

# ANALYZING AND INTERPRETING THE IMPORTANCE OF SET DESIGN CHOICES IN MODERN CINEMA

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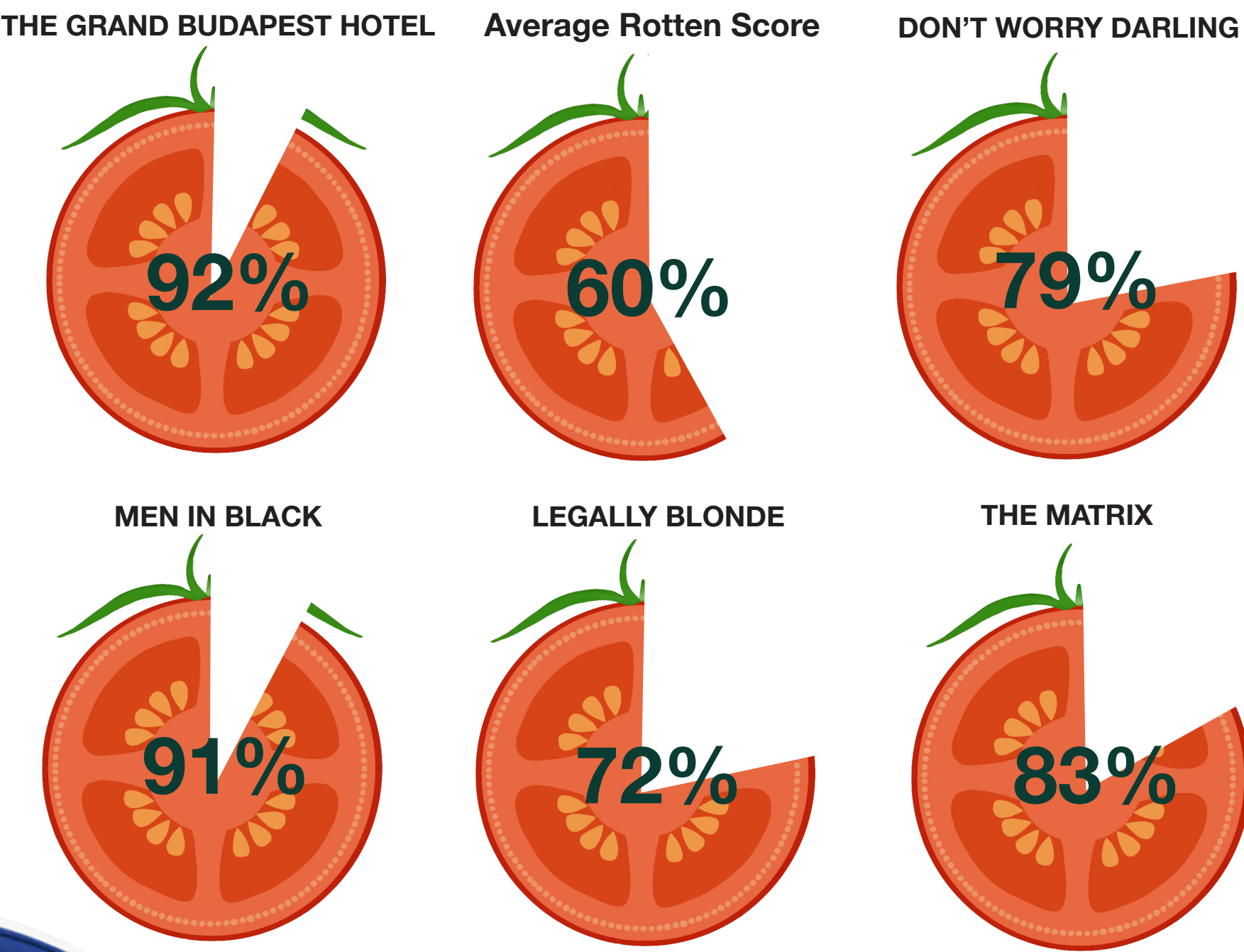
## ABSTRACT

A **precedent** is something that came before. Every furniture piece used in the world today is here due to something that came before it, and therefore based on a precedent. Whether the precedent was used as inspiration or as an additive or subtractive starting point, replicated there is always a reason and a precedent. When it comes to set design, choosing a piece that fits historically with the time period that the film is set in and carries additional, often subliminal, plot-related meaning is crucial. While all furniture has precedents, chairs are among the most recognizable, especially when used in film and TV sets. Studies have shown that there is a **positive correlation** between award-winning set/production design and **higher audience scores**. How a film is perceived and performs coincides with the ability to make the audience feel as though they're immersed in a world that isn't their own—through excellence in set design, which involves a deep understanding of precedence. Often the set becomes the **silent character** in the film or show. The purpose of this research is to analyze iconic set design through the lens or precedent, considering why the director and set/production designer made the choices they did. This research is grounded in **auteur theory**, which posits that the director is the auteur (major creative force) of the film output, and the set/production designer is the auteur of the physical (set) output; both auteurs exercise agency over choice of precedent and layers of meaning ascribed to the scenes and the set. This poster will showcase portions of UGRF work output, including a magazine more fully unpacking these concepts.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

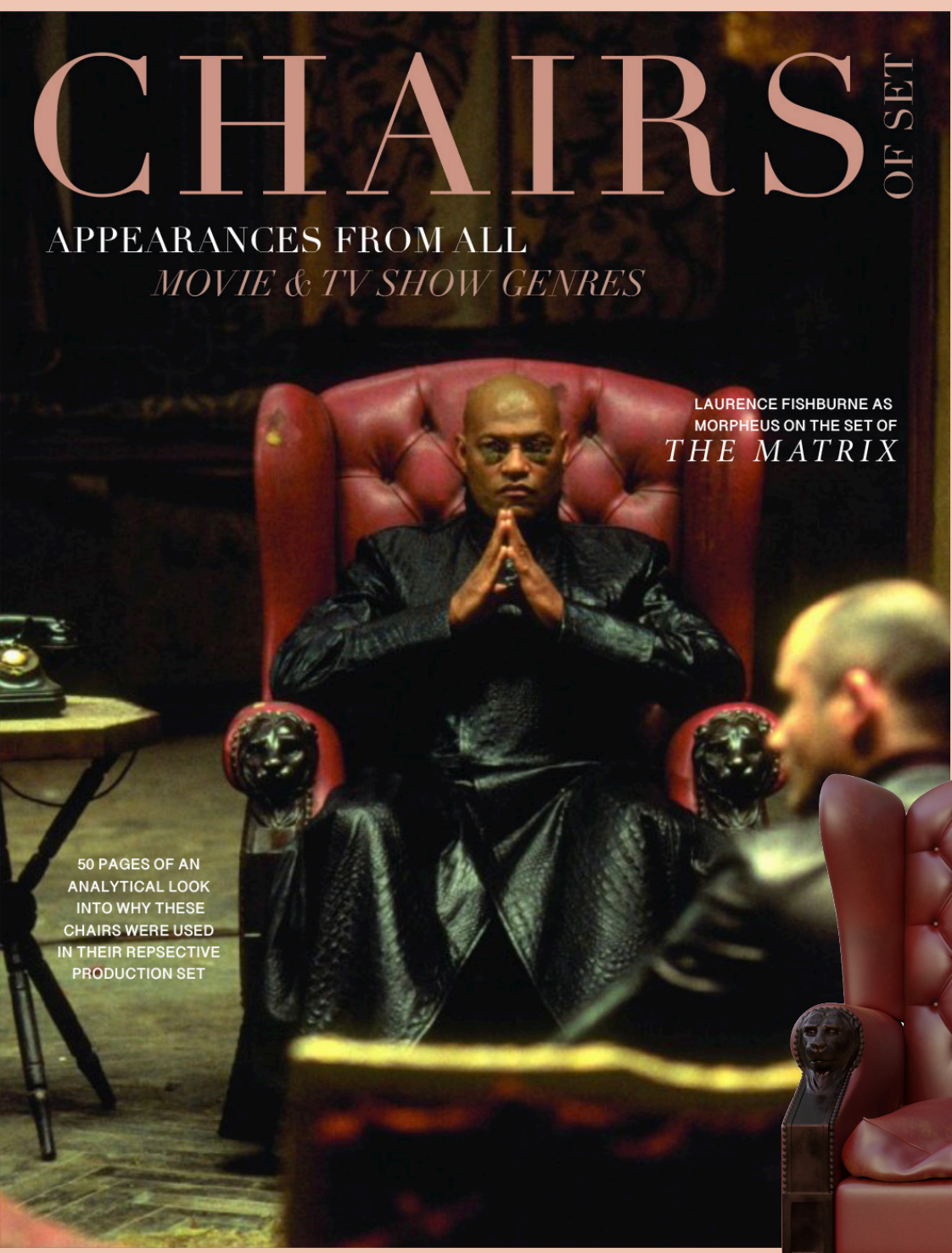
The average rotten tomatoes score by the audience in 2019 was **62%**, and anything under **60%** is considered “rotten” (*About Rotten Tomatoes*). **Don't Worry Darling** scored **79%**, and their set (Rachel Ferreira) and production (Katie Byron) designer won “Best Achievement in Decor/Design of a Science Fiction or Fantasy Feature Film.” Glass Onion: **A Knives Out Mystery** – Elli Griff (Set Decoration); Rick Heinrichs (Production Design) won Best Achievement in Decor/Design of a Contemporary Feature Film and scored a whopping **92%** rating. **The Grand Budapest Hotel** received an Oscar for Production Design, and also scored a **92%** on Rotten Tomatoes. Adam Stockhausen, who won the production design Oscar for The Grand Budapest Hotel, is one of the best known production designers, and **13/19** of his films are above 60% on rotten tomatoes. How a film is perceived and performs coincides with its ability to make the audience feel as though they're immersed in a world that isn't their own. Through being immersed, the set design speaks further about what the actors can't express. According to **DMI (Design Management Institute)**, companies with a strong design have outperformed companies with a weak design by **228%** on the S&P Index (Standard and Poor's Stock Market Index) for over **10 years**. Set designers have the ability to make or break movies, and most, if not all, of the highest-grossing movies have had a recognized and talented set designer. Rick Carter, Roy Walker, John DeCuir, and Dean Tavoularis, whose works include iconic films like “**Back to the Future II and III**,” “**The Shining**,” “**Ghostbusters**,” and “**The Godfather**,” respectively, further solidify their pivotal role in cinematic history. Many of these films are not only commercial successes but also hold esteemed positions on **IMDb's top 250** movie list, as revered by viewers worldwide.

## ROTTEN TOMATOES



Tomatoes drawn and developed by Darby Huber to represent the statistic of audience ratings in accordance to Rotten Tomatoes scorings.

## "CHAIRS OF SET"



Red Leather Wingback

Cover of Booklet Developed by Darby Huber



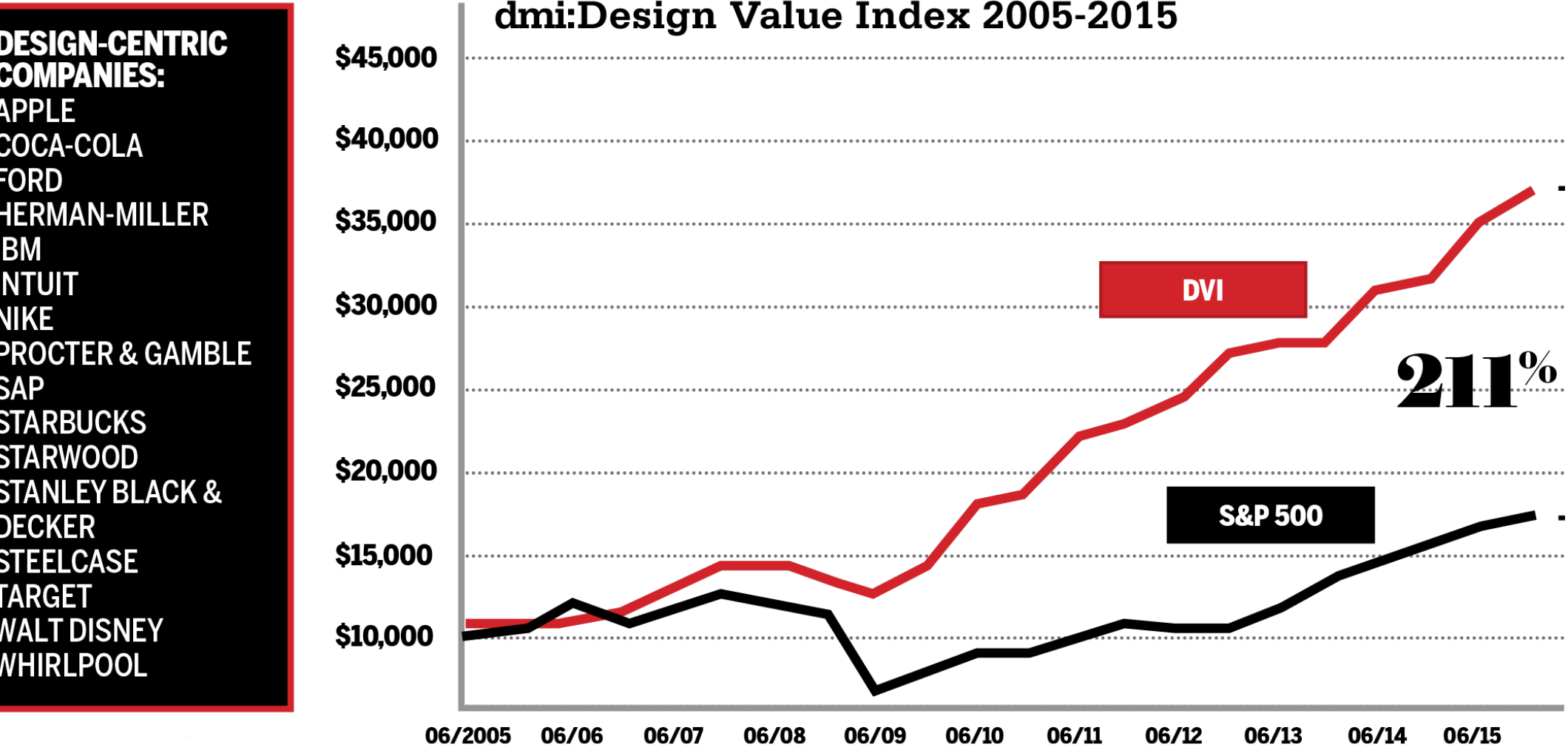
Magazine Spread Developed by Darby Huber

## WHAT IS INTERIOR (AND SET) DESIGN

Interior design transcends mere aesthetics; it possesses the power to facilitate **rapid healing**, **foster thriving individuals**, and **cultivate happiness**. It acts as a nurturing force, igniting inspiration, and instilling encouragement. It encompasses elements such as biophilia, sustainability, LEED certifications, ADA requirements, and stringent safety standards tailored to diverse environments. There've been multiple studies on the positive effects that nature and views have on the healing of individuals in healthcare spaces. One study found that during recovery after surgery, more negative notes were made on patients that had the brick wall view, **3.96** per patient compared to **1.13** per patient with the trees in their view (Ulrich, 1984). So why is it important that we understand the importance of set design? Understanding the significance of set design is paramount; it parallels the importance of home design but extends to cinema and audience engagement. Just as a well-designed home reflects **intentionality**, set design must as well, influencing the **success and relevance** of a production. Consider a show set in the 1980s with a modern-day aspect; its design choices must be deliberate to avoid **undermining** the show's credibility. Design, like any profession, demands thoughtful consideration and purposeful execution—not an afterthought. This attention to detail is what distinguishes exceptional productions and **garners acclaim**. Every aspect of design matters more than what's commonly perceived.



## STOCK MARKET INDEX



First ever “Womb Chair” created by Eero Saarinen at Florence Knoll's request for “a chair that was like a basket full of pillows”. Flash forward to 2001, on the set of Legally Blonde, where this chair is seen in Elle Woods' dorm at Harvard in bright pink.



Magazine Spread Developed by Darby Huber

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Set design in film and television is not just about aesthetics; it is a **deliberate and integral** aspect of storytelling that influences audience perception and engagement. Just as interior design shapes environments to foster well-being, set design immerses viewers in worlds that transcend reality, enhancing their emotional connection to the narrative. Understanding the importance of set design allows for the creation of meaningful and impactful cinematic experiences. By analyzing iconic set designs through the lens of **precedence and auteur theory**, we can appreciate the intentional choices made by directors and designers to convey layers of meaning within each scene. The success of films with award-winning set design underscores the significance of this craft, demonstrating its ability to elevate the production, plot, and cohesion, leaving a **lasting impression** on audiences. Through meticulous attention to detail and a deep understanding of the role of precedent, set designers have the power to shape cinematic history and create **immersive worlds that captivate and inspire viewers worldwide**.

## Barcelona Chair



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