

Antti Tevajärvi

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Video

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Transcript

Introducing Artek 2nd Cycle

My name is Antti Tevajärvi, I've been working for Artek for almost 16 years now – a very long time – and I've been involved with the Artek 2nd Cycle project pretty much from day one, for 15 years. Of course, the whole idea and the concept of 2nd Cycle have evolved a lot from those early stages. Artek 2nd Cycle is a celebration of the strong design heritage of Finland. Mostly, we emphasize the heritage of Artek, but there are more and more other Finnish designs involved in the project. That, in a nutshell, is what Artek 2nd Cycle is about, from various perspectives – museum or environmental conscious consumption – and these themes play a crucial role in our daily work.

Part of the global Artek team

We are Artek: Artek 2nd Cycle is just a concept store of Artek, so we are very much linked to everything that Artek does. And we also do close collaborations with many of the other departments of Artek. Our items are showcased at the flagship store in Helsinki, where they are intertwined with the brand-new items. We also work closely with the Artek Tokyo store, so three or four times a year we send a set of vintage Aalto, Tapiovaara, and other Finnish design items to their store, for our Japanese followers. We do

collaboration with the marketing team locally here, and also with the Artek global team. And what I find very fascinating is the archival research help that we can give to Artek, museums and collectors, that are interested in Artek designs from the past. For example, if Artek is considering relaunching an item that has been out of production for a long time, we can do the research with our contact base and our own research materials – what sort of variants have been in production for a particular design? So, it's a very multifaceted business.

Beginnings of Artek 2nd Cycle

Artek 2nd Cycle started in 2006, when we started collecting very patinated or repainted and aged Aalto stools and chairs for our collection, to be showcased at international and local fairs and exhibitions. The idea was to showcase the longevity of Aalto's designs, that only get better with time. The first international platform was the Furniture Fair in Milan in 2007. Artek 2nd Cycle items were showcased at a pavilion, designed for Artek by Japanese architect Shigeru Ban. The reception was very good. We did not yet know where to take 2nd Cycle as a concept, and we just kept on finding more items, building the stock, and using them in exhibitions oftentimes. Only in 2011, many years after, we felt confident enough to turn it into a store that sells vintage Artek designs. For a couple of years, we were just collecting and looking for the right angle for the 2nd Cycle project. The interest locally, but also internationally, from the beginning was so strong, that we felt that we're really on to something. That's why in 2011, I think it was in October, we opened the store here in Helsinki, roughly a 600 square meters' space. Of course, it has changed since. We still emphasize the

design heritage of Artek and the Aaltos', but we also want to showcase other Finnish designs for our followers: Artek designs that are not that well-known, Finnish designers that are not known at all internationally, and there are even anonymous designs that we haven't been able to discover the official designers for. Everything that goes well with the modern Artek spirit, we want to emphasize in our collection.

Building a Finnish design collection

We are a very small team. My closest colleague is Timo Penttilä, and it's pretty much up to the two of us to make the curation. So far, I think it's been a good reception. We buy the items, so nothing comes out of factories at the push of a button – we really need to scout for pieces that come to the store. We look for patina, especially in Artek furniture. The idea is that they aesthetically need to be looking worn and aged. We also try to go into different areas of Finnish design that have not yet been discovered, at least internationally. The collection keeps changing, evolving, but I think the rule of thumb is that little by little, we are going more and more towards only Finnish design; we have Italian, American, and some of the Nordic designers to spice up the Finnish design collection. We have noticed that that's what we're good at, and that's what we want to concentrate on.

To restore or not to restore

Oftentimes we buy a particular item and find out that it's rare, in an original condition. We appreciate the originality of the item in a sense that we don't even want to restore it much. Then, there is a totally different perspective: maybe the textile in a particular armchair has worn so greatly that it needs a

new upholstery. On a weekly basis we send out our items to our restorer, to upholster and have them restored.

What is the value of old furniture?

There is a trend that people become very appreciative of what they can find in their homes. It's not just about money, it's about the appreciation of design heritage that can be found at their homes. And this is part of our work, too. Even though we're not always able to buy the items to the store, we can still help in investigating into the designer info and details of a particular item, that our client has at home.

It's actually a very good question, and quite a difficult one to answer, because I feel we're still in the process of evaluating the lifespan of an Artek product. So we are trying our best to extend the lifespan and the usage of Artek furniture. Oftentimes it's a basic need – when you have a relationship with a particular furniture item at home, you're willing to invest in restoring or reupholstering it, when it starts to wear out. That's one point, that I think many companies are emphasizing in design, fashion, and furniture industries. But one good thing about Artek is that many of the items have loose parts, that are standard. For example, if we're able to buy a set of Aalto chairs or Artek well-known L-legged furniture pieces, even though the chair itself might be worn out or the backrest could be broken, we still can utilize some parts of the chair, for example, the legs, the backrest, or the seat, for our projects. We try our best to utilize every part that we have of a furniture piece, that might be no longer usable as it is.

Cultivating awareness about design classics

I think we play an important role: in the past 15 years, we have brought in a lot of awareness about Artek designs. There are, of course, common models that every Finn knows, for example, the Aalto three-legged stool, or the Paimio chair. But Artek is so much more than that. We do a lot of research for our followers to find the information regarding more rare pieces. We evaluate the rarity level, of course, but also the value. And that has changed a lot during the past 15 years, too. There is a more transparent and open discussion among collectors and gallerists and enthusiasts, about the value of the items they have. This is one aspect, but also, we've been able to discover a lot of new information from our contacts base regarding Finnish design, and especially about Artek designs. There is a funny story: we were able to buy a beautiful-looking pine sofa, that we bought because of the aesthetics. It was an anonymous piece, and we already sold it, and only afterwards were we able to find that this sofa was also designed at the Artek drawing office. These kinds of discoveries, that are surprises for us as well, are an interesting part of my work.

Knowledge of materials is key

If we go back to the beginning of Artek, there was a lot of wood materials, already from the 1930's onwards, used in Aalto and Artek furniture. You only need to go to Savoy restaurant to realize that not everything there is made of birch – and this is the original setting from 1937. Mahogany, elm, ash, oak, teak – many wood materials were in use, especially on the veneers of the tabletops and seats. But, since birch is very durable and dense wood, it was chosen as the main wood material or timber, especially for the bent

Aalto furniture and Artek designs. In the Paimio sanatorium era, before Artek, the armrests were made of beech, and beech is something that you stumble into every now and then, often in the early editions. During wartime and after the war, a factory in Hedemora, Sweden, was established, which also used ash in the bending processes. I'm quite sure that ash L-legs were produced at the Korhonen factory as well. But these are rare. If we find these sort of wood materials in bent loose parts, it's a great discovery. Pine is something that was used in Artek furniture, especially during the war years in the 1940s, and the years following the war. These furniture pieces appear more rustic. And I know that Aalto designed a few pine chair models in that era. Pine is still used in the screen (the room divider), but maybe the problem with pine is, even if it's not quickly harvested, that it's still a softer wood timber than birch. As I said, it's not good for the bending parts of Aalto furniture.

One great example: I recently visited the town hall of Säynätsalo near Jyväskylä – a beautiful Aalto building, that I think was opened in 1952. It has special edition of chairs, designed particularly for that space, that resemble more standard chair models 45 and 46 by Aalto. If you looked closer at the armrests, you noticed that they were made of pine, not birch. And, if you looked even more closely, you realized that the bending technique was very different than in a regular birch chair 45 armrest. They were actually cut, and the bending was not solid – it was made of multiple parts of pine. This is something that I think has to be mentioned: pine, even if it's long harvested, is still a much softer wood. It doesn't work in the bending processes in Artek furniture.

Timeless appeal of Artek designs

'Timeless', of course, is a difficult term to describe in a nutshell. For us, in terms of our work, timeless is something that Aaltos' designs – some of them from late 1920s, 1930s to 50s – have in their appearance. It's something that you want to live with, something that, if it needs restoration, you're willing to invest in, in order to keep that particular item in your home. From our perspective, and what we want to emphasize in our work, timelessness is something you can find in intricate details of an item. You are so amazed by these details, that you want to continue the relationship with the furniture piece. This is at the core of Artek 2nd Cycle's philosophy – that the furniture pieces from your home could travel from one generation to the next because of their timeless appeal, quality and aesthetic, and the beauty, that the item brings to your everyday life. In Artek designs, I think, many can discover that beauty.