

Hans J. Wegner

1915-2007

Hans J. Wegner, (born 2 April, 1914; died 26 January, 2007), was one of the most innovative and prolific of all Danish furniture designers. His work is representative of the excellent craftsmanship and commitment to modern living that made mid-century Danish design internationally popular. His work belongs to a minimalist school, but preserves function. He is perhaps best known for his many beautifully and cleverly designed chairs using the finest of craftsmanship.

Born to a cobbler, he got an early start working as a child apprentice to a carpenter. After serving in the military he went to technical college and then to the School of Arts and Crafts and the Architectural Academy in Copenhagen. Even his earliest objects, like an elegant armchair with sloping armrests like relaxed wrists (a 1937 design for an exhibition at the Museum of Decorative Arts), exhibited Wegner's approach of "stripping the old chairs of their outer style and letting them appear in their pure construction."



Wegner worked for some time for Arne Jacobsen, another famous Danish designer. Wegner was in charge of the furniture in the Aarhus Municipal Hall, which Jacobsen designed. After some years under Jacobsen, Wegner started his own company. Along with fellow architect, he drew furniture for FDB (a Danish chain of grocery stores), spearheaded by Erik Kold, who founded an organization of Danish furniture makers that launched Danish design abroad.

In his later years Wegner became more attached to P.P. Møbler (which produces most of his designs today) for whom many of his later designs were made. He remained active throughout his life, continually showing new original ideas and concepts. The *Hoop Chair*, originally designed in 1965 with a steel tube base and finally put into production made entirely in wood in 1985 (for P.P. Møbler) is completely without precedent. Wegner has designed furniture for the best of Danish furniture producers, including P.P. Møbler, Johannes Hansen, Carl Hansen & Son, Fritz Hansen, Getama, Fredericia Stolefabrik and others. He designed over 500 chairs and retired from public life only in the last decade of his life.

He received almost all major honours given to designers, from the Lunning Prize in 1951 and the Grand Prix of the Milan Triennale in the same year, to the Prince Eugen Medal in Sweden and the Danish Eckersberg Medal. In 1959, he was made Honorary Royal Designer for industry by the Royal Society of Arts in London. His furniture is part of all major design museum collections in the world: The Museum of Modern Art in N.Y., Die Neue Sammlung in Munich and at least twenty other museums.

Chair Design

Wegner's chair designs were manufactured primarily by P.P. Møbler and Carl Hansen & Son, and were made with the modern, sculptural idea that they could stand on their own, rather than as parts of a furniture set. The *Peacock* chair from 1947, with a slatted back rest fanning out to evoke the bird's plume, was inspired by the traditional "Windsor" chair. His 1949 folding chair was made to be hung on the wall, and his *Shell* chair from the same year experimented with curving the wood in three dimensions to form the seat.

The multi-purpose *Valet* chair, designed in 1953, had elements for hanging up or storing each piece of a man's suit. The backrest is carved to be used as a coat hanger, pants can be hung on a rail at the edge of the seat and everything else can be stowed in a storage space underneath the seat.

In 1960 he came out with several variations on the *Ox* chair which came with or without horns, and was a fine example of the line Wegner could masterfully walk between elegance and playfulness. "We must take care," he once said, "that everything doesn't get so dreadfully serious. We must play – but we must play seriously." In more recent years he continued to design chairs and has also worked with lighting, such as the *Pole* lamp created in 1976 with his daughter Marianne. A true craftsman, Wegner has stated that, "the chair does not exist. The good chair is a task one is never completely done with."

