

## DANISH SMØRREBRØD



Some years ago our family was joined in marriage to a Danish family, an event celebrated with simplicity and joy on the small island of Samsø, Denmark. I remember armfuls of summer flowers, wholesome food set out on scrubbed wood tables, long northern days when the sun seemed never to set.

If you're keen to avoid the increasing heat of the Mediterranean in July consider the Danish countryside. There you'll enjoy perfect early summer temperatures and, for lovers of wild flowers, an astonishing range of Klimt like pallets and textures.

The harvest has still to happen and the wheat and barley bows down under great heads of new seed.

The roads are excellent and driving a pleasure. Everyone follows the rules. All is ordered. Everything works.

We first stayed at Dragsholm Slot in Zealand, an ancient white painted castle where, in addition to a comfortable old style room which looked onto an unpretentious parterre and farm land, we had the run of the entire place. Old

panelled rooms, unpolished boarded floors, lofty windows, light filled and under-furnished.

That evening, raw mackerel cured with salt was not a culinary high point. Better followed but always prepared, to our taste, with an excess of salt. We were never to learn why. For the lunches that followed - always a smørrebrød, the Danish open sandwich.

The following morning despite a sun shy behind racing clouds and occasional showers the colour in the fields surpassed all expectations. We'd seen chicory but quickly realised we were looking at an ocean of cornflowers mixed together with red poppies, yellow tansy, white oxeye daisies and the rust coloured flowers of sorrel. The palette predominantly sky blue.

Can it be that the harder and longer the winter, the greater the explosion of summer flowers?

The Danish aesthetic of 'less being more' is everywhere apparent. It's refreshing. It also says much about the people - decent, modest, straightforward.

In every town and village a church, distinctive with stepped gables, either brick or white painted, boasts a myriad of immaculately tended miniature gardens. Each surrounded by a low hedge. Each the grave of a loved family member. All Lutheran people. Strong community. Low key. Nothing showy. The Danish way. Good old fashioned qualities.

On Samsø this translates into a deeper sense of stepping back in time. Simple pleasures. Bicycles much in evidence. Boats small. Most homes single story, half timbered, often painted in bright colours, thatched and partially concealed behind lavish flowerings of hollyhocks, roses and hydrangeas.

I wonder about the many colourful building facades - most famously along Copenhagen's Nyhavn Canal - despite a national aesthetic which clearly favours monochrome? Why only the building facades and almost never the people's clothes, interiors, cars and much else?

We saw fields of broad beans their white blooms edged a pale lilac and intermixed with red poppies. A caprese of colour.

In Middelfart, just across the Little Belt river from Jutland on the island of Fyn, half timbered gaily painted medieval houses surround their own great church whose construction started in the 14th century and which bears the date 1667 over its entrance. Exquisite grave gardens lie beside it.

From there it's a short walk through beech woods along the banks of the river to the Clay Museum of Ceramic Art.

There we saw a spectacular collection of contemporary ceramics displayed in lofty period rooms and in the light filled modern spaces which lie beneath them - also an exhibition of work by the great Danish ceramicist Axel Salto.

En-route to our ferry, Hou to Samsø, we made sure to visit a large contemporary building which rises directly from the fields at a slope. Its bulk is further concealed by a grass covered roof and housing the Moesgaard Archaeological and Anthropological Museum. The collection and its presentation do not disappoint.

We were happy to return to Samsø, again with family, our numbers swelled by the arrival of new young.

Hidden away amongst well tended fields and carpets of wild flowers - verbascum, harebells, musk mallow, lady's bedstraw and ragged robin amongst many - Vadstrup 1771 is the home of sculptor and ceramicist Rie Toft and her husband Paul. During our stay on the island it also became our home. There we were left undisturbed to enjoy it's elegant simple art-filled rooms and, in their garden, the artist's sculpture.

Alongside the island's beaches there are carpets of rugosa roses both pink and white; also, in profusion, purple field scabious and white bishop's lace.

A disc of mown grass lies amongst the fields. Across it great birds - the harris hawk, the grey eagle owl, the african lanner falcon, the eurAsian steppe eagle and the american bald eagle, flew only centimetres above our heads. The Samsø Falkecenter is a 'must see' destination.

At the end of our visit, en- route to Copenhagen airport, we visited the Louisiana Museum of Modern Art. Be sure not to miss it. If you find yourself in the capital, the Hirschsprung Collection is another 'must see'.

Fireweed glowing a florescent pink stands in front of gold, green and rust grasses, back lit by a setting sun and all moving as one in a warm gentle breeze. Deep enchantment.

Summer in these northern climes feeds the soul with a most particular and precious joy.

