In the history of industrial design in Australia, early British influence gave way to American influence in the late nineteenth century. This transition was clear by WWII as America became the dominant design voice in Australia’s war effort. In the peacetime of 1948 the new American-inspired Holden motorcar showed this influence on the streets with its large body and prominent chrome grille. In peoples’ houses, however, a new source of influence was emerging. Scandinavian and Finnish craft and industrial design practice offered an alternative to the dominant British and American hegemonies of taste and this was especially evident in furniture.

This article charts three areas. Firstly, the furniture design situation in Australia prior to Scandinavian influence. Secondly, the emergence of Scandinavia as a world design “centre”. While some Australian designers were able to travel to experience Scandinavian design first-hand, for many others this influence was spread in Australia largely by British and Scandinavian design critics in books and magazines such as The Studio. Also influential was a series of exhibitions of Scandinavian design objects that travelled to many Australian cities and towns. Finally, the resulting Australian-Scandinavian furniture hybrids are discussed.

Influences from other countries, notably Germany (in helping shape Australian design education), Italy (arriving with the post-WWII immigrants) and Japan (which was to become Australia’s largest trading partner after Britain joined the EEC) are not considered, and await discussion in other forums.

Important early Moments in Australian Modern Furniture Design prior to Scandinavian Influence

The year 1936 seems to have been important in Australia’s industrial development. The search for an aeroplane on which to base Australia’s war effort occurred in this year as did Government support for the development of an Australian-made automotive engine. 1936 also saw the publication of an early overview of tendencies in local furniture design. A nine-page review entitled “Australian Furniture” appeared in the important local journal Art in Australia exploring the choices offered to the consumer – either antique reproduction or modern. In the former camp, the article reproduced illustrations of furniture styled in “the French ‘provincial’ manner” or “Queen Anne style” veneered in English walnut. These reproduction pieces were manufactured by companies such as Sturat-Low Furniture Studios of Sydney or by Captain F.E. de Groot.

Despite these, modern works dominated the article. The local designer Frederick Ward’s furniture was given prominence. A modern austerity and simplicity are evident in Ward’s square-legged chairs with their plain fabric seats. The modernist credo of “truth to materials” is evident in Ward’s often “unfinished” or raw timbers - paint is not used to disguise the timber.

The outlook with regard to furniture has changed considerably during the last few years. Until comparatively recently, in the houses of people of discrimination and taste one naturally expected to find either ‘antiques’ imported from abroad or costly reproductions. Persons of only moderate incomes have to be contented with Victorian cedar and mahogany, bargains picked up at dealers... Today the position is quite different, and the number of people starting off to furnish their homes who engage upon a search for the ‘antique’ is extremely small. Three main factors are responsible for this altered attitude: firstly, the development of built-in furniture,
which is definitely part of the architectural scheme; secondly, a desire for comfort and efficiency; and thirdly, a growing enthusiasm for 'modernity.'

The article also considered the furniture designed by local architects. It argued that furniture in Australia in the early 1930s began to be designed in sympathy with architecture:

The furniture is made for the house, or the room, often designed in collaboration with the architect, in the same way as the mantelpiece or staircase. The best contemporary furniture is therefore marked by the same characteristics as contemporary architecture, sound planning and 'workability', simplicity of form, and interest obtained by the use of fine materials rather than applied pattern or ornament. (my italics)

This recognition of the importance of the architect is undoubtedly correct, as furniture design was taught at this time in Australia only within architectural courses. By contrast, industrial design was not to be taught as a separate discipline in tertiary institutions for another decade. Several architects had work shown in the same article. The architectural team Mewton and Grounds had an example (fig 6), while the Ricketts and Thorp company manufactured furniture designed by the architects Fowell, McConnel and Mansfield (fig 7), and also by Samuel Lipson. Edward Billson's furniture designs for the Branchflower company were also featured. The illustrations in the article reveal the furniture produced by these different designers to be similar in their economy of form, lack of ornament and in their geometric simplicity. The dominant international influence upon these progressive designers was a generalised version of Art Deco.

Furniture designed by architects to compliment specific architectural spaces seemed to be a desirable new goal. The article drew upon the words of English architect Wells Coates who had earlier written: "Very soon it will be considered quite as fantastic to move an architecture, sound planning and 'workability', simplicity of form, and interest obtained by the use of fine materials rather than applied pattern or ornament.

Architects dreamed of the kitchen as a machine for cooking in, with every piece of equipment a standard height, depth and colour, arranged in gleaming, continuous rows. To this end they had the cupboards made in precise bands. By 1939 the dresser was losing popularity and after World War II it had all but disappeared. The furniture manufacturers who made the kitchen settings had by this time accepted the built-in approach and were making modular unit cupboards that could be screwed into the wall in a continuous run. This catch-phrase of 1933. The result was that previously free-standing pieces of furniture became unified. The bath was no longer free-standing on cast iron clawed feet but was now to be set against a wall and bricked up, or was sunken into the floor. The wash basin was no longer visually supported in free air on a pedestal or by its own plumbing, but was now to be embedded in a cupboard. Wardrobes became built into niches provided in the walls of new modernist homes - no longer would many be free standing. According to Boyd, who was deferring to Le Corbusier's famous words:

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Clearly, new ideas were being eagerly explored in Australiaprior to WWII.

**Australian Appreciation of the World’s Best**

While many historians have argued a pervasive Australian design “timidity”, it should be noted that there are several examples of Australian furniture designers engaging in original design work and also looking towards the best international designs as models. For example, the Hungarian designer Marcel Breuer’s cantilever chair design, first manufactured in 1928 in Germany, was quickly adopted by Australians.7 Boyd, in *Australia’s Home*, wrote of the chair’s design virtues and popularity in Australia: “The simplicity of its continuous tube, the excitement of its unsupported rear and the glitter of its chromium plate symbolised the new mood. One such chair without back legs was to appear in every modern interior of the next five years.”9 According to the historian Peter Cuffley, these “German” chairs were being manufactured in Australia by A. G. Healing Limited from 1931.10 There is no doubt these gleaming chrome chairs were perceived to be desirable objects for private and public use. Not long afterwards a notable cafe and milk bar in Melbourne, The Milky Way, caused a minor sensation by providing these gleaming chrome chairs were perceived to be desirable objects for private and public use. Not long afterwards a notable cafe and milk bar in Melbourne, The Milky Way, caused a minor sensation by providing


Many Australian consumers clearly did welcome modernity. The Australian media gave much space to the arrival of a new imported chair (especially if it was expensive or flamboyant) and examples from international designers appeared constantly at local home shows and trade fairs. Admittedly these imports from the “centre” industrial design cultures of Britain, America, Scandinavia and Europe often found their way to Australia a few years later. For example, the selection of industrial design products from the “British Can Make It” exhibition was shown at the Sydney Royal Easter Show in much reduced numbers two years after its original London launch. This arguably reflects more upon the various international manufacturers’ reluctance to market to a small and already British-dominated market than on the reluctance of Australian consumers to embrace modernity. In fact, such was the vitality of pre-WWII Australian furniture design that the local architect Neil Clerehan recently claimed modern design in Australia pre-dated modern architecture. He reflected that Australian architectural expression had been thwarted by the post-Korean war depression and when architects finally realised their visions in the mid-1950s, appropriate modern furnishings for the house were already available, including “Featherston chairs, cork-tiled floors, Francis Burke prints [fabrics].”11 At this time one could also find adventurous chairs by the local designers Douglas Snelling, Clement Meadmore and Gordon Andrews. Perhaps the reason for local furniture design’s progressive nature is that it was initially craft-based and was therefore inexpensive to manufacture in small volumes. Craft-based chairs, such as Fred Ward’s simple wooden ones, were much cheaper to manufacture than a car or radio or any other plastic design object that required expensive engineering and tooling, and generally, multi-national investment and consequent control. Ward’s designs of the 1930s were objects born of one designer’s vision. Again, they were much easier to produce than was a house where building costs, council restrictions, availability of materials and the tastes of the client all had the potential to hinder experimentation. Three major international influences contributed to shaping the practice of Australian furniture design between 1930 and 1975. The historian Grace Cochrane has noted:

In furniture design, the most important new influences in the fifties were Organic Modernism from the United States, with its use of synthetic materials; 1950s Contemporary Style from Britain; and Scan-}

dinavian, which used natural timbers and included the use of both bold printed motifs and textured fabrics in natural materials and muted colours.12 Of these, the historian Roger Butler recently stressed the importance of Scandinavian design as the largest source of influence on Australian art and design from the 1950s onwards.13 In fact, this paper argues this influence began some two decades earlier. Scandinavia emerges as a new Design “Centre” for Australians

If the development of the first largely Australian car was largely played out after WWII between British and American influences, this article argues the most important external influence upon Australian furniture design was that of Scandinavia (and, to a lesser extent, Finland). Like all foreign influences, however, it came through a British filter.

Geographically “original” and less developed industrially than the major European powers of Britain, Germany, Italy and France, the Scandinavian countries of Sweden, Denmark and Norway, together with Finland, nonetheless must be regarded as design “centres” between the 1930s and 1970s. (Of these, the most influential was Sweden and it was common to refer to “Swedish modern” when one actually meant “Scandinavian”. Finland is technically not Scandinavian.) It appears the Scandinavians themselves were somewhat bemused by this new-found position of influence. Writing in a special series of essays devoted to Scandinavian design in the British journal *The Studio* in 1953, Arne Remlov considered Scandinavia’s importance in international design circles14 and attributed much of it to the unique role played by Scandinavia’s professional industrial design associations. Remlov gave the example of the Norwegian association that, unusually at this time, involved the broader public to participate with the design community, encouraging this with “free admission to exhibitions, lectures and other functions.”15 The involvement of industrial designers in Scandinavian manufacturing industries clearly helped provide well-designed objects at affordable prices, and the design education provided to the public seemed to elevate the popular taste.
The identification of British design with Scandinavian design lasted from the 1930s until perhaps the middle of the 1950s and has been acknowledged by recent historians. For example, Frederique Huygen has noted that British designers have always been quite unequivocal in their reactions to foreign streams. Except for Scandinavian design, which did appeal to them, they all got the cold shoulder. The British writer David Joel's book Furniture: An Audience within the Design of Scandinavia: "graceful", "elegance", "quality". He wrote:

During this inter-war period the standard of the Scandinavian countries, Holland and Czechoslovakia became more widely known and much excellent furniture was made. Especially was this the case in Sweden, where the Exhibition of 1930 in Stockholm was informed by the modern style and acquainted the public with it on a considerable scale for the first time. In this movement for showing better design the Swedish Co-operative Society has taken a conspicuous part, and so has the Nordiska Kompaniet, the biggest department store in Stockholm. They have thus shown a grasp of their social responsibilities which might be emulated elsewhere, with equally happy results.

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The Studio, the centenary of the Swedish Society of Arts and Crafts was celebrated. Formed originally in 1845 this body was one of the world's first. An exhibition was staged called Hundred years...and then at which Swedish industrial designers considered the immediate post-WWII problems of supplying affordable goods in order to obtain a good combination of industrial design and social welfare. The exhibition presented various ideas, goods, everyday ware, and utility furniture at reasonable prices, and the public was advised how to furnish an apartment in the most practical and sensible way with good taste and good quality even for those with a small income. In 1952 The Studio made another attempt to explain the Swedish national identity to a British and international readership. The writer declared that the consumer goods of Scandinavian countries were shaped by "the Scandinavian way of life" that included long winters indoors and led to an emphasis on refined crafts-based home-wares.

The noted architect Steen Eiler Rasmussen wrote an overview of Danish industrial arts in The Studio in 1949 appropriately entitled "Industrial". If the Swedes chose to emphasise the legacy of their rich crafts tradition on their domestic product design, the Danes tended to emphasise their engagement with mass production. The final Scandinavian country reviewed in The Studio series was Norway, whose various consumer goods were deemed "applied art". Norway's crafts production included modern furniture, silver and enamel work, hand-woven textiles, pottery and art glass.

In conclusion, it can be seen that Australia's admiration of Scandinavian industrial design—travels and trade fairs

A survey of popular Australian magazines of the 1940s and 1950s reveals many advertisements for travel to Scandinavia by SAS. Examples of Scandinavian design had come to Australia and were generating critical approval - the Swedish Legation building, Canberra, won the Sulman Award for public buildings in 1938; while in 1957 the competition for the design of the Sydney Opera House was won by the Danish architect Jørn Utzon. These two high-profile commissions surely inspired local architects and designers to travel to see work first-hand. Scandinavia and Finland appeared attractive destinations. By contrast American visas were hard to obtain and other European countries had been ravaged by the war. The Swedish and Finnish designs of the Melbourne architect D. A. Norman suggest these countries offered Australian designers a rich experience. In 1950 Norman visited Scandinavia and, on his return, wrote an article for The Australian Home Beautiful. In this article, he declared himself pleased to see so much contemporary furniture in ordinary Scandinavian homes (in stark contrast to what he termed the "vulgar veneers favoured by many of our furniture makers"). While

9. Advertisement. "Scandinavian Modern is Imagination in Glass..."
conceding the Scandinavians were at an advantage to have so much suitable wood, Norman realised “their competence in design is obviously due to something more than the quality of the materials used.” The mass-produced furniture of Scandinavia particularly impressed him. “A similar investigation here would be extremely interesting. Our insistence on cumbersome suites and oversized armchairs is quite incompatible with the minimum areas dictated by the economics of present day housing.” Instead, Australian magazines of the time were filled with advertisements of such “cumbersome suites” suggesting these indicated the general level of Australian taste – overstuffed lounge suites covered with chintz fabrics.

Another Australian traveller to Sweden at this time was the industrial designer, German-born Fritz Luzen- stein (who was to change his name to Fred Lowen and later formed the Fler furniture company). He came back enthusiastic about the potential for developing a range of Swedish-inspired blonde wooden furniture for Australians.

Not blonde wooden furniture the only attraction of Scandinavia. A certain racialist sentiment may be observed in the Australian celebration of Scandinavian people. For example, the Australian holiday guide Off on Holidays reported in the mid-1960s that the northern countries were an ideal holiday destination: “If you go north there is Scandinavia. Denmark, Sweden and Norway are becoming big holiday centres. Cities are open, clean and gay and the people are blonde and attractive. Life is free and easy in Stockholm, Copenhagen, and Oslo…” But for those Australians who could not visit Scandinavia, Scandinavia came to Australia in an important series of exhibitions.

Case study: Scandinavian and Finnish Exhibitions at Australian State Art Galleries 1962-1976

Between the years 1962 and 1976 a remarkable series of exhibitions of Scandinavian design objects visited Australia. The Swedish Government worked with Australian State Art Galleries to enable four exhibitions to tour the country: Design for Living (1962), Design in Scandinavia (1968), Architecture in Finland (1973), Adventures in Swedish Glass (1976). These shows and the accompanying publications helped propagate the Scandinavian style in Australia.

The Design for Living exhibition was a survey of international consumer goods amongst which Scandinavian consumer goods were prominent. Held in 1962, the exhibition had an educational focus and was mounted jointly by the National Gallery of Victoria (NGV), The Council of Adult Education and the Education Department of Victoria. The exhibition toured all Australian State Art Galleries. According to the NGV director Eric Westbrook “The aim of this exhibition has been to show articles that incorporate the principles of good design. All of them have been designed for domestic use.” Eighty consumer products from twelve countries were displayed of which twenty-five were from Scandinavia or Finland.

It is arguable that these exhibits of Scandinavian crafts and products of industry inspired in some commentators a response against industrialism. It is, for example, surprising to note Colin Barrie, director of the Industrial Design Council of Australia, expressing a crafts-based design sensibility as he wrote about the beauty and integrity of simple objects made by ancient civilisations:

“This arose from the all-embracing nature of the process of production. The craftsman was the designer, he also was the master of his materials, for he prepared the raw materials of his trade and knew intimately the characteristics of those materials. He knew what he could achieve with the tools he used to turn the materials he handled into useful and beautiful objects. It is not surprising that such a unified production process resulted in goods of a satisfying wholeness, in a unity of visual and functional elements.”

The unified production process admired by Barrie, and which he evidently saw in the Scandinavian craft objects on display, is not a part of modern industrial design practice where a division of labour occurs between the interests of 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.” (my italics)

National identity was a strong theme in the exhibition. The catalogue essay forged a strong link between national identity and industrial design. It further stressed the importance of the Scandinavian crafts tradition to Scandinavian industrial design. Finally, it also gave a brief overview of Scandinavian design’s influence on international design:

By the 1930s, Swedish Modern was a world design centre. After WWII, Danish Design, especially in wood, came to exert a world influence. By the mid- and end of the 1950’s, Finnish glass and ceramics attracted world attention. In the early 1960s, Norway was seen to be a new, dominant furniture centre.

Many of the Scandinavian companies with objects in the Design in Scandinavia exhibition had agents in Australia and were therefore available for sale to the public through retail outlets. A review of the Design in Scandinavia exhibition by critic Patrick McCaughhey emphasised several themes: Scandinavian naturalness; Scandinavia’s role as an arbiter of taste; Scandinavia’s quality beyond functionalism; its human comfort and “humaneness”, the legacy of its crafts tradition; its lack of engagement with mere “fashion”. The Scandinavian position as world arbiters of taste was noted by McCaughhey:

“...Scandinavian design provides us with our most powerful image of the good life. Siting at your natural wood table in your streamlined chair, sipping your beer with your handle-less Jacobson knife, sipping your beer from a Boda glass and knocking the ash of your cigarette into an Orrefors ash tray would indeed make a good display of good taste. Just how secure the Scandinavians have become the arbiters and makers of domestic taste can be seen from the large exhibition, Design in Scandinavia, at the National Gallery of Victoria. What’s so interesting is the discovery that while much of it is good, little of it is surprising, indicating the success of the Scandinavian infiltration.”

The relationship between the human body and the Scandinavian design object was also enthusiastically

Design for Living 1962

Finnish designs have a rugged individuality and honesty that match the country and its people. When Tapio Wirkkula, a sensitive artist in glass, ceramics, plywood and metal, was asked to name his country’s greatest designer, he replied simply, ‘Nature’.

This favouring of craft (and not of mass-production) seemed to be how Australians chose to view the Scandinavian contribution. The words “Scandinavian” and “Swedish Modern” seemed to be used by local critics as synonymous with “warmth”, “craft” and “humanity.” Coupled with the opinions expressed by Barrie, a growing interest in a crafts-based design sensibility seemed to be taking hold in some quarters in Australian industrial design circles. Several commentators gave this exhibition of utilitarian domestic objects high praise. Alan Warren, first head of industrial design at Melbourne Technical College and also the Sun newspaper art critic, wrote of the benefits such exhibitions of design could play in awakening the public to design in everyday life: “If an art gallery aims to dispel the idea that art is not confined to pictures on a wall, then it is time to start playing a vital part in the community.”

Design in Scandinavia 1968-9

Six years later the exhibition Design in Scandinavia was staged. Between February 1968 and January 1969 it travelled all over Australia visiting the Western Australian Art Gallery, the David Jones’ Art Gallery in Adelaide, the Art Gallery of New South Wales, the National Gallery of Victoria and the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery. The ‘Introduction’ to the exhibition catalogue written by the painter, graphic designer and Director of the Art Gallery of New South Wales, Hal Missingham, explained the intentions of the show:

“...the decision to exhibit industrial design at the Australian State Galleries was some time ago decided in the interests of 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
The ceramics on display and Scandinavian industrial design in general, was considered by Patrick McCaughey to be “direct” and “honest”. The exhibitions Architecture in Finland (1973) and Adventures in Swedish Glass (1978), while of less relevance to this paper on furniture, were also influential for Australian designers.

It is important to note that these exhibitions had a lasting legacy. As well as exposing Australian consumers and designers to what was perceived to be the best in international design objects, at around this time several Scandinavian design objects were acquired for the permanent collections of many Australian art galleries. For example, around 1968 the following Scandinavian chairs were purchased for the NGV: Hans Wegner’s Round chair, the Ax chair designed by Peter Hvidt and Orla Mølgaard-Nielsen, Eero Saarinen’s Tulip chair and Arne Jacobsen’s Swan Armchair.

Australian-Scandinavian Furniture Hybrids

The publications about Scandinavian design by Scandinavian and British commentators and the travelling Scandinavian exhibitions clearly had a lasting influence upon the local design community. They offered an alternative to the British and American design hegemony of taste that had thus far largely characterised Australian design practice. Post-WWII developments in Australian furniture design and manufacturing could well be described as a mixture of international influences and local responses. The various British, American and Scandinavian examples of furniture exhibited at Australian Trade Fairs and gallery exhibitions after WWII helped create notions of other national identities in designed objects. Australian-designed and manufactured furniture often borrowed these identities according to which market segment it was appealing to.

Australian Perceptions of British and American Furniture

The British and Scandinavian furniture that emerged from most of the promotional materials (publications, advertisements and exhibitions) explored during this article’s chronology is largely one of English “heritage” and “formality”. These works found favour with one local market segment. One of the only modern British styles to influence local designers was the “Contemporary Style”. By contrast, American design was perceived by Australians as being “modern”. Chrome tubular steel furniture, while it had its origins in the works of the Dutch designer Mart Stam, the Hungarian Marcel Breuer and the Weimar Bauhaus, was promoted by Australian companies as “American”. For example, the local Australian company Chevon’s work was so advertised. These works found favour with another group of buyers. Scandinavian design was perceived by Australian designers and consumers quite differently.

Scandinavian ‘Naturalness’ as a Model for Australian Furniture

It is worth noting that the majority of Australian craftspeople and designers did not aspire to emulate the Scandinavians in their expertise with stainless steel and glass but instead admired their use of textiles, timbers, and ceramics. Notable amongst Scandinavian contributions to international furniture design was the use of “exposed seat webbing”. Canvas webbing has long been a part of chair construction, but was traditionally hidden underneath decorative coverings. The Scandinavians were the first to make a feature of this “skeleton”. The first chair to reach the consumer in this raw “webbed” state was probably Alvar Aalto’s Armchair 406 of 1933. This technique was later taken up by Bruno Mathsson, who combined it with experiments in laminating and bending wood.

Mathsson’s furniture was described in an overview of Swedish furniture produced in the work of the Fler Co. Stand 4. This exhibit depicts a modern Swedish type furniture manufacturer in natural coloured timbers with a special waxed finish which takes very little upkeep. In conjunction with the Fler Co., Frances Burke has designed the cushions, Hanging, Wall Coverings, etc. Handturned tabletop woodware comprising Cruet Sets, Salad Bowls, Plates...

The Fler company was formed by German immigrant Fred Lowen and Austrian Ernest Rodeck in 1946. Three years later they were manufacturing a Swedish-style dining chair that had been designed by Australia’s first modernist in furniture, Fred Ward. About this chair Lowen said “They are typically Swedish...They represent the entire Swedish way of living - plain lines, no unnecessary ornaments, light natural woods. The Swedes are simple in their ways of living.” The Fler chair was enthusiastically reviewed by Isabel Kennedy in The Australian Home Beautiful who noted the pale golden-hued Pacific maple timber as “a happy change from the inevitably dark, highly-polished, heavy wood which we have been brought up to believe in as ‘correct’.” In other words, from the reproduction antique British furniture traditions that had so long dominated the Australian furniture market.

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In the 1950s through to the 1970s also favoured Scandinavian choices of timbers filtered through the Danish furniture industry as the “world’s design mercantile” and the Swedish furniture company IKEA had opened its first Australian retail outlet in 1988. The names of many Australian furniture companies began to appear in the popular local magazine Scandinavian Journal of Design History · 13 · 2003.

By 1975, Scandinavia and Finland’s role as a design leader was sufficiently well entrenched in the minds of Australians to mean “best” meant Scandinavian. It is, of course, also apparent that the names of many Australian furniture companies became synonymous with Sweden and the word “Stockholm” that also used soft forms and the light-coloured wood known as Tessa – and to have its own furniture range crafted from Australian blackwood was a local copy of the Danish De Luxe, for example, used local dark-coloured hardwoods in their mark. The local manufacturer Danish De Luxe, for example, introduced a Diploma Course in Industrial Design in 1946.

The European connection to Scandinavia offered Australians a range of design values different than those offered by the previous dominant influences, Britain and America. Where British design was often perceived as the “tradition” of the past and American design as the “future” of the country, the Scandinavian choices of timbers resonated with local designers and consumers.

T ypical of them was the Danish De Luxe, Eldon and Malmø Chairs. Even the plastic chairs called “Stockholm” (that also used soft forms and the light-coloured wood known as Tessa – and to have its own furniture range crafted from Australian blackwood was a local copy of the Danish De Luxe, for example, used local dark-coloured hardwoods in their mark. The local manufacturer Danish De Luxe, for example, introduced a Diploma Course in Industrial Design in 1946.

If blonde timber was synonymous with Sweden and America to mean “naturalness” and have an emphasis on the “hands-on” crafts that resonated with local designers and consumers, by the 1980s it was apparent that the names of many Australian furniture companies began to appear in the popular local magazine Scandinavian Journal of Design History · 13 · 2003.

The Sydney Opera House had been completed and the popular local magazine Scandinavian Journal of Design History · 13 · 2003.


By 1975, Scandinavia and Finland’s role as a design leader began to mean “best” meant Scandinavian. It is, of course, also apparent that the names of many Australian furniture companies became synonymous with Sweden and the word “Stockholm” that also used soft forms and the light-coloured wood known as Tessa – and to have its own furniture range crafted from Australian blackwood was a local copy of the Danish De Luxe, for example, used local dark-coloured hardwoods in their mark. The local manufacturer Danish De Luxe, for example, introduced a Diploma Course in Industrial Design in 1946.

The European connection to Scandinavia offered Australians a range of design values different than those offered by the previous dominant influences, Britain and America. Where British design was often perceived as the “tradition” of the past and American design as the “future” of the country, the Scandinavian choices of timbers resonated with local designers and consumers.

T ypical of them was the Danish De Luxe, Eldon and Malmø Chairs. Even the plastic chairs called “Stockholm” (that also used soft forms and the light-coloured wood known as Tessa – and to have its own furniture range crafted from Australian blackwood was a local copy of the Danish De Luxe, for example, used local dark-coloured hardwoods in their mark. The local manufacturer Danish De Luxe, for example, introduced a Diploma Course in Industrial Design in 1946.

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B L O N D E W O O D A M O N G T H E G U N T R E E S


27. "One of the main reasons for the strong position of our handicrafts is the care and thought that throughout the ages we have devoted to our homes. The climate alone has caused us to make far more use of our homes than is usual in more southerly latitudes. Distances between dwellings have often been great, their surroundings poor, barsen and cold. Hospitality, which we like to count among our national virtues, has been a necessity, for without it the traveller would have perished. It has also given rise to one of our weaknesses, our desire to make our homes as fine as possible, sometimes at the cost of comfort. Our homes have always been the centres of our existence...", Huldt, op. cit., 24.

28. The Swedish car industry (which began in 1927 with Volvo and Saab, and the country's aeronautical industry have had little influence on Australian designers working in these two fields. Car design, for example, was dominated by the American giants Ford and General Motors who established their own local manufacturing arms. The Scandinavian influence on Australian design was limited to domestic consumer design, notably crafts-based furniture design.

29. Rasmussen, op. cit., 156-158.

30. Boyd, op. cit., 1960. 31


34. Lane, op. cit., 288.


37. "Show me the products, 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. It could also extend to this. "Show me the products, and I will show you the country." Ibid., 8.

38. "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 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. In Norway and Sweden one can show how the art of making glass has developed continuously right up to the present-day glass firms." Ibid., 8.

39. Ibid., 10.

40. In Melbourne the following agents supplied Scandinavian goods to retailers and the general public: Danish Design Agency, Dudley St., agents for a wide variety of furniture from Denmark; Forum Pty. Ltd., Southern Cross Hotel, agents for a wide variety of ceramics from Denmark; instrument Importing Co., Northbridge, agents for a wide variety of furniture from Denmark, Finland and Norway; Harland L. Hogan & Son, George St., agents for a wide variety of ceramics from Denmark; Incorporated Agencies Pty Ltd, Kent St., agents for a wide variety of ceramics from Sweden and Finland; Messrs. James L. Hudson Pty Ltd, Clarence St., agents for a wide variety of ceramics from Denmark, Peter Marsh & Co., Pty. Ltd., agents for a wide variety of ceramics from Norway; Unik Import, Double Bay, agents for a wide variety of ceramics from Denmark; Vasa Agencies, Pty. Ltd., Wentworth Ave., agents for a wide variety of ceramics from Denmark. In Perth, Messrs. Abem Pty. Ltd. were agents for a wide variety of furniture from Denmark.


42. "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. It could also extend to this. "Show me the products, and I will show you the country." Ibid., 8.

43. "Along with the naturalness of Scandinavian design goes its unspoken valuing of the direct and the honest. Such virtues reflect..." Elegance is too feeble a word for the simplicity of, say, the small Jensen bowl. In an exhibition as large as this, it is easy to miss these perfect, smallest pieces. Yet the Jensen sugar bowl could serve as a paradigm for much of the exhibition. It teaches us to see the gulf between the simple and the plain. Style in the Jensen bowl, as in so much of the exhibition, is part of the making process. You never feel a ‘style’ has come along afterwards. Ibid., 10.

44. Lane, One Hundred Modern Chairs Melbourne, 1974. [p. p.]


46. "Simberg-Ehstrom’s chaise-longue may have a stainless steel frame and base but its sweeping curve proclaims a sensuous love of human comfort. The humanness of Scandinavian design reaches its high point in Yrjo Kukkapuro’s chair whose back is as smooth and as ethereal as Catherine Deneuve’s if rather broader in the beam. [...] In other instances, such as the first-rate Ittala glass with its incised bases, the designers have retained the naturalness associated with craft work, as easy on the eye as to the hand and lip." Ibid., 10.

47. "...Even the worst Woolworth’s glasses perform their function adequately enough as receptacles to drink from. What distinguishes the Scandinavian product is the pure pleasure the humblest knife and fork or the simplest salt and pepper shaker can give the user. Although the majority of exhibits are the results of a sophisticated technology, they exude a totally non-technological feeling. Whereas a Bauhaus chair tells you firmly and proudly of its production line history, the Scandinavian furniture on view suggests a human naturalness." Ibid., 10.

48. "Along with the naturalness of Scandinavian design goes its unspoken valuing of the direct and the honest. Such virtues reflect..." Elegance is too feeble a word for the simplicity of, say, the small Jensen bowl. In an exhibition as large as this, it is easy to miss these perfect, smallest pieces. Yet the Jensen sugar bowl could serve as a paradigm for much of the exhibition. It teaches us to see the gulf between the simple and the plain. Style in the Jensen bowl, as in so much of the exhibition, is part of the making process. You never feel a ‘style’ has come along afterwards. Ibid., 10.

49. Lane, One Hundred Modern Chairs Melbourne, 1974. [p. p.]


52. Lane, op. cit., 1960. 16.

53. Made in Australia Exhibition... op. cit., 25.


55. Ibid.


