



Company Name

Birki

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Contact Person

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Birki restaurant is a new restaurant based in the fishing village of Höfn in Hornafjörður, Iceland

The restaurant is owned and run by a young couple, **Einar Birkir Bjarnason** and **Þórhildur Kristinsdóttir**.

Einar Birkir (b. 1996) is born on a sheep farm close to Höfn, he lived there until he moved to the capital area to get further education. He graduated as a certified chef in December 2020.

Þórhildur (b. 1995) is born and raised in the capital area and has not lived in Höfn until now. But her mother's side of the family is from Höfn. Þórhildur is studying at the University of Iceland for a teacher's degree.

Birki restaurant focuses on offering seasonal menu made from Icelandic and local ingredients in a nice and stylish surroundings.



WHAT WAS THE TRIGGER FOR YOUR BUSINESS OR ENTREPRENEURIAL IDEA?



Pórhildur: We both knew that Einar wanted to, eventually, run his own restaurant but being 26 and 25 it was very much like a future thing for us. We thought maybe in 10 years because we needed to think about financing it. We're still at that age that we feel very mature but also kind of like kids so we're kind of in between. Well, we had planned to move to Höfn, Einar had gotten a job offer there and I was going to continue with my online study. But on the day Einar graduated from his chef study my grandfather, that lives in Höfn and is a businessman, told us that he had in mind to buy a building in Höfn that used to house a restaurant. This building has a lot of history and had a personal value for my grandpa and my grandmother who is now passed away. The house was at that time empty, and grandpa said if we would be interested in running a restaurant there, he would be willing to rent it to us for a fair price. We did not say a single word to each other, we were both very much in shock. Yeah, so that's how the idea came to us

and from that point we took some time to discuss it amongst ourselves.

Einar: We figured, so many people do run businesses who are not educated or haven't gotten a specific education to run a business you might have like farm hotels, or all these great small places and we thought if they can do it, we should be able to do it and if you really want it, you should be able to do it.

Pórhildur: In a small town like Höfn, you soon learn that people from all backgrounds can do things like that, in Reykjavik maybe I think like you go to Business School and then you run a business with its personal chef and this waiter and everything. But we thought we have some smarts and of course he [Einar] can do the kitchen and I was like; I must be able to do stuff. I have experience in waitering and I'm very organized. So, after going back and forth with this idea we said, let's do it.

HOW DOES THE BUSINESS HELP TO ADDRESS REGIONAL CLIMATE CHANGE OR SUSTAINABILITY ISSUES?



Einar: We gladly take part in the municipality policy of recycle but the biggest part is probably the way we try to source our provisions or supplies.

Pórhildur: We want to source locally as much as possible, but we also need to get a lot of our produce from Reykjavik also, from big suppliers who have a lot of Icelandic vegetables that we can't get from small farmers, and we can only get a shipment once a week. As a consumer you just come into a place and everything should be available so we're thinking how can we change the consumers mind to saying oh it's OK that this is not available now, but we live here, and we don't want to over buy and then it goes to waste. The best part is when we can buy from the small farms here in the area.

Einar: But everything we get from these small farms is in small quantities. For a restaurant that's running maybe 200 people every night, a small farm can only produce for like maximum three days.

Pórhildur: But we also buy veggies that do not look right but are totally fresh and fine and are good for all kinds of cooking and then we also go out and pick herbs, berries and mushrooms and we ask people from Höfn to bring us their excess rhubarb and stuff, and we maybe give them a beer instead, so they get a drink on us. Einar: Yes, we use a lot of herbs and pine and birch for flavoring, smoking, just whatever and we have a charcoal grill that we use these imported hardwood coals in and now we mix it with birch from Hallormsstaðarskógur [Icelandic forest] which is very nice.

Pórhildur: We're working on going into natural wine with no preservatives or sulfide soon. After opening a bottle of that wine, it's going to be destroyed by tomorrow so we will find a way to use the rest in food. The wine is coming from Slovenia, and we are working on importing it in collaboration with others to minimize the impact of the shipping. We're really just trying to be sustainable. It's really important to us and it's also fun.



Fabulous!!

A great new restaurant with gourmet-quality food and drink. The staff were so attentive! Soooo thankful we could make reservations online, as this is a popular place.

Phil F – Denver, CO

TripAdvisor: September 2021

HOW IS YOUR PRODUCT OR SERVICE **INNOVATIVE**? WHAT GAP IN THE MARKETPLACE DOES IT FILL?



Einar: There are many good restaurants in Höfn and our way to bring in something new is through what we serve. We search for ingredients in the wild and we are working on a new Nordic-Icelandic cuisine kind of.

Pórhildur: We try to have our dishes as authentic as possible. We make as much as we can ourselves so whether it's the onions that are pickling on the shelf or the mushrooms that Einar picked and dried or the mushroom oil he made. Our foraging is for no particular dish, it's more that we take what we make and ask our self's, what would it be great for? We are also experimenting with alcohol, like not buying everything in, but making our own infusions with leftover rhubarb or peel to garnish the

drinks. I enjoy that when someone asks what's in their food and I can call Einar and he can tell them exactly what's in it.

Einar: I feel like we are building a reputation for the restaurant, just slowly and naturally, I do not want to advertise how authentic we are or want to be. I hope we can get it across in our offerings in the restaurant.

Pórhildur: I think for Einar it's about not forcing it. Einar is always searching for something new, and being out in nature, he puts everything in his mouth, like I'm sure he will die one day of eating something that's poisonous. He's has also been reading this old Nordic books about usage of herbs that are usually not used today.

WHERE DID YOU SOURCE THE MAIN **SUPPORT AND RESOURCES** (Eg. Grants And Other Support)?



Pórhildur: Our situation is special because we got this opportunity handed to us like this, "oh here you can have this building to run a restaurant", we had to build our toolkit and doing so we got a lot of support from the local community.

Einar: If we hadn't gotten this support from Pórhildur's grandpa we would have, probably done some research and maybe found some fund that gives out grants to whoever. The banks would probably not be eager to give a loan to open another restaurant in this small village. They are more willing to loan the big investors in the capital area.

Pórhildur: I know there are funds or organizations who help young entrepreneurs, but the idea probably has to be unique. But we got a lot

of help, even the guys who did the renovations of the house, also, the guys who run the restaurant that opened like eight months before us, we went there hundreds of times just to have a chat about everything, when do you get shipments and who takes your trash?

Einar: And about licensing and getting permits and stuff. We also got support from other restaurant owners that are our neighbors. They gave us good advice and one even gave us a piece of his really old sourdough starter.

Pórhildur: But it's also family. I mean we don't have any family members who's run a restaurant, but they have different education and experience, and we can talk to them and get advice on many part of running a business.

WHAT WERE THE MAIN OBSTACLES OR BARRIERS YOU ENCOUNTERED?

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We like to be a part of this society and to support it we do as much as we can of our sourcing and other business in the local area.

Einar



Þórhildur: With all the support we got to start our business, our main obstacles lie in the operation of the restaurant. I think our biggest obstacle is getting the products we need, the shipping of it.

Einar: Also, when we are sourcing ingredients here, like wedges, the main problem is that the season is very short it's mostly during the fall, but that goes for all restaurants in Iceland. We want to be sustainable and source our ingredients as much as possible from the local farmers but partly due to the short growing season in Iceland everything we get from these small farms is in small quantities. For a restaurant that's running maybe 200 people every night, a small farm can only produce for like maximum three days. The staffing is also an obstacle because if we would like to have more staff, there is nobody looking for a job here.

Þórhildur: Lack of housing on the open market is also an obstacle. We can't hire more staff because they will probably not find a place to live. It is complicated if you need to supply your staff with housing too, not only a job.

Þórhildur: With the shipments, we try to source as much as we can locally or from the East fjords. We visited Vallarnes, an organic farm, they are so close to us but it's like a real hassle to figure out how to get shipments from them and same goes with Klausturbleikja, a fish farm located in the next town.

Einar: Yeah, the delivery truck only picks up their fish products on its way to Reykjavík but not on its way from them to us, so they're taking the fish and driving it to Reykjavík first and then back to us. Then they charged the company twice as much for the delivery. That system is not very sustainable either.





HOW SUCCESSFUL HAS IT BEEN?

Pórhildur: Well, we opened the 10th of June this year, so we are only four months old. We didn't have any idea how to make any goals for this year, so we just made our goals based on what the previous restaurant did the last year they were opened. With things in mind that they were more popular, had had the time to build their reputation, they had a shorter opening window over the year, and we just passed all our expectations. What is most important to us is that people are happy that's how we would like to measure our success regardless of if one person comes or 100 and we've gotten great feedback. We also feel like a little family here the whole staff, and that's also a mark of success for us. We just wanna keep going.

Einar: If we can just create a good environment

for our staff and for our customers, that's a success.

Pórhildur: People who come here two days in a row to drink coffee and work, that's mark of success. For the future, next summer we're going to renovate the top floor and do something fun. We're always having the locals in mind, what's missing or what could we do for them, something we would love but also something that would benefit this small community. We've learned a lot or first summer and we will probably learn a lot this winter with it being slower. There's no real end goal in mind. It's just about doing what makes us happy with in mind what the customer wants and with what our team wants and as long as we're enjoying it and we can pay our modest rent, I think it's a success.



WAS SUCCESS A RESULT OF INDIVIDUAL WORK OR COLLABORATION (OR BOTH)?

Pórhildur: Our success is definitely a work of collaboration. If my grandpa hadn't bought this house and offered us to set up a restaurant in it, we would most likely be doing something else now. Einar would be working in another restaurant as a chef, and I would be doing something else.

Our first steps into our independent business might then, in some years time, maybe have started by buying a food wagon or something like that, starting much smaller than we did.

Einar: We can also mention all the support we have had from others in the restaurant business here and our family members. Definitely a work of collaboration.