

Thonet's repair service: giving preloved furniture a new lease of life

Repaired instead of replaced

The maths is simple: the longer an item is used, the longer its value is retained. Longevity is therefore one of the most important elements of furniture design. As long as a chair, table or shelf can still be used, there is no need to buy new furniture to replace it.

Many Thonet pieces are used for decades; so many vintage pieces are still in use today. To make sure this story of longevity continues, Thonet products are manufactured exclusively in the company's own factory based in Frankenberg, North Hesse, Germany, by seasoned, highly trained experts using only the very best materials. For more than 50 years, these skilled workers have also been entrusted with another important responsibility: renovating pre-loved Thonet furniture. The aim is to further extend the products' already long lifespan. And there is growing demand for such a service: more and more architects, interior designers and property developers are looking to make greater use of second-hand furniture and materials in their projects. With its in-house repair service, Thonet is well prepared to meet this growing demand.



When furniture has been used for more than three decades, as was the case with some Thonet chairs from a town hall in the German state of Baden-Württemberg, those years of use can be seen on each piece. The upholstery might be stained or ripped, the wood might look a bit shabby, and there are likely to be missing gliders or stoppers. But this definitely does not mean that the furniture should be thrown away. All it needs is a few new parts and some TLC. Thonet's comprehensive repair service includes collection of the furniture. It is then repaired in the Thonet factory and returned as good as new. First, the Thonet team in the factory inspects the piece and appraises the necessary repairs. The amount of repair work needed can vary a lot, depending on how long and how intensively an item has been used. Some of the most common repairs include refurbishing wooden surfaces. Seat shells often need to be re-upholstered with new fabric. And, of course, there is the canework for which Thonet is so famous: especially in older models that were made without the supporting synthetic mesh, the canework often gets damaged and needs replacing. The individual parts are reused as much as possible, for example the original screws are carefully set aside and used again. When the refurbishing process is complete, the furniture is once again fully functional and looks like new – ready for its second life.

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Repairing used furniture is, however, nothing new for Thonet. For over 50 years now, the company's headquarters in Frankenberg has not only been manufacturing new furniture but also repairing second-hand items. In fact, private customers often bring their bentwood or tubular steel furniture round in person. However, the repair and refurbishing service is also specifically aimed at contract customers such as architects and interior designers who want to incorporate vintage Thonet pieces into their projects. By way of example, large quantities of chairs used in venue seating have frequently been repaired in the past. But in light of the growing interest in reusing existing furniture, Thonet is now placing even greater emphasis on this long-standing service.

As a basic principle, the Thonet repair service refurbishes all models, regardless of whether they are currently available or no longer stocked. Orders from contract sector customers usually involve larger quantities. In the case of the Ostfildern town hall, for example, around one hundred S 320 chairs were given a new lease of life. In order to process these bigger orders as quickly as possible, the repair department is directly integrated into the manufacturing facilities for new products. In Frankenberg, it is the same teams working on both used and brand-new products. As a result, the repair service not only extends the useful life of these pieces of furniture, but also helps to preserve skilled jobs for furniture makers in central Germany.

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. At the Frankenberg factory, innovative products are still being manufactured today, just as they have always been; they are designed for long-term use and are synonymous with the highest level of quality, functionality and a timeless design. The development of durable furniture has always been a defining feature of Thonet's corporate history. From the earliest days, Michael Thonet's first bentwood designs were not just aesthetically remarkable but also bore witness to a particularly thoughtful approach to the use of materials. Moreover, many Thonet furniture pieces last for generations: they are used for decade after decade and can be repaired in Frankenberg if required. 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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