



Twentieth Century Design Icons
no. 8

“Model 65 Chair”
by
Alvar Aalto
(1898-1976)

THE MODEL 65 CHAIR was designed by Aalto in 1933-35, and has been exclusively manufactured by Artek since 1935.

When one thinks of Aalto, images of laminated wood and plywood furniture instantly spring to mind. Though he experimented with a variety of construction materials, including tubular steel, he made the most significant technical innovations using laminated materials such as birch and plywood.

In 1924 Aalto married the designer, Aino Marsio, and together for five years they experimented with the bending of wood. This research led to their revolutionary designs of the 1930s, produced by bonding veneers together and moulding plywood. The model 65 chair was perhaps the most enduring outcome of this period.

Alvar and Aino’s designs began a new trend in the use of laminated woods and plywood. The furniture proved to be very successful with the public and as a result they set up a company to manufacture and sell their furniture. The company was named Artek, and was set up in 1935.

Aalto believed that his most important contribution to furniture design was his solving of an age-old problem – how to connect vertical and horizontal pieces of material. In order to do this a framework usually has to be built, joints cut or standard components such as screws, bolts or nails used. His bentwood solutions allowed legs to be joined directly to the underside of a seat or a table without the need for a framework or any additional support.

Much of Aalto’s furniture has an organic appearance. It does not look like other furniture of the same period, which appears angular and sharp, often made of polished tubular steel. Such furniture looked mass-produced, whereas Alvar’s chairs look like they have been individually made by skilled craftsmen using natural materials.

Aalto’s furniture was well received both in Britain and the US during the 1930s and 1940s. His philosophy of design, influenced by nature and organic materials, inspired such designers as Charles and Ray Eames.

