

SIDE GALLERY

ISAMU KENMOCHI



Three-seat sofa

From the Haco series
Manufactured by Tendo Mokko
Japan, 1967
Rosewood-veneered plywood, fabric

Measurements

184 × 79 × 66h cm
72.25 × 31 × 26h in

Provenance

Private collection, Tokyo

Literature

Japanese Modern: Retrospective Kenmochi Isamu, p. 194
Japanizu modan: Kenmochi Isamu to sono sekai, exh.
cat., Akita Senshu Museum of Art, 2005, p. 197
Japanese Modern. Retrospective Isamu Kenmochi, Asao
Sato & Hitoshi Mori, Tokyo, 2005, p. 102

Details

Stamped with manufacturer's label

Notes

Designed for the lobby of the Kyoto International Conference Center (1961), this model—nicknamed Hako ("box")—combines a soft, body-fitting cushion with a single-piece wooden frame. Praised for its comfort and proportions suited to the Japanese physique, it entered serial production in 1967, transitioning from a custom to a standard model.

Biography

Born in Tokyo, Japan, **Isamu Kenmochi** (1912–1971) was a pivotal figure in the development of modern Japanese design. He is renowned for his ability to blend traditional craftsmanship with the clean, functional lines of modernism, creating a design language that bridged Japan's rich cultural heritage and contemporary sensibilities.

After graduating from the Tokyo Fine Arts School (now Tokyo University of the Arts) in 1932, Kenmochi joined the Industrial Arts Research Institute, where he explored the integration of traditional Japanese materials and techniques into modern design. This formative experience shaped his philosophy of creating functional, accessible, and elegant designs rooted in everyday life.

In the postwar period, Kenmochi became a key advocate for the modernization of Japanese design. As a co-founder of the Japan Industrial Designers Association (JIDA) in 1952, he worked alongside luminaries like Sori Yanagi to elevate industrial design as a profession in Japan. His work during this era often reflected collaborations with international designers, most notably Charlotte Perriand, with whom he explored innovative uses of traditional materials such as rattan and wood.

One of Kenmochi's most iconic creations is the Rattan Chair (1952), produced by Yamakawa Rattan, which exemplifies his mastery of natural materials and his commitment to simplicity and comfort. His designs, often crafted from rattan, wood, and metal, embodied a balance of tradition and innovation that has become a hallmark of Japanese modernism.

Kenmochi's contributions extended beyond furniture; he designed interiors and products for major corporations, influencing both domestic and industrial aesthetics in Japan. His work remains highly regarded for its timeless appeal and enduring functionality. Isamu Kenmochi passed away in 1971, but his legacy continues to inspire designers worldwide, celebrated as a pioneer who harmonized Japan's past and future in his visionary creations.