

SIDE GALLERY

SABURO INUI



Coffee Table model "Zataku"
Manufactured by Tendo Mokko
Japan, 1960s
Laminated and bent rosewood plywood

Measurements
121 × 76 × 34h cm
47,7 × 29,9 × 13,5h in

Literature
Hiesinger, Kathryn B., and Mio Wakita-Elis. Japanese Design Since 1945: A Complete Sourcebook. Philadelphia Museum of Art, 1990.
Tendo Mokko Co., Ltd. Furniture Catalogue, Yamagata, c. 1960.
Japanese Design: A Survey Since 1950. The Japan Foundation, Tokyo, 1991.

About

This coffee table exemplifies the sophisticated synthesis of technology and craftsmanship that characterized Japanese modern design during the postwar period. Designed by Saburo Inui and manufactured by Tendo Mokko around 1960, the piece demonstrates the remarkable possibilities of laminated and bent plywood, a technique that had become central to the company's identity.

Its sculptural form is defined by gently curved surfaces and a remarkable sense of visual lightness. Rather than emphasizing mass, the design relies on the expressive qualities of molded plywood, allowing structure and material to become inseparable. The rich rosewood grain further enhances the elegance of the composition, revealing the warmth and refinement that distinguish the finest examples of Japanese furniture from this period.

Like many of the most successful designs produced by Tendo Mokko, the table embodies the ideals of postwar Japanese modernism: clarity, functionality, and harmony between object and space. Its understated presence and architectural qualities make it equally suited to domestic interiors and more formal environments.

Biography

Saburo Inui (b. 1920 – d. 1982) was a Japanese designer and architect whose work emerged during a transformative period in postwar Japan, marked by rapid modernization and a renewed search for national identity through design. Educated at the prestigious Tokyo University of the Arts, Inui was part of a generation of creatives who redefined Japanese aesthetics by blending traditional craft sensibilities with modern industrial materials.

Inui's most iconic design is the Ply Chair, originally conceived in 1959. While best known in its molded plywood version—still in production by Tendo Mokko—Inui also experimented with highly limited editions in acrylic. The rare transparent model, manufactured only for one year in 1970, is a striking example of the Japanese avant-garde approach to materials and transparency, aligning with global modernist trends while retaining a minimalist, organic sensibility. The clear shell allowed the chair's sculptural form and construction logic to remain visible, pushing the boundaries of functional art.

Inui was also influenced by the political and social shifts of the 1960s and 70s in Japan, a time when design was seen not only as aesthetic production but as a cultural statement. His work resonates with the goals of the Metabolist movement—a group of architects and designers who imagined modular, flexible urban systems—although Inui's designs were more introspective and focused on domestic scale. Still, he shared their vision of a future shaped by innovation, structure, and the integration of new technologies.