



*On the occasion of the 125<sup>th</sup> year anniversary of the company (founded in 1869), Mr. Anton Jepsen wrote and published – together with Rud. Rasmussen's Snedkerier – a historical booklet about the company.*

## **125 years of Danish furniture making**

There was a shop in London which had in its window a shag-pipe – "The World's Best Pipe", that was – and then this idiot comes along and asks to see their collection.

No, they had "The World's Best..." and then there was no need to offer something of a lesser quality.

What peace this offers. You can just walk into a shop and get the best. You would yourself, after maybe many years of looking around, find the thirdbest.

Professor, Architect Mogens Koch

### **From "The Royal Furniture Emporium" to Rud. Rasmussen's Joineries**

The art of Danish furniture design was systematised in 1777 with the foundation of the government institution "The Royal Furniture Emporium" ("Det Kongelige Meubelmagazin") which was to take care of everything connected to the production and sale of furniture; drawings from architects and joiners, a store of Danish and exotic kinds of wood, education of craftsmen from different trades involved in furniture-making and authorisation and sale of furniture from The Royal Furniture Emporium.

The reason for making so much effort was that the import of furniture, seen from an economic point of view, was unacceptably large. This large import was due to the lack of skilled Danish joiners. They were not good enough, not rational enough and this resulted in unrealistically high furniture prices as well as oldfashioned and provincial furniture design.

In 1815 the task was solved. In the workshops the quality of design and craftsmanship was now very high and The Royal Furniture Emporium stopped its activities. But the furniture makers of Copenhagen had realised the value of having large, conspicuous rooms for exhibiting their products and they joined to establish private furniture emporiums. The first ones were *The Furniture Emporium of United Artwork* ("Det Forenede Kunstflids Møbel Magasin") and *The Furniture Emporium of the Ten United Joiner Masters* ("De ti forenede Snedkermestres Møbelmagasin"). Both with the same high demands to quality in design, choice of material and craftsmanship as The Royal Furniture Emporium had always maintained.

New furniture warehouses were established during the 19<sup>th</sup> Century: *The Joiner's Furniture Establishment for Modern and Solid Works* ("Snedkernes Møbel-Etablissement for moderne og solide Arbejder"), *The Joiner and Chair Maker Masters' Furniture Emporium* ("Snedker- og Stolemagermestrenes Møbelmagasin") and *Emporium for Furniture and Upholstery Works* ("Magasin for Møbler og Sadelmagerarbejde") are just a few of them.

Later in the century the workshops became, in many cases, big enough for the individual master to have his own good-sized-furniture emporium with exhibition and sale of the workshop's own products. *Chair maker master C.B. Hansen* was among the first and the *joiner masters Severin and Andreas Jensen* followed soon after – and they were well-known in the town of Copenhagen.

The demands for quality from 1777 were still unchallengeable in 1869 when *Rudolph Rasmussen* established his workshop and with this lay the foundation for another distinctive furniture warehouse in Copenhagen.

In recent times Rud. Rasmussen's Joineries have closed the ring. In **The Furniture House (Møbelhuset)** on Nørrebro there are several floors of exhibition and today the exhibition contains not only furniture that the firm itself produces. Since 1981 the permanent furniture exhibition on the premises has contained a selection of the best furniture that is made by Danish furniture makers – including furniture from colleagues' and competitors' workshops and from furniture factories.

Exactly as was the case with The Royal Furniture Emporium.

## Curves on a Straight Line

If one were to draw a graph – a curve – of the quality of Danish furniture in respect to choice of material and craftsmanship from the time of The Royal Furniture Emporium till today it would be a straight line, maybe with a slight upward curve towards our time. And it should be up there in the top bracket.

In case one wanted to draw a similar graph showing the design of the furniture of the same more than two hundred year period, this graph would follow the first one until the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century after which it would make a huge plunge until the 1920-30's when it would again begin to near the first one.

This last graph is naturally enough drawn using our modern preconceptions of furniture design.

Machines had begun to take over a great deal of the work in the workshops and they were by now able to make almost everything, also a good deal of that which was earlier given form by the hands and tools of the joiners. It was very easy to experiment with all the styles of the previous centuries. And that is what they did. We call it confusion of styles. Others have been more kind and term it historicism.

Rudolph Rasmussen was apprenticed to Theodor D. Ring in Aarhus from 1852 to 57. Joiner master Ring was one of the well-known Aarhus Joiners of that time; in the 1840's he was among the six partners in "The Furniture Emporium" on Lille Torv, but around the time when Rudolph was apprenticed to him he established a slightly smaller association "Ring's and Ørum's Furniture Emporium" in Klostergade. At that time it was mainly mahogany furniture – neo-rococo furniture – that was produced in the Aarhus workshop.

Later, as a journeyman, Rudolph Rasmussen worked with the distinguished Court joiner, Jens Gustav Lund for a period of years. He was the first in Denmark to install the new joiner's machines with a steam engine as tractive force.

Here the main production was of Victorian furniture together with furniture in neo gothic, neo renaissance, and neo baroque style and this of a quality of craftsmanship probably never surpassed. It was beautiful, but dry – without soul.

Joiner furniture of a certain quality had for hundreds of years been reserved the relatively small elite who could afford them.

The part of the population who could afford to buy a presentable residence, however small it might be, grew rapidly during the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. And there had to be money for the status symbols as well, the furniture. The residence had to be furnished in a manner consistent with one's position. Everyone knew, without perhaps having a deeper knowledge of the history of styles: distinguished people had distinguished furniture!

Therefore, the interest in using the fine old styles increased and the individual rooms of the homes were often furnished in individual styles, impressing neighbours, friends – and business connections.

When you stand in front of one of the pieces of furniture made at that time by Rud. Rasmussen's Oakfurniture Factory (Rud. Rasmussens Fabrik for Egetræsmøbler) you have to admire the expertise used, down to the slightest detail. The form of the wood and the measures of the furniture are carried out with academical precision thanks to the woodcutting machinists. The perfect surface of the furniture and the surface treatment is the result of the cabinet makers' effort. And the four, five woodcarver journeymen, who worked in the company's woodcarving workshop, have made their part of each piece of furniture with an incredible accuracy.

It is genuine craftsmanship. It looks good. It is on its way to become valuable antiquities. But it is also, because of its accuracy, a little dry. You catch yourself looking for the "soul" of the furniture. And this is not only due to the fact that the styles have been "re-used", the furniture was necessarily to become like that given the conditions of the time. The craftsmanship had become so beautiful that it simply was not possible to make it any more perfect.

But at the same time, the craftsmanship was changing seriously, due to the new dominance of the machines. It became increasingly *factory-work* and everything that came from the machine looked exactly alike, exactly the right thickness and breadth, exactly square everywhere. It had become perfectionism.

With all that the new machines were able to do it must necessarily become like that. There is more to this than purely economical aspects of production on a large scale and reduction of the price of furniture. It is only natural that one became excited by all these new inventions. It must have been, well, joyful to establish a factory with buzzing machines.

The old styles from the ages of Gothic, Renaissance and Baroque styles were thought of, designed and formed for the working methods of the cabinet makers.

When the old styles were taken up again in the last half of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century old handmade forms could, of course, not be copied by the machines with their demands to millimetre-accuracy.

But at that time, no one would dream of trying to copy them. What was "primitive" in the old styles now became the utterly perfect in the new furniture. The furniture makers were naturally proud of the results. It looked much better.

In the furniture design of today the "soul" has returned and it is as alive as ever, not despite of the dominance of the age of the machine but because of it.

Round Denmark there are furniture makers and furniture factories that produce furniture of an extraordinary quality also in regard to perfect accuracy in the work. The part of this furniture that is designed by a really excellent furniture designer has this "soul" to such a deeply serious – and happy – degree that looking at it gives one the same experience as listening to the music of Mozart.

Modern furniture design is thought of, designed and formed with regard to a production with extensive use of joiner's machines. It is the interaction between idea and method which is so important to the final result.

And the pieces of furniture, the part of them that we deal with in this book, are all through the process in the hands of competent joiners, from the one who selects the wood to the one who finishes the work, securing that the quality is at its highest. That makes furniture *art*.

The art of furniture making has become incredibly accurate without having suffered. It is more beautiful than ever. Also, and maybe not least, in all the many cases where the designer has "re-used" ideas of furniture design from previous times. He has not copied but processed an old idea and thereby made it new, different, surprising. Beautiful.

You can live a whole life with such pieces of furniture without ever getting tired of enjoying them with your eyes. Enjoy the beautiful, the perfect, in material and form.

It is furniture of this distinguished class that leave the workshops of jubilee furniture makers, Rud. Rasmussen's Joineries; and when the name was changed in 1930 from Rud. Rasmussens's *Factory*... to Rud. Rasmussen's Joineries it was a deliberate move to show a change in attitudes away from the "excitement" of the first generation of the age of the machine, an excitement which the company had long overcome. They are still there, the machines, and the interaction between the management's uncompromising demands to materials and the supreme effort of the cabinet makers and the woodcutting machinists results in the top quality of the furniture.

Rud. Rasmussen's Joineries are luckily not the only ones to produce furniture of this quality, already in the exhibition rooms of the Furniture House this furniture is accompanied by the quality products of other furniture producers.

The fact that there are more – that is what is so important to the art of Danish furniture making.

### **Rud. Rasmussen's Oakfurniture Factory**

The 11<sup>th</sup> of May 1869 Rudolph Rasmussen got his trade licence as a joiner master, but he had, as was usual at that time, established himself some years earlier.

Already in 1866 Rudolph Rasmussen opened a little workshop in Studiestræde together with a colleague. Such an establishment was practical; it would be possible to get small jobs along the way to employ, and definitely not to pay, a journeyman. If there was initiative and energy behind the workshop it might, within a few years, grow to demand bigger premises, employment of journeymen, and the therefore necessary trade licence – otherwise the master stayed in his small workshop for the rest of his life without being master to anyone.

At the big exhibition in Stockholm 1866 Rudolph's master, Court joiner Jens Gustav Lund, exhibited his magnificent furniture. Rudolph was inspector at the exhibition and got at his return 200 rix-dollars for this job. This amount was the basis for "starting on his own". And Court joiner Lund lost a good journeyman.

In 1868 the first workshop had become too small. Rudolph's colleague, Jørgensen, got the opportunity to expand when he took over the whole workshop. Rudolph moved to Gothersgade and shared here, for a short period of time, a workshop with I.P. Mørch who, like Rudolph Rasmussen, became well-known in the Copenhagen furniture world.

One of the important foundations for these kinds of small workshops were often sub-contracts from the bigger joiners, which was also the case with this company. Looking through Rudolph Rasmussen's old account books we see that he, too, delivered works to several of Copenhagen's bigger furniture workshops.

During the first years they produced, among other things, quite a few furniture of walnut for Royal chair maker C.B. Hansen, especially desks with 3 or 5 drawers. In this way the financial foundation for that which was most important – to build up the new workshop's own production – was secured, a safety net for the workshop to take on bigger furnishing assignments.

But as in any workshop Rudolph also received many single orders of different kinds: a cupboard for "a Cutting Machine" ordered by a "Mechanicus". A clock maker had his foundry models made there - a "Model for a Wheel" was re-shaped and an old "Clock Case" was polished.

A butcher ordered a wing-table, a double bed, two single beds and a mahogany divan table and had other furniture repaired. And for "Madam Christensen's Cousin" a chest of drawers in painted pine was produced – 8 rix-dollars and 3 marks.

The results were now so good that it was necessary to employ a permanent staff of journeymen. The time had come to apply for a trade licence as a joiner master.

In the beginning of the year 1869 Rudolph Rasmussen employed three journeymen and before the year had passed he had employed ten. In 1874 the workshop became too small for him. He moved to bigger and better premises in Store Kongesgade. The workshop's future special line, oak furniture, began to take shape already during these first years. It grew to an extent that in a few years it became necessary to move yet another time.

Rudolph Rasmussen knew the new, modern joiner's machines from his previous employment with Court joiner Lund and these machines alone contained the future, they could create rational large-scale production.

For craftsman masters the machines could make the beautiful and ambitious work of the modern age come true: *A Factory*.

There was music in the work. Quite tangibly: whereas the loud buzzing of the machines sounds like a terrible noise to an outsider, to the woodcutting machinist it becomes a sound that he cannot help singing along to, and to the master himself it becomes a song of stability, sales, profits and new extensions.

A fire determined the time for the planned extension. The workshop in Store Kongensgade burned during the carrying out of one of the bigger assignments: furniture for Hotel d'Angleterre.

Rudolph Rasmussen's brother-in-law joiner master J.C. Groule had specialised in polished mahogany and walnut furniture. He, too, needed possibilities for extension and they both became interested in the premises, Nørrebrogade 45. Here were so many building and extension possibilities leaving plenty of room for both of them. They bought the house in 1875 and soon a sign on the door proclaimed the existence of the two companies:

Polished Mahogany Furniture, J. C. Groule – and *Rud. Rasmussen's Oakfurniture Factory*, and thus there were, for many years, two whole furniture companies on the premises.

A new four-storey workshop building was built facing Nørrebrostræde, now Stengade; here Groule and Rasmussen each established his own company and Rud. Rasmussen started to install joiner's machines on the ground floor – a boiler house was built in the yard for the tractive force, an enormous steam engine. This also became the kiln for the store of unmanufactured cabinet wood.

It was a good song that Rudolph Rasmussen thus wrote the first verse for. He had heard it in his inner ear for a long time. And the song still sounds.

The next step had to be a regular furniture Emporium of the old, well-known pattern. It was established with a showroom – with furniture of solid oak: studies, dining rooms, bedrooms and various pieces of furniture.

Before a piece of furniture takes form there is an idea which turns into a rough design, then into some drawings which enables the journeymen to start working in the workshop.

Rud. Rasmussen designed a lot of the furniture produced by the company and quite a few architects and designers had assignments for the company over the years; among the most well-known of the first years were H.V. Brinkopff, and Vilhelm Dahlerup, who were both attached to "The Joiner's Design Association of 1837" ("Snedkernes Tegneforening af 1837") of which Rudolph Rasmussen was member of the board of directors for several years.

This is the association which in the beginning carried the proud but very difficult name "*The Association of Joiners for Promotion of the Knowledge of the Profession's Theory*" ("*Foreningen af Snedkere til Kundskabers Fremme i Professionens Theori*").

The two excellent furniture designers, Brinkopff and Dahlerup, were a little dry and academic in their lines but later on the considerably more unruly architect, Thorvald Bindsbøll joined with some strange furniture but also with some beautiful ones.

Thorvald Bindsbøll left his personal stamp on the furniture production of Rud. Rasmussen's Oakfurniture Factory. It could be robust, proud, straight lines but in the most strange places small coils and convolutions might suddenly appear.

Bindesbøll designed furniture for the company for a period of years and as time passed several other architects were involved in giving form to the furniture, among others, Mogens Clemmensen and Henning Hansen.

But *"Rudolph Rasmussen might adjust the architects' drawings a little, add small details, a moulding here, a profile there"*, Rasmus Berg tells us in the company's 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary publication.

*"But it was not always that these small adjustments were to the liking of the architect!"*.

The co-operation with Bindesbøll began with a marriage. One of Rudolph Rasmussen's sons, Rudolf Rasmussen, was married to a daughter of a well-known art dealer of that time, Valdemar Kleis, who at the time worked with Bindesbøll. This co-operation came to include Rud. Rasmussen's company.

In his book *"Valdemar Kleis 1845-1945 – the old Art Gallery on Vesterbro"* Georg Kleis tells us that his father, Valdemar Kleis, ordered new pieces of furniture. Bindesbøll were to design them, and they of course had to be produced in Rud. Rasmussen's Workshops.

*"It was especially a living room set"*, Kleis tells us, *"which were to be a piece of art designed by Bindesbøll. It was made of mahogany but richly decorated with ornaments, gilded with pure gold and the work stretched over several years. When it was finally finished and we had disposed of the old furniture my father soon realised that this was the only thing he should not have done"*.

*"The furniture was wanted for an exhibition in Brussels and later in Paris, and other exhibitions – yes, I even think one of the pieces, a bookcase, went as far as Chicago. My father could not really say no out of consideration for Bindesbøll but the result was that we had no furniture in the living room."*

Rudolph Rasmussen's two young sons, Rudolf and Viktor Rasmussen, took over the company in 1904 after their father's death. They carried on the traditions on which the workshop was founded and in 1911 the new big workshop building with four floors was ready for occupation; a building which was already planned by their father.

And the young joiner master, Rudolf Rasmussen, followed in his father's footsteps. He too designed furniture.

Still today, the new workshop building in the yard contains all the workshop facilities of the company, among other things a woodstore, woodcutting-, cabinet making- and upholstery workshops.

In the first four-storey workshop building built by Rudolph Rasmussen shortly after he took over the premises you now find The Furniture House – Rud. Rasmussen's Joineries' permanent furniture exhibition.

At the same time as building the new workshop building the company's first steam engine was replaced by a new and modern one, which *"with generator on the shaft created the necessary power for the workshops. There was therefore no transmission shaft any more, which was quite new at the time."*

This information comes from the then foreman, Villads Nielsen, who stayed to celebrate his 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary with the company.

*"Villads Nielsen was something of an inventor"* a third generation member of the company, Rudolf Rasmussen's son, Aage Rasmussen, tells us in his memoirs:

*"Around the turn of the century he had designed a dovetail machine, which is still used today. He always made models of his machines first and there is a small model of the dovetail machine, which really works and can make very small dovetails."*

The good reputation, that Rud. Rasmussen's Oakfurniture Factory attained very quickly, led to major furnishing assignments in private homes as well as for governmental and private institution.

Among the bigger assignments for a private home was furniture for a flat in Frederiksholms Kanal, now known as the national Museum's Victorian Home. For this Rud. Rasmussen made the oak furniture and his brother-in-law, J.C. Groule supplied the mahogany and walnut furniture.

For the exhibition in Aarhus in 1912 architect Mogens Clemmensen designed the furniture with which Rud. Rasmussen participated. It was a chair, an armchair, a worktable, a sofa, a cupboard, and a desk. This little list of furniture tells us that not only the stately and grandiose furnishing, which occupied the minds of that time so much, was considered. The fact that a working man might need a working table was something that Rud. Rasmussen paid attention to.

In 1914 there is an exhibition in Malmø. Rud. Rasmussen exhibits furniture for *"The Royal Room"*, among other things a revolving bookcase.

The Governmental furnishing assignments were many: the Police headquarters, the National Postal Services, the gaol, several ministries, banks, the Technical University, the Gas and Electricity Services, hospitals, hotels, DSB (Danish Rail), the Gethsemane Church .....

But there was still time for the small assignment, time for producing a piece of furniture or new windows for someone's private home. "Miss Frisch" got her dresser, Jacoby got new kitchen windows, Wiese a medicine cupboard, Rudolf Tegner got a screen, Miss Nielsen new bedroom furniture, and goldsmith Poulsen a silver cupboard...

It is single assignments like these that keep a joinery from fossilising in form and in content.

For Thorvald Bindesbøll's grave a bench was made.

A new and interesting furnishing assignment appeared when Copenhagen got its very exciting and different townhall, designed by architect Martin Nyrop.

The building of the townhall created work for a lot of the joiners in Copenhagen. Many of the best workshops produced furniture for it, which was only natural for such big municipal building activities.

There are many examples of the fine co-operation between craftsmanship, handicraft and art which Nyrop's inspiring townhall building gave rise to; to mention just one example: the beautiful wedding hall in Copenhagen's townhall was furnished with Kaare Klint's furniture and the wall-decorations were made by Joakim Skovgaard.

*"It was, among other things, for the furniture for the townhall of Copenhagen that Villads Nielsen's dovetail machine had to be used", Aage Rasmussen tells.*

In 1926 the company starts to work with Kaare Klint. The first works produced are exhibition cases and furniture for the Museum of Applied Art. This co-operation continued till Kaare Klint's death in 1954.

At the furniture exhibition you can still see a few of Kaare Klint's older furniture, which are seldom produced, along with furniture which has been in current production since the first models were made.

Other furniture designers have designed pieces of furniture which are so thoroughly right and beautiful that they have become "classics" but all designers, since Kaare Klint, have, in their training and further development, had to study how this celebrity in Danish furniture design actually "went about it".

You have to be good to side with Kaare Klint.

You have to be unique to beat his genius.

Kaare Klint's furniture meant a tremendous renewal within Danish furniture design. A clear and logical construction was Klint's own demand; nothing superfluous, only honest, pure lines, exquisite materials, good craftsmanship, everything down to the smallest detail.

Size and form were decided on the basis of extensive measuring of everything that a human being could possibly want to keep in the furniture, this being paper, linen, porcelain..., everything. In the same way, the human dimensions formed the basis for any furniture meant for sitting in. This might all seem very natural but it was a very neglected area. Klint was the first person to go about it this way – and thus introduced functionalism into Danish furniture design with an academical thoroughness.

Thorough preparation, precision, honesty in any assignment. There were no compromises in Klint's work.

Kaare Klint had his real break-through at the Copenhagen Joiner's Guilds' Furniture Exhibitions (Københavns Snedkerlaugs Møbeludstillinger). In 1933 Rud. Rasmussen's Joineries exhibited furniture for the study and for the terrace, designed by Klint. *"This is modern joiner-art", Ole Wanscher writes in a review, "...the calculations of size, which form the basis, are of a scientific standard; every fitting, every detail is carefully considered..."*

Architect Arne Karlsen gives this fine, little characterisation of Kaare Klint in a feature article in Berlingske Tidende, 15. Dec., 1988: *"Through his openness towards all cultures and all times, through his deep insight into each assignment's practical and emotional requirements, through his analytical workmethods and through his ability to distinguish the important from the unimportant Klint is able to create a production which, characterised by precision and consistency, is unequalled in modern Danish design. Given temper and the spirit of the time you can prefer one work to another but objectively seen no misses have come from Klint's hand".*

Kaare Klint created an epoch-making change in Danish furniture design and changes of this kind take time. The customers still had their special wishes concerning the furnishing of their homes.

But slowly the new ideas began to catch on. More and more people began to see the stroke of genius and the beautiful in the furniture of the new time. Even though Kaare Klint's furniture never became "the furniture of Everyman" an

overwhelming part of the population would like very much to own one. The Safari chair has thus been "in" for several decades and a hundred thousand copies of this chair has long been sold.

Any "intellectual home with respect for itself" had to obtain two copies of this Klintian Safari chair, with canvas – not leather – on seat and back, and together with a couch and a coffee table the living room was then "furnished"!

"The Klintian School" has been a reality since Kaare Klint's considerable contribution to the art of Danish furniture design. The generation immediately following Klint continued his line with simplicity, clarity and craftsmanlike honesty as the primary considerations. One of the architects who worked closely together with Klint was Mogens Koch, and Rud. Rasmussen soon started to work with this architect too.

In 1928 architect Mogens Koch designed his famous quadratic composite bookcase made of solid wood with unusually thin dimensions, which, with the traditional dovetail and rabbit joinings, became remarkably strong and stabile. The composite bookcase goes into production in 1930 but it is not until the beginning of the 1950's that the production really gets going. Mogens Koch adds other elements and develops the composite bookcase to a whole system of cupboards, bookcases, vitrines, drawers and frames.

In 1982 Mogens Koch received the Furniture Manufacturers' Association's (Møbelfabrikantforeningen) Furniture Award for his bookcase system. The award this year was shared by Koch and Erik Rud. Rasmussen's son, Leif Erik Rasmussen and the latter's partner, Henrik Rolff, both furniture designers, for a bookcase and a series of cupboards designed for Paustian.

In 1991 Mogens Koch received the ID-Classics Prize, which is given to a product that has been produced continually for more than 25 years. The prize, which is founded by Danish Design Center, is given to both the designer and the producer.

The fine co-operation continued until the death of Mogens Koch in 1992, and the "Mogens Koch bookcase" is still produced as one of the notable furniture classics.

At the presentation of the furniture prize in 1982 Mogens Koch said in his speech about the beginning of the composite bookcase, which had grown from a personal need in Koch's own small living rooms: *"The bookcase had to be pure and simple but quality was important – and accuracy. But to me it was just as important that Rud. Rasmussen's Joineries continued to exist generation after generation. The most important, after all, was that once you had started with your bookcase you could continue for as long as you wanted – and that the product was of such a quality that: once a customer always a customer"*.

### **Rud. Rasmussen's Joineries**

We will let one of the third generation owners of Rud. Rasmussen's Snedkerier, joiner master Aage Rasmussen open this chapter with some passages from his memoirs:

*"In 1924 I began my apprenticeship in joiner master Otto Meyer's workshop in the back building of Tordenskjoldsgade 24."*

*"As soon as I had finished my apprenticeship with Otto Meyer I started in the woodworking factory of Rud. Rasmussen's Joineries where the foreman, Villads Nielsen, would teach me how to work the woodcutting machines. He was not a bad teacher."*

*"After a year my father asked me to start in the new Arts and Craft School which had a special Furniture School with Ole Wanscher as a teacher. I was there for three semesters (from November to April), as well as 2 summer semesters in Stuttgart."*

*"After this, 4 months with Fritz Hansen's successor in Dronningsgade, and then in 1935 I started in the drawing office of Rud. Rasmussen's Joineries."*

*"At that time we had a woodcutting machinist who, among other things, took care of the dovetail machine and the tenon machine. He was an able man but sometimes he played tricks on people and Villads Nielsen wanted to fire him. He then borrowed some money from uncle Victor to buy a new suit and had to pay it back over some weeks and with this trick he got himself off the hook for some time."*

*"If that was what pushed Villads Nielsen over the edge, I do not know, but Villads Nielsen went to the inn in Reersø by Storebælt to have a rest."*

*"This happened just as we were going to start working on the exclusive furniture for the town hall in Gentofte. I took over Villads Nielsen's job to try to make things work out in the woodworking factory, and it all went very well, I think. We made furniture for the big conference hall out of American walnut and furniture for the mayor's office and for the*

town clerk. The committee rooms were, as far as I remember, furnished with Kaare Klint armchairs for some tables which were designed by Court architect Thorvald Jørgensen.”

”In the late thirties we were very busy. We supplied all the durable furniture for Nørresundby’s new town hall.”

”The City Council Hall was not assigned to us. It did not have to be as solid as it was not going to be used as much. A sensible argument.”

”My father designed the furniture himself and many of the pieces became models for a lot of the furniture we supplied to the Industrial Unions (*Industrifagene*) and The Iron Industry Association (*Jernindustriens sammenslutning*) on Nørrevold. That was in 1939, when we also made panels and furniture for a committee room in the town hall of Copenhagen. They wanted a polished mahogany table, 12-15 meters long, in three parts; the table top consisted of 60 cm cuba mahogany boards, which were glued together”.

”Then there was Søllerød town hall and architect Arne Jacobsen; a very interesting assignment – and a very interesting architect.”

Rud. Rasmussen’s Joineries’ co-operation with Kaare Klint started, as already mentioned, with the production of museum cases for the conversion of the Frederik Hospital in Bredgade into the Danish Museum of Applied Art.

Here the solid joiner experience met with the most outstanding and innovative furniture designer of our time. Already in 1914 Kaare Klint had created a chair the lightness, elegance and simplicity of which had not been seen since the Danish Empire chair. This chair was designed for the Museum of Faaborg and the Faaborg Chair now became one of the many models of the Klintian collection, which was mainly established during the years 1927-1938.

Aage Rasmussen remembers, from the time before he was apprenticed as a joiner, that he was ”*captured by uncle Victor and made to stand in the gateway of the workshop building to keep an eye on the new museum cases for the Museum of Applied Art. The cart had left with a load and a new load was standing in the gateway. Those were the ones I had to keep an eye on!*”

Chairs for the lecture room of the museum followed, also made by Klint. ”*They were to be of mahogany,*” Aage Rasmussen tells us, ”*3-4 specimen chairs were made and many years went by before the actual production of the chairs started. This co-operation was epoch-making for the company. It was around this time – in 1930 – that we changed our name to Rud. Rasmussen’s Joineries.*”

In 1944, after the death of Rudolf Rasmussen, his sons, Erik and Aage Rasmussen, joined the old well-esteemed furniture company and became co-owners along with Rudolf Rasmussen’s brother, Viktor Rasmussen, who still represented the older generation.

Erik Rud. Rasmussen was, as a civil engineer, the natural inheritor of the economy and sales department of the company.

Aage Rasmussen had been employed by the company since 1935. He had been in, among other places, the drawing office and since he took over the daily management of the workshops. It all added up to 55 years serving the company.

For several years Aage Rasmussen was the chairman of the Copenhagen Joiners’ Guild’s furniture department and on top of that he engaged himself in the technical School and the Craftsmen’s Association (*Håndværkerforeningen*) of Copenhagen.

Erik and Aage Rasmussen changed the company’s furniture production to such an extent that it became possible to produce Kaare Klint and Mogens Koch furniture in rational mass production instead of single production.

New generations, new ideas. A good-natured and funny little recollection can illustrate the dawning of a new generation:

The Safari chair, which might be called the world’s first ”self-assembly-chair”, was meant to be packed in a canvas bag but Erik and Aage Rasmussen experimented ”in secret” with cardboard boxes for the transportation of this chair. Of course, ”*uncle Victor*” was not supposed to discover such a ”scandal” – but the box was a success!

Right from the beginning, it has been a characteristic of Rud. Rasmussen’s Joineries that a production of furniture was not possible in case first class materials were not available, whether that be wood, mahogany for Klint’s furniture, or leather, hide or upholstery materials.

For this reason alone the Second World War must cause the company’s production to be almost at a standstill during these years. Therefore the development of Kaare Klint’s furniture did not really gather momentum until the end of the

1940's A great deal of this furniture is still produced today due to its timelessness and has been a source of inspiration for a new generation of furniture designers, an inspiration for what was later to be called the Danish furniture adventure.

The richness of furnishing options to be found in Mogens Koch's quadratic composite bookcase also started developing at the end of the 1940's when it was again possible to get hold of materials of the necessary quality.

In the decades to come Rud. Rasmussen's Joineries developed concurrently with the fine epoch of Danish furniture design and in the last part of the 1950's Erik and Aage Rasmussen could start a rebuilding of the exhibition building, first with new offices and a renovation of the exhibition room on the ground floor. Later on this exhibition room was connected to the first floor with a spiral staircase. The first floor was also renovated and made ready for exhibitions.

The 11<sup>th</sup> of May 1969 the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the company was celebrated. The sun was shining from a clear blue sky and the Danish flag floated over the workshop building – exactly as when the company celebrated the anniversary of one of its many loyal employees.

A large reception was held in the exhibition building and for this special occasion an exhibition of furniture produced right back to the start of the company was arranged on the second floor. The exhibition was arranged by Erik Rud. Rasmussen's son, furniture designer Leif Erik Rasmussen, apprenticed as a joiner to A.J. Iversen and at that time employed by the company, together with Aage Rasmussen's son, Jørgen Rud. Rasmussen, apprenticed as a joiner to Jørgen Wolff in Hellerup and later trained as a furniture designer.

### **The Furniture House and fourth generation**

In 1974 Rud. Rasmussen's Joineries is turned into a private limited company and a few years later the fourth generation, Jørgen Rud. Rasmussen and Helge Kurt Hansen, takes over the company.

Jørgen Rasmussen has been employed by the company since 1967 and Helge Hansen since 1963, the latter as manager of the apprentice workshop and finished goods warehouse. Helge Kurt Hansen served his apprenticeship with P. Chr. Petersen in Adelgade and then moved to Greenland where he had his own joiner's business.

Already in 1980 the *Autumn Exhibition*, which grew well-known in the years to come, began to take form. The first exhibition showed only furniture of Rud. Rasmussen's own production but already around this time Rud. Rasmussen's Joineries started a co-operation of exhibitions with the remaining joiners from Copenhagens Joiners' Guild's exhibitions at the Museum of Applied Art, from "Den Permanente" as well as from the Joiner House (Snedkerhuset) in Studiestræde. This results in a big joint exhibition in the autumn 1981 in Rud. Rasmussen's showrooms with furniture from Wørt's Furniture Joinery by Holger Nissen; Christensen and Larsen; Søren Horn; A.J. Iversen by Gunnar Iversen; Jørgen Christensen; and Henning Jensen.

This first exhibition leads to permanent joint furniture exhibitions in the Furniture House on Nørrebrogade and moves the company to expand the exhibition area first unto the second floor and later unto the third. On four floors, you can now, along with Rud. Rasmussen's own products, see the best products from the major furniture companies from the rest of Denmark exhibited.

The exhibition, containing a large section of Danish furniture classics, has become more permanent through the years and is visited by many Danes but also by a vast number of foreigners from practically all over the world.

There is also a tradition for separate exhibitions in Rud. Rasmussen's Furniture House. In 1988 professor, architect Mogens Koch's 90<sup>th</sup> birthday was celebrated with a spring exhibition.

An exhibition of architect Bernt's furniture, produced by joiner master Holger Nissen, Wørt's Furniture Joinery, took place in the autumn 1988 to mark 30 years of co-operation between the architect and the producer.

The same year, in December – to mark the century of Kaare Klint's birth – Klint's furniture was shown at a grand commemorative exhibition.

In 1989, on the day of Hans J. Wegner's 75<sup>th</sup> birthday, a big joint spring exhibition with furniture by Wegner and Børge Mogensen was opened.

Through the years many young people have started their career in the company, first as a factory boy, maybe, later as an apprentice, woodcutting machinist, cabinet maker or upholsterer – with a final apprenticeship test and then a fully developed craftsman. Some continue with the company after their apprenticeship, others seek new challenges.

A continually changing group of young people being educated brings life and renewal to a workshop, which is, at the same time, held up by the regular staff of journeymen and foremen, who create the beautiful furniture with industry and skill. The company employs today around 40 people, including the exhibition and office staff.

But there are grey clouds amidst the golden times, later on termed "the slum clearance period" (1980-84): The city of Copenhagen wants to clear the slum and both the exhibition building towards Stengade and the workshop building in the yard of Nørrebrogade 45 has to be torn down. This would mean the end of Rud. Rasmussen's Joineries and thus the fall of the last Danish bastion of Danish furniture design exhibition. But the authorities changed their minds at the last minute and the activities were allowed to continue.

But, "the slum clearance period" led to a new idea: "The Craftsman House" ("Håndværkshuset"). Today, the buildings in the yard contain, apart from Rud. Rasmussen's workshops, the last existing hat makers in Denmark, Andersen and Berner; and H.P. Hansen & Son's Joiner Company by Torben Hansen, who assists Rud. Rasmussen in hanging and putting up furniture at their customers. In the front building towards Nørrebrogade you find the clothes firm, Regent – on the ground and first floor – and above that 8 residential flats.

A garden and a playing field has now been laid out for the building's residents so creating space and air for the elmtree and the limetree towards Slotsgade and Stengade respectively.

Thus ensuring that they, *too*, can continue to grow in the same place.