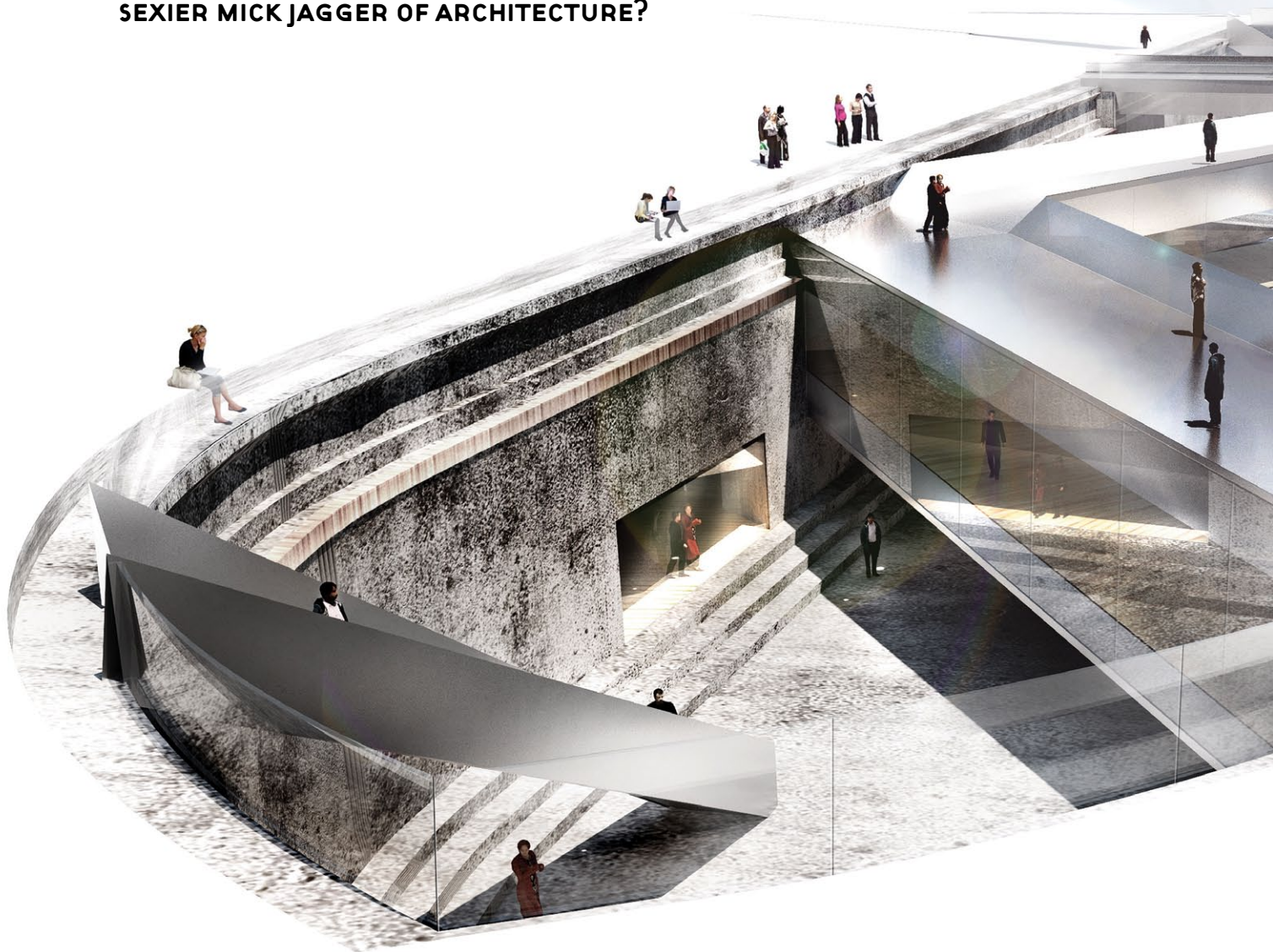


WE LIKE IT BIG

COULD THIS DASHING DANE BE THE YOUNGER,
SEXIER MICK JAGGER OF ARCHITECTURE?



VERY YOUNG, VERY BRIGHT BJARKE INGELS IS THE FOUNDING ARCHITECT OF BIG (BIG.DK), WHICH WAS ESTABLISHED IN 2006, AND HAS OFFICES IN NEW YORK AND COPENHAGEN. HIS BOY-NEXT-DOOR, GOODIE-TWO-SHOES LOOKS AND VAGUE NAUGHTY SCHOOLBOY GLINT HAS CAPTIVATED THE DESIGN WORLD. A SELF-PROFESSED MERMAID ABDUCTOR AND ASPIRING COMIC BOOK ARTIST, THIS YOUNG DANE HAS THRILLED THE RATHER STIFF-UPPER-LIP WORLD OF ARCHITECTURE BY DISPLAYING WORK THAT EMITS A NEW, TRULY ORGANIC FEEL.

TEXT: DANIEL SCHEFFLER



In 2009, *The Architectural Review* said that Ingels and BIG "have abandoned 20th-century Danish modernism to explore the more fertile world of bigness and baroque eccentricity", and that is the crux of how BIG has been able to create such interesting and inventive work. A step away from the inevitable manifestations of modernism that have plagued Scandinavian designers in the last decade, their main desire is to realise bolder and more daring work.

There has also been an increasingly long-line of accolades, such as being named *Wall Street Journal's* Innovator of the Year and being described as "rapidly becoming one of the design world's rising stars", being allocated a place within the 'Top 100 Most Creative People in Design' from Fast Company, awarded a Golden Lion from the Venice Biennale, along with two National AIA Awards, the World Architecture Festival Housing Award, a Forum Aid Award and the MIPIM Residential Development Award. Stay with us, because there's more: multiple teaching opportunities at Harvard, Yale and Columbia universities, as well as Bjarke being a frequent speaker at Wired, TED, the World Economic Forum and Google's Zeitgeist. BIG's been busy – big-time – and so has the man himself, but somehow he manages to remain humble, although incredibly driven.

BJARKE INGELS.



ROCK IT

Bjarke, with his deep dreamy looks and tousled hair, believes that "contemporary life constantly evolves and changes, not least due to the influence from multicultural exchange, global economical flows and communication technologies that all together require new ways of architectural and urban organization".

CURRENT WORKS

Bjarke Ingels comments on two new interesting projects BIG is involved in that are currently heading towards completion.

The Grove at Grand Bay, Coconut Grove, Miami, United States

"An enormous residential project, just a hop away from downtown Miami, is where the new Grove project will stand in its 58,900 square metre capacity and will on completion seek to obtain an LEED Silver certification – a first for a Coconut Grove structure. Rising 20 floors above the bay, the development will highlight the panoramic views with floor-to-ceiling windows, and elaborate on indigenous elements as an evolution of the local condominium architecture. This is that true indoor-outdoor living solution that gives a nod to the famous Florida weather."

Maritime Museum, Helsingør, Denmark

"To be able to make something new and thrilling out of an abandoned dry dock was the first challenge: a cavernous space that will be home to the new museum. BIG slightly bent the rules of the competition and placed the museum on the periphery of the dry-dock walls to act as both a reinforcing structure and a façade. So the museum is now a continuous ramp performing a *loop de loop* around the dry-dock walls. The fun part is that a gentle slope, corresponding to water running off a bathroom floor, will be incorporated. So for instance even though the earth is round, one's perception is that it is flat. And when sailing the ocean one experiences a geometric paradox. So a visitor will walk the entire length of the museum and then innocently arrive at the starting point – just a level beneath."



THE GROVE'S INTERIORS



And it is with this fervour that the TED speaker thrilled audiences at the conference in Edinburgh, where Bjarke showcased BIG's playful designs, which include a factory chimney that blows smoke rings and a ski slope built on top of a waste processing plant. In another TED talk, Bjarke discussed buildings that not only resemble items in nature, but share its behavioural characteristics, such as shielding from the wind, collecting the sun's rays and natural breathtaking views. It's no wonder that he's clocked up millions of hits on the TED website and is considered to be a TED rock star.

In South Africa, he once again proved the favourite at the yearly Design Indaba conference on design and sustainability. His apparent natural swagger and lighthearted way of explaining ideas with a genuine sense of gravitas made conference attendees and the African design world sit bolt upright. He has also made his appearance on film, and was cast in *My Playground*, a documentary by Kaspar Astrup Schröder that explores extreme sports like parkour and freerunning, with much of the action taking place in and around BIG projects. Perhaps the next documentary will feature Bjarke as an action hero saving the planet from badly-designed buildings, but it seems unlikely he'll be quitting his day job just yet.

THE STORY CONTINUES

His career trajectory has always been plain sailing, or so it seems. In 1998, Ingels worked for the prolific Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas in Rotterdam. After some serious mentoring from the famous workhorse, Ingels opened his own practice in Copenhagen. Winning a Golden Lion at the Venice Biennale with Belgian compatriot Julien de Smedt, and completing a series of open-air swimming pools for Copenhagen harbour front simply propelled him to achieve more. And so Ingels' tale of success continues, as the ambitious well-spoken Dane is given the star treatment all over the world, and seems to be welcomed with open arms wherever he goes.

But the first really big break for Bjarke came with the completion of the award-winning VM Houses in Ørestad, Copenhagen. Inspired by the legendary Swiss/French architect Le Corbusier, two residential blocks were designed in the shape of the letters V and M. The M house comprised 95 units and the V house 115 dwellings. According to BIG, the designs took into account the aspects of daylight, privacy and views, and by incorporating diagonal shapes, managed to create amazing vistas of the surrounding nature. This project, a real departure from the known Scandinavian design, brought them a Forum AID Award for

best building in Scandinavia in 2006. Bjarke, who is a firm believer in his own work, even lived in the building himself for a few years.

Most recently, BIG has been selected to design the Smithsonian Institution Master Plan in Washington DC in the US – not a bad gig for a small design firm. BIG will be part of a team of talented designers, masterful engineers and forward thinkers that have been selected to reconsider this historic campus, the world's largest museum and the famous research complex. Bjarke describes this as a "humbling challenge" and explains their task as "exploring the collections with The Smithsonian, and together attempting to untie the Gordian Knot of intertwined collections to unearth the full potential of this treasure chamber of artefacts." BIG seeks to reinstall the original Castle as a proverbial red carpet for visitors and to reassign the now obscured Central Garden as a striking grand entrance. It's a perfect location for a high riser like Bjarke to show off his skills, in the mighty capital where even Obama, and maybe Hillary in his footsteps, will have to take note of their neighbours.

URBANISM

And in April this year in Paris, BIG fought off some fierce competition, including the renowned French Valode & Pistre and



THE GROVE'S EXTERIORS



Manuelle Gautrand Architecture firms, to secure an enormous mixed-use development. Conceptualized by the Auchan Group, this 200-acre ring-shaped project will be positioned in the busy Ile-de-France area. Some of the features include a wave-like green roof that will double up as recreational greenery. The roof will also provide insulation, treat and capture grey water for irrigation and the *micro-ville*.

"The park-topped, transit-connected experimental complex will include a mix of urbanism and landscape design," says Bjarke. And there are also spaces for retail, hotels, offices, museums, exhibitions, nightclubs, restaurants, pools, urban farms, even hiking trails and waste heat-powered spas, an artificial ski slope and the piece de resistance: an aquarium. "The project will be centered upon the defining theme of the European urban experience, diversity and culture," BIG said. Building will commence in 2017 and it will take a long four years to complete.

So with all this happening and so much more in the proverbial pipeline, the charmer Bjarke Ingels still finds time for *Winq* to discuss life, love, work, the universe, who he's currently sharing his bed with, and even his first book *Yes Is More: An Archicomic on Architectural*

Evolution that catalogues 30 of his projects in comic book form.

What is design for you today in 2013?

"Design and architecture are the art and science of making sure that the world fits with the way we want to live. Since the world we inhabit is so extensively man-made – we don't only have the skills and the means but also the responsibility to continuously adapt and improve our physical surroundings to the way we want to live our lives."

And what would you say is the difference between design and architecture? If you believe there to be a difference at all.

"In Danish, the common verb for both design and architecture is *formgivning* – literally form-giving – and so assigning form and shape to physical objects or environments. I guess landscape and building architects design environments for human life, and all the other designers – fashion, product, graphics and so on – populate those environments with content."

You've been called the 'rock star of architecture' by some of the critics and by the many fans. Tell me what you think about that.

"I wish!"

Your website www.big.dk has done more than just make me smile. There's some playfulness in your personality that allows for fun in your industry that can be traditionally rather dry.

"Honestly: no Dane ever thought there was anything comical about .dk – as it is the international abbreviation for Denmark. So it was only when I moved to New York that I started getting comments on the thought-provoking nature of our URL. I guess it only works in our favour, since everybody knows that we are innocent and that the perversion is in the mind of the receiver, of course."

You wanted to be a cartoonist when you were growing up. How do you incorporate that into your work today?

"I do love stories and visual communication and to not only use words but also graphics and layout to communicate complex issues in the most blatant and intuitive way! I guess *Yes is More* – our archicomic – an architectural monograph in the form of a graphic novel, is where we have come the closest to realizing my initial ambition of graphic story-telling."

With the death last year of the legendary Oscar Niemeyer, the world has been refocusing on his work quite a lot. How do you see his work, his opinions and his legacy?

"He brought the Latino spirit to rational functional modernism – A more playful hedonistic and tropical interpretation of the otherwise rigorous and straight-laced international style. At BIG we always attempt to merge need and desire in designs that are as playful as they are hard-working: like for, instance, a power plant with a ski slope on the roof would be a good example."

How much does the American architect, and 'father of skyscrapers' Louis Sullivan's 'form follows function' dictum influence you?

"Each situation has a different set of parameters. I think sometimes function is indeed the most crucial criteria at other times it is the material, the climate, the context, the landscape, the neighbours, the solar orientation, the budget, the identity, the visual impact, the noise-scape or a myriad of other factors. The true challenge is to identify what is the biggest problem or potential in each case and to let that knowledge inform your design decisions rather than applying the same recipe in each case without proper analysis or thorough reflection."

How was it to work for the Dutch architect Rem Koolhaas in Rotterdam?

"The first design I proposed for a part of the Seattle Public Library was instantly nicknamed 'the Scandinavian Pleasuredome' by Rem. He said he couldn't help it – I am Danish after all!"

What are your thoughts about the controversial One World Trade Center (Freedom Tower) in New York?

"Our client Douglas Durst, for the Durst Pyramid, is building it so I've had the pleasure to visit the roof deck whilst it was still under construction. I honestly like the generic quality of the two square towers merged into a single shape."

Where is architecture heading in the future – not just the trends but also much more existentially for you or for the world?

"I think we are heading towards designing cities like man-made eco-systems. Places where the distinction between city and landscape, and, by implication, architecture and nature blur and fuse into a new hybrid notion, will become more important."

Architecture is all about space at the moment. Micro living, co-creating and shared living as more people move to urban areas.

"At the same time, statistics show that we get more and more space per person as societies evolve. So the trend isn't really clear as yet. I see that cities are becoming increasingly inhabitable – piers become parks, pedestrian streets, bicycle lanes, elevated parks on former train tracks are transforming my native New York into a better place to live every day."

What are you reading at the moment whether on Kindle, iPad or good old paper format?

"*Zero History* by the American-Canadian William Gibson. He is one of the few authors of whom I've read every word he has written and I would kill to start on *The Winds of Winter* but George R.R. Martin is just so insanely slow!"

You are dividing your time between Europe and New York now with your dual offices. How do you manage all the traveling?

"I am never an insomniac – so between New York and Copenhagen I have no trouble adjusting. And both places feel like home to me."

So you seem to be a bit of an honorary gay icon in the design world. Congratulations.

"Ha! A great honour indeed." ■

MORE ON WWW.BIG.DK OR ON TWITTER: @BJARKEINGELS



AMAGERFORBRAENDING



W57. NEW YORK



8 HOUSE

SUSTAINABILITY

Bjarke Ingels comments on three of BIG's sustainable design projects.

8 House for St Frederikslund Holding, Ørestad, Denmark
"The 8 House offers homes in all its bearings for people in all of life's stages: the young and the old, nuclear families and singles, families that grow and families that downsize. The bow-shaped building creates two distinct spaces, separated by the centre of the bow that hosts the communal facilities. The apartments are placed at the top, while the commercial programme unfolds at the base of the building. As a result, the different horizontal layers have achieved a quality of their own: the apartments benefit from the view, sunlight and fresh air, while the office leases merge with life on the street. The building also won Best Residential Building at the 2011 World Architecture Festival, and the *Huffington Post* included 8 house as one

of the '10 Best Architecture Moments of 2001–2010'."

West 57th for Durst Fetner Residential, Manhattan, New York, United States
"West 57th, aiming for LEED Gold certification, occupies a full city block at the corner of West 57th Street and the West Side Highway. The project introduces a new building typology to Manhattan – the building is an urban dune that peaks at the northeast corner, thereby both maximizing the number of apartments facing the water and preserving views. The shared green space at heart of the block is derived from the classic Copenhagen 'urban oasis' and serves as a vertical extension of the activity and energy of the Hudson River Park."

A new waste treatment plant for Amagerforbraending, Copenhagen, Denmark
"A new breed of waste-to-energy plant, one that is economically, environmentally, and socially profitable and situated

just outside the centre of Copenhagen in an industrial area. Completion is set for 2016 for visitors and the residents of the Danish capital. Instead of considering Amagerforbraending as an isolated object, it means mobilizing the architecture and intensifying the relationship between the building and the city, thereby expanding the existing activities in the area by turning the roof of the new Amagerforbraending into a ski slope for the citizens of Copenhagen. The roof will be ecological and usable all year round, upending the convention of the energy-intensive indoor or alpine ski resort. When completed, the new facility will – for at least the next 25 years – be able to treat approximately 500,000 tons of waste annually, corresponding to approximately 10% of all residual waste in Denmark. The facility will be able to supply low-carbon heat and electricity to 140,000 households in the metropolis."