

Food Safari



Copenhagen

Denmark

by

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You must be joking!

At one time it was considered a bad joke that the best restaurant in the world – The Fat Duck at the time – was located in the UK, a country not exactly known for its culinary tradition.

The joke is still the same, it has just moved location. The basic culinary tradition in Denmark was never much better than what you would find in the UK. It is a meat and potatoes kitchen – possibly with the one exception that did gain international notoriety, the Danish open-face sandwich.

Now Denmark does not only host the world's best restaurant Noma and the world's best chef, Rasmus Kofoed (Bocuse d'Or 2011) – it also has more Michelin stars (11) than any of the other Scandinavian capitals, with Stockholm as second with (8), Oslo (6) and Helsinki (5).

So how does a small country with a population that is smaller than the number of inhabitants in Hamburg and a 'village' of a capital that would fit within two Parisian arrondissements pull that off?

Apart from the obvious explanation which can also be applied to other countries that have experienced culinary boom over the past 10-15 years that has to do with a steadily increasing interest in food, cooking and lifestyle, there is also the influence of the 19th century Danish philosopher and priest/pastor Grundtvig.

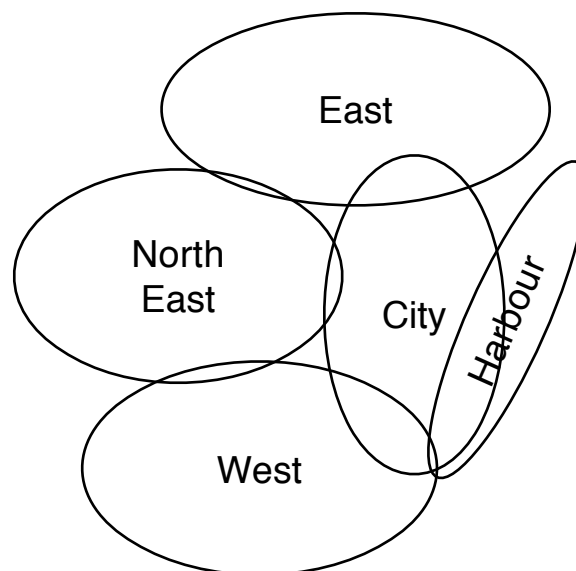
Grundtvig is largely credited with laying the foundation for the Danish educational approach. Denmark and Finland are the two countries in the world who have had broad public compulsory education for the longest time (more than 100 years). This broad approach, to give as many people as possible a solid basic training/education also applies to chef training.

Danish apprentice chefs go through a very solid four-year education with alternation between traditional apprenticeship work in a kitchen and prolonged periods of schooling. The result is a country with a broad base of chefs who

know their craft – and knowing your craft is a great foundation for becoming an artist. (You will see this pattern in football, handball and design, just to name the other examples where Denmark also ‘boxes above its weight’ and produces more remarkable individuals and teams than the size of the population would normally justify.)

Navigating the City

Copenhagen’s origins date back to the year 1167 and the name – København – in Danish reflects the fact that it is both a harbour and a place of commerce. The current downtown area corresponds to what at one point was the medieval city – with its back to the sea and the harbour and a series of moats walls (now lakes) and gates to the east, northeast and west respectively. As the town expanded outside the city walls, three distinct areas with each their characteristics developed and they have taken their names from the directions of the city gates: Østerbro (east), Nørrebro (northeast) and Vesterbro (west). Schematically, it looks like this.



The city's restaurant and café life started in the early eighties with the inner city. The combination of charter travel and a larger influx of foreign workers together produced a wave of mostly Mediterranean inspired restaurants, bars and cafés.

Today the city area is also where space is difficult to find and, if you do, the rent is high; so, with a few exceptions, most of what is in the city today is relatively well-established and has a traditional approach. Thus, as with so many other things, the interesting stuff tends to happen at the edge of the city.



Torvehallerne, Israels Plads in the spring

Nørrebro (North East)

The Nørrebro area was the first to develop significantly during the late 80's into the early 90's where the fun new stuff was happening – typically bars, cafés and music venues in a combination with very affordable ethnic food places. This development was driven by low rents for housing, resulting in lots of young people moving in together with a disproportionately high number of non-Danes. This multi-ethnic situation added colour and flavour to the scene. It is still an interesting area, but not considered as cutting edge as it once was.

Østerbro (East)

The next area to catch the attention of what the French so precisely call *La Clientéle Locomotive* was the Østerbro area with café/restaurant concepts aimed at slightly more affluent patrons corresponding to the general increase in economic activity in the capital. Østerbro became and is still to some the more *chic* area.

Vesterbro (West)

Since around 2005, the new area of interest and where most of the cutting-edge concept development is happening is in the area known as Vesterbro (west) and in two hot spots bordering that area. One is the old meatpackers' area where the city borders the west area – for years a smaller version of Les Halles in Paris and in the same way the main distribution centre for food stuffs to the city's restaurants. The other is the intersection between the harbour, city and the west area known as Islands Brygge – the old wharf area which is now largely residential and as result has all sorts of fun stuff popping up in order to cater to the influx of tenants.

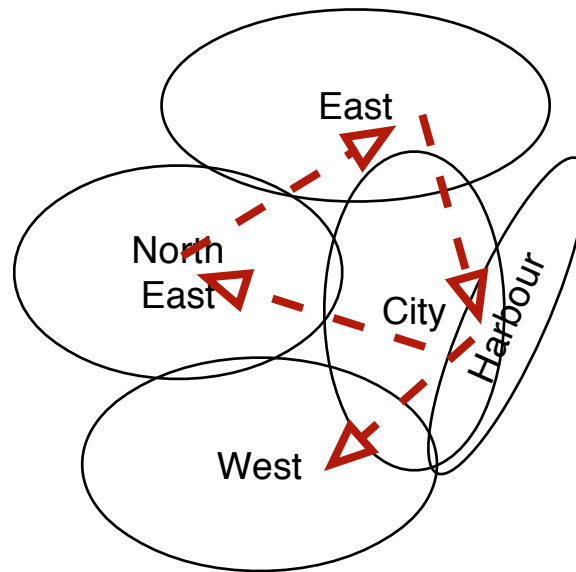
The meatpackers' area gradually lost tenants as the structure of food distribution changed, with fewer and larger players often needing to move to locations that were located outside of the actual city as a result. Copenhagen City Council has not as yet bulldozed the area, instead it has chosen to rent out the leaseholds as they become available. The buildings and facilities are a

combination of dilapidated offices, old abattoirs and warehousing facilities. The rents have been low and that has attracted the creative class.

Today, the area is home to a myriad of small businesses in every imaginable sector, from architects and filmmakers to people who specialise in selling old musical instruments online. Also food service businesses have been quick to see that many of these areas could be converted from just food production to restaurant production fairly easily and therefore establishing new creative food and beverage concepts could be done with a relatively small investment – compared to going to the city and converting a shoe shop into a restaurant for example.

This development of the Meatpackers' District area coincides with the development of the Vesterbro area in general (west). For many years considered the 'bad' part of town that also included the red light district bordering up to the back of Copenhagen Central Station and was known mainly for drugs, prostitution and crime, it is now undergoing a transformation. Large blocks of housing have been renovated, modernised and sold as condominiums. The housing used to be mainly for the lower income part of the city's inhabitants, the individual flats are small – attracting young first-time buyers: typically, singles and couples without children. This demography is reflected in the surrounding streets, where you will find more kiosks and takeaways concepts than in most other parts of the town, but actual supermarkets are few and far between – this is the area of generation Can't-Cook-Never-Tried as opposed to the demographics in the Østerbro area that largely belongs to generation Can't-Cook-No-Time.

This combination of new young residents, creative small businesses and innovative restaurants, cafés and bars makes the west area the most interesting to explore from the point of new trends and concepts if you only spend a short time in Copenhagen.



The migration of La Clientèle Locomotive over the past 30 years

The Absence of International Players

In Copenhagen – or the rest of Denmark for that matter, you will not find as many international food service chains as you might expect, considering the obviously affluent society and the many food service outlets visibly in the market. McDonald's is one of the few exceptions. They gained a solid foothold in the early 1980 and have expanded consistently ever since and now have 83+ units in Denmark. Other big brands such as Burger King, Kentucky Fried Chicken and Subway have made more or less half-hearted attempts at establishing themselves without spectacular success.

There are probably two main reasons for this. Firstly, the cost of labour in Denmark is very high – even just compared with neighbouring countries such as Germany or Sweden; this makes it very hard for international brands to actually deliver their concept in the way that they are used to. A full-time waiter or chef will cost somewhere between 3,000 and 3,500 € a month – add another 15-20% for various public charges. (That is not the minimum wage, but what you need to

pay to get decent folks.) An example is Vapiano (German), well established in Sweden and many other countries outside Germany; have not yet opened in Denmark despite talks with a variety of potential Danish master franchisees, they have not found a way to make ends meet financially in the Danish market.

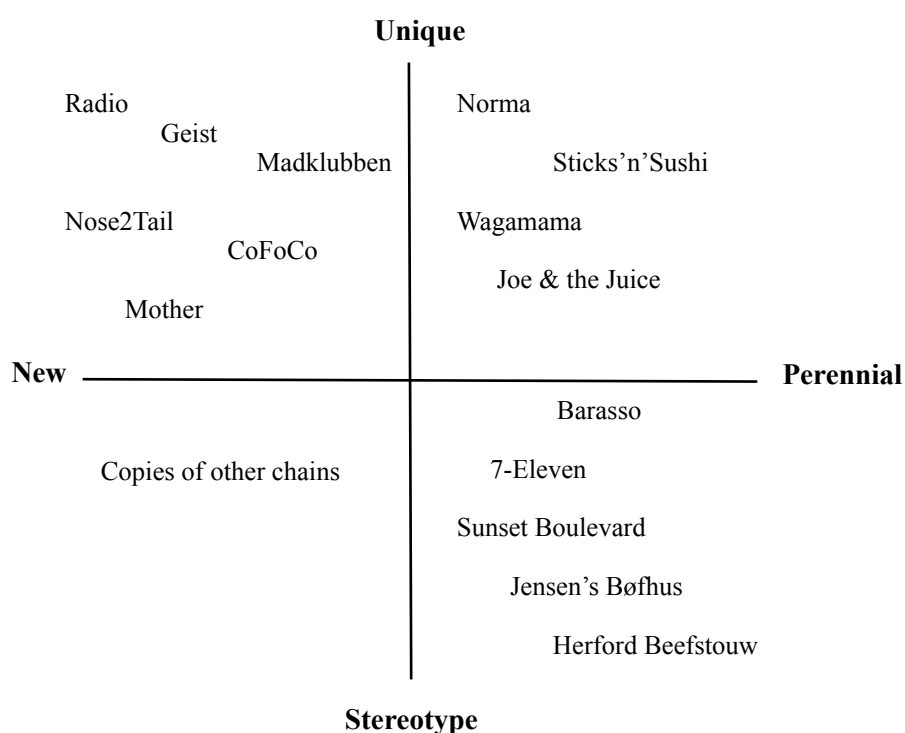
The high labour cost is also reflected in what it costs to go out. Just to give you an indication, a standard Café Latte in most Danish coffee shops will set you back close to 5 Euros (€6 in the airport) – allegedly the most expensive Latte in all of Europe.

Secondly, if you are the international development manager for a large international brand in the UK or US and you look at the map of Europe, there are obviously countries where establishing yourself with local versions, manuals, training programs, etc., of your concept has much more leverage – if you have not yet saturated Poland's 80 million inhabitants with your concept, why struggle with the Danish language and Danish wages when the market is as relatively small as it is. (Remember that even Sweden has almost twice the population of Denmark – the Danes just make more noise per capita than their neighbours.) With the exception of McDonald's, most of the big name concepts that have entered Denmark have been started by local Danes on some kind of master franchise agreement, but very few have gotten past that initial first location and actually managed to develop the brand across the city, let alone the country. Not even Wagamama have made it past one unit after more than 5 years in the market despite their initial intentions.

So, until recently, what in Germany is known as 'System Gastronomy' was not a major part of the landscape – the independent stand-alone business was for years the dominant player. This has, however, changed a lot over the past 4-5 years – not so much because of the arrival of new international players, but because a new generation of younger restaurateurs have seen the potential in operating many units from the same administrative base. (See the last section of this document for more on this.)

Mapping the market

As a way of gaining an overview of food concepts in Copenhagen, it can be helpful to plot them in a matrix with Unique/Stereotype on one axis and New/Perennial (staying power) on the other.



Perennial/Stereotype

In the lower right-hand corner, we have a number of established concepts that follow relatively well-known and well-established formulas and are therefore maybe of lesser interest for the trend hunter.

Oldest of these is A Hereford Beefstouw, a classic steakhouse, closely followed by Jensen's Bøfhus founded in 1984 by Palle Skov Jensen. The

concept was originally inspired by the German chain Bloch House, but has found its own form over the years – the concept was one of the first in Denmark to rationalise kitchen production completely. They typically tore out existing kitchens in restaurants that they purchased and built new ones, taking up a third of the space in order to minimise costs and then to pass those savings onto the end user. Their slogan has for years been ‘Large steaks – small prices’. Jensen’s Bøfhus now has 32 units in Denmark and they have been testing the waters in neighbouring countries, with eight units in Sweden and one unit in Flensburg closed to the German border.

In the same vein, with a different product and price point, is the chain Sunset Boulevard – a sandwich concept. According to them, the chain was inspired by the founder’s travels to Australia, though anyone familiar with the American fast food scene will clearly recognise elements that must have been inspired by the mother of all sandwich chains, Subway. Recently, the chain has expanded its offering to traditional burgers in addition to the baguette-based sandwiches. They operate more than 40 units in high street locations and transport hubs such as railroad stations and motorway service stations.

A more spectacular expansion, especially over the past years, is the explosive growth of the Danish version of the American 7-Eleven convenience concept. As of writing, they have more than 190 stores in Denmark, most of them in the larger Copenhagen area. They have been particularly adept at securing and exploiting prime city locations, with many stores being no more than 5-10 minutes apart from each other on foot.

What is not apparent to the newcomer in Copenhagen is that all three of these concepts have one interesting common denominator. They all have very clear links to the supermarket sector, with Jensen’s Bøfhus and Sunset Boulevard founders both coming out of successful retail families and 7-Eleven being owned and operated by Norwegian retail giant Reitan Group. This may explain

why their staying power lies more in the efficiency of their operations than in their culinary originality.

Last but not least in this category is the coffee chain Baresso, founded in 1999 by Kenneth Luciani. He opened the first Baresso store in year 2000 and today they operate around 40 coffee shops/bars mainly in the Copenhagen area, with a total turnover in the vicinity of DKK 80 million (€13 million). The concept can best be described as a Scandinavian interpretation of the Starbucks way of doing it. They do that well, but not in a way that would make any international travellers turn their heads.

Unique & Perennial

Noma

No portrait of current restaurant trends in Copenhagen would be complete without mentioning restaurant Noma. At the same time it is probably the most well-covered gastronomy subject in the city. National and maybe even more international press have swooned over this restaurant since it was selected as the winner of the S.Pellegrino World's 50 Best Restaurants in 2010 (and again in 2011). Seen from the point of view of the local tourist board, Noma is probably the best thing that has happened since the creation of *The Little Mermaid*.

Noma not only attracts *feinsmecker* tourism in droves, but it has also opened the world's eyes to a lot of the other interesting stuff that is happening in Copenhagen. With headlines such as "Eating in Copenhagen? Lucky you!" in the *NYTimes*. And the *Wall Street Journal's* selecting a well-hidden restaurant in a dark corner of the Meatpackers' District such as The Fish Bar to its list of top 10 fish restaurants in the world. None of this would have happened were it not for the attention that Noma has brought to town.

Noma has been around since 2004, when it opened as one of many creative ideas that have enriched Copenhagen over the past 15 years with Claus Meyer as one of its ‘parents’ (see section on Claus Meyer, The Food Activist).

In the 1980’s El Bulli was all about molecular gastronomy and changing perceptions about what things are, followed on by The Fat Duck as the ones that could think up the craziest concoctions such as bacon & eggs ice cream.

Noma is all about going back in time in search of the root origin of Nordic cooking, before industrialisation, high yield farming and global sourcing changed the landscape. This almost archaeological expedition by chef René Redzepi into the past and subsequent focus on simplicity has influenced a whole generation of young Danish chefs and, in the sense, Noma has not only had a huge influence on creativity and menu development in the industry, but also made the metier wildly fashionable and attractive in itself.

The story about Noma – the short version – is about an idea, new Nordic kitchen and its origins that step by step, over the past seven years, have been developed, refined and tweaked with infinite patience that resembles the Japanese philosophy of Kaizen. And, in the process, the restaurant has gone from strength to strength and from New and Unique to Unique and Perennial – it is today an established classic and Copenhagen's only 2-Michelin star establishment.

Noma – Strandgade 93, Copenhagen K. Phone +45 32 96 32 97

<http://www.noma.dk>

Sticks’n’Sushi – Nordic Zen

Definitely unique and not just by a Danish yardstick, and well on its way to become perennial. It’s hard to imagine Copenhagen without Sticks’n’Sushi; they are part of the city fabric and a darling of Generation X.

The concept is the creation of founder Kim Rahbek Hansen (his brother and a friend participated in the beginning) and is a clever combination of what in Japan are two very separate and distinct concepts: traditional Sushi and grilled Yakitori spits. It's about complementarity and interesting pairs: fish and fowl, cold and hot, Japanese and Nordic. It's a dance. The result is a sushi restaurant that is attractive even for those who don't like fish, as they formulate it. The menu focus is on providing bite-size delicacies. You can stay with sushi, just have the spits, or you can combine the two as you like. It's up to you to decide how many bites it takes to make a meal.

The first restaurant was opened back in 1994 and the company has grown at a steady pace since, in tune with the sushi generation's rising affluence in Copenhagen and the corresponding rising interest in sushi ever since. Today they have nine Sticks'n'Sushi addresses in central Copenhagen and the goal is to expand also to cover other urban areas in Denmark. They have set their sights very high – London is next on the horizon, where the first of many, one must presume, has opened on Wimbledon Hill road.

What makes Sticks'n'Sushi both unique and perennial is more than creative menu development and clever marketing – make no mistake, they are very good at that as well – but it is in their own words a professional business that runs a restaurant, not a restaurant business trying to be professional. This professionalism comes across very clearly when you look further than the tantalising menu photos. This is Sushi with an attitude – they call it sushistainability [Sic]. Behind that is a genuine and well-formulated concern for the well-being of the world we live in or maybe, more importantly, for the world we will end up handing over to our children.

It is about decency. Decency in how we treat the environment and decency in how we treat each other. This value-based and purpose-driven approach spills over to staff recruitment and training and everything else they do. There is a clear recognition that at the end of the day a perennial brand is the result of

thousands of interactions between customers and frontline employees – the famous moments-of-truth – which is why employees attend up to 32 different internal training programmes once they have been taken onboard and the chain goes to great lengths in establishing what it means to be part of the team from a values point of view. As one employee explains, you don't work for Sticks'n'Sushi – you are Sticks'n'Sushi.

This is what John Mackey, CEO and founder of Whole Foods in the USA, would call 'the essence of conscious business'.

Sticks'n'Sushi – see locations on their website <http://www.sushi.dk/en/>



Joe & The Juice

In the bar and nightclub business, there are two main schools of thought on how to attract business. One is, employ pretty females behind the bar and you will attract the heavy drinking males. The other is to employ some really cool and good-looking males behind the bar, and they will attract some gorgeous females, who in turn eventually will attract some heavy drinking males.

Kaspar Basse, the 39-year-old founder of Joe & The Juice, chose the latter strategy for his first juice bar when he opened 10 years ago. It is not quite clear whether this was intentional or just the way it happened, but after a few years Kaspar Basse realised that the core of his success was not just about the actual product, but the fact that he and his team had created a special culture around what they call 'the juicer' – the equivalent of the coffee barista.

The juicers have fun while they work, creating a vibrant high-energy atmosphere accompanied by loud music in a stylish lounge setting. There is an on-going competition with results posted on their web site as to who is the fastest juicer. It is daytime Coyote Ugly (the movie) with a health conscious twist. Today, the chain's characteristic logo with the thoughtful man having his coffee is in all the right places in Copenhagen, from high street locations to fitness clubs – even the airport now has a Joe & The Juice lounge.

There are 23 juice bars in total, with new ones popping up all the time. And with no lack of self-confidence, two new stores have been opened in London, with two more under construction and a first stake has been planted in Miami, USA. Taking Joe & The Juice to the US. brings the concept back full circle. The US was the original inspiration for the concept and the name. 'A cup of Joe' is slang for coffee – so coffee and juice became Joe & The Juice.

The juices on the menu come in several sizes and have fun names that help patrons find what they are looking for: Hang over Heaven, Sex-me-up, Sweet Kiss or Art Away for those that need their arteries flushed for calcium. Despite the promising names, the ingredients are not especially exotic. The chain in fact makes point of using what is around anyway, such as apples, carrots, celery, etc.

The immediate goal is to triple in size over the next few years to 75 units, and ultimately Kaspar Basse is very clear: he aims to be the Starbucks of the juice business – and the tattooed Joe & The Juice logo on his left arm could indicate that he really means it.

Joe & The Juice – see list of locations on their website <http://joejuice.com>

New & Unique

The Meatpackers' District is an ever-changing and evolving scene where new concepts often end up in the pop-up category – not because it was what was intended, but because that is how it turned out. It is the nature of the area where crazy and not so crazy entrepreneurs will test their wild ideas. There are, however, a few businesses that seem to have gained a solid foothold and they are not only unique but could also end up becoming perennials.

BioMio

Not a restaurant, not a café, maybe a people's kitchen except for the pricing, BioMio is hard to categorise. The purpose is clear: to serve healthy and nutritious food with deep bow to the environment that surrounds us. So not only are the carrots and everything else you will eat bio, but so is the cotton in their uniforms and the wood – lots of is – used to make their high chairs and long tables. The layout will seat 250 people and no doubt inspired by German Vapiano is a very large open kitchen where you order directly from the chef.



Patrons pick up a plastic card at the entrance and fetch what they need at the various stations. With one small but important change you don't wait for your food to be ready at the counter, you just order and it will then be brought to your table when it is ready. The atmosphere is easygoing with a humorous touch and that tongue in cheek sense of humour can be traced back to Australian born chef Peter George, who helped create the menu. If you close your eyes and forget the foul Danish weather outside, you might even feel yourself back in the relaxed atmosphere of Bondi Beach.

The menu is full of fun and quirky puns – while at the same time giving you all the information you need, including a set of clever icons that explain what is vegetarian, nutritious, etc.

From the menu: Happy Pork on Your Fork – Protein rich and lean pork marinated in herbs, grilled and served with root crops, sun dried tomatoes and cold tarragon sauce DKK 185 (€25). The restaurant is not vegetarian as such, although there are lots of options for non-meat dishes or selecting version without meat. In the dishes that do contain meat, the aim is for that meat to be only 30% of the dish – leaving plenty room for interesting grains and vegetables.

BioMio – Halmtorvet 19, 1700 Copenhagen V. Phone +45 33 31 20 00

www.biomio.dk



Mother

Copenhagen has its fair share – if not more – of pizza places. The whole range in fact from hole-in-the-wall to pretentious up-market versions in some of the best locations in town. But most of them belong in the ‘stereotype’ section of our concept life map. Nothing really new there. Except for one – Mother.

Opened in 2009 and located in one of the old butcher shops, where the most obvious change since the time when you could purchase whole side of beef here is the beautiful whitewashed beehive of a pizza oven in the middle of the open kitchen.

The oven plays the lead role in the production and everything else literally orbits around it. The main show is of course the pizza here in a sourdough

version that has given the restaurant raving reviews from most of the local press. They are not the cheapest pizzas in town, nor do they have elaborate topping piled onto them. The simple pizza margarita is DKK 90 (€12) and more elaborate versions with a light spread of prosciutto and rucola will set you back DKK 120 (€16). Daily specials – roast lamb or lasagne are often also available, but there is no large set menu. Zen-like simplicity is the order of the day – if it will cook in the oven we can do it, if not... not.

Wine is imported directly, meaning they have a very small selection – to the point that talking of a wine list would be misleading – it's more like wine suggestions in the price range of DKK 175-395 (€23-51) for a bottle.

Mother is owned and run by a diverse trio: Theo Langley, Nick Pound and the Roman chef David Biffani, a diversity that is also reflected in their rest of the staff where you will rarely find a person who actually speaks Danish.

Mother – Høkerboderne 9, 1712 Copenhagen V. Phone +45 22 27 58 98

<http://www.mother.dk/>

Kødbyens Fiskebar – The Fish Bar

It may sound paradoxical, but Copenhagen's most interesting fish restaurant is located in the heart of the Meatpackers' District.

Set in raw minimalist concrete setting with the most unimposing facade you can imagine – you could walk past it several times without noticing it, this relatively small fish bar has attracted the attention of the world press. *Wall Street Journal* has it among the best 10 fish restaurants in the world. The decorative *piece de resistance* is a large fish tank in the centre with an interesting collection of – no, not lobsters in pain – but jellyfish. The menu is new Nordic – of course – there is a trail from the owner Anders Selmer's past back to Noma, where he once worked, but here the focus is fish – fresh, local and, most of all, simple.



Raw dishes include razor clams and fennel, or trout tartar with mustard and capers. There is a new Nordic version of Fish & Chips, an inspiring take on the often under-appreciated North Sea mackerel with pickled root vegetables.

Sea weed, sorrels chilled and sauce hollandaise. The menu has dropped the formality of starters, mains and desserts and is instead divided into ‘raw’ smaller delicacies including oysters, ‘medium’ and ‘larger’ dishes including baked cod, and even a steak for those not in the mood for fish. The easygoing informality is also reflected in the décor. You can choose to book a table formally, but there is also the possibility of just enjoying a few oysters and a glass of white wine on lounge style sofas on your way to a fun night in town or drop by in the later part of the evening and enjoy a light meal from your barstool – maybe ‘fish lounge’ would be an even more appropriate name.

Kødbyens Fiskebar – Flæsketorvet 100, 1711 Copenhagen V.

Phone +45 32 15 56 56 <http://fiskebaren.dk/>

Nose2Tail

Sustainability is the new black in Copenhagen – newest on the Meatpackers’ scene is the one that should possibly have been there from the start – Nose2Tail is an innovative new concept started by three young idealists on a mission. (If you are familiar with the London restaurant scene, you will recognise the inspiration from restaurant St. John and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall.)

It is not the sort of place you drop in as you walk by – on the contrary, you need to know your way to find the entrance down into a basement that used to house the old abattoirs.

They call themselves a food pub – in Danish, mad bodega – the pub part has to do with the informal atmosphere and the rustic décor. The original white 15x15 Raco tiles (standard tiles used when building food facilities in Denmark for as long as anyone can remember) are still on the walls, as well as the well-scrubbed terrazzo flooring with the worn-out wrought iron grids.

The furniture must have been sourced in a we'll-take-it-all deal from a second-hand shop wanting to clear its stock. The whole idea is – a small scale but very sincere protest against all the waste that takes place in modern society. Which is why the overall idea here is no waste – if we take from nature in the form of a live animal, we should at least have the decency to use all of it. As mention before sustainability is the new black in Copenhagen so they put everything – nose to tail – on the menu one way or the other.

On the day the menu depends on what part of the animal they have decided to use. They literally purchase a whole lamb or a whole pig and they create dishes from it until nothing is left and then start on a new one.

So, on the menu you find Animal of the day (ask your waiter) and Fish of the day (ask your waiter). Vegetables are all of the organic variety and sourced from friends and family – meaning people that the owners know personally and trust.

This whole approach also helps keep prices reasonable and so the main dish of the day will typically be around DKK 150 (€20) and fun starters such as pork crackling with tarragon mayonnaise – sustainable is not necessarily health conscious at DKK 50 (€7).

Nose2Tail is open till late, the actual kitchen does not close until 1 o'clock in the morning and you can stay on and enjoy beer – microbrew special for Nose2Tail – till 3 o'clock in the morning and by then it is more pub than food.

Nose2Tail – Flæsketorvet 13A. Copenhagen V. Phone +45 33 93 50 45

<http://www.nose2tail.dk>

Geist

Talk of the town has for a while been all about the newly opened restaurant GEIST – the word in Danish means enthusiasm plus energy. And there is no doubt the chef Bo Bech has just that when it comes to food. Food enthusiasts will recognise his name from restaurant Paustian in northeast part of the

harbour, where he was for some years the head chef and secured a Michelin star for the restaurant. All that is now history. “I have no intention of creating another Michelin star restaurant”, he says. “Geist is a place where you can enjoy a great meal without half the restaurant know-towing as you do. We are real human beings here with enthusiasm – and that is contagious!”

This large restaurant seating 150 people could easily have been inspired by L’Atelier de Joël Robuchon in Paris. It has the same central open kitchen with bar seating on three sides, in addition to a number of traditional 2 and 4 top seating on the floor. Further back behind a beautiful bar/reception area is a more formal restaurant area with curved sofas and high back chairs.

As already illustrated with some of the other examples mentioned in this Copenhagen portrait, the trend at the moment has been towards very simple concepts with a narrow menu focus – Geist goes exactly the opposite way. Here there is more than plenty of choice – between 30 and 40 items on a given day. The portions are small and delicate, although not quite as small as traditional tapas, but more like large starters – the idea is that you compose your own tasting menu. You are also welcome to have just a snack and a glass of wine. Most people will have no problem enjoying four courses and with a healthy appetite even five would not be too gross.

For a foodie, the main attraction is sitting in the bar/kitchen with a full view of proceedings – Bo Bech, a huge man, towers in the centre and calls out the tickets in a surprisingly low voice as they come in – but that is the only sound you hear which is remarkable in a kitchen this size, rolling out 4- and 5-course menus of the highest culinary standard to a full house.

The menu changes as new ideas are developed and is not present in the traditional subdivisions of starters, mains, etc. It is a list of interesting headings to explore and combine:

Brussels sprouts with almonds and mussels, Carrot with Scallop and Sorrel, Wild duck with ginger, lime, soy and sesame. Sheep milk yogurt ice cream with malt and wood sorrel. Candied ripped crushed coconut. The challenge really is to decide what not to have. Prices range from DKK 80 (€11) up to DKK 165 (€22).

Geist – Kongens Nytorv 8, 1050 Copenhagen K. Phone +45 3313 3713

www.restaurantgeist.dk

The Food Activist

Denmark has many talented chefs. Rene Redepiz (Noma) and Rasmus Kofoed (Bocuse d'Or 2011, Chef at Geranium) are well-known outside Denmark, but there are many others with great talent. The one who has had the greatest impact overall on the Danish scene is possibly not even the most brilliant chef per se.

Claus Meyer (46 yrs) is a tricky man to categorise. Entrepreneur par excellence, a foodie and activist, he is the unruly hyper-creative chef – who is not a chef – who is constantly challenging the status quo and only rarely does he pause long enough for anyone to get a real overview of what he is up to; the man who loves 'slow food' is the fastest moving force in town.

He has a business school background – no kidding, in 1991 he earned himself the Danish equivalent of a Masters degree, writing a thesis on business creation and start-up – and that is what he has done ever since. His passion for food started way before that. Staying in France with a French family for a year as a youngster, he realised what attitude and appreciation could do for everything from your daily loaf of bread to the Sunday roast. This started him on a long expedition exploring into all sorts of ventures, some with success and naturally enough others that turned out as flops. He is always a man on a mission: to educate, improve and develop Danish food culture.

Although he is a frequent guest on Danish television, demonstrating with the same laid back simplicity and love of food that is also characteristic of Jamie Oliver how to create wonderful meals, he was never formally trained as a chef. This was for years considered 'a problem' by the high priests of the food establishment, but today formal certificate or no certificate nobody any longer questions his positive influence and creativity on the Danish food scene. The proof: in 2010 he was elected by his peers as the Chef of Chefs together with Rene Redzepi.

Most recently, he enlisted 67 well-known restaurants and hotels in Denmark to on the same evening offer a 3-course dinner for DKK 100 (€13,5) for kids only – no adults allowed. 2,700 children aging from 6 to 15 left their parents at the door and enjoyed an unforgettable meal – the point was twofold. Firstly, Claus Meyer wanted to raise money for his foundation ‘Melting Pot’ for a project in Bolivia supporting children and young people to train as chefs; and secondly, he wanted young Danes to have the experience of ‘fine dining’.



The menu across all the participating restaurants was the same: Mussels, Braised calfs shanks and cheese. No child friendly fish fingers or bangers and mash. The point was to challenge the youngsters and apparently it did.

Today, he employs more than 400 people in a variety of businesses that as of writing consist of a catering company, a chef’s school, canteen contracts, a chain of delicatessen shops, vinegar production, fruit plantation and a bakery; those are just the businesses he is directly involved in. Add to that an endless list of

joint ventures and projects that he has a share in or just contributes to. This includes Estate Coffee, Copenhagen Roasters, Noma and Nordic FoodLab (together with Redzepi).

In addition, Claus Meyer has won countless awards and honours, including in 2010 being declared Knight of the Order of the Dannebrog by the Danish queen.

Claus' latest restaurant venture Radio is a natural extension of the path that has gotten him this far.

Claus Meyer – <http://www.clausmeyer.dk/en/>

Radio

With all the attention that Noma has drawn to itself, getting a table there is now harder than picking a winning ticket in the state lottery. And in that sense Noma does not contribute to Claus Meyer's mission of educating the Danes directly on the beauties of the New Nordic kitchen as was the original intention – so the obvious solution is to create another restaurant that at least for now is more accessible.

The location in the intersection between the west and northeast section of the city, close to where the Danish broadcasting corporation used to have their headquarters for many years, has given the name to the latest venture restaurant, Radio.

Together with what he describes as his two food mates Jesper Kirketerp and Rasmus Kliim, they have developed the idea to focus on vegetables, the new Nordic way – but not to the extreme that this is a vegetarian restaurant. Meat is served but with a less prominent role to play than is normally the case and with at more accessible prices.

There are two reasons behind this:

One, a lot of what grows in Denmark does so at the limits of what is climatic possible. So many interesting plants and vegetables develop in what for them are extreme conditions, colder nights, longer days, etc. This means that sometimes more interesting tastes, smells or colours occur than is normal in their prime habitat. This realisation is at the heart of New Nordic Cuisine and is why Claus and his food mates have established a collaboration with a farm just outside Copenhagen, where they grow most of what they need for Radio; but there is also a section with a Vegi-Lab, where new products are tested for the benefit of the whole Nordic cuisine idea including Noma. We are not just talking carrots and broccoli here – there are more than 80 different species from the plant kingdom that will, at one time or the other of the year, find their way to dinner tables at Radio.

The second reason is sustainability. Quite basically, we need to appreciate vegetables more and reduce our consumption of meat. This is good for us as humans and it is a must for humanity according to Claus Meyer. His ambition is that the New Nordic diet, as he calls it, will be to the 21st century what the Mediterranean diet has been to the 20th century – nothing less.

The 50-seat restaurant offers a 5-course menu at DKK 400 (€54) or 3-course at DKK 300 (€40). What is served truly depends on the season and relates directly to what is coming out of the ground at Grantoftegaard, the farm that supplies them. It will be things like grilled leeks and cod, cream cheese and scallops, or stewed corn with forest mushrooms.

Radio – Julius Thomsens Gade 12, 1632 København V. Phone. +45 2510 2733
www.restaurantradio.dk

NamNam

And just when you think you have Claus Meyer pegged down as the Man on a new Nordic mission, he announces his plans for 2012 – a partnership with the Singapore/Danish couple Michael and Tin Pan-Larsen to open a restaurant with

the clever name NamNam. (This is hopeless to translate, as NamNam in Danish is what typically smaller children will say about something that tastes good: It is nam-nam. Although in Danish this also sounds like a description of Asian flavour.)

The 190-seat restaurant scheduled to open in the new vibrant west part of Copenhagen in early 2012 will feature the Peranakan cuisine – an Asian fusion cuisine with 500 years to its credit that combines flavours from China, Malaysia, Indonesia and Singapore. The menu will include items such as octopus with sambal and ginger flower, hang roasted lamb and stir-fried pork with tamarind and palm sugar. The menu items and presentation will be designed to share in the Asian way. If guests prefer, individual portions can also be served.

NamNam – Vesterbrogade 39, 1620 Copenhagen V. Phone + 45 41 91 98 98

www.restaurantnamnam.dk

By the time we go to print, who knows what Claus Meyer will be up to...

Kent Coffee Laboratory

You will find espresso bars all over Copenhagen – the Danes have taken to Café Latte, Macchiato or Cortado and the rest of the Mediterranean coffee menu in the same way that most other urban areas have. Coffee to go is booming and coffee bars sprouting everywhere.



One exception to the mainstream approach is newly opened Kent Coffee Laboratory located in a 200 sqm basement just off the Nørreport subway station, who have made it their mission to convince the Danes that adding hot milk to your coffee spoils the real pleasure of drinking coffee.

Kent Coffee therefore offers a large variety of more or less complicated brewing methods and a large variety of beans and roasts. You can choose Haio Siphon that brews using a vacuum principle, the V60 filter brewer or ice coffee brewed on cold water or the high pressure Trifecta machine.

It does not make the decision process any easier but it definitely adds to the experience and your understanding of how different coffee can taste – and that is the main point. If you insist, they will make you a traditional latte the same way everybody else does.

Kent Kaffe Laboratorium – www.kentkaffelaboratorium.dk

Interesting Multi-unit players

As already mentioned, international chains are not dominant in Copenhagen. Recently the city has bred a few interesting multi-unit players of its own. Some of them doing well by being extremely efficient at what they do, others as mentioned under the perennials, others by developing more creative concepts or fun twists on already known concepts.

CoFoCo

When exploring the Copenhagen restaurant scene, there is one name that will keep popping up: Copenhagen Food Consulting generally known as CoFoCo.



Started by a young chef, Torben Klitbo, in 2003, the company has spearheaded several innovative approaches to the industry, including being the first restaurant in Copenhagen to ban smoking completely 10 years ago.

The red thread which runs through everything they do seems to be KISS – keep it simple, stupid. As you will see elsewhere in this city portrait, Copenhagen has an abundance of great fine dining establishments, many of them operating at very high standards – but they also charge accordingly. A dinner for two with wine will easily set you back €350-400 in one of the better establishments.

For many years, the only alternative to big spending was to visit an ethnic restaurant, typically a Chinese, a pizzeria or a Thai restaurant. But there were not many alternatives in between those two extremes. The obvious challenge being how to replicate the informality of the French bistro or the Italian tavern with the corresponding moderate ticket in a country with high wages.

CoFoCo have been among the first to crack that systematically and, as a result, have developed nine restaurants in the city, a catering division, two banqueting facilities and a charming auberge in the south of France (as of writing, two more openings are announced for 2012).

The basic approach is the same throughout – keep the menu (and everything else for that matter) simple – so the first restaurant was named CoFoCo and offered a 4-course dinner *surprise*, in the sense that the menu changes daily. In addition, there are nine items on its menu – all smallish portions more like starters than main courses and can be combined as add-ons to the menu. A 4-course dinner is DKK 275 (€37) and a 5-course or more from the menu is DKK 50 + (€6.5) for each. The restaurant was an immediate hit when it opened and you would soon need to book two to three months in advance to get a table.

Realising they had struck a raw nerve with the local population, they quickly opened their second restaurant, Les Trois Cochons – slightly different – again very simple. A 3-course dinner at DKK 295 (€40) – the starters, a selection

according to the mood of the chef – the same served for the whole table, a choice of three mains, Fried Plaice, Confit de Canard or with a supplement Cote de Boeuf at DKK 50 (€6.5). All main courses must be ordered by minimum two people at the table and are served with mashed potatoes and *haricot verts*. As dessert, “Assiette gourmandise”; if you feel like it, you can add a cheese plate at DKK 75 (€10). The wine list reflects the same simplicity – a decent house wine and a selection of 4-5 white and red wines at moderate prices.

Continuing along the same vein, they have subsequently opened:

Two Scarpetta, Italian restaurants with menus along the same principles as the original CoFoCo restaurant, but with classic Italian items.

Restaurant Sputino, again auberge-style but with an Italian accent.

Vespa, a more upmarket Italian 3-course dinner, testing a price range of DKK 400 (€53).

And the CoFoCo version of the classic surf and turf theme called Oysters & Grills. For starters: oysters, mussels or langoustines at prix du jour; main course three types of steak or a grilled sea bass; three desserts, one of them being cheese. And as first in my experience, the restaurant does not accept cash – only credit cards. Keeps it simple.

Finally, they have also launched a new magazine: *Copenhagen Food* with chef interviews and tips and tricks for the home gourmet, and of course a few ideas where to go in town if you don't feel like cooking it yourself.

CoFoCo – see www.cofoco.dk/

The Food Club (Madklubben) – Bistro de Luxe



Originally, there were three partners at CoFoCo – but then one partner, Anders Aagaard, broke out and started Madklubben (the Food Club).

The conceptual relationship comes through clearly in the Food Club as they also target the apparently magic formula of achieving a 3-course dinner in the 200-300 DKK price bracket with a difference when you look closer. The Food Club is more purpose-driven and in a sense ‘cleaner’ even more minimalist than CoFoCo. There are five restaurants in the group: Madklubben, Madklubben Tivoli, Madklubben Steak, Tony’s and Frankie’s Kitchen. And all the menus have the same basic bistro design – including the all important manifesto that outlines why they do it the way they do:

- 1) We supply good food in nice surroundings – we don’t give you longwinded sermons about the food, nor will we venture into detailed explanations as to the specific type of grape or production details of your wine.
- 2) We expect you to participate in the creation of this meal actively. You pour your own wine and take note of what is on your plate. This helps us serve great food and excellent wine at reasonable prices.
- 3) The staff on the floor have been chosen for their sense of humour and contagious laughs – not because of their intense studies of wine and cheese in

foreign lands. If you have a question, please just ask – there is probably an answer and we will do what we can to find it for you.

4) If we do not live up to your expectations, please shout! We will do whatever we can to solve the problem and ensure that you have a great evening – tomorrow is too late.

At Madklubben (the Food Club), you choose one, two, three or four courses and pay DKK 100, 150, 200, or 250 (€13,20, 27 or 34) accordingly. Several of the menu items have add-on prices of DKK 25, 50 or even 100 (€3, 7 or even 13). The main courses are as no-nonsense as everything else: Steak, Duck, Pork, Fish or Roots (for the vegetarians).

Under each heading a slightly more elaborate explanation is offered:
fish [pan fried cod, beetroots, leeks, sauce] add DKK 50 (€7) to the price of the menu. Or: pork [poached pork cheeks, kale, apple, currants, pork greaves].

Tony's is the same principle, based on an Italian menu interpreted in a New York style. Frankie's Kitchen is well... just Frankie's kitchen because, as Anders Aagaards says, all really good parties end up in the kitchen – so this restaurant idea is a homage to his friend Frankie, who is known for organising the best private parties in town. What is served? Well, whatever Frankie feels like of course. They call it international Bistro, which means that basically anything goes. Again pick 3 courses for DKK 200 (€27) or 4 courses for DKK 250 (€34) – but watch out for the small print, because you might need to add a further DKK 50 or DKK 100 (€7 or €13) per item depending on your choice.

Madklubben – Store Kongensgade 66, 1264 Copenhagen V.

Phone +45 33 32 32 34 – <http://madklubben.info>

Tivoli Gardens

One part of Copenhagen City that is a restaurant area all to itself is the Tivoli gardens. Located in the absolute centre of town, this classical amusement park has existed since year 1843. Originally, most of the foodservice establishments in the park were run by independent contractors – some of them having been handed down from father to son for several generations. In the good old days, it was rumoured that owning one of these establishments would guarantee you a most pleasant retirement.

In the beginning of this century, park management started changing policy and increasingly exercised their right to take over establishments as they came up for sale or ran into trouble. Initially this was as a joint venture with Select Service Partner (SSP) under the name 'Eatertainment', but since 2006 the restaurant division has been fully owned and operated by Tivoli gardens themselves. There are still independent contractors in the park, but the majority of the establishments are park owned and operated.

The portfolio of concepts that the park operates itself spans an impressive range, from simple hot dog stands to the Herman, the one-star Michelin restaurant (sadly, Paul Cunningham has announced this autumn that he is withdrawing from Tivoli and closing his Michelin 1-star restaurant, The Paul, that was also owned by Tivoli for the past few years). Most of the Tivoli concepts are developed internally: from pirate ships to cool lounge bars and top of the range fine dining. The only exception is Wagamama where Tivoli is a franchisee and has one unit in the park, and for a few years now has been rumoured to be on the look-out for additional sites outside the park.

Tivoli also houses and operates Copenhagen's possibly most exclusive boutique hotel, the 15-room Nimb. The hotel is part of a larger Nimb complex in the section of the park facing Copenhagen central station, where you will also

find the one-star restaurant Herman and the newly opened New York inspired Bar'n'Grill, as well as the large Scandinavian version of the traditional French brasserie built up around three beautiful cast iron Molteni stoves in the open kitchen called Nimb Brasserie.

Tivoli – Vesterbrogade 3, 1630 Copenhagen V. Phone +45 33 15 10 01

<http://www.tivoli.dk/>

Nimb Bar'n'Grill



The newly opened Bar'n'Grill is a classy interpretation of a New York style upmarket steak house, including a bar which serves serious size drinks. And as such, it is just borderline between unique and stereotype. It is unique in Copenhagen, but from a New Yorker's perspective probably quite stereotype including the waiters with broad suspenders over crisp white shirts.

Nonetheless, in the same way that Disney theme parks are brilliant at creating real-fake, the team at Tivoli are also great illusionists and the moment you step

through the door you are transposed to the romanticised version what most of us perceive as the real New York buzz.

Brisk, friendly and very professional service – lots of proteins – virtually no veggies, and faultless execution in everything from how you order your steak to the way you want your Martini stirred – or shaken. The end result is a very masculine atmosphere, where you expect Gordon Gekko and entourage to breeze through the door any moment.

Just like its role models in the Big Apple, this is not a culinary temple but a well-executed and no-nonsense high-quality cuisine. The menu has a number of tempting appetisers like oysters, petite friture with aioli dip or even Oscietre Selection Caviar for the big spenders. The main items are the steaks. The range from a whooping 600-gram Cote de Boeuf at DKK 435 (€59), over the classic Rib Eye steak to smaller more modest cuts from the flank 250-gram for DKK 200 (€27). Seafood suitable for grilling is also an option, including lobsters, langoustines, tuna or turbot also in the DKK 250-300 (€34-40) range per main course. Add to this a special of the day from the rotisserie, could be wild boar or delicate poussins.

Nimb Bar'n'Grill – <http://www.tivoli.dk/composite-9583.htm>

More to Explore

What to include and what to leave out in a city portrait like this is not easy. Copenhagen definitely has more to showcase than one can fit into one article. The best, of course, would be if this has inspired you to take a tour of the town yourself. If you do, summer is more fun – and the city infinitely more friendly than in winter. But just because it rains cats and dogs won't keep the Danes at home, so there is lots going on any time of the year and now you know where to start exploring further.

Enjoy your safari!

Mike Hohnen

www.mikehohnen.com