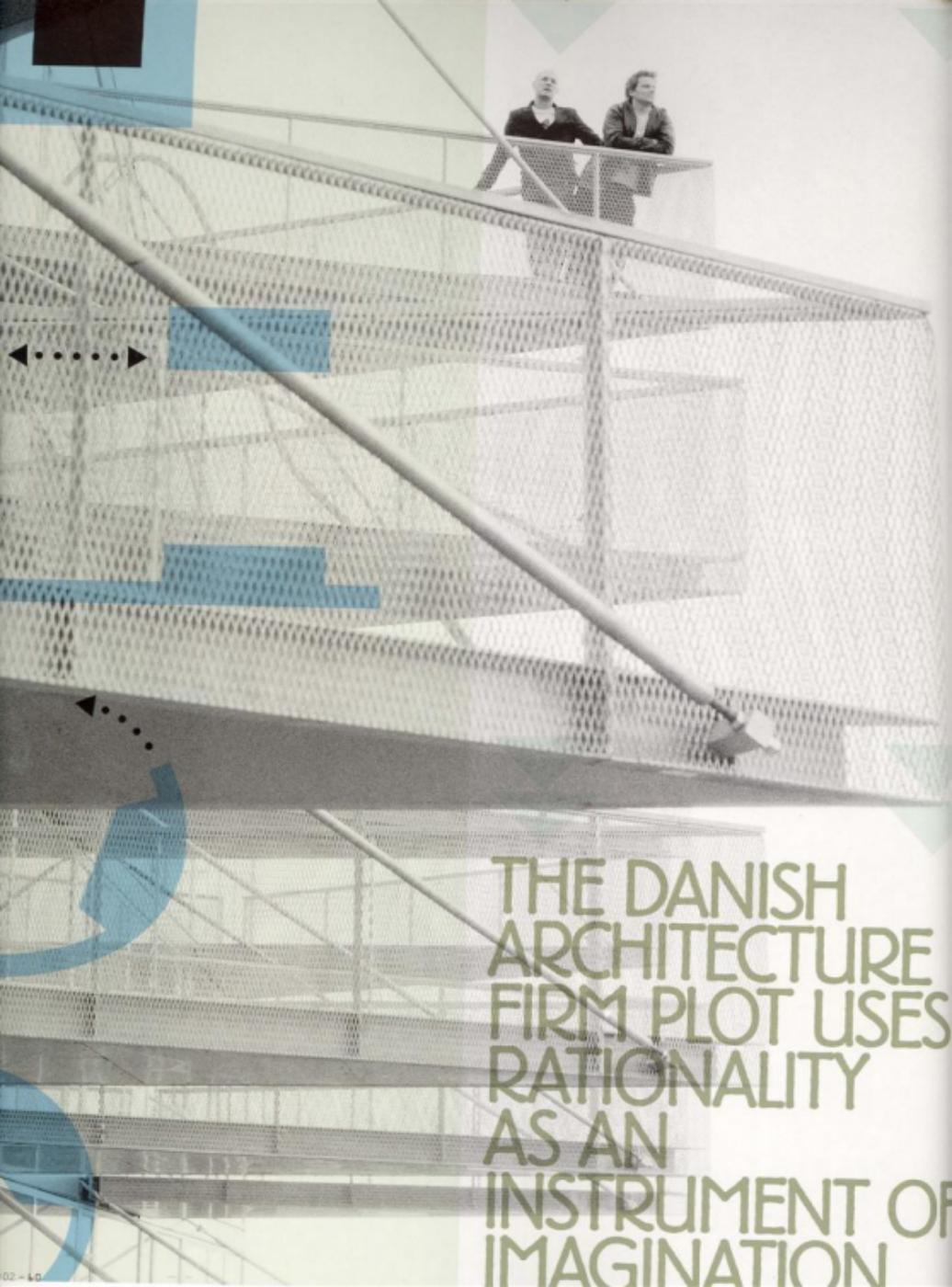


2004

OFF THE WALL



THE SHAPE OF SPEED



THE DANISH
ARCHITECTURE
FIRM PLOT USES
RATIONALITY
AS AN
INSTRUMENT OF
IMAGINATION

THE GEOMETRY OF ENERGY

Likke Aagaard &
Lise Kjaergaard
Photography
by Fox



Copenhagen
four years time, the Copenhagen based architecture firm PLOT has expanded from two people in a two-room apartment - partners Bjarke Ingels and Julien Deleener, who live and work together - to more than 50 people working in a four storey building in the hip part of town. They've come a long way: after being faced with 13 lost competitions in the summer of 2004, their workload exploded in 2005. The VM housing project in the new Ørestaden district is the most recent example of their strategy of logical and almost mathematical architecture, based on investigating schemes - a method of working inspired by recent Dutch architecture. Bjarke and Julien met while working at OMA, and PLOT actually started out with an idea to make a movie together.

We move up through the town house that accommodates the PLOT office, we pass the workshop on the ground floor, the reception and open plan office on the first floor, and blue foam models all over the place - even hanging from the walls. The meeting room on the top floor turns out to be occupied, so we move into the next room to talk by a ping-pong table. The condition of the bats and ball shows that this table is used a lot. Not for meetings but for ping-pong battles and breaks for the big crowd of young architects and students, that - crazy as it sounds - actually make Bjarke and Julien (aged 30 and 29) seem almost mature. This office believes in being a family, where people have responsibility and are trusted, where they can grow and adopt their own specific role and contribution.

Ask Bjarke and Julien to tell us about the architectural tradition they come from. 'We like a lot of things and don't feel restricted to any specific tradition or style. We reserve the freedom to change our point of view from situation to situation. The right thing to do in one situation could be disastrous in another. Sometimes form follows function, sometimes form follows context and topography or production.' Few architects stress this frank about the way they work, and it does have a recognizable style and strategy. It seems PLOT's strategy is energy, but even though they develop projects in different ways, their architectural expression definitely has a clear PLOT identity: straightforward geometric shapes, defined and started by their surroundings.

LONG LASTING FUN, WITH A MINIMUM OF MEANS: THAT'S OUR IDEA OF GOOD ARCHITECTURE'

Bjarke tells us that the closest they ever came to a tradition they can identify with is when they worked with a computer game designer to convert their design of the Aalborg Aquacenter into a 'Counterstrike' game. The game designer described the concept of the game play as the measure that game designers and players use to assess the quality of a computer game. It's not just about a good story, because that might be the initiative and freedom from the players. It's about making the biggest game, because players don't get lost and lose interest. And it's not about the most beautiful graphics or the largest amount of money or the latest software. It's about finding a

something other than the usual typology of this dense city's square houses, which focus inwards, towards the courtyard. 'Surrounded by the common on one side, canals on two sides and a savannah of villas, we wanted to open up the block, and make it building wider. So you have two buildings that are open to the canals, both to the east and the west. Towards the south we pushed the block back to get 'V', and still defined the corners, creating a front lawn instead of a backyard', says Bjarke. The 'W' building was created by the same strategy, opening up and creating a courtyard and some small plazas. Instead of all the apartments looking at each other they all have a view, daylight and are open to their surroundings. The 'V' house is lifted up to let a park flow under the building, while the 'M' house protects the courtyard from the street, but at the same time invites you to turn the corner.

'The apartments are thought of as large, flexible, one room apartments. Most people we know knock down walls when they buy a place. We wanted to provide all spaces with generous views and daylight,' Julien explains. The apartments have glass from floor to ceiling, and most of the flats have double height - or even three storey spaces. Though the apartments interlock in duplexes and triplexes, they form a rational building block. Even though there is great spatial variety in each apartment, they are all based on a very rational building system.

The maximum building heights allowed were created by using sloping roofs. When you combine the sloping roof of the 'V' house with the bend in the middle, and the 'M' house's many cuts, you get a lot of crazy angles, and that meant that even though the design had a quite rational starting point, several special conditions occurred which lead to a total of 76 different apartments out of 220 units - something like a three-dimensional Tetris game. 'Some of the apartments are extremely eccentric. One is accessed through a triangular space in the roof with no windows, it's just like a small landing, and when you take the staircase down, you suddenly have this fan-shaped apartment with panoramic views at both ends. As it happens, some of the apartments are so eccentric that we never could have designed them if we had started out by designing the apartments. In the 'V' house there are apartments with a ceiling that slopes from 1.8 m high in one corner to 5.6 m in the other corner. To our pleasant surprise, the eccentric apartments were all sold first!', remarks Bjarke.

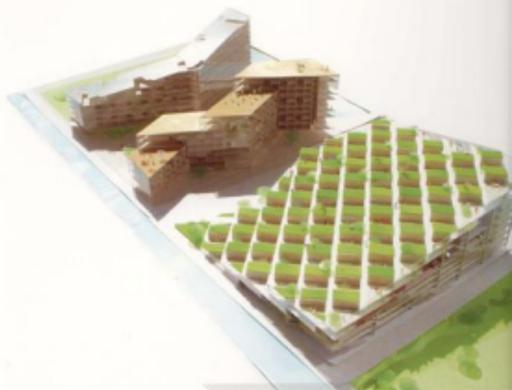
The idea for the OL project came while on a skiing trip in Norway. The VM housing had just gone on the market and apartments were being sold surprisingly fast: ten were sold on the first day, 100 the first week and after three weeks nearly all of the apartments were sold. The client was really excited and called the skiers to discuss the next project. The name 'OL' is a typical example of PLOT logic: in Danish 'VM' means World Championship. The site next to the VM housing naturally became OL: the Olympic Games. We take a look at the ping pong scoreboard hanging on the wall, remember the digital ping pong game one can play on PLOT's webpage and we just know that that's just how it has to be, with these guys.

The zoning plan for the area permits one third of the OL building to be housing. As the site itself is just a flat field, the idea came naturally and is very simple: create a manmade mountain to support an upper level of terrace housing, mixing what you would normally separate. The parking area became necessary in order to lift the housing units and give them spectacular rooftop gardens with long views over the adjacent villas and common. It looks like the ending grid of one-storey, single-family houses continues on top of a car park, becoming the icing on the cake.

Like the VM housing, the OL complex is shaped according to logical principles. Build as high as

OL HOUSING COPENHAGEN

When the VM apartments came onto the market they sold out within three weeks. As a result of this the OL housing project was immediately initiated. It consists of an artificial 'parking mound' crowned by terrace houses.



house to house. Julien explains: 'We always look at problems as opportunities'. The edges give the border-houses an extra quality, as they are simply built out to the edges, forming bigger living areas and gardens. That makes a difference in price, inviting different income groups to move in next to one another. On the tip of the Olympic mountain, Bjarke and Julien have reserved one of the houses for themselves.

'I think Denmark is experiencing a sort of architectural renaissance. Until recently - and mostly still - the general picture was dominated by carefully crafted monuments of the human lack of imagination. But recently we have discovered an increasing interest in experimentation with issues such as mixed programmes, high density and formal diversity,' Julien explains. Bjarke continues: 'Four years ago we spent most of our time trying to "trick" clients into doing something way more interesting than they actually wanted to. Now clients come to us with a genuine desire to try something new. So even though it might not show right now, I think that the increase in risk-taking and experimentation from VM to OL is just the beginning of a Cambrian explosion of architectural species in Copenhagen that will take place in the next five years.' According to Darwin's theory, the Cambrian explosion accelerated the further development of animals, changing the context of all life on Earth.

PLOT is here to get the job done, to bridge the gap between the pragmatic and the utopian, to turn rationality into an instrument of the imagination rather than the other way around. In that sense you can say that a lot of their projects have an air of opportunism, because it all comes down to making things happen.

www.plot.dk
www.pluslaboratorium.com

'FOUR YEARS AGO WE SPENT MOST OF OUR TIME TRYING TO 'TRICK' CLIENTS IN TO DOING SOMETHING WAY MORE INTERESTING THAN THEY ACTUALLY WANTED TO. NOW CLIENTS COME TO US WITH A GENUINE DESIRE TO TRY SOMETHING NEW!'



Continuity

The Harbour Bath is the aquatic continuation of the Islands Brygge harbour park.



Safety

The pools are laid out along lines extending from the centre of the lifeguard tower, thus eliminating blind angles.



Swim

The main pool is 86 m long by wide.



Play

A paddle pool for children and elderly facilitates the potential of the beach for play and relaxation.



Accessibility

A large ramp provides access to the entire facility, including all swimming pools.



Harbourscape

The harbour bath appears as a wooden deck on the edge between land and water.





HARBOUR BATH

COPENHAGEN

Copenhagen's harbour is being transformed from an industrial and traffic junction into the city's cultural and social centre. The Harbour Bath design emerged from the desire to extend the surrounding park onto the water. People go to the Harbour Bath like they go to the beach, instead of to a swimming pool: not necessarily to exercise, but primarily to socialize, play, enjoy the sun, look at each other. This means that not only should the water accommodate more interactive and playful activities than the focused (and lonesome) swimming of laps, but the land should also be geared towards a more accommodating



M HOUSING

COPENHAGEN

The manipulated perimeter block has clearly defined corners, but is opened internally and along the sides. In the 'V' House the vis-à-vis with neighbours is eliminated by pushing the slab in its centre, ensuring diagonal views to the surrounding vast landscape. All apartments have a double-height space facing north, and wide panoramic views to the south. In the 'M' House the logic of the diagonal slab utilized in the 'V' house is broken down into smaller portions. The typology of Le Corbusier's Cité d'Habitation is reinterpreted and improved: the central corridors are short and get light from both ends, like bullet holes penetrating the building.





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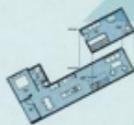
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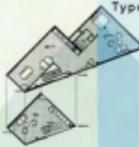
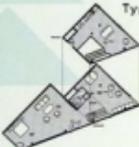
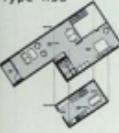
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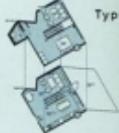
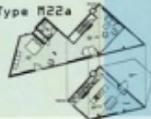
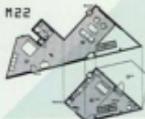
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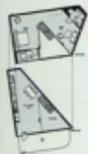
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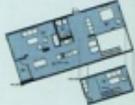
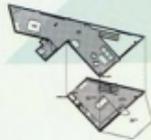
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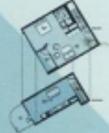
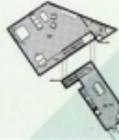


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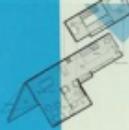




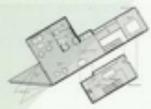
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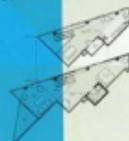
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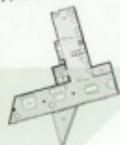
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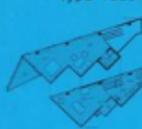
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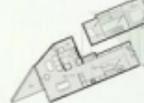
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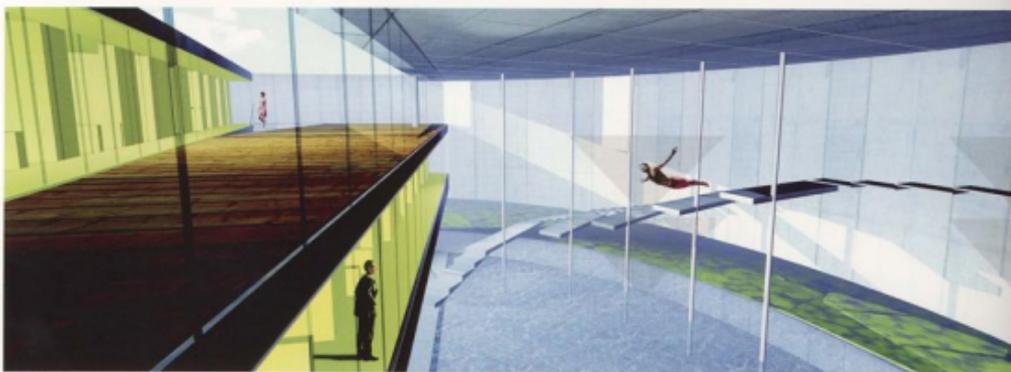
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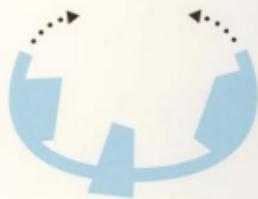
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AQUA CENTRE COPENHAGEN

This competition project is the first building PLOT designed and submitted, initially for a different site. Instead of creating a building with a pool inside it, the architects wanted to organize all of the water areas and adjust the dry functions to the experience of the water. The main idea is to have a 150-m-long, canal-like pool that connects all of the other theme pools, so you can swim from one activity to another. The canal is bent into a circle, becoming a lake with an island in it. This allows you to swim along the view, like a trip in the landscape - integrating the pool with the surroundings. The aqua centre contains a spa, roman baths, swimming

pools, dressing facilities, a café and a rest. The dry functions are in beams spanning the pool, creating large differences in ceiling heights and the intimacy of the relaxation pool with a 2 to the generous 12 m span across the diving platform. Unfortunately, politics and bad luck stopped the construction of the Aqua Centre two months before the building was due to start. Since then, many Danish cities have been interested in the centre. Right now it looks like construction will begin in Odense.



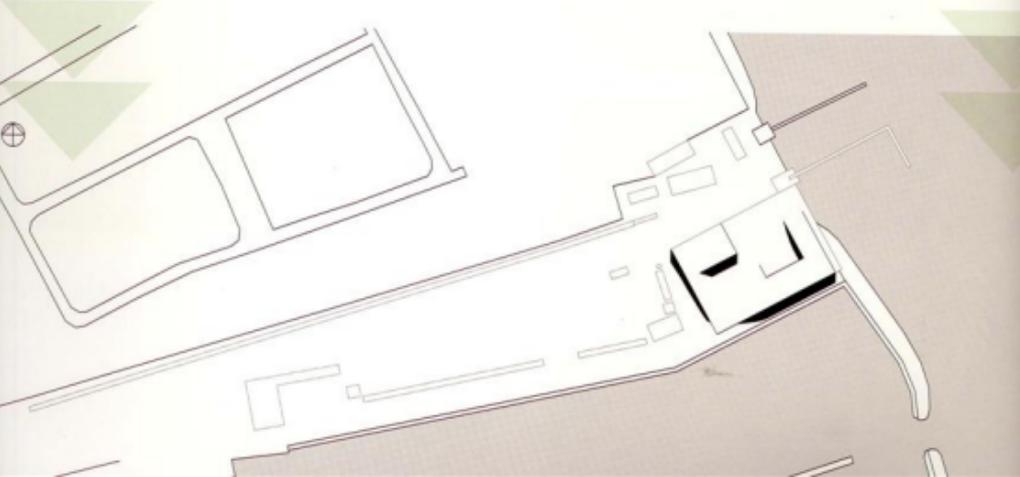
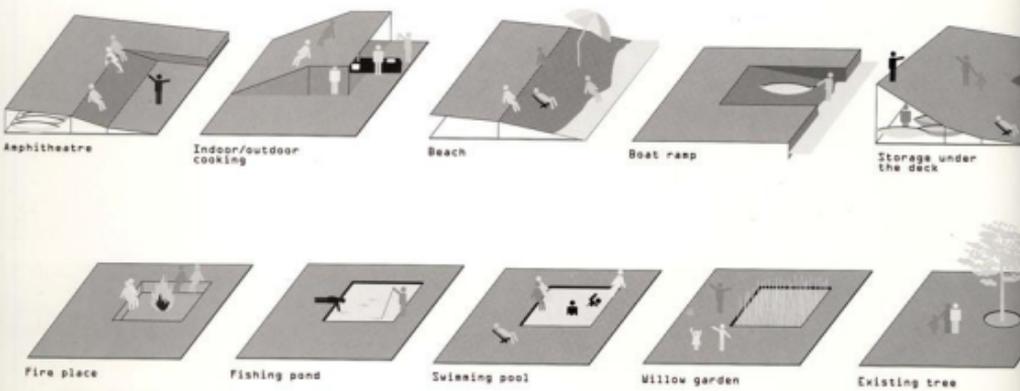
From traditional swimming pool to Aqua Centre in five steps.



MARITIME YOUTH CENTRE SUNDBY

UNTIL RECENTLY
DANISH
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WAS DOMINATED
BY CAREFULLY
CRAFTED
MONUMENTS OF
THE HUMAN LACK
OF IMAGINATION

The Maritime Youth Centre is partly a social project and partly a clubhouse for the youth division of a sailing club. The site is in a harbour and so polluted that the original plan was to remove the surface soil to a depth of 1 m. This would have taken a quarter of the building budget - digging up the soil and moving it 3 km to a pollution deposit station. 'We had the soil analysed, and the pollution turned out to be heavy metals - they don't vaporize or integrate with the surroundings, but stay where they are,' Bjarke explains. 'That's why we decided to put a lid on top of the site in the form of a wooden deck.' The deck is a magic carpet with buildings and boat storage underneath it and leisure facilities on top - creating both the space needed for the sailing club and play areas for the youth club.









and describes the wooden
deck of Seaby's Maritime
Museum Centre as a "magic
carpet".