



Aalto style stool

Not on display

Title/Description: Aalto style stool

Object Type: Chair, Furniture

Materials: Paint, Wood

Measurements: h. 440 x w. 380 x d. 380 mm

Accession Number: 31511

Production Place: Oy Huonekalu-ja Rakennustyötehdas Ab

The Stool 60 designed by the architect and designer Alvar Aalto (1898-1976) in 1933 represents what Aalto himself viewed as the most important discovery in his furniture design. The stool is constructed of a round seat in solid birch and three legs mounted directly to the underside of the seat without the need for complicated connecting elements. The innovation was the idea of the “bent knee” which meant that a piece of solid birch wood was sawn open at the end in the direction of the fibers just below the level of the planned bend and thin pieces of wood veneer strips were then

inserted and glued into the grooves. Afterwards the wood was bent to the desired angle, in this case 90 degrees.

The production method meant a simplified bending process and gave the component an increased stability and Aalto patented it in 1933. [1] With this technique Aalto could create furniture that was stable, hardwearing, and suitable for standardization, but keep the warm and organic qualities of wood which he preferred to the cold tubular steel. As with most of Aalto's furniture designs the stool was designed for a building project, the Discussion and Lecture room in the Viipuri Library (1927-1935). When not in use, the functional design made it possible to stack the stools in decorative serpentine towers – an innovation suitable for a room that had multiple functions. [2]

The Stool 60 represents Aalto's views on design and how interlinked they were with architecture. Aalto spoke of the furniture leg as "the columns little sister". Through the creation of the new leg construction, he had transformed the style of his furniture just as "clearly as the Doric, Ionic and Corinthian columns each resulted in a special order or style of architecture." [3] Aalto's simple L-leg was followed by the Y leg in 1947, the fan-shaped X leg in 1954 and a fourth "order", the H-leg, a leg made of wooden strings. [4]

The Stool 60 and the L-leg also represents the possibilities Aalto saw in standardized elements which created a basic principle that was possible to vary in many ways. The L-leg was applied to another version of the stool with four legs, benches, chairs, and tables. These objects could in turn be varied through the application of paint, stain, and other materials like linoleum on tabletops. From 1933-1956 the system of standard components enabled the creation of more than 50 products. In 1935 Siegfried Giedion (1888-1968) told Finnish reporters exactly why he was so enthralled by Aalto's furniture: "In the history of wooden furniture, nobody had come up with anything truly innovative for over 100 years until Aalto enlisted bent plywood to serve both form and flexibility." [5]

Therese Wiles, February 2022

[1] Göran Schildt "The decisive years" in Pallasmaa, Juhanni ed. Alvar Aalto: Furniture (Espoo; Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1984). P. 77

[2] Mikonranta, Kaarina. "Alvar Aalto – Master of Variation" in Pirkko Tuukkanen ed. Alvar Aalto: Designer (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Foundation, Alvar Aalto Museum, 2002). p. 80

[3] Göran Schildt "The decisive years" in Pallasmaa, Juhanni ed. Alvar Aalto: Furniture (Espoo; Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1984). P. 85

[4] Göran Schildt "The decisive years" in Pallasmaa, Juhanni ed. Alvar Aalto: Furniture (Espoo; Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1984). P. 85

[5] "Puuhuonekalujen alalla ei ole sataan vuoteen kyetty luomaan mitään uusia muotoja" (Nobody has invented truly new in wooden furniture design in 100 years) Kauppalehti 19.6-1935 taken from Mikonranta, Kaarina. "Alvar Aalto – Master of Variation" in Pirkko Tuukkanen ed. Alvar Aalto: Designer (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Foundation, Alvar Aalto Museum, 2002). p. 80

Further Reading

Lahti, Louna. Alvar Aalto, 1889-1976: Paradise For the Man in the Street (Köln: Taschen, 2019).

Mikonranta, Kaarina. "Alvar Aalto – Master of Variation" in Pirkko Tuukkanen ed. Alvar Aalto: Designer (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Foundation, Alvar Aalto Museum, 2002).

Pallasmaa, Juhanni ed. Alvar Aalto: Furniture (Espoo; Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1984).

Schildt, Göran. Alvar Aalto: A Life's Work – Architecture, Design and Art. (Helsinki: Otava Publ, 1994).

Tuukkanen, Pirkko ed. Alvar Aalto: Designer (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Foundation, Alvar Aalto Museum, 2002).
