

**The soaring curves of Søren Robert Lund's new print works in Slagelse reflect the speed and accuracy of the processes within.**

**by Eric Messerschmidt**

Unlike the wooded, mountainous landscape of its Scandinavian neighbours, Denmark's countryside is lacking in grandiose scenery and remarkable settings. An open, essentially man-made landscape, its large flat vistas and gently undulating wooded hills are easy-going on the eye.

At its best, this landscape can be seen as picturesque, a sequence of 'garden-scapes'. At its worst, it just stretches on and on – a monotonous unrolling of nature, interspersed with more or less intelligently planned buildings and infrastructure. This is very much the case around the town of Slagelse, 80km south-west of Copenhagen, where the main roads and railway lines that lead to the bridge that connects Zealand to Funen constitute the dominant visual feature.

It is to just such areas, with their low ground rents and excellent road and rail communications, that developers are attracted when building yet more suburban business parks. Certainly, when one of Denmark's largest printing factories was looking for a new base, the site's strategic position was in its favour. But the new printing works by young Danish architect Søren Robert Lund is an exception to the run-of-the-mill architecture you expect to find in such places. It stands out from its surroundings, taking a bold view of the kind of architectural intervention one can make in such circumstances.

The new building houses the printing plant for Denmark's leading daily newspaper, Berlingske Tidende. It comprises some 4,800sqm, organised as a logical response to the technical and logistical needs of the production of newspapers today. This is a pragmatic, industrial building – reflected in the fact that more than two-thirds of the initial budget went on high-performance printing presses, leaving less than 50 million Danish crowns (US\$6.3 million) for the much larger structure of the building itself.

As a result, this is a straight-forward building. It consists of a printing hall, paper storage, packing room and the basic facilities for the workers and employees. And yet, in its response to the building programme and the landscape, Lund's industrial plant is a lesson in architectural excellence.

It all starts with the coherence established between the building and the landscape. As was the case with his first work – the competition-winning Arken Museum of Modern Art south of Copenhagen (1996), the building that catapulted Lund to fame – the arrangement of the printing plant forms a story that tells of the processes taking place within.

Lund's arrangement of the building highlights the process of transformation within, as raw pulp is turned newsprint. The surrounding landscape has been planted with paper birches, an obvious reference to the tree-pulp-paper theme. Sited perpendicular to both motorway and railway line on slightly falling land, the printing works is longitudinal : pulp goes in one end; trucks collect the finished newspapers from the other. At its centre, a dynamic polygon bursts out like a frozen cascade: a dramatic, zinc-clad visual break in the structure intended as an architectural metaphor for the newspaper folding machine below. It also creates a vertical counterpoint to the overall horizontality of the setting. The large volumes either side are clad with patinated zinc panels with standing seams – their folded forms again underscoring the folding metaphor. To further express this idea, the printing hall facade slopes inward, while the ventilation hall slopes outward.

The large central mass is flanked by shorter buildings, which house the administration, paper storage, shipping room and canteen. The contrast between the expressive centre and the lower rectilinear buildings is underscored in the choice of materials, with the side-buildings covered in black stained wood and concrete elements.

The whole design means that it can be extended in any number of phases west across the site. Contrasts in form and materials are a distinct feature of Lund's work. It is an approach that distinguishes him from most young Danish architects and their preoccupation with its trendy rectangular geometries. His interior spaces are generally conceived less as rooms and more as a loose bringing together of planes. The exterior form emerges as the unfolding of a central leitmotif.

When talking about the Arken Museum of Modern Art, Lund describes his architectural approach as the search for combining the care for human values and artistic commitment with the sense of craftsmanship. Certainly, his buildings all bear the prints or traces of artistic collaborations. This is particularly notable at the newspaper printing works, where the canteen is decorated with black and white graphics by the painter Claus Carstensen.

The strict implementation of the EU Directive on the public procurement of services has been responsible for a remarkable change in the Danish architectural scene over the last five or six years. The country's century-long tradition of holding as many open competitions as possible has served as the stepping stone for young emerging architects to establish themselves and raise the profile their practices. But this is now limited by an increased number of invited tenders. As a consequence, the young architects find it more and more difficult to enter the scene and access the commissions, whether public or private.

In Lund's case, the situation has turned into a paradox. While enjoying wide recognition in his role as chief developer for the Tivoli Gardens in Copenhagen, the expressive and flamboyant nature of his architecture sets him apart from the professional consensus dominated by the closed neo-Modern aesthetics. This may explain why the number of invitations to international competitions exceeds the number of invitations to Danish competitions.

Indeed Lund only won the commission to design the print factory – which came at a time when his only built work was a monumental public art institution in the capital – because of the personal intervention of the company's CEO who had seen his museum and liked it. Wanting to leave an architectural stamp on a project originally conceived of as purely technical, he called Lund's office. Sadly, he died three weeks after the factory's opening. But the lasting benefit is a landscape enriched by a building that actually makes sense of the site and adds a human touch to it.

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