



# Fogo Island Studios

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Few might know Fogo, a small and secluded island off the coast of Newfoundland in Canada, and even fewer will have visited it. This North Atlantic piece of land is the home to the Fogo Islanders, a native people, who through the centuries have adapted to the island's harsh climate and have developed their own traditional way of life, built mainly around cod fishing.

When the Shorefast Foundation launched plans for an inn and a series of artists' studios on various Fogo locations, approaching Saunders about it roughly four years ago, the architect immediately jumped to the opportunity. The organisation is committed to preserving the Islanders' traditions, supported by local fibre optics businesswoman and one of the richest women in Canada, Zita Cobb, and aims at rejuvenating the island through the arts and culture. However, this 2008 commission had an additional and far more personal resonance to the architect. This would be a chance for not only experimenting with traditional architectural forms, methods and materials in a unique location, but also for working in Newfoundland, where Saunders grew up.







The fragile and gorgeous nature of Fogo was key to the brief's development. "It is so beautiful there, but it's a different, very rough kind of beauty", Saunders says. His concept for the studios revolved around creating a series of strong geometric shapes, which would create a contrast, but without competing with the surrounding environment. Orientated towards the sea and used from spring through to autumn, from those studios the residents would be able to experience a range of climatic transitions and seasonal changes. Placed in remote locations within the island, the studios are set to compliment the artists' residences, which are being created by restoring a number of traditional Newfoundland homes within the island communities.





Working on different studio types for each location (a personalised one for each of the nine communities on the island), Saunders developed the designs for about two years before starting construction. The first ones to finish were the Long Studio, the Tower Studio and the Writing Studio. The 120m<sup>2</sup> elegant Long Studio is a linear volume including three rooms and combining open and closed areas; the 80m<sup>2</sup> more iconic Tower Studio is vertical and slightly twisted like a giant origami; and the 20m<sup>2</sup> Writing Studio is the smallest of them all, conceived as a place for contemplation and including a small library. There will be six different studios in total – or “half a dozen” as the local say.





All studios feature wood, and this as well as the construction methods used, refer back to local traditions. Standing on tall pillars, the structures project over the seawater. Saunders explains: “it feels like doing contemporary architecture but based on what’s been there before. Most traditional buildings there are amphibious, only half on dry land, almost like walking off the land and into the water.” Of the total of nine six distinct types planned, five are completed in 2010, while four more will be built on a later stage. “You can say they are ‘strangely familiar’. They look strange but on a closer inspection they are in fact built with very familiar methods”, the architect describes.

A similar feel will dominate the 29-room boutique hotel Saunders is also working on, on the island. Using wood again as the main material, Saunders designed the Fogo Inn as a means towards the island’s both economic and cultural survival, but also as a timeless piece of architecture, which would be ‘made just for Fogo’.



As Cobb outlined in the inn's brief, the building had to be a site-specific design, representing the island and in a way carrying its 'soul'. In order to achieve this, this hotel, comfortable and modern as it may be, is not all about the luxuries inside. "The whole basis of the project is the inimitable views towards the Atlantic coast; the whole project is facing north", explains Saunders. "It is almost an anti-hotel," he says, half-joking.

The Inn includes a restaurant, directed by one of Canada's best chefs, together with a lobby, a library, a small movie theatre and an independent art gallery on the ground floor; four floors of rooms above ground level; and a sauna and spa facility on the top of the building. All spaces are designed by Saunders with the help of local practices, as well as selected invited international professionals. Finnish-born architect Sami Rintala, for example, is behind the top-level spa, while at the moment, the architect and clients' team is in the process of commissioning the specifics of the remaining separate parts to different architects.





The inn's design proved to be a long and occasionally complicated process. While the task of designing a modest and unpretentious, yet unique, comfortable and quietly innovative hospitality space is no mean feat, the procedure itself was also part of the project's challenges.

'We had a meeting with everybody about everything every so often so it has been very demanding. But it was undoubtedly a very fruitful process', Saunders recalls, explaining that discussing all the details with the rather large number of the different stakeholders involved in the Fogo project certainly made the process more complex, as it did fulfilling and eventually exceptionally well-thought out.

The Fogo Island Arts Corporation program kicks off in the summer of 2010 with the opening of the long studio and the end of the year saw the final touches being added to the 3 new studios. The final 2 studios will be built in 2011. Along with the library, hotel, restaurant and art gallery, the residencies' program is putting Fogo on the map as a prime cultural, ecological and culinary tourist destination, at same time safeguarding its local traditions.





Client name: Shorefast Foundation and the Fogo Island Arts Corporation  
The location of the project: Fogo Island, Canada  
The project was started and finished 2007-2011  
The area in square metres: 40, 80, 120m<sup>2</sup>  
Project Architect – Saunders Architecture  
Associate Architect - Sheppard Case Architects Inc.  
Structural Engineer: DBA Associates  
Services Engineer Core Engineering  
Builder: Shorefast Foundation  
Photos: Bent René Synnevåg

