

Labor of love: The lobby is finally receiving guests after a three-year revamp



HOMIE suite HOMIE

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Photographs by *Peter Cederling*

STOCKHOLM, SWEDEN *Six years in the making, Ett Hem is finally ready for guests – or, more accurately, roomers – to move into*

It's mid-May, and the voice on the other end of the phone is a mix of euphoria and sleep deprivation: "It is beyond even my wildest expectations!" The voice is that of Jeanette Mix. When she and her venture capitalist husband, Harald, bought a spacious town house in central Stockholm in 2006, they were planning to convert it into the sort of hotel Jeanette had always wanted to recommend to her out-of-town friends, but could never find. Neither of them could have foreseen how long and winding the road ahead would be, or just how suddenly or beautifully it would all come together.

Finally, after six years, the dream is a reality. Suddenly, eventually, there might be time for a lie-in.


These past few weeks, the eight hotel staff have been toiling from six in the morning till two the following morning to get everything ready. Interior designer Ilse Crawford and her team have been working alongside them, going over every millimeter, fixing and tweaking to perfection. Together, they made it – just about. A few details, some items of furniture, didn't make it in time, but Mix is still luxuriating in the success of this weekend's soft launch for assorted VIPs and their superlative-spouting entourages. Wound up by the shiny black grand piano in the lounge, they sung opera, made friends and ended up talking and drinking in the kitchen as you would at any other successful dinner party. The guests lingered in the easygoing comfort of the hotel during their visit to Stockholm, heading out into the courtyard only to eat breakfast in the sun. They even stayed a



day longer than planned, reluctant to return to their everyday lives.

"I'm overjoyed right now," Mix says.

A few days later, I stop outside a large, black iron gate on the slightly sloping, short cross street leading to the hotel. Peering through the gate, crowned with French lilies, I make out behind a stone wall the delicate glass silhouette of the orangery, a new



*Drawing board (from left):
Architect Anders Landström,
Jeanette Mix and designer Ilse
Crawford compare notes*

‘It’s wonderful to meet people who are so passionate. She [Crawford] is sooo picky’

addition to the original building of dark brown brick, wrought iron and copper. Before it was built, the orangery was a cause of concern in a neighborhood that is sensitive to noise and lots of bustle. But the architects at Anders Landström have given it a new dimension and energy rather than conform to what was there before.

I duck around the corner. The blue shed where the construction workers used to take their coffee break is gone, as is the heavy electric cable fed through a window to power all the tools, and all the surplus timber of various shapes and sizes that filled the courtyard, and the planks that screened off the area and gave it away as a building site.

The hotel on Sköldungagatan is called Ett Hem, Swedish for “A Home.” The name is a clear statement of ambition. The idea is for guests to see this as another home – where they really do feel at home, hopefully becoming a member of the family on future visits to Stockholm: sitting with a laptop working in the library, maybe on a presentation for colleagues; entertaining acquaintances in Hans Wegner’s “Papa Bear” chairs in front of the lounge’s beautiful forest-green tiled stove or sinking into a corner of the sofa at the bespoke Jack Trench brass bar with swing doors; eating something light at the generous Piet Hein Eek table in the orangery looking out over the courtyard sculpted by Swedish garden designer Ulf Nordfjell. If you get hungry in the middle of the night, you can tiptoe down to the kitchen and fix yourself something to eat. That’s fine. That’s the idea.

SCANORAMA HAS FOLLOWED THE CREATION of Ett Hem from the inside since last fall, just a fraction of the journey Mix has taken as budding hotelier. Nonetheless it is a fascinating metamor-

phosis, from the chaos of a building site and hundreds of discussions about how to solve challenges – yes, we might actually have to lift that huge cast-iron bathtub in through the window on the third floor... somehow – to the beautiful, harmonious interior now creating a feeling of, if not euphoria, at least a certain awe.

Ett Hem is on a hill in the peaceful Lärkstan neighborhood of central Stockholm, home to embassies and well-heeled Stockholmers. Despite its location between busy Valhallavägen and Birger Jarlsgatan, you are greeted by tranquillity and birdsong. The to-and-fro of the morning commute seems a world away. The buildings here are stately, solid, with imposing lobbies and big windows. You imagine big rooms with high ceilings and lots of light.

Ett Hem was built as a family home in 1910. When the Mixes acquired it, the building was used for offices. By that stage, the interior had been neglected, corrupted, with possibly practical but hardly sensitive changes and additions to the floor plan. Jeanette found the original blueprints and started work on restoring the building’s dignity.

“There was nothing left of it then. It was all broken and badly rebuilt,” says Mix, who studied hotel management in Switzerland. In Ett Hem she wanted to create a popular and profitable little hotel, a somewhat modest mission statement considering all the ambition invested here. It is also challenged by the media coverage, both within Sweden and abroad. The hype is in full swing. The blogs have been falling over themselves to pour praise on Ett Hem. International magazines are lining up to write about it. The important thing now is not to become overexposed.



Cleaning up their act. Handymen finish up in the guest rooms before leaving the building

Ett Hem is a one-off in a Stockholm that in terms of small luxury hotels with a distinct personality is a bit unimaginative – the only exceptions being the Lydmar Hotel (where Ett Hem’s manager Kenneth Hallström previously worked) and the Hotel Skeppsholmen.

The interior is partly the creation of Ilse Crawford, the London designer whose name virtually guarantees publicity and plaudits. Since she left her position as editor in chief at *Elle Decoration*, one of the world’s top interior design magazines, she has concentrated on her own company, Studioilse, creating interiors and concepts for restaurants, hotels – Babington House and Soho House, for example, were early trendsetters – and stores.

Crawford talks about successful interiors being a “frame for life,” not intrusive, noisy or demanding, but supportive and liberating. It is not the design that is the star of the show, but rather the people, their needs and feelings, and everything that flows from them. It is a philosophy that is described brilliantly in Crawford’s book *Home is Where the Heart Is* (Rizzoli). There is something about these Crawfordian interiors that fills you with well-being, and a sudden desire to smile (some people are moved to tears) as soon as you step into them. They are beautiful

and peaceful – sensual is perhaps the best word. At their heart is a sure grasp of beauty, materials and colors – various shades of beige and gray in Ett Hem’s case – topped off with discreet hints of humor and sexiness. She ties together different eras to create a timeless whole, a narrative where no detail is too small. You are not surrounded by inanimate objects but rather an aura that encourages you to relax, socialize, enjoy yourself – in a word, humanity.

At a guess, this stems from Crawford being a reflective and perceptive person as well as an esthetic perfectionist.

Mix discovered her work through Matsalen, Mathias Dahlgren’s restaurant at the Grand Hôtel. Mix liked what she saw and felt, made contact, and they came to an arrangement. Crawford got involved in the project unusually early, in 2008, and construction started in 2009.

“It was allowed to take the time it needed,” Mix says. “Building with quality is expensive in Sweden, so it was a big risk, if a calculated one. But we would never have been able to do it any other way. It was important that everything was done well, done honestly.”

Mix has worked with the best. She got Hedengrens bookstore to stock the library, turned to Jacksons for the right vintage fur-

Flash point: The neighbors grumbled when they got wind of the orangery, but the end result speaks for itself



niture, iconic Stockholm manufacturers Svenskt Tenn and Carl Malmsten for modern classics, London-based Jack Trench for pieces of furniture specially designed by Crawford, and so on. This group also includes foreman Håkan Theodorsson, the personification of confidence and know-how, who led the construction and managed up to 40 or so tradesmen.

“It is wonderful to meet these people who are so passionate about what they do,” Mix says.

Crawford has been involved in everything, from what sort of food is served, to the drape of the aprons in the kitchen, to the fabric for the shoeshine cloths in a drawer in each room.

“She is sooo picky,” says Mix with a smile.

When I sit down with Crawford on one of her many visits, she says: “A dancer might work 25 years to make everything look so simple.”

She is referring to the incredibly detailed work required to





*Man with the plans:
Foreman Håkan Theodorsson has
stripped Ett Hem down to the bone
and built it back up again*

make accommodation feel natural, uncomplicated. She has her style bible and microscopic attention to detail, and says there is an advantage to working on a project from a distance (London-Stockholm) because it has to be planned thoroughly. But, on the other hand, “Perfection isn’t sexy.”

There has to be scope for surprises, something skewed that doesn’t really match. Perhaps, she speculates, frame for life should be “elastic band for life.” We need structure, yes, but not so much that it leaves no room for growth. A frame can be too rigid, while an elastic band can stretch and change. But no matter which term you use, the important thing is to emphasize the word “life.” First you need to define the feeling you want to communicate, capture “the psyche of a place,” and imagine what will take place there.

Her reflections take in both the building and the times we live in.

Bearing in mind that Ett Hem is part of the Small Luxury Hotels of the World alliance, you can define luxury in different ways.

In recent weeks, an image of comedian Sacha Baron Cohen from his new film *The Dictator* keeps popping into my head, in which he is posing in the dictator’s dazzlingly white officer uniform, ludicrously inflated epaulets, chest covered with medals – and with a gilded tennis racket. That sort of luxury is all about status, showing off.

Luxury, according to Crawford and Ett Hem, is all about emphasizing the things that create a better quality of life, elevating the everyday to something special. Serving a good tea in a beautiful cup is more important than an enormous

‘You have to think outside the box for a small place like this’

breakfast buffet; a ceramic dish in which you can place your rings while you wash, and a thermos with fresh water instead of a carafe on the bedside table, shows consideration for people’s personal rituals.

“It’s important to think outside the normal rules for a small place like this,” Crawford says.

That applies to the staff too, she explains. Every detail about how the staff act has to be thought-through and work well, or else it all falls apart. Even though Ett Hem has only been open a few days, when we stay the night the staff strike an excellent balance between knowledgeable, attentive service and a humble, informal and personal approach.

ON MY PREVIOUS VISIT, it was still difficult to visualize the end result. Mix showed me around, explaining how a small hook would be put up here, a hanger there, a Gustavian mahogany desk in the reception, a couple of sleek Tobia Scarpa lounge chairs from the 1960s, a bespoke audiovisual cupboard, a vintage Vitsœ bookshelf overfilled with books, a specially designed long table with

Kaare Klint chairs, a wine rack in the passageway – not great quantities, changed often – so that guests can select the bottle they want. In the kitchen, a narrow table from the 1600s for breakfast: Swedish cold cuts and cheeses, just-baked bread, a couple of good jams, freshly pressed juice – and here we are in the orangery. I wonder how many thousands of decisions, big and small, have to be taken on such a journey.

And now everything is in place – suddenly. Twelve rooms that radiate brilliance; a modern hotel with a Scandinavian undertone. Mathsson, Mogensen and Hörlin-Holmquist meet Magistretti, Rietveld, and discoveries at Dutch flea markets. Humble meets cosmopolitan. The first thing that strikes me is the sensation of feeling good here, being comfortable. Then there’s the wood paneling, fishbone oak parquet floors, a bathroom entirely in marble, brass details, leaded windows – gorgeous materials. Later, you notice the details and the tactile qualities: the feel of turning on a light or grasping a door handle, the weight of the doors when they swing shut. Nothing left to chance.

“At first, I just thought about crawling into bed and channel-surfing,” says my girlfriend as we walk through the lounge. “But this is where you want to hang out, get comfortable in a corner of the sofa, leaf through a book and savor a good wine.”

It’s the same over a simple soup supper in the orangery, as a romantic rainstorm streaks the glass ceiling, and a long, peaceful breakfast with the morning paper and pastries in the kitchen.

Several days later, she says she still feels “elated.” It’s like she found her home. ✦

THE FACT SHEET

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Sköldungagatan 2, Stockholm, Sweden.

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Rooms from \$545.

www.ettthemstockholm.se

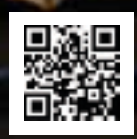
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