

The Træna Chair

How furniture design can reinforce community resilience



1. Sanna, Træna Kommun

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Abstract

In February of this year I travelled to the Norwegian islands of Træna for this Exam project. Sailing the 50 km from the mainland in a February storm, I was in awe of the uncontrollable strength of the wind and the waves. This raw energy always moving demands deep respect and the people who live here must have a special mentality to survive and thrive in this harsh natural environment. This Atlantic Ocean is and for centuries has been a means to travel and to earn an income through trade and fishing.

I have designed a chair inspired by the culture and identity of this small island community that is now investing in its survival by creating new ways to rejuvenate. The chair tells the story of the resilience of Træna, of Vikings, sea routes, fishermen, of the importance of small communities throughout the world and the diversity they can offer, it tells the story of my findings and experiences. It glorifies what can come forth through reflecting upon traditions and identity and it underpins Træna's approach to stay a vibrant community.

Keywords

Wood Oriented Furniture Design, Community, remote island, resilience, sea routes, wood, Viking long boat, sustainability, fishing boats, steam bending, revenues, design language, senses, traditions, longevity, chair, Træna.

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1. Introduction and Background

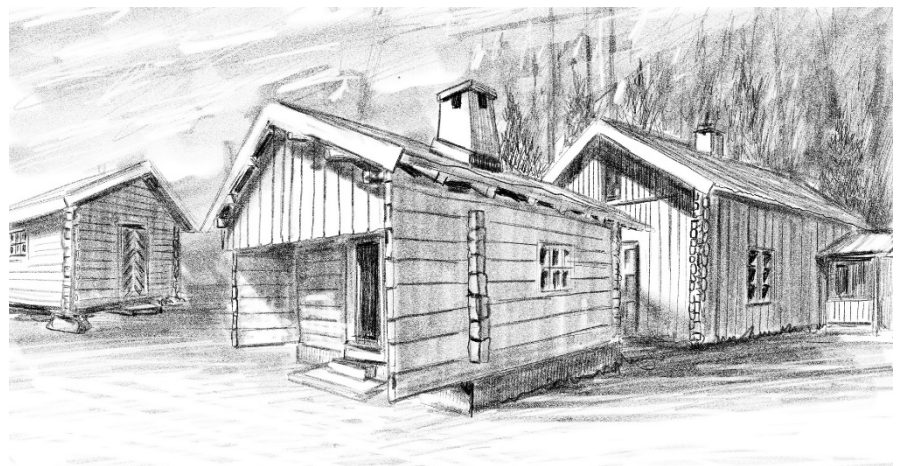
1.1 Previous Education and interest

I grew up in the Netherlands in an urban environment. As soon as I finished high school I left this urban environment, in search for a life in the type of environment's I only knew from family holidays. For a year I lived in the Lake District in England. Here I studied cabinetmaking and lived a life rather different to what I had always known.

I thoroughly enjoyed my year in England and it showed me how important design and the process of designing is to me. In many ways I was looking for a continuation with the potential to focus more on the design part whilst keeping a close link to the material wood. This is an important aspect in my approach to design, realising that developing a full understanding of the physical world, is achieved not just through vision, as described by Palasmaa (2009) in 'The Thinking hand'. Working with my hands, and including designing with and for the senses is crucial within my design process.

Ever since I have been very young I have valued nature, taking in the views, the sound of the wind, of water and the smell of tree's. I have realised to what extent nature often stimulates all of our senses. This was a realisation that partly came to be through my move from this urban environment to ones where nature often had a clear overhand. In urban areas most things that reach our senses come from what is designed. If it has been forgotten to include you might lack the input of one entire sense. This made me further realise the extent to which design shapes our lives and has an impact on us. The following quote by Mau (2020) strikes me for its to the point truth 'Design shapes our lives and therefore bad design creates bad life'.

Following the realisation of the importance of including those senses when it comes to design and my belief in that the sensory perception is crucial for humans I designed the 'Chair of Happiness' in November 2021. This was an exploration into the senses. Bringing different almost contrasting sensory experiences together in one object. The inspiration for this chair was my families little wooden farmhouse.



2. Chair of Happiness
3. Ransby Backen

The house built in 1800 is part of in total five houses that form a very small rural village. The house and its setting has sparked interest into the value and role of small communities, especially in relation to traditions and identity. This chair was designed for that little place. My strong urge in designing for a specific place and environment lies within my belief in the value of culture and identity.

1.2 Growing interest in local communities

Huntington e.o. (2017), 'Local communities throughout the world are experiencing extensive social, cultural, economic, environmental, and climatic changes. Rather than passively accepting the effects of such changes, many communities are responding in various ways to take advantage of opportunities and to minimise negative impacts'. This is community resilience. Resilience is the ability to adapt and change, to reorganise, while coping with disturbance. It is all about changing in order not to be changed. (Walker, 2020).

An inspiring example of community resilience is 'Not Quite' in Fengersfors, a small rural village in Swedish Dalsland, next door to the town I live and study in. As in more small villages in rural Sweden the effects of urbanisation became visible. In 2002 a group of local people started a cultural centre in the old and abandoned paper mill factory. Various artists, designers and craftspeople have set up studio's and workshops here. Not Quite has become a popular destination for locals and tourists with exhibitions, courses and workshops and a popular café and bakery. As a result, Fengersfors has seen a ruralisation of both 'old' inhabitants coming back and 'new' people coming in, and a feeling of pride about the new liveliness of the town. 'Not Quite' has become a success story in the possibilities of small communities investing in their own development. In the summer of 2021 I had the chance to work here for a month as an artist in residence, I designed and built an interpretation of a traditional small Swedish farmhouse kitchen, that after completion was exhibited at 'Not Quite'.

Fengersfors is such a great example because they embraced what they had. The existing factory was unused and became something new. It is part of their story and history and is now creating a new story. An example of first looking back to look forward.

rural countryside must rest on genuine local preferences'. It is this small island community that will be the inspiration for my final exam project.

2. Purpose

This project's purpose is to investigate and analyse ways in which my design can contribute to the resilience of a local community like Træna. Træna is an example project when it comes to the value of identity and local communities.

3. Goal/objective

The goal for this project is to design a piece of furniture or series of furniture that will reflect, incorporate and give meaning to the findings of my research. Focusing on the uniqueness of Træna, a small island community, designing an example piece that focusses on the importance of traditions and identity.

Object that focusses on identity to stimulate variety thus helping Trænas resilience.

That being said, there is one important objective which is that ultimately I am providing a design proposal that should be a solution to the community/the client's needs. Therefore, the outcome has to be a balance between my clients expectations and mine.

4. Questions formulation

1. What is the importance of the resilience of rural communities like Træna?
2. What is the purpose of the Træna 365 project and what are the expectations of the client?
3. What makes up Træna's specific strong characteristics and how can this be translated into a design?

5. Approach

By going to Træna I want to immerse myself in the local traditions and in island life with an outsiders view. I want to learn as much as possible of the specific characteristics of living there. Are there any traditions, specific skills and/or crafts which are vital to island life? Can I find characteristics of their cultural identity? To learn this I aim to talk to as many people as I can while I am there. Further, I want to experience the geographic setting and the nature, walking as much as I can to explore the islands to really get a feel for the place.

I will speak with the client/community about their project. What is their dream, how do they aim to fulfill that dream and how can a design of mine fit into that?

In short, learn as much on the island as possible from the following standpoints: geographic, social, historical and economical. All that I learn on the island will be a basis for my design process.

With the theoretical research and the practical approach I hope to make a design that contributes to underpinning the resilience of Træna. The following actions I hope to accomplish:

- Study relevant literature
- Study and analyse relevant examples of design
- Talk with the client and with other locals on the islands of Træna
- Experiencing the islands, island life and the new architectural project

6. Process questions

6.1 What is the importance of the resilience of rural communities like Træna?

On defining rural there are two approaches. There is the location or place based approach and there is the social and more symbolic approach which many scholars find just as important or maybe even more important. Why do rural people and places matter in this 21 century? As Brown and Schafft (2011) write, concern about rural people and places did not develop overnight. The intellectual legacy of rural studies began over one hundred years ago with the profound societal transformations that gave rise to sociology and other social sciences. Rural people and places matter first and foremost while they make up for 15-30 percent of most developed nations. NCA (n.d.). This is a large minority. The reality of rural places is high unemployment, persistent poverty, deteriorated social well-being, lower earnings, and diminished health care. This is the main reason why the EU heavily supports it's rural areas. It wants to reduce the wealth differences and from 2022 is investing in strengthening regional competitiveness and sustainability. (Rijksoverheid, 2020).

On top of the challenges that rural areas are facing, the U.S. Global Change Research Program has, among others, stated that many rural communities will be disproportionately affected by climate changes. (NCA, n.d.). The reason being that they are less diverse than urban areas in their economic activities. This will have (and already has) a negative effect on community stability. Preserving the ecosystem services will sustain the quality of life in rural communities and also benefits those who come to rural communities for second homes, tourism, and other amenities. They also provide urban residents with vital resources – like food, energy, and fresh water – that meet essential needs. This layered connection between rural areas and populous urban centers suggests that maintaining the health of rural areas is a national, and not simply a local, concern.

Revitalising "rural" must include the participation of small communities in search of positive change, whereby local people are encouraged to think more about their futures and to put into practice their ideas for securing those futures. Capacity building, therefore, deals mostly with the ability of local people to solve problems. These process dimension programs seek to bring about change by forging new skills within rural communities related to leadership, mediation and conflict resolution, group processes, understanding the business of government, and the articulation of a shared vision. In the simplest terms, capacity building can be defined as increasing the ability of people and institutions to do what is required of them. (Huntington e.o., 2017).

Van Assche e.o. (2022) the authors of a recent article about the need for local planning and design as resilience strategy in Northern communities argue that Northern communities need integrated resilience strategies for their development and that such strategies need to have the character of local plans. They argue: “In the formulation of resilience strategy local planning as a site of policy integration is vital. A redefinition or reorientation of key terms is required however, with resilience taking on local attributes, planning understood as pro-active local design and governance seen as an always local bricolage. This approach can enhance the capacity to entertain alternative futures in the governance system, the capacity to assess constantly shifting problematisation of issues, and a better matching of locally desirable futures and existing assets. Those strategies must start from local realities; they will take on radically different forms per community and the idea of resilience itself will emerge differently in each process of articulating a resilience strategy.” (Elsevier Science, 1995).



5. Husoya, Træna Kommun

Wherever viable rural settlements exist, the government, professional planners, and inhabitants within must focus their energies on the immediate place - they must make the word "local" mean something if they are ever to be successful in the retention and sustenance of "local community." A rural development doctrine must, if it is to be effective, give deeper and more concentrated thought to the role of local rural place as we seek to find solutions to the ongoing problems of population imbalance and the dissolution of the countryside. (Keller, 2000).

McIntosh, e.o. (2002) argue that giving meaning to the word local implies giving attention to Cultural Identity. Cultural identity is founded on tradition, lifestyle, values

and protocol. Cultural Identity has a global importance. A Social Report from the New Zealand government says: 'Identifying with a particular culture gives people feelings of belonging and security. It also provides people with access to social networks which provide support and shared values and aspirations'. (Ministry of Social Development New Zealand, 2003, p. 84).

Assman and Czaplicka (1995, p.130) describe the concretion of identity or the relation to the group as: "cultural memory preserves the store of knowledge from which a group derives an awareness of its unity and peculiarity. The objective manifestations of cultural memory are defined through a kind of identificatory determination in a positive ("We are this") or in a negative ("That's our opposite") sense."

If we look at Art and Design, cultural identity plays an important role. On exploring the cultural Identity by artists the Tate Museum of Modern Art writes: "Artists often explore the characteristics that determine our personal and social identity. They construct a sense of who we are as individuals, as a society, or as a nation. They question stereotypes and conventions while exploring attributes such as gender, sexuality, race, nationality and heritage. Our culture is informed by various forms of artistic and social endeavour such as technology, politics, style, music, performance and the arts." (Tate Museum of Modern Art, Essay Cultural Identity).

Tackling large global issues are better done on a smaller scale. Making changes and adaptations within the scale of a community will lead to specific changes that fit that particular community and connect to that specific place. I believe that makes it both more manageable and closer to people's hearts. But it goes both ways, for places like Træna to stay alive, they have to adapt, and they have to do that within their reach and capabilities.

The fragility of a place like Træna and the unavoidable influence from outside and the dangers that come with that is at the core of Træna's challenges. The fact that the community is initiating and investing in new projects and changes to stay vibrant, links to values that I find important. And I have become really interested in how I can contribute to their goal. This makes the Træna project for me exciting.

6.2 What is the purpose of the Træna 365 project and what are the expectations of the client?

After a 36 hours journey by train and bus from Sweden, I arrived at a harbour in Norway right at the arctic circle. It was late afternoon at the end of February. I had a boat ticket for a journey to Træna, a remote island community which lies 50 kilometers from the mainland. The fast ferry would take me to Træna in about two hours sailing. We left the quay but when the conductor inspected my ticket he said, oh no we are not sailing to Træna today. There is too much wind. Eventually the captain said that he would try to do the crossing. After the last stop at one of the islands halfway, the ferry really reached the Atlantic Ocean with me as the sole passenger. And I must admit it was quite scary. The waves were about 5 or 6 meters high and I really had to hold on to my seat. I couldn't resist thinking 'why would people want to live out here?'

Then, thankfully, I arrived at the quay of Husøy, the main Træna island. I was greeted by one of the locals who drove me to my accommodation, a brand-new architectural building, nicknamed the Tower, specially built for Artists in Residence. My new place for the next couple of weeks.



6. Træna 365 on Husoya, Træna Kommun

This architectural building is part of a long-term community plan (Municipal Plan 2030) of the Træna community based upon various pillars to become less vulnerable as a small island community. Just as this long term vision is important so is the focus on diversity to create less vulnerability and enhance attractiveness. In the strategic plan implementing sustainability is a fundamental factor. Tourism clearly stands out as an opportunity and challenge on the islands. The municipality is concerned with a balanced tourism that does not happen at the expense of the local community's uniqueness and identity, but instead enriches it. Sustainability is about balancing, and agreeing on endurance limits before they are passed. The municipality and the business actors are looking for year-round activity to avoid the island being uninhabited parts of the year.

The initiatives within the municipal plan, an Artist in Residence program, tourism development and a number of cultural music, art and food projects are examples of activities that are developed jointly to take care of and revitalise the diversity in Træna. 'It is the community and the island community's values that are always the starting point for what happens. It grows from below.' Distriktssenteret (2020). Changing in order not the be changed is exactly what Træna is doing. In order to stay a vibrant community it is initiating and investing in new projects and changes.



7. The Træna 365 Project

The client and the Træna 365 project

The latest project addition for a viable society is Træna 365. An architectural project and multi-purpose site that combines a museum, accommodation plus venues for offices, meeting places and social hangout areas. A place that is visited for vacation or ‘workation’ 365 days a year. The target is to become a national reference point for how sustainable tourism can be developed.

The initial brief of the client for this project was to design a furniture object or objects which could fit one or more of the architectural spaces. In a later conversation it became clear that they would prefer a reproducible object or objects. I was granted an Artist in Residency place and invited into the community for the purpose of innovation and action. With not so much imposed restrictions I had the chance to design quite freely with one main goal I had set myself; underpinning the long-term plan of the community to make Træna less vulnerable in a sustainable way, supporting their community resilience.

6.3. What makes up Træna’s specific strong characteristics and how can this translate into a design?

‘Those who face the ocean will always be in awe of the uncontrollable power of the waves and the swells, and the inexorable, reassuring, strength of the sea’s rhythm. It is an ever-present force of raw energy which has to be contained by the belief systems and behaviour patterns of the people who live within its compass. However informed we may be of the nature of the sea in the terms of modern science, it is difficult not to recall, in some half-remembered way, deeply rooted ancestral beliefs in the personality of Ocean. (Cunliffe, 2001, p. 554).

The sea has such a profound impact on Trænas development and it has dictated life on Træna. This is largely the approach I have chosen for this project.



8. Sea routes in Viking times. (Cunliffe, 2001)

Træna and all the coastal villages in Norway have always been orientated towards the sea. I was reminded by a book I had read. 'The old ways' by Robert Macfarlene. He writes about paths not only on land but also at sea. 'Along these sea paths for thousands of years have travelled ships, boats, people, objects and language: letters, folks tales, sea songs, shanties, poems, rumours, slang, jokes and visions.' And 'What you should first realise, to understand the sea roads, is how close the ocean brings far-away places. In a pre-modern world, before cars and planes, the boat was the fastest means of long-distance travel. (Macfarlene, 2013, p. 89).

The sea provided Træna's main livelihood; fish (as is still the case). And because the inland of Norway was forested and rugged traveling by boat along the coast to reach good fishing grounds and to trade with other communities and countries was much easier. Already in the last decade of the eight century Norwegian Viking ships sailed the Atlantic to the coasts of Britain, Ireland and France. And they even sailed as far as America. These ships that could travel this Atlantic Ocean had to be seaworthy and stable enough to carry both people and cargo. Translated into the science of shipbuilding Cunliffe (2001) writes: 'the sought for qualities included buoyancy, strength, durability, manoeuvrability, controllability, and sea-kindliness, the last being the ability of the vessel to respond to the sea with the minimum of stress to its frame or occupants. The skill in designing such a structure lay in the balance of compromise between these often competing qualities'. The Vikings had developed such a ship which on a good sailing day could do the trip from Bergen in Norway to the Shetlands in two days.'



9. The Oseberg Viking Ship
Viking Ship Museum; Oslo

The Oseberg ship built around the year 820 and discovered in Norway in 1904 is a beautiful example of the advanced building techniques of the Norwegians (Vikings). The ship has a beautiful shaped high bow and is made of oak with 24 strakes bent into the right shape. Each stake overlapped the one below fixed with iron rivets. The deck and mast are made of pine wood. It was a very ornately decorated ship that could sail across the Atlantic sea.

Traveling the sea routes is what the inhabitants of Træna still do today. Like the vicar I met on a Sunday on the island who uses his sailboat to 'go to work'; sailing to the different islands and his parishes. The sea is the most important factor in the lives of people on Træna. They call themselves 'Sea-people', Havfolket. In my meetings it was apparent that the sea forms their lives. They all make a living depending on the sea either directly in the fishing industry or indirectly through for instance tourism. And it is not only through their income that the sea is important but also the fact that the sea in combination with the weather determines whether or not one can reach or leave the islands. As I have experienced the first time I arrived the weather almost made it impossible for me to make the crossing. This is a situation which is certainly not for everyone.



10. Træna church service

The feeling that you get from visiting the islands and listening to the 'Havfolket' stories is what I want to try to translate into a design. With the (historical) stories as an inspiration I started designing a chair. The more practical inspiration came from the advanced building techniques of Norwegian wooden ships, which had all the right qualities for the purpose they were designed.



11. Eivind and Alf (two locals) in front of a historic Træna built Færing
12. Træna

7. Design process

When it comes to my design process sketching is for me the most important tool. It is a fast method to get a deeper understanding for my ideas and explore them further. For this final exam project I started focusing on furniture that was reproducible and to an extent simple, like the client had suggested. My initial thought was minimal furniture but with a very strong characteristic that was inspired and had a link to Træna and my research.

My research into rural communities, their struggle to keep their traditions alive made me want to investigate and analyse ways in which my design can contribute to the resilience of a local community like Træna, and address the value of identity and local communities. Evaluating my experiences and research, and having ideas for several different furniture objects, with limited time I decided to focus on one object, a chair. Deviating slightly from the client's brief with this decision, I felt that without the need to make this object viable for small scale production, it allowed me to completely explore and interpret Træna's richness into a furniture piece. I felt this in return could to a deeper extent visually back my story, and perhaps function as an example piece for other furniture designed for Træna that would be more viable to produce in a small edition.

7.1 Reinterpreting steam bending

The wooden boats of Norway created by making use of steam bending was the initial inspiration of the technique that I wanted to use in my design. Bending of wood goes back to the very first boats, the skin-on-frame kayaks, in which the 'ribs' would be bent in wood. And later on in the Viking age wood bending played a crucial role. Bending wood relates to a historical aspect of tradition and way of life that has had an important role in the history and development of Træna. Boats and fishing are and always have been a very important factor on the islands. Reinterpreting wood bending in furniture keeps that process alive as a part of Træna's identity.

Though it may sound pretentious, the process and happening of steam bending can seem somewhat magical. When bending, one is forcing the fibers from the direction in which the tree had been growing into a new direction and form, expanding and contracting the fibres.

7.2 The Dragon or Viking style chair

The first inspiration for the design itself was an already existing chair; the Dragon or Viking style chair by Lars Kinsarvik, exhibited at the 1900 Paris Exposition. Norway was under Swedish rule when he designed this chair. It was exhibited in a Norwegian pavilion (which in itself was remarkable) expressing their wish for independence. I was interested in the story behind this chair and in the general outline or composition of this chair as starting point. In the absence of a 'Træna' chair, a chair that of its specific characteristics is inherently associated with Træna, in many ways I could start with a blank canvas. Though this particular chair doesn't

have any specific link to Træna it is a historic chair found in a coastal area in southern Norway. With the extensive over-seas travelling, exploring and trade that the people from Træna have done it is non the less viable that a similar version or an iteration of this chair could have existed in Træna. Most importantly I was looking for specific aesthetic features that I was drawn to and features that could lend themselves well for a reinterpretation using steam bending. This chair has a very Nordic expression/outlook, partly as a consequence of its over-simplicity and the sturdy construction of the chair. There are some wood-carvings inspired by Norse motifs with worm-like creatures, the chair is further decorated by means of painting. The painting of the wood brings to mind other historic Scandinavian furniture such as the 'allmoge' style (Sjöberg, 2018). For inspiration I was especially interested in the bent armrest and the double horizontal backrests.

Steam bending as practice in itself has importance in connection to furniture history. The first mass produced furniture Chair no14 by Thonet was created with the use of steam bending. (Designmuseum, 2022).

It is likely that the wooden 'Dragon or Viking' chair has used a form of wood bending with the use of heat and moisture for the armrest. There is a further link between historic ship building and furniture; the post of the Oseberg Viking ship in the form of an animal head, was originally part of a piece of furniture, perhaps a chair. (Wilson, 1970).



13. 'Dragon or Viking style Chair;
Lars Kinsarvik

The 'Dragon or Viking style' chair is what I started drawing upon, looking to reinterpret especially the front two legs with the bent armrest into the double backrest. With this as a starting point I could add inspirations that would better envisage a feeling more reminiscent of Træna. Inspirations that lead to a certain expression I want the chair to bring to mind. An expression speaking of Viking culture and the wooden boat building techniques in general, the magic of the islands that is created through the place folklore and its natural characteristics such as the ocean, the extreme weather and extravagant geographic features, the history and archeologic finds; mainly prehistoric fishing tools.

7.3 The Træna chair

As the philosopher de Botton (2009, p. 38) said in his book 'Architecture of happiness': "Each designed object will give an impression of the psychological and moral views it upholds."

To achieve this I had to figure out what inspiration I would use for what parts of the chair.

On my final day on the island I was able to meet up with the museum administrator who showed me the small museum they have on the island. It was there that I found another chair that would form an important inspiration for my final object. It was a three legged chair, which I found to radiate a strong yet elegant composition. The three legged layout had an important advantage over a four legged chair. It is stable on different undergrounds even when these are not completely flat. With steam bending one can't quite achieve the level of accuracy in comparison to using dried timber. Slight discrepancies and the moving of the wood can result in a four legged chair to become wobbly whereas a three legged chair will remain stable having all its legs on the supporting surface.

The back leg is inspired by the Bow, the most important part of a Viking ship and the first part they fabricated. This bow also carried ornamentation displaying a feeling of strength and power. The sweeping shape splits open into two parts to support the backrest and upper backrest. Small pieces of ash inspired by prehistoric fishing tools, found in a cave on one of the islands in Træna, function as a crown on the tip of the chair just like dragons on a Vikingship. It represents a certain level of pride.



14. The Træna Chair; model

The composition of the front legs sweeping out are in coherence with the back leg and create a wide opening for the seat making you feel welcomed, with open arms, into the chair representative of the welcoming open arms of Træna's inhabitants that I have experienced first-hand.

Inside a 'Færing' built on Selvær (one of the Træna islands) I discovered some historic wooden oars. These oars had an aesthetic originating from their function which was of inspiration to me. To be structurally sound the shaft, which has to transmit the forces, has to have some substance so is left thick and strong. There where the shaft runs into the 'blade' it becomes a wider and thinner surface in order to save weight and make the oars or paddles manageable and functional (this is called the 'shoulder' and 'tip'). These aesthetics lended themselves very well for the feeling and expression I wanted to portray in the seat.

I wanted to create the seat using solid wood to get the aesthetics of end grain wrapping over the front rail. This, I felt, would go well together with the end grain details of the oak front legs. For the seat to work out of solid wood it needed to have some structure to it. Thickness however was not something I wanted the chair to visually express. Therefore the way in which oars structurally work by being thick in the parts which have to withstand the most forces and thin where it can be was of immediate inspiration for the visual look of my chair. Now, I was able to create the seat out of solid wood leaving enough material for it to work structurally but thinning it out towards the end for an almost impossibly thin look that gives the impression the that seat is floating.

In my 'Træna' chair I wanted to achieve a Nordic outlook, and by taking inspiration from existing Norwegian chairs I was determined to keep the historic Scandinavian feel. It's an extravagant, bold yet elegant chair with organic shapes and forms that portray the magic of the islands through the process and expression of wood bending. By taking inspiration and reinterpreting Træna's own heritage to maintain its identity, this chair underpins the resilience of Træna that is sailing its own course by investing in its future. In this sense the Træna chair connects with the 'Dragon or Viking' chair Lars Kinsarvik designed for the Paris 1900 exhibition to express his wish for independence.



15. The Træna Chair; model

The historic traditions were an important tangible inspiration for the outlook of the chair. As important however were the more intangible inspirations, fueled by my experiences of traveling to and staying on the Island. The way I have brought parts together, and the way certain shapes look was very much a feeling inspired process. I strongly believe that my stay on the island and submersing myself as much as possible in island life has had a profound subconscious influence on the aesthetic whole.

8. Result



16,17,18. Træna Chair



19. Træna Chair

9. Discussion and reflection

9.1 Reflection on Examination

For the discussion section of the presentation we used the following setup; a total of four people came forward that had read my thesis before the presentation. These four people made up the discussion group guided by Professor Hild. This created a discussion to take place in front of the audience, with a selected view that had read themselves into my project. I believe this worked well, as it resulted not so much in individual separate questions but rather in an actual discussion.

This chair is at its core an actual chair. It is functional and its comfortable, however, the chair functions as tool for something else as well. With the chair as an object I am trying to make a statement and tell a story. This was recognised by the panel as the first item discussed was about using design as a language to communicate something. An important aspect that was brought up in relation to this is that it is good to realise that this is my selection of learnings about Træna; it is an assemblage of my findings that are brought together into a piece of furniture for the future.

A further interesting notion that was brought up was that when looking back at history, the Viking style period was the only time that Norway had its own style. What is the significance of looking back at exactly this period for inspiration? Maybe

it stems from a certain nationalism, and focusses on variety. Just as the Viking chair, the Træna chair is a strong signal for independence.

Another thing that was brought up during the discussion is the effect of the chair when sat in. How do you experience the chair? Who do you become whilst in the chair? Things happen because of design. What does it make us into? Important questions that bring up sociology; who do you become? It was stated that the chair has agency.

I am glad this got brought up, as I had not talked about this extensively in the presentation nor in this writing. Yet, it has played an important role in my process and in initially deciding to create a chair. The fact that a chair is used to such a deeper extent than any other furniture object can further affirm this object to not be solemnly an object but a tool, in using design as a language to tell a story. A chair is not an object one only looks at or places something in or on, it supports us as human beings, and whilst in use becomes an extension of our own body. How the chair is experienced, and who you become whilst using it are important factors, and can further help in creating a story. A story in which design does not only provides a function but in which it has a social and physiological influence on us.

9.2 Reflection on Exhibition

In exhibiting my work, I had some personal issues with the location of the exhibition space. The greenhouse we were exhibiting our work in, though in itself is a great space, is not an ideal environment for wooden furniture. With extreme temperatures and moisture, it puts the wood through a fair bit of stress. Wood is a natural material, and should be kept at a fairly constant temperature and moisture levels. Due to this I had debated not to bring the object to the final exhibition, afraid of the wood being put to so much stress it resulting in cracking or parts giving in.

That said, the organisation of the event was good. The communication was clear and the overall event well organised. The vernissage was an event that I was glad to have experienced.

9.3 Reflection on Circularity

Circularity in its core means that you would be able to use the raw materials out of the chair I have made to create something new. Though, this would be possible, I don't believe from a sustainability point of view this makes the most sense for this chair. Instead by carefully designing and crafting something to particularly fit in the environment and architecture of Træna, I hope to give more meaning and depth to my chair. Thus it becoming a more valuable object, that is meant to stay on Træna and be used for generations to come.

With the chair being completely made out of wood, repairs are doable. Re-glueing a small part when the original glue reaches the end of its life span is in many ways only limited if it is easier and cheaper to just buy a new chair. However if the chair offers something more that makes it worth to keep, I believe that an extra effort would be put in trying to keep the chair alive.

10. Conclusion and result

Sailing the 50 km from the mainland in a February storm to the islands of Træna, I was in awe of the uncontrollable strength of the wind and the waves. This raw energy always moving demands deep respect and the people who live here must have a special mentality to survive and thrive in this harsh natural environment. For the islands of Træna this Atlantic Ocean is and for centuries has been a means to travel and to earn an income through trade and fishing. This was the main inspiration for both the tangible as the intangible outlook and feel of the Træna chair.

When designing it is important for me to really consider and understand the particular space and environment. I aim to create holistic design that fits within and speaks of its environment. This is because I value the variety and diversity that locality can offer us and can offer me as a designer. By going to Træna I wanted to experience and emerge myself in life on the islands looking for traditions, specific skills and/or crafts vital to island life; characteristics of their cultural identity. I wanted to get a feel of the place and learn as much as possible from a geographic, social, historical and economical point of view and translate this into a design.

Through my explorations I am drawing attention to the value of a local community and the importance of its existence. This chair functions as a physical object representative of Træna's resilience. It emphasises cultural identity and the diversity this brings can show us what looking back at local values and traditions can bring to furniture design. By creating an object representative of Træna to fit into their new project something entirely new is created for the future whilst retaining Træna's identity of the present and the past.

11. Reference list

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