



Glove brand Nordic Moose makes its collections from moose leather, using material that often goes to waste, but which offers breathability, warmth and softness and is proving to be ideal for its product range.

ALL CREDITS: NORDIC MOOSE



RENEWABLE



WASTE-FREE



LONG-LASTING



SUSTAINABLE



SMEs



GREEN JOBS

Hand in glove

Entrepreneurs Torkel Fagrell and Nóra Németh found ways of combining skills in international business, economics, finance, marketing and brand promotion when launching their company in May 2018. A delicate blend of Nordic know-how and Hungarian flair is also part of the mix. As is leather, moose leather.

Mr Fagrell, a graduate of the Stockholm School of Economics, worked in the venture capital sector in his native Sweden before co-founding the company, high-end glove brand Nordic Moose. It has its headquarters in Budapest and works with specialist, artisan, glove-manufacturing partners in Pécs, 200 kilometres south of the Hungarian capital. The material it supplies for these specialist craftspeople to make its gloves is finished leather from moose hides, sourced and tanned in the Nordic lands. Its warmth, breathability, softness and sustainability are key attractions of this material.

Rules to follow

"The moose season in Sweden is strictly regulated," Mr Fagrell explains, "and people follow the rules." Hunters have to attend education sessions before receiving a licence. Only then can they hunt moose, in season and in keeping with a quota that the authorities set every year. "We have a big and vibrant moose population," the Nordic Moose co-founder says of his home country, "of perhaps 350,000 animals. It's true that this figure has been higher in the past, but it has declined somewhat because that authorities have deliberately set the quotas at high levels. The size of the moose

Start-up brand Nordic Moose is intent on preventing raw material in Sweden and Finland from going to waste, while preserving traditional, artisan glove-making skills in Hungary.

population has to be controlled as too many animals can harm the regeneration of our forests as the animals eat small pine and spruce trees."

He explains that this activity affects the lives and businesses of forest owners, big and small. It also has an effect on the environment because forests are vital in the fight against global warming; growing trees capture carbon dioxide. And because moose can weigh up to 700 kilos, they are a known road hazard too.

Waste that has value

Moose meat is prized among hunters, but Torkel Fagrell says the hides are often regarded as having no value and they go to waste. Nordic Moose disagrees. So does the tannery in western Finland from which the glove brand sources its finished leather. It buys the hides from hunters or hunting



associations in Sweden and Finland. "It can be difficult leather to work with," Mr Fagrell says. "The animals live in the wild and suffer scratches and insect bites, and even when the hides reach us as finished leather, there are usually plenty of flaws. One good thing about that is that each pair of our gloves is unique. To make two that are identical would be impossible."

To add to moose leather's sustainability credentials, he explains that the animals' lives in the wild mean they have a limited carbon footprint compared to typical livestock and that partnering with a tannery in Finland, where water and fresh air abound and regulations are among the strictest in the world, means Nordic Moose's first collections were available only online, but the brand began 2020 by starting to supply owner-run, independent boutiques in different parts of Europe. All of its gloves so far have been made from moose leather, with cashmere linings. If, in future, it introduces other types of leather, it will do so without compromising the Nordic DNA of its main raw material, Mr Fagrell says. Moose, however, will still dominate.

Artisans of Pécs

Co-founder Nóra Németh worked for a number of multinational corporations in major cities around Europe, including Stockholm, but Hungary is where she is from. One of the reasons why Nordic Moose has set up its supply chain in the way it has is because she became fascinated by the glove-manufacturing history of the city of Pécs.

Hungary's fifth-largest town lays claim to being Europe's capital of glove-making (we know that other cities make the same claim too). Pioneering manufacturer János Hamerli was born there in 1840 and died there 55 years later. In between, in 1861, he set up a glove-making operation in the city and perfected an artisan technique for making his products, which involved more than 50 steps. Hamerli's gloves became famous throughout the Austro-Hungarian empire and he opened shops in both its capitals, Vienna and Budapest, as well as in Pécs.

Gloves in a cold climate

In her reading up on all this history, Nóra Németh found it particularly impressive that skills such as cutting, pressing, stitching and lining leather to make gloves were part of the curriculum in schools in Pécs to let young people learn the basics of the trade to be able to work in the glove industry on leaving their studies. Particular skills include hand-sewing two pieces together so that the edge of the leather is showing on both; this is something that Nordic Moose has incorporated into its designs. Before the end of the twentieth century the local industry had diminished but the skills live on and small, family-owned, family-run, traditional, artisan glove-making workshops are still functioning in the city; Nordic Moose has been able to build strong partnerships with suppliers there.

"What is new for these craftspeople is working with moose leather," she explains. "They were more used to working with lambskin, deerskin or peccary. I like moose better because the leather is amazingly soft but it's also very thick for gloving leather, 0.8 to 0.9 millimetres, and that means the gloves keep your hands warm."

The language of gloves

She greatly enjoys travelling to Pécs to talk to the people in the workshop and finds the way they describe their work fascinating. "They use unusual words," she says. "We have words in Hungarian that mean 'slit', but when our colleagues



Nordic Moose holds tight to its ties to Sweden and Finland, but it tips its hat to the glove-making tradition of Pécs in Hungary, too.

in the workshop refer to a slit in the leather at the wrist of a glove, such as we have with some of our styles, they use the word, 'Schlitz', which is German." She explains that this happens with quite a few of the technical terms the artisans use and wonders if this is a throwback to the days of János Hamerli and the empire.

Her partner insists that the craftspeople in Pécs love talking to Ms Németh every bit as much as she likes talking to them. "It's a real competitive advantage," he says. "We are not just a customer managing a supplier. There is a real connection and the relationship is strong, which, coupled with the fact that we are relatively near, makes the whole sampling and product development phase much easier."

Relying on and investing in the work of these craftspeople is the best way of preserving their skills and knowledge. To do so using low-carbon-footprint material that would otherwise go to waste enhances Nordic Moose's circular credentials, all the more so because the brand insists that its gloves be, not just beautiful, but long-lasting too.

It is all the result of ties between Sweden and Hungary, which are in evidence even in the company's address. Its headquarters are in small Budapest street, beside the Danube, close to the Margaret Bridge. The street is named after Raoul Wallenberg, a diplomat who was stationed in the Hungarian capital in 1944, and who is remembered for saving the lives of tens of thousands of people from the city's Jewish community by sheltering them and giving them protective passports from the country he was there to represent: Sweden. 🌍