

# A10



#23



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### Start

- Academy of Arts, Tallinn
- Hotel, Belgrade
- Office campus, Istanbul
- Mobile performance venue, Oslo
- Office building, Bacău

### Ready

- Shopping mall, Lausanne
- Football stadium, Maribor
- Villa, Černošice
- Kindergarten, Tartu
- Bar pavilion, Porto
- Motel, Moscow
- Town hall, Sant Cugat
- Treetop walkway, Kew Gardens
- Water filtration plant, St. Erasmo Island
- Church, Jyllinge

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- Interview: 'Local activists' Helen & Hard
- Beyond building: architecture in the age of post-production
- Architectural tour guide of Hamburg
- Out of obscurity: Vjenceslav Richter's Yugoslav pavilion for Expo 58, Brussels

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# A10

new European  
architecture

## #23

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## Limits and limitations

HANS IBELINGS

The theme of the 2008 Venice Biennale's International Architecture Exhibition is 'Out There: Architecture Beyond Building'. Director Aaron Betsky came up with a catchy title that can be interpreted in myriad ways, including the fairly obvious denial of, if not the possibility then certainly the necessity for architecture to venture beyond building. That may seem like a mere rhetorical trick but there is more reason than ever, certainly in Europe, for architecture to return to the essence instead of transcending boundaries.

The principal reason is that in all sorts of areas there are limits to growth, with direct consequences for architecture. Depending on which projection you use, the European population has already reached its peak or will very soon do so. The average European city has all but stopped growing and this in combination with the ecological impact that construction has on our world, suggests that architects' ambitions will need to be toned down rather than whipped up. There is no reason to revive the doomsday scenario sketched by Dennis Meadows in his 1972 report for the Club of Rome, *The Limits to Growth*. Europeans are not yet teetering on the brink of catastrophe; the continent's wealth offers a not inconsiderable protection

against that. Nonetheless, there are sound reasons why architects should start to cultivate a new modesty. The automatism that has characterized the architectural profession during at least the past two centuries, whereby it was assumed that almost every civic, spatial, organizational, economic or social issue could be resolved by building, seems to be on the wane.

The role of the architect in these new circumstances will no longer be about how, by hook or by crook, to design as many square and cubic metres as possible. Of course, there are and will continue to be reasons for expansion, densification and rearrangement, and so building activity will not disappear altogether, but that a time is fast approaching when the production of architecture on the present scale will no longer be necessary, or perhaps even desirable, seems inescapable.

This post-productive situation in Europe is the theme of the seminar on 9 and 10 October in Bordeaux, organized by the European Forum for Architectural Policies, the French Ministry for Culture and Communication and arc en rêve centre d'architecture, in cooperation with A10. It is a moment to pause and consider the architectural and urban planning consequences of what may well turn out to be one of the most fundamental changes in the development of European societies since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution. ←

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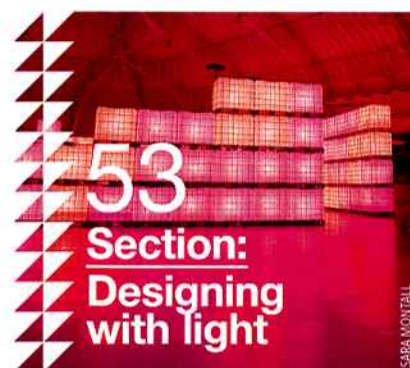
### 20 Interview

Siv Helene Stangeland and Reinhard Kropf, founders of Helen & Hard talk about the oil industry, recycling, collaboration and invention and about what it is like to live and work in Stavanger. Kropf: 'If you don't like the cafés, you have to design them yourself and if you don't like the housing, you make your own.'



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### 70 Out of obscurity

Werner Bossman traces the journey of Vjenceslav Richter's Yugoslavian pavilion for the Brussels Expo of 1958. The crisp modern building got a second life after the world exhibition closed, when it was dismantled, transported and reassembled to become a school building in the Flemish village of Wevelgem.



# Water filtration plant, St. Erasmo Island

*Functionalist logic merged with contextualism in the approach of C+S Associati on an island near Venice.*

ITALY — TEXT: LUIGI PRESTINENZA PUGLISI, PHOTOGRAPHY: PIETRO SAVORELLI

Italy is currently engaged in an intense debate about the future of its infrastructure. The fact is that the country's existing infrastructure is no longer suitable for a technologically advanced country. One need only mention the recent problems with garbage collection in Naples where a shortage of waste sites and incinerators has meant that one of the Italian peninsula's major cities is unable to dispose of the waste it produces. The area is submerged under hills of garbage, ruining the image of the city, driving away tourists and posing a serious health hazard to the local population. Another example relates to high-speed rail lines: delays caused by bureaucracy and local opposition mean that Italy currently boasts less than half as many kilometres of fast rail lines as Spain, Germany and France.

Furthermore, and this is a no less serious issue, new infrastructure projects are not being entrusted to architects with an aesthetic training and a feel for landscape, but to technicians focused on completing the work at the lowest cost. The result is roads, power plants, electrical transformer stations, naval ports and water filtration plants – often too ugly to look at – that compromise rather than ameliorate the environment.

Happily, this situation is improving, even if at a snail's pace. A growing number of structures now require a series of environmental impact studies before they can be approved and architects are beginning to realize that these constructions represent good professional opportunities in the coming decade.

The work presented here is a water filtration plant located in the Northern Lagoon Park, north of Venice, on the south-eastern shore of Sant'Erasmo Island. The project is part of a much larger plan for the urban and environmental upgrading of the island being implemented by the Venezia Nuova consortium for the Venice water authorities.

The plant was designed by Carlo Cappel and Alessandra Segantini, the two partners of C+S, an architect couple in their forties who are particularly active in and around Venice. They are the authors of the masterplan for the regeneration of Sant'Erasmo Island, and the architects of some of the best buildings completed in the region in recent years (including the school in Covolo di Pederobba featured in A10 #11).

The starting point for the design was very simply to ensure that the new water filtration plant would not become an anonymous industrial shed. This led Cappel and Segantini to hide part of the structure below grade, while

the portion above grade takes its cues from the surrounding landscape. Alessandra Segantini: 'We were inspired by the constructions that dot the island. In particular the suggestive system of fortifications that the Austrians built to defend the Venetian lagoon.'

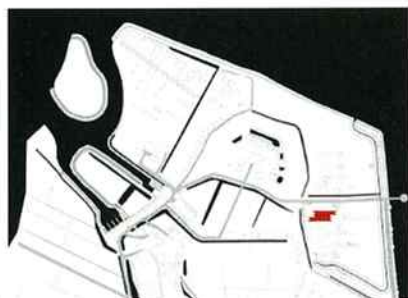
The structure has been designed as an ensemble of thick (circa 1 m) parallel walls in red-tinted concrete. The openable elements have all been realized as large doors, clad in long, horizontal wooden slats. The result is an object of minimalist restraint with the contextual sensitivity of a land art intervention and the chromatic sensuality of the work of Luis Barragan. Even the underground portion contributes to defining the project, emerging from the terrain as a pattern of skylights.

The materials used here are the same found in other works on the island by Cappel and Segantini (including the restoration of the 19th-century fortress known as Massimiliana Tower, which has won five architectural awards and was selected for the Mies van der Rohe Award). Their approach avoids focusing attention on single objects in favour of creating a series of objects that harmonize with the overall image of the island.

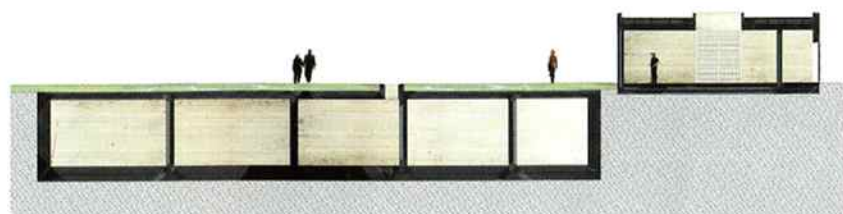
One final observation: even while responding to a series of functional requirements (the large wooden doors are opened once every three to four months to clean the filters), the filtration plant eschews the functionalist logic that calls for a clear correspondence between the function of an object and its image. The approach is not without risks, not least that of excessive contextualism. However, as demonstrated by the ease with which this work relates to its context, it is an approach that, if managed with intelligence, can be extraordinarily rewarding. ←

## WATER FILTRATION PLANT, 2004–2007

Architects: C+S Associati  
(Carlo Cappel, Maria Alessandra Segantini)  
Client: Magistrato alle Acque di Venezia,  
Regione del Veneto, Comune di Venezia  
Address: St. Erasmo Island, Venice  
Info: [www.cipiuesse.it](http://www.cipiuesse.it)



Section showing the large underground part of the plant



View of characteristic entrance

