

The Post Punk Creator of Dissonant Architecture

Interview with

IDIS TURATO

Not so often, there is a chance to sit and talk with people who are interested in the intriguing side of the problem of the project. No matter what is the nature of that problem the solution might be slightly out of a comfort zone – esthetically or functionally. The first impression might picture the chaos and disorder, but when getting to the bottom of the concept one might actually discover the beauty of contradictions in it. Those same contradictions attracted the creator to become bold enough to jump into another architectural reality and threat the problem differently. The exact same thing is responsible and can be described as the situation distinguishing individuals from the mainstream and leads the modern practice towards new ways of its existence and development.



Source: Idis Turato (Photo Maja Bosnic)

If you are a decedent of the 60s from the 20th century, you may recall the new musical wave that totally changed the course of development in musical industry by implementing dissonant melody. Also, if you are from the 80s and you grow up with the sound of electronic music you will also be familiar with the unexpected turn of rhythm or samples within the songs. The same thing happened with the architectural scene at that time. However, in the region of Balkan that was not so widely spread trend. There were music but not punk architects. Therefore, architect Idis Turato is one of the rare examples of an architect that kept this unique spirit of creation still alive even today.

Turato (born in 1965) is an architect, professor, musician and above all very interesting creative mind. He founded RandicTurato office in 1992 with architect Sasa Randic and latter in 2009 he founded the independent architectural office Turato Ltd. in Rijeka. Among his most acclaimed and awarded projects are aula of Pope *John Paul II* in Rijeka, project for sports hall, square and kindergarten Katarina Frankopan on Krk island, Nest and Cave house in Opatija, house Gumno on Krk island and many more.

He has received numerous architectural awards including Croatian Architects Association Award (CAA) Viktor Kovacic, for the most successful architectural achievement, Vladimir Nazor Award, which is annually awarded by Croatian Ministry of Culture for the best artistic accomplishment, CAA Drago Galic, for the most successful realization in residential architecture as well as the international Piranesi Award. He was nominated eight times for the European Prize Mies van der Rohe. He received his PhD in 2012 and is teaching at the Faculty of Civil Engineering, Architecture and Geodesy in Split and at the Faculty of Architecture, University of Zagreb.

This is a short story about a single voice in architecture that is so rare and inherent that the creation alone can play the perfect concert.



Hall and Square on Krk
Source: Idis Turato (Photo Jure Zivkovic)



Hall and Square on Krk
Source: Idis Turato (Photo Idis Turato)

The architecture is not just a job, it is a tradition in your family – many of your relatives and close family members were actually architects. How this tradition did influenced or maybe constrained you or your work?

Turato: For me it was a bit different path because I realized latter in my life that I should be practicing architecture. It wasn't my first choice of study but after a while I realized that I should go to Zagreb and finish the Faculty of Architecture. The family traditions helped me to demystify the architecture very early. I was a witness of my father's work – all the tourist resorts along the Adriatic coastline in the 60s – and it helped me to understand the role of an architect in the world. That is the reason why I don't believe in classical inspiration because I realised a long time ago that the architecture is a very long process. It is far away from the picture that is presented to young kids in the high school – as some sort of infatuation, artistic and dissolute profession. It is very opposite – it is very complex but extremely inspirational profession which can be enlivened. That was very important to me.

I realized that when you are an architect you may stay an architect constantly. This profession is not like a dentist where you have certain part of the day with working hours as dentist and dedicate the rest of the day to something else. When you are an architect you may create things through the whole day – as 24/7. When I

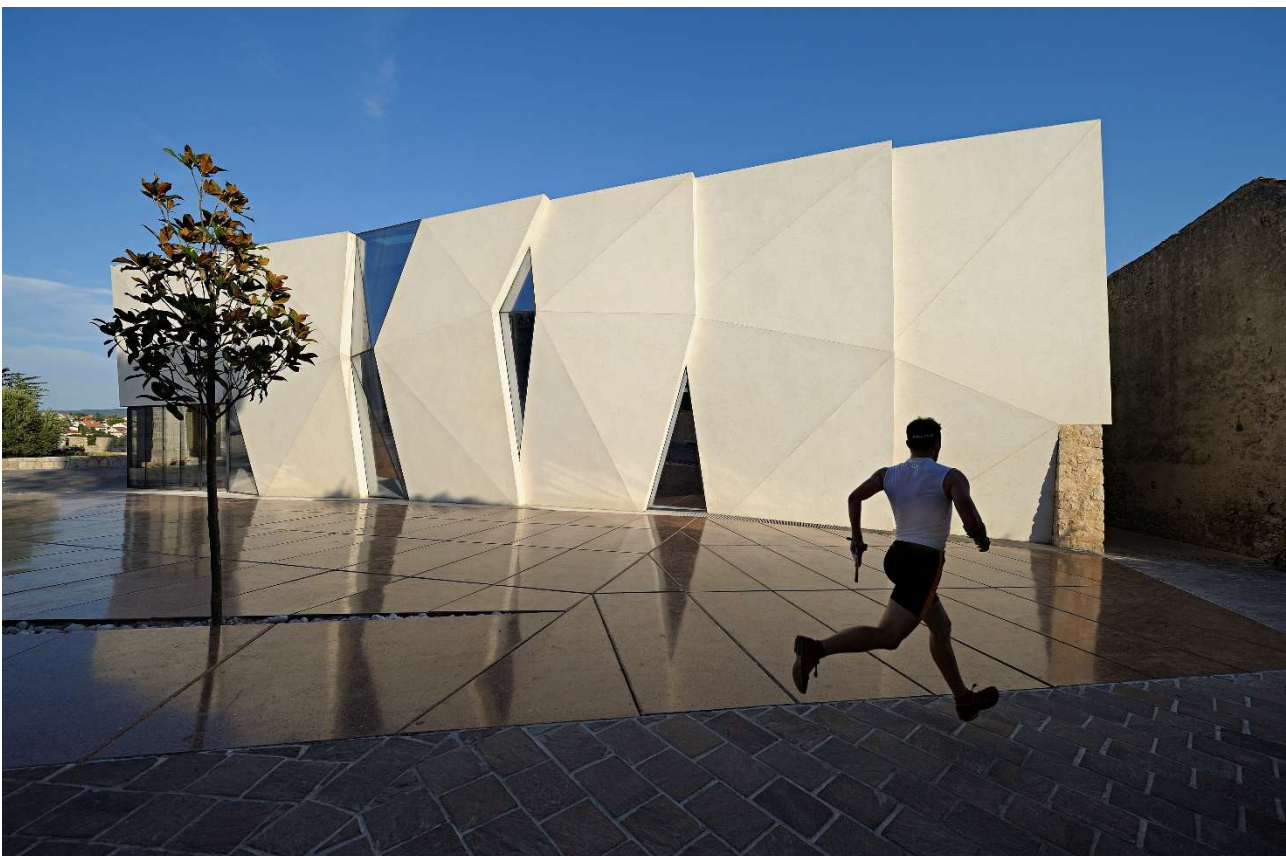
realized that I've decided that this profession is much more suitable for my creative spirit then to finish something else and spend the rest of my days playing the bass. I wanted to have very meaningful relationship with the future profession. The profession that can be lived 24/7 but through various contexts – that is how I see architecture.

Before you become an architect you played bass guitar. Do you still play it sometimes?

Turato: I do play it but only for my soul and my friends. Yes, I was a musician before I became an architect. The experience I gained from playing in a band is quite similar as working in architectural office. There must be an order and equal relationship but then again you are always aware who can play solo in the office and who is the main rhythm or back guitar.

How does music define you? How it influences your work?

Turato: Sometime, in my lectures, I showcase a strong inspirational situation that comes from music industry. Take Liam from Prodigy for example: the founder of music group which first started to sample their music with a synthesizer named "prodigy". By inserting and combing samples of melodies, rhythms and different music styles they created new relationships and new



Hall and Square on Krk
Source: Idis Turato (Photo Sandro Lendler)



Gumno House
Source: Idis Turato (Photo Ivan Dorotic)

music. Or take the musician Nick Cave: in the song "Where the Wild Roses Grow" with Kylie Minogue, he is talking about the murder being with the most beautiful women of Earth. You have so gently women voice and sour lyrics which is indeed in contradiction. Another example can be the USA's band that used dissonant accords and notes by adapting their guitars with restricted tools so the guitar stays dissonant and produces different sounds. This is completely new relation to the instrument, theme and the final product – the song. I am doing that same thing in my architecture. I can describe it as inflicting pain to some walls of other elements and combine them in a new

special relation and composition. So, it could be said that the music explained to me how I should practice the architecture. I am a decedent of a post-punk music generation creating dissonant pictures of our reality.

In your work we can acknowledge so called duplicity of creation – known and less recognized meaning of correlation or dialogue between the existing and the built environment. Why is that so?

Turato: For me, honestly, the specific situation within the urban environment always drove my attention as a



Gumno House
Source: Idis Turato (Photo Igor Crnkovic)



Gumno House

Source: Idis Turato (Photo Ivan Dorotic)

sort of contradictions. This can be explained by my field of interests because I am a kid of pop culture. When you look at the most beautiful cities, those cities are the most contradict places! Take a Venice for example: who on Earth would build a city on water in the middle of a lagoon?! This could be explained as a type of fear from the attack in the middle ages that created some kind of error. From this way of thinking we have a magnificent floating Mediterranean city. Another example can be New York city and the island of Manhattan: we have a typical north American urbanism with high density and too high buildings with strong geometry for that particular location. However, the secret and the beauty of New York lies in that picture of unusually high buildings. These extreme contradictions are very interesting to me. Generally speaking, I love them in a light of unexpected connections or correlations. When you have an opportunity to collies two different things, then it can be very surprising situation. When you synthesize two opposite things the result can be quite different and sometimes I do that on purpose. I look at it as a kind of laboratory – synthetize the ingredients in a correct order and with adequate measure, proportion, the so called “tools” of architecture and wait for the result that needs to have some kind of meaning. I strongly believe in some of those tools. Even if you are working on some chaotic structure it needs to have some order inside it. First, comes the scenario: Why am I even doing it? Then comes: Which are the ingredients in that context? And finally, at the end: I am working on creating something totally surprising!

Since the context is very important to you, which one is more interesting: the built or the natural?

Turato: It doesn't matter the nature of the context. More important is the unique signature of that particular context or a kind of unique problem connected to it. Honestly, I am not making difference between the urban and the natural environment. It is hard to distinguish what is natural today because we can testify that there is nothing left from the original natural environment. Everything is adapted according to our needs.

If I have to choose I would like to make something out of the city, out of the urban area. I would like to get an assignment to create something that will be part of or in the middle of infrastructure, industry or ecology.

It is very interesting that your users are extremely important to you work. Would you explain this a bit more?

Turato: That is the most important thing for an architect. I always start from the problem that future user/client brings on the table. That situation makes me necessary. I always have some kind of forethought, or how would I like to realize some project but still the particular problem comes from the client. The more bizarre problem, the challenge becomes bigger. Even when none of my colleagues wants to do the particular project I am still in, as a cleaner or as a last resort. Honestly, that is the reason why I am still in the business because I don't have fearful nature and I am open to any kind of collaboration. The problem behind the project challenges me, not the object itself. The building is an effect of scenario and/or the story behind the project.

The main accent is on solving the unique nature of the project. Whether the problem lies within the context, or the owner, or the typology, or the finances. I adore problems!

The essence of architecture is the family home as you have declared few times – it is a place of the beginning and of the end, the place of the most beautiful moments. In your work there are many family residences of different sizes and programs. Would you live in some of your creations?

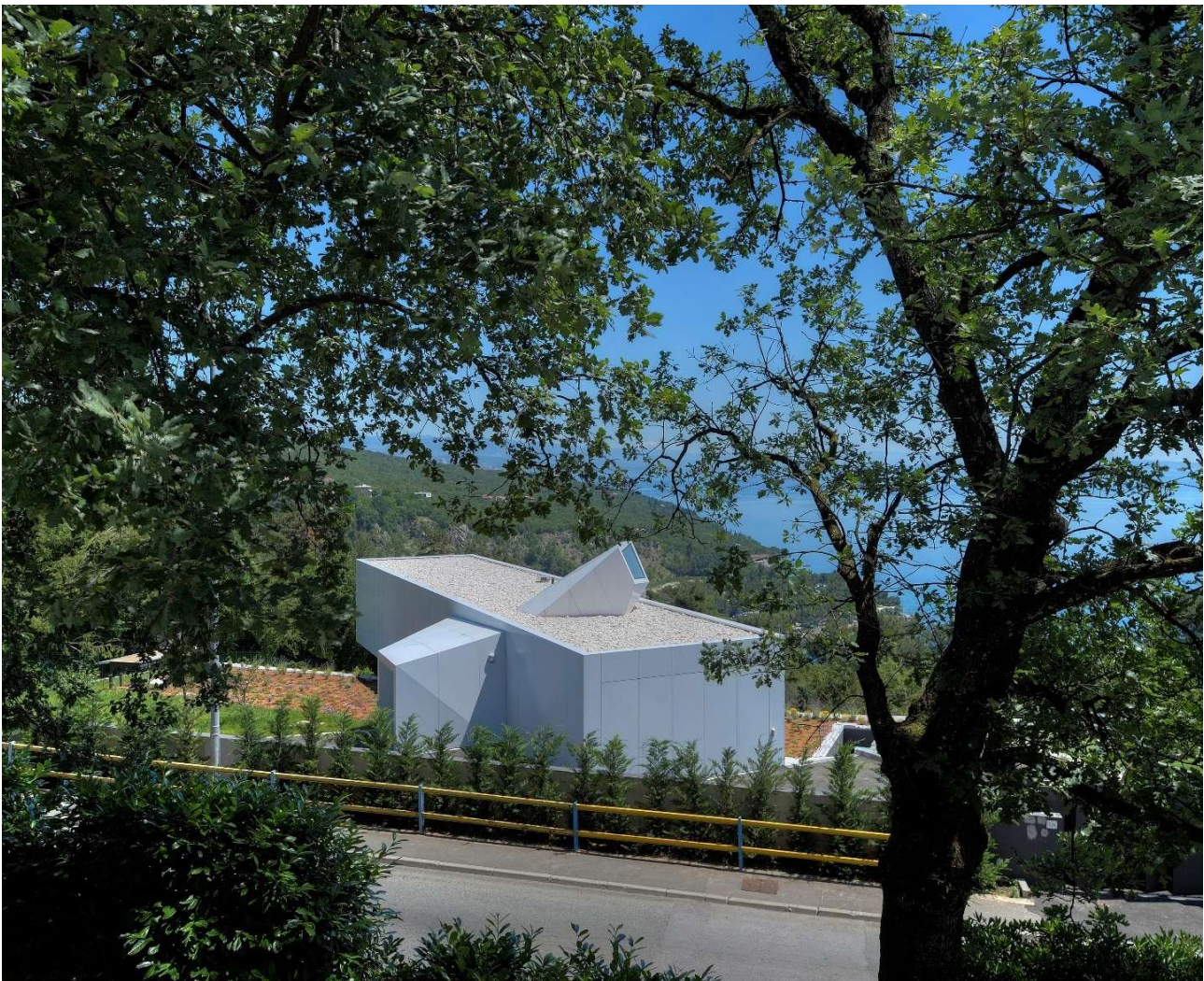
Turato: No, I am living in an old apartment from 1910s. For now, I am certain that I wouldn't be happy to live in one of my own projects. I love to live in a space which I haven't create. I like my apartment because it gives me a sense of piece. It is very introverted which is opposite from my projects which always have a spectacular view. I wouldn't like making my own house. It gives me much greater pleasure working on a project than living in it.

Is that because of special relationship you have with your clients?

Turato: Yes, it has to do with that because I need the other side of the project. I can't do that on my own.

Where do you find the inspiration for your projects?

Turato: I am very curious person. I am always looking at things, whether they are positive or negative. I am analysing them all the time. I am looking for my own answers to the existing problem. Frankly speaking, in a matter of artistic side of inspiration – so called classical inspiration – it doesn't exist within myself in that old fashion. I think that is some kind of myth from the late 19th century connected to the impressionism, which disappeared over time. My inspiration comes from a line of impacts on the location, an analysis and a group of elements that I intend to combine. Each and every day I am looking for new sources of influences.

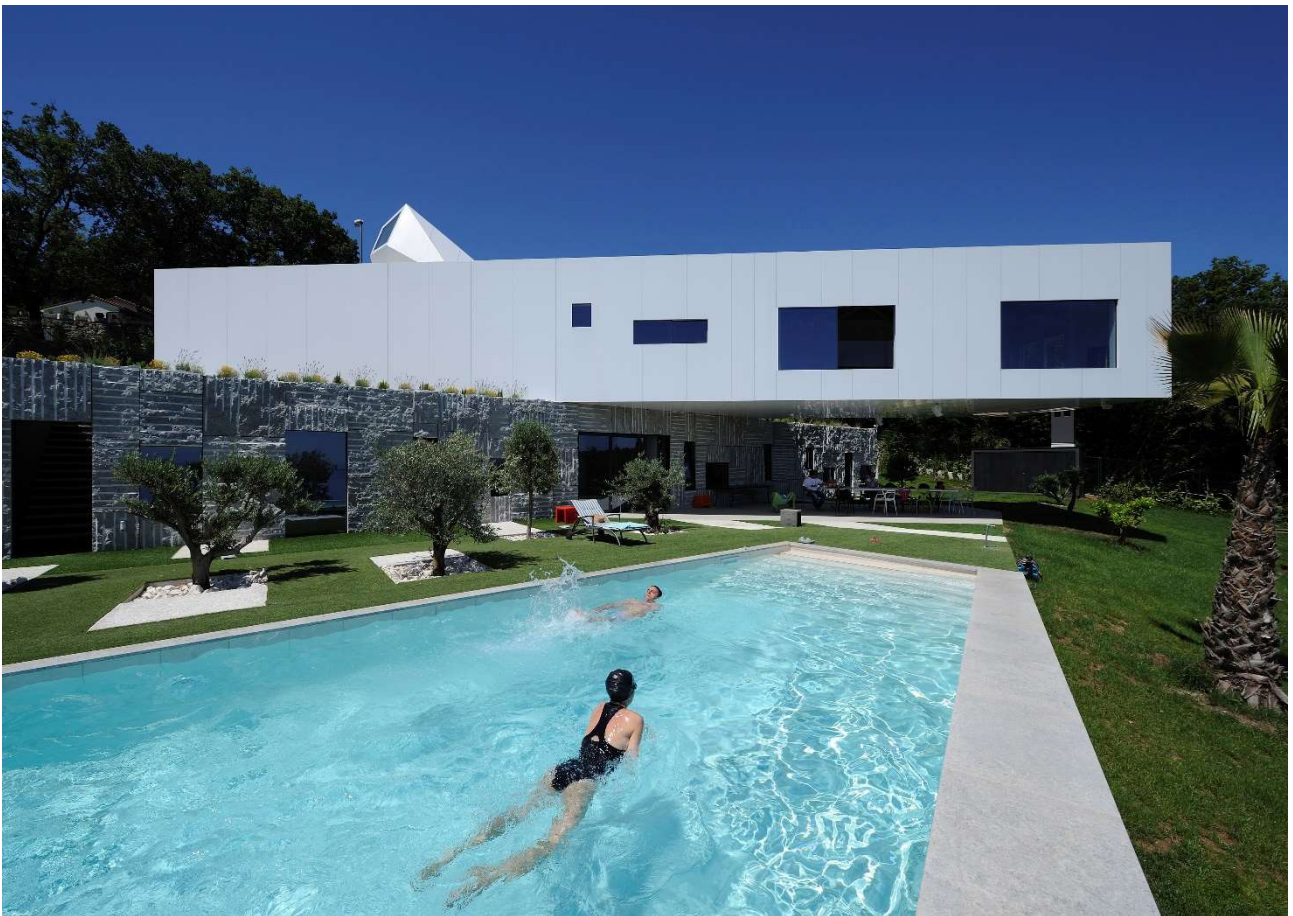


Nest and Cave

Source: Idis Turato (Photo Sandro Lendler)



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You are famous for the certain style in architecture. Does this situation helping you with your future work or not?

Turato: I must say that in a last decade people are more trustful towards me and that is the advantage of that certain affirmation. It is much easier to accomplish the ideas and it is much easier for the public to accept them. People can see the built structure and can rely on me to finish their projects. The bad side of this situation is that people are expecting something already seen. This puts me in a position that it might be opposite from my real picture. It could be just a segment of me and my work, or my past. It is not necessarily everything that I am and that I can do.

You are an architect, musician, professor and researcher. Which role do you prefer?

Turato: I can't separate one from another. All of these roles are important to me. I need them all but not to play big and important man but to test the theory in practice, e.g. each role gives me other point of view a sort of laboratory experiment conducted on the same project. I like to be involved in the education because I intend to intrigue young generations. I like to impel people to be

curious and to study and solve particular problems within the projects. At the moment I am working with a group of students from the Zagreb's and Ljubljana's faculties on the revitalization of an old hotel above the city Opatia on the Adriatic coast. This particular hotel became a generic station – a model of hotels that should be built along the shoreline of Croatia in the mid-50s. However, the building never lived its glory days and only one was built. Today this building is a ruin and it is protected by the law as a historical heritage. The question is: Why did this structure failed? Is it because of its function, or bad connection with the rest of the village, or construction, or the lack of typology itself? Nobody can be sure of the right reason why this structure failed. In addition, on the other hand it is not possible to build that kind of building today because of its characteristics (construction, energy efficiency, ...). Thought the series of conversations with different actors and with the help of different analysis the answer might come up. This is how I am investigating the future and the possibilities. I believe that this is the great potential of each and every faculty. The experience from this kind of work is being transformed to my own projects. Therefore all of my roles are important and they are like connected dots that can't be separated.

We have to look back at our Balkan heritage and region as a place of realisation of the projects. It is not the best possible place for architects with a bold attitude and different projects but which building and/or which author from the Ex-Yugoslavian architectural history is the most interesting and/or important to you?

Turato: There are maybe 3-4 architects who are crucial for me and my development but I wish to emphasize something else. The man isn't capable of running from his origins. I don't find this region (the Balkan) less inspirational or harder to work with. We are just living on this land that has been always called "in between" or in the middle of the East and the West – the land of the crossroads. Honestly, I find this very interesting, maybe even as a great situation. When you are living in this type of space, the result can never be perfect and continues in any sense because of the influence and the judgment you are receiving from each side. The only thing that is certain in this region is the discontinuity.

My hometown was built as an extension of the harbour's infrastructure and it could be stated that it was based on the conflict between the East and the West. This situation helped me a lot. I love that sort of differences that gives birth to unbelievable tension. Our region was always very restless and I think that is a good thing. It is not so important how we are dealing with the situation on our own terrain but I think it is much harder to become a globally recognized architect if coming from the Balkan. No matter how similar we might think and understand the profession, no matter how original we are as our European colleagues we will always suffer from the lack of freedom of practicing our work outside the region.

If I have to recall some architect from our region, I must give huge recognition to Nikola Dobrovic and the famous military Headquarters in Belgrade that was heavily destroyed by bombing. The structure is still standing beautiful as the first day witnessing the greatness of its creator. Dobrovic was the magnificent architect equal to some other great architects from the Europe and the Headquarters building was maybe the best building ever built in our region from that time.

There is a sort of confusion about the green architecture and urbanism. What is the right way to do it and to deliver it? What is a sober or rational way of thinking and perusing that green goal that we gave to ourselves?

Turato: I have a problem with today's green architecture! I don't believe that what we are doing right now and what we are learning today is the only vision of sustainability. We are starting with a location and I do not think that any architect wants to create unsustainable architecture on any location, not today

and not in the past or in the future. We are not the problem, the problem is somewhere else. I really don't believe that this green architecture that we are applying today (e.g. putting some kind of insulation on the wall or putting some smart installation on the roof that will tell us whether it is good to stay in this space or not – some red paranoia according to some thermostat) shows all the faces of sustainability. I really believe that cities like Kotor or St. Stefan are sustainable cities. However, maybe Porto Montenegro is not so sustainable after all.

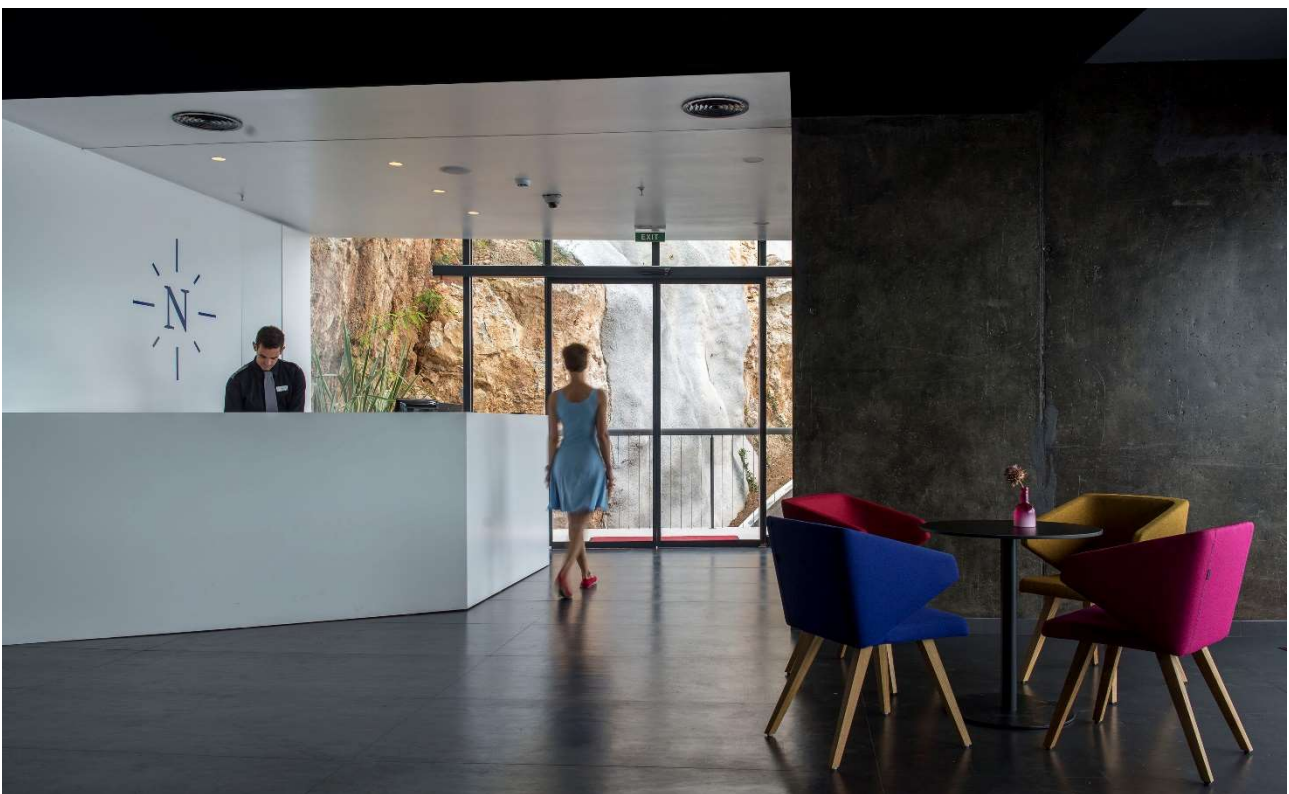
Honestly, I believe that the architecture must be sustainable. That is not questionable at all! Even in the past, it has always been sustainable. Very rare the architecture becomes some sort of gest, trick or monument and of course it doesn't have to be sustainable under all conditions. If you look at the Triumphal Arch in Paris, you will see that the building is sustainable. It serves as a marker of the important event, which is more a social sustainability. When you look at the high tower for example no matter how strange the building looks like it was still built as a sustainable structure. If you look at the three circles of sustainability (society, economy and environment) you may always agree that the building is still made as a sustainable building in the context of one of these circles. That is the reason why I said that the old Mediterranean cities are sustainable – they are built with stones, on rocky location, for local fishermen and traders. The problem comes from the standards that prescribe that these rooms must have temperatures of 22–25°C.

When I was young, in the mid-70s, I slept in the same kind of the stone house where the temperature of the room was only 15°C and I covered myself with much thicker blanket. Back in the days, the houses were much less heated than today but that house was still sustainable. That thicker blanket was today's insulation applied to the walls. Therefore, nobody can make me believe that my house wasn't sustainable for that time. The difference comes out when we look at the "rules" of sustainability from another point of views. When someone says that we have to be able to walk inside our house dressed only in t-shirts or shorts even in the middle of a cold winter, that is the time when the problem of sustainability gets its turn. Instead of adequate clothing suddenly we have inadequate building. The standards have been changed over time and we got ourselves stuck with all existing buildings that are somehow now unsustainable – which is not always the case.

My grandmother had a garden in our own backyard. We foster fruits and vegetables and my family didn't go to a shopping centre to buy groceries – we had it in our own yard and we have been very sustainable. Today we call it urban gardening and it is very rare but back in the days



Hotel Navis
Source: Idis Turato (Photo Ivan Dorotic)



Hotel Navis
Source: Idis Turato (Photo Maja Bosnic)



Hotel Navis

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that was implicit to every household. Then, one day somebody said that we can't foster plants anymore and that is the paradigm of sustainability. This is the reason why I have a "problem" with sustainability. When someone claims that only photovoltaic panels, insulation and geothermal pumps are the only type of sustainability I can't agree with that statement. I can agree that those segments are just one part (the technical part), but those parts are not the only side of sustainability. By my opinion, I think that the term "suitability" become o sort of myth nowadays and lost its true meaning.

What do you think is the future of architecture and what is the architecture of the future?

Turato: The architecture will always have a future. It means that as long as there are gravitation, Sun and

people the architecture will be inconsumable. The essence of architecture – the space itself – will always exist. I honestly believe in the certain surprise with the space that can be compared with the physical fascination – e.g. getting chills when you enter the building. New technologies can help us to better walk along the physical or virtual space but we will still deal with the basic of that space – the walls, floors or ceilings. The only difference will be the influence on these elements – some new kind of medium that will have its' influence on structure. I believe in the future! The past doesn't interest me at all. I consider myself as a futurist of the digital era and I am more interested in what is coming next?! The possibilities are unbelievable and I am so curious about the next level. The certain anxiety about peoples' lives and instability is responsible for a new order where the only thing that is certain is the uncertainty. However, the architecture will remain and develop in the mirror of the coming ages.

Interview: Mirjana Uzelac Filipendin M. Arch.