

## 5. Design Proposals

Design proposals, including illustrations and specifications, were prepared between October 2003 and January 2004 by the author. These proposals were presented to the selected makers for their comments and amendments in February 2004. With consideration to these comments, some final amendments were made by the author before departure to Iceland, to begin the making process on the 28<sup>th</sup> March 2004. The design process for these proposals involved the author sketching, model making, building a full-size mock up, preparing outline and presentation drawings and writing specifications. Whilst reflecting on his experiences with all the makers during the interaction interviews, the author also looked at the sketches and listened to the audio diary recordings he had made during the interaction interviews, strengthening his memory of these experiences, while designing. The editing of the video and photographic material into DVD presentations also helped to remind the author of these experiences. The design proposals were influenced as much as possible by the selected makers via the author's interaction interview experiences. It was not the author's intention to produce designs to be made exactly as presented, but to begin the process and leave the final development of the designs to be done during their making in the company of the selected makers in their workshops.

During the design process, photographs of the drawings, models and mock-ups were uploaded onto the author's website<sup>32</sup> for the selected makers to comment upon, and these images can be seen on the, [multimedia disc 3](#), (file name 'website photographs of work in progress'). Only Fjolinir Hlynsson made a response to these photographs uploaded onto the website. He sent two e-mails, see Appendix 9 (page 229).

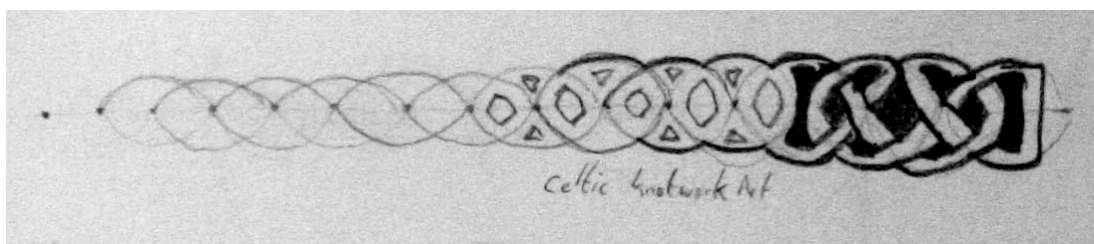
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<sup>32</sup> T.Hawson, 'See pictures of the first model making and sketching of first prototypes', *Work in progress*, [www.thomashawson.com](http://www.thomashawson.com), 2004 (accessed 4 April 2005).

## 5.1. Drawing

The drawings in the author's sketchbook provided on [multimedia disc 3](#), image files P1 to P8, show sketchbook entries made while carrying out the interaction interviews, and the image files P9 to P21 show sketch book entries made during the process of designing the table and chairs.

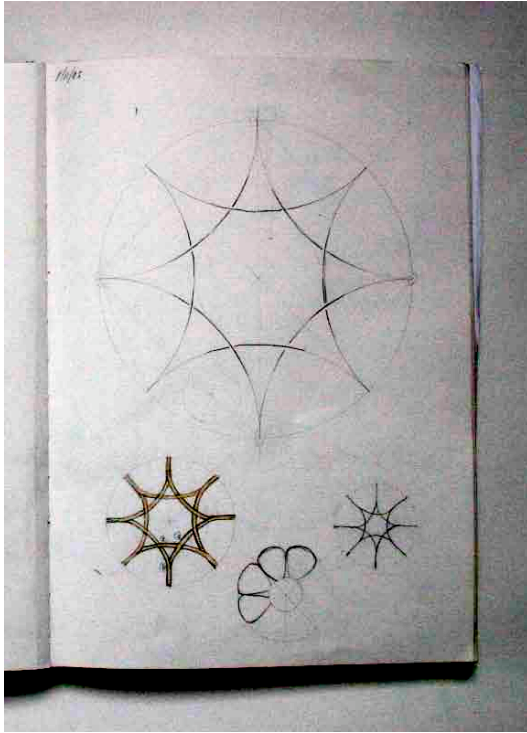
One example of an idea that is represented in the sketchbook and became part of the finished design is the applied tabletop pattern. The sketchbook drawing shown on image P8 (Fig. 18), Celtic knot work art, was drawn from George Bain's book<sup>33</sup>. Thóthur Tómassen, curator of the Skógur Folk Museum, lent this book to the author while at the museum between the interaction interviews in Iceland, July 2003. The Vikings used the same knot work patterns as the Celts for their decorative woodcarving, and the same construction methods for them. Later in the sketchbook image P13 (Fig. 19), the influence of this marking out technique can be seen in a design sketch for the tabletop, which was the pattern used on the finished table.



**Fig. 18 Celtic knot work art.**

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<sup>33</sup> G. Bain's, *Celtic art the methods of construction*, 24<sup>th</sup> edn, Constable, London, 2002, p. 28.



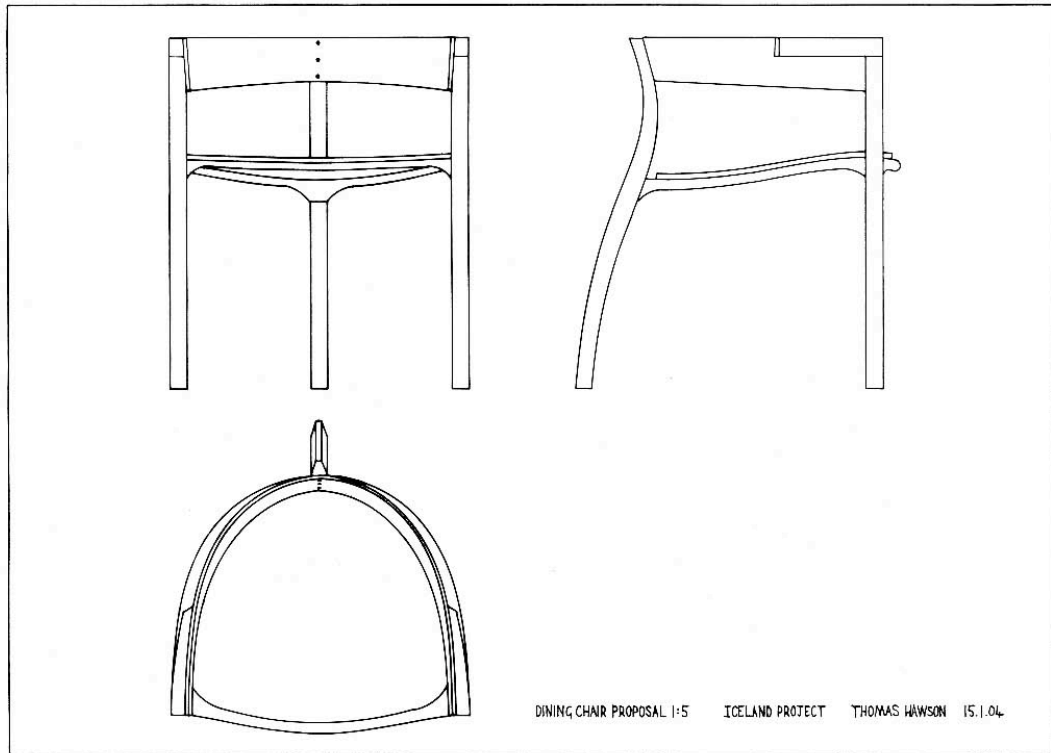
**Fig. 19 Design sketch for table top.**

## **5.2. Models and Mock-ups**

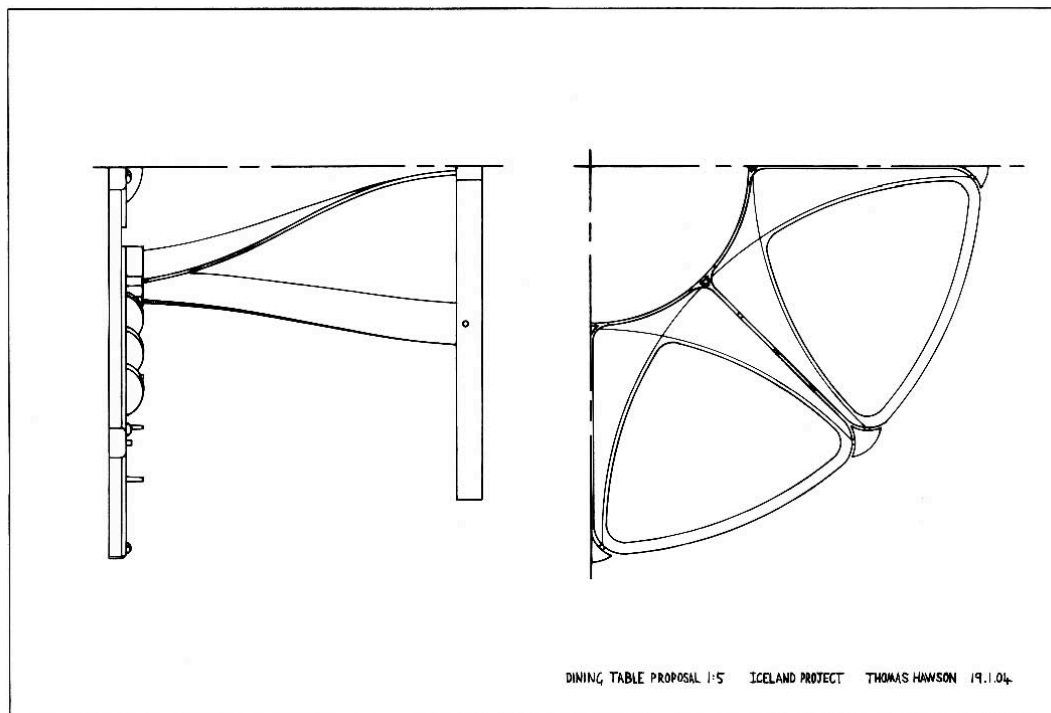
Models and full size mock-ups of dining table and chair designs were built at the author's home studio and Buckinghamshire Chiltern University College, Fine Craft workshops, between October 2003 and March 2004. These models and full size mock-ups were made as part of the design process along with sketching. The models and mock-ups can be seen on [multimedia disc 3](#).

## **5.3. Specifications**

Written specifications, outline and presentation drawings were finished in January 2004 ready for the selected makers to suggest amendments. The outline and presentation drawings are illustrated in Figs. 20, 21 and 22, on pages 85 and 86.



**Fig. 20 Dining chair outline proposal drawing.**



**Fig. 21 Dining table outline proposal drawing.**



**Fig. 22 Dining table and chair presentation drawing.**

The following written specifications give a basic description of the proposed design, suggested materials and methods of construction. Specific influences from the work of the makers on the design were given. These elements are only an indication of the selected maker's full influence on the design.

### **5.3.1. Dining Table Specifications**

The table top was to be constructed of eight separate wooden segments with a central disc in the middle, this central disc may have had the option of spinning round. The eight separate wooden segments of the tabletop were to be connected with eight aluminium castings. The castings would come to the surface of the table at the corners of each segment, and interconnect under the tabletop to make an under frame and provide connection points for the eight wooden steam bent legs. The eight legs were to be connected to a wooden cross frame on the floor. The surface of the tabletop could have had a shallow groove cut into it, to visually interconnect the aluminium details that

would come to the surface and the eight separate wooden segments. Place mats made of wool, of a rounded triangular shape, could fit between the interconnecting shallow grooves on each segment.

The composition of components that made up the table top were described by Fjólnir Hlynsson, having viewed the sketchbook images uploaded onto the author's website, as being reminiscent of Viking shield designs and also early Icelandic jewellery. The interconnecting lines carved into the tabletop are references to the marking-out lines used in the preparation of Celtic knot work, as used by Vikings as a decorative medium. The eight steam bent and twisted legs, are references to the boat building tradition. The square cross frame on the floor is left purposefully simple as if it were made from driftwood found that size.

The wooden elements of the table were to be made of oak. A 5 mm gap would be left between the table top components including the wooden segments, central disc and surface aluminium details. This gap would be open under the surface of the table so as not to trap food crumbs. The table top components would be connected by narrow fins of aluminium.

The aluminium components would be sand cast from a pattern. The pattern could have had a decorative surface texture that would be left on the visible parts of the finished components. Additional surface finishes and effects could be applied to the castings. The aluminium castings would be screwed to the underside of the wooden table top where appropriate slots would be made in the aluminium screw holes to allow for shrinkage and expansion in the wood. The eight legs would be steam bent on to jigs before assembly. These legs would connect to the aluminium castings by bolts ideally in a shallow socket. The legs would connect to the cross frame on the floor into a narrow socket and be secured with a loose dowel. The table was to be shipped as finished components that can be assembled by the distributor/agent or by the end user. The wool tablemats were to be felted and to sit on the surface of the table.

### 5.3.2. Dining Chair Specifications

The chair seat was to be made of an aluminium frame with a woven or plywood infill panel with a felt cover. The aluminium seat frame was to be attached to the aluminium back leg and the wooden front legs. The influence for this chair design was from Viking shipbuilding. The surface finish on the aluminium castings could have the appearance of hand carved wood. The steam bent curved arm/backrest could have lines or a profile scratched onto its surface along the inside edges to illustrate where the nails or screw fixings should go, this would be in keeping with Viking shipbuilding methods.

The profile and shapes in the aluminium seat frame are organic and curved, in contrast to the square section of the front legs. The crude square section of the front legs matched the square section of the table floor frame.

The aluminium seat frame and back leg were to be sand cast. A seat infill panel made of plywood was to be screwed into a rebate in the frame or a woven seat could have been threaded through holes in the seat frame. The seat frame was to be attached to the aluminium back leg and the wooden front legs with bolts. The felted wool seat was to be fastened to the seat to stop it sliding. The wooden patterns for the sand cast aluminium back leg and seat frame, were to have a fine hand carved surface finish (not to be sanded out) to be left as detail in the final sand cast components. The front legs and armrest were to be made of oak. The curved arm/backrest component was to be steam bent from oak and fixed into position with copper boat nails or screws. The chair was to be shipped as finished components that could be assembled by the distributor/agent or by the end user.

## 5.4. Selected Makers Amend the Design

The specifications including the written descriptions (chapter 5 sub headings 5.3.1 and 5.3.2, pages 86 and 88) and drawings, (Figs. 20, 21 and 22, pages 85 and 86), were posted to the selected makers for their comments and suggested amendments to the designs. A form for this purpose was prepared, and subsequently piloted with Halla Bogadottir, an established goldsmith from Reykjavik, Iceland, on 24.1.2004, at Hundalee Mill Farm. Below are the recommended amendments to the comments form after the pilot exercise and discussion with Halla on 26.1.2004.

These are as follows:

- The makers should be advised to look at the technical drawings and presentation drawing together, to get the best understanding of the design.
- A telephone conversation between the makers and the author would be useful during the form filling exercise. This would iron out any misunderstanding and provide for a better outcome. This telephone conversation should take place when the form filling exercise has been done, then the form should not be returned for five days to allow for further comments to be made.
- Ensure that the craft practitioners put their name and the date on all papers, a name and dateline should be provided for.

These comments were taken into account, the form amended and posted out. The amended form is provided in Appendix 10 design comments form, page 231. The telephone calls made were recorded and are provided on multimedia disc 6 telephone design amendments and parts of them have been added to the making a table and chairs DVD presentation, [multimedia disc 7](#).

### 5.4.1. Makers' Comments on Proposed Design

**Gretar Thorvaldsson** and **Geir Oddgeirsson** both chose not to fill in the form because they felt that the design discussions could not easily be made on the phone or on paper. They both agreed that it would be best to make them when the work was in their hands to be done in their workshops. Gretar made the following point on the phone to the author,

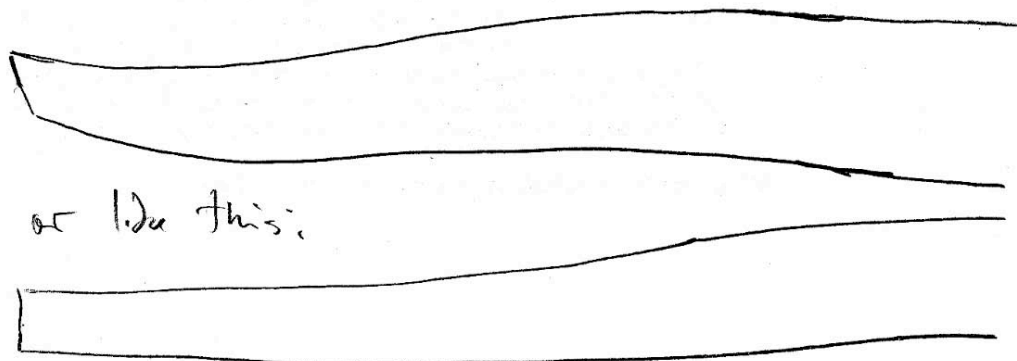
“I don't see the point to draw something down...it is best to do these things when you are working on it in your hands...”<sup>34</sup>

Geir made comments on the phone which are included on the **multimedia disc 6**. These comments concerned the complexity of the table and the suggestion that the table could be made much simpler by having a solid top.

**Birger Andersen's** wrote the following on his returned form:

Steaming: one hour per inch, from when the box is warm.

The shape of a plank on a Viking ship will be narrow towards the stern and wider at the middle like this (Fig. 23):



**Fig. 23 Birger Andersen's amendment sketch**

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<sup>34</sup> T. Hawson, 'Gretar Phone amendments 26.2.04', Multimedia disc 6 Telephone design amendments, 2003. (Audio CD)

The connection of the legs. We don't see this solution on Viking ships, or the few places where there is things like it, it is locked by itself. I think the loose dowel is perfect.

The steam bent wood, will not stay in shape when loosened from the jig, how much it has to be over bent is hard to say.

[Fjolinir Hlynsson](#) did not fill in the form itself but sent the following letter with his thoughts about the design.

Fjolinir Hlynsson

Mithhús

700 Egilsstathir

Iceland

9.2.2004

Dear Thomas.

I have been looking at the designs that you have sent me and I must say they are very clearly and nicely presented. You ask me for my opinion and critic on this design and I will give that to you, but before I start writing negative and form-altering things. I would like to state that the basic design is good.

However there are things that I would like to mention:

The table:

I like the table top, it is very nice. The round-cornered triangles are very interesting, and link the chair a little bit better to the table.

I would definitely get rid of the cross underneath the steam bent legs (Fig. 25, page 92) and strongly consider to get rid of the steam bent legs also. It is way too heavy in context to the fine detailed tabletop. You have made a full size "mock-up" of another kind that is much better, and also a photography set up of a 8 legged and 4 legged version (Fig. 24, page 92). The 4 legged is simple and good. I would like to see some more of that or the first mock-up type. I can imagine that if the arches on the table legs were altered a bit and moved more in line with the chair back arch it would be very good. I would also consider the number of table legs, it looks a bit crowded under the table, maybe 4 would be enough?



**Fig. 24 Eight leg table**

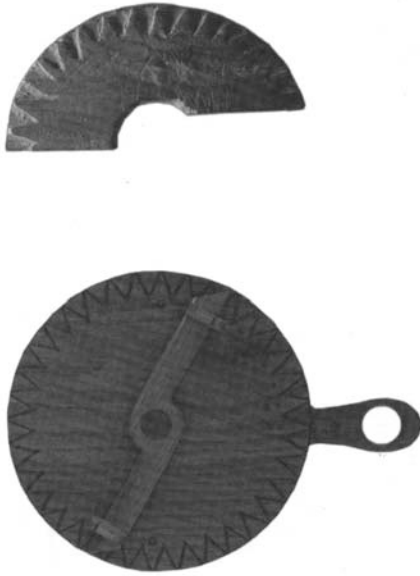
The design I like more (and also the 4 legged photography set up version)



**Fig. 25 Steam bent leg table**

I don't know what you said to Dr Simon Thorne and Prof. Polly Binns, and I miss that. Maybe you gave reasons for various elements in the design – I don't know. I do however **think** that you were expressing the drawn – up lines in the table top in those steam bent legs, and extending a eight segment design down into a four point foundation. Right? It is good thinking but it somehow loses connection to the tabletop. It is way too crazy – and we want calm, we have got the crazy part in the tabletop. They bend in two arches (and one could argue that the back of the chair did that too), but also twist after the length of the leg – due to the round form. Too many – too crazy, baroque, I get a seaweed feeling (I'm not sure if I spelled that right, but it is basically a plant that grows in the sea). I also think that you have to have the table foundations cast in aluminium, not wood. If you look at the watercolour picture you sent me, you will see unbalanced the materials are between the chair and the table. It is also likely that you have to have "shoes" or "boots" from wood or you will again unbalance it. Think about this.

Here is the “Húsasnotra” that Vikings used to navigate across the ocean, and tabletop reminded me of.



**Fig. 26 Viking navigation aid**

At last: I don't vote for a spinning disc in the middle, there is no need for it in this design (Fig. 26, same as Fig. 35, page 230).

The chair:



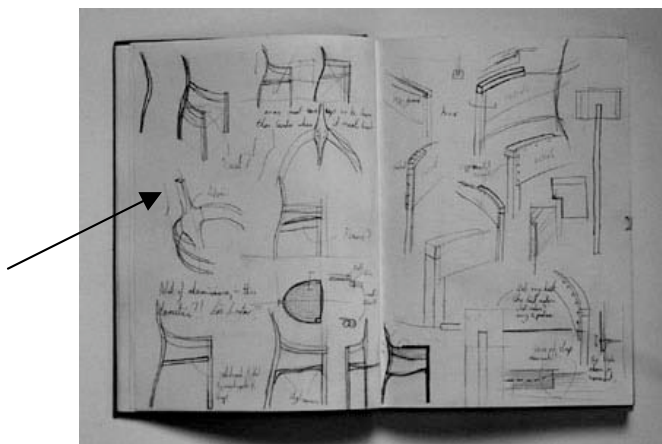
**Fig. 27 Model chair**

This is a photo from the internet web page – and the one I originally saw.

At that point I did not see any aluminium, now that I do, it changes the design and opens up the need for a dialog between the two materials.

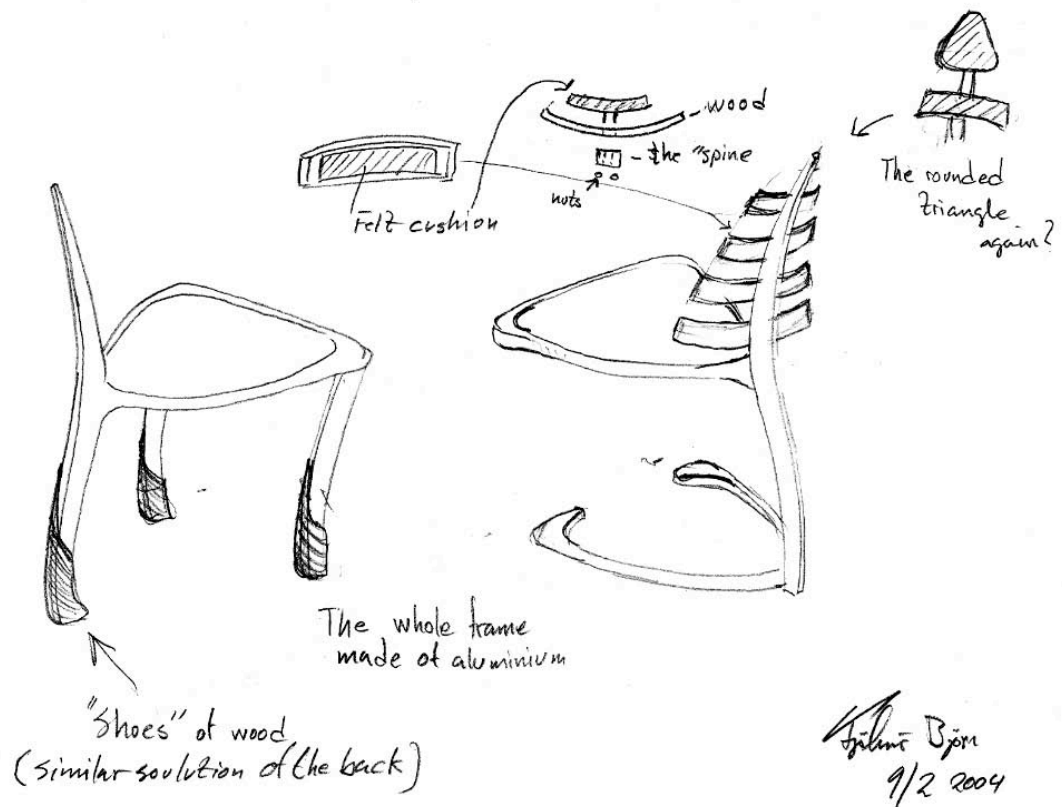
In the watercolour picture you have expressed the aluminium in the back and in the seat. In this dialog the “organic” lines up with the aluminium and now I get this feeling that the front legs and back are from another design.

There is one thing that I would definitely do, ***extend the back/leg above the level of the back/armrest (Fig. 28).***



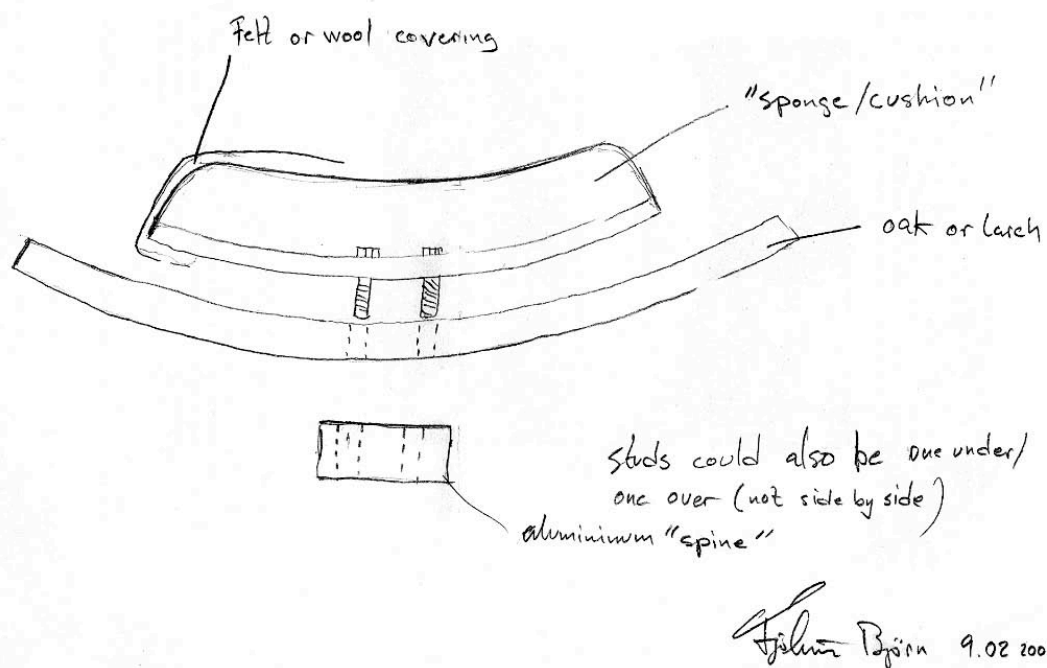
**Fig. 28 Chair sketches**

You have drawn this yourself, and some elements are useful here. I feel you have to move some “organic” over to the wood, or change this balance somehow. The back arch and the three legs format have to stay no matter what, they are the essence and the brilliance of the design. I have mentioned to you before that I feel ships, and I feel bones and skeletons when I look at this. Both are good. Viking ships were just boards of wood that covered a skeleton. Ribs are in the left page of your sketchbook, or you can also see a ship structure, and that might be something to think about. Maybe it is possible to think of the back arch as a spine that has steam bent fine wood arches attached to it, and loose the armrest? Just a thought, but I’ll throw in a sketch (Fig. 29, page 95).



**Fig. 29 Fjølner's chair sketch**

When I first glanced at the watercolour drawing I saw the round cornered triangles, and I saw them mirrored in the seat. But now I have looked at the technical drawings and I realise that it is not so. Is this something to consider? Can the felt in the seat mirror this form? Again just a thought. I have also seen a version (in my mind) of a table and chair where this felt extends the edge and slopes off like a tablecloth does. Maybe this could be an option? Could be removed and washed?



**Fig. 30 Fjölur's chair detail sketch**

### Summary

In few words:

- The cross and the steam bent legs away
- Replace with the other mock-up design, but made of aluminium
- Think about "shoes" or "boots" of wood
- Consider 4 legged photographed set up version
- Change the armrest /front leg to try to match the aluminium better - it is too different

Sincerely yours

Fjölur Björn Hlynsson, Sculptor

09.02.2004

Ása Hatun wrote the following on her form.

Torshaven 22.3.04

Hi Thomas

I think that the new table design is very elegant – I suppose that the legs are sterns of a Viking-boat?

Have you dropped the table-and-chair mats/covers? They are not appropriate now, are they? But the chair may need something soft and warm. But you tell me about further plans.

I choose to make all my comments together.

About the proposal of table and chairs:

I find that felted material will be appropriate material for table-mats and chair-seats.

The design for both can very well match in colour and shape. The tablemats, of course, have to be thinner, but not thinner than they can keep structure and firm. They also have to be easily washable.

The mats for the chairs must be about 4-6 times thicker, hard felted and strong. This will be hard work as handicraft, but will be a fine option to go with this furniture.

The wool to be used for the purpose could be mixed coat and bottom wool, Faroese or Icelandic, in natural shades from white to grey shades, light to dark brown shades.

I find this proposed design very elegant and beautiful. I can easily imagine the legs as sterns of a Viking-boat. Could the lines from the legs (the boards of the boat) faintly be seen in the chair or on the table top? I really have no idea about architecture other than what I feel, so you may not care about what I say.

I wonder if felted mats and seats are appropriate to this version of furniture?

But you tell me what you want me to do, and I will do my best.

As to how to fasten the seats to the chair, it is possible to felted strings in between the layers of wool, so that the seat can be tied to the legs of the chair.

About design; I like the idea of the runes, but also floating patterns that the wool creates can be interesting. You tell me.

Asa

Thorhildur Thorgeirsdottir wrote the following replies on her form:

The dining table top at least on the drawing proposal is too thin compared to the cross frame.

I like it as it is. It reminds me of the sun – mythology – original..

In answer to the following question: What surface finish could be applied to the surface of the castings? Thorhildur wrote:

We will have to see at the aluminium foundry.

In answer to the following question to Thorhildur on the form: Does the pattern the table top components make, remind you of patterns in early Icelandic jewellery? Thorhildur wrote:

Yes the breast brooches from the first Icelandic – women – (Vikings)

Regarding the dining chair Thorhildur wrote:

I like shape/form of the dining chair the triangular shape of the aluminium casting reminds me of a whale bone, the spine and the ribs, (it was used back in the early days as a “chair”), it is still possible to find them in some gardens here in Iceland as a garden decoration.

The surface finish – we will have to see and experiment about that at the aluminium factory. It is possible to get a special piece to put in the polishing machine, with “loose nails” I will see about that. The finish will be a bit hammered?

We will have to think about when this chair goes to mass production that the one aluminium leg has to get some “ending” so it won’t harm the floor

The comments made by the makers in writing and by phone ([multimedia disc 6](#), telephone design amendments, from 25.2.03 to 27.2.03) can be summed up as below.

- The chair was generally liked.
- The table was too complex in construction.
- The pattern on the table top was liked but not the cross on the floor.
- The work needed to be developed in the workshops of the makers with experimentation during the making process.

Before leaving for Iceland to make the table and chairs the author began sketching a new design for the table under-frame and legs, and for a table with a solid top. A new idea for the table developed in the author's sketchbook (Figs. 31 and 32).

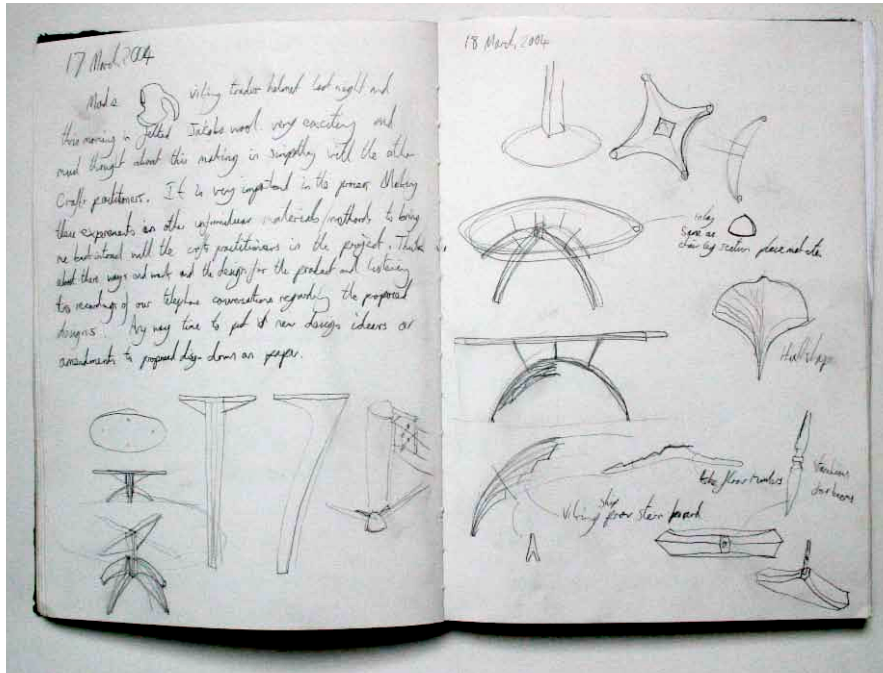


Fig. 31 New table legs sketch

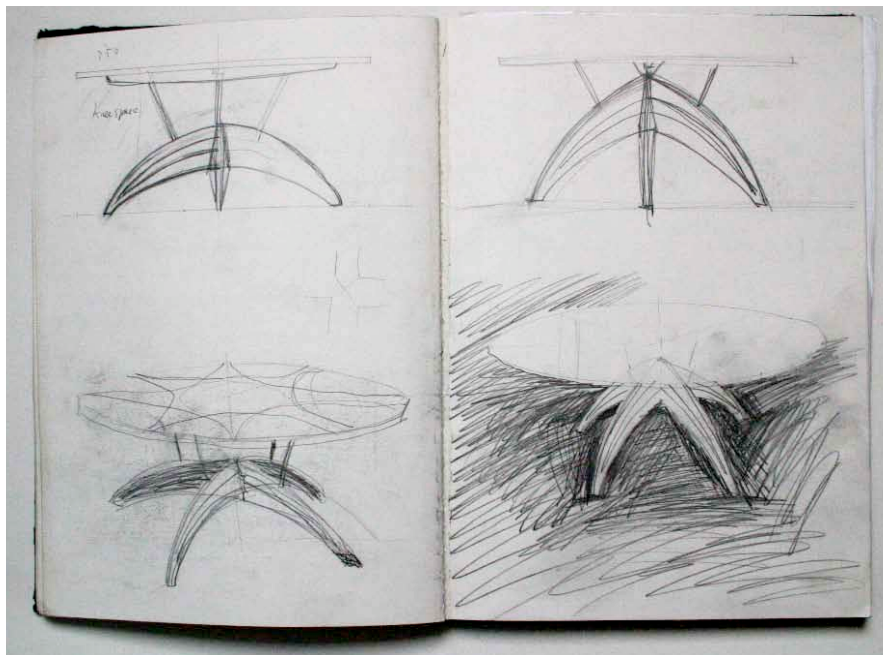


Fig. 32 New table legs sketch 2

This new leg design is an interpretation of the stern posts from a Viking ship, to be cast in aluminium. A model was also made of these new legs (Fig. 33).



**Fig. 33 New table legs model**

*1:5 scale model in wood*