
VELUX®
Daylight that
opens up to nature

# Project data

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| Client: | Privat |
| Architect: | Helena Nyholm, Sesam Arkitekter |
| Location: | Vittsjö, outside Hässleholm |
| Year: | 2019 |
| Photography: | Lars Hauschildt |

Kotten is located on the outskirts of Vittsjö in Skåne, on a scenic lakeside plot. The house sits in a calm area surrounded by both summer houses and permanent homes. Here, Helena Nyholm from Sesam Architects was commissioned to design a house primarily intended for rental.

However, instead of following the client's initial proposal, Helena created a design based on the conditions of the site. A building that follows and respects nature – where natural daylight guides visitors, both to illuminate the space and to help them leave everyday stress behind.

# Letting the site speak for itself



Helena Nyholm is an architect and CEO of Sesam Architects in Kristianstad.
She recalls visiting the plot in Vittsjö in 2019:

*“There was nothing on the site before this house was built. Just a small gap between neighbouring buildings – a place defined by blueberry shrubs and pine trees.”*

The site is characterised by natural beauty and tranquility, ending at the edge of a lake. It was an ideal location for the client, who was looking for a place offering peace and close contact with nature.

*“When I first came here, I was fascinated by the blueberry shrubs, the pine trees with their rough trunks, and the small pine cones on the ground. I wanted to capture the form, structure and texture of a pine cone.”*

**Helena Nyholm, Architect**

Their vision was to build a house for rental purposes. Coming from a hotel background, they wanted to create something that could offer a similar function but on a smaller, more intimate scale. Vittsjö offered the right potential – both the lakeside setting and its proximity to the railway.

*“One of their criteria was that you should be able to arrive by train and walk no more than 15 minutes to the house. That is possible in Vittsjö.”*

Beställaren hade en tydlig bild av vad de ville ha. Huset skulle vara modernt och vitputsat, med stora glasfönster ut mot sjön.

The client had a clear idea of what they wanted: a modern, white-rendered house with large, glazed façades facing the lake, and a low-maintenance solution with no lawn, no façade painting and no window upkeep - a peaceful retreat for families or friends.

Helena Nyholm had a different vision:

*“Pine trees and blueberry shrubs do not suit a white rendered house. They needed a building that could speak to them.”*

Instead of following the original brief, she developed a proposal based on the defining elements of the site.

The client’s expectation of a white, heavily glazed house was replaced with an organic design rooted in the character of the site. Already from the first sketch, the proposal for a nature-based “pine cone” structure replaced the original concept.

*“They accepted the proposal from the very first sketch, and after that I hardly changed anything.”*



*“I have a very good relationship with the contractor, but he did complain quite a few times. They had to carry everything by hand – even the heavy window elements.”*

**Helena Nyholm, Architect**





# Shaped by nature

Before Kotten was built, the site was an empty lakeside plot with pine trees and low vegetation. For Helena, the approach was clear:

*“From the first visit, it was obvious that nature should take the lead.”*

This is evident both in the material choices and the forms used in Kotten, which are strongly inspired by the surrounding environment.

The most prominent example is the exterior, inspired by the shape and texture of a pine cone.

The layered façade is made from cedar wood, a stable material with good resistance to rot and minimal maintenance requirements. Its natural aroma also helps deter pests.

Over time, the cedar has weathered from its original reddish tone to a silver-grey – without losing its functional qualities.

The blueberry shrubs covering much of the site also influenced the design. To minimise impact, the house is elevated on columns, allowing vegetation to grow beneath it and giving the impression that the building almost floats above the ground.

Protecting the site posed challenges during construction, as Helena required that no heavy machinery enter the plot.

Before construction began, arborists were brought in to care for the pine trees. Dead branches were removed, and unhealthy trees were taken down, allowing the remaining trees to grow stronger and more harmonious with the new building.

Nature also defines the interior.

Walls and ceilings are made from slow-growing Swedish spruce from northern Sweden, while the floors are made of oak, some sourced from a local sawmill near Vittsjö.
Despite the strong natural concept, Kotten is designed for comfort.



*“The interior is relatively modern, with a contemporary kitchen and tiled bathrooms. You should be able to enjoy being here while still having the comfort you are used to at home.”*







# A transformation through light

Visitors approach Kotten via an elevated wooden walkway that leads across the blueberry shrubs to the entrance. This path continues through the house and out towards the lake, guiding movement and connecting inside and outside.

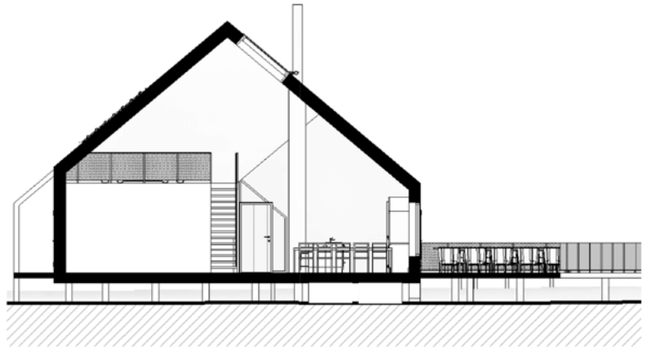
Entering the house feels almost like stepping into a cathedral space. With a ceiling height of seven metres, the atmosphere becomes calm and almost spiritual.

*“The roof windows play a big role. They face north, providing soft, even daylight with no strong contrasts, which lifts the entire space.”*

The north-facing roof windows bring in exceptional levels of daylight—even on overcast days. During daytime, artificial lighting is rarely needed.

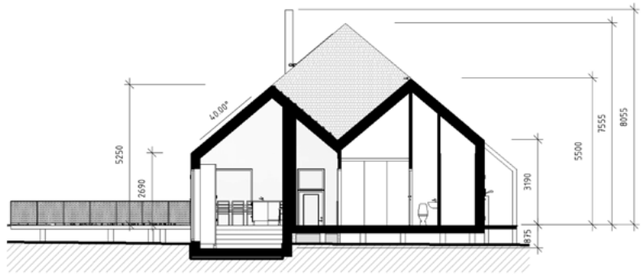
*“I believe people benefit from looking upwards. Whether it is trees or the night sky, it connects us to something bigger.”*

**Helena Nyholm, Architect**



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One of the design objectives was to frame views of the surrounding nature. The largest window opens towards the lake, while the height of the space encourages visitors to look upwards:

“We are used to looking straight ahead. But here, with the seven-metre ceiling, you naturally look up—and then you see this living picture.”

The surrounding pine trees stand out against the sky, gently moving in the wind.

To complement the natural daylight, Helena collaborated with a lighting designer to integrate artificial lighting discreetly, with different light sources serving different purposes:





*“Artificial light is needed in the evening or when daylight is limited. Then we aim for warm, comfortable lighting. The ceiling light is more neutral and provides balanced illumination.”*

**Helena Nyholm, Architect**



# From sketch to reality

When Helena returns to Kotten a few years after completion, she reflects positively on the project. The client gave her full trust, allowing her to realise the vision.

The cedar façade has aged naturally and now blends even more seamlessly into the surroundings—although it has changed the appearance slightly compared to the original design intent:

*"Wood ages naturally. When I chose the colour of the front door, it was based on the original façade tone. Today, the façade has aged and taken on a completely different shade."*

Overall, she remains very satisfied with the result—and she is not alone.

The clients themselves became so fond of the house that they initially decided not to rent it out:

*"When the house was finished, they fell so much in love with it that they wanted to keep it for themselves."*

Only in recent years have they started to share it with others.



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