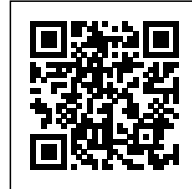


In Conversation.

Boris Brorman Jensen with
Reiulf Ramstad

IN CONVERSATION

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Boris Brorman Jensen I often meet with colleagues around the world who are taken by Nordic architecture. In a way this is paradoxical, in a Danish context at any rate, since there have been discussions over the past few years about how meaningful it is to use a term about Danish architecture as an autonomous entity.

Not because there's anything wrong with Danish architects' self-esteem, nor because national identity markers are considered invalid, but because globalization has changed the way architectural offices operate. Most major Danish firms earn the greatest proportion of their revenue from projects "abroad." The daily working language at the offices is often English, because quite a few staff members are recruited internationally—just as many partners in the various offices have undergone part of their training in Europe or the United States. And perhaps it is only a postulate on my part, but for me, as a Danish "insider," it can often be difficult to see whether a new building in Copenhagen has been designed by a Danish, German, or Dutch architect. How do you see the situation in Norway? Is there a specific Norwegian architecture?

Reiulf Ramstad I think there are some particular cultural and geographical circumstances in Norway that are significantly different than in Denmark and many other European countries. Denmark is a relatively small, homogeneous, and densely urbanized country in comparison to Norway. Norway has one of the longest coastlines in the world but has a smaller population than Denmark. Denmark is not much bigger than Finnmark, the largest of Norway's nineteen counties, and it's clear that Norway's radically different geography is significant to how we perceive ourselves. In my view, Denmark is much more integrated into continental European culture. Norway also has a history that is much more patchwork-like and disjointed than Denmark. We have been relatively poor since the Middle Ages, and this has obviously influenced our culture. Economic poverty and the fact that Norway makes up Europe's northernmost fringe, its provincial backwater, have generated a cultural peculiarity, which still plays a certain role.

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