

SCANDINAVIAN STYLE THE NORDIC PENCHANT FOR DESIGN IS COLONISING OUR TASTES BUT THAT'S NO BAD THING, SAYS HELEN JENNINGS

Seats fit for Thor to sit on

What do Alvar Aalto's Paimio chair, Arne Jacobsen's Egg chair, Verner Panton's stacking S-chair and Eero Aarnio's Ball chair have in common? They were all classics that put the Nordic countries on the style map in the early and mid-20th century.

Yet somehow, more than 60 years on, these countries remain as influential as ever on British homes. And, at Britain's biggest design festival last month, who should win for best contribution at the 100% Design Show but the Danish stand, Made in Denmark?

What's more, Skandium, the niche store for all things Scandinavian, has had such success that it has opened another branch on London's Brompton Road. Danish shop Ilva, which arrived here only last year, is in Gateshead and Manchester now, as well as Thurrock.

Easy to live with

So what is it about this area of the world that gives it such a strong sense of style? Skandium's Swedish managing director Magnus Englund says the homeware has a history of sitting comfortably with other furnishings.

'Scandinavian design is easy to live with, it's practical and it doesn't take over your home.

There's still room for your own personality.' Finnish brand Littal is a perfect example of this. Its furniture-makers strip their creations to the core so you have minimal lines on sleek functional items.

Eero Aarnio rocket stool, from £89. TwentytwentyOne, www.twentytwentyone.com

Although Littal has been around since the 1920s, it, too, is ever quick to evolve. Alongside the Aalto classics, it sells objects such as glass pieces by 31-year-old Camilla Kropp and plates decorated with organic patterns by Anna Danielsson.

'The important thing for us [Scandinavians] is to tell a story with each product. It's never just a chair or a glass; there's always a person behind each item – often an architect who did the item for a specific project. It is part of 20th-century history,' adds Englund, who sells Littal among other brands. 'Littal is very popular,' he says. 'Also, typical of the new wave

Esadra pouf

Testa di Moro 119231 (pelle heritage leather) £1,360. Skandium, www.skandium.com

of design from Sweden that emerged in the late 1990s is our best-selling furniture, the Snow storage range by Thomas Sandell and Jonas Bohlin for Asplund. It's completely progressive,' he continues.



100 per cent Dane

Also in London, the Danish Embassy has transformed a traditional mews house into a Danish design home. Open to the public until December 20, everything from the Velux windows and Dinesan wood flooring to the crockery by Rikke Jacobsen and Normann Copenhagen washing-up bowl is 100 per cent Dane.

Architect Rene Hougaard has overseen the project. 'The townhouse offered the perfect opportunity to create something functional and innovative in an English urban setting. It redefines the boundaries of space and it is aesthetically beautiful,' he says, of the colonising. So what does the future hold for this



Ilva's chair in white gloss finish with removable cover

new generation? Englund believes they must embrace the international mood – they can't and won't carry on producing old-fashioned minimalism.

Move from minimalism

'The contemporary designers have not repeated the shapes of the 1950s but kept the simplicity of the modernist heritage. It's important for Scandinavian design not to stand still or look back. We've had comments that now that minimalism is on its way out, Scandinavian design will fall out of fashion too – but Scandinavia has a great textile heritage and can be very colourful. Just look at the Finnish brand Marimekko.'

Perhaps its success lies in its chameleon skills; whatever your taste, the lands of the Northern Lights can satisfy.

Posh sofa

Ilva, £1,199 www.ilva.co.uk

Gilbert chair, £29.90, Ikea, www.ikea.com

