



PROJECTS BY AMITY WORREL, PHOTO BY ROBERT K CHAMBERS

THE SAARINEN TABLE

It's hard to determine what Eero Saarinen is most famous for: his architectural designs of the Washington Dulles Airport, the TWA Flight Center at JFK or the Gateway Arch in St. Louis. Or the Saarinen table.



PHOTO BY CHANDLER PRUDE

The fact is, his architectural and furniture designs were simultaneous. While designing headquarters for multiple U.S. corporations and buildings for major universities, he was also working with art school friends Charles and Ray Eames and Florence Knoll of the furniture company fame on pieces like the Womb and Tulip chairs and other pedestal designs. The original 1957 Pedestal Series featured side and arm chairs, dining, coffee and side tables, as well as a stool, and they are still in production today through Knoll®.

So how can a 60-year-old table design be classic, current and completely sought after? We asked Amity Worrel, a designer in Austin and San Antonio with a self-professed love of the Saarinen table.

It's all about the base. "The original cast aluminum powder-coated table base is what makes the Saarinen table (sometimes called a Tulip Table) great. I always tell my clients that the beauty of this particular pedestal table is that it looks so light and airy but is so solid and sturdy that a toddler could hang off

the edge of the table without it falling over! It is a miracle of engineering," says Worrel.

The table base also allows for ease of use because there are no pesky legs getting in the way. It's possible to seat a lot of people at one table because the top simply floats, providing lots of legroom.

"My favorite thing to do is to find older Saarinen tables through mid-century dealers and get a table with some history to it. I love to see the wear and tear of time on the tables. Sometimes you can find older table bases that custom tops can be made for so you get the function of the base with the look of the top that you want. The table looks great in traditional or contemporary spaces and can be used well with vintage or new chairs to great effect. It is utterly versatile!"

While Knoll® continues to produce authentic Saarinen tables, over the past years, the market has been flooded with reproductions of the iconic table with an equally wide range of prices. Reproductions may look the same from a distance but the differences are clear as soon as you see the details. Worrel advises, "Consequently, it can be challenging for our clients to differentiate between the many versions and their respective qualities. If purchasing a reproduction, the following guidelines are true for any side table, coffee table or dining table in the Tulip collection."

THE BASE

You will probably find two versions for the base: aluminum and fiberglass. The best reproductions cast a one-piece aluminum base that undergoes a five-step powder-coating process for a smooth,

glossy finish that is resistant to chipping. Cast aluminum is both stronger and lighter than a low-cost fiberglass base which results in a table that will wobble and a poor-quality paint finish that leads to easy chipping.

THE TOP

Most stores will tell you (or sometimes they even do not know) that their table is completed with a top made from genuine Carrara marble, sourced from the stone quarries in the Carrara province of Tuscany. However, most of reproductions use white marble from China (less expensive) which can still be of good quality but is not as smooth and "exclusive" as Carrara marble, considered the best in the world for its natural look and durability.

As you can see, you have to look at the details when it comes to buying a Saarinen table. Prices differ, quality differs and as Charles Eames said, "*The details are not the details. They make the design.*" ♦