

# SCANDINAVIAN MODES

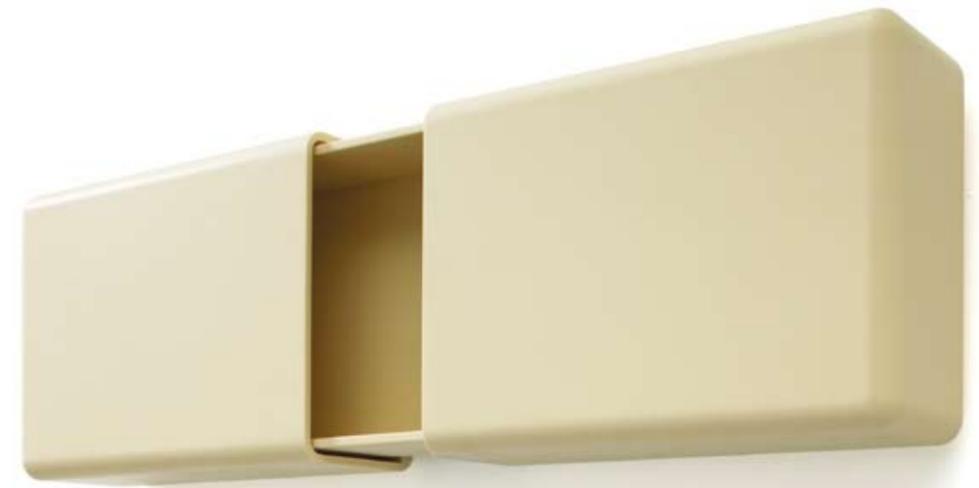


Jonas Lindvall is one of Sweden's most acclaimed designers, but he doesn't like to shout about it. In fact, he'd probably rather let his work speak for itself. In this rare interview Lindvall discusses (in hushed tones) his latest projects and explains why he likes to step back from the madness of the design world.

WORDS: Sarah Brownlee



Meeting room in Lindvall's office with Oak chairs and dining table for Skandiform.



'I DON'T KNOW WHAT THE ENGLISH SAY, BUT IN SWEDEN WE HAVE A SAYING THAT COBBLERS HAVE THE WORST SHOES,' says designer Jonas Lindvall when asked to describe his abode. 'My home is not really something to brag about,' he adds, quietly. 'It's just a small place and I never really have the energy to do much with it.'

This is a somewhat surprising admission from a man whose work spans the disciplines of architecture and furniture design but a pleasing one in an age in which superstar designers hold court, boasting designer lifestyles to match their work, including enviable pads fit for the pages of the glossiest magazines. 'When I go home I want to leave the design scene behind,' Lindvall continues. 'I'm not consumed by it. On the contrary, I believe that the cult status that some designers of products have is not good. At the end of the day a chair is just a

chair and a table is just a table.'

It just so happens, however, that one of Lindvall's recent launches is a particularly remarkable chair. Although you probably wouldn't get him to say so, at least not in so many words. 'It's something that looks like it shouldn't work but it does,' he says of his creation. 'It sounds a bit pretentious but I tried to make a product that comes together in a very harmonious way.' Lindvall produced the first sketches for the Bernard chair several years ago, taking inspiration from a monk's chair he had seen, although now he can't quite remember where (he has a hazy recollection of seeing one in a work by Albrecht Dürer, but can't be sure). Following its long gestation period, the design was finally unveiled at the Stockholm Furniture Fair, earlier this year, and a number of orders have been placed already. 'It's a difficult chair to make and it >>>



(top) Box No3 in Corian, part of the Sacred Boxes series. (above) Lindvall's Mata Hari lounge chair for de Nord.



**left**  
Villa J concept with striking white facade and stepped approach.

**centre**  
(From left) Oak chair and stool and Papa chair for Skandiform

**right**  
Villa M concept featuring open-plan living/dining space.

is very expensive retailing at £700-£800,' Lindvall confirms. 'It is totally hand-made – the back and seat have to be made piece-by-piece by a cabinet maker and it takes a lot of man hours to get right, but the idea was really to make a chair that, both technically and aesthetically, could have been made 500 years ago.'

At the same time, Lindvall launched his Tailored Boxes, an extension of his Sacred Boxes series born out of his fascination for the rituals of opening boxes. And, as with the Bernard chair, there is a religious or spiritual resonance to the work. 'I realise that some in some of the world religions small vessels, containers or pieces of furniture have played an important role in forming the mythologies that lay the foundations for these religions,' Lindvall says. 'My starting point was all the boxes, cases, chests, cupboards and containers with different contents and how they have contributed to creating mystery and atmosphere in people's lives. I was thinking of the Ark of the Covenant and the importance it had for Christianity, Islam and Judaism.'

Again, this was more of a speculative project than anything else. 'The idea of doing one off pieces is important to me,' he reiterates, although he continues to work



## LINDVALL IS NO 'DESIGN SUPERSTAR' (THANK GOODNESS) BUT HE REMAINS ONE OF SWEDEN'S MOST ACCLAIMED DESIGNERS.

on commissions for leading manufacturers having produced works for companies such as de Nord, Skandiform, Idée and

Häg. His most iconic designs to date are undoubtedly his Oak and Papa chairs for Skandiform – simple, but beautiful concepts with a nod to the Scandinavian modern style.

Lindvall says he is not part of what he describes as the 'wider Swedish design scene' which consists mainly of designers based in Stockholm while he continues to work from his base in Malmö, also his home town. But while he is no design superstar (thank goodness) he is undoubtedly one of the country's most acclaimed designers. 'I started off as a painter but it wasn't much of a career,' he says modestly of his more than illustrious background. From there he went into spatial design qualifying as an interior architect in 1993 from the acclaimed Gothenburg School of Design (HDK) before trying his hand at furniture

design at the RCA in London and then the Royal Academy, Copenhagen.

His time is now divided evenly between architecture and furniture projects. 'I like the variety of work I do,' says Lindvall. 'I'd hate to do the same thing every day of my life. I particularly like the idea of doing everything in a house and actually we've just finished a project where we did more or less everything, apart from the lights and fixtures. This way, I think you have a better chance of creating uniform work.'

If he had to make a choice, Lindvall says he would concentrate on architecture. 'In a sense it is more rewarding because you have more contact with the end user. When you design a chair it is more of a one-way communication.'

As well as the residential projects Lindvall also works on commercial architecture and interior design – from offices through to retail schemes and with very successful results. His interior design for the Japanese restaurant Izakaya Koi won him the Golden Chair Award in »»



above  
Lindvall's stunning concept  
for the Bloom restaurant  
in Malmö featuring luxurious  
mosaic detailing and  
custom-made furniture.

left  
Pretty in pink. More of the  
Lindvall's ingenious box designs.

right  
The deliciously complex  
Bernard chair.

## 'THERE'S NOTHING GIMMICKY OR BOMBASTIC ABOUT LINDVALL'S WORK, WHICH ULTIMATELY MEANS IT WILL LAST.'

2005, presented through the Association of Swedish Architects. Sifting through his impressive back catalogue and sneaking a peek at projects in the pipeline it's difficult to pin Lindvall down to any particular style although he concedes he could possibly be described as a minimalist. His abject refusal to work on anything that could be perceived as fashionable or 'faddish,' as he describes it, is what really sets him apart from many of his contemporaries. There is nothing gimmicky or bombastic about his work meaning that in the long run his designs will undoubtedly stand the test of time.

He didn't make it to the biggest furniture extravaganza of the year, the Milan Furniture Fair, due to other commitments, but doesn't seem too concerned. 'To be honest with you I think it's probably more important for me to go to fairs that deal with materials or modern technology and furniture making,' he explains. While the 'star companies' are intent on stealing the show, thus garnering as much publicity as possible, Lindvall is content

to continue designing technically and aesthetically pleasing products that 'will last in every possible respect' and which take into account the important issues of the moment such as sustainability. He is lucky in the respect that he can design what and how he likes and still manage to switch off from it all when he returns to his not very designer (but happily so) abode of an evening. His dream project involves yet more escapism. 'I have worked on a number of hotel projects but I would really like to take on a small hotel in the countryside,' says Lindvall. 'Some kind of retreat, but quite luxurious, where you can go away and leave your worries behind.' In the hands of such a thoughtful designer that's a tempting prospect indeed. ☺

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