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The great freedom

TRIO is turning 50. On the angles and antics of a classic that has remained young at heart. A reflection by Oliver Herwig.

In the early seventies, great freedom also meant a rejection of hard backrests and any form of straight sitting. Lounging, slouching and hanging out were the order of the day. In the middle and underneath: reclining landscapes made of foam on which guests cut a good figure and family and friends could snuggle up.

"Maximum mobility," Karl Odermatt still enthuses today when he talks about TRIO. Just "move parts around and slide them away, be mobile in your own home." In 1964, he founded team form ag in Hinwil, Switzerland, with Franz Hero and has worked for large companies ever since. TRIO was their own idea, a need for nonchalance, perfectly capturing the zeitgeist of the early seventies: Three elements – note the divine trinity: seat, backrest and corner backrest – allowed multiple possibilities to tailor TRIO exactly to the interior desires of the time.

The shape: straightforward and clear. With tongue in cheek, one could say that the pleasant Swiss unobtrusiveness contrasted very well with the expressive double seams that separated the individual parts from each other. And of course immediately reconnected them. Because changeability is TRIO's hallmark. Remove the corner backrest to reveal a recamier. If you also remove the backrests, you get a veritable sofa bed.

Of course he has frequently slept on TRIO, laughs Karl Odermatt. After all, they had also given the piece of furniture a comfortable slatted frame – and not just for late nights in the office. Personally, he just felt it was time for new means of expression for seating furniture. The modular design of TRIO was a direct consequence. Here, the result was not a rigid high-backed chair, but a flexible seating landscape with a connection to family and friends.

Cosy classic

TRIO is now 50 years old and – quite frankly – it doesn't look its age. The clear form is still captivating, it has a natural presence in the room that makes volumes and proportions appear approachable, as if Franz Hero and Karl Odermatt had sawn out a piece of architectural brutalism with a concrete saw and wrapped it in a cosy cloak. TRIO connects worlds that were otherwise

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more separated. Therefore, paradoxes such as its block-like flexibility do it justice in a special way. Or modest but self-confident. Or cushions instead of mechanics.

The 1973 catalogue already plays with these linked opposites and speaks of amazingly new ideas that nevertheless preserve successful COR principles: "The back and armrest mobility offers a still unaccustomed freedom of movement. At the top, the seating landscape changes as it pleases and as it is needed, while at the bottom everything remains as it is." Over the years the language becomes more and more pointed, until in 1976 it says: "What makes the real Trio so distinctive is one of the most original and useful ideas in modern upholstered furniture design: the loose back and armrests!" In the following year came the jubilant exclamation: "Living in a Trio landscape like this is delightfully laid-back." Perhaps it is this unheard-of casualness that has given the 1972 design such a long life. In any case, 50 years have had no detrimental effect on its clear proportions and "soft-edged fluffy seams".

How does Karl Odermatt himself define a classic? It has a logical form and "nothing more can be omitted", says the Swiss designer. Is this Michelangelo's bon mot shining through, whereby his figures were already present in the rough stone, so the sculptor only had to chip off everything that was superfluous? Be that as it may. TRIO is simply too congenial for a totally rational design. This is probably due to the mischievous idea of equipping the backrest with a ski skin on its underside, which increases friction and prevents it from slipping away on the high-pile fabric. Immediately, the design becomes approachable, also because one imagines the Swiss themselves on the ski slope, while their design intelligence undertakes a few extra runs.

Over the course of time ...

TRIO has remained true to itself. Admittedly, it has got a bit bigger in the meantime because people have also got bigger, says Leo Lübke. But everything about its refreshing presence is still there. This presence can be felt and succumbed to, indulged in and dreamed of. The classic is alive.

Abridged version

50 years of TRIO. For its creators, the Swiss designers Franz Hero and Karl Odermatt at team form ag, the modular seating furniture was above all one thing: a piece of freedom in one's own home. From only three basic elements – hence the name TRIO – i.e. seat, back and corner sections, new constellations can be created again and again, ideal for changing homes and lifestyle preferences. The deliberately clear exterior – straight edges, block-like effect – contrasts wonderfully with the striking double seams of the elements and the fluffy fabric. The highlight: a ski skin on the underside of the backrests fixes them in place without any major mechanics. In this way, you can

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create lounging-sleeping-reclining landscapes in the twinkling of an eye. This unheard-of nonchalance still continues to inspire the modern classic even after half a century.

PS A word about so-called timelessness

Timelessness is an overused attribute in design reporting. Frequently, it is even actually incorrect. What is timeless apart from platitudes like change? Aren't even classics products of their time and advanced expressions of specific fashions, materials and ideas? This is precisely the reason for the unheard-of novelty of the design, which is reflected in "high recognition value" (Wikipedia criterion) and tangible cultural influence (Wikipedia criterion). All of the above all offered by TRIO, a very special combination of high quality, innovation and recognisability.