

Kaj Franck quotes and background information:

Saviseppo, Arabia staff magazine, 1981

Kaj Franck – Designer, Museum of Applied Arts (Design Museum), Helsinki & WSOY, 1992

Kaj Franck – Theme and variations, Heinola Town Museum, 1997

ARABIA – Ceramics – Arts – Industry, Design Museum 2009, www.designmuseum.fi

Kaj Franck – a gentleman as the revolutionary of the dinner table

Professor **Kaj Franck** was born in 1911 and grew up in a world where richly decorated, multiple-part porcelain dinner sets were the norm. At the other end of the spectrum were poor households, where all members of the family ate from the same stone dish. During his remarkable career, Franck steered a mid-course between these extremes, changing our collective perception of tableware in the process.

Further information:

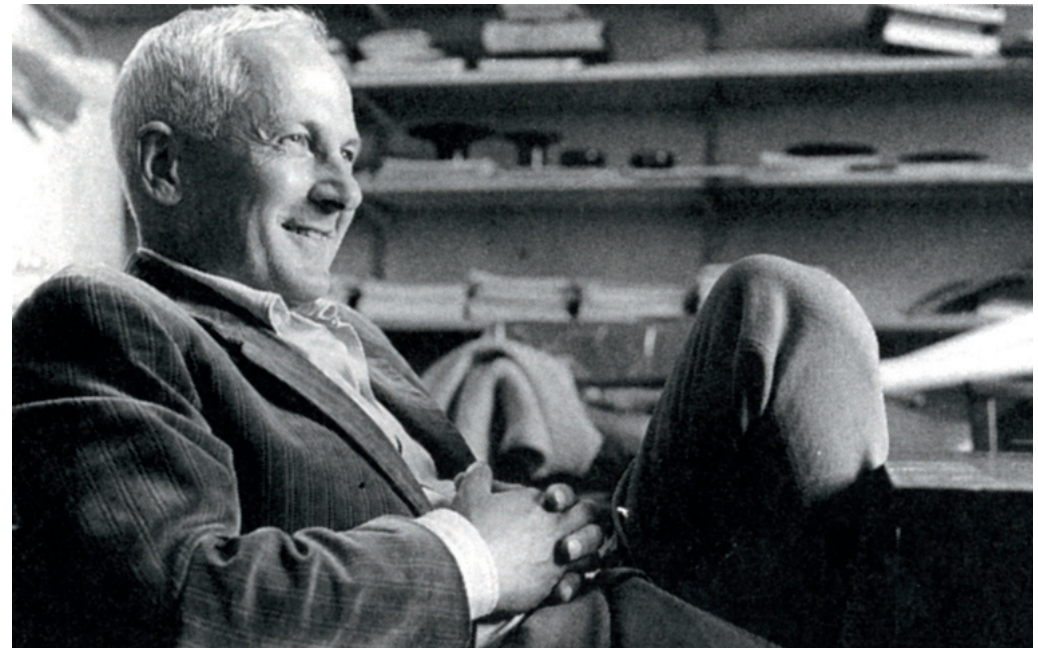
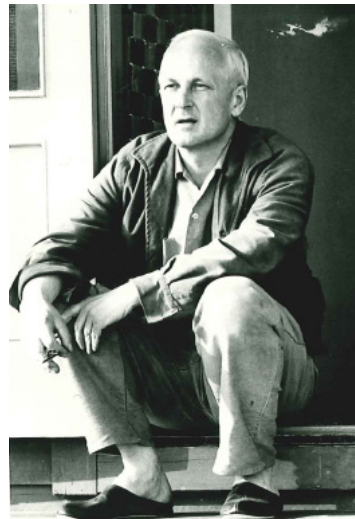
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Deeply functionalist designer

"The point of reference for my design was therefore the basic idea rather than design."

Kaj Franck created the Kilta series piece by piece in the 1950s. This represented an excursion into the essential. Kaj's original impressions of the prevalent style are as follows:

"It is easy to imagine what the Arabia assortment looked like: copies of Swedish models, which had been fashioned after English and French dishes. Of course, these included inimitable, individually flawless and practical items. But on the whole, the collection was unexcitingly superficial and coarse, despite imitating models from Wedgewood, Paris or Leipzig."

Abolishing the existing tableware concept was not easy, because excess decoration often served to conceal faults in the material or defective shapes. When he created Kilta, Franck was Head of Applied Arts at Arabia. He co-operated actively with experts at the factory to achieve beautiful, perfectly unicoloured coatings. These in themselves were decoration enough. Without this teamwork, the Kilta series (1952) and its successor, Teema (1981), would never have seen the light of day.



Life at Nuutajärvi

Professors **Oiva Toikka** and **Heikki Orvola** were long-standing colleagues of Kaj Franck. They worked together at the Nuutajärvi glass factory, becoming close friends who would often spend their evenings watching television in each other's company.

"Kaj often joined us for meals", Oiva recalls. "We shared a semi-detached house, separated only by a wall. Kaj would always enter by the balcony. I remember the day when Inkeri and I had bought a disgusting, light green plasticly curtain and Kaj entered through it as if the thing didn't exist – but you should have seen his face. He was very particular about aesthetics."

Heikki reminisces: "In the evenings we often watched television together – Peyton Place was our favourite series, and we named the Nuutajärvi locals after its characters. I was Rodney." Oiva adds with a laugh: "We spent so much time together that the villagers thought Kaj was the grandfather of my kids!"

Creativity at hourly rates

Both product series and unique items were created in systematic fashion at the factory. The artists were part of the factory staff and knew the glass blowers and office clerks well.

"We punched the clock just like everybody else; our workday lasting from eight to four", Heikki and Oiva confirm.

Kaj filled his eight-hour days by designing numerous, extremely simplified articles for serial production. His unique pieces, however, betrayed his decorative streak. The designer



Kaj Franck, Oiva and Inkeri Toikka and their sons.

loved animals and created one-of-a-kind glass objects, capturing the forms of butterflies and insects. His serial dishes, on the other hand, were straight as a ruler.

"Kaj was never tasteless or narrow-minded. His style was severe in serial production, but free in his unique works of art", Oiva states.

Kaj would draw his dishes as basic shapes: orbs, squares, triangles or rectangles. Their dimensions were meticulously planned: he loved to play with the relationship between height and width.

"Kaj designed objects for his own use; practical aspects lay at the heart of his serial production", Oiva and Heikki summarise.

"The purpose of Kilta was to create independent articles that shared a common look,

by breaking the traditional dinnerware set down to its essentials. Teema is based on the same idea: making do with a minimum number of items."

A gentleman of unfailing style

Kaj Franck's colleagues remember him as an elegant aesthete, with an impressive, even daunting presence. Kaj placed an emphasis not only on the form, but also the colouring of dinnerware sets.

"Since Teema does not have a dominant form in itself, it combines well with dishes already present in the cupboard. With its plain colours, Teema attractively complements more richly adorned items."