

## Shell Shock

Philip Arctander's whimsical clam chair is the latest style trophy



A PHILIP ARCTANDER CLAM CHAIR IN THE BERLIN HOME OF BOUTIQUE OWNER EMMANUEL DE BAYSER.

# object lesson



JILL AND DAN DIENST'S  
MANHATTAN LIVING ROOM,  
WITH A CLAM CHAIR AT LEFT.

In the late 1990s, Peter Kjølgaard, now with the Danish auction house Bruun Rasmussen, noticed an amusing chair on the block. Perched on cartoonish beech legs, its fabric-covered seat and back formed the shape of a happy open clam. You could buy the chair, with no known designer, for about \$300.

In fact, it was only after a series of misattributions—the Danish architect Viggo Boesen; the unknown Norwegian Martin Olsen, which turned out to be merely the name of a now-defunct Oslo furniture store—that the chair's actual

creator was identified in 2013. The much-loved mollusk was designed in 1944 by Philip Arctander, an obscure Danish architect best known for his work on affordable housing.

"Arctander is such an oddity," says Kjølgaard, who verified the narrative with the Dane's descendants and friends. "He's known for basically nothing at all in terms of design."

While the chair was made inexpensively and in mass quantities—and, more recently, reupholstered in cozy sheepskin—it has gained steady traction in the trophy market of late. In 2013 a pair—misattributed to Martin Olsen—went for over \$220,000. After that, says Los Angeles-based dealer Joel Chen, everyone started dusting off their clam

chairs and bringing them to market. Still, mysteries continue to emerge. In May, reports that a 1944 Arctander chair for IKEA sold for \$65,000 made its way around the design world. But dealers generally refute the IKEA attribution: "They are copies or heavily inspired," says Kjølgaard. "A testament to the relaxed attitude toward copyrights in 1950s Sweden."

Regardless of the origin story, the fashion and design sets remain enchanted. Style maven Vanessa Traina has proclaimed her love for the seat. Scandinavian-design dealer Jill Dienst keeps two fuzzy clams in the living room of her New York apartment. And art dealer Maggie Kayne snapped up a pair for her Los Angeles home. Says Kayne: "They're beautiful objects that are supercomfortable. It's not easy to find both." —HANNAH MARTIN



DESIGNER PIERRE  
YOVANOVITCH  
PLACED A GOLDEN  
CLAM CHAIR  
IN A PROVENCE  
CHÂTEAU.