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REX – CHILDREN'S DAYBED MADE AT STOL KAMNIK



An airy children's daybed with folding legs, Rex Small Daybed has been a staple feature in kindergarten interior design for almost 60 years, providing comfortable daily naps to generations of children throughout Yugoslavia. It was designed between 1952 and 1960 by Niko Kralj – one of the most groundbreaking and prolific industrial designers of the postwar era – who had even made a name for himself abroad. At that time, Kralj was the head of development and design at the Stol furniture factory in Kamnik, Yugoslavia.



It would be interesting to know whether Kralj's decision to accept the position at Stol was in any way influenced by the lion in the company's logo, seeing as the *king* of animals was the company mascot even before the war. After all, the Latin word *rex* translates as "king", which is in turn a play-on-words with Kralj's last name, which coincidentally also translates as "king". Hence, it was indeed a *King* who created Stol's biggest bestsellers and elevated it to royal status in the designer scene.¹



¹ The Rex chair is featured in the Museum of Modern Art – MoMa.

A trained joiner, Kralj favoured an easily available and relatively affordable material – locally sourced wood. Kralj’s highly functional designs were accessible to a large customer base. “A good product is defined by the fact that it fulfils its intended function to the greatest extent possible.”²



² Niko Kralj, kralj slovenskega industrijskega oblikovanja. TV show, RTV Slovenija, 2004, <http://4d.rtvsllo.si/arhiv/portret/173102298> (12. 8. 2016).

His chairs, most notably the Shell and 4455 Chair collections, have come to invoke the interior design of socialist-era offices and waiting rooms in public buildings. In the second half of the 1950s, both public and private spaces were inundated with various models and versions of the Rex chair. The most famous and popular item was the Rex 5654 folding chair – a team effort product – which underwent several development stages during the four-year design period (1952–1956). Serial production of the unfolding version of the chair was launched in 1954. Two years later, Niko Kralj and the Stol furniture company, which was operating from Duplica pri Kamniku³ and was established in the early 20th century, brought out the now iconic Rex 5654. Lightweight because of its perforated design, and with a depth of only 10cm when folded, the chair took up very little space in the tiny post-war dwellings. The stacking feature was patented by Kralj in 1958. The production process was very efficient – virtually wasteless – and entailed bending the perforated beech plywood panels. More than one million chairs were made at Stol. The chair was a massive hit on foreign markets; after its patent expired in the 1980s, it was mass produced in the Soviet Union and Japan.

³ France Stele: Sto let Stolovih stolov, ob stoletnici kamniškega Stola, tovarne, ki je ni več: Zgodovina tovarne Stol. Article in Slovenian. Published in: *Revija Les* 56/10, 2004: 339–348.



MUSEJ NOVEJSE ZGOODOVINE SLOVENIJE



The basic Rex mould gave rise to a slew of other Rex-inspired items, however these never reached the popularity of the original Rex; the gamut ran from a dining chair, cinema chair and folding rocking chair to versions with different backrest heights, with or without armrests and even two types of coffee tables. Ultimately, it was also the inspiration for the 51.5cm wide and 130cm long children's daybed, standing on 33cm high legs. The daybed was manufactured using the same bending technology as Rex chairs, the difference being that in this case the plywood was bent in two dimensions instead of three as with the original Rex.⁴ From 1957 onwards, the company produced the daybed in two versions— perforated and non-perforated. The distinctive slotted design of the Rex daybed in particular remains firmly rooted in the memory of Yugoslavian children that attended the uniform childcare system put in place nationwide in 1961.



⁴ The details about the children's daybed were kindly sent in by Mrs Špela Šubic, Curator at the Department of Design at the Museum of Architecture and Design, Slovenia.

“Rex daybeds were provided in all play areas and had to be regularly put away /.../ They were quite heavy for the teachers. Those who had to fold them and put them away reported that it was quite a hassle. The kids thought it was great though, absolutely great,” recounts a former preschool teacher.⁵



The premises in the former workshop of Stol next to the Kamniška Bistrica River are now up for rent. The Rex brand was eventually sold⁶ and repurchased. Today, the Rex range is again available on the market. However, the exclusive price tag is out of the range of a large customer base, distancing the brand from the original intent of designer Niko Kralj.

Text and photos by Nataša Strlič, Senior Curator at the Museum of Contemporary History.

⁵ Account of Jožica Šubic, 5 May 2016; Museum of Contemporary History (Oral History Collection).

⁶ Jožica Grgi: **Kraljevski stol Rex, ki ga ni povozil čas**. Article in Slovenian. <http://www.delo.si/kultura/dediscina/kraljevski-stol-rex-ki-ga-ni-povozil-cas.html> (12 Aug 2016).