

BIG completes curvy affordable housing in Copenhagen

Bjarke Ingels' firm BIG has completed a new affordable housing complex in the northwestern part of Copenhagen, creating "generous" public spaces, large interior spaces, and high ceilings in the interior of the building. The five-storey building is situated in an area characterised by car repair shops, storage and industrial buildings from the 1930s-50s.



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Named Dortheavej Residence, the new housing fulfills the commitment of BIG for "Homes for All". Commissioned by Danish non-profit affordable housing association Lejerbo in 2013, the project brief for BIG was to create "much needed affordable housing and public space in the area", while keeping the pedestrian passageways open and the adjacent green yard untouched.

The building includes 66 new homes for low-income families, featuring unprecedented 3.5m ceilings, generous floor-to-ceiling windows and outdoor terraces, realised on a strict budget.

The checkered pattern of Dortheavej is based on a singular prefab structure. BIG's building is conceived as a porous wall, the building gently curves in the centre, creating space for a public plaza towards the street on the south side and an intimate green courtyard towards the north. On street level, the building is opened up to the street and allows the residents and general public to pass seamlessly into the courtyard.



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Overcoming necessary budget restrictions

"Affordable housing is an architectural challenge due to the necessary budget restrictions. We have attempted to mobilise modular construction with modest materials to create generous living spaces at the urban as well as the residential scale," said Ingels, founding partner at BIG.

"The prefabricated elements are stacked in a way that allows every second module an extra metre of room height, making the kitchen-living areas unusually spacious."

"By gently adjusting the modules, the living areas open more towards the courtyard while curving the linear block away from the street to expand the sidewalk into a public square. Economical constraints often lead to scarcity — at Dortheavej, we have managed to create added value for the individual as well as the community," Ingels added.

On the exterior and interior, the housing modules repeat along the curve and are stacked to the height of the surrounding buildings. The stacking creates additional space for each apartment to have a small terrace, providing a setting for healthy, sustainable living.



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Accentuating the checkered pattern

On the sunny south side, balconies retract and add depth to the façade while on the northern side, the facade is even. Long wooden planks cover the façade on all sides, highlighting the modules and alternating to accentuate the checkered pattern.

Large floor-to-ceiling windows in the apartments allow lots of daylight into the units and outside views to the green courtyard or the surrounding neighbourhood. The size of the apartments range from 60m²-115m² and the materials are all kept very simple with wood and concrete in light colours dominating inside and out.

The north facing façade looks towards an enclosed green courtyard which residents of Dortheavej and the neighbouring buildings can use for recreational activities.

"Our ambition was to create affordable apartments by the world's leading architects. Together with BIG, we have succeeded in creating sustainable, safe and functional homes that see eye to eye with the people who live in them," said Jan Hyttel, president, Lejerbo Copenhagen.

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