

Presentation of Rødovre Municipal Library



Rødovre Municipal Library

Designed by Arne Jacobsen (b.1902- d. 1971).
Build in 1961-1969 as part of a larger construction plan for the area north of the street Rødovre Parkvej and east of the street Tårnvej. Originally the plan included a technical college and an assembly hall.

The library is located centrally in Rødovre Municipality, a suburb to Copenhagen nine km west of the capital.



The Library has a apartment building on its eastern side and the town hall (1952-1956) on its western side, both Arne Jacobsen buildings.

The floor of the library is in level with the tile covered town square.





The building itself is designed in a modernistic style illustrated in its clean cut lines, inspired by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe who is regarded as a pioneer of modern architecture .

Arne Jacobsen's admiration towards nature is apparent in his use of colour and materials such as leather and beech.

Another characteristic, which is found in this building, is his particularly thorough work concerning every single detail inside the building. Everything from the door handles to the staircases have been designed by the architect himself. It can be seen as an example of "Gesamtkunstwerk."



Rødovre Municipal library – A listed building

Why this building?

In 2010 the Heritage Agency of Denmark decided to make Rødovre Municipal library a listed building.

The building is architecture at a high level and it is designed by one of the greatest Danish architects.

Furthermore the building tells a story about the development of the Danish welfare society where access to knowledge has been and still is a cornerstone.



The buildings preservation values

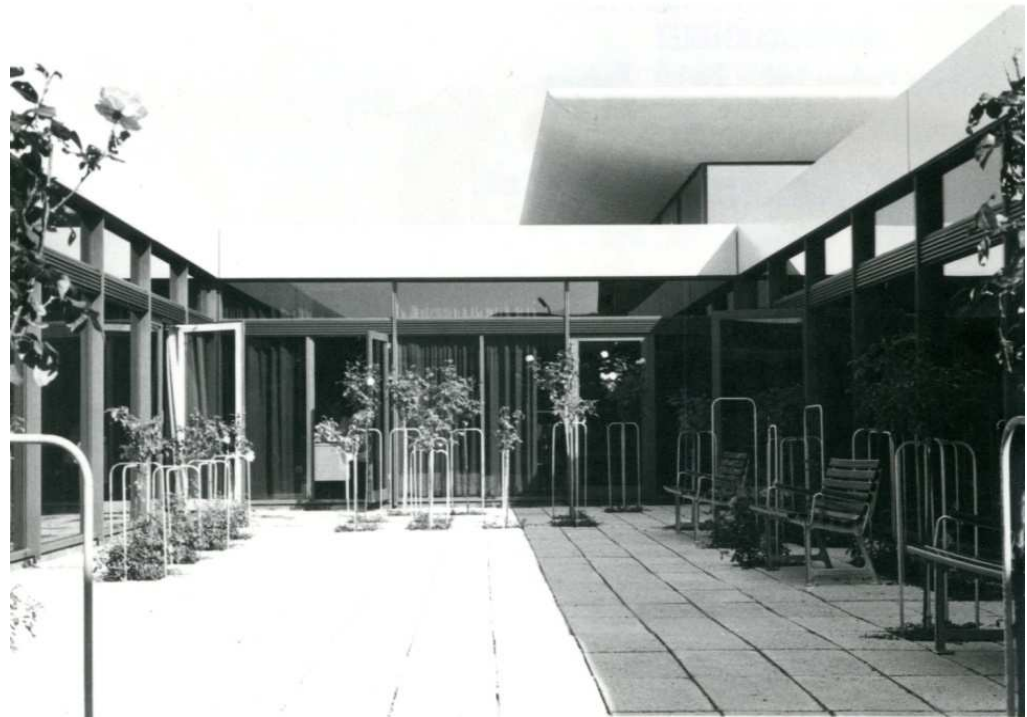
- Special architectural features on the buildings exterior; the windowless walls and its enclosed appearance.
- The building materials, the exterior surface of the wall, consisting of plates of unhewn Norwegian "Solvåg" and the Arne Jacobsen colours.
- The five atrium gardens and their characteristic light. As well as the Great Hall with its almost hovering roof and view off the City Hall on the other side of the town square.
- The building's central location in Rødovre and its part of a greater construction plan is also part of the buildings preservation values.



What are the consequences of the listing?

The listing means that before making any type of changes to the building, apart from general maintenance, permission has to be granted by the Heritage Agency of Denmark.

Any changes made must not contradict the original architectural style of building, which also includes choice of materials.



The exterior of the library

Observed from the outside the library appears as a low, dark building without windows at its exterior walls. This flat appearance however is disrupted by the slightly convex almost hovering roof, on top of the library's Great Hall.



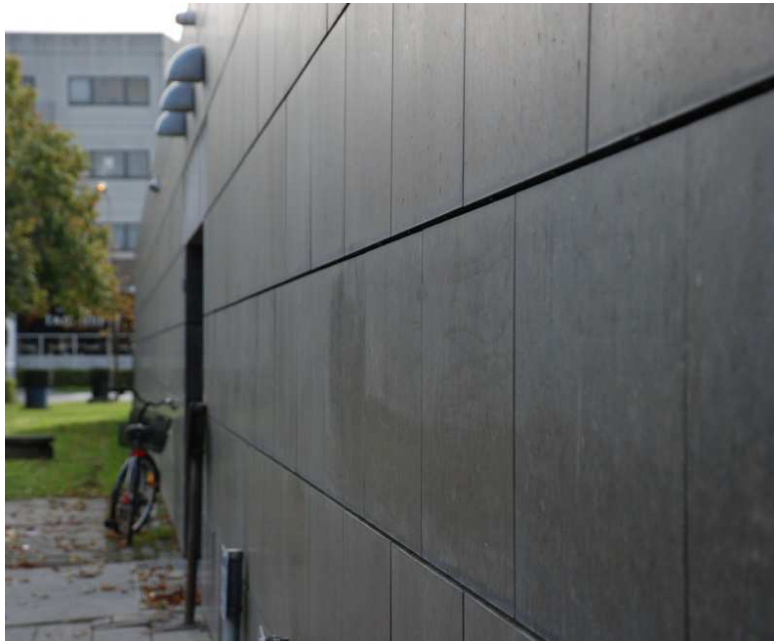
The library is an introverted building which opens up on the inside. The sources of light in the building are five atrium gardens, as well as round skylight and the bright Great Hall with its convex roof.



From the main entrance of the library (picture to the right) is a direct line to the main entrance of the town hall (picture to the left). Arne Jacobsen uses in this way his architecture to underline democratic ideas, by pointing out that the municipal government is elected by the public.



You can see the direct lines several places in the building. The backdoor lies in the same axis as the main entrance.



The exterior surface of the library is covered in plates of unhewn Norwegian "Solvåg" stone. These plates have no load bearing function since they are attached merely to the outside of the perimeter wall, only a few centimeters apart, the inner wall consists of limestone.



By the eastside of the building we find four ventilation ducts, that are shaped like tall pillars: These pillars are painted in a blue colour, one of 11 colours found through out the interior of the library. More about these later on.



The library's exterior sign

An important part of the exterior of the library is its name, written on the southern wall of the building, in bold white letters.

Up until the fall of 1977 the library had no sign on the wall. The original signage of the building consisted merely of a small sign at the end of the tiles covered path leading up to main entrance.

The current sign was not in place until after a visit of the famous Swedish journalist Lasse Holmquist, who came to hold a lecture.



The lack of a sign resulted in a thirty minute long drive up and down the street Rødovre Parkvej, because the unfortunate taxi driver was unable to locate the library.

The very next day the city architect was told to create a sign visible day and night!

(Told by former employee Eigil Malmer)



The Interior of the Library

As previously mentioned, the library is an introvert building. Standing in the main entrance, the building opens up from the inside. Straight ahead is the Great Hall with a glass wall, which enables one to look directly into the hall, with the children's section on its left and the adult fiction and non-fiction sections on its right.



In the interior the 11 Arne Jacobsen colours are found through out the building, for instance at the pillars you can see in the picture. Rumor has it that his wife helped him pick out these colours.



The 11 Arne Jacobsen colours



The Vestibule

The original counter from 1969, designed by Arne Jacobsen.

Here the main characteristics of the vestibule are the skylight, clean cut lines and simplicity.



When the library became self-serviced, the main entrance area and the vestibule were redesigned in 2007 by students from the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, School of Architecture, Design and Conservation. The redesigning happened before the building was listed in 2010.



The new arrangement focuses on curvy lines. The skylight remains an important part of the vestibule as it lights up the counter.

The colours used are not inspired by Arne Jacobsen.



The old counter was physically straining to work in.

It required the employees to stand up all day and to carry heavy loads.

Today the new counter requires less carrying of heavy loads and enables easier access to the library material needed.



The Adult Fiction and Non-Fiction Sections

Arne Jacobsen's clean cut lines run throughout the section, in for example the lamps in the ceiling.

The room itself consists of a long passage with both works of fiction and non fiction, which ends in another cross going passage.

The room is added daily light from two atrium gardens that lies in connection to the room.



”The Starry Sky”

Besides the interest in colours and shapes, Arne Jacobsen also had a great interest in light, both daylight and the light coming from lamps.

The brown – red ceiling is covered in round lamps which light up the room, and at first glance look like a starry sky.



But a closer look shows that the lamps run flush with the lines, of the building's interior, across the ceiling.





The Spiral Staircases

Another characteristic of Arne Jacobsen are his spiral staircases which express a weightless elegance.

The staircases are placed so they do not dominate the room.

They connect the ground floor with the storage rooms in the basement.

The plexi glass was not part of the original staircases, it was added later on to prevent children from falling down the stairs.



The functionality of the Library



Arne Jacobsen's ideas about the library as a functional and modern place is among other things expressed by the building's modular ceiling and wall skirting boards. Former employee Eigil Malmer expresses it in this way:

"Almost everything can be moved inside the house - with the exception of the toilets."

Eigil Malmer, retired librarian



The many glass-facades facing the five atriums have an influence on indoor climate in summer and wintertime. Apart from designing the furniture and the interior, he also designed the ventilation in the building, which is still in working order.



The Bookcases

None of the bookcases in the adult fiction and non-fiction sections are the original Arne Jacobsen bookcases.

The bookcase, in the back of the room, is considered to be the longest in Northern Europe.

The rest of the bookcases, however, are not placed according to his original plans for the placement of the library's furniture.



The Children's Section

Many of Arne Jacobsen's designs can be seen in the children's section.



A theme that connects the adult fiction and non-fiction section with the children's section is the "starry sky" in the ceiling created by the lamps.



The light, from the lamps, is reflected on to the shelf beneath to accentuate the comic book section.



The daylight from the atriums, is reflected on the bookshelves and the play area.



Previous activities in the children's section.



The discotheque in the children's section.
The "listening table" from 1969, was well
used.



The Great Hall

In the late sixties, Arne Jacobsen began to work with daylight as a design element and a material.

He rations the light and worked with its contrast and effects by seeking the values of the underexposed.

The Great Hall receives its light from the large level windows and from the atrium garden in the back.





The roof is raised above the remainder of the library to create an effect of lantern light.



The five atrium gardens



The five atrium gardens are enclosed by glass walls, which provide the building nature and fresh air but also offer the public an opportunity to sit outdoors





Arne Jacobsen was also an excellent painter. He was often inspired by nature and botany. The colours and the different plant species were of particular interest.

One of the characteristics of his work is the contrast between a building's straight lines and the soft natural shapes of the plants surrounding them. The five atrium gardens were founded on Arne Jacobsen's principles.



Everydaylife and practice in the library

"The listing of the library sometimes makes it a bit hard and a little more expensive to make changes in the library."

Eigil Malmer, retired librarian



The library's vision of being a modern cultural institution, open to new initiatives, has not changed after it became a listed building in 2010.

It is still possible to rearrange furniture in the children's and the adult fiction and non-fiction sections of the library.



The children's section

Among other things they offer fantasy, comic books, movies, music, games, audio books, and fairytales. Various non-fiction books, puzzles, and children's books in several languages. There is also a play area for the smaller children.

The Adult fiction and non-fiction section

In the adult fiction and non-fiction sections there are a variety of fiction and non-fiction literature, magna print, audio books and internet media. Non-fiction material about art and architecture is well-represented.

The library offers a collection of periodicals and a music section with a column containing cds available for listening (see picture on the right) . A cosy reading area with tables, chairs and sofas is also in this section.



Activities in Rødovre Municipal Library

The library offers a variety
of cultural activities.
There is access to
computers and free internet.



Here are a few examples of previous activities in the library.



Partners in the local area



”Kulturhuset Viften” is a local cultural institution who collaborates with the library.

”Rødovre Lokalhistoriske Samling” (Rødovre local historical archives) is a part of the library. The archives manage and communicate Rødovre's cultural heritage for example through lectures, exhibitions and education.



What is special about Rødovre Muncipal Library?

"I'm interested in
astrology, you can
get almost anything"
Else 75 years old

"It's fun to be here, you can
sit down and read a book
together"

Ahkem 9 years old

"browse a little
before I buy
books in the
bookstore"
Per 47 years old

"I mostly come here to
use the internet"
Diana 26 years old

"The building is ugly seen from the
outside, but nice indoors.
It's nice with small gardens and
beautiful trees"

Charlotte 34 years old

"Nice display of books, an inspiring
place and a great place to play for
children in daycare"
Laila 55 years old



What is good about being an employee at Rødovre Municipal library?

"Fantastic cooperation, confidence, good management, alternating work, the interaction between the library users and the employees"

Jenny

"It's not boring, it's exciting and varied. Every 10 minutes a user comes and asks about something new and the next minute you're crawling under a table putting plugs in a socket"

Kirstine

"It's the people, the literature, the culture. Every day is different from the day before"

Laila

"works well together, colleague-wise"

Tue



Links for further reading

Arne Jacobsen

<http://www.arne-jacobsen.com/en/arne-jacobsen.aspx>

The Heritage Agency of Denmark

<http://www.kulturarv.dk>

Architectural pictures

<http://www.arkitekturbilleder.dk/bygning-R%C3%B8dovre-hovedbibliotek-67>

Danish pictures

<http://www.danskebilleder.dk/earlylogin.jspx>

The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts, Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation, The Library

<http://www.kasb.dk/dk>

Designmuseum Danmark

<http://designmuseum.dk/>

The Danish National Art Library

<http://www.kunstabib.dk/>



Thanks to

The staff of Rødovre Municipal Library

Former employee Eigil Malmer, historical view

Rødovre Lokalthistoriske Samling, for access to photographs

Architect Kent Pedersen, information about the architecture and the interior

