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Summer Happenings 2002



Sitting sweet, sitting pretty

Eero Aarnio's Pastils are back

Daily life documentalist

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Sitting sweet

As the 1960s were coming to a close, the New York Times called Finnish designer Eero Aarnio's new Ball and Pastil Chairs "the most comfortable forms to hold up the human body".

CITY ICON Design legend has it that Eero Aarnio, having successfully produced and begun shipping his new Ball Chair, observed there was a terrific amount of empty, cushioned space being ferried across the Atlantic. A new round chair would fit in this space, and thus a new chair was born. The soft, enclosed space of the Ball had given birth to the hard, open Pastil. Design works in mysterious ways.

Aarnio constructed the first prototype for the Pastil in 1967 out of polystyrene, which helped determine dimensions, ergonomics and rockability – after all, this was, intentionally or otherwise, the rocking chair for a new, groovy age.

Indeed the Pastil Chair does rock – and roll, spin, slide and even float. And it shines too, in no less than nine vibrant (read screaming) colours, from lime-green and sunny

orange to the colour-spectrum extremes of black and white.

And while the comfort factor is (wide) open to interpretation, the fact remains that it is different, it is stylish, and moreover, it is fun. Perhaps Aarnio might have filled the Pastil's empty space with some psychedelic cushions to temper the hard, slippery surface. But that's not what design is all about – not then, not now.

With the exuberant resurgence in popularity of retro-design (spanning the '50s through the '70s), Aarnio, and others like him – if indeed there's anyone else like him – are pop, again.

Aarnio fashioned his Pastil chairs, named after their resemblance to a

small, round shiny candy or pastille, out of fibreglass, for which he had a particular passion. Being highly resilient, the chairs could be kept outdoors year-round. Being as expensive as they are today, however (they're available on the web for \$1,000 plus), owners are unlikely to use them for mid-winter sledding as Aarnio playfully suggests.

In his Conran Dictionary of Design, architect/designer Terence Conran writes that Aarnio's chairs, for which Aarnio received the American Industrial Award in 1969, "look like essays in period style, props from *Barbarella*". Sci-fi is pop is design is now.

Jeff Bickert

