JOSÉ ZANINE CALDAS



Armchair model “Zeca”
Manufactured by Móveis Artísticos Z
Brazil, 1950s
Veneered naval plywood, yellow velvet upholstery, metal fittings

Measurements
59 × 77 × 85h cm
23,2 × 30,3 × 33,5h in

Provenance
Private collection, Belo Horizonte (Brazil)

Literature
Aric Chen, Adélia Borges, André Stolarski, Lauro Cavalcanti and Maria Cecilia Loschiavo dos Santos, José Zanine Caldas, R & Company and Olhares, New York and São Paulo, 2019, model reproduced in archival advertisements pp. 56 and 92–93
Ruy Teixeira and Jayme Vargas, Desenho da Utopia: Mobiliário Moderno Brasileiro, Olhares, São Paulo, 2016, similar model reproduced p. 98
Nilufar, ed., Brazilian Design, Milan, 2016, pp. 70–73

About
The “Zeca” armchair was designed by **José Zanine Caldas** for Móveis Artísticos Z, the furniture company he founded in São José dos Campos in 1948. Named after Zanine’s childhood nickname, the chair exemplifies his early experiments with industrially produced plywood furniture, developed as an accessible and distinctly Brazilian alternative to the heavier handcrafted furniture of the period.
Its lightweight structure is formed from shaped sections of veneered naval plywood, whose sinuous profile extends continuously from the armrests into the splayed supports. The suspended upholstered seat and backrest emphasize the structural clarity of the frame, while exposed metal fittings reveal how its individual elements are assembled. In this version, the vivid yellow velvet upholstery contrasts with the warmth and pronounced grain of the wooden structure, reinforcing the chair’s sculptural silhouette and expressive modern character.

Biography
José Zanine Caldas (1919–2001) was a Brazilian designer, architect and model maker recognised for his innovative use of wood. Born in Belmonte, Bahia, he began his career making architectural models before establishing Móveis Artísticos Z in São José dos Campos in the late 1940s. There, he developed furniture using moulded and cut plywood, pioneering an approach that combined industrial production with efficient material use. Later in his career, he became known for his sculptural furniture made from solid timber, drawing inspiration from Brazilian vernacular architecture, traditional craftsmanship and natural forms. His work established an important connection between modern design, material experimentation and Brazilian artisanal traditions.