Opus 47

Bolles + Wilson, Nieuwe Luxor Theater, Rotterdam

With texts by Lars Lerup, Mirko Zardini and Peter Wilson and photographs by Christian Richters. 120 pp. with ca. 100 ill., 280 x 300 mm, hard-cover, English
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This building, opened by the Dutch Queen in April 2001, is a theatre for musicals, concerts and opera with a long tradition deeply rooted in Dutch popular culture. The Bolles + Wilson design, which won the original competition against such Dutch luminaries like Koolhaas, Hertzberger or Christianse, responds to the multiple orientation of the harbourside site, radically reconstituting theatre plan form and organisational logistics, with back-stage facilities at the front of the building and delivery trucks routed through to a first-floor stage. A wrap-round red façade encloses visually dramatic foyer sequences like a stage curtain; at the same time it presents the Luxor as a leading actor in Rotterdam’s new docklands district of Kop van Zuid on a wider urban stage. This house of illusion is a full-scale camera obscura with spectacular bridge, city and harbour panoramas choreographed into the unfolding interior landscape.

The Luxor is a significant milestone in the œuvre of Bolles + Wilson. As a major public building it pursues themes first tested in the 1993 new city library in Münster: a characteristic plan form, an intervention that redefines its context, and a synthesis of the abstract with a spatial warmth, an ambience that communicates directly and subliminally to a wide audience base. The architecture of this German/Australian duo does not fit easily into conventional architectural genres. Smallness, intimacy, and precise details characterise their work, just like an increasing number of urban interventions that have made a major impact on cities like Hengelo, The Hague or Magdeburg.

The design of the Luxor Theatre, the process of its realisation, Bolles + Wilson’s surrounding urban fields and, most importantly, the internal life in the building engendered by the architecture are fully presented in this book.

Lars Lerup is dean of the School of Architecture at the Rice University in Houston, Texas. Mirko Zardini has been a member of the editorial board of Casabella and Lotus International and visiting professor at several universities including Lausanne Polytechnique and Harvard University. Christian Richters studied at the Folkwangschule in Essen. He is one of the most sought-after architectural photographers in Europe today.
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South Elevation: sun louvres and delivery ramp lean out over the Rijnhaven quay. The taxi-boat pontoon (by Drost and van Veen) delivers direct to the terrace of the »Leipzig« restaurant. By night – the concept of free ground plans, sandblasted service and suspended foyer – the robust language of harbours – a formal and functional clarity.
The spiralling red façade – even redder as it slips into the foyer, past
the glazed entrance. Stairs spiral up to loge and VIP lounge. The
resulting cut-outs reveal a grey/green depth, a layering to accommo-
date the transition from foyer to auditorium – stairs and lobbies within
the wall thickness. A sound transference-damping console supports the
upper balcony, if supports also a surface of text (signs) – an aesthetic
appropriation of necessity, the expedient and pragmatic philosophy
that permeates the Luxor.
A station to observe arrivals, entrance hall, a first framed view of the city skyline (window left) and the landing square (centre window).
From the entrance two perspectives open up (left): one vertical and one horizontal (past the ticket check and into the entrance hall). Following the second the visitor is eventually integrated into the first.
All foyers are between spaces, between the red spiralling wall and outer framed or panoramic views. When the bell rings one enters the red wall (right).
Entrance hall: Terrazzo floor, illuminated bar, rising and enclosing delivery ramp (wood panels), reflected Rijnhaven light, auditorium supporting and bracing columns.
Entrance hall: Centipede cloak-counter and suspended coat beams.
Three stairs lead from the underworld of the entrance hall to the upper piano nobile – a variety of routes, a landscape to be explored on arrival, departure and subsequent visits.