

Teddy Bear Art Museum

by Laura Beatrice Ricks

The world's first Teddy Bear Art Museum opens in Denmark in the Spring of 2018.



Teddy Bear Art Museum



LEFT:

Alfonzo in his new resting place

ABOVE RIGHT:

Laura with polar bears at Tivoli, Copenhagen

BELOW:

A beautiful representation of Goldilocks and the three bears.

Teddy Bear Art Museum, where the emphasis is on the word “art”, and each bear is a masterpiece in its own right.

The Museum and Gardens

Gitte and Gunhild started the search for suitable premises to house their museum. The natural choice fell on Billund, the Capital of Children, a national and



international hub for children, creativity, play and learning. Billund is also the town where Gunhild grew up and where Gitte and Johnny live. Gitte spent thirty-five years working as a Design Master at LEGO, responsible for many of the popular figures. Following the death of Gunhild's mother, Edith, in 2015 the choice of Museum premises fell on her former home, in the centre of Billund. This former private home where Godtfred Kirk Christiansen, his wife Edith and their children, including their daughter Gunhild, have lived became the perfect location for the new Museum. Godtfred's father Ole founded LEGO in 1932 and Godtfred himself became managing director of the company at the age of thirty.

Billund was a small town and LEGO became – and has continued to be – a very important element in the development of the town. Godtfred was also instrumental in the financing and building of Billund Airport – now a world-class airport with direct international routes from all over the world, including a British Airways route from London. The house was built in the early 60s, in the heyday of Danish architecture. At the time the house was a masterpiece of cutting edge design and convenience. Every detail had been carefully planned, from outer blinds for the

The Museum's Mission

Gitte Pinholt Thorsen has been a keen private collector of teddy bears since 1985. As a prize-winning teddy bear designer, who has won the prestigious Golden George Teddy Bear Award four times, Gitte herself has an excellent eye for quality and detail. Together with her husband Johnny, Gitte has travelled the world, collecting teddies from many countries, each with their own unique expression. A serendipitous encounter with another keen teddy bear collector in Jutland, Gunhild Kirk Johansen, led to the two teddy enthusiasts, Gitte and Gunhild, becoming friends. Gunhild has always loved teddy bears and sewn and knitted her own clothes for her teddy collection. As a family person herself, Gunhild has a particular fondness for teddy bear families, including the VanderBears. Together Gitte and Gunhild have realized their ambition to create the world's first





ABOVE & BELOW: The Teddy Bear Art Museum Garden, the former private home of the LEGO family

large, glass windows stretching from floor to ceiling to a play area with a cork floor for the children. The thought behind the building was “to create a house, which needed to be large, but, at the same time, had to feel cosy to live in for a family”. The house needed to function while there were 70-100 guests, as well as when the family were alone.

Edith’s ambition was also for the house to be easy to keep, despite its grand size. This was especially important for the family as, in the early days of LEGO, there was no local hotel in Billund where business contacts could stay the night. The purpose-built design of the house made it easy for the managing director and his family to accommodate

guests for overnight stays. In fact, the first models of the house were built from LEGO bricks time after time, until the family and the architect felt satisfied that they had created the perfect, functional family home. The central area of the house is built as an atrium to bestow light and sun on all the inner rooms. The atrium, at the heart of the





Gunhild Kirk Johansen
Owner



Mogens Johansen
Owner



Gitte Thorsen
Designmaster & Curator

of the building, is now covered with a roof and small windows all the way around. It is here that the Museum's teddy bear workshops will take place where they will be visible inspiration to all visitors. The conversion from a secluded family home, in the middle of a town, to a functional museum shows the greatest respect for the house's original design. The gardens will be open to the public in the Museum's opening hours.

"The Lady of the House's great interest" The house and garden reflect the Kirk Christiansen family's love of flowers and bushes, particularly Edith's. Every window looked out on a green vista. The Museum has christened the garden "Edith's Garden" to reflect her passion which is still clearly visible in the trees, bushes and flowers in the park surrounding the house. A local newspaper described gardening as "the lady of the house's great interest" in 1962.

Teddy Bear Art Museum Exhibitions.
The Museum's permanent exhibitions comprise Danish

teddy bear collections of hand-sewn teddies, antique and unique teddy bears from all over the world, tableau displays, the VanderBear Family with their unique universe and designer outfits, the history of the teddy bear (the American and the Steiff version) and Alfonzo.

Alfonzo

Meet the world-famous, historic teddy bear, Alfonzo, and hear the incredible and poignant story of his travels with Princess Xenia from Russia, to Buckingham Palace, to high-society Long Island, to Teddy Bears of Witney and now to his new permanent home at the Teddy Bear Art Museum, Denmark.

Activities and events

The new Museum will be a hub of creativity. The atrium centre of the house (which is visible from four sides) will be an active workshop where visitors can follow the process of making a teddy bear or see how a new exhibition takes shape. Enrol in one of our courses on how to make

your own teddy bear (at advanced and beginner levels). Enjoy fun, teddy-related activities for children. In time, the house will host intimate concerts and other cultural events which we look forward to sharing with you. Follow the history of the teddy bear, solve simple creative projects as you go, enjoy a cup of coffee in the Teddy Bear Café or be inspired to sew your own teddy bear.

The Teddy Bear Art Museum is the place to have teddy-related fun! We look forward to seeing you, Spring 2018.

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**Teddy Bear
Art Museum**

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