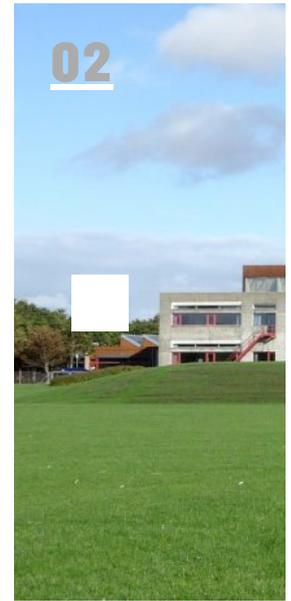


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Architectural Nirvana in Thisted

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Appreciate



A tepid gulp of black coffee is an indispensable ingredient this early August morning. In about one hour I'm heading to the north-western part of Jutland, the peninsula, which comprises more than half of Denmark's total area. My destination is the town of Thisted: Thisted Gymnasium, to be exact. I'm going there to experience architecture or, as my former principal once poetically told me, to *be in* architecture.

But what makes me undertake a three-hour drive to visit a gymnasium designed in the 1970s?

First off, the gymnasium was designed by one of Denmark's most prominent architectural firms, namely Friis & Moltke Architects. Secondly, it's supposed to be one of the most beautiful concrete educational institutions in the country. The last reason is that Mikkel Wienberg, the Creative Director of Friis & Moltke Architects, has promised to tell me all about the concrete sexiness of the place if I take the time to drive there. Well, that opportunity sounds too interesting to miss.

I turn the key and head north.

'There are plenty of Friis & Moltke works where concrete has been used architecturally in strong projects. Thisted Gymnasium is probably the best example. The material has been used in such a way that it comes into its own; the in-situ concrete (concrete which is moulded on-site) can do something completely different from what is done in projects made of concrete elements,' Wienberg told me on the phone a few days ago.

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Local brutalism

Back in the 1960s and 1970s, Friis & Moltke Architects designed a lot of concrete buildings in Denmark. According to a report on Nordic concrete architecture from the Technological Institute of Denmark, the founders, Knud Friis and Elmar Moltke, developed a local type of brutalism.

‘Knud Friis was once asked what he would say to people who believed concrete was ugly. He shook his head and said that it was a silly question, because concrete can look so different depending on how you use it,’ Wienberg explains, as we sit in Thisted Gymnasium’s Teutonic Hall, an extension which was designed by Friis & Moltke Architects in 2012.

According to Wienberg, concrete can correspond aesthetically with a lot of different materials. With in-situ concrete you can mould organic shapes like curves and wavy circles – techniques that are also used at Thisted Gymnasium. The wooden boards that are used as inner sheathing on the ceiling at the gymnasium are the same boards that were used to mould the in-situ concrete. In this way, the concrete gets a different surface compared to concrete elements. At the same time, Wienberg says it’s ‘more sustainable to reuse the wooden boards’.

As I move around Thisted Gymnasium, the whole place somehow feels richer. The undiluted architecture shows its face beneath school bags, lunchboxes and sweaty gym trainers. The main inner street at Thisted Gymnasium functions well architecturally, because of the natural lighting and the connection between indoor and outdoor spaces. The boundaries between indoors and outdoors have been blurred, Wienberg tells me.

‘It was a kind of revolution to build educational institutions like this. Instead of moving from room to room, you were a part of a bigger inner cityscape, where the hallways and corridors became streets and bigger areas evolved into kinds of squares inside the building. I believe that the feeling you get when you move around in a house like that is hard to explain, but when you move around it just feels nice. In this case, the way the concrete is used is one of the elements that make it feel nice,’ says Wienberg.

Feeling it

I’m astounded by the Creative Director’s obvious passion for concrete. It’s permeating his words and sentences as we sit here in the middle of the concrete hall, almost breathing concrete (figuratively speaking). I stop his flow of talk, asking him where this pure fascination with the concrete architectural projects of Friis & Moltke Architects comes from and how it has affected his career.

‘Friis & Moltke Architects’ older concrete works are made in a very convincing way, especially regarding their idiom and shape. It has, at the very least, inspired me to seek simplicity when I design solutions. To seek to minimise the usage of many materials, and utilise the possibilities of concrete,’ says Wienberg.

The hall turns silent. It’s Friday afternoon and the last students have just left the building. I momentarily experience two or three seconds of simply soaking up impressions, an architectural Zen mode, some might say. Wienberg just sits there and then, a split second before the silence becomes awkward, he starts to talk about his favourite piece of advice for experiencing architecture in a good way. I sit back. Listen. And dream away in a north-western concrete hiatus. Pure joy.

[Mikkel Wienberg’s three pieces of advice for achieving great architectural experiences](#)



[Creating a Wooden Success from the Outskirts of Jutland](#)

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– Be there – architecture is best experienced first-hand. It’s really hard to describe architecture in words – even when you are standing next to it – but in a way, you can sort of feel when it’s right.

– Look up – there’s a tendency to look ahead or down when you’re moving around in the city. Try to look up next time; you’ll get a better overview of how buildings connect with each other. You will see contexts in a whole new way.

– Take your time – when you want to capture a scene with your camera, you will have a better chance of getting the perfect picture if you shoot a lot of photos rather than just one. The same goes for experiencing architecture: the more time you spend, the better chance you have of experiencing architecture in an enriching way.

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