

DESIGN

of the 20th Century

Charlotte & Peter Fiell

TASCHEN

Design

of the 20th Century

Front Cover: Alvar Aalto, *Savoy vase*, 1936

Spine: Eero Aarnio, *Ball or Globe chair*, 1963–1965

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KÖLN LONDON MADRID NEW YORK PARIS TOKYO

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"No matter what things you study, you will always find that those which are good and useful are also graced with beauty."

Baldassare
Castiglione,
Cortegiano, 1528

Throughout the 20th century, design has existed as a major feature of culture and everyday life. Its compass is vast and includes three-dimensional objects, graphic communications and integrated systems from information technology to urban environments. Defined in its most global sense as the conception and planning of all man-made products, design can be seen fundamentally as an instrument for improving the quality of life.

To some extent, the origins of design can be traced to the Industrial Revolution and the birth of mechanized production. Prior to this, objects were craft-produced, meaning that the conception and realization of an object was most often undertaken by an individual creator. With the advent of new industrial manufacturing processes and the division of labour, design (conception and planning) was separated from making. At this time, however, design was viewed as just one of the many interrelated aspects of mechanized production. The forethought that went into design had no intellectual, theoretical or philosophic foundation and so had little positive impact on the nature of the industrial process or on society. Modern design can be seen to have evolved from 19th-century design reformers, and in particular from **William Morris**, who attempted to unite theory with practice. While this endeavour was largely unsuccessful due to the craft-based means of production used by Morris, his reforming ideas had a fundamental impact on the development of the **Modern Movement**. It was not until the early 20th century, when individuals such as **Walter Gropius** integrated design theory with practice through new industrial means of production, that modern design truly came into being. In an attempt to bridge the gulf between the social idealism and commercial reality that had existed up to the end of the First World War and to promote an appropriate response to the emerging technological culture, Gropius founded the **Bauhaus** in 1919. The goal of modern design, as pioneered and taught at the Bauhaus, was to produce work that unified intellectual, practical, commercial and aesthetic concerns through artistic endeavour and the exploitation of new technologies. While the Bauhaus advanced important new ways of thinking about design, it developed only some of the ideas necessary for the successful integration of design theory with the industrial process. The principles forged there were later developed at the New Bauhaus in Chicago, which was founded by **László Moholy-Nagy** in 1937, and at the **Hochschule für Gestaltung, Ulm**, which was founded in 1953. Both these teaching institutions made important contributions to new thinking about the unification of design theory and practice in relation to industrial methods of production.

Throughout the 20th century, the products, styles, theories and philosophies of design have become evermore diverse. This is due in large

part to the growing complexity of the design process. Increasingly in design for industrial production, the relationship between conception, planning and making is fragmented and complicated by a series of interlinked specialized activities involving many different individuals, such as model makers, market researchers, materials specialists, engineers and production technicians. The products of design that result from this multi-faceted process are not the outcome of individual designers, but the outcome of teams of individuals, all of whom have their own ideas and attitudes about how things should be. The historic plurality of design in the 20th century, however, is also due to changing patterns of consumption, changing taste, the differing commercial and moral imperatives of inventors/designers/makers, technological progress, and varying national tendencies in design.

In the study of design history, it is important to remember that the products of design cannot be fully understood outside of the social, economic, political, cultural and technological contexts that gave rise to their conception and realization. At different times in the 20th century, for example, the economic cycles of Western economies have had a significant impact on the prevalence of objects that emphasize design over styling – and vice versa. While styling is often a complementary element of a design solution, design and styling are completely distinct disciplines. Styling is concerned with surface treatment and appearance – the expressive qualities of a product. Design, on the other hand, is primarily concerned with problem solving – it tends to be holistic in its scope and generally seeks simplification and essentiality. During economic downturns, **Functionalism** (design) tends to come to the fore while in periods of economic prosperity, anti-rationalism (styling) is apt to flourish.

Increasingly throughout the 20th century, the interests of businesses to create competitive products have driven the evolution and diversity of design as well as the careers of individual designers. While some designers work within corporate structures, others work in consultancies or independently. Many independent designers choose to operate outside of the constraints of the industrial process, preferring to produce work that is mainly concerned with self-expression. Design is not only a process linked to mechanized production, it is a means of conveying persuasive ideas, attitudes and values about how things could or should be according to individual, corporate, institutional or national objectives. As a channel of communication between people, design provides a particular insight into the character and thinking of the designer and his/her beliefs about what is important in the relationship between the object (design solution), the user/consumer, and the design process and society. To this extent, this book

“design ... is a manifestation of the capacity of the human spirit to transcend its limitations.”

George Nelson,
The Problems of Design, 1957

does not promote a single unifying theory of design or ideology. Rather, its aim is to highlight the pluralistic nature of design and the idea that, historically, design can be viewed as a debate between conflicting opinions about such issues as the role of technology and the industrial process, the primacy of utility, simplicity and affordability over luxury and exclusivity, and the role of function, aesthetics, ornament and symbolism in practical objects for use.

This survey of design in the 20th century features those concepts, styles, movements, designers, schools, companies and institutions that have shaped the course of design theory and practice, or have advanced the development of innovative forms, materials applications, technical means and processes, or have influenced taste, the history of style in the applied and decorative arts, and culture and society in general. The areas of activity covered include: furniture, product, textile, glass, ceramic, metalware and graphic design, with interior design and architecture receiving only occasional mention. While a certain amount of industrial design has also been included, a companion book, entitled *Industrial Design*, will be dedicated to this broad field of study, which will encompass among other things the realms of transport, military, medical, heavy industrial, sports and safety-equipment design.

The geographic area covered by this book has been limited to mainly Europe and North America, with a few outlying countries. While the scope of the book's subject demands selectivity, it is hoped that those entries chosen for inclusion will be seen as broadly representative of the many different currents in thinking and approaches to design over the last hundred years. The entries have been laid out alphabetically with cross-references appearing in the text in bold type so as to reveal the many illuminating interrelationships between designers, schools, manufacturers, movements and styles. A time-line at the back of the book also shows the historical overlapping of styles and movements. The book sets out to provide as much factual information as the constraints of space allow. In the occasional instances where opinions and unconscious displays of bias have invariably crept in, it is hoped that these will be recognized as such.

Through highlighting the diverse nature of design, a further aim of this book is to demonstrate that the attitudes, ideas and values communicated by designers and manufacturers are not absolute, but are conditional and fluctuate. Design solutions to even the most straightforward of problems are inherently ephemeral as the needs and concerns of designers, manufacturers and society change. Perhaps the most significant reason for diversity in design, however, is the general belief that, despite the authority and success of particular design solutions, there is always a better way of doing things.

Catalogue

Aalto to Zsolnay

Alvar Aalto · Eero Aarnio · AEG · Aesthetic Movement · Agitprop · Otl Aicher · Anni Albers
Josef Albers · Franco Albini · Don Albinson · Studio Alchimia · Alessi · Emilio Ambasz · Ant
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Hugo Alvar Hendrik Aalto studied architecture at the Helsingin Tekniliiton Korkeakoulu, Helsinki from 1916 to 1921. For the next two years, he worked as an exhibition designer and travelled extensively in central Europe, Italy and Scandinavia. In 1923, he established his own architectural office in Jyväskylä, which later moved to Turku (1927–1933) and then Helsinki (1933–1976). In 1924, he married the designer, Aino Marsio (1894–1949) and for five years they conducted experiments together into the bending of wood. This research led to Aalto's revolutionary chair designs of the 1930s. In 1929, he co-designed an exhibition to celebrate Turku's 700th anniversary – his first complete and Modern structure for Scandinavian public display. His most celebrated architectural projects were his own house in Turku (1927), which is generally regarded as one of the first expressions of Scandinavian Modernism, the Viipuri Library (1927–1935), the Paimio Tuberculosis Sanatorium (1929–1933) and the Finnish Pavilion for the New York World's Fair (1939).

Having turned to laminated wood and plywood as his materials of choice in 1929, Aalto began investigating veneer bonding and the limits of moulding plywood with Otto Korhonen, the technical director of a furniture factory near Turku. These experiments resulted in Aalto's most technically innovative chairs, the No. 41 (1931–1932) and the cantilevered No. 31 (1932), both of

Alvar Aalto

1898 Kuortane, Finland
1976 Helsinki



◀ Model No. 3031
Savoy vase for
Karhula (later
manufactured by
Iittala), 1936

◀ Model No. 41
Paimio chair for
Huonekalu- ja
Rakennustyötehdas
(later manufactured
by Artek), 1930–1931