

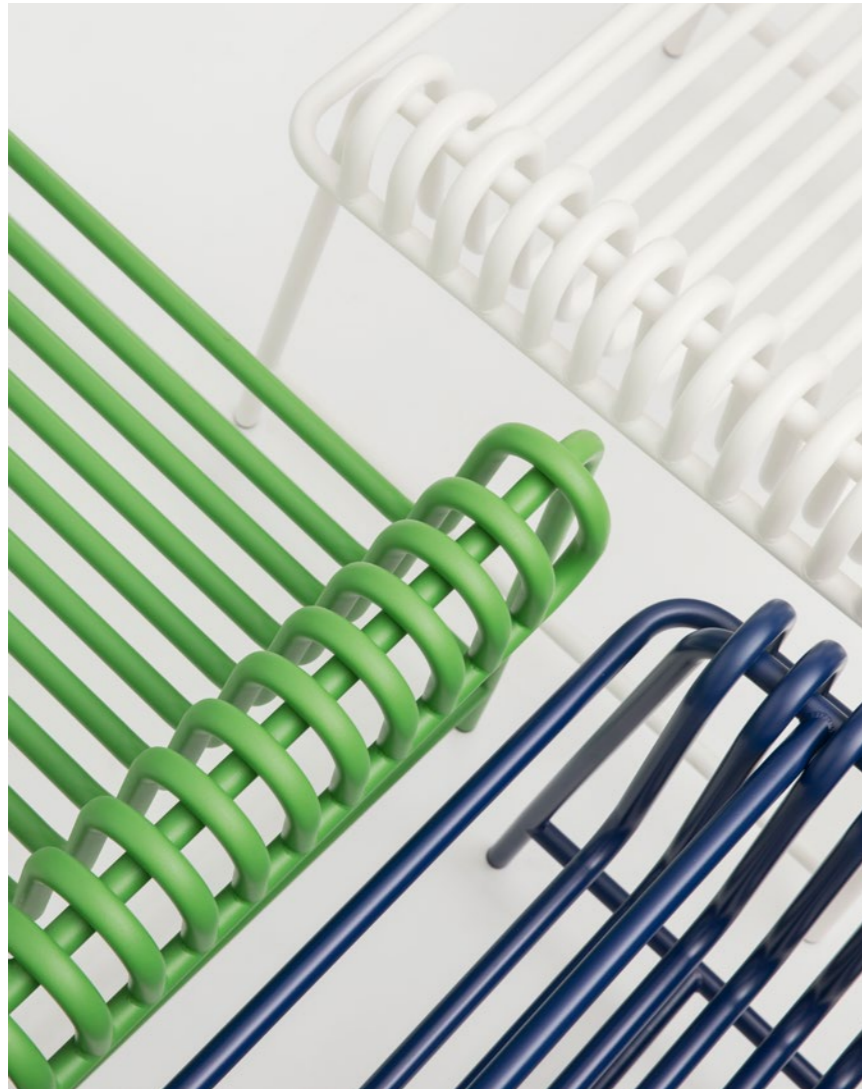
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Built to last

From a young studio founded at university, Blockbau has grown into one of the most exciting emerging design brands in Germany – and co-founder Kevin Rack has big plans for its future



↓ In green, white or blue powder-coated steel, the 22.24 Chair is a harmony of form and function



→ A foam cushion covered in a choice of six colours of Kvadrat's Vidar fabric

→ Intricate yet minimal, the 22.24 Chair was one of the first Blockbau designs

Most university students spend their final year occupied with exams and thoughts of graduate positions. Kevin Rack and Johann Kuhn, however, had already founded their own design studio. The pair spent 2018, their final year of architecture studies at the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology in Germany, developing the collection that would become the foundation for Blockbau, a furniture brand with ambitious plans to take on the international market.

Rack and Kuhn made good use of the student workshops and support of university teaching staff to develop their first pieces – the 80/100 Sideboard and 22.24 Chair are designs united not through their visual language but by the new perspective that they offered on established archetypes. The sideboard features fluted polycarbonate storage on top of a timber frame and can be used as a semi-transparent room divider; the armchair is crafted from bent steel tubes that embrace the body and challenge our conventional notions of comfort.

"Both designs have a very strong, unique idea with a visual appearance that people can connect with," says Rack of Blockbau's first pieces. "We wanted to have a strong statement from the beginning and embrace fresh ideas."

Kuhn has since moved on to different ☺



Photography: Michelle Mantel © Blockbau



↓ Radius tables, available in three sizes, have a concave triangular base that allows them to nestle

↓ Made of blocks put together like a puzzle, the H.12.1 range is a whimsical take on self-assembly

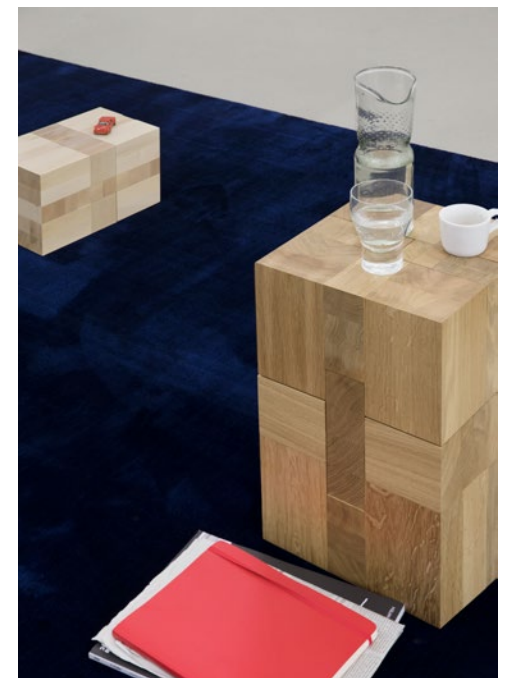


pursuits, and Rack has been at the helm of Blockbau since 2020. Today he leads a small team of four in the city of Mannheim in south-west Germany, and has built relationships with some of the region's best production facilities. By working with established partners, the team is able to focus entirely on design and distribution.

It's these types of relationships and considerations beyond the design of the product – from production processes and the market to social and environmental responsibility – that fascinate Rack, and it's what attracted him to furniture design in the first place. "Personally, I think you achieve the best results if you have the ability to address all these topics, as well as the actual product," he explains.

These relationships, however, didn't always come easily to the young company – and establishing production was one of the most difficult challenges Blockbau faced as an emerging brand. "We had to develop strong personal connections with the right people to get a great outcome," says Rack. "Germany has an extensive design history and there is a high level of expertise. Despite this positive framework, there are relatively few younger companies. So, if you are a young design brand in Germany, a lot of people don't get what you're doing initially."

Blockbau remains dedicated to doing things ☺



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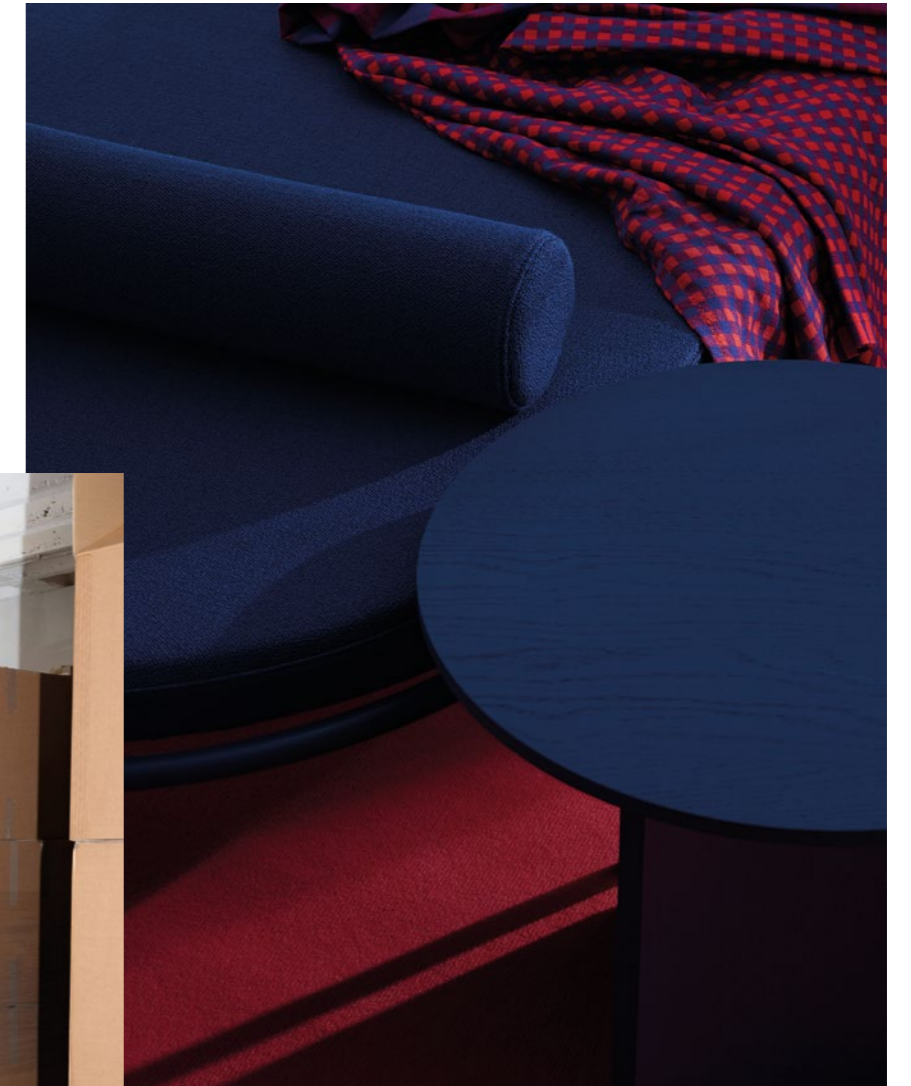
differently and challenging the status quo. Like the very first products, the collection is defined not by a unifying aesthetic approach but more by a conceptual ideal that prioritises fresh, playful identities and a point of difference in every product. "There has to be something that is instantly recognisable and can be understood widely," says Rack.

Take, for example, the H.12.1 series, which is an intriguing combination of puzzle and stool or side table. Comprising 12 individual pieces milled from solid timber, the construction celebrates the relationship between user and object by transforming the often-maligned process of putting together a piece of furniture into a game.

More recently, a small outdoor cafe table has joined the 32-chair range, and there are several long-term projects planned for launch over the ☺

← Customised with upholstery, the 32 Armchair has a chameleon-like ability to change its identity

↓ With a choice of colours and sizes, the Radius table fits into a variety of décors seamlessly



← Rack perches on a 32 Bar Chair and 32 Stool, which come in indoor or outdoor options

↓ Paired with a 32 Café Table, the 32 Chairs make versatile outdoor seating

↓ A responsible approach to materials and resources are a hallmark of Blockbau's approach



next two years. While the first products were designed by Rack and Kuhn, the majority of the current collection began life as an idea from Rack that was developed by the Blockbau team. Going forward, the plan is to shift towards more collaborations with young designers. "It's very important for our future," says Rack.

The brand's first product developed with another designer is the Radius series of side tables by Johannes Lorz. Available in three sizes, the lightweight timber tables can be nestled together in different arrangements to create space-filling installations. The collaboration came about after Rack saw an early prototype of the table exhibited during Milan Furniture Fair and was immediately taken with the simple yet playful concept. He approached the young designer, and they quickly began development with Blockbau's production partners.

The kind of timeless quality that the Radius tables evoke is essential to the future of Blockbau – and is intrinsically linked with the brand's ethos. "We have a responsibility as designers as we use resources to create products for the market," explains Rack. "The most powerful tool we have is to increase the longevity of the products we produce. You have to put every effort into the small details." ▣



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