

A Fine Finnish

Aito, the newest brand from the founders of Hem and One Nordic, takes a new approach to furniture production

By Olivia Martin

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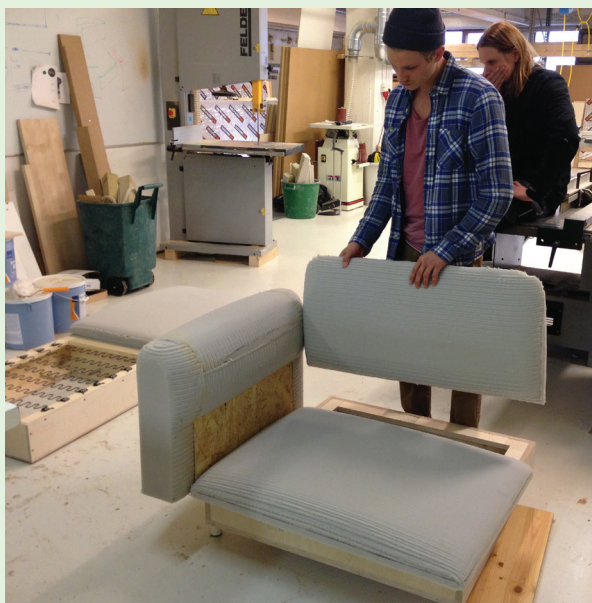


Left

Finnish designer Aarnio Eero inspects one of his iconic Ball Chairs. Aito bought the rights to several classic Finnish pieces for reproduction. Aito's teams are capable of producing prototypes and small runs in house (bottom).

Above

After Stefan Mahlberg's previous company Hem was sold, Aito took over its offices. Here, several pieces of Hem's best-known furniture, like the Pocket Armchair and Alle Table are on display.



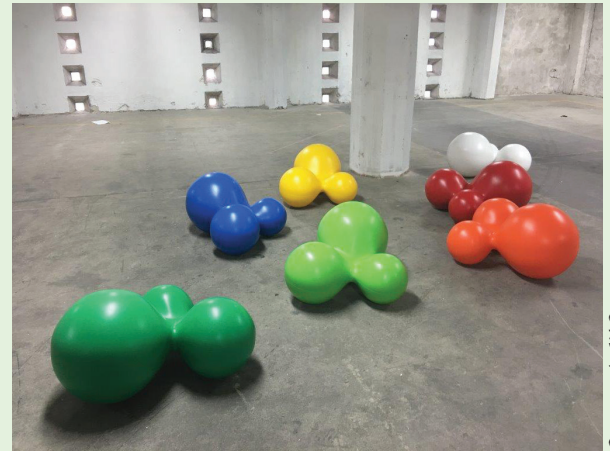
"I've worked with many designers over the years and I used to try to give my own input and opinions," said design entrepreneur Stefan Mahlberg, of his latest venture, Aito. "Gradually I learned that it's useless, because who am I to say what the consumer might want?"

Aito, the latest venture from Mahlberg and Cezary Górczyński, two of the minds behind Scandinavian design giants Flexhouse, Hem, and One Nordic, is an attempt to push the furniture industry forward by taking a step back. Aito, a Finnish word that appropriately translates to "genuine," is a multifaceted brand that revolves around creating the highest quality product at the best value by leveraging the network of manufacturers and producers the team built through its previous companies.

On one level, independent designers and brands can work with Aito to produce virtually any furniture for any project. So, if a designer needs to furnish a hotel, retail store, or restaurant, he or she can utilize Aito to source the best materials and reliable factories to produce the necessary chairs, tables, or shelves—eliminating weeks of legwork and mitigating risk. That

same furniture could then be for sale through Aito. “Projects are wasted opportunities to build interesting products and then make sure they are available,” explained Mahlberg. Already, Tom Dixon, Harri Koskinen, and Ateljé Sotamaa are confirmed to be working with Aito, as well as many others yet to be disclosed.

What makes Aito radically different from conventional high-design brands is the level to which it is focused on its clients. “The consumer will determine whether or not the product is interesting,” said Mahlberg. So while the company’s connections and its designers’ portfolios are universally impressive, “Many of these



Courtesy Ateljé Sotamaa



Courtesy Aito

Profile



Kimmo Syväri

Previous page

Bubbles, colorful molded plastic seats designed by Kivi and Tuuli Sotamaa of Ateljé Sotamaa, were created for Fazer, a Finnish sweets company, and are meant to resemble hard candies (top). A set of Aarnio's Bubble Chairs hang in the Aito office (bottom).

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Ateljé Sotamaa also worked with Aito to create an entire set of furniture for Finnjävel, a modern restaurant in Helsinki (above). A stack of solid wood dining chairs by Harri Koskinen (right).



Courtesy Aito

things have no relation to each other except that people want an authentic, well-made product—they are night and day in terms of design,” Mahlberg said. He went on to explain that while brands who represent Scandinavian design, like HAY, Muuto, and Hem, have “well-curated, nice collections, we also need a broader take on the aesthetic.”

On another level, Aito is working within Flexhouse and its in-house design teams to produce its own projects. Conveniently, Aito was able to move into Hem’s old Helsinki office-workshop after Hem was sold this past February. The industrial space already had many of the components that Aito needed: A paint shop, woodworking

and metal working machinery, as well as CNC-milling, vacuum pressing, and upholstering capabilities.

With this setup, Aito has everything it needs to create prototypes, one-off furniture, and even run small series. Having purchased the rights to classic Finnish designers’ work, Aito will also use its new home to produce and sell legacy remakes of pieces by Ilmari Tapiovaara and Eero Aarnio. The plan, explained Mahlberg, is to reintroduce older models that he and his team feel will resonate with a broad audience.

The company will fully launch spring 2017, but a showroom is opening in Toronto this fall and furniture will begin to be sold at the end of this year.



Courtesy Aito



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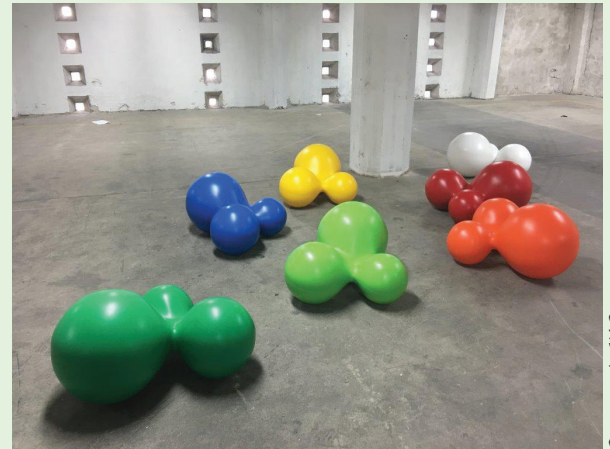
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