How Scandinavia Influenced Design in Canada

True Nordic

Praised for its material sensitivity, regarded both as modern and humble, progressive but quiet, Nordic and Scandinavian design has had an enduring influence on the development of Canadian design sensibility. Emphasizing durability and truth to materials, this aesthetic communicated an integrity that resonated culturally with Canadians as projecting an appealing humanistic form of Modernism.

Richly illustrated, True Nordic: How Scandinavia Influenced Design in Canada presents a comprehensive look at the significance of more than nine decades of Scandinavian and Nordic design on Canadian craft, design, and industrial production since 1920. Alongside essays by curators and scholars, this publication offers a broad historical survey of Canadian-made ceramics, furniture, textiles, and metalware inspired by the aesthetics of Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and Finland.

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Cover
Katherine Morley, Arctic Bookends, cat. 106, p. 116
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Growing up in the 1960s in the interior of British Columbia, the latest trends in design were rather distant to an aspiring architect like me, except for one, Scandinavian modern. Prior to its arrival, modern design was not popular when it infrequently surfaced as the chrome and leather seating in office lobbies; no one I knew then would dream of having this kind of modern in their home. However, the arrival of a sleek, contemporary Danish dining-room set, made of solid teak at a house a few doors away provoked much talk—it was new but not the disparaged functional modern—and soon the style began to appear everywhere in town. When I subsequently went to high school in Winnipeg and then university in Toronto, I realized that the Scandinavian trend had this kind of impact across the country.

I’m sure the new dining room of our neighbours while teak was likely made in Canada, but for my parents the point was it was Scandinavian. That it was contemporary and unlike any of the aspirational English furniture they owned didn’t seem to faze them. The wood was so beautiful, the craftsmanship so obvious, and the fabric on the seats so practical that it seemed impossible for them not to want it. In some ways, modernism packaged by Scandinavia was the Trojan Horse of contemporary—my parents were never conscious that they were inadvertently avant-garde by embracing it.

I don’t know if our neighbours knew much about Scandinavia, I doubt it, and I don’t believe there was a desire to travel there or otherwise understand where this new style came from. Scandinavia was northern like Canada, some speculated even colder than Canada in winter, and they were probably very sincere people given their love of wood, ceramics, and things made by hand. I recall the sense that we thought Danes or Finns or whomever, even if we didn’t know them, were sort of like us albeit they cross-country skied to work and were far more fit, or so we imagined, with the emphasis on imagined. Maybe this sense of kinship, however illusory, gave a friendly connection to the design style that didn’t come with American-inspired modern furnishings, for instance. Did we believe our values were more aligned with those of Scandinavia than our much more proximate US neighbours?

I recently bought a Danish dining-room set, made in Denmark circa 1950. Its relatively modest scale is ideal for a small dining room, and its calm, unfussy lines at ease with a simple, old house where it now resides. That said, I can’t help but look at it and relive my thrill when I first saw examples of the style, and how subversive it was bringing the new to my hometown. This is certainly part of the excitement I personally find with True Nordic: How Scandinavia Influenced Design in Canada, and the extraordinary story it tells of our fascination with Scandinavia and its impact on Canadian design.
**Introduction**

Rachel Gotlieb and Michael Prokopow

True Nordic: How Scandinavia Influenced Design in Canada has been many years in the making and represents the first exhibition and publication devoted to the subject. This project reflects our ongoing engagement with the design history of Canada and, in particular, the stimuli the design cultures of Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden exerted on the country after the end of the First World War. We have long been asking questions about the material and cultural consequences in Canada of the emigration of Scandinavian peoples and about the movement of Scandinavian ideas and objects to this country.

Practical, humane in orientation, and perceived as aesthetically refined and socially progressive, Scandinavian design and its vernacular interpretations had wide appeal in Canada. Admired equally by social and economic elites and enjoying enormous appeal amongst the growing middle classes with their suburban dreams, the modern look of Scandinavian design reflected the optimistic spirit of the nation. With its broad and distinctive stylistic character, Scandinavian design replaced in public affection any number of popular styles. The genial and modest aesthetics of Nordic forms challenged the streamlined and pyramidal massing that characterized art moderne (or what was eventually named “art deco”) and offered a viable alternative to historicist European forms. Likewise, it presented something promisingly different to the traditional pioneer aesthetics of rustic Canadiana and the contemporaneous Bauhaus-informed International Style, defined, as it was, by geometric and rectilinear shapes and narrow materiality.

As a geographically and culturally amalgamating rubric in use since the 1930s by critics and design commentators on both sides of the Atlantic, “Scandinavian design,” is often discussed and understood as homogeneous. However, while popular thinking about Nordic design might focus on the prevalence of blond wood, the frequent presence of curvilinear forms, and the inclination on the part of clients to supply their own regional craft product, and one-offs, as well as objects that all somehow express the spirit of Scandinavian design. Omissions have been made, sometimes due to space limitations and other times oversight. For this we take full responsibility.

The objects in the exhibition represent the work of known designers, craftspeople, and artisans. Other objects are anonymous. Many objects have been borrowed from institutions or have been loaned from private collections, and some—in all honesty—were found in yard sales and thrift stores. In every instance, however, the works on exhibit demonstrate what we see as the characteristics of form and materiality marking Nordic and Scandinavian design. For whether the object was custom-made for clients, mass produced at a time when all things Nordic and modern were the rage, or fashioned by artisans for whom there existed an appreciation of Scandinavian aesthetics in the context of Canadian design practice, the objects selected constitute pieces of evidence in the argument the exhibition makes about the role Scandinavian design played in Canada. Primarily domestic in focus and sensitive to the economic hierarchies that attend the making and preservation of things, True Nordic offers a considered narrative about Canadian society and its relationship with a complex and imported visual history across nearly ten decades of historical and social change.

We are grateful to the generous lenders of the exhibition, who include both designers and collectors, many of whom are scholars themselves and who have shared their knowledge, particularly Allan Collier, Callie Stacey, Rosalind Poppell, Diane Charbonneau, Noel Guyomarché, John David Lawrence, David Weir, David Allison, Daina Augaitis, and Ian Thom. Credit and thanks are also due to Tara Akić and Loryssa Quattrococchi for their assistance with the exhibition. Last, but certainly not least, we express profound gratitude to the Gardiner Museum for producing and circulating this exhibition and publication with the support from Canadian Heritage, Carol Weinbaum and the Jack Weinbaum Family Foundation, and the McLean Foundation, instilling the confidence, means, and technical expertise to accomplish True Nordic.
Design ideas and stylistic trends have long circumnavigated the global marketplace through printed media, education, the movement of people, and the trade of actual commercial goods. Scandinavian-styled objects—generally understood as modern and functional, made in natural materials, with gentle curves, rough or smooth surfaces, and often though not always, evoking imagery from nature—arrived in Canada in the last century, reflecting these disseminating forces. Émigré artisans, public exhibitions, décor magazines, commercial importing, as well as local makers and manufacturers, each contributed to this new visual culture. As this brief overview reveals, these currents cannot be mapped in an easy chronology but reflect a more complex and nuanced history that overlaps and intersects.

Defining Scandinavian Design

The concept of what is called Scandinavian design originated in Sweden and Finland at international exhibitions in the late 1920s and 1930s, developing further after the Second World War, and expanded to include the nations of Denmark and Norway. Simply put, these four countries, sharing a common northern Germanic-based dialect (apart from Finland), geography, and social democratic system of government, united to construct a generic and umbrella image to promote the commercial trade of northern Europe. As a result, the first manifestation of Scandinavian design came to embody unpretentious decorative and functional objects that illustrated some, but not necessarily all, of the inherent attributes: skilled, vernacular craftsmanship; organic imagery; stained, oiled, or hand-rubbed woods (initially cheaper and more available than tubular metal and plastic); webbed upholstery; lustrous silver and metal; nubby woven fabrics; and monochromatic pottery often articulated in biomorphic forms and shapes. (figure 1)

This focus on natural materials and expressive imagery was often referred to as a warming of modernism and offered a palatable alternative to the rational platonic abstraction of the International Style. While this look continued in the 1960s, Scandinavian styling also broadened with the application of advanced moulded plastic technology. Playful pop and space-age motifs that invaded Western visual culture also increased the scope and repertoire of Scandinavian aesthetics, especially in housewares, printed fabrics, and seating.

Scandinavian Émigrés Arrive

In 2011 Danish design historian Jørn Guldberg asked if the concept of Scandinavian design in the United States applied more to the people who made it than to the physical and functional qualities of things. For Canada, the answer is people. Between the mid-1920s and early 1930s with the
Swedish-born, Rudolph “Rudy” Renzius came from a family of metalsmiths specializing in wrought iron, copper, and brass. He advanced his training at the Georg Jensen smithy and with pewter master Jut Andersen. Setting in Toronto in 1930, the six-foot blond Swede often dressed in an artist smock and bow ribbon tie, much impressing his clientele. Known for his simply designed pewter hollow ware and jewellery, Renzius also taught vocational crafts at summer camps and schools and wrote instruction pamphlets on silver and wood, which emphasized the strong link between craft and culture. The populist booster of handicraft among the first generation of artisans from Sweden and Denmark who settled across the country to take advantage of its economic opportunities. These artisans independently shaped its craft scene for the next half century, stimulating a regional and national marketplace for handcrafted domestic goods. More importantly, they instilled in Canadians the importance of home crafts—learning by doing—what he preached, creating a series of patterns based upon the landscape of Ontario’s Georgian Bay for the use of a thousand, to contextualize Canada’s weak craft tradition.

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Cultural Agencies and Retailers Play a Role

As the first wave of Scandinavian émigrés cultivated the taste for contemporary craft in the postwar era, Canadian cultural institutions and the federal government developed new policies and programs, favouring especially exhibitions, to develop a Canadian design culture. More often than not, they turned to Scandinavian principles as a model but privileged industrial design over craft in an attempt to redirect the war industries to the domestic market.17 In 1946 Donald Buchanan, then editor of Canadian Art, who, two years later, became the first director of the National Industrial Design Committee,18 organized the proselytizing exhibition Design for Use in Canadian Products. Based upon the “good design” exhibitions held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York City, the show included A. J. Donahue’s plywood and web-seated chair, illustrated on the cover of the exhibition’s pamphlet, and moulded plywood furniture by Waclaw Czerwinski and Hilary Stykolt from Kitchener, Ontario, and Mouldcraft Plywoods from Vancouver. (cat. 28–29)

When they returned in 1934, Kjeld opened Dykelands Pottery, but the work was so demanding that Erica’s assistance was required. She developed and perfected the glaze recipes—reportedly in the thousands—painted and hand-modelled “goofus” figurines (a quirky hybrid creature between a horse, sheep, and giraffe) as well as mermaids in sea greens and earthy browns, which reference the Scandinavian folklore tradition. (figure 4) Kjeld threw the pots on the potter’s wheel barefoot, to the delight of the media and the National Film Board, which produced several films of the Deichmann family pottery.19 (figure 5 and cat. 5–11)

Ernst Lorenzens, a Dane, attended University of New Brunswick’s forestry program and married Alma, who was of French-Acadian heritage. After the Second World War, they started the New Brunswick Pottery, and in 1949, subsidized by a patron of a major brickworks factory, moved to Lants, Nova Scotia. Similar to the Deichmanns, Ernst sported a beret while operating the wheel, and Alma completed the surface decoration on their functional pottery. (cat. 65) The Lorenzens became known for their some two hundred hand-formed ceramic mushroom replicas, based upon the sketches they made when they went foraging. Mycologists collected them for their scientific accuracy.20

As Montreal was the centre for Nordic-inspired weaving and silver, Canada’s Atlantic provinces led in Scandinavian studio pottery, thanks to two rival potteries operated by husband and wife partnerships Kjeld and Erica Deichmann and Ernst and Alma Lorenzen. Danish émigré Kjeld Deichmann initially resided in Saskatchewan and met his wife, Erica, daughter of a Danish Canadian Lutheran pastor. They moved to the countryside in Moss Glen, New Brunswick, but with the discovery of local clays want to Denmark, so that Kjeld could apprentice with potter Axel Bruhl. Since the pottery was small, there was no place for Erica to work; instead she learned weaving—considered more appropriate at the time for a young wife—from two sisters living nearby.


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furnishings by Nanna and Jørgen Ditzel and domestic metalware by Henning Koppel.12

However, by far the most influential exhibition to fuel the appetite for Nordic housewares was Design in Scandinavia, which toured twenty-four institutions across North America between 1954 and 1957, including the ROM, the National Gallery with the Ottawa Design Centre, and the Vancouver Art Gallery.13 Presenting seven hundred products from Denmark, Finland, Norway, and Sweden under four major themes—“Good Articles for Everyday Use,” “Living Tradition,” “Form and Material,” and “Scandinavians at Home”—the missive was clear: the northern European countries of Scandinavia acted in concert to design modern, democratic, humane, and affordable household objects.14 Various Canadian newspapers got the message and used the exhibition as a foil to compare Scandinavian and Canadian design. For the most part, the match up did not fare well. Toronto Star writer Gordon McCaffrey put the blame on Canadian consumers’ lack of taste, observing that Scandinavian mass-produced household furniture and ornaments were of “simple design and classic beauty,” while Canadian manufacturers were “churning out what our gift shop dealers agree is nothing but junk.”15 Similarly, the Globe and Mail’s arts reporter Pearl McCarthy questioned why Canada “with materials and talents have no comparable cultural expression in design of everyday things.”16

In conjunction with the exhibition the major department stores Eaton’s and Simpson’s organized their own special events and displays. Eaton’s full-page advertisement of designs by Tapio Wirkkala and Georg Jensen pitched Scandinavian design as a “fresh, functional approach to comfortable, modern living,” very much reflecting the marketing copy of the exhibition itself.17 (figure 7) Boutique shops Shelagh’s in Toronto and Pego’s in Montreal also promoted the exhibition.18 Shelagh Vansittart had direct ties to Scandinavian design through her Norwegian husband, John Stéen, who made rope and oiled wood furniture.19 Pego McNaughton was married to the rising industrial designer Jacques Gallun, giving her access to contemporary design. Following the exhibition, more niche stores opened, notably Georg Jensen in 1957 on Toronto’s fashionable Bloor Street. (figure 6) Latvian-born architect Janis Kravis founded Karelia (named after a region that borders Finland and Russia), an importing business for Marimekko fabrics and housewares. He eventually set up stores in Toronto, Edmonton, and Vancouver.20 (figure 8) Oscana Interiors in Regina, Bonli Interiors in Saskatoon, and Guthrie’s Mobilia in Calgary also sold Scandinavian imports.21 The mushrooming of Scandinavian retailers in city centres paved the way for the Swedish chain Ikea to unveil its first North American store in 1976 in Vancouver.

The Printed Media Have a Word

Between the 1940s and 1960s, décor magazines focused on how Scandinavian-styled objects delivered “refined” and “gracious” living, painting a picturesque view of the Scandinavian lifestyle and reflecting the rhetoric of the day.22 According to Mandel Sprachman’s florid account: “The conditions that mold Scandinavian furniture design are similar to our own. They live in a northern climate with long winters; they live in apartments or small houses (somewhat like our subdivision houses, only smaller); they raise healthy children in a relaxed family atmosphere; and they have an inherent liking for the out of doors, summer and winter.”23 By 1958 Margit Bennett from Canadian Homes and Gardens proclaimed: “The greatest single influence is still Scandinavian, and now it has put its light, warm look on everything.”24 Style editor Patricia Lamont was able to distinguish Scandinavian originals from Canadian reproductions “with simulated hand-rubbed finish,” but she had no issue with the Canadian “versions,” instead congratulating the manufacturers for being “alert” and “acknowledging their debt with such identifying tags as Scan-Mor, Danebridge, Copenhagen and Helsinki.”25

In the 1960s, the Telegram and the Star celebrated Canadian “copy-cat” furniture manufacturers for beating Scandinavians at their own game, and “fighting fire with fire.” The ten-year love affair with Danish furniture imports, which according to Len Shifrin had increased by 700 percent, was over, thanks to manufacturers like Punch in Montreal and Imperial Furniture Manufacturing in Ontario.26 Canadian manufacturer William Baltman agreed: “We took the Scandinavian simplicity and developed our own designs to fit it.”27

Baltman’s audacious claim and the media’s support are indicative of how commercial manufacturers across the country recognized the potential opportunities of Scandinavian design and branding, adding gestures of the signature curves and blond woods to their otherwise rustic repertoire of neo-colonial and faux Chippendale furniture designs. Some companies purchased the licence for them, and many more did not. For example, the German family Krug manufactured at their eponymous factory in Kitchener, Ontario, a sturdy ladder-back chair distinguished by a Nordic knot in the centre of each rail, a V-shaped stretcher, and, the best touch of all, a carved horse crowning each stile. The design originated in 1930s with the American manufacturer Ramsever under the name Viking Oak, and reveals the transposition of Nordic styling, albeit rather than modern.28 (figure 9)

For its “Scandinavian feeling,” Canadian media praised Jan Kyppers’s line of residential and household furniture manufactured by Imperial.29 (cat. 27) Kyppers, a Dutch émigré who came to Canada to join the factory as its lead designer, deliberately referenced Scandinavian design, not only because it catered to market demand, but also he believed it was appropriate to Canada. A decade later, as partner of Toronto’s leading industrial design firm Dudas Kyppers Rowan, he participated in a trade mission, visiting Europe and Scandinavian furniture plants and came to the conclusion that the Swedish use of softwood species, such as spruce and Jack pine would be suitable for Canada as well as their strategy to market exports as a co-operative.30 Recently, Jern Guldborg remarked to a Canadian audience, “[to any Scandinavian], Kyppers’s Canadian Scandinavian furniture looks very familiar, and yet, no exact Scandinavian model or prototype does exist. Only one conspicuous detail reveals that the [Skolian] chair is not Scandinavian: the screw on the back.”31

This is not to say, however, that Canadian manufacturers only copied. Far from it. There were many Canadian designers especially, after the 1960s, who skillfully interrogated the aesthetics only to market it as their own, including both Koen de Winter and Michel Dallaire. De Winter, a Belgian designer working in Sweden, joined the Montreal-based Danesco to run its design studio focusing on housewares, and incorporated the bold and simple shapes of brightly coloured plastics emulating the spirit of the kitchen products made by Kosti in Sweden and Dansk in Denmark. (cat. 70) Dallaire designed lighting for Sverige (Swedish for Sweden), a Quebec-based lighting manufacturer that was eventually

Canadian Designers and Manufacturers

Adopt and Interpret

Images

6 Georg Jensen Store, Bloor Street West, Toronto, c. 1957. Panda Associates fonds, Canadian Architectural Archives, University of Calgary, PAN 57051

7 Eaton’s advertisement promoting Scandinavian Design, The Globe and Mail, November 2, 1954. © Sears Canada

8 Karelia store interior in Vancouver, 1970s. Image courtesy of Janis Kravis

14
15
Many important furniture designers arrived in the 1950s, including Sigrid Bulo-Hube, a rising star with an impeccable educational pedigree, who moved to Montreal to work as an interior designer at Eaton’s. A graduate of the Royal Danish Academy, Bulo acted as design director, while Gunnar, the engineer, supervised the slip-casting and kiln firing. Initially they operated the pottery with their six children outside of Toronto, which made for colourful editorial copy. Also shaping the ceramic field was Folmer Hansen, who apprenticed as a cabinetmaker with his father and attended the School of Arts and Crafts in Copenhagen under Hans Salmenhaara. In 1951, when he was a young boy, and learned traditional cabinetmaking. In 1953, he moved back to Denmark to further hone his furniture-making skills and there he designed the Ribbon Chair (now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art). Returning to Canada the following decade, he opened a store currently known as Inform Interiors to retial his softly curved upholstered furniture under the name Bensens. Similarly, Christian Sorensen apprenticed as a cabinetmaker with his father and attended the School of Arts and Crafts in Copenhagen under Hans Wegner. Moving to Montreal in 1956, he formed a partnership with Jacques Guillon & Associates, collaborating on corporate interiors and later designing office furniture for leading Canadian manufacturers. Sorensen further made his mark in Canada, serving as director of Sheridan College School of Crafts and Design, outside of Toronto. Danish-born Leif Jacobsen opened a custom mill shop in Toronto in 1952 and was soon subcontracting furniture for leading American furniture manufacturers Knoll and Herman Miller, as well as producing his own limited-edition furniture with fellow Dane Svend Nielsen. It is due to the efforts of these transposed Danoes located in the major cities of Montreal, Toronto, and Vancouver that Canadian residential and corporate furniture became decidedly modern in the last century.

In the 1960s, three Scandinavian-born and trained textile artists gave the fledgling Canadian fibre arts—textiles as fine art rather than functional craft—a significant boost. Swedish artist Helena Hernmarck moved to Montreal in 1965 and, for the next decade, concentrated on figurative imagery drawn from photography in her loomed textiles before moving on to the United States. Hernmarck, the first president of the Metal Arts Guild of Ontario, who handled commissions from such important modern designers as Arne Jacobsen—clearly shaped her practice. After the Second World War, many Canadian-born artisans and designers took advantage of the peace conditions to travel abroad to study with renowned Scandinavian masters and returned home with these skills, proving, yet again how Scandinavian design came to Canada through the movement of people. Some benefited from travel scholarships offered by the private Canadian-Scandinavian Foundation founded in 1950 as well as newly offered government artist grants. Harold Stacey, the first president of the Metal Arts Guild of Ontario, who initially trained with Rudolph Renzus at Northern Vocational School, attended workshops under Swedish silversmith Baron Erik Fleming at Rhode Island School of Design in 1949. Quebec jeweller and goldsmith Maurice Brault learned enamelling at J. Tostrup, the pre-eminent silver firm in Norway. Canadian graduate of Alberta College of Art, completed postgraduate studies in 1954 at the Swedish School of Arts and Crafts in Stockholm, while David Ross from Winnipeg attended the State Arts and Crafts School in Gothenburg, Sweden. Ross worked in small potteries in Denmark where he met his future partner, Folmer Hansen. Jean Cartier, who served as design director of Céramique de Beauche in Quebec, spent a year in the late 1950s in Stockholm, perfecting his study of glazes in the studio of Stig Lindberg. Similarly, Canadian potters, such as Walter Dranik and Mayta Markson, studied at Cranbrook Academy under the tutelage of Finnish artist Maija Grotell. Canadian craft and design history owes much to Donald Lloyd McInerny and Ruth Gowdy McKinley, an American couple who studied industrial design and pottery respectively at Alfred University in upstate New York. In 1962, on a Fulbright scholarship, they wrote a design book in Finland. Donald discovered the humanist approach at architecture Alvar Aalto, and furniture designers, Yrjö Kukkapuro and Esko Pajamies, while his wife, Ruth Gowdy McInerny, a functionalist potter, visited the ceramics firm Arabia and other potteries. Ylikalli Salmenhaaro a long-time potter at Arabia was a close friend who had recently retired, McInerny’s precise forms glazed thinly to accentuate the shape reference Salmenhaaro’s influential work. The McInernys purchased by Luxe of Norway (famous for its anglophone lamp). Keith Muller and Michael Stewart (whose father-in-law, the famed Finnish architect Viljo Revell, designed Toronto City Hall) co-founded the furniture company Ambiant Systems in 1968. They excelled at moulded plywood stacking furniture, employing Paul Epp, who returned from Sweden in 1972, after apprenticing with James Krenov. Ambiant also manufactured Thomas Lambs’ Steamer chair which became the first woman to join the Association of Canadian Industrial Designers, exhibited furniture at the Kaber exibition. Niels Bendtsen emigrated from Denmark to Vancouver in 1951, when he was a young boy, and learned traditional cabinetmaking from his father. In 1972 he moved back to Denmark to further hone his furniture-making skills and there he designed the Ribbon Chair (now in the collection of the Museum of Modern Art). Returning to Canada the following decade, he opened a store currently known as Inform Interiors to retial his softly curved upholstered furniture under the name Bensens. Similarly, Christian Sorensen apprenticed as a cabinetmaker with his father and attended the School of Arts and Crafts in Copenhagen under Hans Wegner. Moving to Montreal in 1956, he formed a partnership with Jacques Guillon & Associates, collaborating on corporate interiors and later designing office furniture for the studio of John and Kirsten Becker outside of Copenhagen, who handled commissions from such important modern designers as Anna Jacobsen—clearly shaped her practice. In her woven tapestries, Swannie often evokes folklore imagery or the natural landscape, which she crafts into brilliant abstracted fields of colour. (cat. 95).
With the increasing circulation of people and exchange of ideas, it is not surprising that Canadians made their mark in Scandinavia. Notably, Roman Bartkiw, exceptional for his versatility in both studio pottery and glass, introduced Finn Lynggaard to hot glass when the Dane visited Toronto in 1970 to give an artist workshop on pottery, his original métier. (cat. 62) Bartkiw then went to Denmark, on an Ontario Arts Council grant, where he solidified his friendship with Lynggaard. “Roman put on a one-man glass show for the Danes,” according to Tactile, the Canadian craft magazine. “People jammed the studio, eager to see and learn from Roman’s instruction and demonstration, and to participate in “a happening.” Thanks in part to Bartkiw’s influence, Lynggaard is now dubbed the father of studio glass in Denmark, and his repertoire of glass apples and bowls bear a striking resemblance to Bartkiw’s artwork. 65

The cross-cultural exchanges among Scandinavian and Canadian craftmakers and industrial designers continue. For...
example, Pamela Ritchie researched traditional Norwegian caft tilgjæt textile called Bunadstil in Oslo and Telemark in the late 1970s and early 1980s, and has been teaching jewellery and metalworking at Nova Scotia College of Art and Design (NSCAD) University in Halifax for over thirty years. She makes her own contemporary adaptation of this technique, stripping the coils (known in Norwegian as kruser) to emulate and consume Scandinavian design.

In industrial design, Canadians are so well versed in the Scandinavian idiom that they successfully participate in the Stockholm furniture fair, sponsored by the Swedish government and other Scandinavian governments. Patty Johnson has a chair produced by David Design in Sweden, a company that practices the design tenets of “understated, conscious, humane, comfortable and modern,” if its website is to be believed. (cat. 46) The Danish manufacturer Would lighting the collection of Toronto-based MSDS Studio in keeping with its design mission, “simply anchored in our Nordic design heritage.” (cat. 122)

**Endnotes**


3. Artisanal glass made in Canada was mainly introduced by Europeans from Czechoslovakia, Hungary and Italy in the latter half of the twentieth century.


5. Renzius’s famous students include Douglas Boyd and Andrew Fossil. See Anne Barnes, Ornament and Object (Boston Mills, ON: Boston Mills Press, 1997), 16–17.


27 Eaton’s advertisement, Globe and Mail, November 2, 1954. Eaton’s also sold wood dining sets by Danish American-based designer, Jens Risom, manufactured locally by Guildhall Cabinet Shops. Simpson’s placed a prominent advertisement, the day prior to the exhibit opening in Globe and Mail, October 18, 1954.


29 Gotlieb and Golden, Design in Canada, 252.


34 Bennett, Canadian Homes and Gardens, March 1956, 1.


39 Lamont, Canadian Homes and Gardens, September 1954, 20. As pointed out by Virginia Wright, in the 1940s Imperial Furniture carried a furniture line called “Imperial Soarin,” after the Finnish architects and designers Eelik and Erno Saarinen, who taught at Cranbrook Academy in Michigan. See Virginia Wright, Modern Furniture in Canada 1920–1970 (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 80–81.


42 Gotlieb and Golden, Design in Canada, 103, 110–111, 229.


46 Sigrun Bülows-Hübe was the older sister of renowned jewellery designer Vivianna Torun Bülows-Hübe, who remained in Denmark.


50 Gotlieb and Golden, Design in Canada, 250–51.

51 Ibid., 243.


54 Rachel Gotlieb, “Suzanne Swannie and Danish Modernism in Canada.”

55 The Canadian-Scandinavian Foundation is still active and travel scholarships to Denmark, Iceland, Finland, Norway, and Sweden are available.


61 Crawford, Studio Ceramics in Canada, 13–14.


63 Crawford, A Fine Line, 206.

64 “Glass a Canadian in Denmark,” Tactile, March–April (1974).


66 Pamela Ritchie, email message to author, February 28, 2016.

The history of design in Canada is a largely undocumented and undiscussed topic in design studies.”

Anyone browsing the August 1964 issue of Canadian Interiors would likely have noticed the considerable coverage of the XIII Milan Triennale and its theme of leisure. The design fair, established in 1923, was arguably the world’s most important summary of current trends in industrial design and a platform for the promotion of the design cultures of participating nations. The magazine’s reporting of the event took two forms: a harsh critique of the organization of the international fair—labelled a “fiasco” by reporter Madge Phillips—and a lavishly illustrated, highly complimentary photo essay about Canada’s two official entries, a “northern cottage” and a formally curated display of industrial products. The juxtaposition of the editor’s criticism of the state of international design at the fair and enthusiastic praise of Canada’s contributions was striking. Although some degree of favouritism could rightly be expected from the leading national design magazine reporting about Canadian design at an international fair, the significance of the report was that it adjudged the country’s official design installation to be first rate and the aesthetic and material vocabulary of the pavilion to be a brilliant embodiment of the country.

Designed by Ottawa architects Paul Schoeler and Brian Barkham, the pavilion was unabashedly modern. A rectangular box that was completely glazed on two sides, it captured the quintessentially progressive and modest character of Canada and the important role that its northern geography played in the fashioning of the national temperament. Comprised of a large living room, a compact kitchen, a screened-in porch at the front and two bedrooms, the cabin attempted to evoke, in the densely wooded gardens of the Milan fair site, the idea of Canada. In similar ways, the interiors—the furnishings and their arrangement—presented an appealing tableau of national domesticity. The vision of Jacques St-Cyr (a designer with the Government of Canada’s exhibition committee), the cabin was both stylish and comfortable. As the reviewer for Canadian Interiors explained, the character of the cabin was “a perfect combination of Canadiana and leisure.”

Indeed, much was made about how the cabin’s architecture and its decoration captured the character of the country. Significantly, however, the furnishings in the cottage were, in large part, created by Danish emigrants to Canada, and other items, broadly modernist in form, likewise exhibited characteristics of contemporary design from Denmark, Sweden, Norway, and Finland. There was both ideological and cultural logic in the aesthetic language on display in the cottage, and the
transposition of Nordic design sensibilities to a Canadian setting (even one staged for commercial and advertising sake) made sense. The vast popularity of what had, since the mid-1950s, been branded as “Scandinavian design,” and the meanings attached to the idea of Scandinavian society and its design culture, were viewed empathetically in Canada.

In these ways, Canada’s cottage in Milan represented a potent study in the semantic operations of material culture. The objects on display—the work of skilled artisans and designers—encapsulated and exemplified the traditions of making that were closely associated with the histories and practices of Scandinavian craft and design, and at the same time, evinced a reflexively benevolent Canadian interpretation of the same. The published photographs of the furnishings in the cottage’s living room reveal a tonal and material character that is referentially Nordic. (figure 2)

A pair of tall “simple modern” lamps—one light in colour and the other dark—each with tapering shades of spun nylon by Karen Bulow cover the porch sits Hugh Spencer’s Clairtone Project G stereo designed in 1963. In both cases, the objects evoke a mood that hovers between the casual and the chic: the distinctive shape of Noxon’s fireplace as much embodies current trends in Swedish and Danish metal fireplace design (take, for example, Stig Lindberg’s remarkable enamelled stoves for Gustavsberg) as the excitement of the Apollo missions and the lure of Southern Californian living. As for Spencer’s radically innovative stereo—its elegant coffin-like rosewood veneered central volume and its projecting chrome-plated arms holding fixed orb speakers—although deemed “a little citified” by the commentator for Canadian Interiors and “expensive for a cottage” was likewise singled out as “good Canadian design.” And “as such,” the reviewer noted, “belongs in a design exhibition.”

Thus the Canadian cottage in Milan demonstrated the confidence of the nation—in ways similar to most other industrialized Western democracies—witnessed and experimented with a variety of stylistic movements and taste trajectories. These constituted challenges to the hold that modernism had, in all its focussed hegemonic variation, on design culture in North America. Indeed, the 1960s saw significant changes in the design streams—architectonic, biomorphic, and rational—that had defined the modernist movement since approximately 1920.

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It makes sense, therefore, that the conditions of Canada’s northern and modest character could be understood as being Scandinavian in character, or at least owing a considerable debt to the Nordic world.

In the middle of the room on a circular floor plate filled with crushed white rocks stands Court Naxon’s free-standing conceal and rotating enamelled fireplace from his family firm Metalsmiths in Toronto. Against the interior window overlooking the porch sits Hugh Spencer’s Clairtone Project G stereo designed in 1963. In both cases, the objects evoke a mood that hovers between the casual and the chic: the distinctive shape of Noxon’s fireplace as much embodies current trends in Swedish and Danish metal fireplace design (take, for example, Stig Lindberg’s remarkable enamelled stoves for Gustavsberg) as the excitement of the Apollo missions and the lure of Southern Californian living. As for Spencer’s radically innovative stereo—its elegant coffin-like rosewood veneered central volume and its projecting chrome-plated arms holding fixed orb speakers—although deemed “a little citified” by the commentator for Canadian Interiors and “expensive for a cottage” was likewise singled out as “good Canadian design.” And “as such,” the reviewer noted, “belongs in a design exhibition.”

Thus the Canadian cottage in Milan demonstrated the confidence of the nation. The aesthetic language of the wood and glass structure and its simultaneously casual, thoughtful, and Scandinavian-inspired contents communicated much about the nation’s character and self-awareness at a particularly significant and optimistic point in its history as preparations for its centennial anniversary in 1967 were well under way. In looking to advertise Canada as a particular type of country, the organizers of the Canadian cottage purposely linked the nation to Scandinavia and its topographical, social, and cultural affinities. As much authentically earnest as ideally staged, the presentation of contemporary Canada as a legatee of Nordic-Scandinavian design sensibilities constituted a powerful declaration of identity—aesthetic and otherwise.

It makes sense, therefore, that the conditions of Canada’s northern and modest character could be understood as being Scandinavian in character, or at least owing a considerable debt to the Nordic world.
The ideological and affectual visual shifts that occurred in North American design culture after 1960 meant that whatever unity and coherence that had existed, in what can be called the style culture, was diluted and eventually transformed by the many consequences was a change in the status of things purporting to be other things. While the copying of styles and forms was a feature of mid-20th century design, there were significant differences between the way things were produced and sold in Canada and some other countries. The rise of postmodern design sensibilities in Canada—defined as much about forward-looking things and backward-looking things.3

The rise of postmodern design sensibilities in Canada—limited in scope in certain ways and less ideologically contentious than in some other countries—resulted in the flattening of what had functioned as a hierarchical privileging of modernist stylistic culture. It was replaced by a visual and material landscape not only of varied forms and semiotic images, inference, and memorable tag lines—promoted a culture of irony, pastiche, and relativity. It was, to be sure, the style culture, was diluted and eventually transformed by the many consequences was a change in the status of things purporting to be other things. While the copying of styles and forms was a feature of mid-20th century design, there were significant differences between the way things were produced and sold in Canada and some other countries. The rise of postmodern design sensibilities in Canada—defined as much about forward-looking things and backward-looking things.3

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And such was certainly the case with Canadian furniture manufacturers producing domestic goods taking often-ubiquitous stylistic cues from contemporary Scandinavian furniture design (including affordable and abundant exported products from Denmark). This shift—tied, of course, to larger structural adjustments to the Canadian economy—meant that the long-established patterns of artisanal, craft, and small-batch production (or those specialized ateliers, workshops, studios, and factories that were responsible for the creation of significant objects tied to Scandinavian design principles) were required to adapt. The privileged popularity of Scandinavian imported and locally made objects, whether luxury wares or domestic goods, changed in status with the onslaught of both decently and indifferently made domestic interpretations and copies of Scandinavian designs.

Scandinavian-inspired Canadian design flourished in the years after 1965 because of its cultural associations and the social consequences of owning it. It was, to be sure, the style culture, was diluted and eventually transformed by the many consequences was a change in the status of things purporting to be other things. While the copying of styles and forms was a feature of mid-20th century design, there were significant differences between the way things were produced and sold in Canada and some other countries. The rise of postmodern design sensibilities in Canada—defined as much about forward-looking things and backward-looking things.3

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The Canadian experience—domestic and otherwise—Stewart’s furniture design (including affordable and abundant exported products from Scandinavia, and responded accordingly to consumer desire existed for furniture that looked as though it was imported from Scandinavia, and responded accordingly by making furniture that copied and evoked such precedents. Indeed, so popular was Nordic design in Canada with its myriad positive implications, that simply referencing Scandinavian had public allure and financial promise. In an attempt to the outsized Scandinavia and Swedish manufacturers purporting to be other things. While the copying of styles and forms was a feature of mid-20th century design, there were significant differences between the way things were produced and sold in Canada and some other countries. The rise of postmodern design sensibilities in Canada—defined as much about forward-looking things and backward-looking things.3

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For many makers, the direct translation, (possibly) copying, of Scandinavian styles represented a rejection of the safe traditional styles that had been practised in Canada and stimulated the thinking and actions of studio practitioners across the country in the throes of a vibrant culture of craft activity.4

And in similar ways, for example, Toronto companies such as Jeff Furniture, Deltcraft, and the R. Huber Company of Toronto and forms had always been practised in Canada, the advent of significant objects tied to Scandinavian design principles) were required to adapt. The privileged popularity of Scandinavian imported and locally made objects, whether luxury wares or domestic goods, changed in status with the onslaught of both decently and indifferently made domestic interpretations and copies of Scandinavian designs.

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of character. No wonder then that designers, artisans, and makers operating at all scales of production and across the spectrum of function and materiality actively referenced the forms of Nordic design, and participated in the popularized reinforcement of ideas about identity and character and its expression through objects. Barborcraf, for example, the woodworking firm from Levis, Quebec, established in 1922, produced economically priced housewares that looked to Nordic and Scandinavian forms. The company’s maple serving trays were dead ringers for the celebrated designs of Jens Quistgaard for Dansk, and its line of elongated and tapering candlesticks were in keeping with prevailing stylistic trends from both Denmark and Sweden. (cat. 84–85) Jewellers such as Gilles Vidal and Robert Larin of Montreal, for example, were thoroughly familiar with studio trends in Scandinavia. (cat. 60) Larin’s practice in particular was heavily influenced by the work of his Finnish counterparts—Björn Weckström of Lapponia, among others—demonstrated a visual language that communicated an image of the nation as a place aware of itself, its affinities, and its character.21

For many makers, the direct translation, (possibly) copying, of Scandinavian products was simply part of the national enthusiasm for the social effects of good design in the home.22

now a quaint British form that had residual currency in certain parts of Canada. Fashioned of a boldly block-printed cotton depicting tulips in brown, taupe, and bright orange, the reliable if somewhat mundane object embodied the reach of Scandinavian design’s national popularity. Similarly, “Nordic Furniture” of Markdale, Ontario, manufactured all kinds of furniture—coffee tables, hutches, sofas, lounge chairs, and dining-room suites—that looked passably like the seemingly endless imported pieces of “Danish Modern” but which, apparently without consequence, never quite measured up to the spirit of their original and would-be progenitors. And in Burnaby, British Columbia, a small industrial firm operating under the name of Jakobsen Industries offered plastic versions of a famous two-piece planter by the Finnish ceramics firm Arabia.23 Moulded in polystyrene, coming in different sizes, and modified slightly from Finnish designer Richard Lind’s 1964 porcelain original, the Jakobsen planters were produced in a range of colours, including chocolate brown. (cat. 80)

From the early 1970s onwards and arguably into the early 1990s, a popularized Scandinavian style was favoured by middle-class Canada (not to mention many other places as well, but for different reasons).24 Canadian furniture and household product companies manufactured Scandinavian-looking goods because of consumer desire. The Toronto firm of A. Jensen & Son, operating under the trademark “Danish Custom Furniture”, produced high-quality teak dining-room furniture in forms typical of the period. The flat-spindled chairs were slightly organic in form with their high tapered back and curvaceous legs. The waven upholstery was bright, striped, and nubby, typical of Canadian translations of Scandinavian styles of the 1970s. Overall, this largely earnest culture of interpretation represented a vacuolated world of mass-produced objects that conveyed the style and tenor of objects made on the other side of the world, but which did so on Canadian terms.

Craftspeople also looked to Nordic precedent for inspiration. Lidded, wheel-thrown casseroles with autumnal palettes were all the rage, as were graduated pottery canisters and small cork-topped containers for spices. Woven shaggy carpets were crafted in brightly coloured yarns and see-through abstract wall hangings in all shades of beige, grey, and brown became favoured decorative accessories. Weaver Marion Smith of Vancouver, British Columbia, expertly made Rya-like wall hangings and rugs in her West Vancouver studio designed by Arthur Erickson. (cat. 47–48) Ontario potter Jack Herman fashioned carefully incised bowls and small jars with handmade wooden lids in palettes of soft turquoise and grey and monochromatic tapered bottles—in pale blue-greens and sand brown and beige—with teak stoppers, likewise, handmade. (cat. 49) Jewellers such as Gilles Vidal and Robert Larin of Montreal, for example, were thoroughly familiar with studio trends in Scandinavia. (cat. 60) Larin’s practice in particular was heavily influenced by the work of his Finnish counterparts—Björn Weckström of Lapponia, among others—and he fashioned accomplished studio pieces, including heavy bracelets, rings, pendants, and cutlinks, which topographically evoked glaciers, tundra, and the occasional moon crater.25

Indeed, across the material and cultural landscape of the 1970s and 1980s, the taste for Scandinavian styling continued to dominate. There were always competing trends for home décor and for the style of everyday objects. And while the mass character of the appeal may have come at the expense of the cultures of making that celebrated the craftsperson, the core values that people saw exemplified in Nordic-inspired things remained important because they seemed appropriate to the conditions of life in Canada.

“The notoriously difficult question of national and regional design styles,” contends historian Kjetil Fallan, “has long haunted design history and has taken on renewed importance in the wake of the massive increase in international trade and global production and consumption networks over the last several decades.”26 Fallan’s insightful comments—written in 2012 in a radically revisionist essay about Scandinavian design—can easily be applied to Canada.

Ever since colonial Canada’s popular outing at the Great Exhibition of 1851 in London, where slabs of wood, taxidermal mouse heads, and impressive clumps of ore dominated, questions have been asked as to how best to represent the land, the people, and the evolving political and social order. The Canadian design on display in Milan—as sincere as it was theatrical—presented an image of a modern country that embraced the realities of its topography and seasonality. Eschewing the more bombastic symbols of statehood, it demonstrated a visual language that communicated an image of the nation as a place aware of itself, its affinities, and its character.27

But negotiations of identity are rarely finished. Each generation of politicians, makers, and citizens engages with questions of the semiotic errands of defining sovereignty through images, symbols, myth, and metaphor. As constructs, all nations are the products of cultural processes where the contested realities of social existence, collective memory, and uneven shared aspiration combine together in the making of functioning ideas and lived experience. In Canada’s case, nature and ancestry have historically been dominant variables in the country’s equation of selfhood. Accordingly, in light of the multicultural transformation of Canada’s landscape since 1982, it is curious and consequent to mark the recent and subsequent passage of landmark legislation in 1988, the stakes have been raised, both officially and not, on identifying images, symbols, and other aesthetic forms around which the attending ideas about nationalism could coalesce.28 For it is the act of translation that domesticates the natural world, and it is the mimetic act that transforms the observed world into representative and functioning entities. Scandinavian design objects have long been regarded
designed along with a companion low round maple table and maple tray—is both new and deferentially tied to the 1950s. The carefully detailed construction of the frame, the distinct cant of the back legs and the precision of the front-facing understructure, (reminiscent, as it is, of the PK22 lounge chair by Dame Poul Kjærholm) reveal McLeod’s careful rigour as a designer-maker and his informed, sensitive awareness. In caso a rapidly wavy, Place’s furniture also recalls the mid-century aesthetic of designers such as Hans Wegner and Finn Juhl. Self-taught and inventive, Place openly acknowledges that it was a visit to Inform Interiors, the Vancouver design store owned by distinguished Danish-Canadian designer Niels Bendtsen, and his encounter with what he called “Danish modern furniture” that propelled him to his work. “I said to myself,” explained Place, “I’m going to do that,” and just started researching furniture and design.22 Place’s walnut and rattan rocker from 2004—curvilinear, gentle, and efficient—acknowledges its lineage while likewise articulating its stylistic autonomy. (cat. 97) The same can be said of the work of Jeff Martin. His Coastasi Credenza (cat. 115) is a grounded and serious object. Designed in 2015, it is dearly reminiscent of the domestic and architectonic mainstays of stylish and modernized mid-century suburban living rooms and assuredly current. The refinement of the millwork, the quiet patina at the joinery surfaces, the complementary wooden feet (akin to one of Juhl’s signature forms), and potent architectonic presence of the low-slung cabinetry, all nod towards the expansive legacy of this particular historic form and render it augustly anew. One of the more significant developments in contemporary design in Canada takes the form of a set of collaborative projects sponsored by Toronto retailer Mjölk that have provided several designers the opportunity to have their works produced in Canada. Established in 2009, Mjölk’s unexpected transnational production model has yielded results noteworthy on the level of both economics and aesthetics. The partnership with the Norwegian design duo of Torbjørn Aasen and Espen Voll (known as A&V), for example, resulted in the creation of several striking products for the home: The Water Bulb boasts a symmetrically carved straight taper on a hollow tapered stem, which once filled and inserted into the soil in a planter, releases the water slowly and steadily. (cat. 116) Made in Toronto by master glass-blower Gregor Hamrman and reminiscent in form of the whimsical work of Oiva Toikka for Nuutajarvi, the historically important Finnish glassmaking firm, the product is an example of what John Baker and Jüri Oaotu, the owners of Mjölk, call “localization,” or imbuing something bought from one place (where manufacturing is “in decline”) with the studio expertise of another.23 In similar fashion, A&V’s elegant “precision” brass and wood watering can demonstrates the promise of Mjölk’s cultural entrepreneurialism. (cat. 114) With its hand-spun body, long and curving square and cumin-inspired spout, the can displays its production pedigree: it was fabricated in Toronto by the fourth-generation owners of the venerable metalworking firm of Harnisch, established in Copenhagen in 1964—and especially Maia Isola’s vibrant Unikko from 1964—and to the important ergonomic investigations of Charles and Ray Eames in the 1950s. (Figure 6 and cat. 112) Lightweight, stackable, and graceful in its proportions, its double entendre of a name, Jones’s chair exemplifies the ways that ideas and precedents can be rewardedly referenced and reconfigured.

But sensitive and innovative historicism represents just one dimension of the tenor of millennial design in Canada. A considerable number of makers working across the country have looked to landscape and the natural world for inspiration. The work of Loyal Loot Collective—originally comprised of four female designers divided between Edmonton and Calgary who, as the members have explained, make things with “integrity and beauty”—constitutes a solid study in the willingness to reference winter and forests in the making of things. The collective’s birch coat rack (cat. 94) reads simultaneously as a bunch of cross-country skis leaning against a wall and as the wood shavings occasioned by an axe being taken to a tree. It is as generically wy as it is functional. The collective’s bright and affecting log bows—designed by Doha Chebib Lindskoeg—succeed because of the way the bark of sliced log is perfectly preserved with the interior being hollowed out and painted. Here the palette of deep of winter is cheered by vibrant colour. (cat. 93) And other Canadian designers similarly embrace the motifs of the natural world. Glass-blower Brad Copping’s Barkbird Chandelier boasts two asymmetrically positioned large orbs on a comb perched on a branch. (cat. 62) The combination of two of the North American continent. 24 Jenna Place’s walnut and rattan rocker from 2004—curvilinear, gentle, and efficient—acknowledges its lineage while likewise articulating its stylistic autonomy. (cat. 97) The same can be said of the work of Jeff Martin. His Coastasi Credenza (cat. 115) is a grounded and serious object. Designed in 2015, it is dearly reminiscent of the domestic and architectonic mainstays of stylish and modernized mid-century suburban living rooms and assuredly current. The refinement of the millwork, the quiet patina at the joinery surfaces, the complementary wooden feet (akin to one of Juhl’s signature forms), and potent architectonic presence of the low-slung cabinetry, all nod towards the expansive legacy of this particular historic form and render it augustly anew. One of the more significant developments in contemporary design in Canada takes the form of a set of collaborative projects sponsored by Toronto retailer Mjölk that have provided several designers the opportunity to have their works produced in Canada. Established in 2009, Mjölk’s unexpected transnational production model has yielded results noteworthy on the level of both economics and aesthetics. The partnership with the Norwegian design duo of Torbjørn Aasen and Espen Voll (known as A&V), for example, resulted in the creation of several striking products for the home: The Water Bulb boasts a symmetrically carved straight taper on a hollow tapered stem, which once filled and inserted into the soil in a planter, releases the water slowly and steadily. (cat. 116) Made in Toronto by master glass-blower Gregor Hamrman and reminiscent in form of the whimsical work of Oiva Toikka for Nuutajarvi, the historically important Finnish glassmaking firm, the product is an example of what John Baker and Jüri Oaotu, the owners of Mjölk, call “localization,” or imbuing something bought from one place (where manufacturing is “in decline”) with the studio expertise of another.23 In similar fashion, A&V’s elegant “precision” brass and wood watering can demonstrates the promise of Mjölk’s cultural entrepreneurialism. (cat. 114) With its hand-spun body, long and curving square and cumin-inspired spout, the can displays its production pedigree: it was fabricated in Toronto by the fourth-generation owners of the venerable metalworking firm of Harnisch, established in Copenhagen in 1964—and especially Maia Isola’s vibrant Unikko from 1964—and to the important ergonomic investigations of Charles and Ray Eames in the 1950s. (Figure 6 and cat. 112) Lightweight, stackable, and graceful in its proportions, its double entendre of a name, Jones’s chair exemplifies the ways that ideas and precedents can be rewardedly referenced and reconfigured.

But sensitive and innovative historicism represents just one dimension of the tenor of millennial design in Canada. A considerable number of makers working across the country have looked to landscape and the natural world for inspiration. The work of Loyal Loot Collective—originally comprised of four female designers divided between Edmonton and Calgary who, as the members have explained, make things with “integrity and beauty”—constitutes a solid study in the willingness to reference winter and forests in the making of things. The collective’s birch coat rack (cat. 94) reads simultaneously as a bunch of cross-country skis leaning against a wall and as the wood shavings occasioned by an axe being taken to a tree. It is as generically wy as it is functional. The collective’s bright and affecting log bows—designed by Doha Chebib Lindskoeg—succeed because of the way the bark of sliced log is perfectly preserved with the interior being hollowed out and painted. Here the palette of deep of winter is cheered by vibrant colour. (cat. 93) And other Canadian designers similarly embrace the motifs of the natural world. Glass-blower Brad Copping’s Barkbird Chandelier boasts two asymmetrically positioned large orbs on a comb perched on a branch. (cat. 62) The combination of two
1842 and famous for the nautical lighting it produced for the Danish Royal Navy and for the Danish coast guard. Mjölk’s other collaborative projects include an oil lamp with the Toronto-based firm Castor (the fabrication of which was also undertaken by Harnisch) and a set of Fire Tools by Winnipeg designer Thom Fougere. Materially refined, enticing in form, and fundamentally humane in character, the prosthetic imperative of each device—meaning how each tool is an extension of the human body—is rendered in what constitutes an effective updating of the domestic aesthetic of mid-twentieth-century Scandinavian design.

Yet, despite the complex prognoses around Canada’s post-industrial future, there is something reassuring about emerging models of creativity and partnership that build on shared understanding and (perhaps quite literally) common ground with nations of proximate latitude and attending awareness, or what functions as a similar consciousness. If anything, the return by Canadian designers to a direct, guileless acknowledgement of nature and the realities of life in a sparsely settled and earnest land, seem appropriate and sincere. As Canada continues to diverge from the economic and cultural hegemony of the United States, so continues the need and the capacity to speak in its own metaphoric and material voice. That the influential Financial Times of London could run a story in late April 2015 with the title “Canadian Design: Nordic by Nature” suggests that the days of reducing the motifs of land, forests, and weather to caricatures might well be over. Canadian design of the millennium—influenced by the cultures and aesthetic practices, some half a world away, and the legacies of their agents and offerings—constitutes a shared acknowledgement of the legitimacy and benefits of the tending and outfitting of one’s own proverbial cabin first.
Endnotes
3 Ibid., 16–18.
4 Ibid.
5 Historicism, or the embrace of the stylistic past, operated alongside aesthetic explorations that were frequently seen as the logical developments of trends within modernism. The result was a decades-long period in design history where the sureties of modernity gave way to a playfulness and very culture of pluralist possibility.
6 In the context of design in Canada, there was a type of democratization of production. The interpretation and fabrication of objects styled on elite originals expanded, as did the creation of objects for which an original did not necessarily exist as a creative process, but where, significantly, the inference of the newly made thing was sufficient.

7 It is important to note that even in the face of the enormous popularity of Scandinavian modernism, historical styles—revivals and so on—never fell altogether out of favour. Traditional styles, in the same symbiotic ways as contemporary ones, held the ability to conjure a place in time and to demonstrate one’s character and social condition.
8 Canadian Interiors 2, no. 11 (November 1967): 56.
9 Canadian Interiors 2, no. 10 (October 1965): 63. The advertisement shows a low and long storage chest. There are nine drawers each with two inset handles. The legs are tapering spindles. Advertisements for Canadian-made Scandinavian-styled furniture were plentiful. See Canadian Interiors 5, no. 10 (October 1948): 85.
10 Canadian Interiors 4, no. 11 (November 1967): 47.
11 Huber, for example, used the tag line “upholstered furniture with a Scandinavian accent.” See Canadian Interiors 5, no. 10 (October 1948): 93.
12 In an earlier advertisement featuring a rounded sofa and chair set with distinctive look legs arranged so that the front, back, and sides of each different piece were visible, Huber offered, “no way you look at it, Canada’s most exciting line of furniture.” See Canadian Interiors 4, no. 1 (January 1967): 18.
13 Canadian Interiors 3, no. 9 (September 1964): 18–19.
15 Lillian-Mae were also widely promoted and Aapo’s Weaving Supplies of Chelsea, Quebec, advertised almost continually in the pages of the journal between 1975 and 1983. In September 1976, Ms. Pavlo, the owner of the import firm, wrote an open letter to her customers and the weaving community. “Your most beautiful weaving deserves the most beautiful yarns. My national fibres selection from Finland gives you fine quality yarns suitable for home furnishings, personal apparel or tapestry.” The letter explained that the company had secured the distribution rights for “100% pure wool worsted yarn” in 125 colours. The letter also mentioned the availability of “multi-harness counter marche booms of TOSALAN KADETENHOAS of Finland (TOKA). Ontario Handweavers and Spinners 20, no. 1 (September 1976): 15.
16 In June 1977, for example, the editor of Ontario Handweavers and Spinners suggested their readership secure copies of Martine Selander’s classic 1961 textiles Weaving Pattern from Sweden and Swedish Handwoven. See Ontario Handweavers and Spinners 20, no. 4 (June 1977): 57. In December 1980, 27 the advertisement appeared for Glimarka looms. “Most Swedish Weavers Select a Glimarka Loom,” read the notice, “for some very good reasons.” Ontario Handweavers and Spinners 24, no. 2 (December 1980): 56. On Mika’s visit see Ontario Handweavers and Spinners 20, no. 3 (March 1977): 53. Mäki spoke at the “Woven Structures” conference of the Holiday Inn on Kent Street. Copies of her speech were subsequently published by the organization. “This personal point of view by an outstanding artist is a work of art in itself,” read the alert in the bulletin. “It is thought-provoking and very good reading.” Ontario Handweavers and Spinners 20, no. 3 (March 1977): 53. Indeed, the work of Saskatchewan-based Finnish-Canadian weaver Kaja Samelma Harris—trained at the Turku Textile Institute—was widely publicized and held up as an example of the successful translation of Nordic design sensibility to Canada. Harris’s lyrical use of the double-weave in what was described as “lushly colored [and] sensuous work, whether structural or commercial or commissioned.” See “The Premier’s Prize Winner,” The Craft: The Magazine of the Saskatchewan Crafts Council 15, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 4–5 and 8. For example of Harris’s work, see “5 Spring Cloud” in “Dimensions 88,” The Craft Forum 15, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 6, and “Dimensions 89: The Premier’s Prize Winners,” The Craft Forum 14, no. 2 (Summer 1989): 6. Harris was often commissioned to make large-scale installation pieces. Her clients included architect Raymond Moriyama and the Toronto Dominion Centre in Toronto, Ontario, for which she made an enormous tapestry for the foyer of the main building. See “Introducing Some of the Award Winning Craftspeoples: Dimensions 87,” The Craft Forum 13, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 27.
17 Even in plastic, the Jakobssen version of the Arabia pot did manage to communicate a refined design sensibility in the spirit of the original.
18 An additional and important variable in the broad interest in what can be called affordable Nordic and Scandinavian style in Canada was due to the arrival of the first store opened in Vancouver and the company’s aggressive expansion. The store’s distinct approach to marketing—the catalogue, the restaurant, and its DIY sensibility—succeeded in reinforcing the aesthetic preferences to the budget-minded and introduced successive generations to the appealing and good design of the Scandinavian country—needed for modern day hearths—emerged. Each tool was reimagined and tending to the fire—their forms needed for modern day hearths—emerged. Each tool was reimagined and tending to the fire—their forms
19 Larin worked in pewter and plated base metals. One of the striking details of his practice was that he employed artisans with hearing impediments. In the heyday of his work, his factory on the grounds of IKEA in 1976—the first store opened in Canada—was described as “lushly colored [and] sensuous work, whether structural or commercial or commissioned.” See “The Premier’s Prize Winner,” The Craft: The Magazine of the Saskatchewan Crafts Council 15, no. 2 (Summer 1990): 4–5 and 8. Harris was often commissioned to make large-scale installation pieces. Her clients included architect Raymond Moriyama and the Toronto Dominion Centre in Toronto, Ontario, for which she made an enormous tapestry for the foyer of the main building. See “Introducing Some of the Award Winning Craftspeoples: Dimensions 87,” The Craft Forum 13, no. 2 (Summer 1988): 27.
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21 Indeed, that the design for a new Canadian flag was taking place at the same time as the move to secure the visual identity and the logical developments of trends within modernism. The result was a decades-long period in design history where the sureties of modernity gave way to a playfulness and very culture of pluralist possibility.


The author would like to thank the following interview subjects, Alan Collier and the staff of the Shore + Moffit Library at the Damacel Faculty of Architecture, Landscape and Design, and the Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library at the University of Toronto.
George Baird

The Influence of Scandinavian Architecture and Design on Architecture in Central Canada

The “Scandinavian design ethos,” which influenced architecture in central Canada in significant ways, is largely associated with the careers of five major twentieth-century Scandinavian architects. In chronological order, they were Eliel Saarinen (1873–1950) of Finland and the US, Gunnar Asplund (1885–1940) of Sweden, Sigurd Lewerentz (1885–1975) also of Sweden, Alvar Aalto (1898–1976) of Finland, and Sverre Fehn (1924–2009) of Norway.

Saarinen was one of the leaders of the National Romanticist movement in Finland—a cultural blend of Arts and Crafts and Art Nouveau—which flourished in Finland from the turn of the century until the ascendancy of what is called Heroic Period modernism, the movement characterized in the 1920s by the all-white, cubic buildings of Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe. Saarinen’s progress can be tracked from the Arts and Crafts house he designed for himself at Hvitträsk, Finland, of 1902 to his ornate Helsinki Central Railway Station of 1919.

Asplund and Lewerentz, on the other hand, started their careers in the genre known as Nordic Classicism, a spare and very restrained Scandinavian version of the early nineteenth-century neoclassicism associated with Prussian Karl Schinkel. Asplund’s famous Stockholm Public Library, which opened in 1928, would be a well-known example of Nordic Classicism. Gradually, Asplund and Lewerentz shifted away from its restrained formal vocabulary and material palette toward a more emotive modern architecture.

Alvar Aalto, far and away the most admired of this entire group, started his career under the influence of Asplund’s work, but moved away from it in the early 1930s, first to his own version of Heroic Period Modernism and then eventually to the intensely material work of his mature period from 1938 to 1976. Fehn, the youngest of the group, in some respects extended the robust tradition running from Eliel Saarinen through Lewerentz to Aalto in his own career.

It is the entwined consequences of these architectural traditions that had the greatest influence on Canadian architecture, especially in the period from the mid-1950s to the early 1970s, and particularly in Toronto and other parts of Ontario. The main defining features of this ethos were as follows: a strong engagement with the natural landscape, a striking counterpoint of rectilinear plan geometries, on the one hand, and of curvilinear or jagged rectilinear ones, on the other; an intense interest in such “natural” building materials as brick, timber, and copper; and last, but not least, a highly refined sense of material detail. All of these characteristic features are evident in a 1939 masterwork of Alvar Aalto: the Villa Mairea, a villa in Noormarkku in western Finland, the radical significance of which was disseminated widely in the European, British, and American architectural press.
First Evidence of the Influence in Ontario

With the decades-long movement of ideas and images of Nordic architecture to North America from roughly 1930 onwards, the midfifties are key in the history of the Scandinavian influence in central Canada. 

Interestingly, the young associates of Viljo Revell, who conceived the first version of their design for the Toronto City Hall Competition, were already doing. The result of this mentoring conversation was the formation of the influential architects Viljo Revell and Carmen Corneil, who would go on to design several notable buildings in Toronto in the early and mid-1960s.

Significantly, the movement of people and ideas was not always from Europe to North America. The story of Carmen Corneil (b. 1953), a talented Canadian graduate from the University of Toronto architecture program, is particularly telling. In 1958 Corneil made his way, shortly after his graduation, to work in the office of Alvar Aalto, and the consequences of his experience are evident in the form of several significant buildings and projects he designed in Toronto in the early and mid-1960s.

By 1957 the long-term development of the bold new Toronto suburb of Don Mills was becoming publicly visible, at the same time revealing the tensions in architectural culture between what might be called Scandinavian humanism, on the one hand, and corporate modernism, on the other. Most of the institutional and commercial buildings that would eventually make up Don Mills—many of them designed by the major Toronto modernist firm of John B. Parkin Associates—largely did not follow a Scandinavian design direction, but rather, one influenced by German modernist Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. In contrast, many of the houses designed for Don Mills, especially those by either James A. Murray or Henry Fleiss, reflect a notable, if rather generalized, Scandinavian influence. The single and split-level houses with pitched roofs exhibit crisp profiles and minimalist details that characterize Scandinavian contemporary design.

The Main Period of the Scandinavian Influence: the 1960s

By 1959 Corneil had returned to Toronto from Finland, and had commenced his professional career as an architect. He divided his practice working on projects under his own name as well as on projects under the auspices of William McInroy, one of his former teachers from University of Toronto. Over the next few years, Corneil designed a number of projects that clearly demonstrate the powerful influence Aalto had on him and his design thinking. Some of the projects were constructed, such as the headquarters building for the Association of Girl Guides. Completed in 1962, with its angular volumetric form, its very rough brick cladding, and its wood-louved windows, it stands as the most Aalto-esque building erected in Toronto. (figure 2)

In 1960 Corneil was one of the invited participants in a limited competition for the design for a new Massey College to be erected on the campus of the University of Toronto—a competition that included submissions by Arthur Erickson and the eventual winner, Ron Thom. (figure 3) In 1963 Corneil participated in the competition for the design of a cultural centre to commemorate the Fathers of Confederation in Charlottetown. (figure 4) Even though Corneil won neither competition, these remarkable entries, similarly to the Girl Guides’ headquarters, show Aalto’s strong influence on his thinking. This is particularly evident in the geometries of the proposed buildings in plan and in section, and in the deployment of such natural materials as brick masonry.

The Scandinavian ethos in architecture was also evident in the new residence building of the same period for New College at the University of Toronto, designed by Mary Dykes (1929-2007) of the firm Fairfield and DuBois. Built between 1964 and 1969, the building combines a jagged rectilinear exterior form with a sinuously curvilinear interior form in its inner courtyard, and is also clad in a characteristically Aalto-esque red brick. (figure 5)

The work of several other Toronto architects during this period also exhibits evidence of the influence of Aalto’s work. The Group Health Centre, commissioned by the steelworkers’ union in Sault Ste. Marie, Ontario, and designed by Jerome Markson (b. 1929) in 1963, exhibits an adaptation of Aalto’s ideas about massing and materials to the conditions of Ontario. The building incorporates a second storey in the jagged rectilinear style typical of Aalto. Constructed of light-coloured brick at grade and sheathed in white ceramic cladding on the second floor, it represents a clear example of the adaptation of Nordic form in the decades after 1950. (figure 6)
significant for Toronto: Karelia Studio soon moved to its own independent space in the thriving Gerrard Street Village, between Bay and Elizabeth Streets in downtown Toronto. There Kravis stocked stainless steel by Gense, glassware by Karhula-Iittala, Marimekko fabrics, and a wide range of household Scandinavian-made products.

The Gerrard Street shop eventually also proved too small, and Kravis moved again to Lothian Mews, a small, new, and very precocious infill shopping mews behind a building on Bloor Street, across from the Georg Jensen shop. Lothian Mews, a small grouping of shops disposed on two levels around a courtyard and fountain, was famous not just for Karelia Studio, but also for the Coffee Mill. Opened in May 1963 by Martha von Heczey, the eatery quickly became not only fashionable but also culturally important. It operated as the powerful social focus of the significant expatriate Toronto Hungarian community. Lothian Mews, demolished in 1984, has to be seen as the seed of the remarkable small-scale retail explosion that eventually came to define the village of Yorkville in midtown Toronto.

The 1960s proved important in terms of the Scandinavian-inflected cultural life of Toronto. Kravis became a major boutique retailer in Toronto, at his peak managing two large shops, one in the Manulife Centre at Bloor and Bay Streets in midtown Toronto, and a second one in the newly reviving St. Lawrence Market neighbourhood on Front Street East. Notably, in the mid-1960s Kravis also received the major commission to design and to outfit a new restaurant being created in the Windsor Arms Hotel, a venerable small Toronto hotel just off Bloor Street. The hotel had been purchased by Kravis’s lawyer’s son, the young George Minden, who was intent on turning the modest 1920s Gothic-revival hostelry into Toronto’s first fashionable boutique hotel. Opening in 1966, the Three Small Rooms was instantly one of the most glamorous and successful Toronto restaurants. Kravis designed the rich interiors of brick, wood, and copper and much of the restaurant’s furniture. He selected the china, glassware, and cutlery as well. 4 Elegant and intimate, the three differently styled rooms with their discrete food offerings presented a distinctly northern and cosmopolitan sensibility.

But such Nordic progressivism had already been publicly affirmed in 1965, with the official opening of Revell’s new Toronto City Hall. From then on, the new city hall—and more so, the encompassing new Nathan Phillips Square—quickly transformed the social and political life of the city. Arguably, Revell’s new city hall, with its radical form and materially sensitive interiors, and the much-praised retailing and hospitality efforts by Kravis quickly came to be seen as major new Toronto cultural and architectural landmarks influenced by Scandinavia.

Tellingly, perhaps, the peak of the influence of the Scandinavian design ethos on central Canada—decidedly a specific regional phenomenon—was already in decline. It was superseded in successive waves by such international design

5 Carmen Corneil, plan drawing, entry to the Massey Hall Competition, University of Toronto, 1963. Carmen and Elin Corneli fonds, Canadian Architectural Archives, University of Calgary

tendencies as “high tech,” the “megastructure,” and eventually even postmodernism. It is true that recent times have seen projects designed by architects with Scandinavian names erected in Canada. Notable examples would be the new Student Learning Centre for Ryerson University by Snøhetta (2015), Vancouver House condominium by Bjarke Ingels (2016–2018), and the new Halifax Central Library by Schmidt Hammer Lassen (2014). However, the design approach of all of these firms is only very tangentially influenced by the Scandinavian ethos described at the beginning of this text. At their core, all such firms as these have to be described not as Scandinavian, but as post-Koolhaasian—given the overwhelming influence of that charismatic Dutch designer on them.

Still, as late as 2009, the Toronto architects Brigitte Shim and Howard Sutcliffe—both of them participants in Alvar Aalto Symposia in Finland—unveiled their famous Integral House in Toronto’s fashionable Rosedale neighbourhood. (Figure 7) In this project, designed for the mathematician and philanthropist James Stewart (1941–2014), Shim and Sutcliffe reprised the geometrical lessons they had learned from Aalto, even fifty or so years after his most active influence. Distinguished by the sweeping curvilinear geometry of its main living space, which was designed to accommodate the musical performances to which Stewart was so devoted, and with a two-storey glass and wood rear façade (an inversion, in certain ways, of the form of Fairfield and DuBois’s courtyard at New College), and its masterful massing and its storied cascade down a ravine hillsode, Integral House reads as a timely material and stylistic revisiting of the principles that defined Scandinavian architecture in the 1930s and 1940s. For a decade and a half from the mid-1950s onwards, a striking influence from Scandinavia can be seen in the new architecture of Toronto and its environs. At the present time, some half a century later, the appropriate direction for Canadian architecture in the future is not altogether clear. The set of compelling Canadian projects described in this essay cast an eloquent and highly suggestive light on that future.

Endnotes

1 The Danish architect Arne Jacobsen (1902–1971) might be thought an appropriate addition to this list, as he is certainly a figure of historical importance. However, his design sensibility was a more corporate one than that of any of the others listed here and thus less central to the design ethos under discussion.


3 The elder Saarinen, having won second place in the 1922 competition for a new building for the Chicago Tribune newspaper, moved from Finland to the United States to become the professor of architecture and the designer of most of the buildings for George Booth’s famous Cranbrook Academy in Bloomfield Hills, Michigan. It was at Cranbrook where Eero Saarinen spent his youth.

4 With the 1991 sale by Minden of the Windsor Arms for a condominium development, a long and memorable social tradition of dining at the Three Small Rooms came to a sad end.

5 During the same decade and a half from the midfifties to the early seventies, there were a number of architects in other parts of Canada who expressed their admiration for Scandinavian design in general, and for Aalto in particular. The evidence of actual design motifs in the buildings they designed are not nearly as intensely affected as is the group in the general vicinity of Toronto discussed above.

The author gratefully acknowledges the assistance of Professor Michael Milojevic of the University of Auckland in the preparation of this text, in particular for his generous provision of the reproductions of the images of Carmen Cornel’s entries to the Massey College and Fathers of Confederation design competitions.
The Idea of North Revisited: Nordic Myths and Modernisms

Mark Kingwell

It is a well-worn cliché that the iconic imagery of Canada is all wintry. Snowshoes and igloos, toques and down parkas, the boreal forests, icebergs, and frozen oceans at or near the Arctic Circle—the land known, even unto the title of a not very good television series—as “North of Sixty.” (The Arctic Circle itself lies at just over 66.5° north.) The nation’s most widely praised national artists are seven painters who mostly did not visit this land and who people in the rest of the world still, despite the interest of comedian/collector Steve Martin in the work of Lawren Harris, do not recognize. (Figure 1) From ubiquitous ice sports, such as hockey and curling, to the full let’s-go-camping wardrobe of the Roots clothing chain, almost everything about the national mythology references the outdoors, preferably during periods of snow and intense cold.

Harris has become our de facto national painter, in part because, to quote the novelist and critic Russell Smith, he is “the Adele of Canadian visual art”—which is to say, popular, inoffensive, and successful. Smith finds Harris’s “stylized, bulbous, glowing glacierscapes to look a lot like children’s book illustrations… They are pretty and smooth, and perhaps inspiring to people who prefer the idea of a magical, spiritually pure, people-free, dream-like, crystallized North—a place like the planet Krypton—to real places.”

Smith has the better of this argument. The fanciers of what he mocks as “the raw majesty of the Canadian landscape” depicted by the Group of Seven are trapped in a web of national mythology. And while we might dispute the aesthetic judgment that Harris’s icebergs “would be great on posters advertising breath-freshening gum,” the real places are indeed otherwise. The actual north is unknown to the overwhelming majority of Canadians. They live in a handful of large cities that cling to the southernmost edge of the vast geographical territory as if their lives depended on it. Perhaps this is literally true, since Canada’s largest trading and foreign-policy partner has been and remains the United States. There are endless debates—indeed, endless debates about these debates—concerning whether and how Canadians are different from Americans, but the hard fact is that in many important ways they are not. They drive the same cars, live in similar neighbourhoods, shop for and eat the same food, and largely watch the same films and television shows. Marginal variances in culture are important, to be sure, especially when a very small country exists alongside a very large one with a tendency to bulldoze the Other. Canadian music, film, film, radio, and even food—hello poutine, you yummy delight!—make for identity. So, too, do deeper-running differences, such as the ongoing presence of a French-speaking minority, the demographic diversity of those cities, and of course the socialized health insurance of which we make so much.

Still, much of the agonizing that goes on about Canada’s place in the world is a function of what Sigmund Freud called “the narcissism of minor differences.” A far more illuminating, though also
seems to owe more to American architect and architectural draftsman Hugh Ferriss’s influential Metropolis of Tomorrow urban landscapes (published in 1929, and first exhibited in 1922) than to the actual Mount Lefroy (painted in 1930) or other peaks in the Rockies (painted from 1930–1934). (figure 2) Ferriss’s radical “setback” skyscraper designs, drawn in response to the 1916 New York zoning code to control vertical density, somehow feel like the dark doppleganger to Harris’s almost too-bright abstracted arrangements of peaks and shadows. Here, the cityscape literally shadows the landscape.

Thus a curious fact, which might be called ironic if it weren’t so bleak: despite all the trumpeting of Canada’s status as a northern nation, it really isn’t one. The majority of Canadians will never set foot north of perhaps 52° north, let alone 60°.

Thus a curious fact, which might be called ironic if it weren’t so bleak: despite all the trumpeting of Canada’s status as a northern nation, it really isn’t one. Edmonton and Saskatoon are the only major cities up that far, and the Greater Toronto Area, with 6 million of the country’s 35 million souls, just touches 44°. Toronto has trying winters, but nevertheless maintains an attitude of deep denial about both the weather and the sprawling tracts of hostile land, with its scatter of sad settlements, that stretch beyond. Meanwhile, those very same demographic shifts that make Canadian cities so diverse have created new population groups—predominantly from East Asia and South Asia—which will swell the population to more than 42.5 million by the middle of the century. These people have no obvious concern with the North as North, or with the Canadian mythology concerning that wide boreal strangeness.

And so a second irony: even as the real Canadian North is suffering material decline and progressive abandonment, as young people who possess the means flee a crumbling region, the Idea of North seems stronger than ever. The idiosyncratic pianist Glenn Gould—himself an iconic figure in the Canadian pantheon—created in 1967 an odd, compelling CBC radio documentary about this idea, which is still a dominant frame for the concept. (figure 3) Gould was fascinated by northernness and used his well-known penchant for adopting multiple voices and personas to create a work of what he called “contrapuntal radio.” The first program would join two later ones, produced over the next ten years, as Gould’s Solitude Trilogy. They compose, in effect, an autobiographical essay performed in the public medium that joined modern Canada together.

“It’s the Idea of North” remains the best-known of the three, and Gould’s introduction to the piece offers a clear sense of the philosophical stakes:

“I’ve long been intrigued by that incredible tapestry of tundra and taiga which constitutes the Arctic and sub-Arctic of our country. I’ve read about it, written about it, and even pulled up my parka once and gone there. Yet like all but a very few Canadians I’ve had no real experience of the North. No wonder the spiritualized Krypton-North is also people-free. The real people are just not decorative. Not to pile on, but even Harris’s definitive “outdoor” aesthetic sometimes

It is a well-worn cliché that the iconic imagery of Canada is all wintry. plus lack of political influence, you can add racism to the rot call of awful that marks the reality of Canada’s North. No wonder the spiritualized Krypton-North is also people-free. The real people are just not decorative. Not to pile on, but even Harris’s definitive “outdoor” aesthetic sometimes
still terra incognita. There be not dragons there, instead
This is a game without a winner. Canada's North is, finally,
mass: how many trips? How far north? How long the stay?
would note the competitive “Northmanship” performed by
mentioning his trip up to 60°. In the documentary Gould
with rituals of evasion. And note the honest “once” before
That phrase “in the end” captures Gould’s keen sense of
Independence in 1917—there is even a sort of analogy to
not break free of Russian influence under its Declaration of
Sweden—Finland gained independence in 1809, though would
citizens about whom the rest of us know almost nothing. 4
bears and seals and—above all—a small number of fellow
care; also, low overall population density combined with
heritage, parliamentary democracy, and socialized health
imagination: port cities, a forbidding landscape, a royal
form, some of the same things that shape the Canadian
Here we encounter, in more compact and deeply rooted
people, some 80,000 of the
163,000 refugees admitted in 2015 are likely to be deported
before the middle of 2016. 6
Meanwhile, the latitude itself makes for a very different
circadian rhythm, something which is hard to describe: the
day-long duskiness of a crepuscular winter, never really
emerging from twilight, the startling, almost drugged feeling
of the late-night summer sun. For reasons nobody can
quite fathom, Scandinavian novelists have recently, and
extravagantly, dominated the genre of neo-noir detective
fiction. There is no Canadian parallel to this, but one is
emerging from twilight; the startling, almost drugged feeling
day-long duskiness of a crepuscular winter, never really

III
The countries of Scandinavia have a relationship with their
geography that is no less complicated, even if they lie clearly
in the globe’s northern reaches according to the maps. Here
we encounter, in more compact and deeply rooted
form, some of the same things that shape the Canadian
imagination: port cities, a forbidding landscape, a royal
heritage, parliamentary democracy, and socialized health
care; also, low overall population density combined with
significant concentration in southern cities. (For example,
85 percent of Sweden’s population of 10 million reside in
urban areas clinging to the lower edges of the land mass,
principally Stockholm, Gothenburg, and Malmö.) 5) Given
Finland’s ethnic differences and former conjunction with
Sweden—Finland gained independence in 1809, though would
not break free of Russian influence under its Declaration of
Independence in 1917—there is even a sort of analogy to
what Canadians call “the French fact.” Except, of course, that
Quebeckers maintain their own national status within our
territories of provinces and territories. And yes, we all play
hockey obsessively.
At the same time, there is an ethnic and linguistic purity to the
Scandinavian nations that is entirely foreign to the Canadian
experience, a still-young nation driven by wave after wave
of immigration. The heritage of social justice in Scandinavia
has meant that they could not ignore the 2015 Iranian migrant
crisis, for example, but also that anti-immigration politics are a
strong force, ranging from extreme neo-Nazi groups remaining
mostly underground to slick electoral success stories such as
Sweden’s Social Democrats. The fear of “Islamization” in the
region is clearly racial as much as religious or political,
generating in ethnic Swedes and Norwegians a feeling that
they are no longer comfortable in their own homes. Even the
extraordinary effort to help during the migrant crisis by
accepting record numbers of refugees has fallen on the hard
rocks of political and economic reality: some 80,000 of the
163,000 refugees admitted in 2015 are likely to be deported
before the middle of 2016. 6
These comparative markers are fascinating enough, but they
are more suggestive than solid. We can say who the winners
and losers are when it comes to international hockey, but
we can hardly say which country in pursuit of its version
of Northern Justice is faring best, simply because basic
circumstances are so different. No, if we want to explore
the affinities between Canada and Scandinavia further,
there are more subtle mechanisms than these, and so let us
consider the range of beautiful objects that are gathered in
this exhibition.

IV
True Nordic is a design show in a museum dedicated to
objects that almost always belong to the indoor spaces of
human life, but right away I am struck by the thought that
there is a reason they called them “shelter magazines.”
Again and again, we realize that the result of northern living
is intense urbanization. The city and its promises of comfort,
security, and warmth define the experience of the north.
And yet, these promises are themselves precarious. Every
doorway forms an airlock between the livable interior and
the threatening outdoors. Except during brief summers—
surprisingly hot and humid in Toronto, to visitors’ surprise—
we cannot saunter blithely out to the lanai and take our
ease in shorts and T-shirt. Even then it would be silly to have
a lanai; you might have a porch or patio. In any season, we
must always be thinking about thresholds, permeabilities,
energy expenditures. Is that a draft? Do we have enough
insulation in the attic? How long will it take to shovel my
way to the garage so I can liberate the frozen automobile
cached there like an escape vehicle in a disaster movie? The
comforts of the interior are thus at the centre of life in
northern cities in a manner that suggests higher stakes
than elsewhere. Hence, I think, the combination of lushness
and clean functionality we see here, and in other canonical
Scandinavian designs. This is an independent Nordic or
Scandinavian modernism that is now as instantly recognizable
as Deco or Nouveau. It owes something to the International
Style curated by Philip Johnson, that fancier of Nazi Youth,
and yet possesses a distinctive sleekness that feels more organic,
less machined, and forbidding. One writer dubbs it “glacial
glamour,” which seems about right, if perhaps glib. It is
a style easy to replicate, tempting in its simplicity, but also
ripe for overuse and even unconscious self-parody. 7 The first,
still unfamiliar, version was also the modernism that blew a

5 Glenn Gould in his studio, Toronto Star, November 26, 1973
Photography by Ron Bull / Toronto Star / Getty Images

6 The Opening of Toronto’s City Hall, designed by Viljo Revell, 1965
City of Toronto Archives, Series 374, File 799, Item 17
New Canadian styles have of course emerged since this heyday leading up to and celebrating the Canadian centenary in 1967. They feel less and less obliged to confront the national symbolism, or find inspiration in the chilly outdoors. One of the most successful design teams of contemporary Toronto, for example, a redoubtable young group known collectively as Partisans, found inspiration for an award-winning downtown bar interior in the work of Spanish architect Antoni Gaudí. The result is a mini-cathedral of dark, smooth-flowing mahogany in organic shapes that feels entirely unrelated to the boreal.

This is advanced post-national design for the new century.

Canada may yet accept its strange status as a not-quite-northern nation in the emerging constellations of global power and creativity. In the meantime, we have this history, this shared geography, and these exquisite objects from daily life to consider and enjoy.

Endnotes
7 This is especially true in the global profusion of hotel and restaurant designs that offer a depressingly similar array of smooth wood, angular furniture, sleek metal surfaces, and the standard taupe-to-beige palette of Globalized Nothingness. One writer noted recently that, owing to the success of Denmark’s Noma restaurant—repeatedly voted best restaurant in the world—and liturgically rhythmic it could pass for nothingness.
8 The work Hansen executed for British-American Oil Company was celebrated in a 2005 exhibition at the Textile Museum of Canada, curated by Rachel Gotlieb (also the present exhibition’s co-curator). The exhibition and Hansen’s work are beautifully documented in Rachel Gotlieb, Thor Hansen: Creating a Canadian Style (Toronto: Textile Museum of Canada, 2005).
True Nordic
How Scandinavia Influenced Design in Canada
Exhibition Catalogue
This landmark exhibition examines the ways that modern Scandinavian design was introduced to Canada and how the aesthetic principles and material forms that defined it were adopted and adapted by Canadians artisans and designers. True Nordic documents more than seven decades of the marked influence of Scandinavian design on Canadian craft and design. The foundation of all Nordic design lies equally in the notion of what has been called “fitness of purpose”—the functionalism and rationality of objects for everyday life—and the acknowledgement of the conditions of place. Here, the thought and practice of design seeks to serve people and holds the potential to stimulate beneficial social and democratic change.

For both clear and complex reasons, Scandinavian design resonated with Canadians as evidenced first in the importing and domestic manufacturing of goods, in the extensive coverage in the press and the response by consumers to the array of functional and decorative products including furniture, ceramics, textiles, and metalware. Both critics and the general public broadly admired the style of Scandinavian design—modest, pleasingly utilitarian, and materially logical—and judged it to be appropriate for the conditions of Canadian living. It met the needs of Canadians seeking a new and contemporary look for their lives. At once progressive, and genial, Scandinavian design easily and effortlessly fit Canada’s modernizing needs. Both elite and middle-class consumers saw Canadian designer’s interpretation of Scandinavian aesthetics as a new material culture for living and wellbeing.
Arrival and Consequences
1925–1956

Best understood as a more humane and regional variation of the larger trans-Atlantic modernist movement—and one where historical studio practices and traditions easily co-existed with progressive aesthetic and material tenets—Scandinavian design arrived in Canada in the early decades of the twentieth century. The imports from Scandinavia made significant and longstanding contributions to the nation’s material and visual culture. In a country where domestic interiors and patterns of taste had been long tied to traditional British and French models and where the striving design culture of the United States also held appeal, the consequences of the design of the nations of Denmark, Sweden, Finland, and Norway coming to Canada cannot be underestimated.

Scandinavian modernism initially reached Canada’s elite consumers and style-makers via museum and gallery exhibitions, designer showrooms, small retail shops, and articles and photographic essays in popular decorator magazines. In turn, designers who came from Denmark and Sweden in the 1920s and 1930s—many of whom were trained in prominent workshops and ateliers—carried with them skills and sensibilities that resulted in the production of goods in Canada exhibiting the properties of Scandinavian design culture. In addition, other makers across the country—aware of the power and promise of such thinking and practice—were likewise responsible for adopting Scandinavian motifs and principles in the design of everyday household furnishings for the Canadian marketplace. The result was a new national design language that spoke in resonant ways to the public.
1 | Axel Ebring (1869–1954)
Charger, c. 1925. Glazed earthenware, 5.5 x 28 cm
Collection of John David Lawrence. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

2 | Axel Ebring (1869–1954)
Bowl, c. 1925. Glazed earthenware, 10 x 27 cm
Collection of John David Lawrence. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

3 | Axel Ebring (1869–1954)
Pitcher, c. 1938. Glazed earthenware, 19.5 x 21 x 17 cm
Private collection. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

4 | Axel Ebring (1869–1954)
Lamp base, c. 1938. Glazed earthenware, 45.5 x 13 cm
Private collection. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

5 | Kjeld Deichmann (1900–1963)
Erica Deichmann (1913–2007)
Bowl, 1950–1960. Stoneware, 17 x 19 x 19.6 cm
6 | Kjeld Deichmann (1900–1963)  
Erica Deichmann (1913–2007)  
*Goofus* (fragment), c. 1950. Glazed stoneware, 12 x 8 x 10 cm. Collection of Peter Gorham  
Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

7 | Kjeld Deichmann (1900–1965)  
Erica Deichmann (1913–2007)  

8 | Kjeld Deichmann (1900–1965)  
Erica Deichmann (1913–2007)  
Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

9 | Kjeld Deichmann (1900–1965)  
Erica Deichmann (1913–2007)  
Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid
Their combined population, as it happens, is just the same as ours. We resemble each other in habits, in ideas, in climate.

Governor General Vincent Massey, 1954
A person who has talent in a certain craft or phase of craft will find greatest pleasure and productiveness in a position where that talent can be used to advantage. The nation needs all the natural talents available for its Industries, Arts and Sciences.... Handicrafts in the schools, churches, homes, Scout rooms, etc., will give to young people an opportunity to find the sort of work in which they will produce best and be happiest.

Rudolph “Rudy” Renzius, 1945
Good design in manufactured objects, as we understand it today, means a combination of simplicity, fine proportions and functional utility. It is not a question of ornamentation, but of the design of ordinary objects for everyday living. Grace of line and clarity of form are allied to fitness for purpose. This approach to fine design in mass production had some of its first advocates in Sweden and Finland, where many of the more important modern innovations in furniture design originated.

Donald Buchanan, 1947
20 | Carl Poul Petersen (1895–1977)
Bracelet, 1940–1970. Silver, 19.5 cm
Collection of Dimitri and Catherine Anastakis
Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

21 | Carl Poul Petersen (1895–1977)
Bracelet, 1940–1970. Silver, 19 cm
Collection of Dimitri and Catherine Anastakis
Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

22 | Carl Poul Petersen (1895–1977)
Pepper pot and salt cellar, 1940–1970. Silver, 9 x 3.5 cm. Collection of Dimitri and Catherine Anastakis. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

23 | Carl Poul Petersen (1895–1977)
Salt cellar, 1940–1970. Silver, 6.5 x 6.5 cm
Collection of Dimitri and Catherine Anastakis
Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

24 | Harold Gordon Stacey (1911–1979)
Coffee service, 1950. Silver and rosewood, coffee pot: 21.7 x 17.9 x 8.9 cm; sugar bowl: 6.4 x 11.5 x 8 cm; creamer: 8.5 x 13.2 x 7.2 cm
Purchased 2001, National Gallery of Canada, Ottawa
Photo © National Gallery of Canada

Arrival and Consequences 1925–1956
Culture is something that evolves out of the simple, enduring elements of everyday life; elements most truthfully expressed in the folk arts and crafts of a nation.

Thor Hansen, 1955
Scandinavian furniture is timeless and will blend with old periods very easily. It is designed to adapt to the human body. It has a functional design, an economy of line; and its most important purpose is comfort. Its line of beauty lies in the natural treatment of wood and simplicity of shape. Because it has no exaggerated forms or shapes put for the purpose of novelty, you are less apt to tire of it.

Sigrun Bülow-Hübe, 1957
Simultaneous with the second wave of Scandinavian émigrés who arrived in Canada after the Second World War and set up design practices, Canadian designers—some formally trained and others self-taught—further expanded the adaptation and commercial production of Scandinavian-inspired craft and design. Similarly, Canadian tastemakers writing for décor magazines and ladies’ journals played significant roles in promoting the style. These editorials pronounced that it was progressive and comfortable without compromising elegance and taste, that it was affordable for budget-minded families and that it suited what was acknowledged to be changing patterns of middle-class life. The popularity of what was referred to as “Swedish Modern” and “Danish Modern” turned on these overlapping styles becoming synonymous with ideas about good design—a concern that echoed throughout North America—and the aspirational notions of domestic comfort and “gracious living.”

Canadian interpretations of Scandinavian modern design functioned as visual and symbolic antidotes for those who sought something other than the traditional forms of furniture (whether pine Canadiana or overstuffed historical revival styles) that had long defined Canadian interiors. Capitalizing on the market opportunities presented, Canadian manufacturers added Scandinavian design to their conservative repertoire of colonial and historicist offerings and branded these lines with overtly Nordic names, Helsinki, Stavanger, Scanda, and Danesco. Many designers produced sophisticated, materially accomplished, and original objects that evoked the character of modern Scandinavian design, while other makers and companies took a more pragmatic approach. By resorting to the production of cheaper versions and blatant “knock-offs” of Nordic originals—characterized by inexpensive materials and assembly techniques—such manufacturers nevertheless acted as promoters of the style’s meanings in the country.

In these cases, while the shape of a chair, the tapering of a candlestick, the low profile of a sofa, the colourful printed graphics of a textile, and the solid boxiness of a credenza could be questioned because of the issue of originality and the implications of appropriation, the principles of utility, material integrity, and modesty that defined their lineage were maintained in significant and effecting ways. The 1970s saw the breaking of the tenets of modernism with ornamentation, irony, and whimsy increasingly present in design. Scandinavia and Canada were not immune from these shifts in thinking and practice. Leading Canadian furniture designers, while maintaining their adherence to Nordic design culture, likewise catered to the realities of casual and contemporary lifestyles and expanded the scope and repertoire of Scandinavian-inspired aesthetics in Canada.
The conditions that mold Scandinavian furniture design are similar to our own. The people live in a northern climate with long winters; they live in apartments or small houses (somewhat like our subdivision houses, only smaller); they raise healthy children in a relaxed family atmosphere; and they have an inherent liking for the out of doors, summer and winter.

Mandel Sprachman, 1956


41 | Mariette Rousseau-Vermette (1926–2006)

Hiver canadien, 1961. Wool, 540.7 x 213.3 cm

Musée national des beaux-arts du Québec, purchase, 1963.70. © Estate of Mariette Rousseau-Vermette and Claude Vermette. Image courtesy of MNBAQ, Jean-Guy Kérioac

42 | Velta Vilsons (b. 1919)

Wall hanging, 1965–1970. Wool, 146.1 x 90.2 cm

Collection of Gail and Gerry Crawford

Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

43 | Folmer Hansen (1950–2014)

David Ross (1925–1974)

Hansen-Ross Pottery, Fort Qu’Appelle, SK.

Cheese bell with plate, 1965.

Clay, glaze, and wood, 10.5 x 22.5 cm

Saskatchewan Arts Board Permanent Collection.

Photography by Gabriela Garcia-Luna. Photograph was taken at the Moose Jaw Museum and Art Gallery as part of the Hansen-Ross Retrospective Exhibition

44 | Walter Nugent (b. 1913), designer


Wood (walnut), fabric, 71 x 63 x 68 cm.

Collection of Mary-Lynn Ogilvie

Photography by Allan Collier
I got to know Viljo Revell and his team of architects when they working on Toronto City Hall in 1960. They literally opened up their kitchen cabinets and showed me dishes by Kaj Franck for Arabia, glassware from Iittala, as well as fabric and cushions from Marimekko.

Janis Kravis, 2012
Many Canadian homes have already achieved the light airy look without sacrificing naturalness or warmth—thanks to Scandinavian originals or domestic reproductions.

Patricia Lamont, 1956
54 | Lotte Bostlund (1919–1999), designer
Bostlund Industries, Oak Ridges, ON, manufacturer
Table lamp, c. 1965. Slip-cast stoneware, glaze, spun nylon, brass, electrical cord, 75 x 46 cm
Courtesy of Sarah Keenlyside. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

55 | Lotte Bostlund (1919–1999), designer
Bostlund Industries, Oak Ridges, ON, manufacturer
Lamp, c. 1965. Stoneware, glaze, spun nylon, brass, electrical cord, 75 x 46 cm
Courtesy of Sarah Keenlyside. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

56 | Folmer Hansen (1930–2014)
David Ross (1925–1974)
Hansen-Ross Pottery, Fort Qu’Appelle, SK
Bottle vase, 1967. Ceramic, 55 x 11.6 cm. Saskatchewan Arts Board Permanent Collection, C68.12. Photography by Gabriela Garcia-Luna. Photograph was taken at the Moose Jaw Museum and Art Gallery as part of the Hansen-Ross Retrospective Exhibition

57 | Al Faux (1935–1978)
Hugh Spencer (1928–1982), designers
Clairtone Sound Corporation, Toronto, ON, manufacturer
G2 Stereo, 1966. Wood (rosewood) chassis, painted cast aluminum speakers, plexiglas dust cover, brushed aluminum base, 68 x 199 x 37.5 cm. Design Exchange Permanent Collection, 991.1, gift of Frank Davies Image courtesy of the Design Exchange
59 | John Gallop, designer

58 | Keith Muller (1958–2005), designer
Ambiant Systems, Toronto, ON, manufacturer
MS-SC Stacking Chair, 1968. Moulded plywood, exposed bolts, 73 x 49.5 x 47 cm. Design Exchange Permanent Collection, 996.6, gift of Keith Muller. Image courtesy of the Design Exchange.

60 | Robert Larin

61 | Donald Lloyd McKinley (1932–1998)
Soup Can Table, c. 1968. Metal, 40.6 x 45.7 x 40.6 cm. Courtesy of Stephen Hogbin. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid.

61 | Donald Lloyd McKinley (1932–1998)
Soup Can Table, c. 1968. Metal, 40.6 x 45.7 x 40.6 cm. Courtesy of Stephen Hogbin. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid.
63 | Ernst Lorenzen (1911–1990)
Vase, c. 1969. Ceramic, 23.5 x 10 x 9 cm. Courtesy of Allan Collier. Photography by Allan Collier

62 | Roman Bartkiw (1935–2010)

65 | Finnish Woodworking, Sault Ste. Marie, ON, manufacturer
Table leg kit, c. 1970. Wood (maple). Cardboard box: 8.9 x 5.7 x 40.6 cm, legs: 7 x 39.4 cm. Private collection. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid.

64 | Unattributed
70 | Koen de Winter (b. 1945), designer
Rolling pins, 1972. Wood (maple), plastic, 45.7 cm. Private collection. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid
73 | Martha Glenny (b. 1953)
Neck ring and pendant, 1974. 14-carat yellow and white gold, sapphires, neck ring: 13 cm diameter; pendant: 6 x 6 cm. Courtesy of Martha Glenny. Image courtesy of Digital by Design

74 | Leif Jacobsen
Swend Nielsen (b. 1930), designers
Leif Jacobsen Ltd., Willowdale, ON, manufacturer
701 Desk, c. 1974. Wood (rosewood), chrome-plated steel, 73.7 x 198.1 x 91.4 cm. Collection of Irena and Gord Germann. Image courtesy 507 Antiques
75 | Folmer Hansen (1950–2014)
David Ross (1925–1974)

76 | Ruth Gowdy McKinley (1931–1981)
Vase, 1975. Ceramic, 22 x 8 cm. Courtesy of Lauren McKinley Renzetti. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

77 | Waldec of Canada Ltd., Rexdale, ON, manufacturer. Viborg, fabric sample, c. 1975
Cotton, 153 x 172 cm. Private collection
Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid
Esa Niemi Design, Etobicoke, ON
Printed textile, c. 1975. Cotton, polyester, 132.1 x 172.7 cm
Private collection. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid


Esa Niemi Design, Etobicoke, ON
Tea cozy, c. 1975. Cotton, polyester, 24.8 x 29.2 cm
Private collection. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid
82 | Gaétan Beaudin (1924–2002), designer
SIAL 2, Laval, QC, manufacturer. Place setting, 1978
Porcelain and stoneware, coffee pot: 16 x 14 cm;
creamer: 8.5 x 10 cm; sugar bowl: 8 x 10 cm;
7 x 13 x 16.5 cm; cup: 8 x 10 cm; saucer: 2 x 15 cm
Private collection. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

83 | Gaétan Beaudin (1924–2002), designer
SIAL 2, Laval, QC, manufacturer. Two carafes, 1978
Porcelain and stoneware ceramic, 25.5 x 14.5 x 11.5 cm

84 | André Morin (b. 1941), designer

85 | John Kopekiewicz (b. 1955), designer
Thorn Glass Studio, St. Jacobs, ON, manufacturer. Ice candlesticks, c. 1985. Glass, 14 x 5.1 cm each. Private collection. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

86 | Paul Epp (b. 1947), designer
By the 1990s, the realities of pluralistic taste in North American design culture were firmly established. However, many designers in their journey of discovery sought to determine a personal visual language appropriate to time and place. Geography, climate, and social and political culture remained important considerations.

Not surprisingly, any number of Canadian designers continue to work within the aesthetic traditions of Scandinavia because of its depth of meaning, its enduring appeal, and what is seen to be as its effective message in the context of Canadian experience. Some contemporary designers have purposefully sought to reference “classic” designs from Denmark and Sweden. Some look specifically to the realities of climate and topography. Others draw inspiration from the flora and fauna of the country. In all cases, the contemporary makers for whom Scandinavian aesthetics and design hold meaning seek to create objects that both satisfy their personal and professional aspirations that will be critically well received and commercially successful. The result is a rich and varied contemporary design landscape in Canada where the principles of Scandinavian design—materials, use, scale, and appearance—inform current practice. Moreover, as a result of the nation’s diminishing manufacturing industries, expanding digital and global marketplace, and heightened awareness of climate change, there is for many designers the active desire to make work that reflects and affirms such concerns. Perhaps more than ever, Canadian artisans, craftspeople, and designers seek to have their work represent the place and the society in which they live. It is as if what can be called aesthetic nationalism has matured to a point where imagery drawn from nature and forms of objects that reference history no longer necessarily function as stereotypes but exemplify the genuine character and culture of the country at a point in time. And that the tradition and legacy of the cultural exchange between Canada and Scandinavia thrives is significant. Canadian designers study, teach, and work all over Scandinavia; Canadian designers produce Nordic-inspired goods that are distributed outside of Canada; Canadian manufacturers commission Scandinavian designers; and Canadian designers create objects for Scandinavian companies. All of this is to say that in the first quarter of the new millennium the shared cultural and visual sensibilities between Canada and Scandinavian are as meaningful and relevant as ever.
We have always been drawn to the natural material palette and sacred quality of light in Nordic architecture and design, perhaps because we share the inspiration of northern nature.

White is an important colour, the love of it might come from seeing the landscape covered in freshly fallen snow and all the changing colours of sunlight across it.

As students of design we admire the Nordic countries for design that is connected to everyday life and culture in a very grounded, meaningful way, such as the simple beauty of practical tools and the ritual of sauna in Finland.

Stephanie Forsythe and Todd MacAllen, 2016
91 | Arouna Khounnoraj (b. 1973), designer
bookhou, Toronto, ON, manufacturer. Animal
pillows, 2016. Cotton, polyester filling, varied
dimensions. Courtesy of bookhou. Photography
by Toni Hafkenscheid

92 | Paul McClure (b. 1967)
Chromosome X, necklace, 2003. Sterling silver and
22-carat gold, oxidized sterling silver cable, 17.8 cm
Courtesy of Galerie Noel Guyomarc'h, Montreal
Photography by Digital By Design

93 | Doha Chebib Lindskoog (b. 1981), designer
Loyal Loot Collective, Calgary, AB, manufacturer
Untitled (log bowls), 2004. Reclaimed logs, acrylic
paint, water-based glass finish, diameter of cluster
of three: 38.1 cm. Courtesy of MADE Design
Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

94 | Dara Huminski (b. 1982), designer
Loyal Loot Collective, Calgary, AB, manufacturer
Untitled (coat rack), 2004. Baltic birch plywood,
maple veneer, 210.8 x 10.2 x 7.6 cm. Private
collection. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid
95 | Suzanne Swannie (b. 1942), designer

96 | Patty Johnson (b. 1957), designer
Birch ply, 124 x 72 x 100 cm. Courtesy of Patty Johnson. Photography by Peter Mabeo

97 | Shawn Place (b. 1967), designer
Shawn Place Designs, Prince George, BC, manufacturer.
SP210 Rocking Chair, c. 2004. Birch ply, stainless steel, seat, 86.5 x 79 x 58.5 cm. Courtesy of Shawn Place. Photography by Shawn Place
98 | Pamela Ritchie (b. 1952)
Beyond, 2012. Sterling silver, enamel on copper with silver inlay, 23 x 25 x 1 cm. Courtesy of Pamela Ritchie. Photography by Pamela Ritchie

99 | Pamela Ritchie (b. 1952)
Norwegian Soul, 2007. Sterling silver, 18-carat gold, pearls, 4.8 cm diameter. Courtesy of Pamela Ritchie. Photography by Pamela Ritchie

100 | Robert Southcott (b. 1977)
United We Stand, 2007. Birch plywood with brass hardware, 243.8 x 152 x 121.8 cm. Courtesy of Robert Southcott. Photography by Robert Southcott

101 | Lars Dressler (b. 1974)
Brothers Dressler, Toronto, ON, manufacturer
Branches Chandelier, 2009. Wood (white oak), 120 cm diameter. Courtesy of Brothers Dressler. Photography by Brothers Dressler

102 | Kathryn Walter (b. 1963), designer
FELT Studio, Toronto, ON, manufacturer
FELT spool stool, 2009. Felt and foam rubber, 43.2 x 50.8 cm. Courtesy of Kathryn Walter. Photography by Greg Woodbury
104 | Minna Koistinen (b. 1967), designer
Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

105 | Geoffrey Lilge (b. 1967), designer
On Our Table, Edmonton, AB, manufacturer
Hole Slab Long, 2009. Wood (solid walnut), 61 x 23 x 2 cm. Courtesy of the Gardiner Museum Shop
Photography by Geoffrey Lilge

105 | Derek McLeod (b. 1980), designer
Derek McLeod Design Inc., Toronto, ON, manufacturer
Leather Sling Chair, 2012. Leather, wood (maple), steel, copper fasteners, steel fasteners, 71.1 x 66 x 61 cm
Courtesy of Derek McLeod. Photography by Shanghoon

Persistent Variations 1990–present
There’s a very Scandinavian directness in my work that appeals to people. We’ve come through a period where everything was overdone. Simplicity is timeless.

My design sense comes from many places, Canada, Scandinavia. My dad was a cabinetmaker so the precision I learned from him is part of my work too.

I have this line I like to use: “Less is Never a Bore”. It’s my own riff on Less is More, and it’s true. The best things are simple and timeless and last forever. Maybe that’s a Scandinavian thing, and maybe it isn’t. I just know that it works for me.

Niels Bendtsen, 2016
The most cherished designs in my home are of Scandinavian origin. I use many of them every day and they are always trustworthy, a pleasure to use, and well worth the extra expense. By living with Scandinavian design, I am able to connect with a culture which respects materials and honours the accumulated knowledge [of] how to make things well. Scandinavian design is seldom frivolous, but often possesses a modest charm. Scandinavian designs add beauty to everyday simple tasks and are the humble pillars of good design that I aspire to as a designer.

Andrew Jones, 2016
Our goal isn’t recreating Scandinavia here in Canada; our aim has always been to create a picture of Canada through utilizing the optimistic and natural design tradition of Scandinavia.

Working with Scandinavian designers we lean on their expertise in translating a warm and tactile craft language into industrialized products.

As craft production slowly disappears in Scandinavia, there is the opportunity to take the rich design language developed by Scandinavian designers and implement them through small-scale production here in Canada.

John Baker and Juli Daoust, Mjölk, 2016
117 | Jenna Stanton (b. 1978)
Pour me... the self-medicating series, 2014–2015
Slip-cast porcelain, with silkscreened enamel decals, underglaze decoration, 21.6 x 7.6 cm. Courtesy of MADE Design. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid

118 | Brad Copping (b. 1964)
Barkbird decanter and Stumpware cups, 2015
Unique mould blown glass, decanter: 32.5 x 15 x 11 cm; cups: 5 x 7.5 x 7.5 cm each. Courtesy of Brad Copping. Photography by Brad Copping

119 | Coli Balles (b. 1974)
Don MacLennan (b. 1961)
Shadow Light, 2008
Blown glass, 50.8 x 40.6 cm
Courtesy of MADE Design. Photography by Toni Hafkenscheid
120 | Omer Arbel (b. 1976), designer
Bocci, Vancouver, BC, manufacturer.
73 Series Pendant Lamps, 2015.
Blown glass, braided metal coaxial cable,
electrical components, brushed nickel canopy,
varied dimensions. Courtesy of Bocci

121 | Heidi Earnshaw (b. 1969), designer
Heidi Earnshaw Design, Toronto, ON, manufacturer
Woven Cube, 2016. Wood (oiled walnut), Danish cord,
42 x 35.5 x 48 cm. Courtesy of Heidi Earnshaw Design.
Photography by Chris Jackson

122 | Jonathan Sabine (b. 1976) Jessica Nakanishi (b. 1981), designers
MSDS Studio, Toronto, ON, for Woud, DK, manufacturer
Ladder Back Lamp, 2016. Copper, leather, LED fixtures,
91.4 x 61 cm. Courtesy of MSDS Studio. Image courtesy of Woud

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Mark Kingwell is a Professor of Philosophy at the University of Toronto. He is the author of many books and articles about politics and art, most recently the essay collections Unruly Voices (2012) and Measure Yourself Against the Earth (2015).

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