

# Copenhagen by (modern) design

Danish Modern may steal the show, but this stylish Scandinavian city has much to offer



CYNTHIA ELYCE RUBIN  
Orlando, Fla.

Copenhagen, Denmark, is a charmer. Packed with cafés and shops from the winding streets of old town to the city's cutting-edge buildings, the city blends old-world and new. Hop on a bike like the locals or stroll the city on foot.

I had only a few days, so I headed first to the picturesque Nyhavn Canal where



**Photos:** (left) Cees van Roeden / courtesy of Wonderful Copenhagen, (center) Rasmus Flindt Pedersen / courtesy of Wonderful Copenhagen, (above) Cynthia Elyce Rubin  
Left: Amagertorv, on one of the world's longest pedestrian streets, is an old neighborhood filled with modern design.  
Center: The sculpture of The Little Mermaid at Langelinje Pier was sculpted by Edvard Eriksen as a gift to the city from Danish brewer Carl Jacobsen.  
Above: A variety of chairs are on display in the Designmuseum Denmark.



afterwards took a relaxing cruise with a Canal Tour. Then a walk onto Langelinje Pier, where one of Copenhagen's most famous tourist attractions, a bronze and granite sculpture of The Little Mermaid, resides where she has been attracting tourists since 1913. The gift from Danish brewer Carol Jacobsen was inspired by Hans Christian Andersen's fairy tale about a mermaid who gives up everything to unite on land with a young, handsome prince. Every morning and evening she swam to the surface from the bottom of the sea and perched on her rock, gazing longingly toward shore.

In the center of town is Copenhagen's foremost attraction and national treasure, Tivoli Gardens amusement park. Founded in 1843, it has never lost its popularity. With something for everyone, beautiful scenery, exotic architecture, lush gardens, and thousands of colored lights that light up the night, Tivoli appeals with its oldest and most popular ride, a 1914 wooden roller coaster, and its many restaurants and live music events.

But in Copenhagen's DNA are aesthetics. Although Nordic countries all contributed to the output of modern design, "Danish Modern" takes center stage. You find it in contemporary New Nordic cuisine. When Danish chefs Rene Redzepi and Claus Meyer of Noma (short for nordisk mad meaning Nordic food) Restaurant emphasized Scandinavian ingredients and the need for "purity, simplicity, and freshness," their approach to gastronomy was rooted in local, seasonal foods combined with traditional dishes prepared in new ways. You find aesthetics in architecture. As the concrete, glass, and iron designed to meet the social needs of the 1930s evolved, they blended with characteristics from modernism, such as open plan interiors, flat roofs, and glass façades. Aes-

thetics are in the very tone of the city often described as "trendy" and "cool."

Originally, Danish design was a product of the 1950s, the golden age. The post-war period experienced a lack of materials, and design in this period was characterized by simplicity, functionality, and minimalism, a radical departure from previous styles.

To explore an overview of the Danish design phenomenon, I visited the Designmuseum Denmark, a hub for the country's design history, located on Bredgade, a main artery in Copenhagen's 250-year-old royal district. Here you find a gathering of art galleries and vintage design shops, among them the flagship Klassik Copenhagen store (Bredgade 3) established in 1991 with window displays that rival any museum installation. In the museum itself, a permanent installation, Danish Design Now, represents contemporary design covering the entire spectrum: furniture, product design, graphics, fashion, and design in the public space. Another permanent installation is Fashion & Fabric, textiles and fashion showing a wealth of patterns, motifs, and colors in clothing and accessories that follow the themes of decoration, handicrafts, and identity.

Some Danish modernists like Arne Jacobsen designed buildings as well as the silverware, coffeepots, and chairs to complement them. With whimsical names like Ant, Egg, and Swan, his iconic chairs are wildly popular today. Many of his accessories are also still being produced: Stelton with the Cylinda line of tableware and Georg Jensen with cutlery. But Jacobsen considered him-



self foremost an architect. His furniture and housewares were just part of the whole. As an added bonus, a visit to the Radisson SAS Royal Hotel and room 606, which has been preserved exactly as Jacobsen originally imagined it, is a must for any aficionado.

Celebrated industrial designer Jens Quistgaard with his popular pieces for the Dansk brand helped define Scandinavian Modern for postwar Americans. Dansk, an American company, was known for making European styles accessible to the average American consumer. Quistgaard used enameled steel, lighter and less expensive than cast iron, as a medium for cookware. In 1956 Dansk released his Kobenstyle line, enameled in a range of vivid solid colors with distinctive handles that doubled as trivets. That mid-century classic had not been manufactured for more than 20 years until it was recently re-released. That so many examples of the Danish Modern style have lasted so long attests to its timelessness.

The main artery for fashion and design pulses through the heart of the city center. Strøget was inaugurated in 1962 as the world's longest pedestrian shopping street. The area around Amagertorv with its fountain and square is a great place to stop and view some of Denmark's best-known brands. The four-story Illums Bolighus sells every kind of Scandinavian item a modern obsessive could desire. Royal Copenhagen Porcelain founded in 1775 has its flagship store nearby. The beautiful Renaissance house, one of Copenhagen's oldest, dates to 1616 and has been the Royal Copenhagen

location since 1911. The shop displays the entire line of tableware, figurines, and gift items, including the limited edition Christ-mas plates produced since 1908.

Next door is Georg Jensen, the luxury brand of silver jewelry and table items. Jensen first began exhibiting his Art Nouveau works in 1892, and in 1904 he opened his first store in Copenhagen with his philosophy of creating democratic designs possessing both functionality and beauty.

But so much for Danish Modern's allure, my hands-on experiences during a short time in Copenhagen include a flavorful pølse (hot dog) from a street vendor, smørrebrød (open sandwich on dark rye bread) at a typical Danish eatery, and a visit to a bakery to sample Denmark's most-recognized food export, the wienebrød or Danish pastry. Now I fully understand why the Danes are ranked the happiest of us all.



*Cynthia Elyce Rubin, Ph.D., is a visual culture specialist, travel writer, and author of articles and books on decorative arts, folk art, and postcard history, collects postcards, ephemera, and early photography. She*

*is currently working on Enorme Amerika: Norske utvandreres postkort, humor og rariteter to be published by SpreDet Forlag in Oslo and is completing a manuscript on O.S. Leeland, Norwegian immigrant photographer who worked in South Dakota in the early 1900s. See [www.cynthiaelycerubin.com](http://www.cynthiaelycerubin.com).*