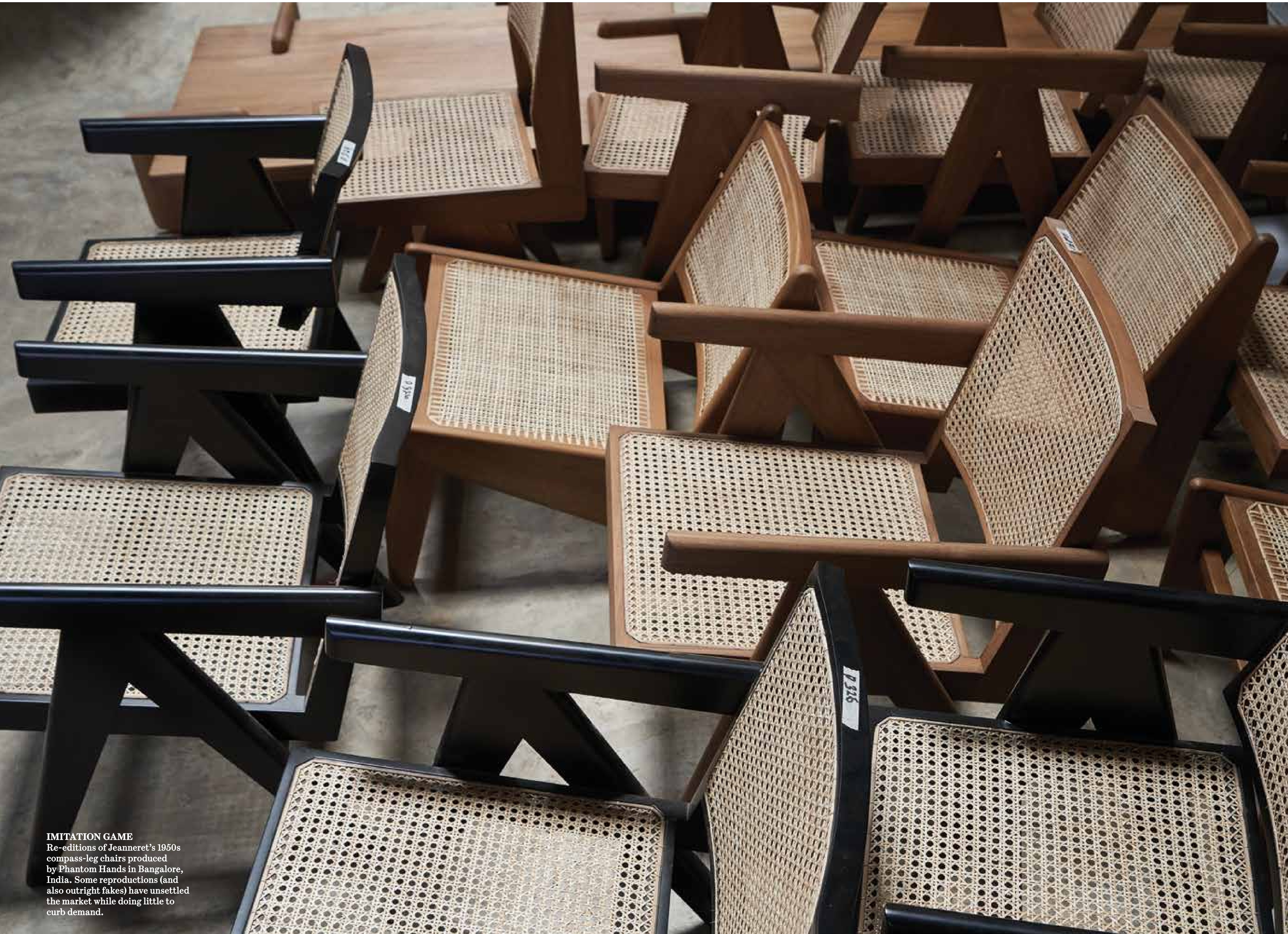


IMITATION GAME
Re-editions of Jeanneret's 1950s compass-leg chairs produced by Phantom Hands in Bangalore, India. Some reproductions (and also outright fakes) have unsettled the market while doing little to curb demand.

Will The Real Jeanneret Please Stand Up?

Navigating the turbulent market for Pierre Jeanneret's Chandigarh furniture.

BY SARAH MEDFORD
PHOTOGRAPHY BY MARTIEN MULDER

WHILE SWIPING through images on an iPad, interior designer Billy Cotton recalls the process of hunting down furnishings for the project on-screen, a family home he's finishing up not far from his office in downtown Brooklyn. A banquette stretching to diving-board length slides by, followed by a cluster of '50s chairs against a wall of abstract paintings. In the living room, a cube-shaped fireplace is flanked by a pair of vintage armchairs by the Swiss architect Pierre Jeanneret, their teak frames blanketed in loden green cowhide. When he gets to a shot of the study, Cotton stops. He pinches and zooms to highlight a desk the color of butterscotch with compass-style legs: another piece by Jeanneret.

"The first time I saw it in person was on the jobsite, during installation," Cotton says, explaining that the desk had been purchased online and warehoused until the house was renovated. "I looked at it and I immediately said, 'That is a fake. We've been screwed.'"

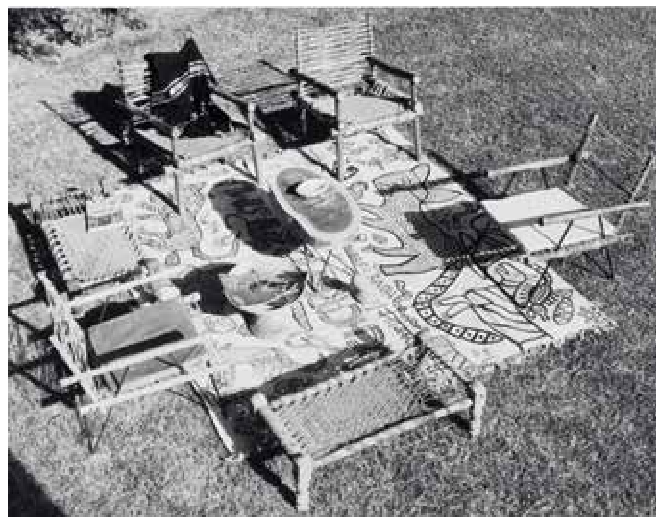
The chairs, purchased from a European dealer, had passed muster, but the desk was another story. "There was a perfect angularity to it," Cotton says. "And that's the thing—those pieces were not perfect. The joints were made by hand; they're not exact. On the underside, the wood was just too uniform. And the finish was too new. It had a little patina to it—it looked like maybe vintage '70s." After explaining the problem to his client, Cotton forced the vendor to replace the desk. "It was a very touchy situation," he says.

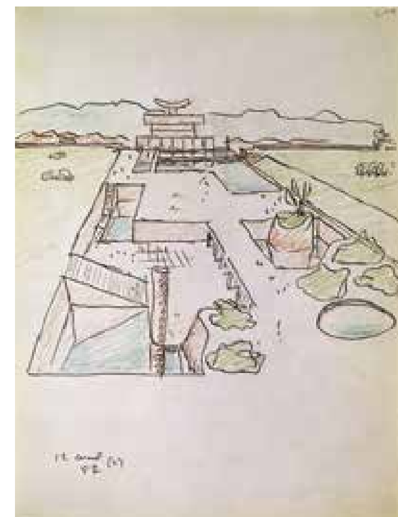
As a quick online search lays bare, furniture identified as "Jeanneret" is only a few clicks away, priced anywhere from $360 for a cane-seated armchair to as much as $109,000 for a library table. What you pay depends on where you shop and what you think you're buying. Over the past two decades, a certain subset of furniture by Jeanneret—designed in the 1950s and early 1960s for Chandigarh, a utopian city in Punjab, India—has evolved from cultural curiosity to collector's trophy to social-media love object, which in turn has led to rampant copying.

Online, the differences between real, passing-for-real and deliberate knockoff are obscured: All three categories can become indistinguishable in the immersion blenders of Instagram and Pinterest. Original or not, the work appears earnest and modern and decidedly handmade—the current coordinates for fashionable furniture around the world.

Reproductions have unsettled the market recently, but they've done little to slow global demand. If anything, the heightened visibility of pieces from Chandigarh has jacked up interest to the point where it's nearly impossible to flip through a decorating magazine in New York, Hong Kong or Rio without coming across a pair of the architect's cane-seated chairs. Raf Simons has furnished his Antwerp living room with them. Larry Gagosian has dotted them around his St. Barts home. Various members of the Kardashian/Jenner/West brigade have paraded them on social media. One could even say that Jeanneret (1896–1967), who spent most of his career in the shadow of his more renowned cousin, the architect Charles-Édouard Jeanneret (aka Le Corbusier), is verging on real-world fame. Le Corbusier may have created the master plan for the Capitol Complex in Chandigarh, now a Unesco World Heritage site, but his quiet relative has since put it on the map.

Some of the best advertisements for Jeanneret's Chandigarh furniture appear under the





ORIGIN STORY Clockwise from top left: A Chandigarh resident in a V-leg chair; heaps of Chandigarh pieces, seen here in a still from Amie Siegel's 2013 film, *Provenance*; a Le Corbusier drawing of Chandigarh; Le Corbusier (left) and Jeanneret; Chandigarh pieces at Galerie Patrick Seguin; Jeanneret's experimental designs for himself.

Instagram hashtag of French architect and designer Joseph Dirand. The minimalist behind Midtown Manhattan's new restaurants Le Jardinier and Shun, the Surf Club in Miami and several popular Paris *boîtes*—Loulou, Monsieur Bleu—lives with Jeanneret's work himself and has deployed it repeatedly in residential projects, such that it's become a signature. "In my home, it is everywhere—my dining chairs are Jeanneret, my table is Jeanneret, my desk is Jeanneret, the armchairs too," Dirand says. "And in my office. Sometimes on Instagram people find this furniture because of me—and sometimes they find me because of this furniture," he adds with amusement. "And now people connect my work to those objects."

As a teenager and budding Le Corbusier obsessive, Dirand visited Chandigarh to see the Capitol Complex, an assemblage of buildings and monuments shaped by the master out of reinforced concrete. He assumed that Le Corbusier had designed their contents. He tried to buy a few chairs on the spot but was told it would be complicated because they were owned by the Indian government. When the furniture surfaced in Paris years later, Dirand began buying it from dealers, as he still does today.

Jeanneret's faddishness—and overexposure—doesn't bother him. "I'm a collector," he explains. "I love these objects—they are historical. Not a fashion or a trend. I don't care. What they represent in terms of architectural history is my interest." Dirand says his passion for the work stems from its "archaeology of modernism," which he describes as a conjunction of postwar industrialization and ancient craft. Jeanneret's design language was brought into being by individual craftsmen wielding hand tools, and the crudely painted or stenciled building codes that often mark a piece ("HCS/CT.18," for instance, shorthand for "High Court Secretariat Coffee Table number 18") just add to the mystique.

"Each piece is unique," Dirand goes on. "The same, but different. Which brings another layer of poetry."

Conservative estimates put the original production of Chandigarh furniture at roughly 30,000 pieces, but the number is devilishly difficult to pin down because the most common models were produced continuously for almost 30 years—and then as needed, when a shelf's joints loosened or a chair's cane seat blew out. Within the past decade, inmates at the central jail in Chandigarh have made new batches of chairs. Authenticating the objects is also no easy task. "If Jeanneret lived to be a thousand, they couldn't make that much furniture," says Reed Krakoff, a longtime art and design collector and the chief artistic officer of Tiffany & Co. Krakoff admires Jeanneret's Chandigarh material; 12 years ago, he bought a major-league library table at Sotheby's that he still loves and uses. But he's lost trust in the market. "I know for a fact there are people still making this furniture," he says pointedly. "And they'll leave it out in the rain for a year so it looks old if you want that."

Tales of chicanery and back-room dealing have dogged the high-end furniture market for centuries. Joseph Duveen, the son of a decorative arts dealer, was a wily British promoter of old master paintings to American tycoons; he peddled suspect tapestries and other less-than-pedigreed furnishings on the side. In 2016, a scandal erupted in the 18th-century French furniture market when Paris dealer Bill G.B. Pallot was accused of overseeing the forgery of four armchairs later sold into the collection of the Palace of Versailles; he was exposed by the use of black licorice as a dirt-mimicking glaze. (On advice from his lawyers, Pallot declined to comment until his case has gone to trial.) As the prices for 20th-century design have escalated, so have rumors of fakes muddying the market. Works by some of today's top-selling designers have been called into question—including Louis Comfort Tiffany, Serge Mouille, Charlotte Perriand, Jacques Adnet, Jean Royère, Diego Giacometti—at least behind closed doors. Disputes of authenticity rarely go public, especially at the higher end of the market, since the potential for embarrassment on the buyer's part usually outweighs the desire for payback. Where do the fakes go? Traded on with the rest of a collection, experts say, a good deal of the time.

Not all copying is done with duplicitous intent. In 18th-century England, cabinetmakers Thomas Chippendale and Thomas Sheraton each published illustrated pattern books of their designs, disseminating them to the American colonies and beyond. Today the terms "Chippendale" and "Sheraton" are applied both to works attributed to and styles popularized by these men. Before and since, sampling has been a constant in the design trade, with or without a published pattern book. Among a certain caliber of decorators, it's common practice to fabricate furniture that mimics a sought-after style and solves a particular design problem: a wood slab dining table in the manner of Perriand scaled up to seat 12, say, or a serpentine sofa referencing Vladimir Kagan but with better lumbar support. Some deep-pocketed retailers have taken this kind of quotation to wildly profitable ends.

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: © STUDIO INDIANO. ARCHIVES GALERIE 54, PARIS; AMIE SIEGEL PROVENANCE (STILL) 2013 HD VIDEO, 40 MINS, COLOR/SOUND COURTESY OF THE ARTIST AND SIMON PRESTON, NEW YORK; ALAMY STOCK PHOTO; PIERRE JEANNERET FONDS CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE GIFT OF JACQUELINE JEANNERET; COURTESY GALERIE PATRICK SEGUIN; PIERRE JEANNERET FONDS CANADIAN CENTRE FOR ARCHITECTURE GIFT OF JACQUELINE JEANNERET

For a designer or foundation, shutting down traffic in outright fakes can be like holding back the ocean. Stools and daybeds designed by Perriand in the 1950s have been copied without permission for years, according to the lawyer for Perriand's estate, Dominique de Leusse. He says that the costs of taking legal action against fakes are so onerous that most of his clients don't bother. "It's so easy to order through the internet; you don't even know where it's coming from or who is selling," he says by phone from his office in Paris's 8th arrondissement. "It's almost the same with the other French luxury goods—Cartier, Hermès, Louis Vuitton."

De Leusse is well-versed in the minutiae of France's intellectual property rights laws. They date back to 1791, though legal protection of authorship in furniture design wasn't formalized until 1957, when a law passed stating that work is safeguarded from the moment of its inception. De Leusse has spent close to 40 years consulting with the Le Corbusier Foundation, and about three decades ago he was hired by Jacqueline Jeanneret, Pierre Jeanneret's niece and his closest surviving relative, to look after some of the architect's legal affairs. (When she died in the winter of 2018, her two daughters stepped into her role.) De Leusse has helped place the Jeanneret archive at the Canadian Centre for Architecture, in Montreal, and he keeps a weather eye on the market for knockoffs. While the family has given up on combating every fake, he says, "they will take great care and [pay] great attention to any large company who may try to manufacture and sell it under the 'Pierre Jeanneret' name. Pierre Jeanneret is a trademark.

"I think they didn't realize the treasure they had in their hands," he admits. "Actually, the treasure they had in intellectual property—the real treasures were in the dealers' hands."

WITH THE exception of Le Corbusier, who had a habit of referring to himself in the third person, members of the Jeanneret family seem to have cultivated an air of self-effacement. Pierre Jeanneret was nine years younger than his mercurial cousin, and he followed Le Corbusier from his hometown of Geneva to Paris, taking a partnership position in his studio in 1922. The elder architect relied on the younger's technical skills and ability to work with builders and engineers to realize his ideas. In letters, he referred to Jeanneret as his best friend and insisted they sign off on plans using both their names. But the hierarchy was clear.

During World War II, Le Corbusier's decision to collaborate with France's Vichy government caused a decade-long rift between the two men, and Jeanneret had to be persuaded (by his former lover Charlotte Perriand, among others) to join Le Corbusier's team in Chandigarh when an invitation was extended in 1950. Already on board were the British couple Maxwell Fry and Jane Drew, who brought valuable experience from civic construction projects in sub-Saharan Africa. Jeanneret hesitatingly agreed to oversee the architecture office in the still-nonexistent city, while Le Corbusier would jet in several times a year, an arms-length arrangement that ended up working well for both.

Jeanneret fell in love with India and its people. He stayed on in Chandigarh for 13 years, well beyond the scope of his initial commitment, and was appointed head of the Chandigarh College of Architecture in the early 1960s. When his health began to falter in 1965, he moved to Geneva, where he died two years later. His ashes were scattered over Chandigarh's Lake Sukhna.

"Chandigarh really became the ground and the field for Pierre to express his own ideas in architecture," says Maristella Casciato, head of architectural collections at the Getty Research Institute and a Jeanneret specialist. While Le Corbusier took on the city's master plan and the heroic structures of the capitol complex, he left the better part of the city to Jeanneret and his team (with the exception of the municipal manhole covers: Le Corbusier's 1951 design, featuring the city's grid, now trades at auction for about $20,000). Casciato estimates that Jeanneret designed hundreds of buildings between 1951 and 1965, from schools, apartment houses and other essential infrastructure to major monuments (the Gandhi Bhawan is considered a masterpiece). The furniture was an extension of the architecture.

"Jeanneret was really an intellectual, a poet, somebody very pure," says François Laffanour of Galerie Downtown in Paris, one of the principal dealers for Chandigarh furnishings. "In photographs, he was never dressed up the way Le Corbusier was. He was very often in short pants, without shoes, sitting in a very simple chair. And if you look at the furniture he created, it's the result of this simplicity, this spirit." Similarities between Chandigarh furniture and the work of the Shakers—both conceived, says Laffanour, out of a sense of social responsibility that led to radically reductive forms—are clear to him. "Making things to be happy and comfortable," he says of Jeanneret's approach. "That was it."

Le Corbusier and Jeanneret were both steeped in the modernist philosophy of building affordably for the masses. Guided by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's vision for a new and independent India, Jeanneret assembled a team of young Indian-born architects and builders who would learn the principles of European modernism on the job. The exchange went both ways: Jeanneret immersed himself in their culture, studying precolonial crafts and getting a grip on the Punjabi language as best he could. When Le Corbusier visited in 1951, the two explored nearby villages by car, stopping to sketch (Le Corbusier) and photograph (Jeanneret) before returning to the temporary camp where each had a small house.

Among the earliest pieces created for Chandigarh were a few rather staid upholstered chairs, several tables and a desk, all destined for the government offices of the capitol complex. These were technically collaborations between Le Corbusier and Jeanneret, but from that point on the younger architect assumed responsibility for the design of all furniture and lighting, an undertaking that spanned 1953 to 1965.

Attuning himself to Chandigarh's context and culture, Jeanneret studied the working methods of the local artisans who made his designs—and, of course, what they'd made previously. It's no surprise that the stalwart, Instagram-friendly office chair known to millions is sometimes confused with Anglo-Indian campaign seating. Even in a postcolonial city, Jeanneret felt history deserved a place.

The rough-hewn forms and hand-worked surfaces of the furniture brought a touch of humanity to the concrete behemoths that were rising out of the dust. There were correspondences too. "I love spotting the thinking behind Le Corbusier's facades in the structure of some of the furnishings," says Patrick Seguin, among the first dealers to source Jeanneret material. The younger architect's stylistic language fused his understanding of Corbusian principles with his own innovative designs of the 1930s and '40s—the compass leg, the scissor joint—and the materials and traditions of the subcontinent. That language was extended across forms, from workhorse items like sheet-metal lamps or school seats with retractable desks to more luxurious sofas and dressing tables intended for the private homes of Punjabi government officials, whose villas he also designed.

The question of how a single individual, even one backed by a youthful, civic-minded architectural office, could furnish the schools, workplaces and high-brow residences of an entire city continues to puzzle many observers. More than 100 different models have been recorded; new pieces turn up now and then at auction. (The most interesting are the experimental ones Jeanneret dreamed up for himself in bamboo, metal, wood and even plastic. They were never produced in quantity and have been given their own display area in the Chandigarh Architecture Museum.) Jeanneret's designs have no known pattern book, and the drawings that do exist—disseminated among sources on at least three continents—are often unsigned, undated or both. What is known is that the pieces were made cottage-industry style in carpentry workshops across the Punjab and possibly even farther afield. This explains the variations that exist even among the simplest pieces.

According to Casciato, the job of managing the furniture production fell to a young architect named Eulie Chowdhury. Fluent in Punjabi, French and English, "she was basically the go-between," Casciato says. "They had, let's say, a kind of network, and she was extremely important in creating that network and supporting the production and all the detailing." Chowdhury even shared a design credit with Jeanneret, for an X-base chair with a wood back.

As Casciato sees it, Jeanneret himself was quite clear on the question of authorship with his designs: They also belonged to the local artisans who constructed them by hand. "Many times, everywhere, Pierre said that he not only respected but was learning from his Indian experience," she says. "So, for him, a hundred percent they are attributed to India. They are Indian made.

"This is the philosophical question of what is authentic," she continues. "Is it the idea or the object? Authenticity and authorship go hand in hand. But for furniture, it's very complicated. The craft and the material are part of the authenticity."

THE FASHIONABLE furniture of Chandigarh made its debut in the early aughts at a number of design

galleries in Paris. Around that time, a handful of dealers in 20th-century French design—among them Laffanour, Seguin, Philippe Jousse of Jousse Entreprise and Eric Touchaleaume of Galerie 54—began showing Chandigarh pieces alongside better-known midcentury material.

"People were responding very fast," says Laffanour, who'd been worried that the furniture would come across as too rustic. "It was surprising to me to see how positive the response was, especially for the armchair." He concluded that functionality was a big part of its appeal. "Prouvé and Perriand specialized in bookcases, tables, desks—but sofas, comfortable armchairs, there was no production. It was missing in the apartments of our collectors. We had the opportunity to sell something that was comfortable and affordable. That was also part of the success."

> "THE FRENCH HAVE BEEN INCREDIBLE FOR CENTURIES AS DEALERS AND AS MARKET-MAKERS."
> —MICHAEL JEFFERSON

How these dealers came to have the material at all is by now a familiar story. Prospecting in Chandigarh in the late 1990s, and increasingly aware of Jeanneret's stature in the French-modernist clique of Prouvé, Perriand, Royère and Le Corbusier, they found desks and chairs heaped like broken dolls from the roofs to the sidewalks of Le Corbusier's radiant city. They convinced local officials to auction off the discarded work. And after doing significant restoration on it back in France (sometimes reconstructing a piece by as much as 40 percent, Laffanour estimates), they started selling it. Ever since, they've been sniped about for running off with India's cultural patrimony.

Laffanour speaks eloquently for the defense. "It's only because dealers have this kind of interest—of course they think they can make a profit—but also they have the patience" to hold onto material until the fashion cycle revolves, he points out. "Because you are working on something which is totally rejected by everybody. You have to believe in it. If you are really in the mood of the piece, it's like your treasure. You feel like you are a little bit lonely with your treasure, because nobody wants to take it from you. But it's also really exciting."

As several of the French dealers emphasize, they haven't been the ones to juice prices—the auction market has done that. They've simply trailed values on their way up. (A pair of upholstered Senate armchairs that might have sold for $12,000 in 2006 generally sells in the range of $30,000 today.) What the French dealers have also done, over a period of nearly two decades, is to make the Chandigarh market as airtight and sexy as they could, contextualizing the work with well-researched shows, publishing books and catalogs, scooping up stock at auction and positioning the pieces as add-on buys for collectors of contemporary art. Their efforts have paid off: Jeanneret continues to be an art-world darling. This past May, White Cube gallery furnished its booth at TEFAF in New York with Chandigarh pieces; Tina Kim did the same at Frieze New York.

"The French have been incredible for centuries as dealers and as market-makers, developing and sustaining their audiences," says Michael Jefferson, newly hired senior international specialist of 20th-century design at Christie's New York. (Jefferson estimates he sold some 450 lots of Chandigarh furniture for his former employer, Chicago's Wright auction house.) "But here they have a vested interest in their own works being right, so you have to kind of understand that," he says. "They are the referee and they are the athlete."

A similar thought has occurred to Cristina Miller, the chief commercial officer of 1stdibs, a major online seller of Chandigarh pieces worldwide. In her words, the dealers in question are "sort of filling the power vacuum, right? They're writing their own books. In one way, it's really great because a lot of them are right and they're doing the right thing, but some of those same dealers will tell you, 'Well, this other dealer, or this other person, wrote a book, and we're not so sure about that content.'"

In 2013, American artist Amie Siegel made a film called *Provenance* that rewinds the complicated history of Chandigarh furniture, starting in the polished Manhattan apartments and yacht staterooms of collectors and ending on Indian junk heaps, where the pieces languished for years—out of view, out of style, out of gas. According to Siegel's website, the film "exposes the circuits of ownership and history that influence the furniture's fluctuating value."

Six years later, the artist's choice of Jeanneret as a case study in the punishing effects of speculative markets on global culture seems almost quaint. The popularity of the work has exploded, which has cued the lookalikes and, inevitably, dimmed interest among a certain segment of trend-aware buyers, many of whom have moved on to Brazilian modernism. Michael Jefferson of Christie's says Jeanneret prices have vacillated but are largely holding firm. Acknowledging the influx of fakes, he nonetheless notes that "the spectrum of acceptance for restoration in Chandigarh material is very broad"—because so much of it was essentially pieced back together in the first place before hitting the sales floor.

"There are ethical questions," he admits. He describes the practice of "gene-splicing," where "you have one arm and you create a complete chair out of that. That's wrong, and you can spot it."

Reed Krakoff is among the collectors confounded by the current market. "Why would you buy refinished old chairs when you could buy new ones for a tenth of the price? You can buy them for $500 easy," he says of the ersatz compass-style seats. He sees a paradox in the work's ubiquity. "It doesn't make it any less great, but it does have something to do with how much it's worth on a simple market level." Krakoff likens the chair in constant rotation on social media to a poster in a museum shop. "If you see a thousand images of a certain painting, it does change how you perceive it," he says. "It's the same painting, but it just doesn't have that spark of uniqueness. If you go online right now, I bet you'll find 350 Chandigarh pieces. Design collecting has become a fashion trend," he says with discernible agita. "It never was before. Never."

Cristina Miller of 1stdibs sees things differently. In her view, the power of influence—the rush to own what someone else already has in her living room, for instance—is really nothing new. "That desire has always existed," she argues. "That's what drives trends and design and gets people interested." Miller characterizes the dealers who sell on 1stdibs as its curators, relied upon to deliver what the market wants. In her experience, the company has never turned away the legitimate work of a designer, even when what might be considered a glut of it already exists on the site. "I'm sort of pausing here because we usually have the opposite problem, which is we want more," she continues. "One of the things we look at on a regular basis is what we call supply/demand lapse, where we have more demand for something than we have supply, and we share that with our dealers. We're usually focused on saying to them, 'Hey, we need more of this.'

"With six million people on the site every month," Miller adds, "there's a lot of demand." A recent partnership with Christie's to host online sales should further goose that number.

In recent years, 1stdibs' vetting procedures have been tightened up. When the sale price of an item exceeds a certain threshold, and the creator is well-known, a higher level of scrutiny is applied. A specialist reviews it, and a condition report is requested. "We do our best to support the creators and the legitimacy of these pieces," Miller says. "There are just a few areas, like Jeanneret, where it's very, very nebulous. If there were a foundation to work with, we would work with them, but there isn't. And the pieces were unsigned."

Miller isn't concerned about the increasingly segmented market for Chandigarh furniture. "There's the collector level, and then there are plenty of pieces that look like these pieces, that you can buy for a lot less," she says. "In that way, it sort of devalues it. But, at the same time—and this isn't necessarily 1stdibs' stance—if people want access to a beautiful design and they don't maybe have an understanding or an appreciation of the history of that design, who's to say that they shouldn't have it?"

BANGALORE, the hub of India's tech industry, lacks the stately urban plan of Chandigarh, more than 1,200 miles to its north. But on a nondescript street, in a former metal shop hemmed in by factory buildings, an artisan collective called Phantom Hands is crafting furniture very much in the Chandigarh spirit. Its founder, Deepak Srinath, is a tech refugee who launched the business in 2013 out of a personal preoccupation with vintage Indian modernism. After building an online sales site for his weekend finds, Srinath ran into trouble sourcing enough vintage pieces to feed the response, and in 2015 he decided to shift to a new-production model. "I realized in my conversations with our customers that most of them didn't really care if an object was vintage or new—what they cared about was the design and the craft," he says by phone from his office near the carpentry shed. The sentiment dovetailed with his own.

Phantom Hands now sells online to over a dozen countries, with 90 percent of orders coming from outside India. It has partnered on successful collections with two European design firms: X+L—the Dutch duo of Xander Vervoort and Leon van Boxtel—and Inoda+Sveje, the Milan-based couple Kyoko Inoda and Nils Sveje. The company's bestsellers, though, aren't new designs but an offering of sofas, chairs and stools called Project Chandigarh, attributed to Pierre Jeanneret.

The name Phantom Hands has raised some eyebrows among Jeanneret dealers who have visited its website. "What does that mean?" Patrick Seguin asks, pacing the parquet floor of his study in Paris's Marais district, a well-worn Chandigarh armchair placed beside a formidable desk. His investment of time and scholarship in the architect's work has been significant, and he declines to comment on reproductions, he says. For Srinath, the phrase "phantom hands" evokes the unsung artisans behind so much Indian modern furniture, whether it was conceived by Jeanneret or one of the many native-born designers he influenced. Today, the craftsmen who come to work at Phantom Hands from across the continent have already absorbed lessons from the Swiss architect by osmosis. "Really, Indian modernism started with Jeanneret," Srinath insists. "It was the first independent, modern Indian furniture."

Srinath is, by his own admission, a Jeanneret groupie. He's researched the architect at length and has come to think of him as the George Harrison figure to Le Corbusier's Lennon/McCartney. Before launching his re-editions, as he calls them, Srinath did his best to secure legal permission. He visited the archive, now located at the Canadian Centre for Architecture, in Montreal, and he reached out to Jacqueline Jeanneret as well as de Leusse, the family lawyer, about obtaining rights to the material but received no reply. Nonetheless, he is rigorous about adhering to the proportions, materials and manufacturing techniques Jeanneret employed. (Very minor adjustments have been made to improve durability, he says.) It takes five or six of Phantom Hands' craftspeople almost a week to make an armchair from reclaimed teak and cane grown in the state of Assam.

GHOST OF UTOPIA
Buildings in Le Corbusier's Capitol Complex in Chandigarh, now a Unesco World Heritage site.

Srinath considers the company's meticulous approach to production to be part of its origin story as he sets out to build a global brand on the foundations of a 70-year-old design movement. His long-term goal, he explains, is to develop a market for well-made furniture in his home country and support local designers: "I'm optimistic because I see some very interesting young design talents coming out of India right now."

Not long ago, Srinath was approached by Cassina, the Milan-based company behind licensed reproductions of furniture by Perriand and the team of Le Corbusier, Perriand and Jeanneret. Cassina was considering making a Chandigarh collection. Would Phantom Hands be interested in collaborating? The idea never got off the ground—Cassina chose to keep the production in Italy—but the collection, named Hommage à Pierre Jeanneret, moved forward and will launch worldwide this fall. Cassina CEO Luca Fuso calls the Indian chapter of Jeanneret's career "the first open source of design ever," because "the work was intended to create something for the community of Chandigarh." (To be on the safe side, the company secured permission via an arrangement with the Jeanneret heirs.)

Srinath has made his peace with the stillborn deal. "The only thing that worries me is that Cassina will flood the market with these designs, and it may become too much," he says. "Right now, there is a bit of exclusivity."

When Phantom Hands showed pieces at a design fair in Mumbai last year, the work caught the attention of Suchi Reddy, an Indian-born architect and interior designer now based in New York. Reddy was impressed with its quality and admired the Jeanneret pieces, which have always seemed at home in India, she says. She recalls seeing them around as a teenager in Chennai (then called Madras) and assuming they were native. "When I was in architecture school in Detroit, I was surprised to find out there was a Swiss architect behind it all," she recalls.

In Chandigarh, at the Architecture Museum, Jeanneret designs are currently being assembled for a permanent collection. Only pieces made before the architect's death in 1967 are being considered. Even so, the city's civic relationship with Jeanneret and his legacy remains fraught. Casciato recalls a trip she made in 2015, when she happened across heaps of discarded Jeanneret desk chairs on the balcony of the Tarlok Singh Central State Library. And yet, she adds, "People came to me many times, officials, saying, 'Oh, we want to sue these people, these things are part of our heritage.' And I said, 'Listen, guys, let it go—you opened the door and all the cows went out. What do you want to do now?'" ●