

S WEDISH CULTURE

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Architecture in Sweden

Swedish architecture of the 20th century bears witness to a century characterized by extensive change. From having been an art form reserved for the great institutions of society and its more affluent citizens architecture soon became public property in the form of sound housing environments. The consequences of public planning and the extensive social house-building projects which were later carried out can be seen throughout the country.

A high level of ambition and relatively substantial resources has endowed Sweden with a uniquely high standard of housing. It has also led to a dominance of comparatively new buildings with more than half of the country's homes having been built after 1960.

ARCHITECTS IN SWEDEN

When, at the close of the 19th century, Sweden became an industrialized nation, it was not primarily through new enterprises being launched in urban areas. Iron processing and forestry were the primary industries which developed to supplant the agrarian society. Both of these industries needed to be located where the supplies of wood and waterpower were abundant. It was not until the 1930s that the urban population had surpassed the number of dwellers in rural areas. For this reason Sweden has not developed an urban culture comparable to that which is found in central Europe. Stockholm is the only centre in Sweden with a population exceeding one million but even there people are accustomed to having large open areas at their disposal. During the summer months many of Stockholm's residents also abandon the city and move into the countryside for the holidays.

The modern architect, a businessperson who designs various types of buildings for a range of clients, emerged during the mid-19th century, but the period of real growth for the profession coincided with the building boom during the industrialization of the 1880s. It was an age when an abundance of new types of building project, making new types of demand, arose, and the infrastructure developed rapidly from a very low level to a world-leader, requiring railway stations, post offices and telegraph stations. This emerging society also needed industrial plants, administrative buildings, hospitals, churches and housing. During the 19th century these tasks were, as a rule, executed within the framework of the Beaux-Arts tradition. Prominent architects of the day included Fredrik Wilhelm Scholander, Helgo Zettervall, F. G. A. Dahl, Isak Gustaf Clason and Adolf Wilhelm Edelsvärd, the latter, not unusually, having been trained as a fortification engineer. Many of the advancements in building technology during the 1800s can be traced to engineers with a military background.

At the turn of the century Sweden had a population of roughly five million and there were some 300 hundred architects. The majority worked in one of the three largest centres: Stockholm, Göteborg (Gothenburg) or the Malmö area. The basic training programmes for Swedish architects have since 1877 been offered by technical colleges. At the turn of the century however training standards varied greatly. Regular architect training was only available at the Royal Institute of Technology (*Kungl Tekniska Högskolan, KTH*) in Stockholm. In Sweden the title of architect has never been accorded professional status and other educational programmes were therefore available at, for example, Chalmers University of Technology (*Chalmers tekniska högskola*) in Göteborg. Many basic programme graduates opted to supplement their training at the Architecture School of the University College of Fine Arts (*Konsthögskolan*). Today, virtually all members of the National Association of Swedish Architects (*Svenska Arkitekters Riksförbund, SAR*) possess a degree from one of the technical university colleges in Stockholm, Göteborg or Lund. Further training at the University College of Fine Arts remains an attractive supplement in the field of architecture and architectural restoration.



Laboratories for Astra Hässle Medical Research Center in Mölndal by Gert Wingårdh (1991).

Bengt Ericksen/Wingårdh



Fire station in Gävle by Ferdinand Boberg (1890).

Max Plunger

ARCHITECTURE IN A TIME OF TRANSITION

At the close of the 19th century architects sought artistic liberation from the academic architecture style. The American architect Henry Hobson Richardson served as an early role model with his asymmetric compositions which allowed the building materials themselves to contribute to the sculptural form. Through buildings such as the Gävle fire station (1890) by Ferdinand Boberg (1860–1946) and the Dickson Public Library (1897) in Göteborg by Hans Hedlund (1855–1931), this freely composed architectural style made a significant impact on Swedish building culture.

At the beginning of the 20th century ideas were also being imported from Britain, Denmark, Germany and Austria, all of which generated an especially rich and varied architecture. From Britain the ideas of the Arts and Crafts Movement were conveyed by architects like Carl Westman (1866–1936), Ragnar Östberg (1866–1945) and Torben Grut (1866–1945). This material and craftsmanship-based design school was regarded as an alternative to the increasingly stereotypical mass production offered by industrialization. From Denmark and Germany came the brick building tradition which very quickly established itself as part of the Swedish building culture. Austria served to inspire architects such as Carl Bergsten (1879–1935) and Georg A. Nilsson (1871–1949) to produce modern, geometric designs without reference to classicism's forms. Others, e.g. Ernst Stenhammar (1859–1927) and Erik Josephson (1864–1929), worked with a geometric style where steel and glass played a prominent role.

One project with unique scope was the construction, around 1900, of an entirely new community, Kiruna, in the most northerly reaches of Sweden. In order to exploit an enormous deposit of iron ore an entire town was built in the wilderness in a short space of time. The bulk of the town was designed by architect Gustaf Wickman (1858–1916) and the church, built between 1902–12, represents a synthesis of Nordic wooden architecture and the American shingle style.

The rise of the middle classes focused the attention of architects on private dwellings and resulted in the production of a multitude of fine homes around the country during the opening decades of the 20th century.

The architects who set the tone were those who adopted the Swedish countryside and cultural history as their guiding principles. A new generation emphasised the neglected Swedish rustic tradition. Familiarity with the rich, domestic building culture, from Renaissance and Baroque castles and manors to the Swedish timber building tradition, spread. Combined with the influence of the Arts and Crafts Movement, this resulted in a sensuous and often very personal architecture using wood and brick. This "national romantic" architecture was introduced by the Swedish Medical Society's building (*Läkarsällskapet*, 1904) in Stockholm designed by Carl Westman. The Röhss Museum (*Röhsska museet*) in Göteborg (1914) and the Stockholm Courthouse (*Stockholms rådhus*, 1916) by the same architect are other important buildings in this style, as well as the Stockholm Stadium (1912) by Torben Grut and the Engelbrekt Church in Stockholm (1914) by Lars Israel Wahlman. Erik Lallerstedt (1864–1955) designed station houses, offices and institutional buildings in the same monumental style.

The period's principal work is Stockholm City Hall (*Stockholms stadshus*, 1911–23) by Ragnar Östberg. The building is a poem in brick, capturing its corner location and the water. The interior is composed with an eye to its ceremonial function and bears witness to the interest in the late 1910s for classicism from the period around 1800. The craftsmanship and powerful presence of the material in combination with the functional layout make this an outstanding structure.

In addition to Östberg, architects like Ivar Tengbom (1878–1968) and Gunnar Asplund (1885–1940) made magnificent contributions to the neo-classical style of the late 1910s and 1920s, which became known internationally as Swedish Grace. Tengbom largely designed buildings for major companies. His break-through work, the Enskilda Banken building in Stockholm with its ionic portico (1915), marked the beginning of Swedish Grace while his head office for the Swedish Match Company (1928), also in Stockholm, marked its zenith.

Gunnar Asplund is Sweden's most internationally renowned architect. His playful, irregular classicism awakened renewed interest during the post-modernism of the 1980s. In the course of a relatively short career Asplund demonstrated his genius in a host of different styles. From the massive brickwork of the early 1910s, his buildings took on a manifestly lighter tone during the 1920s, while in the early 1930s they were clad in the austere robe of cubist modernism. Towards the close of the 1930s this strict rationalism was tempered and natural materials with softer forms played an increasingly important role. The highlights of his classical production include the Lister County Court House (*Lister härads tingshus*, 1919–21), in Sölvesborg, southern Sweden; the Snellman House in Djursholm, north of Stockholm (1917–1918), and the Stockholm City Library (*Stockholms Stadsbibliotek*) from 1927. In collaboration with Sigurd Lewerentz (1885–1974) Asplund designed the Woodland Cemetery (*Skogskyrkogården*, 1914–40) in southern Stockholm which has come to lead the way in modern landscape planning. Asplund and Lewerentz also designed a number of chapels located on the cemetery grounds.

EARLY PLANNING

At the turn of the century a number of significant urban planning competitions were held around the country. It was through these competitions that the Austrian architect and urban planner Camillo Sitte's ideas on the artistic treatment of street space based on topographic dictates made inroads. Göteborg in particular distinguished itself through a number of progressive planning measures. As early as 1861–62 Göteborg held Sweden's first general urban planning competition when the city was preparing to expand beyond the old fortification structures. In 1900 the city was on the verge of expansion into new, more rolling terrain and consequently a new competition



Headquarters of the Swedish Match Company in Stockholm by Ivar Tengbom (1928).

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The Woodland Crematorium in Stockholm by Gunnar Asplund (1935–40).

Max Plunger

was arranged. This was won by Per Hallman (1869–1941) and Fredrik Sundbärg (1860–1913) who proceeded to introduce Sitte's ideas to Sweden. Responsibility for their implementation rests largely with Albert Lilienberg (1879–1967), Göteborg's first director of public works from 1907 to 1927. The residential neighbourhoods of Bagaregården and Kungsladugård rank among the largest and most consistently implemented areas anywhere designed in the spirit of Camillo Sitte. Among the areas' qualities are the small-scale buildings with one storey of stone and two of wood, a style characteristic of Göteborg. These so-called county governor buildings were granted uniform yet dignified features through the work of architects such as Arvid Fuhre (1885–1959).

The aim of modern urban planning was to achieve architecturally homogeneous environments, and the Götaplatsen project of 1916–23 was to create a magnificent architectural environment for the first time in Sweden. The central site is occupied by a host of cultural institutions and forms a backdrop to Göteborg's most fashionable street, Kungssportsavenyn. Its development took longer than anticipated and consequently the original intentions were not realised. The Art Museum (*Konstmuseet*) and its terraces from 1923 by Sigfrid Ericsson (1879–1958) and Arvid Bjerke (1880–1952), the City Theatre (*Stadsteatern*) by Carl Bergsten from 1935 as well as the Concert Hall (*Konserthuset*) from 1936 by Nils Einar Eriksson (1899–1978) are, however, high-quality examples of their time.

SWEDISH FUNCTIONALISM

During the 1910s people realized that society had to take initiatives to improve the country's general housing standard. Following a number of social reforms the circumstances of the working population, at work and in political institutions, had been strengthened, but housing standards still remained at a very low level in an international comparison. A host of measures were implemented in a short space of time in order to make workers' accommodation more functional. Architect Osvald Almqvist (1884–1959) presented proposals for standardized kitchen fittings based on user-studies, and government housing subsidies replaced philanthropy for the financing of practical and hygienic housing. Consequently, when modernist architecture fully emerged in Sweden with the 1930 Stockholm Exhibition a series of important measures in the spirit of functionalism had already been implemented.

The Exhibition proved to be of great importance for this new design philosophy. Gunnar Asplund was the Exhibition's principal architect and he designed the majority of the main buildings in light and elegant modernist style. Several other architects, who would later become influential, also contributed. Among them were Sven Markelius (1889–1972), later Urban Planning Director in Stockholm and one of the driving forces behind suburban planning, and Uno Åhrén (1897–1977), leading ideologist within the branch of functionalism that emphasised social aims.

Functionalism received political support in the policies of the Social Democratic Party which came to power at the same time. Collective effort would now and forever eliminate poverty. A planned society was the goal and functionalism was the means. Sweden adopted the Weimar Republic's vision of a broad, social housing construction programme. Over the next forty years housing planning and design was architecture's main task in Sweden.

As a style unfettered by tradition functionalism gained tremendous symbolic value but in its initial, more abstract form, never achieved general popularity. Nor were the flat roofs and large windows particularly appropriate for Scandinavia, something that architects only accepted with reluctance.

Changes became evident by the middle of the 1930s and a couple of summer homes in the Stockholm archipelago exemplify this new, softer, more traditional architectural style. They were designed and built for private use by Gunnar Asplund and Eskil Sundahl (1890–1974). With their cosy atmosphere, where the open fire was permitted to dominate the interior, these buildings are more closely related to the Anglo-Saxon ideal home of the 1910s than the "laboratories" of Bauhaus. This marked the beginning of a period when functionalism's doctrinaire solutions were softened up and the concrete brick replaced the abstract white concrete as façade material. Functionalism remained as a principle but was united with traditional elements to create a "functional tradition". Gunnar Asplund's annex to the Göteborg City Hall (*Göteborgs rådhus*) from 1936, a project which occupied him for more than twenty years, stands as an eminent example of this period.

Social aspirations to open the labour market to women led to experimentation with collective housing where certain common functions such as cleaning, cooking, child-minding and laundry were handled by employees. In 1935 a building designed by Sven Markelius and featuring these services attracted considerable attention when it was built in Stockholm.

POST-WAR ARCHITECTURE

Sweden managed to avoid active involvement in the Second World War and this isolation from a Europe at war served to reinforce ties with the Swedish tradition. The new building projects, such as the terrace housing development known as Friluftsstaden in Malmö from 1944–48 by Sigfrid Persson (1898–1983) and Erik Bülow-Hübe (1879–1963), were executed in tempered classicism. The fact that reinforcing bar and asphalt were in short supply during the war years contributed to a renaissance for brick and tiles.

Urban planning also changed. The neighbourhood ideas as expressed by the American sociologist Arthur Perry in 1929 gained a firm foothold in Sweden. Small-scale housing estates designed for social interaction, with schools, daycare, community centres and green areas, were developed by Sven Backström (1903–92), Leif Reinius (1907–95) and the Ahlsén brothers, Erik (1901–88) and Tore (1906–91). The



Housing in Kungsladugård, Göteborg from around 1920.

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Gunnar Asplund's own summer house at Lisön (1937).

Sune Sundahl/Arkitekturmuseet



Church of St. Peter at Klippan by Sigurd Lewerentz (1962–66).



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Collective housing at John Ericssonsgatan, Stockholm by Sven Markelius (1935).



Gunnar Hansson/Arkitekturmuseet

Vällingby center by Backström & Reinius and Erik Glemme, landscape architect, (1954).



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Collective housing at John Ericssonsgatan, Stockholm by Sven Markelius (1935).



Gunnar Hansson/Arkitekturmusset

Vällingby center by Backström & Reinius and Erik Glemme, landscape architect, (1954).



Max Plunger

planning of neighbourhood units formed the backbone of Swedish housing production. Sweden also influenced other countries here. In Britain this principle, involving small and medium-sized housing estates with a slightly folksy tone, was known as New Empiricism and became of major importance to the New Town Movement in Britain, Italy and elsewhere.

The 1950s were a dynamic decade for Swedish architects. The political model formulated at the close of the 1920s known as *Folkhemmet*, literally the People's Home, had made some headway. The model's foundation was a harmonic relationship between all sections of society. Housing subsidies were not directed towards the most disadvantaged groups in society but aimed at achieving a high overall housing standard, with overcrowding as public enemy number one. Via a regulated market economy the greatest possible prosperity was to be available to as many as possible. "Sweden—the middle way" was a concept minted by American journalist Marquis W. Childs in his 1936 book of the same name. Particular attention was focused on Backström & Reinius' honeycomb building in Gröndal, Stockholm (1944–46) and Rosta housing area in Örebro (1947–49), Guldheden in Göteborg by Wejke and Ödén from 1945 as well as Årsta Centre in Stockholm (1943–53) by the Ahlsén brothers, Erik and Tore. Now the suburbs gained a portion of the larger city's range of commercial and cultural activities. It was, however, the establishment of Vällingby (Sven Backström and Leif Reinius, 1952–54) north of Stockholm that attracted the greatest attention, both domestically and abroad. This huge housing estate on virgin soil was not to be a dormitory suburb but a living neighbourhood with workplaces, housing and a town centre. The centre itself, with a cinema, theatre, meeting-places, department store and church, was inaugurated in 1954. Adjacent to the centre there are high-rise blocks of flats with lower, multi-family dwellings beyond and groups of terrace houses on the periphery. The idea of gathering the terrace houses into small "villages" of 20–30 houses and where the private lot was minimized in favour of a larger area of common land, became widespread during the 1950s and was often executed with great care.

The increase in leisure time led growing numbers of families to build holiday cottages. As an alternative to the small, detached cottage, architect Stig Ancker took the initiative for the establishment of a holiday camp by the sea at Haverdal on the west coast (1953–56) in the form of a housing group characteristic of the period. Today, Sweden has more holiday cottages per capita than any other country.

Economic development made a wide range of opportunities available to architects. New residential areas were established throughout the country. The unassuming façades did not infrequently mask exciting spaces. At the time designing private residences was still common, but this was a market that was to disappear entirely during the 1960s and which to date has yet to recover other than to a marginal extent. At the great design exhibition of the 1950s, H 55 in Helsingborg, Carl-Axel Acking (b. 1910) and Per Friberg (b. 1920) created a sensual pavilion with space and light where abstract aesthetics were paramount. It came to serve as a dividing line; following the exhibition structural issues advanced increasingly into the foreground.

Two trends can be discerned in post-war Swedish architecture. On the one hand the "liberal" branch with roots in both Modernism and Classicism. The Swedish Co-operative Union and Wholesale Society's Architects Office (*KF:s Arkitektkontor*) produced matter-of-fact and unobtrusive works that combined the classical legacy of Heinrich Tessenow and Gunnar Asplund. This branch has since sprouted shoots such as the Ahlsén brothers, Nils Tesch, Nils Ahrbom, Helge Zimdal, Klaes Anshelm, Ralph Erskine and Carl Nyrén.

On the other hand there is a more "intellectual" school represented by names like Paul Hedqvist, Sven Markelius, Bengt Lindroos and Peter Celsing. These architects are perhaps more closely allied to international architecture but despite this their work would be unthinkable outside the Swedish simplicity. The significance of Swedish poverty is often raised in discussions of the Swedish cultural inheritance. Foreign extravagance with gold and precious stones received more economical attire in wood and paint. In purely aesthetic terms this often meant that expressiveness increased when the means declined.

MASS PRODUCTION AND REACTION

Faith in economic growth continued into the 1960s but despite greater material wealth in the form of cars, washing machines and holiday cottages, the housing shortage in the big cities became increasingly aggravated. In order to address this deficiency, caused in part by an influx of people from rural areas, it was decided in 1965 that one million new dwellings were to be built in the coming ten years. Achieving this demanded a well-developed prefabrication system. "Production-steered planning" became a concept that fundamentally changed architecture. Until this point building had been based on the techniques of craftsmen. The million target had more or less been achieved when the building crisis of the 1970s struck. People did not want to move into the new housing estates and the criticism directed towards architects was blistering. Structuralism was more appropriate for administrative buildings. During the 1960s the Royal Board of Public Building (*Kungliga Byggnadsstyrelsen*) amassed considerable expertise in the commissioning of government buildings.

For those more inclined to sculptural architecture, churches were one of the few objects which remained. In connection with the development of new housing estates in the 1950s, the Church of Sweden once again became an important client. Sigurd Lewerentz' churches in Björkhamnen in Stockholm (1956–60) and Klippan in Skåne (1962–66) are two of this master's last works. He refined building design to a minimalist art form employing brick, wood and glass.

Peter Celsing (1920–74) also designed a number of churches in very powerful brickwork. His largest works are the Cultural Centre (*Kulturhuset*, 1968–1973),



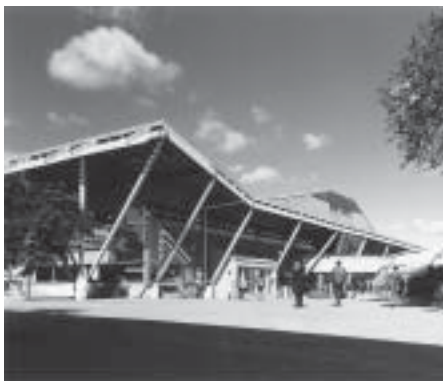
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Bank of Sweden in Stockholm by Peter Celsing (1965–76).



Sune Sundahl/Nyréns arkitektkontor

Railway station in Jönköping by Carl Nyrén (1983).



Max Plunger

Student Union Building at Stockholm University by Ralph Erskine (1979–81).

which also houses the City Theatre and the Bank of Sweden (*Riksbanken*) in central Stockholm (1965–76). Over the course of several decades an anti-historical attitude ravaged Sweden and resulted in the demolition of major segments of many town centres. The old, richly varied buildings were razed and replaced by large-scale work-places and commercial properties. Celsing, despite the artistic qualities of his work, was made the scapegoat for the devastation of central Stockholm.

The core of Sundsvall, on the other hand, remains virtually intact since the turn of the century and the magnificent stone buildings reflect the public and private wealth invested in them during the golden years of the timber industry.

Few architects were able to avail themselves of the heritage of the 1950s and 1960s. One of them was Englishman Ralph Erskine (b. 1914), who just before the war sought out the “Swedish Model”. At a time when the general public’s confidence in architects had reached its low-water mark Erskine’s popularity was on the rise. The residential area of Nya Bruket in Sandviken (1973–78) and the Student Union Building (*Allhuset*) at Stockholm University (1982) are two examples of his light-hearted and expressive architectural style. Through the Byker housing estate in Newcastle, England, this approach to architecture also put down roots abroad. Carl Nyrén was also much appreciated for his low-key architecture with deep roots in the old Swedish tradition. By employing light as the main vehicle of expression he succeeded in transforming international trends, uniting them with Swedish materials and forms. Among Nyrén’s foremost works are buildings designed for Pharmacia in Uppsala, Stockholm University and the Uppsala Public Library.

When the criticism was sharpest the architectural profession was struck by paralysis. Functionalism’s doctrines collapsed and the search began for a new platform. Sociological studies of how people used their neighbourhoods and workplaces led to experimentation with “participation”, where residents could design their own surroundings. Environmental damage had also begun to influence architects. Strong ties to nature were granted new forms and experiments involving techniques with more attractive ecological qualities were begun. Ralph Erskine, for example, hung balconies from the façade in order to avoid thermal bridges. A special building culture has been developing since the 1970s in Järna, near Södertälje, where anthroposophists have been building colleges, housing and a hospital designed under the leadership of the Danish architect Erik Assmussen (1913–95) and in keeping with Rudolf Steiner’s characteristic round and prismatic forms.

Adaptation to ecological considerations was begun in special enclaves of single-family dwellings known as “eco-villages”. With the aim of minimal environmental impact, these communities were built using energy efficient technology, organic building materials and separated treatment of the households’ liquid and solid waste. The latter technology has since been introduced in multi-family dwellings. The shift to a sustainable society also characterises many of the refurbishing projects undertaken in suburban areas, where the large scale environments of the 1960s were rebuilt to improve their function from both a social and Agenda 21 perspective.

During the 1980s the municipalities lost their influential role in planning issues. Instead, the industry advanced its position and dictated building in a manner hitherto unknown in Sweden. By means of so-called negotiated planning the financially weakened municipalities traded planning permission for utilities that they could no longer afford to finance themselves. The architecture of the international financial community soon came to dominate building in Sweden. On the other hand, a “critical regionalism” founded on tradition and the character of the site, thrived in smaller building enterprises. Architects such as Jan Gezelius (b. 1923, homes, museums), Gunnar Mattsson (b. 1937, museums, cultural centres), Ove Hidemark (b. 1931, restorations), Dahlbäck and Månsson (b. 1943 and 1933, Vasa Museum 1990 and others) were guardians of the “independent” tradition.

CONTEMPORARY BUILDING

The plans for building the Swedish welfare state could be implemented virtually unimpeded for more than forty years. However, the powerful role initially held by architects gradually diminished as the building industry increasingly dictated the terms and conditions. With the economic boom of the 1980s the client emerged as the stronger party. This in turn strengthened the position of the architect, and in today’s relatively limited production the architectural ambitions are often lofty.

Sweden’s two most successful export corporations, AstraZeneca, the pharmaceutical company, and telecommunications giant Ericsson, have applied the Swedish tradition of carefully planned workplaces at several new facilities and this approach has also come to characterise the companies’ building abroad. Both companies have often commissioned architect Gert Wingårdh (b. 1951) who through the Öj Jared Executive Country Club (1988) and Astra Hässle (1988–97), both outside Göteborg, demonstrated his skill in producing high-tech architecture of international class. Wingårdh’s practice is now one of Sweden’s most expansive and is currently designing housing, workplaces and cultural buildings such as the Science Center in Göteborg.

The strong emphasis on high housing standards in combination with the boom in office building in the 1980s has resulted in Sweden having largely satisfied its building needs. The management and extension of existing buildings has therefore become increasingly important. Fuelled by a renewed interest in history and locales, centrally situated former industrial sites have been converted into attractive housing areas. The 1993 Housing Exhibition on Stumholmen in Karlskrona displayed Sweden’s skill in transforming older structures to serve new functions. An industrial park in the centre of Norrköping has been rebuilt and now houses a museum, concert hall and university college, while on Norra Älvstranden in Göteborg, a former shipyard is being converted to provide housing and educational facilities (architects: Arkitekturkompaniet, White arkitekter, and others).

In such projects meticulous landscaping is of central importance. In all larger undertakings architects collaborate closely with landscape architects. Ever since the "houses in parks" housing projects of the 1930s, Swedish landscape architects have sought to achieve the most natural relationship between the buildings and their environment—an expression of the Swedish attitude to nature as being, in all circumstances, superior to culture. It was not until the more figurative architecture of the 1980s that landscape architecture achieved more formal expression. Playgrounds have, however, always been important in the planning of housing estates, not uncommonly serving as the hub for a group of houses. Among the most popular landscape architects of the 20th century are Sven Hermelin, Walter Bauer and Per Friberg.

Today Sweden has a population of approximately 8.8 million and about 5,000 architects. A considerable number of them work in the public sector on general planning and inspection. The Swedish building sector is still characterised by large-scale enterprises, both with respect to contractors and architectural firms. Companies like Sweco and White arkitekter are among the world's largest in their field. The finest artistic quality is however produced by the smaller practices. In recent years, Swedish architects have been challenged by foreigners like Niels Torp from Norway (SAS head office in Stockholm, Nils Ericsson Terminal in Göteborg and others), Tegenstuen Vandkunsten (housing in Borås) and Henning Larsen (Malmö City Library) from Denmark. A Spaniard, Rafael Moneo, designed the most prestigious projects of the 1990s, the new Modern Museum (Moderna Museet) and the Museum of Architecture (Arkitekturmuseet), both in Stockholm.

During the closing decades of the 20th century Swedish architects turned to history to rediscover techniques, design and the social significance of architecture. Alongside this reconstruction work grew a renewed interest in modernism as form and idea and, with the architecture of the 1930s as a springboard, a new international style has established a foothold. Building commissions are now mainly for institutions such as schools and colleges. Despite a major migration, chiefly to Stockholm, the level of housing construction remains very low. It is concentrated to exclusive sites, which has served to justify very high standards. The resources for heavily subsidised housing construction are no longer available and the state's involvement in building has therefore shifted direction. One such expression of this new approach is the architecture action plan that aims to improve Swedish architecture. One means towards this end is the expansion of the Museum of Architecture, which, from its new premises on Skeppsholmen in Stockholm, is in charge of Sweden's official Year of Architecture 2001.

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The Vasa Museum in Stockholm by Dahlbäck and Månsson (1990).

Max Plunger



The Modern Museum and the Museum of Architecture in Stockholm by Rafael Moneo were inaugurated in February 1998.

Hans Hammarskjöld/MM

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The author alone is responsible for the opinions expressed in this fact sheet.

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