



← From outside, the hotel room interior is invisible, but inside, skylights and carefully placed windows draw nature into the blond-wood interior.

⇒ The mirror-wrapped 4 × 4 m cube forms a room that disappears, camouflaged, into the forest around it, drawing visitors deeper into the landscape.

“On the natural sites, in the Stockholm archipelago or in the far north, our architectural choices are, to a large extent, directed by these conditions,” says Tham, “but they are also directed by our wish to leave as much as possible of the existing qualities of the site untouched. People travel so far to find pristine, beautiful landscapes, so we try to develop concepts that support the landscape, and that would leave no trace if the house were to be taken away in the future.”

This respect for place and nature also informed the design of a hotel room for the Treehotel (2008–10) in Hardas. In the west, Sweden’s hills swell and crest into mountains, and whatever isn’t water is heavily forested—69 percent of the country is pine and birch woodland, especially as one heads north. Aptly, each “room” at the Treehotel is a tree house designed by a different architectural team. Tham & Videgård’s low-impact scheme made use of what was, at the time, an infrequently used material: they covered a 4 × 4 × 4 m cube entirely in mirrored glass, making it disappear into the sky and the canopy, camouflaged by its reflections of the landscape.

Another interesting material choice—though one intended to make the building’s materiality more pronounced, rather than cloaking it—was taken for the Creek House (2015). This artfully rustic holiday getaway on the southern coast of Sweden boasts a flourishing garden and its own stream; it is part town house and part barn. The structure’s load-bearing Leca concrete blocks were to be given a brick veneer, but, when the architects noticed the deeper texture and greater range of hues on the back of the block, they decided to turn them all back-to-front. Then, like impressionist painters, they crudely over-applied thick gobs of grey mortar, ornamenting the cluster of buildings with this adhesive. Inside the building, the flooring and the frames around the windows and doors were also clad in brick so that views between rooms or out into the landscape became little trompe l’oeils, with the threshold between indoors and outside blurred.

Truth to the nature of a site, truth to nature, truth to material—all are evident in the work of Tham & Videgård. Sustainability—not least the sustainability of simply building well—also undergirds their practice. Sustainability has been, so to speak, native to Nordic countries, where designers are even putting planted green roofs on truck weigh stations north of the Arctic Circle. “The qualities we look for are those that make a building last over time,” says Tham. “To our understanding, sustainability is something that goes far beyond the simple systems of classification that are often used these days. The oldest building still standing and in use is most likely the most sustainable architecture, so it is important that we contribute to producing buildings that stand for a long time.” Looking at how the architecture world around them has changed in recent years, the two architects report a recent boom in talent, and a new optimism: a promising generation of architects is growing up, that wants to make buildings that are both contemporary and well-built. “Since our start seventeen years ago, this represents a big change,” Videgård says. “At that time, there weren’t any local practices that inspired us, so we started our own instead. Today, there are many and, by extension, a much more vivid culture of architecture in the Nordic countries.”

and south; harsh winters and unexpectedly warm summers occur in the north, as compared to short, cold winters, more sunlight and temperatures closer to southern England than Spitzbergen in southern and central Sweden. “Building in the Swedish climate definitely influences our designs on a very pragmatic level,” says Tham, “since all technical solutions must withstand quite extreme and large variations of weather during the different seasons.” Sweden, at high latitudes, also experiences day-less days in the summer and night-less nights in winter—periods without darkness or light. The consolation is, says Videgård, that “nature is never far away in this part of the world, even if you live in the bigger cities.” Indeed, Sweden has long coastlines, 40,000 square kilometers of water area, and more than 95,000 lakes and freshwater streams. In fact, the country is clad with woods and water—or, rather, woods and hundreds of little islands—meaning that even denizens of large cities like Stockholm or Göteborg (and 86 percent of Swedes live in cities) can get into nature after a short boat ride or drive from downtown.

Retreats into nature are common, even traditional, in Nordic countries and represent fertile creative ground for architects like Tham and Videgård. Their Krokholmen House (2013–15) is a holiday home in the outer Stockholm archipelago, situated on the shoreline at the very exposed tip of a small island. The architects had to ensure the home would withstand severe winds, and establish secluded, sheltered outdoor spaces for the clients. They created a wooden structure atop a concrete foundation, cast in situ, with supporting glue-laminated-timber beams that curve upward to form a lightweight, tent-like ceiling over the interiors. The base clings to the bedrock, which extends beyond the house to form a terrace looking out to sea.

