

The Architect's Newspaper

October/November 2022

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Fair Trade

Landscape architecture design studio Terremoto addresses labor exploitation in its industry. [Read on page 20.](#)



COURTESY TERREMOTO

Paradise Paved Over

Segregation by Design maps highway expansion in Florida's Magic City. [Read on page 22.](#)



SEGREGATION BY DESIGN

James Polshek, 1930–2022

In November 1979, a classmate from Cornell who was working for Marcel Breuer & Associates asked if I wanted to work on a design competition for a joint venture of Breuer and James Stewart Polshek and Associates. I knew Breuer's work quite well but had never heard of Jim. I may have seen him from across the studio once during the competition. As we wrapped up the design, it occurred to me that I needed a *real* job. Leaving work one evening, I spotted Jim on the street corner, approached, and asked for work. I started the next week at his office on the top floor of 19 Union Square West. I was one of seven. I soon learned who Jim was.

There is a line in the poem "Desiderata" by Max Ehrmann that goes: "always there will be greater and lesser persons than yourself." Implied in that statement are a practical humility and a broad inevitability that have always reminded me of Jim Polshek. [continued on page 7](#)



ALBERT VECERKA/ESTO

Pod People

Rogers Partners converts a Brooklyn factory into a high-tech manufacturing hub. [Read on page 11.](#)



MICHAEL VAHRENWALD

6a architects for CARA

[Read on page 13.](#)

Who Is the City For?

In a 2011 column, "Signs Uglify Our Beautiful Bridges," anthologized in Blair Kamin's book *Who Is the City For? Architecture, Equity, and the Public Realm in Chicago*, the recently retired *Chicago Tribune* architecture critic takes aim at garish vinyl Bank of America (BoA) ads affixed to the Wabash Avenue Bridge which spans the Chicago River. Built in 1930 and designed by Daniel Burnham's compatriot Edward Bennett, it has corner anchorage limestone facades and mansard roofs that make it a dignified sentry along the river. Kamin calls them "a grotesque cheapening of the public realm."

If you read the Chicago NPR affiliate WBEZ, then you know there are deeper reasons for Kamin to object to marring this piece of public infrastructure with the logo of a bank that has steadfastly refused to lend money to people who aren't white. [continued on page 48](#)

AN FOCUS

Landscape

Case studies, products, and much more. [Read on page 29.](#)



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12 Dispatch

Bricks in Bruges

META and Eduardo Souto de Moura collaborate on a convention center in Belgium with impressive results.



FILIP DUJARDIN



FILIP DUJARDIN

The Bruges Meeting and Convention Centre (BMCC), designed jointly by Belgian office META and Portuguese architect Eduardo Souto de Moura, is an exercise in grandiose modesty. Its imposing front facade dominates the small public square over which it looms, but the project's mimicry of materials and rhythms found in the vicinity makes the bulky structure surprisingly affable. Its friendly nature notwithstanding, the promise of wholesale appropriation by the community—the massive hall can be turned into a public plaza by opening the glass walls on all sides—has yet to be fulfilled, as managerial reluctance has prevented local residents from taking full possession of the building.

This effort, the first collaboration between the two distinct (and distinguished) architects, has produced a significant building. During a visit to the center on a hot summer morning, Eric Soors, architect and managing partner at META, recounted a telling anecdote: Having been presented with META's work prior to the start of the project, Souto de Moura apparently exclaimed, speaking French to even out the difference between Portuguese and Flemish: "*Nous parlons la même langue!*" ("We speak the same language!") And while that might not literally be true, the BMCC shows a clarity and consistency that enable it to comfortably reside in the portfolio of either atelier.

That clarity is, Soors explained, not just a matter of taste: It was also the only way to fit the ambitious program—an approximately 48,000-square-foot expo hall and a conference center capable of hosting 500 visitors—on a small site. The chosen solution is elegantly simple: The ground floor consists of an enormous hall preceded by an entrance area containing two vertical cores (one for visitors, one for logistics), while the three levels of conference center are stacked on top of the lobby. Space is used efficiently throughout, as are materials. The glass-and-brick exterior is complemented inside by exposed in situ concrete walls, large rectangular windows, and a ceiling of sleek gray louvers through which ducts and cables can be glimpsed. Structural work has largely been left exposed, giving the interior a somewhat austere atmosphere.

Still, the minimalism of the BMCC feels distinctly chic. Proving that trade fairs and conventions can do without glitzy casino carpets and faux crystal chandeliers, the straightforward design approach has produced a building that is easy to understand. It exists to facilitate the

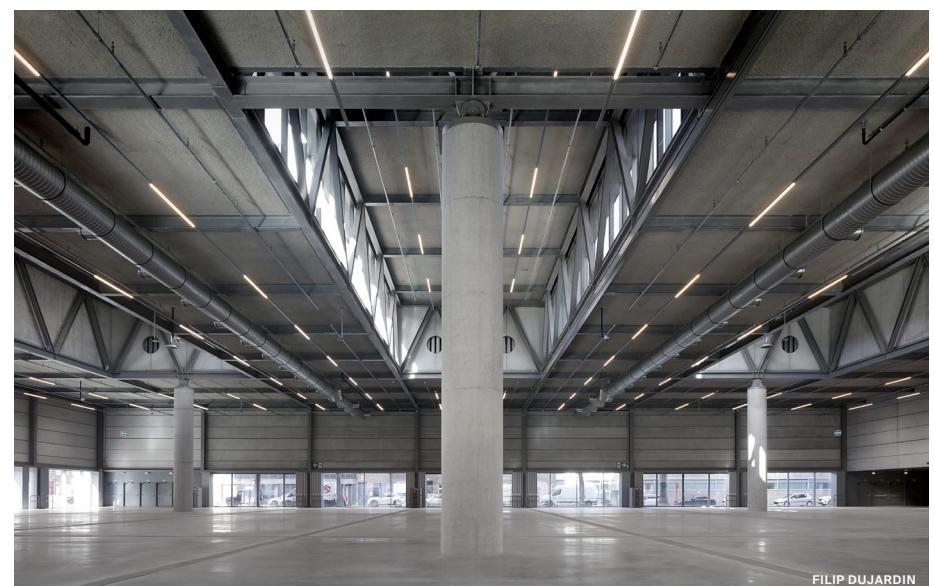
events it will host—and to do so effortlessly and generously. The efficiency never turns uncomfortable, owing to the (very) high ceilings and ample outside views throughout the building.

There is poetry, too, in the proportions of spaces, the thickness of walls, the distribution of mullions, and the careful placement of columns. The conference center features an upward promenade that spans three floors, offering increasingly impressive views of the surroundings that culminate on the roof terrace, where the city's famous medieval skyline unfurls at your feet. This journey takes place directly behind the impressive front facade, a floating grille of vertical brick mullions stacked between two thin horizontal metal channels. Because of the large depth of the thin brick piers, which provide shade and security to the spaces behind them, the grille offers passersby a shifting view of the interior: It's opaque at an angle but transparent when viewed head-on. An enormous 26-foot cantilever makes the facade hover almost ominously over the main entrance. (The gesture elaborates META's design of a building for the University of Antwerp completed in 2017.) The result is as blunt as it is impressive.

The enormous interior of the expo hall is blunt and impressive also. Its roof, a grid of steel trusses, is carried by six enormous concrete columns that are the only elements standing on the otherwise unoccupied concrete floor. Despite its size, the hall is well lit thanks to sunlight flooding in through light wells in the roof and a ground-level glass facade on three sides.

The glass on the ground floor is part of a nice tectonic trick: While the upper floors of the building are clad almost completely in brick, the ground floor is wrapped by rows of windows and grayed-out doors and panels. The "upside down" application of materials—heaviness above, lightness below—adds daring to a volumetric expression (that of a big, closed-off box) that could've ended up quite bland without it. At the same time, the openness underneath the mass of floating bricks dissolves the difference between inside and outside, communicating the building's desire to be hospitable.

That ambition has not yet been fully realized. The curtain wall is, in spirit, meant to be a permeable membrane that allows locals and passersby to freely enter and appropriate the hall when no event is underway. So far, that has not happened, as postpandemic blowouts



Left: The footprint leaves space for existing trees.

Top: Large doors can open the hall to the city.

Above: Steel trusses land on six cylindrical columns.

are rare, and building managers have so far been reluctant to leave this state-of-the-art space unlocked for unsupervised individuals to explore as they see fit. The BMCC certainly possesses a polyvalent quality similar to Cedric Price's Fun Palace concept, which makes the securitized entries more unfortunate. Moreover, rather than allowing for an open flow of users across the ground of the old city, the way the building forces residents to navigate around its mass emphasizes how tightly the building fits inside its context.

The BMCC is wedged between rows of beautiful old trees on three sides that could not be cut down or moved during construction. (The subterranean parking garage is actually narrower than the building itself to leave room for the tree roots.) With all but the front entrance closed, the large building hulks among both the vegetation and its medieval neighbors. That the structure replaces a less welcoming (and only slightly smaller) predecessor only partly absolves the BMCC from the delayed experience of its openness.

The BMCC is Souto de Moura's second project in Belgium, after a crematorium in Kortrijk was finished a decade ago. It's also his first building to prominently use brick, though a notable usage occurred in the laminated

end wall of his Casa das Artes in Porto, finished in 1991. For META, on the other hand, the brick facade fits neatly within a portfolio full of masonry. In Bruges, an atypical brickwork detail is used: Excess mortar in the joints between the rough, white-speckled bricks has been left in place. This utilitarian finish paradoxically required special instructions for the bricklayers, who—being skilled professionals—weren't used to leaving their work "unfinished." The Bruges municipality also received at least one email from a concerned citizen wondering whether the builders were cutting corners.

The venue was finished within budget and on time, despite the pandemic's preventing both offices from meeting in person and making it impossible for the Portuguese architect to visit the construction site. Those statistics are impressive enough, but the singular consistency of both the design and its execution betrays a pleasant partnership; I would not be surprised to see further collaborations between two offices that really do speak the same language.

Tim Peeters is a Dutch architect and writer living in Brussels. He currently works for design group ORG. In 2022, he cofounded FALSEWORK, a research and design studio based in Rotterdam and Brussels.