

The newly opened Copenhagen Museum is a wealth of fairytale shades and ornate murals, staged with the dramatic theatre production of natural light and shadow. Thanks to Anne Jonstrup Simonsen, historical colour expert and owner of Copenhagen Conservator, the rooms once again reverberate with their original explosion of colour narratives that chronicle life in Copenhagen 120 years ago when the house was built.

## ANNE JONSTRUP SIMONSEN



Conservator of fine arts Anne Jonstrup Simonsen holds a master's degree from the Royal Danish Academy of Arts, specialising in 17th century colours in interior and decoration. She has worked with architectural paint research in historic and preserved houses of all eras, as well as with art in architecture. Recently, she finished one of her biggest projects to date: the restoration of the Museum of Copenhagen. Anne is also the owner of Copenhagen Conservator, which specialises in preservation of art and historic architecture.

[koebenhavnskonservator.dk](http://koebenhavnskonservator.dk)  
[cphmuseum.kk.dk](http://cphmuseum.kk.dk)



Elegantly matched: the colour of the woodwork and the walls connect the richly decorated ceiling, checkerboard marble floor and red marble plinth on the first floor landing. When the Museum of Copenhagen was to move to its current address on Stormgade 18 in central Copenhagen, Anne Jonstrup Simonsen was asked to carry out archaeological paint research and use it as a starting point for a new colour scheme. She began with a large investigation of the entire house. The original and spectacular dark colour scheme created by the architect Hans J. Holm in 1893-94 was highly typical of the time and borrows from the colours of the Italian Renaissance.





The office of the museum's chief of staff. Here, the walls are painted in a caput mortuum colour that is found in several places in the house.







Detail of the ceiling motif repeated throughout the house. The decoration is meant to create the illusion of murals from Italian Renaissance palaces in secco and fresco techniques.

“DURING SECONDARY SCHOOL when my dreams for the future were taking form, I thought I was going to be a painter. Then a restoration architect. Then an art historian. But during the long summer holidays, I worked as a custodian at Skagen’s Museum in Northern Jutland, where I happened to meet a conservator trainee who was to analyse P.S. Krøyer’s drawings and painting techniques. I was deeply intrigued and knew that this was how I wanted to work with art.”

“I AM A COLOUR ARCHAEOLOGIST – or colour detective, if you will. When I investigate the oldest paint layers of a space or surface, they rarely look the same as when they were painted. Wear and age have left their marks, often changed by the later paint layers. Therefore, the paint layers must be identified and analysed, either chemically or optically under a microscope before further process.”

“KNOWLEDGE of historical painting techniques and materials is the key element in my work with art and architecture. I always do my very best to find the truth about the original appearance of a given interior and its surfaces. When was it created? Where did it belong in society? This is of great importance to the interpretation and restoration of the work. So, the task of colouring is to understand the history of a space. It is important that I understand the intention, the ideal and the thoughts behind the previous colour scheme. Otherwise, there is no story.”

“THE COLOUR SCHEME that I reveal makes the spaces appear as the architect intended from the start. Often, I find a kind of hierarchy in the colours. For instance, you discover the foot panel is darker than the doorframe, or walls that are divided into two by colours. Often, that has been done because it suits the architecture’s proportions and highlights and balances important elements of the room.”

“MY COLOUR ARCHIVE is where I collect the colours and pigments that I have registered during my work in this field. I often go there to see if I have found similar pigments in the past or if new pigments can be added to the collection. The colour archive becomes even more varied and rich over time and contributes to an important knowledge and insight into the use of interior colours through history.”

“HISTORICALLY, the primary function of colours has been to imitate materials such as stone, marble, wood, soft velvet or precious metal. The meaning of colours has played an important role in all strata of society, and has been used far more creatively than today. It was natural for architects to create entire projects including form and colour. Last year, I examined the Danish artist Kai Nielsen’s studio in Ordrup just north of Copenhagen where it was quite clear that the architect had sketched the exterior colours from the bricks into the house and adapted the rooms to the exterior colours.”



The earthy ochre is one of the most traditional and historic colours, in use since ancient times. The choice of yellow for the large hall was probably to emphasise the golden details of the beamed ceiling.







From the entrance, stairs lead up to the first central room where the main staircase begins. The green walls mimic the colour of the leaves on the ceiling; an earthy green hue that dates back to ancient times.

Layers of time are revealed in the hall, beginning with the oldest paint colours from the bottom and the most recent on top. The woodwork has almost always been light grey while the walls have been painted yellow for three periods and since then white. Showcasing the building's colour chronology, it also tells us how the past is often adapted to the present.



Stairwell with the late artist Agnes Slott-Møller's beautiful glass mosaic that reveals figurative stories about the original purpose of the building: the protection of children who had lost their parents. The red colour used here is a classic oxide red.



"IT WOULD BE GREAT if more architects dared to think colours into architecture or let artists be a natural part of the process. Colours provide tranquillity and softness as opposed to white surfaces, which are hard and sharp."

"TODAY THE USE OF COLOUR reflects fashion in general. We are more concerned with what emotional moods a colour can evoke. When you look at a colour chart and study the names that the manufacturers give the colours, they speak of emotions and not of what the colour actually consists of. Who wouldn't like to paint their bedroom 'tidal blue' or 'harmonious blue'."

"TIME HAS SHOWN that colour preferences change – fashion always has – and we must continue with that. There is no right or wrong in the choice of colours and it is important to make experiments using different colours and materials. We benefit from the advantage that almost all colours are available, and we can pretty much get everything we want. That was not the case 300 years ago, and it is a huge gift that one must take advantage of and enjoy."