

From left to right:

Japanese woven silk kimono. *Stylist's own.*  
Lace bodysuit, €790, Lace bra, €395, Silk double strap bra, €395,  
Silk shirt, worn underneath, €1,025. All *Stærk.*  
Fine silk veil, price upon request. *Archive Stærk.*  
Ball clip gold earrings. *Stylist's own.*

Shirt with neck tie, €930, Lace bra, €395, Woven riding skirt, €995,  
Woven riding skirt peplum, worn underneath. €425. All *Stærk.*  
Leather wall sculpture 'Finn' No.1 (Edition of 20), € 3,075. By *Camilla Stærk.*  
Painting 'Tiderne skifter'. By *Hans Henrik Lerfeldt.*



# The Stærk Arts

Danish designer Camilla Stærk's singular pieces, marked by black leather, untreated wood and a certain dark romanticism, have enjoyed a cult following since she launched her namesake brand 20 years ago. With a new furniture line and a high-profile design project and on the horizon, Stærk has sparked her next era. Best friend and collaborator Helena Christensen intimately captures the designer in her West Village apartment.

Words by GABRIELE DELLISANTI Photographs by HELENA CHRISTENSEN

The morning we meet for a chat over Zoom, Camilla Stærk tells me she has an important appointment to attend later in the day. It will take place in Brooklyn, it's scheduled for straight after our talk and she can't be even a minute late. Her excitement is palpable. "I have time, but it's important you know," she says, politely.

It's a particularly packed week for the Danish designer, who is busy wrapping up various projects as she prepares to celebrate the 20th anniversary of her namesake label after two years of pandemic-induced restrictions. Just the day before, she invited top Copenhagen-born model and photographer Helena Christensen into her home for her first-ever *Vogue Scandinavia* shoot. As longtime friends turned business partners, the two recently joined forces to design a collection of home furnishings and accessories that pay homage to their Danish roots. "I feel comfortable when Helena is around," says Stærk, who defines the friendship as being almost telepathic. "We know what

each other wants without even speaking."

She is sitting by a window in her modestly-sized flat in the West Village. The space is dotted with a curated selection of dark-hued furniture placed against clean white walls. "There's something about black that calms me," she says. She's wearing a large pair of glasses, her own design,

*"We know what each other wants without even speaking"*

their shiny lenses reflecting the deep blue shade of a clear sky. Wrapped over her head is a long black silk turban that gently drapes over her left shoulder. The item has become a signature everyday accessory for the New York-based designer, one she can't leave home without.

When probed on the details of her aforementioned meeting, she's thrilled to share the news. News that, as she was assured mere moments before, could

be announced here for the very first time. "I've been asked by Danish chef Mads Refslund to work on the interiors of his first New York restaurant," she shares, referring to the renowned co-founder of soon-to-close Noma. Refslund's new concept, named ILIS, will debut later this year in Greenpoint and feature a Nordic-inspired menu. "Needless

to say I am beyond thrilled," she says, smiling.

The commissioned work will see Stærk decorate parts of the restaurant's space with a number of her original designs including one of her best-known pieces: the smoky feather light, a pendant lamp defined by a strikingly unique look. It features a long striped feather running down the wired cable leading to a white porcelain socket wrapped by a smoked topaz glass shade.

For the piece, Stærk drew from one of her greatest inspirations, Danish author Karen Blixen, combining interpretations of the writer's time spent on a Kenyan farm in the 1920s. "It reflects how I imagined elements in Karen's home in Kenya when I read her books in school," she explains. Blixen went on to inspire much of Stærk's oeuvre, from home decor to fashion pieces. Among these, an elegant wool rug designed in collaboration with British artist Marcus James that depicts an abstract interpretation of a spine and artfully blends different shades of grey on a black background. Stærk's fascination for turbans, which she designs herself and wears daily, can also be traced back to Blixen, who was often portrayed wearing one. "She had a lasting impact," Stærk says.

Stærk was born and raised in what she often just refers to as "the middle of nowhere": a countryside estate located in a rural patch of southern Zealand, the Danish region home to Copenhagen. "Not even Danes know the place I am from," she says with a laugh.



Smoky feather light, €2,210. *Stærk*  
Furniture, inherited danish antiques.



Leather capelet, €1,855, Lace bodysuit, €790, Lace bra, €395,  
Silk double strap bra, €395. All *Stærk*. Fine silk veil, price upon request. *Archive Stærk*.  
Ball clip gold earrings, price upon request. *Stylist's own*.



Tailored wool blazer, price upon request,  
Lace bodysuit, €790, Lace bra, €395, Silk double strap bra, €395,  
Silk skirt with back ruching, €1,025. All *Stærk*. Vintage 1940's hat. *Stylist's own*.  
Fine silk veil, price upon request. *Stærk from Archive*.  
Gold bracelet, price upon request. *Stylist's own*.



From left to right  
Tailored wool blazer, price upon request, Hooded jersey dress, €790. Both *Stærk*.

Waxed cotton trench coat with leather belt, price upon request, Lace bra, €395, Silk double strap bra, €395. All *Stærk*.  
Fine silk veil, price upon request. *Archive Stærk*. Head scarf, €325. *Stærk*. Glasses, €245. *Stærk&Christensen*.  
Ball clip gold earrings, price upon request. *Stylist's own*. Hand-knitted leather armour clutch, €2,560. *Stærk*.



Leather knot stilettos with rope from 'Still' Camilla Stærk Art Gallery Solo Exhibition, price upon request. *Stærk.*

Photographer : HELENA CHRISTENSEN  
Stylist : CAMILLA STÆRKE  
Talents : CAMILLA STÆRKE, HELENA CHRISTENSEN  
Hair Stylist : TAKUYA YAMAGUCHI  
Makeup Artist : STOJ  
Styling Assistant : KRISTIAN THOMASSEN  
Photographer of images of both Camilla and Helena : KRISTIAN THOMASSEN  
Post Production : HECTOR PEREZ

It took Stærk over two decades to evolve into the fully-fledged and multidisciplinary designer she is today. Honing an extraordinary set of skills that have taken her from runway fashion shows in Paris and Milan to furniture galleries of art collectors in Los Angeles.

Questions on when and where inspiration strikes aren't always easy to address for many in the creative industry, yet Stærk doesn't hesitate. "Without any doubt: my family," she says. She's thankful to both her parents for passing on a strong dedication to manual crafts and a creative outlook. "I really owe them 50-50," she says. "What I do today is the result of years of observing both my mother's and my father's work, even though they were very different people in very different fields."

Her father was a well-respected furniture designer, who started his business in nearby Copenhagen and specialised in furnishings with a strong mid century aesthetic. Pieces defined by an abundance of natural materials and geometric silhouettes. He climbed the ranks within the industry and spent much of his time travelling far and wide, working on commissions for interior projects around the world. Stærk's mother spent her days at the family farm. Here, she specialised as a horse breeder and helped run the stable, often practising her skills in leatherwork by designing saddles and various pieces of equipment.

It was this very combination of exploring her mother's locally-honed craft and strong involvement with her father's business among Copenhagen design aficionados that ultimately gave Stærk the inspiration she needed to break out on her own. From then on, it was just a matter of finding her niche. "I needed to find myself and the craft that was right for me," she says. What followed was a journey of self discovery that involved numerous travels from Paris (where she celebrated her 18th birthday),

to Australia and New Zealand. She backpacked for six months across Southeast Asia, returning to Copenhagen for a year or so before moving to London. Talks about entering furniture design school and joining her dad's business didn't interest her at the time, so she leapt into a profession that equally required a strong eye for aesthetics and a knack for manual craft: fashion. "I wanted to forge my own path into the creative industry while honouring all of what my family had taught me," she says.

It was during her years at Ravensbourne University in London and a three-month internship at New York fashion designer Patrick Robinson, who she discovered on the pages of American *Vogue*, that Stærk developed a passion for working

Over the next few years, Stærk met with a host of big names from the industry and showcased her pieces at fashion weeks from Milan to Paris to New York. This culminated in a full-blown, high-concept collection that pushed the boundaries of traditional fashion design. Defined as 'modern noir' and taking inspiration from Coco Chanel's early designs, her collection of leather garments features a near-total black palette and a clear reference to her favoured cinematic genre.

Stærk's success in the world of fashion led her to also venture into furniture design – a craft that she'd been eager to explore since an early age. "From watching my father's work and inspiring achievements growing up, I knew I would one day de-

## “There's something about black that calms me”

with leather — one that would go on to define much of her career for years to come. "I worked with leather through spending time on horseback and in the stable with my mother, who is a horse breeder. I was always fascinated by its tactility and different uses," she says. "So I decided to explore it my own way."

A pivotal moment came after Stærk's graduate exhibition in London in 2000. Showcasing her first collection of handcrafted garments, created with a special leather-weaving technique she'd devised over the years, she caught the attention of a prominent fashion journalist, the late Hilary Alexander from British newspaper *The Daily Telegraph*. The following day, the paper featured a full-page picture of her, an in-depth article on the collection and one unmissable detail: she had secured her first-ever buyer. "Browns in London wanted the entire collection and I just couldn't believe it," she says.

sign my own pieces of furniture," she says. "I just needed to find an identity of my own first." Just like her fashion items, Stærk's collection of home decor is characterised by dark tones and the use of natural materials, including the woven leather technique she developed during her studies. Pieces range from woollen rugs to lighting and decorative leather sculptures. In 2016, she took things one step further and partnered with Danish model Helena Christensen to start joint brand Stærk & Christensen.

A nod to their Danish roots, the duo's collection is based on the silhouette of a swallow, the small bird with a distinctive appearance that can be seen flying in large groups across Danish landscapes in the summer months. The motif appears clearly in each design: be it an imposing arched mirror, a sculptural room divider in blackened ash and brass, or elegant cuff bracelets handmade in 18kt gold vermeil. "I appreci-

ate how different and similar our aesthetics are, that's what immediately makes us work so well together," says Christensen over the phone. "Camilla is all about simplicity, clean lines, dark tones, all with a dark romantic edge and I'm all about colours and chaos. And somehow we found each other in the middle somewhere."

The two met in Denmark in the summer of 2000. Stærk was preparing her first fashion show after graduating and Christensen, who had co-founded LA-based fashion title *Nylon*, wanted her collection to appear in the magazine's next issue. They spent a day shooting at a summer house in northern Copenhagen, and Stærk remembers vividly how they immediately clicked. "It was each other's creativity that brought us so close so quickly," she says. "Things haven't changed since."

Over 20 years after their first encounter, Christensen finds herself at Stærk's New York apartment, camera at hand, ready to shoot portraits of her best friend for *Vogue Scandinavia*. "I see her as this mysterious silent movie character whenever I shoot her," she says. "That's the side of her that comes through when we work together."

For the occasion, Stærk fitted the apartment with a carefully-curated selection of elements that connect to her brand, including black Arne Jacobsen Ant chairs, a timeless Danish design classic, and a pair of dark red stilettos that were first exhibited at Etage Projects gallery in Copenhagen as part of a presentation of Stærk as a multi-talented designer. These are combined with furniture antiques passed down from her father and a horse riding helmet from her years living at the family farm, now decorated with one of her signature veil designs.

"Every piece represents a fragment of my career until now," she says. "Celebrating 20 years is an important achievement – and I would like this moment to reflect where I am in my life." 