



The Seleri collection by Mentsen

IMAGE Matevž Paternoster

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Seleri by Mentsen for Zilio A&C

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"It's filling in the missing piece of a contract-focused product that I thought was needed." Product designer Yasuyuki Sakurai is speaking about the Italian design brand Zilio A&C, for which he and communication designer Risa Sano have launched the *Seleri* seating range. But he might equally be referring to his own studio Mentsen, which he co-founded with Sano in 2011.

Mentsen is London-based and in its short lifespan has developed a portfolio taking in exhibition and book design, branding and catalogue design. *Celeri* however - presented this week at Milan's Salone del Mobile - is the studio's first piece of production furniture. A range of oak café seating, the collection is understated yet confident, steeped in Britain's design history.

"*Seleri* doesn't have too strong a character," says Sakurai. "It's distinctive, but it doesn't fight for attention and it blends in to environments. Chairs should be like good alphabets: when they're laid down, they should disappear into the page, while still impacting how you view the whole. We didn't want something that screamed for attention."

The chair and two stools that form the collection are compact with a small footprint. The seating's form, Sano explains, was inspired by the austere furniture designs developed in Britain during the Second World War

"We were in London looking at café chairs and noticed that a lot of them have very similar chairs that have been there since the wartime," says Sano. "Those types of chairs have character if you look at them individually, but when they're in situ in a cafe together they seem anonymous. That's the sort of chair we wanted to create."

Of particular influence was the work of the Utility Furniture Advisory Committee, an organisation in existence between 1942 and 1952 in which designers such as Gordon Russell and Edwin Clinch produced a number of state approved furniture designs, all of which were austere, minimal and durable enough to fit with the scarcity of materials created by the War.

"We were very interested in that philosophy of being efficient and using the resources that were available," says Sakurai. "We thought it might be appropriate to do something like that, but in a more contemporary form." The influence of Russell and Clinch on *Seleri* is clear from the unadorned nature of the design and the nostalgic stretchers that connect the chairs' legs for strength.

Seleri however is more delicate than Russell and Clinch's work. Finished in mint and blue hues (among others), the chairs features detailing such as legs that softly curve on one side so as to resemble a stick of celery: the root of the collection's name. The effect of the curve means that from some angles the legs appear slim and delicate, from others thick and generous.

Mentsen has worked extensively with Zilio A&C in the past, producing the brand's 2012 catalogue and creating its stand designs and colour palettes. Yet *Seleri* heralds a new path in furniture design for the studio; that the collection has been handled with elegance and an eye for detail suggests that product design's addition to Mentsen's repertoire is a very welcome one.