



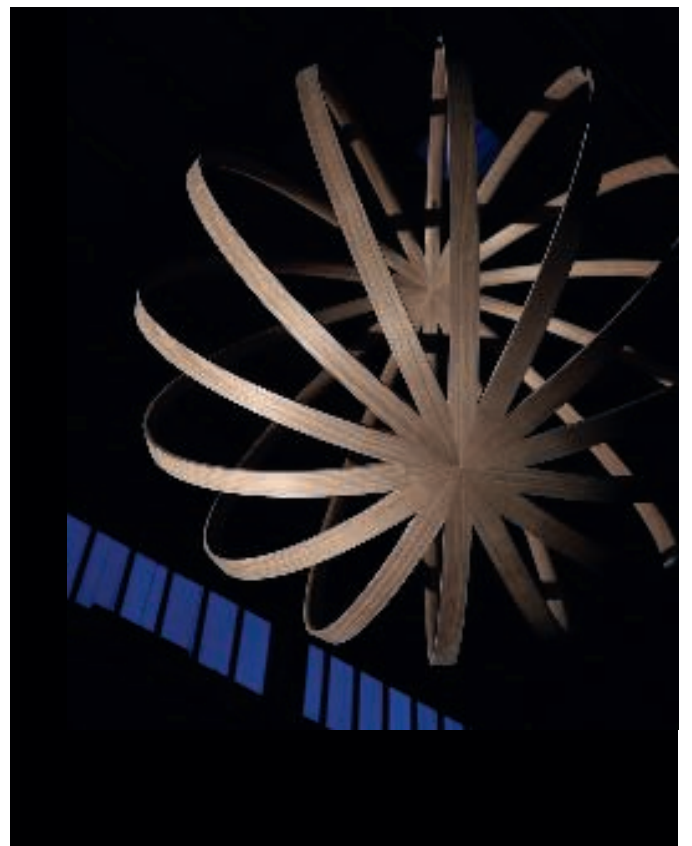
THE INNERMOST BEING OF WOOD

They boil wood in water, watch blocks of ice melt and play around with wood shavings, fire, sandpaper and elbow grease as they strive to find the innermost being of the wood. With enthusiasm and an uncompromising approach, designer couple METTE BENTZEN AND LASSE KRISTENSEN from Egeværk add new realisations and insights to their vast body of knowledge on wood. The result is artworks of international stature and handcrafted furniture of the highest quality.

Words: Susanne Holte



EGEVÆRK has designed and sculpted more than 200 unique pieces of furniture in dialogue with customers, and often for specific spaces. The Stems Table from 2018 is a good example. ORBIT is a three-dimensional wood sculpture that consists of 14 arced slats crafted from walnut. It is large enough for a grown man to stand upright inside it, thus making Orbit a tribute to Leonardo da Vinci's Vitruvian Man. The sculpture was on display during the UN climate change conference COP24 held in Poland in 2018.

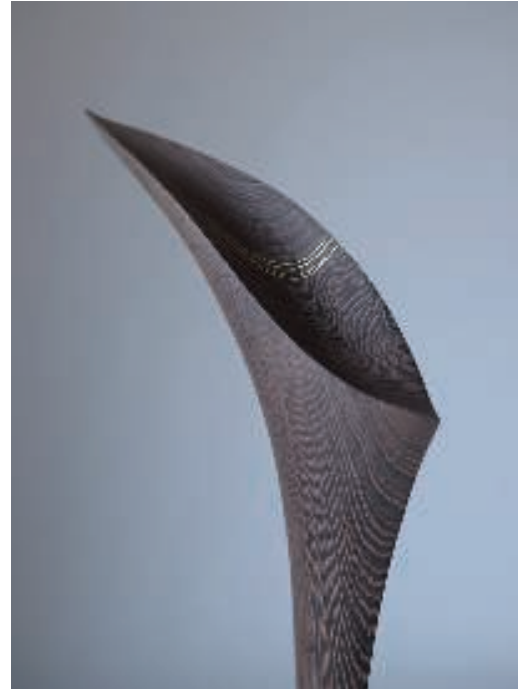




THE ESSENTIA CABINET is a bespoke cabinet in wengé and copper – two essential materials in nature. The cabinet is a reminder that nature is so much older than humankind. STALACTITES grow slowly from cave ceilings, while stalagmites grow from the ground up. Made of lime deposits, they have growth rings much like trees that tell a story of climate change. These formations have inspired Egeværk to create a series of sculptures in ash and smoked oak. DETAIL from a stalagmite sculpture.



“We most enjoy working with one-off pieces
- it creates a very special dynamic in
the work process and enables us to work
with new techniques.”



A flame burns – not just in the studio, where experiments are conducted with fire, water and ice – but also within two artists, whose passion for the wood’s potential sparks this inner fire. Mette Bentzen and Lasse Kristensen, who are in the process of closing down their Hundested studio and moving somewhere larger in Helsingør, are in their own words filled with love for wood – a love that translates into fantastical artworks and expressive furniture pieces that find their way to collectors around the world.

Anyone watching the artworks at Egeværk take shape is bound to be enthralled by the stark beauty and the organic, sensuous design idiom. Next comes amazement that a practical craft exists that can liberate the expressive sculptures lying dormant within the individual block of wood.

Mette Bentzen, who shares a workshop, a passion for wood and her personal life with partner Lasse Kristensen, admits that they are both ‘extreme nerds’ and are both prepared to walk through fire and water to learn more about the inner power of wood.

“Wood is a living material that takes an entire lifetime, or more, to know. And no matter how much effort we make, and how many hours we work, we will never be finished learning. This is why it is absolutely necessary, inspiring and educational to work with people who have accumulated knowledge about the wood’s potential,” explains Mette, who qualified as a machine woodworker at PP Møbler, where she worked with some of the industry’s best cabinetmakers. This was also where she met Lasse, a cabinetmaker with an approach to his

craft that is both artistic and scientific. Together they have created Egeværk, established in 2011 – first as a cabinetmaker workshop for bespoke furniture, and later as an experimental workshop for exhibiting their own, more artistic works. They began with a 45 m² space in Hundested Harbour, followed by a series of expansions, and now they are again spreading their wings and moving to an 850 m² workshop and gallery in Helsingør.

But before the independent workshop and the expansive growth, they got to know Hans J. Wegner inside and out at PP Møbler, where they both completed their apprenticeships, earning a silver medal (the highest Danish guild honour for a craftsman, with only God being eligible for gold). Lasse continued his medal quest by subsequently winning both the Danish and the Nordic championships in cabinetmaking, just as he represented Denmark in the World Cup in Japan. Grants later made it possible for Lasse to study at Hinoki Kogei in Japan. The insights gained from the Empire of the Sun can today be seen in both his design idiom and techniques.

“My path to Egeværk was a bit more winding than Lasse’s. I actually studied art in Copenhagen before going off to sea on a three-year voyage around the world. While travelling, I learned about the diversity of the cabinetmaker’s craft, and on returning to Denmark, I joined PP Møbler as an adult apprentice,” explains Mette, who is grateful for having learned from the very best.

“Precisely because wood is a living material that never stops telling us stories, we need to exchange experiences, and Lasse and I draw on all the talented ▶



► people around the world that we can. We're involved in a number of networks and are always happy to share our knowledge with others," says Mette.

Together with the rest of the Egeværk team, they demonstrate their methods to other wood nerds, and the new gallery enables them to do more outward-facing activities and even to allow more visitors to observe and follow the creation process. More than 80,000 visitors come by annually, and they now have even more elbow room - and Mette and Lasse have more peace in which to work.

"Our own adventure began with furniture making, but a collaboration with Maria Wettergren Galerie in Paris, where we showed furniture designer Hannes Stephensen's chair *A Touch of Mack*, sent us in an all-new direction. The big game changer was an exhibition in England, where we came in contact with gallery owner Sarah Myerscough, who didn't hesitate to call our work art. At that point we had already begun focusing on more sculptural things in which function had been partly removed from the equation - what today is called 'collectible design'," explains Mette.

"When you remove the function from a piece, you gain new freedom both in terms of art and craftsmanship. Creativity is set free, which for us has meant that we can explore the intersection between art, nature, design and science, but always with the craft and the material in focus," emphasises Mette, who has not completely discarded the functional in her work.

"Function can help give a piece strength, because you're forced to cut down

to the essentials. That is the case with a project such as our *Shapes of Ice*, where we seek the boundaries between sculpture and furniture," says Mette.

Mette and Lasse have closely studied how a block of ice changes shape when it melts, and have visited glaciers, explored stalactites growing in caves and followed meltwater channels in the terrain - all to transfer the impressions with the help of chisel and sandpaper and thus add new aesthetic layers to the wood. This process results in otherworldly sculptures, curated by their English gallerist Sarah, who opens the doors to exhibitions the world over - particularly in the USA, where demand for Mette and Lasse's artworks is high. The sought-after couple behind Egeværk, besides making a demanding move and completing orders for bespoke furniture pieces, must also find time to experiment. At the moment, the big pots are in use. Lasse boils wood to find out if it is possible to make transparent wood. Mette and Lasse are on a never-ending expedition into the wood universe, and they use science to help them decode nature - something for which Lasse has a real genius, according to Mette. Actually, it seems they are both pretty brilliant, for Mette and Lasse are always forging new and innovative paths, and the world has long since become aware of their qualities.

"We have the greatest respect for the historical craftsmanship traditions on which we both draw. So we never compromise on quality and finish, but nevertheless push boundaries and go to the limits of the possible - and you can only do that if you know the rules and have mastered your craft," says Mette. ■

THE ICE SERIES is inspired by Nordic nature and its harsh winters. The designers worked to capture the fleeting beauty of nature and ice in the solid, stable wood. For many months, Mette Bentzen and Lasse Kristensen studied the ice's melting process, which they carefully catalogued in a series of photos and later transformed into poetic wood sculptures. THE VOID TABLE is a non-table. Anything you place on it will be drawn down into a void and disappear. The unique piece is an exploration of the relationship between function, shape, craft and art. THE BLOOM CHAIR was created in close collaboration between Egeværk and furniture designer Hannes Stephensen. It is represented by Maria Wettergren Galerie and made in a limited, numbered edition of just 20 pieces.

