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Thonet Concept Bike: A chair takes to the road

Lead

Wherever would coffee house literati be without them: signature, Thonet 'Chair 214's in steam-formed beech? Using the same process, the young, London-based designer Andy Martin has now created a concept road bicycle inspired by this icon of design.

How to wow your tech-savvy friends? Show them your daring Andy Martin bicycle made of solid wood. Martin, from Australia, who cut his professional teeth working for Marc Newson in Paris, was asked by Thonet to create a concept bicycle using its steam-forming process, developed in the 1930s.

"The challenge was," said Martin, "to take on the fairly low-tech process of bending and shaping with steam, and then apply it to a 21st Century bicycle with highly complex engineering." The final jointing and contours of the elegantly shaped design were cut and adjusted on a computer-driven CNC machine. Martin also needed to develop a series of connectors and spring-rods to reinforce areas of stress in the frame of a bicycle looking deceptively simple and modest.





The Thonet bike itself is a fixed wheel: in the tradition of cycling and what you would expect from a company that has been in the wood-shaping business for 190 years. It is not equipped with brakes but does have several interchangeable gear ratios. The seat is solid beechwood resting on spring-rod supports. The wheels are pure contemporary cycling high-tech: carbonfibre HED H3s.



Unlike many other concepts, the Thonet bike is available to buy, strictly as a limited edition. It also comes at a price: £43,000. Then again, what other chair can take to the road?

Photos: Andy Martin Studio

Gallery

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