

URBAN LIVING

The city pulse. Ever-larger crowds of people, bicycles and cars. Tall buildings and narrow alleys. Rooftop gardens and expansive parks. In this issue of Z Magazine, we celebrate cities.

The legendary journalist *Herb Caen* once said, "A city is a state – of mind, of taste, of opportunity. A city is a marketplace – where ideas are traded, opinions clash and eternal conflict may produce eternal truths." With thousands of cities of various size around the world, there are many eternal truths out there. In order to learn about some of them, we had a chat with architect *Pål Ross* from *Ross Arkitektur & Design*. We talked about architecture, cities and their impact on the way we live.

What is architecture?

"Architecture is an art form that you can live inside, and which has certain qualities. As such, not all buildings can be considered architecture. I often use music to illustrate the difference, since more people are familiar with that art form. There is a difference between music and sound. Music affects us – we feel excited, relaxed, sad – while sound generally doesn't have that same effect. And it's the same with architecture and buildings. Moreover, architecture has an outside and an inside, just like we do. And with that comes outer beauty and inner beauty – again, just like us. The outer beauty receives the most attention, but the inside is just as important, if not more. It's the inside of a building that turns architecture into liveable art."

How does architecture affect us?

"Architecture is the reason why people in different cities, or even different residential areas, have different levels of happiness. It isn't something in the air; it's the architectonic impact. And we shouldn't underestimate the importance of this impact. The effect is similar to that of music – not as apparent, but just as real – but unlike music, you cannot switch off the environment around you. If your work environment is depressing, as a result of poor architecture, there is little you can do about it. That environment will have an impact on you eight hours a day, five days a week."

The correlation between architecture and happiness is difficult to measure, but there are many examples of its existence. One of the most famous examples takes place in the 1950s, when *Nobel Prize*-winner *Jonas Salk* was working on the polio vaccine. Unhappy with the progress he was making, Salk left his *Pittsburgh* laboratory and moved to *Basilica di San Francesco d'Assisi*, a 13th-century monastery in the *Italian* town of *Assisi*, where he ultimately invented the vaccine. After this experience, Salk became a strong believer in the power of architecture. A correlation between architecture and happiness could possibly explain why people often are happier in smaller cities than in the larger ones.

What is the architecture like in a city?

"A city has different layers of architecture. In the city centre, you have older architecture spanning hundreds of years of architectonic heritage. There are churches, city halls, modern shopping malls and tall skyscrapers. The further you get from the city centre, however, the more homogenous the architecture becomes. In the suburbs, large sections are often built at the same time, and as such, the architecture in a suburb is more representative of when it was built. Interestingly, villages have more in common with a city centre than with a suburb, despite the size difference. The suburb is sort of depending on the support of the city, while the village has to be more self-sufficient. Villages are like small cities. You have churches, restaurants, museums, office buildings and a city hall. Then, of course, you have places like *New York City* and other metropolises. Using Nordic cities as a point of reference, it is difficult to grasp their size, their height, the number of people and the number of cars. Personally, I love *Manhattan*, but I'm also always a bit relieved when I return home."

Although massive cities might not be to everyone's liking, they are definitely an inherent part of the future. A *UN* report from 2014 stated that fifteen years from now, in the year 2030, cities like *Sao*

Paolo and New York City will no longer make the top 10 list of the world's most populated cities. Instead, nearly all the largest cities will be found in Asia and Africa. Fifteen years from now, India will have 404 million new city dwellers, while China's cities will expand by 292 million people and Nigeria will have 212 million new residents in their cities. That's more than 900 million people moving to, or being born in, cities in the next 15 years – and that's just in those three countries!

How do you envision the future of architecture?

"My vision, towards which I will contribute as much as I can, is that cities will become greener. Even though cities grow, as they inevitably will, they can become greener at the same time. I have a vision of us winning back the cities by raising the street level above the roads. We are already doing our best to put most of our roads underground, and if we could make the entire street level free of cars, then people could ride their bikes to work and parents could let their children out to play, despite living in a densely populated city."

The idea that cities will become, or rather, need to become greener is widespread, and there are cities that have managed to reinvent themselves by going green. Take the city of Detroit, for example. In 2013, the motor city filed for bankruptcy. At the time, Detroit had more than 80,000 abandoned homes, the combined area of which is larger than the entire city of Paris. Some plots of land were priced at 500 US dollars, and people still weren't buying. More recently, however, Detroit has become something of a hipster darling. Young people move to the city in search of low rents and great opportunities. Detroit-based hipster initiatives include turning old parking lots into massive allotments, and as the ultimate testament to the city's hipster status, Twitter recently opened an office there.

Another great example of green cities can be found right here in the Nordics: Copenhagen. The Danish capital city has one of the highest percentages of bicycle riders in the world. Some surveys have shown that more than 50 percent of the population ride their bikes to work or to school, compared to less than ten percent in Stockholm. The secret to the city's bicycle success is its infrastructure, as Copenhagen has separate, four-metre-wide roads meant exclusively for bicycles, as well as designated bicycle carriages on the Metro. One particularly popular innovation is the Bicycle Snake, which is a 230-metre, meandering, elevated bridge for bicycle riders. Crossing the bridge is almost like riding on rollercoaster, albeit a rather slow one. Furthermore, in order to avoid having thousands of bicycles parked on the pavement, the city has continuously converted parking spaces for cars into parking spaces for bicycles, at a rate of two percent per year.

Pål Ross goes on to explain:

"Hopefully, we are also heading towards a future that doesn't have separate residential areas and office areas. Although it might sound odd at first, flats and offices go really well together and create some amazing synergies. For example, flats need heat while offices need cooling, so having them right next to each other saves lots of energy. In addition, offices tend to be busy during the day and quite in the evenings, so if you had a layer of offices between the flats, you'd get fewer noise complaints. You can also have separate entrances and lifts, so that families don't have to deal with hordes of office workers in the mornings. In the future, I also see us reconquering the rooftop. A rooftop makes it possible to live in a villa right in the city centre, with light, sunshine, trees and gardens. It's not even that difficult to plant trees on a roof: you just need a few feet of soil for the roots to take hold. It will be the new, hip way of buying property in the future. Instead of leaving the city centre to purchase a villa outside the city, you can have all the benefits of a villa while enjoying a city's superior level of service, with its restaurants, concerts and nightlife. You simply purchase a rooftop! You



ROSS ARKITEKTUR & DESIGN

Ross Arkitektur & Design specialises in exclusively designed villas, with past, current and prospective clients from all around the world. In addition to their exclusive designs, of which there only exist one of each design in the entire world, Ross Arkitektur & Design also offers limited edition designs, of which there are a maximum of twelve iterations, albeit at a certain distance from one another. Villa Östersund (pictured right) is an exclusive design that has received numerous awards, including Best Single Residence Sweden at the 2014 European Property Awards and Best Architecture Single Residence Sweden at the 2013 International Property Awards.

When asked what makes Ross' architecture stand out, Pål Ross explains: "The aim of our architecture is to make people feel better. We are amongst the first architect offices to specialize in designing private homes, and we will have soon completed 300 projects. Architecture is like cooking. Most people can make a meal that satisfies your hunger, but it won't necessarily be nutritious or tasty. A great chef, however, can take the same ingredients and make something extraordinary – a meal that makes people happy. And that's exactly what we do here. We create gourmet meals. We create music where others create sound."



"Nature has been around for billions of years, and whenever we want to build something it should be on nature's terms" – Pål Ross

can have your own pool up there too, and you'd have a great view. It will be the coolest piece of land you can buy, and I'm convinced that we will see this phenomenon in cities all around the world. Couple that with my idea of raising the street level, and you'd have a much brighter and more liveable city."

Indeed, in central Stockholm houses are already being built on top of other houses, with gardens and children's playgrounds. It takes less than a minute to reach the city centre, since it's only a lift away. In the future, with companies like Amazon experimenting with delivery systems using flying drones, you might not even have to take the lift. In extremely densely populated cities like Tokyo, it is common to find gardens and tennis courts on rooftops, as it is often too expensive to have them on the ground. So who knows, we might see a Pål Ross villa on a rooftop in the not-too-distant future.

How would you describe the architecture in Nordic cities?

"The architecture in Nordic cities is heavily regulated. There are rules for how tall a building can be, and exceptions are very rarely given. In Stockholm, for example, you rarely see buildings taller than seven or eight floors, and this means that no matter where you are in the city, you receive the same amount of light. The only district where the light differs is Gamla Stan, the Old Town, and that's just because the district is hundreds of years old."

Which cities have the best architecture in your opinion?

"I am a big fan of Stockholm and Venice, both of which have a proud architectural pedigree. I like the fact that the cities' history and architecture intertwine. I also love water, and both Venice and Stockholm have large, open areas of it. Some cities have kilometres upon kilometres of roads and buildings, and it creates a sense of confinement where you feel shut in. Cities without water or parks can easily become dull, and they are usually more polluted."

Who are your favourite architects?

"Well, Frank Lloyd Wright is one of my biggest idols. His flagship house Fallingwater from the 1930s is to die for. I'm also a big fan of Finnish architects Alvar Aalto and Eero Saarinen, and I was a fan of Frank Gehry before it became fashionable. Erik Asmussen was a Danish architect who designed the Cultural Centre in Ytterjärna, and he helped me understand the importance of motion in architecture, and how it affects people's wellbeing."

What is the importance of motion?

"If you look at my architecture, you can probably tell that it's inspired by the motions of the people who will be living in the building. In many conventional buildings, everything is based on cost-efficiency – the user simply has to adapt to the shape of the building. However, if people were able to move inside the building in a way that fit their natural motions, then they would feel much better. It's just like in parks where gravelled paths have 90-degree turns – people will make their own diagonal footpath across the grass. If you're at a beach or in the woods, you never make 90-degree turns, but you are forced to make them all the time in your home and office."

Can this philosophy be applied to cities as well?

"It certainly can! In older European cities, you will notice that many streets are curved. You can't see all the way in front of you, but as you walk, new sections of the street are revealed for you. Compare that to modern inner-city roads where you can see hundreds of metres in front of you. It's unexciting and exhausting. Cities that haven't been optimised for cars driving at 70 kilometres an hour have a completely different vibe. They are less windy, and they feel safer."

Whether we will live in green cities, tall cities or overpopulated cities, the city is here to stay. And it appears we have an exciting, urban future to look forward to. ☺