

ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

❖ Architecture

Distinct Nordic architecture can be traced back to the Viking period. Boathouses were amongst the most wildly built structures, which were used to hold their ships during the winter and during periods that were deemed not suitable for sailing. These boathouses were often built in multiples, and built to the specifications of the ship, which sometimes extended to over 25 meters in length.

Longhouses were also common during this period, and their size depended on the wealth and stature of its owner, but all were built around wooden frames on sturdy stone foundations. The walls were often constructed with planks of logs or of wattle and daub. The longest Viking longhouse was found in Lofotr, Norway, which stood at a staggering length of 83 meters. A replica of the longhouse, which was excavated in 1983, was built close to the original site for travelers wishing to see and learn more about it.

Trelleborg, or Viking ring fortresses, are also indicative of medieval Nordic architecture, and was a collective name given to the six circular forts that were built in Denmark and southern Sweden. Five of the six known trelleborg date back to the reign of Harold Bluetooth of Denmark, who died in 986.

Only when Scandinavia and its territories converted to Christianity did Nordic architecture shift its attention from the construction of everyday buildings to its early churches, which became the chief artistic activity of its people. The medieval wooden stavkirke (stave church) is the perfect example of both Nordic artistry and ingenious design, with its grotesque figures, layered structure and innovative construction that are unique only to the region.

As time passed, Nordic architecture began to show signs of change, as it began to assimilate foreign stylistic influences that were distinctly Gothic at first – such as the cathedrals of Linköping and Trondheim, and the architectural works on the island of Gotland – before turning to the design philosophies from the North German school of Lübeck during the Renaissance and Baroque periods. The Danish and Swedish castles like Kronborg Castle (1570-1590) and Gripsholm Castle (1537 – 1545) were heavily influenced by the Lübeck style.

It was only in the 20th century, when the Nordic region finally gained international architectural prominence with the inventive use of traditional and local forms. Notable architects from the 20th century include Denmark's P.V.J. Klint and Sigfrid Ericsson, and Sweden's Gunnar Asplund. Finland's architects have also greatly influenced Nordic architecture by establishing new forms architecture unheard of before.

As a whole, Nordic architecture – in all its shapes and sizes – can be best described as timeless and a concerted effort for functionality, recognizing the need to integrate as much of nature into the design as possible; not for aesthetic reasons, but primarily to counter the harsh living conditions that are prevalent in the region. This is why buildings and homes with a distinct Nordic style tend to be open and bright, functional and modern, and are designed to be able to adapt and withstand the outside elements – be it long and dark winter days and nights or cold temperatures and weather conditions such as strong winds and extreme snowfall.

❖ Design

Nordic design is a philosophy and movement associated with simplicity, functionalism and minimalism. This design type was borne from the Nordic people's practical and simple approach to daily life and its constant improvement, all the while embracing the key elements of nature, light and comfort.

As a concept, Nordic design is all-encompassing. It is both iconic and practical, so much so that it was made to be utilized in the everyday. It can be seen in the bold structure of the Oslo Opera House, commanding the attention of every passer-by, as well as in the subtleness of an Alva Aalto Savoy Vase, adding a touch of timeless Nordic elegance to one's home. It has in fact, even transcended the borders of the region and out into the world, its simplicity and unique purity of line finding its place in imitated glassmaking, woodwork, metalwork, and ceramics.

Today, Scandinavian design is more accessible than ever, thanks in part to its most well-known export – IKEA. It may not be an exclusive and designer brand, but in keeping with Scandinavian values, it was made to be accessible to all. It is fair to say that today, most people have a little something Scandinavian in their homes, be that by Danish designer Arne Jacobsen or Swedish furniture giant, IKEA.

Traveling to and through Scandinavia is an immersion into its architecture and design philosophy. From the small touches in your hotel room, to an internationally acclaimed viewing point that provides access to outstanding nature.

Here, design is not just a concept. It is a way of life.

