

# Grete Jalk



The focus of Grete Jalk's work has always been furniture, although initially, this was not so. She went to university to study philosophy and to earn a law degree. As it happened, however, she soon exchanged the academic environment for that of the craftsman and became an apprentice to a cabinetmaker for three years.

She went to the school of arts and crafts to take a degree in furniture design and later pursued postgraduate studies at the school of architecture at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, under professor Klint, the father figure of Danish furniture design.

## Early Fame, Many achievements

By the years she earned her first design degree, in 1946, she had already won a national competition. Over the years she went on to win many more. Her prizewinning designs of furniture, textiles, wallpaper and accessories went into production and became part and parcel of daily life in many Danish homes up through the '50s, '60s and '70s.

## GRETE JALK 1920 – 2006

Grete Jalk, the Grande Dame of Danish Design  
The renown Danish furniture designer Grete Jalk (born 1920) loves to shock – not to create commotion, but to stir things up and inspire action. Her honesty and deep concern for quality in all matters has made her the walking conscience of the Danish design world. She cuts through the marrow of problems and points out the essence; she is highly respected. Her work will soon be featured in a major exhibit that will tour the United States and Canada for the next two years.

Grete Jalk has been widely influential as a member of an endless number of committees, as a competition juror, as a co-founder of the Association of Industrial Designers in Denmark, as a member of the Danish Design Council, as a constantly experimenting designer of furniture.



Before winning 1st prize in an important international competition in 1963, and so becoming a member of an influential international network, she had begun her career as an editor as well. In 1956 she joined the international furniture journal *Mobilia* and stayed with that lively publication until the middle '70s as a most creative member of its editorial team.

From 1954 on, she had also run her own design office, but that did not prevent her from communicating about furniture as well as designing it.

The communication of all aspects of design later became her main interest. Most of the '70s were spent inventing new solutions to problems of exhibition settings, designing and developing exhibitions of "design" for the Danish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and setting them up in cities across Europe and the Near East. Her shows were both ingenious and beautiful. Her design process firmly rooted in functionalism, Grete Jalk solved the practical and technical problems of a traveling exhibit and still managed to present an elegant "landscape" of Cubist forms as a setting for products.

#### Reviving the Copenhagen Cabinetmakers' Guild

Although Grete Jalk has involved herself in many areas of design, I think her heart has, all along, been with the group she started out with in 1945: The Copenhagen Cabinetmakers' Guild. There she won her first prize for furniture design and many other prizes in subsequent years. Her designs were shown in their exhibitions at the Museum of Arts and Crafts every year for twenty years. They were her people.

She was also the one who saw the importance of documenting the work of the Copenhagen Cabinetmakers' Guild — so she did it. It took her almost ten years to retrieve the material and edit it into four volumes. Twenty years after the last Guild exhibition closed, her exhaustive work, *40 Years of Danish Furniture Design*, was published.