

Foreword by Otto Kapfinger

Ablinger, Vedral & Partners build houses with roofs. Modern, old-fashioned? To build a house with a wide roof projection was a deadly sin in the classical modern age. Architects who planned such roofs were old fashioned traditionalists. Smooth, geometrically pure roofs with the rectangular edge, with-out cornices were modern. The so called open air deck for gymnastics or sunbathing on the flat roof replaced the unfavorable spaces of inferior quality under the steep-pitched roof branded as conservative. Tuberculosis sanatorium, open air culture, nudism, mechanical abstraction, and efficiency of production were the leitmotifs of those years. Naturally, there were some people who worked outside of these trends, who were possibly more modern then these modernists. For example, Frank Lloyd Wright and R.M. Schindler always designed striking roofs and were never admitted as a part of the international style.

The old Japanese house was a model for many modernists, but only for its dimensional modularity, its structural strictness, and lack of furniture. One of its fundamental qualities, the filter-zone between inside and outside under the broad projected roof, the verandas with their sliding light-structured walls, was marginalized by the new concrete and steel construction techniques. The Japanese house was a wooden structure. Ablinger, Vedral & Partners are also indulged in wooden structures. The wide canopy is still an irreplaceable constructive protection system in our climate as long as one takes the potential and qualities of wooden construction seriously. Not only does the wide roof projection above a window-façade or a piece of wall act as an umbrella against rain and snow, it also provides protection against the sun, creates a mini-climate in front of the outer wall, and defines an informal anteroom which acts as a buffer zone between inside and outside. Roof and canopy are complex, multivalent elements of building, at any rate more functional than what the so called functionalism had in mind by using the shapes of ships or cars as models for other machines. The shiny facades of the classical modern age with their white finish certainly opened up new esthetic and ethic realms. They were often functionally and technically problematic; inevitable structural damage, construction forms which were not designed to last, and which had to be continuously renewed in order to stay intact.

Had the Bauhaus School only been aware of the whole range of the ancient Eurasian house typologies, apart from the old Japanese model, such as the highly cultivated wooden constructions of eastern Turkey, the Bosphorus, Levant, and the Balkans from Bulgaria all the way into Slovakia with their refined staggered house profiles, their subtly diversified roof, and their canopy structures which acted as weather protection, climate regulator, formed spaces, and visibility filter, the classical modern style might have taken another course. This is however history.

In the meantime roofs were “rediscovered” as such. New technologies were developed for wooden constructions. Architecture today is an overall discipline with a much broader environmental and technical orientation. Ablinger, Vedral & Partner use wood extensively in their buildings and consequently come up with striking roof structures, which is part of the fundamental idea behind their design. Roofs and canopies do not merely conduct water away from the house. When they are designed as green roofs, they also collect the rain/hail/snow and turn it into growing insulation layers, divert the water on the surface into various cycles which use the house and its grounds as a coherent thermal-environmental system. The canopy covered with greenery also acts as an extension of terraces or balconies and as a visibility screen. Thus, the lower stories, or ground-floor gardens of multi-storey buildings, are shielded from the view from above. The wide roof slab facilitates a further typical element. It is possible to plan large wooden-glass sliding windows/doors on the outer shell underneath this weather shield. The interior space is thus spatially and

functionally exposed. On the other hand the transition from inside to outside can be arranged in a smooth and also radical fashion. The electrically operated venetian blinds suspended from the canopy act as an outermost layer of form and use. They also act as a shield against the low sun rays and as a partial visibility filter. Thus, very large glass surfaces can be optically and thermally controlled in an efficient way. The suspended slats in this whole system work as an additional staggered sun-shade and drip edge as well as a scaffolding for maintaining and finishing the wooden-glass façades. The exterior wooden surfaces can thus acquire the fine, attractive patina over the years which is highly appreciated in old, rural buildings without any chemical conservation. Ablinger, Vedral & Partner combine innovation in technical areas and installation design with precise responses to usage profiles and the topographical facts of the site. Their own office-residential building turns a 45° sloped, narrow, south oriented parcel of land into a fascinating biotope. It is a technical and special reticulation of nature and architecture, of wood, stone, glass, metal, earth, water, light, shade, fauna, and flora. It is a house in the trees, over and under the trees, with a view of Vienna Woods for miles around at the top and a shady jungle down below, with a cycle of water which starts at a height of 12 m and flows into an optically rimless pond encased in a concrete tub, the bottom of which vaults a cool bench-grotto; a place of contemplation surrounded by ivy and dense undergrowth.

Here are two more aspects of the abundant discrete details, which reveal their complicated simplicity only when in use: unsealed larch floor boarding, placed with an amazing precision holds the sub floor heating. Narrow strips of wood which are easily disassembled reveal the cables and technical installations of a typical office; coming out of the bedroom, one steps out on an inner terrace which consists of a wooden grid floor made out of narrow strips of wood that reaches up to the sliding glass façade and continues around the air space of the living room. Thus, one walks out of bed with naked but warm feet on the porous wooden floor, comes out onto the grid of fine planed down strips of wood which not only act like a massage board but also let a striped, filtered roof light shine through on the oblique placed dining space underneath.

As seen in this example as well as others, architecture is, for this team, a special-climatic and bio-technical transformation of landscape into habitat. The esthetic qualities of the modern times are in balance with the natural conditions and resources. The contemporary feeling of space and the advanced knowledge of construction are in harmony with the natural and sustainable treatment of materials. In some buildings, wood-glass-tectonic is combined with pressed loam walls, which act as a hypocaust replacing the conventional air-conditioning system. These acclimatizing walls provide a comfortable radiant heat or cool air without draught by means of fresh air which filters through the self-planted greenery and the heat-exchange in the mass of earth under the building; preheated in winter and cooled off in summer. They also supplement the wooden structure flooded with light by means of their complementary optical and tactile presence.

Bruno Taut, not only a pioneer of the European modern age, but also an intimate expert on Japanese and Ottoman housing and building culture writes in his teachings on architecture: "Function has four dimensions; length, width, height, and time. The fifth dimension is the relation of space to its neighbors and neighboring spaces, valid also for streets and squares. One could call this "the elasticity of space". The sixth dimension is the light, the seventh the sound, the eighth could be the air which influences the size of space considerably by the kind of ventilation; the ninth could be the specific weather and climate conditions, etc. One cannot regard any one of these dimensions as isolated from one another but needs to order them harmoniously together." The buildings and projects presented here fulfill these maxims in a more and more self evident fashion on a continuous basis. It is not possible to make a greater compliment in my opinion.