

The Luxury Cuisine
& Travel Magazine

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Christopher Biggins: A national treasure at our table

Guest Edited by

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Fig & custard cobnut tarts

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FIRE, FIKA & FISH APRONS
MEETING SWEDEN'S MOST CELEBRATED CHEFS



Douglas Blyde travels to Sweden to meet two of the country's best-known gastronomic personalities: lauded home cook and cookshop owner Leila Lindholm, and flame-master Niklas Ekeddt



Niklas Ekeddt

Niklas Ekeddt's fire-led restaurant feels an odd choice on Sweden's hottest day of the year so far. However, the hushed extraction system proves mighty effective at draining surplus

heat from his four furnaces. I sit at table 101, close to the coalface, as chef calls out, in English, 'Service!' for my langoustine. Its flesh, steamed in its own now peeled-away charred exoskeleton, pops like a burst balloon on my palate, and is served with micro-planed asparagus and hard-dried scallop roethat's shaved like *bottarga*. The latter, I remark, is the colour of Swedish chef Leila Lindholm's bathroom wallpaper, which features exotic animals from Bengal tigers to a diplodocus. 'It's very different to my house,' says Ekeddt, with a smile. He sits down and tells me that he was first a customer at one of Lindholm's shops, before becoming her friend; now, they jointly present popular food-related podcasts, and have a mutual television project forthcoming.

Although a reservation at his restaurant is coveted, Ekeddt has a determinedly-casual vibe, its decor stripped to the bones. Explaining the colour scheme, as well as dining utensils themselves, Ekeddt tells me that his native northern Sweden, a seven-hour drive, is famous for copper. 'Can you believe people are skiing there now?' he says. Tableware is hand-crafted, tactile and precise, including a miniature font-like bowl. Ekeddt describes himself as an accidental restaurateur. 'My mum was a terrible cook; Dad did it all. When he travelled, my brothers and I took over.' When I ask him about why orders are called out in English, he looks a little sad. 'We have a Jamie's Italian here in Stockholm. I'm worried we could become entirely English like Copenhagen already has.' Finally I ask Ekeddt, who has known environmental extremes from birth, how he would define luxury. 'Time and details,' he says. Which is why Japanese and Swedes have a lot in common.'

Eksdedt: ekstedt.nu

SPIRIT MUSEUM

The tour of Stockholm's Spiritmuseum begins in a copper-clad foyer, representing distilling apparatus. Highlights include the Absolut vodka art collection begun by Andy Warhol, and a focus on the country's one hundred and fifty breweries (there were just nine in 1988). Also interesting is the examination of Sweden's whisky scene, developed in 1961 through the Skeppets brand. Although criticised for its overwhelming 'smokiness', rare examples today change hands for 30,000 Kroner (£2,300). 'If there was an earthquake, I'm going to drink it,' confides tasting room manager Nadja Karlsson of the museum's only bottle. The restaurant, guided by avant-garde Petter Nilsson, is arguably Stockholm's most desirable lunch spot. spiritmuseum.se



Leila Lindholm

With sun swallowed hungrily by its large, original, curtain-free rippled glass windows, Lindholm's white but warm kitchen feels like a set from one of her many books covering food and

design. 'Celebrity is not the same as in the UK,' she says of the undressed windows. Through the open door, the mostly-edible garden nods to the organic farm which her mother now tends.

After coffee, Lindholm prepares lunch, I ask from where her impetus to cook arose. 'Most of my childhood memories focused on the kitchen,' she says. 'Then, as a teenager, I realised I could go to restaurant school.' After three years of practical study, Lindholm swapped the Swedish archipelago for another island: Manhattan, where she worked in leading Nordic restaurant, Aquavit. 'It was more common to see women in top US kitchens than Swedish ones,' she recalls. After two years, she returned to Stockholm, embarking on, tangentially, food styling.

However, most likely inspired by the profession of her journalist stepfather, it would be communication that would propel her to fame. 'I remember seeing chefs on television who simply wanted to prove themselves, concocting recipes to watch rather than do yourself, using hard-to-find ingredients. I decided to change that; to make food accessible.'

Lindholm's resulting morning television cookery show soon migrated to primetime. Then came the baking show. 'It was a big breakthrough; there hadn't been a bakery show before on Swedish television.' Lindholm was voted television chef of the year, and her book on baking became a best-seller.

What could Sweden teach the UK, I ask? 'Enjoy a *fika*!' she says, referencing the national need for repeated coffee and snack breaks. 'It's so important to Swedes that it is built into the working day; a way to socialise.'

Leila Lindholm: leila.se

Gripsholm Vardshus - Sweden's oldest inn

Reached by narrow-gauge steam railway, or, less romantically, road or rail, Gripsholm Vardshus is Sweden's oldest hostelry. It overlooks fourteenth-century Gripsholm Castle, home to the National Portrait Gallery. Charming idiosyncracies at the hotel include two cabinets brimful

of the owner's antique corkscrew collection, and the wine cellar, with reasonable-value older bottles. Savour a platter of langoustines and oysters on the heated terrace, where staff lower the national flag promptly at 9pm.

Gripsholm Vardshus
gripsholms-wardshus.se

