



Finn Juhl,  
*Chieftain sofa* for  
Niels Vodder, 1949

Opposite: Alvar  
Aalto, *Model no.  
3031 Savoy vase*  
for Karhula, 1936

## scandinavian design

Scandinavia is a patchwork of Northern European nation states that form a cultural and regional entity that is very distinct from the rest of Europe. Sharing a common economic and cultural history and linguistic roots (except Finland), the Scandinavian countries each possess a unique character that reflects their different geographies and environmental conditions. More than anywhere else in the world, designers in Scandinavia have instigated and nurtured a democratic approach to design that seeks a social ideal and the enhancement of the quality of life through appropriate and affordable products and technology. From its birth around 1920, modern Scandinavian design has been underpinned by a moral humanist ethos the roots of which can be traced to Lutheranism – the state religion throughout Scandinavia, which stresses truth and reason and teaches that salvation can be gained through honest work that benefits one's fellow man. It is this moral belief in social imperatives that has formed the philosophical bedrock from

which Scandinavian design has evolved and prospered.

Scandinavia is a term generally used to describe Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. But only the latter two nations are actually situated on the Scandinavian Peninsula. More properly, within the region the five countries are referred to as *Norden*, or quite literally "The North." Omitting Iceland, the lonely outpost in the North Atlantic, the other four countries form a territorial entity that extends 1,900 km (1,200 miles) from the Danish-German frontier to the northernmost part of Norway. Their combined land area is about 1,165,000 sq. km (450,000 sq. miles), greater than Britain, France and Spain put together. But the balance changes dramatically when people, not acres, are counted. Vast expanses of northern Finland, Norway and Sweden are given over to mountains and forest, while most of volcanic Iceland is totally uninhabitable. Those who can properly call themselves Nordic number just over 27 million and are to be found





*Pastil* chair for  
Asko, 1967

## eero aarnio born 1932 Helsinki, Finland



One of several designers to bring international recognition to Finnish design in the 1960s, Eero Aarnio studied at the Taideteollisuuskeskuskoulu (University of Art and Design) in Helsinki from 1954 to 1957. He subsequently established his own design practice in 1962, and since then has worked mainly as an interior and industrial designer. Following the precedent set by earlier Finnish designers during the first half of the 20th century, Aarnio initially designed furniture in natural materials using traditional handcraft techniques, such as his *Jattujakkare* wicker stool (c. 1958). Believing, however, that, "Design means constant renewal, realignment, growth," Aarnio began experimenting during the 1960s with fiberglass and in particular the bold and exciting forms that this material permitted. His best-known series of designs from this period included the *Ball* chair (1963), the rocking *Pastil* chair (1967), for which he won an AID (American Industrial Design) award in 1968, and the Perspex hanging *Bubble* chair (1968).

While these iconoclastic seating solutions captured the spirit of the 1960s with their visually exciting space-age forms, Aarnio did not embrace the Pop culture ethos of ephemerality and disposability. In 1973, Aarnio designed his playful toy-like yet adult-sized *Pony* seat, which was marketed as the *Mustang* by Stendig in the United States. This unusual design made of upholstered molded foam reflected Aarnio's belief that, "A chair is a chair, is a chair, is a chair ... but a seat does not necessarily have to be a chair. It can be anything as long as it is ergonomically correct." This unusual Pop design could either be sat on sideways or "rode" presumably into a "fantasy" landscape limited only by one's own imagination. During the 1980s, Aarnio developed a prototype plywood chair and later in the 1990s designed two fiberglass tables – the *Copacabana* (1991) and the *Screw* (1992) – for Adelta, as well as sculptural metal door furniture (1996) for Valli & Valli. Despite his advancing years, Aarnio continues to look forward optimis-

tically to a time when, as he once put it, "The personal approach of the past and the robot manufacture of the future clasp hands ... (so that) ... industrial production will be so completely mastered that we can forget it." Although best known for his furniture and interior schemes, Aarnio has also worked in the areas of graphic design and photography.



*Ball* chair for  
Asko, 1962

Below: Original  
publicity photo-  
graph of *Bubble*  
chair, late 1960s





Design for *Poppy*  
tapestry, c. 1898

Opposite: *Summer  
Night's Dream*  
tapestry hanging,  
c. 1899

## frida hansen

1855 Hillevåg-by-Stavanger – 1931 Oslo, Norway



The Norwegian textile designer Frida Hansen studied painting before establishing an embroidery workshop in Stavanger in 1882. During this period she became familiar with the Norwegian folk tradition of tapestry weaving – since the 18th century “peasant” weavers had produced tapestries depicting naïve biblical scenes. These textiles, whose powerful artistic expression made up for their lack of technical finesse, were generally viewed in Norway as national art treasures. Inspired by these antecedents, Hansen began learning weaving techniques on a standing loom at Kjerstina Hauglum in Sogn, and then in 1892 moved to Oslo (then known as Christiania), where in 1899 she founded the weaving company Det Norske Billedvæveri (DNB). Initially she drew motifs from the ancient Norwegian sagas, but after a trip to Paris around 1885, she embraced the Art Nouveau style. From this period onwards, her tapestries were often adorned with “Mackintosh-style” roses and other highly stylized flowers with strong saturated colors and bold swirling

outlines. At the DNB workshop, Hansen not only revived the use of natural dyes and old weaving techniques, but also pioneered special new techniques including her famous “transparent weaving,” which brought her widespread acclaim. This innovative technique involved leaving some areas of the warp exposed to create a transparent background that contrasted dramatically with the richly colored woven motifs. During the 1890s, Hansen collaborated with fellow Norwegian designer **Gerhard Munthe** (who designed several tapestries for DNB), and in 1899, she wrote a book entitled *Husflid og Kunstindustri i Norge*. She exhibited her work at the 1893 “World’s Columbian Exposition” in Chicago and also at the 1900 Paris “Exposition Universelle et Internationale,” where she was awarded a gold medal. By the turn of the century, Frida Hansen was not only the most important Norwegian weaver but also one of the greatest advocates of the naturalistic Art Nouveau style in Scandinavia.



