

SLOW

a project
by AHEC

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Slow design for fast change

From 26 November 2021 to 20 February 2022, Berlin's Kunstgewerbemuseum (Museum of Decorative Arts) opens its permanent collection for a special intervention showcasing and celebrating emerging design talent and the sustainability and versatility of wood as a design material.

Initiated by the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC), Slow consists of nine projects from emerging designers working with American red oak, cherry and hard and soft maple. Woven among the museum's existing exhibits, these contemporary designs represent fresh design voices that articulate new ways of thinking about sustainability and accountability in terms of design, materiality and production process.



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The rise of 'slow'

The values of our society are changing. As much as the rise of individualism generated a diversity of lifestyles and approaches to consumption, it has also brought about a changed understanding of quality in terms of design. Today, more and more of us are taking into account considerations such as the design process, production location and materials used when making buying decisions, alongside the broader concerns of sustainability and quality.

Products that keep materials in circulation for as long as possible are increasingly appealing. In parallel, the global Covid-19 pandemic has made people reevaluate their lives and reassess how they want to spend their time, as lockdowns, working from home and social distancing have transformed the way we live and work. All over the world, once-hectic routines have been forced to slow down drastically, making people even more aware of what and how they consume.

The concept of 'slow' – as understood in terms of slow fashion or slow food – has come to entail a holistic approach to creative thinking, processes and products. It does not refer to how long it takes to design or do something, but rather to an expanded state of awareness; to accountability for daily actions; and to the potential for a richer spectrum of experience for individuals and communities.

The next design generation

Nine young designers were hand-picked by a selection panel comprising their university tutors, the project's manufacturing partner, German workshop Holzfreude, three professional mentors – Hanne Willmann, Sebastian Herkner and Garth Roberts – and the AHEC team.

• Maximilian Beck • Clémence Buytaert • Simon Gehring • Hansil Heo • Sarah Hossli & Lorenz Noelle • Anna Koppmann • Haus Otto (Nils Körner and Patrick Henry Nagel) • Theo Luisotto • Maximilian Rohregger

From one or more of four hardwoods – American red oak, cherry, and hard and soft maple – each designer has created an object that reflects their approach towards the theme 'slow design for fast change'. The result is a wide range of products, including bowls, chairs, benches, shelving systems, tables and modular furniture elements. This variety reflects the diverse voices and ideas that define the design industry today, united by an emphasis on sustainability, longevity and a focus on quality.

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Produced by Holzfreude, the finished objects embody the value of perfect craftsmanship as well as presenting a selection of the best emerging design talents in a unique historical context.

THE NINE OBJECTS

The following pieces will be on display at the Kunstgewerbemuseum, from 26 November to 20 February 2022:

Leftover Synthesis by Simon Gehring

American cherry, maple and red oak

Gehring's piece is an exploration into making better use of wood scraps from furniture production, combined with computational design methods. Leftover timber that falls below a certain dimension is often sorted out, incinerated or shredded. His concept aims to minimally process those leftovers, while retaining their individual forms and shapes. By using algorithms that adapt to the varying shapes and sizes, the leftover timber is precisely arranged, like building blocks, to create the form of furniture, giving the timber a second life as a functional object. The variable size and number of parts used for each chair, means each final piece is assembled in a different way with a unique finish.

Rocking Chair by Clémence Buytaert

American red oak

For Buytaert, the definition of 'slow design' is taking time, reducing waste, producing higher-quality products and finding balance between the society and environment in which we live. For her, a rocking chair embodies 'slow design'. The back-and-forth motion of the chair encourages mindfulness in activities, while the object itself is traditionally passed down through generations. The chair's thoughtful design gives it an artisanal feel but allows it to be flat-packed for practicality and to reduce the carbon footprint of transport.

Combo by Theo Luvisotto

American red oak

Luvisotto started his design process by studying the modular and multifunctional aspect of objects, while keeping in mind the brief of questioning the status quo of the furniture industry. By observing the proportions of interior furniture, he unified two fundamental



Kunstgewerbemuseum
Staatliche Museen zu Berlin

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functions: seating and storage. Combo brings together a stool and a box into a single object, which can be stacked and adapted to fit with the user's space and lifestyle. The curves of his piece offer a combination of comfort, thinness, and solidity and the use of American red oak makes it a particularly robust and durable object.

Kies by Maximilian Beck

American cherry, maple and red oak

Beck began the design process by studying the natural formation of pebbles. Over years, sediments from mountain ranges are transported through glaciers and rivers until they reach the ocean – a process that slowly erodes the rough surface of the stones until a smooth and evenly shaped pebble is left. For Beck, this process was the embodiment of the Slow brief. His collection of tables and stools alludes to a pile of pebbles, the smoothed edges and neutral colours bring a sense of calm – a deceleration that stands in direct contrast to the fast-paced world of today and gives the concept of 'slow furniture' a new dimension.

The (UN)Ordinary Chair by Anna Koppmann

American cherry, maple and red oak

Is beauty just a question of looks, or could there be more to it than meets the eye? Inspired by Naoto Fukasawa and Jasper Morrison's book *Super Normal*, Koppmann designed a chair that flirts with the idea of an archetype to draw attention to a more important issue: supporting a sustainable forestry system.

Today, combining different types of wood in a single piece of furniture is still unusual and often a matter of taste. But the forest can't be healthy and climate resistant in the long run if we continue to simply cherry-pick material from it.

With its classical form, The (un)ordinary chair makes the combination of woods both visually and physically appealing for our living spaces, while contributing to a sustainable use of the forest.

RE;Collection by Hansil Heo

American cherry, maple and red oak

Reflecting on the brief, Heo asked herself: "What is slow? Slow doesn't mean stop. Slow seems to have stopped, but it is still changing. And it isn't immediately noticeable, but by recording, we know. What is changing without us noticing? What would you like to record and remember?" Heo's sculptural storage system was inspired by historic Korean culture. Traditionally, a tree would be planted every time a baby was born. It would grow over time

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and become their playground, shelter and a companion and end its life as a piece of furniture, or a coffin, uniting their lives together. RE;collection is an object that will grow over time with the user, acting as a storage space for memories and stories, keeping their most valuable items safe.

Endless Garden by Haus Otto

American red oak

Endless Garden is a modular shelving system which addresses the meaning of 'slow' in an ever-faster world and deals with ideas of longevity, sustainability and deceleration. In contrast to today's big cities, which are characterised by industry and speed, rural regions can evoke an image of deceleration and tradition. The associative and playful approach to the motif of the fence as a symbol of the romanticised ideal of home ownership creates new scope for interpretation, while drawing on simple and traditional woodworking techniques. The fence as a symbol of our sedentariness thereby creates new spatial structures, demarcates, unites and redefines our human living spaces again and again. The final design is based on a fragment of the fence that can be expanded through both vertical and horizontal multiplication to grow with and adapt to our spatial changes. The emphasis on the horizontal structure, through the interlocking connecting elements, thereby creates the impression of infinity.

Propellers by Maximilian Rohregger

American maple

Rohregger took inspiration from the distinct propeller-like shape of maple seeds for his table and stools, with many subtle details that mirror the ingenious design of nature. The form of the stool allows it to be adjusted in height by a screw thread, referencing the spiral trajectory of the maple seed as it falls from the tree. In the natural world, the seeds hang from the tree branches and are carried away by the wind for pollination. Rohregger has reflected this in his stools, which can be distributed around the room or hung under the table to save space.

Forest by Sarah Hossli and Lorenz Noelle

American cherry, maple and red oak

Hossli and Noelle began by researching the interactive forest maps generated by AHEC that visually portray the volume, growth and removals of the American hardwood forests. These naturally regenerating forests are huge and diverse. Cherry, maple and red oak trees make up 40% of the total standing timber and grow to a substantially greater volume than is used.

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Forest is a collection of nine different bowls, the design of which is based on data from these maps.

The shift to sustainability

Across the world, the throwaway culture of fast consumption is coming to an end. Consumers are becoming more and more conscious of the stories behind the products they spend their money on, favouring products that will last longer – possibly even for multiple generations. Objects that are durable, timeless in design and quality are increasingly a focus of consumers, individual designers and corporations alike. Slow design is fast becoming an economic mindset.

In this context, wood is becoming increasingly preferable as a design material, thanks to its natural look and texture and to its inherent sustainability – the perfect choice for ‘slow’ design.

“Strong, tactile and visually appealing, wood is essential in an era of plastics, over-consumption and climate change, because of its low impact on the environment and the fact that it can be easily recycled. As well as being a material for making, it is also a low-impact fuel and a carbon store. This project presents four underused timbers and questions the assumption that the most well-known varieties of wood are always the only ‘right’ woods to use.”

– David Venables, AHEC Europe

Designers today have an enormous influence on how products are made and where, with what and how they are manufactured. The future of this shift lies within the next generation of designers – the students and recent graduates who are likely to shape the industry for decades to come. Thus far, the global pandemic has largely robbed this generation of opportunities to showcase their ideas and products to international audiences. Thanks to AHEC and SLOW, they have both a platform to demonstrate their talents and an incentive to rise to the challenge and come up with innovative products, objects and ideas that reflect and accelerate the transition towards slow design.

Find out more: slowdesignforfastchange.org

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About AHEC

For over 20 years the American Hardwood Export Council (AHEC) has been at the forefront of wood promotion in Europe, successfully building a distinctive and creative brand for U.S. hardwoods. AHEC's support for creative design projects such as The Wish List, Endless Stair and The Smile, for the London Design Festival demonstrate the performance potential of these sustainable materials and provide valuable inspiration.

AHEC pioneered the environmental impact assessment (EIA), an approach that has since been adopted by other industries. This measures a number of impacts: primary energy demand (from renewable and non-renewable resources); global warming potential; acidification potential; eutrophication potential; and, photochemical ozone creation potential.

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