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P. Morton Shand and the Promotion of Alvar Aalto

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This article reconsiders the success of Alvar Aalto in interwar Britain through the perspective of P. Morton Shand. As a journalist fluent in French and German, Shand introduced European Modernism to British architects. From 1930, he focused his efforts on Aalto, leading to the seminal exhibition of the Finnish designer's furniture in 1933. By viewing the exhibition through the lens of Shand, this article points to the role of critics as active participants in interwar design culture, leading the promotion of modern design and blurring the lines between journalism and commercialized propaganda. While historians are productively describing the roles of consumers, critics and other nondesigners in design history, Shand has remained unappreciated, despite operating at the heart of many interwar exchanges. With the use of an uncataloged collection of his correspondence, this article reveals his individual impact in popularizing the furniture of Aalto.

Key words: Aalto; Alvar; 1930s; interwar; plywood; modernism; furniture

In November 1933, Alvar Aalto opened an exhibition of his furniture to a captivated London audience. The architect, previously little-known outside of his native Finland, was to spring into international recognition. This article reconsiders the seminal exhibition from a different angle to previous studies which have foreground the figure of Aalto. Architectural critic Philip Morton Shand (known always as P. Morton Shand, 1888–1960) conceived the exhibition and led the international promotion of Aalto before and after the show. By shifting the focus from the designer to the critic, this article argues that Aalto's success was the result of a concerted effort to establish a domestic identity for British Modernism.

Jonathan M. Woodham has considered the shift in design history away from the "dominance of the designer."[1] This approach has been applied productively in recent years by Elizabeth Darling, Alan Powers, Jessica Kelly, and others, by surveying exhibitions, journalism, lectures, and networks. The hidden role of critics—not as bystanders, but active participants in design culture—has also been uncovered, with Kelly writing on J. M. Richards and Neal Shasore on Arthur Trystan Edwards.[2] However, no study has focused on Shand, despite his presence at the heart of many of these interwar exchanges. He has always occupied an uncertain role in accounts, with Powers describing him only as an "elusive figure."[3] This is despite widespread recognition of his importance. As Darling observes, he was "the leading authority on modernism of his day."[4] An archive of his correspondence has recently been made available to the public at the University of Dundee, providing the opportunity to resurface his actions.[5] The collection is used here to uncover Shand's motivations and operations as he created the "Aalto English Home for English (!) Aalto furniture."[6]

An assessment of Shand exposes the commercialized nature of interwar criticism. Like many other writers, Shand blurred the lines between journalism and propaganda, promoting modern design as a means of profit-making. While the commercial context will be explored, this article will not consider the career of Aalto to a significant degree. Numerous accounts have focused on Aalto within the history described here.[7] Instead, this article situates the culture of design criticism which enabled Aalto's establishment in Britain.

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Crossing paths at Stockholm 1930

The 1930 Stockholm Exhibition—a decisive success for the international dissemination of Nordic Modernism—provided the backdrop for the first meeting between Aalto and Shand.[8] Both attended and wrote adoringly of the show. Writing for a Swedish newspaper, Aalto rejoiced in the alternative line of Modernism presented: "It is not a composition in stone, glass, and steel, as the functionalist-hating exhibition visitor might imagine, but rather a composition in houses, flags, searchlights, flowers, fireworks, happy people, and clean tablecloths."[9] Aalto, aged 32, had recently secured significant architectural commissions in Finland, but was yet to attain international status. His Paimio Sanatorium and Viipuri Library designs were still under construction; designs which would present his breakthrough in the fields of architecture and furniture.

Parallel to Aalto, Shand's journalism was flourishing as he was sent to cover the Stockholm Exhibition for London's *Architectural Review*. Aged 42, Shand had only recently embarked on a career of architectural criticism. Previously, he had written books on food and wine, before an approach in 1925 by Christian Barman—editor of the *Architectural Association Journal*. Aware of his residence in Lyons, Barman requested Shand's report on the Paris *Exposition internationale des Arts décoratifs et industriels modernes*.[10] Barman had connections at the *Architectural Review* and likely introduced Shand to its proprietor-editor, Hubert de Cronin Hastings. Under Hastings's leadership, the *Architectural Review* and its sister publication—the *Architects' Journal*—turned increasingly to cover Modernism, with Shand quickly welcomed into the fold as a freelance contributor in 1926. His fluency in French and German proved invaluable, as he became the European correspondent for the two journals.[11]

The entire August 1930 issue of the *Architectural Review* was devoted to the topic of Swedish design, with Shand delivering an illustrated survey of the exhibition over 29 pages.[12] While Shand's early journalism focused on French and German developments, at Stockholm 1930 his allegiance shifted. His text, besides image captions, contained little specific description of the material on show. Instead, he described the overall effect of lightness, fragility, and uniformity: an alternative to the "distressing Franco-German sideline."[13] Stockholm had set out its mission in "taming and humanizing the growing monster," Shand argued.[14]. A few months after the exhibition, he penned an article in the *Architectural Review* titled "The Myth of French Taste"—alleging the overstated influence of France and pointing to Sweden among other countries worthy of attention.[15] The journal duly provided attention through numerous articles on Swedish architecture.[16]

Shand mediated his findings directly to the Swedish press as well, declaring in an interview with the *Svenska Dagbladet* that "the Stockholm exhibition is the best I have ever seen, Sweden is even far ahead of Germany."[17] He received the personal thanks of the exhibition's chief instigator, Gregor Paulsson, for his assessment.[18] Within a month of the exhibition's closing, Paulsson traveled to London, where no fewer than four lectures on the exhibition were held. A discussion at the Design and Industries Association on "Sweden's Contribution to Modern Design" opened with introductory remarks by Shand.[19]

The Stockholm exhibition received wide coverage in Britain beyond the *Architectural Review*. F.R. Yerbury and Howard Robertson covered the event for the *Architect and Building News*, providing a positive appreciation. Their report lacked any conviction, however, as they dryly commented that "the Exhibition, whether it pleases you or not,

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is not negligible."[20] Shand suffered no such hesitancy in celebrating the exhibition's success, painting a violent picture replete with Viking imagery:

> A grim new champion enters the Modernist ring and throws down his ringing challenge to the bow-legged intellectuals who have been vociferously pamphleteering in it. A fresh artistic *Volkswanderung* is being unleashed upon Christendom. Le Corbusier's blood will soon be quaffed out of his own massy skull, just to show there is no ill-feeling; Gropius's Communist Bauhaus be razed to the ground so that a new Valhalla may arise at Dessau.[21]

Considering the arrival of the Vikings on British shores, Shand pleaded for Britons to join their cause: "May our own Viking blood, the only blood in us that matters, rouse itself to join in the massacre of those traitors to our age, the unnatural, spavined invertebrates who, in their Neo-Cotswold olde-worlde sanctuaries, daily pronounce anathema on reinforced concrete, chromium steel and plywood, in the sacred name of John Ruskin."[22] Shand, unlike Robertson and Yerbury, was a true propagandist, whose language never failed to provoke.

Others in the profession were equally excited by the opportunity opened through Stockholm. Reginald Blomfield, an elder statesman of the architectural profession, had railed against continental Modernism in his book *Modernismus* (1934). But he too saw the solution in Scandinavia, where modern architecture had developed "on different and very much sounder lines."[23] Even a traditionalist recognized the need to modernize and saw in Sweden a nonviolent approach to doing so. Having identified a possible alternative, the profession mediated their findings through to laymen. Designer Prudence Maufe encouraged the public to pay a visit during a BBC radio talk reproduced in the corporation's magazine, *The Listener*.[24] *The Connoisseur* considered the *Architectural Review's* special issue and acknowledged Sweden's progress "beyond the *cul-de-sac* in which the respective modern architectural movements of Germany and France are lodged."[25] The writer referred to Shand's promotion, noting that his outspokenness was necessary to rouse an English reaction.[26] Britain was hooked, with the use of curves, colors, and natural materials shattering the stylistic formalism starting to coalesce around machine Modernism.

While Stockholm had presented a path forward, the domestic problem was far from solved. As Christopher Wilk has considered, furniture manufacture lagged behind the construction of modernist architecture and the market remained sparse until the mid-1930s.[27] In his interview with the *Svenska Dagbladet*, Shand admitted that while the architecture at Stockholm was faultless, everything from the furniture to textiles and pottery was still overly attached to old styles.[28] Attempts at new furniture produced little more than imitations of existing models, with Sven Markelius creating steel tubular chairs based on Marcel Breuer's famous designs.[29] The issue of modern furniture was discussed in Sweden where the metal house of the future was subject to some ridicule, just as in Britain.[30]

The Stockholm exhibition did show some developments, with Gemla fabriker AB presenting its range of bentwood furniture including pieces designed by Gunnar Asplund and Uno Åhrén.[31] The exhibition's Parkrestaurangen Lilla Paris made use of this new furniture (**figure 1**). For the *Architectural Review*, Shand observed that "bentwood furniture can be good, but this isn't," as he complained that the "rather common" tables and chairs in the main restaurant ruined the effect of the architecture.[32] Significantly, however, the chairs provided the site for the first conversations between Shand and Aalto.

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At an architects' dinner at Stockholm 1930—seated on simple bentwood chairs—Shand met Alvar Aalto. Without a common first language, the pair spoke a mixture of German, Swedish, English, and French.[33] Discussions naturally turned to Aalto's architecture, leaving Shand curious to learn more. In March 1931, after returning to England, Shand wrote to Aalto seeking photos of his buildings.[34] Upon their receipt, Shand jumped into action to become the first person to introduce the designs to Britain. His first article on the architect appeared in the *Architectural Review* in September 1931, displaying Aalto's Turun Sanomat. He drew attention particularly to the humanist approach, noting that although a "functionalist," Aalto had applied "an almost tender regard for the design and arrangement of incidental practical details."[35] His appreciation intensified after receiving photographs of Aalto's Paimio Sanatorium in March 1932, which he described as "the cleanest and most noble creation that I have seen for many a year."[36] Shand provided a glimpse at the wider interest of the British press, writing to Aalto that his editor "fell on [the photos] with a cry of jubilation and tore them from my hands."[37] As well as for architecture, the Sanatorium was significant for its furniture, with Aalto presenting the first attempt at a vocabulary of curved plywood—the Paimio Chair.[38]

Fig 1. Gunnar Asplund, Parkrestaurangen Lilla Paris, Stockholm, 1930. The chairs appear to be the Gemla no. 5402, as illustrated in Gemla's exhibition catalogue. Swedish Centre for Architecture and Design.

The Mediterranean meeting

Shand's interest in Aalto was expedited by his desperate personal affairs. He had survived entirely off family money into his early adulthood. However, his careless lifestyle—marrying four times and divorcing three times in only 15 years (1916–1931)—led to his financial ruin. He was sued for bankruptcy by a creditor in July 1932 before being discharged in March 1933.[39] Even after his discharge, royalties from his books continued to be forfeited.[40] His parents, enraged at his recklessness, had him cut off by July 1933.[41] Supporting two children with his fourth wife, he was thrust into an unenviable position. He had never held a stable job in his life and freelance journalism was not enough to support his family. Determined to make money fast, Shand focused on Aalto's potential.

In the spring of 1933, Shand co-founded the Modern Architectural Research Group (MARS), Britain's chapter of the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAM). MARS had their first international assignment immediately upon them, as they joined international delegates at CIAM's fourth congress in August 1933. The congress was held at sea on a cruise-ship journeying from Marseilles to Athens. In the buildup, Shand suggested to Aalto that they travel together to the starting point of the cruise.[42] Having already unsuccessfully encouraged Aalto to visit England numerous times, Shand hoped the Finn might be persuaded to travel to Marseilles via England. The proposal was foiled by Aalto's decision to join the congress only for the return journey from Athens (10–13 August).[43]

Not to be deterred, Shand cornered Aalto on the return voyage—a moment captured in László Moholy-Nagy's film of the congress (**figure 2**). Subsequent letters between the pair shed light on the discussions held.[44] The men identified two opportunities. Firstly,

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Fig 2. Shand (left) and Aalto in discussion aboard the SS Patris II. In Moholy-Nagy's *Architects' Congress*, 1933. Moholy-Nagy Foundation.

they agreed to plan a Finnish exhibition in London. Alongside Aalto furniture, the exhibition would include construction materials designed by the Finnish firm Enso-Gutzeit. Second, Enso would work with British architects to construct model houses showcasing their materials in England. A third, hidden, motive was also in play. While the exhibition itself had little chance of alleviating Shand's financial woes, there was the opportunity to follow it up with the sale of Aalto furniture.

Upon his return to England, Shand immediately got to work. In August 1933, he introduced Aalto's furniture in the *Architectural Review's Decoration and Craftsmanship Supplement*. A photograph of Aalto's Paimio Chairs adorned the cover of the supplement, while inside Shand declared that "it has been left to a young Finnish architect to revolutionize both the form and construction of the arm-chair by redesigning it as a plywood hammock."[45]

Simultaneously, Shand established a working group to plan the exhibition. He secured the vital backing of Hubert de Cronin Hastings—in the form of his two journals (the *Architectural Review* and *Architects' Journal*) as well as his private connections.[46] Fortnum & Mason was soon identified as the ideal setting for the exhibition. The department store agreed to provide two of their rooms. Others recruited by Shand included John Betjeman, attracting "snob" interest.[47] Architect F. R. S. Yorke, facilitating Enso's contribution.[48] And writer Geoffrey Boumphrey, handling sales through his record-cabinet company, Boumphrey, Arundel & Co.[49] However, it was Shand at the heart of everything as Aalto's main point of contact. Aalto, in turn, was shocked by the developments, accusing Shand of taking his over-enthusiastic proposals too seriously.[50] With his finances entirely dependent on his entrepreneurial gambit, Shand had little alternative but to give it his all.

Göran Schildt's biography of Aalto, naturally distorted by the author's friendship of his subject, plays down the role of Shand in the organization of the exhibition. We are told that Aalto's career was built upon "his skill in marketing himself and in finding the right assistants."[51] In truth, Shand was not an assistant, but the driving force behind the exhibition, pushing the venture forward from start to finish and excruciatingly dragging Aalto through the necessary hoops to see its success. Shand—like all of those writing to Aalto—suffered from the architect's lackadaisical approach to correspondence. With the Aalto exhibition agreed for October 1933—a mere 2 months from the start of planning—Shand expected its organization to take place with urgency. Samples had to be sent over to reassure Fortnum & Mason. A list of exhibition items had to be produced. Patents and selling rights had to be secured. All of this depended on Aalto's support—which proved hopeless.

The urgency of planning was also spurred by a desire to have the exhibition take place soon after a "British Week" held in Finland from 4 to 10 September. As Shand observed, the British Week had led to a reciprocal British interest in Finland which would soon fade.[52] Receiving no response from Aalto, Shand was incensed to learn from Moholy-Nagy that Aalto was no longer planning on coming to Britain in October.[53] The entire

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event was rescheduled for November to suit Aalto's uncommunicated decision, seemingly made on a whim to enable him to travel to England with Moholy-Nagy.

Even with the exhibition postponed until November, progress was slow. Writing a matter of weeks before the exhibition opened, numerous issues were still to be addressed. Shand pleaded for Aalto to take the matter seriously: "don't you dare let me down now with dates, delivery, answers to questions, or your own arrival. I must really be able to rely on you completely now, because my own powers are at an end and my nerves are at breaking point."[54] Shand's desperation could not be disguised, with financial ruin looming over his shoulder should the project fail.

Wood Only

The exhibition finally opened at Fortnum & Mason under the auspices of the *Architectural Review* on 13 November 1933, with the title "Wood Only" (**figures 3** and **4**). Most of the space was devoted to Aalto furniture—and particularly variations of the Paimio Chair. Bent strips of laminated timber embellished the walls alongside photographs of the Paimio Sanatorium. Glassware adorned tables. Black and white photographs of the exhibition hide the warmth that would have greeted visitors. Varied wood tones, woven rugs, flowers, and casually closed curtains combined to create an aesthetic not evocative of a machine, but of a lived-in home. Shand took the title of "Wood Only" seriously, stressing over the inclusion of a metallic sofa-bed which had arrived without even upholstery to soften its severity.[55] It was omitted.

The exhibition exemplified the interwar phenomenon described by Katie Lloyd Thomas as the "proprietary turn," as building specifications increasingly stated products and brands to be used in construction.[56] In September 1932, the Building Centre had opened in London, presenting a range of products for the general public and architects to select from.[57] The Aalto exhibition appealed to this emerging audience and, in subsequent years, Aalto furniture was frequently exhibited at the Building Centre.[58]

Enso-Gutzeit used the exhibition to engage with this market directly. As Shand admitted, Enso's involvement was the "bait" which was used to lure the interest of the Architectural Press and the British architectural scene.[59] The firm displayed their materials, marketed in Britain through Wood Products Ltd.[60] This included rolls of Enso wallpaper which Aalto had used in his Paimio Sanatorium.[61] In conjunction with the exhibition, Enso planned to seek out British architects to apply the material in the construction of model houses, even proposing a visit to Finland for interested parties in the summer of 1934, though these plans were unrealized.[62] Attempting to capitalize on the proprietary turn—with architects increasingly playing the role of shopper on behalf of their clients—Enso prioritized public displays. The firm commissioned a model house by Aalto and Yorke for the 1935 Daily Mail Ideal Home exhibition, though the scheme was canceled due to Aalto's illness.[63] Enso was represented instead at the 1936 Olympia Building

Fig 3. "Wood Only" exhibition at Fortnum & Mason, London, 1933. Artek Collection/Alvar Aalto Museum.

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Exhibition with a stand designed by Breuer and Yorke. In 1935, Yorke had become the editor of *Specification*—the authoritative guide for composing architectural specifications.[64] Perhaps encouraged by his work with Enso, Yorke swiftly added proprietary material clauses to the journal's recommendations. Despite the focus on Aalto, a multitude of parties were interested in the exhibition's success.

One interested party that would receive little appreciation was Aalto's wife, Aino Marsio. Alvar consistently insisted on Aino's influence in his designs; declarations early historians disregarded.[65] Shand never acknowledged her work, except in passing in an article for *Decoration* in 1939.[66] His actions frequently furthered a male-dominated profession and—also in 1933—he caused lasting damage to the historiography of Charles Rennie Mackintosh by attacking the role of his artist wife and collaborator, Margaret Macdonald Mackintosh, following her death.[67]

With the British scene fixated on Alvar, Shand was not alone in his disregard of Aino—though *The Times* commented positively on her glassware displayed in the exhibition.[68] Possibly the only other reference to Aino came from *Country Life*, which credited the entire exhibition to "Mr. Aino Aalto."[69] Aino was more appreciated in Finland, where she secured architectural commissions, organized exhibitions, designed furniture, textiles, and glassware, and co-founded the Arcitecta Club for women architects.[70]

The Aalto exhibition was an outstanding success. Just as the forms at Stockholm 1930 had dismantled the dogma associated with modernist architecture, the London exhibition showed an alternative approach to modern furniture. The event was promoted far and wide, with Arts and Crafts luminary C. F. A. Voysey among the guests in attendance, sharing words with Aalto.[71] *The Times* responded with high praise, particularly for Aalto's grounded—even traditional—approach to Modernism.[72] F. R. S. Yorke reviewed the exhibition in the *Architects' Journal*—avoiding mention of his role in its buildup while describing the "outstanding work" displayed.[73] With the *Architectural Review* featuring a special issue on electricity in November, plans for extensive promotional material to coincide with the exhibition's opening were impeded; a half-page squeezed into the "Marginalia" section was all that could be included.[74] However, the journal joined in on the campaign of post-exhibition promotion in December.[75] The exhibition was also covered in Finland, with the front page of the main architectural journal, *Arkkitehti*, describing it as the art industry's "most important international victory to date."[76] A translated article by Shand also appeared in the journal, explaining the appeal of the exhibition in Britain; appeal he had carefully calculated.[77]

Fig 4. Aino Marsio-Aalto's "Riihimäki Flower" nested glassware displayed at the "Wood Only" exhibition. The wall-mounted models illustrate the elastic properties of laminated timber strips which form a sheet of plywood. Artek Collection/Alvar Aalto Museum.

The allure of Aalto

Shand employed several strategies in promoting the Aalto exhibition: first, requiring that the show attract "snobs."[78] Snob was a derisive term in the design-discourse of the period. The *Architectural Review*

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illustrated examples of snob design in July 1933, contrasting "genteelisms" with "normal things."[79] Shand had attempted to define the term in a 1929 article for the journal: "a snob adopts, but seldom adapts. He is a vigilant camp-follower, an eager middleman and broker, an unconscious popularizer, never a pioneer, a precursor or an innovator."[80] In prioritizing snob appeal, Shand explicitly sought popularity over his own moral campaign of superiority.

Snobbery was rooted in class connotations. For the Aalto brand, this meant establishing an image of social or intellectual standing for the public to pursue. Shand brought his friend John Betjeman into the fold to handle the "Snob-Art-Intellect-Side" and attain this illusion by attracting the interest of his upper-class contacts.[81] The high-end, Piccadilly store of Fortnum & Mason provided the ideal grounds to enhance the snobbish spectacle. As well as embodying the luxury image, the store was among a handful of independent establishments tapping into the modern furniture trade through close collaboration with prominent design figures. Waring and Gillow established a "Modern furniture department" under Serge Chermayeff, for instance.[82] And Heal's employed Prudence Maufe to advise on interior decoration.[83]

Shand's approach was made all the more important as plywood had suffered an image problem since the 1920s, being seen as a cheap substitute for solid wood.[84] By presenting the material in a loftier setting, this association could be avoided. The affordability of the furniture was just as important as its allure, however, especially at a time of economic depression. So, while other modern furniture was criticized for being unobtainable, Aalto furniture was remarkably cheap.[85] The *Architects' Journal* exalted the exhibition "of good modern furniture *which is cheap*…Are we not all sick to death of modern stuff that is snob because it is expensive, expensive because it is modern, and modern because it is snob?"[86] A comment in *Country Life* concurred, describing the "extremely economical" bentwood furniture featured in the exhibition and noting the significance of its display in a "luxury" store.[87] As well as the critical reaction, the appeal extended to the public. One of Shand's contacts at the BBC wrote appreciatively of the exhibition's success, adding "I have bought two tables there myself!"[88]

The potential paradox of affordability and artistry had concerned Moholy-Nagy—who was separately exhibiting in London in November 1933. Writing to Aalto, Shand referenced Moholy-Nagy's fears that his artistic reputation would be damaged by having his exhibition presented as a commercial-seeking enterprise. Shand reassured both men that there was no such issue with the London public: "You can be, simultaneously, a chimney sweep, or a hypnotist *and* a sculptor or a critic, without it ever being discovered, that the two people were the one and the same."[89] Shand's advice, therefore, was to "begin with business and then afterwards, as & when you wish, unfold yourself as an artist of an entirely different world."[90] The advice conveniently suited Shand's own desire to make money fast.

Shand targeted the broadest possible engagement. Affordability was one element. Another was appealing to audiences unfamiliar or unconvinced by modern design. To coincide with the exhibition, Shand wrote an article on Aalto's Paimio Sanatorium in *The Listener*—featuring a header pointing readers to Fortnum & Mason.[91] This was a vital piece of propaganda; unlike the specialist pages of the *Architectural Review* and *Architects' Journal*, advertising in *The Listener* enabled direct promotion to a layman audience. Shand also encouraged the inclusion of textiles, ceramics, and household "bits" to "humanize" the exhibition and appeal to "the ordinary not very intelligent or aesthetically developed English society woman."[92] Modernists—or "aesthetically developed" individuals—were only a fraction of the market. Shand was keen to avoid

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association of the brand with such a niche audience. In a letter to Aalto in December 1933, Shand explained that Britain had found Germany's "New Objectivity" to be "abhorrent" while Aalto appealed to "fundamentally conservative" Britons.[93] In Aalto, Shand saw the opportunity for stealthier conversion to modern design. Taking this approach even further over subsequent years, Shand encouraged Aalto's collaboration with English architects to create an image of the "Aalto English Home for English (!) Aalto furniture."[94] His ultimate aim: marketing Aalto furniture as organic, conservative, inoffensive, indigenous.

Soon after the 1933 exhibition, Shand formed Finmar—the exclusive British wholesaler of Aalto furniture—together with Boumphrey and with J. J. Faulkner.[95] The lines between criticism and explicit advertising in Shand's output vanished. Even before Finmar had been founded, he occasionally adopted his pseudonym—Baird Dennison—to promote Aalto, masking his vested interest.[96] In 1939, an advert for Finmar in *Decoration* referred readers to Shand's article on Aalto in the same issue.[97] The coincidence was planned out by Shand, as he persuaded Boumphrey to place the advert "because willy-nilly I should have to illustrate some Aalto furniture."[98]

Finmar was only one of Shand's commercial projects conducted alongside his architectural journalism. His most lucrative endeavor was the sale of image rights for photographs he obtained from his continental contacts.[99] His writings were sometimes explicitly advertorial as well, such as a piece promoting Wells Coates's prefabricated Sunspan House scheme in *Britannia and Eve* in 1934.[100] He was also a frequent contributor to *The Concrete Way*—the trade journal of British Reinforced Concrete—earning a salary of almost £200 a year.[101] Additionally, he promoted the Vienna Method—a standardized graphic language created by Otto and Marie Neurath. As with Aalto, Shand had met Otto aboard the 1933 CIAM cruise. Soon afterwards, he became the British Secretary of the Vienna Method, working 2 days a week for an annual salary of £150, until operations paused in March 1934.[102] And, in 1937, Shand formed Fortecon with Quantity Surveyor Cyril Sweett, importing foreign wines and textiles.[103] The company also had ambitious, unfulfilled plans to engage with the proprietary building market, seeking to obtain patents for foreign building materials, construction systems, sanitary appliances, and lighting products.[104]

Many other critics of the period moved effortlessly between commercial and critical roles as well. Christian Barman combined his role as a journalist with design work for HMV and publicity work for the London Passenger Transport Board.[105] John Gloag secured a secondment from Pritchard Wood and Partners to work at the Timber Development Association.[106] And Nikolaus Pevsner advised the firm of Gordon Russell on its purchases after praising the store's furniture.[107] Others in the design profession were involved across Shand's entrepreneurial projects, with Wells Coates and Maxwell Fry joining in on his promotion of the Vienna Method.[108]

Some figures in the profession considered such commercial enterprises unattractive, however. Asked to support Shand's ultimately unsuccessful campaign to succeed Noel Carrington as editor of *Design for Today* in 1934, Frank Pick asked: "Has [Shand] not been connected with commercial advertising? If he has I am not so sure he will not be at some disadvantage in consequence. I am a little suspicious of commercial advertisers."[109] Shand's sale of image rights led to frequent disagreements as well. Having received a piece on Aalto from Shand, the editor of *Decoration* was outraged at his "temerity to charge a reproduction fee of 10/6d on every illustration that appears in his article…it was not until we sent him a cheque for his contribution that it crawled

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up his back that he might mulct us for copyright fees."[110] While the Aalto brand flourished, Shand's unpopularity was a contributing factor to his postwar fall.

While Finmar rises, Shand falls from grace

Finmar was a success, with Britain dominating the pre-WWII import of Aalto furniture.[111] The furniture sold readily at Gordon Russell's, Heal's, and 22 other retail outlets.[112] It was equally popular with architects, enjoying use by Tecton, Connell, Ward and Lucas, Serge Chermayeff, F .R. S. Yorke and Marcel Breuer. Moholy-Nagy even included an Aalto armchair in his set design for H. G. Well's *Things to Come* (1936), set in the utopian year of 2036.[113] However, supply continually struggled to meet demand—even after storage transitioned from Shand's basement to a dedicated Pimlico showroom.[114] Numerous communicational issues hampered the supply chain.

Seeking to smooth over these issues, Shand met with Aalto during a trip to Finland and the Baltics with Jack Pritchard and Herbert Read in August 1935 (**figure 5**). The trip was paid for by Venesta, where Pritchard was a Marketing Manager.[115] Venesta was the British sister company of the Estonian plywood furniture manufacturer, Luterma. Despite their shared branches of business, Shand did not get along with Pritchard, writing to Aalto that "Pritchard is of no particular importance…nor is he even a director, and in all probability never will be."[116] Shand proved to be mistaken. Pritchard, for his part, later recalled enduring Shand's "impish humour" during the trip: "[Shand] insisted on getting out of the train in each country and telling the customs and other officials how delighted he was to be in their wonderful country, but each time referring to the wrong one, causing great fury."[117]

Soon after the eventful trip, Aalto appointed his wife, Aino, and Nils-Gustav Hahl to oversee the operations of Artek—a company formed to process the global exportation of Aalto furniture.[118] Finmar was to become the first star in a sprawling constellation. At the same time, Aalto delivered an ultimatum to his Turku factory, demanding they expand their operations—or else be replaced.[119] In a cruel twist, with Finmar finally starting to require less time-consuming oversight, Shand was forced to sell his shares to pay for his immediate needs. Despite the improvements in communication and positive sales numbers, the benefits were apparently yet to be seen financially, with Shand writing to Betjeman in February 1939 that Finmar was "doing far from brilliantly, and has ceased paying its directors anything."[120] He admitted that he had sold all of his shares over a year ago "to 'elp sole the kids' boots."[121] In an appeal for financial support from the Royal Literary Fund, Shand stated that his original £800 worth of Finmar shares had been sold for

Fig 5. Left to right, Shand, Aalto and Pritchard at the Paimio Sanatorium. Photograph taken by Herbert Read in August 1935. UDA.

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£650.[122] For all his understanding of the national appetite for modern design, Shand was unskilled in operating a business. He admitted in a letter to Sigfried Giedion in 1939: "I am, unfortunately, not a 'business man', because I was born, as we say in English, 'with a silver spoon in my mouth', only the spoon is long gone!"[123]

Having already lost his authority over Aalto by leaving Finmar, the Second World War cemented Shand's departure from design circles. In November 1945, having finally resumed contact with Aalto, Shand despaired that an air raid over London had destroyed his card-indexes of foreign addresses—along with his papers, manuscripts, and books.[124] Other factors cited for his withdrawal included his relocation to "provincial" Bath and prolonged restrictions on foreign travels.[125] However, his problematic personality surely contributed as well.

Shand's anti-Semitism was a poorly kept secret. J. M. Richards later described him as a "a difficult man, with a habit of taking irrational dislikes to people and a tendency to xenophobia, and especially to anti-semitism."[126] John Gloag had no time for his company, confessing: "[Shand] was an eccentric and not very attractive character, and although I knew him fairly well, I disliked him…I wasn't the only person who disliked him."[127] Though never ostracized, the premature decline of Shand's career is unsurprising.

His indifference in aiding the emigration of persecuted designers—despite his continental links—contrasted the considerable efforts of other figures such as Edward "Bobby" Carter, Godfrey Samuel and Jack Pritchard. While Shand collaborated with Pritchard to secure work and enable the emigration of Walter Gropius, his generosity did not extend to Jews fleeing persecution. A request he received from the Zurich-based Elsa Girsberger-Voegeli to assist with the emigration of two of her Jewish colleagues resulted in a "polite but blank refusal."[128] Although he forwarded the request to Samuel within a day of receipt, his accompanying letter contained several anti-Semitic quips.[129] Meanwhile, his disregard for women designers—privately referring to Jane Drew as a "dreadful woman with artificial eyelashes," for instance—would only have alienated him further from an increasingly inclusive postwar profession.[130]

The Aalto effect

Despite his departure, Shand's intervention initiated a ripple throughout the British design scene. Christopher Wilk described the Aalto exhibition as a pivotal moment for its impact on British designers and manufacturers.[131] Other exhibitions of modern wood furniture followed, with *The Times* reporting on one at Betty Joel's in February 1935. The newspaper reassured its readers that the term modern "in this connexion, does not mean anything alarming, not even steel, but only adapted to contemporary tastes and conditions" while also describing the use of timber as "a sensible simplification of traditional forms."[132] Aalto's furniture was on display again at the 1934 Ideal Home Exhibition.[133] Geoffrey Boumphrey, having aided Aalto's British introductions and co-founded Finmar, considered the exhibit in *The Spectator*: Aalto's contributions "should appeal to those who appreciate the lines and springiness of steel chairs but dislike their coldness."[134]

Other manufacturers soon circled in on the opportunity Finmar had uncovered. Serge Chermayeff's Plan Ltd had already sought to undermine Shand's project and secure rights to Aalto furniture in Britain.[135] Shand complained to Aalto about the move, glossing over the personal ramifications and instead explaining that the company would suffer for not being connected to the MARS group and that "that horrible little

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jew, Erik [sic] Mendelsohn is really at the back of them."[136] While Plan Ltd received no response from Aalto, other firms were waiting in the wings.

The Swiss firm Wohnbedarf, operated by Sigfried Giedion, had sold furniture—including Aalto pieces—across Europe since around 1931.[137] Once the success of the exhibition became apparent, Wohnbedarf approached Shand in December 1933 with the task of overseeing the formation of a British branch of their business. This would involve the establishment of a British company with the rights to drawings and models, enabling local manufacture of products without relying on the importation of goods.[138] Anticipating sizable sales, Shand was offered 10% of the licence fee, estimated at £500–800 per year.[139] The opportunity stagnated, with Shand citing the lack of desire for either side to visit the other in person.[140] Instead, Boumphrey was eventually sent to Switzerland for negotiations concerning the importation of Wohnbedarf items through Finmar. Shand subsequently wrote to Zurich listing the specific items Finmar would be interested in importing. In response, Wohnbedarf demanded that all their stock had to be included, or nothing.[141] No further discussions were held.

Wohnbedarf would have better luck approaching Jack Pritchard, who had been experimenting with plywood for Venesta since 1930.[142] Shortly after joining Shand for the expedition to Finland and the Baltics, Pritchard focused his efforts on his own company—Isokon.[143] He was approached by Wohnbedarf in 1934 with the offer of selling Marcel Breuer's furniture in Britain.[144] Much like Shand, Pritchard knew the British audience well; he advised Wohnbedarf that "snob appeal" must come first to market a fashionable brand.[145] However, Breuer's aluminum furniture would never command the same appeal as Aalto in Britain. In 1936, Breuer translated his aluminum recliner into plywood, designing his Long Chair for Isokon.[146] Finmar retaliated by claiming plagiarism, with Shand holding discussions personally with Breuer on the matter.[147] An agreement drafted between Artek, Finmar and Isokon mandated the requirement of an Artek license—but the contract remained unsigned.[148] Similarly, having visited the Aalto exhibition, Gerald Summers used his company, Makers of Simple Furniture, to produce a series of Aalto-inspired chairs using Venesta plywood.[149] Finmar and Artek considered action against the company but did not pursue the issue further.[150]

Beyond the impact on furniture and the popularization of plywood, the events triggered by Shand nurtured the global rise of Aalto. The United States architect Harmon Goldstone recalled being "overwhelmed" after reading one of Shand's articles on Aalto.[151] Following a swift trip to meet Aalto in Helsinki, Goldstone returned to New York to arrange the 1938 Aalto Exhibition at the Museum of Modern Art. Goldstone also referred his friend, Laurance Rockefeller, to Aalto's furniture—"much the best modern furniture anywhere."[152] Rockefeller established the first United States distributor of Aalto products: a short-lived but influential company called New Furniture.[153] With the formation of Artek, Aalto furniture became a global phenomenon, finding its way into houses across the world. Alongside Aalto, Nordic Modernism maintained its ascendancy after the Second World War. The *Architectural Review* continued to lead British appreciation with editor J. M. Richards spearheading the postwar promotion of Scandinavian-inspired "New Empiricism."[154] Shand's desperate dive into entrepreneurship had encouraged a global wave of appreciation.

Conclusion

The success of Aalto in interwar Britain relied on the mediation of his designs through the period's most prominent critic. With knowledge of the British scene, Shand seized on

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Fig 6. Alvar Aalto with Elspeth (left) and Mary Shand (right). Possibly taken in Ladbroke Square, near Shand's home in London, in the run-up to the November 1933 exhibition. UDA.

Aalto for his fulfillment of an acceptable domestic language of Modernism. Like many critics of the period, Shand's actions were in part commercially motivated. However, he was also encouraged by his appreciation of Aalto—not only for his architecture and furniture, but for his personality, with letters chronicling the pair's encounters over drinks and their "wild pranks."[155] A photograph of Aalto holding Shand's daughters demonstrates the personal bond between the two men (**figure 6**). In 1936, requested by the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) to recommend foreign architects worthy of appointment as Corresponding Members, Shand specified the name of Aalto, who was duly appointed in 1937.[156]

Following the war, Britain was the first country with which Aalto resumed contact through several exchanges, notably with F.R.S. Yorke.[157] In 1948, Aalto was appointed a Fellow of the Royal College of Art and, in 1950, he provided lectures at the Architectural Association.[158] Finally, in 1957, Aalto was awarded the RIBA's prestigious Gold Medal. The event provided a final reunion with Shand. Once close friends, then business partners, the pair ended as virtually strangers. In a speech at the award ceremony, Leslie Martin acknowledged the presence of Shand in the audience, noting that he had "recognized Mr. Aalto's work in the 1930s and did so much then to bring it to our notice."[159] Shand wrote to Aalto remarking on his rise to stardom: "You (Sie) have been famous for so long that I no longer dare address you familiarly as Du."[160] However, Shand reflected with contentment at having facilitated this rise:

> I still see in my mind's eye how the higher RIBA animals smiled superciliously and shook their heads when I appeared as a prophet and soothsayer. Today we have come so (apparently) far that I suspect that the young people look on you more as a reactionary, whereas the surviving high RIBA animals of the Thirties will applaud loudest at the ceremony. Time's revenges, time's revenges![161]

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In 2019, Alborz Dianat commenced a PhD as the recipient of the Graham Child scholarship from the Society of Architectural Historians of Great Britain. A subsequent recipient of an AHRC scholarship, Dianat is in the final year of his research on architectural critic P. Morton Shand. This research is based on an uncataloged archive at the University of Dundee. Dianat has conducted archival research in several other roles: including at the Glasgow School of Art Archives and Collections and the D.H. Lawrence Birthplace Museum.

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