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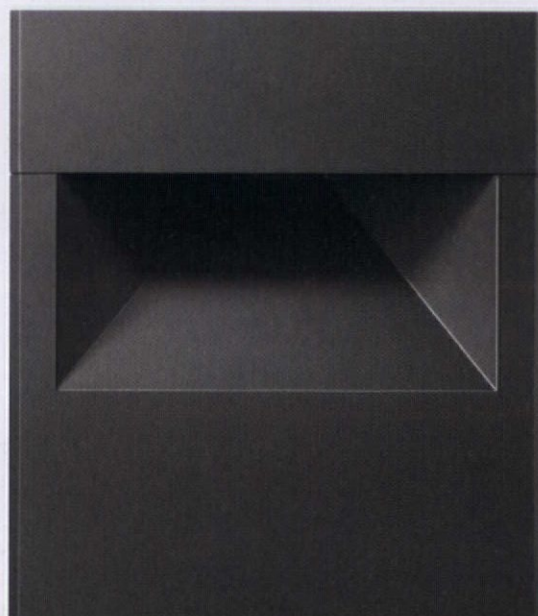
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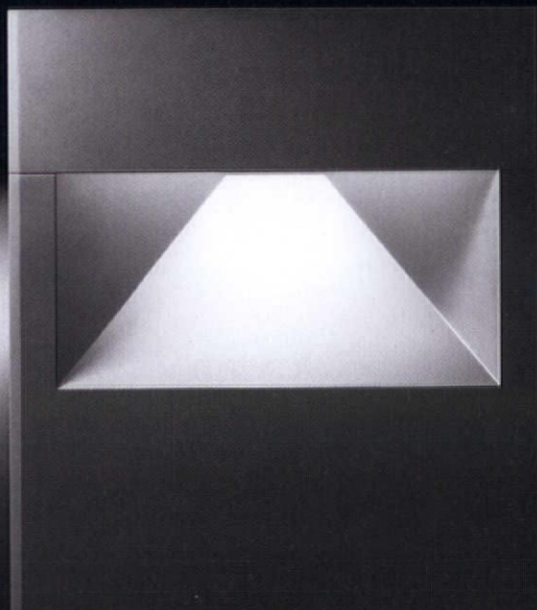


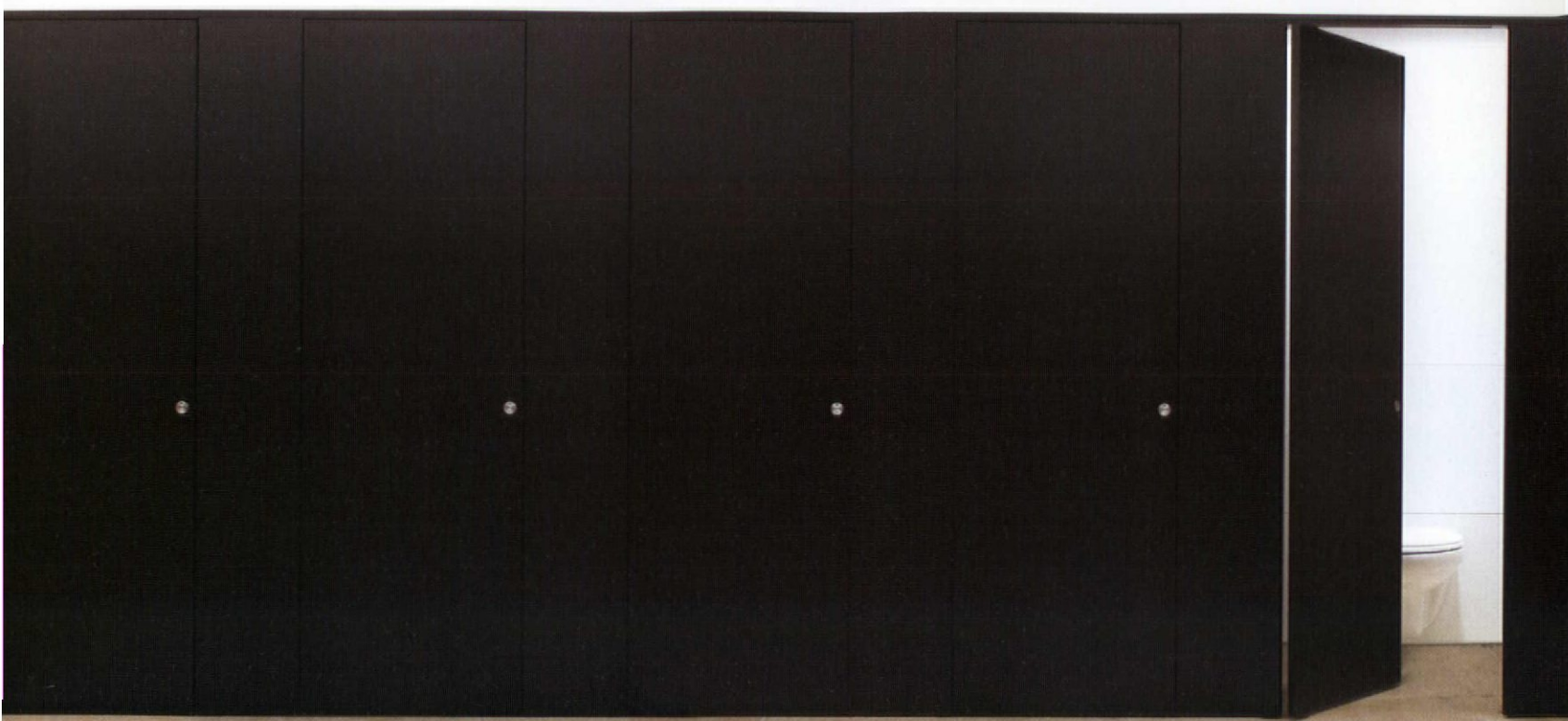
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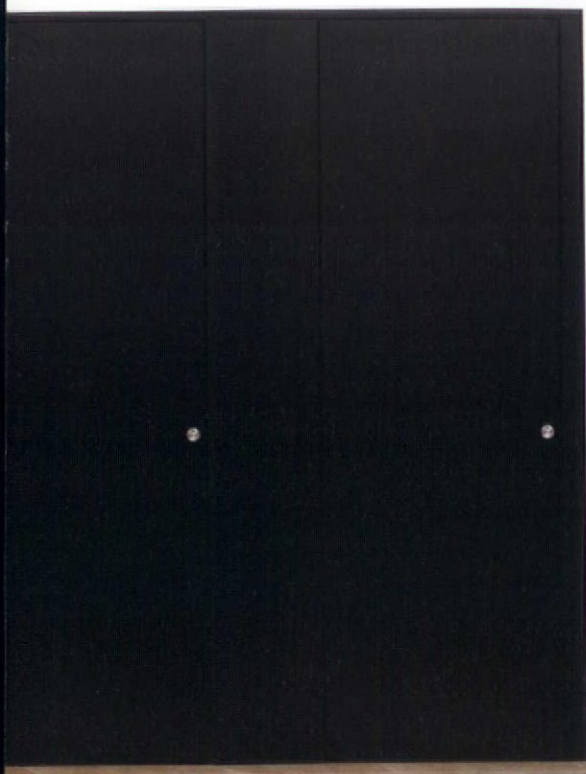
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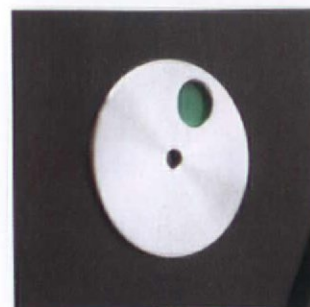




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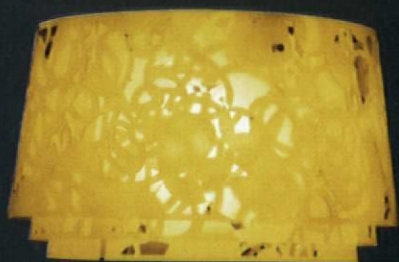
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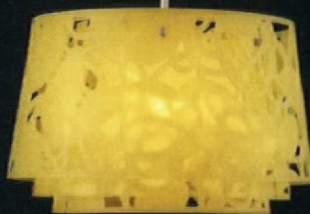
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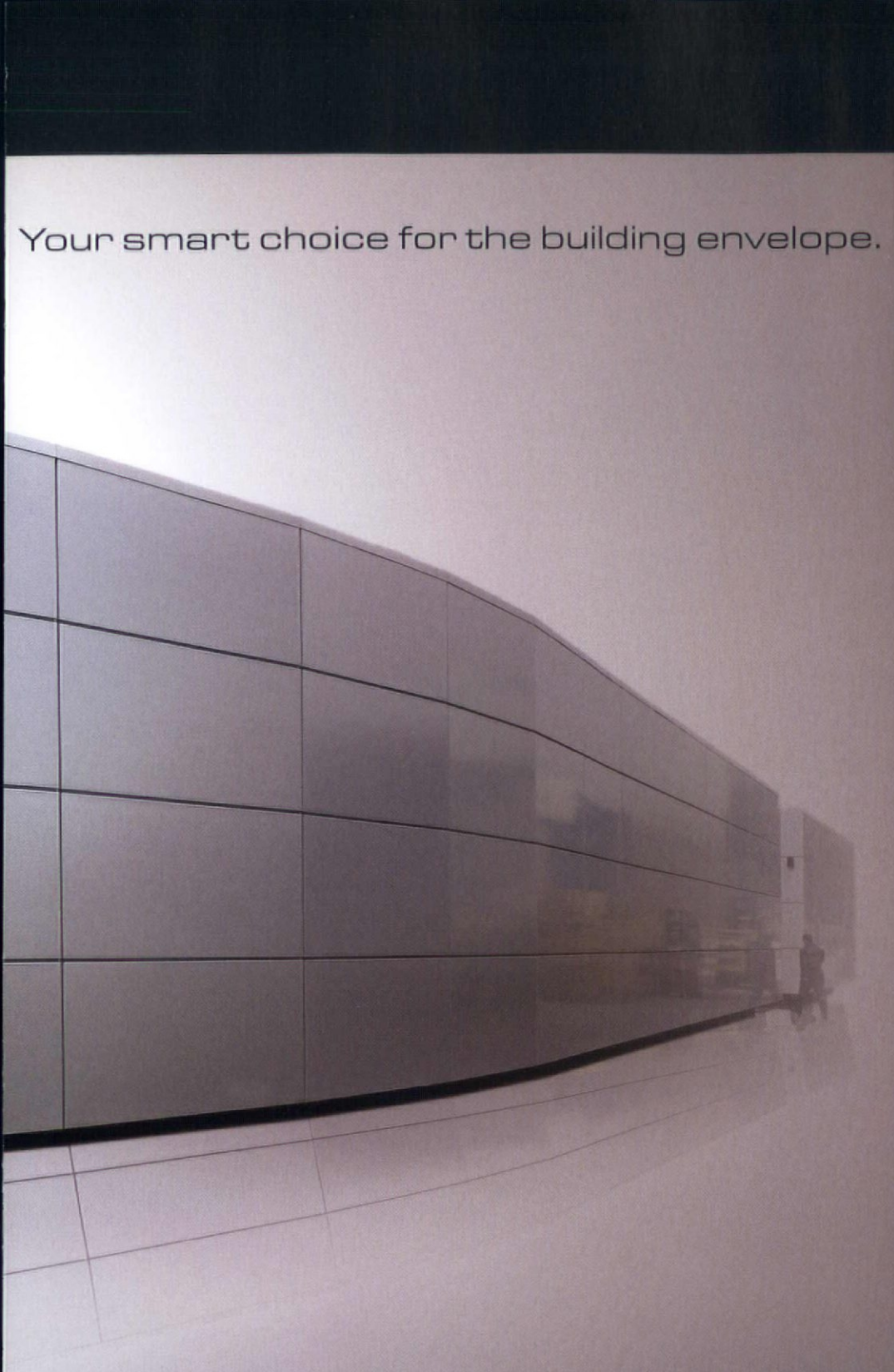




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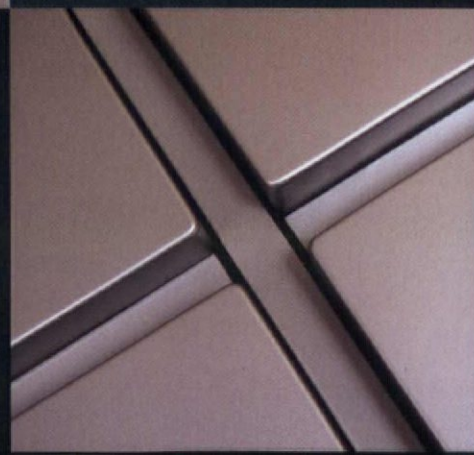
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ON CHAIR, BY WILKHAHN

Wilkhahn

Any visitor to the Milan Furniture Fair knows that each year throws up dozens of 'new' seating systems, but genuine innovation is actually extremely rare. Wilkhahn's new ON range of office chairs is that rare thing: an evolutionary leap that combines refined design with the latest ergonomic theory to produce a radically different seating system.

Rather than anchor the sitter in a single, fixed position, ON goes with the flow, providing support for fluid and flexible three-dimensional movement. Current ergonomic research suggests that back pain and its associated degenerative symptoms are the result of 'imposed' posture that restricts movement. Most office chairs have a degree of mobility – flexible backrests, adjustable seats – but this tends to be only in two dimensions. ON is unique in that it encourages three-dimensional movement. The chair responds to the sitter, mirroring the natural scope of human movement. This enhances posture, stimulates muscles and bloodflow, cultivates spinal elasticity, reduces neck and shoulder strain and induces a general sense of well-being. As office workers spend around eight hours a day in the same chair, Wilkhahn's philosophy is that sitting should be good for you.

Recently launched, ON is the outcome of a lengthy process of research and development that began at the end of 2005. Factors such as psychology, materials, form and manufacturing were extensively analysed. In particular, new theories of ergonomics (that bodies need to

move rather than be corseted in one position) prompted a complete re-evaluation of what a chair does and how it does it. Office chairs seem to have become more complex for the sake of it, so Wilkhahn's engineering team, working closely with Weige, its in-house designers, reduced things down to core essentials, stripping away superfluous elements.

ON's distinctive, elegant form allows you to sit, turn, reach or swivel and the chair goes with you, supporting and responding to your every move; what Wilkhahn calls 'tailored kinematics'. The design recalls the organic qualities of Charles and Ray Eames' iconic modern office furniture, but re-envisioned over 50 years later in a more technologically astute way.

The basic structure is simple. The chair sits on a five-arm star base with a gas lift column. Two swing plates of die-cast aluminium, which can move independently of each other, form the support for the seat. The plates are fixed to the chair's rear frame by a three-dimensional connection, and with the natural elasticity of the seat shell and backrest, this provides stability, control and freedom of movement in three directions.

ON is closely modelled on the human body, so the seat component is like a pelvis. Freedom of forward and backward motion ranges from an angle of -3° to 13° in the seat and up to 28° tilt in the back. Seat and back can also be tilted up to 13° sideways. The tilting and swivelling movement of the chair mimics the seductive, hip-rolling sway of a belly dancer. To suit individual levels of comfort,

resistance can be easily adjusted by an under-seat rotation mechanism.

ON is also characterised by a forensic attention to detail. The seat is flexible polypropylene shell with an upholstery panel that can be covered in the same Fibreflex material as the backrest. Other textiles are also available, including plush executive leather. The depth of the seat pan can be adjusted by simply rolling the edge of the seat downwards. This ingenious device provides a depth adjustment of up to 65mm. The back frame, which comes in different two heights, is also flexible, with six lockable positions. Assembling the back requires no tools – it just slots into place and can also be removed completely, reducing the space needed for storage and transport. Adjustable armrests are integrated into the individually articulated swing plates, so can respond to the chair's entire range of movements.

ON embodies balance, in the notion of physical equilibrium and maintaining the human body in a perfectly balanced state, regardless of posture. But Wilkhahn also strives to achieve a wider, holistic balance through an environmentally responsive approach to design and manufacturing, which it has pursued for decades. Wilkhahn optimises use of materials and energy, streamlines manufacturing processes, cultivates corporate and social responsibility and encourages longevity. Planned obsolescence and the culture of a throwaway society have no place here. Good design endures and ON has been designed to last.

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Architect John Beswick embarked on a mammoth circumnavigation of Africa's coastline, building shelters for HIV clinics and raising money for charity en route. He describes the remarkable panoply of vernacular buildings he encountered on his long journey

Daniel Rosbottom is a director of London-based DRDH Architects and head of architecture at Kingston University. He travelled beyond the Arctic Circle in northern Norway to report on the opening of Steven Holl's Knut Hamsun Centre

Wouter Vanstiphout, who writes about the Dutch concept of maakbaarheid in urban design, is a partner in Crimson Architectural Historians. He lives in Rotterdam and is currently curating part of the city's International Biennale

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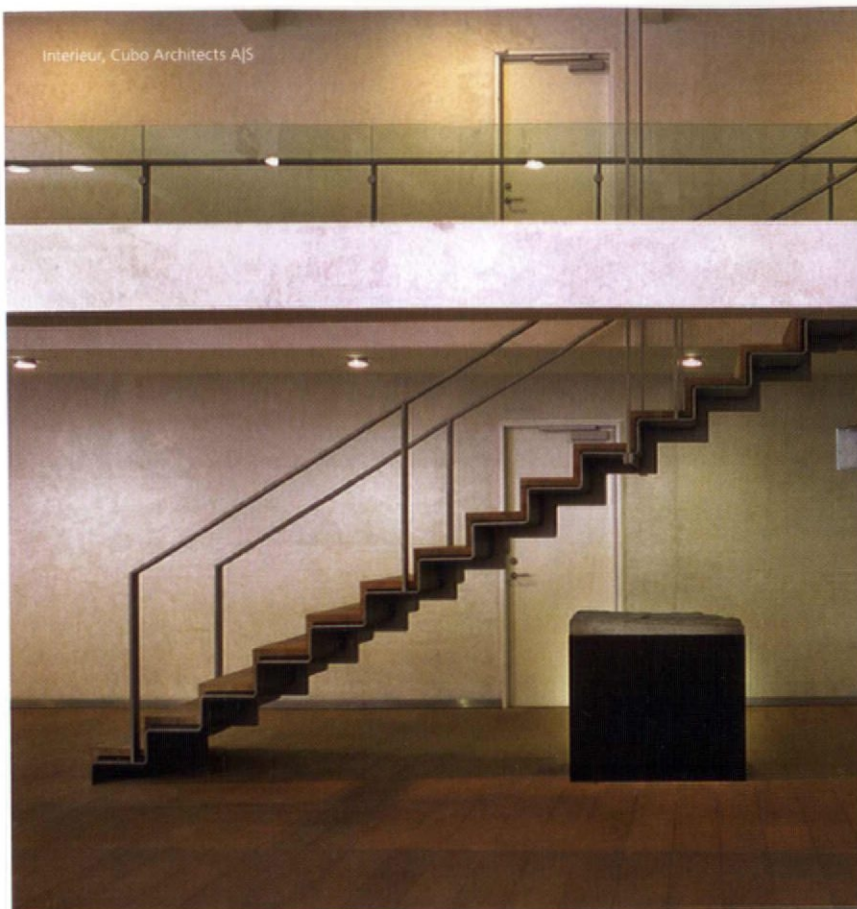
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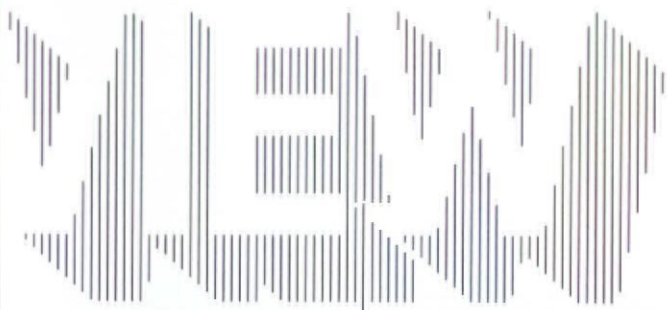
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BARCELONA, SPAIN

In the shadow of Gaudí, Toyo Ito's Barcelona hotel design stirs up controversy

ROB GREGORY

■ www.hotelurban.com

When contemplating Toyo Ito's new Suites Avenue hotel facade from the roof of Antonio Gaudí's La Pedrera, a number of local architects could be overheard expressing their profound disappointment in Ito's contribution to the streetscape. On the glamorous Passeig de Gràcia, widely accepted as one of the city's finest avenues (populated by buildings by Gaudí, Lluís Domènech i Montaner and Josep Puig i Cadafalch), **Ito's contribution was considered by some to be an unwelcome guest. Seen as little more than a thinly veiled marketing ploy to exploit the fact that interest in the Japanese architect is set to rise** considerably as his two towers in exhibition complex Fira de Barcelona near completion, the disapproval was palpable. At that time, their argument seemed quite reasonable, especially in consideration of our context, with comparisons being made between the wafer-thin steel facade across

the street and the massive load-bearing structure on which we stood. Returning to meet the project architect one month later, however, offered an opportunity to clarify the context of the project and to better understand Ito's very particular response to the brief.

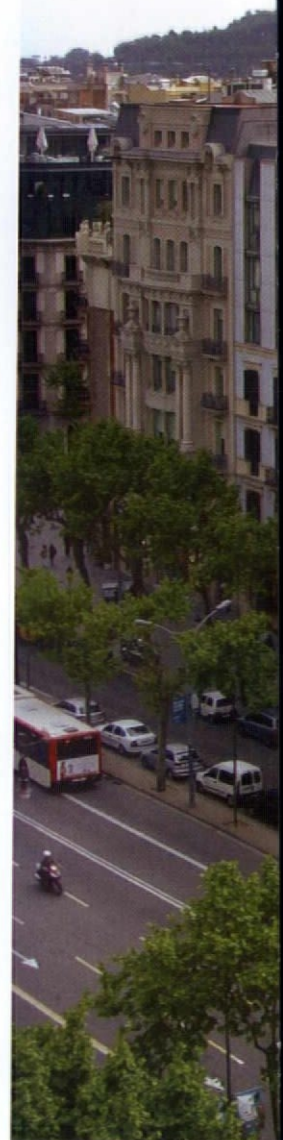
The project is in fact not an Ito building at all, but rather a very small component of an extensive refurbishment project for a hotel chain, Derby Hotels Collection. Wanting to create new luxury accommodation, they decided to keep the existing office building, not merely to preserve its functional structure but more importantly to retain the benefit of the top-floor roof terrace. Had a new build been proposed in this location, a terrace at that level would almost certainly have been refused, due to recently enforced height restrictions. As it is, residents of Suites Avenue not only have an enviable view of La Pedrera through Ito's perforated screen, but when

on the roof, turning 90° in either direction reveals spectacular panoramic views towards the sea and to Barcelona's distinctive mountainous border to the north.

Ito designed two surfaces: this screen – constructed from 8mm Cor-ten – and a reflective and rippled glass lining for the building's retained lightwell, featuring a similar pattern to that on the facade. As explained by project architect Makoto Fukuda, Ito's original designs went through rigorous conservation consultation, with his first proposals rejected on grounds of mimicking Gaudí too closely. His final design was deliberately lightweight both in terms of its detailed execution, and also in relation to the porosity of the screen as a whole.

Fabricated in full-width sections, the screen was welded on site. It was then sprayed with a metallic paint containing a pink pearlescent tint that renders the surface incredibly responsive to Catalan daylight.

Bearing up well under the sun's unforgiving scrutiny, its finish is likened by Fukuda to that of a car. On the internal face, a more simple matt finish in dark grey has been applied, matching the glazing system (by others) and helping to create coherent external rooms for each of the apartments that enjoy this street-front location – making it the ideal place to sit and wonder at the splendour of one of Gaudí's finest buildings and, for those who are not fans, the ideal place from where to avoid seeing Ito's controversial response to context.





Above_ Viewed from Gaudí's La Pedrera, Ito's rose-tinted facade is a conspicuous sight

Above right_ Ito's steel and glass balconies create sheltered external rooms
Right_ Welding and spraying on site produced an exceptionally high-quality finish



ROB GREGORY; MAKOTO FUKUDA

OBWALDEN, SWITZERLAND

Switzerland's race to lower tax rates skews the natural laws of urbanisation

DEANE SIMPSON



As the site of one of the most committed experiments in neo-liberal tax policy, the Swiss inter-regional war to attract the super-rich has recently taken on a new dimension. The tax-rate 'race to the bottom' now incorporates a battle over urban territory, articulating what may be called Laffer-curve urbanism.

The Laffer curve asserts that decreasing tax rates can produce increased tax revenues, and is one of the key justifications for tax competition. In Switzerland, where each canton (local government state) has autonomy over taxation policy, reducing rates has become a lever to draw in companies and wealthy individuals, resulting in the nation becoming home to over 4,000 foreign tax exiles.

Tax competition reached a new level in 2005 in Obwalden,

in the centre of Switzerland. An economically weak canton, it is reliant on agriculture and small industry. Amid a political campaign without substantial opposition, politicians proposed aggressive tax-rate reductions, including a regressive system that set higher levels of tax for lower income earners. The policy was supported by almost 90 per cent of voters, but the federal government repealed that tax system in 2007 as unconstitutional. In response, the canton approved a flat tax.

As a result of the corporate tax rate drop, in three years the number of companies in Obwalden rose by over 50 per cent to around 3,000 in 2008. However, most of these are PO Box companies that have contributed little to the canton in terms of jobs or real growth.

Anticipating increased revenue from reduced tax rates, the canton has instead found itself sliding to the bottom of the revenue mountain, leading to further shortfalls that threaten the supply of public services and infrastructure.

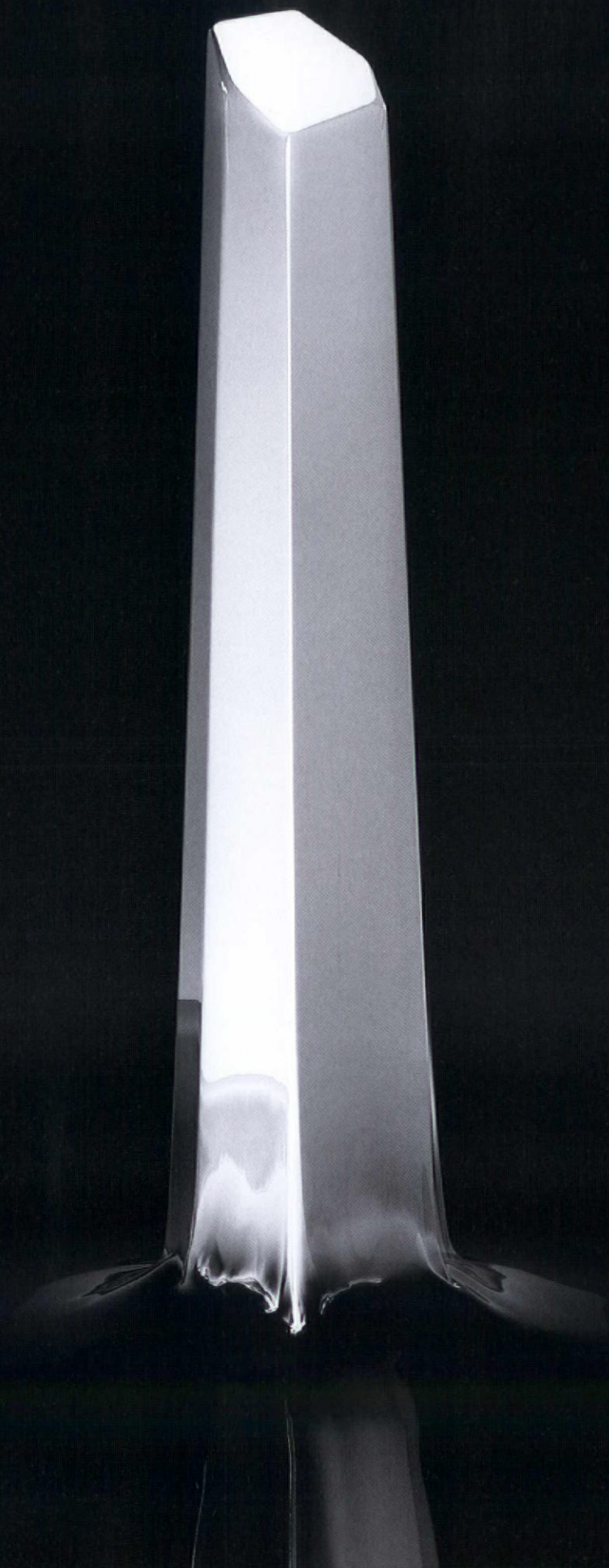
Now, plans are in place to set aside prime areas of land by the lake of Sarnen (pictured) – upon which building has been historically prohibited – to be designated as 'special living areas' for exclusive villas, featuring spectacular views protected by law.

Swiss urban historian Angelus Eisinger describes the driving forces particular to this form of Swiss suburbanisation as based on a 'discrepancy between the functional and political structuring of space. The factual success [of cantons]

relies on an almost banal prerequisite: their physical proximity to international hubs like Zurich. This leads to drastic transformations of the urban landscape and of the spatial network of everyday life.' For Eisinger, the imbalances in taxation policy produce distortions that prevent other, more preferable outcomes of densification and urban restructuring.

What is remarkable in the Swiss context is the extent of local government planning dedicated to such extreme redistributive practices, in terms of economics and land use. In a country that prides itself on egalitarianism and participatory democracy, these practices have been sold to voters as necessary steps to prosperity, but they are more likely to realise a Robin Hood effect in reverse.

These tendencies outline the formation of Obwalden as a 'spatial product', to use American architect Keller Easterling's term. It is a form of urbanism produced by an abstract organisational calculus of corporate tax rates, non-residency legislation, tax exile definitions, banking secrecy laws and tax revenue projections, one that invites global (PO Box) capital to enjoy a state of tax exception in the bucolic landscape of the Alps. The subversiveness of such a spatial product lies in the fact that it operates almost invisibly, while functionally it is capable of completely transforming the economic base of a sizeable political entity. To the keen eye it may be observed in the expansion of local post offices or in the addition of a few villas. Meanwhile, it is likely to enact a gradual but measured dismantling of public services and infrastructure in one of the poorest cantons in Switzerland.



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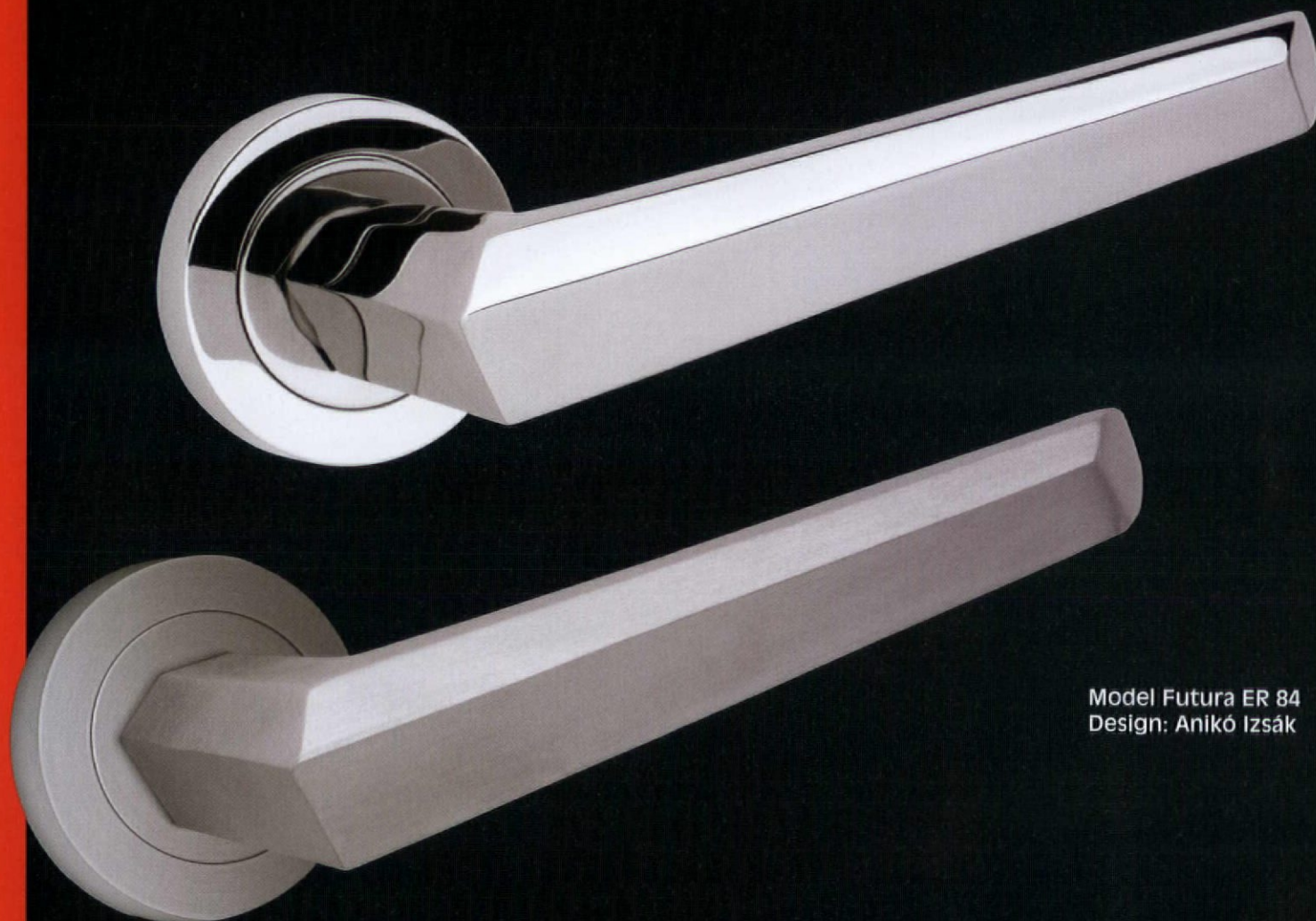
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The High Line parkland project paves the way for a new kind of urbanism in the US

JAFFER KOLB

www.thehighline.org

Below: New York's High Line park has transformed 1.5 miles of disused rail track

Beyond being universally regarded as one of the best new public spaces in New York, the High Line has done something far greater for the rest of the country. Now complete, it has given cities and citizens across the United States a reason to evaluate existing landscape and infrastructure and see them as opportunities rather than burdens, already proved by a number of like-minded projects popping up nationally.

Disused rail lines and other so-called detritus left in the wake of the centralisation of industry and subsequent post-industrial condition have, particularly in the US, been seen as unsightly reminders of a bygone era and ripe for demolition. The American model suggests we pave paradise and put up, at best, insipid, non-contextual parks with plugged-in gardens and water features. But the High Line

represents something different. The park began as an elevated freight rail track that has been redeveloped by Diller Scofidio + Renfro, with Field Operations working on public space. The first phase, stretching from Gansevoort and Washington Streets in the West Village to 20th Street and 10th Avenue to the north, opened on 9 June.

Getting the park built involved a 10-year battle for preservation, to overturn existing planning codes, and to design a space that would retain its identity when transformed from a disused rail line to attractive greensward.

Anyone familiar with New York planning and government need not be told how epic the struggle has been to execute this feat – from convincing landowners (who had expected the rail tracks to be torn down) that they weren't losing out, to staging and executing a major design competition.

Across the country, towns and cities are looking beyond these difficulties, knowing that something of comparable scope can be achieved. So over the next few years, the idea of public space and adaptive reuse in landscape design should make tremendous advances.

The first and most notable such project is the Bloomingdale Trail in Chicago. A 2.7 mile-long elevated rail track to the



IMAN BAAN



Above, Chicago hopes to emulate the High Line's success with its Bloomingdale Trail

DAVID SCHALLIOL

north-west of the city centre, the trail has been considered for development since at least 2004, though according to Ben Helphand, board president for the Friends of the Bloomingdale Trail, there has been talk of adapting the track into public space since the early 1990s.

At present, the proposed park has already gone through the City of Chicago Department of Planning and Development, and preliminary design and engineering work is under way. The design team is led by Arup, selected through a request for proposals (RFP) process in July. Collaborators include Chicago-based Ross Barney Architects and New York-based Michael Van Valkenburgh Associates. According to the Trust for Public Land, which has been involved in the park's execution, the latter firm was sought

because of Van Valkenburgh's work on the High Line.

'Everyone's been excited about the High Line, and the comparisons are apt. Its success paves the way for us,' says Helphand. He adds, however, that there are key differences. The Bloomingdale Trail is lower in height than the High Line, so access points can be achieved through ramps. Also, the area of Chicago is physically quite different to the Meatpacking Districts and Chelsea in New York. 'The rail is lined by single family homes and connects very different neighbourhoods,' Helphand explains. Right now the park isn't about connecting a cultural corridor, but aims to introduce a greensward that directs pedestrian traffic and

bicycles across the city.

The Friends of the Bloomingdale Trail looked to the High Line not only as a model of development, but also for its lessons in how to manage a process of this scale. Helphand says: 'A lot was given to us by the Friends of the High Line, like how to organise and connect with the city. They told us not to do a design competition if we didn't have to and both sides specified the importance of doing what's right for the project.' Bloomingdale Trail is slated to complete in time for the 2016 Olympics, a goal that helps ensure timely commitment from the city.

Similar proposals are being considered for projects from Tennessee to Pittsburgh. The former is part of a new masterplan in development for Morristown, a city in the north-east of the state, and takes better advantage of a system of skywalks (elevated pedestrian paths) that were built in the 1960s. In Pittsburgh, designs for an elevated park were developed for RiverParc (a cultural redevelopment project helmed by Stuttgart-based Behnisch Architekten), but have been temporarily shelved because of the economy.

These few projects indicate that the High Line can and will function as a model of civic participation and new attitudes about public space – something American cities have long needed. It is fortunate that such an endeavour falls under the banner of sustainability through its core aim of reusing existing space, but hopefully it will also change the way people regard disused land and the rich potential it offers in shaping the urban environment.



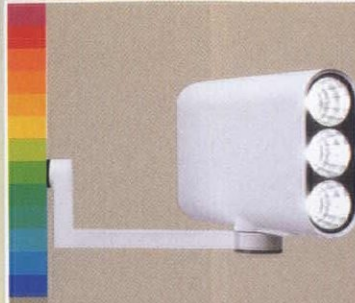
The High Line is an imaginative force for civic good and other US cities should build on its example

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Rus in urbe: French funster EXYZT brings a radical, rural idyll to London's East End with its windmill and wheatfield

CRYSTAL BENNES

www.exyzt.org

The ideology-laden press release for the Barbican's current exhibition, *Radical Nature: Art and Architecture for a Changing Planet 1969-2009*, could have been scripted by French experimental architecture practice EXYZT. The exhibition's aim, to bring together key figures from different generations to create utopian works and inspiring solutions for our ever-changing planet, reads straight out of the EXYZT manifesto. But this forward-thinking collective also backs up its manifesto with fascinating community-focused installations.

Like most of EXYZT's projects, its Dalston Mill in East London is fundamentally a collaborative effort, developed after the Barbican invited it to participate in *Radical Nature*, introduced it to London-based architect muf, and let it loose on

the East End. Driving around Hackney searching for a site, Nicolas Henninger of EXYZT says that when they eventually strayed into Dalston, he knew they'd discovered their location. 'We were looking for a site with immediate potential. As the windmill is situated within the landscape, you quite naturally have a confrontation with the area. With Dalston, we were attracted to its very mixed landscape, as well as to its history and vibrancy.'

Dalston Mill, a 16m-high windmill which creates low-voltage electricity to produce flour, has been received with genuine enthusiasm by its neighbours. When I visited one Sunday afternoon, a local cake-decoration club had taken over the bar area, a cycle repair shop had popped up outside, and plenty of people were milling about admiring the sight

of a wheatfield in the urban surroundings of East London. Henninger enthuses about the local residents. 'We've had so much local support. When I look at the postcodes of the visitors who sign our mailing list, they're mostly E2 and E8, which I think means our project has been a success with the local community. We're interested in creating an interaction between the people and the architecture, in providing certain amenities on a local level, so it's fantastic that the people of Dalston have responded to what we've done.'

Henninger's positive comments extend to wider praise of the working culture in UK architectural practice. He feels that there is more support for younger practices in the UK than in France. 'It's good for us to spend time in different working cultures. The UK trusts

young practices, which is not always the case in France. Especially in a big city like London, there seems to be an increasing engagement with questions of dealing with the contemporary issues about the city and about living, all of which are very open to experimentation.'

Up next for EXYZT is a collaboration with Venetian architecture collective Rebiennale, which aims to highlight the amount of waste material left behind after the Venice Biennale by recycling it for use in local projects. Working with Rebiennale, EXYZT hopes to renovate an unused social centre and turn it into an off-site pavilion for next year's biennale. There is also talk of projects in the south of France and another installation in London, but these are in the early stages of development.





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TOKYO, JAPAN

Robust debate at the International Architectural Education Summit

THOMAS DANIELL

www.iaes.aud.ucla.edu

The International Architectural Education Summit, a co-production between UCLA and the University of Tokyo on the topic of 'Negotiating Global Pressures on Professional and Educational Standards in Architecture', comprised a series of somewhat fractious panel discussions between a select group of the world's top architectural educators. The event, held in Tokyo in June, was complemented by an exhibition of student work from the participating schools.

Intended to 'address tensions between local practices and international standards for a globalised architectural profession', there was indeed plenty of tension on display, much of it focused on Fernando

Ramos, co-director of the UIA Architectural Education Commission and the UNESCO/UIA Charter for Architectural Education. Ramos found himself under attack by eloquent apologists for unfettered experimentation, while the charter (a relatively modest document intended to enhance accountability, ease accreditation and facilitate the mobility of students and teaching staff) was treated as a deadening imposition on creativity: global standards were seen as a lowest-common-denominator hindrance to innovative teaching programmes. In response, Ramos pointed out that the UIA has no official jurisdiction – the charter comprises a set

Below, from left: Yasuaki Onoda (Tohoku University), Ralph Lerner (University of Hong Kong), Kazuhiko Namba (University of Tokyo), Odile Decq (École Spéciale d'Architecture), Fernando Ramos (UIA Architectural Education Commission) and Mark Wigley (Columbia University), at the summit's final session

of recommendations, and anyone involved in the field is welcome to contribute.

The theme of globalisation itself caused conflict. Almost every speaker concurred on the importance of a global 'biodiversity' of architecture schools, but the comfortable consensus was upset by Neelkanth Chhaya, dean of the architecture faculty at CEPT University, India, who commented that all the work in the exhibition looked the same (the implicit exception being the low-tech, socially engaged work being done at his own school). Digitally designed organic forms were indeed conspicuous, but Sylvia Lavin of UCLA answered Chhaya that it was the responsibility of educators to possess the expertise to identify and nurture differences, however subtle they may be.

The relationship between the design studio and the real world proved to be the crux of the debate. Ecole Spéciale d'Architecture's Odile Decq lamented the conservatism of today's students – reflecting a general concern that environmental issues are used to justify timid designs – and insisted on the importance of maintaining the autonomy of the studio as a place in which to fantasise. In response, Alejandro Zaera-Polo of Delft University of Technology declared that any studio not actively engaged with reality was headed for irrelevance. It was Ralph Lerner from the University of Hong Kong who finally pointed out the elephant in the room: in a globalised educational marketplace, the students are now so well-informed, mobile and ruthless in their choices that any academic institution or individual not keeping pace with consumer demands is unlikely to survive.



INTERNATIONAL ARCHITECTURAL EDUCATION SUMMIT EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE



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LOS ANGELES, USA

The father of architectural photography, Julius Shulman, dies in his Hollywood home, aged 98

MICHAEL WEBB

www.juliusshulmanfilm.com

Seventy-one years ago, Julius Shulman immortalised a building and a moment in time. Richard Neutra had built eight apartments on a hillside to the west of UCLA, in Westwood, Los Angeles. He hoped to generate income but potential tenants thought them too austere. Then MGM star Luise Rainer, who had won the Best Actress Oscar two years in a row, decided it would be a perfect hideaway. Shulman shot a glamorous celebrity kneeling, immersed in her books, and those images of domestic bliss, combined with the crisp white geometry of the exterior, conferred magic on this innovative project. Soon after, Charles and Ray Eames moved into the same apartment and stayed until they built their own house in 1949. I've had the good fortune to live there for the past 30 years and little has changed since those defining shots.

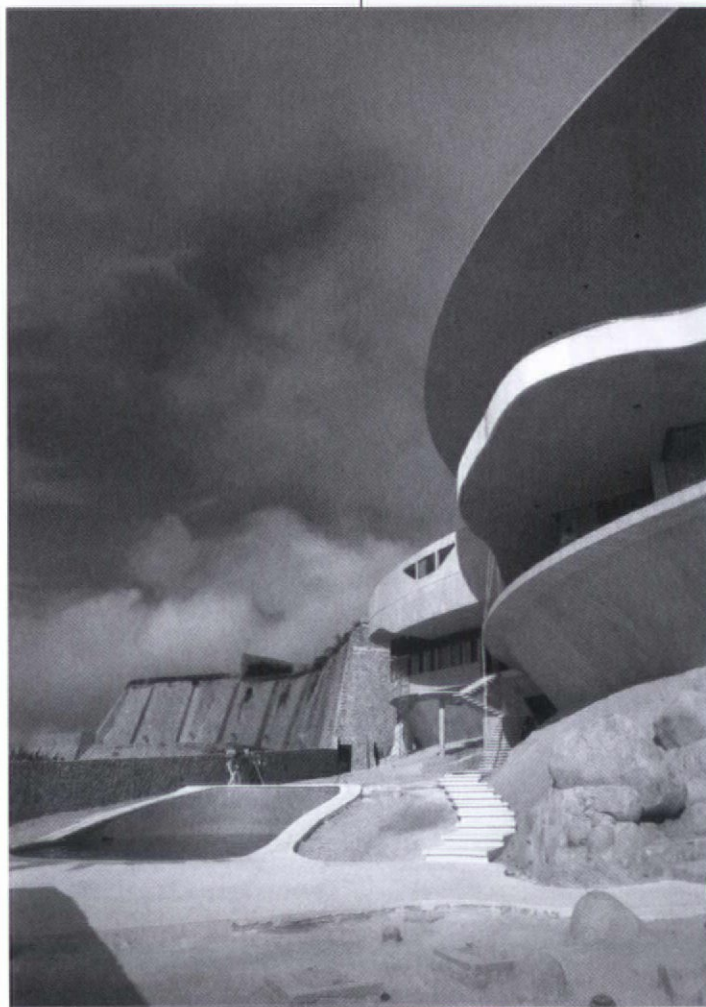
Shulman was a master of light and composition, but his

greatest achievement was to win a broad audience for modern architecture in southern California. From 1936 almost until his death, he tirelessly promoted a vision of carefree living in spare, light-filled rooms and beside the pool. He lived that dream, commissioning a steel and glass house from Raphael Soriano in 1950, and created a luxuriant garden behind it. His sense of optimism matched that of his clients: good architecture could enrich lives.

He was ahead of his time in peopling interiors. Californian architect Pierre Koenig is the attentive husband in the classic image *Case Study House 21*, and the two women in white who float in a transparent bay above the lights of LA are girlfriends of the architect's associates. His images seduced editors and readers around the world. He was zealous in sending them prints, but even happier when people came to him.

Until The Getty Research

Below_
Julius Shulman
strikes a pose
Bottom_
John Lautner's
Arango House in
Acapulco, Mexico



Institute acquired his archives in 2005, Shulman maintained his own with the same exactitude he brought to his craft. Every time I wanted to illustrate a book or an article, I would drive up to his house – often as the last visitor was leaving – and he would locate contact prints of each project in a few minutes of looking in file drawers. I marvelled (as did the Getty curators) at the efficiency and the encyclopedic coverage. **'I was lucky enough to be doing the right thing at the right time,' he demurred. 'So, anytime someone wants a photograph of a modern house, Uncle Julius provides the picture.'**

He could have processed a score of requests in a day but that would have denied him the pleasure of reminiscence. Despising post-modernism as a betrayal of the rational architecture he had embraced for over half a century, in the 1980s he sold his cameras and settled into retirement. The memories were vivid: of seizing the moment as avidly as French photographer Cartier-Bresson, and of artfully composing a shot with multiple lighting set-ups over 45 minutes. Once he was in full flow it was impossible to stop him, and it hardly mattered that the stories were oft-told.

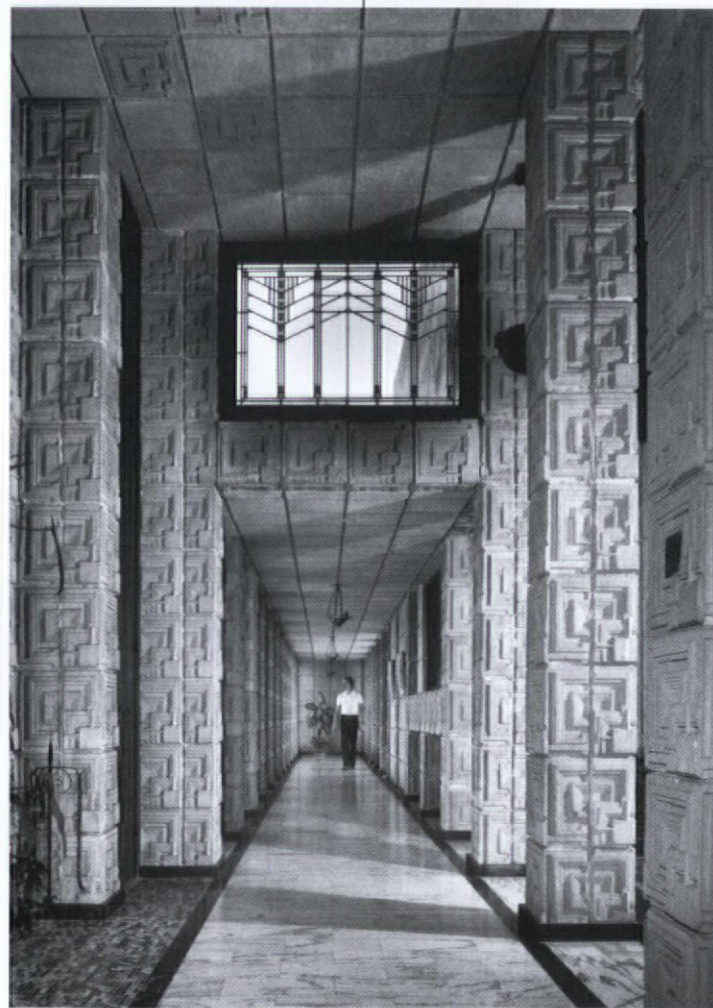
Shulman's career spanned the heyday of modernism, and he was a principal beneficiary of its revival. The po-mo toad was still croaking out in the suburbs, but urban sophisticates were drawn to the cool lines of the post-war era, and Shulman's photos pushed up the prices for modern classics. A German photographer, Juergen Nogai, who was visiting LA to take some shots for a book on the Case Study Houses, showed his work to Shulman. The veteran was impressed and proposed they collaborate. A few weeks



Left_ Richard Neutra and Luise Rainer in one of Neutra's LA hillside apartments in 1938. Shulman's evocative shots sold the scheme and Charles and Ray Eames subsequently lived there
Below_ Interior of Ennis House by Frank Lloyd Wright, photographed by Shulman

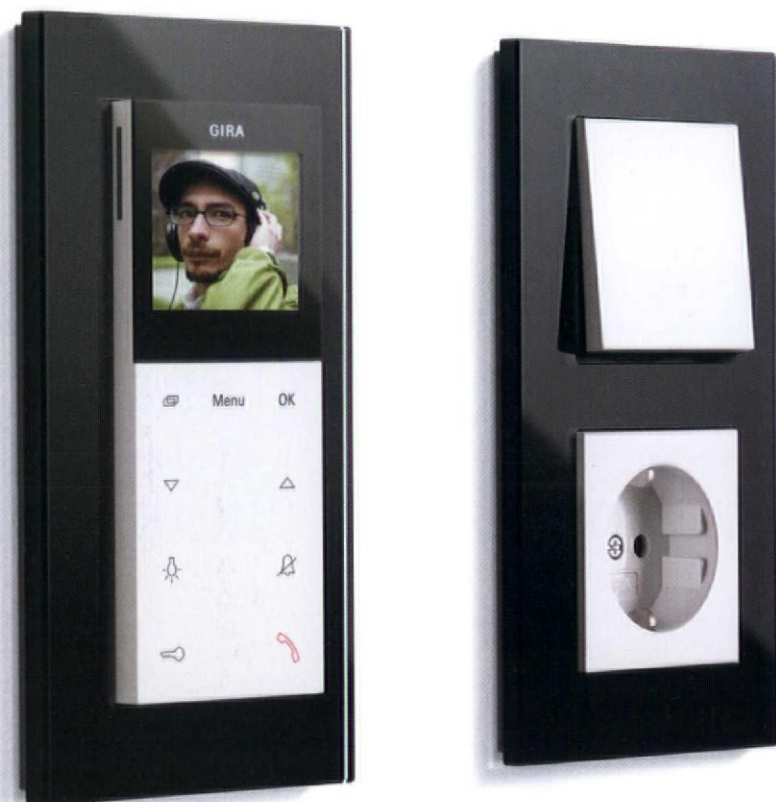
later, Nogai received a call at 3am. 'Come back. We have a lot to do,' said Shulman.

For eight years, they worked side by side, shooting new work and reinterpreting the classics. Shulman preferred black and white for its iconic, abstract qualities. 'Colour softens and prettifies, and often it adds nothing,' he declared. 'But I have to offer editors a choice.' He had always thought of himself as a journeyman, shooting historic and commercial buildings as well as modern masterpieces. For years he practically gave away his prints, but then an LA art dealer, Craig Krull, marked them up into the thousands of dollars, and they sold briskly, making Shulman a star in his mid-nineties. He had gone backpacking in the mountains every summer into his eighties; now he was increasingly frail. But his eyes and his tongue were sharper than ever, and he was out composing memorable images almost to the end.



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BUILDINGS

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065

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RIJKSMUSEUM ATELIERGEBOUW

LOCATION AMSTERDAM,
THE NETHERLANDS

ARCHITECT CRUZ Y ORTIZ

067

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ACTIVITY AND LEARNING
CENTRE

LOCATION KOH KODD ISLAND,
THAILAND

ARCHITECT 24H

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CAN FRAMIS MUSEUM

LOCATION BARCELONA, SPAIN

ARCHITECT BAAS

QUEENSLAND

Historically overshadowed by Sydney and Melbourne, Queensland's architects are now fermenting a pragmatic counterthrust that responds to a very particular climate and context. Rob Gregory introduces the Queensland scene and looks at two recent buildings in detail

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BROOKES STREET
NORTH OFFICE

LOCATION BRISBANE,
QUEENSLAND, AUSTRALIA

ARCHITECT JAMES RUSSELL

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BRISBANE GIRLS GRAMMAR
SCHOOL CREATIVE
LEARNING CENTRE

LOCATION BRISBANE,
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QUEENSLAND

IN QUEENSLAND, THE AR DISCOVERS A GENERATION OF ARCHITECTS OCCUPYING THE TERRITORY BETWEEN THE SENSUAL AND THE CEREBRAL

WRITER

ROB GREGORY

The editorial brief for the AR's recent Australian tour was, above all else, not to come back with any more crinkly-tin sub-tropical houses. No matter how delightful they were, we wanted something more urbane. We wanted to learn how architects were tackling issues related to contemporary practice in the city, to give readers an understanding of the breadth of Australian architecture today, beyond the modernism of Harry Seidler or the corrugations of Glenn Murcutt (two of the country's most internationally lauded architects). We visited Queensland – a region previously overlooked by the AR's historic coverage, which predominantly focused on Sydney and Melbourne – meeting more than 25 architects and visiting over 40 buildings in an intensive 10-day tour.

Hosted by the Queensland Department of Employment, Economic Development and Innovation, the tour followed an unprecedented declaration of support for the architectural profession by state premier Anna Bligh. As recalled by Lindy Johnson (the department's manager of creative industries) at the launch of Place Makers – a state-funded exhibition featuring 22 local architecture firms, held last year at the Gallery of Modern Art in Queensland's capital Brisbane – Bligh

enthusiastically stated that Brisbane should try to stage an architectural exhibition every year. Her support has given traditionally cool architects a warm glow, with exhibiting architect Richard Kirk, founder of Richard Kirk Architects, stating: 'This is the first time a premier has shown any support whatsoever for design. It's really important that Queensland people are constantly reminded that good urban outcomes are mandatory, not optional.'

In the past, Queensland's premiers have shown little interest in the quality of the urban environment, as seen most profoundly in the pre-Expo '88 days of Johannes 'Joh' Bjelke-Petersen, who presided over times when public realm barely existed and eating outdoors in public places was illegal. Since Expo '88, the city has enjoyed a greater sense of public liberty, manifest in the complete transformation of the Expo's South Bank site from a former industrial wasteland into today's popular cultural strip. Despite this, the value of good design remains low, and speaking more broadly about the lack of an embedded design culture, Johnson chooses an example that sums up the Queenslander's psyche perfectly: 'We eat outdoors for at least nine months of the year and yet we're crap at designing garden furniture and barbecues. They're too functional. Clunky, ugly things.'

Johnson could easily have been describing some of the city's worse buildings.

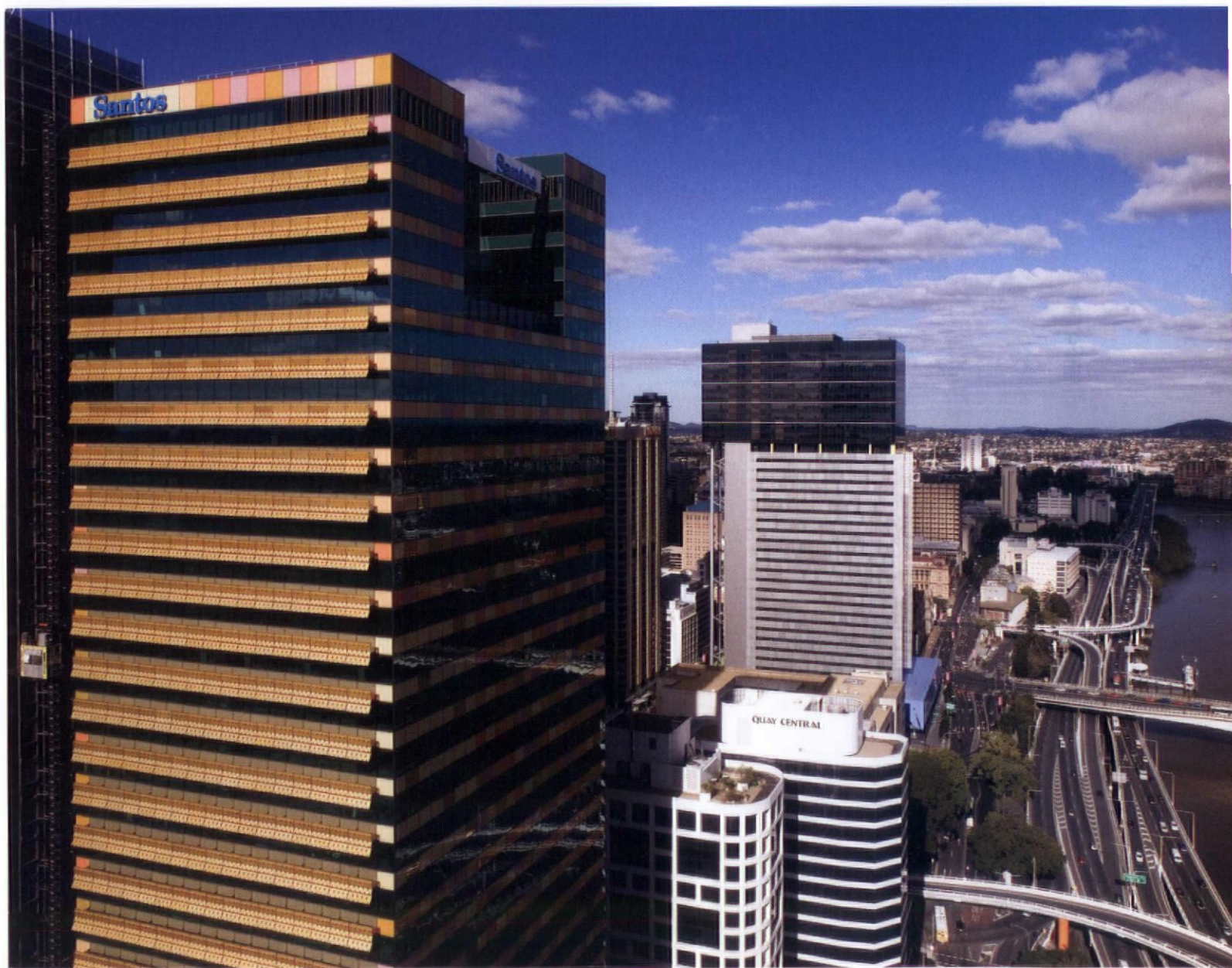
Support for architecture has been lacking in Queensland, and the need to raise the bar is widely accepted even among the region's best architects. In response, having infiltrated public office, building on the momentum of the Place Makers exhibition, Johnson and her team launched Heat, described as 'Queensland's new wave of environmental architects' – an initiative that seeks to promote the skills of its leading architects and overcome the sense of creative inertia. Harboured a curious second-rate self image, based on hang-ups associated with its origins as one of Australia's worst penal colonies, Brisbane is desperately trying to outgrow its nickname, Brisvegas, by shaking off its reputation for lacking sophistication. Some see this an uphill struggle and, despite having grown up here, local architect Timothy Hill acknowledges (with embarrassment) that Brisbane still has the reputation of being 'the white trash capital of Australia, settled purely to clean up Sydney'. As co-founder of Donovan Hill, another of Heat's featured practices and one of a handful of home-grown firms producing genuinely world-class work, you may have expected Hill to speak more tactfully. Instead, he cuts straight to the point, saying: 'You may find an exceptional building here, but that would be extraordinary. Australians are not really into architecture.' The Heat initiative seeks to remedy this and Queensland has also recently appointed a new state architect, Philip Follent (previously city architect for the Gold Coast), who has charged himself with taking the Heat message to the masses. Having already gained genuine support among the profession, Follent is described as an 'at the coal face' type of person, and seems perfect for the job of architectural advocate. But can he cover the ground alone? —



Left_ Donovan Hill's
2006 State Library of
Queensland
extension

Right_ Looking out
from Donovan Hill's
2004 Northbridge
Tower at the library
and Architectus' 2006
Gallery of Modern Art

Below_ Northbridge
Tower, with Denton
Corker Marshall's
2007 Brisbane
Square beyond



BRISBANE CONTINUES TO STRUGGLE WITH ITS CIVIC IMAGE AND IDENTITY. IT HAS NOT COME TO TERMS WITH BEING A PROPER CITY

The lack of critical mass is a reoccurring theme when discussing the low level of architectural aspiration in Queensland, and even without the questionable influence of ghosts of convicts past, Brisbane continues to struggle with its civic image and identity. Unlike any other Australian state, Queensland's population is scattered across a vast area, and Brisbane has not fully come to terms with being a proper city. Hill goes further by saying: 'It is actively in denial as a capital, so as not to alienate the majority of Queensland's rural electorate. We still have a category of yeoman and farmer to cover thousands of otherwise unclassified residents.' Brisbane's architectural culture, he adds, compares poorly to that of Sydney and Melbourne. 'Brisbane just doesn't compete in the ongoing fight between Melbourne and Sydney – places where the devolution of rivalry can be traced throughout the profession.' In his eyes, while Sydney architects pursue the formal purity of the white and the smooth, in Melbourne the architectural culture is far more intellectualised, and you are more likely to hear someone say, 'I referenced that interior detail from Semper – and then made deconstructivist reading of it.' So, while Sydney's 'stunning beauty' remains unrivalled, and as long as the 'piss-elegance' of Melbourne

perpetuates its status as the hot bed of Australian architectural education and theory, what can be said of the scene in Brisbane?

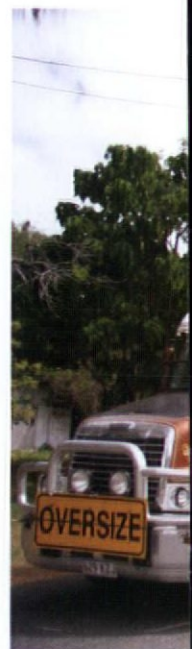
INHERITING THE CRAFT OF DWELLING

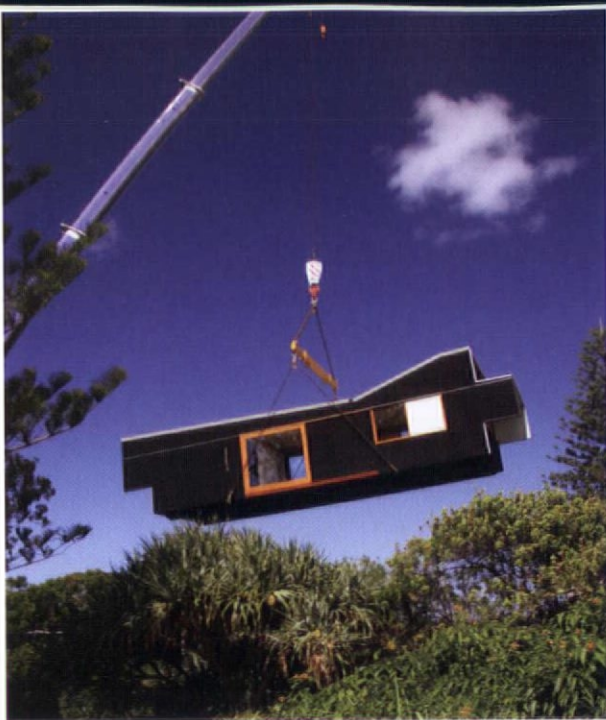
Haig Beck – assistant technical editor of *The Architects' Journal* from 1970-71, co-founder of *UME* magazine (with Jackie Cooper) and now professor of architecture at the University of Melbourne – has a theory that concurs with some of Hill's observations. Beck's views also resonate with Rory Spence's 1985 essays in the AR, which described the difference between Sydney and Melbourne as the difference between the sensual and the cerebral. Visiting him in his Usonian idyll, situated on Queensland's delightfully remote Stradbroke Island, Beck explains the key differences between Sydney, Melbourne and Brisbane in a way that can be usefully summarised in relation to Spence's classifications: 'sensual' Sydney is 'a place where functionalist ideals have become ever more focused on detail', while Melbourne, City of the Mind, is home to a generation of architects which has sampled the intellectual ideals of well-known Melbourne architect Peter Corrigan's without applying his level of spatial brilliance. This has resulted in 'an architecture of surface, in which the difference between

inside and outside is not in any way controlled by any sort of climatic ideal'. By contrast, says Beck, 'Brisbane was always below the radar, left to get on by itself'. But this was no bad thing. 'In fact, it was really rather good that Brisbane was just left to get on by itself,' he continues, 'as throughout the 1950s, '60s and '70s there was a very powerful group of architects, authors, writers, artists and academics, operating here together as a genuinely engaged and supportive community.' In Brisbane's architecture, Beck concludes, 'climate was always a given. So, when functionalism came here in the '50s, it automatically took on a climatic viewpoint, along with the need to use the technologies that were available. And this was basically a timber technology.' From this came exemplary projects such as Richard Lepplastrier's house in Mapleton (AR April 1998) and Andresen O'Gorman Architects' 1998 Mooloolomba House – familiar projects that typify our idea of the best of the region's contemporary vernacular.

As would be expected, the smartest people in today's emerging generation, who understand architecture as a discipline of continuity, implement the lessons learnt from regional precedent, even when working in the city. The two Queensland projects featured in this issue exemplify this. They are featured here because they demonstrate that craft still figures prominently at all scales, from the small, in the case of James Russell's Brookes Street North Office (pages 52-55), to larger scale buildings like m3architecture's Brisbane Girls Grammar School Creative Learning Centre (pages 56-59).

As discussions with Russell reveal, however, lessons learnt from predecessors do not only relate to construction, to bricks and mortar, or to fibro-cement board and nails. The occupant's relationship to their environment is also a key concern, 'not just in terms of seeing what the weather is like, whether it's —





Left and centre left_ Donovan Hill has formed a joint venture with Hutchinson Builders to create a new form of prefabricated Queensland building, the Happy Haus. The first full production model is seen here being transported and craned into place on Stradbroke Island

Bottom left_ Richard Leplastrier's house at Mapleton, with its sweeping covered walkway leading from house to workshop

Right_ Stradbroke Island, one hour by car and ferry from central Brisbane, has become popular among Brisbane architects. Andresen O'Gorman Architects' 1998 Mooloomba House is an exemplary contemporary Queensland building

Centre right_ Bob Riddel's weekend retreat, an original 1940s fibro-shack, encapsulates the spirit of an islander's attitude to dwelling. Haphazard and principally external, this place needs no makeover

Bottom right_ Elysium is a recent premium housing development near Noosa, with individual houses designed by Queensland architects. Overall the development carries some, but not all, of the region's best architectural sensibilities



YOUNG PRACTICE OWEN AND VOKES DEALS WITH THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN INSIDE AND OUT BY CREATING BOLD GARDEN ROOMS

sunny or rainy, but how, for example, their experience of a space will change after it rains'. Relating this to a description of his own home, 'even though the house is bang in the middle of the valley [Fortitude Valley, a suburb of central Brisbane], the moon arcs across the sky above the courtyard, the sun comes through saw-tooth rooflights, and crows and kookaburras come here in the morning. It really makes me smile.' Russell and his peers genuinely appreciate and promote what it means to dwell in a place, prioritising the threshold or the edge of a building instead of concentrating on maximising internal space. But ultimately this relies on patronage, and, as Russell states: 'I have had some wonderful clients who have been genuinely prepared to consider how limited their accommodation can be, in order to allow them to be more engaged with the places in which they live.'

More than any stylistic or functional manifestation, therefore, it is this sensual component of architecture that seems to unify much of the work of this generation of Queensland architects, particularly in terms of the domestic sector. So, just as there is a remarkable consistency in the way Japanese architects get the most out of their tight urban plots (AR September 2005), Queensland

architects exhibit a rare level of sensitivity to the nature of a place. The result is a freedom of expression that ranges from the highly provisional to the most tightly controlled. The Stradbroke Island retreat occupied by Bob Riddel, founder of Riddel Architecture, sits at one end of this spectrum of refinement; a humble but charming collection of 1940s fibro-cement shacks that Riddel modestly suggests he could never improve upon. And at the other end, a (dare it be said) more Sydney-esque response to contemporary dwelling is seen in the work of Owen and Vokes – a young practice which deals with the relationship between inside and out by creating bold and highly mannered garden rooms using familiar forms, but without reverting to the Queensland act of feathering the threshold. There is not a slat nor a decorative screen in sight.

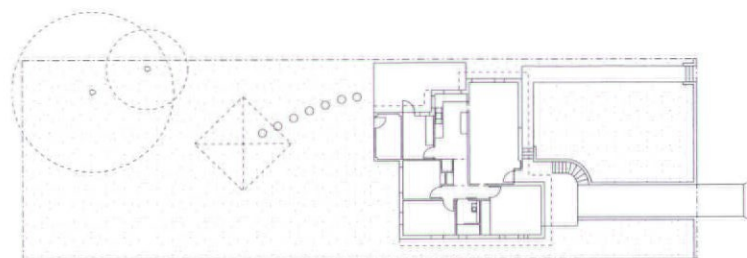
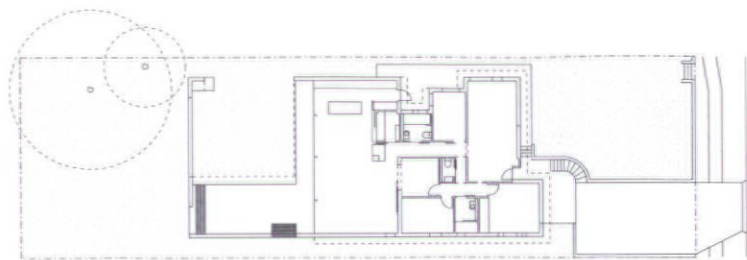
CRAFT AT THE CITY SCALE

If tying white-modernism to the heritage of Queensland architecture comes as something a surprise, then some may find the mention of speculative office towers even harder to reconcile with conventional expectations of Queensland architecture (despite Harry Seidler's obvious contribution to this typology). There are, however, a number of home-grown architects

who have risen to the challenge of the commercial market, breaking with the convention that has historically seen the region's most thoughtful architects operate almost exclusively in the domestic sector (for example, Rex Addison, Elizabeth Watson Brown and Gerard Murtagh).

While the development of the contemporary Queensland house has benefited from supportive clients, the same has not been true of the commercial sector, as noted by Kirk. 'The issue is not that Brisbane suffers from a lack of good architects,' he says, 'but more that there is a lack of leadership among clients. Brisbane has too few adequately funded projects, illustrated by the rule of thumb that good buildings here would have half the facade budget of a similar project in Sydney or Melbourne. This is why many architects maintain a residential focus.' In this regard, Kirk's 2004 Brisbane headquarters for film and television post-production company Cutting Edge is something of an exception. The process benefited from a combination of good tender returns and, most crucially, from the fact that Kirk was responsible for delivering the project through to completion. In Brisbane, this sort of contractual experience is the exception, not the rule, as is illustrated by the procurement of Brisbane's Gallery of Modern Art in 2002, which saw a relatively controversial competition process (with consensus among the architectural fraternity being that Benson + Forsyth's scheme should have been chosen over that of eventual winner Architectus) further compromised by the dumbing-down process of a standard design and construct contract.

As recounted by Hill, 'Brisbane specialises in doing the champagne toast on a beer budget, and for the last 10 years we have been conditioned by two industry truths. The first is the need to work with the design and construct process, not against it, which has been good —



Top left_ Before and after plans of Owen and Vokes' 2004 Newmarket House show how the 1940s art deco cottage has been extended
Above left_ At the rear, a clean, white extension contains an additional bedroom and larger living room.

Described as an inhabited 'garden wall', the extension focuses on a 'garden room'
Left_ From the street, Newmarket House retains its original identity
Top and above_ Owen and Vokes also applies its domestic strategies in more urban situations,

seen here at the recently completed Camp Hill House
Below left and right_ Garden rooms also feature in more remote settings, seen here in the firm's design for the 2008 Hervey Bay Farmhouse



TO PARTICIPATE IN CITY-MAKING, WE HAVE BEEN FORCED TO WORK IN THE MOST OUTRAGEOUS CONTRACTUAL CIRCUMSTANCES

TIMOTHY HILL

for us in a Calvinist way, never letting our ego get out of control. The second is that we are part of the last pre-digital generation, who spent the early part of our careers completely immersed in the realities of construction.' Donovan Hill has chosen to play the contractors at their own game, instead of retreating back to the safety of the domestic project. And, while Hill acknowledges that there is a danger in becoming a 'design and construct smarty-pants', by the same token he thinks all architects should be canny enough to figure out similar contractual tactics, without running the risk of 'legitimising shitty methods'. By this, Hill is referring to Donovan Hill's experience on its recently completed Northbridge Tower – a 35-storey building of formal, material and urban distinction that completely outclasses Denton Corker Marshall's inoffensive but generic equivalent, the 37-storey Brisbane Square, completed in 2007, located a few blocks to the east.

With a number of first-rate domestic projects under its belt, including the D House (AR December 2001), which won an AR Award for Emerging Architecture in 2001, Donovan Hill is a proven expert in the craft of architecture across all scales. But taking this craft to the scale of the city was not an easy process. Hill says: 'In order to

participate we have been forced to work in the most outrageous contractual circumstances. For example, on Northbridge Tower we never saw the contract between the proprietor and the builder.' Always employed by the builder and not the client, drawings are just 'a guide', and the architect spends most of their time juggling the building as it emerges, and trying to make 'the best play at the best time'.

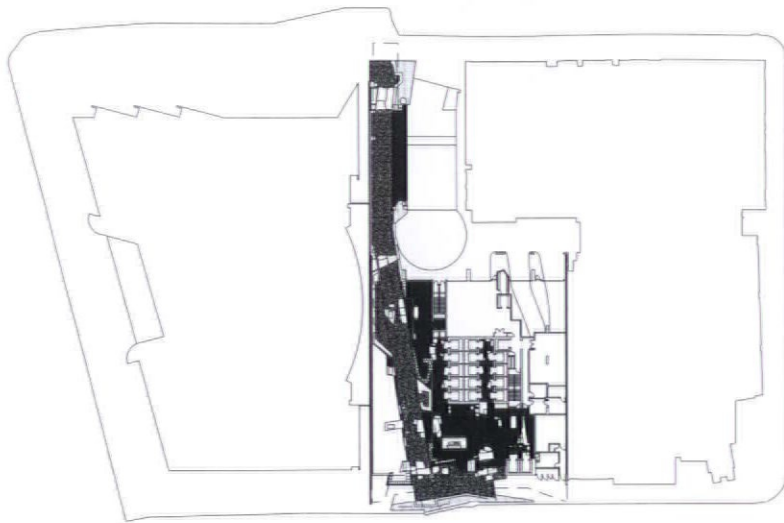
Hill continues: 'With Northbridge, we played a curious role that meant once we had absorbed all the development criteria, and had window sills and various features designed by the real estate agent, we, the architect, acted more like a project narrator, implicitly charged with making sure that the original remit of the project saw the light of day... Early on, our narration dictated that two of the five key things that absolutely had to happen were the laneway through the building and the foyer beneath it. So as momentum built, and as the rest of the team were busy importing facades from China, forgetting about the laneway being a priority, we would be there reminding everybody – we've got to make sure we still get this laneway. Sometimes we do the opposite, by not even piping up at all, so that if something is out of the firing line, then we just let it lie.' As was the case with the dramatically

low 2.1m ceiling heights in the foyer, which the client later took issue with.

Donovan Hill also needed to develop what Hill calls a form of 'super-consciousness' in the way it handles professional relationships. 'In Melbourne you can just stamp your foot, and say "I want". But you can't do that here,' he says. An example that illustrates this point perfectly was when the core of Northbridge Tower finally rose high enough above the hoarding to be visible, revealing that the foreman in charge of the jump-form had taken it upon himself to change the setting-out of openings within the core. When alerting the contractor to the error, the foreman simply said, 'I just thought I'd rationalise it a bit', to which the architect responded, 'Do you not think it's fair that the boys, as well as the girls, can get to their toilet?'

As haphazard and as provisional as this may sound, the story summarises broader readings of Queensland's current architectural scene, with a generation of architects which is using its expertise and sensitivity to outmanoeuvre a planning and development industry that remains, as Hill puts it, 'neolithic'. According to Hill, in this sort of industry on these sorts of contracts, you can't afford to remonstrate or get cranky with the foreman. All you can do is remain in control and give pragmatic reasons for why things are the way they are. 'Being the narrator of the project, we know in the end what has to happen, so there really is no point in trying to win with a tantrum. In a funny way, that foreman was genuinely trying to help,' says Hill.

Clearly Brisbane's architects are trying to maintain standards set by their predecessors, making the most of the provisions of the moment while holding on to visions of holistic architectural outcomes. Collectively, this generation lacks none of the sensuality or thoughtfulness attributed to its colleagues from Australia's southern states. 



Top left_ The ground-floor plan of Northbridge Tower shows the laneway and foyer: two of the key architectural moves that Donovan Hill fought hard to retain
Above left_ The foyer is conceived as a room that belongs more to the public laneway than the corporate office. Furniture, light fittings and low ceiling heights contribute to a more domestic identity

Far left_ Projecting out over the street, boutique offices cloak an above-ground car park
Left_ The tower's distinctive solar shades show Donovan Hill's playful attitude to detail and motif
Above_ The laneway. Diverting the contractor's attention to other matters, the architect was able to ensure that foyer rates were applied to the specification





062

BROOKES STREET NORTH OFFICE

LOCATION

BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND,
AUSTRALIA

ARCHITECT

JAMES RUSSELL

WRITER

ROB GREGORY

PHOTOGRAPHY

JON LINKINS

On meeting James Russell in the busy inner-city suburb of Fortitude Valley, he is keen to underline that 'the images of this place are not crash hot'. The tightness of the site, combined with Brisbane's strong sunlight, plays havoc with light levels. Furthermore the project has never been (and perhaps never will be) officially complete and ready for a glossy photo shoot. As with most self-funded, self-initiated, self-build projects, time is not always such a big deal.

Acquiring the site after returning from a working sabbatical, Russell and his wife have developed it in a piecemeal manner, as funds and domestic necessity have dictated. Initially living in the church itself (a 19th-century heritage-listed building, now restored and used as a furniture showroom), there have been three key phases, in the form of discrete new-build additions on pockets of land around the perimeter. First came a single-storey pavilion facing the street, which houses a café, and Russell's current home, an ingenious 5.6m-wide stilted 190m² structure centred on a delightful elevated grass courtyard on a narrow site to the south. Secondly came this curious wedge-shaped structure, the official

office and socialising space for James Russell, Architect.

Russell is keen to keep his practise small, but this does not mean he only wants to work on private domestic projects. As Russell's own built manifesto shows, also enjoys the challenge of gritty urban situations.

The office consists of three levels: a masonry cellar (built by the coolest brickies in Brisbane, Elvis & Rose), a transparent meeting place (with screens rising up from the base), and an open-air elevated timber working platform (with a perimeter desk for four workstations). 'The intent behind the design was to explore a model for office development that maximises inner-city voids as site,' explains Russell. 'It is also an investigation into methods of occupation within the public and private realm. We work under an open sky, we gather on the lane, and read and drink within the ground.'

The cellar houses books, wine and a card table, and is accessed by ladder. The office is reached via a steep slender stair that sits between the church and buttress. Highly provisional, charming and functional, glazed awnings and a weatherproof curtain allow the office to retreat in harsh weather, when it comes. 

Previous page_
 Architect James
 Russell's office
 clings to the corner
 of a heritage-listed
 Methodist church
 Opposite_ The
 south-eastern

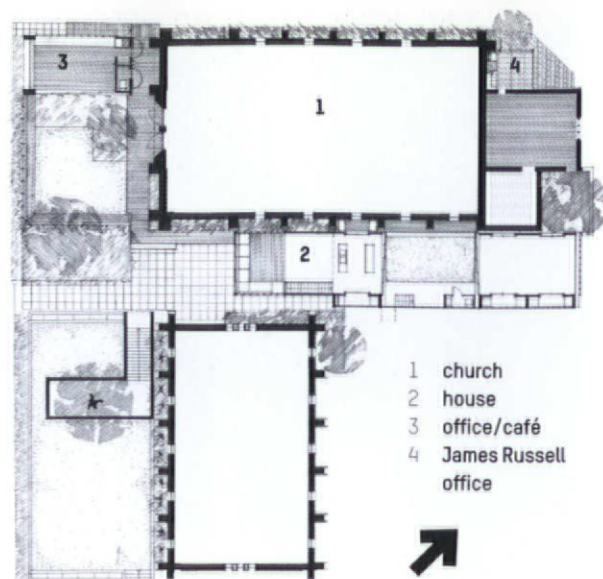
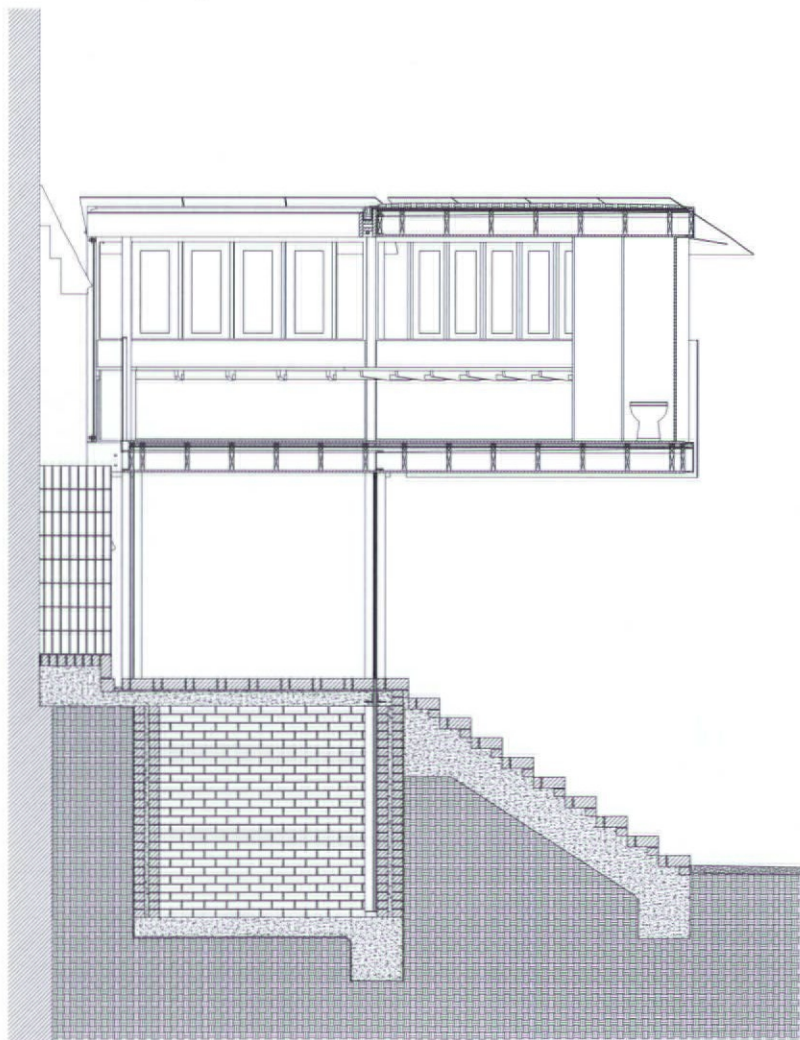
elevation of the
 church forms one
 boundary for
 Russell's elevated
 courtyard house
 Below centre_
 Stairs lead to an
 upper-level studio,

while glass walls
 drop down to the
 cellar below
 Below far right_ From
 the street, the café
 alerts passers-by
 to Russell's
 interventions

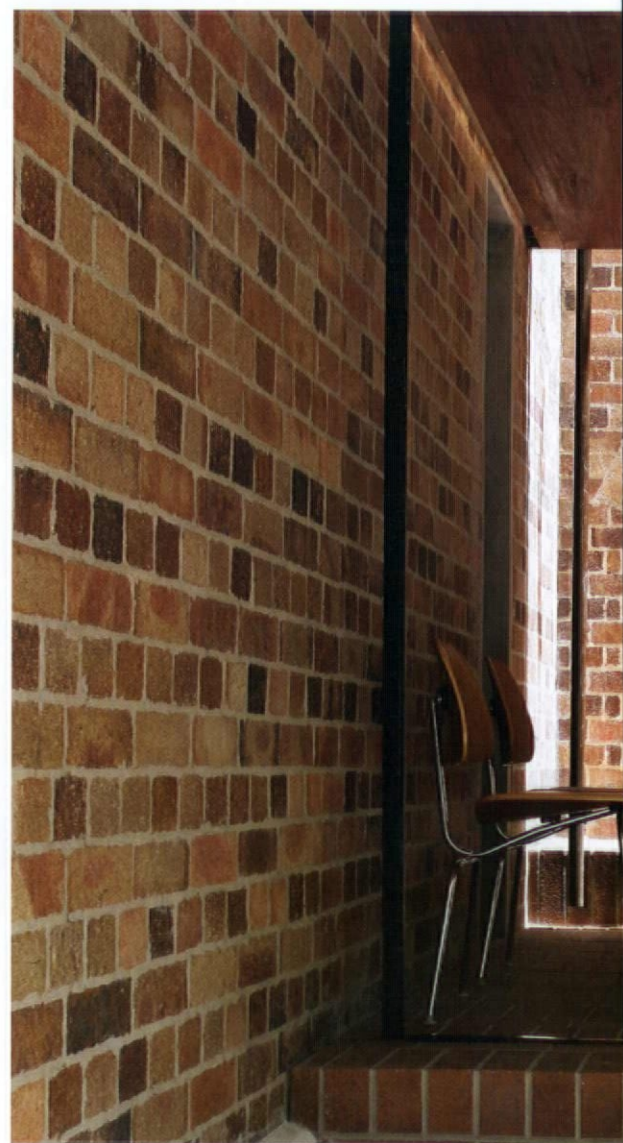
long section through house



detailed section through James Russell office

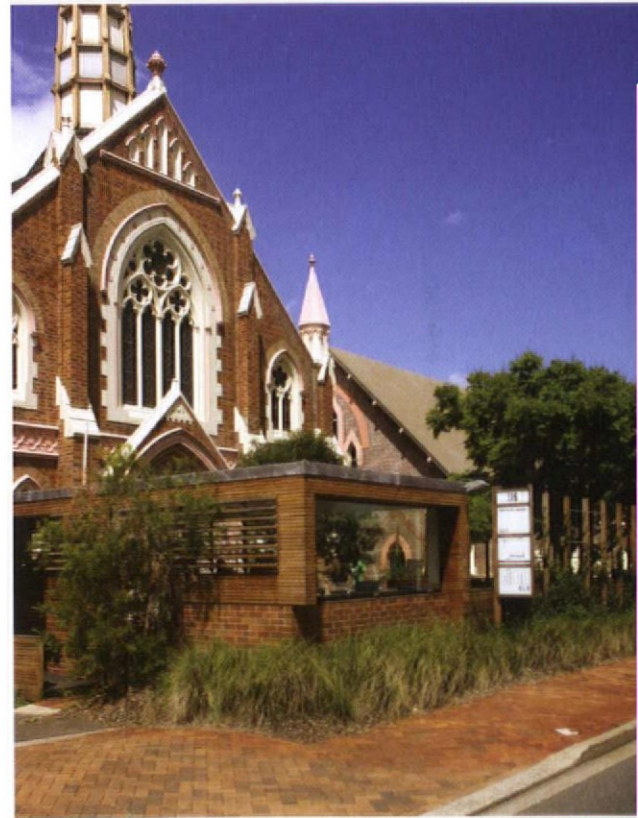
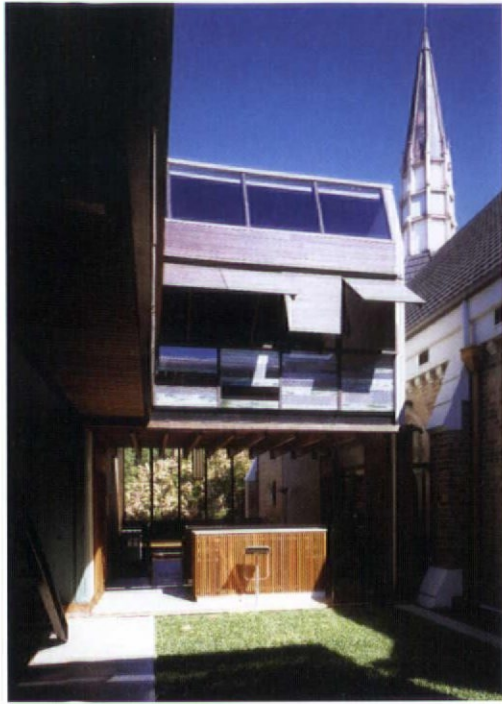


site plan



**THE INTENT BEHIND THE DESIGN
WAS TO EXPLORE A MODEL FOR
OFFICE DEVELOPMENT THAT
MAXIMISES INNER-CITY VOIDS**

JAMES RUSSELL



063

BRISBANE GIRLS GRAMMAR SCHOOL CREATIVE LEARNING CENTRE

LOCATION

**BRISBANE, QUEENSLAND,
AUSTRALIA**

ARCHITECT

M3ARCHITECTURE

WRITER

ROB GREGORY

PHOTOGRAPHY

JON LINKINS

Driving along Brisbane's Inner City Bypass, the new Creative Learning Centre (CLC) for Brisbane Girls Grammar School (BGGS) is an arresting sight. Not just because of its distinctive weighty form but also, with contrasting levity, due to its filigreed western elevation that warps and throbs with a mesmerising radial moiré effect. The CLC is described by architect Michael Banney of m3architecture as 'a building of two halves'; a six-storey horizontal stack of orthogonal cellular teaching space, separated from a dramatic, vertically ordered veranda-like space by a five-storey void, all screened and sheltered by three-storey tapering fins. Duality also exists in the building's tectonics, merging two of Queensland's main architectural traits: its solid structural base line in concrete, resonant with the heroics of the city's 1970s new-brutalist South Bank (predominantly designed by Robin Gibson), overlaid with a more melodic skin of bronze anodised aluminium in a basket weave. This

skin shades interiors in a manner reminiscent of the timber fretwork applied to traditional stick-built Queensland homes. Set at shifting angles in front of a wall of vertical stripes, the basket weave activates the wall's distinctive interference pattern when seen in motion – an optical illusion so convincing that some assume it is mechanically operated.

The building is not only testament to m3's acknowledged architectural inventiveness, seen in the ornate split-brick facade of the Micro/Health Laboratory at the University of Queensland. It also demonstrates their opportunistic and ambitious desire to gain larger, non-domestic clients, initially only having been appointed by the school to carry out a strategic plan for its campus site. As the architects state: 'The approach to the CLC was centred on making connections – those occurring within the building, within the school, and between the school and the city.'

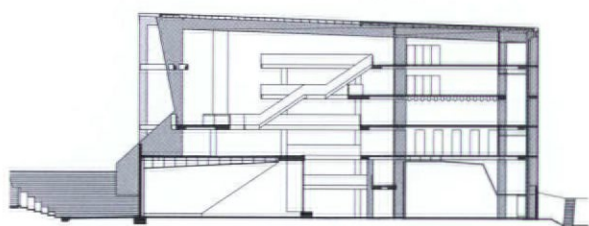
Resolving the 60° geometric shift between the school's existing

buildings on Gregory Terrace and the site's low-lying orthogonal corner plot, m3 has produced a building that is as dynamic in plan and section as it is in elevation. Likened by state architect Philip Follent to an Escher painting, the central atrium resolves complicated circulation problems identified in their strategic plan.

With a significant fall across the site, the ground level of the existing buildings cuts across the CLC at level four, where dining and staff rooms form a new social hub. Above this are two levels of teaching space for creative technology and creative arts, while descending through the void takes you through drama and music areas before reaching the lowest level, which accommodates three double-height rehearsal spaces. Reports from satisfied students confirm the building has significantly improved social dynamics within the school community, which is not only essential to student life, but also in attracting new students in an increasingly competitive educational market. 

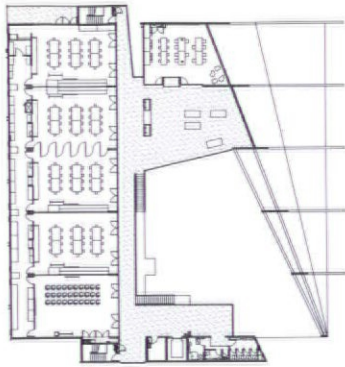


**DUALITY ALSO EXISTS IN THE
BUILDING'S TECTONICS,
MERGING SOLID CONCRETE WITH
A MELODIC SKIN OF BRONZE**

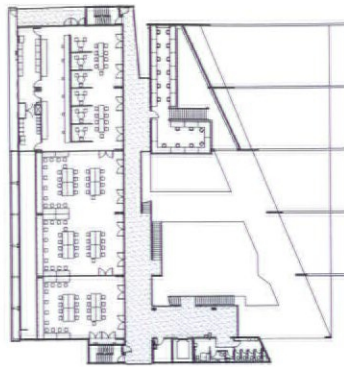


Cross section

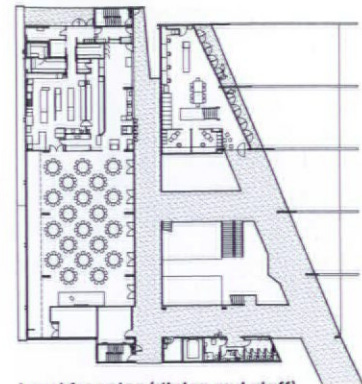




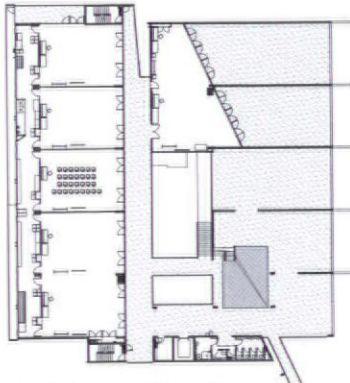
Level six plan (creative technology)



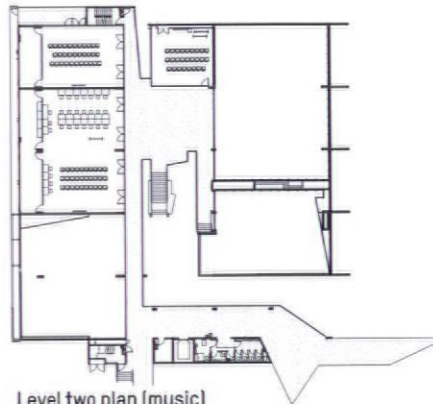
Level five plan (creative arts)



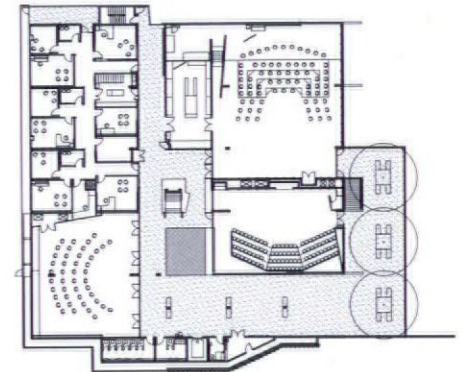
Level four plan (dining and staff)



Level three plan (drama)

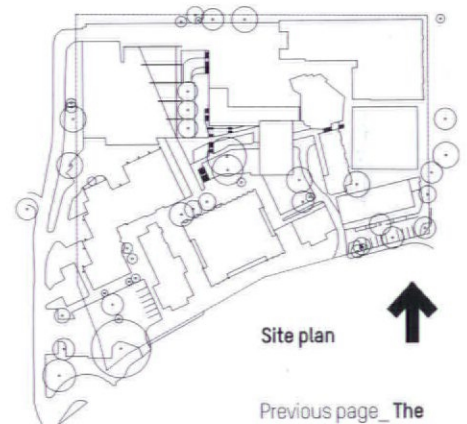


Level two plan (music)



Level one plan (rehearsal)

0 20m



Site plan



Previous page_ The east elevation, an über-veranda with concrete fins
Opposite, top_ The Escher-like void, the new heart of the school
Opposite, bottom_ The western elevation creates a distinctive optical illusion
Top left_ Level three, looking towards the void
Bottom left_ The lowest-level rehearsal rooms benefit from borrowed daylight

ARCHITECT
m3architecture,
Brisbane, Queensland,
Australia
**STRUCTURAL AND
M&E ENGINEER**
Connell Mott MacDonald



064

KNUT HAMSUN CENTRE

LOCATION

PRESTEID, HAMARØY ISLAND,
NORWAY

ARCHITECT

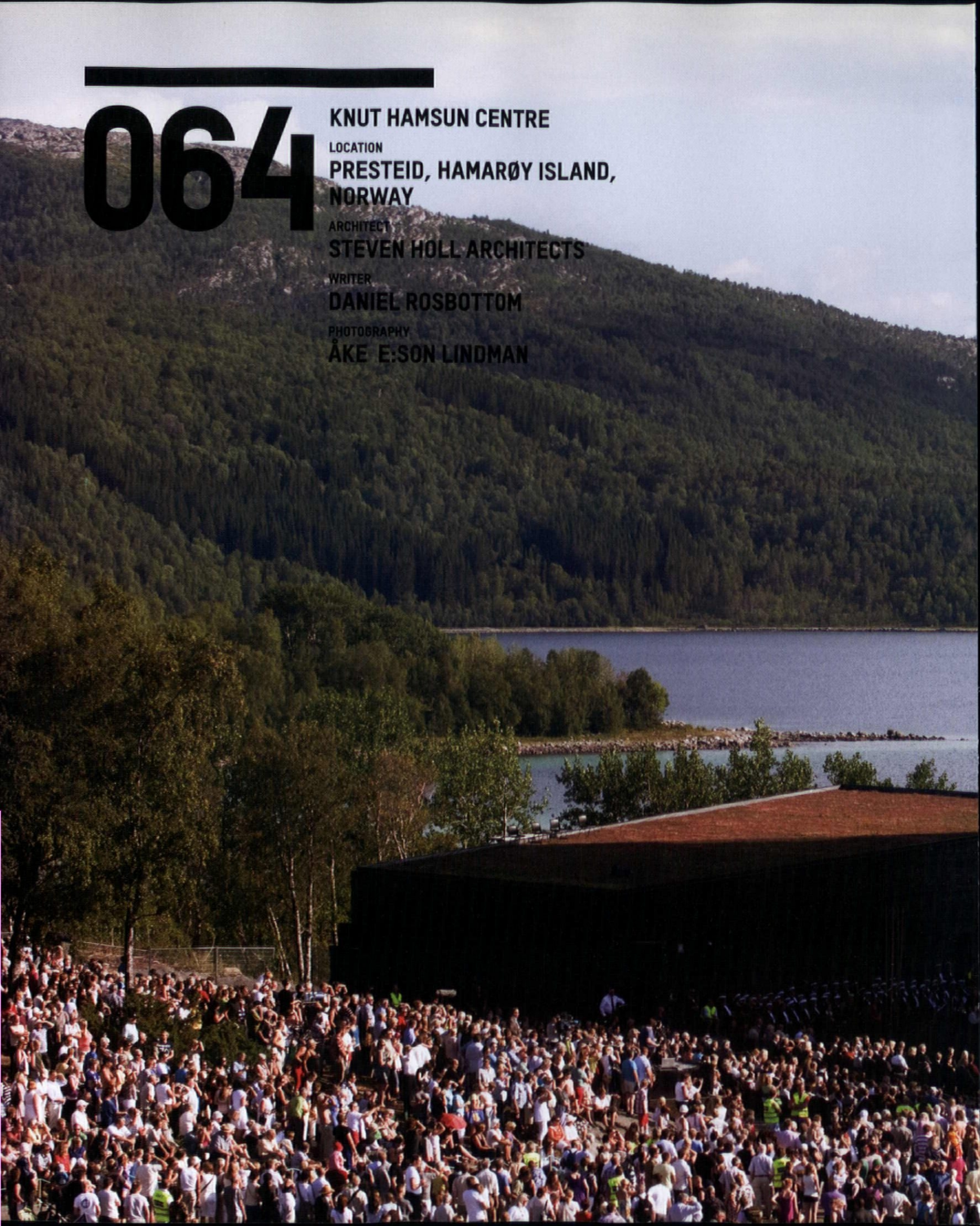
STEVEN HOLL ARCHITECTS

WRITER

DANIEL ROSBOTTOM

PHOTOGRAPHY

ÅKE E:SON LINDMAN





FOR HOLL, THE TOWER
BECOMES LITERAL,
UNDERSTOOD AS BOTH BODY
AND LANDSCAPE FRAGMENT



Previous page_ The brooding tower rises above the harshly beautiful landscape of northern Norway. This shot records the building's opening gala in early August
Below left_ Holl's key concept sketch abstracts episodes and motifs from Hamsun's texts
Below right_ The dark stained timber recalls traditional Norwegian stave churches



There was a tower in front of me... a black octagonal tower,' so begins the compelling fairytale narrated by Nagel, the central character of the novel *Mysterier* (1892), an outsider whose sudden arrival excites an isolated, North Norwegian community. The book was an early triumph for Norway's most famous, and infamous, author Knut Hamsun. The Nobel Laureate is now commemorated by a similarly mysterious, dark tower rising above the beautiful island of Hamarøy in Norway's Nordland County, 200 miles inside the Arctic Circle.

The completed Hamsun Centre must seem something of a fairytale for Steven Holl Architects, given that it was awarded the commission in 1994. Dressed for the inaugural ceremony in a yellow suit, as Nagel does in *Mysterier*, Steven Holl recalls the saga of the project's development.

His initial ideas were sketched on the first visit to the original site, Hamsun's farm in nearby Hamsund. Despite the resulting design winning the 1996 Progressive Architecture Award, the project stalled, mired in controversy. Concerns that the proposal might upset the delicate ensemble of existing farm buildings caused the site to be moved to Hamsun's childhood home, the neighbouring village of Presteid in 1998. However, the controversy relating to Hamsun himself was much more significant.

Through a suite of books written in the 1890s – *Hunger* (1890), *Mysterier* and *Pan* (1894) – Polish laureate Isaac Bashevis Singer suggests Hamsun instigated 'the whole modern school of fiction in the twentieth century.' He inspired many literary heavyweights, from Kafka to Hemingway and, for Norwegians, became synonymous with the myth of the great poet.

That myth was shattered when the elderly Hamsun announced his support for Nazi Germany, which culminated in him writing Hitler's obituary in *Aftenposten*, the leading Norwegian newspaper at the time.

For many this struck a blow at the heart of Norway's cultural identity, placing Hamsun alongside wartime leader Quisling, who gave his name to traitors worldwide.

The sense of betrayal remains, but in 2007 the project received government funding. Ground was finally broken in May 2008, allowing the building to be almost ready for the 150th anniversary of Hamsun's birth on 4 August this year.

Holl is open about the dilemmas inherent in constructing a monument to such a figure. While happy that such discussions are expressed through the centre's exhibitions, he is clear that the building is primarily concerned with materialising themes from the trio of early books. The main focus is on the novels' concerns with the intricacies of the individual mind and their evolving attitude to context – a journey from the 'culture' of the city, through the intimacies of rural life to the unity of Nature and human nature.

The idea of the 'tower' appears across many of Hamsun's novels as a metaphorical device. For Holl, the tower becomes literal, understood both as body and landscape fragment, embodying fundamental qualities of prose and place.

The building's situation is defined by juxtaposing two principal components. The six-storey tower, a parallelogram in plan, houses the centre itself while an associated horizontal element contains an auditorium. This was added when the building was re-sited to offer a balancing, barn-like form that grounds and scales the centre within the village and community.

Both volumes are clad in dark stained timber, referencing traditional Norwegian stave churches. The auditorium has a turf roof, again alluding to vernacular archetypes, but is otherwise mute. In contrast, the tower has an expressive, geometrically nuanced form, which Holl suggests is responsive to the chiselled quality of the mountains that dominate the landscape. As you

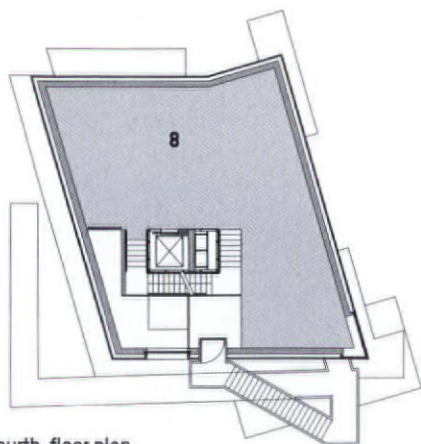
move around it, the tower's character shifts constantly – light creeps across its subtly angled and folded surfaces while its proportions swell and stretch.

Hamsun's rejection of notions of universality, embodied within collective understandings, is echoed in Holl's decision to animate the building through the abstraction of particular episodes and motifs selected from the texts. Noted on an original sketch, a key 'equation': 'Building = body – battleground of invisible forces', refers directly to a line from Robert Bly's 1967 translation of *Hunger*.

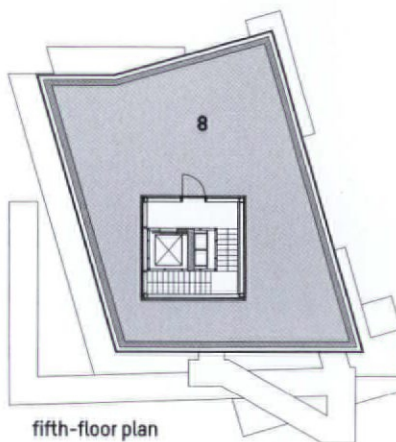
Holl visualises this critical narrative moment through elements he describes as 'hidden impulses, which pierce the surface.' The seemingly arbitrary observation of 'a servant maid leaning out of a window, her sleeves rolled up, cleaning the panes from the outside' becomes translated into an angled balcony of yellow glass, piercing a corner. Elsewhere, a partially covered timber balcony (in reference to Nagel's empty violin case) creates an aural passage from interior to landscape.

Each intervention forms an intuitive, experiential counterpoint to the larger expression of the building. Collectively, Holl suggests, these invoke the 'concretisation of a Hamsun character'. Whether you can literally read such detail into these curious projections, or whether that is even a desirable aspiration, is open to question. What is clear, as you watch the balcony's yellow-stained reflection slide across the timber, is that Holl's lyrical phenomenology is singularly descriptive of the visual qualities within Hamsun's prose, exemplified by the suggestion in *Hunger* that 'an intense, peculiar exhalation of colour emanates from these fantasies of mine.'

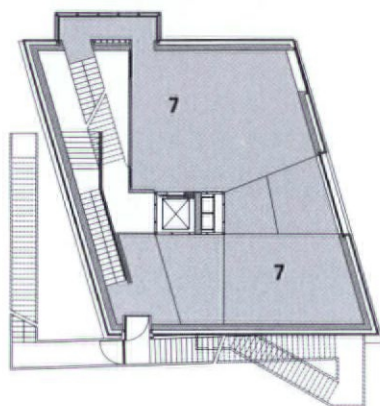
The smooth, dark, timber skin of the exterior is unexpectedly counterpointed by the raw precision of a white, board-marked concrete interior, cast in-situ. If the building is a body then this is its robust —



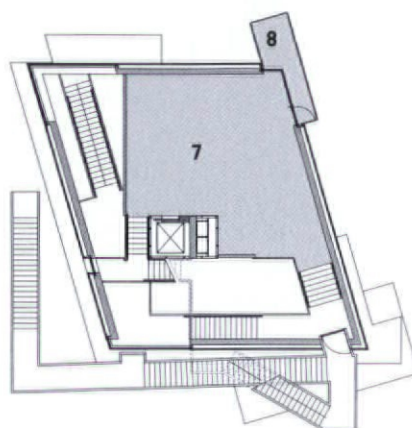
fourth-floor plan



fifth-floor plan

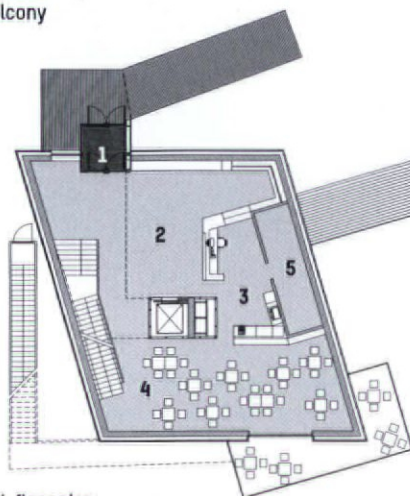


first-floor plan

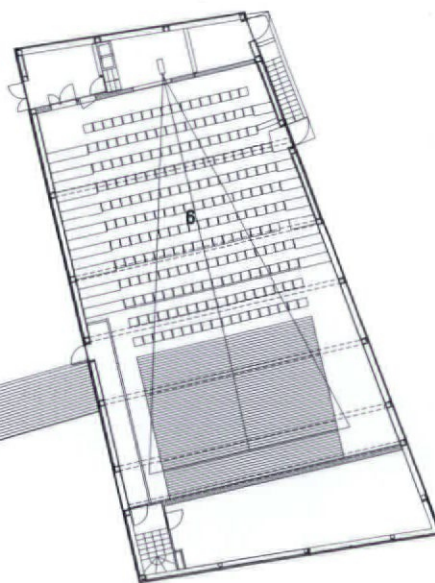


third-floor plan

- 1 entrance
- 2 lobby
- 3 reception
- 4 café
- 5 kitchen
- 6 auditorium
- 7 exhibition space
- 8 balcony



ground-floor plan



skeleton, a structural concrete tube with post tensioned beams and a rigid, spinal brass-clad lift. From the ubiquitous entry-level café and bookshop, four inter-related levels, connected by concrete stairs, climb upwards through a continuous sectional space. At one point, they pass through to the exterior, behind a perforated brass screen, before arriving at a roof terrace, with views back to panoramic horizons. This journey is materialised through the continuity of an apparently seamless, exquisitely cast surface of black concrete, ground back to reveal its aggregate.

As with the exterior, floors subtly fold and walls inflect at shallow angles. It is as if the whole building has been subject to the kinds of geological forces that, at another scale, formed the breathtaking landscape beyond. Openings are placed in relation to the larger figure, sequentially framing ground, water, sky or horizon as you move obliquely against them. As might be expected from Holl, they are also precisely positioned to allow shafts of light to pierce the space, in direct correlation to movement. Hamsun, who wrote to a colleague that he 'took to loving light', would undoubtedly approve of these dramatic and orchestrated moments of illumination.

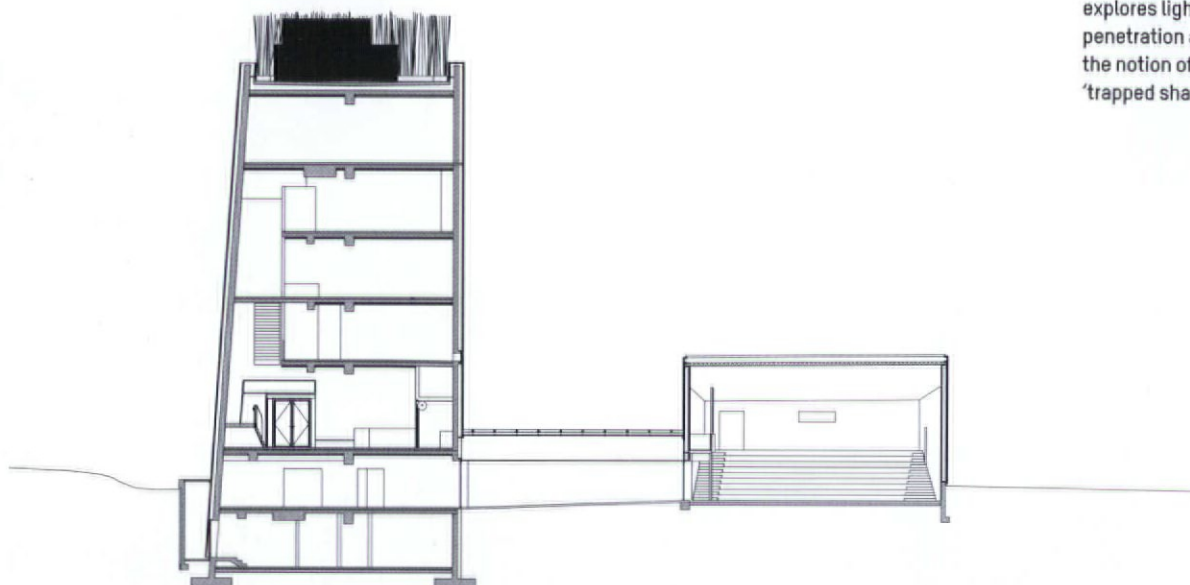
In his essay *The Art of Hunger* (Menard Press, 1982), Paul Auster concludes that Hamsun's protagonist 'walks into the twentieth century'. Here it is the visitor, rather than some fictional character, who transforms into a Hamsun-esque 'wanderer', exemplifying modernism's roving and unstable relationship to space.

A similar sentiment relates to the building itself, which responds to place but remains an outsider. In this season of midnight sun, sporting the summer plumage of bamboo canes on its roof, it has a jovial, almost comic, physiognomy. But in the long dark winter to follow, you can imagine it hunkering down to become an appropriately brooding figure. 

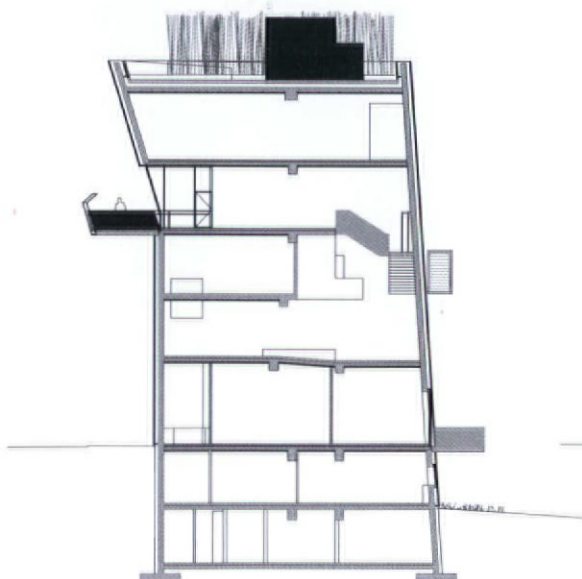


**OPENINGS SEQUENTIALLY
FRAME GROUND, WATER, SKY
OR HORIZON AS YOU MOVE
OBLIQUELY AGAINST THEM**

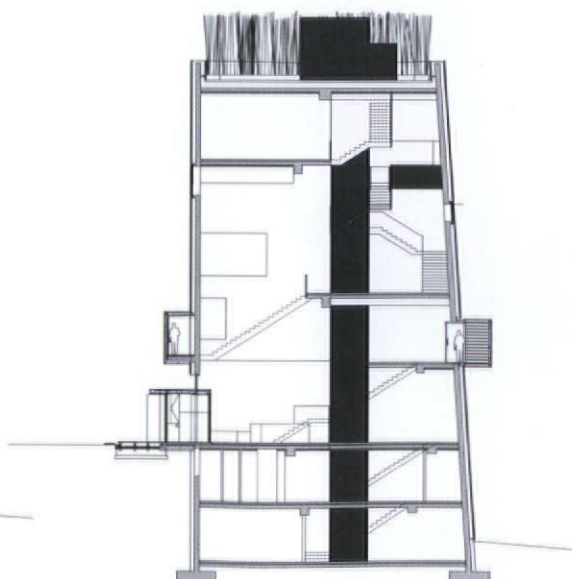
Previous page_
Landscape is caught
and framed by
the building
Clockwise from
right_ A brass
enclosed lift shaft
forms the building's
rigid spine; the
subtly nuanced form
echoes the chiselled
quality of the distant
mountains; light is
dramatically
choreographed
within the plain
white interior; an
early sketch by Holl
explores light
penetration and
the notion of
'trapped shadows'



cross section through tower and auditorium



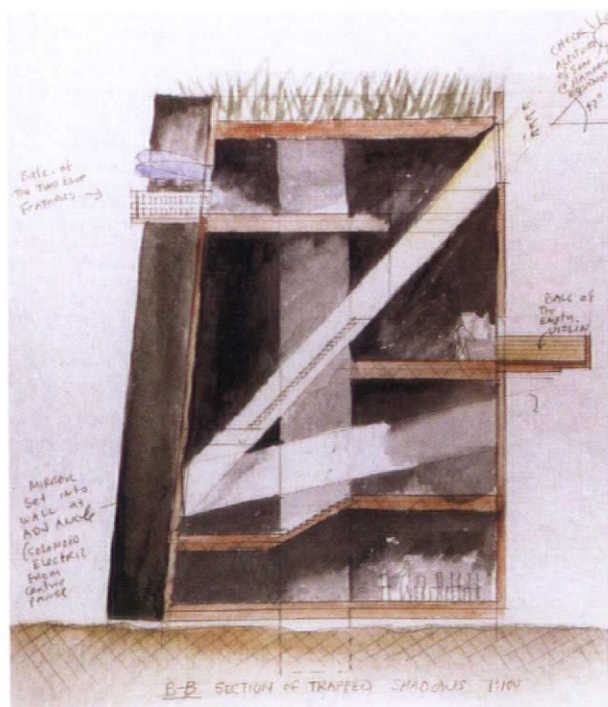
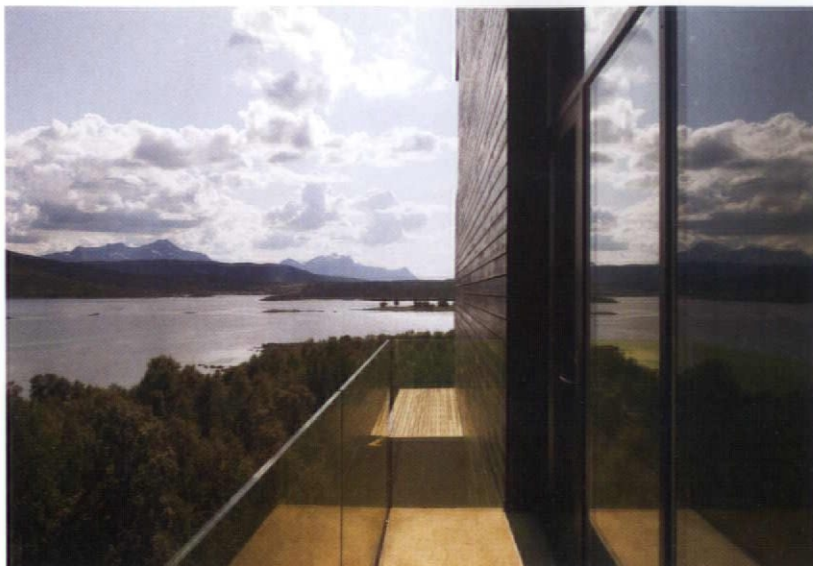
cross section



cross section

ARCHITECT
Steven Holl Architects,
New York
PROJECT TEAM
Steven Holl, Noah Yaffe,
Francesco Bartolozzi,
Ebbie Wisecarver, Erik
Fenstad Langdalen,
Gabriela Barman-
Kraemer, Yoh Hanaoka,
Justin Korhammer, Anna
Müller, Audra Tuskes
ASSOCIATE ARCHITECT
LY Arkitekter
STRUCTURAL ENGINEERS
Guy Nordenson and
Associates, Rambøll
Norge
MECHANICAL ENGINEERS
Arup, Rambøll Norge
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT
Landskapsfabikken





065

RIJKSMUSEUM ATELIERGEBOUW

LOCATION

AMSTERDAM,
THE NETHERLANDS

ARCHITECT

CRUZ Y ORTIZ

WRITER

CATHERINE SLESSOR

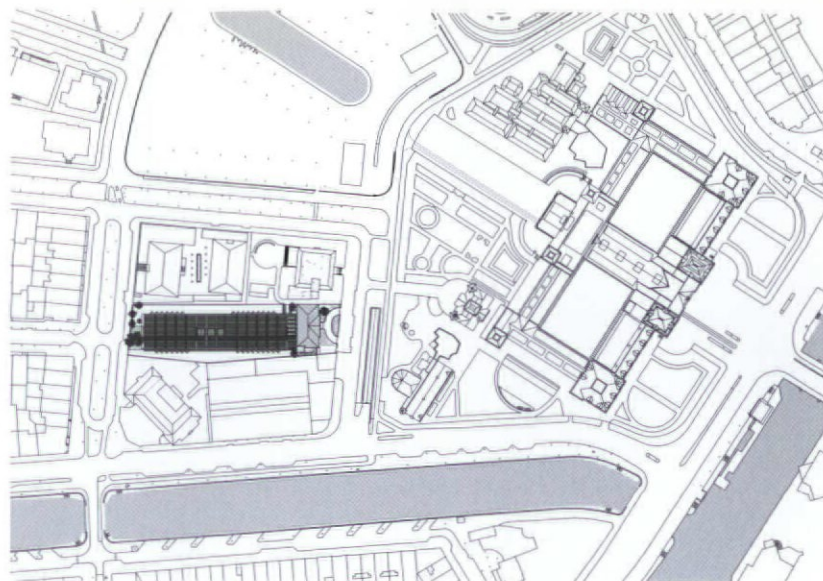
PHOTOGRAPHY

DUCCIO MALAGAMBA





GLAZED SERRATIONS ON THE
WALLS AND ROOF GIVE
THE NEW BUILDING A PUNKY,
QUASI-INDUSTRIAL PROFILE



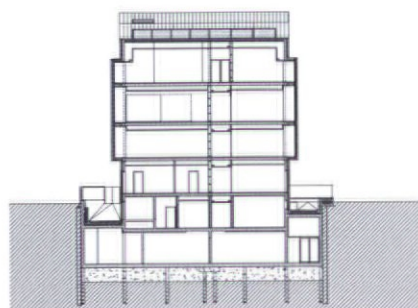
site plan



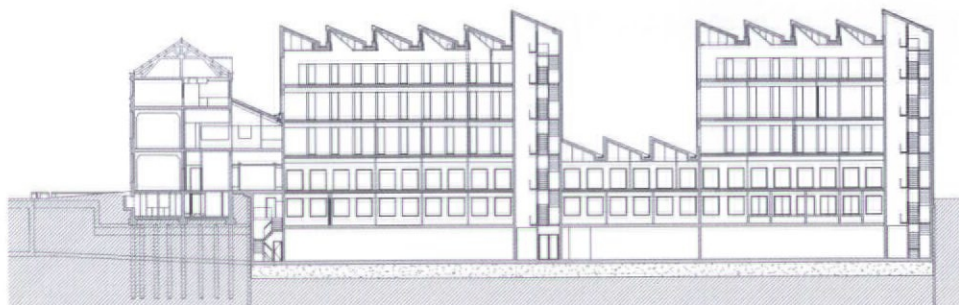
Previous page_
The serrated block
of the Ateliergebouw
duels with the
Rijksmuseum.
An open mid-
section preserves
urban views

Opposite, top left_
Cuyper's institute
building forms the
public face on
Hobbemastraat
Opposite, bottom
left_ The aluminium-
clad south facade

Opposite, right_
Glazed slots
funnel north light
- essentially, the
building acts as a
giant light source



cross section



long section

The lift purrs up to the third floor of the Rijksmuseum's new Ateliergebouw and ping! You're in a high-tech, high-spec version of an artist's garret, bathed in pale, Low Countries light, with the turrets and gables of Amsterdam wheeling off in all directions. Ateliergebouw means 'studio building', and this workshop is the set piece space in a facility dedicated to the conservation of historic objects, from paper and ceramics to metal and textiles. Up here, paintings from the museum's collection are repaired by attentive conservators. The pace is painstaking, the atmosphere hushed, but there's still something slightly disarming about seeing priceless works at such close quarters - naked, unframed and casually propped on wooden easels - as if you'd strayed into Vermeer's studio by mistake. As it has been for centuries, clear north light is key to these endeavours, greedily funnelled through glazed serrations on the walls and roof, which give the new building a punky, quasi-industrial profile.

With its brown brick and big windows, the Ateliergebouw might seem quintessentially Dutch but in fact was designed by the Seville-based partnership of Antonio Cruz and Antonio Ortiz. Their tough, contemporary take on Amsterdam's milieu is impressive, but perhaps not

that surprising given a track record of being intelligently alert both to local surroundings and the undercurrents of history, which swirl more deeply here, as the Ateliergebouw marks an important juncture in the ongoing redevelopment of the Rijksmuseum. Since 1885 the Dutch national art collection has been housed in Pierre Cuypers' blowsy 19th-century chateau, familiar to legions of tourists, but by the turn of the millennium it was suffering from deterioration and overcrowding. The government grasped the nettle and in 2001, following a competition, appointed Cruz y Ortiz to implement an extensive programme of works that will culminate in 2013.

This initial phase sees all the Rijksmuseum's restoration departments rehoused in the Ateliergebouw, freeing up exhibition space in the Cuypers building. But it also marks a shift in working culture. In the labyrinthine quarters of the Rijksmuseum, departments were disconnected. 'We had a lady who worked in textile restoration for 30 years and nobody really knew who she was,' says Robert van Langh, head of conservation and research. The new building is more consciously integrated and is shared with staff from the Netherlands Institute of Cultural Heritage and the University

of Amsterdam, which runs courses in art conservation.

Lying to the south-east of the Rijksmuseum, the site is a long, narrow strip compressed by surrounding buildings. The 'main' north facade on Hobbemastraat is a fragment of the former Veiligheidsinstituut, also designed by Cuypers. The bitter chocolate hue of its brick is faithfully matched by Cruz and Ortiz, but the new material, laid in plain stretcher bond, has a more intense, almost violet tinge, set off by greenish-grey aluminium cladding on the roof and south-facing walls.

The old part has been radically reconfigured to house offices and the staff restaurant. Extending behind it, down the length of the site, the new block contains four floors of clinically white, rigorously climate-controlled restoration labs, workshops and studios. Below ground are two technical and storage levels and a passage linking the Ateliergebouw with the Rijksmuseum, so objects can be safely conveyed back and forth. Despite the onerous technical and security requirements, there is poetry too, with panels of internal glazing encouraging views across the length and breadth of the building, affording tantalising glimpses of the staff at work and the precious objects of their attention.

THERE'S STILL SOMETHING
SLIGHTLY DISARMING ABOUT
SEEING PRICELESS WORKS
AT SUCH CLOSE QUARTERS



ARCHITECT

Cruz y Ortiz, Seville, Spain

ASSOCIATE ARCHITECT

A+D+P

PROJECT TEAM

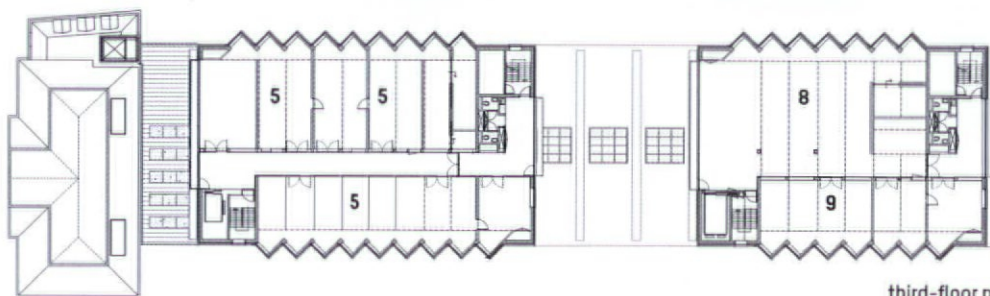
Thomas Offermans, Tirma
Reventos, Iko Mennenga,
J Carlos Mulero, Miguel
Velasco, Luis Gutierrez,
Monica del Arenal

STRUCTURAL ENGINEER

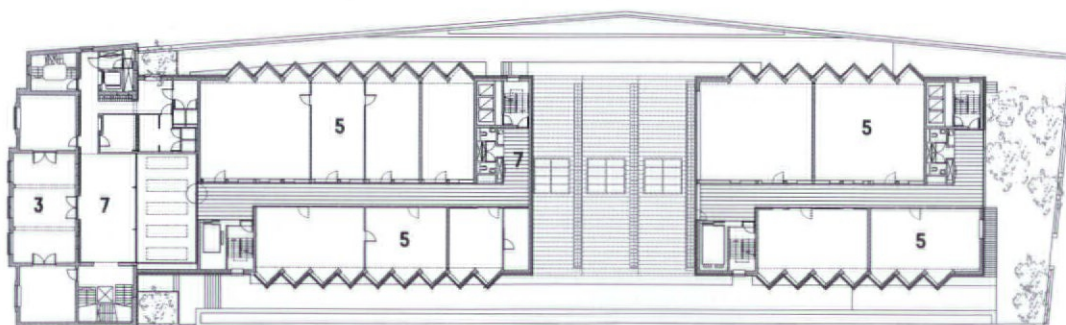
Aronsohn Raadgevende

SERVICES ENGINEER

Grontmij Technical
Management

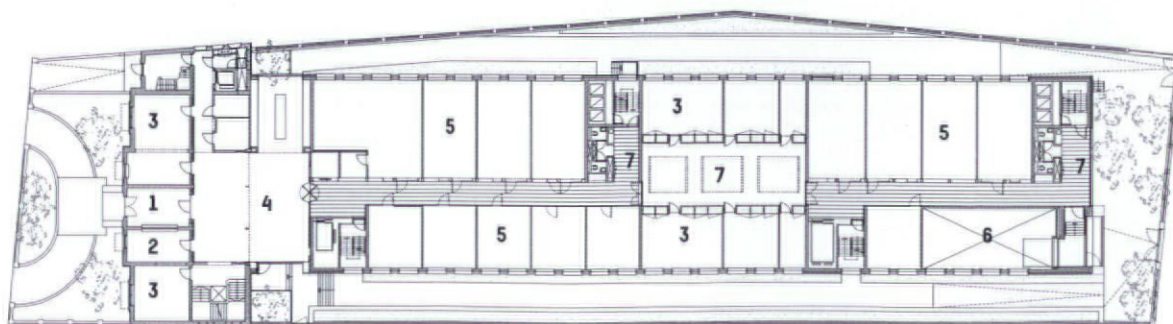


third-floor plan



first-floor plan

- 1 main entrance
- 2 reception
- 3 offices
- 4 atrium link
- 5 conservation studios and workshops
- 6 void over loading bay
- 7 breakout space
- 8 painting studio
- 9 framing studio
- 10 paper studio



ground-floor plan



Opposite_ The atrium link between the new block and the Cuypers building
Left_ The paper conservation studio. The Ateliergebouw deals with all kinds of historic objects and each field needs highly specialised conditions and equipment
Below_ The high-tech painting studio. Grey walls provide the necessary visual contrast for restoration work



066

CAN FRAMIS MUSEUM

LOCATION

BARCELONA, SPAIN

ARCHITECT

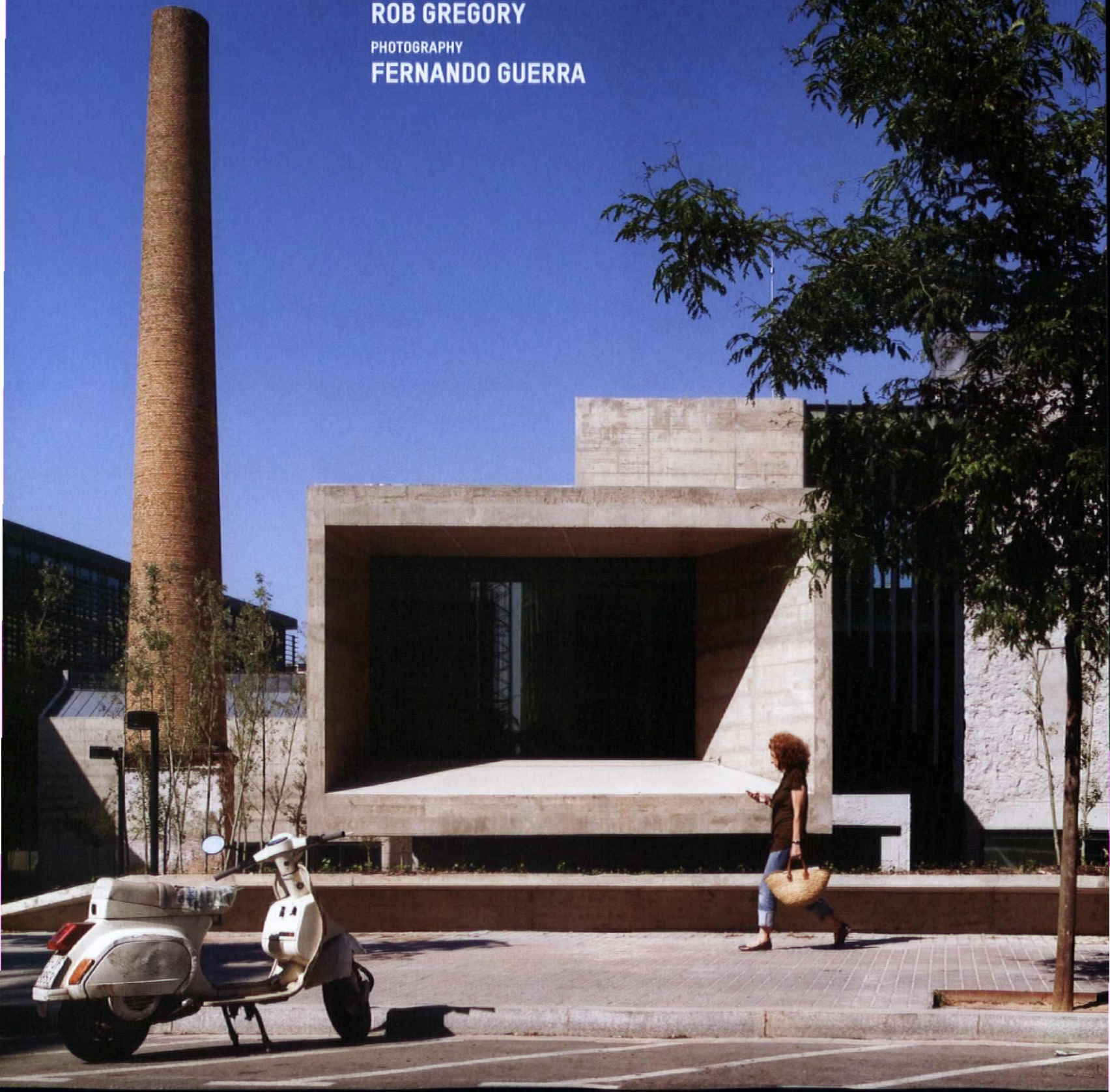
BAAS

WRITER

ROB GREGORY

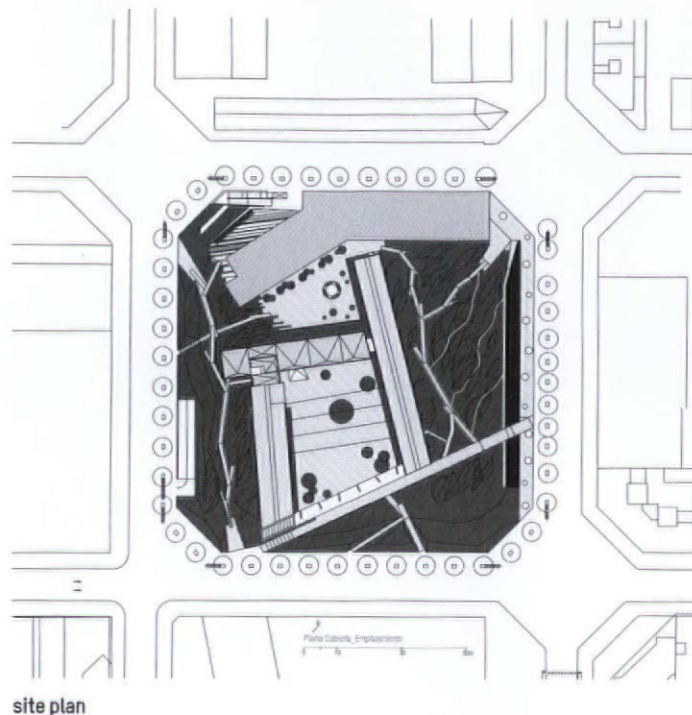
PHOTOGRAPHY

FERNANDO GUERRA





BADIA SEES CAN FRAMIS AS AN OASIS, A PEACEFUL PLACE THAT WILL EVENTUALLY BE SURROUNDED BY BUILDINGS



Previous page_ Sheltering 1.5m below street level, the museum is an exemplary model of the adaptation of existing buildings

Arriving at the Can Framis Museum with sand between your toes epitomises the delightful condition of Barcelona, where society and the sea co-exist. With a medieval core embedded within Ildefons Cerdà's triumphant city grid, and its spectacular position between natural boundaries of ocean and mountain, Barcelona is a place of harmonious contrast, dramatic juxtaposition and curious, fractured continuity. This new building, funded by Catalan pharmaceutical magnate Antonio Vila Casas, extends such paradoxes. A private art archive of emerging Catalan painters, it is designed to be accessible but not follow the traditional model of public gallery. The client was clear that his foundation was not intended as a visitor attraction, and there is no café or bookshop here. Instead, under his patronage the foundation collects the art of today to create a treasure chest for tomorrow, in the hope that future generations will judge for themselves each piece on merit.

Can Framis is situated in the Sant Martí district, the city's eastern hinterland between the avenue

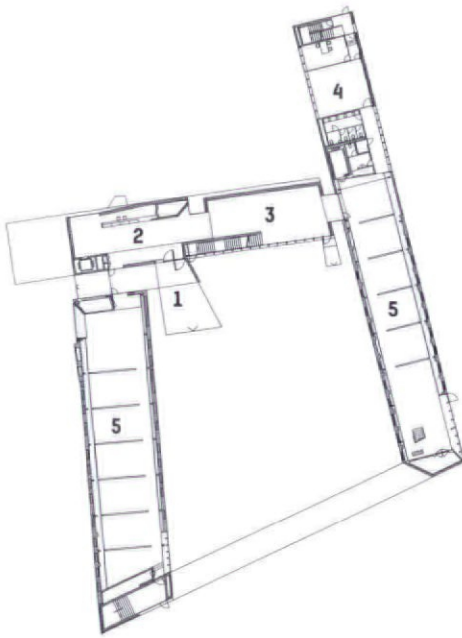
Diagonal and the beach, branded 22@Barcelona, where former industrial building stock is being replaced by contemporary business premises. Here, in the shadow of Jean Nouvel's Torre Agbar, the city council has purposefully legislated against domestic developments and designated this particular sector for audio-visual businesses.

'It is very special, this area,' says architect and academic Jordi Badia. 'All of the factories were here when the people lived in the centre of Barcelona. Since industry has moved out of the city, the council has decided to change these factories, but only for what they call productive service industries. They are not interested in dwellings, but only offices, hotels, universities and a few public buildings. They decided to keep some of the historic buildings to maintain the memory of the site.'

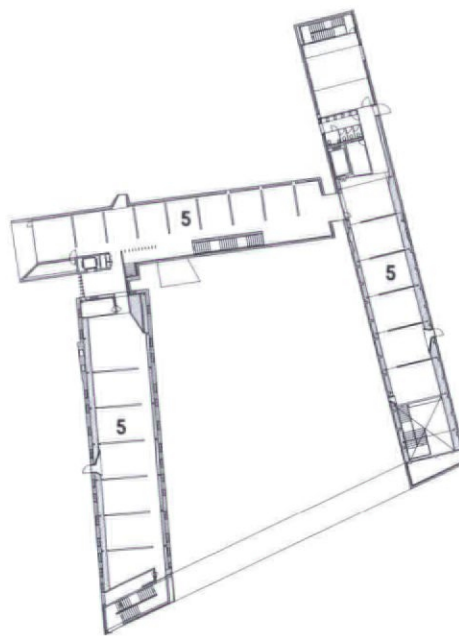
Keeping two near-parallel factory ranges and constructing a new building between them on the footprint of another relic, Badia describes the piazza as the most important space in the museum and the most logical place for the

building's principal entrance. The factories remained because they were some of the first to be built on the site. 'The buildings themselves were not important from an architectural point of view,' explains Badia. 'One of the most interesting things, however, is the level, with factories set 1.5m below the contemporary city. This allowed us to create a garden around the building, in the form of a small mountain range to hide streets and cars.' Badia sees Can Framis as a form of oasis, a peaceful place that will eventually be surrounded by tall buildings occupied by many people. It is hoped that museum and piazza will offer a silent space in which to relax, however with Barcelona practice Cloud 9's boxy Media-TIC building rising on an adjacent plot in all its steel and plastic glory, it will be interesting to see how successful this aspiration will be. As it is, only from key vantage points, when putting on something of a squint, do the painted, randomly coursed masonry walls and vertical glazing transport you to a more remote Aaltoesque setting. Opening your eyes wider reveals the more gritty reality, amplified —

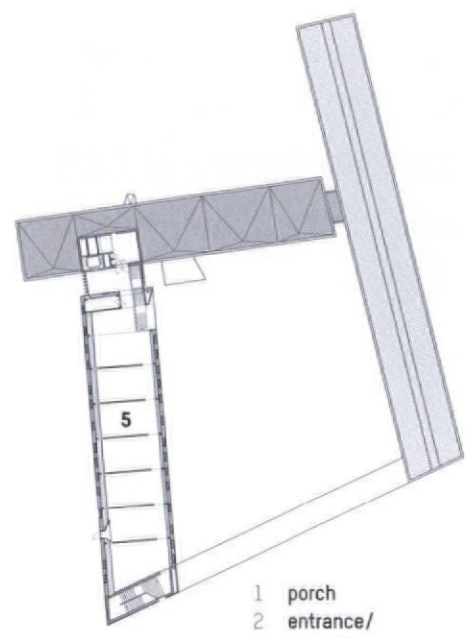
ground-floor plan



first-floor plan



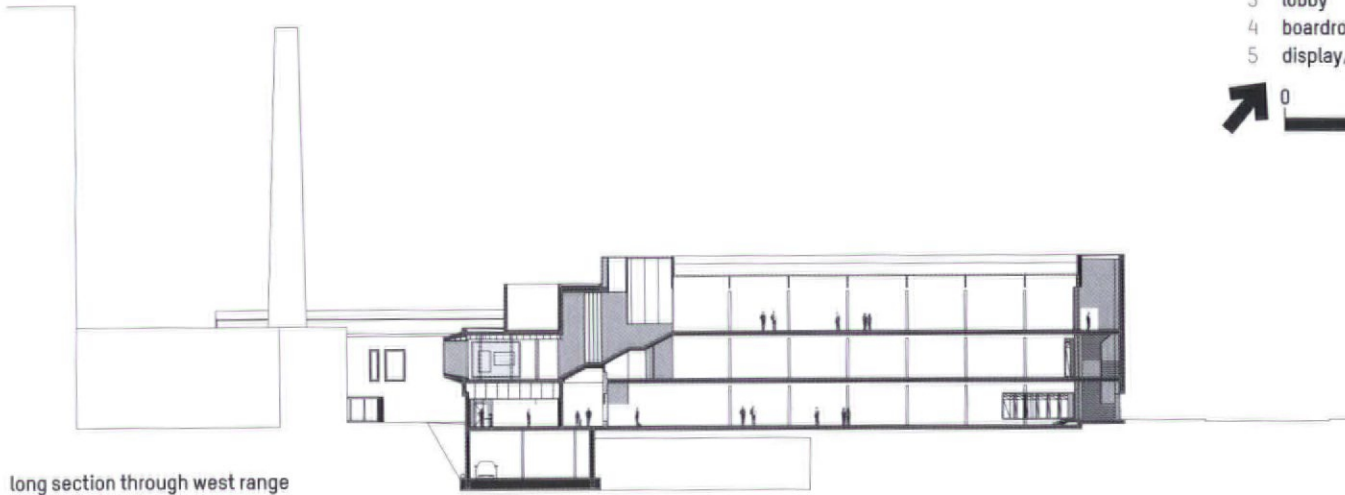
second-floor plan



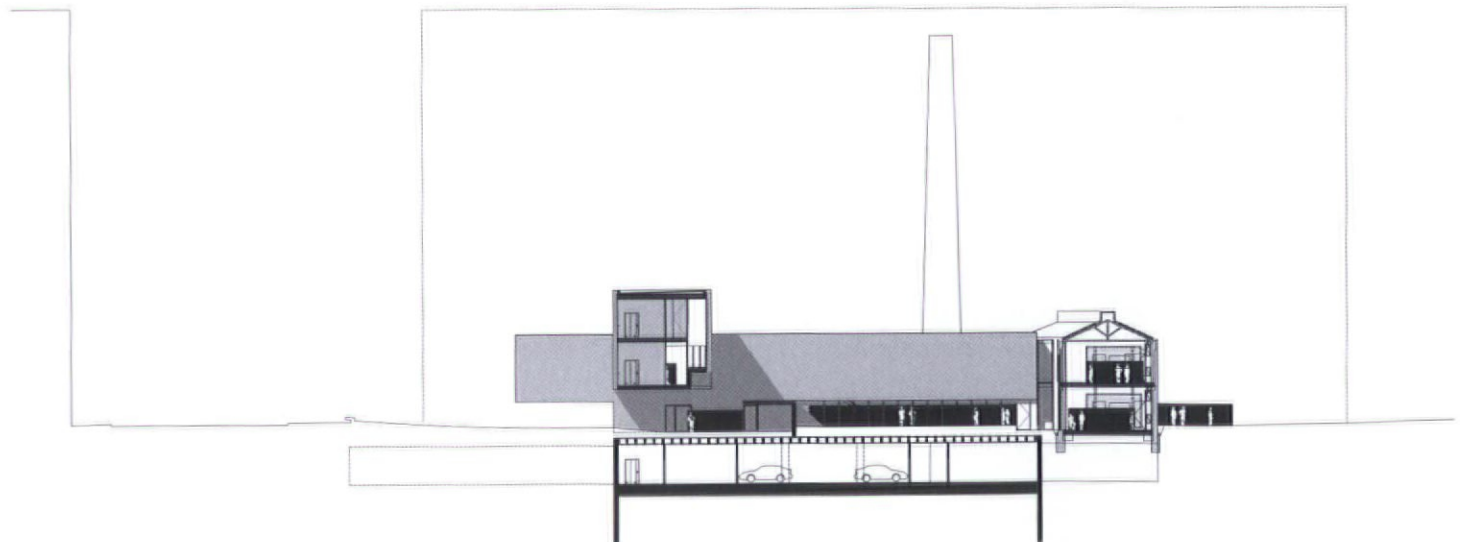
- 1 porch
- 2 entrance/reception
- 3 lobby
- 4 boardroom
- 5 display/storage



long section through west range



cross section through west and east ranges, including canyon-like slot, looking north



THIS ADAPTED AND EXTENDED FACTORY SITS AS A POTENT MEMORY OF THE AREA'S NOT-SO-DISTANT PAST

Above_ Viewed from Cloud 9's Media-TIC, new and old are clearly articulated
Opposite_ At the most architecturally intense part of the building, existing windows have been infilled and new elements added

by the architect's tectonic that displays a wonderfully pragmatic level of finesse.

As construction details reveal, existing ranges have been lined with an internal skin that bears on a new concrete structure. In sympathy with masonry, the new building is made from roughcast in-situ concrete and where new meets old, good manners prevail through the use of glazed slots. In-situ concrete is also expressed externally, framing zinc roofs between new gable ends added to the existing ranges. In these locations, however, a more mute detail has been employed as brick and concrete meet seamlessly without glass dividing strips.

Working within the existing envelope, behind retained external walls and where possible beneath repaired and reset roof trusses, the new structure has very shallow floor zones, with soffits of beam and block and screed floors. To service the building, ducts are set within false walls, giving Badia more depth to play with when composing splayed window reveals that alter the scale of openings between inside and out.

The city's conservation officer placed strict conditions on the position of new openings and even forced the architect to recreate the tower-like gable at the end of the south-western range when designing a new access core.

It was in the composition of the new range that Badia was able to exert more of his own sculptural intent, with subtle elevational distortions, projecting bays and jettied stairs that resolve geometric discrepancies between new and old. These are reminiscent of projecting light shafts seen in his León City Morgue, which won joint first prize in the 2001 AR+d Awards. Approaching from Diagonal, the most extravagant of these projections reaches out to frame a large bay window; a type of signpost that draws uninitiated visitors into the canyon-like slot that gives secondary access to the piazza. It is in this place, where the principal stair sits in the north-westerly knuckle of the plan, that a number of subtle relationships summarise Badia's site-wide architectural moves. Here the staircase's uppermost flight lands within a lofty glazed lantern;

a prominent contemporary form embedded within the historic structure that rises above the existing ridge-line. Adjacent to this, bridging the canyon, is another glazed element, articulated as a series of vertically modulated panels that resemble the concertinaed bellows of an accordion, stretched between new and old. When viewed from the otherwise insular, dense display spaces, this junction give essential glimpses to the outside world, in this instance framing a view of the retained chimney that sits in a northern courtyard between the museum and the adjacent university premises.

In contrast to much mediocrity locally, this adapted and extended factory sits as a potent memory of the area's not-so-distant past, and it is little surprise that Badia and his team's efforts were rewarded earlier this year when Can Framis won Spain's 2009 national award for cultural heritage. In the city of harmonious contrast, dramatic juxtaposition and curious fractured continuity, this is an exemplary response to context. 



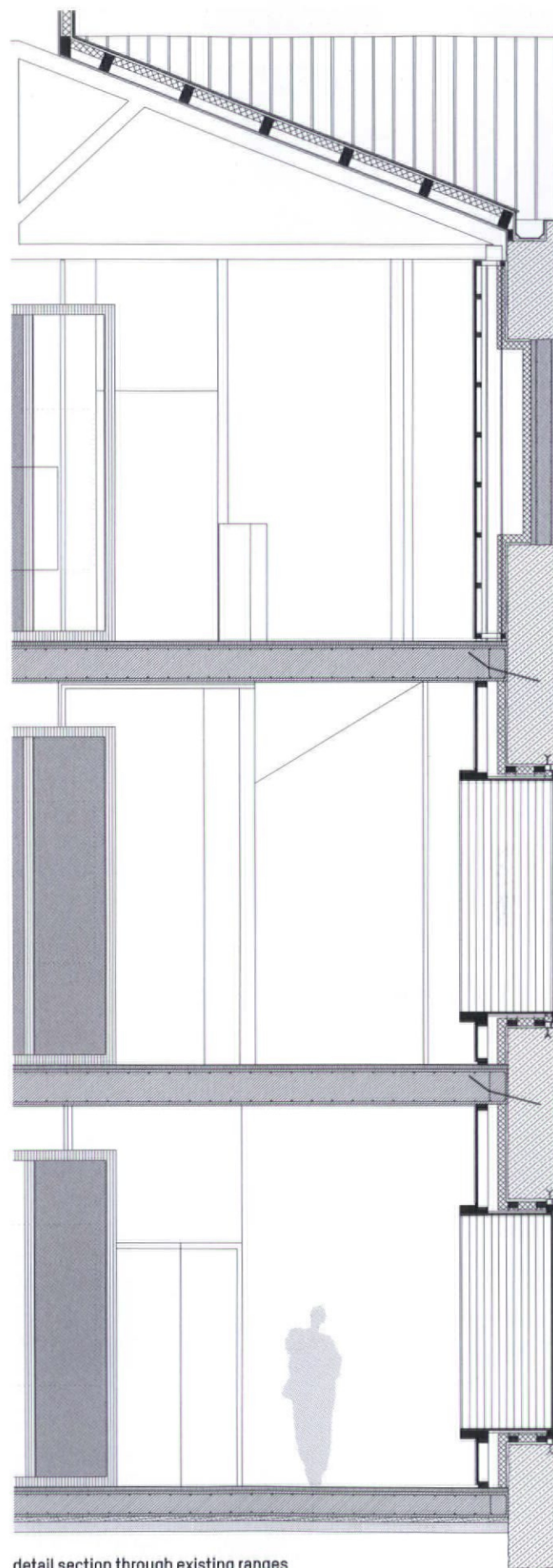
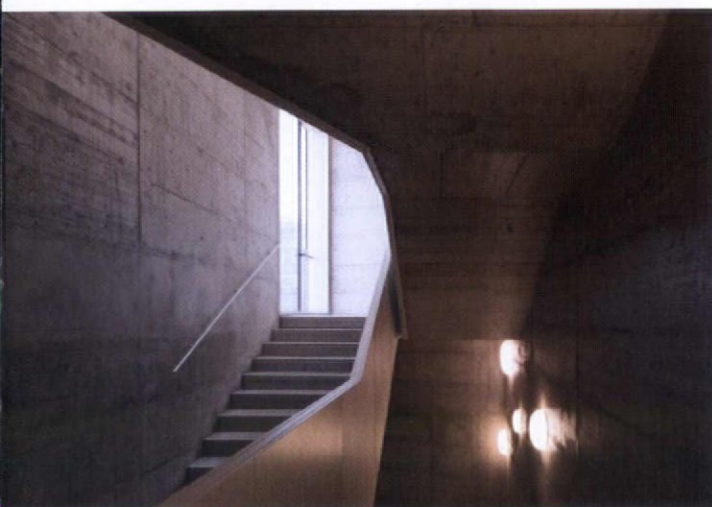
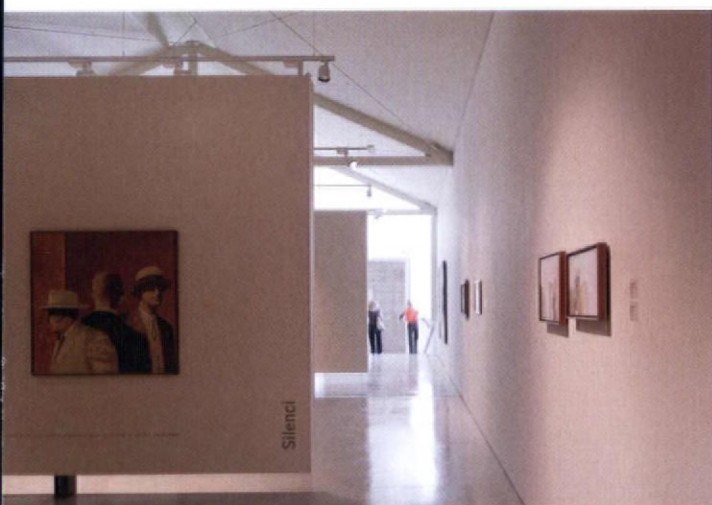


**BADIA WAS ABLE TO EXERT
HIS SCULPTURAL INTENT WITH
SUBTLE DISTORTIONS, JETTIED
STAIRS AND PROJECTING BAYS**



Left_ At the top of the stair, the lantern looks towards the retained chimney
 Below left_ In the entrance hall, simple screed floors and plaster walls create a calm atmosphere
 Below_ Within the existing ranges, where possible, roof trusses were repaired and reset. The collection is displayed in a functional way, on freestanding walls
 Bottom_ In the western range, a new stair core is constructed in fair-faced concrete

ARCHITECT
 BAAS, Barcelona, Spain
PROJECT TEAM
 Jordi Badia, Jordi Framis,
 Daniel Guerra, Marta
 Vitório, Miguel Borrell,
 Mercè Mundet,
 Moisès García
STRUCTURAL
ENGINEERING
 BOMA. Josep Ramon Solé
LANDSCAPE
 Martí Franch



detail section through existing ranges

067

ACTIVITY AND LEARNING CENTRE

LOCATION

KOH KOOD ISLAND,
THAILAND

ARCHITECT

24H

WRITER

CATHERINE SLESSOR

Is it a bird? Is it a plane? No, it's a giant bamboo manta ray on an island in the Gulf of Thailand. Bamboo – tough, economical and green – is bountifully indigenous across South-East Asia and this project for a children's activity centre inventively exploits its structural and aesthetic properties. Though the swooping, organically inspired structure looks as though it has sprung from the cutting edge of digital modelling, it is equally, perhaps, a response to the inherently malleable qualities of bamboo, which can be bent and shaped into striking forms.

Young Dutch architecture practice 24H collaborated with Colombia-based bamboo specialist Jörg Stamm on the project. Stamm, who originally trained as a cabinetmaker, became interested in the structural applications of bamboo and set up a company to develop standard elements for use in the construction and furniture industries. He has also designed and built a series of bridges and small-scale structures, and has become something of a bamboo evangelist. 24H operates out of Rotterdam and

was founded by Boris Zeisser and Maartje Lammers, who between them have worked for Mecanoo, Erick van Egeraat and OMA. Judging from this project, a potent whiff of Dutch modern baroque has clearly rubbed off, but their approach is also informed by a curiosity about how buildings can be more ecologically responsive, and Thailand proved a perfect testing ground.

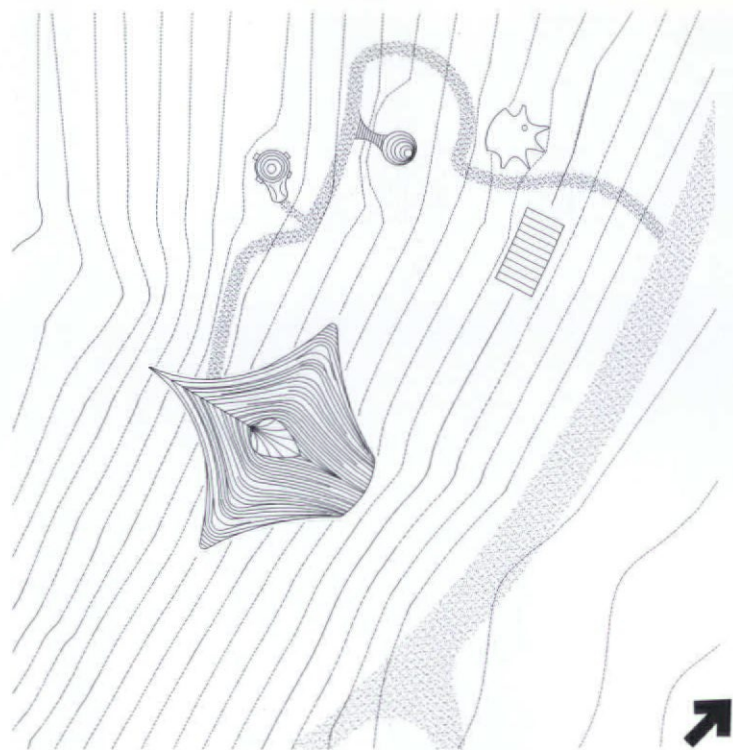
Perched on a wooded hillside overlooking the sea, the building uses local bamboo and actively explores the principles of bioclimatic design in tempering the hot, humid climate. Cantilevering up to 8m, the roof acts like a huge umbrella, providing shade and protection from the heavy rain. The structure is permeable, with a high roof and setback floors to encourage the flow of air and passage of light, thus minimising energy requirements. Under the sheltering sweep of the roof, space is loosely partitioned into pod-like enclaves allotted to different functions.

The activity centre is intended to entertain and distract children at the upscale Soneva Kiri eco-tourist resort on the island of Koh Kood. 'The aim was to find an organic shape that —





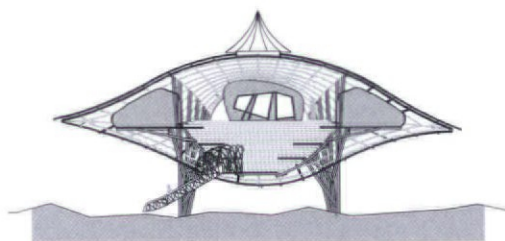
**THE BUILDING USES LOCAL
BAMBOO AND EXPLORES THE
PRINCIPLES OF BIOCLIMATIC
DESIGN IN TEMPERING
THAILAND'S CLIMATE**



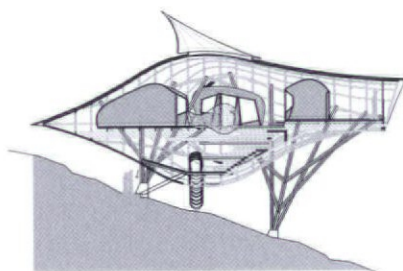
site plan



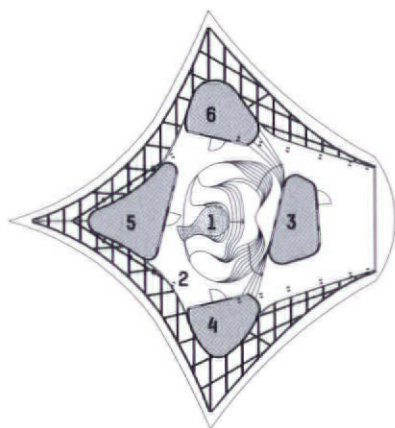
cross section



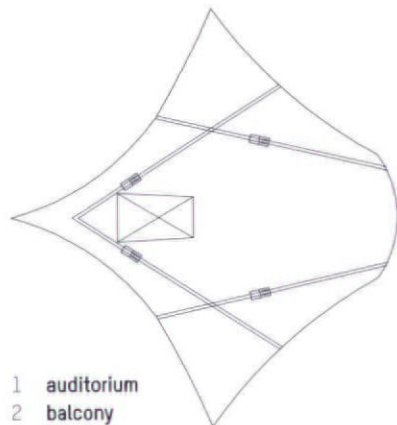
long section



main floor plan



hillside plan



- 1 auditorium
- 2 balcony
- 3 library
- 4 music
- 5 art
- 6 fashion



could function as an enclosed children's play area and also be an exciting sculpture in itself,' says Zeisser. Even the most recalcitrant child could not fail to be entranced by what is essentially a giant tree house containing a library, chill-out balcony, art pod, music pod and fashion pod, all grouped around a sunken auditorium used for showing films and plays. You can also exit the building in style, gliding down a gently inclined slide on to the hillside below.

Next to the centre is a sleeping pod for toddlers, together with a cooking cave and vegetable garden, so that the children can learn a bit about where food comes from and prepare their own lunches with the help of an on-site cook. The interior is constructed from River Red Gum wood (a type of eucalyptus) sourced from a local plantation, and rattan is used to fabricate the individual pods.

Rustic, colourful and slightly over the top, it's a bit like being on a *Lord of the Rings* film set. You half expect to encounter hobbits pottering around. But in its use of materials and energy, it has a serious agenda – and beats Butlins any day. 



ARCHITECT

24H, Rotterdam

ASSOCIATE ARCHITECT

Habita Architects,

Bangkok

PROJECT TEAM

Boris Zeisser, Maartje

Lammers, Olav Bruin,

Anne-Laure Nolan

BAMBOO CONSULTANT

Jörg Stamm

Previous page_

Swooping above the hillside and forest, the activity centre is supported by a skeletal structure of local bamboo. Opposite_ Activities are grouped around a central auditorium. Top_ Blending in with the landscape on the island tourist resort of Soneva Kiri. Above_ One of the activity pods, made from rattan.

URBANISM

MAAKBAARHEID, A UNIQUELY DUTCH CONCEPT OF SOCIAL IMPROVEMENT THROUGH ARCHITECTURE, HAS GIVEN IMPETUS TO A SET OF NEW URBAN PROPOSALS FOR THE ROTTERDAM BIENNALE

WRITERS

WOUTER VANSTIPHOUT
MICHELLE PROVOOST

As part of the fourth International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam (IABR), Crimson Architectural Historians is exploring *maakbaarheid*, an enigmatic Dutch term that usually refers to a period in Dutch society between the 1960s and '70s when government policies were explicitly aimed at spreading wealth, knowledge and power through massive bottom-up emancipation policies. *Maakbaarheid* is difficult to translate. Literally, its meaning lies somewhere between makeable and feasible; conceptually, it is connected to terms such as 'social engineering', with a strong whiff of progressive public interventionism.

Thirty or forty years ago, these interventions consisted of equalising incomes and the education system in order to stimulate individuals from all classes to develop and educate themselves. It also meant large subsidies for non-elitist cultural, musical and art initiatives. Under the umbrella of the government, different parties – housing corporations, trade unions and entrepreneurs – worked on creating an ideal model of society through planning. Architecture,

planning and housing were important aspects of this *maakbare samenleving* (makeable society): designing it, shaping it, contributing to it and presenting it. In short, *maakbaarheid* was the Dutch interpretation of the current biennale's main theme, the Open City – the city as an 'integration machine' encouraging distinct communities and groups to settle, interact and establish dynamic relationships.

Maakbaarheid is not just about describing a quality or function of urban spaces; rather, it denotes the way that these spaces are produced. Crimson's initiative focuses on Rotterdam, widely seen as the unofficial centre of architectural and urbanistic energy in the Netherlands. It examines ways of making the Open City here, harnessing a strong public ambition to shape architecture using the best figures of the design world. That this initiative to revitalise the architect's role in shaping society comes from Rotterdam seems inevitable. The city is not just a magnet for architectural firms; Rotterdam is also *maakbaarheid's* locus classicus: the ultimate

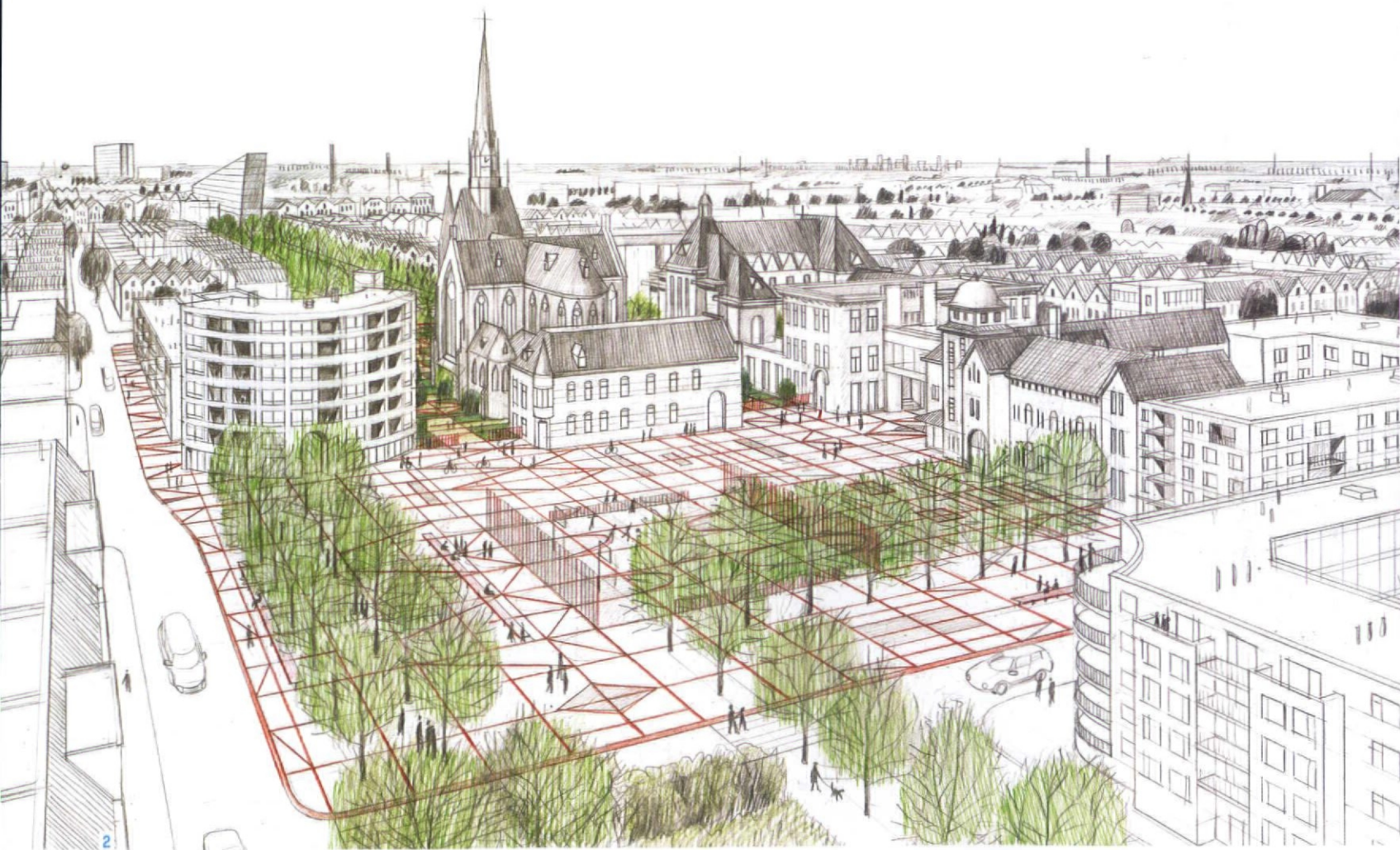
'makeable' city, having been remade in radically different shapes several times in the last century alone.

By a curious coincidence, *maqbar* is also the Persian word for graveyard. Perhaps this is a better description of Rotterdam, which, despite its heroic aspects and can-do idealism, is also strewn with the cadavers of past attempts to shape society through architecture and urban planning. The number of times a new project has promised to reinvent the city is far outweighed by the number of times the idea of shaping urban society through architecture has been declared officially dead. The optimism of the IABR comes at a time when Rotterdam is facing the consequences of the global economic crisis more intensely than any other city in the Netherlands. Politically, it has abandoned most, if not all, of its public planning ambitions and its architects' offices are scrambling to survive, forced to shed the experimental, speculative urban ambitions on which their international fame has been based. Smaller offices are filing for bankruptcy at an alarming rate. Larger partnerships from Rotterdam (for instance KCAP, Ector Hoogstad Architecten, Claus en Kaan and EGM) are also suffering, but are predicted to come out as strong monopolists, dividing up jobs and commissions from increasingly risk-averse clients among themselves. The urban renewal process of the past decade, involving an immensely complex coalition of public and private institutions and corporations, is now more or less accepted as a failure, without any measurable effect on the liveability of the areas involved.

On a political and moral level, the idea of Rotterdam as a progressive, modern and open city has also become harder to defend since the introduction of Rotterdam Law, a controversial set of legal tools used to limit the number people on benefits who aren't native to the city getting houses in certain neighbourhoods. The Rotterdam —



1. In Carnisse, this proposal by DaF Architects empowers flat owners to refurbish and improve their blocks. To stem a spiral of decline, solutions must be practical and well as social. This acts as a catalyst for the improvement of the overall area
2. Proposals for the redevelopment of Het Klooster, also by DaF, aim to revive the square and public realm around an old convent. The historic structure is tactfully re-embedded in the neighbourhood and public space is reorganised



THE ROTTERDAM LAW IS A NEW SET OF POLICIES AND POLITICAL AGENDAS AIMED AT DISCOURAGING THE CONCENTRATION OF POOR PEOPLE AND ETHNIC MINORITIES

Law is just one example of a whole new set of policies and political agendas aimed at discouraging the concentration of poor people and ethnic minorities. So for nearly a decade, Rotterdam has been carefully crafting tools for demographic control over its citizenry, a control that often goes beyond the so-called makeability of society, associated with the leftist 1970s.

There is also a parallel between the many overblown urban plans recently proposed for Rotterdam, and its inclination to select, stop, spread and concentrate its inhabitants according to income, ethnicity or religious beliefs. There is a famous interview with former mayor Ivo Opstelten – popular for his unwavering commitment to repressing small-time criminality – in which he discusses the constant eviction of heroin addicts and dealers from squats in poor neighbourhoods. He also tells a critical journalist that if you keep on spreading around the addicts and dealers for long enough, they will simply ‘evaporate’.

In the face of all this wishful thinking about the *maakbaarheid* of

Rotterdam, we are forced to accept that sometimes the ambitious urban schemes, argued and designed in the spirit of the Open City, are mere window dressing. Does this corrupt the assumption that *maakbaarheid* could be reintroduced as a viable route towards consciously and rationally constructing the Open City? Possibly, but first it is important to reconstruct when, where, by whom and for what purposes the term has been used in the past few decades. Doing so gives a perspective on planning and social engineering in the Netherlands that is infinitely more ambiguous, contradictory and rich than the familiar mantra that Dutch society used to be *maakbaar*, but it isn't anymore. It also acts as a rebuttal to the opaque way in which architecture and urban planning are being used to manipulate society.

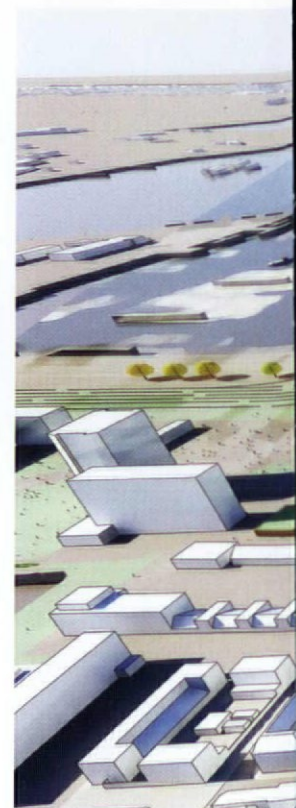
To this end, Crimson has organised nine realistic projects in which design is not used to imagine a future as a way to revolutionise the present, but as a tool to change a specific situation and architecturally represent existing programmes and urgent spatial questions. The radical

quality lies in not imagining a different societal set-up, but in accepting and understanding existing roles and possibilities and working with them to achieve precise goals. These projects neither assume the return of public planning as we knew it, nor propose visionary solutions. They are small plans – though this doesn't mean the actual scale is small or is unrelated to a larger context. On the contrary, each small project is embedded in a larger-scale analysis of the urban context and accepts the current playing field of highly decentralised and privatised urban development, planning and policymaking.

Each project is based upon a coalition of partners, with the architect present from the outset to synthesise the various ideas and interests. In these coalitions – as opposed to many of the partnerships since the 1990s – the roles, responsibilities and agendas of the different players are sharply defined. All parties share an interest in establishing Open City qualities, by connecting different user groups, areas, programmes and institutions. All parties are also convinced of the spatial and social need for less fragmentation, less segregation, more cohesion and more coexistence.

Within this consensus, each participant has a distinct role. Municipal urban planners offer their knowledge of the city in order to embed each project in municipal policies. Client-users – mostly housing corporations and project developers – provide a question and an idea of use. Architects translate the question into a spatial and symbolic answer. Uniting these disciplines, Crimson edits, defines and poses the question in such a way that all parties can work together for the higher goal of developing realistic urban projects based on real needs.

Though the projects will be realised in practice, they also contain a level of urban speculation for other parties to develop. So each project consists of a ‘real’ part, and the —



3. A proposal for Waalhavenstrip by Maxwan Architects reconfigures an industrial zone between the harbour and the city. New workspaces reconnect the two zones, offering the area's inhabitants enhanced economic prospects

4. FAT's proposal for Hilleplein, a marginalised area next to Rotterdam's largest mosque, focuses on developing new landmark architecture to provide better facilities for the neighbourhood



THE RADICAL QUALITY OF CRIMSON'S PROJECTS LIES IN UNDERSTANDING EXISTING POSSIBILITIES AND WORKING WITH THEM TO ACHIEVE PRECISE GOALS

potential of further development. In financial terms, they are safe options that aim to re-establish trust in architecture, planning and development as investments that actually deliver. To achieve this it is crucial that the private interests of the stakeholders and the public interest of the project are clearly separated and articulated.

In terms of the public agenda, each project tries to achieve authentic *maakbaarheid* goals. In Waalhaven, an industrial zone between the harbour and the city, the aim is to provide new workspaces that spatially reconnect the two zones while also opening up economic possibilities for the inhabitants of the neighbouring area, potentially emancipating young, immigrant citizens. In Rotterdam West the area of intervention is the former harbour-train dyke between Spangen and an isolated triangle filled with public amenities such as a petting zoo, swimming pool and sports fields. Spangen is a once shiny example of social-democratic *maakbaarheid* from the 1920s, but is now a largely immigrant area crippled drugs, crime

and unemployment. The project aims to transform the dyke and adjacent area into new types of public space that can be shared and used.

In the 19th-century area of Rotterdam Noord, another project centres around Het Klooster, a former convent which, like the area surrounding it, has suffered the effects of recent urban renewal. By analysing the building's inherent spatial and architectural qualities, a set of functionally fitting programmes is distilled in order to re-embed the historic structure within the neighbourhood. At the same time, the surrounding public space is redesigned and reorganised. Out of the resulting square and the adjacent amenities, the project aims to create a vibrant neighbourhood centre.

Hemmed in between railway lines, busy roads, a school building and Rotterdam's largest mosque lies Hilleplein, bordering some of the city's most disenfranchised neighbourhoods. Here, the project consists of developing a new landmark for education and culture, including a library, neighbourhood centre and houses. Rather than trying

to reinstate spatial continuity in a completely fragmented area, it seeks to establish a new sense of urban dignity by focusing on a public programme and high-quality architecture.

The many standard 1940s blocks built by architect Jo van den Broek present a completely different challenge. In Carnisse, an area which has one of the lowest real-estate values in the city, flat ownership is largely in private hands. To prevent a downward cycle it is necessary to address the technical as well as spatial problems of the blocks. The aim is to give the owners of the small apartments an architectural toolbox to take the refurbishment of their blocks into their own hands, thereby improving their living conditions as well as the overall attractiveness of the area. The soon-to-be abandoned Hofbogen train line dates from the early 20th century and includes two stations and almost 2km of viaduct, running through a 19th-century area in the north of Rotterdam. This viaduct will be redeveloped through a series of new commercial and cultural programmes and the project will reanimate the surrounding city by transforming the train line from a barrier into a connective element.

Following the Second World War, the centre of Rotterdam was extensively rebuilt and the effects of this still endure in the ubiquitous zoning of functions. In the redevelopment around Central Station this zoning runs the risk of creating a monofunctional and isolated area, while erasing the small-scale creative economy already established there. The brief for this so-called Central District forcibly connects the isolated super-development around the train station with the potential circuits and routes of the inner city. Replacing the tabula rasa approach with a gradual growth model forms an integral part of the redevelopment.

The Kleinpolderplein is one of the most impressive highway sections in the city, but it bisects a neighbourhood, and has a destructive

5_ ZUS (Zones Urbaines Sensibles) is working on a proposal to implement a model of gradual, incremental growth for the area around the Central Station. Due to the existing rigid zoning of functions, this part of Rotterdam risks becoming isolated and monofunctional. ZUS proposes forcibly reconnecting the area with the circuits and routes of the inner city

6_ Park-knot Hoboken, also by ZUS, is another project that aims to reunite parts of the city separated by infrastructure; in this case, the main city hospital and a series of parks. A Medical Museum humanises medical science, while also healing the fractured urban realm

7_ Spangen was a model *maakbaarheid* development from the 1920s, but is now crippled by poverty and social problems. This proposal by FAT redevelops an adjacent dyke to create a new kind of public space, which connects the community with existing amenities

impact on the surrounding urban areas. This project aims to tunnel, bridge, resurface and penetrate the motorway in order to counter this impact and facilitate cross-traffic, especially pedestrians and cyclists. Finally, the Park-knot Hoboken project also aims to bridge different parts of the city that have been separated by infrastructure (in this case a dyke) to create a meaningful continuous public space between three parks and Rotterdam's main city hospital.

Creating a series of projects that share an ethos of straightforwardness and realism is surely more effective in meeting the city's needs than another out-of-the-box alternative, or a spectacular 'transformational vision'. As generations shift, so do the ethics of urban intervention, analogous with do-it-yourself punk bands and entrepreneurial hip-hop artists superceding the bombastic symphonic rock played by millionaires in sports arenas.

By re-embedding architectural and urban projects in the highly specific context of a location, user and programme, we hope to save them from the damaging competition for attention and political support to which masterplans or grand visions often fall victim. The straightforwardness of the site-specific project could be a much-needed antidote to the degradation of credibility that big plans have brought to architecture and urban planning – but having a small plan in no way means having small ambitions. Being precise about the feasibility and the effectiveness of a plan means being completely accountable – a risk that very few makers of big plans are willing to take. Equally crucially, such projects set an example by showing what can be done, how it makes a difference, and that you can actually do it. 

The International Architecture Biennale Rotterdam runs from 24 September 2009 to 10 January 2010.
www.biennalerotterdam.nl

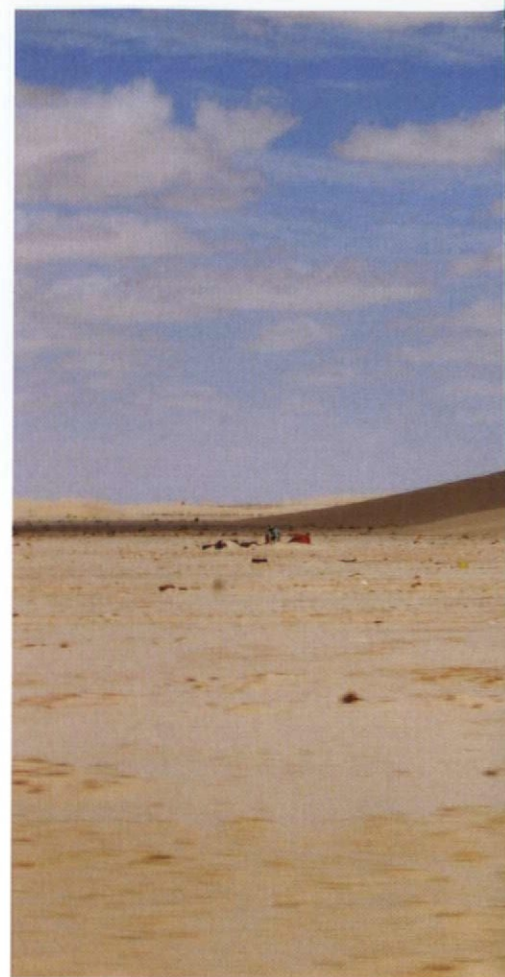


EXPLORING THE

THE AR TRAVELS THROUGH THREE CLIMATIC ZONES ON THE WEST COAST OF AFRICA TO DISCOVER THE REGION'S MYRIAD STRANDS OF VERNACULAR ARCHITECTURE

WRITER

JON BESWICK



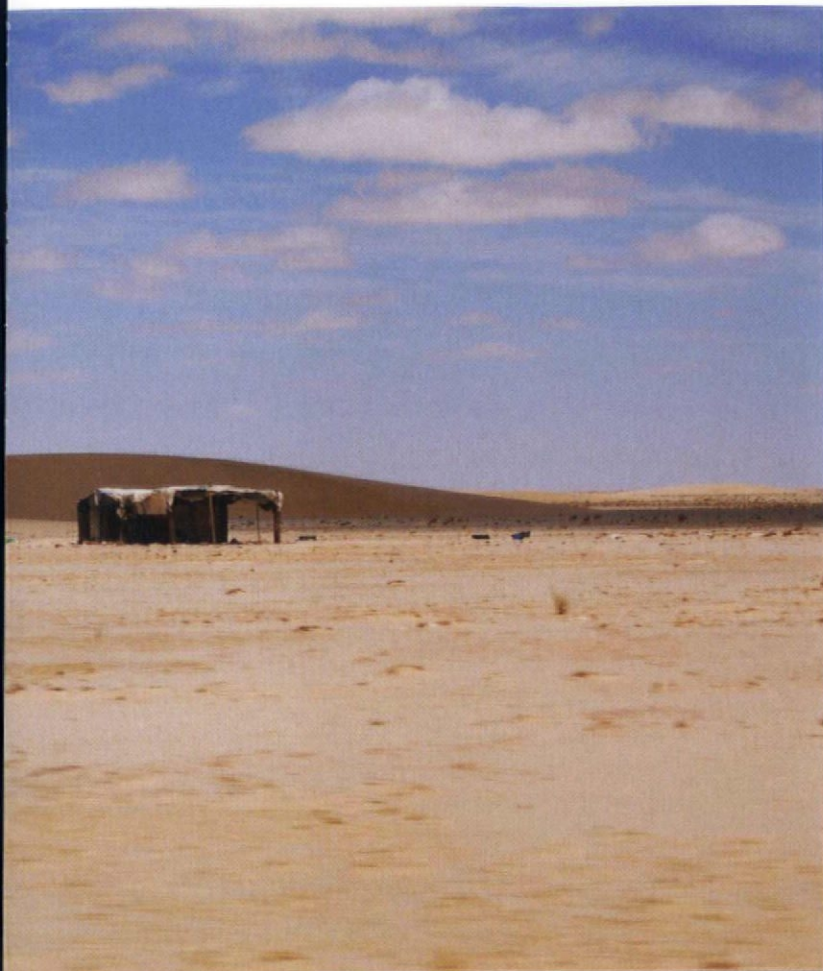
This is an architectural journey through the west coast of Africa. Why the west? Because the east coast of Africa is a path well trodden and well documented – the champagne tour of Africa. But as east Africa's bad older brother, west Africa has a far darker reputation. Very little is written about it, especially its architecture. For so long, much of west Africa has been inaccessible through war and coups d'état. My trajectory took me through every country with a coastline and en route I visited and stayed in many different kinds of vernacular dwellings. In doing so, I experienced some of the most inaccessible, beautiful or unusual sights on the planet: kasbahs in Morocco, minefield borders in Western Sahara, the Sahara Desert in Mauritania, wrestling in Senegal, slave stations in Guinea-Bissau, mines in Guinea, diamond mines in Sierra Leone, rainforests in Liberia, mass deforestation in the Ivory Coast,

savannahs in Burkina Faso, stilt villages in Ghana, voodoo in Togo and Benin, surfing hippos in Gabon, the Skeleton Coast of Namibia and South Africa's Table Mountain. This survey looks at vernacular building in three different climate zones north of the equator.

By its very nature, vernacular architecture inhibits classification, as it depends on tradition, social norms, domestic priorities, climate and the availability of skills and materials. These factors vary from country to country, region to region, village to village and even family to family. To categorise by country would disregard the context of African history, in that most African countries and borders have been artificially created by European colonial powers over the last hundred years or so. Going further back in history, it is possible to trace the influence of Africa's indigenous empires on the vernacular, but again this gives an incomplete picture.

Most villages I visited were organised by families or clans who use architectural means to identify themselves. Walls are painted with family motifs, ventilation holes form characteristic patterns, and even the men bear scars on their temples to indicate clan membership. The number of African clans is enormous. In Nigeria alone there are 36 states, with 250 ethnic groups and 521 languages, giving some indication of Africa's powerful and pervasive tribal history. Identifying cultural influences is clearly not a complete system for analysing African architecture.

Driving through this vast continent, there is one glaringly obvious common denominator: poverty. As a result, the vast majority of Africans live in shelters built from cheap, natural materials or the vegetation found around them. As local vegetation is linked to climate, grouping architecture by climatic region helps to explain —

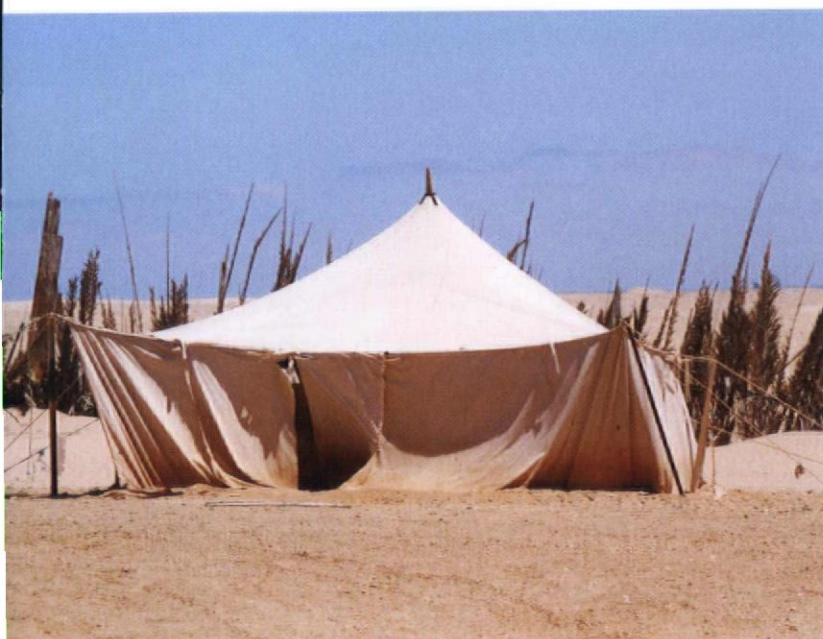
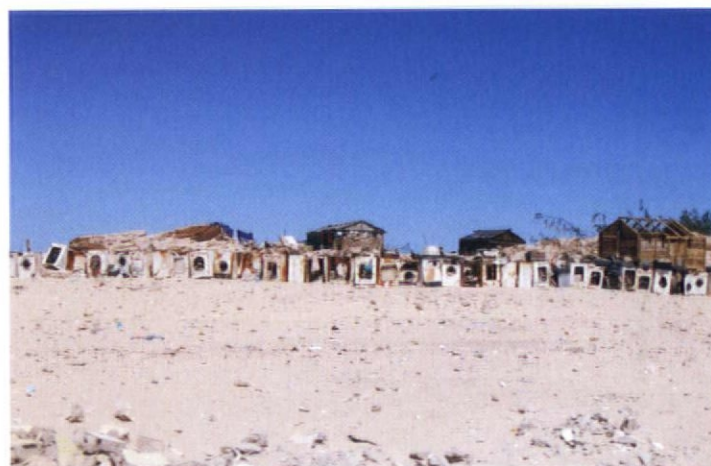


Left_ Ad-hoc timber structure with fabric roof in Mauritania

Below left_ Nomadic Bedouin tent in the Mauritanian desert made from white canvas

Below, from top_ Coastal compound in Mauritania

enclosed with a wall fabricated from salvaged materials; simple thatched roof structure made of local grasses in Senegal; mud brick dwelling with corrugated metal roof in the Gambia



WALLS ARE PAINTED WITH FAMILY MOTIFS AND VENTILATION HOLES FORM CHARACTERISTIC PATTERNS TO INDICATE CLAN MEMBERSHIP

construction techniques. While there may be an infinite number of architectural variations between villages, inhabitants are still limited to the availability of materials in their certain climatic zone. So while scale, function and details can vary, construction techniques are broadly similar due to the inherent properties of these materials.

DESERT CLIMATE

Desert climates extend from northern Africa to below the Tropic of Cancer. The Sahara, a vast, barren and desolate swathe of land, dominates north Africa. Natural shelter is hard to come by and protecting inhabitants from the sun is essential. On the edges of the rolling sand dunes of the Sahara, vegetation may be scarce but rocks are plentiful. In Morocco, houses are made of local rocks, built using dry-stone walling, a technique similar to that found in rural parts of the UK. Roofs are constructed by

stretching a large piece of fabric across the structure and anchoring it in place with rocks along the edges. To repel sandstorms and heat, windows are typically small and high, and sometimes non-existent. In common with other desert structures dwellings are dark and cool inside.

Along the coast of Western Sahara and Mauritania, the desert meets the sea in spectacular fashion. Inhabitants are either fishermen or soldiers (patrolling the coast for illegal immigrants coming ashore), who construct huts from driftwood and anything else claimed from the sea. Without natural materials, these coastal structures are an eclectic mix of wood, plastic bottles and other discarded materials washed ashore, all wrapped in fishing nets. Roofs are usually constructed either from fabric or timber planks and are tied down and anchored with large rocks to protect against fierce sea storms.

Across the Sahara, I encountered

Berber and Bedouin desert nomads with their famous tents. Strips of cloth are sewn together on ground looms or by hand; originally these were made of goat hair, now brilliant white canvases reflect the desert sun. Strips are held in tension with anchored ropes, the number of which varies depending on the size. Either a single central pole or a ridge (to prevent the pole piercing the fabric) gives the tent its shape. The loosely woven fabric creates a cool space inside by allowing air to circulate and contracts in the wet to protect its inhabitants from leaks. Bedouin tents in the Atlas Mountains have steeper pitches for snow than the flatter variants in the Mauritanian desert.

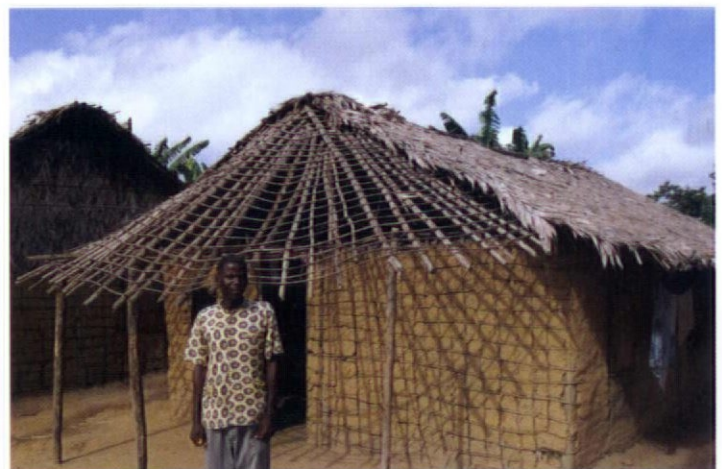
The availability and flexibility of mud has made it the most common building material, from the top to the bottom of Africa. Typically used for wall building, its application and properties vary enormously. Chemically there are many types of mud, all with their own qualities, acidities and colours. Dry desert soils of rock and sand are alkaline and especially suitable for building. The combination of these properties have been utilised over centuries of desert trading, culminating in the mud-built kasbah. While the Bedouin tent is lightweight, the kasbah has the advantage of having heavy walled construction with its inherent thermal mass mediating temperature fluctuations.

SAHELIAN CLIMATE

Lying south of the Sahara, the Sahel is a vast, semi-arid region that forms a transitional zone between the desert and dry tropical climates. While largely earth and sand, an increasing amount of vegetation colonises the barren landscape. As with desert regions, shade is vital to Sahelian inhabitants.

In these harsh arid climates, grasses, the sturdiest of vegetation, are found everywhere, even in conditions where other plants fail. Mostly non-structural, grasses —





Left_ Mud dwelling with thatched roof in the former Portuguese colony of Guinea-Bissau
Above left_ Woven walls, which encourage airflow, and thatched roof in Guinea-Bissau
Above, from top_ Woven walls awaiting a final layer

of mud in Sierra Leone; two-storey dwelling in Liberia, with mud brick walls at lower level and decorated, lightweight woven screens at upper level; mud brick and thatched house, showing timber roof structure, in Liberia

IN POORER AFRICAN COUNTRIES STRUCTURES TEND TO BE 'UNDERBUILT', TO PROTECT INHABITANTS DURING FAILURE

are commonly used for roofing where they are cut by hand, bundled and tied. Laid on thin timber frames, the resulting thatch is lightweight, waterproof and insulates against the sun. Thatched roofs are built up in layers. In northern Senegal I ate cassava stew in a hut with a thatched roof built from three layers, supplemented by sacking on the underside to provide additional protection against the rainy season. Many Senegalese structures have no walls to encourage airflow, while others have thin walls constructed from woven grasses stretched between timber frames.

In the West there is a tendency to 'overbuild' by sizing structures to exceed the everyday live load requirements from people, wind etc. As a result, these buildings tend to last. In poorer African countries buildings tend to be 'underbuilt', if finished at all. This is partly due to structures being temporary, partly

due to lack of resources and partly to protect inhabitants during failure. The biggest problem faced by African builders is the dead load of the roof, its weight carried by supporting walls. The resulting movement is often left untreated, so buildings continue to be occupied until they eventual collapse. In the West, the solution to this problem is often to triangulate the roof structure using a tie beam. However in Africa, walls tend to be much lower, with the roof used as head room. It is far more common to employ lightweight thatched roofs so when failure occurs (as a result of the rainy season), the problem area can be quickly rebuilt. Often, replacement roofs are erected on the ground, ready to be lifted on to walls when the existing structure fails.

SAVANNAH CLIMATE

The tropical savannah climates have a pronounced dry season, with the driest month experiencing

precipitation of less than 100mm (by contrast, the rainy season can experience up to 600mm of rain in a month). Most places that have this climate are found at the outer margins of the tropical zone. As with Sahelian climates, mud and grasses are the most readily available building materials.

When wet, mud is incredibly malleable and capable of producing wonderful forms built up using handfuls of the material. When evaporation causes the mud to dry, the soil shrinks, bringing layers of mud together in compression and strengthening the structure. In northern Ghana, the Ivory Coast and Burkina Faso, individual huts are linked together with mud walls to create compounds. These villages consist of conical moulded huts for sleeping, cooking and washing as well as huts for food and livestock. Everything in these villages is created with mud including walled thresholds, seats and shelves. Other conical solid mud towers contain the ashes of the recently deceased. Honoured with liquid food, the columns are allowed to collapse with time and so the deceased are returned to their ancestors. In the town of Nangodi in Ghana, the location of the new walled village is the responsibility of a land priest called the *tendaana*, who approves requested sites and helps lay the foundations of each new structure.

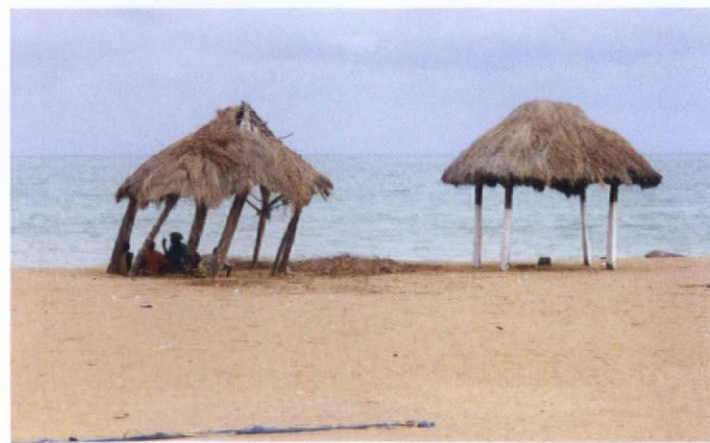
One advantage of brick construction is that some spaces can be left to create vents. To create basic bricks, mud, water and straw are moulded by hand into rough cubes and left in the sun to dry. Wealthier communities fashion bricks using wooden casing or even metal vices to produce a more standardised shape with sharper edges. The bricks are then either stacked directly on top of each other or staggered, creating circular or rectangular structures, and additional mud is sometimes used as mortar. The entire structure is then finished with a plaster of mud and straw. 





Left_ The ultimate
'green' roof in the
Ivory Coast
Below left_ Mud
plastered on to
a timber frame
in Ghana
Bottom left_
Individual conical
mud structures
linked by a unifying

wall in Ghana
Below, from top_
Village compound
in the Ivory Coast;
timber and thatched
dwellings on stilts
on a river in Ghana;
thatched canopy
structures on a
beach in Benin





RECONSTRUCTION OF MOORISH BATHS

LOCATION

BAZA, SPAIN

ARCHITECT

IBÁÑEZ ARQUITECTOS

WRITER

CATHERINE SLESSOR

PHOTOGRAPHY

FERNANDO ALDA





Baza, in the northern part of Granada province, is one of the oldest settlements in Spain. Colonised by the Moors, it still bears the powerful archaeological traces of their occupation. Among these is a finely preserved ensemble of Moorish baths located beside the town's mosque in the historic area known as Marazuela. Dating from the 13th century, the remains were originally discovered just over 100 years ago and have become a fixture on the tourist circuit. However, until recently they had not fared well, lying partially unearthed and completely decontextualised, surrounded by a

scrubby concrete block wall.

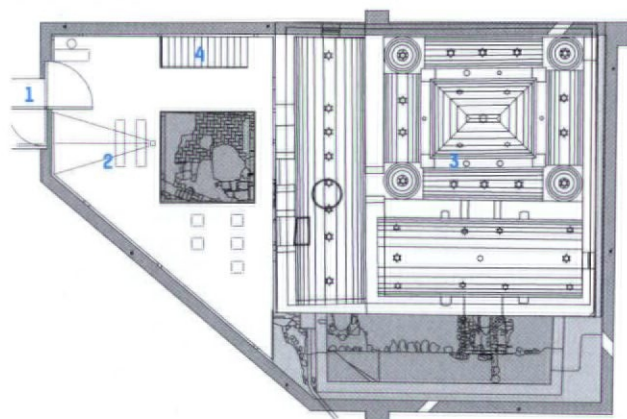
Ibáñez Arquitectos was given the obvious practical task of restoring and protecting the remains, but this project has a more subtle aim – to recreate the spatial and experiential qualities of a Moorish bathhouse. Dedicated to the pleasures of cleansing and relaxation, these were refuges of exquisite sensuality, heightened by the interaction of light, shade, water and steam. Set in a system of barrel-vaulted and domed brick chambers, the Baza baths consisted of a large, warm pool and smaller cold and hot baths, together with an entrance patio and wood

store. Light percolated through star-shaped incisions in the vaults, shafting atmospherically into the steamy gloom. Early watercolour sketches by the architect attempt to evoke this nuanced play of light.

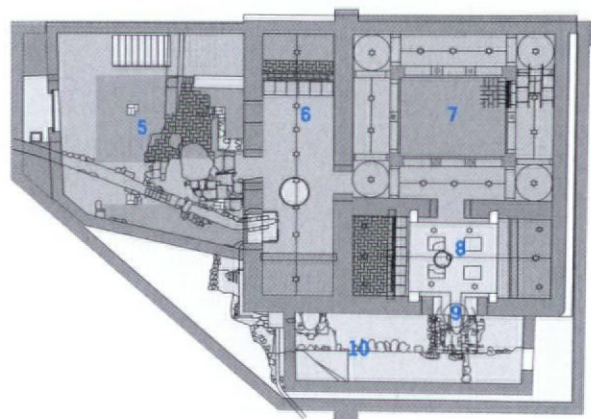
Using the techniques and materials familiar to Moorish artisans, Ibáñez Arquitectos' refurbishment carefully reconstructs the vaults and domes, complete with star-shaped skylights, so that the baths are fully enclosed once more. Like a Russian doll, the repaired structure is in turn enclosed in a small, blind pavilion at street level. Fabricated from raw concrete panels, this pavilion —

SCINTILLATING AROUND THE CHAMBERS OF THE BATHS, THE LIGHT HAS A MAGICAL, MYSTERIOUS QUALITY

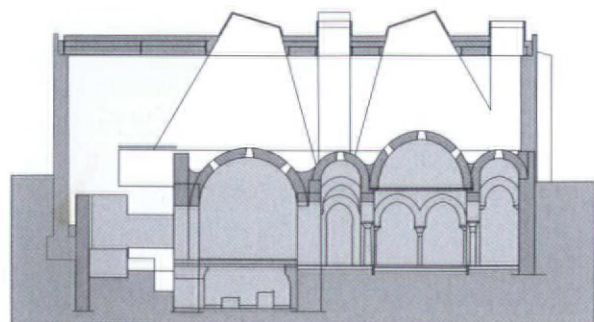
- 1 entrance to pavilion
- 2 orientation gallery
- 3 roof of baths
- 4 stairs down to baths
- 5 patio
- 6 cold chamber
- 7 warm chamber
- 8 hot chamber
- 9 stove
- 10 wood store



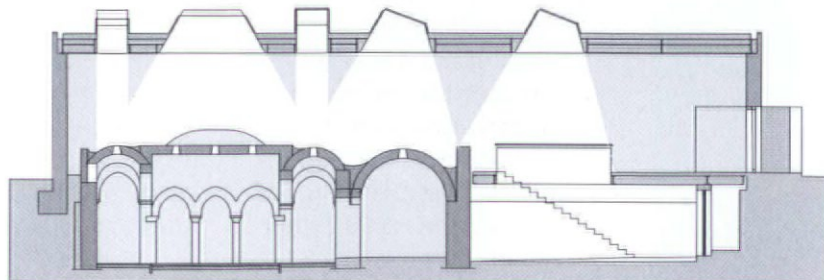
ground-floor plan



lower ground-floor plan



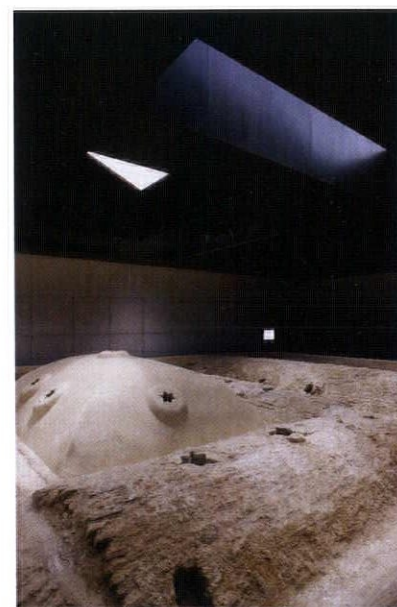
cross section



long section



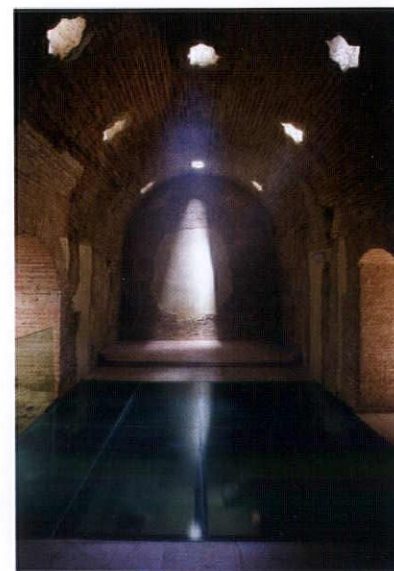
Previous page, left_
Inside the new
pavilion, which now
encloses the baths
Previous page, right_
Light percolates into
the restored baths
Opposite_ Pavilion
at street level
Left_ Main warm
chamber, now
without water
but still highly
atmospheric
Below_ Sequence of
light penetration
Bottom_ The hot
chamber, with new
glass floor



contains a viewing hall, from which the domed and vaulted geometry of the restored roof can be surveyed before visitors descend into the baths below. Above, on the roof of the pavilion, an array of truncated conical skylights channels light into this interstitial space, from where it filters down through the 'starlights' to illuminate the chambers of the baths. To ensure adequate levels of light penetration, digital modelling was used to calculate the size, shape and position of the new skylights.

This makes it sound a bit prosaic, but the actual experience is far from it. Scintillating around the chambers, the

light has a magical, mysterious quality. And though none of the bathing pools now contain water, part of the damaged floor of the hot chamber is recreated in glass, which suggests the presence of a shimmering, reflective surface. A limited palette of modern materials sharpens the contrast between the historic and the contemporary. Along with concrete and glass, new elements are executed in Cor-ten steel, varnished to darken its surface. Gracefully bridging six centuries, the project not only consolidates the physical remnants of the baths, but also reanimates their intangible, sensual aura. 



FLYING GRASS

Crisis is the point at which things 'spin out of scale'

BOOK / Crisis: Urban China Bootlegged by C-Lab for Volume
Jiang Jun and Mark Wigley
C-Lab, 2009, US\$ 15

The thought model for this book – a cross between C-Lab's quarterly *Volume* and a Chinese urbanism publication – is like a bootleg recording: an editorial memory of cassettes sold at gigs to hardcore fans. True to the format, it looks pretty terrible. Most pages are printed one colour, and the design sabotages legibility with oversized fonts, narrow margins and cumbersome column widths. Images are cut across pages and, rather impenetrably, article titles are ripped away from their texts. But, as with the best bootlegs, once you get over this, the material is pretty interesting.

Forty-five independent contributions comprise a mixed bag whichever way you cut them. Here are essays, email conversations and interviews, addressing cultural theory, spatial hermeneutics and practical architecture, from architects, politicians, bloggers, computer games designers and so on. They cluster around the theme of crisis but, as author Mark Wigley points out in his opening piece, crisis is the point at which things 'spin out of scale.' The lawlessness of the collection is an expression of crisis, and repeatedly, crisis emerges as transgressive – it occurs when problems can no longer be contained.

Looking at the world today, the compendium has its pick of transgressive crises. Most prominent is how the American sub-prime mortgage crisis spilled over on to most things on the planet; but equally, there are spiralling crises presented by Iraq and Africa, and the 2008 earthquake in Sichuan, China. This last is given the most concrete treatment, including paper-tube constructions and reconstituted earthquake bricks, but all key into a more global argument that crisis is both the bane of our times, and our opportunity to strike out anew.

There is a strong sense that we somehow deserve our current crises. We had a decade of overreaching greed, dirty debt and bad Mr Bush et al., which led us to calamity. But we are now in the transformational phase of crisis-hope, wherein crisis is to be seized as much as suffered. The danger however, as shrewdly espied by Sam Jacob, is to 'presuppose that the logic of the crisis is somehow more intelligent, cleverer and more informed than the boom.' **ADRIAN HORNSBY**

+ *Proof that negative can occasionally be positive*
– *The design could do with crisis management*

Below_ This summer, Rotterdam's Schouwburgplein was temporarily enlivened by the Flying Grass Carpet, a giant, Persian rug-style confection executed in coloured astroturf. Dutch designers ID Eddy and HUNK-design devised the carpet, which is, literally, flying around Europe and can be scaled to suit different locales. In Rotterdam until 17 September, then on to Madrid.





Not since the Renaissance has a media tool revolutionised the built environment

**FESTIVAL /
Beyond Media**
9-17 July 2009, Stazione
Leopolda, Florence, Italy
www.beyondmedia.it

Beyond Media is an international festival of architecture and media held in Florence. The latest instalment, titled 'Visions', focused on contemporary architecture and the consequences of its communication. Given the focus on digital media and its role in reshaping architecture, the festival's location could not have been more poetic. Not since the Renaissance has a media tool truly revolutionised the built environment and the way it is represented. Assembled in the 19th-century train station Stazione Leopolda for discussions on digital media's contribution to architecture, it was impossible not to imagine Brunelleschi, Donatello and Alberti congregating in a 15th-century Florentine palazzo to discuss what was perhaps the most innovative media tool in history, the linear perspective, and how this could be applied to the arts and architecture.

The festival's array of videos, animations, images and urban strategic plans illustrated the various disciplines involved in using digital media. Four days of talks and symposiums also gave a range of speakers the chance to air their contrasting views on the its role in architecture. During the symposium 'Architecture, Vision and Power',

Below_ Photograph of solar-powered shelters in New Orleans, from the Urban Visions exhibition, curated by Michele Bonino



Peter Wilson of Bolles+Wilson credited winning a competition to his decision not to submit a single image but a physical model instead, describing how his 'romantic' sketch won over planners through the 'power of massaging'. This, he claimed, is the real power of the image.

John Frazer, a pioneer in the development of digital media – who, along with Julia Frazer and Cedric Price, developed the first working model of a self-organising intelligent building – highlighted the importance of 'the intention of design' and the architect's responsibility to engage with environmental, construction, social and economic issues.

In the 'Spot On Schools' forum, while many of the participating universities

concentrated on the use of programmes to create abstract forms, the most interesting insight came from Ball State University's Kevin Klinger. He highlighted a project in which students work hands-on in the workshops of local Indiana limestone and hardwood manufacturers. They aim to develop new processes to carve and shape the materials through digital programming. Klinger's view is that 'digital fabrication should bring us back to handcraft, not take us away'.

The event managed to maintain the conviviality of its Italian setting. As usual, the most profound conversations took place off-piste at the dining table or over a cocktail at the bar. The organisers anticipated such encounters

by constructing a *tavola della condivisione* – which roughly means 'a table around which to share your visions' – in the main exhibition space.

Among all the theoretical discussions, one of the most memorable comments came from Alvise Simondetti of Arup when he said: 'I am not a theoretician. I cannot theorise. I can barely speak. In fact, what I am good at is drawing.'

KARIN TEMPLIN

+ Inspired setting leads to inspired ideas

— Time to put down our pens?

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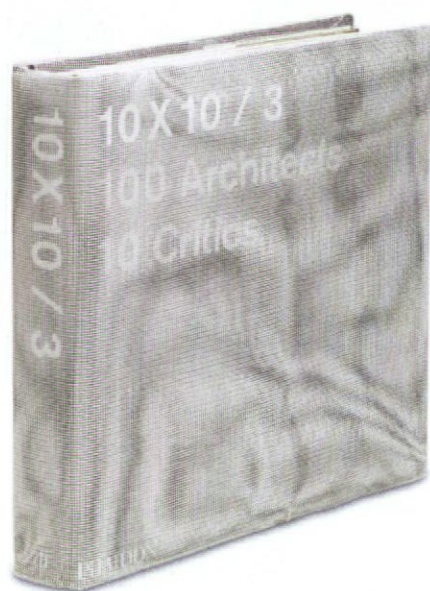
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A plumb-bob and a mousetrap are some of the more obscure items branded 'good design'

EXHIBITION /
What was Good Design? MoMA's Message 1944-56
Until 30 November 2009,
Museum of Modern Art,
New York
www.moma.org

In mid-20th century America, MoMA curator Edgar Kaufmann Jr coined the term 'good design' to promote everyday objects that economically combined beauty and function, aligned with the precepts of the modern movement. At a time when countries were scrambling to take control of post-war markets, Kaufmann's doctrine emerged as a brilliant ploy to catch popular imagination, re-assert American identity and breathe new life into the country's economy. The message was as much commercial as educational, disseminated through women's magazines, television and department stores, as well as academic journals, exhibitions and competitions. MoMA's influence won its chosen designs a place in many American hearts and homes, as well as in the public sphere. When Nixon and Kennedy debated the first televised presidential election in 1960, they were sitting in Hans Wegner armchairs.

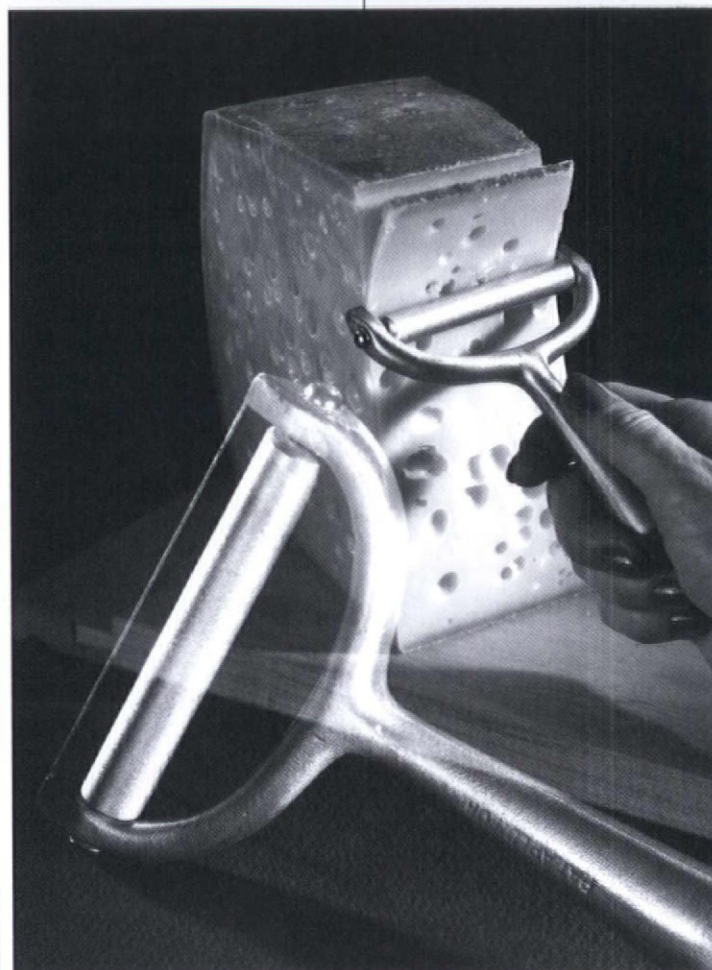
MoMA's exhibition *What was Good Design?* celebrates Kaufmann and MoMA's role in spearheading this eventful period in design history. Curators

Juliet Kinchin and Aidan O'Connor have scoured the MoMA archives for over 100 examples of 'good design' in order to revisit the idea of blending museum, media and merchandising. Furniture, textiles, graphics, utensils and appliances are drawn from the International Competition for Low-Cost Furniture (1948), the 'Good Design' exhibition series (1950-55) and the 'Useful Objects' exhibition series (1938-48). A display of 'low-cost' chairs designed by Eero Saarinen, Charles Eames and Marcel Breuer is the star of the show, but smaller artefacts also succeed in sustaining interest. A plumb-bob (weight), a hunting bow, a shrimp de-veiner and a mousetrap are some of the more obscure items MoMA branded 'good design' over the years.

The concentration of exhibits into a modest space hints at their domestic context, and a playful approach to their assembly sees Tupperware bowls and cups sharing a plinth with Kaj Franck's famed Kilta earthenware (1948). Never far from the array of retro curiosities is a reminder of their affordability and accessibility. A video installation shows Kaufmann in curator/salesman mode demonstrating seating and storage wares on *News of the World for Women* in 1952.

MoMA's 'good design' assault on the American public has been widely criticised as crass and commercial in its intent, or even more cynically, a trading-in on

Below Domestic bliss: Presto cheese slicer designed by John Carroll, 1944



the aspirations of the middle-class. But by laying bare evidence from its past, the exhibition makes no excuses for this, asking its visitors to decide whether MoMA's influence was a power for good in the design world, or an elitist exercise in shaping consumer culture. In our own uncertain economic times, what should be admired is the restorative impact of MoMA's message and its ability to raise the profile of the industry with national and global effect, influencing society, culture and

identity to leave an indelible mark on everyday American life.

RIYA PATEL

+ A fascinating trawl through some curious design landmarks
- MoMA's message has been slated as crass and commercial

The Bauhaus story is broader, more controversial, and both funny and tragic

EXHIBITION / Modell Bauhaus

**Until 4 October 2009,
Martin-Gropius-Bau,
Berlin, Germany
www.modell-bauhaus.de**

In 1968, Stuttgart, then in West Germany, curated an exhibition called 50 Years of Bauhaus. This year, 10 years short of its centenary, Bauhaus is again the object of national celebration, but this time in Berlin, as capital of a reunited Germany. Four decades on, this show has an advantage over its predecessor in being able to draw on post-reunification cooperation between the Foundation of Weimar Classics, the Bauhaus Dessau Foundation and the Bauhaus Archives Berlin. To view their pooled resources, with loans from abroad, visitors need a day to trawl through 18 halls and two specially commissioned art installations: DIY Bauhaus by New York artist Christine Hill, (sponsored by Ikea and the latter-day DIY German store, also called Bauhaus) and Endless Bauhaus by Ilka & Andreas Ruby, featuring an assemblage of video interviews with today's design stars.

Visitors also get a heartening glimpse of Bauhaus bacchanalia. Walter Gropius, the school's founder, instigated themed parties to encourage esprit de corps, complete with costumes and elaborate decorations. At Dessau there was a 'white' party, a 'metal' party [with a steel slide the length of a

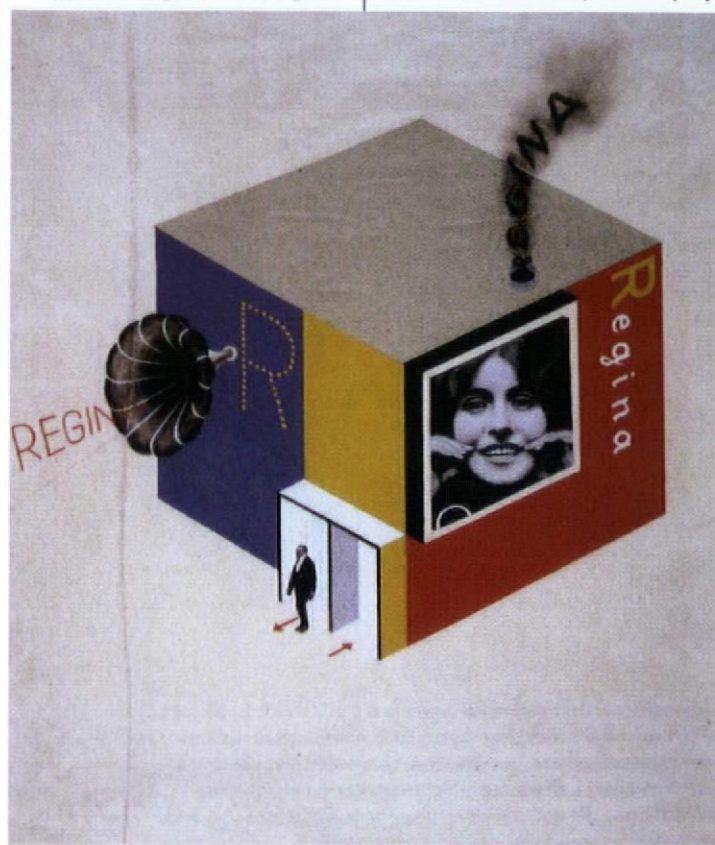
corridor), and a 'beard, nose and heart' party.

What is now mass-produced for Ikea in the third world was first handmade by Bauhaus masters and students as prototypes, in the hope of making 'necessities for all, not luxuries for the few'. In a film of the construction of Hannes Meyer's Dessau-Törten estate, precast concrete beams are seen being handmade by construction workers born in the 19th century. Bauhaus was at the turning point between a class-riven society and revolutionary movements. Dessau was the Silicon Valley of its day, and Gropius wanted to forge links there with Junkers & Co, the aeroplane manufacturer, to mass produce steel houses, among other things.

Bauhaus is not a style, as Omar Akbar, former Dessau Foundation director, has constantly reiterated. And through emigration, Bauhaus became even less definable. A common misconception is that white cube buildings, tubular steel furniture and impractical teapots are Bauhaus, but the school energetically propagated handicrafts, esoteric beliefs, expressionism, constructivism, De Stijl and industrialisation. It was also a pedagogical experiment, an intellectual conference centre, and a hotbed of Communist resistance to fascism. The Bauhaus story is broader, more controversial, and both funny and tragic.

In their US exile, Mies van der

Below Herbert Bayer's 1924 design for a trade fair stand for a toothpaste company



Rohe, the last Bauhaus director in Berlin, and his staff were dubbed White Gods by author Tom Wolfe. Gropius, the first and most influential director, earned the title Silver Prince, while Hannes Meyer's role, as Marxist and second Bauhaus director, was played down. Ultimately, as architecture came to be seen as social engineering, his influence indirectly touched a wider public, in the post-war new towns.

The irony of history is that Germany ensured Bauhaus' global success, through persecution and even murder, and now reclaims it as a tourist attraction and an industrial seal of quality. In the wider world,

would Conran have been able to pioneer his Habitat empire, or Ikea found a furniture dynasty, if Bauhaus hadn't shown the way?

CHRISTOPH KRÄMER

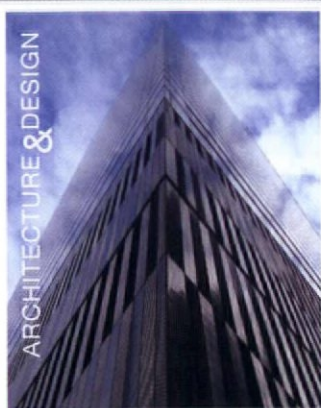
+ A long-awaited and expansive display
– Not enough Bauhaus?
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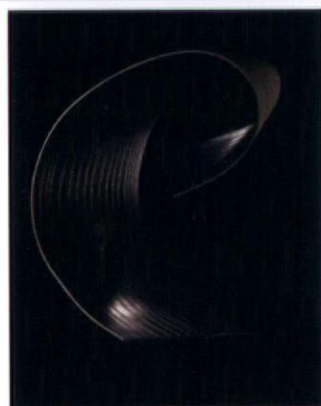
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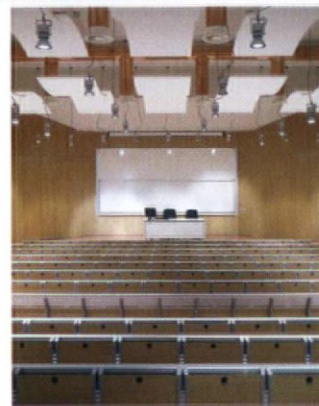
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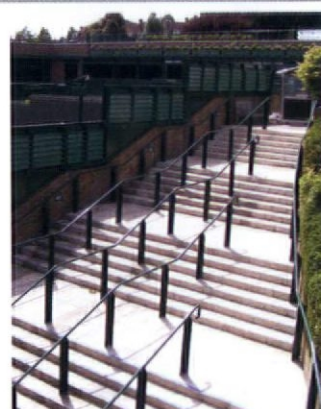
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CATHEDRA STONE ENQUIRY NUMBER 905

Home of the UK's premier tennis tournament, Wimbledon is a venue steeped in history and now a world-famous landmark. Cathedra Stone recently supplied new paving, step units and Corduroy tactile paving in and around the new Tea Lawn and some of the outside courts. These have added to the wide range of Cathedra Stone products already within the grounds.



INALCO ENQUIRY NUMBER 906

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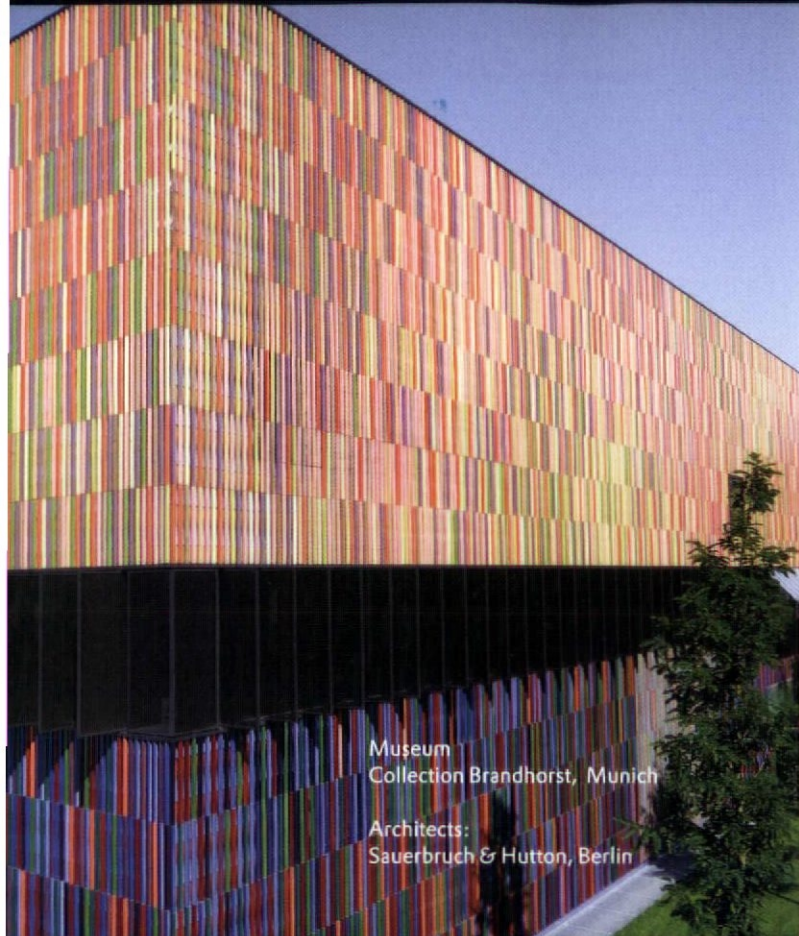
New for 2009 and available immediately, Tallin is the latest product innovation for bathrooms from the creative designers at Astro Lighting. Available in 300mm, 600mm and 900mm widths, Tallin is perfectly sized to fit above a mirror, providing a practical and contemporary lighting solution. Designed as a low-energy fitting, this wall light is IP44-approved making it safe for wet areas.



STOAKES SYSTEMS ENQUIRY NUMBER 908

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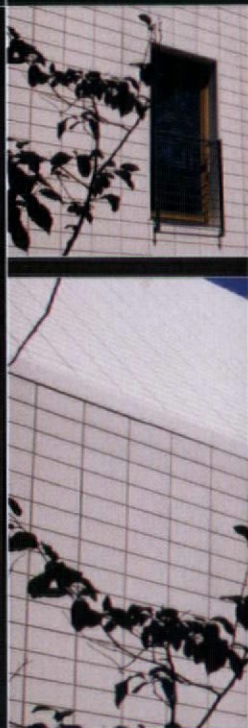
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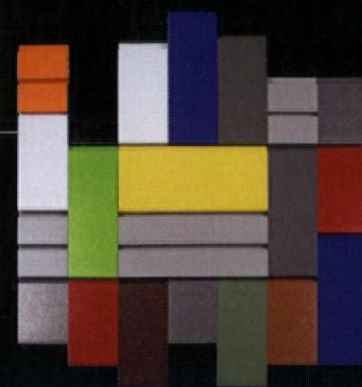
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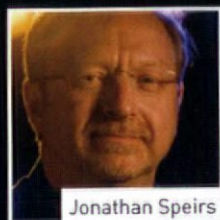
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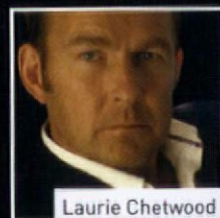
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DAGENHAM HEATHWAY

STEFFI KLENZ

This photograph, entitled *Dagenham Heathway*, was taken by the artist Steffi Klenz on the periphery of London in 2004. These heaps of raw materials, made of the remains of demolished buildings, supply the essential aggregate used to construct the city. They are, nonetheless, mountains, and evoke Heinrich

Heine's 1823 poem *Lyrical Intermezzo*.

'Ich steh' auf des Berges Spitze,
Und werde sentimental,' which
translates as, 'I stand on the mountain's
summit and am getting sentimental.'

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