BYFO
Association of Owners of Historic Houses in Denmark

The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts
Schools of Architecture, Design and Conservation

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IN SEARCH OF IDENTITY

Anniversary gift to the former Danish West Indian Islands

A strong organization

With the Schools of Architecture in Aarhus and Copenhagen in the lead, this project is coordinated by the Association of Owners of Historic Houses in Denmark (BYFO) in collaboration with a number of strong partners with expertise in project management, architecture, history, cultural heritage and experience of cooperation with the US Virgin Islands. The steering committee consists of the following members:

- Birthe Iuel, Chairwoman BYFO
- Christoffer Harlang, Professor of Transformation, Cultural Heritage and Restoration, The Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts School of Architecture
- Mogens A. Morgen, Professor of Transformation of Architectural Heritage, Aarhus School of Architecture
- Bent Kolind, Senior advisor and architect MAA, The Danish Architects' Association
- Bo Manderup - Jensen, CEO
- Ulla Lunn, Architect MAA
- Oliver Harboe, Coordinator for Senator Myron D. Jackson, Legislature of the Virgin Islands

Opposite page: Arcade with tiles from Oeland in Sweden on St. Croix.
Photo: Birthe Iuel

In Search of Identity
2017 is the Centennial of the observance of Denmark's sale and transfer of the former Danish West Indian Islands to the United States.

"In Search of Identity" is a collaborative project between Denmark and the Virgin Islands of the United States, which is tangible and concrete, and provides a better understanding of our joint history, the good as well as the bad.

Based on the enslaved Africans' contributions and labor, great fortunes were made on sugar and trade in the period of almost 250 years under Danish colonial administration. Towns and buildings in Danish architectural style were erected, which to this date still bear witness to how splendid craftsmen could build in the old days. Denmark's Centennial gift should be the beginning of a partnership that holds our common destiny history and focus on the future.

Front page: Local dancers in front of the former Danish school in Frederiksted. Photo: Ulla Lunn
Opposite page: Entrance at Fort Christiansvaern on St. Croix. Photo: Birthe Iuel

Still strong roots in Denmark

The Virgin Islands of the United States are today an unincorporated Territory and not a state - which means that residents are unable to vote in the presidential election of the United States, and their representative in Congress is a non-voting member. The islands have their own governor with an elected Senate and are under the oversight of the U.S. Department of Interior. Today tourism, rum production and federal funding from the United States support the economy.

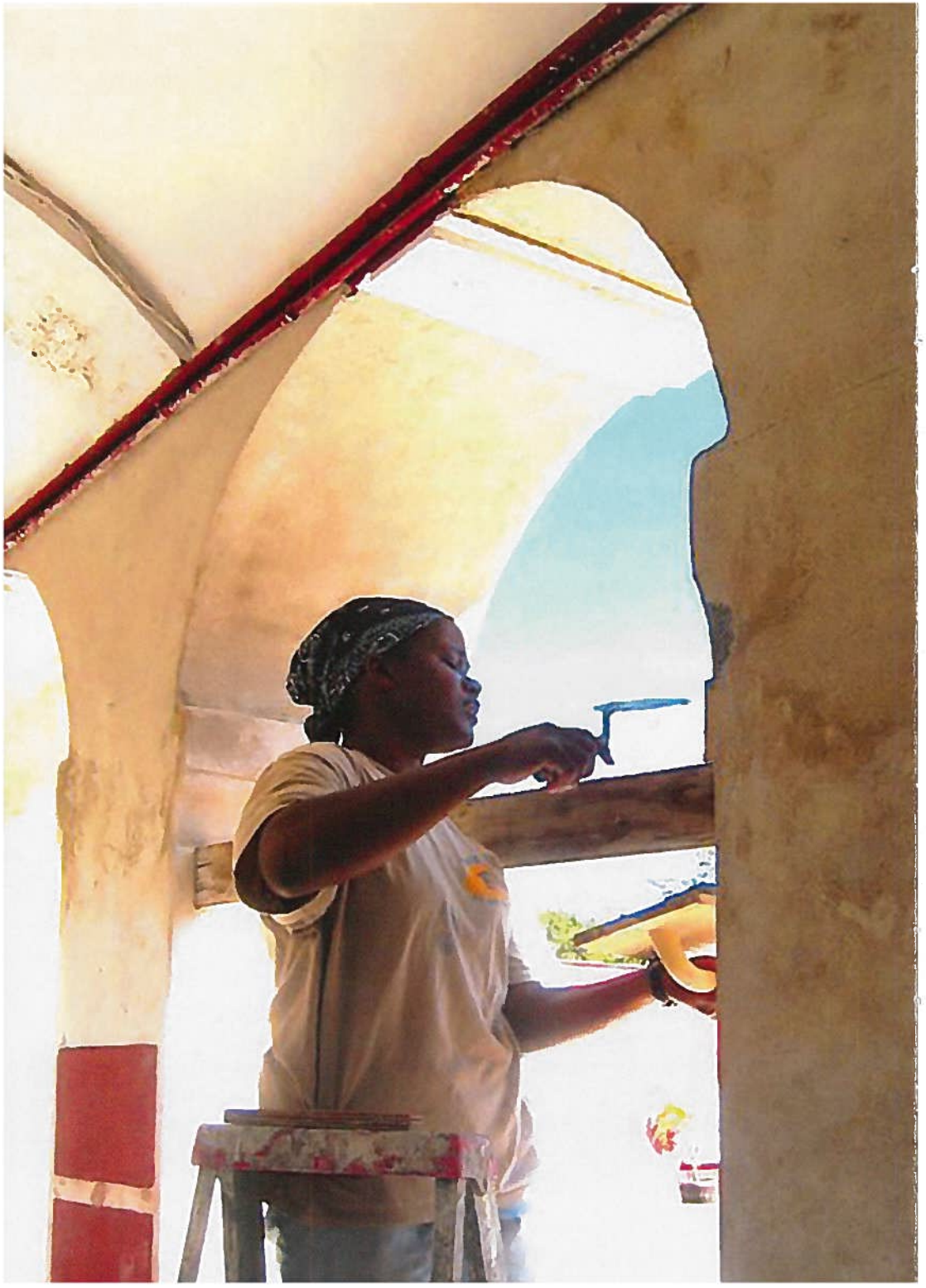
An increasing number of Danish tourists visit the islands – up to 25,000 guests annually. It is a good opportunity to tell the story of our common Danish West Indian history and cultural heritage. For better or worse, our shared history is present, but the future is crucial for the 150,000 people currently inhabiting the former Danish West Indian Islands. "In Search of Identity" with Danish participation will strengthen Danish-West Indian-American relations.

Opposite page: Government House in Christiansted on St. Croix.
Photo: Niels Bjerg

Former Danish buildings frame the project
With the Schools of Architecture in Copenhagen and Aarhus in the lead, the project petitions for funding to implement two projects. Within an estimated budget of $20 million, the proposal petitions for $10 million US dollars in Denmark from both government and private funds. A corresponding amount must be raised in the Virgin Islands of the United States.

The funds in part establish an academy of craftsmanship, architecture and cultural heritage on St. Croix, and in part create the islands' first National museum on St. Thomas. Both facilities should be designed in former Danish buildings, which will be renovated – the Danish barracks in Christiansted and the Danish military hospital in Charlotte Amalie. The future operation of the school and the museum must be handled and financed by the Virgin Islands of the United States.

Opposite page: Passageway between Jarvis School, the future National museum, and the neighboring building. Photo: Birthe Iuel



Danish building culture originates from the time on the islands
No other place outside of Denmark exists such large amounts of Danish building culture. If you would like to see how splendid craftsmen worked in the old days, the towns of Christiansted, Frederiksted, and Charlotte Amalie are a good place to start. In the early 1800s Charlotte Amalie was the second largest city in Denmark. The Danish West Indian cities have urban and street names in common with Danish cities, including Kongensgade, Dronningensgade, and Vimmelskaftsgade.

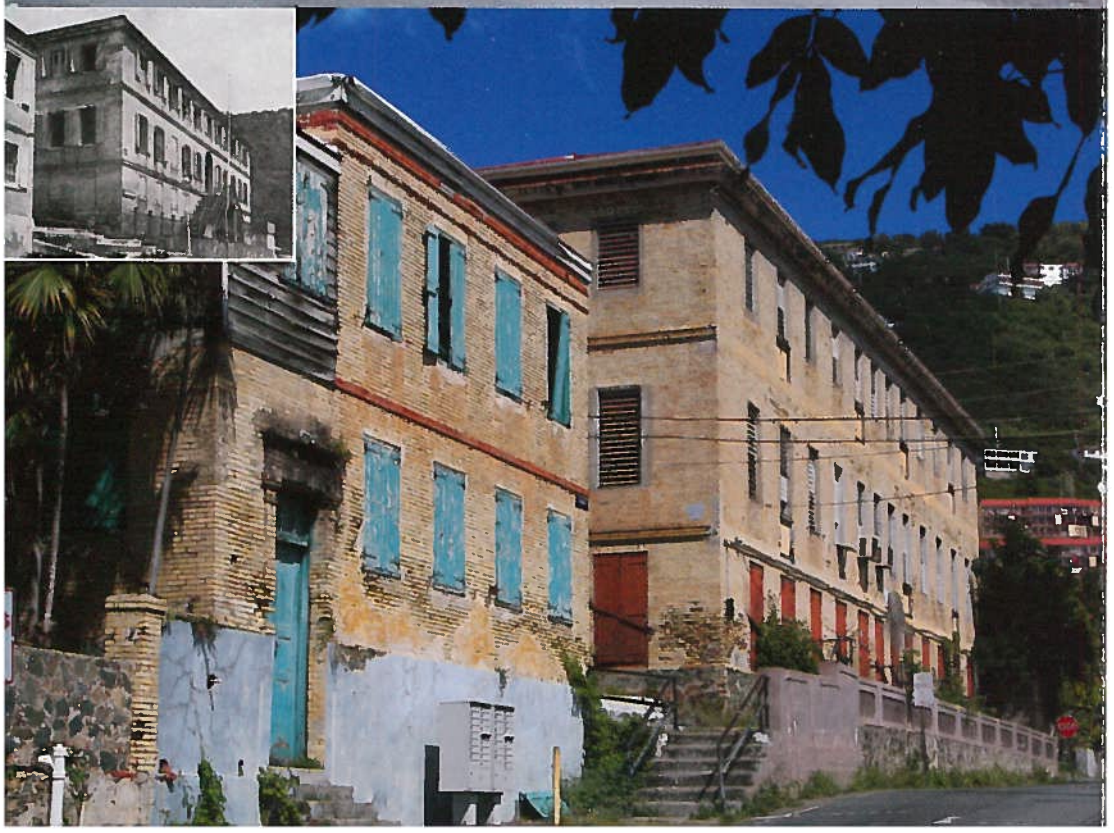
We share destiny
It is clear that the Danish West Indies have had a tremendous historical and economic importance for Denmark. It is reflected clearly in the many 1700s mansions in Copenhagen, which are the concrete, historical expression of the great fortunes that were earned on St. Thomas, St. Croix and St. John in the nearly 250 years during which they were Danish islands. There are still many West Indians with the names Petersen, Larsen, Jensen and Hansen - descendants of the plantation owners, soldiers, officers, officials and craftsmen who traveled from Denmark to control the colony. The tangible heritage on the islands tells the story. With this project, "In Search of Identity," we seek to communicate this story for an international audience and for ourselves.

Opposite page: Statue in Charlotte Amalie. King Christian IX was also King of the Westindies.
Photo: Niels Bjerg

A strong future of cooperation
"In Search of Identity" will come into existence in close cooperation with representatives from the Virgin Islands Legislature and Denmark. The project could be the start of a closer cooperation between the Virgin Islands and Denmark on culture, education, trade and economy.

Education, history and pride
This project's idea is that the restoration of two significant buildings from the Danish era will create the framework for future training of craftsmen and on that basis, foundation for a National museum. The islands urgently need good scholarship and an upgrade of both working with history, craftsmanship and dissemination. Therefore, the future students will function as the maintenance and dissemination team that will manage the two institutions in the long term.

Opposite page: Young apprentice bricklayer on St. Croix. Photo: Ulla Lunn



Exchange will create international cooperation
In 2016, the Schools of Architecture in Copenhagen and Aarhus will send two classes of students to St. Thomas and St. Croix to prepare the projects. They will make precise measurements that will be the foundation for further work on the buildings.

An academy of craftsmanship will be started in Christiansted on St. Croix, with the old Christiansted barracks creating the framework for the architecture, conservation and heritage dissemination, including a vocational school for the training of craftsmen, so future generations can then have the knowledge to take care of the buildings.

A National museum will be started in Charlotte Amalie on St. Thomas at the former J. Antonio Jarvis Elementary School, which was once the site of a historic Danish military hospital. The building will be restored and used as a learning center and an integral museum in cooperation with the Smithsonian Institution in Washington, D.C. The new museum will house collections from the Native American period to Columbus, colonial history under Danish administration, and the recent history and culture of the Virgin Islands of the United States.

Opposite page, top: The future Academy of Architecture and Crafts. Photo: Ulla Lunn
Opposite page, bottom: The future National museum. Photo: Niels Bjerg