

Andrew Thies
Scan Design: Dorte Mandrup Arkitekter
Evaluation Report

My interest in pursuing Scan Design scholarship for an international internship at Dorte Mandrup Arkitekter developed from a design studio at the University of Washington taught jointly by Peter Cohan and guest professor Dorte Mandrup during the spring of 2012. The design studio, which is funded by Scan Design, is an excellent example of a successful partnership between the University Of Washington College Of Built Environments and the Scandinavian design community. During the studio most if not all students found that working with Dorte, an internationally respected architect, was exciting and extremely enriching. Students were able to candidly speak with Dorte Mandrup daily to develop their designs. From these design critiques and discussions, Sarah Eddy and I were able build a report with Dorte which would later become an internship opportunity.

Dorte Mandrup Arkitekter is a medium sized architecture office with around thirty employees, half of which are student and recent graduate interns. This configuration, a 50/50 split of permanent staff architects and interns makes for an exciting workplace culture where new faces are coming and going every six months to one year. The office works this way because DMA relies heavily on design competitions to get work. Architecture offices often do not receive a fee for entering competitions which require huge amounts of time and effort to accomplish. For this reason architecture firms cannot employ many of their full time staff on competitions where there is no guarantee of payment. As a result competition teams at DMA consist of one full time architect and usually two to four intern architects who only receive a small stipend per month. Obviously, to work as an intern is not an opportunity to make money, rather it allows students to work alongside of very talented architects and to work on large complex projects. For me this experience was invaluable. Most of the interns working at Dorte Mandrup required additional funding whether it is personal or through scholarship to supplement the small stipend offered by the office. Scan Design funding was a real must to make the most of the six month internship.

Most of the intern staff are from countries other than Denmark, for this reason English is spoken whenever a non-Dane is present. While most interactions involving interns are in English, sometimes at meetings or during high stress situations the staff will speak Danish for speed or if they require more specificity. This can be frustrating for a non-Danish speaker but it is best to roll with it and ask for clarifications after the meeting or when a particularly stressful

interaction has passed. Additionally, contrary to the cold or unwelcoming stereotype about Danes, the office is extremely friendly and talkative. Not greeting each other when you come and go from the office, something which may be commonplace in the U.S., is considered rude and strange behavior. For this reason it would be nice for present and future applicants to learn a little Danish as a gesture. The permanent staff see new interns come and go every six months so the quicker a new intern can interact and be cordial with the architects the more fulfilling the experience will be as a whole. Conversational Danish is probably not an attainable goal, but a simple, hello, good morning, good night would be a nice and unexpected gesture.

I was lucky enough to have worked on three different competition entries from start to finish during my time at DMA. Programmatically, these competitions included, a large scale mix use master plan, a culture house and a university building. These projects were all large to medium scale projects with complex design strategies and solutions. Interns are asked to work with Dorte and the architects throughout the schematic design and final competition proposal. Interns are given time to develop schemes that are almost completely their own and allowed to present them as such. Everyone was given a fair shake, only the idea mattered. Ultimately, this work was used to test a broad concept, to give it a run through and see if it succeeds or fails and why. The job of an intern is not always to find the right solution but to take a possibility and run it to its terminus.

Interns should be competent and confident with digital modeling tools, 2D digital drafting, physical modeling, and post processing. Because interns stay for such a short time the office is not really in a position to help interns develop new technical skills, rather it is a hope that the intern can jump right in and hit the ground running. That said, the skills learned and required at The University of Washington are right on par with what is expected. Autocad, sketchup and photoshop are international languages. The level of work and rigor at DMA is well balanced with lightheartedness and leisure. It is clear that the employees work hard to maintain work/personal life boundaries and high standards of life. It is not (usually) a 24/7 job.

Although, I had a very busy work schedule the additional Scan Design events, trips and dinners, coordinated by Scan Design's contacts were welcomed and enjoyable breaks. The trip to Oslo was a fun and generous activity. These trips give student interning or studying abroad a sense that they are part of a group outside of the office and allow for more variety of experience. It is unfortunate that I had to miss a few events because of my work schedule. While it

is impossible to plan ones work schedule in advance, future interns should try and choose a few events and work with the intern coordinator to find free time.

My recommendation for future applicants and interns would be to try and hit the ground running as soon as possible. For me this was the fastest six months of my life. While a future intern's goal should be about personal enrichment and learning it should also be to represent ones school and home country in a positive way. Throwing yourself into the mix quickly by working hard and interacting socially with your co-workers is the best way of achieving this. Overall my experience was extremely positive. I was able to work on challenging projects with very talented architects and interns. This experience has helped me understand a component of the profession in a way that would have not been possible to replicate in Seattle or the United States. I would recommend this opportunity to students who want to learn about international/European competition architecture.