Aalto, Aino (1894–1949) The work of the Finnish designer Aino Aalto (née Marsio), like the American designer Ray *Eames, has tended to be overshadowed by the work of her husband, a process in which historians have colluded. In fact she collaborated with Alvar across many aspects of design practice, from furniture to glass, following their marriage in 1924. A qualified architect and interior and glass designer, she and Alvar designed for many companies including the *Iittala glass company (which made her 1932 pressed glass Bölgeblick range, in production until the 1950s). As production supervisor, she also played an active role in the *Artek Company (established in Helsinki in 1935) which manufactured and sold Aalto furniture as well as promoting modern Scandinavian art and design. She and Alvar were jointly awarded the commission for the Finnish Pavilion at the *New York World's Fair of 1939–40.

Aalto, Alvar (1898–1976) Alvar Aalto is the most celebrated Finnish architect and designer working in furniture, lighting, glass, and textiles. His work is characterized by the use of organic forms and natural materials allied to the emphatically contemporary aesthetic tenets of *Modernism. Alvar Aalto trained as an architect at the Helsinki University of Technology, completing his studies in 1921. From 1923 to 1927 he established an office in Jvaslaka, in Turku from 1927 to 1933, and then in Helsinki until his death. In 1924 he married architect-designer Aino Marsio, who collaborated with him on many designs until her early death in 1949 (see AALTO, AINO). Amongst Aalto's best-known buildings were the Paimio Sanatorium (1929–33) and the Municipal Library at Viipuri. His use of organic forms and natural materials blended with the Modernist aesthetic, which was evident at Viipuri, was also embraced in his design for the Finnish Pavilion at the *New York World's Fair of 1939–40, which did much to establish his reputation in the United States. After the war he was appointed Professor of Architecture at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (1946–8) and in 1949 won a competition for design of the village centre of Säynätsalo, one of his most significant projects.

From the mid-1920s, in common with many other avant-garde designers in Germany, France, and elsewhere, Aalto designed tubular steel furniture. However, his reputation was founded on the use of moulded plywood, with which he began to experiment from 1929, working closely with Otto Korhonen, a factory manager at Huonekalu-jaRakennustyotehdas. He found his métier in the sweeping organic forms of the Paimio armchair (1930–3) and the bentwood stacking stool (1933) for the Viipurin Library. The former was specially designed for the Sanatorium, its flowing, scroll-like form and laminated birch and plywood elements embodying practicality and functionalism—it could be easily cleaned and was able to be moved quietly, thus suiting its context. He was also well-known for glass designs, winning several competitions, resulting in designs such as the Riihimaki Flower set of stacking vases (1932) and the Savoy vase (1936) manufactured by *Iittala.