



THE AMSTERDAM BAKELITE COLLECTION

The Amsterdam Bakelite Collection was founded in 1990 by Reindert Groot, a Dutch professional producer and photographer, with a mission to “promote knowledge about one of the most miraculous materials ever invented: Bakelite, its history and that of its inventor Leo Baekeland.” Baekeland, a Belgian born in 1863, came to his plastic revolution by way of a photographic paper he invented called Velox. The sale of Velox to Kodak in 1899 provided Baekeland with enough money to build his own laboratory, where he invented and patented the first all-synthetic material: phenol-formaldehyde resin, or Bakelite, in 1907. Besides Bakelite, urea-formaldehyde and melamine-formaldehyde resins, thermosetting plastics and other colourful materials are represented in the Amsterdam Bakelite Collection. Their activities include organizing exhibitions, including ones in the United States, Japan, China and the Netherlands.

In 1910 Baekeland joined with a German phenol supplier to establish the first factory to produce the new product: the Bakelite Gesellschaft mbH, in Erkner, near Berlin. In less than five months a second factory was set up in the United States: the General Bakelite Company in Perth Amboy, New Jersey, and in 1926 Bakelite Limited in Great Britain. In these factories, workers pressure moulded the plastic into different products. Because of its electrical resistance, Bakelite became the material of choice for encasing new consumer products like telephones and radios. Baekeland himself appeared on the cover of *Time* magazine in September 1924 with the legend: “It will not burn. It will not melt.”

At the Amsterdam Bakelite Collection, Groot has some 4,000 varied and variegated objects. Designer names linked to Bakelite include Raymond Loewy, who used Bakelite for his Purma Special camera in 1937, and Norman Bel Geddes, with his Patriot radio in 1939. From the 1920s to the 1940s, Bakelite was also used for jewellery production. One of the most iconic designs is the Radio Nurse, an early example of a baby phone. The Japanese-American sculptor Isamu Noguchi was commissioned to design the Radio Nurse’s receiver. It became an abstract face of a nanny, expressed in high-gloss, dark brown Bakelite.

But Bakelite is really a material of mass production, and we don’t really know how many things were ever made out of it. The thrill of the chase—to fill gaps in his collection—is what drives Groot. His collector’s eye is always on the lookout for stylish, shiny and colourful Art Deco, Bauhaus or Streamline designs. **U**



Clock with kitchen timer, "Measured Time." Design by Isamu Noguchi, United States, circa 1932.



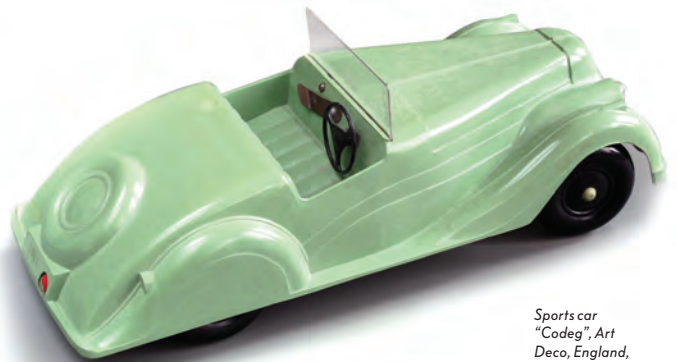
Thermometer / hygrometer, promotional product, United States, 1930s.



Baby phone receiver "Radio Nurse." Design by Isamu Noguchi, United States, 1937.



Table fan, French Art Deco, 1930s.



Sports car "Codeg", Art Deco, England, 1930s.