ISSUES AND IMAGES
ICELAND

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PHOTO BY PÁLL STEFÁNSSON

Issues and Images
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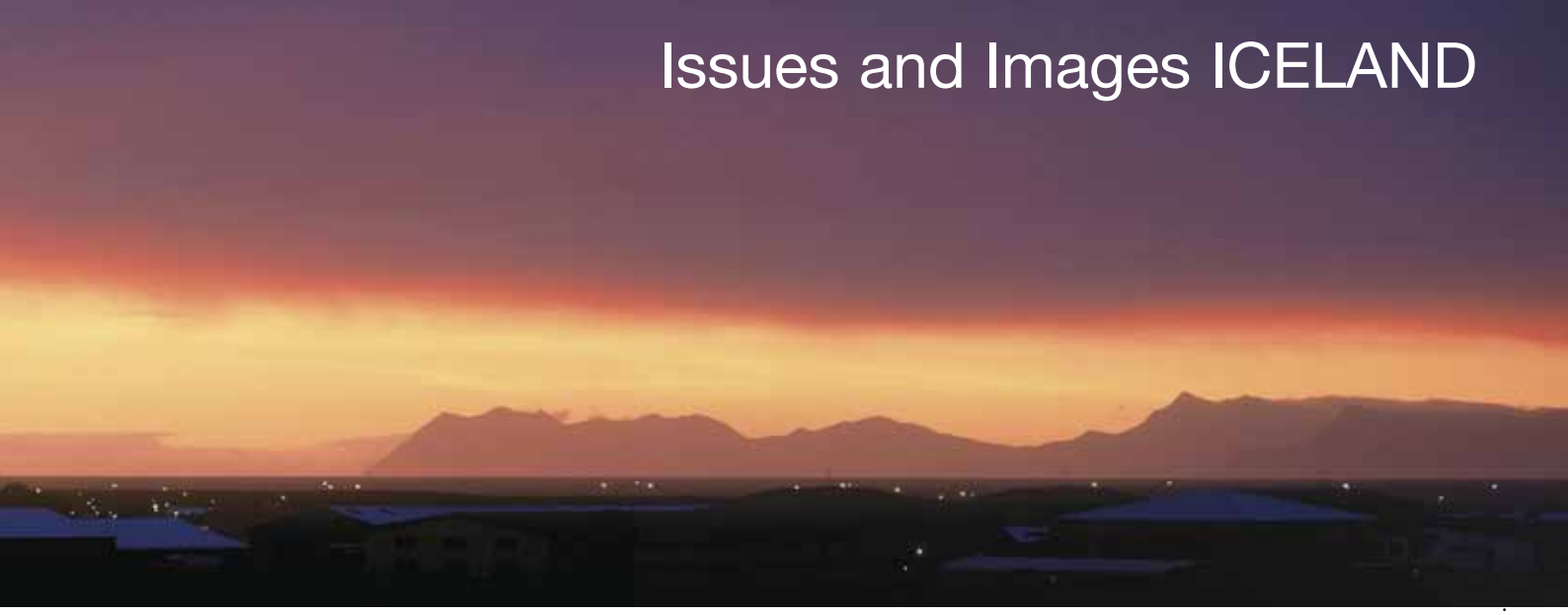

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Q&A

Ron Arnason
Waianae, Hawaii, USA

Q: What constitutes a farm in Iceland?

A: According to Ólafur R. Dýrmundsson, National Adviser on Organic Farming and Land Use at the Farmers Association of Iceland, legal farms, or *lögbýli*, are registered specifically with agricultural authorities and their owners enjoy certain rights.

Usually, a *lögbýli* consists of a piece of land (which can vary considerably in size), buildings, some sort of agriculture, and human inhabitants. However, there are examples of abandoned farms defined as *lögbýli*, which may have held that status from ancient times.

Linda De L'Etoile
Hollywood, Florida, USA

Q: How much of Iceland is covered by lava?

A: Kristján Jónasson, Project Manager of Geology and Curator of Mineralogy and Petrology at the Icelandic Institute of Natural History, stated that postglacial lava covers 11.4 percent of Iceland.

This is based on the geological map of Iceland 1:600,000 published by the Icelandic Institute of Natural History. It includes all lava that has formed after the Ice Age, or within the last 11,000 years or so. Lava that has formed in historic time (the last 1,100 years) covers 2.5 percent of Iceland.

Older bedrock in Iceland is largely made up of layers of lava-flows, so you could argue that most of Iceland is built up of lava. However, these have been heavily eroded by glaciers during the Ice Age, so they are generally not included.

Jacey
Shijiazhuang, China
(currently in Singapore)

Q: Could you introduce some of the major music festivals in Iceland?

A: On the website *icelandicmusic.is* you can find an extensive listing of annual music festivals and music-related festivals of all genres in Iceland.

THESE INCLUDE: Dark Music Days, a contemporary music festival in Reykjavík in January; the Reykjavík Blues Festival in March; the free festival Aldrei fór ég suður in Ísafjörður at Easter; Við Djúpið, a classical music festival, also in Ísafjörður, in June; a choral music festival at Lake Mývatn in June; Eistnaflug, a heavy metal festival in Neskaupstaður in July; Bræðslan, an all-round music festival in Borgarfjörður eystri in July; the Verslunarmannahelgi long weekend in August with outdoor festivals across the country; Skálholt Summer Concerts at the south Iceland bishopric in August; the Reykjavík Jazz Festival in August; and, the grand finale, Iceland Airwaves in Reykjavík in October.

PHOTO BY PÁLL STEFÁNSSON

Anthony
Houston, Texas, USA

Q: Are there any remote towns, villages, or hamlets in the highlands?

A: No, the highlands are characterized by glaciers, mountains, lava fields and sand plains, and are largely uninhabitable. Towns and villages in Iceland are mostly located by the seaside. There is no clear definition as to where the highlands begin and the lowlands end. Some speak of a certain altitude—200, 300 or 400 meters above sea level.

From the early part of the 19th century and until the mid-20th century there were a number of remote so-called *heiðarbýli* ("mountain farms") scattered across northeast Iceland, located at altitudes as high as 550 meters. Möðrudalur á Fjöllum is currently the country's highest farm, located at an altitude of 469 meters above sea level. In past centuries, the highlands served as a sanctuary for outlaws, who took shelter in caves and managed to survive under incredibly harsh circumstances. One such famous hideout is that of the outlaw Fjalla-Eyvindur at Herðubreiðalindir, a green oasis in the northeastern highlands, included in Vatnajökull National Park.

Anna
Cambridge, England

Q: Where are good places to see puffins on a day trip from Reykjavík?

A: Puffins have nesting grounds quite close to Reykjavík and some whale watching companies organize tours to Lundey ("Puffin Island") on Kollafjörður fjord.

You can book trips with Elding (*elding.is*) or Hvalalíf (*hvalalif.is*) from May to August.

You can also take a day trip to the Westman Islands (by ferry: *herjolfur.is*, by air: *eagleair.is*), home to the world's largest puffin colony with six to eight million birds.

Duncan
Colorado, USA

Q: Do you know of a resource listing natural hot springs in the countryside?

A: Vatnavinir, Friends of Water, is an international multidisciplinary team of professionals with experience in developing bathing and wellness concepts. Their goal is to explore opportunities for building a network of complementary thermal treatment centers in Iceland. For further information, go to *vatnavinir.is*.

***Swimminginiceland.com* is a website that aims to become a complete database of all thermal pools in Iceland, including some natural hot springs.**

Originally published in 'Ask Eygló' on icelandreview.com

PHOTO BY PALL STEFANSSON

REMAINS OF THE DAY

"My goal was to write a comprehensive and accessible book about Icelandic archaeological sites, which in my opinion was needed," says Birna of her book *Mannvist*. "The focus of the media and the general public tends to be on either particular pieces or some major discoveries bound to change our perception of the past, when there are so many smaller but just as important categories that never get the credit they deserve. Perhaps variety is the key concept behind it."

Issued in 2011, it has already earned great critical acclaim and been well received by critics, scholars, and the general public. The book, which is filled with photographs and speaks in simple yet eloquent terms, is divided thematically into chapters. It deals with various aspects of the lives of Icelanders over the course of a millennium, from Viking graves to fishermen's huts, milestones to man-made caves, outlaws' hideouts to places of worship.

Interestingly, it also explores even more intriguing territories, such as remains of a world beyond, inhabited by monsters, trolls, fairies, and the hidden people. "According to the law, these sites have cultural historical value and therefore qualify as archaeological remains. However, obviously it is more difficult to verify that."

The origins of archaeological research in Iceland can be traced back to the 19th century, actually a by-product of the nation's enormous interest in researching the Sagas. "Scholars would take them out and across the country, trying to get a feel for the land and match the stories with the sites where they supposedly took place. They sometimes even recreated the scenes. Afterwards, they usually chose how to interpret the findings in order to support their own theories."

Shedding light on Iceland's thousand-year history, Mannvist *is a fundamental piece of writing.* Ásta Andrésdóttir *met with its author, archaeologist* Birna Lárusdóttir.

Photo courtesy of Howell M. Roberts

A 12th to 13th century chess piece, found by Siglunes near Siglufjördur.

The interest in the Sagas and archaeology was sparked by the nation's fight for independence from Denmark. "The goal was to fortify our national identity and highlight our glorious origins, as they put it; a powerful tool. Today, of course, archaeology is about shedding light on who we really were as a nation, as opposed to searching for something to prove a point."

During her career, Birna, who holds a BA in Icelandic and an MA in archaeology, has focused on the documentation of archaeological remains, a task that entails traveling from farm to farm and interviewing people, gathering information on the remains on their property, and mapping them out with GPS system.

"Meeting these people, and hearing their stories, is very rewarding. Interestingly, they usually begin by saying *Sorry but we don't have any archeological remains here*. They think that we're only looking for something ancient and extraordinary. So, this book is also intended to broaden people's horizons regarding what constitutes archaeological remains. And to encourage readers to keep their eyes open when they are walking in nature. There are remarkable things to be found at every turn."

"Even though we haven't been conducting this research for long, already a great deal of new sites have been discovered and we continue to gain a better overview of Iceland, its landscape and history. Even so, entire parts of the country have yet to be examined and documented, which is first and foremost due to lack of funds. It has been estimated that there are at least 130,000 archaeological sites in Iceland. So we still have a long way to go. But with all this unchartered territory, it is definitely an exciting time."

By Ásta Andrésdóttir

Photo courtesy of Mats Wibe Lund

A sports field in Þjórsártún, South Iceland, built by hand in 1911.

ICELAND YEAR ROUND

How about eating Icelandic pancakes with the President, or sushi with the Mayor of the capital city of Reykjavík? This past winter, the ''Accept Iceland's Invitations'' project, sponsored by the agency Inspired by Iceland, encouraged visitors to participate in various aspects of Icelandic life by accepting invitations to meet real Icelanders and join them in their homes or in various activities. The program was enormously popular, and it seemed that everyone got involved, from the President and the Mayor, to hundreds of Icelanders who were proud to show off their skills and their country. Visitors were offered a vast range of experiences, from picking mussels on the shore in the south of the country; to knitting with luxurious Icelandic wool; to improvising with rock musicians; to hiking with a mountain-climbing guide and her dog. This was the very successful first year of a three-year project entitled Inspired by Iceland, which aims to promote Iceland as a year-round destination. The program is supported by grants from the private sector, as well as a matching grant of ISK 300 million from the Icelandic government. The ''Invitation'' project can be seen in a charming, heart-warming documentary made by the filmmaker and blogger Rupert Murray in cooperation with the *Huffington Post* UK.

Then, in early March, a tiny mobile kitchen, called the "Eldhús," or Little House of Food, traveled around the country for twelve days as part of the "Invitations" project. Four guests at a time were able to book the fabulous dinners made by the various master chefs who cooked for the little red kitchen. For the DesignMarch festival, the little house of food was transformed into the Little House of Design, and four international students from London´s Chelsea College of Art and Design were invited to use it as a base from which to contact and learn from Icelandic designers.

One of the most amazing things about Iceland is the sophistica-

Travel and entertainment 365 days a year Inspired by Iceland is inviting the world to experience a wide spectrum of activities in Iceland all year round.

tion and creativity of the people. The thousand-year old culture that stems from the Vikings and the writers of the Sagas places great emphasis on independence and hard work, which can be seen in the innovative art, design, and filmmaking for which Iceland is famous. The music scene in Reykjavík is one of the most active and vibrant in the world—both the international musician and performance artist, Björk, as well as the new Billboard chart-breakers, Of Monsters and Men, are singular Icelandic phenomena. The major international rock festival Iceland Airwaves is held annually in October, the annual blues festival is in April and the jazz festival in the end of August-early September. Reykjavik´s elegant new concert hall, Harpa, which opened with the Icelandic Symphony Orchestra conducted by Vladimir Ashkenazy in May 2011, has hosted such world-class classical performers as Kiri Te Kanawa and Jonas Kaufmann, as well as rockers like Jethro Tull and James Taylor.

In summer, when the days are famously long, but also in fall, winter, and spring, activities include not only hiking and skiing, but also outdoor and indoor swimming in pools that are never too cold. The hotpots alongside the pools, heated by water from natural hot springs, provide a warm welcome where visitors can relax and chat with the natives. Natural sites all over the country—from the wonders of the Golden Circle east of Reykjavík (which includes the impressive waterfall, Gullfoss, and Geysir, the geyser that gave its name to all other geysers in the world), to Dettifoss, the most powerful waterfall in Europe, near the northern capital of Akureyri, to Jökulsárlón, the natural lagoon formed by glacial water on the south coast—can be seen at any time of year. There is always so much to see everywhere in Iceland—in the capital city of Reykjavík and out in the small villages and countryside as well—all year round. For more information: www.inspiredbyiceland.com

By Ann Sass

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD BY ÓSKAR ÓLAFSSON AND PÁLL STEFÁNSSON

THE WORLD´S HERRING CAPITAL

Entrepreneur Róbert Guðfinnsson has big plans for his home town, Siglufjörður, North Iceland.

PHOTO BY BENEDIKT JOHANNESSON

Life is herring. Life was herring in Siglufjördur, Iceland's northernmost town. A town enclosed on three sides by high, steep mountains, facing the Arctic Ocean to the north. It all started in 1903 when the Norwegians came to catch herring, and made Siglufjördur their base. The town was perfectly located in the center of the north coast, and had an excellent natural harbor in the small fjord by the same name.

In forty years, the township grew from approximately 100 inhabitants to become Iceland's fifth largest town, with more than 3,000 inhabitants, as well as 6,000 seasonal workers and fishermen from Iceland, the Nordic, and the Baltic countries. The summer months were the herring season. Today, approximately 1,200 people live in Siglufjördur (or Sigló as the locals call it), which is part of the Fjallabyggd municipality.

In the middle of the last century, Siglufjördur was known as the Klondike of the Atlantic Ocean—herring was the silver of the sea. Twenty percent of Iceland's export came from this town alone, a town that until 1937 had no road connecting it to the rest of Iceland. When the road was built over Siglufjardarskard, a very steep and high mountain pass, it could only be open for a few weeks during high summer. In 1967, a tunnel was constructed, and last year another one was built connecting the town with Akureyri, North Iceland's capital. Today, Siglufjördur is not a dead-end town.

1968 would be the last herring season in Iceland for decades.

The design of the 64-room luxury hotel, which will open in three years by the Siglufjörður marina.

Overfishing meant the end of an era for Siglufjördur; the silver rush was over. “I was ten or eleven years old, and the next ten years growing up in Siglufjördur were depressing. Both people and money left the town, there was complete stagnation; it was a ghost town” says entrepreneur Róbert Gudfinnsson. “I feel that what happened for Siglufjördur in 1968 is the same thing that happened to Iceland after the financial bubble burst four years ago. No clear vision for the future, no belief. A negative outlook. My father was a hardworking laborer, and lost his job; it is difficult to be without hope and without a job as it was when I was growing up. When I came back after having earned an education thirty years ago, one third of the population had moved away—but things had turned around. There were jobs to be had, and the fishing industry in Siglufjördur – cod and shrimp – was doing okay. For the next 20 years or so, I was the CEO and later chairman of Þormódur Rammi, by far the biggest fishing company in town, and one of the bigger ones in the Republic. We were planning ahead. The fishing quota law was set by Parliament when I was starting, and we at the company were planning for the long haul. In 1999, I moved to Reykjavík, and for the next five years, I was chairman of the board at SH/Icelandic Group, one of the largest companies at that time in Iceland, a company with seventy years of expertise, and today a leading international seafood company,” Róbert explains.

“In 2005, I thought the time had come to take a break, to move on. I moved to Phoenix, Arizona. Why there? It was the best base for my new project, fish farming in Chile and Mexico. I liked the good climate there, and the fact that it doesn’t smell of fish,” Róbert laughs.

But maybe he ended up missing the smell of sea and salt and fish. In 2007, he started planning to restore old fish factory buildings by the Siglufjördur harbor, which had stood empty for decades. Robert’s family, jointly with his childhood friend Hördur Júlíusson, founded the holding company Raudka and bought six houses, four of which have been restored and one has been demolished. The next project is to build a 64-room hotel by the small boat harbor, as well as a pharmaceuticals factory. “We partly own the biotech research company Genís and have secured a patent on a new drug we have developed, which fights diseases that start with inflammation. The secret is in the shrimp shell. Forty to fifty people will work there. Once that’s finished, our total investment in my home town will be over ISK 3 billion.” Raudka has already opened two colorful restaurants in Siglufjördur—Hannes Boy, which opened three years ago, and next door, Kaffi Raudka, which opened last year.

“We see great opportunities for tourism here in Siglufjördur. First of all, there is the new tunnel; it’s not a dead-end town anymore. Second, here we have the best ski area in Iceland, and we are investing in efforts to improve it even further. Thirdly, here we have the award-winning Herring Era Museum, Iceland’s largest maritime museum, the oldest part of which is Róaldsbakki, built as a Norwegian herring station in 1907. And then we have The Folk Music Centre, the only museum of its kind in Iceland, located in the so-called Madame House. Next on the agenda is a nine-hole golf course, which will eventually expand to 18 holes.

We could not master international stock market trading in a moment; therefore we had the financial meltdown in 2008. We thought we could. No, these are long-term investments here in Siglufjördur, for the future. A good investment for me as a capitalist, as well as for my home town.”

By Páll Stefánsson

PHOTO COURTESY OF RAUDKA

PHOTO BY BENEDIKT JÓHANNESSON

A WORTHY PRIZE FOR THE CHARMING HISTORICAL VILLAGE OF STYKKISHÓLMUR

PHOTOS THIS SPREAD BY PÁLL STEFÁNSSON

Stykkishólmur, a beautiful village on Snaefellsnes peninsula in West Iceland, is a charming place to visit. In the fall of 2011, it was among 21 destinations that received the so-called EDEN Award. EDEN stands for "European Destinations of Excellence," a European Commission initiative promoting sustainable tourism development models across the 27 European Union member states and candidate countries.

The award was well deserved. The jury described the town thus: "This charming fishing village, built on the western tip of Iceland, faces the mountainous West Fjords across the ocean. With the decline of the fishing industry, the hamlet of Stykkishólmur introduced a regeneration project to encourage tourism while emphasizing the need to protect the environment.

"Old fishing houses have been renovated and opened as guesthouses, offering work to the young, who now choose to stay and welcome visitors instead of leaving the village. The fjords are a major draw to this remote, wild region, as are the Volcano Museum and Museum of Local Folklore. Come here to escape the rush and find a slower pace of life."

Stykkishólmur is the perfect place to go if you want to experience a blend of old and new Iceland. It's a place that offers a bit of everything: tranquility, history, and natural beauty. Only a two hours' drive from Reykjavík, it is one of the places Icelanders go to be truly next to nature.

By Benedikt Jóhannesson

THERE ARE TWO GREAT MUSEUMS IN THE TOWN OF STYKKISHÓLMUR: One is ice, the other fire. Vatnasafnið / Library of Water, a long-term project conceived by the New York artist Roni Horn, is a constellation of 24 glass columns containing water collected from the major glaciers around Iceland. The other, Eldfjallasafn / Volcano Museum, is a unique exhibition of international objects related to volcanic eruptions, collected by well-known volcanologist Haraldur Sigurðsson, who has studied volcanoes all over the world for the past 45 years.

EATING IN, ICELANDIC STYLE

Culinary expert Sólveig Baldursdóttir invites tourists to taste Icelandic delicacies in the intimate setting of her home.

Ceviche with herbs and halibut, smoked auk with horseradish, Arctic char with sorrel, and cured wild goose pâté with onion chutney are among the delicacies dinner guests at Sólveig Baldursdóttir's home can expect.

Formerly the editor of Iceland's leading food and wine magazine, *Gestgjafinn* (the magazine's title means "The Host"), Sólveig has taken that role to a new level. Inspired by the hospitality she has encountered when traveling abroad, Sólveig now hosts dinner parties for tourists, introducing them to Icelandic cuisine through her culinary experience company Reykjavík Kultur Kitchen.

"I had worked at *Gestgjafinn* for 13 years and thought it was time to try something new. I've always been interested in travel—I've worked as a guide—and came to realize that when I travel abroad and end up being invited to people's homes, that's the experience that stands out, to experience the culture through locals," Sólveig says. "So I considered what I have to offer and realized that it's a lot."

Sólveig's husband, Gunnar Hrafnsson, is an established bassist and their two daughters are also musicians, one plays the piano and the other—who has toured with the wildly popular Icelandic band Of Monsters And Men—the trumpet. "And we have a Chihuahua that sings along to the sounds of the trumpet," Sólveig laughs.

Visitors usually pay for a package that includes a three-course dinner, often consisting of game, salmon or lamb, with *skyr*, an Icelandic dairy product, for dessert, followed by a concert by the family band. Sólveig takes care of the cooking; in the case of larger groups she enjoys the support of master chef Úlfar Finnbjörnsson of *Gestgjafinn*. Groups of up to 25 people can be accommodated in Sólveig's dining room but larger groups are taken to different venues. "In December we will offer special Christmas packages at the National Museum of Iceland, including a concert with a larger band and a tour of the museum."

When cooking, Sólveig tries to use Icelandic ingredients as much as possible, buying fresh fish and meat from local vendors and growing her own vegetables and herbs. Her dishes are inspired by the Nordic cuisine trend, emphasizing traditional Icelandic food with a modern twist. "Last week [in May] I sautéed salt fish in oil and served it with olives to a group of young people in their thirties who travel specifically to experience the world's cultures through dinners at local homes; we had a lot of fun."

Her initiative has been well received and after positive coverage by foreign food journalists during the 2012 Food and Fun festival, the word is beginning to spread. *solkultur.is*

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir

PHOTO COURTESY OF SÓLVEIG BALDURSDÓTTIR




PHOTOS BY PALL KJARTANSSON

FOR THE LOVE OF FOOD

The corner grocery store Frú Lauga carries products straight from the farm.

"May I fill these up?" a woman carrying two empty wine bottles asks, and knowing the answer, proceeds to tap olive oil from a large iron container delivered straight from farmers in Sicily into her bottles. An elderly gentleman fills a plastic bag with small golden oranges from the same region, and a young mother hastily chooses goods, while checking on her baby in the carriage outside. Two Asian tourists enter the store, curiously scanning the selection, which includes crowberry-flavored salt and tea made of Icelandic herbs.

The quaint corner grocery store Frú Lauga, run by the epicurean couple Arnar Bjarnason and Rakel Halldórsdóttir, has a nostalgic atmosphere about it, with scales on the counter and friendly clerks in aprons. It carries old-fashioned Icelandic food products, along with creative innovations to local food culture, and mouth-watering goods from European farmers.

Apart from being located on the street Laugalækur, the store was named in honor of the couple's grandmothers, three of whom shared the nickname Lauga and a love of food. After studying in the US and Italy, Arnar and Rakel missed the diversity of the markets abroad, so they started to import products, mainly wine at first. They later sensed the need for promoting the quality in Icelandic agriculture and the idea for Frú Lauga was born. It opened as a farmers' market in the heart of the capital in 2009.

And customers appear to appreciate the initiative. Double-smoked *hangikjöt*, Icelandic holiday lamb, is the most popular product in December, oranges sell hand over fist in the winter months, and summer is high season for Icelandic vegetables, lined up on tables outside the store. "Green cabbage is currently a big hit," Arnar said in mid-May; one supplier grows the cabbage in greenhouses. Open Tuesdays through Saturdays, most deliveries arrive in the latter part of the week, which is also the busiest time at Frú Lauga.

Not only busy at the store, Rakel is also managing director of the Museum Council of Iceland, and recently gave birth to the couple's fifth child. When asked whether this isn't a lot of work, Arnar casually responded, "we don't think it makes much of a difference as we have so many kids already," cheerfully adding, "interview me again in one year and another baby may have come along."

Just like the family, business is flourishing at Frú Lauga, a destination for those sharing Arnar and Rakel's passion for "locating the special and unique, strengthening good traditions and encouraging innovations," to quote the store's website, *frulauga.is.*

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir

EIDERDOWN: WARM, SOFT GOLD

Eiderdown has been a source of both comfort and income for Icelandic farmers through the ages.

PHOTO BY PÁLL STEFÁNSSON

A true eiderdown comforter is a rarity. It is the Fabergé egg of comforters, and if you are concerned about price, it is not a product for you. The finest, warmest, and rarest down comforter in the world, eiderdown is harvested by hand from nests that the mother duck covers with down she plucks from her own breast to keep her eggs warm. The eider ducks are protected from the usual commercial type of harvesting, and hand harvesting while the ducks are temporarily off the nests is very labor intensive and expensive.

My grandmother had a picture of an eider duck on the wall in her room. She told me that ever since she was a little girl, growing up in the 19th century on an island off the coast of Reykjavík, she always loved the eider most of any bird. “It was peaceful and provided us with warmth.”

The Common Eider, (*Somateria mollissima*), is a large sea duck, which can be found in most parts of Iceland as well as on the northern coasts of Europe, North America, and eastern Siberia. It breeds in northern regions, but winters far south in temperate zones, when it can form large flocks on coastal waters.

The eider duck builds its nest close to the sea and lines it with the celebrated eiderdown, plucked from the female’s breast. This soft and warm lining has long been harvested for filling pillows and quilts. Although true eiderdown pillows or quilts are now a rarity, eiderdown harvesting continues and is sustainable, as it can be done after the ducklings leave the nest with no harm to the birds.

Eiderdown has been a source of both comfort and income for Icelandic farmers through the ages. Farmers provide settlements for the birds, often on islands or isolated spots where they are safe from foxes and mink. After the bird has nested and laid eggs, the farmers start collecting the precious down from the nests. When the bird leaves the nest temporarily for a few minutes, the farmer carefully approaches the nest. The down is replaced with hay, and the eider does not appear to be bothered by this. It returns to its nest as soon as the collectors move on. Harvesting the eiderdown is always done by hand, usually in June.

Eiderdown is a completely natural, sustainable material. Collection of the down causes no damage or distress to the ducks – they are not handled or restrained in any way. The ducks remove their own feathers to line their nests, and they return to the same nesting sites year after year. An eider provides a valuable, renewable, environmentally friendly crop. The eider farmers may no longer be the richest in Iceland, but the down continues to be a valued product for the finest and warmest comforters in the world.

By Benedikt Jóhannesson

ICELAND GEOTHERMAL A NEW WAY TO UNLEASH ENERGY

PHOTO BY PÁLL STEFÁNSSON

The cluster initiative Iceland Geothermal is based on ten projects that the members have agreed to work on. The purpose of this project is first to create the cluster´s cooperation platform for further development and growth.

In October 2008, Prime Minister Geir Haarde addressed Iceland on TV, effectively marking the beginning of the collapse of the Icelandic banking system. The nation was deeply depressed and consultant Hákon Gunnarsson sent an e-mail to Harvard professor Michael Porter stating: "The country is in very deep trouble." Porter immediately replied: "Yes, I heard. What are you going to do about it?"

In the Western world, we are getting more and more accustomed to waiting for someone else to help. Hákon decided to form a consulting company, Gekon, and one of the first projects was to form a cluster cooperating on geothermal energy. Iceland is known in the world for its natural beauty, volcanoes, and geothermal energy. Most of Iceland's energy comes from renewable energy sources, and Iceland uses geothermal water to heat houses in most towns around the country. The country also has numerous geothermal power plants and extensive expertise exists in this area.

This led Professor Porter to ask: "Why don't you become the Houston of geothermal energy?" When asked what he meant, Porter explained that Texas had been the oil field of America. But although nowadays there are not so many new oil projects in the state, companies and nations all over the world still seek advice from experts in Houston when they are planning new oil-drilling projects.

Iceland has already done much to help others in this field. The United Nations University Geothermal Training Program (UNU-GTP) was established in 1978 by the Government of Iceland and the United Nations University and has hundreds of graduates all over the world. The idea to form a cluster, or consortium, including all those involved in geothermal energy is a new approach to cooperation in this field in Iceland. Now the cluster Iceland Geothermal includes around 80 members, roughly 90% of them from the private sector. The purpose is to jointly advance ten well-defined projects connected to geothermal energy.

Iceland Geothermal is hosting an international geothermal energy conference at the new Conference Center Harpa in Reykjavík, from March 5th to 8th, 2013. The overall theme of the conference is to share effective exploration methods, learn from veterans how to maximize the utilization of geothermal energy, and explore ways to realize geothermal projects with less risk and higher profitability.

Gekon is a small company running the cluster and the major sponsor in the beginning was the newly restructured Arion bank, which is committed to putting their focus on renewable energy. In 2011 a board of experts was established, drawing on some of the biggest participants. Hördur Arnarson, CEO of the National Power Company Landsvirkjun, and Eyjólfur Árni Rafnsson, CEO of Mannvit, Iceland's biggest energy consulting company have been called godfathers of the project. "It is of vital importance to have the major companies behind the initiative. It means the project has a very good chance of fulfilling high expectations," Hákon Gunnarsson says. For more info: www.geothermalconference.is

By Benedikt Jóhannesson.

The cast and crew of Ridley Scott's Prometheus *(2012) on location at Dettifoss waterfall, Northeast Iceland.*

LIGHTS, CAMERA, ACTION

In recent years there has been a major increase in Hollywood film productions taking place in Iceland. Movie stars like Angelina Jolie, Pierce Brosnan and Charlize Theron have visited Iceland to work on blockbuster films. This year includes Tom Cruise, Ben Stiller and Russell Crowe, not to mention Game of Thrones*, that currently tops the IMDb.com chart for the most popular TV series of all time.*

Director/producer Clint Eastwood on the set of Flags of Our Fathers.

Why Iceland?

The first thing that pops into mind is the unique, rough and rugged nature. James Bond killed some Soviet Union bad guys, when jumping between icebergs in the movie *A View to a Kill*. Batman seeks 'the means to fight injustice' in a Himalayan temple, located next to an imposing Icelandic glacier, in *Batman Begins*. And *IMDb.com* describes the new Tom Cruise movie, *Oblivion*, in the following manner: "A court martial sends a veteran soldier to a distant planet, where he is to destroy the remains of an alien race. The arrival of an unexpected traveler causes him to question what he knows about the planet, his mission, and himself."

The Icelandic filmmakers joke about it themselves, saying: "When God created earth, he experimented with Iceland." Although the entertainment value of this joke is questionable, it definitely offers some truth. Wild rivers, dignified glaciers, wicked geysers, massive waterfalls, yellow sulphur montains, tundra, active and dormant volcanoes, lagoons with floating icebergs, black sands and endless fields of lonely moss-grown lava. It's all there.

The Icelandic government has made film productions in Iceland feasible for Hollywood, by refunding 20% of the production cost. This, together with the weak exchange rate of the Icelandic króna, has often proven to seal the deal, says Einar Tómasson, film commissioner for Film in Iceland.

Tómasson also notes that filmmakers are becoming more aware of the fact that Iceland is closer to the US than you would think. From New York, the flying distance to Iceland is about the same as to San Francisco. And traveling from all the major gateways in Europe takes only 2–3 hours.

Another major factor is the presence of a thriving group of professional film production crews and casting agencies in Iceland. Both Eastwood (whom the Icelandic people affectionately gave the nickname "Clintarinn"—an English approximation of which would be "The Clinter") and Ridley Scott have said how impressed they were with the Icelandic professionals that worked on their sets.

Last but not least, the local authorities and tourist boards at the locations that have seen most of the action have been extremely cooperative. The film crews have even received permission to close off tourist attractions for several days while shooting. According to Tómasson, the locals realize that in the long run, having these tourist attractions show up in major blockbusters will boost what they call "film tourism".

By Jóhannes Benediktsson

PHOTO COURTESY OF TRUE NORTH

FROM GLACIAL STREAM TO SALMON RIVER

The Jökla salmon fishing system is about 50 kilometers long. With only six rods on any given day, the sports fisherman can fish undisturbed in this diversified "new" river.

From ancient times in Iceland, the glacial river with the name Jökla or Jökulsá á Brú in eastern Iceland created fear for those who had to cross it. It was a magnificent and fearful force that divided the peaceful countryside in two. Everyone knew that if you fell into the waters you were not likely to come up again alive. Even in modern days, you could stand on the bridges and feel the hypnotic power of the murky water streaming past, knowing full well that if you tried your powers against this force of nature you would surely lose. Vatnajökull, Iceland's biggest glacier, has been an endless source of water to Jökla and many other glacial rivers.

This summer, you can stand on those same bridges and look at the calm, clear waters of Jökla and wonder why anyone could be afraid of this beautiful and tranquil river. Now and then you might see salmon fishermen carrying a rod and you would think you were in the wrong place. Surely this was not a glacial river (that's what Jökulsá literally means). What could have caused this miraculous transformation?

When Iceland's biggest power station was built at Kárahnjúkar in the years 2000 to 2007, it was seen by many as a conflict between man and nature. Environmentalists said that the dam would cause a large area of beautiful land to be lost, while those who were in favor pointed out that huge revenues and many jobs would be created. The aluminum plant in nearby Reydarfjördur provides hundreds of jobs to an area that previously depended almost entirely on fishing.

Hence, it is a trick of man, who finally conquered the river, that the once terrifying Jökla has been transformed into a popular salmon river. The dam at Kárahnjúkar sifts out all the sludge and what is left is a much smaller waterway, one you don't have to fear when you go close to its banks.

The Jökla salmon area is really a system of several rivers. The formidable Jökla is the backbone, but brooks like Fögruhlídará, Kaldá, Laxá and Fossá have become havens for the mighty salmon. The histogram shows how the catch has risen from zero to 565 salmon in five years. Those who fish in Jökla are pioneers, they are the first to try fishing grounds that never existed before. The Jökla salmon fishing system is about 50 kilometers long. With only six rods on any given day, the sports fisherman can fish undisturbed in this diversified "new" river. In July and August only fly-fishing is permitted, but after that, more diversified methods are allowed. Jökla, the salmon river, is an exciting and unexpected by-product of a controversial project. But nobody will complain about this new small miracle of man and nature.

By Benedikt Jóhannesson.

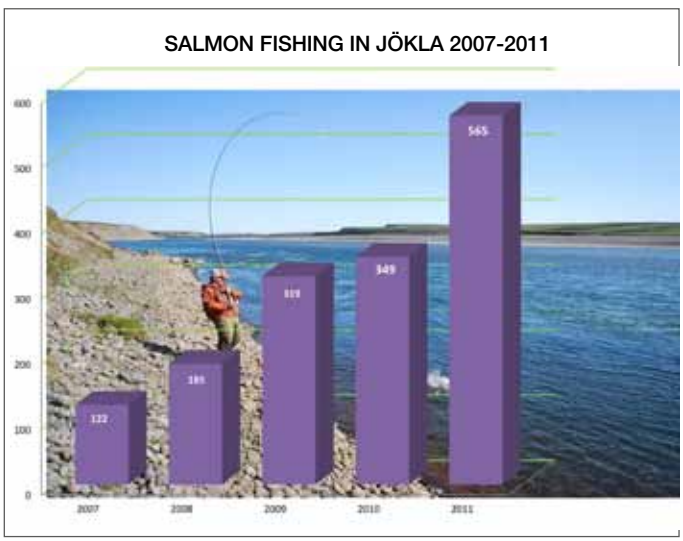


PHOTO COURTESY OF THRÖSTUR ELLIÐASON

PHOTO BY MBL / ALFONS FINNSSON

FRESH & FROZEN FISH

Iceland is a fishing nation on an international scale, number three in Europe, and in the top twenty globally.

Fish has been Iceland's most important export through the centuries, and it remains so today. Capelin was the species with the greatest numbers in last year's catch, with 765,000 tons, followed by cod with 177,000 tons, mackerel with 145,000 tons, herring with 121,000 tons, and pelagic redfish, with 55,000 tons. There are 33 species that are fished in the North Atlantic waters around Iceland. The smallest total catch last year was the Icelandic scallop, with only a few hundred kilos.

The third biggest company in Iceland, Icelandic Group is a leader in selling fish around the globe. Icelandic Group, formerly named Icelandic Freezing Plants Corporation, was founded in 1942. The company history states that its objective was to sell marine products manufactured in the freezing plants of its members, to undertake the procurement of supplies required for the operation of the freezing plants, to seek new markets for the products manufactured by the plants, and to experiment with new products and processing methods in the freezing plants. Today, Icelandic Group is one of the five largest seafood companies in Europe, and one of the ten largest worldwide, offering a wide variety of fresh, chilled, and frozen seafood products, on a global scale.

The first Icelandic Group overseas sales agency was established in New York in 1945, and ten years later, the company gained a foothold in the UK, with the establishment of a chain of fish and chips restaurants. In Japan, Icelandic Group has been operating since 1990, concentrating on capelin products. The company also has sales agencies in Spain and Norway.

The company has expanded rapidly in recent decades, making further inroads into its principal markets. Icelandic group has turned a page in its history with significant investments in companies specializing in fresh and chilled seafood, in addition to expansion in the markets for frozen seafood. The list of markets in which Icelandic Group operates has become wider than ever before.

Fish is one of the healthiest foods available, so if it is harvested with care and sustainability, as is done in Iceland now, there will be a market for high-quality fish products for years to come.

By Páll Stefánsson

TURNING WASTE INTO VALUE

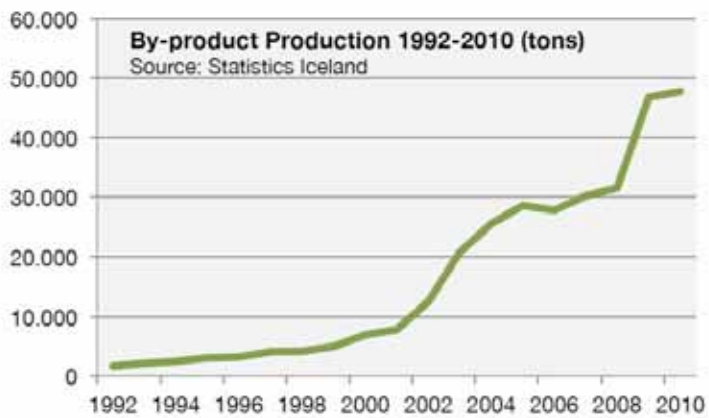
As a result of catch limitations, Icelanders have expanded the fishing industry to exploit the whole fish. In fact, due to the depletion of fish stocks in the past decades, producers worldwide have progressively turned towards the complete utilization of the fish.

PHOTO BY PALL STEFANSSON

Icelanders have been particularly active in developing technologies and markets for by-products—goods made out of those parts of the fish typically not considered for production. Up until a few years ago, the number of products made from white fish was relatively meager. In the past years however, the Icelandic industry has undergone significant modernization in the form of vastly improved product diversification. According to Statistics Iceland, domestic production of by-products went from 1,667 tons in 1992 to 47,782 tons in 2010, which translates to a 2766% increase in 18 years. Among Icelandic goods made of by-products are dried fish heads, dried bones, skin lotions, leather, skin regeneration products, caviar, omega-3 fish oils, protein isolate, gelatin, mince, and many other products.

375,000 TONS INTO THE DUSTBIN/SEA ANNUALLY

Iceland Ocean Cluster is currently conducting research on the utilization of cod in the North Atlantic Ocean. The preliminary results estimate the utilization rate in cod production in the area to be around 50%. If this holds true, the three most active cod fishing nations wasted 375,000 tons of cod in 2010 through discards at sea and unnecessary waste in processing. According to our findings, Icelanders have achieved up to 95% utilization of the cod by effectively exploiting cutting-edge technologies. By spreading this knowledge and raising awareness of complete utilization, substantial benefits can be gained in fish production around the world.



ICELANDIC BY-PRODUCT FIRMS

A number of Icelandic firms have proven to be successful in producing and selling products made out of fish by-products. Consider the stories of three interesting by-product producers:

Zymetech is a knowledge-based biotechnology company, most recognized for their so-called Penzyme Technology. The company is grounded in decades of scientific research and has been developing and selling pharmaceutical products and medical devices made from by-products of the Atlantic cod. Their principal product, PENZIM, a water-based skin gel, has been sold in international markets for several years.

Haustak, founded in 1999, specializes in drying fish products and sells dried heads, bones, stock-fish and chops. The market for dried fish keeps growing, but most of Haustak's production is shipped off to Nigeria, the world's largest and most stable market for dried fish bones and heads. The firm currently employs around 50 people and continues to flourish.

Lysi, considered the world leader in the field of marine lipids, was established in 1938. The company's operations are based mainly on the production of cod liver oil but its consumer product line includes Omega-3 fish oil and shark oil also. The firm's international operations have been growing steadily for the past years and Lysi recently doubled its output for fish oils by extending its processing plant.

TURNING WASTE INTO VALUE

Zymetech, Haustak, and Lysi represent just a small fraction of the numerous by-product producers in Iceland. All of these firms are utilizing parts and raw materials that would otherwise have been wasted and discarded, sometimes at substantial cost. The Icelandic fisheries sector has flourished since the 2008 crisis in spite of fairly loud and destructive disputes over its catch-management system and taxation policy. Despite some uncertainties over future outcomes, the fact of the matter is that Icelanders are experts when it comes to fish production and utilization. In our view, it is crucial that discussions are steered away from bickering over regulations into exploring new opportunities, increasing value added, and further developing this exciting industry.

By Haukur Már Gestsson & Jón Guðjónsson
Iceland Ocean Cluster

COMING HOME

An exhibition showcased two series of fashion drawings by Laufey Jónsdóttir.

For her striking creations, often inspired by Iceland's dramatic landscape and cultural heritage, fashion designer Steinunn Sigurðardóttir *has earned international fame and won prestigious awards. Now, in a place close to her heart, she has begun a new and exciting chapter in her career.*

Steinunn Sigurðardóttir is standing in the middle of a wide open space with an original worn stone floor, and ceiling windows that allow the sunlight to form ever-changing patterns on the freshly painted white walls. Here, in central Reykjavík's trendy fish-packing district, she recently opened her new headquarters and flagship store.

"This used to be a fisherman's warehouse," she explains in her soft spoken and warm manner. "What makes this location so interesting is that my father is a retired ship's captain. When I was a child, he always used to take me here, to the harbor, to look at the ships. In a way, I was raised on the docks! I feel like I'm home. In this old and raw and beautiful space, I have created a little piece of gold," she smiles.

On this cold and windy afternoon, she is wearing a black woolen coat and a black voluminous scarf wrapped many times around her neck. Undoubtedly, this is her own design; her striking, yet timeless garments are instantly recognizable. It is all in the impeccable tailoring, the top quality fabrics and the clever details. When it comes to Icelandic designers, she is in a league of her own.

A testimony to her iconic status, she has been awarded several prestigious international prizes. In November 2011, the Icelandic Fashion Council presented her with the first annual *Indriði Award*, named after and inspired by the late Indriði Guðmundsson, an Icelandic tailor who emphasized quality and professionalism. "Receiving the award was a very emotional experience. First and foremost it was because of the loss of Indriði. We worked together and knew each other well. Of course I was also deeply honored by the fact that my peers at the Council chose me. It is a great inspiration as well as a great source of encouragement in proceeding on the same path."

Born in Reykjavík in 1960, Steinunn studied art at the Reykjavík Art School before heading to New York City where she studied at the world-renowned Parson's School of Design. In 1986, she graduated with honors and a BFA degree in fashion design, the first Icelander to graduate from the school. Ever since, she has enjoyed a highly successful career. Having begun by working freelance for many well-known designers, she soon became head designer at world renowned fashion houses Gucci, Calvin Klein and La Perla, specializing in knitwear.

In the year 2000, she moved back to Iceland and founded her own brand, naming it STEiNUNN. "Once you've worked for large international fashion houses, you're done with that. Then you start asking yourself what is the next challenge. I decided that it was me. Being my own boss is completely different than working for others," she says. "Designing for your own brand is a lifelong project; a question of finding the courage to try new things—the courage to begin. It might take you a while to find your essence; your signature style. But once you do, you develop that style inside a frame; you never stop. It is a lifelong passion."

In her designs, Steinunn draws inspiration from Iceland's cultural heritage, especially strong women and the way they wore their clothes. But her greatest source of inspiration is Icelandic landscape. With her ruffled silks, sheer chiffons and fine or coarse knits – often in tones reflecting nature's own palette – she subtly pays tribute to her native island's capricious shapes and forms.

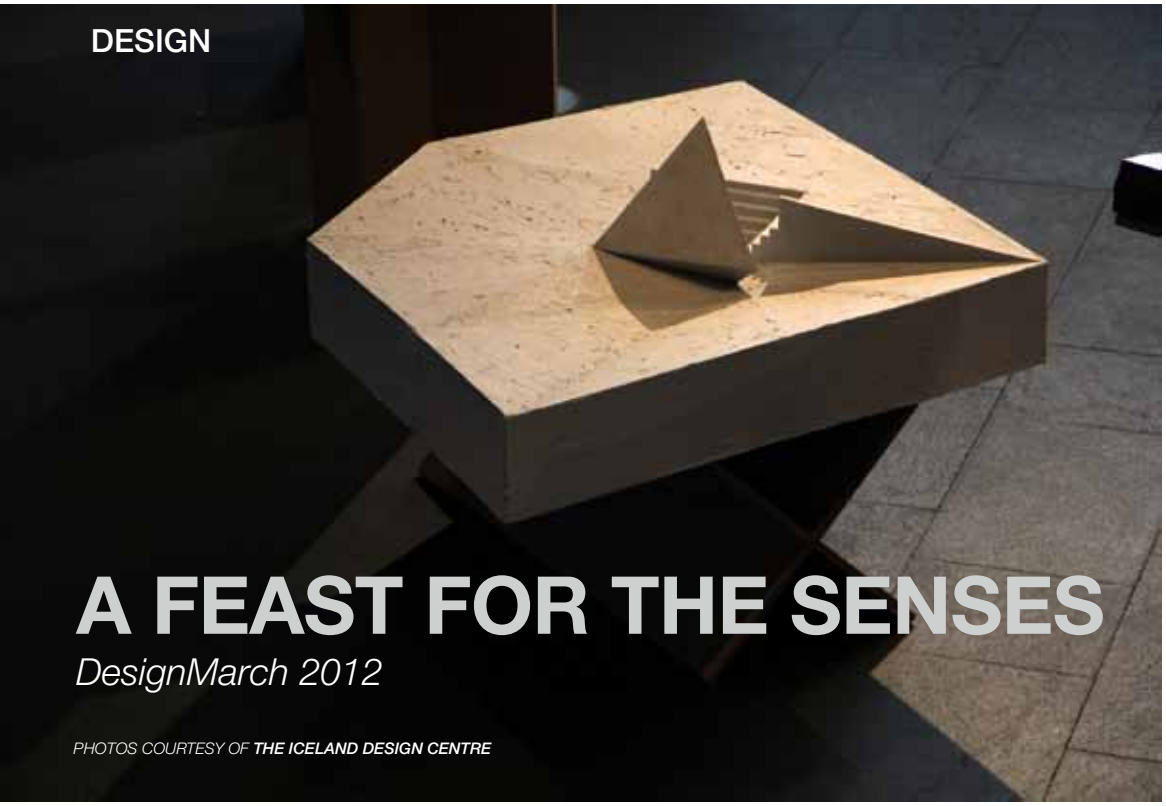
"All it takes is to look at all the elements of Icelandic nature. Not only do we have snow. We have snow, sleet, frozen snow, windbeaten snow, icebergs, ice in water, fresh fallen snow that looks like feathers; you see the visual descriptions here. This variety is exactly what I'm trying to achieve with my clothing. Nowhere in the world do you get such a close encounter with the forces of nature. I turn off the lights in my living room and get a dazzling display of Northern Lights. I live by the ocean where the stormy weather is sometimes very impressive. You only need to drive for an hour and a half and you have reached Sólheimajökull Glacier. Not to mention the frequent volcanic eruptions. In New York, you do not get that. This is what makes Iceland so unique. And we tend to take all these wonders of nature for granted. When you come home, decades later, you learn to appreciate your surroundings all over again."

By Ásta Andrésdóttir

PHOTO BY GEIR ÓLAFSSON

"Designing for your own brand is a lifelong project; a question of finding the courage to try new things—the courage to begin."

PHOTOS BY PÁLL STEFÁNSSON



A FEAST FOR THE SENSES

DesignMarch 2012

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ***THE ICELAND DESIGN CENTRE***

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Over four days and more than one hundred openings, exhibitions, workshops and parties, with fashion, furniture, city planning and *skyr* candy, Iceland's most important annual design festival, DesignMarch, transformed Reykjavík into one big venue full of the creativity, originality and festivity that is the local design scene. Modeled on the traditional Icelandic town fair, rather than the professional trade shows of the modern era, and including people from all fields of design—fishermen to fashionistas—more than ten percent of the nation turned up and joined the celebration.

1. ARCHITECTURE **2.** JEWELRY **3.** FASHION
4. FOOD **5.** GRAPHIC DESIGN

5.

PHOTO BY PÁLL KJARTANSSON

THE JAZZ QUEEN OF ICELAND

Sunna Gunnlaugs and her trio have been following up their album by touring Europe and the US.

If you had outstanding talent as a jazz pianist and wanted to continue to be creative, where would you settle? That is the question that Sunna Gunnlaugs, one of Iceland's foremost musicians, has repeatedly faced. For over a decade she lived in Brooklyn, New York—the US being perhaps the natural choice—but then she decided to move back to her native Iceland. This might slow some artists down, but Gunnlaugs has continued her creativity with her own band. She has seven CDs to her name, all with her own music.

She put out her latest CD, "Long Pair Bond," on 11.11.11 at 11.11. The publishing concert was a day later at the London Jazz Festival. When you listen to Sunna Gunnlaugs' music, you realize that it is rooted in traditional American jazz but includes strong Nordic influence as well. With the trio format comes more space and there is an overall serenity to the album which, like her homeland, is disturbed from time to time by unbridled energy bubbling up under the surface.

It's safe to say that the album got a welcome reception from the critics. Jazzstreet in Japan named it "Album of the Month" and John Kellman said in All About Jazz: "Gunnlaugs has always been about musical depth that doesn't sacrifice inherent accessibility, but by trimming back to a trio, she's delivered one of her most approachable albums yet, where there's no shortage of challenge."

Gunnlaugs and her trio have been following up their album by touring Europe and the US. They played at the Rochester International Jazz Festival and the Nordic Jazz Festival in Washington. Her European program includes the Oslo Jazz Festival. She has captured the eye of the critics. *Time Out New York* said, "Sunna Gunnlaugs is proof that jazz is as much a part of the picture as the pop of Björk or Sigur Ros."

By Benedikt Jóhannesson

PHOTO BY PÁLL STEFÁNSSON

TO NAME A COUNTRY

In the year 865, Flóki Vilgerðarson left Norway and sailed to Iceland with family and livestock to settle in a new land, which was at the time known as Garðarshólmi. Flóki set up winter camp in Vatnsfjörður in the West Fjords. The summer was very mild so he found himself ill-prepared for the cold winter that followed. Waiting for the spring, Flóki hiked up the highest mountain above his camp from where he spotted a large fjord full of drift-ice. He therefore named the fjord Ísafjörður and the entire island Ísland, Iceland. When Flóki and his men returned to Norway, they were asked about this recently found land. Flóki believed it to be worthless. His friend Herjólfur believed that the land had both good and bad qualities whereas his cousin Þórólfur Þórólfsson claimed that "butter dripped from every straw" and so was nicknamed Smjör ("Butter"). Despite speaking badly of the island, Flóki later returned and settled in Skagafjörður, North Iceland, where he lived with his wife and son Oddleifur until his dying day.

COUNTING THE GANNETS

Gannets are colonial breeders on islands and coasts, normally laying one chalky, blue egg. It takes five years for gannets to reach maturity. The gannet live on many Icelandic islands and coastal cliffs. This colony is in the north-eastern corner of Iceland, on Langanes peninsula. Can you guess (or count) how many birds are in the picture?

Our guess is two hundred and seventeen.

PHOTO BY BENEDIKT JÓHANNESSON

ÖSSUR AND OSCAR – REDEFINING ABILITY

PHOTOS COURTESY OF ÖSSUR

Based in Iceland, Össur is a leading global provider of innovative prosthetic and orthopaedic technology. The prosthetic limbs manufactured by the company are used on a daily basis by a majority of elite athletes, such as the world-renowned South African sprinter, Oscar Pistorius.

Oscar is a member of Team Össur, a group of outstanding amputee athletes who compete at the highest level of their sport. In 2011, he made history by becoming the first amputee sprinter to compete in the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) World Track and Field Championships, and is currently ranked 14th in the world in the 400 meter sprint.

Oscar Pistorius was born in 1986 without the fibula, the long, slender bone running along the outside of the leg from below the knee joint down to the ankle, in each of his legs. His parents consulted with some of the leading doctors in the world before making the heart-wrenching decision to have his legs amputated above the knee by South African orthopaedic surgeon, Dr. Gerry Versveld.

Supported and encouraged by his family, Oscar lived an active life and became a keen sportsman during his school years. Whatever the sport, Oscar played it.

In June 2004, Oscar received his first pair of Össur-manufactured Flex-Foot Cheetah® prosthetic "blades." Eight months after first stepping onto the track, the South African created a sensation in the world of sports by winning the T44 200 meter gold medal at the Athens Paralympic Games, breaking the world record with a time of 21.97 seconds. He also came home with a bronze medal in the 100 meter race, and overnight was propelled onto front and back pages around the world.

Spurred on by his achievements at the Paralympics, Oscar set his sights on competing against able-bodied athletes and has competed in numerous IAAF-sanctioned meets in the last few years. He is now ranked 14th in the world in the 400 meter sprint, alongside the likes of sprinting legends Jeremy Wariner and LaShawn Merritt.

Oscar competed at the IAAF World Championships in Daegu, South Korea, in August 2011, and went home with a silver medal for his participation in the 4 x 400 meter relay with his fellow South African teammates.

Oscar has always pushed the boundaries of what is perceived as "normal" and remains focused on his goal of continuing to compete at the highest level of his sport. While not every amputee will reach Oscar's competitive heights, Össur is dedicated to helping amputees of all ages and activity levels reach their goals.Together we will redefine ability.

ACTAVIS ONE OF WORLD´S LARGEST PHARMAS

Guðbjörg Edda Eggertsdóttir has lead ***Actavis*** *through big changes in 2011. The acquisition of Actavis by Watson will result in the third largest generic pharmaceutical company in the world.*

PHOTO BY GEIR ÓLAFSSON

With the agreement last month for the acquisition of Actavis by Watson Pharmaceuticals, Actavis Iceland will now be part of the third largest global generic pharmaceutical company in the world.

Actavis has grown from a small Icelandic company that employed fewer than one hundred people in the late 1990's, to a company that operates today in forty countries and employs over 10,000 people, about 700 in Iceland. The company recently moved its headquarters to Zug, Switzerland, and also has manufacturing sites (in addition to Iceland), in the United States, the United Kingdom, Bulgaria, Italy, Malta, Serbia, Romania, Russia, China, Indonesia, and India. The company's total annual revenue in 2011 was 1.84 billion Euros. Watson agreed to acquire Actavis for 4.25 billion Euros or 700 billion Icelandic Kronur. The merger will be completed in the last quarter of 2012, according to Actavis Iceland´s CEO, Gudbjörg Edda Eggertsdóttir.

Gudbjörg Edda is an executive with thirty years´ experience in pharmaceuticals. After completing a master´s degree in pharmaceuticals, she joined Delta (which merged in 2002 with Pharmaco to become Actavis), as Marketing Manager in 1983, and served as Deputy CEO of Delta from 1999 to 2002. At Actavis, she was appointed Deputy CEO in 2008, and President, Iceland, Strategic Projects, in 2010. Gudbjörg Edda was elected President of the Board of the European Generic medicines Association (EGA), an independent industry interest group, in 2011.

Gudbjörg Edda has said that she is proud of the fact that Actavis has increased in size to rival the two main aluminum companies in Iceland combined. Actavis expanded its manufacturing site in Hafnarfjördur, Iceland, increasing its capacity by 50% and creating 100 new jobs. She said that one of the most important functions of Actavis is research and development. The Actavis Group has one of the broadest portfolios in the generics sector with over 1100 products on the market and over 300 products in the development pipeline and in registration. In 2011, the company put 13 new generic drugs on the market in Iceland, over 700 on the world market, and was producing over 22 billion tablets per year.

Gudbjörg Edda is also proud of the fact that 60% of the staff at Actavis Iceland are women, and 39 of the 69 managers are women, a higher percentage than in any other Icelandic company. Half of all the employees in Iceland have a university degree, and there are over one hundred pharmacists working at Actavis.

In an interview earlier this month, Gudbjörg Edda said that her outlook for Actavis for 2012, and for the merger with Watson, is positive. She pointed out that in Switzerland, there are thirty Icelanders working among the 150 employees, with Icelandic the second language in use after English.

"We will continue running all the key units, such as the manufacturing site, R & D, regulatory affairs and Medis (the division responsible for sales to other pharmaceutical companies)," she said. "We consider Watson a good fit for Actavis as a whole, as there is limited overlap, and the merger will create a financially strong company capable of taking the business up to the next level, and becoming a very important player in the field of generics and biosimilars."

By Ann Sass

HARVESTING BEAUTY

*Harvesting human-like protein from genetically modified barley, Icelandic biotech company **ORF Genetics** has changed the face of the cosmetics industry.*

The Icelandic word for scythe, the traditional farmer's tool for reaping crops, is *orf*. As it happens, ORF is also the acronym for Open Reading Frame, a stretch of DNA sequence, which can be translated to build a protein. Therefore, with its name, pioneering company ORF Genetics celebrates its Icelandic roots and ties with nature while working on cutting edge biotechnology and scientific research.

"This started out as a research project but soon grew so big that my associates and I decided to found a company around it. Now we are a leader, not only in Iceland but in the international field of plant biotechnology," says the company's co-founder and CEO Dr. Björn Örvar. "We have developed a highly detailed method of producing growth factors, which are substances found in the human body capable of stimulating cellular renewal and maintenance. These proteins are usually produced in bacteria, animal cells or even extracted from human tissue, but with a certain genetic technology we have found a way to produce them in barley seeds," he explains. "We grow the barley in our Green Factory, a state-of-the-art greenhouse in Grindavík, on the Reykjanes Peninsula. In a long and delicate process, the barley is grown in pumice from the volcano Hekla and watered with pure Icelandic water. Once it has been harvested, the protein is extracted from the pulverized seeds."

The company's operations can be divided into two categories. On one hand, it produces and markets various kinds of growth factors, mainly intended for regenerative medicine and research. "We spent our first years developing the production system based on this gene technology. Then, we began creating technology for producing dozens of different growth factors for medical research. Now, we have begun to use these pipelines to place various growth factors in a range of new products in skincare. Since 2009, we have developed and marketed them via our subsidiary Sif Cosmetics."

The result is the groundbreaking skincare range BIOEFFECT—the first ever cosmetic range to contain plant-based growth factors. The active ingredient of its first product, the BIOEFFECT EGF SERUM, is EGF (Epidermal Growth Factor), a cellular activator natural to human skin. Its role is to stimulate the renewal of skin cells and reduce the effects of skin ageing. Since then, it has launched two more products: a day cream and a skin conditioner. "No other cosmetics company is built on a foundation of plant biotechnology. This is the first time that such a product is available for the consumer market. Currently, we are working on creating a complete skincare range, which is not a problem since we have a state-of-the-art laboratory and access to all kinds of growth factors with different functions."

All across Europe, the sales, reviews and the media coverage of the serum have been very positive. Now it is also available in Asia, Australia and the United States. "In order to test the water, we had launched a slightly different version in Iceland in 2010. We did not know what to expect because even if it contained such a special ingredient as EGF, it was quite expensive. But the numbers speak for themselves. In the first year, we sold 33,000 bottles."

The future is full of opportunities for ORF Genetics, which is also working on other projects based on the same technology. "Cell growth factors can be used in so many ways, including pharmaceuticals, regenerative medicine and stem cell research. So, we are very busy. And we are growing fast. And with this positive reception to our products, we couldn't be happier."

By Ásta Andrésdóttir

PHOTOS BY PÁLL STEFÁNSSON

MUSEUMS OFF THE BEATEN TRACK, BUT STILL BY THE ROADSIDE

We often travel far and wide to see unusual places. Even so, we often miss very interesting sights right in front of our very eyes. Three unusual museums in northeastern Iceland are a find for the tourist who thinks he has seen it all.

THE ICELANDIC FOLK AND OUTSIDER ART MUSEUM

Folk art and naïve art or nativists are not high on every art fan's list. The sometimes primitive and often unusual works of art by little-known members of the public may bring forth a smile of pity or arrogance. Many find it hard to take the art of "amateurs" seriously. One who does is Marínó P. Hafstein, who runs the so-called Safnasafn or Museum-museum just off the road by Svalbardseyri, a few kilometers east of Akureyri.

The modern, bright exhibition halls are in sharp contrast to the stereotype of a museum of outsider art, often found in seedy old barracks or dark basements in shady alleys. In the summer of 2012, it features an exhibition by Pálmi Kristinn Arngrímsson, an old man who carves figures out of wood. Another show features the primitive and often scary statues by Ragnar Bjarnason, who used to display them in his garden in Reykjavík.

The formal English name is the Icelandic Folk and Outsider Art Museum. At present it stores approximately 4,100 works. The museum has an extensive exhibition area, a library and research facilities, as well as accommodation for tourists, visiting artists, and scholars. Every year 12-15 new exhibitions are on display in the museum, along with paintings, drawings and sculptures. The collection also encompasses embroidery, models, souvenirs, books, dolls, toys and tools, thus presenting an interesting view of various outlets for creativity and what inspires them.

You will leave this museum in a better mood than when you came in.

PHOTOS: THIS SPREAD BY BENEDIKT JÓHANNESSON

MÁNÁRBAKKI FOLK MUSEUM

Another very special museum is situated about 20 kilometers north of the town of Húsavík, the now famous whale capital of the north. Many folk museums in Iceland collect items from the 19th century. The museum at Mánárbakki is different. Sure, it features the old spinning wheel, but what makes it different is that is displays so many everyday items from the 20th century. The owner and curator, Adalgeir Egilsson, has been a compulsive collector from early childhood. He collected matchboxes, chocolate wrappers, cups and saucers, stacks of playing cards, postcards, etc. You name it, Adalgeir collected it. In many marriages this might cause a problem, but Adalgeir was lucky because his wife shared his interest in collecting. In the year 1995, they moved the collection from their basement to a wooden house called Thórshamar, which they bought in Húsavík and moved to their farm at Mánárbakki.

Adalgeir has a story about every item, but because the articles are not extremely old many visitors are able to add stories of their own, stories that the host welcomes and quickly adds to his repertory. Recently, the museum was enlarged when Adalgeir added a house, built in a traditional Icelandic style, from rocks, wood and turf. Here he stores items that could not be fitted in at Thórshamar. The museum is open daily from June 10th to August 31st and by appointment at other times of the year.

Even though the museum is not very well known, almost every Icelander knows the name Mánárbakki. It is a collection point for the Iceland Meteorological Office. Every morning for more than half a century, Adalgeir has collected information on temperature, wind and barometric pressure, and at ten past ten, the information is read to the public on National Radio. He says he is still enjoying collecting information. After all collecting is his passion in life.

SIGURGEIR'S BIRD MUSEUM AT LAKE MÝVATN

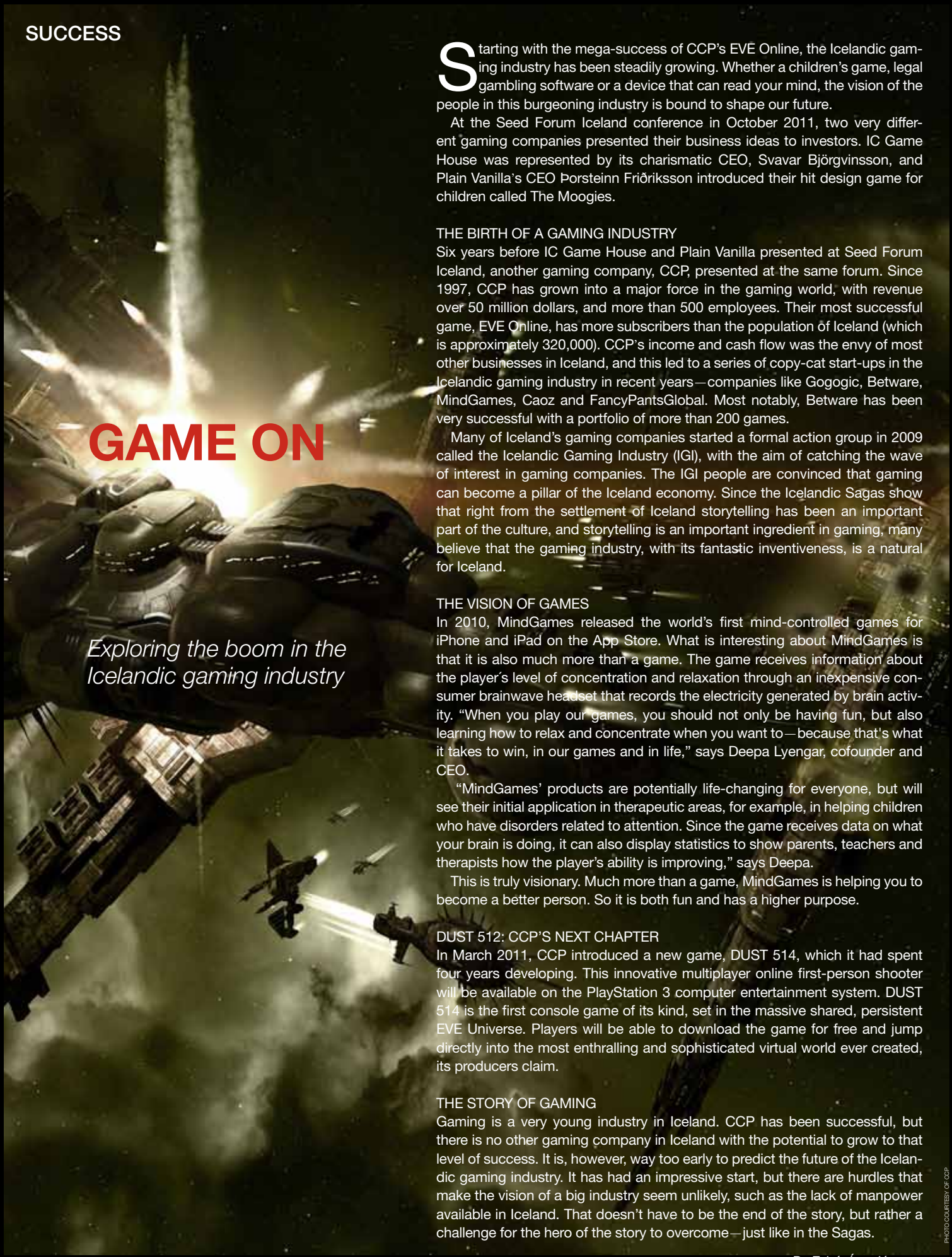
Almost all tourists who travel to the northern part of Iceland go to Lake Mývatn. It is one of the most beautiful places in Iceland with many different natural phenomena in one spot. The bird life is a feast for the eye and the ears. In 2008, an unusual bird museum was added to the Lake Mývatn area.

The bird museum was established based on the pioneering work of Sigurgeir Stefánsson, a young man who lived at a local farm. Sigurgeir was a bird lover, who collected birds and had them stuffed by taxidermists. He collected over 180 bird species and about 100 types of eggs. In 1985, he put his collection in a small hut and made it available to the public. Tragically, Sigurgeir Stefánsson died in an accident on the lake in 1999.

Sigurgeir's bird museum is considered the largest known private bird collection in Iceland. The interactive display is both interesting and educational. It contains a specimen of every Icelandic breeding bird, with the exception of just one. In addition, there is a multilingual computer guide to Iceland's birds, a shop with refreshments, and bird books for sale. There is also a logbook of recent sightings, telescopes are set up to watch the birds on the lake, and a remote camera displays live wildlife images from one of the lake's islands.

Much of the bird life of Lake Mývatn can be viewed directly in front of the museum. You can watch the birds on the lake while enjoying some local refreshments.

By Benedikt Jóhannesson



GAME ON

Exploring the boom in the Icelandic gaming industry

Starting with the mega-success of CCP's EVE Online, the Icelandic gaming industry has been steadily growing. Whether a children's game, legal gambling software or a device that can read your mind, the vision of the people in this burgeoning industry is bound to shape our future.

At the Seed Forum Iceland conference in October 2011, two very different gaming companies presented their business ideas to investors. IC Game House was represented by its charismatic CEO, Svavar Björgvinsson, and Plain Vanilla's CEO Þorsteinn Friðriksson introduced their hit design game for children called The Moogies.

THE BIRTH OF A GAMING INDUSTRY

Six years before IC Game House and Plain Vanilla presented at Seed Forum Iceland, another gaming company, CCP, presented at the same forum. Since 1997, CCP has grown into a major force in the gaming world, with revenue over 50 million dollars, and more than 500 employees. Their most successful game, EVE Online, has more subscribers than the population of Iceland (which is approximately 320,000). CCP's income and cash flow was the envy of most other businesses in Iceland, and this led to a series of copy-cat start-ups in the Icelandic gaming industry in recent years—companies like Gogogic, Betware, MindGames, Caoz and FancyPantsGlobal. Most notably, Betware has been very successful with a portfolio of more than 200 games.

Many of Iceland's gaming companies started a formal action group in 2009 called the Icelandic Gaming Industry (IGI), with the aim of catching the wave of interest in gaming companies. The IGI people are convinced that gaming can become a pillar of the Iceland economy. Since the Icelandic Sagas show that right from the settlement of Iceland storytelling has been an important part of the culture, and storytelling is an important ingredient in gaming, many believe that the gaming industry, with its fantastic inventiveness, is a natural for Iceland.

THE VISION OF GAMES

In 2010, MindGames released the world's first mind-controlled games for iPhone and iPad on the App Store. What is interesting about MindGames is that it is also much more than a game. The game receives information about the player´s level of concentration and relaxation through an inexpensive consumer brainwave headset that records the electricity generated by brain activity. "When you play our games, you should not only be having fun, but also learning how to relax and concentrate when you want to—because that's what it takes to win, in our games and in life," says Deepa Lyengar, cofounder and CEO.

"MindGames' products are potentially life-changing for everyone, but will see their initial application in therapeutic areas, for example, in helping children who have disorders related to attention. Since the game receives data on what your brain is doing, it can also display statistics to show parents, teachers and therapists how the player's ability is improving," says Deepa.

This is truly visionary. Much more than a game, MindGames is helping you to become a better person. So it is both fun and has a higher purpose.

DUST 512: CCP'S NEXT CHAPTER

In March 2011, CCP introduced a new game, DUST 514, which it had spent four years developing. This innovative multiplayer online first-person shooter will be available on the PlayStation 3 computer entertainment system. DUST 514 is the first console game of its kind, set in the massive shared, persistent EVE Universe. Players will be able to download the game for free and jump directly into the most enthralling and sophisticated virtual world ever created, its producers claim.

THE STORY OF GAMING

Gaming is a very young industry in Iceland. CCP has been successful, but there is no other gaming company in Iceland with the potential to grow to that level of success. It is, however, way too early to predict the future of the Icelandic gaming industry. It has had an impressive start, but there are hurdles that make the vision of a big industry seem unlikely, such as the lack of manpower available in Iceland. That doesn't have to be the end of the story, but rather a challenge for the hero of the story to overcome—just like in the Sagas.

By Eyþór Ívar Jónsson

PHOTO COURTESY OF CCP

LITTLE TALKS WITH THE SEXTET

PHOTO BY PÁLL KJARTANSSON

Of Monsters and Men is the latest and greatest music export from Iceland.

Two weeks after Of Monsters And Men's first record, *My Head Is An Animal*, came out in North America on the Universal label, it was the number-one top-selling rock album in the United States, the number-one alternative album, and number six on the Billboard 200 list. That is a greater achievement than any other Icelandic artist or band has ever reached.

The indie folk/pop sextet hails from Garðabær, a small town close to Reykjavík, were the 2010 winners of Músíktilraunir, an annual battle of amateur bands in Iceland.

All the band members are just over twenty years old. They are Nanna Bryndís Hilmarsdóttir, Ragnar Þórhallsson, who both sing and play the guitar, Brynjar Leifsson, on guitar, Arnar Rósenkranz Hilmarsson, drums, Árni Guðjónsson, piano, and Kristján Páll Kristjánsson on bass.

"Our first tour in North America, in March and April, was out of this world," Nanna Bryndís told our photographer as he captured them on film during their very brief stopover in their home country. "All the concerts were sold out, and the audience knew our songs; that was a big surprise. But the food was not that good… or wholesome." Ragnar continued: "We were constantly on the road from one place to another, in our tour bus, so we kind of heard about the great success of the album in the news from back home. The band is getting better, the sound is tighter. This has become our day job, and we will be touring in Europe and North America for the next couple of months." *By Páll Stefánsson*

PILOTING THE POWER

Rational Network helps companies cut their energy costs.

PHOTO BY PÁLL STEFÁNSSON

"In Iceland we don't know how lucky we are—heating is so inexpensive that foreigners think we're joking," states Þröstur Jónsson, an electrical engineer who is founder and one of two employees of Rational Network in Egilsstaðir, the largest town in East Iceland. Þröstur refers to the fact that in Iceland, geothermal energy—hot water pumped straight from the ground—can be used for heating houses, whereas most other countries must use different methods. "In Norway and Sweden, the main energy cost of households is for heating, and in Belgium and Holland, heating is also extremely expensive," he says.

Rational Network helps cut that cost. The company provides its customers with a software solution called Control2Net to manage distributed devices, such as energy meters, street lights and pump controllers. "When I started working independently, I wanted to do something fun that no one else was doing, something that I could envision in the future," Þröstur says of the company's origins in the early 2000s when he first started developing the technology. At the same time, an experiment in managing the energy consumption of 45 Norwegian hotels was being conducted, which is where Þröstur's software was first put to the test. "One thing led to another. In Canada they had the hardware to match and in Holland they were working on managing street lighting."

Rational Network was founded in 2003 and reorganized in 2007. The company is now part of Rational Group; its sister companies are Rational Minds in Canada, which designs the hardware that complements the software, and Rational Products in Belgium and Holland, which handles sales and marketing.

What sets Rational Network apart from its competitors is that its solutions are web-based; customers only require a web browser and an internet connection to use the software. "When I worked on establishing it online in 2001-2003 people thought I was mad. They said it couldn't be done," recollects Þröstur. Also, the total system supports a soon-to-be-patented power-line communication (PLC), in which existing power lines in buildings and streets are used for data communication. "This is the only PLC technology that is reliable enough," he claims.

Rational Group's customers are located in Europe, mostly outside Iceland. For example, in London, the energy used by one of the largest buildings in Canary Wharf is monitored by Control2Net. In Norway, the hotel chain mentioned earlier achieved energy savings of more than 20 percent by using the group's solutions. "Significant sums of money are at issue," states Þröstur. "Customers see the return of their investment in less than 12 months, which is considered a very good outcome." *rational-network.com*

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir

ENCOUNTER WITH HISTORY

The history of Iceland comes alive at Árbæjarsafn – Reykjavík City Museum.

PHOTOS BY PÁLL STEFÁNSSON

PHOTOS BY PÁLL KJARTANSSON

Árbæjarsafn, an open-air museum that is part of the Reykjavík City Museum, is a special place. Located in the Reykjavík suburb of Árbær, visitors are invited to step back in time. Staff members are dressed in traditional Icelandic garb and undertake various old-fashioned tasks, adding to the illusion that visitors have gone through a time warp.

The site looks like a small village with houses from different time periods—old houses from Reykjavík and elsewhere have been relocated to the site—where various items are on display, such as Icelandic national costumes; Icelandic wool and yarn; an old printing office; old school assignments in handicraft; a confirmation dress that was fashionable in the 1950s; and wooden skis inside an old boy scout cabin. Inside other houses, the inventory and furniture have been left untouched so it almost feels as if you're intruding when you take a peek into rooms where the beds seem to have been made only recently and the dresser drawers are open, revealing pieces of clothing. Unfinished handiwork has been left by the bedside and a book lies open on the desk. It's interesting to see the living standard of times past—that six people slept in one small room, for example.

The most interesting house on the site is the old turf farm Árbær. The Árbær farm buildings are the only houses in the museum still standing in their original locations. The name Árbær ('River Farm') derives from the nearby Elliða river. The farm has a long history. It was among the possessions of the monastery on Viðey island in the 13th century, but was first mentioned in sources from 1464 when Ólöf Loftsdóttir 'The Wealthy' called witnesses there as she concluded a property deal. After the Reformation in 1550, Iceland's monasteries were dissolved, and their properties, including Árbær, passed to the King of Denmark and subsequently various Icelandic owners. In 1881, the couple Margrét Pétursdóttir and Eyleifur Einarsson moved to Árbær and restored the farmhouse. In its present state, Árbær is an example of the last stage of the turf farmhouse, a wood or stone structure with a turf-covered peaked roof. In Margrét's and Eyleifur's time the farm became a popular pit stop on the way to and from Reykjavík.

The land of Árbær was no longer farmed after 1948, when Kristjana, the daughter of Eyleifur and Margrét, moved away. It was proposed that the farm should be preserved. The estate had been owned by the Reykjavík town authorities since 1906. The Reykjavík Museum had been founded in 1954, and various locations had been suggested for an open-air museum in Reykjavík before the decision was made in 1957 to locate the museum at Árbær. *minjasafnreykjavikur.is*

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir

SWIMMING IN A DREAM

A pioneer once dreamt that he could use the earth's warmth to teach youngsters how to swim. Almost 90 years later, tourists still frequent his unique pool, Seljavallalaug, constructed up against a cliff, filled by a constant flow of geothermal water.

"Are you going for a swim?" a middle-aged man, whom I took to be a foreign tourist, asked my husband and me as we met on the narrow path. He and his wife both had wet hair and a dreamy expression on their faces. We nodded. "It's unreal!" the man exclaimed.

We were on our way to Seljavallalaug, the oldest swimming pool in Iceland still in use. Built in 1923 it was an ambitious construction, initiated by local pioneer Björn J. Andrésson. At 25 meters, the pool remained the country's longest for years and it was the first swimming pool of that length to be used for swimming lessons.

To reach the pool, visitors have to walk for approximately 15 minutes from the farm Seljavellir in south Iceland, past spectacular columnar basalt formations and across a bubbly little stream. I was amazed at the striking bright green vegetation peeking out through the black ash of the 2010 Eyjafjallajökull eruption, which instead of suffocating the plants, now seemed to serve as fertilizer.

We were on a weekend trip in south Iceland in late August 2011, exploring some of the region's wonders. The highlight was easily Seljavallalaug—the tourist's description wasn't far off. The sight of the pool, huddled against the cliff, and the small white pool house right in the middle of nowhere did seem unreal. Cleverly designed, the concrete frame of the pool lies up against a rocky slope and geothermal water flows into it from a pipe; the water is constantly renewed through overflow.

It surprised us how many people were at the pool, both natives and foreigners, but then again, it's not strange that Seljavallalaug is an attraction. Admission is free and maintenance is voluntary. "Are you here for the first time?" I asked a tall blonde girl. "No, I come here all the time," she smiled. "I was actually one of the volunteers who cleaned out the ash in the spring." I remembered how the Eyjafjallajökull eruption had buried Seljavallalaug in ash and that whenever it was emptied, the wind was sure to fill it up again. When we lowered ourselves into the pool our feet touched what felt like soft sand.

The water temperature was perfect, enveloping us as we glided through the water to the far end of the pool. I thought about the kids who learned how to swim here. In the early twentieth century, Icelanders generally didn't know how to swim; certain death awaited fishermen who fell overboard. We sat there for a while, allowing the hot water pumped straight from nature's kettle to relax every strain in our muscles. I closed my eyes and floated off into a waking dream. "Should we get out?" my husband asked, as it was time to continue our journey. "No," I smiled teasingly, knowing very well that it was time to go. I could have stayed there forever.

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir

PHOTO BY EYGLÓ SVALA ARNARSDÓTTIR

DIFFERENT FLIPPERS

Whale watching is listed near the top of to-do lists of tourists in Iceland, whereas seals, smaller and equally gentle marine mammals, are often left unnoticed.

There are two species of seals that inhabit the shores of Iceland, the harbor seal, which numbers approximately 15,000 animals, and the grey seal, of which there are around 6,000. Other species of seals, and even walruses, are sometimes spotted in Icelandic waters, although their normal habitats are in more distant oceanic territories.

The first time I saw seals in Iceland I was on a bumpy trip to the tip of Langanes peninsula in the northeast. As I looked down the massive bird cliff I was surprised to see curious eyes looking back up at me. They seemed almost human and I half expected the seals to give me a little wave with their flippers.

It reminded me of a well-known Icelandic folk story, which goes something like this: One morning on a stroll along the shore, a man noticed people partying inside a cave and a pile of seal pelts outside. He grabbed one, brought it home and locked it inside a chest. Later in the day, he walked back to the cave and saw a beautiful naked woman crying. It was her pelt that he had stolen. The man brought the woman home and gave her clothes. She stayed with him but wouldn't socialize with others and often stared at the sea. They had many children and were happy together but the man always kept the pelt locked in the chest and carried the key with him wherever he went. One day many years later, he forgot the key at home and when he returned the chest was open and the pelt gone. The woman had not been able to resist the urge, put on the pelt, bid her children farewell and dived into the sea. As she disappeared, she said: "I'm torn. I have seven children in the sea and seven on land." The man was devastated but when he rowed out to sea a seal often swam around his boat and seemed to be crying. He always got a good catch from then on. When their children walked along the shore, a seal often swam in the surf and tossed multicolored fish and beautiful shells in their direction. But it never returned to land.

The Icelandic Seal Center has operated in the small seaside town of Hvammstangi in Northwest Iceland since 2005. It focuses on pinniped research in Iceland, promoting sustainable tourism in the area and educating the public on "this most graceful of sea creatures," as stated on its website, *selasetur.is*. Hvammstangi is located on the Vatnsnes peninsula, home to some of Europe's largest and most accessible seal colonies and is a prime location for seal watching. The Seal Center advises those interested in observing these peaceful animals in their natural habitat from land. For a different approach, take a boat trip with the town's seal-watching company, Selasiglingar. *sealwatching.is*

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir

PHOTO BY RAX / RAGNAR AXELSSON

PHOTO BY PÁLL STEFÁNSSON

LEADERSHIP IN SHIPBUILDING

Trefjar is the manufacturer of fiberglass boats, aquaculture equipment, and acrylic parts.

It was 23 years ago, that the Iceland Export Award was established. This year, Trefjar is receiving the award for its leadership and development of fiberglass boats for the fishing industry. Former winners include leading Icelandic companies, such as Marel, Össur, Icelandair, Eimskip, Bláa Lónið, Sæplast, Lýsi, CCP, and last year, Icelandic Farm Holidays.

This year's winner, Trefjar, is the manufacturer of fiberglass boats, aquaculture equipment, and acrylic parts. The company was established in the town of Hafnarfjörður in Iceland in 1977, and is now the largest, and by far the leading manufacturer of its kind in Iceland. It now has two factories: a 3,500 square meter factory with 15,000 square meters of outdoor working space, set up in 1996, and a 3,800 square meter purpose-built boat factory with 8,000 square meters of outdoor working space, inaugurated in 2008.

Trefjar has manufactured close to 500 small craft fiberglass fishing boats of several different sizes and types since 1979. These boats, SKEL 26, SKEL 80, and SKEL 86, were the most popular small fishing boats among Icelandic fishermen in the eighties. The SKEL boats developed a new concept in the building of small fishing boats, based on the old traditional Icelandic design of small craft vessels, "the Breidarfjardarlag," which has proved its functionality and seaworthiness on the rough seas around Iceland since the beginning of the century—combining the best from the past and the present.

In 1994, Trefjar developed a new line of fast fishing boats, the Cleopatra series, in four sizes. They are high-speed boats designed to meet all the requirements of professional fishermen in terms of efficiency, speed, and seaworthiness. Trefjar has been creative in developing its products to suit various international markets.

At a special ceremony held at the presidential residence in Bessastadir, Mr Ólafur Ragnar Grímsson, the President of Iceland, presented Trefjar with the award.

By Páll Stefánsson

SALT OF THE SEA

In the innermost part of Ísafjarðardjúp, the wide fjord that almost cuts the West Fjords in half, lies Reykjanes, the home of an innovative, yet historically-inspired salt processing plant.

PHOTOS BY PÁLL STEFÁNSSON

In 2010, three young pioneers, Garðar Stefánsson, Björn Steinar Jónsson and Yngvi Eiríksson, decided to revisit a 240-year-old method of using geothermal heat for processing sea salt. After a year of research, they were ready to open Saltverk Reykjaness in a defunct salmon farming station on Reykjanes in the West Fjords.

"The location was the idea of my father-in-law, a historian from Ísafjörður. We wanted to base our saltworks in the vicinity of Reykjavík but after visiting Reykjanes I knew it was the best location for salt making in all of Iceland, if not the world—it's no coincidence that it was picked originally," says Garðar of the proximity to the Arctic Ocean and natural hot springs. He proudly introduces himself as a *saltari* ("salt maker"); the job title was last used at the old Reykjanes saltworks, which shut down at the end of the 18th century. Founded at the initiative of the Danish king, salt was produced there for processing salt fish for almost 40 years. Iceland didn't have coal or firewood, so the salt makers used geothermal water to boil the seawater.

Water from the Arctic Ocean is boiled in open steel pans with water from a geothermal borehole channeled underneath the pans. Such boreholes are used all over Iceland to access hot water for heating houses and generating electricity. The seawater is gradually distilled, leaving brine. After approximately 20 hours of continued boiling, crystallized sea salt is created. Once most of the fluid has evaporated, the salt is dried with hot air, again using geothermal heat. "It's basically dried sea," explains Garðar, adding that the salt from Saltverk Reykjaness is tastier and healthier than rock salt from salt mines, as it includes a lower percentage of sodium chloride and more trace minerals.

Consumers appear to agree. "We can hardly cope with demand," Garðar says. When the blue-and-white boxes from Saltverk Reykjaness first arrived in mid-December 2011, they were sold in specialty stores in Reykjavík. Now they've popped up in supermarkets and will soon be available around the country. Two employees from Ísafjörður have been hired, the saltworks will be enlarged this summer and exports have begun. "We've sent 20 kilos to the USA," smiles Garðar. The gourmet market The Meadow in Portland and New York carries salt from Reykjanes. Further exports to Denmark are planned. "But it is all natural growth," he stresses, explaining that they don't want to overextend themselves. "We're not about to build a 400-square-meter factory in one go just for it to stand unused."

Regularly commuting the 330 kilometers between Reykjanes and Reykjavík where he lives with his girlfriend and young child, Garðar doesn't complain about the distance to work. "It's a privilege to be able to work outside in nature right on the shore of the Arctic Ocean, watching seals and whales swim past and the birds soar above," the salt maker says, also mentioning that visitors are welcome. *saltverk.is*.

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir

PHOTO COURTESY OF VATNAJOKULL©VISITVATNAJOKULL.IS

WINTER MAGIC

Tourists can experience many activities in Iceland in winter. Read on to learn about adventures that await you.

Imagine this: Dressed in ski pants and a warm parka, you're trekking in powder snow towards Dimmuborgir, a lava field filled with eerie rock formations near Lake Mývatn in Northeast Iceland. The lake is stunning in its frozen state at this time of year and popular for ice fishing. Above, millions of stars twinkle in the dark winter sky and, if you're lucky, dancing green and purple northern lights add to the magic. Suddenly you hear rough singing and know that you're about to reach your destination. A curious chap clad in woolen clothing welcomes you to his home. He's one of the 13 ogre brothers, the Icelandic Yule Lads, who live in Dimmuborgir and greet visitors throughout December. Enjoy the performance and warm up by the open fire. Perhaps you will get a taste of the Yule Lads' special *hangikjöt*, smoked lamb, a traditional Icelandic Christmas delicacy for which the Mývatn region is famous. Afterwards, you are immune to the frost outside as you enjoy a relaxing soak in the steamy, comfortably warm geothermal water of the open-air Mývatn Nature Baths.

Keen for more action? How about gliding through snow-covered landscapes in south or west Iceland, pulled by cute furry Greenlandic sleigh dogs with Dogsledding Iceland? Visit one of the country's many ski resorts or, for the adrenaline kick of a lifetime, try heliskiing with Bergmenn on Tröllaskagi peninsula in the north. In collaboration with North Sailing in Húsavík, Bergmenn offers a combination of sailing and skiing in a desolate area with peaks up to 1,000 meters high and plenty of snow, just waiting to be explored. They might also tempt you to climb frozen waterfalls. Nearby, in Grenivík, Kaldbaksferðir invites travelers to ride on a snowmobile up Mt. Kaldbakur, enjoy the view from the top, and then slide back down the 1,174-meter slope—the longest slope in Iceland—on skis or a custom-made toboggan (or hitch a ride back down with the snowmobile). The ultimate winter adventure is perhaps building your own snow house and sleeping in it, as travelers with Borea Adventures in the West Fjords have experienced.

In East Iceland, tour operators organize trips to the highlands (which are inaccessible to regular vehicles at this time of year), including sightseeing of the mighty volcanoes Kverkfjöll, Snæfell, and


PHOTO BY BY PÁGMAR TH. SIGURÐSSON/MSTVATNAJÖKULL.IS


PHOTO BY BY PÁGMAR TH. SIGURÐSSON/MSTVATNAJÖKULL.IS


PHOTO COURTESY OF THORVARÐUR ARNASON/MSTVATNAJÖKULL.IS


PHOTO COURTESY OF VATNAJÖKULL@VISITVATNAJOKULL.IS

Askja; exploration of ice caves; and bathing in natural geothermal pools in the middle of nowhere. As far away from light pollution as you can get, your view of the elusive northern lights is unobstructed, although a few reindeer might want to share it with you. Wild reindeer can only be found in East and Southeast Iceland. The region is popular for fishing and hunting as well as cross-country and slalom skiing. An annual Easter festival is held at local ski resorts, in the area called 'the Eastfjord Alps.'

In Southeast Iceland, in the Vatnajökull Region, at the foot of Europe's largest glacier, travelers can choose from a range of tours. There are many optimal viewing points for the northern lights in the vicinity of Höfn and glacier walks are particularly enjoyable in winter when the massive icecap takes on a hue of striking blue. Early spring is the best time of year to explore the glacier's ever-changing ice caves. Jökulsárlón, the glacial lagoon that is one of the country's biggest attractions, is particularly beautiful in winter when it is filled with blue icebergs. Sailing trips are scheduled from March to November, or for as long as weather permits. Tourists can also taste the 1,000-year-old icebergs in a special local beer, brewed from iceberg water and Arctic thyme picked at the foot of Vatnajökull.

Closer to the capital, Iceland's most popular day tour, the Golden Circle, is a completely different experience in winter, with steam coming out of the snow-covered ground in the Geysir hot spring area and the majestic waterfall Gullfoss turning into a massive ice sculpture. South Iceland puts geothermal heat to good use. Vegetables and flowers are grown year-round in greenhouses that cast an otherworldly glow on the dark winter landscape. The region is also famous for its many nature baths and swimming pools, the latest addition being Laugarvatn Fontana. Taking a dip in frosty temperatures is an absolute must, especially following an action-packed glacier tour by jeep or ski-do, not to mention a hike on the glacier. It's the perfect end to a winter's day in Iceland.

For further information, go to: *south.is*, *west.is*, *westfjords.is*, *northiceland.is*, *east.is* and *visitvatnajokull.is*.

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir

ICELANDIC MOVIES: ADVENTUROUS,

Icelandic filmmakers are increasingly turning their attention towards violent crime, although silly comedies always pop up in between thrillers. New avenues are being explored too: Last year saw the premiere of Iceland's first full-length animation.

BLACK'S GAME

Much anticipation surrounded the premiere of the Icelandic thriller *Black's Game* (*Svartur á leik*), directed by Óskar Þór Axelsson, at the Rotterdam International Film Festival in January 2012. The film's executive producer was Nicolas Winding Refn, the director of the critically-acclaimed *Drive*. When *Black's Game* opened in Icelandic cinemas in early March, it became an immediate hit with 60,000 tickets sold (that's almost 20 percent of the population), and an income of more than ISK 60 million (USD 464,000, EUR 369,000), making it the fourth-highest-earning Icelandic movie ever made.

I too was tempted to see what all the fuss was about and was thoroughly impressed, mainly by the performance of the three male leads. I barely recognized the chameleon of an actor, Jóhannes Haukur Jóhannesson, who is brilliant at comedy but proved to be equally at ease in his role as the brutal and buff gang leader Tóti. Rising star Þorvaldur Davíð Kristjánsson convincingly portrayed the troubled and torn youngster Stebbi, whose inner demon gets him caught up in a sticky situation, and Damon Younger really made me detest the twisted and ruthless Brúnó.

Based on a novel by Stefán Máni, the storyline includes events that are said to have occurred in the Icelandic underworld in the 1990s, painting an ugly picture of a country that prides itself on being peaceful. I found it shocking that the film is set some 15 years ago, graphically depicting drug trafficking, beatings, animal abuse, rape, sex orgies and cocaine consumption of mountainous proportions, when the media has only recently started to report such events as reflective of the reality of crime in Iceland. At least that's how I've perceived it. Regardless of its authenticity, *Black's Game* belongs to a new generation of dark Icelandic thrillers, in which each new film has to top the next in terms of sex, drugs and violence.

The movie is fast paced, keeping the viewers on the edge of their seats, perhaps even making them feel compelled to cover their eyes during the most obscene parts. My attention certainly never trailed off, although I generally prefer a clever plot that riddles the mind to a ride on the superhighway to destruction. However, the film also includes a hint of a love story with Stebbi hopelessly falling for the gang's babe Dagný (María Birta Bjarnadóttir), and the film's ending is sure to leave viewers with a lot of questions. Overall, *Black's Game* is a solid thriller, which is unlikely to disappoint fans of the genre, featuring a star league of Icelandic actors, who all proved their worth in their first heavy-weight roles. *By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir*

IT'S A FACT:

THE ICELANDIC FILM AND TELEVISION AWARDS (THE EDDA AWARDS) FOR 2012.

BEST MOVIE; ELDFJALL (VOLCANO) DIRECTED BY RÚNAR RÚNARSSON

GRUESOME AND HILARIOUS

EITHER WAY

My pick for the best Icelandic movie of the year 2011 is definitely *Either Way* (*Á annan veg*). It has mostly been described as comedy, but it's not like the straightforward Hollywood comedies, but rather a subtly dramatic comedy.

The story is set in the 1980s, somewhere in the West Fjords, where the protagonists, two employees of the Icelandic Road Administration, meet up to do some road work. Finnbogi and Alfreð spend their summer in a remote, barren area, hand-painting lines on the asphalt and putting up yardsticks along the road. They have nothing to do but their daily work routine, and no one to talk to but each other.

This is quite amusing to watch as they don't like each other very much and don't get along well. Finnbogi is a serious, diligent and stern man, whereas Alfreð is a flaky, party-loving pleasure seeker. Alfreð is also the brother of Finnbogi's girlfriend. Naturally, the men's different personalities clash. But due to certain unexpected events in both of their lives (NO spoilers intended) they have to go through some sudden changes and learn to appreciate each other.

The talented Hafsteinn Gunnar Sigurðsson both wrote and directed the film and created a wonderful, touching and funny movie with witty dialogue and compelling characters. Finnbogi is played by Sveinn Ólafur Gunnarsson and Hilmar Guðjónsson stars as Alfreð. Both actors give brilliant performances and it's a delight to watch the two on screen. They make it easy to empathize with their characters.

During the Reykjavík Film Festival in September 2011, the movie sadly disappeared a bit among the mass of films on view and didn't quite get the recognition it deserved. Therefore, I was very pleased to read that *Either Way* has received international critical acclaim and not only earned the Baltic Film Prize, but also the TFF Torino Film Festival Award.

Either Way is a very Icelandic film. Even though it is set in the 1980s, it reminds me of today's society and it captures the spirit of Icelanders quite well. Finnbogi is a hard-working, responsible man who takes his relationship very seriously, whereas Alfreð indulges in the vibrant nightlife in the capital looking for one-night stands. Both characters are typical Icelanders, in my opinion. So, if you haven't already seen this great comedy, do so asap. It will be released on DVD in the autumn of 2012. *By Katharina Hauptmann*

LEGENDS OF VALHALLA – THOR

When *Thor*, Iceland's first full-length animated cartoon, premiered in October 2011, I was excited yet kept my expectations in check. It's not that I don't enjoy an animated film with a clever plotline. But in my adulthood I have seen very few animated films that capture the innocence of youth without trying too hard to be deeply meaningful. Produced by Caoz and directed by Óskar Jónasson, among others, to make Iceland's first full-length animation was a brave task and a process that took a total of seven years.

The plotline of the film is simple. A youth bordering on adulthood embarks upon the journey for which he is destined, a journey that reflects his descent from the gods. Thor's mother copulated with the great Norse god Odin but since then has been left to raise her son in the world of man.

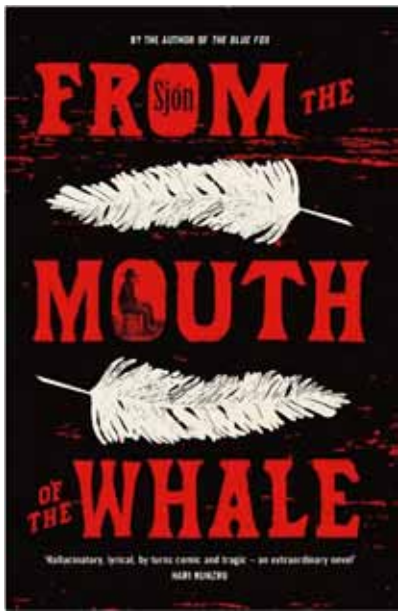
The classic motif of selfless courage in the name of love and honor is not a new message in an animated film meant for younger audiences. Yet combined with the Norse theme, this classical motif gives rise to a narrative that is perhaps losing its power in the modern world. The film's take on the theme is rather liberal, introducing comedy to myths that are perhaps taken too seriously.

The beginning of this bildungs-tale focuses on the protagonist's clumsy way of communicating with the opposite sex and his longing to be a soldier and hero. But Thor's transformation to a hero cannot be accomplished without a proper weapon. Far away from the human world lies Asgard, home to the aged Odin and the strikingly beautiful goddess Freyja. Sindri, a leprechaun-like dwarf, goes there with the greatest weapon ever made, the golden magic hammer called the Crusher. By an accident no doubt linked to destiny, this super weapon is dropped into the human world and finds its way to the home of Thor and his blacksmith mother on the very day it is needed the most. With the Crusher as his weapon, young Thor fights Hel, the queen of the underworld. In blind ambition, sparked by a brief personal history Hel once had with Odin, she sends her army of trolls to Thor's village.

The setting of the film is marvelous. The vibrancy of the human world, the shimmering metallic surface of Asgard, and the ice-clad mountainous valley where Hel resides with her gang of trolls revive the world of Norse myths for a new generation. The 3D animation is delightful to watch, the plot is simple but intriguing enough to captivate an adult viewer, and the excitement of my ten-year-old niece when we left the cinema was certainly good enough for me. *By Júlíana Björnsdóttir*

ICELANDIC BOOKS:
SURREAL, VIOLENT AND HISTORIC

Our critics look at three different Icelandic books by three different Icelandic authors.



FROM THE MOUTH OF THE WHALE

From the Mouth of the Whale (Icelandic title: *Rökkurbýsnir*), the second novel by the Icelandic writer Sjón to be translated into English, was shortlisted for the Independent Foreign Fiction Prize for 2012. This award for the best contemporary fiction in translation published in the UK in 2011 is unique in recognizing the importance of the translator. The magical work of translator Victoria Cribb preserves the special alchemy of the original Icelandic language.

From the Mouth of the Whale is set in seventeenth-century Iceland, the pre-Enlightenment period when science was just beginning to challenge religious authority. The protagonist and narrator, Jónas Pálmason the Learned, is a self-taught healer who is exiled for blasphemy and sorcery to desolate Gullbjörn's Island off the coast of Iceland in the year 1635. Jónas is steeped in the superstition and lore of his time, predominantly Catholicism and an embryonic science that sought to understand the world through cataloguing all its wonders.

Jónas's story is told in a stream of consciousness style that allows the reader to ride along on all the fantastical journeys, tangents, highways and byways of his mind. His meandering narrative tells of his career as a healer of women's diseases; his struggle to conquer a gruesome ghost; the deaths of his three children; his debates with his mentors, the Danish scholar Ole Worm and the Icelandic poet Snorri Sturluson (real historical figures recruited into Jónas's story); and his persecution for allegedly invoking the devil. The profusion of Jonas's mind shows the richness of the world and of one man's imagination, especially when stimulated into high gear by the lack of anything else around it.

Sjón based Jónas on a real personage, Jón Guðmundsson the Learned, an Icelandic self-taught sage of the seventeenth century who was exiled for sorcery, but left behind several important texts. The line between Jónas Pálmason the Learned and Jón Guðmundsson the Learned is unclear, and in typical post-modern style, the characters in Sjón's book overlap, and time and boundaries blur and fade with tantalizing surrealistic echoes.

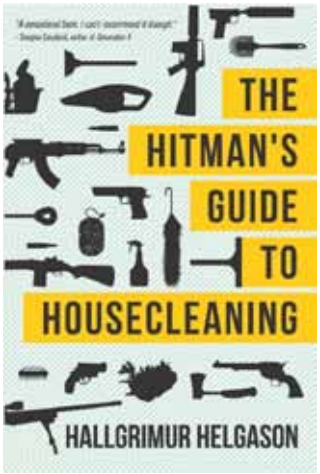
Jonas slyly describes a speckled sandpiper as a medium-sized fellow, with beady brown eyes, clad in a grey-brown coat, not unlike himself (or the author himself, perhaps). And at the end, Jón Guðmundsson the Learned steps into the book. Jón dreams of a man in a grey-speckled cap, with beady brown eyes surrounded by feathers, who says to him, "When you awaken you will have forgotten your name; for all you know, you may be called Jónas Pálmason."

The theme of magically transmogrifying material is woven throughout the book in references to talismans, tupilaks, bezoars, kidney stones, and diacodi—objects in which simple organic material becomes transformed and endowed with power. Just as the bird becomes the man becomes the writer, the shapes and colors of old Icelandic texts are remixed in this modern text, so that translation becomes a form of alchemy in which the original wonder becomes a new kind of wonder.

By Ann Sass.

IT'S A FACT:

2011 WAS A RECORD YEAR IN BOOK PUBLISHING IN ICELAND; 757 BOOKS WERE PUBLISHED, WHICH IS TEN MORE THAN IN 2010. THAT MEANS THAT EVERY DAY OF THE WEEK, TWO BOOKS ARE PUBLISHED IN ICELAND ON AVERAGE.



THE HITMAN'S GUIDE TO HOUSECLEANING

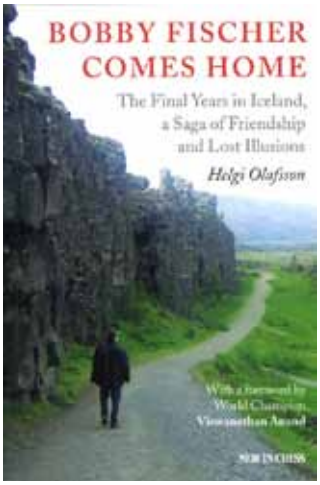
When I picked up *The Hitman's Guide to Housecleaning* (Icelandic title: *10 ráð til að hætta að drepa fólk og byrja að vaska upp*) by Hallgrímur Helgason, I was in for a pleasant surprise. The book turned out to be deeper and more entertaining than I expected after reading the first few pages. Starting out in a *Pulp Fiction* fashion, with a passionate New York-based Croatian hitman, code name Toxic, describing his joy of killing, peppered with far-fetched metaphors as well as graphic descriptions of his girlfriend's body parts, the story took an unexpected turn.

Not at all a thriller, the book is rather a mix of a black comedy and drama. The drama is what took me by surprise. After a successful career as a ruthless murderer, Toxic accidentally kills an FBI agent and is forced to flee the US, alienating himself from his colleagues in the Balkan Mafia. In a twist of fate, he ends up in Iceland where he impersonates an American minister and cons the television preachers who are his hosts into having him stay in their house. After his cover drops, the couple make it their Christian mission to save the hitman's soul.

As far as the comedy goes, Hallgrímur mocks Icelandic society as seen through the eyes of a foreigner, who is stunned at the pre-crisis luxury. He creates English words for names of places and people according to how they sound to him, like calling a woman called Gunnhildur, 'Gunholder'. Many of the people he encounters in Iceland are comical characters, including the missionary couple, a religious-fanatic karate-fighting priest Toxic calls 'Torture' (Thórdur), the owner of a strip club, and immigrant workers. Although exaggerated, they reflect Icelandic society and convey a level of criticism of our community.

But what I really liked about the book is Toxic's way of reflecting on the past—his experiences in the Balkan war and his reasons for becoming a hitman. It turns out he isn't without a conscience or human emotions. They are just buried deep inside him and only start to surface little by little as the story progresses. I don't know how well Hallgrímur researched the Balkan war but his descriptions sound plausible. Pieces of the puzzle gradually come together as Toxic discusses hidden secrets and searches for a long-lost love. Toxic's life in Iceland seems to be evolving into that of a proper citizen when a ghost from the past comes back to haunt him. I came to realize that, for me at least, Toxic's story wasn't the main issue in this book. It is really about war and its horrid consequences, how it mutilates the souls of young frail people and turns friends into enemies.

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir



BOBBY FISCHER COMES HOME: THE FINAL YEARS IN ICELAND, A SAGA OF FRIENDSHIP AND LOST ILLUSIONS

Some foreigners, especially Americans, find it hard to understand why Icelanders offered former World Chess Champion Bobby Fischer a home after he had been arrested in Japan on an American arrest warrant. I have been asked: "Wasn't he a half-crazy, confused man who ranted about the evil American government and a Jewish conspiracy?" The answer is 'yes,' but that means that there was all the more reason to help him. There is no doubt that Bobby Fischer was always a very difficult man and sometimes his eccentric behavior bordered on insanity. Many things indicate that he crossed that border in the years after he became World Champion in the "match of the century" in 1972. After Fischer had insulted everyone who wanted to help him—to the point where he was sitting alone in a Japanese jail—there was no doubt that he needed a shelter.

Helgi Ólafsson is one of the Icelandic grandmasters who became fascinated by chess during the 1972 match. He was a teenager at the time and fondly recalls some of the exciting games from the match. Fischer was, and still is, in spite of everything, an idol for a good many chess players. Hence the disappointment when he forfeited his title by refusing to defend it in 1975 against Anatoly Karpov. The book Bobby Fischer Comes Home briefly tells the story of Fischer's life but concentrates on what happened after he came to Iceland in 2005. We hear about Fischer's outrageous views on many things, especially the Jews (he was Jewish himself), and how he was absolutely paranoid, thinking he was being followed and under surveillance. Helgi Ólafsson was one of the few Icelandic people who were close to Fischer during his years in Iceland. He recounts the story of bringing Viswanathan Anand (the current World Chess Champion), to meet Fischer. Bobby was very suspicious when Anand brought his wife and only calmed down when Helgi said, "They are always together," a claim that was surely false!

Fischer was clearly still following chess events with interest, and the book tells of an instance when he discovered a brilliant move in a blitz championship that had been on TV in Iceland (yes, we are truly wild about chess). Unfortunately, he fell out with one after another of his friends, including Helgi Ólafsson. They never spoke during Fischer's last year alive. He died after refusing medical care for his ailments.

Fischer was a lonely man in Iceland. Even though he was strange, he was not bothered when he wandered aimlessly in the streets of Reykjavík at night. Most people recognized the big bearded figure in his baseball cap, but they left him alone. In the end he was buried in a small cemetery outside Reykjavík, in an isolated place in southern Iceland. He found home and he was home alone.

By Benedikt Jóhannesson.

THE GOLDEN GOAT

You might not know it but there is an animal species in Iceland that is endangered. You may not even have heard of the domesticated Icelandic 'Settlement Goat', which has been isolated on the island for centuries, ever since it was brought to the country with the Norse settlers some 1,100 years ago.

Jóhanna Þorvaldsdóttir, her husband Þorbjörn Oddsson and their family at Háafell in Hvítársíða, a farm near Borgarnes in West Iceland, are the country's most active goat farmers and have long fought for the stock's preservation. Their herd numbers approximately 200 goats, a large share of the 700 goats that exist in the country. In July 2012, the Icelandic Goat Center was inaugurated at Háafell, open year round for those interested in learning more about this unique species, which is the only kind of goat in Iceland. People can also foster goats at the farm, that is, pay for their food, and in exchange, drop in for a free annual visit, pet the goats and play with their offspring. I myself foster the beautiful black-and-white Hrafnkatla, a she-goat that gave birth to two lovely grey-necked kids this spring. There are few things cuter than a newborn kid, as I can assert after a visit to Háafell. The colorful little creatures were jumping about in green pastures, curious about the visitors, thankful for a friendly pet and scratch on the neck. Jóhanna's favorite animal is a snow-white 12-year-old buck called Prins, with horns the size of a machete, that grazes peacefully among the bouncing kids. "He's the friendliest creature you'll ever meet," she lovingly states.

"I have to slaughter all the young bucks and also sort out some of the she-goats," Jóhanna says solemnly, when talking about the lack of capacity at her farm. "But this one will live because of the color," she adds, pointing out a tiny golden dot on the back of the soft little buck I was cradling. She is hoping for the birth of an all-gold goat. Like all Icelandic farm animals, the Icelandic goat is very colorful, as evident in Jóhanna's herd, where the animals range from white, grey, tan and brown to jet black and multicolor. "The golden color is about to disappear; the only examples left are at my farm."

At the turn of the 20th century, there were only around 100 goats in the country. In 1930, their number had increased to approximately 3,000 because goats had become a source of milk in seaside villages. However, in the postwar years when people started to grow gardens, it was prohibited to keep goats in urban areas. Shortly after 1960, the number of goats had dropped to 86 but has since, slowly but surely, been on the increase.

Háafell's main goat products are skins, meat, and beauty products. Healthier meat is hard to find since chevon, or goat meat, is low in fat like chicken and rich in protein like beef. Jóhanna would like to market goat milk for infants who aren't breastfed, and for people with stomach problems—it doesn't contain the dairy protein that many people can't tolerate. There is enough demand for goat milk, but placing it on the market has proven to be a problem. So far, the sale of nonpasteurized milk products is prohibited in Iceland. Currently, Jóhanna uses the milk to make soaps and skin creams, along with goat fat, which has healing effects, she says. Icelandic goats have cashmere wool—in fact, the Scottish cashmere goat is one quarter Icelandic—and trials are being run on cleansing and spinning the wool in Iceland. Jóhanna is also collaborating with other food producers on the experimental production of goat milk ice cream, cheeses and salami.

It looks like we have a lot to look forward to. Meanwhile, the Icelandic Goat Center has provided goat enthusiasts with yet another reason to visit Háafell. I'm planning another visit soon. Perhaps that golden goat has arrived? *geitur.is*

By Eygló Svala Arnarsdóttir

PHOTOS BY PALL STEFANSSON

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