



Torsten Hild

An Unorthodox Approach to Design in Sweden

Profiled Firm: Torsten Hild

Location: Borås, Sweden

In 2008, Hild was awarded the coveted Golden Chair for his work on PO Medica, an educational center for brain and orthopedic surgeons. The award, bestowed by the Swedish Association of Architects, is Sweden's highest honor for interior architecture. Hild teaches Design Management and Design Methods at the University of Gothenburg and also in Borås.

Torsten Hild received his Master of Fine Arts(MFA) from the School of Design and Crafts at the University of Gothenburg's Department of Interior Architecture. In 1996, he and Eva formed 2Hild, and he began taking on design projects ranging from offices, shops, and restaurants, to furniture and lighting fixtures, to exhibits and graphic design. Hild also wrote articles for several design and architecture magazines, including Swedish publications Arkitekten (the Architect) and Arkitektur (Architecture) Forum, as well as FRAME, an international architecture/design magazine from the Netherlands.

Reimagining Safer Streets

In 2000, Sweden was appointed Chairman Nation in the European Union. Part of the country's responsibilities included managing several conferences for European ministers. Since Sweden's "Zero Vision" national traffic safety program was successfully working towards its goal of zero traffic fatalities, the chairmen asked Hild to create a unique exhibition that would showcase this prized program and hopefully inspire other nations to adopt a zero vision policy as well. The project took one and a half years from design to completion. Hild managed all aspects, from designing to managing to building the two dozen exhibits. "Of course using CAD was much more helpful than drawing by hand. That's another planet. It's not even the same universe. . . it would have required three or four more people. It saved me and the client time and money." Working with an old industrial site that sported 20 meter ceilings, Hild used Vectorworks® Architect software to design a bridge that wove through the entire space. Walking the floor, visitors met with many different types of traffic obstacles, just as they would on a street. When visitors took the bridge, they saw the solutions.

My inspiration is life itself and the ever-growing power of human will, dreams, and fantasies. I believe that most people can perform in the most surprisingly creative way, if they get the right support. Our built environment, our public spaces, and our interiors can be one of the most

important supports—and one of the most depressing obstacles. I prefer to make them surprisingly supportive.

— Torsten Hild, Principal Interior Architect, 2Hild

"The project was fun because they told me that this should be like nothing else—it should be completely new and interesting," explains Hild. He started by looking at past exhibits and asking the "Zero Vision" team what they envisioned when they thought about traffic accidents. Most conjured up images of smashed cars. Hild then turned this preconception on its head. "I said, 'No smashed cars,' since that's one of the first things you think about. . . then we will just confirm old thoughts," he says. Instead, Hild wanted to challenge those viewing the exhibit by creating fresh symbols, including a body bag displaying the words "50km." A nearby stretcher showed "30km," illustrating the difference in consequences for the two speeds. The project managers were skeptical about these controversial symbols, but accepted Hild's recommendations. Hild also placed telephone booths throughout the exhibit. When the phones rang, you could pick up the receiver to hear people who had lost relatives in car accidents relaying their stories. "It was really strong because they were authentic," Hild recalls. The entire effect of the exhibits was powerful. People remembered them.

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Making Surgery Softer

Hild won the prestigious Golden Chair Award in 2008 for his work for PO Medica (POM) in Borås. Right from the start, it was unlike anything he had ever done. The company, an educational center that trains surgeons for orthopedic and brain surgery, also sells biomedical screws, tubes, and other small pieces needed for these procedures. POM attracts world-renowned surgeons to teach and receive training, since it is one of the few places to offer this service. So the client stressed that it should be a very impressive place, noting "People who come here must never forget this place." It was an especially great challenge because there was no corresponding big budget.

Initially, Hild assumed that the company needed the space to show computer simulations of the products in use. When executives told him the demonstrations would take place using actual human brains, he started to visualize "people standing at heads." Once Hild realized that "of course there are companies that do this," he envisioned a very unique space that would reflect the important work being done but also soften the sterile feel.

His approach was innovative. Rather than creating smaller rooms within the large, old storage building that was provided, Hild designed two smaller buildings inside—one as a conference room and one as a workshop. Between the two, Hild created an open space for recreation, meals, and other private events. "It's compact and efficient, like a space station, with an interesting blend of high tech and humanity—very retro-space-feeling with unexpected material meetings," Hild explains. He used a mix of steel, wood, and linoleum throughout the space, along with wood elements to add a feeling of warmth. He also worked with several surgeons to make sure that it was ergonomically sound.

The entire project took about six months to design and six months to build. POM's business increased significantly once they began using this space, and the highest compliment came when their toughest competitor asked to lease the building for their own European sales staff meeting.

Tools of his Trade

To complete designs that continually raise the bar, Hild recommends using 3D whenever possible. "For me the big revolution in CAD drawing is working in 3D directly. So you're making the model from start and then you take out the information from the model. There is so much you can do with it. If you model in 3D from the start, it's faster than drawing in 2D, especially if you have the tools that Vectorworks has. I think that the tools are really terrific—they're very efficient," he says. Hild has been a Vectorworks user since 1989. "Vectorworks is essential for my work," he says. "It has a very low threshold for learning. It's been very easy to get started and to maintain the efficiency, even though I'm not at it every day. The basic tools are so good." He tends to use the wall tools, window tools, and other hybrid objects most often.

A Floor that Breathes

Hild recently completed work on the library used for both the high school and the town itself in Gislaved, Sweden. This building was in such bad shape that the small community was considering razing it and building it again from scratch. The ground slab was very wet, so the children's library section experienced moisture that crept up through the floors. The library turned to Hild for a recommendation. After some research, Hild ruled out ceramic tile due to its hardness. Instead, he recommended using the material that is used to make athletic tracks—a very unusual suggestion. It's a recycled rubber with ecological appeal and a very soft, porous surface that would allow the dampness to pass through. The library managers were extremely skeptical at first, but then changed their minds after a number of meetings. "In the end it was a success. It was soft, sound absorbing, and gave a nice walking comfort. The kids love it, and the librarians also like it, because it is kind to their knees and backs." Additionally, it's affordable and ecofriendly. The space is now "welcoming, modern, and highly accessible," says Hild.

A Different Approach Yields Better Results

Hild attributes much of his success to a philosophy that he learned long ago from a colleague. When planning for a space, it is imperative to spend time researching the company or organization that will inhabit this space and interviewing employees on many levels. Not only does Hild spend time with the highest-level decision makers, but he also spends time with their staff. From these two vantage points, he often sees very different perspectives of the company.

"When I start a project I ask the company, 'What are you doing, how do you work, what equipment do you use?' Often, you get the information top down and you get one picture of what is needed. If you go bottom up also and ask the people who are working in the specific situation, you get another picture. . . I then recommend that they make an internal consensus. Also, I try to encourage them not to only define technical and physical parameters; I'm also interested in communicative parameters, like their identity—who they are and what they want to communicate to their staff or customers," explains Hild. His colleague taught him to "see the difference between the official information and the unofficial information" since people often incorrectly describe how they actually work.

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Hild continues, "Often we get into really interesting discussions about aesthetical expressions. I don't want aesthetics to be separate from everythingelse; I want the aesthetics connected to the needs. Once I'm clear on their needs, demands, and expectations, I can come up with unorthodox and odd solutions. As long as I relate to their described needs they tend to agree on my design proposals. I find this most satisfying and rewarding. I really make a difference for the client on all levels—even beyond their office space—and I get the chance to express my creative talents in a way that gives my work a readable context, even if it's an odd idea."

Hild likes to take the road less traveled, and that has brought him much success.

