

**SECRET**

INSIDE PERSPECTIVE

**AGENT**



## **THE SECRET AGENT REPORT**

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# **COPENHAGEN VS MELBOURNE**



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## COPENHAGEN VS MELBOURNE

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Welcome to the Secret Agent report for January. This holiday edition we take you away from Melbourne to Denmark's capital city Copenhagen. Why? It's the world's most liveable city, according to leading design and current affairs magazine Monocle. Melbourne was featured as the No.2 city in the world, and while this is great, we cannot rest on our laurels!

The Monocle report ranks cities according to safety/crime, international connectivity, climate/sunshine, quality of architecture, public transport, tolerance, environmental issues, access to nature, urban design, business conditions, proactive policy and medical care. Secret Agent decided to head to Copenhagen this Christmas to see what all the fuss is about! Spearheaded by Paul Osborne and Julian Faelli, the focus of the trip was to document some details of the city, and find in those details some lessons to be learnt. We hope you enjoy this special insight and wish you a super year ahead for 2014.

Copenhagen, Denmark's capital, was originally founded as a Viking fishing village in the 10th century. The city began to expand beyond its medieval centre in the mid 18th century, giving it today's unique residential fabric. The apartment blocks are all six stories tall, typically with two apartments per level. This distributed density provides the backdrop for city life. The city reveals itself early to the visitor. Bicycles are in abundance and outnumber cars 20 to 1!

The average Dane embraces consumerism with open arms - as shown by the sheer number of design shops. A street named StrOget is the longest and oldest pedestrian street in the world, with 3.2km of uninterrupted shops. It would be a crime for a Dane to own badly designed cutlery! The streets are thriving with people engaged in conversation, even with the temperature around 0°C. Open markets with heat lamps are busy with vendors selling gluehwein, Danish sausages and gingerbread.

Copenhagen is a lifestyle city and the people embrace the weather conditions in order to shop, eat and socialise. Like Melbourne, the real Copenhagen can be found in the inner urban neighbourhoods. In these neighbourhoods, such as Vestrobo, there are supermarkets, cafes and a wide range of retail within a short walk. To get any further afield or into the town's centre, most Danes cycle or jump on the newly constructed metro. It's easy to see why cycling is so popular.

The city is flat and there are bicycle lanes on nearly every street. You can get anywhere in the city within 15 minutes on a bike. In this regard it is extremely well connected internally. It is interesting to see the specialised bike infrastructure needed to cope with the large bicycle population, such as the 'stackers' at stations and central points.



BICYCLE STACKER

Copenhagen is a melting pot of cultures and foods, much like Melbourne. The option of bio dynamic, organic or vegetarian on menus show a level of progress over that of the Melbourne food scene. Places like the Coffee Collective have a very similar feel to home. Some of the best coffee in Copenhagen is found here.



THE COFFEE COLLECTIVE

Overall it would appear that Melbourne and Copenhagen share a similar enthusiasm for fine food, coffee and hospitality in general. Copenhagen is home to the world's best restaurant, Noma.

#### DESIGN AND ARCHITECTURE

The personality of Scandinavia (Denmark, Norway and Sweden) can be found within its design. Both architecture and everyday items have a playfulness that is distinctly Danish. Inside apartments you can see that the Danish reputation for good design is well deserved. Great pride is taken in their interior spaces - in part due to the time spent inside during the short winter days. Everyday objects are carefully curated to ensure light, bright and functional spaces. Danish design classics from the likes of Arne Jacobson (more on him later) and Hans Wegner sit comfortably next to the new school designers like Cecile Manz. Many of the early 30's - 50's functionalist classics have been reissued in new colours. It all comes together to form an aesthetic that is distinct to the city.

Lighting plays a huge role in Danish interiors. There are no down lights here. Instead, pendants, floor lamps and task lighting are used together for a soft glow. The warm light is complimented by the warm tones of the timber furniture. The popular bent timber chairs make an appearance everywhere, upholstered in the fantastically textured Kvadrat fabrics.

One of Denmark's most influential designers of this century is Arne Jacobsen. His pre-war architecture of the 30's is a reflection of his time spent at the Bauhaus in Germany. It's easy to see where the post-war modern movement sprung from in Jacobsen's work. His 'Bellavista' apartments in seaside Klampenborg (12km north of Copenhagen) are a fantastic example.



BELLAVISTA APARTMENTS, KLAMPENBORG

The apartments sawtooth back along the site providing privacy and views to each. How modern this must have looked in 1934! It is a project that has influenced a number of buildings, from the 60's apartments next door - that takes cues from its massing and proportion - to new projects in the Orestad district.

A short walk inland through the sparse forests of native ash and you find yourself at the home of Finn Juhl, one of Jacobsen's contemporaries. Finn made a name for himself on the worldwide stage with his 1952 design for the United Nations headquarters in New York. His own house built in 1942 is a fantastic example of modern living. Through the bright blue painted front door the house opens up into a series of distinct spaces. Small light filled areas transition between the perfectly sized living, dining and bedroom areas. It's a small house, human in scale, where spaces feel comfortable instead of vast. The large windows and natural light do however make it feel larger than it really is. The house is filled with Juhl's own furniture. In combination with his collection of vivid modern artwork, the house sings even in the winters weak light. It's a real gem because the complexity and depth of the building isn't evident from the outside.



FINN JUHL HOUSE

Follow the coast line further north to Humlebaek to find the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art, one of Copenhagen's biggest attractions, being visited by over 600,000 every year. The museum itself is a tour de force of late 50's - 60's modern architecture. Delicate glass pavilions link the gallery spaces, all rendered in a combination of wood, glass and white painted bricks. The network of buildings sits elevated on the site overlooking the Oresund sea. On the afternoon that we visited (it was already starting to darken) the horizon line was obscure in the mist, with the Oresund sea melting seamlessly into the grey sky.



LOUISIANA MUSEUM OF MODERN ART

Louisiana is currently hosting a exhibition of Jackson Pollocks's work and his Danish contemporary Asgar Jorn. The level changes of the gallery create the feeling that the exhibition at times is happening underground thereby providing an immersive platform to experience the art. In combination with the backdrop of brick and timber wall Louisiana provides a richer and more organic experience than the traditional white gallery space.

Back in the city, in the up and coming Orestad region, the next wave of Danish architects have been practising. The suburb is reminiscent in many ways of Melbourne's Docklands. The linear area is serviced by the metro and a great boulevard that runs through the centre. New office space and apartments are littered along the boulevard. At the start is an imposing black behemoth of a building - a take of Jacobsen's 50's hotel for SAS airlines.

The best buildings on the strip have been orchestrated by BIG (Denmark's current poster child of Architecture). The two BIG apartment blocks present a hard edge to the street and metro line to the North, tiering down toward the canal at the rear to provide a soft interface to the existing single level housing. Floor to ceiling glass exposes split level apartments. To the Australian eye, the blank glass facade with individually furnished living spaces beyond comes across as even a little bit 'rude'. Privacy of the home doesn't seem quite as important to the Dane's - perhaps due to centuries of apartment living.



ORESTAD REGION

All in all, Melbourne and Copenhagen share many similarities as well as great divergences. Presented in the artwork is the fact that we share the extremes - arctic themes in Denmark, with desert and bush lands being the prominent Australian landscapes.

We took an ordered look at the components of the Monocle report to give our assessment.

#### SAFETY AND CRIME

Copenhagen feels quite safe. There appears to be a drug culture, however, the openness of special clinics show a willingness to accept that society will always have these issues. Melbourne's larger scale make it appear slightly less safe in the crime stakes from our impression.

#### INTERNATIONAL CONNECTIVITY

Copenhagen airport is a major connecting point to Europe from Scandinavia. Melbourne is a long way from other international cities, so Copenhagen would take the cake here on its reach to other international destinations.

#### STATE OF ARCHITECTURE

Another area that would be hard to beat the Scandinavians in. Melbourne has some brilliant design, however the quality of Copenhagen is at a higher level overall.

#### PUBLIC TRANSPORT

The underground metro and train system is incredible in Copenhagen. We headed to Sweden one morning for Breakfast and it only took 25 mins. The transport in Copenhagen is great, including the rights given to cyclists with their own lane almost on every street.

#### TOLERANCE

Copenhagen has become quite multicultural. We hear from the locals that some integration issues have been prevalent in the past. Melbourne might be just ahead of Copenhagen in this department.

#### CLIMATE / SUNSHINE

Melbourne would be well and truly up front, unless you prefer extreme cold. In January the temperature can be minus 15°C. Melbourne's climate is preferable overall!

#### ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES

Copenhagen is at the worlds edge for looking at better ways to help conserve the global environment. It is a progressive city in this regard, while we can be seen as taking a backward step in Australia at present. A key motivating factor for this would be the fact that melting ice in the arctic has had the greatest impact within the Scandinavian region.

#### ACCESS TO NATURE

Both are good, while Melbourne might offer more diverse terrain than Copenhagen when it comes to getting out of the big smoke of the inner city.

#### URBAN DESIGN

Copenhagen was built at a different time so many things need to be factored in. The design has been progressive in creating great connections between locations by bike, and many apartments that fill the inner city locations. Melbourne is extreme in its low rise density combined with massive sky scrapers. We noted many families living in apartment buildings and having to lug their kids up 5 flights of stairs. It didn't seem to be too much fuss! In our opinion the urban areas feel like they have the right type of density and consistency. We would welcome Melbourne to adopt similar principles.

#### BUSINESS CONDITIONS

The global financial crisis has been tough for Denmark. The Scandinavians in general operate highly sustainable businesses, however business conditions can be more restrictive for foreigners. For example, property cannot be purchased by foreign citizens. Melbourne, within the Asian pacific region, may be in front in this topic. However the ease of international travel from Copenhagen makes this a close race.

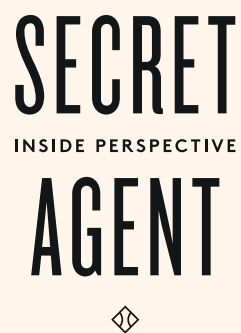
#### PRO-ACTIVE POLICY

Copenhagen is completing extensive works for its future. As much as this is a shame to admit, Copenhagen shows greater long term sustainable thinking, than in Melbourne.

#### MEDICAL

The Danish pay extremely high taxes and a high proportion of these goes towards their healthcare system. They spend approximately 21% more than Australians on healthcare. The aim of the Danish system is universal, free and equal access to healthcare. It is even free to go to medical school in Denmark. Furthermore, Denmark is a leader when it comes to e-health or telemedicine. They began using digital health records over 10 years ago and now have one of the most efficient information systems in the world. This puts them above Melbourne in terms of healthcare, although they still have similar issues with coordination of services and waiting times. Also, we note that life expectancy is approximately 3 years longer in Australia than Copenhagen.

In closing, we think something special is going on in Copenhagen. The long term thinking and sustainable decisions are of vital importance. Even though Copenhagen gets a few more ticks than Melbourne, some things that cannot be changed, such as climate, make Melbourne the place that we still want to call home. Melbourne is a city we should all be proud of. Perhaps through a visit to Copenhagen, we can look at what we must improve so that Melbourne stays at the cutting edge of the world's most liveable city.



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