

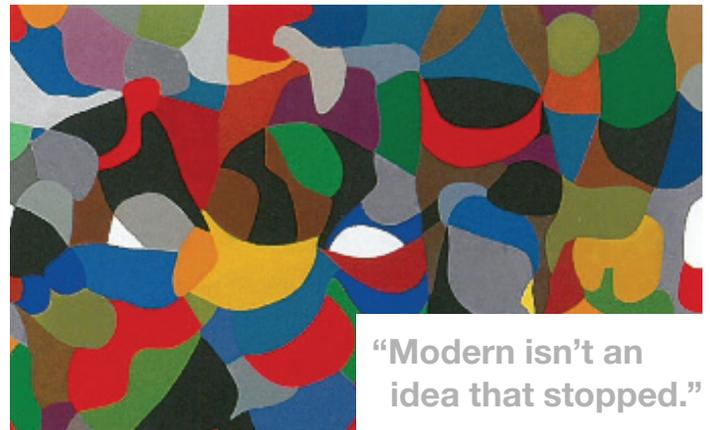
# Rockwell Unscripted™ Idea & Concept

**David Rockwell, FAIA and Rockwell Group founder and president, is often referred to as an entertainment architect or a choreographer of space.** Such fuzzy job descriptions suit the multi-tasking designer of restaurants, hotels, offices, playgrounds, Broadway scenery and much more just fine. “I’ve spent my life trying not to be defined by a system or a box,” he explains. As an architect with a penchant for plot lines and a set designer able to conjure space with either an economy of means or an abundance of period detail, Rockwell not only plays multiple roles but also occupies many aesthetic worlds, often at once. All this makes him a surprising choice as a creative collaborator for always modern Knoll—or does it? Not according to Benjamin Pardo, Knoll executive vice president and director of design.

In fact, says Pardo, it’s Rockwell’s ability to work under multiple guises that made him the ideal partner for Rockwell Unscripted, a comprehensive, eclectic array of furniture that can be easily and, seemingly, endlessly adapted to create—borrowing from the performance analogy at the collection’s conceptual heart—a variety of scenes and experiences. Calling the New York City-based designer “a combination of P.T. Barnum and Frank Lloyd Wright,” Pardo describes Rockwell’s mix of showmanship, grand vision and command of detail as “the embodiment of the idea that we wanted to bring to this series of products.” What’s more, “Modern isn’t an idea that stopped,” says Pardo. “Our pledge to modernity is that we have the obligation to help move the ideas forward of what it is that works in a modern interior.”

Unscripted is anything but unplanned. The most ambitious Knoll product launch to date, based on the sheer quantity of individual elements, over 30 in all across six categories, it is the culmination of years of research—by Knoll and Rockwell, independently and together—about the way work is truly done today. Yes, we still use a combination of private and open-plan offices as well as activity spaces of all sizes. However, work increasingly takes place elsewhere: at a coffee shop or lunch counter, walking down the street, sitting on a park bench or even perched on a bar stool and overall the urge to demarcate or defend individual territory is giving way to a desire for community. Whether alone or with colleagues, planned or the result of

happenstance, people are often productive at unexpected moments and in unforeseen settings. Pardo intuited that Rockwell’s decades of experience in restaurant and hotel design was directly translatable to emerging trends in the workplace. And he recognized that above all, Rockwell knows how to make the people who inhabit his spaces feel comfortable and in control—the protagonists in dramas of their own making—and it’s this same sense of hospitality and empowerment that office workers, liberated from their desks by wireless technology, are seeking.

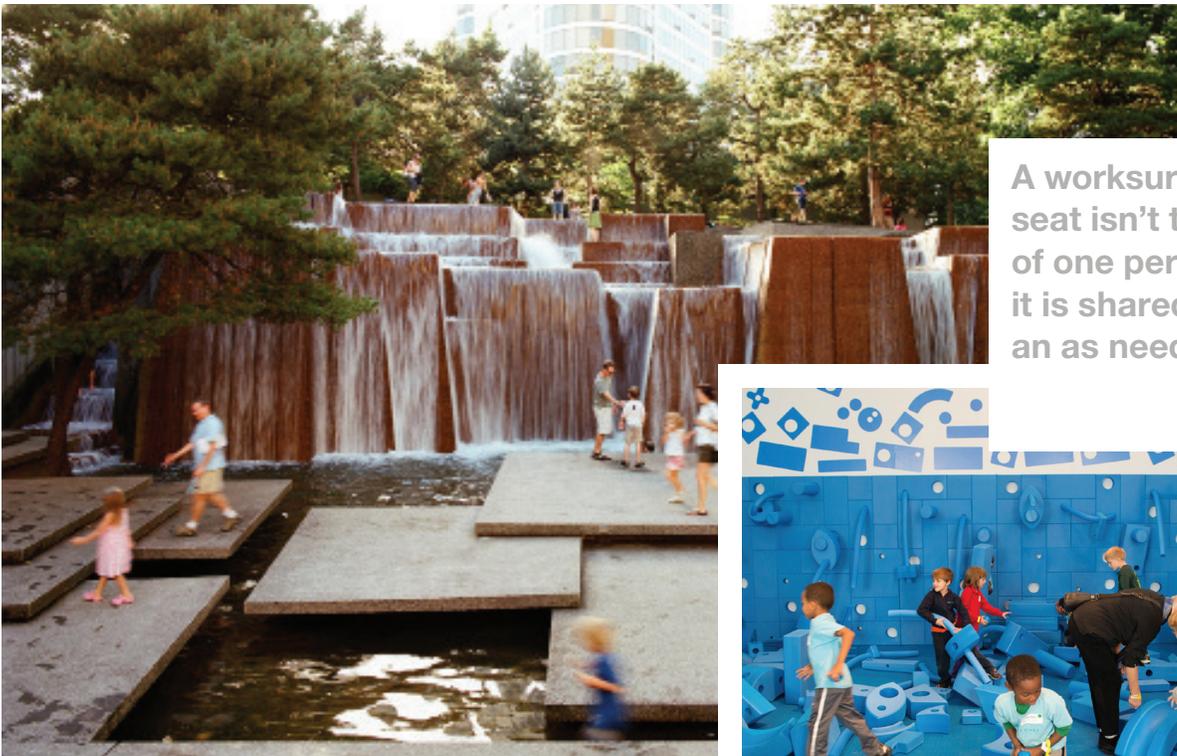


“Modern isn’t an idea that stopped.”

Benjamin Pardo,  
Knoll



Knoll found conceptual inspiration for what would become the Rockwell Unscripted collection from artist Alberto Burri’s work (top) and found the right partner in David Rockwell, known for innovations in theater and hospitality. *Neuehouse NYC photograph by Eric Laignel*



A worksurface or a seat isn't the property of one person, rather it is shared by all, on an as needed basis.

Use of topography, scale and materials in open gathering spaces both large and small served as inspiration as to how Rockwell Unscripted could be used to plan an entire workspace.

Above: Ira Keller Fountain by architect Lawrence Halprin by Susan Seubert Photography  
 Right: PLAY WORK BUILD exhibit at the National Building Museum photograph by Kevin Allen



## Blurring the Boundary Between Work and Play

Knoll research revealed that people spend more than half of their time engaged in group-based work, but for heads-down work they often are leaving their offices to take refuge in coffee shops, parks or hotel lobbies to answer emails, write without being interrupted and make business calls or generally work alone in a crowd. As a result, the overall premise of Unscripted is that blurring the boundary between work and play in the office doesn't diminish the amount of work being done. Instead, it injects a new vitality, creating holistic, open-to-interpretation workplaces that can enhance ingenuity and productivity. Increasingly, progressive organizations are embracing aspects of co-working spaces and the start-up culture by creating almost private club like atmospheres for their employees, allowing them to shift seamlessly over the course of a day from focused independent work to group meetings and socializing. In such contexts, a worksurface or a seat isn't the property of one person, rather it is shared by all, on an as needed basis. In order to both attract and retain desirable employees, it's incumbent on companies to provide a stimulating environment, says Knoll Senior Vice President, Chief Marketing Officer Alana Stevens. As she explains, it is a natural next step in the evolution of the workplace to envision it as "one immersive experience"

comprised of distinct yet intertwined environments that feel like cafés, reading rooms, lounges or even active streetscapes for the people that occupy them—in other words, the places outside the office to which you might otherwise gravitate.

As the Unscripted name implies, the storylines of these hospitality-based experiences aren't already written in advance. There are some possible scenarios sketched out by the various product categories—different height "borders," including the Creative Wall™ for delineating spaces that incorporate white boards for brainstorming or tackable surfaces for visual displays and can be arranged in endless configurations; tables from small to extra-large and from low to high; "steps" that create tiered seating you can sit, climb and work on; seating from club chairs, high-back settees and modular lounge pieces, to poufs, wood blocks, upholstered swivel seats, stools and benches; storage, both modular and mobile, including shelves, lockers and credenzas, as well as more streamlined portable carts that can fit beneath tables; and a range of complementary accessories. Many pieces are agile and lightweight, allowing users to craft the scene around what it is they're doing that day.

## Planning for Spontaneity

Unscripted takes the notion of planning for spontaneity from an inherent contradiction to a tangible reality: with fairly little effort, furniture can be adapted or reconfigured around you, for whatever you happen to be doing and with whomever you happen to be working at any given moment. How does a coffee break suddenly turn into a team meeting? Informal seating adjacent to a white board recasts the drink rail as a worksurface. How does an accidental hallway encounter shift into a project ideation session? Seating and steps can be repositioned for spontaneous gatherings and, if needed, storage elements can be rolled over for handy access to materials.

Decisions about how the products are set up and reconfigured within a particular space is ultimately in the hands of the end-users, the “actors” who animate Unscripted. “It’s the people who complete the story,” says Stevens of how particular pieces can be positioned or recast as needs shift and the scene changes. As boundaries blur between spaces dedicated to work and play, and individual and team, a single piece of furniture develops multiple personas.

Such effortless transitions—that from one minute to the next, a space can play two very different roles—are essential to the overall experience. In the Unscripted workplace, work has flow and takes place in adjacencies as often as it does in discreet spaces. As in theatrical design, how you make transitions is equally important to how you create scenes.

Rockwell says his work in theater has taught him that it’s important to really listen to the story being told—both dialogue and action. “In the theater, from a storytelling point of view, I’ve always believed that what the physical world can do is set the stage for the narrative,” he explains. Of course, companies can direct the overall format, tone and character of their own space through the elements they select and the materials and colors they choose as finishes. “An interesting part about the collection is that it is very much open to what other people will do with it,” says Rockwell. “It’s an invitation for designers and clients to personalize it and make it their own.”

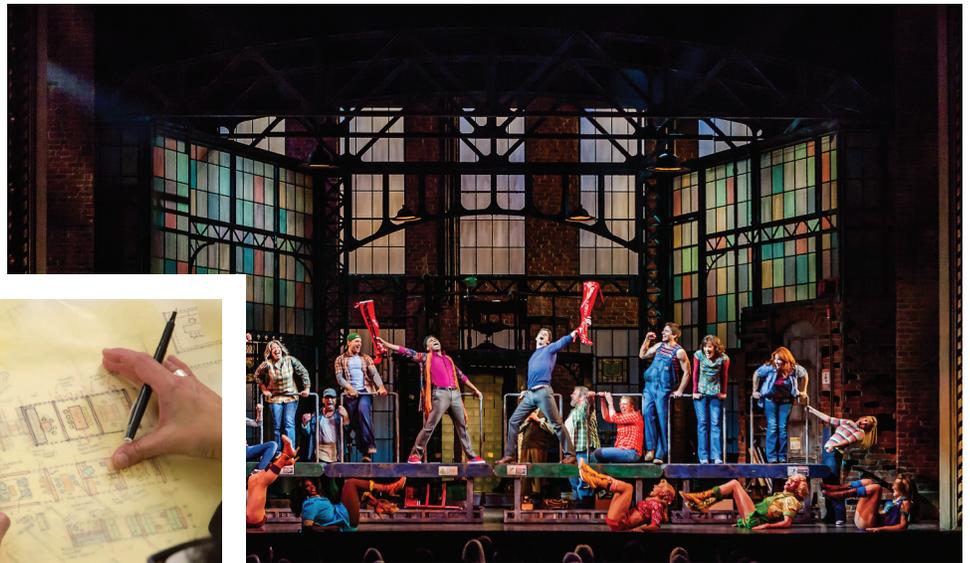
The combination of improvisation and variety is part of a broader understanding of how important camaraderie and informal networks are to corporate culture and workplace productivity. Now, with the furniture to foster and support it, collegial exchange is no longer relegated to outside of the office or after hours; it’s given its rightful place at center stage. Ultimately, maintains Pardo, furniture, like laptops and cell phones, is a tool to get us through our day. In his mind, such tools should be utilitarian and pleasurable. “There’s a lot of joy in the objects,” he says of the collection’s many pieces. Referring to the theater analogy at the core of Unscripted, he adds, “they represent the figure—a person—and so are the dramatic elements in this play that we call work.” **K**

**“It’s an invitation for designers and clients to personalize it and make it their own.”**

David Rockwell,  
Rockwell Group



The unlimited opportunity Rockwell Unscripted gives for unique planning ideas was equally as important to the concept as the quality of the experience people would have in the spaces. Combined they create a richly layered, immersive and hospitable experience. *Above: Rockwell Unscripted planning ideas, Knoll, Inc; Right: Kinky Boots photograph by Mark Ballogg*



.....  
*Compiled and edited by Knoll, Inc.*

*Based on interviews with Rockwell Group’s principal and founder David Rockwell; Benjamin Pardo, Knoll executive vice president and director of design and Alana Stevens, Knoll senior vice president, chief marketing officer.*