



A retro hotel pays tribute to a generation of Danish designers

BY CLARA LE FORT

Nestled in the heart of Copenhagen, just steps away from Town Hall Square and a five-minute walk from Tivoli Gardens, stands Hotel Alexandra, a one-of-a-kind gem in a city rich with design history. Each of the hotel's sixty-one rooms celebrates Danish design by showcasing furniture and art from the 1930s to the 1960s — with a special emphasis on the '50s and '60s — allowing visitors to fully immerse themselves in the world of Danish modernism. Some of Hotel Alexandra's rooms feature works by a medley of designers; others are dedicated entirely to one Danish icon, such as the Finn Juhl and Verner Panton suites or the Hans Wegner and Arne Jacobsen deluxe rooms.



The hotel building dates back to the 1880s, when it was originally constructed to house fashionable apartments. It was transformed into a hotel around the turn of the twentieth century, but it wasn't until 2001 when General Manager Jeppe Muhlhausen came up with the concept to embrace the nation's design heritage.

"I wanted every space to pay tribute to some of our brightest design minds and offer guests the possibility to stay in rooms completely furnished with vintage design references and collectibles: Hans Wegner, Finn Juhl, Arne Jacobsen, Børge Mogensen, Nanna Ditzel, Verner Panton... we had them all lined up!"

Muhlhausen and his team began to buy inexpensive pieces first, since back then Scandinavian design wasn't much in vogue. It was only around 2004-05 that prices started skyrocketing. This market shift brought the hotel unique opportunities as well. "We started receiving anonymous calls from Danes who wanted to sell us their 'oldies.'" One day, he even received a call from Hanne Wilhelm Hansen — Finn Juhl's widow — "who offered 'their' bed. She said, 'We slept in it throughout our marriage; maybe you could use it at the hotel?'" The piece subsequently resided in the hotel for years before being returned to Finn Juhl's house north of Copenhagen, which was opened to the public in 2008 as part of the Ordrupgaard Museum.

Constantly enriching the Alexandra's interiors with new finds, Muhlhausen walks us through six of his favorite design highlights from the hotel:

Finn Juhl

Finn Juhl was too avant-garde to be a university professor, so for the first decade of his career, he worked for famous Danish modernist architect Vilhelm Lauritzen and helped him design the iconic Radio House in Copenhagen. It is believed that Juhl designed the Crown Lamp in the Hotel Alexandra's lobby while working on this project. Illuminating his greater design approach, in 1952, Juhl noted that a chair isn't simply a product in a room, "it is a design and a room in itself."

Arne Jacobsen

An interesting story about Arne Jacobsen — and one that doesn't concern the Egg or Swan Chairs that sit in the room decorated in his honor — is that, as Jews, he and his wife Jonna left Denmark during World War II to find refuge in Sweden. While there, the pair collaborated on textile and wallpaper designs based on his watercolor studies of Swedish flora throughout the seasons. The curtains in Hotel Alexandra's Arne Jacobsen room derive from this marvelous series.

I wanted every space to pay tribute to some of our brightest design minds.

Børge Mogensen

While his contemporaries were obsessed with handcrafting, Mogensen wanted to make furniture for the people and to push industrialized processes. In that sense, he was very much a visionary, proclaiming that design should be accessible to everyone. Ironically, years later, his sofas and chairs now furnish ministry offices and Danish embassies around the world. Two of his 1963 Wing Chairs are placed on both sides of the Alexandra's lobby. The chairs envelope the body, and their wings help shut out the world, giving one the peace to read or relax. In the Mogensen room, one also finds additional examples of the couch from the same line.

Verner Panton

Throughout his career, Verner Panton was passionate about the ways in which we interpret spaces, and, specifically, about the sense of overall "light" one experiences in a room. This concept reached from physical lighting (such as his 1960 Moon and 1970 Ball lamps, which illuminate the hotel) to his use of color (the two rooms that make up his namesake suite are clad in deep blue and vivid orange) and new materials (featured in everything from kinetic wallpaper to unique flooring techniques).

Hans J. Wegner

Wegner was a pure craftsman, and always very keen on being part of the process. Over the years, he created some of the most well known, and long-lasting, Danish furniture designs. He was also very respectful of tiny living spaces, and even designed a wall-bed that fit inside the first student flats. One of these pieces of design legend is placed in the Hans J. Wegner Suite: In the States, Wegner's work embodied the international arrival of the Danish modernist design trend; his 1949 Round Chair — simply known as "The Chair" — was the one John F. Kennedy and Richard Nixon used in the first ever-televised U.S. presidential debate in 1960.

Nanna Ditzel

Over the course of a career that spanned over five decades, Ditzel designed everything from furniture and textiles to tableware and jewelry, in a broad array of materials. Her clean yet curvaceous 1958 Ring Chair, later re-released as the Sausage chair, embodies the spirit and aesthetic of this Golden Age of Danish Modernism. A few of Ditzel's original Ring Chairs happily call Hotel Alexandra home.

For more information on a truly unique excursion into modernist design, visit www.hotelalexandra.dk