



Maciej Kowaluk*

Construction quality of architecture

The first thing is an idea which is disturbing enough to prevent a peaceful sleep. It needs to be worked out and broken into its component parts and all pros and cons need to be thought through. Then it is slowly transferred to paper to develop a project which is often subjected to evaluation and changed finally to meet all possible requirements and recommendations. Construction: transformation of a vision into reality, erection of walls and unbearable expectation of the final result.

However, this is not the moment when the last brick is laid that the work is complete. The real test and the only true verification is time. The evaluation of the quality of buildings includes a lot of factors, the most important of which seems to be the durability of architectural solutions and their correct application.

Not all of them can stand the test of time. More importantly, some of them which at first seem to be world scale events and the keys opening new doors cannot bear the burden of the load placed on them. Constructed with the spotlights directed at star-architects, the buildings' foundations are supported only on their fame. Often the renown is not coupled with construction quality or diligence.

Fortunately, some real gems can be found in the star architecture firmament. Works that not only defend themselves but also combine finesse, artistry and functionality as well [2].

Simplicity, work at the grass roots, quality, and transparency are only some of the distinctive features of the designs by Peter Zumthor. The number of structures designed by him is not too high. However, that too works to his advantage. Rejecting the model of run-of-the-mill designs and a model of a factory worker, Zumthor relies on work quality, attention to detail, and uniqueness. Just like a real carpenter, he cuts each structure in a unique way. His work, which can be easily called a masterpiece of a good craftsman, focuses on details, keeping in mind

one of the most fundamental features of any building: functionality. Although buildings are rightly predestined to be called works of art, it should not be ignored that they are constructed primarily to be functional. In the case of architecture, the category of aesthetics is as important as meeting the usability requirements in everyday life.

Zumthor perfectly combines care for beauty with care for functionality.

This can be easily exemplified by for instance the Kolumba Diocesan Museum in Cologne. First of all the space which had already existed was used: the new building was erected in the place of a cathedral or more specifically on its remains. Building an addition, Zumthor incorporated it into the city and did not invade the character of that space. Special bricks which were used are simply laid with gaps in between them, thus rendering an extraordinary effect. Light which is allowed into the interior delicately penetrates through the cracks, bends in specific places and the visitors can admire its exceptional display. It slowly trickles inside, creating a unique atmosphere of the place.

Another example of his works is his design of the hotel/spa facility in Vals. In this case he applied narrow rubble stones and ultimately created an impression of exceptional mass and weight. Thick, seemingly too thick, walls themselves would appear huge, overwhelming, heavy and providing little interior space. However, combining them with water, its delicate structure, subtlety and peace tames the walls. This combination provided balance between two opposites. Placing them on one scale pan was a good idea because they in fact do not repel each other in a vulgar way; on the contrary, they harmonize and create a space which perfectly serves the designed purposes [3].

Another example of Zumthor's artistry is the museum of modern art in Bregence which perfectly demonstrates the frail nature of glass. He achieved it by emphasizing and presenting its edges. Presented in this way, glass displays its truly delicate structure additionally contrasted by application of bare concrete inside. The elements combined in this way create an intricate structure which displays cold, austere, and neutral features. This is important

* Wrocław University of Technology, Faculty of Architecture.

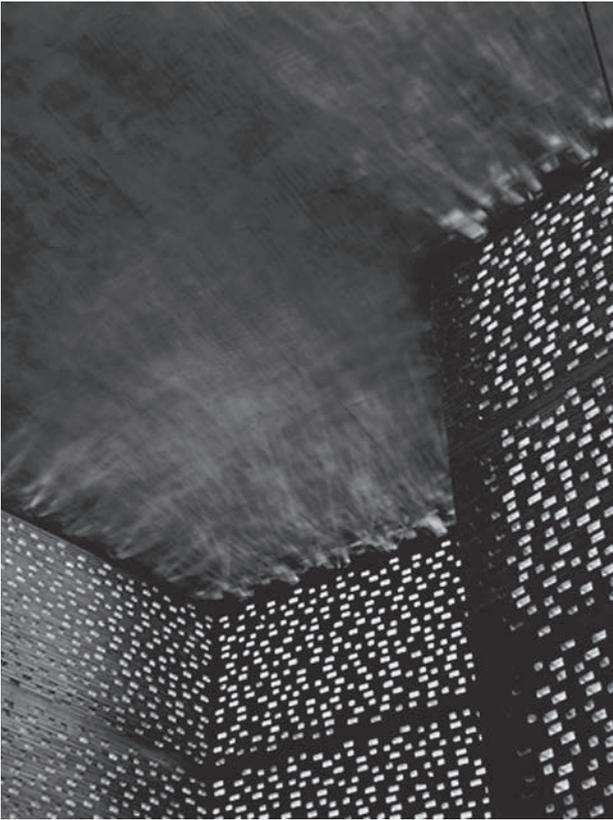


Fig. 1. Kolumba Diocesan Museum in Cologne,
designed by Peter Zumthor, photo by Helen Binet.
Source: <http://www.wallpaper.com/gallery/art/helene-binet>

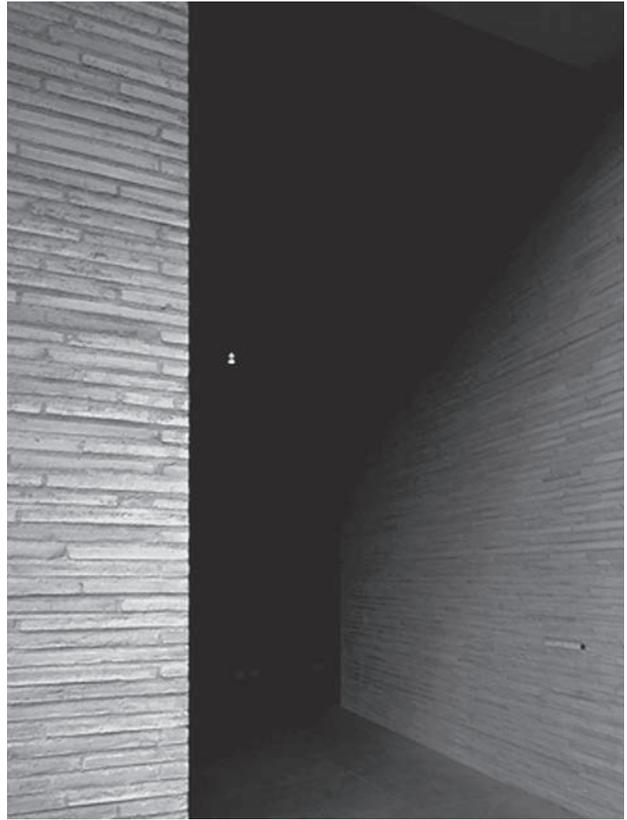


Fig. 2. Kolumba Diocesan Museum in Cologne,
designed by Peter Zumthor, photo by Helen Binet.
Source: <http://www.wallpaper.com/gallery/art/helene-binet>



Fig. 3. Therme Vals in Vals,
designed by Peter Zumthor, photo by Helen Binet.
Source: <http://www.wallpaper.com/gallery/art/helene-binet>

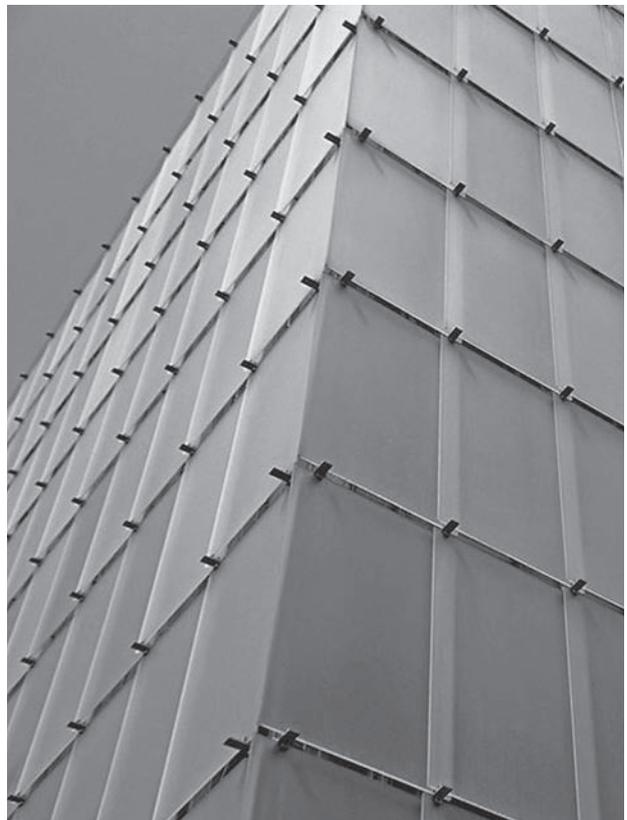


Fig. 4. Art Museum in Bregenz, designed by Peter Zumthor,
photo by Hans Peter Schaefer.
Source: <http://www.reserv-a-rt.de>

for the function of that facility as it is not supposed to be a work of art – it is indeed ‘only’ its aesthetic packaging – its true objective is to make people anxious to see what’s inside.

Passing time terrifies everybody, including architects who frequently look at the struggle of the buildings they designed with its passage. Not everybody wins that fight. Some buildings, maybe as a result of the lack of precision or their excessive form, deteriorate in time and fade into oblivion. Others prove triumphant and go down in history as designs which are one of the kind and unique.

The example of Peter Zumthor demonstrates that it is not only about aesthetics and care for external beauty but also about a job well done, taking into account all aspects and nuances, including those connected with the usability of the structures, that provide the result which is praiseworthy and timeless [1].

Quality is not about how quickly a structure can be built or about the use of most innovative solutions but about the ability to combine this with its usability and sound workmanship.

This is what every architect should remember.

References

- [1] Pontopulos K., Peter Zumthor, *Office designer*, 2009, 3, pp. 28–81.
[2] Stec B., *Droga. Kaplica brata Klausa.*, *Architektura & Biznes*, 2007, 7/8, pp. 38–43.
[3] Stec B., *Trzy rozmowy z Peterem Zumthorem*, *Architektura & Biznes*, 2003, 2, pp. 20–39.
[4] www.archdaily.com
[5] www.mimoo.eu
[6] www.wallpaper.com

Budowlana jakość architektury

Podstawą pracy architekta jest akt kreacji. Proces projektowania wieńczy budowa. Jest ona finalnym efektem naszej pracy, a zarazem jej weryfikacją. Wyznacznikiem dobrej architektury może być funkcjonalność, estetyka, wpisanie w tkankę miejską, kompozycja przestrzennobryłowa.

Jednak prawdziwym sprawdzianem dla obiektu budowlanego jest czas. O jakości budynków decyduje trwałość rozwiązań architektonicznych i ich poprawność budowlana.

Niektóre budynki są ogromnymi wydarzeniami medialnymi za sprawą star-architekta. Jednak w przypadku, gdy za rozgłosem nie poszła jakość budowlana, obiekty te nie wytrzymują próby czasu. Na uwagę zasługują prace Petera Zumthora. Tworzy on projekty niepowtarzalne, bardzo medialne, ale zarazem oparte o doskonały detal architektoniczny.

Należy podkreślić, że poprawność rozwiązań budowlanych jest podstawowym elementem zawodu architekta. A w oparciu o solidny detal można stworzyć niezwykle obiekty i przestrzenie.

Key words: constructions, quality, architecture

Słowa kluczowe: budownictwo, jakość, architektura