

## SCAN|DESIGN INTERNSHIP EVALUATION

Douglas Brandon

Master of Architecture Candidate, University of Washington

Thanks to the generosity of the Scan|Design Foundation, I had the opportunity to spend six months as an architectural intern with Dorte Mandrup Arkitekter (DMA) in Copenhagen, Denmark. From January until July 2015, I helped with many different aspects of the studio's operation, from competitions to research to real projects. I experienced interesting differences between Danish design, sustainability, and culture. I even had the chance to help make drawings that were eventually published in a book. This incredible time of learning was both challenging and enjoyable – a chance to flex the skills I had acquired in school, while continuing to develop a personal position towards the history and future of the profession of architecture.

### WORK RESPONSIBILITIES

During my internship with DMA, I participated in more than 10 projects and competitions. The first competition, representative of a typical internship experience, was a sketch proposal for a cultural organization in an aging neighborhood of Copenhagen. The community group was interested in upgrading the entrance to their property, renovating the interior, and attracting new users of all ages. At the start of the project, just one other intern (from Finland) and I worked directly with Dorte to develop ideas and strategies. The first few meetings with Dorte were fascinating – I was finally getting a first-hand perspective on one of Denmark's leading design firms.

Throughout the process, we interns were given great freedom to explore a variety of solutions and designs. Dorte was consistently open to new suggestions, but always critical of the function and performance of each proposed decision. The architectural *WHAT* was less important than the *WHY* at this stage; we were building a logical approach to the problem. After several weeks of model making and sketching, more interns joined the project and as the ideas began to take form, we began working on the final submission. With drawings assembled and last minute changes made, we sent our ideas away to be judged...and later found out that we won!

I worked on a wide range of projects after this initial one, including several other competitions, a type-house proposal, drawings for a book, and exploratory studies for clients about what might be architecturally possible in existing buildings. The chance to work with the firm in such a wide variety of roles was valuable in many ways. First, I was exposed to the working-style and design methods of many of the other permanent staff architects. I was also able to continue developing my skills with digital tools, orthographic drawing, and physical model making. I was especially happy to build so many "sketch" models; the ability to iterate designs quickly through massing models will certainly be important when I return to school.

### OFFICE CULTURE

The office culture at DMA features a unique balance between the qualities of both large and small architecture firms. Firstly, with a growing reputation and numerous projects outside of Denmark, DMA is taking on larger, more complex challenges that small firms aren't equipped to handle. However, unlike a large firm, the primary design leader has insight into all parts of the business. Dorte's hand is in each design, and each intern benefits from her knowledge and experience.

Often, the interns work in small groups on sketch proposals, which leads to close friendships and a strong community. The work is taken very seriously, and there were a several late nights leading up to competition deadlines. Last minute changes were typical, but representative of the firm's attitude of dedication and consideration for each project.

However, as hard as we worked, each Friday afternoon was reserved for “Fredagsbar,” a time to relax, drink and snack together, process the week, and enjoy the sunset from the 4<sup>th</sup> floor of Vesterbrogade 95. Just as in America, many of the best discussions about architecture happen outside working hours.

Additionally, the interns at DMA come from all around the world. The backgrounds and various cultural experiences of each intern enhance and challenge the design thinking in the office. Architectural points of reference, precedents, drawing styles, and ways of thinking mix and blend in this intellectually stimulating environment. The rotating group of interns at DMA is as valuable a resource to the studio as the studio is to the interns. This relationship of sharing and exchange on such a large scale creates a unique environment of mutual benefit, which shouldn't be underestimated. I'm very grateful to have spent time working in such a setting, meeting such a range of interesting and colorful people, and working under one of Denmark's great lineage of architectural minds.

## COPENHAGEN

Living in the vibrant cultural heart of Denmark is an unforgettably rich experience. Copenhagen is a uniquely positioned city with a foot in Europe and another in Scandinavia, an interesting history, and a strong artistic tradition. The numerous and widely varying community institutions in Copenhagen provide an ever-changing art scene and endless opportunities for seeing and feeling others' points of view. And great architecture is always just around the corner. From classics like the Louisiana Museum and Grundtvigs Kirke, to contemporary landmarks like 8Tallet and the Maritime Youth Center (not to mention an incredible number of DMA projects in and around Copenhagen), there is always something new to visit and discover.

During my time in Copenhagen, I was able to live with a handful of Danish students, which I highly recommend. I was graciously welcomed into their culture and circles of friends; my life outside of work was wonderful. I spent time learning Danish, joined an ultimate frisbee team, went rock climbing, visited Sweden, Germany, and Greece, worked at a huge music festival, and swam in many cold bodies of water. I was also able to participate in several great events put on by the Scan|Design ambassadors in Copenhagen. We even took a trip to the tiny, yet beautiful island of Bornholm!

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The Scan|Design internship is an amazing opportunity to stretch personally, professionally, and maybe even physically (be careful of too much SketchUp – remember to stretch the wrists). Any student with strong initiative and a passion for architecture can succeed in such a task. After all the necessary preparations for travel are made, I recommend that future interns spend time researching Danish history and culture – living in the country among its people will become much more interesting. Additionally, take advantage of free language lessons – even a simple “Hvordan har du det?” can go a long way. I also recommend that interns find housing as close to the city as possible, and live with Danish roommates – the internship is a cultural exchange as much as it is a chance to develop work skills. Finally, listen well and be willing to learn – Danish architecture is different because the Danes think differently, and international experience is valuable for the unexpected perspectives it affords.

Before my six-month term as a Scan|Design intern was over I was given the opportunity by DMA to continue working at the office, which I was happy to do. I plan to extend my stay here until December when my work visa expires. The Scan|Design internship has been both an extremely valuable learning experience for my professional development, and also an amazing personal journey of discovery. I'm very thankful to Scan|Design for the chance to work among such an impressive culture of design at Dorte Mandrup Arkitekter, in such a fascinating and beautiful city.