



Lessons in design from a trip to Copenhagen

By Sandra K. Barnidge

February is a tough time to be a lot of places, and Vienna is no exception. Volatile weather, gray skies, cranky people — this month is not our adopted city's finest, and we were very much in need of a getaway.

And what better place to design an uplifting weekend than Copenhagen, capital of the world's happiest country and a headquarter of Scandinavian style?

Design Concept #1: Proximity

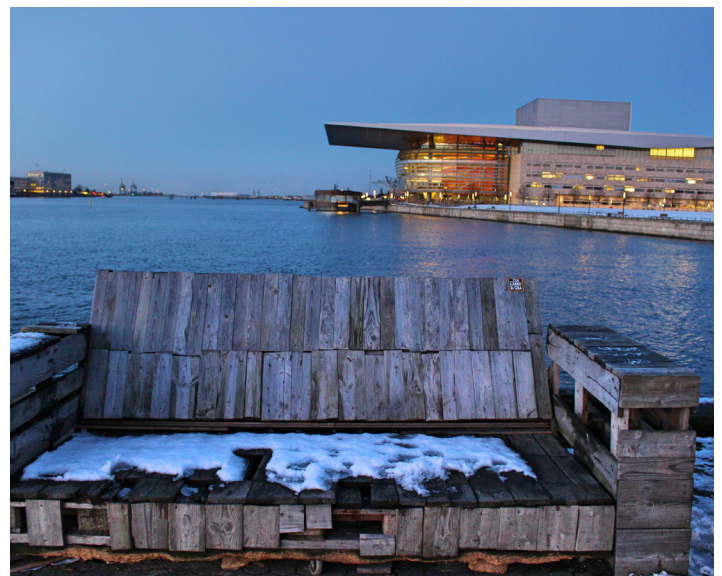
The relationship between elements, as established by a focal point

The rumors are true: Copenhagen is expensive. But we got lucky and found an off-season deal at the Admiral Hotel, a four-star hotel that's within walking distance of almost all of the city's big attractions. Sure, the historic granary-turned-resort may be haunted, and sure, we may have actually heard the ghost rolling balls and moving furniture above us all night long, but hey, a deal's a deal.

Design Concept #2: Mimicry

The tendency to copy elements from nature or pre-existing environments

Nyhavn is Copenhagen's oldest canal, and its two-block stretch of colorful townhouses is the city's most iconic (and most photographed)



Copenhagen's opera house on the harbor, as seen from Paper Island. Photo: Sandra K. Barnidge

backdrop. Hans Christian Andersen lived here, but Nyhavn isn't where you'll find living Danish culture today, especially in February. The harbor bars and restaurants closed much earlier than we expected, which left us scrambling to find a pizza on our first night in town.

In the morning, we gave Nyhavn a second shot. For brunch, we tried smørrebrød, or traditional Danish open-faced sandwiches, at a restaurant called Nyhavns Færgetro. I'll admit that cold prawns and fried fish may not be everyone's top choice for a morning meal, but the platter was a hearty start to a busy day.

Design Concept #3: Contrast

The juxtaposition of opposing elements in order to create visual interest

Papirøen, or Paper Island, is a floating food market that's part of an experimental and somewhat controversial new development plan for Copenhagen's waterfront. It's a mash-up of shipping containers, food trucks, outdoor bonfires, a disco cow suspended from the ceiling, and the best cheap eats in town.



Chairs in Copenhagen's Designmuseum. Photo: Sandra K. Barnidge

The Louisiana is a big museum in every way. Big compound, big installations, big ambitions. We spotted a couple of Warhols prints and a sketch by Picasso, but our favorite was a gallery dedicated to William Kentridge, a South African artist who makes and projects surrealist videos onto large walls. Here's a clip to get a flavor of it — though it's a totally different experience to stand in the middle of the room and watch the figures move around you.

Design Concept #5: The Veblen Effect

The belief that an element is desirable because it is more expensive

After our big museum day, we opted for small portions of New Nordic cuisine at the upscale Geist ("spirit"). Located a block from the empty Nyhavn restaurants, this place was packed. We were lucky to get a couple of stools at the bar, but the effort was worth it. Mead and mezcal cocktails, lumpfish, kale — THIS is Scandinavian fusion at its very best.

Design Concept #4: Scale

The size of an element in relation to other objects or to the human body

The Louisiana Museum of Modern Art had us intrigued from the moment we heard its name. (Fun fact: the museum has no connection to the state of Louisiana; the founder picked the name because he happened to marry three women who were all named Louise.) To get there, we trained north of Copenhagen through forests and gentle hills to the charming hamlet of Humlebæk.

Design Concept #8: Balance

The even distribution of elements in order to create structure and stability

Just down the road from the palace is the Designmuseum Danmark, a museum dedicated to Denmark's influence on contemporary design and style. The main attraction? The hall of chairs, which is exactly as it sounds.

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