

## The Story of a Dining Room, a Business Tycoon and a Leap into the Future for Danish Design

The following five auction lots represent some of the most exciting furniture pieces that we have ever had up for auction at Bruun Rasmussen. The unique furniture set is also an example of a time when "Danish Modern" took shape in earnest and reveals a new and unknown side of Danish furniture design. The furniture set comes with a sprawling backstory that spreads out in many directions – to an enterprising business tycoon, to one of the most important furniture manufacturers in Denmark and to some of the greatest Danish modernist designers. In addition, the set of furniture also embodies the detective work that we often carry out here at the auction house, where we see it as the finest and sometimes also most challenging privilege to have the opportunity to delve into the past in an attempt to bring forth that which has been forgotten. Sometimes we succeed, sometimes we don't. We have discovered a lot about the dining room furniture up for auction, but trying to find out who the designer is has led us far and wide around archives and to conversations with heirs, manufacturers and more.

### An Enterprising Business Tycoon and His Dining Room in Slagelse



But let's start at the beginning with a story about a loner – an enterprising tycoon who, almost like a mirror image of the fictional Mads Skjern in Lise Nørgaard's Danish national treasure of a TV-series, *Matador*, left his mark on the town of Slagelse on Western Zealand. His name was Jens Udsen, and he was born in 1888 as the eldest son of a miller in the town of Skødstrup in Jutland. The plan was to have the boy apprentice as a hardware dealer, but supposedly he was too small to see over the grocery counter. Therefore, he instead apprenticed as a waiter at Hotel Jylland in

Aarhus, which paved the way for later jobs at international hotels in England, Morocco, Germany, the United States and more. The world was wide open for the young Udsen, but



he returned home to Denmark in 1920 and took over the lease of the renowned luxury beach hotel "Kongen af Danmark" (The King of Denmark) on

twenties" also reached the island, during the summer season. Here you see, but also the upper classes and ces – there were both motor races on direct flight for the privileged few to on Fanø gave Udsen the courage to re of his life. In 1928, he acquired the in Slagelse at a foreclosure auction, tions and expansions, he transformed dining and cultural scene. But Udsen beyond his business. He was very born Jutlander, but generous and full World War, he housed the local re- and it was here they established their of Denmark on 5 May 1945.

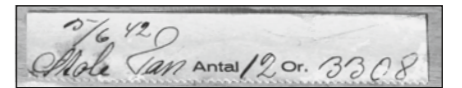


the island of Fanø. The "roaring and Fanø became the place to be were surrounded by not just the their ensuing social extravagan- the beach "Daytona" style and a and from Copenhagen. The time embark on the next big adventu- dilapidated Hotel Postgaarden which, after extensive renova- into a focal point for Slagelse's also left his mark on the town well liked – a strong and stub- of kindness. During the Second sistance movement in his hotel, headquarters after the liberation

Alongside his work, he had a deep-seated interest in art and established ties to several of the leading artists of the time – he became particularly close with Agnes and Harald Slott-Møller. As the patron of the artist couple, he established a large collection of their paintings and hung them in Postgaarden much to the delight of the hotel guests. He also became a board member of the West Zealand Art Association.



Udsen himself lived in a private apartment at Hotel Postgaarden, and it was for his private dining room in this apartment in Slagelse that the dining room furniture in question was made. From a dated furniture manufacturer label placed on the chairs, we know that the time of the furniture's creation was June 1942.



For the same dining room, the artist Erik Rahr made a funny wall relief with the title "Madtrolden" (Pan of the Pot), which is also up for auction. The

set of furniture shows us that Udsen also had his own home renovated with a sure artistic taste. Udsen never married nor had any children and died after a brief period of illness in 1947. After this, his life's work, the Hotel Postgaarden, was sold, while the art collection and the offered dining room set were inherited by his brother, and the dining room set has been in the family ever since.

### A Leading Furniture Manufacturer – Fritz Hansen

We know from the aforementioned labels that the furniture was made by the manufacturer Fritz Hansen, who has been at the centre of Danish furniture production since 1872. For many, the name is inextricably linked with Arne Jacobsen's design icons such as "The Egg", "The Swan" and "The Ant" from the 1950s. But up through the 1930s and 1940s, Fritz Hansen was also the place where you found modern furniture in serial production quality. Partly Fritz Hansen's own design, but also design based on drawings by the modernists of the time. In addition, they were also suppliers of special furniture pieces for larger projects and interiors following drawings by designers. Among the more well-known examples are places such as Søndermarken Cemetery Chapel, The Royal Danish Theatre and The Radio House. With the special orders, it occasionally happened during this period that Fritz Hansen made furniture from expensive types of wood, handmade and with carpentry of a very high quality – a kind of Fritz Hansen "gold", which shows that their level of craftsmanship was of the finest quality when a customer is willing to pay for it. Jens Udsen's dining room furniture is made of Cuban mahogany and has been created with the best craftsmanship.



Unfortunately, there is a lot of knowledge about these special assignments from this furniture manufacturer that have been lost. Despite their great willingness to collaborate, Fritz Hansen has not been able to find more information about Udsen's dining room set in their archive. Records etc. have apparently been lost in a fire many years ago.

### Detective Work in the Auction House

At Bruun Rasmussen, we make a living from selling art, antiques and design. Prior to a sale, a larger or smaller amount of work is carried out, depending on the specific object, to identify the artist or designer behind the

object, describe how the object was made, place it in a cultural-historical context, etc. and finally determine a value for a sale at auction. Most often, this can be done rather quickly based on our employees' memory, knowledge and experience and with the help of our databases. Sometimes, however, we must investigate an item more closely by consulting available specialist literature, older journals, external specialists or other experts in our network. And every once in a while, we are faced with something that both ignites the passion we feel about our work, and which all our experience tells us is both important and expensive, but where no help is immediately available anywhere. It is in this category that we can place the Jens Udsen dining room set from 1942.

The furniture set, especially the chairs, are, in our clear opinion, decisive masterpieces in the history of Danish furniture design. These chairs appear completely original and as they were made in 1942 and are an expression of a design that in every way was ahead of its time. A chair where the separation in the structure between the carried and the carrying parts is clear – at a time when this approach was still unusual. It is a chair that is both visually light, organically sculptural, modern and made with exquisite craftsmanship. The chairs are accompanied by a "floating" wall-hung sideboard, where the doors and drawers all have brass handles in a distinctive shape made by the finest brass finisher. A small wall-hung mahogany console captures the contrast between the chairs' leather cover and frame with its original cream-coloured paintwork on the doors. The dining table is more anonymous in its shape, and here the most characteristic feature is a small "notch" on the rim by the legs. And above this furniture set floats the artist Erik Rahr's wooden relief "Madtrolden" (Pan of the Pot).

We are dealing with fantastic furniture pieces, where we with certainty know where they come from, who made them and when they were made. It is against this backdrop that we have initiated a major detective operation to see if there are any small pieces and clues that can point us in the direction of who the designer is.

### The Year 1942 and the Search for the Right Designer

The overall question is basically who could be the possible designers who designed the furniture pieces with these characteristics at this time? To get closer to an answer to this question, we have looked at who designed something similar in approximately the same period. With these criteria in mind, there were six names that immediately seemed to be the most likely candidates – Eva & Nils Koppel, Magnus Stephensen, Peter Hvidt, Finn Juhl and Vilhelm Lauritzen.

We have dug a little deeper into the careers and furniture of these designers, and we have come to the conclusion that it cannot be the design couple Eva & Nils Koppel. They graduated as architects in 1941 and worked with The City Architect before fleeing to Sweden in 1943. It seems unlikely that they, as completely new and unknown architects, would have designed furniture for Jens Udsen in 1941/1942. Despite the fact that they later around 1947-1950 designed chairs that are similarly sculptural and organic. Furthermore, the design of the other furniture pieces in Jens Udsen's dining room does not point towards the Koppel couple.



From approx. 1930, Magnus Stephensen both designed furniture for Fritz Hansen and



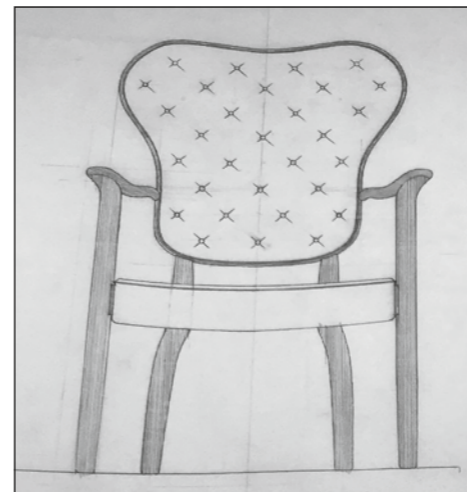
worked with a similar wing-shaped back on his chairs. However, they have a more robust expression and are in a way rooted in the design of the 1930s, while Udsen's chairs point ahead in time with their design. Stephensen was also at this time involved in several building projects as an architect, which means that we do not see it as likely that he is the designer behind Udsen's furniture.



Peter Hvidt could be a better bet, as he designed many pieces of furniture for Fritz Hansen in the period from 1944 and onwards. He worked with chairs that have a similarly constructed back and in the style of Udsen's chairs. However, the other furniture pieces from Udsen do not resemble anything from Hvidt. And then there is the time again, 1942, which jars with Hvidt's career. He only opens his design studio with Orla Mølgaard in 1944. Since inquiries with both Fritz Hansen and the son of Hvidt, the furniture designer Christian Hvidt, cannot confirm or otherwise shed light on Udsen's furniture, this trail also went cold.

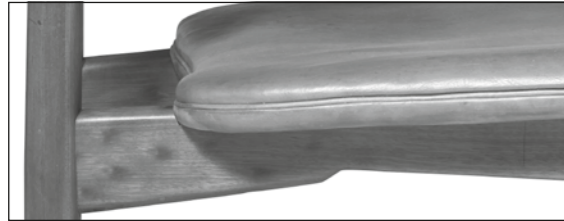
### The Trail Leading to Vilhelm Lauritzen and the Radio House in Copenhagen

One of the most important starting points in the work with Udsen's furniture has been the original black and white photo from the Udsen family, which shows the dining room at its "opening" in approx. 1942. The photograph shows the dining table with seven of the chairs around it and the funny wall relief "Madtrolden" (Pan of the Pot) on the wall. However, the picture also shows two mirrors on the wall and a lamp hanging over the table. The lamp is a "Radio House Pendant Lamp", which was designed by Vilhelm Lauritzen for the Radio House and is a well-known classic produced in very large numbers over the decades. But here the lamp hangs in Udsen's living room in 1942 – several years before the Radio House officially opened. The two mirrors, square with rounded corners, are the same model that Vilhelm Lauritzen designed for the Radio House, which were also made by Fritz Hansen. These clues lead us in the direction of Lauritzen as the actual designer behind the dining room furniture set.

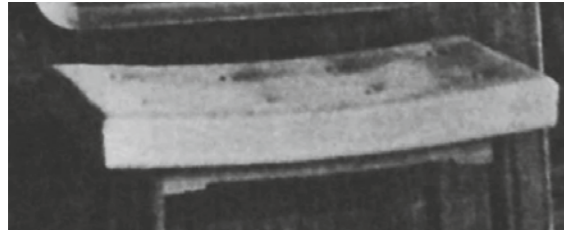


If we look at the chairs, the characteristic deep-fitted back is related to the type of back that Lauritzen used on the chairs for the distinguished "Kongeværelse" (King's Room) in the Radio House. All in all, the soft undulating shape is repeated several places in the Radio House.

"Kongeværelse"



*Side Udsen chair*



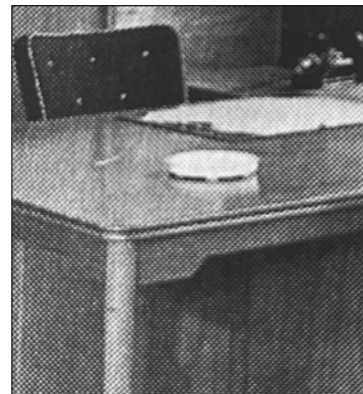
*Stool Radiohuset "Kongværelse"*



*Front Udsen chair with bench from Radiohuset*



*Udsen table*

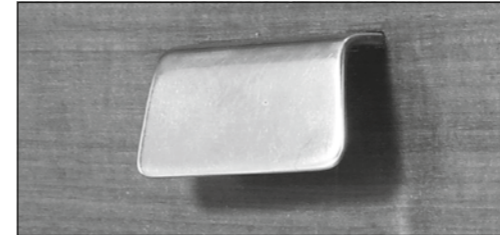


*Office Radiohuset*

On Udsen's chairs, there is a characteristic profile on the stretcher between the front and back legs. We find the same shape on a stool made for the aforementioned "Kongværelse".

Furthermore, Udsen's chairs have a "notch" profile on the stretcher between the two front legs. A feature that we also find on several of the pieces of furniture in the Radio House.

The dining table from Udsen also repeats this notch on the rim, as is also seen on tables in the offices of the Radio House.



*Brass handle Udsen sidebord*



*Overhang entrance Kastrup Airport Terminal*



*Backside corner sofa bench, Kastrup Airport Terminal*



*Allmounted brass shelf in Terminal*

The floating wall-hung sideboard from Udsen is distinguished by the elegant brass handle with soft rounded corners that notches into the sides. This is a form that we know from another Vilhelm Lauritzen project from around the same time, namely the Kastrup airport terminal. Here, this shape appears again and again in the elegant overhang above the entrance, on the leather-covered sofa benches in the waiting room, and even on the brass shelf on the wall in the waiting room.

There are thus many distinctive features of Udsen's dining room furniture, which are so distinctive that – due to our in-depth research and the many clues found – we consider it overwhelmingly likely that Udsen's furniture was designed by Vilhelm Lauritzen. We can add to this the fact that Vilhelm Lauritzen himself was born in Slagelse and presumably must have come to the Hotel Postgaarden during a visit to his hometown and would likely have met the friendly and hospitable Udsen there.

With that, we arrive at least to a point where we are able to attribute the design of Udsen's dining room furniture to Vilhelm Lauritzen. But the discussion about who actually steered the pen across the paper



when the furniture was drawn may not be over. Because, as is known by many familiar with Danish design history, Finn Juhl was employed at Vilhelm Lauritzen's design studio precisely in 1942 alongside carrying out his own early furniture projects in the evenings. Finn Juhl is also generally considered to be the employee of Vilhelm Lauritzen who designed large parts of the interior for the Radio House. There are features of the construction and the division between the frame, seat and back that are in line with Finn Juhl's chairs and especially an almost unknown model that Finn Juhl designed in 1940.

#### Acknowledgements

In the work with cataloguing Jens Udsen's furniture, we would like to extend a special thanks to:

Slagelse Local Archive by Christoph Klinger, Fritz Hansen by Ida Leisner, the Collection of Architectural Drawings at Denmark's Art Library in Søborg, Design Museum Denmark by Christian Holmsted Olesen and the designer Christian Hvidt.

