

Alvar Aalto – Designer and Architect

The Finnish architect Alvar Aalto (1898-1976) is known in Austria in particular for the designs he submitted for the competition to build Vienna's Stadthalle in 1953. He was awarded the first prize together with Roland Rainer; however, it was the latter's design that was eventually realised.

Alvar Aalto's furniture designs number among the masterpieces of 20th century applied art. Among his most famous prototypes are the seatings he designed for the sanatorium at Paimio in 1931/32 as well as the stacking stools and chairs for the city library in Viipuri which date from 1932/33.

Aalto explored the major design themes of the 20th century, developing standard models for industrial serial production as well as innovative production processes. In 1935 he founded the Artek company which still produces Aalto's furniture designs, marketing them worldwide through exclusive furniture stores.

Animated by the humanist conviction that *"true architecture exists only where man stands in center"* [sic], Aalto concentrated on the specific needs of the user when designing his furniture.

Bentwood Furniture

For his furniture Aalto decided to use birch, a type of wood native to Finland and a material with both tactile qualities and emotional associations. His furniture is made of laminated wood and plywood and represents a major development in the history of bentwood furniture which had been revolutionised by Michael Thonet in Vienna in the 19th century.

The Dr Heinz Kossdorff Collection

For the first time, the Imperial Furniture Collection presents the private collection of Dr Heinz Kossdorff, whose predilection for birchwood led him to start collecting Aalto's designs. The exhibition comprises around fifty pieces of furniture by Alvar Aalto together with designs in glass by Aalto and his wife Aino. The exhibition is complemented by a section illustrating the history of bentwood furniture with examples of bentwood furniture by Thonet as well as by contemporary examples of plywood furniture by Marcel Breuer, Gerald Summers and Charles Eames.

(Eva B. Ottlinger)