

3.1. Case study: the LC4 chaise longue

Objective

The objective of this case study is to learn how the design strategy ‘subtract details’ works by analyzing exemplary work by famous designers. In this mini case study, we refer to the two chairs mentioned in the chapter: the LC4 chaise longue by Le Corbusier and his two partners, Pierre Jeanneret and Charlotte Perriand, and the Paimio chair designed by Alvar Aalto.

Background

The design of the LC4 chair was inspired by the bentwood technique developed by the Austrian-German Company Thonet (fig. 3.1a). Another source of inspiration was the Bauhaus, a German Design School that privileged functionalism and the use of modern materials such as the steel tubes in the Wassily Chair¹ designed by Marcel Brauer (fig 3.1b).



Figure 3.1a: Thonet rocking armchair



Figure 3.1b: Wassily Chair by Marcel Breuer

The LC4 combined the sinuous curves and the rocking function of Thonet's chair, with curvilinear steel tubes and leather upholstery. The choice of steel was rather unconventional at that time (between 1927 and 1929) when tubular structures and metals were not considered appropriate for house furniture and were somewhat typical of public places such as hospitals or stations.

The LC4 shape was designed to optimize the posture of a human body in a relaxed and resting position (fig.3.1c), following Le Corbusier's principles that the chair was a ‘machine for sitting’ and the house a ‘machine for living’ (Lombardi Borgia, 2019). The chair was actually designed as a mechanic concoction. It can be detached from its four-legged base, and when on the floor, it could be gently rocked. Instead, when it is sitting on its base, the chair is kept still by the attrition created by rubber inserts on the two transverses, which allows users to regulate the chair's inclination to the desired position. A popular version of the LC4 comes with pony skin upholstery. It seems that this decorative aspect was a Perriand's idea, inspired by the shape of the chair that reminded her of a horse.

¹ The Chair was named after the famous painter Wassily Kandinsky, a faculty at the Bauhaus School, although the chair was not designed specifically for him.



Figure 3.1c : LC4 Chaise Longue

Instructions

Read the following articles and do some extra web research to collect more information about the Paimio Chair (history, design features, etc.) and answer the questions below:

<https://www.moma.org/collection/works/92879>

<https://www.artek.fi/en/products/armchair-41-paimio>

- For which context of use was the chair designed?
- Which was key idea around which the chair was designed?
- Compared to other armchairs, which details do you think Alvar Aalto removed from the design, which ones did he keep and even emphasize? Why?

References

Lombardi Borgia, M. (2019), The peculiar story of the LC4 chaise longue by Le Corbusier,

<https://legnocurvatodesign.it/en/the-peculiar-story-lc4-chaise-longue-le-corbusier/>