

Shaped by a harsh climate and scarce resources, Norway's culinary tradition is nevertheless rich inspiration for the world's youngest triple Michelin-starred chef.

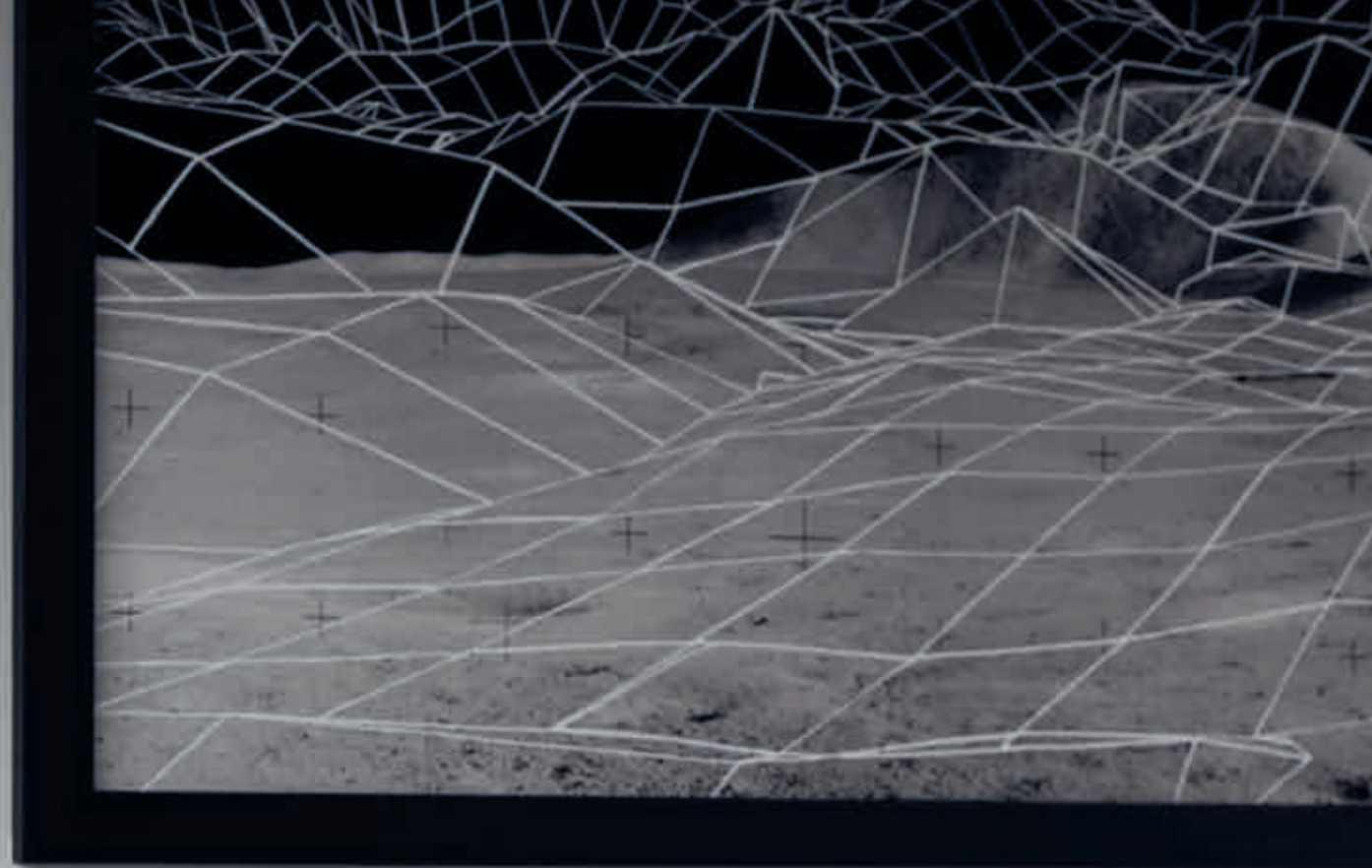
# AT THE CHEF'S TABLE



Head Chef Esben Holmboe Bang quickly fell in love with Norway's seasonal fare and fresh seafood.



The monochrome interiors reflect the modern Nordic ethos of the restaurant.



**IN 2016, THE OSLO-BASED** restaurant Maaemo became the first Norwegian restaurant ever to hold three Michelin stars. The restaurant's Danish chef and co-owner, Esben Holmboe Bang, also became the youngest three-starred Michelin chef in the world.

But Holmboe Bang isn't in it for the accolades. In fact he's quite clear that he's really "just a cook". His aim is to create a cuisine that honours the traditions of Norway and clearly reflects its history of poverty by using ingredients from the country's past. He's fascinated by the humble culinary traditions that reflect Norway's harsh history and climate, such as salting and drying. His engagement with such traditions is an act of cultural preservation – and evolution – that Holmboe Bang takes seriously. "In Denmark you'll eat a whole roast duck for Christmas," he says. "Whereas here, it's a salted sheep. It's not extravagant in any way. There is a tension that I really like."

**BORN AND RAISED** in Copenhagen, Holmboe Bang grew up working in restaurants from the age of 14. His love for cooking was ignited as a child when his father made kjøttbein ("meat bones"), a dish of meat on the bone roasted in the oven – he remembers it being set on the table and everyone digging in with their hands. Holmboe Bang didn't start cooking with the aim of becoming a chef, however, but impulsively when he needed a job and decided to see where it took him. It was only later that he realised that food was the perfect medium and creative outlet through which to communicate his ideas surrounding community, nature and ritual.

"I've always been interested in food from a social standpoint," he says. "In my family, we always gathered around to eat, and it was the only time we would really gather. The meal was the most important thing." Holmboe Bang, now 35, lives in Norway with his wife and their two children. When he first met his wife, she brought him to Oslo, where he quickly fell in love with Norway: its history; its stunning scenery; its amazing diversity of seasonal fare. And produce has always been his starting point – the point of ignition or the spark that sets a dish in motion. The coastline, too, is key, with its abundance of fresh seafood including scallops, langoustines and cod.

**WHEN HOLMBOE BANG** opened Maaemo in 2010, he chose to situate the restaurant in the most modern part of Oslo because he wanted

it to stand on fresh ground. The restaurant is located in Bjørvika, which is in close proximity to the docks, where the fish comes in, and to the forests, where Holmboe Bang and his staff forage for herbs and berries. It also presented an opportunity to juxtapose old Norway on the plate with new, more modern surroundings.

The restaurant has only eight tables in the main dining room, in addition to a private test kitchen table that has a direct view of the chefs at work and the distinctive skyline of Bjørvika. The monochromatic design of

Maaemo's interiors plays on lines, shapes, rhythm and light to result in a poetic, Nordic modernism, with dark woven Bolon Graphic Etch flooring as a foundational element of the space. To Holmboe Bang, the spatial experience of the restaurant and the materials used in it should resonate with the wider aim of the restaurant. His interest in Bolon flooring stemmed from its low environmental impact and versatility. "I wanted Maaemo to reflect where we are in the world," says Holmboe Bang. "That's why >

Esben Holmboe Bang, head chef and co-owner of Maaemo in Oslo.



## "BOLON'S LOW ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT WAS A DRAW FOR MAAEMO."





Aesthetically, Maaemo plays with "lines, shape and light". Bolon Graphic; Etch (left image) provides the perfect complement to this.





The restaurant is located close to Oslo's docks, where the chefs get fresh fish and seafood.





## “WE USE MATERIALS THAT SHARE A COMMON GROUND WITH OUR VISION.”

it made sense to play on cultural references and history, and use the surrounding nature to get that terroir feeling. I want Maaemo to be a footprint of where you are and in what time. Anything you touch and have an interaction with has to generate some sort of expression that links up to what we're doing. We use materials and objects in the restaurant that share a common ground with our overall vision for what we want Maaemo to be.”

In the warmer seasons, Holmboe Bang and his staff look to nature for their produce

and forage by the nearby fjord. In the spring and summertime, the restaurant has multiple staff members who are completely committed to foraging. They head into the forest to pick seasonal herbs, berries and mushrooms and navigate the fjords and extensive archipelagos to scour the one-of-a-kind microclimates for ingredients. “I get inspired by the smell, taste and tactility of the produce,” says Holmboe Bang, whose process is firmly rooted in the ebb and flow of the natural environment. “That’s what

sparks my imagination. But to be honest, it could be anything: music, conversation, or art. Anything that starts a thought process.”

This flexibility is what keeps Maaemo’s ingredients surprising: juiced spruce; salsify pickled in juniper broth; dried chanterelles; creamed hazelnuts; potatoes with “Norwegian gravy” and preserved rhubarb; autumn-red Oxalis leaves draped over beets in a sloe-berry syrup. Then, of course, there is the famous langoustine dish with pickled spruce and cold-pressed rapeseed oil poured over dry ice to create a vapour that smells of the Norwegian forest. Holmboe Bang’s creativity with ingredients is all part of his commitment to honing any craft, however humble or lofty.

“I THINK THAT’S my responsibility,” he says. “Whatever you are in your professional life, it’s your obligation to stay curious about your craft. And it doesn’t matter what you do, whether you cook hospital food, flip burgers, or work at a hotel restaurant. It’s a necessity as a human to evolve and fill yourself with information.” It’s a philosophy he shares with Bolon: a nod to tradition while simultaneously evolving through curiosity and education; it’s the transformation of a favourite ingredient or material into a new, yet somehow familiar form. For Holmboe Bang and the rest of the Maaemo team as with Bolon, collaboration is key to this process.

“I have been dictatorial in the past,” he says. “But Maaemo became great when all the people worked together and we tried to pull the ship to shore together. It’s a cliché, but it’s about recognising that you can’t do it alone. You have to work towards the same goal otherwise there’s no point.”

**WHEN HOLMBOE BANG** isn’t combing fjords for moss or edible flowers, he spends time with his wife and his two children, who are six and nine years old. He also finds time for travel, cycling, music and art. In his home, he uses the very same Bolon Graphic Etch flooring that he selected for the restaurant.

“I walk barefoot most of the time at home and I like the feel of the texture on my feet. And having kids, it’s an easy flooring to clean,” he says. “I choose things for the restaurant as I would choose for my home.”

“I’m just a regular guy,” he says. “The accolades and all that – it’s fantastic and I’m humbled, but at the end of the day I do the things that make sense to me as a person. If you do something that is true, honest and personal, that’s what matters.” ♦



### PROJECT INFORMATION

COLLECTION NAME:  
Graphic, Etch  
AREA: 220 m<sup>2</sup>  
LOCATION: Oslo, Norway  
CLIENT: Maaemo