



Twentieth Century Design Icons
no. 3

"series 71 Chair"
by
Eero Saarinen
(1910-1961)

EERO SAARINEN was born in Hvitträsk, Finland, on 20 August 1910. He emigrated to the United States in 1923, when he was thirteen years old. He grew up within the community of the Cranbrook Academy of Art in Michigan, where his father taught, and studied under his father and took courses in sculpture and furniture design. Saarinen had a close relationship with fellow students Charles and Ray Eames.

Beginning in September 1929, Saarinen studied sculpture at the *Académie de la Grande Chaumière* in Paris, then studied architecture at Yale University, completing his studies in 1934. After that, he toured Europe and North Africa for a year and spent another year back in Finland, before returning to Cranbrook to work for his father and teach at the academy. He became a naturalized US citizen in 1940. During the Second World War, Saarinen joined the military service in the Office of Strategic Services (OSS), and drew illustrations for bomb disassembly manuals and provided designs for the Situation Room in the White House. After his father's death in 1950, Saarinen founded his own architectural office, "Eero Saarinen and Associates".

Saarinen first received critical recognition, while still working for his father, for a chair designed together with Charles Eames for the "Organic Design in Home Furnishings" competition in 1940, which was awarded first prize. This chair, like all other Saarinen chairs, was taken into production by the Knoll furniture company, founded by the Saarinen family friend Florence (Schust) Knoll together with her husband Hans Knoll. Further attention came while Saarinen was still working for his father, when he took first prize in the 1948 competition for the design of the Jefferson National Expansion Memorial, St. Louis, not completed until the 1960s. The competition award was mistakenly sent to his father.

During his long association with Knoll he designed many important pieces of furniture including the "Grasshopper" lounge chair and ottoman (1946), the "Womb" chair and ottoman (1948), the "Womb" settee (1950), side and arm chairs (1948-1950), and his most famous "Tulip" or "Pedestal" group (1956), which featured side and arm chairs, dining, coffee and side tables, as well as a stool. All of these designs were highly successful apart for the "Grasshopper" which, although in production until 1965, was not a big seller. His Womb chair and ottoman, as well as his "Tulip" collection, have remained in production and are considered iconic.



Saarinen served on the jury for the Sydney Opera House commission and was crucial in the selection of the internationally-known design by Jørn Utzon. He died, while undergoing an operation for a brain tumor, in 1961 at the age of 51.