



The beauty of function and as a function

The max bill collection is characterised by clarity, simplicity and mathematical precision.

max bill's wooden furniture is the physical expression of his belief that functionality, as well as the economy of materials and design, should be combined with meeting form-related and aesthetic demands. Bill's designs and products are based on qualities such as functionality, longevity and an economic use of resources.

For max bill, industrial design was of particular importance in the economic upturn during the post-war years and because of the widespread destruction left by the war: he saw industrial design as an opportunity to improve the environment with versatile products. Following the US example, the aesthetics of things were becoming important during this period. For the first time, exemplary products – most of which were «anonymous» factory designs – were given a prominent place in the magazines. Authorities like max bill and Siegfried Giedion had a clear attitude: they despised any design that would only serve commercial interests and that, in so doing, would follow fashionable trends, thus fostering a throwaway mentality.

The phrase «beauty from and as function» from Bill's legendary talk became a key statement. He opened up the rigid notion of functionalism by putting the forms of everyday products into a larger context with the forms of both nature and the arts and by juxtaposing industrially produced everyday products with craft-based and technical objects. His major achievement was his call for a «new beauty ideal»: harking back to Henry van de Velde's concept of «rational beauty», which referred to «combining the rationalism of engineering with constructive beauty.» Bill wanted things to not only function but also look beautiful. The idea of an order immanent in form was, throughout his entire life, the hypothesis on which his work was based.



1
Ulm Stool
1954



2
Three Leg Chair
1949



3
Cross Frame Chair
1952



4
Bill Barstool
1964



5
Three-Round Table
1949/1950



6
Three-Round Table, low
1949/1950



7
Square-Round Table
1949

1 The Ulm Stool was designed in 1954 by max bill, the first director of the Ulm School of Design, in collaboration with Hans Gugelot. The stool was to be used by the school's students and was produced in the school's joinery workshop, using donated wood. Lightweight yet sturdy, this versatile stool can be used as seating, as an occasional table or shelf, but also as a transport container, serving tray or as an additional element set on top of a table.

MATERIALS:
Natural spruce, crossbar and foot: beech (original)
Available in natural spruce, in lacquered walnut and in birch apple green, sky blue, dark blue, fiery red, glowing orange, lemon yellow and **NEW** in black.

DIMENSIONS
H/W/D 44/39,5/29,5
Weight: 2,1 kg

2 The Three Leg Chair was designed in 1949 by max bill for wohnbedarf Zurich – the originals are wanted rarity for experts. The original is in beech natural. This model was honoured by the quality seal «die gute Form».

MATERIALS:
Seat and backrest: beech plywood, legs beech natural, backlegs bent solid wood

IN CM: **DIMENSIONS**
H/W/D 75/43,5/52, Seat 44 cm

3 The Cross Frame Chair was designed in 1952 and has been produced ever since (since 1999 as a re-edition). The chair showcases Bill's skills as a product designer and has received several prizes, among others «die gute form» (1950s) by the Swiss Werkbund. The cross-frame leg construction was invented by Bill. It supports the seat in the centre and gives the chair the greatest possible structural stability. In terms of form, the contrast between the slim seat and the sturdy frame accentuates the chair's technical construction, giving it a powerful and sculptural expression. And, last but not least, the chair is extremely comfortable.

MATERIALS:
Seat and backrest: beech plywood, legs: beech.
Available in three versions:
Seat/Back/Legs natural finish
Seat/Back natural, Legs black
Seat/Back/Legs black finish

DIMENSIONS
H/W/D 78/48/52, Seat 46 cm

4 The Bill Barstool is a classic of its kind. max bill designed the stool for the «Bar du Théâtre» at Expo 64 in Lausanne, where Bill was the architect responsible for the «Educating and Creating» section. The new version of the popular Bill Barstool comes with four instead of three legs. The seat is padded with soft black leather and the frame is chrome-plated.

MATERIALS:
Seat black leather, four-legged frame, chrome-plated

DIMENSIONS
H/W/D 79/35/35

5/6 First designed by Charlotte Perriand in the 1930s, «tables en forme» became popular in the 1950s as kidney-shaped tables. Next to the free forms featured in almost all famous examples, max bill's Three-Round Table, designed around 1949/50, appears almost strict and precise. Its geometric shape is constructed from three circles. Conceived in a low and high version, the Three-Round Table marks a high point in max bill's campaign for design reform.

MATERIALS:
Tabletop: linoleum, black, legs: solid maple, natural lacquer finish, edging: maple.
NEW Three-Round table low: Tabletop in olive and smoky blue.

HIGH VERSION DIMENSIONS
H/O 72/110 (picture 5)

DIMENSIONS LOW VERSION IN CM:
H/O 44/110 (picture 6)

7 max bill designed the Square-Round Table in 1949 for wohnbedarf Zurich. This piece embodies Bill's idea of concrete art in product design and is one of his most important designs. The square-shaped table extends into a circular table by unfolding its four leaves that then are supported by the table's frame. The resulting visual impression with its rhythmic partitions is a prime example of Bill's art.

MATERIALS:
Frame solid maple, natural or black lacquer finish, tabletop: linoleum, black, edging maple

IN CM: **DIMENSIONS**
H/W/D 128/90 x 130/130/SQUARE

collection
max bill

form is
what we encounter
in space

max bill, 1952

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max bill

Architect, graphic
designer, painter,
sculptor, publicist,
educator and
politician

Bill described his approach as one of responsibility and of small steps. He was an advocate for a better world, for the material, intellectual and societal coherence of the designed environment and for a social order that would allow a humane world.

His biography and work are so comprehensive that only books can do justice to his oeuvre. The following lines are aspects of his knowledge as a product designer.

max bill was born on 22 December 1908 in Winterthur, Switzerland. From 1924 to 1927, he trained as a silversmith at the Zurich School of Applied Arts. He admired Le Corbusier's work and, after attending a talk by Le Corbusier, Bill decided to become an architect. In 1927/1928, he studied at the Bauhaus in Dessau. His teachers included Josef Albers and László Moholy-Nagy (preparatory course), as well as Oskar Schlemmer, Paul Klee and Wassily Kandinsky. Back in Zurich, his main source of income was the design of advertising under the brand names of «bill – reklame» and «bill – zürich». In 1930, he joined the Swiss Werkbund (SWB). In the same year, Theo van Doesburg was the first to provide a definition of «concrete art», which was later rewritten by Bill.

wohnbedarf was founded in 1931. From the beginning, Bill was responsible for the design of the company's logo, which is still used today, and for the design of brochures, advertisements and stationery. Using furniture from wohnbedarf, Bill also designed the «Home and Studio for a Painter and Illustrator» in the Neubühl residential estate, which had just been completed, as well as the respective advertising material.

In 1932, Bill became a member of the «abstraction – creation artists» group in Paris, participating in the group's exhibitions and meeting, among others, Jean Arp, Piet Mondrian and Georges Vantongerloo. In 1932/33, he built his own studio-home in Zurich-Höngg, working, from then onwards, as an architect, painter, sculptor, graphic designer and publicist. In 1936, he designed the Swiss contribution to the Milan Triennial, for which he received the Gran Premio award and much international acclaim. It was also the first time that the original form of the «infinite loop» was shown in a public exhibition. With his designs for industry, Bill belonged, together with Hans Bellmann and Wilhelm Kienzle, to the new generation of Swiss «industrial designers».

In 1944, he redesigned the patria typewriter, followed by various everyday objects such as the Dreibeinstuhl (Three Leg Chair), the Kreuzzargenstuhl (Cross-frame Chair), the Dreirundtisch (Three-Round Table) and the Quadratrundtisch (Square-Round Table). As co-founder and first rector of the Ulm School, in 1954, he created a stool with two different seat heights as part of the school's furniture, which has become known as Ulmer Hocker (Ulm Stool). Starting in 1957, he designed various clocks and watches for the Junghans company, based in Schramberg.

For the 1949 Schweizer Mustermesse (muba) in Basel, the SWB commissioned Bill to design «die gute form (the good form)» exhibition, which was the first exhibition to introduce the topic of industrial design to a large audience. The exhibition was subsequently also shown to great acclaim in Germany, Austria and The Netherlands. Following a proposal by Bill, from 1951 to 1968, the SWB recognised good industrial design with the «die gute form – forme utile label». 1952 saw the publication of «Form: A Balance Sheet of Mid-Twentieth Century Trends in Design», a book edited by Bill. The book included an international selection of products and furniture that met Bill's theoretical definition of «constructive, logical, economical = beautiful».

Bill was a member of various associations and commissions and was the recipient of many prizes and honours. Many of his designs are still, or are again, sought-after pieces today. max bill died on 9 December 1994 during a visit to Berlin.