Peter Jay Zweig’s destiny to become an architect was proclaimed by his fifth grade teacher. Always ahead of the pack with his innovative and forward thinking, he has made great strides in improving the environment for modern man with his utilization of technology, materials and creative design.

One of Zweig’s crowning achievements was co-designing a university in Morocco with King Hussein. The King wanted the entire venue completed within a year and a half, and when a King sets the deadline, the job gets finished. From universities, 70,000-square-foot palaces and a hotel atop a drilling rig, Zweig appreciates the places his career has taken him.

Zweig shares his modern home with his architectural partner and muse, wife Linda. Like a geode, the outside is simple, and the inside is a jewel. Their home and chair collection are reflections of their passion for art and design.
Why the homage to chairs? Linda and I think of the chairs as our friends. There are many pieces in our collections that were done by people we admire and know well as friends. In our eyes, the chair has become an extension of the designer. We sit in it, it is intimate and it becomes a sculptural art object in its own right. The chair is about the beauty and innovation of materials, representing our time. Some are handcrafted, some reflect high technology and represent an experimentation by the designers.

What was the first chair you collected? The first chair was from a friend of ours named George Nakashima who we first met 30 years ago. He has since become highly collectible and revered. His art represented a transition from the past with his love of natural wood. Knowing him, living with his pieces, and believing in his integrity and convictions still creates and influences my own passions in designing furniture.

What are your rarest pieces? Evaluating a collection is like choosing your favorite child. It is impossible. Many of the pieces have stories and memories that, for Linda and I, have become an extension of our lives. As an example, we have an Alessandro Mendini chair that he did for his daughter 25 years ago called the Proust chair. While visiting in Milano, he offered the chair to us and said he would make another one for his daughter. The design of the Proust became a pivotal image in the design shifts in the international art/architecture world. One of the rarest chairs we have was done by Shiro Kuramata, an architect who lived in Japan. He is most known for designing the Issey Miyake fashion showrooms and was thrown into the international arena with his participation in the Memphis Group from Milano. We also have a chair by Donald Judd made of a fir tree. Judd’s chairs were not common and now are sold only through his foundation.

How did your friendship with legendary Italian architect Ettore Sottsass begin? We designed a showroom together in Dallas called Grace Designs 20 years ago. It was his first commission in America. The repartee and open dialog was inspirational in trying to integrate a vision of the times with the fields of architecture, decorative objects, graphics, performance, photography and art. I was just with him at an opening in New York last month and at 88 years old, Ettore still is forging a vision of the future.

Tell me about the photograph of the late architect Philip Johnson in the non-chair? While you were the philanthropic chairwoman helping establish the endowed chair for the Philip Johnson Foundation at the University of Houston, Dean Joe Mashburn asked if I could work with Philip in coming up with a concept for his participation in the foundation. Collaborating with him in his legendary Seagram Office, we both gleefully said, “Let’s design a chair together.” It quickly evolved into the non-chair as a metaphor for the foundation. It has become one of the prized pieces in my collection, even though it only exists as a conceptual photograph. Philip was an artist at heart.

As an artist and architect, can you explain the seductive, delicious, scrumptious quality of collecting? For me, designing and collecting objects is analogous to collecting ideas – these inner thoughts of the designers and their concept of how the body might relate as a piece of sculpture. For Linda and I, living with these beautiful objects that truly represent our time is an opportunity to have a feast for the eyes and the mind. Isn’t that scrumptious?

As an architect, do you see your furniture designs as an art form? Although furniture requires a functional underpinning, it ultimately must create a dialogue, a running conversation about the people who inhabit the space and their passions and inspirations for their own times.