

# perfect finnish

Emerging from the **great heritage** of the founders of Finnish modernism, the next wave of young designers in **Finland** is gaining **international fame**.

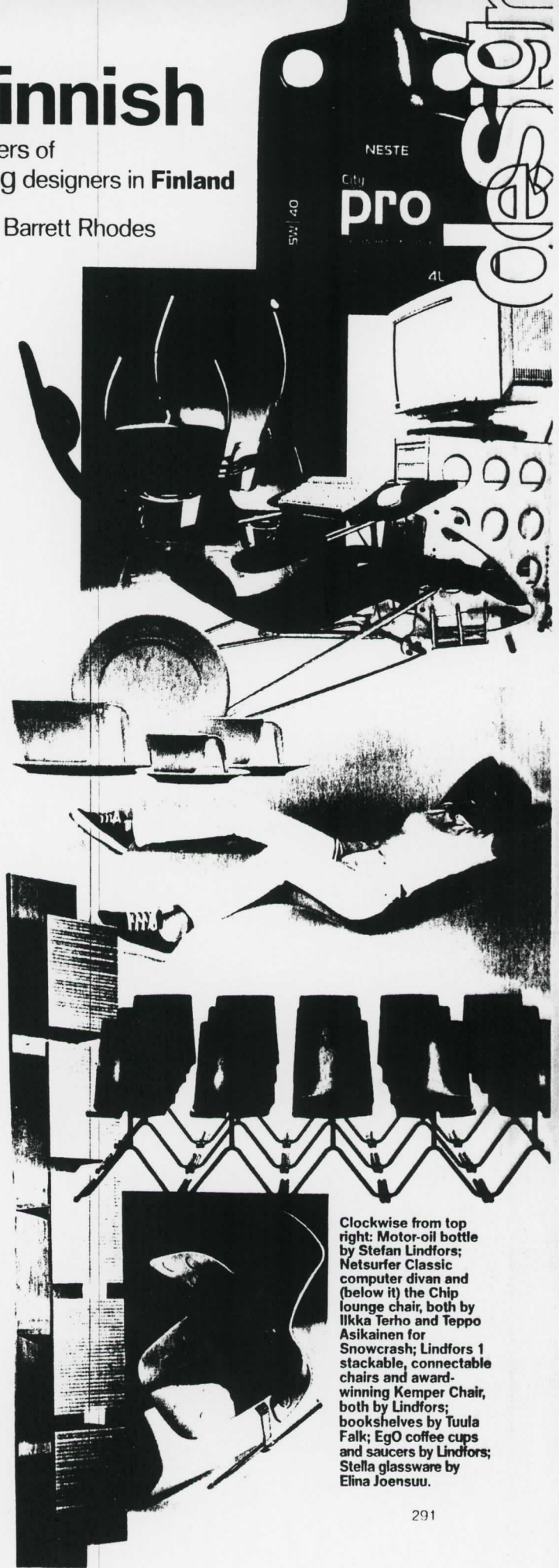
By Melissa Barrett Rhodes

"Designs for a virtual living room from the land of snow and cellular phones" is the motto of Snowcrash, a collective of four young furniture and architectural interior designers based in Helsinki, Finland. Its members, Ilkka Terho, 30, Teppo Asikainen, 29, Timo Salli, 34, and Ilkka Suppanen, 29, have banded together to design clever, futuristic furniture, which has just been snapped up by such manufacturers as the Italian giant Cappellini. From the warped, snowboardlike Chip lounge chair to the Netsurfer, a computer station for navigating cyberspace comprising elements of a motorcycle and a surfboard, Snowcrash designs speak to a high-tech, millennial youth culture.

In the past few years, there has been a resurgence of inventive Finnish design, the likes of which the country hasn't enjoyed since the great modernists of the '30s, '40s and '50s redefined the national design aesthetic: Legendary masters like architects Alvar Aalto and Eero Saarinen and glassmaker Kaj Franck pioneered the fluid, organic designs for which 20th century Finland has become known. The emergence of the country's new talents coincides with the 80th anniversary of Finland's independence from Russia, an event that will bring a host of celebrations—from music and dance to architecture and design exhibits—to an international audience. Among the many events, in New York the Museum of Modern Art is putting on a centennial retrospective of the sublime architecture, furniture and glassware of Aalto (through May 19), while the Pratt Institute will show his lighting fixtures and lamps (through April 22). Glassware, ceramics, furniture, and industrial designs dating from important Finnish midcentury modernists up through contemporary designers are also on view at the Bard Graduate Center (through June 30).

Included in Bard's exhibit is the work of 35-year-old Stefan Lindfors, a renowned sculptor who has lately branched out into architectural interiors and product design ranging from furniture and tableware to computer monitors and motor-oil bottles. "I love the challenge of designing for industry," says Lindfors, "because the object, after going through the sausage machine of production, must still retain its soul." Most known for his cocoonlike translucent fiberglass sculptures, Lindfors has recently mounted installations at Manhattan's Gershwin and Mercer hotels and is currently in negotiations to create interiors for two New York restaurants. Tuula Falk, 39, a Finn working in Stockholm, has enjoyed similar international success with her graceful, handmade wood furniture that pays tribute to Finland's tradition of fine craftsmanship. At 24, Elina Joensuu is still a student in Rauma, Finland, but her sleek *Stella* line of glassware for Iittala has already become a design classic.

Although there is a great respect for those who first forged the country's modernist movement, many of Finland's newcomers now feel a need to progress beyond that heritage. "Earlier this century, Finland produced a few very strong designers within a period of only 20 to 30 years," says Lindfors. "It's taken a long time to break away from that identity." Snowcrash's Terho agrees: "For us, it is important not to hide behind history, but to have something to say to people today." ■



Clockwise from top right: Motor-oil bottle by Stefan Lindfors; Netsurfer Classic computer divan and (below it) the Chip lounge chair, both by Ilkka Terho and Teppo Asikainen for Snowcrash; Lindfors 1 stackable, connectable chairs and award-winning Kemper Chair, both by Lindfors; bookshelves by Tuula Falk; EgO coffee cups and saucers by Lindfors; Stella glassware by Elina Joensuu.