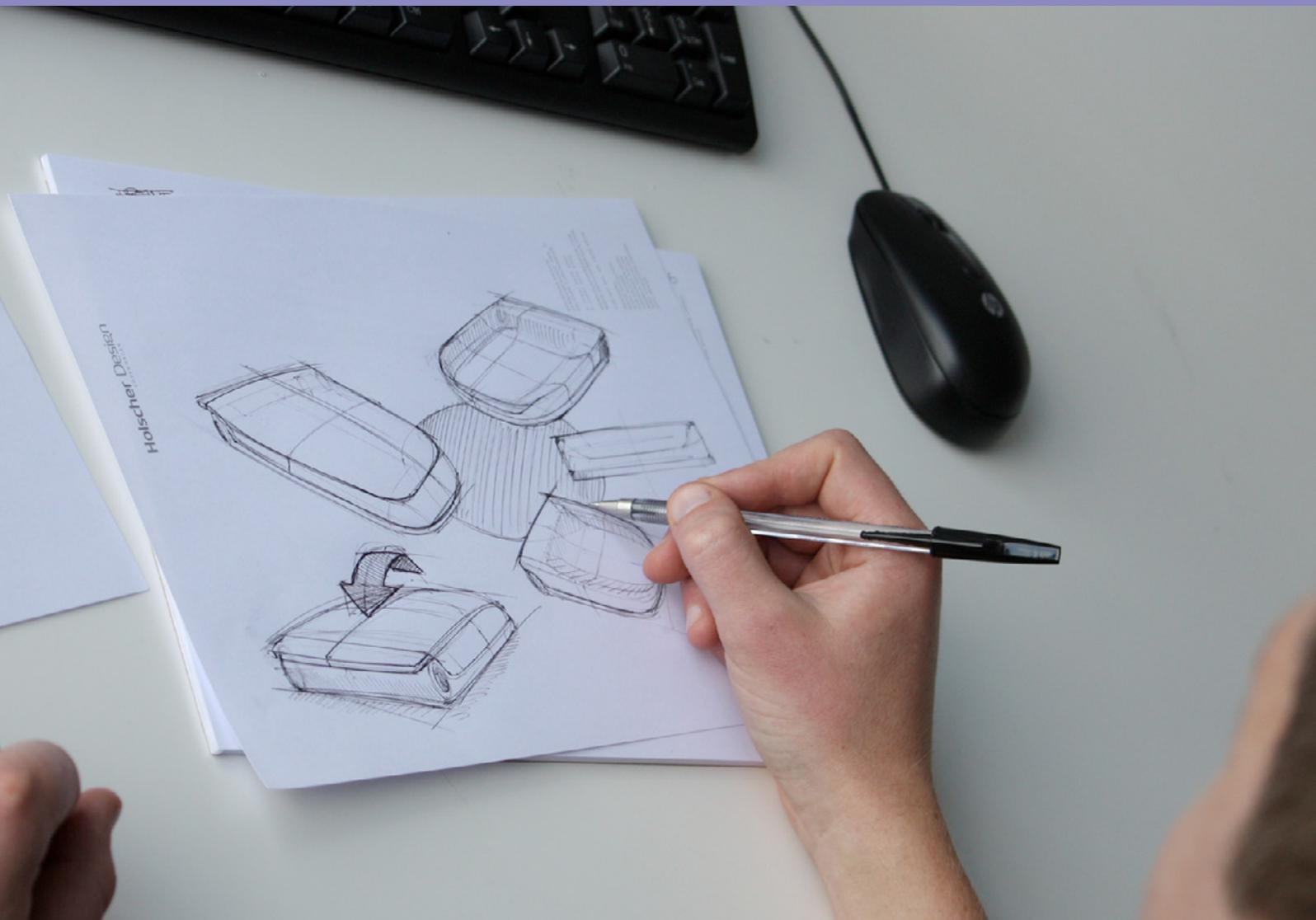


INSPIRED BY THE PAST, LOOKING TOWARD THE FUTURE: UNDERSTANDING DANISH DESIGN



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INTRODUCTION

Design is a central component of Scandinavian culture and “Scandinavian design,” with its balance of simplicity, beauty and utility, has become iconic in the design and architecture industry. Danish design especially has become instantly recognisable and beloved around the world. Over the last century, many renowned furniture, industrial and architectural designers have emerged from Denmark. This list includes furniture designers Hans Wegner, Arne Jacobsen, and Verner Panton; electronics powerhouse Bang & Olufsen; and Sydney Opera House designer Jørn Utzon.

Today, Danish design is known for its high quality, focus on functionality and a minimalist, timeless aesthetic. Yet the

precise characteristics that make Danish design so distinctive are often more difficult to identify. An understanding of the roots of Danish design, and its rich tapestry of cultural, social and historical influences, provides a path to understanding how Danish design remains relevant today and why it will continue to be influential into the future.

In this whitepaper, we explore the factors that have shaped Danish design over the last century and made it successful across the globe. We provide a closer look at Denmark’s rich creative history and explain how these threads connect to place Danish design in the unique position of being at once steeped in tradition and at the forefront of innovation.

To this day, Danish design has been a world leader in creating simple yet functional furniture, made with advanced construction techniques and high quality materials.





A HISTORY OF INNOVATION

Since the mid-20th century, Danish design has been internationally acclaimed for its commitment to functionalist principles and a clean, distinctive aesthetic. Modern Danish design has its roots in the minimalist approach of the Bauhaus School of Design in Germany, which operated from 1919 to 1933.¹ The Bauhaus style was a counterpoint to the lavish and ornate furniture designs that were popular in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, and focused on simplicity and functional design.² The Bauhaus design philosophy centred on “Functionalism”, a principle of designing objects on the basis of purpose and function and making aesthetic decisions within the framework of function and utility.³

The principles of Bauhaus Modernism were embraced by Kaare Klint, who was the head of the Furniture Department at the Architecture School of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in the 1920s. Considered the father of Danish Modern design, Klint taught an analytical approach to design that favoured form and function over ornamentation.⁴ It was this Functionalist, minimalist approach, combined with the natural warmth and beauty inherent to traditional Danish furniture making, that gave birth to the Danish Modern style that is now recognised around the world.

The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts produced a number of well-known Danish Modern designers such as Finn Juhl, Arne

Jacobsen, Børge Mogensen and Poul Kjaerholm. Klint's work during this period, including the Propeller Chair, Safari Chair and Church Chair, proved highly influential and represented an innovative use of traditional materials with a sharp focus on simple, functional design. In 1927, the Danish Cabinetmakers Guild established a furniture exhibition in Copenhagen that fostered close collaboration and lasting partnerships between cabinetmakers and designers, encouraging more innovative designs while further developing the Danish Modern style.

The international popularity of Danish furniture design increased markedly between the 1940s and 1960s. A number of factors contributed to this, including the scarcity of materials after World War II alongside the emergence of plywood as a leading construction material; a post-war housing boom that increased demand for furniture especially in the United States;⁵ and the development of new, refined techniques that enabled the mass-production of bent plywood furniture.⁶ Designers such as Hans Wegner and Børge Mogensen produced chairs in teak plywood and beech in the late 1940s and later, in 1951, Arne Jacobsen developed the innovative “Ant Chair”, the first chair with a seat and back in one piece of plywood that had been bent in both directions.⁷ To this day, Danish design has been a world leader in creating simple yet functional furniture, made with advanced construction techniques and high quality materials.



DANISH DESIGN DNA

In 2017, the Danish Design Council published the Danish Design DNA paper, which provided “a picture of Danish design both past and present.”⁸ The ten values⁹ contained therein are summarised below.

- **Social:** Danish design is “social” in that it is rooted in the country’s socialist mindset, which informed the design movement during its formative years. This value is reflected in Danish design’s focus on the end-user and accessibility.
- **Quality:** Informed by the Danish tradition of craftsmanship, Danish design is preoccupied with quality in terms of creating long-lasting, timeless solutions but also with respect to materials, build and detail.
- **User-oriented:** A key aspect of Danish design is its unwavering commitment to creating solutions oriented towards the user and context. This focus is rooted in the Functionalist tradition, which is a fundamental aspect of the Danish design philosophy.
- **Human:** Danish design meaningfully incorporates people and their surroundings, with sensuousness, use and functionality as main concerns.
- **Factual:** A honed sense of pragmatism, functionality and simplicity characterises Danish design. Clear lines and geometry are favoured, which is a highly utilitarian approach that imbues Danish design with a straightforward, “factual” quality.
- **Simple:** Danish design, as a local interpretation of international Modernism, emphasises a Spartan style that focuses on user-orientation, form and simplification.
- **Durable:** In Danish design, durability results from high quality craftsmanship, detailing and materials as well as from stylistic timelessness. Durability is among the chief reasons why many internationally-recognised, classic designs have emerged from the Danish design movement over the last century.
- **Craftsmanship:** An extension of the Danish craft tradition, Danish design extols the virtues of high quality craftsmanship and applied art. A feature of Danish design throughout the years is the development of innovative techniques to enhance the look and feel of materials and an unerring commitment to achieving perfection in the final product.
- **Collaborative:** While Danish design began with a strong “auteur” tradition, industrialisation in the latter half of the 20th century gave rise to advanced manufacturing techniques and more complex designs requiring close collaboration between designers and manufacturing companies. Reflecting the Danish democratic culture, collaboration is heightened today across all design genres as designers seek active involvement from users and experts to inform their designs and prototypes.
- **Holistic:** Danish design is closely tied to the country’s history of architecture, resulting in a holistic approach to design. For example, all aspects of the SAS Hotel in Copenhagen, designed by Arne Jacobsen and opened in 1960, can be traced back to the same design idea, resulting in a consistent identity throughout the building.

DESIGN FOR TODAY – AND TOMORROW

All the above values can be traced back to specific aspects of Danish ideals and tradition, combining to create a design philosophy that has thrived unlike any other. Danish design, marketed as “Danish Modern” in the 1950s and 60s, is a combination of Functionalist and Modernist ideals and ancient craftsmanship traditions informed by Danish societal and cultural values.¹⁰ The furniture and design objects emerging from this movement are known for their perfectionist detailing, emphasis on use and function, timeless minimalism and simple geometry, all of which can still be seen in current Danish design.¹¹ The use of natural elements and textures in Danish design further adds to its appeal, creating warm, inviting interiors and pairing well with other contemporary styles.

Design is a critical component of Danish culture. A number of institutions have been set up to promote and nurture Danish design. This includes DANISH™ an online platform set up to promote Danish design and architecture; the Danish Design Council; and the high number of design schools throughout the country. According to DANISH™, “quality, functionality, aesthetics and intelligent solutions” are a “birthright” for

Danish citizens and, in Denmark, design and architecture are considered important tools to “help improve urban development, sustainability, play and learning”.¹²

Part of Danish design’s enduring appeal is its ability to adapt to changing needs and technologies. The Danish Design Council highlights contemporary designers such as Cecile Manz, Niels Hvass and Kasper Salto, who push the Danish design tradition into new areas through the use of new, innovative production technologies and techniques.¹³ While some observers note that Danish design will not undergo massive changes to its signature aesthetic over next few decades,¹⁴ developments in sustainable design, digital technology and the trend of personalisation and individualised design are predicted to influence Danish design in significant ways.

The Danish design mentality, with its hyper focus on the user, embrace of innovation, openness to new challenges and promotion of cultural values such as democracy, equality and high levels of knowledge,¹⁵ will make Denmark a hotbed for innovation for years to come.

PRESSALIT

Since 1954, Pressalit has led the global market in premium commercial bathroom solutions, especially here in Australia where their products have been used for over 30 years. Leveraging their vast knowledge and innovative design, the privately owned Danish company specialises in toilet seats that meet the needs of a diverse range of users worldwide. Pressalit products deliver high quality bathroom solutions for many applications such as hotels and aged care facilities.

Pressalit continues the rich Danish design tradition, drawing on its core principles and values to deliver durable, high performance products that outperform competitors and add genuine value commercial bathrooms. With a dynamic research and development culture that prioritises user needs and feedback, Pressalit products

rise above fleeting trends to create timeless solutions that feature the efficiency, functionality and minimalist aesthetic that characterises Danish design.

Pressalit has received numerous Red Dot Awards for the design of their bathroom products. Red Dot is an internationally-recognised accolade that has become the international stamp of quality for product design. Featuring clean, geometric lines, high quality materials and functional design that can withstand daily wear and tear, Pressalit toilet seats are a long lasting solution designed specifically for the realities of contemporary bathrooms. Pressalit offers a 10-year warranty and multiple toilet seat designs with various hinge options.

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