



PRESS RELEASE

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Eclectic history of plywood revealed in new V&A exhibition exploring material that made the modern world

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Plywood: Material of the Modern World

Sponsored by MADE.COM

Supported by the American Friends of the V&A

15 July – 12 November 2017

Porter Gallery

Admission free



Light, strong, affordable and versatile, plywood is the unlikely material behind an eclectic array of groundbreaking designs to be celebrated in a world-first exhibition at the V&A this summer. From the fastest and highest-flying aeroplane of WWII, the de Havilland Mosquito, to the downloadable self-assembly WikiHouse, more than 120 objects will be brought together in an exploration of how the often-overlooked product has helped create the modern world.

Fragments of layered board have been found in ancient Egyptian tombs, but it was the advent of mass production in the nineteenth century that saw plywood's adaptability and potential fully exploited. Used to construct everything from a tube to house an experimental elevated railway in 1867 New York to hatboxes, tea chests, surfboards and skateboards, plywood has been embraced by designers, architects and engineers; each successive generation finding ever-more innovative ways to shape, mould, cut and fix it.

Opening this July, Plywood explores the near-ubiquitous material's global impact and history from the 1850s to the present day. The exhibition brings together significant new research with new acquisitions and objects that have never before been on public display. It will take

visitors through plywood's many reputational transformations; from a cheap product that was often hidden or maligned for its inferiority to solid timber, to the material prized by mid-century modernists and by today's flourishing maker movement.

Coupling objects drawn from the V&A's world class furniture, design and architecture collections with significant loans from across the globe, highlights include early experiments in plywood, such as a 1908 book printed during Ernest Shackleton's Nimrod expedition to Antarctica and bound with plywood covers; celebrated pieces by modernist designers such as Alvar Aalto, Marcel Breuer, Grete Jalk, Robin Day and Charles and Ray Eames; and striking examples of transport design such as 1917 moulded canoe, a 1960s British racing car with plywood chassis, and some of the first ever surf and skate boards.

Interspersed throughout the displays are three 'process' moments that mark important milestones in the evolution of plywood manufacture: the invention of the rotary veneer cutter in the early 19th century; the advent of moulding techniques that inspired the ground-breaking forms of 1930s modernism; and plywood's recent dominance as a material for CNC-cutting and digital manufacture.

In the John Madejski Garden, a cluster of ice skating shelters designed by Patkau Architects will be on display throughout the exhibition. Visitors are invited to take a seat in the structures which are made by bending flexible plywood sheets and attaching them to a timber frame to create sculptural forms. The shelters were originally designed to sit on a frozen river in Winnipeg, Canada and the installation is supported by the American Friends of the V&A.

Christopher Wilk, exhibition co-curator and Keeper of Furniture, Textiles and Fashion at the V&A, said: "Plywood is such a common, everyday material that most people barely notice when it is used. One could say that it has been hidden in plain sight. Since Victorian times, it has been one of the most popular and versatile materials used in manufacturing, and by designers and architects. Today it is more popular than ever."

Ruth Wassermann, Head of Design at MADE.COM said: "Plywood as a material has hidden depths. Created to have more strength and reliability than solid wood, its development as a mouldable material has changed furniture design immeasurably through the 20th century, and with current moods around provenance and honesty of material, has now come into its own for its decorative properties. Plywood is integral to the soft wooden curves of Nordic design and features in furniture and home accessories from every design style at MADE.COM."

- ENDS -

Notes to Editors

- *Plywood* runs from 15 July – 12 November 2017 in the Porter Gallery. Admission is FREE
- The exhibition is co-curated by the V&A's Christopher Wilk and Elizabeth Bisley. It is accompanied by a new publication authored by Wilk, co-published by the V&A with Thames & Hudson, as the first in a series on the history of materials. Priced £29.95
- Exhibition interior supplied by James Latham
- The exhibition builds upon the V&A's industrial design heritage dating back to 1851 and the Great Exhibition
- Image credit: Patkau Architects, Ice skating shelters, Winnipeg, 2012 © Patkau Architects

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MADE.COM:

MADE.COM believe that great design is for everyone. It surprises, tells a story and makes the everyday a little less ordinary. At MADE we design for how people live today.

MADE.COM was set up in reaction to the standard ways of thinking, living and buying. We're restless in our mission, constantly questioning traditional methods and looking for better ways to use technology and streamline to bring high-end design to people at affordable prices.

Ning Li first came up with the idea of MADE.COM when trying to kit out his own flat in Paris. Frustrated by the lack of inexpensive good quality furniture, he felt there had to be an alternative. United by their appreciation of good design, the team set about re-defining the process. The concept was obvious: simplify things, work directly with the makers and bring high-end lifestyle design to everyone, everywhere.

American Friends of the V&A:

The American Friends of the V&A (AFV&A) is delighted to support Plywood, the first authoritative history of a material that has shaped global histories of design and manufacture, from the 1850s to today. The AFV&A is an independent charitable organisation that works to strengthen the V&A's international presence and encourage the American public to engage with this outstanding museum.