



(News No.2—4) Wick Chair

Designed by Jesper Ståhl & Karl Malmvall

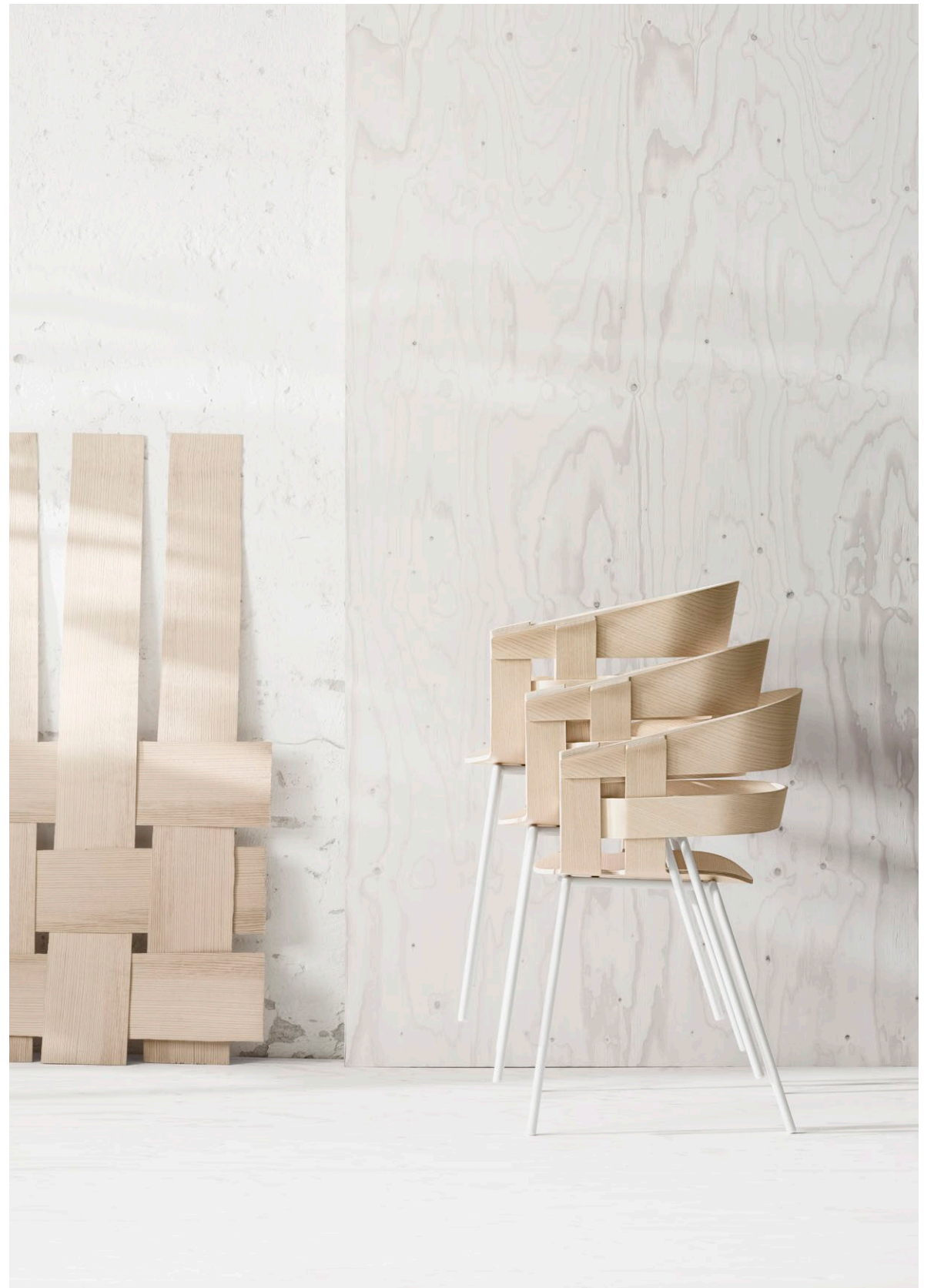




















Designer Karl Malmvall testing the chair's stackability at the factory in Nybro, Sweden. 3D printed models of various options for support to the left.

*Wick Chair — a modular and versatile chair that combines tradition and avant-garde.*

For very good reasons, chairs form the backbone of any furniture collection. Anders Färdig, managing director of Design House Stockholm, describes them as the furniture industry's 'T-shirt business.' By which he means that, like T-shirts, they are a staple product. Everyone uses them and there is not a collection that does not include them. And they appear in numerous variants: short arms, long arms, breast pockets, round-necked or V-necked. On an emotional level too, chairs and T-shirts have much in common. Who doesn't have a favourite T-shirt? And surely we all have a chair that we prefer to sit on if possible. How chairs work and their various parts are well-known, so how can Design House Stockholm dare to claim that the *Wick Chair* is a revolutionary item of furniture?

Chairs that fulfil the same function as the *Wick Chair* are available by the score. They are to be found in every office, in many homes, in cafés

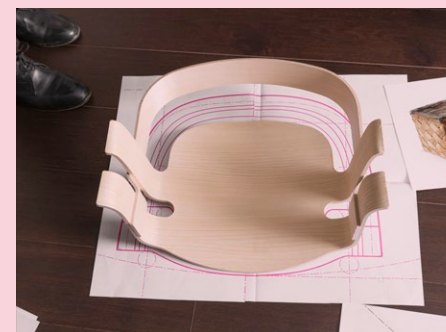
and restaurants, in government departments and many other sorts of premises. In short, they can be found wherever people have views about sitting in comfort and aesthetics. The various aspects of the chair have not been designed with half an eye on success in the market but in accordance with an agreed specification: a basket seat that can be combined with various means of support such as wooden legs, steel tubing, revolving support, and that can be supplied in ash or oak. In sum, a highly varied item of furniture with a vast potential.

However, it is not the combination of possibilities that is revolutionary. Design is only radical when it breaks with the norm for what a furniture typology should look like. *Wick Chair* is not, in the words of Anders Färdig, a 'plastic tub.'

"I have a great weakness for avant-garde designs that form part of some type of tradition," he explains while recalling the meeting at which designers Karl Malmvall and Jesper Ståhl presented their idea of what the *Wick Chair* might look like.

The duo responsible for the *Wick Chair* are

*"The chair has gained resilience and tension that cannot be achieved using solid wood"*



designers with roots in the province of Småland where so much of the skills and expertise of the Swedish furniture industry have developed. Both Karl Malmvall and Jesper Ståhl come from families that have manufactured furniture, with parents and grandparents who started successful companies that they have developed and refined. In Karl's case there was a tradition of fine cabinet-making while Jesper's ancestors redirected a metal manufactory to become a successful pioneer in the field of public-sector furnishing.

*Avant-garde based on tradition*

Their lengthy experience of designing furniture and other products both for the home and for the public sector has given the duo a detailed understanding of the criteria for a modular shell chair.

"Karl and Jesper placed an old basket in front of me, explaining that this was what they had in mind," Anders Färdig remarks. "I was pretty much all at sea!"

The intention was never to produce a basket but the item that the designers presented explains





Wick Chair is manufactured in Nybro, in the Swedish furniture industry's heartland.



the origins of the *Wick Chair* and the values that it conveys. The wood-chip basket is the sort that we recognized from Swedish artist Carl Larsson's romantic watercolour of his daughter Brita which has become emblematic of what Christmas is supposed to look like in Sweden. At the time that it was painted it was a modern interpretation of tradition. That the *Wick Chair* is plaited in similar fashion to the wood-chip basket signals the design tradition from which it springs, but the plaiting can equally well be seen as an aspect of the designers' elegant solution to a difficult practical problem.

"There are limits to how much one can bend wood," Karl Malmvall explains. "That was why we decided on the plaiting."

### *Intuitive functionalism*

This pragmatic, no-nonsense approach, has been directly inherited from the country-craft tradition but it is also a solution that gives the *Wick Chair* its unique shape. Another challenge that Malmvall and Ståhl faced was how they were to plait the seat without covering everything with glue.

"This was our final challenge," Jesper Ståhl explains. "Combining the back and the seat without

spreading glue over everything was not difficult in itself but it had also to work on a production line."

One positive effect of the interweaving is that at the point where the pieces of wood lock each other they can be glued on both sides. True, Jesper Ståhl and Karl Malmvall had simplified the shape to its absolute essence so that the *Wick Chair* only has one interwoven element on each side, but the shape has many intentional functional aspects. It is the trials and the insights that follow that have made working with laminated wood so rewarding.

"The chair gains a resilience and a tension that one cannot achieve using solid wood," Karl Malmvall explains.

Wood, whether it is solid or laminated as in the slender back to the *Wick Chair*, is more pleasant than plastic which is often experienced as either too cold or too hot. This is yet another reason why the chair has found a home with Design House Stockholm which is a firm that unites bold design with materials that are associated with the Scandinavian design tradition which, in turn, is renewed when the avant-garde is successfully united with tradition.

*Daniel Golling*

