JACOB JENSEN’S STORY

A VESTERBRO BOY

Jacob Jensen was born on April 29, 1926 in Copenhagen, the son of an upholsterer, Alfred Jensen, and his wife Olga Jensen. He grew up in the rough environment of the Vesterbro area, left school after the seventh grade, completed his training as an upholsterer in 1946, and went on the road for some months, as was the custom for newly trained artisans.

His father established his own furniture workshop in 1947 in Gartnergade, Copenhagen where Jacob joined him. Here he developed furniture, including a sofa bed, and began to design chairs. He was discovered by chance and encouraged to attend the School of Arts and Craft.

THE SCHOOL OF ARTS AND CRAFT

He was accepted at the School of Arts and Craft in the furniture division in 1948 as the only upholsterer among 11 furniture makers, one of these being Poul Kjærholm. The school was a breeding ground for the many furniture designers, which has made Danish furniture world famous. The international breakthrough of Danish Design occurred during the very years that Jacob Jensen attended the school. The training was based on the design methods of Kaare Klint and was taught by people such as Hans J. Wegner and Jørn Utzon. Utzon initiated a course in a brand new subject called “Industrial Design” which Jacob Jensen, greatly inspired, joined and completed as the only student. Jacob Jensen graduated from the School of Arts and Craft in 1952.
BERNADOTTE & BJØRN
In 1952 there was only one studio in Scandinavia which employed industrial designers. This was Bernadotte & Bjørn in Copenhagen, with Sigvard Bernadotte, a son of the Swedish King, as one of the partners. Jacob Jensen worked here from 1952 to 1958, as studio chief from 1954. Here he learned about the growing market from the bottom up. According to Bernadotte, it was Jacob Jensen who in 1955 designed the company’s most successful product, the Margrethe bowl, which is still in production.

USA
In 1956, Jacob Jensen went to the USA to work for a number of leading studios. The contacts were established by Bernadotte and included the design star Raymond Loewy in New York and the design strategy studio Latham, Tyler & Jensen (LTJ) in Chicago. During his time in Chicago, Jacob Jensen was particularly inspired by Richard Latham. Latham thought in terms of survival strategies, incorporating both the market oriented American tradition and the idealistic Bauhaus inspired tradition. In 1960, Jacob became a partner in LTJ and managed the company’s European interests until 1975.

OWN STUDIO
In 1958, Jacob Jensen opened his own studio in Strandgade in Copenhagen. Soon after, Jacob Jensen Design moved to a suburb Frederiksberg with a staff of 8. This development involved more management than design, which did not suit Jacob Jensen’s taste. He reduced the staff to two and moved further outside the city to the village of Jyllinge. In this period, Jacob Jensen completed an extensive design concept for General Electric, which pointed towards Hi-Fi-systems of the future. General Electric chose not to use the design, which later became the basis of B&O’s form language and strategy.

HEJLSKOV
In 1966, Jacob Jensen Design moved to its present location, Hejlskov on the Limfjord. The house is a modern fortress, built by Jacob Hermann, one of Jacob Jensen’s former teachers at the School of Arts and Craft. It is situated in a beautiful and isolated landscape on the edge of the fjord. With Jacob Jensen is his American wife Patricia and their three children, Thomas, Katja and Timothy.

BANG & OLUFSEN
The move to Hejlskov was partly related to Jacob Jensen’s new client, B&O in Struer, 50 kilometres from Hejlskov. The relationship was begun in 1964 and continued in various forms until 1991. During this period, Jacob Jensen designed over 200 products for B&O, creating the exclusive form language, which has provided the company with its international status and survival niche.

THE MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
Jacob Jensen’s design is exhibited in a number of art and design museums around the world. The most significant of the international exhibitions is the solo exhibition at MoMA in New York in 1978: “Bang & Olufsen – Design for Sound by Jacob Jensen”. The exhibition comprised 28 audio products. Both before and after the exhibition, MoMA purchased Jacob Jensen designs for its permanent collection, and today owns 19 pieces.

OTHER PRODUCTS
Jacob Jensen is primarily known for his B&O design, but as an industrial designer he has designed more than 500 products for a large number of clients. Among these are hearing aids for Danavox, Hi-Fi for General Electric, office chairs for Labofa, telephones for Alcatel-Kirk, cable reels for JoJo, wind turbines for NEG Micon, kitchen hardware
for Gaggenau Haugeråte, along with watches, telephones, weather stations and more under the brand name JACOB JENSEN™.

AWARDS
Jacob Jensen has received countless rewards, medals and accolades through his long career as a designer. In 1949, he was awarded his first medal by HRH King Frederik IX of Denmark in connection with a contest for which the young Jacob Jensen had submitted a chair. Later in life, he was knighted with the Knights Cross of the Order of Dannebrog (1996), included in the Foreign Ministry’s list of “Great Danes” (1999), and in 2006 King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden and Queen Sylvia awarded the Danish industrial designer the Prince Eugen Medal for outstanding artistic achievement. In 2008, Jacob Jensen was awarded the lifelong honorary grant from the Danish Arts Foundation. (In a separate document there is a complete list with more than 100 exhibitions, awards, etc.)

THE MEDITERRANEAN
In 1981, Jacob Jensen realised his old dream of sailing. Together with his second wife Hanne and their two children, Troels and Toke, they sailed through the canals of Europe to the Mediterranean where the family eventually settled on Mallorca. For some time the studio was run from Mallorca with assistants in Hejlskov.

GENERATIONAL CHANGE
In 1990, Timothy Jacob Jensen, the youngest son of Jacob’s first marriage, took over the company. Timothy was apprenticed to his father from 1978 to 1981 and is now the main shareholder, CEO and chief designer. Under Timothy’s management, Jacob Jensen Design has remained a highly awarded design studio. The form language has been refined and transferred to new areas of application while the company has gone global. Today, Jacob Jensen Design has studios in Hejlskov as well as Shanghai and Bangkok. Furthermore, Timothy Jacob Jensen has designed a wide range of lifestyle products sold across the world under the brand of JACOB JENSEN™.

RETIREMENT
Right up until 2011, Jacob Jensen worked as a designer and collaborator on special projects. In recent years, Jacob Jensen spent his time at home in his house by the Virksund Marina along with his third wife, Nanna.

Jacob Jensen passed away peacefully on the 15th of May 2015.

LITERATURE
· Christian Holmsted Olesen (2003). Jacob Jensen. In the Louisiana series, “Danish Designers”, Aschehoug, (available in Danish and English)
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