

## FINAL REPORT - SCANDINAVIA

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As proposed in my application, the trip I made to Scandinavia was to investigate the possibility of creating an international exchange between a Scandinavian Design School and the Furniture Design Program at San Diego State University's School of Art, Design and Art History. I went in with the idea that I would investigate a wide range of schools to get a feel for what would work out best for our program and students. In addition I wanted to get a sense of what we could offer as well.

Interestingly, very early in the trip it was clear to me that there were two major types of programs that are considered to be within the furniture design areas. One is completely studio-based, with ties to the traditions of woodworking and craftsmanship, for which these countries are very well-known for. The other is completely design based, with very modest hands-on programming but very high in the area of product design and design for industry. The students in such programs are also offered a wider range of studio access to other materials as well as wood, such as metals, plastics, rubber, resins, and textiles. These distinctions are also quite prevalent here in the US as well, and I had decided early on that I would focus on those programs that are studio-based with the focus being on the making of one-of-a-kind furniture. These programs are parallel to ours.

I had thought that this possibility could be extended to the areas of interior design and architecture as well but the programs there are so vast and so separate from the furniture programs. I had decided that such a proposal was over my head and best to be undertaken by individual faculty from those departments in the School of Art should they be interested. There is much to be offered just in furniture alone.

However I would not rule out the possibility of our students venturing into the programs abroad that have more to offer in the fields of design for industry. The School of Art, Design and Art History sorely lacks funding and facilities for such a venture and it would be to our benefit to develop exchanges with such programs. Denmark, Sweden, and Norway have long been known for their innovation in design, especially in design for industry. The works that come out of those countries have always been on the cutting edge for its creativity and its practicality in its use of materials, and their accessibility to the public. They also pride themselves in their use of high tech machinery developed to optimize the quality of work without the compromise of the design.

I admit now that my original proposal was extremely ambitious in my quest to see the number of schools that were listed. Also I had mistakenly thought that the different city centers were just a "hop and a skip" from one place to another. Scandinavia is larger than I thought!

However I was pleased to be able to see and visit as many institutions as I did in such a short time. While I did have a large list of schools that I wanted to see, not all the schools responded in time for me to include them in my itinerary. Others were slightly less than cooperative, possibly due to the timeframe that I chose to travel - many schools were in the throes of their final weeks during the time that I was able to travel.

I think it is important to note how I came to propose this trip in the first place. I went to the Anaheim American Woodworkers Trade Show in June 1999 on a fundraising project. The show is a yearly event that alternates between Atlanta in Anaheim. In addition, some of my students were exhibiting in the furniture show that was held there. I came across a booth for a unique and fascinating new technical process that treats wood so that it becomes very pliable and is used for applications that are alternatives to the usual strip-lamination or traditional steam bending processes. The Compwood machine is from Denmark of course, where some of the most sophisticated machinery for woodworking and furniture making is designed and produced. The process involves steaming the wood in special chambers and immediately after, the wood is moved into a special device that compresses the wood lengthwise - this process creates a cell structure that makes the wood extremely pliable, using the principles much like the bending straws that are used for drinking. After this treatment, the wood can be stored in this state indefinitely as long as it is kept in cold storage. Unlike traditional steambending, where the wood has to be bent immediately after it's steamed, this wood is cold when bent. In talking about the machine, I befriended Ole Jensen, the representative for the company and we spoke about education and schools. Upon hearing of my interest he encouraged me to come visit and that he would be able to assist me in finding schools and contacts in Denmark and Sweden. We also talked at length about the possibility of doing a project with the company and having my graduate students work with Compwood and having the opportunity to work with this amazing process. (please refer to [www.compwood.com](http://www.compwood.com)) Since June of last year I have kept in constant contact with Mr. Jensen and his assistant. Tanja Thomsen.

Through Mr. Jensen, I made contacts with about 12 schools and was able to secure visits and meetings at five institutions in Copenhagen, Kolding, Malmo, Stockholm and Kalmar. In addition, I added Oslo and Helsinki to my itinerary to visit museums and artists there.

I left San Diego on May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2000 and arrived Copenhagen the following morning - that day I took the train to Kolding, which was about 4 hours south of Copenhagen. The next morning I had a meeting and tour at where I met with a professor of furniture design, Mr. Morten Dall, at The Danish Design School. It was here that it was clear to me that the program there was focussing more on product design, rather than furniture. Mr. Dall had rather intellectual and conceptual ideals about design, rather than on material and process. This was reflected in the small studios, which allowed at most, work in small wood pieces and primarily modelmaking with foam and plastics. He had also studied in

Germany, which influenced his attitude about design which was very formal and in the lines of Bauhaus design which was prevalent in the 1930's and '40s.

The following day I was able to do a tiny bit of sightseeing, I visited a castle in Kolding which had a modest collection of furniture but had to head back to Copenhagen Sunday afternoon.

Monday, May 8, I went to the Danish Design School in Copenhagen where I met with a professor of furniture design named Pier Jensen. The facilities here were quite good and the focus however was still primarily in design for industry. There is a tremendous focus on modelmaking and prototype design. But also, unlike the Design School in Kolding, there were also other crafts programs there in ceramics, glass, textiles and metals. There wasn't a woodworking program per se, such as ours but more of a design shop where prototypes were made. The furniture students there also did a project with Compwood Machines and in addition, one of the other professors, Erik Krough, had designed a series of chairs using the Compwood materials and had an exhibition of his work there.

On Tuesday, May 9, I had a meeting and tour at the Compwood plant by Mr. Jensen's assistant, Tanja Thomsen. Following the tour, demonstration and a lunch, I was able to hash out the details of a project between Compwood and our students. Mr. Jensen graciously is sending us several lengths of wood this fall for experimentation with this material and is not charging shipping costs. In addition we were able to come up with a modest fee for our students, at \$88 per student to have a piece of this treated wood for our second project this Fall. In return, we plan to photograph results for use by Compwood on their website as alternative solutions to the use of their materials.

On the next day I took the boat to Sweden from Copenhagen to Malmo, and the very next day I met with two people from Vingaskolen, a major woodworking school - this school focuses on wood industry and had probably the most phenomenal facilities I have ever seen in my entire life. The school had a total of SIX machine rooms, all fully equipped with top of the line high quality machinery. (It was actually sort of depressing since we at SDSU have to work hard just to buy a drill!) In addition to furniture building studios they also had a painting program where paints are used to design interiors and also for furniture restoration and decoration. It was the first time I had ever seen a course in a furniture department where the focus was on decorative surfaces! Usually woodworkers loathe the idea of painting wood. I am a proponent of paints on wood so this was all down my alley. However the program here takes it a bit further and the painting research also has a more scientific approach, based on chemistry and compatibility. Pigments are ground and made from scratch, and vehicles are created for its application, either in water-based solutions or various solvent based solutions.

The different machine rooms were all for different programs of woodworking. Two of the machine rooms were primarily for the production of furniture on a large scale - all machines are designed to work on computers and can produce on a scale that would be used by companies such as Ikea. Students in this program

tended to be young, possibly right out of high school with a vocational leaning for industry.

Two other machine rooms were for cabinetmaking, but with the idea of production and making limited editions of straightforward cabinetry and wood objects. These machines were also very sophisticated. It also had its own Compwood set-up, which is impressive. (These machines run about \$50,000) The quality of the work produced in this program was somewhat compromised - a lot of sheet goods are used, such as plywood, MDF, melamine, and laminates. Nevertheless I can see how much even I could learn in both this program and the one mentioned earlier.

There is also a one-of-a-kind shop that is more akin to what we do here at SDSU - the professor in charge of this program graduated from Carl Malmsten School in Stockholm, a well-known international school. The two machine rooms for this program are more modest but still very sophisticated and far more superior to our program facilities. The works produced in this facility were very high in quality, both in the skills required and materials used. The quality of draughtsmanship was also impressive, and one can see the intensity of the program in that the students work here five days a week. Much can be learned in such a short time here.

The friendliness and enthusiasm of the individuals I met here were phenomenal, and both expressed a keen desire to initiate an exchange. I suspect that both professors were also more keen to come to the US themselves to visit as opposed to sending students! But the idea of a professor exchange is very appealing to me and I hope this is something that can be worked out at some point in time.

The facilities were so incredible that I had to come back a second day to take pictures and the folks there were so wonderful that they came to pick me up from my hotel twice to take me there rather than make me take a bus or taxi. It was a fairly long drive from the hotel to the school as well, about 20 minutes each way.

I took three days off to go to Oslo - I had wanted to Statens Kunst & Håndverks Skole in Oslo but they didn't respond to my inquiries made in February until AFTER I returned from the trip. However I always wanted to see the Viking Ship Museum and that was very nearly a religious experience - the haunting shapes and scale of these ships was amazing and to see how they survived the centuries is still incredible. The museum was built specifically to house these artifacts and it had a cathedral-like stance.

Also one of my former students, Beate Arnesen is from Oslo and she has since returned to her homeland and I was able to spend a few days with her. It turns out that her great uncle is Gustav Vigeland, who created a large sculpture park in Oslo and her great grandfather is the painter Emanuel Vigeland who created a beautiful little museum in the hills of Oslo. In addition, her mother, Tone Vigeland, is a world famous metal artist who has had solo shows all over the world. I got to meet this incredible woman and saw her wonderful works in her

studio. I was so tremendously inspired by her constant activity as a woman artist and at her age, she is going stronger by the second! So I got a bit of a tour from insiders' point of view and can understand now how Beate turned out to be an artist herself.

On Monday I went to the small island village of Kalmar, where Capellagarden is. Capellagarden is a wonderful little school started by Carl Malmsten, who was disenchanted at the direction of the world and its lack of responsibility to the environment and the traditions of crafts. He was a world famous woodworker and started the Carl Malmsten school in Stockholm initially and then started this beautiful little school in Kalmar, which not only had woodworking but also ceramics, textiles, and gardening/botany. The school has a self-sustaining nursery - students come here to study gardening nearly as a craft and learn harvest seeds, landscape design, and create food gardens. The furniture program was very impressive, and I would have to say that the quality here was superior, and the best I have ever seen. Students come from all over the world and at the time there were two very hard working students from Japan - all students were working hard to complete a deadline so it was a good time to visit. One student from Japan was sustaining himself nearly solely from "Red Bull" energy drinks, with cans strewn all over his bench area - he had an amazing wall unit that he was working on that was phenomenal. He had also had to pull in his belt about three notches from the loss of weight and from working hard!

What struck me was not only the quality of the woodworking that was exhibited there but also the quality of the handmade hardware that was being made - the brass fittings, the special latches, the hinges were all incredibly crafted and beautifully executed.

The director of the school, Bo Petersen was an extremely gracious host - he gave me a small house to stay in, and picked me up from the airport, had dinner for me at his home, and is very enthusiastic about an exchange. It also turns out that his daughter is going to college in San Diego, at USD and he plans a trip to visit.

We are already in the planning stages of an exchange. A nearby college accredits Capellagarden, and we have tentative plans to initiate a two-way exchange in 2001-2002. Already plans are under way for them to accept a student from SDSU next Spring. The way they choose to initiate an exchange is that they would provide housing and tuition to our students if we could provide the same. Their housing is on campus and if we can provide an exchange home for their student it would be ideal. Much of this can be discussed during Mr. Petersen's visit here in January. It is hoped that we can secure meetings for him with the Office for International Exchange and with the Assistant to the Dean, Hayes Anderson at PSFA during that time. Hopefully research can be done before his visit to present him with as much information as possible. I am thrilled at the prospects of this exchange.

On Wednesday May 17 I traveled to Stockholm - I had a meeting set up with Konstfack, an art school in Stockholm, and Mr. Petersen had set me up with a meeting with an official at Carl Malmsten School there as well.

Unfortunately I had an accident and fell down some stairs the night I arrived, and spent the following day in the emergency ward at Karolinska Hospital attending to a very swollen foot. The final diagnosis was a severe stress fracture in my foot and a severely bruised left shin and I was required to stay off my feet for two days. I had to cancel both appointments at Konstfack and Carl Malmsten School.

I was on a very tight schedule and had to go on to Helsinki - I had not been able to form contacts there but had wanted to see the city. I also spent the first day having to get used to using crutches and was only able to spend so much time a day on my feet. I did manage to see several museums and furniture showrooms.

I then flew back to Copenhagen, spent a few days there being a tourist before going back to San Diego on the 22<sup>nd</sup> of May.

### Conclusion:

The trip was a great success, and I felt that I gained some good friendships and partnerships from the trip. Three schools that I felt was worth continuing contact with are the Danish Design School in Copenhagen, Vingaskolen, and Capellagarden. The most compatible program and most easily adaptable for an exchange for the moment is Capellagarden. Vingaskolen would be ideal for shorter-term exchanges. Because of what SDSU lacks in facilities and programming, both Vingaskolen and Danish Design School offers potential for our students in terms of reaching a workplace and opening up larger options for professional practice.

Once contact and exploration of program development is in place, it would be expected that candidates for study abroad will be encouraged to apply for one semester of exchange study, possibly in exchange for another student from the other program, but not necessarily always at the same time. While it is preferable that the applicants be graduate students, some provisions can be made for outstanding senior students as well. Funds will need to be generated to cover some travel costs - as a faculty member I would be interested in seeking funds for these costs, as well as promoting the exchange program. In turn any advice and direction that the Office of International Studies or the Foundation Office can offer would be so greatly appreciated.