



PHOTOGRAPHY BY PETRA BINDEL

NORTHERN ECHOES

The Global-Local issue of Oak celebrates Scandinavia as a global movement by journeying to over 20 countries to explore the resonance of the Nordic spirit. We've sought out creative visionaries in local communities from Tokyo to Bolivia and traced the far-reaching global influence of Nordic ideas and ingenuity. But you will also meet talented individuals that have been drawn to this northern corner of the world, and make it the vibrant international epicenter that it is today.

As a Canadian with a longtime love of Nordic culture, this region has always beckoned as a vision of what the world could be. The welfare state, gender equality, child-friendly policies and a forward-thinking sustainability agenda have put these northern countries far ahead of the rest of the world, with the happiness statistics to prove it. The well honed aesthetic, visible in its architecture, interiors, fashion and food, is a reminder that the surrounding beauty of the natural world is never far from daily life - whether that's the Norwegian fjords, windswept Danish islands, or the remote wilderness near the Arctic Circle, flickering with northern lights. Here, a quietly self-assured creativity, a hardiness and an appreciation for a simpler, slower pace of life is a welcome antidote to much of the outside world. Scandinavian countries can do luxury with the very best of them, but there are few places in the modern world where a sojourn in a cabin without electricity, running water or the internet, is actually considered a vacation.

To introduce this issue of Oak, we've spoken with three people whose very lives and work epitomise the spirit of this Global-Local issue. Danish design gallerist Maria Wettergren, a Parisian of over 20 years, reflects on the beauty and craftsmanship of Scandinavian design, while American founder and chef of Copenhagen-based restaurant Amass, Matt Orlando, reveals how New Nordic cuisine has taught him to honour the integrity of ingredients. Fellow Copenhagen-based expat, Michael Booth, is the British journalist and author of "The Almost Nearly Perfect People: Behind the Myth of the Scandinavian Utopia" – and while he might be slightly more pointed with his assessment of the Nordic world, even he can't argue with the fact that this is a pretty good place to live.

And while of course, even the Nordic world isn't perfect, you only need to look out the window of the Oak Copenhagen HQ, at the end of the working day, to see that life is a little bit different here, than say London or New York. Outside, the bike paths are flooded with Danes on their way home to enjoy the late afternoon autumn sun with family and friends. Whether Scandinavia is your home, or you're as fascinated by it as I am, this issue of Oak will reveal a new side of the creative people and inspired ideas of the Nordic region, as they create waves outside its borders. After all, venturing away from familiar territory, might just be the best way to see this northern corner of the world with fresh eyes.

- Karen Orton, Editor



MICHAEL BOOTH

Copenhagen-based British journalist and author of six books, including "The Almost Nearly Perfect People: Behind the Myth of the Scandinavian Utopia" (2014)

The world, particularly the United States, has been looking at Scandinavia - its culture, politics, and society - because it sees this economically equal part of the world, and there seems to be a general recognition that economic equality is the foundation of happy, successful and well-functioning societies, which is absolutely right. Many aspects of Scandinavian society that Americans - and we're talking about Bernie Sanders and his supporters - have pinpointed, are really excellent, including not only economic equality, but also gender equality, respect for children, environmental policy and social cohesion.

The problem I've often observed, however, is that politicians and outsiders have this fantasy of taking the Scandinavian template and applying it to their country. But there isn't a transferable template, Scandinavia is

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the way it is because of a thousand years of history, combined with migration, climate and topography. All these things have created a unique set of circumstances that have made Scandinavia into what it is.

When foreigners look at Scandinavia, they see a lot of things to aspire to, and with very good reason. In terms of culture, we've seen this amazing Scandinavian wave that has swept over the world. It probably started back with Dogme 95, in the mid-90s and then we had it again at the end of the century, when people started to notice Scandinavian culture. It has been everything from food to fashion to architecture to, of course, the TV series and crime thrillers.

My harebrained theory is that from the mid-90s onwards, everyone had this Mediterranean fantasy, we all wanted to live among the olive groves. But following the global economic crisis in 2008, I think people looked towards Scandinavia and were attracted by the aesthetics, by the functional simplicity of Scandinavian design, the way we live here - the quality of housing, the quality of furniture. I know it sounds ridiculous, but it was the lampshades and the sofas that caught people's attention in TV series and other cultural exports. And they thought, 'Hold on a minute, there's more to it than that - there's this back-to-basics, almost old-fashioned notion of what a good society is.'

But what tangible things have the rest of the world taken from Scandinavia? For all of the talk, what actual policies are taken? The biggest one is food. And that comes down to one man and one restaurant: René Redzepi at Noma. What he has done is amazing. His influence around the world is at the highest echelons of dining, but it's filtering down to supermarkets and organic produce.

Scandinavia is much more interesting and complex than this utopia that people imagine it to be. I still live here and really like it, and I appreciate it the older I get. If you were to ask me how Scandinavian thinking resonates with the outside world in 2016, I'd say the world is deeply intrigued, but has yet to seal the deal. People have been looking at it for a long time. They've bought the lampshades and the crime novels, but I don't think they've bought the fundamental principles and structures of Scandinavian society - yet.



MATT ORLANDO

American owner and head chef of Amass Restaurant in Copenhagen, which is known for its dedication to local, modern cuisine with an emphasis on spontaneity.

I think the New Nordic movement has had a massive influence with regard to an intense respect for the ingredients here, and that has resonated beyond the borders of the Nordic countries. The Nordic movement says, "Let's pay homage to our ingredients," it's not about manipulating them so much that you have no idea what you're eating. In fact, in Scandinavia, we appreciate ingredients more than anywhere else, because we have such a short growing season. When stuff grows, chefs go crazy.

The best example of the influence of new Nordic cuisine is going into the wild and looking for plants that are indigenous to your area. Of course, people have been foraging for thousands of years, but you never really heard about it until this Nordic movement came along. A great example of a chef who has adopted these ideas is Dan Burns, who has a restaurant in New York called Luksus. He has brought so much back from Scandinavia and is doing something really cool in Brooklyn.

A lot of Nordic cuisine is influenced by Japan. But every cuisine draws inspiration from other cuisines around the world, especially these days because we are so connected. I can see what they're doing in a small village in Laos now. In the last three or four years, so many foreigners have moved to Scandinavia to work in restaurants. There's Amass, but also the Nordic Venezuelan cuisine at Taller and Rosio's tacos, and more. This outside influence is going to start to change the Nordic cuisine. It's going to evolve into something amazing.

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Denmark only has 5 million people and yet you hear about its architecture and its minimalist approach to design - I think that translates into the food being served in Scandinavia right now. You have two to four ingredients put together, and they have to be perfect for the dish to work. And then there is the very specific look of Nordic restaurants, this stripped-down, raw, natural approach, with exposed wood, steel, concrete. There's a sense of being so unrefined, that it is refined. Scandinavia is a creative realm. It's an amazing place to be and not just for cooking - there are an incredible amount of creative people in this country, you meet them all the time.

Personally, I think we have such a voice right now as chefs from Scandinavia, that we need to push the sustainability agenda. We need to take the opportunity to talk about what a restaurant will be like in the future, how can we preserve the ingredients that we hold so dear, and take into consideration the impact we have on the Earth. This is going to keep the Nordic movement alive and at the forefront of cuisine in the world. It's why Scandinavia has had such an impact on the culinary world, because all of us are collaborating, which makes our voice a bit louder. If we organise ourselves we will have a huge influence on the outside world. I would love more than anything for Nordic cuisine to have this legacy of working responsibly and sustainably to preserve the Earth as a whole.



MARIA WETTERGREN

Danish founder of Galerie Maria Wettergren, a Parisian gallery of contemporary Scandinavian design and art

Scandinavian design is associated with minimalism, purity of form, natural materials and exquisite craftsmanship. It's a mix of aesthetics and ethics - it's not only about beautiful form, but the thought behind it, which may be about sustainability or ergonomics. And the designers often do the work themselves, or have it done by master craftsmen. You can feel the human presence, the traits of the artist and the time invested in the object, physically and intellectually.

The idea of beautiful design for everybody as a democratic ideal started in the early 20th century, through institutions like the Swedish Society of Industrial Design. Their aim was to appeal to the masses with something both beautiful and accessible. The concepts that beautiful things can make your life better, and that a beautiful object made of natural simple materials doesn't necessarily need to be expensive, have influenced the western world throughout the century.

There's also a strong connection between Nordic design and Japanese aesthetics. Nature and natural materials are treated with great respect and spiritual awareness. They're both very interested in expressing the beauty of natural materials, whether wood, ceramics or fibres. There is this idea of working and repeating the same

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gesture again and again, until you forget the work and it becomes a spiritual activity. In both cultures, there's no real difference between the work of the mind and the work of the hand. One is as noble as the other. Scandinavian design is a little less directly spiritual than the Japanese tradition. In Japan, besides Zen Buddhism, you have Shinto, an animist religion where natural forces are considered as expressions of gods and divinities. You don't have the same relationship to nature in Denmark, for instance, where it's maybe more about a Protestant idea of honest work, well done, and natural, simple materials.

There are also historical similarities between Nordic design and other international design movements. Brazilian Modernism has a close parallel in the minimalism and elegant proportions, and works with craftsmen and beautiful, handcrafted natural materials like leather and wood. In the post-war period, early modernist designers such as Charles and Ray Eames in the US and Arne Jacobsen in Denmark shared a common interest in sculptured, abstract form combined with the possibilities of mass production.

There's an increasing group of international art collectors who are very interested in the hybrid dimension of new contemporary Nordic design, where you have both arts and crafts, the machine and the handmade, and sculpture and function - as in the works of Mathias Bengtsson, Astrid Krogh and Grethe Soerensen. My gallery sells to art collectors as well as to museums like the Pompidou.

Paris plays an important role in the way that I work and shape the artistic direction of the gallery. By the simple fact of looking at your own culture from a different point of view, you create a distance from it, which can help you see it in another light. I am not sure I would be able to have a gallery like this at home. It is wonderful to present Scandinavian design to a Parisian audience because they are very curious and interested in it, and they have a long tradition of welcoming foreign artists and cultures.

