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Nordic architecture and design: Nature, form and function

Beautiful everyday things: the origins of Nordic design

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### Lecture summary

In this lecture, Mark Ian Jones traces the origins of Nordic design before it became internationally branded as "Scandinavian Design." Beginning with late nineteenth-century ideas about the ethical significance of the home, it examines how figures such as Ellen Key and Carl and Karin Larsson helped establish domestic life as a site of cultural reform. Through exhibitions like the 1917 Home Exhibition and the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition, and through the work of designers across Sweden, Denmark, Finland and Norway, modern design was positioned as a social project aligned with housing reform, welfare politics and industrial production. By the late 1930s, these developments had gained international visibility, setting the stage for the post-war construction of Scandinavian Design as a coherent regional identity.

### Key Figures



*Alvar & Aino Aalto, Vase, 1937*

- Ellen Key (1849–1926) – *Beauty in the Home* (1899); ethical conception of the domestic interior
- Carl & Karin Larsson – *Sundborn home*; *Ett Hem* (1899)
- Gregor Paulsson – *Vackrare vardagsvara* (1919); "artist in industry"
- Wilhelm Kåge – *Liljebå* (1917); *Argenta ceramics* (1930s); Gustavsberg
- Simon Gate & Edward Hald – *Orrefors glass*
- Göran Hongell – *Finnish glass*; *Karhula*
- Alvar & Aino Aalto – *Savoy vase* (1936); bent laminated birch furniture
- Kaare Klint – *Functional furniture pedagogy*; *Danish cabinetmaking*
- Poul Henningsen (PH) – *PH lamp*; lighting theory
- Carl Malmsten – *Craft-based Swedish modern furniture*
- Axel Larsson – *Industrial Swedish furniture*;
- Estrid Ericson & Josef Frank – *Svenskt Tenn*; *Swedish Modern interiors*
- Vicke Lindstrand & Edvin Öhrström – *Orrefors art glass*

### Key Exhibitions & Events

- 1899 – Publication of *Beauty in the Home* (Ellen Key)
- 1917 – Home Exhibition (*Hemutställningen*), Liljevalchs, Stockholm
- 1919 – Publication of *Vackrare vardagsvara*
- 1925 – Paris Exposition (*Swedish Grace*; Pavilion by Carl Bergsten)
- 1930 – Stockholm Exhibition (*Functionalism*; Asplund, Markelius)

- 1937 – Paris International Exhibition (Sweden, Denmark, Finland pavilions)
- 1939 – New York World's Fair (Swedish Modern; Danish & Finnish participation)

## References

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