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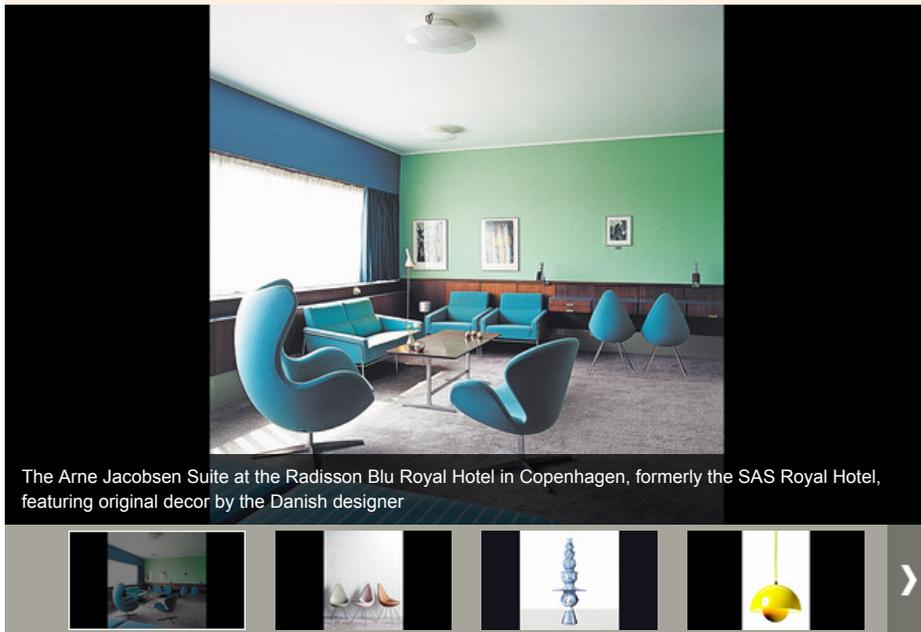
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Scandinavian mid-century design remains a fine vintage

By Troy McMullen

Recent sales at auction are testament to the enduring appeal of postwar furniture produced by the region's designers



The Arne Jacobsen Suite at the Radisson Blu Royal Hotel in Copenhagen, formerly the SAS Royal Hotel, featuring original decor by the Danish designer

When Wright auction house in Chicago holds its Scandinavian design sales next month some of the most important names in postwar furnishings will go under the gavel. Works by Hans Wegner and Arne Jacobsen will feature in a roster of more than 200 items on May 8.

Recent sales at auction are testament to the enduring appeal of postwar Scandinavian furniture. Christies, Phillips and Bonhams all reported higher total sales in the sector in 2013.

Los Angeles Modern Auctions (LAMA), one of the first US auction houses to specialise in 20th-century design, reached a record \$5.12m in February at an auction anchored by Scandinavian furnishings.

Meanwhile, at this year's Salone Internazionale del Mobile in Milan, the design company Republic of Fritz Hansen is reintroducing Danish designer Arne Jacobsen's Drop chair "after more than 50 years in hibernation". The Drop was designed in 1958 for Copenhagen's SAS Royal Hotel.

Scandinavian design of the mid-century period is generally understood to be decorative furnishings created after the second world war through to the end of 1960s. It was characterised by the modernist principles of simplicity and functionality. The works were produced by

a small group of designers whose elegant but comfortable creations helped popularise the term Scandinavian Modern. The group rose to international prominence in the 1950s and 1960s with a fresh aesthetic of sculptural and organic modern furniture.

In the late 1990s and early 2000s, as the market for contemporary art soared, original mid-century Scandinavian furniture once again captured the interest of collectors. It was elevated from a niche market for aficionados to a coveted must-have for an expanding set of global wealthy who viewed the elegant, modernist creations as collectable art similar to paintings and sculpture.

The total amount achieved at Wright's last auction of Scandinavian designs reached a record \$1.8m. Among those sales was a 1940 Niger leather and mahogany armchair by Frits Henningsen that fetched \$55,000.

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- Richard Wright

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Auction houses, sensing growth, are also featuring more Scandinavian furniture pieces. Wright has added to its programme two annual sales dedicated exclusively to mid-century Scandinavian design and it brings about 500 pieces from this period to auction each year. Lounge chairs by Danish architect Philip Arctander and lighting designs by Finnish designer Alvar Aalto will be among furnishings sold at its auction next month.

Meanwhile, LAMA has doubled the number of lots for its sale of postwar Scandinavian works in Van Nuys, California, next month.

“This area of the market has consistently outperformed at auction,” says Richard Wright, founder and director of Wright. “The qualities of clean finishes and strong craftsmanship still resonate with collectors and everyday

The appetite for Scandinavian furnishings is particularly keen in the US, where buyers are increasingly bidding up prices on everything from pendant lamps by Alvar Aalto to teak and oak cabinets by Arne Jacobsen.

Despite fluctuations in other collecting areas, mid-century Scandinavian design endures, says Peter Loughrey, founder and director of LAMA. “Its popularity at auction has gone far beyond simply trendy to something much more substantial in art and design collecting,” he says.

Auction houses are not the only outlet for obtaining top-tier Scandinavian furnishings. High-end furniture galleries and design boutiques also stock rare pieces of Scandinavian furniture.

Førest London, an upmarket furniture gallery and store in Clerkenwell, London, specialises in original mid-century Scandinavian and northern European design by designers such as Arne Vodder and Hans Wegner. Scandinavian design is “still a very attractive sector of the mid-century furnishings market,” says Eva Coppens, the shop's owner. “There has always been a strong sense of balancing modernity and restraint and that's an enduring appeal for many buyers.”

The Apartment, a furniture showroom and gallery in Copenhagen's Christianshavn district, sells individually designed interiors as well as vintage Scandinavian furnishings. Tucked inside a restored 18th-century apartment in the heart of the city, the boutique carries works by recognised contemporary designers, such as Rune Bruun Johansen and Michael Anastassiades, alongside difficult-to-find vintage pieces by the likes of Finn Juhl. The owners, Tina Seidenfaden Busck and Pernille Hornhaver, also advise auction houses and offer private consultations on interiors.

Furniture store midcenturyLA, in North Hollywood, imports postwar furniture from Scandinavia and has attracted an ardent following among Californians with a passion for mid-century design. Among the wide range of furnishings on offer are vintage pieces by Kai Kristiansen and Arne Vodder.

“ Through the use of natural woods and bold colours and patterns, these pieces add warmth and a little whimsy to any space ”

- Noha Hassan

Cristina Grajales is a veteran contemporary design dealer in New York who specialises in the postwar period and advises auction houses on mid-century furnishings. Her eponymous gallery showcases rare works by mid-century designers such as Charlotte Perriand and Jean Prouvé.

“What is important to buyers is that the design stays true to the aesthetic vision of its creator and Scandinavian furniture designers have managed to balance that perfectly,” says Grajales. “Collectors want unique pieces from this period that are in terrific condition.”

Manhattan-based interior designer Noha Hassan says the elegance and timelessness of Scandinavian furnishings resonate with homeowners who are looking to add warmth to cold, austere interiors.

“It’s a sculptural aesthetic that adds softness or drama to modern interiors,” says Hassan, who has clients in the US, Europe and the Middle East. “Through the use of natural woods and bold colours and patterns, these pieces add warmth and a little whimsy to any space.”

Nicole Hollis, an interior designer in San Francisco, says accessories such as pendant lamps, candle holders and teak waste-paper baskets created in Scandinavia during the postwar period are particularly appealing to devotees of modern design. “Scandinavian furnishings help wonderfully accent a minimalist aesthetic,” she says. “This often allows a contemporary interior scheme to be luxurious yet distinctive.”

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