



Stephanie Levassor (designer)

# Experiments in living

**Jana Leo de Blas** It is April 1st 2016. It looks like we are going in a rock and roll tour; we are all sleepy and full of joy. We are going to visit a state prison, Ennermark, in East Jutland, built in 2009 by architects Friis & Moltke. The day trip is part of a workshop I am teaching on imprisonment: Experiments in Living: Bringing the Prisoner Home

**Klaus Wahid Knudsen** We are driving in a pink minivan. After having left the highway, the bus continues towards the open land, where field after field fills our view. Arriving at our destination, we are met by a kilometer-long white wall surrounding the prison. It is built by reinforced concrete and rises 6 meters above the ground. It is also dug well into the ground, we are told, no possible escape that way either. An extra fence with a barbed wire top is added on the outside of the wall. It is safe to say that nobody will get neither in nor out of Ennermark Prison.

**Andrea Ougaard** I have never seen a prison before, not in reality, not on a sunny day. Three at the time, we enter through one door, and another. Red light, green light, security check-point. Always two layers of doors, never open at the same time. Inside bikes belonging to the employees are lined up next to the fence. One of us asks "How do the inmates get around?". "They walk. They have plenty of time". In spite of the ever-present fences, walls and prison guards it is the small things that remind me of where I am.  
A prison is a building for the confinement of persons. My understanding of prison and punishment is as superficial as the dictionary definition. I have always perceived the prison as a punishment



because of the confinement, but never questioned the institution and its purpose. My knowledge originates in American prison movies, and it turns out to be far from the reality in Ennermark state prison, which has a lot more in common with other public institutions: hospitals, libraries, my primary school.

**Jeppe Mølby Larsen**

The system seems to make demands of the inmates, the employees, the visitors, the architecture. When nurses at our publicly funded hospitals run fast to make ends meet, and when the farmers use all the hours of the day to produce our bread and earn their living, high demands of the persons on the dark side of the wall are only to be expected. But the logic is not to break down people in order to then rebuild, to threaten or to punish those who are already lying down. Rather, the inmates are seen as people who might be missing something, in need of healing. Seen in that light, the prison guard's job sounds poetic, if not heroic.

**Ariana Kiyomi Alexis Zilliacus**

Coming from Copenhagen, a city with a lot of energy, sounds, movements, life, distractions and temptations, this prison was in many ways an oasis of peace. A breath of fresh air. Literally. It was so silent and calm. The narrow, winding gravel paths; the fields of grass, both surrounding and within the walls; the softly curving landscape; the silent bicycles; the quietly whirring delivery vehicles. It was just all very tranquil.

The only feeling of slight unease was at the special security ward, seeing the restraining room and the isolation rooms. However, the rooms were so empty and sterile, they almost felt like props that weren't really being used. (Although I know that they are. Around 20-30 times a year.)

The inmates we saw were all seemingly calm figures as well. Had I met them around town, I don't think I would have picked them out for being criminals. It is important to note that we were walking around with a guard, and were in one of the safer wards. It was also a very beautiful day, which certainly set a more idyllic scene. As someone said though, it is simply nice to know that prisoners are treated so humanely there. One can only hope that they turn into more well-functioning members of society, as a result of spending extensive time in a place that is worlds away from their ordinary lives.

One of the strongest experiences were to visit in a small outdoor yard in the unit for solitary confinement. The yard had three to four-



**Stephanie Levassor** meter-high walls, preventing any view out. Above it a fence hindered escape in the vertical. The yard gave me a clear sense of isolation, but also a sense of claustrophobia. Not being able to breathe freely. The entire unit had a strange feeling to it. You could sense that things were in use, things had happened.

**Jana Leo de Blas** The only thing that is non-domestic of this kitchen is the cables holding knives to the wall with thick lockers. The kitchen is the heart of the home. This kitchen is perhaps saying: "This is home for you now" or "this is the model of domestic living that you should follow". The kitchen is inviting. One will have natural light while cooking. The dining area is parallel to the kitchen facing a window. One can eat whenever he wants and whatever he wants. There is not such a thing as prison food in this prison. Each person receives a set amount of money 400 kroner per week; there is a shop to buy food and each person have to cook their own food. A prison in which you cook tells a lot about dependency and responsibility. The place provides the possibility for you to eat but it does not feed you. You are not a baby; you are an adult and able to cook and feed yourself. The model is promoting autonomy not dependency.

This is an architecture without representation, or rather an architecture representing domestic suburban architecture; that is, warm materials: brick in the exterior; spacious modern interiors with open kitchens, natural light and views to green fields, a recreational area in the back and the front, the porch and the back yard that substituted the traditional enclosed prison patio. As if this prison was saying that, since there is no access to the outside, no possibility to intervene in the world, the only thing that can be enhanced is the domestic aspect. The everyday, the continuity of the cycle, enjoy small things, be in a meditative state, live in the present.

**Fruzsina Boutros** Thick bars, high fences, beautiful landscape and art messes with our perception. Leaving the building, once again surrounded by the calm landscape and the good weather, the confusion just increased. The last building we entered to explore was the cultural house. It housed a gym, music room, library, church and a grocery. It felt like it could have been any other community center of a small town, except of course the heavy, locked doors. On our way out, we looked inside one of the guest apartments, which can be rented by inmates' families to ease the separation. The apartment looked worn, indicating its good use.







