

NOGUCHI COFFEE TABLE

A triumph of form and function, this piece is one of the most loved – and copied – examples of Mid-century Modern design.



Japanese-American artist and industrial designer Isamu Noguchi famously declared that “everything is sculpture” and his most popular creation is almost more abstract artwork than coffee table: a curved three-sided slab of glass atop two biomorphic interlocking wooden legs. In fact, when American manufacturer Herman Miller debuted the design in 1947, the catalogue described it as “sculpture for use”.

Fast forward to the early 2010s and cheeky design blog F*** Your Noguchi Coffee Table, which called out decorating trends that had hit maximum mainstream popularity, such as antlers and fiddle-leaf figs. The blog’s title exemplified the Noguchi table’s universal appeal – and the number of knock-offs. “It’s a victim of its own success,” says interior designer Lauren Li, founding director of Melbourne studio Sisällä.

The charismatic Noguchi was born in 1904. A one-time studio assistant of sculptor Constantin Brancusi, he was influenced by Modernism and abstraction in the 1920s and ’30s but refused to be pigeon-holed. “I do not wish to belong to any school. I’m always learning, always discovering.” Inspired by Zen gardens and Surrealism, Noguchi turned his designer’s eye to everything from public squares and playgrounds to stage sets for Martha Graham, bronze busts for wealthy clients and his much-loved Akari paper lamps. But this coffee table was his favourite furniture piece and has been in continuous production since its reissue in 1984.

Distributed in Australia by Vitra, a genuine Noguchi is priced from \$5360 at Living Edge (livingedge.com.au) – and the designer’s signature on the glass proves it’s the real thing. An off-beat blend of form and function, it’s an injection of art into the everyday. ●