

Brutal beauty

New Finnish design brand Vaarnii makes global debut at LDF 2021

This September, in twentytwentyone's Clerkenwell showroom, Finnish design will be redefined for the 21st century. The store's Back & Forth exhibition for London Design Festival will mark the official international launch of Vaarnii – a new furniture and homewares brand that sets out to establish a striking new expression of Finland's design culture.

The launch collection comprises striking yet simple designs from a roster of world-leading designers, all made in Finland by hand-picked local manufacturers, from wild-grown Finnish pine.



The AA Bench by Kwangho Lee celebrates the natural pine grain. Photograph by Jussi Puikkonen.

International brand launch at twentytwentyone

After being introduced to Finnish audiences in Helsinki in May, Vaarnii will step onto the global stage in London at twentytwentyone's Back & Forth exhibition on 20–26 September, and products will be available to buy at twentytwentyone thereafter.

Held to mark the design company's 25th anniversary, the show will combine the Vaarnii launch with a showcase of 25 iconic design products from the 20th and 21st centuries, selected by twentytwentyone's founders for their importance to the brand's story. While these represent the glories of design past, as the 'forth' part of the exhibition, Vaarnii represents the possibilities of the future – and a new chapter in the story of Finnish design.

"We've known twentytwentyone for the better part of a decade and always thought it would be the most logical home for our brand in the UK. As our products are quite distinctive the retailer truly must also understand and appreciate these qualities. twentytwentyone also has a long history with Finnish design products, and we believe London is the single most important city for all things design, so this seemed like the perfect place and time to introduce Vaarnii to the wider design world."

– Antti Hirvonen, co-founder, Vaarnii

A new era of Finnish furniture-making

For decades, Finland's design vernacular has been dominated by the brand of modernism espoused by the likes of Alvar Aalto and the generation of designers that followed. Having worked with some of the most admired international design brands between them (including Apple, Artek, Bang & Olufsen and Tom Dixon), Vaarnii founders Antti Hirvonen and Miklu Silvanto wanted to create a brand that offered global design appeal, while embodying what they saw as the quintessential characteristics of Finnish culture: honesty, clarity, simplicity and toughness.

For their starting point, they reached back to the pre-modernist period of the country's history of making, when the look of a product was determined purely by the need it fulfilled and the material it was made from, rather than having the ideals of a designer imposed upon it. In other words: Vaarnii products look like what they are.

The return to pine

Hirvonen and Silvanto's decision to work exclusively in pine for Vaarnii's launch collection could easily be seen as unorthodox, if not obtuse. As a furniture material, pine carries baggage. Popular in the 1990s, but out of favour since, the softwood is easily dented, and the cellulose-based lacquers used in the past frequently left it off-puttingly shiny, queasily yellow and prone to cracking.



Vaarnii's founders Antti Hirvonen and Miklu Silvanto. Photograph by Jussi Puikkonen.

"A pine product will greatly change its appearance over the years, and as it takes about 100 years for a wild pine to grow into an appropriate length to be used in furniture making, our promise is that our product will at least last that long."

– Antti Hirvonen, co-founder, Vaarnii

Vaarnii's solution is to ditch the lacquer and use a more modern oilwax that soaks into the wood, resulting in a matt finish that preserves the tactility of the grain, prevents cracking and allows the wood to patinate naturally over time, acquiring new depth and character as it ages.



Photograph by Jussi Puikkonen.

Launching 'brutally Finnish' designs by world-leading designers

Making its global debut at London Design Festival, Vaarnii's launch collection comprises a number of pieces by a roster of internationally renowned designers. Vaarnii tasked each with creating an object that responded to the inherent qualities, limitations and benefits of pine, and which celebrated what Fredrik Paulsen calls the 'psychedelic' beauty of its grain. The result is a remarkably cohesive – and highly striking – family of furniture and accessories that makes a compelling case for a pine renaissance.

- **Fredrik Paulsen** has designed a complementary Dining Chair and Table that make the most of the beauty of pine grain in their chunky, confident profiles and large exposed surfaces. Despite their brawn and heft, the pieces have been designed to optimise comfort.
- The archetype of vernacular furniture, **Dimitri Bähler's** compact Ast Stool is strong, sturdy, simple and versatile enough to be used as a side table, bench or seat.
- The Stilts Side Table by French-Canadian designer **Philippe Malouin** is inspired by the architecture of the lakeside cabins abundant in both Quebec and Finland. Honest and matter-of-fact, the table is resolutely practical, rejecting over engineered solutions in favour of an intuitive structure.
- One of the most striking pieces in the collection, the Coffee Table by **Soft Baroque** is a beautifully solid piece of furniture featuring a highly distinctive joint construction evoking traditional Finnish log houses. The round notch joints have been inflated to hulking proportions, contributing to the table's sturdiness.
- **Max Lamb's** approach to developing his sculptural Lounge Chair was experimental, piecing together off-the-shelf sections of wood to develop a logical form with a large surface area. Scooping material from the blocks created two convex recesses, which make the chair physically comfortable, emphasise the grain, and create the effect of an optical illusion.
- The centre of the AA Bench by **Kwangho Lee** is a whole pine log, sandwiched between a plank seat and an inverted 'V'. The forms are stacked as though heaped up in a timber yard, bluntly emphasising pine's material origins and identity.
- Distinctive but complementary to any interior, **Industrial Facility's** architectural Alter Mirror has angled sides made from solid pine surrounding a copper-tinted glass, with a row of handy, hidden hooks.
- **Mac Collins'** low-slung shallow Bowls are confident and endearing, showing off the qualities of pine in their combination of straight lines and soft curves.
- In the strong geometry of her Square and Round Trays, **Livia Lauber** pays tribute to pine's lively grain while also incorporating considered user-friendly details such as a small gap beneath the edge to allow easy lifting, and a softened edge to make the trays comfortable in the hand.
- **Sarah Kaye Rodden's** trio of wall hooks are as sculptural as they are functional. By removing circles of wood, the designer has created both a decorative effect and new possibilities for use, inviting owners to hang clothes, towels and other objects on, through and over the hooks in an ever-changing installation.

- Designed by Vaarnii's in-house team and made from solid pine offcuts, the Doorstop is, appropriately, inspired by the traditional Finnish lumberjack's splitting wedge; an everyday tool used in the harvesting of timber.

"As the aesthetic we wanted to achieve is quite distinctive we spent a considerable amount of time deciding which designer would design what. We also wanted to find a good balance between serious industrial designers and more artistic ones. One doesn't create future classics trying by playing it safe. We always thought that we'd rather make ugly than non-distinctive products."

– Antti Hirvonen, co-founder, Vaarnii

Double-dowel serendipity

Several of the pieces are notable for presenting a 'double dowel' motif, created by the jointing techniques employed. Vaarnii has embraced this as a serendipitous brand signature, evoking the twin tittles of the 'i's in its name. "At some point during the development we noticed that there was a double dowel in several of the designs and we realised that with a very slight tweak we could make it more uniform," says Hirvonen. "It obviously represents the dots on the i's of our wordmark. While we think it's cool, we will not artificially try to make it a feature of future products. It happens if it happens."

Notes to editors

For more information about Vaarnii and its LDF launch, interviews with the founders, product loans and images, please contact us at vaarnii@zetteler.co.uk

Vaarnii

Launched in 2021, Vaarnii is a furniture company with a uniquely Finnish perspective. On a mission to kickstart a new era in furniture design, the brand creates striking yet simple objects rooted in function and defined by material. The result is a brutal yet sophisticated aesthetic, a transparent materiality, and a collection of contemporary furniture that will endure for generations. Vaarnii's first collection is made exclusively from wild Scots Pine – the most abundant wood in Finland – and each subsequent collection will focus on a different material.

vaarnii.com

Vaarnii's launch products

- 001 Dining Chair – Fredrik Paulsen
- 002 Dining Table Round – Fredrik Paulsen
- 003 Ast Stool – Dimitri Bähler
- 004 Stilts Side Table – Philippe Malouin
- 005 Coffee Table – Soft Baroque
- 006 Lounge Chair – Max Lamb
- 007 AA Bench – Kwangho Lee
- 008 Alter Mirror – Industrial Facility
- 009 Bowls – Mac Collins
- 010 Trays – Livia Lauber
- 011 Circle Wall Hooks – Sarah Kaye Rodden
- 012 Door Stop – Vaarnii

...and more coming very soon!

Back & forth

twentytwentyone showroom
18c River Street
London EC1R 1XN

20–26 September 2021