

# A New Seating Player

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**By Lauren Folkes**



Celesse from Friant

**F**riant & Associates, a company whose formula consists of low-cost high-quality products, and a streamlined manufacturing process, will introduce their latest chair, Celesse, in April, which combines comfort and support with an innovative adjustable lumbar mechanism.

Friant strove to provide comfort with tractable accessibility with the Celesse product, a mid-back chair offering added comfort due to the adjustable lumbar device and adjustable arm rests. It is part of the company's Entourage Series. "If you look at today's chair, one of the things (other companies) did was create a sliding seat," said Paul Friant, owner and president. "What we did with Celesse was create a sliding back. So depending on where you position yourself in that chair you would always be able to create a back support by simply pulling that forward to you."

Celesse utilizes two simple, futuristic buttons to activate the lumbar support, both located on the back of the chair. Pull forward to move, and activate the buttons to move back. To adjust the arm rests, just grab and pull forward. The company tried to make it as easy as possible to adjust the chair.

Friant said he believes office chairs are simply too complicated. "Once you get that office chair finally set to the level of being comfortable, you dare not touch it," he said. "Walking through a dealer, I see five or six people sitting in the middle of their chairs and I simply ask them: Do you mind sitting exactly the way you are, but in this chair? And they're absolutely amazed at how much comfort they get."

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Friant is keenly in tune with human behavior in regards to furniture, particularly sitting in chairs. The psychology of nimble movement, the realistic understanding about sitting mid-way versus against the chair's back, the hesitation of adjusting a seat via a lever during a meeting, are all well-comprehended and were used to create Celesse's sleek and surprisingly simply design. "You can sit six inches on the front seat and still have back support," Friant said.

Working with its overseas design team, the function of the chair really defines its design. Celesse features black or white mesh backing and an aluminum base and back mechanism with chrome finish. Because Friant handles its fabric, manufacturing and final assembly they will be able to alter the colors of the chair per request.

Friant said, "If you had 10 color chairs, out of every 10 sold, eight of them would be black." Therefore, currently Celesse will only come in black or white until demands are measured.

"We fell in love with the white mesh," he said. "You see it in those all-white conference rooms."

Celesse is made from standard materials such as plastic, polyester and polished aluminum. Friant plans to "green" Celesse in order to undergo the screening process through Materials Analytical Service (MAS), an environmental testing service similar to Greenguard. Friant cooperates with MAS because environmental concern takes an important role with the company. Friant's Tiles

and System 2 were inspected and both lines were deemed exceptional -- requiring no changes to the product.

Friant emphasizes the user-friendly factor that Celesse embodies. "Be comfortable, be safely comfortable, be able to make changes, and understand your chair -- I think that is what we have brought back to the marketplace," he said.

"Ergonomic chairs can be so complex with 18 different settings and taking 10 minutes to get exactly right. I think Celesse cuts through all the noise and gets to the heart of discomfort which is the lower back," said Stephanie Ariel, Marketing Director. "There is a simplicity and an elegance to this design."

A high-back version of Celesse will enter the marketplace a month or so after Celesse, featuring a snap-on headrest. "In today's market if you buy an executive chair that you can put a headrest on, it's complicated. This is a really quick snap-on piece," Friant said.

Friant & Associates originated 20 years ago, under Paul Friant, who envisioned a business that would streamline the design and manufacturing process to keep low-overhead costs and pass on those savings to customers. Offerings include laminate and wood furniture, casegoods, a variety of seating and two systems of office furniture; one utilizing frame and tile and the other a monolithic panel system.

A recent achievement worth mentioning: Friant won the deal for the largest-customs casegood order in San Francisco, perhaps in the last four years, by Morrison Foerster, one of the largest law firms worldwide. An architect design team specifically designed the office furniture in Morrison and Foerster's image. "What that did for us, being in the furniture industry for 20 years, creating designs of low-cost furniture with high-quality made people look at Friant only for a workstation under \$1,000, but then all of a sudden here is one of most incredible designs, over \$1 million of cost in office furniture and Friant Associates gets that," Friant said. "We have the ability to cover both ends."

Friant's message of factory direct denotes ownership of overseas manufacturing facilities, which sets them apart from most competitors. "We bought the dirt overseas, we own and operate those locations, we created the buildings and designed it specifically for the types of products we manufacture to support the costs we need to be at."

Expect multiple new chairs to emerge from Friant, mirroring Celesse's design concept. The next chair to follow Celesse will be made available in the summer of 2011, tentatively referenced as Level 5. It will mimic the innovative strategy employed for Celesse with a different task and lower price point. "The mechanisms create this feature. And we are working on taking that feature and developing it into different designs," Friant said.

The mechanism on the outside points of Celesse will be moved into the center of Level 5, creating a very futuristic look. Level 5 will likely fall at a price point of \$100 to \$150, incorporating many plastic and lower-cost materials but still maintaining a significant structure and carrying a long warranty and all of the special lumbar functions of Celesse.

The creative process to design Celesse was completed in October. Inventory is ready and the chair will be fully available in April. Friant hopes people will view his company as innovative with an understanding of design and comfort that merges both as a fair-cost solution. "We are so excited about our new development of chairs, we want everybody to have one," Friant said. ☞