

## **Jens Thomas Arnfred**

### **An architect cannot rescue the world, but he must try to make it better...**

Jens Thomas Arnfred

*The Danish architect, member of the Danish academy of Arts. The winner of more than 60 architectural competitions, the owner and the chief architect of Tegnestuen Vandkunsten bureau, the teacher and the author of books on history and the theory of architecture. The adherent of energy-efficient construction. The last proposal of Jens Arnfred, widely discussed in Denmark is the project of Copenhagen expansion in water: compact planning of building on piles, returning of boats as transport means.*

Jens Arnfred – the ingenious architect who has built at least half of modern part of Copenhagen, the author of numerous projects in Sweden and Denmark – has arrived to Moscow at the invitation of Rockwool. After an impressive master class Jens has shared with the editor of **Home and Interior** magazine his impressions of Moscow and has explained what the Scandinavian design is "according to Jens Arnfred".

#### **H&I: Have you been to Moscow before? How do you like the city?**

**J.A.:** I am here for the first time, and I am afraid. Everything is so such big! People, buildings... do not think of me badly, it is not a bad fear. Simply you become speechless when you see such scales and heights... Russian architecture appeals to me very much: there was a fantastic modernist style in Russia, the architecture of Russian constructivism is magnificent. At that time your architecture was very close to what is close and clear to me. It was very strong, so, you have enormous potential in respect of town-planning.

#### **H&I: What are the specifics of modern Scandinavian architecture?**

**J.A.:** The Scandinavian constructions are elegant, simple, beautiful, and poetical. One of my most favorite Scandinavian architects, Jorn Utzon, the author of the well-known Opera in Sydney, died two years ago. He did fantastic architecture in Denmark, was the genius, was able to listen to architecture and built at the highest level.

#### **H&I: Do you have any rigid rules according to which you work?**

**J.A.:** I have a lot of rules. I think, an architect cannot rescue the world, but he must try to make it better. I try to design energy-efficient buildings. I use solar panels, heat-insulating materials as much as possible. This world does not belong to us, our children will live after us, and we need to leave something for them. When an architect constructs a building, he uses the earth – it means that he should give something to the earth. One should not be too greedy. My buildings are designed for human scale; I do not build high-rise buildings in Scandinavia. They do not correspond to our landscapes. Besides, it seems to me that on some seventeenth floor a person should feel terribly lonely. We were born to touch the earth, to be closer to it, to eat what it gives – in direct and figurative meaning. There are skyscrapers all-over Manhattan, and I understand that there are places in the world where

it is necessary to build this way, but definitely not in Scandinavia. I like to reconstruct old buildings, to give them a new life. A dialogue of the old with the new. If this dialogue is interesting it means that the project has turned out to be successful.

**H&I: And do you have favorite materials?**

**J.A.:** I choose the materials with character, individuality, with a strongly pronounced structure. Often I use them in an unusual way. For instance I have covered one building with heat-insulation panels, has selected the panels with higher density and not those which are usually used for intended purpose. Vulgar, brilliant materials with a glossy surface do not impress me. I would be happy to change habitual ideas about luxury. The modern luxury can be simpler, pure, without gold and brilliants where they may be inappropriate.

**H&I: You want to say that gold is incompatible with high-class design?**

**J.A.:** No such thing. But a high-class design does not mean only gold, rather than a functional, convenient and cozy accommodation. Another extreme is gigantomania. And meanwhile the quality of life does not depend on the quantity of square meters in the house. A lot of space and gilding is rather good for a room in a luxurious hotel, and the majority of people need warm, small space proportional to the person for every day life.

**H&I: You build with observance of ecological standards. In Russia it is not customary to save energy yet, there is no such tradition. Do you think it can get along with our mentality, in our difficult climate?**

**J.A.:** Certainly. Sooner or later it will become clear that one can be happy only in harmony with the nature. Happiness is not about having the biggest car. It is possible to live without a car at all and to be an extremely happy person. Like love: it is not the question of how much money you have. More and more all of us come to understand that it is impossible to accumulate infinitely material assets, to pollute the earth. Sometimes it makes sense to abandon something. If mass media, the interior magazines write more about it, show the beautiful things which are not connected with addiction to luxury, people will change their opinion.

**H&I: What would you advise to young architects?**

**J.A.:** It is necessary to be fair, curious, to study life, to care about people, it is necessary to work. Work of an architect is not simple, so one should be strong. And the most important thing – do not lose hope!

The interview was taken by Sofia Remez.