

scandinavian design

Charlotte and Peter Fiell

TASCHEN

KÖLN LONDON LOS ANGELES MADRID PARIS TOKYO

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Endpapers, pp. 4/5, 678/679: Per Lütken, glass design for Holmegaard, 1950

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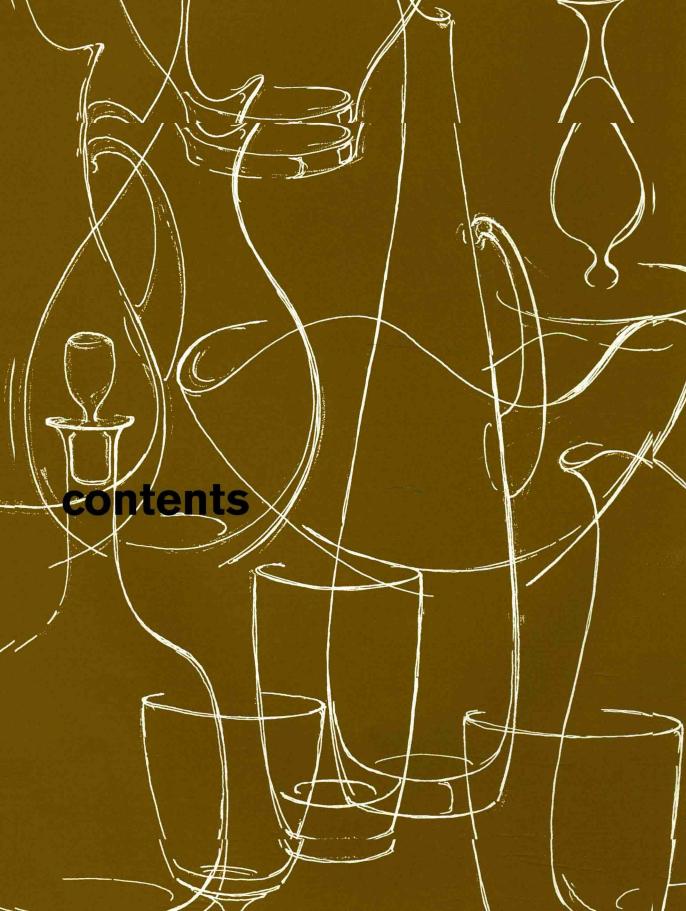
Design: Sacha Davison, London

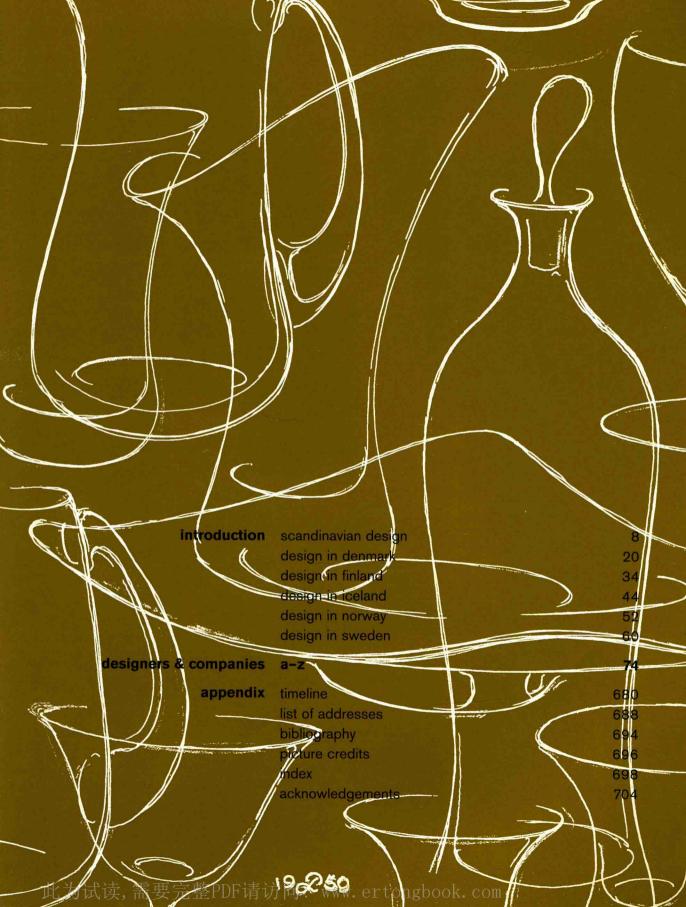
Editorial coordination: Sonja Altmeppen, Sabine Bleßmann, Cologne

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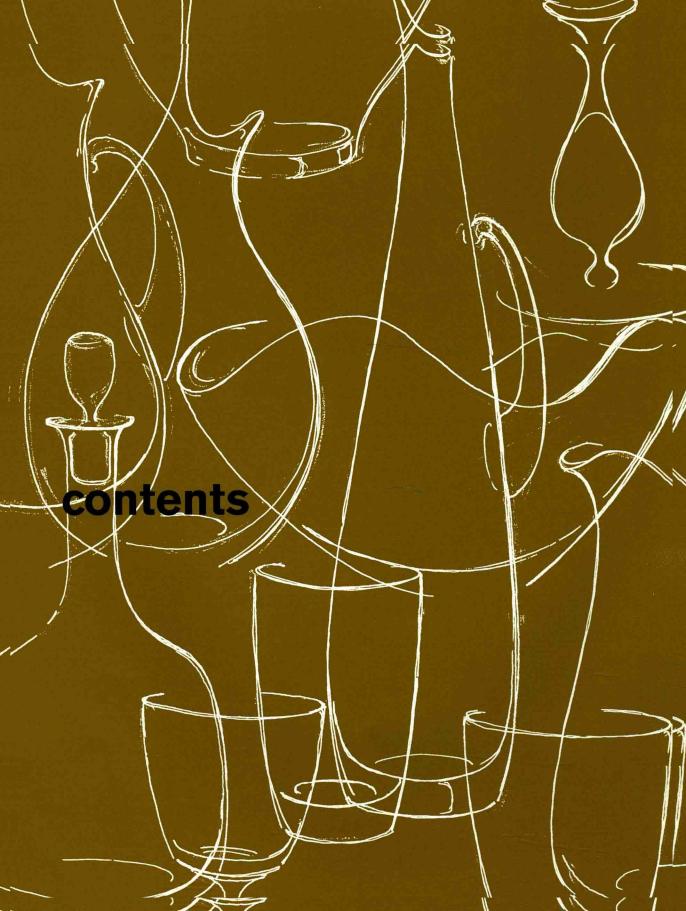
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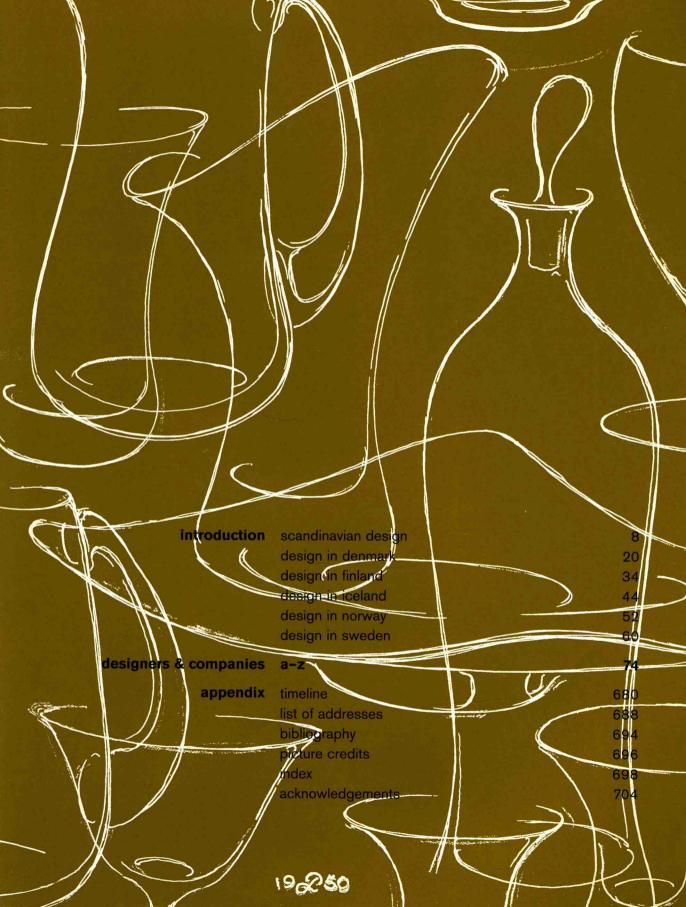
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Alvar Aalto, Aalto vase for Karhula, 1936 – later produced by littala – this version of Aalto's famous vase was also intended to be used as a simple serving tray

⊳⊳ Erik Magnussen, Thermal Carate (Colour 990 – Yellow) for Stelton, 1976 – yellow version introduced in 1996

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Scandinavia is a patchwork of northern European nation states that form a cultural and regional entity that is very distinct from the rest of Europe. Sharing a common economic and cultural history and linguistic roots (except Finland), the Scandinavian countries each possess a unique character that reflects their different geographies and environmental conditions. More than anywhere else in the world, designers in Scandinavia have instigated and nurtured a democratic approach to design that seeks a social ideal and the enhancement of the quality of life through appropriate and affordable products and technology. From its birth around 1920, modern Scandinavian design has been underpinned by a moral humanist ethos the roots of which can be traced to Lutheranism the state religion throughout Scandinavia, which stresses truth and reason and teaches that salvation can be gained through honest work that benefits one's fellow man. It is this moral belief in social imperatives that has formed the philosophical bedrock from which Scandinavian design has evolved and prospered.

Scandinavia is a term generally used to describe Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden.

But only the latter two nations are actually situated on the Scandinavian Peninsula, More properly, within the region the five countries are referred to as Norden, or quite literally "The North". Omitting Iceland, the lonely outpost in the North Atlantic, the other four countries form a territorial entity that extends 1,900 km (1,200 miles) from the Danish-German frontier to the northernmost part of Norway. Their combined land area is about 1,165,000 sq. km (450,000 sq. miles), greater than Britain, France and Spain put together. But the balance changes dramatically when people, not acres, are counted. Vast expanses of northern Finland, Norway and Sweden are given over to mountains and forest, while most of volcanic Iceland is totally uninhabitable. Those who can properly call themselves Nordic number just under 22 million and are to be found living mostly along the coasts or in the rich agricultural areas of the south, where nearly all the big towns are located.

Each Scandinavian country has enjoyed longestablished nationhood and a strong identity, and cherished historical associations and myths from which their people have taken much inspiration.





▶ Finn Juhl, teak bowls executed by the Kay Bojesen workshop, 1950

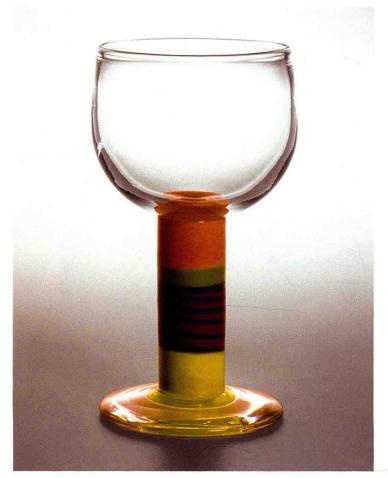
▶▶ Jens Quistgaard, cast-iron candleholders for Dansk International Designs, c. 1955

While in the distant past there was serious inter-Nordic conflict, the nations of Scandinavia have achieved a viable and continuous peace with one another for a period of almost two hundred years. Despite certain superficial differences, the Scandinavian people remain much alike. The populations of the five countries are remarkably homogeneous in ethnical and religious terms. The legal systems come from common origins and are dominated by a mutual philosophy - many modern social laws are formulated in common. Although there are many similarities and close bonds between the five Norden states, strong stylistic distinctions in terms of approach to design exist between each of the countries. These are due not only to different industrial, political, economic and social conditions, but also to the fundamentally different temperaments of each country's population. As the design writer Anne Stenros noted, "On the emotional level: the Danes are a little more 'southern', the Finns are a little more 'eastern', the Norwegians are a little more 'northern' and the Swedes stick to the golden mean. The Icelanders have sturdy roots of their own." These differences in national character have resulted in diverse approaches to the applied

arts and the "flowering of design" at different times in their histories.

Perhaps the single most important unifying trend in the Nordic region over the last 500 years has been the movement away from tyranny towards a social world in which the voice, desires and efforts of the individual have played an increasingly significant role - one in which the maintenance of a prosperous, modern, democratic nation has been crucial. Indeed, while the basic common ideal of individualism is modified in practice by the varying degrees of socialism in each of the five states, today the Nordic countries are among the most affluent, just, humane, and democratic in the world. The most obvious inherent characteristic of the Scandinavian people, however, is their pervasive practicality, and nowhere has this had a greater effect than on the development of modern design. For centuries "the home" has been the central focus of the Scandinavian people's existence as it not only offers a vital haven from hostile climatic conditions, but also functions as a framing structure for family life. This age-old "household culture" was additionally prompted by the fact that self-sufficiency was often an economic necessity





⊳ Gunnar Cyrén, Pop goblet for Orrefors, 1965–1966

⊳⊳ Jens Quistgaard, rosewood, steel and leather lounge chairs for Nissen, 1965

in remote rural communities. It is not surprising, therefore, that over the long history of the applied and decorative arts, Scandinavian designers have tended to concentrate on the production of functional yet attractive wares for the home which reflect the craftsmanship and essentialist principles that throughout the ages have guided the making of tools, weapons and domestic implements. In Scandinavian countries well-designed products are commonplace because the whole notion of "good design" has permeated their socially inclusive cultures. Spurred on by Ellen Key's call for Skönhet åt alla (Beauty for All) and the Svenska Slöjdföreningen's (Swedish Society of Craft and Industrial Design) catchphrase Vackrare Vardagsvara (Good Everyday Goods - or as directly translated, More Beautiful Everyday Objects), Scandinavian designers in their pursuit of affordable, beautiful, yet useful household objects have historically adopted an approach to design whereby products are developed within a humanist interpretation of the formal, technical and aesthetic principles associated with Modernism. For the majority of Scandinavian people, design

life, but also as a means of effecting social change. There has also been a historical tendency among Scandinavian designers to seek an optimum balance between the man-made and natural worlds in their work. The climate in Scandinavia - nine months of dark wintry cold and three brilliant months of glorious and abundant summer - has also meant that designers have sought inspiration as much from the delights of the natural world as from the concept of the warm and cheerful home. The Scandinavian peoples have traditionally relied on design ingenuity for their very survival and have become adept at skilfully handling the limited material resources available so as to use them as efficiently as possible. This reliance on design as a means of survival has led them to regard it is an important element of their cultural, social and economic welfare. Although the majority of Scandinavian countries have enjoyed a long history of design excellence, it was not until the 1950s that the concept of "Scandinavian design" was first widely popularized through exhibitions such as the seminal "Design in Scandinavia" show, which toured the USA and Canada from 1954 to 1957.

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