

# Interview with furniture designer Andreas Engesvik

In the AE,O studio

Majorstuen, Oslo.

MJ - Mikkel Jøraandstad

A.E - Andreas Engesvik

MJ

If you were to explain what a good chair is, what examples would you bring fourth and how would you describe it?

AE

A good chair is many things. An important factor is the comfort. The textbook answer would be a mix of visual qualities and aesthetic qualities. Another important thing is the material usage. A good chair needs to be light, and while light it also needs to be sturdy all while having universal qualities. By that I mean qualities that connect themselves to spacial sizes and bodily sizes. By that I mean that you look, experience and feel the object with your hands.

MJ

That's really interesting. When it comes to how we as designers think about chairs as an object full of qualities I have, along with designer Fredrik Wærnes created a list of ten qualities a good chair can have.

AE

Ah! Like a manifest of sorts?

MJ

Yes! Kind of. The qualities we ended up at were, production friendly, conceptual, timeless, contemporary, sustainable, ergonomic, comfortable, universal, aesthetic and material oriented. Do you have any comments on these categories or qualities?

AE

Thats really interesting, I would say that sustainability is one of the most important categories for all objects these days, and that means chair as well. I am reading reports on recycling, sorting and the waste hierarchy. I see in the amount of waste and in circular economies design place a really big role.

MJ

Because we work in the planning face ?

**AE** Exactly! It's the very first step. That took me by surprise. It's about thinking longer, and being smart about what's to come. Plan ahead. Its essential for the result of the object and how they affect our environment.

Some of the objects that I have made, like the Bollo chair for instance, its constructed using a very strong steel frame, there is no need for any loose bolts, or screws or anything. Then you screw on the softer material, which makes it functional through the padding and shaping. Already there you have done a lot for the environmental impact of the chair since you can take the different materials apart for recycling and even the padded parts can be washed or replaced.

The opposite of that would be a material that is fully glued together. Using a lot of different materials. I have talked to the "Renovasjonsetaten" and waste management in Norway and what they are most concerned about is something they have called problem fraction. They are sandwich constructions of different material glued into each other making them impossible to separate and recycle. Like a sleeping mattress, The metal springs are glued to the foam making them inseparable.

But back to you question! I think you list covers it all, no need to add or remove anything!

**MJ** Thats great! I was wondering, when it comes to the qualities of a good chair, I have found that some chair, like for instants the Bollo chair, Its a chair, just like any other but it has an intangible quality that other chairs don't have. Why do we look up to chairs like Bollo or the Safari chair and not the Grorud chair, which is a nice chair, but it just doesn't have the same aura?

**AE** The hidden quality... It's about many things, if we are going to talk about it from an academic point of view, I think it is a common denominator for Scandinavian design is the use of materials. For example, a wooden chair looks like a safe object because you look with the naked eye, you see how it is put together, maybe you can fix it? Maybe even paint it? Do a few things that are not possible to a "finished" object. The second is that we all humans have touched about 50 materials in one day, we have a much more active experience of materials and everything we surround ourselves with, so I think some people think to develop it to a greater extent. So when you manage to exercise that quality, we can start talking about things like taste for example. But think some furniture speaks to you because they are bodily, such as the Bollo. It has a built-in contrast so it starts a discussion about whether it is ugly or nice, it has a boldness that draws us back to sizes such as hate and love. Out of the box people and things force a position in those who meet them, they challenge you. You must take an active position in relation to a safe object that does not fight back. Then you like wooden chairs and Italian sofas. But if there are new things that challenge you, You create active choices and deeper connections.

**MJ** When it provokes and works then -

**AE** Thats where you get some kind of anchoring. Something people will remember. Most people don't like the Bollo chair right away, but it grows on you in away. It's important to read further into how people will read and think about an object, specifically chairs.

**MJ** Take a few more steps than other people while creating? Thinking ahead?

**AE** Yes, exactly! For example, the Tiki sofa has very universal features, it is built like a chair, the legs are under something that lies on top. The hand is central. As a pre-conjunctive indicator. When you sit down in the Bollo, it is the hand that explores it first. With Tiki, I think so too. In order for you to have control, all heights must be below the torso, everything above will be uncontrolled. The second is that you can take over all the volumes, they imitate something we are very familiar with. \* Grips himself in the arm \* the body is a stuffed piece of furniture. That composition is one of the safest we have. Therefore, I think people attach to it physically. Some may come to it themselves while some will just say it was a good chair.

**MJ** One thing that is interesting about your work, since I have previously worked here in the studio, is that I am often asked why your work has come before other people's work, I can not answer in your place but have done my best, and then I have often drawn out the strength of the silhouette in your works. Do you work with that a lot?

**AE** Silhouette is very important, for example in fashion designers it is used a lot. I think it is very important, I also think that giving things shape, designer, when giving things shape, back to the Tiki sofa, it is much more related to spatial elements, talking to the room. While the Bollo is bodily, it is in a 1: 1 relationship with the body

**MJ** So you think about what kind of communication the object is performing? If its the spacious room or the person?

**AE** I really believe in that.

**MJ** I know you have recently drawn a chaise-lounge for Fogia, in what conversation does that fit in?

**AE** The chaise lounge is the precursor to the sofa. The Tiki sofa has been given a form theme, it gives different associations, it was the intention that you create a visual and physical commitment in something like 2d, you have to try to work out other themes that support that commitment. I think that's why the furniture is 1: 1. They are private in nature. It increases the connection. It is yours and should not be shared. That is the domain of the chair. But the most important thing to understand is how the chair or furniture is read by the user and its important to understand what the hand knows and what the body knows.

**MJ**

I have formulated an idea of why it is so interesting to work with furniture, and especially the chair. When it comes to objects in our time, they are constantly replaced because their use disappears, but the chair will never lose its function. There is something timeless about it, do you have any thoughts about the chair that is a long-term object or something that can be inherited, for example?

**AE**

I think the chair has always been the most expensive, the most difficult to make. Before the chair was the bench, but almost everyone can make it. The chair in the format we know it today is a result of a workshop culture that has increased or upgraded the status of the chair as an object in our object history. When you see people fleeing or the like, they always carry their furniture with them. It represents so much, and is often expensive. Another thing that is interesting here is that it is a technique aspect. When the status of the chair increased, they wanted to make as nice chairs as possible. The old farm chair always had a frame, a cross or a brace. This was to mimic the beautiful status chairs, but made in a simpler way with cheaper materials. Make something that is easy to make, you do not have the equipment and it can end up forming a new expression.

**MJ**

One last question. Do you have a favorite chair?

**AE**

Wow, I really need to think about that..... To be perfectly honest, I don't. There are too many great ones and it would be too hard to pick just one.