

Press Release
Cologne/Frankenberg, September 2018

Update of chair 404 by Stefan Diez – how a modern classic remains vibrant Oak instead of beech, ergonomically improved and a place in the Neue Sammlung München

For the first round anniversary of the successful wooden chair 404, designer Stefan Diez and Thonet decided to make several adjustments – even 10 years after its market launch, the chair, which is already considered an icon, was to stay on the pulse of the times. Therefore, the slender 404, the slightly wider chair version 404 F, and the barstool 404 H are now made of oak wood instead of beech. The natural wood structure and attractive haptic of the surface, which provide the chair with a fresh and, at the same time, cosy touch, convinced the designer, who is known for his intensive work with materials. The colour range was also adjusted: In addition to the natural oak version, six stain shades – some of them more discrete, some brightly colourful – are now available. The incline of the backrest, which is now formed three-dimensionally, was ergonomically improved, making the chairs even more comfortable.

The selection of the Neue Sammlung – The Design Museum at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich, which will add the chair 404 including the entire process of its creation and prototypes, mock-ups, and a disassembled version of the chair to its collection in September 2018, confirms that the relatively young design can already be considered a classic.



The programme range, which refers to the Vienna Coffee House Chair 2014 and the bentwood armchair 209 as historic models, is characterised by a special construction principle. Diez's innovative idea to merge bent chair legs and armrests in a "knot", and to insert it in the bottom of the seat, was enabled by Thonet thanks to modern plywood and moulded wood technologies: The ergonomically shaped seat is enforced towards its centre, and towards the edges the material is strongly reduced. This knot connection does without any notch or screws. "With the 404, I wanted to interpret Thonet's bentwood classics and translate the idea behind them into the 21st century. The design is based on a simple idea that is realised through modern production methods – and that's how it was already for Michael Thonet," Stefan Diez explains his approach. "The 404 was not to be a trendy product, but rather to continue the company's tradition. I would say that this succeeded." Norbert Ruf, Creative Director at Thonet, is also enthusiastic: "Thanks to the newest adjustments, our customers receive range 404 as an absolutely matured product which has gained in relevance over the years."

The renewal of the programme range 404 at the occasion of its 10th anniversary also comprises the changeover to regional oak wood, which replaces the beech used in the past. "Oak especially convinces due to its striking grain. I wanted the wood structure to show even with the new, bright stain shades. It fits well with the lightness of the design," says Diez. Due to the long fibres, oak wood can be especially well bent. "Wood – and oak wood in particular – has the great property of being elastic without breaking. You can only do something like the 404, which in principle is a sculpture in space, with wood," the designer adds. For the new version, the incline of the slightly flexing backrest was ergonomically adjusted and slightly curved out towards the back, providing the chairs that do not

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prescribe a specific seating position with even more comfort today.

Since summer 2018, chair 404, the armchair version 404 F and the matching barstool 404 H have been made of oak wood and available in the following colours: oak natural (lacquered or brightened), white varnished, or stained in black, dark brown, walnut, rusty red or lemon yellow.

Still young and already a museum piece – the 404 in the Neue Sammlung München

The Neue Sammlung – The Design Museum in the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich is one of the biggest and most important museums for applied 20th and 21st century art worldwide. It is considered the leading collection in the fields of industrial and product design. Stefan Diez: “When we developed the 404, I had the wish to design a wooden chair that would fit in with the Thonet tradition, which started in the mid-19th century. Having the design added to the Neue Sammlung, I would say that this wish has actually come true, and naturally this makes me very proud.”

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Thonet – future-oriented furniture design with a long tradition

The unique success story of Thonet began with the work of master carpenter Michael Thonet. Since establishing his first workshop in Boppard on the River Rhine in 1819, the name Thonet has stood for high-quality, innovative and elegant furniture. The breakthrough came with the iconic chair No. 14, the so-called Vienna Coffee House Chair: the pioneering technique of bending solid beech wood for the first time enabled the mass production of chairs. The second milestone in design history was the tubular steel furniture by the famous Bauhaus architects Mart Stam, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Marcel Breuer in the 1930s. At the time, Thonet was the world's largest producer of these tubular steel furniture designs, which are considered timeless today.

For the company today, the continuous process of innovation stands in the foreground alongside a focus on tradition and fine craftsmanship. Thonet collaborates with renowned national and international designers – in addition, some of the furniture is designed by the in-house Thonet Design Team. All of the furniture is produced in the company-owned manufacturing facility, and, following the motto “Individuality is our standard”, custom-tailored solutions are part of everyday life in Frankenberg. Chief Executive Officer Brian Boyd together with Chief Operating Officer Michael Erdelt and Creative Director Norbert Ruf manage the company at the corporate head offices and production site in Frankenberg/Eder (Germany). The descendants of Michael Thonet, the fifth and sixth generations, are actively involved with the company's business as partners and sales representatives.