



*elementa*

Oslo, 2016

*Elementa* is a Norwegian maker of ideas and furniture for work.  
From our point of view, today's workspace seems an outdated artefact.  
A remnant of the industrial age.  
More importantly it is out of touch with the very essence of how we  
function and thrive as human beings,  
physically and mentally.  
Elementa's goal is to create a much-needed platform for new  
Scandinavian design seeking to address urgent,  
real life issues of work and play.

In our time, we find ourselves in the curious predicament where our  
economies and ecosystems seem more uncertain than ever  
- and at the same time we see a boom in technical  
innovation unparalleled in history.  
The dizzyingly rapid development of new technologies is driving  
the change in how we work more than furniture or our physical  
surroundings ever can.

Instead of leaning on the momentum of the latest development in  
tech,  
we believe there are interesting discoveries to be made by studying our  
ages old human bodies and souls with fresh eyes.  
It's so easy to get distracted away from an obvious, yet elusive fact:  
*Our generation is free to recreate from scratch the realities of work,  
design and money  
- as well as our relations to each other,  
nature and ecology.*

At Elementa we believe there are essential design lessons to be learned  
in the study of the *workday*.  
What is work anyway?  
Value creation?  
If so, when do we actually create value for living beings, the ecosystem  
or ourselves?  
When do we decrease values while at work?

Elementa explores how design can play a role in renewing the tactile  
and conceptual framework of the workday,  
as we advance into a future that is infinitely  
stranger than fiction.





1- Attention  
Creates  
Universes

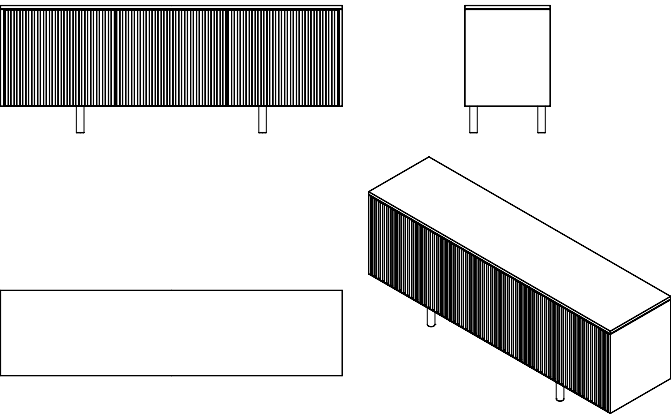
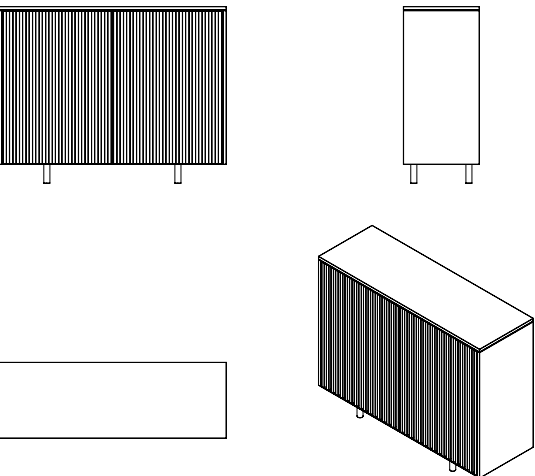
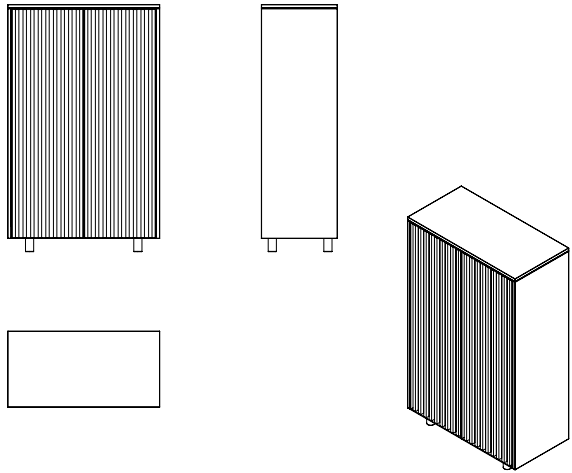
What you pay attention to is what creates your inner world – and this in turn, defines your contribution to the world as a whole.

In today's world one of the most valued commodities seems to be attention - and it has become exceedingly profitable to capitalize on its scarcity. Even as the methods used to shape our precious nerve endings and direct our hands and hearts are turning more subtle, few of us have trained our minds to focus our thoughts according to our own deeper values and motivations.

When addressing the institutions of *news reporting*, many years prior to the digital revolution, Buckminster Fuller concluded: *"Probably our most polluted resource is the tactical information to which humanity spontaneously reflexes"*. In our muddled stream of information, we are unable to see and react to the real state of affairs – in ourselves and on this planet. Our true reflexes are paralyzed by information overload.

Focused attention requires time, silence and spaciousness to develop. In addition we'll have to muster the will and gain the ability to reject the majority of information that occupies our perception at any time. With focused attention, we can accomplish anything. Including making a more sensible world.

**How do we create workspaces that allow us to cultivate our abilities to focus our minds?**



dB tall cabinet: 80 x 40 x H120cm  
dB wide cabinet: 120 x 40 x H90cm  
dB low sideboard: 180 x 45 x H60cm



dB silent cabinets  
Designed by StokkeAustad

Elementa dB is a series of storage units with fronts doubling as sound absorbents.

The doors are made from metal frames with inlays of thick wool felt kept in place by vertical slats in solid oak. The carcass is made in white, light grey and anthracite melamine or oak veneer. You can choose between two different bases – one in solid oak – and a lighter version in lacquered metal.

There are a lot of possible colour combinations with the carcass, the slats, the felt and the base. Check [www.elementa.no](http://www.elementa.no) for current availability. If you wish to have made a bespoke version for a project, get in touch with us.





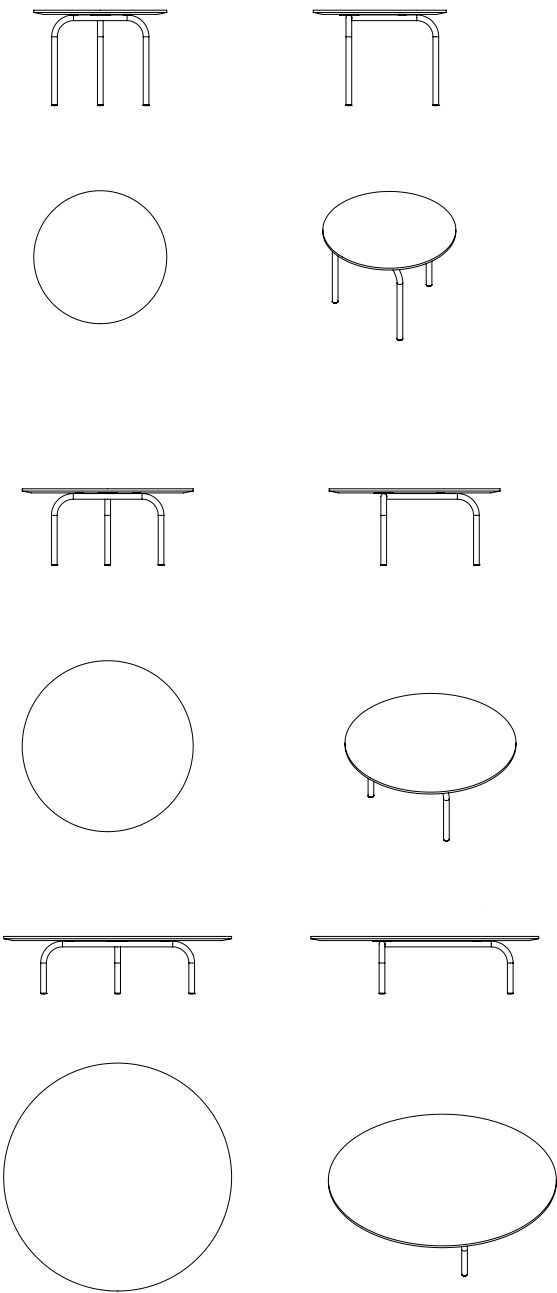
ON table landscape  
Designed by StokkeAustad

Elementa ON is a series of lounge tables based on the simplest possible shape, the circle.

The 3 different tabletops are generously proportioned and made in oak veneer, lacquered natural, white, red or black, keeping visible the natural grain and warmth of the wood. The three-legged tubular base gives the tables a floating, minimal character and allows tables of different sizes and height to be placed above each other to produce an elegant landscape of round shapes.

The name ON could relate to an ON button. Consider it a reminder that you are free to turn OFF your devices and have a rest in the lounge. ON is also the Egyptian name of ancient Heliopolis - the city of the Sun. (By the way, *Elementa* is the Latin name of the Greek-Egyptian mathematician Euclid’s monumental and revolutionary treatise on geometry.)

ON high lounge table: Ø70 x H50cm  
ON medium lounge table: Ø90 x H40cm  
ON low lounge table: Ø120 x H30cm



<sup>2</sup> Be kind  
whenever possible.  
(It is always possible)

A term like *kindness* may seem a bit uncanny when applied to the world of design, work and business. It's easy to dismiss it as something belonging to a personal sphere altogether. We are also, often wisely, suspicious when corporations are acting too "friendly" towards us and other living beings. After all every business endeavor is a battle at its core. Or is it really?

The Internet and social media have expanded massively our possibilities for interaction with each other. However, the courteousness and kindness naturally embedded in our psyche often disappear behind the cloak of internet anonymity, giving rise to the cruel and callous language that flourishes ever more all over the Net.

When you allow people to meet in flesh and do something essentially human together, like making something or sharing a meal, often our manners will tend towards kindness, despite any unfavorable preconceptions we may have had of the other. Physical meetings do still carry profound qualities still impossible to reproduce in digital communication.

Kindness is not something that can be easily coded into a culture (just ask a politician), even less so programmed into an object or a piece of software. It is a deeply personal, responsive phenomenon that takes place in a space between vulnerable living beings.

The basis for the field of economy as we know it is the maximization of monetary profit. This, along with specific readings of evolutionary biology has implied an understanding of the human being as a primarily egoistical being, unable to act selflessly without a hidden cause. Today, new models of business and psychology are challenging this dogmatic view.

In a transparent world, where it is impossible to hide away ones less desirable activities for long, it is becoming increasingly clear that only integrity is going to count. Institutions and business are, after all, made of people coming together to produce value.

In the field of design, one very obvious act of kindness is to create non-toxic objects that harm nobody, including the jungle and its animals. However, the possibilities of design can take us way beyond that which really should be self-evident. To strive to be kind, privately and professionally, is not a matter of theorizing about our biological wiring or economical models. It represents an ongoing process of adventurous, imaginative acts of choice, which may sometimes come at the price of having to break with consensus and conformity.

**How can design help us awaken to the fact that we are part of an infinitely complicated, incredibly beautiful but still vulnerable eco-system of living beings?**



3·The Internet of No Things

The digital work revolution could well have realized our dreams of more time for our favourite activities, but we spend as much time at work as ever. Moreover we allow work to follow us into our private spheres in ever more intimate ways.

Most people would love to work less for money, and spend more time connecting to what matters for them. Yet, even without debate we choose collectively to structure our desires and economies in ways that allow us to maximize our consumption and thus the length of our workdays.

The notion of work as a curse originates from Adam's punishment in Genesis, to have to *eat the bread by the sweat of his brow* for Eve's and his mischievous eating from the Tree of Knowledge. In today's Scandinavia, Eve is actively taking part in Adams punishment, while keeping her original curse of giving birth in severe pain.

The promises of new technology include an easier life, more effective work and better health. Curiously it tends to deliver excellently on all points. The price however, seems inevitably to be less *spaciousness* in our lives. Being connected and at all times creates often a false sense of urgency in us - of having to relate and reply to our highly customized digital representation of the world.

If the prophets are right, sensors, chips, counters may soon overrun the hegemony of laptops and phones as our main gateways to the Internet. Interfaces will be embedded everywhere - including our workspaces and our bodies. The notion of the *Internet of things* is as exciting and adventurous as it is potentially catastrophic for privacy and our ability to relate to the world, each other and other living beings.

**How can design help us remain present with the unfolding of technology, while still securing our privacy and the option to disconnect at will?**



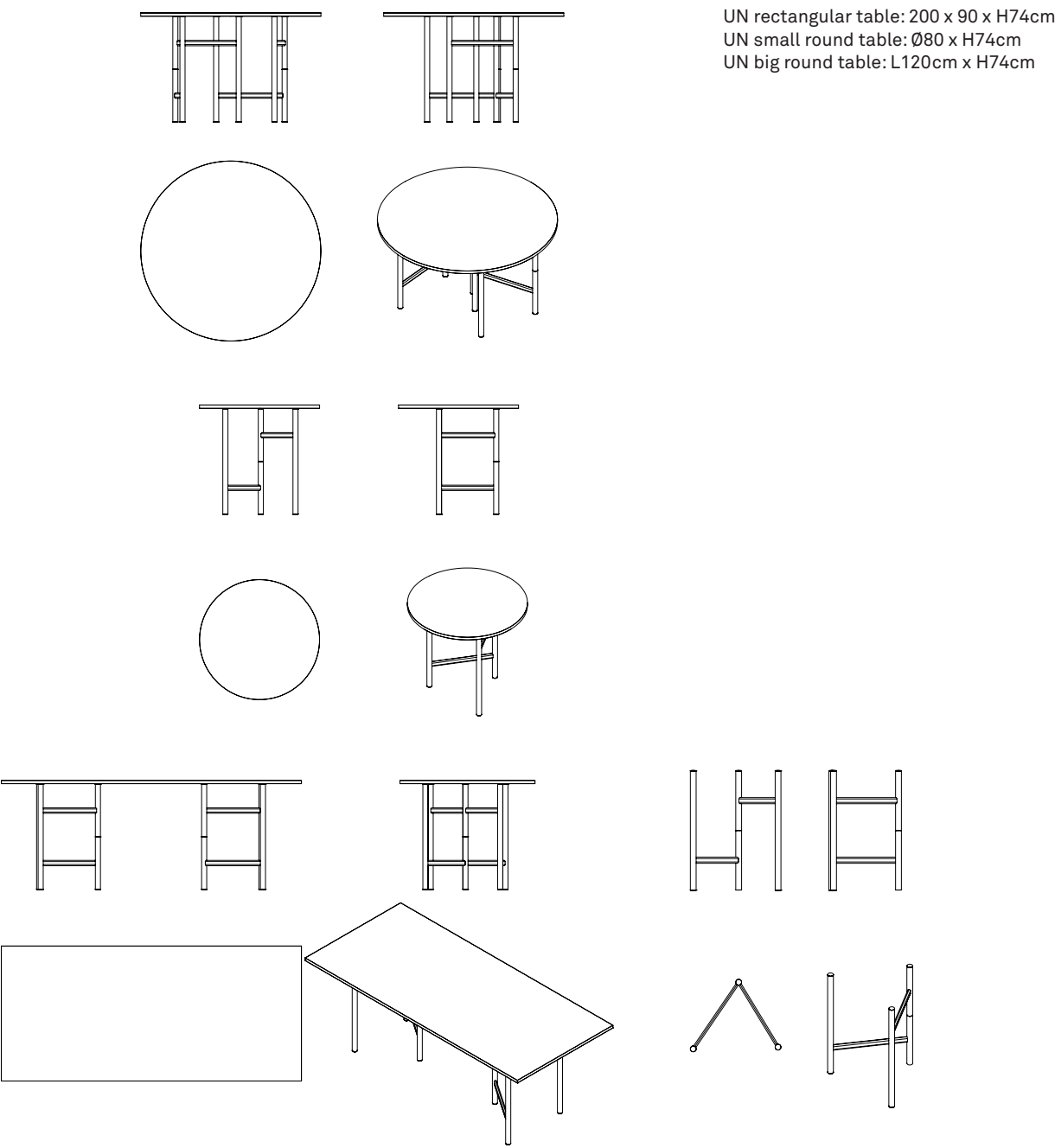
UN trestle table system  
Designed by StokkeAustad

An elegant minimalist table system in its own right, the UN trestle base is quite a multifaceted invention with many different uses.

Almost as simple and self-evident to be called an archetype, the trestles may be used for tabletops of almost any shape. The trestle folds out to accommodate various depths and you can add and angle as many trestles you need for support. It also folds in and stacks away very easily.

We make the UN trestles in black or white lacquered steel – or for projects – lacquered in any colour you like. Tabletops are made in laminate, linoleum or oak veneer.

The name UN may stand for UNiversal, which would be a telling name for the product. It could also point to the terms like UNbound, UNcluttered or UNrivaled. Maybe even UNlimited.







Elementas headquarters are situated in the historic quarter Prinds Augusts Minde in central Oslo. Together with several other companies working within ecology and design we inhabit the disused church room on the top floor of a workhouse completed by Architect Christian Grosch in 1833.

On the other floors we have excellent neighbours in, amongst others, Klubben - the Norwegian Designers Union. There are no elevators, and the floors and walls are as quirky and uneven as you can imagine.

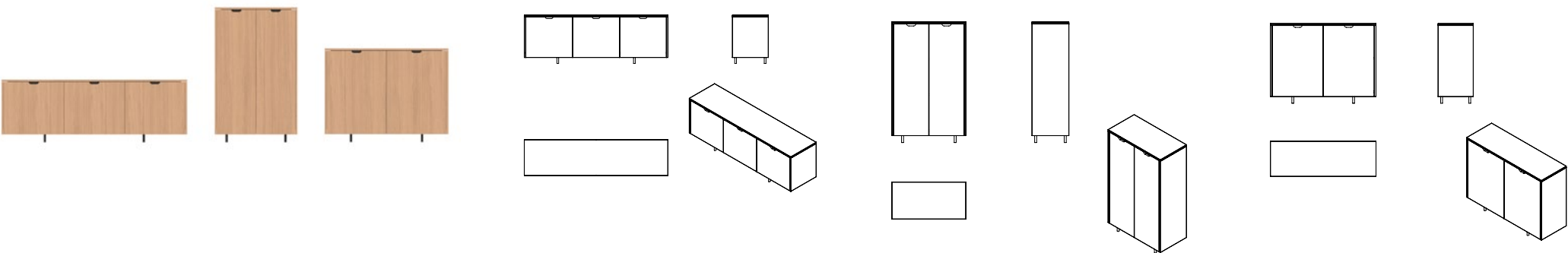
We eat a vegetarian lunch meal at 12. Do call us if you are in town and would like to share a simple meal organized by ourselves, our friends at Growlab, Foodstudio or designer Hallgeir Hornstvedt.

The film about the Mechanical Ballerina was shot by the artist group "O" during spring 2015 in the Church of Elementa. The characters appearing in the various Elementa publications are based on their neo-alchemical symbol system









O3 tall cabinet: 80 x 40 x H120cm  
O3 wide cabinet: 120 x 40 x H90cm  
O3 low sideboard: 180 x 45 x H60cm

O3 storage  
Designed by StokkeAustad

E4 electrical desk:  
140 x 80 x H71-121cm  
160 x 80 x H71-121cm

Even in a masterfully organized paperless office space, clear surfaces will mysteriously attract *stuff*. StokkeAustad’s cabinet series O3 is built with the same frame as the dB Silent cabinets, but without the magical sound-absorbing doors. They are plainly very elegant office cabinets with room for lots of your gear, tools, toys, snacks, literature and paperwork.

As a standard product we make the three different O3 units in white, light grey or dark grey melamine or in oak veneer. The doors are even available in linoleum. The metal feet can be lacquered in a colour similar to the carcasses giving either a monochrome or a contrast-coloured cabinet.



E4 height adjustable desk

Ideally we should not have to stay so long at our desks as to want to be standing while working. But we do so, even ourselves, and when in the mindful corner we actually use the electrical adjustment a lot.

E4 is a height adjustable table with some extra elegant features. An unbeatable Danish made motor by Linak quietly powers it. Its telescopic frame is turned upside down, so it remains super stable and retains stability and with a expression its aesthetics even when elevated.

The E4 table is available with a black or white lacquered base – and with a desktop in white laminate or in black linoleum with lacquered chamfered edges.

There is also a specially made cable door in metal, a tray to care for cables and a specially designed slim pen-drawer to fasten under the desk.



4. The imperative of Imagination

“It is easier to imagine the end of the world than an end to capitalism”. Elementa believes the unfettered imagination to be hugely important for our ability to cope with the challenges of today.

Imagination is not information, neither is it equal to the consumption of fantasy in the form of entertainment. Imagination lies at the core of our perception of reality, and is perhaps one of our mental faculties most difficult to explain, along with the mystery of consciousness itself.

Memory and imagination are closely linked. With all information accessible at any time, we are changing the very neural structure of our minds. As a result, our knowledge of the world may be comprehensive, yet often shallow. Our ability for deep understanding requires an essential element of imagination, which may be a threatened faculty these days. The journalist Jason Louve has likened what he calls the *desertification of imagination* to the disaster of real life deforestation.

Before the invention of printing, books were incredibly expensive, rare and heavy. To be able to appropriate knowledge, intellectuals would practice the now forgotten *Art of Memory*. In carefully visualized sequences of inner halls, called *Memory Palaces*, they would create images representing the information of the book. To recall the information they would mentally walk through the rooms and reconstruct the coded information easily and with high precision. The ability to internalize a great array of advanced and perhaps contrasting ideas, showed to be a fertile ground for the imagination, as can be explored in the artistic heritage of the renaissance when use of the technique was at its peak.

Our present day workstations can be likened to the memory palaces of the past, potentially superfueled by incredible tools and splendid interior design. At Elementa we are convinced it may be tremendously fruitful to give as much effort to exploring the subtler dimensions of our *inner imaginative space* as we do to the design of our tactile and digital dimensions in office design.

**What would a workspace that catered for imagination look like?**



5. The path leads into the jungle

Humanity is now way beyond having *irreversibly* changed nature. Chances are, sooner or later – nature may succeed in “changing us back into itself”. It is easy to imagine that this could happen in the form of a disaster where humanity takes a lot of other species with us down the drain (as the script goes). Perhaps it is less easy, but a lot more interesting to imagine ourselves setting out to learn and to realign our culture according to the inner workings of our ecosystem.

A common trap when thinking of nature and culture, is the notion that there is an inherent disunion between the two. As secularized protestants, we Norwegians have a tendency to think of technology as an alien phenomenon to nature, a sort of disobedience. Yet, transgression seems to be right at the core of the human being, along with our will to evolve, and to seek the impossible. In other words, it’s absolutely *natural* to want to take a bite of whatever forbidden fruit is laid before us, whether it’s wise to do so or not.

At Elementa we are convinced that our conscious efforts towards sustainability in design cannot arise from a guilty conscience. The project must be rooted in an imaginative, vital impulse to create solutions and to explore the infinite universe, not in a half-hearted wish to minimize the bottomless damage of previous generations.

If our notion that humanity are to “be changed back to nature” makes sense on a level – we would much rather go upright into the jungle to learn, than being dragged in – “in later days, in uglier ways.”

How can we renew the engagement of the Scandinavian design tradition with nature? Which new collaborations can we propose through design to make new paths towards sustainability?

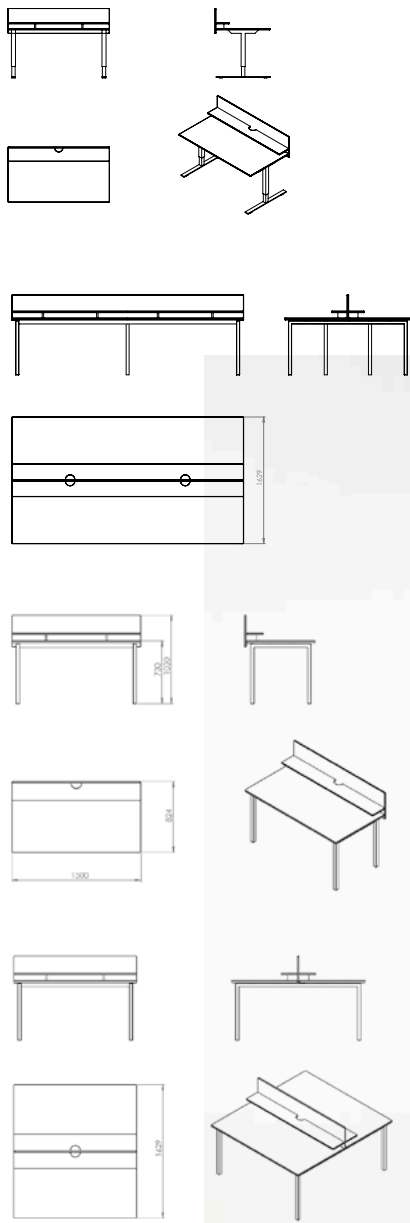


The UT project

Elementa UT is a project engaging Scandinavian designers to make products and strategies to make it easier to live and work with plants. First up is Norwegian designer Hallgeir Homstvedt.

To be physically close to greenery can have a pretty tremendous effect on us humans. For the scientifically inclined, there are documented health benefits of certain plants, like cleaner air. The more intangible psychological effects of actually taking part in a miraculous event like the growing, blooming and even withering of a living plant, may lead to increased harmony, a more relaxed, generous atmosphere. Put plainly, it may give you a better life.

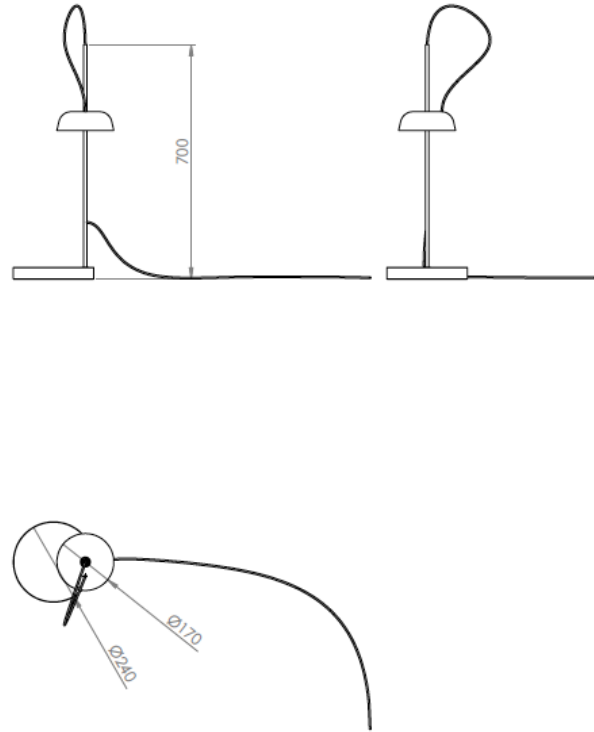
By the way, research shows that people who touch soil with their hands daily report to be happier than those who don’t do so.



UT desk  
Designed by Hallgeir Homstvedt

The UT desk is a redesign of the classic Elementa U1 table which is really an archetype of a modern desk – but with an added shelf designed for plants. The desktop and shelf is made in birch veneer with a nice soft desktop linoleum from Forbo on top.

The system is delivered as a single desk – or as a shared bench for 2 or 4 people (and a whole bunch of plants). We can even make it with a height-adjustable T-foot should you want to enjoy your plants both while sitting and standing.



GL growlight  
Proposal designed by Hallgeir Homstvedt

The unending winter season can be pretty black in Scandinavia, and a lot of plants will be happy to get some extra light whether in the office or at home. Hallgeir Homstvedt’s Growlight is a lamp that can be put right into the soil of any plant in need of special love. The shade can be easily adjusted in height and angled with a clever magnetic solution. There is also an elegant version of GL with a marble base with room for your favourite flowerpot.





Photo: Ann Holmgren  
and Frode Sandbech (Growlight)  
Concept: Elementa + ^O^  
Design: Erik Johan Worsøe Eriksen

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