

WEEKEND JOURNAL.

THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

CATALOG CRITIC

Sitting Pretty Smartly

We Try Out Desk Chairs to See Which Work Best at Home; The Seat-Edge Tilt Factor

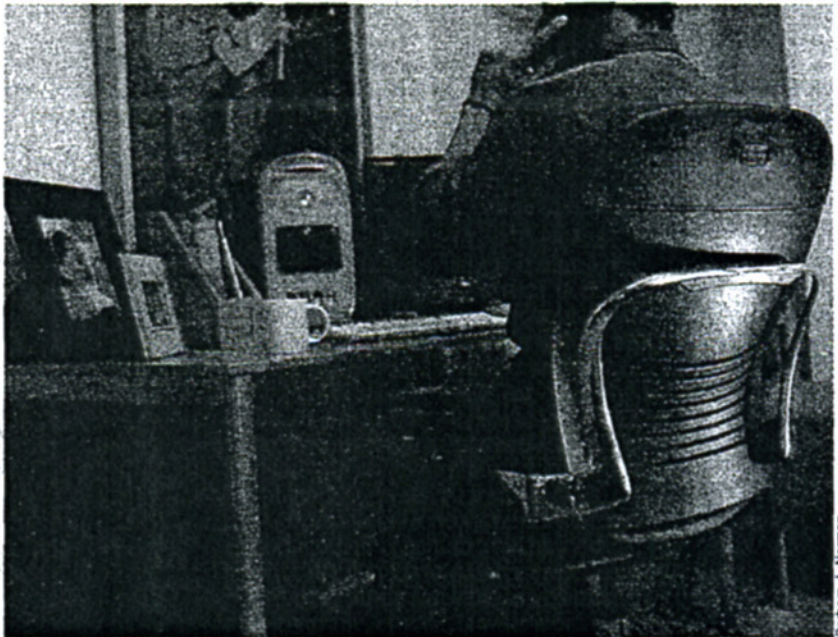
By TROY McMULLEN

FOR A RECENT PURCHASE, Mary McDade perused brochures, visited several showrooms and tested 10 different models. After sorting through exotic-sounding features like "harmonic tilt" and "dual-pivot backrest," she finally came home with a brand-new... desk chair.

Weeks later, the 45-year-old jewelry distributor in Rockford, Ill., says she still hasn't tried some of the adjustments on the new chair for her home office. "They put so much stuff on these things," says Ms. McDade.

If you think setting up the computer for your home office is complicated, try buying the chair. With the number of U.S. home offices up 7.5% last year, furniture makers are rolling out increasingly complex models with arcane ergonomic adjustments and "form-sensing" materials. Herman Miller, known for its high-end Aeron office chair, now sells the Mirra, a less-expensive alternative. The \$895 Freedom chair from Humanscale appears in both office-supply stores and such home-friendly catalogs as Design Within Reach. Ads for fancy desk chairs are also appearing in Dwell, House Beautiful and other décor magazines.

Makers are eager to get into the home, in part because of a drop-off in business. Overall office-furniture sales fell to \$10 billion in 2003, down from \$15 billion in 2000, according to the Business and Institutional Furniture Manufacturers Association. Mean-



Catbird seat: Desk chairs like the Leap try to combine function with fashion.

while, desk chair sales climbed 6.7% in the same period. Makers know "that the home-office market is growing and they need to be a bigger part of it," says Tom Reardon, director of the trade group.

In search of a chair that would be simple to adjust and would look at home outside a cubicle, we anonymously ordered five models from popular manufacturers. Besides distributing the

Please Turn to Page W8