

Norwegian Wood

A man sits in an armchair, watching television. The screen displays a fire merrily burning in a fireplace. The man is mesmerized, like most people when they stare into a fire. Plus, this is Norway, where the flicker and crackle of a fire, even on a television set, is unalloyed entertainment and primal gratification. Norwegians take their wood burning seriously, as would you if you chose to live where a winter's day is regularly -20°F, and there are lots of trees and fine stove makers.

The fire continues to burn on the screen, and burn and burn, uninterrupted. A hand fleetingly enters the television picture and adds a fresh piece of wood to the fire, but evidently not enough for our hero, who is no longer mesmerized but has passed through the looking glass. Without taking his eyes from the screen, he reaches over the arm of his chair and grabs a hunk of rock-hard beech; in Norway, a piece of firewood is always there when you need it. He tosses it on the fire. The television implodes. Like his television, the man is shattered, having been so blissfully out of body and now so rudely returned to it, there in the armchair in front of the smoking ruins of his boob-tube blaze.

This story is true — reported in *The New York Times*, no less — and telling. It explains why Norwegian Lars Mytting's *Hel Ved* — “Solid Wood” — is a bestseller all over Scandinavia. Fire and Scandinavians go way back, the very best of friends. Their trust and synergy go unspoken. *Hel Ved* is published here as **Norwegian Wood** (which is, admit it, pretty crafty) — a peerless, pathological entrée into the world of firewood.

[Barns & Noble Book Review](#)

The latest Scandinavian publishing phenomenon is not a Stieg Larsson–like thriller; it's a book about chopping, stacking, and burning wood that has sold more than 200,000 copies in Norway and Sweden and has been a fixture on the bestseller lists there for more than a year. *Norwegian Wood* provides useful advice on the rustic hows and whys of taking care of your heating needs, but it's also a thoughtful attempt to understand man's age-old predilection for stacking wood and passion for open fires. An intriguing window into the exoticism of Scandinavian culture, the book also features enough inherently interesting facts and anecdotes and inspired prose to make it universally appealing. The U.S. edition is a fully updated version of the Norwegian original, and includes an appendix of U.S.-based resources and contacts.

[Amazon.com](#)