

MANSION

BALANCE SHEET

When Two Is Better Than One

A Danish family was set to move to the suburbs, but realized what they really wanted was a second home

BY J.S. MARCUS

CARSTEN AND RIKKE Christiansen, a Danish couple in their mid-30s, were beginning to think they had outgrown their home in Copenhagen's Vesterbro neighborhood, the city's traditional red-light district turned hipster haven.

Parents of a growing family, they planned in 2010 to relocate to one of Copenhagen's greener suburbs. Then they had an epiphany while visiting a friend's vacation home on the northern coast of Zealand, the Danish capital's island. The couple—now parents of two small children—realized that what they needed wasn't a whole new home but a summer house.

The result: a custom-designed, eco-friendly, three-bedroom structure suitable for year-round living, where they and their two sons spend most of the summer plus many weekends the rest of the year.

Mr. Christiansen says people often drive by just to take a look at the unusual house, with its striking black facade and array of A-framed, cabin-like sections. The home has a distinctive, fan-like layout, devised by architect Charles Bessard, the French-born Copenhagen-based principal in the Dutch-Danish firm, Powerhouse Company. Mr. Bessard compares the five interlocking buildings to a spread hand. A network of skylights, strategically placed windows and several terraces mean that the Christiansen family can track the light of the sun throughout the day, starting with breakfast on an east-facing deck, and ending with an evening gathered on a southwest balcony.

The layout disguises the actual size of the house, which is only 1,300 square feet. "We didn't want a castle," says Mr. Christiansen, an engineer who supervises construction projects for Copenhagen Airports A/S, the company that owns and operates the two main airports in the Copenhagen area.

The couple found their property after searching in the same area as their friend's home, about an hour's drive north of the Danish capital. In April 2010, they purchased for \$172,000 a half-acre lot with a 600-square-foot summer house dating back to the 1960s. The plot, in a village called Vejby, is about a third of a mile from the sea and is surrounded by ordinary Danish summer houses meant to be lived in for a few months a year.

It is typical in Denmark to buy a summer home fully furnished. The Christiansens decided to keep much of the previous owner's furniture—which they felt would add a more homey touch than new pieces—but tear down the actual house.

Mr. Christiansen found Mr. Bessard through an article in a Danish design magazine that mentioned the architect in passing. "I called him on the phone and told him about my project," recalls Mr. Christiansen. "I told him that we didn't have a sea view and that the plot is in the middle of other houses—so it has to be something different."

The two developed "a kind of chemistry," he says, and Mr. Bessard responded by coming up with three entirely different designs. Mr. Christiansen chose the spread-hand approach—the most unusual of the three. Used to planning buildings at work, he adds: "I didn't want a regular house that I could have made myself."



FOLLOW THE LIGHT Windows and terraces in the home near Denmark's Zealand coast are situated so that the Christiansen family can track the light of the sun, starting with breakfast on an east-facing deck and ending on a southwest balcony.



FAMILY TIME Carsten, August and Rikke Christiansen in the summer home.



WITH TRIMMINGS Architect Charles Bessard argued for pricey oak trim on all the windows. The couple relented and now feel the wood adds warmth to the interior.



SOMETHING OLD IN SOMETHING NEW The Christiansens decided to keep much of the previous owner's furniture for a homey touch, but tore down the actual house.



HOT SPOT The property has a free-standing sauna lined with ash wood.

The couple and their architect agreed on just about everything, except for the subtle—and expensive—oak trim around the inside of the windows, which Mr. Christiansen thought was unnecessary, adding about \$13,000 to the budget. Mr. Bessard held his ground, however, and now the couple feel that the trim lends essential warmth to the interior.

In addition to the three small bedrooms, the one-story house has two discreet sleeping lofts.

"We wanted small rooms," says Mr. Christiansen, which he says encourages the family to get together in the large central living and dining area. The master bedroom has a wall that opens entirely onto a private deck overlooking a tree-lined yard.

They hoped to finish by Christmas

2011, but delays on foundation and basement work meant a half-year postponement. They finally moved in July 2012, spending more than \$500,00 on the project.

A basement is unusual for a summer house in the area, says Mr. Christiansen, but it was necessary to conceal the complicated technology involved in making the house energy efficient. Outfitted with a heat pump, solar panels and photovoltaic cells, the house can generate all of its heating, and can contribute electricity to the grid when the family is away.

Triple-glazed windows and near-total insulation mean that controlled ventilation is essential, and the house is programmed to ventilate itself four times a day. Heating can be controlled by a smartphone app, which

allows the house to be just the right temperature when the family arrives for winter weekends.

In addition to the main house, the property has a new free-standing sauna, lined with ash wood and equipped with a large picture window. The wood-burning sauna oven is imported from Finland. Mr. Christiansen designed the sauna himself. "It is beautiful sitting here in 175-degree heat," he says, of his winter sauna sessions, which end with a roll in the snow.

Saunas aren't rare in Denmark, but "most Danes who build a sauna end up using them for storage," says Mr. Christiansen. The couple, looking ahead to the property's resale value, built the sauna to be easily converted into a guesthouse.



OFFERING A HAND The layout is in five cabinlike sections, like spread fingers.

ADDING UP THE SUMMER HOME

Property price, including original house

\$172,000

Architect's fee

\$32,180

Demolition

\$16,000

Basic house structure (walls, roof, foundation)

\$195,000

Windows, roof, light, doors

\$26,700

Kitchen

\$6,670

Bathroom

\$10,700

Garden

\$3,550

Terrace

\$8,500

Sauna and shower

\$12,800

Paint job, inside and outside

\$19,550

Oak floor, castle plank

\$15,100

Oak window trims

\$12,800

ESTIMATED TOTAL

\$531,550

NOTE: Mr. Christiansen saved about \$35,500 by doing some of the work himself.



GOING UP The one-story home has three bedrooms and two sleeping lofts.



SPREAD SHEET | SANETTE TANAKA

Cold Cash: The Effect of AC on Home Prices

EVEN IN the winter, the air conditioner is working hard—boosting a home's value.

An analysis of property listings in 22 major metro areas found that homes with central air conditioning are offered for 13% more, on average, than homes without central air, according to real-estate brokerage Redfin. Cities in the Midwest see the widest price gap: Homes with central air are listed for 105% more than homes without central air.

Of course, homes with central air may have other amenities that help bump up the list price. But AC seems to be a driving force in the decision making, according to the National Association of Realtors, a trade group. In a survey of

Stay Cool

A look at homes with central air conditioning, by region, and a price comparison of current home listings in 22 major metro markets with and without central air:

REGION	NORTHEAST	MIDWEST	SOUTH	WEST
% homes with central air	36%	68%	83%	47%
Median list price with central air	\$359,900	\$249,800	\$255,687	\$410,000
Median list price without central air	\$239,900	\$122,000	\$219,990	\$330,000

Source: U.S. Department of Energy residential energy consumption survey; Redfin

recent home buyers released in November, central air was the No. 1 feature sought when house shopping, according to the survey of 2,005 respondents who bought a home between 2010 and 2012. Respondents who purchased a home without central AC would be

willing to pay \$2,520 more for a home with this feature.

Don Prather, technical services manager of Air Conditioning Contractors of America, another trade association, says homeowners are installing new features that are both high tech and energy efficient.

Touch screens on thermostats make it easy to control temperatures in zones throughout the house. Some systems allow remote access so homeowners (or even the utility company) can adjust settings to manage energy consumption, he says.

Luxury homes tend to have more of these high-tech features than starter homes, but because they are larger and have more amenities, the upscale properties typically use more energy, according to Home Innovation Research Labs, a subsidiary of the National Association of Home Builders.

Still, some eco-friendly options, such as geothermal heat pumps, are increasingly common in luxury homes.

These units can both heat and cool by drawing from the relatively stable temperatures within the earth, says Ed Hudson, director of the market-research division at Home Innovation Research Labs.

Two years ago, Amy Musser

and her husband, Matthew Vande, oversaw the design and construction of their 2,800-square-foot home in Asheville, N.C. The structure was tightly insulated, and the couple added solar panels to generate electricity and a geothermal heat pump for heating and cooling.

The house cost just under \$500,000 to build, but energy incentives in the form of tax credits and rebates lowered the overall cost, says Ms. Musser, who with her husband founded the technical-consulting firm VandeMusser Design.

Now they can crow about their savings: "My average bill is probably \$10 a month. And that's pretty much just service charges," she says.

