

## Blu Dot: Three college friends and a dream that did not die

On a backpacking trip through Asia in the late '80s, three college friends—John Christakos, Charles Lazor and Maurice Blanks—talked about the possibility of making a living by designing furniture. By the mid-'90s, the talking got serious.

we were reacting against,” such as blue-plate special and blue collar. “Our graphic designer dropped the ‘e’ to make the logo work, and we agreed since he was doing it for pennies for us,” Blank says.

For a while, the friends worked together by e-mail.

In 1997, they took their wares (prototypes of about eight “families of products”) to the International Contemporary Furniture Fair in New York. As an afterthought, they stopped the cab at a Kinko’s on their way to the fair and printed up a bunch of order forms.

“Turns out, the whole day we were swamped,” Blanks says. “We got back from the show and realized we had to fulfill them.”

This year, the Minneapolis-based furniture design company Blu Dot was named one of the “Fast 50” companies by Fast Company magazine.

Blu Dot’s Buttercup chairs, made of molded plywood beech core with white ash veneer and metal base, are part of the Museum of Contemporary Art’s “Universal Experience” exhibition. Curator Francesco Bonami, an admirer of Blu Dot, was looking for furniture to create the feel of a mid-century airport lounge for the travel-inspired show. Not only is it handsome and comfortable, Buttercup is also perfect for an exhibition that ponders the idea of the evaporation of borders and boundaries. “The shell is made in Poland and the base in Taiwan,” Blanks says.

—Ruth Lopez

**Maurice Blanks will give a talk in the Design Matters lecture series “From Garage to Global: Blu Dot’s Trip” at the MCA Tue 29 at 6pm.**



**The Buttercup chair.**

“At that time, we were trying to furnish apartments, getting into real nests and the sort of things we purchased after college were falling apart,” Blanks says.

What they loved, they couldn’t afford. They realized there had to be other people just like them who were looking for affordable modern furniture a step up from IKEA.

Blanks was in Chicago finishing his architecture degree at UIC. Lazor was at Yale School of Architecture. Christakos, an artist, was at Northwestern for his MBA. It was Christakos who decided to quit his day job and rent a space in Minneapolis to start a design practice. They called themselves Blu Dot as a nod to pop music deity and fellow city compatriot Prince. “It was right about the time Prince changed his name to a symbol, and we liked that,” Blanks says. “But we soon realized that answering the phone is hard if your company name is nonverbal.” They wanted something unpretentious and graphic and wanted to tie it to *blue* because it connected to “things that are not part of the fancy-pants designer world that