

ACADIA'S BROWSER: A VIRTUAL STUDIO, AND MUCH MORE

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Once upon a time, in a land far, far away... Oh come on, the Netherlands isn't that far away.

Anyone familiar with the Internet knows how it can make distances become irrelevant. The site reviewed today did just that by projecting me into someone else's classroom, across the ocean, through a virtual studio. What more - this is only one part of the site. It also contains many juicy digital drawings and explores a variety of architectural subjects.

It is amazing to think that this was all started by students, at Eindhoven University of Technology (TUE), in 1993. Nowadays, the site provides an Internet lab for architecture called LAVA, linked to AIDEM MEDIA and the CALIBRE INSTITUTE, and can be found at:

www.aidem-media.com/lava or [atwww.calibre.bwk.tue.nl/lava](http://www.calibre.bwk.tue.nl/lava)

LAVA is modest but it contains an array of fine things. The site has been there for a while (since 1993) yet it still looks fresh since it constantly changes as its leaders try new approaches. For example, the virtual studio brings us into the context of an ongoing classroom, inviting the user to get involved with students' work in progress and chat with them across borders. It feels almost as if you are looking over the students' shoulders as they are working. This is complemented by an archive full of images from students' sketches and other digital drawings.

Beyond the studio/labs area, LAVA provides all sorts of interesting tidbits of information. For example, one of the projects focuses on Le Corbusier's "Unité d'Habitation à grandeur Conforme" in Marseille, by Arthur Turksma, and includes a list of references and illustrations. You will also find a gallery of pictures on Groningen and Prague as well as a section on museums with each museum picture, a small screen provides credit information and a brief description of the content within.

The LAVA site also contains a delicious number of CAD drawings. You can check out www.calibre.bwk.tue.nl/lava/modelshop/ to see spiffy computer renderings presented in Modelshop. These go beyond your traditional CAD renderings. They can be seen in a variety of formats, some of which include vrm(wrl) and movie (avi) formats. Pictures modeled in 3D spaces allow the user to study the virtual spaces in which the models float. This demonstrates the sensitivity of the web site to education since technology is not used as an end but rather, it is used as a means of gaining a greater understanding of architecture.

To complement this, the site provides a guide to Internet resources in architecture as well as multiple other pointers to WWW information. It provides flavorful book reviews and essays. Additional information is available about other departments and institutes. The links to the Calibre Institute and to AIDEM MEDIA are inspiring as they contains many images and research projects related to their work on multimedia,

technology and virtual reality (www.calibre.bwk.tue.nl/projects and www.aidem-media.com).

The "School of the future" project, for example, used a 3D model on CD-ROM, a website and a fly-through animation to promote the construction of a new experimental school. The CD-ROM was distributed to potential contributors for fund-raising purposes. Projects such as this one make the AIDEM MEDIA and Calibre Institute sites interesting to look at. These two sites are also well planned and provide an easily navigated environment.

All of this is quite exciting and leave my mouth watering. It is, however, somewhat confusing to navigate through the LAVA site since it does suffer from browser clutter and dangling links. The site also lacks unity as the graphic presentation and color scheme vary significantly from one area to another. Finally, the site contains old links such as an announcement for a competition and workshop ("At the Edges") that took place in 1994. The LAVA team, however, can be forgiven for this since they are in the process of reorganizing their sites into a new location following a web ring format of distributed sites.

Otherwise, the navigational tools on the front page are practical and readable. In addition, the site offers access to search tools and information to help you create combined queries and find particular information within the LAVA web pages. All in all, LAVA presents an unpretentious site providing good things for all of us to use. Several sections are still under development and it leaves me curious to see what they'll have within the next few months. This is a site I am sure to visit again.

Aesthetic	4.0
Creativity	4.5
Execution	3.8
Information	4.0

Image Credits

1. *Proposal for a new skyscraper in Frankfurt, by Maike Klee. Work performed in the context of Studio: Grosses Hobes Haus, one of the virtual studio.*

2 & 3. *Library/Cultural Centre - Architects Julia Bolles (1948-) & Peter Wilson (1950-). Construction date 1987-1993. Location: Muenster, Germany. Modeled by Walter Ebert. Model info: Vertices: 4k - Polygons: 5k. Credit: LAVA research team, (lava@urc.tue.nl).*

4. *Prouns - El Lissitzky (1890-1941). Date unknown. Modeled by Rob Robbers. Credit: LAVA research team, (lava@urc.tue.nl).*

5. *Grotta Residence - Architect Richard Meier (1934-) - Construction date 1983-1989. Location Harding Township, New Jersey. Modeled by Joop van der Vleut. Model info: Vertices: 27k - Polygons: 27k. Credit: LAVA research team, (lava@urc.tue.nl).*

6 & 7. *Visualization of Taj Mahal. Made by: www.aidem-media.com, commissioned by Calibre*

