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THE ARCHITECTURE OF POST-CONSUMERISM

The refinement of retail spaces with the underlying aim to increase revenue has inspired and challenged architects and developers since the beginning of the Industrial Age. Today, extensive research on human behaviour, perception, and patterns of consumption enables designers, marketing strategists and architects to create environments of desire and temptation. While consumer value driven commercial architecture (e.g. Victor Baltard and George McRae) has seemingly disappeared over time, contemporary designs tend to employ strategies to optimise revenues. Subsequently, theories in the field of architecture that outline and explain design principles of consumerism have been developed and practised. This paper outlines significant developments in consumerism and its inherent implications for architecture. It argues that architects underestimate the role of consumer values in the design process. Using winery architecture as a case study, the author explores and evaluates the importance of the reintroduction of costumer values in retail architecture.

During the 1980s, the wine industry underwent a major organisational transformation. The advancement of production technologies, as well as rising public interest in the wine industry, demanded a re-conceptualisation of traditional approaches to winery programmes and designs. Architecture emerged as agent in the reinterpretation and reinvention of the industry and is recognised as an important factor in the creation and communication of values to consumers.

As a consequence of this organisational and conceptual shift, winery architects find themselves exploring notions of tradition and innovation, artefact and user, place and technology. This paper argues that architectural designs that incorporate *aesthetic experiences* and place specific values are

able to facilitate innovative artefact-based, consumer-oriented relationships; and provide approaches that differ from an architecture of consumerism.

The Architecture of Consumerism

The principles of consumerism in American popular culture are best summarized in a statement by US-economist Victor Lebow[1], who notes that "our enormously productive economy demands that we make consumption our way of life, that we convert the buying and use of goods into rituals, that we seek our spiritual satisfactions, our ego satisfactions, in consumption [...] we need things consumed, burned up, replaced and discarded at an ever-accelerating rate".

Lebow's thinking inspired business and commerce schools[2], as well as the arts (e.g. Independent Group). Encouraged and fascinated by the mechanisms of consumerism, product designers openly started discussion on how to deliberately manufacture faulty products without compromising customer's brand loyalty.

Alongside a changing material culture, the 1950s also inspired architects to manipulate and narrate places and contexts. The Hilton Hotel in Istanbul by Skidmore, Owings and Merrill, opened in 1955, allegorised an 'All American' experience. Visitors were given the opportunity to enjoy commodities they usually consume at home, making it a "home away from home"[3]. The resulting detachment of place experiences from a site-specific, spatial context introduced a paradigm shift in the understanding of place-based values[4]. Places became stages for events and, thus, commodities. Over the years, symbols, imagery and sign values, representation and brand values gain in importance[5] (e.g. Venturi). Inherently, not all narrated places satisfy the user and investigations of perceived voids that occasionally occur during a design process become of interest to various disciplines; most prominently featured are Relph's concept of *placelessness* and Augé's notion of *non-places*.

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1 Lebow V.: *Price Competition in 1955*, Journal of Retailing 7, Elsevier 1955 p. 7.

2 Julier G.: *The Culture of Design*, Sage Publications, London 2001, p. 63.

3 Nickson D.: *A Review of Hotel Internationalisation with a Particular Focus on the Key Role Played by American Organisations Progress in Tourism*, Hospitality Research. Vol. 4. 1998, pp. 53–66.

4 Wharton A. J.: *Building the Cold War: Hilton International Hotels and Modern Architecture*, The University of Chicago Press Chicago 2001, pp. 19–38.

5 Venturi R., Izenour S., Scott Brown D.: *Learning from Las Vegas: the forgotten Symbolism of Architectural Form*, MIT Press, Massachusetts 1972.

At the turn of the century, Daniel Herman describes three primary conditions for the architecture of consumption that comprise place, placelessness and material culture[6]. Firstly, he argues that architecture is highly dependent on numerical demands of the market and mainly consumer driven. Secondly, he argues that it is essential for spaces of consumerism to be replicable. Markets follow patterns, hence consumer follow patterns; if a pattern cannot be established, a market cannot be developed. Finally, he described how both, retailers and consumers are continuously on the lookout for the 'Next Big Thing'. Consumption became a form of *societal practise*.[7] Based on assumption that these observations are veridical, they could be applicable for all forms of retail space. By means of case studies, this paper analyses winery architecture as one particular form of retail architecture.

Winery Architecture and Consumerism

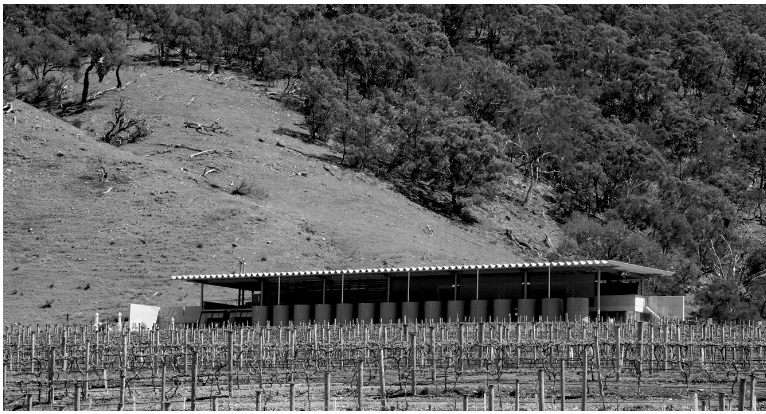
Before Robert Mondavi founded the Opus One vineyard in Napa Valley, California, in 1979, wineries were merely regarded as *elegant sheds*. The accompanying winery, designed by Scott Johnson, opened in 1991.[8] The design concept of Mondavi's winery overcame the traditional, mainly production focused approach and offered a revolutionary and unique consumer orientation. Opus One's architecture communicates values beyond functional and economic values by adding symbolic values and imagery. Soon, winery entrepreneurs became aware that wineries offer the opportunity to build and cultivate consumer relationships. Johnson's approach became a successful prototype and found numerous epigones. In addition to the explorations of spatial potentials for winery businesses, a new field of research investigating social dimensions of the wine industry emerged; the *Next Big Thing*.

An example of the application of the *Next Big Thing*, is the winery Marqués de Riscal situated in the Rioja wine region in Spain. Due to legal frameworks in Spain, wineries are not open to the public. Nevertheless the winery owners wanted to create a unique experience and decided to commission Frank O. Gehry to build a 'City of Wine'. Since the showcasing of the production facilities is not feasible in the region, a 65 million Euro, 14-room hotel

6 Herman D.: "Next Big Thing – Survival of the Fittest." In: Chung C. J., Inaba J., Koolhaas R., Loeng T.: *The Harvard Design School Guide to Shopping / Harvard Design School Project on the City 2*, Taschen 2002, pp. 526–541.

7 Julier G.: *The Culture of Design*, Sage Publications, London 2001, p. 70.

8 Kuzmany M., Gust K. (2008): *Wine and its Path to Architecture* in a+u Architecture and Urbanism 08:10 2008, pp. 50-54.



was build instead. Essential to the design brief was that Gehry was asked to outshine his museum design in Bilbao.[9] This strategy has been applied in faith that the utilisation of architectural design enables a high level of control over the representation of the wine brand and its wider image.[10] Further more, the assignment of well-known architects promises media attention and offers the potential for increase market shares. To date, eight Pritzker Prize winner have been appointed to design wineries. As a recent development, more and more wineries strive for attention and employ similar strategies to achieve this goal, causing increased competition.

The most prominent example for a supra-regional approach to manipulate people's perceptions is the Austrian wine industry. After a wine scandal in the mid 1980s, different wine regions agreed to strive for a new image by building a new reputation. Besides offering quality produce from now on to gain consumer trust, architecture was considered to be a key driver for the successful implementation[11]. With hundreds of wineries following a similar approach, differentiation became of upmost importance. The creation of a point of difference in the spatial narration became a requisite for wineries in Austria. Yet, the inability to replicate one successful winery model separates winery architecture from architecture of consumerism. The quest for architectural distinction often entails a design process that draws on meaning and pleasure, quality and precision, aesthetic as well as hedonic experiences. Unsurprisingly, the winery architecture comprises modernism and post-modern ideologies.

9 Stanwick S., Fowlow L.: *Wine by Design*, Wiley-Academy 2005, pp. 24–27.

10 Hall C., Mitchell R.: *Wine Marketing: A Practical Guide*, Butterworth-Heinemann 2008, pp. 227–257.

11 Webb M.: "Building a Better Winery." In: (2008) *a+u Architecture and Urbanism* 08:10, pp. 12–16.

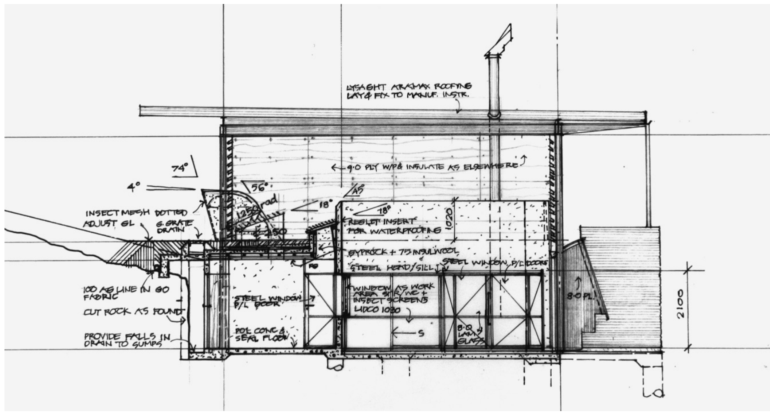
Sensory, somatic and aesthetic experiences as approach to create distinctiveness

Wine as sensory experience provides an enormous potential for bodily pleasures. The senses used in the appreciation of wine are primarily smell, but also sight and taste. Both, connoisseurs and winemakers look for colour, clarity, body, complexity and age in a wine and can with a little experience, not only identify the grape variety, but also the define where the vines are growing.

Unlike a label on a wine bottle, winery architecture is asked to communicate and facilitate experiences and to generate positive memories. But how can architecture enable pleasurable experiences and create enjoyable memories?

In the world of wine, distinctiveness is often described as *terroir*, a French term that embodies geographical and cultural, as well as human notions. Even so the term and its origins are debatable, it provides guidance for vintners and customers alike. Winery architecture is still missing a resilient conceptual framework that helps in the development of a place and user centred design approach, meaningful experiences and spatial distinctiveness. Hereby, places and artefacts are understood as two determining factors for spatial narration. Consequently, a concept that incorporates values of place and aesthetics has been chosen as source for inspiration. In the field of aesthetic experiences, philosopher Richard Shusterman identified four principal dimensions that are value and experience based. Shusterman identifies 'evaluative, phenomenological, semantic and demarcational-definitional dimensions' in his writings[12]. The evaluative dimension addresses pleasure or *jouissance*, the phenomenological dimension is described as being concerned with vividly felt emotions. Meaningful experiences are seen as part of a semantic dimen-

12 Shusterman R.: *The End of Aesthetic Experience*, The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism 55:1. 1997, p. 30.



sion. The demarcational-definitional dimension addresses uniqueness or distinction.[13] Architectural design considerations and space programming that address relevant aesthetic experiences, enable a spatial expression of qualities and values and allow for an instigation of memorable experiences. A consumer-oriented approach that makes a point of difference is in principle not replicable but carries the potential for customer loyalty. Instead of providing a design guideline, this paper aims to point out these additional intangible and tangible dimensions that are capable to enrich architecture.

As a case study, Glenn Murcutt's Lerida Estate Winery has been analysed retrospectively, to investigate how the architecture addresses sensory, somatic and aesthetic experiences.

When visitors approach the building located adjacent to Lake George in New South Wales, Australia, they are invited to experience the evaluative dimensions of the place. By going through the vines uphill towards the entrance one can immediately feel the harshness of the climate and the diligence needed to cultivate vines in that particular spot. The architecture itself, carefully frames vistas and connects the surrounding with the interior in a very sophisticated way. But not only the inside-outside relationship is important for the architecture, Murcutt arranged the spaces in a linear way so that the production flow is visually traceable. One can feel the aesthetic properties by looking at the precision of tectonics. The winery also appeals on a phenomenological dimension by providing informal spaces that enable visitors and hosts to create individual experiences. The positioning of rainwater tanks creates a detached, secondary, yet functional facade and gives insides to the climatic conditions of the terrain. The semantic dimension is taken account for in a way that human interaction is enabled; the setup makes it easy for visitor and hosts to generated meaningful experiences. The careful placement

13 Shusterman R. Tomlin A.: *Aesthetic Experience*, Routledge 2008, p. 3.

of the building in the landscape is, as well as the harmonic colour selections are important part of the demarcational-definitional dimension.

The analysis of Glenn Murcutt's winery design is based on a visitation, an interview with the architect and a study of the original drawings, is not trying to post-rationalise aesthetic experiences within winery architecture. Nonetheless, over the last couple of years winery architecture has managed to engage in *architecture parlante*, that focuses on the provision of enjoyable experiences and the creation positive memories in high hopes of consumer loyalty. The principles of the architecture of consumerism as identified by Herman cannot be found in winery architecture. Market demands, replicability and consistent novelty are not part of the design agenda, making winery architecture the architecture of post-consumerism.