



MUSEUM DIRECTOR KIERAN LONG EXPLORES CABINETMAKING
AND THE SWEDISH ARCHITECTURAL CANON WITH
CHRISTIAN AND RUXANDRA HALLERÖD
AND HOW THEIR HOUSE IN THE FOREST FREED THEM TO
DESIGN FOR PLEASURE.

IN CONVERSATION

PRINCIPLES OF FREEDOM



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PHOTOGRAPHY WICHMANN + BENDTSEN

KIERAN LONG: *I would love to hear how Halleroed started and about your careers. You're a couple in life and in a partnership in work.*

CH: I grew up outside Uppsala and then I moved to Norrtälje, and I started high school in Stockholm where I started my education as a cabinetmaker for furniture from the beginning. Then I went to Carl Malmsten school for their fine carpenters and design education. I started working in 1998 with my own company and we met in 2003. RH: I'm born in Romania and I came here with my parents when I was eight and lived in Linköping for a while. When we met, I thought we were very unequal; I was in my third year at KTH Royal Institute of Technology and my background was more of a technical high school, not so arty. Christian already had his own company and knew so many things. He knew everything about everyone and everything about architecture, art, furniture – all that.

I talk to a lot of Swedish architects who don't spend a lot of time talking about their work. They're not really interested in talking about it. Was that the same for you Christian?

CH: Yes, totally. I am not so comfortable talking about my work. Back in those days I was working more with furniture; when I started more with interiors, we started to talk about the different projects.

RH: We started working together more officially in 2015. In architecture school you don't learn about interiors, so I had to practise it a bit more, to be more secure. When I finished school, I started working at Sandellsandberg and I was there for five or six years. Then I worked at Oscar Properties for five years.

Christian, how does your background as a craftsman influence your work? It's a different way of working from being an educated architect.

CH: It's totally different. For me it's super strong to have that background because you are aware of quality and how to make things and you always have an idea of how to produce stuff. We always have pieces that are specially made, and we want to keep it like that because it is a strength. We have the range: we are doing door handles and we have the full structure of the house.

It feels in your retail projects that you have been able to control many levels of detail, furniture, a whole range of things that sometimes an architect would lose control of or not be invited to do. How did those retail collaborations start?

CH: The client has to be interested in the process, and in the space that they're building, otherwise it's not so deep; it's building a surface. *Some of those you worked with at say Acne or Byredo were very literate, cool, with extreme levels of taste and internationally connected.*

RH: One thing is that with all these people, when we started to work with them, it was their own company. So, you have one person who is both in charge of the creative and the money, then it is easier.

Why do you think that some of those fantastic individuals that you have worked with come to you?

CH: The first interior project we did was for Ben Gorham at Byredo and when we did the first store it was tiny, like 25 square metres. We looked at retail and to make the store in a new way for the city and also, we took care of all the details, the whole space. That was a good starting point and people liked it. Because Ben is really generous, he opened a lot of doors for us as well. Now everyone is super keen on how to be presented in their stores, but back then it wasn't the same level.

RH: Now to do a store it's much harder to be unique. Everyone is doing crazy stuff and people are putting in much more money. I think what has worked well is that we don't really have our own aesthetic. We like some things that you can maybe see in some projects, but we don't always do the same thing and that makes the client trust us better because they understand that you do it for them. In retail that is very important.

So now to your house in the forest [on the island of Blidö]. A bit of background first: How long were you working on it?

RH: We bought the plot maybe four years ago and after six months we started to design it.

CH: No, I think it took a year because we had so many other projects. It was always at the end of the list. We were looking for a plot for almost three years, and then we found this in the archipelago. The forest is like classic old Swedish; pine trees that have been there for a long time, a bit wobbly.

RH: We found a spot on the site to place the house quite early, it's in the middle of the forest so you don't have a specific direction. We wanted it to seem just placed down; it's not easy. The house is actually built in Slovenia and then delivered and assembled on site. We managed to keep the forest very close to the house on two sides and two were a bit more damaged when we did the construction, so we are working with the landscape now.

What was the starting point for the design; this iconic form with this high gabled roof?

RH: The house goes out in four directions, because we wanted to have this overview of the entire forest and we also wanted the house to be very close to the forest. We were at a Josef Frank exhibition at ArkDes [Josef Frank – Against Design, 2017], which had models that he'd done for these imaginary houses. I saw this house and the plan looked so weird because it had an irregular shape but then it had this big roof that was very rectangular. I thought it was a smart way of working with an irregular volume but still make it look quite regular, because I am a little bit strict in our way of seeing things.

The most striking thing is that plan drawing. It's not quite in the tradition of these modern Swedish summer houses which are still quite functional; they will have a line of bedrooms, a gathering place. But how do you use what looks to be a rotational pinwheel?

RH: We use it in the way we thought. Sometimes we work a lot with symmetry and stricter monumental spaces but for this we wanted to be freer. We wanted to be there all year round so we wanted different zones that were activated with different functions. So, it is functional in a way because every zone is connected to something you can do. We start at the dining table with breakfast, then we move to the fika place with the big window and then maybe we move to the fireplace before dinner, then on the sofa at the end. It's a very social house.

I'm interested in the reference to Josef Frank who cared so much about comfort and the reality of life, and who became very critical of modern design. Are you more broadly sympathetic with Frank and what he had to say about design?

RH: I think both; you can do things in different ways. Some projects don't have to have any comfort because it's about an impression.

Maybe I am wrong, but I have the impression that Frank would not be at the top of references.

CH: Maybe not. I agree with you, but it's really strange.

RH: It's because he's not Swedish [laughs]. I don't think he was ever really accepted as an architect in Sweden because of his foreign background.

CH: Could be, but I really like his furniture.

RH: But he's not radical in the same way others were. He has more of his own way of doing things that is actually radical, but not in the modernist way.

CH: At school there were a lot of people doing his furniture because the level of the craftsmanship is really high, so he's always been on the radar.

RH: He became so associated with Svenskt Tenn – the upper-class ladies with taste – and then it becomes conventional, especially maybe in the days when architects valued other things.

There's still no bigger crime in Sweden than to appeal to wealthy people. We are working on a very large exhibition of Sigurd Lewerentz [for 2021] and one of the interesting things is that his furniture always appealed to wealthy patrons and the press hated him for it. In the 1930s he got really awful personal vicious critiques that it wasn't modern and it wasn't functional. It was bourgeois taste and it was very popular in Östermalm but he was definitely a radical architect. Coming back to the house, tell me, Christian, about the individual pieces that bring it to life?

CH: It's a country house and we wanted to push that feeling. There's an old Carl Malmsten chair that I did in 1994 when I went to school. It's been at my parents because we never had anywhere to put it. It's not something you would have in a modern space.

RH: We didn't want it to be like a villa or a house, more like a cottage. It sounds horrible but you can dump all the nice things that you have collected. In our projects we were more structured but here we wanted to be more intuitive.

It's high-level and beautiful but it seems to have the quality of the summer houses where you are allowed to not have your best taste all of the time.

CH: Exactly.

RH: I tried to push the Romanian thing. Maybe we can have ceramic plates on the wall finally.

CH: More like adding more than taking away.

What do you mean by more?

RH: The soft things like a wall rug that Christian's mother did when she was young. If you saw it you wouldn't think it was so beautiful but in the house it looks nice.

CH: Then when you have the history it's more personal. We always loved those small armchairs by Luigi Caccia Dominioni and wanted to use them somewhere.

RH: They were designed to be in front of a fireplace and that is why they are so tiny because you can lift them and put them aside.

Frank or Caccia Dominioni are of a certain era and perhaps not as pure functionalist, or funkis as we would say here, as many designers in the Swedish tradition. Lewerentz is the same; he was never interested in the purity of the functionalist style whereas many of his colleagues were. I wonder where you stand in all of this?

RH: In more recent years, say the past four or five, we have had a French agency and we are doing our third project with them. When you start to work a bit more internationally with an international client you start to understand that you are very Swedish by comparison. We tried to work in France, for example, and it really doesn't work.

Why is that?

RH: Because in the end people think ...

CH: We are too minimalistic.

RH: We are like, "this is not minimalistic; it's a lot of stuff," but for them it's empty. Then you're like, "but you don't need anything else" and they're like, "but it's empty." That has also been a process for us in the house, daring to be more eclectic.

CH: We love that kind of interior.

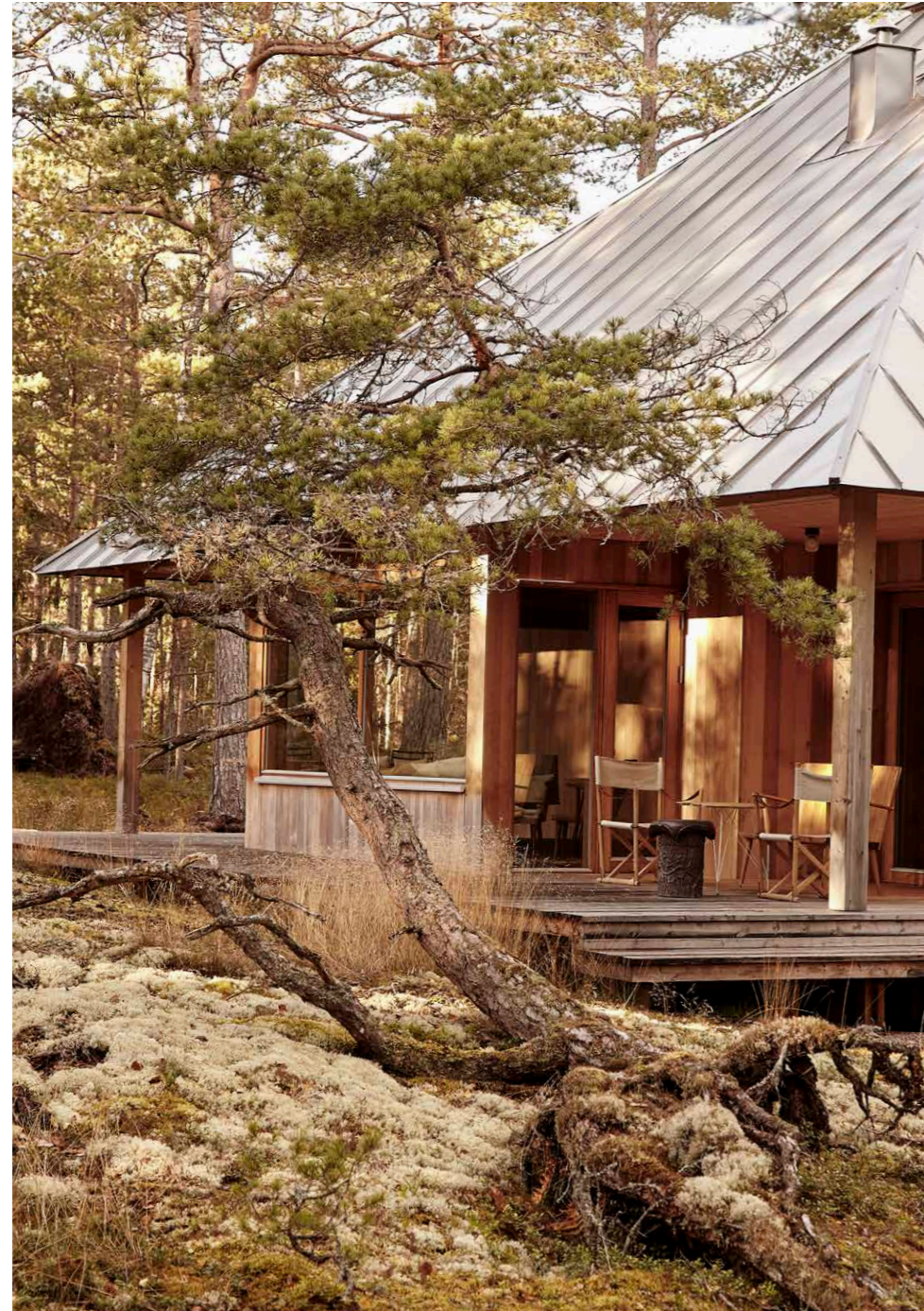
RH: But if you're not used to working that way you have to practise it before you understand it. For me, at least, with age, you get more experience and then you are not so afraid that everything has to be strict. You dare to do those kinds of more eclectic or not so functional or aesthetically strict things that we could try in our house before we tried in a project.

Maybe this is a strange question and it's something I am thinking about in relation to Lewerentz. One of the arguments we are developing is that he stood for the life of pleasure, the life of shopping, the life of good – all these things that were not of interest to the functionalists and he did all of them. When I look at your summer house, I see so much pleasure there, and in your interiors, which have a luxury to them which can only be pleasurable. What does it mean to design a place mainly for pleasure? Is it hard for a Swede to do that?

RH: I think so, that's why many interior decorators are from America or maybe France, a little bit Italy; they are more used to handling the pleasure because their clients demand that and they have other budgets. It doesn't have to be expensive, but it can be.

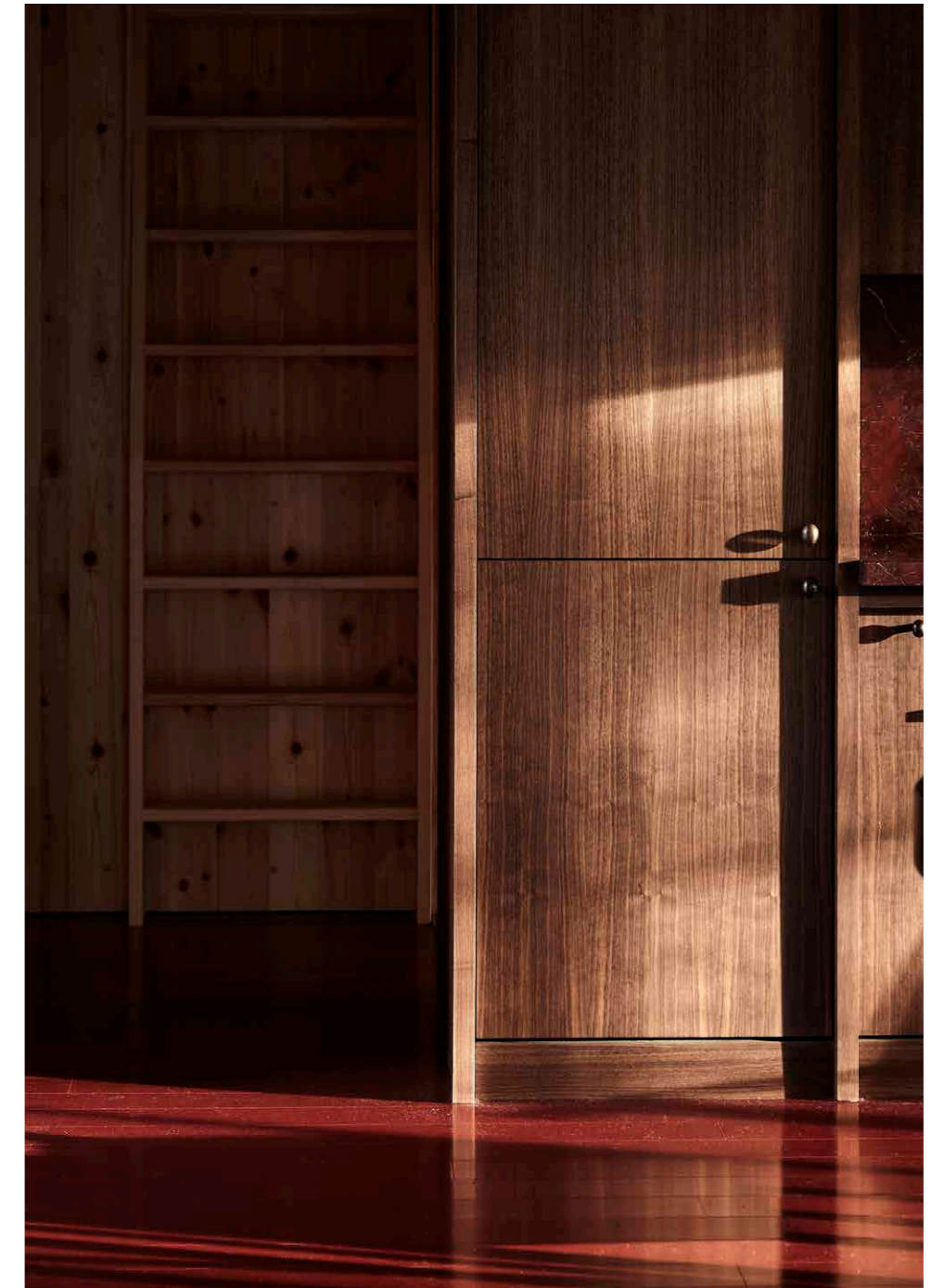
But maybe it's from retail that we have to work with pleasure because the client has to feel the pleasure and the luxury. We can express that in different ways with architecture and details and make people feel it, even those who are not particularly interested in design.

IN OUR PROJECTS WE WERE MORE STRUCTURED BUT HERE WE WANTED TO BE MORE INTUITIVE.



The covered terraces account for almost as much space as the interior and are perfect for the sometimes-inclement Swedish summers, providing sun and shade as well as protection in winter. Ruxundra and Christian Halleröd designed the house, which was built in Slovenia, shipped in sheets or boards and assembled on site. Using all-natural materials, the structure employs 100-millimetre cross-laminated spruce with wood-fibre insulation and untreated cedar wood for panels and pillars on the exterior. **OPPOSITE:** Danish oak is used for doors and windows that frame different views of the forest of fir, pine and juniper in which the house is sited. The regular shape of the cantilevered metal roof masks the irregular volumes of the house. There's an abstract reference to the face motifs in some Japanese houses, such as the Face House by Kazumasa Yamashita.



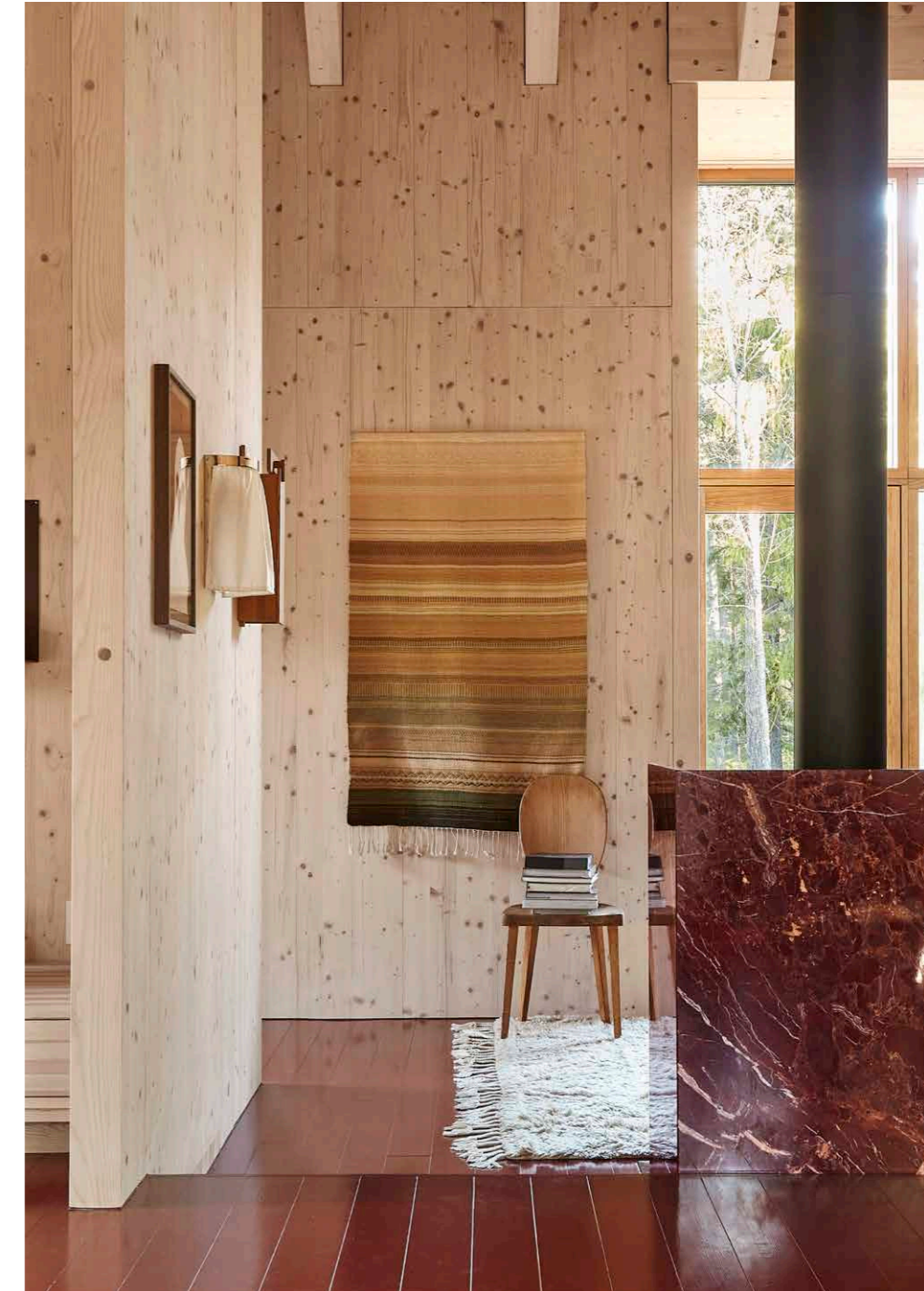


Dark walnut kitchen cabinets, with vintage bronze doorknobs found in New York, are by Halleroed and produced with Tre Sekel. The splashback and bench top are in Italian red jasper marble from Italy while a ladder playfully leads to the guest room in the loft. OPPOSITE: Floors of red-lacquered planks add warmth throughout the house, and the cross-laminated spruce inside is left untreated. An Akari L8 Lamp by Isamu Noguchi hangs above the Massproductions Ferric table and vintage Carimate chairs by Vico Magistretti. A ceramic sculpture by Dorothee Loriguet sits on the table and a Bror Hjorth lamp by Richard Johansson hangs on the wall to the right.

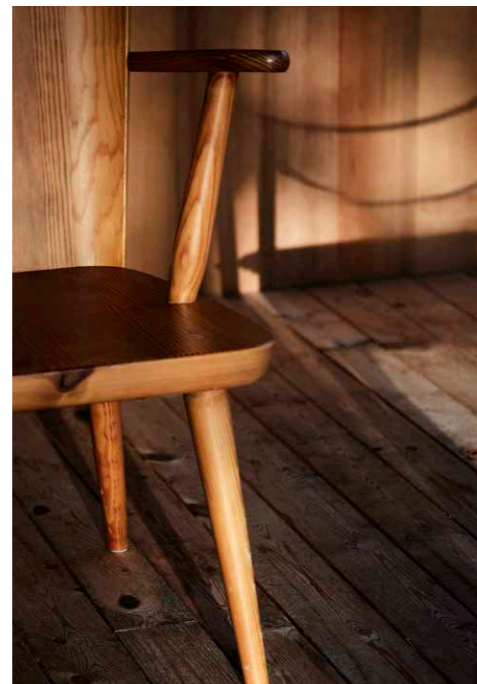
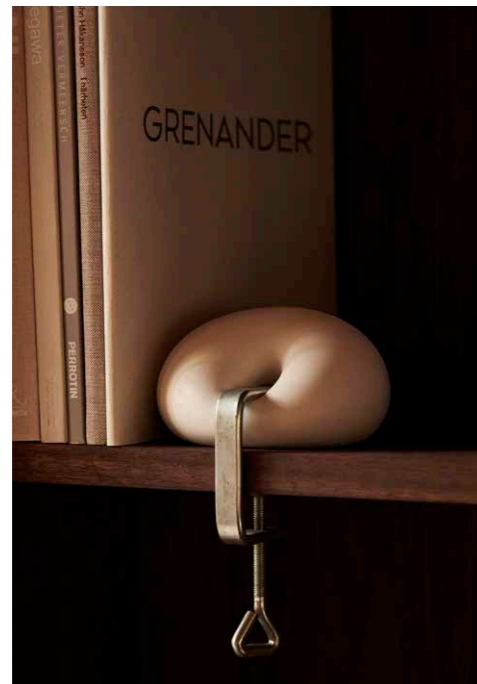
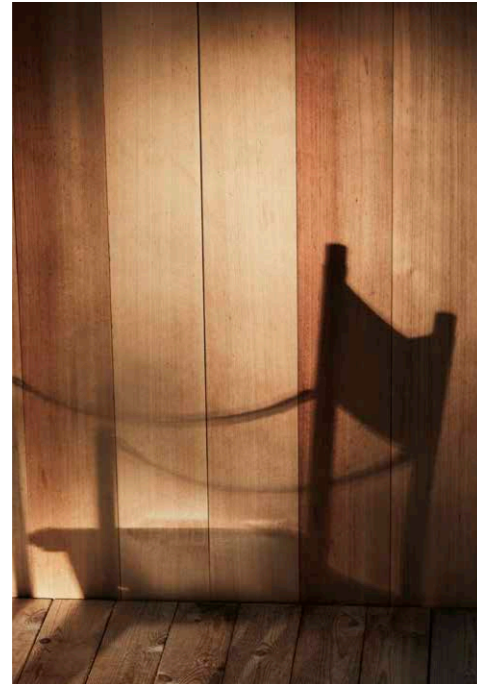


Two Chinotto armchairs by Luigi Caccia Dominioni sit on a rug that was custom-made with Knut Mattor. Christian Halleröd made the Widemar chair, originally designed by Carl Malmsten, in 1994; the artwork on the shelf above the chair is by Brendan Austin. OPPOSITE: A lower dividing wall marks out a lounge space with built-in sofas by Halleroed. The vintage hand-knotted rug is from Svensk Hemslojd and a Satellite pendant by Mathieu Matégot hangs above a vintage Finnish wooden stool. Near the window is a drawing by Oskar Korsár with another artwork by Peter Em nearby. The ceramic on the built-in table is by Ellen Ehk. On the wall outside the nook is a lamp by Adolf Loos from Woka and wall cabinet by John Kandell.

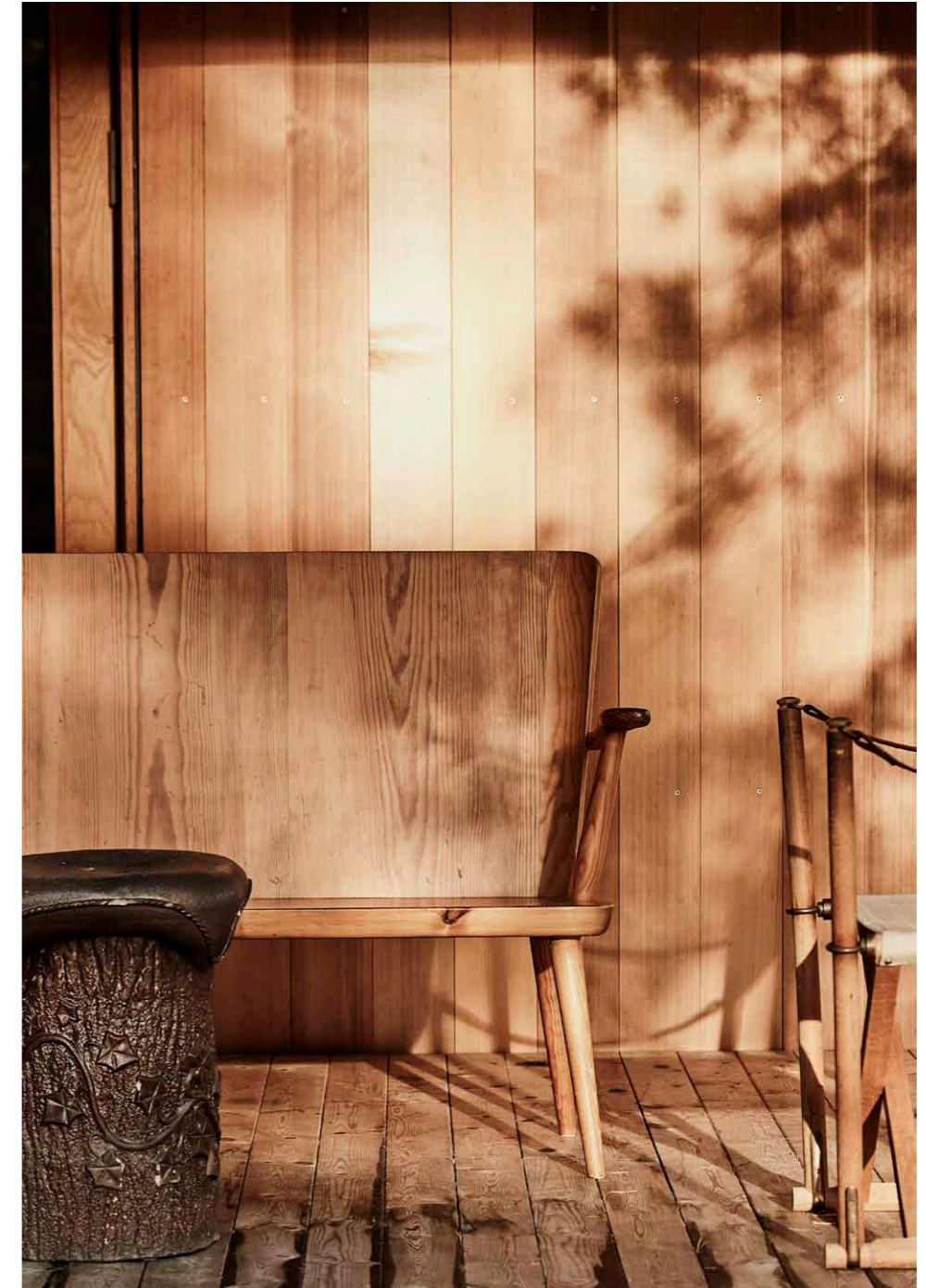




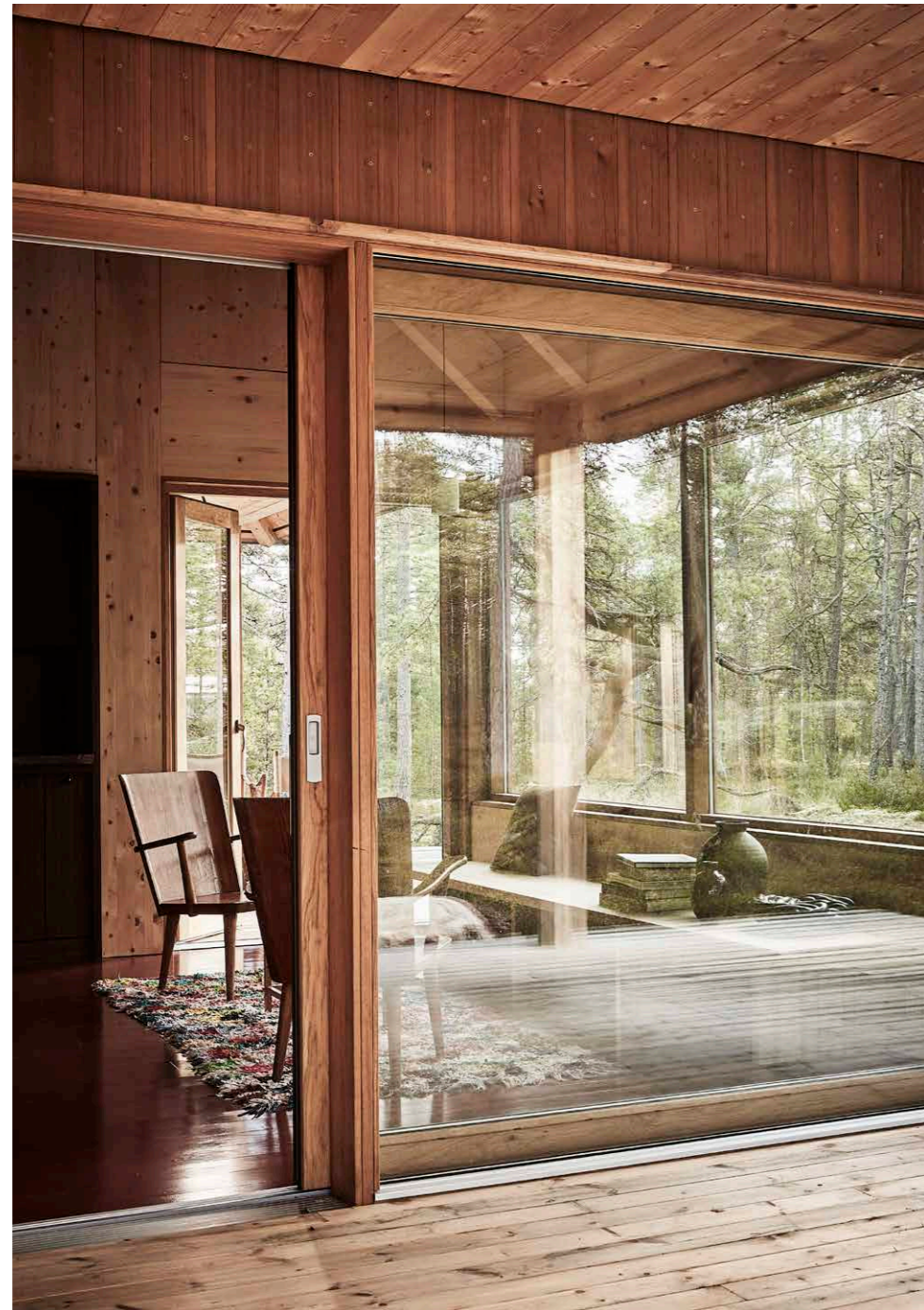
Christian Halleröd's mother, Birgitta, made the wall-hanging from yarn dyed with plants and berries picked over a summer in northern Sweden. In front is a vintage Skedblad chair by Carl Malmsten. OPPOSITE: The Morsø cast-iron wood-burning stove is enclosed by a red jasper marble divider to create a more intimate space. In the background to the right, *Cirkus/Circus* by Klara Kristalova can be seen hanging on the wall above two Eva chairs by Bruno Mathsson.



Wooden furniture echoes the fine craftsmanship of the timber construction and ceramics contribute to the handmade ethos. Bottles by Catherine Dix and ceramic by Shane Schneck. The whimsical artwork *Blob* by Gunilla Klingberg works hard as a bookend. A pinewood chair by Göran Malmvall for Svensk Fur.



Evening light filtered through the pine trees on an outside terrace, a fir sofa by Göran Malmvall for Svensk Fur, ceramic stool from Högånäs and a MK16 chair by Mogens Koch.



The sense of being immersed in the forest is heightened by the windows on three sides of the fika place, the space near the kitchen for coffee and conversation. Two pinewood armchairs by Göran Malmvall for Svensk Fur sit on a vintage Moroccan rug from Knut Mattor. On the solid pine bench near the window are a vessel by Stefan Andersson, a vintage ceramic vase and a ceramic artwork by Märten Medbo.

