Marcel Breuer

Product Designer

Nationality: Hungarian
Movement: Bauhaus

BACKGROUND INFO:

Marcel Breuer was born in Hungary in 1902 and became one of the most influential designers and architects of the early 20th Century. He first of all studied art in Vienna however he was unhappy there and instead found a job in an architect’s office. He decided he wanted to work in the design industry so first of all became a student at the Bauhaus School of design in Germany, where he completed a carpentry apprenticeship and produced one of his most famous designs called ‘The Slatted Chair’. He was so successful that he became a teacher at the Bauhaus and this lead to the Bauhaus becoming the birthplace of one the most important design movements in history.

K40 Sofa table (1927) Tubular steel and glass
Chaise Longue (1938). Molded and cutout plywood and upholstery
B9 side tables

SOCIETY & INFLUENCES

The impact of the First World War, poverty and inflation created a design movement which was a reaction to social change. The economy in Germany was collapsing after the crushing war so Architect Walter Gropius was appointed to head a new institution which would help rebuild the country and form a new social order. This was the Bauhaus School of Design. He trained designers to develop cost effective, functional designs for contemporary houses. This included designs for both the architecture itself and for all of the basic household equipment inside. They designed cheap, practical, standardised but beautiful homes which were durable and technically simple to produce. They wanted their designs to be hygienic and affordable for the masses and used a lot of flat aluminium and tubular steel.

In 1935 Breuer was forced to emigrate to London. Like many artists, writers and designers in Germany, he was threatened by the Nazis who did not appreciate new ideas and independent thinking. It was also too dangerous for Breuer to stay in Germany as he came from a Jewish family.
In Britain he designed several houses in England combining wood and local stone and continued to produce products for the home however this work was very different to the designs he produced in Germany as he was told that the British were far too traditional to buy his modern, metal furniture. After the war he moved to America to work at Harvard University and set up his own design studio with another famous architect called Walter Gropius.

**STYLE.**
The Bauhaus style, also known as the International Style, was marked by the absence of ornament and ostentatious decoration and by harmony between function, materials used and form. Bauhaus Design was extremely purist and plain in style with the emphasis on straight edges and smooth, slim shapes. Bauhaus buildings have flat roofs, smooth facades and cubic shapes. Colours are limited to white, grey, beige and black. Furniture is simple and functional.

**MATERIALS & TECHNIQUES**

In all phases of his working life, Marcel Breuer tried to create designs which used simple, easy to manufacture techniques. He was keen to use materials which were standard sizes, lengths and shapes so that he could produce reasonably priced furniture. Breuer was inspired by the shape and form of his bicycle handlebars when he created one of his most famous pieces, the *Wassily Chair No B3* in 1925. The frame of the chair was made from polished, bent, tubular steel, which later became chrome plated. The seat came in canvas, fabric or leather in black section. This chair has been widely copied. As it provides comfort without the need for springs to be introduced.His experiments with tubular steel during this time led to a number of innovative furniture designs, which soon brought Breuer international fame. Using tubular steel as his basic element had the great advantage for Marcel Breuer in that it was easy to purchase and easy to mass produce. It also was extremely economical and hygienic. It was important to Breuer that his designs were affordable for the masses, and perform the function they were designed for. Breuer considered these issues to be essential for modern living.

During the 1930s, he enhanced his reputation by creating furniture made of then-unusual materials such as aluminium, tubular steel, bent laminated plywood and leather. As well as designing furniture he also began to design sleek interiors for structures designed by influential architects.