



CELEBRATING 100 YEARS OF ARNE JACOBSEN



AJ door handle for Abloy



Cutlery Set for Stelton

**Arne Jacobsen (1902 to 1971)**  
**Was one of Denmark's most influential 20th century architects and designers.**  
**Both his buildings and products, combine modernist ideals with a Nordic love of naturalism.**

Born in Copenhagen in 1902, Arne Jacobsen worked as an apprentice bricklayer before winning a place to study architecture at the Royal Academy of the Arts in 1924.

Humble though Jacobsen's first job may seem, there are echoes with those of other great architects like John Soane and Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe, who worked for their fathers as a bricklayer and stone mason respectively.

It also imbued Jacobsen with the love of materials, which became a dominant feature of his work.

As a student, Jacobsen travelled to Paris for the ground-breaking 1925 Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs, where he won a silver medal for a chair design.

On that trip, he was struck by the pioneering aesthetic of Le Corbusier's L'Esprit Nouveau pavilion, as was another architecture student, Luis Barragán, who was destined to be as influential in his country, Mexico, as Jacobsen would be in Denmark.

Before he left the Academy, Jacobsen also travelled to Berlin, where he discovered the rationalist architecture of Mies and Walter Gropius. Their work influenced his early projects in Denmark including a design for an art gallery which won him a gold medal when he graduated from the Academy.

Like most young architects, Jacobsen started out by designing private houses which, in his case, fused the rationalist simplicity he admired in Mies and Corb's work with the classicism of his Scandinavian mentors, notably the veteran Swedish architect Erik Gunnar Asplund.

The same combination was apparent in Jacobsen's larger projects such as an extension to the Nøvo pharmaceuticals factory and the Stelling Hus in Copenhagen. With both, Jacobsen was at pains to integrate the new buildings with their surroundings.

Architectural commissions dwindled during World War II, not least because construction materials were so scarce.

Being Jewish, Jacobsen was also threatened by the Nazi occupation of Denmark.

In 1943, he left the country by rowing across the Sound in a small boat for two years of wartime exile in Sweden, where he designed fabrics and wallpapers. There, he was inspired by Scandinavia's rich cultural heritage and natural beauty.

When he returned to Denmark in 1945, the country urgently needed new housing and public buildings. Jacobsen's late 1940s houses and apartment blocks were fairly spartan in design and intended to be built at speed.

By the 1950s, he had become more experimental in projects like 1952's Allehusene complex and his 1955 Søholm houses.

Jacobsen's experiments culminated in the circular Round House he designed for the manager of a local fish-smoking plant on the island of Sjaellands.

During the 1950s, Jacobsen became increasingly interested in product design inspired by the work of the US furniture designers, Charles and Ray Eames.

He was also influenced both by the ideals of his textile designer wife, Joanna, and the Italian design historian Ernesto Rogers, who believed that the design of every element was equally important "from the spoon to the city".

By the late 1950s, Jacobsen was given an opportunity to put his theories of integrated design and architecture into practise in the design of the SAS Ari Terminal and Royal Hotel in Copenhagen. He designed every element of the building from its skyscraping structure down to the ceramic ashtrays sold in the souvenir shop and the stainless steel cutlery.

The elegant functionalism of the SAS Royal Hotel and the 1950s schools Jacobsen had built in and around Copenhagen persuaded the Oxford dons who were touring Scandinavia in search of an architect for St Catherine's College that he was the ideal candidate.

Together with the SAS Royal Hotel and the later National Bank of Denmark headquarters, St Catherine's is regarded as one of Jacobsen's architectural masterpieces.

When a Dane who spoke very little English and seldom left his Copenhagen studio was commissioned in 1958 to design a new college for Oxford University, one eminent architect sent a letter to The Times describing it as the worst insult to British architecture since the 11th century when a Frenchman had been entrusted with the rebuilding of Canterbury Cathedral.



Undeterred, the dons pressed ahead with the commission and Arne Jacobsen started work on the design of St Catherine's College. Jacobsen believed that the design of every element of a building had to be harmonious - down to the doorknobs.

He insisted on adding a clause to his contract stating that: "Professor Jacobsen should undertake as much as possible of the landscape design and the design of fixtures and fittings."

Jacobsen interpreted this as being given carte blanche to obsess over everything from the exact shade of grey for the curtains, to the height of the cedar trees he planted in the quadrangle and the combination of fish - to be placed in the pond.

The result is a completely coherent, perfectly proportioned, yet very gracious campus: the design of which has remained more or less unchanged since its completion in 1963.

From the 1950s onwards Jacobsen, or "the fat man" as he was called, was the dominant figure in Danish architecture, but outside Denmark he made his mark as an interiors product designer.

Months before his death in 1971, Arne Jacobsen reflected on his career.

**"The fundamental factor is proportion,"**

### Biography

1902 Born in Copenhagen.

1924 Enrols as an architecture student at the Royal Academy of the Arts in Copenhagen.

1925 Wins a silver medal for a chair design at the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs in Paris where he discovers Le Corbusier's work.

1927 Visits Berlin where he sees the architecture of Walter Gropius and Ludwig Mies Van Der Rohe. Wins a gold medal on graduating from the Royal Academy.

1930 After years of designing private houses as a young architect, Jacobsen wins his first public project to modernise the beach at Bellevue.

1935 Completes the groundbreaking Bellavista apartment blocks, now regarded as a classic of the Danish modern movement, in Klampenborg.

1935 Designs the controversial Stelling Hus building in Copenhagen.

1943 Begins two years of wartime exile in Sweden where he concentrates on textile and wallpaper design and a summer house for two doctors.

1945 Returns to Denmark in peacetime to spend several years working on housing and schools.

1950 Starts a five year project to design the Søholm /series of houses in Klampenborg, which mark the start of a looser, more experimental phase.

1951 Inspired by Charles and Ray Eames' furniture, Jacobsen designs the moulded plywood Ant Chair, later refined into 1955's best-selling Series 7.

1956 Designs two upholstered chairs - the Egg and Swan - for the SAS Royal Hotel in Copenhagen

1957 Completes the circular Round House on the island of Sjaellands as the culmination of his experiments with the "houses of the future".

1960 Wins the commission to design St Catherine's College, Oxford. He insists on designing the fixtures, fittings and garden as well as the buildings.

1961 SAS Royal Hotel opens in Copenhagen as the apogee of Jacobsen's ambition to design a building in its entirety down to the smallest fixtures.

1964 The futuristic Belvedere Restaurant opens in Hannover above an early 18th century garden.

1966 Jacobsen wins the competition to design the new National Bank of Denmark headquarters in Copenhagen. Construction continues after his death with the building opening in 1978.

1968 Commences collaboration with I.P.Lund for the design of in built modular tapware range

1971 Arne Jacobsen dies in Copenhagen.

**The idea**

Shortly after Arne Jacobsen won a competition in 1961 for his design of the National Bank of Denmark, he was contacted by the owner of Vola A/S, Verner Ovegaard who introduced his proposal for a new type of wall-mounted floor tap. He imagined a design where all the mechanical parts of the floor are hidden leaving only the handle and spout open to the user. At the time this was a completely new concept, but Jacobsen realized that this idea combined with his functionalistic approach to design could be developed with that basic principle in mind, the simple and concise Vola design we know today was conceived.



Vola tap for the National Bank of Denmark



Verner Ovegaard  
Manufacturer of Vola

**Product development and design**

During the 54 years of production, technical specifications of the Vola range have been constantly updated in order to meet the requirements of market and material changes. Any product developments have been made on the condition that the Vola design remains unchanged.

Vola received in 1991 the iF-Classic Prize.



One of the first Vola drawings



Vola tap for the National Bank of Denmark



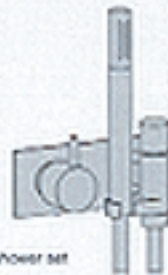
Vola KVI with rubber membrane sealing



Vola KVI with ceramic disc valve unit

**Vola in colours**

During the seventies the Vola range had its breakthrough on the international markets in colours like yellow, red and black which fitted perfectly the style in architecture at that time. In the late eighties when white was the dominating colour in architecture and interior design the Vola design was just as attractive in the white colour.

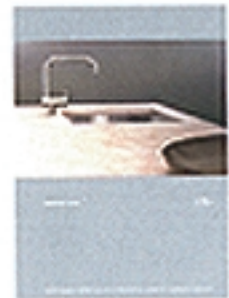


Vola shower set

**Solid stainless steel**



Vola 111 in solid stainless steel



Vola in solid stainless steel



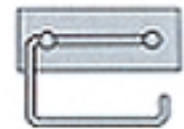
Vola in 18 colours



Old Vola brochure



Vola KVI in solid stainless steel



Vola 112 in solid stainless steel





Douglas presenting the vola candle stick prize



Philip and Alex



Arne Jacobsen



Ole and Sascha



Arne Jacobsen



Mia and Lucy



Jenny, Ed and Frank

**The new is always criticized**

**Interviews with Arne Jacobsen were rare in the Danish Press, but when the first stage of the National Bank's new building in Copenhagen, one of the architect's last completed works, was inaugurated in the spring of 1971 the Copenhagen Newspaper Politiken published this interview on 25/2/71**

The interviewer was Anne Wolden-Rrethinge

**AJ** Have one of my home-made pastries; it's all because I've been put on this damned slimming diet that I've got so good at giving things away.

Architecture seems to absorb everything else; it's become one's entire life. But one does, of course, make architecture for one's fellow men; they are the ones that are going to use it. On the other hand, there are many who accuse me of not paying enough regard to my fellow-men; and one is a party to the case, so one can't judge, and occasionally I say to myself: I wonder if they're right?

Every time I build a house it's consigned to hell by some people. In 1934, when Stelling House was finished, the paper said I should be banned from building for life.

When the SAS building was inaugurated, a Newspaper sponsored a competition to select the ugliest house in the city - I won the first prize.

Yes, of course, one is saddened by this; because the criticism nearly always comes where something new appears and you want to get it out. And though one doesn't make such heavy weather over an ordinary reader's letter as over a contribution from a professional, one realizes that the letter was written by somebody involved enough to sit down and write it and post it, and many really serious things come out in readers' letters and give rise to debate. It's a proof of freedom, and I suppose that it's that that one sets highest..

**AWR** Do you feel a little bit like the prophet without honour in his own country?

**AJ** Obviously, the country one belongs to feels the greatest right to criticize one. Actually, there's nothing wrong in that.

**AWR** Have your international commissions never tempted you to settle abroad?

**AJ** I tried to be a refugee in Sweden, where indeed I was happy, but seemed to get overcome occasionally by a cheap sentimentality which told me that I ought not to live abroad.

**AWR** In what architectural setting was your childhood passed?

**AJ** It was in a flat; but as my parents were rather old I was a bit too lively for them, and so I was sent to boarding school at Nrerum, and that was a happy time for me. It was a place where you learnt to enthuse about nature. When I was awarded a silver medal for a chair, in Paris in 1925, I was sent the programme, where it said "artist Arne Jacobsen". But my father said: "That must be a mistake, my boy: you're no artist and you're too fat to be an artiste."

**AWR** But you weren't deterred by paternal scepticism?

**AJ** Of course one was sorry in one's heart, but it has meant that one has become armed to the teeth, in order to fight to make something decent. I painted my room white; my parents thought that was completely barbarous, on top of the expensive wallpaper with the coloured pattern. But I think that parents who criticise their children too much are in fact better than parents who praise their children too much

**AWR** Was it your father, too, who joggled the palette out of your hand?

**AJ** My father once took some of my sketches from the school of architecture and said: "I'll hang these at the school of painting, as that's where they belong!" But when I'm travelling I draw and paint sketches which are great fun to sit with. And when you're fully aware that it has nothing to do with art, I think that's all right. But architecture is art. If building becomes architecture, then it is an art. Clearly, if a building is not functionally and technically in order, then it isn't architecture either, it's only a building. It has been said for many years that when a thing is practical and functional, it is beautiful as well. That I don't believe, because there are different ways of solving a problem functionally - without ever managing to be beautiful!

If architecture didn't have to do with art, it would be astonishingly easy to build houses, but the architect's task - his most difficult task - is always that of selecting. When you have a problem to solve there are nearly always different solutions -many times many solutions, sometimes only a few solutions -and they may all of them be practical and functional. But they may lack the aesthetic solution which raises the result to architecture. That's where the artistic comes in: in selecting the best of these solutions.

Unfortunately, I don't possess the ability to see the obvious solution immediately. I don't feel sure until I've confronted my first solution with other solutions; that it is so often the first solution which turns out to be the right one is another matter.

Impressions sink in, of course, and emerge perhaps later: none of us has invented the house; that was done many thousands of years ago.

**AWR** What does the architectural idea of beauty consist of?

**AJ** The primary factor is the proportional. It is precisely the proportions which make the old Greek temples classic in their beauty. They are like great blocks, from which the air has been literally hewn out between the columns. And whether one looks at a building from the Baroque, the Renaissance or today, those one wants to look at, those one admires, are all well-proportioned; that is vital.

Next comes the material, not mixing wrong materials together. And out of that comes of course the colour -and together the overall impression.

**AWR** Does it pain you to see one of your own houses dolled up with frilly, lace curtains?

**AJ** Not pain -but I just don't understand it. I remember one of my workmen saying to me once: "Look, Mr. Jacobsen, it's not nice of you to call the wife's curtains baggy bloomers!" And I was sorry because he loved both his wife and her curtains. At that moment I realized I had overstepped my authority.

**AWR** Is good taste out in this country?

**AJ** Now I can't stand the term "good taste" as if we were talking about ladies' hats. I would rather say: artistic approach, receptiveness, alertness. In one way the sense of quality has got better; the status symbol in little things has gone; people will presume to have stainless steel, even though the neighbours have silver.

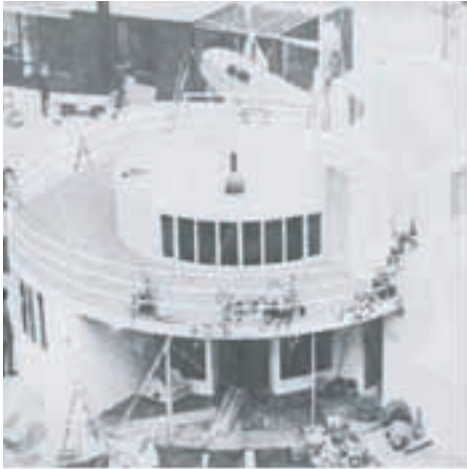
I readily think that prefabrication and industrial design make people more neighbourly. I think that's a good thing. On the other hand, I don't understand the enthusiasm for everything in the antique shop that Grandma threw out. There I think the sense of quality has declined; otherwise Grandma wouldn't have thrown it out. But here in Denmark where we are so democratic, we use the little phrase "it's a matter of taste" of both pastry and architecture.'

**AWR** And you eat only architect-designed pastry?'

**AJ** Pastry usually tastes best when it looks nice. A custard flap, surely that looks nice. In fact there's nothing I don't mind if it looks nice.

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"House of the Future" , Copenhagen Exhibition, 1929



St Catherine's college, Oxford, 1964 -66



Texaco service station , 1937



Munkegaard School, 1952 - 1956



National Bank of Denmark HQ, 1971



Fish smokehouse, 1943



Bellavista complex, 1935



Arne (improvising) photographed most of his own projects



Soholm villa houses where Arne lived , 1946