

Minna Tarkka ROSEGARDEN PROMISES:

sensuous, imaginative architecture,

A huge tree grows at center space. Its trunk, made of ventilation tube and wire, cuts across four floors, each with a landscape depicting seas, fields, forests and skies. Around the trunk, lit by the oval skylight, float terraces. Shaped after a bunch of grapes, a squirrel and a cloud, the terraces provide work and rest areas for office staff, neighbourhood people, as well as visitors from afar.

This improbable interior was commissioned by cleaning company SOL in 1995 for renovating an old school building into a hybrid of office, playground and cultural centre. Due to appeals to the building's conservation values, the controversial *SOL-world* never got realized. But it initiated Rosegarden productions, a collaboration between architect Erkki Pitkäranta and artist Jan-Erik Andersson.

Of the pair, Andersson is the joker-bricoleur whose performances subvert our notions of normality and proper conduct, while Pitkäranta is the philosopher, whose reflection and argumentation help convince us about feasibility and importance of a richer environment. As a team the two complement each other, and the work flows seamlessly from art to architecture and back.

Rosegarden's mission is to bring imagination, sensuality and joy to architecture. The cow house *Cumin* is inspired by the arousing scents of milk, cheese and caraway; the flower-shaped *Gerbera* house includes a permanent installation of bird sounds. Rosegarden's use of bright colours and ornaments breaks violently with the tight-lipped greyness of the contemporary built environment.

Dominated by Modernist/Minimalist style, technological cost-effectiveness and a strict building code, today's Finnish architecture is conceived as a neutral platform for the lived 'content' of life, carefully avoiding too loud gestures. But what if the content - the lives and imaginations of the users - was to drive the process? Rosegarden proposes an alternative to the mainstream of glass and steel facades - their joyous 'minor architecture' resonates strongly with the more vernacular traditions of building and thinking. In their vision, buildings shall express emotions, tell stories and grow with the users.

crafted spaces

Besides a set of assumptions about the prospective user, the cost-efficient technology of building involves a complete aesthetic system. Ranging from city planning to wall elements and window profiles, this vocabulary effectively guides what can be spoken through buildings. This is why there is a strong craft element in Rosegarden projects - after all, buildings are made of wood, brick and mortar, which can be seduced to behave in many ways and forms. The making of the petal-shaped roofs and classrooms for Kiiipula Gardening institute's *Gerbera* was such a challenging task. It is not so often that construction workers photograph the site, but in *Gerbera* it happened: the finished building was an object of pride not only for the architects and their clients, but also for the craftsmen who had successfully put their skills to the test.

"Architects usually think in terms of building masses, but also a state of mind, a detail, even a decoration could become the starting point", says Andersson, who is responsible for the ornamental richness of Rosegarden projects. Besides craftsmanship, the Rosegarden team highly admires Art Nouveau, which they consider the last movement towards a multidisciplinary, organic and expressive architecture. Just as in Art Nouveau, many of Rosegarden's ornaments depict flowers and natural shapes, but with a contemporary twist; even the Evangelists at *Masala church* are illustrated in a comic-strip style.

Thus the respect for craft and Art Nouveau does not entail a nostalgic return to the 19th Century. For Rosegarden, the idea of craft involves a distinctive mixed media approach. Materials and their endless combinations excite them; hand-made details collide with computer-aided production of ornamental inlays; recycled materials are joined with cutting edge media and construction technology.

Life on a leaf, an experiment in artful building and living, reveals the kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk* Rosegarden strives at. The studio house designed for Andersson will make use of a Finnish invention: insulating concrete. The material allows the house to be sculpted in organic forms and ornaments. Freed of supporting walls, the open interior will provide space for suspension bridges and small huts. Each building phase will be initiated with a performance, and the finished house will incorporate a sound ambience that reacts to weather changes outside. Perhaps the artist will enjoy his meals from a dish of his own design, which presents the food in landscape forms.

designed with the users;

Architecture and planning usually speak the language of experts. Rendered in 3D models and birds-eye views, the plans represent disembodied views of the environment. This “design from nowhere” approach is effective in silencing other voices – claiming the status of fact, expert language does not allow an open dialogue about the needs and desires of future inhabitants. This way, it is the buildings that construct the users and not vice versa.

In contrast, Rosegarden design starts with the dwellers, a very particular “somewhere”. The users of the building - company staff, schoolchildren or parish members - will be talked with, listened to and involved in the process. After initial moments of hesitation - are we really allowed to? can this really be done? - the users contribute enthusiastically to the chain of ideas.

Andersson and Pitkäranta talk warmly about a private house project, the *Dream of Pachalinius*. Inspired by the collaboration with the architects, the client couple presented a long wish list - a Dallas-type glitzy entrance for the lady, and a 4-meter lighting system for the master to name a few - to be fulfilled by Rosegarden. “Censorship is not the architect’s task. The clients are the experts of their own living”, says Pitkäranta.

Maybe the most radical example - and certainly the best known - of Rosegarden’s user-centred design is the *Cumin* cow house, commissioned by an ecological dairy farm. What do cows like, what makes them happy and their life worth living? were the important questions. Since the cows could not be interviewed, Rosegarden had long talks with people who take care of the animals. They learned more general things: that cows are social animals who enjoy mobility and constant access to food. And details, for example that cows prefer grazing within tree-filled pasture grounds.

These insights were put to work in the building with exceptional care. The support structure, made of recycled telephone poles, was laid out as a small ‘forest’ to simulate the cows’ favourite pasture. Instead of being shut away into box stalls, the cow mothers have direct visibility of their offspring, the calves, who in turn may gaze at the star-lit sky through the skylights made of glass house elements. There is even a slight slope in the uneven ground, and to their satisfaction Rosegarden found that the herd’s leading cow immediately occupied this top position!

form follows fun

“People are welcome to draw their own houses. They attach the sketches with cloth pegs on a rope.”, states a drawing called *Rosegarden open production table*.

On the production table, ready at hand, are large amounts of clay, cardboard, glue and paint. Instead of a building programme, followed by ground plans and sections, Rosegarden design starts with a sculptural brain-storming process, a mess that evolves into shapes and model landscapes which are soon populated by tin soldiers and other toys. In Rosegarden design, form follows fun as well as function, and fun - together with accessible tools such as clay - is a key requirement for making participatory design work.

The improvisatory process does not proceed linearly, guided by a predetermined plan. “It is like finding oneself at the edge of a thick forest: we know that there is a pond somewhere inside but we don’t know how to find it. So we just take off, and on the way we see different things and finally discover what is essential” , describes Pitkäranta.

Very often, the emerging designs are tested with the daughters of the Rosegarden team - if they don’t get it, forget it, goes the motto. Andersson often refers to memories of childhood play, where the scale, function and meaning of things were all flexibly adjusted to the context. His favourite city planning manual is found in Elsa Beskow’s fairy tales: the story about Eldertown, where buildings were shaped to hint at the dweller’s identity.

Metaphors and analogies - seeing the object as something else - are integral to play, imagination and to the way Rosegarden makes architecture. In mainstream architecture, the house is still seen as a machine for living, but Rosegarden prefers more organic metaphors, conceiving houses as flowers, trees and landscapes. Besides associations and imaginative leaps, metaphor also provides the design process with a generative structure, a principle that guides the explosion of ideas from the early improvisations and works towards a coherent outcome. This is how the bee, in search of the Gerbera flower, got frozen in the form of the window.

to make buildings that communicate

Like in Eldertown, Rosegarden buildings may be imagistic, but they don’t share the irony of architectural Postmodernism, with its added-on stylistic quotes and representational elements. All

fun and playfulness aside, the Rosegardeners seem to be serious about one thing: they wish to make buildings that communicate and work towards a better communication between people.

For Rosegarden, story-telling is an integral part of architecture. The houses are conceived as adventures, designed to yield experiences, with a grounding in the community's life. The narrative is often developed around the design metaphor. The story may be based on actual history of the building site, but it might as well be a fantastic spin-off of the design process. Such is the case of *Gerbera* narrative about Ericus Kipulensis, an alchemist who, so the tale tells us, built a genetics laboratory in Kiiipula in the 14th century. Traces of Kipulensis' experiments can still be found in the building: the giant petrified leaves of a manipulated birch tree provide places for sitting groups, and the 'ruins' of the laboratory enclose the school's computer class.

As story-teller, Andersson is a specialist of intimate tales of the everyday, of family and love. Even his artistic projects deal with everyday rituals - eating, cleaning, sending kisses and chocolate hearts over the internet. Pitkäranta is well versed in the grand narratives of Christianity: thanks to him, Rosegarden's church projects form an interesting continuation of the expressive and narrative art of church murals. At *Masala church*, the rocky altar - Mount Sinai or the cliffs at Golgata - splits into two, and in *Karakallio chapel*, episodes from the life of Christ are depicted in an ornamental approach to the altar. "Religion and faith are about joy, not about asceticism. God gave us our eyes to see all those wonderful colours", says Pitkäranta - and the argument seems convincing for the Lutheran church, which strives at bringing more experiences and rituals to the service.

The striking altarpiece at *Karakallio chapel* - a big red heart, covered with bread, with strong roots reaching down - reveals a central aspect of Rosegarden's mission: architecture should be conceived of as a kind of communion, both sacred and profane. In everyday life, this communion is acted around tables, those pieces of furniture that function to bring people together. And tables, designed in different shapes, sizes and colours, abound in Rosegarden productions, representing the team's utopia of architecture as a collaborative and participatory activity.

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