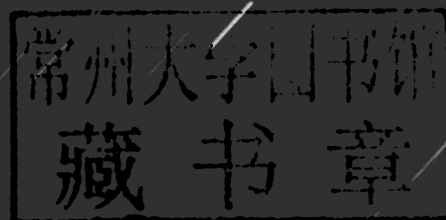




ROBERT WALT KENING

ROBERT WALT KENING: A JOURNALS OF INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

ARVINIUS FÖRLAG



MONICA FÖRSTER

LATERAL THINKING

FURNITURE / OBJECTS / INDUSTRIAL DESIGN

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INTRODUCTION

HANNA NOVA BEATRICE

“She has a mind of her own.”

In the spring of 1996, furniture designer Monica Förster was experimenting with silicone in her Stockholm apartment. She had recently graduated from Beckmans College of Design and didn't yet have her own studio. Instead, she made silicone moulds at home and baked the material in her kitchen oven. The end result, the light *Silikon*, is playing with a new typology for a light; one that can be placed just about anywhere, be it in the sofa or in the lap, without heating the surrounding surface. The choice of material was controversial at the time, as the debate about breast implants was at its peak, but Förster was first and foremost attracted to how the material affected the light. *Silikon* became one of the first products that Förster brought with her when she exhibited outside of Sweden and together with her inflatable room *Cloud*, she took the first steps toward the position she now holds on the international design scene. If you look at her development, from her first products to where she is now, you realize what an important part she has played in establishing contemporary Swedish design internationally.

Today, Förster is a well-known name both in Sweden and internationally. She has worked with producers from all over the world and by doing so has contributed not only to the image of Swedish design, but also to the view of Sweden as a country where female designers have a strong presence. From the moment she started out as a designer, she has followed her own path. She has spent time networking, building and running a successful design studio and developing her skills and processes, as

well as collaborating with well-known brands such as De Padova, Tecno, Alessi, and Poltrona Frau. She regularly flies to Italy, where many of the producers she collaborates with are long-term clients. In most cases Förster is one of very few women they work with; in the case of Poltrona Frau, she is the only independent female designer. This is not unusual, the design industry is by and large a male dominated industry, but it shows Förster's determination.

Throughout the years, Förster has become well-known for her sensitivity to form and her attention to detail. Her work is understated, refined and quietly unassuming. She doesn't apply a particular style to her furniture or objects – no signature feature dominates any of her work – but her presence is always evident. Her presence, and that of the company she works with. This is an important detail, which is often overlooked. In the most successful collaborations the identity of both the producer and the designer is felt in the final product. This requires a designer who is intuitive and able to communicate the heritage and values of a brand, and this is one of Förster's strongest qualities.

The way Förster is perceived abroad may be different from the way she is perceived in Sweden. Even though she works internationally, she's firmly rooted in her native country. She likes to find inspiration in her daily life, and sometimes she goes back to her origin in the north of Sweden to find ideas. Some of her most interesting work combines her own background with the heritage of the producer. She works with several Swedish companies that are local both in terms of production and distribution. Many of them have a long history in Sweden, such as the candle maker Liljeholmens, which dates back to 1839. In order to communicate the craftsmanship that goes into making a tapered candle by hand, Förster made a tall sculptural candle with an undulating curve in the middle for them.

However, Förster doesn't only design the rare and exclusive, her presence is felt in everyday life in Sweden. I use her *Dorotea* set of cutlery, produced by the Swedish manufacturer Gense, every day. The name comes from the Swedish village where Förster's family ran a hotel and restaurant. The cutlery is precise and understated. It took a long time to arrive at the exact curvature she was looking for, but she never leaves anything half-done. During the course of my day I come into contact with many other objects designed by Förster: the coffee table *Breeze* for Swedish producer Swedese, the hand-turned aluminium boxes *Babuschka* made in Habo, southern Sweden, and an office chair aimed at women for the Swedish office furniture manufacturer Officeline.

Designers who succeed in this very competitive market and that have managed to stay on top have something that others don't. I think we can all agree on that. But what is it exactly? Talent and perseverance add to it – but is there more? I think the key is originality. Something that can't be copied. Förster follows a straight and highly personal course. It's obvious not only in her work, but also when she speaks about it. She isn't interested or influenced by trends. She listens, reflects and comes to her own conclusions. She doesn't mind discussing her viewpoint, but she firmly stands by what she believes in. This most enduring characteristic has remained with me during the course of working on this book. To me, this is what unites and distinguishes Förster's work. She has a mind of her own.



The studio team in action. The studio is centrally located in the Södermalm area of Stockholm.



Monica Förster and the team in the studio regularly create small installations in the showroom. This is a wall landscape created by hundreds of pins.



