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## CritBuns by Joe Gebbia

Joe Gebbia knows what an art-school crit feels like, and he's here to lessen the pain. A 2006 graduate of the Rhode Island School of Design who double-majored in industrial design and graphics, he spent plenty of time slouching on hard chairs or slumping on concrete floors, writhing in search of a more comfortable position while his work was scrutinized. "Studio spaces are great for making art, not critiquing it," he says. "You were lucky if you got the one metal stool in the room."

One day, he noticed a fellow student rising from the floor with two round imprints of charcoal on his butt. Gebbia imagined turning the prints into a mold from which he could create a soft pillow; these were the first stirrings of CritBuns, a brightly colored foam cushion designed to support the rears of students who suffer through long evaluations.

CritBuns took shape in 2005 during a Maya course. Gebbia translated a computer image into a foam pillow using rapid-prototyping technology and went on to win the annual design diploma competition held by the school's Office of Student

Life. From there, the route to happier rears was short and steep. Aiming to produce 400 CritBuns in three weeks so the product could be handed out to graduating students as a farewell gift, Gebbia hustled to find a manufacturer. A pool-float company created the molds in only four days at a production cost of around \$2,500. That summer, Gebbia designed a package, logo, and sales slogan. Though he was tempted by the tag line "Supporting creativity where others can't," he settled on the more professional "For the love of the crit."

In the ego-bruising spirit of art-school critiques, the package also includes harsh motivational statements—"You are all cows. You only see the grass as something to eat"—the likes of which clearly worked their magic on Gebbia, who is now a designer at Chronicle Books in San Francisco. Of his success—CritBuns has sold more than 1,500 units—Gebbia says, "Everything was so theoretical at RISD. This was putting the rubber to the road."

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— RACHEL LEHMANN-HAUPT

