

Beauty and power: how Norway is making green energy look good

The future of power

Hydropower

On the edge of a forest in northern Norway, an unusually handsome hydroelectric plant is generating a buzz

Stuart Dredge



'We thought it should live up to the surroundings': Øvre Forsland hydroelectric station.

Photograph: Pedro Alvarez/The Observer

Øvre Forsland is a big departure from the hulking power stations that traditionally served our energy needs. **It looks more like an elegant, custom-built home from TV show *Grand Designs*.**

Located in the Helgeland district in northern [Norway](#), it's a small hydroelectric power station capable of supplying 1,600 homes with power.

Designed by Norwegian architecture firm Stein Hamre Arkitektkontor, it sits on a riverbed at the edge of a forest, with an exterior that **aims to reflect the irregular shapes of the spruce trees forming its backdrop.**

"It's a small plant. The biggest stations in this region were built in the late **50s and 60s** to serve industry, but in the last 15 years it has been **much smaller projects**," says Torkil Nersund, production manager at the plant's owner, energy company HelgelandsKraft.

Hydropower will play a main role in renewable society in the future, so we want more attention on it

"It's the perfect place; the environment is fantastic. This region is known for its spectacular nature, so we thought the building should try to live up to the surroundings."

The station benefits from a 157-metre drop in the Forsland river, and uses two Francis water turbines to turn the flow of water into electricity for the surrounding community. It produces about 30 gigawatt-hours (GWh) of energy, with the **flexibility of its storage system ensuring it can meet surges in demand,**

"You can say that hydropower will play a main role in **renewable society in the future**, so we want more attention on the hydropower business."

Øvre Forsland is also angling for the attention of people who come to Helgeland for **its hiking trails and beautiful scenery.** Those visiting the power station can look through a tear in the building's exterior that reveals its innards: the turbines.

"The community around us has built up because of the energy resources in the area, but many people have forgotten, because it was another generation that built them. We want to educate Norwegians and also [foreign] tourists about the story of hydropower in Norway, and how **it can work in harmony with nature,"** says Nersund.