

Konäs Evaluative Report

A Critical Analysis of Design
Outcome

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Konäs

At a retail price of £150, Konäs is an affordable chair for the young consumer. With a cheerful and cosy appearance Konäs emulates the aesthetic of IKEA. By being able to be unpacked and assembled within thirty minutes by a single person, practicality and simplicity is brought to the consumer through minimum parts and easy to understand instructions.

Designed for maximum comfort of the user, Konäs's arms are shaped to sit out of the way of the user's own arms when they are reading a book or sitting with their arms at their side.

By offering the consumer three different wood stains - ebony, oak and ivory - and multiple colours of cotton upholstery as well as different colours of leather upholstery, they can chose the combination that suits them and their home.

Audience

From the beginning of this project I knew that I was designing for younger consumers (ages 18-35), with focus of the design including it being easy to transport between the rooms of house and between two houses. As well as this, the design needed to be visually interesting but not so outlandish that it would look out of place in a collection of un-matching furniture or that it would be impractical to the user.

In respect to easy transportation between locations there are two main options that the user can go with. They can disassemble the entire product into its separate components and transport them as such or they can disassemble Konäs into five distinct parts - the two legs, the base, the backrest and the cushion. There are positives and drawbacks to each method but having the choice and it being so easy to chose between either is a positive for the consumer.

Transportation within a house was easily achieved by the design being compact enough that it can fit through an average sized doorway while being carried and it being light enough that the average person can carry it without being over-encumbered. This is a positive for the consumer because it allows them to move the chair about and rearrange it without hassle or having to put a lot of effort into choosing a place to set it down without having to worry about wanting to move it again.

Customisation is also important to consumers and the variety of wood and upholstery combinations allow them to tailor their chair to their home. By offering three different wood stains and multiple colours of cotton upholstery as well as different colours of leather upholstery, they can chose the combination that suits their specific needs and wants.

At a total retail price of £150, Konäs is an affordable chair for a home or an apartment. Since the cushion and frame are sold separately, those with young children or pets won't have to purchase

a whole new chair if something happens to the upholstered cushion, extending the chair's product life span.

Assembly

To test ease of assembly and the clarity of the assembly booklet, I provided a test subject with all the parts of the chair laid out before them in the same manner as they would arrive in the packaging [Fig.1, Fig.2]. This was to give them as close to the authentic experience of assembling the product themselves. The test was highly successful in many different aspects.

Firstly, the test subject was able to understand and follow the instructions after their first reading without any issues presenting themselves. Achieving this was very important to the overall product design, since part of my self assigned brief was to emulate the style of IKEA in its whole, meaning that I had to emulate their instruction booklets for their clear and concise communication. This also meant that I couldn't use written language to communicate the instructions.

Being able to build the chair without frustration and issue is also very important in respect to the user experience. A consumer that finds something simple and enjoyable to assemble is more likely to return to a brand than a consumer that has a negative experience.

Since the tester was able to enter this test without having previous knowledge of assembling the chair, their ability to build it in under twenty minutes was also an important achievement.



Fig. 1

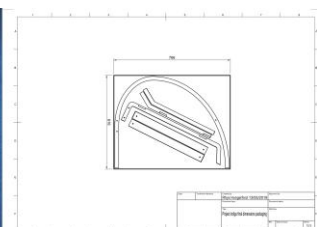


Fig. 2

However, something that must be stated that affected the assembly time was that I was able to assure them from the beginning that all the parts that the chair would need were already present. This means that an extra five to ten minutes would need to be added to approximate the time it would have taken the consumer to open the packaging and check all the parts were present. This brings the time of unpacking and assembly to approximately thirty minutes.

What the tester also mentioned was that they were very happy to have been able to assemble the chair on their own without having to ask for help or even consider needing a second person to help them assemble it. Self assurance like this is both good for the user and myself as the designer. After they assembled Konäs, I asked them the following questions:

Me: "If I were to design another IKEA style product, would you feel comfortable and confident assembling it? Also, due to experience, would you feel more confident assembling that product than you did with the chair you just assembled?"

Test subject: Yes, I would feel more confident next time. With how easy it was to put together, I think I would have fun building something else.

Emotional response

The main emotion I was trying to invoke in consumers was one of comfort, since I believe comfort to be the most important aspect of a reading chair. To measure how successful I was at invoking this sense of comfort to a third party, I posted a single image of the final design to a relevant website. From the comments and replies that I received numerous stated that that they thought Konäs looked comfortable as well as warm and inviting. "[...], this looks comfy"(Reddit, 2019), "I wish I could try it, looks inviting[...]"(Reddit, 2019)

and "The chair is warm and inviting, [...]"(Reddit, 2019) were among comments that I received.

However, as well as the positive comments there were numerous people noting the placement of a mug on the chair and how it made many people feel uneasy about its position and chance of falling "Also the mug is giving me anxiety" (Reddit, 2019).

I would consider unease and anxiety to be negative emotions. I most certainly didn't want the consumer to feel these emotions while observing this particular promotional imagery. By having numerous comments state that this is part of what they felt, I knew that I made a mistake in that particular photograph. In person, the mug looked much more stable than in the photograph, but what I perceived in the photography studio and what is perceived by a third party looking at promotional imagery are two different things. In the future I know to be careful with items placed in such a way as they appear that they could fall or be knocked over unless I am trying to cause those particular.

Aesthetic

Emulating the aesthetic of an already existing company can be difficult to achieve effectively. This was something that was difficult to achieve as it came down to a mixture of the aesthetic of the design as well as the promotional photography that ended up accompanying it. The main aesthetic that I was trying to emulate was light and moderately minimalist. Ikea tend to use a variety of vibrant and light colours, such as yellow and green (Ikea, 2019). With this in mind, I was very particular about the way in which I took photographs of Konäs.

I have had multiple comments that stated that they thought Konäs was something that could be bought in Ikea (Reddit, 2019), which I consider to be a success and proof that I understand how the achieve the visual aesthetic that I was emulating.

What elevated the aesthetic of the design was the details of the photography. Little things like the pink mug that was used complimented the light colours of the room and the wood.

Packaging

An important aspect of flat packed furniture is how it's packed when the customer purchases it. My research let me know that there was no standardisation for the packaging of flat packed furniture since each and every different product had different requirements for the packaging. Therefore, when blueprinting the layout of the packaging, what I had to keep in mind was that it should be easy to transport by hand.

When I was designing my product I kept the packaging in mind and designed both around easy packing and functionality of the design itself. I was very careful to make sure early on that it would be easy to pack the parts in as small an area as possible while still allowing for space for packing foam. So once I had all the parts of the blue foam model, I was able to blueprint the packaging order [Fig. 3].

At a total weight of 14kg and size of 766mm*616mm*125mm [Fig. 2] the packaging for Konäs is light and small enough for a single person to be able to carry without issue.



Fig. 3

Manifesto

Of course it's important to compare the work I completed with my manifesto and the statements that I made therein. The application of my thoughts from my manifesto is important because not following what I wrote as my personal beliefs proves to myself and the world around me that I didn't actually believe those statements to be as important enough to make sure that I followed them.

One of the most important statements I made was about working for a company that has ethical work practices and business practices. Personally, I think that the world we currently live in can be improved and one of the ways in which we can improve it is to reduce the amount of waste we create and resources that we consume.

With products like the Solstrale coming to markets around Europe (The Telegraph, 2017) and their commitment to "to cut greenhouse gas emissions from its production systems by 80 per cent in absolute terms by 2030", they are making clear strides towards making less of a negative impact on the earth than they already are. As well as these steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, they have also announced that in 2018 their 70% of the materials they used are either recycled or renewable sources such as bamboo and cotton (Edie, 2019).

Even if these policies were only created to make themselves appear good in the eyes of the consumer, it's better than them having done nothing, therefore I personally think that designing with them in mind as the producer is ethical.

However, one statement that I am ashamed of having failed to achieve was in respect to personal care. " We have failed as a society when people are working to the point where they are unable to rest properly, are ill or are working so much that they are unable to have a social life". This is a difficult one to pull apart because I most certainly didn't fulfil it. On numerous occasions I made myself ill by working

longer or harder than my body would allow at a given time. I also was unable to have much of a social life, particularly during a specific three week period where I worked beyond my body's limit to the point where I was suffering issues with my mental health on top of the issues with my physical health.

Looking back at that time, I know that I am unhappy that I pushed myself that far. However, I will fully admit that I would not have been able to have developed my design and product to its final state without doing so.

Personally, I am proud of the outcomes that it achieved but I am wholly ashamed that I did such damage to myself and that I was willing and, at the time, proud of pushing myself to the point that I had to take whole weekends (and often extra days) to recover. The hours that I put in are reflected in the final design, but that doesn't mean that it was worth it to break my personal beliefs nor put my health at risk like that. This is something that this project has made me have to reflect further on.

Ergonomics

Ergonomically, the chair has been designed and successfully tested to be comfortable for the average user. The height of the cushion from the floor was tested by multiple people as well as the backrest angle. The angle that was chosen as the most comfortable by the test group [Fig. 4] was 100° from the horizontal. Only one person preferred the back rest at 95° but they admitted that it was due to having issues with their back and that it could easily be rectified by placing a cushion behind them. Their second choice was 100°.

Back Rest Angle	Preference
95°	I
100°	III
105°	II

Fig. 4

However, something that may not be appropriate for all consumers is the height of the back rest. I chose to have it relatively low because during my testing of the back rest angle, the testers were asked to read a book as they sat in the testing chair. They all tilted their heads forward to read the book. If the chair is being used for other activities, such as watching a television, the back rest may be less comfortable than reading.

Sustainability

All of the packaging can be recycled (MNN, 2014). The cardboard box can be recycled anywhere in the UK. The polypropylene packaging in which the cushion is purchased is recyclable, as well as the polystyrene packaging foam that is used to stop the parts moving in the box while in transit. The polyethylene used to wrap individual parts to protect them from damaging each other is also recyclable.

However, if I were to have more time and more resources available to me, I would happily research further and do continued design work to reduce the effect of the environment that the wooden components of my product have. Since the wooden components are produced from oak veneer, the wood sourced is not as sustainable as something like pine wood which grows at a rapid rate, "The pine tree grows two feet per year, a rapid growth rate that makes it perfect for the timber industry." (Country Line Magazine, 2012). However, I am unsure how well suited pine veneer would be for such a product, therefore I was unable to pick a more sustainable option for the wood due to lack of data.

I am also unsure of the effect that the adhesive used to bind the layers of wood has on the environment. Urea-formaldehyde may be biodegradable given the right environment or it may not degrade for a hundred years. Further

investigation into an alternative adhesive would be desirable.

As well as this, my product would have a long life span if given proper care and it would be an easy product to give to a charity shop or to sell as second hand, this reduces the chance of it being thrown away. With it being so easy to be disassembled and moved it is easy to be taken somewhere for resale, making the product last longer than a heavier, harder to move counterpart. too low for all users to at the most comfortable they could be. This is a flaw in the design and would be interesting to look into further with extended testing periods where the testers are given the chair for an extended period of time (such as a week) and asked to use it in the comfort of their own home and provide feedback after the week for how it suited their needs and whether or not something needed change. Sadly, this is the kind of test that I was unable to perform due to time constraints, as well as other factors.

Changes

If there was further development or time that I could put into Konäs, I would certainly be interested in doing more in-depth testing of the final product. For example, I would like to be able to test the maximum weight limit of the chair. Personally I think that this is a very important part of the overall design but due to only having a single final model, I am unable to test this without damaging the model which is currently required for other purposes.

There are other minor things that I would be interested in changing, however, they are more for my curiosity to see if they would help improve the design further than where it already is. Given the option, I would be interested in testing more threaded inserts and their applicability to the design, even though I am happy with the inserts that I have chosen for the final design.

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