

## *On the Architectural Design Parti*

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What is an *Architectural Design Parti*? Better yet, what is the *architectural design parti* of *your proposal*? If you can't answer this question, then you can't really go anywhere. Well, you can go many ways, but you are truly lost. Going home, finding your whereabouts, your direction – that's what it means to become aware of your *parti*.

So, what is a *parti*? Simply put, it's the most basic organizational principle that expresses your architectural design. It is the scheme, main concept, or idea that explains better than anything else the character and appearance of your design. It's the position your design takes in front of the world of infinite architectural possibilities. Very much like what a political party does in the midst of the many political ideologies, it could embrace or address the state of affairs of a country, people, crisis, economy... After all, *parti* comes from the French word similar to the Spanish word, "*partido*". In Spanish arriving at a *parti* requires "*toma de partido*", literally to "take a position". So selecting a *parti* demands your declaration of affiliation, the commitment to a major idea of architecture that resolves a given set of architectural challenges...

So the *parti* is not neutral. It demands professing... professing a belief.

The *parti* is the widest yet most profound description possible of your act of making. In a way it comes foremost and first, before any language is applied. Hence you can have the same *parti* being applied by Peter Zumthor or Jean Nouvel, Zaha Hadid or Michael Graves... Of course, certain types of languages may preclude the selection of certain *partis*, very much like certain cultures may not accept or chose certain kinds of political or economic ideologies.

So, what is it? You see, if you answer this question then you resolve all the questions, hence its importance and its difficulty. For a *parti* permeates every single aspect of architecture... its formal manifestation, its tectonics and details, its engagement of program and site, its experience... Despite seeming to be 'intellectual', the *parti* is far from being intellectual – the *parti* is the true nature of the design. It manifests its very essence and therefore cannot be just intellectual. Of course it takes a kin mind to clarify the essence of your architecture. But such an act is better said to be just one of sharp observation rather than one of intellectualization. In fact, intellectualization often obscures or confuses what is in front of you. In a way, the essence, nature, or basic condition of the architectural being cannot be 'figured out' but rather needs to be 'seen' or 'felt'.

Of course, one can start with a *parti* and then steer the design process toward creating a being that expresses such character. Let's say you pick a 'juxtaposition' *parti*. This choice may be random, pre-assigned, chosen for good reasons (analysis, site, precedent, etc.). However, once you select this or that *parti*, then you are definitely moving toward this and not that direction. You have now an operative system for critiquing, developing, realizing your architecture.

In short, the *parti* is the overall and comprehensive schema, idea, or concept giving order, meaning, and rationale to a building. It provides a horizontal thrust that connects program, site, experience, form, and tectonics together in such a way that, if very well done, it also points to a vertical dimension: philosophy. The *parti* may start from a particular architectural concept interpreting a specific dimension of architecture (context, precedent, composition, materiality, etc.). However, in order to become a *parti*, it needs to become comprehensive, cross-dimensional, bringing all aspects of a design within its domain.

### **Architects on the Architectural Design Parti:**

*“The most important matter in designing a building is to establish a design philosophy. Each building needs and should have its own appropriate principle that directs the design... Little by little the philosophy of the building starts to take shape in my mind and suddenly I have the feeling that it is ready...”* (Legorreta in AD 110-Aspects of Minimal Architecture, 1994, p.16)

*“Without an IDEA, Architecture would be pointless, only empty form... An idea is capable of: serving (function), responding to a place (context), resolving itself geometrically (composition), materializing itself physically (construction)... Architecture is always a built IDEA. The history of Architecture is the History of built IDEAS. Forms change, they crumble, but the IDEAS remain, they are eternal.”* (Alberto Campo Baeza, p.22 in AD 110-Aspects of Minimal Architecture, 1994)

*“...making architecture is about making choices, which once made, exclude other choices. The choices one makes establishes a kind of testament...”* (Pawson Williams Architects, p.42 in AD 110-Aspects of Minimal Architecture, 1994)