



Our love affair with Scandinavian design has largely overlooked the Norwegians. That's changing, with a crop of innovative and fjordable products inspired by the great outdoors, writes **Eleanor Flegg**

# Norway is so cool

**Y**ou probably thought you knew everything about Scandinavian design, from Ikea to Aalto, given how we less-northerly Europeans tend to gush at almost everything they

turn their hands to up there. But unless you own something from Norway — yes, I said Norway — you only know three-quarters of the story.

The lesser-known “Scandesigners” have written the missing books of the Nordic design bible. So cool it, Copenhagen, save it, Stockholm. Oslo is the new buzz city.

Historically, Norway has not had the same level of recognition as its high-profile neighbours, Denmark, Finland and Sweden — from whom it got independence only in 1905.

The Finns have the architect and furniture designer Alvar Aalto, whose Savoy vase (1936) is so ubiquitous that you can even buy ice-cube trays that reproduce its iconic curves. Finland is also home to the textile manufacturer Marimekko, famous for Maija Isola's 1964 Unikko poppy print.

The Danes can claim Arne Jacobsen of the Egg and Swan chairs (both 1958), and Poul Henningsen, brains behind the famous Artichoke lamp (1958).

And then there's Ikea, Sweden's biggest exporter, not to mention an illustrious history in art glass. All of which leaves Norway — well, out in the cold.

Henrietta Thompson, the curator of 100% Norway, an exhibition at London's Design Week last month, says:

“In the 1990s, a new generation of Norwegian designers emerged, combining international youth culture influences with the classic elegance of the Scandinavian tradition. Although the contemporary design industry in Norway is only just emerging, the national identity that comes through is so strong, the feeling is that it has been there all along and we — the rest of the world — were just very slow in discovering it.”

Many of the latest Norwegian designs are linked to geography, climate and the outdoors, but none more so than a limited edition of rugs produced by Permafrost. The circular Silence rug is white and indented with the footprints of a passing hare. This is a lovely and atmospheric piece, the wool of the rug flecked with shimmering specks of a reflective silver material that give the impression

of snow. In pure white, it's clearly designed for a society that leaves its shoes at the door, but might also work in Ireland. The circular John Deere rug, also by Permafrost, has the pattern of tractor tyres indented in it as though a tractor has accidentally run across the edge. The rugs, handmade in New Zealand wool, cost €600.

With a more romantic take on the outdoors, the Pebble rug by 2Form Design is made of hundreds of realistic grey pebbles made of felted wool, by the designer Ksenia Movafagh, who hopes her products add a certain poetic value to the interior space.

Also firmly linked to the outdoor experience is the Polar lamp, designed by Fido (Morten Kildahl, Oyvær Svendsen and Merete Nes). It is basically a hand-blown light bulb resembling a figure of eight, transparent at one end and frosted at the other. The lamps can either hang in groups or be placed on a table, solo or in interlocking pairs.

“The unique gradient of the transparent glazing was an attempt to make the lamp look lighter, like it's frozen in midair. It almost resembles a droplet from an icicle, ready to drop,” says Nes. “Maybe Norwegians have a special relationship with light: dark winters, midnight sun, bright midsummer nights.” The lamp is produced by Northern Lighting and costs €499 for a triple pendant, €205 for a single pendant, and €190 for the table-top version.

Catherine Maske is one of the designers whose art glass pieces were among the first to attract the international spotlight. Her Blue Wing Butterfly vase, which shows insect motifs suspended between layers of glass, was designed to draw attention to a native species that is close to extinction. This is a one-off product and costs about €2,500.

The knitted cushions of Johan Rye-Holmboe are inspired by the fabric designs of the past.

The first porcelain gift collection of Wik & Walsøe, established by the designers Linda Svedal Walsøe and Ragnhild Wik, is based around the fairy-like motif of the elfin.

“The elfin is a strong part of Nordic cultural heritage,” explains Wik. “She symbolises dreams, hope and the belief in making the impossible come true. She is joyful, noble-minded, and a master of skilled handicraft.”

The motif is depicted in a metallic glaze with a matt finish on shiny glazed porcelain.

■ *Wik & Walsøe, [www.wik-walsøe.no](http://www.wik-walsøe.no); Johan Rye-Holmboe, [www.boetco.no](http://www.boetco.no); Permafrost, [www.permafrost.no](http://www.permafrost.no); Polar Lamp, from [www.scanstyle.de](http://www.scanstyle.de)*



**A Blue Wing Butterfly vase by Catherine Maske; left, a pebble rug by 2Form Design; top, porcelain by Wik & Walsøe**