

The Eames Shell Chairs

Design: Charles & Ray Eames, 1950

The Fiberglass and Plastic Chairs by Charles and Ray Eames are regarded as some of the most important furniture designs of the twentieth century. Together they go under the name Eames Shell Chairs. Over the course of the chair's long production history, various details have been constantly improved and adapted to changing needs – whether heights, materials or colours. Following an intensive analysis of archival holdings and historical documents relating to the original colours, Vitra is now presenting a palette of new shell colours.

The 2019 colour update creates a coordinated palette for the Fiberglass Chairs and Plastic Chairs, while highlighting the distinctive properties of each material. Available in vibrant and more subtle colours, the chairs can be easily mixed and matched –and together with the newly revised upholstery colours and a wide selection of bases, a total of more than 100,000 configurations are possible.

For years Charles and Ray Eames explored the idea of a one-piece shell moulded to fit the contours of the human body. In 1950 they finally succeeded. The design was a ground-breaking innovation and established a new furniture typology: the multifunctional chair combining a seat shell with variable bases. It quickly became ubiquitous in homes, offices and public spaces, inspiring future generations. While the variants, materials or colours of the Eames Shell Chairs have been adapted over the years in collaboration with the Eames Office, the design concept has remained relevant for seven decades.

Timeline

1950

The Fiberglass Armchair (A-shell) is launched on the market, quickly followed by the Fiberglass Side Chair (S-shell). First available in the versions LAR, RAR, SAX and LAX, the chairs are initially offered with shells in three colours specially developed by the Eameses: greige, elephant-hide grey and parchment. Later the colour palette is expanded to include sea foam green, lemon yellow and red, along with a choice of several more bases: DAR, DSR, DAX, DSX, DAW and DSW.

The Eames Fiberglass Chairs are the first mass-produced chairs to successfully combine the seat and back in a single three-dimensionally moulded shell. Before their creation in 1950, most chairs consisted of two separate seat and back components.

1951

The Eames Wire Chair is introduced, recreating the shape of the Fiberglass Side Chair in a different material.

The S-shell becomes available with upholstery.

1952

An upholstered version of the A-shell is marketed.

1954

Eames Stadium Seating is developed as a prototype.

1955

The Eames Stacking Side Chair (DSS) is launched.

Introduction of the Eames Pivoting Armchair and Pivoting Side Chair on a contract (cast aluminium) base.

1960

The following shell colours are introduced to the market: navy blue, seal brown, raw umber, ochre light, olive green dark and red orange. Over the next years, bolder colours are added to the collection.

Charles and Ray Eames were the first designers to create fibreglass with integral colours. The Eameses spent countless hours developing the dyes and making slight adjustments until the desired hue was finally achieved.

1961

For New York's La Fonda del Sol restaurant designed by Alexander Girard, Charles and Ray Eames modify the shape of the shells and create the new La Fonda base.

1963

Launch of the Eames Tandem Shell Seating, with fibreglass shells mounted on a T-beam.

The Eames Fiberglass Chairs are the first chairs in history to be designed for so many different applications. The chairs can be used in almost any setting, whether in homes, offices or public spaces. Over the years, the product line includes task chairs, dining chairs, stadium chairs, waiting room chairs, armchairs, rocking chairs, auditorium chairs, stacking chairs, restaurant chairs, chairs with and without upholstery – and the shells are offered in a myriad of colours.

1970

Charles and Ray Eames produce the film: *The Fiberglass Chairs: Something of How They Get the Way They Are*.

1990

Vitra launches production of La Chaise, a reclining piece designed by Charles and Ray Eames at the same time as the Fiberglass Chairs in the late 1940s.

1993

Vitra discontinues production of the fibreglass shells for reasons of occupational safety and ecology.

1998

In close collaboration with the Eames Office, the Eames Shell Chairs are reintroduced as the Eames Plastic Chairs with shells made of polypropylene, a thermoplastic polymer that satisfies technical demands in regard to shape, strength and resilience. The substitution of polypropylene for fibreglass allows more affordable production techniques.

2018

Thanks to a new high-tech production process, Vitra reintroduces the Eames Fiberglass Chairs in close cooperation with Eames Demetrios, grandson of Charles and Ray Eames and Director of the Eames Office. The new colour selection is based on the original hues designed by the Eameses in the early 1950s. Demetrios and Vitra research the vintage colours of the Eames fibreglass shells in the holdings of the Vitra Design Museum.

2019

Vitra reissues the Eames LAR, a comfortable lounge version of the fibreglass armchair designed by Charles and Ray Eames in 1950.

Vitra expands its repair and service options, making it possible to exchange the shells and bases of the Fiberglass and Plastic Chairs. It also introduces a Take-Back program to ensure that the chairs will be properly recycled at the end of their product life.

Vitra creates a new link between the Fiberglass Chairs and the Plastic Chairs with a colour update. In an extensive process of research and analysis, the historical Eames colours inspire a harmonious palette that emphasises the affinity of the two chair groups. With the relaunch of the Eames Fiberglass Chair and continuing production of the Eames Plastic Chair, the choice of shells, upholsteries, bases and colours allows for more than 100,000 possible combinations.

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