



SEPTEMBER 13 - NOVEMBER 9, 2001

# Strictly Swedish

AN EXHIBITION OF CONTEMPORARY DESIGN

INTER-AMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK

*Camp, clock by Claesson Koivisto Rune*

# Introduction

The IDB Cultural Center is pleased to present *Strictly Swedish*, an exhibition of contemporary Swedish design. The exhibition brings together an assortment of objects—chairs, tables, jars, lamps, a clock, a coatrack—that provide a general view of the latest trends in Swedish design of objects for daily use.

Since the 1950s, the works of Scandinavian designers have literally invaded public and private life everywhere, from the kitchen to the airport. Their designs of everyday objects have affected the lives of people around the world, who enjoy and appreciate the spare, efficient feel of Scandinavian objects. The Swedish, along with their Scandinavian neighbors, created an entire school that would rethink personal and popular behavior along these lines.

The practical aspect of these works, especially the concern for making them efficient, challenges the designer, who must balance form with function. The designs exhibited here encompass simplicity, comfort, practicality, and elegance. Young designers and architects setting trends in the field include Johan Celsing, Ingegerd Råman, Anna von Schewen, and Mats Theselius. These designers show great originality and have enriched the context of contemporary design with modern approaches and inspirations.

With great appreciation, the Inter-American Development Bank's Office of External Relations welcomes *Strictly Swedish* and thanks the Embassy of Sweden for assisting the IDB Cultural Center in preparing the exhibition.

*Berliner*, steel and leather chair by Claesson Koivisto Rune

Nobel Forum Chair by Johan Celsing



BD Relax by Björn Dahlström



Glass jars by Ulla Forsell



2



1



16

*Strictly Swedish* is an exhibition of contemporary Swedish design focused on objects of daily life in its various aspects: work, entertainment and leisure, and other activities.

The practical aspect of these objects, especially the concern for making them highly efficient that inevitably is part of the conceptual and creative process, constitutes a natural challenge for the designer who must balance form with function. The designer's role, besides being responsible for the object's optimal functionality and integration in people's lives, is to free individuals from the elementary and anticlimactic repetitiveness involved in most of our personal habits. In this way, the designer makes our daily rituals more joyous.

These objects are not necessarily destined to magnify the ego or show off an overblown self-esteem, or even demonstrate the financial status of the individual. The exhibition includes some works that do these things, but in general the objects reaffirm and distinguish the personality of the consumer in carrying on everyday obligations. For the cultured, sophisticated, but not-so-wealthy person, a constant question is how to live with dignity and decorum with the objects that surround us. For the practical, educated consumer, the question is how to get the best for the least.

In economic terms, most of these objects that are taken for granted—the chair at work or at home, the clock, and the drinking glass—accommodate our activities and are cost-driven. At once welcomed and unappreciated, the designed object is ideal if, while inexpensive, it responds to the unavoidable routines of today's fast paced and complicated daily schedules. Far from being irreplaceable, the objects are indispensable, although people may have little time to appreciate them aesthetically or formally. Unfortunately, as happens with things devoid of economic, social, or romantic meaning, people tend to be oblivious to their existence; the items are ignored until they are needed.

However, this is not the case for the Swedish. Since the 1950s, when the West was still recovering from the aftermath of the Second World War, the work of Scandinavian designers, including the Swedish, has literally invaded public and

# Strictly



Latta, chair with ottoman by Anna von Schewen

private life everywhere. Long before, Axel Samuelson had designed the famous Coca-Cola bottle. From the kitchen to the airport, their designs of everyday objects have increased our aesthetic curiosity and affected the lives of people around the world. The Scandinavians have designed or inspired many unlikely spaces, private and public, for instance, Sven Markelius' meeting room at the United Nations in New York.

The agility, practicality, flexibility, and adaptability of Scandinavian design in general became a trademark of postwar society and added a sense of confident recovery. People everywhere enjoy and appreciate the spare, efficient feel of Scandinavian objects. The Swedish, along with their Scandinavian neighbors, created an entire school that would rethink personal and popular behavior along these lines. The galleries dedicated to the work of Swedish designers between 1900 and 2000 at Sweden's National Museum of Fine Arts in Stockholm remind us of their outstanding excellence in this field. The designers built relationships between mundane activities and a specific type of clean design, produced without fanfare or extravagance.



9



3



4



6



13

# Swedish



The Swedish followed a model of their own isolated society that never gave up on imagination. Their works provide the best evidence that design has triumphed over improvisation and limitation. At the same time, the trends of Scandinavian design were opposed, in a nonconfrontational way, to the programmatic and disciplinarian trends developed by the Germans, the epic approach of the French, the monastic solemnity of the Spanish, and the lavish and Epicurean richness of the Italians (note these are broad characterizations). Swedish designs were very much in tune with the realistic desire of a society willing to start from scratch, but in a comfortable, updated way, a feeling shared by most people in the postwar world.

In the past ten years, along with trends of economic globalization and new technologies, which have spurred the invention and appreciation of new materials, Swedish design and creativity have experienced a renaissance, which again the world has quickly been able to recognize.

In this environment, Scandinavian design, and Swedish design in particular, has reclaimed its place in the sun. The prevailing circumstances have

helped to move the spotlight to its fundamental aspects: uncomplicated functionality (as Åke Axelsson makes obvious); the understated, practical elegance of the minimalist (as evident in the exquisite glassware of Ingegerd Råman); and superb craftsmanship (reflected in the chairs and silverware of Mats Theselius). The designers combine these qualities with great imagination and sensibility to civilize the vulgar and elevate the common to better standing. Traditional craftsmanship still survives, although with more difficulty due to the increasing cost of processing raw materials paired with time-consuming labor; the results nevertheless show undeterred dedication, as can be appreciated in the fabrics woven by Handarbetets Vänner.

At times, some Swedish designers have shown their awareness of outside influences by enhancing their projects based on the historic legacy of other architects and designers. Such contributions are a healthy sign that the field is evolving. Johan Celsing's Nobel Forum in Stockholm (building and furniture), for instance, is inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright. *Berliner*, a chair designed by Claesson Koivisto Rune for the Swedish Embassy in Berlin, pays combined tribute to le Corbusier and the Bauhaus School. Humor is a relatively new component that Björn Dahlström shows in *The Joystick of Magis*. Postmodern romanticism surrounds the "*Ballerina Lamp*" by Jonas Bohlin, never losing sense of the primary function an object must perform, a fundamental condition for good design.

The rest of Europe and beyond have recognized the unique qualities of Swedish design. German and Italian manufacturers, among others, produce many Swedish-designed pieces, especially furniture. Most of the designers selected by the IDB Cultural Center for this exhibition are young and setting standards for the contemporary design movement in Sweden. Most of them have received national and international recognition and their work is present in the showrooms of many design centers worldwide.

Félix Angel  
Curator





# Sweden and The Inter-American Development Bank

Konungariket Sverige, the Kingdom of Sweden, serves as a paradigm for a country's ability to develop a fully globalized market economy and a solid welfare state. With a well educated population of 8.9 million people, the country exported US\$107.7 billion worth of goods and services in 2000, almost half of its national product. Per capita income is \$25,000. On the strength of high public spending on social programs financed by high taxes that allow cradle-to-grave protection for all its citizens, Sweden's social indicators are among the world's best: infant mortality is 3.5 per thousand and life expectancy is 77 years for men and 82 years for women.

Sweden was able to overcome what, in the early 1990s, looked like a crisis in its economic and social development model, when its fiscal deficit became unsustainable. The government of Prime Minister

Göran Persson, author of

the book *The Indebted Are Not Free*, embarked on a correction course that led to a fiscal surplus in 2001 thanks to reduced government spending and increased taxes. Currently, Sweden has one of the best economic growth rates among the industrial countries, with inflation at 0.5 percent and low unemployment.

This Nordic Kingdom has a complex history. It has not participated in a war for almost two centuries and it has distinguished itself by its neutrality. In the 17th century, by contrast, it was a great military power that occupied vast areas of the Baltic.

Today's Sweden has a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary regime, a participatory democracy, and a social democratic government. But the country was founded in 1523 by an absolute monarch. Today, Sweden's advanced industrial economy boasts large, internationally successful companies. In the past, the economy was long based on primary products.

Sweden has also distinguished itself with its support for developing countries, reflected in the high proportion of its national product devoted to external aid. A member of the IDB since 1977, the country has established various trust funds to help the institution's programs: the Swedish Trust Fund for Small Projects and Technical Assistance for Latin America; the Swedish Fund for Microenterprise Activities in Bolivia; the Swedish Trust Fund for Domestic Violence; the Swedish Trust Fund for Governance, State Reform and Civil Society; the Swedish Fund for Consulting Services and Training Activities; and the Swedish Framework-SIDA IDB Partnership Program for social programs in Central American countries affected by Hurricane Mitch.

The IDB, with headquarters in Washington, D.C., is the oldest and largest regional development bank. It is the leading source of multilateral finance for the economic, social, and institutional development of Latin America and the Caribbean and for regional integration. The Bank belongs to 46 member countries: 26 in Latin America and the Caribbean, plus Canada, the United States, 16 countries in Europe, Israel, and Japan. The IDB's annual lending capacity is US\$8.5 billion.

Carlos Brezina



5



The *Skyline* vases,  
by Ingegerd Råman

# Designers

## 1 Nirvan Richter

*Kapphylla*, closet rack with shelves and hangers  
*Pelarbord*, round table



## 2 Handarbetets Vänner

Three different types of upholstery for the *Gustav* chair by Åke Axelsson



## 3 Åke Axelsson

*Safari* chair in beech and leather for Galleri Stolen AB (2000)  
*Spring*, daybed in beech for Galleri Stolen AB (1999)



## 4 Anna von Schewen

*Latta*, chair with ottoman  
*Latta* floor lamp  
*Sound Object*, speakers  
Drawings for *Spillersboden*, the 10M2 house



## 5 Eero Koivisto

*Vibe*, glass containers  
*Byrne*, office armchair on casters  
*Smith*, table center board



## 6 Claesson Koivisto Rune

*Camp*, clock  
*Berliner*, steel and leather chair



## 7 Ingegerd Råman

Three sets of etched glass from Orrefors including *Plangasvav No. 4*, the *Skyline* vases, and the *Slowfox* vase



*Spring*, daybed in beech by Åke Axelsson

# and Works

## ⑧ Ergonomi Design Gruppen AB

"Beauty" body care program, set of hygiene aids for the physically disabled  
Paint scraper  
Hacksaw stand



## ⑨ Gunnel Sahlin and Cecilia Strömberg

*Flaska*, bottle for Svenskt Brännvin, Allied Domecq



## ⑩ Ulla Forsell

*Glass jars*, five different colors



## ⑪ Pia Röndahl

*Azalea*, base and bowl

## ⑫ David Skoog

*Cup holder*



## ⑬ Björn Dahlström

*The Joystick of Magis*, one black and one white  
*BD Relax* with sleeping bag and pillow in nylon, and *BD 6 Office* for CBI



## ⑭ Jukka Setälä

Glass lamp over a metal spiral produced by Design House Stockholm AB, one in frosted glass and the other in clear glass



## ⑮ Johan Celsing

*Mokka* chair for Gärsnäs AB  
Sample of the architectural projects *Kavalleristen*, *Sommarhus*, *Terrasshus I*, and *Millesgården*  
Interior of the Nobel Forum in Stockholm



## ⑯ Mats Thesellius

*Easy Chair Thesellius*, finished in polished aluminum for Källemo AB  
*Boots*, in leather and silver  
*Silverware* and *silver teapot* for W.A. Bolin



## ⑰ Inger Bergström

*Floor*, conceptual throw piece made of fabric cylinders glued together



## ⑱ Jonas Bohlin

*Tyllampa*, "Ballerina Lamp" (1997), photo by Lennart Kaltea  
*Spira*, coatrack



## ⑲ Harri Koskinen

*Pick Up*, folding newspaper and magazine stand for Källemo AB  
Cooking and serving implements for 1999 Hackman Tools series  
*Block Lamp*



# Inter-American Development Bank

Cultural Center  
1300 New York Ave., N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20577  
[www.iadb.org/exr/cultural/center1.htm](http://www.iadb.org/exr/cultural/center1.htm)

## The Inter-American Development Bank

Enrique V. Iglesias  
*President*

K. Burke Dillon  
*Executive Vice President*

Paulo Paiva  
*Vice President for Planning and Administration*

Alvaro Rengifo  
*Executive Director for Austria, Denmark,  
Finland, France, Norway, Spain and Sweden*

Pekka Hukka  
*Alternate Executive Director for Austria,  
Denmark, Finland, France, Norway, Spain  
and Sweden*

Mirna Liévano de Marques  
*External Relations Advisor*

Elena M. Suárez  
*Chief, Special Programs Section*

## The Cultural Center

Félix Angel  
*General Coordinator and Curator*

Soledad Guerra  
*Assistant General Coordinator*

Anne Vena  
*Concert and Lecture Coordinator*

Elba Agusti  
*Cultural Development in the Field  
and Administrative Assistant*

Gabriela Moragas  
*IDB Art Collection Managing  
and Conservation Assistant*

## Exhibition Committee

Félix Angel  
*Curator of the Exhibition*

Jacob Hertzell  
*Assistant Coordinator in Stockholm*

Nancy Westman  
*Exhibit Liaison  
Cultural Counselor, Embassy of Sweden*

Leilany Garron  
*Catalog Designer*

The Cultural Center would like to thank all persons and institutions that made this exhibition possible, especially the Government of Sweden for its financial and logistic contributions; His Excellency Jan Eliasson, Ambassador of Sweden to the United States of America; Mr Henrik Orrje, Project Manager, and Ms. Charlotte Juul, Program Coordinator of Svenska Institutet in Stockholm; and all the curators, architects and designers from public and private institutions and studios who provided information, examples and photographs of their work.

