Presse

Friday 23 March 2018
The Australian Financial Review
www.afr.com
AFR

TRAVEL NORWAY

Magnetic north

On this remote Scandinavian frontier, even the architecture speaks of place, writes **Barry Stone**.

Above and right: glass and plywood sea cabins are cantilevered over Grøtøya strait on Manshausen Island. Below: a cosy retreat at 29/2 Aurland, a reborn traditional farmhouse.

Main: The wood-clad buildings of Fordypningsrommet in the Fleinvaer archipelago. Above left and right: the Aurlandsfjord, and Juvet Landscape Hotel, setting for the film *Ex Machina*.

How can you convey something so ineffable? A tiny A-framed sleeping box on a glaciated island, fixed atop a four-metre-high steel column. It looks more bird house than living space. To the indigenous Sami people, it echoes their traditional *njalla* – a hut for storing meat, raised on timbers greased with animal fat to keep predators at bay. Indeed, that was its inspiration.

Here though, reimagined and impressively engineered, it is a sanctum, oriented to loving the surrounding islands and a sometimes hostile North Atlantic into keen focus. Come here and you risk losing yourself in a stillness geared not so much to trendy mindfulness as to, well, a sort of mindlessness.

"You first have to empty something," its owner Håvard Lund says, "before you can fill it anew."

Humans have been living here, on the low-lying islands of the Fleinvaer archipelago in the Nordland region of northern Norway, for 5000 years. Today the archipelago's 360 islands have a permanent population of 30-something, a paucity that reflects both its isolation and the country's continuing struggle to halt a decline in its rural populations.

To look over these elongated, grassy, mesmerising islands, you'd think the first signs of that decline began right here. Who knows, perhaps Fleinvaer was its epicentre? But that is a silly thought. It's too remote here, teetering too much on Europe's frigid edge, to be the epicentre of anything.

Except, perhaps, as part of a brave new world of bespoke Norwegian architecture.

Lund is one of Norway's finest jazz musicians, and this place, Fordypningsrommet, or "room for deeper studies", is his inspired creation, a collection of mono-functional sleeping boxes as well as a kitchen/dining room, conference room and sauna, all clad in 5000 individually hand-cut wood shingles that provide a natural bulwark in a challenging climate.

Its construction was inspired, too. It was raised by an army of volunteer "carp-itects", architecture students turned carpenters from the University of Science and Technology in Trondheim, who gave up their time and picked up their hammers and set squares in the best traditions of that lovely Norwegian concept of *dugnad* community.

It looks idyllic. And really, it is. But even *dugnad* doesn't always carry the day. Berry feuds are a peculiarly Scandinavian thing, and one Fleinvaer family gets the ferry to Bodø on the mainland to buy berries because the owner of the only shop here that sells them went and picked their berries. Now they don't speak.

It makes you think. I once picked cloudberries in a bog in northern Finland. I could have been shot …

North of Fleinvaer, more structures have been raised by another overachieving Norwegian.

In the 1990s, the famed explorer Børge Ousland became the first person in history

Today the Fleinvaer archipelago's 360 islands have a permanent population of 30-something.

to trek to the North Pole alone and without a support crew, and the first to cross the Antarctic via the South Pole. In 2010 he began looking for a retreat of sorts, a silent place where he could conceive and plan challenges. He could have lived anywhere but came and settled here, in the Steigen coastal region of northern Norway, where he bought an island. This island.

Manshausen Island in Grøtøya strait, a stone's throw from the mainland, is a great place to pretend you have Norwegian blood. You can learn survival skills, kayak, hop over to the mainland and rappel down mountains, even snorkel. You can explore the 140-metre-deep Hessholla sea cave, hike a glacier, traverse ridge lines and ski in the nearby mountains of Nordland.

At the end of each day, assuming you're still conscious, a design adventure awaits in the form of four bespoke glass and plywood sea cabins, three of which are dramatically cantilevered over the water on Manshausen's northern shoreline. Oriented north to take advantage of the aurora borealis, they have views across to another private island, one owned by Randi Skaug, the first Norwegian woman to summit Mount Everest.

Over coffee she tells me how, on her descent from the summit, she waved to the second Norwegian woman to summit the mountain. Skaug beat her by four hours.

This impulse to climb, to confront nature for whatever the reason, is becoming a refrain. A woman who lives near Flåm in a valley surrounded by fjords, where the sun is so low in the sky from October to February you can't even see it, tells me she hikes to escape the fjords' "claustrophobic confines". She feels the need to "go up", she says, just to see a horizon.

Back on Manshausen, the views are as wide as the earth is broad, thanks to expansive exteriors of double-glazed glass. Inside my cabin are two bedrooms, a kitchenette and seating area, with screens you can lower to filter the sun, and windows that open to channel sea breezes. There's filtered coffee in the cupboards and even a mudroom to throw off all the bits of Norway you'll have so joyously accumulated.

The trip is morphing into an architectural pilgrimage. Trondheim, Norway's third-largest city, is full of design gems, old and new. I kayak underneath the 1918 Skansen Bridge, a gorgeous iron truss railway bridge with a unique overhead counterweight, and pass by TYIN tegnestue Architects' fabulous Lopsided House (2013).

Near to Trondheim, Stokkøya Island's 16 square kilometres are home to an emerging community of prefabricated, sustainable modernist housing which is helping put it, and Trondheim, at the crossroads of some exciting new disciplines. Stokkøya's Food Laboratory ensures it will remain on the cutting edge of Nordic cuisine, while the architectural innovations on its rocky coastline have it at the forefront of studies into the interplay between marine and social environments.

South of Trondheim, high in the inland district of Valldal, Juvet Landscape Hotel near Geirangerfjord is the pride of its owner, Knut Slinning. A series of cubes on stilts, they are a glorious amalgam of glass and wood, a triumph of organic simplicity overlooking a dramatic bend in the Valldalla river. No rocks were blasted to make way for them, nor any terrain altered.

Chosen as a location for the 2014 British science-fiction film *Ex Machina*, a night hasn't gone by when its 1914 barn/dining room doesn't have someone there because of this acclaimed movie and its showcasing of the stunning, though isolated and therefore often overlooked, Valldal valley.

Norwegian farmers call Norway boulder country, and the drystone walls around 29/2 Aurland, a traditional farmhouse near the Aurlandsfjord, remain as testament to the strength of a family who, in the 19th century when the great Norwegian migration to the US was at its height, decided instead to stay in a region that has been continuously settled since the Viking Age.

My final night in Norway is spent at 29/2 Aurland, and how appropriate it is. Bespoke, after all, means "made to specification", and this 350-year-old farmhouse is surely that, reborn with stairs constructed from leftover wooden beams, its doors rescued from old timber yards, its interior draped with rugs from Iran, with cow hides on its floors and vintage bed covers from Dublin.

29/2 Aurland makes the vernacular look contemporary. It even has original furniture by the revered Danish designer Hans Wegner, one of the giants of 20th-century furniture design.

And wouldn't my previous hosts Lund, Ousland and Slinning love to get their modernist hands on some of that. **TR**

The writer was a guest of 50 Degrees North.

Need to know

Fordypningsrommet Sørvaer, Fleinvaer, Gildeskal Municipality Tel +47 971 59726. Email haavar@fordypningsrommet.no. **Rates** Single cabins price on application

Manshausen Life Manshausen, Norway Tel +47 23 38 2200. Email post@manshausen.no. **Rates** from $280 per person a night

29/2 Aurland Tokvarnsvegen 12 – 5745 Aurland. Tel +47 900 26756. Email post@292aurland.com. **Rates** contact the property directly

Getting there Finnair flies daily from Singapore to Oslo via Helsinki

Juvet Landscape Hotel Alstad, 6210 Valldal. Tel +47 950 32010 (not for booking). Email knut@juvet.com **Rates** from $287 per person for a double room

For more go to fiftydegreesnorth.com

TRAVELLER

Rafael Moyano
chief executive
Adecco Group Australia

First, business or economy Business. It strikes a good balance between price and comfort. But if a flight is less than three hours, I don't mind flying economy.
Favourite travel destination All around the world. I love to travel – during the five years I lived and worked in Asia, I took more than 100 trips a year. I was lucky enough to travel throughout the region and have a true love and appreciation for the continent, its peoples and cultures. People are very welcoming to foreign visitors and eager to share their culture. On top of this, Asian cultures and cities have evolved rapidly, adapting to globalisation while maintaining distinct traditions.
Favourite airport Changi in Singapore. It's very convenient and very fast. It's impeccably designed and everything functions like clockwork.
If I ran my own airline I would … Enhance the passenger experience from boarding to baggage claim and offer more leg room and better-quality food. Perhaps I would even curate the entertainment according to the personal preferences of each passenger.
Where would you go with an unlimited travel budget? Africa. I would love to go on a safari, getting off the beaten track and discovering places that are still relatively untouched by tourism. I would also like to visit South Africa to dive with great white sharks.
Worst place you've been lost Cairo – it's so difficult to find your way around, but I should mention this was before Google Maps.
Best trip ever The Maldives. The quality of the water and the resorts are unrivalled. There is something for all travellers, whether you're on a medium or a high budget.
Most memorable overseas dining Tokyo – Japan takes food to the next level. The country has so many Michelin-starred restaurants, yet you can find unforgettable culinary experiences on any budget. Everyone should treat themselves to an authentic sushi bar dining experience at least once.
In the suitcase I always pack my running gear. Exercise helps balance out indulgent dining habits when travelling.
The first thing you do in a new city I walk around the hotel to get a feel of the people and their culture before attending any meetings. I like to sit in a quiet venue for a local beer or a coffee.
How do you make the most of a spare afternoon in a strange city? If very tired, I take a massage. I also like to walk around the neighbourhood and observe people. Of course, every city has a famous landmark or attraction, which I also try to visit.
Who would you most like to travel with and why? My wife and two beautiful children. Most of my travels are for business, so I always appreciate any opportunity to take my family

My favourite purchase so far is a stubby holder – I use it almost daily.

with me to experience the world.
Cure for jet lag If it's a short trip, I don't try to adapt. I have meals at the local time, but I don't force my body to sleep. This causes less distraction upon return. If it's a trip beyond three days, I like to do some exercise during the day – it helps to trick your body into being awake. I also take melatonin to assist with sleeping, as well as indulging in a massage to help with relaxation.
Is there anywhere you'd recommend for a special occasion? For culture and food, I recommend Japan. I go back at any opportunity. For island holidays and relaxation, Vietnam, Thailand and the Philippines offer a balanced experience between price, location, culture and cuisine.
Best overseas purchase My favourite purchase so far has been a stubby holder, which I bought on my first trip to Australia. I still use it almost every day – I've even started a collection.
Best travelling tale While en route to Guatemala 20 years ago, a heavy storm forced our plane to land in Nicaragua. The army came onto the plane, confiscated our passports and transported us to a barracks-style accommodation facility, where we were required to spend the night. We had no access to amenities, luggage or clean clothing. Thankfully, the storm cleared overnight and the next flight only took 15 hours.
Top travel gripe I find any unexpected delays or time spent waiting at boarding, luggage collection or customs incredibly frustrating.

lfjeandleisure@afr.com.au

AFRGH 12006

Outdoor Clearance
Sale On Now

Melbourne 03 9281 1999
Sydney 02 9317 3011
Brisbane 07 3254 0000
Perth 08 9415 2522

Designer Sofas, Dining & Poolside

www.coshliving.com.au

coshliving

2018

Australia Financial Review

29|2
AURLAND
RIVERSIDE FARM LODGE