

Press release
Frankenberg, October 2008

The most frequently built chair in the world turns 150 in 2009: bentwood chair 214 by Thonet

Design: Michael Thonet, 1859

When Michael Thonet first introduced his bentwood chair (the '14' now known today as the '214' chair) in Vienna in 1859, little did he know that he had created what would become the first mass-produced chair in the world. Since then this solid bent wood chair has been in continuous production with over 50 million chairs produced to date. Developed specifically to appeal to - and be affordable by - broad levels of the population, it was to launch Thonet's international reputation in the 19th century. Today, the company is run by the fifth generation of the Thonet family, direct descendants of Michael Thonet, in Frankenberg in North Hesse, Germany, Thonet's head office.

Six components and a handful of screws: The 214, the "coffee-house chair" became the first flat-pack chair. This revolutionary process enabled the chair to be constructed from six components and a handful of screws. As a result it was easily shipped all over the world and assembled on site in Europe, North and South America, Asia and Africa. Today the 214 chair is the most successful industrial product in the world, and is the reason why Thonet is regarded as one of the pioneers of industrial design.

New and simple aesthetic appeal: With its simple, unfussy shape and high level of functionality, the chair's introduction also saw the beginning of a new aesthetic appeal. Homes, cafés and restaurants suddenly looked quite different - lighter, and less opulent. Michael Thonet revolutionised the furnishing world of his day, since the new chairs were inexpensive and could be afforded by the broad masses. The quality was - and remains - so good that the chairs survive for generations. Many of the chairs produced in the 19th century are still in use today.

Timeless, sensuous, perfect - what people have to say about this "chair of chairs": Although the 214 chair has inspired many architects and designers, the design has never been beaten. The Swiss architect **Le Corbusier** confirmed that "... this chair, millions of which are to be found on the European mainland and in both Americas, has class." The Danish designer **Poul Henningsen** once said that if ever an architect produced a chair that were five times as expensive, three times as heavy and just one-quarter as beautiful, then he would undoubtedly make a name for himself by doing so. According to the Portuguese architect **Alvaro Siza**: "An old person or a child can easily carry it..... It is still a chair that looks like a chair. It is the chair." The French designers **Ronan and Erwan Bouroullec** write: "The subtle harmony of its shapes, created by the pioneering method of bending wood, have made the chair a timeless classic."

Source of the last two quotes: "Mein liebster Stuhl", publ. Sandra Hofmeister, Munich: Callwey 2008)

Press release, page 2
Frankenberg, October 2008

Thonet 2009 - the year of anniversaries:

- **190 years of the Thonet company**
- **120 years of Thonet at the company's head office in Frankenberg/Germany**
- **150 years of Stuhl 214 ("coffee-house chair")**
- **90 years of Bauhaus**

Thonet contact in the United Kingdom

Distribution

THONET (U.K.) Ltd.
Hemsley Associates
66 The Avenue
London W13 8LS
Great Britain
Tel. +44 20 8998 4559
Fax +44 20 8248 4326
Email ph@hemsleyassociates.co.uk

U.K. press contact

Caro Communications
Christina Freyberg/Julienne Webster
19/20 Great Sutton Street
London EC1V ODR
Great Britain
Tel. +44 20 7336 8488
Fax +44 20 7336 8848
Email christina@carocommunications.com

Thonet press contact

Thonet GmbH
Vivie Thonet
Michael-Thonet-Straße 1
35006 Frankenberg/ Germany
Tel.: +49-6451 - 508-126
Fax: +49-6451 - 508-129
Email: vivie.thonet@thonet.eu

Claudia Neumann Communication
Claudia Neumann, Georg Maurer
Eigelstein 103-113
50668 Köln/ Germany
Tel.: +49-221 - 91 39 49 0
Fax: +49-221 - 91 39 49 19
Email: thonet@neumann-luz.de