



DESIGNER PROFILE

BØRGE MOGENSEN



Børge Mogensen (1914-1972)

Børge Mogensen was known as ‘the people’s designer’ – not only because of his convivial nature but also because, throughout his career, he insisted on designing quality furniture that was within people’s reach. Mogensen’s approach to the creative process was to produce pieces that placed humans at the centre and could last for generations. With this as his starting point, he became one of the most influential designers of the post-war era and a prominent figure among the designers behind Danish Modern. Mogensen’s ambition to design simple and functional wooden furniture for both private and public spaces was, and continues to be, in line with the Danish understanding of design and the concept of democratic design.

Mogensen’s designs represent a restrained aesthetic with emphasis on strong construction and materials of the highest quality. Throughout his life, he swore by solid wood, particularly oak, pine and beech wood, as well as leather. From these materials, Mogensen created a string of simple and functional furniture pieces with the purpose, in his view, to invite people to express themselves freely. Many people will recognize his Hunting Table and Deck Chair Set. The driven designer avoided unnecessary adornment and wild experiments. Instead, he stood for visual clarity, and often used the squares of his A4 graph paper pad as the starting point for his work.

Mogensen learned the stringent and clear approach to furniture design from Kaare Klint, one of the most influential designers of his time. As a student of Klint’s at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Mogensen was inspired by his thoughts about the bare essentials and the fact that Klint based his designs on human proportions. According to both Klint and Mogensen, a successful furniture piece should radiate both visual calmness and pure functionalism. In contrast to Klint, however, Mogensen



placed considerable emphasis on developing furniture for informal interior décor and adapted to modern production facilities.

Mogensen completed his cabinetmaker training in 1934. From the beginning, he based his design on the universe of wood, and retained his fondness for this organic material throughout his career. He later studied furniture design at the Copenhagen School of Arts and Crafts (1936-1938) and at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts (1938-1942). In the same period, he was employed at Kaare Klint's and Mogens Koch's design studios, where he worked until he was hired as chief designer for the Danish furniture cooperative FDB in 1942. Here, Mogensen became a pioneer for the concept of democratic design, setting a whole new agenda for modern interior design until 1950, when he established his own design studio. His plan was to develop modern, useful furniture pieces that could be produced locally using material from the Nordic woods.

Even though Mogensen developed his own expression, with visual simplicity as his focal point, he also found inspiration in other cultures and styles, including international modernism, ethnic arts, Japanese carvings, and historic works such as simple Shaker furniture. Over the course of his relatively short life, Mogensen established himself as a distinctive furniture designer with a very personal style. He was extremely productive in his 35-year career, designing a wide range of furniture pieces and furnishing fabrics, many of which are regarded today as classics.

Mogensen also found time to teach furniture design at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts from 1945 to 1947. He participated in the annual Copenhagen Cabinetmakers' Guild Furniture Exhibitions and the exhibitions held by the National Association of Danish Crafts in Denmark and abroad for several years. In 1948, Mogensen participated, together with his friend Hans J. Wegner, in the international Competition for Low-Cost Furniture at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and in 1961 had a solo exhibition in London.

In 1950, Mogensen was awarded the Eckersberg Medal and in 1971 the Danish Furniture Prize. In 1972, just before his death, he was awarded the C.F. Hansen Medal and appointed Honorary Royal Designer for Industry at the Royal Society of Arts in London.

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