



Background material

New expectations for embassies

The story of House of Sweden began several decades ago. The Swedish National Property Board (SFV) and its predecessor, the Royal Swedish Building Preservation Board [*Kungliga Byggnadsvårdsstyrelsen*] had long sought a good long-term solution for a new embassy in Washington.

There were a number of potential sites, and the lot on which House of Sweden currently sits was a candidate as far back as 1997, but the timing wasn't right for the project, and the plans to build an embassy on the Potomac were shelved.

The embassy in Washington is one of Sweden's biggest and most important diplomatic missions anywhere in the entire world. It employs over 50 people, under the direction of the Swedish ambassador, Gunnar Lund. The embassy's last address was at the corner of 15th and M streets, but the Swedish mission has moved several times over the years. The effort to find a good long-term solution had been under way with various levels of intensity since the Swedish parliament's decision in the 1960s to procure property for a Swedish building.

New expectations for future embassies

The expectations for a Swedish embassy have changed in recent years, both in terms of the building's architectural elements and the embassy's mission. The Swedish idiom was seldom given priority in the past. Swedish embassies have often been housed in anonymous buildings, sometimes shared with other organizations under the same roof. This was the case in Washington as well.

In 1998 the Swedish government passed an architecture bill that lent support to the notion that a Swedish embassy building's exterior and interior design also represents the country. The new guidelines emphasize that buildings housing Swedish representatives abroad should show what Sweden is capable of in terms of architecture, form, and design. Quite simply, a modern Swedish embassy should reflect what Sweden stands for, show what Swedish architects are capable of designing and, preferably, be built from materials that reflect Swedish roots and traditions.

The mission of the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs has also been expanded: a modern Swedish embassy must also play an active role in the endeavor to create favorable conditions for the Swedish business community and cultural contacts.

A new chance to acquire the dream property

Another opportunity to acquire the highly desirable lot on the Potomac presented itself in 2002. Acting quickly, SFV managed to sign an option and preliminary lease with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs. In June 2002 SFV announced an architecture competition.

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By that time SFV had signed an agreement with an American developer to lease part of the intended construction on the lot in Georgetown, on Washington Harbor, but also negotiated the right to design it with Swedish architecture: an entirely new kind of embassy was to be built.

A new concept is born

SFV has been involved in House of Sweden since 1997, and developed the “House of Sweden” concept in close cooperation with the Swedish Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

Jan Thews, the project manager for House of Sweden at SFV, has been with the project from the very start.



“When I started at SFV, the embassy in Tokyo had just been finished, and it was a successful combination of apartments and offices,” says Jan Thews. “That was followed by the Nordic embassy complex in Berlin – a landmark that brings in over 90,000 visitors each year on the strength of its buildings alone. It became a dream of those of us involved to do something similar in the world’s most important capital, Washington DC.”

“We made an attempt in 1997, but the timing wasn’t right. Only after we had aroused interest in the architecture of embassy buildings, in part through our exhibitions and books, and after the government had formulated its architecture program, did we again get the green light. We got lucky: the same site was available once again, and the developer was under time pressure, which led to a favorable agreement.”

A unique concept for fostering dialogue

For the first time, a House of Sweden would be built abroad, with the Swedish embassy and Swedish business community housed together under the same roof. The building represents a new Swedish arena in the USA. It is a different kind of embassy building, housing embassy offices, 19 apartments and an event center. House of Sweden offers a unique opportunity to live, work and entertain in a creative and vital building.

“An embassy used to be just an embassy, or rather an office,” says Jan Thews.

“Now it has become an arena for coordinating our forces in the interests of a common goal: to elevate Sweden’s profile. The embassy will help to build



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relationships on behalf of Swedish business, tourism, culture and the arts. Supporting such an effort takes more than just an office, it requires an arena in which various forces can be marshaled. Our vision is to create a new landmark in Washington DC, an outstanding platform for Sweden, the Swedish business community, and Swedish culture, arts and diplomacy.

For more information and pictures, visit: www.sfv.se/houseofsweden

Or: www.houseofsweden.com

The architecture competition

SFV announced the architecture competition in June 2002. The complex contest assignment included creating an atmosphere of openness and transparency, a unique quality for an embassy building. The building was also to contain more public areas so that seminars and exhibitions could be held. There were also to be two floors of residential apartments.

The winners: Gert Wingårdh and Tomas Hansen

Gert Wingårdh's victory in the architecture competition to design the Swedish embassy in Berlin, which was completed in 1999, became something of a signpost to a new era. Swedish architecture with Swedish materials was a concept that aroused a level of interest that many found amazing. 90,000 people visited the new Berlin embassy in its very first year.

In 2004 it was clear that Gert Wingårdh, this time with his colleague, Tomas Hansen, had designed the winning proposal for the new embassy in Washington. Gert Wingårdh is not alone in having designed more than one embassy, but he is the first to have done so after winning two architecture competitions. The jury found that their proposal was clearly the best of the five submitted in the competition.

"The proposal is beautifully shaped and composed, with nicely balanced facades. It represents a sound Swedish architectural tradition that uses simple means and deliberate lighting to create an architecture that is rich in the experiences it provides, yet still refined.

(Excerpt from the jury's explanatory statement)

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The various parts of the building – a tour

1. Entryway and exhibition level

The main entrance from 30th street is designed as a narrow passageway, a cubical glass space in which artist Ingegerd Råman reflects the building's contact with the Potomac by letting water slowly undulate across the insides of the entry walls.

The first thing the visitor encounters is the "conciierge counter." There is a round reception area in white glass and black cast material reminiscent of granite. This black/white theme recurs throughout the building. Working with two materials or two sensory expressions, e.g. dull/shiny, wood/glass or black/white is one of the distinguishing features of Gert Wingårdh's work.

At the conciierge counter there are Swedish-speaking staffers who, in addition to welcoming visitors and assisting with exhibitions, are available to the tenants, who can quickly and easily get help with anything from catering and theater tickets to extra cleaning services. The conciierge functions as a service center at the heart of the building.

As you approach the embassy section, you encounter Ingegerd Råman's artistic glasswork, which makes up the wall leading to the embassy entrance. The aquatic theme from the main entryway is repeated, here in the form of rime frost. The door to the embassy section, with its organically crafted wooden handle, stands open when the embassy is receiving visitors, a clear sign of openness and hospitality. The embassy has its own reception area, and even though most of the work is done one floor above, there are some practical support functions on the entry floor. For instance, you can make passport arrangements and conduct interviews here.

The large exhibition hall on the entry level overlooks the Potomac on one side and Rock Creek on the other. The hall is ingeniously designed with sliding partitions in the corners, so that vehicles and large objects can be rolled in. The Ministry for Foreign Affairs will begin putting on exhibitions in the fall of 2006. Like the event center, the

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exhibition hall, which is called Anna Lindh Hall after the sitting Foreign Minister when the decision to build the embassy was made, is available for rent by anyone who would like to use it. It is hard to imagine a brighter or more beautiful setting.

2. Conference center

One floor below lies the conference center. Here the visitor is greeted by a large stone slab that stands in a black granite-lined pond spreading out toward the leafy greenery from Rock Creek outside. Artist Ingegerd Råman has conceived the pond as a metaphor for a Swedish tarn, and has placed seven black iced glass rods in a straight line, just below the water's surface. When the light reflects off them, it is easy to make associations with floating ice floes and Nordic climes.

The sitting area next to the pond is furnished with pieces by Swedish architect and furniture designer Bruno Mathsson. He was himself a glasshouse architect back in the 1950s, and would certainly have appreciated House of Sweden.

The conference center contains five conference rooms that are named accordingly: One, Two, Three, Four and Five, along with a large multipurpose room, Alfred Nobel Hall, which can be adapted to meet a wide range of needs. It is actually a fairly simple room – a black box that is given life by the content with which it is filled. It can serve as an exquisite dining facility for up to 120 dinner guests, or as a setting for an exhibition, concert, theatrical presentation or lecture.

Together with the exhibition hall on the entry level, the meeting rooms offer the best imaginable setting for informational meetings, entertaining and presentations. In front of conference rooms One and Two visitors encounter *Sverigebilden* [Images of Sweden], a cabinet containing 100 pictures that provide glimpses into what Sweden is and stands for. The work was created by architect Mikael Bergquist. The approaches taken in the pictures vary, and the themes may change over time, but common to all the images is that they convey some small aspect of the country of Sweden.

3. The embassy

The embassy in Washington is one of Sweden's biggest and most important diplomatic missions anywhere in the world, and more than 50 people work there.

Like the event center, the embassy comprises one and a half floors. The embassy is self-sufficient from a communication standpoint. From the lower level you can take either the interior staircase, which is covered with sound-absorbent maple paneling, or the elevator, which makes the premises accessible to the mobility impaired.

The egalitarian access to light is manifested in that nearly all the office workstations are located along the glazed facades, which are striking whether viewed from outside or within. If an open-plan solution should be preferred later on, the setup can easily be



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changed, but the embassy has chosen until further notice to organize itself based on these fairly small and standardized cubicles, which measure 2.4 meters across. White walls, white ceilings and wood floors. Nothing extravagant, but cozy and functional.

The embassy building has been well received in Washington by both the press and the local Commission of Fine Arts, whose members are appointed directly by the president. Some have said that this type of open embassy is what the Americans themselves should build, but cannot. Following the Second World War, the USA endeavored to manifest itself by being open, inviting and modern, everything that the Swedish embassy represents. But modern American embassies are instead usually large, closed-off buildings located a safe distance from everything else.

Despite its openness, the House of Sweden has the same level of security as other Swedish embassies, neither lower nor higher.

4. The residential floors

The idea of uniting the embassy, event center and corporate apartments under a single roof is unique to House of Sweden.

There are a total of 19 apartments, ten on the fourth floor and nine more on the fifth. Most of the apartments have one bedroom, while some have two. The smallest units measure 75 m², while the largest are 260 m².

It is easy to be won over by House of Sweden's geographical setting, but even though the lot may be termed exclusive, the apartments themselves are neither extravagant nor luxurious. The emphasis is instead on simplicity, clarity and functionality. In this way, they represent important elements of the Swedish tradition.

The apartments have wood floors, and all the woodwork is Swedish. For instance, the kitchens come from a woodworking facility in Vimmerby, Småland.

SFV has seen a great deal of interest in the corporate apartments. Volvo Group, Saab and Lars Thunell, vice president of the World Bank, are among those who have signed contracts, and negotiations are under way with many other interested parties. These include Swedish, Nordic and Baltic companies as well as private individuals with ties to such organizations. SFV believes that the House of Sweden concept will also interest Swedish companies who are in the process of expanding their operations in the US, as well as Swedish regional interests and industry organizations.

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5. Rooftop terrace

The rooftop terrace offers a fantastic view of Washington, and seats 200. It is intended mainly as a resource for the event center, and will be one of its most important features. It will certainly be a popular place to hold different types of receptions. Perhaps a presentation, or why not a cocktail party?

For more information and pictures, visit: www.sfv.se/houseofsweden

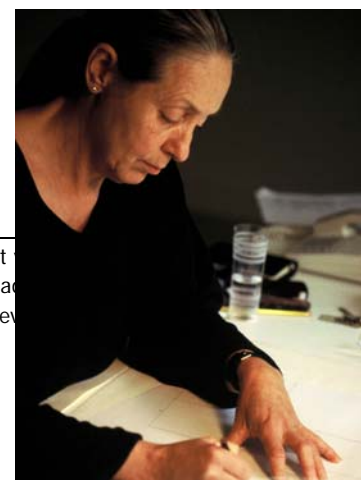
Or: www.houseofsweden.com

Ingegerd Råman's glass artwork "Water and Ice"

Swedish artist Ingegerd Råman was commissioned by the National Swedish Public Art Council to assume responsibility for the artistic decor in House of Sweden. Among other works, she has created a glass piece known as "Water and Ice" – a multi-part work of art that expresses associations with water and ice in the form of slowly running water, glass bearing frostwork patterns, and black granite – all key elements in the Swedish landscape.

The main entrance to House of Sweden is realized as a narrow passage, a small glass space in the shape of a cube, through which the visitors quickly pass. Here in this transparent room, Ingegerd Råman has chosen to let water flow in slow undulations on the inside of the glass walls of the entry. This gentle, motion along the waterwalls, scarcely perceptible, helps the visitor to perceive and grasp the totality of the work "March 6 a.m." more clearly

The large piece of glass decorated with frostwork is positioned precisely opposite one of the waterwalls. This treated glass surface is part of a larger glass wall that separates the open foyer from the building's more enclosed spaces. The "Ice Wall" provides a contrast to the flowing water, and can be likened to a frozen membrane that breaks when touched, never to form the previously seen patterns again. Between these walls lies a black granite floor with dull and



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shiny stripes, like a traditional Swedish rag carpet. Where the architect has utilized distinct black/white contrasts, Ingegerd has worked with different scales and modulations within a theme. From the far end of the open foyer a long staircase leads down to a black, granite-lined pool – a metaphor for the Swedish tarn. Here Ingegerd Råman has chosen to place seven black iced glass rods in a straight line, just below the surface of the water. The rods reflect light, and are more visible at certain angles, from which they can be perceived as ice floes.

Participants at the press seminar June 2, 2006

Bo Jonsson, Swedish National Property Board (SFV)

The Director-General of the National Property Board since 2003, Bo Jonsson came to SFV from the Swedish National Financial Management Authority, where he served as Director-General from 1998 to 2003. Prior to that he served as Director-General of the Swedish National Premises Agency from 1993 to 1998, and prior to that, he served as Undersecretary of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries from 1989 to 1991. Bo served in the Ministry of Finance's budget department for a long period, 1978 to 1989, prior to his stint at the Ministry of Agriculture, Food and Fisheries. Bo Jonsson holds a bachelor's degree in business economics, was educated at Stockholm University, and has extensive experience in government studies and reports.

Jan Thews, (SFV)

Jan Thews is the project manager for House of Sweden, and has worked at SFV since early 1993. He started out as property manager for SFV's foreign properties, with the Ministry for Foreign Affairs as the primary tenant, and has devoted his time exclusively to his project responsibilities for House of Sweden since October 1, 2004. Prior to working at SFV, he worked at Reman AB and, before that, at the Board of Public Building. There he was involved in project planning, and was responsible for many major renovation projects in downtown Stockholm. Jan began his career working in private architecture firms. Jan is an architect, educated at the Royal Swedish Institute of Technology in Stockholm, and is a member of the Swedish Association of Architects (SAR/MSA).



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Peter Ohrstedt, (SFV)

Peter Ohrstedt has worked at SFV since 1993. Peter has been responsible for study reports, organization and the initial phases of various SFV projects, including the new Naval Museum in Karlskrona, the new embassy in Berlin, the renovation of Vadstena Castle and reconstruction of its ramparts and towers, the new World Culture Museum in Göteborg, the new ambassador's residence in Pretoria, the new embassy in Bogota, the new embassy in Washington D.C./House of Sweden, and the study and architecture competition for the new Sami Parliament building in Kiruna.

Peter worked as a design architect at BS-Konsult and AOS from 1970 to 1984. He was CEO of AGORA Arkitekter from 1984 – 1991, and worked as a self-employed project manager from 1991 – 1993, before coming to SFV. Peter was trained in architecture at the Royal Swedish Institute of Technology, and is a member of the Swedish Association of Architects (SAR/MSA).

Ingegerd Råman, glass sculptor, Orrefors Glasbruk

Ingegerd Råman is one of Sweden's most renowned glass sculptors, and she currently works at Orrefors Glasbruk. In a career spanning nearly forty years, Ingegerd has received the "Outstanding Swedish Design" award 19 times for her work in both glass and ceramics. Ingegerd has had many shows, and her work can be seen at the Nationalmuseum in Stockholm, the Victoria & Albert Museum in London, the Danish Museum of Art and Design in Copenhagen, and the Corning Museum of Glass in the US, among others.

Ingegerd has had numerous public commissions, and has created many glass services for various clients, from the Moderna Museet restaurant to the Swedish Parliament. Ingegerd was trained at the University College of Arts, Crafts and Design in Stockholm and at Instituto Statale D'arte Per la Ceramica in Italy, and was named a professor by the Swedish government in 1955.

Gert Wingårdh, architect, Wingårdh Arkitektkontor

Gert Wingårdh has had his own architecture firm since 1977, and has won many prizes for his buildings. In 1988 he won the Kasper Sahlin prize for the "Öjared Executive Country Club." In 2001 he received SAR's residential prize for the best apartment building at the residential housing tradeshow in Malmö, Bo 01. That same year, after a Swedish public vote, Gert also took the prize for Best Modern Building for Universeum in Göteborg, as well as the Kasper Sahlin prize for the student union and auditorium at Chalmers University of Technology in Göteborg. In 2002 Gert won the ECSN European prize for best concrete building for the flight control tower at Arlanda Airport in Stockholm. In 2004 he won the Swedish Prize for Architecture in Wood for the Universeum in Göteborg. Gert has a degree in architecture from Chalmers University of Technology in Göteborg, and is a member of the Swedish Association of Architects (SAR/MSA).

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Gunilla Persson, Project Manager, Project Unit, SFV

Michael Blomqvist, Administrator, SFV

Lars Brandberg, Consultant, SFV

Gunilla Ekberg, General Manager, House of Sweden

About the building

The shining facade

House of Sweden's most striking distinguishing feature will likely be its spectacular shining facade. Architect Gert Wingårdh sought to capture the glow from Swedish woodchip lampshades when he created the backlit glass facades with their patterns of pressed wood. A soft, warm Nordic glow will emanate from House of Sweden, and the building's situation on the river will make the view from the bridges over the Potomac spectacular.

Building facts

Area: 7,500 m², divided into 5 floors, including a basement garage

Project management: Swedish National Property Board in cooperation with Forsen

Projekt (Stockholm) and Karchem Properties (Washington)

Architect: Gert Wingårdh, Wingårdh Arkitektkontor

Artistic design: Ingegerd Råman

Swedish subcontractors:

Glass facade: Skandinaviska Glassystem AB

Wooden floors: Kasthall

Interior woodwork: SSC Skellefteå AB

Interior wood paneling and wood panels in false ceilings: Gustafs

Stonework and terrace: Appari Sweden AB

Fixtures and fittings in corporate apartments, business event center and common areas: Senab

Many of the lighting fixtures are Swedish: Fagerhults belysning AB, Smedmarks & Co and Ecolux AB.

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Costs:

Building construction including lot, and fixtures/fittings: SEK 482 million

Rent for apartments: USD 40 – 60 USD/m², which is equivalent to SEK 3,000 – 5,000/m²

Service charges apply.

Apartment sizes: between 70 and 250 m²

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