

ON LOCATION

A 'Sanctuary' on the Danish Riviera



Andreas Meichsner for The New York Times

In an area unofficially called the Danish Riviera, a modern home is nestled in a former fishing village.

By ELISA MALA

Published: August 24, 2011

HUMLEBAEK, Denmark — Claus Moeller is used to uphill battles. As a biomedical researcher, and the chief executive of the Danish pharmaceutical company Azanta, he has helped create cancer-fighting drugs. But nothing prepared Dr. Moeller for the trials of constructing a home in a shoreline suburb nearly 20 miles north of Copenhagen.

RECOMMEND

TWITTER

SIGN IN TO E-MAIL

PRINT

REPRINTS

SHARE

Multimedia



In Denmark, a Sanctuary by the Sea

“It was more nerve-wrecking to build a house than to design a drug,” said Dr. Moeller, 49, who had planned to move into the 64 million Danish krone home (\$10 million) with his second wife, Marianne, in 2010, but instead filed for divorce.

Dr. Moeller’s two-story, seven-bedroom house, intended for a large family, is now a bachelor pad nestled in this former fishing village in an area unofficially called the Danish Riviera. He settled into the house early this year with his 16-year-old son, Alexander, from his first marriage. (His daughter Dana, 19, also from his first marriage, and his son Andreas, 5, from his second marriage, also visit frequently.)

The 5,404-square-foot structure with gabled twin copper roofs is perched on a grassy seaside slope overlooking the tranquil Oresund strait and the Swedish isle of Hven.

The large house stands out in a country not known for a showy nature. Unlike other pastel-colored houses in the well-heeled enclave, its exterior facade is brick, finished with a bright-white stucco wash. There is a wall of glass lining the entire back of the house, the side that meets Oresund. “We wanted to bring the view of the sea into the house,” said Carsten Fischer, the principal architect of the house. Topping it are the double roofs, which make the structure seem like two homes side by side.

The size and style of the home, though, became a subject of debate among Dr. Moeller’s

neighbors and the local officials. After he bought the nearly half-acre lot in 2006 at an auction, for 10.25 million Danish krone (\$2 million), he had difficulty getting his building permits approved and held a series of meetings with government officials to win them over. At one point, discussions with neighbors about the design of his home grew so heated that they had to be resolved in Mr. Fischer's offices at [Henning Larsen](#), the architectural firm in Copenhagen. "I'm an expert in Danish diplomacy," Mr. Fischer said jokingly.

Now, though, the tempestuous past seems to be behind Dr. Moeller.

The home, on a manicured lawn surrounded by hedges, is where he retreats to soothe his soul.

A path of smooth, rectangular slabs of gray-blue granite from the nearby island of Bornholm leads to the main entrance. The front door opens onto a modern steel-and-oak staircase that pierces through the house, dividing it into east and west wings.

Natural light floods in from floor-to-ceiling windows opposite the entrance, bouncing off the white plaster walls and the Dinesen oak floors. "It's much about transparency," Dr. Moeller said of the house's design.

Off to the right is his teenage son's bedroom, a guest bedroom and Dr. Moeller's home office. In the opposite direction, a narrow hallway opens into a cavernous light-filled space with floor-to-ceiling glass windows. The area is divided into a white-walled contemporary kitchen and a living and dining area where abstract paintings, mostly from the Belgian artist Pierre Alechinsky, line the walls. A gas-burning fireplace from the Danish brand Boley is recessed into one living room wall. The entire first floor encloses a courtyard paved in stone.

The upstairs level holds more bedrooms, including Dr. Moeller's, as well as his favorite place in the house — an upstairs living room with pale, angular Cappellini furniture, a 42-inch Bang and Olufsen flatscreen television, over-sized Ralph Lauren candles, a second Boley fireplace, and a prized possession: copy No. 249 of "Helmut Newton: Sumo," a 480-page book issued by Taschen, the German publishing house, and signed by the late iconic photographer. Printed in a series of 10,000, the 66-pound book is showcased in a Philippe Starck metal stand designed for the volume.

But the basement is where the action is. This downstairs level houses a home theater, where movies and video games — mostly those belonging to his son, Alexander — are projected onto an approximately 9.5-foot-by-16-foot Gibson screen (\$1,400). There is also a wine cellar, a fitness center, a custom-designed Jacuzzi, and a 82-foot lap pool, both lined with polished local granite and illuminated with skylights. In warmer months, he simply jumps straight from his backyard into the ocean.

Of his completed home and overhauled life, Dr. Moeller says his existence is now as serene as his surroundings. "It's a sanctuary," he said.