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ARCHITECT PROFILE: MATTEO THUN, MILAN

Acclaimed Italian architect, Matteo Thun of Matteo Thun & Partners talks exclusively to African Design Magazine about the future of architecture and gives his views on African design.

Photo by Francesca Lotti



Q Tell us about your background.

I was born and raised in Bolzano, South Tyrol in Italy. I studied at the Academy of Salzburg with Oskar Kokoschka and at the University of Florence (Architecture). Then I met Ettore Sottsass and Memphis group was founded. From 1980 to 1984 I became member of Sottsass Associati. In 1984 I opened my own office in Milan and was parallel working for Swatch as Art Director.

Q How did you get involved in architecture?

My mother worked with clay and taught me to create forms at an early state. Later, after my studies in Florence and then living in Milan, architects were working on projects ranging from a small to a large scale. Following the Milan school: from spoon to city. This has become the formula of our studio, including a team of 60 international professionals, architects, interior, product designers and graphic designers.

Q What is the biggest challenge you face as an architect?

We focus on sustainability and environment,

“I think African architecture should focus on building for Africa’s urgent needs of today: survival, disease, poverty and climate change.”



Photography by Jens Weber; Tiziano Sartorio; Klaus Frahm

respecting the genius loci. We work on an architecture combining long-lasting solutions, tradition and new technologies; an architecture saving resources, generating measurable economic results, while contributing to beauty. This means a constant challenge!

Q What has been your favourite project to date?

Let me put it like this: the next one.

Q What existing project do you wish you could have been involved in?

Actually I would take it as a privilege to work on a church for the new Pope in a sub-Saharan country – only with local craftsmen – in adobe and local wood.

Q What are you currently working on?

We are working on several challenging projects: At the moment we are transforming an Island facing Venice into a hotel resort, a lux-hotel in Hamburg, a resort at lake Garda in Italy, ceramic totems in Tuscany, glass birds in Venice...

Q Where do you see architecture going in the next decade?

Sustainability is my 'leitmotiv' – and this is what architecture should be about. The respect for the spirit of the site, with its cultural and historical background, its climate and morphology, its flora and resources, determines our creative process.

Q As we are a magazine for Africa, what are your thoughts on African architecture?

I think African architecture should focus on building for Africa's urgent needs of today: survival, disease, poverty and climate change. It should be about integration and about respect of the resources and

not substitute satisfaction on shrinking, hit by planar vacancy rates in Europe or elsewhere.

Q And do you have any advice for aspiring African architects and designers?

It depends on the spirit of the building site. What are the requirements? Personally, I am very much

inspired by the architecture of the 'Walser' tribe that shaped the architecture in the Alps. They are my undisputed idols of architecture as they have built according to the motto 'less is more'. They created the simplest and most economical solutions due to poverty and climate conditions. This creates an aesthetic that does not mean minimalism but which is essential. The same approach I'd like for Africa. **AD**

Hugo Boss Strategic Business Unit, Coldrerio photographed by Klaus Frahm



Binder Woodcenter, Kösching, Ingolstadt photographed by Jens Weber



Further recommended viewing: Matteo Thun interview