

Kevin Davies

Finmar and the Furniture of the Future: the Sale of Alvar Aalto's Plywood Furniture in the UK, 1934–1939

Finmar Ltd. was a wholesale company founded to market Alvar Aalto's plywood furniture in the UK. This paper looks at the operation of the company from its start in 1934 to the beginning of the Second World War. By treating Aalto's furniture as a simple commodity, using economic data (particularly trade figures), information from company archives in Finland and the UK, and specialist journal coverage, the work attempts to establish and understand sales patterns for goods marketed in the UK as 'the furniture of the future for the homes of today'.

Keywords: Aalto, Alvar–Design and Industries Association–Great Britain–marketing–Modernism–plywood

The subject of this paper is an analysis of the UK market for Alvar Aalto's plywood furniture during the period 1934–9. This furniture, which was made by the Korhonen family firm, now known as Korhonen Oy,¹ based near Turku in Finland, was sold in the UK by the firm of Finmar Ltd. [1]. This company, founded in January 1934² to act as exclusive UK wholesale agents, was modestly successful and rapidly established the UK as the largest single export market.³

Finmar closed in 1964 and there is no company archive for 1934–9 to refer to. My method has been to reconstruct a company history and an impression of the market in which the company operated by studying the archives of companies Finmar traded with and advertisements and citations in periodicals such as the *Architectural Review*. My aims are to chart and comment on the appearance of Scandinavian design in the UK (Aalto's plywood furniture was one of Scandinavia's most significant exports of 'good design' to the UK before the Second World War), trying to establish who bought the goods and why—in particular why the UK formed such a receptive market—and also to provide a case study for the interaction of business and design.

Aalto's interest in plywood furniture, and the

development and production of his designs in collaboration with Otto Korhonen are well documented.⁴ They began working together in 1929, and the majority of designs were finalized by the



1 Finmar logo c.1936

end of 1933, forming a range which Aalto saw as a complete system of furniture suitable for all human needs (although he continued to develop additional pieces). A number of designs were first exhibited abroad at the Milan Triennale of 1933 and shortly afterwards in England.⁵ The circumstances of the exhibition in England are closely connected with the foundation of Finmar.

The two founders of Finmar, Philip Morton Shand and Geoffrey Boumphrey, both wrote for the *Architectural Review* and were active members of the Design and Industries Association (DIA), an association dedicated to the promotion of 'good design', and of some sway in the period before the Second World War. Shand—a founder member of MARS (Modern Architectural Research Group), the British wing of the Congrès Internationaux d'Architecture Moderne (CIAM), of which he was also a member—was a prominent and articulate supporter of Aalto, and has to be credited with some influence in forming the latter's reputation. He originally met Aalto at the Stockholm International Exhibition of 1930 and subsequently corresponded with him, writing a number of journal articles on Aalto's work that brought him to the attention of the British architectural profession.⁶ As well as sending Shand architectural photographs for his articles, Aalto also sent some pictures of his plywood furniture, developed in particular for the Paimio sanatorium, completed in December 1932. Shand immediately offered to 'make a real splash with them',⁷ and under the auspices of the *Architectural Review*, in conjunction with an official English–Finnish trade week, he instigated an exhibition of the furniture for November 1933 at Fortnum and Mason, the well-known London department store [2].⁸ On the basis of orders received from this, Shand and Boumphrey formed a company, known as Finmar, to import Aalto's furniture to the UK. Boumphrey already owned a small furniture distribution company⁹ and seems to have been brought in by Shand because of his experience and access to some capital. They employed J. J. Faulkner as a business manager and salesman.¹⁰

For the first two years of Finmar's operation the company dealt directly with Korhonen Oy, the firm that made Aalto's furniture in Finland. How-

ever, from 1936 an independent company, Artek, was established in Helsinki to handle the distribution and sale of the furniture, and Finmar then dealt with them instead. Artek was formed because the demand for the furniture (most notably from Britain) had created problems that were beyond Korhonen Oy's organizational capacity. Finmar closed at the onset of the Second World War, subsequently reopening under different ownership.¹¹

From the outset of Finmar's business the UK formed the largest foreign market for Aalto's plywood furniture.¹² Although the early development of the market for this furniture in Finland is difficult to trace,¹³ it had clearly not been established long before the Fortnum and Mason exhibition in London, given the dates at which many of the designs were finalized. To provide a comparative framework for the development of Finmar's business economic figures for the Finnish furniture trade are given in Table 1. This presents data for the export of furniture from Finland to seven countries during the period 1932–9.¹⁴

These figures show, for the period under consideration, that the UK formed the largest single market for all Finnish furniture exports¹⁵ as well as for Aalto's plywood furniture. In both cases the margin of difference between trade to Britain and trade to other single countries appears substantial. Throughout this period the UK formed Finland's largest export market for the total of all goods (by a considerable margin) and any Finnish commodity would be likely to have the UK as the major consumer (so that Aalto's plywood furniture was no exception to a more general trend). Despite this, the figures as stated do not take into account the different populations of each country and a more meaningful comparison can be made on the basis of per capita consumption. Complete figures for exports by Artek are only available for 1937 and 1938.

Table 2 has the advantage of presenting a far less polarized picture, although it is one complicated by a worldwide downturn in trade in 1938. In sum the results still show the UK as the major consumer, followed by, in order, Sweden, Belgium, The Netherlands and France, but by a lesser and more equivocal margin, especially



2 Alvar Aalto furniture exhibition at Fortnum and Mason, November 1933

Table 1 Finnish furniture exports by year 1932–9 (millions of Finnish marks)

	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939
Total	2.63	6.81	13.2	9.0	12.4	13.1	10.7	9.2
Total by country								
UK	11.3	7.6	10.3	10.1	6.3			
Sweden	0.19	0.23	0.56	0.84				
Netherlands						0.25	0.98	
Belgium						0.13	0.14	
USA							0.2	
Germany			0.16		0.15			
Switzerland			0.17	0.14				
Total exports of Aalto furniture by Artek					1.56	3.07	1.6	2.2
Total exports of Aalto furniture to Finmar			0.73	0.87	1.43	2.18	0.95	
	1932	1933	1934	1935	1936	1937	1938	1939

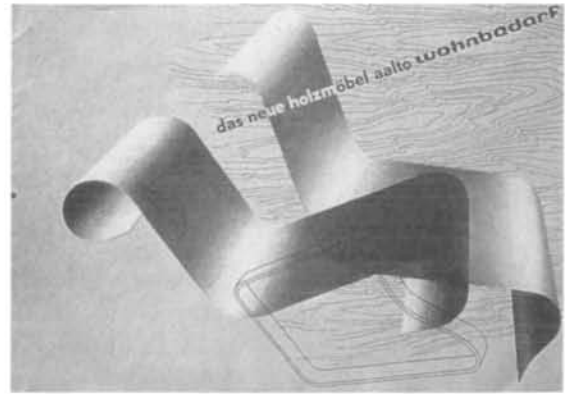
Table 2 Relative per capita consumption of plywood furniture from Artek (arb. units)

Country	Agent	1936	1937	1938
UK	Finmar	100	139	61
Sweden	Sv. Artek	50	105	77
Netherlands	Metz		57	35
Belgium	Jasinski		35	77
France	Stylclair		6	2

when the figures for 1938 are considered. For the UK, Sweden, The Netherlands and France, the order correlates strongly with conventional markers of economic performance¹⁶ such as industrial

output, growth over the previous five years and per capita national income.¹⁷ (Britain had the highest in Europe during the period). This association of consumption with economic performance provides strong evidence that price was a limiting factor in the circulation of Aalto's furniture in Europe with British buyers being best placed to afford it. During the 1930s the costs of labour and raw materials in Finland were extremely low, so that, even after shipping and distribution costs were taken into account, its cost abroad was extremely competitive. Finmar furniture was considerably cheaper than the majority of comparable home-produced items.¹⁸

The UK was not the first country to which Aalto's furniture was exported [3]. From around 1931, the Swiss firm of Palag and its sister company Wohnbedarf [4], run by Siegfried Giedion, Werner Moser and Rudolf Graber, held the exclusive European distribution rights.¹⁹ This had been agreed by Aalto and Giedion who had met at a meeting of the CIAM, of which Giedion, a critic, was the founder. In retrospect this was a poor business decision by Aalto because it appears to have held back the development of the market in Europe. Wohnbedarf, which was founded with the commitment to sell modern furniture designed by European architects, may have seemed ideologically and practically suited because it effectively functioned as the retail and wholesale furnishing arm of the CIAM (most of the other retail outlets throughout Europe appear to have got their agencies through attending CIAM meetings).²⁰ Unfortunately its location in a land-locked Zurich would have presented some practical problems to the distribution of furniture to other parts of Europe, a situation no doubt exacerbated by political developments in Ger-



4 Wohnbedarf catalogue, designed by Herbert Bayer, 1933

many.²¹ Certainly, retail outlets in France and Holland complained during 1934 and 1935 that they were unable to obtain the furniture (which should have been supplied to them by Wohnbedarf) despite being sure that they 'could sell large quantities'.²² Export figures to Wohnbedarf from Artek for 1937 and 1938 of Fmk6000 and Fmko respectively appear to support this. By 1937 Artek, which from the end of 1935 controlled the distribution of the furniture from Finland, appear to have tackled the problem by renegotiating Aalto's agreement with Wohnbedarf and selling directly to the retailers tabled above.²³

The geography of the market also had a strong political dimension. Most notably Aalto's plywood furniture only sold in small quantities in countries with fascist regimes, such as Germany (despite substantial improvements in the German economy during the period). Wohnbedarf and Palag held the relevant distribution rights but were unable to function as distributors to Germany from 1933 because of Nazi attitudes towards Jews, left-wing architects and modern architecture. The contacts and potential customers that Giedion had through the CIAM in the German-speaking architectural world were Modern movement architects like Walter Gropius, Arthur Korn and Eugen Kaufmann who were forced to leave because of religious persecution, because their work had been taken from them, or because of their identification as cultural bolsheviks.²⁴



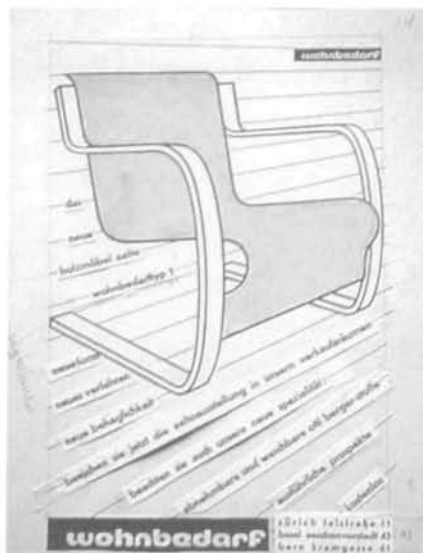
3 Map of Artek's exports c.1938

the UK; it is clear that Finmar's Aalto furniture was widely used by modern movement architects working in Britain. A number of these, people such as Eric Mendelsohn and Eugen Kaufmann, were Jewish *émigrés*, some of whom originally had contacts with the CIAM.

The functional range of the Modernist buildings in which Aalto's furniture appeared in the UK was large, extending from flats through shops, an airport, a nursery, to civic buildings such as libraries. Clearly this was a reflection of the versatility of Aalto's furniture system, but was also connected with its relative cheapness. As well as up-market flats like Highpoint and conversions in Mayfair, where the furniture was fashionably combined with antiques, there were municipal appearances, particularly at the Finsbury Health Centre, the Kells Colliery Community Centre and Owen Williams' Pioneer Health Centre, Peckham, that were intended to serve people at the other end of the social spectrum. The range of social use in the UK, as represented in the *Architectural Review*, had many features in common with that in Finland.⁴¹

Clearly, illustrations in the *Architectural Review* were selective and it is very difficult to estimate from them the actual size of the UK contract market for Finmar's furniture. However, the quantities that architects were interested in could be significant. For instance, before the Fortnum and Mason exhibition Shand received enquiries from Tecton who wanted a quote for fifty 'spring' chairs [5] (ten times Heal's 1934 sales figure for the same model), and the restaurant of the De La Warr pavilion contained about fifty 'verandah' chairs [6] (approximately equal to Heal's annual sales total). Letters to Korhonen Oy sometimes mention individual orders which further help to put the size of the contract market into perspective: an order for a working men's club required over 1000 chairs of different types, including 558 serial stacking chairs [7] (for comparison, in 1936 Finmar sold a grand total of 2960 serial stacking chairs, whereas Heal's sold an average of about eighty per year) and a children's home (probably Barnardo's) wanted about 2000 stools [8] (in 1936 Finmar sold 3233, and Heal's 297).⁴²

Without a buoyant building trade—as there



5 Alvar Aalto 'spring' chair in layout for Wohnbedarf advertisement c.1934

was in the UK at the period—the UK market for Finmar's furniture is likely to have been smaller, although the nature of the correlation is difficult to clarify because building by Modernist architects only represented a fraction of total building for the period. Nevertheless, Shand and Bournemouth were both well positioned and connected in the building world to be able to make use of such an advantageous circumstance.⁴³ Shand's membership of MARS, a group that had similar aims and objectives to the CIAM,⁴⁴ and contained a



6 Alvar Aalto 'verandah' chair, Finmar catalogue, 1934

The British Market

One of Aalto's intentions in devising his system of furniture was to provide serial pieces that would be cheap enough for anybody to afford,²⁵ something that reflected ideas of social concern and welfare. Shand and Boumphrey in their initial marketing of the furniture in Britain seem to have completely ignored this and aimed it at a particularly privileged group—customers of Fortnum and Mason (it is difficult to think of a wealthier group in the UK at that time).

Shand's letters to Aalto describe Fortnum and Mason as a 'snob'²⁶ store and mention 50 000 account customers as potential buyers. However, architects and some others such as the Finnish Trade Minister were invited to the exhibition too. Trying to establish a pattern for the buyers at the exhibition clearly involves some speculation, but, as well as Fortnum and Mason's account holders, Shand and Boumphrey would also have had access to all subscribers to the architectural journals for which they wrote, and to the membership of the DIA (the latter were groups that overlapped to some extent). Effectively this is likely to have meant a sizeable proportion of practising architects in the UK and the 'retailing High Priests of the DIA'.²⁷ Shand actively promoted the exhibition in the *Architectural Review*, which included photographs of some of the pieces on show, and also wrote a piece for *The Listener*.²⁸ By this date he had already published articles on Aalto's architectural work so his name was known within certain circles, particularly those with an interest in Modernist architecture and design such as the MARS group and the DIA (whose members already had an established interest in the Swedish branch of Scandinavian modernism).²⁹

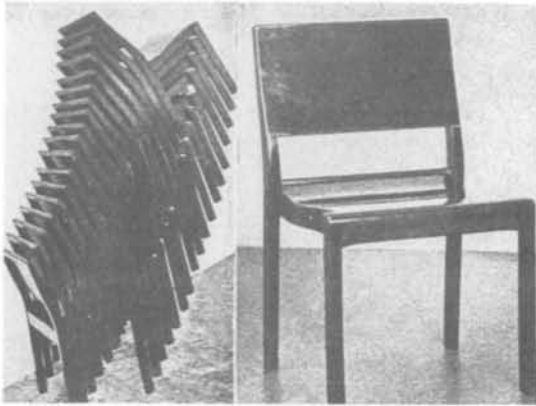
A number of orders were taken from the Fortnum and Mason exhibition (in total nearly 1200 pieces of furniture), which arrived in England in early January 1934.³⁰ A copy of the order exists in the archives of the Aalto Foundation. Whilst it does not give any details of customers, the quantities of individual pieces show a pattern which perhaps suggests that purchases by individuals for personal use were limited (all of the quantities were either round numbers or multiples or fractions of a dozen).

Subsequently Finmar showed their furniture at their warehouse in Ranelagh Road, Victoria, which opened early in 1934, and at the Building Centre in Bond Street where it was a regular feature. These were all more predictable venues for exhibitions of furniture (no doubt arrived at through the contacts Shand and Boumphrey had in the building world), indicating that the development of the company proceeded on more straightforward lines. The Ideal Home Exhibition of 1934, where the furniture was used in the cafeteria, was the source of much interest.

The British Contract Market

Looking at the furniture market today there is a division between domestic and contract consumption such that there are two almost separate markets. Because of the different requirements for contract and domestic furniture, and the different marketing structures needed to sell them, most manufacturers and distributors now deal with one or other market more or less exclusively. In some countries, such as the USA, the division is especially pronounced.³¹ This can be seen too in the activities of Finmar in the 1930s when the company, unusually, supplied both architects who wanted to furnish their buildings, and a number of retail outlets that supplied the public for home use.

Both the contract and retail markets appear to have been sizeable and of comparable orders of magnitude. Although it is not possible to provide a precise quantification, a reasonable impression can be gained by looking at a number of sources. For instance, the pages of the *Architectural Review* give an indication of some of Finmar's customers because they show many illustrations of modernist buildings that were all or part-furnished with Finmar furniture. Included were buildings by Mendelsohn and Chermayeff,³² David Pleydell Bouverie,³³ the Tecton group,³⁴ Owen Williams,³⁵ Oliver Hill,³⁶ Connell, Ward and Lucas,³⁷ Felix Goldsmith,³⁸ Eugen Kaufman & R. E. Benjamin,³⁹ Maxwell Fry,⁴⁰ and so on. Aalto furniture can be seen in contemporary illustrations of the De La Warr pavilion at Bexhill on Sea, Highpoint, the Finsbury Health Centre as well as numerous lesser landmarks of the modern movement in



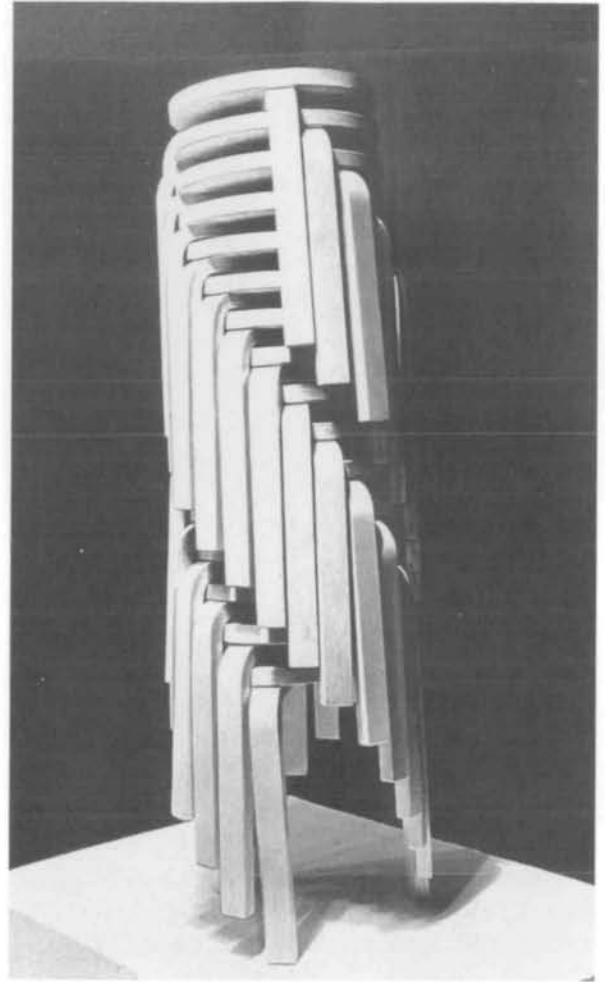
7 Alvar Aalto stacking chair, Finmar catalogue, 1934

number of *émigré* CIAM members, must have been particularly influential. In addition, illustrations in the *Architectural Review* provided marketing that neither Shand nor Boumphrey were particularly restrained about using.

The British Retail Market

Only a partial documentation of the retail market can be achieved. Material in the Artek archive suggests that Finmar was supplying twenty-four retail outlets. Only a few of these, nearly all based in London and probably the larger ones, can now be identified. All of the known stores that sold Finmar furniture during the 1930s were those noted for providing 'well-designed' goods to the middle classes, and included Heal's, Liberty's, Dunn's of Bromley, John Lewis, Peter Jones, Druce and Co., Bowman's, Gordon Russell, and Whiteley's. Outside London, Gane's in Bristol and Findlater's in Edinburgh are the only stores it is possible to identify. Sales were also made to retail outlets in Quebec, South Africa, Australia, Madras and Calcutta, but these all appear to have been of quite small quantities.⁴⁵

Of the companies noted only Heal's has existing records for the period that are in the public domain.⁴⁶ Approximately 4% of Finmar's turnover was due to trade with a Heal's.⁴⁷ Heal's records show the popularity of the furniture, which, for the years 1934–7, was one of its best selling lines, promoted in 1934 as part of a range



8 Alvar Aalto stacking stools, displayed at MOMA, New York, 1938

described as 'better furniture for better times'. In 1938 and 1939 trade tailed off slightly.

By looking at Heal's sales figures for all of the different models they sold it is possible to make a tentative generalization about the leanings of the retail and contract markets. Most of the Aalto furniture that Heal's sold was relatively simple, practical and straightforward, comprising largely serial chairs, stools and rectangular or circular tables, that did not make use of cantilevers or heavily scrolled plywood. The various 'spring' chairs designed by Aalto did not figure highly in Heal's retail trade. In contrast, illustrations in the *Architectural Review* record a proportionately

greater interest in designs such as these amongst architects.⁴⁸

One important factor that has to be examined in relation to the retail trade was the role played by members of the DIA. Both Shand and Boumphrey were members, as were a number of the retailers involved in selling the furniture to the public. Those retailers that were not members often had close affiliations with the DIA, for instance being included on the list of DIA approved retailers of 'good design'. In the same way that a network of contacts achieved through MARS and the *Architectural Review* can be seen to have aided the distribution of Finmar's furniture within the contract market, the retail market appears to have revolved, at least in part, around the DIA.⁴⁹

From about 1930, when there had been an organized visit to the Stockholm International Exhibition (following a successful visit the previous year to several Northern capitals), members of the DIA held a particular interest in Scandinavian (generally Swedish) design.⁵⁰ With a rallying cry of 'Fitness for Purpose' (that could easily and appropriately be applied to Aalto's furniture) the rather disparate membership of this organization saw its main task as a crusade to improve the quality of British design,⁵¹ 'to promote the development of British Industry by encouraging good workmanship, based on excellence of design and soundness of material, particularly in the Common Things of Everyday Life'. However, as was pointed out at the time by Gregory Brown, one of its members, it could be difficult to reconcile this intention with the actions of some of its more prominent fellows, particularly those involved with the retail trade, the 'High Priests' as he called them. Brown's concern, voiced in the DIA's own *Quarterly Journal*, was that 'It would seem, on reviewing the facts that its object [the DIA's] was the exploitation of good design for the purpose of making profits . . . ' because they were selling goods 'at prices at least twice the article's value, sometimes more than twice, and, of course, completely beyond the reach of the general public.'⁵² Although Shand, Boumphrey, Gordon Russell, Heal's, Geoffrey Dunn⁵³ and other retailers were clearly in business to make a living, Finmar furniture was considerably cheaper than almost anything comparable on the market. Thus

Brown's specific criticism is difficult to hold against them, despite the fact that it is hard to see exactly how selling cheap imports could act as a spur to British Industry and British designers.

Finmar's business as an importer of 'good design' does raise some questions about how DIA members fulfilled their aim of promoting British industry. Clearly a spirit of internationalism was important to Modernists (explicitly to CIAM members, including Shand), and it would seem that DIA thinking⁵⁴ was that selling and promoting Finmar furniture⁵⁵ would stimulate customer demand and open up opportunities for home-designed modern furniture in Britain. However, conventional economic wisdom and commercial reality would have it differently; selling cheap imported goods only disables home production. Two notable cases—Isokon⁵⁶ and Makers of Simple Furniture,⁵⁷ both manufacturers of plywood furniture designed in Britain whose growth was stimulated by the appearance of Finmar—provide some justification for the DIA view, but it must be realized that neither of these companies (unlike Finmar) supplied anything other than a very small élite market. Furthermore, the directors of Finmar and Artek subsequently attempted to prevent Isokon manufacturing their 'long chair', designed by Marcel Breuer, because it was seen to infringe one of Aalto's patents,⁵⁸ an action that, although perfectly legitimate from a business perspective, does seem to run counter to the spirit of the DIA's aim of promoting British design. Finmar and Artek also considered action against Gerald Summers, the owner of Makers of Simple Furniture, but there is no record of the outcome of this. It is clear that there could be some conflict between the aims of business and the aims of the DIA.

Beyond this, the role of the DIA should be qualified: J. J. Faulkner was employed by Shand and Boumphrey because he had experience of the furniture trade and thus had a set of contacts and expertise that was complementary to theirs. He acted as a business manager and a conventional salesman and was successful enough in this to have been made a director of the company after about a year of employment. Unfortunately there is little record of his precise contribution to the business which nevertheless appears to have been substantial.

What can be said about the people who bought Aalto's furniture in the retail market? Although the names of clients requiring special orders of Finmar furniture⁵⁹ are recorded in Heal's stock books, none of these are known persons and without further details the information is of little help. It is possible to make some generalizations about the usual customers of the stores through which Aalto's furniture was sold (although plywood furniture buyers may not necessarily have been usual customers). In the inter-war period the rough dividing line between a middle-class and a working-class salary was about £250 per year, with those households in receipt of less than this figure making up about three-quarters of all households. One of the more 'élite' of the retail outlets for Aalto's furniture was Gordon Russell's shop on Wigmore Street. Gordon Russell Ltd. was primarily aiming its stock at members of the general public with annual salaries of £400–500 and upwards, 'essentially a public with an interest in Design and a desire for well-made things'.⁶⁰ It is probably fair to say that Heal's, Liberty's and some of the other stores had, on average, rather less wealthy customers, but these would still have to be categorized as comfortably middle class, and as such constituted a minority of the population. Although unemployment was high during the 1930s it was not a problem that necessarily affected the middle classes. Those who remained in work throughout the period were able to maintain a relatively high and improving standard of living in which the consumption of household furniture, fittings and equipment played an important and increasing part.⁶¹ Such factors would have been important for the success of Finmar.

To reach any further into an analysis of the market for Aalto furniture is beyond the scope of this article, and would, because of a lack of sales documentation for the period, involve a considerable amount of speculation. Finmar's business importing Aalto's furniture was brought to a close by the start of the Second World War. Although the company started up again in 1949 it had changed ownership and the main source of its goods became Denmark.⁶² By that time, however, raw material and labour costs had escalated in Finland so that Aalto's furniture had lost its major competitive advantage—it was no longer so

cheap.⁶³ Subsequently, Aalto's furniture has had only a relatively small market share in the UK.

In summary, this work tries to explain how and why Aalto's plywood furniture came to be so successfully distributed about Europe (especially Britain), despite the fact that it originated in a relatively isolated and geographically peripheral part of Europe and Scandinavia. The work illustrates the function that organizations concerned with design, such as the CIAM, MARS and the DIA, had in providing a network of contacts that effectively served the twinned aims of business and ideology,⁶⁴ thereby aiding (subject to political constraints, most notably with respect to the distribution of Aalto's furniture in Germany) the geographical diffusion of goods that can be seen as an archetypal Modernist commodity. The analysis presented here shows that the inference that Britain was particularly receptive to the flow of Modernist ideas from the Continent because Britain was the major purchaser of Aalto's furniture⁶⁵ is somewhat simplistic. Although the period of sale of Aalto's furniture by Finmar corresponds closely with the rise of the International Style in Britain, Britain was also the destination of nearly 80% of Finnish furniture exports (Fmk46 million, of which Aalto's furniture made up only 13% at Fmk6.2 million), the majority of which has not been discussed by historians of the Modern Movement. Whilst there can be no doubt that Aalto's plywood furniture was popular with Modernist architects and designers, it was also extremely competitively priced, a factor that has to be seen as the single most important reason for the more widespread circulation of the furniture in Britain. Indeed, the close correlation of per capita consumption of Aalto's furniture with conventional markers of economic performance for a number of European countries provides compelling evidence that cost was a major factor in limiting a far more extensive fulfilment of Modernist ideals.

KEVIN DAVIES
Southampton Institute

Notes

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- 1 At the time the company was actually known as Huonekalu- ja Rakkenhustydlas Korhonen Oy, but throughout the text I have referred to the company by its simpler present-day name.
- 2 Finmar's certificate of incorporation has been lost so the precise date of foundation of the company is a matter for conjecture (see note 9 below). However, the company's first consignment of furniture arrived in mid-January 1934.
- 3 It was not until the foundation of Artek in 1936 that attempts were made to consolidate the Finnish market.
- 4 J. Pallasmaa (ed.), *Alvar Aalto Furniture*, Museum of Finnish Architecture, 1984; G. Schildt, *Alvar Aalto: the Decisive Years*, Rizzoli, 1986.
- 5 Pallasmaa, op. cit.; Schildt, op. cit.
- 6 See, for instance, P. Morton Shand, 'A tuberculosis sanatorium in Finland: A. Aalto architect', *Architectural Review*, vol. 74, no. 442, 1933, pp. 85–90; Baird Dennison (P. Morton Shand), 'From angles to body curves', *Architectural Review*, vol. 74, no. 441, 1933, pp. 71–2; P. Morton Shand, 'Standard wooden furniture at the Finnish Exhibition designed by Aino Marsio-Aalto and Alvar Aalto', *Architectural Review*, vol. 74, no. 445, 1933, pp. 220–1.
- 7 Source: letter from P. Morton Shand to Alvar Aalto, Aalto archive, Munkkiniemi, Helsinki, Finland. Shand had recently been disinherited, had some financial difficulties, and was presumably looking for business opportunities out of necessity.
- 8 John Betjeman, who also wrote for the *Architectural Review* at this date, was responsible for dealing with Fortnum and Mason because of his aristocratic contacts.
- 9 This was called Boumphrey, Arundel and Co., a company that described itself as 'manufacturers of "The Sesame" record cabinet, patented in all major countries of the world'. The letterhead for this company was used in correspondence with Korhonen Oy until early January 1934. A letter from Shand to Aalto (dated 7 September 1933) indicates that Shand and Boumphrey had already been granted sales rights for his furniture in the UK. Mendelsohn and Chermayeff, through Plan Ltd., had also expressed an interest.
- 10 Shand, who was a writer, had very little to do with the daily running of the company, although he became involved when problems arose because he knew Aalto well and was able to write to him in German (a second language they shared). Boumphrey (when he wasn't skiing) worked for Finmar two days a week. Another director, R. W. Potter, was a tennis-playing friend of Boumphrey and took little active part in the business, although it is likely that he supplied the financial risk. The majority of correspondence and business between Finland and the UK was handled by J. J. Faulkner, about whom little information exists. He appears to have had previous experience in the furniture trade as a salesman.
- 11 See Kevin Davies, 'Scandinavian furniture in Britain: Finmar and the UK market, 1949–52', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1997, pp. 39–52.
- 12 According to Pekka Suhonen, 'Artek, to the Finnish public of the 1930s, meant a modest but strikingly modern shop in the Union Bank of Finland's building in Fabianinkatu street. Something they were perhaps unaware of was that 40–50% of its sales were made abroad, mainly in Britain'; from Pekka Suhonen, 'Artek 50 years: a short history', in *Artek 1935–85*, Taideteollisuusmuseo Helsinki, 1985, p. 14.
- 13 Data for the consumption of Aalto's furniture within Finland are only available for the period of Artek's existence because some of Korhonen Oy's records—which would document the early period—were lost in a fire at the factory.
- 14 During the period the exchange rate was fixed at £1 = Fmk227. These figures have been compiled from official Finnish trade statistics and the archive of Artek. Both of these present an incomplete picture, which is why there are gaps.
- 15 It is not clear who manufactured the other furniture that was exported to the UK. Jukka Korhonen, the managing director of Korhonen Oy, has suggested the firm Schauman Oy since it was involved in the manufacture of plywood. Asko-Aventius of Lahti is also a likely candidate. Carl-Johan Boman's Z chair, made by Oy Boman Ab, appears in Finmar catalogues, but no information is available about quantities exported. With the exception of the latter, it is not, to my knowledge, furniture that has attracted the attention of design historians.
- 16 Belgium fits roughly into the same pattern for Industrial output and growth. See D. H. Aldcroft, *The European Economy 1914–1970*, Croom Helm, 1978, p. 81.
- 17 Calculated from information given in *National Income Statistics 1938–47*, Statistical Office of the United Nations, and *Statistical Yearbook of the League of Nations 1938/39*, League of Nations.
- 18 Heal's stock books contain the coded cost and sale prices for hundreds of different models of furniture that they sold. Amongst these models it is excep-

- tional to find pieces that were cheaper than the equivalent Finmar model; Heal's archive, Victoria and Albert Museum, Archive of Art and Design. Finmar also took orders for furniture and fittings to clients' designs to be made up by Korhonen Oy in Finland. This suggests that it was cheaper for Finmar's clients to do this than get the work done to the same design in the UK. Korhonen Oy archive.
- 19 Letter to Finmar from Korhonen Oy. There is also considerable correspondence from Wohnbedarf to Aalto held at the Aalto Foundation, Munkkiniemi, Helsinki, Finland.
 - 20 F. Mehlau-Wiebkling, A. Ruegg & R. Tropeano, *Schweizer Typenmobil 1925–35: Siegfried Giedion und die Wohnbedarf AG*, GTA Verlag, ETH Zurich, 1989. A. Olafsdottir, 'Les Meubles d'Alvar Aalto: leur diffusion internationale (1920–40)', in *L'Internationalisation de design dans les années trente*, 1994, p. 207. This paper presents an account of the appearance of Aalto furniture outside Finland, but gives no idea of the influence of underlying economic or political factors.
 - 21 Giedion was in the USA in 1938 lecturing at Harvard and appears to have shown a diminishing commitment to Wohnbedarf.
 - 22 Letters to Korhonen Oy from Finmar.
 - 23 Giedion and Wohnbedarf also had commitments to sell other ranges of furniture, for instance pieces designed by Marcel Breuer, that could have provided a conflict of interest.
 - 24 See Charlotte Benton, *A Different World: Émigré Architects in Britain 1928–1958*, RIBA Heinz Gallery, 1995.
 - 25 'In 1938 Alvar Aalto and Nils Gustav Hahl [a founder of Artek] visited the factory . . . Alvar Aalto had a [laminated] bent leg in his hand and said that the product must be sold so cheaply that only the cost of the raw material would be charged', Paavo Korhonen, translated interview transcript, Artek archive. Paavo Korhonen was the son of Otto Korhonen.
 - 26 Aalto thought Shand a snob.
 - 27 Gregory Brown, 'The Design and Industries anomaly', *DIA Quarterly Journal*, December 1927.
 - 28 The DIA organized a series of talks on design that were broadcast by the BBC every Tuesday between 18 April and 27 June 1933. A number of these were published in *The Listener* so that its readers were familiar with some of the ideas and debates on modern design.
 - 29 'Those who went to Stockholm this year, and more so those who were unable to, will alike welcome the news that an exhibition of Swedish glass, textiles, ceramics, printing etc., which were so outstanding at the Stockholm exhibition, is to be brought to England in May of the coming year. The DIA is cooperating with the Anglo-Swedish society in the organisation of this exhibition', *DIA Quarterly Journal*, October 1930, p. 14.
 - 30 Faulkner's letters to Korhonen Oy, rather naïvely, suggest that this was an intolerable delay for Finmar, who do not seem to have anticipated that, having put in a large order for furniture, Korhonen Oy might have to make some of it. They also do not seem to have considered that shipping goods across the Baltic was sometimes a little more difficult in winter.
 - 31 I am grateful to Brian Lutz, marketing director of Artek, for pointing this out to me. Currently Artek only supply both domestic and contract markets in Finland where Aalto's furniture is something of a national institution, outside Finland the company feeds largely the contract market.
 - 32 'House at Chalfont St Giles', *Architectural Review*, vol. 78, 1935, p. 174. The De la Warr Pavilion was illustrated in *Architectural Review*, vol. 80, 1936, pp. 22–3.
 - 33 'Ramsgate Municipal Airport, architect D. Pleydell-Bouverie', *Architectural Review*, vol. 82, 1937, p. 3.
 - 34 Highpoint, *Architectural Review*, vol. 79, 1936, p. 9; Dudley Zoo, *Architectural Review*, vol. 82, 1937, p. 177.
 - 35 'The Pioneer Health Centre', *Architectural Review*, vol. 77, 1935, p. 203.
 - 36 'House at Wentworth', *Architectural Review*, vol. 77, 1935, p. 241.
 - 37 'House at Woodmancote', *Architectural Review*, vol. 80, 1936, p. 291.
 - 38 'Flats in Park Lane', *Architectural Review*, vol. 77, 1935, p. 121.
 - 39 'House at Wimbledon', *Architectural Review*, vol. 78, 1935, p. 127.
 - 40 'London Associated Electricity Showroom in Sloane St.', *Architectural Review*, vol. 80, 1936, p. 163; 'A Surrey house in a park', *Architectural Review*, vol. 82, 1937, p. 187.
 - 41 As shown in numerous photographs in the Artek archive.
 - 42 Information in this paragraph has been collated from a number of sources. These are: Finmar letters, Korhonen Oy archive, Littoinen, Finland; furniture stock books, Heal's archive, Victoria and Albert Museum, Archive of Art and Design; Export figures for 1936, Artek archive, Helsinki, Finland.
 - 43 Ake Tjeddar (interview June 1996), a former director of Artek who dealt with UK sales in the 1950s and

- 1960s, said that he found the UK market difficult because he initially lacked the personal contacts to make sales. This position eased when he was made a member of the Arts Club to which a number of architects belonged whom he was then able to meet over lunch and in the bar.
- 44 Giedion had suggested the foundation of MARS as a British wing of the CIAM.
 - 45 Artek's records indicate that its directors were not entirely happy with the size of Finmar's market in Britain's colonies. It would appear that Finmar's directors only had effective business contacts in the UK.
 - 46 Heal's archive, Victoria and Albert Museum, National Archive of Art and Design.
 - 47 Heal's stock books for the period 1934–9 are not entirely unambiguous, and the record they present may be incomplete. The figure of 4% is based on Finmar furniture known to have been sold and would have to be revised upwards if Finmar sold Heal's any upholstered furniture (of which there is no record).
 - 48 It is easy to see that cantilevered plywood chairs would be more likely to develop some kind of association with status amongst architects than with less structurally aware members of the general public.
 - 49 Clearly there was some overlap between architects and DIA circles—I do not intend to imply that they were mutually exclusive groups, far from it.
 - 50 'The more English [*sic*] people can be attracted to Sweden, the better for Sweden, and the better for England too', N. L. Carrington, *DIA Quarterly Journal*, July 1930.
 - 51 In reality their efforts were often more of a somewhat priggish propaganda campaign to improve the taste of the British consumer. An example would be the almost obsessive concern with advertising notices outside petrol stations and garages. For a history of the DIA, see R. Plummer, *Nothing Need be Ugly*, DIA, 1985.
 - 52 Gregory Brown, 'The Design and Industries anomaly', *DIA Quarterly Journal*, December 1927, p. 11.
 - 53 I interviewed Geoffrey Dunn in November 1994. When I asked him if he didn't think selling Scandinavian goods was a little unpatriotic, he replied that it didn't matter to him where things came from as long as they were well designed. To be fair to him he was not absolutely consistent on this matter; when I told him that I thought a Robert Heritage chair (designed for the QE II) looked like a Finnish one I had seen, he replied, 'how could you be so beastly?'
 - 54 Brown, op cit.
 - 55 See, for instance, 'The DIA exhibition at Dunn's of Bromley', *Design for Today*, June 1936, p. 246. The accompanying illustration showed an extensive range of plywood furniture, which, with the exception of an Isokon stool, was supplied by Finmar.
 - 56 See C. Wilk, *Marcel Breuer Furniture and Interiors*, Museum of Modern Art New York, 1981, pp. 126–46.
 - 57 See M. Creese, 'Gerald Summers and Makers of Simple Furniture', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 5, no. 3, 1992, pp 183–205. Gerald Summers founded Makers of Simple Furniture in 1931–2 but did not start experimenting with making bent-ply furniture until late 1933. Creese stresses the importance of Aalto's designs for Summers' work.
 - 58 Wilk, op cit.
 - 59 This included items of furniture made to specific dimensions or pieces with non-standard finishes (one or two clients preferred their birch ply to be stained to a mahogany coloration).
 - 60 Cited in Rosamund Allwood & Kedrun Laurie, R. D. Russell, *Marian Pepler*, exhibition catalogue, Inner London Education Authority, 1983.
 - 61 Information in this paragraph comes from Richard Stone & D. A. Rowe, *The Measurement of Consumers' Expenditure and Behaviour in the United Kingdom, 1920–1938*, Cambridge, 1966. However, many useful data from this text are conveniently summarized, tabulated and helpfully discussed in Sue Bowden & Ave Offner, 'The technological revolution that never was', in Victoria Grazia & Ellen Furlough (eds.), *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, University of California Press, 1996. Bowden & Offner's paper (one of a series on related topics) considers the consumption of domestic electric appliances during the inter-war period in Britain and provides an illuminating analysis that is complementary to that presented in this paper.
 - 62 See Kevin Davies, 'Scandinavian furniture in Britain: Finmar and the UK market, 1949–52', *Journal of Design History*, vol. 10, no. 1, 1997, pp. 39–52.
 - 63 In the early 1950s Aalto furniture was approximately five times its pre-war price. In the intervening period inflation was low.
 - 64 Despite the fact that, in the case of the DIA, specific business interests were, arguably, sometimes counter to its aims.
 - 65 This is a paraphrase from an introductory essay by M. Eidelberg, 'The Modernist canon', in M. Eidelberg (ed.), *Design 1935–65: What Modern Was*, Musée des Arts Décoratifs de Montréal, Abrams, 1991, pp. 22–8.