

On a visit to Paris in the early 1980s, Rolf Fehlbaum, Chairman Emeritus of Vitra, acquired a vintage Antony chair by Jean Prouvé from 1954. 'For me, Jean Prouvé was the French counterpart to Charles and Ray Eames. What they have in common is the combination of structural honesty and an ensuing creative expression of timeless beauty,' explains Fehlbaum. The purchase marked the beginning of an intensive programme of collecting. Today the Vitra Design Museum has the most extensive museum collection of furniture and objects by Jean Prouvé. But it did not stop there. In October 1999 discussions between the Prouvé family and Vitra led to an agreement granting Vitra the right to produce Prouvé furniture.

The collaboration commenced in 2000 – in close consultation with Catherine Prouvé, Jean Prouvé's youngest daughter. Over the past twenty years, Prouvé's reputation has also extended beyond the borders of France and his name is synonymous with design that exists beyond trends and fashions, remaining relevant and unsurpassed to this day.







New Colours

Furniture by Jean Prouvé has an artistic awareness that is expressed in the details, joints, proportions, static flows and overall construction, and ultimately in the processing and execution of the material itself. The final touch in the treatment of surfaces and selective application of colour was no exception. Jean Prouvé understood the profound resonance of colours, as his daughter Catherine Prouvé explains: 'Prouvé chose his colours with great care – he wasn't a painter's son for nothing!'.

The colours developed by Prouvé for his architecture and the steel elements of his furniture drew on various references – from his Blé Vert, which mirrors the colour of young green wheat, to Gris Vermeer, which alludes to the grey tones in the work of the painter Johannes Vermeer. Yet according to Prouvé, who believed in the 'nature of a material', only parts in danger of corroding should be painted, which is why he left wooden and aluminium elements in an untreated state whenever possible. However, beyond the practical benefit of rust protection, Prouvé was aware that he could use colours to instil his furniture designs with a certain aura.

Vitra is expanding the palette for Jean Prouvé's furniture to include some of these original Prouvé colours: the existing options of deep black, Japanese red and Blanc Colombe are now joined by Gris Vermeer, Bleu Dynastie, Blé Vert and Bleu Marcoule, as well as the Métal Brut variant in unpainted steel.

New Colours Jean Prouvé





Prouvé Bleu Marcoule (Marcoule blue) refers to a colour from an important client who ordered a great range of furniture from Ateliers Jean Prouvé.

Tabouret Métallique in Japanese red

Japanese red has featured in the Prouvé Collection since 2006 and is now a classic colour in the overall Vitra design portfolio.







Prouvé Bleu Dynastie (dynasty blue) recalls the cobalt oxide in the blue-and-white porcelain from the Ming dynasty.

Standard in Prouvé Blé Vert

Prouvé Blé Vert (green wheat) has the fresh colour of a field of young green wheat just before it turns to yellow, ready for harvest.







Prouvé Gris Vermeer (Vermeer grey) alludes to the famous Dutch artist Johannes Vermeer. A closer look at the grey tones in his paintings reveals the source of Prouvé's inspiration.



Prouvé Blanc Colombe (white dove) is inspired by the off-white tone of dove feathers, enhanced with hints of grey-beige and yellow. Prouvé Blanc Colombe was launched for the Jean Prouvé portfolio in 2013, and went by the name 'Ecru' until 2022.





Prouvé Métal Brut (raw metal) is not a colour but a variant in which the surface of the steel is coated with a clear protective finish. The treatment results in an honest expression of the material itself, exposing the welds and connection points.

Tabouret N° 307 in deep black

Deep black was launched for the overall Vitra design portfolio in 2013 and is widely used in the Jean Prouvé Collection.







Jean Prouvé Collection

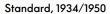
A chair by Jean Prouvé marked the beginning of Vitra's relationship with the work of French designer Jean Prouvé. Even after more than twenty years, the collaboration with his heirs still remains active and strong: Vitra is now revising the collection with new colours and introducing a number of lesser-known designs.

Collection Jean Prouvé

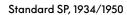
Chaise Tout Bois, 1941

Chaise Tout Bois is the only chair by the French 'constructeur' and designer Jean Prouvé that is made entirely out of wood. The design is very similar to Prouvé's famous Standard chair, but wood was substituted for the metal base due to the scarcity of metal during the Second World War. The form of the Chaise Tout Bois articulates Prouvé's intention to provide added strength at the transition point between the seat and backrest, where the load weight of the human anatomy is greatest.





The Standard chair by Jean Prouvé has evolved into one of the most famous classics of the French 'constructeur'. The seat and backrest of this understated, iconic chair are available in various types of wood, and the metal frame comes in different colours.



Standard SP (Siège en Plastique) builds a bridge from past to present, revisiting Prouvé's iconic Standard chair without altering its form: the seat surface and backrest in robust plastic give Standard SP a contemporary look.



The Cité armchair is an early masterpiece by the French designer and engineer Jean Prouvé. Originally designed to furnish the student residence halls at the Cité Universitaire in Nancy, Prouvé also used this comfortable, expansive armchair with powdercoated steel runners and leather belt armrests in the living room of his own home.



Fauteuil de Salon, 1939

Developed by Jean Prouvé, the Fauteuil de Salon is a typical example of the distinctive structural aesthetic of his designs. The armchair's understated character suits a wide variety of interiors, and its ample upholstery and oiled, solid wood armrests emanate inviting comfort.



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Fauteuil Direction, 1951

Fauteuil Direction is especially suited for dining room seating or as an armchair in home offices. The design reflects Jean Prouvé's characteristic aesthetic vocabulary, which is based on structural requirements.



Fauteuil Direction Pivotant, 1951

Jean Prouvé always placed an uncompromising focus on functional requirements and his designs have never become outdated over the decades, despite evidently hailing from another era. Fauteuil Direction Pivotant is just one example. The swivel armchair is adjustable in height, and its backward tilt mechanism can be adapted to the weight of the user. Paired with voluminous cushions, the chair offers excellent comfort.

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Tabouret Bois, 1941

Tabouret Bois is a simple, robust stool made of solid wood that clearly bears the designer's signature: it reflects the stringent structural principles that characterise the work of Jean Prouvé. Thanks to the flat, even surface of the seat, Tabouret Bois can also be used as a small side table.

Tabouret N° 307, 1951

In the early 1950s, Jean Prouvé designed various stools that he named with different numbers. The seat of Tabouret N° 307 has the shape of a tractor saddle – without holes – and is reminiscent of the seats in the lecture theatre at Aix-Marseille University, which Prouvé designed around the same time.



Jean Prouvé designed
Tabouret Métallique along
with two other proposed models in metal in 1936 for the
Maison d'éducation surveillée
de Saint-Maurice. The
design elaborated in the Jean
Prouvé studios never actually went into production, but
is now being manufactured
by Vitra for the first time. The
underframe made of bent
sheet metal exhibits structural
affinities with the later
Trapèze table.

Tabouret Haut, 1942

The classic Tabouret Haut bar stool by Jean Prouvé is available in robust solid oak, with a natural or darkstained finish. The chromeplated steel ring with an anti-skid surface guarantees stability and offers comfortable use as a footrest.







Collection



Table S.A.M. Bois, 1941

Jean Prouvé developed Table S.A.M. Bois during the Second World War and due to the scarcity of metal at that time, he designed the elegant piece with wooden legs. The solid wood components in a choice of natural oak, dark stained oak or American walnut lend the table a sense of ease and refinement.



EM Table, 1950

Jean Prouvé developed the EM Table (Entretoise Métallique, metal struts) around 1950 for the project 'Maison Tropicale'. Adhering to the aesthetics of necessity, even the smallest details of this table are determined by its construction. The canted legs are connected by a crossbar, illustrating the structural forces and flow of stresses in a way that is typically seen only in engineering structures.



Trapèze, 1950/1954

Jean Prouvé originally designed the Trapèze table for the Cité Universitaire in Antony near Paris. The trapezoidal shape of the sheet steel legs provided inspiration for the name and also gives the table its distinctive character.



Guéridon, 1949

The wooden table Guéridon, which was produced by the designer and engineer Jean Prouvé for the University of Paris, is a convincing demonstration of clear structural principles. It is a variation of Prouvé's architecturally informed design vocabulary in a natural material, proving that modern tables do not have to be made out of steel and glass.



Guéridon Bas, 1944

The round Guéridon Bas coffee table bears the distinctive signature of French designer and engineer Jean Prouvé. Available in different types of wood, the unassuming table lends itself to a wide range of interiors.



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Rayonnage Mural, 1936

Bookcases that attach to the wall were commonly found in interiors during the first half of the 20th century. Jean Prouvé also designed a number of different wall-mounted shelving units – such as the Rayonnage Mural produced by Vitra, which was originally conceived in 1936 for the Ecole Nationale Professionelle in the French city of Metz.



Compas Direction, 1953

The slender, elegantly splayed metal legs of the Compas Direction desk by Jean Prouvé call to mind the hinged arms of a compass – 'le compas' in French. Their design is based on engineering principles that typify the structural approach of the French designer and engineer. Paired with the oiled solid wood table tops, they form a richly contrasting mix of materials in the home office.



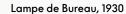
Petite Potence, 1947

Petite Potence has similar proportions to the larger model Potence, while its compact dimensions are ideally suited to smaller interiors. The swing arm is 103 cm long, with a powder- coated finish in colours derived from the original hues used by Prouvé. The cable is sheathed in a high-quality textile casing, and the LED bulb is dimmable. Thanks to its reductive aesthetic, Petite Potence is an ideal lighting choice for a wide variety of settings, from dining and living rooms to offices or cafés.



Abat-Jour Conique, 1947

Abat-Jour Conique is the first lampshade designed for Potence by Prouvé in 1947 and is intended for use with the Potence and Petite Potence lamps. It is simply fitted over the light bulb and can be removed again when needed.



Jean Prouvé designed the Lampe de Bureau (1930), a small table lamp made of sheet steel, for the halls of residence at the Cité Universitaire in Nancy.

Potence, 1950

The Potence wall lamp is one of Jean Prouvé's puristic masterpieces. Reduced to the essentials – a light bulb and a pivoting wall mount – the long swing arm wall light is made of powder-coated tubular steel with a oakwood handle. The lamp is controlled by a cord dimmer and comes equipped with a light bulb.







Jean Prouvé at the Vitra Design Museum

An interview with Serge Mauduit, Collections Curator

The Vitra Design Museum in Weil am Rhein, Germany, is home to the world's most extensive Jean Prouvé museum collection. It dates back to the 1980s when Rolf Fehlbaum (Chairman Emeritus at Vitra) acquired the first Jean Prouvé design, an Antony chair that he found in Paris, sparking Fehlbaum's interest in the work of Jean Prouvé.

The Prouvé designs he gathered over the years grew into an immense collection that culminated with the 2006 Vitra Design Museum exhibition 'Jean Prouvé: The Poetics of the Technical Object'.

Since the Prouvé exhibition, the collection has continued to expand and today represents around 170 pieces, which are used for research purposes and exhibitions. The Jean Prouvé Collection also plays a major role in the ongoing development of the Prouvé design portfolio at Vitra.

Serge Mauduit, Collection Curator at the Vitra Design Museum for nearly 35 years, shares insights from his decades of work with the development of the Jean Prouvé Collection.

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Serge, when did you join the Vitra Design Museum? How did it all begin?

Serge Mauduit: I started working for the Vitra Design Museum the year before the actual opening in 1989. Prior to my arrival, I was the personal assistant to Alexander von Vegesack who was an acquaintance of Rolf Fehlbaum and who was hired as the first museum director. These two men had a shared interest in Thonet furniture, which became the foundation for their future collaboration.

Vegesack and I first focused on the overall furniture collection that Rolf Fehlbaum had initiated in the late 1970s. It was a small assemblage of 300-500 furniture designs. Then we prepared the opening of the Vitra Design Museum by organising, photographing and buying additional objects for the collection. At that time, it mainly included important pieces by Charles und Ray Eames and George Nelson, along with some Italian and Scandinavian de- evolution'. This model can be found in sevsigns. We also searched for a local storage facility on the Vitra Campus to keep the collection near the actual museum.

How about the Jean Prouvé designs? Is it correct that the Antony chair was the first piece in the Prouvé Collection?

Yes, the first Prouvé object was collected by Rolf Fehlbaum in the 1980s. It was a vintage Antony chair from 1954, and was already here when I arrived.

Jumping forwards several decades since that first collected piece, today the Vitra Design Museum contains one of the world's largest furniture collections with a total of around 20,000 objects including 7000 furniture designs. You have been working closely with Rolf Fehlbaum to develop this archive, including artefacts and documents from the

Eames Office as well as the estates of prominent designers such as Alexander Girard, George Nelson and Verner Panton. It must have been quite an exceptional and educational experience! About the Prouvé collection: how did it come to be the most extensive Jean Prouvé museum collection in the world?

SM: It is true that the Jean Prouvé Collection held by the Vitra Design Museum represents the largest number of different Prouvé pieces worldwide, but even so we do not have all the different models or variations within each type. It will probably never be possible to have a complete collection because within each furniture type, there are often a great number of variants. Most orders that went through the Ateliers Jean Prouvé were custom produced and depended on the individual needs of each client.. The Prouvé Standard chair is a typical example of a Prouvé 'design eral variants, refinements and adaptions in response to changing needs and materials, but all pointing back to the same 'structural idea'. At the Vitra Schaudepot - which is a permanent exhibition of selected designs from the Vitra Design Museum Archive - a timeline visualises the evolution of the Standard chair with a variety of historical models.

The Fauteuil Visiteur, a reclining armchair, is another example of a Jean Prouvé design evolution as it underwent several modifications. How many variations does the Vitra Design Museum Archive own?

SM We have three variations of this model. A Fauteuil Visiteur with plywood backrest and aluminium seat, another Fauteuil variant with wood slats and adjustable back, and finally a very

rare Fauteuil Kangourou that has these pronounced wooden hind legs. The fact that Jean Prouvé named the armchair 'Kangourou' reveals his fine sense of humour. Like its namesake, the seat carries its weight on its hind leas, and as with his other designs, the profiles reflect their static construction. To reinforce this zone, Prouvé deliberately exaggerated the size of the rear frame and created a shape similar to aircraft wings - a profile that was employed in many of his designs and architectural constructions.

What is the most recent addition to the Jean Prouvé Collection?

SM: The newest addition to the Jean Prouvé Collection is a small stool. It is like the Tabouret Bois but with some dis- had lost both his hands. tinct differences, especially the connecting parts in metal. As mentioned, we try to have as complete a collection as possible. For those objects we do not own, occasionally we learn of unique pieces before they are available on the market, but in view of current prices, we would probably not buy them anyway.

Yes, over the last 20 years, the popularity and cost of Jean Prouvé vintage pieces have risen tremendously. How does the Vitra Design Museum differ from the galleries and auction houses?

SM: The Jean Prouvé Collection at the Vitra Design Museum is here for research purposes and exhibitions, and is not for sale. Jean Prouvé was one of the major designers of the twentieth century, and for many years now, his work has formed a key focus at the museum. The auction houses, and most collectors, instead buy the pieces as an investment with the intention of reselling them.

Having worked close to these pieces for several decades, do you feel that you have established a greater understanding of the man, Jean Prouvé?

SM: Well, Prouvé designed most furniture for universities, schools and social institutions, and that already says a lot about the man. Many of these designs were subsequently further developed and produced for the domestic market. Jean Prouvé had a social mind. He called himself a 'factory man', and preferred to work directly with the machines in the workshop side-byside with his employees. During World War II, the Ateliers Jean Prouvé expanded to a workforce of 200 employees. It is said that when he lost his workshop in the 1950s, he felt that he

The Vitra Design Museum is an independent institution from Vitra, and its extensive collection of design objects forms the basis of many exhibitions, publications and research projects that reach far beyond the portfolio of Vitra authors.

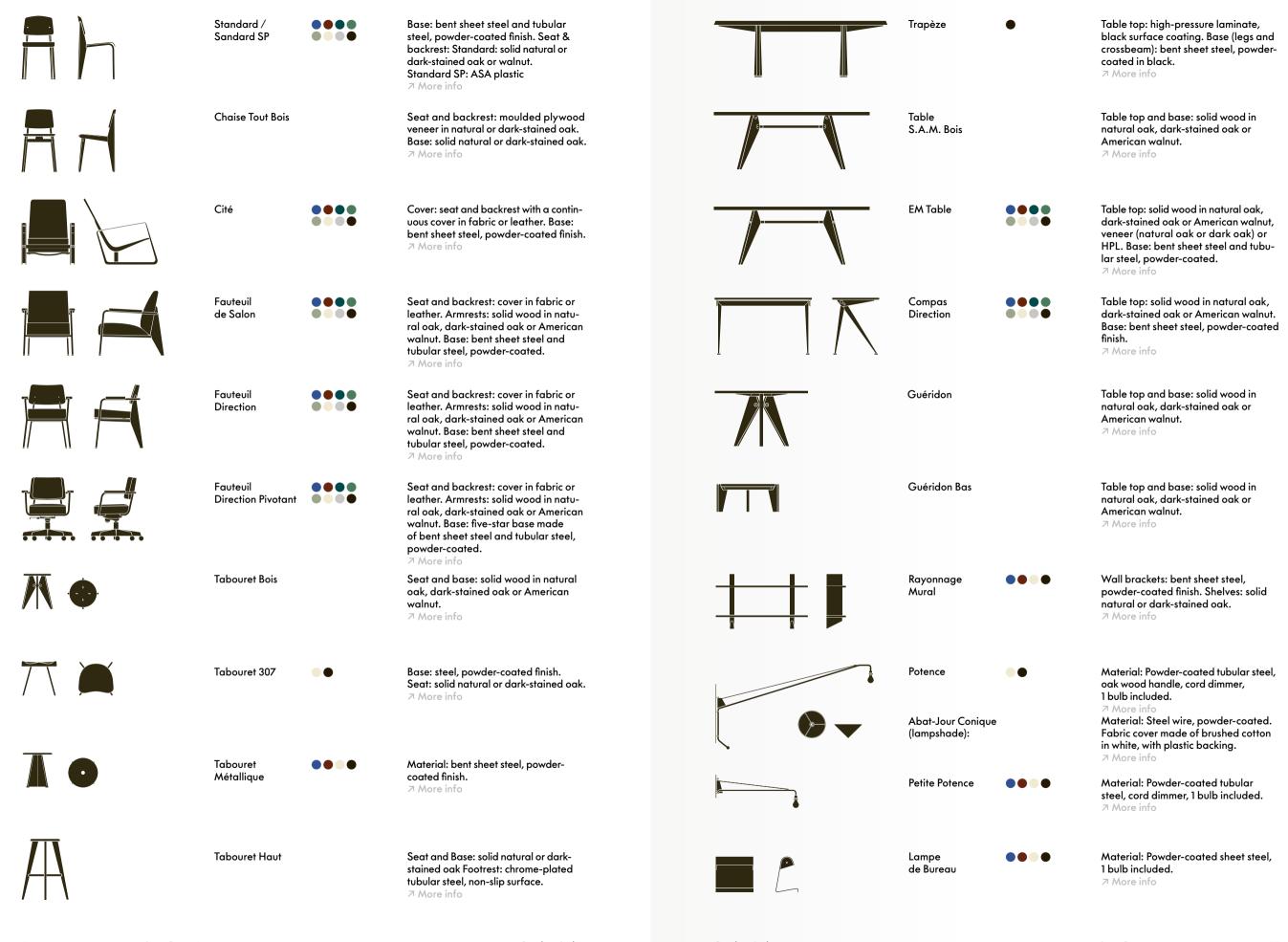
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The museum collection plays a major role in Vitra's overall identity and has an important influence on how the company works when developing and communicating the classic as well as the contemporary design portfolio. The collection is an inspiration and a learning opportunity for Vitra's employees and designers.



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