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BONUS :: SHATNER/ALSOP REMOVABLE ARTWORK // RED SEA SERENITY
MAESTRO OF HIS DOMAIN // FERRARI PRESIDENT EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
ORGANIC MINIMALISM // GOING BRAZILIAN



Juliën De Smedt

THE 'OUTSIDE THE BOX' INTELLECT

"With more mass, the complexities are higher and the potentials are bigger. But at the same time, when you do small things you always get back to the real questions, things like light and ventilation, things that are super important, whatever the scale."

- JULIËN DE SMEDT

After working at Rem Koolhaas' OMA for two years directly out of school, Juliën De Smedt established architectural firm PLOT along with OMA colleague Bjarke Ingels. In January 2006, after five successful years of business, Ingels and De Smedt chose to concentrate on their individual careers, with De Smedt opening JDS Architects. Known for turning rigorous research into practical design, the thirty-one year old Belgian architect has been hard at work creating not only buildings, but what he describes as 'vertical urbanisms.'

Q :: What did you mean when you said, "Why does urbanity require the erasure of urban space? Can more build mean more void?"

A :: A lot of countries want to build more square metres of useable space, like offices, parking, public facilities, but they take out public space and they don't supply back anything. It's a very simple issue, but it's an important issue to address. Because if you look at the bigger picture, the more we grow, the more urban our environment and world becomes – eventually, if you don't learn how to supply that space back, who is going to do it? Who is going to have the knowledge to do it?

Q :: An example of this would be the recent project that JDS Architects proposed for a client in Shenzhen, China?

A :: Yes. It opens up the public space below, as it has a very little footprint. It also gives a very big park at the top. These are things that, yes, they cost money, but buildings nowadays are also standing for a long time.

Q :: Can you speak to @ Gallery, the Virtual Art Gallery within the JDS website.

A :: My direct environment is very diverse. A lot of the work I do is in collaboration with artists. It is tagged as art, but I see it as architecture, all of it. The current exhibition featuring the work of Nikolaj Moller, to me, is in fact a lot about the relationship between micro and macro landscapes from the skin to an actual building. I have an increasing interest in photography in that sense and I'm working with photographers more and more to obtain different views on things.

Q :: What recent design feat are you most proud of?

A :: The Shenzhen Tower. To realize the kind of space you have

to actually completely rethink the entire form of doing a vertical building. At first, we were completely missing the point and it was a problem because we were close to deadline for the conceptual presentation. Then one night in bed, I was going through it. The problem was that we were doing a stacked building, like any other tower. But, there was simply too much area to do that. Then I thought, what is that you do with one point five million square metres? You do a city. What do you have in a city? You have urban space, you have infrastructure, and private programs mixed with public ones. Then, I woke up and went and took paper and a stapler and stapled a model. It's actually a stack of square pieces of paper and the corners are stapled, and then the next floor is twisted and stapled in the middle, and so on. From that, we understood it was a totally different thing. It's not a tower. It's a vertical urbanism.

Q :: You have done work in several cities. Is there one in particular that excites you the most to be designing projects for?

A :: Every place is interesting and has its own rules, and I think that's quite exciting. I am looking forward to this meeting on Monday (Feb. 26/07) in Montreal. The way I see it, Canada has the scale and capacity to do very interesting projects, but it doesn't have as much formality that defines America. It's a little more European in a way, which I think is a plus. I believe Toronto ranks as the most ethnically diverse city in the world, that is great ground to be doing great work. So, I hope somebody is going to call me from here!

Q :: Does this mean JDS has something in the works for Montreal?

A :: I know a developer in Montreal and I'm meeting with him. It's nothing that I can really talk about, but I like the way he works and he likes my work.

Q :: JDS' architectural language is one that uses vast, naturally lit open spaces combined with abundant green areas and rooftop terraces. Why are these features important to your designs?

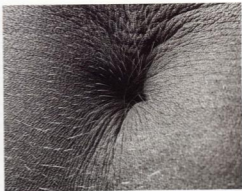
A :: How can it not be? It's a matter of enjoying life, isn't it? It's a matter of enjoying simple things, good light coming in, space to hang out. Le Corbusier made the five points of modern architecture in the twenties, and one of them was a roof terrace, and nobody's been doing it! ☺



Above :: The Shenzhen Tower, China
Renderings of interior and initial paper model



Above :: Alexanderplatz Tower
Renderings of exterior



Above :: Nikolaj Moller
Relationship between micro and macro landscapes from the skin to an actual building