

Press Release
Frankenberg, January 2019

Thonet 404 – How a modern classic remains vibrant **Design: Stefan Diez, 2007**

With the chair 404, Stefan Diez designed a wooden chair range that directly references Thonet’s bentwood heritage but transforms it based on aesthetic and technological criteria. Bent legs and armrests join in a “knot” and are inserted in the bottom of the ergonomically shaped seat. The range communicates and enables comfort – it does not prescribe any specific seating position, and the organically shaped backrest has a comfortable flexing effect.

Since 2018, the slender 404, the slightly wider version 404 F, and the barstool 404 H are produced from oak wood instead of beech. The natural wood structure and attractive haptics of the surface that 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. In addition, the incline of the backrest was ergonomically improved, making the chairs even more comfortable. The chair, which is already considered an icon, thereby keeps up-to-date.

The selection of this chair by the Neue Sammlung – The Design Museum at the Pinakothek der Moderne in Munich confirms that the relatively young design can already be considered a classic: Since September 2018, it has been presenting the 404 including the entire process of its creation and prototypes, mock-ups, and a disassembled version of the chair in its collection.



Stefan 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 strengthened 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 transfer the idea behind them to the 21st century. The design is based on a simple idea that is realised through modern production methods – and that’s how it was for Michael Thonet,” says Stefan Diez, explaining his approach. “The 404 was not to be a trendy product, but rather was intended to continue the company’s tradition.”

The renewal of the programme range 404 at the occasion of its 10th anniversary in 2018 also comprised 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 colours. 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,

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which in principle is a sculpture in space, with wood,” the designer adds. For the revised version, the incline of the slightly flexing backrest was also ergonomically adjusted and slightly curved out towards the back, providing the chairs with even more comfort today.

The chair 404, the armchair version 404 F and the matching barstool 404 H are produced from oak wood and available in eight colour versions. The seat and backrest are made of moulded plywood, and the legs and backrest are made of laminated wood. Versions with leather or fabric upholstery are also available.

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

Die Neue Sammlung – The International 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.

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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.