

If it is true that nothing is happening in Austria, they are doing a great job of hiding it. Its universities are active in Africa, its architects question refugee policies or raise the standards of sustainable building, and bottom-up organizations invite world-famous architects to design local bus stops, which the communities then build themselves. Step into the Austrian reality of today's architecture, presented by the Architekturzentrum Wien's Dietmar Steiner (creative director), Karin Lux (executive director) and Sonja Pisarik (editor). 'We don't need new morals in architecture. Just a new sense of reality.'

All quiet in Austria

TEXT: INDIRA VAN 'T KLOOSTER

Dietmar Steiner and Karin Lux, directors of the Architekturzentrum Wien (Az W), take a modest stance regarding the status of architecture in Austria. According to Steiner, 'There is no difference between Austria and other countries in Europe. There are no longer leading countries. Offices are internationally oriented. Everywhere, we see the same questions regarding energy, sustainability; the same solutions, even. We are not particularly good at anything special, although we have a very refined social housing system which is of a very high quality. We have a difficult system of nine federal states for only eight million people, that each have their own rules, regulations and focus points.'

↓ Dietmar Steiner, director Architekturzentrum Wien



DAVID PAVR

That said, Vorarlberg, a small state in the middle of the Alps, has become one of Europe's leading regions for sustainable architecture. The way young architects are taught at an institutional level to build socially is quite unique. It's time to explore how Austria learns from the rest of the world, creating an inspiring climate for recalibrating architecture.

Why is Az W so involved in *Think Global, Build Social*?

Architecture is no longer driven by architectural genius, but by the building industry. By working mainly on impersonal, big buildings, the power of the architect has been reduced, and made him lose contact with the reality of the everyday, like basic users' needs or the act of building on-site. That's why at Az W we promote bottom-up projects. Now that starchitecture has moved to Asia, we in Europe have returned to small-scale building. That's the new reality. The *Think Global, Build Social* project shows examples of that throughout the world. The fact that we have equally interesting entries from Finland or France shows that it's a European issue, not just the Austrians alone.

The scale on which Austrian universities have encouraged architecture students to go to Africa to work on local projects is quite exceptional. Why do we see so few bottom-up projects in Austria itself?

It's more difficult to build in Austria, because of regulations and all kinds of safety issues. Africa is like a training camp for young architects; there they can find out about real human needs. This way of thinking is expanding slowly in Europe. But we have some very good examples, also in Austria. VinziRast, for example, which is the refurbishment of an 18th-century building into a house for students and homeless people (see p. 49).

So what is it that architects should learn in Austria?

Like everywhere in Europe, it's not the profession itself that gets more complicated, but rather the conditions for being an architect. It's no longer a job of glamour, but it's still possible to be in control. To be financially involved is a good start. Otto Wagner started his career like that in the 19th century. Young architects could look up from their computers for a while and look for the reality of architecture on the streets. Or they could study Wagner's competition entry for the Sparkasse. He described the whole design in such detail! All the materials, all the details, all the construction information. By judging today's competition entries, one can tell that young architects no longer possess that kind of detailed knowledge about building. They should skip all the poetry and metaphors and learn more about construction. We are still in a post-modern condition. We lost the notion of good and bad architecture. Which is okay. We don't need new morals in architecture. Just a new sense of reality. ◀

Architekturzentrum Wien

TEXT: SONJA PISARIK



ARCHITEKTURZENTRUM WIEN

↑ The Architekturzentrum Wien's café-restaurant by Lacaton & Vassal, with its oriental tiled ceiling designed by Asiye Kolbai-Kafalier

UPCOMING EXHIBITIONS

A to Z. The World of Isay Weinfeld
18 Dec. 2014 – 23 Feb. 2015

In February 2014, a project by Brazilian architect Isay Weinfeld won the architecture competition for the site around the Eislaufverein (ice-skating association) in Vienna and became the subject of an animated discussion. The Architekturzentrum Wien presents the prizewinner to the public with an exhibition of his selected work. *A to Z. The World of Isay Weinfeld* illustrates the philosophy of this renowned architect in a most impressive manner. The wide range covered by his oeuvre results from his insatiable curiosity, from a constant urge to try out something new, and from his conviction that willingness to expand one's horizons is decisive in creating good architecture. A cross-section of the work of Isay Weinfeld will be presented. Weinfeld takes visitors with him on a journey through the universe of his creativity – from the door handle to the office building, from the stage set to the interior of a McDonald's, from the Instagram installation to the handbag, and from the cradle to the coffin – from A to Z. As Weinfeld himself comments, 'You know, I don't think all that much of architecture in which the author sees himself as a genius. I am simply just a good listener who has the ability to transform what I hear into a building. And I am a damned good listener.'

↓ Edifício 360° by Isay Weinfeld, São Paulo, 2013



FERNANDO GUERRA

The Architekturzentrum Wien (Az W) was founded as a non-profit society in 1993, on an initiative made by the Austrian State and the City of Vienna to provide a platform for exhibitions, as well as a meeting place and a reliable source of information for all those interested in architecture and the art of building. Since its founding, Az W has become a highly respected forum for debate and reflection on architecture and urban development.

In October 2001, after eight years of being a provisional exhibition facility, Az W moved to significantly larger premises on the site of the former Messepalast, now the MuseumsQuartier. Since then, Az W has been able to offer an extensive programme and range of services: work presentations, panel discussions, congresses, symposia, guided tours, workshops and series of events provide a more in-depth engagement with the subject of architecture and the culture of building.

As a centre of knowledge and research, Az W houses a specialist public reading library, an ever-expanding database of buildings (www.nextroom.at) and an online encyclopaedia of architects (www.architektenlexikon.at) that provides details of over 1000 architects working in Vienna between 1770 and 1945. The active conservation of Austria's architectural heritage is the primary responsibility of Az W as the foremost Austrian architecture museum.

A special attraction at Az W is its café-restaurant, designed by the French architect duo of Anne Lacaton and Jean-Philippe Vassal. A visit to the exhibitions can be rounded off with delicacies under the oriental tiled ceiling designed by Vienna-based Turkish artist Asiye Kolbai-Kafalier. ◀

Architekturzentrum Wien, Museumsplatz 1, 1070 Vienna Info www.azw.at



→ Siegfried Theiss, Hans Jaksch, Werner Theiss Competition entry, Reichsautobahn traffic junction at Triesterstrasse (perspective), Vienna, 1941

Vienna. The Pearl of the Reich – Planning for Hitler
19 Mar. – 17 Aug. 2015

The spring/summer 2015 exhibition in the Architekturzentrum Wien is devoted to a presentation of building activity in Vienna under National Socialism that is unique in terms of its extent and the buildings selected. Using Vienna as an example, the construction and planning activity of National Socialism is presented for the first time in this form, making it possible to analyse and explain these buildings in the context of the Nazi goals.

Through the creation of Gross-Wien (Greater Vienna), this city on the Danube became the second-largest city in the Reich after Berlin. Spatial guidelines were developed, and Vienna's geopolitical role in the Third Reich was defined. This resulted in a large number of planning projects, ranging from new designs for monumental urban districts to individual buildings. Infrastructure, industry and regional planning projects indicate Vienna's function as a bridgehead and transit space to and from south-eastern Europe. Architecture was instrumentalized for the aggressive expansion policy of the National Socialist regime. Scientific disciplines such as urban design and spatial planning became an instrument of power for the Nazi population policy. The decentralized development that aimed at achieving a kind of urban landscape anticipated the loosely organized, car-friendly city after 1945, and indicates continuity in terms of planning objectives. The protagonists remained the same, and in Vienna's post-war reconstruction period they revived their 'old' concepts.

Think global, build social: the design-build movement

TEXT: SONJA PISARIK AND DIETMAR STEINER

The exhibition *Think Global, Build Social! Architectures for a Better World!* (14 Mar. – 30 June 2014) marks the high point in the many years that the Architekturzentrums Wien (Az W) has spent examining the introduction of a social and sustainable approach to both architectural education and practice. In 2004, Az W presented the Rural Studio, founded by Samuel Mockbee at Auburn University in Alabama at the beginning of the 1990s. This architectural initiative has by now acquired legendary status, but Az W was the first institution in Europe that dedicated an exhibition to its work; the title, *Just Build It*, sums up a specific attitude. Students at the Rural Studio have been designing projects for the poorer sectors of the population, which they subsequently implement in a creative and economical way. The regional focus has been Hale County, Alabama, where the poverty rate reaches almost 40 per cent. It is a truly forgotten place, where early developments by settlers lie close together with the banal and more recent. Shanty towns stretch alongside the vast pools of industrial catfish producers. Random arrangements of mobile homes are surrounded by rusty cars and semi-derelict cabins. Everywhere, one can see the last traces of what was formerly a flourishing agricultural region. In this no man's land, the Rural Studio has realized imaginative architecture. It shows sustainable, social and ecological commitment beyond the glamour of international star architecture. The Rural Studio offers a programme for students of architecture that draws them away from abstract academic curriculum. It educates them to deal with the problems of reality, combining useful work for the community with a redesigned architecture course based on real architectural practice.

By drawing attention to the work of the Rural Studio, Az W encouraged socially committed building in Austria as well. Dietmar Steiner invited Austrian architecture faculties to learn from this American model. Why not integrate the design and implementation of bottom-up projects in university curricula? Indeed, a first step in this direction had already been made. Peter Fattinger had just set up his design.build studio at TU Vienna. This made him a European pioneer in an area that is still an extremely young form of special training for architecture students. Over the years, several other initiatives have developed, which integrate the implementation of building projects in university teaching alongside design. They counteract a tendency that, in recent decades, has separated architectural training from building practice.



↑↓ Exterior and interior of schap1 classroom and workshop, Magagula Heights, Johannesburg, South Africa (FH Spittal/Carinthia)



↑ Exterior view of schap2 primary classroom, Magagula Heights, Johannesburg, South Africa (FH Spittal/Carinthia)

SCHAP1
After a lengthier planning phase in the FH, construction was completed in just six weeks on site. The project includes a building that provides 80 m² of space for a classroom and 50 m² for a workshop, as well as various service spaces, such as a 'safety box' for the secure storage of tools and a toilet complex with washing area. A timber structure made of prefabricated elements erected on a concrete slab serves as a structural frame and was filled with a mix of clay and straw. In the classroom, the timber structure provides just the roof construction, the rest was built with clay and straw bricks. In Carinthia, a series of experiments was carried out to test different mixes for a clay brick measuring 60x30x15 mm. On the basis of the test results, it was decided to use a new interpretation of the traditional clay-straw building method. Brick blocks were produced on site with the help of students from Ithuba Skills College. The second project consists of two classrooms with a wing containing sanitary facilities and a multi-purpose space. Schap2 takes up the straw and clay construction method that proved its worth in the earlier project in 2009, but with a number of modifications. The two L-shaped buildings are placed in relation to each other in such a way that they define individual outdoor spaces. The project also makes use of solar energy; the north-south orientation of the classrooms and the large windows help to optimize the building's internal climate. There are two window types: one for (cross) ventilation, the other with deep reveals inside that offer a place to linger. The roof overhang provides adequate shade in the South African summer while still allowing sufficient sunshine to penetrate in winter.



↑ A mix of clay and straw fills in the prefab timber structure.

schap1 (classroom and workshop), 2009
schap2 (primary classroom), 2011
Magagula Heights, Johannesburg, South Africa
FH (University of Applied Sciences) Spittal/Carinthia

↓ Inner courtyard of schap2 primary classroom, Magagula Heights, Johannesburg, South Africa (FH Spittal/Carinthia)



'Design-build' describes initiatives that develop projects for students within the context of their standard architectural instruction – buildings or installations that students can actually complete on site themselves. Contact with reality is the decisive difference between artificial building experiments at universities and on-site projects in socially precarious circumstances – architecture's direct confrontation with real life. This engagement shows the participating students that there is a real need for their expertise and knowledge; that they can actually solve problems – and not just generate them, as in academic experiments – using their own hands and applying their own ideas. The discussion with, and constant feedback from, future users, as well as the use of locally available resources, brings students to reflect on the necessity and concrete purpose of their architectural ideas, and to refine them when necessary.

Among those who attended the opening of the *Just Build It* exhibition at Az W was Christoph Chorherr, a Green Party politician and member of Vienna's City Council. Listening to the lecture given by the head of the Rural Studio, Andrew Freear, Chorherr asked himself whether it might be possible to use design-build projects with students to contribute to development work. Chorherr had already been involved in welfare projects in Africa, and he now set up the s²arch (social and sustainable architecture) association. Since then, s²arch, together with different architecture faculties, has carried out an impressive number of more than 40 projects. According to Chorherr, 'It's not the clicks and likes on virtual Internet sites that change the world. It is the willingness of young people to devote their abilities, their time, and their strengths to a concrete project that benefits others and opens up opportunities in life for them.'

Since 2008, s²arch has concentrated on erecting two large school campuses. It created Ithuba Skills College in Magagula Heights, located roughly 50 kilometres south of Johannesburg, South Africa. By now the college has grown into a complex of over 20 different buildings (classrooms, residential units, events hall, workshops). Since 2010, the association has been working on another school, Ithuba Wild Coast Community College, situated in Mzamba on the Wild Coast of South Africa's Eastern Cape.

Another design-build initiative can be found at Austria's smallest school of architecture, based at the Kunstuniversität Linz. In 2004, the head of the school, architect Roland Gnaiger, set up a project studio with the name BASEhabitat. It offers students the opportunity to try out and further develop what ▶



↑ **HOMEmade** in Rudrapur, Bangladesh, comprises three two-storey dwellings with living room, bedroom, storage space and veranda, built with clay and straw bricks (Studio BASEhabitat, Kunstuniversität Linz).



METI SCHOOL AND HOMEMADE
As a result of her degree thesis, Anna Heringer, then student of the Kunstuniversität Linz, built her 'handmade school', together with Berlin architect Eike Roswag, in Bangladesh in 2005. The so-called METI School received the Aga Khan Award for Architecture in 2007. It marks the start of an intensive involvement with Bangladesh on the part of BASEhabitat and Heringer. The METI School was followed, among other projects, by three model houses that were also erected in Rudrapur and given the name HOMEmade. Eight students from BRAC University in Dhaka and five students from the Kunstuniversität Linz endeavoured, together with local craftsmen, to improve living conditions in a sustainable way. This also required a kind of re-education. Although traditional building materials are extremely sustainable, people increasingly fail to appreciate the many qualities of clay and bamboo. Instead they call for 'modern' houses built of fired bricks, concrete and corrugated iron. On the one hand, this is due to the urban models that people are presented with; on the other, the building tradition is technically outdated because it has not been further developed for centuries. The three model houses use an adapted form of local building methods to meet the growing need for space and higher requirements for comfort.

METI School, 2005–2006
HOMEmade model houses, 2007–2008
Rudrapur, Bangladesh
Studio BASEhabitat, Kunstuniversität Linz

↑↑ The METI School in Rudrapur, Bangladesh, is a two-storey school building with five classrooms (Studio BASEhabitat, Kunstuniversität Linz, with Anna Heringer and Eike Roswag).



they have learned in the areas of solar architecture, building ecology and constructing with timber and earth. According to Gnaiger, the main focus is on reconciling opposites: between basic needs and aesthetics, between ecology and economy, between prosperity and poverty, and between usefulness and poetry. In all its projects, BASEhabitat explicitly pursues the aim of never neglecting the beauty of the buildings, for 'building without art is spiritless, destructive, cynical and often brutal.' The two projects realized by Studio BASEhabitat illustrated here reflect this ethos.

When design-build projects are implemented in developing countries or distressed areas, the accusation of neocolonialism is often raised. At first glance, it seems a waste of resources when a dozen privileged, middle-class undergraduates from the Northern Hemisphere pay for expensive flights to a township or region struck by catastrophe. There, for several weeks, they administer the placebo of a selective solution to a pervasive structural problem that affects all of society. This cannot be denied, but it must be viewed in relation to today's gigantic global market for professional social and catastrophe aid, which is primarily dictated by the commercial interests of the Northern Hemisphere, and which largely ignores local cultures and needs.

The design-build movement, by contrast, emphasizes a communicative learning model that draws on the local situation and empowers the local population. Instead of presenting a community with a lifestyle imported from the wealthy North to which local people cannot relate, such projects inspire them to reactivate their own traditions and construction methods, and to ennoble them. Through this, they develop new capabilities in shaping and designing their situations. It does, therefore, make sense for student task forces to get involved with design-build projects in developing and distressed areas. They learn from one another and gain a healthy general scepticism toward the capitalistic business of architecture in the Northern Hemisphere. Design-build projects in developing countries break through Western rituals of distinction, encouraging the local population to view their traditions with renewed pride and to develop their own brand of contemporary architecture. ◀



↑ **BUS:STOP KRUMBACH UNTERKRUMBACH SÜD**
Design Architekten De Vyllder Vinck Taillieu Construction planning Thomas Mennel

'The small form presents architecture with the greatest challenge. Only the best manage to achieve something great at a small scale.'

Dietmar Steiner, director Architekturzentrum Wien and curator BUS:STOP Krumbach

↓ **BUS:STOP KRUMBACH BRÄNDEN**
Design Sou Fujimoto Construction planning Bechter Zaffignani (Rene Bechter, Michelangelo Zaffignani)



↓ **BUS:STOP KRUMBACH UNTERKRUMBACH NORD**
Design Ensemble Studio (Antón García-Abril, Débora Mesa) Construction planning Dietrich | Untertrifaller Architekten (Helmut Dietrich, Much Untertrifaller)



↓ **BUS:STOP KRUMBACH GLATZEGG**
Design Amateur Architecture Studio (Wang Shu, Lu Wenyu) Construction planning Hermann Kaufmann



↓ **BUS:STOP KRUMBACH KRESSBAD**
Design Rintala Eggertsson Architects Construction planning Baumschlager Hutter Partners (Carlo Baumschlager, Jesco Hutter)



↓ **BUS:STOP KRUMBACH ZWING**
Design Smiljan Radic Construction planning Bernardo Bader



↓ **BUS:STOP KRUMBACH OBERKRUMBACH**
Design Alexander Brodsky Construction planning Hugo Dworzak



BUS:STOP Krumbach

TEXT: ARCHITEKTURZENTRUM WIEN

How seven little bus shelters bring culture, business and architecture under one roof.

In the course of the present year, what started with an unusual idea from the association 'kultur krumbach' developed into a sensation that has attracted worldwide attention. Seven internationally acclaimed architecture offices designed seven 'little bus shelters' for the village of Krumbach, in the Bregenzerwald region of western Austria, where the new structures now engage in a dialogue with people, landscape and tradition. With the assistance of architects from the region and local skilled craftspeople, small functional buildings that resemble unusual sculptures were erected in public space, where they draw attention to the public bus transportation system.

Krumbach is situated in one of Vorarlberg's loveliest cultivated landscapes. This village, with a population of 1000, is a scattered settlement typical of the Vorderer Bregenzerwald, with large green agricultural areas. This project started in 2012 with a vague idea derived from the need to renovate a number of bus shelters in the area around the village. The result is the outcome of an unusual collaboration in which around 300 people took part voluntarily and, for the 'fee' of a week's holiday in the Bregenzerwald, seven internationally known architects – Alexander Brodsky (Russia), Rintala Eggertsson Architects (Norway), Architekten de Vyllder Vinck Taillieu (Belgium), Ensemble Studio/ Antón García-Abril and Débora Mesa (Spain), Smiljan Radic (Chile), Amateur Architecture Studio/ Wang Shu and Lu Wenyu (China), and Sou Fujimoto (Japan) – designed projects in which they intensively examined the landscape, the architecture and the skilled craftsmanship of the region.

This project tells a tale of the strength of communal action. The story of an idea about creating something jointly, and subsequently taking delight in what has been achieved. In addition, the project BUS:STOP Krumbach illustrates how a community can deal in a responsible way with questions about the design of public space. The culture of building is revealed as a process that can actively develop further if certain parameters come together; above all, the involvement and commitment of courageous citizens. Here the encouragement of high-quality contemporary architecture is of equal importance to the cultivation of the architectural legacy and the further development of a living tradition of handcraft. The perfection and mastery in the use and detailing of the different materials from which the seven bus shelters were built – especially wood, glass and metal – sets high standards for which this region is known. ◀

From 18 Sept. until 7 Oct. 2014 the exhibition BUS:STOP Krumbach was presented at the Architekturzentrum Wien, after which it travels to other cities.

The Fight Club

TEXT: INDIRA VAN 'T KLOOSTER

Meet Austria's most competitive architects. Not only do they eagerly participate in competitions, they are also prepared to tackle awkward subjects like the backwardness of the Austrian Architects Association or the ethical implications of asylum seekers in this conservative nation. In what they describe as a rather boring architectural climate, they are prepared to fight. Every last Friday of the month they step into a self-created arena to debate the quality of their work. 'Hard, straight and really personal.'



↑ The Fight Club (from left to right): Bernd Scheffknecht, Christoph Leitner, Erwin Stättner, Markus Bösch, Marion Gruber, Irene Prieler, Günter Mohr, Michael Wildmann and Michael Aigner

Sue Architekten, YF architekten, franz architekten and PLOV Architekten are the real prizefighters.* The more tactical players are grundstein and Günter Mohr. Erwin Stättner and Robert Diem founded franz architekten in 2009. Since then, they have won many competitions, among which a gymnasium in Gainfarn, a music school in Zwettl and a youth accommodation in Hollabrunn have all been realized between 2012 and 2014. Working 24/7 at querkraft for nine years, without ever having the time to talk, the pair met over a beer at an opening, discovered they had similar ideas, started their own office and won their first project soon after. 'We stopped talking after that... too busy again,' jokes Erwin.

YF Architekten was founded by Markus Bösch and Bernd Scheffknecht in 2007. The Centre of Justice in Eisenstadt is one of their recent projects on the table. Refugee centres and prisons? Is this a typical theme in Austria? 'Hell no, just the kind of public projects that are on offer by the government,' smiles Markus.

Harald Höller of Sue Architekten, lovingly called 'Harry' among the club's members, knows something about fighting since starting work on a detention centre in Vordernberg (see A10 #59) that caused a lot of debate. 'Architects can change the world because they can deal with real problems,' he claims. Since the office's inception in 2006, they have also won the competition for the Salzburg Court of Justice (2015), so this statement is not just coffee table small talk. 'The number of these types of projects fits the climate in Austria, which has the lowest acceptance rate of refugees in Europe. The fact that we are accommodating for this restrictive policy is awkward. Yet, it is also the reality of architecture in which we can at least provide a human environment.' No jokes this time.

That's when Irene Prieler and Michael Wildmann of grundstein step into the arena. The pair is not an office but a collective aiming 'to bring about relevant architecture discourse, ideas and visions'. Both architects, who also met a party, work on the interface between architecture, art and energy-efficient

design. One of their social projects is Bücherschrank Ottakring (in cooperation with artist Frank Gassner), where people can borrow and leave books at an open-air library in a small street in Vienna. Their energy and sustainability projects involve research and small building projects.

Likewise, Günter Mohr has also found different ways to approach architecture. 'First, I tried to do competitions, but I never won. We did a lot of small projects: apartments, small houses. In 2011, I started working with my wife, who is a traffic planner. Now we do stations and railway projects. We bring design into traffic problems. It's more than just numbers and functionalism. We prefer to see traffic as a lifestyle.'

Competitions are a vital element of building a portfolio in Austria. Public authorities are obliged to publish competitions. Private clients can do whatever they want. There are a lot of closed competitions that require participants to pre-qualify. Public competitions are usually open. But the game is changing.

Says Markus, 'When we started, competitions were our only reasonable chance to get work, as we had no connections. There used to be no entrance regulations to enter a competition. Now it's more strict. You need to pre-qualify and you need references, which is harder for starting practices. And it's not always anonymous.' What's also problematic is that competitions are the norm for big projects. According to Irene, 'A hundred schools at the same time, or five kindergartens at once.' Teaming up is a possibility, but 'teaming up doesn't really help in terms of pre-qualifying. We need bigger offices, or engineering offices, to add different qualities to the collaboration,' remarks Erwin.

Günter continues, 'Still, in Austria, we are quite okay. There are competitions and there are assignments. We discussed the architectural climate with Italian architects, for example, and they are way worse off than we are. We should be more positive.'

Harry is not in the mood for relativity: 'I am now on a jury for a school competition. You have to bring three references, one of ten million euros, the other of 80 million. That's too much for us. Isn't it strange that I can be judging competitions that I cannot enter?'

Markus is also in the mood for a riot: 'Why is it necessary to have built a school before at all? But



↑ Detention centre, Vordernberg (Sue Architekten)



↑ Justice centre, Eisenstadt (YF architekten)



↑ House, Weissenbach (grundstein, bauchplan, AL1, Peter Kneidinger)



↑ Railway station, Korneuburg (Günter Mohr)



↑ Residential development, Salzburg (PLOV Architekten)



↑ Secondary school, Gainfarn (franz architekten)

clients are usually jurists, not really interested in architecture.' And so the conversation continues. The architects' association should do more. The quality of the judges should be better. But all of that is not what they are actually discussing at the Fight Club.

Robert explains, 'We discuss projects; competitions that we want to participate in. There are three rules: it has to be about work in progress, it must be about a project that has been designed with the aim to be sold, and the comments have to be upfront and personal, hard and straight.' The aim is to build a network, but mostly to get some critique.

'We need conflict,' says Harry. 'We ask the group for advice and then work further.' For the last five years, they have been each other's most severe critics.

'One year ago, we had a competition. We had to finish it on Monday, and on the Friday before we had Fight Club,' says Erwin. 'We showed it, and then Markus said, 'No, you have to do it like this.' And he convinced us. On Saturday morning, we started to change the entire plan, we didn't sleep all weekend, and worked it out just like he had suggested.' He pauses for effect, then continues, 'Two weeks later, Sunday morning. I checked my email, and I couldn't believe it! We had won out of 150 entries!'

Irene steps in, saying, 'I met one of the judges later, and he said that it was not that often that the winner was so clear.' And it didn't even result in an awkward situation. 'It was their project, their drawings, their sleepless nights,' Markus adds.

'But it can be hard,' says Harry. 'A few weeks ago, we were sent home. They said the house we were doing was bad, to do it again. Which we did.'

Erwin, joking again: 'We are only architects, we have no place outside the office.' Half-seriously, Michael responds, 'We usually bring our students, so that we don't have to tell them what everybody said about the plans and can start working right away.'

When asked about international competitions, things again get serious. They have all entered competitions in the German-speaking countries. Says Markus, 'We did a competition in Germany. We got third place. The first three are invited, and then negotiations about money start. Then we withdrew. The jury only does this to get the price down. The first prize should win the project. We sent a letter to the jury, and also to the winner, so that they knew they didn't have us as an enemy; that he didn't need to bargain.' Grundstein, on the other hand, is trying their luck abroad. 'The scene is becoming very conservative here at the moment. We are interested in energy design and we may have to go somewhere else. Austria has the image of sustainable architecture, but Austrian clients usually want conservative buildings. There is little room for experiment.'

Günter then adds, 'The tendency is going toward public-private partnerships. That might be bad for the profession, because there will be no market for the smaller practices any longer. Or, if it turns towards design and build, it's up to the contractor to choose the

architect. They are used to building for people who build the buildings, and not for people that use them. Architects are still on the ethical side of the game. We are not in it to make as much money as possible.'

What might they actually do to better the situation? Markus responds, 'We could be more involved with the Chamber of Architects. It's not too bad, but not very powerful, either, and it's the only institution that's active.'

According to Harry, 'We should open up more to the public. To explain the importance of architecture.' Irene continues, 'Some of us have been members of IG-architektur, an open network representing the interests of everybody involved within the creation of architecture that tries to open up decrepit structures. It's hard work, but with some engagement even small changes within the law have been possible within the last ten years.'

Günter interjects, 'We often disagree amongst ourselves. We should agree as a group first, before talking to other architects, or the outside world. We could make a stronger statement, if we could decide upon a consensus.'

But first and foremost, they can produce better projects – and help each other to do so, in the Fight Club. Interested? Everyone is invited, any time, to join in and get thrashed (next Fight Clubs: 31 Oct. and 28 Nov. 2014).

* Marion Gruber and Christoph Leitner, who founded PLOV Architekten in 2009, were not present at the interview.



1

PERFECTLY INSERTED
The architects of this conversion of three listed buildings into an events centre in the historic core of Bad Radkersburg see their design primarily as 'a new interpretation of the existing building substance and an upgrading of it in terms of content'. The three existing structures, into which a variety of spaces of very different sizes were inserted, surround an internal courtyard that has been given a textile roof. New building parts, formulated in differentiated ways, respond sensitively to the small-scale structure of the roofs of the surrounding buildings, while the rusty colour of their external Cor-Ten steel cladding underscores the aim of harmonizing it with the nearby tiled roofs. (MARION KUZMANY)
Kongresszentrum Zehnerhaus, Bad Radkersburg, 2009
Architect Gangoly & Kristiner
Info www.gangoly.at

2

INNER CONTEMPLATION
The block-design installation of a meditation and multi-purpose room in this 200-year-old stable, which is protected as an historical building, displays a modest form in its outward appearance. The horizontal window slits in the base, the compressed clay walls and the light spruce floors define the introverted atmosphere of the mediation room. The entryway is not thermally equipped so as to maintain its connection to the exterior, and small slits in the original woven construction offer unique lighting effects. The haptic quality of the existing building enters coherently into dialogue with the stair elements of raw black plate. (NORBERT MAYR)
Spiritual centre, Embach, 2010
Architect LP architektur
Info www.lparchitektur.at

3

A HOUSE LIKE A HOUSE
For the jet set, the southern part of Burgenland is truly unremarkable. Nevertheless, this small wooden cottage has managed to be represented, critiqued and praised on all major social media platforms around the world. Why all the hype? A summer house for the parents of the architect, it probably charmed the world with its radical simplicity. Everybody can imagine sitting in this house, drinking wine, gazing out over the landscape and thinking, to paraphrase Gertrude Stein's eternal axiom, 'a house is a house is a house is a house...'. (KLAUS-JÜRGEN BAUER)
Sommerhaus Südburgenland, Deutsch Tschantschendorf, 2011
Architect Judith Benzer Architektur
Info www.judithbenzer.com

4

CHECKERBOARD ON THE OUTSKIRTS
This branch of BTV, the Vier Länder (Four Provinces) bank, is located in a suburb of Innsbruck. Architect Rainer Köberl responded to the heterogeneous pattern of the surrounding development with an unconventionally shaped building with a steeply soaring roof and eye-catching exterior cladding: a checkerboard pattern of square, concrete-toned panels alternating with aeration cavities of the same size. A one-storey concrete wall wraps the ground floor at a distance from the building, forming a kind of protective cloak that provides the required level of privacy. (ANNE ISOPP)
BTV Mitterweg branch, Innsbruck, 2011
Architect Rainer Köberl
Info www.rainerkoerberl.at

5

GRAVES LIKE GARDENS
A century after Islam was officially recognized as a religious community in Austria, the Islamic cemetery in Altach expresses the socio-political task of 'integration' in a subtle formal language. A linear structure of exposed, rust-coloured concrete walls encloses five areas of graves and the end building, which contains a viewing room, a hall for leave-taking, a room for the ritual washing of the deceased and a prayer room. The concrete walls are staggered in height and create a delicate mesh; the finger-shaped areas of graves are embedded like individual gardens in the landscape. (GABI KAISER)
Islamic cemetery, Altach, 2012
Architect Bernardo Bader Architekten
Info www.bernardobader.com

6

HOUSE AS PROCESS
A site with 30 trees: paradise! A gift from their parents to the clients, two landscape architects with four children. The design, transdisciplinary. Working with AL1 Architects, they conceived this long house with a sunny, open-plan kitchen and cube with a cantilevered upper floor. This creates a covered courtyard, perfect for swings, hammocks and games. The firm of grundstein executed the construction drawings and the details, while Peter Kneidinger did the statics. The innovative wall system is comprised of wood uprights friction-connected to an exposed concrete slab, multi-wall polycarbonate panels, and hemp infill. Furthermore, the project is self-built. Its mud floor is excavation material, tamped down with help from friends. (ISABELLA MARBOE)
Gemini House, Weissenbach, 2012
Architects AL1 ArchitektInnen, bauchplan landschaftsarchitektur & urbanismus, grundstein, Peter Kneidinger
Info www.al1-architektinnen.de, www.bauchplan.at, www.grundstein.cc

7

URBAN DIALOGUE
The Nordbahnhof in the 2nd District of Vienna measures 85 hectares, making it the city's largest inner-city development area. The tripartite PaN-Housing Park was conceived under the motto 'intercultural housing'. PaN stands for 'Partners of all Nations' and is the Vienna-based federation of all Austrian-foreign societies. Werner Neuwirth (Vienna), Von Ballmoos Krucker (Zurich) and Sergison Bates Architects (London) erected a total of 90 subsidized apartments in three heterogeneous buildings, each of which displays an independent approach. The buildings are grouped around a public square so that their ground floor zones form a communally used urban space. (SONJA PISARIK)
PaN-Housing Park, Vienna, 2012
Architects Sergison Bates architects, Von Ballmoos Krucker Architekten, Werner Neuwirth
Info www.sergisonbates.co.uk, www.vbk-arch.ch, www.2824.org

8

POWER OF SOLIDARITY
The winter of 2009 was frosty. Fighting for their education, students occupied the lecture halls of the University of Vienna. The homeless were also attracted by the heat. They were given the right to stay, got involved, and there was a good exchange. Businessman Hans Peter Haselsteiner donated an old house to the St. Stephan's Society of Saint Vincent de Paul. Alexander Hagner of gaupenraub +/- became the designer, construction supervisor, foreman and coach, all in one. Volunteer homeless persons and builders made the corner house into a multifunctional meeting place. The VinziRast-mittendrin is much more than just a student centre. It's a restaurant with no pressure to order anything, a home to students and the former homeless, a lecture hall, and a site to regain strength with a view of Vienna. This is applied community. (ISABELLA MARBOE)
VinziRast-mittendrin, Vienna, 2013
Architect gaupenraub +/-
Info www.gaupenraub.net

9

ELEMENTARY BUILDING
Thanks to the waste heat given off by its occupants, lighting and electrical appliances, this office building can manage without the use of a heating system throughout the year. Cooling or ventilation systems are also unnecessary. Here, that role is played by the elementary elements of architecture: 80-cm-thick brick walls, large window openings and high rooms. Due to the thermal inertia of the building, with its enormous storage mass and the intelligently conceived relationship between volume and interior space, the temperature is never outside the appropriately named comfort zone of 22 to 26 degrees centigrade. If the CO₂ content of the air is too high, ventilation flaps integrated in the timber frame windows open automatically. These can also be operated manually at any time: at night, for instance, to extract heat that builds up inside the building during the day. (SONJA PISARIK)
2226 Building, Lustenau, 2013
Architect baumschlager eberle
Info www.baumschlager-eberle.com

10

PLAYGROUND OF CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE
In October 2013, what is currently Europe's largest new university development was opened in Vienna, near the Prater funfair. The new campus for the University of Economics and Business comprises six buildings with a total floor area of 90,000 m², plus intelligently planned outdoor space that is conceived as a 'walk-along park' with different places at which to stop. The core of the campus is formed by Zaha Hadid's Library Learning Centre. The masterplan was designed by Laura Spinadel of BUSarchitektur, who also built the Cor-Ten-clad Teaching Centre. Peter Cook from Crab Studio in London, the Madrid-based office of NO.MAD Arquitectos, Catalan Carme Pinós, and Japanese architect Hitoshi Abe completed the team of international star architects. (ANNEKE ESSL)
WU (Vienna University of Economics and Business) Campus, Vienna, 2013
Architects BUSarchitektur, Crab Studio, NO.MAD Arquitectos, Estudio Carme Pinós, Atelier Hitoshi Abe
Info www.busarchitektur.com, www.crab-studio.com, www.nomad.as, www.cpinos.com, www.a-slash.jp