

SERGIO RODRIGUES

BRAZIL AT THE TIP OF A PENCIL



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Organization
Instituto Sergio Rodrigues

Copy and research
Regina Zappa



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INTRODUCTION



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Established in October 2012 in Rio de Janeiro, the Instituto Sergio Rodrigues is a non-profit organization whose aim is to preserve the master's collection and make available to the public at large, especially students and researchers from Brazil and the world, the whole of his work and to promote and encourage knowledge and dialog about architecture and Brazilian design.

The **Sergio Rodrigues - Brazil at the tip of a pencil** biographical profile project presented in this issue is part of a series of actions promoted by the Institute to honor the six decades of the master of Brazilian furniture design, who passed away in September 2014. At www.institutosergiorodrigues.com.br, the copy is illustrated with photos that have never been seen before and that belong to the institute's collection.

Chapter 1

Brazil at the tip of a pencil

Sergio broke away from paradigms by inventing a language of his own in search of the Brazilian identity

Sergio Rodrigues left us in September 2014, when revisiting his life and career. Always with great humor and precision, he chronicled much of his childhood and adolescence, his college days, and the opening of OCA, a store he created and that heralded a new phase in the production of Brazilian furniture. Sergio is one of those Brazilians who leave behind a large void in the country's life when they go. He is an icon, not only of design and architecture, rather of the Brazilian culture. His deliberate, relentless pursuit of modern Brazilian furniture was one of his great contributions to the story of creativity in Brazil. The Delta Larousse Encyclopedia defines him as "the creator of the Brazilian furniture."

Born in 1927, in Rio de Janeiro, he graduated as an architect in 1952 and went out in a "frantic search," as he himself put it, for a type of design that could represent the spirit "of our people." In architecture, his designs were made in order for "life to happen in there." Sergio broke away from paradigms to invent his own language in search of the Brazilian identity and harmoniously integrated the three areas in which he militated: architecture, design, and drawing.

His creations came at a time when Brazil was investing in a new federal capital, and the Brazilian people were breathing an atmosphere of invention and of Brazilianness in fine arts, music - with Bossa Nova - and architecture, with the construction of Brasília. Sergio sensed that modern Brazilian architecture lacked contemporary furniture to keep up with this. Sergio's creations, aimed to make modern, comfortable furniture suited for the Brazilian tropical climate, making great use of wood and leather, soon led him to the new capital: His furniture was ordered in large scale and taken to Brasília.

An expert designer, a talent inherited from his father Roberto Rodrigues, Sergio collected not only drawings of his projects, but also humorous illustrations of his furniture, of everyday scenes and of himself. The words of the designer Fernando Mendes de Almeida about his teacher, friend and cousin, highlight the importance of the creator: "Sergio Rodrigues' dimensions as an artist and public figure become eternal and blend in with our life history and with the history of the nation itself. Few Brazilian artists defended our culture, our way

of life, and the way we are for so long and with such determination. Few designers had such a long productive life.”

To the journalist and design expert Adélia Borges, author of *Sergio Rodrigues*, part of Editora Viana & Mosley’s Arquitetura e Design collection, nationality defines Sergio. “He presents himself with a much more personal vision, one which comes from our Iberian tradition of more robust, heavier furniture. And he did this while Joaquim Tenreiro used to say that Brazilian furniture should be formally light. This is what distinguishes Sergio.”

By adopting a Brazilian language, Sergio also drew inspiration in the appreciation of Brazilian materials, especially wood and leather. An architect, product designer, interior designer, set designer, dresser, decorator and lecturer - in all his multiplicity, Sergio, over and above his explicit Brazilianness, imbued his creations with the spirit of Rio, ever since a time when the city of Rio de Janeiro boiled with modernization, and Brazil turned to the pursuit of its national identity, especially in the arts.

Sergio’s contribution to the gestation of the truly modern Brazilian furniture is undeniable. Obstinate, he never stopped creating and devoted his creative energy to design throughout his life. He was always in a “permanent state of creativity and production, despite the several adversities he faced along the way,” says the article devoted to him posted on the *Casa Museu do Objeto* website (http://www.acasa.org.br/biblioteca_texto.php?id=219).

In just over a half-century of work, Sergio created some 1,200 different models of furniture. “His furniture is based on our deep cultural roots, but is not limited to them. He built a very particular language in which he recreates the robust furniture of the Iberian tradition, but within a modern syntax. In addition, he was instrumental in helping add value to interior design and, by doing so, taking design to the field of culture,” says the article.

And also: “Sergio knew how to overcome difficulties with persistence, work capacity, tenacity, energy, and his unlimited talent. He was a pioneer not only of design *in* Brazil, but also of design *from* Brazil. A design that believes in the country’s own values and seeks to be the expression, in the form, of these values.”

To Adélia Borges, who says Sergio’s legacy is superlative, “It’s a privilege to have a person of his dimensions in the Brazilian design scene. He transcends his area of operation and becomes significant for society in general.”

Fernando Mendes de Almeida believes that another one of Sergio’s great legacies is the message he left of the example of his own life and of his entire professional career. “The great life lesson he leaves us is to always have done what he liked and wanted to do, with enthusiasm, courage and daringness. It is as if he always said to us: Do it with love, passion, surrender to what you are doing. I am a great admirer of his strength and joy.”

Sergio's place in this scenario is unique. His Brazilianness was always in his ability to absorb the life around him and observe the world in which he lived and of which he was a full part. Nothing better to understand this passion for all things Brazilian than an excerpt from an interview he gave in 1985 to *Casa e Jardim* magazine, which was republished in September 2014, shortly after his death:

He said that in order to create Brazilian furniture it sufficed to imagine a few scenes:

“That late afternoon charm at a farm balcony, after a summer downpour, with the smell of damp earth in the air, a ripe mango, a certain corral touch, with a fresh cup of coffee and toasty warm corn scones.

or

Dawn on a white sand beach, the calm sea, a scenery with the marked horizon of spring, where the cool breeze and the sea air mix.

or

A cold night in the mountains, with shadows disturbed only by the excitement of the fire in the fireplace burning pine-tree heart, a draft filling the air with the smell of lavender, mold, smoke from a pipe burning good tobacco, perhaps a little onion soup.

or

Perhaps afternoon tea, next to a small, well-kept inside courtyard, peanut brittle flooring covered with small plant vases and grassland flowers, only dark wooden pergola from which tree ferns with Benghal dayflowers and ferns planted in them hang. “

It is, in fact, design in his mind and Brazil at the tip of a pencil. The Brazil he kept in his heart with fervor.

Chapter 2

Plowing of the land: a quick “pre-history” of modern design in Brazil

Sergio Rodrigues started presenting his work in a context that was already teaming with the idea of modernity and was daring to take the first steps in Brazilianness

When Sergio Rodrigues graduated from the college of Architecture, in 1952, the winds of a new modernist language coming mainly from a Europe interested in “rationalizing” domestic life started blowing in Brazil. The Industrial Revolution had changed hearts and minds during the eighteenth century and laid the foundations of a more practical, less artisanal and sophisticated life. With the end of the two world wars, Europe found herself immersed in movements that were reviewing the wasteful life of the elites before the conflicts and betting on a more rational, economical life.

In Brazil, the higher classes were still dazzled with European furniture, upholstery made of velvet and other fine fabrics, which hid its internal design, such as the French furniture that Sergio called “ladies” furniture, “full of embellishments”. The designer and sculptor Joaquim Tenreiro, creator of iconic Brazilian furniture, used to speak of the style “of all Louises,” referring to the kings of France. But even in Europe, this type of furniture was still what people wanted.

The European rationalist movement then began to move away from that style, which marked the taste of the wealthy homes of that era. In the early 1910s, a line of thought that introduced new proposals that preached “the shape that follows the object’s function, and function alone” surfaced in design.

When Sergio became interested in creating furniture in the 1950s, attempts to make the modern Brazilian furniture were already emerging in the country. In the 1920s, for example, Gregori Warchavchik, a Ukrainian architect and designer who had studied in Italy, immigrated to Brazil and built the first modernist houses in the country. He used to support the rationalist furniture idea, already in vogue in Europe, and launched the first modernist architecture manifesto in Brazil. He introduced the metals that were widely used in the European rationalist language to his furniture, but did not absorb Brazilian influences or the materials found here. On the other hand, he focused on designing the purer lines of the modern language and joined a group that also included Lasar Segal, a Lithuanian painter and sculptor who moved to Brazil in 1923 and also ventured into furniture design.

Warchavchik dreamed of manufacturing furniture in the industrial reproduction series, but it was not yet time for that. Society was used to references coming from other times and places, and was not ready to accept the new modern furniture, so his dream did not come true in his time. Nonetheless, those were the first steps taken towards a new furniture design, although not on the path towards a Brazilian project.

Change was on its way, though. In the transition from artisanal to industrial furniture, around 1906, the Gelli furniture factory, a brand that exists yet today, appeared in Petrópolis. However, to the Brazilian journalist and design expert Adélia Borges, the great watershed separating artisanal and industrial furniture was the Patente furniture factory, established in 1910. Essentially, Patente manufactured popular furniture, although a few of its pieces were more refined.

Soon thereafter, in 1913, the Cimo furniture factory was inaugurated in Santa Catarina, a pioneer in designing products that could be taken apart and were ready for industrial scale production. There was so much demand for Cimo's furniture that the federal government department in charge of procurement at the time imposed Cimo's measurements as the official standard measurements, thus giving rise new impetus to the factory's production. Government offices, cinemas, and schools used Cimo furniture and, in 1941, more than 500,000 Cimo armchairs had been installed in concert halls nationwide. The factory then became the largest furniture plant in South America.

Meanwhile, an event in Germany would reinforce the avant-garde wave of furniture design throughout the world: In April 1919, Walter Gropius established the Bauhaus school of design, art and architecture, supported largely by the Weimar Republic, which remained in place until 1933, when it was closed down by the Hitler administration on account of its leftist orientations. Bauhaus influenced one of Brazil's main architects, Oscar Niemeyer, who designed Brasilia based on the modern and functionalist tendencies of the Bauhaus school.

In this innovation-filled environment on the international scene, where the idea was to break away from the ornament and the notion of stylistic embellishments, appeared Dutchman Gerrit Rietveld, who radicalized and proposed furniture construction be very well explained. He removed all skin and layers from furniture, leaving it like a skeleton. With colors, he depicted these components and created the famous Red Blue chair in 1932.

Pushed by the same daring spirit came Le Corbusier, a Swiss architect, designer, and painter who traveled to South America in the late 1920s and stated that "the house is a machine to live in." Along with the Brazilian architect Lucio Costa, he would be in charge of the project that became a landmark of modern architecture in Brazil: The MEC (Ministry of Education and Culture) building, in Rio de Janeiro, built pursuant to the modern architecture with the Brazilian temperament.

In the wake of the international rational movement came Mies van der Rohe, a German-

born American architect, professor at Bauhaus, a follower of a style that left the mark of a rationalist, geometric architecture who proclaimed: “Less is more!”. The American architect Louis Sullivan, who had been around longer and was considered the father of modernism in architecture and the “father of skyscrapers,” the mentor of Frank Lloyd Wright, once again set the direction to be followed by the modern design and architecture which became the motto of Bauhaus: “Form follows function.”

In 1952, nearly twenty years after the closure of Bauhaus, and to promote its principles, Max Bill created the Ulm School of Design in Germany, also known as Superior School of Form, which closed in 1968 for political and financial reasons. The school brought together architects, designers, filmmakers, painters, musicians and scientists, among others, and was meant to train professionals with solid artistic and technical foundations for creating objects produced on an industrial scale for everyday or scientific use. The Ulm model resumed the relations between art and crafts, art and industry, art and everyday life.

From these “thinkers” of the new aesthetics of architecture and design came a European furniture trend created pursuant to the thesis of the “maximum expression with minimal elements.” This is the uncluttered furniture, as opposed to the stylish one. When, in 1928, Warchavchik designed the first Brazilian modernist house, in São Paulo, he wanted to create a kind of rational, comfortable, purely useful house. A good machine to live in, with simplistic lines and compatible with mechanized requirements. But there was no talk of Brazilianness because the rational furniture was independent of time and place and it was an avant-garde European trend.

An example of the new thinking was the Wassily chair, designed by Marcel Breuer, an American architect of Hungarian descent and professor at Bauhaus, who broke away from paradigms by introducing new materials like tubular steel and by using uncluttered geometric shapes.

This ebullience arrives in Brazil. “The Brazilian modernist movement,” says Adélia Borges, “has a clear influence on architecture and design. It preaches integration among architecture, furniture, and landscaping. Thus, architects went on to design not only buildings, but furniture, lamps and household items.” Together in the modernist movement were Warchavchik, Lasar Segal, and John Graz, a Swiss painter, illustrator, designer and sculptor, who came here, became an interior designer and was largely responsible for introducing art deco in Brazil. The painter Flavio de Carvalho, also an architect and designer, was part of the group and devoted himself for some time to designing clothes, adopting the modernist “Flavio de Carvalho uncovers Brazilian fashion from head to toe” motto.

Meanwhile, Oscar Niemeyer starts making the modern Cataguazes houses, in Minas Gerais, and invites Tenreiro to work with him. By making intensive use of Brazilian woods, Tenreiro spurred the creation of Brazilian furniture. At the same time, in the 1940s, the architect Lina Bo Bardi arrived in Brazil, coming from Italy, and was surprised she did not

find modern furniture for her projects here. She then started to create furniture for her own projects.

As Lina, Zanine Caldas, who in addition to being an architect was also a landscaper, sculptor, and furniture maker, known as the master of wood, also started making furniture for his projects and even opened a furniture factory in São Paulo. The two produced a lot, but their furniture design was always subordinate to the architectural projects. Their design product factories did not last long.

Sergio Rodrigues started presenting his work in a context that was already teeming with the idea of modernity and dared to take the first steps in Brazilianness with Tenreiro's projects. Already with an industrialization background and the new fresh air of the modernist language, he plunged into the mission of creating the Brazilian furniture. Architecture was a safe house for a while, and he lived off of it. As Lina and Zanine, he started designing furniture in the shadow of his architectural projects. Over time, design went on to gain autonomy in Sergio's work. He began creating furniture that was not necessarily linked to an architectural project.

Sergio and Tenreiro developed their careers in parallel. The difference is that Sergio produced what he created. He opened a factory and started making his products on a large scale. Oca, which he created and became an icon in the 1960s, was a store that remained open for business for many years. In addition to it, there was Taba, Oca's factory, on a large scale. Finally, with Sergio Rodrigues, design gained space on the Brazilian track of inventions.

(Adélia Borges collaborated with this chapter)

Chapter 3

A tragedy with deep scars

His father's death remained a mystery to Sergio for a long time

The earliest recollection Sergio had of his childhood was the scene of his father and mother sitting on the couch that he could see from his small bed. This was one of the few images he kept of his father, Roberto Rodrigues, who was murdered when Sergio was but 2 years old. He could also remember his father riding a horse in cowboy dress, and his mother, also on horseback, riding with his father on a farm belonging to a few family friends in Cabo Frio, where Sergio was taken to gain weight soon after he was born.

Roberto Rodrigues was born in Recife and came to Rio de Janeiro quite young with his mother, Maria Esther Falcão Rodrigues, and father, Mário Rodrigues, Sergio's grandmother and grandfather. The Pernambuco patriarch of the Rodrigues clan and a well-known journalist in Recife, Mário worked at the *Diário de Pernambuco* newspaper when he had to move permanently to Rio de Janeiro, in 1912, on account of political issues. He moved there with his wife and sons, Milton, Roberto, Mário Filho, and Nelson. Mario was considered one of the most courageous Brazilian combatants and journalists in the early twentieth century.

Upon arriving in Rio, the family went to live on Alegre street, in Aldeia Campista, a district later absorbed by its neighbors Andaraí, Maracanã, Tijuca, and Vila Isabel. In the capital city, and after a tumultuous period at the *Correio da Manhã* newspaper, with political charges and a small stint in prison, Mário founded his first daily in Rio, *A Manhã*, in 1925, in which he was a chronicler of destructive rhetoric. One of the most feared chroniclers of his time, writing bright and hurtful articles, Mário revolutionized journalism, but his corrosive style eventually turned against him and led to a great tragedy in the family.

According to the *Biblioteca Nacional Digital do Brasil* portal (<http://hemerotecadigital.bn.br/artigos/manh%C3%A3-1>), *A Manhã* was “a versatile 12-page morning newspaper published in standard size, with a good layout and making good use of images (...). An embattled critic, he used scathing, pamphleteering, demagogic, humorous, and accessible language. He confronted authoritarianism, the oligarchies and the political structure of the Old Republic, pursuing commitment to popular causes.” Therefore, Mário Rodrigues

was feared for his bold journalism, which displeased many. In his day, he was considered one of the most courageous Brazilian combatants and journalists in the early twentieth century.

In Rio, Mário and Esther had other sons and daughters (14 in all) and Roberto went work with his father as a newspaper illustrator at an early age. He had studied at the School of Fine Arts, and was considered an expert drawer. Robert's family was one of artists and intellectuals. Nelson Rodrigues, Roberto's younger brother, transitioned from journalism to drama, becoming one of the most celebrated Brazilian authors. But Roberto did not live to witness this fame, as he died tragically at a young age, when his brother Nelson was 15.

Between paint brush strokes and drawings at the School of Fine Arts, Roberto, a seductive, handsome young man, a good writer and gifted illustrator, a true Rudolph Valentino of the time, fell in love with Elsa Fernanda Mendes de Almeida, who was also taking classes at college, as a listener. That was the only way her family would allow her to go to college. The only granddaughter of Fernando Mendes Almeida, a member of a Catholic family that was part of the Rio de Janeiro high society, of intellectuals linked to the Church, among whom Dom Luciano Mendes de Almeida later stood out, Elsa had to face her family's opposition to her relationship with Roberto. Her family did not want her to marry someone coming from a family with such a bad reputation. But the unexpected pregnancy resulting from a great passion sealed their marriage. Sergio could not help comment what happened with humor: "I do not know the details, but it is said I had been made before the marriage. It is somewhat hazy."

After leaving *A Manhã*, Mário founded *A Crítica*, in 1928. It was at this newspaper that some of his kids debuted in the journalistic career. When he owned *A Crítica*, he was arrested again and convicted on account of an unsigned story in which Pernambuco mill owners were denounced for giving the then First Lady, Maria Pessoa, a diamond necklace. Mario served his sentence and returned to the newspaper. His aggressive style permeated the newspaper's editorial line, and he himself once even said that "someday someone from *A Crítica* was sure to be shot dead."

No sooner said than done. One day, in 1929, the newspaper published a story about a noisy divorce case, at a time when marital separations were taboo. *A Crítica* announced the divorce of Sylvia Serafim and João Thibau Jr. with fanfare. Sylvia could not take the scandal and walked into the newspaper's newsroom, gun in hand, ready to kill Mário Rodrigues. Since Mário was not in, she was met by Roberto, his son. Sylvia did not give it a second thought and shot Roberto, who died three days later, at age 23.

As said, Sergio was only 2 years old. Elsa could not attend the funeral. His grandfather, Mário, who could not bear the pain of losing a child to a bullet intended for him, started drinking heavily and died four months later.

His father's death remained a mystery to Sergio for a long time. His mother's family moved him away from his father's relatives hastily and would always change subjects when Sergio asked about his father. Sergio's sister, Maria Teresa, was only a year old, and the other one, Vera, never even got to know her father because Elsa was three months pregnant when Roberto died.

Sergio could not accept to know nothing about the circumstances of his father's death. It tormented him so much that, at age 17, he went to the National Library, in Rio de Janeiro, to search for information. He researched newspapers of the time tirelessly. And then he learned the truth. *A Crítica* had published numerous editions on the crime, which became a scandal in all papers. Sergio was disgusted with the article that caused the tragedy. The note about the woman who was getting divorced featured a drawing that Roberto had made at Mário's request to illustrate the story. Although he remembered very little about his father, a memory had set in Sergio's mind of a scene that only came to light in a session of psychoanalysis, many years later: Sergio was taken to his father's funeral and put on top of the casket.

Despite the very short amount of time he spent with Roberto, Sergio always admired his father's strong, stylish lines, which he used in his paintings and drawings, in scenographic screens for vaudeville or to illustrate newspaper stories. But what stuck in Sergio's emotional memory of his father's work was, according to Maria Cecilia Laschiavo, "his sensitivity to capture, handle, and represent aspects of the collective imagination with fluid lines and the taste for things of the earth." No doubt a legacy he left Sergio.

Chapter 4

Airplanes and race cars, an “amazing connection”

“In his drawings he flew World War One aircraft, traveled on flying carpets, rode hot air balloons, visited the stars.”

(Fernando Mendes de Almeida)

An aviator. That is what Sergio wanted to be when he grew up. If for some reason he could not achieve that, he would be a race car driver. He got his taste for speed early on. He was still a young boy, but a great admirer of a friend of his grandmother Stella, Irineu Correia, who was an aviator and a race car fanatic. Another friend of hers, Pedro Correia da Rocha, had a large farm where the family spent many summer vacations. There was a real locomotive on the farm, and Sergio was happy while playing and dreaming of one day being able to fly or to drive the roads in a fast car. There was also a friend of his mother, Elsa, called Dark de Mattos, a millionaire who had boat and a plane and used to take Sergio’s family for rides. The boat was kept at the Rio de Janeiro Yacht Club, and the plane would land nearby there, in a small field. The boy was fascinated: “I think my passion for planes comes from all these things. Dark would do pirouettes and suddenly lower the plane, it was sensational. I loved the smell of gasoline.”

And not even the tragedy he witnessed in 1935 scared him off. A year earlier, in 1934, there was the first Gávea circuit, which he watched with excitement and further enhanced his passion for racing. After all, he kept pace with the history of racing cars ever since he was 6. But the following year, his grandmother’s friend, Irineu Correa, who had a car repair shop, got involved in an accident during the race and died instantly. It was a shock that he never forgot. “I was there, and I think he was the first person I knew who died. I was very impressed with that.” But the passion for race cars and aircraft followed him for life.

He got to know the Correia da Rocha farm, in Cabo Frio, while yet quite young. His parents took him there at age one for him to gain some weight because he was too skinny. His maternal grandmother, Stella Mendes de Almeida Santos, called Sergio a “chick” because he was born thin. And he was so thin that he himself used to say, when looking at his photos, that he looked like a monkey, with huge eyes popping out of his head because he was so skinny. He only left the place when his sister Maria Tereza was born. He was then two years old.

After they got married, Roberto and Elsa moved to Copacabana, near the Cardeal Arcoverde

square. But they did not stay at that first home long. Since Mário, Sergio's paternal grandfather, had a huge house, almost a mansion, at Copacabana as well, at Joaquim Nabuco, 62, the couple eventually moved to Elsa's father's house when Sergio was less than a year old. More precisely to a "very nice" habitable basement, as Sergio would say later on as an adult. It was a house full of rooms to house the Rodrigues family, which had 14 children. It was in the basement days that Roberto met Cândido Portinari in college, who would always visit him at Mário's house. They were such good friends that Roberto invited Portinari to share his painting studio with him. Portinari came to paint several portraits of Roberto, Sergio's father, and of all the Rodrigues family. When her husband died, Elsa left the Rodrigues house and moved with her mother to another place.

Grandmother Stella was a major influence in Sergio's upbringing. Stella came from a family of intellectuals. Her grandfather, Candido Mendes de Almeida, was a writer, a professor of geography and history in São Luis do Maranhão, and served as a Senator of the Empire. Stella's father, Fernando Mendes de Almeida, was a law graduate and a Senator. In 1984, he bought the *Jornal do Brasil* newspaper.

Once her daughter became a widow of Robert, Stella went ahead and brought in her three grandchildren - Sergio and his sisters, Maria Tereza and Vera Maria, who was still in her mother's womb - and replaced the Rodrigues family, of artists and journalists, for the Mendes de Almeidas in young Sergio's life. Mother and children all went to live with their grandmother. Sergio's maternal great-grandfather, Fernando, was a very wealthy man, but gradually lost his fortune. He actually became the owner of the *Jornal do Brasil* newspaper in the early twentieth century, but during one of his trips he lost the newspaper to one of his employees, the future Count Ernesto Pereira Carneiro.

Stella had three brothers and a sister and married Portuguese physician Jorge Abranches Santos. She had an only daughter, Elsa, Sergio's mother. Elsa was a modern woman for her time, full of life. She was born in Paris and, despite having studied at the Sacre-Coeur de Marie Catholic school, she was a free-spirited Rio de Janeiro resident. Intelligent, a lover of life, she spoke several languages. Her family, who had a guaranteed place in the Rio de Janeiro society, lived in a big house at Botafogo Beach, and to go to school the girl used the shortcut between Botafogo and Laranjeiras, which was under construction at the time (today it is Pinheiro Machado street). There was a time when Elsa, while yet a young girl, went to school riding a donkey she was given by her grandfather, Fernando Mendes de Almeida, accompanied by an employee who would go on foot. Sergio used to like to say that all school girls would line up to go for a ride on the donkey.

After the shock at the death of her husband, Elsa needed to unwind. A while later she traveled to Paris, to the house of a diplomat uncle, her mother's brother, and stayed there for a year. Her children stayed with their grandmother during that time. Sergio was almost three years old then, and because of her absence he had no memories of his mother in his

early childhood. First communion, school parties - in his memories, it was the image of grandmother Stella that came to mind when he tried to remember his early childhood.

When she returned from Paris a year later, Elsa moved in with her children and mother Stella in a village, at São Clemente street, next to Colégio Santo Inácio. Sergio had few memories of this house. However, one of the strongest and most wonderful images he kept was that of his mother arriving by ship from Europe, when he went pick her up at the port. Through one of the ship's portholes, she shook an object in her hand and shouted to her son: "Look what I brought you." It was a toy car, one of those 1930s race cars, and yet another element of his "amazing connection" with racing cars.

At that time, the family still lived in the village near Santo Inácio. They then moved to the house of uncle James, Stella grandmother's uncle, where Sergio lived for most of his childhood and adolescence, of which he has the best and most vivid memories, filled with joyful and creative stories that helped shape the artist and inventor.

Chapter 5

A world made of games and inventions

The passion for wood and drawing that turned real

The house was shaped like a little castle and everyone called it “72,” its number on Flamengo Beach. The little castle belonged to James Andrew, whose sister was married to Fernando Mendes de Almeida, Stella’s father. Uncle James had a huge influence on Sergio’s upbringing. Passionate for furniture and wood, James had a carpentry shop in the back of the farm that surrounded the house. The backyard went all the way from Flamengo Beach to Catete. In the back it had a huge orchard “with incredible fruit,” several types of mangoes, a lot of room to play soccer and run in at will. While describing the “72,” Sergio’s voice rejoiced and his eyes sparkled with the fun, vivid memories he had of the place:

“I didn’t need to go out on the street to have fun. I used to take friends home, played soccer and was always having fun. There was a soccer field there, and I learned how to barbecue. Berries, mangoes, jambul, avocados, bananas, all of that on the other side of the gate. There was a part of the yard where there was a large iron door leading to the farm where the fruit trees were. The little castle’s facade featured the family shield, which had a deer in it. My uncle did nothing, he was rich. A National Guard colonel, he had been an adjutant of Marshal Hermes. Woodwork was his hobby. The basement of the house was full of the remains of old houses that he gathered. There was furniture and fixtures, it was great. Amazing things. And we, children, were libertarians; we used to make a big huge mess.”

“At the little castle, in the mess basement, there was a lot of old stuff, old chandeliers, and many other things. It was below street level, and when there was a storm tide, water would splash into the basement. He had his woodwork shop in another room, in the backyard. The bottom part was his joinery, on the top were the employees, and I had my mess studio in the last room. The chicken coop was next to it.”

“In the mess basement there was a ladder leading up to the house. It was all crafted in wood, made by uncle James. He also liked to invent and manufacture chairs. One of his habits was having two colors of wood: light and dark, peroba and Jacaranda. Everything was done that way. Dark and light wood wainscoting covered the full length of the dining room. It went up a meter and a half and went up to the middle of the wall. He would order his carpenters to

do the work and would stick his nose in everything they did. They were excellent. In order for his woodworkers to understand what he wanted, he would make drawings to show them what he was looking for. He would use foolscap paper and red ink, with a feather that fit into the pen. The drawings were horrendous, no one could decipher them, but the Portuguese woodworkers understood what he wanted.”

Although he was very young and all the time he spent at “72” was an intense experience in fun and games, the way his uncle communicated his ideas to the woodworkers through drawings was the key for Sergio to start drawing and end up heading into architecture and design. “It was the great click,” he said. Realizing that things could be made from drawings, designs, was a revolution, even if unconscious one, in the boy’s mind, because humor and imagination were already flying around free in Sergio’s childhood.

The uncle’s workshop was the old stable there used to be in the back of the house. The stable was later torn down and the wood was all used. Sergio used the leftovers to make toys and play games. “I thought I could play around with the wood too. It would be easy because instead of using dough, all you had to do was to make it out of wood. We used to make a lot of things out of dough, especially wax, such as toys. We used church wax, the one that accumulated next to those candlesticks that spill wax. We would shape it. I then wanted to use the woodwork shop there was at home. There are a lot of small cedar boxes that I used to make toys and that was, incidentally, one of the types of wood I used a lot because of its smell. The smell of cedar, the smell of a box of cigars, it was all very exciting to me.”

The playful mood of his childhood surfaced later on, and often, in his work. “Sergio sees furniture like toys. The Burton table, for example, has both aeronautical and naval elements. It looks like he took a few parts of a sailboat to make the table. But he does not mess around. This table has a rod that is not there as a mere ornament. If you remove it, the table will not stand firmly. It has plastic beauty and a structural function both.” It is Fernando Mendes de Almeida, a friend, cousin and pupil, who says so.

Sergio continues talking about the enchanted world he lived in as a child: “Aunt Léa’s home was next door, and there was a sapodilla tree there. The bats used to eat its fruit, but it was the best. I used to do all kinds of things at uncle James’: I even built a lift to get the dog up on the sapodilla. Fly was my dog. I would pull her up, and she would stay up there with me. There was the pantry and the service staircase leading to the pantry. I used to like to make milkshakes, but since I didn’t have the tools to make them, I would take milk and coffee up those stairs and spill it into a cup in the pantry from up there. That would make foam and I would drink it as if it were a milkshake. Mom would spank me. Then, when she got tired, she would order me to go get a belt to be spanked with. I used to pick the most beautiful one.”

It was a huge mess, and the entire house seemed to invite the most creative and daring games. The taste for speed and the car craze were still there: “There was a bathroom in the manor from the Dom João days. There was that large tub with small feet on it. And there

was a tool to heat the water. It was a strange object. I used to pick it up in a certain way and played a dangerous game with it: I would somehow push the water away before starting the machine. The thing would explode and the lid would fly down there. It always happened at bath time, and Grandma would come running. Next to the house there was also the Astoria hotel, with rooms facing our inner courtyard. Employees and customers used to complain all the time. To make even more noise, we built a scooter using ball bearings. So it would seem like a car race, we used to put zinc sheets on the ground and race on top of it all.”

Sergio loved making his own toys. From his childhood inventions came many ideas and experiences that he absorbed and used later on in his creations. He devoted himself mainly to his favorite toys, which he built by intuition. Aircraft wings were one of his passions. “I would take the side of a box, which was practically a wing. All I had to do was sand it down. To make the plane’s fuselage - it was always a biplane - I would make a tiny, thin body and then put on either side and glue it. I later started using hardboard.” He also used to build sailboats, another one of his great passions. He was not interested in motorboats, speed boats or ships. It was sailboats that made him imagine drawings of super aerodynamic parts that could be made. With nowhere to try his boats out, other than occasionally at an aunt’s place where there was a pond, Sergio often sailed them in the Guanabara Bay. “We lived right there at Flamengo Beach, on the seafront, and there was a ramp to the Flamengo Club. I used to take those tiny boats there and let them go. I would just sit there and watch them go.”

Later, he started to build balsa wood aircraft with screens and Japanese paper. And, after a while, he would throw the plane from the window of his house. “It was a big two-story house. I would throw it from up there and it would fly.” But his imagination never settled down. “Some time later, I decided to experiment with wrecks. I would soak a piece of cotton with a little alcohol, light it up and hurl the plane. And I would watch it go down in flames, a big disaster.”

It was not just airplanes and boats. There was imagination for everything. “We had an imitation radio. It was a metal soap dish. Friends, among whom Candido Mendes, used to go over to my place to sing on the radio: we used to call it the General Tranquility Grinder Radio. I used to scandalize the neighborhood. I got spanked a lot. There was Eduardo, who was the son of the maid and four years older than I was. He helped me a lot making huge messes. Eduardo and I once built an airplane. He had good ideas.”

The passion for interior decoration came from many places. One was by analyzing the furniture of the houses where he lived. “All the furniture in my house was *deco*. Nearly everything was *deco*. Even the chandeliers, everything.” Later, Sergio realized that his father, Roberto, was the missing link between *art deco* and the expressionist modernism of his drawings and of those of his famous friends.

Another source of his passion came, of course, from grandmother Stella's hat "factory." Stella had a sewing room on the second floor of his uncle James' house. She designed and sewed hats for her chic Rio de Janeiro society clientèle. To showcase and try the hats,

she had a female bust made out of papier-mâché. And there were mannequins around the house that Sergio and his sisters loved to use to scare the maids. They used to dress the mannequins up, put the papier-mâché head on them and position the spooky piece somewhere in the dark.

His talent for lines also came from his family. "Grandma used to draw figures that I really liked. Mom also drew." And, despite his brief life, his father was considered a drawing genius. Sergio grew in this creative atmosphere, and everyone admired his drawings and games.

"They used to think I was a genius. Mom respected my games a lot. I used to paint the walls of my room with amazing Machiavellian figures. Mom would not get mad. Instead, she would tell people not to go in there because I was painting. I keep a story for psychoanalysis purposes: I painted a candlestick with melted candle wax that looked like breasts. I had no malice at all. But Mom came and said: 'What is this? You doing indecent things like this?' It was hard back then. My maternal grandmother forbade me from putting my hand in my pockets, and you could not sleep on your stomach."

After she married Dadi, Elsa and her husband built a house in Gávea. They ended up moving there with the girls. Sergio stayed at uncle James' with his grandmother because it was much closer to school. He lived at "72" until 1949, when uncle James died. Sergio was 21 at the time. Uncle James left the home to Stella, but she, unable to support the little castle, sold the property. The grandmother Sergio loved so much died ten years later, in 1959.

Chapter 6

The scare with illness and the grandmother's wish

"Sergio, you have no vocation at all [to be a priest], you'd better go out and take care of your life," said a friend of Sergio who was a priest.

A while after she came back from Europe, Elsa married Dadi, as Zepherino Amaro D'Avila Silveira, a Rio Grande do Sul civil engineer, was also known. Sergio was 6 years old. Dadi was a childhood sweetheart, a distant relative of the Mendes de Almeida from southern Brazil who Elsa had dated when she was a girl and would go with her mother on vacation to the south. "He was delighted with my mother, though it was superficial dating." Later, when Dadi found out Elsa was a widow, he began courting her. Dadi was so passionate that when Elsa told him she could no longer have children, he said: "Why should I want any more if I already have three of them?". They were the sons of Elsa, among whom Sergio. "Dadi was wonderful to the boys," says Vera Beatrice, Sergio's widow, with whom he was married for over forty-one years, to the end of his life. Elsa liked to enjoy life, traveled a lot, and the greater responsibility in educating the boys ended up with Stella, their maternal grandmother.

Soon after the marriage, the family left uncle James' house and went to a village near the Santo Inácio school. They moved into in a big house on São Clemente street, 254. Friends of his grandmother had two houses and lent one of them to Sergio's family for them to live in. They stayed there a while. Grandmother Stella always took the lead in the boys' care. However, in 1936, at age 9, Sergio developed a serious illness that would take away the games and affect him permanently. One day he went to sleep and would not wake up.

Sergio's memories just before falling ill were good. There was a "June party" at number 254, the big house next to his, and at the Santo Inácio school, with much laughter and noise. But he went to bed early because of the firecrackers, which he hated. I was afraid of them, even of the small ones, and went to bed. He started dreaming in color, with many events. "With my eyes open as if I were awake, I looked ecstatic at the patterns on the curtains, which turned into Indians and dragons." He and his sisters, who slept in the next room, had made a hole in the wall to chat through. (Incidentally, it is Sergio who says that the hole that appears so often in his creations "started there"). In the morning, the day after the festivities, his sisters started calling their mother, distressed. "They said I was going crazy, banging my head on the wall, as if I were epileptic." He slept five days in a row, in a kind of coma.

The case was so serious that the grandmother, who was very Catholic, called a priest to give him his last rites, candle in hand. Doctors could not figure out what he had. He was unconscious. A physician then gave came up with the diagnosis: lethargic encephalitis. The doctor found that out had done his thesis on the subject and said that the patients usually either died or went mad. No case had been reported of someone escaping the disease. But he decided to give Sergio a new drug and, after five days, he woke up.

And he woke up as if nothing had happened. “The first thing Mom did was to suspend school until the end of the year. And it was just June. I loved it, it was a blast.” At that time, Sergio’s family was here and there. They would spend some time at grandma’s friend’s house, aunt Nina, and then at uncle James’. “That was the height of the mess,” recalled Sergio. But Vera Beatriz believes that the disease left sequela, emotional issues. Vera attributed the naiveté that always hurt Sergio’s business and caused him to not like talking about politics, economics, or other matters of this kind, to this sequela.

And life went back to normal. Sergio recovered, spent a few months having a lot of fun and playing games at home and returned to Santo Inácio, where he studied. Sergio had taken an admission exam along with his cousin Cândido Antonio (Cândido Mendes), who he considered “highly educated”, but did not pass. His Catholic grandmother had a dream: she wanted Sergio to study for priesthood and become the first Brazilian pope. She ordered a rosewood ring carved with the symbol of the Mendes de Almeida and told him: “You will wear it when you get the blessing.” And Sergio did. “I wore it and lost it on the first Sunday because I took it to the beach to show off to friends.”

In high school there was Aluizianum, the Jesuit pre-seminary. Those who had a calling went there. And in Sergio’s case it was because his grandmother recommended it. “It was Grandma who had a calling. The priest scolded me all the time. One day we made so much noise that the priest confiscated our ball. ‘You will have no football anymore.’ I called Grandma and said: ‘Go down to the Sete de Setembro street, at Valdemar’s place, and get a number four ball. Come here and throw it over the wall.’ And she did that. When the priest saw us playing ball again, he threw another fit.”

But there was another priest who was a friend of Sergio’s and was frank with him: “Sergio, you have no calling whatsoever, you’d better go on and take care of your life.” No sooner said than done. Sergio left the pre-seminar at about 14 years of age, but continued at Santo Inácio.

After graduating from high school, Sergio enrolled in CPOR (Preparatory Center for Reserve Officers - an option for military service). Perhaps because he was so afraid of popping noises, he asked to work in the artillery, handling canons, as perhaps he might lose his fear that way. And he did. After the first cannon shot, he was no longer so scared. After completing the CPOR, he joined a preparatory course to try to get into the School of Architecture. But where did he get that idea? One reason was prosaic: Pedro Correia da Rocha, the owner of the

farm he used to visit as a teenager, had an architect nephew named Frederico Faro Filho, and Sergio used to make incursions into his studio, where there were enlargements of house prospects, designs, and drawings. That excited him. “I remembered uncle James’ drawings. I used to think architecture only involved house facades.”

But before that there was also that aviation thing, the desire to be an aviator. Another nephew of the owner of the farm, who was four or five years older than Sergio, had studied at Campo dos Afonsos, in the Air Force. Sometimes he would not come to the farm because he was flying in the Air Force. There was talk about aviation every night, and Sergio would fly on the pilot’s wings in his imagination. He wanted to blend his passion for aviation with his love of drawing. He then thought about designing airplanes, being an aircraft designer. “I also wanted to fly, but was more interested in drawing.” He went as far as taking the Air Force admission exam while still in high school, but did not pass. He went back to high school, graduated and took the entrance exam for architecture. He didn’t pass that either, as he failed math. But with the interference of his grandmother and the help of a supplementary list, he managed to get into Architecture.

Chapter 7

Something beyond architecture

He had been looking for some port from where he could sail and drop his ships. Over time he understood that what he was looking for was a specialized course in interior architecture.

The University of Brazil's National School of Architecture still operated, for the last year, at the building of the National School of Fine Arts, in Rio de Janeiro. To Sergio, everything was very pleasant in college, and he said it was a “very nice” period in his life. The only thing that bothered him was math. He could not “operate” properly in that subject and benefited from the patience of his renowned math professor, Júlio César de Melo e Sousa, known for the Malba Tahan heteronym, which was how he used to sign his books, including the famous *The man who calculated*. Sergio says Malba Tahan allowed him pass in math every year, but only barely.

Over time, Sergio started liking architecture. He was very fond of a professor who was very knowledgeable in art history, and Sergio was deeply interested in that subject. But he had been looking for some port from where he could sail and drop his ships. Over time he understood that what he was after was a specialized course in interior architecture. He was studying the early part of architecture and wanted to dive into decoration and the styles of all eras.

Therefore, his great interest at that time was in interior decoration. In fact, he was always interested in this, ever since he discovered the wonderful world of his uncle James' workshop, as a kid growing up at number 72, as he called his uncle's place. All of the furniture in it was European, and Sergio found it very interesting: lamps, armchairs, chairs, tables. At the workshop, which was in the backyard, uncle James repaired furniture. Sergio paid attention to the slots and made his wooden toys using joinery techniques that he learned from his uncle's woodworkers. He also liked to make arrangements.

His aunt Zita, uncle Pericles' wife, used to always ask him for help with her flower arrangements. “Boy, you have the hang of it!”, she would say. And he would get excited about it.

Sergio then found out that the study of Interiors was part of the college's curriculum. However, it was not very explicit. “It was not complete, and I was dying to have it all.” His gift and interest led him to look for a book or some other school that would teach him so he could go deeper into the Interior issue that fascinated him so much. He was a junior in college. It was no easy task. He did visit Singer Decorações, but when we got there he found that there was only a group of women

working with sewing machines. Singer machines, of course. He sat there for a day, watching. He thought someone might explain styles and arrangements to him, but soon realized that was not what we wanted and left.

He continued his search and soon saw an ad: "Home Decorations, professor Louis Earl James." That would be another James in his life. This one was a Jamaican who had studied in the United States and returned after taking several courses. Interior design courses: furniture models, styles, arrangements. He also decorated for customers. He taught in a room at Churchill Avenue, downtown Rio de Janeiro, and all of his students were female. "He would show fabrics he brought from the United States and women would go crazy. They were only interested in that. But he soon realized that I was really interested in the classes."

One day the teacher told Sergio he only knew how to arrange environments of one style. "I cannot do anything modern, but you do modern in college," James said to Sergio. He said that and invited him to be his assistant and help out with the modern concept. Sergio gladly accepted. The work included travel to São Paulo and tasks in Rio de Janeiro. Sergio liked that, and did it along with his studies. He even created two or three pieces during its course.

In the same period, he met Decorative Composition Professor David Azambuja at college. He signed up for his class and dove deeper into this area. He was so interested in it that Azambuja invited him to be his teaching assistant. Thus, Sergio took both Azambuja's class in college and James' class at the same time: "I would average the two out and go deeper into the matter." That is how it was until he graduated.

Architecture took place in parallel. Sergio was frustrated to see almost all his colleagues taking internships at architecture firms and being unable to get one. He would go from one place to another with plants, designs, and drawings under his arm in hopes of finding a place to "do, see, feel environments that knew architecture or creation." (Casa e Jardim magazine, January 1985). He then decided to rent a room with a group of friends. Each person would only take his own materials there. Sweet illusion. Nothing happened.

But the answer he wanted would come soon after. It was just before Sergio graduated from college, when professor Azambuja, a well-connected native of the state of Paraná, was hired by Bento Munhoz da Rocha, then governor of Paraná, to create the Civic Center of Curitiba, a kind of mini Brasília, with a government palace, buildings for the state departments, the Palace of Justice, and everything else. Azambuja did not give it a second thought. He called Sergio to take part in the work. Olavo Redig de Campos and Flavio Regis do Nascimento were also summoned.

Sergio agreed, of course, and thought he would serve merely as an assistant in the project. But that was not how it went down. Sergio had no idea that he was going to do architecture and be put in charge of creation, but each architect was vested with a mission. Azambuja gave each one a palace to work on. When they went to sign the contract, the governor saw Sergio among those older, more experienced architects and asked: "And what about that kid over there?". The

professor replied: “He’s no kid, he is in charge of the departments.” Sergio nearly fell off his feet. The departments? “I was just a boy, almost a pirate’s parrot. I hadn’t even taken my final exams at college yet. But I went.”

It was determined that the offices would be at the head office where the Civic Center would be built. Sergio had his helpers and would take part in the project on an equal basis with celebrated architects such as Olavo Redig de Campos, Flavio Regis do Nascimento, and David Azambuja.

He would be in charge of designing the Departments palace, a 33-floor building, and the dome of the State Payment and Receipt building, the calculation for which, made by the engineer Paulo Fragoso, would turn it into one of the boldest “concrete shells in the world.”

But despite the responsibility and of having been given a grown-up’s task, Sergio would earn half the others’ wages. Because “he was a boy.” They made 40,000, while he, 20,000. At the time, it was common for an architect to make 5,000 to 10,000. Although he thought Azambuja would “keep a lot of the money for himself,” Sergio agreed and thought: “So be it, whatever God may want.”

He returned to Rio and took his final college exams. He was gearing up to marry his girlfriend, Vera Maria Serpa Campos, because he had started having ideas. If he was going to make 20,000 and the work would end one day, he should better marry his bride, who was 17 years old. That was when, at the eve of his wedding, Azambuja came in and brought him a bundle of money. “Here’s all the money I saved for you.” “He thought I was going to do something silly with the money and saved the other half for me. It was a lot of money.” The “savings” he was unaware of helped him materialize his marriage.

Chapter 8

The first store in Curitiba

It was a big hit in the beginning. Visitation to the store was almost a daily vernissage.

Soon after celebrating his graduation, in 1952, Sergio was divided, for a time, between Rio de Janeiro and his work in Curitiba. He had an apartment in the capital of Paraná, and considered the office's location very good. He developed a great friendship with his assistants, architect colleagues, and engineers. He was in charge of the Departments Palace, a 30-floor building. Passionate about the work, he had "wonderful ideas."

Work was going full steam ahead when architects and engineers were called to a meeting. They learned that the money for the works had ran out because of the poor coffee harvest that year, that it was a tragedy, and that the project would not continue. Sergio had a daughter, Ângela, who was born in Rio de Janeiro, and the family spent a lot of money traveling from one city to the other.

However, as he had anticipated that the work might be interrupted, Sergio decided, in the meantime, to open a furniture store, since the movement at the Civic Center attracted a lot of people to work there who could be potential customers. While going back and forth, he had met the Italian designer Carlo Hauner, who had gone to Curitiba to open a branch of a large furniture store there used to be in São Paulo. Sergio had also met decorator Julio Senna, who was creating the ambiance at the Governor's Palace. Contact with the two opened the door for him to create interior equipment and "adjust it properly to the Brazilian reality."

"I went crazy with that. Having a connection with someone from Italy and doing more intensive work was phenomenal." Sergio and Carlo, together with his brother Ernesto Hauner, became partners and stayed at the "furniture boutique," which had the same name as the other one in São Paulo: Móveis Artesanal. The difference was that, in Curitiba, Paraná, it was called Artesanal Paranaense. To open the store with his partners, Sergio asked for help from his grandmother Stella, who had sold the little castle and could afford her grandson's shop.

In Icatu's book about Sergio Rodrigues, André Seffrin describes life in Curitiba at the time the designer opened his store: "The Curitiba of the early 1950s, from the intellectual viewpoint, was that of Dalton Trevisan winning over his first Brazilian readers [...]. It was the Curitiba

of Glauco Flores de Sá Brito, a poet, playwright, and television man; of Poty Lazzarotto and of Guido Viaro, in the graphic arts and painting; of Themistocles Linhares and Wilson Martins, the voices of a new criticism and of a new view on history [...]. Eating chicken stew at the Santa Felicidade restaurants, slicing pine nuts in winter, temperatures below freezing.” During this period, Sergio bought his first car, a German VW Beetle, which he later took to São Paulo.

The experience lasted a year, from 1953 to 1954. It was a big hit in the beginning. Visitation to the store was almost a daily vernissage. People came from all over Paraná to check the novelty out. There was traditional furniture, created by Hauner. Well-made, but traditional. Sergio became a Hauner representative in Curitiba. And he started drawing because he had already discovered that what he loved was creating furniture. At that time, he began designing gaming tables and complementary tables.

But the project failed. Since Curitiba was a kind of “style” furniture capital, the most sophisticated Curitiba residents preferred to buy directly in São Paulo. “The store was a tragedy. Six months after it opened so successfully, and to the delight of Curitiba residents, it closed. No one bought anything. There were six months of zero income.”

As he already had all of the infrastructure ready, Sergio decided to open another shop with friends from Rio and São Paulo, with furniture left over from Móveis Artesanal, which belonged to Hauner, and made by other São Paulo designers. It was a representation shop. It was another fiasco. “It sold nothing and accumulated a huge loss.”

Sergio was then in doubt about whether or not to remain in Curitiba. “I was known there.” Before taking the decision he was called by two contractors for two buildings. He gave his price, but the businessman said, “What kind of price is this that you are asking me for? I can hand it over to any designer and he will do it for a millionth of what you are asking for.” Says Sergio: “So, I said: doctor, keep your project and enjoy yourself.”

For another project, the building of a luxury Country Club, Sergio prepared 12 wonderful clipboards. “On the eve of the competition, the club’s president, covered in perfume, came to my house awkwardly and said he had some bad news. He asked me not to send the project in to avoid embarrassment, because the winner had already been picked, and someone from Rio would have no chance. I could charge for my work, but no price had been set. It was a very unpleasant thing.”

Thus, the solution was to leave town. He had been in Curitiba for two and a half years. Sergio called Hauner:

– I’m here in a crunch misery, with my daughter, family, I have no money to do anything. Would you have something there for me?

And Hauner said:

– Grab your stuff and come to São Paulo. I will make living arrangements for you, come here, stay nearby me, and work with me. Grab your stuff and come.

From his adventure in Curitiba, Sergio only took his VW Beetle with him.

Chapter 9

Forma - the shortcut to his own business

The experience in São Paulo definitely brought him close to creation

The year was 1954. Sergio went to São Paulo with his family and ended up living in a big, two-floor house near the Móveis Artesanal factory, in the district today known as Itaim Bibi. “Life then became scandalous.”

The experience in São Paulo definitely brought him close to creation. “I used to go to the factory in Itaim a lot, and that was where I first came into contact with a furniture factory, its machines and its issues.” His first furniture had been created in Curitiba - a game table and a desk -, made at a small workshop and sold at Móveis Artesanal. To him, the plant made high-level furniture, with a wonderful finish. “I was excited, and used to spend the whole day there, imagining things. And I already risked making a few drawings.”

That was when Carlo and Ernesto Hauner and other partners invited him to head the interior architecture creation department at the newly opened Forma store, in São Paulo, a large furniture factory, but still linked to the functionalist language that dominated international design at the time. Already working at Forma, which occupied a three-story house on Barão de Itapetininga street, Sergio started risking more drawings. He would make separate parts, such as tea and side tables.

At that time, Sergio met Lina Bo Bardi, who showed up at the factory to order a few of her designs. Lina created pieces for her architecture projects that were considered cutting-edge those days, and Sergio developed a friendship with her that included long conversations about modern furniture. In the city of São Paulo, he also met leading architects such as Ícaro Castro Mello and J. Vilanova Artigas, who often visited Forma, and the creator of the modernist house, Gregori Warchavchik. Those were precious exchanges between the young architect who dreamed of creating furniture and important exponents of modernity in architecture and furniture.

With his creative streak already wishing to be unleashed, one day Sergio drew a wonderful table and a sturdy couch that he named the Hauner sofa as a tribute to his friend. “He was very enthusiastic about it.” It was a wooden frame sofa, with a seat and back, loose cushions,

and a shelf behind it. But when he presented the project to the other partners it was shot down. “I was hugely disappointed. I put everything I had into that piece. I believed in it. The company was no longer Artesanal, because the partners had changed. It was Forma. Full of arrogance, Martin Eisler, one of the partners, said: ‘Sergio, stop designing furniture. This is not for you, you have no future in it. What you are doing is trash. Who would buy it?’”

Frustrated, Sergio swore he would have his own business. Although short, his passage in São Paulo had been very fruitful. Sergio had landed many contacts with leading architects, furniture makers, and professionals working with wood, fabric, and objects of art. The sofa, created and despised in 1954, was only produced some time later and presented in the store that Sergio would create in Rio the following year, the Oca. The sofa appeared with the SO-3 acronym. But at that time Sergio was so discouraged that he told Hauner he had decided to go back to Rio. Ernesto and Carlo had become good friends of Sergio, especially Ernesto. Carlo had quarreled with the other Forma partners and left for a period.

– There is no place for me here, I am going to Rio, Sergio said.

Carlo Hauner encouraged him:

– Go. You know everyone and you have your thing going for you there. You will succeed.

At nearly 30 years of age, Sergio went to Rio with little more than his wife and his daughter, Ângela. He also took the Beetle, which by then had been in an accident and, because of some type of mistake, had been painted extravagantly and drew people’s attention everywhere it went on the streets of São Paulo.

Chapter 10

Oca, a revolutionary shop

Sergio entered Oca with the Mocho stool in his hand

The 1955 creation of Oca, the store that revolutionized the idea of furniture in Rio de Janeiro, was a major overturn in Sergio's professional life. With no project to do and a family to support, Sergio arrived in Rio in late 1954, coming from his experience with Forma, in São Paulo, to try his luck. With "a corner" his father-in-law had offered him at his office, Sergio started working. But nothing worked out. He knew his future lay in creation; however, he envisioned creating a high-level store with top-notch furniture, something that would look a lot like Forma. With his prior experience, Sergio knew he could get in touch with major furniture makers. "I stuck my neck out and did it. That was when the great thing came up, which was Oca." A store that was linked to the history of industrial design in Brazil.

The idea was great. However, I had to find a partner and a good place. Sergio started looking for a partner who could make his project feasible. He found the Italian count Leoni Paolo Grasselli. A natural merchant from Bergamo, Grasselli had a glassware shop in Africa and ended up coming to Brazil with Carlo Hauner. Sergio knew him from São Paulo. "He was enthusiastic about the idea and we took off to make history. I went head on to City Hall to speak with the authorities, and they agreed to talk. I thought it was possible to build a pavilion on the sand. And it almost was."

Since Sergio never thought about money, but trusted work, he went in pursuit of possibilities. The first place that was suggested was on the Leblon beach. Not at the Delfim Moreira avenue, but on the beach itself, on the sand. They later found a piece of land at Chácara 92, between the Bartolomeu Mitre and General Urquiza streets, but at that time, free of buildings, the place was practically on the beach. At first, the proposal was to build a pavilion. Of course, you had to get permission from the City, know how it could be done, and if it would be legal to build a pavilion there.

It was all planned. Sergio had not only arranged the furniture from Artesanal that would be resold in Rio, but also from other major São Paulo firms. There were rugs, Dominici light fixtures, Italian furniture. "We were ready to go." There was only a little problem: Where the money to fund the store opening would come from. Sergio believed the idea was so good that when people heard about the project, the money would appear.

They had a meeting with the owner of the land. He went directly to the subject. He said he liked the idea of renting the land for the store to be installed on it because he could not sell it, so Sergio offered him 10,000 Cruzeiros, which was a very good rate. But there was a problem: His relatives, also partners in the land, were “a little crazy.” “We tried to do something there several times, simple things, and they would come around and brake it all up the very next day,” the owner told Sergio. But he bet that when Sergio presented his project so firmly, he would have no problem building there.

Sergio was concerned. He knew that when they presented the project someone would offer the construction, equipment, and furniture free of charge to him and his partner. Even Coca Cola and Kibon were offering conditions. But he did not want to take a chance. He said to his partner, Grasselli, that they should not do it because they would be held responsible if anything happened. “The cure would be worse than the ailment.”

The man, according to Sergio, got a little desperate, but he understood. So they went looking elsewhere. At the General Osório Square, in Ipanema, more precisely on Jangadeiros street, a building had just been built and the first floor, which led to the square, had already been nearly entirely rented out. There was only one store left to rent, and it was empty because it had a pillar almost smack in middle of the display window. Shortly thereafter, Sergio bought the store with the inheritance his grandmother left him.

Even before he saw the space, Sergio said: “Let’s rent it anyway.” It was a good, large space, but Grasselli found it odd that there was a pillar right in the middle of it. Have a store with a pillar right in the middle of it? But Sergio insisted, and they went to work. The store was inaugurated on May 10, 1955. “Even my mother helped me. She sewed a big blue canvas that we used to make the ceiling lowering. It was a wonderful time. It was a golden age.” He said Oca was inaugurated “with all courage.”

But Oca had to be different. Even in its name, which was conceived an afternoon at Grasselli’s apartment in Arpoador. Sergio did not want Sergio Rodrigues Office, as Grasselli had suggested. He wanted a name with few letters, one that expressed the Brazilian interior architecture. And he did not want to simply create a furniture warehouse. He wanted to give customers the idea of a whole.

To achieve this, he created true scenarios and environments inside the store. To make up the shop window, Sergio invented a wooden puppet who dawned in a different position every day, sitting in armchairs or chairs, showing people passing by how comfortable the furniture was. The doll was a big hit.

At first, Oca sold furniture made in São Paulo, but before long Sergio’s creations came to occupy most of the space. In addition, Oca also sold innovative Dominici light fixtures and beautiful fabrics designed by the artist Fayga Ostrower. With support pouring in from architects who saw in the store a new option to organize the settings for their interiors with good commercial acceptance, Oca grew rapidly on the market.

On the opening day, Sergio walked into Oca carrying the Mocho stool in his hand, the one he had created just under a year before, in 1954, and would become an icon of his work. That was where Mocho, which in 2014 turned 60 years old, began its long and brilliant career. The Hauner couch, which he had drawn in São Paulo, was taken to the store already at its opening and would be Sergio's second piece to enter Oca.

"The opening was a huge hit. Jaime Mauricio was the trendiest art critic of the time, he was a friend of Carmen Portinho, from Burle Marx, and of Guiomar Muniz Sodré, from Museum of Modern Art. He loved Oca, he was always there. The store got full pages in newspapers. There were two pages in *Correio da Manhã*. It was a scandal. It spoke about the opening of the store, about me, Grasselli." The opening party was sponsored by the Museum of Modern Art (MAM). "It was a really big thing."

Sergio took care of furniture arrangements and of the store's general decor from the beginning. It was a store unlike any other, with a scenic arrangement coordinated by Sergio. Since at the time there was nothing with the modern atmosphere that the store got, Oca was a hit in no time at all. "Not a day went by that someone didn't talk about Oca. It was spontaneous, we never paid a penny for promotion."

The work Sergio did at Oca was a manifestation of the effervescence of the Brazilian culture in the 1960s and ended up representing the "struggle for a truly national, contesting art," wrote Maria Cecília Loschiavo. And what the furniture contested was excessive formalism, delicate stick feet that gave way to the "stupendous strength of Brazilian wood."

Sergio did a thousand tricks to publicize Oca. The greatest of them was the idea he had to photograph some of the shop's furniture, including the Mole armchair. The photographer was Otto Stupakoff, one of fashion photography pioneers in Brazil, the same who had ordered a creation that eventually became the Mole armchair.

"Otto Stupakoff ordered a couch for his studio, which was tiny. The sofa would be a piece to be used for resting. The idea was for it to be there for the person to feel at ease on. He paid for the piece by photographing it for Oca's first catalog," recalled Sergio.

They set out to photograph the furniture. The set? Nothing other than the Leblon beach. It was very funny. We put the piece on the sand, at the end of Leblon, which was quiet at that time, three o'clock in the afternoon, it was deserted, there was a flat, even surface, an infinite, wonderful background, since he had neither an infinite background nor a specialized studio. But there came a naughty wave and all of the furniture got wet. It was funny, because at the time there was a lot of anxiety. But the next day, the exhibition with the Mole armchair was inaugurated with remarks in the press that stated that we had thrown the furniture to the sea, as if it were a kind of black magic," said Sergio to the *Folha de S.Paulo* newspaper, in February 2006.

Sergio's goal, as was that of Lina Bo Bardi and other architects of the time, was to make pieces compatible with the modern Brazilian architecture. Sergio bet all his tokens on Oca, which was more than a store. It was a blend of a shop and art gallery and, in a very short time, became the place of gathering of Rio's intelligentsia.

On that same street, Jangadeiros, next to Oca, there was the Silveira Sampaio theater, which was already a gathering place for intellectuals and artists. Since the theater was very small and there was no room in the foyer for people to wait for the performances to begin, Oca started being used as a meeting place. The store stayed open a little later, and the theater audience filled the sidewalk and the spaces between the furniture.

Seeing such an enthusiastic audience, both of the theater and that the store itself had won over, Sergio decided to organize events and exhibitions at Oca. Almost all the known artists of the time exhibited there. In addition, the store started attracting young and talented architects, among whom Bernardo Figueiredo, Marcos Vasconcelos, and Dolly Michailovsky. They all designed furniture for the store and Sergio supported everything they did.

The bet on Brazil was clear from the name Sergio chose for the store: Oca. "The simple choice of name defines the meaning of the work Sergio Rodrigues and his group did. Oca is the house of a native Brazilian. The house is structured and pure. In it, utensils, equipment, personal gear and vestments articulate in everything and integrate with formal precision as a function of life," wrote the architect and urban planner Lucio Costa, the first to note the presence of this character of Brazilianness in the designer's work.

"When I imagined opening a shop that represented Brazilian furniture, I came up with a name that was, in a way, enough to determine what I had in mind," said Sergio. "So I did not use my name, as one would imagine, of course, for the production company, because that is not what it was all about. I used a name that could add value to the work of other designers and materials. That was what Oca was about. And, in this case, the starting material was, naturally, Jacaranda."

Shortly after the opening of the store, Sergio began to go deeper into his most famous creation, the Mole armchair, which he released two years later, in 1957. Made of Jacaranda, the model had a top cushion divided into four interrelated parts and soon drew attention for its innovative features. What was going on there, as said journalist Adélia Borges, was "the gestation of the truly modern Brazilian furniture." In 1961, Sergio, who did not much care for self-promotion, because of great insistence of then Governor Carlos Lacerda, ended up entering his Mole armchair in the IV International Furniture Competition, in Cantu, Italy. Sergio won the contest in which 27 countries and 438 competitors took part.

The competition involved big names in the international design scene, and the jury justified granting the award to Sergio: "The only model with current features, despite its structure with conventional treatment, not influenced by fads and absolutely representative of the region of origin." It was the first international award ever granted to a Brazilian design.

Chapter 11

The Taba to host the Oca

The industrial experience with semi-artisanal furniture

At first, as has been said, 95 percent of the furniture Oca sold came from São Paulo (from stores such as Forma and Ambiente). The remaining 5% were Sergio's drawings: the roundish stool (Mocho), small sofas, coffee tables. But Sergio wanted a store that could meet the needs of a broad audience. "I was kind of disappointed because since it was not industrialized (although it could be), my furniture came out of the oven with a very high price tag." He also noted that the workshops that were making these prototypes went on to incorporate them in their lines. Furthermore, there was increasing demand for furniture. To solve this issue, Sergio started thinking about opening a factory.

Thus came Sergio's first plant in Rio de Janeiro, in 1956. The small factory was named Taba, and was in Bonsucesso. Although the idea was to manufacture on an industrial scale, Taba still made its products by hand. "Thus, the quality of the raw material did not influence the final cost very much, and Jacaranda was rehabilitated, putting an end to the supremacy of pau-marfim." Rio de Janeiro joined the map of modern Brazilian furniture. Three years after Oca was created, Sergio no longer imported furniture from São Paulo: 100 percent of the models were his creations. In 1958, they were cited internationally by Gio Ponti in his *Domus*.

The industrial experience was a challenge for Sergio. At first, three or four models of furniture were manufactured at a time. But there was a surge in demand, and it became necessary to make a larger series. Years later, still at Oca, Sergio opened another factory, this one much bigger, with 10,000 square meters of covered area, in Jacareí, state of São Paulo, which he called Oca.

Oca Gallery

Oca launched furniture. And artists. For those events, it also became known as Oca Gallery. Among many others, Sergio introduced the painter, sculptor and printmaker Juarez Machado, who had come from Paraná and became famous shortly thereafter. The architect Dolly Michailovsky, who worked with Sergio at Oca for many years, emphasizes what many already knew about Sergio's personality: "Sergio was incredibly open. Everyone who had something to do with Sergio became great friends of his. He always valued what we did.

Being around him was a human experience, and a life experience. As a creator he was amazing. An unbelievable talent. It was something that sprang right out of him. There was not much of a working method, he was loose, an artist. He drew all the time.”

Dolly studied architecture and had a boyfriend who lived near Oca. Her interest in interiors surfaced because of Oca. One day, a recent graduate took courage and climbed the stairs that stood in front of the store’s entrance door and went talk to Sergio, who spent nearly all his time working in this room, upstairs from the store. She could hardly believe it when Sergio listened to her attentively and invited her to work there. “He gave people a lot of space. I helped design and present Sergio’s projects.” When she got married, Sergio gave her a Mole armchair. “Sergio is unforgettable. Anyone who knew or worked with him knows that.”

At that time, Sergio made scenarios for the plays of the theater located next to the store. And other ones, such as for a play at the Copacabana Palace, by Peter Bloch. In that same period, he decorated singer Roberto Carlos’ home with Oca furniture. Roberto called him “prafrentex” (very modern), but Sergio said he was nothing of the sort. The house was decorated, at the time, with all of Oca’s furniture and looked more like an exhibit of the things there were in the store.

The researcher Maria Cecilia Loschiavo dos Santos, who has written several books on modern Brazilian furniture, says “Sergio Rodrigues created objects whose forms are very present in the Brazilian collective imagination, close to the land, to the hammock, to the cot, to the way the hillbilly, the gunman, and the backwoodsman sit, to the simple indigenous object, the work of these two artisans who made the cross in the beginning of Brazilian history, in 1500.”

The “Meia-Pataca”

Sergio was bored because he wanted to create new things, design new furniture, not just sell things that were already known. “I used to get very upset because I am not a trader by any means. I was bothered by having to sell furniture and make other pieces. My partner used to say: ‘You sell Oca furniture. You may even invent other things, but you have to sell Oca furniture.’ And I used to do that whole thing, pushing Oca furniture... but I always wanted to do something new.”

Oca furniture started being purchased by government offices, banks, institutions. They all bought back then. At that time, Brazil’s new capital was being completed in a hurry, and Sergio was recruited for many projects in Brasilia. That was when mass consumption started surfacing in this area and Sergio, who at first had his work focused on providing solutions for modern architecture, for public buildings spaces, and started getting orders from private customers.

But Sergio was not satisfied yet. He wanted a larger audience to be able to buy his furniture. In the meantime, in order to sell furniture made in series at lower prices, in 1963 he decided to establish the Meia-Pataca shop, which remained on the market until 1968. It was a buying

alternative for the middle class, because at Oca his furniture ended up being targeted at a high-income market. In addition to furniture manufactured in series, Meia-Pataca also started selling products that were simpler to implement and, therefore, more accessible. He set a limited number of products and decided to use a different type of wood at Meia-Pataca, other than Jacaranda, which was used at Oca. He went on to use Gonçalo Alves wood (today called Maracatiara or Muiracatiara in São Paulo).

Meanwhile, Sergio associated himself with two Americans, enthusiastic about his furniture, and with them opened, between 1966 and 1968, a store in Carmel, United States, which he called Brazilian Interiors and permanently showcased models he had created. His furniture was a unique attraction. Sergio loved it. "It was a very friendly shop located in a shopping mall made entirely out of wood." The California store proved that Americans, even then, liked Sergio 's furniture. "I think it was such a great hit because the entire West Coast was created by Latinos, and they had no current furniture and could get no designer to do this kind of work. When they saw my furniture they were very excited. The store sold my furniture exclusively for two years."

The end of Oca to Sergio

Oca was moving ahead at full steam, but business not so much. Sergio did not participate in the store's management, and although it was a hit, business was not going well.

For Sergio's misfortune, because he never had eyes to other people's wickedness, another partner that was in business with him from the start proved to be poor manager and eventually led Sergio to bankruptcy. Friends and family were trying to alert him of how poorly business was being conducted. Naively, Sergio did not believe them. Therefore, his business skills did not keep pace with his immense creative capacity. When the Italian partner, Grasselli, realized that business was not going well administratively because of the third partner, he decided to leave.

With Grasselli's departure, the store ran out of money. That was when they called Giulite Coutinho, who later, between 1980 and 1986, would be president of CBF, to be its venture capital partner. He immediately realized the store was poorly managed and fired Sergio's partner, and Sergio, in solidarity, also left the store that he himself had created. The same year he left Oca, 1968, he also closed the Meia-Pataca.

Sergio was distressed. By now he had four children. Veronica, Adriana and Roberto had been born. He didn't know what to do. A little later, he asked his former partner to give him his shares because Giulite wanted to buy them. Only then did he find out that they had evaporated into thin air. That is, they no longer existed. Feeling disappointed with his partner, Sergio apologized to Giulite and they were friends until the end, although Sergio never became a partner of Oca again. After thirteen years as a partner, from 1955 to 1968, Sergio resigned from Oca.

Shortly thereafter, Sergio set up a studio in Rio, where he worked with interior design for homes, offices, and hotels and undertook projects for various clients, including for the owner of the Bloch publisher, Adolfo Bloch, doing the entire interior of the publisher's headquarters in Rio. He also developed furniture lines for industrial production. It was then that he participated in the "Brazilian Furniture - Assumptions and Reality" exhibition, at the São Paulo Museum of Art (MASP).

Sergio was already married to Beatriz Vera, an old childhood sweetheart, who fortunately took over the task of managing Sergio's professional life. From then, his furniture went on to be made by contracted suppliers case-by-case and, in 2000, Gisele Schwartsburd, from Curitiba, signed a contract with Sergio, brokered by Vera, to open Lin Brasil, a company that would only make his pieces. Without production concerns, Sergio could return to give vent to his incredible creativity and went on to create projects incessantly, like a "think-tank".

Chapter 12

Furniture as an Object of Art

Sergio wanted to exhibit more than furniture: He wanted to showcase the author's face too

The existence of Oca and the way products were presented there, with the designer's name and the material used, paved the way for the author to gain a leading role in his product's creation. When Sergio started designing furniture there was no recognition of the author in Brazil. "The first moment of Brazilian design is marked by a design that has no author. This shift in paradigm is a very recent thing in history, beginning perhaps some time about twenty years ago," says researcher and art critic Afonso Luz. The author started emerging as a central element in design from Sergio's creations, but also very much so due to a practice he adopted at Oca, where each piece showed the author's name and the material used. This trend was even more evident in the exhibitions he organized at the store. "I intended to showcase more than the furniture," said Sergio, who wanted to show much more than the product.

From the moment we opened our doors, the store started innovating. They soon began to use Oca's space to exhibit works of plastic artists, but also to experiment in design. One of them was the famous *Furniture as an Object of Art* exhibition Sergio invented and coordinated.

To Afonso Luz, this exhibition "is one of the most important historical references to the idea of author design, even internationally, an exhibition that greatly anticipated this contemporary trend, (...) that look that sees design as art." To him, the Chifruda armchair, which appeared at the exhibition and was born and baptized as "Aspas", and is a milestone of that.

The exhibition was born from a disquietude of Sergio. The year was 1962. At that time, the Mole armchair was already in production, although Sergio thought it had not gotten adequate commercial support. Something that happened long after with all of his work. Sergio believed furniture creation used to be taken for granted, unlike what happened with someone who painted a picture or designed a rug. "To me, people did not consider furniture as an object of art. Magazines, the media, only discussed indoor settings. They cited the paintings, the authors of the paintings, of the rugs, they discussed the material used, spoke of everything, but never mentioned the furniture. They said nothing about the bed, the sofa, the armchair, as if such objects had not been someone's creations." They even discussed

the fabrics, coating materials, but never who designed them. That bothered him. “They never gave proper attention to that. I wanted them to pay this attention.”

Sergio also had another concern. He thought it was necessary to show the authors' faces. “We knew the face of practically all foreign creators, but didn't know Tenreiro. Nobody knew what Tenreiro looked like. Nobody knew what many established authors looked like, despite all their importance. There was much talk about Tenreiro, but this figure was never shown publicly. So I wanted to do things differently, my intention was to exhibit not only furniture, but the author as well.”

With this idea in mind - of showing something about the author that could reveal who he was, citing his activities and peculiarities - Sergio started organizing the exhibit. He wanted to invite young students. But also renowned creators in Brazil, some made famous with the construction of Brasilia, others known abroad, such as Lucio Costa, Sergio Bernardes, Alcides Rocha Miranda, Marcos Vasconcelos, and Bernardo Figueiredo. So Sergio invited this group of architects to make pieces for the exhibit.

But how to do it? All guests were famous architects, not designers. Sergio then asked them not to worry because whatever they created would be developed by Oca, at Taba, the factory that Sergio opened to make his furniture. The authored furniture was taken to the exhibition together with the author's name, origin, and characteristics. The exhibition blended new talent and big names. Celebrity guests included Oscar Niemeyer. But the great architect of Brasilia at the time was preparing a few pieces for the Brazilian capital and was unable to present his project. There were other important names too, of the likes of Lucio Costa.

Oca's technical and creative support was key. As was the case of Lucio Costa, who created two pieces, a small and a regular chair. Although he had a lot of experience in architecture, Lucio Costa did not feel confident with what he had created. He said Le Corbusier himself had made one of the pieces and that he was copying the master. But Sergio reassured him: “What? Le Corbusier never made a piece out of wood like that. No. I myself have made this chair back and it has nothing to do with Corbusier.” There was no true distinction between creation and what the development of design was in a piece of furniture. Sergio went further: “Mister (which was how he addressed Lucio Costa), you are saying that you copied Le Corbusier, but I say that Le Corbusier copied a Danish author. He did not create, rather he developed a chair that had already been created in the middle of the previous century, since in the nineteenth century there was a chair like this that was part of the products of war of English colonization.”

Sergio was fascinated by Lucio Costa's humility and helped him find solutions and get where he wanted to be with his furniture. “He was delighted. The armchair was made and it is a wonderful thing - the small Lucio chair.” Lucio's second piece was a small, four-legged, round seat chair. When Sergio saw the drawing, he said: “This chair will not stand up.” Sergio knew that conceiving a chair and developing it were two different things because

development demands knowledge and experience. But he tried to help. Even so, the chair would not stand up. So a prototype was made. Lucio Costa thought it was funny and said it was easier to build Brasilia than to make that chair.

“The chair did actually collapse, and would not stand on its own. I never talk about it because it may give the impression that I am making fun of him. But I did not want to interfere. ‘You see? Lucio made a chair that would not stand on its own!’. And I did not want to interfere, that was not the goal, I just wanted to help. His simplicity, humbleness in accepting other people’s opinions was phenomenal. “He said what thickness he wanted, the leather he wanted and how he wanted it. He was very pleased, and so was I.”

Lucio Costa admired Sergio. To him, Sergio managed to rescue the spirit of traditional furniture and aspects of indigenous Brazil. “He made the Brazilian Brazil coexist with the Ipanema Brazil.”

Sergio Bernardes had already designed armchairs creatively, armchairs that lacked the ordinary structure. Like one that had four legs, crossmembers etc., and two large rolls and a leather or canvas screen that gave it its back. “You would sit in it and could always mold it to your body. I used to say: ‘A skinny girl sitting here can settle herself in and keep her body upright. But if a heavier person sits in it, he or she will sink in and you will have a different slant on the back and the seat.’ And he said, ‘No! This is how it must be!’. I mean, he was a joker.” Arthur Lício Pontual made a couch that could be taken apart completely. The cushions were loose.

Sergio wanted to show the quality of Oca’s artisans. The “Chifruda” chair was born from the desire to show the quality of the stitching of the leather elements. “I figured that the chair would get a few playful details or details that kept a distant relationship with period furniture, in addition to a certain playful aspect, which was already my passion for the Vikings. Hence that horn - a headrest with that sharp shape. I made the chair. People found it very strange. It was very funny. But, at the time, the puritans thought it was a little strange. A lack of taste. I have nothing to do with that, right?! Whether or not they liked it was not my problem.”

Sergio says the exhibition was a big hit because it featured “important folks.” After that came other exhibits, including works of art made by well-known artists, guided by Jaime Maurício, the *Correio da Manhã* newspaper art critic.

While people came in to the store to enjoy the exhibits, Sergio would keep the Chifruda chair at a corner of the store to be seen, analyzed, and tested.

Always keeping pace with the effervescent changes of the 1950s and 1960s, Sergio made room for more recognition for the design profession at both exhibitions and at his store. Despite being a less known facet of his, he also wrote articles for publications such as *Senhor* and *Módulo* in this period. His pieces were filled with irony and jokes, ignited a process of awareness and created an audience of readers for the design area.

Chapter 13

Kilin and Xibô

A passion that came and went many times

Little squirrel was what Sergio used to call Vera Beatriz, the great love of his life. From this nickname came Kilin, one of Sergio's most famous creations, who addressed his wife using his nickname all his life. As far as she was concerned, Vera Beatriz was amused at Sergio's slanted eyes and his playfulness. She started by calling him a foolish Chinese, which turned into Xibô and ended up becoming the name of another important piece in the designer's story: The Xibô chair. Beatriz Vera and Sergio's story had a chapter all of its own.

Vera Beatriz dated Sergio at the tender age of 13. And he was all but 16 years old at the time. They dated at parties, as did all teenagers. "It was platonic love. He would always say: 'Will you marry me?' We dated for a year. For a year we danced at all parties," says Vera Beatriz. After a while, Vera Beatriz learned that Sergio was the nephew of Nelson Rodrigues. Her mother was worried about her daughter dating a boy from a family she considered very complicated. "Nelson, at the time, was a scandal. The bourgeoisie would get up and leave during plays because they said things no one dared to bring up on stage. When my mother heard that, she was not amused. Furthermore, she had read about his father's tragic murder in the newspapers."

Vera Beatriz was beautiful and very popular among boys. Unable to withstand the pressure from her family, the relationship ended after a year. Sergio was heartbroken. "He wouldn't leave me alone, he even followed me to church. He would wake up early in the morning because the bus from Sacre Coeur would pick me up before seven. He would go to the corner just to wave me goodbye."

Time passed and Vera Beatriz married her first husband. She says that he was a good, kind man, but they had nothing in common and, after the birth of their son, Luiz Eduardo, and of four years of marriage, Vera Beatriz left him. He was very disconnected from the world, while Beatriz Vera was a modern, educated, lively woman. Her marriage was no longer going well, and Beatriz Vera announced her divorce. "At the time, it was an act of heroism because no one separated. My father wouldn't talk to me for a long time."

After this first separation, her parents sent her to Curitiba where her Uncle Munhoz da Rocha was the governor. They agreed that he would offer her a notary public in northern Paraná if she gave up the separation. She didn't, but while in Curitiba she went to her uncle's library and ended up bumping into Sergio, who, at the time, worked for the government of Paraná. "He turned pale. He had just gotten married and I had already separated." Sergio went away and told his then wife, Vera Maria, to whom he was still married. The truth is that Sergio's passion for Vera Beatriz had never ended. Later, Vera Beatriz found that, in his teens, Sergio had kept a notebook where he described all the parties they went to those days they dated, all of her dresses, and the songs the two danced to.

Shortly after traveling to Curitiba, Vera Beatriz got married again. She had a daughter, Luciana, and this time was married for nineteen years. She waited for her daughter to get engaged at age 19, did psychoanalysis and announced she would separate. Vera Beatriz already had a job at a distributor selling bed and table linen and underwear and earned good money.

After separating for the second time, she found out Sergio had been separated from his wife for a year. Sergio had four children: Angela, Adriana, Veronica, and Roberto. Her friends told her that he was still in love. They prepared a dinner and invited the two. When he met Vera Beatriz, he immediately wanted to get married. She no longer wanted anything to do with this marriage business, as she had been through two unhappy marriages and now wanted to enjoy life. "He insisted and I agreed to meet him. I went to his apartment. He played the songs of our days to get me involved. And I said I did not want to get married anymore. Then Sergio went out to get some ice cream. Hazelnut ice cream, I remember well. " When he came back, something in Vera Beatriz had changed. And marriage with Sergio became a real possibility.

They started dating and were soon living together. "I went to live with him in Leblon. I left a huge duplex and went to live in a tiny apartment with no wardrobes." They got married in a civil ceremony, in 1973, and only years later, in 1992, after the two were already widowers of their first marriages, they had a church ceremony.

The church wedding was an old dream of Sergio's. After all, he had been educated by Jesuits at Colégio Santo Inácio. It took a while to get married in the church. Sergio always felt sad because he thought he had to have a church wedding. "One day, Sergio woke up in tears. He said he had dreamed he was at a church that was not a church. He stood before a priest who was not a priest, dressed in white. A wonderful light. It was a spiritual dream. Both wearing white and friends in white too. This priest gave me an absolution, and 'I've been forgiven, Kilinha.' He really wanted to get married in the church."

As the two were then widows, they were free to do so. Sergio contacted Don Luciano Mendes, his cousin. Beatriz Vera was no longer Catholic, but spiritualistic. And the person Sergio wanted as his best man was Jewish. Don Luciano gave a lot of thought to it and said: Wasn't Jesus Jewish too? And married the two. The ceremony took place at

their house in Petrópolis, in a small chapel built especially for the occasion. Later, it was converted into a studio.

Sergio and Vera Beatriz rented a house on Conde de Irajá street, in Botafogo, where they put a kind of shop and an office together. They still lived in Ipanema, but got tired of commuting from Ipanema to Botafogo. They then moved to the upper part of the house, which later they managed to buy. Finally the couple moved to São Clemente street, close to work, to have a little more peace and quiet.

Sergio Rodrigues' business skills did not keep pace with his huge creative capacity. But Vera Beatriz ended up managing Sergio's professional life. Lucky for him. She went to the office and never left.

Chapter 14

Sergio at Piazza Navona

“Whoever made this table will do the entire embassy in Rome.” (Hugo Gouthier)

As often happens, Sergio’s recognition in Brazil increased after he started being praised abroad. Just before winning the award in Cantu, Italy, as said earlier, Italian magazine *Domus* published, in 1959, a report on Sergio’s work, an article signed by the famous Italian architect Gio Ponti. It was glory. *Domus* was a very prestigious magazine among Brazilian architects of the time, and it used to be said that those who did not know it had no right to call themselves architects or designers.

As years went by, his fame abroad grew in the form of publications and awards. Both the award and the praise abroad opened a path for Sergio to get government orders to shape the view people had on Brazilian furniture abroad. The most significant project was the 1959 invitation to do the entire interior decoration of Palazzo Pamphili, the Brazilian Embassy in Rome.

This invitation came after ambassador Hugo Gouthier, who served in Rome and came to Oca one day, saw Sergio’s furniture. He looked around and said: “Whoever made this table will do the entire embassy in Rome.” The Foreign Ministry then hired the author of the furniture. Sergio went to Italy alone and decided he could not take the furniture from here. He recalled that his former partner Carlo Hauner had a workshop in Italy. Sergio consulted him. He said he would make the drawings, but who could produce them? Hauner replied: “I will make the furniture in my factory in Italy.” No sooner said than done. He called the factory, which had a good stock of African Jacaranda, and there they made all of the embassy’s furniture.

Sergio spent a year working at the embassy in Rome. During this period, he often went to Milan, the temple of Italian design. Until one day, his partner Carlo Hauner, who was Italian and was there, invited him to meet Gio Ponti. They went over to his house and he was there. Sergio remembered this meeting well, as its outcome was the *Domus* publication.

“Gio Ponti welcomed me in a very friendly way. I found the way he treated interiors very interesting - because he was an interior architect as well -, but was not very fond of his

furniture. Except for one piece or another. It is not that they were embellished. In fact, they had a touch of simplicity. His Superleggera was very fine, very light. It was a very beautiful thing. You could lift it with a finger. He became interested in my work and wanted to see it. I already had photos of my furniture with me. He was very interested, picked out five or six pieces, and published them in Domus. When it arrived in Brazil, it was a big hit, a very big boost.” Because of this episode, some time later Sergio renamed as Gio, in honor of Gio Ponti, an armchair he had created 1958, a year before the publication in the magazine.

At that time, Brazil was experiencing the cultural effervescence of bossa nova, of the New Cinema, the concreteness and abstraction in the visual arts and modernism in architecture. It was a modernization fever and Sergio came to represent, in creating his furniture, this modernity and effervescence. A new, cheerful, relaxed, informal Brazil appeared. Sergio Rodrigues’ style rolled out innovation based on tradition. It was a moment of great hope. “He was the designer of that hope, of a better Brazil, with joy, in which people were happy. I think he expresses this a lot,” said Adélia Borges.

When MoMA curator Paula Antonelli used the Tropical Modern expression to refer to designers known as the Campana Brothers, Adélia went further. She said the Campanas were already postmodern and the Modern Tropical expression is more fitting of Sergio’s profile and of those who came before, such as Tenreiro. To Adélia, the arrival of Sergio and of his deliberate search for Brazilianness resumed the tradition of the Iberian furniture.

Industrial production

Sergio’s first major job was an order placed to make the interior of the Legislative Assembly of São Paulo. Sergio recalls: “That was the first major order I got. Then I started to get desperate because we could not have it done elsewhere. I did not want to give the blueprints to others. And ended up doing it all myself. But I was always a little late. So we decided to do a more industrial thing. And the workers and masters we had were very capable. But since there were no orders to meet an industry, we controlled that. When there was a more serious order, in larger amounts, we delivered. The staff worked Saturdays, Sundays, if needed. But that only went to a certain extent, because later a little more complex orders started coming in. We were already at capacity. At first, we started off with a little factory, Queta, who had master Viana, who was wonderful. I realized the need to have something a little more complex to fill orders.”

The workers at Sergio’s factory were able to do business, but could not use special machinery for that yet. “We just braved it. The first factory was in Bonsucesso. The second we installed close to Avenida Brazil, at João Torquato. In 1965, we found a possibility, a large mattress company, that was filing for bankruptcy, in Jacareí, São Paulo. We went visit it. There were enough wood machines, somewhat precarious, but sufficient. Many machines and looms. There were 40 looms to make fabric as well. It would not be our production, but it was always something interesting. I caught myself several times experimenting with fabrics. Mainly for Meia-Pataca. For the chairs and sofas themselves. But the fabrics were a little more rustic.

So this factory, which covered an area of 10,000 square meters - it was very large - was adapted to be able to meet large orders and, in that case, the order placed by the Legislative Assembly of São Paulo. And a few things started coming in from Brasília.”

Chapter 15

Bossa in Brasilia

Furniture with the looks of Brazil

Already with his name spreading abroad, Sergio was called in for important projects in Brazil, especially in the new capital. During this period, also at Oca, Sergio started getting orders to design furniture for Brasilia, the newly inaugurated capital of Brazil.

“I realized that Brasilia was coming up with those palaces, with that special architecture, and did not have an interior consistent with the architecture that was being presented. You noted that furniture was missing, that it did not complement things. So, certain settings in Brasilia were initially formed by pieces that complemented foreign architects’ work. There were wonderful pieces. But I believed that since a monumental architecture with the looks of Brazil, with something of Brazil, had already been created, the complements for these environments should be Brazilian too. There should be a touch of Brazil. There should be something that reflected our culture, our usual materials. Something of the Brazilian culture could be the Indian part. The historical part applied to the concept of furniture. So I said: ‘I will fight for this idea.’ And done with advantages, using Brazilian materials.

During a visit to the city, in 1963, the anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro, then president of the University of Brasilia, took him to meet the Dois Candangos auditorium, which was under construction at UNB. Darcy wanted Sergio to design the auditorium chairs. Sergio was very enthusiastic about it and, at the same time, in a panic, because he only had twenty days to deliver an order for 250 chairs, which he called the Candango armchairs. On the flight back, he imagined a metal base to hold the single piece of leather to be used for the seat and back of the chair. According to journalist Adélia Borges, this way the chair “should swing slightly to allow people to circulate better between the rows - a detail he decided to use when he sat, at the door of a motorcycle shop, and looked at a wheel missing its spokes.”

The mission was difficult and heavy, but Sergio managed to deliver the chairs in two weeks. The imbroglio to assemble them at the auditorium was a second stage of this complicated task. When the first chair was installed and Sergio sat in it, the leather sank. There was a big rush to solve the issue and they ended up calling in a college student’s father who manufactured gloves, and who attached the leather firmly to the structure using a wooden

instrument. And so the auditorium was opened hastily, with all chairs in place, except one, for lack of time. Sergio then spent the entire opening ceremony standing in the place where the chair was supposed to be so nobody would notice its absence. The chairs used at UNB were then used in many other theaters throughout Brazil, including the Anhembi theater, in São Paulo.

After the UNB chairs, Sergio was called in to Brasilia several times for other orders. He made furniture for the Foreign Ministry and furnished the office of the chancellor. He also made furniture for the Senate, for the Alvorada Palace. Beatriz Vera recalls that when they got married, Sergio was furnishing all the houses of the Central Bank directors, in Brasilia. He did the interior of the National Theater of Brasilia, of Cine Brasilia, and many other projects.

“Some furniture in Brasilia was made in a very large series. It was not comparable to Forma or Objeto yet, these other already traditional factories. We were getting started there, but bravely, doing a lot of things. And the Foreign Ministry, always very enthusiastic with us, always wanted something more. For example, the case of the furniture that went to the Embassy Palace in Rome that the Foreign Ministry called us to do. There was much to be done, minister tables, that kind of thing. They said this: ‘We are building all these Ministries, but there is no table for the ministers.’ I said: ‘There are the tables that we have here at Oca.’ First, there was enough of them, better than what there was in the market, and all were of style. It was something closer to traditional furniture, but they saw that we were offering a Brazilian style of furniture.”

A few years later, in the early 1970s, already under the military regime, Vera and Sergio started going to Brasilia together. “We would cry. We would visit the homes of Central Bank directors, for example, and the furniture was all American. The houses all looked like those in *House and Garden* magazine, floral sofas in profusion. The furniture Sergio had made was all stacked away in garages. These were the wives of the military men, it was the military regime. That is why the foreigners bought everything at a bargain price. Everything made out of Jacaranda. We were so disappointed.”

Veronica, Sergio’s architect daughter, now deceased, once remarked that an ambassador she had known had said that when he arrived in Brasilia there was already some of Sergio’s furniture there. “She said that every person who came arrived there replaced, got rid of or even carried a piece away. In the military regime days it had to be a beauty. Everything had to be changed, thrown out, I don’t know. Sergio said Jacaranda was beautiful. The table of the Itamaraty Palace chancellor is there in Brasilia, yet today, and is beautiful. Behind the chancellor’s desk there is a bookcase that was also made by him. It is a beautiful cabinet. All of it is Sergio’s. These they kept in a very good state.”

Chapter 16

Mole, an icon of Brazilian design

“A wonderful synthesis of the Brazilian spirit.” (Odilo Ribeiro Coutinho)

In 1962, when he decided to hold the “Furniture as an Object of Art” exhibition at Oca, Sergio made a chair that he had been designing for over a year and was named Mole. He said the piece was not well received at the time. With his usual humor, he described the general reaction: “If my drawings were considered ‘futuristic,’ well then that one could not be qualified at all. A piece of leather on those pieces of wood was just too much. Onlookers standing at the display window would say that it was very expensive to be a dog bed.” Others called it a fried egg.

Mole came up against a bitter, discouraging lack of interest in it and was forgotten for a year in Oca’s display window. “Instead of beating me up, my partners wanted to keep the chair in the back of the shop, but I decided to face them on that issue because I had a lot of faith in the chair. And it started being accepted by people of a certain cultural level.” Until it called the attention of several personalities, including the then Governor Carlos Lacerda, who practically demanded that Sergio send the chair to a competition in Italy. Sergio obeyed, but without much conviction. He even tried to reason with the governor.

“It was a joke to me. I said to him: ‘Look, I will not submit this to an international competition. People in Europe are doing work at a very high level, it is not worth it, I only have this piece of wood.’ But he insisted, and we sent the drawings in.”

A week later contest organizers advised us that Mole could not compete because it was already known. “To me, in and of itself, that was already a diploma, since I was not aware of the fact that the chair was already known in Europe.” Sergio then made a small change to the chair, entered it in the competition and it was accepted.

Mole ended up taking first place in the 4th International Furniture Competition, in Cantu, Italy, in 1961. The European press highlighted, in various publications, the casual atmosphere generated by the loose cushions thrown on the Sheriff Chair structure, as it became known abroad. The award put Brazil in a prominent position in design on the world stage. The Sheriff name was given by the licensed manufacturer in Italy, which went on to produce the chair.

Sergio believes that one of the reasons why the chair was awarded was because it was considered one of the first postmodern pieces of furniture. “There was a Brazilianness accent. It was a piece that easily revealed where it had been made. It could only have come from a place where there was a lot of wood and leather. And there was a certain informality in the design,” said Sergio to the *Folha de S.Paulo* newspaper, in February 2006.

With robust, sexy wooden components that were a pleasure to touch, and made in the traditional construction techniques, with bolts, generous cushions, leather straps forming a basket where the cushions, also made of leather, would be put, the roundish wooden frame: that is how the Mole armchair came into being, enabling the user to shape his or her body anatomically to sit comfortably. This description does not only define a piece of furniture, rather a key project in Brazilian design.

The idea of the Mole armchair came from one of Sergio Rodrigues’ desires to create furniture that expressed the national identity. The embryo of the Mole appeared in 1957 to meet a request from the photographer Otto Stupakoff, who asked for a sofa for the tiny studio he would put together in Rio. Sergio himself says how the order was made: “Sergio, come up with a sprawling sofa, as if it were a Sultan’s, to put in the corner of my studio.” According to Sergio, the sofa would be a piece for resting. “The idea was for it to be there for the person to feel at ease. But he really could not buy it because it was a very expensive piece, handmade out of Jacaranda. He ended up paying for the piece by photographing it for Oca’s first catalog.”

Mole’s successful career began in Cantu, but unfolded in Oca. Although it was not well received at first, a year after its launch the store started getting several orders for the chair, which secured its place on the market. It was not the bestselling piece of the store, but it had distinguishable qualities.

Mole would soon become an icon, perhaps the piece of Brazilian design that was best known individually. The sociologist Odilon Ribeiro Coutinho says that Mole was the first “irreducible” Brazilian object of art that did not imitate the colonizer. “It is wonderful synthesis of the Brazilian spirit.”

Maria Cecilia Loschiavo dos Santos, a philosopher and historian of Brazilian design, wrote: “The craving to design a piece of furniture to express the national identity took Sergio Rodrigues to a design that mocked the reigning standards: To the slender and elegant stick feet, Mole replied with the thickness and the strength of the Brazilian Jacaranda. In and of itself, this was already a great revolution. One aspect that stood out strongly in this project was the designer’s attempt to respond to new sitting habits that emerged at the time, mainly some very peculiar informal behavior among Rio de Janeiro natives, which Sergio so ably captured and expressed in his furniture.”

In this sense, Sergio anticipated the so-called aesthetics of thickness, which, subsequently, formed the foundation of some of the forefront movements he engaged in during the 1960s.

From there, the “muié dama,” as anthropologist Darcy Ribeiro called it (“it embraces you, envelops you, you like getting tangled in it”), began to gain notoriety. Another who loved the chair was Millôr Fernandes: “That’s when Sergio Rodrigues’ aesthetic talent came to meet my good sense and comfort requirements and, unexpectedly, pushed the aforementioned Mole chair beneath me. I did not sit on it. I laid down and rolled around on it,” wrote Millôr. To him, Mole is the furniture version of Sharon Stone.

It was the workers who made the chair themselves that gave it its name. It comes from the Portuguese word soft, limp. Six years after winning in Cantu, Sergio made another change to Mole and created Moleca, without changes to cushion design. It was the Mole-Ex or Mole for export.

The creator explained the versions of his creature in the 2006 *Folha* interview: “There are three Mole armchair models. The first was created in 1957, and had a more rigid structure. The second version was sent to Italy in 1961. Then came the Moleca version. Since it was not possible to create an armchair from one day to the next, Sergio took Mole itself and made a few changes. It remained with the same feet, structure, and he made some curves on what had been flat and straight. A month later came the Italian award and immediately thereafter an invitation from the Isa outfit, from Bergamo, for series production. The plant called Mole Sheriff. The third Mole was then called Moleca. It can be disassembled to reduce the packaging and shipping cost in exports, with certain colonial touches of wood and assembly with wedges.”

Art critic Afonso Luz considers Mole a landmark. “I think that until the Mole armchair he is faced with a challenge of Brazilian modernity, the challenge of establishing his autonomy in terms of language, technology, and local structural solutions toward the world. After that, Sergio Rodrigues got more freedom, this great humor and the style of a sophisticated informality that create a strong authorial reference, something all of his own.”

Today, Mole is part of the collection of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) in New York, and has become a big sales hit.

Chapter 17

The reissue by LinBrasil

Vera Beatriz went looking for producers to relaunch Sergio's furniture

When he left Oca, Sergio lost the rights to his work, which belonged to the company. Upon leaving, he left all his assets. He had never registered the furniture he created in his name. Officially, they were Oca's furniture, not Sergio Rodrigues'. Years later, in the 1990s, Oca was sold to an American company. They only sold imported furniture there, but kept the name. The Americans did not appreciate Sergio's furniture. They went on to buy and resell furniture. When they decided to sell Oca, they phoned Sergio and, luckily, Vera Beatriz answered. They wanted to sell Sergio his own projects. "How can Sergio buy his own drawings? They are his intellectual property, we will sue you," said Vera. The Americans eventually closed the store, left Brazil, and gave Sergio's designs back to him.

After she decided to take Sergio's business over, Vera Beatriz organized his entire personal and professional life. When they got married, Sergio worked as an architecture, and no longer dealt with furniture production as much. Vera knew he had to get back to making his designs and resume furniture creation and production. She always found it easy to interact and negotiate with people. Determined, sweet, but firm, she was ready to relaunch Sergio and his creations.

That was when Vera began to endeavor to revive Sergio's furniture. They traveled to the South in pursuit of potential manufacturers, offered at factories, went to São Paulo, Bento Gonçalves. "In those days, no one could care less about design. Factory owners wanted to get rich fast and sale furniture that was easy to make, which they could put in the machine and sell. They thought it was all beautiful, but very expensive and very difficult to manufacture because the furniture was all semi-artisanal."

When a piece of Sergio's furniture came in, manufacturers were excited, but then thought it would not be feasible. "Entrepreneurs in Brazil new nothing about design," said Vera Beatriz. "That was between 1975 and 1980."

While Vera was trying to find a manufacturer to make Sergio's furniture, two exhibitions of his work marked an era and brought Sergio back to the mainstream. One was at the Rio de Janeiro Museum of Modern Art, in 1991. MAM granted a wonderful lounge and Sergio and Vera, without

money to make the exhibition, had to use imagination and creativity both. They had to buy the practicable pieces to exhibit the furniture and pay the entire assembly. Vera Beatriz had already invested in Sergio's furniture project everything she had and what she had inherited from her mother. They then boldly asked Kati de Almeida Braga, from the Icatu insurance company, for help. It was the saving solution. Kati agreed and her company funded part of the exhibition, which was a big hit. The exhibition showed the date on which the furniture had been created, in chronological order, and there were pictures of Sergio at all those times, like a timeline marking his career. Sergio's friend Adolfo Bloch ordered posters and flyers with the program and description of the exhibition, which was open for visitation a long time.

In 1999, another exhibition at the Rio Design mall, in Leblon, caught the attention of a Curitiba businesswoman, Gisele Schwartsburd. Soon after visiting the show, Gisele contacted Sergio's office and said she wanted to pay him a visit for a chat. She liked his furniture and wanted to know why he did not make it anymore. Upon arriving, she said her father had a furniture factory in Curitiba, and she was his representative in Rio. Vera Beatriz had never met her before. "The only reference we had of her was that she was a friend of the son of a friend of mine, of Sion," said Vera.

– I want to relaunch Sergio's furniture.

– But can you afford it? - asked Vera.

– Not a penny. But I have an apartment in Vidigal. I will sell it and relaunch Sergio's furniture.

Vera Beatriz accepted immediately, believing in her by intuition. She was tired of peddling his products from factory to factory to no avail, and saw that Gisele truly realized and believed in the value and quality of Sergio's furniture.

Shortly after that, in 2000, Icatu Seguros funded a beautiful book about Sergio, organized by Soraya Cals, with copy by Maria Cecília Loschiavo dos Santos, an introduction by Millôr Fernandes, and presented by Kati Almeida Braga. The book was distributed to all his customers. Since there was also an English translation of the book, Icatu sent it to its customers abroad. The book launch was held at the studio of dealer Jean Bogisch. "It was a year full of light for us."

Beatriz Vera remembers the time well: Until then, Sergio's furniture was being made by two exceptional carpenters, Joaquim Milhazes and Romualdo Falcão, the best in Rio, Vera Beatriz guaranteed. However, in 2000, Gisele opened LinBrasil, a company to make only his pieces. "It was a turnaround. Because of the book, everyone wanted Sergio's new furniture. Then, Gisele started to revive the furniture, at first with a little difficulty, until the factory got the manufacturing right and made the furniture properly."

"Our furniture was built very well, we sold to our customers, but they were handmade. They were not sold in a store. Sergio did a lot of interior architecture and would put his furniture

in the project. He drew furniture for customers and then would not produce those pieces any more. We made a little off of the furniture, because we made nothing at all with architecture. The designs were very thorough, and Sergio changed details all the time. But we needed more income.” That was when Vera decided to open a furniture store and a place to house the Sergio Rodrigues Arquitetura Ltda. architecture firm at the house they had bought on Conde de Irajá street, 63, in Botafogo. And they started making a living off of that.

In 2004, Gisele changed factories and started making furniture with excellence. Three years later, in 2007, Sergio’s furniture appreciated a lot after being exhibited at the Trade Show in Milan, Italy, promoted by LinBrasil. Fernando Mendes de Almeida also started making them with extreme precision.

The contract with Gisele was initially for a ten-year term. During that time, no one else could make the furniture and she was the only person who could sell Sergio’s productions. “But I would do anything because no one wanted to make it. I had noted that Sergio was going to die without any recognition.”

When the contract was renewed with Sergio, the line was split in two, with the exclusive lists going to LinBrasil and to Atelier Fernando Mendes. Today, Butzke manufactures the garden line under assignment of LinBrasil, and Etel Carmona was granted the right to manufacture the Adolpho desk and small chair.

Today, Vera has a contract with Gisele and another one with Fernando. LinBrasil kept the furniture she already made, the most iconic, and classics like the Mole and Kilin armchairs, the Oscar chair, and the Mocho stool. Fernando kept the special furniture, which had not yet been released.

Today, Vera Beatriz is sure things would have turned out very bad for Sergio had he not married her. “Sergio was never rich, but I was able to put his life on track. He earned money with decor, but was not organized, it was all chaotic, he always lost money. I went to take care of him because his financial life was a total wreck. No factory wanted anything to do with Sergio. Today, they are all desperate after Sergio and Gisele, who decided to launch his furniture, and was very successful.”

Sergio got only 2 percent of sales proceeds from the few factories making his furniture. With Gisele, this was increased to 10 percent. “My goal was to add value to his name. He was a genius. He often woke up at night and asked for a piece of paper to draw a piece of furniture on. I wanted him to get this recognition before he died. And we managed to do that.”

Dolly Michailovsky, who worked with Sergio for many years, since the Oca days, believes he owes 40 percent of his success to Vera Beatriz. “She never gave up. People often preferred what they saw in foreign magazines. Now it is his furniture that is featured in those magazines.”

Chapter 18

The wood and materials chosen by Sergio

“The spirit of the forest remains when the wood is treated with love.” (Sergio Rodrigues)

When he started designing furniture, Sergio went out in a frantic search for a design that could represent the spirit “of our people.” To achieve it, he plunged into a little explored area in which “wood, our raw material, leather, straw, and thick fabrics would have primordial projection,” as he used to say. “They did not know this, but by designing with these materials, they were delivering a mortal blow to thin-feet furniture, and using Jacaranda was the blow of death on the pau-marfim style,” said Sergio, once, during an interview with *Casa e Jardim* magazine.

Sergio then went in pursuit of new projects and materials. Aided by what he called “the great contribution of technology,” which brought new equipment and machinery, and by the “appearance of an infinite range of materials,” Sergio left to sow the seeds of his work at Oca and, later, at Meia-Pataca. Naturally, his passion for wood began when he was still very young and he saw his uncle James’ workers use wood to fill his uncle’s orders.

As once said the architect and urban planner Lucio Costa, Sergio was able to “superimpose on modern furniture production elements seen at the Brazilian homes of our ancestors.” Sergio’s use of wood and straw in his work reinforces that view. He worked with these two materials very well, creating new forms of seats that have become classics, such as the Oscar armchair, in honor of Oscar Niemeyer, of 1956: Solid wood, originally Jacaranda, with a backrest and straw seat. To honor Lucio Costa, Sergio designed the Lucio Chair, also made of wood with seat in straw.

At first and for a long time, Sergio chose Jacaranda, a type of hardwood that is durable and easy to work with, as his favorite. However, the widespread use of this type of wood and its smuggling abroad led to its depletion, and, from the 1980s, he went on to use wood such as imbuia, pau-marfim, and frejÓ, among others. Later, he also used eucalyptus and tauari. Straw and leather - materials whose tradition dates back to colonial furniture in Brazil - play an important supporting role in his creations, and only in a few pieces did its use surpass the use of timber.

“Furniture considered as formal was made of Jacaranda because the wood itself added dignity to the product. But for less expensive pieces, made on a larger scale, the pieces were made of wood that had a touch of Jacaranda or were also masked of Jacaranda, in other words, varnished like it, to give it that special quality. I started using Jacaranda precisely because it had that quality, with that in mind. The furniture that used to be made in palaces and in more formal settings here in Brazil were of Jacaranda. Then I started using this material to enhance design too.”

A while after having used Jacaranda in his creations, Sergio said he felt guilty for having used this type of hardwood so broadly: “Jacaranda was a type of wood that was easily found at first. Then it started getting increasingly difficult to use it. I feel like I am one of the killers, one of the major consumers of Jacaranda.” His daughter Veronica said that he, in fact, immortalized Jacaranda. Despite his *mea culpa*, Sergio had a conviction with regard to the material he used in his work. He once said: “The spirit of the forest remains when the wood is treated with love.”

In the interview he gave to Afonso Luz, Sergio discussed the use of the wood: “Our material, our key raw material is wood. I used to think that we should continue using wood until we had adequately or perfectly studied or developed other elements or other materials that could come to be applied, such as metal. Some people say I do not like metal. I like metal. I think it’s wonderful. Bauhaus is made almost entirely of metal. The appearance of metallic structures in furniture was certainly a great addition. This side of the Bauhaus technology, which it added to its design, came as an opportunity to us. When they made Bauhaus, they wanted to use a material that was at hand. The industry in Germany was already providing a lot of evidence to that effect. In fact, Bauhaus furniture was only compositions. Of course, they were applied with a lot of “Bossa,” and a lot of design, and they were elements assembled without major frills, no need to sculpt the material. Here, at the time, wood was used not only in the assembly, but also worked like a sculpture, with all those grooves. But I believed it could also be used structurally, as raw material to compose these products. When I made Mole, they said: ‘Sergio, with this piece of yours, making this leather cushion with four legs, you defined the place perfectly, first observing a tradition of culture, which would be, in that case, the indigenous culture.’ As if the natives had created or had a Mole armchair. They treated wood with no refinement, or better, without worrying about making grooves or carving wood. There did not carve wood. They used wood as it is, as it comes from nature.”

Sergio used metal associated with timber at various moments. For example, he made the Leve Beto armchair for the Presidential Palace Waiting Hall structured in stainless steel, with a seat and back in polyurethane foam covered in velvet or leather and with hardwood arms.

To Sergio, the question was how to treat the wood, which could be a technological resource, and not just a material one. “It is logical that wood would be the material. You would have the traditional European way and the simple influences of people without the culture of special wood treatment, but with a structural view.”

From the moment Sergio realized that mass production of his furniture led to the need to find another solution on account of how hard it was to come across Jacaranda, even back then, he switched to other types of wood. “Since we had other woods available to us, it was easier to study them and adjust other woods with similar features. They may not be as beautiful as Jacaranda, but similar.” Since Jacaranda does not have a very broad variety of tones, Sergio began using other types of wood with lighter and darker shades, making some changes.

“Many pieces that used Jacaranda lacked the design qualities of the culture of the time. Not every piece of furniture made with Jacaranda is Brazilian design. Jacaranda was one of the important materials of that time. But not all of our horizons were aimed at it. So we moved on to other woods that have a certain color, a certain detail similar to or near Jacaranda. Ironwood, imbuia itself, had qualities that could be less expensive than Jacaranda but similar to that of this wood.” To Sergio, this new reality furniture facilitated manufacturing because the industry started using these materials for mass production. And Jacaranda was being gradually replaced.

Chapter 19

Architecture in harmony with life

“A good architect must understand the human dimension of his invention.”
(Fernando Mendes de Almeida)

Sergio often repeated a phrase: “Architecture defines itself from inside out. The facade is just the result.” Your way of seeing the house, the setting, has always been looking from inside out. Its architecture was designed for life to happen in there, based on an idea of harmony that the environment could bring to people. Settings are planned in detail in his drawings. It is not uncommon to see illustrations of activities taking place inside homes or objects that could contribute to the understanding of everyday life in Sergio’s drawings. For example, a drawing of a stool for one to put on a shoe on or a reading lamp next to the chair appearing in the middle of an architectural blueprint. When designing a beach house, he drew a woman wearing a bikini in a room who you could see through the open window. They were always drawings of people or objects falling into place in the setting, keeping coexistence in the house in mind.

But the architect was always in contact with the designer in Sergio’s work. To Fernando Mendes de Almeida, one of his main professional heirs, construction, in his architecture, always involved the idea of fitting in. “Not in the sense of joinery fitting, rather pillars and beams. He always thought up settings in which objects seemed to be characters. It was all done considering coexistence. Nothing was disconnected from affection. It was not enough for an architect to plan and study his creations technically. To be successful, he needs to understand the human dimension of his invention.”

Sergio’s architecture was full of elements and always thought through play. The house he built for his family in Petrópolis had a skylight, mezzanine, and stairs in the Santos Dumont style that led to a loft that was open to the living room. His room had a window looking out and another one looking in. It had high ceilings. “It was almost like a big game, but made with the utmost seriousness, just as serious a game is for the child,” says Fernando.

The connection between architecture and interior design comes from the time that chairs used to lean against the walls and completed the design of the building as if they were columns or elements of the actual architecture. This can be seen, for example, in the Crystal Palace, in Versailles. There, the chairs, furniture, sofas, armchairs, auxiliary tables, all

positioned against the walls, form an architectural complex with these walls. Sergio brought the concept that interiors should be connected to architecture into his training, a fact often overlooked by architects.

To Fernando, Sergio always had a calling for furniture. “He said he saw a very advanced movement of Brazilian architecture with the modernist movement, and that interiors did not keep pace with this modernity. Interiors continued being filled with colonial or imported furniture. They lacked this modern furniture. He had this vision, this intuition, and invested in it, and it ended up being his main route. His architectural view is very interior.”

Sergio was aware of this. He revealed this thought in an interview with critic Afonso Luz: “I used to think, since I studied architecture, I am architect, and I like wood and furniture, that prefabricated architecture, made in a workshop, was design. So, prefabricated architecture, the output, is design because you have the qualities needed for design and it is actually it that *equips* architecture to perform, that *equips* this space with elements characteristic of what has been created for a given function, such as the solutions that were given to the furniture.”

In 1975, Sergio won the prize of the Brazil Institute of Architects, in Rio de Janeiro, with the Kilin armchair. At this point, home, hotel, and office projects were already gaining space in his career. From 1977, several architects and designers often collaborated with Sergio in his prototypes, people such as Freddy van Camp, Arthur Jorge de Carvalho, and Lucinha Redondo. From 1980, house and interior ambiance projects once again went on to count on the collaboration of Dolly Michailovska. After working with Dolly, Veronica became the main contributor to Sergio in architectural projects.

The SR2

From the desire to build a country house on the land of his father-in-law that could be transported in the event of a move, in 1959, Sergio started making the first studies for the SR2, a system composed of prefabricated wooden elements for building housing architecture. Sergio first thought of a structure made of galvanized iron pipes coated with plywood. Then, of course, he arrived at wood. He made these projects outside of Oca, and worked into the night, Sundays and holidays, to find the solution.

When seeing Sergio’s study material, the then director of the Museum of Modern Art (MAM RJ), Niomar Muniz Sodré Bittencourt invited him to make an exhibition at MAM, in 1960. Thus, in fewer than twenty days, the first prototype of a modernist house designed by Sergio and built at MAM was born. It was not a prefabricated house with a ready-made project, rather a building system attentive to the customer’s program. The prototype measured 50 square meters and had great impact. There were standard pillars, beams, closing panels, and this house was built as if out of Legos. The piece was assembled with predetermined panels. Lucio Costa said in a letter to Israel Pinheiro - who was responsible for building and, later, the first administrator of Brasilia - that that would be the only wooden house that could be built in the new capital because the master plan did not allow wooden houses.

From 1962 to 1967, Sergio put into practice his studies on the SR2 system in buildings such as the Brasília Yacht Club and two pavilions to lodge teachers and restaurants at the University of Brasília, at the request of Darcy Ribeiro. More than 200 houses were built with this system until 1968, and at least 70 were taken from São Paulo to the Amazon in Hercules aircraft and assembled in the forest to serve the Humboldt Research Center.

The SR2 was also used in Goiânia to build houses and clubs, and, in 1977, in partnership with the Danish architect Leif-Artzen, Sergio undertook a study for export for use in extreme Nordic country temperatures which was called Modu-Home.

In the beginning, the more than 200 houses that had been designed had a flat roof. Some time later they were made with sloping roofs. Only the former had flat roofs, such as some he made in Brasília. Sergio worked with the project in three phases. In 1980, he returned with the SR2 with the construction of his own house in Petrópolis, and another one in Brasília. He stopped again, and resumed construction in 1993. He made many homes after that.

Sergio's work as an architect was relatively overshadowed by his notoriety as a furniture designer, but the exhibition of the prototype, in 1960, kick-started the production and assembly, in that decade, of hundreds of units, including houses, housing projects, hotels, clubs, restaurants and outpatient centers. In 1982, Sergio participated in the *Design in Brazil: History and reality* exhibition at SESC Pompéia, in São Paulo, which paved the way for the revitalization of the SR2 System, in 1984.

Despite having been more noted as a furniture designer for a long time, Sergio made sure that the seal placed on his furniture brought the inscription *Sergio Rodrigues, architect, Brazil*. Architecture was believed to be more prestigious. Sergio used to say: "I design furniture, but I am architect." Nevertheless, Sergio never had any affinity for the so-called high architecture. According to Fernando Mendes, it is not his way of being. "He likes simplicity, warmth, he is good-natured, playful, likes the informality that is not the language of this high architecture." Later, Sergio went on to sign only as *Sergio Rodrigues, Brazil*.

Throughout his life, Sergio never lost his humor and *savoir vivre*. However, in 2012, just over a year before his death, he suffered a setback which left him bitter. He lost his daughter Veronica, who worked with him for many years in his architectural office and was his right arm. They were very close and he considered her his heir in this area. Talented, following in her father's steps professionally, Veronica took part in all of Sergio's architecture projects and the two used the same language. "Veronica proved to be an excellent architect. She was the continuation of Sergio, his right arm and a great companion. Sergio viewed his continuation in her," said Dolly Michailovsky. To Vera Beatrice, Sergio's widow, "she inherited her father's creativity. Even while ill, she still worked and taught at PUC, despite feeling sick. I have never seen anyone with such a fight in them," she said. It was a huge blow. Sergio was very shaken by the death of his daughter, and never fully recovered from it, although he always tried to keep his humor and his light way of being.

Chapter 20

Sixty years with Mocho

The stool harbinger an exceptional career

The Mocho stool was the first major piece Sergio designed. Simple, with round seat and a crossmember underneath linking the three feet, Mocho was the harbinger of a brilliant career. Sergio, who always fed from the Brazilian popular culture, was inspired by a woman from the countryside milking a cow on one of those typical farm stools, many of which with one foot. A piece carved from solid wood, Mocho is a fun and, at the same time, admirably elegant stool.

Journalist and expert Adélia Borges says that if it were possible to choose one of Sergio's favorite pieces of furniture, she would choose Mocho. "It has a lot to do with the Brazilian tradition and is enormously simple, in essential forms."

The first version of Mocho, which had a more dug-in seat and a cushion firmly attached to it, came in 1954. With the change that took place on the market and changed gauges, the seat got shallower and Sergio took the cushion away, probably to allow for the purest stool possible, since it already had the comfort of the curve. He made slight changes to the shape of the feet, raised the crossmembers and the seat was lighter, shallower. The strap's design was also changed.

"Mocho has a handle for carrying the stool. This idea of carrying the stool around by hand is warming," says Fernando Mendes. "When you look at the Mocho from the side, with its round seat, you see a trapezoid formed between the feet, the lower crossmember and the seat. It is a triangle connecting the three feet. All these geometric figures appear in the drawing."

Remarkably modern, Mocho, which turned 60, heralded what Sergio's career would be. When he entered Oca, the store that transformed the idea of furniture in Rio de Janeiro, carrying the stool, Sergio did not know that he was already carrying what would become the hallmark of his work with him.

Chapter 21

Only fine food at Papo de Anjo

Between one business and another, Sergio invented an amazing restaurant

Sergio never stopped and never gave up, even in adversity. When he left Oca, his situation got worse. Now with four children - Ângela, Veronica, Adriana, and Roberto - Sergio needed to make sure he could support them all. Since he was designing the interior architecture of the Manchete building, which belonged to Bloch Editors, hired by Adolfo Bloch while still at Oca, Sergio decided to continue the work. All of the furniture at Manchete was from Oca, and the contract was with the store, but Sergio did not want to abandon the project and volunteered to complete and supervise it, even if not making any money for his work.

Sergio even made Manchete's theater, innovating with a wall full of pieces of Jacaranda that were left over from the furniture, an invention later copied by many people. One day, Sergio met Bloch at Manchete. Surprised, Bloch asked:

- Sergio, what are you doing here supervising the work? You are no longer at Oca.

- But this is my responsibility, I have to oversee it, said Sergio.

Adolfo was impressed and decided to sign a separate agreement with Sergio.

- You will be Manchete's architect.

That was his salvation. For a long time, Sergio worked for Adolfo Bloch's company. But the arrangement with the owner of Bloch was not enough to solve his life. Since he was restless and could never settle down, he imagined making a lifelong dream come true. Sergio dreamed of finding a restaurant that was not cold, but warm, and where the customer would feel like he was at a friend's place. Also, talking about eating well was one of his favorite subjects. So why not do both at the same time? In other words, why not realize that dream and the desire to eat a meal in a cozy atmosphere by launching a new venture? His first wife, Vera Maria, cooked very well and it would not be hard, he thought, to get a good place.

They got a house at the Botanical Gardens, on Corcovado street, 252. Franco Magrini, an Italian production engineer who was a good friend of Sergio's, agreed to work with him at the restaurant. Vera prepared the food, Magrini's wife made the arrangements. The ceiling was all painted by Juarez Machado, an already well-known artist at that time. There was a lot of sophistication and a bit of everything on the walls: Companhia das Índias ware he was given by his grandmother, important paintings, old plane collections, in short, a fantastic stage design with everything Sergio liked.

Years later, Sergio recounted the restaurant's adventures: "Thus was created Papo de Anjo, the name I gave it for allowing for a plethora of puns, including Papa de Anjo, Pope of Cooking, Papos, etc. I designed a character, Maservera Pappa, who would be a retired architect, crazy for great food, an expert cook, who would convert his workshop home using its industrial stove in an experimental lab worthy of angels."

In fact, Maservera Pappa blended the names of Sergio, Magrini, Vera and the word "papa". Sergio made incredible stories up. There was even a picture of this architect, painted by Magrini. Sergio "mapped out" Maservera's genealogy tree and handed it over to Millôr Fernandes, who wrote a fun story about the adventures of the architect. The story later became the restaurant's brochure. The names of the dishes were always deliciously suggestive, like "chicken, but honest".

"The chosen home [...] was a gem. We could call it the "petropolitan" style, very nice. [...] Millôr created the logo: the nameplate placed at the entrance was put away every night, because it was so charming that the first ones were stolen at dawn by someone of good taste. Juarez Machado, as a Michelangelo, painted scenes of angels on the dome of the lobby."

The designer Freddy van Camp, who worked at Oca after Sergio left, when the owner was already the Giulite Coutinho, always admired him a lot. "I like Sergio's verve, in everything he does. Even in his design. He had a vivid imagination and was always making stories up. At the entrance of Papo de Anjo, there was a wall full of photos. He made up that someone had gone hunting in Africa, a family member, and each photo had a story. He really let his imagination flow. The furniture had a story, often controversial, which changed as his mood did. Sometimes he would tell the story of a piece of furniture one way, sometimes another, different way."

In the restaurant, the Mole armchair was kept in a place of honor. The restroom bathtub was turned into a huge plant pot. Embassies and all kinds of personalities booked reservations at Papo de Anjo, which was often cited in newspaper and magazine columns. It was also featured in foreign magazines: "When you go to Brazil, you have to go to Papo de Anjo."

But all architects and friends ate for free. Only foreign champagne and Scotch whiskey was used to cook the food. So, despite its huge success, the restaurant started turning a loss. The partners dropped out and the place was closed.

Chapter 22

Design and drawings

“If I could sum it all up in a single shot, design is creation.” (Sergio Rodrigues)

Sergio always resented the fact that nobody ever gave him a good explanation of what design was while he was in college. There was not a practice of showing and remarking on the design of a chair, an armchair, a sofa, or any object. So, intuition was always a strong vein in Sergio's training. After all his experience and background, Sergio could theorize about design and create his own definition, as he did in conversations he had with art critic Afonso Luz:

“Design is an element that, added to technique, is a mode of work in which you add something to things. Whether aesthetic, technological, design adds something to the object. This addition is what makes a difference, an impression, and it is also what causes an issue to people who do not understand design. Because they always imagine that design is related to the product's aesthetic appearance, it is the plastic part. But in reality, design is a series of elements, among which the drawing and beauty it adds to the product's appearance, that give the product a few visual predicates. If I could sum it all up in a single shot, design is creation. To me, everything related to creating is design. Everything that is created is design.”

As he developed his theory during his career, Sergio was also learning what design was in practice. He had to work this characteristic in his daily realization, mainly when coming to grips that design is closely linked to trade. One of the characteristics of design, he said, is to provide economic benefits to those who consume it, or also cultural details, which are very important for one to appreciate the work, to differentiate one product from another in the customer's eyes. “It is in the way these things are applied in the study of a design that you value the work.”

Nevertheless, Sergio said he was not called a designer. “If you ask me what I am, I say I am a furniture draftsman.” To him, design is a part of the construction profession. As architecture should be. With humor, he accurately explained the function of good design. “Architecture students should spend some time in a wood workshop. Do it in practice. Use construction techniques, not only with wood, but also with iron, concrete, etc., in order

not to do something stupid. Because designers often imagine many wonderful things and sometimes they do not work. That is the case of this little object that is cute as hell, this thing that I gave myself, which is a thermos, it attracted me a lot at the time. I bought it real fast. I took it home, and when I got there the thing did not work. Why? You would put coffee in there... And to get the coffee out it, how did the thing work? What do you do? You have to press down on it. After a long time, then you press on it. By then you had a big mess on the table, on the floor..."

Sergio used to say that his most important testimonial was his daily work. His drawing was already a construction. His capacity for synthesis in projects always drew attention. He could even design a large table on one or two sheets of A4 paper, in scale, with details and life-size cuts, without repeating or leaving information out. "It's all there, complete," explains Fernando Mendes de Almeida, who worked nearby Sergio for many years. "He said he was bad in math, but was excellent in geometry. In furniture design, especially of chairs and seats, you make the blueprint, the cut and views, everything overlapping and in one design."

What Fernando admired most in Sergio was his ability to draw, but also the freedom he allowed himself in the drawing. "He is free in his creation. His things have a huge playful appeal." And he joked: "I think he makes toys, not furniture. In some pieces, when manufacturing them, you can see the toy being born. You assemble it all, using a lot of aesthetic resources on different pieces, but it is all a game you put together. Some things seem very simple, but sometimes they are complicated to manufacture. Others seem super complicated, but production is quite simple. He plays with these things. And he always knew how to create according to the technical resources available for manufacturing."

The power of synthesis in Sergio designs has the advantage of simplifying the understanding of the design, preventing the manufacturer from getting lost, since objectively guides the construction of the piece. "He brings all the alignments, the rotation of the plan. This type of design clearly conveys the feeling of the object's volume. You see the thickness of the wood, how the pieces match, the exact size of the fitting, especially when there are curves. It is all there, all the information to make the part in its actual size in all three dimensions. His design is already half way to making the piece itself," assures Fernando.

One of the strongest memories in Sergio's childhood, which paved the way to design, was to see uncle James designing furniture, delivering it to the carpenters and, from there, a product actually being made. This idea that design eventually becomes something tangible, manufactured, awakened his vocation.

Fernando learned a lot by watching Sergio draw, observing him working. Today, people design their projects on the computer and in 3D and you lose the direct relationship there was in the past, like Sergio had with his pencil, paper and line, which is imperfect but brings the warmth of handmade design. You lose your intuition.

“The pencil’s texture on the paper is warm, a part of a construction, it brings a wealth of details, information, emotions. I learned a lot with him. Sergio worked as if he were in pursuit of a treasure which, at a given moment, he indeed found. As if something was outside of him and another inside and suddenly this marriage happens. Then you arrive at the drawing and realize: ‘That is what I wanted.’”

Sergio never designed on the computer, always freehand, even technical drawings. Sometimes someone drew for him, but under his supervision. He used to make a draft, he would not get lost in minutiae. It was loose, free. He had stopped making large drawings some time before, but drew on small pieces of paper, on a scale and with details in natural size. Veronica, his daughter, also chiseled away extensively on her designs.

The illustrator and designer

Sergio did not stand out in project design alone. Like his father, Roberto, who had a short, productive life, Sergio was also an accomplished designer. “I like Sergio’s verve, in everything he does, even in his design,” said designer Freddy van Camp, also a former collaborator and admirer. “His design has a lot of humor in it, and I think he would have had a career as a designer if he had not dedicated himself to architecture and furniture design,” said journalist Adélia Borges.

Sergio used to make drafts and often threw out his drawings until he got where he wanted. Fernando was around Sergio in many moments of creation. “I once saw him drawing a table. He drew, drew, and made those typical holes with his circle template. And he said: ‘It took me a long time to find the right place for this ball, but now I have found it’ - and it is just perfect this way, he joked. One day he was at his office, tired: ‘There’s no point to sticking around here scribbling if I have no good ideas in my head. You need to wait for that kindle that will guide your work’.”

Sergio made drawings and caricatures his entire life. Many drawings were dedicated to Vera Beatriz. He did it rather as a kind of seduction to her. The drawings of Vera Beatriz tell his stories. And often they were fun self-portraits. One day he was in an old clunker and she in a flying saucer. Or he would be in a caricature, sprawled on a Mole armchair. The drawings always had stories. And there were also the freehand drawings showing details of a part or the straps of the Mole chair, the first ideas. He drew a lot next to Vera Beatriz. In many of the drawings he is a rat and Vera a squirrel. In fact, as we know, that is where the Kilin armchair’s name came from - Vera Beatriz’s “little squirrel” (“esquilinha,” or “kilin”) nickname.

Sergio’s mood shined through even in his architectural work. He always did something funny in his projects, an illustration here, another there, that represented life in that home or office. He once designed a house in Angra dos Reis for Antonia, the daughter of Kati

Almeida Braga, with a deck in front of the house and the pool built into the deck. In perspective there was a woman inside the room wearing a bikini. And another one in the pool, turning around in the water.

There are many examples. Another time, he drafted a design for a military man and added an old boot with a hole in its sole next to the couch in the drawing of the setting. The man was offended by that and Sergio lost the project because of the joke. On another occasion, a customer asked him to draw a lake on the grounds of a farm in Itaipava. He wanted to have a space to welcome his guests lakeside. Sergio and Veronica imagined an archaeological house that had already been on the grounds for centuries. Sergio drew two huge, robust pillars, as elements of an ancestral home. However, the project also included a contemporary feature, as it had a deck leading to the lake floating between these pillars. And the final, humorous touch was that he added a gondola drifting by in the drawing of the lake.

Chapter 23

Armchairs, chairs and tables - some of the icons of Sergio's work

Kilin and Diz, two masterpieces

The Mole armchair was so bright that it overshadowed the recognition of other striking creations featuring amazing design solutions. Kilin, from 1973, and Diz, from 2001, are chairs experts considered masterpieces.

Named after Vera Beatriz, who Sergio affectionately called "little squirrel," the Kilin armchair is many people's favorite piece. With a bold design, forms and fittings made of shapely hardwood, leather floating in the air and made in such a manner as to shape and embrace the body, Kilin is one of Sergio's most copied pieces. It was also among the most exported to the Nordic countries in the 1970s. Kilin was born from Sergio's desire to make a less expensive, simpler armchair his friends could buy.

"Oca's models were expensive, not because I wanted them to be, rather because the material was expensive, construction was expensive, they were hand-crafted and the skilled workers that built them were expensive. I was worried about not being able to sell to friends who could not afford it. So I created a company called Meia-Pataca, next to Oca. It sold furniture I had designed, but that were made with simple wood and were semi-serial. It was then possible to lower the price. That is how Kilin was born. Many people used to buy from the main store, Oca, while they would buy for their kids or for the cottage at Meia-Pataca."

But Sergio also wanted a more affordable piece at Oca. He then imagined a wooden structure with two sides and two crossmember, a back and leather seat in one piece and less expensive for Kilin. The structure was made with crossmembers attached to the side with wedges. Sergio had already left Oca when Freddy van Camp, the store's new designer, asked the crossmembers to be attached with Allen screws, which would simplify manufacturing, and they began to be packed in special cardboard boxes and exported.

Diz and Chifruda

Diz, made entirely out of wood, can be extremely comfortable even without any upholstery. It is one of Sergio's most sought after pieces. But in its design, Diz is a little different from what is on the market. Sergio made the seat and backrest shells with 24 solid wood strips each and a

trapezoidal section to form the curvature. The parts are glued using a mold and the piece is then machined. Each ruler is in the shape of a small cane with a curve at the tip to form the trim of the ends of the seat and backrest. He conceived the piece this way. Today, the seat and back of Diz are made with molded plywood using a large aluminum press, and it already comes out in that shape from the industrial manufacturing process. The original was more sophisticated.

To Adélia Borges, Diz is the synthesis of Sergio's career. "It is amazing how he attained a phenomenal degree of comfort in a chair using only wood to make it. It is the outcome of a mastery and a synthesis of what he learned over the years about the proper slope, arm support, etc. Diz innovates and, as he says, it is "hard" comfort as opposed to Mole (soft)."

Fernando Mendes says that when Sergio made the first Diz chair its feet were chubbier than the crossmembers. "It was more elaborate and handmade. It is not like that today. The sides join the feet and form a single plane. You glue it all, run it through the molding machine, make the profile and shape the contour. In all his work you can notice the possibility to simplify the design to meet the requirements of industrialization. The pieces are always fun and creative. It does not matter whether there is a super joiner or a simple factory available. In the very simple Cuiabá construction, or in Oscar, with much more elaborate manufacturing, since its woodwork is more exquisite, one may note that none of them lost any expression or the looks of Sergio Rodrigues' furniture." The Oscar armchair - a tribute to Oscar Niemeyer - with a back and seat made of straw, wooden legs and arms, was commissioned by the Brazilian Jockey Club and refused by the customer for being "too modern."

The Chifruda, which Sergio created in 1962 for the "Furniture as an Object of Art" show, which was held at Oca, was, according to Sergio himself, a joke "to show the technical capacity of leather and wood." To him, "its leather craft was very good." At the time, Chifruda was a scandal. "True creation, made with love, it is art," he guaranteed.

Xibô

The Xibô armchair (a nickname Vera Beatriz gave Sergio, who called him that in private), meanwhile, is a project that had reached a standstill because they needed to determine what to do with its upper part. "There was always an obstacle in this project," said Fernando, who helped Sergio, adding some details in a perspective of Xibô. "Sergio then made a little line, defining the outline of the head and the project was finally resolved. He made a simple free hand line that brought the answer he took twenty years to find," remarked Fernando. "I made the entire prototype, but Sergio still wanted to add the traditional holes of his pieces. We were going to make the wooden headboard, but with its sharp bend, the piece would be weak at its tips. We developed it and made the piece out of molded plywood. Sergio was not happy with the way the edges of the plywood looked. So we decided to coat the plywood with leather while maintaining the holes at the tips. It was the upholstery man who saved us, as he made the leather lining using the same stitching technique used for car steering wheels to finish off the holes in the headboard. With all these comings and goings we were able to close the Xibô project."

Tonico

The Tonico armchair, created in the same period as Chifruda, was a piece of furniture designed to offer the same comfort as Mole, but to be easier to make and could be used in student housing. Tonico chairs were sold especially to people who owned cottages, vacation homes, and beach houses. “It was not only to meet the needs of people with fewer financial resources, but to offer the simplicity and top comfort those drawings could provide. I called it Tonico to honor my brother in law. He fell in love with the chair. He had no taste at all. He sat in it and said: ‘I want nothing else, only this. This is beautiful.’ I mean, he already thought the chair was beautiful, had great aesthetic quality, and considered it good and comfortable. So I gave it his name: Tonico. The names are almost always connected to things in the workplace, to the customer.”

Gio and Vronka

Sergio made the Gio in honor of the Italian architect Gio Ponti, who a few years earlier had published an article on Sergio’s furniture in the famous magazine Domus. He made it in 1958 and, always with his sharp wit, thought students would start to respect him “a little more” because Gio Ponti was an important architect. Sergio then created Vronka, a reinterpretation of Gio.

“I had that in mind. I wanted to make a chair that could be used by some kids in the counterculture days. The chair had a seat that was hardly a seat. It was a wider piece that allowed one to keep a young person’s pose, in other words, sit cross-legged on the chair. It has a few pins on its side to allow the shell to move. It is the first piece that appears on my furniture with upholstery, as a coating. And then I found it curious because looking at the finished piece gives you the idea that it is highly complex, hard to make, but it is very simple. It was the influence of the furniture I had in my house, with classic knobs. There was a piece at Gio that came in and out of those shell holes that allowed the person to sit in other positions. And the fixed pad to support your head on and adjust.”

He already imagined manufacturing in his drawing

Sergio’s proximity to the manufacturing process of his furniture is striking in his career. Sergio was never a joiner, but had owned several factories and knew the machines well. When drawing his projects, he could already imagine how that piece of furniture would be manufactured. “I never saw Sergio make mistakes in this respect in his designs,” says the designer Fernando Mendes, who worked with Sergio for many years and is one of his professional heirs.

“I was able to keep pace with the evolution in Sergio’s eyes when he revisited his projects. He has done this with many pieces while debugging his work,” continues Fernando. “He did it with Diz, with Mole, with Mocho. After a while, his view on the piece matures and he moves away from the moment of creation. But at the time of production, there is also the interpretation of those who will manufacture it. This may be an evolution, but it can also be an involution. Sometimes the work is in the hands of the master carpenter, who may be more or less sensitive to interpret the drawing. Sergio never was overly severe fighting for his projects, demanding them to be exactly what drew. So sometimes they did not turn out exactly the way he wanted them to be. I always try to be faithful to the design.”

The Burton table

The observation of and fascination with objects that have always been in his life may have led Sergio develop this intimacy with the manufacturing of his products. In an interview with Afonso Luz, in July 2012, Sergio spoke of the impact this had in his creations, describing his furniture: “I had a passion for aviation and boating. I liked sailing, yachting. And I also used to like aviation, especially First World War Aviation because you can see the entire structure, which is nearly apparent and with special airfoils. I started making some furniture with those characteristics. That is how I designed the Burton table, for example. It started being made yet in 1957. And it was already made with crossmembers with those oval or aerodynamic sections. The feet were like airplane wing brackets, on bi-planes, also with the appropriate section. To me it was wonderful. And, to wrap it all up, since we were making its feet with small dots touching the table top, there was a need for a metal rod for balance. So there was a rod as well to stabilize it. That was a table that I liked a lot. And it was greatly appreciated the first day I put it in the store [at Oca].” The Burton table was made out of solid wood, with a solid table top and details made out of polished tin.

Chapter 24

The influences and the heirs

Influenced by various creators, Sergio also left his mark on many Brazilian designers

The first contact Sergio had with modern furniture, while yet a college student, was with the creations of Joaquim Tenreiro, the Portuguese craftsman, carpenter, painter and sculptor who became famous in the furniture design field. Architect José Zanine Caldas' industrialized furniture also caught his attention. Over and above being a landscape architect, Zanine was a furniture maker and sculptor. He used to make airplane plywood furniture that could be disassembled and was extremely simple, made in São Jose dos Campos, and Sergio had great admiration for him.

There were also models made by members of the so-call Italian artistic mission - for whom he had great admiration, such as Lina Bo Bardi, Giancarlo Palanti, Dominici, in lighting, and Carlo Hauner, with whom he had his first store, Móveis Artesanal Paranaense. Burle Marx was a major influence on prints and Lili Correia de Araújo, with her handmade fabrics.

In his early career, Sergio got mad when he was compared to some other designer. "I gradually became aware of things and realized that the influences of this or that architect were often portrayed," he said in an interview to *Casa e Jardim*, in 1985.

During his São Paulo stage, surrounded by Italian partners, designers, and publications, those became his models. But the more he studied Scandinavian furniture, the more he realized that they had "more to do with our way of being." "They were purer, and had not slid into superfluous fads." In the same interview he said: "Today, I humbly realize the influence of Carlo Molino, from Turin, in the first desk I designed, although I never saw anything made by this architect. There is also something of Hans Wegner and Vito Latis in the little couch with a straw seat and back."

But just as he was influenced by various creators, Sergio also left his mark on many Brazilian designers. The journalist Adélia Borges points a few out. "Sergio is very special, a very important figure in the Brazilian scenario, and was fortunate to have followers." She says Sergio's first followers started emerging in the 1980s, among whom Carlos Motta, in São Paulo, the designers of the Baraúna Joinery (Marcelo Ferraz and Francisco Fanucci, architects

in SP), Claudia Moreira Salles (from Rio, but living in SP), and Mauricio Azeredo, in Goiás. It was a generation that emerged in the 1980s using a language that continued valuing wood as a Brazilian material par excellence and giving continuity to the research into what Brazilian furniture would be. Sergio led the way and planted the seeds for things that others followed. Fernando Mendes de Almeida is an important name as a follower, as is Zanini de Zanine.

Zanini took an internship with Sergio and was beside him when he produced his first piece of furniture, a collapsible coffee table with a wooden base and glass top. "Taking an internship with Sergio for a year was like going back to college, an amazing experience, not only to learn more about his work, but to get to know him closely," said Zanini (<http://oglobo.globo.com/rio/design-rio-toque-artesanal-de-zanini-de-zanine-para-humanizar-pecas-13067039>).

Sergio, in turn, paid tribute to his friend Zanine's son: "Zanini de Zanine inherited all the artistic and artisan qualities, in addition to the moral and ethical virtues of his designer father. Zaninho, as I call him, served as an apprentice, but helped me as a veteran in my studio."

Adélia Borges believes Sergio has a unique place that is his alone. "He continued when many others discontinued: Tenreiro drifted off into the fine arts, Zanine and Lina Bo Bardi stayed in architecture. Sergio, meanwhile, remained in the furniture area creating very significant things. In the 1950s, he created the Mocho stool, the Mole armchair, in the 1970s Kilin. He was very fertile over the decades. Today, he is seen as the most fertile Brazilian designer. Added to that is the amount, quality, and the very specific pursuit for the expression of the Brazilian culture in furniture. This gave him a unique position in the Brazilian scene."

Fernando, on the path of the master

One of his "heirs," Fernando Mendes was his main collaborator. When he arrived in Rio, coming from São Paulo, to study Industrial Design at the School of Fine Arts, Fernando Mendes attended a lecture by Sergio Rodrigues. He was fascinated by what he saw and heard. He was introduced to Sergio a few months later, approached the master, and started making discreet visits to his office. He soon fell in love with the Kilin chair and then realized that his career would be linked forever to drawing and wood. And, later, he discovered that Sergio was a cousin of his on Sergio's mother's side.

Admiration led him to draw near to Sergio, who invited him to work at his office. The first job I did for him was in 1986. It was a prefabricated house mockup. For exactly seven years, from 1993 to 2000, he worked with Sergio, with architecture on wood and later, from 2002, making custom handmade furniture for the office, at the time when Fernando was a partner at Mendes-Hirth. Then, in his own studio, Fernando join Sergio again. At first, he used to make furniture that was not in Lin Brasil's industrial line, but after the contract with the factory was renewed, Fernando was given an award by his master: A license to manufacture 50 models of the collection of pieces created by Sergio, many of which as a relaunch of furniture that marked a period in the 1950s and 1960s.

A few pieces that had no commercial life because only one or two of them were created for customers in specific situations and were never made again will be reissued, for example, the Leif stool, that had been designed especially for a particular balcony. Other pieces, such as the Xibô and Tetê armchairs had prototypes completed years after they were created. These parts will be available on the market for the first time. The pieces were selected by the two and Fernando is gradually developing the production line.

While going through Sergio's collection, Fernando also made new discoveries, such as a chair Sergio had forgotten about and for which there wasn't even a prototype. It is now being manufactured at Fernando's workshop, in São Cristóvão, named after its discoverer: The Fernando chair.

Fernando learned Sergio's working method and developed a very unique way to work with him. "One time, Sergio was developing the project for Juarez Machado's apartment, who wanted to have three chairs made for a tea table, but based on the existing model of the little Tajá seat. Sergio wanted to make a few changes, substitute a flat seat for a curved one, remove a crossmember there was below it, thin the tips of the feet a bit. And he gave tips on how to do that over the phone. I suggested increasing the crossmember of the seat to strengthen the chair. Anyway, we did it over the phone." Based on the tips he got, Fernando understood what Sergio wanted. This chair, called Tajua (Ta because it was inspired by the Tajá chair, and Jua, for Juarez Machado), was made without a drawing. After it was ready, it was delivered straight to the customer, when Sergio saw it for the first time.

With the new mission of manufacturing Sergio's furniture, Fernando put his dream of "creating and doing" into practice. "To me, there is an inseparable link between creating and doing." To him, as for Sergio, knowledge of how to do is part of knowing how to design. "If some day I make a piece out of iron, I will have to visit a metalwork shop to learn how to cut, fold, which machine will be used, so on and so forth. A person may think about the plastic part, but does not know how the piece is made, so the docking solution, the ratio may be mistaken. If you take the arm of an Oscar, which is super delicate, full of nuances, relief, slots, hugely complex in terms of joinery, but if you know how to make it, you can imagine how you will develop it in each machine."

Fernando learned a lot from Sergio by inventing his own style, but never stopped following the footsteps of his master in the passion for the craft of creating and making Brazilian furniture.

Chapter 25

Recognition abroad and prizes

"We sold 14 pieces of the Diz armchair. The store had never sold so many pieces in a first exhibit." (Sergio Rodrigues)

In 2004, Sergio Rodrigues won his first solo exhibit abroad, more precisely in New York, at 25th Century, the Tribeca gallery. He was then 78 years old. The exhibit took place forty-three years after he won the 4th International Furniture Competition in Cantu, Italy. It was as if Sergio was being rediscovered, after his furniture had been a unique attraction at the Brazilian Interiors store, in Carmel, California, between 1966 and 1968, and after the Mole armchair became part of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) design collection, in New York, in 1974.

Two years after the exhibit, Sergio spoke with Folha de São Paulo reporter Mario Giola about how his work was appreciated outside of Brazil in an interview titled *Sergio Rodrigues, tropical designer* (<http://www1.folha.uol.com.br/fsp/ilustrad/fq0802200616.htm>) and remarked on the New York exhibition: "Three years ago, a group from New York that has an art gallery and sells antiques, which they call vintage, R 20th Century, came here to Rio. They already sold my pieces, pieces by Zanine [José Zanine Caldas, 1919-2001, a Bahia furniture designer], and pieces made by Tenreiro [Joaquim Tenreiro, 1906-1992]. They were raved about the new furniture made by Lin Brasil. They decided to take a few antique pieces and one I had just made. It was the Diz armchair, my last 'daughter.' I was and still am crazy for it. I was invited to an exhibit that they were going to make at Tribeca, where the gallery is located, with my furniture. When I got there, I saw the Diz armchair in the shop window. After a week, the shop owner told me excitedly that he had sold 14 pieces. We had never sold so many pieces in a first exhibit." They continued buying new pieces, and I continued making new designs."

Critics believe that Brazilianness was at the base of the interest Sergio always aroused outside of Brazil, and of the many articles published about his work in the international press. Another reason for this interest was the increasing appreciation of Brazilian design abroad. In fact, the Brazilian culture was gaining space in the international media and opening fronts in order to also increase interest in Brazil in general.

The São Paulo journalist Adélia Borges, who is specialized in Brazilian design, has a distinct feeling of this change and believes that, today, Brazil has another status in the universe of design creations. "In the 1980s, when I attended international trade shows and said I was a

Brazilian journalist, some of the booths would not give interviews, they would turn their backs saying Brazil was copycat. Factories that copied things done outside Brazil predominated in the country. Today, when I say I am Brazilian, I am seen with interest, respect, and curiosity. This interest in Brazilian design was greatly propelled by the Campana brothers, when they made an exhibition at MoMA, in New York. Since 1989, the Campanas had been producing on the artisanal scale: Things they designed and produced in very small amounts on their own. Then came a large Italian factory, Edra, which went on to produce and to divulge them. They became stars at the Milan furniture salon. At that time, two Brazilians dictated the trends. They paved the way to what was happening in Brazil as a whole. But Sergio's awards, in 1961, were a first moment of recognition."

In 1961, the Isa outfit, from Bergamo, Italy, started producing the Mole chair and renamed it Sheriff. And they divulged it a lot. This company went as far as giving the chair away as a gift to personalities of the time, such as Nikita Khrushchev and Pope Pius XII, President John Kennedy, and Queen Elizabeth. "Today, the world is more multicultural, with multidirectional exchanges and, thus, Brazilian design, which had no visibility at this time, had something to show," says Adélia.

In 1989, the whole of Sergio's work was granted the Lapiz de Plata Award at the Buenos Aires Architecture Biennial. In 1993, he took part in the Convegno Brasile - La Costruzione a Identita Culturale show, in Brescia, Italy, together with Zanine Caldas and Lucio Costa - it was called Furniture, Architecture and Urbanism. In 2004, he was the topic of the Sultan in the Studio solo exhibition, at the R20th Century gallery, in New York.

The following are a few awards Sergio was granted and exhibitions he took part in over his career:

Awards

- 4th International Furniture Competition in Cantu, Italy, first prize (1961)
- IAB award for the Kilin armchair (1975)
- 4th Movesp Furniture Design Award, São Paulo (1991)
- Design Award at the Casa Brasileira Museum: 1st place for the Diz armchair, in the furniture category (2006)
- Grand Master Medal of the Rio Branco Order, at the Itamaraty Palace, in Rio de Janeiro (2003)
- Lapiz de Plata Award - Buenos Aires
- 1st Móvel Brasil Product Development Awards, Santa Catarina (2009)
- Cultural Merit Order Medal, delivered by deputy governor Luiz Fernando Pezão, in Rio de Janeiro (2009).

Exhibitions

- 1982 - Design in Brazil: History and Reality - SESC/São Paulo
- 1984 - Chair: Evolution and Design - Casa Brasileira Museum, São Paulo, 1991 - Speaking about Chairs - Museum of Modern Art, Rio de Janeiro 1992 - Missing Brazil: The JK Era - Traveling Exhibition
- 1993 - Brasille93 - La Construzione Di Una Identità Culturale Exhibit - University of Brescia, Italy
- 1997 - Forty years of Mole - Rio Design Leblon, Rio de Janeiro
- 1998 - International Design Show - Method and industrialism - CCBB, Rio de Janeiro 2004 - Exhibition at R20th Century, New York
- 2007 - Furniture Exhibition at the Milan Fair, sponsored by LinBrasil. 2008 - Bienal Iberoamericana de Diseño - Madri, Spain
- 2008 - Brasil Casa Design - Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- 2008 - Time and Place: Rio de Janeiro 1956/1964 - Moderna Musset, Stockholm, Sweden
- 2009 - Brazil Influence - Brussels, Belgium.
- 2010 - Sergio Rodrigues: A Designer from the Tropics - Rio de Janeiro/Brazil
- 2012 - Sergio Rodrigues Exhibit - I am Rio, this bossa is ours, Fashion Rio, Rio de Janeiro (curatorship by Mari Stockler).

Chapter 26

An enlightened creator

Sergio left us as he reached the top of his creative verve

“May I have discovered the spirit of Brazilian furniture?” once asked the restless Sergio Rodrigues, after his Mole armchair was awarded. More than that, Sergio was able to translate the Brazilian soul into his furniture and to synthesize the way of being a “carioca,” as Rio de Janeiro natives are known. Easygoing, playful, an adept of informality, Sergio was always an open-hearted, unarmed boy. His mood contaminated his furniture and everyone around him.

“Until Sergio appeared, what ruled was furniture that forced people to sit with good manners and elegance. Sergio brought about complete informality and comfort. Mole embraces you, other pieces welcome you well and give you freedom to move,” said the journalist Adélia Borges.

Sergio left us as he reached the top of his creative verve. Were it not for the illness that took him early, while still creating and producing, we would yet today have the opportunity to experiment with his inventions, smart humor, and his passion for the craft he chose. As far back as the days of his store, Oca, in the 1950s and 1960s, master architect Lucio Costa was amazed at his dynamism: “Generous, instead of just celebrating his fabulous armchair, he remains active, he never stops.”

Sergio worked in many areas. He created 1,200 models of furniture. He designed pieces for offices, hotels, restaurants, gardens and homes, banks, and ministries. In Interior planning he designed settings, sets and created decoration, all in addition to his architectural work. He was the setting and decor editor for *Senhor* and *Joia* magazines, and wrote articles for numerous publications, including *Módulo* magazine.

He created for the Oca (from 1955 to 1968), Mobilínea (from 1961 to 1963), Meia-Pataca (from 1963 to 1968), Escala (1975) and Tenda Brasileira (1977) stores. In 1985, Sergio said that the trend in furniture would be to reduce it to the minimum and indispensable expression: Lightweight, practical, versatile, and inexpensive. One of his major contributions was to take interior design away from the realm of futile ideas and social status and put it within the field of culture.

When Sergio began, interior design was traditionally the stronghold of women, housewives, especially the richer ones who could decorate their homes. That was until Sergio went on to make a male professional contribution to an area dominated by amateur females. Men who were in architecture at that time cared very little about interiors. “Sergio was a male voice in the universe of interior decoration,” said Adélia Borges. “He is neither delicate or a mannerist. He is more incisive, rough, coarse, and this is not a negative evaluation. But that is his language. He gave up on the idea of the aesthetic beautification and embellishments.”

The researcher and critic Afonso Luz believes Sergio was able to approach a language of transition in international style, while he got a “modern Brazilian footprint that allowed him to create within it a full historical development.”

It was no coincidence that the international jury of the Cantu contest, in Italy, who granted his Mole the top prize, said that “(...) although it is not a copy or styling, this piece, created aiming at nothing other than to bring comfort and relaxation, blends indolence and Moorish sensuality that the fluffy cushions suggest, with the bravery of the people where crude leather represents protection against the harsh wilderness, nestled in a 17th century cot whose component robustness denote the plant wealth that characterizes a region, the North-Northeast, perspiring, unequivocally, the atmosphere of his home country, Brazil (...)”

Sergio’s biggest concern has always been with the human dimension of his creation. At a time when architecture predominated in the facade, Sergio thought about life “in there.” The furniture, he said, “is a key complement of architecture, pieces that define it, products that make up the architectural space in its interior.”

As is known, Sergio received many honors during his lifetime. In 1989, the whole of Sergio’s work was granted the Lapiz de Plata Award, at the Buenos Aires Architecture Biennial. In 1993, he participated in the Convegno Brasile - La Costruzione a Identita Culturale exhibit, in Brescia, Italy. In 2004, he was the subject of the Sultan in the Studio solo exhibition, at the R20th Century gallery, in New York, among other tributes.

Of the good memories he kept in his heart, during a 1985 interview granted to Casa e Jardim magazine he highlighted that he loved seeing the Mole chair as the only non-Scandinavian piece at Illums Bolighus, the design center in Copenhagen; he looked back fondly on taking a six-month internship in Brescia, Italy, at the factory belonging to designer Carlo Hauner, and was delighted to get a call from Oscar Niemeyer, who was calling from Milan, inviting him to arrange the settings for the home project he was designing for the Vice President of Brazil, in Brasília (which he ended up not doing).

Sergio was in love with his wife Vera Beatriz, loved having friends around, and enjoying a good meal in good company. He loved life with fervor. However, the death of his daughter Veronica, a partner of all hours at work and in life, stole the brightness from his eyes and made him depressed. Despite trying not to be down and maintain the humor that characterized

him, Sergio got weak during a treatment against tumor and left little more than two years after his daughter. He left behind welcoming homes and environments, illuminated by his talent, and an extensive and definitive work, an enormous pride for Brazilians.

Chapter 27

Preserving the memory

The Instituto Sergio Rodrigues organizes Sergio's collection and disseminates the master's work

Throughout his life, Sergio Rodrigues had never organized his work-related projects and documents. There was stuff scattered everywhere in the house at the Conde de Irajá Street, and in a few other places. Veronica, Sergio's daughter, felt it was important to collect all the material and organize it somehow. The exhibition held at the Mauá Pier, in January 2012, curated by Mari Stockler, lit the wick: Why not create an institute to preserve the memory of Sergio?

Soon after the exhibition, Sergio and his wife Vera Beatriz invited cultural manager Renata Aragão to coordinate the project. In October 2012, the Instituto Sergio Rodrigues was born, based in Rio de Janeiro, the land where the designer was born and lived most of his life, in the same house at Conde do Irajá street, where his office already worked. The goal was to preserve the master's collection and make it available in order for the public at large, but mainly students and researchers from Brazil and the world, to be able to get to know the whole of his work. Moreover, the idea was to promote and encourage knowledge and dialog about Brazilian architecture and design.

A non-profit organization, the Institute had Sergio as its honorary president until his death. Under the presidency of Vera Beatriz Rodrigues and the executive management of Renata Aragão, the Institute also has a trustee council composed of important names in the dissemination of Brazilian culture, among whom the journalist Adélia Borges, the critic and researcher Afonso Luz, and art director Mari Stockler, in addition to an advisory council which has among its members the architect Bel Lobo and designers Freddy van Camp and Tulio Mariante.

Several projects were carried out in 2014. The Institute has been organizing the master's entire collection, handling, cataloging, and digitizing drawings, projects and documents of his life, with sponsorship from Itaú Cultural. About 30,000 items have been inventoried of a collection that also includes work that is still unknown, little known sketches, and many references that explain his work to the Brazilian and international audiences. All of this material, taken from drawers and rolled out of tubes, will be available on the Institute's website and by means of a database intended for researchers.

In the year of its inception, the Institute celebrated six decades of Sergio's design launching the brand new Benjamin armchair, 60 units of which were made by hand at the Fernando Mendes workshop, in Rio de Janeiro. Two other events helped celebrate the master's work: Lin Brasil launched a special numbered and certified edition of the Mocho stool made of cabreúva wood, and a miniature Mocho stool pendant made of gold was conceived in partnership with the jeweler Antonio Bernardo.

The milestone of six decades of Sergio Rodrigues design was but the pretext for the creation of the Instituto Sergio Rodrigues, where he is still present in all of his vitality through the projects that have been stored and cataloged. Just as he is present in every piece and in every admirer of his work. His work is more than revealing of our culture, it is our culture itself translated into furniture and housing elements.

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Sergio Rodrigues in his office
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Laíse Rangel and Pedro Roitman | Minerva
DOC



INSTITUTO
SERGIO
RODRIGUES

Rua Conde de Irajá, 63, Botafogo

CEP 22271-020

Rio de Janeiro – RJ

instituto@institutosergiorodrigues.com.br

www.institutosergiorodrigues.com.br



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