

Press Release

BENTWOOD AND BEYOND

Thonet and Modern Furniture Design

Press Conference	Tuesday, 17 December 2019, 10:30 a.m.
Opening	Tuesday, 17 December 2019, 7 p.m.
Exhibition Venue	MAK Exhibition Hall MAK, Stubenring 5, 1010 Vienna
Exhibition Dates	18 December 2019 – 13 April 2020
Opening Hours	Tue 10 a.m.–10 p.m., Wed–Sun 10 a.m.–6 p.m.

On the occasion of the 200th anniversary of the world-famous company Thonet, the MAK invites on a journey through time and modern furniture design. The innovative bentwood furniture from Michael Thonet established one of the most successful furniture brands in the world and made style history. The exhibition *BENTWOOD AND BEYOND: Thonet and Modern Furniture Design* compares the fascinating Thonet product program with numerous other aesthetically and historically formative exhibits. For the first time, in addition to a chronological overview, the legendary Thonet furniture is broadly embedded in the technological, typological, aesthetic, and historical development of furniture design.

In the middle of the 19th century, German master joiner Michael Thonet (1796–1871) set out from Boppard on the Rhine to Vienna beginning a unique success story: In Austria, he perfected and patented the bentwood technique he developed, and founded the largest furniture empire of the 19th century. The ultimate breakthrough came in 1859 with the production of the iconic chair No. 14, the epitome of the so-called coffee house chair. The novel technology of bending solid beech wood made it possible to produce furniture in industrial dimensions for the first time. Chair No. 14 is still one of the world's best-selling pieces of furniture and is considered the undisputed "classic" of modern industrial design.

The exhibition *BENTWOOD AND BEYOND: Thonet and Modern Furniture Design* presents the entire company history from the first half of the 19th century up to today. It seamlessly chronicles of the developmental stages of bentwood technology, the transition from manual craftwork to mass production, and finally to mass production. Not only chairs, but also tables, armchairs, loungers, and wardrobes were and still are

manufactured using bentwood technology, again and again in cooperation with well-known designers and architects.

Starting from the 1930s, Thonet focused on a second material and became the world's largest producer of tubular steel furniture. Even after the Second World War, attempts were repeatedly made to build on contemporary developments in international furniture design or to become trendsetters themselves.

Exhibition curator Sebastian Hackenschmidt, curator of the MAK Furniture and Woodwork Collection, and guest curator Wolfgang Thillmann, a high-caliber scientific expert on the history of Thonet include nearly 240 exhibits in the exhibition. The furniture is placed into groups of two to three objects and approximately 100 comparisons are made therewith. This provides a sound insight into material technological developments, typological parallels, and iconographic affinities.

Bentwood furniture meets tubular steel furniture, plastic chairs, classic office chairs, and avant-garde furniture experiments, and also occasional references pieces from the Biedermeier Period or courtly furniture. Relationships and correspondences as well as contrasts and divergences with other manufacturers can be seen as well as fractures and caesuras that accelerated the further development of furniture production.

The timeless aesthetics and perfect shape of the Thonet furniture have always been a source of inspiration for contemporary artists, designers, and architects. With works specifically placed in the exhibition, Birgit Jürgenssen, Bruno Gironcoli, Rolf Sachs, Uta Belina Waeger, and Markus Wilfling, among others, discuss the radiant power of bentwood technology from an artistic perspective.

The MAK holds one of the most important Thonet collections in the world, with a globally leading inventory of bentwood furniture. A compact overview of one hundred of Thonet's productions as well as that of competing companies from the 1830s to the 1930s is permanently exhibited in the MAK Permanent Collection Historicism Art Nouveau.

Many of the exhibits found in the exhibition *BENTWOOD AND BEYOND: Thonet and Modern Furniture Design* comes from the MAK Collection, while approximately one quarter are on loan from the companies Thonet Frankenberg (D), TON (CZ), Gebrüder Thonet Vienna (IT), as well as museums and private collections.

The exhibition is accompanied by the catalog *BENTWOOD AND BEYOND: Thonet and Modern Furniture Design* by Sebastian Hackenschmidt and Wolfgang Thillmann, edit-

ed by Christoph Thun-Hohenstein and Sebastian Hackenschmidt. German/English, ca. 304 pages with numerous color illustrations. MAK, Vienna/Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel 2020. Available at the MAK Design Shop and online at [MAKdesignshop.at](https://www.makdesignshop.at) for € 49.95.

Press photos are available for download at [MAK.at/en/press](https://www.mak.at/en/press).

Press Data

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Curator	Sebastian Hackenschmidt, Curator, MAK Furniture and Woodwork Collection
Guest Curator	Wolfgang Thillmann
Exhibition Design	Claudia Cavallar
Graphic Design	Maria Anna Friedl
Publication	The exhibition is accompanied by the catalog <i>BENTWOOD AND BEYOND: Thonet and Modern Furniture Design</i> (MAK Studies 28) by Sebastian Hackenschmidt and Wolfgang Thill- mann, edited by Christoph Thun-Hohenstein and Sebastian Hackenschmidt. German/English, ca. 304 pages with numerous color illustrations. MAK, Vienna/Birkhäuser Verlag, Basel 2020. Available at the MAK Design Shop and online at MAK- designshop.at for € 49.95.
Supporting Program	In preparation
MAK Admission	€ 12 / Reduced € 9 / Family Ticket € 15 Every Tuesday 6–10 p.m.: admission € 5 Free admission for children and teens under 19

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