

# HiLo™

## Idea and Concept

“As designers we are constantly facing challenges and adapting and responding to them,” says Seth Murray. Bret Recor agrees, adding, “We are challenged by our clients and we are the challengers. We are always trying to approach a project in a new way by taking a different position or a fresh point of view.” For the duo, design is a process of strategic engagement and HiLo, a product of their collaboration at San Francisco-based Box Clever, a design and branding agency, perfectly embodies this philosophy.

From their base in the Bay Area, Recor and Murray have a welcome vantage point on technology companies and, as a result, emerging trends in the workplace. “How they work and where they work is important,” explains Benjamin Pardo, Knoll Executive Vice President and Design Director of his initial decision to tap the designers for this small-scale yet potentially ubiquitous product. Their immersion in start-up culture, where the boundaries between work and play are increasingly tangled, is essential. Pardo wanted to find a way to accommodate that elusive position between sitting and standing—a posture that is increasingly common in today’s office as people shift back and forth between focused independent work, group meetings and socializing. And, for the increasing number of health-conscious people working at height adjustable

desks, Knoll saw the need for a form of seating that adapted accordingly.

While several perches already exist on the market, Knoll planned to do more than just check another product category box. “I was looking for something that can give you support and also accompany you—a helpful extension of you,” recalls Pardo. His initial, if unexpected, challenge to Murray and Recor sparked a playful approach to a piece that in its final form is more like an action-movie prop than the standard, sedentary piece of office furniture.

“Product briefs are always tough. They are there to give you structure so that you have constraints. But great design doesn’t just check all the boxes; sometimes it creates new ones,” explains Recor. Happily for the designers, Pardo’s initial project description was less about product performance, which was a given, and more about creating a persona. “He told us he wanted



Above: Seth Murray and Bret Recor on HiLo prototypes.  
Right: Early sketches.



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a companion,” recalls Murray of the assignment for some type of seating that was easy to grab and bring along to an impromptu gathering or a meeting space without enough chairs.

HiLo is made from two triangles—one is the seat and the other is the base—connected by a rigid metal stem. By rounding the corners of the triangles, the design conveys both the familiarity and reliability of a primary geometric shape and the friendliness of soft edges. “This is not a piece of gym equipment,” explains Pardo of the deliberate decision to avoid an overly expressive athleticism in favor of clear visual clues—simple pieces of aluminum and plastic, a gentle tilt—that communicate how HiLo functions. As the design developed, inspiration came from a variety of sources, ranging from footwear—how layers of foam, rubber, and leather can be bonded together to provide both support and flexibility—to basketballs—how changes in texture can be exploited to create a non-slip surface—to, more surprisingly, archetypes of fiction. “At the back of my mind, I was always picturing Don Quixote and his faithful sidekick Sancho Panzo,” admits Murray of his particular, if unexpected, muse for HiLo. “No matter where Quixote goes, Panzo goes with him and serves at his pleasure.”

As the project team developing HiLo was predominately male, Pardo was adamant that the designers consider all potential users, going so far as to supply the designers with kilts so that they could directly experience the impact that certain fashion choices might have on how you perch, a particular issue when two thirds of the tripartite support “system” are the user’s own legs. Just in case someone is new to perching, a sticker on the foot illustrates exactly how to use HiLo.

After HiLo’s initial preview in the Spring of 2016, Knoll spent months refining details in response to extensive user testing, adding weight to further stabilize the base and incorporating a curved lip on one side of the seat to clearly identify it as the back. Made of foam, the seat has a rubber casing while the base has a spring steel sub-structure that is over-molded with an elastomer



to provide flexibility. Rather than use a bulky gas cylinder for the stem, the designers worked with Knoll to develop a corkscrew mechanism that operates like a clutch to adjust height. HiLo can be positioned at a height of anywhere between 24.5 to 31.5 inches by pressing a button and raising or lowering the seat by hand, allowing it to be easily stowed underneath a desk or adjustable table, ready to be pulled out as a more active seating alternative or to be shared with a colleague who stops by for a chat. Weighing in at 11 pounds, HiLo is light enough to accompany nomadic office workers as they move through their busy day. After all, says Murray, “a companion needs to be right there at the ready at all times—freestanding and ready to help out.” K