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EERO

S.83-91

THE PURE
CRYSTALLINE
COOL OF
SCANDINAVIA

ART
ARCHITECTURE
CHAIRS
AN AIRPORT
DESIGNERS
TEXTILES
GLASS
FOOD
HELSINKI
COPENHAGEN
STOCKHOLM

+ TADAO ANDO'S
ARMANI HEADQUARTERS

EXTRA* BRACELET DESIGNED BY LINA FALKESGAARD FOR GEORG JENSEN

S.84-91



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FROM THE EDITOR

SCANDINAVIA NOW – IT IS AN AMBITIOUS TASK TO ATTEMPT TO DEFINE A DESIGN PRINCIPLE. OUR FOCUS THIS ISSUE IS TO GATHER WHAT WE BELIEVE TO EXEMPLIFY THE STYLE AND CHARACTERISTICS OF A REGION THAT HAS INFLUENCED THE WORLD OF DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE ON MANY LEVELS FROM THE MID-20TH CENTURY TO TODAY.

ANOTHER INSPIRATION IS ARNE JACOBSEN, AN AWARD-WINNING ARCHITECT WHO EPITOMISES THE COOL REFINEMENT OF THE SCANDINAVIAN AESTHETIC. THIS YEAR MARKS THE CENTENARY OF HIS BIRTH.

ALSO WE LOOK AT THE STARK MAJESTY OF TADAO ANDO'S TEATRO ARMANI IN MILAN, A FITTING COMPANION IN AN ISSUE THAT IS AS DIVERSE AS IT IS COMPREHENSIVE.

ERIC MATTHEWS
EDITOR



THE FINNISHED PRODUCT

'BUBBLE', 'BALL', 'PONY', 'PASTIL', 'TOMATO' – EERO AARNIO'S FURNITURE IS ICONIC. IT SCREAMS FUTURISTIC, GROOVY, JAMES BOND, AND YET IT REMAINS AS FRESH AS THE DAY IT WAS CREATED.

TEXT BY LOUISE UPTON. PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID MATHESON.

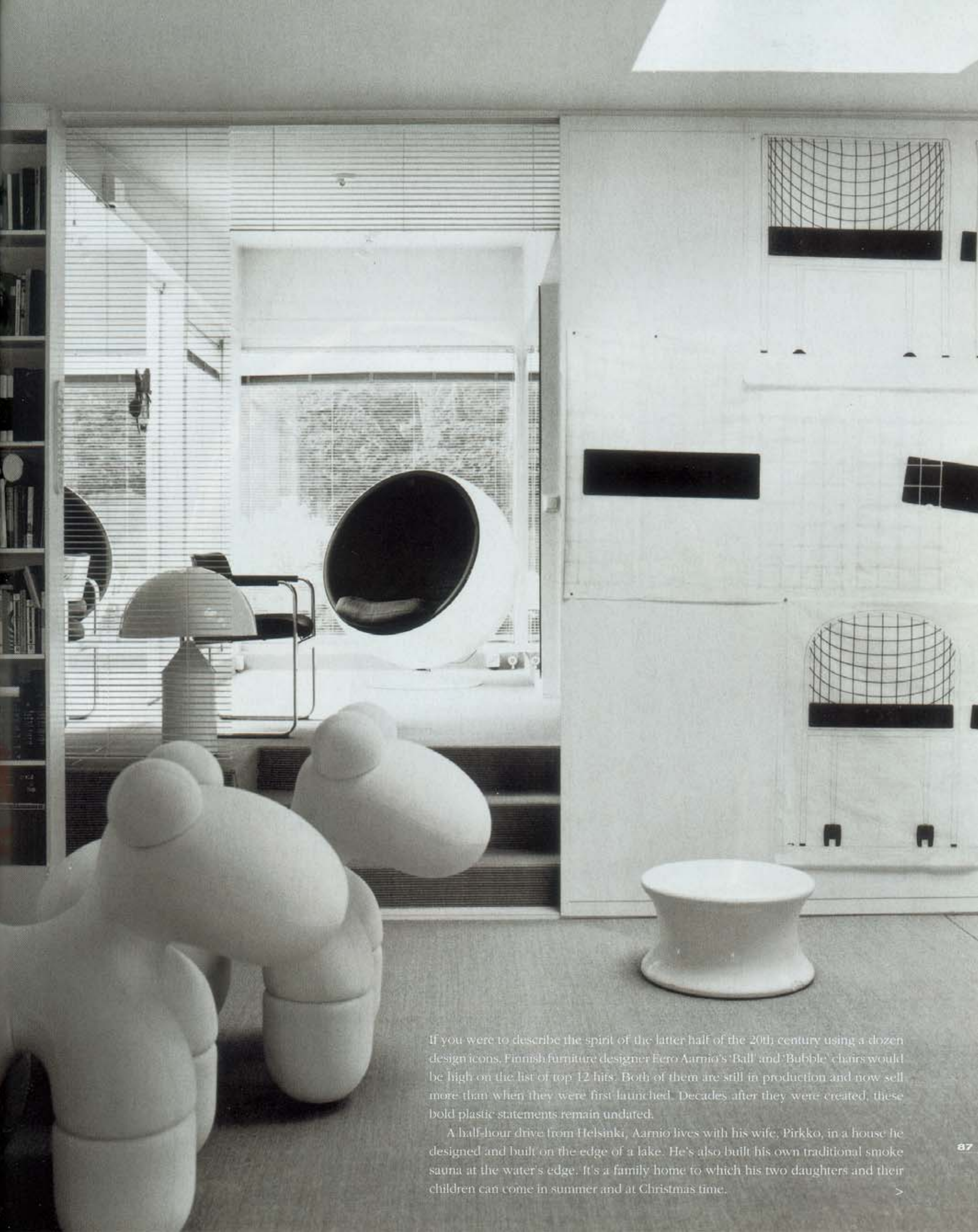
THIS PAGE EERO AARNIO'S 'SCREW' TABLE, 1991, PERCHED IN FRONT OF HIS HOME IN THE FINNISH COUNTRYSIDE.

OPPOSITE PAGE AARNIO'S 'TOMATO' CHAIR, 1971, WAS MEANT TO RESEMBLE ITS NAME. HERE, IT SITS IN FRONT OF THE TRADITIONAL SMOKE SAUNA AARNIO CONSTRUCTED BY THE LAKE.





THIS PAGE FORMULA CHAIR, 1998, SITTING UNDER AN ESTABLISHED OAK IN FRONT OF THE GLASS PORCH AREA, BRAVES THE ELEMENTS. **OPPOSITE PAGE** IN BACKGROUND, AN EARLY BALL CHAIR, 1963, HAS ITS OWN TELEPHONE IN FRONT OF THE WHITE SLIDING WALL, WHERE AARNIO PINS HIS SCALE DRAWINGS FOR HIS CORPORATE DESIGNS, SITS MUSHROOM STOOL, 1962, AND TWO PONY CHAIRS, 1973.



If you were to describe the spirit of the latter half of the 20th century using a dozen design icons, Finnish furniture designer Eero Aarnio's 'Ball' and 'Bubble' chairs would be high on the list of top 12 hits. Both of them are still in production and now sell more than when they were first launched. Decades after they were created, these bold plastic statements remain undated.

A half-hour drive from Helsinki, Aarnio lives with his wife, Pirkko, in a house he designed and built on the edge of a lake. He's also built his own traditional smoke sauna at the water's edge. It's a family home to which his two daughters and their children can come in summer and at Christmas time.

THIS PAGE ONE OF
THE FIRST 'BUBBLE'
CHAIRS, WITH
ORIGINAL SILVER
FABRIC CUSHIONING
FROM THE 1960s
OPPOSITE PAGE
EERO AARNIO,
SERIOUSLY FINNISH.



"The house began with a garage. I converted it into a self-contained place where my daughter, who lives in the US, and her two children and husband can come to stay.

"After all, houses are for people. Cars can stay outside."

Aarnio, who has designed furniture for 40 years on a freelance basis, also designed the house with his working life in mind. Entering through the winter garden-like porch, down into the living area, Aarnio's office area sits behind a large gliding wall of white which closes off the space from the rest of the house, leaving it with its own entrance to the bathroom. The sliding wall serves a dual purpose: Aarnio also pins on it his one-to-one scale drawings of the corporate furniture he's designing. For the past 20 years, Aarnio has been designing office furniture for Martella and EFT (European Furniture Group).

"Since 1962, I have worked as a freelance designer and all the time it is some sort of survival game. This is a small country and I am very successful, but the furniture needs are not great. This is not Germany or France or America. But it is why I stay busy: to live and because I enjoy working.

"I like the corporate work because it's very logical and practical and it's easy to do because there are producers. The contrast to this work are the designs I do for Adelta," says Aarnio of his funky chairs, stools and tables.

"That's the problem in Finland: when I have ideas I have to pay for the prototypes myself. I have more ideas than the capacity to produce them. That's why I need a big factory to sponsor me. Then there would be no worries about whether or not it makes good business sense – I'd just try it out and see what happens. Often from there great things come.

"And, if there's nothing in the brain," says Aarnio, tapping his forehead, "then go fishing. Catch salmon and smoke it. Have a sauna. This is why I love this house – because it is designed for my work and it works perfectly."

Aarnio has lived here now for 12 years. It's possibly the longest he's been in one spot, when he tells me that he has lived in 17 different houses since he married in 1956, all of them in Helsinki, except for four years when he lived right in the centre of Cologne.

Throughout the house and garden are prototypes and produced examples of his designs. They are playthings for his grandchildren and himself, used and loved pieces of household furniture often left outside to suffer the extremes of Finnish weather: ice, snow, cold, sun, heat, rain. Through all conditions they look as good as the day they were made.

"I remember once trying my 'Pastil' out on the lake to see if it would flip over. I went over twice, both times hitting my head on the



bottom and seeing stars. It was why I designed 'Formula', which is very safe and very stable."

'Formula' was also inspired by Mika Häkkinen's world-championship car racing and it is remarkably sleek to sit in. It takes you, as does Aarnio's newest work, 'The World's Best Rocking Chair' (chosen as the iconic image for Habitaré 2001, Finland's largest and most prestigious homeware show), on a ride.

Rakishly good-looking, a lover of good cars and driving, Aarnio, who is closer to 70 than even he is willing to admit, is living proof that the extremes of indulging in the sauna ritual – much heat followed by plunging into cold water, then more heat – might just be the elixir of youth. But his innovative approach to materials and continuing optimism in his design are also factors in his youthfulness. As a young man starting out, he says, he wanted to create something that said: Here is a new design and a new designer. His 1963 'Ball' chair was the answer. It is handmade in the same way that fibreglass boats are built: there is a mould for the outside and it is hand-laminated inside.

"It was 1962 when I started. I was freelance, with a wife, two little children, no work. I wanted to design furniture – a big, roomy easy chair." The prototype came from pondering and sketching, then deciding: >

THE PROTOTYPE OF THE 'BALL' CHAIR CAME FROM PONDERING AND SKETCHING, THEN DECIDING:



WHY NOT A COMPLETELY ROUND CHAIR?



Why not a completely round chair? Within this period, Aarnio met one of Finland's chief executives for the Coca-Cola company. Eager for sponsorship to produce the chair, Aarnio approached Coca-Cola with the chair painted in the brand's signature red and white. While impressed, the company could not see its way to producing the design.

Coincidentally, a large German furniture company, Asko, had come to see Aarnio's wooden furniture. Always open to an opportunity, Aarnio made sure the 'Ball' was in the room when the executives arrived. Fascinated by what they saw, they decided to take it to the Cologne Fair in 1965. It was a huge success, and was sold to 30 countries.

"It was so successful and it really made me. From there, I have been able to do so many other works, such as the 'Bubble' chair. I designed it in 1968, after the 'Ball' which I found very comfortable to sit in but very dark. I put a light inside the 'Ball', but I wanted a window and then I thought: Could I use a transparent material?

"At first it was on a base, but it wouldn't fit properly and it looked ugly. Then I had an idea: Why not hang it? The 'Bubble' is made from acrylic sheet and it is my smartest design. No mould is needed because it is made exactly as you would a soap bubble. You blow it up.

"You heat the material, it becomes very flexible and you can place the steel tubing in and press it into the acrylic. You place it on a table covered with material with a hole in the middle and you blow through the hole. It's a very simple process, but all the windows and doors of the factory must be closed because the material is so pliable when it is hot that any wind will cause it to reshape. You could easily end up with a parabola or something else."

For Aarnio, his work in plastic, fibreglass and acrylic is the perfect juxtaposition to the world of corporate furniture. The contrast to this world of big-drawing design is the work he does for Italian company Valli & Valli, designing furniture handles. The small, detailed drawings Valli & Valli require are faxed to the company. It is the complete contrast Aarnio loves.

Up and coming for Aarnio is a new table he says is scheduled to be shown at Cologne and, as with many things he does, will probably all come together in the last minute. He believes procrastination is an "international sickness".

Also due out this year is a portfolio of Aarnio's work. Edited by a Chinese architect who has been living in Finland for five years, the book is published by South China Press as a glossy 200-page English edition and will be followed by a Chinese version. It was, at the time we met, the project that was consuming Aarnio's thoughts and time. Collecting his drawings, sketches and photographs was an exciting prospect: "No-one has done a book before." □

THESE PAGES VARIOUS AARNIO-DESIGNED PIECES, INCLUDING THE 'COPACABANA' TABLE AND 'PONY' CHAIRS, FORM PART OF THE LIVING ROOM FURNITURE. TO THE LEFT IS THE KITCHEN AND EXIT TO THE VERANDA. TO THE RIGHT IS THE SUNKEN LIBRARY.