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Let's talk about
Interviews

Lisa Merk & Viola Vallon

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Lisa Merk & Viola Vallon
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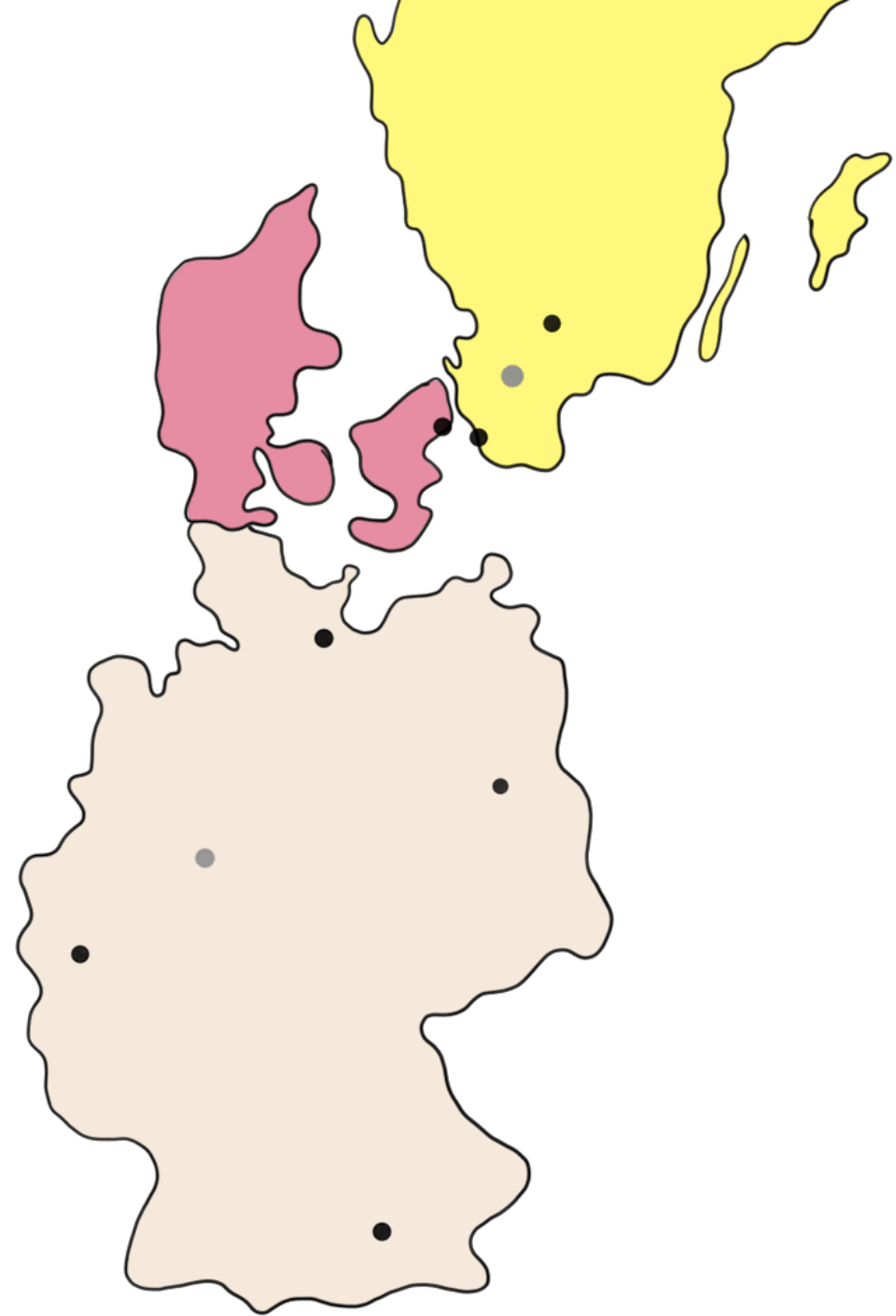
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Foreword

Some people see design as vocation. We see it as our profession with which we want to be able to enter the market and find a job. Within our master thesis “Let’s talk about” we dealt with the question of how to gain a living as a young designer especially when cooperating with industrial productions. We addressed questions around ways to enter the market, ways of working as a designer, the potential of mass production, production processes, and many more.

There are many ways one could go within the design profession. Each designer has his or her own experiences. This was why we decided to interview designer and design studios to see what we can learn from their experiences and mistakes and ask for advice what a future generation of design graduates have to know before finishing school. We interviewed 18 people and design studios. The full interviews can be read on the following pages.

Note: Singel sections of some of the interview transcripts where changed or left out according to the interviewees wishes.



Interviews

a series of personal insights



MEJK

It was a cold afternoon in February when we got in the car to drive from Lund to Malmö to visit the first design studio to do an interview for our master thesis. Just some days before we sent an email to Per Lundahl, the product developer of Mejk Design, to ask if he would be willing to discuss the growing gap between young designers and the producing industry in Europe. We are both industrial design students who are in their last section of their design education. Being right in the middle of our master thesis, we acknowledged how useful it might be to talk to several people from the design scene to get second and third opinions on topics that we found quite important, not only for our final university project, but also for the future.

Only shortly after sending out the email in which we provoked to talk about the growing gap between designers and manufacturers, we got a message back, saying that Per did not agree with us that this gap exists. He invited us to a little discussion about this matter. The next Friday would be perfect for him so that we could join the studios “fredagsöl”, a very common Swedish manner to finish up the week with all colleagues.

That Friday afternoon we arrived well prepared and admittedly with some respect, to face the discussion at the design studio. To conduct our first interview was a big step for both of us, since neither had done an interview like that before. Mejk is situated in a low but generously widely build midcentury bungalow in the midst of a residential neighborhood. Per, a friendly, mid-aged man opened the door and advised us to sit on the light green couch. He started to prepare coffee while we started to chat with Ida, one of the studios employees. Ida is a former student of the Master’s Programme of Industrial Design in Lund and has been working with Mejk for two years. She took on another job right after her graduation but noticed that a design studio would fit her way of working better. Per entered the room with some mugs, offered us coffee and petted the dog Bengt. Ehlén, his partner, and Karin, another of their employees, joined us to talk about design and production.

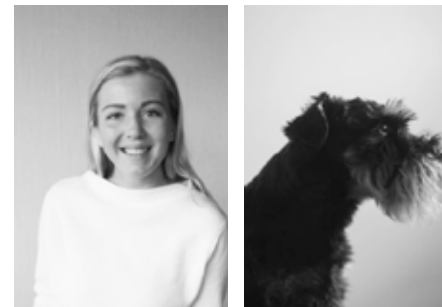
Ehlén Johansson is a well-known designer particularly in the world of IKEA. She designed several objects that have been produced and sold worldwide

for this leading furniture company. She is not only the creative head but also one of the founders of Mejk. Ehlén told us: “Per is responsible for the boring part of our business. He takes care of business contacts, calls people, builds up new connections and deals with the producers. He is the voice of Mejk.” The two employees Ida and Karin as well as the intern Ebba are helping them with creating designs for clients. The studio works exclusively on orders that come either from retailers, wholesalers or directly from producers. Per told us that the biggest problem that designers have is to sell their designs. He does not see that designers have a problem to work with producers: “Sure, the contact needs to be set-up but once you can convince a producer to work with you, it will be easy to communicate. Producers are very helpful and willing to improve a product since it is about money for them as well.” The only issue that he sees for young designers is, that they are not aware of the gap between designers and sellers. He adds: “A designed object can have the biggest potential on the market but it will never get out there and will become successful on the market, if the designer doesn’t sell it.”

We started to talk about the structure that school provides students with. Karin contributes that school projects are often unrealistic: “Projects never really end, the endpoint in a schools project equalizes the starting point in reality.” We went from selling to production to how difficult it is to position yourself as a designer. Ehlén, who started her first own company in 1996, told us: “You need a little bit of luck. But in order to be lucky you have to work.”

The conversation went smooth and we were especially pleased that everyone who is working at Mejk was part of our interview. The discussion about the gap between producers and designers led us to a fruitful conversation about the opportunities the market offers young designers. It was great to see how someone with a business background and someone with a lot of experience in the field of design can benefit from each other. Besides noticing that there are many ways into the design business, many pathways, detours and experiences to make, it was great to hear Ehlén talking about design. She has many years of work experience and is sharing her knowledge with the new generation of designers who are working for her. What in the end really impressed us was, that it was great to ask people about their opinion and different views on design and manufacturing processes. Above all, we lost the fear to ask people whether they would be willing to be interviewed by us – we even learned that it is a lot of fun! Besides the already stated input, we got a lot out of the insights of this first interview that we would like to share. These are the most important points summarized:

1. Learn to sell your design
 - a. Or find someone to collaborate with who loves to sell your design
 - b. Try to close the gap between the designer and the seller
2. Collaborate! Nobody is good at everything
3. Be aware of the responsibility that a designer has
4. Keep your spirit up
5. Attract manufacturers with potential orders or clients who will bring in the needed money
6. Talk to people, companies, producers – talk, connect and network
7. “Up-side-down” process of a design project is usual
 - a. In the professional life you often start with the material and find the form later
8. Do an internship during your studies to get insights on how the reality for designers looks like
9. Always be aware of transportation costs
10. Try to enter the German market (the Scandinavian market is very small)



photos: <http://performfff.com>

Date: 15.02.2018

Anna Gudmundsdottir

Anna Gudmundsdottir is an industrial designer based in Malmö. Right after her studies in Industrial Design at the School of Industrial Design in Lund, she started to work as a freelance designer. Anna is focussing on sustainable design and local production and is one of the founders of “Malmö Upcycling Service”.



Where do you work currently?

I am doing different things at the moment. I am working at SPOK* once a week. It's an office job but since we don't officially have an office yet, I sit at Jenny Nordbergs office or at home. And there are also side projects that are freelance. Right now I am cooperating with the material depot. It is initiated by SPOK*. We pair up a designer and a material researcher from Skåne. They are going to exhibit their collaborations at the Dutch Design Week. I also work with “Malmö Upcycling Service” where we make products with waste materials from local industries. That's been taking a lot of time recently because we just had an exhibition in Stockholm.

Does “Malmö Upcycling Service” pay your work hours?

No, it's just us. Britt Jönsson and I got a grant from LU Graduation. We got it this summer so we could work the whole summer on the project. I also have another startup which is called “remarkable”. And I was in this hackathon, which was organised by a architecture company called “link arkitekts”. They had a hackathon last year in November about a business cluster. A sustainable business cluster where “Kinnarps” and all the big producers that make public furniture, for example for offices, are part of. The hackathon was about “How can we implement new ideas around sustainability in the furniture producing companies?”

Are those furnitures for the public realm or general furniture?

The cluster is about public furniture companies, so it was specifically for that. We made a marking service. As a furniture producer you can buy your company into this service and the label initials that the chair has to be reused. So when the client is done with it they can send it back to the furniture producer and they will re-use it instead of throwing it away. We keep track of it as well. The project is still in a very early stage.

Do you have your own studio space?

Yes. And I'm also working extra at from/design center in the shop and the café to get some extra money.

* read more about SPOK on page XXX

Wow, you have so many different jobs! form/design center is probably paying you and SPOK is probably paying you as well. But the other projects, do they bring money in?

We got some money for the remarkable project. That was a contest where our idea won. So we got 25.000 SEK to split in the group and to continue working with it. But that's project money and we took it all out for our time. And then we got another 25.000 SEK once we had done a business plan, but now there is no more financing for that project. Malmö Upcycling service now starts to get assignments for workshops and being a part of panels and things like that. But it's only a tiny amount of money that we earn from it.

Who is asking you for assignments?

We got a request from a sustainability fair. They want us to be part of a panel. And form/design center is organising a party and wants us to create a give-away product from waste. So now it starts with getting assignments that pay a little bit more. Before that we made stuff and sold it and the profits we put into new products.

Did you at any point took a loan?

Not yet. Well, maybe from my parents for Milan. I exhibited there last year on my own and that costed around 20.000 SEK.

Can you see something coming from exhibiting, besides being published on blogs and magazines?

That's the problem. You never know. I got contacts of other designers. So it broadened my network. Now I have an international network. It's like when you do this sort of work **you realize how important it is to know people. Most of the things are about recommendations from other designers, stylists or people in the industry.** Otherwise I can now put on my CV that I had a solo exhibition in Milan.

If someone would ask you for one of your products to give it to them for free so that they can show it somewhere. Would you rather give stuff away that people continue recommending you or would you not?

No, you have to sell! Sales are so important. I mean we don't learn

anything about that in school. But you have to know how to sell and how to put prices on things, and how to calculate the VAT and the commission and all that; depending on where you sell it.

Do you know how to do that?

I learned it from Jenny Nordberg. She has taught me a lot. If I haven't had her as a mentor, I would have been completely lost.

How did you get in touch with her?

I did an internship during my BA at her studio. Then I worked for her and she started SPOK. Since I had already worked on it for her, she employed me. But sales are very hard. **I don't even like selling stuff. I mean not even our own stuff. It's hard, almost like you want to keep it.**

Would you say that's something a designer has to learn during the education?

Definitely. We don't learn how to sell. We don't learn how to calculate sales if you have your own production or if you freelance and do assignments. We don't learn how to get payed for our time. I mean do you know how to make an invoice if a company hires you to do a lecture or a project? And when you are out you have to learn all that on your own.

We are reading the book "design is a job" right now. It has all the advices and tells you that you have to bill everything. But they also don't say a specific amount. Maybe because it differs from place to place. But how much is too much? How much is to less?

And this also affects other designers. People don't really talk with each other. We do now. Me and the people I know around me. Who all graduated and started working. Because we know the same amount of information. Other designers, that's what I've heard at least, don't really talk about things like that. The bad thing about that is if newly graduates coming out and start billing way too low, they are lowering the average price of a designers work for everyone.

Would you think it's a good idea to have a general price?

Maybe. But it varies. I don't have the same hour price for everything I

do. It depends on what you do, whether it's a graphic job or a website job or anything like that. If it's a workshop for example it's higher.

How do you set the price then? Is it how you think it's right?

Yes. And what kind of job I do.

So you base the price on your own experiences?

Yes. And also on advice from others; from what I have heard. In general we've been saying, I don't know if this is right or wrong, but the lowest a designer should take for design work is 750 SEK/hour. But this is for when you have your own company. You have to give 30% taxes and half of what is left goes to social charges. You have to think about that everything you would get as an employee, like vacation and pension and so on, you have to take away from your hourly rate. I have taken a lot lower price in the beginning, just because as a newly graduated you do not know that.

What do you think about producing products as a designer?

I think there is a big difference between working as a freelancer and selling your design to others or producing your own design and also selling it. That's much more work but also much more money, not only 3%. A lot of Swedish designers are going that way. But then a lot of it becomes very small scale production; design comes closer to art. It's hard to create a certain volume if you are on your own. There is a studio in Copenhagen from Kristina Damm who works exactly like that. They do all their own production on a medium scale.

Do you have a specific direction in your designs?

All my work has to do with sustainability. That's my profile. That's the reason why I want to be an industrial designer, because I think that's where you can actually make a change.

Where do you see yourself right now? Are you happy how things are going or are you rather frustrated? Are you optimistic about the future of what you are doing?

I am optimistic, it's going well. But I could definitely get paid more. I am working for free a lot, what I am very stressed about. **In the start-up world you say that you won't make profit for the first three years.**

But how can you afford those three years?

You apply for money. There are grants you can apply for. Or you can work on the side. **In Sweden there are a lot of design grants, studio grants or project grants.** I have written a lot of applications! Also from awards you can get money.

If you could choose someone to pair up with what kind of background would that person bring in?

I got the advice to open up a studio with someone who is not a designer, maybe an engineer or someone from a different field.

Could it be a problem that designers tend to think they know everything and just try it themselves?

That's the downside of design. With every project we get we deep dive into the subject and think that we have enough insights about it. It's the same with marketing, economics and sales. But it's not that easy. We do it anyway. But that's why you never have time for anything. It's like running after the clock all the time because you're spending so much time on administrative stuff. If you're selling things for example, you have to produce it, you have to pack it, you have to ship it, you have to store it, you have to assemble it and you also have to be customer service and all that stuff.

So now you are in these first three years where you are not getting so much profit out of it. What is your plan to go on? Are you going to push one of your projects more than the others?

I am waiting to see what takes of the most. With Malmö Upcycling Service we have done our own production and we have stuff we sell. But now we want to work with bigger furniture producers and work their way, so that they can produce it themselves. We want to look at the waste they have already in their industries, designing a chair or something based on that and then the production can start rolling.

If you are with the four of you, how do you split the money that you make?

The concept is that everybody is in the Malmö Upcycling Service. We help each other out but you commit to a project. So the latest designs were done mostly by Brit and me. We did equal amount of work and then split the money between us two.

What were your experiences with bigger manufacturers?

The problem with bigger manufacturers is that it's hard to get into. Especially if you are on a prototype level. You can just try things out and see how it goes. **But if you don't have an order of 1000 pieces they might not even bother talking to you.** Always bring fika!

How did you work with the industry so far?

I can show you what I did within my master project. For example from a tube bending factory I used the standard pipe that they used the most. That meant that it was the most common one to have on the machine to create the standard radius. So I just used that one for all my prototypes.

Did they charge you for everything?

Not that much. Some parts were very cheap because it was material that they had laying around.

How did you choose the companies?

I visited a lot. And those who felt the most willingly to work with me, I chose.

Did you take what you could get and started your design based on that or did you have your design first?

I had to see what materials they had and what they could do. I asked a lot of questions about what would be easy, cheap and fast, and I tried to work with that. But some parts could have been quite expensive, because I had to make my own tool for their machines. And a tool should have cost around 9.000 SEK.

Was your plan to start your own business after graduation?

I got the advice to start my own company right away. Because everyone who gets a job after graduation and works for a couple years has a certain income and if you start your own company you have to go back to scratch.

Thank you!

Date: 15.02.2018

SPOK / Anna Gudmundsdottir

SPOK is a platform where producers and craftsmen gather to offer their services. The platform is formed and expanded continuously by its users. Jenny Nordberg founded and developed SPOK in 2014. SPOK wants to support craftsmanship, production and designers in Malmö and the whole Region of Skåne.



S — P
O — K



Can you tell us a bit more about SPOK? How does it work if we for example would like to work with one of the companies we found online on SPOK's website?

SPOK is not an agency, it's more a platform. It is free for the manufacturers to get listed and it's free for designers, architects and interior designers, that's the user group we are directed towards, to use the platform. But the contacting you have to do yourself.

What else does SPOK offer?

We also work in listing local materials on the website. Like stone, wood and clay. Different materials that are accessible to base manufacturing here in southern Sweden. Apart from the website we also work on transferring knowledge. So we have seminars, study trips and different events that are all about trying to find out where the knowledge gaps in today's design industry in Southern Sweden are. For example we had a lamp seminar with a designer who has designed her own lamp from idea to a finished product she is now selling. She told us what it is that you have to go through. For example you have to have certified labels and testings. So by this seminar people who never had made lamps learned what it needs to produce lamps. So we just try to find what knowledge people are lacking to be able to survive as individual designers who work with their own production to support them.

Since when does SPOK exist?

Since 2016, I think it's been exactly two years now.

Do you get good feedback from the producers? Does it help them to get new clients?

We now have over 100 companies. I think not everyone has been contacted, but we try to illuminate all the new collaborations that sprung up from the platform. For all the manufacturers that have been contacted through the platform it has been positive.

How is SPOK financed?

It's financed by the state. We've been applying for money each year at different institutions. So we got money for specific parts of the project. Now we permanently will become part of the form/design center.

Siri Skillgate

Siri Skillgate is an industrial designer with a specialization in textile design. She studied Industrial Design at the School of Industrial Design in Lund. She opened her design studio in Malmö in Autumn 2017 and is mainly working on clients projects.

Date: 19.02.2018



photo: <https://skillgate.se>

How would you call yourself?

I am a freelance Industrial Designer.

What are you working on?

I am working on several things. I'm working a lot with IKEA. Both, with their innovation department, where I just finished a big job that I've been working on for several months, and also for their design department. Except from that I just created an exhibition for the School of Industrial Design at Lund University. Also, I have a project coming, that I can't talk about yet. And then I am working on different designs for a Swedish company. And what else? Ah! I am also involved in a project I'm doing together with a glass blower; also Anna Gudmundsdottir* is involved in that. I applied for money to work on that. Moreover I am involved in two projects together with SPOK**. The first one is a souvenir project where I am supposed to develop a souvenir that is produced locally in Skåne. And just last week I found out that I will be involved in a material research project, where a designer is paired up with a material researcher. That is a super exciting project!

How do you get all those jobs?

I think by mingle, mingle, mingle... really! **And also I'm prepared to do anything. I'm not picky.** I have had my company for five months now and I mean it is going well. But the money I get is mostly from the IKEA projects.

You did your master thesis with IKEA. If that would not have happened, would it be very different?

Definitely. It would be very different.+

Before that, did you have a vision of how you wanted to work?

I am not so much a team worker; I like to work on my own. For example I'm not a morning person, I like to work late and have quite specific, preferred ways of working. **Before I finished my masters I did six different internships. So I have been working quite a lot - in bigger companies, smaller studios, I tried different kinds of working. So I knew that I'm quite suitable for being a freelancer.** I think that designing is fun, but it

is even more fun to promote my company, meet people and everything this results in work. I want to be able to stand for what I do and stand behind my own company. I think that is very nice. I am working a lot with textiles, but from the perspective of a product designer. I would say that for at least half of the projects I'm working on, this was the reason why I got hired. If I wouldn't be working as a freelancer I had this vision of working in London for Nike, doing textile projects – something like that. It was either that or starting my own company. Actually it was very clear that I was going to start my own business.

Do you aim to stay within your own business or is working for Nike still a goal?

I would keep my own business. The dream scenario would be that I have three to four people working for me – or together with me. So I would be the person who is responsible for the projects and who is making sure that new projects come in and I would be the supervisor of the projects. That's what I'm good at. I can design but I would say I am better in understanding what the customer wants and these kinds of things.

Do you join some sort of network events or do you use connections you already have?

I don't join any networks. **All the jobs that I have I got through personal connections.**

You did your BA and your MA at the School of Industrial Design in Lund. Would you think that it could be more profitable to go abroad, do part of your education somewhere else than where you started? Or is it maybe better to stay within a surrounding you know to build onto that network?

When I finished the BA program I decided to take a year off. It didn't work... I like to apply to things; I think it's satisfying to send away applications. So I just tried to apply to all the schools where I would like to go. Then I was accepted in Denmark for furniture design. The reason why I took it was because it was a long process to get in and they were only accepting two people that year, since they have the five-year program there were only two spots available. I thought I would never get this opportunity again; so I started my masters there, but I didn't like it at all and quit. For several reasons... After that it was very clear

for me that I wanted to do my master in Lund. The reasons were, for example, that I knew very well what I wanted to do with the two years of my master studies and it was very important to me to do a master. It is good to have it for regardless what comes afterwards. More than that I wanted to take the opportunity to explore what you want to do for two years. In Lund I knew what I would get and what I would have to find externally. It's a good network and I think the teachers are amazing because they are personally involved; they are always helping you out with whatever you need. To have that support was very important to me. They supporting me in choosing my own way of working was very important. I think it depends, but I personally am very happy that I did five years in Lund, and I would recommend it to others.

Where or in what kind of areas did you do your internships?

The first one was in packaging and identity of especially food products. With the second one I was involved in a big research project, where I was hired as a designer to work within a team of engineers and try to find systematic ways of explaining so called digital materials. After that I worked at a small design studio here in Malmö. I worked with just three people there. The next one was at the car company KIA in Germany and then one at IKEA. I also had an internship at a weaving mill in Norway.

What was your master thesis about?

Since I was working with the innovation department at IKEA and they decided to apply for a patent on some of the things I developed, I cannot show it. As soon as the patent goes through and they figure out what they want to do with it... I think it's a long long process for that. But I was working with innovation in textile production. One part is about questioning the way we work with textiles as designers. The other part was a specific project that I was asked to join at the innovation department. I've been working a lot with suppliers and different production techniques.

Do you think it would be good if industrial production processes would take in a bigger part of the design education?

Absolutely.

How would you imagine that to happen, since there are so many different types of productions?

I don't think that you have to understand every single production technique; it's not about that. **One of the most important tasks of being a designer, at least for me, is to question things, to ask stupid questions. I think my work benefits from not having certain knowledge.** For example when I started exploring weaving I have never worked with textiles before. I didn't have any understanding of the process. But it's about having an understanding of how you do work with production and how do you approach certain things. It is important to know what language they speak and what is important in the communication; **I think it's more about how you actually work with suppliers rather than how the production actually does work. There will always be an expert for each production, you don't have to solve that. But you have to look at it from a different perspective, and that's the role of a designer.**

Do you think that is something that could be taught or is that something you have to go through yourself?

I think you can definitely teach that. Just finding a producer and see what you could do by using their production techniques in a different way could be very interesting. The outcome maybe wouldn't be as feasible. But it's a way to explore how to look at things from another perspective. I've been visiting different suppliers, for example in china for over one month, and that was very eye opening. **So far I have been sitting in the studio in Malmö designing and thinking I had good knowledge. Then I went there and realized that what I learned in school about production is not necessarily how it looks in real life.** They made a paper box 100% by hand that I have designed from a perspective of a machine production. Some of the steps that I expected to be easy became very difficult. **That shows that you always have to ask questions as a designer. The answers could dictate the outcome.**

That needs practice. Either in school or in the actual design field. Probably the second is where you learn much more, don't you think?

For me that's one of the problems. I think it should be learned earlier. Of course there are many different ways of working as a designer and

you have to find that way yourself. But I feel like students are too spoiled and think everything is easy. Actually students are often very lazy and complain too much. And I mean – everything is possible and you can get almost everything, but you have to practice to ask for it and you have to work for it. It's always is easy to say “If I would have had an internship within my education it would have been so different...” **That's one of the things, you have to get it yourself!** An interesting example is when I applied for this textile scholarship. That was something, that was sent out to the school and I was the only one who actually applied for it. Afterwards everyone asked me how I got it... everyone had the opportunity to apply. Maybe I wasn't even the most suitable for that scholarship, but I simply have been the only one who applied. That's – you know – interesting.

Would you say it's some sort of skill to go out, chat with people and built up your network to then get project started through those contacts?

I think so. It also reflects how I am as a person. It is a skill and it's important to value it as a skill. It's something that's often not valued as a resource. Almost like it would be something you only do for fun, but it is also works. **People tell me “You're always so lucky!” Maybe I am, but I also sacrifice something.** That used to annoy me, now I went past it. You should never only see the result of something. The journey there is important. Often it's not about luck but about to ask the right questions. There is this Swedish saying “frågar är alltid fri”, which means it doesn't cost anything to ask. That's important to know. The worst thing that could happen is a “No”, which surely can be scary. But if I don't ask, nothing will happen. You have to learn to not take that personal.

If you write an invoice, how do you know how much your work is worth?

That's difficult. I mean, who decides that? Either they say how much money they have and you have to decide if you can deal with that. Or, for example, I was asked to send a suggestion, so I had to decide how much my work is worth.

Would it be good to have a minimum wage within the design scene that everyone commits to? Would that even be realistic?

It should be. It is like that within other fields. For architects there are recommended pays. It's impossible to pay below that. Of course I think it would be doable. But maybe even more important is to be more transparent. I think that people are not transparent enough. People are not talking about such topics like money. That's sad. Especially in a city like Malmö, which is quite small and only a few designers. It's important to have communication between them. Obviously it's also risky if someone knows what I am charging for a job, they could simply charge less and get the project instead of me.

It is competitive and everyone needs to make a living what seems to make it quite difficult.

I haven't experienced that yet. But I'm also not that involved in the design community in Malmö – for various reasons. I'm also still very new to the business. Now that I am joining the SPOK project that will change.

What would you say are the most important skills a designer should bring into the business?

The first, as I said, is to not be afraid of asking questions, especially if you are a freelance designer. **Second, don't be afraid to be perceived as a little bit stupid and naïve.** That's actually one of the most useful tools I have ever had. For example I try to make, very early in the process of a design project, "not so serious" suggestions to engineers and others. This way I am allowing everyone to add their comments what I as a designer have to think about. **Moreover, I think it's important to not make everything too hard for yourself. Grasp opportunities. It could just mean to ask all your teachers if they know something that could help you. It's also about speaking up about what you want to do.** As soon as you say it, you put a certain pressure on yourself to be able to achieve things. Another important thing, if you are a freelancing designer, is not to be afraid of what you do. You have to try things. If something fails do something else. Be flexible. Don't have too much pride and say you only want to do one specific thing. Try to figure out what it is worth to achieve your

goals. Would it be worth it if you had to work four days a week in a café? ...I think it would be.

Do you have a side job?

No. I can live on the money I make.

Are you afraid that the situation might change?

No. I think I should, but I don't.

Why do you think that?

It is something you are supposed to do. You are supposed to be worried... be a bit ahead of yourself. But I'm not. And it also wouldn't be a problem to work in a café or so. And I think if I wouldn't have enough projects anymore I would start to make things myself. I could see myself doing jewellery, having a little shop besides the studio. **I have ideas of other things that I want to do as well. Right now I'm too busy to actually do what I really want to do.** That's of course a luxurious problem. But at the moment it actually is a problem for me. I have signed up for a lot of things.

How does your working day look like?

Sometimes I'm away, for example in Älmhult where IKEA is. Other than that it is a lot of emailing. I don't build any prototypes or anything. But that depends on the projects. I didn't really have a project where I had to do prototypes myself. Usually I'm going to suppliers and do samples with them. After that I can do changes and so on. At the moment I am traveling quite a lot. And if I am not away I am sitting here at my computer.

How do you stay inspired?

Once a week I go to all the flea markets in Malmö. I think that's important for my creative process. That was something that I wasn't sure about in the beginning, because I also have to use my time to work on my projects. But now I really believe that this is important for my work. I also see this as working. I think I can be very efficient but I also have a long process of mentally preparing myself to do something. So when

I'm going to the flea market I'm working on that, even though I'm not sitting at my desk.

How would you estimate your skills when it comes to selling? Do you sell your own designs?

No, I don't. I would like to do that more. But, again, it's all about priorities. If I get a job from IKEA, I take that first because I know it brings me money. I don't know if I'm good at selling.

Thank you!

*Read more about Anna Gudmundsdottir on page XXX

**Read more about SPOK on page XXX

Date: 23.02.2018

Witek Golik

Witek Golik was founded in 2015 by Sisse Witek and Martyna Golik as a result of their common curiosity and shared visions. Both studied textile design at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. The studio's projects are characterized by the development of artistic concepts into honest products that engage and inspire the user. At the moment Witek Golik is focusing on both self-initiated as well as commercial projects for international design brands.



Can you tell us a bit about your work?

MG: We do commercial projects for different brands but we also do our own projects. We still try to figure out how we can earn money with what we do. We rather turn to some small scale production sides to create prototypes. A good thing in our collaboration is, that I am from Poland. The production there is quite alive and affordable compared to Denmark. That's why we collaborate with a polish producer. We also use a Danish producer. We made a tufted project for which we went to Poland and collaborated with a small manufacturer who does only a few rugs.

SW: Most what this producer does is tools for polishing machines. They don't do anything exciting. So when we approached them, they were very happy because finally something was happening. This company has around 10 - 15 employees.

Why did you choose to work with them?

MG: If we would have gone to a bigger company, we are pretty sure that they would not want to collaborate with us. What we missed after graduating was that we had no more access to the machines in school. Quickly testing an idea was not possible any more. You can always draw or face the process but all this is never better than using the machines to test things. We wanted to have access to the machines of the company to make samples ourselves. So they rented the machine to us for a few days, which was very special because many companies would not do that.

SW: After a few days working with them we really wanted to taft ourselves so we just asked them. The company was a bit surprised because nobody ever asked to use their machines. They asked if we knew how they work and then they just let us work there for a few days. It wasn't a problem at all. I think they were just waiting for something to happen.

Do think that this company suffers from the production in Asia?

MG: They told us that they can really feel that the whole production moved to Asia and that most people don't see the quality in handmade things anymore. The tendencies are changing but people still buy cheaper things that have been done in Asia. We did another project that

we showed at the Stockholm Furniture fair. For this project we again collaborated with manufacturers in Poland. It's funny because some of my childhood friends are now working there. One is making mirrors and another one set up a company where they are bending metal. **We learned that if you have a good relationship with the people that are making your products, it's just great.** It makes it easy to communicate. You feel more like partners. In some of our commercial projects you can really feel the difference. The production and the designers are very separate from each other. It's great if both parties are passionate about the project. I am not saying that all parties included into a commercial project are not passionate, but it feels very different if you send out a drawing and a bit later they send back a prototype.

SW: If the prototype is wrong, you have to send it back and you will get a new one. **It helps to put a face onto the person who is producing the prototype and it's much easier to talk in person to explain your design.** The biggest gap that we have been noticing is that if you don't have this face of the producer, it somehow becomes very complicated to produce your prototype.

Can't you just go there to meet the producer?

SW: Well, the ones in Asia for example – no. But also, the companies often want to keep their production secret. In some collaborations we don't know the production side. It is very much about the competitors.

MG: Most of the brands now work with freelance designers so they are aware that we also work with other brands. That's why they want to keep everything secret. Which I completely understand. There are a few brands that we work with where we feel like it would be much easier to go there and just talk to them but mostly it is not possible.

SW: We had another project in India. Martyna went down there and had a three day testing. The starting point was to get some inspiration. We did a small testing round which was very unique. It came through a company that is lead by an Indian women who wants to empower Indian design.

What do you think, how can you earn money with your work?

SW: It's the mass production – unfortunately. We are always in the process of figuring out what the next process will be. Are we going to set up a more established production? Where would we do that? We would probably do that in Poland or maybe in India since we know this lady there. **We need to have a close relation to the production – especially as young designers.** Imagine how insane it would be to just send out your design to China and you have no idea what you get back. We have no experience with what happens if production goes wrong. Who is responsible, what are the possibilities?

MG: Also, what we have experienced is that there is often time-pressure that a project has to be released at a specific date. But because the productions place was so far away things went wrong and the product wasn't there in time. You can't really blame anyone for this...

SW: **If you work with commercial clients, many times you don't have the full responsibility for the production. But when we do our own projects we have the whole responsibility.**

MG: Which is great but also very scary.

SW: The things we did now, we are producing and selling them. For us the natural way would be to set up a production of a few things in Poland. However, I feel like there is also a big difference in what kind of product you produce. In the textile industry it is really hard to compete with prices in Asia and India. If you produce a rug in Denmark or even in Poland it will be a luxurious product. It will never become affordable for everybody.

MG: When we were analyzing who is selling best, the company who is producing smaller batch productions or mass productions, we have to include the PR. We live in this internet area in which the stories that we tell become important. Every brand has to make sure that they reach the right people. If medium size brands would be very good in their PR work, they could do good.

How do you deal with PR?

MG: We do the PR ourselves. When it comes to investment, we try to go to fairs like Stockholm Furniture Fair. This is a good way to meet magazines that want to feature you. Once you got featured you establish

a network.

SW: We start to see that we get more success on our instagram profile.

MG: It's such a great tool. I am so thankful for instagram. It's a great way to advertise yourself and you can reach so many people. We are also telling a story, we are not very strategic on our instagram yet, but people want to see the process.

Who is your target group?

MG: It's important to say that we don't see ourselves as a brand. What we are working with are commercial brands. What we are still exploring is how to create our own things. I guess our target group are people who are appreciating the design process and where it all comes from.

How do you get your commercial clients?

MG: It's a very long process. **We make sure to talk with a lot of people.** It's about increasing the number of people you talk to. We talk to so many people and we go to fairs and there are so many people that say "yeah, let's do something". If you talk to 50 people it maybe happens that you work with one person. It's important to keep the conversation alive and to hope that something will happen. There are just so many things that have to fit, for example timing. We just have to wait for the right moment to start a collaboration.

Can you tell us a bit more about how you two started and how you decided to work together?

SW: We both went to the same school (Royal academy of fine art in Copenhagen) but we never met. Martyna graduated half a year before me. After my graduation we had an exhibition to which Martyna came as a guest. A bit later she wrote me an email saying that we should talk about our future. She said we have some things to talk about. We met at a café and we talked for two hours. In the end we said "Ok let's do a project together". We started a project that we wanted to exhibit in Milan. We have a similar approach to design and same ambitions. We follow each other.

MG: It was actually really amazing, now that I think about it. We just spend hours meeting and talking and being inspired. Then Sisse went to

a meeting – you can tell this... It actually just came to us ...

SW: We started and then suddenly through contacts we were contacted by NOMESS. They wanted to do a textile collection and asked me if I wanted to do it. And I asked them "what about if I do it together with Martyna"? And then we just started doing that together.

At the same time Martyna had some contacts in Milan and talked to some other clients. At that point we decided to just share everything and just see how far we could go. We had to decide how much we wanted to keep for ourselves but quite soon we realized that it is better to just put everything into one pot and just share it all.

MG: That was when we realized how cool it is to have two people who work together. We have very different backgrounds, come from different countries, we did internships at different places but that only means that we have two different networks that are so great to combine. When I moved to Denmark, I always had struggle to reach the Danish companies. But Sisse now has this network. I think we were quite lucky. SW: For the next step it was time to start reaching out. If we went to exhibitions we just had to talk to people. You have to go there, knock on everybody's door, telling them "It looks like you need some textiles". Sometimes you get in a dialog other times you don't. You don't have anything to lose.

MG: I remember when we went to Maison Objects together because we released the pillows with NOMESS. So we decided, since there were so many cool brands, that we should just talk to them. We did not know how to approach them. But at one point we just felt like "whatever" and just went there to tell them that we would really like to work with them. People reacted very positive. We only had to show appreciation to what they do.

SW: Half a year ago we went on a trip to Poland and Czech Republic.

MG: We did a road trip, with Sisses small baby.

SW: She was six month old. It was a good time to travel. She came to a lot of meetings with us, flirting with the clients.

This opens a whole new chapter of questions. Especially as a woman in the design business, how do you manage all this if you want to create a family?

MG: Yea, how do you manage that Sisse?

SW: I think we have a really good system in Denmark that makes it easy in comparison to other countries. Also I pay cheap rent and I have a boyfriend who earns some money. I also have a side job to be able to afford this. On certain things you have to spend money. I think it's part of a bigger plan. If we don't focus on it now, it will for sure not happen in ten years. Because then you might have three kids and a house but if you then work in a startup, how would that work? The first years are always on a really small budget but if you just came from school it doesn't really matter. You are not used to have any money so you just continue this lifestyle.

The whole financial part, for example writing invoices, how did you figure that out? Was that part of your education?

SW: No, it was not part of the education. I think this is really hard. Bookkeeping, making budgets, everything about sales and contracts with brands and with productions; these are all things you don't know anything about. After our first project Martyna and I had a conversation about what went well and what went wrong.

MG: It just made us so much smarter.

SW: We learn so much from our mistakes. It's a learning curve.

Do you do everything, like photos, marketing, and so on, yourself?

MG: No, we collaborate with friends who are photographers. We needed some time to figure out what our style was. Sometimes you just see how someone works and you know that it is a good match.

SW: We also spend energy and money on pictures. In the end that's what is very important. Even after the fair in Stockholm, what remains are the pictures.

Do you talk about general things and questions with other designers? Do you share informations and knowledge?

MG: Yes, this is the good thing about this office.

SW: Everybody here is in the same situation. It is very smart to discuss

with other designers. Most of the people we know are quite established. It's really good to ask people and to break the barriers, also about the money topics.

Would you wish for a common minimum wage per hour?

SW: In Denmark we have a recommendation about how much designers should take per hour. You can find that at Forbundet Arkitekter og Designere (FAOD).

MG: In Germany there is also a book that shows all kinds of wages for creative businesses. It explains how much you could charge to make a pattern. It would be a great thing if all designers would agree on wages but I am not sure if that is possible.

Talking about your own projects, do you produce them and sell them directly to the costumer or how do you do that?

SW: It's something we actually need to discover. We do sell our rugs ourselves but the rugs are really expensive so the clients are a special. But we would like to reach a bigger audience. It's something we would like to do in the near future. We want to produce more projects ourselves. We have really good connections with production. It would be stupid to not use this connection. **Especially in Denmark there is a huge gap between the industry and designers.** Also, there is almost no textile industry. It would be stupid if we would not use that Martyna is coming from Poland. She can go there and talk in Polish. That makes it much easier. If I would work solo, I would not have the same possibilities. A lot of people in these companies still don't speak English. Maybe the owner does but than the person who runs the machine doesn't speak English.

MG: Also, how would you know which company to contact? The companies that already work international are much better in being visible but they also have much higher prices. It's best to collaborate with the smaller manufacturers who are good at what they are doing but who are not good at reaching out to find new customers. I can just call them to ask if they can work with us. Sisse could not do that so easily.

What do you think are the most important skills for your studio?

MG: I think it's about believing in yourself and not being afraid of taking risks. It is hard to start something when you just graduated. That's why many people work for companies where they don't have to deal with instability.

SW: I think it is about vision and will and also about believing that you can do something – it is being a bit naïve.

MG: Yes, it's a lot about being naïve.

SW: We are quite naïve – but in a good way. Also, if you always think in limitations it doesn't work. If somebody asks us to design something that is outside of our comfort zone we would say: "Sure! We can do that."

MG: I think we are also really really lucky that both our families and boyfriends are so supportive. I guess if I would have a boyfriend who would not be supportive, I would not be able to feel so confident about what we are doing. It's the same with my parents. It's the same for Sisse. She has very lovely parents who are understanding and supporting us.

Do you have a goal for your studio?

SW: Yes, we have goals. We actually have to sit down quite soon to rethink our goals. Each six-month we need to set up new goals. We ask ourselves where we would like to be within the next half a year. After each six-month we take a look at everything: what went good and what went wrong. We have many goals and ambitions.

MG: It's about growing organically. If we were able to earn a full amount of money with what we are doing at the moment, it would be great but for us it's also about being happy in your life in general. If you feel like you have to work so much, that your private life is imbalanced it would not be good. It's so cool if your work and family life is in balance. Our work is a lot about trying out along the way. Maybe in two years we figure out that we want to grow, but at the moment we only want to grow organically and see what happens. We develop all the time and learn new things. We have new challenges everyday. Of course we would like to have a cool studio in Copenhagen with a big showroom. And then I would like to have a branch in Poland or somewhere else – that is all on the list but we don't know when that will happen.

Before you started your own studio, did you ever consider to be employed at a company?

SW: Yes, sure. But from my point of view. I thought, if I don't try it now, it would not happen. When else would I have tried it? You have to ask yourself how much you are willing to invest. We did not lend money to start this studio. If everything goes wrong, we can just apply for a job. We haven't been taking any risk that can affect our personal lives. For me it's more like a playground. The worst thing that can happen is that things are not working out the way that we want it. We can always get a job but this you can't always do.

How old are you?

SW: I am 31.

MG: I am 28.

Have you had some kind of business classes in your education or did your school invite designers to talk about their businesses?

SW: Yes, we had some external designers. This is actually something that we would like to suggest, that you should start thinking about a business plan within your education.

MG: I don't understand why school don't include that. I just read that more than 50% of the people who graduate from the design school in Denmark start working as freelancers. I guess the tendency to do so is everywhere in the world. So why are the schools not prepared to teach those skills? The need is there!

There are educations where you can learn that. Degrees like Design Management or Design and economics. But if I am a creative person, I might want to build up my creative skill set. I would probably still choose a product design MA instead of a design management course.

During my bachelor education we had a seminar about writing a business plan. But then at that point it was way too early in the education. The students did not see the need because they only wanted to design and being creative. Students often have the problem that they are not aware of what they need to know and what other skills and knowledge would help additionally.

SW: I had a few courses like this at the end of the master. Bookkeeping and so on but it was still not easy.

MG: There was this one business panel that made a big difference for me. Within this class they invited successful designers and freelancers and they talked about what they did and where they struggled. They have been very honest. This is what made me understand that I needed to know more. I understood how helpful it would be to know how to write a business plan.

SW: To get some insights of what it means to be an independent designer would have been helpful. Also, free coaching for people who startup a company would be great.

That exists in Sweden. You can just write them and get free appointments.

That exists in Sweden. You can just write them and get free appointments.

SW: Many situations you just don't know before you are in the situation... You can prepare yourself but some things are just coming along the way. I often feel like "if we would just have somebody who could help us with this". It would be great to hook up with other people.

MG: It would be cool to match graduates with some mentors or to have a class that is connected to businesses in Copenhagen. The Design school had some classes with students from CBS – that was cool. I don't think it is actually needed to teach hardcore business classes for designers.

SW: In many situations we have to pay for services but what we like most is to find somebody to collaborate with who is in the same situation. Exchanging knowledge or so is so much nicer than paying for it. Like this everybody would gain from the collaboration.

MG: We know some photographers who are in the same situation as we are. They also want to create something cool and want to be out there. But they also need somebody to do it with them. If we apply to be published in different magazines, it's also good for the photographer to show his or her work. If the pictures are featured, everybody gains from that.

SW: I really like to benefit from each other strengths. Some things are very difficult for us but I am sure that for someone else it's easy.

Thank you!

Date: 23.02.2018

Jenny Ekdahl /Stoft

The design studio Stoft was founded in 2013 by Jenny Ekdahl, Ola Nystedt and Joel Herslow. The Malmö based studio is working in the field of furniture design and works on self-initiated projects as well as on client projects.



Our starting point was that we noticed that if we graduate and we want to create a prototype without having access to the schools facilities anymore the first step would be to get in touch with the producing industry. This seems to be very hard. How do you do that?

But most industries are so helpful with that. Especially if you say that you are a newly graduated student. I did so many collaborations when I was in my masters. I just called them and said: "Hey I want to cast this wulf leg in aluminum, but I have no money!". And they were willing to help me, since I was a student.

Was it a producer in Sweden?

Yes, that was a small metal casting company here in Malmö. I also worked with other - well I guess it wasn't big industry - more smaller companies.

We think just noticing that we have never been in touch with them and that they seem to be so far away led us to the decision to do something about it. We also noticed you can be very lucky to find a producer that helps you. Many students just don't know where to look for producers. Companies don't want to help you because you don't have money.

Maybe you also don't know how much for example one producing technique costs and you have already designed your thing and you're locked to that shape and then it would be super expensive. That's interesting because Ola's graduation project, his master thesis, was to work with local producers to connect the missing dots. So we visited many of them together and it was so interesting.

Regional production is very important. But we feel like either you are a hardcore industrial designer and you only produce in China or you are only supporting small business, like the craftsman shop next door. But there is something in the middle, on a medium sized production scale, that can still produce in mass but not as in thousands of pieces like they can do in Asia. These European producing industry still exists but the market is getting smaller and smaller. We want to see how they could support us and how we could support them while building up a collaboration. Or even some kind of a network where more students or freshly graduates could gain from.

So you're looking on a project in a way that is a little bit like SPOK* to connect designers and local manufacturers but outside of Sweden.



It starts off more on an individual base. We now connect with producers to build our prototypes. Did you visit production sites?

It was news to me, when we visited all these producers in Sweden, that some furniture producers are not ordering 200 chairs at a time. They are ordering one or two and then they have two weeks to deliver. And that was really new for me. I thought that you always order many pieces. But even the big companies are not really into that. I guess that's more the Chinese market, but then it is like really large scale.

I mean we could all produce in China but then you also have to invest a lot and take a lot of pieces, which you all have to sell. And also we have a functioning industry in Europe. And if we compare the size of Europe to the rest of the world transportation ways are not that long within Europe. And if we would only focus on for example Sweden we most probably wouldn't find everything we would need. That's why we look into Europe, and especially northern Europe to see what kind of industries do we have and how can we work with them to not go to Asia. Because if we would go to Asia, if everyone would go to Asia, the design scene would suffer over time. Which they already to - but it would get worse.

I guess the big companies go to Asia. Many furniture companies want to keep it a bit more local to have control over the shipping and the prototypes and the delivery times and everything.

Can you tell us about how you do it in your studio?

So we are a very small company. And, even though it was four years ago we were founded, we still feel that we are really in the beginning of everything. We have some collaborations with local glass workers or carpenters. And that's mainly because we are only producing three or four pieces at a time. **It's important for us to go there and develop the products together.** But we also work with some companies that we got in contact with the help from school. So we are working with a few small family owned companies in Vietnam to produce things like the ceramics, the porcelain, the natural fiber products and stoneware. With some of the companies we are not designing our own collections. We are hired by them to design something that would work for the European market. It's a very interesting collaboration. We have actually applied for a grant to go there in the autumn to develop a project. To be there for six

weeks and just work with them, to do something with the Stoff name on it. It's so different to work with producers in another country.

Where do you apply for such grants?

Konstnärnämnden, it's the biggest one in Sweden. You can get project grants or developing grants. You could apply with some examples of what you have done and you get money to continue to do this work. **That's actually a really good way to start a project** since that is so expensive.

Do you also have clients?

I think the whole furniture thing for us is difficult. You have to invest so much money. In order to get something out of it we have to produce a lot more and make more collaborations and that takes so much time. To make a chair takes one year and then you have to wait one year for the producer and then you will get the royalties only for two years. That's not enough; you would have to get it for ten years or something. So we do consultancy work as industrial designers; also to get food on the table.

How do you get those clients?

We have been lucky. Just **through contacts who have recommended us.** So it's not something that we actively work for but something that just works. That's a way to earn money fast. We have been lucky since the start. And then with the furniture if you sell a cabinet that's good, that's a lot of money, but you can't really count on it and you never know when it happens. Or with the caravan, we have sold some but you never know when it will happen again. So that's why it is good to be three as well. We can always have some own projects that we work, but we can also always have the others that bring money.

Is that all you do or do you also have side jobs? Or was that the case in the beginning?

Definitely. I work at form/design center one weekend of the month. **I think it's relaxing for the soul to know that you have some money every month.** When you have your own company you will never know if you get all the money for the year in July... and what about January, February and the rest of the year?!

If you do those consultancy jobs, what do clients ask for?

It's very different. The three of us are very different. Ola and Joel are interested in hardcore industrial design. So we had one company that we worked with for three years. It was a start-up company and we worked with them every month. And now Ola is working on a pop-up exhibition concept. After we made the caravan as an exhibition and shop concept we got some jobs from that as well. It can be so different. It also can be the municipality or it can be companies like startups. Since the last year I also work with graphic design and product development for a company for building side tents. I can do that half time and I can work from here. It's also very different but we need those projects.

How do you split the tasks within your team?

It comes very natural to us. I am a starting person; I do mostly concepts and sketching. Joel is often working together with me to develop it and he's the one doing all the design works. Ola is doing most of the prototypes.

If you would go to a client. Would all three of you go?

Mostly, yes. We work with a glass blower and they have asked us to develop a lamp with them. So they are kind of a client, but they don't pay us, and we don't pay them either. They just want to collaborate with us to develop something they can maybe sell. In this case we go with all three of us since it's fun and we can discuss everything together with them. Also, we have a new collaboration coming up with a company that works with some kind of a black stone, and we make a mirror with it. They also don't pay us and we don't pay them. We just develop it together. But for other clients, like the work that I have, I mostly go to Norway, the company is based there, on my own, because I have that client. An Ola has another client. Sometimes it's necessary to be the three of us in a first meeting to have three minds, one might be faster than the other.

What are the most important skills for your business?

To sell. I think you don't have to be so good as a designer if you have the skill to sell yourself and what you do. We are not like that, we think it's very boring and quiet hard to lift the phone and sell yourself. We have worked more with being really good with what we do as designers and then try to get people to come to us. But it's a longer way and you have to have so much patience. It can work but it takes a lot of time. So that is important. And also you have to be a little bit crazy to start your own company. There are so many insecurities. **You just have to be bold and take some steps.**

Was the plan from the beginning on to start your own business?

For me yes! I couldn't imagine a life where I would be controlled. If someone else would control me, I would be so mad. I would have problems with having a boss. I definitely wanted to have my own company - at least until I'm sure that it didn't work. Or you get other priorities in life, maybe if you'll get a family it wouldn't be so important anymore. For Joel I think it's because he really enjoys working with friends. For him it's really important to have that working place where you can feel that you can say anything and that everyone is listening. He was employed in San Francisco at a company. There was a hierarchy within the company and that was something he didn't like. For Ola it's also to have this safety within this group. We just go to work everyday and we have all our friends here. Moneywise it can be tricky but it is always fun to go to work.

All three of you are having a design background. Did you ever consider taking someone with a business background into your team?

If we would be in the position where we could hire someone, that would definitely be a discussion, what that person's skill would be like. It would probably not be a designer. I think if we had been more similar that would have been a problem. Now, even though we have the same education, we are so different in what we do and what we like to do. So it's not that one person has to always do the boring stuff and someone else is doing fun stuff. Because what I think is boring Ola thinks is fun. I think that is important. So it would be an economical or sells person.

We also get applications for internships with these creative and beautiful portfolios. But if you have a small company and only 2% of your time you can do design, you really want to do them yourself. That can be difficult to explain. We need someone who does what we do besides that. Like driving around, looking for the perfect screw for one day.

That are the things you don't want to do!

I mean I like doing different things. I don't want to sit in front of the computer the whole day. I want to be in the workshop, I want to visit production places, I want to visit the glass blower, the carpenter. I think that is what makes it fun. So if I had been hired at a company just doing CAD drawings I would die, because it's not for me. Joel would enjoy it, he finds peace in that. But he loves to visit the manufacturers as well!

How do you do prototypes for your projects?

In our experience, for example with the chair, it can be as expensive to produce 20 chairs as if you would just make one as a prototype. So we have a structure in our company that everything we do we can also sell directly to customers. We don't make "just a prototype". So we also have a backup plan to sell it ourselves.

What if something is wrong with a prototype and it doesn't function.

That's why we have to do a lot. For example with the lamps we had to book the glass workshop three times. One full day is 12.000 SEK. And we had to use it three times before they could make the models that we wanted. And then of course we had to sell the first batch as a "limited edition" because that's not what was wanted for the final shape. Also, we did some other glass lamps we couldn't sell at all but since we sold a batch of the other lamps we could invest money into product development. But for the chairs we are lucky because Ole could do the carpentry for them. So we could keep the costs low. So it's good to have a structure where you get some money to then invest some money.

You have to be bold to sell products that are not perfect. Do you sell them to a lower price, because you sell them for example to people you know?

That has been so tricky for us. We have been careful with that because we sell some products that are really really high end and are very expensive and just for galleries, so it has to be really good.

How do you sell?

We sell directly. We have some websites. We are in a gallery in London, MINT, that sells the expensive things.

So it's on demand?

Yes. The "dear disaster" is like that and the "whittle away" will be like that as well. With the chairs we have a producer in Malmö so we will sell four at a time to get them produced.

It would be good to learn in school how to sell things and how the market looks today. It's more that you produce smaller batches and then you sell through galleries or yourself. And you maybe work less with producers because the royalty is so low. That has also changed.

Those royalty contracts come from a time where the market was completely different. Do you think they could change?

It has to change. Because companies today do not only work with "real designers". They just get the famous person or just take a chair that was in production in for example the 50s and they make it again because that is safe. That's why we have stopped approaching producers. We rather work the other way around. **We are getting visible and getting a lot of attention, which gets people to come to us.** And still it's not a big fee that you get besides the royalties. That's why it's nice to work with the producers in Vietnam because the contract we have with them says that we have a royalty of the produced batch, which could be two containers of the production.

How do you get visible and draw attention to your studio?

Exhibiting at fairs or other exhibitions and media of course. And blogs. We do press releases for them. So we have contacts at "dezeen" or "design milk" already and just send pre set press kits to them. That's very

important because it has to be easy for them. So if you have everything in the right way for them they will publish it.

Do you do tasks like taking pictures or writing the texts of your products on you own?

We have a woman we work with that always takes our photos. And I write all the texts. The texts are very important!

What do you think about influencers? Do you think this helps the design market?

No, that's for the stylist market. It depends on what kind of blog it is. We have worked with some stylists but many of them, not all of them, don't really understand the value of design. They don't understand the pricing because they don't understand the time it took and the things behind it. For them it's just a good image and then they want to have the next. So of course it depends on who it is and how many followers they have. If it is a profile with many followers it could be good as well but we don't send out products to stylists. We think we won't get that much back. We tried it but the problem is also that they think we are a big company and they say "We got this much from some brand, why can't you send us ten lamps?". I mean that's all we have! We have to sell it we can't just give it to them.

How do you calculate your rates?

If we sell ourselves we always use the standard formulas you use when selling something in a store. You times it 2.5. So you take what you pay to produce it and double that, so you get something for your own, and then you take double plus the tax. And then you add the part for the shop. So the shop is always the winner. But if we sell directly we get the part the shop would get as well, so it's better for us to sell directly. Still you have to have storage space and you need to send it, so it's a lot of work that is not design work. **It's about the balance. You need some shops but you earn more money if you sell it directly.** Our aim is not to produce a lot and everything. We want to keep it small because we want to also make new things. So now it's important for us to find collaborations with more royalties to balance out and have time for our special collections.

You said you have the client in Norway that you work for. How do you separate that from the work you do within your company?

We always split it within Stoft. Otherwise it gets very difficult. In the end it would lead to discussions and a question of money that would split up the team. I know if I have to work very hard for one week and the others are doing all the fun stuff, someone else would do the hard work the other week and I would have the fun part. So we have to share it and it works out in the end. After four years you notice it always goes right. You have to find people that you can trust. But it's tricky to find people that you can collaborate with like that but for us it works really well. We are really lucky.

What are you working on at the moment?

Now for example we have a collaboration with a museum and our task is to design something for the shop but we would be the designer and the manufacturer. The museum will buy it from us and then sell it. So when we calculate the prize it would not be good to sell something under 2.000 SEK. If you sell it out to a customer for 200 SEK that means that the shop buys it from you for around 70 SEK, so it has to cost you 30 SEK to produce it. And then you only get 30 SEK if the shop sells the piece for 200 SEK. And you also have to pack it and everything. That doesn't make sense. So you have to have a large volume. If you have a smaller batch our limit is around 2.000 SEK in the shop, then we would get 500 SEK per product. Than we can motivate ourselves to handle it for five minutes before we send it out. Others might think different about it. For us it would be difficult to start with something cheap. Because we then wouldn't get the people that are interested in our high-end products and we would be locked. **It's really important to, from the beginning, have the right price so it's worth the work that you do for it.** I guess that's also why people start with smaller batches. If we are now going to Vietnam in the autumn we will probably design some collections that we will invest around 50.000 SEK in, just to buy space in the container and store it here and then sell it. But it would be impossible as a first project to do that. **Or you have to have a lot of money saved.**

Is there something you would like to work with at the moment?

There is one collective, a shop, a gallery and a producer, they are called “matter of stuff”. They are working with a lot of designers from the whole world that are the same as we are - up and coming, emerging designers trying out different things. And one thing they do is that they have some connections, for example with some producers in Portugal that make marble and ceramics, also in Italy. And they connect the designer to work with those manufacturers to make a product that they would sell. So the designers and the producers don't pay anything and they sell the product. They are two really nice girls and you can definitely talk to them. We sell our lamps with them. And just imagine, that would be a dream to go to Portugal and work with the ceramics manufacturer. There is one girl in Sweden, Anna Elzer Oscarson, she works with a Swedish ceramic producer. She is the main designer for them. That's the old way, that you were a industrial designer hired at a manufacturing place. It's such a great thing to do. It's much more fun to work with them than to work with the producers that are looking down on you and not want to pay you anything. It's much more fun to work with the manufacturers and than sell it yourself.

Did you make an experience with producers that they “look down” on the designer?

If you have a good collaboration with a producer you don't leave that one. But some brands definitely screw people. They stop paying royalties or it just doesn't work with them. There are too many designers, too many sending them suggestions for free, because that's how it works. So you can't put any pressure on them saying “I want this in advance, then I can sketch and then you can get it”. **Too many people are sending things out for free** so they just take this or that project and then don't continue with the designer, they just continue picking out things. I guess the problem is that it's not enough money in the industry. The trends are too fast and everything is a little bit all over the place. Something needs to change. Too many graduates, too many designers – and all happens too fast. Everybody is working against each other and that's why designers are more and more selling directly, not only in Sweden but everywhere. They are making their things themselves and don't bother to work with

the producers. But if you have a good producer and they are serious about the collaboration it will work fine. It's just a slower process. You go there, talk with them, build up a relationship. So than it's good if they are close by. It will be tricky to create a relationship with a producer in Italy.

Is it a process everyone has to go through themselves to figure it out or could you share this with others?

It's stupid, isn't it? Everyone just does it on their own. It was the same for us when we started. All the things we didn't know; we still don't know everything but at least we talk now. **So we are 20 studios and we meet to talk about design.** It would be good to already have that in school. “Den Nya Karta”* was one of the projects that helped to bring the studios together. Also form/design center has changed a lot. “Den Nya Karta” was initiated by Jenny Nordberg, I think she applied for some grant to get it started. And that project was to connect 15 designers with 15 manufacturers. It also suggested this 50:50 economical system of how to share the profit. Some worked like that, some did not. Afterwards came “SPOK”, also initiated by Jenny Nordberg. **What happened was that people started to talk to each other. Not only the designers, also designers and manufacturers.** Something happened, that's really good. We and Kaja did the caravan, that also connected local designers. We got to talk a lot with people. Now it's the museum collaboration. Ten designers with ten museums to create something. That's why we are working in Malmö, is a very nice place and not at all competitive!

Thank you!

Nestor Campos

Nestor has a Master in architecture. In Stuttgart/Germany he has been working as an architect for five years. He moved to Sweden and started his education in Industrial design in 2012. Since 2014 he runs his own studio.

Date: 01.03.2018



photo: <https://northern.no/hvr/designer/nestor-campos/>

How did you start your business?

For me an important starting point was to meet people during fairs. I just asked them how they started their studios and asked them all kinds of practical things. Now that I have started to work it's easier to understand how it goes. There are many ways to go. I like to see it as if you are walking in the mountains. You know where you want to go to but there is not only one-way. You can follow a path but you could also find your own way that you have to make yourself.

What was your goal?

That's the thing. You can aim to go somewhere but in the middle of your way you might find another place where you want to stay. Sometimes you work for a big company but you don't quite like. If you change company it suddenly is fun. What I mean is that you will find things on your way that you haven't thought about. **The only recipe that I can give you is that you have to start to do stuff.**

What kinds of projects, companies or clients you started to work with?

First I didn't have any company contacts. In Scandinavia companies have their contact information on their website, so you can contact them directly. Italian companies don't have that. You have to go to fairs and talk to them. If you do that they will always check if you are a student or a "real designer". You have to have some kind of portfolio. For me it was really good that I went three years in a row to fairs. **When you are going to a fair you force yourself to do something and to have a good portfolio.** You find your style.

Which fairs did you go to?

I went to some fairs with the school, in Stockholm, Milan and Berlin. It was good to see how to prepare an exhibition. The first one I did on my own was in Stockholm at the Greenhouse. I think that is a good one to start. You can show that you are a designer and that you take it serious. It shows companies that you are able to do a project, also you show that you really want to be in the business, since it takes a lot of money and time, and then of course you also get a lot of contacts.

How did you finance your first solo exhibition in Stockholm?

The prototypes were done in school, because at that time I was still a student. Usually almost all the money goes into prototyping. I think the key is to keep it on a low budget. **It is good to share a fair booth with other designers.** For example on transport you can save a lot of money.

Where do you produce prototypes now that you left the school?

Right now I join a workshop for artists here in Malmö. It's called KKB. It's a big hall with a good atmosphere where people do their stuff.

How did you get into that workshop?

You have to apply. If they select you will get a key and you can go in and out whenever you want. The problem is that you have to bring everything yourself. They have the big machines, but small tools and material you have to bring. That's one of the big differences. It is not like being in school, you don't have any excuse anymore. You have to organize everything yourself, and if something goes wrong it is your fault. **If something doesn't work you have to have a plan B.** That's one of the things you learn when you start your own business.

Do you have a side job besides working as a designer?

You have to find a balance between working to get money and time you need to produce prototypes. Right now, I also work as an architect in an office. I spend about 60-70% of my time there. It's quite a lot. I work as a freelancer but I sit in the office with them. Before that I have done other freelance jobs. I also worked a lot at Lund University as an assistance for two years. In a way it was good because I had access to the workshops. The downside is that you don't earn as much money. It was a good job for the first two years. Now I decided to move my whole life to Malmö, therefore I work here as an architect. Sometimes I miss the good workshops of the school but it's also good to be out of the student atmosphere and try to work fully professional.

How valuable were contacts you made during exhibiting at fairs?

I don't believe that you go to a fair and then you just pop up everywhere. It's a slow process. I got in touch with companies that maybe didn't bring me anywhere in that year. But what is more important for me are the contacts with other designers. You talk a lot with them during the fair. I met people that I will have collaborations with and I met people I shared my exhibition stand in Milan with. Others could help me with getting in touch with a certain company. So I think the designers you meet at a fair are even more important. Also, I feel that companies take me more serious after my second year exhibiting in Milan. I don't say that if you went to Milan everything could happen, but it gives you a lot of creativity and contacts that could open doors later. For example, in Stockholm I met a designer who is now product developer of a company. That might help me in the future.

Will you exhibit this year to Milan Design Week?

I decided not to go, because it takes almost a whole year to prepare for the fair. But probably I will go again next year.

What does your work now look like? Are your projects self initiated or do you work for clients?

Most of my projects are self-initiated. I also have some companies that have sent proposals for designs to but they were looking for something else.

Does that mean you mainly reach out to furniture producers? Or are you also looking for manufacturers to collaborate with to create something you could sell yourself?

I mainly contact brands that I like and of which I think that they are open to my designs. It is very difficult to get the first two to three products out, but it gets easier over time. One time I was in contact with a manufacturer to produce a prototype and they thought my product could be interesting for a certain company so they put me in contact with them. **As I said, you start to move and then things happen. I always say the key is endurance. Important is that you get the money to survive.**

*Going back to the picture of the mountain, where do you see yourself now?
And what is on top of the mountain?*

The top of the mountain would be if I had my own studio and people would be working for me and I could realize all my ideas in prototypes. Right now I have many ideas but can only use two or three of them because I don't have the time to make all the prototypes myself.

What would you say is the most important skill set a designer should bring in?

If we are talking about someone who has an own studio, I think it is that you have to learn how things work. Meaning that you have to see things from a business side. You cannot sit in a closed room and create nice products. You have to go out, contact people and show your work. There are many products that are nothing special but they are out there because someone had a good contact. **Business is a lot about contacts, and that takes time.** But of course you cannot only mingle and talk to people, you have to do your work as well.

How did you learn what it takes to build up your own business?

As I said I first met a lot of designers and we also talked about companies, exhibitions or other things where they could tell me what is good or what is maybe not so good. Many of the things you learn by your own. When I started, I read books about how to be a freelancer. I think it is important to have a structure. I for example try to be efficient. You have to push yourself a lot.

How much of your time actually goes into design work?

It's difficult to say. What I can say is the process of bringing an idea into a prototype is fun. But to actually get the product out takes a lot of time. Then it's easier to just start a new project. I try to work on three projects at a time. To start a new prototype, I have to finish one of the other three projects. That way I try to push myself to finish projects. Every two weeks I sit down and send out projects and contact people. atmosphere and try to work fully professional.

Do you send out ready-made projects just to companies or do you also send it to magazines?

I haven't focused so much on magazines. I am not sure if that it is the right strategy. Of course, if someone would publish my work it would be perfect, but I think things are only shown once and then they are seen never again. Anyway, it is good but I prefer to talk with companies. They sometimes also send things to magazines so that it gets publicised.

If you send something to a company, how much do you actually show them?

I think the more famous you get the less you have to send. When I started I always sent finished products. It was good to show them that a product is "real". Especially with accessories. If they then have it on the table they can see if it fits to their collection. Now, I more and more send in renderings. I never send only a sketch. I think they only take a short time to check what you send them. And a sketch doesn't say that much as a rendering where you put your product into the right context, even though it takes more time.

Did you have bad experiences with a company?

It has happened. I don't celebrate anything anymore before I see the product in the shelf. It happened with two or three projects already, even with contracts. You have been waiting for one year and in the end they say no, because something didn't work out. That's part of the game.

How about producing items yourself by finding a manufacturer and selling it yourself? Is that an option for you?

I have done that with a wooden toy. I have an online shop, but I haven't sold anything there. I don't have the time to put things out on instagram or on other channels. When I was at Lund University I was in a programme called Bento Lab with this toy project. It was very interesting to see the whole picture of production and selling. Usually when we design we don't see how much something costs and how you can sell it. So this project was really interesting, but I only sell a little bit. I am not really into it.

Some people say that Instagram is a really good tool for designers to find clients, also private clients. How do you think about that?

I think there are two ways: A designer goes more into the direction of doing limited editions, of for example furniture pieces that can be shown in magazines, that private consumers would buy. Another designer would go into the real industrial field, where you have companies and producers. When I was in Milan many people asked me if they can buy my things, but I only have prototypes. It would be too expensive if I produce them myself. For me it is not so interesting to do that myself.

So if there is no company that wants to buy your idea, is your design just standing around or do you think that there is a potential gap on the market for it?

NC: Sometimes you have to show things several times before someone takes it. I think with every project you do, you learn something, so you can do it better for the next time. It is not that you just throw something away. You could also apply with projects for competitions or exhibitions.

Do you right now invest more money than you get out?

Yes. That's why you need to have a side job.

Can you tell us something about royalties?

Royalties take a lot of time. It depends on the company. If a company takes something into production, it will probably take at least one year until it is on the market, and then it takes another six months or more until you earn something. Probably it will stay on the market for five years, depending on the company. I guess you need a lot of products to live only from that.

Do you think that principal might change some day, since the market today differs so much from how it was some years ago?

I have seen some designers who would like to change this system. I think by selling products yourself, you earn more money with less sales. I haven't had the right chance and market to do that yet. Another possibility is to work with architects and with interior designers to place your objects. However, the biggest difficulty is to find the right contacts. Some say Instagram is very good for that, but I would say it is saturated.

There are so many accounts and different people. My tip would be to enjoy whichever way you take.

How open are people when it comes to talking about earning money and pricing within your network of designers?

That's very different. Some people don't even want to share their contacts. Other people are open about these things. My philosophy is that information that is given to me for free I can share. I don't want to hide anything when it comes to giving help and tips. For example someone who will exhibit in Milan asked me about my experiences. I shared my knowledge about things I would have liked to know before exhibiting there. I think although we are all designers in the same business, we shouldn't see each other as competitors. If a company likes your design they will take it, it doesn't matter how many other designers there are.

Do you perceive a cultural difference?

Yes. In Scandinavia people are more open. When I studied in Sweden everyone talked openly about his or her projects. In Spain everybody would hide what they were working on, especially the architects. I think that is wrong. If you show what you are working on to others, you can get input which might help. Not only during studies but also later on. Sometimes you help someone and later on they might be able to help you. I don't say that this should be the only reason to help others. It is for a long run. Like they say, when you look back you can connect the points.

How does it feel for you to combine being an architect and a designer?

I am really happy to work as an architect again after having a break. It feels like completing the circle. It combines two sides, the customer side and the designer side. The one who designs a chair and the other one who chooses a chair for an interior project. I learn a lot by that. In my opinion, if you have a second job, it is good to do something that is related to design to gain more than just money.

What would you recommend to someone who has just graduated?

I think it is really good to work in an employment first if you ask me. I was employed before my Master studies and had time to experience what I like and where I wanted to go.

Thank you!

Date: 05.03.2018

Chris Liljenberg Halstrøm

Chris Liljenberg Halstrøm lives and works in Copenhagen. She studied furniture design at The Royal Danish Academy in Copenhagen where she later taught in the furniture and textile design department. She opened her own design studio in 2007 where she mainly works with furniture and smaller objects for the home. Chris has two employees and works for companies such as SKAGERAK, Framo and +Halle.



text and photo: <http://www.chrisliljenberghalstrom.com>

Could you tell us how you started your work life?

The thing is that I graduated in 2007. I came out to a world that was in the middle of economic crises. That meant that most companies actually stopped furniture production. Some of my friends who had graduated five or ten years before already had things in production and were living from royalties, many of their products were taken out of production and everything just went dead in that period. Since I graduated in that period that was just how the world looked. There were no jobs and nothing to really do. That meant that I was focusing a lot on making exhibitions. That was what I was focusing on in the beginning. It was the only thing I wanted to do. I worked quite hard applying for grants to be able to make the exhibitions. I went to Stockholm to exhibit. It was very good to exhibit at Green House. I also have been teaching for many years in different design schools but mostly at the Royal Academy in Copenhagen.

In which field did you teach?

In the furniture and in the textile department. Mainly in the furniture department, doing different courses and being a tutor. I always wanted to teach. It felt quite natural for me. My husband did a PhD in the design school. He has also been teaching. So we both have been teaching a lot. When I was too busy in my own studio, I decided not to teach anymore. I would like to teach again at some point. So, I was arranging exhibitions. We were living in a very small apartment with our kids, living from nothing. We were quite lucky that we were able to do that so that I could have my studio. I was lucky to get some grants. In Denmark we have quite a good system for applying for grants from different foundations and from the state. This helps in the beginning to work on your projects. I was doing a lot of press releases and writing to people saying “come to this exhibition, do this, do that” – all those things that a lot of designers really hate. I also wanted to cut my stomach open and throw out my guts because I hated it so much but you get to a point where it is not hard anymore. You really see that the magazines just copy paste whatever you write. They don't spend time figuring it out themselves. The more you can give them, the better. I don't do it anymore. Fortunately I don't have to – that is really nice. But this is something that is good to do in the

beginning because people will get to know you. They won't know you if you don't tell them that you are there!

At the Stockholm fair I met the Danish company "SKAGERAK". It is a company I work together with very closely today. I feel that we have a very good understanding of each other. How I like to work is very much with self-initiated projects, for exhibitions, or when I don't have a company that tells me what the sales people like or what the customer needs. These are stupid constraints. They don't really lead to anything interesting – for me at least. The road for me has very much been to participate in different exhibitions. I was in the "mindcraft" a few times. Some of the exhibitions I did by myself. These products have afterwards been taken by companies. I have always felt that it is really hard to just contact the company if you already did something and then you show it to them. Somehow it seems like the companies want to contact you first. I don't know, I don't understand the mechanism. But I have been really lucky to make the exhibitions and to have a very free way of working and actually to find some companies that took the products afterwards.

Was it always companies that have contacted you?

Yes.

Are all your projects royalty based?

I have only royalty based contracts with companies. I think that is the normal way of doing it. Unless it is a big company like IKEA. They don't pay you royalties; obviously – that would be a really good deal for you. Imagine, IKEA would pay you royalties ...

For me it is always a royalty-based contract and I can see that with some companies that is a good deal and with some companies I have not yet reached the amount of money that I spend working for that project. You never really know. This is the hard part – what should you choose? A royalty deal or a big amount of money in the beginning? What I do now is that I always get a sketch fee. I rather have a sketch fee. Some companies offer an up-front payment but that is then deducted from the royalties afterwards. I would always go for a sketch fee that is not an upfront. I just want a sketch fee and later royalties because you can actually risk that you have to pay back the upfront if the product doesn't

sell or if it never reaches the market. So that is really important for me. Of course some companies don't want to budge on that and then you have to decide if you want to risk it anyways. The thing is, I think a sketch fee is quite fair even though you get royalties because you spend a lot of time in the beginning and you don't really know if the product will end up on the market. You just spend more than a year and that would go all out of the window. It is very hard at the beginning because you have nothing to negotiate with. I never go for anything less than 5% - that is for sure.

Never?

Never! I had some very strange negotiations where the companies called me saying: "Ok, we don't want you to go to another company so we pay you 5%." I am just saying to them that this is how it is. That's the only thing. Anything less than 5% is just ... There are companies who will never give you that and there you have to decide if you believe that they will sell enough so that you still make enough money. Some companies will pay you 3% and the more you sell the less you get and you end up only getting 1% when they sell a lot. It is a strange way of doing it. If their production is very easy and going smoothly you earn less and they will earn more; it is very strange.

Are you included into the production process? Would you visit manufacturers?

It is different from project to project. At the moment I am working with an American company. That has been quite special because I did not meet them in person until after a year that we have been working together. We have been talking on Skype all the time. Now I got the first round of prototypes and we will make some changes to them. With these changes we will go directly to the factory and meet with them during the day, stay overnight and the next day we see the new prototype. That's one way of doing it. I often work with a friend who is a cabinetmaker and I have a deal with one of the companies I work with; when I do new projects directly for them, they asked me to do a chair for example, so not a self-initiated project but of course something that I would like to do, then the deal is that I get a sketch fee and they pay for

the hours I use with the carpenter doing mock ups and a prototype that they then can send to the company that produces the product. I will be going to Slovenia to visit that producer. But often I work from here so it is easy for them to copy the chair when my carpenter and I have done the prototype. This is a way that I really enjoy.

Do you also have a workshop space in our studio?

Yes, I have a workshop space as well. Before I go to my carpenter I do all the testing myself. I have around 100 sqm for my studio. It is divided so that I have space for my assistants, a workbench, some work tables and a separate room with some tables as well as some backrooms. I do have to do a lot of the upholstery. When I work with upholstery it seems to be very hard for the manufacturers to follow simple drawings – I don't know why. I found out with at least five projects that I had to do the upholstery myself and send the sample down to them – then they make it perfect. I worked with different upholstery companies and it was difficult for all of them. So I noticed upholstery is very important. I do a lot of sewing for that. I also do a lot of models and mock ups.

What kind of tasks do you give to your assistants?

They almost always do the 3D drawing because I am not able to do it myself. I never learned that. Sometimes they help me with building models as well.

How many people work for you?

I have two employees. One is on maternity leave so I just work with one of them at the moment. The other assistant is there only two days a week so I will have to find another person. I like to be alone most of the time but I found out that I cannot solve all of my work alone. So I have to have people and it is nice. I have two really really good assistants who I have been teaching in the design school. I know them really well. I trust them with a lot of ideas. I think it is very hard to have other people do stuff for you but I am getting used to it. They are doing a lot of the 3D modelling for me and I found out that it is a very nice tool actually. When I have been drawing and making models it is nice to put it in the computer to see how it looks. They make some renderings to see how

everything fits. My hand drawings only go so far to feel how they look. Making models is important but I feel like its really good to have 3D as well. It comes late in the process. I never use 3D early or as a sketch tool. I only use it to test what I already made in sketches and models.

Where do you get your inspiration from when you do so many projects at a time?

It's hard to talk about inspiration somehow. When you ask designers that question all of us always answer with the same thing: that it is the everyday life that inspires you. Designers observe a lot of things. That is something that I see in artists and designers, we notice everything. Like my own family for example, they think that I am really strange because I am saying things like: "Oh, look that thing there on the ground. I need to pick it up to take a look." You probably recognize it. That's a very great tool for a designer. Sometimes it's just too much and I just want to close down to not see all the information. Inspiration is about analyzing situations. A lot of designers talk about function and this is of course important but I think if you talk about situations instead you have a great tool of analyzing what you really want to do. Maybe you have found out that it is very boring to do the dishes for example. That is the situation. But what could a preferred situation be? This is kind of what I see design being and this is also what some theorists have said. Design is changing situations into preferred ones. You have some kind of situation that doesn't really work – how do I change it into something that is really nice? You don't really have to know the object that you are going to do. If we take the situation with doing the dishes again, maybe you figure out how you can actually enjoy it. But how can I be helped to start doing the dishes? That could be a step to be analyzed. What could make it fun? What could make you want to do the dishes? Is it the brush or is it a certain kind of music that you want to hear? Or is it a really nice surface you are standing on that massages your feet while you wash the dishes? Something like that could be a solution. You find all kinds of answers when you are asking how you could change the situation to something nice. Then you find out what the product is that you will make. This is what I really like and it is also the way that I work when companies ask me to design a product. I usually tell them that

they can't tell me what to do and that they can't tell me what kind of product to expect. I tell them that I will analyze their company and that I will come up with what I feel they might need. I think that this is the best way to design. This is what we designers are good at, we know how to find problems and solve them. Companies are not very good at that – they think they are but they compare themselves with other companies “they have this kind of chair then we need this kind of chair as well.” I think that this is just boring. We see it now with many companies; they all have the same kinds of chairs - that's not really design that is just styling and not very interesting. When I see some companies that are really good in just telling designers to design what they need, they will get some crazy stuff which is new and innovative. I think this is what companies should do. Especially in industrial design where you really want to invent new things. That is where you need to have great excess to the analytical part. You always have to ask what the situation is to be able to not do boring stuff.

How much of your work is actual design work and how much of your time is needed for administration, bookkeeping and so on.

Too much time. I do all my book keeping myself – it is not too hard. I got a system. I use three full days a year on bookkeeping – that is ok. Then I spend a big amount of time answering emails. Earlier I used a lot of time writing applications for grants because this is how I made money in the beginning. Now I make my money on royalties, which is really nice. But you can never know how much comes in every third month. It is always a gamble. But I got a three-year grant from the Danish art foundation. There are just a lot of practical, administrative things. But some of it is also about contracts, talking to the lawyers.

Is that something you taught yourself or did you just learn it by doing?

I had no education in that. Some years after I graduated my husband and I did a course in the design school on how to make press releases because they never taught it before. They never taught us how to make a contract or how to talk to media or so. It is eleven years ago and so much happened in that time. For example, back then, you would have never been in a magazine as a student. There was no instagram. **Now people are**

very good at promoting themselves at different social media platforms. I think most people are not very good at the written presentations of themselves. This is something I would definitely tell students to practice more. Ask someone who is better at it! When I was in school, I would do press releases for my friends and they would do technical drawings for me. This was before money was in my world. **It is very important to be able to explain your work.** I think the administrative work is not actually a big part of my work but it somehow feels like it is a big part. It takes a lot of energy.

What is difficult for you?

When you have a new product coming out, you have interviews and the companies want you to write about the products. They want you to find a name for your work – sometimes it's easy with the names and sometimes it is so hard. Like today, I have to find a name for a thing I did. I already spend three hours on it and I don't know what to do. The communication part is quite big and difficult. Everybody wants stories now. If the story is already part of the process, it is so much easier to talk about it afterwards. For me it is important to talk out loud and write a lot in the process. If you are analyzing the situation in the end you will have all the answers to why all the things look like they do. Then it is easy to have the elevator speech for someone. It is important – I hate that word and I hate when people say “practice your elevator pitch”, but it is important to - you really have to.

What do you think are other important skills designers have to bring in?

I think it is important to dare to talk to people about your work. Of course the most important art is to be very thorough in your work and to do a good product. If you do something really good it will probably come up but if you don't show it, it won't come up. You can't really do one thing without the other. It is also important to choose the company for your products. I have this stool with Georg collection (the Georg stool). There were different companies who wanted to take it in. They were surprised and almost angry that I said “no” to them. But I am really glad that I said no because it would probably been in their collection for two years and then they might have taken it out again. Other companies

wanted to do cheap versions with some screws that go all the way in. I really did not want to do that. Most collections only last for two years - in with the new and out with the old. When you are young you don't really have the opportunity to choose the company. You kind of have to say "yes" to anything but I had some really bad experiences with companies. There was this Spanish company and it was just horrible. However, I learned a lot from it and you just can't walk through this world without meeting really strange people. What I have seen now and actually, I felt it from the beginning, the first meeting that I had with these people was "there is something weird here". Even though they have been nice and so on. I think, that the chemistry should be good. I never say that you should trust your gut feeling in the design process. I think you should know why you are doing what you are doing. But meeting people that you have to work with, it is really important to trust your gut feeling! It is really hard to go through the encounters that make it really hard. They made me question if I am a good enough designer. You have to be prepared to meet people who are not only good. Also you have to be prepared that you will meet a lot of people who will tell you that they want many of your products and in the end you never hear from them again. This is happening all the time. Even companies who call you because they "really want to work with you" never get back after the first phone call. It is really weird, but it is normal. You have to get used to it. It is very exiting when people call you, especially when you are new and young but you never know if something will turn out of it until the product is on the market. Even then you are not really secure because the product might be taken away from the market after six months. When a product is out for three years you know that it is a success. Being stubborn and being patient is a good skill.

How do you perceive the role of designers? How did it change over the past 10 years?

I will sound really old saying this, but I think that with the social media a lot of people have become very focused on designing stuff that will fit in with magazines and that will fit in with certain styling situations and it is not really interesting for me to see that kind of stuff. I think it is the

most boring path that lifestyle design has taken. Stylists can really do something good for a company and help them present the products in a good way - that is a good thing. But I have been thinking, back when I was teaching at the design school, that there has been a lot of focus on what kind of product would look good in this or that magazine. People are talking like that. I am not sure if that is a good way to go. I think that we should be talking about the real people using the products. I think this changed a lot since the last eleven years; since I graduated. It is mainly because we only had two interior design magazines back then. And Instagram does a lot as well. Even I use Instagram to show my stuff. I have a photographer who takes pictures for my website. This is actually another good thing to know: have a good photographer. It is worth all the money. I know that even here at the design school they had this course about trend colors and I am not sure why this is important - unless you become a stylist. If you are a stylist you are not a designer. It's also a good way of working but it is just something else. You will need to know about art history and all kinds of things if you want to be a good stylist. Trends are taking up a lot of space. I think it is boring.

What do you think about the designer as producer?

I have some friends who have been doing it. It is super tough but then again, you have the control of everything. What I have also been seeing is that they spend so much time on the administrative work that in the end they make one new thing every third year. The people I've seen doing this have a skill and interest in being the salesperson, meeting people and trying to get them to buy their things. But I really don't have that interest. I appreciate that a company takes over this step. They do all the marketing and they have all the responsibilities. If a leg of a furniture piece breaks I am not the one who is sued. I want to spend my time creating new things. This is my interest. But I don't think it is wrong to do it the other way around. I think there are a lot of interesting ways of being self-producing. With furniture it can be hard because there are a lot of insurance issues but with smaller objects I do find it really nice to do it yourself as well. However, for me it is too much work. You have to have a web shop, you have to send it out and so on. I would never do it myself.

Do you still have goals that you haven't fulfilled?

Actually I had a talk with a friend about goals recently. I think earlier I had a lot of dreams about whom I wanted to work with. But, going back to what I said earlier about meeting people and working with them, during the years I found out that it is the good chemistry that means a lot. I do a lot of work with the Danish company "SKAGERAK" and other companies as well. **We became such good friends and this is something that showed me that having a good everyday life makes me more creative. I want to have time.** This is my goal: to have time. That means not to chase every project because it gets too much. This can be a hard point also. At the beginning you have to take everything. You say yes to every opportunity because you don't have a choice. And then at a certain point it tips over and you don't have to say yes to everything. This is something new. I don't really have a certain goal anymore – I have the goal to have time. That's it. That's what I am always working on. Finishing stuff so that I have more time and somehow I say yes to something else and I have no more time.

How does your work go together with your family life? If we understood you right, you have two kids.

Usually I go to my studio everyday. But for example today my son is sick so I can also work from home. This is a very great privilege. My husband works at the university doing research. He also could work from home to do his work from here if he wants to. We are very privileged when it comes to our time. We can always work in the evenings. The best way to work for me is going from 9:00-17:00 to my studio, everyday. To go there, doing all the emails in the morning and then after lunch I am really in a good mood. This is when I get my best work done. But this is also about figuring out how your work process is. At a certain point I was wondering why I could not work in the morning. What is wrong with me? But I noticed that I just can't. I wake up very slowly. So doing the administrative things in the morning works out well. That is also when I have meetings and so on.

Did you ever consider to get employed after your graduation?

Well, the thing is that there were no jobs. I couldn't get a job as a designer when I came out of school and I did not know how to do the computer thing so I couldn't really get a job. This is what happened to all people who graduated at that time. One friend did an internship with Cecilie Manz and taught herself how to do solidworks and in the end she got a job at Cecilie Manz Studio for a couple days a week. That was one of the only opportunities in that period. Now I see that it is easier to get a job as a designer. I never really wanted to get a job. I always wanted to do this on my own.

How long did it take for you until you started to teach at school?

I started off my studio straight after graduation. I think I started teaching two years after my graduation. I only did that part-time. I stopped four years ago.

Thank you!

Date: 06.03.2018

Glen Baghurst

Glen Baghurst studied Industrial Design at the “Swinburne Institute of Technology in Melbourne”. He opened his design studio 2014 in Malmö. He works as a designer and co-producer of products and furniture. His work explores luxury ideas within a simple Scandinavian style. Glen shares his time between his studios in Malmö, Sweden and Sydney, Australia.



Can you tell us something about your background and how you became a designer?

I got interested in design in 2009 when I was living in London. I went back to Sydney to complete my Bachelor of Science and then I did a short object design course and noticed that this was something I was interested in. I then did a Masters of Industrial Design at ‘Swinburne University in Melbourne’, after that I wasn’t too sure in what design area I wanted to work with so I did a couple of internships. I did an internship with ‘APOKALYPS LABOTEK’ that was run by Jenny Nordberg and Petra Lilja. I then did an internship with Mats Theselius in Malmö who is doing high quality and exclusive furniture. He went to an art school in the late 80’s so he is doing more limited edition work. His furniture is often released in editions. I worked for him, first as an intern and then another year on various projects. Then I started up my studio in late 2014. I created a body of work which was shown at ‘Stockholm furniture fair’ 2015. These were products tailored towards mass manufacturing, but treating the materials as naturally as possible. Vegetable dyed leather, soaped ash wood, that kind of thing. In Stockholm that aesthetic was received very well.

How did you produce those pieces?

The metal work for those prototypes was done in Malmö. In hindsight they probably weren’t the best company to do that prototype with, but as a fresh designer you don’t know that.

How did you make the connection with the manufacturer in the first place?

I first sent some emails, but they didn’t reply, so I walked in and had a chat with the managing director. I showed them the drawings and they got back to me with a quote for the job, and some small changes to fit their way of working. So for all this stuff I just paid. I took the money that I earned during my time working for Mats and spent that on the furniture – to get it made and shown. That collection did well, it was shown in the ‘DesignmonatGraz show Selected ‘16’, ‘May Design Fair’ in London and the armchair was exhibited in the ‘Conran Shops’ annual showcase of talent.

I was then invited to 'Den Nya Kartan' which was curated by Jenny Nordberg. That was really important, It was my first group show. Basically the idea was that you were teamed up with a craftsperson and you'd develop a project 50/50. So the designer did the design work free of charge, the craftsman builds it for nothing, and when we started selling the furniture we split the profits. The costs consisted of the craftsperson's wage including the material costs. That exhibition was published in 'Wallpaper'. The magazine took the pictures of 'The Champagne table' and showcased it in the article, it started getting more popular from there. It has been quite a sought after piece, we are now into double digits of tables sold.

Are magazines and blogs showing the piece self initiated or do you also send out press kits?

I hired some photographers to do a shoot with the collection at the Clarion Hotel's 'Sky Bar'. I used those photos in conjunction with the press release of 'Den Nya Kartan'. I showed it as part of the exhibition in Malmö, Stockholm, Milan as well as London. I also showed it at the 'Révélations' in Paris last May, which is in the Grand Palais. So this piece has been displayed quite a lot. We shared the costs for the exhibitions.

When you say you shared the costs, with whom did you share them?

I shared the costs with the craftsperson. 'The Champagne table' was made with 'M&E Ohlssons Klock Gjuteri AB'. You can see all my collaborations on my website. If I say collaboration, other than creatively, it means that we share costs in manufacturing and marketing.

Is that how you always work together with manufacturers?

Yes, that is the main way. I have in the past had brief encounters with producers, but I have been more focused on creating my own work, keeping it really niche and developing alongside the craftspeople. I also try to do more luxurious products, because I think the craftspeople that I am engaging haven't got a lot of time. They already have one type of job, which they are already doing, and I think to create something bespoke on the side it has to be a product with a heavy price tag. We can only do so many pieces of that object. Plus their crafts are rather

exclusive. Just the way that they are working, it doesn't make sense to do a mass-manufactured. It wouldn't work and it would cost too much.

What if a company would ask you to design a product that would be mass-produced on a lower price range? Would you take such a job?

Yes, sure.

So it's not that you only do high-end furniture?

No, not at all. I'll probably keep my brand separate to that. But if I was to work with another company – yes definitely. Especially when you are starting something up, I see a lot of other designers doing really cheap stuff and I think that this is often quite difficult. The cheaper the stuff is, the more you compete on price. To get something cheap you have to order over 1000 pieces. That's the reality of it. Manufacturers will start talking to you at 10 pieces or above. But if you want to order less than 10 pieces, manufacturers don't want to know you. Some subcontractors, people who are doing all the small individual parts, they might start to work with you at a number of 10 or 20 pieces. But before that, it's too hard. If you are doing small stuff, it is really difficult to get the price down. I think it's doable, it's just easier with the way we are working, to do bigger and more exclusive objects.

Do you live purely from your design work or do you have a side job?

At the beginning I had to work with Mats Theselius' company on the side, that was my support. I also worked with my father in law. Who was in marketing education, he helped me out for two years. I was working 50% with him. **I think you need that for the first time. There is no time limit – it just depends on when you can make enough money.** I still struggle. It's not easy. That is why I tend to not really hold stock. I do a lot of made to order furniture. So if I make a sale, I know the money is coming in. Which is why I also like the more expensive made to order way of working, because you are not going out of pocket. I kind of broke my rule this year and started to make some chairs. But prior to that I haven't done any stock and that worked really well.

If you sell a piece and its parts are produced from different manufacturers. Who does the assembling, the packaging and the shipping?

I try to get the craftsmen to do everything because they tend to have the space. For example, the 'Orotundo' table has a few bolts in there, which are done by another factory. But it is as simple as we order the bolts and we pay 50/50 of the production cost, prototyping and so on – we also share those costs. For example, when we first made the 'Orotundo' table we had to find glass in the middle of Sweden, which was made bespoke for us by a company that cuts glass and we shared those cost. We put all costs of manufacturing and selling into the costs of making the table. But that's all handled by the craftsperson. I think one person should handle it all if possible. Sometimes I do small things like 'The Champagne Table' has a stainless steel bucket for the ice, which I order, and the leather parts on that are made by my saddle maker, but other than that M&E Ohlssons takes care of everything else involved with production.

How do you get the craftsmen to work with you in this way? Do you have to convince them?

Well, the first one was because of the project 'Den Nya Kartan' - that was 'The Champagne Table' done with the bellmaker, I have done a lot with them. Working together is pretty easy for us. I also did a piece with a piano maker in Vienna. That project was funded through the 'Vienna Design Week' and their project "Passionswege". The third collaboration with 'Kullaro' was made through 'Den Nya Kartan' as well.

Can you tell us something about your current collaboration?

I'm doing a project with a plumassier (feather artisan). He is a professor who teaches how to work with feathers. He is based in Paris and works with 'Louis Vuitton', 'Jean Paul Gaultier' and other fashion companies. He does the most amazing feather work. We found each other when I showed my work at the Grand Palais in Paris. It was more a craft fair, but in the year that I exhibited, the topic was to blur the lines between craft and design. He was very open-minded towards design. He doesn't work with feathers like they do for the 'Rio de Janeiro Carnival' or like in

'Moulin Rouge'; he does more contemporary feather work. We are doing a project that we will show at the 2018 'Milan fair'. It's called 'Miart' (Milan contemporary art fair) and it is one week before the actual furniture fair. The area which we are to be shown is called Object, and our work will be presented by 'Matter of Stuff', a research based creative design gallery.

How do you know how to price your products?

This is always one of the hardest things to do. At first I was selling direct, which means that people would just contact me and buy it. I started to have contacts with agents. At first we had one agent in Hong Kong. She is buying lots of my things and selling them onwards in Asia. She has an agreement with me, she takes a percentage for her sales. I then copied that to other agents around the world. Then I started to get in touch with galleries. They require a larger markup. So when that happened, I had to reposition myself. I never advertised my prices because I always knew that this could happen. So I had to increase my prices. I still don't advertise my prices on my website. I have now come into a situation where I believe the prices have reached a ceiling, for now, but changing the prices was never a made up thing. They are based on a cost and on hours that the craftsperson works and we have a cost for the product and then we have to factor in how much the agents or gallery takes. I just started advertising on 'First Dibs' (www.1stdibs.com/) as well. It is an open price structure, where I actually do advertise my prices now. So you can see all the prices on 'First Dibs, for furniture and so on. It is an international luxury/high-end bespoke furniture website.

Would you give a product away for free to a stylist?

No, I don't think so. Maybe if I did something smaller and cheaper. Never one of the limited edition pieces.

Have you ever done it?

Never for free. When I lent it to 'Wallpaper', we split the shipment costs. I wouldn't ask for money, but I asked them to pay the transport, because often the things are quite heavy. I think styling is a good way of advertising. You make good contacts with that. Of course it reaches

a limit at one point, but right now I am really open to lending my products for styling. Obviously, I take them back after the photoshoot.

What are your goals for your business?

I would like to have shops in New York. I would like to have a shop in Monaco as well as the west coast of the USA, and I would like to have some sort of agency distribution as well. For the business it's more about focusing on building the sales pipeline and finding out how to access different people around the world. But it's not just about selling, it's also about impressing a culture; like in Australia there is no gallery that is focused on objects or functional art. They tend to be more focused on the fine arts and sculpture. Of course you have furniture showrooms but they will likely stock 'HAY' or 'MUUTO' – there is no in-between area. Basically, I just want to create more objects and work with more collaborations. You learn so much. Like this feather project: I am trying to communicate with this feather maker. You start communicating very abstractly. You can't draw feathers. It is getting very abstract, even if it's something physical, it becomes abstract. When you are communicating a piece that is in brass or marble it is much easier. I think it is going to be very exciting. There is a lot to do with craftspeople. In Sweden the crafts are very old and very traditional. But in France there is a lot of focus on craft ateliers. There is a lot to do down in France.

You are not only in Sweden but everywhere where you find something to work with?

The reason why I'm in Sweden, is because my wife is Swedish. That's why we have been based in Sweden. I like it in Malmö, it's a nice city. Also, I think I have a lot in common with the Swedes as well. It's a very easy place to be. I've just been in Sydney for three months, I just love it down here as well. I see myself as both Australian and Swedish. But with these things you have to think global. Hopefully at some point we can start to work global local (producing and selling in the same country) – for the moment it's fine to just make the things and send them somewhere, to keep it as simple as possible. I think the international thing is very important.

Could you say where your main market is right now?

I am selling the most in Japan and in the United States. These are my two main markets at the moment.

What would you say are important skills a designer should have to start his or her own studio?

I think the most important thing as a designer is to know yourself, to know what you are, to be the best at being you. But the most important thing to start off is to go and find some people who can teach you and where you can explore work. Don't just go and start your studio. It's very good to first have a look around, get that experience. You know, I have interns working for me and sometimes I just think "what are they getting?" but afterwards they all get a sense of what they won't do and what they will do. It forms you. I think it's good to do that for a couple of years if you can afford it. Then when you start the studio it depends on what you are doing. Some of my friends that are designers, are very good with communication. They're really into their branding and how they build their social media, translating their philosophies and concepts. It is important to understand your direction. Before you make a big step it is good to have one foot planted nice and firm, that would be your part-time job, then you take the next step, which would be your studio. And later you can take another step if, you're fortunate, which would be to work in your studio full-time. That takes patience.

You mentioned social media. How important is that for you?

I don't believe I have sold anything through 'Instagram.' I think it is important to be seen. I don't know if that is true, but people say that if you see something three times, they start to feel familiar with it. I have heard that some people are really able to sell off their (instagram) accounts. But I think that this is with cheaper stuff. I am not sure how strong social media is with the more luxurious products. It is important to show the essence of the brand – but I am actually pretty bad with that. It's something where I could develop.

What are the tasks of your interns?

I like to bring in people with different backgrounds. Because I am a young company I can bring in people who are doing different things to what I am doing. For example the first intern I had did fashion branding. We looked a lot at the brand: how does a Scandinavian luxurious brand look? What are we trying to say? We developed my website. We worked together for four months. Then I have two interns this year and our focus is going to be more on design and creating projects. They will basically be working on the communication with craftspeople to get to know the factories. They will learn how to understand quality – what's nice, what's not nice, what's good quality, what's bad quality. That is something that I want them to learn.

Do you have someone else who helps you with tasks like bookkeeping?

Yes. I employ an accountant. She does all my books. I do my own sales at the moment – I am a pretty good talker. I might employ someone who takes care of the business, someone who is actively reaching out by making phone calls and spread the information that we exist.

Do you take the product photos yourself?

I do a mixture. Professional photographers do most of my photographs. But I could also take pictures myself if needed.

Do you have a tip on how to network?

I think it has a lot to do with your character. **You have to be yourself, you have to be very sincere and open to attend things.** Show up for openings. Don't sit in the corner – **go and talk to people! Generally, the more people you talk to the easier it gets.** If you talk to people with a common interest you have things to chat about. I go around at fairs and always meet people – it's like meeting a group of friends.

Thank you!



Michael Lanz / designaffairs

Michael Lanz studied product design at the University of Wuppertal. After graduating he started to work as an Industrial Designer in the design department of Siemens AG in Munich. His focus was on medical technology, professional equipment and communication devices. In 1997 the design department became an independent company called designaffairs GmbH. In 2001 Michael Lanz became key account manager, with responsibility in the area of cordless products. He guided a team of five designers. In 2005 he became head of the Color & Material Design Team and the Color & Material Lab. Since 2007 he is one of four owners and managing directors of designaffairs GmbH. In addition he became head of the Institute Product & Transportation Design as well as the BA and MA Program Leader at FH JOANNEUM in Graz, Austria, in April 2014. designaffairs started with offices in Munich and Erlangen with about 30 employees in 2007. Today they have an additional office in Shanghai and recently opened one in Portland, Oregon. Today designaffairs has around 110 employees.



photo: <https://www.designaffairs.com>

It was very interesting for us to incorporate an interview with Michael Lanz into our project. Since he is one of the co-owners of a relatively large design company, we were sure that he could give us insights that we did not yet get in any of our other interviews. He has many years of working experience in the design field, not only from working at Siemens and designaffairs but also from teaching design students. During a telephone conference, that we had arranged in March 2018, he told us a bit more about his background and his view on design today. Over the years his tasks shifted from designing to more management based matters. He is responsible for everything that is related to PR, communication and marketing. For us it seems to be a rather uncommon way to become a manager if you start with a design education. When we asked him how he learned how to manage handling all these kinds of tasks, he answered that everybody is growing with their tasks. He also took additional management seminars. He sees it as a mix of good training and learning-by-doing. One thing must be clear to anyone who wants to work in a management position: Designing will no longer be part of your daily work life. This was one reason for Michael to start the professorship at FH Joanneum in Graz: "I wanted to get a bit closer to design again." The professorship includes weekly commutes to Austria and less time for his tasks in the office in Munich. Three days in Graz and two days in Munich don't allow much space for anything else. That is the reason why he recently will leave the teaching position after four years of teaching. During our conversation we talked about many interesting topics. You will find some of his answers here: *

How do you see design today? Did it change over the years of your career?

Yes, the classic industrial design profession is changing. Software plays a crucial role in addition to the hardware. designaffairs tries to work with holistic systems that examine and satisfy users' needs (human centered design). We are often doing workshops with clients. The workshops are based on "participative design" and co-creation. Usually, these workshops last two days and take place with the customers and / or the users. It's about understanding how a product is used to improve its application.

Can you give us an example?

In hospitals, nurses and caregivers are the people who use technical devices. The workshops are not centered around the product but around the environment. The team tries to filter out how to ease the handling of the product or how to reduce a patient's fear of technology by taking a closer look on how nurses and caregivers handle the product. How can a core tomography tube be visually designed so that the patient loses or reduces his or her fears? I always tell my students: a product is just a crutch. Users are interested in the function. Design is about satisfying needs. A good example is the chair, the real issue is not sitting on the chair, but the question is: how can the product satisfy your needs?

What else do you teach your students?

The research phase is getting more and more important today. The more you know about a topic, the better a result can be. Designers should not think in solutions but in added value and requirements. Design is always about meaning! That is a designer's dilemma, it is to weigh whether and how much, for example, a product is wasting resources and whether that waste is justified. Each product has an impact on the next generations, to whom we have a big responsibility. Ethics and morality play a major role in design. **We need a clear mind to decide what makes sense and what does not make sense. That also means that we have to say "no" to some potential clients or employers.**

What does designaffairs need from new employees/designers?

First of all, what we can offer to young people is, in addition to a fair payment, a certain work-life-balance and a good working atmosphere. We try to give our employees meaningful tasks with which they can make a difference. That seems to become more important today. Conversely, **we expect our employees to be curious, motivated, and that they have a certain balance between self-esteem and humbleness. Also to be open, tolerant, and to be able to communicate ideas is very important.** People who bring a good mix of talents usually fit in with the company. **Today, employees need to work a lot more interdisciplinary than before.** If one only wants to work with pure product design he or she will have a hard time.

How do you see the development and the role of design today?

With Industrial design we tend to produce large numbers of producible designs. Design becomes more and more a fashion phenomenon. The problem is that this absolutely contradicts with the idea of sustainability. **We can't really afford to not be sustainable today!** The duty of a designer lies in the opposite direction: to restrict consumption, to use resources sustainably and to encourage consumers to rethink, not to buy. However, this does not correspond to what the industry is aiming for. Money is earned through consumption.

What could be a solution for that?

A possible way for example is BMW "Drive now". The car manufacturer sells kilometers instead of cars. Thus, a service that the product offers is sold rather than the product itself. This opens up new demands on the product such as longevity and consumption costs need to be optimized. Only if the service can be used, money can be earned. It can be observed that the requirements are changing and sustainable consumption is favored. Other adapted or new products are coming onto the market. **The question is: how can the interest of industry and designers be brought together? How can the relationship between consumer and product be changed?** A model can only be successful if all parties are satisfied - which also means they are making money off of it.

What do you think about the trend when designers become producers?

Small production is not a wrong path in itself. You have to start small. Good things eventually become big on their own. It makes sense to adapt the production process so that they are scalable. You start small, but keep an eye out for a bigger production. If you want to achieve bigger things, you should set bigger standards right from the start. For example, one can start producing regionally and later transfer the functioning business to other regions. It can be said that regional production is per se more sustainable and that is good. Many designers make a mistake here: **to produce regionally also means to sell regionally and / or to find producers in other regions to then sell there.** In the end, everyone has to be satisfied, the user, the manufacturer and the designer.

Do you have any advice for young designers?

Yes: Stay curious!

Stay up to date. Observe and use new technologies!

Stay critical!

Stay true to yourself!

Set yourself limits, but remember that some borders are fixed and others should remain flexible.

Thank you!

** This interview was held in German. All answers are translated from memory.*

Date: 06.03.2018

Moritz Putzier

Born in 1986 in Munich, Moritz Putzier studied Design at the University of the Arts Bremen. In 2004 he founded his own studio immediately after graduation. Today he works in his studio space in Cologne where he works on self-initiated as well as on client projects.



Can you tell us a bit about yourself and your background? Where did you study and how do you work today?

I graduated in summer 2014 in Bremen. The program was called Integrated Design. That was an interdisciplinary course, which means that I did not only product design but also a bit of fashion design and things like that. In the end, I've specialized in classic product design. In the eighth semester I was in London for nine months and did an internship with Mathias Hahn. Before I started to study, I did an internship with Ingo Maurer.

What do you mean by classic product design?

Classic product design was the design of technical devices as well as problem and performance-oriented design during my studies. This went from sports equipment to furniture to kitchen knives. At that time, I still thought that classic product design would mean to design a pen and things like that. As I said, my studies were very broad, but most of the time I concentrated on products.

In comparison to product design, how do you define industrial design?

Maybe the term "classic product design" is misleading. For me it makes no difference. I do not care if I do product design or industrial design. The definitions are very vague. Perhaps one might be more interested in industrial production methods and focused on current technologies and developments in the industry. This might be their inspiration to work with industrial methods.

How did you continue after your diploma?

To be honest, before I finished my diploma, I never really thought about what I wanted to do afterwards. I always had that feeling that it would be great to do something on my own, but something else could have happened as well. When I graduated suddenly the question of what I wanted to do popped up. By chance, one of my former fellow students asked me if I wanted to design the interior of a new theater café in Bremen. Since I did not really know what else I wanted to do, I said yes. It was a pretty big project and ran for half a year. The project went from zero to a hundred from one day to another. It was all about space,

furniture, light and about what was happening inside the café. I had to deal with a lot of things I had no clue about safety regulations or the question of who would produce the items. Parallel to this project, I submitted my diploma thesis to competitions and was quite successful. Many exhibitions followed. I exhibited at the Biennale in Belgium, then at the imm in Cologne. Suddenly everything had developed in such a way, that it felt right to take the chance and be self-employed.

How did you realize being self-employed from the financial side?

I earned money with the theater project, otherwise I probably would not have done that. Regardless of what and for whom you do something you have to eventually see that you get paid for the work you do. Everybody has to earn something. That kept me afloat for the first few months. Back then I did not know how I would continue. I got some money from the fair in Cologne. If I'm honest, I was living from hand-to-mouth. But it was a happy time. Through the fair, I got a great job with a wood manufacturer. I contacted the manufacturer after the show. For them (they are not from the design industry) it seemed to be normal to pay me when I was designing something for them. That job went until the summer of 2015. Everything was very low-budget but it worked. I wasn't at a level where I could have done big investments, but I could live on it.

Did you also actively look for projects or did companies always contact you?

Both. I am working like this since three years now. The fact that I was asked for a project right at the beginning and that it actually worked out was a good situation for me. But I am not sitting here in Cologne waiting until someone calls me. I have to contact the people and annoy them. My diploma thesis, the cooking table, got quite a bit of press. In retrospect, I would say that it was important to have a good project to start with. This project was, so to speak, my capital. It was received well by the press. That gave me tailwind to even have the opportunity to start the self-employment. **After all, the design business is a mix of having the right contacts and making good designs.** Without the right network and without showing what you do, you can still design many good things but it probably would not work out.

Apart from exhibiting at fairs, how do you expand your network? Do you specifically target people?

At the beginning I contacted contacts that I had collected at trade fairs, visited them at fairs and tried to keep the contacts warm. 2017 I was one of the finalists at the German Design Award. I did not win, but during the exhibition and the award ceremony you can sit together with people who might be important contacts later on. This has also resulted in something for me. Just from the fact that you met and got to know each other at such an event and then stayed in contact. They also wanted to do something together. I already gained a lot from it!

Does that matter to others as much as it matters to you?

I think there are two types: Either I design something and send my designs to brands without ever having seen them. However, I know the company somehow and have the contact. I could send my design and hope that someone answers my mail. There is a chance that a project will come out of this procedure. But of course companies are getting flooded with designs in our times. The other option is that if I get to know someone personally, you may well understand each other on the human level, and that this results in a cooperation.

Which of these two ways are you going?

I go both ways and try different things. **But I stopped to simply send out drafts. It is not purposeful but rather frustrating and takes the fun of designing.** I only send designs to contacts that I met personally and where someone could still remember me.

What is your daily work routine in your studio? Do you have a side job?

I've been sharing a studio with Peter Vording for a few months now. We have a small workshop. I do not have a part-time job, but I sometimes have some freelance jobs, such as drawing plans or doing CAD jobs, which are pure money jobs. That means these are tasks in which I don't design myself but only work things off. About a year ago, I started to do more and more interior projects, which means no more pure product design. Since then I am working on a large interior project which will be completed in October. Parallel, I started a second project. At the

moment, I am able to earn my living. These projects are a bit different than if I would do a product design job and are therefore calculated in a different way.

How do you calculate and what is the difference?

I've got very different experiences, but often a product works in such a way that either the design performance is paid in advance and you earn money on the design or you get paid with licenses, so you don't earn money right away. With development work for the company it takes two years until you earn anything. That is also the reason why the start of self-employment can be so difficult. But if I design an interior, in this case that of a public building, the client is the city or an institution. Depending on the calculation model, your own design performance will be remunerated. Be it a room concept or the research, I can calculate the working hours and my hourly rate. The offer is then either accepted or discussed. This area is often billed as a percentage of the total budget according to the fee schedule for architects.

How do you calculate your hourly or daily rate? How did that change compared to the beginning?

At the beginning I asked other people what they would take as an hourly fee. Of course, you try to rise rather than lower the prices. For me, it's not like I have a fixed hourly rate but rather see it as a guideline. Apart from paying at least an hourly most clients want a complete package or a percentage calculation.

Do you have time to design new products next to your interior projects?

It works. However, I have to make time for it. Frankly spoken, this annoys me with self-employment. If you do everything yourself, especially with interior design, a lot of time goes into organizing and implementing the projects. **There's often a lack of time for product design work, but I keep doing it.**

What's the goal for your studio? Do you want to keep working alone or can you imagine employing someone?

The goal is definitely that someday I will not do every single move on my own. At the moment I think it would be more work to get someone employed - apart from the fact that I could not afford it. It is good that we share the studio space, so you can exchange thoughts. Working alone is not good in my opinion. To reflect on your own work it is helpful to talk to others about it. My goal isn't to keep things as they are now. I honestly don't know how long I could work the way I am at the moment. Not because I do not enjoy it, but because a lot of time and energy goes into my work. This is not a model I would pursue for the next ten years.

Do you get help from outside for certain tasks?

I have a tax advisor. In the first year I did it myself, sat there forever and did everything wrong. I have a photographer, too. A former fellow student from Bremen.

The projects that we can see on your website have been partially licensed by companies. Were these projects self-initiated or were they contract work?

One project, the table for the company Pollmeier, was requested. This was commissioned work where I followed a briefing. The other projects are self-initiated. Until now I have been specifically asked if I would like to do a project four times. First for that table and also for one of the current interior projects, and two other projects that I am still working on. I designed everything else and then tried to get in touch with contacts.

How do you use social media platforms, magazines and blogs?

If I have something new or on exhibition, I have a newsletter that I send to all my contacts, including press contacts. Social media is a weird thing. I probably use it too little. For a long time I did not want to do that. On the one hand, I see that it is a good option, but especially with Instagram, many things can or may not be real and produce a false effect on the outside. In terms of advertising, it's probably not bad at all. I also know people who have created projects as a result. So I do not want to condemn it. I use it, but I think I could definitely do better.

When it comes to making prototypes, how do you make them? Are you working with industrial partners?

I'm doing something with glass, I can not do that myself. Over contacts I got to know a glassworker to which I send my design. We do some things here as well. So it's a mix. When I was still in Bremen I could still use the workshops of the University. **After graduation, you first realize that all that costs money and you cannot quickly build something.** It suddenly can get very expensive. It is important to get out of the University environment, which is rather out of touch with reality. After graduating I first had to find new ways how to work.

Do you think it would have been easier working as an employed designer?

I do not know what I would recommend. I did not work in a job before I started my own business. It depends on the circumstances. Sometimes everything fits and you have good opportunities to start your own business. If I would not have gotten all the oportunities I had in the beginning, I would not have received the support of various junior scholarships. If I were to start my own business now, I would not be sure if that would work at all.

In your opinion, what is the most important skill set that a designer should bring to self-employment?

It is very important to be able to talk to people, convince them and be enthusiastic about your own work. I notice that again and again. Sometimes you wouldn't think that, because the focus is actually somewhere else.

Where?

The focus should actually be on the creative personality and above all on the quality of the work. But the focus is not always there. For example, someone who does not feel like going to a fair and who finds it difficult to address people has a much harder time working as a freelance designer. You may also be able to walk your way with reticency, but most of the time it does not work.

Is there something that was not part of your education, but you feel it is important in retrospect?

Yes, a lot. For example, I had no idea how to negotiate, how to properly sell my work, how to calculate design performance, and so on. However, you will not be trained to become self-employed during your studies. At least not at the University where I studied. For me, something was missing, but on the other hand, I do not know how it would be possible to teach these things in the University bubble.

Could you imagine working in a salaried employment after being self-employed for a few years?

If I had to, yes. But I do not have to at the moment.

What is your opinion about the model of the designer as a producer?

I tried that. It was medium successful. We had the Cluster Dots, a wall mount thing. I did that together with a colleague. We thought we would try this with a small, less complex product, with which we can earn more. I would not say that it did not work. We sold the product thoroughly. But there is a lot of effort involved and you have to consciously opt for this path. For me that was not an exclusive option; to do that half hearted - well. Despite the fact that it is a less complex product, one should not underestimate the individual steps of the production chain. I can understand the idea that you make something yourself instead of getting 2% royalties. If you do it skillfully, invest a lot of time and money, especially in advertising and social media to sell it, you can definitely earn more this way.

Have you ever had a project request that you have declined? What would be a reason for you to refuse a request?

Yes, I have already done that. When I'm asked to do something without getting paid. I absolutely do not see the point in doing that. If I do something for myself and have a company in my head where I see the product, and then they implement the product, I would be happy and they do not have to pay for my preliminary work. But if things go the other way around, someone asks me to design something and pay me only if the design suits, that's not right. Requesting a draft and not being

willing to pay is like eating in a restaurant and only paying when the food tastes good. The understanding of design performance has been partially lost. **Is often the fault of the designers themselves. The more designers work for free, the more others assume there is no need to pay.**

Could you imagine that within Germany there is an agreement among designers who set a minimum hourly rate for trained designers or students and you have to stick to it?

Would be nice, but I think it will never happen. One can only make recommendations, who holds to it is another question. That's a thing. Assuming I have a project request with a payment of only 40 Euro per hour, then I know that this is too little, but the alternative is not to do it and to earn nothing. To refuse that you have to be in a comfortable situation. You have to decide whether this can be a way forward or not. I quarrel with this often. If you want to live from your job, sometimes you accept circumstances that are not right. The option would be to not accept such a thing and have a side job. That would mean that I would lose time and projects to develop myself further. In my opinion there is a difference in working for no money or 40 euros per hour.

We had a lecturer at the University who told us exactly what we should earn. For me it has never gone the way she told us until today. I am very critical about the theoretical construct of self-employment, such as having a livelihood for three months at a time. I hardly know anyone who runs accordingly. That can be very daunting. I'm still in the beginning and, though it looks good, I cannot say that my year is safe. I know what it means when jobs break away. Still, when I hear how poorly others earn in a employment, I think I'd rather do my own thing.

Do you know what your former fellow students are doing now?

Many are no longer in the field of design. It is scary but I would say that 70% are not satisfied with what came after graduation. I think that's because there are too many designers. It has become incredibly difficult to be a designer because there are so many. At first you have to manage to find your own position and try to create your own future. I do not

Thank you!

This interview was held in German. All answers are translated.

want to be negative. It's a great job that is fun! But it is difficult.

Date: 07.03.2018

Knut and Marianne Hagberg / IKEA

Knut and Marianne Hagberg are brother and sister who studied Interior Design before they started working at IKEA in 1979. Since then they have been co-responsible for the development of the design idiom of IKEA products. Over the past four decades, Knut and Marianne have launched more than 1500 products.



We would like to get a feeling about how you work and how you get to the point you are at now. Can you tell us a bit about you?

KH: We studied five years to become Architects in Copenhagen. That was 1973 – 1978. We graduated together. After that we run our own business for half a year or so.

What kind of business was that?

KH: We did interior designs. We are both furniture designers and interior architects. These are two good skills. We choose that because if you are a designer, it's good if you can make the room settings as well. Of course, the furniture should be in the context of a house or a restaurant. After our education we worked a lot with public things like restaurants and so on but after a while we had to come closer to a company. Then I was advertising in a newspaper and IKEA was looking for staff – it was for decoration of the stores – that was in Älmhult. After six month we quit our own business and moved to Älmhult; that was Marianne, my wife and me. We had a flat here. After six month we noticed that the job wasn't our cup of tea and that we would have to do something else. So we said, that we would quit and go back to Lund or Malmö. And then Ingvar Kamprad's closest friend Gillis Lundgren, who was head of design, asked us if we would have lunch with him. He had heard that we were about to quit and asked us if we would be interested to work as designers. So we said: "yes, why not", because we were educated in design as well. So we said, we give it three years and then basta. After 40 years still it is so much fun!

MH: There is always so much happening: new materials, new categories. But regarding our education in Copenhagen, it was quite different than it is today. All our teachers were half teaching and half working as professional architects.

KH: The big names in Copenhagen were teaching. They are still some of the best designers. So we got a very practical education. Tough and practical – for five years.

MH: For example, in the end of each year, we had 12 hours examinations. You went into the room, you did not know what they would give you. They would ask you to do a restaurant, for example, and you should suggest the colors, furniture, and prices without having anything

prepared. All this within 12 hours.

KH: There was a guard behind you if you had to go to the toilet. He was following you and waiting for you outside. It changed a lot to today but it was a very good school.

MH: Then when they examined you, people from the ministry would join.

KH: There have been 15 different subjects to be examined in. It could have been design, construction, style history or any other skills we learned. You never knew what they would ask, so you had to read very much.

MH: You always had to keep yourself updated about prices, companies and so on.

You are working together since your education? Why?

KH: We are brother and sister

What are the benefits?

KH: We are male and female and we know each other quite well. We have a very high level when we have discussions.

MH: Its also good because we sometimes don't have the same energy in a project. So each of us could say: I slip out for a while – you can take it.

KH: We always work together. We don't draw on the same table but we discuss every project.

MH: We do the drawings by hand still.

KH: We do this kind of drawing (he shows a full scale technical drawing) by hand and on big paper sheets. We always do it like that.

MH: It is a handcraft for us.

KH: It is the brain, the eye and the hand and the paper.

MH: We start with a big white paper when we make our designs. We are not limited to the size of our sketches. If we use a computer it always has the same size on the screen

KH: You can't cheat when you make a drawing like that. But when you make a picture you can cheat with the lightning, you can twist it around to see the best position. But here, when we are drawing we have one, two, three positions so we have to be correct – otherwise you can't make the drawing. We do it like this: we do 1:10 and 1:1 drawings. If

we draw a chair, we show the top, the legs, the thickness and so on. For some objects we don't have to draw 1:1 – 1:10 is often enough.

MH: One could do a drawing by hand or by computer. The only thing that is important is the physical prototype, so that you can see the proportions. Does it fit me, does it fit into the room?

Do you also build the model?

KH: We build it together with the people in the patternshop. We go into the patternshop every day, two or three times. It is like a huge industry – you will see it later. It is huge and has many machines. They have everything in it. You will be amazed when you see it.

MH: It's the best place here.

KH: We are very close to different persons there. We have different departments for different materials, and they are very skilled. There are also a lot of printers; big, huge ones. So you can even print a chair if you want to. Sometimes you have to split it into four pieces. You will have it one day later and you only have to glue the pieces together.

How do you work on your designs?

MH: Also regarding our education we had no conception. We never worked like that. I think today that is much more needed. **Many things are purely done digital today but other companies also want to have a physical prototype that they can produce in their factory.**

KH: Normally we do it like this: we got 2.2 kg plastic to make very cheap furniture for children out of that. We made some drawing in scale 1:5 and 1:1 to see if our idea was working. When working as a designer at IKEA the transportation is very important and it is for you as well. Everything should go on a palette and it should be in a container. If it is lipstick or furniture – everything needs to be transported. Flatpaks keep the cost down. IKEA is a big company so you have to take everything into consideration. Everything will be tested like hell. It's good because then it is save furniture. There is a lot to take into consideration if you make furniture. The design has to be as easy as possible, so that the customer can assemble them themselves.

MH: If you don't understand how it works, who should understand it? Normally we say that we have the easiest work in the world because we

are consumers ourselves.

How do you start a project? Do you have an idea and you start it or do you get a project assigned?

MH: It's both.

KH: It could be a need in the range like a new sofa or furniture line.

MH: Or a new material. It could be anything.

Where do you get your inspiration from?

KH: Everyday life.

MH: Everyday life.

How many products/designs did you do that went into production?

KH: More than 1500. We got a lot of design awards also. Its not only at IKEA that our designs are liked, but also outside. That is good because it is good to hear it from another side as well. But the best is to get good feedback from customers.

MH: That is what is most important.

If you would give an advice to students or young designers, what would that be?

MH: **Keep it simple.**

KH: Exactly, keep it simple.

MH: Don't try to complicate things because it will never be good. Keep it as simple as possible.

Regarding the jobs: would you tell them that it's better to be employed or to work on their own?

KH: We are not the right ones to say that. Since we are employed, we would say choose that, but if we would sit on the other side we would probably say that's the better side.

MH: We work here too long to answer that properly.

Could you imagine to work somewhere else?

KH: No. We got a lot of comparison from other big companies in Europe but ...

MH: We are so much in love with the idea to make life better for so many people - that is so fantastic!

KH: That is our key of working. I mean when we are meeting some, new friends. We always look around. If we find something that we have designed, we call that house a "Hagberge". We haven't been in any house, still, which didn't have a piece from us. And if they don't have furniture, they have the snake for sure (he shows a shoehorn "Omsorg"). For sure, you can find it everywhere.

(They show a plastic stool) This was a new technique that you join two plastic materials together. It was quite new and used for screwdrivers and so on. You know, it is soft plastic and hard plastic in combination and then we said we have to work with that - furniture-wise. Small furniture. So we did that one. Back then it cost 19 SEK, 20 years ago and today it still costs 19 SEK. And it still sells. It's the same with the shoehorn.

Do you think in how things get produced?

MH: Of course! Always.

So you also keep track on new production techniques?

MH: **We always begin from the back. We don't make a design for the design or the shape.**

Do you also go and visit production sites?

MH: Always, yes.

KH: **We visit different suppliers in Asia, Europe or wherever. It's the best good designers have.** We are working so long now but we are still learning. It is fantastic.

MH: **Working with our supplieres is like having a bank of knowledge.**

It is so sad that during education you almost don't get in touch with producers.

KH: We had the same back in Denmark. We had a lack of that. Also, we didn't know how to run a company, the economic situation - same as it is for you. We couldn't meet suppliers, we were sitting in school making models; same as you do.

It feels so far away from reality.

MH: I think there should be tutoring during education. You should spend half a year in a factory. School is a bubble. It is so strange that this hasn't changed. It has been 45 years since we started the education.

What do you think is an important skill set to have as a designer?

MK: Open-minded

KH: To be Open-minded and curious and to look around in your daily life. And to be interested in new materials.

MH: You can always adapt knowledge from one material to another.

Do you have a favorite material to work with?

KH: Wood, plastic and metal. And glass.

MH: We are not working with textiles.

KH: We make carpets.

MH: But we don't work with running meters because we are not educated in the quality of that.

How many employees are there at IKEA?

KH: 150.000

On how many projects do you work at a time?

KH: 10 – 15, it depends. It could be like that: We could start a new product tomorrow and it takes time. It is a long process until it comes to the store. It could be two – three years. Some of our projects are in the middle of it, some are at the beginning, some are in the end. We don't start to work on 15 projects at a time.

Thank you!

Date: 07.03.2018

Henrik Preutz / IKEA

The Swedish designer Henrik Preutz works as a Designer for IKEA since almost 15 years. He started his career as a trainee during his studies at HDK Gothenburg. Straight after graduation in 2003 he got the offer to work as a Designer for the company. Since then the Senior Designer is creating products for the everyday life at home in close relation with his colleagues as well as producers.



Can you tell us something about your work as a designer for IKEA?

Working as a designer for IKEA is something totally different than being your own designer. Here at IKEA we have so much money and power. If we go out to a supplier they have 50 people waiting in line to help us, just to get the IKEA project. It's like a totally different world from being your own designer. I have only worked for IKEA that is why I don't know anything else. I only know this world.

When did you graduate?

I graduated in 2003 and then I ended up at IKEA straight after school. I have never experienced anything else.

How did you get the job at IKEA?

We have three trainee spots. Three spots during the autumn and three during spring, each for five months. Back in 2003 I was one of these trainees here at the IKEA Design Department. During these five months there were some openings at the Design Department so they asked me if I wanted to stay. So I had a really simple transaction from being a student into the profession.

Was it ever an option for you to work as a freelancer or start your own studio?

No, not really. If you get a full employment at IKEA I don't think you leave this. It's like a dream job. But I was actually not aiming for it when I came here as a trainee. It was more a lot of luck that there were two open jobs and I managed to get one of those.

What were you aiming for instead?

Actually I first had five months of trainee during the autumn of my last year at HDK in Gothenburg. They already asked me if I wanted a job before I did my master thesis. So I already had my job set before I even graduated. I did my thesis then for IKEA to already work here and use the workshops for the prototypes. That made it very simple.

What is your job title and how does that job look like?

Senior Designer. I've been working here for almost 15 years now. Mostly

I do some quick hand sketches and then I work with SolidWorks to do 3D modeling. In some cases we do prototypes here at the pattern shop. And sometimes we go straight to the factory. Either I send my drawings down here to the pattern workshop or I send them to the factory. Then I get feedback and do changes.

Do you also directly go to production sides?

Yes, often. Sometimes when we need to understand the production 100 percent, to do a really good design that is easy for mass production. But working here for 15 years, I know most of the production techniques. It's more that I go there to look at samples and get feedback from the suppliers. It could be that they want to change something to produce it in a better way. You have to give and take. **Being an IKEA designer you have to be very open to adapt design to production.**

What skills do you need for your job as a designer that you might not have learned during your education?

If you work with projects at school you don't have to take into consideration how to pack products in a good way. If you come to IKEA it is question number one how pallets will be filled in a good way. We have to choose the angle of a flowerpot so that we can stack as many as possible. You don't just have to find a nice looking angle you find pretty, you have to find something that is stackable. So you have to be very open to changes and production and transportation.

How does it look like to get a project started at IKEA?

We have product developers. They are in charge of certain areas. For example we have one person taking care of office chairs. It is never that we just do new products to put in the stores. We don't have any space for that in the IKEA stores. We take out one office chair to bring in a new one. Let's say they take out the medium price modern style office chair. Then we have to replace it with a new one that sells better. I always get a brief that tells me exactly what the product is. For example it should be a medium priced office chair in a modern style and it will probably be produced in this factory and there are some kinds of prerequisites to do this chair. It's a pretty tight frame to do IKEA projects. You have

to work in this tight frame but try to do new things, and I think that is the fun part.

Is there something you miss being an employed designer?

Not really. You can work with so many different things in a company like IKEA. I can work with soft toys or I can work with sofas and so on. And if I feel like working with soft toys I just contact the product developers working with soft toys and tell them that I have some energy to do some soft toys and ask if they have a project for me. I can shape what I want to work with in the next years.

Do you have further goals you want to reach within your professional life?

You know, there are so many different projects I can work with at IKEA. So I don't have any real goals. Just to produce nice things.

How would you define good design?

I think it's something that can have a very good price so it can reach a lot of people but still is something that is nice and basic so that it will last for a long time. People shouldn't get bored of it. Also the finishing and material should last for a long time. I think if you manage to do that you can have a really good product.

Products produced from IKEA have a certain price range. Is it difficult to stay within that price range when designing a product?

Yes, it is very hard. I know the price, how much material I can use, what kind of material I can use and how many pieces should fit on a palette from the beginning on. Working with this tight frame makes it interesting. If you could do whatever you want I don't really see the challenge. Doing a nice looking chair in gold – then you can be an artist or sculptor. If you don't have to care about the price and don't take any frames into consideration.

What skill set do you think a designer should bring?

An important thing is to be open to new ideas and listen to other people that you work with, for example technicians and the people at a factory. You really have to be open and take in information and try

to understand things to be able to create a good product that is good in production. It's not enough that something is beautiful; it has to be possible to be produced in a good way that is sustainable and easy.

If it comes to user tests, is that something you are in charge of or would that be someone else?

Depending on what kind of product it is, it can happen. At the moment I am working with some children wall lamps. I actually brought the prototypes to a kindergarten and the children can pick which one are their favorites.

How many projects do you work on?

It's about 10-15 on-going projects. About five of them are in a sketch phase, five of them are waiting for prototypes or waiting for feedback from the supplier and five of them are even further.

How can we imagine a working day of you? Do you have some kind of routine?

It can be quite different. But if I am working on my projects I spend a lot of time in front of the computer doing 3D renderings, running down to the pattern shop. There is a lot of time that I'm just sitting down trying to figure out new designs. And then it's a lot of meetings of course. I have to show it to the product developer and we have to have a dialogue and work together to create a good new product. There are as well a lot of meetings with technicians and packaging technicians. Because if I have my new design I have to understand how we should fit it into a box. It's definitely not a one-man show. You have to work together with about ten people in the early stage of a project and it's even more people coming in at a later stage. But I also have a lot of visitors like journalists, groups of people from within IKEA that are coming from somewhere else and want to understand how we work here. So it's also a lot of presentations.

What's your favorite step within the design process?

My favorite part is the second where you solve your problem. It's the early process that's the nicest part.

If you would give advice to a young designer, who is about to graduate, what would that be?

I think it definitely is important to get in contact with companies to not just sit by yourself. You have to dare to talk to people, find the contacts and try to get into work with them. That's the most difficult part as well. An of course the first years are the most difficult ones as well. You have to have some luck and find a company that believes in you.

How did your perception of design change after you left school?

The most important learning was that when you are in school you think that you have to know and do everything yourself. But when you get out into working life there are other people that are experts on bending metal tubes. You work together with other people. You can't do everything by yourself. I think it's important to try to get these connections with people that help you.

Are these connections in house at IKEA?

Yes, here it's not a problem. I just walk 100 meters and find all these people that know everything about any kind of material. We have a big advantage here. If you are a student or just graduated it's obviously trickier.

Working on so many projects as you do, needs a lot of inspiration, where do you get that?

We travel a lot, visit a lot of factories and learn new things. For me as a designer my brain is always on record mode. I get inspiration from everything.

So you don't see the design job as a nine to five job?

I try to focus on work during working hours but then of course I can't help myself being inspired by things during the weekend. That's the life of a designer, you are always curious about things.

Where are the factories that you are traveling to?

All over Europe and in Asia, in China.

If you travel to a factory, how many days do you spend there?

Usually we sent sketches to the supplier. When we get there they have some mock-ups and input about changes. Then we probably spend a full day working with the people there. That is very important. The people there work everyday with these kinds of things and have so much knowledge that I could never learn by myself. It is very important to get their help to do a really good project.

Would you consider yourself as an “all-round-talent” or are you a “specialist”?

If it comes to material I am more into plastic, glass and metal, rather than wood. I don't do so much furniture; I do some but not as much, since I have an Industrial Design background.

Do you keep track of how many products you have designed went into production?

I think I have around 500 in the store. But I think we do around 5000 new products every year. Sometimes it's really hard to understand that what you do here ends up in stores all over the world.

If you work on a project together with other designers, how do you split tasks?

Sometimes we are paired up with two people, sometimes with three or four. Usually that's the case with bigger projects, so a product family or series. It's not that four people draw just one product. Usually we work in pairs and have brainstorm session together and sketch a bit before we split up. It depends on the project and the individual designers. It's their decision.

Do you also have single projects?

For most of them I am the only designer, but then I work together with the product developer, the technician, and the packaging technician. It's always teamwork! You always have to be open to understand the others.

Did you ever struggle with the flat packaging of a product?

Once I did a floor lamp and I packed it in such a small package that the customer couldn't believe that this floor lamp is in this box. So it didn't sell. And if you work with flat metal sheets and pack them all together

on a pallet it gets too heavy to be lifted. Sometimes doing too much flat packaging messes it up in the end because it's too complicated for the customer to assemble or it is just too heavy. You have to find the right balance. Of course you can make a table fit into a very small box, but the customer has to screw hundreds of screws in and it won't be too stable. So that's not the right balance. We want to have fewer screws, easy assembly and a small package. That means you have to be really clever.

Thank you!

Date: 09.03.2018

Simon Legald / Normann Copenhagen

Simon Legald studied furniture design at The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts in Copenhagen. During his studies he completed an internship during at Normann Copenhagen and was hired by the company right after finishing his studies in 2012. Simon is head of design and significantly responsible for the design language of the company.



text: <https://www.normann-copenhagen.com>
photo: <http://trendvisions.lancia.it/en/article/simon-legald-less-is-more/simplicity>

Could you tell us a bit about your background?

I studied at the Danish Design School in Copenhagen, where I did the Bachelor and Master in Furniture Design. Then I did three different internships: one at “Fritz Hansen”, one at a company called “Good Morning Technology”. At “Fritz Hansen” I did a lot of modeling work for sofas and so on and at “Good Morning Technology” my focus was more on concepts and public furniture. I also did an internship at “Normann Copenhagen”. After that internship I kind of just stayed and it turned into a job.

Where the internships during your studies or after you graduated?

They were during my school. Usually, I think you can only do one internship during school, but I tried to cheat my way into more.

What was your motivation to do that?

I think the school is not teaching you anything about how life is as an designer. You don't learn which kind of tools and which knowledge you actually need in order to be able to get a job. So, I thought the relevance of being an intern was a lot more interesting than just sitting in school and do drawings of whatever I wanted to draw. I used it to get the experience that I needed but also to get a bit more insight into the information's that were necessary to learn. For me the best part of school were the internships.

Since when are you at “Normann Copenhagen”?

I started the internship 2011. After that I stayed. Almost six and a half years.

What are your daily tasks at your job?

Everything. It really depends on the day. Anything from answering emails to visiting manufacturers, to drawing up models in CAD to helping out other people to do what they need to do. My function is Head of Design.

If you don't know a manufacturer yet, how do you get in touch and how do you start the conversation?

It depends on the product. If we have a new product, we would take the product to the manufacturer in a quite early stage so that we can get their input on how they would produce it. Of course, as a designer you have many ideas of how it should be but the production people produce everyday. They have a better knowledge of how to save time or how to optimize some steps that are not important for the design. A tiny change of how you construct the design can make a big difference for the final price. **We use them a lot to have a dialog of how to make the product in the correct way without changing the design.**

Does that dialog start when the design part starts?

No. I already visited many manufacturers and worked with many different materials. I would say I have a basic knowledge of how you could produce most things from glass to steel to plywood to molded foam to plastic. But of course, when we make a new design, **I try to forget about the production because if you are focusing on how to do things, you restrict yourself.** You also need to challenge the production in some sense, that you don't just do what is the most obvious. We always try to forget it and then we come to a stage where it becomes more technical. This is when we would take the product to the manufacturer to ask for advice. Sometimes they of course say "just do it like this – it will be a lot easier" and we say "no, we need to have it in this or that way". They also like the challenge – everybody likes to be challenged in some way; you can also see it as a nice way to do something new.

Where do you see the biggest challenge in your work as a designer?

We also work with external designers. Some of them have never brought a product into production. It seems that they are often a bit insecure about the static part of a furniture piece and how it has to be constructed to be stable. If you have never worked with a manufacturer your knowledge in which kind of materials you should use in order to produce your product is much smaller. Many designers make a prototype and they spend maybe a full month working on it. **But in production the product should not take more than two hours. Maximum, if you do**

something with upholstery. You need to think about which components you want to use. If you use plywood, how would you cut the plywood? How would you bend it? How do you attach it to the other materials that you are using? This is something which is very important but people don't realize that because most of them either do a prototype where they just CNC it or so. **Of course you can CNC any shape but if they don't encounter the production side of it, the product won't be good.**

This way of looking at the design process is not being taught in school. Do you think it should be part of the education?

No. **I think it is the student who should have an interest on how to manufacture things and be curious about how you actually do a plywood chair or molded foam or plastic or whatever.** If you have some sort of idea which materials could be relevant, it is also easy to look into how you could construct it. If you send in a design proposal, as an external designer to "Normann Copenhagen", you often just send the drawing or a rendering of a chair. Maybe you even have a prototype – that's fine but we need to do the rest of the work. We need to figure out how to construct it, so that it can pass the European test, how it could be produced, what kind of materials we should use. We have to go all the way back to the beginning. The only thing we have is the drawing. Students and Designers are often missing some kind of interest in how to produce things and I don't think it is difficult to let the school teach you which materials you could use but it really depends on the individual product. If you want to do a chair out of solid wood, there are many things you need to encounter for. You need to figure out what you can do with solid wood so that it doesn't break. In my opinion people should be more interested in how to manufacture the things they design.

The production sides you work with, are they mostly in Asia or mostly in Europe?

Most of our accessories are produced in Asia but all the furniture is produced in Europe. We have production in Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Italy, Slovenia, Denmark, ... It really depends on the product.

How do you communicate with producers? Do you always travel there?

We have two product developers in the studio. One of them is in charge of furniture and the other one is in charge of the accessories. The guy who is in charge of the accessories, which are produced in China, goes there every third month or so. One of the owners is usually joining him. They go through all products there. Plus we have staff in China which does quality control. We kind of teach the staff in China what kind of things they need to be aware of and what kind of quality we expect from the manufacturers. Of course, in China, there is a different understanding. They don't see the same things like things we want from the product. In Europe it is a bit easier. The manufacturers usually know if there is something not accepted. But still, we need quality control here as well because they still make mistakes. It is not that different I think.

Who is your target group of Normann furniture?

It is a mixture. We try to do design that is relevant for both the private market as well as the public market. A lot of people would of course buy chairs and tables for their private homes. A bigger part is actually being used by architects for wholesale, restaurants and so on. The contract market is becoming much bigger now. That of course requires more furniture because if you want to sell to the United States you need to be able to provide. Also, the foam needs to be certified, fireproof and so on. There are a lot of challenges for the contract market in comparison to the private market.

How many pieces do you usually produce?

It really depends on the product. You can never really predict what is going to sell. You can only have an idea if it's going to be a good product or not. Of course there are higher volumes on accessories because they are cheaper – they are for an impulse-buy. A client would need more time to choose if they want to buy a chair since it costs more money. They really consider the cost much more than if they buy a tray. There is a minimum quantity. We always try to do minimum quantities because we never know what is going to sell. The number depends on the product and which material. If you do a vase it might be 1000 pieces

but if you do a chair it might be 200 pieces. Sometimes it is 4000 or even 10.000 pieces. It really depends on the product.

Did you ever think about going freelance?

Sometimes but my job actually is like a freelance job. We kind of just do what we find interesting. As always, there are ups and down in working for a company but you would also have up and downs when being a freelancer. For me it is more interesting to focus on the design, to learn and to develop and that I can do in a completely different level here than if I would ever do as a freelancer. I can just do as many projects as I want and I can put them into production. But if I would be working as a freelancer, I would put most of the time doing presentations, chasing down clients and stuff like that. For me this is very interesting – at least for the moment.

Where do you see your future goals?

My goal is just to learn and to have fun. I think for now I am really having fun. It is fun to go to work every day. There is so much diversity. As I said, I can in principle just do what I think is good and the next day I can do something different. Plus, if I want to try a new material, let's say I want to do something in glass, then I can just do something in glass and maybe the next day I want to make a chair. I can not really imagine how it could be better

Are there no restrictions?

No, because the bosses trust in what I do and what I think. Of course we do a lot of designs and sometimes they choose not to produce it. This can be for different reasons. It is mostly not because there is anything wrong with the design. Let's say we want to produce a new series of wine glasses. There are two ways of doing wine glasses: either you mouth blow them or they are machine made. With machine-made glasses, you can do a lot more complex shapes and you can make the glass more interesting. You can make it very straight and perfect every time. It is a cheaper to produce. However, the problem is that you need to pay for molds. They maybe cost around 1.000.000.000 DKK and you have to order a volume of 500.000 glasses. Of course 500.000 glasses is

nothing we can sell within one year or two. The glasses would occupy a lot of capital and warehouse space. **Sometimes the design does not suit enough for where the company is at the moment.** We are not big enough to produce some of the things that I want to do. But that doesn't mean that it won't happen in the future. It just means that it is not possible right now.

What is good design for you?

It is something that you want to own for more than just a few years. Design shouldn't be too trendy because trends are coming and going. I prefer products that have a lifespan of 10, 20 years or whatever is possible. I think it is more sustainable than producing products in seaweed or so. No matter what you are doing, if you do a chair in seaweed or a chair in plastic, they equal the same amount of pollution in the sense that you need to use machines that need to be powered. You have to keep these machines running. The only different thing is the material. A plastic chair in principle, if you make a nice chair, they can last and the design is good, you might have the chair for 50 years. If you do a seaweed chair, it will be trendier. My point is, if you buy the egg chair, you will not throw it out, you would sell it on and it will be something you will probably have for generations. It might be, that the chair is mainly produced out of oil but the lifetime of the chair is maybe 70 or 80 years. I think this is a nice idea. It is nice if the design is not determined by time.

Do you work with some kind of trend forecast?

Not at all.

Where do you get your inspiration from?

From the past. There is a lot of history. I think design is something about history and about tradition. It is about how you can look into something and to use it to make something new and relevant with it. If you make a chair for example, it is not necessarily relevant. The chair is the most designed object in the world. There have been more chairs designed than any other item. **But a chair is also a statement of a period of time and I think it is relevant that you kind of use the history to bring it back**

into the present – if that makes sense. Also, sometimes you just want to try a specific material. I find that a lot of the materials that are used in architecture and other kind of industries are very interesting to use them in small-scale products. Most people stick to the most common materials like steel, plastic or wood. But it is nice to look into materials and use them in a tiny different way.

Do you also build prototypes yourself?

We have a small workshop and two small 3D printers. And if we do stuff that is more complicated, we would either CNC it at a prototype manufacturer or we would go to the manufacturer to make the prototypes there.

What is the most important skill-set of a designer?

Passion. It is really important that people care about what they do because if they don't have passion they won't have interest for the things that are necessary to learn. It is important that people learn about proportion, 3D, production and all these things come back to passion.

Do you see benefits in new technologies or do you prefer to draw by hand?

There are definitely benefits in technologies. 3D makes it a lot easier to learn how to bend shapes. It is easier to make technical drawings, you save a lot of time. Also for presentations and so on, software is a fantastic tool but it is nothing that makes you a good designer. It is the passion again. 3D is just a tool, if you cannot use the tool, it doesn't matter. I have seen many people that applied for internships. They might be extremely good in making CAD files or renderings but they have no sense about proportions or the strength of the chair or whatever they draw. They might also become animators instead of designers.

There are so many people graduating at design schools at the moment. How will that change the market?

I know that at the Danish design school they educate around 100 people a year and only around 12-13 % of them are getting jobs within design.

That is around 12 people a year. The difficulty at the moment is that the market is a lot more global than it used to be. It doesn't matter if you are

from Germany or from China, you have the same kind of chances to get a job in Denmark. **That means that everybody is competing against everybody.** I think if you just go 20 years back, it was much easier for people who lived in Denmark to get a job.

In Denmark they cut some design and architecture programs. Do you think that's good? Should they do that in other countries as well?

No. I definitely think there is a market for a lot of designers. It also depends what your expectations are. I always had a clear goal when I was in design school. I wanted to be able to work as a designer. I was not so focused on if I would work as a freelancer or for IKEA or so. My main focus was just to be able to enjoy my passion for design. I think many other people have an idea that working for a company would be best because it is commercial. I think the mentality of Danish people is that they are a bit spoiled. They just all want to have their own freelance studio or work for Philippe Starck or so. This is not how the world works because they don't have the experience yet. They have to learn first in order to have a freelance studio. They need to gain some sort of experience. They have no experience when they are done with design school. And that is the difference to many other schools. **When you study to become a lawyer, when you graduate, you will be a lawyer. But when you graduate from the design school after 5 years, you still need to learn about what you actually studied.** I think they need to have more contact with companies and get a better understanding as well as being more realistic about the jobs that are actually out there. There is nothing wrong in having a job at Lego and sitting and making Lego figures. This is just a different approach.

How do you see the role of a designer in society?

Some people want to save the world. Of course you can make products that society can benefit from. But there are so many branches of design. If you do graphic design you will never really save the world. I think it depends on the job that you take.

What do you think about designer who produce everything themselves?

I used to work for a company, which was kind of a collective with a store. They produced everything themselves. They worked on products

that they could produce themselves like ceramics, jewelry and so on. Of course it is a nice idea. The issue is just that the bigger you become, the more you will just sit and do the same thing. None of them had any fun because all they had to do was to do the same thing again and again and again. When people came and bought a vase they had to make a new one. They were never doing any design; they were only doing their concrete vases or whatever they did. The only way to escape would be to outsource to external production. **If you want to do design, you also need to focus on what you are good at.** And that is not sitting there and doing the same vase all over and over again. It is your ideas and creating something different and new. **I also think people have an evil mind about mass-production. But if we do a vase in ceramic, it is all handmade. It might be, that it is handmade in 10.000 but it is still hand-made. If we do mouth-blown glass, there is a guy standing there with a stick blowing each glass – it is also hand-made. If we do wood there is also a person standing cutting the wood. Mass-production is something where you produce plastic in a mold but many products like wood you cannot just put in a mold.** Probably the perception of mass-production is wrong. **If people buy a glass from “Normann Copenhagen”, they think it is not made by a person but by a robot and that is not the case.**

What advice would you give to a young designer if they want to produce wood with a manufacturer?

Pretend that you are a student! I have never been in the position so I can't really tell.

How is your connection to the manufacturers you work with? Is it more a partnership, a friendship or only a business?

Of course you know some of them better so you are friendly but I won't hang out with them in my spare time. Of course, it is kind of a friendship because if you want to make good work together, you need to understand each other and need to be polite. We all try to help each other. The more the company believes in what you are doing, the more they are also willing to invest time.

Thank you!

Date: 09.03.2018

Louise Hederström

Louise Hederström is a furniture designer based in Malmö. She graduated from Beckmans School of Design in Stockholm in 1998. She opened her own design studio in Malmö in 2008. Her clients include some of the most respected manufacturing companies in Scandinavian design, such as Offecct, Skagerak and Maze. Louise works on her own.



text <https://louisheiderstrom.com>, photo: Louise Hederstrom

Can you tell us a bit your work as a designer?

I work mainly with furniture design. I also do some interior design.

You graduated 20 years ago. How did you start working after university?

I got this scholarship from IKEA. That's why I went to Älmhult for five months directly after studying at Beckmans. I think that was what I wanted right after design school. I needed to go out and work. I didn't want to start my own business – it was still too early.

At IKEA, they are very good about their economics. I got 50,000 SEK for the time I worked with them. They also paid my flat. After that I asked them if I could stay a couple of months longer because I didn't know what else to do. I stayed for eight months in total.

Did you like the way of working as an employed designer?

Yes, it was nice. I had some fun colleagues. They hired three young designers so it was a very good place to be. It was a great opportunity to learn and to get to know the company. It was good to understand how they think, understand their "religion" and learn how they work. 20 years ago the school I went to did not think that computers were important. At IKEA I learned AutoCAD. Björn Dalström contacted me and asked if I wanted to work for him. I moved back to Stockholm and I worked at his office for furniture design for one and a half years. It was a good place to be because he worked with Swedish and international companies. I made all of his drawings and measured old furniture. I was his assistant. After that I thought that it was time to do something on my own. I also started to teach at Beckmans and IKEA gave me some assignments.

What was the reason that you chose to start working as a freelancer?

I asked Björn if I could work part time because IKEA asked me to work for them. That was a very sensitive topic since he did not work with them. He was standing in the middle. A company like his is a bit sensitive to companies like IKEA. In the end it wasn't a problem for a limited time. Also, I just felt like it was time to start on my own. I rented a studio with another designer. 2001 my husband got a job offer in Malmö. That was when we moved down here. Even though we are both from Skåne (south region of Sweden), we didn't have any connections in

Malmö. It wasn't the city where you went to when you were young. But we gave it a try. So I worked a bit for IKEA and wanted to see if I could do some small production on my own. That was how it started. I also started to teach at Lunds Design School.

The good thing with Beckmans was, that you met different people. We had projects with companies and you met designers who were working there. That was my first connection to the real work. We went to see producers. I did a project with Lammhults and tried to explore what was possible to do. Also while working at IKEA I got to know the production side and working with Björn Dalström taught me a lot as well. With him I saw how difficult it is to work with Italian companies for example. It was a good time to get connections. So when I started my own business I took a look at what connections I already had. I tried to exhibit as much as possible. I went to Stockholm to exhibit. From my point of view, moving to Malmö wasn't the best strategic thing to do. In Sweden everything happens in Stockholm. It is getting better but people still ask me "do you still live in Malmö?". I started to knock on companies doors to ask for collaborations.

2004 I exhibited at Salone satellite in Milan. It was a good way to show my work. I showed a lamp and got that into production. The funny thing was that it got into production at a Swedish company. **Sometimes you have to go far away to reach the Swedish brands.**

Could you live from your income that you got from your design jobs back then?

I was teaching all the time – otherwise it would not have worked. Also my husband has a regular job. I lived on a very small amount of money. That works for times. Everything was ok until I broke my foot. Suddenly I understood how the system works. You don't get anything from social security if you have your own company. **My advice: Don't get sick!**

Do you work more with self-initiated projects or with assignments that companies give you?

Through the years I worked a lot on my own ideas. I also worked on assignments that I got. **In the furniture business it is a bit hard to get assignments before you showed that you can do something.** That is the

dilemma. You have to build up your portfolio. You do that either by yourself or with tasks of a company.

Did you need assignments to get jobs from them or because you needed tasks to work on?

In the furniture business it is a lot about royalties. You get paid when your projects sell. You have to show companies your projects so that they see what you could do for them or to sell an already existing idea. You always want to get something into production. It is always about creating relations with different companies. Maybe you show them something and they say "almost" or maybe you show something and in the end they give you a brief. I think it is an idiot system, when you are new. You invest all your time but you never know if your projects goes into production or if it in the end sells. You may get paid after four years. For some projects it take two years just to develop them.

Did you ever had an collaboration that failed?

Yes, I think so. I try to forget about these things.

What was your best collaboration so far?

This is a difficult question. There are so many different ways of collaborating. For example I have been working with "Maze Interior" for many years. When that started, it was a lot of fun because they put my projects into production. They said: "yes, we can do that!" They were totally new on the market and just went for it. I kept on working with them even though it was a bit messy from time to time. Now they have a new head of business and everything is going much better. I think, because I am very patient, I finally get paid for my work. So that is fun! It is very good. If you work with small companies you might be able to do things that you can't do for others. Hopefully in the end it will pay off. It is also very interesting to work with bigger furniture companies that work with public spaces. I also have a project with an upholsterer. We do a small-scale furniture in limited editions for a gallery. I like the difference of all jobs. I like to work in different ways. This is how you continue to develop your way of thinking.

How do you decide when a project is done?

In the moment when you give a project to a company the first step is done. When they take over it is again something where you learn how a company works. Maybe you work with a company that always informs you about every step they take, maybe you work with a company where nobody ever tells you something about the production steps. Suddenly you get a prototype – so every company works differently. You learn how to understand them. Some companies say that as long as you don't hear from them, everything is ok. Some companies stay quiet for half a year – that always gives me a very strange feeling. A bit later they call you to see the prototype and after making some changes you won't hear from them for a while again.

How do you work today mainly?

I have companies that I work with. Some of them I have a close relationship with. We often discuss what new project we could do next. Many small companies can't manage to push many projects at the same time. Some other companies I have to call to ask for a meeting to discuss a new project. I just had an exhibition in Stockholm. I made a rug with "Kasthall". I also did a view products that relate to the same topic that were shown as well. I will try to find a producer for the products.

Did Kasthall produce the carpet? Who did pay for the project costs?

Did Kasthall produce the rug? Who did pay for the project costs? Since it was a collaboration they paid for the production. It was a big project. It was a project where you give and take. It was good for both sides. "Kasthall" is a great company and it was fun to see the production. The project was also a bit scary.

Why was it scary?

Because I have never done such a project before. Sometimes you just decide that you want to do something and once you are in it you realize what that means. The project was a combination of their production techniques and my design. The techniques used were developed by a designer who worked for Kasthall for many years. It was great to use another designer's special technique and to show what you could

possibly do with that. I am sure that this project will be something good in the future.

Do you have employees or do you work alone?

In my studio it's me and my husband, who is a graphic designer. We work together on some projects. We always support each other. We have a big flat and two big rooms for our studio.

Do you hand out tasks?

Yes, I have an accountant. I think that you can't be good at everything so you have to hand a few things out. I really want to give all paperwork away.

How about photo shootings?

I am not good at that. I have booked Ulrika to take photos for me. Also my partner can take photos as long as it is not styling. Sometimes when I have to do very complicated 3D modeling, I ask someone to help me. **That is also the difference with different companies; some have very good technicians who can help you a lot but with smaller companies you have to deliver the drawings to the factory.** Today it is more and more common that factories have somebody who does the production drawings. I like drawing 3D myself because you can decide on the details much better.

Do you have goals that you want to reach?

I would like to be a bit more international. I would like to earn more royalties so that I could live from that. I don't want to focus on chasing hours. At the moment I also work as a consultant for bigger companies. It is very interesting but that work is not royalty-based.

Do you think that the way how designer get paid in royalties till works today?

I think it is not a sustainable thing if you see how some companies work. Some companies only sell products for two years. That doesn't work. It is not a good way of working. That is one of the things why I stopped working with IKEA. The work wasn't royalty based but they are totally focused on how much they are selling. We did a good project and then

if they didn't sell it they took it off the market. They produce new ideas all the time but do not take care about good ideas. **Maybe I see it in an old fashioned way but design is not fast-food. It takes time and affords to develop a product. I think there is some respectfulness in giving it time.** If you believe in a product and you invest all the time and money then you should give it some time on the market. The contract market works much slower. Architects do houses and the interior. It takes a couple of years before a house is finished. It is a much longer process. It's not as if you buy a candleholder and if you don't like it anymore you throw it away. I don't follow that way. Of course we are all interested in what's new but we also have to take care of our ideas. I think that is why I like the part of the business that is not about showing off in magazines. I see the contract market much more as a way that focuses more on functionality and on quality. IKEA produces around 1000 products every year and they think that this is a good idea. I don't agree with them; I don't think that it is a good idea. **Sometimes we talk about slow-production. It takes time to develop a product, it takes time to produce and it takes time to use it also.** That gives some respect for our world and nature. Of course that is the dilemma with royalties, since they are based on how much you sell.

How do you see the future of design produced in Europe?

We still have a lot of production in Sweden and a lot of people don't know about it. Not everything is made in China. The industry that we still have here is very interesting.

How do you reach the industry and how would you advise us to get in touch with them?

You have to still develop yourself, maybe do some projects. **I think the best way is to exhibit at fairs for yourself, even if it costs money.** At a fair you can show your products and you can scan which company might be interesting in your design. Afterwards you can go there and knock on their door. You should go the head of design, get him for your idea – or her, but it is mostly him. It is changing but this is also a problem. I can say that because we are all women here. It has been a man's world. There are some people who have a lot of power in this business who maybe shouldn't have it.

Did you ever experience that you did not get valued as a designer?

Yes of course. It happens that I have to explain why my time costs money. People often say: "You can be part of this and it is good for you to show your work." But how am I supposed to go to ICA and buy my food? I need money and that is something you have to explain sometimes. Good companies understand that but some companies don't agree to pay you a sketch fee. I just have to get a sketch fee – how else would I do it?

What would be reasons for you to say no to a project?

I say no if I don't feel that it is not the right idea behind a design. If I believe in an idea I would always take the job. If it is not made in a good way, if the quality wouldn't be good enough, I don't want to do the job. I don't think that low-cost furniture is interesting. This is not definite; a low-cost project with good intentions for example can be good.

Do you protect your design in some way?

That is a bit difficult because you send your sketches out. **When a product is in production it is the producing company that takes care of the protection. It is hard to protect your ideas.**

What do you think a designer has to be best in, to be able to sustain?

I think if you are a great designer, it doesn't really matter. You have to be really stubborn and persuasive. I can see that in people I went to school with where I always thought that this designer will make their way. They were focusing and believing in their projects. It is a bit a scary part of this profession. I think you don't have to be a great designer to work as a designer. You also have to be a salesmen, to convince that your idea is the best and you have to get the facts right. You have to have an idea how you want to work and don't look to much on how others think that you should do your work.

Was there ever a time when you thought that it would be better to be employed?

I was employed part-time for a year with an Austrian company. After that I did not want that anymore. It was good for me to learn that it wasn't right for me. Today it's getting always a bit better but at the beginning it was difficult. If you enjoy to manage your own time and

be free to take out the dog in the middle of the day it great to work freelance. It is something I feel very strongly about. I love the freedom.

Do you also travel a lot?

For vacations? **I need more vacations!** I travel a lot of the business. Last year I went to Milan, New York and Paris and it was all about work. It is very difficult to plan my vacations. I try to book it in advance and then the summer comes and nothing works out. Since you are on your own it is very hard to say no. I have to get better when it comes to summer vacation. Than I do nothing for one month, just sit somewhere and have coffee.

Did you ever produce yourself?

Yes, I did that for a bit. I produced a lamp and I do some small hangers but nothing where I have to do a lot of assembling work. I also have a collaboration with an upholsterer called Carina Grefmar. We do a small-scale furniture project where we go to a carpenter who produces the structure and we do the rest. We sell our furniture to galleries or people who order it from us. It started as part of the project DEN NYA KARTA*.

If a young designer would ask you for an advice, what would that be?

I think there are many different ways of working. It seems to get easier to do your own production. That is really good. It is hard to start your own business and expect a salary on day one. **If you start your own business you have to have time for it.** If you are employed then at least 50 percent the time should go into your own work. For me it was good to first work for someone else. You can not run your own business on 20 percent – that is not enough time. You should be clear about if you want to sell your idea to a producer or if you want to produce your ideas yourself.

Thank you!

*read more about DEN NYA KARTA at page XXX

Schneid

Schneid is a design brand that designs and produces lighting and furniture in-house. The brand was founded by Niklas and Julia Jessen in Lübeck/Germany. After completing his training as a carpenter, Niklas Jessen went on to study architecture in Lübeck. Julia initially studied literature and linguistic in Berlin. They started the company Schneid in 2012 together and sell their items internationally.



text and photo: <https://schneid.org/about/>

Date: 16.03.2018



Can you tell us a bit about your career?

NJ: I studied architecture in Lübeck. I had a bit trouble in the job because it is only office work, at least in the first years. That's why I had the idea to create something myself. At the end of 2010 I started very small on the attic. That did not have much to do with design. I pushed myself into cold water. On the side, I did my Zivi (community service). I then opened a shop pretty quickly and we produced ourselves. The first luminaire series was the series A. These are luminaires made out of lasered slats. That was economical nonsense - at least in the short term. Then Julia and I got to know each other in 2011. Julia's influence has made the company much more professional. We thought about how we can both live from it and how the products could get even better so that we could sell them. That was the big difficulty in the beginning. We had a nice product but no know-how how to market it. Today there are more possibilities.

JJ: When I joined in 2011 there was already a website. We started to work on a concept. In 2012 we renamed as Schneid- that's why we always speak of our foundation in 2012. From that point on we were us two and resurfaced from scratch. With the new concept, we joined for the first time a trade fair. This was when everything started.

How did you finance yourself in the beginning? Did you have part-time jobs?

JJ: Niklas was still studying and worked in an architecture office and I was still studying, too. By the time I finished my master, I got a side job.

NJ: And we rented our apartment via Airbnb.

JJ: Exactly, suddenly Airbnb existed! Renting out our flat suddenly gave us more money and the freedom to spend more time working on Schneid. At some point it annoyed us too much, but at that point Schneid was already doing so well that we did not necessarily needed part-time jobs anymore.

NN: The first few years we could have made more profit but we have invested everything we earned into the company. New products are expensive. Even today the percentage of the investment compared to the profit is still relatively high; it is much higher than for large companies. The first few years you spend everything so that you have almost no money left, at least if you do it as we did, without any external investors.

We never borrowed money from the bank or from other people - except maybe our parents who lent us some money.

JJ: Niki also saved a bit. We bought the laser from that and produced the first lights. The laser is very small but is still in the workshop today. Otherwise, we only borrowed money from our parents when it was really necessary - for fairs, for example. We have always paid it back directly. It's such a thing when you invest so much money. A fair can be really expensive and then it can be really bad for a while.

How can you endure the financial pressure over those months?

JJ: You still get money but it's always hard to find a way to pay the producers. Sometimes we have to negotiate payment terms.

NJ: But it's not that bad. The first few years have already been difficult, but since 3 - 4 years we earn our own salary. You can endure that.

JJ: It was very hard for us after the imm cologne (furniture fair in cologne).

NN: Yes, it was a bit more difficult. We had a few really exhausting months.

JJ: That's something I would not recommend students, for example. I would not advise exhibiting directly at such a big fair.

NJ: In the furniture sector, it is relatively difficult to succeed in the short term.

JJ: **You have to try to keep the expenses low.** You always want to grow. But actually you have to really try to keep the expenses as low as possible.

This was what we have learned in the past years: You have to do as much as possible in the shortest possible time. To compress everything and to professionalize processes is very valuable. This way you don't have to hire so many people. I think that many young designers feel that they have to go to trade fairs or get marketing right from the beginning. It was good for us that we had acquired all the knowledge ourselves and were able to do everything ourselves. Not relying on working with other companies was good for us. A company we know has worked with a marketing company. They paid them but nothing really came out of it. They have lost a lot of money and regret it today.

What does your working day look like?

NJ: It depends a little on how many people there are. At the moment, we have many interns. If that is the case it feels like I only have meetings all day. I can't be busy with my own stuff. Basically, I can say that I coordinate production, sales and distribution with some help. We both do the design and Julia is responsible of the marketing and the graphics.

Are there any tasks that you like to hand over to others?

NJ: We complement each other very well. It's a lot of fun! For example, I could not do any stylings or take care of photoshoots. I am too impatient for that. I also don't like graphic tasks. I rather do the production. The distribution of tasks is quite clear. Julia would not like to take over production either.

JJ: I'm interested in the production but my focus is more in other areas. What I don't like is customer contact. I'm a bit impatient with that. Marketing is very different for me than communicating directly with the customer and taking orders.

What are tasks that you give?

NN: We prepare the bookkeeping and then give it away. Get a good tax consultant! For photoshoots we book Noel and for the graphics we have support from Sophie. We book her if we do the lookbook for example.

JJ: Oh and that reminds me; you do not like interviews, Niki.

NJ: Well, if they take place here in the studio, it's ok, but to do a written interview - well, I do not like that.

JJ: I take on such things.

Do you send ready-made texts to magazines and blogs?

JJ: We did that for a while. At the moment we only do that on request. Mostly magazines contact us. I think it's important to publish your design to get even more press. We now have a network of editors to whom we send information from time to time. It almost happens automatically.

How did you build up your network of manufacturers? How did you start and what does your network look like today?

NJ: In the beginning we did everything ourselves. At that time we did not need any manufacturers, which was a big advantage. Then we designed the Eikon for which we needed manufacturers. The research was quite banal. We just googled manufacturers. We simply picked out terms like “wood turning” and send mails to the first 20 companies and requested an offer. We took the best offer. We were really lucky because the carpenter back from that time has become our best supplier. Also concerning the interpersonal relationship. He immediately understood what we wanted; that’s just a good company!

JJ: They are very flexible!

NN: Today we do it a bit more professional. We are still researching online for manufacturers. Theoretically you could go to manufacturer fairs, but we don’t do that. Today we call them first, introduce ourselves and ask where we can send the request. If you only send mails, too much is getting lost. The manufacturer search is one of the hardest things.

JJ: Often designs are not as feasible as we would like them to be made. Sometimes we have to drop designs again. Often the production is simply too expensive to offer the products in our framework. For us it’s clear that, if that happens, the product does not suit to us and to how we work at the moment. We try to create simple products. That’s how we always did it and it works well.

NJ: The whole thing is totally relative. We and also other designers have the know-how to tell when a product is a good product. However, in 80% or 90% of the cases the end customer can not distinguish. For example, our plate is the most complicated product we have. But the customer can not see that.

JJ: Reducing our drafts is one of the last steps. In the end, we always take another look if all elements are really necessary.

You produce most of your products in in Germany. Are you internationally represented?

JJ: Yes, we were released internationally from the beginning. International design blogs like “Design Milk” wrote about us right at the start. At that time “Design Milk” even wrote and posted a whole article about our “Eikon” lamp. Since then, the Eikon is in the US quite well known and

in demand. And the Junit in New York. I think that happened through “Sight Unseen”. We now sell our products everywhere.

You get all parts of your lightings from different manufacturers. Who is responsible for assembly, packaging and shipping?

JJ: We do that here.

What are your business goals? Where do you see your future?

JJ: Right now we want to grow a bit. We want to place the products even more with architects.

NJ: For me, one of the goals is to be able to hire and pay the people who work for us. And we also want to be able to pay us higher salaries. For years we have earned very little.

JJ: We have often had the experience that we have formulated business goals but had to take them back again. We often have to reflect and see what is possible in our context. We have no financing and no investors, and that’s the way it should stay. We want to continue to grow gradually. I do not imagine that we have much more employees. If you have too many people then you are just an entrepreneur and busy caring for others. The staff management makes me crazy. I want to be able to concentrate on my own work. We have to find good people who work independently, understand the goal and are motivated. There are many people who do not really understand what we are doing here. Right now it’s great. We have Ricardo, Rico and Thore with whom we work together. All three have the goal in mind and are totally compassionate and dedicated. That’s really awesome!

How has the location in Lübeck proven itself? Do you think it would be better if you were in a different city like Munich?

JJ: That’s always the question.

NJ: We have so many advantages but also disadvantages due to the location.

What are the advantages?

NJ: The rent. That we can be here in this area is great. That would not work in any big city. We would have much more pressure elsewhere.

Here we have no pressure and that's really good. We can do whatever we want. We are really lucky. This is not only due to Lübeck, you can also get lucky in cities like Hamburg where the landlord just lets you do your thing. Our landlord is very happy that we rent and heat the rooms. The disadvantages are also obvious. Lübeck is relatively poor and people are not particularly interested in design. There is no network of designers.

JJ: Architects exist, but it's very hard to get in touch with them. The architects here are not particularly open to something new and a bit behind time. In general, we weren't received with open arms by the architect community in Lübeck.

How do you stay fresh and where do you get your inspiration from?

JJ: I think inspiration is not so much about the external impact on one, it's more about the inner attitude. You have to open up and make room for everything that surrounds you. You can also be inspired by a plant. Travel can be inspiring simply because the awareness of things changes. When I walk through Lübeck with an open mind, I also discover things that are new again and again.

NJ: If the work itself is going well, it will inspire you too. When things are intertwined that one has created, then that motivates.

JJ: That's an attitude thing. You have to let everything go and try to stay curious. It also helps to be open to other areas like art, painting or movies. It's not true that you, just because you live in Berlin and have creative people around you, get inspired by it. I think networks of designers are really great. Exchange is very important!

You are both not classical designers. What do you think are the most important things that a designer has to bring into this job?

JJ: Structured thinking.

NJ: You have to be a total all-rounder. That's our advantage, we're not people who fixate on just one thing. I cannot do just one thing.

JJ: We are interested in a lot of things.

NJ: This is one of the most interesting things about being self-employed, that you always have new tasks.

JJ: If you become an entrepreneur, you have to take care of everything.

NJ: That is something you first have to learn.

JJ: And that's why it's so good for us to come from different areas. My theoretical, text-based study helps us to write and communicate texts. We try to acquire a lot of self-taught things. The design area, which we both do not cover, well, Niki studied architecture but I had nothing to do with design; I was always a bit dissatisfied. That is something we have gradually worked out. Both of us always had creativity in us and all the other skills have grown along the way.

NJ: A good example of this is the Zappy lamp. It's pretty easy to see how much or how little know-how we've had in design and design history. Design studies are also about design history and we both did not learn that. That's why we've never known Poul Henningsen's Artichoke. Many associate the light with his lamp. Even blogs compare or traded our version as a new interpretation. That was really nice in the beginning. We could design completely impartially, without any restrictions of things that already existed.

JJ: Today, it is so good that we have so much knowledge.

NJ: Yeah, that's nice, but we do not have the non-knowledge anymore and we will not get it back.

What percentage of your working time do you spend in design compared to other tasks?

JJ: Working hours are a bit difficult for us anyway ... What is our working time? We are together the whole day ...

NJ: Except when we're with our daughter Tilda.

JJ: We really have to stop working when Tilda is around. We try to hold ourselves back. Working time is actually the whole day and the whole evening. The afternoons are spent with Tilda. I would say that we spend about 30% of our time designing.

NJ: It depends a bit on what you are counting in. Sometimes I almost do no design at all. When we're preparing for a trade show or when it comes to product development, I do not design it at all. I would say that designing also includes the inspirational phase. Often, you also think about new products during everyday things like sleeping or when you do the dishes. That's part of the job, too.

How many projects are you currently working on? Do you think in annual collections?

JJ: We do not do collections. At the moment we have a lot of projects running at the same time. Maybe 10. All products are in different phases and it is difficult to plan when which product will come onto the market.

NJ: Especially when working with new producers. We have often made the mistake of showing projects that were almost finished. We then exhibited the prototypes and took orders as if we had the product in stock - which is not recommended. Often something else happens in the meanwhile. It just takes time for a product to be ready for serial production. As a small business, you have to be honest with yourself and only sell when you have in stock. That is sometimes difficult.

JJ: You have to be careful to show products before they are on the market. The registration is extremely important.

Do you patent any of your designs?

NJ: You cannot patent, but you can register a design to get protection. There are basically utility models, designs and patents. This will be subdivided into worldwide, pan-European and national. Patents cannot be applied to such simple products as we do. Everything you register must never have been shown anywhere; everything must be new. The product can never have been anywhere, it must not have been shown on instagram, not on Facebook, you may not have exhibited it and have not released it in any other form. It is very strict.

JJ: Everything you have already shown without registration, cannot be protected anymore.

NJ: These are things that nobody knows and nobody tells you about. Imagine you've done a design and it's on Instagram - you'll never be able to apply for protection again and you'll have only two years of protection! In Europe, you automatically have two years of protection for every product that you design.

Do you also need legal protection? Do you have a lawyer?

NJ: So far we did not need a lawyer. If something goes wrong, we usually ask a friend of us who is a lawyer for some advice.

JJ: The only topic we would actually talk to a lawyer would be if someone would copy our design.

NJ: There are also startups that take care that your products are not copied. But that costs a few thousand euros a month and your designs must be registered. The problem, especially for young designers, is that a subscription costs money. It's not like you're just signing up. If you want to register a product Europe-wide, then you have to think carefully whether you really do that. The "Unit" would have cost 1500 €. Students cannot register every semester, how would they pay that? If a design is not worth registering it, you do not necessarily have to do so.

JJ: If you want to promote yourself via instagram and show your designs and the single design is not worth so much, then you can show your work. You just have to be sure about what you are doing.

NJ: In recent years, we have been a little bit sensitized about this topic. Copies of our lights are available on Alibaba for \$ 10.

JJ: Again, back to the question: We do not really have contracts or a lawyer. Customers bring their own contracts that we have to sign.

NJ: Insurance is much more important to us. That's what you should rather worry about. For example, a legal expenses insurance is absolutely necessary!

What are your marketing experiences on Instagram?

There are insanely many interior bloggers in Germany and around the world who show their homes privately and have hundreds of thousands of followers. These are ultimately potential end customers. In itself, it is a good investment to send bloggers products that they install, photograph and are happy about having a great new product. This is an emotional post because they are happy about how beautiful their apartment is - and that makes others happy as well. That's just advertising. If someone sees 10 times the same lamp in the "Couch", then they want it as well. If ten interior design bloggers in Germany have different things from us and see them again and again, also through our account, it's worth it.

NJ: That's very simple sales psychology.

JJ: Other companies do not or cannot do that, but it's much cheaper than showing ads. It just makes sense to advertise. Every entrepreneur

advertises that. We tried to promote our products through Google for a few months. It was \$ 400 a month. That is still a very low price but actually you have to invest at least 2000 € a month, so that the advertisement takes up speed.

NJ: We offer niche products. We don't fight the price war. That's why direct marketing through bloggers is the best tool for us. At least according to our experience.

JJ: We always have to differentiate whether we talk about normal customers or about architects. **Of course, if we sell directly through our online store, we have the highest margin.** This only makes sense if we invest more time to generate more visitors and sales through our website. In this respect, the end customers are very interesting for us and these end customers are best reached via Instagram. For us it is also very good to show our products in a natural environment. We always do our photoshoots here in the studio and have rather abstract pictures. During the last photoshoot we tried for the first time to create a kind of living space. It still looks like a studio, which I like, too, so it does not look so sleek.

What is good design for you? What is your design about?

JJ: Good design is when it's reduced, simple and clear. That's what makes our design. Everything we do is simple - of course that's because of our conditions and the given framework. Good design also has a background. The story is very important. It does not always have to be a totally profound or poetic design but the inspiration has to be discovered. Otherwise the product has no soul or expression.

NJ: This question is hard to answer in a few sentences. That is something designers try to find out over several years of studying. It is very subjective. Good design is something that touches me. It is an emotional thing, too. It does so through many different factors. These factors sometimes change, too. The factors can be reduction or materiality, even technical things can touch me. Novelty, colors - there are so many things, you cannot explain it so easily.

JJ: For us it is also the intermediate step between industry and craft.

NJ: And design and art.

JJ: To find a solution between industrial manufacturing and classic crafts. We like to develop new forms through traditional crafts - that is a big topic for us. It's great to reinterpret traditional manufacturing techniques.

NJ: We want to give this traditional craft industrial product's karma. That's why it's so much fun to do things on our own.

Thank you!

This interview was held in German. All answers are translated.

Date: 16.03.2018

Modiste / Marick Baars

Marick Baars is the associate creative director of the dutch furniture and interior design company Modiste. With his background in Advertising and Graphic Design he started working at an Ad-Company after his graduation in 2005. In 2008 he founded a branding company and in 2013 an online shop. Together with Joeri Horstink and Jelle Baars he founded Modiste in 2011. The company is based in Berlin and Rotterdam and realizes the design and production of furniture designs as well as interior design projects internationally.



Can you tell us about your background?

I actually did not study anything that was Interior Design or Furniture related. I studied advertising and Graphic Design at the art school in Rotterdam from 2001 to 2005. Just as I graduated advertising I already felt like this became an irrelevant field. I got this degree of something so irrelevant that I did not find it nice. During my whole study I started doing advertising. At that time advertising wasn't really like making a TV commercial. I drew and created concepts that I showed to my teachers. If he found it funny it was good. I felt like TV was becoming an irrelevant model of our time and in the future. That was why I decided to concentrate more on graphic design as well, to at least have a skill with which I could actually make something and not only come up with a concept. With graphic design you could at least make all your ideas look nice. That was what I did. In that period more and more people started to call this whole thing branding. But there wasn't a study program in Holland for that. When I graduated I wanted to start my own company but I was asked by one of my favourite companies in Holland, an Ad agency called "Staat". Of course I wanted to work with them. They were also experimenting with the edge of everything. They didn't do advertising, they didn't do graphic design, they didn't do special design, but they did a bit of everything if it was relevant. They worked for brands like Nike or Levis. I did for example a project for Nike. They celebrated 25 years of the Air Force 1 shoe and they wanted to do something. We came up with the idea to have a pop-up space, which was a quite new concept in 2005/2006. We did an Air Force 1 museum where you could also customize your shoe. We rented a space for two weeks, put a collection of a famous collector in there. We had around 55 different kinds of Air Force 1 there. That was the first time that we had to do a 3D space instead of an ad. This led to a fascination of working with carpenters and craftspeople in a world where graphic design became less and less physical – it became digital. Graphic design became less interesting because nobody wanted anything printed anymore and if they wanted it printed they wanted it cheap and definitely not by this high-end print shop with nice materials. Especially since 2008, when

everything became cheaper in the financial crises, nobody wanted to pay for beautiful stuff anymore. When I left this agency in 2008, I founded my own company. It was a branding company.

When did you start working with furniture?

The furniture thing that I do now just started out of experimentation. We had to do our own office. We needed furniture and we did not want to buy it off the shelf. We felt like we could do something else. I hired two guys, my brother and one of his classmates. Both studied interior architecture. After graduating they worked with me on shelves and a café interior. The café came to us because they wanted business cards and we asked them “why don’t we design your whole café?” From there it started to grow. With the background of doing events and this Nike projects and all sorts of things, where you work within the room, came the desire to do more like that.

Have you been able to make a living with these kinds of projects?

At that time the ad agency had really big but boring clients, which brought us money. If you come back to the question of how you make money as a designer, you have to do these kinds of jobs. At first that is all you can think of. **If you don’t work for another company and if you don’t have a wage and you start on your own, how can you make an income that is relevant and sustains you?** In my case I felt like the money coming in had to be high enough to be able to spend money on projects that were not commercial. **My solution to that question was to do really commercial work and totally non-commercial work at the same time.** There are probably also a lot of people who go for developing their style very fast and always wanting every assignment to be exactly between the commercial and the personal side but for me it was always that I knew what I could do and if I could sell it to a large company I would do so. If I could make enough money there to spend more on the side I would go for it.

What would a typical side project be?

For us it was the furniture. We spend basically all the money on prototypes, materials, and samples. Of course the first café we did

had a low budget so all the hours we worked on it were unpaid. This is what you do. I worked with these two guys. They were working as interior designers but also made projects that would pay their wages like commercial projects. We did that for two or three years. I got really tired of this whole advertising thing and decided to quit. In 2013 I moved to Berlin. I basically quit the company, dissolved it and decided that I just want to go on with interior and furniture design projects. As a branding company we were already hired by Bonanza to do their branding. They got a space and asked us if we could design the whole space for them. That was exactly what we wanted to do. We had to start small again because we didn’t have large commercial projects. It is harder to make money out of one or two very nice projects than out of a lot of shitty ones. When this interior design for Bonanza Roastery was realized in the end of 2015 we got some very nice publications. Since then it kept growing and we got more assignments. How we can make a living is really to combine the projects on the one hand and the furniture on the other hand. We wouldn’t be able to just live from our furniture pieces. It would be much harder. You don’t know how much you going to sell. Sometime we had years where it was wonderful. Once we had a client who owned a clothing brand in Paris and he wanted our shelves for all his shops. That is fantastic and you make a lot of furniture. And a couple of month after this nobody ordered anything. Of course these times are nice to make prototypes but you also need to earn money. So for us, combining large interior projects and smaller furniture works well.

How do you get those projects?

Well, I think it is quite interesting. When I was doing the ad work somebody always knew someone who knows someone who says “he is a nice guy”. But it was basically just on a personal note. Nobody that I know was looking at stuff, saying “I want that”. When we started the interior projects, I decided that I didn’t want to do that anymore. I just wanted to make something that was our vision and people should hire us because they expect something along those lines. Not that they just need somebody to draw the interior. I think this is the harder way to get clients because it takes much longer. You also have to find that first client that wants to do your design without any changes. With Bonanza

we already did a good job on the website and the packaging so that they thought that they could just let us design the space as well.

Did you know them before?

Yes.

So it was Vitamin B?

No, they were a random contact. We did the fashion week design in Rotterdam and the people from Bonanza saw that. They knew someone in Rotterdam and so we got introduced to him.

Why did you decide to move to Berlin?

I came here since 1997/1998 just for the party scene. I was also a DJ back then. I came regularly to play at clubs. I always liked that the people in Berlin were a little bit more open towards young people doing stuff. In Holland it is a little bit traditional. The costs of doing something in a place like Amsterdam are so much higher than in Berlin. If you are going to invest two million euros in a restaurant, it's not going to be the 28-year-old people doing the investment. That ends up with lots of boring stuff. Because people want to be safe since they invested so much money. When I came to Berlin it felt like everything was still relatively cheap. A lot of interesting things happen because there is much less capital needed. Things are more idea based than capital based. Of course Holland doesn't really have a big city. Neither Rotterdam nor Amsterdam are big cities, they are a bit like provincial towns still. I wanted to go to a big city and asked myself if it is London, New York, Paris or Berlin. Berlin turns out to be much more affordable than New York for example. So one of the reasons was due to the low costs. Of course with this low cost people who are willing to take risks come. Bonanza is a good example. When we started to work with them they were still roasting coffee out of a garage in Wedding. They went from a garage to this beautiful space. Things like this are only possible in a place where the costs of living are relatively low. The current situation in Berlin is quite different today than even three years ago because the rents are rising so much at the moment things are becoming more expensive. You find a way where what you are able to do makes the

biggest impact. I think ending up in a place like London or New York would be much harder if you don't have wealthy parents, savings or any way to think about other stuff than paying your rent. Here you can just try to get a low rent apartment and you will have so much more time to think about the creative stuff rather than thinking about paying rent. There is an interview in "Monocle" with the fashion designer Dries van Noten and they asked him why he is still in Antwerp instead of New York or Paris. He answered exactly the same thing. **He says he wants to have people in his office who are thinking about creating things instead of thinking about how to pay rent.** If you would open a studio in New York everybody would spend half their time thinking about how they will be able to afford this month's rent. He describes it very well. **You want to be somewhere, where the big city influences are available but you can still afford to be creative. Being creative, at least at the beginning, means to spend money.** I think every creative who wants to work on his or her own is basically a start up where you need investment. That can either be time or money. People always do this balancing act at the beginning, between side jobs, commercial projects and creative work. If you put a lot of research into successful designers **there are a lot of people who are prepared to live with very little for a long time to be able to create the things that get noticed and then get the ball rolling.** That is what you do. It was the same with the roastery. We wanted to make it in a way that it would be interesting for people to write about. We wanted to make something that outshines its budget so that it looks much more than what they actually paid for. Just to get your foot into the door. If you do these kinds of things, in my experience, it always pays out. There is always somebody, luckily, who notices that something looks better than what you would expect or that you see the love, care and detail that went into it. It is not all just budget. I think that is pretty much why I decided to do it differently then with the agency with which I worked before. We too soon had to take care of paying the wages of our staff. Here we were just focused on creating something that looks really good and making the sacrifices that made it all possible.

Where you able to start both of you companies without any financing?

Yes. When we started in 2008, it was right before the financial crisis. And as we rented our first office, the day we got the contract signed we heard the news of the collapse. Then came the realization that work wouldn't be available all the time. But we hadn't really thought about it – we just quit our jobs in the hope to find clients in the first couple of month. Luckily we found some through word of mouth. There was one client of the old agency who wanted to work with us and so things somehow worked out. But no, there was never any outside financing. We tried with a furniture company once but then the investors had such different motives that we decided against it. There was a lot of “we will finance you if you can then do this and that for us”. They basically wanted to hire us and we didn't wanted to get trapped in that process again.

Do you work with producers?

Yes, for the furniture pieces. That part is also much harder without any money. If you make one piece of furniture it is so much more expensive as if you do 20 pieces. That is where it starts to be interesting to look into financing to make production more affordable. The way I see it is that you have people who come right from school who are very talented in making stuff and in designing. These people are maker designers. That was something I was never really interested in. Not because I couldn't make stuff, but because I felt so limited to what you can make, that influences your design process a lot. On the other side there are the people who can make concepts that look really strong at the Milan fair or so. Companies come to them to ask if they could do something noteworthy. That is another part of the spectrum that I was not so interested in. I don't want to do stuff that just looks good on a blog or in a magazine and I also don't want to make stuff that I can make myself. I am stuck in the middle.

So you want to have a professional manufactory producing for you?

Yes. But without becoming that designer that only makes crazy stuff to attract brands. In my opinion that is what is happening since the last couple of years. They start designing for the blogs and magazines because they know exactly what will look good and will get noticed.

I am bit old-fashioned in the sense that furniture is also very much a product that has a practical use. This is also why we originally started the shelves. It is not a sexy piece of furniture. It is the most boring thing. It is for storage and not an awesome chair or a crazy piece of lighting. We wanted to make it very professional from the start. We didn't want to cut the wood ourselves or do the welding of the frames. In the beginning it was very difficult, because the prices that we sold the furniture for were even less or slightly more than what we had to pay to get it build if you just order one. That is why we made no money creating furniture. We decided that this time it was ok.

How did you sell? Which channels did you use?

We used our website. We decided to skip the whole retail market, because the profit margins they want made it impossible for us to sell our furniture through them. From the beginning we kind of have been against the whole retail model. In general you have to sell for four times less than their sticker price. You have to sell through an agent who gets a percentage, who then sells to the retailer so you end up with a product that costs € 250,- to produce having a sticker price of € 1000,- for the consumer. That results in a lot of furniture that is cheaply made in China or Eastern Europe or somewhere else. Or, and that is kind of interesting, but that is not us, very high-tech. In the field that we are now we see that most people just sacrifice quality to make it at a certain price point. We specifically didn't want to end up at a spot like IKEA or HAY, or anything like those low-cost, high volume brands. We were inspired by the mid-century model, where you have a designer and a maker working together. Especially in Sweden and in Denmark where they have a lot of carpentry schools. We were much more interested in that. I think at the moment we are in the position where it becomes interesting, because the production volume is high enough to do a limited series production. For examples all the metal shelves that we use, we can now order in 100 at a time. That makes it extremely affordable in comparison to only order four.

Who is producing the frames and your wood?

The metal is outsourced. We found a company in the North of Holland. Of course we came up with a size of the frame, which is 15 mm, which is kind of hard for industrial production. When we made the first models, we had a welding guy in Rotterdam who was also a former art school student. He really put a lot of effort into it to make the welding and the corners very beautiful. But it was very expensive because a lot of time goes into the frame. Then we found a company that said we should serial produce it and laser cut it. They had all kinds of theories how to make production more affordable. We went with three companies who all said that they could do it and none of the prototypes were good enough. So we went back to that one guy who did all other frames to see how he could make them cheaper. He made some molds, he helped us but still we couldn't get the price down. Because we did more and more projects we got to know more producers. We found a company that did the railings for super yachts. They only do that. We thought that they were very good at polishing stainless steel to a very high degree. They had a workshop full of guys knowing how to do detailed work. We worked with them for another project and at one point asked them if they could take a look at our frames. They said "sure" and now we are working with them. They will deliver the first 100 frames in the end of May.

Once you get the frames, do you assemble them yourself?

Yes. We have a wood workshop. It is a close collaboration with a furniture maker in Rotterdam and us. He is building a new warehouse and we can store our frames and wood there. He assembles and ships to clients, which are usually overseas. 80-90% of our sales go to the US. It is the most interesting market – and the UK. In Europe we sell very little.

How about finding a producer in the US? Would that be an Option?

Probably but the volumes at the moment are not high enough.

Do you have any business goals?

Of course our ultimate goal is to have a workshop in Berlin and to have all relevant machines. So that we could actually produce 100% in house. But we could only do that with the wood. The Metal work is such a

specialized area that it would be impossible for us. At the moment we are working on a limited edition that is going to be polished stainless steel.

Do you plan to create more furniture or is your focus more on the interior projects?

We have been focused more on the interior because that is where we make our wages. We are at a good place at the moment with the amount of projects we have. That means that in the future we really want to spend more time on extra furniture and limited editions. I don't think that we end up being a furniture company that brings out different sofas and so on. We want to keep it to the grid-based thing that we like to do and then slowly expand from there.

Are you working alone at the moment?

Actually Joeri quit in January to work more on his art projects. And my brother Jelle quit his job in March to move to Berlin so that the studio will be fully Berlin based to then work together with one or two furniture designer. We want to have all the creative power here but the production will remain in Rotterdam. In my experience German companies are very good with solid wood but with the veneer we feel like there is a lot of specialty in Holland. Probably because of the shipbuilders. For us it still makes more sense to produce in Rotterdam, put it in a truck and ship it to wherever.

Do you think it is easier to collaborate with people from your own culture?

Absolutely! I think the companies we did talk to, the ones that are able to assist you in English, are also the expensive ones. They are already international oriented. I am very sure that outside of Berlin there are lots of people who might do the work very well, but we will not be able to find them. I also think that the way Germans built companies is a lot more bureaucratic for the long run. If you come up with a new idea, Germans, in my experience, are not very fond of new ideas. For example BMW has a research and development workshop where they love your ideas but the general population is going to say "no". The Dutch overestimate themselves sometimes a bit. In our case that is good. It's

nice to have a metal guy who says, “I have never done that before but yes, lets try”. Or the railing company: they specialize in railings and have been specialized since at least 50 years. When we said that we wanted to make furniture with them, they said sure why not. If we had contacted a gigantic ship building company in Germany they would not have taken us seriously.

What are the biggest challenges for you?

The most difficult part is to find clients that trust in what you are able to do. To convince people is not always easy. We find that digital prototyping is the only way around that. My brother is very good at 3D Rendering and I can do Websites. Clients often can't imagine that you would have a nice web shop and not you sell anything.

How do you split tasks and what kind of tasks would you outsource?

I am basically the creative director. My task is to oversee everything and to come up with first rough idea concepts. My brother studied architecture so he really knows how to do CAD and all that. He also works more in details. I can't do anything of the 3d renderings or software to make a floor plan. That makes it easy to divide tasks. When I was running my ad Company with my partner we could both do exactly the same things. It was much harder to differentiate what each of us would do. A lot of things didn't get done. The things I can't I just can't do so I ask my brother do to them and he is not good at business so I take those tasks. It is a perfect situation.

Do you also build physical prototypes?

Yes. We get them produced by manufacturers. We never touch any piece of sawing equipment. The only thing we do ourselves, because nobody likes it to do it in so much detail, is the surface finishing. If we want to test a new type of wood oil or lacquer we would do that ourselves.

How do you see design today?

I think it is the designers job to convince people that something else than standard is possible. It almost becomes the definition of design to create something into existence, where previously there was something

different or even nothing. It is imagining things for yourself as well as for also for other people.

What skills do you need for your business?

Convincing people is the most undervalued thing. Nobody ever tells you when you start design school that your job is about convincing people. They all say that it is about talent. I think talent is a word that is being misused a lot. Even clients think that everything goes down to talent. I think this is also why it is so hard to make a living as a designer because many people think that it is this inevitable talent that you just have. “I asked a designer because he has the talent –I am not creative.” I think talent is so overvalued by people who don't realize all the work that goes into design. If you don't spend hours and hours and hours on failing things, because that is basically what you do, the end result of most designs is the part that succeeded. Behind that stuff is just a pile of ideas that didn't succeeded. I think qualities that you have to have on top of talent is persistence and to convince people to keep going. You also have to convince yourself to keep going. We really wanted to make a marble table. We made at least 40 prototypes and we still don't have it because it just doesn't work the way we want it. The marble is so heavy and the base needs to be so bulky. Whenever we end up with something that looks quite nice, it just doesn't work. We might end up with something that looks very simple but is very technical. In a sense that we have to mill out the table to such a degree that it becomes very light. We can fill it with another material and then cover it with marble. Then we can add our slim, tiny base, which supports it. Otherwise you end up with designs that already exist. You have to be able to keep working when every single prototype doesn't work.

Do you work with other people or hire staff for specific tasks?

Yes. When a deadline comes close we sometimes work with freelance designers who can draw the details and so on. We also hire photographers to take photos of our interiors.

Is your business German or Dutch?

It is Dutch. That is why things are a bit easier for me. In the moment we are in the process of finding out how we can move the whole business to Germany.

Thank you!

Bartman Berlin

Date: 19.03.2018

The brand Bartmann Berlin was founded in 2007 by Sebastian Kunath, Lasse Schnack and Robert Zeise. The Berlin based designers develop furniture and everyday objects within their team or in cooperations with external designers. Sales and production are mainly practiced in-house.



photo: <http://bartmannberlin.de/about-us>

Can you give us a short insight into the beginnings of your company?

RZ: We exist as the brand Bartmann Berlin since 2015. Before that there were the three of us. We came together in 2007, which was during our studies. Lasse and I studied product design and Seb went to Holland and worked at Piet Hein Eek, as a carpenter and in the design department. At that time we had the opportunity to get these rooms here and decided to do something together. First we did regular jobs, interiors, events and a lot of transmedia projects. These were all commissioned works. It worked well and we had more and more employees. In 2015 we had an exciting time. We developed a new logo, at that time we were called “Betten Bartmann”. We also created a new CI. We had a portfolio filled with furniture pieces and made the decision to work no longer as autonomous designers, but to work within a common brand, also in collaborations with external designers. This means that either everyone in the team works together on a design, a design is created together with an external designer or a design is bought from an external designer and produced under a license agreement.

Do you sell your furniture yourself?

RZ: Exactly. We have an online shop through which we do direct sales. We also have a dealer network. The biggest buyer is “Manufactum”, actually “Magazin”. “Minimum” is also one of them. Otherwise, we have a few other online stores that sell our products. There is also a shop in Switzerland.

Are you producing in-house or do you have producers that produce parts, which you then assemble yourself? Who is responsible for things like packaging and shipping?

RZ: We do all that ourselves from here.

Does that mean that you have extra storage rooms?

RZ: Yes, we have a warehouse in Berlin Schönefeld. And here in the basement we have a small storage. The numbers are still quite small. We don't have quantities of a hundred or a thousand pieces in stock. We are not a start-up company with millions of euros in the background, which

we could spend. We finance ourselves from our profits. Therefore, our steps are a bit smaller.

How did the financing work in the beginning?

RZ: Through small jobs. The brand began small and grew over time.

If a brand would come to you with a project request, would you license your design instead of producing and selling it yourself?

RZ: We decided against that. Otherwise we would be our own competitors.

Was that never an option at the beginning? Out of which reasons did you decide to become a furniture brand?

RZ: At first, when we were still working as autonomous designers, it was an option for us to cooperate with other manufacturers. Then we decided that we want to keep the production in-house. We want to supervise the production, keep an eye on the quality, in order to be able to stand up for it. This works best within your own company. If you give something out to manufacturers, production is usually tied to sales and quantity, in order to keep the prices low. Often production goes to China. You can tell the difference between something that we made in-house to something that was produced in China by its quality.

Where are your producers?

RZ: Actually, all in Berlin, or within Germany.

If you could not produce something in Germany, for example because it would be too expensive, would you go to Poland, Italy or other countries within Europe?

RZ: Sure. You have to remain on a competitive basis. One example is our Lounge Chair Lenz, its shell and the steel frame are complex to produce. That doesn't make it easy to stay within a price frame of comparable chairs. And we aren't a high quality brand, which is in a high-priced segment where you would spend 10.000 € for a Bartmann chair. Customers compare prices. To keep a certain price we have to think economical. In such cases, we could imagine to look for manufacturers across Europe. But China will never be an option. Poland for example is

so close. For us, it would be important to be able to visit manufacturers, to get to know the production and the people. We don't like to send out an email and wait and see what happens. When a large production starts, we want to be on-site to avoid unwanted surprises.

If you start a new project, would you first go to a manufacturer to get inspired by their production possibilities or would you do that after designing a product?

RZ: That might be a good way. However, this is an approach for which you need a lot of time. At the moment it is more likely that we have a design and then look for a manufacturer. Currently we are doing a shelf. The original producer cannot translate the design as we imagine it. That's why we have to look for someone who can produce it that way. But it would be exciting to first see what the manufacturers can do.

How do you generate new products and directions?

RZ: Sometimes it just happens out of a need. We are not yet as market-oriented as other major furniture brands. Such brands send out very precise briefs to designers, which state clearly what kind of furniture they need, which material, the aimed price range and include a mood board. So they do accurate market analysis and it's very clear what they want. They know what the trend for 2019 looks like. So far we don't do that, but it's something to pick up from. Of course we keep an eye on which of our products sells well or not that well and on what our portfolio is missing. Obviously we want to have a comprehensive portfolio with which we serve different areas. But we don't want to exaggerate, so that we would have kitchenware, kids furniture, living and so on. It should remain tangible for the customer visiting our website.

What distinguishes your design?

SP: All our designs are rather simple and reduced, no unnecessary details. It is important that many things can be produced here, in-house. We use sustainable materials, no plastic or other environmentally harmful materials. Overall the design has to be a round thing. In our designs we mostly work with wood and metal. Nevertheless, we are, of course, open to other new, exciting materials.

RZ: We are looking for materials that we can mainly process ourselves,

so that we can build prototypes. That's important to us. We do 1:1 prototypes early in the process. I would say steel and wood are two materials that we know well and feel comfortable with. We want to design with a clear conscience. Our approach is, as Silva said, that we don't only make a nice table. It also has to be practical in a way. It should also be aesthetic, it is probably no foldable camping table. It needs both, aesthetics and a meaningful benefit. That's important to us.

SP: And it should have a quality that will last a lifetime.

RZ: Exactly. If it wouldn't be stable it wouldn't satisfy us.

Do you build prototypes only in-house or also with manufacturers?

RZ: Partly we built them with producers, if it makes sense. First of all, we try to estimate proportions here with cardboard mock-ups, also to proof the visual appearance. But to be able to test stability, for example, you have to work in the original material and sometimes we reach our limits of producing everything in our workshop. Then we get it produced external.

The three of you have similar backgrounds. How do you split tasks? Do you have someone who is better when it comes to administrative tasks or are all of you focused on designing?

RZ: You could say that this is not the dream constellation to start a business. It would be better to have someone from the business field or IT segment within the team. That would perhaps be the faster and more promising way to grow a company. We have to get professional help for certain tasks. Covering all of them as a product designer makes no sense. Of course we have divided our tasks among each other. Lasse does a bit more in sales and marketing, I tend to do production and Seb does project management and design. Silva also does design, project management and production support.

Is Silva the only employee who is a designer?

RZ: Silva is the only employed product designer, yes.

You told us that your studio will move. What are your future goals? Do you plan on expanding your company?

RZ: We will have to expand in sales. We just hired someone for that area. That's a first step in the right direction. It will surely need more staff at some point. It's the same in marketing. If we move and the workshop gets bigger we need more staff there. We are always unsure with how much production we make in-house and how much production we outsource. On the one hand we like it very much and think that we have a good network and experience to make the production ourselves, on the other hand we also know that if you make it somewhere else, it would be a optimized production construed to produce something serial. For example producing a chair. **You have to calculate, if it makes sense to produce 100 chairs yourself or if it is better to hand it over and get 300 chairs, but for a good price.** So we can grow a little bit within our team, but it will not be infinite. Support and packaging could still be considered to expand.

Are you doing all that in-house at the moment?

RZ: Yes.

How many people are working at Bartmann Berlin in total?

RZ: Ten to twelve people.

How much design work do you still do yourself?

RZ: The percentage of creative work compared to the administrative work decreases very much. At the moment we have three products on going - a shelving system, a freestanding shelf and a chair. Silva is doing more creative work than me. Just like the interns who work in SolidWorks and prepare the designs. At the moment I'm doing a lot of administrative work and contract business. We develop and build many kitchens on customer requests. There is no set "Bartmann kitchen" that we sell to the customers. We work very closely with the customer, but always stay within the "Bartmann design" frame. If the customer likes this, we can design a kitchen for him according to his or her wishes. We want to develop this process further. This means that processes should be standardized in order to work more efficiently and to be able

to act faster. From the initial cost estimation to the offer, brainstorming, visualization to the final kitchen - now this is often a long process. I'm currently spending a lot of time on completing such a project faster. Besides that you wouldn't believe what other tasks there are - clean up servers, make internship contracts, write offers, tidy up, ...

How does Bartmann Berlin make itself visible? Are you going to fairs? Do you use social media?

SP: When requests come from blogs, we of course send out press kits. But we are not that active ourselves.

RZ: Our new intern Nora is responsible for sales and marketing. Right now we have some ads on Facebook. There is room for improvement - we have to admit that. But it is also very expensive; you realize that quickly. You can easily spend 2000 euros for advertising in a week. But we also realized that it makes sense. There's a lot going on online. In order to remain visible there are only two or three big providers where you can advertise. So you have to pay services like Google to stay visible. Otherwise you will be downgraded and nobody buys your things because nobody sees your website.

Do you exchange knowledge and experiences with other design studios?

RZ: We have been teamed up with six other Berlin brands as "Berliner Zimmer". So we went touring, so to speak. We were twice in Munich and once in Berlin. We also went to a fair. That gave a platform to exchange ideas with each other about different things. In terms of advertising ourselves, we have found that relatively little came back through the "Berliner Zimmer". We had more success with banal Facebook advertising. Even though we had great events where people could come by and talk to us. And no one bought anything there. It can be said that customers have to see something three times before they make a buying decision. Once we had a factory sale we have advertised on Facebook. You have to put people under pressure, so to speak. We said, "If you're here at noon, you will get great discounts!" People were standing in line and within twenty minutes we had sold five beds.

Did you have some kind of design community to exchange knowledge when you started your business?

RZ: People often meet at fairs. We have been to various fairs and you always meet the same people. We are friends with some other designers and of course there is an exchange. But it needs to work out so that you do not have a label next to you that also sells beds or products with the same design language. For us it always worked out well.

Speaking of "community" there is now an initiative called "Stuhlkreis" here in Berlin. Recently there has been a group mail that was directed to all the brands and designers in the city. It now took place for the first time and I heard that many people were there. It's about just getting together and trying to get something started in Berlin. There is no fair or something similar in Berlin, but of course there are still strong design labels here that have developed but do not come together. Many say that there is too much of a competition. But if you meet them it actually is good. However, everyone is always very busy and it's hard to find time to organize things. And if you actually decide to do something, then the problem is that a Design Studio is responsible for it. You would have to collect money to pay someone everyone trusts in organizing such an event. That's not so easy.

What are tasks that you outsource?

RZ: Taking care of the website and photo shootings too. Unless we need pictures with a white backdrop, that we dare to do ourselves. We have handed over the realization of our catalogue to a graphic design office. We often work with external graphic designers. Currently we are looking for someone for our accounting. We have done that in-house for far too long. **I hear it again and again: If you eventually become self-employed, then the first thing you should do is to look for an assistant! This is the most important thing to release yourself from the administrative stuff. Otherwise you will sink into the swamp of administration! I like to invest this money to free up time. The moment I take care of the bookkeeping I cannot design.**

Do you have a lawyer?

RZ: Yes. It's a contact from university. We can send him for example a license agreement and he revises it for us. We also have legal support through Lasse's father, who is a lawyer.

If you employ for example design interns, do you feel that students or young designers lack certain skills or knowledge that you ask for?

RZ: You cannot say that in general, there are such and such. **What I sometimes miss is a certain power of endurance.** I remember spending our nights at the university to finish what had to be done. Nowadays, I rarely hear that students doing night shifts. Also the "trying out" and "pushing boundaries" is missing. Often there is an idea that is implemented directly instead of continue building several models and trying out new things. **It sometimes seems to me that the university either can't any longer be used as a "play ground" because the credit system doesn't allow it, or young students simply don't perceive it as such anymore.** As a student you need to remind yourself: **"I am not in a set design job yet, I can and should try myself and my possibilities out."** I cannot quite estimate exactly how it actually is.

Where did you study?

RZ: UdK (University of the Arts Berlin). That was still a diploma program. We had a lot of time and possibilities. Now with the bachelor and master system ... However, they are getting taught good skills. They know how to work with Solid Works, Photoshop, InDesign and so on. When I first started studying in 2005, there was no Solid Works version we could use. The university purchased that kind of software over time. There was no computer room where twenty computers were standing around. **Rapid prototyping was not a thing at the time. Nowadays you can do prototype so fast - I wonder why nobody does that? A 3D printer is not expensive. Why doesn't the process go faster? I can try so much, so fast in a row ...** it seems like some people don't make use of that. I sometimes find that a pity. The interaction between working with your hands, going to the computer and check it in 3D and adjust the drawing, then go back to the model and make use of all those possibilities to compare drafts and develop them.

How did you feel about that, Silva? Did you have the feeling that you met the expectations or was there a lot you had to learn right after graduating?

SP: I first did an internship here, since I still wanted to do the master's degree. **After completing my studies, I did not feel ready to go directly into professional life. Of course you are always nervous at the beginning. But it worked out and it was a good fit, otherwise I would not be here anymore.** I was quickly entrusted with projects on which I worked independently. In the beginning I had concerns that something could go wrong but everything went very well. Certainly, it also depends on how your personality is, how it fits with the team. I now notice that with interns. Some match better, others do less.

What was the reason that you got employed as a designer? Could you imagine starting your own business?

SP: It was a fluent transition from the internship to the permanent employment. I realized how much work it is to be self-employed. Much of the design work then falls away for administrative work. I don't want to do that all. I can do many things here that I enjoy. Of course there are also projects that just have to be done but when it comes to design work, I have freedom. And it's fun to work here with the team. To be self-employed would be too much for me.

What advice would you give a young designer who is about to start as a self-employed designer?

SP: **I think it's important to work with someone who can take care of administrative and financial matters. And besides that you have to be tough, especially in the beginning.** If you want to bring your designs onto the market it needs self-confidence and a strong personality.

RZ: I think the same. The most important thing is that you are convinced of yourself. With a natural understanding of self-assessment, so that you still stay likeable. However, it still happens that you make a very very good design and some people just won't like it. Don't get discouraged by that! **You have to hang on and stick to it.** In the beginning it's important to get a foot down. You have to win one customer, that's important.

Besides, in the beginning I would take part in various competitions, trying to become visible. Use social platforms. And do not sell under value in any circumstances!

You can negotiate and adjust prices, but you have to formulate clearly where you might cut your work. If you are just like that make a job for 5.000 € instead of 10.000 €, then you quickly become implausible. That won't make you happy. We also made these mistakes. What's also very important is to start building a good network as soon as possible. It's best to start early in the university, the university usually has a good network! Also participate in competitions, events or exhibitions. Be there in person. Show yourself at events and the parties, get into conversation with people, and don't be afraid to introduce yourself. I think it's important to always stay friendly and honest! Such a network helps a lot. At some point you will get back to someone you met once and you usually meet twice in life.

What other skills are important?

RZ: If you realize, for example, that you cannot sell well, then you should seek help. Either you learn how to do it or you look for someone who sells for you. You do not have to do everything yourself. Sometimes you just have to have someone to support you.

Another thing is the quality of a portfolio or a cover letter when applying for a job. If someone has good designs but does not manage to show them properly, it will leave an impression. Is the person unreliable, chaotic? Can I work with someone like that? This is important. If someone is a good designer, but totally unreliable, you won't work with that person.

My recommendation is: before you start your own business you should take look into one, two or three companies. A big one, a small one, or one abroad. Collect impressions and take them with you to start your own company.

Thank you!

This interview was held in German. All answers are translated.

Conclusions of Interviews

Reflection of the knowledge we collectected

Talking to so many designers who deal with the design world everyday, we noticed that the working life will make you richer! If you only study, one part of the profession will always stay undiscovered.

The job will teach you things you cannot learn in school. When we started the thesis, neither of us had experiences in taking interviews. To be honest, both of us were quite scared to just send emails out to designers, design studios and brands and ask for an interview with them. Surprisingly the bigger percentage of the Designers we got in touch with actually read our proposal and reacted very positively towards our request. Some were very interested in the topic themselves and were thus more than happy to talk to us. We even noticed that the questions we asked helped some of the (especially the younger) design studios to reflect on their own work. It was great for us to see that being a student and daring to ask questions actually can make a change in how people think about their work. It almost felt as if we were giving something back to them. The 18 interviews allowed us to re-think our own idea of the work-life and to reframe, over and over, how we could imagine to work and to live as designers. Each interview opened more perspectives for us and truly widened our horizon. In the end it wasn't hard, scary or frustrating at all to take time to sit down with other designers. We actually had difficulties to stop interviewing. We had a lot of fun! One important thing we personally took from the interviews was that we 1. Broadened our personal network in an easy way and 2. That we can relax – everything will come together – it just takes time!

For others

Good advice is for free

We are aware that not many people will take time to sit down a read all interviews. We did the interview series to be able to collect valuable information and viewpoints from designers who are already settled in the business life or just started to. We wanted to share the knowledge that we collected with design students, graduates and even young people who have not yet started their design education. There is so much a designer need to know about the business that is not and probably cannot be taught in design school. Knowing a bit more about what is needed by each individual, which strength and skills should be developed early on might help the one or other person to set a focus early on. One outcome of our thesis project is the “GOOD ADVICE IS FOR FREE” list in which we collected an essence of important tools for all designers.

We hope you enjoy reading them and that you actually can make use of some of the points!

GOOD ADVICE IS FOR FREE

Be part of networks!
Connect with people!
Dare to share your work!
Prioritize your work!
Define your goals!
Save up some money!
Do internships – learn from others!
Exchange information's with other designers! - Sharing is caring!
Keep your eyes open for inspiration!
Exhibit your work!
Find a side job!
Talk about new projects!
Get out there – start to work!
Don't restrict yourself to materials, tools, or so!
Keep going!
Make it work!
Organize your time!
Set yourself goals!
Get help if needed!
Find someone who is good in selling!
Stay curious!

Stay true to yourself!
Stay flexible!
Be kind!
Talk! Talk! Talk!
Believe in what you work on!
Build models in scale 1:1!
Ask for feedback!
Get in touch!
Use rapid prototyping!
Visit fairs!
Find collaborators!
Accept sacrifices!
Apply for grants!
Believe in yourself!
Dare!
Make use of your connections!
Write about your work to train your writing skills!
You don't have to know everything!
Try new things!
Relax – everything will come together if you keep working on it!

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