

Women at EHH

In times where historical buildings' place is challenged with the overtaking of modernity, Birthe Luel stands as a model of dedication to preserving cultural heritage. With a lifelong connection to protected building areas and currently residing in her sixth listed property, Ms. Luel's passion extends beyond her personal interests.

Reflecting on her role as Chair of the Historic Houses Association of Denmark, a board member of EHH and her later appointment as president of Bygningkultur Danmark (the built heritage), Ms. Luel reveals her deep-rooted appreciation for architectural history: "I was brought up with a strong sense of history, and as a child, I learned to look at buildings and sensed that historic buildings had an extra dimension and a special beauty".



When Ms. Luel married into a family with several listed and rental properties deserving of preservation, Ms. Luel's relationship with these structures evolved into a professional and financial endeavour as she was in charge of restoring and renovating them. "It is a challenge to balance originality, authenticity, and demands of modern comfort in the restoration strategy without putting a sensible business of the investment out of control," emphasising the delicate dance of preservation and practicality.

As a woman that started at 28 years old her first company as a fishfarmer, Ms. Luel reflects on her journey in male dominated sectors, saying "I have never felt in any way that it was a handicap for me that I was a woman. On the contrary, I think it helps if you, as a young woman, move into a male area with professional seriousness. Perhaps I should not underestimate the fact, that my husband was a local landowner. At that time local people were not used to see the wife of the landowner working together with local people. On the other hand, I also think it is a lot about your own attitude. I grew up in a home where I saw my father as a leader. That experience, together with a certain amount of fearlessness, has meant that I have exuded a confidence that made it easy and natural for me.

When it comes to inspiring women around her, Ms. Luel chose among many to honour the impactful work of G. Stisen at the Historic Houses Association of Denmark: "In

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Historiske Huse, we have a telephone service where members can ask questions to us about protected buildings. Sometimes elderly owners call in with questions that can be answered quickly, but in reality, they need a chat and presence. In our secretariat, we have employed a woman, Gitte Stisen, who I believe helps and delights many people all year round. She takes her time. It inspires me when people have the energy to be available to other people, spend time and show empathy."

Acknowledged with the Order of Dannebrog by Queen Margrethe II, Ms. Iuel looks optimistically to the future of private built heritage. "The time is with the historic buildings," she notes, highlighting a renewed focus on renovating, rather than replacing, structures. As Ms. Iuel contemplates her legacy and the future of historic preservation, she expresses two ambitious goals before retirement. Firstly, she wishes to improve the framework conditions for private owners of listed buildings, advocating for a fair distribution of costs. Secondly, with the assistance of AI, she aspires to develop a method helping municipalities register and designate buildings worthy of preservation, safeguarding Europe's architectural legacy for generations to come

EHH is proud to have such a committed member among our association that shows leadership and passion for historical buildings, especially the deeply overlooked private sector of historical buildings. With European objectives for a sustainable future, Ms. Iuel remains committed to ensuring that the buildings of the past resonate in the present and the future.