Homeness

Furniture and the role of interior designers
in ending homelessness

Jakob Carl Tangen

MFA Design

HDK-Valand, University of Gothenburg

May 2024

External support Cecilia Bergstedt

Mentors Thomas Laurien

Mattias Gunnarsson

Markus Bergström

Foreword 1
Abstract 2
Introduction 3
Purpose 5
Questions 5
Positioning 6
Methodology and Process 15
Contribution to practice 19
Discussion 42
Reference list 45

Foreword

Those who have been without a home have also been without objects and furniture that help carry memories and relationships to other people and places. Without a home and without things that carry our history, we risk losing a sense of who we are. Our identity then lacks the support of lived spaces that we have formed and influenced ourselves.

To have a home is to have rooms as witnesses to one's life. In this way, the home is a fundamental part of the creation and preservation of our identity. A home and its objects remind us of who we are. It takes time to feel at home. Slowly but surely, it is the repetitions, the reentrances and the creation of memories that weave together into a sense of home.

For those who have experience with homelessness the road to feeling at home in an apartment can be long and winding. The new rooms can be a reminder of what has been but was lost, or they can hold dreams of the future.

The things in your home are more or less your choice, depending on the circumstances. How do you go about putting your mark on the space? Which aspects of your personality should be highlighted, and which should be toned down? Which colors and materials give a good feeling, and which have the opposite effect? Why is this the case? What would add a sense of belonging to the home?

These questions, and many others, arose during meetings between designer Jakob Tangen and three people who were given Housing First apartments after being without homes for a long time. All three have lived in their apartments for some years and have dealt with both sadness and joy in them. They have begun to make their mark on a place that is their own, and the project has provided further opportunities for them to anchor themselves in their homes.

Throughout the process, tenants have had the opportunity to reflect on what characterizes their style, tastes, personality, and interests. What was initially formulated in exchanges of words and images, then took concrete form in three unique objects - designed and made by Jakob. These pieces of furniture are now in three homes as a materialization of memories, experiences and the meetings between Jakob and the participants. Something new, yet familiar, had moved into the homes.

Cecilia Bergstedt

Abstract

This project explores the impact of furniture design in the home-lives of individuals who have transitioned from homelessness to independent housing. With an ethnographic approach, the author engages with Housing First tenants through the process of designing furniture based on their preferences. The project contemplates the right to adequate housing in relationship to a personal sense of home and proposes a role for designers within the context of Housing First.

Introduction

A friend of mine once told me about his coffee cup. It isn't a very nice one by anyone's standards, not even my friend's. It's brown with a generic coffee cup-shape. A comic strip style cartoon of the inside of Noah's Ark covers one side. In the image's foreground, there are countless bunnies and the text "Day 39 on the Ark". Behind them stand two elephants. One of the elephants says to the other "I thought the limit was two."

My friend says that he feels something with this cup. He thinks it's ugly, but when his wife and kids are away, this is the cup he chooses to use. He tells of a time in his life when he lived in a second-hand apartment. The primary tenant had gone to live somewhere else for a period and sublet to my friend. When he moved in, the apartment was completely furnished with everything he needed. He says that for the entire time he lived there he didn't add or change a single thing, except for that cup.

It was given to him by someone for some insignificant reason. Yet overtime, the cup began to carry an emotion, a sense of something. Perhaps it was the loneliness of the time. Perhaps my friend learned something about himself during that period. Maybe the cup signified the many changes and movements within his life, both good and bad, during those formative years. It isn't clear what exactly it is with that cup, but he chooses it every time, and he feels something.

I interpret this feeling that my friend describes as a contribution to his sense of home. Objects play a big part in how we imprint ourselves onto the places we live. More so than the architecture that forms our private spaces, objects mark a place as belonging to someone in particular. When we move, much of what we own is brought to the next place. Objects in turn embody associations and memories from places, events and periods in our pasts. These memories and associations, among other things, likely play a role in forming what we generally think of as a sense of home.

It is a strange thing – this sense. It doesn't have to be bound to a place per se. It seems to be a complicated something that we carry with us; a sense of security and boundary; a connection to our background, our past. Even when I am away from my physical home I feel 'at home' because I sense that at that moment home is somewhere, and I'll eventually end up back there.

What happens, though, when people lose their home? What happens when they have nowhere to keep their things? Do they lose their sense of home as well? What does it take to get it back? These are the kinds

of questions Cecilia Bergstedt has been thinking about. Cecilia is a housing assistant for the Gothenburg City Mission's[1] Housing first[2] program,[3] meaning that Cecilia regularly meets with people that have been homeless long-term but are now living in their own apartments.

I have had the privilege of working with Cecilia for the duration of this thesis project. Together, we met with three of Cecilia's Housing First tenants to discuss the objects that furnish their homes. I pointed at things around the living rooms and asked the tenants about where the objects came from, what their significance is and how the space feels as a whole. I also gathered information about their taste in relation to colors and styles. All of this served as the basis for new objects, pieces of furniture that I then designed and made for the individual homes. The tenants decided on what type of furniture they would like me to make, and over the next few months I delivered these new objects and followed up with interviews and photographs.

The purpose of this project was to contemplate the significance of interior design, particularly furnishings, within the specific circumstances that the Housing First program creates. The aim is to examine a potential role for designers within Housing First, and the possibly unique and positive impact that an interior designer's skillset could have in these situations. This paper will describe the meetings I had with tenants, explain my thought process when designing for them, discuss the qualitative findings of the project and speculate on the potential future and implications for this particular role for designers.

We designers often think about meaningfulness in relationship to our creations. We sometimes talk about objects creating meaning for people. I think designers understand that objects can do something for people beyond function and aesthetics, but meaningfulness is often unclear, untestable, subjective, and subtle. Nonetheless, we know what it is and that it is there, but it can't simply be placed onto an object. All we can do is take care of the things we make and take care of the people who will receive them. The meaning of an object depends on the people around it.

[1]Göteborgs Kyrkliga Stadsmission, [website], http://www.stadsmissionen.org, (accessed 9 May 2024).

[2]Housing First Europe, *What is Housing First* [website], https://housingfirsteurope.eu/what-is-hf/a-beginners-guide-to-housing-first/, (accessed 19 January 2024).

[3] The Gothenburg City Mission is called Göteborgs Kyrkliga Stadsmission in Swedish, and Bostad Först is their Housing First program. For this paper they will be referred to by their English titles.

Purpose

The purpose of this project is to give an example of how designers can engage with Housing First programs and show the potential for a design role within the model. The aim is to observe tenants' reactions to a designer entering these situations and discuss the practical possibilities for creating such a role.

Questions

How could an interior designer support Housing First tenants' in creating a sense of home?

How might a design position within Housing First look practically?

Positioning

Housing First

The United Nations have agreed that adequate housing should be a basic human right. Here in Sweden, people have the right to live somewhere adequate.[4] However, 3221 people in Gothenburg were defined as homeless in 2022.[5] The city of Gothenburg uses the national social service's definition of homelessness which is divided into four different homelessness situations.[6]

These situations encompass people who have short-term solutions for housing, for example a friend's couch or a family member's guestroom. People who don't have access to the normal housing market and stay in long-term housing solutions like training apartments and communal contract apartments are also included in the definition. People who don't have a place to go when they are signed out of institutional housing like psychiatric hospitals and correctional facilities are considered homeless too. Those sleeping rough, outside or in public spaces, and the ones staying in overnight shelters and protected accommodations, are of course also considered homeless.[7]

The ultimate hope for any organization fighting homelessness is to get people into their very own living situations as a long-term, stable, self-motivated solution, in other words, to end homelessness. The causes of homelessness usually involve some level of psychological illness in combination with drugs or alcohol addiction. It has traditionally been assumed that potential permanent housing tenants must first go through some level of rehabilitation and demonstrate that they can maintain sobriety and continue psychiatric treatment before they are 'housing ready'.[8][9]

As one can imagine, achieving these goals is not easy, and they present great challenges for both the people participating in the programs and the people running them. Historically, those who have not managed to meet these requirements were sometimes deemed 'treatment resistant' or 'hard to house', entering a cycle of perpetual homelessness within the systems made to get them out of it.[10] From what I understand, these systems of treatment-as-a-path-to-housing are simply placing treatment in the position of a means to get into housing. What happens when these

[4] UN-Habitat, *The Right to Adequate Housing: Fact Sheet No. 21/Rev. 1*, Geneva, 2014.

[5] Sveriges Stadsmissioner, *Vad vi gör* [website], https://www.stadsmissionen.org/vad-vi-gor/, (accessed 19 January 2024).

[6] Center mot hemlöshet, *Göteborgs Stads hemlöshetsplan* [website], https://centermothemloshet.goteborg.se/rattigheter/definition-av-hemloshet, (accessed 9 May 2024).

[7] Center mot hemlöshet, *Göteborgs Stads hemlöshetsplan*, (2024).

[8] Housing First Europe, *What is Housing First* [website], https://housingfirsteurope.eu/what-is-hf/a-beginners-guide-to-housing-first/, (accessed 19 January 2024).

[9] S. Tsemberis, *Housing First, The Pathways Model to End Homelessness for People with Mental Illness and Addiction*, Center City, Hazelden, 2010, p. 14.

[10] S. Tsemberis, *Housing First*, p. 15.

positions are switched? Position housing as a means to overcoming addiction and mental illness - this is the idea that Sam Tsemberis was testing out in the 1990's in New York.

Dr. Tsemberis founded the organization Pathways to Housing in the early 90's which would eventually lead to the original Housing First model[11] that is used internationally today. Housing First, as opposed to treatment-first, offers what its name suggests. Instead of working up to an individual apartment, people who are homeless are offered a normal apartment of their own without prerequisites. Since its introduction, Housing First has proven itself to be more effective than traditional methods at getting people off the streets permanently at a resolution rate of 80%,[12] meaning only 20% end up back on the streets at some point.

Since its advent, Housing first has spread into Europe and is regarded by many as the best option for fighting homelessness in any city. Countries like Finland and Holland are famous for their successful use of the model.

The Designer's Role

In the fall of 2023, I noticed a poster hanging on the bulletin board at HDK-Valand. It was among a menagerie of job and scholarship information and was titled 'Ett Skönare Hem?' which roughly translates to 'a nicer home' or 'a more attractive home.' The poster presented the idea of pairing interior design students with Housing First tenants to do simple updates to their apartments and make things a bit more personal and comfortable for them. The idea was no more complicated than that. There was no mention of compensation, monetary or otherwise and no mention of the criteria for participation on the student's side. The only framework that the poster presented in terms of value for the students was the potential to weave the project into their schoolwork.

At the time, I was in the early stages of developing my thesis, and the topics of value and meaningfulness in objects and the designer's role within society were at the front of my mind. With those glasses on, the poster prompted to me a question along the lines of: Which is the more exciting design project, one framed by economic gain in the form of reaching a hypothetical target group through functionality and aesthetics, or one framed by a specific place, person and purpose? Although I am not opposed to the former, I am far more excited about the latter.

Just like so many others, my design interest developed from a childhood passion for playing with LEGOs. I thought it was fun to follow the

[11] S. Tsemberis, *Housing First*, p. 1.

[12] Housing First Europe, *What is Housing First* (2024).

instructions and build what was on the front of the box, but the real fun came with the challenge of making something else entirely. Later in life, I would have said my dream was to have some sort of creative profession, but architecture and design seemed out of reach to me. I struggled in school and feared the challenges of higher education, and the prospect of paying for a degree at an American university wasn't something I considered possible. But when I moved to Sweden in 2016 to be with my now wife, the opportunity to study opened. I started my bachelor's degree in design at HDK in Gothenburg in 2019 and continued directly onto my master's. My five years at HDK-Valand are now coming to their conclusion with this thesis.

As a kid, the thing that was most exciting about building with LEGOs was the ability to bring something from my imagination out into the world. I remember lying awake in bed with my eyes closed. In my mind's eye, I constructed cars and ships in detail, using the real-life pieces that I knew from memory were hidden somewhere in the LEGO bin. I do the same thing these days too, but instead I'm usually attempting to solve construction problems in metal and wood, my two main working materials. Most of the time just the anticipation of finally seeing a design realized in physical space is enough to keep me working hard for extended periods of time.

Furniture has been my focus ever since the second year of my Bachelor's. Back when I had not yet found my design orientation, I decided during a tutoring session that I would commit to furniture design until I lost interest. I never did. The aspect of furniture design that drew me in was the accessible marriage of form and function, very much in the modernist sense. When I say accessible, I mean that furniture takes little more than some crafting skill and some idea of function and ergonomics, things that I felt I had a grasp on, however loosely.

I have had many opportunities to make furniture through school projects and internships and have experienced the Swedish furniture design industry through multiple exhibitions in Stockholm and in Paris. I've learned quite a bit about the culture that hopeful designers like me must in some way join. There are good sides and bad sides. The battle of personal integrity is very much present here. Well intending Swedish furniture companies who take an active approach to sustainable practices still need to sell chairs.

Perhaps the most important thing that I have recognized through these experiences is that I am far more interested in an object when it is within its use-context, not so much when it is on a stage at Stockholm Furniture Fair. Further, the use-context is particularly valuable when it is

personal, like someone's home. It's almost as if an object cannot truly be seen for what it is until is has been put in its rightful place, and time and patina always reveal a piece of furniture's true quality.

I contacted the poster's author, Cecilia Bergstedt, and said that I would like to participate. She was happy to hear it and said that she would begin looking for a tenant for me to work with. I decided to ask if, instead of focusing on the interior as a whole, I could design and produce a piece of furniture for the tenant. At this point in time, I had not yet begun to think of this project as central to my thesis, but as an object-oriented designer I was curious how a bespoke object would be received. When Cecilia got back to me with someone, we booked a first meeting.

Hemkänslor

When I was researching the Housing First concept ahead of the meeting, I found an essay that Cecilia had published through the City Mission in 2021. The essay is called *Hemkänslor*,[13] and in it she interviews seven Housing First tenants about their experiences of moving into their new apartments. The text illustrates the challenges of this process after having been homeless long-term and describes the importance of developing a sense of home, or in Swedish 'hemkänsla'. An idea of particular importance to the essay is that the process of creating a home is more challenging for someone that has been in long-term and acute homelessness situations.

Some of the essay's interviewees were new to their Housing First apartments and others had lived in their apartment for a few years. For all of them though, when they first received the keys, they began a long and difficult process. Recently, Cecilia was driving us back from a meeting with a tenant. I asked her how the idea for writing *Hemkänslor* came about. I translated her response:

> There is an implicit assumption within Housing First that if you get a place to live, you'll feel better and things will work out. And it's almost never like that. Instead come a bunch of worries and fears and concerns. It's hard to inhabit a home. And we rarely talked about that… I rarely experienced that someone in Housing First or even the social services problematized or thought: why is it so hard?
>
> If you imagine you're someone receiving these conditions that are fantastic, as they are usually presented - Look, you get an apartment to live in. Now everything is going to be great. You get to apply for money for furniture and you'll furnish the apartment and then move in. And there's this idea that things are going to be so wonderful, but

[13] C. Bergstedt, *Hemkänslor*, Göteborg, Göteborgs Stadsmission, 2021.

> everyone, almost everyone thinks it's super challenging and super scary…
>
> There is a handbook from Housing First that says something like 'home is a safe place' and such. But it is only safe if one feels comfortable with themself and is capable of creating the conditions that are needed for it to feel safe. I became so interested in what the tenants actually feel themselves and what their thoughts are on which factors have an impact on their sense of home. As an anthropologist, I of course thought: I want to do interviews with these people. I want to ask what it is that they need to feel at home.[14]

The factors that play into a sense of home that the interviewees described in the essay are many. From relationships with neighbors, the influence of friend groups, and the effects of long-term societal disenfranchising to the way one spends one's free time. Throughout the text there are references to the procurement, organization and use of furniture and other objects. Every Housing First tenant has to make a lot of decisions about the organization of objects, lighting and placement of furniture. It isn't hard to imagine that this factor, the interior decoration of their environment, has a huge effect on their sense of home. It should be assumed, like with the other more social factors of home, that homelessness has a lasting impact on one's relationship to aesthetics, taste and organization. In *Hemkänslor* Cecilia writes:

> When we try to create a home, there are a number of rooms that need to be filled. As we have seen, it is not obvious how and with what we should fill them. The people we have met here usually have no belongings that can form the basis for decorating the home. We easily think that meaningful things contribute to a sense of home, but if there are no things, no home to recreate and no familiar home routines to fall back on, it can be like building empty scenery rather than a home.[15] (Own translation from Swedish)

Cecilia has said to me on more than one occasion that when a person's life becomes messy, so does their home. I don't think anyone in the Housing First program has had it easy. When they move in, their lives in one way or another are a mess, and simply having a place to keep that mess isn't enough. In regard to a sense of home, moving into a Housing First apartment is not the end of homelessness. There are countless factors that must be taken into consideration before adequate housing can truly become a home.

Cecilia's recommendation at the end of the essay is for housing assistants to take this problematization into account when working with

[14] Conversation with Cecilia Bergstedt translated from Swedish, May 10th, 2024.

[15] C. Bergstedt, *Hemkänslor*, 2021, p. 48.

tenants, especially in the beginning.[16] Supporting Housing First tenants in these challenges will take the expertise of experienced social workers, health workers and psychologists. Even family members and neighbors will play a part. But what about the spaces and the way they look, feel and function?

From my perspective, *Hemkänslor* reads like a design essay, and although the solutions for the most part require expertise outside of the design field, there is a role in there for designers. It occurred to me that the aspects of what Cecilia presents pertaining to interior design form a gap, and my particular interests and skillset fit perfectly into that gap.

The Comfort of Things

Before our first meeting with the tenant, I learned that she had requested a reading chair. I met Cecilia at the City Mission office and she drove us to the apartment in one of the cars shared among the housing assistants. When we arrived, I felt a bit nervous. We greeted the tenant, who will be referred to here as H, and sat down.

In the small living room, there was a couch and a wooden dining chair. The chair, which felt like a placeholder for something else, was where I sat. We talked for about an hour and a half. I began to relax. The conversation was simple and felt natural to me. In fact, I very much enjoyed it.

As a designer and maker, I am endlessly interested in objects, their histories, forms, and compositions. I pointed at things on the walls and tables and asked her to tell me about them. I was eager to learn where things came from, what sort of value they contained for her, as well as what she didn't like. Many objects were clearly of more value to H than others.

One object in particular comes to mind: A small wooden wall cabinet that was stained petrol blue. It was made by the tenant together with her father. She was happy to describe the fond memory unprompted. She laughed and recalled that her father criticized the quality of the planks she had purchased and that they didn't have a doorknob for it so her father fashioned one from a branch. "I really like smart solutions like that" she said.

The format for this first meeting was unplanned. The topics of conversation arose naturally and were rich with information, not just about material things, but also relationships and emotions. I was struck by how easy it was to talk with a stranger in this way.

[16] C. Bergstedt, *Hemkänslor*, 2021, p. 52-54.

In the early 2000s, the anthropologist Daniel Miller was having meetings very similar to this one. I discovered this similarity afterward in a book he published in 2008 called *The Comfort of Things*, [17] in which he describes 30 such meetings in detail.

In the book, Daniel Miller goes door to door with his colleague Fiona Parrott on a street in south London hoping to get insight into the lives of the individuals that live there. Miller and Parrott ask about the many things that furnish the homes. Through the objects, topics that would not likely come about through direct questioning rise to the surface. Miller describes how these things act as channels for human interaction and relationships, and argues that material things, although often associated with over consumption and sometimes blamed for causing distance between people, in fact do the opposite more often than not.[18]

For my thesis, I decided that I wanted to do more interviews like this. I asked Cecilia if she could find two more tenants that would be interested in a new piece of furniture and the plan for my project developed into this: three Housing First tenants, three objects and three meetings each.

The first meeting would be like the one I had with H, with the goal of learning as much as I can about the person through talking about the objects that we find together. I would begin drawing the piece of furniture and follow up with questions over phone calls and text messages. The second meeting would be to deliver the piece. And the third would consist of a final semi-structured interview and photographs.

Cecilia Bergstedt and Daniel Miller are both anthropologists. The study of humanity will inevitably arrive at the objects that we surround ourselves with. Trying to understand people through objects makes sense when considering how most of what we do in a day is in direct contact with things that we have made. I, however, am not an anthropologist. I am also not a social worker. I am a designer and maker. In my interviews with these three wonderful people, I recognize that the position I am taking as a designer in their homes is not that of a researcher, or for that matter a savior.

I am not equipped to study or solve any of the challenges that they are facing. From my perspective, these three people are my neighbors, and since I know something about design and I'm passionate about making things, my question then becomes this: Could what I do as a designer support Housing First tenants in making their adequate housing feel

[17] D. Miller, *The Comfort of Things*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2008.

[18] D. Miller, *The Comfort of Things*, p. 1-7.

more like home? And could the documentation from this project help to bolster the argument for including designers in the Housing First model in the future?

Hammarkullen

The three pieces of furniture that now exist within the tenants' homes are not the only physical results of this project. The fourth is a book, which will enclose the photos and interview material produced during the final meetings. Since the tenants would be given the objects to own and keep, the pieces would not be available for display, at least not without having to borrow them. I felt it was important that this not be a common occurrence, at least not more than once as their sense of ownership is important to this project.

Since my hope is that designers and workers within Housing First organizations would see and understand this project in the future, I recognized the need for documentation that would successfully disseminate the core intention and results of this project. I therefore decided to make a book, which, to the best of my ability, will represent and retell the experience I had, as well as of those I met.

An especially influential person for me in terms of documentation is Jens S. Jensen. In 1974, Jensen published a photobook called *Hammarkullen*.[19] I became familiar with the photos shortly after I arrived in Sweden because I moved to an apartment in Hammarkullen, and Jensen's photos have become an important part of the neighborhood's identity. Little did I know then that his photos were world famous. They do a wonderful job of providing a sensitive and personal look into the lives within Hammarkullen. The people are what make Jensen's photos beautiful. Even in the photos where no people are seen, the people are discernible through the lived environments, and the objects that furnish them.

Jensen's direction was the way I wanted to go for my book. But as an inexperienced photographer, I never intended to match Jensen's level of professionalism, and I was afraid of including the subjects in the photos. In March, I had a meeting with Niclas Östlind, Ph D. in photography and senior lecturer at HDK-Valand. Östlind was a friend of Jensen's before his passing in 2015, and recently authored the book *Jens S Jensen – Samlat verk*,[20] a collection of his 40 years of photography in Hammarkullen. Having the opportunity to speak with Niclas Östlind was significant for me. The two main things I took from that meeting were that photos of the tenants may be more important

[19] J. Jensen, *Tänk om allting var underbart*, Göteborg, Tre böcker, 1995.

[20] N. Östlind, *Jens S Jensen: Samlat verk*, Malmö Arena, 2022.

than I have realized, and that Jens Jensen was an untrained photographer too, which I took as a challenge. My hope is that the photographs I took in these homes will be able to properly communicate the truth and capture the same beauty that I see in them.

Methodology and Process

In combination with the anthropological perspective of positive human-object relationships and Cecilia Bergstedt's perspective on the need for and challenges of developing a personal sense of home, this project consisted in large part of practical object design processes. This section will give a chronological account of the basic structure that each of these three processes shared, with a brief description of the methods used at each point in the process. The next section, Contribution through Practice, will give more detail regarding the objects themselves, their formation, and the responses from tenants.

1. Selection of participants
2. Meeting 1 - Talking about things
3. Sketching
4. Build
5. Studio photos
6. Meeting 2 - Delivery
7. Use-context
8. Meeting 3 – photos and interview

Selection of participants

When looking for a participant for the project Cecilia took into consideration a few important factors: Is the person currently in a good enough state in life to take on a project like this and open their home to a stranger? Are they capable of scheduling and holding appointments? Are they interested in developing the interior of their home?

As some tenants go through different phases and periods in their lives, sometimes they are in such a psychological or emotional state that a project like this one would potentially only cause stress. The tenants that receive this offer are determined by Cecilia to be doing well and could benefit from this process, the object and the interactions with me.

Sometimes tenants are not 'receptive' as she puts it. Perhaps they have relapsed or are going through a period of depression. This sensitivity and regard for Housing First tenants' wellbeing is an important part of Cecilia's role as a housing assistant. I'm sure she also considered my ability to meet tenants in a manner that wouldn't cause unnecessary strain. The fact that I am a man was a factor to consider in the case of one individual. Ultimately though, the tenants that participated in this project had the idea described to them, were asked if they would like to participate, and said yes. I was not involved in this selection process.

Meeting 1 – talking about stuff

The first meeting with each neighbor took place at their home with both Cecilia and me. Since Cecilia has already briefed them about what will happen, there is very little to explain on my part except some information about myself on a friendly, neighborly level, and some questions about taking photos around their apartment and use of their name. Both meetings so far have jumped quickly and naturally into a discussion about objects. I photograph most objects for reference in my design process later.

All the things we talked about began to form what I think of as a taste profile. Regarding the piece of furniture that I would make, I asked questions in a broader sense about materials and forms and tried to focus on the "feeling" or "mood" that they would like their piece of furniture to exude, instead of focusing on style in the sense of seasonal fashions and time periods.

Sketching

My process usually begins with sketches on notebook paper. This is where I begin to do what learning theorist Donald Schön calls reflective practice. It is something I've been doing naturally since before I ever considered it but found words for it in Schön's book *The Reflective Practitioner*[21]. The basic idea with reflective practice is that an artistic process, which is nothing exclusive to artists, follows a cycle of decisions and actions guided by intuition, which in turn feed back into the cycle through experience, which in the long-term forms even better intuition. This is the cycle that I follow in designing the objects in this project, starting with sketches.

The sketching phase is also a search for inspiration and a planning phase where I price materials and test material combinations. It also became common during these projects for me to call tenants on the phone with questions, and frequently for tenants to call me with newly developed perspectives, or just curiosity.

Build

This line of communication continued onto the building phase. Once the general form of a piece and the materials it will be made of are known, I then begin solving all of the practical issues like joinery techniques and dimensions. The answers to many of the questions that arise are found in 3D software where a basic digital model of the object can reveal things that have been overlooked. 3D also gives additional information regarding proportions, which, when making a one-off object can sometimes be difficult to appreciate fully until the object is

[21] D. Schön, *The Reflective Practitioner*. Hampshire, Arena, 1995.

almost finished. Sometimes a rudimentary mockup is required anyways, since 3D can also give a misleading picture of how the size of an object will actually feel in real space.

I almost always begin a build with the parts that will be most difficult to change later on. That way, when needed I can adapt the more flexible aspects of the design with less effort. As my reflective practice continues, I constantly learn new information and adapt at each stage. Sometimes compromises are needed, but more often than not these compromises end up being faithful to the original design in a way that add a richness I could not plan for. I also find a lot of value in asking other respected designers for their critical opinion on the direction I should take.

Studio photos

Once an object was close to being done, I informed Cecilia and we set up a second meeting with the tenant and I booked the photo studio. Having proper studio photos is important for documentation and my portfolio, but I also intended to use these photos as a compliment to the interior photos in the final publication. So, taking consistent photos between the three objects was important. This was made difficult by the fact that each object was finished with up to two months in between. My solution was to take detailed notes as to camera settings as well as a video walk around of the studio in order to remember exact placement of the shrouds and flashes.

Meeting 2 - delivery

The meetings where we delivered the pieces of furniture were the simplest of the three. There was no ceremony involved in revealing the objects except for perhaps the removal of a blanket. The intention behind this was to draw the focus away from me and my skills as a designer and instead focus on the object's placement in the home. We of course discussed the objects form and materials and I took the opportunity to express my thinking. Fortunately, at all three meetings, the objects were received well and the conversations that followed were easy and joyful. I also received many compliments from the tenants which I am thankful for.

I then asked them to come up with a name for the object, which would later be physically added to the piece. I was very aware of the sensitive nature of taking photos inside their homes, so I made attempts to make them as comfortable as possible. Here I reminded the tenants about the next meeting which would include photography.

Use-context

After the pieces were delivered it was important to give each tenant as much time as possible to own and use the objects. I wanted to know what they thought of the thing after having lived with it for a period, as opposed to their first impressions. As I mentioned before, the use-context is in my opinion where objects can truly be seen for what they are. The time was limited here however, especially for the last tenant, due to the timeline of the school year. The last tenant only had approximately two weeks with their object before the final interview was done.

Meeting 3 – photos and interview

The final meetings were for photos and a short interview. I also came with a label for each piece of furniture where the date, the name of the object, my name, and the tenants name were shown. We began with an interview I had prepared. Cecilia supported me with follow up questions. I then took time to photograph the objects within their contexts, other objects in the homes and take a portrait in some form. It was not a matter of course that the tenants wanted to be photographed, and the discussion about the nature of their inclusion in my project and an eventual book continued after these meetings.

Contribution through practice

This section will give insight into the three individual projects, including photos, interview material and other relevant details about the processes. In the same way that the tenants are referred to in *Hemkänslor*, a single letter will represent each of the participant's names.

As of writing this on May 12th, only one of the three final meetings has taken place. The second of the three meetings was booked for May 10th, but the tenant did not answer the door when we arrived and failed to answer their phone. The third meeting is booked for May 15th. Because of this, only one of the three projects will be included in this section in full. My intention is to update this section once the other material is available.

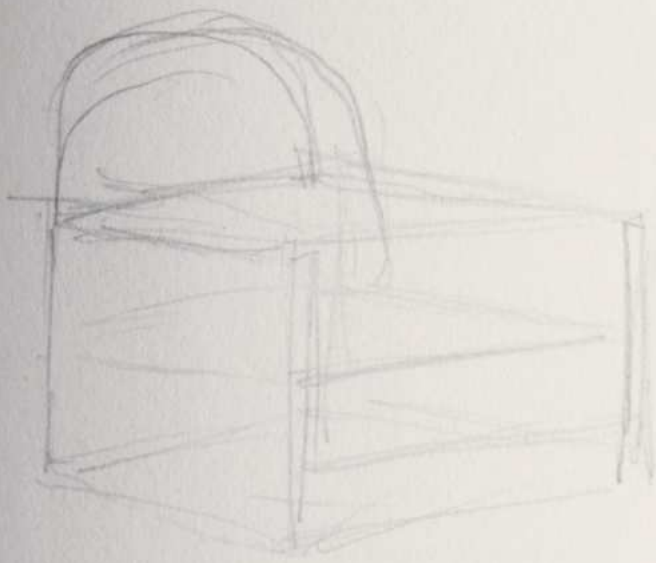
Isoor.

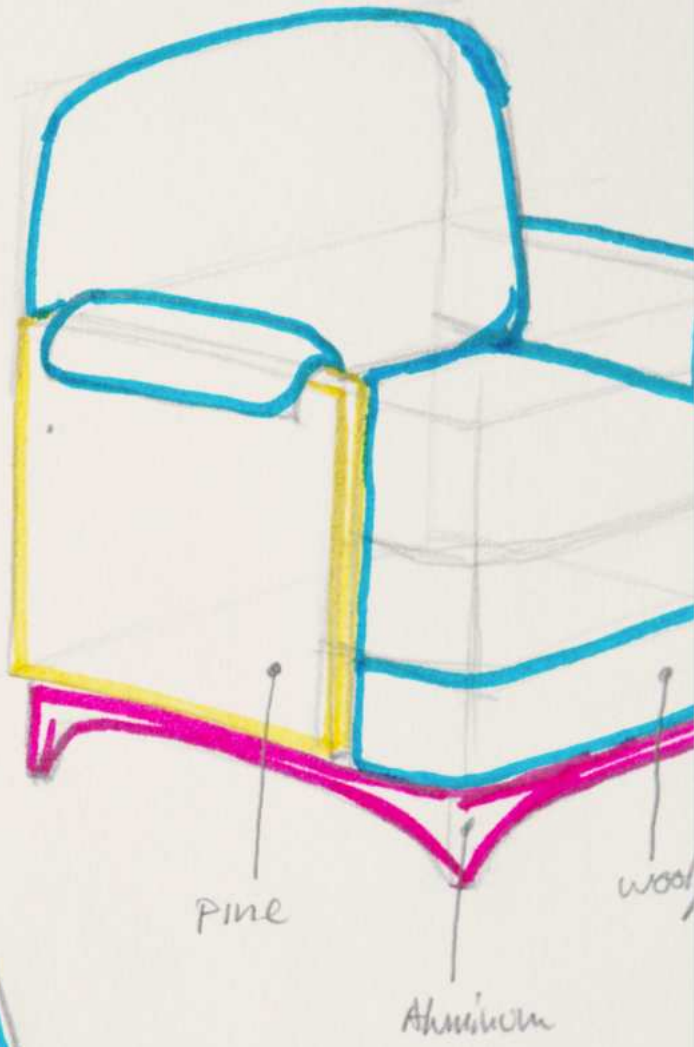
H. lives in a small one-roomer on the 12th floor. She's afraid of heights. Despite this, the space seems to work well for her, but the balcony isn't her favorite place to be.

H. likes Nirvana, and Eva Dahlgren. She likes green and blue. And with a choice between classic and modern furniture, she'd choose modern, like Arne Jacobsen's Myran.

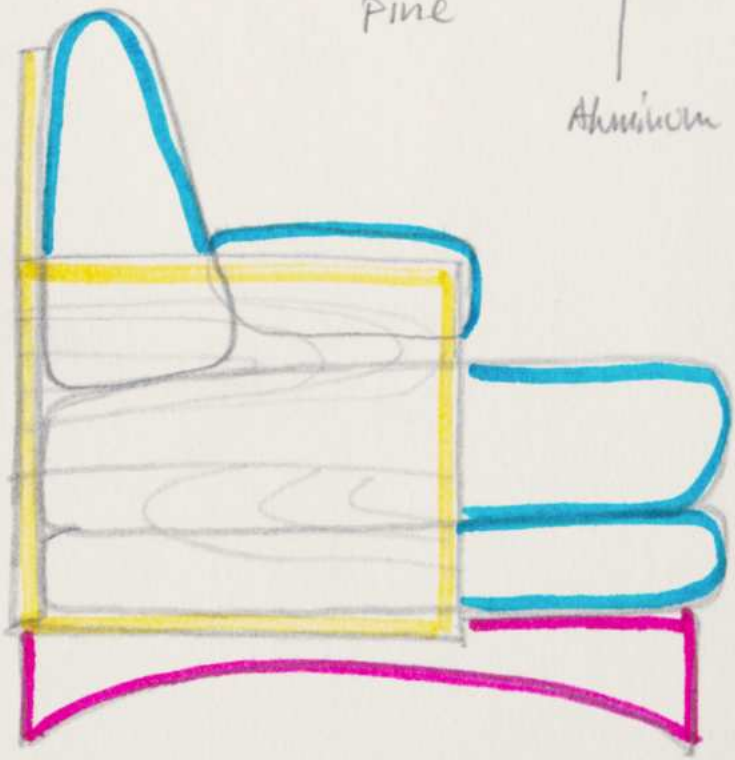
There's a painting of a flower next to the balcony door. Other paintings and drawings by H. riddle the room. Some are originals and some are pastiches. H. says she has always enjoyed drawing. When she does draw she probably sits cross-legged, because that's how she usually sits.

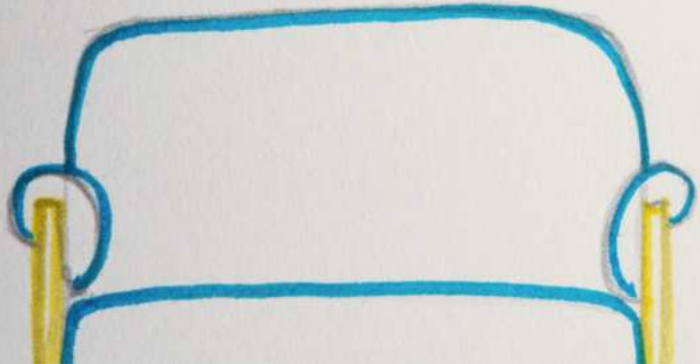
Under the window there's a wooden dining chair. H. would like to replace it with a reading chair - one that you can sit in with your legs crossed.





"Plåt kan vara på utsidan. Det blir snyggt. Men inte på insidan bara."



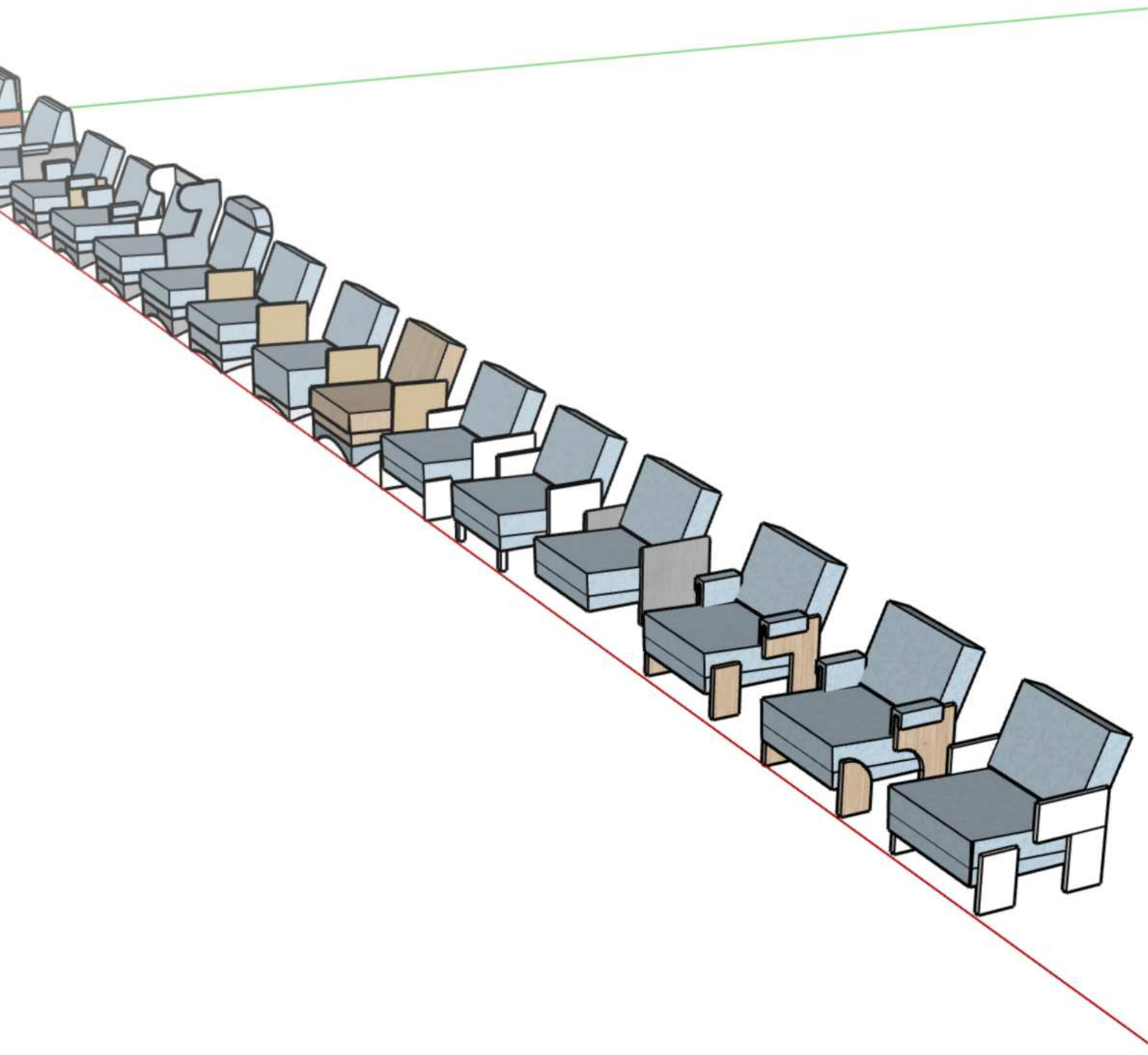


H.'s chair needed to be comfortable, warm and cool. If that makes any sense.

I started looking for a simple construction to place thick cushions in, allowing the foam to make up both the cushion and spring. Some of the elements from this original idea stuck around, like the square armrest, which eventually became a void between the armrest and the legs.

H. had these two jars that she inherited from her grandmother. She said she didn't love their look, but that she liked them because of where they came from. As we talked about her grandmother though, H. started liking the way they looked too.

I found a fabric made by Bergems Väveri that made me think of those jars. When I asked if they would like to support the project with 3 meters of fabric they didn't hesitate.



6-dockan

The frame is made from Swedish ash - a very nice material to work with. I coated it in hard wax oil, which will protect the wood, but feels and looks natural.

As I was drawing the backrest I felt that the proportions weren't right as long as wood was the sole material. I wanted something that felt lighter. Creating a void and supporting the back with a sheet of aluminum did it.

I sprinkled vinager on the aluminum to etch in an irregular pattern, just to break up the suface. What was left ended up being a good contrast to the soft upholstery.

Han skapar Eurovision

Would you say you're happy with how things feel here?

-This is my home. This is my fortress... When I come through the door I feel that this is mine. Its good.

If you were to change something in here what would it be?

-I'd put some things away and organise things in some better storage. There's a bit too much stuff out all the time.

Is there anything here that you would say that you associate with a sense of home?

-Oh yes. Maybe that little CD shelf. I've had that for a long time. There are lots of things here that I've had for a long time. This stand from my grandmother I painted. I think it's better now.

How would you say Isoor has changed your sense of this space?

-Ah its cool its stylish. It does a lot here. It gives a more modern impression here. Its nice. Very nice.

And you think of more modern as a positive development?

-Yeah the things I have here feel a little bit old sometimes. A little 80s 90s... The sofa for example. It's nice I like it but it isnt 2020.

-I'm very happy with this chair. I'm happy that I have it. It's really nice. I think it fits in here and it lifts up my home.

T.

0.

Discussion

Photobook

The graphic design, layout and treatment of the book will be done by Skogen, a graphic design firm in Gothenburg. Together with Skogen I have coordinated a skill exchange where Skogen produces a book for me, and I produce two folding tables for them.

I expect the photobook to take time. Work with Skogen will take place from now until the material is properly ironed out. This may include further trips for photographing and potentially more questions for the tenants. Then there is the matter of funding. Paper prices have gone up and book production in small quantities is not cheap. The process of applying for grants will begin once Skogen has arranged an offer from a printer. I foresee the whole process taking a year, but in reality, I have no way of knowing. What's important is that the material is treated properly and the people are treated properly.

Creating a position within Housing First

Over the course of this project, I've tried to imagine different formats for positioning designers in Housing First. I've considered stipendiums and charity funding from large organizations, but because of the privacy requirements, the position would have to be low-profile, and things like marketing and public events would not be appropriate. That means that the funding would have based on the conviction that this is an important thing to offer tenants who are struggling to establish a sense of home.

The prevailing idea, which I think is most realistic, is for Housing First programs to budget for a certain number of hours each year that can be used by housing assistants to have a designer come and meet with their tenants. The designer would have their own practice and possibly their own studio. They would be in a sense on retainer, perhaps even paid per year. Cecilia has presented the idea to authorities at the City Mission about this possibility, and talks will happen at some point, but things like this move slowly.

I think that this format would at least work for me if I were to take on such a position. I am guessing that it would be better to have a designer that has their own practice outside Housing First, instead of them working full-time with Housing First tenants. The designer's practice will be made richer by the work with Housing First, and their experience and development through traditional work will make their work with Housing First better too. If a designer were to work full time at Housing First, there could be a long-term consequence in terms of habits and expectations, but this is of course only speculation. Someone should try and find out.

According to Cecilia, the Gothenburg City Mission is currently responsible for something like 70 Housing First apartments. The city itself manages over a hundred and the social services have a few too. In 2024, around 100 additional apartments will be allotted to these three organizations. If a designer were to take on a position there would likely be a good amount of work to be done, especially if they were available to all three organizations.

Working together with a housing assistant

I imagine that a designer taking a role within Housing First would continue to meet tenants together with a housing assistant. It has been so valuable to have Cecilia with me at each meeting. My hope is that these discussions around objects will bring about good and positive topics of conversation, but of course, there is the risk that these moments could cause stress as well. That's why I make sure to not press a certain topic if it seems to be leading in a negative direction. Cecilia is well equipped for these kinds of conversations and knows the tenants well. It's clear to me that many topics, ones that I have not discussed with the tenants, are sensitive, and Cecilia navigates these well.

The value of interior design for Housing First tenants

There are so many other factors that have an impact on how we feel, and the interiors of our homes perhaps don't get as much attention because other factors seem more important and more pressing. When I asked Cecilia where she would place the value of interior design in relation to other factors that affect one's sense of home, she said it is more important than the tenants themselves believe. Things like addiction, economy and mood are on the front line of day-to-day struggles, and interior design is not a priority. At the same time, when a tenant is at a low, the state of their apartment is too, and when their environment is strenuous, they can lose their sense of space and time.

Cecilia believes that the interiors of Housing First apartments are woven together with all the other struggles that tenants must deal with. There is no real way of knowing how exactly interior design is affecting tenants. I'm sure it is different for all of them. But we could do some sort of study. I don't think it is hard to imagine that those who, with the help of a professional, manage to make a living space that feels good will do better in their homes in the long run, and that is the whole point of Housing First, is it not?

Working with unreliability

As mentioned in the contribution section, one tenant has not been responding as of the submission of this essay. Cecilia is not surprised. This is apparently not an uncommon occurrence, and designers working

with tenants will also have to adapt to a level of unreliability with certain tenants.

Furniture or interior design?

The original project idea that Cecilia posted on the wall at HDK-Valand was for design students to help Housing First tenants make small changes to their apartments. This was not the focus of my project. As a furniture designer I wanted to create new, creative objects. My priority from the beginning was to deliver objects to these homes at a high level of quality and in forms that meet, preferably exceed, the desires of the people receiving them. I originally intended this project to be more focused on objects themselves, and how they change a space. Although this is still present in the content shown in the contribution section, the overarching idea is that designers do what they are good at. That could be furniture design, or it could be furniture renovation, perhaps interior design in a more special sense.

I don’t intend for housing first tenants to all get bespoke designer furniture in the future, but if I was able to offer that, I would. Since I could offer that within the framework of my thesis project, I took the opportunity, and I think that the objects offer a beautiful visual connection between the tenants’ homes as they have organized them and a designer’s subtle and not overpowering impression on the space.

References

Bergstedt, C., *Hemkänslor*, Göteborg, Göteborgs Stadsmission, 2021.

Center mot hemlöshet, *Göteborgs Stads hemlöshetsplan* [website], https://centermothemloshet.goteborg.se/rattigheter/definition-av-hemloshet, (accessed 9 May 2024).

Miller, D., *The Comfort of Things*, Cambridge, Polity Press, 2008.

Schön, D., *The Reflective Practitioner*. Hampshire, Arena, 1995.

Göteborgs Kyrkliga Stadsmission, [website], http://www.stadsmissionen.org, (accessed 9 May 2024).

Housing First Europe, *What is Housing First* [website], https://housingfirsteurope.eu/what-is-hf/a-beginners-guide-to-housing-first/, (accessed 19 January 2024).

Jensen, J., *Tänk om allting var underbart*, Göteborg, Tre böcker, 1995.

Sveriges Stadsmissioner, *Vad vi gör* [website], https://www.stadsmissionen.org/vad-vi-gor/, (accessed 19 January 2024).

Sveriges Stadsmissioner, *Vad är Bostad Först?* [website], https://www.bostadforst.se/vad-ar-bostad-forst/, (accessed 19 January 2024).

Tsemberis, S., *Housing First, The Pathways Model to End Homelessness for People with Mental Illness and Addiction*, Center City, Hazelden, 2010.

UN-Habitat, *The Right to Adequate Housing: Fact Sheet No. 21/Rev.1*, Geneva, 2014.

Östlind, N., *Jens S Jensen: Samlat verk*, Malmö Arena, 2022.