

# Entering a new reality: Herman Miller in the virtual world

Herman Miller has joined the online, interactive, three-dimensional virtual world of Second Life.

At NeoCon, the company let visitors preview its presence in this new world, and on October 8 officially opened the doors to its new site within Second Life, where it's making a collection of famous designs available to those "residents" who visit the Herman Miller Real Goods virtual retail store on Avalon Island.



Second Life is host to the digitally rendered homes and facilities of millions of residents from over 100 countries. It's attracting an ever-expanding number of organizations, businesses, educational institutions, and brands.

## 'Get Real' virtually

Building on its earlier and successful "Get Real" campaign in the real world, aimed at combating unauthorized knockoffs of its designs, Herman Miller is offering both products and information to virtual-world consumers and businesses.

It's expected these new and beautifully rendered editions of the work of Charles and Ray Eames, George Nelson, Isamu Noguchi, Bill Stumpf, Don Chadwick, Studio 7.5, and Yves Behar will replace the knockoffs that some outlets have been selling to Second Life residents. Herman Miller is making its designs available at no cost to consumers and organizations who earlier purchased virtual knockoffs.

"The initial response has been great," says Maryln Walton, who has led the Herman Miller Virtual World launch team, which includes Karen Hapner, Dick Holm, Christine Morse, Julia Lyons, Rob Richardson, Mark Schurman, Ken Williamson, and Marcus Zidek. "We've received a lot of positive feedback from Second Life residents and a lot of positive press from the media and bloggers."

Initial traffic to the site has been vigorous, with over 800 visitors and 1,800 virtual Aeron chairs being purchased or exchanged for knockoffs in the first week alone.

"This is a wonderful opportunity for people and businesses in the virtual world to enjoy great, authentic design, from the company that commissioned and collaborated with some of the world's greatest industrial designers," says Marg Mojzak, director of Herman Miller for the Home. ▶

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“For some time we’ve urged customers to ‘check the product, check the source, and check your conscience’ before purchasing a classic. We’re bringing that same message to Second Life, and in the virtual world people will be able to own and enjoy them for pocket change.” For example, a virtual Aeron chair costs L\$500 (Linden dollars), the real-world equivalent of about \$1.85.

### Real Herman Miller

The collection includes 15 original Herman Miller pieces (many of them available in an array of colors and finishes) from residential and office seating to sofas, tables, and even lighting. All of the designs are digitally labeled, identifying them as “Real Herman Miller.” Each highly detailed, authentic-looking design was modeled from scratch by Rivers Run Red, a London-based firm that has worked closely with Herman Miller on the project.

Visitors to the Herman Miller Real Goods virtual retail store can browse or buy the virtual designs, gather more detailed information via links to product pages on [HermanMiller.com](http://HermanMiller.com), or link to a real-world listing of retailers and commercial dealers where they can purchase the actual pieces for home or office. ▶



### So, what is Second Life?

Second Life is an interactive, participative community, a 3-D virtual world entirely created by its residents, whose personas (called “avatars”) can travel at will throughout it.

It’s an evolution of the Internet, a new kind of human habitat where people form relationships, network, and conduct business. It’s a virtual world that engages real audiences. Second Life participants learn, collaborate, create, experiment, and join in individual and group activities.

Interest and participation in it are growing fast, with millions of individual residents and literally thousands of corporations, educational institutions, and other organizations represented.

Begun in 2003 by San Francisco-based Linden Labs, Second Life has its own currency, Linden dollars, which its residents use to buy and sell virtual land, services, clothes, and furniture, among other things. The exchange rate for one U.S. dollar is about 275 Linden dollars.

### Getting there

Easy access to the Herman Miller Real Goods store can be had through [www.hermanmiller.com/virtualworld](http://www.hermanmiller.com/virtualworld). Existing Second Life residents can then link directly to the virtual store. First-time users can link to Second Life to download the free enabling software, create their avatar, and begin their exploration of virtual space.

If you choose to sign up as a Second Life resident, you must do so from home due to Second Life security requirements; when you sign up from home you can use either your work or home computer.

Not all Herman Miller computers are suited for optimal viewing within Second Life; this will be evident if Second Life doesn’t run smoothly, or at all, on your computer.

Herman Miller's interest in the virtual world goes well beyond brand building, the protection of intellectual property, or any revenue from the sales of virtual design. In fact, the company's exploration of virtual worlds began within its Future Insight Group, a focused team within Research and Development charged with exploring emerging trends and technologies, and their implications both for global society and Herman Miller's business. The researchers believed that Herman Miller needed to be actively involved in the virtual world space.



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“By early 2007 there was clear evidence that virtual worlds were rapidly growing phenomena with staying power,” says Walton, who was then the program lead for the company's Future Insight Group. “The interactive, visual experience offered a compelling new form of self-expression, communication, and social networking that was globally accessible. In combination with the emerging use of virtual reality among businesses and other organizations for distance-free collaboration and learning, it was clear this was about both serious work and play.”

The company formed an exploratory team that began to review virtual worlds in detail. Among its findings were the significant numbers of enterprises actively using the technology to further their organizational missions, including educational institutions and major companies.

Many of these are building and furnishing virtual interior spaces to support their work, and Herman Miller is preparing to make groupings of virtual furniture available for use in their Second Life settings.

Herman Miller also has its own separate island on Second Life and is exploring ways to develop and utilize it for educational, collaborative, and knowledge-sharing purposes. 🗣️

