

There's many a rocking chair which, like this one, is rediscovered in the attic after many years.



'Shaker'
(around 1800)



'Schaukel-Fauteuil No. 1', Thonet
(around 1860)

RELAXING FURNITURE

The rocking chair was always a well-loved piece of furniture in which you could roll back in comfort, away from the hassle of everyday life. Its story has been one of change.



For discussions in his office in the White House, US President John F. Kennedy always preferred to sit in his rocking chair. The classic 'Kennedy Rocker' (left) is still being produced today.

For anyone wanting to relax and 'chill out', or just needing a short break, a rocking chair is the ideal place. To lean back, allow yourself to shift down a gear, and let your thoughts wander. There is no other kind of seat that offers so much room for manoeuvre on a single spot. And it has been this way for hundreds of years. The exact location of the 'cultural cradle' of the rocking chair is not known. It was first mentioned in the Oxford English dictionary as a 'rocker' in 1787.

Discreetly stylish

It was the Shakers who, at the end of the 19th century, helped to bring great popularity to leisure furniture. This community of Protestants had emigrated to the USA from England in the late 18th century. Its members followed a rather ascetic lifestyle, as is reflected in the simplicity of their furniture, made from pine, maple or walnut. Their particular form of armchair, with a seat of woven wool, reeds or leather, and its two sickle-shaped runners attached to the legs, was designed to soothe the sufferings of the sick and the aged. The rocking motion was intended to induce calm and relaxation.

Coveted by collectors

Around 1860, with the help of its patented wood-bending technology, the German furniture manufacturer Thonet provided a counterpart to the straight-lined rocking chair of the Shakers. The back and the seat each consist of a single beech bentwood frame, filled in with rattan lattice-work. Viewed from the side, the rockers, arm rests and the supporting struts made from bent



'J 16', Hans J. Wegner
(1944)



'RAR', Ray and Charles Eames
(1948)



'Loop', Willy Guhl
(1954)



'Rockid', Ontwerpduo
(2010)

beech wood with their curving lines give an attractive ornamental effect. The 'Schaukel-Fauteuil No. 1' ['Rocking chair No. 1'] became a classic, and a true collector's item. The last production batch was made in 2009 in Frankenberg as a limited edition of 25 pieces.

A style for modern times

Later, designers continued to demonstrate the versatility of the rocking chair. Hans J. Wegner, for example, who produced designs including the famous 'J 16' for the Danish furniture manufacturer Fredericia. The oak rocking chair with its high back, long vertical spindles and its seat hand-woven from paper cord, has been in constant production since 1944. Four years later Ray and Charles Eames developed their model 'RAR', a rocking chair with a compact and adaptable seating shell in plastic. This piece can still be obtained in a variety of colours. In 1954, the Swiss designer, Willy Guhl, presented a rocking chair for the garden called 'Loop': a loop adapted for seating, formed from a single band of fibre-reinforced cement. Later, the construction material incurred some criticism due to its asbestos content. For decades the Swiss company Eternit has continued to produce this seat in a slightly modified version without the potential risky fibres.

Rocking in a jet plane

It is not only designers who were constantly inspired by rocking chairs: even Pablo Picasso, Abraham Lincoln and Mark Twain rated them highly and allowed themselves to be photographed in them. In 1961, US President John F. Kennedy moved into the White House

– accompanied by a rocking chair. This special seat from the P & P Chair Company, with its high supple rattan back, was designed to bring relief to his chronically painful back. He did not even do without it in his Presidential aircraft, Air Force One. In the meantime, the 'Kennedy Rocker' is being produced by another traditional chair manufacturer in North Carolina.

Two pieces of furniture in one

The idea of a rocking chair is similar to that of a cradle. So why not fuse the two into a single piece of furniture? As with the 'Rockid', a concept by the designer duo from Eindhoven, Tineke Beunders and Nathan Wierink. With this, the pair gave new life to an idea that had occurred to craftsmen hundreds of years ago. In the English-speaking world the 'Nanny Rocker', in the traditional Windsor furniture style, was already bringing mother and child together in harmony during the 18th century. The pleasure in rocking continues without interruption.



Replica of a 'Nanny Rocker':
'Rocker Cradle', Fine Woodworker (2005)

CONTACT

- **Shaker rocking chair 'F151': Habit**
Ulrich Lodholz GmbH, Im Heider Feld 2
51515 Kürten-Engeldorf, www.habit.de
- **'J 16': Fredericia Furniture A/S**
Treldevej 183, 7000 Fredericia
Denmark, www.fredericia.com
- **Eames Plastic Chair 'RAR': Vitra GmbH**
Charles-Eames-Strasse 2
79576 Weil am Rhein
www.vitra.com
- **'Loop': Eternit (Schweiz) AG**
Frieser Baustoffhandel GmbH
Naumannstraße 79, Haus 38,
10829 Berlin, www.frieser-baustoffe.de
- **'Kennedy Rocker': P & P Chair Company**
P.O. Box 208, Troutman, NC 28166
www.thekennedyrocker.com (from the
manufacturer or from
www.americanhomestyles.de)
- **'Rockid': Ontwerpduo**
Halvemaanstraat 20, 5651 BP Eindhoven
The Netherlands, www.ontwerpduo.nl

MUSEUM

- Thonet GmbH, museum with
rocking chair exhibit,
Michael-Thonet-Strasse 1
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■ Text: Micaela Buchholz, Photos: Neeltje Reijerman (17), Christian Malsch-von Stockhausen (1), Habit, Thonet, American Homestyles, Abbie Rowe/White House Photographs/ JFK Library, Boston, Fredericia, Vitra GmbH, Eternit (Schweiz) AG, Ontwerpduo/Lisa Klappe, Scott Morrison/ Fine Woodworker