

Press release

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Foster + Partners create new home for Copenhagen's Indian elephants

Foster and Partners have revealed their designs for a major building project for Copenhagen Zoo a new Elephant House. Renowned for its herd of increasingly rare Indian, or Asian elephants, the Zoo urgently needs contemporary facilities to provide a more natural, relaxed and stimulating living environment for the animals, and to create better spaces from which to watch and enjoy them.

Giving onto separate outdoor areas for males and females (a division that is naturally adhered to by elephants in the wild, except when the cows are in oestrus) the new Elephant House will consist of two covered enclosures a smaller one for the bulls and a larger one for the main herd. The two enclosures will be embedded in the landscape and covered with light-weight glass domes, also unequal in size, that will rise, side by side, out of the earth. Their simple geometry and transparent, rounded forms will contrast with the angular facades of the original 1914 Elephant House nearby.

Running around and between the two domes, and unifying them into a single building, will be a broad terrace. From there, visitors will be able to view the elephants, either sheltering inside the building or roaming in the landscape around it. Beneath the terrace will be a ramped, internal promenade providing views into the two enclosures and a generous educational exhibition space. Also below the terrace will be support spaces for keepers, storage areas and a delivery zone for food.

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Foster and Partners design had to respond both to the needs of elephants and to those of their carers and visitors, and their first zoological building has led them to seek unique solutions to the needs of unusual clients in terms of security, maintenance, stimulation and comfort. The larger of the two new enclosures will, for the first time, enable female elephants in captivity to sleep together, as they would in the wild. The external landscape includes a dry riverbed with mud holes, and logs for the elephants to toss around, mimicking their natural habitat. One striking feature is the natural rubber flooring in the covered areas that, during winter, will be heated to keep the elephants feet in good condition.

Both economic and environmental considerations were priorities: the building will be naturally ventilated and rainwater will be recycled. While the glass domes will fill the spaces with daylight, the panes will be fritted to avoid unnecessary heat gain. Trees will be planted to provide extra shade in summer.

Copenhagen Zoo is set in a historic royal park. The new Elephant House will open up new vistas between the Zoo and the gardens of Fredericksberg Palace to the west. The handsome existing Elephant House, to the east, will be renovated for use as an education space and cafeteria.

Notes to Editors:

- The design for the Elephant House has been developed in collaboration with Buro Happold (structural and service engineers) Davis Langdon and Everest (cost consultant) and Stig L Andersson (landscape architects).
- Indian, or Asian elephants are the more endangered of the two elephant species. More easily tamed than the larger African elephants, have smaller ears, they have a

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more rounded back and a fourth toenail on their hind feet.

- The Copenhagen Indian elephant group is the best breeding group in Europe.
- The Director of the Copenhagen Zoo was inspired to approach Foster and Partners by the Great Court of the British Museum, which he felt had the brightness and friendliness to make it the perfect elephant house.

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