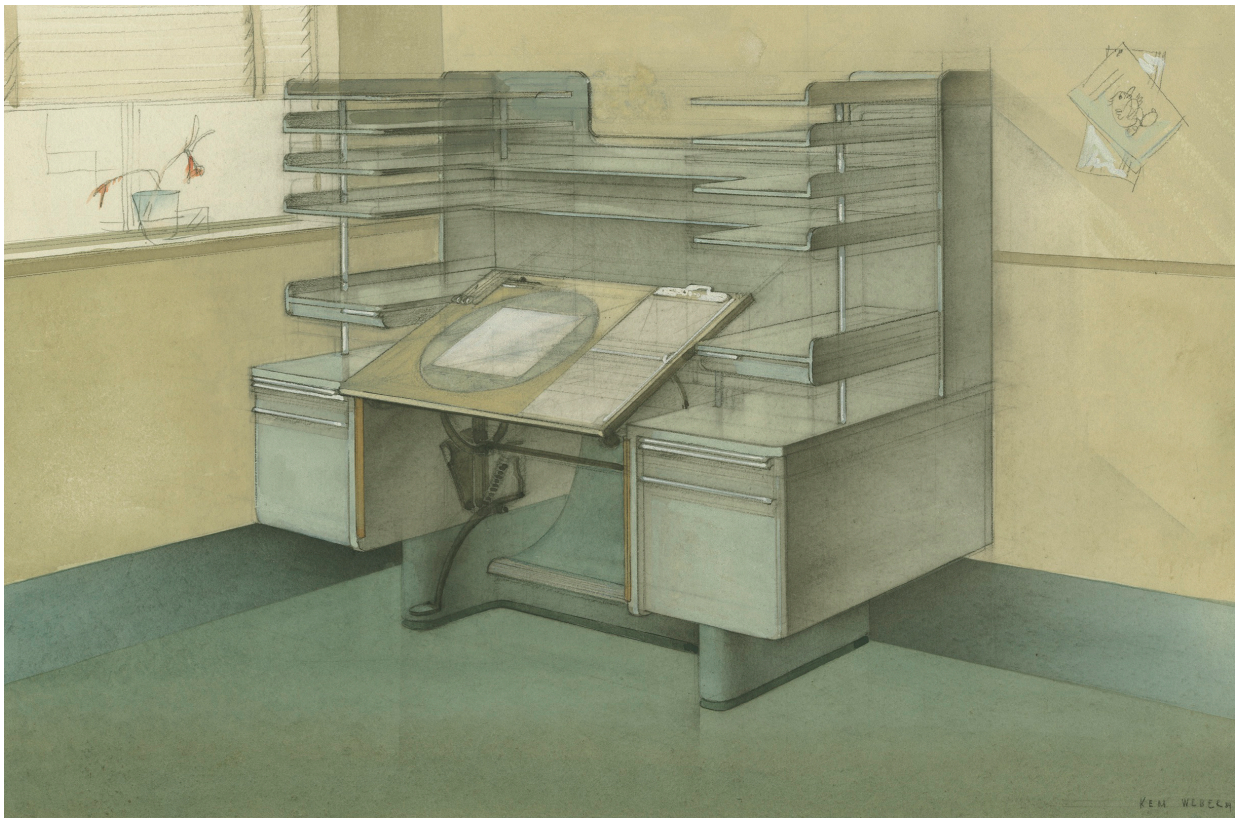


7 Things That You Didn't Know About the Disney Animation Furniture

By Dave Bossert

During the course of researching and writing [Kem Weber: Mid-Century Furniture Designs for the Disney Studios](#), I jotted down some interesting facts about the Disney Animation furniture. These are bits of information that, unless you spent years working on this furniture, you likely didn't know anything about. From the outset, most are unaware that Walt Disney had the most optimal animation furniture designed for use at the new studio he was building in 1939. Just like the pencils and brushes, the tools of the trade, his artists used to create the those animated masterpieces, the desks were in essence the toolboxes of the trade. So, unless you worked at Disney Animation, here is my list of 7 Things That You Didn't Know About the Disney Animation Furniture:



1. While the Studio was in production on *Pinocchio*, Walt asked Kem Weber to work with Frank Thomas, one of his top animators, on designing an efficient animation desk. A prototype of the Weber animation desk was built and Thomas animated on it to help work out and refine the design before the desks were mass produced. Pictured above is an early concept of the animation desk by Kem Weber. ©UCSB

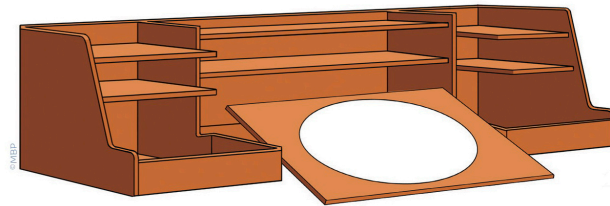


2. The metal drawer pulls on the Disney animation furniture are perfect bottle openers. Whether this was by design or a happy accident doesn't matter as many a beer bottle was opened using them. But, as societal norms have changed such frivolity has been curbed and in some cases frowned upon in the workplace.



Imaged by Heritage Auctions, HA.com

3. The deep drawers in the lower half of the desks, UNITS No. 14, 19, 1B, 2 and 2A were designed for deep storage. But, as studio legend has it, the drawer is the perfect height for a fifth of liquor standing in the drawer when closed. Note the bottle ring in the empty space where the deep draw should be on the lower right of the desk above. Certainly, this came in handy for imbibing in the afternoon, which was socially acceptable at work during that time period. Today, of course, there are likely no artists that are keeping liquor in their desk for fear of a visit by the HR representative.



4. The Weber animation desks were built in a modular design in which there were several different upper and lower units that could be mixed and matched. This was an ingenious way of allowing the artists to customize their desks and it was ahead of its time in terms of modular furniture construction. The Weber animation desks took on an almost mythic status with newer artists laying claim to desks that had belonged to Disney animation legends. Some even felt that the patinaed desks emitted an aura of those who had previously occupied the furniture.



5. Weber first started experimenting with the Airline Chair with a 1929 prototype. He wanted an affordable modern chair that could be carried home in a box and assembled by the consumer in minutes. He was years ahead of IKEA. By 1935, Weber had perfected his design but it was the depth of the Great Depression and he could not get traction on selling these chairs to the masses. But, when he got the Disney Studio project, Weber was able to convince Walt Disney to purchase 200 of these chairs for his new studio complex. In all, only about 300 of these chairs were ever made. The Studio still has about 125 left, the other 75 may have “walked away” over the years.



6. It was common for employees to smoke at the office and more than fifty-percent of the U.S. population were smokers in 1940. At the Hyperion Studio, artists frequently would lay a lit cigarette on the edge of their desk as they drew and flipped their animation, which required two hands. In between drawings, they'd pick up the cigarette to take a drag off it and put it back on the edge of the desk or in an ashtray. But, sometimes the cigarette burned the top of the desk. This was frequent enough that a “Cigarette

Protector” was added to the Weber animation desks at the new Burbank studio to prevent burns to the furniture surface. The cigarette protector was a two-and-half-inch wide strip of stainless steel that had a quarter-inch lip on it that was screwed to the desk on either side of the drawing board for the regular animation desk and on the right side for the modified or compact animator’s desk.



7. Contrary to popular belief, the Weber designed animation furniture for Disney was not built on the Studio lot. All of the Disney animation furniture was built by the Petersen Show Case & Fixture Co., Inc. This was a commercial furniture and display company located on San Pedro Street near downtown Los Angeles. According to a Disney purchase order, Petersen had ninety days to manufacture the furniture for delivery on or about December 13, 1939. Pictured above is (LtoR) Kem Weber, Howard Petersen, and Walt Disney. ©UCSB

Most studios, including Disney in the early years, used makeshift office desks with drawing boards and animation discs sitting on top of them. The Disney studios were the first and only to make a real effort in designing animation furniture with input from the artists that worked on it. There are many more stories associated with the Disney animation furniture in my latest book, [Kem Weber: Mid-Century Furniture Designs for the Disney Studios](#). Included are concept paintings of early designs, photos and interviews with some of the animation legends that work on these desks.

KEM WEBER

MID-CENTURY FURNITURE DESIGNS
FOR THE DISNEY STUDIOS



DAVID A. BOSSERT

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About the Author:

David A. Bossert is an award-winning artist, filmmaker, and author. He is a veteran of The Walt Disney Company and is now an independent producer, creative director, and writer. He has contributed his talents to such films as *The Little Mermaid*, *Beauty and the Beast*, *Aladdin*, *Lion King*, *Pocahontas*, *Who Framed Roger Rabbit*, *Tim Burton's The Nightmare Before Christmas*, *Hercules*, *Fantasia/2000* and the Academy Award-nominated shorts *Lorenzo*, *Runaway Brain*, and Disney/Dali short film *Destino*. See a full list of his credits at IMDb.com. Bossert is considered an authority and expert on Disney and animation history. He has written numerous articles, liner notes, and concert program essays related to animation, music, and early film history. He co-authored *Disney Animated*, which was named iPad App of 2013 by Apple and won a prestigious British Academy of Film and Television Arts (BAFTA) award. Bossert is the author of six books including his latest, [*Kem Weber: Mid-Century Furniture Designs for the Disney Studios*](#). Learn more at www.davidbossert.com