

Back & Forth to Fogo

Embroidering mothers and tinkering fathers



VEERLE DEVOS

It can be considered of a privilege to be invited to a fishing community on a remote island (we won't mention the cold temperatures) to design some furniture, working closely with the locals. Ineke Hans has certainly experienced this honour; suiting up, she simply plunged in and proceeded to harness the skills of the people who live there. By making the most of the traditions on offer, the designer has not only managed to incorporate new techniques into her creations, but has also played a part in engendering new hope in a very small town that had since become disillusioned with its lot.

From her studio in Arnhem, it takes Dutch designer Ineke Hans one-and-a-half days of travel to reach Fogo, a fishing island between Newfoundland and Greenland. Its remoteness, along with the fact that traditional fishery has declined, has resulted in many people leaving the island. Or maybe they were just cold: "For the very first time in my life I had to buy a ski suit, simply to survive the -30°C Fogo temperatures!" It may be obvious, but one has to be resilient to commute between Arnhem and Fogo, which Hans did because she was invited to design wooden furniture for the Fogo Island Inn, a hotel that chose Todd Saunders to make the architecture, and Ilse Crawford to plan the interior concept and propose the designers.

It was Zita Cobb who invited Ineke Hans, along with other designers, to work with the locals. Cobb is a fisherman's daughter who made a career in fibre-optics, then sold her company (some 10 years ago) and started to do projects on illiteracy in Africa, following which she thought about her island again, where

unemployment is hitting hard. Cobb launched an ambitious arts programme back in 2006, including artist-residencies, and the Fogo Island Inn is the most recent icing on the cake, from which all profits go back into the community.

To develop her in- and outdoor furniture, Ineke Hans worked with local boat-builders and coopers, who weren't exactly professional craftsmen. "They would only work with wood in the winter, when they weren't fishing, and had no experience with producing items on a larger scale or making furniture from complicated drawings. Also, these men are the bosses of their own ships and very much used to freedom and autonomy. I wanted to respect all of that and to also give these men the opportunity to exercise some creativity in the process, like in traditional woodturning." One would think it's quite a challenge to design in a context like this, but Hans has managed. "I grew up in a rural community myself, with embroidering mothers and tinkering fa-



FURNITURE FOR THE ROOF AND TERRACES OF FOGO ISLAND INN

A ROCKER AND A CHAIR IN THE LOBBY OF THE FOGO ISLAND INN

INEKE HANS ON THE BOAT HEADING TO FOGO ISLAND



1



2



8



10



3



5v



9



11



12

- A LONG BENCH (1)
- A ROCKER IN PROGRESS (2)
- DON SEATED IN THE VERY FIRST GET-YOUR-FEET-UP CHAIR (3)
- LADIES QUILTING (4)
- A GET-YOUR-FEET-UP CHAIR IN A ROOM AT THE FOGO ISLAND INN (5)
- A FOGO HOUSE IN FOGO COLOURS (6)
- A HOOKED RUG WITH A BOLD PATTERN (7)
- A SHINGLED HOUSE (8)
- FOGO COLOURS (9)
- A ROCKER IN A FOGO COLOUR (10)
- OLD FOGO FURNITURE: WINDSOR-TYPE CHAIRS AND SOME BOLD WOODTURNING (11)
- A HOOKED RUG DONNING A FOGO VIEW (12)
- A FOGO SEAT IN A ROOM WITH A VIEW AT THE FOGO ISLAND INN (13)
- AN OLD FOGO INTERIOR (14)



6



78



7v



79



14v



thers – proud and committed people, open-minded and welcoming, while also somewhat reserved, and naturally cautious about things that come from outside their community. Since I know this context all too well, I could handle working with the Fogo men and women. “And yes, the women were also involved; they proved to be a bit more practised, too, with their crafts being sold in other parts of Canada – “They have their weekly gatherings in a former church (most people here have Irish backgrounds – in good Irish tradition, there are two churches, a Protestant and a Catholic one, which happens to be rather too many for the 2700 inhabitants that remain). They’re experienced in quilting, communal knitting, rug hooking, etc. They also knit very nice mittens with a certain fluffiness, which I have integrated into the furniture cushions.”

TOGETHERNESS

The result of all this local-yet-global collaboration is wooden furniture that reflects the local traditions of knitting and woodturning – notice the winks given to the Windsor-type chairs on the island. But it is still very much Ineke Hans herself, who has a preference for colourful, simple, clever, contemporary design. There is a twist to it too, because the wood-turned elements have been split, creating a surprising looking, but comfortable back. “Our collaboration worked so well that we were asked to make more furniture for the Inn’s terraces and roof. Inspired by the multi-coloured wooden houses, we created simple plank seats, high seats, tables, and chaise longues, all of which fit neatly under each other and are easily produced by the men in the workshop.” Additional to this are seats designed for placing round the island (as yet unmade): simple furniture based on the basic plank

structures and fences found everywhere here. “The benches are very ad-hoc looking and will randomly pop-up in public areas on the island, to offer visitors and hikers a short rest.”

Ineke Hans, who has worked on many industrial projects over the past years, enjoyed working with the local community. “In the end, it’s not that very different. As a designer, you always have to think about how design, production, and function fit together best, and common sense is needed in every case. Also, the fact that I could take part in a project that changes people’s lives in such a hopeful way gives me a lot of satisfaction – some islanders were depressed, you know, since the place they loved had become less economical for them and the younger people had left. Thanks to this great initiative, the locals have regained a perspective on life. Some of the young people have even returned – e.g. the chefs at the Inn who cook with the herbs and vegetables that grow on the island. And in particular, the Inn is becoming a new landmark as well as a community centre where locals play music, attend a wedding, or come to watch a movie. I very much like the idea that this inn, designed to please tourists, is also a place for the locals.” <



www.inekehans.com
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A FENCE-BENCH
ON FOGO ISLAND



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