Nordic architecture, a perfect balance!

Simplicity and elegance. These two words - probably reductive - characterize the Nordic architecture, fusion of modernism and tradition. In Copenhagen, as well in Oslo where the vernacular meets a renewed functionalist movement or in Sweden multiplying places where aesthetics and innovation are daily present.

Northern people have always had a special link with nature, this being one of the reasons why the industrial revolution arrived relatively later in this part of the world. They have intrinsically applied functionalism (before it became a movement) to develop a specific approach and a way of mind based on the “form - follows - function” principle and realize intelligently designed buildings. The Nordic style would never have been fully recognized by the rest of the world if Alvar Aalto (1898-1976) had not existed. Whilst the analogy between its free forms and the shapes of the Finland landscapes are often underlined its architectural approach is also linked to the symbolic expression of nature in contact with the international artistic avant-garde.

Some of the greatest designers come from Denmark, Arne Jacobsen as leader. His buildings, as well as his still much appreciated furniture, show the human dimension of organic modernism. During these last years a wave of new architects brings the Danish architecture to a top level. One of the most famous today is Bjarke Ingels, the founder of BIG - Bjarke Ingels Group. Although he is sometimes accused of abandoning Scandinavian modernism and some of its principles based on a harmonious relationship with nature, his buildings (often eccentric) will still favour green roofs, plenty of natural light and spaces designed in relation with the climatic conditions. However, thanks to the new materials available and the idea of labour liberty, he claims an “pragmatic utopian architecture”. Many other offices continue the history of Scandinavian design in relation to nature with a brilliant use of technology.

Series of volumes, materials, textures and light playing a key role in the architectural conception, contribute to deeply transform the space into a new nature for the contemporary life. The Northern architecture is being reinvented. In opposition to globalization the designers are showing a strong will to emphasize and reinforce the national and cultural particularities. It does not mean refer to proven solutions but to reinterpret and transcend traditions by refreshing them.

Marie-Claire Regniers
Europa Building Brussels

Philippe SAMYN and PARTNERS architects & engineers, LEAD and DESIGN PARTNER. With Studio Valle Progettazioni architects, Buro Happold Limited engineers. Photo © Marc Detiffe

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With its extraordinary patchwork Mondrian style façade with recycled frames and its intriguing interior, the new European Council headquarters in Brussels show the challenges taken up and the technical virtuosity of Philippe Samyn. And mainly his respect for the genius loci, the sustainability and the well executed work.
Everything started in 2005 when Samyn Partners, Architects & Engineers won, in partnership with the Italian office Studio Valle Progettazioni and Buro Happold Limited Engineers, the architecture competition for the European Council's new headquarters. It’s the beginning of a long term project, which will last almost 12 years, with thousands of drawings, plans and more than 20000 emails exchanged. When he initiates this high-flying project, in the heart of the prestigious Brussels European district, with his 35 year experience and his meticulous precision, when finalizing all the details of the technical specifications, his first idea is to preserve this symbolic building for
the Brussels population: the Residence Palace. He wants to save the building’s historical part designed in the 1920’s by the Swiss architect Michel Polak, whilst studying what the existing structure could still propose. For Philippe Samyn, the respect of the heritage doesn’t mean to exclude modernity. Rapidly, he feels the urgent necessity to create a cube, with no concession to forms, a sort of box open on the city attached to the Residence Palace. A type of revenge on the unattractive urban context, among the flow of cars. The two façades made of waste frames, collected from all parts of Europe, treated, reworked, with simple glazing and adjusted with random appearance by steel brackets, symbolize diversity (the 3000 window frames come from all the EU countries), unity (all are made of oak) and obviously recycling.

The building not only integrates unexpectedly these elements of the past whilst clearly transmitting sustainability, but it reveals also a poetic approach, in complete contrast with the usual functional buildings where the Eurocrats work.

A second skin made of double glazed security glass enables to reduce the impact of the Rue de la Loi noise and limits the thermal heat losses. The glass is fit on a microblasted stainless steel frame with variable width braces, which enable to spare material. It is amusing to note the use imposed by Philippe Samyn in the technical specification for the choice of the color « dust grey » (dust to be taken from the Rue de la Loi) to avoid that the areas with intense walking traffic become too easily dirty.

In the middle of this great transparent cube, a sort of huge lantern lit up during the night - a curved volume covered with glass diagonal strips to change the transparency - houses the Council of Ministers meeting rooms and offices. Each floor develops an elliptical layout with
Philippe SAMYN and PARTNERS architects & engineers, LEAD and DESIGN PARTNER. With Studio Valle Progettazioni architects, Buro Happold Limited engineers.

Photo © Marie-Françoise Plissart
different sizes. One can easily imagine all the drawings, studies and calculations needed to obtain this original form.

As to the atrium, it accommodates on its eleven levels all the conference rooms, reception lounges and restaurants. For the inside of the building, Philippe Samyn worked with the painter Georges Meurant who has drawn, within a great range of colours, the woolen carpets, the felt ceilings, the glazed lift shafts showing the huge coloured square paintings on all the height of the stairwells.

Europa, the symbolic landmark to welcome the European summits and the meetings between all the EU Presidents and Prime Ministers, was a complex adventure, because, at each stage of the project, the architect and engineer teams had to innovate and invent solutions. Philippe Samyn wants to underline the positive role of the Brussels Building Authority and the importance of his partnership with the industries, as well as the flexibility and open spirit of all the enterprises he worked with. “It is crucial to federate the craftsmen on the project”. The architect admits that he generally learns a lot from the workmen on
the construction site. “For the enterprises, the permanent training of the qualified workmen is fundamental, as they have to feel they are an integral part of the project.”

Architect, city-planner, civil engineer and Doctor in Applied Sciences, Philippe Samyn admits his obsession for the global concept intimately mixing architecture and engineering. Without showing off nor any pretension. Today we sometimes notice projects with an excess of forms, which are really an insult to mankind. “One must aim to a moral improvement of architecture, he says.” It means a humanist approach of technology. The basic concept for the Europa building has materialized, namely that, like the representation of the building, “Europe is also a patchwork giving a great cultural wealth. Europe is a constant duality between unity and diversity. It is unity within diversity. That is what had to be shown.”
Gifted with a pioneering spirit, Viggo Haremst contributes to the reputation of Henning Larsen, one of the greatest Danish practices.

Viggo Haremst
Henning Larsen, Denmark/Germany
www.henninglarsen.com

After studying at the Lund University (Sweden) and at The Danish Design School in Copenhagen, Viggo Haremst graduated in architecture at the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts School (2000). The architect started his professional career at two famous offices, i.e., Zaha Hadid Architects (2002) and White Architects (2003). After that he worked at Nord Architects in Copenhagen (2007), before joining the Henning Larsen team (2012) where he worked as one of the company’s lead designers for several years. In 2014, he joined Henning Larsen’s Munich office as a Partner and Design Director with the task to expand the office internationally together with the Managing Director and Partner Werner Frosch. He initiates and develops projects with a strong conceptual identity as well as coordinating the design direction of ongoing projects. His focus is on large public buildings, headquarters, universities and mixed-use projects in various cultural contexts.

Viggo’s creative management and attention to detail has been the driving force on several large competition teams. His experience ranges from creative management in the early phases to the actual building
Viggo Haremst has a vast international experience leading prize-winning competitions and projects of various scales in Europe, Asia, the Middle East and Africa, among others the Batumi Aquarium in Georgia, the Gem Building in Riyadh, the Southern Denmark University’s Kolding Campus building, the Roskilde Campus and the Mediacorp Headquarters in Singapore. He has taught at the Technical University of Denmark and as partner of Henning Larsen he acts as a keynote speaker in various parts of the world holding lectures about current research and projects.

**University of Southern Denmark, Kolding Campus, Kolding (2014)**

With its triangular shape and its creative façade, Kolding Campus creates a significant new landmark in Kolding and will thereby form a close interaction with the other educational institutions of the town. The solar shading system consists of approximately 1600 triangular shutters of perforated steel, mounted on the façade in a way which allows them to adjust to the changing daylight and desired inflow of light. Inside the five-floor atrium, the displaced position of the staircases and access balconies creates a special dynamics where the triangular shape repeats its pattern in a continuous variety of positions up through the different floors.

**Gem Building, Riyadh, Saudi Arabia (2013)**

The Gem is composed of three separate buildings for a mixed-use programme. The cluster of gems creates spaces for a fluid and flexible circulation around and through the buildings. Wrapping the faceted exterior, a high quality metal mesh fabric provides solar protection and weather-resistance to local sandstorms. In addition, the geometry and the situation of the building create shade between the volumes. Combined with site-wide strategies for water-efficiency and reclamation, the energy efficient technologies support several sustainable initiatives. The building is designed to achieve LEED Certification upon completion.
Henning Larsen Architects was founded in 1959, in Copenhagen, by the famous Danish architect Henning Larsen (1925-2013) after he worked first with Arne Jacobsen and then with Jorn Utzon. The first great project outside of Scandinavia is the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Riyadh (Saudi Arabia), which establishes their long lasting international reputation. Noticing an increasing demand for Scandinavian architecture, the office reinforces and expands its international presence by opening branches worldwide, in Riyadh, Munich, Oslo, Istanbul, Faroe Islands and Hong Kong. More than 200 people – architects, engineers, designers and employees - perfectly combine proximity with clients, local context, traditional Scandinavian concept, sustainability, social responsibility and cutting-edge technology know-how to resolve the present challenges.

**Campus Roskilde, University College Sealand, Denmark (2012)**
Consisting of four square buildings – slightly rotated towards each other to screen the area from the motorway, the campus facilitates dialogue and random meetings and provides the students with a feeling of being part of a manifold university environment beating with one pulse. In this way, a new meeting place is created between the urban quarter of Trekroner and the green areas around Roskilde University. Under the overhang of the main building, a roofed square opens up to the rest of the campus area and creates life and a sense of community among the students. consolidating its professional bachelor’s programmes covering social education and social work, health and teaching.

**Harpa Concert Hall & Conference Center, Reykjavik, Iceland (2011)**
Situated in a solitary spot with a clear view on the sea and the mountains surrounding Reykjavik, the building (28,000 m²) stands out as a large, radiant sculpture reflecting both the sky and the harbour space as well as the vibrant life of the city. Seen from the foyer, the halls form a mountain-like massif that similar to basalt rock on the coast forms a stark contrast to the expressive and open facade. At the core of the rock, the largest hall of the Centre, the main concert hall, reveals its interior as a red-hot centre of force. The spectacular facades have been designed in close collaboration between Henning Larsen Architects, the Danish-Icelandic artist Olafur Eliasson and the engineering companies Rambøll and ArtEngineering GmbH from Germany.
Moesgaard Museum, Jutland, Denmark (2014)
Like an invitation from prehistoric times, this museum in the heart of Jutland beckons visitors to come inside, where the exhibition halls are designed as terraces that open up to reveal their secrets, like the strata of an archaeological excavation. After Moesgaard Museum moved into this new exhibition building, the number of visitors increased to more than half a million per year. The sloping roof, landscaped with grass and moss, makes the museum a striking icon in this historical setting. In the summer months, the roof has been used as a theater stage, cycling track and Viking market. In the winter, after a snow fall, the steep roof is the most popular tobogganing slope in the area. The museum's roof has thus been used in ways that far exceed the expectations.

Umeå Museum of Art, Sweden (2011)
Umeå's contemporary art museum, Bildmuseet, has been described as one of the world's most beautiful art museums. The museum is built as a tower with three open stories, with the aim of fulfilling different exhibition requirements. The Nordic design reflects the detailed treatment of daylight and our vision to create close interaction between the museum, art and nature. The facade covering's vertical slats of larch wood emphasize the building's symbolic value as a beacon of creativity in Umeå.
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Lego House  
Billund, Denmark (2017)  
Arch. BIG and COWI

Lego House brings the toy scale of the classic Lego brick to architectural scale, forming vast exhibition spaces and public squares that embody the culture and values at the heart of all Lego experiences. The place is an experience hub for Lego fans of all ages, as well as an architectural landmark and a significant step towards the city’s goal of making Billund the Capital for Children. Due to its central location in the heart of Billund, the building (12,000 m²) is conceived as an urban space as much as an experience center. The 21 overlapping blocks are placed like individual buildings, framing a square that is illuminated through the cracks and gaps between the volumes.

Lego house is a literal manifestation of the infinite possibilities of the Lego brick. Imagine new exciting and expressive worlds is what children do every day with Lego bricks. The square is energized by an urban character, welcoming locals and visitors to the café, restaurant, store and conference facilities. Above the square, a cluster of galleries overlap to create a continuous sequence of exhibitions. Each gallery is color-coded in Lego’s primary colors so wayfinding through the exhibitions becomes a journey through the color spectrum.
The first and second floors include four play zones arranged by color and programmed with activities that represent a certain aspect of a child’s learning: red is creative, blue is cognitive, green is social, and yellow is emotional. Guests of all ages can have an immersive and interactive experience, express their imagination, and not least be challenged by meeting other builders from all over the world.

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The Baltic city had already known at the beginning of the seventeenth century the wooden building of the Elizabethan Theatre. After about four centuries a new theatre was built at the same place, but in a completely different urban and landscape context, restarting from their archaeological traces. In 2004, there was an international competition for the design of the new Elizabethan Theatre. As if the new theatre had to represent on the stage of Gdansk the political changes of the country. The outer edges are public passageways leading around the whole complex. This new pedestrian urban platform lies 6m above the entrance level. The height offers a new viewpoint of the historic and modern city with its contrasts and compositional counterpoints. Functionally, the edges ensure escape ways from the theatre, and pedestrian links with all the levels of the complex, including that of the basement at 5m below level ground. On the outside, the theatre’s silhouette is characterised by three general aspects: volumes, masonry ribs, and an openable roof. From the volume’s profile two very distinct parts emerge. The first belongs to the Elizabethan theatre, and sets the height of
the building at 12m. The second belongs to the 18m high scenic tower. Technical, systems related and symbolic requirements make it the highest panoramic point.

The retractable roof over the auditorium, consisting of two movable roof planes with dimensions 10.5 x 21m each is unique in the world. The roof structure is fixed to the building’s reinforced concrete structure and concealed behind the parapet wall, it is thus not visible from the street level. Anemometers are attached on each wing to measure the wind speed, giving an alarm when a predetermined threshold is reached and the roof is then closed. The roof is clad in pre-patinated copper with standing seams. Thermal insulation is provided by composite panels filled with polyurethane foam. Acoustic panels with spot light fittings are placed in in the upper truss plane to expose and enhance the spatial aspects of the roof structure. When the roof is open, the view from the tower includes the interior of the theatre. Masonry ribs in the outer walls characterise the volumes of the theatre and scenic tower. On the outside, they indicate the rhythm of the modular indoor structure. They are needed to absorb the pressure that the open “wings” of the roof exert on the walls below in order to contrast the force of northerly winds.

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Architect and partner to AW2, a practice known for its capacity to adapt to all types of programs or contexts, in France and in foreign countries, Stéphanie Ledoux designs her projects with an open approach, without preconceived ideas and focused on the bioclimatic concept.

Stéphanie Ledoux
AW2, France
www.aw2.com

Founded in Paris in 1997 by Reda Amalou, the international architecture and interior design office AW2 is now run by Stéphanie Ledoux and himself, both partners personally involved in all the projects. The practice has specialized in high added value projects, especially in “de luxe” hotels and quality interiors, which represent an important part of their activities. Enabling them to win many awards throughout the world. In 2012 and 2014, AW2 won the MIPIM Award for Best Hotel with the Six Senses Condao resort and was nominated twice at the AFEX (French Architects Overseas) Grand Prix d'Architecture in France.

The French architect Stéphanie Ledoux has studied at the Ecole Spéciale d’Architecture de Paris, then at the Milwaukee University (Wisconsin, USA). She continues her training period with Jean-François Lagneau, Chief Architect at the Monuments Historiques. In 1999, after receiving the « Meilleur Diplôme de l’Ecole Spéciale » Prize, Stéphanie Ledoux starts working with the office AW2, where she becomes a partner and one of the managers in 2002.

Her partnership with Reda Amalou is the beginning of a period during which AW2 will strengthen their multidisciplinary team in order to be able to handle sizeable projects. Stéphanie Ledoux, together with her
"Maison Krug", Reims, France (2017)

AW2 realized the entire renovation of the House of Krug made with a homogenous architecture and a contemporary vision, without erasing traces of its history. Taking part of the project, the intimate Salon des 400 Vins is lined with 400 multicolored wine bottles to form an representation of the 250 base wines and 150 reserves, which, when combined, create each blend of the label’s annual Krug Grande Cuvée.

Lycée Français in Amman, Jordan (2013)

The architectural concept of this 6500sqm school complex for 450 students is directly coming from the site’s inherent qualities. Jordan (more especially Amman) has appeared as a place where the light, strong, lively and omnipresent, expresses itself especially well when interacting with the material to create shadows which reveal the volumes. The town of Amman being built on a hilly site the buildings will follow the grounds forms and will be organized in a tight pattern to generate open spaces where take place gardens and shady zones. The stone ‘s omnipresence, conversing permanently with the vegetation, makes it a harmonious place strongly impregnated with traditional culture. Our site study corresponds well to this approach of the city: steep slope, East-West orientation, visual environment with a remarkable landscape quality. The combination of this site’s aspects enables to design a project respecting three themes: Anchorage, Material & Light.
associate, continues each year to develop new projects throughout the world. This strong presence in foreign countries enabled them to open in 2005 a partnership with a local based company in Vietnam. The projects, the “Lycée Français’ in Ho Chi Minh City (Vietnam) and in Amman (Jordan), the International Esmod School in Paris, the renovation of the “Maison Krug’ in Reims (France) have a common characteristic: they are based on specific issues, i.e. understand the site with its richest components, being able to read the elements of the cultural, climatic, programmatic and economic context, use the most immediate resources and draw projects taking account of the problems and the context. This approach enables to tackle all the matters with an open point of view, favouring invention, whilst treating the subject accurately and pertinentely. This bioclimatic approach allows Stéphanie Ledoux to question and to position herself beforehand as to the relevance of the establishment on the site, the intelligence of the envelope, the coherence with the immediate environment resources, the optimization of the energy choices. The office favours wood, in all its approaches, with the object of innovating the form whilst treating with pertinence the stakes of each project. For an architect a project starts always by a questioning. It is important to define the project’s context and determine its ambitions. Its architectural approach corresponds more to an open and without a priori process than to a theoretical and stylistic strict frame.
Six Sense Con Dao, Vietnam (2012)

The site is one of the most beautiful places on Con Dao Island. The main concern at the start of the project was how to deal with these wonderful pre-existing conditions without destroying the essence of the site and give a real identity to the resort. This implied ecology and sustainability issues. For the guests’ resort experience, the architects had to preserve this feel of nature. The concept is to enhance the natural local setting with its main features, to design all buildings and circulations in term of scale and texture to fit within the existing environment and to provide beautiful views and a permanent discovery of the landscape. Located at high level and over the river, the main arrival takes the guests into a series of timber frame buildings organised in public areas on terraces over the beach and the river. Created as pavilions, the residential villas are connected by terraces and pathways. Against the falling rocks, small public buildings are a reinterpretation of the traditional shape of the Vietnamese house with two pitches shingle roof, one building linked to another as we may find them in the village on countryside. The walls are clad in old Vietnamese doors. This is a clear statement made both environmentally in terms of re-use of discarded construction materials but also to give a sense of place. The final result is a stunning arrangement of buildings, which carry the mark of history of a vernacular Vietnamese architecture.

Innovative Houses, Chanteloup en Brie, Marne la Vallée (2016)

The pilot real estate program of Lodges – 35 passive and scalable housing – is an answer to the stakes of tomorrow’s city: scalability, thermal performance, emphasis on innovative economic subjects. Conscious that the traditional construction modes accelerate the raw materials exhaustion, as well as the energy resources needed for their manufacturing, the architects have decided to extensively use materials based on renewable raw materials of agricultural origin. They chose wood as components for the structures and for the exterior carpentry and hemp wool for insulation purposes. The approach integrates the will to face the challenges of sustainable development, by applied research and innovation, to favour reflections on city-planning and construction, and to work on the improvement of a project from the beginning to its realization and even further on.
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**Architecture et psychiatrie : Approches françaises et internationales**
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Published as an extension of the second symposium on the subject, which took place in Paris, at the Paris-Val de Seine National School of Architecture, the book deals with architectural solutions adapted to all phases of mental disorders by reconciling at best security while providing people with a space that promotes their recovery and maintains their social connections.

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**100 Contemporary Brick Buildings**
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Henk Ovink & Jelte Boeijenga

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More information: www.projectearth2.org/citiesoftomorrow

The museum of language

The aim of the competition is to design an iconic museum of language in the heart of London that will deconstruct the science of linguistics into various aspects of speech, script and sense. The proposal must not only become an archive for the past and present world languages but also serve as a learning center that works to develop languages and future communication systems.

Architects, Architecture Graduates, Students or Engineers are eligible to participate. Interdisciplinary teams are also encouraged to enter the Competition.

Registration deadline: 01/04/2018
Deadline for submissions: 30/04/2018
More information: http://archasm.in

Art Prison: Call for Entries

YAC – Young Architects Competitions – and the Municipality of Favignana, in cooperation with the Italian Government, launch “Art Prison”, an architectural competition to refurbish a breathtaking fortress on a scattered island in southern Sicily. A cash prize of € 20,000 will be awarded to the winners selected by an internationally-renowned featuring Daniel Libeskind (Studio Libeskind), Manuel Aires Mateus (Aires Mateus), Felix Perasso (Snøhetta), João Luís Carrilho da Graça (Carrilho da Graça Arquitectos).

How to transform an ancient prison into a treasure chest containing works of art and the creative action of internationally renowned artists and intellectuals? How to transform an ancient fishermen isle into an open-air contemporary art museum?

This is the fascinating challenge of Art Prison.

Registration deadline: 08/04/2018
Deadline for submissions: 11/04/2018
More information: www.youngarchitectscompetitions.com
The future of building

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