

Björn Steinar Jónsson, salt maker

Portrait / Gunnar Sverrisson

the local



→ Icelander Björn Steinar Jónsson makes a "lava salt" by adding charcoal to hand-harvested salt. His other flavours include birch-smoked and Arctic thyme

It wasn't until the Icelandic financial crisis that engineer Björn Steinar Jónsson gave any thought to working with salt. Living abroad in Copenhagen, he saw the pain his country was going through and decided to start an enterprise that would make use of Iceland's free energy from its natural hot springs. "I found articles about salt production using geothermal energy in the Westfjords 250 years ago, with pretty good detail on the old methods," he recalls. "As I read, I thought: 'So it can be done.'"

In 2011, he set up Saltverk in the remote and rugged Westfjords region of Iceland, 120km from the nearest small town. Despite the obscure location, he finds his work – making salt from seawater, using geothermal energy – relaxing and engaging. "There are many variables you can't control: the heat and the quantity of energy that varies from season to season, even the salinity of the seawater – but many of the best restaurants in the world want our salt, so we must be doing something right." saltverk.com