



“I felt like it was time to bring a slice of native Norwegian style to the UK”



CATHRINE AND SIMON



clapboard summer houses that Cathrine grew up with, the place sits at the bottom of her garden and is a peaceful oasis for anyone wanting to explore the local area.

Inside is an extension of the café's calm and collected style, with a mix of Scandi minimalism and quirky British finds. There's a huge dining table that you can wheel across the room for more formal or relaxed dining, and the bedroom is a haven of crisp white sheets, painted wooden floors and natural woven baskets.

But, the road to creating this now beloved brand hasn't been a simple one. "We opened a café at Haddenham train station 19 years ago," says Cathrine. "It became popular and we realised how much potential there was for something more here. We walked past this old building on the high street and started dreaming about how amazing it would be to open a café there."

In 2008, Cathrine and her husband Simon bought the building to launch another café branch – known as the Little Italy Espresso Bar at the time. But fast-forward to 2017, and Cathrine had had a brainwave. "I got ill back in 2016 and had been away from work for a year, getting well. When you're growing a business and you're also working on the café floor, time just disappears. So, when I got back, I had a different perspective. I felt like it was time to bring a slice of native Norwegian style to the UK. I just thought, life's too short, let's go for it." Together, they rebranded it to NORSK, which means 'Norwegian'.

"I don't like sterile," says Cathrine. "So, we added a lot of natural wood elements, exposed some of the brick walls and created different flooring heights and tiling to add texture and depth." The cosy, inky blue of the panelled walls is the same hue as Cathrine's mother's kitchen – a happy accident. "I didn't think about it when selecting it, but it's exactly the same!"

Nordic CHARM

Founder Cathrine Tjore shares the secret to *NORSK* café's success and why everyone might benefit from living more Norwegian

By **AMY BONIFAS**

Ask anyone local to NORSK in Ford End, Haddenham, and their eyes will light up at the thought of this cosy café and lifestyle store. An exceptionally friendly team serve up expertly crafted coffees and authentic Nordic buns (more on these later), against a backdrop of muted tones and well-curated Scandi wares.

A lover of Scandi style myself (show me a Brit who isn't), the place has always intrigued me. So, when I had the chance to meet NORSK founder and born-and-bred Norwegian Cathrine Tjore, I jumped at the chance.

We meet at NORSK's summer house just down the road in Long Crendon. It's the brand's newest addition and it's now available to rent for short stays on Airbnb. Inspired by the traditional white

INSIDE NORSK





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Now, as you step from the quiet high street, lined with period cottages, it’s impossible not to feel inspired by the Scandi-cool aesthetic and the amazing aromas coming from the kitchen. No matter the time of week or day, the place is always buzzing with families, groups of friends and solo locals.

Behind the till are tempting rows of freshly baked rye and sourdough loaves, and the coffee is some of the best I’ve tasted in Bucks. The menu combines seasonal Norwegian and British breakfast and lunch dishes and includes everything from smoothie bowls to Norwegian open sandwiches like the Salmon Smorbord (pronounced ‘smur-bord’).

This month, there are seasonal additions like warming lentil dhal, homemade soups and a new smoked cheddar, mustard leeks and red onion toastie – perfect for fending off the January blues.

Then, there are the Nordic buns, swirled with cinnamon icing. “I took our café manager, Frankie, over to Norway to meet my mum. She gave Frankie the recipe and trained her to make them from scratch,” says Cathrine. “There are lots of Scandi places out there now, but I hope that customers can feel the difference here and know that what we’re serving is authentic.”

It’s true that over the last 10-20 years, the UK has been obsessed with Danish and Swedish cultures and concepts like ‘fika’ and

‘hygge’, often smushing the cultures together into one big Scandi smorgasbord. But, the unique Norwegian culture is just as fascinating, with its focus on outdoor and mindful living.

“I grew up in Kristiansand – a seaside town on the southern tip of Norway, known for its archipelago where chic Norwegians flock in the summer months,” says Cathrine. “I’d spend whole summers just swimming and hanging out with friends.

“We had a summer house on one of the remote islands, and in the winter we’d drive for two hours to our little cabin and go skiing and hiking. It sounds grand, but lots of Norwegians’ holiday homes aren’t. Ours didn’t have running water and we got most of our heat from an open fire. The simplicity of it was lovely though – no mobile phones, fishing for crabs and catching your dinner – it’s something that I think a lot of people are craving nowadays.”

Perhaps this is why Norwegians are consistently voted as some of the happiest in the world? “When I look at my friends and family living in Norway, I feel that they’re better at living in the present,” she says.

“They work hard, but they live now to have a good time, making the most of the outdoors and getting active whenever they can.”

It’s this connection to her roots that drove her to make NORSK a laptop-free zone. Well, that and certain work-from-homers coming

in, spending £3 and refusing to budge for hours. “I don’t think people realise that in this industry you need to make money00. In the end, my husband and I were adamant about the policy. We were worried that we’d receive a lot of backlash, but we actually became busier! The whole atmosphere changed.”

And people are coming in to shop now, too. Cathrine and her team are behind the beautifully curated selection of homewares on offer – from artisan candles and handwoven blankets to statement ceramics and kitchen tools. “I wanted to sell things that I’d have in my own house, things that aren’t going to go out of fashion tomorrow,” says Cathrine.

“Some products we spot during our trips to Scandinavia and just have to bring back to the UK. Some are by British makers with a keen eye for Nordic style. We have a fairly small selection, but most things are timeless as we want to encourage a more sustainable way of shopping.”

And it’s this strong sense of vision, passion and genuine love for her team that is Cathrine’s biggest key to success. So, next time you feel like slowing things down or taking a proper lunch break you know where to head. 🍷

Visit the NORSK cafe and lifestyle store at 7a Fort End Road, Haddenham. Open Wed-Sun. Discover more and shop online at NORSK’s award-winning lifestyle store at norsklifestyle.com