

AS A MATTER OF FACT...

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Most of us (CAD loving architects) are thrill seekers. Though we ground ourselves in history, traditions and legacy, we also embrace novelties, high tech elixirs and liquid crystal. We love forward thinking juxtaposition and contrasts of ideas. As a matter of fact, we get bored when everything is understood and predictable. It is all about brain chemistry.

That is why I loved A-matter (<http://www.a-matter.com/eng/amatter.htm>). This Web Site celebrates unpredictable design in contemporary architecture. It provides jazzed up ideas and indulges us in electrifying deliberations (figures 1 and 2). It captures the essence of our everyday life while throwing us into a perceptual kaleidoscope. Who needs mind altering drugs when architecture gives you such a jolt?

The web site is structured on a linear grid with icons punctuating the grid in hypnotic rhythm. The content remains unpredictable, with projects such as the “wired church,” “the thinking room,” or the “Universe of More Space limited.” Fast paced ventures co-habit with meditation rooms. Psychedelic images stand next to photographs of nature (figures 3 and 4). Staccato movements share space with muted colors. We are in a world of extremes yet it seems a propos. It all feels grounded.

The thinking room, for example, takes the form of a small building with meditative qualities erected to provide clients with a space for lyrical productivity, a space to support reflection and concentration. This simplified thinking cell helps clients get centered, away from their over stimulated, scrambled lives (Architect: Kurt Schuster, Q.RT Raum für Architektur, Dornbirn – from Vorarlberg, Austria).

In contrast, we can jack up our senses and focus on the moment by studying the work of the Universe of More Space limited (Caro Baumann, Amsterdam; Pia Cerber, Barcelona; Johannes Schele, München). The UMS lies in the possibilities hidden in undefined everyday space. “Momentary relevant space,” for example, symbolizes an automatic space, relevant to the “now.” We clothe ourselves with it and surround ourselves with its mutant appearance. Its spatial extracts are influenced by daily momentary events while its borders remain torn and frayed.

In this same fast pace, moment oriented mood, consider this multifunction additional room that is completely prefabricated (by architects Kammerl Kammerl Aldenhoven)(see figure 5). The additional room is quickly snapped to an existing building. It is on wheels and is not tied down to a permanent location. It has a nomadic component, an ephemeral feel. If your needs change, you can move it around. If you move, you can take it with you. It matches the disconnect and reconnect or our fragmented lives while epitomizing “form follows function.”

In contrast to these small-scale, non-permanent structures, the web site also celebrates skyscrapers (see figures 6 and 7). Though they have been criticized in many ways, skyscrapers continue to evoke euphoric fascination and ecstasy as they

leap off the ground. They call to our emotional side by their embodiment of human potential. Modern designs are being reengineered with new age visions and concerns for energy conservation. For example, designers generate natural cooling and ventilation by using the inherent suction effect found in skyscrapers (effect similar to that of a fireplace chimney). Such renewed approaches could be seen as a “design revamp” or as another “vampire sign” of our society, as if we are bleeding the skyscraper concept to death. Despite efforts toward creating greener structures, skyscrapers remain most unnatural.

With its fragile transparencies, the art, night and light portion of the web site makes a more immediate appeal to our senses. The “light show 2000” (in the cities of Hanover and Braunschweig, Germany) produces a prosaic and theatrical setting for your mind to wander in. Artists combine light effects with bridges to magically transfigure the cities. Fabrizio Plessi transforms the ruins of a destroyed bridge by installing an endless waterfall under its foundations. This waterfall reflects into the real water to create the impression of a bridge with a renewed function, expressing concerns for things of the past and washing away destruction.

In parallel with these outdoor exhibits, a discussion on exhibition spaces provides a journey where utopia meets earthly delights. Some ask if we should build exhibit spaces in which everything is possible rather than spaces that artists have to come to term with. Others argue that artists do not like to enter into neutral boxes and would rather have strong, expressive buildings. While playing with your mind’s megascopic views, the discussion presents a variety of attitudes toward art, space and time.

By offering all this “in sight,” A-matter provides us with a mind-bending atmospheric journey. It stands witness as the moment of life races by. It is only a matter of time before avant-garde becomes passe. It is a matter of fact and it is a fact of life. A-matter serves to keep us on the edge, like glow inducing vitamins. It’s a trip on innovations and visions in architecture.

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Figures 1 and 2: “To have integrity” was presented at the 2nd “Rencontres Internationales d’Architecture d’Orléans”, France 2000, as a manifestation of young avant-garde architecture on the theme of “Ville du Futur.” It illustrates how globalization, context and identity condition one another. By Naga Studio (NL): The Red Sea Resort, Hurgada, Egypt.

Figures 3 and 4: Thoughts on “tomorrow’s real space” presented by Caro Baumann (Amsterdam), Pia Cerber (Barcelona) and Johannes Schele (Munich) of the Universe of More Space limited.

Figure 5: Additional room designed by Eik Kammerl, Bibi Kammer, Katrin Aldenhoven for the Plan 2000 Forum aktueller Architektur in Köln. Sales:through Exilhäuser Architekten (e-mail: x@exilhaeuser.de).

Figure 6: Skyscraper using the concept of a classy shopping bag with handle: Kingdom Centre, Riyadh, Saudi-Arabia, (model). Architects: Ellerbe Becket, Minneapolis/ Minnesota, US

Figure 7: Skyscraper looking ready for take-off: ELA Tower, Tel Aviv, Israel, 1995-96, (model) Architects: Shin Takamatsu with Eliakim, Architects.

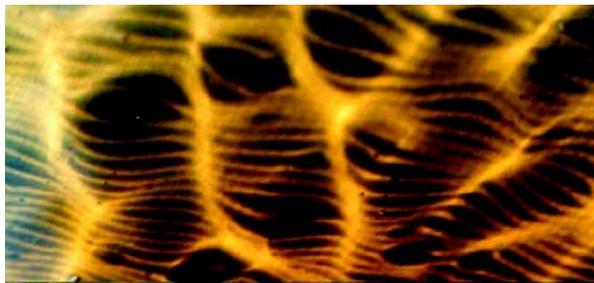
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