

Félix Solaguren-Beascoa

Jacobsen



SANTA & COLE

ARNE JACOBSEN

FÉLIX SOLAGUREN-BEASCOA

LISBET BALSLEV JØRGENSEN

BARD HENRIKSEN

ERIK MØLLER



SANTA & COLE

Editorial committee:

Javier Nieto Santa, Pilar Nieto Santa and Julia Pettersson Salom

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Index

Presentation	6
Note to the fourth edition	7
Introductory texts	
Preamble: more than thirty years later <i>Félix Solaguren-Beascoa</i>	11
The design of Arne Jacobsen Finding the idea behind the shape of the stone ax <i>Lisbet Balslev Jørgensen</i>	19
Aarhus City Hall Constructions, materials, and artistic decoration <i>Erik Møller</i>	29
The interior world. The world of objects <i>Félix Solaguren-Beascoa</i>	35
Design files	
Buildings	45
Objects	129
Bibliographical files	197

Presentation

Jacobsen embodied the architect that all of us would like to be: the complete professional, capable of improving our entire living space, from the smallest detail to the farthest reaches of our vision. This kind of architect would have been only a chimera, a figment of our imagination had history not given us some tangible examples:

Wright, Mies, Aalto, Asplund, Coderch and Jacobsen.

Nowadays no one expects much of architects, perhaps only that they be discreet and professional, but not want to change a world that does not belong to them. Jacobsen was discreet and professional, he changed the world without really planning to, and it is this world and this profession that we have inherited, that we nurture and respect so that the message from our forerunners will not fade away.

Santiago Roqueta
Director of the ETSAB
1991-1994



Note to the fourth edition

Since 1991 Santa & Cole has been publishing books that explain how well-designed objects are created, using hitherto unpublished documentation and specific research to approach the work done by creators of recognised prestige in other disciplines.

In the field of architecture, this book gives us fresh insight into Arne Jacobsen, one of the few “all-encompassing architects” whose work shines in its own right and who left an enduring imprint on the history of design.

Browsing through the section on his “Design Archive” immerses the reader in the richness of his breathtaking creativity. His repertoire spans from the simplest objects to furniture and household and public lighting, from building complexes to proposals for prefabricated homes. This book captures the essence of Jacobsen’s overarching vision, providing a more comprehensive understanding of his multifaceted interests.

We now present the fourth edition of this unique work, out of print for years, widely distributed internationally, which describes the perhaps less widely known aspects of Jacobsen’s life and work. This edition contains more photos and additional revisions. It is a tribute to his exquisite sensitivity and meticulous simplicity in design, that transcends function to enter the realm of timeless artistic expression. This work was curated by Dr. Félix Solaguren-Beascoa, a renowned Jacobsen scholar, professor and Director of ETSAB Barcelona School of Architecture.





Introductory texts

Preamble: more than thirty years later

By Félix Solaguren-Beascoa

My project on Arne Jacobsen's work began in 1986 with the support of Gustavo Gili and Ignasi de Solà-Morales. Shortly thereafter, I contacted Lisbet Balslev Jørgensen through Finnish architect Simo Pavilainen. Lisbet, then curator of the Architectural Drawings Collection at the Danish Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen, who became a great friend and a pivotal part of my work for many years. The Dissing+Weitling practice, along with architects like Hans Dissing, Teit and Birgit Weylandt, Jes Stork and Edith Lang, among others, also contributed essential help.

In addition, I contacted Jonna Jacobsen, Arne Jacobsen's second wife, and met with their eldest son Johan Jacobsen, their grandson and my good friend Tobias Jacobsen, and Jonna's son Peter Holmblad.

After my first publications, Javier Nieto Santo encouraged me to continue delving into the Danish architect's work as a designer, a project that culminated in 1993 with a volume dedicated to his work in that field.

That book helped me to show that his architecture is closely linked to his work as a designer and vice-versa. This is quite common on the Scandinavian scene, and that's how I expressed it in the book that is now being revised.

At that time, we decided to divide the book into four parts: introductory texts, a second chapter linking architecture and design, a third one dedicated to objects designed specifically for commercial purposes, and lastly, a section containing a selection of press articles from the period with references to Arne Jacobsen's work.

The first part included a contribution by my dear friend Lisbet, who, as I've already said, was the key person who definitively introduced me to the Scandinavian world and, more specifically, the Danish world.

I was lucky enough to meet with Erik Møller, co-designer of Aarhus City Hall, at his apartment near Rosenborg palace in Copenhagen. Over tea, I asked him if he would write a text for the book, narrating his experience working with Jacobsen. He got up and handed me a volume¹ about the city hall he and Jacobsen had worked on together. He asked me to use the text from that book, as he didn't feel up to writing another one.

Alongside these two reflections, Javier Nieto insisted I write a third one which I ended up titling *The Interior World. The World of Objects*.

I have now revised it with some nostalgia, and having done so, I wouldn't touch a single comma. The text covers what I have so often discussed with Maria Àngels Negre, my wife, an architect, and someone to whom I owe so much for the drafting of this and all the works we've shared.

I think this title captures something quintessentially Danish, stemming from the country's specific climatology: the concept of the interior. This interior, so often a necessary shelter, has given rise to a vast world of poetry, literature, dreams and design. In short, culture or identity; national identity.

While in his novel *Prince*², Ib Michael describes the resin outflows and amber formations adjacent to the white cliffs of Møn island, Hans Christian Andersen's stories evoke other realities, such as that of a hundred-year-old oak tree with a hollow trunk in which the characters from his stories are said to have lived.

That tree exists³. It is next to Strandvejen highway, just beyond Jacobsen's Bellavista complex. Its hollow trunk can accommodate any visitor and it is a tree that might well conceal the treasures Andersen referred to. It is an interior in which any dream might come true.

It is seductive to draw the reader's attention towards these places, but the Danes' interest in the consistency of this interior and all the people and objects that inhabit it is by no means a coincidence.

Arne Jacobsen would not have been a stranger to all this, and much less so his architecture and design.

The glass cabinet

Everyone knows the story of when Arne Jacobsen told his father he wanted to be a painter. This initial vocation was endorsed when he received a letter from France. The envelope was addressed to *Monsieur Arne Jacobsen, artiste*.

The letter informed young Arne that he had been awarded the silver medal at the International Fair in Paris in 1925 for the design of a wood and wicker armchair he had presented for the competition and which he named Bourgeois.

It was quite the declaration.

Jacobsen was twenty-four years old at the time, and it was the first time he'd been called an artist, an appellation that confirmed his calling.

1. *Aarhus City Hall*, The Danish Architectural Press. Copenhagen, 1991.

2. *Prince*, Ib Michael. Ed Salamandra, Barcelona, 2002.

3. See *Det gamle egetræes sidste drøm*. Hans Christian Andersen. 1858.

Even with this letter in his possession, his father remained impassive, questioning this supposed flattery with the observation that he was “too fat to be an artist,” as the bohemian, needy image typical of artists was not what he wanted for his son.

The Lassen brothers, Mogens and Flemming, who were school friends of Jacobsen, very likely influenced his final decision to stray from his initial course and instead opt for the world of architecture, a profession that, at the time, and according to those around him, “would offer him a better future.”

The Jacobsen family lived in an apartment in the Østerbro district, to the north of the historic centre of Copenhagen. Their home was on Classensgade, a street that runs from Lake Sortedams, the easternmost of the five lakes that surround the city centre, to the railway line parallel to the east coast of the island of Sjælland, next to the Strandvejen highway. This highway, number 152, ends near Kronborg castle, the setting for Shakespeare’s Hamlet.

A significant part of Jacobsen’s architectural work can be found in this area, which is why he would always carry this landscape with him, throughout his life, locked into his memory.

The façades of the houses on Classensgade are simple. They could easily be included in the book Knud Millech and Kay Fisker published in 1951⁴ on Danish architectural trends between 1850 and 1950, a publication that is fundamentally based on residential architecture projects.

The buildings on the street are taut canvases that use similar composite materials and resources: horizontal lines modulate the hierarchy and arrangement of the elements that form them through plain mouldings that give similar but subtly different results for each project.

Though each is different, their overall impression is of a uniform whole, like that of so many streets of the Danish capital.

There are not many balconies in this false monotony; nor are there many overhanging elements, although very occasionally a small gallery breaks with the smoothness of the continuous facing that makes up the street.

This impression of uniformity is also achieved by the large windows of the apartments that let abundant natural light indoors, at the same time as sheltering their inhabitants from the harsh weather.

The Jacobsen house meets these requirements, and the white light of the north floods into a cluttered interior decorated with furniture, souvenirs, and personal items typical of a Bourgeois family of the period, much alike that of all the neighbouring homes.

It is worth noting that many of these items were placed on the inner windowsills of these large windows, and were therefore also visible from the street. From the inside they were back-lit and only their silhouettes would be distinguishable by day. By night, though, they would be clearly visible under the artificial indoor light, allowing one to fully grasp their value.

4. Østifternes Kreditforening. København 1951.



Jacobsen House (1929). Lounge.

While during the day the light came from the glass window in the façade, at night the focus changed and it came from the interior. These were the only two options.

Although the architectural landscape was well defined and mature in the Copenhagen of the 1920s, the first murmurings of the new architecture and modern designs were also emerging. And the young architect Jacobsen gradually began to dissociate himself from the prevailing tradition in Danish architectural projects and building. Nevertheless, the back-lit image of his parents' house was to remain etched on his retina.

Evidence of this can be seen in the living room of his first white house⁵: a jumbled, chaotic space the atmosphere of which was similar to the family home on Classensgade.

The clutter contradicted the image typical of the demands of the select, exquisite new modern man who was to be the main user of this new architecture. The living room window was a large display window, a large glass cabinet with no back to it.

This glass resource already existed in traditional Nordic architecture as a thermal solution, but in the form of double-glazing, wherein air is trapped between two panes of glass, one outer and one inner. Between them the small space also facilitates the transition from indoor to outdoor.

This space gradually started to be filled with small objects and plants, adding nuances to and enhancing this relationship between indoors and outdoors.

As more objects began to be placed in this space, the separation between the two panes of glass increased. It even began to protrude from the outer plane of the façade, becoming a sort of window display containing these objects and

5. Godfred Rodesvej, 2. Hellerup. https://issuu.com/realdaniaby/docs/arne_jacobsens_eget_hus_charlottenl



Glade Olsens House (1934). Window.



Rùthwen-Jùrgensen House (1954-57). Showcase.

plants. It was a display case that further emphasised the modern resolve; it was a large glass cabinet embedded into the space in the outer wall, and visibly protruding from it.

Arne Jacobsen became interested in the design of these objects: wooden clocks, trophies, candlesticks, drinking glasses, salt sellers, cutlery, etc., items that could easily be found in any display case.

The windows/glass cabinets were lit from both sides: from the outside (natural light) and from the inside (artificial light). If the window protruded from the wall, it also received light from the other two perpendicular faces.

Jacobsen did not only work on the design of the objects placed in its interior, but he also recognised that the glass box was an independent element that offered him new possibilities.

One initial aspect was to make it more lightweight so as to subsequently integrate it into his projects.

The depth of the new buildings gradually increased. The new artificial ventilation and lighting mechanisms allowed these interior spaces to be occupied, affording them an importance they did not previously have, connecting spaces and indoor offices or waiting and meeting rooms.

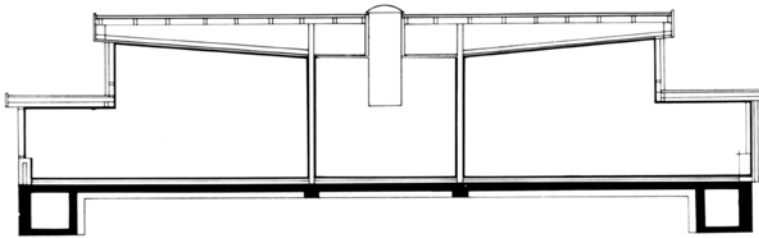
The problem was that, despite being technically sound, they would not receive natural light if they were too far from the exterior. In such cases, natural lighting could only be achieved using skylights when the building was only one floor high.

Jacobsen was aware of this and proposed a significant variation by merging this overhead light source with the glass cabinet-window.

The result was that these interior areas could have this same quality usually reserved for external rooms: it was the glass display used on the façade taken into the inner realms of the project. The result was both a light source and a display element where objects were illuminated, not by the vertical panes of glass but from above, from the skylight.

The Nyager school in Copenhagen is a good example.

The floor plan comprises several north-south, single-storey volumes that are grouped linearly and length-wise. Some of them face the east and others face the



Nyager School (1959-64). Section.

Nyager School (1959-64). Showcase.



west, so that they face away from each other. In the centre is a wide corridor. The new construction has greater depth and is therefore more efficient.

The classrooms section is resolved by means of a break in the roof similar to that used previously in the Munkegård school. This allows light to enter from two sources, one in the façade and the other halfway across the room where the roof steps up. This achieves a more uniform indoor lighting.

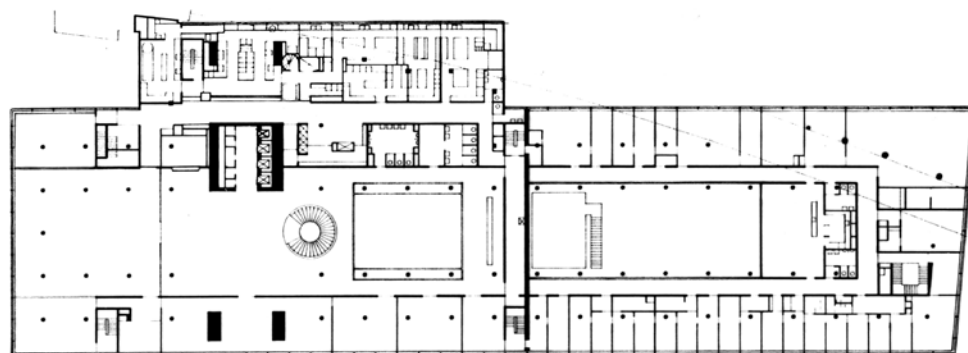
Initially there was little light in this central corridor. Jacobsen resolved this problem by designing large overhead light cylinders which he placed in the centre of the corridor. In other areas he modified these skylights and turned them into rectangular window displays that served a dual purpose: to light the interior and showcase objects.

Another meaningful example is the so-called “Winter Garden” of the SAS/Royal Hotel in Copenhagen. With a change in scale, it is a large transparent room, a pleasant waiting room for the users of the airline and the hotel. It is located at the end of the spiral staircase that dominates the lobby.

The initial idea was for pilots and flight attendants to bring plants from anywhere in the world to be placed in the space enclosed by a double-glazed perimeter wall. This room, a large transparent box, had a sufficiently generous separation between the two sides to accommodate both the structure and the exotic vegetation.

The delicate border is lit from above by a skylight that bathes the large room in light. It is an autonomous element within the hotel. The objects, the permanent inhabitants, are those designed by Jacobsen: the Egg armchair, the Swan armchair, tables, ashtrays and various lamps, and they can be seen from anywhere on the ground floor. Guests and travellers contribute circumstantially to the decoration. It is a restful place with natural light and a pleasant atmosphere: it is part of the exterior that forms part of the interior.

In 1961 the Danish National Bank project in Copenhagen commenced, ending after the architect’s death in 1978. The multistorey bank was built on a single-storey, stone supporting structure that occupies the entire lot, on one side of which stands a volume of offices.



Hotel Royal SAS (1955-60). Plant



Hotel Royal SAS (1955-60). Winter Garden.

This ground floor houses two differently purposed areas: one of a restricted nature, featuring offices and security areas, and the other of a public nature, housing the main access and a large room for currency exchange.

This is located in the central interior area and cannot be lit from the outside. To resolve the lighting of this area, Jacobsen combined artificial and natural light. For the electric lighting, he used the same solution he had already employed some years before in the council chamber of Rødovre City Hall. A large white ceiling reflects indirect light from the electrified rails. It is a uniform indirect light that contrasts with the beautiful wooden floor.

For natural light, he used his overhead glass cabinet-display case. The final design is resolved through a combination of two previous experiences: the glass cabinet-display window of the Nyager school combined with the double-glazed exterior of the winter garden of the SAS/Royal Hotel.

Once designed, plants were hung in its interior, receiving the diffused overhead light: again Jacobsen blended outdoor with indoor.

The house where Jacobsen lived and worked was at Strandvejen 413 in Klampenborg. It was the one at the front of the Søholm I complex, next to Bellavista beach, and close to the tree that inspired many of Hans Christian Andersen's stories.

This home embodies and condenses Jacobsen's concerns.

At the Søholm I complex, the roof has a break in it allowing the light to enter a dual space. In the lower part, the dining room features a round table and four chairs similar to those designed for the Gentofte stadium. The lighting is mixed throughout, with natural light coming in thanks to the break in the roof, and artificial lighting from a beautiful Globe ceiling lamp by Poul Henningsen.

In the rest of the house's interior are objects, plants and furniture designed by the architect; it is an interior with outdoor conditions.

The home has a landscaped area where Jacobsen worked on one of his great passions: botany. The severe geometric design of short, parallel green walls and the clearly-drawn areas of vegetation represent an exterior that aspires to be an interior, like the hanging plants in transparent glass cabinets.

Arne Jacobsen devoted much of his life to designing objects and to gardening, and also to designing sideboards as a way of combining the two, and his architecture was able to contain both at the same time.

Perhaps that was my initial intuition, one that, thirty years on, I have corroborated. That intuition was what helped me to title the text *The interior world. The World of Objects* in 1993.

It is to them, to those objects, that this book is dedicated.



National Bank (1961-78). Change room.

Barcelona, October 2023

Arne Jacobsen's Design

Unearthing the idea behind the shape of the stone axe

By Lisbet Balslev Jørgensen

A very young Arne Jacobsen started his training at the Copenhagen Kunstakademis School of Architecture in 1919. It was a time of transition: the war was over. New values and new ideals were emerging. Architects were acquiring a social conscience. The old society was breaking apart. *Arkitekten*, a review edited by Kay Fisker, published a number of important articles that year: Carl Petersen's *The Faaborg Museum*, as well as his lecture on the behaviour of materials; *Country Houses*, by C.F. Hansen, his surveys in Liselund and his paper about Spurveskjul, the country home of sculptor Nicolai Abildgaard; the article by the Swedish art historian Gregor Paulsson about standardisation of crafts and architecture; the research by P.V. Jensen-Klint about the church of Grundtvig and the development of Danish art, and the Ivar Bentsen opera house and concert hall; the papers by art historian Vilhelm Wanscher on the basis for scientific- architectural teaching and versatile construction. Towards the end of the year, the review published *In Memoriam: The Architect's Free Association (Den Fr: Arkitekforaning)*, an article about this association that had been in existence for ten years. Its members felt that they had done their duty, disseminating knowledge of one of the most important periods of Danish architecture, the final stage in the development of the style, true classicism. *In Memoriam* also contended that Copenhagen City Hall, a work by Professor Martin Nyrop, then in his later years, was disliked by younger architects. Fifty years later, Arne Jacobsen was also profoundly misunderstood by a younger generation who defaced the projects he presented at the Charlottenburg Exhibition of 1969, claiming his architecture represented the aesthetics of an elitist bourgeoisie.

The new masters, who introduced modernity to architectural teaching, were Carl Petersen, Hack Kampman, Kaj Gottlob and Edvard Thomsen, and in 1920 they hired Kay Fisker as a professor. The two-year course known as the “Temple Class” was to prove pivotal. Ancient architecture was studied and surveyed. In Jacobsen’s time the teaching of urban planning, landscaping and furniture crafts was introduced. Thomsen used to say that Fisker and Jacobsen had been his best pupils. They already knew everything before they started; they were studious and diligent and did all their exercises and homework uncomplainingly, and they stayed out of trouble. This was due in part to their youth, but also to the fact that they were keen to learn everything they could from their older colleagues and on top of that they also knew how to paint with watercolours. Fisker did not hesitate to hire Jacobsen for his studio when he was commissioned to design the Danish pavilion for the 1925 International Exhibition in Paris.

Before World War I, a group of students, including Povl Stegmann, Aage Rafn, Ejnar Dyggve and, the youngest of them, Kay Fisker, had already laid the groundwork for enhanced teaching methods and for an architecture more in keeping with the changing times. As members of the Association of 3 December 1892, they had already studied and surveyed a typical eighteenth-century Danish corner building (in 1910). In 1914 they published a paper on this subject in which they wrote:

“[...] the simple items in the rooms, arranged with an urgent, almost refined, sense of proper proportion. The use of panels and mouldings, plain or panelled doors, a rich variety of bright colours all add to the character of each room.

Very seldom is anything that is not strictly necessary allowed.

[...] is a concept of form in which functional reality is understood and expressed immediately, simplicity acquires value through its origin and by serving its purpose.”

This group met regularly until the war broke out. Their aim was to increase their awareness of the technical qualities of materials and to develop an architecture that would reflect the changing structures of the society of that time.

“Functional analysis reduced the problem to its different parts, and this analysis became a language that stemmed from the qualities of the materials selected. The style we were seeking was, at least theoretically, timeless. Its idea was embodied by the shape of the stone axe, the window of a Danish village house, the floor plan of a country church, the rules of basic construction.”

The students found common properties from which they derived typologies, examined functions and delighted in the practical and constructive details they found. They made surveys because they wanted to have a view of architecture as a whole and of the future, but not with a view to copying. The requirements of the new times created their own form and appearance, but for it to make sense in Denmark it was necessary to acquire a thorough knowledge of past methods of construction.

In 1924, Arne Jacobsen took part in the study and survey of the cottages M.G. Bindsbøll had designed for a health resort that was about to be demolished in Kampenborg, north of Copenhagen. In 1925, he went on a study tour to Paris, where he attended the International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts. Having been warned not to be impressed by all the modern bluff, he also travelled to Provence and Italy, and to the purest of all sources: the temples of Paestum. Jacobsen had designed the Danish pavilion in Fisker's studio and had also received a medal for his design of a chair.

He meticulously studied ancient architecture, which only the ignorant regarded with contempt. Intelligent souls had the good sense to investigate its essence and search for its values and forms of expression. "It is not enough for me to know that a column has entasis," wrote Povl Stegman, "I also need to know the proportions determining the line that yields the most harmonious entasis. I need to know the simple things that provide the basis for all linear harmony, as meter is to poetry or rhythm and interval to music." Arne Jacobsen, the artist, was highly perceptive. He did not need to be warned against modern delusion. He was an artist, and as such understood what lay behind everything: the idea underlying the shape of the stone axe, the function, and the technical and tactile qualities of the material. He had surveyed the Place des Vosges in Paris and the Saint Blaise chapel in Arles; he had studied Brunelleschi in Florence and surveyed Santa Maria de Cosmedin, in Rome, and the Basilica of Paestum, as well as many other sites. It was not the style that was essential, but the conjunction of primary forms and skilled craftsmanship.

Different starting points led this new generation back to classicism. Some wanted to continue from the point where natural stylistic development had stopped; others felt the need to rationalise the language of form: the coming together of primary elements. The Kunstakademis School of Architecture sought continuity in teaching. In Danish society, every development had to be evolutionary. The *tabula rasa* and revolutionary concepts would only lead to emptiness and a sense of loss. Only a firm hold on European tradition could provide the foundation for solid development in the art of construction. *Festina lente* is the motto on the sketchbook of Martin Nyrop, who, in a publication of his notes and measurements, averred: "With old iron we shall forge new weapons."

In his schoolwork, Arne Jacobsen began with classical space and simplified the language of form, as his teachers wished, but he did not allow himself to be constrained by established models. It was his meticulous attention to every detail and to the possibilities of the materials he used that ultimately produced the result.

Abstraction

With the help of space and stereometric forms, the precursors of functionalism threw off the shackles of the worn-out platitudes of style.