

NON-ORDINARY (MODERN) FAMILY HOUSES & ORDINARY (TRADITIONAL) PEOPLE TASTE

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ABSTRACT

For majority of people "dream house" is quite different of that what is offered by modern architecture styling. With some examples, it is illustrated a sensibility of "ordinary people". Some of the most famous houses had different kind of problems, which decreased wide public interest for the 'art of the future'. Field of problems is sketched through relation to immediate environment and acceptance of close neighbours, content of investors with house they got, functional and constructional quality, costs and troubles that legislation process can bring. With presumption that the modern-traditional misunderstanding is globally presented, Croatian situation is described. Plenty of historical places, inherited environments and types of residential architecture from castle to modest old stone house, create a formal and spatial romanticism that is motivating in contemporary family house construction. As an opposition is strive for modernism, ideas that will be rooted in most advanced world achievement. In Croatian architectural field, modern idea is referred on examples from thirties, called 'Zagreb-moderna'. Although it is clear that majority of people these days has an ordinary (traditional) architectural taste, as a conclusion it is put that non-ordinary (modern) family house expression would be more popular in the future.

Key words: family house, modern architecture, Croatian architecture

1 INTRODUCTION

There are couple hundreds (or thousand) famous XX century family houses that are participating in the story of modern architecture. Many approaches, statements in them, different 'ismus' are making that story. Examples alike Ledoux: River Loue (1776), Wright: Robie (1908), Loos: Steiner (1910), DeStijl (1917-1931), Bauhaus (1919-1933), Rietveld: Schreder (1924), Neutra: Health (1927), Weissenhofsiedlung

(1927) Werkbundsiedlung (1932), Corbusier: Savoye(1931), Charau: Maison de Vere(1932), Mies: Tugendhat(1930), Sharoun: Schminke(1933), Invernizzi: Girasole(1935), Wright: Fallingwater(1936),Gropius: Own House(1937), Aalto: Mairea (1939), Casa Malaparte (1942), L.A. Case House Study (1945-1966), Eames:Own House(1949) ,Johnson: Glass House(1949), Mies: Farnsworth (1951), Rudolph: Millam (1962), Breuer: Stillman (1966), Meier: Smith (1967), Eisman: HouseII (1970), Graves: Snyderman (1972), Botta: Ligorneto (1976), Murcutt: Moruya (1984), Gehry: Schnabel (1989), Koolhaas: Villa d'All Ava (1991), Ando: Kidosaki (1986), Ito: S-house (1996), Holl: Stretto (1993), Herzog-deMeuron: Koechlin (1996) and so on, will give a feeling what they are as an architectural feature. Although there are many differences among these examples, common is the break with historical vocabulary and connotation of the past. They are published in leading world architectural magazines and books, they are subject of research and lectures on architectural schools, and if available targets of sightseeing for architects, architectural students, art historians and occasional laymen. Majority of people is not informed about these examples, and it is difficult to say how they would react after better acknowledgement. But according to illustrative examples and houses what people build (order) for themselves it seems that there is a serious gap between modern architecture and ordinary people sensibility.



Fig.1.Vaucesson -the Le Corbusier's first modern villa from 1922.



Fig.2.Vaucresson -the same villa from 2001.

1.1 Ordinary- non-ordinary

Ordinary taste is referring to the taste of majority of people no matter of their social or wealthy status. Their living space and structure and general idea "how an edifice should look" is mostly rooted in existing , "traditional" image of house . Mass popular taste usually do not expect that existing image of house should be transformed. Conformity in combination with historic romanticism supports a traditional outlook of house. Functional comfort improvements are acceptable ,but without break with traditional heritage (castle, villa, or vernacular architecture) . They do not read architectural magazines so that new "aesthetic propaganda" and glamorous presentation of modern examples hardly reach them.

Modern architects with non ordinary approach and futuristic romanticism are trying, with more or less success, to break an image of existing reality. Using new technical possibilities, if available new materials and anticipating a new living pattern , they try to form new structure . Sometimes it is only new design, new shape for " an old function". Results are often very personal, specific with stressed authorship, and those houses are not-ordinary, they might be a piece of art.(Wright:"House is more home by being work of art"). To the ordinary audience, they might be rather provocative, but to the future development quite inspiring.

1.2 General feeling

First modern villa designed by Corbusier, Vaucresson-Paris area, from 1922. , in a style of white plaster , clean volume 'prism pour', flat roof, strip window, ship-like fence, these days looks quite different. It has been transformed in a shape that fits more to the popular taste: pitched roof, stressed chimneys, ground floor extension with commercial information. This example says about vulnerability of modern architecture in contact with rude life. Piece of art has become a piece of daily reality.

In 1927. Buckminster Fuller made project Dymaxion House exploring all existing technological devices and anticipating some that would be invented in near future.

Three tons heavy structure with interior floor area of 144 m² was supposed to be prefabricated and mass-produced. In 1992. American project "Affordable House" came with similar aim to fulfil demands of wide population (prefabrication, mass-production), but with completely opposite expression, as a revival of traditional architecture.



Fig.3.Dymaxion-model, 1927.



Fig.4. Abacus:Affordable House-prototype, 1992.

Although in period of sixty-five years happened tremendous technological development (fantastic speeds, TV, computers, landing on Moon, etc.) techno-futuristic aesthetic of Dymaxion had to withdraw for past romanticism, quite probably because of general feeling of wide audience and consequently of success on market.

Weissenhofsiedlung in Stuttgart, as the third example, appeared as a triumph of modern architecture in 1927., but soon after become a target of fierce attack of the Third Reich architects for the sake of 'heimatstil', traditional 'deutsche' house with pitched roof and utility garden. Cosmopolitan residential architecture of "foreign blood and soil (Arabiadorf, Jerusalem suburb, etc.)" was prohibited in nazi-period and Weissenhofsiedlung was prepared to be demolish, but fortunately it did not happened. Furthermore in eighties it was renewed and announced as a national monument, luckily for modern architecture followers, but I think that ordinary feeling about this area, as a residential place, is quite cool, even today.

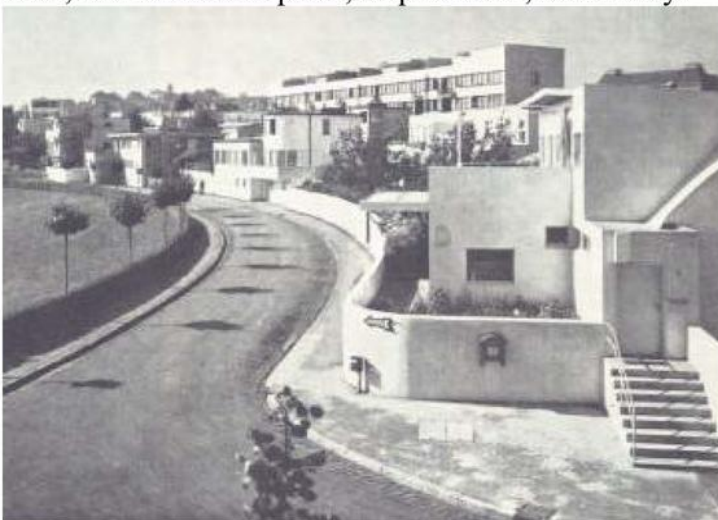


Fig5.Waissenhofsiedlung 1927.(Mies, Le Corbusier, Gropius, Scharoun, Tauts, Behrens, etc.).



Abb. 14. Araberdorf (Weißenhofsiedlung Stuttgart - Schwäb. Kunstverlag, G. Bretzger, Stuttgart. (Vgl. Schw. H.-B. 1934, Abb. 132)

Fig6. "Araberdorf"- "Heimatbuch" from 1941.

2 FIELD OF MODERN PROBLEMS

There are many reasons why modern architecture has not succeeded according to early expectations. Some of them are going to be briefly mentioned.

2.1 Neighbours

Many famous family houses have been quite unpopular among their immediate neighbours.

Last year I visited the Saint Cloud (Paris) area with attractive traditional styling villas where only one, Villa d'All Ava, was quite different. I spoke with ten neighbours from the same street: everyone disliked that edifice "that was intruding the image of neighbourhood", they knew almost nothing (and had bad feelings) about the villa inhabitants, never heard for the villa architect, neither thought he should be famous.

Neighbours of the Frank Gehry, and his own house in Santa Monica (1978.) also protested after famous architect had made a reconstruction on a previous house from 1910.that was alike many other American decent suburb house. Putting metal sheets, wire nets plastic and plywood in ad-hoc arrangement over partly demolished old construction, architect offended spatial picture and architectural taste of his neighbours. A bad consolation to them was many visits architectural students and admirers from far away.

The *Schroder House* with its obvious stylistic differences from other houses in the street and neighbourhood ran contrary to traditional sense of house image. According to Mrs.Schroder and other contemporary observers in the time of building up, crowds gathered staring at the strange form and waiting for its collapse because it was built "completely against material rightness" and probably were puzzled and offended that it had not happened.



Fig.7. Villa d'All Ava with neighbouring traditional villa
 Fig.8. The Tugendhats kids on the villa terrace in 1933.

2.2 Clients

Who are the clients for these non-ordinary modern buildings?

In his memoirs Richard Neutra described his excitement about Wright's Robie House and his wish to visit it and meet Mr. Robie, the investor, and to see his feelings about house that he got. Neutra described his visit in 1923: *"Mr. Robie? Never heard of him- answered Mrs. Wilson living there who had bought the house some years back, and was probably the fifth owner. She wasn't at all enthusiastic about it, but had bought the house because it was very cheap. She didn't particularly like the house, and she had all kind of petty criticisms. Nothing was working- at that time the house was some fifteen years old, and badly neglected"*, and further: *"I had almost the same experience in practically every one of the places which I finally spotted, everywhere the story was similar. People...who had ordered this thrilling architecture of the future...were not to be found. For the most part the inhabitants and their furnishings seems sorry misfits, but their houses were every bit as beautiful as I had expected...I had arrived in fairyland, but fairies had gone. And the occupants of the of the enchanted forest looked entirely inconsistent and contradictory to what their setting called for."* Neutra, pp.180.

In seventies I visited three of Wright's houses, and in all three, their inhabitants were very pleased with them.

When built, the Villa Tugendhat was seriously criticised from both professionals (questioned functionality, *"too luxurious and frivolous"*) and laymen, but the best and resolute defend came from the Tugendhats, his investors who *"were very satisfied with house and architect"*. They lived there from 1930-1938, but many years later, their son who spent in villa a part of his childhood said that *"the house was not very comfortable and his parents were not be taken too seriously since they were rather bizarre people"*.

One of the worst scandal with architect-client spoiled relation has been in 1950s when the Mies-Dr.Farnsworth case finished on the court. Campaign against Mies, at that time was orchestrated by the magazine "House Beautiful" whose the owner was W.R.Hearst.



Fig. 9..Mies van der Rohe: Farnsworth House,1951.



Fig.10. J.Morgan:W.R.Hearst Castle (1919-40)

2.3. Function, construction and costs

"There is an idea called 'functionalism' that is often associated with modern architecture; in fact even by well-informed people modern architecture is often described as 'functionalistic'...and this is entirely untrue" is completely acceptable statement of J.M.Richards. 'Modern' and 'functional' are not synonyms."One house can be modern in appearance - traditional in organisation" (Wittic). Modern house may easily lack comfort and functional quality, and many famous examples have very dubious solution. In Ando's Horiuchi House (1979), parent's bedroom is on the second floor and the closest WC and bathroom is in basement.

Floor area might be out of rational analysis need but also uncontrolled spend 'for the aesthetic sake of space'. Use of expensive materials can enormously rise the cost -but not durability guarantee, too). That "less" might costs "more" is proved on the Villa Tugendhat which total floor area is about 1.200 m². "It is stressed that no less than thirty standard family houses could be built on the same budget"(V.T. brochure).

The no.1 among villas, the Villa Savoye also had enormous costs, although central heating was not installed and construction for the all time of use (1932-1939) had problems with waterproofing, leaking and dampness. On 7 September 1936, six year after the villa completion Mme.Savoye wrote to Corbusier: "It's raining in the hall, it's raining on the ramp and the wall of garage is absolutely soaked. What's more, it's still raining in my bathroom, which floods in bad weather, as the water comes in through skylight. The gardener's walls are wet through"-(Sbriglio: Villa Savoye, pp.146)

In his own house Frank Gehry also had problem with leakage and many silicon protection had been undertaken to stop water in.

2.4 Legislative

Uniqueness of some modern house is in breaking the existing legislative. It is really unclear and puzzling how they had got all needed building permits. They are often completely different from houses of their surroundings, or are located on the sites in prohibited areas (Casa Malaparte), and it is evident that regulative is distorted. To break and avoid rules demands an additional effort in house legalisation, what might be quite long and uncertain. Many potential investors would rather not take risk, and

instead of problematic modern house problems in procedure they will pick up standard conformist solution .

In Zagreb, alike in all Croatia, for many decades until recently, urban plans prohibited erection of family houses with flat roofs. That rule definitely weakened the position of modern architecture, and examples that had appeared with 'flat roof modernism' are again result of rule 'smuggling' and 'improvising'.

In the pitched roof raw house street, for the Schroder House in Utrecht, a tricky device was to sign its first floor as an attic and probably some strong support from aside.

There are some projects that are so specific and unique, that almost any kind of regulation might be an obstacle for its imagination and realisation. What kind of rules could provoke an architecture as in fascinating Villa Girasole from 1935.?



Fig. 11 A.Invernizzi: Villa Girasole rotation.

3. CROATIAN SITUATION

Situation in Croatia referring relation toward houses of modern architecture houses is based on a field of similar problems that I have mentioned. On one hand there is modern ambitions and strive to use any possibility to exploit modern thinking-on another hand there is a wide base of people who prefer traditional expression of their house. Both sides, "they who are making ugly, inappropriate, non-houslike houses" and "they who prefer kitch , naïve past themes reinterpretation or tasteless boast" have some referential points from the Croatian space.

3.1 Heritage



Fig. 12

Dvorac Trakošćan-the most popular castle in Zagorje, erection started in XIV century, renewed in XIX

Croatian territory is full of different historic examples of residential architecture in the scope from the highest level to the modest living edifice, from Roman imperial Diocletian Palace in Split to attractive stone masonry clusters (Adriatic area) or traditional wooden houses (continental part). In the district of Hrvatsko Zagorje northern from Zagreb, on the area of hardly 1000 square km, there about 90 castles and manor houses, in the area of Slavonija 60 more, all from XVI-XIX century in the style of medieval architecture, baroque, classicism and historicism. Around Dubrovnik there are 20 preserved summer residence, 50 in ruins (200 registered) for their noblemen from XV-XVIII century. Many picturesque historic towns are filled with dwelling units, as well as villages with old vernacular houses. That entire heritage, often escorted with idealised and much more favourable image of life, than it really had been, has made very romantic sensitivity toward traditional architecture.

Image of continental castles give a feeling of being historically part of Mitteleurope, part of respectable, civilised world, it is neglected bloodshed in and around that castles but pointed nice feature in as painting, music, poetry, fashion and style. Image of Adriatic towns is feeling of good weather and favourable mild climate, open hearth and pleasant people, good song and healthy food, and of course relax by the sea. Many in these days, making own house, especially if it is on the Adriatic area, would rather imply red tile (more than one) roof, grilled shutters, and possibly some arches- not for the reason of static but for the sake of romantic.

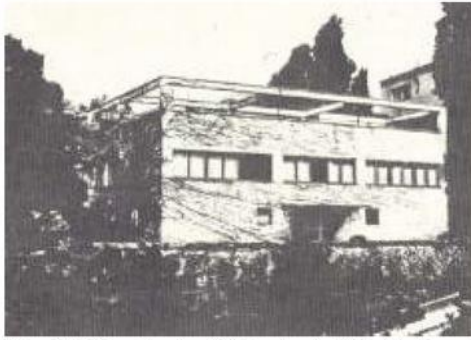


Fig. 13

Kaštel Gomilica, near Split-stone cluster with peasants' houses, from XVI century growing on

3.2 Zagreb -Moderna

In the thirties (1928-1940) in Croatia, mostly in Zagreb, under influence of Loos, Corbusier, Weissenhofsiedlung, the Czechoslovakian 'functionalists', excellent examples of modern villas were made. They were a part of that time modern dream - pure, geometric cubes, straight line, volume without, décor and ornament, windows without frames, no gutter, no roof - dream. There was a quite illusion that everything was scientifically elaborated: static, light, hygiene, function, etc. Getting rid of pitched roof was liberating from past, conclusion to forget what had been and to start from the zero-point. Motivating motto was "to live and to create in a spirit of own time". Thirty, forty single family villas together with similar style edifices of other residential types and function function (tenant buildings, schools, offices), sensibility and philosophy they provoke, are called today 'Zagreb-Moderna'. Architects and villas are: Vidakoviæ: Pfeiferman (1928), Auer: Own House (1929), Šterk: Radan (1931), Neuman: Klaiæ (1931), Ibler: Beer (1931), Kauzlariæ & Gomboš: Spitzer (1932), Aranjoš: Suden (1932), Uhrlich: Matica (1932), Antolia: Blaž ekova (1934), Ostrogoviæ: Malinska (1936), Weissman: Kraus (1936), Cota:Deutch (1937), Galia: Own House (1938), and others. Clients were "wealthy cosmopolites".



*Fig. 14 Kauzlarica & Gomboš: Vila Spitzer, Zagreb, 1932, for the owner of the Velenje /Slovenia/ coal-pit
 Fig.15 F.Cota: Vila Deutch, Zagreb, 1937, villa with elevator, built for the three wealthy single sisters*

It has become a myth and strong reference for a number of architects and architectural critics, these days. Its value is presented in Architectural faculty education, it is influential in getting awards and elite professional respect, and it opens way to our architectural magazines.

Being modern supports an idea of global culture, symbolically is futuristic orientation.

3.3.Gap

The ordinary people do not read architectural magazines, they do not visit architectural exhibitions, and their romanticism is often historically oriented. In analysis of Zagreb-moderna it has never been stressed the importance of investors who wanted new architectural ideas to implemented on their houses, because even today sort of clients who are preferring modern architectural thinking is rare. There is prejudice that modern design complicates things referring costs of building and maintenance , quality of structure and details, and real fear because of problems in legislative procedure . All that makes orientation on proved traditional slanted roof house, more or less formally developed, depending on means and ambitions. Ordinary somehow has a taste of traditional.



*Fig. 16 The Pregrada Castle, built 1993-01, idea and rough sketch of the owner, post- socialistic tycoon
 Fig. 17 Dvorac Vrbanja, built from 1982./period of socialism/ to these days, picture from 1999., idea, design and big deal of realization made by owners-lady is school teacher and poet, and her husband*

Recently, 'modernists' launched a severe attack in an ironical way on bad taste frivolous and superfluous boast of recently made post-socialist tycoon villas with an inappropriate



Fig. 18 I.Crnković: Family House Proložac, Imotski, 1983.



Fig. 19 V.Penezic&K.Rogina: Family House, Zagreb, 1998.

pastiche of historic vocabulary. Jovial criticism of form without analysis of functional and constructive value had a limited influence on wide public opinion, but probably made some rethinking in wider architectural circles.

These days in Croatia there are not as much modern family houses as we would like to be, but there quite enough to keep away any complex of provinciality and to keep in touch with contemporary global happenings. Intentions and struggles are similar to those in thirties, when one of protagonists said that house should be *"as it has been done in the world"*.



Fig. 20 D.Kovačić: Family house Meje, Split, 2000.



Fig. 21 Studio 3 LHD: Vila Klara, 1997-99.

4.CONCLUSION

For the time being definitely majority of people, "ordinary people" , do not accept non-ordinary "modern" houses, but increasing knowledge about logic of construction, quite probably will transform feelings about house expression, signs and symbols.

Maybe modern pioneering examples were only 1:1 models (mock-ups). Many of these famous houses from the first part of century are deserted now and they cannot be tested in full living circumstances. Family houses and villas in style of modern architecture although had failings and problems, should be an important way of thinking, because that thinking in general has a future orientation. It seems quite logical that new materials and technologies should not be tamed for the sake of problematic historic romanticism, they must express their potentialities. Stone, timber logs, brick tiles, small pieces of glass and iron cannot make the same house and the same expression as reinforced concrete, steel, glass sheets, aluminium and waterproof plywood. Sincerity and logic sounds better than fake and imitation. Also a style of life in past was not so idealistic as it might look in our fiction, and new style (lets hope better than previous one) could get new formal outlook more appropriate for new coming generations.

A family house- is powerful field of ideas and can rise an attention in the world of architecture. Modern art and architecture if were not the main and dominant style in culture of XX century, might become in XXI century.



Fig. 22 Lenko Pleština: *The View House*, 2000, (3D-model)

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