



One man's quest for perfection — led to this windswept, remote island...

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► It took six hundred kilometres by car and a ferry ride to get to the tiny island of Venø, off the coast of Denmark. Then another drive along a long, winding road to reach the remote cottage. Yet it was worth the trip, because Frede Kristensen was at the end of it. You might not have heard his name before, but Kristensen is the world's foremost restorer of classic Bang & Olufsen equipment. Stubbornly insistent on perfection, his character is typical of Jutlanders, a people made hardy by surviving the elemental forces that buffet

them more or less continuously. I found out about him through his website (www.beolab.dk) while on an optimist's search for a mint condition BeoLab 5000 and BeoMaster 5000 – particularly difficult as they were designed 40 years ago. As it happens, Kristensen specialises in Bang & Olufsen designs from this era alone. He had been working on the equipment for five months before he was satisfied enough to let me come and listen. During that time he had first assembled two “new” units with parts from donor sets.

He had then checked each electrical component, replacing everything that didn't conform to specifications. That was followed by a 500-hour test period throughout which he measured performance, signing off against a list of critical benchmarks.



The last item in the restoration process was the exterior which, I had been promised, would be finished to “as new” standards. As a result of this meticulous attention to detail, Kristensen claims that a BeoLab restored by him will answer to the original factory specifications. I couldn't wait to see – and hear – the result. His thatched house by the beach gives no clues as to its amazing contents. He welcomed me, showing me to the annex that serves as music room and workshop. One entire wall held classic Bang &

Above left: Frede Kristensen, master craftsman and restorer of classic Bang & Olufsen equipment
Above: The island's wild and windswept landscape

Olufsen tuners and amplifiers, many with the original price tags from the '50s and '60s still attached. “They're absolutely beautiful,” he says. “Every element is there for a purpose. I wouldn't have been as committed if it wasn't for this marriage of form and function.” The BeoLab 5000, with its companion BeoMaster 5000 tuner were the first units to unite wood and metal, which would become a hallmark of this period for the company. At the time, Bang & Olufsen employed some of Denmark's finest joiners, who would

first pick the very best of the available wood veneers, then put them through another elimination round before choosing the cuts that would be used for Beolab 5000 and its speaker cabinets. “I use fine steel wool and oil, beeswax and ‘elbow grease’,” says Kristensen about the exterior restoration work. “Once I find an undamaged cabinet, I spend time coaxing its lustre back to how it once used to be.” The original design placed an aluminium fascia with slide-rule controls on both the amplifier and



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the tuner so the design matched the exact performance. "It's hard to find fascia that are up to my standards," says Kristensen. "Most have been abraded by use. I usually have to pick components from up to three units to recreate the exterior and interior of just one – and there aren't many out there to begin with."

To show what he means, he takes me to the basement where he does his testing and stores components. "I have a number of fascia I can't use here, so I'm looking into having the fronts reprinted. But it isn't easy

Above: The isolated cottage contains a treasure trove of Bang & Olufsen equipment that goes back to the 1940s
Below: Kristensen in his basement workshop doing what he loves

to get the same precision result."

Having seen the painstaking work behind the restoration, I was very keen to pick up my equipment and make the long return journey home to listen in familiar surroundings.

You'll hear people say that technology is technology, and that all claims of more or fewer musical components are just exaggerations. Is Beolab 5000 "musical"? That night I met a friend who plays in an orchestra. We connected the units and gave the amplifier the ultimate challenge – Salonen's impossibly "bassy"

interpretation of *The Rite of Spring* with the Los Angeles Philharmonic.

It's a recording that makes many modern amplifiers switch on their protective circuitry when the kettle drums start pounding away. The BeoLab 5000 is famous for its rock-solid bass reproduction, and we wanted to hear how well it went from deep kettle drum to woodwind highs.

We weren't even halfway into the *Dance of the Adolescents* when my friend turned to me and summed up the experience with two simple words: "That's music." ●

