

The history of chairs with curved structure began almost 200 years ago, although not from metal tubes but from beech wood rods.

Tubular furnishing is almost two hundred years old

In 1819, German carpenter Michael Thonet was asked to create Biedermeier furniture, characterised by curved lines. At that time, pieces of wood were immersed in water until they could be bent and then they were assembled to other furniture parts with adhesives. Not satisfied with the techniques in use at that time, Thonet employed three decades to develop the technique of bending lathed beech wood rods by putting them in a team saturated room and then, once the required flexibility had been reached, placing them in jigs to bend them and then through drying ovens to allow the rods to take on their final shape.

This invention, one of the most brilliant of the 19th century, leads Thonet to redesign furniture structures and especially chairs that are light, stackable but are also sold on a large scale considering that they were made of a few loose pieces supplied in a flat package that the buyer could assemble with only a few screws, making the product affordable to even the less wealthy segments of society.

The timeless models Thonet N° 14 and Wassily

The Thonet N° 14 chair, designed in 1859 for Café Daum in Vienna, is still renowned even today. In the decades to follow the family firm, consisting of the father and his five sons, went on to reach a production of 4000 units per day of this model alone, with semi automatic processes in its six factories located near beech forests. The same and countless reproductions continue to be produced today, although mostly with a curved tubular structure.

However, only after the first world war, under the auspices of the BAUHAUS School of Architecture created by Walter Gropius after the First World War in Weimar, which later moved to Dessau, were tubular structures developed by renowned figures such as Marcel Breuer and Mies van der Rohe.

In 1925, Marcel Breuer designed his first chair, made of a structure based entirely on tubular steel, which

was given the name Wassily, paying homage to the painter Wassily Kandinsky, who, along with colleague Paul Klee, taught painting at the same school.

With this chair, invented by a carpentry teacher, who then became one of the most famous twentieth century architects, comes a revolutionary concept both in terms of production, which was automated over time, and lightness combined with strength, but most of all the design concept.

Wassily, an icon of modern and contemporary furnishing, is now regarded as a timeless classic. Not satisfied with that, Breuer also designed footrests and stackable tables (Laccio series) that offer maximum comfort to those who relax in the Wassily.

Very few know that the inspiration to use tube came from bicycle frames that have only recently been made with tubular elements. Marcel Breuer did, in fact, have the first chairs produced at Adler-Werke, a bicycle manufacturer and then mass production was transferred to the Italian Dino Gavina, which was later taken over by Knoll International.

Between 1928 and 1935 came the S32 and S33 chairs designed by Dutchman Mart Stam together with Marcel Breuer and produced by the ever-growing Gebrüder Thonet only to be followed by other chairs like the D40 produced by Tecta, the LC series that ranging from armchairs and sofas to the popular LC4 chaise longue, designed by Le Corbusier and nowadays produced by Cassina and last, but not least, the Lariano chair developed by Giuseppe Terragni and made by Zanotta.

Made in Italy

If, at that time, designers and companies operating in Germany were the precursors, in the years following World War II, the market discovers the advantages of metal-based furniture and the inventive race begins to offer an attractive design, adequate comfort and suitable solutions for the sometimes restricted living structures.

This time, the protagonists are a number of Italian companies including Castelli with their folding, but particularly light Plia chair designed by Giancarlo Piretti. Zanotta proposes the folding chair called April 212, known as the film director's chair, designed by Gae Aulenti. And this is where companies start to appear, such as Driade, with various models by Enzo Mari using metal wire structures and, more recently, Segis with its Breeze and Kadrè models. To make history (or school) are also Scandinavian companies that include Danish Fritz Hansen, Hyboda and Swedish Kinnarps, Lammhults Mekaniska, followed by Spanish and Japanese designers and companies, that introduce the know-how of this field into their respective countries.

Among the German companies it is worth mentioning Sedus Stoll that has centuries-old roots, having been founded in 1871 and Vitra that has even built a museum dedicated to the "art of the chair" and other companies that have furnished entire schools, universities, churches, hospitals, offices, small businesses or entire groups, shops, convention centres, theatres, cinemas, hotels as well as airports and, therefore, places that we are constantly in contact with.

Many ideas generated in that sector have also contributed to the development of other products ranging from supermarket trolleys, airport trolleys, and fitness equipment to urban transport furnishings. Moreover, in the last half century, the BLM GROUP has tried to make its know-how available in order to contribute to the success of these and many other companies.



Thonet n°14



S33 di Mart Stam
e Marcel Breuer



Breeze by Kadrè



April 212 by Zanotta



Series 7 by Fritz Hansen



S70 by Lammhults
Mekaniska