

125 Jahre Dreipunkt

125 Years of Experience

Perfection of Form Product Design as a Factor of Identity

Whoever believes that product design is nothing more than arbitrariness, mere decoration or simply a matter of taste is mistaken. The shape of a product reflects the identity both of a company and of society – with all its positive as well as negative implications. At the same time, a distinctive use of form – clear and recognisable – bespeaks an equally distinctive self-assurance. Forms refer to ideas and ideals. Accordingly, formal difficulties or deficits in recognisability uncompromisingly reveal the conceptional shortcomings of a company and are met equally ungraciously by a certain sales resistance on the part of potential customers. At first glance, a comprehensive review of the history of Dreipunkt and the company's specific use of form for the products and their presentation shows nothing more than upholstered furniture. At the same time, however, it affords a profound insight into the different stages of corporate identity as well as the development of a society which wishes to own Dreipunkt furniture and feels at home in these design dimensions.

Compared with the products of the pre-war and war years, those of the immediate post-war years were yet to show a fundamental profile. The upheavals of the recent past were still too fresh to allow the development and shaping of a new, autonomous identity. The attempt to lean on what had once been and to find orientation in the familiar, however, soon proved to be outdated. It did not take long before old forms of existence and living were succeeded by new insignia of social expression.

Breaking Ground 1956/57

Graphic patterns of fine lines and Japonistic reminiscences run through the sparse arrangements of sofa and armchair, side table with vase, carpet, curtains, standard lamp and painting – ever-repeating elements in the 1956/57 catalogue, which presents the insignia of stylish living in the late 1950s. The pieces of upholstered furniture and the tables stand on slender legs, the lamps with their delicate swan-necks stretch towards the ceiling, even the flower vases are slim and erect with their arrangements of single flower stalks, craning their necks like the lamps standing next to them. The rank growth of flowers has been domesticated and provided with a certain innocuous air, a lightness which is also reflected by the separately hung landscapes in their narrow frames. Graphic designs of restrained lines spread over curtains and carpets, reminiscent of fireworks, perhaps – bows which take up the contours of the kidney-shaped tables; or the formality of the spray reappears in an abstracted form in the curtains.

The whole furnishing on its delicate, slender legs seems almost to float, as if to draw its curves on the firmament of new euphoria, clad in translucent pastels, leaving the gravity of dark shades of brown and rust far behind.

The heaviness of the plush drawing-rooms of the 1930s and 1940s is a thing of the past: voluminous sofas reaching down to the floor with cords of thick fringes at the lower edge, which almost seem to seal them to the floor; full-length fringed table-cloths, velvet and velours upholstery fabrics and the characteristic pot-bellied lamps and vases. Their static appearance has given way to a new dynamism, an entirely unprecedented use of form. They convey a longing for lightness, breaking ground and the wish to forget the trying, encumbering and destructive wartime era. What matters now is to leave the old behind, unburdened by pompous, ponderous shapes.

At this point, the upholstered furniture manufactured by Hermann Schwarz offered new perspectives for the German living-room and caught the spirit of his target group: The techniques and materials of upholstery – the so called "Spezial Dreipunkt Donzdorf Federeinlagen" (a special system of interconnected coiled springs) – resembled those of pre-war times. Colours and forms, however, reflected modernity. The protruding armrests of model 269, for example, reminiscent of the tail fins of American limousines, must have seemed rather daring, just as the fan-shaped rungs or wicker insets of the bed-settees model 337 and 338. The bed-settee itself is a piece of furniture which bears witness to the practical requirements of a time when living space was scarce – too scarce to be filled with voluminous pre-war furniture: cupboards, for example, which would have exceeded the room-height of the newly-built flats of the 1950s. And too scarce to assign a separate room to every functional area, as had been done in the (upper) middle-class houses of former times. What was needed was flexibility, if the youngsters could not claim a room of their own and had to lay down their heads on a convertible piece of upholstered furniture in the living-room, instead, or if guests were to be accommodated. There was not enough space for a separate guestroom, but even though hotel rates usually exceeded the housekeeping budget, the Germans took great pleasure in personal freedom and mobility, which in many cases manifested itself in trips to faraway friends or relatives in the newly acquired motorcar. In accordance with this auto-mobile atmosphere of new departures, BMW, in 1959, promoted their new Isetta with the itinerary of a car trip from Stockholm to Sicily.

Any excessive boisterousness, however, was out of the question. Events of the recent past were still too fresh to put the newly gained security at risk. The perception of women in those days was extremely conservative compared to the "Roaring Twenties" with their avant-garde style icons. What people wanted now was a re-interpretation of traditional values such as domesticity and solidity. Accordingly, Dreipunkt furniture expressed a high potential of security and reliability, control and order, the rigidity of which, however, was soon to be overcome.

Breaking Out 1958/59

Only two years later, the Dreipunkt catalogue 1958/59 presents itself in a square format, which has replaced the standard DIN-A4 size. On the inside, the beholder finds a furniture line the style of which resembles that of the previous catalogue's models. Only the special Dreipunkt spring system, though obviously still in use, is no longer men-

tioned. Instead, the new forms require new upholstery materials. The use of foam-padded plastic shells has been discovered and is now making its curvaceous debut.

Among the furniture presented in the brochure, neat kidney-shaped tables and spruce flower arrangements are on the retreat in favour of a reduced pictorial representation, which is less orientated towards the depiction of a glamorous new world than towards graphic forms of expression. The range of colours begins to break away from the amiable lightness. The catalogue's highlight is an abstract lounge construction composed of sandwich-like, bright yellow and purple layers and radically abandoning the classical form of sofas. Equally abstract – and typical of the time – is the graphic presentation of the furniture in front of black-and-white striped wall-paper and a wood engraving of a biblical-looking scene, which depicts, even though only discreetly, the convergence between the sexes. And already at this point, an angularity of design is to be seen which will soon replace the swinging and bending forms of the era of kidney-shaped tables.

The Zeitgeist of the late 1950s is characterised by a rapid succession of different events and moods. The yearning for a neat, intact world, in which the reverberations of war-time memories could be wrapped in soft colours, gradually yielded to a re-awakening social self-confidence. It had been nourished by a whole decade of growing prosperity and the successful reconstruction of a devastated country. However, this upward trend not only manifested itself in society in general. At Dreipunkt, too, a certain freedom of design started to replace former restrictions. After a year-long "vacuum of demands", during which there was no need for extravagant or progressive upholstered furniture, but for the largest possible quantities of furniture conveying an air of security, the worst supply gaps had finally been closed. Now, the newly won scope of freedom encouraged the company to go beyond the limitations of simple basics in their product decisions. Dreipunkt, who had always had a reputation as a high-quality manufacturer, began to distinguish themselves as an avant-garde designer.

During this time, a new trend product emerged and challenged the significance of the bed-settee: the recliner. In the slipstream of television, a new technology which quickly found its way into German living-rooms, a product was developed which not only allowed the user to enjoy this new medium undisturbed; the social prestige gained by owning a television set was also of fundamental importance. Grandpa's old wing chair, formerly the place for contemplative retreat in the corner of the room, was now replaced by the recliner, which can be seen as a kind of indicator for the style-setting influence exerted by the possession of the new consumer electronics.

In the following years, the triumphant success of the new medium brought about a fundamental change in people's seating habits, triggering off a shift in the use of upholstered furniture. Formerly, the attention within a circle of guests had been directed towards each other, but now this closed circle was broken up and the individual's gaze was drawn to a bluish flickering rectangle outside the circle. From this moment onwards, upholstered furniture had of course to be designed and arranged in a way that afforded everyone present a full and unobstructed view of the television set.

Looking Ahead – and Back 1960/61

In the early 1960s, the trend towards angularity in the design of upholstered furniture, which had emerged in the preceding years, continued. Apart from a few exceptions, rounded shapes and organic lines were regarded as out-dated. Instead, the Dreipunkt programme now featured cubic-geometrical forms, and the product presentation had changed accordingly. The coloured black-and-white photographs in the catalogue have the unconventional air of photo-realistic drawings, the room structures being merely sketched out with coloured surfaces, thus enhancing the abstract look. Most of the decorative items have vanished from these stylised living-rooms, and only occasionally is the strictness of forms broken up by fur footstools and shaggy carpets, which offer a striking contrast. These are the heralds of a slowly emerging trend towards broadness.

The world of the early 1960s had not yet been affected by the cloudings and excessively vital disturbances which would arise towards the end of that decade. People revelled in a feeling of feasibility and success, just as if life itself could be designed on a drawing board. In the midst of this ever-increasing strictness of forms, which is only broken up by the stylised curves of bowl chairs, the beholder of the Dreipunkt catalogue suddenly comes across the model 234, the "period suite", which forms a sharp contrast to all the progressive designs surrounding it. The model, however, was by no means a pre-war relic, but had been added to the Dreipunkt programme in what almost seems a touching attempt to break free from an increasingly de-sensualised world, as if the company were suddenly taken aback by their own daringness. However, this was to remain the only venture of its sort.

The Choice is yours 1962/63

Instead, the cubism of forms advanced as did the stylised appearance of the product presentations. Like coloured dots floating in space, glass bulb lamps, cups, bowls and vases in bright colours dance around cropped suites of upholstered furniture. The familiar beech wood elements of the past are joined by Afrormosia, today known as teak, which has almost become an emblem of that decade.

Being able to choose is another novelty of the Dreipunkt catalogue of 1962/63, which features a whole range of different furniture legs made of square-shaped or rounded timber or of metal with brass-coloured bases. They herald an era of highly individualised products which enables the consumers to "assemble" their personal model from a system of modules rather than having to submit to the manufacturer's dictate.

For the first time, Hermann Schwarz backs up the depiction of his range of products with a verbal explanation of his manufacturing principles: "Due to the huge demand for inexpensive, visually appealing and functionally flawless seating and lounging furniture, the production in my company has been taken to a higher level of industrialisation – a measure which requires careful planning on the drawing board. The prevailing creative desire with its great number of different shapes, sizes and structures and their innumerable variations has a hampering effect on the development of industrial production, which can only be realised in the form of a serial production with interchangeable standardised parts." This comment calls to mind the fundamental ideas of Bauhaus architecture, which aimed at supplying inexpensive housing for a large number of people by way of standardising the single constructional elements. At first glance, the illustratively photographed pile of wooden frames is in fact reminiscent of the high-rise buildings

which were erected in city centres during the 1960s. Contrary to their original purpose, however, the Bauhaus apartments were never inhabited by the initial target group – this form of architecture proved to be too high-priced and stylistically unfamiliar. Still, up to the present day, the concept of Bauhaus lives on in the principles of industrial production as well as the ideals of product and architectural design.

Zeitgeist and Life-style of the Time 1964/65

More and more, Dreipunkt furniture was incorporated into people's elaborately scheduled schemes of life. What the presentation of the pieces offered was a reference to the world perceived to be the ultimate upmarket life-style. Plants no longer serve as small, domesticated decorative accessories, but have mutated into spectacular graphic elements. Whether an exotic palm tree, the famous violin adorned with roses, or leather-bound volumes of classic literature, they all clearly show in what kind of surroundings one is to imagine Dreipunkt customers to live (or, for that matter, where the customers would like to see themselves). This form of positioning is accompanied by an introductory text: "Clarity and clean lines, unpretentious elegance – what a contrast to the over-embellished pomp of the past. Upholstered furniture made by Dreipunkt: the spirit of modern times."

This implicitly didactic approach forms a sharp contrast to the presentations of furniture in preceding catalogues. On the one hand, it shows that home furnishing has acquired a symbolic significance, and on the other hand, that the changing market situation requires more than the mere provision of products. Customers are addressed directly and offered an attractive projection screen for their personal way of living: For the first time, the presentation of the furniture models is complemented by images of real people – the distinguished gentleman on the sofa smoking a pipe, absorbed in an highbrow-looking daily, wearing a shirt and bow-tie even with his casual jumper; or his female companion, sweetly smiling and hair perfectly back-combed as was the fashion of the day, turning towards the beholder over the back of her armchair.

Eventually – and much to the displeasure of the company owner Hermann Schwarz – the image of a lady even replaced the product pictures on the front page of the catalogue, reportedly prompting him to remark that the company was "not, after all, selling fur coats". Neither did the entrepreneur approve of the stylised musical instruments on the title page of the subsequent brochure. With the announcement that "we neither sell musical instruments nor are we a musical society" he put an end to this mode of presentation for the time being, as in his opinion it was too far removed from the actual products and conveyed too much domestic harmony. In keeping with his entrepreneurial maxim, he much preferred a clear and spacious mode of presentation.

Expanding the Dimensions 1968/69

"Extra large" is the label that might best be used to describe the portrayed pieces of furniture as well as the format of the subsequent brochure: The horizontal contouring of elongated four-seater sofas is further enhanced firstly by their broad, low armrests and the horizontal sectioning of the single cushions and secondly by their presentation on an equally extra-wide paper format. The prevalence of small items, typical of the late

1950s, has been replaced by a new spaciousness which reflects the growing dimensions of German living-rooms. The shortage of living space has – at least for Dreipunkt's target group – largely been overcome, and architects enthusiastically put the principles of their Bauhaus fathers into practice. All functional rooms are minimised in size and grouped around a living-room of predominant dimensions. This is a way of suggesting an abundance of space, which is characterised by the same elongated design that re-occurs in the structuring elements of contemporary building. The covered buttons of the upholstery, once characteristic of classical period furniture, are arranged in a linear-geometrical layout, thus enhancing the furniture's claim to nobility as well as underlining the reduced linearity of a technically inspired design with a geometrical basic grid.

Soft Skills 1971–73

Only four years later, the beholder was faced with entirely new dimensions of furniture presentation. After the design-(r)evolution of the early 1960s, changes in the social atmosphere as well as technical innovations in the construction of upholstered furniture once again took effect and left obvious marks – both on the furniture and its presentation. The gold-rush euphoria of the bygone decade with its steady, flourishing growth was slowly but surely marred by the first signs of crisis.

For the first time in the Federal Republic – which after twenty-one years had just about come of age –, the word "unemployment" became an everyday term, accompanied by unmistakable signs of declining economic activity. The stable concept of the American "goody" and the Russian "baddy", which had up to then provided clear fronts – at least you knew where you stood –, crumbled when, in the aftermath of Vietnam, the USA came under increasing criticism. The matter gave the yin and yang of world powers an ambivalent face. Protesting, the younger generation of the 1968ers disassociated themselves from the "establishment" of those, who – in their view – upheld the overly conservative values of a system centring on achievement and followed the existing tight hierarchy. They wanted to create a "new world", in which very different criteria would prevail: Make love, not war. In addition to such political and economic conflicts, the early 1970s saw the first signs of an ecological crisis, which gave grounds for a new appreciation of the value of nature as opposed to the abuse of one's natural environment and the idea of subjecting it to man. The reason for this ecological awareness was the oil crisis, which painfully reminded people of the scarceness of resources, restricted their highly appreciated and exploited mobility and made clear how fragile a situation like theirs, based on a linear expansion and increase, actually was.

The notion of what "better living" meant underwent constant changes. Whereas the extreme angularity and reduced strictness of the 1960s had communicated all those "hard facts", which had proved perfectly sound up to then, this present world was becoming too cold, and its inhabitants constantly risked – in the true sense of the word – hitting a bend. The open space between the sparsely distributed pieces of furniture was too wide to provide the support which was needed now. The backbone was no longer strong enough to keep itself upright always and everywhere. People were longing to withdraw into warm, secluded spheres.

Dreipunkt offered such spheres with furniture models and a mode of presentation which were entirely new and did not rely on the current use of form. With the new pieces of upholstered furniture and their softly rounded shapes, right angles are – at most – faintly hinted at. The steel constructions, which have practically turned the furniture's skeleton inside out, now disappear beneath a thick, form-dissolving cover. The seats of the armchairs gently slant backwards, incline downwards in the centre and rest on a kind of textile hammock. They prevent any healthy, upright seating position from the outset – and this is not intended, anyway: The stiffness of the past has given way to a yearning for regression and security. The accurate grid of the upholstery buttons, which always looked as if it had been designed on the drawing board, is dissolved by dots set in diagonals and seemingly sinking into the soft drapery of the thickly padded cover leather – just like the people sitting on these sofas and armchairs themselves. Certainly, with these pieces of furniture the folds in the leather were by no means a reason for complaint, but rather a sign of their befitting an entirely new consciousness, which was also reflected in earthy shades of brown, beige and cognac. And all those who would not lazily roll themselves up on the sofa could bury their feet in the woolly depths of long-pile shaggy carpets, which imitated the archaic look-and-feel of shaggy furs. Even the coffee tables lost their shin-endangering angularity and were padded all around to match the armchairs.

A design like this was both a reaction to the social trends of the day and to the mechanisation one decade before. Again, Dreipunkt scored great success with their collections, which goes to show once more how essential a sense of social issues is to product design and corporate communication. Accordingly, in one of the Dreipunkt corporate identity brochures, underneath the headline "From Functional Furniture to Modular Furnishing Elements", Hermann Schwarz states: "Today, there is a remarkable trend towards modular furniture. Advanced by the modern method of elemental construction, mobile living has been the key concept in the world of cultivated living since the end of the sixties. Infinitely extendable suites of furniture can be disassembled into single seating elements, which, in turn, can be re-combined to whole suites. Today, upholstered furniture has taken the shape of modular design elements." Those design elements took into consideration the new forms of social life, as stiff gatherings with rigidly pre-set, unchangeable seating positions had finally given way to casual get-togethers.

However, it is not only the changes within a society which determine its products at a given time. Technical development also left its mark on the shapes of Dreipunkt models.

Repercussions 1976–80

The following years until the end of the decade brought forth only few innovations in Dreipunkt's design policy. The forms which had – still under Hermann Schwarz's supervision – caused quite a stir in the early 1970s were developed further, but underwent no major stylistic changes until well into the 1980s.

In the year 1976, Dreipunkt launched Plus, the most successful model in the company's history: Like a draped feather bed and with a slight overhang all around, its seat cushion fits snugly to a compact corpus. With a retail price of 9,384 German marks for a suite consisting of a three-seater, a two-seater and an armchair, potential buyers

literally had to be "well furnished", as, in the 1970s, you could purchase a new Volkswagen Golf for the same amount of money. Dreipunkt caught the spirit of their target group, which, in its turn, was ready for this investment, so that in 19***, Plus achieved a turnover of fourteen million German marks.

What was altered in those days was the context in which the products were presented. Had Dreipunkt "grown up"? The general atmosphere of change, which prevailed until a few years before, has calmed down, voluminous carpets have been reduced to dignified short-pile velours from the assortment of the parent company DLW, and the accessories bear witness to the new status symbols: silver candlesticks and the inevitable bottles of spirits, which already turned up in previous years, on solid marble or glass coffee tables in a cosy-looking ambience. In addition, there are subdued reminiscences of exotic destinations – the yucca in its wicker pot as the plant emblem of the late 1970s; tropical fruit, also arranged in a basket, sea shells, louvre doors and parchment-covered lattice windows as a reference to Asia. To those items are added some bourgeois insignia of arts and crafts (the little porcelain horses in close-up almost threaten to steal the show from the detail of the furniture's seams, the actual focus of the picture) and the much-used quotation of the expertise-suggesting Wagenfeld desk-lamp. In 1975, Hermann Schwarz retired from the business so that now – after many years – the pieces of furniture are once more enlivened by women with long, blonde hair, clad in fashionably flowing robes and blending with the overall picture in monochrome unity.

Revolutions – whether great or small – were not initiated during those years; after the upheavals of the preceding years, a phase of rest had begun, without shocks, but without progressive tendencies, either. Dreipunkt, too, seemed to hold still in the position they had reached, as if trying to cling to their achievements even though the social and economic surroundings live on and continue to change. The brilliance of old, however, can not be retained simply by conjuring it up and refurbishing it again and again. Not even the model Diana, named after the Greek goddess of hunting, could help to recapture the successes of the past.

Questions of Identity 1985

"Motivated" by the decrease in sales and the growing losses in strategic business, the time had come for Dreipunkt, an outstanding manufacturer of upholstered furniture who had, due to a concern decision, taken to offering office furniture as well, to start developing new products.

The excessive curves of the upholstered furniture had been straightened, and Dreipunkt resumed more austere forms and cooler colours, as if they wanted to orientate to a new rationality, but at the same time they followed the general trend. In the product range of the mid-eighties, two models form the stylistic highlights: the cubic Enzo, stretching in front of the beholder with an accurate accentuation of horizontal lines and broad, low arm rests; and Duca, a new development as well. This model combines a distinct, innovative use of form with an integrated functionality, which meets the growing demand for additional ways of usage for furniture. With the help of a concealed adjusting mechanism, the otherwise level neck elements can be variably adapted to the user's requirements. It seemed as if a new, path-breaking line of design had been discovered, a distinctive hand, which could be traced through the whole furniture range.

But far from it: The entrepreneurial indecision which can be discerned in those years also manifested itself in the furniture's design. The cubic forms of the base frames are toned down by a soft cover – a lack of stylistic self-confidence, which could be reminiscent of Hermann Schwarz's occasional regression to period furniture in the 1960/61 catalogue, had it remained an exception. However, the ambivalence of constant tugging and restraining runs through most of the now inconsistent, unrecognisable range of products oscillating between the progressiveness of an Enzo or Duca and the homely suite Scala.

The new mode of presentation of the furniture employs an architecture which signals spaciousness and brightness; the sheer solidity of the past years has been replaced by a rather transparent style of decoration and by "peppy" accessories: Colourful cushions, preferably in red, serve as colour accents on sofas and armchairs, recurring in the furniture's surroundings, large-size art posters bespeak the typographical innovations of the time. They are hung in narrow clip-on picture frames on nylon threads and could equally be found in an office – a branch whose retailers Dreipunkt also furnish at that time. All these efforts were, however, not sufficient for a real turn-around, nor could they answer the questions of identity of a company which had been uprooted from its original substance.

Pizza Cento Stagioni 1989

Anyone who wants to avoid deciding on just one culinary taste chooses Pizza Quattro Stagioni and will get "something of everything" – of course without the guarantee that the cheese and sea food, chilli, salami, ham, pineapple and the vegetarian quarter of the Italo-all-rounder really form a favourable liaison. The Dreipunkt product range of the 1989 catalogue is even more heterogeneous and contrasting – and it is no longer labelled with the slogan "Sitting in its Most Beautiful Form".

The highly indiscriminate range includes models like Enzo with its super temporal use of form and conciseness, the well-known wood-frame models and a number of increasingly trendy products. They form a sharp contrast to Dreipunkt's original orientation towards a clear differentiation between, on the one hand, a promising product policy at the social and technical pulse of the time and, on the other hand, a consideration of current trends, which is inconsistent with an elevated positioning of a brand. Those years' soft wood furniture with its multi-coloured covers and numerous formal gimmicks is reminiscent of Scandinavian-style teenagers' bedroom furniture, the "attractiveness" of which is promoted with an unmistakable suggestiveness: "A beautiful landscape only waiting to be discovered by you. Pisa is so versatile and well-shaped that you will not tire of seeing this model." Such a definition of the concept of "customer contact" diverged from Hermann Schwarz's entrepreneurial ethos, and besides it did not really prove to promote sales in the end, either.

The only thing becoming standardised was the presentation of the products, which were now depicted in a clearly drawn frame set against a black background and seemingly floating in a vacuum.

In the following years, this mode did not change substantially. Instead of returning to a policy of respectability and excellency, the "third-league-style" was continued. It was only few customers who "let the eye wander with pleasure over the gentle, well-padded curves of Vega" (in the words of the 1995 catalogue!) and her sister models, whose creative "fathers" were now even mentioned by name.

In 1998, Dreipunkt, once a successful company, who for several decades up to their incorporation into the structures of DLW had embodied tradition and innovation, declared themselves bankrupt.

Determination 1998

In the same year, Thomas Jungjohann took over the impaired company, the identity of which had been reduced to a brand whose fame was on the wane and a functioning production site. Dreipunkt's departure into a new dimension began with a speedy, painful, but at the same time liberating process of peeling. In an uncompromising "red-pen decision" Thomas Jungjohann cancelled the existing product range, knowing full well that it would not allow the brand Dreipunkt to gain a foothold once more. Models which had guaranteed a turnover of ten million German marks were wiped out to provide the space for new ones, which would be viable for the future. Now, the company's future resembled a blank sheet of paper waiting to be filled with content.

In contrast to the preceding years, the development of a new product range centred not on the hectic search for "the" ingenious element of design, but on the Dreipunkt target group with their forms of living and their demands on the appropriate furniture.

With regard to living-rooms, this meant abandoning the absoluteness of existing usage. The forms of living and working became increasingly individual and created an entirely new image towards the turn of the millennium, which was mentioned in connection with the consumers' "incalculability". Aiming at a "calculation" of human behaviour, however, is inappropriate in the first place. What should be foremost is the quite different challenge for the entrepreneur to understand his target groups and take them seriously.

Perhaps the discrepancy between a generally negative tone in society and a high material standard of living unequalled in history is a core characteristic of our present society at the beginning of the 21st century. It is not material need that many people suffer from, but rather an excess of commodities which are offered without the manufacturer or dealer being aware of the actual needs. The buyers' reserve can also be explained with the lack of appeal and concept behind the offered products, which they perceive and which cannot really be concealed behind polished marketing manoeuvres.

Thomas Jungjohann focuses on his product and the demands it has to face to find takers among potential customers. His object is to develop upholstered furniture "for people who turn their living space into a universally usable domain of their lives, for casual get-togethers, changed living conditions and new forms of living together."

To make allowance for this diversity, the product range was split into two central areas. The label "Dreipunkt Tradition" (which would be discontinued two years later) comprised models reminiscent of the early, homely pieces of furniture with wooden frames

and bourgeois, solid shapes. The line "Dreipunkt International" followed a product policy with an entirely new thrust. Already in the year of the takeover, model D800 went into production – a trailblazer, which would mould an utterly new use of form in the years to come. Its organic, sculptural-looking lines abandoned all principles of symmetry and angularity and introduced a style of upholstery which invited one to sit in a whole range of different positions. The seat depth varies according to the current position, the curved outlines of the backrest allow all possible and more or less upright ways of sitting, flexible side elements permit the user to stretch out and relax. Even the single asymmetrical elements as such can be arranged flexibly. No matter if used separately or in combination with others, set up cornerwise or in a shell-shape, close to the wall or free-standing – the perspectives of sitting and beholding are unlimited. The model took up the fundamental perception of upholstered furniture as a "modular furnishing element", an idea which Hermann Schwarz had communicated as early as 1971 and which was now, several decades later, transformed into a new, trend-setting shape.

This "shape" presented itself with a quasi-sculptural precision only seemingly contradicting the model's sitting comfort and functionality and thereby proved that convenience and aesthetics do not have to be mutually exclusive. The attempt at a symbiosis between concreteness and relaxation, which had seemed impossible in the ever-alternating "either-or" of the 1960s and 1970s models, was finally successful.

The regained brand identity of Dreipunkt furniture started to bear fruit. At that time, the product range assembled around the innovative model D800 was characterised by its unpretentious, modern forms stemming from a distinctive hand, but still lacking a unique succinctness.

The presentation of those products was conceived in a similar mode, amidst no-frills, bright surroundings, but was still wanting in a concise corporate design. For a short time, the photographs were once more inhabited by men and women, friendly people "from next-door", who almost threatened to minimise the substantial innovational drive of individual products.

New Dimensions: 2003

Compared to all that, the large-sized brochure of the year 2003 seems like a departure into a new dimension. In a *mise en scène* which might have been taken straight from Fellini's film studio, select accessories are dispersed in abstract architectural rooms in all shades of grey, which lead the beholder through a thematic world from astronomy to zebra fish. They are – among other things – furnished with pieces of upholstery, which, however, are not the centre of attention in these surroundings. The brochure opens up wide spaces standing for entrepreneurial scope – which still need to be filled with tangible results. They transport the notion of a high standard on a brand which is just about to regain its leading position in international circles and to project its former success story into a promising future.

Thanks to the development of its product range, the brand Dreipunkt is well on its way to inscribing the unmistakably distinctive hand which has already shown with model D800 into a wider spectrum of furniture.

Furniture Revived 2004

The series production of an entirely new generation of upholstered furniture starting in the summer of 2004 reveals just how closely Dreipunkt is orientated to trends in society as well as to technical potentialities: "Comfort in motion" leaves behind customary patterns of usage and function and presents itself as a piece of amazement. Its frame, seemingly suspended in mid-air between two arches and invisibly subdivided into five separate segments, is set in motion by four synchronised electric drives connecting them. They form sculptures of different conditions which tell of the whole run of a day – the state of sleeping and waking, of relaxation and work, of seating and lying positions. They also relate the story of a de-standardised life which is created by the individual, not dictated by a rigid exterior world. The borderlines between work and leisure time are blurred, different times of the day and activities performed are newly defined, and, amidst myriads of simultaneous possibilities, "Comfort in motion" represents a centre of self-reflection.

What is more, Dreipunkt once again show the interweaving of technical development and new possibilities in product design: This piece of furniture has – considering the beginnings of Dreipunkt's furniture production in the post-war years as well as the their current best-sellers – very much departed from the classic way of manufacturing upholstered furniture. The heart of this universal seating and resting furniture consists of the five afore-mentioned steel frames, connected to each other by electric drives developed exclusively for Dreipunkt. In addition to their usual range of functions, they do not only move, but have to stand firm against static pressures. A person sitting down on the very edge of the furniture or shifting on it, for example, exerts an enormous force on the single connectors, which, nevertheless, need to resist it, just as the whole piece of furniture has to keep on standing firm and imperturbably on the ground, even in this situation.

Finding a Distinct Identity 2005

In the year 2005, the spectrum of the Dreipunkt product range committed to an unmistakable "common denominator" finally becomes evident. There are four themes presenting themselves to the beholder, all of them in a characteristic Dreipunkt design: The organic forms have been varied and expanded into new ranges of models. It is the same forms which were defined as early as 1998. But now, seven years later, they are in the focus of the international trends in architecture and design.

What is added is an internationally appealing cubic use of form based on straight lines. It is employed by the company to demonstrate the potential of perfecting a reduced linearity. These forms are complemented by modern-classic sofa models which can be combined flexibly, if desired by the customer. With the models of "Comfort in motion", whose functionality is meanwhile employed in different ranges of application, the wheel comes full circle.

Supertemporality 2006

The relaunch of the model Komet at the International furniture fair in Cologne in January 2006 can be regarded as a reconciled look back at the potential of the past (which was made use of only marginally then) and its revival in a promising future. A quarter of a century before, in the year 1981, the company had cooperated with Prof. Rudolf Bernd Glatzel, a designer from Hildesheim. One of the results of this cooperation was a largely leather-covered cantilever chair with a footstool, whose slightly curved flat-bar frame of high-grade steel demonstrated a fascinating interplay of stillness and dynamism. This simultaneousness of stability and progressiveness has lost nothing of its topicality in the course of the past decades, but still represents the task Dreipunkt are pursuing with an undiminished intensity. Precisely twenty-five years after the product first left the factory, the model Komet is re-integrated into the Dreipunkt range and already ranks with the Dreipunkt classics, whose use of form makes a clear statement about "Sitting in its Most Beautiful Form".

Creation at its highest level characterises Dreipunkt's mission just as much as it characterises Rudolf Bernd Glatzel's credo. Born in 1923 as the son of a Hamburg joiners' family rich in tradition and appreciative of the fine arts, he focussed on furniture design up to his death in 2005, combining perfect craftsmanship, the recognition of which he had virtually inherited, with a high sensitivity for material and form. Professor Glatzel was neither interested in being "chic" or "stylish" nor in adjusting "comfortably" to prevailing trends, nor was he aiming at a compatibility with the taste of the masses. Instead, his work was guided by a passion and a deeply felt love for lines and forms. The result of contemplatively scrutinising what could seemingly be taken for granted and contrasting it with what might perhaps be possible, was the unmistakable hand of Glatzel's unagitated, distinctive design.

Glatzel owed his admission to the Hanseatische Hochschule für Bildende Künste, the Hamburg art college, in 1944 to a war injury (in rescuing a wounded man as a medical orderly, he himself had fallen victim to a mine). A graduate interior designer, he started teaching furniture design at the Werkkunstschule in Hildesheim in 1948. At the same time, he made designs for noted German manufacturers of upholstered furniture, among them for many years Dreipunkt. Numerous prizes give proof of Rudolf B. Glatzel's success and the high level of his work – a mere surface, however, which allows no conclusions about the personality behind it. With the sharp nib of his black fountain-pen he created accurate freehand drawings based on a number of points distributed seemingly at random across the paper and serving as the frame for the subsequent drawing. Then he would complete this frame with small but nevertheless expressive details, thus filling the sketched drafts with life: the glass on the table, the characteristic flower arrangement, outlined in a reduced way but still unmistakable – atmospheres of a quality which set a lively counterbalance to the technical perfection and perspective accuracy of the complete work.

That Professor Glatzel aligned "art" with "ability" and not with the maximum possible boosting of a boisterous originality is one possible explanation for the still unabashed fascination his designs communicate. What might be equally essential is his adherence to a holistic layout for an "intact" living environment. The Porsche slogan of the 1990s, according to which the sports cars from Zuffenhausen were ideal family cars ("Leaving

home later and getting back sooner"), had years before been Rudolf B. Glatzel's motivation to commute between Hildesheim, where he had studied and now lived, and his clients in Baden-Württemberg in a Porsche 356. As a concomitant of those journeys he learned to sense social envy. Family life with his musical wife and their three children was his mainstay and source of energy, and in his garden Glatzel perceived nature with an equally high esteem as he perceived the aesthetics of high-quality design. Taking care of an injured titmouse with the same intensity as when creating precise forms, keeping a symbiotic balance between family life and a successful career and, as a result of all this, creating products which stand out for their substantial vibrancy and super temporal validity – such values are in demand at a time when most things are only superficially retouched. Thus, the relaunch of Komet is more than the "mere" expansion of an attractive, promising product range. It is a clear profession of an entrepreneurial and humane attitude.

With this distinctive image and a prominently positioned as well as concise range, Dreipunkt emphasise the actual achievement of their products in the 2006 catalogue. Like divas on a catwalk they are placed in the focus of an accurate light direction with no need for an up-grading through a whole flood of life-style accessories referring to an external world. It is a step back and forward at the same time when the photographic concepts of 2006 and 1968 meet each other. Even then, the focus was set on products with an expressive, distinct use of form and on a minimalist mode of presentation. The way opens up to the imagination of the beholders, who are free to choose their own interpretation of "Sitting in its Most Beautiful Form".

This unmistakable collection demonstrates how entrepreneurial identity can be regained when the term "crisis" is interpreted in its proper sense as the notion of a positive chance for a new beginning. To take this chance means first of all to reflect critically on the "task" a company and its products should fulfil in the context of a given society: "Today, there is a remarkable trend towards modular furniture. Advanced by the modern method of elemental construction, mobile living has been the key concept in the world of cultivated living since the end of the sixties. Infinitely extendable suites of furniture can be disassembled into single seating elements, which, in turn, can be recombined to whole suites." It is thirty-five years since this statement describing the development from "functional furniture" to "modular furnishing elements" was formulated. That it is still valid today reveals that within the past three-and-a-half decades the challenge faced by a manufacturer of upholstered furniture has undergone only marginal changes. What has changed, however, is the translation of the postulates for furniture fitting different situations in life, for its versatility in usage and for a combination of functionality and design. From the modular system concept of D500 SQUARE to D900 LOFT with its wide and individual range of use to the D9900 "Comfort in motion" as a far-reaching new definition within the world of upholstered furniture – the Dreipunkt models of the beginning of the third millennium formulate answers to the demands of an individualised society.

With the success stories from the company's history and its perpetuation in the future, the wheel comes full circle. Dreipunkt International has set the course for a continuation of the hitherto promising corporate development: with intelligent products reflecting new ways of life and responding to the changed requirements. With the courage to walk on new, innovative paths off the beaten track. And with a commitment to quality and design "Made in Germany".