Chair - BA3 chair

Object: Chair

Place of origin: London (designed)
London (made)

Date: 1946-1948 (manufactured)
1945 (designed)

Artist/Maker: Race, Ernest, born 1913 - died 1964 (designer)
Race Furniture Ltd (manufacturer)

Materials and Techniques: Cast aluminium, plywood, upholstery and dyes

Museum number: W.3-2010

Gallery location: On display in Values of Design, Design Society, Shekou, China

Public access description
The BA 3 is one of the earliest chairs designed by the prominent post-war designer Ernest Race, who is most known for designing the Antelope and Springbok chairs for the 1951 Festival of Britain. The BA 3 was unveiled at the 1946 V&A 'Britain Can Make It' exhibition that was intended to boost the public's post-war morale. The BA 3 chair was part of a range of innovative furniture made from cast aluminium, one of the few materials freely available at a time when rationing was still in place and more traditional materials were in short supply.

Descriptive line
Chair, cast aluminium, plywood, upholstery and dyes, 'BA-3', designed by Ernest Race, made in London, 1946-1948.

Physical description
Upholstered dining chair with die-cast aluminium frame. Die-casting has been used for five components of the chair: the seat frame and four legs, the latter with a tapered T profile and section. The top surfaces of the front legs have a triangular section, with three screw holes to affix the seat. The rear legs are identical in shape to the front, but extend upwards to become the two seat back uprights. Level with the top of the front legs, where the distance between the rear legs is narrowest, are two triangular-shaped horizontal protrusions to join the back legs to the chair. Four studs riveted towards the top of each back leg affix the leg to the backrest. The alloy backrest plate has a concave curve, with each side lightly tapered downwards. The backrest is upholstered in green duck cotton with a rubber backing, and the same material is used to upholster the seat, whose padding is made from rubberised hair. The seat cushion is affixed to a D-shaped aluminium rimmed frame, the flat side at the front of the chair, which has two diagonals in a cross formation. The seat is affixed to frame with one screw in each corner; three of these are original, the front right screw a temporary V&A replacement to prevent further movement upwards by the seat.

Dimensions
Height: 77.5 cm, Width: 44 cm, Depth: 49.5 cm

Museum number
W.3-2010

Object history note
Ernest Race designed the BA 3 dining chair as part of a range of cast aluminium furniture in 1946 for Race Furniture Ltd, the company he had set up that year with the engineer J. W. Noel Jordan. The chair consists of five interchangeable cast and hand-polished aluminium components that could be easily dismantled and reassembled for transport and assembly. Race used aluminium for the chair's structure as there were no restrictions on its use: aluminium had been used for wartime aircraft manufacture and Race's design was based on using this resmelting alloy. Usage of wood was restricted under the government Utility Scheme that had been set up in 1942. The upholstery is similarly a result of wartime restrictions. This version is upholstered in green duck cotton and was also available in blue or brown. All three colours conform to the conditions of immediate post-war manufacture; these dye colours were not rationed, but rather were in surplus from their use in the manufacture of military uniforms. Restrictions on colours for upholstery dyes would not be eased until 1948.

In 1946 Race showed the prototypes to the Council of Industrial Design, who approved the chair's inclusion in the V&A exhibition 'Britain Can Make It' that year, where it was shown as part of his range of aluminium furniture. The versions on display at 'Britain Can Make It' were made from sand-cast aluminium, but this would soon be replaced by the die-casting process that was used for this chair in the V&A collection. This change was due to one of the visitors to the exhibition, one E.C. Lewin, the managing director of a foundry in Kettering, who suggested that he would be able to die-cast the aluminium - a technique that up to then had been used for making incendiary bomb casings. Die-casting provided a more accurate manufacturing process that necessitated less material and resulted in stronger, but more slender, legs. That year this modified manufacturing process was put into place when the company received its first major contract, to supply 1,500 BA 3 chairs for troop ships including the 'Navassa' and 'Oxfordshire' that were bringing home demobilised servicemen.

The chair is available with arms (BA 3A) and from 1947, following increasing availability of the material, in wood (BA 2). From 1948, the chairs were generally manufactured with wooden legs. The chair continued to be manufactured into the 1960s.

Historical significance: This is an early example of the BA 3 chair, made by Race Furniture Ltd in 1946 and designed by its co-founder Ernest
Race, one of Britain's leading designers of the immediate post-war period. The material, manufacture process and colour scheme are all the result of wartime processes or post-war restrictions, and the chair was recognised at the time as highly innovative in its use of sand-cast aluminium. The BA 3 chair was highly praised on its unveiling at the 1946 V&A exhibition 'Britain Can Make It', where it was exhibited as part of a range of cast-aluminium furniture designed by Race, and in 1954 was awarded the Gold Medal on its appearance at the X Triennale di Milano.

**Historical context note**

Ernest Race studied interior design at the Bartlett School of Architecture in the 1930s, and then worked as a draughtsman at the lighting firm Troughton & Young, whose Modernist architecture commissions led him to meet architects such as Walter Gropius and the founder of Isokon, Jack Pritchard. On his return to London following four months in India in 1937, Race opened a shop on Knightsbridge's Motcomb street selling textiles and carpets and furniture to clients including Gropius. At the end of the war, which Race had spent with the auxiliary fire service, he responded to an advert in The Times placed by the engineer J.W. Noel Jordan to collaborate in the design of Utility furniture. In 1946 they set up Race Furniture, based in Clapham, South London.

**URL**

http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O1160024/ba3-chair-chair-race-ernest/