Norwegian furniture in Icelandic homes

Although the name references a geographical region consisting of Sweden, Denmark and Norway, Scandinavian modern furniture is most closely associated with Denmark. The Nordic country Finland’s mid-century furniture designers have also received recognition (Alvar Aalto and Eero Saarinen in particular).

But there is a Scandinavian country whose design history has gone largely unnoticed: Norway. While not as renowned as its neighbours for a proud design legacy, Norwegian mid-century design has been enjoying a renessaince in the past twenty years. Everyone knows Tripp Trapp (1972) from Stokke but there is also so much more.

Some of the older pieces are sold for small fortunes, especially those which received international awards (and many did!) some 60 years ago. Quite a few are back in production after a long break. Companies like Fjordfiesta, Eikund, LK Hjelle and Vatne Møbler produce Norwegian designed furniture in Norway. Design groups as the one called Norway Says with famous names like Andreas Engesvik are making sure that Norwegian design also has a bright future beyond mid-century modern.

It’s always baffling to recognize such a large number of Norwegian chairs, tables, shelves and other artifacts in old Ielandic family photos or in glossy magazines, usually referred to as “an old chair from my husband’s childhood home”, “bought by my father during his seaman years” or a “cool chair bought at Góða hirðinn, it’s probably Danish”.

## **Smuggled by sea**

How did all the Norwegian furniture, hand made from mainly the west coast, end up in Icelandic homes? We asked a seaman who were one of the many Icelanders to visit Norwegian ports and harbours and bring Norwegian products to Iceland in the sixties and seventies.

*It was difficult to get hold of foreign currency but in the foreign ports we all got a fee called “löndunarpeningar” when we landed i.e. herring, and this fee was in the currency of the country. I never spent it on anything else than what my family needed at the time. The selection of foreign products was scarce in Iceland, and what you could have was very expensive, We bought for example clothing, furniture and electrical goods in Norway. I brought back Tandberg amplifiers, speakers and cassette player, as well as Falcon chairs and several book shelves. The skipper got the biggest part of the “löndunarpeningar” but everyone got something. We stacked everyting on the boat and we were of course smuggling. The skipper usually had a cabin for himself to fill up with whatever he bought. The rest of us shared the space which was free. Sometimes this was the fish hold itself, of course very well cleaned after landing in Norway.*

*Customs were mostly interested in smuggled goods like alcohol but they started to show some interest in the mercandise we brought back. Once they sealed off the entrence to the cabins. This was just before Christmas and they intended to search the vessel after the holidays. However, the crew was used to improvising with technical solutions and the lock of the door was set up in a way that allowed us to open it without breaking the seal. We managed to clean everyhing out before the customs came back. Friends and family helped out. That was some Christmas.*

Written by the Norwegian embassy in Reykjavik