

DENMARK

text **Geoffrey Coffey** photo **Pablo Ravazzani**

A self-ironic mixture of Nordic conformity and pure abandon marks everything Danish, from the business desk to the design studio to the dance club. These people work hard and feel a Lutheran “accountability” for any successes that might distinguish them from their peers (“Don’t imagine you are anything special,” urges Danish-Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose); yet a guilt-free *joie de vivre* characterizes their daily lives, manifested in a diet of high-fat foods, a penchant for smoking and drinking, and the notorious barrel laugh that encapsulates Denmark’s irresistible sense of humor.

The architecture of Copenhagen reveals a similar bent. Sleek lines of glass and steel explore the minimalist and the modern, while an older skyline of Renaissance spires and Baroque cupolas testifies to an

underlying history. Yesterday’s symmetry, regularity, and rhythmic repetition now jostle with today’s newer interpretations of functional housing in subtle and arresting shapes.

Danish design introduced a more organic understanding of form, a deep respect for function, and a genuine interest in the interplay between them. Sometimes visitors from abroad will ask what happened to Danish design—“Did they lose the battle?” No, actually they won, and that’s exactly the point: the values and ideals once unique to Denmark are now held by designers throughout the world, and thus are no longer strictly Danish. But in today’s era of increasingly limited resources and increased expectations, the principles of Danish design uphold an old adage—anything worth doing is worth doing well. ■



