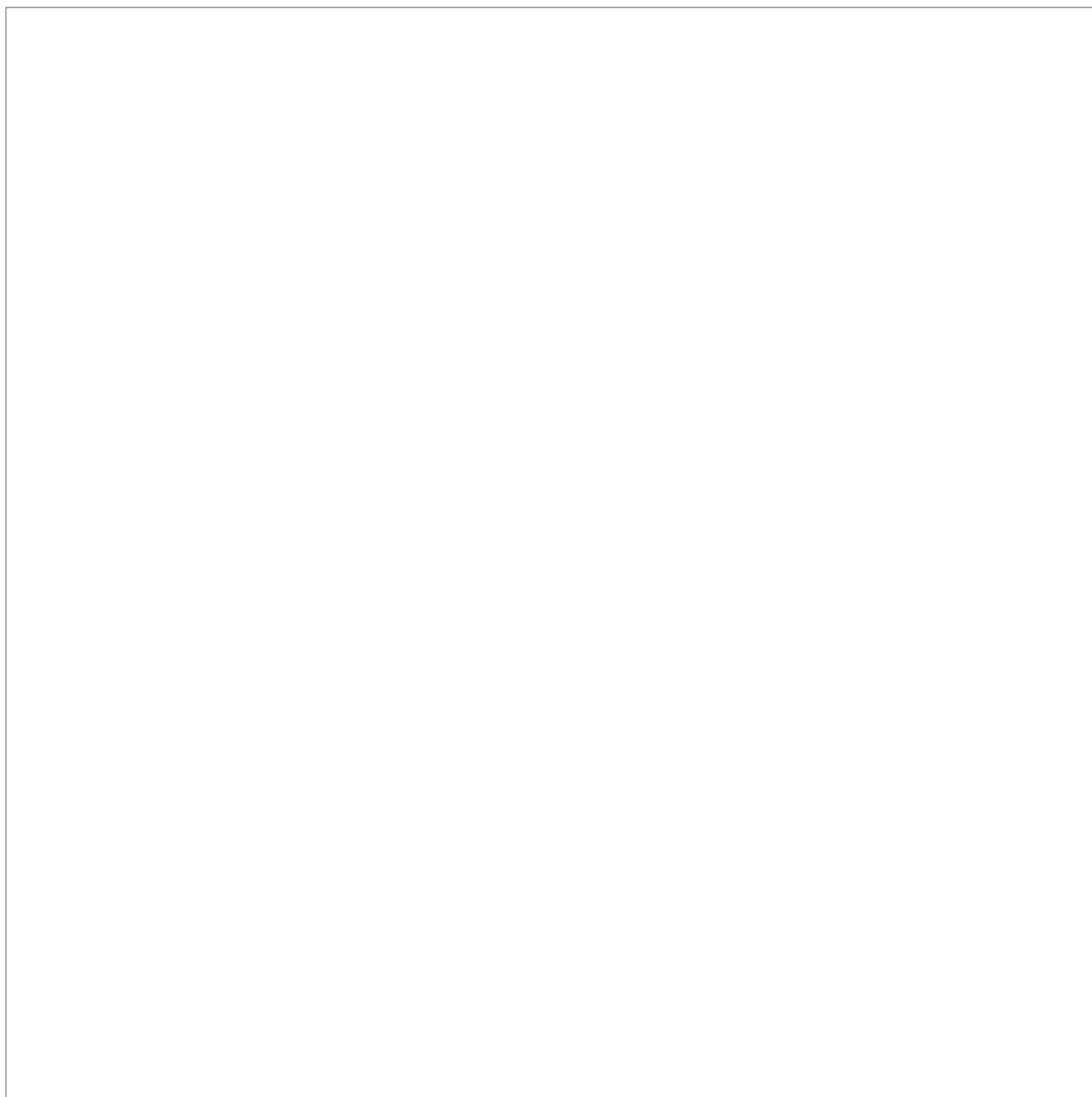


# Casket in the shape of a “sąsiek” (corn chest)



- Author Jan Mosh
- Date of production 1910
- Dimensions height: 18 cm, length: 28 cm, width: 18 cm
- ID no. S/1258/MT
- Museum [The Dr. Tytus Chałubiński Tatra Museum in Zakopane](#)
- Subjects [daily life](#), [rural areas](#), [mountain](#)
- Technique [casting](#), [chiselling](#), [grinding](#)
- Material [steel](#)
- Object copyright The Dr. Tytus Chałubiński Tatra Museum in Zakopane
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- Digitalisation RDW MIC, Małopolska's Virtual Museums project
- Tags [styl zakopiański](#), [życie codzienne](#), [Stanisław Witkiewicz](#), [sztuka ludowa](#), [3D](#), [3D plus](#)

## Daily life companions

We buy, receive and collect... items of everyday use – the faithful companions of our reality. We try to

surround ourselves with those objects that make us happy, those which make our hearts beat faster, and those to which we feel sympathy at first sight. After all, the space that surrounds us is important. We run away from "ordinariness" and "mediocrity". We always try to decorate this space. This was also the case in the past. In England, in the 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, artists who disliked mass-production and machine-made products launched the Arts and Crafts Movement. They wanted to revive what was beautiful and noble in functional objects. The initiative drew a positive response throughout contemporary Europe, including in Poland.

In 1886, Stanisław Witkiewicz, a painter, critic and theoretician of art, came to Zakopane. After four years, he settled in a small village at the foot of the Tatra Mountains and gave rise to a new style in architecture. Inspired by folklore and the art of [Podhale](#), he created the Zakopane style, which referred not only to architecture, but also to furnishings of new houses. Like the mentioned English movement for revival of arts and crafts, the Zakopane Style was a comprehensive project, covering every detail of the work in the making. Witkiewicz wanted his ideas and concepts to spread throughout Poland, which at that time remained under the authority of the invaders. The new style, called the Zakopane style, also was to become the first Polish national style, which was not only to delight the eye, but also to sustain the national consciousness. These new guidelines were implemented with various outcomes. However, some artists became interested in the project of Witkiewicz and tried to create new works in this spirit. Such works included e.g. a casket – *sąsieczek* and a clock in the form of a highland cottage made by Jan Mosz in the 1<sup>st</sup> decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Witkiewicz believed that the folk art of Podhale was an abundant source of inspiration for designers. He did not mean, of course, copying existing designs blindly, but thought about a creative approach to what could be found in highland cottages. A whole range of objects that "today's people cannot do without" must have been invented by those taking up the challenge of the Zakopane style. These objects included a casket for valuable trinkets and a small clock on a desk or table. Their forms actually derived from the repertoire of folk forms.

The form of the container for valuables was derived from *sąsiek* – an object which was present in almost every highland cottage. *Sąsiek* was a chest of typical carpentry construction, resembling pillar trusses used in wooden architecture. The basic structural elements were four massive pillars constituting legs and vertical edges of the chest. In the pillars, two thick slats were tucked with a number of vertical woodblocks planted between them, which resembled shingles with their shape and joining method. The chest lid was flat. It was made of hard, durable wood, which was joined with the use of wooden pegs. They were used to store various items in the chamber, including grain. In smaller and more decorative ones, "blessed herbs" could be found. In the case of the casket, its creator applied such an object typically used for storage merely by reducing its size. He also took another material – steel. *Sąsieczek* (little *sąsiek*) metamorphosed from of a heavy, massive chest into a stylish and chic container for jewellery.

The entire highland cottage of log construction, with a gable, shingled roof, decorated with coping in the form of a *pazdur* (vertical decorative element) was an inspiration for the clock. The dial is on the door enclosed with a rich door frame studded with pegs. The mechanism is hidden inside. Just like at home, the heart beats within it. Such a form is a kind of advertisement of Podhale architecture. When looking at the metal miniature, we can recall wooden originals from Tatra villages. It happens whenever we turn our eyes towards the dial to check the time. It is said that architecture is an art that is closest to people. Undoubtedly, items of everyday use are even closer to them. These inconspicuous companions of everyday life are witnesses of our every move, our joys and sorrows. We move among them, briefly touch them and look at them, sometimes even without noticing them; and yet we know their shapes and all their ornaments by heart. And they are not without significance to us. We have our favourite cups, spoons and vases. We choose carefully a friend that will measure our hours. No wonder that after some years even everyday objects find a safe haven in museum exhibitions. When watching them, we should not forget about those whom they kept company...

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# Applied arts in the Zakopane style

“Inside of this cottage everything bears the imprint of artistic preferences (...)”<sup>[1]</sup>, wrote Stanisław Witkiewicz with regard to a highlander's house. Applied arts, inspired by the region of Podhale, developed simultaneously with Zakopane style architecture. From the very beginning, Witkiewicz's concept assumed the principle of completeness, i.e. creating architecture along with interior design, ranging from furniture equipment to the finest decorative details. Just as much as a highlander's cottage was a model for architecture, its furnishing with particular items of equipment inspired stylish designs for furniture and applied art, because “all this had to be made of the material found in the forms existing in folk art”.<sup>[2]</sup>

The forms of a highlander's cottage were adapted to the requirements of more demanding clients. Witkiewicz believed that “the white chamber, almost unchanged, can be located in even very exquisite and rich apartments and constitute a splendid dining room”.<sup>[3]</sup> According to his conception, a highlander shape and appearance should be given to all interior elements and, therefore, elements should also be created which “obviously did not exist in a cottage and had to be produced in a fully independent manner under the influence of new emerging needs”.<sup>[4]</sup> In 1904, a new collective work entitled, the Zakopane style, was published for this purpose, edited by Witkiewicz. Volume I: the Dining room was a furniture template set, which included designs of various new home equipment, as well as examples of the use of Podhale ornamental motifs.

Therefore, the basic equipment of a highlander's cottage, consisting of a table, [chairs](#), shelves, boards, and [storage space](#), constituted a pattern for this stylish furniture. Their form was primarily shaped by their function. They had a very logical structure, which, at the same time, constituted their artistic value (e.g. little pegs, overlap joints, or dovetail joints), and was more important than the surface ornamentation. The line, which decoratively followed all edges and clearances, was also of great aesthetic value. If these basic furnishings were created in the Zakopane style, they usually followed the model highlander form, adding variety to the details and decor. In order to design, for example, living room or office furniture, which was not originally in a cottage (“Washbasins and toilets, couches and armchairs, chaise lounges and stools, cabinets, mirrors, desks and a whole lot of other equipment”),<sup>[5]</sup> it was based on the forms and construction of highlander equipment, compiling their elements into completely new furniture. [A cupboard](#), for instance, was formed by combining a chest, table legs (called “srogi”) and a top unit modelled on a shelf, while the chair backrest or bed headboard were based on the design of a backrest of a sleigh.

The Zakopane style drew directly on the repertoire of Podhale ornamentation, mainly created using the technique of shallow carving. Geometric motifs, such as zigzagging, “recica”, cone, cross, as well as plant motifs: groves, martagon lily, “parzenica”, asphodelus, parnassia (a type of a thistle) and the famous [“sunrise”](#) were used, with the frequent additional use of openwork, gaps, and fenestrations.

Although objects in the Zakopane style was subjected to its prototype (highlanders' furniture) in the field of form and ornamentation, artists were, in practice, more inclined to cater to the wishes of the clients, rather than rigidly adhere to the models. In addition, stylish items differed depending on the designer or contractor, who often worked out their own, individual style. It was important simply to convey the flair and style of Zakopane. After the successes of Witkiewicz's first complete realizations in Zakopane—a villa with furniture—the popularity of the Zakopane style continued to grow, and so did the demand for various products in this style. The orders “encompassed a huge range of life needs, from a ball gown to a chasuble; from a stool to an altar; from a spoon to a monstrance; from home to church”.<sup>[6]</sup>

Apart from Stanisław Witkiewicz, the main designers of stylized furniture were Wojciech Brzega, Wiktor Gosieniecki, and Stanisław Barabasz. Home furnishing and fittings were also made by highlanders, especially Maciej Sieczka, Jasiiek Walczak (turner), Wojciech Gąsienica Roj (sculptor), and others.

Interior designs also contained furniture made by the School of Wood Industry.

In fact, there exist only a few interiors designed by Witkiewicz; for example, the home furnishings of the Pod Jedlami house and the library in the palace in Kluczkowice. In contrast, the greatest activity in the field of furniture industry was developed by Wojciech Brzega, who ran his own workshop from 1903. He made various kinds of items in the Zakopane style there, in addition to creating sculptural works.

Elaborated by Paulina Kluz (Editorial Team of Malopolska's Virtual Museums),



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[1] S.E. Radzikowski, *Styl zakopiański*, Kraków 1901, s. 13.

[2] T. Jabłońska, *Styl zakopiański Stanisława Witkiewicza*, „Lamus”, 28 (2013), nr 2/12, s. 64; za: S. Witkiewicz, *Styl zakopiański. Zeszyt I: Pokój jadalny*, s. 367.

[3] S.E. Radzikowski, dz. cyt., s. 15.

[4] T. Jabłońska, *Muzeum Stylu Zakopiańskiego im. Stanisława Witkiewicza: przewodnik*, Zakopane 2002, s. 38.

[5] Tamże.

[6] J. Majda, *Styl zakopiański*, Kraków 1979, s. 22.

Tags: [furniture](#), [The Podhale](#), [cottage](#), [craft](#), [Stanisław Witkiewicz](#), [Zakopane Style](#), [Creative Commons licenses](#)

# Stanisław Witkiewicz vs. Imperial and Royal Professional School for Wood Industry in Zakopane

The first signs of interest in the culture of the highlanders emerged before Stanisław Witkiewicz's arrival in Zakopane. The first Woodcarving School had functioned in this town since 1876. It was later renamed, the Imperial and Royal Professional School for Wood Industry (k.k. Fachschule für Holzbearbeitung in Zakopane), in which professional craftsmen were trained. The school operated under the rule of the Austrian occupier, and its curriculum propagated Tirol styles. Despite this, it was this school's pupils who created the first works inspired by the art of Podhale. During the years 1885 and 1886, under the supervision of the then school principal, Franciszek Neužil, a bed and room screen in the Podhale style were made, according to meticulously designed projects by Magdalena Butowt-Andrzejkowiczówna, on the special order of Countess Róża Krasińska. From the second half of 1880s, this decorative style became widespread in the School. Numerous furniture sets designed by Neužil were produced. These were of simple design, and the only thing that connected them with the highlanders' culture was the abundance of applied ornamentation, hardly reminiscent of folk art. However, the principal himself was the first to describe them as the “Zakopane style” (zakopaner Style).

After settling in Zakopane, Stanisław Witkiewicz began to notice great potential in the production of the wood industry and the tradition of local wooden products. There was, after all, a school training professionals, as well as a large group of folk carpenters and craftsmen. However, Witkiewicz's first contact with the Professional School for the Wood Industry did not bring the expected results. The school authorities still opted for Tyrolean-Viennese inspirations for their products. Apart from executing individual orders for sets of furniture stylized to look like Podhale art, highlanders' patterns were simply considered “peasant” designs. Witkiewicz expressed the increasing antagonism between him and Neužil in the work *Na przełęczu* (On the col) (1890), in which he called the School "a seedbed of Tyrolean-Viennese taste, a German poison, killing the artistry of the highlanders".<sup>[1]</sup> Undoubtedly, this situation encouraged Stanisław Witkiewicz to take up designing furniture and various equipment himself. The first example of this was the realization of (Villa) Koliba for Zygmunt Gnatowski.

In 1895, Edgar Kováts—a Hungarian—came to Zakopane to work as a teacher. In 1899, he became the new principal of the School. The Austrian authorities, in line with local politics, had become inclined to recognize highland designs as "the appropriate national style in Galicia",<sup>[2]</sup> which was manifested in Kováts's activity, especially in his book of templates entitled: *Sposób zakopiański* (the Zakopane way) (1899).

Kováts introduced his concept into the field of art with solid impetus, and he successfully competed with the Zakopane Style of Stanisław Witkiewicz. The highlanders' culture, introduced by Kováts, entered the school's programme, and the designs he proposed were adopted for use by craftsmen. Kováts won numerous orders and support from many personalities in the world of art. However, despite his all-out attack, Witkiewicz neither competed nor argued with him. He only emphasized that the Zakopane Style had nothing to do with Kováts's proposals, and the two should not be confused.

The Zakopane Style by Kováts proposed an eclectic formula. Witkiewicz accused him of superficiality in referring to the art of the highlanders, the use of forms other than Podhale art, as well as exaggeration in furniture and equipment decor. Kováts's decorative patterns combined geometric, floral elements with Tyrolean motifs. They were overused and applied without full understanding of their purpose. The furniture and equipment were of conventional form, with variation added only by inlaid or carved ornamentation and decorative top panels.

The discussion about the priority of the “style” or the “manner” gained publicity, shaping artistic factions. Initially—supported by several architects—the superiority of “manner” was opted for, thanks to which, it was Kováts who participated in the preparation of the Galician Pavilion for the World Exhibition in Paris

in 1900. And yet, the public debate between opponents and defenders of the Zakopane Style—who sometimes expressed their views via magazines and newspapers quite aggressively—restored favour to Witkiewicz's style. Feliks Jasieński rightfully criticized the Paris Pavilion by describing it as “a synthetic-Slavonic-Byzantine-Kováts interior of a non-Polish home in a Polish manner”.<sup>[3]</sup> Over time, a broad group of Krakow artists and professors of the Academy of Fine Arts spoke in favour of the Zakopane Style, as subsequently did the Society for Polish Applied Arts, established in 1901.

Despite Witkiewicz's ideological victory over Kováts, in practice, Zakopane carvers often used the Zakopane way in their designs, mixing its elements with Podhale art motifs proposed by the Zakopane style. An example of this is the library of the palace in Kluczkowice, which was constructed according to Witkiewicz's design, although some of its decorative motifs were based on the Tyrolean patterns of the Manner. Such compilations resulted from Witkiewicz's unclear method of drawing patterns from Podhale art, which was treated freely, as well as from the fact that his collaborators were very often professionally educated students and graduates of the School of Wood Industry.

Stanisław Barabasz, an artist and ethnographer, was the first Pole to be the principal of the School from 1901. From then on, relations between the School and Witkiewicz were normalized, because Barabasz “opened up this ‘chained-up’ institution to Witkiewicz's concept”<sup>[4]</sup> by introducing the style of Zakopane to the School's curriculum. The next principals were artists who had collaborated earlier with Witkiewicz, such as Karol Stryjeński and Wojciech Brzega.

Elaborated by Paulina Kluz (Editorial Team of Malopolska's Virtual Museums),



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[2] B. Tondos, *Styl zakopiański i zakopiańszczyzna*, Wrocław–Warszawa–Kraków 2004, s. 85; za: M. Leśniakowska, *Jan Koszyc-Witkiewicz (1881–1952) i budowanie w jego czasach*, Warszawa 1998, s. 17.

[3] B. Tondos, dz. cyt., s. 92.

[4] J. Majda, *Styl zakopiański*, Kraków 1979, s. 8.

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