



Terence Conran

The prolific British designer celebrates his 80th birthday with a new exhibition at London's Design Museum



Who is he? Looking back at the 60-year-old Sir Terence Conran is awe-inspiring. As an entrepreneur and restaurateur, he's transformed not only the way that Britons relate to design, but the way they shop and eat out. Many people know that he founded Habitat in 1964, but fewer will be aware that he also oversaw BHS, Next, Mothercare and others in the 1980s, helping to change the face of our streets. As he celebrates his 80th birthday with new furniture launches and a retrospective exhibition at London's Design Museum, there's never been a better time to celebrate this brilliant talent.

What makes him a design hero? From his first designs in the late 1940s, when he quit his textile job to set up a product studio with artist Eduardo Souto de Moura, Conran was committed to opening Britain's eyes to the possibilities of modern design. This was no easy feat. Modernist furniture was alien to the average Brit. The 1951 Festival of Britain put him in the public eye, and people were soon drinking their tea out of his ceramic mugs. In 1953, inspired by a visit to France, he opened The Soup Kitchen in London. A host of brasseries followed, hailing a cosmopolitan outlook for the nation's restaurant scene.

Conran's achievements as a designer are truly impressive. From his conical wicker chairs of the 1950s to the more recent leather 'Glove' chair, the Content by Conran range (2003), his style is simple, functional, with bold colours and keenly observed details. Many of his pieces can be seen at the upcoming Design Museum exhibition. 'It has taken a good half-century for Britain to begin to accept modernity,' Conran said. 'We wouldn't have done so without him.'

Where can I buy his work? His 'Barton' collection for Ercol is available at The Conran Shop (conranshop.co.uk). Plus, check out his new collection at Marks & Spencer (marksandspencer.com).

READER OFFER 'Terence Conran: The Way We Live Now' runs from November 16-March 4 at London's Design Museum (designmuseum.org). ELLE Decoration readers can buy two tickets for the price of one by presenting this page at the ticket desk. Plus, for the duration of the exhibition, show this page to claim 10 per cent off at the Design Museum shop (no photocopies accepted).

MUST-HAVE DESIGNS BY TERENCE CONRAN

'The Leading Light' floor light, £910, Benchmark (benchmarkfurniture.com). 'Godwin' armchair, £999, Marks & Spencer (marksandspencer.com). 'Pavilion' side table, £175, The Conran Shop (conranshop.co.uk). 'Brindley' side table, £199, Marks & Spencer (as before)

