

# ARCHMOSPHERES:

architecture - centred photography  
with an awareness of atmosphere.

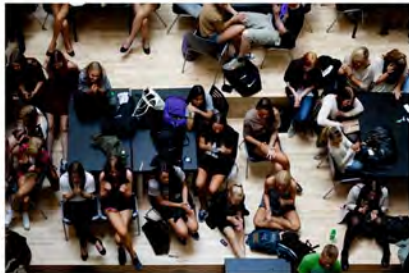


## 3XN ØRESTAD DENMARK

The interview with Kim Nielsen lasted just 30 minutes and was very intense. He had clearly spoken a great deal about this project over the years, and the challenge was to get him think beyond the sound bites he rolled off, one after another, at the beginning. He talked a lot about the space as a stage for young people to show off..

*"Girls and guys are standing around the hand-railing looking ...the girls are standing up there using the staircase as a catwalk where they walk up and down. This where you have the chance to show yourself where the audience is standing around watching."*





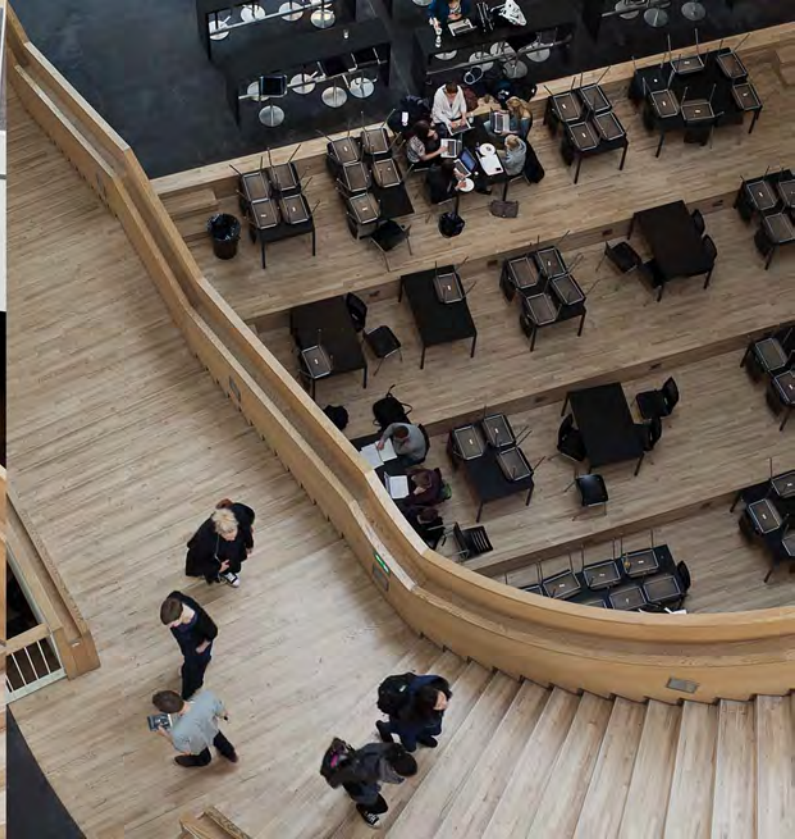
To my mind, this statement clearly aligned itself to Gernhot Bohme's essay about the atmospheric qualities of the theatre. The question then became a simple one of documenting that quality, thereby visualising his statement. Here the photographer found himself in the classic role of the hunter with lens.



The function of the building was also discussed:

*"I think one thing you have to know, the building is designed for 800 students and now there's 1200. That again can be used in photos to get the atmosphere of the building. Our intention was to make an indoor village."*













I asked him if he thought their motto, architecture shapes behaviour, required people in photographs to show that beaviour being enacted, not just the architectural mold to shape it in, as their pictures of the school were for the most part empty. He agreed with me once the recorder was switched off and subsequently ordered a dozen pictures of the school filled with students.



## KHR ØRESTAD COPENHAGEN DENMARK

When asked what he thought of Ørestad and the metro, Mikkel Beedholm, partner at KHR didn't mince words: "I've been here for two years and I get more and more angry. In my generation hundreds architects have really missed every opportunity." He said that Ørestad was, in a word, a disaster. However, he was a very warm and positive person to interview and spent 2 hours showing me around his building with obvious pride and affection. He was determined that his school should not suffer the same shortcomings as the neighbourhood. One main point is particularly relevant here: the importance of framing views. He expressed this repeatedly, both as a first-hand, lived experience and as a mediated, photographic one.

Atmosphere is considered by Beedholm as a sensual experience, at once visual with engaging views and at the same time a corporeal experience - one of warmth and the feeling of being enveloped. Beedholm expressed repeated the importance of function and aesthetics and that each of these should be encountered and appreciated by all visitors, not just trained specialists.

The photograph was, for him, a sort of litmus test of that experience:

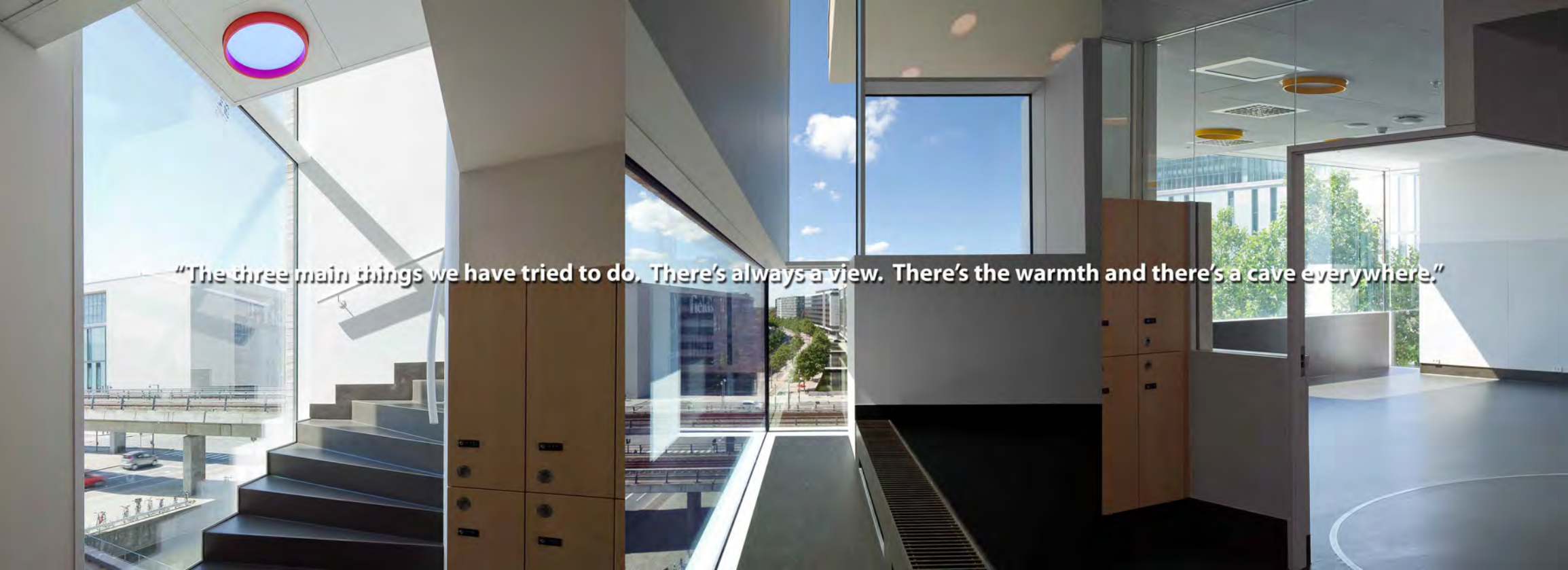
"The role of the photographer for me, or the picture? I would hope anybody could take a picture of the experience of it [ie, the building]. Anyone taking a picture [inside or outside the building] can see any image they think is interesting."



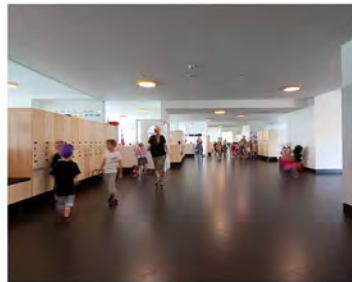
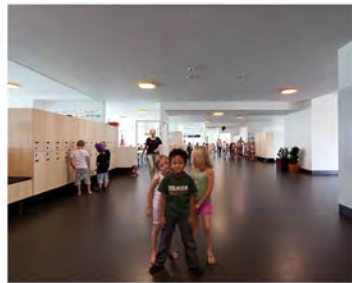
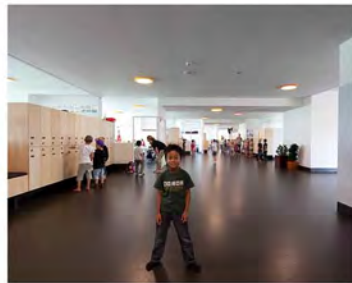




This idea that anyone can take a good picture if your building looks good enough posits photography as a net used to catch butterflies. All you need in order to be successful is a net without holes and a good set of reflexes. Technology certainly brings architects nearer to achieving that desire, as cameras get easier to use and high resolution becomes democratically priced. If photography is hunting, that dream will eventually come true in most areas where photography is used instrumentally, as a means to an end. If photography is a means of research, an end in itself, perhaps not so.



**"The three main things we have tried to do. There's always a view. There's the warmth and there's a cave everywhere."**









## PLH ØRESTAD COPENHAGEN DENMARK

Torben Hjortsø is one of the partners of PLH and has been with the company for several decades. His answers immediately took us down the well-beaten path standard architectural dogma, appearing cautious and not wholly engaged or convinced by the questions he was being asked: "When we designed the metro stations, we had several things in mind. First of all, pure functionality. It's got to function, that's why we redesigned the original design."

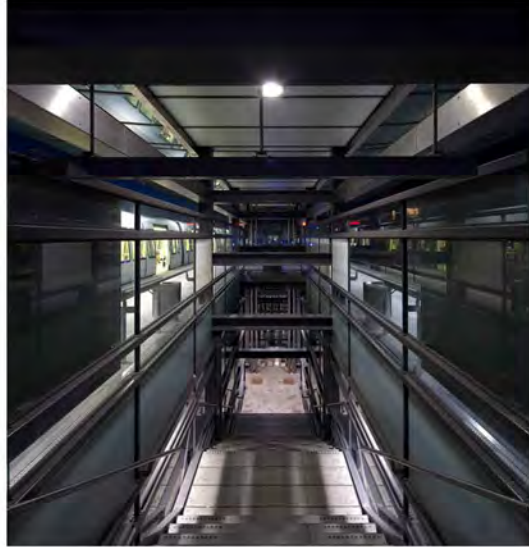
The purpose of these interviews is neither to confirm or disprove the value of atmosphere in architectural photography nor seek controversial statements. Atmosphere is a topic that was hoped would provide a new focal point away from architectural and photographic clichés, a means of opening up the conversation: a neutral ground common but foreign. Transparency was a notion that emerged thanks to repeated attempts to speak about atmosphere. For the designer it is a key aspect of the programme and hence part of the function; for the photographer transparency is a keyword to direct the process of capture and edit.

"Passenger flows, the relation to the outskirts and neighbouring buildings the relation to the streets that pass through it. We introduced another way of doing the stations because the client wanted a more transparent design so people would feel safe in an open environment. We analyse the situation to use the eyes of the daily user, the girl standing there alone at midnight. We tried to make the design as transparent as possible...you can see what is in front of you always so you feel more secure."

This idea of transparency was incredibly freeing, as it meant that the photographs could really concentrate on what it is like to be on the platform looking out or what the area surrounding the platform looked like from the ground. To do this, I photographed each station from the platform and at ground level repeatedly at various times of day. In doing so, I was able to get to know and visually summarise the area – Ørestad – in which all of the Danish project were located. The metro came to act as the proverbial red thread.















## AOA HELSINKI FINLAND

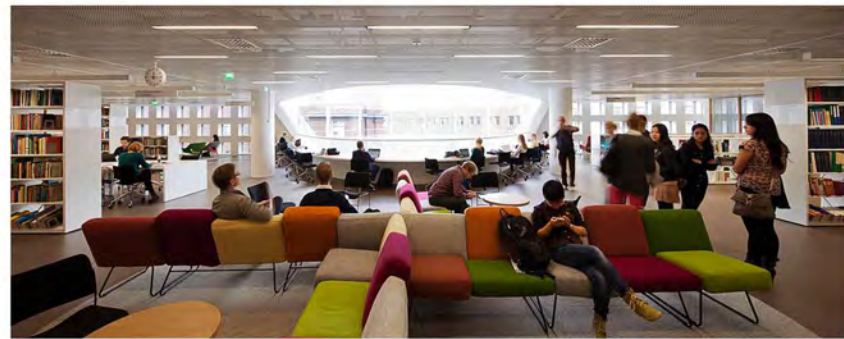
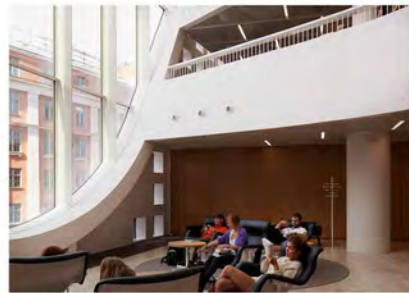
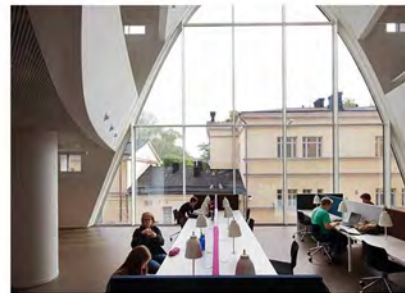
In a talk given at the architecture school of Aalto University and later during our interview, Vesa Oiva, half of AoA architects mentioned the importance of atmosphere repeatedly: "[In Kaisa Talo, the University of Helsinki's new library] there are three different voids, each with different atmosphere which changes on each level due to spatial relationship of floor. The goal was to create the best atmosphere possible for learning: several different atmospheres are employed to suit the varied needs of visitors." The low ceilings common to this sort of building are punctured by three parabolic voids, creating a stark contrast from the square geometry of the walls, floors, shelves and books. The building is large, changes from one level to the next and is very different on each side: one facing the 18th & 19th century neoclassical quarter designed largely by Engels, which feels studenty, peaceful and reminiscent of the days of empire, the other facing one of the busiest and more urban parts of what is ultimately rather a quiet, empty city, is the entrance to a busy metro station, is crossed by cars and trams and filled with shops. The building was shot several times during the winter of 2011 while still under construction and finally during the first week of its opening in September 2012. All of this will be reflected in the eventual selection of photographs and is perhaps hinted at here to some extent.





















## JKMM SAUNALAHTI FINLAND

*My interview with Samuli Miettinen, partner at JKMM, was one of the longest, most indepth and engaging. It was also one of the first. Perhaps the process of asking the same questions over and over again during the course of several months means the interviewer is less engaging, too. But for the two hours we spent discussing the topics of atmosphere and architecture, architecture and representation and architecture in Finland, we were each very focussed on the discussion. Atmosphere was of particular significance to the project Samuli presented me with: a crèche providing day care for babies and children up to the age of schooling. He had very clear ideas about how the school might be looked at with a focus on atmospheres: "I would like to see some key moments producing atmospheres: children eating breakfast, taking off outdoor clothes after getting dropped off and putting them on to go out to play, children doing things under skylights and in playground, the chaos of life and work." This message was a clear one, and I think the key moments and the chaos of life were obvious and easy to translate from word to image. Some of the other suggestions he had were that "photography needs to reach the other senses: touchable surfaces, acoustic surfaces, soft/hard, hot/cold." Again, sensorial indicators like these transfer well, showing that photography is not just a visual medium, but rather one engaged through the eyes but which can activate the other senses, particularly touch and sound. There are noisy images and quiet ones, hard surfaces and soft ones. All of this quite clear without actually visiting the location. Photography, Samuli helped me to understand, is more than a visual medium. Herein lies the idea behind the embodied image.*



















*Lunch with the 3 partners of K2s was thoughtful, chatty and very encouraging. From the outset they made statements that piqued my interest in their work and our collaboration, such as their interest in the "trend to get rid of the boundary between art photography and architectural photography."*

*They were openly aware of the importance of connotation when producing architectural photographs. The standard statements about objective, neutral depiction were nowhere to be found in the course of our discussion. Instead, "with the web, the magic you create through official photos is taken down by the kind of...snap-shots you see taken by other people."*

*And when it came time to suggest future trends in photography they could see developing or discuss the type of images they would like to see more of in the future, again they were full of ideas, pointing to the lack of spontaneity, and the need for more "eventful lively photography."*

*However, when asked whether the rise of cheap, high quality video would mark the end of photography's role as the primary means of representing architecture, they were sceptical: "You have to somehow reduce, and photography is still a good way of doing that."*



