

## Editorial

Y. Çağatay SEÇKİN • *Editor*

It's already December. Can you believe it?

Personally, 2017 felt like it just flew by. At the same time, I'm feeling really fulfilled and grounded. Because despite my failures, I learned a lot and I know they will help me in following years. I hope, you all are in agreement with me about that.

Anyway, as the year fades away, let's leave aside our personal feelings about 2017, and look back at some of the memorable architectural and design events of 2017.

There is no doubt, the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg is the architectural highlight of the year, which was opened in January 2017. Hamburg's long-awaited and hugely expensive building has opened after 16 years of planning and construction. The Elbphilharmonie is the first concert hall designed by the Swiss architectural firm Herzog & de Meuron. Initial plans were priced at 186 million Euros, with the opening scheduled for 2010. After a succession of delays, revisions and legal disputes, the final bill for the city came to 798 million Euros, leading to political debates and public protests.

After all these debates and protests, much of the initial curiosity is directed at the architecture by all means. The building is Hamburg's new landmark, visible from far down the river and an icon of contemporary architecture. With its contemporary glass crystal, the Elbphilharmonie dynamically contrasts with its historical brick plinth, Kaispeicher A. The Kaispeicher A, designed by Werner Kallmorgen and constructed between 1963 and 1966, was originally used as a warehouse for cocoa beans until the end of the last century. The new building has been extruded from the shape of the Kaispeicher A and is perfectly compatible with the brick block. In contrast to the stoic brick facade of the Kaispeicher A, the glass facade of the new building transforms the new building into a gigantic crystal that catches the reflections of the sky, the water and the city

and transforms them into a complex puzzle on its facade.

Actually, Hamburg, as an old trading city, is Germany's principal port and its second-biggest city. But despite its fame, its soccer team lags near the bottom of the Bundesliga, and few international tourists visit. In recent decades, Hamburg has marketed itself as Germany's capital of musicals. But the city's robust classical-music scene is still overshadowed by Berlin and Munich. The new hall is expected to change that by raising the standards of the ensembles that will play in its inspiring and acoustically excellent interiors.

The building is sufficiently spectacular and it can create a Bilbao Effect a reference to the Spanish city that became a major tourist destination, thanks to its Frank Gehry's Guggenheim. With its waterfront position and optimistic thrust, the Elbphilharmonie also brings to mind Sydney's Opera House, another landmark building that was criticized during its construction for overrunning budgets and missing deadlines.

As well as critiques about Herzog & de Meuron's Elbphilharmonie, Kengo Kuma's self-criticism was also a remembered event from 2017. Kuma is particularly well-known for his use of wood which he incorporated into multiple buildings. He is even using wood to construct the stadium for the 2020 Tokyo Olympics where he won the competition. However, his early career was dominated by projects that were more experimental in style and form. In an exclusive interview, Kuma said he now avoids that type of architecture all together:

"To be honest, sometimes I feel a bit embarrassed by some of my buildings. I studied the history of architecture and discovered that the basis for the European and American architecture tradition was in fact Ancient Greek and Roman architecture. Later, when I studied at Columbia University in New York City, I realized through discussions with my American friends that I should study Japanese architecture because I'm Japanese. In America, they have great knowledge of European architecture, but as I studied Japanese architectural history, I found depth

that one could view as equal to that of the European and American history of architecture. I realized that traditional Japanese wooden architecture is as great as Ancient Roman architecture. And that's actually the result of my American experience."

As understood from this dialogue, Kuma is not a typical arrogant star architect. In fact, he is not quite fond of his old experimental-style buildings, such the M2 building in Tokyo which showcases an eclectic mix of styles and received a wave of negative publicity and criticism. He openly states that:

"My method is to avoid heroic gestures, because you get to a point where the heroics kill the beauty of the material. I want to find a balance expressing form and material. The form of the building should be as subtle as possible, because then the material's character can reveal itself. If the balance is there, it's beautiful."

After this excerpt from the interview with Kenzo Kuma, let me talk about two architecture books in English that stuck in my mind from 2017. *Four Walls and a Roof* by Reinier de Graaf and *Architecture and the Turkish City: An Urban History of Istanbul since the Ottomans* by Murat Gül.

Reinier de Graaf, in his book, talks about the rise and fall of Marzahn, a colossal East German housing development, built of factory-made standardized components. He recounts his own practice's entanglements with the politics of Putin's court, when trying to build something in Russia. One chapter consists entirely of quotations by famous architects, justifying their decisions to work for the Chinese government and other tyrannies. In brief, it is sharp, revealing, funny and strongly recommended.

Murat Gül's book was also another interesting book that I read in 2017. By exploring Istanbul's modern architectural and urban history, Gül highlights

the dynamics of political and social change in Turkey from the late-Ottoman period until today. Looking beyond pure architectural styles or the physical manifestations of Istanbul's cultural landscape, he offers critical insight into how Turkish attempts to modernize have affected both the city and its population. I really enjoyed this book where Gül laid out his argument on how architecture tells the city's history as well as creates its fabric.

Actually, in 2017, there are more memorable, confusing or spectacular topics for sure. But, not the pages reserved for this editorial nor the time of readers will be enough to tell all of them. So, I would like to put an end with a quote said by Babette Porcelijn in 2017. Porcelijn trained as an industrial designer, but recently authored a book titled *Hidden Impact*, which reveals the full extent to which human actions affect the planet. According to Porcelijn, the biggest human impact on the planet is the manufacture of new products. She advises designers to completely rethink their approach. She believes designers are better equipped than any other profession to offer solutions to issues such as pollution, climate change and depletion of resources. She says;

"Scientists can show us what we should not do, but we need designers, not scientists, to show us what we should do and how to change the World."

As it always has been, I would like to thank all our readers for the support they provide to the Journal. We really look forward your comments, contributions, suggestions and criticisms. Please do not hesitate to share with us your feelings and especially, let us know if you have ideas or topics that we could be focusing on.

Enjoy your reading and meet with us again in next issue on March 2018.

Happy new year!