

*Philip Jodidio*

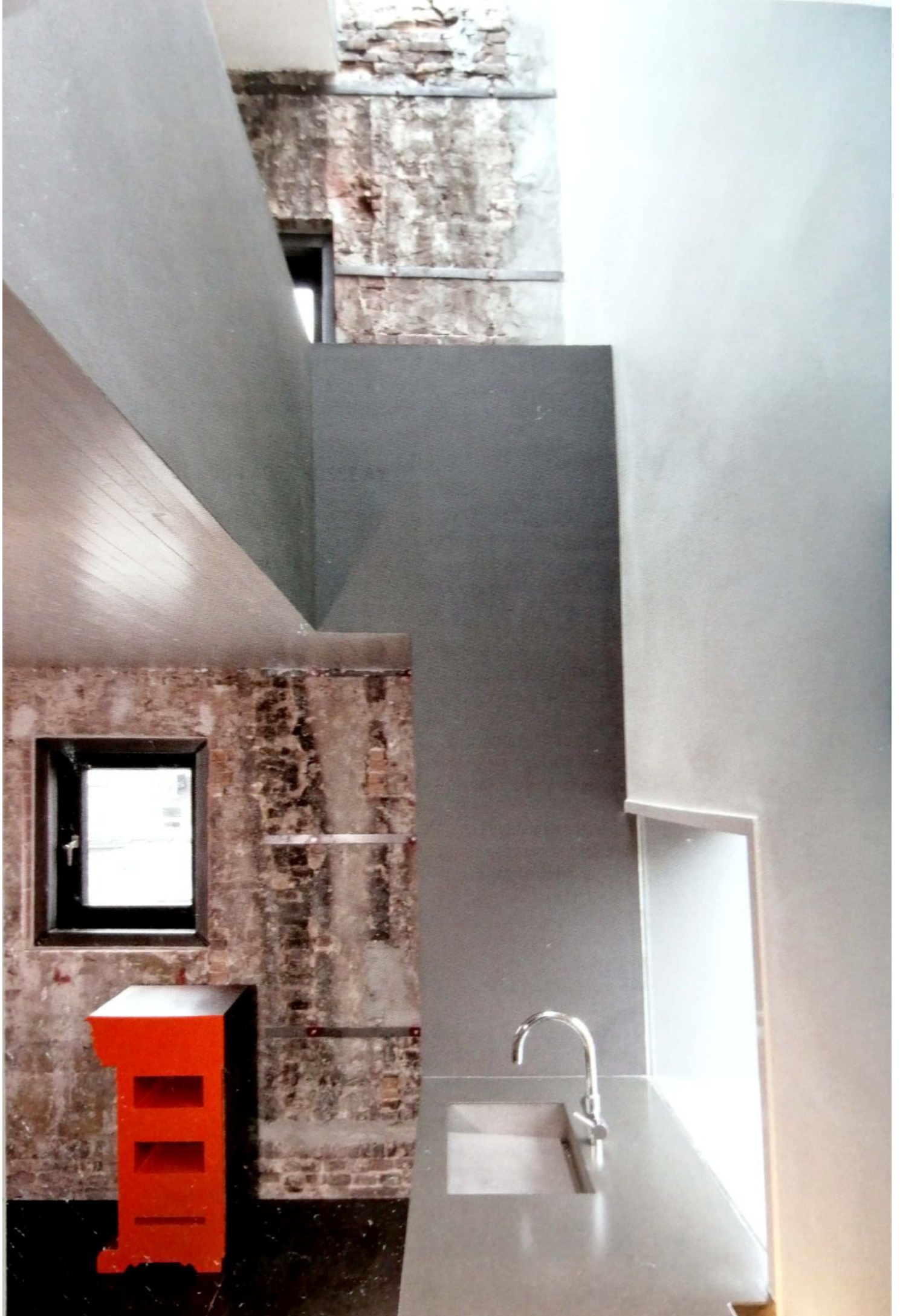
# SMALL ARCHITECTURE



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# INTRODUCTION

## SMALL, BUT PERFECTLY FORMED

What happens when economies falter and construction grinds nearly to a halt? Does architecture, often so deeply dependent on finances, also lose its inventiveness? In a time of excessive spending on construction, countries such as Spain produced a number of remarkable buildings, and brilliant new architects came to the fore. With young Spanish or Portuguese architects today seeking any work they can find elsewhere in Europe, does inventiveness evaporate, or is energy transferred elsewhere and into different types of projects? Despite what has been described as a global slowdown, some countries continue to develop at a rapid pace—thus the estimated GDP of China grew by 6.9% in 2015. Though it has fallen from a high of over 10% in 2010, India's economic growth in 2016 is estimated at about 7.1%. These countries and others are by no means in recession and their architecture reflects this fact.

## SIZE DOES MATTER

Does size really matter in architecture? It may be interesting to note that many of today's outstanding architects, from Frank Gehry to Tadao Ando, started their careers with astonishing small projects—mostly houses. Their own transition to larger scale work was not always as successful as might have been hoped. So is bigger necessarily better? In fact, the larger a project is, the more bureaucratic and complex it tends to become, leaving the architect less and less say in the final result. Works like Frank Gehry's Guggenheim Bilbao (Spain, 1997) are basically the exceptions that prove the rule. Bigger is not automatically better and never has been. Works like Donato Bramante's Tempietto (San Pietro in Montorio, Rome, Italy, 1502–10), which is just 4.5 meters in diameter, have marked the history of architecture more than many larger buildings. It might be suggested that size does matter, but that small buildings often provide a degree of freedom to architects that cannot be obtained in gigantic public or corporate projects.

The advantages of small work also become apparent in a time of economic stress. Big budgets have become rare, but the desire or the need to build has not disappeared. Smaller is cheaper in most cases, so what happens when the money disappears—more small structures are created. This type of generalization is, of course, more or less true according to the parts of the world concerned. Some countries, like Japan, have a cultural preference for or bias toward small buildings. Due to the density of populations along Japan's eastern seaboard, in particular between Tokyo and Osaka, inhabitants have long since learned to make do with relatively little space. Real-estate prices in Tokyo and some other Japanese cities are such that even a tiny plot of land is very expensive to say the least. Thus, small homes, under 100 square meters, are more the rule than they are an exception, even when talented architects are called on to design them. Although Japan's economy has been in the doldrums since the 1990s, there is a continuous flow of new residential work that has given rise to more than one generation of very talented architects.

In Japan, but elsewhere as well, changes in lifestyle coupled with economic pressures seem to be reconfiguring many of the requirements of architecture. Where private houses, in postwar America for example, had a number of standard features such as distinct kitchen, dining, and living areas, more recent trends have, in a sense, broken down the walls between these spaces, or often eliminated them. An open living space that is contiguous with cooking or dining areas has become more frequent than enclosed volumes, which often implies a reduced space requirement. The Japanese, with their long tradition of sliding screens that can reconfigure interior space, or even the rapport between inside and outside, are presently leading the way in a new generation of houses that have practically no divisions in their spaces. Space that is sufficiently "flexible" to be used in many ways can allow a small building to satisfy more needs than larger ones did in the past.

## SMALL IS SEXY

Bramante's Tempietto or much more recent works like Philip Johnson's Study (New Canaan, Connecticut, 1980) have long been erected at the very threshold between art and architecture. Johnson's odd Study has a floor area of just under 36 square meters. Though he did work in what he called this "monk's cell," Johnson's forms, like the later ones of Frank



Gehry, certainly approach sculpture. Small structures are clearly freer of extensive building requirements than their larger counterparts. This is one reason that artists who are interested in architecture sometimes indulge their fantasies by creating small buildings. The reverse is also true. For an architect, creating a veritable work of art can be more easily conceived at a small scale than in a huge building that must meet so many different demands. It is not always easy to create art when you have to park a thousand cars in the garage, or provide emergency egress for hundreds of panicked office workers.

This volume whose contents originated in the *Architecture Now!* series focuses on small buildings or spaces. This is no accident in terms of the inventiveness shown by the architects (and artists) selected, nor is this choice unrelated to larger events on the stage of the global economy. When there isn't enough money to conjure up huge convention centers and skyscrapers, small architecture starts to look very appealing indeed. Where excellent architects might well have declined small commissions a few years ago, a number of them are beginning to see the interest of downsizing in a positive way. No doubt about it, today, in architecture, small is sexy.

### THE USEFUL AND THE USELESS

Where, precisely, does the line of demarcation between art and architecture lie? Several works published in this volume clearly pose this question. The American sculptor Richard Serra has stated that "the difference between art and architecture is that architecture serves a purpose." Though some architects may flirt (dangerously?) with structures that serve no discernable purpose, Serra's definition is a useful guideline that certainly does not keep us from including some of these "ambiguous" works in a volume essentially dedicated to architecture. Readers of the *Architecture Now!* series are by now familiar with these incursions into the domain of the "useless"—it being fairly obvious that artists are often ahead of their times and more in tune with the spirit of the moment than some of their more "concrete" architectural colleagues.

An interesting example of crossing the lines between art and architecture is offered by the Belgian team Gijs Van Vaerenberg. Pieterjan Gijs studied civil engineering and architecture at the Catholic University of Leuven (KUL, 2001–06) like his colleague Arnout Van Vaerenbergh, but he also obtained a Masters in Urbanism and Territorial Development. Their work *Reading between the Lines* (Borgloon, Belgium, 2011, page 180) has an area of just 28 square meters. It has a reinforced concrete foundation and was made with 30 tons of Corten steel and 2,000 columns. It is not a piece of architecture in the usual sense, but rather a "transparent object of art." It forms the outline of a church, but does not seek to serve that function, instead it is a commentary on absence on the dialogue between solidity and emptiness in architecture.

An interest in crossing the usual boundaries can be found in many disciplines, not only art and architecture per se. The Dutch designer Erik Rietveld is a case in point. He studied Economics & Business at the University Maastricht and graduated in 1993. He then studied Philosophy, Psychology, and Portuguese at the University of Sao Paulo (USP), graduating with a Master in Philosophy from the University of Amsterdam (UvA) in 2003. He works with his brother Ronald Rietveld (born in 1972) who is in fact an architect—the two of them worked on Bunker 599 (Diefdijklinie, Zijderveld, The Netherlands, 2010, page 394) involving a military bunker built by the New Dutch Waterline (NDW). The designers explain, "A seemingly indestructible bunker with monumental status is sliced open. The design thereby opens up the minuscule interior of one of NDW's 700 bunkers, the insides of which are normally cut off from view completely. In addition, a long wooden boardwalk cuts through the extremely heavy construction. It leads visitors to a flooded area and to the footpaths of the adjacent natural reserve." Cutting a concrete bunker in two and creating an open passage through it cannot be said to participate in a "useful" form of architecture, rather it is a philosophical and artistic interrogation about buildings themselves.

Ryue Nishizawa, half of the celebrated Pritzker Prize-winning duo SANAA has all the architectural credentials and yet is actively exploring the limits between what is built and what is simply willed into existence as a commentary on the art of building. His Fukita Pavilion in Shodoshima (Shodoshima-cho, Kagawa, Japan, 2013, page 350) covers an area of 185 square meters but is made up only of two overlapping, curved sheets of steel. The corners of the two sheets are welded together. The space thus created between the two sheets of metal provides seating for visitors, and also serves as a playground for children in the area leading to the temple. Despite its rather ephemeral appearance, this is a permanent



structure without any foundation. The architect states, "It is a simple arrangement as if the pavilion had just brought and placed there." This type of reasoning is also applied to works of art of course, even if the "usefulness" of art can always be debated.

The Greenhouses created by another talented Japanese architect, Junya Ishigami, at the Japanese Pavilion of the *Venice Architecture Biennale* (Venice, Italy, 2008, page 234) were indeed tiny. Each of the greenhouses was conceived as an actual building, just barely able to stand up thanks to sophisticated calculations. His intention was to suggest "the future possibilities of architecture." Ishigami also refers to Joseph Paxton's Crystal Palace at the *Great Exhibition* in London (1851) which was in the form of a greenhouse. Ishigami worked with the botanist Hideaki Ohba who carefully selected the varieties of plants that at first seemed to be native to the environment, but in fact represent a "slight disturbance in the landscape of the park." Wooden furniture was placed in the garden, suggesting the ambiguity or more precisely "simultaneity" of interior and exterior space, while the inside of the Pavilion itself was essentially empty except for delicate drawings on the white walls. Here, the usual definition of architecture may have been approached despite the very small size of the greenhouses, and yet, there was also a clearly artistic or thoughtful intention in these works.

The Spanish artist Cristina Iglesias, born in 1956, has a considerable reputation in the international gallery and exhibition circuit. She has also frequently branched out with her sculptures, into installations that occupy enough space to begin to be considered in architectural terms. Her *Vegetation Room Inhotim* (Inhotim, Belo Horizonte, Brazil, 2010–12, page 228) has a nine-by-nine-meter footprint. Located on the property of the Inhotim Contemporary Art Institute, the work alternates between polished stainless-steel surfaces that reflect surrounding plants and a carved vegetal design on the inner surfaces. Iglesias calls this a "plant room" and indeed its location on a property that includes 300 hectares of native forest and 110 botanical collections is appropriate. In this instance, the "usefulness" of the work is essentially artistic, but, as is the case with Olafur Eliasson, it surely makes visitors think again about the natural environment that surrounds them, and, perhaps, to respond to it in a different way.

## TEAHOUSES AND TOWERS

Terunobu Fujimori is well known for his whimsical designs that are often deeply rooted in Japanese culture. His four-square-meter *Beetle's House* was one of the structures actually built for the exhibition *1:1 Architects Build Small Spaces 2010* held at the Victoria and Albert Museum in London from June 15 to August 30, 2010 (page 164). He points out that Japan is one of the few countries where there is a long history of top architects being involved in the design of tiny structures, often for the tea ceremony. His original plan to suspend the structure from the ceiling of the museum did not work out, but there is a part both of humor and of very serious thought involved in this project—it meets the criteria of Serra, because it was indeed designed to serve a purpose, but it is also very much at the threshold between an artistic installation and a tiny building.

Another participant in the 2010 exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum was the Oslo firm Rintala Eggertsson, established in 2007 by the Finnish architect Sami Rintala and the Icelandic architect Dagur Eggertsson. Their *Ark Book-tower* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London, UK, 2010, page 424) measured a modest nine square meters in floor area, but their goal was no less than to allow an "escape from the physical space of the museum into the mental space of literature." By filling their tower with used books, the architects fulfilled something of their literary ambitions, but, as it happens, they also used the books as a "unified minimal wall surface." The debate about surface and content in architecture rages on, it would seem.

Rintala Eggertsson were also the architects of the *Seljord Watchtower* (Seljord, Telemark, Norway, 2011, page 420), part of a development program conceived by the municipality of Seljord. The Watchtower makes reference to a local legend that the lake of Seljord is home to a mysterious serpent. The tower doubles as a shelter for small exhibitions. With an area of 70 square meters, the structure demonstrates the interest of calling on talented architects in the context of efforts to attract tourists, a point also made in recent years elsewhere in Scandinavia in particular.

Much more subjected to the conditions of "real" construction and design in a more complex environment, their *Hut to Hut* (Kagala, Karnataka, India, 2012, page 416) is a 27-square-meter double structure built with locally produced supplies



and renewable energy sources. The interesting aspect about this design is surely the combination of a regional aesthetic and materials with a real sense of Nordic invention and technical know-how.

## THINKING ABOUT ARCHITECTURE

The young architects Florian Idenburg (born in 1975) and Jing Liu (born in 1980) have already made quite a name for themselves (So – II: Solid Objectives—Idenburg Liu) working in the United States and elsewhere. Their Tri-Colonnade (page 466), part of the exhibition *The Street* in the context of the *Shenzhen Hong Kong Bi-City Biennale*, curated by Terence Riley (2011), was very small (24 m<sup>2</sup>) but sought to pose some of the basic issues of architecture that are related to façades or surfaces. Noting that the façade has become “implicitly flat,” they used a laminated marble print on columns with mirrors behind them, giving visitors the impression that the “marble” expands as visitors approach it. What appears to be flat is not. This concept, perhaps described as one of optical manipulation, is actually quite popular in contemporary architecture, where effects of light, transparency, and reflection are frequent. A pavilion like the Tri-Colonnade might again not be perceived as serving any real purpose, and thus characterized as being more like an art installation than architecture, and yet, its whole point is about architecture.

Another architect who is present in this volume with a work that might well be compared to art installations is the Mexican Michel Rojkind. Born in 1969 in Mexico City, Rojkind has worked frequently with the local offices of Nestlé, and, in 2012, he was the coordinator of an unusual project that involved Nescafé as the sponsor for work that included the participation of seven artists. Rojkind’s own Portal of Awareness (page 430) was put in place, arcing over the sidewalks of the Paseo de la Reforma, one of the largest avenues of the Mexican capital. A structure made up of a weave of rebars supports 1500 metal coffee mugs. Given their quantity and the regularity of their placement, the mugs become a sort of decorative motif, although presumably the coffee-oriented nature of the work is lost on no one. With a low budget of just \$11 000, Rojkind manages to put architecture, art, and commerce in the spotlight in a dignified and original way.

An unexpected case of transgression of the usual categories of photography, art, or architecture is that of Tim Hursley, a specialist in architectural images who has often seen his photos published in the *Architecture Now!* series. In the case of this book, Hursley proposed what is undoubtedly a small building, a 4.6-meter-diameter silo located in Greensboro, Alabama, in an area where he often works with Rural Studio. The 14-meter-high structure was badly damaged in about 1993 and remained in its curious bent form until Hursley noticed it, took pictures, and eventually acquired the object (page 224). In its twisted state, the silo would probably not meet Serra’s definition of architectural usefulness, but its shape gives it an artistic aspect that Hursley has obviously noticed. Agricultural buildings, usually in a better state of repair, were catalogued in an almost scientific manner by the German couple Hilla and Bernd Becher. The Bechers are known for their influence on an entire generation of German “art” photographers, and, indeed, their focus on industrial buildings of various kinds did not only bring attention to a largely ignored form of architecture, but also suggested that photography can achieve a level of artistic quality with a subject that could be considered banal, but which reveals itself in pictures.

## HOUSES WITH NO WALLS

It is interesting to note that the innovation seen in Japanese houses in recent years can, to some extent, be attributed to a kind of school of architecture, led by the generation of architects like Kazuyo Sejima (born in 1956). Half of the Pritzker Prize-winning team SANAA, Sejima continues to design some buildings on her own, such as the recent Tsuchihashi House published here (Tokyo, Japan, 2011, page 456). With a total floor area of just 72 square meters, the Tsuchihashi House emphasizes verticality with a full-height atrium. What is most striking in the design is, indeed, the openness of the interior and the sensitivity to light or even weather conditions on the roof terrace that is displayed. Sejima has ventured into territory also explored by Sou Fujimoto, where even floor levels seem to be distributed in a pattern that allows for intermediary levels and a very open use of space.



Born in 1975, Tetsuo Kondo worked for seven years in the office of Sejima (1999–2006), before creating his own firm. His House in Chayagasaka (Nagoya, Aichi, Japan, 2011–12, page 270) has a floor area of 90 square meters. His philosophical approach in the design is that the architecture should not have a dominant or "strong" system of organization but rather should "incorporate various meanings"—the organization is seen as a "soft order" rather than a more rigid, or "hard" one. As he explains, the use of space for a family with two small children evolves over time, and his "one-room house" allows for these changes.

### **(DOLL)HOUSE DREAMER**

Joshua Prince-Ramus was the founding partner of OMA New York, the American affiliate of the Office for Metropolitan Architecture (OMA) / Rem Koolhaas in The Netherlands, and served as its Principal until he renamed the firm REX in 2006. His Madison Avenue (Doll)House (New York, USA, 2008, page 410) occupied an area of just four square meters in the Calvin Klein store on Madison Avenue. The architect was also asked to design a "concept house" for the "Calvin Klein woman," a 190-square-meter residence that remained an unbuilt scheme. This installation by Prince-Ramus might be seen as a commentary on architectural scale and purpose, but also on the minimalist environment of the store, which was the work of John Pawson. Not a freestanding structure in itself—though the concept house would have been—the Madison Avenue (Doll)House certainly deserves a place in a book about small buildings.

### **INTO THE WILD**

From these very artistic incarnations of the small building, one might venture into the wild, or at least into nature, where small, ecologically sound structures allow some to spend time in a wilderness setting without having the impression of destroying the environment. An example of this approach is the Endémico Resguardo Silvestre (Valle de Guadalupe, Ensenada, Mexico, 2010–11, page 188) by the Mexican architect Jorge Gracia Garcia. This hotel features 20 rooms, each of which is a freestanding 20-square-meter structure. Using a steel skeleton that interferes as little as possible with the land on this 99-hectare site in the wine-producing area of Baja California, the architect employed COR-TEN steel for exterior surfaces in an effort to blend in with the tan or brown landscape. In this setting, guests can indeed enjoy nature, while also taking advantage of hotel services.

An example of a small individual structure placed in a natural setting is the Hut on Sleds (Whangapoua, New Zealand, 2011, page 132) by the Auckland firm Crosson Clarke Carnachan Architects. Placed on a white sand beach on the Coromandel Peninsula, the Hut is set on two wooden sleds that allow it to be moved on the beach or onto a barge at will. "The aesthetic is natural and reminiscent of a beach artifact, perhaps a surf-life-saving or observation tower," according to the architects. Clad in wood, the Hut can be entirely closed when not in use, but large glass doors and a two-story front shutter, which serves as an awning when it is open, give this 35-square-meter holiday residence almost all the comforts of home.

Andreas Wenning (baumraum) is well known in Germany and other countries for his extensive work in designing and creating tree houses. Indeed, tree houses seem to have become quite fashionable in many parts of the world, perhaps because they offer adults a way to get away from urban stress, or to get closer to nature. One of Wenning's efforts at creating tree-house hotels is published here. His Tree Whisper Tree-House Hotel (Bad Zwischenahn, Germany, 2011, page 92) is formed by four tree-house "rooms" built at a total cost of 280 000 euros. Set 3.5 meters off the ground, the structures rest on steel columns but are suspended from their host trees with stainless-steel cables and textile straps. The tree house, like the Japanese teahouse, is almost by its very definition a type of small architecture. Neither tree houses, nor the tea ceremony, are comfortable with large spaces. In the case of the Bad Zwischenahn hotel, each tree-house cabin has a bedroom for two people, a bathroom, and a living area with a kitchen unit and two additional beds. Some might say that this degree of comfort goes beyond what can be expected when suspended from a tree, but the use of materials like untreated larch will surely calm such ecological doubts.

A talented American architect, Tom Kundig, based in Seattle, Washington, has made a name for himself in good part with small structures. His Sol Duc Cabin (Olympic Peninsula, Washington, United States, 2010–11, page 370), measures



just 36 square meters in floor area. Clad in steel, the structure is lifted up on four steel columns to protect it from local flooding conditions. The client asked for "a compact, low-maintenance, virtually indestructible building to house himself and his wife during fishing expeditions" and there is something a bit war-like about this design. Above all, it shows just how much a talented architect can bring to the design of a very small temporary residence. Each element is used fully, thus for example the cantilevered roof provides not only shading but also storm protection.

## ARCHITECTURE OF NEED

Small size is often a criterion for architecture that is meant to provide facilities for people who may be in distress due to natural catastrophe or simply left at the mercy of systems and cities that cannot adequately provide for everyone. The aptly named Home-for-All in Rikuzentakata (Iwate, Japan, 2012, page 248) is a 30-square-meter meeting place designed by Toyo Ito, Kumiko Inui, Sou Fujimoto, and Akihisa Hirata. The area was almost completely destroyed by the earthquake and subsequent tsunami of April 11, 2011. Designed with considerable input from local residents, the wooden building was the object of a display during the *13th Venice Architecture Biennale* (2012) in the Japan Pavilion in the Giardini, where it was awarded the Golden Lion for Best National Participant. The Venice jury stated: "The presentation and the storytelling in the pavilion are exceptional and highly accessible to a broad audience. The jury was impressed with the humanity of this project." It is of particular interest that top architects put this much energy into a scheme and a presentation that is, indeed, accessible to the public. Contemporary architecture (and even the *Venice Biennale*) have often been justifiably criticized for being elitist—the Japanese presence goes a long way to responding to that criticism. This is, indeed, what good architects should be doing.

Santiago Cirugeda, born in Seville, Spain, in 1971, has quite intentionally placed himself at the periphery of contemporary architecture, often operating in a legal gray zone where temporary construction and "squatting" are in any case dimly viewed. And yet, his actions in Spain are clearly associated with universities and people who are interested in testing the limits of urban rigidities, in terms of space, but also of materials used and methods. Given severe cutbacks in Spanish government spending in areas such as culture, Cirugeda's *Recetas Urbanas* seems ready to play an even more significant role. He states: "Since 1996, I have developed a critical practice through subversive projects in diverse urban environments, all of which ultimately demand the revision of city planning regulations and ordinances." His 80-square-meter *Aula Abierta* (Seville, Spain, 2011/12, page 404) was erected using materials that had been recuperated from a building slated for demolition in Granada in 2004, on an empty and essentially abandoned lot. *Aula Abierta* is part of a larger project called "Espacio Artístico—La Carpa" (Artistic Space—The Tent), which is the headquarters of the Varuma Theater and the future Circus School of Andalucía. In Europe, where government funding of culture has long been taken for granted, it may well be that *Recetas Urbanas* will become a role model for other such architecturally inclined organizations, trying to fill the gaps where government regulations and spending are inadequate.

The Vietnamese architect Vo Trong Nghia has been involved in the design of low-cost housing, a much needed contribution in his country, where many houses are actually smaller than 10 square meters. His Low-Cost Houses (Dongnai Province, Vietnam, 2012, page 542) are in the range of 20 square meters and cost just \$3200 per house to build. Since they do not include bath and toilet facilities, assumed to be exterior and shared by several families, these one-room houses with curtains and floor level differentiation to provide some privacy, were designed to be flexible in terms of future expansions. Vo Trong Nghia has shown considerable expertise in the use of bamboo in architecture. Here louvers are in bamboo, but the walls are in polycarbonate panel, and corrugated FRP (Fiberglass Reinforced Plastic) is used for the roofing.

One of the real masters of temporary and relief architecture is of course the Japanese Pritzker Prize winner Shigeru Ban who has designed a number of emergency buildings used after natural disasters such as the Paper Emergency Shelters for the UNHCR. More recently, he has worked in Haiti and L'Aquila, Italy, though bureaucratic and practical barriers make earthquake-victim relief in such circumstances rather complex. On January 12, 2010, a 7.0-magnitude earthquake struck near Port-au-Prince. Over a million people lost their homes and more than half a million took refuge in hastily made tents. Shigeru Ban collaborated with professors and students from the Universidad Iberoamericana and Pontificia Univer-



sidad Católica Madre y Maestra (Dominican Republic) to build the one hundred shelters made of paper tubes and local materials for Haitian earthquake victims (Paper Temporary Shelters, Port-au-Prince, Haiti, 2010/11, page 74).

## PLAYTIME

It might seem logical that small structures are sometimes designed for children, precisely so that their own size is respected in the environment that surrounds them. The Norwegian firm Haugen/Zohar Arkitekter has been quite innovative in this area, as two of the projects published here can attest. Their Fireplace for Children (Trondheim, Norway, 2010, page 212) was commissioned by the city of Trondheim. With a very small budget the architects designed the 30-square-meter structure to be built with materials they managed to gather from a nearby construction site. With short pieces of wood assembled in 80 layered circles, each made with 28 pieces of pine, they were inspired by examples of some traditional regional structures. Their work was one of 25 in the last phase of the 2009 AR Emerging Architecture Awards. Their Cave for Children (Trondheim, Norway, 2012, page 208), also conceived for the city of Trondheim, is located next to a city kindergarten. Looking to natural caves for inspiration in this instance, the architects employed XP foam used for industrial packaging. By hollowing out this material and gluing it together, they managed to create a friendly 16-square-meter environment for small children, again with very limited means. A side benefit of their method was that the foam employed, destined to be disposed of, did not have to be burnt or otherwise pollute the environment.

Another, more substantial structure destined to children is the Peanuts nursery school (Hiroshima, Japan, 2011–12, page 306) designed by Keisuke Maeda (UID architects). The 119-square-meter timber structure is broadly glazed, giving ample natural light to the interior. With the omnipresence of curves in the design, the architect describes Peanuts as “not a completed form... like a plant bearing fruit in soil.” This remark and some aspects of the design recall the statements of Tetsuo Kondo about his House in Chayagasaka, where the concept of a “soft order” is explored. Almost inevitably, the exterior of any building assumes a relatively “concrete” form, or at least one whose contours can be recognized. The “softness” employed by Maeda or by Kondo has to do in good part with the interior, where a gentle flexibility is conceived to allow for freedom of movement and perhaps to facilitate future changes. This approach might well seem to be diametrically opposed to the rigidity of the Modernist grid that has so long held the upper hand in contemporary architecture. For houses, ambiguities and overlapping functions (living, dining, cooking, etc.) are almost naturally conducive to a progressive abandonment of straight, hard walls. Privacy is naturally an issue, in particular in a house, but the Japanese seem to adapt well to the proximity imposed by small volumes, and to prefer fewer walls to a sense of strict separation.

## A BLACK PEARL

The Japanese are, of course, not the only nation that tends to build small residences. The population density of a country such as The Netherlands has also encouraged over a long period the design and construction of small houses. One such building, dubbed The Black Pearl (Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 2008–10, page 498), was the home of the designer Rolf Bruggink. Bruggink was one of the founders in 2003 of Zecc Architects, a firm that gained some notoriety with projects such as their Stairway to Heaven house (Utrecht, The Netherlands, 2007), a converted church. Zecc worked on the 100-square-meter Black Pearl with Rolf Bruggink. A 100-year-old so-called *métier* house was the basis for the project, which involved the complete restructuring of the interior. Rather than the original series of small rooms, a continuous space was created on four floors. The architects explain: “This creates living spaces that are connected by voids, large stairwells, and long sightlines. All redundant banisters, railings, and doors are left out, causing a high degree of spatial abstraction. Floors, walls, stairs, and ceilings blend together and seem to recall an ‘Escher-like’ impossibility.” Though aesthetics vary from country to country, it is interesting to note to what extent this description of open interior space might be applied to many of the recent Japanese houses published in this book.



## CAST-IRON TREES AND A SYMBOL IN A PARK

Toilets are generally conceded to be relatively small spaces, but it is rare that talented architects take the time to design freestanding public facilities. This rule was broken in a conjuncture between the young firm design neuob and those responsible for the ongoing Kumamoto Artpolis project, which has scattered interesting pieces of architecture around the southern Japanese city since its creation in 1988. The Shirakawa Public Toilet (Kumamoto City, Japan, 2010–11, page 142) is an 11.6-square-meter structure that is marked by the presence of cast-iron trees. Given its location on the banks of the Shirakawa River, where Japanese regulations do not allow real trees to be planted, the gesture of planting artificial trees involves some commentary on the over-regulated and over-built environment that has developed over the years in relation to grand public spending intended to bring the country out of its economic doldrums. Design neuob wanted its Public Toilet to be in some harmony as well with an architectural environment that includes nearby works in the Artpolis project. In this case, the Richard Serra test of “usefulness” obviously applies, but the architects have also managed to give a little dignity, if not a touch of art, to a toilet.

The examples cited here and others in this book give some idea of the range of uses in contemporary architecture for small structures or spaces. They are useful, or useless, as Richard Serra defined the line of division between art and architecture. Well, almost: does a building that makes a comment about the state of architecture, but serves no other purpose, really qualify as architecture? Small architecture is often at the threshold between what might also be called being and non-being. To be or not to be? The New Amsterdam Pavilion (New York, USA, 2009, page 532) by UNStudio is a case in point: 37 square meters of polyurethane-coated wood, where inside and outside are blurred willfully by the Dutch architects. A purpose, of course, to celebrate the 400th anniversary of New Amsterdam, the original name of New York City. But otherwise, is it a shelter, an architectural statement, or, finally, a work of art? The same question of course arises for Zaha Hadid's 45-square-meter Burnham Pavilion (Chicago, Illinois, United States, 2009, page 196). It was one of a number of small structures commissioned to celebrate the 100th anniversary of the Burnham Plan for Chicago, another was by Ben van Berkel and UNStudio. Containing a video installation, such a structure could be said in a sense not to serve any real purpose. The architects stated, “The presence of the new structure triggers the visitor's intellectual curiosity whilst an intensification of public life around and within the pavilion supports the idea of public discourse.” The usefulness of the architecture is then one of stimulating public awareness, much as would a work of art. Small is beautiful?

## SIZE IS IN THE EYE OF THE BEHOLDER

The question of just what is “small” in architecture might also be posed. House 77 (Póvoa de Varzim, Portugal, 2009–10, page 110) by José Cadilhe has an area of 232 square meters, perhaps rather large for a book on small buildings? In fact, this house is extremely narrow, which means that the problem of small space is present throughout the design, even if the total floor area is relatively generous for a residence. A church by Marlon Blackwell (Saint Nicholas Eastern Orthodox Church, Springdale, Arkansas, USA, 2009, page 106) that is even larger figures here, but it may be argued that the definition of “small” is different according to the building types concerned. Churches are usually intended for relatively large congregations, as opposed to chapels that by definition are usually tiny. Most structures in this book have a floor area of less than 100 square meters, but in a country like Vietnam, where the architect Vo Trong Nghia points out that many houses measure less than 10 square meters, such a figure might seem palatial. What is small is relative to function and presence as well as to national cultures. How many wealthy Americans would ask a Pritzker Prize-winning architect to create a house with just 30 square meters of floor space (Kazuyo Sejima, Tsuchihashi House, Tokyo, Japan, 2011, page 456)? Probably none. Japanese architects such as Toyo Ito have long posited that their urban density and the solutions it engenders may well be a model for the future development of cities across the world. Today, 54 per cent of the world's population lives in urban areas, a proportion that is expected to increase to 66 per cent by 2050. The urban population of the world has grown from 746 million in 1950 to 3.9 billion in 2014. With rising urban density, and in any culture or country, space is more and more at a premium. It seems inevitable that small architecture will be a way of the future, particularly for residences. The trend to preserve and better use resources also points in the direction of smaller buildings in the future, there will be less space for more people, hopefully in a more environmentally-oriented society. Perhaps, soon everyone will be happy to have just a few

square meters of private space? It can be said that some of the most inspiring architectural spaces are "grand"—ample in size, almost too large for their use, in the spirit of Grand Central Station in New York for example. And yet in the right hands, even small buildings can have a grandeur and most significantly an intimate relation to the human scale. Indeed good design, good architecture is just as useful and significant for a small building as for a large one. There are of course great towers still rising in nearly every major city in the world, far from the realm of the Small Architecture featured in this book. And yet those buildings, destined often to wealth and powerful users for all their skyline-changing power, do not represent the world that most ordinary people live in. We are most definitely entering a time of small architecture, constrained by the conservation of resources, and rising populations. The future is small.

*José Cadilhe, House 77,  
Póvoa de Varzim, Portugal,  
2009–10 (page 110)*





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Illustration page 2: Studio Rolf.fr and Zecc Architects,  
The Black Pearl, Rotterdam, The Netherlands, 2008–10  
(page 498)

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