

THE GOODS

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INSIDE



TOPENERS

Is it a fork? A spoon? A knife? Yes.
The Goods, by Brendan I. Koerner. **2**

A Spork With an Added Edge

NO mealtime utensil has attracted as much devotion as the spork. A spoon with stubby forklike tines in place of a rounded front edge, ubiquitous at school cafeterias and fried-chicken restaurants, the spork is a frequent recipient of online adulation. It is celebrated on adoring Web sites (like Spork.org) and in droll haikus ("The spork, true beauty/the times, the bowl, the long stem/life now is complete").

The spork's renown, even if tongue-in-cheek, apparently has yet to reach Scandinavia. When the Swedish product designer Joachim Nordwall began working on his own hybrid utensil in 2003, on behalf of the outdoor accessories company Light My Fire of Malmo, Sweden, he'd never used a spork. Nor was he familiar with its affectionate place in American culinary history.

But he had seen pictures of the product, and he felt that the spork's traditional design offered users the worst of both worlds. "It feels like a compromise to me," Mr. Nordwall, who lives in Stockholm, said. "Which, of course, it is."

The times, he noted, appeared too feeble to spear a sizable chunk of meat, and their presence made it that much harder to eat soup.

Mr. Nordwall's solution was to commit something of a spork her-

esy: he separated the fork from the spoon, and instead placed full-fledged tines on the utensil's opposite end. The result, now available as the Light My Fire Spork, is best described as a two-headed utensil.

Mr. Nordwall chose to have the fork and spoon parts curve in opposite directions. "I thought it would be most practical to have them facing different sides," he said. "Since one is facing down and the other one is facing up, it's easy to change sides really quickly if you need to."

The Light My Fire Spork wasn't designed to be a stand-alone product, but part of a meal kit for backpackers. With rugged use in mind, Mr. Nordwall constructed it of heat-resistant plastic that won't warp when placed in boiling water. The plastic is so durable, in fact, that in a pinch the spork can be used as a tent stake.

Given its target audience, Mr. Nordwall initially saw no reason to include a knife component — he figured that outdoorsmen always carried pocket knives. But after using the initial prototype, he decided to spare campfire diners the chore of

washing another utensil by adding a serrated edge to one of the fork's outer tines. (Sporks equipped with blades are referred to as "splades" by the utensil's devotees.)

The meal kit featuring Mr. Nordwall's spork went on sale in August 2005. Almost immediately, consumers asked Light My Fire to offer the spork as a separate item. The company complied, starting in November, pricing the spork around \$3 and offering 11 colors. "If you're an army tough-guy, you can buy a green one," Mr. Nordwall said. "If you're a lady, you can buy a pink one."

Light My Fire, whose products are distributed in the United States by Industrial Revolution of Redmond, Wash., has so far sold more than 750,000 sporks worldwide, primarily through outdoor retailers like REI and Paragon Sports. The company said the utensil had also proved popular among office workers who packed their own lunches.

Mr. Nordwall's unorthodox design, however, has yet to attract any online haikus from the community of spork lovers. □

A Swedish designer takes an American idea and reinvents it.