INTERVIEW WITH HORIZONE STUDIO

THE CAMPUS OF THE MUSIC ACADEMY

ERICPOL OFFICE BUILDING
Dear Reader,

Today, Poland is one of the most dynamic construction markets in Europe. From the perspective of architects, who have also been active on European markets for almost two decades, how would you summarize the current trends in Poland?

Horizone Studio. Over the last few years, Poland has become an increasingly mature market. The presence of foreign investors has boosted the country’s competitiveness and facilitated the emergence of demanding quality standards. Change is perhaps most visible on the office market. Buildings built 15 to 20 years ago no longer meet today’s aesthetic expectations. And then there is the desire to internalize expectations when it comes to the quality of public and residential buildings. This progressive evaluation of project standards and architectural competence requirements is very much a matter of satisfaction. This is where we see our competitive advantage. We hope the world will be an increasing awareness and expectations towards public spaces.

Each of you have previously worked for years in other architecture offices in Germany, Sweden and Ireland. Today, you are taking advantage of your international experience when doing business with foreign investors who increasingly decide to launch their projects in Poland. Which professional model works best when cooperating with foreign clients in the Polish market?

- Most importantly, because of our experience abroad, all of us are well equipped to lead investors through the complexities and administration hurdles of investing in Poland. It is ensuring that impetus from understanding investors’ expectations on the way. Understanding these expectations is important for both sides. From the investor perspective, it is a guarantee that, at the end of the day, the highest standard will be delivered. For us, it makes the design, implementation and supervision process smooth and free of any uncontrollable circumstances. The Rolls Royce investment in Gdynia is a good example. We worked on it as consultants, together with an investor from the UK, project manager and a designer from Germany and a contractor from Poland.

You are maintaining strong ties with the Scandinavian market. What are the Polish reference names in the German Chamber of Architects. What are the benefits of having such a diverse network of contacts?

- International cooperation and experience sharing on a day-to-day basis is not just a matter of the market, but also look at the Polish market from a different perspective. Thanks to this, we are in a position to recognize market changes a little faster and, consequently, respond to them on the level of projects we are developing in our office.

Architects are your cooperation with domestic investors? Where is your competitive advantage?

- Professional Polish developers also put demanding requirements before us, often linked in the application of advanced technologies. The role of architects, in addition to the design process itself, is to advise and help investors make well-informed business decisions. This is why for many of our projects, we have implemented the globally recognized Integrated Design Process. This is a method, in which we neutralize the level of specialists in charge of individual project sectors are involved in the entire project from the very beginning. Thanks to this cooperation, professional management of all aspects that impact upon the proactive and effective functioning of the building is the infrastructure post-pandemic.

During the annual PLBBG Green Building Awards gala in October last year you were awarded two top awards. One of them was the Metropolitan Government Office in Kraków, the other by the Gdynia Post office building in Gdynia. The latter award was for ‘the best green building built without certificate’ category. What does it mean that a building is green but has no certificate?

- It’s true that both for leaseholders and property buyers, certification has become something like a guarantee of a well-designed building. However, there are projects, even those that are not designed with ecological certification in mind, we are making efforts do take account the majority of guidelines for sustainable buildings. In the first quarter of 2023 Horizone Studio stood out thanks to your participation in the much talked-about, international competition for the campus of the Academy of Music in Kraków. Frank Gehry’s concept was to be the winner. Your proposal put you in the top ten, but the concept you have put forward has generated quite a lot of interest from the public opinion. What is your view on that?

- We believe that people living today in cities like Kraków, Sydney or Edinburgh are focused on consuming a diverse mix of good experiences, we consider the most important aspect of urban spaces — sustainable living, which is more than a green building. The space is sustainable if it makes sense to inhabit, has an aesthetic and functional quality. A green building must be built with the environment in mind. We do not believe in following the latest trends, we are focused on creating a space that is comfortable, functional and a place to spend time. This way of thinking about architecture is very close to us.

Do you often take part in social projects aimed at raising the awareness of city inhabitants with regard to the quality of life in the city?

- Yes, we are happy to participate in city initiatives. This is why we have recently accepted an invitation to take part in workshops dedicated to the development of the new Školska Development Strategy for Kraków. It’s a good thing that architects are invited to participate in such initiatives as experts. Friendly city landscape contributes to inhabitants becoming more active and to general city development. The task of an architect is not only to understand the current needs but also to prepare the surroundings to new challenges and functions that will emerge in the future.

Interviewed by: Dawid Hajok

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The modern office building of Ericpol Software Pool was built in the centre of Łódź, in the neighbourhood of Piotrkowska street. Its historical context is defined by the former industrial and residential area originally developed by Karol Wilhelm Scheibler. This means that the design was subject to consultations with the Regional Heritage Office. Today, 750 Ericpol (now Ericsson Polska) IT professionals work in the building.

The building consists of two main sections, i.e. two four-level wings, joined by a glass intersection with a lobby and lift area. The building is X-shaped, which helps optimise the use of the building as well as its flexibility in the context of possible office space rental. The functional design has been adjusted to the type of work performed in the building as well as to the investor’s demands with reference to safety and access control. The building elevations allude conceptually to 19th-century factory structures. Its eastern and western walls consist of hand-made, traditionally fired brick, which stands in contrast to the large-format windows and glass sections of the main façades. Attention is drawn towards the many sophisticated details by the use of carefully chosen materials and the quality of the craftsmanship.

The choice of architectural language has made it possible to incorporate distinctive visual allusions into the surroundings. What makes the building stand out from other facilities with typical office functions is the use of greenery. It enters deep inside the building and optically becomes part of its interiors, thanks to large glass panes. The view from the main lobby is particularly eye-catching. It points to the park and the nearby cathedral. The building makes use of multiple state-of-the-art technology solutions, including thermoactive TABS ceilings.

According to surveys conducted by Ericpol among the employees in the building, satisfaction resulting from the comfortable work environment, availability of creative spaces, and the possibility to actively use the well-developed areas surrounding the building stand out as positive features. The surrounding space is used not only during breaks but also for work-related meetings.

The building was presented among the 20 most interesting facilities of the past few years at the exhibition "Polska.Architecture". Commissioned by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it promotes Poland worldwide. It also received the Annual Award of the Association of Polish Architects (SARP) for the best office building built in Poland in 2015.
The project was developed as part of a two-stage, international competition. The goal was to develop a concept for the new location of the Music Academy in Kraków. The complex included: teaching rooms, a main concert hall for about 550 people, four rehearsal rooms (orchestra, choir, organ, theatre/vocal), an administrative section with the Rector’s Office, a library, common areas as well as an additional building with guest rooms.

The didactic section was given a low-rise design to better integrate the building with the pre-existing greenery. An internal courtyard/pathway has been included as the backbone of the entire design. The attractive, green courtyard, with trees as natural monuments and spaces for spending time during breaks between classes, was conceived as the focal space in the life of the campus. The project gives a subterranean space potential for movement and cycling within the campus premises. It abandons the traditional layout dominated by corridors and interrelated spaces. Thus, more intimacy and individuality is achieved for individual Academy departments. The use of tubes/loops between the chosen practice/rehearsal rooms situated below the green roof, this way people standing on the terraces and in the roof area will hear the sounds coming from practice rooms and thus will participate in the musical experimentation process.

The concert hall together with its main functions was designed in a way that makes it possible for them to operate independently from the educational section. The multiple shades of red and burgundy reflected on the main structure of the hall were conceived as an artistic element in its own right. It creates thought and sense of beatro. distinctive, recognizable qualities on the Music Academy.

HORIZONE GRAPHICS

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Slightly curved, rounded lines of balconies, warm, wooden wall panels, atmospheric, subtle lighting, the audience area, 550 chairs. Somewhere in the middle, a minuscule-looking piano glimmers in semi-darkness, creating the impression that a drawing tool lies next to it, strangely like a fallen tree. The mock-up of the concert hall of the Music Academy is one of many developed by Horizone Graphics, a division operating within Horizone Studio.

Horizone Graphics specialises in photo-realistic visualisations as well as building architecture models. We have been active in this field since 1996. Thanks to the passion and experience of our graphic designers and modellers, we are entrusted with developing models for developers, city authorities, private investors as well as architecture offices from Sweden, Poland, Holland and Germany. Each month, Horizone Graphics delivers at least one model as well as multiple visualisations developed for one of these countries.
The summer of 2017 has been spent on meetings and highly informative trips. As part of the exchange of experiences, we participated in 5-day "Developer Workshops" ("Warsztaty Dewelopera") in Copenhagen, organised by SBDiM. We learned about the scale of investments being undertaken as well as the mechanisms behind them. We conducted meetings with, among others, Jens Mikkelsen – chairman of By & Havn, the special purpose entity of the city of Copenhagen, in charge of the development of the new districts: Nordehavn (3.6 million sq.m.) and Orestad (3.1 million sq.m.), State of Green, a company specialising in new technologies for construction, Lars Riemann – head of buildings in Ramboll, one of the biggest engineering companies in Denmark.

Towards the end of 2016, the design work for the construction of the complex of buildings for the Małopolska Regional Government Office in Kraków was completed. Currently, preparations for the tender aimed at choosing the general contractor are under way. The complex with a total space of 41 000 sq. m. is to be constructed near the Grzegórzeckie Roundabout. Horizone Studio is the designer of buildings A and B, and is also in charge of the development of the area. Building C is designed by Małeccy Biuro Projektowe, with RCA Małopolska as investor. The end result will be one of the most technologically advanced office spaces in Kraków (e.g. a trigeneration system will allow for generating combined cooling, heat and power on site).

The last few months have been dedicated to developing large-scale, sophisticated models for Eko Park, Angel Poland Group, Budimex Nieruchomości as well as the Swedish companies, Bonova and Ikano. In August, we supplied an urban-development model for the Elingsgard district in Malmö. The size of the model, scaled down to 1:500 is 1.2m by 1.8m. It is made of wood and stained plywood, and the residential buildings are printed by 3D printers. The model commissioned by Ikano is a marketing and information tool. It enjoys great popularity among those who come to see the investment and it seems to be a real treasure for the investor, judging by the fact that a special exhibition hall has been constructed to display it.

The design of the building for a family of four in Lusina is one of our most recent completed projects. In the next edition of this bulletin we are planning a closer look at this investment. The house, situated near Kraków, with a simple geometry to it, has been designed with the use of high-grade elevation materials: titanium-zinc plates, Trespa panels and external, sliding blinds made of cedar wood. The balcony balustrades and the terrace have been built from frameless glass. The neutral colours of the house correspond closely with the surrounding garden, which visually blends with the picturesque meadows on the western side, allowing those who sit on the terrace to savour the beautiful view.