

Sustainable since 1819: Thonet scoops German Ecodesign Award

Thonet's iconic 214 coffee house chair picked up a German Ecodesign Award on 2 December 2024 in Berlin, winning the special Timeless Design award in the Product category. "Thonet has been operating sustainably since 1819," explains Norbert Ruf, Creative Director at Thonet. "Our innovations in exceptionally resource-efficient production using steel and natural wood have written furniture history. This makes us all the more delighted to have been recognised with this German Ecodesign Award." The jury explained why the 214 was selected for the special award: "Thonet has written history with this chair. The 214 is an archetypal design classic that is loved throughout the world – an iconic piece and the perfect example of a product for the ages that we will still be buying 100 years from now. This special award recognises its design language, history and its sustainable production. It's a chair that has eliminated the need to constantly develop new products and thus also the carbon footprint that comes along with it. A timelessly sustainable chair."



The German Ecodesign Award recognises designers, companies and students from Germany and Europe whose work makes an important contribution to the sustainable transformation of our economy and society. It is an annual prize that has been awarded since 2012 by the Federal Ministry for the Environment and the German Environment Agency in cooperation with the International Design Center Berlin. Thonet's iconic 214 coffee house chair picked up a German Ecodesign Award on 2 December 2024 in Berlin, winning the special Timeless Design award in the Product category. "This chair marked the beginning of modern furniture," explains Norbert Ruf, Creative Director at Thonet. "It was based on a new technique, the bending of solid wood, which Michael Thonet perfected in the 1850s, making serial production of this chair possible for the very first time."

With its clear, minimalist aesthetics and durable design, this classic chair has been used in the most diverse settings for over 160 years. "Michael Thonet began experimenting with wood bending techniques in his workshop in Boppard am Rhein, which he established in 1819. When Prince Metternich, a German statesman at the court of the Austrian Emperor, became aware of Thonet's

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work, he summoned him to Vienna. There, Michael Thonet became the first to industrialise furniture production, taking the world market by storm thanks to his unrivalled low prices and innovative distribution,” adds Norbert Ruf. “Synonymous with this revolution is undoubtedly the No. 14 chair, known today as the 214, which has now been manufactured in the millions.” Back then, thirty-six of these disassembled chairs and their screws were packed into a one-cubic-metre shipping crate and sent all around the globe. They were then assembled upon delivery – in Europe, North and South America, Asia and Africa. This cemented Thonet’s status as a pioneer of industrial design and made the No. 14 – today the 214 – chair the most successful industrial product in the world. It is the chair that marked the beginning of modern furniture. “Now, as then, this chair can be found in homes, cafés and a wide variety of public spaces. Its design is completely timeless,” enthuses Norbert Ruf. “We see it continuing to be used well into the future in this exact same form, and we are very proud that it has been recognised as the Timeless Design winner by the German Ecodesign Award.”

About Thonet

Thonet has been making furniture for the residential and contract sectors since 1819. With a passion for bentwood and tubular steel, the German company produces iconic designs – from its famous coffee house chair and Bauhaus classics by Mart Stam, Marcel Breuer and Mies van der Rohe, to contemporary pieces by leading modern designers. Combining the latest production technology with traditional craftsmanship has made Thonet one of the world’s favourite furniture makers. Its production facility in Frankenberg continues to create innovative products that are designed to last. Thonet furniture is synonymous with quality, functionality and a timeless design language. Sustainability is engrained in the Thonet story. From the earliest days, Michael Thonet’s first bentwood designs were not just aesthetically remarkable. They expressed a deep understanding of efficient use of resources. Thonet furniture has a very long life cycle and is built to be handed down from one generation to the next. It can also be revitalised in Frankenberg upon request.

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