products on them. “We listen, respect and respond,” he said.

The company, based in Southern California, celebrated its 25th anniversary a few years ago with the introduction of its OM5 Series chair. At that time, Hwang said the company was still fairly young and customer-focused, which remains true

today. He said the company is still small enough to care about each other, while large and experienced enough to handle any sized order.

Founded on March 18, 1986, the company started by producing value-oriented, ergonomic seating out of a small facility in San Diego. Since that time, the company has experienced steady growth and a few years ago completed construction

on an efficient and green 102,000 square foot headquarters located in Ontario, Calif.

Last year, the company launched OM5 Active, an addition to its popular “dynamic ergonomics” task seating family. The OM5 Active is a collaborative seating collection that features three primary additions to the OM5 line: a simple function, light task chair; a sled-based high-density stacker; and a 4-legged side chair available with glides or casters.

In its official debut to the national ergonomics community, the OM5 Active recently took home the marquee prize at the national ErgoExpo held annually in Caesar’s Palace. In cap-



John, Wallace, Wilson, William (front row)



turing one of the 2013 *ErgoExpo Attendees' Choice Awards*, the OM5 Active was one of the top four vote-getters as decided by more than 1,400 ergonomic experts, as well as by decision makers such as end-user facility, environmental health and safety and purchasing personnel.

The OM5 Active was the only seating winner, beating out competition including the Steelcase Gesture, Humanscale Diffrient Smart, Nightingale IQ2 and Scandinavian Business Seating RH Mereo. "As a mid-market seating provider, it's not always as easy to develop a signature chair of your own making," Chow said. "We have been able to do that."

Chow knows that the major companies in the industry lead in many ways, but there is definitely a position for companies like Office Master, who lead the industry in other ways like pushing the envelope on price and often being more nimble than their larger competitors.

And there is an underlying love of seating in Chow, who calls himself an unabashed chair geek who pauses movies he is watching to get a better look at the chairs in the scenery.

"I've been sort of a lifelong fan of furniture and I'm a card carrying chair geek," he said. "I know we are not Herman Miller; we are not Knoll. We don't have that sort of history, but from our humble beginning, we feel that 28 years of listening to our customers is not insignificant."

Most importantly, Chow understands the advantages his company holds over its larger, well-established competitors. Office Master is quick to develop products to meet its customers' needs. And it can crush it when it comes to price.

With a youthful leader at the helm, Office Master is poised for more growth.

"I hope that with my leadership and guidance, we will be even better able to respond to changing market needs," he said. "We have always been much more focused on comfort and value and I will not abandon that. At the same time, we have a unique capability to invest in what we see that is needed in the market. Tell us what you need. Because we have this big toolbox (of products), we can definitely listen closely." 





OM 13 Chair