



Left: The Big Apple chair by Henriette Leth. Right: Hans Wegner's Circle chair. Below: Dialog 1 by Hans Sandgren Jakobsen.



toward materials into a fully realized design aesthetic. The power and universality of that aesthetic resonates in the fact that many historic designs are still produced by Danish manufacturer Fritz Hansen and others.

That tradition continues today in Copenhagen with designers such as Kasper Salto, whose Runner chair was a favorite of President Clinton (echoing John F. Kennedy's partiality for a Wegner chair). Salto says the chair was inspired by his absentminded bending of a light filter during a photo shoot, when he realized the plastic could simultaneously be bent

COPENHAGEN, DENMARK

POPULATION 615,115 | LATITUDE 55 DEGREES 41' N | LONGITUDE 12 DEGREES 33' E | NICKNAME THE LATINOS OF SCANDINAVIA | MUST EAT SMØRREBRØD

SITTING PRETTY

THE LEGENDARY Danish designer Hans Wegner once credited the strength of his country's design with its ability to freely import influences from the outside world—and send back better versions. “Denmark has always been an international meeting place,” Wegner wrote. “This is a function and a tradition that’s part of its historical position as a seafaring nation. Denmark is a country where trade routes—and ideas—meet. Ideas create ideas. That’s why outside impulses are so essential.”

And nowhere was the exchange of ideas so fulsome as in Copenhagen, the canal-veined metropolis where a

generation of provincial cabinetmakers came together in a loose movement of *dansk* design that would wield an outsized influence in the postwar global domestic landscape.

Wegner, born in Tønder, came to Copenhagen following an apprenticeship with a local cabinetmaker; there he encountered the annual Copenhagen Cabinetmakers’ Guild Exhibitions, a breeding ground of such incipient talent as Kaare Klint and Ole Wanscher. In Copenhagen, where Klint would eventually run a furniture school at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, the cabinetmakers turned their innate talent and sensitivity



in two directions. Before enrolling in the Danmarks Designskole (which has since eclipsed the Royal Academy as the primary generator of furniture designers), Salto apprenticed with a cabinetmaker—one of the few current designers to do both. “I would say the biggest source of my inspiration comes from nature, or from the good designers that came before us,” Salto says. “The most important thing is that you know what you’re doing with the materials.” Still, says Birgitta Capetillo, a curator at the Danish Design Center, a strong sense of community exists among Copenhagen designers: “Designers have their own

association with product, graphic and interior designers,” she says. “It’s a small city, remember, so most of them know each other.”

Salto admits that the shadows cast by such Danish design legends as Finn Juhl, Arne Jacobsen and Verner Panton can be long. He’s confident, however, that a new generation of furniture designers—Hans Sandgren Jakobsen and Henriette Leth among them—can carry on the tradition even as they invent new ones. Denmark, as always, is doing its best to promote them, sending work from many of the

most promising new designers (Salto among them) on worldwide tour in the *Danes on the Move* exhibition, sponsored by Copenhagen’s Danish Design Institute. Two important international exhibitions, Capetillo adds, are also on Copenhagen’s horizon: *Index 2005* and *Congress 2005/ Redesigning Design*. “It’s very important for a small country like Denmark to emphasize design,” Salto says. “We don’t have the power or money that countries like Germany or the United States have.”

TOM VANDERBILT

