



Aalto chair

Alvar Aalto

Not on display

Title/Description: Aalto chair

Artist/Maker: Alvar Aalto

Object Type: Chair, Furniture

Materials: Birch

Measurements: h. 800 x w. 485 x d. 430 mm

Accession Number: 31521

Production Place: Oy Huonekalu-ja Rakennustyötehdas Ab

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Credit Line: Bequeathed by Lady Sainsbury, 2014

Chair 611 designed by Alvar Aalto is a stacking auditorium chair made of solid birch and was advertised as the 'auditorium chair bar none' when it came on the market in 1929. It is also known as the row chair. As with most of Aalto's furniture designs chair 611 was used to furnish a specific project and the chair was first used in the auditorium of Aalto's Jyväskylä Defence Corps Building (1926-29). [1] The chair was ideal for furnishing public spaces because it was light and easy to move around and when not in use one could place the chairs in stacks on the side which meant that floor space could be freed which created a multifunctional space.

Aalto stands as the creator of the Chair 611 but the chair is also a product and a symbol of the close cooperation between the manufacturer Otto Korhonen (1884-1935) and the designer Aalto who first met in 1928. [2] The design of the stacking chair was actually an improved version of a stackable chair that Korhonen had created a few years earlier. Korhonen had placed the seat of an ordinary chair on top of legs extending to the sides which made it possible to stack the chair. After Aalto and Korhonen met in 1928 Aalto developed the prototype into an object that was more proportionate, aesthetic and commercial.

The chair also symbolizes the position of the designer around the 1930s, a period when the designer's identity was of minor significance. In the development of standardized products, the technical expertise was so important that manufacturer often became more influential than the designer which also can be visible in the rather anonymous designs of this period. [3]

Korhonen was the technical director and owner of the furniture producer O.Y. Huonekalu- ja Rakennustuödehdas A.B who would later produce Aalto's furniture. He was highly aware of the new requirements that industrialization, mass production and modern marketing meant for his company. The introduction of an even more industrialized production method meant that furniture became standardized objects and marked a move away from handicraftmanship but neither Korhonen nor Aalto seems to have wanted to compromise on the high quality which is visible in the materials that they used in their furniture. Focusing on good quality wood that many times was left visible under a layer of varnish. [4]

Painted versions of Chair 611 were also produced which showed the flexibility that standardized products had. Korhonen's experience and technical knowhow would prove invaluable when Aalto developed his furniture later during the 1930's. The furniture incorporated innovative production methods, local material, and a new form language. [5]

Therese Wiles, July 2022

[1] <https://www.alvaraalto.fi/en/work/chair-611/> [accessed 15 October 2021]

[2] Louna Lahti, *Alvar Aalto, 1889-1976: Paradise For the Man in the Street* (Köln: Taschen, 2019). P. 29

[3] Mikonranta, Kaarina. "Alvar Aalto - Master of Variation" in Pirkko Tuukkanen ed. *Alvar Aalto: Designer* (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Foundation, Alvar Aalto Museum, 2002). p. 69

[4] Juhani Pallasmaa ed. *Alvar Aalto: Furniture* (Espoo; Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1984) p. 117.

[5] Mikonranta, Kaarina. "Alvar Aalto - Master of Variation" in Pirkko Tuukkanen ed. *Alvar Aalto: Designer* (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Foundation, Alvar Aalto Museum, 2002). p. 59

Further Reading

Lahti, Louna. Alvar Aalto, 1889-1976: Paradise For the Man in the Street (Köln: Taschen, 2019).

Mikonranta, Kaarina. "Alvar Aalto - Master of Variation" in Pirkko Tuukkanen ed. Alvar Aalto: Designer (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Foundation, Alvar Aalto Museum, 2002).

Pallasmaa, Juhanni ed. Alvar Aalto: Furniture (Espoo; Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1984).

Schildt, Göran. Alvar Aalto: A Life's Work - Architecture, Design and Art. (Helsinki: Otava Publ, 1994).

Tuukkanen, Pirkko ed. Alvar Aalto: Designer (Jyväskylä: Alvar Aalto Foundation, Alvar Aalto Museum, 2002).
