



# NORRSKEN LODGE

Text och foto: Anja-Maria Eriksson Norén

**MAX HENSLERS MOVE TO NORTHERN SWEDEN HAS BEEN A LIFELONG PROJECT TO SAY THE LEAST. HIS TRAVELS TO SCANDINAVIA, BOTH BUSINESS AND LEISURE, GO BACK MORE THAN 30 YEARS. ONE CAN EVEN SAY IT'S A LIFELONG LOVE STORY.**

**MAX WAS BORN AND RAISED** in the village of Einsiedeln in Switzerland; know for its large abbey and the Diorama Bethlehem, the world's largest nativity scene. The Einsiedeln Abbey is a Benedictine monastery and home to about 50 monks. Max says that the church was a big part of growing up in Einsiedeln and that the Catholic religion runs deep in the community. The village itself is about the same size as Övertorneå and Max says that growing up in Einsiedeln, because of religion, found it difficult to find his own way.

- As soon as I realized that the catholic way might not be the only way forward in life I tried to break free, Max says. The connection to Rome is very strong and it's not for me. But at the same time I am very proud of Einsiedeln and the place I come from, he continues.

Every seven years the Einsiedeln local theater association puts on a play called the great Einsiedler Welt Theater. The original play was written by a Spanish writer in 1586, so it's very catholic, Max explains. God has seven unborn people that he sends to the

world in different roles, like the rich, the poor, the beauty and the farmer. They go through life in their role, die and go back to God. The past decade the play has been re-written to a more modern story, to fit the times we live in now, Max explains. He says that it's part of his own history too; his family has been a part of The Great Einsiedler Welt Theater for generations, starting with his grandma in 1924. It's amazing to have been a part of it, Max says.

## **FROM FLUTE TO FINE MECHANICS**

Even from an early age Max did his own thing. He played the flute when everyone else played the drums or guitar. Soccer and skiing was popular but Max says he was one of the first who started climbing, indoors, then outdoors and later on ice climbing. In high school he took an apprenticeship working and studying at the same time, a common way of education in Switzerland. – I've always wanted to do something with my hands, but normal mechanic or plumbing was too boring so I studied fine mechanics, Max says and laughs. I've always had a little bit of a rebel in me.

Max didn't end up as a mechanic, but as a self-employed project manager. A job that he says he was good at and liked. But the hectic way of life and the work-load took its toll on Max. For too long he'd been working too hard and he crashed. He describes the Swiss way of life as far too performance-driven. When you fall off the chair there are three people behind you waiting to take your seat, Max says. He says he doesn't know if it was the system that destroyed him that time, what he does know is that he'd been working too long on the edge of breaking down. He should have stopped earlier.

Max describes Zurich as very international, in particular the schools and kinder gardens. The expats push their children, they speak 3 languages, they can read and write before they even start kinder garden, Max says. That means that when a new child who can't read or write starts kindergarten, he or she is the odd one, he continues shaking his head. Children should be given a chance to play until they are 8 or 9. Let kids be kids, Max says.

### **A FJORD IN NORWAY**

Eight years ago we were sitting in a fjord in Norway; at that time we were travelling to Scandinavia two or three times a year, Max says. We were saying that perhaps it's time to buy something, an apartment or cabin. My wife Yasmine said that a house would be nice, with a couple of rooms to rent so that other people could enjoy it too. Max says that's when they

came up with the vision of giving people a fantastic time and having happy people around them. That's why the Norrskén Lodge logo says "a fantastic time".



Max says life in northern Sweden is very different. The process of moving and not just changing zip codes, but countries, is huge. Both Max and his wife Yasmine see their move as an opportunity for their kids. - They get to grow up here and enjoy the nature. Övertorneå School and what they do, it's fantastic, Max says. But it's hard to explain to someone who lives in Switzerland. Max older sister had and still has a difficult time understanding how they could bring their kids out into the wilderness. But most of their friends weren't that surprised with the decision to move, and all of them very positive to the Hensler family living in northern Sweden.





### **THE FURTHER UP NORTH THE BETTER**

Max says that Yasmine is the family-researcher and that's she's very good at finding things online. After they decided to give the idea of moving to Sweden a chance, Yasmine started looking. Östersund, Lycksele, Dorotea, Sorsele, Arvidsjaur and Arjeplog were some of the places we looked at, Max says. It was like the further up north we went, the better we felt.

Initially Yasmine and Max looked at a place in Slagnäs, Arjeplog. But after months of negotiations they realized it wasn't for them. Three days later, Luleå posted a movie from the region Luleå in the winter with a song that stuck to Max. Both Yasmine and Max agreed that the scenery was beautiful and they became even more convinced that moving was the right thing to do. The song that they'd heard in the video turned out to be Markus Fagervall. At that



time Max didn't know who Fagervall was but he listened to the album every day and he says it gave him energy to keep looking. Knowing that eventually they'd find something is what kept them going. - Keep in mind that I couldn't work at this time, Max says. I was burned out.

Then one day Max came home and Yasmine said she'd found something. After emailing the broker he got on a plane to northern Sweden, mid of December. After 20 minutes of looking at the place Max says he knew it was it. Övertorneå was going to be their new home.

### **DREAM WAY OF LIFE**

Max says that Sweden is a dream way of life for many Swiss people. The mountains in Switzerland are beautiful but sometimes you just can't see past them, both figuratively and literally speaking, Max explains. You feel trapped. Max says he thinks it's the wilderness; Swiss people have a strong connection to nature and the nature in northern Sweden is so vast compared to Switzerland.

- All those things that make people go back to the basics, to nature, to space, to silence. I think more and more people are looking for that. It's almost like it's a luxury these days, if you can afford it you get space and silence. Away from the city, in a cabin with only water and a fire, no electricity, might be the new way to vacation, Max says.



## **NATURE, ACTIVITY AND CULTURE**

Not everything about the move to Sweden has been easy. Max says he was shocked when he realized how much administration there is in Sweden. Running a business again, in a foreign country with a new language Max says he worries almost every day that it will all be too much for him. Work-life balance is difficult for me, Max says. But I think I can read myself better now. I can see the signs and I'm quicker to ask for help, he continues.

Since Max took over from the old owners they've done a lot of changes, new saunas has been constructed and the cabins have gotten a facelift. Max and Yasmines original plans were to build a huge lodge down by the water, a sort of luxury cabin. Everything was set; the building permit came in, but at the end of their first season they realized that an eight meter high glass construction might not be the right thing for the site.





Realizing that Norrsken Lodge won't be a five star hotel has been an important journey for Max. He explains that he came out of global project management, working on major projects and thought that Norrsken Lodge will be huge and luxurious. Just to realize that huge and luxurious isn't the right thing.

Instead Norrsken Lodge is nice, sweet, tiny, small cabins everywhere, hidden behind trees or a rock. He says that of course it should still provide a fantastic time, and it will. But in a more modest way, the luxury here is the space and silence. Max and Yasmine want to create more with less and the topics that will identify Norrsken Lodge are nature, activity and culture.

### FULL OF ENERGY

The idea that started eight years ago in a fjord in Norway, of giving people a fantastic time, is still their main priority. But Max and Yasmine also wants to do something for stress prevention and/or relief. Wilderness spa or nature wellbeing are two things that they've thought of when working with Flenergy, the name of what surely will be an oasis in the desert for people who are looking to recover from stress.

Max says for his part, managing stress and everyday is learning how to let go and hand over duties and tasks to someone else.

One example is the planned husky-kennel. Max says that when it's finished the idea isn't to have sled-dogs of their own, but to rent it to people who have huskies and are interested in running a sled-dog business here.

- I was always trying to be the faster, better and stronger. I'm more laidback now, Max says. I try not to stress about the small stuff. I worked for over 20 years using my head. Nowadays I work with my hands. It feels so much better, he continues.

Proof that Max might have gotten better in asking for help shows in the project Playground of your dream. He says that choosing what to build and how it would look was too difficult, so he asked the students in Hietaniemi Friskola to draw the playground of their dreams. The drawings are detailed, one with a candy shop, spider webs, swings and slides. We will combine all the good ideas to one playground and have the kids help us build it. To top it off we'll have a grand opening for them to show their parents and friends, Max says and smiles.

# ÖVERTORNEÅ