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Start

- Environmental park, Santomera
- Bridge, Antwerp
- Art gallery, library and conference centre, Pécs
- Winery complex, Modra
- Distribution centre, Staffordshire

Ready

- Thermal spa, Bad Aibling
- Fire station, Den Helder
- Apartment building, Hveragerði
- Apartment building, Paris
- River aquarium, Mora
- Housing, Zagreb
- Villas, Pirogovo
- Library and community centre, Barcelona
- Cultural and sports centre, Dole
- House and studio, Scharans

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- Interview: Svatopluk Sládeček draws inspiration from the Czech periphery
- The architecture of Euro-Islam
- Pilgrim-photographer William Brumfield
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- Out of obscurity: observatory on Mount Śnieżka

Section: Flourishing facades

Clever cantilever

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Good architecture respects its surroundings, according to Peter Jannes. Which is why, when he was building his own house in the leafy surrounds of Grobbendonk, a rural village close to a nature reserve, he chose Scandinavian softwood as his building material – ‘ThermoWood’, to be precise, wood that has undergone a heat treatment that gives it greater dimensional stability and the same durability as teak or bankirai. In the far north, the wood is sometimes used in its naked, rough form, but for this dwelling it was given a coat of black lacquer which Jannes used to create a contrast with the luxuriant greenery around the house and with the cool white that sets the tone in the austere interior. Close up the wood is seen to be rough and uneven, but from a distance it has a smooth appearance.

The architect conceived the house as a piece of sculpture. The sloping roofs of the individual volumes do not join up in a seamless whole, but create a sense of movement with a sculptural effect. It helped that the building regulations applying to this plot were relatively flexible compared with newer plots. Jannes opted for an L-shaped house in which the west-facing wing looks out over the nature reserve and the other, south-facing, wing opens onto a patio formed by the house and a garage. Seen from the front, a dearth of windows gives the house a rather shuttered appearance but at the rear large expanses of glass allow inside and outside to merge. The garden connects seamlessly with the house: a lawn edged by maples runs smoothly beneath a scattering of trees.

For the interior the architect opted for ‘brutalist’ materials that complement the rough

Scandinavian wood of the exterior: a floor of polished concrete and black-stained oak parquet. The ground floor has the characteristic feel of an industrial loft. There is one big space in which various zones are partitioned off from one another by subtle architectural means – an open hearth, storage units and different ceiling heights. Throughout the house a sense of unity is imparted by the restricted colour palette; the only deviation from the cool white colour scheme is provided by the furniture. Light and space are the leitmotifs here, and nowhere is design given priority over functionality. It is a decidedly modernist architectural vision: everything has a function, with not a superfluous line anywhere.

But because Jannes believes that contemporary architecture goes beyond design and functionality, a lot of attention has been paid to eco-friendly and energy-saving technology. The house has a heat pump and a heat-recovery ventilation system. There is also a zone reserved for photovoltaic cells so that the house’s heating system will eventually be self-sufficient. Eventually, because the cells have yet to be installed. The choice of Scandinavian ThermoWood is also environmentally responsible as the pinewood carries a label guaranteeing sustainable forestry management and the treatment applied to increase the wood’s durability does not involve the use of chemicals. The dividing walls on the upper floor, where the children’s rooms are located, are Gyproc plasterboard panels which are easy to remove if and when a different layout is required. Handy for when the children finally leave home. ←

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Peter Jannes’ contemporary wooden house in leafy Grobbendonk

 BELGIUM — TEXT: DOMINIQUE SOENENS, PHOTOGRAPHY: LIESBET GOETSCHALCKX

