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Conversation with Paul Rudolph, one of the most famous architects in the world, these days.

### **DUBROVNIK DELIGHTED ME**

*“Personally I prefer to live on lower floors, surrounded by green and look at other buildings through treetops, but I am also sure that it is possible to create a pleasant dwelling space on higher floors.”*

*‘Dubrovnik I will remember by the feeling of human presence in space: every passerby has its own individuality. \*\*\* My propositions about ‘20th Century bricks’ reach up to 60 floors, but each apartment gets a spatial terrace and a small garden. ‘*

One of the greatest contemporary architects, Paul Rudolph, has gained world known recognition and fame by using both artistic strength and creative instinct in handling engineering work while making a sketch into a reality. More than hundred realized objects spanning from various family houses to entire city blocks are the best illustration of interchange of space art and technical base. Schools, libraries, university campuses and many other residential buildings designed by Rudolph put this 56-year old American on the top of world architecture. Two other projects can be added to Rudolph’s list, project of a new town near Washington with population of 8000 inhabitants and inspiring proposal for building with ‘20th Century bricks’ in New York. Usually, there is always a danger that some huge production might decrease the value of particular project, but in Rudolph’s case an enormous dedication to work and inexhaustible creativity made every work becoming unique.

Former dean of Yale, one of the best architectural schools in USA, Rudolph has left his professorial post after ten years so he could dedicate himself to designing as an office architect. During the Yale years Rudolph designed the Art and Architectural building which made him world known even in his forties. These days, as a guest professor, he is lecturing all over the world: Moscow, Tokyo, and Jerusalem. Although majority of his work is in the USA, he has made very noticeable projects in Japan, Bangladesh, Spain, Lebanon, Israel and Saudi Arabia. Ordinary observers find in his work attractive complexity and appealing, architects find virtuosity, and he says that he is looking for psychological virtue of space, human scale and intimacy of space.

Recently, Paul Rudolph visited Dubrovnik – an attractive town to visit: by tourists to boast being there, by hardworking to get a rest, by lovers to love, by artists to be inspired. An architect comes here to be more refined and inspired by the architectural and urban uniqueness of town.

### **STONE HAS ALWAYS BEEN BEAUTIFUL**

*“I am delighted with Dubrovnik” – says Rudolph. “Old town I had seen in photographs has a real human scale. It is hard to say why. It is not because it is small in measure or fragmented. On the other hand, the beauty of town walls is their impressive size. Beauty is in general unity of the town. I like the positioning of the streets that are flowing from two sides to Stradun (Central Square). Town-generating idea is interesting: filling the narrow and putting earth between small islands and all-together encompassing with wall. Here I met many fantastic architectural situations: fine proportions of houses, the Sponza Palace atrium, the Pile town gate, two beautiful cloisters, Stradun. A slight*

*narrowing of main town square or tiny irregularity of cloister is the way I like to feel spaces. I don't like pure geometry. It makes us passionless.*

#### **How do you imagine present growth of Dubrovnik?**

*Town surrounding is impressive; landscape that is descending straight into the sea. I would set up a rule to leave quite many open green spaces: maximum four floors building by the seaside. As gradually going up the hill, so would the house heights be increased, and finally those on top would be the highest. You would get fantastic views and rise from the sea would be more dramatic.*

#### **What kind of building pattern would you recommend?**

*That is a matter of scale, not of form. Form might be changed. There are also more styles in old Dubrovnik but they make unity because of common scale and they inherit discipline of stone as a material.*

#### **Which materials would you take for nowadays buildings?**

*That is not an easy answer. Nowadays, there are many different materials. Stone has always been beautiful, but it is expensive. Concrete is the most adequate considering its price. Every material has a soul and possibility that needs to be used proper.*

#### **Do you think that some of the Dubrovnik scenery might be your own inspiration?**

*Absolutely, but it is hard to say what precisely. Dubrovnik I will remember by the feeling of human presence in space: every passerby has its own individuality, he seems familiar. In New York where there is enormous number of people, that feeling is being lost.*

#### **The old Dubrovnik was built by the local builders, but also some of the builders came from abroad (Onofrio della Cava, Michelozzi). Would you like to design here?**

#### **XX.th CENTURY BRICK**

*Since the houses have been built in industrial way, there was an idea about production of bit parts, prefabricated in factory and assembled on the site. Some attempts have been realized in Japan and in Expo in Montreal. It happened to be quite costly, although theoretically industrial approach should be cheaper than traditional building techniques. Rudolph has been studying and working quite long on this problem. So far, only one smaller project of 330 dwelling units has been realized. Since that is a mechanically manipulated unit and assembling those creates an object, Rudolph named them 'XX.th Century bricks'. The US building industry has a potential to accept this new technology, but there are many obstacles: existing regulation, fear of high price and Trade Union resistance.*

#### **Where can the '20th Century brick' be used?**

*That is a structure unit with installed electrical wire, running water, sewage pipes etc. They can be used for any kind of building where smaller cubical spaces are required: hospitals, hotels, schools and dwelling of course. All together, they might be used for 70 percent of all buildings.*

#### **What is the measure of that modular unit?**

*Measure of the brick is in accordance to strength of a human hand. 'XX.th Century brick' is based on the strength of crane power and transportation conditions on the road. In USA, their measures are 12 ft width, 11 ft height and 60 ft length. Very important thing is that the unit should be as light as possible, because sometimes they need to be stacked up high. In my project for New York they are lifted up to 60 floors.*

*Building with modular units, "XX. Century bricks" is a very effective way of construction and I believe it will be very popular soon.*

*Many things in American architecture have European roots. A skyscraper on the other hand is an American innovation. As much is the stone house typical for Mediterranean area, so is the skyscraper typical for American 'City'. Old record holder, Empire State Building has been overtaken with ten stories higher two towers, World Trade Center. Chicago has a 100-story high, Hancock building and today's highest building in the world, 110-stories high, Sears building. Frank Lloyd Wright's mile-high skyscraper 'Illinois' has been a measure for some future project and quite probably it will be realized once. Skyscrapers are growing and growing. Are they going to stop at certain height, I don't know. I can't say many advantages to go higher. It seems to me that at certain moment they will stop being practical. Many of reasons are in prestige. One bank wants to be more powerful than the other so it builds a higher skyscraper. It's a human reaction, but it is doubtful concerning architecture.*

**The highest skyscrapers are filled mostly with business space, but the Hancock Building in Chicago has apartments form 60<sup>th</sup> to 100<sup>th</sup> floor. What does it mean to dwell so high?**

*Many of those residents are rich people who have another house in city surrounding, or they are people without children. In any case, no family spends their whole life in a skyscraper.*

**There was a recommendation in Hamburg that families with small children should not live above fifth floor?**

*I wouldn't agree with that decision. Personally, I prefer to live on lower floors, surrounded by green and look at other buildings through treetops. Good design can make quality of space on higher floors. People who voted for the Hamburg rule would not like two residential towers of 40 and 42 stories I had designed and that had been constructed in New York. My propositions about 'XX.th Century bricks' reach up to 60 floors, but that each apartment gets a spatial terrace and a small garden with enough greenery. This way, you can have very pleasant and comfortable residential spaces.*

At the end, we put a dilemma in front of famous architect: techniques or art. Paul Rudolph's answer is: 'For me, being involved in architecture means to initiate an art.'

Paul Rudolph with our associate, architect from Zagreb, Lenko Pleština. (note with photo)

Rudolph doesn't have a template for design: every time he has been proved by a new fresh idea.

ALL ABOUT PAUL RUDOLPH

1948. Graduated on Harvard University

1954. San Paulo award for the most promising young architect

1958. Sarasota School, Florida

1958. Arts and architecture building on Yale

From 1957. Dean of Architectural School in Yale

1959. Garage for 1500 automobiles, New Haven

1960. Building for married students, New Haven

1963. Student dormitory, Massachusetts

1963. Nursing home, New Haven

1968. Governmental Center in Boston – traces of Mediterranean inspiration

1969. - Tracey Towers (40 and 42 floors) for 1000 people

- Stafford, new town close to Washington, D.C.

- Buffalo Waterfront, Buffalo

- Stadium, Saudi Arabia

1970. City complex in Beirut, Lebanon

1970. Faculty of agriculture, Bangladesh

1973. Niagara Falls Library

1974. Business complex in Tokyo, breach into a firm Japanese architecture

1974. New forms of boosting NYC (XX.th Century brick)

One entire city area in NY might be realized according to Rudolph's project with '20th Century bricks'

Lenko Plestina