

LEPO

60 YEARS IN FURNITURE

Contents

04	 	Foreword
06	 	The 50s The origins of Lahden Lepokalusto Oy
22	 	The 60s Lepokalusto Oy
46	 	The 70s The Lepofinn brand
58	 	The 80s Lepofinn Oy
68	 	The 90s Lepo Product Oy
82	 	The 2000s
94	 	The 2010s
104	 	Ship furnishing
118	 	Furniture export
132	 	Designers
143	 	References

A major industrial concentration for furnishing of Finnish homes and public interiors emerged in the Lahti area from the 1950's. The post-war reconstruction and the growing migration from the rural areas to the industrial cities resulted in an increased demand of furniture. Gradually as people got wealthier, households stopped using steel-framed 'Heteka' beds and switched to spring mattresses. And the origin and success of the Lahti Lepo furniture range owes much to this.

Through the collaboration of manufacturers and interior designers, the Finnish furniture industry's success story was born, and its reputation around the world grew. This book tells the story of just one furniture manufacturer. The story reveals the reasons behind the success and the Finnish designers who influenced it, some of whose contribution to the development of Finnish interior design has been partly forgotten. An impression of past decades and the changes in interior design is conveyed through the archival material presented here: contemporary photographs, brochures and events.

The story also reveals how teachers pass on the art of design from one generation to the next. Indeed, there has been a direct link between teachers and fellow students in sharing the craft since the beginning of Lepokalusto. During the company's col-

ourful history the name has changed several times, but be it Lahden Lepokalusto, Lepokalusto, Lepofinn, or Lepo Product, the company has always been known as Lepo.

The scrapbooks collected by the founder of Lahden Lepokalusto Oy, Aake Anttila, were used as a source for the book. Anttila had assembled a vast collection of photographs and excerpts from articles from the first three decades of the company's existence. I would like to warmly thank the Anttila estate for lending the excellent material.

I would also like to thank Lepo designers Reijo Ojanen, Yrjö Kukkapuro, Ahti Taskinen and Risto Halme, whom I interviewed and who gave me vital information and photographic material for this booklet. Many thanks to the Council for Architecture and Design of the Arts Promotion Centre for their support, and naturally to Lepo Product Oy for publishing this work.

For the author, this archival adventure has been an exhilarating experience. Interior design photos, newspaper cuttings and excerpts from furniture catalogues chosen for this booklet will hopefully convey similar feelings to the reader.

Lepo at 60 in 2013

Kaarle Holmberg, Interior Architect SIO

1

Lahden Lepokalusto Oy



The 1950's

1 | Soft Epeda spring suspension

In 1953 the technician Aake Anttila, Pentti Roitto and Paavo Virusmäki founded the company Lahden Lepokalusto, which began to manufacture upholstered furniture using the “world-renowned Epeda method.” Sofa beds and beds with elm veneer headboards were manufactured in the beginning and easy chairs by the end of the year. In the first years Anttila was responsible for the design of new furniture models and Roitto was responsible for sales.

Pentti Roitto, Aake’s brother-in-law, said to Aake: “If somebody were to make good sofas, then it would be easy to sell them. Aake answered: “Then I will start to make them, if you will sell them.”

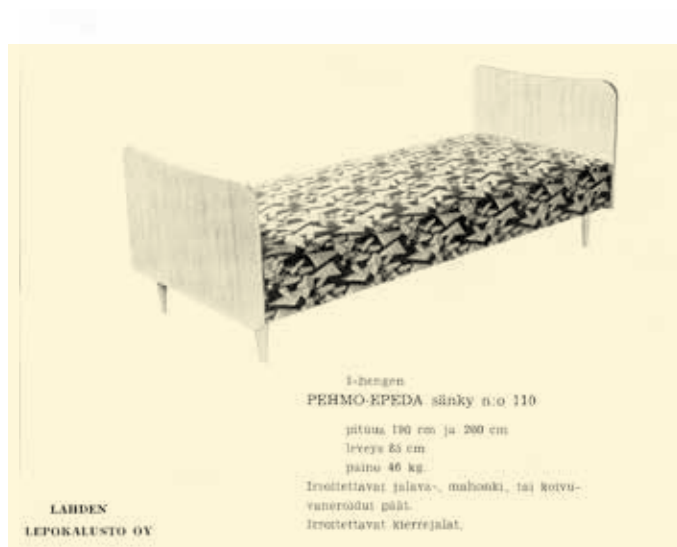
From the start the managing director was responsible for a great variety of work. Anttila was an enthusiastic and skillful photographer: initially all the photos of the collections were taken by him, and lat-

er some of them at least. Aake Anttila was also a music lover. He was the chairman of the Lahti Opera Association and he performed in Lahti Opera’s concerts. Music was always an important ingredient in the company’s parties.

In the beginning there were five employees, who did the padding, upholstering and assembly of the furniture, working in a space rented from the Salvation Army at 28 Hämeenkatu road. The managing director, Aake Anttila, was responsible for the design and for overseeing the production. Before this the majority of Finnish beds had simple horizontal springing (Heteka) and the more luxurious vertical spring type of the new spring mattresses was an outright success. A nationwide newspaper ad campaign was successful and in under a year Lepo furnishings had 15 employees and after two years a further 30.



2 | Soft Epeda bed from 1953



3 | The details of a sofa bed

The first circular letter was sent to furniture salespeople on June 20, 1953:

”Lahti Lepokaluste Oy

Upholstered furniture with Epeda spring suspension

The company will begin to manufacture upholstered furniture using the world-renowned epeda method in the beginning of July. The first models will be a sofa bed and a single bed with an elm headboard.

Later in October we will begin to produce easy chairs.

Our managing director is the technician Aake Anttila, who has previously worked in Finland’s largest furniture factory and is very experienced in managing modern serial upholstery production, so rest assured: our production will be fully efficient from the start.

Mr. Pentti Roitto will be handling the sales along his other tasks.

In order for us to better plan our production programme as a new company, it would be of importance to us that you could make your first order as soon as possible.

Our telephone number 6014 will be in operation from July 6th onwards.

Awaiting your valued orders,
respectfully yours,

Lahti Lepokalusto Oy.”



4 | Manufacturing a mattress at Lahden Lepokalusto's first workshop. From the top-left: a spring machine, machine sewing and mattress manufacturing, knitters of a spring mattress in line, spring coilers, framers and upholsters.

Pehmo Epeda



Paula No 310

Hinta:
22.000,— + 3,0 m
päälliskangasta.

Käsitönnä jalavaa tai mahonkia, istuin
kaksiosjousitettu, No-sag + Pehmo-Epeda,
Istuin ja selkä irroitettavat, Solvan pituus
135 cm.



Paula No 310

Hinta:
13.000,— + 1,5 m
päälliskangasta.

Käsitönnä jalavaa tai mahonkia, istuin
ja selkä irroitettavat, kaksiosjousitus,
No-sag + Pehmo-Epeda.



Sängyt No 112

Hinta:
Ilman päällyä
15.700,—, päällyt
8.250,—, sija-
pöytä 2.600,- kpl.

Mitat 190 x 85 tai 200 x 85 cm, kaksio-
jousitus No-sag + Pehmo-Epeda, Päällyt
irroitettavat, jalavaa, mahonkia, teakia tai
kovua, irroitettavat kierrepöytä, ulkolaiset
sini- tai vihreäkuvioidut patjakankaat.



Katriina No 14

Hinta:
28.260,— + 3,9 m
päälliskangasta.

1-2 hengen vuodesohja, puusotat jala-
vaa tai mahonkia, jalat kierreillä ja irroi-
tettavat, istuin modernin puolin peh-
mustettu, alapuolella patjakangas, selkä
voidaan asettaa istuimen rimalle, jolloin
saahtaa 2 hengen vuode.



Susanna No 311

Hinta:
9.440,— + 1,8 m
päälliskangasta.

Istuimessa ja selässä Pehmo-Epeda jousi-
tus.



Susanna No 311

Hinta:
18.220,— + 4,0 m
päälliskangasta.

Istuimessa ja selässä Pehmo-Epeda jousi-
tus, pituus 160 cm.

Pehmo Epeda



6 | Exhibit section, 1956. In the foreground is the streamlined easy chair *Lili* designed by the managing director.

Lepokalusto's collaboration with young Finnish interior designers began in 1958. In the beginning, the furniture was designed by the interior designer Oiva Parviainen and, when Lepokalusto acquired Moderno Oy, the production of designs by Yrjö Kukkapuro began. Since then, com-

fort has been a byword for Lepokalusto's chairs.

By 1958 the collection of Lahti's Lepokalusto was already available in Finland in 35 furniture stores as far as Rovaniemi and Maarianhamina.

Interior Design

Due to a shortage of material, the interior design in the 1950s was plain, even spartan, compared to the current range of trends and possibilities. The typical features of furniture were tapered legs and the use of hardwood materials. In interior design the wallpaper patterns were restrained and the shades were light. Houses were small and there were lots of children. The size of sofas, armchairs and beds was 10-20cm smaller than it is now and often a sofa with no armrests was used as a spare bed. For this purpose Lahti's Lepokalusto manufactured sofa beds that became very popular. The sofas were usually upholstered in two colours, the sides in light grey and the seat in black or burgundy red.



7 | Pehmo-Epeda couch *Silvana*, 1956

Oiva Parviainen

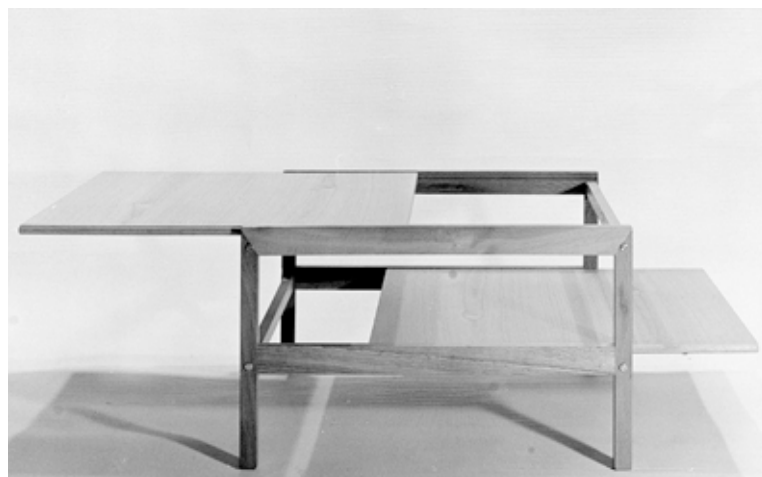
Oiva Parviainen was Lepokalusto's first designer to graduate from the School of Arts and Design (nowadays Aalto University). This talented young interior designer started working for Lepokalusto in May 1958, right after graduating. His new collection immediately caught the attention of the press.

A caption in a report in the Lahti newspaper concerning the *Kodinsisustus* exhibition opened on May 11, 1958 in the Lahti Art Hall: "Attention is drawn to the living room furniture designed for Lahti's Lepokalusto by the young art student Oiva Parviainen."

In a report from August 17, 1958 on the Lahti Furniture Fair, Oiva Parviainen describes the furnishing style of the day, as well as the importance of quality: "Tranquillity as a current furnishing style is reflected in the furniture: matt surfaces and tranquil, plain fabrics are used. Great tribute must also be paid to the Finnish factories producing upholstery textiles, because their products are nowadays not only elegant, but also display top quality in every way."



8 | Spring exhibition, 1954



9 | Furniture designed by Oiva Parviainen, the easy chairs *Linna* and *Pikku Linna*, and a double table, the upper surface of which may be doubled in size by lifting up the lower surface.



10 | Most of the furniture from the 1950's was photographed in a temporary studio within the factory.



11 | On display is the armchair, which can be assembled, and was designed by Parviainen for export. This *Export* chair and the *Pikku Linna* easy chair were awarded the Export Mark of the Finnish Foreign Trade Association as a sign of quality in design and manufacture.



12 | A view from the 1957 exhibition in the Lahti Art Hall, planned by Ilmari Lappalainen and Kurt Hvitjsjö. The exhibition was organised by the Lahti Art Association, the Lahti Association of Artists, and the Industrial Artists' Society. Fabrics designed by Anna Vainio in the background.

Pehmeä LEPOTUOLUJA EASYCHAIRS	Muunneltava OIVA PAEJÄÄNEN Design - OIVA PAEJÄÄNEN	Pehmeä SOVITET COUCHES	
			
Pehmeä JENNA, Teak, mahonki, kivi "LITTLE CASTLE", Teak, mahogany, birch	OIVA, Teak, mahonki, kivi "CASTLE", Teak, mahogany, birch	Sovitet KARMIEN, Jalar kivi Couch "CARMEN", Birch legs	Pehmeä LIPSA, Jalar metallipuitteet Face chair "LIPSA", Pine legs
			
Pehmeä EXPORT, Teak, mahonki, kivi "EXPORT", Teak, mahogany, birch	OIVA, Jalar metallipuitteet "OIVA", Pine legs	Pehmeä KARMIEN, Jalar kivi Easy chair "CARMEN", Birch legs	Pehmeä LIPSA, Kivi- ja metallipuitteet Easy chair "LIPSA", Arms: Elm, mahogany
			
Pehmeä MIEKA, Teak, mahonki, kivi "MIEKA", Teak, mahogany, birch	LEE, Mahonki, teak, Jalar 18 x 18 mm metallipuitteet "LEE", Mahogany, teak, legs 18 x 18 mm pine	Pehmeä RII II, Jalar metallipuitteet Allround chair "RII II", Pine legs	Pehmeä RII I, Jalar metallipuitteet Scrolled up chair "RII I", Pine legs
MYYNIT HUONEKALDEKKEISSÄ KAUKA MAAN.	SOLD IN FURNITURE SHOPS ALL OVER THE COUNTRY.	MIENTEN SUORAAN TERTIAAKKA.	EXPORT FROM THE FACTORY DIRECTLY.

13 | A collection brochure from 1958.

14 | The *Toivekoti* magazine advertised the chair like this. The name of the chair is *Pehmeä Liisa* ('soft Lisa').



↑ Lepotuoli Pehmo-Liisa n:o 228. Tuolia valmistetaan kahta tyyppiä, kuten oheisista kuvista selviää. Toisessa jalat ovat putkea, toisessa käsinojilla varustetussa puuta. Pehmusteena kummassakin vaahtokumi. Muotoilija: sis.arkkitehti Oiva Parviainen. Valmistaja: Lahden Lepokalusto Oy, Lahti.



15 | The *Toivekoti* exhibition in Tampere.

The Furniture Department of the Finnish Foreign Trade Association organised an export furniture exhibition in the Fair Hall in 1959, and a reporter wrote: “An example of how quickly results can be achieved with good co-operation is the stand for Lahden Lepokalusto Oy, whose designer is already getting a name for his chairs. A well-researched structure and the anatomical proportions are still important prerequisites for the designer Oiva Parvi-

ainen. In the background here is Yrjö Kukkapuro, who, with his chairs drawn for *Moderno*, proves himself to be a promising chair man.” (The newspaper *Suomen Sosiaalidemokraatti*, March 11, 1959)

The sharp-eyed reporter was right: the *Moderno* collection was soon to be sold all over the world.



16 | The spring exhibition for export furniture, 1959.

2

The 60s
Lepokalusto Oy

The 60s

In 1959, a new marketing association, Kaluste-yhtymä, was set up for the furniture industry. Chairman of the board was CEO Aake Anttila. A close collaboration between 20 furniture factories and 100 leading Finnish furniture retailers began.

As soon as Lahti's Lepokalusto had bought Moderno Oy, the entire *Moderno* collection passed to Lepokalusto. The foreword in a brochure from the 1960's has the following description of the product selection: "Lepokalusto mainly produces upholstered furniture with wood or metal frames, to be used in homes and public spaces. In the catalogue, the collection is divided into two sections: the *moderno* collection designed by interior architect Yrjö Kukkapuro, and the *Pehmo* collection designed by interior architects Oiva Parvainen, Reijo Ojanen and Erik Uhlenius."

Although products for the *moderno* collection have been designed since the mid-1950's, the set was not complete until 1962, and it included mostly metal- and timber-framed seats, ranging from sofas to office chairs. The products received

L-number codes and names. In *moderno* booklets, the name was always written in bold with a lower-case initial. The *moderno* brand included Kukkapuro's dragonfly logo which was still in the catalogues in the 1960's; some of the products were called *moderno* L-44, *Pikku Pala*, *moderno* L-22, *Cocktail* and *moderno* L-1000. The *moderno* collection included twenty, and the *Pehmo* collection forty items.

The personnel in Lepo had grown sevenfold in ten years: in 1953 the company started with 5 employees and by 1962 had 40. Production was moved to a factory building in Villähde, near Lahti. This was the year when Lepo products were displayed in the Cologne furniture fair where 15 Finnish producers brought their own collections. In the 1960's, Lepo also took part in export exhibitions in New York, in 1967 in Moscow, in 1968 in London, and in 1969 in Copenhagen.

Since the devaluation of the Finnish markka in 1957 the furniture manufactured in Finland was extremely cheap in export markets compared to that of European





18 | Planning of an exhibition stand in the design office of Oiva Parviainen, 1960. The designer has just finished a small scale model of the stand.

competitors and the export trade for furniture started to expand across all sectors. Moreover, due to the lack of foreign imports, domestic sales dominated the market– Finnish furniture sold well even in Finland.

The Lepo collection was exported to USA, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium and Sweden. In Sweden, Lepo furniture struck a deal with the Swedish Futura, and there began the manufacturing under licence of Parviainen's furniture and Ojanen's *Bella* plastic chairs.

Parviainen's *Export* chair won a gold medal in an international exhibition held in California. Famous interior architects were in charge of the Lepo furniture designs. Interior architects Ojanen, Kukkapuro, Parviainen and Uhlenius, friends from student days, had started working with Lepo furniture and the collection rapidly grew. Many of their products got an export label granted by the Foreign Trade Association, a guarantee of good-quality design and manufacture.

By 1967, Lepo furniture was already furnishing 31 hotels and restaurants around Finland. Upholstered furniture for homes made up 40% of its production; the remaining 60% was for public interiors. In Helsinki the company had a 500m² exhibition space for selling furniture for public interiors as well as its own interior design and sales office. To promote

exports, the Lepo furniture products also featured in sales exhibitions in New York, London, Stockholm, Helsingborg, Berlin and Frankfurt.

Yrjö Kukkapuro

The impact of Kukkapuro's work on the Finnish furniture industry has been considerable. The products designed for the *moderno* collection show a mastery of proportion and functionality, both characteristics of his work.

Besides his design work, he taught for many years, later as professor and principal at the University of Industrial Arts and as a visiting professor abroad. Indeed, since the 1960's, Kukkapuro's influence as a teacher is clear from the work of other Lepo designers.

Owing to their ingenious, simple structure, the pieces of furniture from the collection are light and can serve various purposes. Thanks to the tubular framework the material volume and heat release rate are small, so the collection is well suited for use in restaurants, ships and office buildings.



19 & 20 | Furniture from the *moderno* collection by the interior architect Yrjö Kukkapuro. The chair legs come in either tubular steel or turned wood. Kukkapuro's chairs have a rectangular seat and, unlike any Finnish chairs to date, the turned legs were equal in diameter throughout.



21 | Auditorium chair, Kari Asikainen.

The chair was designed during his studies. Aake Anttila noticed it when he was visiting the school and it was immediately added to the collection. Aake always had a habit of visiting the University of Industrial Arts during the spring exhibition, where he found items that would fit the collection.



22 | Office chair *moderno* L-38.

A newspaper advertisement for this chair in Turku's Kalustekeskus department store:

"Turku holds the world record. The *moderno* office chair, the latest advance in chairs with a back support: every necessary adjustment option, foolproof, unbreakable, fully chrome-plated legs, two-year warranty.

AWARDED WITH FINNISH FOREIGN TRADE ASSOCIATION'S GUARANTEE OF QUALITY.

Among others, the World Bank in Washington has chosen *moderno* office chairs for their bureaus."



23 | A *moderno* being upholstered.



24 | The stackable *moderno* café chair.



25 | *Triennale* chair with metal frame by Kukkapuro, 1960.



27 | *Casino* chair by Kukkapuro, 1960. A consignment of 400 chairs were delivered to Nigeria. During the shipping Nigeria underwent a revolution and the chairs were later returned to the market in Finland, where they sold out immediately.



26 | *Tip-top* chair with wooden frame by Kukkapuro, 1957.



Reijo Ojanen

Ojanen had been working in an architects' office for five years, ever since he was 17, until he applied to study in the Institute of Industrial Arts in 1953, a few years prior to Oiva Parviainen and Yrjö Kukkapuro. At the time, furniture design was taught by figures including the legendary "Skåpe" aka Olof Ottelin and Ilmari Tapiovaara, whose auditorium chair was also a mainstay of the Lepokalusto collection. Soon Ojanen set up his own design studio, working alongside Oiva Parviainen in the early days.

The interior architect Reijo Ojanen has done a great deal of work with theatre and restaurant spaces. For example, the Tampere Workers' theatre and the Pyynikki Summer Theatre are his designs. Numerous architectural magazines around the world wrote about the amazing rotating auditorium of the Pyynikki Summer Theatre and it even inspired the building of a similar structure in the USA.

Besides a 40-year career as interior designer for the city of Tampere, Ojanen also managed his own projects in his own office. He also spent five years teaching at the Tampere University of Technology.

He often also designed the furniture for his interior design projects, furniture which was manufactured by Lepokalusto. A number of locations in Tampere were furnished by Lepokalusto, including the ice rink, the mayor's office, the KOP offices, the Koukkuniemi retirement home (the largest in the Nordic region), the restaurants Kustaa III, Tammer Kilta, Suomen Neito and Tuotanto, The Workers' theatre's pub and the Tampere police station.



29 | The *Orfeus* sofa suite, 1964





30 | Koukkuniemi retirement home, a seat from the festival hall, 1962.



31 | The *Reijo* chair, 1962





32 & 33 | The *Suomen Neito* restaurant, Tampere 1964

The wonderfully designed setting of the restaurant exudes dignity and comfort. The customers were well dressed – there was no going in without a tie, and women had to be accompanied by a male escort!



Erik Uhlenius

The interior designer Erik Uhlenius designed only one set of furniture for Lepokalusto: the *Pixen* ('Pixie'), but it sold all the more.



35 & 36 | The *Pixen*. This chair was sold in vast quantities to Finnish restaurants and was exported to both the east and the west, but especially to the Soviet Union. Thanks to its resilient structure and comfort, this chair can still be found in restaurants after decades of usage.

The Lepokalusto collection brochure reads: "Pan Am's world's largest office building, whose Trattoria café is furnished with LEPOKALUSTO chairs. Other important overseas commissions include the world's largest fur auction house in Leningrad, the World Bank in Washington, Cummins corporation's headquarters in London and the Sheraton Hotel's restaurant in Puerto Rico." The *Pixen* was even shipped to the USA.



Design in the 60s

Design in the 1960's was marked by optimism and boldness. Colours were strong and the designs themselves were eye-catching and unique. The availability of materials had improved since the immediate post-war period and designers took full advantage of this new-found access. Lepokalusto had plastic chairs manufactured and introduced them into Finnish interiors. The Finnish press often praised the new designs in their lengthy articles.

“The importance of colour in furniture is better understood nowadays. The Finnish furniture industry is of first-rate quality

and has thus increased its international sales. The factories that have understood the significance of export, have gone through a revolution in both technical advancements and in refinements to their collections. The use of bold colours as the basis for choosing furniture is an excellent idea, and the young couples of today are leading the way here.”

(*Savon Sanomat*, September 10, 1965).



37 | *Manhattan*, Oiva Parviainen

38 | *Moderno* in a modern home setting in the 1960's

Ahti Taskinen

The interior architect Ahti Taskinen was appointed artistic director of Kalusteyhtymä in 1964, and he also designed for Lepokalusto, since Lepo was a part of the corporation. The main idea for his designs was to create batch produced furniture that featured great proportions and functionality.

The modular *Igor* sofa was the first of Taskinen's designs to be put into production by Lepo. In addition to the seating sections, it included a cabinet for a record player that could be placed in the corner, the end or the middle of the modular sofa. The stereo system was beginning to be more common in homes, and this was the first piece of furniture into which it could be integrated.

It was simple to assemble the sofa to suit your needs, because all the elements were the same size—55cm wide and 75cm deep. In comparison to today's metre-deep modular furniture, there was significant space saving, and it made the sofa an easy fit for rooms of all sizes. Judging by the sheer number of articles written about it, *Igor* seemed to be a favourite of interior design magazines, and it was chosen as the winning couch in the *Avotakka* magazine's Christmas competition. "Ahti Taskinen's *Igor* sofa, was one of the first realisations of the successful concept that is modular so-

fas. *Igor* solved the problem of corners, because a table or a seating element could be put there. The hollow framework made it easy to move around."

Igor remained in production for over twenty years.

In the 1960's a lot of family apartments were built, apartments which often had long and narrow living rooms. The problems of furnishing such a long room could be solved by taking the units of the *Igor* sofa and placing the sofa set, for instance, in the middle of the narrow room.

The modifiability and modularity of these furnishings are a hallmark of the designer and Taskinen's board-structured furniture does well in other manufacturers' collections as well. "I aspire to design objects that are unique, practical, durable, appealing and easy to manufacture. I have drawn hundreds of pieces of furniture and I have come close to my aspiration with a few products, the *Igor* sofa being one of them," says Taskinen.

In Sweden the *Igor* sofa was advertised with the slogan "IGOR- I GÅR- I DAG- I MORGON." ('IGOR- YESTERDAY- TODAY- TOMORROW.')



39 | The modular *Igor* sofa, 1964



40 | The manufacture of furniture in a wood furniture factory in 1968.

Esko Pajamies

The interior architect Esko Pajamies designed his first series of furniture for Lepo in 1965 and the co-operation continued all the way to the early 1970's. Pajamies also designed furniture for many other manufacturers and his products proved lucrative in both decades.



41-43 | *Polar*, 1965-66

3

The 70s
The Lepofinn brand

The 70s

The Lepokalusto production went through rapid growth in the 1970's. By the beginning of the decade there were already 142 products in the catalogue with a number of models to come. The collection broadened further with the introduction of new designers.

Lepokalusto purchased the furniture manufacturer Resto Oy in 1973. The aim of this fusion was to increase sales by a third, even though the turnover had already tripled since 1969. The deal consisted of 15,500m³ of factory space in Villähde with an increase in the workforce to 280 employees. An agreement was signed with Wärtsilä to provide the furnishing for two ships, and exports to Germany were under consideration. Home furnishings made up 30 per cent of production, 32 per cent of furniture was for public spaces, and the final 38 per cent was for export.

At this point, the company was one of the largest suppliers of furnishings for hotels, restaurants, theatres and ships in Finland, and sales had reached 40 million marka. For example, the Hotel Viru in Tallinn was a large-scale project that led exports to the Soviet Union. The biggest single deal up to this point was the furnishing of 1,600 rooms and other spaces in the Pulkovskaya Hotel in Leningrad.

Leposti

The Lepokalusto staff news bulletin was launched in 1973. The title of the first issue was *Lepolainen*, later changed to *Leposti* in a naming competition held for the staff. The bulletin came out quarterly. It included export outlooks, staff news and events, all of which was well illustrated. Most of the time the photos were taken by CEO Aake Anttila, who was known as a skilled photographer. Staff events and Christmas parties always featured musical performances in which the tenor Anttila himself took part.

In his long editorials the CEO encouraged employees in their efforts to improve workplace safety and comfort, in tune with the times. Once, just as the bulletin had been distributed to the staff, a group of students from Helsinki came on a factory tour. One of the students remarked: "Surely nobody can work here with all this dust around!" In hindsight you could say some of it has yet to settle, thankfully.

Leposti also included an employee representative's column and in each issue there was an article covering the staff's lively sports activities and a richly illustrated list of results from recent competitions. In the 1973 AGM of the sports committee Olavi Kräkin said that in view of the staffing levels, the interest in sports activities was



44 | *Juju*, Esko Pajamies 1971

on the wane, but “we have taken steps to boost team spirit by buying matching kit and Lepo tracksuits.”

According to the article, the size of the personnel had increased to 312 by 1974. Out of these, 259 were on the shop floor, 45 were clerical staff and eight worked in the *moderno* unit. Turnover had grown to 28.7 million euros, in current-day terms.



45 | *Pele*, Esko Pajamies. This line of recliners became popular as a TV chair (in private homes) and was also used in fireplace rooms and public spaces.



46 | *Juju* recliner or 'Laiskiainen' ('Sloth'), voted 'Chair of The Year' by the readers of the *Avotakka* magazine in 1972.



47 | The *Kouvola* chair, 1970. The interior décor and furnishings of the Kouvola house were designed by Yrjö Kukkapuro.

Design

Interior design changes in the 1970's.

In the furnishings of public interiors, special emphasis was laid on ergonomics and on componential thinking. Office interiors were dominated by unadorned plywood designs. The schooling of interior designers was focused on planning public spaces and furniture. Even the interior design magazines no longer wrote about furniture for the home. Instead the articles treated the current trends from a wider perspective.

By the end of the decade most of Lepo's collection consisted of furniture for public spaces. "During the 70's the designs for public spaces could not be based purely on aesthetic grounds; they had to be based more on the results of techno-scientific research,"

says Kukkapuro. Ahti Taskinen agrees that the atmosphere in design changed in the 1970's and that the open-mindedness and cheerfulness of the 1960's were now lost.

And domestic interiors changed too. Gone were the muted and carefully considered choices. Risto Halme calls the new trend the "thread-spool rococo". Large couch sets became popular in interior design, something that had not previously been typical of the Finnish design tradition. In an interview, Marika Hausen, a teacher in the School of Art and Design in Finland, once described the situation as "a herd of buffalos taking over the Finnish living room".





49

48 | The *Tarantella* sofa, Hannu Jyräs, 1970.

The structure of this piece of furniture is ingeniously simple.

49 & 50 | *Jytä* children's furniture, Jaakko Halko, 1975.

This furniture system is a typical example of 1970's design. It was a multifunctional and adaptable set that could be adapted to suit the age of the user, thanks to its screw holes. The self-assembly elements were flat pack, so suitable for export, and both national and international magazines praised the genius of the product. However, the manufacturing costs proved too high and *Jytä* never became a success.



50

Lepofinn production expands

“The beginning of the year has been busy in many ways. Everyday discussion is coloured by one crisis after the other, now it’s the oil crisis, and practically everyone is feeling the pinch.

The future of many companies looks more uncertain and the spiralling prices and salaries threaten to jeopardise exports. However, it looks like the Lepokalusto premises won’t meet the growing demand. Consequently, a new Lepokalusto factory will open in 1974 in Kajaani. Production in Villähde and Orimattila will be increased if the workforce can be found, but experience tells me that is unlikely,” says CEO Aake Anttila in a 1974 *Leposti* article.

The company had been known as Lepofinn since the early 1970’s. The name appeared almost without exception in magazines, even if it was only a trademark. Lepofinn Oy was founded much later.

Thus it was that the Lepokaja Oy furniture factory was established in Kajaani in 1974. The factory made wooden furniture and furnishings for hotel rooms. The president was invited to the grand opening of the factory. His diary was full, but he did send the Prime Minister, Kalevi Sorsa, with his wife to represent the State. President Kekkonen came

on a later visit and after the factory tour said in his speech: “You might like to think about changing the company name Lepo [‘rest’]—you never seem to let up!”

Lepokalusto now had four factories: the first and the second in Villähde, one factory in Orimattila, and Lepokaja, where staffing levels were expected to rise to one hundred, and that of the entire corporation to 400. Material purchases pushed up costs: for example, in 1975 the quantity of ply alone used by Lepokalusto was up to 100,000m²!

The factory in Kajaani was set up with the prospect of expanding markets in Russia, especially as Finnish companies were soon to begin building the city of Kostamus. There were delegations of buyers from the Soviet Union visiting the Kajaani factory as well. Indeed, the distance between Kajaani and Kostamus in the Soviet Union was fast travelled by train. However, the building of Kostamo with its furniture deliveries started just too late for Lepo. The company’s rapid expansion, heavy costs and huge collection with its variations plunged the company into difficulties and it folded in 1978.



THE STATE TRAINING CENTRE, HELSINKI

51 | The State Training Centre

The furniture and interior were designed by Jussi Peippo; the furniture was made by Lepokalusto.



52 | The *Polar* couch suite in the lounge of Hotelli Aulanko.



53 | The *Aulanko* waiting-room furniture set, Risto Halme.

Furniture Manufacturer **Jouko Mäkinen Oy**

Lepokalusto was bought by the furniture manufacturer Jouko Mäkinen Oy, which continued the production in 1978. The manufacturer was a part of the Grahn corporation, which had factories in six cities and a total of 1,600 employees. The plywood and furniture manufacturer Grahn bought Lepokalusto in order to support its

own business and to be able to share in the Soviet export market. It had previously bought Jouko Mäkinen Oy, whose products went under the trademark Macfinn. The Lepokalusto collection meanwhile was marketed under the name of Lepofinn. Hence both Lepofinn and Macfinn were owned by Jouko Mäkinen Oy.

4

The 80s
Lepofinn Oy

The 80s

During the time of Jouko Mäkinen, the Lepofinn brand was associated with furniture for both private homes and public spaces, as well as with specialist furniture, such as for boats.

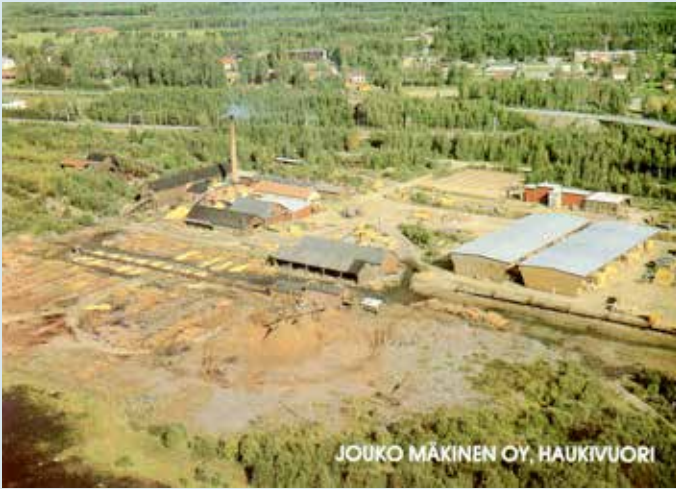
Lepo still exported a lot of furniture to the USSR. In fact, in the beginning of the 1980s 40% of the company's profits came from these exports. In 1983, Risto Halme was asked to be the leading designer of the furniture sold to the Eastern neighbour. Their most important products at the time were furniture for hotels and restaurants.

The marine interior decor business grew significantly by the end of the decade, and in the 1980s the collection was changed to reflect the needs of customers in the foreign market. Designing and producing fixtures also kept people employed, because a huge number of new furniture col-

lections were crafted for boat fittings and the needs of the Soviet market in addition to the regular collection. By the halfway point of the decade, trade with the Soviet Union represented half of the company's sales. The marine interior business was also a big employer, as Lepo delivered furniture for five new vessels to France, and for each of them the company had to design a number of new models.

54 | The Factories of the Grahm corporation

The Grahm corporation was a multi-industry conglomerate, whose main branches of business were mechanical wood refinement and operating in the furniture industry. Their headquarters was situated in Mikkeli. Their parent companies were Oy Grahm Ltd and Kalso Oy. The biggest company in the conglomerate was the furniture manufacturer Jouko Mäkinen Oy. The furniture was made in Nastola, Jurva, Valkeala and Lahti, and plywood was produced in Mikkeli, Vammala, Valkeala and in Otterbäck-en, Sweden. The corporation had five sales offices in Helsinki, Stockholm, Savonlinna, Mikkeli and Jurva.



JOUKO MÄKINEN OY, HAUKIVUORI



JOUKO MÄKINEN OY, VILLÄHDE



VÄNERPLY AB, OTTERBÄCKEN



KALSO OY, VUOHIJÄRVI



OY GRAHN LTD, MIKKELI



JOUKO MÄKINEN OY, JURVA

Risto Halme

The interior designer Risto Halme was the man behind many of the items designed for the Soviet market. The Soviets' understanding of design was different from the Western countries, and continuous customising of the collection became a huge task. A new collection had to be designed and presented in a fair in Moscow every year. Halme had to travel to the USSR frequently to showcase new products and oversee interior projects.

The USSR, which had been the main destination for Lepo's exports, began to dissolve in 1989 into separate states as its centralized economic and political structures collapsed. A batch of 5,000 unfinished pieces of furniture was left in Lepo's possession. It didn't sell well in the West for the simple reason that it was suited to the Soviet market. The dissolution of the Soviet Union meant that exports to the East dried up, resulting in closures for many Finnish furniture manufacturers.

Finland joined the European exchange rate mechanism in 1986, which meant big devaluations were no longer possible. As a result,

the increased price of furniture became an obstacle in the export market when compared to countries like Italy, for example. In addition, the parent company Grahn's plywood factories had been making a loss for a long time and because of the corporation's too rapid expansion, the parent company folded. It also pulled down the furniture manufacturer Jouko Mäkinen Oy with it. At this point, the only remaining factories were a Swedish plywood factory and sales company, a metal factory in Jurva and the furniture factory in Lahti.

In 1987, Pekka Köntti and Kari Laukkanen bought the Lepofinn company, which had operated in Villähde, from the bankrupt estate of Jouko Mäkinen. For the next five years, manufacturing continued under the name Lepofinn Oy. There were 105 people employed at the time.



55 | *Amadeus*, Risto Halme

This was the number one seller in the 1980's.



56 | *Linea*, Pirkko Söderman.



57 | Ahti Taskinen measuring the side element of a chair.



58 | *Opus*, Ahti Taskinen, 1983.
An easy chair made by bending ply veneer.



59-61 | Birka, Pentti Hakala 1983.

The *Birka* series, comprising two different armchairs and a sofa, came about as a commissioned work for the *M/S Birka Princess* cruiseliner, finished in 1984, but the series was also sold to other public spaces. Hakala's aim was to come up with a chair series which differed in design terms from earlier works.

Kaarle Holmberg

“Back in my student days in 1976 the then *Lepofinn* CEO Anttila visited the spring exhibition of the School of Art and Design, and, seeing one of the armchairs I had designed, invited me to visit the factory at *Viillähti*. Even then we discussed bringing the design into production.

My collaboration with the manufacturer began with the *ARC* chair series only in 1986. The same autumn I had been approached about a teaching position at the Lahti Institute of Design when Pentti Hakala stepped down. It was natural for me to continue the co-operation with the nearby *Lepofinn Oy*. I had just received the Artek award and the Ornamo Young Designer grant. Perhaps this explains why I was chosen to be the head designer of *Lepo*.”



62 | The ARC chair collection, Kaarle Holmberg, 1986.

There were both wood and metal versions of the Arc chairs.

This series was not originally designed for Lepofinn Oy; the company got interested in it when they saw a prototype in my office.

5

The 90s
Lepo Product Oy

The 90s

During the previous decade most of Lepofinn Oy's productions were sold to the USSR. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the devaluation of the rouble, exports of furniture ceased and Lepofinn Oy went bankrupt.

Lepo Product Oy

In 1991, the product manager since the early 1970s, Köntti, and Markku Antila incorporated Lepo Product Oy to keep production going. The company's concept for collections and marketing strategy were redeveloped and there was a determination to make the products stand out. The company logo was revised and, in a break with the past, new stronger lines emerged in the photographs and graphics. In 1996, Pekka Köntti became sole owner of the company.

The Business plan

Lepo Product Oy's business plan was to manufacture seats and tables for public spaces and ships and Lattoflex beds for the home. The aim was to produce furniture which would be both high quality and unique in design. While the company had previously designed for public spaces, such as restaurants, hotels and ships, now their marketing target was to include business premises. Their goal was to increase sales in Finland and in other Western countries so they concentrated on streamlining their operations and improving their collection and image. Meanwhile it was important to maintain contacts with the countries to the east.

The aim of the product development was to design diverse product families. In addition to standard models, the company made custom-built furniture designed by architects for ships and public spaces. The company's own factory produced limited series, one-off furniture, coatings, upholstery and assembly. Wooden parts and large metal sets were subcontracted. The company continued to produce customised furniture for ships and maintained the trade with Russian Federation countries – they made the furniture for the State Duma in Russia, for example.

The company made their products in two factories, with a joint floor space of 7500m². One of the factories concentrated on the early stages of production and the other on finishing. Only two old Lepo-*finn* furniture series were retained in the new collection, *ARC* and *Birka*, while the new *Paletti* collection was being extended. The graphic designer Pirkko Hacklin designed a new logo for Lepo Product Oy to support their new business plan and Kaarle Holmberg was chosen to be the company's head of design. New office furniture was designed for Lepo.

Product development

The role of different custom designs was emphasised in the product development of Lepo Product Oy. It was especially common with furniture designed for ships that the products were manufactured based on the marine architects' designs. In this case, the product had already been sold prior to the start of the product development process. Thus, the product development concentrated on the products' structural properties and their functionality. The factory's drafting technician produced the working drawings leaving the client to deal with the product's aesthetic properties.

Only very few of the furniture pieces designed for ships remained set models, as they were mostly custom-made products. Out of these few products the most sig-

nificant in terms of sales were those designed by the Norwegian designer Njål Ejde.

The strength of the business lies in the experience in manufacturing specialty furniture as well as the speed and flexibility of the product development, starting with the designer's idea. For example, the business was able to expand the *Paletti* range by ten new products during the first year of operation, even while other product development projects were being carried out. The expenditure on product development was approximately five per cent during the first accounting period, which was an exceptionally large share in this line of business in Finland.

Office furnishings

The furnishing environment for public spaces changed due to the demands of workplace ergonomics and thus technical properties were added to the furniture. Offices were furnished with ergonomic office chairs and tables made up of several pieces. Entirely new ergonomic solutions were called for in furnishing the working environment. Large desktop computers—and the height adjustments required by them—drastically changed the furnishing of the work environment and in many cases resulted in a designer's nightmare.

A new trend, minimalism, was taking over design in Finland by the latter part of the

decade. It was characterised by basic forms without curved shapes. The rise of minimalism was a reaction against the exaggerated forms of previous decades and proved a resilient aspect of Finnish design.

New colours and materials for furniture and upholstery were introduced at the beginning of the 1990's. Whereas black chrome was used extensively in metal frames, plain Alcantara textiles were favoured in upholstery.

The ongoing co-operation

Paletti was the first furniture range I designed for Lepo Product Oy that differed from previous products and product policy. The design of the *Paletti* range was not based on the demands of the market; rather the basic premise of the range was technical and design-oriented. The *Paletti* range was said to represent “an aggressive product policy” as its appearance deviated so strongly from the conventional concept of furniture for public spaces.

The *Paletti* chair came into being through the designer's own desire to create. Lepo became interested in the chair only after the completion of the first mock-up. Thereafter, work began at once to carry through the product development, as there was a firm belief in the potential of the product. Only a few months later the chair attracted substantial interest at the Ornamo jubilee exhibition, where an order was placed for 200 chairs to furnish the new Organisation for

Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) congress venue. Production had to be started immediately, and that was the beginning of *Paletti* series. The chair received the SIO award in 1991 as well a Pro Finnish Design honorable mention. At the time, the chairs in the collection were the only new Finnish products that represented organic design. For this reason they stood out in the market and the sold well from the beginning.

Paletti was a success, and altogether 22 products from seats to office table systems were designed for the product family. *Paletti* is characterised by the moulded organic design, which is integral to the product's structure.

The *Paletti* chair collection was displayed in the Finnish pavilion at the Milan Furniture Fair, and many orders were placed even on the opening day. The sample chairs were bought from the pavilion and shipped to Argentina!

63-66 | *Paletti* 1991

Holmberg tells how he “had visited the architecture exhibition by Santiago Calatrava, and thus was inspired by the organic design. Italian postmodernism was a passing fad in Finland, and its wilder products soon lost their appeal. On the other hand, it was difficult to go on with the simple and plain style of Finnish design, and [he] needed to break free from this tradition.

The natural organic design in chairs proved to be a good principle in my design work. Meanwhile, a new upholstery fabric was launched, one that stimulated the design with its fresh look and colours. The Alcantara upholstery fabric turned out to be a great success as well.”





67-68 | Organic forms are used in this wooden chair as well. The multi-coloured upholstery fabric is made for a furniture exhibition by textile designer Erja Hirvi who back then studied in the University of Industrial Arts in Helsinki. The manufacturer wanted some blazing young vision, and that's what he got!



69 | *Kuu*, 1993
A stackable café chair



70 | *Paletti* lobby furniture



71 | *Paletti* office furniture, 1992

The bowed, tapered table legs characterise this furniture collection.

A Finnish firm manufacturing metal furniture still had in its possession the old tools for making front bicycle forks. They were used in the production of quite a number of furniture components of that kind throughout the decade. In a way, some of the forms in wood design from the 1950's are present in the metal structure of these products.





72 & 73 | Typical interior design from the early 1990's



74 & 75 | Zoo suite, Antti Kotilainen, 1993

Zoo is Antti Kotilainen's project work included in the Lepo collection. It represents 1990's minimalism with its clear forms. The Swedish Pharmacy Association furnished their premises with Zoo lobby chairs.

The *Helsingin Sanomat* newspaper reports on the Habitare exhibition: "During a recession young designers are rarely taken on by big furniture manufacturers. The open-minded Lepo Product Oy has added to its collection the chairs designed by Antti Kotilainen, a third-year student at the Institute of Design within the Lahti University of Applied Sciences. "Zoo" stools are easy to stack, their details are uncluttered and the upholstery is fashionable Alcantara."

CELLO
VUODEN TUOLI

DESIGN KAARLE HOLMBERG
SISUSTUSARKKITEHDIT SIO:IN VUODEN 1994 HUONEKALUPALKINTO

LISÄTIETOJA:
MYYNTINÄYTTELY
PUH. (90) 680 1700

LEPO
LEPO PRODUCT OY, MYYNTINÄYTTELY, YRJÖNKATU 25, 00100 HELSINKI
TEHDAS: 15540 VILLÄHDE

76 | *Cello* chair series, Kaarle Holmberg, 1995

The trade union for interior designers, SIO, gave this series of chairs a prize. The grounds cited for the award were the design collaboration between the manufacturer and the designer, and the promotion of the profession within furniture design.

In the jury's opinion, the structure of this chair involved "metal tubing shaped in a challenging way".

Sometimes when I'm showing a new model sketch to Lepo I've been worried that I've designed a shape that is too difficult. However, to my surprise every time the model makers have just said "Let's do it, it's worth a try." And when

they have been able to do it, it has been great to learn about the new technical possibilities used in the production. Naturally, a designer is always excited to try something new, but so are the model makers. Most of the prototypes have indeed been finished in a couple of days.

The project on research and product development

Lepo Product took part in a research, product development, and educational project supported by the EU, during which the whole personnel took part in various forms of training. The partners of the furniture manufacturer in the project were the Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Helsinki, the Institute of Design and the Faculty of Technology within the Lahti University of Applied Sciences, Lahti Chamber of Commerce



77 | Zoo

and the Lahti Employment Agency. Tarja Nissinen, a university researcher, conducted research on companies, where operational models in leading, work organisation, product development and marketing were compared within small and medium-sized companies that had become international in scope or operated in the home market. One of the companies involved in the study was Lepo Product, which had a suite of office furniture design based on the development plan commended by Tarja Nissinen.

The training was organised in the premises of the Institute of Design, and the students of the Institute were in charge of the photography and product graphics for the brochure.

Automation had been delayed in the Finnish furniture factories and at the end of the decade the price competitiveness of the domestic furniture was weak compared to the tough rival countries. Many furniture producers were forced to quit their operation. Previously devaluation had also played an important part in promoting exports and Finland had indeed devalued its markka at least once every decade since the 1930's. Under conditions of a shared currency, devaluation could no longer be used as a tool of economic policy.



78 | *Point* office furniture, Kaarle Holmberg , 1998

The picture also features an office chair designed for the new Lepo collection by Heikki Ruoho as part of his degree work for the Institute of Design.

6

The 2000s

By the 21st century, wood had practically disappeared as a material for public interior seating furniture and the Lepo collection mainly consisted of metal-framed furniture.

Furniture manufacturers from Western Europe began to relocate their production to Eastern European countries in order to lower production costs. Even the previously competitive Italian manufacturers were struggling and moved their factories to those areas.

After the collapse of the Russian rouble, Lepo was once again forced to adjust its business strategy and the company faced debt restructuring in 2003. In consequence, Lepo Product Oy gave up their wood factory and the collection was rationalised to retain a competitive edge. Starting from the restructuring, the company focused on chair manufacture and ship refurbishment. At this time, the annual subcontracting sales from roughly 15 regular suppliers already constituted 50-60 per cent of the turnover.

Basic chairs were made as a combination of a bent ply seat and a tubular frame. The bent ply was produced by a partner company LK-Taivute Oy in Lahti. Lepo also entered into a marketing agreement with ADI-Kaluste Oy and Kinnarps Oy in the early 2000's.

Thanks to a retro boom, old shapes and designs came back into fashion and the *moderno* line, designed in the 1950's, returned to production in 2001. It was hip again!

Kimmo Köntti M.Sc. (Tech), son of Pekka Köntti, took over as the new CEO and owner in 2006.



79 & 80 | *Moderno and Melon.*

Violet, grey and hardwood as in the 1950's.



81 & 82 | *Juna*, Kaarle Holmberg, 2000
The *juna* chair collection.



83 | *Sitron*, a new office furniture line, Kaarle Holmberg, 2000

Computers had become a necessity in the office and the employee did not necessarily have their own personal work space. *Sitron* furniture, equipped with wheels, is easy to move if the need arises. This office furniture line was manufactured for several years.



84



84 | *Pala*, Elina Hakala , 2008

Hakala's lobby suite, presented as diploma work for the Institute of Design.

85 | The *Artemis* sofa, Risto Halme.

Halme designed this furniture during his studies for the Lahti savings bank and it is now part of the Lepo collection.



86 & 87 | *Viva & Apollo*, Kaarle Holmberg



88 | Viva chairs in the Paroc Oy headquarters, 2012.

89 | *Melon*, 2003
Helsinki University's Faculty
of Behavioural Sciences.





89 (see previous page), **90 & 91** | *Melon*, Kaarle Holmberg, 2003

The deep curve of the chair shell is made by compressing ply. A nearly identical anatomically-shaped seat was the award-winning *Cello* chair. At that time the chair was overly upholstered, because the compressed surface veneer could not be guaranteed not to crack. The seat of the *Cello* chair was originally meant to be made from plastic, but to my amazement, they were able to produce a shape with this degree of curvature out of bent ply without it breaking.

A whole product family was based on seats made using this technique: stackable chairs with metal legs, with or without armrests, office chairs equipped with wheels, barstools and row chairs, even high-backed conference room chairs are a possible variation on this. And they can be upholstered in a variety of ways or surface-treated for a particular colour.

All of Lepo's bent ply articles are manufactured by LK-Taivute located in the city of Lahti. They have a long history of partnership with the Lepo company, going back to the times of the Vuohijärvi factory. Bent ply chairs that, thanks to their shape, are particularly comfortable to sit in, are indeed one of Lepo Product Oy's most important product groups. The general-purpose chair (right) has proven to be a hit with customers.





92 | The *Moderno* easy chair in the 2000's

7

The 2010s



93

The 2010s

The work environment went through yet more changes with the rapidly growing popularity of laptop computers. Office space incorporated meeting rooms and break areas where working on laptops was entirely comfortable. After a long absence wood made a comeback in public interiors, and it was once again OK to design chairs with turned wooden legs!

Young designers from the Lahti Institute of Design and Fine Arts began working with Lepo and the modernised product line forged into the new decade. With the growing emphasis on ecological values, organic aspects and natural wood colours have been incorporated into in-

terior design. Light green and pale violet have been typical colour elements in the 2010's.

Lately, the export market for Lepo furniture has been Sweden—new models are always exhibited in the Stockholm Furniture Fair. The first stages of production are in the hands of a subcontracting franchise, and the products are finished, upholstered and assembled at Lepo. Furnishing ships continues but with an emphasis on refurbishing. In this area, the company's reputation for rapid deliveries is as robust today as it ever was!

93 & 94 | *Kaite*, Marika Häkkinen, 2013

A chair collection for break rooms and lobbies designed by Marika Häkkinen, a student of interior design at the Lahti Institute of Design and Fine Art.



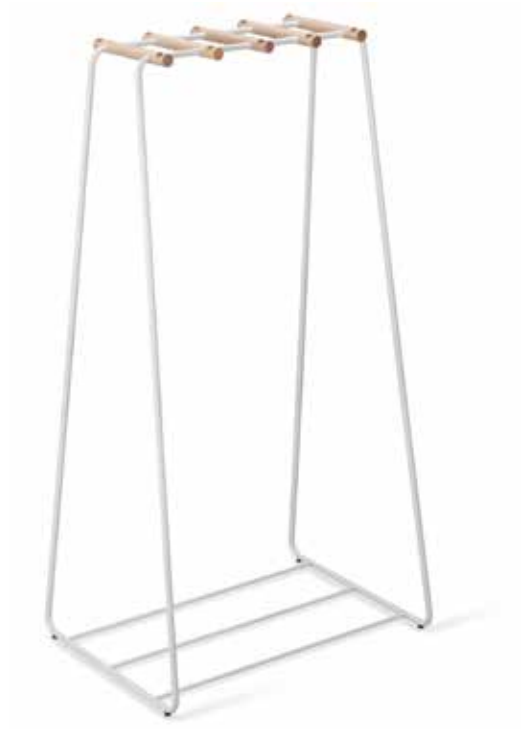
96 | *Apollo* conference chair, Kaarle Holmberg, 2010



95 | *Kalevi* sofa, Marika Häkkinen, 2013



94



97 & 98 | The *Rata* coat stand, Maiju Korpelainen, 2013



99 | Holmberg's *Lokki* chair and *Pukki* table by Maiju Korpelainen, 2013



100 & 101 | . Lepo furniture in the Seinäjoki City Library in 2012. Päivi Meuronen, the interior architect of the library was nominated Interior Architect of the Year.





103 & 104 | The wooden-legged *moderno* by Kukkapuro is back in production and Holmberg's *Nami* chair begins production in 2013.

Look at those legs!

Lepo at 60

To celebrate our 60th birthday the organisation was audited: Lepo Product Oy met the ISO standard requirements and was granted the quality assurance and environmental certificates ISO 9001:2008 and ISO 14001:2004 in May 2013.



105 | ISO certificate

8

Ship furnishing



Ship furnishing is divided into two sectors:
new-building and refurbishment.

Ship furnishing

New-building

Lepokalusto is involved in the ship furnishing business largely thanks to the *Moderno* chair series. Earlier, ship fixtures had to be made from inflammable materials and the *Moderno* seating series was well suited for this purpose. The steel tubing framework of the chairs can be supported with inflammable sheet metal, making the fire load of the furniture very low.

Upholstered seating and furniture specially commissioned by shipping companies for the communal spaces of the ships, have played an important part in Lepo's history, from the first significant commission for the *M/S Song Of Norway* in 1972.

Besides Kukkapuro's *Moderno* series, interiors and fittings designed by the Norwegian architect Njål Ejden have been produced by Lepo for many ships around the world since the early 80's. Ejde designed the interiors for the *M/S Royal Princess* and so began a lengthy partnership. Lepo's practice was to produce a variety of models based on Ejde's sketches, and leave him choose his favourites.

A broad spectrum of styles is considered characteristic of ship furniture. Ship interiors differ entirely from almost any other interior design setting. Here's how a ship designer was instructed in the 1980s: "Since the passenger can't be allowed to feel like time's dragging during the trip, all the spaces need to be designed in a way that no matter where the passenger looks, there is always some new source of delight in view." This type of thinking is particularly conspicuous in the designs of luxury liners.

In 1995, Lepo delivered 6.5 million markka's worth of furniture to two ships at the French shipyard, Chantiers de L'Atlantique. The furniture was delivered to Caribbean luxury liners and the contract included an option on the following two luxury liners. Royal Caribbean Cruise Liners granted Lepo Product the status of Quality Supplier and Lepo still produces furniture for cruise ships.



106 & 107 | Suite

In new ships, special furniture items, such as bar counters and sofas, were made according to the architects' specifications.



108 | *Polar 1001 and 1003*, furniture designed by Esko Pajamies, as a part of the interior design of a luxury liner sailing on the Black Sea

109 | Ship interior

“In shipbuilding the subcontracting schedules are very tight, and this goes for the furnishing manufacturers too. Technical drawings for the furniture are made at the factory based on the designer’s drafts, and the prototype furniture is manufactured for the approval of the client. The ship’s interior designer seldom draws their own chairs for the ship; ready-made furniture is most often chosen these days. Then the shipyard or the overall supplier asks the furnishing suppliers for bids for providing the furnishing subcontract. After the bidding, a suitable supplier (usually the cheapest) is selected and the manufacturing can begin. The process is the same with fixtures, but specialised enterprises, so-called cabin factories, are always the ones responsible for cabin furnishing and production. These days it is very difficult to get to supply furniture for new construction sites, so they are a smaller part of the sales of Lepo’s ship furnishing,” Kimmo Köntti explains.



110 | Night Club



111 | Island Sky



112 | Star Cruises



113 & 114 | Ship interiors



115 | Njål Ejde, 1990. A chair lot for the *M/S Princess* ships.

Refurbishment

In refurbishing, the process is different from new construction. The ship which is to be refurbished is divided into sub-contract sectors, which the overall suppliers then bid for. The shipping company does not necessarily make very detailed plans beforehand, or order straight from the manufacturer, but the orders come via “Turn-Key” suppliers.

Single pieces of furniture are usually sold as part of a collection only. From the out-

set, items similar to those in previous sites are offered, or else the customer is allowed to select a completely new set of products.

In refurbishment, contract schedules are even tighter than in new-building. For example, lack of time usually leads to the modification of existing chair models instead of designing completely new ones. In the 21st century, Lepo’s refurbishment contracts have often included fitted furni-



116 | Star Cruises

ture, as well as the re-upholstering of old furniture, and some additional construction and fine-tuning.

A typical ship contract in the 2010's goes something like this: "The supplier of Turn Key puts out a tender with just two weeks' notice. The bid was worked out using preliminary calculations, after which it was accepted. This meant that the units had to be delivered to the Bahamas in three weeks for assembly. On receiving the order, the CEO immediately visits the ship and takes preparatory measurements. During the trip, the CEO makes the workshop drawings which then need the client's approval. The next step is to acquire the materials – such as laminates and textiles – from European manufacturers. After selection, the orders are placed, and then all that remains is to choose the professionals who will be sent to the furnishing site in the Bahamas, where the ship will be fitted out in three weeks' time under the CEO's supervision. The challenge here is that a site like this is totally new to the contractors. There is very little time to

make plans or prepare the workers to carry out the job, and you can run into all sorts of problems; there may be no air-conditioning available, or even power.

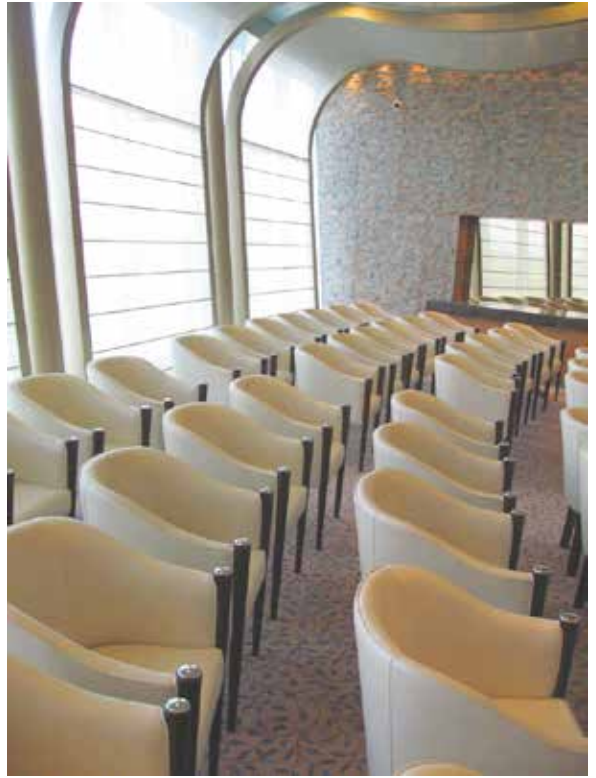
Anyway, the cruise has already been sold out in advance and everything has to be ready on time. "It is expensive to fix mistakes afterwards, because the ship is sailing somewhere at sea and the repairs will have to be done on the ship anyway," says CEO Kimmo Köntti.

The client's wish is that we deliver as large a consignment of good-quality kit as possible at the right time, keeping in mind the client's budget. It is important to provide maintenance services already at the tender to secure a bigger part of the project.

Lepo furniture's amazing speed of model building has made it possible to stay in the ship business up until the present day and it is still a significant part of the company's business practices. In the 2000s, the share of cruise ship interior design in Lepo Product Oy's sales has varied annually between 30-40 per cent.



117 | *Celebrity Silhouette*, Library



118 | *Allure of the Seas*, Wedding Chapel



119 | *Viking ship's chair*, Robert Tillberg

9

Exports and Finnish
economic Trends, 1950-2012

Exports and Finnish economic Trends, 1950-2012

Furniture export

During the years 1945 and 1949 the Finnish markka to dollar rate went up 70 per cent due to devaluations, which led to rapid growth in western exports in the 1950's. The war reparations to the Soviet Union were paid by 1952 paving the way for heavy investment in western exports.

The wages in the 1950's were low and almost all materials were in short supply. In 1956, a law governing wages and prices was repealed, and wages began to rise. Consequently, the currency was devalued again in 1957 by 28.1 per cent in order to stimulate the wood and paper industry, and foreign currencies be-

came 39 per cent more expensive. This kept import prices high and export prices low, benefitting Finnish manufacturing.

The Korean War resulted in a business boom in 1951. The quality of Finnish manufactured goods had risen due to the war reparations industry and exports started to grow rapidly in western markets. Lepo, too, jumped at the opportunity and took part in export exhibitions abroad to gear up for the export market. Interest in Finnish design and furniture was on the increase in the 1950's and exports to West Germany grew the most.



120 | *Suomen neito, Moderno, and Reijo.*

The economist Lenita Airisto founded a company whose business idea was to promote the export of Finnish goods. Judging from photographs, Lepo's stands had competent displays in all exhibitions during this "aesthetic era".



121 | The *Pixen* photographed on the Seurasaari island and in a German restaurant in 1968.

The pictures taken on Seurasaari acted as a template for the decoration of the restaurant in Germany. The restaurant, Cafe and Restaurant Uberseebrucke in Hamburg, seats 250 people and is decorated in a Finnish style. The owner says you have to offer the customers that something special, and that a cozy setting is as important as great food. Finpro (the former Finnish Foreign Trade Association) is saying that the restaurant will automatically become a window for Finnish products in Hamburg.

The table below shows the rapid growth in exports. The furniture's export figures are presented in Finnish markka.

	1957	1958	1959
West Germany	169 000	46 872 000	156 047 000
Benelux countries	3 090 000	9 105 000	9 861 000
France	185 000	8 391 000	10 748 000
Sweden	4 944 000	6 955 000	8 438 000
Switzerland	268 000	881 000	8 653 000
USA	7 765 000	7 649 000	29 809 000

In their export price list for 1959 Lepokalusto's products already have a price in the following export centres: Hamburg, London, Rouen, New York, Portland Oregon, Montreal and of course Moscow. On August 5, 1969, the Finnish daily *Kansan Uutiset* wrote:

"Furniture export to the US doubles. Lepokalusto makes a contract to deliver 24,000 chairs to the US along with two other factories of the Kalusteyhtymä group. CEO Anttila estimates that employment is secured for the next three years and the company will take on a further 40 employees."

The export business was also boosted by developing the sales network. This was done with the assistance of Finnish state commercial secretaries. The colours and materials of the furniture collection were modified to match the established tastes of each country.

In 1962, a new showroom for Finnish furniture was opened in New York City. Six Finnish furniture manufacturers founded the joint venture Fennoform, with the American company ICF, International Furnishings Inc, in charge of marketing in Canada and the United States.

Lepokalusto's products marked for export were now marketed effectively in the West. According to a 1966 magazine article, the offices and restaurants furnished by Lepokalusto now included the World Bank headquarters in Washington, the NYC University Hospital, the *Trattoria* restaurant in Manhattan, the Leningrad Fur Auction and the restaurant of the Hotel *Ukraina* in Moscow, to name but a few.

Devaluations help furniture exports

The Finnish markka was devalued by a further 31 per cent in 1967, which spurred another era of strong industrial growth. According to the foreign trade statistics of the National Board of Customs, the devaluation boosted the exports of furniture by about 50 per cent in the following four years.

Customs item 94: Furniture and parts thereof, mattresses, furnishings etc.

year	exportvalue
1966	20,58*
1967	30,54*
1968	45,19*
1969	65,46*
1970	77,15*

*million Finnish markka

Lepo looks to export markets

The growth continued after a slight downturn until the recession of 1975, when Lepokaja was founded with the express hope of increasing exports to the East. This was followed by some years of zero

growth, and it took three small devaluations in the years 1977 and 1978 to boost.

Permanent exhibitions were opened in Stockholm and Oslo with Metsovaara specializing in furniture textiles, and the exports to Sweden and Norway started. There was a strong emphasis on exports. For example, in 1972 Lepo took part in exhibitions and furniture fairs in Lagos, Moscow and Kajaani. In the following year, a sales office was set up in Stockholm and a furniture shop in Jeddah!

The company started exports to Africa as well. Lepo made a contract for the furnishing of a theatre and 600 new apartments in Lagos, Nigeria. The deal was worth 7 million markka.

"Furniture factory sold to Nigeria," was the headline in the daily *Helsingin Sanomat* on November 5, 1976. The aim was to build a factory in Africa, and at first to ship furniture components from Finland to be assembled in the Nigerian factory. However, there was a coup d'état in Nigeria as the ship was still on the outward journey, and all the agreements made under the previous government regime were declared null and void. The furniture delivered by Lepo returned home after a long sea voyage!



122 | *Moderno* in Manhattan.

On November 4, 1968 the Finnish daily *Aamulehti* published an article titled:

Oldtimer and Moderno:

“An Oldtimer from the metropolis and a new chair from the little country of Finland.

The wide streets of this world city have opened up to this new Finnish export. Permanent sales exhibitions around the world strengthen our nation's reputation for design and quality. A tourist like me can feel practically at home in many grand hotels and restaurants since Finnish furniture is starting to be pop in both the west and the east. A chair from Lepokalusto's *Moderno* collection has found its way to the other side of the Atlantic, to the World Bank in Washington, the Sheraton Hotel in Puerto Rico, the Ukraina Hotel in Moscow and other public places. An understated constructiveness and sturdiness make the *Moderno* chairs ideally suited for facilities that require a sense of space and maybe even a hint of aristocracy.

The Finnish head for export has been refreshed in recent years. Paper and timber have been joined on sea voyages, most notably by design items. The Finnish high life and tasteful public spaces attract foreign buyers and the Finnish reticence with sales is a thing of the past. Lepokalusto, which began humbly with a five-strong work group in 1953, is now one of our great factories manufacturing furniture for public spaces.”



123 | FAO, Rome. A building designed by the architectural office of Alvar Aalto, and furnished by Lepokalusto. The interior designer for this location is Pirkko Söderman, who is the fourth designer to have graduated from the same class as Kukkapuro.

Exports to the West in the 90's

Lepo Product exported mainly to Sweden and Germany, but Finnish furniture manufacturers' exports westward had begun to tail off by the beginning of the 1980's. In 1993, Lepo made one last attempt to enter the US markets with some help from the Finnish Foreign Trade Association. The trade was still subsidised by the state. After the EEA (European Economic Area) Agreement's entry into force in 1994, financial support for foreign trade was given primarily to small- and medium-sized enterprises. In 1993, the costs for com-

panies amounted to 340 million markka, 110 million markka of which was used by the Foreign Trade Association. Companies were supported through regional trade centres, which also provided commercial secretaries and included units of the Regional Development Fund.

Six furniture manufacturers, including Lepo, became part of a mutual export network.

The companies in Finland formed a joint venture whose Californian subsidiary was

responsible for the actual exporting. This joint venture channelled the subsidies received by the network to the US. The export network's trade area was Los Angeles, which was believed to provide good opportunities for exporting furniture to the West Coast. The network had its own exhibition at the Pacific Design Center, a hub in the field of furniture manufacturing on the US West Coast.

This operational model proved to be an expensive solution and it did not lead to financial success. Clearly the West Coast deemed Nordic design too foreign. The local entrepreneur had operated exclusively as an importer of furniture for homes. Consequently the export network wound up its operations within a few years.

Trade with the East

Here's an excerpt from Aake Anttila's presentation at the Junior Chamber International seminar on trade with the Soviet Union in Kerava, on September 19, 1975. At this time, exports to the USSR made up 30 per cent of the value of Lepo's production. "The big problem we face today is the constantly high inflation rate, and the increased costs that come with it. We know the interest in our furniture in the Soviet Union is great, especially in the public sector, bearing in mind the demands of the 1980 summer Olympics.

On the other hand, we have a five-year contract just beginning in which products of the woodworking industry have an annual

budget of 10 million rubles. Finnish furniture manufacturers hope that the furniture quota could be raised because of the Olympics. A year ago total furniture imports to the Soviet Union was 1,200 million markka, of which 50 million markka was imported from Finland. This is just four per cent of the total imports. This means that that four per cent will be targeted towards the high-quality western-style furniture, no matter what. But if the price increase affecting this four per cent is too high, it's a much bigger issue for us than for the buyer. It's no big issue for them where they invest this sum."

Business with the Soviet Union was based on a so-called bilateral system. The countries made an agreement every five years on what they would buy and sell from and to each other. The prices and import/export quotas were determined and recorded in annual bilateral meetings. This system lasted until the 1980's when imports from the East comprised a fifth of Finland's business. In other countries the bilateral system had been finished a long time ago.

Finland bought mainly oil from the Soviet Union primarily in exchange for consumer goods. Any rise in oil prices correspondingly raised the cost of Finnish exports to the USSR, and in this way the Finnish furniture manufacturers profited from such oil price increases. And, if the Finnish markka was devalued by 30 per cent, and the export had been worth—for example—one hundred markka, the income was 130, because the rouble rate was that much higher. According to the bilateral agreement,



124 | The diploma signed by the President of the Duma, Ripkin

Finnish export products had to be 80 per cent domestic in origin. Since the furniture delivered by Lepo was mainly upholstered, the company used Finnish woollen fabric produced by mills such as Sellgren.

”In the 80’s, furniture was often exported to the so-called *nomenclatura* of the Soviet Union, for example to the spa hotels for the administrative elite in Sochi. Having conducted the trade we received a ‘claims notice’, which was actually an invitation to a spa holiday. We paid the flight tickets to Moscow ourselves, and continued our journey by government plane. At our destination we had free accommodation and meals either in the spa or in a private villa by the Black Sea.

Equally unusual was the fact that the reception lobby was on the top floor, the

tenth, and you got to your room by taking the lift down,” says CEO Pekka Köntti.

Suomen huonekaluviejät ry was established to promote the export of furniture, but it was shut down at the end of the 1980’s, as export to the West fell rapidly. Suomalainen huonekalu ry was established in 1993 to promote exports to the East and consisted of at most 68 associate companies. Medium-sized Finnish factories had ceased to operate and after the disappearance of the three large furniture manufacturers, only small furniture factories were left. Thus, exporting to the East became increasingly difficult. As a result of the dissolution of the Soviet Union, exports to the East practically came to a standstill at the end of the 1980’s.



125 | A fur auction house in Leningrad was furnished with *moderno*.

126 | Astoria Hotel's model room number 222 in Leningrad. Ahti Taskinen's hotel furniture series with *moderno* and *Reijo* chairs.



127 | Manhattan 1995

The furniture designed for the manager's office in the construction company owned by the president of the Duma. The designers are Kaarle Holmberg, Pasi Pänkäläinen and Hannu Selvenius.

**Trade with the
East in the 90's**

In the early years of Lepo's operation, 55 per cent of the company's turnover came from furniture for public spaces and Lattoflex beds delivered to the domestic market, an additional 30 per cent from Western exports which relied heavily on marine furniture, and the remaining 15 per cent from home furnishings targeted at the eastern market.

In 1996, the overvalued Russian rouble crashed. Consequently, exports decreased and the company's revenue fell by 30 per cent. After 1990, companies had to find their business associates in East Europe-

an countries by themselves. Lepo Product Oy's first large order after the collapse of the USSR was for the courtroom of the Moscow Duma. After elections in 1994, the Russian Duma moved to the city block of Gospla and Lepo delivered the same furniture for the Duma for the second time! For this Lepo was awarded a certificate of merit, signed by the President of the Duma. Later, Lepo delivered even more furniture for the Duma, for example for the lounge of the president of the Duma.

Trade was conducted with the post-Soviet countries, the Commonwealth of Independ-

ent States. In 1995 Lepo's CEO Pekka Köntti said: "After the Russian white house had burned down in 1993 we were asked if we could deliver 450 chairs for an auditorium in just one week. In the end the Russians settled for 200 chairs within a fortnight. The workforce was at full stretch—luckily other producers weren't in a position to offer work because of the depression". At that point Lepo's current total exports amounted to 75 per cent of the value of the company's production.

"Then began a slower period right before the presidential election. The year 1996 marked a major downturn but now orders started coming in again and business was also made in the South Ural region. We have delivered furniture to the Duma of the Republic of Dagestan (the neighbouring state of Chechnya). This deal also got us an order from a local cognac factory. It was quite calm in Dagestan when the furniture was taken there last spring. Now it is more restless in Chechnya and that can be seen in Dagestan and the deliveries are organised in convoys of two or more lorries, accompanied by security guards. All in all the Russian trade requires time and money. A lot of travelling needs to be done since the Russians expect to negotiate face to face with the manager," Pekka Köntti explains. (Säynäjärvi, Etelä-Suomen Sanomat, January 27, 1998)

The same year the furniture for a hotel owned by a Russian metal processing company, Ural Elektromed, was delivered.

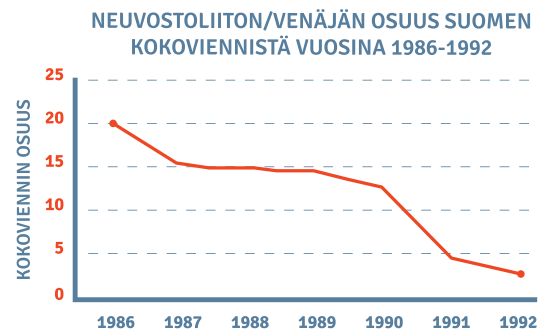
Access to the Ural's markets was gained by taking part in a joint exhibition of Finnish manufacturers arranged in the Ural region.

Production costs

When comparing the statistics, the unit costs of both Germany and Finland are equally high for 2010. The labour cost per hour in Finland is 33.80 euro, including all the indirect costs. The most costly is in Sweden at 43.80 euro, and the cheapest in Bulgaria, at only 2.90 euro. (*Helsingin Sanomat*, April 6, 2013.)

All products in Finland are approximately 20 per cent more expensive than in other countries in Europe.

Increasingly Finnish furniture manufacturers have moved their factories to countries with lower unit costs.



128 | The share of the export to the East expressed as a percentage of Finland's total exports Tapio Tolmunen, *Historia* magazine 4/301

Designers

The designers whose products are shown in this book are:

Oiva Parviainen, interior architect.
The first designer at Lepo.

Yrjö Kukkapuro, interior architect, a long-serving teacher at the University of Art and Design (Aalto University) where he also held the positions of professor and rector.

Reijo Ojanen, interior architect, taught at Tampere University of Technology.

Esko Pajamies, interior architect

Jussi Peippo, interior architect

Ahti Taskinen, interior architect, teacher at the University of Art and Design and professor at the University of Cincinnati, USA.

Kari Asikainen, interior architect, teacher and professor at the University of Art and Design.

Hannu Jyränen, interior architect

Pirkko Söderman, interior architect

Robert Tillberg, interior architect, Sweden

Njål Ejde, interior architect, Norway

Risto Halme, interior architect, teacher at the Lahti Institute of Design and Fine Arts.

Pentti Hakala, interior architect, teacher at the Lahti Institute of Design and Fine Arts and at the University of Art and Design.

Kaarle Holmberg, interior architect, part-time teacher at the Lahti Institute of Design and Fine Arts and at the University of Art and Design.

Antti Kotilainen, furniture designer

Heikki Ruoho, industrial designer, teacher at the Institute of Design and Fine Arts.

Elina Hakala, furniture designer

Marika Häkkinen, interior designer

Maiju Korpelainen, interior architect

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Scrapbooks

The main sources for this book have been the scrapbooks compiled by Aake Anttila, the founder of Lahden Lepokalusto Oy. These scrapbooks hold a vast number of photographs and cuttings from the first three decades of the company's existence. From a documentary perspective, it is unfortunate that most of the photographs and newspaper cuttings appear unattributed.

Photography

Studio photography of Lepokalusto furniture has been done by Otso Pietinen in the 1950's and 1960's, Mauno Viljakainen and Pekka Viljakainen in the 1970's, 1980's and 1990's, Jussi Tiainen in the 1990's and Teemu Töyrylä since the 1990's.

I have been unable to trace the photographers of certain of the pictures. However, most of the photographs were taken by Aake Anttila, who was an active and skilful photographer.

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