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International Real Estate

House Hunting in ... Sweden



Johan Spanner for The New York Times

The open living room leads to the dining room. The wall to the right has a contemporary fireplace by Safretti, an Italian company.

By NINA ROBERTS

A TWO-BEDROOM PENTHOUSE WITH A TERRACE IN MALMO

\$1,040,856 (6,995,000 SWEDISH KRONOR)

This two-bedroom penthouse on the seventh floor of an apartment building in the heart of Malmo, Sweden's third-largest city, has almost 1,000 square feet of interior space. Most of the exterior of the 1938 elevator building is clad in tan tiles. The penthouse has a copper facade, and a spacious L-shaped terrace wrapped around two sides. The unit gets abundant natural light through numerous windows and glass doors. The current owners bought the apartment two and a half years ago and created an open floor plan.

The entry opens into the central living room, which has two windows of different sizes and a glass door to the terrace. One wall has stained wooden cabinets custom-built around a flat-screen TV and a stereo system, all of which are included in the asking price. A sleek square fireplace made by the Italian company Safretti is recessed into another wall. Flooring throughout the apartment is burnt oak parquet. "I chose oak because it's hard and you can have parties here with stiletto heels, no problem," said Marten Hedlund, the owner.

The bath, near the entry, is outfitted with Grohe fixtures. The wall tiles in the shower are from Italy; the smooth stones embedded in the floor are from the east coast of Sweden.

To the left of the living room, the master bedroom has built-in shelving and a walk-in closet, as well as expansive windows on one wall and a second glass door to the terrace. To the right of the living room is the dining area, followed by the second bedroom. The open kitchen, off the dining room, has dark metallic cabinets by the Swedish company Vedum. A bright orange glass backsplash stripe runs horizontally beneath the mounted wall cabinets, coordinating with orange cabinet handles. The thick countertop is made of oak. Most of the kitchen appliances are by the Swedish brand Husqvarna.

The Siberian larch terrace has more than 1,200 square feet of space. Mr. Hedlund describes it as "the biggest thing in the apartment" in both size and allure. It has a Viking Spa hot tub, which is included in the asking price.

The penthouse has panoramic views of a number of Malmo landmarks, like the ornate turret top of the Odd Fellow Palace on one side and a historic graveyard on the other.

Literally and figuratively, there is fluidity between Malmo and Copenhagen, which is across a strait called the Oresund. The five-mile Oresund Bridge opened in 2000; many Malmo residents commute to Copenhagen for work, a 15 to 30-minute trip by train or car. The International Copenhagen Airport is 20 minutes from the apartment, as are miles of Swedish beaches.

MARKET OVERVIEW

The housing market is robust, as Sweden was largely unscathed by global financial troubles. "There was a little dip felt in 2008," said Fredrick Hagberg, a Malmo broker with the company Bjurfors. "The prices fell 5 to 10 percent, but overall, the market was not that affected."

WHO BUYS IN MALMÖ

Nearly all the foreign buyers in Malmo are from Denmark. Between 2006 and 2007, Mr. Hagberg said, Danes flocked to Malmo to buy residential property because prices were less expensive than in Sweden. "But not anymore," said Mr. Hagberg, echoing the sentiment of other brokers. "The market in Denmark crashed a little, it became cheaper to buy in Denmark, so all the Danish people moved back. We do have Danish buyers, but it's not so common anymore."

BUYING BASICS

In general, buyers do not use a lawyer or a notary; transactions responsibilities rest with the real estate broker. "We don't have the same system as in other European countries," said Emma Hakesjo, an associate lawyer in the Malmo branch of the law firm Vinge. She says Swedish brokers are required to be independent, representing neither the seller nor the buyer; it is they who draft purchase agreements.

A buyer might pay about \$1,000 for the services of a building inspector before the purchase, although it is more commonly done for a house than an apartment. Property is bought "as is" in Sweden, and should a structural problem arise after purchase, it is typically sorted out through home insurance.

The process of buying and selling in Sweden is shifting from the traditional bidding system, in which properties are first listed below their actual value, to entice bidders. Increasingly, brokers are using the "accepted price" system typical of transactions in the United States, in which the asking price reflects actual value. Both approaches are used in Sweden; this penthouse is being sold in the "accepted price" system.

It is possible to obtain financing from a Swedish bank, said Mariella Fake, the listing broker, from Eklund Stockholm New York. "All Swedish banks have different rules, some of them are tough, some of them less," she said in an e-mail. "This decision can be very different from bank to bank."