

Norwegian wood

A midcentury figurine inspired by Arctic fauna is reissued by a new Nordic brand



GLOBAL INTERIORS
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NORWAY

When designer Morten Hippe joined forces with furniture maker Frode Tingbø and a mutual friend, former professional footballer Jørgen Tengesdal, the trio had a clear idea in mind: to bring classic mid-20th century Norwegian designs back to life, or, as Hippe himself puts it, 'to highlight the geniality of Norway's long-lost design history for the world to see'.

They set up Eikund in 2016 with this premise and, after a year of research into the country's furniture archives, design history, manufacturing techniques and materials, the brand unveiled the first reissues of designs by Sigurd Resell, Torbjørn Bekken and Fredrik Kayser; wooden chairs and tables featuring a distinctive Scandinavian aesthetic and a minimalist sensibility. More furniture designs are in the works for 2019, and the young brand has also collaborated with hotels and restaurants, such as Stockholm's At Six hotel (W*217), and institutions, such as the Norwegian Consulate General in New York.

'Norway is the underdog of Nordic design,' says Hippe. 'When people think of Norway, they think about our oil and fishing industries, but we are much more than that,' he continues, citing craftsmanship traditions, which range from boat building to weaving,

embedded in a design DNA that still inspires a young generation of brilliant creative minds.

Having established its furniture production, Eikund's next project takes on a humbler scale – a polar bear figurine by Arne Tjomslund, a somewhat forgotten figure of Norwegian design. Until now, his work has been a well-kept secret outside of the country, and even there, Hippe notes, it is mainly appreciated by rare collectors. A self-taught designer, Tjomslund specialised in small animal figures carved from wood or whalebone. Hippe says Tjomslund's designs were on their to-do list from the start, but they had concerns about their fit with the new brand. 'We came to the conclusion that we had to get his collection preserved for future generations, as it's way too good to be forgotten.'

Tjomslund was born in 1915, the son of a preparator at Oslo's Zoological Museum. Having lost his mother at a young age, he spent his days at the museum with his father, surrounded by animals; an environment that inspired his creativity. 'One of his clearest memories,' says Hippe, 'was of a skinned bear hanging from the roof, a vision that stayed with him his whole life.'

In the 1940s and 1950s, Tjomslund worked in advertising and as a designer for the Kon-Tiki »

Above, 'Isbjørn' wooden polar bear, NOK1,112 (€114), by Arne Tjomslund, reissued by Eikund



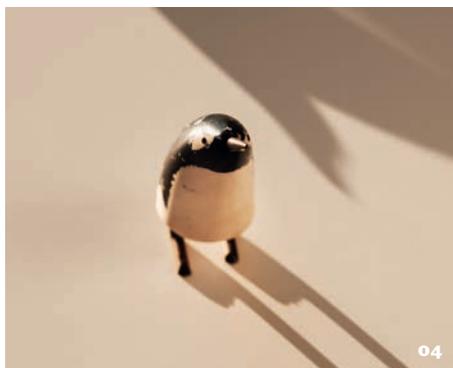
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DESIGNS FROM THE ARNE TJOMSLAND ARCHIVE, 1955-1965

- 01 Elk family, teak
- 02 Auk figures with fish, whaletooth
- 03 Fisherwoman, teak
- 04 Penguin, whaletooth
- 05 Blackbird, oak
- 06 Grouse figures, whaletooth
- 07 Puffin, whaletooth
- 08 Owl, oak



08

Museum in Oslo, before setting up his own carving workshop at home. The first piece he created, in 1955, was inspired by his time at the museum as a child: a stylised polar bear, its shape as simple as it was expressive. This marked the beginning of a prolific output of animal figurines inspired by Arctic fauna, as well as Inuits and Vikings, in wood and whaletooth. When demand for his pieces grew, production was partly taken over by a local company, Goodwill, which carried on making his pieces until the mid-1960s.

To get to grips with the full stretch of the archive, Hippe and his team worked closely with collectors all over Norway and with Tjomsland's son Stein. 'When I was young, I didn't think much of all the sculptures he brought home,' says Stein Tjomsland. 'But in recent years, I could clearly see his genius in making those objects look so alive.' One of his most vivid memories of his father involves him carving a piece of soap. 'I was about eight or nine and I saw my father standing at the kitchen table with the soap and a knife. He started carving and within a few minutes he had turned it into a musk-ox. Then he said: "Now go wash your hands for dinner, and use this musk-ox to do it!"'

All of Tjomsland's pieces seem to be intuitively carved with a sensibility that combines a deep

understanding of natural shapes coupled with a poetic imagination and a touch of humour. 'They all have their own personality in the way they look,' says Hippe. 'Tjomsland was able to catch a feeling in all his pieces, not too serious, not too playful, but just right.'

The polar bear is the first of what Hippe hopes will become a series of pieces by Tjomsland. It also expands Eikund's scope as it enters into a collaboration with the WWF. 'Together we will put focus on the polar bear and its diminishing habitat, issuing a special edition to support all the work that's being done to protect this threatened species,' says Hippe. And as Tjomsland's originals were carved out of teak, a material from the rainforest, this has been substituted for a more sustainable wood, alder.

It has been a learning curve for Hippe and his team, both from a manufacturing perspective and for expanding their knowledge of Norway's design history. 'Tjomsland was special in that he saw things differently. He wanted to show the beauty of Nordic fauna in a pure and simple way,' says Hippe, concluding with a quote from Tjomsland himself, which could very well serve as a universal definition of good design: 'Because life is complicated, it has to be pure and right.' ★ eikund.com