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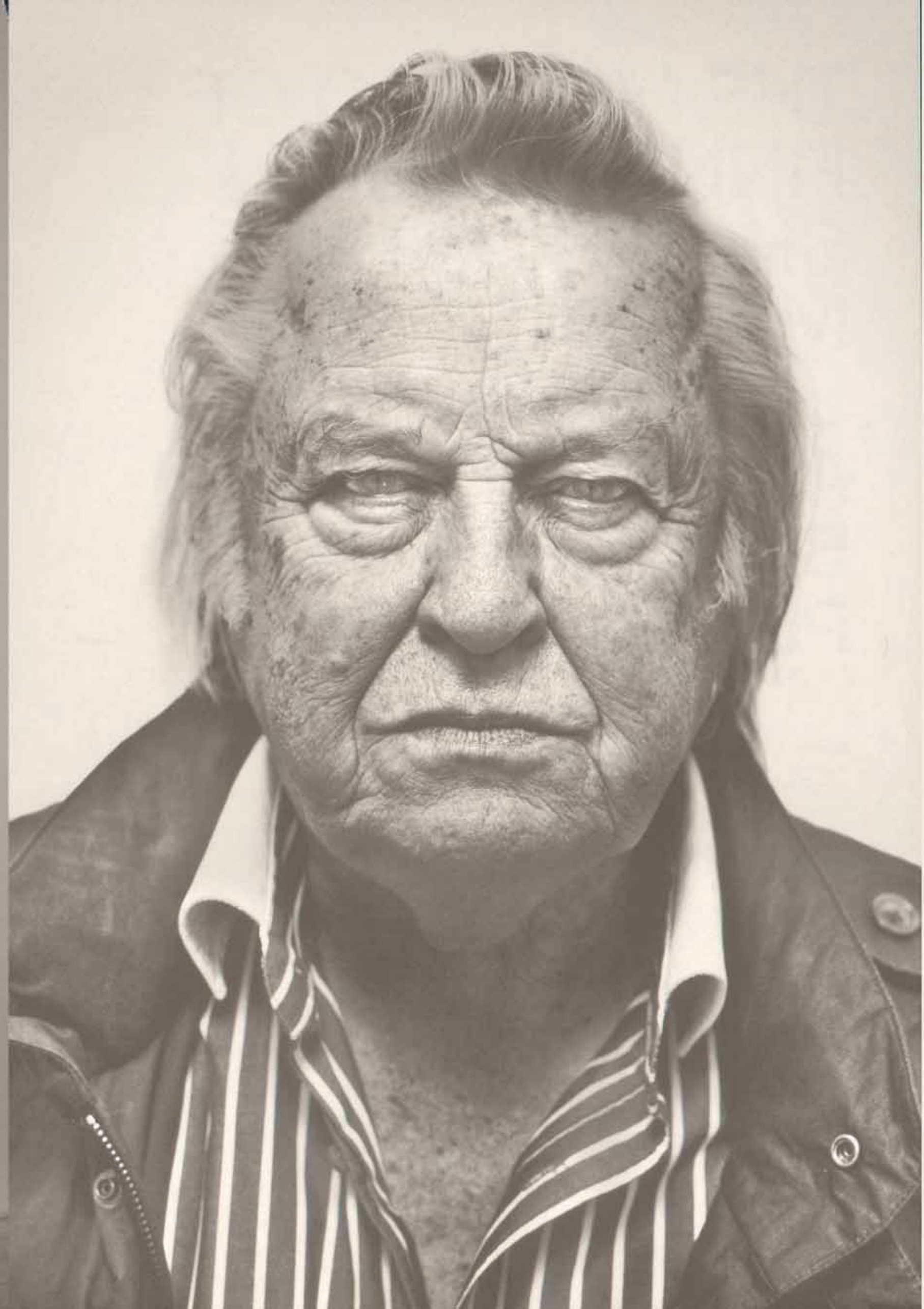
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Portrait of Eero Aarnio



THE MAESTRO OF FINNISH DESIGN SHOWS US HIS MAJESTIC LAKEVIEW AND THE ORIGINAL BALL CHAIR WITH PLEASANT PRIDE.

Portrait of Eero Aarnio

His exuberance is infectious. Eero Aarnio calls us and we're disarmed by his charm. That's all it takes.

"Yes, of course we can meet. I have an exhibition deadline, but I'll definitely meet you. Let's set the time right now, no need to call back and forth. By the way, it's an exceptionally beautiful evening. We're sitting here by the lake right next to my house with my wife. It's perfect."

In Nordic design the greatest reducers have made the greatest names. They are renowned for pure-lined simplicity and modernist minimalism. Finns are especially known for their use of wood, and the efficient adoption of Mies van der Rohe's immortal motto *Less is more*. Nordic aesthetics have come to stand for the same thing as Miles Davis' 50s jazz—the definition of *cool*.

Designer Eero Aarnio is arguably one of the brightest minds and steadiest hands of Finnish design, best-known for his innovative and colourful plastic and fibreglass creations.

He stands apart as Mr. Effervescence.

Aarnio is all mouth. There is no holding him back. The first thing he tells us, as we step over the threshold of his home, is that he tends to start by telling people that his designs range from a toothpick to this house.

The toothpick was a playful idea of a little aeroplane

containing a pick, a proposition made for Finnair in the 50s that never went into production. The house on the other hand did go into production. It stands on a lakeside property in Veikkola, near the Helsinki metropolitan area. It is pure-lined and white, inside out, covered with bright colourful spots, Aarnio's iconic work.

The façade opens to the interior space through transparent doors. As soon as we walk into the entrance hall, we are surrounded by Aarnio's work—without realising it, we stand by the original Ball Chair from 1963.

As he starts his tour of the house, he bellows to his wife: "Pirkko, the boys are here to interview me. The first interview of the day, the Italians will come at 12."

The house, built all white, grows around the living room with an adjacent kitchen, study, office and workspace, which was built four years ago as the last addition to the 1986 construction. Aarnio talks of the house like of a dream come true.

It turns out he talks of everything with the same pride and exhilaration.

We sit on the white sofa, and Aarnio asks where he should begin, and in the same sentence he starts to describe the first steps of his career. The 77-year-old designer talks of his work with excitement that catches on.

THE END IS HERE — WE ARE THE INCREDIBLY DROGTER — NO. 1

The more
you like art,
the more art
you like.

Previous spread: Mr. Aarnio takes a breather in his own handiwork, which inspires him to talk of his creation: "I have to say the Ball Chair is a very clever design—it requires no mold. How brilliant! It's blown up like a soap bubble."

Once, a long time ago, he decided to go freelancer, and has worked home ever since.

"I tried working in the city but it was too much of a hassle. Here I can draw first thing in the morning if I want."

By a bowl of walnuts, he talks about the history of his first major freelancer project, the Ball Chair. The lengthy description does not lack missed chances or upsets. He made the first chair on his own, and even offered the chair to Coca-Cola before it was picked for production by a Finnish-German furniture company. A bright idea overshadows business upsets.

Aarnio always attempts to reduce a design to the mere necessities, down to the crystallised idea.

"I try to take a corner out if it's possible. That's how the Ball Chair came about. Ultimate reduction. If it's possible to make a chair with just three legs, I'll do it. If it's possible to do one with just two legs, I'll do it, and then try to do it with just one leg."

The main thing while embracing the "less is more" design credo is not to forget the initial child-like flutter of inspiration. It keeps the still highly active Aarnio going.

"I don't really see the point of taking a day off. You can't say to your brain 'Stop, we're taking a day off', can you? No, I get ideas daily. I rest when I sleep."

He has just spent the last days building a stand for the Habitare design fair in Helsinki.

Last year Aarnio received the coveted Kaj Franck Prize for accomplished Finnish designers. He used the prize money for a related exhibition at Design Forum in Helsinki. Along with featuring his signature pieces, he collected and laminated a retrospective of all the spreads he had had in various international magazines over the years, altogether 800 picture pages. It resulted in a comprehensive overview of his career from 1963 to today. The prize money was used to the last penny.

He shows us a sliding door covered with the magazine covers, and points at Carmen Electra sitting in a Ball Chair on the cover of Playboy.

"Hugh Hefner has done me some decent favours—without knowing it".

The designer hasn't used a penny on advertising—his pieces just find room in the media. And Aarnio continues to design artefacts that become media pets.

"Even the rocking chair! It wasn't in production, and then a fashion journalist comes in and asks if someone has portrayed it yet. I said no, and she said they'll do it—it's brilliant!"

He points us to the chair.

"Try it. It is brilliant."

Unlike the stereotypical Finnish man, Aarnio is very articulate about his success.

Finally, we are at the front door, ready to leave. We see the Italian journalist, Aarnio's 12 o'clock appointment, walking towards us. Our host notices her.

"Here come the Italians. Let's see what they want this time," he says to us in Finnish. And smiles. □

Words Matti Pentikäinen

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