

Out of the forest

Bolon and the Stockholm-based design studio Form Us With Love have grown up together. Now, as the two prepare to embark upon a new collaboration, studio founders Jonas Pettersson and John Löfgren find themselves in the mood to reflect.

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THE FOUNDERS OF the Stockholm-based design consultancy Form Us With Love (FUWL) first came together when organising elaborate-themed parties in the dark forests of Kalmar, south-east Sweden. Jonas Pettersson and John Löfgren were design students at Linnaeus University and the themes of their parties ranged from video games to superheroes.

Although Pettersson and Löfgren got off to a lighthearted start, they have gone on to build a 10-person design studio that works across product, furniture, homeware, interior and branding design, along with industrial design consultancy, business ventures and civic projects. The studio has collaborated with international names such as Ikea, Muuto and LG; Italian furniture brands including La Cividina and Cappellini; and Swedish companies including Hem and Bolon. FUWL has worked with established design companies, but also introduced design to brands where it had previously been absent. “We started off being very ambitious and naive,” says Pettersson, the studio’s CEO. “In 2015, we properly stopped for the first time to reflect on what we have done and how we have effected the people that we worked with.”

FUWL spent two months in 2015 considering its trajectory over the 10 years since the studio’s inception in 2005. With the help of Petrus Palmér – a fellow co-founder of FUWL and now CEO of Hem – as well as mentors and collaborators from across the design industry, Pettersson and Löfgren

hosted a series of workshops to explore their journey. The conversations culminated in a 1,000-page book published in 2015. Edited by Lia Forslund and designed by Henrik Nygren Design, the book, entitled *I—X*, is set against the backdrop of a changing design industry – from the extravagance of the early 2000s and design art, to the current milieu of minimalism. “What will happen in the next 10 years? That was the starting point,” says Pettersson. “Then we thought we’d also look back 10 years. It really brought the whole studio together because people understood where we came from.”

Pettersson and Löfgren’s entry to the design industry came when they exhibited their Cord Lamp at the Greenhouse exhibition for emerging talent at the annual Stockholm Furniture Fair in 2006. The design foregrounded the cord as the main feature of a stand-up lamp, using a classic textile cord held upright by a concealed steel tube. The playful and refined simplicity that was embodied by the Cord Lamp are characteristics that have remained part of FUWL’s work. The studio employs graceful curves and clean lines that express a reverence for functionality and accessibility. Its Janinge chairs for Ikea spurred a two-year investigation into creating durable and affordable furniture with progressive materials and dynamic silhouettes. Their ethos of “designing real change” informs an oeuvre that spans from the oversized Hood lighting for Ateljé Lyktan to their Baux

project, which utilises recycled wood pulp and cement to create modifiable acoustic tiles.

These designs take straightforward concepts – lighting and acoustic panelling – and create systematic approaches that encourage interior designers and architects to get closer to brands through experimenting with a customisable product or material. In the case of Baux, this collaboration was with Träullit, a family-owned Swedish business that was founded in 1946 and which produces floor cladding using wood pulp and cement. FUWL encouraged the company to embrace design and to diversify, leading to the creation of the Baux tile. This form of approach is part of FUWL’s underlying philosophy, which emphasises innovation and interaction. The studio’s name is a nod to this ethos, although Pettersson acknowledges that “love” is a strong word. “It was a promise to us, to not do things that we are not passionate about and it’s a promise to our employees and clients to not work on projects that they are not passionate about,” he explains. “If you’re passionate about something, the work will be good.”

IT’S AN ETHOS that has helped shape the studio’s democratic approach to projects and their eagerness to collaborate with less-established clients – as long as they sense a kinship in approach. This is what drew FUWL to Bolon in 2008, when Pettersson approached the company to sponsor the studio’s Stockholm Design Week exhibition at the Nordiska Kompaniet department store. “I was attracted »



John Löfgren and Jonas Pettersson met as students while organising parties in the forests near Kalmar. They established FUWL in 2005 and have grown to be an award-winning studio.



Top left: A selection of scale prototypes for furniture collaborations. **Top right:** Refurnishing the Stockholm studio. **Bottom left:** Colour, material and finish work for Danish upholstery brand + Halle. **Bottom right:** Löfgren sketching concepts for the Bolon exhibition at Stockholm Design Week 2017. **Opposite:** Pettersson and Löfgren at Form Us With Love's studio.

FACTS FORM US WITH LOVE

NAMES: Jonas Pettersson and John Löfgren
AGES: Jonas 36, John 40
PROFESSION: Designers.
HOMETOWN: Stockholm, Sweden
NOTABLE PROJECTS: The duo has worked with Nest Collection on a sofa range; designed three zones of the Ikea museum, Älmhult; created an amphitheatre for AbsolutVodka events; fitted out a retail outlet for Pen Store; and conceived the Plug Lamp in collaboration with Ateljé Lyktan.

to Bolon because the range of product offered so many different expressions," he says. "Compared to what they offer today it was not that much, but to us it looked like we could use it in different ways to enhance the products, and cut and shape the material as we wanted." Bolon agreed to sponsor the young brand and became an early supporter. It was a formative period for both businesses. Although Bolon was founded in 1949, the company underwent a transition in 2003 when Annica and Marie Eklund repositioned it as a global brand. "We were all very ambitious and driven," says Pettersson. "We wanted to create some kind of change but didn't know how to do it. But we were open-minded and hungry. That

connected us." FUWL began to work on projects for Bolon and was integral to forging the flooring company's contemporary identity, hitting their stride in 2010 with the Bolon Botanic flower campaign, which made use of recyclable, woven, earthy-coloured vinyl flooring called Botanic. Instead of presenting traditional flat-surfaced flooring, the conceptual project took shape as a collection of oversized flowers, herbs and plants made of the Botanic woven vinyl. It was a breakthrough, and firmly positioned Bolon as a design house. "They are the creatives," Pettersson says of Bolon. "They have the big ideas and big visions. Our job is to listen and to filter, because usually they have three to five big ideas and it's our »

Pettersson in his favourite area of FUWL's work space. The studio's work falls into three areas: consultancy, ventures and civic

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goal to direct the focus to just one concept.” It has been eight years since FUWL first collaborated with Bolon and six years since the Botanic campaign, now FUWL will work to reposition Bolon in 2017. The campaign aims to reinforce how material experimentation is at the heart of Bolon and make the versatility of the company's flooring clear to architects and interior designers. “The campaign will focus more on the core of their product, rather than placing a concept on top of the product,” says Pettersson. “The starting point was the fact that Bolon is testing a lot of different materials. They are experimenting with weaving various fabrics to understand what happens if you weave vinyl with wool, for instance. Or vinyl with fluorescent colour. It will be the beginning of repositioning Bolon from a flooring company to a woven material company. And with different properties in the textile, you can also use it for different things.

It could end up on the chair that I'm sitting on or a sofa – there are so many applications.”

THE REPOSITIONING IS a natural step for Bolon and fits with FUWL's desire to bring architects and interior designers closer to brands by offering a product or material that invites customisation and experimentation. “Our work is about changing a brand or people's behaviour in their homes or supporting what happens in the office,” says Pettersson. “We need to be curious about what change is happening. Is there new technology? Then maybe adapt that, or if there is a new material coming, or another innovation. As a small design studio, if we get together with great people and ambitious brands, we can actually make change. Our conversations when we meet clients start with, ‘What are you doing? What's happening? How is life and love?’ Then, we work together. For us, that relationship is unique with Bolon.” ♦