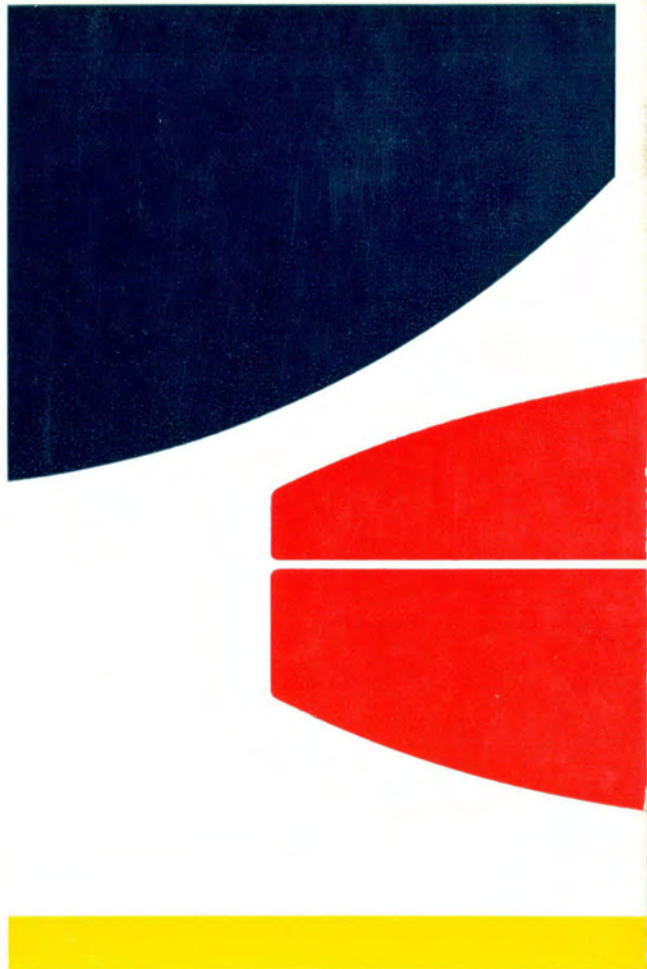


DESIGN IN SCANDINAVIA





DESIGN IN SCANDINAVIA

February 1968—January 1969

Denmark
Finland
Norway
Sweden

Patrons

His Excellency the Governor General of the Commonwealth of Australia
His Majesty the King of Denmark
His Majesty the King of Sweden
His Excellency the President of Finland
His Majesty the King of Norway

Committee of Honour

H E J.C.G. Kevin, CBE, The Australian Ambassador to Sweden
H E Gösta af Petersens, The Swedish Ambassador to Australia
H E Emil Blytgen-Petersen, The Danish Ambassador to Australia
Mr. Olavi Wanne, The Finnish Chargé d'affaires in Australia
Mr. Arnt-Jakob Jakobsen, The Norwegian Consul General in Sydney
Mr. J.A.B. Campbell, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the Western Australian Art Gallery
Sir Leon Trout, President of the Board of Trustees of the Queensland Art Gallery
Mr. Erik Langker, OBE, President of the Board of Trustees of the Art Gallery of New South Wales
Mr. N.R. Seddon, Chairman of the Board of Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria
Mr. H.W. Miller, President of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery
Mr. Alf Bøe, President of the Norwegian Society of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Design
Baron Jonas Cedercreutz, Chairman of the Board of Governors of the Finnish Society of Crafts and Design
Mr. Anders Hostrup-Pedersen, President of the Danish Society of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Design
Mr. Rudolf Kalderén, President of the Swedish Society for Industrial Design

Australian Executive Committee

Mr. Frank Norton, Director of the Western Australian Art Gallery
Mr. Robert Kidnie, Managing Director, David Jones' Art Gallery, Adelaide
Mr. James Wieneke, Director of the Queensland Art Gallery
Mr. Hal Missingham, Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales
Mr. Eric Westbrook, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria
Dr. W. Bryden, CBE, Director of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

Scandinavian Executive Committee

Mr. H.O. Gummerus, Director of the Finnish Society of Crafts and Design
Mr. Mårten J. Larsson, Director of the Swedish Society for Industrial Design
Mr. Bent Salicath, Director of the Danish Society of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Design
Mr. Jørgen Skaare, Director of the Norwegian Society of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Design

Exhibition Designer

Mr. Antti Nurmesniemi, Finland

Honorary Secretary General

Mr. Thor G. Thorvaldson, Sydney

Secretary General

Miss Ulla Tarras-Wahlberg, LLB, Sweden



INTRODUCTION

by Hal Missingham

In welcoming this exhibition of **Design in Scandinavia** to Australia on behalf of the combined State Galleries, perhaps I may be permitted to retail something of the difficulties which attended its origins and its now happy fulfilment.

Early negotiations were begun in 1963 between Eric Westbrook, Director of the National Gallery of Victoria, Mr. Henning Hergel, a former Consul-General for Denmark and Mr. H.O. Gummerus, Director of the Finnish Society of Crafts and Design who visited Australia in that year to meet the State Directors in Annual Conference in Perth, Western Australia, where it was agreed that an exhibition showing the artistic work of the four Scandinavian countries would be most welcome.

However, after many vicissitudes the project was abandoned in early 1964 and it was only re-opened by the intervention of Mr. Thorvaldson, Finnish Consul in Sydney who suggested to the Danish Society of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Design that I might be invited to Copenhagen to discuss re-opening the project while I was in London in October 1965.

The resulting meeting between Mr. Anders Hostrup-Pedersen and his subsequent visit to Australia, Mr. Gummerus, Mr. Bent Salicath and myself, confirmed Australian interest in the project and on my return to Australia I was happy to agree that we would welcome the Design in Scandinavia Exhibition, opening its Australian tour in Perth at the time of the Festival there in February–March 1968.

Unfortunately the National Gallery of South Australia was unable to accept the exhibition at the time of the Adelaide Festival, but it will be shown in Adelaide in David Jones Art Gallery immediately following, opening on March 28th.

The Australian Galleries some time ago decided that they would exhibit not only the "fine arts" of painting and sculpture, but those parallel arts which by their acceptance in public use furthered the whole conception of the need for educating taste in the community in all its widest manifestations.

We feel quite sure that this exhibition of the best products of arts, crafts, and industrial design of the Scandinavian countries will not only demonstrate their undoubted creative abilities but will materially help our own country to progress in these fields.

The exhibition is guaranteed by the Government of the Commonwealth of Australia and the Governments of the Scandinavian countries.

FOUR COUNTRIES – ONE TRADITION OF DESIGN

“Show me the possessions, and I will show you the man”. This variation of an old saying is sometimes quoted in Scandinavia when discussing the furnishing of private homes or public environments. One could also extend this to read: “Show me the products, and I will show you the country”.

The Scandinavians now present a joint exhibition of their goods, not only to show the world what kind of articles we produce, but also to reveal what kind of people we are. Exquisite silver or sturdy china from Denmark; a richly-coloured “rya” rug or a functional chair from Finland; an enamel dish in glowing shades or a brightly-patterned heavy sweater from Norway; a shimmering glass vase or high quality stainless steel cutlery from Sweden – all these are symbols of what we can produce in specific artistic fields and also of the high standard of the articles made for everyday use in our respective countries. These articles, primarily intended for use in the home, at work and, to a certain extent, in public surroundings, are of course only a small part of the varied selection produced by four industrial countries. Scandinavian Design also covers office and household equipment, electrical appliances, plastic goods and motor cars – i.e. an increasing proportion of the entire range of industrial products.

It is clear that the latter articles mentioned express the same essential ideals found in all high quality industrial production today. At the same time, however, there is justification for seeing in them the logical development of our earlier traditions. In other words, this exhibition should be regarded not only as a display of different aspects of a production programme, but also as expressing a social and cultural concept as to how we should design the things around us in order to achieve the realisation of “the good life”. Seen from this point of view, Scandinavian Design expresses a democratic and individual tradition of design, in contrast to the uniformity and monotony which so often result from the expansion of mass production.

10.000 years in Scandinavia

We who live and work on the roof of Europe usually call ourselves “the North”. Few nations inhabit an area as large and as sparsely populated as Scandinavia. It stretch-

es for 2,500 miles from the Danish-German border in the South to Danish Greenland in the North, and 2,000 miles from the West coast of Greenland to the Finnish-Russian border. Twenty million people live in this area, all of them descendants of tribes that may have settled in Ultima Thule as long as 10,000 years ago. As far as language is concerned, the Finns differ from the other Scandinavian peoples – but not with regard to historical heritage. According to the ethnographers we all share the advantage of living in the climatic zone most favourable to “active human beings”.

Our common history and origins, however, do not prevent us from having our own distinctive characteristics which we demonstrate happily to each other. Denmark is a typical agricultural country and the Dane likes to stress his roots in the soil. Finland is a forest country with a thousand lakes and the Finn frequently adopts the role of a harsh and silent lone wolf, with inexhaustible “sisu” (drive). Norway is a magnificent land of mountains and snow-capped peaks, where steep cliffs tower above the fiords, and the Norwegian claims to be happiest when on a stormy sea or tramping to his “hytte” (log-cabin) in the mountains. Sweden is a country of plain and mountain, forest and sea, and the Swede would probably wish to persuade you that he possesses all his neighbours’ virtues. In our “Nordic Fellowship”, however, we do not take these supposed differences too seriously. We understand and value each other.

Industrialisation, urbanisation, the far-reaching levelling of class differences, good labour relations, political stability and an extensive programme of social security – these features, with slight variations, are common to us all and contribute to the smoothing over of our differences. The joint Nordic Council, and extensive cooperation today in legal, cultural, social, economic and other fields, give concrete expression to our friendly relations.

Development under straitened conditions

When the term “Scandinavian Design” was first launched during the years after the Second World War, it did not refer to a new phenomenon. The silver from Denmark, the “rya” rug from Finland, the enamel dish from Norway and the glass vase from Sweden mentioned in the introduction paragraph, did not suddenly appear from nowhere. On the contrary, they are links in a long chain of historical development, and in order to understand what “Scandinavian Design” really means, we must retrace our steps in history.

Until modern times, the Nordic countries were regarded as remote and far away. They were lacking in the more valuable types of wood and in precious metals, and they never formed a background for princely magnificence and noble splendour in the same way as those countries of central Europe that acted as centres of fashion. A

tradition of design created under straitened conditions in a varied and sometimes harsh climate. But in this isolation, an environment developed that did not lack its own individual character. Under these circumstances, the home came to play a decisive role for the sparse and scattered population. Whereas in lands further South, with a more equable — even if not always more pleasant — climate, people gather in the streets and squares and use these as a large, communal “outdoor room”, the home became the obvious meeting-place in the North, and still is today. As a result of this, the home and its furnishings have received special care and attention. Since the Stone Age, Denmark has had an almost uninterrupted ceramic tradition. As early as the Middle Ages, “rya” rugs were being woven in Finland. During the days of the Vikings, the Norwegians were carving their unsurpassed sculptures of “the long ships” and sleighs, while Sweden too had corresponding traditions in all handicrafts. This skill in handling nature’s raw materials, found in widely scattered groups of the population, survived down to the end of the 19th century and in some cases even longer.

When industrialism started to make its mark and directly or indirectly threatened to break down this handicraft tradition, the Scandinavian countries, as well as other European nations, formed societies with the idealistic aim of preserving if possible handicraft skills for posterity. One of the organisations sponsoring this exhibition, the Swedish Society for Industrial Design was established in 1845 and is today one of the oldest active organisations of its kind in the world. The other Nordic countries also gradually set up similar societies — the Finnish Society of Crafts and Design in 1875, the Danish Society of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Design in 1907 and the Norwegian Society of Arts and Crafts and Industrial Design in 1918. At the same time, training schools for craftsmen were established, followed by others for craftsmen designers in the applied arts and, in our own time, by institutes for industrial designers. These schools are of unparelled importance for Scandinavian Design and their pedagogic tradition also dates from the same period as the handicraft societies.

Thanks to the comparatively late arrival of the industrial revolution in Scandinavia, it was possible, with the assistance of the societies, to transfer a handicrafts tradition that was still essentially alive to the industries producing goods for use in the home. The famous Danish master carpenters, who carry on the skill in the art of making furniture, have literally incorporated their knowledge in the furniture industry. The Finnish “rya” rugs would not exist today if the country did not still possess brilliant women hand-weavers. Their skills have in turn benefited the textile industry in many ways. In Norway and Sweden one can show how the art of glass-making has developed continuously right up to the present-day glass firms, which in several cases

were founded in the 18th century. Examples of only a few specialities are given here and it is important to lay stress upon the fact that on the whole all the countries have the same background in all the various craft fields.

Beautiful articles for everyday use

The above outline of the historical development gives a picture of the traditional side of Scandinavian Design. The modern aspects can be explained by the stimulating contacts made at the turn of the century and in subsequent years between progressive ideas of design coming from Europe and domestic Scandinavian heritage. Far-sighted men and women exchanged views with representatives of the Jugend movement in England and on the Continent at this time, and carried home with them ideas of a new, artistic and environmental culture, free from the necessity of imitating earlier styles. At that time too, the collaboration began between industry and artists-designers in Scandinavia, which was to result in a new, contemporary concept of design. Social and political influences were a very important element in the new philosophy of environment. It sought to produce well-designed articles at a price which the ordinary man could pay. As early as 1917, at an exhibition with the slogan “More beautiful articles for everyday use”, furniture, textiles, wall-paper, china and kitchen utensils of simple and practical design and at a reasonable cost were displayed. When the Scandinavian countries presented their goods at the 1925 Paris exhibition, the glass designers received particular praise for having devoted as much care to an everyday set of glasses as to a magnificent goblet. With the initial breakthrough of functionalism at the beginning of the 1930s, an extensive number of household articles appeared which in all essentials were characteristic of Scandinavian Design: outstanding technical quality, carefully considered from a functional viewpoint, design suited to the material used and a certain unostentatious simplicity of appearance.

Perhaps one should add that production of the separate items used in furnishing a home was already in the 1930s seen in relation to the building of houses. Architects and designers began systematically to study the purely practical functions of housing, furniture and household articles, especially with regard to proportions and measurements. This research has to an increasing extent, and with state support, benefited production. For example, standards have been worked out for the use and equipment of the kitchen, and the size of rooms has been adapted to provide the space desired for the furniture. After thorough investigation, the dimensions of furniture used for storage have been adjusted to fit the requirements of the average family. This attitude to purely utilitarian articles has not restricted in any way the design of

decorative or artistic articles. While furniture designers have imposed certain restrictions on themselves, conditioned by practical use and the demands of production, textile and ceramic designers, for example, have been able to play with complete freedom on the entire register of their respective materials, where form and colour are concerned.

During the past fifty years, the development of the artistic handicrafts and industry has been exciting and richly varied. At one time, a particular material has been the focus of interest and at another, a different one: sometimes one country, sometimes another, has been in the forefront of design. To over-simplify, one can say that in the 1930s Sweden to some extent took the initiative and won recognition with Swedish Modern. Immediately after the Second World War Danish Design made brilliant contributions, especially where furniture was concerned. In this field, Denmark for a period of time set the fashion. Towards the middle and end of the 1950s it was Finland's turn to attract attention, above all by its glass and ceramics and a series of strikingly artistic exhibitions. During the first part of the 1960s Norway came forward strongly as a manufacturer of furniture that was greatly admired. This summary is clearly too superficial but I merely wish to show that Scandinavian Design has been the result of a vital interaction between the four countries. Since the structure of arts and crafts has varied to some extent from country to country, this interaction has been inspiring and fruitful. It is characteristic of Denmark that the relatively few though important industries are supplemented by a strikingly large number of independent craftsmen, with their own studios or workshops. The position in Finland, on the other hand, is almost diametrically the opposite. There the market is dominated by a relatively small number of important industries which employ the leading designers. Whereas Denmark can offer an exceptionally wide range of products within the pure applied arts, Finland has a small but equally distinguished élite of designers. In Norway, a large number of relatively small firms help promote modern design, while Sweden, as the largest of the sister countries, has the most extensive purely industrial production. In the atmosphere of stimulating competition that prevails within "the Scandinavian family", one cannot claim that any single country is in general superior to the others, but rather that one country at a particular time may have led the others in one or another special field. This atmosphere encourages renewed efforts and assists development.

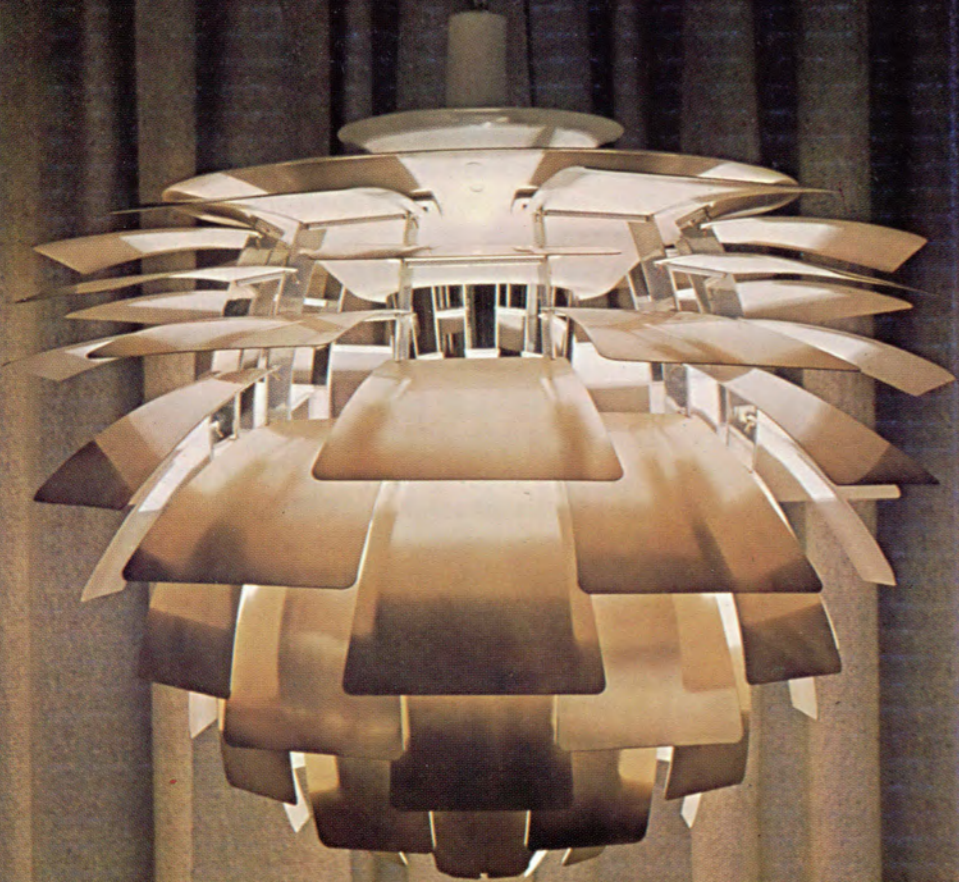
From artist to industrial designer

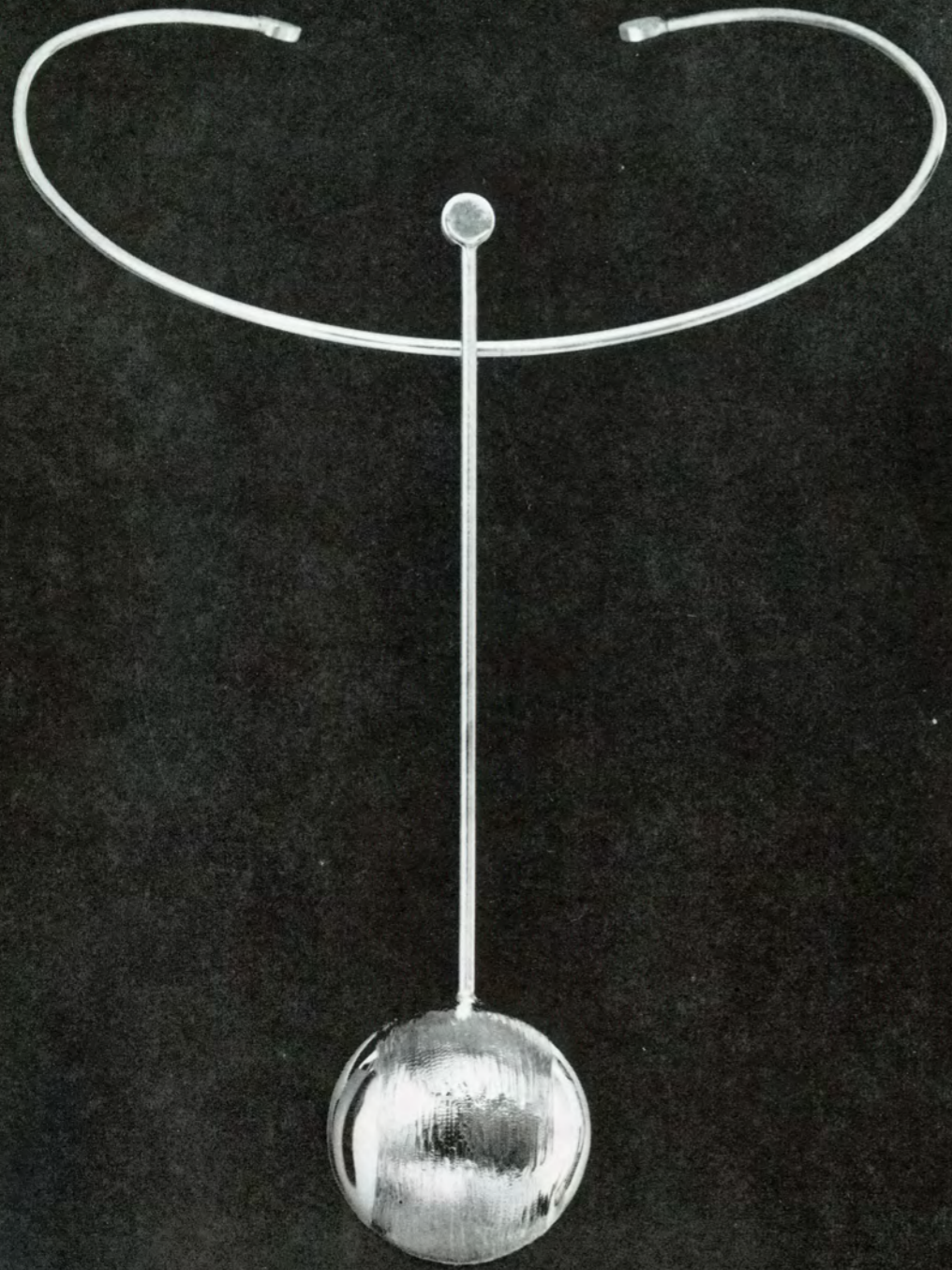
It has been said, perhaps too often, that Scandinavian Design is above all characterised by high quality and cool, sober elegance. This may have been true twenty or

thirty years ago. Today the picture is far more varied. One can observe an increasingly distinct demarcation line between articles that are primarily practical and those that are mainly or exclusively aesthetic. One of the reasons for this development is that industrial design in the strict modern sense of the term has also become a reality in Scandinavia.

The first designers in the applied arts came from the ranks of painters and sculptors. The pioneers of Scandinavian Design after the First World War were to a very great extent independent artists and, to some degree, architects interested in the arts. Their successors in many cases were also artists but artists who had been trained specifically in the industrial arts in order to design china, glass and metal articles for household use. The most distinguished of these have in their turn been pioneers of industrial design and created lamps, radio sets, stainless steel cutlery and coffeepots. Their pupils, the designers of the '60s, have in many cases turned to industrial design proper. They design motor cars and irons, washing machines and electrical appliances, welding equipment and hairdryers: in fact the entire range of machines on which our technocratic civilisation is based. These products do not always differ in any very spectacular way from corresponding articles produced by other countries. But frequently they do differ, especially the best of them. Their sensible and straightforward form, perhaps too their simple elegance – in this case, the word is appropriate – can be explained by the fact that the designer has been trained, admittedly by modern methods, but in the basic artistic spirit which has been, and still is, a distinctive feature of Scandinavian Design. The glass designers at the Paris Exhibition more than forty years ago were praised for having devoted all their skill to the design of even the simplest household glass. In the same way, we feel that the Scandinavian designer of the future, trained as he is to make products that are not only functional and practical but also pleasant, and indeed beautiful, to the eye and touch, will be able to convey the deeply human philosophy of Scandinavian Design, even when shaping machines and equipment. If these products are to help us to achieve "the good life", they must also visually be capable of doing so.

Ulf Hård af Segerstad





3

4



