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SURFACING

Oasis of Energy in Copenhagen

By SETH SHERWOOD

NO doubt unfairly, Denmark's most famous intellectual used to call his hometown of Copenhagen a "little stain," a "toilet," and a "poisonous swamp." Then again, the 19th-century existentialist philosopher Soren Kierkegaard, author of such sunny works as "Fear and Trembling," has rarely been toasted for his cheerfulness.

Still, even a career brooder like Kierkegaard might be impressed with the changes afoot in the neighborhood of Norrebro, where he often strolled and where he is now buried.

In the last 150 years, the district has morphed from undeveloped hinterland to factory-worker neighborhood to Middle Eastern immigrant enclave, emerging in the last few years as the city's hippest night life and shopping district, home to sushi bars, design boutiques and cocktail lounges.

"We like to think of Norrebro as our SoHo," said Fridrik Weissappel, the lanky, co-owner of the Laundromat Cafe, Elmegade 15, (45) 35-35-26-72. His cheerful, bright orange establishment opened in August and has become a popular hangout for hip Danes in thrift-store attire, who come to dine on Icelandic fish soup (the house specialty, \$24, at 5.7 kroner to the dollar), peruse used books or clean their vintage T-shirts and skirts in industrial washers and dryers. "I get the same buzz and energy in Norrebro as I do when walking around downtown New York," Mr. Weissappel said.

The epicenter of the buzz is Sankt Hans Torv, a picturesque cobbled square ringed by places like Kaffe Plantagen, Sankt Hans Torv 3, (45) 35-36-22-32, a white minimalist cafe where Danes in designer eyeglasses flip through home décor magazines and sip espresso (\$2.85), and Pussy Galore's Flying Circus, Sankt Hans Torv 30, (45) 35-24-53-00, a pioneering Norrebro bar-restaurant with a hefty club sandwich (\$12.30). On warm nights, crowds flood the outdoor tables or sit directly on the square's paving stones, offering toasts with Carlsberg beer (\$4.60) before sampling the ever-expanding roster of Norrebro nightspots.

One is Norrebro Bryghus, Ryesgade 3, (45) 35-30-05-30, a sleek microbrewery with angular contemporary décor that is as clean and crisp as the house New York lager (\$5.65). Even more modern is the Oak Room, Birkegade 10; (45) 38-60-38-60, where throngs of young media workers and creative types illuminate the white, podlike chamber with their red-and-pink cocktails (\$9.70 to \$11.50).

During the day, Copenhagen fashion and design enthusiasts cruise down Ravnsborggade, a street just off Sankt Hans Torv that has become well-known citywide for its clothing boutiques and antique shops, among them the unmarked shop, Antiktanken and Design (Ravnsborggade 21A), which sells high-end, museumlike Scandinavian stoneware, pottery, housewares and furniture from the 1920's to the 1960's.

"This used to be a neighborhood with working-class people and prostitutes and fighting," recalled the proprietor of the retro furniture store Scantik, Ravnsborggade 7, (45) 35-35-05-20, who gave her name simply as Sussi. A few feet away, a 30-something couple poked around piles of old-looking cookware and porcelain. "Now you've got antiques

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and fashion and flowers. It's a continuous process. And it should be."

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