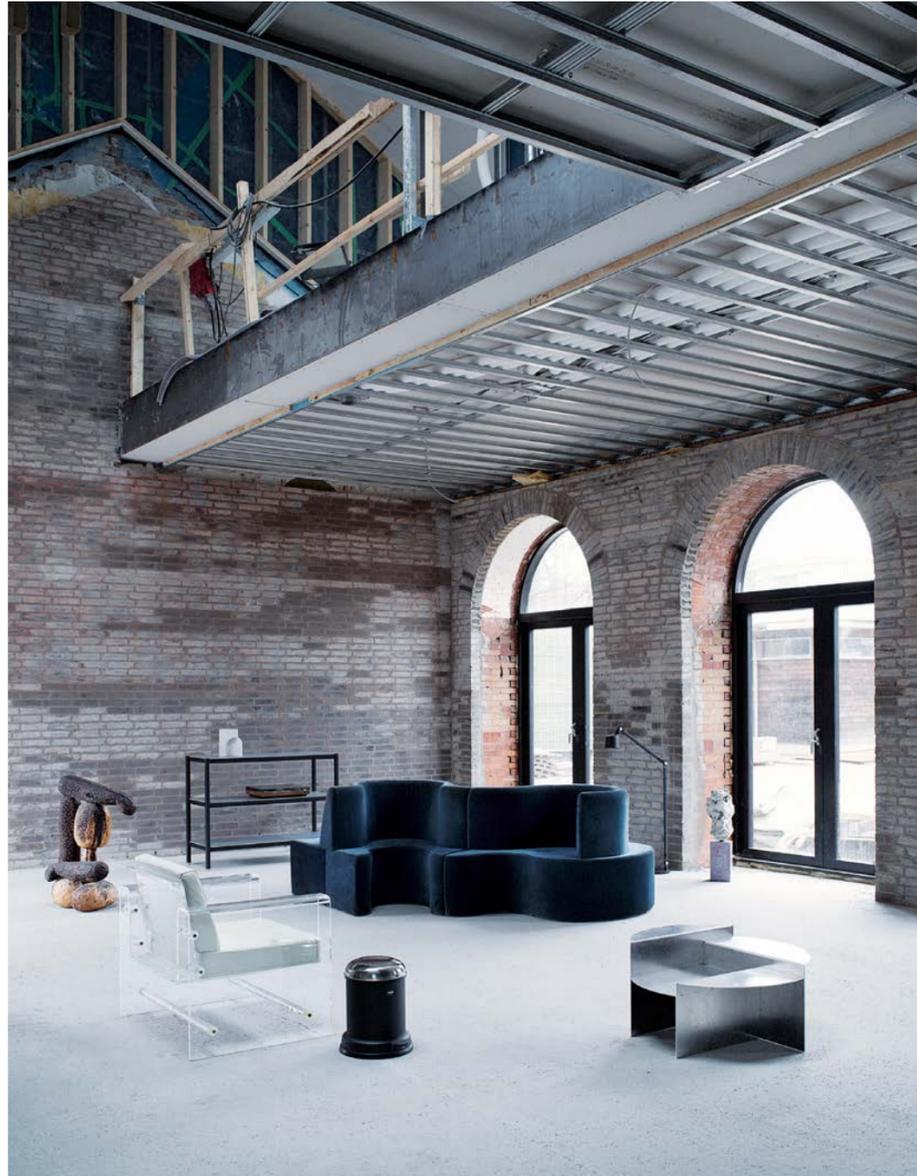


STUDY IN DESIGN

VIPP SMART

The Danish brand that started out selling one product—a hair salon trash can—has become a design phenomenon thanks to the hard work and uncompromising vision of the Egelund family.

BY NATALIA RACHLIN PHOTOGRAPHY BY FELIX ODELL



SPACE PROGRAM The Chimney House, on the northern edge of Copenhagen, opens this month as the third hotel from Danish brand Vipp. Here, the interiors, still under construction, showcase Vipp products—a shelf, a floor lamp and the iconic trash can—alongside pieces that provided inspiration for Studio David Thulstrup's design, including a Verner Panton sofa, a vintage Lucite chair and an aluminum Jonas Trampedach table.

SPARKS FLY through the air, thick with a sawdust haze, as a workman solders a joint at the top of a makeshift staircase, inside an old red-brick building on the northern outskirts of Copenhagen, near the coast.

Kasper Egelund, the CEO and third-generation co-owner of Vipp—the 79-year-old Danish design company best known for its iconic trash can—climbs the rickety flight to survey the scene. Floodlights illuminate raw floors, stray wiring and unfinished walls below, and a recent roof extension overhead. The bones of the building are good, its proportions handsome; nevertheless, this is a construction site with quite a way to go.

“I realize it requires some imagination at this stage,” says Kasper, 43. “But soon enough this will be the ultimate showcase of our brand universe.”

This March, the Chimney House, named for the outside stack that sprouts from this former water-pumping station's roof, will become the third outpost of Vipp Hotel, a series of Vipp-styled spaces meant for short-term stays. Designed in collaboration with one of Copenhagen's buzziest young architecture practices, Studio David Thulstrup, this two-bedroom addition to Vipp's portfolio will allow visiting aesthetes the chance to live an idealized version of Danish life.

“Traditional retail seems to be losing its power, but what is not losing power is our desire to see or do or read about something interesting,” says Kasper. He sees the Chimney House as “the experience economy coming alive.”

Alongside several custom Thulstrup-designed pieces, a substantial selection of Vipp products will furnish the Chimney House, part of a lineup that today includes home accessories, furniture, lighting, bathroom units, a modular kitchen system and even a prefab home. The 1,800-square-foot space will be living proof of Vipp's evolution: What began nearly 80 years ago as a humble bin business has become an international lifestyle brand with big ambitions and a strong point of view.

“Our second product was a toilet brush,” says Kasper's mother, Jette Egelund, 68, later in the day, at the company's Copenhagen headquarters. “I actually designed it myself, and we released it in 1996. It proved to be very popular.”

Since taking over the company in 1992, when her father, Vipp founder Holger Nielsen, died, Jette has held just about every role in the company, from product designer to CEO. She handed over the reins to Kasper in 2011, and today she is the chair of Vipp's board. Both Kasper and his younger sister, Sofie Christensen Egelund, 40—currently the brand's communication and concept director, based in New York—officially joined Vipp in the early '00s. Together the three Egelunds are the sole owners of the business, one built on transforming mundane, often unglamorous household trivialities into attractive tools to be both used and admired.

From a \$79 dishwashing brush to a \$12,000 leather-and-aluminum daybed, there is an aesthetic and intrinsic confidence that pervades the Vipp collection, which has grown to include more than 50 products under the stewardship of the brand's chief

designer, Morten Bo Jensen. Quality craftsmanship, impeccable finishes and the frequent use of rubber and steel create a strong industrial look and feel. This self-assurance extends to the fact that each of Vipp's product categories is most often defined by a single, hyperfunctional option.

“The first thing I always tell someone about the kitchen is that they can have it in whatever color they want,” says Kasper. “As long as it's black.”

Launched in 2011, Vipp's kitchen—a design that ranges from \$40,000 to \$100,000—is indeed available only in one somber hue. There are no alternative handles, finishes or countertops. The only variables are how many modular units are required and how they are configured. In the lucrative and highly competitive kitchen market, which tends to be all about customization, this take-it-or-leave-it approach seems particularly daring.

But there have been plenty of takers. The first U.S. customer to get a Vipp kitchen was Marcus Wainwright, the co-founder and CEO of fashion label Rag & Bone. Photographer Douglas Friedman installed one in his second home in Marfa, Texas, and Vipp also counts the skin-care brand Aesop as a repeat client.

Since 2015, Sofie and her husband, Frank Christensen Egelund, 47, have run Vipp's stateside operations, working out of a Tribeca “showroom” that's also their home. “Over here the kitchen seems to have particularly clicked with people in fashion and advertising, artists and architects,” says Sofie. “The creative community has been the majority so far.”

Sofie notes that in the time she and Frank have been in New York, the business has tripled its U.S. sales (the company does not publicly disclose details of its financials). Of course, there's still plenty of room for the brand to grow in this big, new market. “Sometimes over the phone you try and get through to a potential client, and they say: ‘Vipp? Sorry, how do you spell that? Never heard of it.’ That can be humbling, as back home we're now quite well known,” Sofie says. “But it also makes us hungry to tell the story of my grandfather's product and all that has happened since.”

In 1992, when Jette Egelund took over Vipp, the company was based in her hometown of Randers—a former industrial hub on Denmark's Jutland peninsula—and was making just two products, both trash cans with flip-top lids. (The name *Vipp* was inspired by the Danish verb *vippe*, meaning “tilt.”)

Holger Nielsen, who was trained as a metalworker, had developed his first bin as a one-off for his wife Marie Axelsen's hair salon. There, the wives of local doctors and dentists noticed it and recommended it to their husbands. Over the decades, the bin became a favorite of Denmark's medical professionals, and a small but sustainable business developed as Vipp saturated the clinical market.

Jette recalls her first decade at Vipp as an uphill battle. She was happy to have left behind careers in social work and HR, but in the early days of managing the company, she still had to take on odd jobs (singing in a choir, among them) for extra income, after divorce left her financially unsettled, with two teenagers to raise. Yet she was intent on making the bin known beyond a professional context, and she slowly



FAMILY AFFAIR
From left: Sofie and Frank Christensen Egelund, Jette Egelund and Kasper Egelund.



PROGRESS REPORT Above: The Chimney House under construction. A new story in steel has been added to the original 1928 building. Below: Vipp founder Holger Nielsen and his wife, Marie Axelsen, in 1960. Nielsen first designed the Vipp bin for Axelsen's hair salon in 1939.



but surely expanded sales locally and across Europe.

By the late '90s, the retail market picked up, and the trash can crossed the threshold from public to private: In Denmark, Vipp quite literally became a household name, as the bin became a fixture in the kitchens and bathrooms of countless design-conscious homes.

In 2009, when New York's Museum of Modern Art added Nielsen's original bin to its design collection, Vipp became a part of the international design record. “With the rounded profile and the reassuring noise the lid makes when it closes, it's a friendly design.... It shows that nothing is too unimportant to deserve the designer's attention,” says Juliet Kinchin, the MoMA design curator who acquired the bin. “It was a big moment,” recalls Jette. “As time goes by, it feels like a fairy tale. But it's also not over yet.”

This autumn, Vipp will delve further into the furniture market when it debuts both a dining and a lounge chair. The designs will feature new materials, softer silhouettes and more nuanced interpretations of the brand's industrial DNA, Kasper notes.

Also in the works is a new version of the brand's prefabricated home, the Vipp Shelter. Launched in 2015, the original model sits on the shores of Lake Immeln in southern Sweden. A glass-fronted steel container, the 592-square-foot cabin evolved into the first location of the Vipp Hotel—the second is a loft atop the company's Copenhagen headquarters—an endeavor that hints at what the company may be aiming for in the future: creating a Vipp way of life.

“We were a trash can brand. Then we became a bathroom brand, then a kitchen and bathroom brand, and now we're what you call a lifestyle brand. But is that it? There's no rule that says this is where it ends,” says Kasper. “You have to have a dream and then pursue it like hell.” ●



DYNAMIC RANGE Clockwise from above: The Vipp Shelter, in rural Sweden, now part of the company's hotel series; the Vipp15, which is nearly identical to Nielsen's original 1939 model; a Vipp kitchen with Vipp homewares on the back-wall shelving.