

MONOCLE



Stay in a design museum

Under the management of the passionate Jeppe Møhlhausen, the Hotel Alexandra is a temple to Danish Modern Design - so much so that a few nights there almost negate the need to visit the Design Museum. That's a very conscious decision by Møhlhausen, who since 2001 has been stocking every room of the hotel with covetable mid century pieces.

"I wanted to make a living museum," he says. "We had a lot of help from the Danish Architecture School and I train the staff in the history of the furniture."

The resulting spaces epitomise Danish functionality and aesthetic charm. While the smaller rooms feature a range of items from a variety of designers, the hotel also has specialty suites dedicated solely to the works of single creators, including Hans J Wegner, Finn Juhl, Arne Jacobsen and Nanna Ditzel. "We get more and more guests coming for a particular room," says Møhlhausen. Also worth a look is the Collector's Suite, where the furniture is refreshed every six months and all the pieces on view are also for sale.

MONOCLE

Design of the times - Danish Modern

BY GENERAL MANAGER
AT HOTEL ALEXANDRA
JEPPE MÜHLHAUSEN

In the 1950s Danish Modern furniture took the world by storm. Jeppe Mühlhausen writes of his love for this golden era of design and how it inspired him to create a "living museum" dedicated to it.

My interest in Danish art and design came from my grandfather, who was a painter and the head of exhibitions at Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, for 10 years from 1959. As a kid I would spend holidays there and he introduces me to that whole world. I still remember the day my parents bought their first piece of designer furniture - a six-seater Børge Mogensen sofa. It was really, really fine - perfect for napping on.

They also purchased a Piet Hein Superellipse table, a lamp by PH (Poul Henningsen) and eight Arne Jacobsen Series 7 chairs. In the 1970s, our house was somewhat avant-garde, and I was always embarrassed when my school friends would come over. We didn't have carpets, which was pretty out there for the time, and we were one of the last families to get a colour television. My father was a hippie communist- he had a beard down to his chest and wore a Soviet jacket - and my mother smoked a pipe, so you can just imagine.

Like many people, my parents had realised that Danish design could give their home some personality. Danish designers were ahead of their time by recognising this global desire to express status and lifestyle - individuality- through home furnishing. When I moved out of home at 21, I bought my first piece of furniture - a PH lamp, a Superellipse table and an Arne Jacobsen chair. I copied my parents' style, basically. My career led me into hospitality and I became the general manager at Hotel Alexandra in 1992, at the age of 29. At the time, the building was very run down and would close for three months during the winter, so I was asked by the board to find a new way to run it. The hotel had a few pieces of furniture made by Kaare Klint. Klint is often called the father of modern Danish design; he founded the furniture school at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in 1924 and taught some of the country's finest designers including Børge Mogensen, Hans J Wegner, Nanna Ditzel and Ole Wanscher. He believed that Denmark's heritage of quality workmanship should be both preserved and adapted to new needs.



MONOCLE

Klint felt that it was the architect's reasonability to bring order to chaos and despised anything that didn't serve a purpose. It was an opinion that greatly influenced the following generations, both directly and indirectly. Even though many people took exception to the traditional forms in his designs, it is still his influence that marks the quality and homogeneity of Danish furniture design.

The furniture designed in the frugal, post war 1950s reflected the modesty of the times through their sharp, clean lines and simplicity. It was during these years that Arne Jacobsen created his most famous chairs and buildings. The style of Danish Design was also influenced by the long Nordic winters: people spend so much time indoors that Scandinavian designers have learnt to create environments that are comfortable, uncluttered and practical.

It was Klint's pieces in the old hotel that inspired me to create a design museum that people could stay in. The board accepted my proposal and we slowly began restorations in 1994.

When we started collecting for the hotel we had a lot of help from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts about how we should treat it, and the stories behind each piece. We became passionate about it. Now I train all our staff in design history, so they are knowledgeable, and understand its historical and cultural importance to Copenhagen.

Originally, we bought from auction houses but now many sellers contact us directly because they've heard about the concept of Hotel Alexandra. A couple of times I have found Jacobsen chairs that have been thrown away in the recycling centre in Copenhagen, which is pretty wild.

When we first began collecting we didn't really think about the value of the furniture, it was just so beautiful. But in the past ten years or so, the prices have gone through the roof. We have an extra set Finn Juhl furniture that we want to sell in order to buy something from a less well-known designer. We had bought it for DKK 15,000 (€2,000) but was valued recently at DKK 180,000 (€24,000) it's totally crazy.

We are not worried about our guests damaging the furniture; it is so robust and of such high quality. When people check in we always welcome them with a short story about what's in their room so that they are aware and value it.

Five or six years ago, when we weren't so good at communicating what we were doing, we had a lot of foreign guests who would stay with us and say, "Why don't you get rid of all that old furniture?". But now the majority of people come here because they have an interest in it.

My favourite room is the Finn Juhl Room. Juhl was one of the more experimental designers. He was spiritual in his expression: he did not consider a chair simply a product in a room, "It is a design and a room in itself", he once wrote.

His Poet sofa from 1941 is so beautiful and it has a special significance for me because my father was a lightning technician on Danish national television and the name came from a movie that the sofa was used in, and my dad worked on, called "The Poet and the Little Mother".

My work is my passion and I am so lucky I can spend my days sharing stories about their designers. And on my days off when I visit my mother, I still nap on that old Mogensen sofa. My mum will say, "You need a rest, go to the couch".