



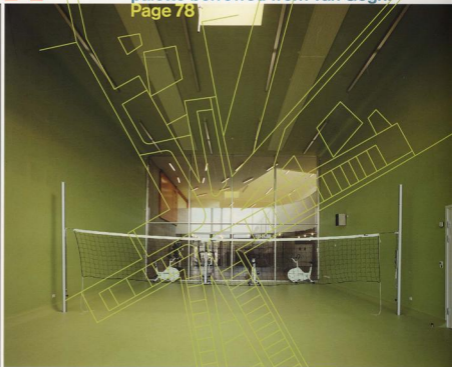
In Helsingör a star-shaped building is trying to break the bad patterns of psychiatric care. Light instead of darkness. Views instead of no views. And a colour palette borrowed from van Gogh.

Page 78

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To be and not to be, that is the aim

In Helsingør a star-shaped building is trying to break the bad patterns of psychiatric care. Light instead of darkness, views instead of no views. And a colour palette borrowed from van Gogh.

Psychiatric hospital/
 Biarke Ingels Group and
 Julienne De Smedt Architects/
 Helsingør

COUNTRY



TEXT

LARS ÅBERG PHOTO MOEN

Lars Åberg is a Malmö-based freelance journalist and writer who interviewed Ken "Cuckoo's nest" Kesey in his home in Oregon a month before Kesey died. He is a regular contributor to Forum AID and last wrote about the pre-historic exhibition Odden's eye.
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PHOTO



The psychiatric hospital has entrances on both floors. While the upper one (glimpsed to the left) faces the parking lot, the one underneath is an asphalted approach that makes ambulance transport possible.

Can you get well from architecture? Lone Borberg gives a very affirmative answer when we meet at the new psychiatric hospital in Helsingør:

"Yes. It is significant that the building has a high quality. This means a fundamental acknowledgement: 'Yes, you are worth something'. The environment supports treatment."

Borberg is hospital matron and was on the jury that in 2003 accepted enthusiastically the architect office Plot's competition entry for a non-authoritarian institution without the heavy shadows and interminable corridors that made the chief Sopsop Bromden run away in the final scene of *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest*, Ken Kesey's classical depiction of society as a hospital.

Together with a few other heads of department, Lone Borberg also wrote *The schizophrenic paper*, the collection of ideas for the new hospital which became the competition programme.

"What was so inspirational was the programme's extreme contrasts", says David Zahle, architect in charge of the project. "There were a thousand small rooms that should all be next to each other, but nonetheless not too near anything else. On one hand, no one should feel that they were in-patients in hospital and on the other hand there should be a centre and it should be easy to supervise the patients. Control and freedom. Open and screened-off. Private and communal. Both one thing and the other. As we found ourselves in Helsingør we were forced to find the solution to prince Hamlet's problem – it was actually possible to be and not to be."

Zahle received the hospital commission while he was still a student and was practicing architecture at Plot in Copenhagen, Bjarke Ingels and Julien De Smedt's almost insolently successful design office, awarded last year's Forum Prize amongst others. Today the office is no more since the founders have gone their separate ways and Zahle works at BIG, or Bjarke Ingels Group. The name may sound like a guitar trio from the seventies, but in all essentials it has the enthusiastic atmosphere, and the bustle of T-shirts, sneakers, laptops and plastic models just moved from the old office on Vesterbrogade to the new on Nørrebrogade.

"We talked about doing an anti-hospital, a building of wellness instead of a building of sickness. Many surveys show that people become sick from being put into hospital. The faster the patients can get home, the healthier they become. If we are depressed and land up in hospital we know at that moment we wake up where we are. Perhaps if we had come to heaven instead it might be better!"

Helsingør's psychiatric hospital is situated discreetly and slightly floating in the somewhat sloping terrain, that faces a deciduous forest and a little lake just behind Helsingør's hospital's 1970s box with linoleum corridors, easy for cleaning machines, and a myriad of signs on the walls. From the outside it looks like an art museum, long glass walls moving in, under and out from the lawn. From above, it looks like a starfish. All of its tentacles issue from the same centre, a central entrance without reception, but they are autonomous at the same time in

relationship to each other. It is a construction that works as a hospital but could equally well be a centre for studies or – if the sports facility had had a swimming pool – a resort.

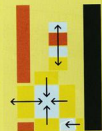
Glass is a central part of the construction. Older mental hospitals narrowed the possibility of looking in or out – the inner darkness corresponded to the outer one – but in Helsingør the patients' single rooms on the ground floor look out over the landscape through large window panes. All the corridors have one length of glass. Here and there glassed garden rooms break up the structure, a type of nature's peepshow. The nurses and doctors have their meetings in glass boxes where they can be seen by the patients.

"It provides security and also shows that we are not just sitting, drinking coffee", laughs Lone Borberg.

She seems very satisfied with the new building, but also stresses that such a modern and different hospital needs getting used to. Some of the patients feel that the furniture is too modern and uncomfortable; perhaps they will need to add some more old-fashioned upholstered chairs sooner or later. And won't the windows without curtains cast unpleasant reflections when the darkness of winter sets in?

You could say that the competition programme's contradictions concerned hiding the control mechanisms attractively. Psychiatry should be opened up without patients running away. The in-patients had to be supervised and still feel that they were the ones watching their surroundings.

In the sixties the influential British psychia-



A



B



C



COUNTRY



ARCHITECT

BLANKE INGELS GROUP ALIEN DE SMEDT ARCHITECTS

ARCHITECTURE

PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

A
A schematic presentation of level 1's four main functions: offices (orange); recreation rooms (yellow); light-courts (light blue); patients' bedrooms (blue). The arrows indicate the lines of sight.

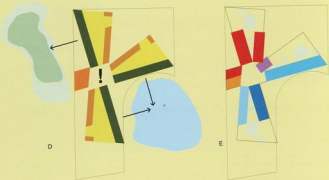
B
Level 1, south wing. A version of the previous presentation, adapted from the plan. The light-courts function as room dividers in the wide corridors between bedrooms and offices. The corridors are wide enough to function as recreational rooms.

C
Level 1 in its entirety with the plot border marked. The four fingers of the building stretch as far as possible in order to integrate the building optimally with nature and expand the sphere of the patients. Sixteen patients live in each corridor, totalling 48. The four fingers meet in the central room.

D
All the patients' bedrooms on level 1 face a grove or a lake. The adjacent hospital complex can only be seen from the staff offices and meeting rooms.

E
Level 2, out-patients' care. Each finger is a separate section. Everyone has a view of the surroundings.

The hidden emergency exit on level 2 is clad in similar aluminium metal as the rest of the façade. The fence around the light-courts in simple metal netting allows the light to stream down to the enclosed sections' recreation rooms on the bottom floor.



trist R. D. Laing wrote that it was society that was sick and this was discovered by the really healthy people who were consequently locked away. But it is not that sort of change in perspective that has guided the hospital building in Helsingör; living here should be like checking into a hotel, but there is no doubt that treatment is what it is all about.

"We haven't been asked to change psychiatry", says Zahle. "We are not psychiatrists, even if my grandfather was and my mother is a psychologist. But in the programme we aimed at doing something new and different. That's what the clients wanted: an architecture that retained the good things about the old, but added new elements."

"I don't think you can recover because of architecture, but you can be put in a better

"As we found ourselves in Helsingör we were forced to find the solution to prince Hamlet's problem – it was actually possible to be and not to be"

mood. Naturally the surrounds play a part in one's mental state, but I don't think this can replace therapy."

But why were those old drab corridor hospitals built, anyway?

"The best intentions were there! The most important thing was that everyone should receive treatment, something we take for granted today. Many hospitals are from a time when one considered medical treatment and education in factory terms; you were inserted into one end and came out the other, no one really thought so much about pleasant experiences on the way. Nowadays society places the individual much more in the centre."

Psychiatric patients belong to society's unseen; since the 1980s budgets have been slashed in country after country, from the US to Sweden, hospitals have been closed down and people without the ability to look after themselves have been sent home or out alone or, in the worst case, out into addiction and a homeless existence in the parks.

Bjarke Ingels thinks the venture in Helsingör shows that politicians, at least here, have at long last decided to do something for qualitative psychiatric care. There are many bad patterns to break as psychiatric care has developed and been reduced.

But the construction of the building did not go altogether smoothly. Suddenly money had to be saved again and the project was held up for a year.

Wouldn't it be possible to remove the upper

floor? The plants in the glassed garden cubes were replaced with stones. And what was wrong with linoleum?

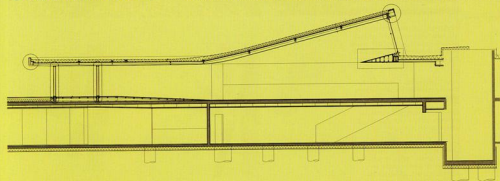
"There are so many hospital clichés!" sighs Ingels. "Myths have developed about how hard it is to build hospitals. There are no limits to what people can find problematic if new ideas are put forward."

Ingels, who exchanged ideas constantly with Zahle, wanted to cover the facade in gold-chrome steel plate. With a less spectacular surface, some fewer rooms and some amount of unpainted concrete, gradually the whole project was completed.

"The senses need nourishment!" Ingels insists. "That is why we tried to eliminate all the clichés from the world of hospitals. Everything that is normally dead corridor area here is either recreation rooms or galleries where you can experience your surroundings. We fought for the colour scale of the floors, that we got from van Gogh's palette. First the nurses voted us down – you can always argue with an architect in a democratic welfare state. But when we brought in a real artist, there was no longer anything to discuss!"

In his inaugural speech Ingels joked about having had a paranoid contractor and a schizophrenic commissioner and that it had almost led to a manodepressive architect.

"But when we stood there and the sun shone and we saw how lovely it all was, we began once again to believe in the healing power of the physical framework", he says today.



Section showing the upper floor's main entrance and passage to the central room. The roof stretches upwards into a window with a view of the sky.



"I don't think you can recover because of architecture, but you can be put in a better mood"

COUNTRY



ARCHITECT

BJARKE INGEL'S GROUP, JULIEN DE SMEDT ARCHITECTS



Outside the glassed offices is an external aluminium and galvanised steel plate gallery. About 80 people work at the hospital.

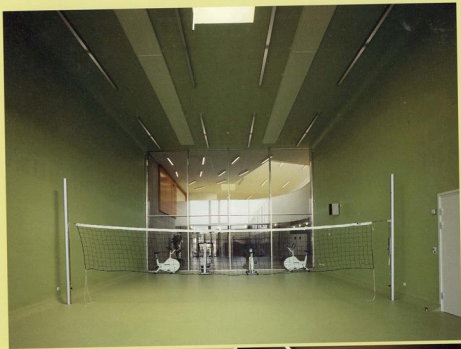
The entire bottom floor is an enclosed section. The only opportunity to breathe fresh air is via the light-courts. These have grass and wild flowers in them. The stone boulders are from when the plot was dug. In the background can be seen Helsingør's hospital.

A communication path connects the psychiatric hospital to the adjacent somatic hospital. The path is about 50 metres long, of which 20 stretch over the path for emergency services that surrounds the new building. In time grass will grow on the path.

Helsingør's hospital (left) is the region's central hospital, a building from the seventies, in asbestos cement sheeting from that period. The psychiatric hospital faces away from it and towards the nature.

ARCHITECTURE

PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL



The sports hall on two levels is a green tunnel with glass at both ends. One window faces nature, the other the central room.

The untreated cement pillar on level 2 contrasts with the floor's bright colour. To the left of the pillar can be glimpsed the lift, and to the right the visitors' toilets.



The triangular light-court channels daylight into the building and forms a natural meeting place. The specially designed wall-mounted benches follow forward at different levels and form tables as well as steps out to the light-court.



"The senses need nourishment. We have tried to eliminate all the clichés from the world of hospitals"

COUNTRY



ARCHITECT

BJARNE INGEL'S GROUP ALIEN DE SMEDT ARCHITECTS



Office corridor on level 2. The bench of powder lacquered tubing ensures that the passage can function as a meeting place, with a view out to the grass-covered roof.

The central room with its arched stairway. As with the rest of level 2, the floor is of epoxy and painted bright yellow. The architects' preliminary studies showed that coloured walls have a negative effect but coloured floors seem to be embracing.

The central room is open on two levels. The yellow stairway from the top floor contrasts with the lower floor's polished concrete floor. Two light filaments are used throughout: strip lights that emphasise the building's movements and a simple light bulb in the recreation rooms.

The central room with the main entrance at the back. Visitors step right into the large room. No reception is necessary, visitors rarely come unannounced.

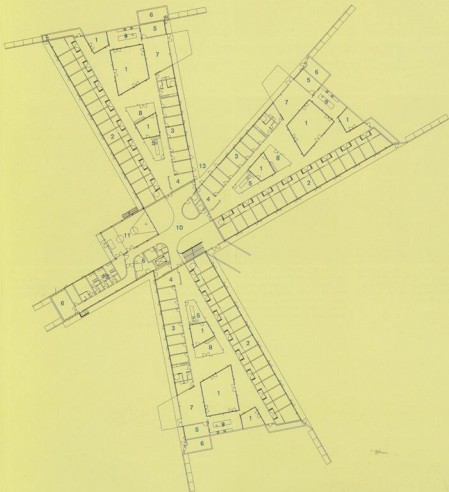
ARCHITECTURE

PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL

The psychiatric hospital's star shape can be seen clearly from Helsingør's hospital. The building is partly buried in the billowing landscape. In time, grass will grow on the slopes.

Level 1

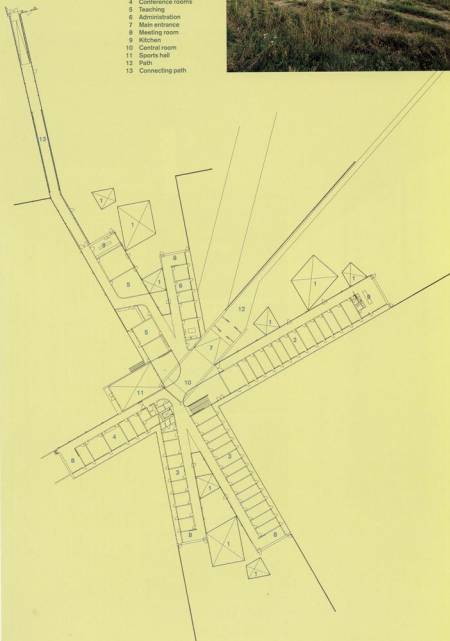
- 1 Atrium
- 2 Bedrooms
- 3 Offices
- 4 Reception
- 5 Meeting room
- 6 Technical equipment
- 7 Dining room
- 8 Smoking room
- 9 Kitchen
- 10 Central Room
- 11 Sports hall
- 12 Changing rooms
- 13 Entrance



One of the architects' main aims was to maximise the patients' contact with nature. The large glass areas of the façade ensure that the building is more like a spa hotel than a hospital.



- Level 2
- 1 Atrium
 - 2 Psychologist reception
 - 3 District psychology
 - 4 Conference rooms
 - 5 Teaching
 - 6 Administration
 - 7 Main entrance
 - 8 Meeting room
 - 9 Kitchen
 - 10 Central room
 - 11 Sports hall
 - 12 Path
 - 13 Connecting path



COUNTRY



ARCHITECT

BIJRNK INGELS GROUP, JULIEN DE SMEDT ARCHITECTS

ARCHITECTURE

PSYCHIATRIC HOSPITAL



Psychiatric hospital/Bjarke Ingels Group and Julien De Smedt Architects/Helsingør



Esrumvej 145, Mølle Kirkedal, 3000 Helsingør, Denmark. **Architect:** Prot Through, Julien De Smedt, Bjarke Ingels with David Zahle in collaboration with Lutz Andersen and Annette Jensen; Jakob Egger, Jesper Bø Jensen, Jacob Skovgaard, and Ole Peter Sørensen; and Peter Povlsen, Simon Steup. **Consultants:** Frans Henkens, Jørn Jensen, Kasper Larsen, Niels Gjørtzel, and Peter Povlsen. **Interior architect:** Schiøtz and Lundsholt (landscape architect). **Contractors (selection):** MCC Construction Denmark (main contractor); Kai Andersen (stairs and windows); Christening (floors); Window Master (ventilation); Mesa Arkling (landscape); Jacobs Inox-Lux (grocery layout); Helsing Teglsløkker (roof); MCC Teknik Danmark (installation). **Suppliers (selection):** Hey (furniture); Tørrn Lighting (lights). **Client:** Frederiksborg's municipality through Jette Svendsen. **Total area:** 5,700 sq m. **Total cost:** 95m DKK (12.8m EUR). **Period of construction:** 18 months. **Completed:** June 2006.

PORTFOLIO

Klosterkvarnen (Designed 2003–2006). **Hammerstøbet** on Islandsøerne in Copenhagen (2003) was the project that ensured the fame of Bjarke Ingels and Julien De Smedt for a general public in Denmark. An area of 1,000 sq m turns into 3,000 sq m in extension of the surrounding park.

The VM complex (2003) Ørestaden, Copenhagen. Winner of the Forum prize 2004. A residential area of 25,000 sq m with 76 flats with different designs on one, two or three stories.

Etcher Turm (2006), a glass skyscraper on the edge of Copenhagen, designed for Franz Hesse. The building has a quarter area of 20,000 sq m. By Bjarke Ingels Group.

