

THE DESIGNS OF  
**ARNE  
JACOBSEN**



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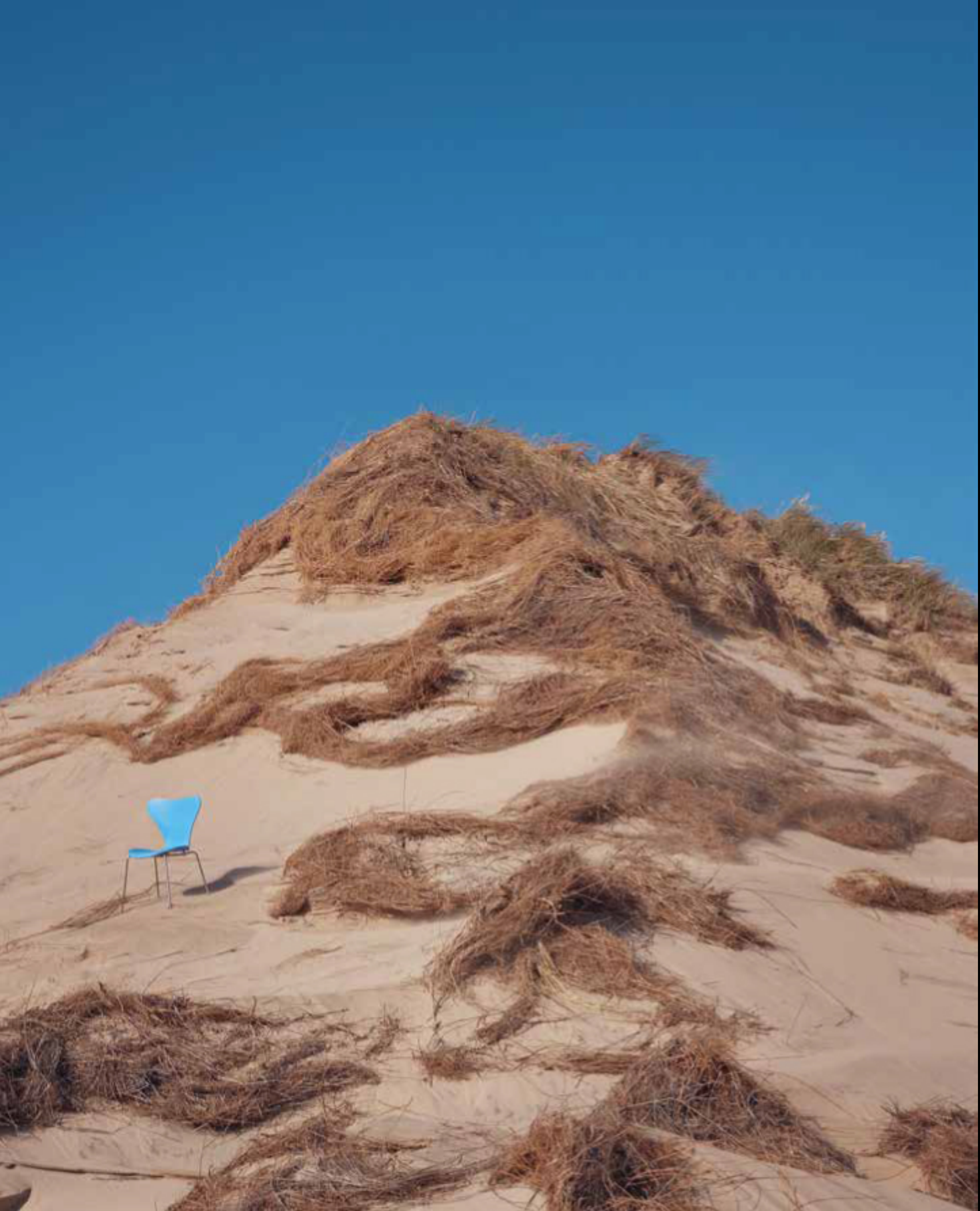
**Interiors, Furniture, Lighting and Textiles  
1925 – 1971**

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*Arne Jacobsen was caught between Apollo and Dionysus – between architecture and design. In professional circles, and especially in Denmark, Jacobsen is known as one of the most successful architects of the 20th century. But on the broader international stage, it is probably his furniture that comes to mind when people hear the name.*

*The books written about Jacobsen to date tend to describe him as a building architect who also happened to design furniture, lamps, door handles, and the like for his buildings. But the picture is far more nuanced than that. Dig a little deeper, examine the sources, and study his incredibly numerous and versatile works, and you'll see how a picture emerges of a dedicated creator who may well be one of Denmark's first true industrial designers.*

This book is the story of an architect who was one of the most far-reaching and productive innovators of his generation. Had he just concentrated on designing buildings, he would still have been awarded a prominent place in the architectural hall of fame. Yet with incredible diligence and ingenuity, he also created a design landscape consisting of hundreds of unique products and designs. That said, he didn't draw everything himself, which we'll touch on later in the book. Indeed, one of his greatest strengths was serving as a leader, motivator, and curator for the many employees and organisations with which he worked. Moreover, he had an almost seismographic ability to sense the spirit of the times. This did not make him a turncoat, however, but rather an artist who intuitively understood what so many needed and craved. Such as when he and his wife Jonna, during their exile in Sweden in the Second World War, began drawing, painting, and producing textiles with nature motifs. It was at that time that such material struck a chord with people, as most longed for a more peaceful and safer world amidst all the horror and misery.

Later, Jacobsen would create some of the distinctive furniture, lamps, and other industrial products that represent the cool Danish-Nordic design of the post-war period.

How he saw himself was that of an architect and not a designer – the latter of which he considered an English buzzword that he loathed. In interviews, Jacobsen often referred to classical Roman architects such as Palladio and Vitruvius, while his modern references were Gunnar Asplund and Mies van der Rohe. He described design, on the other hand, primarily as something functional. “This little chair is good for small apartments,” he said of the *Ant*. “This is an ice bucket, but at home we use it as a soup tureen, as we eat more soup than we drink spirits” – he was, of course, talking about the *Cylinda Line* series.

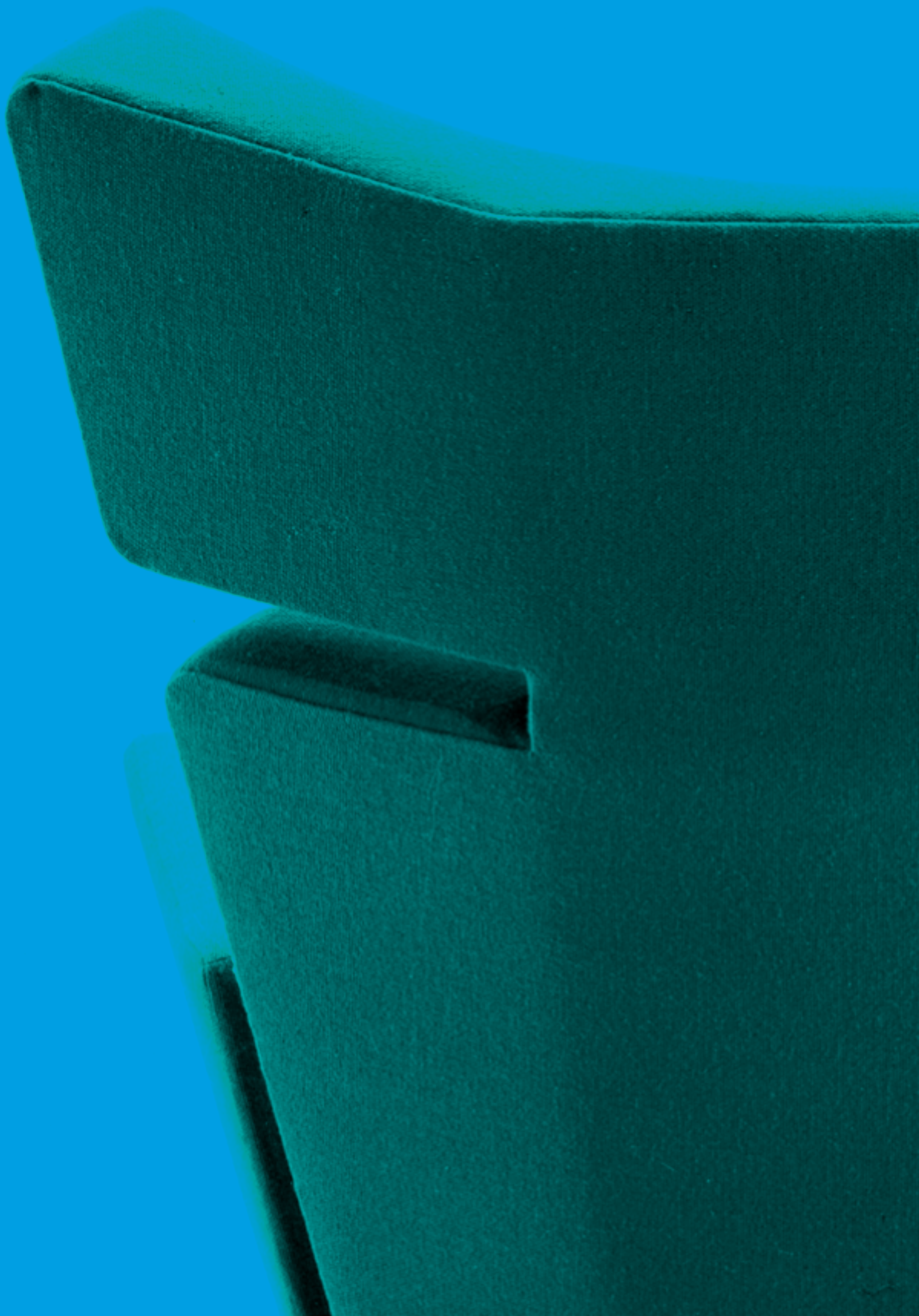
Not least inspired by Nietzsche, the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus were often referred to at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts and in architectural circles, and so was Jacobsen.

In this context, Apollo represents the god of cool aesthetics, while Dionysus was the god of feasting and wine. Architecture of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and art for that matter, was often seen as a battleground between the pure, beautiful, and objective Apollonian form on one side, in accordance with the functionalist mantra “form follows function”, and then the unbridled and expressive Dionysian culture on the other. Jacobsen's *architecture* can be seen as Apollonian, cool, and clear, while his design is more playful and atmospheric. In the hierarchy of art history, long-lasting architecture was perceived as being higher than the changeable and innovative design, which was seen as pop.

Jacobsen believed that a better world could be created through architecture and, to this end, agreed with most contemporary architects on this point. His buildings are subdued – they were not yet so innovative or outlandish in their expression, but created for the spirit of the times. When a change occurred in the 50s, Jacobsen followed suit. And while he speaks reverently of Apollo's virtues, it is really Dionysus whom he worships from this point on – full of lust for life and desire. And it was at this moment that Jacobsen, somewhat to his own surprise, “hit the mark”. He found himself at the forefront and was anything but low-key during this period.

Throughout his career spanning over four decades, he had an unparalleled ability to do this again and again, with buildings, design, and textiles – 400 buildings, 150 textile patterns, 100 furniture designs, and no fewer than ten major product collections that all became his life's work.

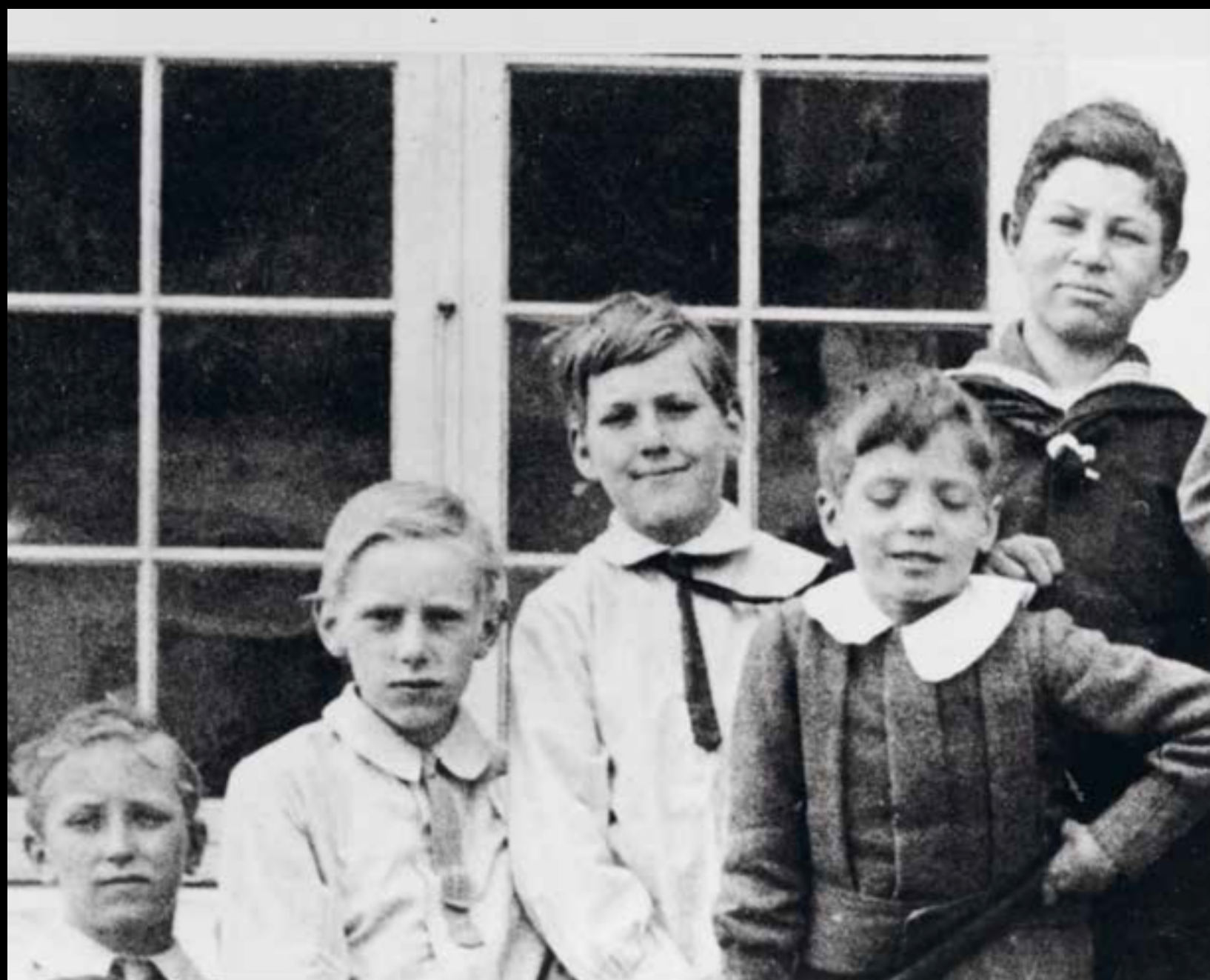




# Introduction









Arne Jacobsen in a sailor's outfit on the right together with Mogens and Flemming Lassen on the far left.

*The great train robbery. The architect Flemming Lassen, his brother Mogens Lassen (also an architect), and Arne Jacobsen knew each other from school. All three had been sent to boarding school in Nærum for having been a touch too restless at home. So restless that they stole a train for fun and made off with it. They must have had fun.*

*They were three teenagers with a passion for technology who had read stories about how to drive a steam train, build an iron bridge, dig a canal, and make loop-the-loops with an aeroplane. So it was their shared boyhood dream to take a train for a spin. And it was just a matter of putting the theory to the test. They had poured over the American magazine Popular Mechanics. Like them, it came into being at the beginning of the 20th century.*

So when they found water and coal on board the engine parked up at Lyngby Station late one evening, and the two little carriages coupled to it put up no fight, all that was left to do was to turn the regulator and various other valves. But hey, when you release the brake, the train moves – that much they definitely knew. It's one thing to start a train, and quite another to bring it to a stop. Several kilometres further along the small side track, they finally managed to turn the right handles in the right order and bring the engine to a stop. However, they couldn't resist a single, small farewell whistle from the steam locomotive when they arrived at the final station in Nærum. The following day, the morning train that was supposed to leave Lyngby was missing. Passengers for the large industrial buildings along the line couldn't get to work and the police were called – a train robbery had taken place.

It was the little whistle that gave the three lads away. And they went to school in Nærum, did they not? Thankfully, they were let off with a stern talking-to thanks to the intervention of the school and parents – they were just boys being boys. A little burdened by guilt, but probably also quite uplifted, the whole train-driving experience ignited something in them that night. It was the feeling of mastering the technology that was necessary to tackle the modern world. They weren't fully aware of this at the time though, of course. But, following their share of mediocre high

school exam results, it was this “wow” experience that steered them towards technical school and then onto architecture school. The three simply weren't content with burying their heads in books.

In the early 1920s, while the world was still reeling from the aftermath of the First World War, the three friends learnt about old-world aesthetics and architectural art at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts' School of Architecture. They measured column chapters in temple class with their teacher Kaj Gottlob, studied residential construction with Ivar Bentsen, and designed storage furniture under Kaare Klint. In these years, modern architecture and design were primarily seen as a refinement of earlier decorative developments in the historicist style. The ornaments and decorations were removed, but the basic models, buildings, and furniture had the same shapes and proportions as always.

So even though modernism slowly found its way into new designs, perhaps a little fumbling and hesitant at first, it nonetheless rested on a solid classical foundation. In particular, this involved mastering the fundamental elements of all good architecture and design – the carefully balanced proportions, the expert use of colours and materials, and the almost musical mastery of the structure, and the rhythmic flow of the objects.





Arne Jacobsen was born on 11 February 1902, the only child of Johan and Pouline Jacobsen. His father was a wholesaler of buttons, snap-fasteners, and safety pins. His mother was one of the first women in Denmark to be educated in banking. In her spare time, she had a passion for flower painting. Jacobsen's childhood home was located on Classensgade in Østerbro, Copenhagen. It was old-fashioned and bourgeois in the historicist style of the time. As a child, he was very lively, one could even say restless, which resulted in him being sent to boarding school in Nærum from the fifth grade onwards. He was no star pupil, but one of his teachers discovered his talent for drawing and painting, and she encouraged him to continue by giving him a box of painting supplies.