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Nordic architecture and design: Nature, form and function

The golden era of Nordic design: global influence and legacy

Mark Ian Jones

#### Lecture summary

In this lecture, Mark Ian Jones explores how Nordic design moved from post-war reconstruction to international influence under the name "Scandinavian Design." Beginning with the breakthrough at the 1951 Milan Triennale and the touring exhibition Design in Scandinavia, he examines how Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden presented a shared vision of modern living to the world. Through furniture, glass and textiles, Nordic design came to represent a humane, democratic alternative to more monumental forms of modernism.

The lecture then turns to Australia, tracing how Scandinavian design resonated strongly in the 1950s and 60s through magazines, department stores and local manufacturers. Exhibitions such as Sweden at David Jones and the emergence of companies like Fler, Danish DeLuxe and Parker show how Nordic design was translated into Australian homes. The session concludes by reflecting on how Scandinavian Design became both a global brand and a lasting influence on modern domestic life.



Max Dupain, 1968, *Design in Scandinavia 68*, Art Gallery of New South Wales

#### Key Figures

- Tapio Wirkkala – "Miracle of Milan," IX Triennale (1951); exhibition architecture; glass and industrial design
- Toini Muona – Arabia ceramics; Milan 1951 award
- Gunnar Nyman – Finnish modern glass; posthumous recognition, 1951
- Astrid Sampe – Signerad Textil, NK; textile modernism institutionalised

- Armi Ratia – Founder, Marimekko (1951); branding and graphic identity
- Vuokko Eskolin-Nurmesniemi – Graphic textile modernism; Marimekko
- Maija Isola – Large-scale printed textiles; Marimekko
  - Arne Jacobsen – SAS Royal Hotel Copenhagen 1960, total design
- Hans J. Wegner – “The Chair” (1949); Kennedy–Nixon debate (1960)
- Vicke Lindstrand – Swedish art glass; international exhibitions
- Stig Lindberg – Gustavsberg ceramics and textiles
- Arne Korsmo – Norwegian pavilion, Milan 1954
- Birger Dahl – Norwegian lighting; Milan recognition
- Fred Lowen – Co-founder, Fler
- Danish DeLuxe
- Tony Parker – Parker Nordic range
- Verner Panton – immersive design, plastics

### Key Exhibitions & Events

- 1951 – IX Milan Triennale (“Miracle of Milan”)
- 1952 – Nordic Council established
- 1954–57 – Design in Scandinavia touring exhibition (USA & Canada)
- 1954 – Sweden at David Jones, Sydney
- 1954 – X Milan Triennale (first coordinated Nordic presentation)
- 1958 – Formes Scandinaves, Paris
- 1960 – Kennedy–Nixon debate (Wegner’s “The Chair”)
- 1968–69 – Design in Scandinavia exhibition in Australia

### References

- Lasse Brunnström (ed.), *Swedish Design: A History*, Bloomsbury Visual Arts, 2013.
- Lucy Creagh, Helena Kåberg and Barbara Miller Lane (eds.), *Modern Swedish Design: Three Founding Texts*, The Museum of Modern Art, 2008.
- Per H. Hansen, *Danish Modern Furniture 1930–2016*, University Press of Southern Denmark, 2018.
- Mark Ian Jones, *Vicke Lindstrand on the Periphery*, Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 2016.
- Mark Ian Jones, *Nordic Design Down Under: ‘Swedish Modern’ and Scandinavian Design in Mid- Twentieth-Century Australia*,  
<https://unsworks.unsw.edu.au/entities/publication/87b374b7-8173-4cbc-beab-4a143ffac2ae>
- Mark Ian Jones, A Fleeting Glimpse? ‘Sweden’s Shop Window in Sydney’ - the Sweden at David Jones’ Exposition of 1954, *Fabrications*, 33(2), 279–305, 2023.  
<https://doi.org/10.1080/10331867.2023.2282294>
- Pekka Korvenmaa, *Finnish Design: A Concise History*, V&A Publications, 2014.
- Jennifer Opie, *Scandinavia: Ceramics and Glass in the Twentieth Century*, V&A, 1989/2001.