

Press release
Cologne/Frankenberg, January 2020

200 years of Thonet – 200 years of design icons **A look back at an exciting anniversary year**

For the Thonet company from the town of Frankenberg in North Hesse, 2019 was a year dominated by major anniversaries: in addition to 100 years of Bauhaus, Thonet celebrated its own 200th birthday and now looks back at two centuries of groundbreaking furniture design. “We’re proud of the impact this unique anniversary has had at every level – from product launches and trade show booths all the way to our collaboration with specialist dealers and awareness in the press and social media,” says the firm’s CEO Brian Boyd. “With 200 years of company history and products that are unfailingly contemporary, Thonet is second to none when it comes to modern, timeless furniture that’s made to last and retains its value,” adds Thonet’s equally delighted creative director Norbert Ruf.

To mark the anniversaries, Thonet launched two limited celebratory editions (S 533 F and 214 Two-Tone with Studio Besau Marguerre), prestigious museums and galleries examined the Thonet story from diverse angles and numerous events were held for retail partners.

New materials and colours: the celebrations begin with special editions and Café Thonet

Thonet’s anniversary year 2019 actually began in September 2018 with the presentation of a limited edition of the famous cantilever chair S 533 F. Hamburg-based design duo Besau Marguerre developed two new versions of the design by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe: one with a frame in pearl gloss chrome and anthracite leather, the other in champagne chrome with pale pink leather. The subtly coordinated, sensuous colours and materials bring the iconic tubular steel chair into the here and now and combine the objectivity of the Bauhaus with a warm look and feel. Produced in a limited edition of 100 chairs per version, the new interpretations of the striking design sold out before the year was half over.

In January 2019, the trade fair booth at imm cologne – likewise designed by Studio Besau Marguerre – marked the official launch of the anniversary year. Titled Café Thonet, the inviting concept by Eva Marguerre and Marcel Besau combined bentwood and tubular steel, past and present to transform the Thonet brand’s DNA into a tangible experience. The coffee house was and is a place of communication, and therefore a symbol of Thonet’s expertise: “People have been getting together on Thonet chairs ever since its success story began back in the 19th century in the great coffee houses of the day – nothing has changed in that respect, even 200 years down the line,” says the company’s creative director Norbert Ruf.

imm cologne 2020 also saw the launch of another design by Studio Besau Marguerre: an anniversary edition of the famous Coffee House Chair 214. In 2019 only, this Thonet classic was available in four modern two-tone colourways that focus attention on the ingeniously minimalist design: black, white, velvet red and sage. The connecting elements of the chair are stained several shades lighter than the seat ring and legs and give the classic a new, thoroughly contemporary look that deliberately emphasises the iconic character of the design.

Thonet in focus – cultural heritage and a source of inspiration

The 200-year existence of a company like Thonet is also a welcome opportunity for curators and art lovers to shine a spotlight on the history of the firm and its inspirational impact on artists. In Munich, for instance, Die Neue Sammlung – The Design Museum of the Pinakothek der Moderne – is hosting the monothematic exhibition Thonet & Design (17.05.2019 to 02.02.2020), for which the museum invited Munich-based product designer Steffen Kehrlé to develop a new scenography for the most important Thonet furniture. Kehrlé’s concept consists of a brightly lit and clearly structured space that permits long sightlines and stages the exhibits objectively. Besides presenting the company’s

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pioneering achievements, the exhibition also focuses on designs from the second half of the 20th century and showcases contemporary models as well.

In addition, Munich gallery Schellmann Art is showing the group exhibition Thonet Re-Imagined (12.11.2019 to 31.01.2020), which presents intriguing explorations of the cultural myth surrounding the Thonet brand by well-known artists. Numerous representations of Thonet furniture in works of visual art dating from the late 19th century until the present day serve as the starting point for the exhibition. In sculptures, photographs, installations and tabletop designs created specially for the exhibition, artists including Christo, Liam Gillick, Keith Haring, Tobias Rehberger, Thomas Ruff and Rosemarie Trockel reflect on Thonet's design language and impact.

The gallery exhibition at Schellmann Art also features US artist Wade Guyton (*1972). After finding an old tubular steel cantilever chair on the street near his New York studio in 2001, Guyton distorted the piece of furniture into an abstract sculpture. Similar artworks followed. For the exhibition in Munich, the Frankenberg production facility lacquered new S 64 chairs red, white and black and twisted them into sculptures under Guyton's direction.

Starting in autumn 2019, Museum Ludwig in Cologne is devoting a major exhibition to Guyton's work in the form of an overview entitled Wade Guyton. Two Decades. MCMXCIX-MMXIX (16.11.2019 to 01.03.2020). Besides the sculptures of distorted Thonet furniture, the company is also represented by the S 43 cantilever chairs that provide the seating for the exhibition.

The anniversary year drew to a close with the opening of another extensive exhibition dedicated to the company's history and designs. In honour of Thonet's 200th birthday, the MAK Museum of Applied Arts in Vienna is showing a major exhibition on modern furniture entitled Bentwood and Beyond. Thonet and Modern Furniture Design (18.12.2019 to 13.04.2020), featuring the characteristic bentwood furniture in context with contemporary technological, typological, aesthetic and historical developments. Thonet's bentwood chairs are juxtaposed with chairs made of tubular steel and plastic, as well as with classic office chairs or avant-garde furniture experiments.

Anniversary celebrations at the POS

In addition to numerous exhibitions, special editions and accompanying events, the furniture producer from North Hesse also celebrated its big anniversary with its retail partners. Besides selling the special editions of the S 533 F and two-tone 214 models, the company's sales points throughout Germany and the world also focused attention on the anniversary year with consistent POS designs. Other special exhibitions and exclusive evening events ensured the company's sales network was an important part of the activities.

Thonet press contact international

neumann communication
Claudia Neumann, Anne Polch-Jahn, Hannah Knospe
Eigelstein 103-113
50668 Köln
Germany
Tel. +49 (0) 221 – 91 39 49 0
Fax +49 (0) 221 – 91 39 49 19
E-Mail thonet@neumann-communication.de

Thonet GmbH
Susanne Korn
Michael-Thonet-Straße 1
35066 Frankenberg
Germany
Tel. +49 (0) 6451 – 508 160
Fax +49 (0) 6451 – 508 168
E-mail susanne.korn@thonet.de

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Thonet press contact in the UK

QuickStep PR
Stephanie Bretherton
Unit 405 United House
North Road
London N7 9DP
United Kingdom
Tel. +44 (0) 20 – 7609 1151
E-mail stephanie@qspr.com

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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. Ever since he established 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, today known the world over as the Vienna Coffee House Chair: the pioneering technique of bending solid beechwood enabled the mass production of chairs for the first time. 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. During those pioneering years, Thonet was the world's largest producer of these tubular steel furniture designs, which are today considered timeless.

For the company today, the continuous process of innovation is the top priority, together with a focus on tradition and fine craftsmanship. Thonet's furniture designs originate both from its collaborations with renowned national and international creatives and from the in-house Thonet Design Team. All the furniture is produced at the company-owned manufacturing facility in Frankenberg where, in line with the motto "Individuality is our standard", customised solutions are part of day-to-day life. Chief Executive Officer Brian Boyd and Creative Director Norbert Ruf manage the company from the corporate head office and production site in Frankenberg/Eder (Germany). Michael Thonet's fifth- and sixth-generation descendants are actively involved with the company's business as partners and sales representatives.