Maurice Villency Chairs Stay in the Family

By KATHERINE ROSMAN  CONNECT

Product designer Eric Villency takes simple items and fabulizes them. His company has made hardyres with decorative patterns on their exteriors and sparkly smartphone cases festooned with Swarovski crystals.

But Mr. Villency’s prized possession—a pair of teak chairs—requires no embellishment. The chairs were handcrafted in the early 1950s by Mr. Villency’s grandfather, Maurice Villency. In 1832, the elder Mr. Villency founded the eponymous company his grandson leads, which is now known as the Villency Design Group.

The chairs were a fixture in Maurice’s Lynbrook, N.Y., home, Eric says. They faced a rotating display of artwork—pieces made by painters such as David Alfaro Siqueiros and José Clemente Orozco. Maurice, who died in 1988, would sit in the chairs and tell his grandson tales of growing up in Glasgow, Scotland. “He was a great storyteller and had a thick Scottish brogue,” Eric says.

About 10 years ago, Eric visited the company’s warehouse in Jericho, N.Y. While rooting around a section that held vintage family heirlooms, he found the chairs. “I pulled a truck up and threw them in,” he says.

He called in some of his company’s artisans to refresh the chairs. They sanded down the arms, refinished the wood, removed the fabric from the cushions and reupholstered them in butter-soft leather.

Eric loves having his grandfather’s chair in his office as a reminder of the company’s roots. But any time anyone sits upon them, he panics. “If someone spills their mochachino on these chairs,” he says, “it’s going to be a tragedy.”

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