

# Driving Innovation

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## TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY FIREFIGHTERS



The beautiful world  
of Eero Aarnio

Our future  
together is  
on the back  
page

Plastics  
Second Life





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# The Beautiful World of Eero Aarnio



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The least traditional of designers designs playful furniture that will become a new tradition. Sheer magic

- 1. Eero Aarnio depicted inside a Bubble Chair
- 2. Screw tables
- 3. Mushrooms
- 4. Balloon Chair
- 5. Pony
- 6. Copacabana tables
- 7. Tomato Chair
- 8. Formula Chair
- 9. Pastil Chair
- 10. Table and matching chairs

Grassy knolls extending from pine tree forests, sparkling blue lakes fed by cascades of waterfalls, splendid daylight and deep, dark nights: it would seem that we have arrived into the secret world of elves.

But look again: Plexiglas bubbles, floating tomatoes, green ponies and magical mushroom shapes abound in multiple bright colors. A table that appears to be preparing to snap up and gobble down one of its matching chairs, two dimensional trees aligning themselves on the horizon... while several people lounge in suspended transparent bubbles. Have we landed in some far futuristic cyber city? No. We have simply entered the universe of the Finnish ergonomic design king: Eero Aarnio. Even his name seems secretive and elfin, no wonder he is not the "house-hold word" he deserves to be, despite that his work is recognized by millions the world over.

## The original "Balloon"

Aarnio was born in Helsinki in 1932 and studied at the Helsinki Art & Design School from 1954 to 1957. Married a few years later and settling into a new home, he wanted a "big armchair" that had to fit his conception of originality and comfort and above all one that he could build for himself. As his sketches became more numerous and his research grew, he realized that he had been drawing over and over again that simplest of geometrical shapes - a round circle. A sphere. A balloon. He drew a balloon and sliced off a portion.

Hanging his life size drawing on the wall, he "virtually" sat in the shadow it cast, while his young bride traced the movements of his head within the drawing. In this way, the "Balloon Chair" was born. Placing the sphere on a rotating pivotal base, it became a design breakthrough that changed our conception of inner space forever. A true icon, the "Balloon Chair" is perhaps one of the most photographed (and copied) pieces of furniture of the 20th century. The original piece was built by Aarnio himself: using the same techniques that are used to build a plane's wing, he constructed a wooden mould, covered it in liquid fiberglass and withdrew the mould.

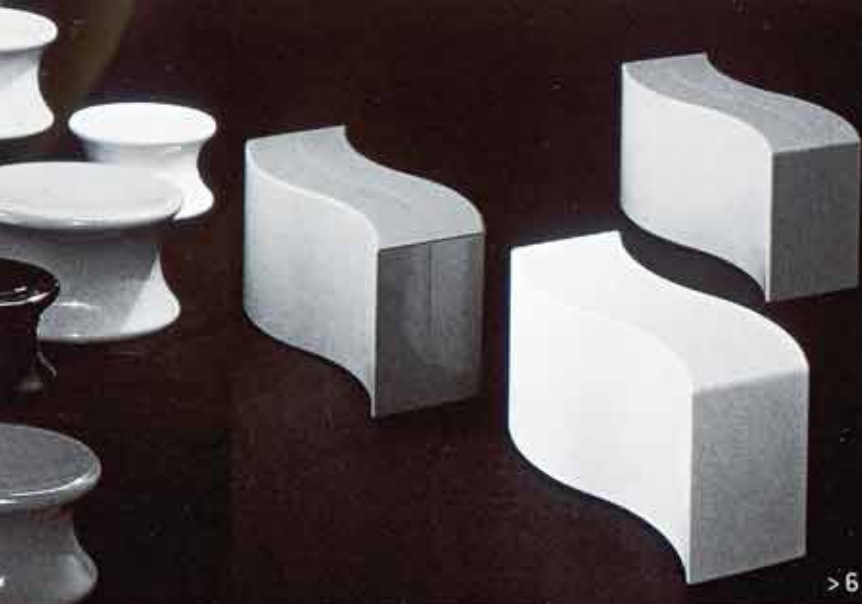
## A soundproof bubble

His first effort of industrial production dated to the years when he was studying: "My first commercial design idea was a cane stool which I wove myself in 1954. In 1960, I expanded the stool into a whole family of products and found a manufacturer in Hong Kong. The first fiberglass samples of these stools were only produced in the '70s, and the actual production did not start until the end of the '90s. The name of the stool was Mushroom in the US market, and because the fiberglass version is the same product, as far as shape, dimensions and function are concerned, they were given the same name." The transparent "Bubble Chair" came along in 1968. "After I had made the "Ball Chair" (balloon chair), I wanted



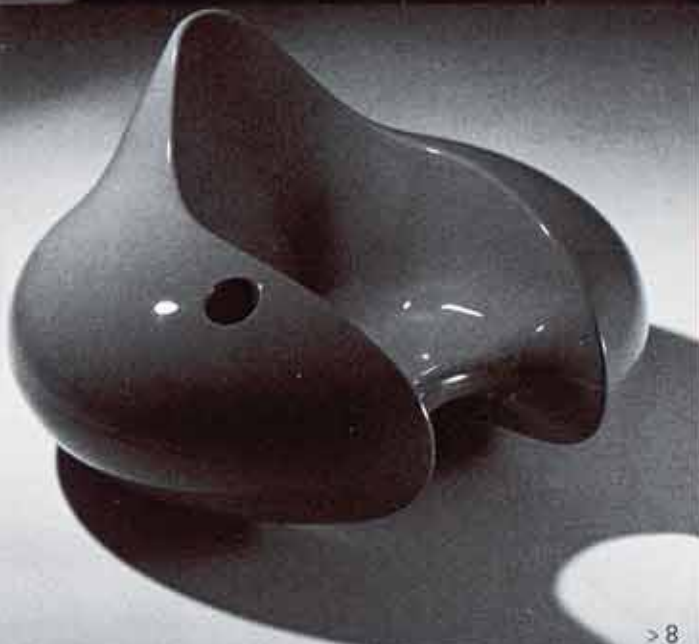
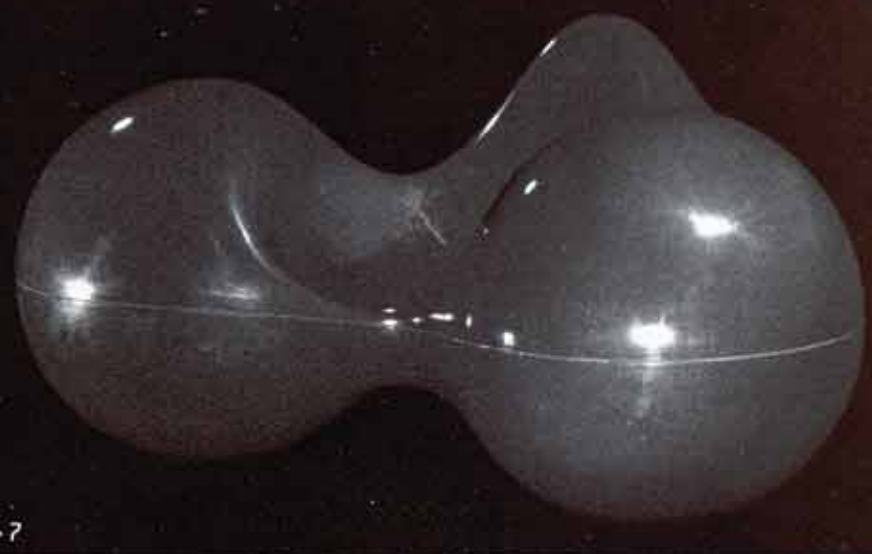
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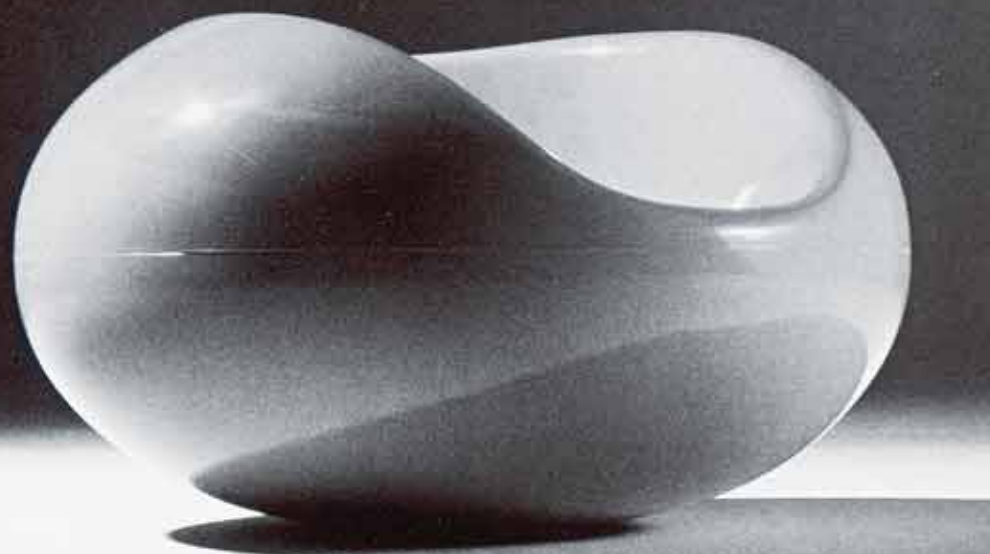
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to have light inside it, so I had the idea of a transparent ball where the light entered from all directions. The only suitable material was a plastic, acrylic, which is heated and blown into shape like a soap bubble... Luckily, since there is no way to make a clear pedestal, I hung it from the ceiling. The name was obvious." Yes... it is obvious, but is this simply "luck" or is it magic, Elf play? Both the Balloon and the bubble demonstrate a natural acoustic that "swallows" the surrounding noise, isolating the user in a very pleasant manner.

The first encounter with fiberglass and plastics, that indicated to Aarnio that these could be a tool that would permit him to live and create within his personal Article of Faith that "design is constant renewal, reevaluation and growth", was the discovery of them as refuse in a Helsinki shipyard in the early 1960's. He didn't refuse them, far from it. These new elements lent him the liberty to create objects with organic shapes and forms, as well as splash vivid colors onto the gray industrial skyline. The material could be rounded, without attachments; things appeared seemingly made of one piece, allowing him to abandon what had been considered the traditional shapes until then.

Renewal: the classic Balloon Chair was re-introduced to the public in October 2008, during the Helsinki Design Week. For its renaissance, an entire stereo system had been incorporated into the sphere, as well as armrests being added. The perfect sensorial experience, forty years after its first conception.

## Two-Way

In his newer "Children's Collection" Aarnio had designed a small plastic chair (Trillio), easy to stock, and even easier to clean. As is his wont, he used his favorite palette of bright primary colors which only plastics can provide. He made the chair in three different heights, because children do have a tendency to grow. The chair can be used in schools or at home. Nevertheless, he was unsatisfied: what was missing for this fun loving Elf? AHA! Rotation molded polyethylene, Aarnio added a loop on the back of the chair and it immediately became... a rocking horse! Everything should lend itself to several purposes.

The Pastil chair is either a rocking chair or a raft-like floating armchair. Made in the shape of a Scandinavian sweet (from which it also borrowed its name), the Pastil has exactly the same diameter as the opening of the Balloon chair, allowing shipping from the point of production to enlarge the capacity as the Pastil fits comfortably into the Balloon. And, as the artist himself says "because fiberglass is always laminated by hand on a smooth mould the visible surface is perfectly shiny and smooth, but the other surface is slightly rough. I have always wanted to hide this side of my fiberglass products, and in the Pastil, they are all on the inside, thus totally invisible".

Growth: Over the past 50 years, Eero Aarnio has given us the Mushroom, the Tomato Chair, Bubble Chair, Balloon Chair, and the Pony. His creations now extend to room dividers, lamps, dining tables, door handles and even an electric guitar. His objects have become more and more playful as he grows in age. Pony was born in 1973, while Tipi the chick saw the light nearly 30 years later.

It is said that Elves are eternal... what more proof could we ask for that Eero Aarnio is a magical creature who lives in a very wondrous space?