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## Kaj Gottlob and the 100th Anniversary of the Beginning of a More Conscious Danish Furniture Design



Today, it is common knowledge that the creation of a special type of Danish furniture design, which achieves its climax in reach and recognition in the period around 1950-1960, was particularly due to the annual exhibitions, which the Copenhagen Cabinetmakers' Guild started in 1927 and carried out over the next 40 years. The exhibitions contributed to a general societal debate, the development of housing policies and changes in interior design that unfolded in contemporary times. A time which was characterized by major changes and new ideas and needs. The exhibitions had several goals, but among the most obvious was the desire to show that craftsmanship, quality, modernity and democratization did not have to be in opposition to each

other, on the contrary, they could perhaps be the basis for and examples of an interior design that could meet the desires and needs that a modern life posed.

In practice, it was far from all the furniture on display that united both craftsmanship, quality, modernism and democratization. The furniture was, among other things, generally quite expensive, but the exhibitions set the course for the Danish furniture industry in general and freed it from the ornamentation, confused styles and overloaded, faux luxury of earlier times.

However, it is not very well known that the problems which the Cabinetmakers' Guild furniture exhibitions tried to address were already in the minds of architects before 1927, and that an attempt to provide an answer was given as early as 1922.

As the architect Aage Rafn wrote in 1922 in the trade journal – *Arkitekten* –: “We probably don't need to tell each other that it is without enthusiasm that we look at the windows of furniture stores.”

The association “Danish Arts and Crafts” was founded in 1914, and in 1922 it organized an architectural competition which resulted in an exhibition of the selected manufactured furniture. Among these was a so-called “Study Suite” designed by Kaj Gottlob as perhaps the most significant contribution, and it is from this suite of furniture that the present unique and completely exceptional book cabinet originates.



The impressive set of furniture consisted of a set of Klismos chairs, a large sofa, a distinctive desk and two cabinets with an identical basic structure, one with wooden doors and the present one with glass doors. It was all furniture with clear classicist features. For example, the continuous meander border – a la Greque – and the Romanesque arches on the cabinets and the corresponding circular shape on the glass door frames. A geometric shape that Kaj Gottlob maintained a fondness for throughout his oeuvre.



With today's standards, it may be difficult to view this piece of furniture as markedly modern, but here it is important to understand that during precisely this rather short period from about 1918-1925 there was a broad European tendency to be inspired by the purity, ideals and designs of classicism among even the most modern designers.

A kind of brief intermezzo occurred before modernism and functionalism had their breakthrough and found its regional expressions from French Art Deco a la Ruhlmann, to the “Swedish Grace” style as seen in, among others, the work of Gunnar Asplund and Carl Hörvik, or the Viennese style as formulated by people such as Josef Hoffman.

In a Danish context, there is relatively little evidence of this period. The most important is probably Politigården (The Police Headquarters) in Copenhagen by Hack Kampmann and Aage Rafn, which stands as a Danish temple for the period.

The present cabinet is today probably the only remaining piece from this suite of furniture from 1922, as the other pieces were probably lost during a move in the 1940s.

The cabinet thereby also becomes the remaining expression from the exhibition in 1922, which was probably the first conscious attempt in a broader sense to formulate a new, better and modern Danish furniture culture in the 20th century.

However, it was Kaare Klint's ideas and his school and the Cabinetmakers' Guild exhibitions that would succeed in this project from 1927 onwards. Yet, revisiting this cabinet shows that Kaj Gottlob's furniture has its own special strength.





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KAJ GOTTLOB

b. Copenhagen 1887, d. 1976

"Herreværelsemøblement" (Study Suite). Exceptional, unique mahogany book cabinet with semicircular gable profiles. Front with three glass doors with curvy bars. Interior with adjustable shelves with profiled front rim, fittings of brass. Base decorated with carved meander border. Designed and made 1922 by cabinetmaker Anders Svendsen, with maker's metal tag. H. 175 cm. L. 152.5/157.5 cm. D. 34/36 cm.

*Provenance: Johan Ludvig Kuhn 1876–1943. Founder "Young medicals association" 1904. Chairman for "Danish Medical association" 1912, Editor of "Danish medical journal" 1922. He acquired the entire Study suite most likely directly from the exhibition in 1922 and used it in his home until he passed away in 1943.*

*After his passing his widow had to part with most of the suite which most likely has been lost.*

*The present cabinet was however kept and passed on in 1945 to his son Holger Johan Kuhn and later by inheritance to the present owner.*

*Designed for the "Dansk Kunst og Haandværk" association's exhibition in 1922, preceded by a competition.*

*Literature: Mirjam Gelfer-Jørgensen [ed.]: "Herculanum paa Sjælland", matching furniture suite ill. on Fig. 291 and mentioned p. 317. Glass front book cabinet specifically mentioned Cat. 196, p. 399.*

*DKK 200,000–300,000 / € 27,000–40,500*