

Furniture Folklore

Text / Shonquis Moreno

On a coarse coastline accessible only by ferry, the hotel at the end of the earth rose out of the North Atlantic in June 2013. The Fogo Island Inn faces the spume of waves that are cut with shards of ice and boil into scalded milk around dark phalanxes of rock. Its 29 suites are anchored lightly to an island off the larger island of Newfoundland, each surveying the violent ruminations of a restless ocean. The architecture is stolid, minimal and bright, with air and space; it is furnished with rocking chairs, beds, benches and quilts that speak eloquently, not only of shelter and repose, but of the local culture that made them. Because it was, precisely, the local culture that made them.

From sconces and side tables to dining chairs and hangers, the inn's furnishings were crafted by island artisans and designed in collaboration with fresh talents from Europe and Canada like Elaine Fortin and Ineke Hans, who visited the island to collaborate with a craftsman. Then, last October, working with the Inn and its newly launched shop, Canadian design showroom Klaus by Nienkämper decided to distribute a 70-piece Fogo Island furniture collection described by Nienkämper himself as 'furniture folklore' to the international market.

As a reflection of place, the work represents a dovetailing of the austere with the whimsical. 'These pieces are local to Canada, local to Newfoundland and really local to Fogo Island,' says Kingman Brewster, director of design and development for the Shorefast Foundation. 'The specificity of them is immediately apparent and yet each is imbued with contemporary international design.' British textile designer Donna Wilson's Bertha armchair is an exposed plank chair softened with wool cushions to invoke the warmth of islanders' wooden boats and the insides of their homes. The Puppy side table, designed by islander Nick Herder, was fashioned from a single piece of wood board, one leg of which is made from the pattern cut out of the table's other side. Montreal-based Elaine Fortin worked with a local boat builder to prototype the

Punt chair through old island building techniques: the two harvested timbers from the base of tamarack trees that had grown in the particular shape needed to accommodate the piece were milled, air-dried and finish-milled to arrive at the chair's precise form.

'Fifty years ago everything on the island was from the island. So we decided that everything in the Inn had to be made on the island,' says the Inn's architect, Newfoundland-born, Norway-based Todd Saunders, who grew up just a ferry ride away. 'Growing up on an island in the North Atlantic, you have to know how to fix anything. The boat makers were really intuitive — you couldn't put anything in front of them that they couldn't figure out.' For example, London studio Glass Hill didn't produce drawings; instead, they sent prototypes to the island and Skyped while the carpenters made their own sundry adjustments. The building process was much the same. 'We did 125 drawings and we never even looked at them,' says Saunders. 'We were going back to old-school master building.'

The Inn is in Joe Batt's Arm, a name that sings of being local and of the local being personal. The furnishings and the Inn are part of a larger social enterprise reinventing the island — one of Canada's oldest rural communities — which was hit hard following the collapse of the centuries-old Grand Banks cod fishery. Through multiple creative and commercial channels, the Shorefast Foundation has been making an isolated, formerly brittle economy resilient so that those who invest in the furniture are giving by getting: profits from both the inn and furniture sales go back into the community.

Of course, now no one has to go to the ends of the earth to experience a little bit of the ends of the earth. But if the Fogo furniture serves as a souvenir for those who have made the journey, it also represents the lure of a journey to come for those who have yet to leave home.



Top and bottom: Inside the guest rooms at the Fogo Island Inn, Newfoundland. Images by Alex Fradkin



creative bathroom solutions



Top: The lobby area of the small hotel. Image by Alex Fradkin
Bottom: A rocking chair, one of a 70-piece Fogo Island collection. Image by Steffen Jagenburg

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