

# RUM

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OF DESIGN



More than three decades after cementing his place as one of the best ballet dancers in the world, Alexander Kølpin reigns as the unofficial hotelier maestro of Copenhagen, running three successful luxury hotels and, as of this year, Sanders Residence - an entirely unique apartment space in the heart of the Danish capital. Here, RUM chats to Alexander Kølpin about his enticing new venture and the importance of putting on a good show.

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S T A G I N G  
T H E  
E X T R A O R D I N A R Y

Showman: Alexander Kølpin approaches his hospitality business with the same mindset he utilised during his time at the Royal Danish Theatre, first as principal dancer at the Royal Danish Ballet and later as director of the annual summer ballet Copenhagen International Ballet. He refers to the running of a hotel as "every-day theatre" and considers his guests his audience. Sanders Residence, his newest venture, is a 220 square metre historic apartment situated in a neoclassical building from 1780.







The combined dining and conference room seats 14 people and features a large custom made table and chairs, while a woven rattan sideboard hides a screen for corporate use. The room's dark blue walls – Inchyra Blue No. 289 from Farrow & Ball – and burnt orange hues create a relaxed and inviting mood. The lamps are vintage.

SPEND FIVE MINUTES in the company of the magnetic Alexander Kølpin and it becomes clear that you are conversing with a natural-born showman. A showman whose peculiar career trajectory seems a marriage of his native Denmark's two greatest cultural exports: fairy tales and design aesthetics.

Indeed, there is something both whimsical and undeniably glamorous about a world-famous dancer from the Royal Danish Ballet who pivots into the role of a world-famous hotelier maestro of understated luxury, meticulously curating memorable experiences for guests with as much attention to detail as he afforded his dazzling stage productions. Theatre vernacular frequently colours the conversation as Alexander Kølpin talks about the parallels between his former world and the key to succeeding in the one he has inhabited for the past decade and a half developing the Kølpin Hotel's portfolio of exquisite properties.

There is the laidback yet scrumptiously stylish Hotel Sanders in Copenhagen – located, fittingly, across the street from Alexander Kølpin's old theatre haunt. Then, an hour's drive north of the city, travellers are spoiled for choice with the seaside resort Helenekilde Badehotel boasting gorgeous views and old-school charm, and the smaller, romantic Tisvildeleje Strandhotel nestled in what is commonly referred to as the Martha's Vineyard of Denmark (beloved by locals as well as Hollywood stars such as Jeremy Strong and Oscar Isaac, both of whom own holiday homes in the area). And the fourth jewel in Alexander Kølpin's crown?

The newly opened 220 square metre apartment Sanders Residence. A unique space with a correspondingly unique address at the very first registered property parcel in Copenhagen, known as Matrikel no. 1, and the setting of RUM's interview with Alexander Kølpin on a warm summer's day.

#### CLASSY CALM MEETS CROOKED CHARM

"There are plenty of fine apartments in Copenhagen that tourists and business travellers can rent, but the main difference between those properties and Sanders Residence is that Sanders Residence offers full service, from a private chef to housekeeping and a personal point of contact who will arrange everything from finding a babysitter to scheduling a massage," says Alexander Kølpin.

We are sitting in an elegant, pleasantly temperate corner living room that overlooks the busy Gothersgade and smaller Kronprinsessegade, as well as the park Kongens Have (The King's Garden) with the picturesque Rosenborg Castle at its centre. Outside, the weather seems to have drawn out the entire city, yet inside Sanders Residence all is quiet, courtesy of the new double-glazed windows that allow guests to take in the bustle without any of the accompanying noise.

Alexander Kølpin hopes to attract both business clients as well as families and speaks of the strengths of combining a workspace and state-of-the-art conference room with leisure facilities and *hygge* – that quintessential Danish ingredient of cosy togetherness.



A bottle green panel in Farrow & Ball's Beverly No. 310 frames the hall, connecting it to the kitchen and rooms at the back. The chest of drawers is a Danish antique, the mirror is a 1975 Danish antique and the bench is a custom design inspired by classic pieces. On the chest of drawers is a blue and white vase from G & C Interiors and a bowl from Alexander Kølpin's private home. The jute runner is from Tine K Home and the framed swan motif poster *De grønne svaner* is from PlakatCPH. The solid oak floors, which form a Hungarian Point chevron pattern, have been treated with pigmented oil.





As a contrast to the rest of the rooms, the kitchen features low ceilings, creating an intimate feeling. The dining table is custom made from oak and marble. The caramel leather Gesture dining chairs by Hans Olsen are from Warm Nordic, while the yellow pendant light is by Poul Henningsen. A large sisal rug under the table underscores the relaxed mood.

“It is true, the city has gone through a rapid transformation that has elevated it from provincial to international. I absolutely adore the Copenhagen of today”

ALEXANDER KØLPIN

Every piece of furniture has been designed by the hotelier himself and custom made to fit the timeless Sanders aesthetic – a blend of mid-century modern and contemporary Scandinavian design, dusted with nostalgic sprinkles of the Orient Express – while the bones of the apartment itself have been restored with great respect for the original features. To an extent, that is:

“Before we levelled the floors, office chairs would roll from one end of the apartment to the other. But we did not do away with all crooked angles – just have a look at the doorframes! Such quirks are part of the charm,” grins Alexander Kølpin, gesturing around the room.

He recounts how his passion for design and architecture dates back to early childhood:

“My mother was a fashion designer, and my father an architect, so I grew up watching them work with drawings and aesthetics, and different materials and ways of visualising design. Add to that my own, later experience in theatre and film, and you might say that today, I am very much harvesting ideas and inspiration from the garden I grew up in. A garden of culture, design and performance art.”

#### THE SURPRISING PIROUETTE

Alexander Kølpin was thirteen years old when he was accepted into “the Swiss watch mechanism that is the Royal Danish Ballet School” where he embarked on learning an incredibly complicated language of movement and expression. At 22, he advanced to principal dancer at the Royal Danish Ballet and before his 30th birthday, Alexander Kølpin had become known as one of the best dancers in the world. His ballet career also saw him take the stage for the Bêjart Ballet Lausanne in Switzerland as well as the legendary American dancer and choreographer Twyla Tharp in New York, and for no less than 25 years he served as the director of the annual summer ballet Copenhagen International Ballet, which Alexander Kølpin himself founded in 1991.

Later, at that inevitable but strange turn in a ballet dancer’s life when the sun sets on their stage careers as contemporaries in other professional fields are still greasing their wheels, Alexander Kølpin transitioned to working as an actor – appearing in, among others, a production of *The Full Monty* – determined to continue evolving his creative drive.

*What led you to enter into the world of hotels?*

“It was in 2008 and a bit of a happenstance. My father and a couple of his associates had bought what is now Helenekilde Badehotel because they thought it was such a beautiful building. They were leasing it to an operator to run as a hotel, but when that arrangement fell through I put my hand up and asked if I could have a go at it. It was an unconventional move, no doubt about it, but I was brought on, and for the next few years I worked both at the theatre, in film *and* with hotels – Helenekilde as well as Tisvildeleje Strandhotel. It was a steep learning curve and eventually something had to give. When the idea for Sanders was born in 2015, I realised I had to make a choice and invest 100 percent of myself, thus letting go of theatre and film. A place like Sanders you cannot run with your left hand while the right attempts to nurture a second career. Today, I’m very glad I made that decision.”

*You do not miss the theatre?*

“This is every-day theatre. We have a show on daily. My background has everything to do with how I approach working with hospitality as if I were setting up a stage production and drawing in audiences. It is a creative process, perfecting a product that is essentially a curated experience with a narrative in three acts:

In the first act, we make contact with the guest and engage in a dialogue about their stay. How do we tailor it to their express desires? What is the nature of the luxury we are presenting them with?

In the second act, the guest arrives to stay for a day, or ten, or even a whole year, as some of our guests have.

In the third act, the guest leaves but the dialogue continues as we aspire to one day welcome them back.





In order to create a sense of harmony and flow, Alexander Kolpin has worked with one colour scheme throughout. All of the floors are oiled oak. The porcelain sockets and switches are from Berker's Bauhaus-inspired range titled Serie 1930.

There is luxury in storytelling and as long as your narrative comes across as authentic, the guest – or the audience – will experience an equally authentic journey. This is why I put my trust in *feeling* before business. If the staging of the experience you offer is sound, success will follow.”

*Over the past 15 years, Copenhagen has seen a momentous revitalisation in gastronomy, culture and urban planning, and as a result hereof, the hospitality industry is flourishing. How do you continue to seduce and surprise visitors in such a crowded marketplace?*

“It is true, the city has gone through a rapid transformation that has elevated it from provincial to international. I absolutely adore the Copenhagen of today. Our gastronomy scene is outstanding, the harbour front is being utilised in so many innovative ways, and design is blooming – look at how the annual design festival *3daysofdesign*, which Sanders takes part in, has overtaken the fashion week in popularity! But I digress. How do we keep surprising guests, you ask? Why, by sticking to our narrative, of course. By always making sure that there is a direct correlation between what we promise and what we deliver. Our three hotels and now Sanders Residence as well are all as well-designed as the service and handling of guests are thorough.”

*What is the very best thing a guest can say to you?*

“Unlike the theatre where people applaud and then exit the venue, at a hotel you get to see your guests in the evening before they turn in, and in

the morning when they come down for breakfast. Hearing a guest say that you have brought them joy, that you have made them feel *good* – that is the best thing. That means you have touched your audience whether they came to work, to eat or to kiss. When you operate in the luxury segment of hospitality, saving a few quid on the bill is not at the top of travellers’ priorities. When, at the end of their stay, they get in the taxi to go to the airport, what matters is value for money. That said, at Sanders we have had guests express disappointment because our brand of luxury did not meet their expectations of being able to drag two oversized suitcases down the corridor, one in each hand. Some people do not appreciate the before-mentioned crooked charm of historic buildings, but in those few instances, we readily offer to help guests relocate to the hotel D’Angleterre instead. This is precisely why good, clear communication is so important in act 1. Sanders and Sanders Residence are nothing like your standard luxury hotels, they are *homey* – homey in high heels.”

*Rumour has it that Kolpin Hotels has been looking to expand internationally, namely in Zurich and Milan. Is that true?*

“There are a few sketches on the drawing board, but we are in no rush. We are looking at other destinations, too. *Maybe* we will add another property. Maybe. But all growth must be organic, or you will lose control of your limbs.” /



The dusty greige kitchen is made by a local Danish cabinetmaker and has been tailored to the historic and slightly wonky building. The kitchen island top, worktops and back splash are all Carrara marble and all of the fixtures are the Christiansborg design from Toni Copenhagen. The lamps are custom made by Alexander Kolpin in collaboration with a local blacksmith.



An attractive corner with a custom made armchair upholstered in textile from Circus 25, a framed poster from PlakatCPH titled *Takes Time to Pass* and walls painted in Farrow & Ball's Cardamom No. CB5.



Several pieces of furniture have been custom made for Sanders Residence, including the British-made sofa, envisioned as a colourful sitting room centrepiece and brought to life in an understated retro look with bullion fringe and bespoke patterned cushions for contrast. The rattan armchairs with soft cushions are also custom made, while the table is from local Copenhagen shop and café Beau Marché. The curtains are made from soft, orange corduroy draped with linen at the top. The wooden blinds add a further layer to the windows, dressing the interiors in a colonial-inspired mood. A striped carpet from Ege Tæpper adorns the floor. The graphic black and white *Frame* poster is from PlakatCPH.



The point of departure for the interiors was found in the meeting between 1970s glam and British eccentricity, forming a continuation of the style seen at Alexander Kolpin's Hotel Sanders, which is situated nearby. This inspiration is reflected in a mix of warm colours and patterns that repeat from room to room, such as in the bedroom, where the burgundy walls act as a backdrop for the bed's enormous headboard and the custom designed upholstered chairs and tables. The wall colour is Farrow & Ball's Etruscan Red No. 56. The Rosenberg Chandelier is from Akua Objects.



A glimpse into the room at the back, adorned with a poetic William Morris wallpaper. In the foreground is a vintage Danish chest of drawers and a spiral-footed table lamp from local interiors shop and café Beau Marché.



Classic limestone tiles from Sweden's Öland region preside in the bathroom alongside walls painted a warm yellow to complement the calm, earthy colours. On the wall are small artworks by the late artist Viktor IV. The sink is from Neoclassica, the tiered trolley is from Rowen & Wren and the smaller marble table with towels on top is titled A Table For Sanders and designed by Lind + Almond.