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## Hans Wegner

Hans Wegner, the Danish furniture designer who died on January 26 aged 92, was once described as the "Enzo Ferrari of the wooden chair", and was responsible for a huge range of familiar, functional yet beautifully crafted modern designs.

These included the Wishbone Chair of 1950, named after the forked uprights that supported the curved back; the Peacock Chair of 1944, a take on the traditional Windsor Chair, stripped of detail and with the back spindles fanned out like a peacock's plume, and the Round Chair of 1949, a huge hit in America, where it accommodated the backsides of John F Kennedy and Richard Nixon during the 1961 televised presidential debates. Interiors magazine described it as "the world's most beautiful chair" and it eventually became known simply as "the Chair".

The son of a master cobbler, Hans Wegner was born on April 2 1914 in Tønder in southern Jutland, where he grew up surrounded by forests, workshops and craftsmen. His instinct for materials grew out of the hours he spent in his father's workshop and at 13 he was apprenticed to a local cabinetmaker. But it was in Copenhagen, where he did his military service and remained to study at a technical college, then at the Copenhagen School of Arts and Crafts, that he encountered Bauhaus and became inspired by design.

He trained as a cabinetmaker, and worked as an assistant in Eric Møller and Arne Jacobsen's architectural practice, helping with the famous design for Denmark's Arhus Town Hall.

But it was only when he opened his own office, in Gentofte in 1943, that his interest in chairs began. His skill lay in taking old techniques — the steam bending of timber, the weaving of cord seats — and giving them a modern twist. In his early work, Wegner concentrated on stripping traditional chairs to their pure essentials and adapting them into a modernist idiom, working mainly in Danish hardwoods — oak, beech and ash.

With the Round Chair, however, he left tradition behind and won an international following. American manufacturers tried to persuade him to move to the United States, but Wegner insisted that his chairs were designed to be made in Denmark by Danish craftsmen.

Wegner said that he designed chairs he would like to use himself, which may, perhaps, account for some of his more idiosyncratic ideas. His Valet Chair, for example, designed in 1953, featured a back designed like a coathanger for a jacket and a shallow drawer under the seat for depositing the contents of jacket pockets; angled open, it functioned as a hanger for trousers.

His Ox Chair, designed in 1960, came with or without horns. "We must take care," he once said, "that everything doesn't get so dreadfully serious. We must play — but we must play seriously."

Wegner continued to design into his 80s from the workshop of the stone and wood house which he built near Copenhagen in the early 1960s. The Hoop Chair of 1985 was designed when Wegner was 71 years old, yet was startlingly original in concept. In more recent years he also worked with lighting, sometimes in collaboration with his daughter Marianne. Over the years he produced some 500 designs, of which 80 remain in production.

Among numerous honours, Wegner was made an Honorary Royal Designer for Industry by the British Royal Society of Arts in 1959. His furniture forms part of all major modern design collections.

Wegner is survived by his wife, Inga, and by their daughters.