

The image shows the interior of a modern building, likely a school or office. The room features large glass windows with dark frames, providing a view of a forest. The floor is a bright, reflective green. A set of stairs with a metal railing is visible on the left. The ceiling has exposed ductwork and lighting fixtures. The overall atmosphere is bright and airy.

# Making

# The Plus

HATJE  
CANTZ





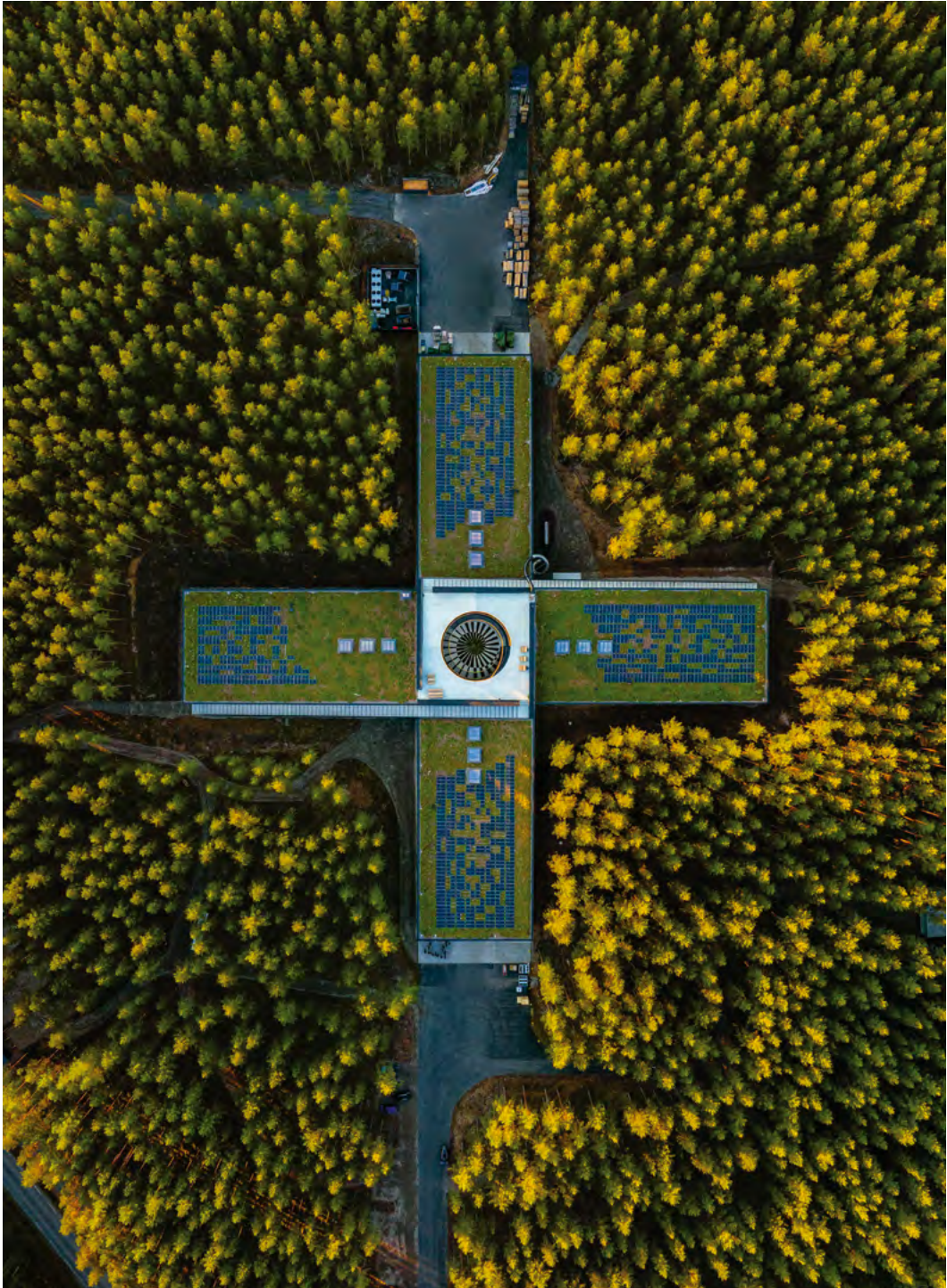






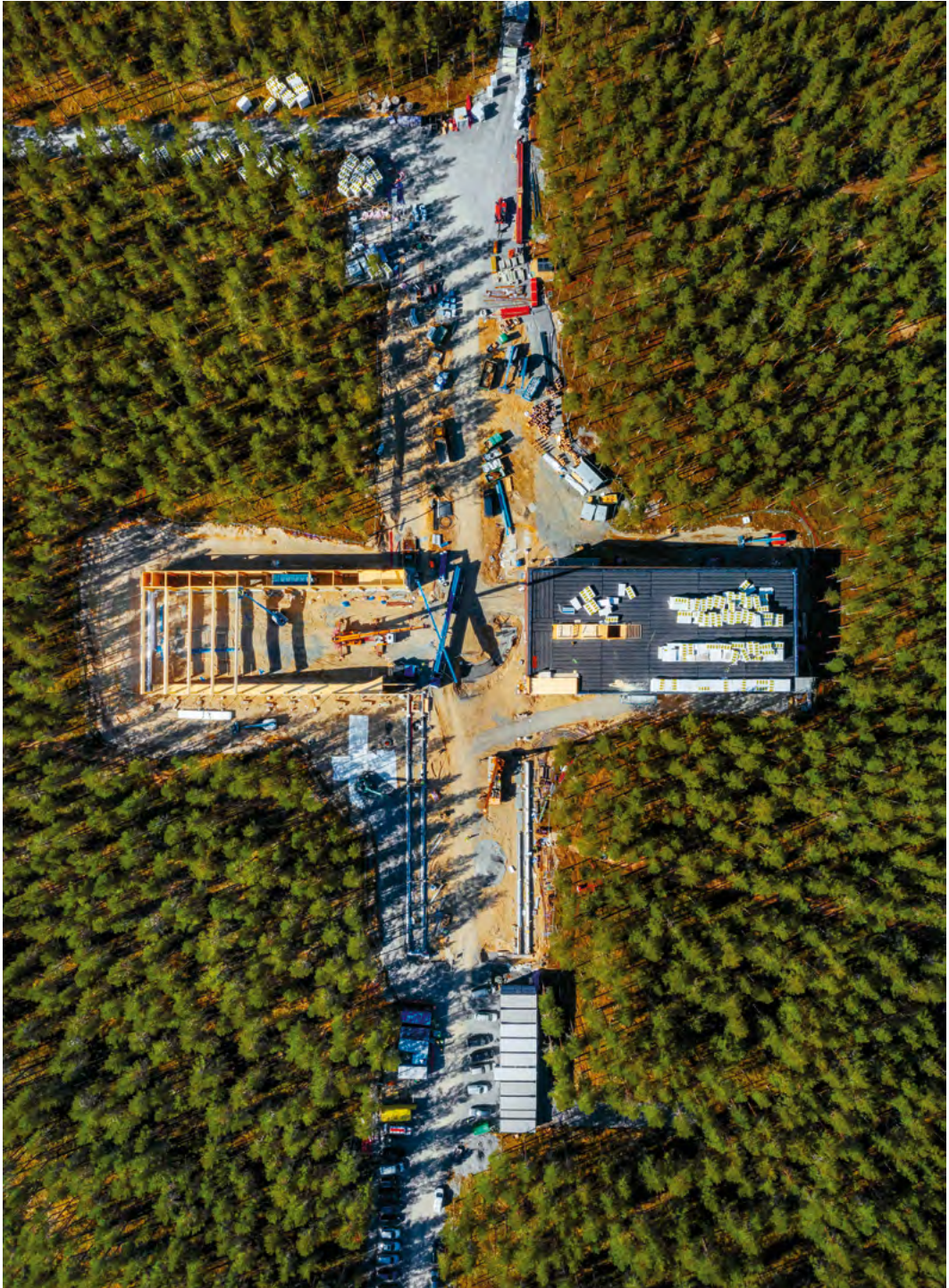






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Making

The Plus

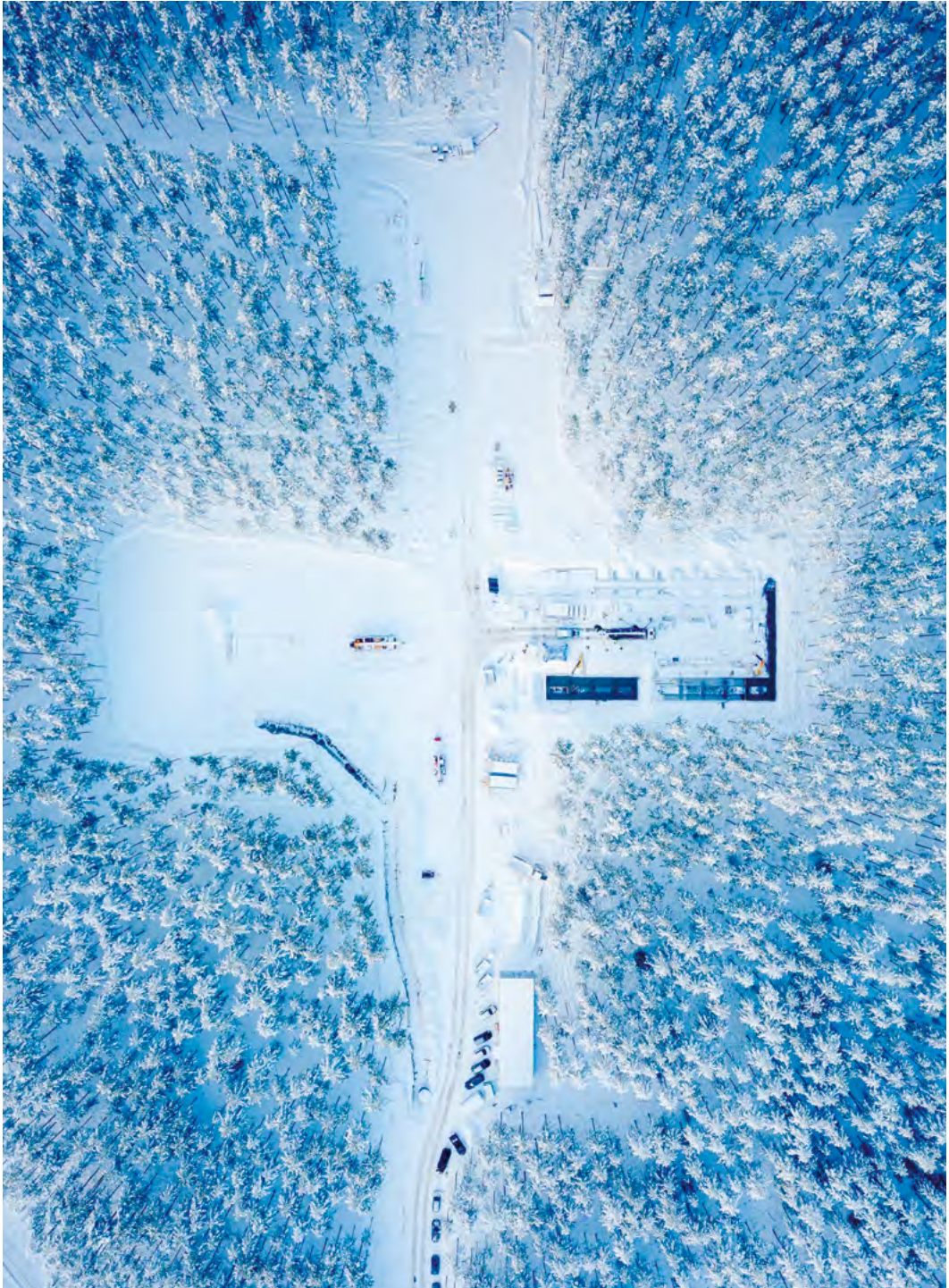


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13.01.2021







Someone has  
to Take the Lead

If We are to Accelerate  
the Green Shift



Two things happened in the autumn of 1969 that would later coincide. One had huge ripple effects for Norway and the world. The other would, fifty years later, enable a business venture in a young pine forest at Magnor in the Norwegian county called Innlandet.

On September 30, 1969, the main story in the local newspaper *Glåmdalen* was about a sharp increase in the price of production, and about how the increased interest rate would cause a greater gap between rich and poor. This was at a time when Norwegian industry was struggling. On the front page were also two foreign affairs stories, with photographs. One photo showed the Swedish Prime Minister, Tage Erlander, together with Olof Palme. The other photo showed a smiling Willy Brandt surrounded by journalists after his election win in West Germany. This small local paper in Kongsvinger, in Innlandet county, had turned its gaze outwards—towards Norway's most important trading partners.

At the bottom of the first page, there was an article about major damage from a storm in western Värmland, in Sweden. Power lines and forests bordering the newspaper's readership area were destroyed. This would develop into the storm of the century, which raged on across the border to Norway and decimated forests. Of those reading the front page of the newspaper that day, none could have known about the local effects of the storm that was coming, or that a few days later, the Ocean Viking drilling platform, located around 280 kilometres southwest of Stavanger, would come across a major petroleum source at a depth of 3,081 metres.

The forest at Magnor had to be restarted from scratch. And Norway had to do the same in the North Sea—starting at the bottom. At the time of its discovery in October 1969, Ekofisk, the petroleum field that *Ocean Viking* had found, was the world's largest offshore oil field. The discovery transformed cities and towns in western Norway. Entrepreneurs and politicians both were crucial in establishing the conditions for this new industry. Shipping companies and fisheries invested in new skills, technologies, and machines to start up the offshore industry. The government established a state oil company and arranged for profits to be saved in Norway's largest fund—which then, now, and into the future belongs to the Norwegian people.

This was done in line with Norwegian social values, which also include the right to roam, as part of the Norwegian cultural heritage and welfare services, which are protected by cross-party agreement. It is also part of the Nordic model, which is supported by three pillars: tripartite collaboration, the welfare state, and good financial management. Using the words of the Värmländer Tage Erlander, "The politicians' task is to build the dance floor, where people can dance as they please."

With the welfare state behind us, we were able to develop the technical solutions necessary to create a completely new industry in Norway. One example is the corrosion protection of steel using a powder-coating process developed for and used by the Norwegian offshore industry, so that the powder-coated surfaces

can withstand the weather in the North Sea. This is the same technology we at Vestre have used on furniture since the 1980s, which allows us to offer a lifetime guarantee against rust.

It is not difficult to create products with a long lifespan, but it requires the will to do it. We cannot cut corners or compromise on quality. A long lifespan is a prerequisite for sustainability. At the same time, we must reduce greenhouse gas emissions, and one of the most effective ways of doing this is to prevent the industry from producing items that do not last, and reclaiming materials so they can be used in new products.

In Norway, we have cast our gaze abroad and dismantled a lot of our mainland industry. We have done what many other rich countries do, creating an artificial distance between a product's origins and market, and we have sought out cheaper production locations where labour rights and environmental requirements are weaker.

Those who manage the world's resources today must phase out reliance on oil and gas. We must aim to transfer skills, jobs, and investments into renewable industry and a circular economy. In 1969, with human determination, innovation, and risk management, we landed on the moon and succeeded in deep-water oil drilling. Now, everything we do must have a long-term perspective and so help to reduce the consumption that is damaging to the environment and climate. This is the green shift and transition. This our common moon landing.

At Vestre, we have chosen to keep our production and industrial jobs close to our roots, and we have become one of Europe's leading furniture manufacturers. When we opened our factory in Torsby, Sweden, in 2013, designed by the leading architectural firm Snøhetta, we did not know we would outgrow it just a few years later.

This photo book is intended as an inspiration for all design, architecture, and sustainability enthusiasts—for all those who believe in change. We want to share thoughts and experiences and show why we believe Vestre has succeeded as a design company. We are successful because we are uncompromising on innovative design and quality. We have worked with the finest industrial and furniture designers, and we have listened to professionals, customers, landscape architects, city planners, and landscape gardeners.

Our furniture design has created social meeting places for millions of people and won many awards. The same goes for our design exhibitions and graphic profile. It has been important for Vestre to create value, to be a reliable employer and to share our profits—not just by supporting sustainability objectives, but also by consistently giving exciting assignments to up-and-coming talents. This is how we grow together.

In 2012, the photographer Einar Aslaksen first collaborated with Vestre, and he is behind many of the recent studio photographs for Vestre's product launches. He has a broad background in architecture, design, and portrait photography; this is his first book containing only his photographs. As we got to know his distinctive qualities, Aslaksen's work has also helped develop

Vestre's visual profile. For a value-based family business that is ambitious and does not take shortcuts, preferring to take the long way round if it is the right thing to do, it feels good to be seen and recognized. As you may sense, Aslaksen's photographs convey a respect for nature and the architecture, raw materials, and the engineering involved. Here he has documented the construction of a factory building and the completion of a concept, and he does it all with a sense of wonder: why does Vestre work the way we do?

The short answer is because we can. Our rapid growth contributed to increasing pressure on our subcontractor chain. During many years of steady sales growth, we tucked away our profits into the family business's savings, as it became clear a new factory would need to be built to increase capacity. This time, the factory would be located in Norway. Vestre wanted to have more control over all the production processes, reduce lead times and transport stages, and be responsible for lacquering and woodworking. We would invest in Scandinavian mainland industry and create industrial jobs, and the factory would be forward-thinking and sustainable.

Remaining profitable in a high-cost country requires us to use the latest technological solutions and efficient organization, hallmarks of Industry 4.0 (the transformation of manufacturing). For Vestre's owners, it would be a dream come true: imagine creating the world's best and coolest furniture factory! But where was the perfect plot of land that would combine nature, culture, and soul?

Over the winter and spring of 2019, the family owners took weekend trips to Innlandet county, between Vestre's factory in Sweden and the head office in Oslo. Equipped with printouts of regulated commercial plots and a phone camera on standby, all areas had to be inspected. There were many options, but none were perfect. During a meeting with possible industry partners, government supporters, and municipalities, an invitation came from the Mayor of Eidskog municipality, Kamilla Thue, to look at a young pine forest plot in Gaustadvegen – the same forest that had to be renewed after the storm in 1969. There, our supplier Hydro would be our closest neighbour. On its own initiative, Eidskog municipality started regulating this area for commercial purposes before they invited Vestre to establish a furniture factory there. The spirit and drive shown by the municipality was exemplary. It is easy to draw a historical parallel with the Stavanger region fifty years ago. The establishment of The Plus in Magnor has created many new jobs, and major ripple effects will be felt in Eidskog municipality and perhaps in time, across the entire Scandinavian region.

Fortunately, the municipality had not had time, to clear the forest and lay a concrete platform on the plot. Vestre wanted to keep the young forest and manage it as a recreation area, because here we were to create something that the world has not seen before: the world's most environmentally friendly furniture factory. The renowned Danish architectural firm Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG) would design the factory.



Facsimile frontpage *Glåmdalen* September 30, 1969, the local newspaper published in Kongsvinger.



June 2019. The designer Lars Törnøe created a concept image to visualize the ideas from Vestre's then CEO, Jan Christian Vestre. It is an actual photo from the plot in Magnor.



To pitch the assignment to BIG, a brief was prepared. The Norwegian designer Lars Tornøe drew a concept image based on Vestre's vision for a unique factory and a photo from the actual plot. On June 3, 2019, Vestre's two owners attached the image in an email to Vestre's board, together with this short description:

This will be a factory which considerably blends into the existing surroundings—the cultural landscape, nature, and people—and which provides inspiration, whether you are working on the inside looking out or on the outside peeking in.

The plan was unanimously accepted and supported by the board, and few days later Vestre's owners headed southward to Copenhagen and BIG's office for the initial meeting.

The rest of the journey is documented in this book. On June 3, 2022, three years after Vestre's board received the email, we celebrated the opening of The Plus, the people's factory, together with our 1200 guests. Open, accessible, and without any fences, with a green roof and solar cells, Norway's tallest slide, and a 300-acre recreation area. Here, visitors can follow the poetry trail, which is a homage to the poet and lumberjack Hans Børli (1918–89), who lived his whole life in Eidskog. In the poem *Minnene* ("Memories"), translated by Louis A. Muinzer, Børli begins with an invitation:

Take it with you!  
The smallest green thing that has  
happened to you  
can save your life some day  
in the winter land

The Plus is not the biggest "smallest green thing" that has ever happened in Norway. Nevertheless, it is the single largest investment in the Norwegian furniture industry for decades. It meets the Paris Proof targets (that is, it is committed to the principles of the Paris climate accords), the first and only furniture factory in the world to achieve the highest level of certification, BREEAM Outstanding (energy efficient, sustainably built, and responsive to user needs). This is probably why The Plus furniture factory has attracted lots of international attention and has become a token of the green transition and perhaps a symbol of hope. We created The Plus together with BIG, project manager Fokus Rådgivning, main contractor Ø.M. Fjeld, and around a hundred advisers and suppliers—because Vestre believes that each and every one of us can change the world. A little.

We would like to thank our partners for their cooperation to realize The Plus. An important aspect of sustainability is telling and sharing, and we would like to thank our publisher Hatje Cantz, the design studio AKFB and the Disegno team for creating this beautiful and insightful visual story.

We believe our industry can be part of the solution and not the problem. With this book, we want to inspire more green action by sharing the story of a unique design and construction project at a time when there is a loud and seemingly growing consensus that it is impossible to achieve the 1.5-degree goal in the Paris Agreement. We still believe it is possible. Because if you are like us, you don't give up.

Marianne Preus Jacobsen







Plus, ça change:

Vestre, BIG and the  
Clean Factory

The Plus, designed by the Bjarke Ingels Group (BIG) and opened in 2022, belongs to a fascinating sub-species in the evolution of environmentally informed architecture: the innovative northern European furniture factory. Commissioned by the Norwegian family-owned furniture company Vestre, The Plus is the child of a series of furniture factories that has become increasingly radical since the 1930s, as we have become more aware of and more informed about the effects of material culture on the biosphere. What began in 1920s Europe as an interest—part ethical, part pragmatic—in wood instead of steel for modernist furniture, has grown to embrace a concern not only with the product, but the with means of production and, most recently, the place of production. In the early twenty-first century, more or less a century after the first experiments with modern wooden furniture, we are able technically to address the factory and the dramatic reduction of environmental impact in both its construction and operation. This is important because the processing of wood is, conventionally, a resource-hungry, waste-producing enterprise.

Why so much innovation from furniture companies? It was and is by no means all of them—rather, very few. Those that have innovated have had a clear idea of what they have wanted to produce and why, a strong commitment to design and designers, a pronounced interest in furniture made predominantly of wood, and, no doubt connected, a pronounced sense of stewardship toward the source of their living material—the natural world.

## THE PRODUCT

Marcel Breuer's 1925 Wassily Chair, the product of a study of plumbing techniques and bicycle parts, introduced the world to tubular steel furniture and was a radical break with the ornate and heavy wood furniture that preceded it. Charlotte Perriand followed suit in 1927 with her Fauteuil pivotant, ●<sub>1</sub> as did Mies van der Rohe with his tubular steel MR series. The material rapidly became one of the symbols of the Modern Movement: industrially produced, mass produced (in theory), and designed by Modernist architects and designers to promote their vision of the *gesamkunstwerk*, an all-embracing design.

By the 1930s, however, furniture design was becoming more varied in material terms. Ten years after his Wassily Chair, Breuer designed the bentwood Breuer Lounge Chair, and at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in the United States, Eliel Saarinen and Charles Eames were exploring the design possibilities of plywood. In 1938, again in the US, Hans Knoll set up the Hans G. Knoll Furniture Company in New York, producing high-end modernist furniture; it still does so today.<sup>1</sup>

Three years before of Knoll came Alvar and Aino Aalto's Artek company, founded in 1935 with, most

unusually, an art historian—Nils-Gustav Hahl—and a patron of art and architecture, Maire Gullichsen. The name Artek combined the words art and technology, typifying the early Modernist attitude to design, and the company emerged from an abrupt change of direction for the Aaltos in the 1930s. Before that, their forays into furniture design followed the doctrinaire rationalism of 1920s Modernism and its industrially produced tubular metal furniture. At the same time, however, Alvar Aalto was working with Otto Korhonen in Korhonen's factory, developing techniques for bentwood furniture. ●<sub>2</sub> There were practical reasons for this interest in wood: World War I had created shortages of imported materials, but forests were available on the doorstep, and Aalto was a representative for the Finnish timber industry.

There were also social concerns that informed the Aaltos' shift to wood. For Alvar Aalto, "rationalism in furniture design, exemplified by tubular metal furniture, was deficient with respect to the concept of humanism"<sup>2</sup> and human needs. Rationalism needed to be extended "to the verge of psychology and beyond."<sup>3</sup> Artek's furniture, then, was environmentally sustainable more by default than by intention, wood having less impact than metal, but there was also a conscious rejection of pushing a new line of products every year in favour of incremental changes to the furniture being produced, for example, the chair, the table, the lamp.<sup>4</sup> Economy of means. The environmental sciences had yet to enter the stage, but Aalto moved outside the machinistic frame of reference of most of his Modernist contemporaries and was thinking of design in terms of nature. For him, the infinite variety found within the standard structure of the organic cell was the model for industrial standardization, what he called "flexible standardization."<sup>5</sup>

In her essay "Aalto and the New Nordic,"<sup>6</sup> Eera-Liisa Pelkonen describes the Nordic Renaissance in ideas and design of the 1930s that had its epicentre in Stockholm and influenced the Nordic countries and beyond. In addition to Aalto, Modernist designers and architects included Gunnar Asplund, Sven Markelius, Gregor Paulsson, and Poul Henningsen. Pelkonen goes on to celebrate a new Nordic revival:

Now, some ninety years after Aalto benefitted from the lively artistic and intellectual culture in the region, we seem to be experiencing a new Nordic Renaissance as young architects from around the world travel to see buildings by the two most visible practices in the region, Copenhagen-based BIG and Oslo-based Snøhetta. ... Not since Aalto was at the height of his international career in the 1950s have Nordic firms reached such international prominence.<sup>7</sup>

This is certainly the case, and although this shifts us from the scale of furniture to the scale of architecture, architects have been and are involved with the design of furniture, sometimes as their own clients, sometimes not. There are many permutations, all united by innovative design—and by wood.

Plus, ça change: Vestre, BIG and the Clean Factory



2 Alvar Aalto, Paimio Armchair No. 41, 1932.



1 Charlotte Perriand, Fauteuil Pivotant, 1927.



3 Map showing the distribution of forests within Europe.