

# Budapest's new beauties

Emiel Lamers has selected 25 discreet but remarkable contributions to the Hungarian capital's fabric by a new generation of architects.

HUNGARY — TEXT: EMIEL LAMERS, ILLUSTRATION: MENNO WITTEBROOD

Outside Hungary, late twentieth-century Hungarian architecture is known chiefly for the organic works of Imre Makovecz and his followers. This idiosyncratic style was pushed into the background by the political and economic changes of 1990. In no time at all it seemed, big, bland shopping centres were popping up all over the capital, while vacant sites along the city's motorways were colonized by the familiar corrugated iron boxes housing international retail chain stores. As a rule there was little time and concern for the quality of the architecture, let alone innovation.

Recent years have seen an interesting development in the field of architecture, this time of a more modest, retiring character. Scattered here and there around the city are renovation and new-build projects that put Budapest on the architectural map of the 21st century. No high-rise projects, which are still not permissible under current building regulations, but mostly small-scale interventions tucked away in the city's various districts. The search for this new generation of buildings begins on Vörösmarty Square in the centre of the Pest district. In the very first issue of A10, I wrote about a **shopping centre** (1) that was to be built here. Since then, the 1960s building has been demolished and work has commenced on the renovation of the 'Vigado' building behind. The mock-up on the corner of the building site already offers a foretaste of what the complex's diamond-shaped glass facade will look like.

A stroll through the recently spruced-up park on Erzsébet Square brings us to the corner of Sas utca and the **Kartell shop** (2). The interior design by **Dóm architects** is an interplay of light, shadow and reflection in which the detailing is as airily designed as the plastic furniture on display here. At one end of Erzsébet Square is a shallow pool that is simultaneously

the glazed roof of the **Gödör Klub** (3). In 1998 construction began on this site for a new National Theatre to a futuristic design by Ferenc Bán. When the Fidesz party assumed power, the plan was cancelled and a design competition for a club to fill the already excavated pit was won by a group of young architects. A new National Theatre was eventually built at the so-called Millennium Centre on the Danube, but to a neo-classic design by Mária Siklós.

From the Gödör Klub we walk along the tree-lined Andrásy út. Number 9 was once the **headquarters of ING Bank and Nationale Nederlanden** (4). The conversion and extension of the 1883 Brull Palace by **EEA architects** dates from 1994 but it is still one of the most progressive designs in the capital. Sadly, the whale-shaped conference room on the glass roof of the atrium is not open to visitors. But it's worth walking around the corner to number 12 Paula Ede utca, from where the canted rear elevation can be seen. Back on Andrásy út and opposite Miklós Ybl's 1884 National Opera at number 27, is **Caprice Jewellers** (5). The oak and imitation leather interior was designed by **minusplus** with great attention to the detail-

ing of the display cases where all the hinges and fixings have been carefully hidden from view.

Past Oktogon Square, on the left side of Andrásy út, stands the controversial **House of Terror** (6). For twelve years its cellars were used as a prison, first by the Nazis in 1944-1945 and subsequently by the communist state security police. In sunny weather, the word 'terror' is projected onto the facade via cut-outs in the deep steel awning. The slow descent by lift to the torture chambers is an experience in its own right.

The journey to the next building on the itinerary can be pursued underground by means of the 111-year-old, superbly refurbished metro line. Exit at Hősök tere (Heroes Square) and there on your right you will see the prestigious new **ING Bank headquarters** (7). The curved metal lines running horizontally across the backward-leaning vertical facade are intended by architect **Erick van Egeraat** to set up a relation with the adjacent former trade union building, which was also built by his firm. On the north-east side of the city park, in the leafy suburb of Zugló, stands the **Snooker Centre** (8) (see A10 #9). There was no money for doing up the exterior and the budget for the interior was far from generous, but the architects still managed to create a good-looking, chic interior. As in the Caprice shop, the painted walls were decorated using an old-fashioned roller stencil. Above the snooker tables hang luminaires made from orange sun blind material, designed especially for this project.

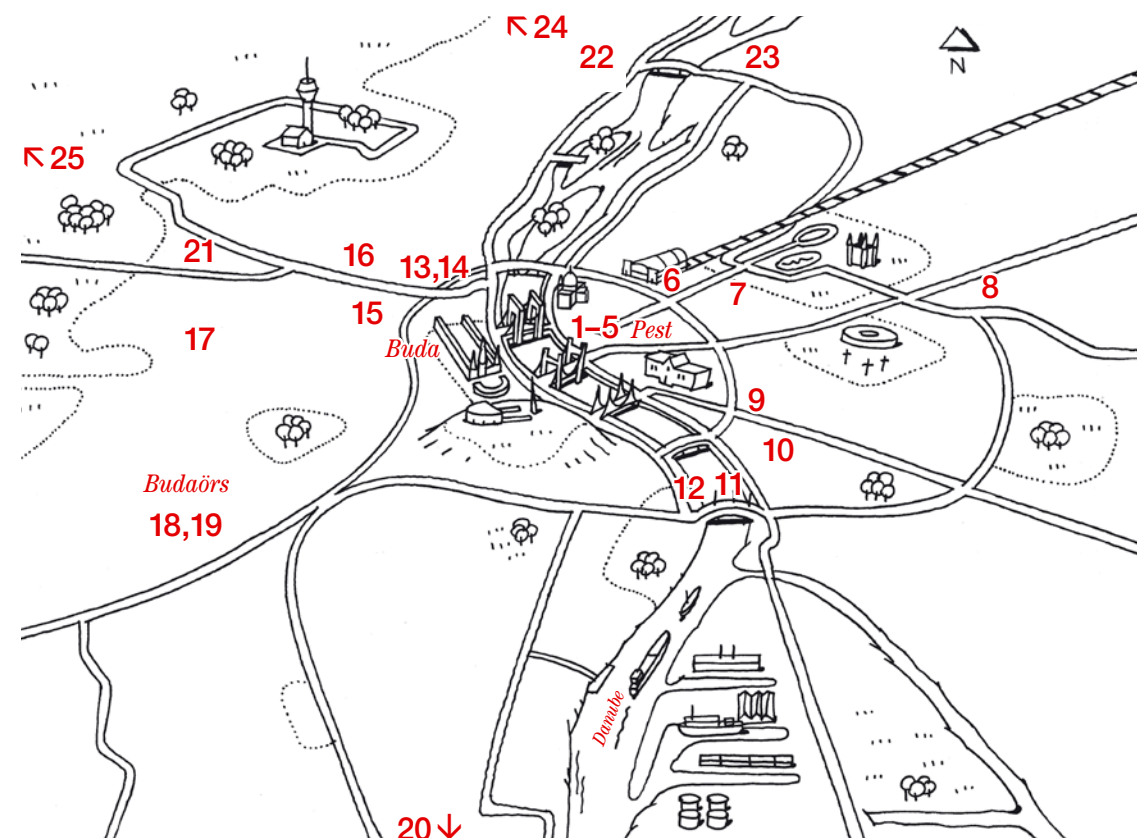
## From garden café to No House

A fascinating phenomenon that is particularly evident in the 7th and 8th districts is that of the temporary open-air cafés – dilapidated courtyards that have been turned into attractive garden cafés with a minimum of means. The oldest (2001) and best known is the Szimpa kert (garden) at number 14 Kazinczy utca.

At the end of the vast swathe of cleared land behind the Corvin cinema (the future site of the Corvin shopping promenade) is the new, temporary location of the fashionable **Nagy West-Balkán club** (9). In a garden decked out with coloured lighting, sculptures and a projection screen, stands a little building made of polycarbonate sheeting; from here a short tunnel of the same material delivers you into an unexpectedly big covered courtyard where there are often shows in the evenings. A contemporary arts centre is located on the upper floor of the same complex. On the other side of the busy Üllői út is the **Holocaust Memorial Centre** (10), built in 2002. The eight-metre-high walls surrounding a courtyard are engraved with names of the 600,000 Hungarian-Jewish victims of the Second World War. The museum itself is below ground level and takes the form of an affecting promenade that ends in the restored synagogue.

The new Millennium Centre beside the Danube is also worth a visit, if only because of the enormous scale. Hungarian/Canadian developers Trigránit are building a lot of offices and high-end apartments here. Close to the bridge stands the **Palace of the Arts** (11) (see A10 #6). Given this project's high aspirations, the finished facade is a bit of a disappointment, but inside the architects pulled out all the stops in terms of design and materials. The bookshop boasts an interesting collection of art and architecture books!

On the other side of the Danube, close to the Petöfi Bridge, is a 1960s Ukrainian cargo boat that has been moored →



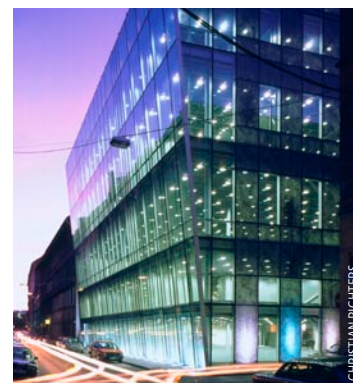
**1 SHOPPING CENTRE**  
Architects: György Fazakas and Paul Viguier  
Completion: 2007-2008  
Address: Vörösmarty tér (5th district)



**2 KARTELL SHOP**  
Architects: Dóm Architecture Studio  
Completed: 2000  
Address: Sas utca 2 (5th district)



**3 GÖDÖR KLUB**  
Architects: Firká Építész Stúdió  
Completed: 2002  
Address: Erzsébet tér (5th district)



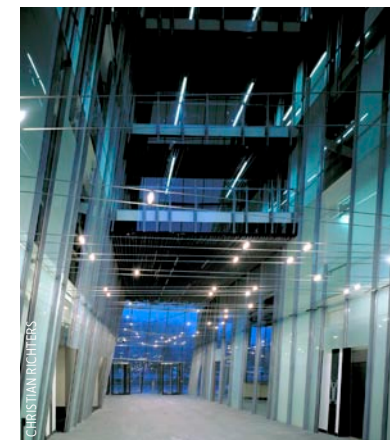
**4 ING BANK & NN HEADQUARTERS**  
Architects: EEA Erick van Egeraat associated architects  
Completed: 1994  
Address: Andrásy út 9 (6th district)



**5 CAPRICE JEWELLERS**  
Architects: minusplus architects  
Completed: 2006  
Address: Andrásy út 27 (6th district)



**6 HOUSE OF TERROR**  
Architects: A. F. Kovács, J. Sándor, K. Újszászy  
Completed: 2002  
Address: Andrásy út 60 (6th district)



**7 ING HEADQUARTERS**  
Architects: EEA Erick van Egeraat associated architects  
Completed: 2005  
Address: Dözs György út 84/b (6th district)



**8 SNOOKER CENTRE**  
Architects: GEON Építészstúdió Kft.  
Completed: 2006  
Address: Szuglói utca 65 (14th district)



**9 NAGY WEST BALKÁN**  
Architects: Gábor Arató  
Completed: 2006  
Address: Futó utca 48 (8th district)



**10 HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL CENTRE**  
Architects: István Mátyi, Attila Gáti  
Completed: 2004  
Address: Páva utca 39 (9th district)



**11 PALACE OF THE ARTS**  
Architects: Zoboki, Demeter and associates  
Completed: 2005  
Address: Komor Marcell utca 1



**12 A38**  
Architects: Balázs Deák, Miklós Miltenberger-Miltényi, László Váncza (VM Művek)  
Completed: 2003  
Address: Petőfi bridge, Buda side



**13 MILLENÁRIS PARK**  
Architects: Ujirany  
Completed: 2001  
Address: Kis Rókus utca (2nd district)



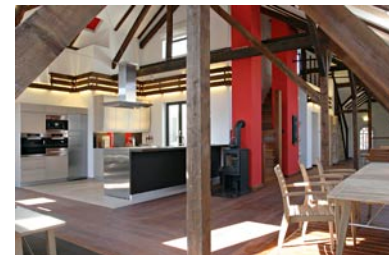
**18 BUDAÖRS TOWN HALL**  
Architects: László Kalmár, Zsolt Zsuffa  
Completed: 2005  
Address: Szabadság ú 134, Budaörs



**14 GLASS CONCRETE PAVILION**  
Architect: Zsuzsanna Fekete  
Completed: 2005  
Address: Kis Rókus utca (2nd district)



**15 VILLA BARABÁS**  
Architects: Péter Basa, Borbála Parizán, Adám Reisz  
Completed: 2003  
Address: Városmajor utca 44 (12th district)



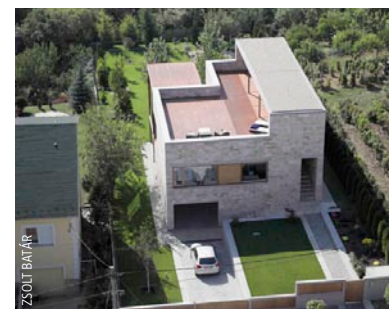
**16 SCANDESIGN SHOWROOM**  
Architects: Éva Gáspár  
Completed: 2006  
Address: Trombitás utca 11 (2nd district)



**17 HEGYHÁT HOUSE**  
Architects: Dóm Architecture Studio  
Completed: 2000  
Address: Normafa, Hegyhát utca 21 (7th district)



**18 BUDAÖRS TOWN HALL**  
Architects: László Kalmár, Zsolt Zsuffa  
Completed: 2005  
Address: Szabadság ú 134, Budaörs



**19 PÁDÁR HOUSE**  
Architects: László Kalmár, Zsolt Zsuffa  
Completed: 2005  
Address: Széchenyi utca / Zichy Péter utca 29, Budaörs





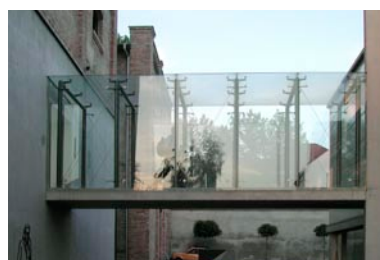
**20 BLACK HOUSE**  
Architects: MCXVI Architects, Gábor Szokolai  
Completed: 2005  
Address: Pogány utca 11, Budafok (22nd district)



**21 BOOK-KEEPERS HOUSE**  
Architects: Bodey + Polgar építész muhely  
Completed: 2006  
Address: Gyöngyvir utca 99 (2nd district)



**22 OFFICE BUILDING**  
Architects: sporaarchitects  
Completed: 2006  
Address: Szentendrei út 141 (3rd district)



**23 MEO MUSEUM**  
Architects: Inarchi építészroda  
Completed: 2001  
Address: Újpest József Attila utca 4-6 (4th district)



**24 ÜRÖM HOUSE**  
Architect: Építészlabor (Gábor Sajtos)  
Completed: 2004  
Address: Üröm, Huszár utca (north of Budapest)



**25 LOOKOUT TOWER**  
Architects: Péter Basa, Péter Czér  
Completed: 2005  
Address: Nagy Kopasz Hegy (west of Budapest)

### (Budapest's new beauties)

here since April 2003. The ship has been given an industrial-style makeover and is now known as the **A38 ship (12)**, a reference to the type of boat – Artemovszk 38. This floating cultural complex contains a restaurant, a café and, in the hold, a concert hall for some 600 people.

Close to Moszkva Square, diagonally behind the Mammut shopping centre, is the popular **Millenáris Park (13)**. Opened in 2001, the park occupies the former site of the Ganz Electrical Factory. Part of the power station was demolished but some of the buildings were recycled and converted into a café, theatre and various exhibition spaces. In 2006 the House of the Future science museum was built here. On the edge of a centrally located water feature stands a modest **pavilion (14)** by architect **Zsuzsanna Fekete**, made from so-called glass concrete. The process for manufacturing this material is different from that of the better known LiTraCon glass invented by fellow Hungarian Áron Losonczi (see A10 #5). Fekete makes building blocks by alternating glass sheets of three different thicknesses with a thin layer of coloured concrete.

On the south side of Városmajor Park stands the neo-classical **Villa Barabás (15)** from 1840, which the district council had done up in 2000. The villa is now surrounded by a café, a gallery and an underground multi-purpose hall in a restrained style that features meticulously detailed glass and wooden slats. In 2003, the renovation won the Europa Nostra Award, a prize awarded to restorations that contribute to the preservation of European cultural heritage.

On the north side of the same park stands an equally stately villa that is now the **showroom of Scandesign (16)**. The previously unused top floor has been turned into a tall, light-filled space by the introduction of dozens of skylights. With all the taut Scandinavian design on display and the centrally located open hearth, visitors are momentarily seduced into thinking they are in Northern Europe.

Beneath the round, eighteen-storey Budapest Hotel is the starting point of the rack railway to Normafa Hill. At the sum-

mit, not far from the departure hall of the 'children's train' (also worth a visit for the socialist mosaics), stands **Hegyhát House (17)**. According to **Dóm architects**, this private residence consists of a 'House' and a 'No-House'. The House contains the living, dining and bedrooms. The No-House is a kind of garden pavilion which cuts into the House with its round walls. In the No-House various kinds of local forest vegetation have free play.

### Further afield

An excursion to Budaörs, west of Budapest, is worth the journey just to see the **Town Hall (18)** (see A10 #8). Built in 2005, this big, monumental building was designed by **Kalmár & Zsuffa**, who describe their design as an artificial rock that might well have rolled down from the surrounding hills. The town hall's west wing was an existing office block that was integrated into the new complex. The rising park behind the town hall is a pleasant spot to pause and catch your breath before moving on to the eastern outskirts of this municipality to see another work by the same architects: a luxury holiday home, **Pádár House (19)**. The client lives in the inner city and wanted a place where she could receive her extensive circle of friends, especially in summer. The architects designed a compact house with a large roof terrace, which was only possible because the local building regulations do not stipulate a pitched roof – oddly enough, given the traditional style of the houses in this neighbourhood.

In the rural part of Budafok, south of Budaörs, **Gábor Szokolai** designed a **private house (20)** in a most unorthodox colour – black. The otherwise archetypal form is disrupted by several large expanses of glass set flush with the brick facade. The black colour forms an elegant contrast with the traditional houses in the immediate vicinity.

In the northern part of Budapest's 2nd district stands **Book-keepers House (21)**. The young architect of this recently completed home studiously ignored current Hungarian archi-

tecture and his style is more reminiscent of experimental houses by several well-known Dutch architectural practices.

Near the former Roman town of Aquincum, on the busy northern exit road, stands a new **warehouse and office complex (22)** designed by **sporaarchitects**. Despite the limited budget, the architects succeeded in realizing an experimental and flexible building. Such designs, with an adaptable floor plan, are still rare in Hungary.

In north Pest (újpest), a former industrial building was converted into the **MEO Museum (23)** in 2001. This centre for contemporary art is best known for its photogenic, coloured light facade. Unfortunately most of the light bulbs no longer work and it appears that, because of the specific (poor) detailing, it will be almost impossible to replace them.

North of Budapest, in Üröm, **Gábor Sajtos** designed a **private house (24)** in a busy and stylistically varied new residential development. His 2004 design, executed in fine materials and meticulously detailed, is restrained and exudes an air of tranquillity. The obligatory pitched roof has been hidden as much as possible by clever detailing of the gutter.

Finally, for those who cannot get enough of new Hungarian architecture (and are fit enough for a stiff walk or bike ride), a beautiful timber structure. The **lookout tower (25)** (see A10 #11) stands to the west of the capital, on top of the highest hill in the vicinity of Budapest. The tower is built from larch wood elements, each of which was carried up by hand. The climb to the top and the panorama one finds when one gets there are both breathtaking.

All in all, reasons aplenty to book a trip to the Hungarian capital in the not too distant future. A tip for the winter: conclude the tour with a visit to one of the many enchanting (Turkish) thermal baths. In summer you can finish at a pavement café or at one of the new 'alternative' cafés that keep on popping up in the inner city's down-at-heel courtyards. ←



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