

## Nordic Insights eps 12 Hans Jorgen Jahr

[00:00:14] Moi Hejsan and hello, welcome to Nordic Insights, where I introduce you to high achieving Nordic and Nordic inspired people with expertise in business, lifestyle, education, innovation, tech, travel and more. I'm your host Satu Raunola, a Finn, passionate about all things Nordic, as well as your running, sustainability, well-being and great coffee. Listen in for some tips on Nordic approaches to a happier and more holistic business and personal life. Join me to explore Nordic common sense and trends in this complex world. This podcast is delivered to you every Wednesday.

[00:01:03] Hey, welcome back to Nordic Insights. This is Episode 12, firstly, thank you so much for your support. I am super excited that today as I have over two thousand one hundred downloads. It is a fantastic result, so soon.

[00:01:30] Today's guest is an intriguing Melbourne based Norwegian maker of things, Hans Jorgen Jahr.

[00:01:40] He was so inspired by multi Grammy Award musician Ben Harper that he decided to start designing guitars. He didn't know then that Ben Harper would be his first customer. This very talented and soft-spoken Nordic designer, carpenter and photographer chose his inspirations from Bauhaus and Nordic designers. Hans talks about his time in the Norwegian army as a pacifist and about his love for outdoors and extreme sports, including ski jumping snow and skateboarding. Hans is a very dedicated father and step father. We discuss what it is like to be a Nordic father and how it differs from Australian based on his experience.

[00:02:30] Now let's go back to the show and meet Hans Jorgen Jahr.

[00:02:34] So, Hans Jorgen, great to have you as my guest. Now, you are based in Melbourne and on your website, you call yourself maker of things, taker of photos and a Norwegian in Melbourne. So how did you become a maker of things?

[00:02:56] Thank you very much for having me on your podcast. I have pretty much most of my adult life I've been designing and making things. So that's been sort of a natural part of my life for a very long time. Yeah, both both graphic things as as a

graphic designer and also objects things, various things, including guitars and woodworking and. Yeah, lots of different things.

[00:03:25] Okay. And do you think your design you are a Nordic designer?

[00:03:31] Yes. I think somehow that is reflected in a lot of my designs and things that I make that I have that heritage.

[00:03:41] I guess it's quite minimal in general and also functional. So I guess that's a bit Bauhouse approach to form follows function, which is also a bit Nordic and Scandinavian, I guess so, yes.

[00:03:58] I think that is apparent in most of the things that I make that I have that heritage. And where do you get your inspiration,

[00:04:05] I guess, from everyday life? I like challenges. So my perfect project as a as a designer and carpenter now is to be presented with a problem or a challenge and first of all, work out with the client what is needed. And then from that brief, designing what needs to be made and then actually get in my workshop and make it and install it and install the finished products on site. That's that's sort of my ultimate project at the moment. And that gives me a lot of inspiration to be able to do that.

[00:04:44] Tell us more in details. What do you make? What things do you make? Furniture?

[00:04:49] Yes. So these days I'm mainly making furniture, so I prefer making functional things. I love a challenge of a small space that needs to be utilised in the best possible way and maybe having something multifunctional in there that can can do several jobs and and utilise space. Yeah. So that could be anything from a sofa, a desk, maybe with a bookshelf attached to it and pretty much anything. Like I said, these days, most of the stuff that I make is made out of wood.

[00:05:36] Right. So you have also sustainability in your design.

[00:05:41] Yes, yeah.

[00:05:42] I prefer using reclaimed timber for most of my for whenever that is practical. I also really enjoy working with plywood, which is also quite a sustainable material where you sort of utilising a lot of the timber and it's also very stable.

[00:06:03] Who inspires you? Do you have designers who you really admire? And you said you your style is more like a Bauhouse house style and movement, but do you have Nordic design or any other designers that you find very inspirational?

[00:06:20] Yes, I do have a lot of designers that I get draw inspiration from.

[00:06:27] And of course, there are a lot of Scandinavian Nordic designers. I like Alvar Aalto stuff, Eero Aarnio of course, all the Danes Poul Kjærholm, Hans Jorgen Wegner, Finn Juhl and also some Norwegian designers I like the work of Hans Bratrud, Fredrik Kayser. And yeah, the list goes on just and also, of course, non Scandinavian designers as well, like Australian designer I really admire is Mark Newsome. Yeah. So the list is long.

[00:07:09] And well, many of the Nordic design is one thing in common is that they get their inspiration from nature. Do you also have that?

[00:07:19] Yes, I think I do surround myself by nature as much as I can. So, yeah, a lot of my inspiration comes from there. And that also maybe makes my sign may be a little bit unique because I draw inspiration from the nature that I'm currently in, which is here in Australia and also, of course, have lots of cultural heritage and memories from my younger years in Norway. And the deep forests, I guess, of my inspiration comes from there as well and get sort of mixed together.

[00:08:06] Right. And you also design and make guitars. So tell us about that.

[00:08:13] Yeah, that was a very sort of spontaneous project. I basically wanted to learn how to play slide guitar. They were a bit hard to find. This was when I lived in Oslo last and I decided to make one instead of buying one. And I had friends who were just started using carbon fiber back then in the early 2000s. And I was very curious about that material. So I decided to try to make this guitar out of carbon fiber, and I did. And it

was an interesting experience that I really enjoyed. And it ended up becoming a full time job for a while, making guitars, because I had ended up having quite a bit of demand for them.

[00:09:09] Now, tell us your experience and your connection with Ben Harper.

[00:09:15] Yeah, he actually was the reason why I wanted to learn how to play guitar because I really admired his music and his guitar playing. And when I had when I finished the first guitar that I built, I sent an email to his an email address from his website. And I got a response back and I was asked to make him one. So he was actually my first customer. So I ended up making two guitars for him, which was great.

[00:09:54] That's pretty amazing. Start for your career.

[00:09:57] Yes, it was. So yeah, that was a huge inspiration that kept me going for a for a couple of years doing that full time.

[00:10:07] Right. And it must be very challenging to actually design guitars because this it's you actually I wouldn't even understand how it works, but you must be really there's so many things that you have to think about, not just the design, the actual guitar, but also, you know, how it sounds and all of that. So how where did you learn all that?

[00:10:31] Well, it was sort of my approach was a lot of instrument makers are basically trying to recreate all the instruments that have shown to work really well, whether those violins, Stradivarius or old Gibson guitars or Martin guitars from from way back there have been sort of golden models and trying to recreate them or or there's also a small group of us, I guess, who just want to take things in new directions and see where we can end up. And that's sort of what I ended up doing. And then you sort of make something and then it either works or it doesn't. It's more like you learn as you go along, I guess. And it's I was fortunate that it ended up working quite well.

[00:11:37] That's really amazing, amazing achievement. Now, you mentioned that you get your inspiration also from your youth and being lots in outdoors in Norway. And you send me these really delightful little stories about your journey from a young age. And you've been really a big you're a big risk taker. You've been a ski jumper. You

snowboard, you windsurf, your mountain bike. So you are a typical Nordic person that loves outdoors, but also take huge risks when you outdoors, climbing a mountain and so on. So tell about your your childhood and your youth.

[00:12:22] Yeah, it was so most of it was spent outside, which is the typical Scandinavian thing. I guess so. And, and I was quite early on hooked on, I guess you call it action sports started ski jumping when I was about six and I was doing that for just over 10 years, my early life sort of ended up being semiprofessional the end. And and that was most of my childhood and adolescence years was sort of spent doing that. And then on the side, I was also hugely into anything to do with boards, snowboards, skateboards, windsurfing, and later on also surfing. So, yes, I had a very active, active life. And I still really enjoy getting out on the snowboard, skateboard whenever I can.

[00:13:26] You went to Army for two years, even you didn't really want to do it. So what was that all about?

[00:13:33] Yeah, no, I was set. It was compulsory army training in Norway when when I was at that age. But I had actually organised all the paperwork and everything I needed to get out of it because I didn't want to. But then I think I just read too many Hemingway books that last year of high school and decided to to join the army instead. And instead of just doing the normal one year service, I decided to do opposite school. And it just ended up being a bit of a challenge or something. I wanted to prove to myself that I could do because it was quite obvious from very early on that I really did not like it. It was not for me, but I still finished the two years. I remember the last day my the head officer, my main teacher congratulated me and said I was most likely the first pacifist ever to go through school.

[00:14:41] Well, that's amazing achievement, but would have been quite challenging if it's kind of against your values. And but you still obviously you're you still wanted to push it through and see that, you know, you can do it.

[00:14:54] Yes. I mean, it had learnt a lot, and I'm really happy that I did it. And so I definitely got something out of it. But yeah, was a was a constant struggle to. Yeah. To follow through and not get kicked out.

[00:15:09] Yeah. I think the army is well for us Nordics, like in Finland is also compulsory. And what, what I saw like my, my family, my brother. And when you say that when you, when a boy goes to army and man comes out.

[00:15:29] Yeah.

[00:15:30] So there's a huge experience. You just learn a lot about life and yourself and other people and and I could see like in my brother, there was a huge change in him when he actually finished his, you know, a year in the army.

[00:15:45] Yeah, definitely. Yeah. So most of the people I was in the army with sort of straight from home, it was a bit different for me because I had moved away from home when I was 15. So I had already been living by myself for four, four, four years by the time I joined the Army.

[00:16:04] Hey, everyone, just quickly, I want to talk to you about Nordic institution anorak jackets. Anorak jackets originated in the Nordic region, and we're used to protect folk from the harsh natural elements. The traditional anorak jacket is a pullover style jacket with a zip and hood. Australian based Anorakki company sells anorak jackets that suit our modern, busy lifestyle. They are contemporary Nordic design, 100 per cent high quality brushed cotton fabric that is strong and durable and ethically made in Finland and Estonia by R-Collection. Nordic Insights listeners get 10 percent off and free shipping by quoting Nordic when ordering. Anorakki offers full returns and they are Unisex sized. Visit [anorakki.com.au](http://anorakki.com.au) and now back to the show.

[00:17:00] And you also in some stages, well you live now in Australia, but you are very widely travelled and use you in some stage... I read that you've been, you know, with 23 countries.

[00:17:13] Yes. That was after the the two years in the Army. I saved up all the money that I made during those those years in the army and spent that on on travelling around the world for about 13 months straight after. And then during those 13 months, I think I visited twenty three countries.

[00:17:35] And what was that experience for you like?

[00:17:38] That was another eye opening experience, I guess, pretty much from beginning to end from when we first landed in in Nairobi, which was the first Kenya was a first stop and. Yeah, and all the way through through Central and Southeast Asia after that. And and it was also the first time I visited Australia, travelling around Australia for about a month during that round the world trip. So yeah, definitely learnt a lot during those 13 months and a lot of wonderful experiences. And of course, I would not choose to travel like that now as an as an adult, because it was I think I would have maybe lasted maybe two weeks or that's kind of always looking. Remember, we were basically using Lonely Planet. This was before the Internet and and that kind of ways to get around. So we were using Lonely Planet and it was just always about finding the cheapest accommodation and heading straight to the. Yeah. The cheapest dorms and stuff. And and then. Yeah, so it was it was not the kind of travel I would choose to do now, but I'm very happy to be done it.

[00:19:04] Totally understandable now. So what then made you to move to Australia. You said that you, you visit here and a little bit, but then later in life you decided to move to Australia.

[00:19:19] Yeah. It was not actually not long after I came back to Norway, after that, travelling around the world, I decided what I wanted to do, which was graphic design, and had already sort of found a university in in Australia that would but I wanted to try to get into and and the Norwegian government was sort of ..I don't know there might still be encouraging people to travel overseas, to study, to broaden the horizons, I guess. And it was quite easy for me to get a scholarship and the finances sort of sorted so I could go to Newcastle and study. And I just thought if I could do that, instead of doing it in Norway, it was that was an easy choice for me.

[00:20:13] And what did you study?

[00:20:14] I studied graphic design or visual communication at the University of Newcastle. So that was a bachelor. So I lived in Newcastle for about three years.

[00:20:24] And then you decided to stay and now you live in Melbourne and you have a family.

[00:20:31] I actually moved back to Norway after I finished studying and lived in Oslo for six years and then moved back to Australia about ten years ago.

[00:20:44] Okay. Why did you then decided to stay, you know, park yourself in Australia?

[00:20:50] Because my my ex-wife wanted to study Chinese medicine, though, and Australia was what made more sense to me. It was a better place to do that than anywhere in anywhere in Europe, I think. So that's why we ended up in Melbourne.

[00:21:07] Yes. And you have a great profession, you know, being a designer and maker of things that you can really base yourself anywhere in the world.

[00:21:17] Yes. Yeah, definitely. That's quite universal. And I also ended up working for the for the first six years after moving back to Melbourne, I was actually still working for a Norwegian advertising agency as a graphic designer.

[00:21:33] Now, one thing you mentioned earlier on when we spoke that two things are very important in your life. One is design and the other one is family and know you have family and you are a father of two daughters?

[00:21:50] Two daughters and one stepson. Yes.

[00:21:53] Do you feel like you are a typical Nordic father?

[00:21:57] Yes, I think. I think I am, because I probably do spend more time with my children than what maybe the I know it's dangerous to generalize, but probably spend more time with my children than the average Australian father.

[00:22:16] So what does it mean for you to be a father?

[00:22:20] Of course, it's about being a good role model and to try to behave like I would like my children to behave. Yeah, that's probably the main thing.

[00:22:34] And how being a father has changed your own values.

[00:22:39] Yes, I think becoming a parent was I guess it is for everyone a big revelation when you sort of get pushed off centre from your own universe and you're not in the center anymore. And that is a huge change from being a non parent to being a parent. And that can both be a bit frightening and also be I just find it a huge relief. It just it's one of those things just suddenly give your life meaning and you don't have to ask yourself so many questions in them.

[00:23:16] All right. And did you I mean, do you work from home or did you do you take parental leave?

[00:23:24] Yes, I did take parental leave, yes. So, yeah, we have always spent pretty much 50 50 equal amount of time with with our children.

[00:23:36] So this was parental leave in Australia or in Norway?

[00:23:40] Both.

[00:23:41] Okay, so in Australia it's very short and compared to the Nordic countries, isn't it?

[00:23:47] Yes, it is. So but I have sort of never for the last 14 years I haven't really had a proper job. So it's I've I've been working freelance, so it's been up to me how how I want to organise my work life. So it's it was possible for me to to have time off when both my daughters were born.

[00:24:12] Nordic countries being the most gender equal in the world; I just read the recently a research about parental leaves and just for us as a little information bit; Sweden offers the longest paid leave with sixty nine weeks altogether, followed by Norway, Denmark and Finland, with around fifty weeks each and Iceland around 40 weeks, and payment levels rate from 70 to 100 per cent. But also for fathers; in Denmark, two weeks are reserved, reserved for fathers and thirty two weeks can be shared, compared to Finland, where nine weeks are reserved for fathers and twenty six can be shared. And in Sweden, 13 weeks are earmarked for fathers and mothers

respectively, and they have additional forty three weeks to share. And then there are also three part leave system, which some of the weeks are allotted to father and some to mother. And then then they're also part of the weeks that each parents, each parent and to share also in Norway. And it was interesting to read this survey because the Nordic countries are so way ahead with most Western countries. So the importance of, first of all, having the parental leave, but also the having the the opportunity for father to be looking after children is very important. Has being a parent and having spending time with your children changed your experience of parenting or relationships and your work?

[00:25:53] Yes, I think I think it's all about finding a balance between family and work life. I do think that it's more culturally embedded in the Nordic countries to to share all that more equally. And it also so that just comes more natural. It's not even necessarily an active decision that you need to make. That's just how it is and that's how it should be. So it's definitely it's very different from from how it is perceived here and in Australia, which still seems to be a lot more given that it's it's the mum that stays at home. Father keeps trucking on with work.

[00:26:42] Yes. And how does how does your Australian mates what do they think about you if you are more, much more hands on father than they are?

[00:26:53] I think, though, it's it it depends. I mean, in in the profession that I work. Now, would I do a lot of carpentry work and work as a as a tragedy and in that sort of profession, there's not that many fathers who are that much hands on. And but but I don't find it difficult to to make people understand that that's how I prioritize, because it's I mean, it's basically just a matter of of explaining your values. And I don't find that difficult at all because it's something that I feel so strongly about, that I don't feel embarrassed or find it difficult at all to explain to people that that my main priority is my family and then we will just have to fit in around that.

[00:27:50] So you for you shared childcare responsibilities, physical and emotional care and daily planning that kind of inbuilt in in you, that you automatically do them and that there's no it's not a big deal at all.

[00:28:05] No. And I think that is one of those things that are maybe have brought with me from from Norway, that it's that that's just how it is. It's not it doesn't even need to be discussed. It it's just equal.

[00:28:20] Yeah, that's right. And actually, the same research was quite interesting. It also stated how important it's been shown in many ways that the if the fathers are more hands on in in childcare there, the children are less likely to experience social and psychological difficulties, and even they form much better in in academically.

[00:28:45] And but it doesn't necessarily mean it's not necessarily need to be, you know, a woman, a mother and and a male father. But it's just like having two parents who are loving and it's the same result. But that was a very interesting outcome of this research.

[00:29:05] Yes. Yeah. No, I totally agree with that. And it's sort of also I guess it sort of makes sense. It's pretty basic psychology. So there's no magic involved in work in that. I think it's more just how society, how things have been for for a long time and that there are just such a slow process seems to be for a country like Australia to change. Why that is, I don't know.

[00:29:39] Australia's quite macho culture. It's quite additional male female way of thinking about things. And for us Nordics, it's it feels quite, you know, very traditional. And so do you think can you see any change happening? Do you have friends who are actually male friends who are more dedicated to everyday life of that of their children?

[00:30:07] Oh, yes, definitely. It's definitely changing. And yes, I have friends who are absolutely, really good parents, both, of course, both mums and dads. And and I think there's there is change. But it is when when the structure of the whole society also needs to change, then it is a slow process.

[00:30:33] So how do you perceive other things then being a father and being a parent? When you think about your Nordic model and thinking, how do you see that Nordic thinking is different, like thinking in Australia or maybe in other countries?

[00:30:48] Well, I would like to think that the typical Nordic person maybe thinks a bit more and talks a bit less.

[00:31:01] Yes, I agree.

[00:31:03] No, that's probably not right. But I think I just I think Nordics are really good at blending in and adapting to their surroundings. It's one of those things I've noticed here in Melbourne. I'm sure there are lots of Norwegians and Scandinavians here, but I don't think in general, maybe we find have such a strong need to to hang out together and creates a little sort of pockets of Nordichness. I think we're happy to just blend in and contribute in whatever surroundings we're in.

[00:31:44] And I do agree. Now, what is your contribution to your community? What do you feel like you how do you contribute to your community?

[00:31:53] I think my main contribution would be to raise my children, to be good people. And tried to set a good example for whatever I do, not necessarily the one pulling out and talking so much about things, but just trying to do the right thing through actions and setting an example both for the people around me, but most of all, my children.

[00:32:24] And do you think your children have Nordic, Nordic or Norwegian characteristics in them?

[00:32:30] Yes. Yes, I think I do. I feel like I do. Probably becomes most obvious when we travelled back to Norway. And they actually you can tell that they actually feel that connection, that they are part of them are Norwegian. Yeah, it becomes very obvious when they are back in Norway.

[00:32:53] So they feel very at home.

[00:32:55] Yeah. Yeah,

[00:32:56] That's nice. That's how I feel always that I have two worlds to living when I go to Finland, I that's my it's my world, but that's not my everyday world. So then being there for a while, then when I come home, this is my everyday life. But I still feel that I'm that's my world as well. So it's it's a bit interesting. It's very interesting. Yes. Positives and negatives.

[00:33:24] Yeah. Of course. It's always have friends and family and memories from Norway that makes it a bit difficult sometimes because you miss things and people and moods and and weather and whatever. But but then in general it's just very rewarding to have and I feel very fortunate to have to go to other countries. And I'm very grateful for being able to call both Norway and Australia home.

[00:33:57] Yeah, totally agree. Now, what's the one thing you really miss from Norway?

[00:34:03] Well, of course. Of course. Family and friends. Because but but besides that, I think this summer light now for being a photographer. I really appreciate light. And that's something I miss. And the winter light to the the changing of the the lights and the seasons. That's something I miss.

[00:34:28] Yeah, I totally agree with that. It's quite special. If people would like to learn more about your work, your graphic design and your beautiful woodwork and your beautiful guitars, where can they find more information?

[00:34:43] I have a couple of Instagram accounts and also my website is [jarh.com.au](http://jarh.com.au)

[00:34:53] And what are your Instagram account.

[00:34:56] Yes, one is with mainly my photography work is a pile of trees and full of my stuff that I make its Jarhmade

[00:35:07] Great, Thank you. I will, I will put the links in, in the show notes so when people can go and check your beautiful work. Well Hans-Joergen its been wonderful to talk to you. Thank you very much. And I invite everybody to go to your website to see your beautiful photography and beautiful woodwork that you have created. So thank you very much. It's been lovely to have you as my guest.

[00:35:36] Thank you very much. Do thank you for having me on this show.

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