



Student's Name:

Nathanael O' Hara

Student Number:

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Signed: _____

Date: _____

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ARNE JACOBSEN

EARLY LIFE AND COLLEGE

Arne Jacobsen was born on the 11th February 1902 in Copenhagen, Denmark. While growing up Jacobsen dreamed of becoming a painter. An influence on this could have been his mother who painted floral motifs as a past time (Hansen). His father persuaded him to forgo this dream and instead chose a more secure job as an architect.

Jacobsen trained as a mason at the school of Applied Arts in Copenhagen, and graduated in 1924. He then went on to study architecture at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, and graduated in 1927 (Hollingsworth, 2008). During his time at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts he won a silver medal for a chair design he had done for the Paris Art Deco fair, Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes. Jacobsen also travelled to Germany during his time at the Academy, where he became acquainted with the work of architects Mies van der Rohe and Walter Gropius. These two architects' rationalist architecture influenced Jacobsen's early designs including his graduation piece which he won him a gold medal.

After graduating from the academy he worked for two years as an assistant in the City Architects Office in Copenhagen (Hollingsworth, 2008).

STARTING WORK AND INFLUENCES

After his two years as an assistant in the Architects Office, Jacobsen joined up with Flemming Lassen to design the House of the future, a circular house which had a helicopter pad on its roof (Hollingsworth, 2008). This design won in a competition in the building and housing exhibition held in Copenhagen's Academic Architects Association. Jacobsen became recognised as an ultra-modern architect because of the project.

Jacobsen's early designs in architecture were greatly influenced by Nicolai Abildgaard, but the influences of Le Corbusier and Mies soon began to be seen more and more (Corral, 1989).

Jacobsen was known for not only designing the house itself, but also designing the interior as well. He often designed the furniture for the building and sometimes would go as far as designing the cutlery as well. Most of the furniture he designed was for buildings he had designed. Most famous being the Egg chair and the Swan chair which he designed for the SAS Royal Hotel and Air Terminal in Copenhagen.

MAIN WORK HISTORY OF FURNITURE

Arne Jacobsen worked on a few big projects during his career which influenced his furniture designs. The first work that influenced his furniture was the House of the Future where he designed several pieces of furniture that were made up of tubular metal (Hollingsworth, 2008).

Jacobsen's most famous pieces of furniture were the ones he designed for the SAS Royal Hotel and Air Terminal in 1958. These included the Egg chair, the Swan chair, and the 3300 series. The Egg chair was a high-backed lounge chair which was designed for the lobby and also put into guest rooms (Sheridan, 2003). The Egg chair is a curved egg shaped with the seat and the back moulded out of the one piece of material and covered in leather, Michael Sheridan describes it as serving both as a throne and a refuge. The Egg chair was never mass produced because of the difficulty in making it and also because its design was flawed in that the couch was too big for two full cow hides and hence there would be a noticeable seam down the middle of the chair. A few years ago a few of the Egg chairs was made and sold for \$50,000.



Figure 1: Egg Chair (Hansen, Fritz Hansen, 2014)

The Swan chair is similar to the Egg chair as it was designed for the same building. The Swan chair's back and seat is moulded in one piece like the Egg chair and is also covered in leather, with metal legs. Unlike the Egg chair, the Swan chair is still being produced today. The Swan chair has a deep seat and high armrests, which hugs the sitter.



Figure 2: Swan Chair (Hansen, Fritz Hansen, 2014)

Another famous piece of furniture Jacobsen designed for the SAS Royal Hotel was the 3300 series, which included both a chair and a sofa. The 300 consisted of an upholstered body set into a metal tube frame. The chair was designed so that it could be located singularly or in groups and not look out of place.



Figure 3: 3300 series (Hansen, Fritz Hansen, 2014)

There is a couple of furniture designs that Jacobsen designed for other buildings other than the SAS Royal Hotel, the most famous being the Series 7 chair. The series 7 chair

is Jacobsen's biggest seller of furniture, with over five million units being produced exclusively by Fritz Hansen. It was designed in 1955. The Series 7 chair used a new technique in which plywood could be bent in three dimensions. It had four legs made of metal tubes, and metal arms came up to support a piece of bent plywood for the armrests. The Series 7 like the Ant was a stackable chair. The Series 7 like most of Jacobsen's furniture was manufactured by Fritz Hansen, and are still produced by the company Fritz Hansen today. It was the great chair for the modern living, being light, compact and easily stackable. It was one of the most popular types of chair during the late 20th and early 21st century. It also became one of the most copied chair designs during this period. It even got featured in the soap EastEnders. (ARNE JACOBSEN, 2006)



Figure 4: Series 7 Chair (Hansen, Fritz Hansen, 2014)

Another famous design was the Ant chair. As stated above, the Ant chair was stackable like the Swan chair. The Ant chair was designed to be light, stable, and easy to stack up. Jacobsen designed this chair for the canteen of a Danish pharmacy firm Nova Nordisk in 1952. Its seat and back was made from one continuous sheet of plywood moulded into shape, and it had only three legs. (ARNE JACOBSEN, 2006) The Ant chair got its name because it was said to look like an ant with its head risen up. The Ant chair was Jacobsen's breakthrough in furniture design. Although originally it was close to ending up as only a prototype because Fritz Hansen did not think the chair had any potential (Hansen, ARNE JACOBSEN - THE MAN). Jacobsen would not allow the chair to be made with four legs, but post-humously the four-leg Ant chair was manufactured (Hollingsworth, 2008).



Figure 5: Ant chair (Hansen, Fritz Hansen, 2014)

In 1956, Jacobsen was honoured with a position as professor emeritus at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, which he held till 1960. During this time Jacobsen continued his work as an architect, even completing one of his most famous buildings the SAS Royal Hotel. Also during this period Jacobsen, despite not having good English, was commissioned in 1958 to design a new college in Oxford called St. Catherine's college. Arne Jacobsen as usual believing that the design of every element of a building had to be harmonious designed the interior as well. Jacobsen designed the Oxford chair for the professors of this college.



Figure 6: Oxford chair (Hansen, Fritz Hansen, 2014)

STYLES

Arne Jacobsen furniture designs were famous for being designed for his buildings. Jacobsen liked all the elements of a building to be in harmony with each other. Jacobsen's usage of the technique of bending plywood in three dimensions on works such as the Series 7 and the Ant chairs was influenced on work done by Charles and ray Eames.

Jacobsen liked to push the limits of modern technology in his designs. Most of his furniture used new techniques and new materials. The Swan chair and the Egg chair both used a new state of the arts material for its core, before being covered in leather. Jacobsen despite preferring to use modern technology in his design, liked to keep his design quite simple, yet effective. Jacobsen a few years before his death was quoted saying:

"The primary factor is proportions. Proportions are what makes the old Greek temples classic in their beauty....next comes the material - not mixing the wrong materials, and after this comes, of course, the colour - and, in sum, the overall impression." (Hansen, ARNE JACOBSEN - THE MAN).

JACOBSEN'S FURNITURE TODAY

Most of Jacobsen's furniture is still being produced by the company which first manufactured his designs, Fritz Hansen. The original furniture that Jacobsen designed for the SAS Royal Hotel has mostly been replaced, but there is still one room in the SAS Royal Hotel that has been kept in its original state. This room, room 606 is still being let out to guests. The price is around 650 euro per night. This room contains the original design, from the original furniture to the colour of the walls. Chairs such as the Egg chair, the Swan chair and the 3300 series can be seen here. Also the table and stools in this room are also designed by Jacobsen.



Figure 7:

Room 606, SAS Royal Hotel (Room 606, 2003)

OPINION

My first opinion when I saw Arne Jacobsen's work was that it looked very simple and there did not seem to be a lot of creativity in the designs, compared to designers from older generations. My opinion of Jacobsen's changed as I researched him and his work. I realised that he was actually a visionary. Jacobsen saw the need for a different type of furniture in the modern era. Instead of the big, heavy and fancy chairs that were around at that time, Jacobsen decided to design a light, stable chair that was easy to stack on top of each other. Jacobsen's first architect design, The House of the Future might have went a little bit too far with the helicopter pad on the roof and windows that wind down like in a car, but even at this young age Jacobsen was looking to see what was needed for the future in his line of work. He used modern technology to help achieve a more comfortable, yet stable chair.

Arne Jacobsen believed that to design something and make it look good, you had to first think about proportion, then let the rest follow. I fully agree with this conclusion, but it is something I would not have fully thought about in my design process. I would have thought about everything else first and leave the size proportions to the end.

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