



Jens Risom

“Successful executive furniture never allows a visitor to imagine that, perhaps, he should be talking to someone higher up.”

OFFICE AFFAIR

Left, a Richard Avedon-photographed advert for Jens Risom Design, circa 1960

Below, among Ralph Pucci International's new collection of Risom reissues is this 120in sofa, \$17,400, and coffee table, \$7,320, pictured with a David Weeks lamp



Archive material: courtesy of Rocket Gallery

One of the many compensations of making it into your nineties must be living long enough to see your work being revered by a fresh generation (or two) below yours. Jens Risom, the grand old man of midcentury furniture design, is now 94 and this year sees collections of his furniture reissued on either side of the Atlantic.

In the UK, London's Rocket Gallery has joined forces with Sean Sutcliffe and Terence Conran's Benchmark furniture company to produce and sell a collection of nine pieces in walnut and oak from the 1950s and 1960s, when Risom's company was the third largest furniture-maker in America.

Danish-born Risom designed 15 of the 20 pieces in Hans Knoll's first furniture collection, issued in 1943. After parting with Knoll, he set up Jens Risom Design in 1946, so he could control the manufacture of his own streamlined modernist designs. In the 1950s, the firm rode the back of a Richard Avedon-shot ad campaign – under the tagline “The answer is Risom” – to US and international success. Only after he sold out to the Dictaphone Corporation in 1970 did his name recede among the furniture-buying public.

“In recent years he has had several approaches to reissue his furniture in Europe,” says Jonathan Stephenson, owner of Rocket Gallery. “These he's turned down, but since we held an exhibition of his work in 2007, he has confidence that we're doing things in the way that he would like. His furniture from the 1950s and 1960s is very down to earth and functional, but still has enormous elegance. It is a fusion of the craft tradition he learned in Denmark with American modernism

MORE FROM MILAN AND A PUCCI COUP

Designs reborn in New York and Milan this year give us more Risom to be cheerful

Interest in Risom has mushroomed on both sides of the pond in the last couple of years. In the US, Knoll Studio and Design Within Reach have both been selling parts of Risom's original Knoll collection from 1943. In particular, they have turned the ‘Risom Lounge Chair’, with its webbing seat, into a born-again design icon. Then, in April this year, at Milan's Salone del Mobile, Knoll Studio reintroduced the ‘Risom Dining Table’ and ‘Risom Side Chair’ (originally produced from 1943 until 1960 and reissued in the US in 1994) to the European market.

Now, more of Risom's later work is being made available Stateside. Earlier this year, Ralph Pucci International, the New York mannequin, art and furniture gallery, launched a collection of nine pieces that it describes as ‘rediscovered’ from the 1950s and early 1960s, as well as a sloping desk that it maintains is a new discovery.

Prices start from \$3,300 for a cane-back chair and the collection also includes a club chair, a high-back chair, a sofa (pictured) in two widths and a console, in American walnut. Risom furniture ‘is a piece of art, inside and out’, a beaming Mr Pucci told *The New York Times* at the launch party. **Ralph Pucci International, tel: 1.212.633.0452 (US), www.ralphpucciinternational.com**

and the hi-tech of American production methods. It is significant that he always wants to be known as a Danish-born American designer, not a Danish designer. His designs are more pared down than those of the likes of Hans Wegner or Finn Juhl.’

Risom studied in Copenhagen in 1935 at the School for Arts and Crafts under Ole Wanscher. He also studied under Kaare Klint, who led the furniture school at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. He left for America in 1939, he says, ‘to be one of the first designers in a new, large market for modern furniture, rather than one of the many in Denmark’ (W'109). Despite selling up 40 years ago, he has continued working and, in his still-sprightly nineties, designed stools for Philip Johnson's Glass House, located in Risom's home town of New Canaan, Connecticut.

Key to Risom's decision to reissue part of his collection in Britain was a visit by his son Sven to Benchmark's workshops. ‘As well as a designer, Jens is a manufacturer, so he really gets making,’ says Sutcliffe. ‘He designed for manufacture, for example, by including many common pieces across different designs or by having the detailing designed in such a way that it made sense during the manufacturing. Sven said our workshops are just like his father's old factory, because while we do have computer-controlled equipment, his pieces are designed for traditional machinery and techniques that we also follow here.’

Rocket Gallery, London, will launch the Risom collection at its exhibition, 2 July-4 September. It will then be available at www.jensrisom.com and select outlets. Tel: 44.20.7729.7594 (UK), www.rocketgallery.com