

Bellevue Theater

Strandvejen 449-451, Klampenborg
1935-1937

The building comprises what was originally a summer theater and a side wing that originally held the Old Bellevue summer restaurant. This restaurant took the place of a summer inn of the same name that had been founded in the 19th century, but with Bellevue Inn had to make way for the expansion of Strandvejen in 1935.

The theater building is placed perpendicular to Strandvejen, with the main entrance across from what was then the Bellevue Beach Hotel, and ends towards the railway in the stage tower. The restaurant wing is attached to the theater building but turns away from Strandvejen in a soft, sweeping movement.

This arrangement makes room for what was originally the restaurant garden, while the plan refrains from directly miming the U-shape of the Bellavista complex. This maintains the autonomy of both complexes, while the relation between them is maintained, a relation that is emphasized by the buildings' height and scale and their white facades.

Jacobsen's justification for the sweeping movement was to give the restaurant the best possible view. The curved wing was a theme that Jacobsen also used in his building for the Novo pharmaceutical company that was finished in 1935, the same year the proposal for Bellevue Theater was drawn up. The theater and restaurant were completed in 1937.

The stage tower is the fundamental, stable element around which the building grows, the tallest element and the one with the thickest walls. It is a basic volume, regular in plan, right-angled and squared off.

On ground level, a softly rounded volume holding the foyer and cloakrooms for actors and audience encloses and extends from the stage tower, like two arms reaching out towards the Sound in a gently opening movement. Between the two arms emerges a slightly conical or trapezoid auditorium, delimited towards the Sound

and main entrance by the lobby, stretching from one arm to the other as a gently curved, transverse buffer zone. After the two gently curved partitions that delimit the lobby lengthwise comes a third that curves the opposite way: the ground floor's embracing, concave facade. This second and concluding transverse zone, which in the plan corresponds to the profile of a concave lens, contains the porch and two kiosks.

Three categories of walls were used: the orthogonal wall of the stage tower (the thickest), the softly rounded wall that delimits the cloakroom and foyer (the "wrapping"), and the transverse partitions (the thinnest). The first constitutes space and mass, with clear inner and outer sides, while the third serves purely to separate. And finally, there is the wall that surrounds the volume of the "wrapping," which, as it breaks through the facade's purely partitive walls, changes status in a single movement from outer to inner wall. It consequently contributes to an experience that the exterior and interior fold together in the auditorium, an experience intensified by the fact that part of the ceiling in the auditorium can be opened.

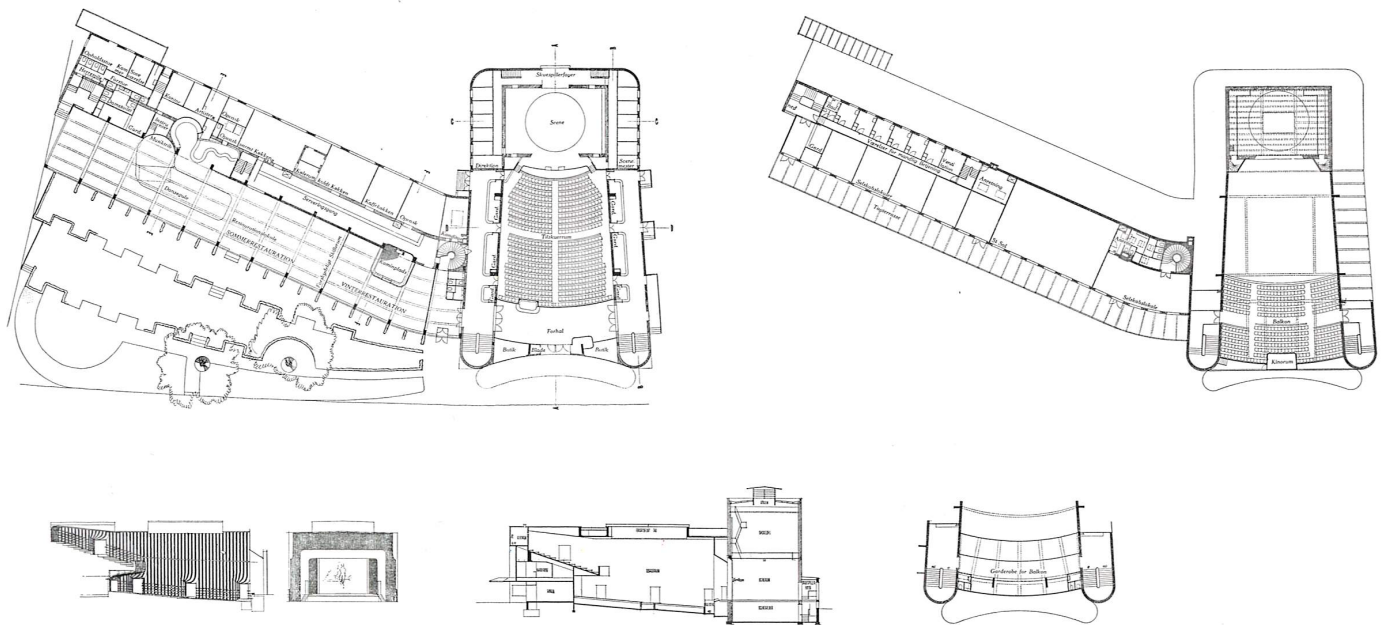
On the second-story level, where part of the volume of the "wrapping" has been eliminated, in a manner of speaking, and turned into a roof, this wall maintains its fluctuation between inner and outer. What is the outer side in the auditorium is the inner side in the stairwell, after which it once again becomes the outer wall in the restaurant wing and, after its only sharp turn, the facade for the restaurant's recessed upper level. The wall that in the theater on the first floor was purely partitive now changes character as it delimits volume.

This wall articulates not only the ground floor's inclusion of the Sound's exterior spaces in the auditorium, but now, in a direct interweaving, also the inclusion of the exterior space of the landscape in the roof terrace and stairwells.

Turning the restaurant wing away from Strandvejen signals this interweaving on a larger scale, on the level of the site plan, since the two triangular recessions produced by this diagonal position in a manner of speaking wedge the spaces of the terrain in the back and the beach into one another, in fact interweave them.



Left: Bellevue, 1996. (Photo: K.V.)
Facing page, top: Contemporary
photo across Strandvejen. (KAB)
Bottom: Plans and section, 1:1000.





Also on a smaller scale, inside the building, a kind of interweaving is signaled in the way in which the bandstand cuts into the kitchen facilities and protrudes into the restaurant.

ROUNDINGS AND CURVES

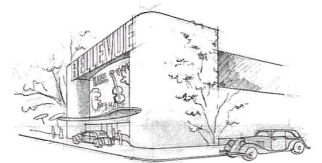
The plan also introduces the roundings, curves, and trapezoid forms that characterize several of Jacobsen's projects up to and including Århus City Hall. Tentative free curves were found first and foremost in the bar's cave-like cuts into the kitchen area behind and the serpentine bar, while the entrance to the theater and the lobby are characterized by soft circular curves.

The theater's symmetrical facade itself is dominated by convex and concave curves to a degree that evokes comparisons to the church facades of the Baroque. At the risk of taking the comparison too far, we can say that the facade of the Bellevue Theater, like that of Borromini's San Carlo alle Quattro Fontane (San Carlino) in Rome, has three bays, and like San Carlino's facade, it demonstrates an interplay between convex and concave curves and surfaces. The facade elements that are concave on San Carlino, however, are convex on Bellevue, and vice versa. Another common feature is that the facade of the center bay changes from convex to concave, or vice versa from the bottom up. San Carlino's cornice has become Bellevue's corbeled baldachin and the medallion at the top has become the sign on Bellevue's facade that straightens out all the curves as it meets the horizon.

Like Borromini's San Carlino, Jacobsen's facade also speaks of the contraction and expansion of space, of the wall as a fluttering membrane between inside and out. And what we call the wall of the "wrapping," with its niches and bulges and smooth transitions between inner and outer, is an expression of a spatial dynamics that has an affinity to the spatial concept of the Baroque.

The motif of two circular stair towers, flanking the symmetrical facade, as well as the entrance's design and the auditorium's frame construction, seem to have been influenced by the model factory by Walter Gropius and Adolf Meyer at the Werkbund exhibition in 1914.

But the facade of the Bellevue Theater is first and foremost itself a stage – with the billboard as a curtain. Or actually, the theater has not only a proscenium, but also a "presceniun," a sluice or gateway.



Top left: Section of the theater's facade. (Photo: K.V.)

Above: Sketch, c. 1935 (KAB)

Facing page, top: The facade of the former restaurant wing, now with apartments (Photo: Jens Lindhe), **middle:** Evening photos of the facade, late 1930s (KAB), **bottom:** The theater's northern corner seen facing south, along Strandvejen. (KAB)



THE RESTAURANT

The restaurant was just over 60 m long and nearly 10 m wide, divided into summer and winter sections that could be separated by a sliding partition so that the summer restaurant, by far the larger of the two, could be closed off in winter. The main entrance was placed at the end of the wing, towards Bellevuevej and Bellavista. It also had access to the terrace and private dining rooms on the second story. At the other end of the wing was yet another entrance, oriented toward Strandvejen, with access to the theater's foyer.

Like the auditorium, the restaurant had a frame construction of reinforced concrete, while the rest of the building was traditional brickwork. The frames were visible in the ceiling and the facade on the Sound, and so were the lengthwise purlins in the ceiling. This was a construction that bears a conspicuous resemblance to the one used by Asplund in halls 2 and 26 at the Stockholm Exhibition. Glass sections with sliding windows were placed in frames in the facade on the Sound. There was access to the terrace from the center section.

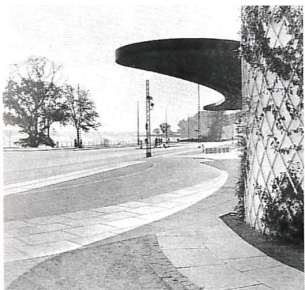
Thick bamboo poles were mounted on the long wall opposite the glass wall in the summer restaurant to hold green creepers. The wall was brightly illuminated from lamps built into a long metal reflector suspended from the ceiling. This indirect illumination was supplemented by the soft light from opal globes wrapped in yellow silk. Jacobsen took great care with the color and quality of the light here, something that the lamp designer and cultural critic Poul Henningsen naturally praised in his

review of the lighting at Bellevue. Henningsen used the same occasion, however, to criticize the colors: "Just as boldly as Arne Jacobsen uses form and line, he is 'highly cultivated' when it comes to colors; he is ever so refined and so colorless, and it is a rather a pity for future architecture in the entertainment business that it has to be so terribly pale."¹

The bandstand and fireplace cut into the long wall like niches, from which the stage with the dance floor and a sofa bench oriented towards the fireplace protruded into the restaurant. This motif might have been inspired by Asplund's reader's niche surrounded by benches in the fairy-tale room at the Stockholm City Library. The fireplace was intended for people on their way to the Deer Park for winter sports. Here in the winter restaurant, the long wall was clad with oak panels, while the double curvature of the fireplace niche itself was made of exposed Roman bricks.

The bar in the summer restaurant cut even farther into the kitchen area behind the long wall and was almost cave-like. The boldly curved bar was made of teak and its front of maple.

The tall, tubular-steel bar chairs seemed somewhat overgeared in their effort to be modern and "jazzy," and are primarily worth noticing because the organic contour of the backrest anticipates the free curves of such chairs as "The Ant" and "The Swan" from the 1950s. The frame seems to have come from an office chair manufactured by Fritz Hansens Eft.



A predecessor of "The Ant" on a technical level is the dining chair for the restaurant, one of Jacobsen's earliest experiments with steam-bent wood. But in contrast to the bar chair, it has quite a traditional and anonymous look, even considering the architecture. The chair was manufactured by Fritz Hansens Eft. for a number of years.

THE AUDITORIUM

As noted above, the auditorium has a reinforced-concrete frame construction, but with the frame placed outside the building so that it does not intrude on the fairly narrow, slightly conical room. Jacobsen himself noted, "because of the restaurant building's great length ... it was impossible to give the auditorium what was undoubtedly a far more correct fan shape instead of the present relatively long and narrow form."²

The auditorium's ceiling and long walls were covered with fire-resistant and sound-absorbing asbestos cloth, kept in place by thick bamboo poles. The cloth had white and grayish-blue stripes on the walls and was solid white on the ceiling. (The original cloth was replaced when the room was rebuilt in 1979.)

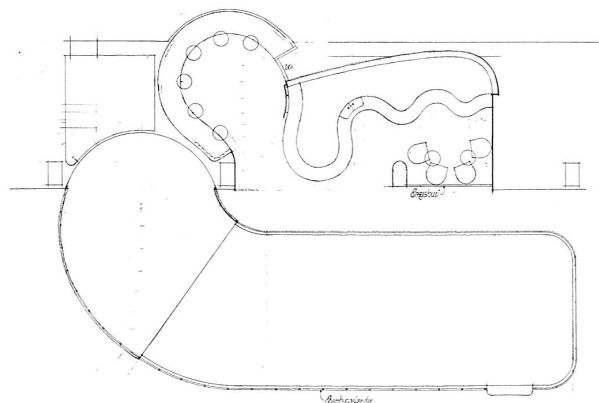
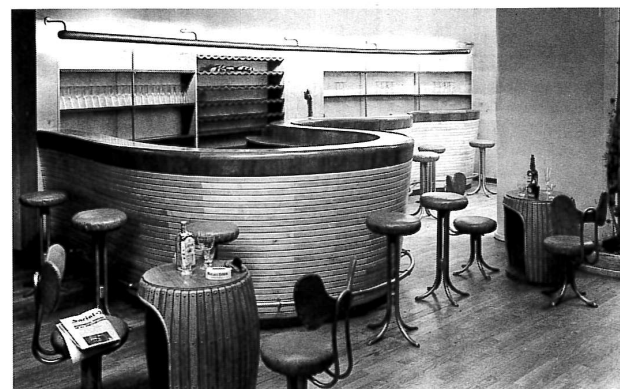
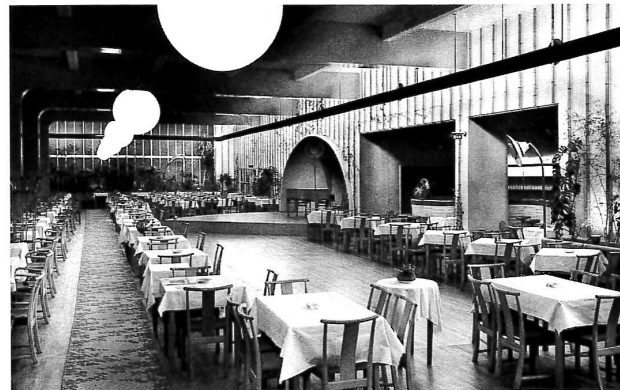
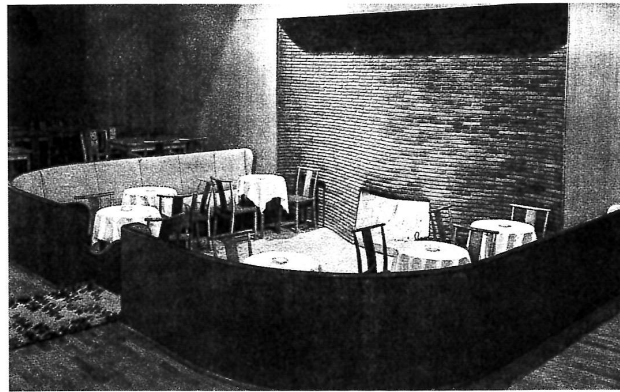
Rooms that were draped to give the illusion of "military" tents were found in Romantic Neo-Classicism, for example in the tent room of Schinkel's Charlottenhof, whose walls and ceiling were also draped with white-and-blue striped cloth. The auditorium's plans, however, also have an affinity to those of the Baroque: curved walls fixed by columns, in this case bamboo poles.

Edvard Thomsen, who apart from the tent felt that there was something Japanese about the room, quoted G. M. Bindesbøll for having said when he built his "Cottages" a bit farther north, "In the summer, people should live in tents."³

The center part of the ceiling could be pulled back with electric engines, as noted before, making it possible to play under open skies when weather permitted and also air out the room quickly and effectively. Thomsen also pointed out, "The frame of the opening in the ceiling brings to mind the coaming of a ship's hold," and continued, "Lightness, the Japanese, and ship's architecture are what Le Corbusier largely based his architecture upon. Bellevue is an example that it is not necessary to take motifs from Corbusier; it is much better to go to the sources – for someone called Arne Jacobsen."⁴

The wall of the stage and the balcony's curved front and undersides, which merge with the back wall, in a uniform, articulated surface or screen, are covered with rattan.

There is something Aaltoish about the character of the facing, the profile of the balcony, and the way in which it emerges from the back wall that might have been inspired by the auditorium of the library in Viipuri. The screen here, in contrast to Aalto's, has a double curvature and is moreover divided into sections or layers, a feature that did not appear until later in several of Aalto's room dividers. First and foremost, the screen must be seen as an early expression of Jacobsen's feel for the more freely formed, double-curved shell, a feel that first and foremost was expressed in the shell chairs of the 1950s.





Facing page: Photos of the restaurant.

From the top: The fireplace with sofa bench screening off the area, the restaurant proper with the outer wall on the left, the bar, and a plan of the bar. (all KAB)

This page: The ceiling of the auditorium could be pulled back in the summer. The stage curtain was painted by Svend Johansen. (KAB)



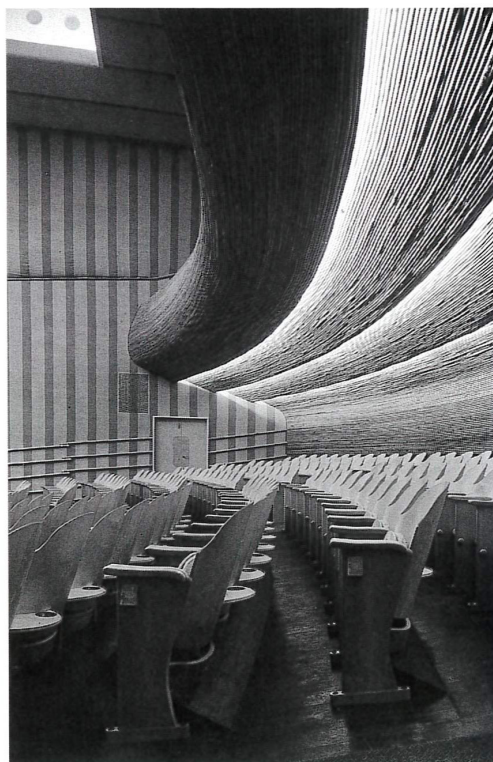
This page: The auditorium. (KAB)

Facing page: Arne Jacobsen's poster for the Bellevue Revue. (Danish Museum of Decorative Art)

The same can be said of his feel for the potentials of steam-bent plywood; the chairs in the auditorium can be viewed as a starting point. Especially with regard to the shell of the chair backs, they combine the use of free curves in both the plane and the elevation in the loveliest way. The inward and outward movement of the composite chair backs are echoed in their horizontal undulation. The interplay between the rows is like a reflection of the Sound's gentle waves.

Together with the rattan covering, the walls of striped cloth, and the ceiling that could be opened to the sky, the undulation of the chair backs helped bring the light, summery atmosphere from the beach into the theater, which was conceived specifically as a summer theater.

But this did not work. As early as 1938, it was transformed into a movie theater, and in 1952, most of the restaurant was closed and turned into apartments. In 1979, the balcony was closed and turned into a separate movie theater, which was later closed. Today, despite rebuildings and renovation, the auditorium looks the way it originally did, and is again used for theater performances.



Notes:

1. Poul Henningsen, "Belysningen i Gl. Bellevue og Bellevue Teatret," *Periodiske Meddelelser*, July 1936, p. 73.
2. Arne Jacobsen, *Bellevue Teater, Arkitekten M* (1937), p. 22.
3. Edvard Thomsen, "Offentligt Byggeri," *Moderne Dansk Boligkunst*, vol. II, ed. S. Bernadotte and J. Lehmlaursen (Odense: Skandinavisk Bogforlag, 1947), p. 275.
4. Ibid.

Bibliography:

Arkitekten M (1937), pp. 17-24.

Bibliography on the Bellevue area in general:

Johan Pedersen, *Arkitekten Arne Jacobsen* (Copenhagen: Arkitektens Forlag, 1954).
Bryggmästaren 16 (1937), pp. 166-175.
 Bo Bramsen, ed., *Strandvejen – før og nu* (Copenhagen: Palle Fogtdal, 1995), pp. 213-227.

