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Peter Opsvik: Tripp Trapp chair and Balans chair

I want to talk about the works of Norwegian industrial designer Peter Opsvik - Balans Chair and Tripp Trapp Chair. He and his studio focus on designing products that solve problems. Opsvik is also the co-founder of the Minor Foundation for Major Challenges, which supports projects that promote climate change action, and Design Without Borders, a nonprofit that leverages designers' skills to improve lives in developing countries¹.

At the end of the 1970s, Opsvik began taking an interest in ergonomics, the science of arranging the workplace to the user's needs. One of the first works towards that was the Balans Chair, a forward-tilting chair that allows the user to move around and change positions (photo 1). The chair is designed as an open construction, free of mechanical adjustment parts. It is lightweight and can easily be moved around. Its curved runners allow for gentle rocking motions while a tilted seat enables an open hip angle. There are two cushions beneath the seat that are used to rest your shins, one or both feet, or neither by placing your feet on the ground². Balans chair made of a natural or black finish and a wide range of upholstery fabrics and colors. The wooden runners are made from layers of beech and ash veneer. Fabric made from 100% post-consumer recycled polyester, so it is reducing the environmental impact both in production and on natural resources.

Another notable work of Peter Opsvik is the Tripp Trapp Chair (photo 2). This is the only work of Opsvik that is exhibited at MoMA now. This chair is an innovative work, which he created in 1972 for his 2-year-old son so he could sit comfortably with the rest of the family¹.

Tripp Trapp chair is made of European lacquered beechwood with water-based finishes, and has a height- and depth-adjustable seat and footrest that “grows” with the child to fully support the back and the upper and the lower legs. With accessories, the chair can accommodate all types of people, from infants to 242-pound adults.

Nowadays, both of these chairs are mass-manufactured, and you can buy them for home. For example, a variation of the Balans chair can be found on Amazon for \$313, but I think the main company that makes and sells this chair is Varier, which creates (according to their description on Amazon) “Original Kneeling Chair Designed by Peter Opsvik”; they sell it for \$380³. Tripp Trapp chair is also selling on Amazon now, for \$200-250 minimum. What I found interesting, is I think this chair is a “progenitor” of these toddler’s chairs in McDonald’s. It really looks similar, except McDonald’s chair has a little desk, too (and you can find this table variation on Amazon as well, for \$380)⁴.

What I noticed right away, is that these works very much resemble what Bauhaus was doing back at the time. Peter Opsvik always is focusing on product design as a means for solving real-life problems, just as well as Bauhaus. Bauhaus's principle was to make a mix of design and functionality. One of the school’s slogans was “Form follows function”⁵, which means the design has to be functional first, then beautiful. Doesn’t it correlate with the ideas of Opsvik? I think, yes, it does. One more principle that goes well with Opsvik’s works is “Simplicity and Effectiveness”--there is no need to make things more and more beautiful, they’re fine as they are⁵. Both Balans and Tripp Trapp chairs are fine as they are, and there is no need to make them more appealing to a customer/user because people would still buy them thanks to their function. What I want to say is that both discussed works are excellent examples of modern Bauhaus works.

Works Cited

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Images Cited



Balans Chair



Tripp Trapp Chair

Source for both images:

Design Through the Decades: The 1970s, Houzz.com, August 14, 2019,

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