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interviewed by:
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Guy Perry:

“We Seek to Build in a Timeless Way”

» Guy Perry is a French American architect and urban planner with development and design experience on five continents. Prior to founding INVI, Guy was Senior Vice President with Trizec Hahn overseeing the design and development of projects throughout Europe. Among them the development strategy and award winning master-planning of the 169 hectare Wilanów (Warsaw) community. As well as two winning entries for the 27 hectare Palma de Mallorca port redevelopment competition. Guy was also Vice-President of HOK Intercontinental and worked 7 years with Kajima Corporation in Tokyo, Paris and Brussels as Project Manager on a range of developments. Early in his career Guy worked for Ricardo Bofill on the design of projects like the Barcelona Olympics, the Antigone district of Montpellier, France and the SWIFT head quarters in Brussels. For SOM he designed a bank facility in the San Francisco bay area. He redesigned Houston’s principal city park with the late Charles Moore and studied growth strategies for downtown Houston for Hines and Cadillac Fairview.

- When and where did you work with Ricardo Bofill?

- I worked in 1984 and 1985 in Barcelona. The office was in a converted cement factory in the outskirts of the city. I have not had the opportunity to work in such a wonderful physical office environment since! I started work on my 22nd birthday. I had come over from Rice University, where I had completed my undergraduate studies in Architecture. Ricardo Bofill was willing to give me a chance, since the University had recommended me and his top designer at the time was a graduate from Rice 6 or 7 years before. It was my first long term full-time job.

- What was Barcelona like in the mid 80's?

- Spain in general was undergoing a rapid transition. It was on track to join the EU, but had a lot of catching up to do after decades of Franco rule. Barcelona was one of the most creative places on the planet at the time. As if something had been held back for an entire generation and was suddenly released. The Catalan people were proud, confident of their city and confident of their ability. Architects were really respected even considered leaders. The mayor was rightly a big supporter of Catalan design talent. It was a much grittier city than today, you really felt like you were on the cutting edge at the time. The city was going after the Olympics, but we had the sense that the city was going to change regardless of whether we got the games... My Barcelona years were like a dream experience... they gave me the confidence that cities could be transformed, while not losing their essence, in a matter of years not decades.

- Do you see comparisons between Spain of the 80's and Central Europe or Ukraine today?

- Absolutely, this is probably why most of my work is in transition markets today like Poland and Ukraine.

Central Europe is now benefiting from the same support and transition mechanism that Spain benefited from during the 80's. Ukraine does not have the same EU subsidies as the Accession countries, but it does have an enormous amount of foreign capital waiting to make investments. Perhaps proportionately more foreign private capital than was going into Spain in the 80's. The key question will be whether or not Ukraine and cities like Kyiv will take advantage of this outside investment to make their cities more attractive, competitive and sustainable. I would say that cities like Warsaw have only begun to take advantage of the investment. So much has been wasted on project appropriate to the last century: Character-less shopping malls that compromised the central city. Gated housing communities that suggest the upper and middle class are afraid of democracy and faceless office towers that could have been built anywhere. I hope Kyiv will fare better. The studies I undertook with Harvard and MIT had the kind of foresight that transition cities need, but their implementation remains



a question mark. In Barcelona there was no such hesitation.

In many ways Spain and particularly Barcelona leapfrogged the rest of western Europe. We not only employed best practices from more "advanced" markets, professionals in Spain set their own standards, and subsequently became a reference the world over for architecture and urban re-generation. In essence Barcelona jumped from being a 19th century city to a 21st century city. It's unique character was re-enforced in the process! It is my hope that through my activities in the region I can help be a catalyst for the same to occur in central European capitals.

- What did these buildings have in common?

- At the time the Taller De Arquitectura had a very consistent classical style. At first I thought we were designing for archeologists, each line I drew: in plan, elevation or section was part of a proportional system. Over time I found that this rigorous design allowed the team to function more efficiently but most importantly it gave our buildings a timeless and

powerful quality that I would argue was uncommon during the 1980's. The Taller avoided the retro historicist approach of many post-modernists at the time. Instead there was an elegant modern crispness to the buildings as they embraced modern building techniques in concrete and glazing. The proportional systems were also used in landscape design. Bofill at the time was one of the few architects serious about making public places. We consistently designed the public places and spaces between the buildings as carefully as the buildings themselves.

We also seek to build in a timeless way. The classical discipline I learned with Ricardo Bofill will never leave me. Even when I make a contemporary design it has classical underpinnings. Even if one wishes to be modernist or deconstructivist, you have to have a deep understanding of the traditions that you reacting to. If you don't, it is only a stylistic exercise.

- On what projects did you work with Ricardo Bofill?

I had the opportunity to work on a wide range of projects, but the four

that were completed include: the SWIFT headquarters in Brussels, Regional Government Center of Montpellier in the South of France, the Parque De L' Aguera in Benidorm, Spain and the INEF one of the buildings built atop Montjuic for the Barcelona Olympics.

- How would you say your time at the Taller de Arquitectura effects your work today?

- From Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura we created projects all over Europe, the US and North Africa.

I learned to put a premium on creating strong places between buildings. During the 1980's no-one else was doing this. Cities were being built of amorphous space, much like that on Kyiv's left bank on the one hand and the faceless American suburban sprawl on the other.

It still has a profound impact on many aspects of my firms and my own work today. The international character of RB practice has been a model for our organization. We also seek talent from around the world. We focus on large scale projects that transform cities and build new districts. CREUA