

Alternative Visions

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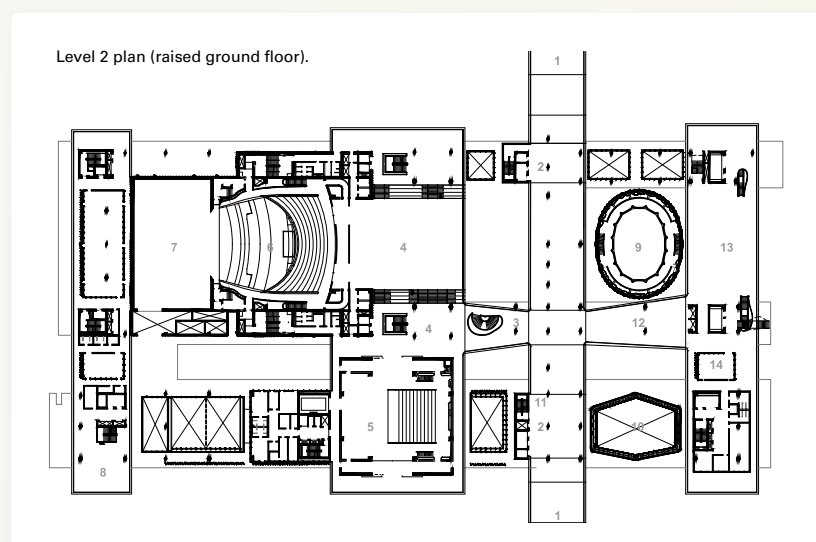
Herzog & de Meuron,
Arena do Morro,
Natal,
Brazil,
2014

The gymnasium's distinctive white
roof creates a new landmark for
Mãe Luiza alongside the existing
lighthouse (right).

Brazilian City

In conversation with
Herzog & de Meuron
Senior Partner
Ascan Mergenthaler

What does it take to design sensitively and inclusively in Brazil? In the lead up to Rio 2016, Herzog & de Meuron have designed two projects: the Cultural Complex Luz in São Paulo (2012) and the Arena do Morro in Natal (2014). The former being unrealised and the second built and in use. To find out more about the approach that the premier Swiss practice took to these buildings, Guest-Editor **Hattie Hartman** interviewed Herzog & de Meuron's Senior Partner **Ascan Mergenthaler**.



LEVEL 2 PLAN

- | | |
|---|---------------------------------|
| 1 - PEDESTRIAN ACCESS | 8 - BACK OF HOUSE |
| 2 - RAMP ACCESS FROM PARKING, STREET AND DROP-OFF | 9 - RECITAL HALL |
| 3 - THEATRE ACCESS | 10 - ORCHESTRA REHEARSAL SPACE |
| 4 - GRAND THEATRE AND EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE FOYERS | 11 - ACCESS UP TO DANCE COMPANY |
| 5 - EXPERIMENTAL THEATRE | 12 - ACCESS TO MUSIC SCHOOL |
| 6 - GRAND THEATRE | 13 - STUDENT PLAZA |
| 7 - STAGE | 14 - LIBRARY |

Herzog & de Meuron,
Cultural Complex Luz,
São Paulo,
2012 (unbuilt)

The Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron have recently undertaken two projects in Brazil – a performing arts centre in the dilapidated Luz neighbourhood of São Paulo, which remains unbuilt, and a gymnasium in the northeastern city of Natal, completed in 2014. The two projects differ across almost every parameter: one is a cultural complex located in a central district of São Paulo, and the other is a gymnasium located in a favela in Brazil's remote northeast; the first was a public commission, while the second was privately funded by the philanthropic foundation of a Swiss agricultural company; one was secured through a conventional international bidding process, while the other was the Swiss practice's first pro bono project, undertaken for a repeat client; the arts centre remains unrealised, while the gymnasium is complete and in active use.

Yet what both projects share is a sensitivity to their context, an understanding of the demanding constraints imposed by the need for security and an intelligent approach to bioclimatic design.

The Essence of Lina Bo Bardi's SESC Pompeia in Cracolândia

Commissioned by São Paulo state's Ministry of Culture in 2008 during Brazil's economic boom and put on hold five years later in the wake of the street demonstrations that erupted during the Confederations Cup, the 85,000-square-metre (915,000-square-foot) Cultural Complex Luz is an ambitious proposal for a performing arts centre and music school that would consolidate the city's cultural district linked to the nearby Campos Elíseos neighbourhood. Situated southwest of the 19th-century Luz railway station in a run-down area known as Cracolândia because it is a nucleus of São Paulo's crack trade, the Cultural Complex Luz also has a strong regeneration agenda.

'The most inspiring place in São Paulo is Lina Bo Bardi's SESC Pompeia. It's a masterpiece with so many interesting details and different qualities from an architectural, spatial and urban point of view,' observes Ascan Mergenthaler, a Senior Partner at Herzog & de Meuron. In charge of projects in Europe, Asia and the Americas, Mergenthaler was responsible for the realisation of the deYoung Museum in San Francisco and is currently working on commissions such as the Tate Modern Project in London, the Blavatnik School of Government in Oxford and the Elbphilharmonie in Hamburg. He proceeds to observe of the SESC 'What is most inspiring is how people engage with it and use it. You can sense that people are proud when they are there. They all have something in common and they behave so well. This idea of creating a

building that is alive day and night and attracts a real cross-section of society – poor people and rich people looking around and enjoying activities – is the role model of what we wanted to achieve with this project,’ he continues.

Initially, Herzog & de Meuron considered surrounding the Luz site with a wall but then concluded that ‘this was not the correct response’. The architects’ ambition was for the building to interlock with the urban fabric, and their solution was to elevate the ground-floor plane with a generous ramp, and to densely landscape the street level. The complex, proposed to house a 1,750-seat dance theatre and two smaller halls as well as a music school for 2,000 students, consists of six split levels with intersecting internal courtyards so that every space has direct contact with daylight and greenery.

‘This building would not be possible in Europe. What was so nice for us is that in the São Paulo climate you can work very differently on architecture,’ Mergenthaler explains. The building incorporates several open-air environments. The



Herzog & de Meuron,
Cultural Complex Luz,
São Paulo,
2012 (unbuilt)

above: The scheme is focused around an internal public plaza with links to the performance halls and the dance school.

below: Visualisation looking southeast. Accessed by a wide central ramp, the proposed complex would link Julio Prestes Plaza and Sala São Paulo to Princess Isabel Place, forming part of a network of public open spaces. The porous design of the scheme with extensively landscaped internal courtyards is intended to link and reinforce other nearby open spaces including Princess Isabel Place to the west, the Luz Park east of the railway station, and the gardens of the Museum of Sacred Art to the northeast.



main internal plaza and the lobby of the dance theatre are protected from rain and sun, but have no physical external wall. In each instance, the extent of mechanical systems was tailored to the programme. Other spaces have walls for acoustic or privacy reasons, but are made comfortable through simple cross-ventilation. Dance studios and rehearsal spaces require mechanical natural ventilation, but no air conditioning. Only the actual performance halls are fully sealed air-conditioned spaces. Together with extensive planting designed by Isabel Duprat Arquitetura e Paisagismo throughout the complex, this approach is a 21st-century reinterpretation of Brazilian Modernism's handling of bioclimatic design half a century ago.

In the long term, if the Cultural Complex Luz were to be built and the neighbourhood improved, street-level planting would have to be partially removed to open up ground-level spaces to the street without compromising the security of the complex.

Herzog & de Meuron,
Cultural Complex
Luz,
São Paulo,
2012 (unbuilt)

A raised ground-floor plane creates a public plaza with densely landscaped courtyards and open-air performance spaces within.

Despite Brazil's difficult economic climate and public scepticism about high-profile projects in the wake of the vast quantities of public money lavished on the 2014 FIFA World Cup stadia and related infrastructure, Mergenthaler remains a forceful advocate of the Luz scheme: 'The Luz Cultural Complex is the right thing to do from an urban and cultural point of view for this neighbourhood and the area. The strength of the project is that it is a very open and permeable structure, open to all 24/7. This is not just a dance theatre for the rich; it is also a music school for the kids of the neighbourhood. The Sala São Paulo is just across the street and is a very closed building. Wealthy people go there by night by car, attend the concert and leave again. They don't mingle with the neighbourhood. Our building is a very different proposal. It would be good for the community and for all of São Paulo.'



Urban Acupuncture in Mãe Luíza

Herzog & de Meuron used a similar approach at a more modest scale for the Arena do Morro in Natal to create a secure gymnasium on a site that served previously as an improvised football pitch for the adjacent Mãe Luíza favela. Commissioned by the Ameropa Foundation, the philanthropic arm of a Swiss agricultural feed company active for several decades in the region, the new gymnasium addresses the public realm of the street with a robust curvilinear facade made from bespoke semi-transparent concrete blocks adapted from a common local building material. The result is a building envelope that is permeable both to curious onlookers of all ages and to the prevailing winds, as well as a luminous gymnasium interior that doubles as a multipurpose community meeting place.

The architects accepted the pro bono commission from Ameropa, for whom they had designed an office building near Basel some

Natal: Key map locating major landmarks and the Mãe Luíza favela, location of Herzog & de Meuron's Arena do Morro

right: Natal is unusual among Brazilian coastal cities because a state park created in 1977 protects a linear dune along the coast and has limited development along the beachfront.

Herzog & de Meuron, Arena do Morro, Natal, Brazil, 2014

below: The generous roof canopy and undulating wall along the street create an inviting entrance facing the dunes.



1. praça nas dunas | plaza at the dunes
terraço nas dunas para atividades contemplativas e educação ambiental
terrace at the dunes for contemplative activities and environmental education
2. oficinas | workshop
área para atividades profissionalizantes
professional activities area
3. quadra de esportes | sports field
atividades esportivas diversas
sports activities
4. lojas | shops
atividades comerciais
commercial activities
5. arena do morro | sport and dance
atividades esportivas e ensino de dança
sports activities and dance learning
6. escola | school
atividades educacionais existentes e centro de ensino profissionalizante
existing educational activities and professional learning centre
7. uma nova ligação | a new link
ligação entre as atividades propostas através de percurso térreo ou elevado
connection of the proposed activities through a ground or elevated path
8. cultura | culture
atividades culturais de artes, música, dança e anfiteatro para espetáculos
cultural activities such as arts, music, dance and amphitheatre for shows
9. parque | park
recuperação da vegetação original e tratamento paisagístico conforme estudos do paisagista Roberto Burle Marx
recovery of the original vegetation and landscape according to Roberto Burle Marx's studies
10. passarela do mar | sea walkway
integração entre o bairro e a orla marítima através de um percurso à beira mar
integration between the neighbourhood and the seafont through a path
11. cobertura verde | green canopy
passoio sombreado por vegetação na rua João XXIII
tree-shaded walkway at João XXIII street



0 100 250m



UMA VISÃO A VISION



10 years earlier, on the condition that the team could spend six months familiarising themselves with the area to prepare a masterplan for Mãe Luíza first. The well-established favela of approximately 70,000 people – small by Rio or São Paulo standards – occupies a dramatic site between sand dunes along the beach and the commercial beachfront. Herzog & de Meuron's 200-page 'Vision for Mãe Luíza' identifies missing and underdeveloped activities in the community, documents underexploited areas within the favela's dense urban fabric, and proposes potential new activities. Some of the masterplan proposals, such as strengthening the main shopping street and creating a pedestrian precinct with a playground and improved sidewalks, have been taken forward by the municipal government.

Eighteen months into operation, the Arena do Morro hosts almost 30 different sports sessions that meet from one to three times weekly, with activities on some days running from 7 am to 10 pm. In March 2015, a city-wide workshop held at the gymnasium attracted more than 25 community organisations to discuss local development issues, the right to the city and

Herzog & de Meuron,
Vision for Mãe
Luíza, Natal,
Brazil, 2009

opposite top: Developed in collaboration with the local university, the architects' masterplan for Mãe Luíza proposed giving priority to pedestrians in the favela's main shopping street and creating a strong link to the beach.

Herzog & de Meuron,
Arena do Morro,
Natal,
Brazil,
2014

below left: The Arena's light-filled interior serves as a multipurpose community room.

below: Ground-floor plan.

opportunities for participatory budgeting where local communities can influence expenditure.

Most telling of all, Ion de Andrade, deputy director of Centro Sócio Pastoral, a church-based community organisation that was participant for the Arena do Morro, reports that the rate of decline in the number of homicides in Mãe Luíza was four times that in other parts of Natal during the first year of the gymnasium's operation. Some local observers attribute this improvement to the presence of the Arena.

Even a hint that quality architecture could have such a large impact on social behaviour is remarkable. But the fundamental question remains: Is this approach replicable? It is difficult to extrapolate from this one-off exemplar of Swiss patronage to the interventions required in countless favelas across Brazil's many cities. Nevertheless, the Arena do Morro is a beacon, the repercussions of which are guiding the way. ▴

This article draws on a telephone interview in August 2015 by Guest-Editor Hattie Hartman with Ascan Mergenthaler, a Senior Partner at Herzog & de Meuron.



LEVEL 0

Arena do Morro
Mãe Luíza, Natal, Brazil

- 1 School Entrance
- 2 Teachers' Lounge
- 3 Changing Rooms
- 4 Sports Field and Stands
- 5 Multipurpose Room I
- 6 Multipurpose Room II
- 7 Storage
- 8 Multipurpose Room III
- 9 Public Entrance
- 10 Toilets
- 11 Lobby and Circulation
- 12 Artwork by Flavio Freitas

