



design for every body | swedish design for the active life

Design gives freedom. An object can make life easier, give us new possibilities and encourage us to take on new challenges. An object can have a decisive effect – as an extended arm, or something that makes us smile. Whatever our own personal situation in life. Because we are all different. Tall, short, old or young. With one arm, paralysed legs, or impaired vision. We are all unique. The exhibition Design for Every Body displays carefully designed objects intended for us all.



We are all disabled at some point in our lives. Even if I as a so-called 'able-bodied' person am not always conscious that that is what I am. The occasions when I face physical difficulties occur so seldom that I simply do not place much importance on them. More or less automatically, I go around the obstacle or just relinquish the goal. That is what I do today. But if instead I were to confront different obstacles on a daily basis, how would I then think and act?

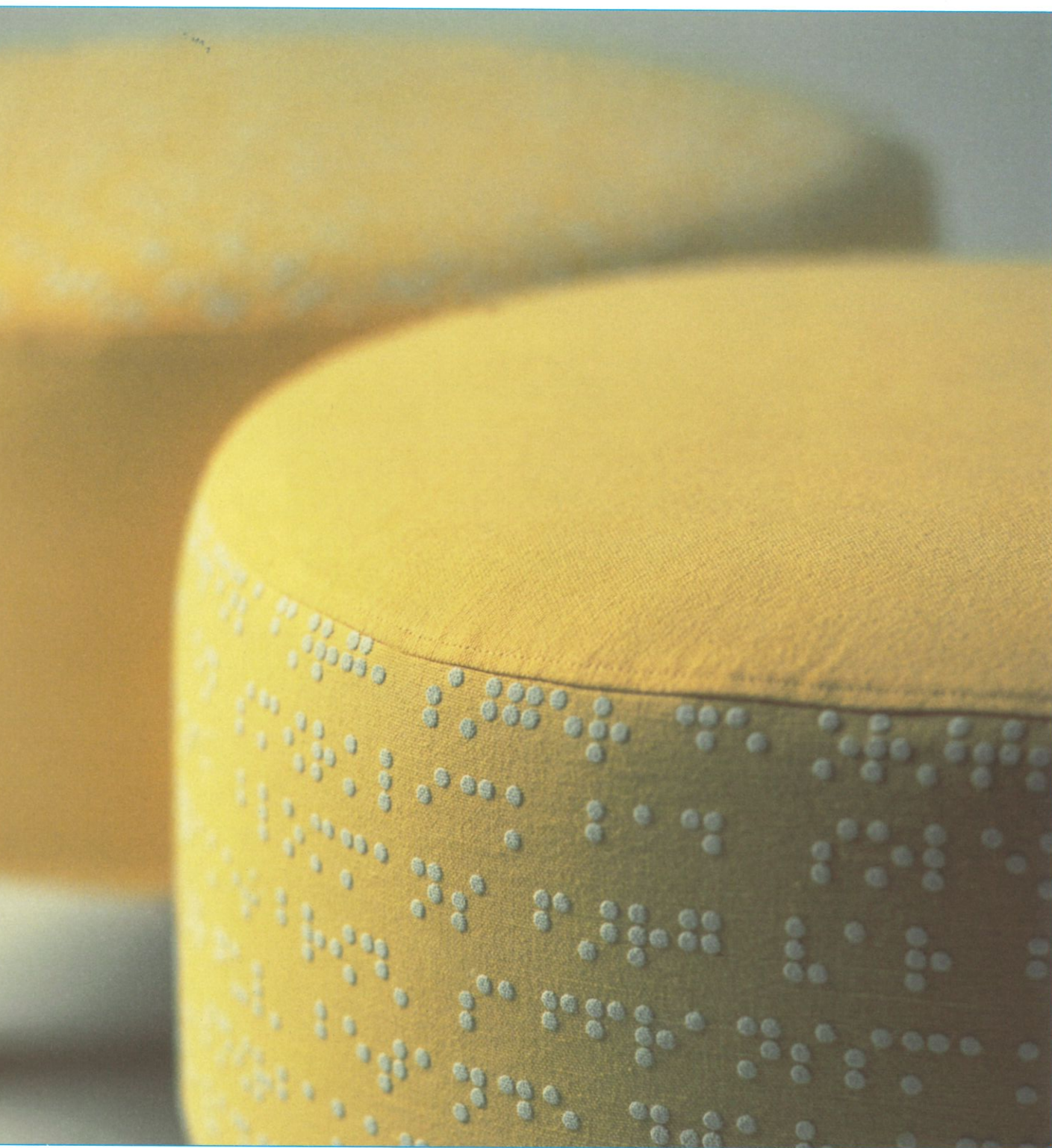
A person becomes handicapped in a certain environment. A child is handicapped in an environment built for adults. Stairs are obstacles to prams and wheelchairs. The visually impaired have difficulty in reading unclear signs. Certain environments shut out people with asthma and allergies... The list can easily become long, and the question is if the list with the 'able-bodied' group is, in fact, smaller than the list of people with some form of impairment?

At the end of March 2000, the Swedish government presented a proposal for a national action plan of policies for the disabled. Before 2010, all public premises and transport will be accessible to all disabled people. Disabled people are to have the same rights and obligations as everyone else, and are not to be regarded as a special group. This approach is a breakthrough – a concrete step away from the 'them and us' mentality. The program makes it clear that everyone's knowledge and experience is important to society, and that the social environment must be designed so that we can all contribute to its development. Municipalities who do not comply will be fined.

design for every body



Swimsuit. Designed by Stay in Place.



Blind, fabric pattern. Designed by Saldo.

Throughout the years, the Swedish government's approach has been of considerable significance for the image of Sweden as a model country in this field. The first regulations governing issues of accessibility in Sweden came into effect in 1966, and in the 35 years since, Swedish designers have come a long way in designing for the disabled. All the time, the goal has been to make it possible for the disabled to live as actively and independently as possible, through means such as personal assistants and ergonomic aids.

'Accessibility for all' has become a slogan. Hopefully it will soon be as self-evident to us as the right of access that Swedes enjoy to walk on private land and pick wild flowers, berries or mushrooms. A right of which we are very proud, and one that has become symbolic proof of equality in Sweden. Now, with 'accessibility for all', we not only have the right to wander in forests and fields, we also have the right to the means of getting there.

Thanks to the computer and IT revolution in recent years, the personal computer has become available to everyone. The computer has offered unimagined possibilities and given whole new dimensions to such fields as communication and information. Many places in the world are now seeing extensive development of various 'smart' products, which also have the goal of making life easier. Simply put, the 'smart' house means that most things in the home can be controlled remotely. Lighting, warmth, the television, food purchases and so on are controlled via infra-red light, voice or a WAP telephone. This entire field demands new design expertise: a whole series of technical products must be given a user-friendly interface, that is, a design that simply and clearly indicates how the object should be used.

design for every body



'do Swing', lamp. Designed by Thomas Bernstrand. Droog Design.

Swedish design is known for being functional and having a clean, minimalistic form. Certainly, function is still the core of our design tradition, even if today the market has more and more products in which function does not play the key role. Playful objects that capture the needs of new ways of life are appearing as a stimulating complement to the main trend of Swedish design. Take the 'do Swing' lamp, designed by Thomas Bernstrand, as an example. A chandelier that you can actually swing from – just like in films. A lamp that sends a message of an unforced lifestyle – do what you've always wanted. In the same way, the lamp can work as an assistive device – something to grab onto when you want to get up from a chair or out of bed.

We need objects that provoke the senses. For who does not need to challenge his prejudices or examine her attitudes at regular intervals? And perhaps it requires even more will, energy, power and fantasy to overcome our prejudices than it does to overcome a disability?

How the forms of our everyday environment actually affect us has not really been explained. We only know that they do. Beauty, for example, is supposed to have a positive effect on the rehabilitation process – which should mean that great care is used in designing such environments. In the same way, it should be self-evident that assistive devices are developed in close co-operation with a designer.

Perhaps in time we will no longer need any assistive devices in the traditional sense of the term – when all products work for everyone. Although is that really the direction we wish to take? Despite everything, our needs are different. The most important thing should be that all products are designed with just as much knowledge and care as those in the exhibition Design for Every Body. [Pernilla Åbrink](#)

design for every body



Act, wheel chair. Etac.



Tango, walker. Designed by Morgan Ferm for Etac.

Perceptions, receptions and realities

Australia and Sweden. Sweden and Australia. Disparate countries with few cultural interfaces, historical links and climatic similarities. How was it that Sweden developed a reputation in Australia for good design, quality products and consistency in craftsmanship – a reputation that still resonates today? Was it through the mythology surrounding the Vikings, the sea-faring nature of the Swedes, the connection to a harsh extreme climate?

The reception of Swedish design in Australia is similar to that of the impact of the Swedes themselves – it was by osmosis rather than via a direct sudden impact. Although one can trace early contact to the first settlement, it was in the 1950s that the first strategic impact of Swedish and Scandinavian design was made not only in Australia but also globally. Perceptions about Swedish design by most Australians are synonymous with that of Scandinavian design. Only specialists can truly differentiate between whether a product is Danish, Swedish or Finnish.

design for every body



The Pipinette potty. Designed by Olle Gyllang for Pipinette.



Oxygen, vacuum cleaner. Electrolux.

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Historically, the Scandinavian and Swedish design philosophy was strongly linked to the international style of modernism. It borrowed from the Bauhaus, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe but reinterpreted modernism in an original way. The Scandinavian focus was ergonomics, natural materials and texture and less focussed on mechanistic, streamlining and stringent adherence to minimalism. This focus not only suited the Swedes' unique requirements but also related back to craft and tradition and ultimately found a synergy in the 1960s with Australia's own arts and crafts movement.

Sweden provided a solid example of design as a unifier that produced economic, social and political benefits for all Swedish citizens. It revealed through advocacy of such ideals as the 'Swedish Model' (research which provided blueprints for design of interiors of homes in the mid-20th century), how the design movement supported a sense of national identity both within Sweden and abroad. It showed Australians how design could improve living standards and be a powerful unifying force with a broader socio-cultural message of egalitarianism. An egalitarianism that led to the Swedes providing answers on how to improve the quality of life for the mentally and physically disabled. 70% of designed products for disabled groups come from Sweden. In this design sphere, the Swedes are unrivalled.

There were several coalescing events, which precipitated the eventual popularity of Swedish design and products in this country: initial timing of the marketing push into a post-war prosperous and family-oriented Australia, endorsement by renowned Australian architect, Robin Boyd and others in Australian home journals, a combination of trade and regal diplomacy, an approach to design which was humanistic and fresh, and the Swedish retail and marketing successes such

as the 1954 'Sweden at David Jones' exhibition. The Swedish Chamber of Commerce's innovative and ambitious exhibition transformed the Sydney department store into a microcosm of Swedish industrial design and cultural life. This exhibition set the positive tone for the future reception of Swedish products here. Australians got to see first hand the designs, products and decorative arts that they had read about in home journals. Designs from Orrefors and Kosta Boda glassware were juxtaposed against the Primus gas stove, the Electrolux vacuum cleaner, the Wettex, Aga stove and the Bahco spanner.

Sweden showed Australia options and continued to shape attitudes of architects, designers and craft practitioners on how to integrate aesthetics, functionalism and environmental imperatives for heating and cooling, fenestration, ventilation, lighting, energy conservation and, implicit in this was an understanding and use of available local natural materials. These Scandinavian concepts are particularly resonant in the buildings of architects Glen Murcutt, John Mainwaring and Richard Leplastrier. Although the cohesion between design and industry was not fully embraced in Australia, it was fundamental to debate and discourse particularly by the Australian Society of Industrial Design, academics in design and architecture and the Sydney School of Architecture. It motivated the public to pursue issues surrounding what represented Australian design, what was meant by functional and humanism, and what was acceptable quality and raised issues about buying behaviour. For many designers and architects, Swedish and Scandinavian design was part of their lexicon and contextual reference like art and new technology.

design for every body



Dropp, armchair. Skandiform, Designed by Claesson Koivisto Rune.

Gordon Andrews, Bill Lucas, Peter Corrigan, Russell Whitechurch, Grant Featherston, Robert J Haughton, Marion Hall Best, Ann Gyngell and Caroline Casey have all commented on the lightness, airiness, brightness, use of nature and natural materials and how Scandinavian – Swedish design 'suited' Australian conditions. These Australians were challenged in their creation of three-dimensional spaces for human dwelling to consider:

- use of available natural materials
- climatic considerations such as heating and cooling
- sociology and living patterns
- importance of functionality
- visual openness
- energy consumption and wastes
- environmental issues of sustainable and recycled timbers and materials

The Swedes have contributed to an emerging Australian design philosophy and ever-changing way of life. Many of these influences have been long lasting and have become endemic to the Australian lifestyle. The Swedish way is practical, pragmatic and above all, utilitarian. It showed middle-class Australians a new way of seeing and appreciating objects of beauty. This, plus the fact Swedish design has gained currency in a fast changing modern Australian society is unique. The fact that Australia was open and receptive to new approaches and ideas, speaks volumes about the nature of the society here and the cohesion and consistent quality of Swedish design. **Sally Marwood**

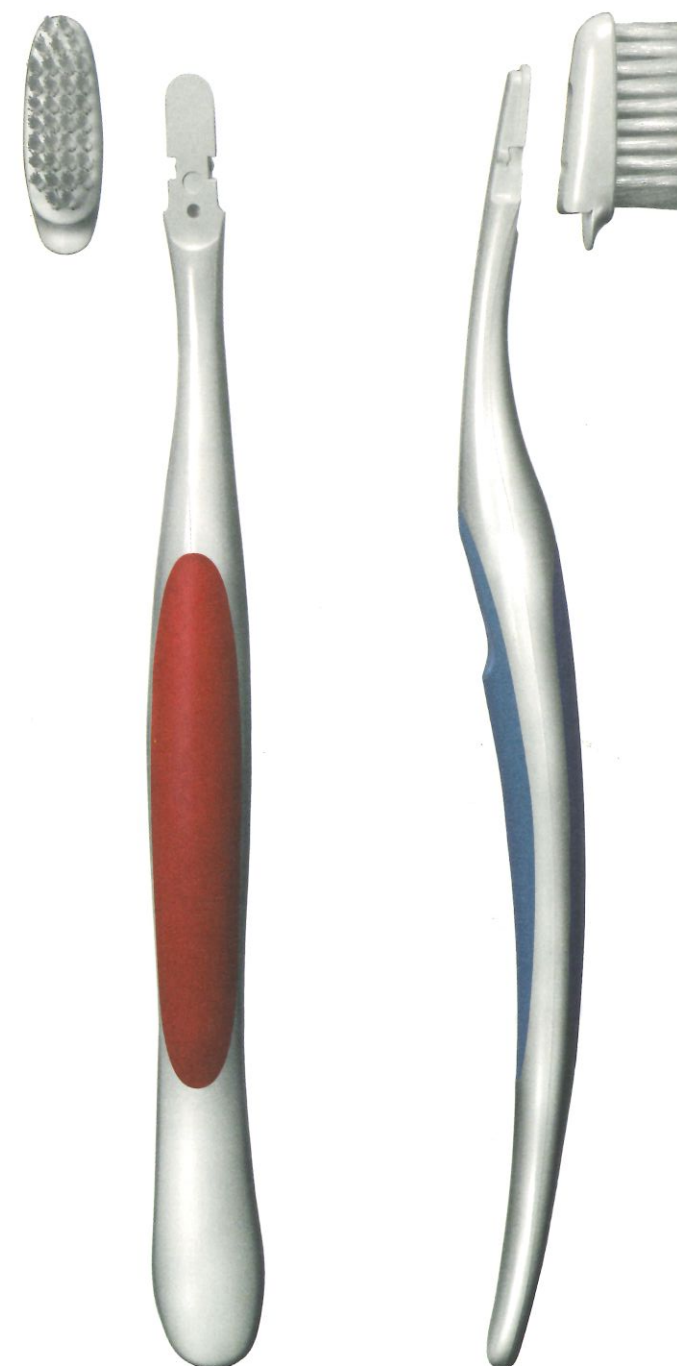
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Silicon lamp. Designed by Monica Förster for David design.



Futura, cuff link. Designed by Björn Dahlström for Simplicitas.



Proxident toothbrush. Athena Nordic.

exhibited objects | australian snapshot

The Fountainhead. Duncan Trevor Wilson, Street Furniture Makers Pty Ltd.

The Fountainhead is a unique design for a public drinking fountain. The product identifies existing problems such as unreliability, poor hygiene, vandalism and lack of disabled access. The result is an elegant blend of form and function, forever changing the direction of drinking fountain design.

Sydney Paralympic Torch. Blue Sky Design, GA & L Harrington Pty Ltd, SOCOG.

Both the Sydney Olympic and Sydney Paralympic Torches are icons of the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games and Sydney 2000 Paralympic games. They are symbols of Australian technology and style at the start of the new millennium. The torches were created through collaboration between university researchers, the manufacturer and designer.

Saucepan Design. Michael Cornish.

A saucepan designed for people with wrist disabilities – focussing on arthritis and tenosynovitis sufferers. The handle consists of a vertical power grip and armrest with a ventral horizontal handle to aid pouring, which relieves pressure on the wrist by utilising larger muscle groups and spreading the load through the armrest onto the forearm.

Racing Wheelchair. Brad Marmion.

A high-tech, aerodynamically advanced racing chair for disabled athletes, which promises to revolutionise the sport. Three years in the making and using skills Marmion learned both through his Masters in Industrial Design at RMIT and as a boy from his boat making father, the racing chair is set for international exposure at the Sydney Paralympics. The shell encases the upper wheels and the athlete's body to improve aerodynamic wind flow over the rider and the chair.



The Fountainhead. Duncan Trevor Wilson, Street Furniture Makers Pty Ltd.



Sydney Paralympic Torch. Blue Sky Design, GA & L Harrington Pty Ltd, SOCOG.

design for every body | 14 October – 3 December at Object galleries, Sydney.

The exhibition

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Exhibition architecture and graphic design: Konstfack (The University College of Arts,
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Ericson and Industrial Design students; Marie-Louise Gustavsson, Anna Westholm
Viktor Brattström and Gustav Nord
Curatorial Manager: Alexandra Bowen, Object galleries, Sydney
Curatorial Assistant: Tabitha Ramsey, Object galleries, Sydney
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Svensk Form

Svensk Form (The Swedish Society of Crafts and Design) is mandated by the
Swedish government to promote Swedish design both nationally and internationally.
Svensk Form has recently opened a new design centre on the island of
Skeppsholmen in Stockholm.
The Society publishes FORM Design Magazine in six issues per year, with English
summaries.
Svensk Form honours annually a number of Swedish products with the Excellent
Swedish Design award and with a selection of Young Swedish Design.
Svensk Form has a unique library and picture archive.
Through the Svensk Form Copyright Panel, the Society assists designers and
manufacturers in cases of plagiarism.
Svensk Form arranges exhibitions, seminars, study visits and design events.

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