

# Architecture in a time of crisis: 2008 – 2013

The bliss of the 2004 Olympic Games in **Athens** lasted more than four years after their conclusion. The Games radically transformed the post-war city that was, until that time, produced by the repetition of the *polykatoikia* (apartment building) typology, albeit in multiple variations. The changes introduced a new, extra-large-scale layer of infrastructural urbanization laid on top of the pre-existing modern urban fabric. New circulation networks allowed for the diffusion of Athens in all directions.

ATHENS (GR) — TEXT: YANNIS AESOPOS, ILLUSTRATION: HARMEN VAN DER HORST

The unprecedented mobility offered by the infrastructural networks, together with numerous loans light-heartedly offered by the banks, led to the development of an intense consumerist culture. Numerous shopping malls popped up along circulation axes. Simultaneously, a large part of the more affluent population departed the city centre for new neighbourhoods on its periphery, leaving a vacuum to be filled in by thousands of illegal immigrants migrating to Greece from Asia and Africa.

Crisis did not take long to arrive. The first signs became apparent with the massive riots in the centre of Athens following the killing of a young student by the police in December 2008. A year later, the country's public debt bubble burst, forcing Greece to agree to a very large financial aid package from the EU and the IMF, accompanied by severe austerity measures. From 2010 onwards, construction activity in Greece, and Athens in particular, ground to a halt. Over the last three years, we have witnessed the collapse of the construction sector, both private and public. The only projects completed or under construction during this period are either ones begun pre-crisis or those funded by public benefit foundations.

Single-family homes have always been a significant part of Greek architectural production. Most houses built

in the last fifteen years refer mainly to the work of Nicos Valsamakis and, to a lesser degree, that of Aris Konstantinidis, two masters of Greek architecture from the 1960s, characterized by orthogonal geometry, volumetric simplicity, the use of white plaster or finely exposed concrete and the search for spatial continuity between the house and its surrounding landscape. The design of single-family homes in the Athenian suburbs reflects signs of opulence and express an extroverted lifestyle developed in the 2000s that is now fading.

The **House in Kifissia (1)** and the **House in Psychico (2)**, both by Valsamakis and completed after the mid-2000s, embody in a 'sober' manner the characteristics of the aforementioned architectural idiom. Both are very simple, white and orthogonal two-volume prisms placed in large gardens. Likewise, the **House in Psychico (3)** by BLP Architects (Iro Bertaki, Christina Loukopoulou and Costis Paniyirisi) adopts an L-shaped plan so as to isolate itself from neighbouring buildings and open up to its garden and pool. The first-floor bedrooms form a white, linear volume that hovers above the ground level, accentuating the building's horizontality.

**Two houses in Kavouri (4)** by Maria Kokkinou and Andreas Kourkoulas are placed at different levels of a sloped

site in the southern suburb of Vouliagmeni. House A consists of a large volume of living quarters connected to three individual bedroom volumes. House B also uses the platform element as a design tool, upon which stand the extensive living quarters, complemented by shaded areas opening onto an unobstructed sea view.

The **house in Ekali (5)** by ISV Architects (Babis Ioannou, Tasos Sotiropoulos and Alexander Van Gilder) provides spaces for living but also for exhibiting the owners' large art collection, organized in multiple levels along the site's slope, while a **house in Voula (6)** by mplusm sits on an oblong site, organized as two parallel volumes. Its smaller, sky-lit volume encases vertical movement and offers views to the linear pool through its tall louvers. The larger volume contains the living areas, which open onto the ground level terrace and bedroom spaces, defined by a large glass-and-metal structure. Similarly, **two L-shaped houses in Penteli (7)** by Demetrios Issaias and Tassis Papaioannou face each other at two ends of an elongated plot, creating an interior courtyard joined by a covered walkway.

*Polykatoikias* constitute the other most common building type in Greek architectural production. During the last five years, the rising demographic heterogeneity of Athenian society due to intense immigration led to less generic designs of *polykatoikias* that, based on their architecture, appear as identity providers for their inhabitants. The **Uptown Residences (8)** housing complex in Marousi by BLP Architects occupies an entire urban block and consists of seven functionally autonomous buildings with a total of 70 apartments, linear communal spaces with gardens and underground parking. The complex is laid out in an S-shaped plan, with elevations marked by the white horizontal stripes of balconies, referencing the typical facades of modernist Athenian *polykatoikias*.

**Oyster Smart Flats (9)** by ISV Architects is a serviced apartment building located in an up-and-coming neighbourhood with notable cultural institutions. It addresses a diverse crowd of young people seeking a fresh relationship with the city centre. The building provides spaces for relaxation, exercise and meeting, and balconies are planted to reproduce a wild flora within the urban environment. The finely-crafted exposed concrete ***polykatoikia* on Deinokratous street (10)** by Giorgos Aggelis sits on a sloping, three-faced site. It introduces a public passage on different levels, cutting through the ground-level pilotis to bring urban life into the building, while a four-storey exposed concrete ***polykatoikia* in Voula (11)** by →

Over the last three years, we have witnessed the collapse of the construction sector.



**1** HOUSE IN KIFISSIA (2006)  
Architect: Nicos Valsamakis  
Address: Pentelis street, Kifissia



**2** HOUSE IN PSYCHICO (2006)  
Architect: Nicos Valsamakis  
Address: Agiou Dimitriou street, Psychico



**3** HOUSE IN PSYCHICO (2011)  
Architect: BLP Architects (Iro Bertaki, Christina Loukopoulou, Costis Paniyirisi)  
Address: Diamantidou 75-77, Psychico



**4** TWO HOUSES IN KAVOURI (2011)  
Architects: Maria Kokkinou and Andreas Kourkoulas  
Address: Archimideou 1, Kavouri, Vouliagmeni



**5** HOUSE IN EKALI (2010)  
Architect: ISV Architects (Babis Ioannou, Tasos Sotiropoulos, Alexander Van Gilder)  
Address: Rodon 64 and Vakhou 2A, Ekali



**6** HOUSE IN VOULA (2012)  
Architect: mplusm (Memos Filippidis, Marita Nikoloutsou)  
Address: Vassileos Georgiou 55, Voula



**7** TWO HOUSES IN PENTELI (2008)  
Architects: Demetrios Issaias and Tassis Papaioannou  
Address: Phediou 12, Palea Penteli



**8** UPTOWN RESIDENCES (2012)  
Architect: BLP Architects (Iro Bertaki, Christina Loukopoulou, Costis Paniyirisi)  
Address: Dionysiou 148, Aghios Thomas Amarousiou



**9** OYSTER SMART FLATS (2012)  
Architect: ISV Architects (Babis Ioannou, Tasos Sotiropoulos, Alexander Van Gilder)  
Address: Evidamantos 7 and Sfigos, Neos Kosmos



**10** POLYKATOIKIA ON DEINOKRATOUS (2012)  
Architect: Giorgos Aggelis  
Address: Deinokratous 123, Kolonaki



**11** POLYKATOIKIA IN VOULA (2008)  
Architects: Dionisis Sotouvikis and Anastasis Sotouvikis  
Address: Konstantinou Karamanli 139, Voula



**12** OFFICE BUILDING ON PIREOS (2008)  
Architect: Alexandra Kalliri  
Address: Pireos (Panagii Tsaldari) 38, Omonoia



**13** OFFICE BUILDING AND SUPERMARKET (2010)  
Architects: Maria Kokkinou and Andreas Kourkoulas  
Address: Pireos 222 & Kydonion, Tavros



**14** NEW ACROPOLIS MUSEUM (2009)  
Architects: Bernard Tschumi Architects with Michael Photiadiis & Associate Architects  
Address: Dionysiou Areopagitou and Makriyanni, Acropolis  
Contributed by: Eirini-Tsianaka



**15** NATIONAL MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART (EMST)  
Architects: Kalliope Kontozoglou with 3SK Styliandis Architects  
Address: Kallirois 44 and Frantzi, Fix



**16** ONASSIS CULTURAL CENTRE (2010)  
Architect: AS Architecture Studio  
Address: Syngrou 107-109, Neos Kosmos



**17** STAVROS NIARCHOS FOUNDATION CULTURAL CENTRE (2015)  
Architect: Renzo Piano Building Workshop  
Address: Syngrou and Poseidonos, Kallithea



**18** FALIRON URBAN WATERFRONT PARK  
Architects: Renzo Piano Building Workshop (concept design), a-3/BLP Architects, mplusm, Diversity Architects (design development), Eandscape/Helli Pangalou (landscape design), Thimios Papagiannis Associates (general studies coordination and masterplan)  
Address: Faliron Bay



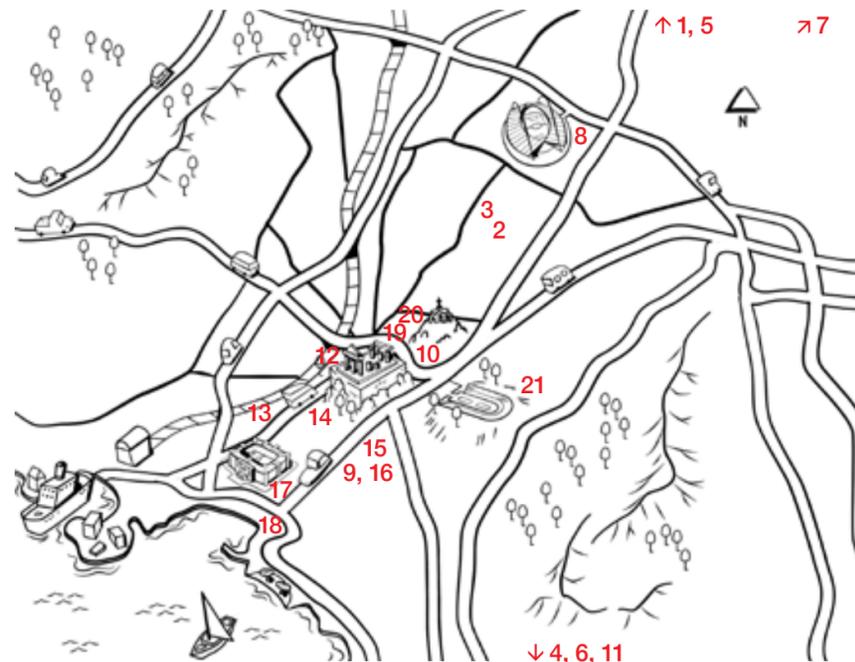
**19** MONASTIRAKI SQUARE (2008)  
Architects: Nikos Kazeros, Vasileia Maniaki, Zina Kotsopoulou, Christina Parakente, Eleni Tzirtzilaki  
Address: Monastiraki



**20** NAVARINOU PARK (2009-2010)  
Architects: Local community groups and citizens  
Address: Navarinou & Harilaou Trikoupi, Exarcheia



**21** POCKET PARK IN PANGRATI (2012)  
Architects: Labros Seklisiotis and atenisas  
Address: Pafsaniou 20 & Phaidrou, Pangrati



## (Architecture in a time of crisis)

Dionisis Sotovikis and Anastasis Sotovikis faces the Saronic Gulf. Based on its simple geometry, large glass surfaces and long, cantilevered balconies, the building accentuates the significance of the unobstructed view and operates as a 'diving board' to the sea.

Office buildings, which constituted a significant part of architectural production during the economic boom, are now scarce. The **office building on Pireos street (12)** by Alexandra Kalliri continues the city facade with the use of a curtain wall laid out as a play of indents and protrusions accentuating the presence of light and shadow. Of its three volumes, only the middle one touches the ground to provide an entrance, while the remaining ground-level space is left free to form an urban garden; an extension of public space into the building's core. Voids provide natural light and ventilation to all parts of the building, offering a sense of unity.

An **office building and supermarket (13)** by Maria Kokkinou and Andreas Kourkoulas (see A10 #39) also sits along busy Pireos street. The large roof of the supermarket is designed as a rooftop garden for use by office employees, and combines orderly planted trees in large flower pots and drought-tolerant true grasses that grow in a random manner. In an interesting sectional move, the roof dips down to connect to the office building's street-level collective spaces.

Following the economic crisis, the impoverishment of the state has rendered it weak, unable to fund new public buildings and open public spaces. This task has been taken up by prominent foundations for public benefit, and by several newly-formed citizens' groups or collectives. The former fund large-scale projects, with commissions given to well-known architects, while the latter operate on a smaller, neighbourhood scale through low-tech collective enterprise. The most important public building of the post-war period in Athens is the **New Acropolis Museum (14)** by Bernard Tschumi Architects with local partner Michael Photiadis & Associate Architects (see A10 #15). Since opening its doors in 2009, it has become a major cultural pillar and tourist attractor. The museum is formed by stacked volumes: a base of exposed concrete is topped with a glass prism housing the Parthenon sculptures. The latter is shifted from its base so as to acquire the same disposition as the Parthenon and thereby achieve a viewing experience as close as possible to that of the original monument.

Another important state-funded public building nearing completion is the **National Museum of Contemporary Art (EMST) (15)** by Kalliope Kontozoglou with 3SK Stylianiadis Architects. It stands between two busy streets, Syngrou and Kallirois avenues, and reuses the remaining half of the abandoned Fix Brewing Company. The building's two characteristic facades, with linear glass stripes facing the two streets, designed in 1957 by the prominent architect Takis Zenetos, are preserved. The other facades are redesigned as solid walls of sedimentary stone – a reference to an underground stream – that 'protect' the exhibition spaces lying behind them. The museum will house exhibition spaces, archives, library and auditorium.

Less than a kilometre to the south, along Syngrou avenue, stands the **Onassis Foundation Cultural Centre (16)** by AS Architecture Studio, which opened its doors in 2010 to become a major cultural hub. The centre contains a large auditorium, open-air amphitheatre, library, restaurant and exhibition hall. Its orthogonal

glass volume is clad with horizontal louvers of white Greek marble that dematerialize its large volume. The spaces for performances are part of a large, gold-plated and organically-shaped volume that seems to 'float' inside the prism.

Further south on Syngrou avenue, at the point where it meets the sea, one reaches the huge construction site of one of the most important civic projects ever undertaken in Greece, the €550 million **Stavros Niarchos Foundation Cultural Centre (17)** by Renzo Piano Building Workshop, scheduled for completion in 2015. Located on a 200,000 m<sup>2</sup> site, it will hold the new National Library, the new National Opera House and a 120,000 m<sup>2</sup> park. The southern part of the park facing the sea is lifted to cover, in the form of artificial ground, the two large volumes of the library and opera and create an outdoor and indoor belvedere to the Saronic Gulf and the city. Just in front of the Niarchos Cultural Centre, the two-kilometre-long **Faliron Urban Waterfront Park (18)** will be realized following a concept by Renzo Piano Building Workshop and development design by a-3/BLP Architects, mplusm and Divercity Architects. Studies for the project were funded by the Niarchos Foundation. The new waterfront park re-establishes a long-desired connection between the city and sea by covering an existing highway with a green surface and extending five streets along piers. Small-scale buildings, some of them half-buried in the ground with planted roofs, house various recreational programmes.

Returning to the city centre, the most successful example of designing public space is **Monastiraki Square (19)** by Nikos Kazeros, Vasileia Manidaki, Zina Kotsopoulou, Christina Parakente and Eleni Tzirtzilaki. The square, situated at the skirts of the Acropolis, is a vibrant, bustling intersection of commercial streets and metro lines. This character is expressed in the design of the square's pavement, conceived as a colourful mosaic of marble and stone.

A different approach to the design of public space was followed in the making of **Navarinou Park (20)**, located in the lively, bohemian neighbourhood of Exarcheia (see A10 #38). Community groups and individual citizens turned a parking lot into a small urban park with no pre-existing plan. The strong presence of the underlying soil revealed during construction and the random planting of trees creates a pocket of nature in contrast to the surrounding urban context. Wooden planks placed along a small hill create an amphitheatre that emphasizes the park's role as a 'common' space. Navarinou Park paved the way for other citizens' groups to produce new public spaces at the neighbourhood scale, such as **Pocket Park in Pangrati (21)** by atenistas group. Within a single day, an abandoned municipal playground was turned into a small park with pathways, benches and a play area for kids. Recyclable materials (wooden pallets, tree trunks and tires) provided by the municipality, together with plants, toys and paint provided by sponsors were used by a group of 30–40 volunteers and citizens coordinated by the architect to build a space for relaxation and play. This same strategy has been applied to other run-down sites in the city.

Ten years after the 2004 Olympic Games brought about radical changes to the city's composition and led to a period of excess, Athens is once again at a turning point. In the midst of an unprecedented crisis, all givens and rules related to the production of space must be renegotiated and set anew. ←

MI Tour Guides published in A10 magazine are available online at MIMOA ([www.mimoa.eu](http://www.mimoa.eu)).

## In the next issue:

### Ready

### **Water square, Rotterdam**

Due to changing climate conditions and increasing rainfall in some areas, now is the moment to look at all that water from a different perspective. Places in cities where drainage occurs primarily via underground systems are especially vulnerable. The municipality of Rotterdam and the design office De Urbanisten have found common ground in a unique approach: a public space where water can be stored when it rains heavily.



### Eurovision

### **Catalonia**

Eurovision presents an overview of the current state of architecture in a specific country or region. Catalonia will be the focus of the upcoming issue.

### Tour Guide

### **Tallinn**

The capital of Estonia blends historic urban heritage and a vibrant contemporary architecture scene. Many neighbourhoods provide excellent snapshots of various periods from the city's past, from classicist palaces to functionalist town houses and Soviet experimentation. Over the last two decades, the time of Estonia's regained independence, Tallinn has witnessed a building boom that entails a number of new public, commercial and private ventures. A10 correspondent Triin Ojari shows us some of the more outstanding projects.



↑ Apartment house in Rotermanni quarter by Alver Architects, 2013.

...and much more. A10 #56 will be published 1 March 2014.