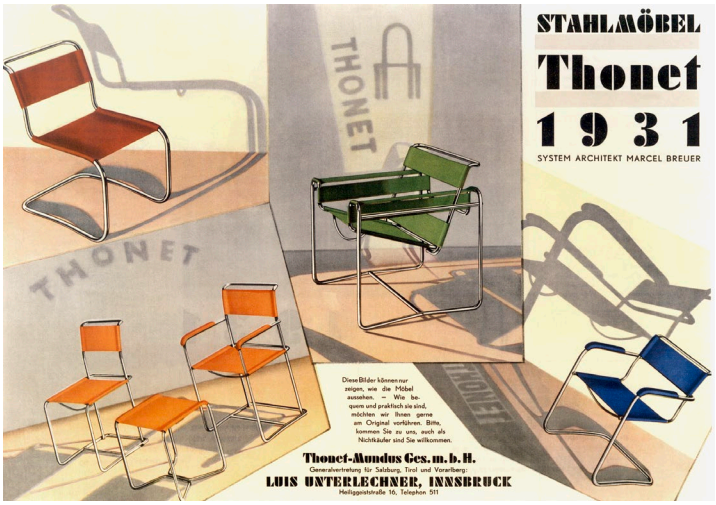
Press release
Frankenberg, February 2026

A new spin on an old story

The S 33/S 34 cantilever chair is now available with fabric coverings in a nostalgic nod to early tubular steel models

Red, blue, green: some of the first tubular steel designs featured colourful coverings made of sturdy *Eisengarn* fabric. To celebrate these designs from the past, Thonet has developed a new fabric covering for the S 33/S 34 cantilever chairs by Mart Stam. This new "Soft" version lends the chair's minimalist silhouette a certain warmth and, quite literally, a softness.



Every era creates its own stories about the past, shaping how historical periods are remembered. These characterisations are not, however, as fleeting as the term "*Zeitgeist*" would make them seem. In fact, they are often surprisingly stable. The modernism of the 1920s and 1930s was long regarded as a period of radical, novel, machine-like aesthetics, outshining the stuffiness of the past with cool glass and gleaming metal. Tubular steel pieces from Stam, Breuer, Mies and others became emblems of this modern story. Starting in the 1980s – and perhaps even before – furniture made of chrome-plated steel and black leather became synonymous with modernism. But we have known for some time that this is not the whole story. In fact, modernist design and architecture were far more colourful than the black-and-white photos of the day would have us believe. And we also know that the Bauhaus was simply one location of many where this new era of design took hold. In addition to the well-remembered men of the era, there were also many women writing design history. To mark the 100th anniversary of Bauhaus Dessau's opening in 1926, Thonet is highlighting a lesser-known facet of the designs from this era: the cantilever chairs S 33 and S 34 by Mart Stam are both now available in "Soft" versions with a fabric covering. Stam is known as the inventor of the chair without back legs. He first sketched the idea for it in 1926 and his pioneering design was quickly picked up by others. His classic cantilever chairs have now been given a softer, cosier look in the new "Soft" variants – particularly in combination with colourful powder-coated tubular steel frames.

Hard-wearing fabric from the Bauhaus weaving mill

The idea for the fabric covering for the "Soft" version of the S 33 and S 34 was indeed taken from the designs of the 1920s. Early tubular steel chairs were often covered with *Eisengarn* fabric, literally "iron-yarn" fabric, as well as other materials such as hemp straps, rubber mats, canework or leather. First used by Marcel Breuer, *Eisengarn* does not actually contain any iron – the name simply referred to the indestructible nature of the fabric. It was developed back in the 19th century by twisting cotton yarn

together many times and then giving it a special protective coating. At the Bauhaus, weaver Margaretha Reichardt experimented with and improved the material so that it could be used as a chair covering. The fabric was stretched across the tubular steel frame, creating a seat and backrest that had to withstand significant tension and pressure. And withstand they did: some of the original coverings are still around today, delivering undeniable proof that modernism was comfortable with colour. The chairs featured red, blue, yellow, green and beige coverings, sometimes paired with colourful tubular steel frames in contrasting shades.

Special method for the coverings

Today, *Eisengarn* fabric's role is limited to the restoration of old tubular steel pieces. Stability, however, is of course still a problem. Unlike sturdy butt leather, a simple fabric covering would never be robust or durable enough. So, for the "Soft" versions of the S 33/S 34 cantilever chairs, Thonet developed a method of stabilising the fabric using a reinforcing material. This helps to prevent warping or bulging. Thanks to this "sandwich construction", the chairs can now be covered with a variety of fabrics from the Thonet collection. From smooth and sturdy to soft, fluffy and voluminous, the possibilities are endless. The look and feel of the coverings can be designed to match the interior design and how the chairs will be used. Just as the development of the "Soft" version took a bit of fiddly work – the process to create it lasted around a year – creating the finished item also poses quite a challenge. Thonet's chairmakers in Frankenberg sew the coverings, which they then stretch over the bent tubular steel frames. Since every piece of fabric behaves a bit differently, it takes craftsmanship and experience in cutting and assembly to get it just right. The finished product is proof that the way we see design objects can evolve over time. Every era has its own Bauhaus. And, in the case of the "Soft" version of Mart Stam's cantilever chairs, his original focus on simplicity and clarity has come together once again with the period's love of colour and fabric. In celebration of the 100th anniversary of the Bauhaus Dessau and its cantilever chair, the "Soft" version is putting a new spin on an old story.

About Thonet

Thonet has been making furniture for the residential and contract sectors since 1819. With a passion for bentwood and tubular steel, the German company produces iconic designs – from its famous coffee house chair and Bauhaus classics by Mart Stam, Marcel Breuer and Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, to contemporary pieces by leading modern designers. Combining the latest production technology with traditional craftsmanship has made Thonet one of the world's favourite furniture makers. Its production facility in Frankenberg continues to create innovative products that are designed to last. Thonet furniture is synonymous with quality, functionality and a timeless design language. Sustainability is engrained in the Thonet story. From the earliest days, Michael Thonet's first bentwood designs were not just aesthetically remarkable. They expressed a deep understanding of efficient use of resources. Thonet furniture has a very long life cycle and is built to be handed down from one generation to the next. It can also be revitalised in Frankenberg upon request. Thonet's commitment to sustainable design, which is firmly anchored in its DNA, was recognised in 2024 with the German Ecodesign Award: the iconic 214 coffee house chair picked up the special Timeless Design award in the Product category.

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