

icon

The 20 essential young architects

Guest editor
Dunne & Raby

Herzog & de Meuron in Madrid

Stefan Diez

Obsolete technology returns

Plus work by Valerio Olgiati, Thomas Heatherwick and Office for Subversive Architecture



OFFICES

OMA
RotterdamOMA New York
New YorkElemental
SantiagoGuillermo Vazquez
Cansuero
BarcelonaAn Architectur
BerlinPLOT
CopenhagenDecosterd & Rahm
London, ParisPenny D'Avonine
Architects
LondonHarper Mackay
London

EMPLOYEES

80
70
60
50
40
30
20
10
0REX
Joshua Prince-Ramus (17)
Erez Eilat (10)
New YorkAlejandro
Arevena (10)
SantiagoEstudio
Barozzi Veiga
Felipe Barozzi (12)
Alberto Veiga (14)
BarcelonaFAT
Sam Jacobs (17)
Charles Holland (10)
Sean Griffiths (11)
LondonJesko Fezer (17)
BerlinBIG
Bjarke Ingels (33)
Copenhagen250
members
Architecture
for Humanity
Gerrit Stijl (15)
Kara Seiber (11)
San FranciscoSerie
Kapil Gupta (15)
Chris Lee (15)
LondonPhilippe
Rahm (10)
London6a
Tom Entwistle (10)
Stephanie Macdonald
(10)
London

SCHOOLS

Yale School of
Architecture
New HavenHarvard Graduate
School of Design
Cambridge

Jed Auer University

Malkin School
of Architecture
ChicagoBarlett School
of Architecture
LondonWeyman
University
LondonUniversidad
Católica
SantiagoIstituto
Universitario di
Architettura di
Venezia

TU Seville

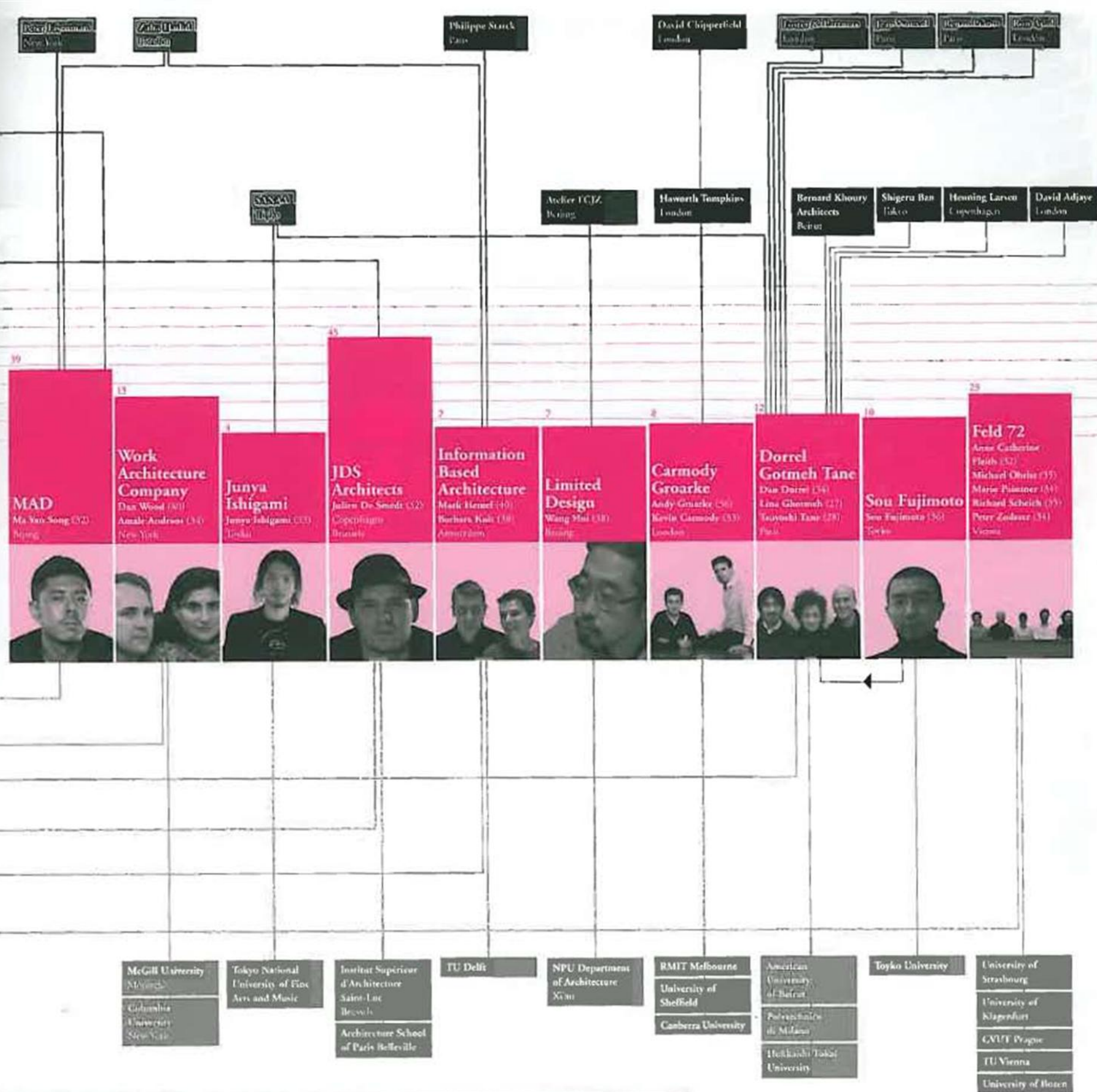
Ecole d'Architecture
de Paris La VilletteUniversity of
the Arts
BerlinRoyal Danish
Academy of
Fine Arts
CopenhagenEscuela Técnica
Superior
de Arquitectura
BarcelonaArchitectural
Association
LondonSir J College of
Architecture
MumbaiUniversity of
Plymouth

University of Bath

Royal College
of Art
LondonCambridge
UniversityLondon
Metropolitan
UniversityPolytechnic School
of LausanneSwiss Federal
Institute of
Technology
Zurich

20 young architects

Is it just us or is the young architect a very different beast these days? For the first time, "young" actually means young, but "architect" may no longer mean architect. This is our list of the most significant rising practices. Like all list stories, you'll disagree with some of it, but that's half the fun.



The first thing to mention is that the “young architect” is definitely younger than he or she used to be. We borrowed the convention of using 40 as our cut-off point, but at least half of the people on this list are 35 or under – and one of them is a 33-year-old overseeing a practice with 75 staff. Have we moved from the architect of promise to the upstart with power?

Secondly, the school of thought that architects need to build things to make their presence felt is losing currency. There are a few on this list who reflect that – these are the strategists and networkers who challenge legislation and foment debate.

Interestingly, of those who do build, by far the most successful in business terms are the

practices who were nurtured by Rem Koolhaas at OMA. There is a world of seismic competition wins and huge staff counts.

But where’s all the rebellion? There’s little sense here of a generation reacting against the ideology of its elders – perhaps that’s simply because we live in apolitical times. In fact, there are few signs of a coherent generation at all, although there are definite camps: the Children of Rem, the quiet but extremely sophisticated disciples of Zumthor and SANAA, the tower builders and the open-network activists.

This is a global list in more ways than one. You’ll find three Americans, two Japanese, two Chinese, a Chilean, an Indian and a bunch of Europeans. But increasingly these practices are international anyway, undermining notions of

national architecture – more important a crucible these days are the practices they meet at. Having said that, you’d think a British magazine might put more British architects on the list. But then, the key thing that is giving all these youngsters their big break is the culture of open architecture competitions – and that’s something this country desperately needs.

"Rock star architects...?"

laughs Julien De Smedt. "I appreciate the idea, but you know, I really hate rock and roll."

De Smedt puts his feet up on the desk in front of him and winks as its owners and our hosts, Oslo-based architect Space Group, peer into the meeting room with raised eyebrows. He puts his feet down.

Everyone's in high spirits because De Smedt's office, Copenhagen-based JDS Architects, has just been announced as the winner of the Holmenkollen Ski Jump competition — with a luminous elegant profile that promises to be one of Scandinavia's major landmarks. A second office is about to open in his native city of Brussels and his first monograph has just been published.

I first met De Smedt in Copenhagen in

2006, a few months after Plot, the practice he co-founded with Bjarke Ingels, had closed — somewhat bitterly. Although he declined to comment on the split, what was clear was De Smedt's fierce ambition about his future independent from Ingels. He opened his office with 25 staff and 20 projects at an age when most architects would be happy just to be project architect on a single building.

Belgian-born De Smedt, 33, is one of the many children of OMA to find success on their own. But as fundamental as his internship with Koolhaas was to his career, he frequently refers to seven years skateboarding on the streets of Brussels, ripping off the benches, pavements and buildings of the city, as an overarching influence. He strongly believes it has guided his approach to design and presents a theory of



architecture as one based on the real; a concern for the tactile and an ability to manipulate and play with even the most mundane of scenarios.

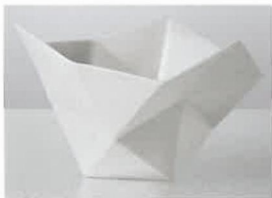
But perhaps this "streetwise" stuff more often emerges in resilience to authority, which leads in De Smedt's case to a particularly tangential logic, an inability to tolerate pretension and a hell of a lot of confidence. At best, it has the potential to give projects the rigour of Koolhaas but with the delicacy of SANAA. At worst there is ego, arguments and a jetset lifestyle that unnerves even the most faithful of clients.

His progress has been rapid for all these reasons, but it's hard to discount luck. The collaboration with Ingels, whom he met at OMA, led to five dizzy years in Copenhagen winning competitions and building some

remarkable and influential projects – from the VM Housing to the Maritime Youth house that is reminiscent of the Yokohama Ferry Terminal – all before the age of 30. "I don't think there is any comparison to what we did," says De Smedt. "It was incredible and insane. So much happened in so little time. It not only excelled in ambition but in our resolve and in scale. Somehow it's only now that we see it."

De Smedt's moments of sentimentality are rare and he is primarily interested in talking about the present. Current projects range from a one-off house in Taiwan and one of the 100 villas for Ai Weiwei in Mongolia to being in the final two for a competition for a riverside development in Rimini, and most spectacularly a commission for a 1,111m-high tower in Shenzhen – a vertical city on a massive scale.

Right: Crushed Bowl, 2007, for Muoto
Below left: The Holmenkollen Ski Jump, due for completion in 2011
Below right: Logistic City, Shenzhen
Bottom right: The Logistic City shopping centre



In contrast to the dramatic Logistic City project for Shenzhen, the appointment to build a 7,000sq m Buddhist institute in Paris was a selection by karma. "We had a cup of tea, talked about the project and that's it," says De Smedt. "They felt that the karma was right, so we got the job. It was a very pleasant way to be interviewed."

But you don't run an office on karma, and like Plot, JDS has a forceful, proactive approach to work. The practice continually enters competitions and approaches landowners with proposals. In recent weeks the Holmenkollen Ski Jump has been through some financial jitters, but it became the subject of a massive campaign of media lobbying and careful persuasion by De Smedt and was reinstated by the city. "We showed them a series of interventions. We made clear the fact that they could not discard us. Even Rem is bending over for clients when he needs to. We're just not the kind of architects that say 'Fuck it' and leave." BG

