



Translating Polish Craftsmanship into
a Contemporary Furniture Context

CULTIVATING
WICKER

Acknowledgments

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Abstract

Cultivating Wicker explores how contemporary design can sustain local craft ecosystems while forming a new visual language rooted in Polish culture. Developed in collaboration with rural artisans, the project translates traditional wicker techniques into a collection of contemporary furniture and lighting. Through ethnographic research, it examines how Polish everyday rituals and cultural attitudes shape visual language and design typologies. Drawing from basketry, wicker workshop furniture, and rural material culture, the work translates craft into a contemporary context as a system of gestures, knowledge, and material intelligence rather than decoration. It proposes a locally grounded, repairable collectible design model that positions Polish craftsmanship as both a cultural and ecological framework for contemporary practice.

1. Introduction

This thesis, *Cultivating Wicker*, investigates how traditional Polish wicker weaving can be translated into a contemporary furniture system that combines handcraft with modern metal structures. The project develops a collection of furniture, including a standing lamp, hanging lamp, lounge chair, and low table, structured around the material potential of woven willow (*Salix viminalis*). While the full collection frames the larger design proposal, the standing lamp functions as the flagship piece and physical thesis outcome. It embodies the project's conceptual, structural, and material logic and a summary of my research.

Rather than treating wicker as a decorative layer, the project approaches it as a structural material shaped by ecological conditions, manual skill, and inherited knowledge. This approach is informed by Richard Sennett's understanding of craftsmanship as a relationship between hand, mind, skill, and judgment¹, as well as Tim Ingold's argument that making is not the imposition of form onto passive matter, but a process of following and negotiating with materials.² In this sense, wicker is not simply a material to be shaped. It is a living system of growth, preparation, resistance, flexibility, and technique.

Wicker weaving has historically played a significant role in Polish material culture. In Rudnik nad Sanem, one of the most important Polish centers of wicker craftsmanship, generations of artisans developed advanced techniques for working with willow, creating objects that were durable, lightweight, repairable, and widely used in everyday life.³ Throughout the twentieth century, Polish designers also searched for ways to connect craft traditions with modern forms of living. This can be seen in the work of Władysław Wołkowski, who treated wicker as both a functional and poetic material within the domestic interior.

However, the relationship between craft and design weakened at the end of the twentieth century, especially after the political and economic transformations of the 1990s. Industrial manufacturing, imported products, synthetic materials, and globalized taste increasingly displaced many handcrafted objects and local production systems. As a result, a gap emerged between Polish craft communities and contemporary design discourse. Wicker weaving is disappearing and survives only within fragile regional craft networks, while remaining largely absent from contemporary furniture and design discourse. In Poland, wicker is also often associated with poverty, outdated interiors, or the aesthetics of the socialist period, which has contributed to its marginalization within contemporary visual culture. One of the aims of this project is therefore to challenge these associations and reposition wicker as a material capable of operating within contemporary design, collectible furniture, and future-oriented material culture.

At the same time, design today is increasingly shaped by concerns around sustainability, overproduction, ethical production, and the disappearance of local knowledge systems. Willow, as a fast-growing, renewable, and biodegradable material, offers both ecological potential and a strong cultural foundation. Its reintroduction into contemporary design creates an opportunity to rethink material use through a more responsible, traceable, and locally grounded approach.

This project explores how design can create new contexts for the continuation of wicker weaving. By combining traditional weaving with metal frameworks, the collection translates existing techniques into forms suited to contemporary context. The woven elements are developed in collaboration with artisans associated with DELTA, a Polish wicker production network based in Rudnik nad Sanem, where decentralized, home-based making remains an active model of production.⁴

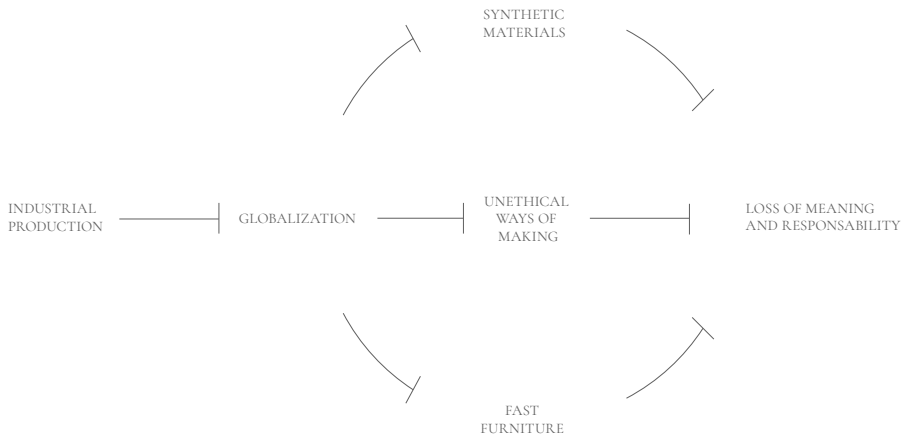
Ultimately, Cultivating Wicker proposes a model for contemporary furniture that integrates craftsmanship into current cultural and ecological realities. Grounded in research, an anthropological framework, and ethnographic fieldwork, the project repositions craft not as nostalgia, but as a necessary component of contemporary design. The collection addresses an audience that values durability, authenticity, material honesty, and thoughtful production, offering an alternative to generic, disconnected modes of manufacturing.

2. Research Context

2.1 Production Without Place

Contemporary design operates within a globalized system of mass production characterized by overproduction, disposability, and a growing disconnection between objects and their origins. Furniture is produced at scale, often detached from local materials, cultural context, and the people who make it. In this system, objects circulate without traceable relationships to place, maker, labor conditions, or material history, leading to a loss of authorship and meaning.⁵

This condition is especially visible in furniture economies shaped by outsourcing, standardization, and anonymous supply chains. Contemporary interiors are often furnished with objects that are formally efficient but culturally ungrounded. This produces a disconnection from processes of making and, as a consequence, from responsibility (see Image 1.1). Without understanding how objects are produced, users are less able to make conscious and ethical choices.



1.1 Graph explaining industrial production consequences in XXI Century.

Craft is frequently reduced either to a nostalgic aesthetic, a marketable reference, or a luxury commodity. It is less often understood as an active mode of production and knowledge transmission. In response, this project proposes a return to craft traditions not as stylistic references, but as active systems of knowledge, material intelligence, and production⁶. It asks how design might re-engage locality, cultural specificity, and material responsibility as alternatives to anonymous global production.

2.2 Why Craft Matters

Craft is not only the production of objects. It is a system of knowledge, labor, discipline, and cultural transmission. In *The Craftsman* Sennett describes craftsmanship as a dialogue between hand and mind, where skill develops through repetition, correction, attention, and judgment⁷. Ingold similarly frames making as a process of working with materials rather than imposing a predetermined form onto them⁸. His writing on material flows and engagement is especially relevant to this thesis because it shifts attention from finished objects to processes, gestures, resistance, and transformation. Within this framework, craft becomes a way of thinking through making. It integrates environmental awareness, embodied knowledge, and social values into material practice and object production. This thesis therefore approaches craft not as heritage to be preserved in static form, but as a living system capable of informing contemporary design. The value of craft lies not only in the final object, but in the relationships it creates between maker, material, user, place, and time. This position is especially important in opposition to fast furniture and disposable objects. Fast furniture often encourages short cycles of consumption, low emotional attachment, and limited repairability. Craft, by contrast, can create objects that invite care, maintenance, and longer use. In this project, craftsmanship becomes a strategy for slowing consumption and rebuilding cultural and material responsibility.

2.3 Polish Context: Folklore, Everyday Life, and Cultural Continuity

Polish craft traditions have historically been closely tied to questions of identity, place, and everyday life. Poland's history of partitions, shifting borders, war, and political transformation means that cultural continuity was often maintained not through institutions, but through practices, rituals, domestic habits, religious customs, and material culture embedded in daily life.⁹ To understand what "polishness" means in relation to design, it is therefore necessary to return to the culture of the countryside, folk traditions, closeness to nature, and the cultural attitudes that shaped everyday objects.

The term *folklore* was introduced by William J. Thoms in 1846 and means "knowledge of the people". In ethnographic tradition, folklore refers to a wide range of cultural phenomena, including oral traditions, rituals, customs, beliefs, social practices, and material culture.¹⁰

This expanded understanding of folklore is important because it shows that folk culture is not only a collection of motifs, but a system of living practices. It is a system of practices, behaviors, meanings, and performances that exist within specific social and material contexts.

Polish folk culture did not develop primarily as an aesthetic category, but as a practical system of making shaped by local materials, climate, economy, religion, and social structures. Objects produced within this context were functional, but they often carried strong visual character. Their form emerged from the logic of use, construction, available resources, and repeated gestures.¹¹

This thesis frames Polish craftsmanship as practice and performance embedded in everyday life. This became a starting point for my research. My observations in ethnographic museums reinforced this understanding. The distinct character of rural objects often came not from applied ornament alone, but from the way they were made: the thickness of a wooden element, the curvature of a woven structure, the directness of a carved surface, or the pragmatic shaping of a tool for a specific task. A simple example is the milking stool, whose form is defined by stability, proximity to the ground, and direct use rather than stylistic intention.



2.1 Folk Milking Stool, Muzeum Etnograficzne w Krakowie.

Polish folk art and craftsmanship therefore include much more than decorative motifs. They encompass regional practices such as weaving, wood carving, lace making, ironwork, weaving, pottery and embroidery. These practices produced objects that were structurally direct, materially honest, and expressive through proportion, rhythm, gesture, and detail.

2.4 Craft and Design in Polish Modernity

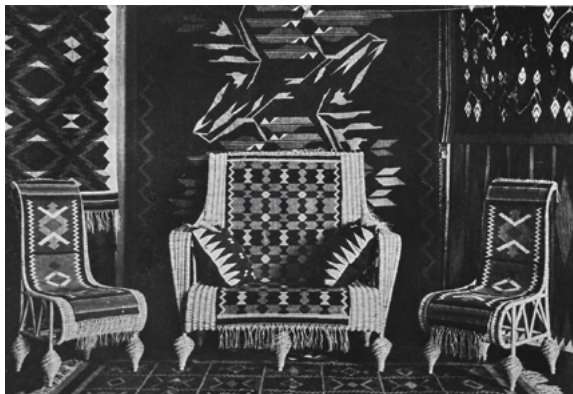
At the beginning of the twentieth century, following the restoration of Poland's independence in 1918, the relationship between craft, design, and national identity became central to the formation of modern Polish culture. Designers and architects were confronted with the challenge of constructing a coherent visual language that could express both the historical depth and future aspirations of the newly re-established state.

A key example of this effort was the Polish Pavilion at the 1925 International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts in Paris, designed by Józef Czajkowski. The pavilion represented an important attempt to articulate national identity through modern design by transforming regional references into geometric, and contemporary forms.¹²

Rather than directly reproducing folk motifs, Czajkowski translated these references into a formal language aligned with modernity. This translation is represented in Art Deco wicker furniture set by Wojciech Jastrzębowski, where he combines local tradition and shows it in international dialogue. This moment is important for the thesis because it demonstrates that Polish design has previously used craft not as backward-looking nostalgia, but as a foundation for future-oriented visual culture.

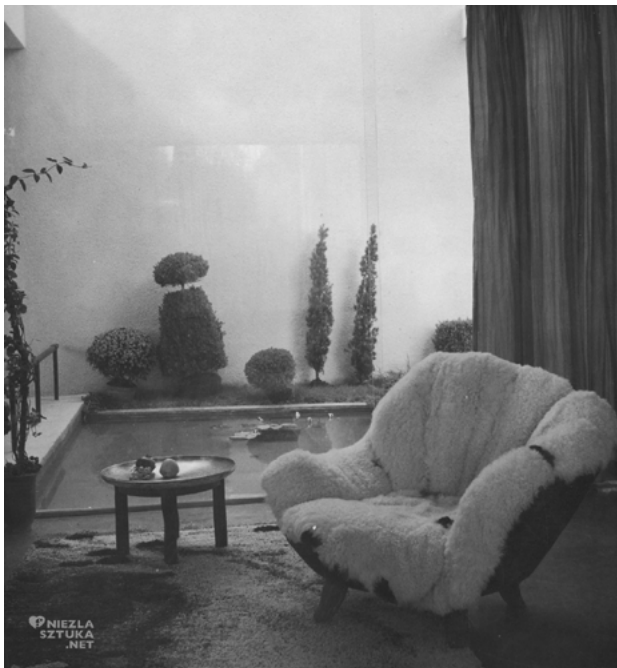


2.3 Józef Czajkowski, *Polish Pavilion at the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, Paris, 1925.*



2.4 Wojciech Jastrzębowski, *wicker furniture shown in relation to Polish Art Deco and modern national design language.*

Parallel to these developments, other designers explored ways of integrating local traditions with modernist principles on a domestic and experimental scale. Barbara Brukalska's interior design for the Polish Pavilion at the 1937 Paris Exhibition, provides an important example. Her work, in dialogue with the Praesens group and the broader modernist discourse, connected architecture, aeronautics, and modern living with references to Polish material culture. In the project "Interior for the Constructor of Airplanes", Brukalska combined references to technological progress with local materials and textures, including traditional sheepskin cover from Zakopane region.¹³



2.5 Barbara Brukalska, *Interior for the Constructor of Airplanes*, Polish Pavilion, Paris Exhibition, 1937, source: Katarzyna Uchowicz, *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 87, no. 4 (2025).

This period can be understood as a moment of forward-looking construction, in which Polish identity was actively shaped through design, architecture, and everyday objects. It was not simply a return to the past. It was a projection into the future, where modern ways of living were imagined through the synthesis of tradition, craft, technology, and innovation.

3. Research Methodology & Findings

To understand how Polish identity is perceived today and how it might inform contemporary design, I conducted qualitative research supported by a small-scale visual survey, fieldwork, and material experimentation. The aim was not to define Polishness as a fixed aesthetic, but to understand how it is remembered, recognized, and practiced through objects, materials, domestic rituals, and cultural attitudes.

The qualitative research was structured around two primary groups. The first included participants over the age of 80, whose memories are connected to pre-industrial, wartime, and early post-war conditions. This group functions as a living archive of practices, domestic objects, and rural knowledge that are now partially forgotten. The second group consisted of younger participants, approximately aged 30 to 45, who represent the target audience of the project: urban, culturally engaged, and increasingly interested in natural materials, sustainability, and objects with a clear origin. Participants were asked how they live, what they remember from

domestic or rural environments, which objects they consider culturally familiar, and how they understand Polishness through material culture.¹⁴ Responses from the older generation strongly reinforced the importance of the countryside as a defining context of Polish life. The village was described not as an idealized landscape, but as a space of necessity, multifunctionality, adaptation, and labor. Objects were remembered as durable and practical companions to everyday life. Their value was tied to longevity, repairability, and the ability to serve multiple functions. Participants recalled interiors composed of heavy, often handcrafted furniture, oak wardrobes, embroidered textiles, kilims, and hand-painted elements, frequently made by local craftsmen or family members. These objects were not only functional, but embedded in daily rituals of care, maintenance, and use.



3.1 Painted Ornament on wooden furniture, source: Muzeum Etnograficzne w Krakowie.

These recollections also emphasized the collective nature of rural and early urban life. Domestic activities such as cooking, washing, and cleaning were labor-intensive and often shared, forming part of a broader social structure. There was a strong awareness of material value: waste was minimal, objects were reused, and resources were carefully managed. Everyday life was structured around scarcity, which fostered an ethos in which everything had a clear purpose and an extended lifespan.

At the same time, this group revealed an important contradiction. While some memories highlighted craftsmanship, community, and material intelligence, others associated rural life with poverty, hardship, and physical labor. The coexistence of rural and working-class urban experiences, particularly in pre-war and post-war interiors, reflected a tension between tradition and aspirations toward modernity. One participant described a strong desire to move away from countryside conditions, associating progress with cleanliness, technological advancement, and a different domestic environment.



3.2. *Picture presenting mid-war summer in rural area in Poland. Family archives.*



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These responses demonstrate that material culture is deeply entangled with emotional memory and personal experience. Polishness emerges not through fixed forms, but through context, sentiment, use, and lived conditions. They also confirm that folklore and rural traditions are not universally perceived as positive. They are shaped by complex and sometimes difficult histories. This reinforced the need for a design approach that is strongly informed by the current context and that works with cultural memory critically, without romanticizing it.

The younger research group expressed a different but complementary perspective. Many participants demonstrated growing interest in cultural grounding and identity, particularly in relation to materials and everyday objects. They emphasized a preference for natural and tactile materials such as stone, wood, wool, and wicker, associating them with authenticity, durability, and a return to more rooted ways of living. Their responses reflect broader contempo-

rary tendencies toward ecological awareness, balance, and slower modes of consumption, often linked to ethnodesign and slow design philosophies.¹⁶

I wanted to understand whether there is a common visual language that should be considered in the design process. I conducted a visual survey in which participants of different ages were asked to identify which objects or ornaments they perceived as more Polish. The survey used references from ethnographic museum collections. The results suggested that recognition was not strictly tied to specific regions. Instead, participants responded to qualities such as material honesty, familiarity of use, visible handwork, and the ability to create beauty from simple and accessible materials. This provided important visual clues for the design process. It suggested that Polishness can be translated through proportion, gesture, material relationships, and construction logic, not only through direct ornament.



3.4. Visual survey references: selected Polish folk, craft, and design objects used to study recognition of Polish visual language. Muzeum Etnograficzne w Krakowie.

To deepen my understanding of Polish form, I conducted an interview with Katarzyna Smyk, a professor of cultural studies, who emphasized that the visual language of Poland is rooted in cultural attitudes. To read form, it is necessary to understand the behaviors and value systems that shape it.¹⁷ I found that Polish culture is shaped by a set of shared values, such as modesty, frugality, resourcefulness, attachment to home, continuity, and the importance of family and ritual. These values inform not only how objects appear, but also how they are made, used, and interpreted.¹⁸

For example, attitudes such as *prostolinijność* (directness), *sprawczość* (agency), and *zaradność* (resourcefulness) are materially and visually embedded in traditional wooden objects from the Zakopane region. The act of carving wood expresses a decisive interaction with the material, where form emerges through action rather than purely abstract design. The carved surface becomes both a record of technique and an expression of cultural attitude.

These values exist in dialogue with material logic and visual language. We can also observe broader qualities such as *swojskość* (familiarity or homeliness), *prostota* (simplicity), and *zaradność* understood as practical intelligence rooted in rural life.

Many of these attitudes are historically intertwined with religious practices and domestic rituals, which structure everyday life, seasonal rhythms, and domestic environments.¹⁹ This connection influenced the development of typologies within the project, particularly objects associated with gathering, care, repetition, rest, and light.



3.5. Stool from Zakopane, XXI. Source: Jan Tylka.

4. Wicker: Material, History, and Cultural Context

Among the various Polish craft traditions explored in this research, wicker weaving emerged as a particularly significant yet underrepresented practice in contemporary design. Despite its deep historical roots and cultural relevance, it remains relatively absent from current design discourse. For this reason, it became the primary material focus of the project.

4.1 Wicker as a Universal Practice

Wicker refers to flexible plant-based rods, most commonly willow (*Salix viminalis*), used for weaving structural objects. Wicker weaving has accompanied human life since ancient times and appears across cultures as a fundamental form of making.

Woven materials were used to produce clothing, footwear, walls, doors, containers, fishing tools, storage systems, cradles, mats, baskets, furniture, and architectural elements. Jarosław Szewczyk argues that woven structures belong to the oldest and most universal forms of material culture and that they played a fundamental role in the development of architecture²⁰. Early Slavic communities used woven materials in many aspects of daily life, including agricultural tools, fishing traps, containers, and domestic equipment. The practice extended beyond small objects to include larger constructions such as walls, roofs, boats, fences, transport elements, and furniture. This widespread use highlights the universality, diversity, and technical sophistication of weaving. It suggests that weaving is not only a craft, but a fundamental human activity rooted in creativity, problem-solving, adaptation, and embodied intelligence. By engaging both the mind and the manual skills of the hands, wicker weaving reflects a human capacity to transform natural materials into objects that are both functional and meaningful.



4.1 Rural beekeeping, including traditional wicker beehives, as part of Polish material culture.



4.4 Traditional woven fishing trap as a formal and structural reference. Muzeum Etnograficzne w Krakowie.

4.2 Wicker in the Polish Landscape

Wicker weaving is strongly embedded in the Polish landscape and cultural imagination. The willow tree carries symbolic associations with rural Poland, river landscapes, roads, fields, and domestic life. This connection appears in Polish poetry and visual culture, where the willow often marks a sense of belonging, melancholy, and familiarity. In the poem "..."²¹ Kazimierz Laskowski writes "Where the willow sways across the fields, I know Poland begins or ends". For this thesis, willow is therefore not only a biological material. It is a cultural sign connected to landscape, memory, and identity.

4.3 Material Intelligence of Wicker

Wicker is not a single material, but a system defined by growth, harvest, preparation, technique, and use. The process begins with harvesting willow, typically in late autumn or winter, when the sap has withdrawn and the rods are strongest. Willow is cut annually, sorted by length and thickness, and bundled before undergoing different forms of preparation depending on its intended use. The rods may be used with bark intact, creating a darker and more raw material appearance, or processed through boiling and peeling to produce unbarked wicker, known in Polish as *wiklina korowana*. This term refers to willow with the bark removed and is strongly associated with the lighter and more refined aesthetic character-

istic of Polish wicker craftsmanship and visual culture. Boiled and peeled willow can also be sun-bleached to achieve an even lighter tone. Before weaving, dried material is soaked again to restore flexibility and prevent breakage during the weaving process.²²

Weaving is based on a structural system. A framework, or *osnowa*, often formed as a cross, or *krzyż*, establishes the geometry of the object. Around this framework, techniques such as *wężykowy* weave, cross weave, bound weave, and open lattice are applied, determining both structural strength and visual appearance.²³ No two rods are identical. Variations in thickness, curvature, density, and moisture require continuous adjustment during making, reinforcing the importance of the craftsperson's judgment and tacit knowledge.

The material is flexible yet resistant. It requires moisture, controlled force, and technical sensitivity. Form emerges through bending, tension, compression, and interlocking rather than rigid mechanical joining. Structural edges lock the woven system together and prevent unraveling. Wicker objects therefore operate through a balance between softness and strength, flexibility and control, openness and support.

Wicker can consequently be understood as a form of material intelligence in which structure, gesture, and making are inseparable. Design is not imposed onto the material, but negotiated with it through direct engagement with its properties and limitations, aligning with Tim Ingold's understanding of making as a process of following materials.²⁴

At the same time, wicker carries ecological relevance within contemporary design discourse. Willow is a renewable and biodegradable material that generates minimal processing waste and does not require synthetic finishes or chemically intensive treatments.

4.4 Polish Historical Development and Production Context

In Poland, wicker weaving developed significantly from the sixteenth century onward, partly through the influence of Dutch settlers who brought knowledge of land cultivation, water management, and willow use.²⁵ Initially, wicker was primarily associated with utilitarian basketry and rural work. Market baskets, storage containers, fishing baskets, and agricultural tools became deeply embedded in the Polish countryside and everyday domestic life.

A major expansion of wicker production occurred in the nineteenth century, particularly in Rudnik nad Sanem, which became one of the most important centers of wicker craftsmanship in Poland. Count Ferdynand Hompesch recognized the abundance of willow growing along the San River and its economic potential. Through his initiative, local inhabitants were trained in basketry and furniture making, including through education in Vienna. In 1878, a weaving school was established in Rudnik, marking the beginning of a structured production system based on willow cultivation, distributed home-based labor, technical education, and organized sales.²⁶ By the early twentieth century, wicker production in Rudnik had developed into a large-scale industry, especially in furniture. Workshops and cooperatives expanded, and the region became one of the most important wicker production centers in Europe.²⁷ Production included traditional baskets and domestic objects, but also furniture and goods made from imported materials such as bamboo, raffia, and tropical reeds.

During the interwar period, wicker production played a significant role in Polish export, supporting entire communities and functioning as a primary profession rather than only a supplementary activity.²⁸ At the same time, the stylistic language of Rudnik products was shaped by broader European trends. Wicker furniture often followed the tastes of elites and drew inspiration from French and English models. This positioned Polish wicker production within an international design context while maintaining a local material and labor base.



4.7. Wicker furniture vendor, circa 1930, Kraków. Source: Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe.



4.8. Historical wicker furniture and basketry production in Poland.
Source: Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe



4.9. Wicker goods in historical trade and urban market context. Source: Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe



4.10 Wicker production and trade in an urban Polish setting. Source: Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe.

This system continued into the post-war socialist period. Cooperative structures supported local production, while institutions such as Cepelia maintained the visibility and distribution of folk craft objects throughout Poland and abroad.²⁹ Cepelia played an important role in preserving regional craftsmanship and sustaining artisanal production during a period of political and economic instability. At the same time, however, craft became increasingly institutionalized and associated with state-controlled systems of production and representation. Folk objects were often reproduced through repetitive typologies and became linked to souvenir culture, standardized interiors, and the visual language of the Polish People's Republic.



4.11. *Cepelia-era folk craft presentation and the public image of handmade objects in socialist Poland. Source: Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe*

Due to closed borders and limited access to imported goods, wicker furniture and handcrafted domestic objects were frequently associated with necessity rather than personal choice. Over time, these objects became culturally entangled with ideas of scarcity, modest living conditions, rural hardship, and the economic realities of socialism. Although craft traditions survived, wicker gradually lost its position as a desirable contemporary material and instead became associated with something outdated, old-fashioned, or socially aspirational to move away from.



4.12. Wicker and folk craft objects displayed in Cepelia store. Source: Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe.

After 1989, with the transition to a market economy, imported Western products and industrial aesthetics became strongly associated with progress, modernization, and social mobility. Industrial production and imported furniture increasingly replaced labor-intensive craft. As Wojciech Świątkowski emphasized in interview, wicker production cannot compete with industrial furniture in terms of speed or scale. A handmade wicker chair requires time, skill, and physical labor, while industrial systems can produce thousands of standardized objects within a controlled production line.³⁶ In response, wicker production shifted toward smaller companies and decentralized home-based systems. Today, it continues through networks of independent artisans working from home. This model preserves knowledge, but it also reveals the fragility of the craft. Wicker weaving often functions as supplementary income rather than a primary profession. Świątkowski notes that many contemporary weavers are women, often engaging in weaving seasonally or part-time, which has influenced the scale and typology of production. Smaller baskets and domestic objects remain common, while large furniture pieces have become less frequent because they require greater physical effort, time, and technical expertise

Education has also changed. Traditional mastery once required many years of practice. Contemporary courses are shorter and often structured around contemporary life rhythms. While these programs help maintain knowledge, they also reveal a fragmentation of craft transmission and a shift from professional formation toward semi-professional or hobby-based practice ski.³⁷

The recognition of plecionkarstwo in Poland within intangible cultural heritage frameworks confirms its historical and cultural importance. At the same time, it exposes a central tension. Heritage frameworks protect traditional techniques, but they can also stabilize them into fixed definitions. For a designer, this creates an important question: How can craft evolve without losing the knowledge, community, and material logic that give it meaning?

4.5 Wicker as a Cultural System

Wicker should not be understood only as a material. Historically, it functioned as a complete cultural system connecting landscape, cultivation, labor, domestic life, economy, and identity. Wicker objects were shaped by function, material constraints, and repeated patterns of use. Their forms emerged from structural logic rather than stylistic intention. Baskets, fishing tools, storage containers, furniture, and domestic equipment all reflected specific needs and environments. They were lightweight, repairable, biodegradable, and locally produced. In this sense, wicker embodied a way of thinking through making: form, material, labor, and everyday life were inseparable. Katarzyna Smyk's research on Rudnik nad Saniem shows that wicker is understood locally not only as craft, but as a system of identity, memory, pride, belonging, generational obligation, and economic function. This confirms that wicker in Poland is not simply a historical technique, but a living cultural structure embedded in social relationships and local economies.³⁰

At the same time, this system is undergoing transformation. Wicker exists today between heritage, craft, design resource, and economic survival. It is no longer only a rural necessity, but it can become a contemporary material language if approached with care, knowledge, and cultural specificity.



4.13. Wicker weaving process in Rudnik nad Sanem.by Aleksandra Powalacz.

4.6 Designers and Wicker: Wołkowski, Grunert, and Ingarden

Several Polish designers and architects have demonstrated that wicker can move beyond utilitarian basketry and become part of a broader design and cultural discourse. One of the most important figures is Władysław Wołkowski (1902-1986), often called the “Michelangelo of wicker” Wołkowski elevated wicker from popular craft to the level of artistic and design experimentation. His work combined utility, natural materials, rhythm, proportion, and symbolic value. Rather than treating wicker as a fixed folk material, he explored its structural and expressive potential.³¹

Wołkowski’s approach was unconventional. Trained across multiple artistic disciplines and interested in mathematics, he developed harmonic constructions based on rhythm, proportion, and structural relationships. His wicker works were not traditional baskets, but spatial systems in which material, form, and construction became inseparable. This aligns his practice with modernist thinking, where form emerges from material logic rather than ornament.

His concept of *mieszkanie poetyckie*, the poetic dwelling, is especially relevant to this thesis. He imagined the interior as a holistic living environment shaped by the relationship between people, objects, nature, and atmosphere. Furniture was not treated as isolated equipment, but as part of a broader emotional and spatial system. Natural materials such as wicker, wood, and reed were used to create interiors that supported sensory experience, well-being, and symbolic connection.³²



4.14. Władysław Wołkowski, wicker chair exploring rhythm, structure, and spatial form. Source: Muzeum Wołkowskiego.



4.15. Władysław Wołkowski, wicker chair exploring rhythm, structure, and spatial form. Source: Muzeum Wołkowskiego.

Another important figure is Paweł Grunert, whose work moves between sculpture, furniture, installation, and conceptual design. Grunert treated furniture as a form connected to the body, memory, and physical presence. He worked with wicker, roots, branches, hay, grain, steel, and glass, often combining organic matter with industrial materials³³. His approach demonstrates that wicker can move beyond typological repetition and become a contemporary spatial, sculptural, and conceptual material.

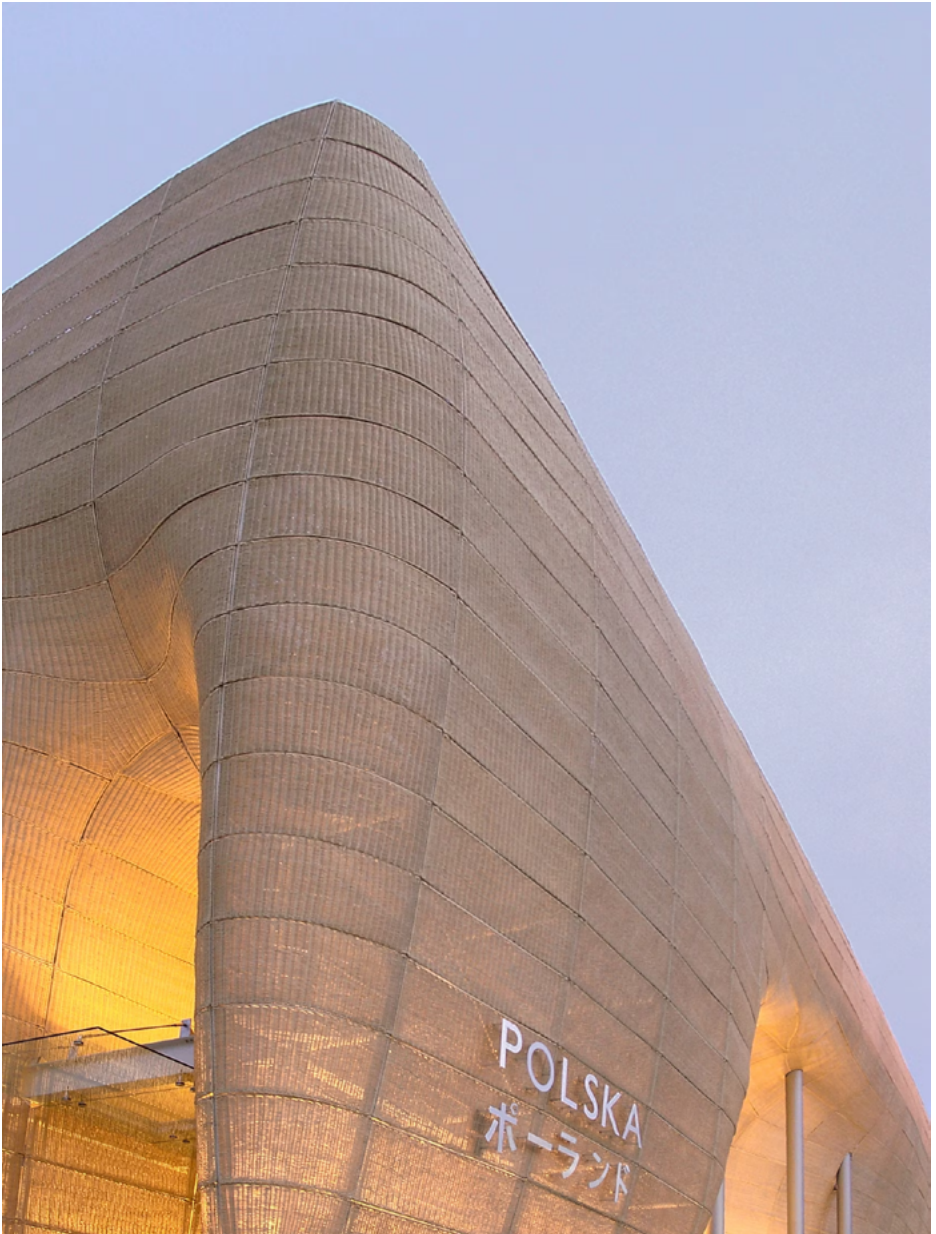


4.16. Paweł Grunert, contemporary furniture object combining organic material and industrial structure. Source: vogue.pl

On a larger architectural scale, woven wicker became visible in Krzysztof Ingarden's Polish Pavilion for Expo 2005 in Aichi, Japan. The pavilion used woven wicker panels made by craftsmen from Rudnik nad Sanem, combined with a steel and glass structural system. Szewczyk identifies the Polish Pavilion in Aichi as a breakthrough in the contemporary return to woven architecture and as an important example of wicker operating in architectural form, ornament, haptics, and symbolism.³⁴

The pavilion was inspired by the image of Fryderyk Chopin beside a willow tree in Warsaw's Łazienkowski Park, connecting wicker and willow to Polish cultural memory, music, resistance, and landscape. Seeing the light model of this pavilion in Rudnik nad Sanem became an important personal reference for my project. It revealed how light interacts with woven structures and how wicker can create atmosphere through porosity, shadow, and translucency. This directly informed the development of the lamps within *Cultivating Wicker*.

Together, Wołkowski, Grunert, and Ingarden demonstrate that wicker can operate across multiple scales: interior, furniture, object, sculpture, and architecture. Their work shows that wicker is not only a traditional craft material, but an archetypal and structurally meaningful medium capable of connecting contemporary design with cultural memory.



4.17. Krzysztof Ingarden, Polish Pavilion, Expo 2005, Aichi, Japan, using woven wicker façade panels. Source Expo booklet.

4.7 Decline, Folklorism, and Contemporary Challenges

Despite its strong history, contemporary wicker production faces significant challenges. These include aging craft communities, declining interest among younger generations, economic instability, limited integration into contemporary design practice, and the difficulty of competing with industrial production.

Previous attempts to revive wicker have often focused on preservation. Institutional programs have supported education and the teaching of traditional techniques, but they have not always responded to contemporary economic realities. Younger generations often reject weaving because it is physically demanding, time-consuming, and financially uncertain compared to other professions. The craft itself can also be conservative. Traditional patterns and typologies are often repeated with little formal change, and some communities resist modifications of established techniques. Heritage frameworks, while important for protection, can reinforce this conservatism by defining one version of the craft as authentic. This tension is also visible in the recent inclusion of Polish wicker weaving on the UNESCO Intangible Cultural Heritage list, which acknowledges its cultural significance while simultaneously raising questions about how such practices can evolve without being fixed into static forms.³⁵

Additionally, the market often reduces craft to decorative or folkloristic products. Orszulak-Dudkowska explains that contemporary ethnodesign - being often operates between local tradition and global trends, but she also connects it to the broader problem of folklorism, where cultural forms are removed from their original context and used for new purposes.³⁸ Ethnodesign can easily become kitsch when cultural references are used superficially, without understanding their context, function, or material logic. In such cases, tradition becomes a visual motif rather than a living system.

On the other hand, some contemporary design experiments with wicker move too far away from the craft context. By combining wicker with materials such as epoxy resin or by radically altering the technique, these projects may produce visually interesting results, but they often become difficult to scale, environmentally problematic, or disconnected from local craft communities.

The challenge is therefore not simply to preserve wicker or to innovate with it. The challenge is to find a middle position: one that respects craft knowledge while allowing it to adapt to contemporary needs.

4.8 Position of the Project

These challenges reveal the need for a new role: the designer as translator. In this thesis, translation does not mean copying historical forms or applying folk motifs to contemporary objects. Translation means identifying the structural, material, social, and cultural logic of a tradition and rearticulating it within present conditions. The designer should not simply preserve tradition unchanged, nor transform it into something disconnected from its cultural and material roots. Instead, design can mediate between inherited craft knowledge and contemporary conditions of living, producing, and perceiving objects. This project positions wicker as an active system rather than a nostalgic image. It does not use craft as decoration, nor does it aim to reproduce historical forms. Instead, it works through the structural and material principles of wicker: bending, tension, porosity, rhythm, repetition, lightness, and repairability.

My role as a designer is to translate these principles into contemporary furniture and lighting. This means understanding the realities of weaving, the knowledge of artisans, the limitations of the material, and the conditions of local production. Constraint is not treated as a problem, but as a design framework.

The project also aims to support local craft economies. By collaborating with existing weaving communities rather than replacing them, the work seeks to contribute to the continuity of skills and livelihoods. If wicker is understood as a cultural system, then supporting it must also mean supporting the people, labor, and regional structures through which it continues to exist. At the formal level, the project creates objects that are contemporary but culturally situated. They do not directly reproduce historical wicker forms, but they carry traces of familiar proportions, gestures, archetypes, and material associations. The aim is to create objects that feel connected to Polish visual culture without becoming nostalgic replicas.

4.9 Why Now in Poland

Recent social and economic shifts in Poland have created a new context for re-engaging with craft and material-based design. A growing urban middle class is increasingly willing to invest in durable and meaningful objects that emphasize authorship, material honesty, sustainability, and cultural identity³⁹. At the same time, there is a broader shift toward slower and more conscious consumption. Interviews conducted for this project confirm growing interest in natural materials such as wood, stone, wool, and wicker, as well as in objects connected to origin, tradition, and ecological responsibility.

. This aligns with wider tendencies described by Orszulak-Dudkowska, who notes renewed interest in folk-inspired forms, natural materials, ecological awareness, and slow philosophies.⁴⁰

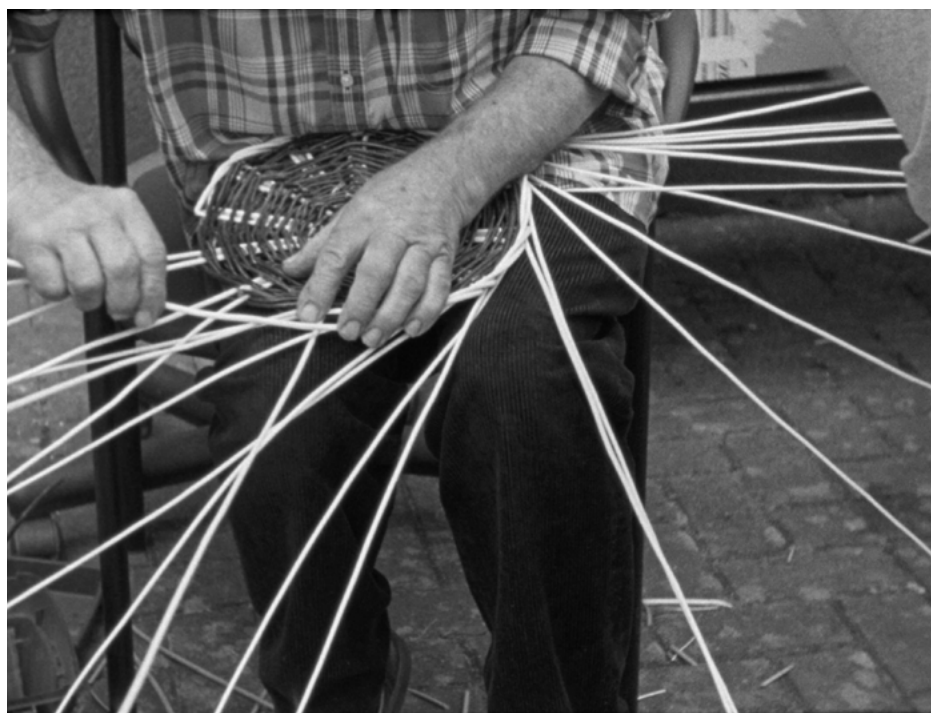
This explains why folk culture and craft are becoming relevant again. They offer an alternative to anonymous global production: local, material, durable, and embedded in history. In Poland, where craft traditions have often been interrupted by political and economic transformation, this return is not simply nostalgic. It reflects a search for grounded forms of identity within contemporary life.

Meanwhile, the global rise of collectible design has created a market for objects that combine material authenticity with conceptual depth. Interviews with industry specialists, including Michał Roszkowski, indicate that there is growing space for high-end and collectible furniture positioned between art and design, particularly when supported by a strong narrative and material logic.⁴¹ Together, these conditions create a unique moment. Wicker can re-enter contemporary design not as a folkloristic residue, but as a forward-looking material system. This moment offers an opportunity to guide users toward more conscious, materially honest, and ethically informed choices, positioning design as both a cultural and social agent.

4.10 Collaboration and Production Context

This project is developed in collaboration with DELTA, a wicker production company based in Rudnik nad Sanem. DELTA works with a decentralized network of approximately sixty artisans, many of whom weave from home according to long-standing regional production traditions.⁴²

This system allows the project to operate within an existing ecosystem of knowledge, labor, and material expertise. Rather than inventing a new production model from outside, the project builds on active craft infrastructure. The collaboration allows contemporary design to meet local craft practice while respecting the rhythm, autonomy, and technical knowledge of the weavers. DELTA's importance extends beyond furniture production. The company also contributed to internationally significant projects, including the woven facade panels for the Polish Pavilion at Expo 2005 in Aichi, Japan.⁴³ This demonstrates that the Rudnik craft community already has the capacity to work at the intersection of traditional weaving, contemporary design, and architectural-scale production. For this thesis, collaboration is not only a practical production strategy. It is also an ethical and cultural position. The project depends on the knowledge of artisans and aims to create objects that could be realistically produced within existing local systems.



4.20. Weaving process developed in collaboration with DELTA artisans in Rudnik nad Sanem by Aleksandra Powalacz.

5. Design Direction and Development

5.1 From Research to Design

The design process began with an ethnographic investigation into what Polishness means today. Rather than approaching identity as a fixed aesthetic or a set of recognizable motifs, the research focused on understanding it as a lived condition shaped through everyday practices, memories, values, and objects. This phase included interviews with Polish individuals across generations. Conversations with participants over the age of 80 focused on memories of the countryside, traditional ways of living, and material culture embedded in daily routines. These were complemented by discussions with younger participants, exploring how Polish identity is understood and performed in contemporary, often urban, contexts. Additional interviews examined domestic environments, asking what objects people live with and how these relate to comfort, familiarity, and belonging.

The research revealed that Polish identity is not expressed through fixed forms, but through attitudes and behaviors such as resourcefulness, modesty, durability, repair, and care. These attitudes shape not only how objects are used, but how they are made. This shifted the project away from searching for a visual “Polish style” toward understanding Polishness as a system of practices that generate form. Parallel to this cultural inquiry, the project developed through a material investigation into wicker craftsmanship in

Rudnik nad Sanem. Fieldwork included collaboration with artisans, consultations with DELTA, and interviews with weavers and industry specialists. Through this process, wicker emerged not only as a material, but as a system of knowledge embedded in gestures, rhythms of labor, tacit skill, and regional production systems.

In line with Sennett's notion that making is thinking, wicker weaving was understood as a form of knowledge production, where decisions arise through direct engagement with material behavior.⁴⁴

The flexibility, resistance, and structural logic of willow do not allow form to be imposed freely, but require negotiation. This shifted the design approach from form-driven aesthetics toward process-driven form generation, where material intelligence actively shapes the outcome.

Traditional wicker objects, including baskets, fishing traps, and workshop furniture, were analyzed in terms of construction logic, proportion, gesture, and structural behavior. Together, these references reinforced the understanding that form emerges from use, constraint, and material negotiation. The Polish landscape, particularly rural environments shaped by willow growth and agricultural practices, also became a conceptual starting point, situating the material within a broader relationship between place, culture, and production. Several design principles emerged from this research. Polish identity can be expressed through subtle cues such as proportion, material relationships, gesture, and structural clarity rather than explicit motifs.

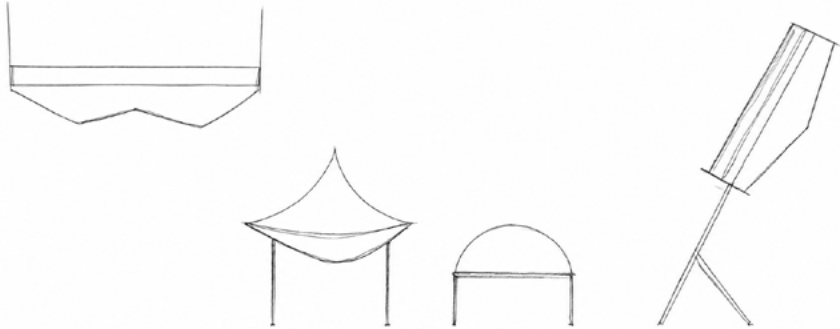
Craft must be engaged at the level of structure and process rather than surface. Innovation should operate within material and cultural constraints rather than against them. Finally, design can function as a mediator, translating between tradition and contemporary life while maintaining continuity with existing systems of making.

5.2 Defining the Design Direction

The project developed as a response to the absence of a contemporary Polish design language rooted in local material intelligence. It proposes a collection of furniture and lighting objects that translate traditional wicker weaving into a contemporary context, combining handcraft with industrial fabrication to create hybrid forms operating between craft and design. The collection includes a standing lamp, hanging lamp, lounge chair, and low table. Each object draws from Polish vernacular typologies, wicker workshop structures, and the social rituals of rest, gathering, and domestic care. The design direction draws from multiple sources. These include Polish folk objects and vernacular forms, particularly those emerging from wicker workshops, where construction is defined by gesture and use. The tripod structure of the standing lamp references workshop furniture and rural support structures, while the vertical proportions and tilted gesture refer to fishing basket typologies, including *wiersze*. The woven volume draws from basketry, but it is reinterpreted as an atmospheric and spatial structure rather than a container.

At the same time, the work positions itself in dialogue with design precedents. Ingarden's architectural use of wicker and steel introduced an important contemporary structural reference, while Wołkowski and Grunert demonstrated how wicker could operate beyond craft as a poetic, sculptural, and conceptual material.

Rather than replicating historical forms, the project extracts structural, behavioral, and cultural principles from these references. The aim is not to reproduce the past, but to extend it into the present through a material-driven and contextually grounded design approach.



5.1. Early sketch of the collection typologies.

The standing lamp was chosen as the flagship piece and semantic summary of the research. It combines a handwoven willow structure with a stainless steel base. The object brings together references to fishing baskets, workshop tripods, landscape, light, and domestic atmosphere. It also demonstrates the central thesis of the project: that traditional craft can be translated into contemporary design through structure, collaboration, and material intelligence rather than through ornament.

5.3 Iterative Design Process

The development of the standing lamp was iterative and unfolded across interconnected stages, combining ethnographic research, material investigation, sketching, 3D modeling, engineering consultation, fabrication testing, and lighting integration. The process moved continuously between concept and making, with each stage informing the next and refining both formal and structural decisions. The process was grounded in continuous dialogue with different actors, including Polish users, artisans, the DELTA wicker company, engineers, electricians, curators, and fabricators. These exchanges informed both conceptual and technical decisions, particularly in relation to feasibility, scale, production logic, material behavior, and safety. They also ensured that the project remained connected to existing craft systems rather than operating as an isolated design exercise.

The earliest stages of the project focused on identifying vernacular typologies and structural archetypes embedded within Polish wicker culture. One of the most important references became traditional fishing baskets and traps, particularly woven forms historically used in Polish river landscapes. These objects interested me because of their direct relationship between function, structure, and material behavior. Their elongated geometries, tapered forms, and woven porosity emerged from practical needs rather than stylistic intention.

Many of these typologies are now disappearing alongside local fishing traditions and changing rural economies, yet they retain a strong sculptural and atmospheric quality. Their forms became an important starting point for the geometry of the standing lamp.



5.2. Traditional woven fishing trap as a formal and structural reference.

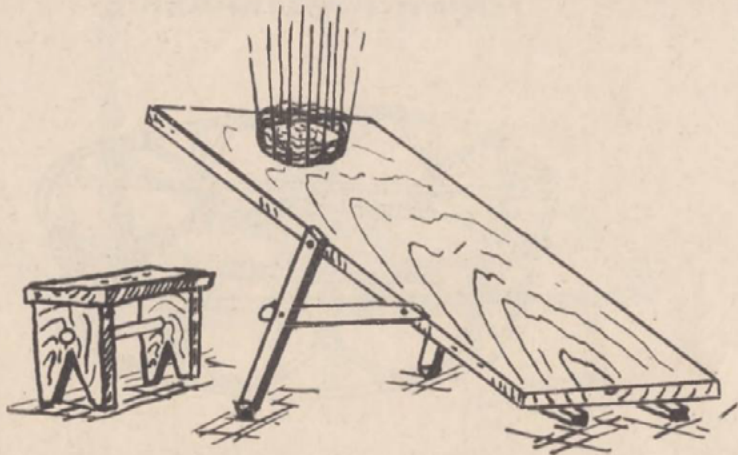


5.3. River landscape and fishing structures as references for the lamp's verticality and atmosphere.

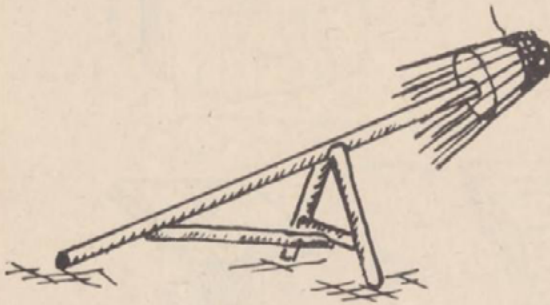


5.4. Traditional fishing basket typology informing the woven volume of the lamp.

Another significant reference emerged from wicker workshop furniture and tools used within weaving environments in Rudnik nad Sanem. In particular, the tripod structures commonly used as supports, working stands, and utilitarian workshop elements informed the lower structure of the lamp. These forms are visually direct and structurally efficient, often defined by balance, inclination, and stability rather than ornament. The tripod became important not only formally, but symbolically, as a reference to labor, making, and the hidden infrastructure surrounding craft production.



WARSZTAT KOSZYKARZA



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5.5. Archival drawing of wicker workshop furniture and tripod support structures.

The relationship between wicker and stainless steel also developed conceptually through ideas of contrast and counterbalance. Wicker operates through flexibility, irregularity, porosity, and organic variation, while stainless steel introduces precision, weight, durability, and structural control. Rather than hiding this tension, the project intentionally exposes it. The steel structure counterbalances the visual and physical lightness of the woven upper form, while also allowing the object to operate within a contemporary furniture and collectible design context. This dialogue between organic and industrial systems became central to the formal language of the collection.

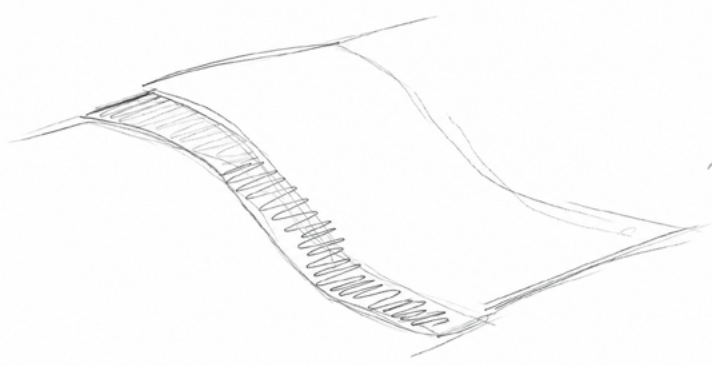
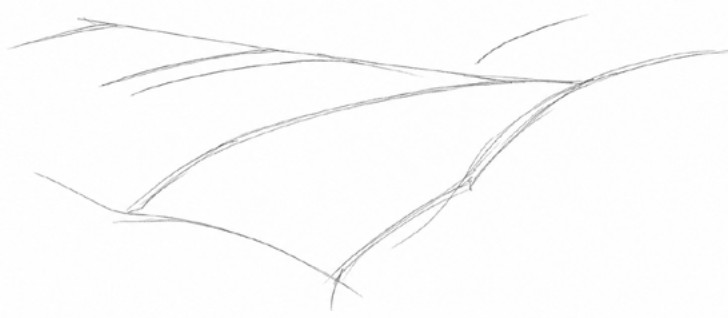
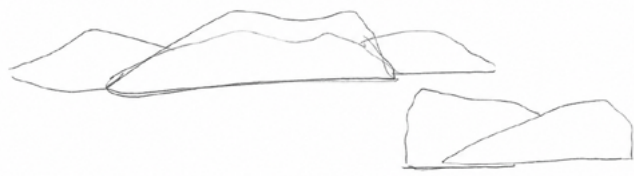


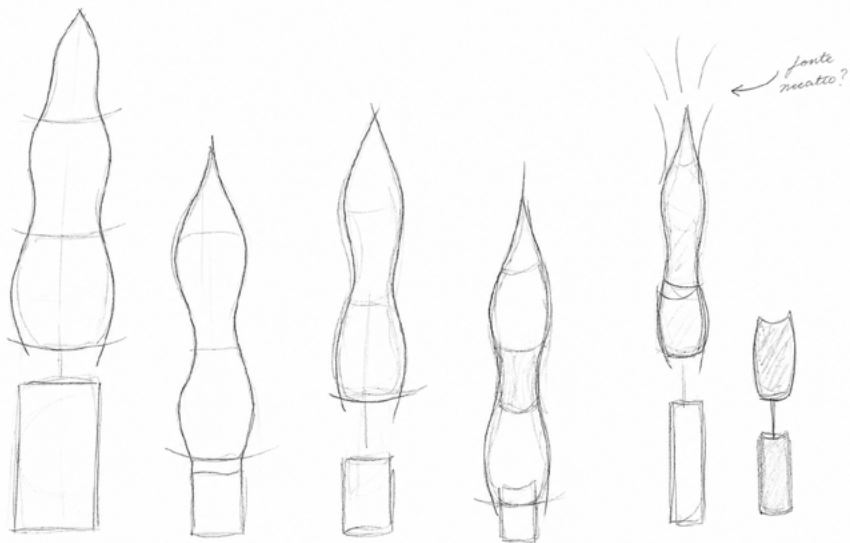
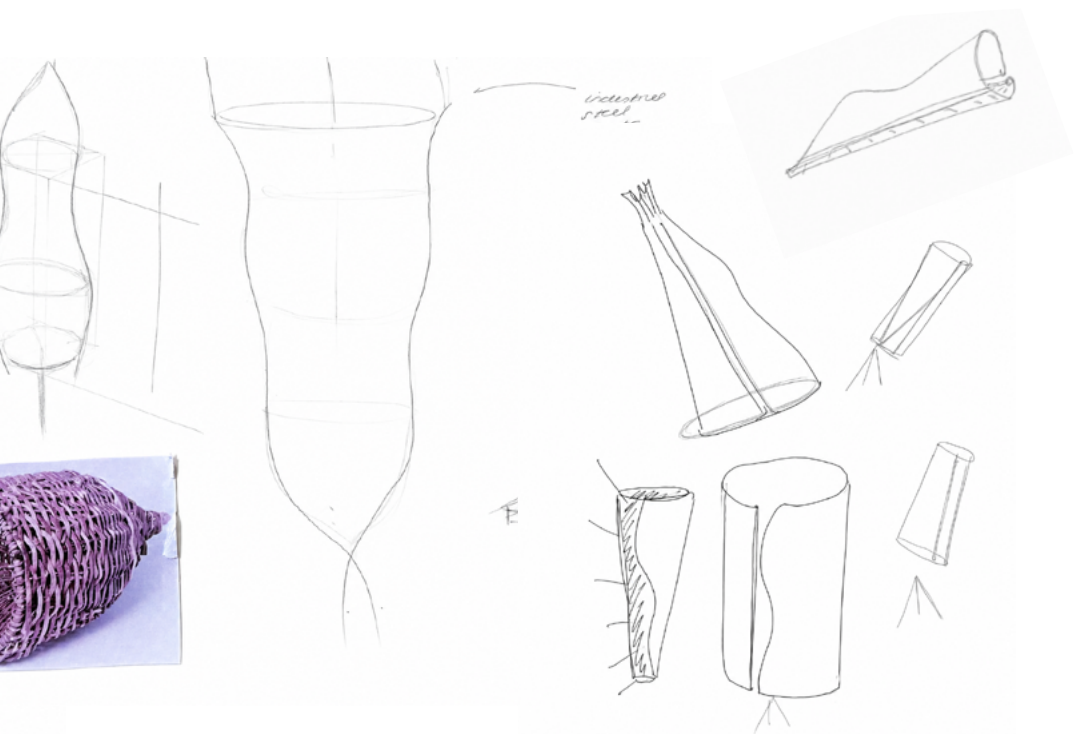
5.6. Stainless steel detail showing the industrial counterbalance to the woven structure.

The Polish landscape also informed the design process. The tilted gesture of the standing lamp references the instability and movement of grasses, reeds, fishing structures, and willow forms found in rural river environments. The proportions and verticality of the object were developed not as literal representations of landscape, but as atmospheric translations of openness, lightness, and seasonal materiality associated with the Polish countryside. These references allowed the project to maintain a connection to place without relying on decorative folklore.



5.7. Polish rural landscape informing the project's material atmosphere and visual language.





5.8. Early sketches exploring landscape, fishing baskets, wicker forms, and lamp typologies.

Initial design translations were developed through hand sketching, followed by 3D modeling. Early iterations focused on defining typologies, especially the standing and hanging lamp, testing proportions, inclination, and the relationship between woven and metal elements. Digital models were used to refine geometry, align structural components, and test the integration of key elements such as the central tube, light source, and woven volume. This stage established the basic formal language of the collection.





5.9. Digital iterations testing the proportions, inclination, and woven volume of the standing lamp.

Scale models were produced to evaluate proportions and relationships between components. These were complemented by full-scale spatial testing, including marking outlines in interior spaces to assess height, tilt, and footprint within a domestic environment. This stage was critical in determining the inclination of the standing lamp, its visual balance, and its spatial presence. It allowed the object to be evaluated not only as an isolated form, but as part of an interior setting.



5.10. Scale and spatial studies used to evaluate proportion, height, and balance.




5.11. Scale and spatial studies used to evaluate proportion and height.

A central technical challenge was achieving stability within an inclined structure. Engineering consultations were used to define safe tilt angles, appropriate weight distribution, and structural reinforcement. These tests demonstrated the limitations of a fully woven structure at this scale and led to the development of a hybrid system. The final solution adopts a visible combination of wicker and stainless steel, where a central metal structure provides stability and load-bearing capacity, while the woven element operates as both enclosure and diffuser. A weighted base was introduced to counterbalance the inclined upper volume.

Alt. $w/bc = 480\text{ mm}$
 $d > 28\text{ mm}$

$$F_C = \frac{141 \cdot 28 + 51 \cdot 1260}{480} =$$

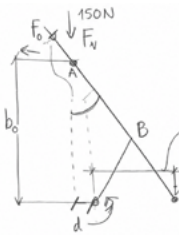
$$= F_C = \frac{3948 + 64260}{480} =$$

$$F_C = \frac{150 \cdot 28}{480} > \frac{4200}{480} = 8,75\text{ N}$$


$$\frac{F_v \cdot b_v}{bc} = F_C$$

0,8 kg

36 kg



$$M_R = F_v \cdot d + F_0 \cdot b_0 = C \cdot bc$$

$$M_R = \frac{F_v \cdot d + F_0 \cdot b_0}{bc} = \frac{C \cdot bc}{bc}$$

$$C = \frac{F_v \cdot d + F_0 \cdot b_0}{bc}$$

coeff. 2

$$b_0 = 126\text{ cm} = 1260\text{ mm} \quad C = \frac{141\text{ N} \cdot 158 + 51\text{ N} \cdot 1260\text{ mm}}{3430}$$

$$d = 15,8\text{ cm} = 158\text{ mm}$$

$$F_0 = 51\text{ N}$$

$$F_v = 141\text{ N}$$

$$= \frac{22 \cdot 278 + 1311}{3430} =$$

$$bc = 34,3\text{ cm} = 343\text{ mm} = \frac{23 \cdot 589}{3430} = 6,8787\text{ N}$$

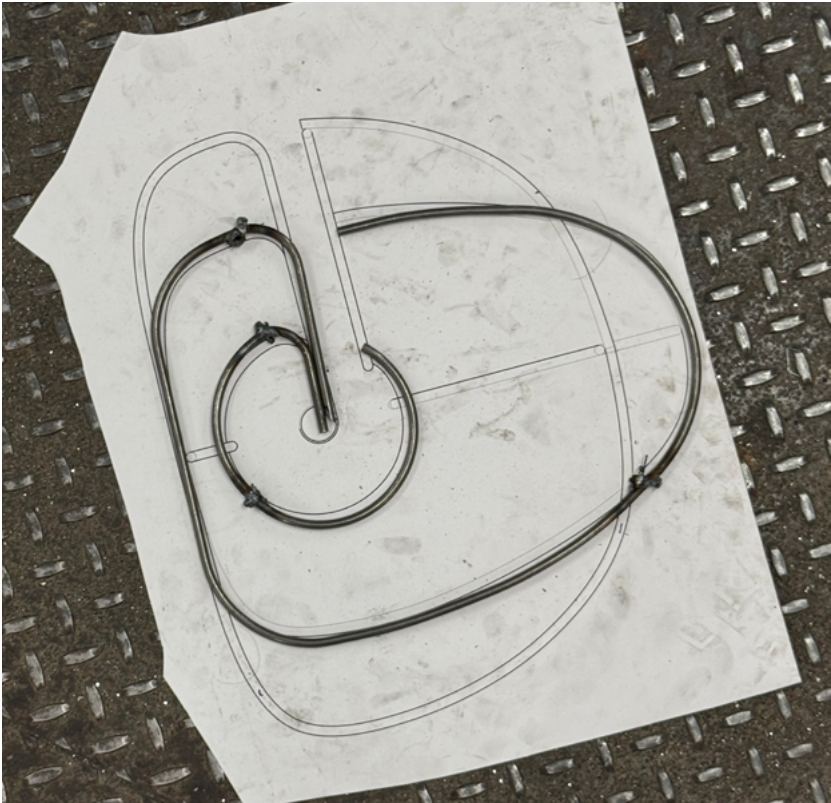
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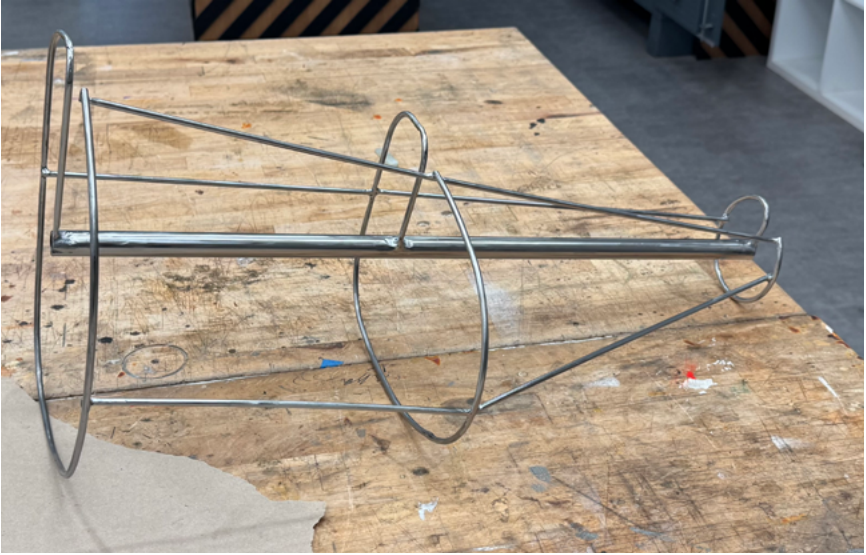
$$68,7\text{ N} = 6,9\text{ kg}$$

5.12. Engineering consultation focused on ensuring the structural balance and stability of the standing lamp.

Material development focused on integrating stainless steel and wicker within a coherent structural system. The prototyping process included bending, welding, grinding, and finishing steel components, developing connection details between metal and woven elements, testing stability and load distribution, and refining weaving density, vertical elements, and overall geometry.



5.13. Structural and material prototyping of the stainless steel and wicker system.



5.14. Welded top structure.



5.15. Grinding of the bottom structure.

Different weaving approaches were tested, including traditional wicker techniques and rod-based systems, to understand structural behavior and visual outcomes. These tests clarified how density, spacing, and fiber direction influence both strength and transparency.



5.16. Weaving testing.

Lighting was developed together with Eric Beam, and it required a separate series of technical iterations focused on performance, integration, and compatibility. Tested approaches included exposed light sources, enclosed diffusers, and integrated linear LED systems, which became the selected solution. The final system uses a linear LED source integrated within a tubular structure positioned inside the woven form. The tube dimension was selected based on standard sizes, allowing the internal placement of LED components while maintaining a minimal and controlled profile. Frosted and diffused elements were considered to regulate light output.



5.17. Light construction 3D model.

The woven structure functions as a natural diffuser, filtering light through its porosity. This required testing weaving density to balance light transmission and visual opacity. Electrical considerations included LED strip and COB LED systems, an external driver or transformer connected to wall power, compatibility with dimming systems such as foot-operated dimmers, and adaptability between US and EU electrical standards. Additional stainless steel elements were designed to secure and align the lighting system within the structure, ensuring integration between material, structure, and performance. The iterative process demonstrates that form, structure, and performance were developed simultaneously. Design decisions did not follow a predefined aesthetic, but emerged through continuous negotiation between material behavior, technical constraints, spatial requirements, and cultural references.



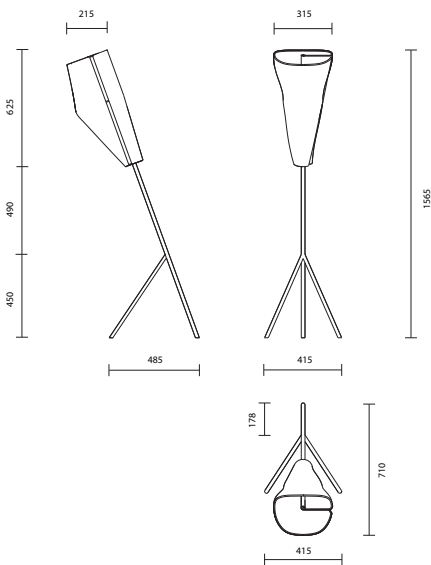
5.18. *Testing light diffusion through the woven structure.*

5.4 Final Object: Standing Lamp

The standing lamp is a hybrid object that brings together traditional Polish wicker weaving and contemporary metal construction. Its form emerges from a translation of vernacular typologies. The tripod base references the *trójnóg*, commonly associated with rural workshop structures and support systems, while the woven shade draws from the geometry of fishing baskets historically used in Polish river landscapes.

The decision to use stainless steel was based on its durability, corrosion resistance, and ability to position the object within a contemporary design language. The wicker is not applied as decoration. It functions as a structural and atmospheric element, diffusing light while retaining its material logic of tension, flexibility, and porosity. The integration of LED lighting allows for continuous warm illumination that interacts with the density of the weave, producing gradients of light and shadow. The object operates at the intersection of craft and industry, where manual skill and engineered components coexist. The color and material decisions were informed by the Polish landscape and traditional uses of wicker. Natural willow tones were selected not as nostalgic references, but as a way to maintain a direct relationship with the material's origin and seasonal character. The contrast between stainless steel and organic willow creates a dialogue between precision and irregularity, industry and craft, modernity and landscape.

Developed in collaboration with artisans from Rudnik na Sanem, the lamp reflects a decentralized production model rooted in local knowledge. It proposes a contemporary role for wicker as a material system capable of scaling from traditional basketry to furniture and lighting. In line with the understanding that making is a form of thinking, the project treats material, process, and form as interdependent. It positions craft not as heritage to preserve unchanged, but as knowledge to evolve.



Materials

Structure: Stainless Steel

Shade: Handwoven willow (Salix viminalis)

Finish: Brushed / satin steel

Weave: Natural wicker

Light Source

Type: Integrated LED

Color temperature: 2700K (warm light)

Dimmability: Yes (foot dimmer)

Voltage: 110–120V / adaptable to 220–240V



5.19. Final rendering of the standing in the interior.

5.6 User and Market Feedback

The design process was informed by informal user feedback and ongoing market research. Conversations with potential users provided insight into expectations regarding scale, usability, and perception, particularly in relation to comfort, familiarity, atmosphere, and the balance between functionality and expression. The feedback confirmed that the object needed to operate both as a functional lamp and as a culturally meaningful piece of contemporary furniture. In parallel, market positioning was examined through analysis of contemporary lighting brands such as Flos, as well as visits to design galleries and showrooms in New York. This research focused on construction quality, material integration, pricing logic, and the relationship between design objects and collectible contexts. The project is positioned within collectible design not because it rejects function, but because it combines authorship, material depth, limited production, and cultural narrative. These observations helped situate the project within a contemporary design landscape that values both technical refinement and narrative depth. At the same time, they reinforced the importance of maintaining cultural specificity, ensuring that the objects remain grounded in their material and social context while operating within an international market.

6. Conclusion and Next Steps

Cultivating Wicker proposes that traditional craft can become a contemporary design system when approached through material intelligence, collaboration, and cultural translation. The project began with a concern: that Polish craft traditions, especially those connected to rural life and wicker weaving, are disappearing from everyday visual culture while globalized furniture production becomes increasingly detached from place, labor, and material meaning. Rather than responding to this condition with nostalgia, the thesis develops a design methodology that treats heritage as a living resource. The research demonstrates that Polish visual identity cannot be reduced to decorative motifs or fixed historical forms. It is shaped by attitudes, gestures, domestic rituals, material practices, and forms of everyday resourcefulness. Interviews with older participants revealed the importance of durability, repair, multifunctionality, and care in rural and early post-war domestic life. Conversations with younger participants revealed a renewed desire for natural materials, cultural grounding, and objects with clear origins. Together, these findings show that Polishness is not a style but a relationship between people, materials, memory, and use. Wicker became the central material of the project because it carries this relationship with particular clarity. It connects landscape, cultivation, labor, domestic life, and local economy. It is renewable, biodegradable, repairable, and deeply embedded in Polish craft history.

At the same time, it is technically demanding and culturally fragile. Its continuation depends not only on preservation, but on the creation of new contexts in which weaving can remain meaningful, economically viable, and formally alive. The standing lamp, as the flagship object, embodies this position. Its stainless steel structure introduces precision, durability, and contemporary spatial presence, while the handwoven willow element carries the knowledge of regional craft. The object does not quote folk aesthetics directly. Instead, it translates the structural logic of wicker, the gesture of the tripod, the atmosphere of filtered light, and the memory of rural typologies into a contemporary furniture object. In doing so, it demonstrates how craft can operate beyond decoration as structure, atmosphere, and cultural meaning. The project also proposes a role for the designer as translator and mediator. This role requires listening to craftspeople, understanding material limits, respecting existing production systems, and creating forms that can operate within contemporary markets without losing their origin. In this model, design does not replace craft. It creates conditions for craft to evolve.

The thesis is complete as a research and design proposition, but the project has clear potential for further development. While the standing lamp is resolved as the final exhibition-ready object, the wider collection, including the hanging lamp, lounge chair, and low table, remains open for refinement and production in Poland in collaboration with artisans. The next phase will focus on the transition from prototype to small-batch production, including further

structural testing, lighting refinement, pricing strategy, fabrication documentation, and the development of repair and maintenance systems.

Potential contexts for presentation include international design platforms such as the International Contemporary Furniture Fair, in New York and “Craft Days” by the Visteria Foundation in Warsaw, as well as institutional exhibitions and collaborations with Polish cultural organizations. In these settings, the project can function both as a furniture collection and as a research-based exhibition, presenting finished objects alongside material studies, archival references, fieldwork, and process documentation.

More broadly, *Cultivating Wicker* argues that the future of Polish design does not need to imitate global aesthetics or reproduce folk tradition literally. Instead, it can emerge from a more precise and responsible understanding of material culture. Through wicker, the project proposes a framework for contemporary design rooted in ecological responsibility, cultural continuity, and local knowledge. It suggests that craft survives not when it is preserved unchanged, but when it is allowed to evolve through new forms of relevance.

Endnotes

- 1 Richard Sennett, *The Craftsman* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 20–21.
- 2 Tim Ingold, *Making: Anthropology, Archaeology, Art and Architecture* (London: Routledge, 2013), 31–32.
- 3 Anna Feliks, *Meble plecione w Polsce 1864–1939* (Warszawa: Państwowe Wydawnictwo Naukowe, 2014), 15–18; Katarzyna Smyk, "Wiklina w systemie wartości mieszkańców Rudnika nad Sanem i okolic. O specyfice badań AD 2025," *Twórczość Ludowa*, no. 3–4 (forthcoming, 2025); DELTA representatives, interview by Xenia Kwiatkowska, Rudnik nad Sanem, 2025.
- 4 DELTA representatives, interview by Xenia Kwiatkowska, Rudnik nad Sanem, 2025; Wojciech Świątkowski, interview by Xenia Kwiatkowska, New York, January 29, 2026.
- 5 5. Janusz Barański, *Świat rzeczy: Zarys antropologiczny* (Kraków: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, 2007), 11–15; Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 22–24.
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- 7 Sennett, *The Craftsman*, 30–45.
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2.5 Barbara Brukalska, Interior for the Constructor of Airplanes, Polish Pavilion, International Exhibition of Arts and Techniques in Modern Life, Paris, 1937. Source: Katarzyna Uchowicz, "Architektura i aeronautyka. Wokół grupy Praesens oraz strategii promocyjnej Polski na wystawie Sztuka i technika w życiu współczesnym w Paryżu (1937)," *Biuletyn Historii Sztuki* 87, no. 4 (2025).

2.6 Wicker furniture designed by Wojciech Jastrzębowski for the Polish Pavilion, Paris Exhibition, 1925. Source: Narodowe Archiwum Cyfrowe (National Digital Archives).

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4.7 Władysław Wołkowski, selected wicker works. Source: Anna Wywiot, "Mieszkanie poetyckie – koncepcja twórczości Władysława Wołkowskiego," *Kwartalnik Architektury i Urbanistyki* 58 (2013).

4.8 Paweł Grunert, selected furniture and sculptural works. Source: Agnieszka Sural, "Paweł Grunert traktował mebel jako formę, w której zapisuje się obecność człowieka," *Vogue Polska*, March 4, 2026.

4.9 Polish Pavilion, Expo 2005, Aichi, Japan. Source: Krzysztof Ingarden, *Architektoniczne przestania* (2013).

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