

SCAN|DESIGN INTERNSHIP EVALUATION

Riva Black

I applied to Scan|Design's six-month internship due to my interest in further exploring Danish design, culture, and the cutting-edge developments in technology which Denmark and Scandinavia, in general, are engaging in. More importantly, I recognized it as an exceptional opportunity to take what I personally value—a respect and recognition of global perspective—and draw it into my professional sphere for the long-term. Having recently visited Scandinavia and Denmark in 2014 as a graduate summer course, I was exposed to the amazingly wide variety of Scandinavian design. The time spent in Copenhagen was brief but most exciting due to the rapid development of the city while still maintaining its historical significance. Having the opportunity to work in Denmark enabled me to immerse myself in their distinctive design approach and allowed me to develop my skills further.

WORK RESPONSIBILITIES

Through the generous Scan|Design grant, I was placed at Dorte Mandrup Arkitekter (DMA), beginning January of 2016. Having previously visited her office and studying aspects of her firm through graduate classes, I expected to work mainly on smaller competition pieces but was happy to have received a much more diverse work exchange. Upon my arrival I began working on a small hospital and sports center just north of Copenhagen but was quickly transitioned to new projects as they rolled in. The majority of these projects were local housing or grocery stores without a competition aspect. Midway through the internship I was placed on a competition team for an extension to the local engineering headquarters (IDA) on the Copenhagen waterfront. This project was against two other well-known, local firms: COBE and EFFEKT. We worked in a small team of 4 (3 interns and a project architect) but were also working closely with Dorte to guide the project. This was a unique opportunity where Dorte pushed us to try something outside the box. It was very gratifying to win this project for the office and be able to see it come to fruition in the near future. This competition and much of the other projects I worked on, relied heavily upon model making skills, producing multiple models a week if not a day. Thus I felt very prepared for taking on the necessary tasks in the office, having the architectural training I did. The work tasks assigned were always something I had done before, giving the opportunity to hone those skills daily.

OFFICE CULTURE

I had very few formed expectations of the office beyond the type of work I would be doing. Thus I was pleasantly surprised to find a laid back atmosphere, as well as a large intern pool. Having previously worked as the soul intern in offices, it was refreshing to find others at similar stages of their architectural careers. This also worked as an advantage to expanding one's skill set, having an entire team of individuals to easily teach you tips and tricks within programs you may not have been aware of or new programs all together. The constant rotation of these interns in and out of the office made for an easy assimilation and welcoming attitude.

The diverse backgrounds of the employees, both culturally and academically, was a further interesting part of the experience. Not only did the office afford a work exchange but also a cultural exchange working side by side with a diverse European group, from Lithuanian to Portuguese. Being rapidly shifted between projects and architects further gave me an opportunity to examine these cultural differences. This was a

great way to get to know everyone as well as see the different ways people approached projects management and their preferred methods of design.

The work hours were largely irregular and seasonally dependent. There were many long nights and weekends worked (mainly in the winter when it was dark) but the office always compensated with days off after these deadlines had been met. A strong cultural sense of balance between 'work life' and 'personal life' was made clear and encouraged. When the weather improved and projects tapered, everyone would leave the office early to enjoy time outdoors in the sun.

COPENHAGEN

Copenhagen is a fantastic city with so many cultural and architectural opportunities. I took advantage of much of the city by foot and by bike when not in the office. Public transportation is quite expensive to use regularly but makes it easy to get to the airport or hop on a train to explore other parts of Denmark. The most unique part of Copenhagen is its public and outdoor spaces. In the winter, everyone is hunkered down inside and you see very few people but as soon as it begins to thaw, the city comes alive with outdoor activities and people filling these public plazas, waterfronts and many, many parks.

During my time in Copenhagen, I lived in two wildly different neighborhoods that gave me the opportunity to explore different aspects of the city. Originally I found an Airbnb in Christianshavn for 3 months. I then relocated to Vesterbro, which was closer to the city center and work, making my daily commute much shorter and weekend access easier. It is incredibly difficult to find housing in Copenhagen, which was probably the only issue I experienced while on the exchange.

SUGGESTIONS

Overall the internship and exchange process was fabulous. The support received in the initial stages of getting a visa, navigating academic hoops and the support from UW staff was extremely helpful. However, support received upon arriving could be improved. I was never in contact with Scan|Design on the Danish side for events or even contacts I could reach out to. It would have been great to have a meet up or had a happy hour event where we could meet the network of Scan|Design individuals in Denmark. This support could potentially have helped a bit in navigating the local issues of CPR, housing and others that arose over time. Additionally, online housing options were not always as advertised and presented some rather unique situations. Securing desirable, long-term housing at a realistic price was quite a challenge. Having housing options or additional support in place for interns would definitely have been helpful.

Despite any minor hiccups, the exchange was an invaluable life experience that I would recommend to anyone. Working at DMA went so well that I was able to extend my stay and internship for another 6 months which only added to a well-rounded exchange in Copenhagen. Thank you so much for this opportunity.