

Buyer's Guide Going Dutch

With a perceptible increase in interest in mid-century furniture from The Netherlands here in the UK, we ask specialist dealer *Jonathan Stephenson* from Rocket Gallery (rocketgallery.com) to explore the Dutch aesthetic and what makes it so appealing

Floor-standing shelves,
1960s, painted steel,
made by Tomado,
The Netherlands.





Left: Friso Kramer, 'Reform' table, 1955; pictured with four 'Result' chairs by Friso Kramer and Wim Rietveld, 1958, both manufactured by Ahrend De Cirkel, The Netherlands. Right: Martin Visser, KW85 sideboard, 1965, painted wood and plastic, made by 't Spectrum, The Netherlands; pictured with 't Spectrum book.

What defines the Dutch mid-century aesthetic?

The characteristics of simplicity and functionality in the context of industrial production and a preoccupation with geometry and colour define the Dutch mid-century aesthetic. These Dutch designers had a strong desire to influence the post-war generation and to affect lives with good functional design. They were not concerned with organic forms and the natural world in the way that Scandinavian mid-century designers were. This was true Modernism, ultimately traceable back to the legacy of the Bauhaus.

What first drew you to Dutch furniture?

A passion for furniture design that is minimal and rigorously functional, and a long-term interest in Dutch art and graphic design, led me to look more closely at mid-century Dutch furniture. There is no division in The Netherlands between the various disciplines – art, photography, graphic design and product design all overlap without self-imposed impediments. The work of the Total Group, with graphic designers like Wim Crouwel collaborating with product

designers like Friso Kramer, represents this approach to design.

Which designers and manufacturers do you feel were most important?

The seriously minimal and highly functional work of Martin Visser deserves one of the highest accolades – the furniture produced by his company 't Spectrum in Eindhoven is some of the most beautiful and technically brilliant of all mid-century Dutch Modernism. Other designers of paramount importance include Friso Kramer, who worked mainly for Ahrend De Cirkel in Amsterdam; Cees Braakman and his company, Pastoe, based in Utrecht, and Wim Rietveld, who worked for manufacturers like Gispen in Culemborg and Ahrend De Cirkel in Amsterdam, and whose designs were often guided by the principles of his famous architect father Gerrit Rietveld. Other designers whose work is worth looking out for include Rudolf Wolf, Andre Cordermeijer and Tjerk Reijenga. And, while not attributed to any one designer, the manufacturer Tomado produced highly successful coloured shelving systems.

Photograph copyright Paul Tudler; courtesy of Rockal Gallery







Previous page: A R Cordemeijer, '3803' desk with two drawers, 1959, painted steel with vinyl, made by Gispen, The Netherlands.
 Left: Martin Visser, SZ02 easy chair, 1965, polished steel with leather, made by 't Spectrum, The Netherlands.
 Right: Friso Kramer and Wim Rietveld, 'Result' Chair with arms, 1958, second series; teak, painted steel and Bakelite, made by De Cirkel, The Netherlands.

What materials did they favour?

The Dutch manufacturers were experienced with industrial materials, so the designers naturally favoured bent and tubular metal, painted steel, compressed plywood and modern plastics.

What were their influences?

The Dutch Modernist aesthetic is undoubtedly influenced and inspired by artists and designers of the De Stijl movement (1917 up to the early 1930s) – in particular the work of the architect Gerrit Rietveld (1888-1964) and the artist Piet Mondrian (1872-1944). These influences can be seen in the embracing of geometry and the confident use of colour. Equally, other earlier international designers were influential: Friso Kramer acknowledges inspiration from Jean Prouve and Le Corbusier; Martin Visser's work shows echoes of Marcel Breuer, and all of the Dutch designers were undoubtedly inspired by the Eames' in America and their approach to mass-production.

Have you observed any buying trends in relation to Dutch furniture?

Dutch mid-century design was first reassessed in

New York in 2000, when the work of Cees Braakman and Pastoe was exhibited at the R20th Century Gallery exhibition 'Made to Measure' – Braakman's Japanese series of made-to-measure cabinets became highly desirable after this, even in the UK. More recently, since his death in 2009, Martin Visser's very rigorous body of work has started to gain a serious following, with exhibitions in 2012 at Rocket, London and at the Bonnefantenmuseum, Maastricht. And with Friso Kramer reaching his 90th birthday in 2012, his work has become increasingly sought after, fuelled by exhibitions in Antwerp and Paris and the publication of the monograph *Friso Kramer's Chair*, which tells the story of the 'Revolt' chair, a Dutch classic.

How easy is it to find these pieces in the UK today?

Dutch Modernist furniture has been overlooked in the UK, while it has been heralded over the last decade in the USA, France and, even nearer to home, in the Benelux countries. For the relatively conservative and nostalgic UK market, the Dutch aesthetic is perhaps too pared down and minimal,

