

THE SCANDINAVIAN BOOKAZINE
– It's all about creativity

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design

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Dolomites

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Q1 2015

Tower Bára II, Chrudim, 2009
(Architects: Martin Rajniš, Martin Kloda, David Kubík)
PHOTO: RADKA ČIGLEROVÁ
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architecture

architectures are living constructions that reflect
the spirit of time, for better or for worse



Martin Rajniš



PHOTO: ERIK WÄHLSTRÖM



Martin Rajniš

Martin Rajniš at DOX

BY JANA TICHÁ

“As architects, we’re in a really strange situation. We’ve been responsible for our own exile to the fringes of society. We’ve made so many mistakes, produced so much nonsense, that people don’t trust us. If we don’t just want to whine and complain, then it’s reasonable to try looking for ways and examples of how to do it differently...” says this Czech architect who travelled to Paris in May to receive the *Global Award for Sustainable Architecture*. A major exhibition at DOX presented examples of the work of his guild.

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PHOTO: ERIK WÄHLSTRÖM

Floating garden A pop-up pocket park in Uppsala

BY MICHAEL GATES CARLSSON

During the summer LOFT saw an innovative and intriguing mini-park floating on a raft in the middle of the Fyris River in the university city of Uppsala, one hour north of Stockholm. We asked the organisers to explain the background to the project and how they managed to carry it out.

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Kindergarten in Prague, Krč, 2013-2014. (Architect: David Kubík). PHOTO: PETR KRÁLÍK © MARTIN RAJNIS ARCHITECTURE GUILD

Martin Rajniš at DOX

BY JANA TICHÁ



The recent exhibition held at the DOX Centre for Contemporary Art in Prague presented a cross-section of the work of Czech architect Martin Rajniš and his studio, emphasizing projects from the last 12 years. Rajniš, who travelled to Paris in May to receive the *Global Award for Sustainable Architecture* for his outstanding contribution to world architecture, follows a philosophy of “natural architecture”. He has become famous for projects that combine long-term sustainability, ecology, and the notion that architecture should be a tool for development of community and society.

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During the 1970s, Martin Rajniš worked at SIAL, headed by Karel Hubáček, and for example co-authored the Máj department store on Národní třída and the History of Transport Pavilion at Expo 1986 in Vancouver. Since approximately 2002, however, Rajniš's work has transformed significantly. He now focuses on smaller structures built from natural materials (wood, stone, glass) and looks for approaches that with a minimum of means and with great respect for existing structures and the landscape, serve as broad a user base as possible, and return architecture to its key position in human civilization.

Architecture is a tree-sloth

Jana Tichá (JT) interviewed Martin Rajniš (MR) prior to the opening of the exhibition.

Jana Tichá: Martin, your exhibition in DOX represents twelve years of work, twelve years of designing and building architecture in accordance with nature in the broadest sense of the word. You call this “Natural Architecture”. It's been appearing gradually ever since the time when you returned from your travels around the world in 2001 and had your lecture at Club Roxy here in Prague where you first formulated what you came across in your traveling. You spoke about how contemporary Western



Písek City Forest Administration, 2009-2010. (A)
PHOTO: RADKA ČÍGLEROVÁ © MARTIN RAJNIŠ A



Písek City Forest Administration, 2009-2010. (Architects: Martin Rajniš, David Kubík, Martin Kloda).
PHOTO: RADKA ČÍGLEROVÁ © MARTIN RAJNIS ARCHITECTURE CUILD



(All three pictures): Studio above the river, Kamenný Újezdec, 2009. (Architects: Martin Rajniš, David Kubík, Jan Mach, Vojta Hýbler, Martin Kloda)
PHOTO: RADKA CÍGLEROVÁ © MARTIN RAJNIS ARCHITECTURE GUILD



architecture irritates you, how you encounter many interesting things among so-called 'primitive' peoples, and began to speak for architecture. It changes its course, pulls back a bit from its previous achievements and starts to be natural. If you go back today, 13 years on, how do you see it? Do you actually come about of everything you spoke of?

Martin Rajniš: This decision to leave the world and try in my "third life" to orient myself a bit in the world, to learn something, was absolutely correct. And what I called – back there in Roxy – a professional suicide turned into a life and strengthening elixir. My disappointment with contemporary architecture, whether Western, Eastern or Central, was strong. Part of this disappointment, which arose out of my daily interactions with major investors, of course has disappeared since then. But what definitely hasn't vanished is my conviction that architecture is in crisis. And even that this crisis has deepened. Architecture no longer does the main thing it should.

JT: What should architecture do?

MR: Architecture should be an all-powerful friend, an all-powerful, all-embracing basis for human life. Architecture should be welcoming, inhabitable, harmonious, understandable, legible, close to people. It should support people in a good life, in happiness, in good relationships. Architecture is the nesting-place of our life. And in that moment when we began to look at architecture as a technical system, as a functioning machine, we began to regard people as repeating components of a kind of gigantic peripheral to it. The more I think about it, the more I'm convinced that it was a complete error, a real mistake. The modern age has escaped from under architecture's feet. Architecture is a beautiful, loving, welcoming tree-sloth. It moves slowly, because for some kind of a building to be accepted truly into society, it must be similar at least for ten generations. To see how birth and death happen, how people fall in and out of love, how life is hard and beautiful, how it works in fog, in winter, how it works with the landscape with society. And all of this is something that cannot be done quickly, it is something that requires long-lasting cooperation of generations.



Hýbler, Martin Kloda)



architecture irritates you, how you encountered so many interesting things among so-called 'primitive' peoples, and began to speak for architecture that changes its course, pulls back a bit from its civilised achievements and starts to be natural. If you look back today, 13 years on, how do you see it? What's actually come about of everything you spoke of then?

Martin Rajniš: This decision to leave the path and try in my "third life" to orient myself a bit more in the world, to learn something, was absolutely correct. And what I called – back there at the Roxy – a professional suicide turned into a healing and strengthening elixir. My disappointment with contemporary architecture, whether Western, Eastern or Central, was strong. Part of this disappointment, which arose out of my daily interactions with major investors, of course has disappeared since then. But what definitely hasn't vanished is my conviction that architecture is in crisis. And even that this crisis has deepened. Architecture no longer does the main thing it should.

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JT: But where do we find this balance so that we don't at the same time have to give up those modern achievements that make life easier?

MR: The only way is a return to the roots, and searching. We have the incredible luck of living in an enormous, continually running experiment, being done by nature. It's been going on for four billion years, and in every moment with myriads of cells, information, structures. All around us we have an incomparable arsenal of incredible things. And one of the best is what we carry in our heads. Those 130 grams of brain matter that think, and the remaining 1.30 kg that support it, may well be the most amazing thing ever to come up in nature. This allows us to



understand a great many things. I personally think it's insane to think we will have to give something up. We don't need to give up things that serve us, yet at the same time we shouldn't let things become our masters, and somehow repress, deform, sadden us. After all, we are *Homo sapiens*. How did we win out over those Cro-Magnons? Through our love for art, and our ability to communicate. Architecture doesn't function, architecture is a magical structure in which we can live. Contemporary architecture is that tree-sloth all alone, whose legs have been run over, time has escaped it, disappeared somewhere in the dust, and now it doesn't know what to do next.

JT: Do you think that the way out of this crisis, out of this trap that the poor sloth has got itself into, leads through a return to roots, as you said just before? Doesn't it rather lead forward, with the sloth finding something new, something it doesn't yet know?

MR: For me, the way back is not a return to

historical architecture, I have no desire to return to anything of the kind. These returns have already happened, and weren't any help. I see the way back as a way towards quality, understanding, sensing a thing. Yes, we don't live in a primordial sociability, we live in a society. We don't make the things we need for our daily lives ourselves, we have someone else make them, we buy them. And yet the most important thing is the architecture we experience on a daily level: the living room, the bedroom, the terrace, the kindergarten, the school, the pub. Yes, the pub is also important, particularly in our country. All these things have got the short end of the stick over the past 180 years. As architects, we're in a really strange situation. We've been responsible for our own exile to the fringes of society. We've made so many mistakes, produced so much nonsense, that people don't trust us. If we don't just want to whine and complain, then it's reasonable to try looking for ways and examples of how to do it differently. And we're trying to. Often, it's only the first small steps, not completed concepts, nothing complicated. It's only about trying to see if it works for very little money, if everything has to be expensive and high-flown. And we are making these tests now.

JT: So you mean it's an experiment? What's the place of experiment in architecture?

MR: Absolutely essential. I'm not saying that it's only an experiment. It's the search for a way. An experiment is concentrated on demonstrating a specific hypothesis. We are trying, through the experiment, to get somewhere further on. We make different types of buildings, and at the same time try to bring in certain things that aren't done that often, but could be pleasant and intriguing. For example, the "transboarder". A hybrid between a cable-car and a bridge, with a firm construction very high up, so that floods can't wash it away. And at the same time, it's playful. This is one of many examples of where we want to go. Or the wooden "Jára da Cimrman" lighthouse, growing up out of a cement-stone wall. It's like what you always see in the Sahara, where the houses are made of the very same stones lying around, and become a direct continuation of the landscape. When the landscape



Chrátava Transborder, 2010. (Architects: Martin Rajniš, David Pavlišta, David Kubík). PHOTO: TOMÁŠ TESÁŘ © MARTIN RAJNIS ARCHITECTURE GUILD

emerges through the house, it gives us a nice feeling that it's logical, it's easy, it's the simplest thing that we could do on this spot.

JT: For entire centuries, architecture has defined itself in opposition to nature, yet once in the modern era it's been reversed. Now we no longer have a need to define ourselves so much against nature, but instead we seek it out. When we want to relax, we look for it, simply put we need it.

MR: Yes, we're the descendents of people – speaking about several million years back – who were satisfied in nature. Those who weren't satisfied with it, who didn't like the green, who didn't like the blue sky, the clouds, the striped giraffes and similar things and felt sad from them, they had fewer children than the others who did like them. So we're descended from those who liked nature. "Biophilia" is what they call this, love for life. From this nature, we take our materials but also – and more importantly – certain approaches, certain configurations that occur in it. And these are merging, ever more often, with architecture. While in 2001 this sounded dubious, by now there are thousands of architects and other creative professionals who are returning to nature, returning to natural materials, natural structures. I'd say it's happening very subtly, but all across the world something is emerging that isn't a style, isn't an aesthetic, but a highly varied stream of things, something like the delta of a river. What was originally a broad stream becomes divided into a great many islets, currents, separating, connecting and flowing onwards, flowing more

slowly. And possibly this is the method that will allow architecture to return again to a friendly relationship with people. A friendly architecture. Things like habitability, comprehensibility, harmony are more and more in the background of what's going on within architecture. Every era carries in itself remnants of the older one, yet at the same time new things are born. And this is the content of the present exhibition. The exhibition is over a decade's work of a small group of people who try to think, experience, push forward a different architecture, try to return it to that legendary service to people. Of course, we have a long way ahead of us. What we're doing is only an indication of what should be considered for the overture. It has its beginners' problems, but occasionally these few notes of the overture join together to form a new melody. Things appear that connect the unconnectable, the Dogon of Mali with Zen, pounded mud with stick-structures, things that have complex mathematics with things that are absolutely primitive. And at the same time there is this broad discussion about planning and not-planning. I'm very sceptical towards plans, yet still I'm always sketching, and I say to myself how can I be sceptical towards something that's my daily bread? But long years of life have taught me always to bite the hand that feeds me.

JT: Or are you sceptical precisely because you've sketched so many plans over your life? Because you know what the problems are?

MR: Definitely. I know how a plan can crush into the ground so many things that bring life, those

crooked lines that you can't get on a computer.

JT: And what if you build something like this elephant spine here on the terrace of DOX? What does the plan look like for such a structure?

MR: Planned and unplanned. David Kubík said let's make an elephant spine, he drew a sketch of an elephant spine, I drew a sketch of an elephant spine, and we both know well that between what we sketch and what will be standing on the terrace there is a huge difference. Why? With bent sticks it's not possible to make a precise topology. In place of a plan, which is bound so a specific topology, this is more of a guideline. We know what sticks and connectors we should have, we know roughly the density of the connections and can formulate in our heads the curve of an elephant's back, and since Kubík is a sculptor and I'm an anarchist, then the softness of the object and the uncertainty of our path won't confuse us. Perhaps it will work out. And precisely this is what I like in the Dogon tribe, or even Bohemian folk architecture. There's a balance between a certain level of proportion, rhythm, purposefulness and at the same time a certain level of disorder, chance, chaos. Chaos makes things bearable for us. If we were to meet with thirty identical people, then definitely we wouldn't have a good feeling. Just look at *The Matrix*, there they express it perfectly what the modern age has done, in other words Mr Brown is just a walking prefab tower-block. Hundreds of them, all the same, this is for machines, it's not our world. Our world is variety. I'd compare it to a situation when in communication we lose all non-verbal information, gestures, facial expressions,

PHOTO: TOMÁŠ TESÁŘ

House in the Železná
(Architects: Martin Rajniš, David Pavlišta, David Kubík)
PHOTO: ANDREA THOMPSON





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PHOTO: TOMÁŠ TESAŘ © MARTIN RAJNIS ARCHITECTURE GUILD

House in the Železná preserve, 2010-2011
(Architects: Martin Rajniš, David Kubík)

PHOTO: ANDREA THIELLHOVÁKOVÁ © MARTIN RAJNIS ARCHITECTURE GUILD





Tower Bára, Chrudim, 2009
(Architects: Martin Rajniš,
Martin Kloda, David Kubík)
PHOTO: DAVID KUBÍK ©
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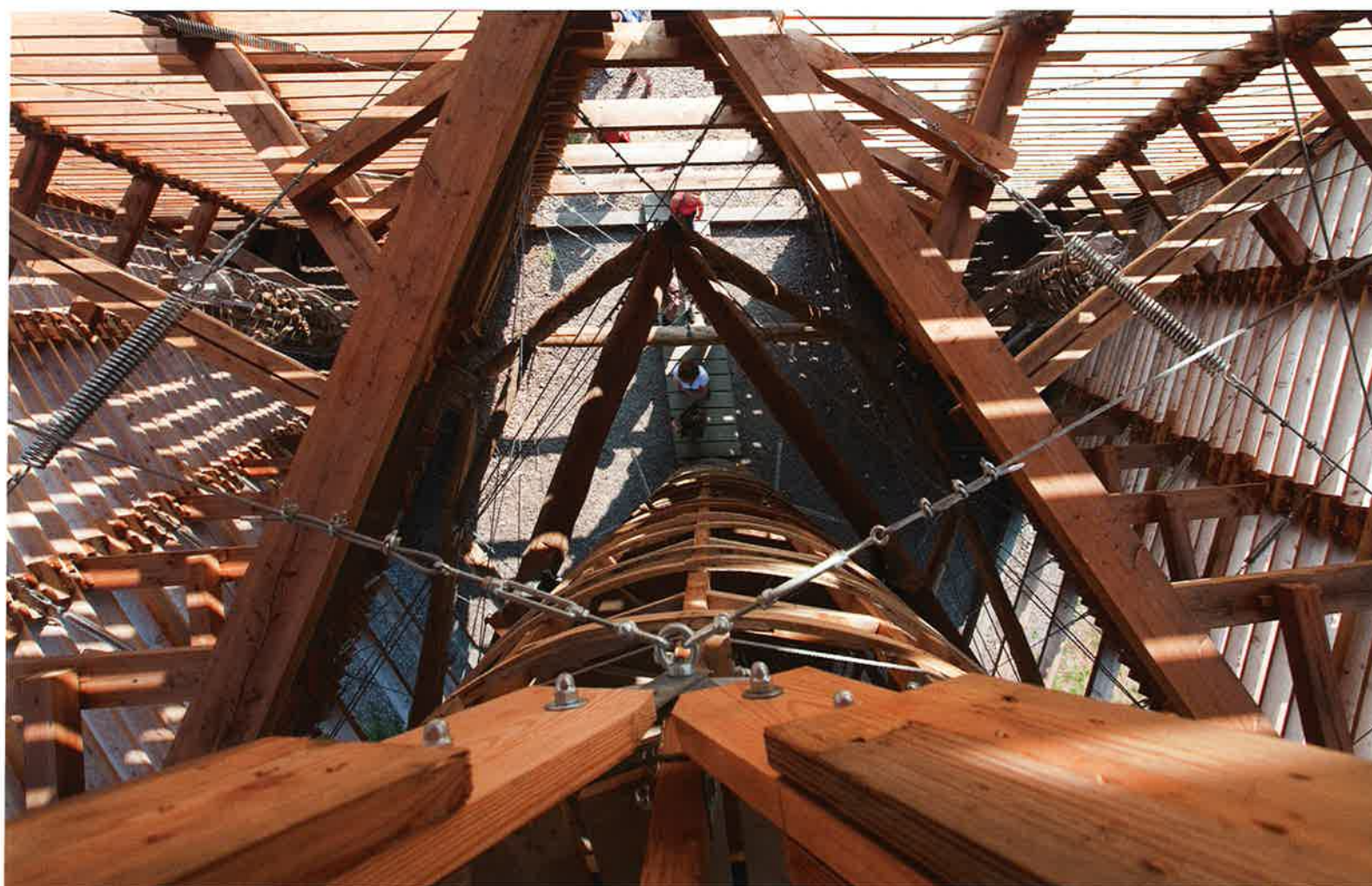
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OTO: DAVID KUBÍK ©
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Tower Bára, Chrudim, 2009. (Architects: Martin Rajniš, Martin Kloda, David Kubík). PHOTO: ANDREA THIEL LHOTÁKOVÁ © MARTIN RAJNIS ARCHITECTURE GUILD

lip-smackings, voice tonalities, here we've lost 80 percent of the meaning. Just the same, when we create a completely smooth, clean, aseptic architecture, the same effect emerges. This never happens in nature, nor in folk architecture.

JT: So could you tell me now how you prevent this from happening in architecture, which has to be precise and planned. Your team, after all, doesn't only build elephant spines, but also completely normal houses that have official building permits, buildings where people live and work. What is the relationship between the buildings that have to be planned with great precision and elephant spines?

MR: I try to do everything possible so that our sense of what is a legal building could also include the elephant spines. Because a great many regulations a priori destroy several wonderful and necessary qualities. I would say that between these things there's no difference. Because – and this is the most important thing I wish to say – the seed of a tree contains in itself the information about that tree. A kind of plan for the tree. Yet “plan” is a bad term, it's really a guideline of how the tree should live, how photosynthesis should take place, it's not a literal plan. The seed doesn't carry within itself

a plan saying that the tree will have 8721 leaves, these will be separated by a difference of 21 mm, each leaf will have 67 points and of this a certain number of larger or smaller ones. Nothing of the kind exists. The tree has a guideline of how it should grow leaves, but each leaf is unique, just as much as our own fingers or ears or eyes. This is because it's done from a guideline, not from a plan. This is where the difference lies. A guideline means that someone knows how to do it, yet at the same time slightly adapts it to the situation. There's a place in it for a certain level of irrationality. And these approaches and paths are there in immeasurable quantity. It can't be said that any one is a priori the only one and the best. There are guaranteed paths and very risky paths, but both are paths. So we, and others, have set out on the path of how we can take this kindly tree-sloth, all alone in the dust of the roads, bandage it up, feed it, and not keep forcing it always onward. Just to give this sloth a number of places along the paths and say: hey sloth, here you can get your claws stuck in and find something tasty to eat. These places are more and more, the sloth can eat what it wants, will be satisfied, cosy, friendly. I only regret that I can't live three or four hundred years and say, well that 20th century was

awful, the 21st not much better, but the 22nd, now that was an improvement!

JT: To return all the way to the beginning: in the Roxy you spoke about how to get to a vision of architecture in 2030. Why did you select precisely this year?

MR: A similar method to Orwell's, when in 1948 he set his dystopian novel in the year 1984 and created his vision one generation ahead. I thought in terms of one generation too. And just rounded off the year.

JT: And do you think that within one generation this change can be seen?

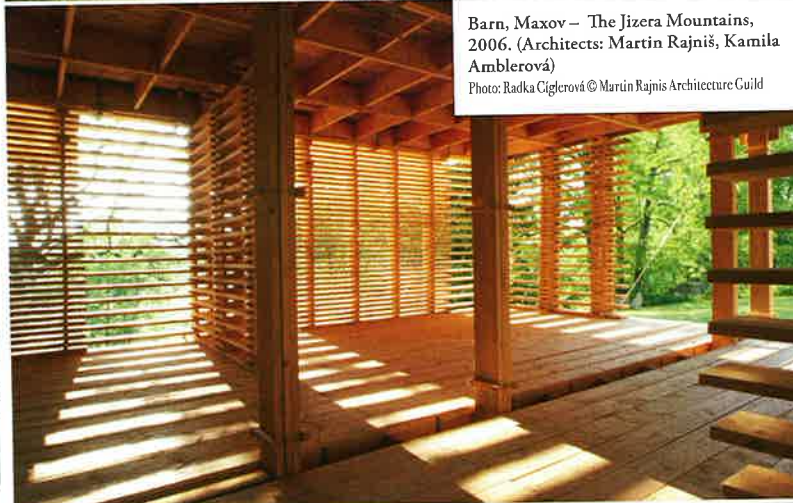
MR: Absolutely. Now we are, let's say, in 40 percent a single generation. We've done some things, we live with them, analyse them. The path isn't straight, it twists and turns. Some things only now, once we've realised them, have developed – perhaps not in the technical details, of course – but in the sense of how the building lives in the world. Of what waves it's created around itself. How it's slipped into people's subconscious and how people react to it. All of this has pushed us on, sent us to the next camp, but the peak is still far distant. It's not yet time to put on the oxygen masks. ■



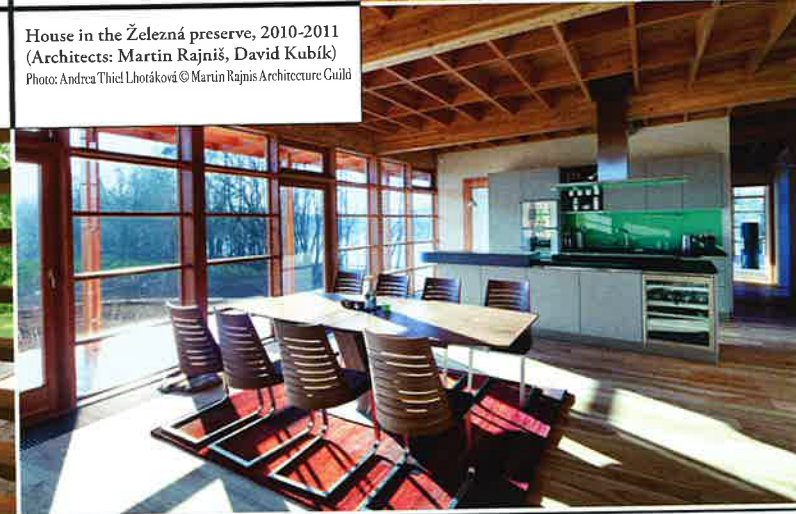
Stack-house in Slavonice, 2007
(Architects: Martin Rajniš, Kamila Amblerová, Václav Horecký)
Photo: Radka Ciglerová © Martin Rajniš Architecture Guild



Tower Scholzberg, Maxov – The Jizera Mountains, 2006. (Architects: Martin Rajniš, Jan Mach)
Photo: Radka Ciglerová © Martin Rajniš Architecture Guild



Barn, Maxov – The Jizera Mountains, 2006. (Architects: Martin Rajniš, Kamila Amblerová)
Photo: Radka Ciglerová © Martin Rajniš Architecture Guild



House in the Železná preserve, 2010-2011 (Architects: Martin Rajniš, David Kubík)
Photo: Andrea Thiel Lhotáková © Martin Rajniš Architecture Guild

12 theses

1. Diversity

Diversity of a system implies the maintenance of welcome similarities and differences among individualities. Unless everything is an original, something is missing. The opposite of diversity is monoculture.

2. Entropy

Entropy describes the level of organization and chaos in a system. A correct level of entropy is found in a naturally growing city, as opposed to an artificially planned one. The spontaneous city is closer to us. It resembles a forest, it resembles nature with its own correctly set level of entropy. As soon as chaos entirely vanishes, we cease to understand a thing as natural and it appears foreign to us.

3. Interfaces

The greatest wonders of nature occur at its interface points – such as the interface of forest and meadow, or meadow and pond. Similar interface conditions should also occur in our houses and cities: the deep interface between exterior and interior. If we do not make use of the interface, we are making a mistake.

4. Symbiosis

For billions of years, organisms lived in symbiosis. What we have to achieve is that our buildings and natural systems become symbiotic, that they mutually positively influence each other. This is not simply a question of letting them be covered with vines. It is really about both participants starting to help each other, work together, adapt.

5. Intelligent skin

Intelligent skin belongs to this symbiosis; all living organisms have an intelligent epidermis. This is their multi-layered envelope that continually changes and reacts to the changes in their environments. If our buildings are to be natural, we have to create for them a similar envelope that reacts to changes inside and out.

6. Adaptability

A plan that does not take into account that even at the moment of its realization it is imperfect and requires change, is a bad plan. We need to make things adaptable, to build buildings so that they can be easily adapted.

7. Freedom

Freedom is the twin sister of chance, with courage as her brother. Without the freedom to build – understood in the sense of free usage, modification, disrespect for heavy-handed rules – good architecture can never arise. Limitation of freedom always leads to damage to the system. Strict planning systems strangle our buildings and cities.

8. Materials

Natural materials are close to us – wood, stone, glass, water, earth, clay. And they are closer than materials that have been more thoroughly processed. They age naturally, like a person, like nature, and natural architecture is created from them.

9. Economy and ecology

There is no “ecological” house that does not have its economics in order. At the heart of any behavior of nature there is an underlying economic interest. Every plant, every organism solves everything with the greatest thrift, the greatest restraint. Whatever wastes resources to achieve its end is wrong. An expensive environmentally-friendly house is a contradiction – either it is expensive, or it is environmentally friendly.

10. Energy streams

All living organisms orient themselves towards the stream of energy that comes to us from the sun. In this stream they find a safe haven. We are impoverished as soon as we and our buildings cease to find correct orientation in this stream, to seek for and draw upon its energy.

11. Emergence, existence, disappearance

The less that a building forces itself upon nature, the more careful it is and the better it conceives its own disappearance, the more natural it is. Now, we tend more to act like tsunamis, volcanoes, earthquakes and other ‘acts of God’. Would it not be better to behave like a meadow or a forest, which knows how to appear and after a time to disappear? A natural building is a non-violent structure, requiring no maintenance, which its human user instructs with a few unassuming directions in how to serve him or her.

12. Building

Building is the very essence of architecture. Natural architecture must be tied to good building craftsmanship. If the building is not in order, the architecture is somewhere else altogether.

This is
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It's the world's largest me
It's where you discover all
It's where 650 unique des
It's where you do the best
It's where you listen to the
It's where you experience
It's the most inspiring plac
It's all about being where i
and a real meeting means

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