

SIDE GALLERY

ISAMU KENMOCHI



Kabuto Chairs (Set of 4)

Manufactured by Tendo Mokko
Japan, c.1960s
Molded plywood, Steel

Measurements (each)

53 × 54 × 71h cm (Seat height: 44 - 46,5 cm)
20,9 × 21,3 × 28h in (Seat height: 17,3 - 18,3 in)

Provenance

Private collection, Japan

Literature

Japanese Modern : Isamu Kenmochi Retrospective', p.
191 e 98, Ed. Kokusho Kanko Kai, 2004
Japanese Design from 1945, Naomi Pollock, Editions de
la Martinière, 2020. Page 50
Tendo Mokko, Yanagi, pg. 110

Details

Designed by Isamu Kenmochi, a central figure in postwar Japanese design, the Kabuto chair takes its name from the traditional samurai helmet. The chair's sculpted plywood shell—evoking both armor and elegance—embodies Kenmochi's exploration of cultural identity through modern materials and techniques. Produced by Tendo Mokko, Japan's pioneering molded plywood manufacturer, the Kabuto represents the refined craftsmanship and technical innovation that characterized the firm's collaborations with leading Japanese designers during the 1960s.

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.