



Plus Linje Peacock chair, designed by Verner Panton, 1960. The 20th Century Art & Design Fair, Olympia. June 2000.



Arne Jacobsen designed set of eight high back Oxford chairs 1960, upholstered in vinyl on an aluminium support. Sold for £1,527 (including premium) at Sotheby's, 3rd May 2002. Photo courtesy of Sotheby's.



Plus Linje Square cone chair, designed by Verner Panton, 1960. The 20th Century Art & Design Fair, Olympia. June 2000.



Peter Ghyczy Garden Egg chair 1968, fibreglass shell with interior padding, the top could be closed down when not in use. Sold for £350 (including premium) at Sotheby's, 3rd May 2002. Photo courtesy of Sotheby's.



Plus Linje cone chair and stool, designed by Verner Panton. The 20th Century Art & Design Fair, Olympia. June 2000.

The 1960s Seat. Includes Buyer's Guide and Recent Values

by Zita Thornton

Colourful, curvy and comfortable, seats from the sixties were design icons of the period. Moving away from traditional wood, their designers used plastic, fibre glass and foam to form waves, spheres and cones which instantly sum up the style of the time. They were works of art, designed to startle, but to be comfortable and functional too.

The post war 'Baby Boomers' had come of age. The age of austerity was over. Optimism in a time of great technological advances had arrived. Men had travelled in space, flown supersonically in Concorde and had heart transplants. Permanence and uniformity was out, change and variety came in. Newly developed plastics provided a flexible and inexpensive material with which to interpret the fashionable Pop Art.

In 1964, Terence Conran's Habitat shop opened in Fulham Road, London, to provide the new, young, middle class with well designed, new shapes and colours with which to furnish their homes. It offered the best international designs, from Denmark, Finland, France and Italy. Their designers brought a beauty and sophistication to a material which had previously been used for cheap, throwaway items.

Cost effective production methods brought inexpensive practicality to mass produced chairs for contract use too. Robin Day's 1963 design takes the title of most successful chair in this area. Other's brought style to the office, such as Arne Jacobsen's Oxford series available with a number of different modifications such as low or high back, with or without castors.

Verner Panton in Denmark was the first to design a chair made from a single piece of plastic. His brightly coloured, cantilevered 'Stacking' chair was originally produced in 1960 and mass produced commercially from 1967. The Italian Joe Colombo designed a one piece injection moulded chair in 1965.

At the end of the nineteen fifties, designers had begun to experiment with foam, upholstered in fabric or leather on aluminium or tubular steel frames. Arne Jacobsen is well known for his 'Swan' and 'Egg' chairs. This latter, designed in 1957 was produced for the SAS air terminal in 1958. Its upholstered moulded fibreglass, enclosing arms, on a swivelling base, offered some privacy and warmth in a large open area. The modern Egg chair is still popular today.

Eero Aarnio took the desire for comfortable privacy further in the mid sixties with his 'Ball' chair. Intended as a home within a home, the fibreglass globe chair had an upholstered interior, complete with speakers or a telephone. Its cut out opening could be swivelled away to provide complete privacy. New 'Ball' chairs, using original moulds are currently manufactured.

The idea for the Ball chair led to another in 1967 when Aarnio designed the 'Pastilli' or 'Gyro' chair to make use of the empty space inside the ball when it was shipped to retailers. This shiny fibreglass garden chair, was the same diameter as the opening of the 'Ball' and as it floated could be used in pools too.

A year later Aarnio designed a chair similar to the 'Ball' but which let in much more light. The 'Bubble' was made from

transparent acrylic and could not be set on a swivel base so was designed to be suspended from the ceiling. Today 'Bubbles' provide quiet, but light spaces in libraries and in a Norwegian telecommunications company for uninterrupted mobile phoning.

A year after Aarnio designed his 'Pastilli' chair, Peter Ghyczy took the idea a stage further by allowing the backrest of his upholstered, fibreglass pastille shaped chair, to be closed down forming a weatherproof garden seat. A number of designers developed seating whose tubular metal frames were completely softened and hidden with fabric covered, foam upholstery. Pierre Paulin designed sculptural shapes resting directly on the floor without legs. The indented 'ABCD' sofa took its inspiration from an egg box. Olivier Mourgue designed the futuristic gentle curves which were seen on 'Djinn' chairs and sofas in the 1968 Stanley Kubrick film '2002: A Space Odyssey'. Joe Colombo took versatility to its extreme with his 'Additional Living System' of foam shapes which could form eight different types of seating arrangement.

Equally practical is Roberto Matta's modular foam seating system which formed a sculptural wall when not in use. By the end of the decade ideas became even more radical, especially from Italian designers. The 'Sacco' chair designed by Gatti, Paolino and Teodor in 1968, was virtually formless. This polystyrene filled beanbag dispensed with a frame altogether. The 'Blow' chair, as its name implies, was inflatable. Designed by De Pas, Urbino and Lomazzi, in transparent PVC, it was produced from 1967 right up until 1991. Those which have survived in good condition, complete with foot pump, are rare and therefore highly sought after. This innovative trio, later produced the 'Joe' chair, inspired by American baseball star Joe Di Maggio and is as much of a soft sculpture as a seat, in the form of a baseball glove.

Buyer's Guide

- 8 When buying plastic furniture, condition is vital. Plastic cannot be easily restored.
- 8 Avoid pieces which are scratched, cracked or faded.
- 8 Italian plastic chairs are often marked with the moulded signatures of the designers.
- 8 From 1970 the Panton 'Stacking' chair was injection moulded. This can be detected by fins under the curve of the seat to the foot. The technique allowed a thinner body. Earlier versions had thicker bodies and are more sought after.
- 8 As some original designs have been reissued, buy from reputable dealers to ensure that you are buying an original vintage design.
- 8 Sotheby's include sixties seats in their 20th Century Design sales.



Fritz Hansen 'Wire Cone Chair' by Fritz Hansen. *The 20th Century Art & Design Fair, Olympia, June 2000.*

Recent Values (includes premium)

A set of eight high back Oxford chairs by Arne Jacobsen first designed for St Catherine's College, Oxford £1,527.

Olivier Mourgue Djinn 3 piece suite £1,057
A series of 7 pieces £3,172.

Roberto Matta Malitte modular seating system which forms a wall when not in use £1,057.

Peter Ghyczy Garden Egg chairs from £293 to £411.

Arne Jacobsen Egg chair £517.

Pierre Paulin Tulip chair £293.



An egg chair with a fibreglass shell, the interior fitted with two speakers, on a revolving aluminium foot. Sold for £1,645 (including premium) at Sotheby's, 3rd May 2002. Photo courtesy of Sotheby's.



Herman Miller's Panton chair, 1959-1960. *The 20th Century Art & Design Fair, Olympia, June 2000.*



White fibreglass gelcoat Bouloum (or 'Person') chaise longue, designed by Oliver Mourgue, 1968, maker Arconas. £2,850. Exhibitor: The Country Seat. *The 20th Century Art & Design Fair, Olympia, June 2000.*



Roberto Sebastian Matta 'Malitte' modular seating system designed 1966, designed to function as a sculptural wall when not in use as seating. Sold for £1,057 (including premium) at Sotheby's, 3rd May 2002. Photo courtesy of Sotheby's.