

DAVID ROWLAND

40/4



40/4

David Lowland

The 40/4 chair

In 1964, David Rowland's 40/4 chair finally went into production, after almost a decade of development and struggles to find a company who would manufacture and sell it. The chair was an instant success, and since then, 8 million chairs have been produced and sold. With good reason. No other chair embodies the spirit of its time with such eloquence - it is the perfect manifestation of 1960s America, and of the dreams and values the rest of the world found in America at the time.



The first true stacker

The 40/4 is lauded as the first truly stackable chair, and its name is an expression of that fact: 40 chairs can be stacked within 4 feet. It is a minimalist construction, built of slender steel rods, and originally with a sheet metal seat and back.



Timeless design

For obvious reasons, there has never been a slow-down in the popularity of the 40/4. It is used in historic and modern public buildings across the world, and is preferred by many leading architects. Like the 40/4, most timeless objects are perfect expressions of a specific age that eventually transcend the period of their making, and become the very essence of their materials and function. The Barcelona and Thonet-chairs are similar classics. The 40/4 is the ultimate stackable chair, almost a template which has set the standard for contract furnishing.



Instant recognition

In 1964 David Rowland's 40/4 chair was awarded the Grand Prix at the prestigious Milan Triennale. David Rowland is one of only two Americans to receive this award, the other being Buckminster Fuller for his Geodesic Domes. The Grand Prix was the first of many design awards it has received. Today the 40/4 is on view in design collections and museums around the globe, revered as a modern design classic by prestigious institutions the world over.

Tredicesima Triennale di Milano

Tempo libero

Esposizione internazionale
delle arti decorative e
industriali moderne
e dell'architettura moderna

Leisure

International exhibition
of modern decorative and
industrial arts and
of modern architecture

Freizeitgestaltung

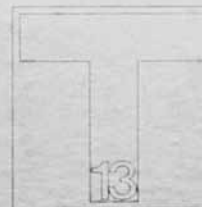
Internationale Ausstellung
für moderne dekorative
und angewandte Kunst
und moderne Architektur

Loisirs

Exposition internationale
des arts décoratifs
et industriels modernes et
de l'architecture contemporaine

diploma di gran premio

The General Fireproofing Co.



Il Presidente
della Giuria Superiore
Prof. Bruno Molajoli

Il Presidente
della Triennale di Milano
Dino Gentili

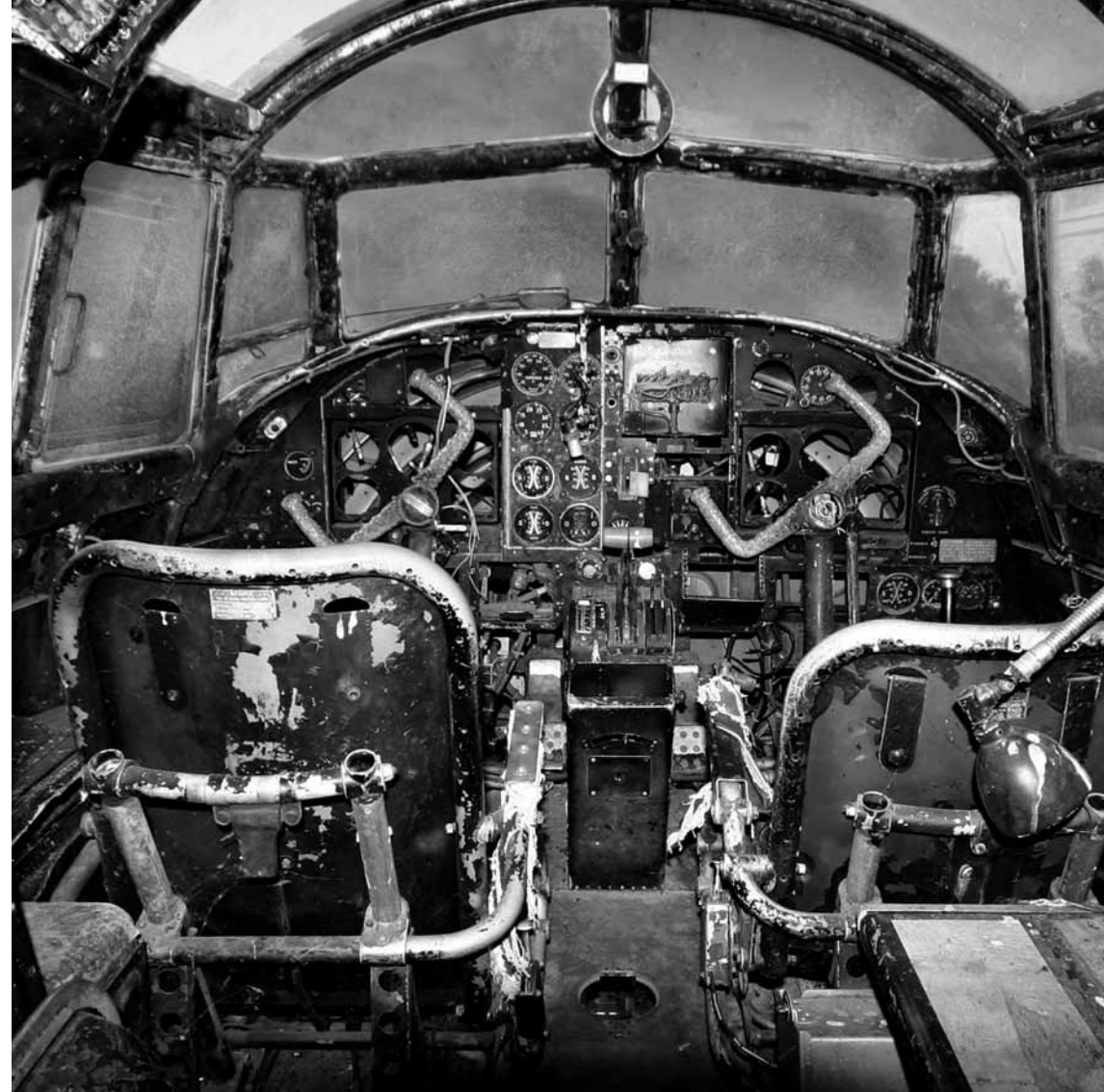
The times

At the end of WWII, the USA found itself to be the industrial, economic and political leader of the world. Along with amazing economic and military power came a new spiritual and artistic energy, particularly focused on the West Coast, in Chicago and in New York. New forms of artistic expression arose within every field of art: in painting, American abstract expressionism and pop-art brought new energy to a stagnant art-form; in architecture, new American modernism became the norm across the world; in poetry the beat generation introduced the rhythms of real life; and in music, jazz crossed over into both the mainstream and the avant-garde. All these artistic expressions represented a rejoicing in the here and now of life. Large scale production and popular culture influenced all the arts, America was finally coming to terms with its own ideas and values, and it showed.



A peaceful mission

The values of the post WWII culture of aspiration are easily visible in 40/4. And perhaps best expressed in David Rowland's motivation for designing the chair in a \$40-a-month one-room apartment in Upper Manhattan: "In 1945 I completed 24 bombing missions over Europe. Accompanying the dramatic strains of war, including some missions of 12-hour length, was the fact that the seats were beastly uncomfortable. I resolved to do something about that if I ever returned home safely."



Determination

The matter-of-fact manner in which the designer recounts his courageous war-time experience, and his resolve to 'do something about that' seems to encompass every aspect of the postwar American vision. These people were determined that the world after the war would be a better place, and they meant this in a very literal sense. This was an ambition firmly placed in the real world and its endless possibilities - a strong counter position to the ideological morass that had burned out Europe.



Flexibility

40/4 set several new standards for furniture - and not only chairs. One is the relation of industrial production to form; compared to pre-war furniture, which was created for a world of crafts, the 40/4 is a more integrated design, where every aspect is determined by production, rather than preconceived notions of form. Equally advanced is the whole concept of a stacking chair. This corresponded with the contemporary concept of flexible space. A great hall was no longer to be a fixed space, with a stage and rows of seating. Instead, convention- and sports halls were made to accommodate several purposes. Rowland was the first to respond to the need for contract furniture to fit these new flexible spaces.



Comfort

The 40/4 was designed for comfort, not for 30 minute time limits. And Rowland himself has described the endless full-scale experiments needed to achieve this comfort. In this sense, the chair represents the humanistic values so characteristic of the age. This was before postmodernism's emphasis on image and style, and although geometry plays a significant role in the design of the chair, it is geometry at the service of man, not vice-versa. In fact, Rowland actually invented 'the Mod' - Rowland's own cubic expression of a modular measurement relating products much more closely to the size of people.



Precision and purpose

Today, with wide-spread enthusiasm for minimal art and design, and a rising appreciation of humanist values, it is also possible to understand the elegance of the form of 40/4. Here is a chair which in every detail emanates precision and purpose. Its very anonymity is a part of its optimistic flavour - the expression of a rising society with the ambition of including all in its economic and political successes.



Rowland's background

David Rowland was born in 1924 in Los Angeles, California. He was the only child of Earl and Neva Chilberg Rowland. His father was an artist and the director of the Haggin Museum in Stockton. His mother was a violinist. When he was very young, Rowland studied under Laszlo Moholy-Nagy, the Hungarian architect who had been the major creative force within Bauhaus - Walther Gropius' school for the arts in Dessau, Germany. After this study he joined the US Air Force as a pilot.



Principia and Cranbrook

After his service as a pilot Rowland went on to major in science from Principia College. Following graduation, he then began studies at the highly esteemed Cranbrook Academy in Michigan where he obtained a Master of Fine Arts Degree in Industrial Design in 1951. Cranbrook was a gathering place for the brightest minds in American design - people like Buckminster Fuller, Serge Chermayeff, the Eames couple, Florence Knoll and Harry Bertoia. It was they who created the new language of form which would come to dominate the decades after WWII.

The 40/4 is very much a realization of the ideals in those important years - both in the methods Rowland used for its development, and in its final form. The minimalism, humanism and adaptability of the chair are all expressive of the atmosphere created by this new generation.



Rowland's inspiration

Before WWII, a number of metal stacking chairs were designed, within a modern vocabulary of form. First of all, Mallet-Stevens 'Stacking Chair', in production since 1930, but designed already in 1928. This chair owes a lot, formally, to the Thonet types, but it is very flat and angular; the steel-rod structure goes along the edges of the seat and back, which makes it necessary to compromise comfort for structure and stackability. Another early stacking chair is the Swiss Hans Coray's 'Landi' from 1938, where the problem of structure and comfort is solved in a more elegant way, by placing the structure under the seat. The Landi chair is a powerful statement, and what is interesting about it is that Coray's design method was similar to Rowland's - both designers worked on the program for the chair in order to invent a new form, and both created a type which has inspired generations. However, the stackability of the Landi is limited by the thickness of the structural parts. Obviously, the American XL 101, designed by Buddy Nightingale in 1929, which in some ways is similar in form to 40/4 but not nearly as elegant or stackable, must have provided some inspiration. These three early chairs outlined the task Rowland was undertaking - and contained the solutions in sketch form.



Hans Coray
'Landi' chair

Innovative thinking

During the years Rowland was working on the chair, several interesting chairs were developed by the Eames-couple, by Bertioia, and by Danish Arne Jacobsen, which may have provided some inspiration for the designer, especially in their use of thin rods, where new production-techniques had made it possible to slendelize the construction. Nevertheless, all stacking chairs had the problem of thickness of the construction under the seat limiting the number of chairs in a stack - the obvious, but technically challenging solution was provided by Rowland: the seat and back are set within the frame, rather than on it. Added to this stroke of genius are other inventions, - parallel stacking, the dolly for stacking, and connectivity, which allows the creation of rows of seats.

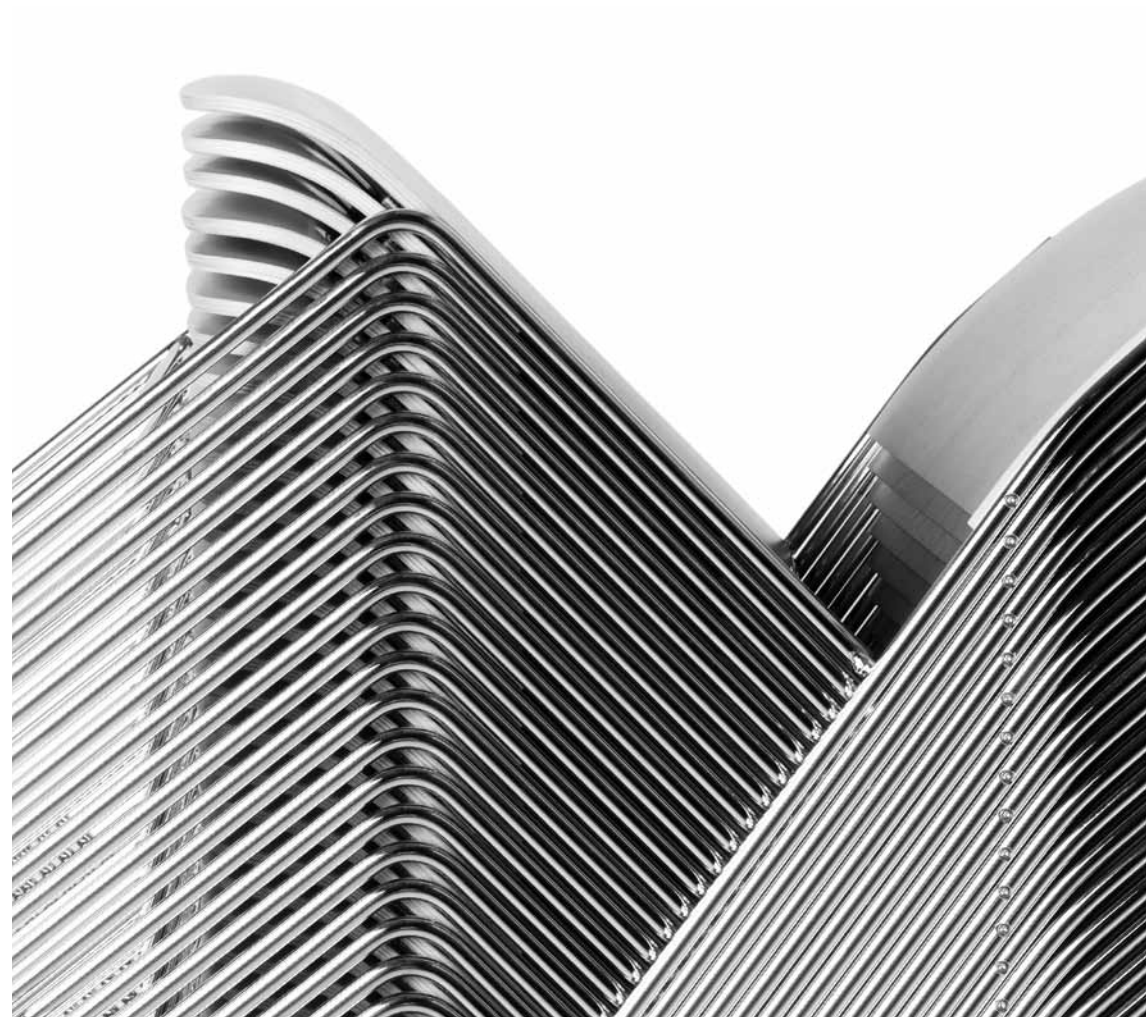


Becoming an icon

After the 40/4 was introduced, a number of companies and designers attempted to create an equally successful counterpoint. Indeed, every year brings its new crop of minimalist stacking chairs. Many of these are blatant copies, with no independent value, but some manage to develop the concept in new directions. Among the chairs inspired by 40/4, Rodney Kinsman's 'Omkstak' from 1971 is one of the first to make a strong statement, comparable to its predecessor, if more youthful in its expression.

Enzo Mari's 'Delfina' for Driade has a humorous touch, while it very obviously owes a lot to the original 40/4. Piero Lissoni's S44 is similarly both new and in the same line of thought. A more recent experiment is Jasper Morrison's elegant 'Sim', a chair very much in the spirit of Rowland, but with a different, contemporary understanding of the minimal, and a very beautiful handling of materials.

The copies, as well as other more independent developments, are indications of the fact that David Rowland redefined chair design and created a whole new concept of furniture, which is profoundly expressive of contemporary life.



Becoming a family

David Rowland designed the 40/4 chair in 1964 and the armchair version shortly thereafter. Although he continuously worked with developments and new versions of the chair it was first after year 2000 that the new versions actually became development projects in cooperation with HOWE a/s, who wanted to market a family concept from the original 40/4 chair. Today the 40/4 chair family is represented by the original side chair, the armchair, the chair with writing tablet, the lounge chair, the barstool, the outdoor chair and the swivel chair. All of them designed by David Rowland with 100% integrity to the original, making it possible to create a complete interior with just one chair design.



The impact

David Rowland passed away in August 2010 at his home in Marion, Virginia at the age of 86. Until his death he lived and dreamed the 40/4 chair, and was constantly developing new ideas for the chair. A determined man with a dedicated mission who left a permanent legacy in the international design community by creating one of the most important design icons of the 20th century.



Permanent collections

David Rowland's work is found in the permanent collections of the following museums:

NEW YORK

Museum of Modern Art, Cooper-Hewitt Museum of Design, Metropolitan Museum of Art, The Brooklyn Museum

LONDON - The Design Museum

CHICAGO - Art Institute of Chicago

MONTREAL - Musée des Arts Decoratifs

WEIL AM RHEIN - The Vitra Museum

MUNICH - Die Neue Sammlung

RIO DE JANEIRO - Museu de Arte Moderna

FLINT - Institute of Fine Arts

PHILADELPHIA - Philadelphia Museum of Art

CRANBROOK - Cranbrook Academy of Art Museum



Extract of references

St. Paul's Cathedral, UK

Le Grand Louvre, France

Reichstag Berlin, Germany

Royal Opera House, UK

Norwegian Opera House, Norway

Nouvel Opéra, France

Architect School Oslo, Norway

Architect School Umeaa, Sweden

Audi Forum, Germany

National Gallery, Sainsbury Wing Ext., UK

Salisbury Cathedral, UK

Canterbury Cathedral, UK

BMW Regensburg, Germany

Tate Modern, UK

British Library, UK

Caixa Forum, Spain

Valencia Congress Centre, Spain

Uppsala Concert and Congress, Sweden

Centre Pompidou, France

Chanel, France

Tenerife School of Scenic Arts, Spain

Das Bauhaus - Dessau, Germany

Eiffel Tower, France

Lloyds of London, UK

Max Mara, Italy

Nottingham Trent University, UK

University of Venice Architectural School, Italy

Hewlett Packard HQ, London



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www.howe.com

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