

Suite sounds make us sit up and take notice

Fans can't get enough of the Michigan Avenue 'toon chair clamor: Where's Wile E. Coyote when you need him?

BY PAIGE SMORON

STAFF REPORTER

Its name, "Furniture," doesn't begin to describe it.

Robin Ferguson, 33, and her young son refer to it as "The wiggler."

"The bouncy chair," says Lucas Vanderbilt, 5.

"Don't you think it looks like Dumbo?" asks Christine Sapato, 33.

Call it what you will, but you'll know it when you hear it-*boooooing!*

"...whatever you think is not going to happen, is going to happen. People are going to jump on it, kick it, hit it: People think it's like a game."

-Toon chair creator Kathy Kozan

The bright blue, cartoonish wingback chair isn't the only entry in Suite Home Chicago's sidewalk art project with sound effects. But Chicagoans

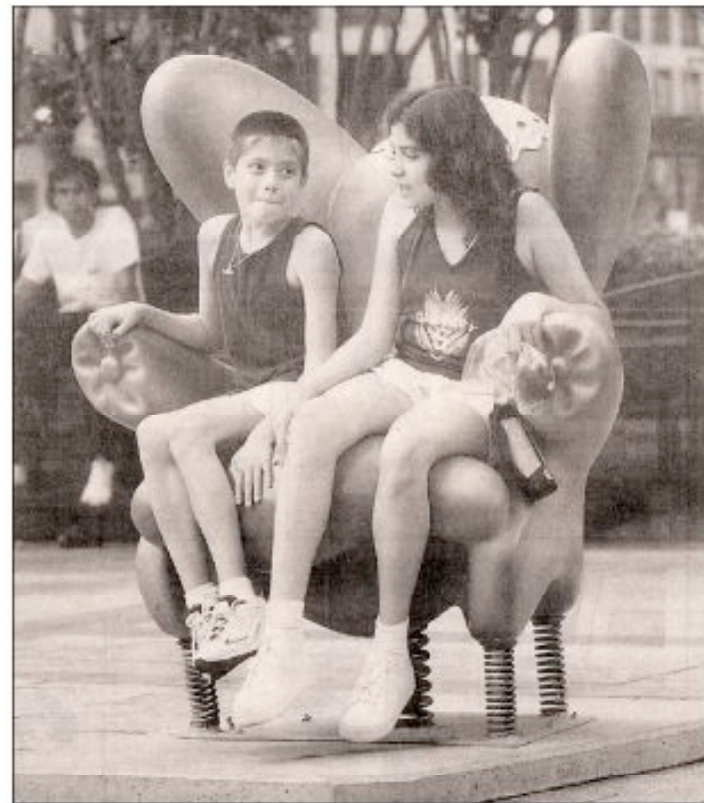
and tourists agree that sitting on Furniture is a distinctively loud experience.

The oversized blue chair is located in Pioneer Court in front of the Equitable Building along North Michigan Avenue. Perched on four springs, art lovers must sit so high up and so far back their legs dangle. The jiggling triggers a series of noises straight out of a cartoon soundtrack. They're all variations on one sound: Boing!

Adults seem more excited about the chair than kids: "It's interactive," says Patrice Thomas, 41. "It reminds me of Dr. Seuss."

The chair is part of a quartet that make up Furniture, designed by Kozan Studios. The robot chair, the silver phoenix chair and the skyline chair recline nearby and draw plenty of attention. But when videocameras are pointed, it's in the direction of the chair that goes-boing!

continued



RICHARD A. CHAPMAN/SUN-TIMES PHOTOS

Michael Jimenez, 10, and his sister Stephany, 13, of Chicago, explore the oversize cartoon chair, which is part the city's Suite Home Chicago public art program.

Of course, not everyone's a fan. As Gilda Reyes, 25, propped her 21-month-old daughter in the corner of the chair, baby Elisa started bawling. "It scared her," says Reyes, heading over to the phoenix chair for another try.

That was not the artist's intention. Kathy Kozan created what she calls the "Toon Chair" because "I wanted people to sit in it and play in it and feel good," says Kozan, a community muralist who's also responsible for the Newsstand Cow from Cows on Parade two years ago.

"I wanted people to be involved in it," Kozan says, "and not just walk by and say, 'This is a pretty piece of artwork.'"

Kozan also figured the chair would have to be sturdy. As a former teacher in an all-boys high school, she learned from experience that "whatever you think is not going to happen, is going to happen. People are going to jump on

it, kick it, hit it: People think it's like a game. They go by on their bicycles and kick the chair."

Not that she minds.

"I'd rather not clean off the footprints every week, but I did want to see people have fun."

At least one young man considers the Toon Chair his personal nemesis. "I work in Tribune Tower, 15 floors up," he says. "All day long, that's all I hear: boing!" He asked not to be named, perhaps because of his determination to find a way to shut the chair up. He likens the annoying noise to "the LaRouchies outside the Wrigley Building" and especially resents passersby who routinely give the chair a whack just to trigger the sound. "That's the worst part—people who come along and just hit it."

But he has a plan, a devious, fittingly cartoonish one. "I need to be like Wile E. Coyote: Get

an Acme bomb and put it under the chair. It would probably blow me up while the chair just sat there."

Oblivious to the evil plotting, carpenter Brian Caldwell, 41, casually walks by, giving the chair a smack without breaking his stride. Boing!

"I hit it twice a day," Caldwell admits. "Sometimes four." Why? "It makes me smile."

A day in the life of the chair that goes boing!



Pictured: Charles Davis, 12; Mary Anne Dorado, 3, and mom Catherine Dorado; Diana Dapper; Veronica McDaniels; Athena Beckford, 6; unidentified boy.