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## COPENHAGEN

MUNTHE PLUS SIMONSEN  
ARNE JACOBSEN  
DANISH MOVIE  
DANISH DESIGN  
CLUBBING  
KOXBOX



**FREE ISSUE**  
MALMOE-LUND-HELSINGBORG-COPENHAGEN



# DEFINITELY ECCLECTIC

## THE UNIQUE STYLE OF MUNTHE PLUS SIMONSEN

Words > Keri Bridgewater • Image > munthe plus simonsen

**Kylie Minogue, Alicia Keyes, Helena Christensen** and **Nina Persson** are all fans, while stylists in Germany are clamouring to dress their TV and news presenters in the latest collections. Their clothes have appeared in Lars Von Triers abstract film offerings 'The Idiots' and Dogma series, as well as on SVTs 'Grynets Show'. Sales are global with stores and boutiques worldwide eager to sell their products. Everyone's talking about Denmark's latest fashion stars – **Naja Munthe** and **Karen Simonsen**, founders and co-owners of the firm **munthe plus simonsen**.

We are sitting in their showroom along trendy Vastergade, downtown Copenhagen. A spacious and light oblong room, the penthouse location peeks out over the surrounding rooftops. Outside the skies are grey and overcast, inside the lights are soft; a candle is burning. High wooden stools with chamois cushions surround matching high metal tables. Natural wood flooring & neutral tones create a subtle and tranquil setting to display the 2003 Spring/Summer collection, which hangs on long bars around the room. The colours open with ivories and glacial whites, morphing effortlessly into pale peaches, lilacs and delicate turquoises closing into earthy taupe, deep maroons and coppery browns. It all looks like heaven and feels like a dream. You can't help but gently touch and examine each piece, marvelling at the delicacy of every detail. Their clothes are as soft as a whisper, and as haunting as a memory from a forgotten summer; each piece tells its own story.

**Naja Munthe** and **Karen Simonsen** come into the room. They are lithe and softly spoken, dressed exclusively, as always, in their own label. What better ambassadors for the brand than the designers themselves? Munthe in white & red, while Simonsen sports cool blue tones with white fur trim. Are their colour choices a reflection on their personalities? "Perhaps" they muse, **Naja** suggests **Karen's** penchant for icier shades can be a reflection of her cool, collected nature. Then the same must apply for **Naja**, warm and fiery reds. Combined, harmoniously balancing the elements.

They met as students in 1991 on the dressmaking programme at the School of Crafts and Design, Kolding. There was an immediate spark, a coming together of kindred spirits. Moving to Copenhagen in 1994 they set up the 'munthe plus simonsen' label as a trend agency. Working as stylists and fashion reporters in any form of media you care to mention they quickly cut their teeth and became well acquainted with the fashion industry. Using savings their first commercial designs were made up and sold to clothes store Nogaard in 1995. Humbly starting out with only 50 examples per piece they now produce around 1000 each of 70 designs each collection.

Fast-forward 13 years later. You can see just how far they have come in the vast, and sometimes merciless, world of fashion design. Once accused by their fellow pupils "of being pushy and stealing the limelight" 1, it is no doubt thanks to this that they are very much at the forefront of the game right now. "In the beginning we had no plans to do this for the fame or the money, just the love of designing and creating beautiful clothes." continues Simonsen "That our style, our taste is so popular with women around the world is simply fantastic. We are lucky, so lucky we are able to design and create exactly the kind of clothes we love, and not have to compromise our artistic integrity for anyone".

Their latest collection follows a more sophisticated style of boho-chic, with inspiration drawn from all corners of the world. The approach is both mystical and alluring – think Arabian princesses and Russian empresses - with designs gene spliced between Eastern and more traditional Nordic origins. The clothes are feminine and sensual; encompassing a wide range of opulent fabrics and materials – ribbons set with tiny metal beads, delicate embroideries and intricate lace detailing all take their place alongside silks, tulle, velour, satins and crepe. They have a seemingly effortless ability to incorporate the infamous Scandinavian coldness with a multicolour style, both bohemian and metropolitan in the same moment. Self assured women who are looking for that something a little more eclectic appreciate the individual look these pieces offer.

After the successful collaboration on last year's catalogue with singer turned photographer **Bryan Adams**, this year the focus was on fresh and as yet undiscovered Danish talent. The images in the current catalogue were shot by photographer **Jette Jors** on location in Denmark and have been exquisitely adulterated by art student **Cathrine Raben Davidsen**. The effect is otherworldly – reminiscent of old Super 8 movie stills, grainy, textural – stained in hues of burnt reds and yellows. Munthe explains, "This year we wanted to change direction completely, and so we used new and upcoming Danish talent for our latest catalogue pictures." Continues Simonsen "There is so much talent in Denmark right now that we wanted to help expose other artists, help showcase their work". We think it is important to help support and nurture other native designers, photographers and artists - what better way than to collaborate on projects like this?"

munthe plus simonsen



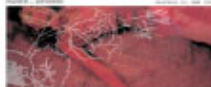


Naja Munthe and Karen Simonsen

In a little under a decade they have created a brand and clothing line which inspires and attracts women from across the globe – Europe, Australia, the US and selected outlets in South East Asia and the Middle East. Little wonder then that 2002 saw them scooping 3 major awards. Ernst & Young saw fit to award them the Young Entrepreneur Prize, while the Danish Design Centre honoured them with the prize for corporate Branding & Strategy, a title won previously by audio and visual giants Bang & Olufson. At present it is of these achievements they feel most proud. "We really felt like we made a little piece of history by being the first female fashion designers to be awarded the Danish Design prize" explains Simonsen. "Design has always traditionally been so male dominated, and fashion design in particular thought of as frivolous, not as 'serious' as product design or architecture. So for us to win felt amazing, a real landmark for us; breaking boundaries for women in business everywhere."

Last year they were asked to guest lecture at a seminar for women in Tokyo - as part of an initiative promoting women's issues. Did they have any idea they would ever become such role models for future generations of women? – "We have always had self-belief. I think we have our mothers to thank for that" says Munthe. "They were both strong, independent women who taught us we could do and achieve anything we set our minds to in life". This good advice has surely paid off, although when I ask them if they feel satisfied with their achievements they tell me this is still only the beginning. "In the last 5 years we have built up a really good, solid label and brand image. The world isn't so big anymore. That motivates us to push on, we would like to see how just big this can get."

It's a couple of weeks later on a snowy Copenhagen night. A queue of people lines the red carpet alongside Christian den IV's Bryghus, the location for the Munthe plus Simonsen 2003 Autumn-Winter show. What a place; upon entering the 15th Century building we are ushered into the cellar area - all cobbled floors, archways and whitewashed brick. It's chilly, but after savouring some fine wine and chocolates we soon warm up. The show is high tempo; the DJ sets the mood with some trance techno tunes while the models parade the red vinyl runway, impeccably showing off the newest collection. What can I say - Munthe and Simonsen have done it again. The clothes encompass their trademark style but, as always, incorporate some exciting new twists. With an emphasis on suede, fur trims, chunky knits and micro minis it's definitely one to look forward to!



- Flagship store: Kronprinsensgade 11, Copenhagen.
- Phone: +45 33 32 03 12 [www.muntheplussimonsen.com](http://www.muntheplussimonsen.com)
- 1Quote taken from Scanorama Interview March 2000

