

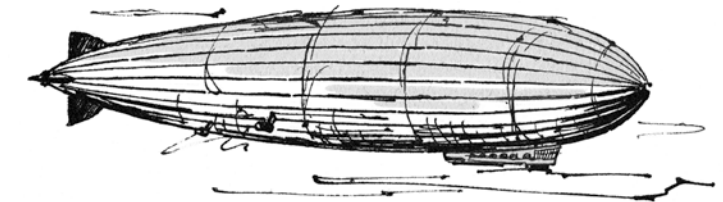
TRADITIONS AND VISIONS

Happy Birthday, Walter Knoll

Walter Knoll is without a doubt a relic among furniture companies. The history of the German manufacturer dates back to 1865, when Wilhelm Knoll founded a leather shop in Stuttgart. In celebrating its 150th anniversary, the brand looks to the future as well as to the classic pieces it has produced. With an astute knack for choosing key collaborators in the form of architects, designers, and artisans, Walter Knoll is responsible for many an iconic piece during its existence, all the while managing to steer design forward during the various historical periods. DAMN° reviews the substantial timeline.

SANDRA HOFMEISTER
IMAGES © WALTER KNOLL

Student hall of residence,
Hamburg, 1953, with Vostra
chairs and tables designed
by Jens Risom



expanded over the years.” When the Benz family bought Walter Knoll 22 years ago, Markus Benz had gained his father’s confidence and enough financial backing to advance the company, forming a synergy between two family experiences in the furniture market. Today, his vision is focused on Walter Knoll as a global brand. “It is only through the brand that we can truly convey the values encapsulated in the products.”

WAY BACK WHEN

Back in the 1920s, two revolutionary systems, Antimott and Prodomo, were invented by Walter Knoll for upholstering furniture. These techniques replaced the traditional use of spiral springs, seaweed, and horsehair, and banished carpet moths from their ancestral habitat. The new, lightweight armchairs and sofas that employed the new technology were used in airships like the Hindenburg and the world’s first wide-bodied DoX aircraft, creating a new understanding of the whole typology. The Prodomo models are now considered the first modern upholstered furniture. This technical approach, utilising elastic steel band suspension, opened the way to the inexpensive mass production of upholstered furniture.

Furniture companies love birthdays. Just recently, some have celebrated their 70th or even 80th anniversary. But few can look back such a long way as Walter Knoll. The high-end manufacturer based in Herrenberg, a town 30 kilometres southwest of Stuttgart, is revelling in reaching the significant age of 150 years. Its long life reflects the story of design in all its stages, from the late 19th century to the achievements of early modernity, and from post-war peculiarities to the global network of an international brand that today operates in more than 60 countries.

“The history of every company is affected by its founders”, states Markus Benz, CEO. “In 1865, Wilhelm Knoll opened a leather shop in Stuttgart. This early competency in stitching leather is still a hallmark nowadays, having been developed and

Markus Benz, CEO of Walter Knoll (1)

Walter Knoll (1876–1971), one of Wilhelm Knoll’s two sons / The company story began with Wilhelm Knoll’s leather shop. (2)

DoX, 1929, the world’s first wide-bodied aircraft, was entirely furnished with models employing the Prodomo upholstery system. (3)

The arrow-drilled moth became the trademark of the Antimott programme that replaced springs and plush upholstery with elastic straps, boasting fine suspension properties. (4)

Leather stitching is still a main feature of Walter Knoll products. (5)

The 1936 LZ 129 Hindenburg airship was furnished with lightweight tubular aluminium chairs designed by Professor Fritz August Breuhaus and upholstered using the Antimott system. (6)

The company headquarters in Herrenberg, near Stuttgart (7)



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