

Jocelyn Reutebuch

Henning Larsen Architects, Scan | Design Architecture Internship Program Evaluation

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I was interested in working in Scandinavia because of my experience during the 'Architecture in Scandinavia' program at UW, led by Peter Cohan and Jennifer Dee in the summer of 2010. At that time, we traveled to Denmark, among other Scandinavian countries. I was impressed by the experimentation and originality of Danish design. I was originally supposed to work for C.F. Møller Architects in Århus, but I had many difficulties with my visa, mostly centered around age requirements, and C.F. Møller was unable to help me with these difficulties. Henning Larsen Architects were willing, however, to handle my irregular visa issues. I was pleased to work for a firm with this can-do attitude, and additionally excited when I remembered some of the buildings they designed that I had seen in Copenhagen.

I am a 3+ year Master's student, which means I came from a field other than architecture. I had never worked for an architecture firm before, even though I have extensive work experience in the field I was working in before switching to architecture. Much of what I learned during my time at Henning Larsen probably has to do with that, and as such, this was an incredibly important experience for me. While I understand that there can be large differences in working cultures among different architecture firms, I think dealing with actual clients, real-world production schedules and the pressures of doing business are all elements that are both missing in academic studios and unavoidable for architecture firms, even though the responses to these elements vary. Being exposed to these 'real-world' aspects of the practice of architecture was very important for tempering my expectations about what can be accomplished by an architectural project, especially because these elements do not have the same influence within each project, but have varying impacts. I realized that the communication style that architects use amongst themselves is often ineffective when trying to get information to clients. I also learned that the intentional and creative use of architectural theory, which is so often praised in academic studios can be completely absent in the working world, and with less ill-effect than I would have predicted. I believe this experience will have an unequivocal effect on my final thesis project, a consideration of some of the factors I became familiar with during my time with this firm, especially in how potential future employers will understand my strengths as an architect, especially since thesis is arguably the most important portfolio project.

I found that while Henning Larsen's staff had been excited about my unique niche within architecture (I have a background in science, and have used it in many studio projects), they did not really understand what to do with it. They thought I might work with their in-house sustainability department, but that group is mostly civil engineering students doing internships, working on specific, fairly autonomous research projects. I finally found a home in the master planning department, since the new focus on environmental systems in city planning is as popular in Scandinavia as it currently is in the U.S., though most master planners do not have a background in ecology. I had hoped to work more directly with the architecture department, but there is a specific use for interns in Henning Larsen's architecture department, which is to supplement the computer skills that older designers often either lack or do not have time to invest in generating models within. While I did do some Photoshop rendering work, the 3-D modeler I (and many other students at UW) am most familiar with, SketchUp, is not used at Henning Larsen, and cannot replace the software they use exclusively, which is Rhino.

I would strongly recommend that any future interns sent to Henning Larsen architects be competent in at least Rhino and the Adobe suite, since the core of what typical architecture interns do at Henning Larsen are dependent on these skills. I also wonder if it would be possible for future interns to be able to read the evaluations of former interns, and so far I see only Cory's online. Since it seems ScanDesign will be sending more students to Henning Larsen, it would be great if we could get an idea about the working culture of the firm before we arrive, and this evaluation format seems to have prompted information I did not gather while speaking with previous interns informally.

For the majority of my time at Henning Larsen, I worked on one project within the Master Planning department. This was an RFP for a biomedical community on the outskirts of Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Because there was no competition deadline, the work was conducted at a much slower pace than the work in the competitions teams,

which I enjoyed. I worked longer hours than my supervisor, but I was still out of the office around 6 p.m. most nights, well ahead of the other interns who often stayed late into the evening. We did have a couple of presentation deadlines, and during these times, the work schedule became more intense, similar to what other interns experienced on a regular basis. I was initially included in most of the concept development, but over time, as the design solidified, I was assigned specific drawings to execute in specific styles. I gained a lot of experience with generating very detailed, large-scale plans, which will ultimately be helpful with my thesis project (and be a good work skill to possess). I also spent a fair amount of time generating a booklet and presentation boards, and learned important differences between architectural documents that are meant to communicate to clients versus those we have been generating in school, geared towards our architectural critics.

I really enjoyed the free lunches served in the cafeteria every day. I got to know the Danish architecture interns this way, as well as my fellow non-Danish interns, who were from all over the world. Only five other Americans (two interns) were even in the office. For the first time in my life, I was surrounded by English that was so different from mine that I actually heard my own accent, my west coast slang. It was extremely interesting. I also learned a lot about Danish culture from trading simple anecdotes about life around the table: they often belonged to clubs of one kind or another (one guy always went everywhere with his rugby club), none of them were actually from Copenhagen, they all spent a lot of time with their families and friends they grew up with. They taught me how to eat Danish style; I'd follow one of them in the food line to learn what sauces to put where and with what, which had me trying things I would normally have been a bit afraid to eat. I was also there for the annual Christmas party, which was quite a shindig. We went bowling, had a catered dinner at a golf club that the firm had designed, and then had a DJ-hosted dance party in the firm's canteen. They also gave all employees very nice Christmas gifts, interns included.

I started working at the same time as a lot of other interns at the firm, and so there wasn't a place for me at the intern's apartment that the firm keeps. I managed to find a place to live before I got there, even though that was a very difficult process. I was absolutely thrilled with my apartment, however. I lived in a very large bedroom in an apartment with one other woman about my age, who worked for a large Danish pharmaceutical company. She is enamored with Danish design (as many Danes seem to be) and was happy to have an architect in the house. It was really great to live with a Dane, as she proved an invaluable resource for answering any questions I had about what was going on around me. I lived on Christianshavn, which was a great location: close enough to the city to have an easy commute to the office, but a little outside of the core so that it was fairly quiet, and I could get some peace along the canals and constructed battlement moats, which was pretty important, as Copenhagen doesn't have a lot of city parks, and I did have some free time for a little relaxation.

Because my working schedule was more relaxed than other interns', I actually used the ScanDesign community to its full extent, in a way that I'm not sure most other architecture interns, or even architecture students get to. I went to nearly all of the ScanDesign events, including boat trips, museum trips, dinners, out-of-town trips, etc. This ended up being one of my 'clubs' (as in, Danes do things socially within clubs, you need to be in one), was a good blend of Danes and fellow Americans, and we did things intended to give us opportunities to do 'Danish things' instead of just 'architectural things' the way we had during my first trip to Copenhagen. The ScanDesign coordinators were very friendly and helpful. I enjoyed being able to take part in the many different seasonal and holiday 'meal-celebrations' that Danes seem to have all the time.

I was glad that I'd seen Copenhagen before, as it meant that I was oriented to the city fairly quickly, and could focus on visiting places that helped me to begin work on my independent study project that I'm currently engaged in, based in Oslo, Norway. I'm looking at the connections between water and buildings, mostly rivers. While Denmark has fewer rivers, being so flat, the whole place lies so low to the water that there are many fascinating water interactions. I was especially interested in the construction of new land, which is a continual process for Danes. The island I lived on was constructed in the 1700s, but the island next door had additional land added to it as late as a few decades ago. There is also a particular sensitivity to flooding and water drainage, since the city (and much of the country) lies so low along the water, and it was very interesting to uncover some the subtle details of this in their design. I was fascinated to hear first-person accounts of the large flooding event they

experienced in Copenhagen in 2011, and also got to look over original documents from the projects that Henning Larsen has done for city retrofits to adapt to the possible flooding from climate change.

I am extremely happy I was able to participate in this program, and appreciate the large amount that I learned, both about working in an architecture firm, and about Danish culture. This kind of knowledge really could not have been learned any other way, and I believe this program will continue to strongly benefit those who partake in it with exposure to both the real-world practice of architecture and what it means to live in Denmark, such a design-oriented culture.