

SIDE GALLERY

RIKI WATANABE



Rattan Stool

Manufactured by Yamakawa Rattan
Japan, circa 1950
Rattan, bent rattan structure, woven rattan seat

Measurements

31 cm diameter × 52h cm
12,2 in diameter × 20,5h in

Provenance

Private collection, Japan

Literature

Riki Watanabe. *Innovating in Modern Living*, National Museum of Modern Art, Tokyo, 2006
Yamakawa rattan catalogue, 1960. Page 160

Notes

This rattan stool is an early design by Riki Watanabe, conceived around 1950 during the formative years of postwar Japanese modern design. The piece exemplifies Watanabe's deep interest in traditional materials and artisanal techniques, reinterpreted through a modern functional lens.

The stool features a compact circular seat with finely woven rattan cane, supported by three gently curved legs that converge at the center and extend outward to a circular base ring. The structural clarity and lightness of the design reflect Watanabe's belief in furniture as an extension of everyday life—objects that are honest, durable, and visually restrained.

While the manufacturer is not documented, the construction and material vocabulary are consistent with early Japanese rattan production of the period, closely associated with workshops specializing in bent rattan furniture. The visible hand-bound joints and subtle irregularities testify to its handcrafted origin.

Both sculptural and practical, this stool stands as an early example of Watanabe's contribution to establishing a distinctly Japanese modern design language—one rooted in craft, proportion, and material integrity rather than ornament.

Biography

Riki Watanabe (1911–2013) was a central figure in the development of modern Japanese design. Active from the prewar period through the late 20th century, he played a pivotal role in shaping Japan's postwar design identity, balancing international modernism with indigenous materials and techniques. A founding member of the Japan Industrial Designers' Association, Watanabe was deeply involved in design education and institutional development. His achievements were recognized with numerous awards, including the Milan Triennale Gold Medal, the Mainichi Design Award, and the Japanese Medal of Honor with Purple Ribbon.