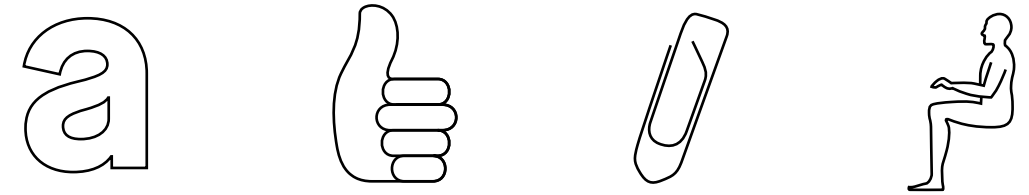
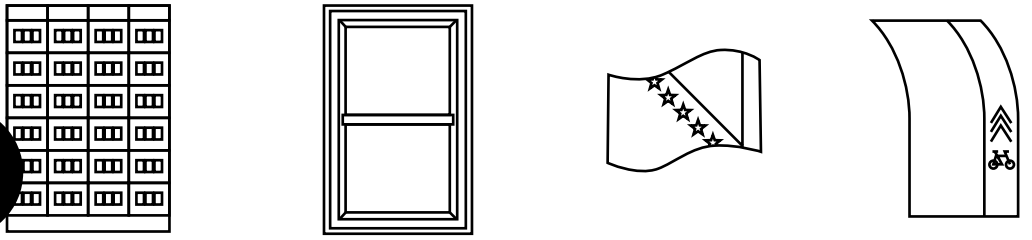
PAN-EUROPEAN MAGAZINE OF BORDER-BREAKING STORIES

are we europe





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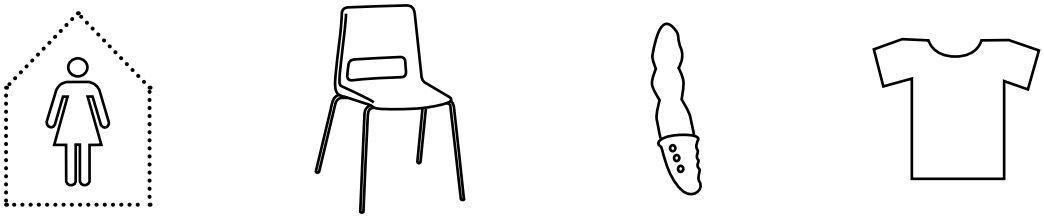
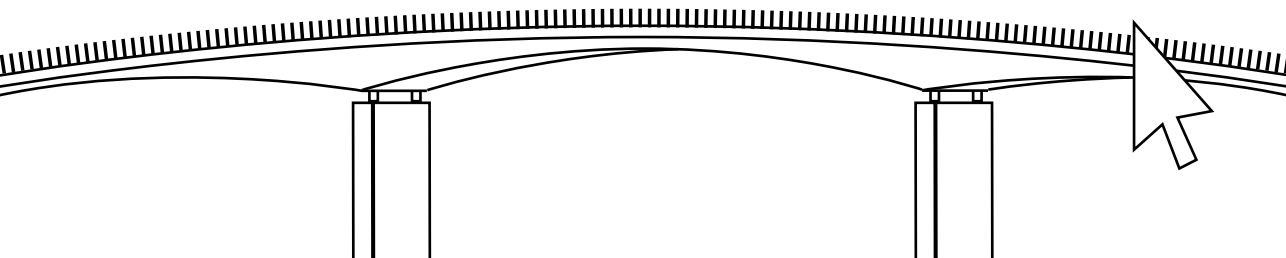


Designing (for) Humans



About the Are We Europe Foundation
This is a publication by Are We Europe, a non-profit foundation and media collective of European creators. We believe that headlines about Europe have obsessed over Brussels, Brexit, and borders for too long, ignoring the bigger picture.

As an award-winning media outlet, we bring you borderless journalism from the next generation of storytellers through print, podcasts, and multimedia stories. With the support of our members, we're (dis)covering Europe through a new lens.

Co-founders & board members
Marije Martens, Kyrill Hartog,
Mick ter Reehorst & Ties Gijzel

are WE europe

Teresa O'Connell ..... *editor-in-chief*
Eddie Stok ..... *creative direction & design*
Toon Vos ..... *editor*
Yvo Ronhaar ..... *design*
Hanna Torseke ..... *photography editor*
Oisín Davies..... *proofreader*

Mick ter Reehorst ..... *co-founder & managing director*
Kyrill Hartog ..... *co-founder & editor*
Anneleen Ophoff..... *editor-in-chief-to-be*
Tamara Levy ..... *head of PR*
Ataberk ..... *business & growth*
Gleb..... *analytics, marketing & video*
Stijn Frankfoorder ..... *head of Awe Studio*
Malena Rachals..... *editorial assistant*
Juli Simond..... *deputy editor*
Mya Berger..... *membership editor*

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VISITING & CORRESPONDENCE
Are We Europe c/o KANO Brussels
Boulevard Barthélémy 20
1000 Brussels
Belgium

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Note from the Editor's Desk

Welcome to a brand-new Are We Europe magazine! In this issue, our storytellers explore the ways in which design shapes our surroundings, determines how we behave and who we are.

Whether it has to do with the objects we sit in or the chaotic urban development of a once paradisiac Mediterranean island—one size rarely fits all. What good is design that replicates, rather than questions, imperatives of profit and efficiency at the expense of the people it is meant to serve?

In northern Germany, we meet the women behind a design-driven sexual revolution; in Paris, we follow an artist whose fashion breaks colonial stereotypes. Around Europe, we see how re-thinking urban design can improve mental well-being. What emerges from these stories is that, whatever the scale, the potential of design depends on people—both those behind it, and those interacting with it.

From earplugs to bike lanes, sex toys to post-war reconstruction—designers set the visible and invisible boundaries of our lives. In doing so, they have great responsibility, deciding on matters related to inclusion, representation and accessibility. By drawing on different fields, places and experiences, we hope this issue will contribute a more pluralistic and diverse understanding of the ways design impacts our everyday lives.

ABOUT THE DESIGN OF THIS ISSUE

You may have noticed that your Are We Europe magazine looks different than usual. How could we have an exploration of design without questioning our own? In the current context of climate awareness and sustainability, "designing for humans" effectively means "designing for the planet." That's why all paper is 100% recycled and there's no plastic laminate on the cover, so it's easier to recycle. Stapled binding allows us to avoid using plastic-based glues to keep the pages together. Finally, we've opted for a thinner paper, reducing the weight of the magazine by almost 50%, and saving both space and CO2 emissions during transportation. The mostly black-and-white design uses up less ink and reduces chances of misprinting and reprinting. All of this makes this the most environmentally friendly magazine we've produced so far!

Please reach out to editor@areweeurope.eu with any feedback. Whether it's about this issue's content or its design, we can't wait to hear your thoughts!

Happy reading,
Eddie Stok, Teresa O'Connell,
and the Are We Europe team

The People in this Issue

Since she was a child, Valentina Vivona has seen the world as a source of information, inspiration and stories. As a reporter, she covers social and environmental issues—and their intersection—across Europe. She wants to shed light on things that are marginalised and at risk of fading. She sees it as her mission to make important things interesting.

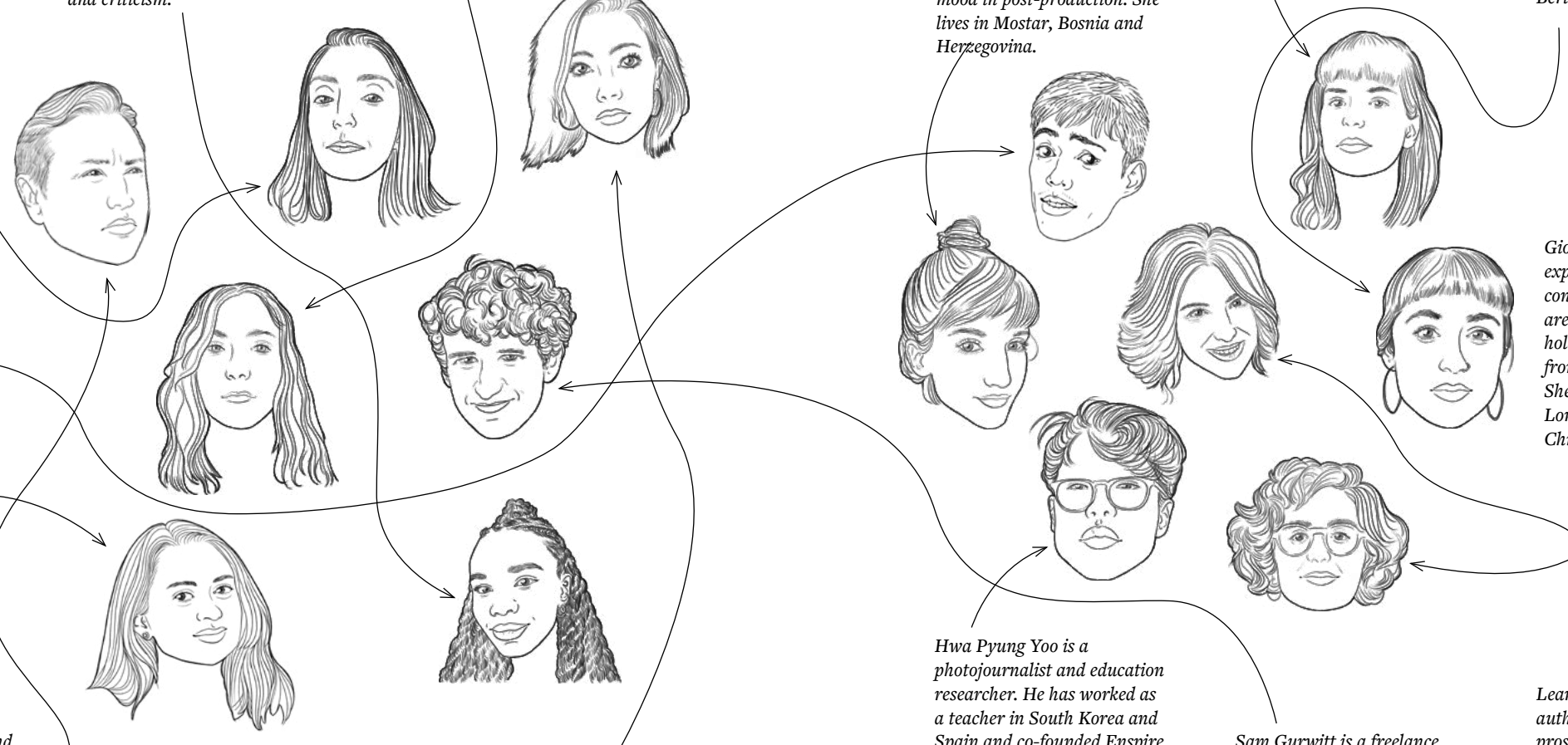
Tara Okeke is a writer, artist and former young carer from London. She has co-facilitated dementia-friendly reminiscence workshops for senior citizens and people affected by degenerative conditions; researched heritage spaces and conservation in Birmingham and Nottingham; and conducted fieldwork on spatial equity, refuge and ecologies of respite in Athens. She writes cultural commentary and criticism.

Anja Jerkovic is a writer, poet, and community organiser living in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina. She makes a conscious effort to stay wowed by the world, and uses words to heal, not to hurt.

Aside from working as a photographer, Fatima Obradović is a lab and radiology technician in the medical field. With her photographs, she aims to capture spontaneous moments, to create memories rather than fleeting glimpses. With experience in street, fashion, wedding and product photography, she loves the freedom to adjust model posing, framing, lighting and mood in post-production. She lives in Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Natálie Zehnalová is a writer and translator in Berlin. She has written for the Calvert Journal, We Are Europe, Kajet Journal, and Lyrics as Poetry. She is currently studying Cultural Studies and Cultural Semiotics at the University of Potsdam.

Miriam Partington reports on the future of work, company culture, and the startup scene. She enjoys researching and writing about how we can work, live, build and shape our communities in a more sustainable way. Her work has appeared in Deutsche Welle, New Statesman, and Courier magazine, as well as independent art and design publications in Berlin and London.



Eddie Stok is a graphic designer, illustrator and Creative Director of Are We Europe. In his free time he dreams up graphic stories which he only occasionally has the time to actually make.

Giola Cassar's photography explores the human condition, continually questioning who we are to ourselves and others. She holds an MA in Photography from the University of Brighton. She has exhibited in Malta, London, Brussels, Brighton and China.

Tamara Levy is head of PR and Communications at Are We Europe. She has worked with companies including VICE and Subversive Threads UK on a range of advertising campaigns from printed media to sex toys and luxury fashion. She can be found either at the gym, with her nose in a book, or chatting with anyone who will listen.

Simon Lowe is a British author and journalist. He writes about art and society, book reviews and short stories. His novel, The World is at War, Again was published in April 2021 by Elsewhen Press. He lives in Hertford, England.

Jennifer Sizeland is a freelance writer and assistant producer for the media industry. She has written for publications including the BBC, the Independent, Metro, Manchester Mill, Get Me Giddy, the Media Diversity Institute and Funny Women. She keeps a blog about sustainability called Land of Size. She lives in Manchester.

Hwa Pyung Yoo is a photojournalist and education researcher. He has worked as a teacher in South Korea and Spain and co-founded Enspire Korea, an initiative addressing barriers to education access in South Korea. His interests include deinstitutionalising learning, political identity development, and critical pedagogies. Hwa Pyung is currently pursuing a Master of Journalism & International Affairs at Sciences Po Paris.

Sam Gurwitt is a freelance journalist interested in the way people interact with history. He is based in Leipzig, Germany, where he moved on a grant to research East German mass housing. Before moving to the eastern side of the Atlantic Ocean, he was a staff reporter at a local paper in New Haven, Connecticut, after studying history at Yale.

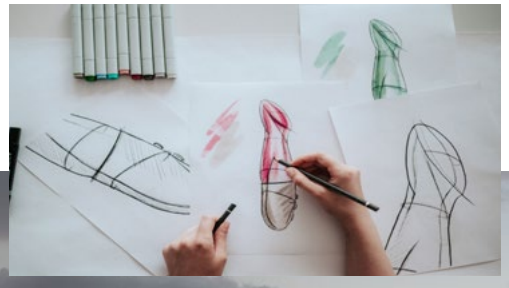
Leanne Ellul is an award-winning author who writes poetry and prose for adults and children. She has translated a number of works into Maltese and is a member of organisations that promote the Maltese language and culture, such as Inizjamed and Fondazzjoni HELA. Her first collection of poems, L-Inventarju tal-Kamra l-Kahla (The Blue Room Inventory), was published in 2020.

12 The Life of Things *Toon Vos & Hanna Torseke*

64 Dress to Express *Hwa Pyung Yoo*

36 Memories of Mostar *Anja Jerkovic*

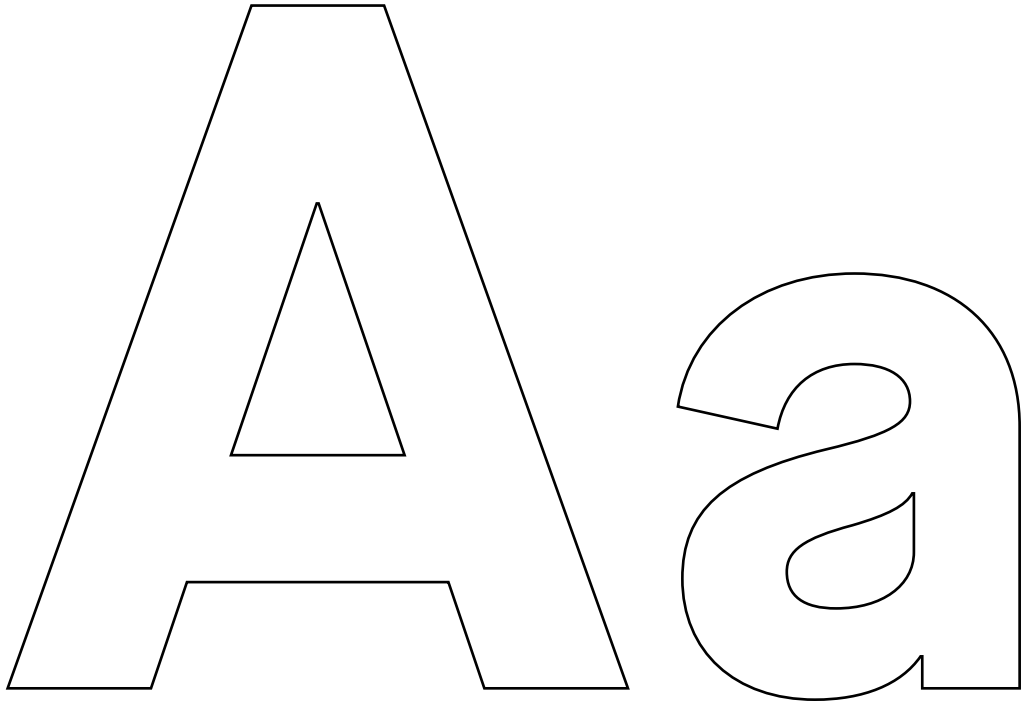
60 The Pleasure Producers *Tamara Levy*



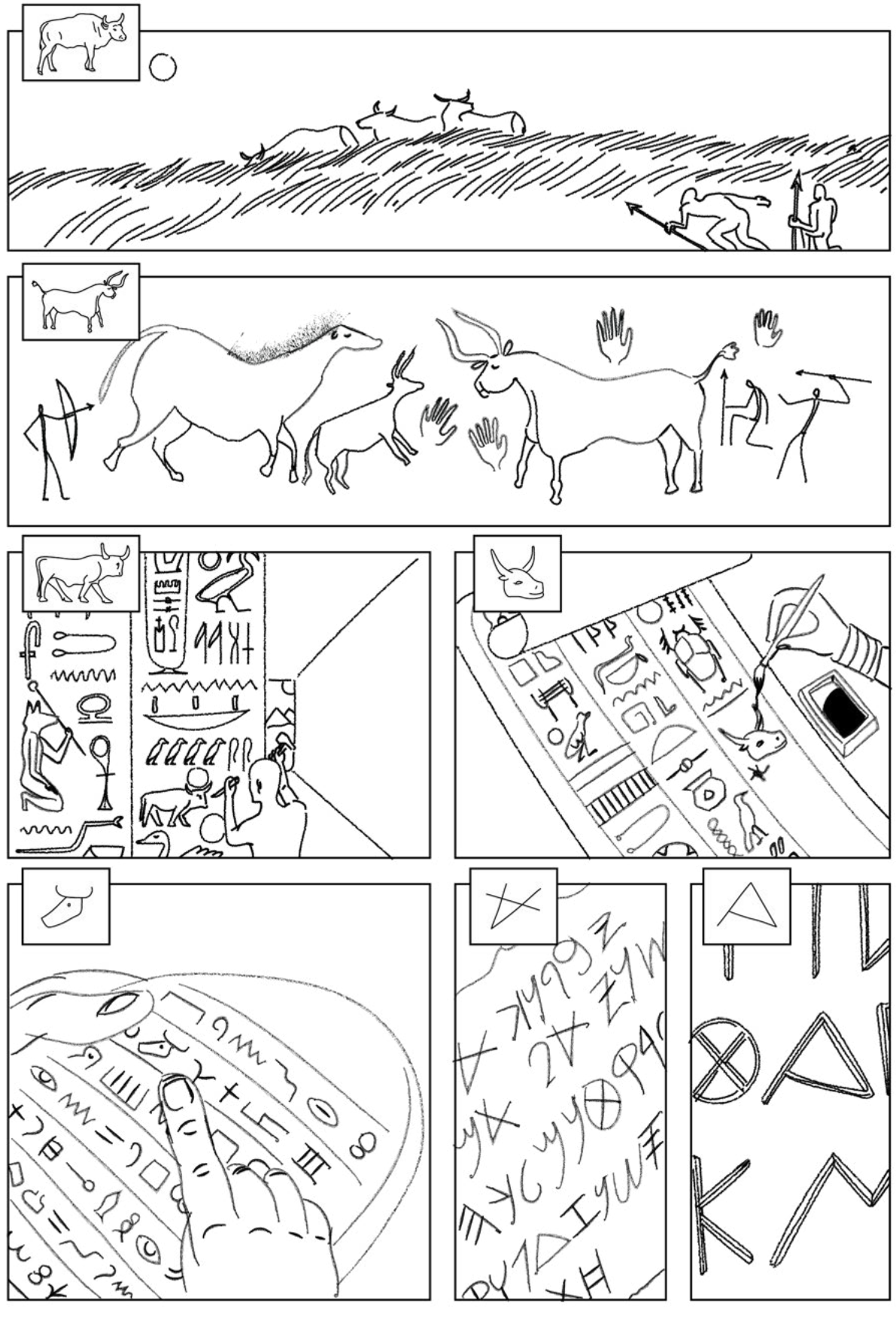
28 Outside My Window *Leanne Ellul & Giola Cassar*

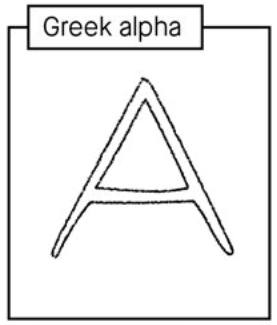
A: character study

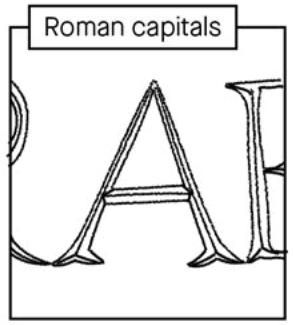
by EDDIE STOK

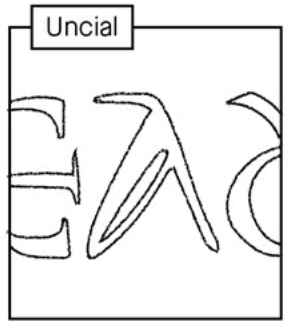


From the first herders domesticating aurochs in central Anatolia 10,000 years ago to the latest advances in variable font technology, the letter A(a) has its long roots entangled in the evolution of humanity itself.




Greek alpha


Roman capitals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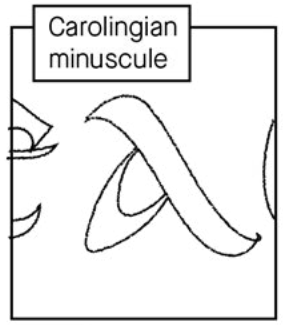
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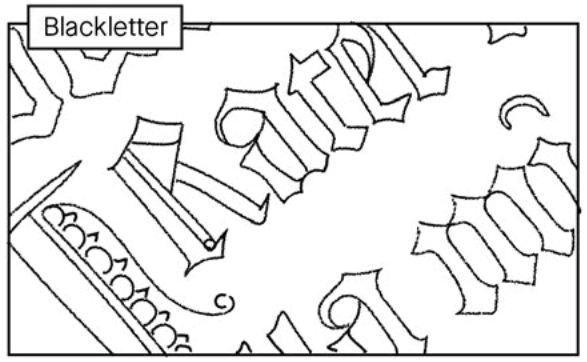
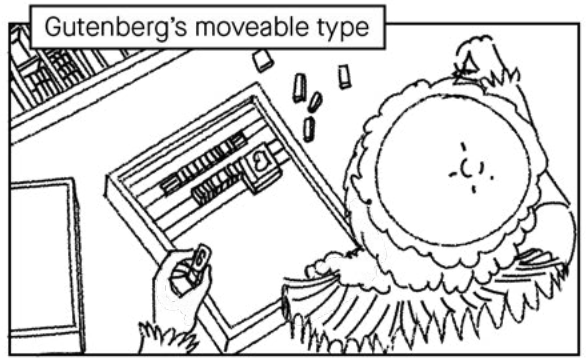
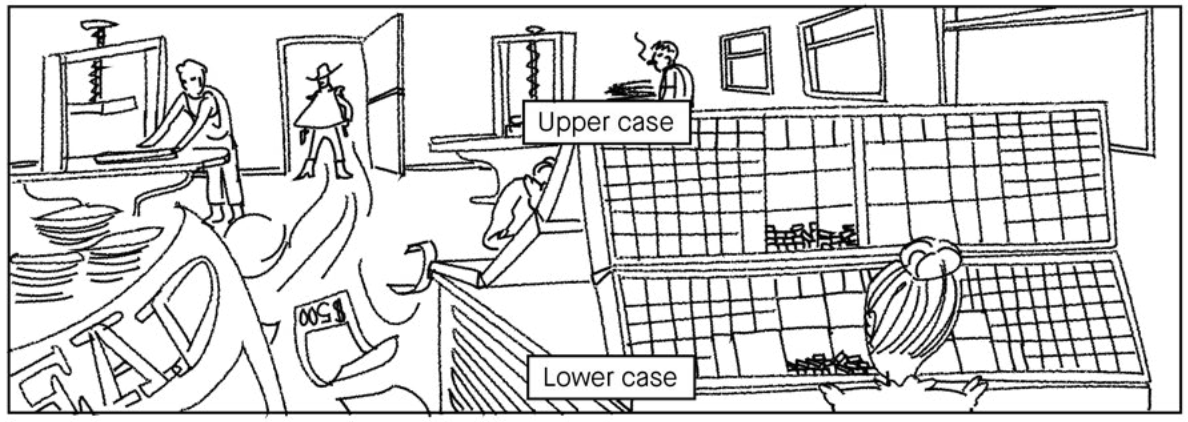
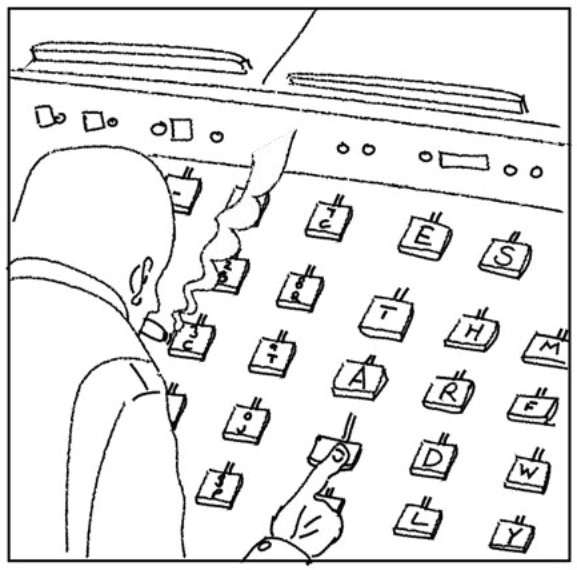
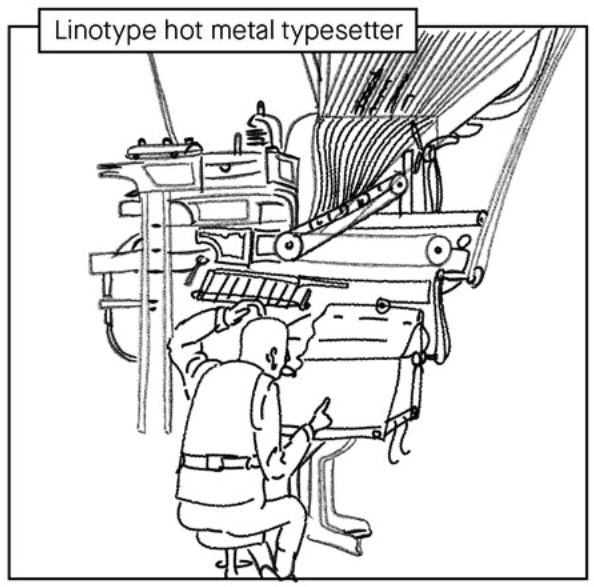
minuscule

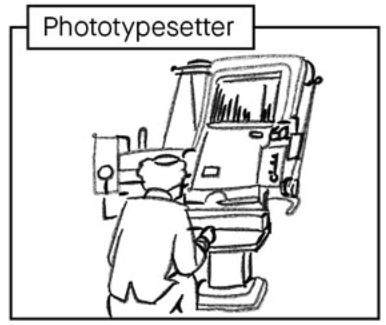

Blackletter


Gutenberg's moveable type


Upper case
Lower case




Linotype hot metal typesetter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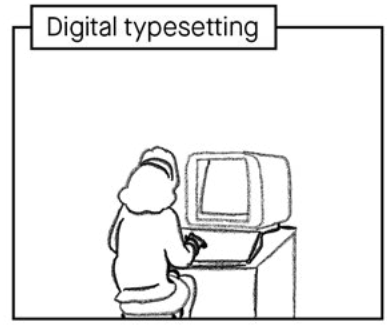
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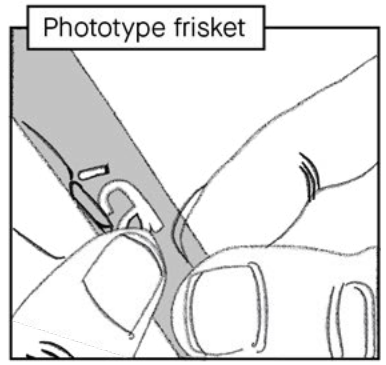
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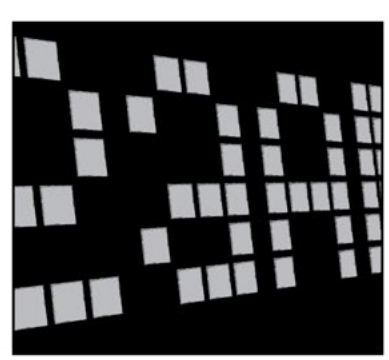
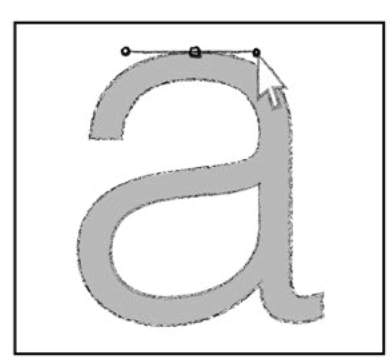
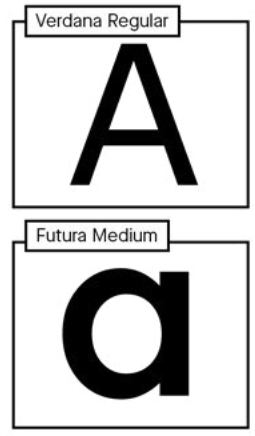
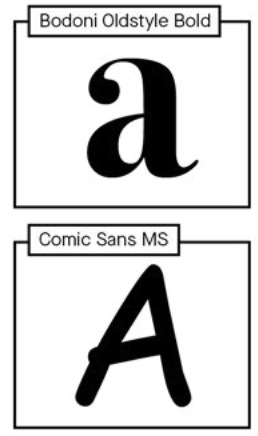


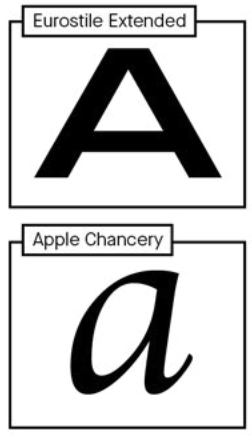



Times New Roman


Helvetica Bold


Verdana Regular

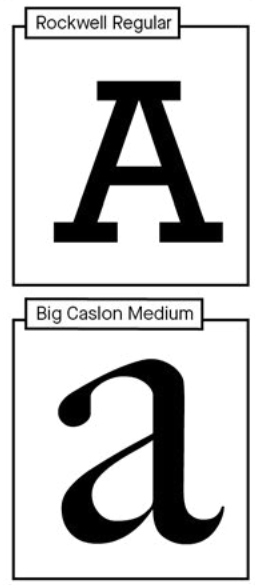

Bodoni Oldstyle Bold

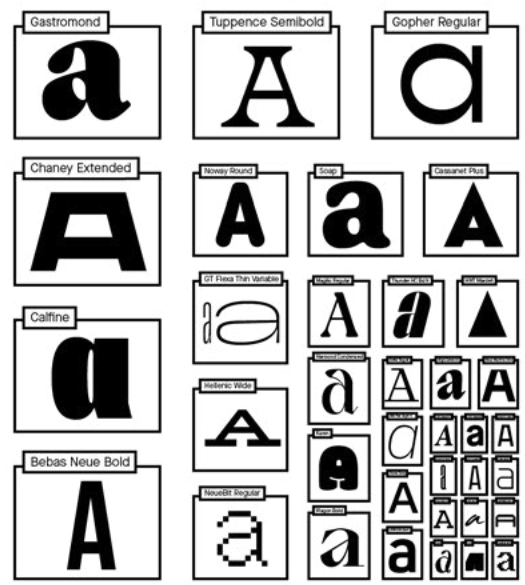

Eurostile Extended

Futura Medium

Comic Sans MS

Apple Chancery


Rockwell Regular
Big Caslon Medium
Bebas Neue Bold


Gastromond
Tuppence Semibold
Gopher Regular
Chaney Extended
Noway Round
Soap
Cassanet Plus
Calfine
GT Flexa Thin Variable
Hellenic Wide
NeueBit Regular

by
TARA OKEKE

Thumbs Down Emoji

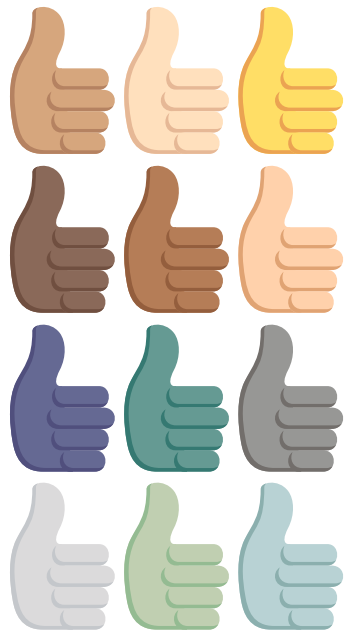
Good design isn't just language or style. It's a matter of inclusion and care

When emoji was introduced in 1997, it was considered something of a novelty design element outside its native Japan. In the late noughties, it was standardised by Unicode Consortium—the organisation promoting universal character encoding worldwide. The ideographic script had become a powerful, cross-language communication tool. From the *Winking Face* to the *Water Droplets*, *Sparkles* and the *Person Shrugging*, emojis make it easier to express ourselves in a text-based medium.

In 2015, the *Face with Tears of Joy* was chosen as the *Oxford English Dictionary*'s "Word of the Year." The following year, noticing their increased use by diplomats and politicians, Britain's *New Statesman* magazine heralded emojis as "the Esperanto of the digital age." The possibilities assigned to these pixels appeared infinite.

Emoji draws its power from its capacity to be both a language-substitute and language-supplement. It draws its meaning from stylistic principles, cultural perceptions and demographical uptake. This is also its central weakness: some icons simply do not translate

"When we design the nuts and bolts of our communication, we also need to think about those they will not serve."



across operating systems, state lines, or generations. Emoji's limitations in terms of accessibility and representation have been an ongoing topic of discussion.

In 2015, Finland became the first country in the world to commission, design and publish its own set of emoji stickers. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs approved 30 images representing the Nordic nation's culture and customs. Ranging from a sauna to a swan, a Nokia 3310 to a festive pastry known as *joulutorttu*, they brought together a considerable sweep of national symbols with the country's best-known international exports. The expanded set now features 56 emojis, including the Sámi flag, added in 2017 to spotlight the region's indigenous people.

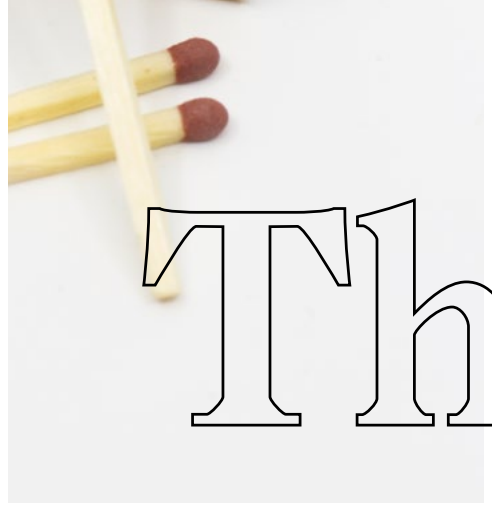
Unfortunately, that has been the only effort to date to include Finland's minority ethnic citizens. How useful is this emoji set to the country's population of Roma, Pakistani or Somali heritage—to name a few immigrant communities—which it does not represent?

Finland has been home to Roma people since the 1600s. The community has influenced the arts scene, most notably through *Schlager* music. Though the rights of Finland's 12,000 Roma are protected by the Finnish Constitution, the community has long been subject to extensive and systemic discrimination. In 2013, the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) reported concerns over the treatment of immigrants and minority ethnic communities, including Roma, in Finland. Two years later, the country ranked number one in the World Human Capital Index. The collection of emojis may have been an opportunity for Finland to publicly show its commitment to the long road of redressing past wrongs.

The emoji set could have been crowdsourced and co-produced with Finns from different demographics. It could have been a space for thinking critically about Finnish identity. It could have included emojis symbolising the Roma's contributions to Finnish culture, allowing a more inclusive picture of the country to be communicated at home and abroad. Instead, it was designed as a PR campaign—reproducing the dominant, and decidedly exclusionary, story of what it means to belong.

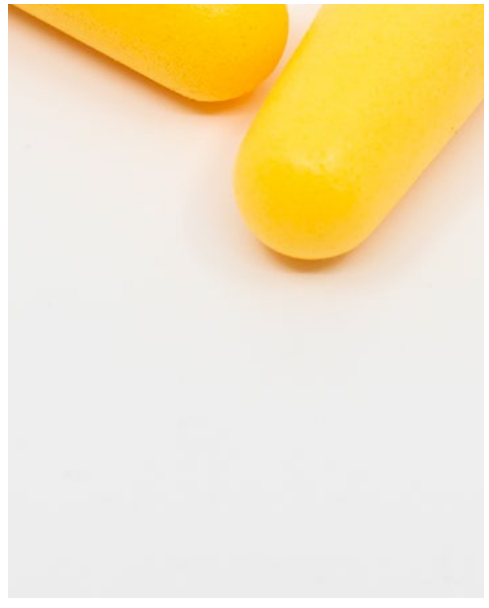
When we design the nuts and bolts of our communication, we need to think not only about the people they will serve, but also about those they will not. *WW*

The Things of Life



by TOON VOS

photos by HANNA TORSEKE



Almost everything around us was designed by someone. Certain items are marvelled at and put behind shiny red rope in museums; others are rarely given the airtime they deserve.

We compiled a list of things that make our lives easier, cleaner, safer and more organised. Objects that have proved so successful, they have become ever-present—to the point we don't even notice them. Their origins aren't always so easy to trace. But once we took a closer look, we realised they each have a story to tell.

Name Paper clip

Description A small piece of bent wire used for holding pieces of paper together.

Origins The Gem Paper Clip was never patented and went into production in Britain in the 1870s.

Predecessor Straight pins and T-pins, which held papers together by piercing them. Before that, “penknives,” small knives used to sharpen quills, were used to cut a slit in a pile of papers through which string or ribbon was pulled.

Story Like floppy disks as the universal “save” button in computer programmes, paper clips are a powerful reminder of our analogue past—most notably as Clippy, the now-obsolete Microsoft Office 2000 assistant.

Name Pockets

Description A container, usually made of cloth, that is sewn into clothing or onto a bag.

Origins In Europe, as vertical slits on a tunic in the 13th century.

Predecessor Leather or fabric pouches.

Story In the Victorian era, pockets disappeared from women’s dresses, and purses and handbags took off. Pockets were a “man’s-thing” until the early 20th century, when the suffragettes started claiming them—along with clothing originally designed for men—for themselves.

Today, pockets are still a symbol of gendered clothing. They are much smaller on women’s than on men’s clothes, not to mention the abomination of fake pockets! Whilst we all carry around large-screen smartphones, cards, and keys—fashion fails to address the everyday needs of many of us, for the sake of silhouette and style.

Name Matches

Description A short, thin stick made of wood or cardboard and covered with a special chemical at one end that burns when rubbed firmly against a rough surface.

Origins Sulphur matches are known to have been sold in the markets of Hangzhou around 1270. The first iteration of the self-igniting match is credited to Parisian Jean Chancel in 1805.

Predecessor Flint and steel

Story Early self-igniting matches were called “lucifers,” and the word is still common in the Netherlands. A passionate article in Punch, or the London Charivari from 1844 warns of the dangers of the demonic device after some kids were found guilty of arson.

“These offences are very dreadful—very. We are shocked at the powers of mischief which the Lucifer match places in the hands of the reckless and malignant. Terrible it is … to imagine the savage satisfaction gleaming in the eyes of the starved, and therefore sullen and revengeful peasantry.”

The writer continues to connect Lucifer matches and Lucifer’s tongue of evil.

Name Computer mouse

Description A small device that you move across a surface in order to move a cursor on your computer screen.

Origins Invented by Douglas Engelbart in the US in 1964.

Predecessor The “ball tracker” by the British Ralph Benjamin, a mouse-like device that stays stationary while you spin a ball to navigate.

Story Most dictionaries accept both “computer mouses” and “computer mice” as the word’s plural form. Many tech companies avoid the trouble by referring to “mouse devices.”

Name Keys

Description A piece of metal that has been cut into a special shape and is used for opening or closing a lock.

Origins The oldest lock was found in the capital of Nineveh of Assyria and goes back as far as 4,000 years.

Predecessor Metal keys have been popular throughout history, but wooden keys are known to have been used.

Story Famously used for opening doors, keys and their ability to open locks have spread across cultures and languages. Some common English expressions are evidence of their metaphorical power: the key to success/heaven/one’s heart; keywords and figures; singing off-key; to lock someone in or out; to lock horns.

Name Folding chair

Description A chair that can be collapsed flat for easy storage or transport.

Origins The oldest depiction of a folding chair dates back 4,500 years to Mesopotamia.

Predecessor Folding stools may have been the very first chairs, according to the author of the 2016 book Now I Sit Me Down, Witold Rybczynski.

Story Two folding chairs accompanied all-star pharaoh Tutankhamun to the afterlife when he died in 1323 BCE. Around 3,000 years later, they are popular in households worldwide. This light-weight, colourful chair by a known Swedish retailer is perfect for dining, makes for a good alternative to a desk chair for working, and is easily folded and stored when not in use.

Name Earplugs

Description A small piece of soft material, such as wax, cotton, or plastic, that you put into your ear to keep out noise or water.

Origins Mention of beeswax earplugs in the Odyssey suggests they were already in use in Ancient Greece.

Story Circe, the Greek goddess of potions and herbs, warns Odysseus and his crew about an island they will pass during their travels. The Sirens’ hypnotic chanting makes sailors go mad. So Circe gifts Odysseus a block of beeswax to fashion earplugs for the road ahead.

Being the curious character that he is, Odysseus decides he’d like to hear the Sirens for himself and orders his men to tie him to the boat’s mast. Bewitched by their voices, he sees them as beautiful creatures. Thanks to the earplugs, his men see them for what they really are: two horrifying monsters with a desire to kill.

Name Mug

Description A large cup with straight sides, often with a handle, used for hot drinks.

Story The oldest evidence of clay vessels dates back 20,000 years. Shards of pottery were found by archaeologists in the Xianrendong cave in south China's Jiangxi province.

The use of clay pottery ushered in the era of storing food for longer periods of time, which, in one way or another, led to stackable containers, cupboards, drawers, mugs and rubbish bins. The idea of creating one item to store another is on par with the invention of the wheel. ***W***

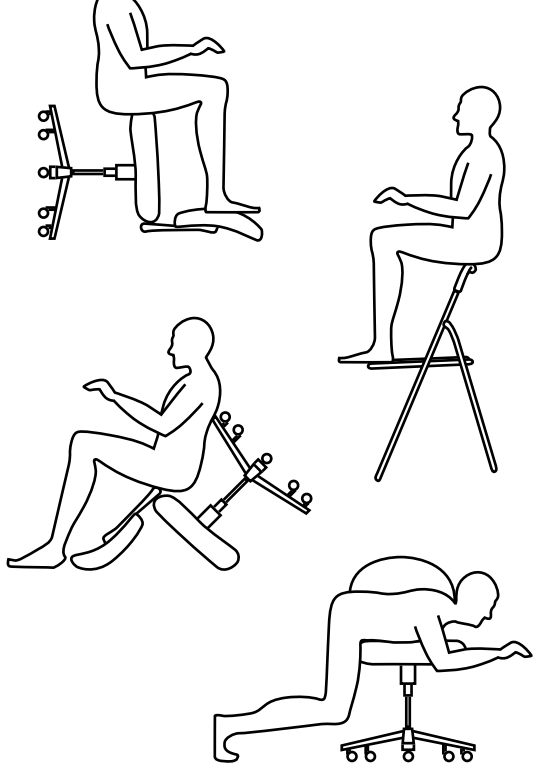
Chairs carry our bodies in all sorts of situations. A meagre metal structure squeaks in the nervous silence of waiting rooms, whereas a colourful formica chair invites guests to the dinner table. A cosy armchair lets you sink into its cushion, and a light foldable stool comes in handy to holidaying campers and weary gallery visitors alike.

Chair People

by

NATÁLIE ZEHNALOVÁ

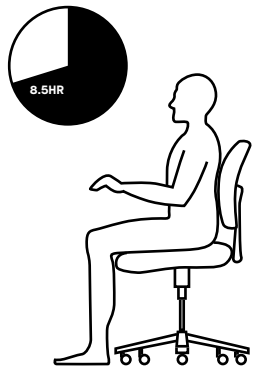
Stand up for the future of sitting



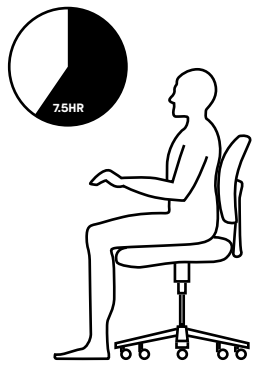
Throughout their lives, modern humans spend a lot of time with their buttocks spread over the flat surface of a chair. According to a recent study, Germans spent an average of 8.5 hours per day sitting in 2021, an hour more compared to 2018. To take the weight off our feet is a natural urge. Yet our sitting habits do not reflect the needs of our bodies.

"Some chairs make you feel you're too big for them," says Bethan Griffiths, a historian in Berlin, as she sits down on a narrow metal chair in the garden of a café. "They dig into your legs and back and squeeze you like a pair of ill-fitting jeans." Griffiths regularly walked in her previous job as a tour guide. Since working in research, she spends her workdays on chairs, which often seem ill-suited for their purpose. Not fitting in furniture makes her feel doubly uncomfortable: "As if it wasn't made for people like you. If you don't fit in the furniture, then you don't fit into your surroundings either."

Think away the support that chairs offer, and you will get a human body in a position that seems at odds with its shape and form. According to Galen Cranz, a professor at the College of Environmental Design at the University of California in Berkeley, chairs have little to do with our biology. Our bodies are, by design, meant to be active, yet chairs work to the contrary. Sitting furniture attempts to contain rather than facilitate body movements. This leads to the discomfort we feel when we sit over prolonged periods of time.



2021

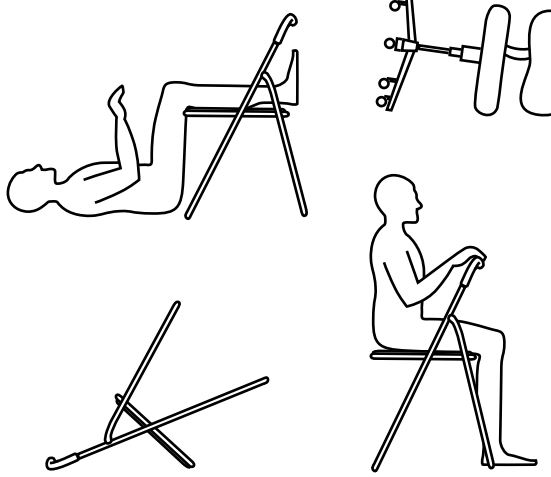


2018

Daily sitting habits in Germany

Western bathroom habits may offer insights into the paradox of sitting. Public toilets in ancient Rome were long benches with key-shaped holes. In medieval Europe, the rich and powerful throned on a commode—a piece of furniture with a seat and a lid concealing a pot for the waste. The water closet dates to 16th-century England, and although it took until the 1880s for toilets to become connected to the sewer system, the chair-like structure has remained more or less the same to this day. In recent years, however, the inherited sitting posture has come under scrutiny, and toilet stools that encourage squatting to facilitate bowel movement have grown in popularity. Despite the proven health benefits of that position, many still prefer to sit.

As Cranz argues in her book, *The Chair: Rethinking Culture, Body and Design*,



"Sitting furniture attempts to contain rather than facilitate body movements."

chair-sitting has a long tradition. Wooden furniture, in shapes remarkably similar to modern-day chairs and stools, was charged with symbolism in ancient Egypt. The Greeks and Romans sat or reclined on various types of furniture, and in Medieval Europe, most people sat on the floor, and chairs were reserved for the affluent. By way of colonialism, chairs spread across the world and became a symbol of westernisation, existing alongside more traditional forms of sitting such as squatting or sitting cross-legged on the ground. "Chairs have become a way of displaying hierarchy in complex societies," Cranz explains. Whilst postures, including sitting, have symbolic meanings in all cultures, the western chair-sitting habit is linked to notions of status, power, and dignity. As opposed to the ground, a chair usually holds one person at a time, thereby emphasising their existence as an individual. From this perspective, floor-sitting was deemed primitive, uncivilised and unhygienic.

Connotations of power are at work in language, too. The word "chair" comes from the Greek *kathédra* (*kata*, "down" and *hedra*, "seat") and its Latin successor *cathedra*, which in turn came to signify the bishop's seat in early Christian basilicas. In English, an academic strives to hold a university chair (*cattedra* in Italian), a chair-person presides over an organisation or a committee, and a politician runs for a seat. A similar logic applies in other European languages, including Czech and German, where a "chairperson" is the one who "sits in the front."

"Connotations of power are at work in language, too...

...an academic strives to hold a university chair, a chairperson presides over an organisation or a committee, and a politician runs for a seat."

Industrialisation brought chairs into our lives in large numbers. They finally became affordable—who hasn't sat on a white plastic chair?—and gradually indispensable as work became more sedentary, a process that has continued with the digital transformation of the past decades.

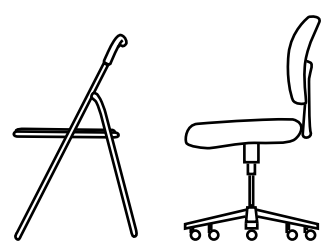
Meanwhile, designers have made efforts to make seats more comfortable. The first office chair designed to respond to the sitter's body and provide both support and comfort was the Vertebra in 1976, followed by the famed Ergon chair that same year. An array of ergonomic designs has been issued ever since. But these are often based on a standard body type and do not take into account the different needs of the people who will be sitting in them. Personalisation is one way around this. "Mass customisation is the buzzword we should have in mind here," design theoretician Friedrich von Borries, a professor in Design Theory at the Hamburg University of Fine Art, says. "Just send a 3D scan of your body and get the perfect fit of your preferred chair—and why not, if you will use it for life?"

Regardless of whether it's possible to design furniture to support our changing bodies throughout our lives, the comfort of a healthier posture comes with a price tag. Jess Percival, a digital marketer in the UK, has trouble placing her feet flat on the ground when sitting in most chairs. Since working from home, she has invested in an expensive, ergonomic office chair that suits her height, making her feel at ease throughout her working day. The switch highlighted the discomfort of the average seat: "Now if I have to sit on any other chair for long periods of time, I can't stand it."

We all seem to agree we spend too much time sitting uncomfortably, yet our culture offers few alternatives. We live in spaces designed around our chair-sitting habit, which informs other aspects of the built environment, such as the placement of windows or the height of tables. Mass-produced furniture can hardly reflect the diversity of human bodies, an experience familiar to both Griffiths and Percival, but also many people with an average frame.

"We either have to relearn existing modes of relaxing body positions, or redesign all the seats we know from trains, bus stations and waiting rooms," von Borries explains. He notes that the first option would be more interesting, although the second one seems more realistic. Cranz argues we need to shift away from a compartmentalised way of thinking. A proponent of body-conscious design, she encourages both designers and users to take our bodies seriously, appreciate how they are put together and see them as dynamic systems.

So, should we squat at bus stops? Bounce on fitness balls during university lectures? Install standing desks in all offices and replace our sofas with a thick rug and an assortment of cushions? If it feels good, the answer is yes. Whilst we can't expect our environment to change overnight, we can shake up our habits. *ww*



Plattenbauromantik

Instagram odes to a concrete homeland

by SAM GURWITT

One sunny afternoon in June, Clara Rogowski stood at the base of a 16-storey apartment block on the outskirts of Leipzig. As she pointed her iPhone upwards, her screen framed a familiar motif. Rough washed-concrete panels divided the near wall into a grid that stretched to a sharp point against a pale cloud-wisped sky. "As an East German person, you sort of have that in your identity," she said. "We all know these GDR blocks."

In the strict sense, Rogowski, a 23-year-old university student, is not East German. The German Democratic Republic (GDR) ceased to exist in 1990, well before she was born. Still, the visual language of its modernist architecture has lodged itself deep inside her. She finds the concrete housing blocks ubiquitous across the former GDR—*Plattenbauten* ("panel-buildings") in German—beautiful. Twenty years ago, that would have been nearly unthinkable. But Rogowski's generation looks differently upon the architecture of its grandparents.

A few days later, Rogowski uploaded the photo to her Instagram account, where she regularly posts images of *Plattenbauten*. She's part of a growing community of millennial and gen-Z amateur photographers devoting their accounts to GDR modernism. The hashtag #plattenbauromantik has over 28,000 posts on the platform. It is used beyond the German-speaking world, often by the Russian or Polish accounts that inspired the German revival.

Rogowski lives in a *Plattenbau* in Grünau, one of the massive housing estates built in the GDR on the outskirts of Leipzig. Throughout the 1960s, and increasingly in the 1970s and 1980s, the East German government constructed nearly two million apartments in *Plattenbauten*, which are composed of concrete panels stacked one on top of another. Though some now see their spare grey and brown walls as symbols of the socialist regime that constructed them, the GDR's main goal in its housing construction was not aesthetic. Rather, it was to build as much quality housing as quickly and cheaply as possible: concrete turned out to be the best solution. When it was built, having an apartment in Grünau was a privilege. Central heating, a private bathroom, and hot water were luxuries for many. By 1989, nearly one third of East Germans—over four million people—lived in *Plattenbauten*.

By 1989, nearly one third of East Germans lived in *Plattenbauten.*

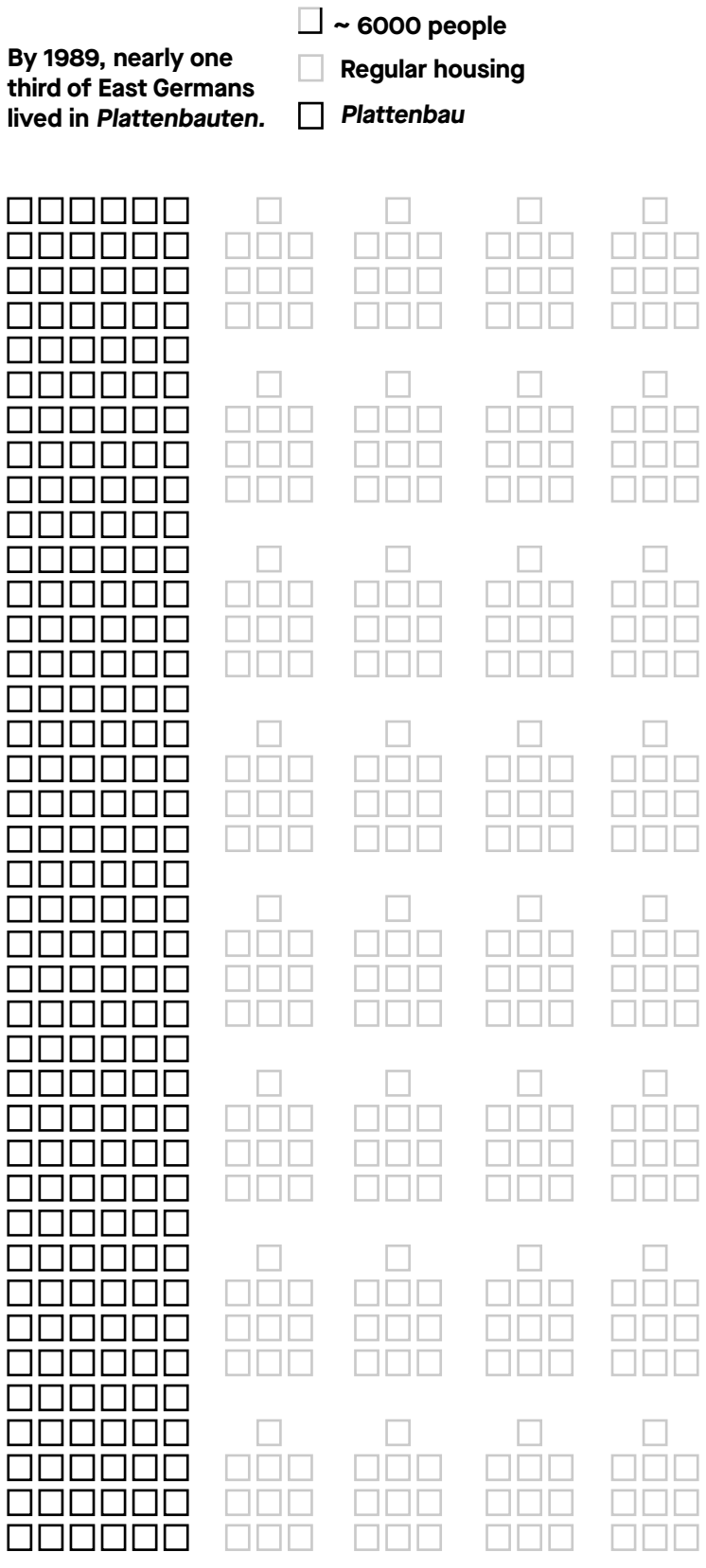
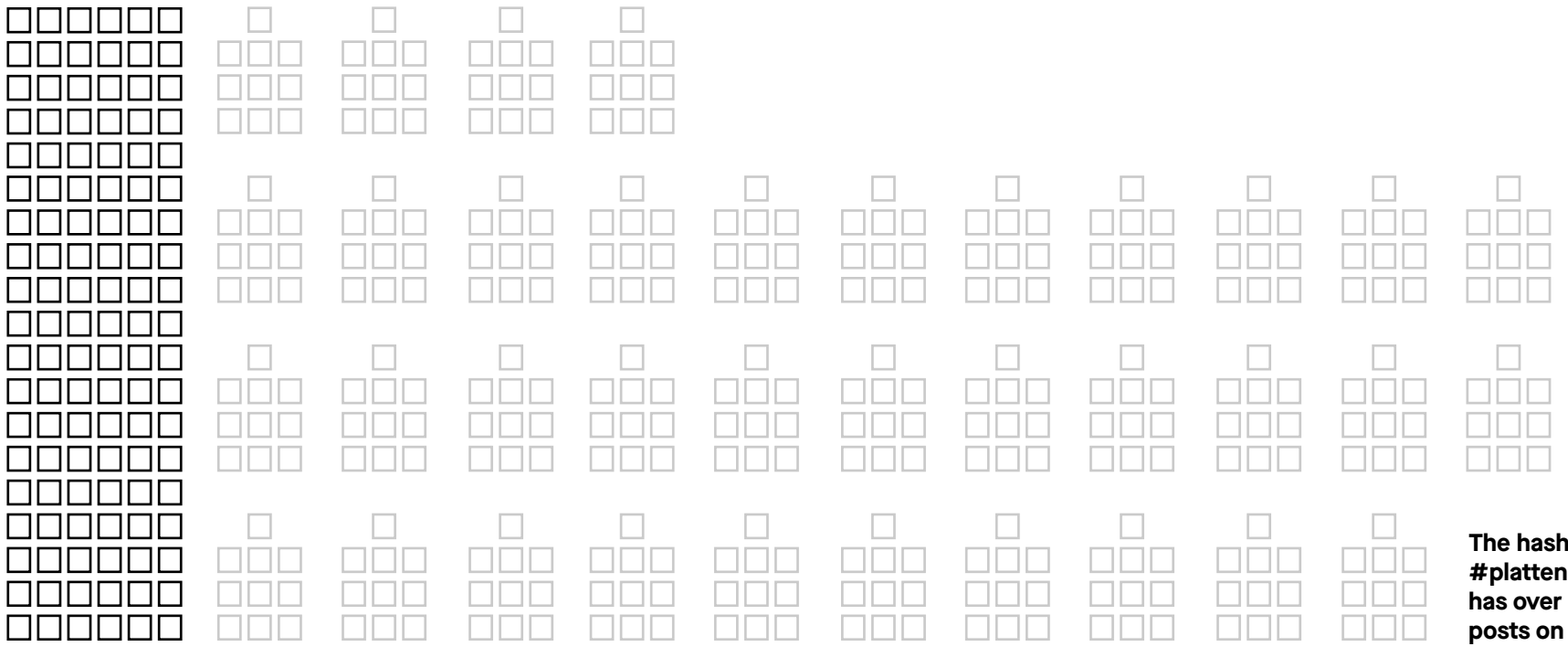


Photo on previous page: Spring in Grünau, Liepzig. Photo by Sam Gurwitt

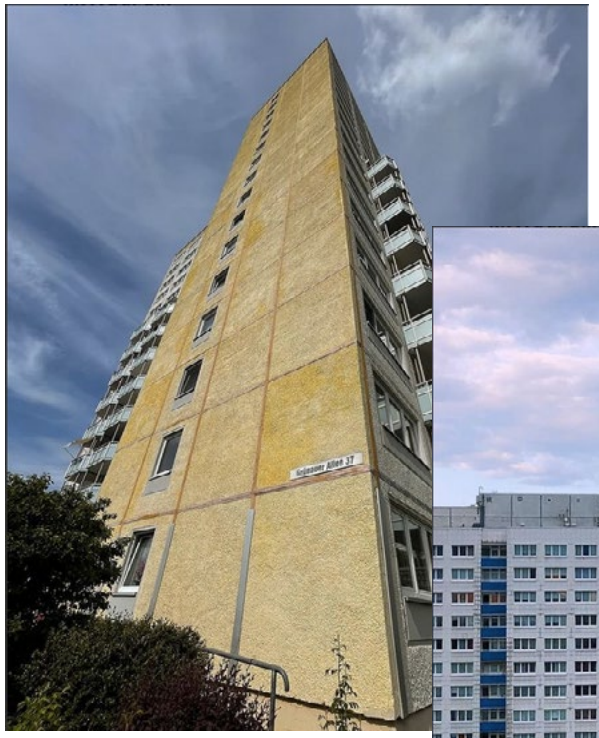
Reunification plunged the *Plattenbau* into disfavour. Modernism was already sliding out of fashion in East Germany even before the Wall fell, as it had earlier in the west. New federal programmes began to subsidise the renovation of 19th-century tenements and the construction of single-family homes. People suddenly had the chance to live in a private house with a garden or a spacious renovated apartment with high ceilings in the city centre, options they never had before. The once coveted *Plattenbauten* were cheap and cramped in comparison. As residents abandoned them, cities began to tear blocks down to stem rising vacancy rates in the 2000s. Those who remained were often the residents who could not afford to leave or who were too old for it to be appealing. With increasingly unstable social structures, *Plattenbau* neighbourhoods became stigmatised. At the same time, prominent government or cultural buildings had lost their functions with the collapse of the GDR economy, and many were demolished and replaced with buildings that fit the image of a capitalist city centre. The demands of the new economy had left East German modernism in disgrace.



This was the context into which many of today's *Plattenbau* Instagrammers were born. As a child, Liesbeth Charlotte Werner would often tell her parents and grandparents she thought *Plattenbauten* were beautiful. "They would always respond: 'How can you find that beautiful? It looks so ugly!' I never understood that," she says. Though the 20-year-old photographer does not live in a *Plattenbau*, her grandmother and many of her friends do. She grew up surrounded by them in Chemnitz, a small East German city with an impressive ensemble of modernist architecture and a 40-tonne bronze bust of Karl Marx in its centre. Werner says she has fond memories of her grandmother's building. When she visited, she would often go play with the neighbouring kids in the courtyard.

Mainstream taste among young people would probably still condemn the *Plattenbau*, but the ranks of their proponents are growing. In some ways, the trend is predictable. Arnold Bartetzky, an art history professor at the University of Leipzig, says it is a typical result of generational change. After 20 years, buildings tend to be perceived at their ugliest. That begins to change when they turn 40 or 50, he says. In the latter half of the 20th century, the generation whose parents were busy building *Plattenbauten* began to fight for decaying pre-war tenements. For them, modernist concrete was destroying the old structure of the cities they had grown up with. But for the 20-year-olds of today, GDR modernism is part of the historic urban fabric.

In the 2000s, small initiatives began to oppose the demolition of individual GDR buildings. These were led mostly by art historians or people in similar professions, many of them from the east themselves. They argued that those buildings had design merits worth preserving, says Mark Escherich, a preservation specialist at the Bauhaus University in Weimar. Conferences followed, and artists started making work in and about GDR modernist buildings.



Grünau tower
Clara Rogowski @ostblock.aesthetik

Apartments in Chemnitz
Liesbeth Charlotte Werner
@lilly.kamilli

Renovated Plattenbauten on Frankfurter Allee, Berlin
Otilija Wurster
@platte_030

"After 20 years, buildings tend to be perceived at their ugliest. That begins to change when they turn 40 or 50."

In 2005, then architecture student Martin Maleschka, 38, began to photograph buildings and public art in his hometown of Eisenhüttenstadt as it experienced a wave of demolitions. At the time, his work mostly met scepticism. But as time passed and GDR structures became rarer, his audience grew. "For me it's totally astounding that people born after 1990 are also interested in the topic," he says.

Yet the younger fans of *Plattenbauten* often approach GDR modernism without the same emotional attachments as their parents, says Christoph Liepach, a photography student who runs an architecture publishing house in Leipzig. They are like outsiders, able to look at architecture without emotions driving them to either love or hate it, he explains.

When you scroll through photographs of dusk-tinged concrete walls tagged #plattenbauromantik or #ostmoderne on Instagram, it's easy to assume the trend is a fad of Berlin hipsters with bulbous wire-rimmed glasses and fetishes for concrete. But if you talk to the people behind many of the accounts using those hashtags, you will hear mostly about grandmothers and memories rather than about the appeal of something exotic.

Rogowski says she likes to play with "nostalgia" in her photos. People a few years older than her shun that word. In the 1990s, *Ostalgie*—a play on the German words for "east" and "nostalgia"—was often used derogatorily to refer to East Germans who wanted the GDR back, or to the kitsch trend in which East German products were sold as souvenirs.

But Rogowski is not afraid of similar accusations. She believes she is way too young for her emotional attachments to gesture at the GDR itself. "For me it has nothing to do with some kind of pride but is rather simply nostalgia: I feel at home. It reminds me of childhood." With her Instagram account, she wants to show "that Grünau is not just the decaying fringe of Leipzig," she says, "but much more." *WW*

“…if you talk to the people behind many of the accounts, you will hear mostly about grandmothers and memories rather than about the appeal of something exotic…”

Plattenbauten in Brandenburg
Photo by Sam Gurwitt

Outside My Window

text by LEANNE ELLUL

photos by GIOLA CASSAR

Reflections on Malta's overdevelopment

NAVIGATING HOME

It is early December. The first, to be precise. It is six in the morning, and I am holding a mug of lukewarm coffee in my right hand. Outside the sliding window, stationary metal structures obstruct the view of the valley. I am in my small apartment on the island of Malta, and despite the time of year, I am not feeling cold at all. I long for a cooler breeze. I wish to freeze a little. My tweed jacket has been hanging in the wardrobe for over a year, and I do not think I will be putting it on anytime soon.

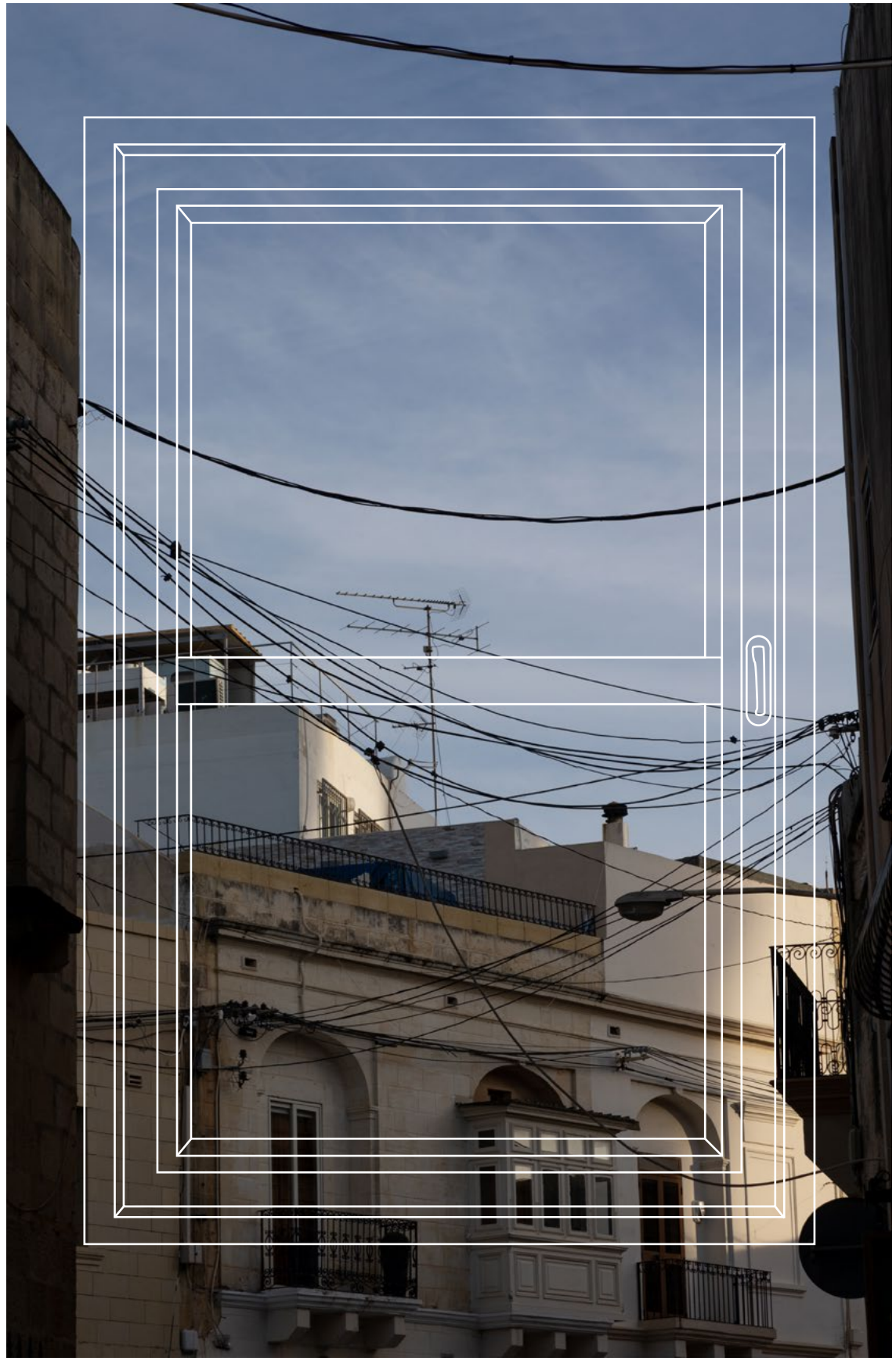
That jacket reminds me of the many spare buttons my mother has at home. The ones she got from the newsagent's that has since disappeared, to make way for a huge apartment block. That shop was the definition of clutter. In each corner stood an eclectic collection of assorted items—pencils, cigarettes, cold drinks, newspapers, and sweets.

Next door was my uncle's house. It, too, contained pencils and cigarettes, cold drinks, newspapers, and sweets. Walking through it, I became a tightrope walker, treading cautiously to avoid knocking over anything in my way. There were piles of stuff everywhere: napkins, teabags, rags. Heaps became objects in their own right. One day, I thought, they will start to spill into the streets.

MIRRORING HOME

It is happening. The streets of Malta are overflowing, they are becoming as cluttered as my uncle's home. There are over 249 thousand housing units on this tiny island, with a surface of 316 square kilometres—the party island of Ibiza is about 1.8 times bigger, ed. Buildings cover 27.5% of Maltese land, compared to the European average of 4.2%. Yet development on the island is relentless.

Can it be that we are overstuffing the country in the same way as we overstuff our homes? Overbuilding has become a concrete problem. We are licking the dust, while lacking the air.



THE REFLECTIVE WINDOW

Let us reflect further. This is a window to the outside world, but what you see is merely a reflection of what is inside. Concrete on top of concrete in the shape of towers littering our neighbourhoods. With no style, with no character, with no life.

THE JALOUSIE WINDOW

As I curiously look through the louvres, the last tree standing on the opposite side of the road seems dissected. I cannot help but think it is a synecdoche for the rest of Malta: over 2,400 protected trees have been uprooted since 2018. It is not a sight to be jealous of.

THE FIXED WINDOW

And such is our opinion. A fixed window implies no dust, no dirt, no air—windows that can't be opened. It is a choice we are making every day: to wear blinkers and to walk ahead, head down, eyes fixed, whilst the stark reality is escaping us every fleeting moment.

THE HIGH-ARCHED WINDOW

This ornate style of window is getting harder to come by. The roofs above our heads are getting lower and lower, whilst the surrounding buildings are rising higher and higher. All we get to look outside are small windows that do not let enough light in. In 2020, one in ten people in Malta said the place where they live is too dark.

THE DOUBLE-GLAZED WINDOW

This is the one the contractor decides to install in our homes and then presents it as a choice. It is a double-edged sword: on the one hand, we spend more money on windows with less character. On the other hand, they shield us and improve sustainability. The irony of it all!

THE AZURE WINDOW

This iconic natural arch at Dwejra, on the Maltese island of Gozo, could have been the only window of opportunity left for us to open our eyes to the beauty of nature. But it collapsed in 2017 and with it, our dreams.

HOMING IN

Later in the day, I look out the same window and see another crane towering over the valley. From where I stand, I count up to 20, and then I lose count. And then I lose heart. The buildings on the other side are squashed together like sardines. Land reclamation projects are unfolding in the distance. And I am (almost) giving up. *WW*

Memories of Mostar

Building my future on the ruins of my war-torn hometown

text by ANJA JERKOVIC

photos by FATIMA OBRADOVIĆ

Staklena banka, "Glass Bank." During the war, it was also referred to as "Sniper Tower."

It was the first time we had been back alone—without any other family members to join us. I had begged my father for the opportunity to travel with him, given his position in my mind as our nostalgic hobby historian.

"Let's go to Bosnia without interruptions," I proposed several times over the phone. At the time, I was studying abroad in Oslo. He was working behind a desk for some military-run company in California, a pacifist who somehow ended up in the war industry. It was the ultimate irony given our experience as refugees. Since we had left our hometown of Mostar, Bosnia and Herzegovina, due to the war, trips back to the motherland had been sparse. We would instead visit our family members, scattered like shell fragments across the globe.

Before that autumn of 2017, I had never encouraged the visits. My eyes had adjusted to the sights of the west, and were used to the constant stimulation of shopping malls and restaurants. I saw little more than ruins when we went to Mostar. Unlike the place that my parents described with melancholy tugging at their lips, it felt unruly and dirty, like a sagging city. But in my later years, something shifted. And this particular year, I wanted to switch things up, to go back together.

A FORCED DECISION

In 1993, I was a three-year-old girl. I knew something was *wrong*, but I also felt like everything was normal. The aggression on our town had reached its peak. Members of the Bosnian Croat army entered our apartments on what is now known as the west side of the city, armed, masked, uninvited. The decision we had to make wasn't just whether to stay or to leave, but how we would, moving forward, exist at all. Some days later, we began our journey westwards—where after the long road of visas and passports and applications and border crossings and interviews with officials, we would find new grounds in a place polished with palm trees and golf courses: Palm Desert, California.

We would spend Saturday evenings with other members of the diaspora, singing along to old Yugoslavian hits until three in the morning. We had each brought with us enough details of our past to paint a nearly complete scene of what it looked like, tasted like, sounded like, felt like—thousands of miles away from the place we had been forced to flee.

Mostar had become what the French historian Pierre Nora defines as a "site of memory": a place which carries special significance to a particular group, a site conceived to anchor the memory of something that no longer exists outside of that collective remembrance.

I was uprooted too early to tell you with confidence how my country was before the war. That is why I felt a strong need to have my father pilot me through our hometown, to redesign the current landscape using his knowledge of how it once was. The only thing I could gather as a child, listening in on conversations with the elders from our community, was that *nothing* had stayed the same. The stories of those who resettled around us felt like constructions of the imagination. There was nothing I could confirm, nothing tangible. Every place they mentioned, every street corner they used to meet each other on. There was no documentation for comparison, to see if I had gotten it right, if the details checked out.

Pictures were of no use—archives were burnt, museums destroyed, houses looted and vandalised, devoid of their residents' belongings. Having left everything behind that could not fit in my mother's two arms the night we were picked up and carried across the border, my adult years were spent mourning the physical belongings I had never had the opportunity to touch. My mother's coat, the toys I had confided in as a child, books read to me before bed. Somehow, their absence made our former life feel further away—abstract, even. I was eager for the specifics, to reconstruct it in my mind.

REDRAWING THE MAP

I had visited as an adult prior to that time. I had consulted family friends for recommendations on what to visit, where to eat, what to see. Most seemed unsure their answers would support me in any way. *Everything is different*, they would stress, adding that I couldn't possibly understand the velocity of the change. They would provide directions and pause, when reminded of Mostar's new normality—their own city, barely recognisable. It was not that they had forgotten the map, but rather, that the whole map had changed. Streets donned new names—mostly those of war heroes, Croatian royalty, or events that had taken place during battle. They would direct me to their favourite cafés or restaurants by the names of their owners. They still identified most public places by their *nadimak*—the nickname given to them by the locals that frequented them all that time ago.

During the war, Mostar was divided into east and west sides—a division that did not exist prior. Between 1992 and 1995, people with different ethno-national identities, who had previously mixed and lived together, were segregated into different parts of the town: Croats in the west, Bosnians in the east, and Serbs in several enclaves surrounding the city. While we were, for national unity's concern, all Bosnians, the war divided us in such a way that we retreated to identities formed generations

"Like the streets in our town, we had stayed the same, but our names had taken on new meaning."

The *Dom Omladine*, "youth centre," was once the house of the mayor, as well as the Club of Educators.

in the past. The places where our family names reigned, where the religions we had inherited held the greatest weight. We became less "Bosnians", and more Bosnian Muslims, Bosnian Catholics, and Bosnian Orthodox Christians—or rather, Bosniaks, Croats, and Serbs. Like the streets in our town, we had stayed the same, but our names had taken on new meaning.

The war in Bosnia was one of the conflicts arising from the breakdown of the Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia in 1992. One by one, the six republics of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, Croatia, Montenegro, Slovenia, and Macedonia began to claim independence. Nationalist leaders rose in the wake of this collapse and highlighted ethnic purity and borders in areas that were previously inhabited by several groups and religions living peacefully together. Bosnia and Herzegovina's diversity made its claim for independence a highly contested move. In Mostar, known for its highly mixed population of Bosnian Croats, Bosnian Muslims, and Bosnian Serbs, this division was highlighted even more. It was a place where one could see, at the same time, a synagogue, the minaret of a mosque, the Serbian Orthodox church and the Catholic cross. Mixed marriages were the norm. We shared meals on one another's holy days. This harmony is what made Mostar the most heavily destroyed city during the conflict.

After the war, it was not as if the smoke cleared and everyone went back to where they once were. Lines had been drawn, neighbourhoods remapped, a city of displaced people. Three quarters of Mostar's 120,000 citizens had fled the city and approximately 70% of its buildings had been damaged. Ethnic lines strengthened, divisions became clearer, and corrupt politicians—who built their followings based on old war rhetoric about national unity—used their positions to further separate the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina. The altered relations amongst people were solidified by the division of space in the post-war reconstruction.

THE RUINS OF MEMORY

As we drove towards Mostar in a rented car, my father began reconstructing the town through his memories; of old partners, friends lost in the war, cafes and *disko klubs*. He wanted to paint every skeletal building in such a way that I could smell the fresh coat he had slathered on it with his retelling of events and those who had been present. I became increasingly aware of the privilege I had in seeing things as they were, not for what they once represented. To not have to carry around two realities. It was as if I, unburdened by painful memories of the past, had been given a mental colouring book, waiting to be filled in by the colours and lines of my father's recollections.

We drove past places that had disappeared, lay in ruin, or were still standing, now with different names and functions. Among the dirt ground, piles of beams, bullet holes and slabs of concrete scattered like rocks, covered in graffiti and used as dumping grounds, the people of this city once came together. No one asked what name you held or what god you prayed to, but rather, "do you want to have this dance?" Or, "can I buy you a *rakija?*" The sites of my father's youth, the work places of his parents, the college and high school his neighbours had attended alongside students from nearby Sarajevo, Tuzla, Konjic. These were the buildings that I had heard about from the elders of the diaspora, but that I had not been able to track down—not without knowledge of what they had been converted into, what vernacular was now being used to refer to them.

As we strolled down Lenin's *Šetalište*—"walkway"—a name reminiscent of Yugoslavia's communist era, I learned that it had been renamed Nikole Šubića Zrinskog, after the 16th-century Croatian nobleman and general. My father would always refer

to buildings, streets, and places with their former, pre-war names. Then, he would mention the renamings half-heartedly, with less enthusiasm in his voice. For him, and I assume for most of Mostar's diaspora, the changes which took place during and after the war symbolised the success of those who sought to change the city. Specifically here, where public spaces were inherently part of daily life, street names, parks, football pitches and cafés were like extensions of one's home. It wasn't your neighbourhood Starbucks, it was coffee and gossip on *Korzo*. Places were personified—they were like beings in themselves. Changing their names made them ghosts, locations that those who knew them prior to the war could hardly recognise, or rather, struggled to accept.

DESIGNING DIVISION

I stopped at one particular site that caught my attention. No one had mentioned it to me before. It stood surrounded by the renovated buildings of various administrations and organisations. Yet it looked like this particular one had been left behind, bypassed by the town's post-war reconstruction.

Just across the way, the local office of the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe was nestled behind a gated fortress lined with cars donning blue licence plates. To the left of it was the Old Gymnasium, a prestigious school originally built under Austro-Hungarian rule. It had been rebuilt after the war to become the first school in the region to educate youth of all ethno-national identities under one roof. The implications of this project were monumental, but the institution only ended up meeting its goal halfway. It did educate both groups, but during different sessions in the day. Everything around us had been rebuilt. But this ruin where we stood—it was *just* bones, no skin. When I asked my father what it used to be, I saw a chapter of his life open up before him. Through overgrown bushes and heaps of trash, he walked into the derelict building like it was the entrance to an open-air museum. We trailed off into the backyard, where a large sycamore tree stood in the centre, seemingly centuries old.

We were standing in the summer garden of the *Dom Omladine* ("youth centre"), my father told me. Concerts would be held here, whilst downstairs, he pointed out, Mostar's first *disko klub* opened in 1969. The front steps would be buzzing with hippies—long-haired, bell-bottomed, high-heeled Marlboro-smokers, looking for love on the walkway that opened out right in front of them. I could see the space *so* clearly, yet I was starving for the real thing. *Why hadn't this place been rebuilt?*

I had begun to learn about present-day Mostar. I had seen students in smokey cafes, wearing headphones to drown out the background music pulsating through the speakers. I had visited both—separate—libraries, where I had run my fingers along the back of the dusty book spines. I had seen the lack of places where young people could not only *be*, but *be together.* Because the division had so strongly defined the reconstructed city's landscape, most, if not all, public spaces were duplicated—two colleges, several schools on either side, two libraries, two cultural centres, two public theatres, post offices, hospitals, even double children's puppet theatres. All for a city with a little over 100,000 residents. This presents them with the constant choice of which side to be on, which space to occupy. This duplication gives rise to constant comparison—*who has it better?*

The post-war reconstruction of Mostar was entrusted to public officials, whose only credentials were their ties to nationalist politicians. They not only allowed, but rather encouraged, the further division of Mostar's ethnic groups. Surrounded by the ruins of this place of leisure, of community, the goal of separate spaces felt so clear, so unmovable.

"Because the division had so strongly defined the reconstructed city's landscape, most, if not all public spaces were duplicated—two colleges, two libraries, two public theatres."

Gone were the days of Tito's unified dream, the leader of pre-war Bosnia, when it was still a puzzle piece in Yugoslavia. Tito's ability to create a sense of camaraderie and solidarity through the negotiation of space is one the things he is most remembered for. Neighbourhoods had designated parks, cafes, bakeries, hair salons—community spaces which brought forth a sense of unity. The space surrounding one's home was designed in such a way that one had their built-in community amongst a larger sphere that was Mostar, the bigger, albeit tiny world.

When the war started, when lines were drawn and sides defined, and citizens were told where to live, that dream died. So did the idea of shared public space, encouraging diversity and communion, through which that dream had been sustained. The communal life, supported by the architecture, fell to pieces. The duplication of everything created busier landscapes, ate up green space, and depleted our chances for having a *susret*—a serendipitous meeting around town.

Had the war resulted in a winner-loser situation, perhaps someone might feel proud of or fulfilled by the new landscape. But when nothing and everything changed, to the discontent of most citizens in Mostar, the question arises: *Who does this serve?* Despite one's ethno-national identity, all continue to suffer the consequences of poor public administration, nepotism, and an economy not built to serve the needs of everyday people. As reported by Trading Economics, in October 2021 the unemployment rate in Bosnia and Herzegovina was registered at 31.63%. According to the International Finance Corporation, this rose to 40% amongst people aged 18-30. It's common knowledge in Mostar: if you're unwilling to register with one of the three major nationalist-oriented political parties, finding a job in the public sector is near impossible. A 2021 survey by the United Nations Population Fund found that 70% of young people believe that Bosnian society is "systemically corrupt," and nearly half of

18 to 29-year-olds would like to leave the country either temporarily or permanently over the next 12 months.

Inside the yard of the city's old youth centre, filled with the distant echoes of its concerts, its smoking hippies, its underground disco club, and looking at the reconstructed buildings around it, I couldn't help but wonder. How could such a promising space have missed the train of reconstruction after €3 billion of EU funds had been funnelled through Bosnia and Herzegovina since 1995?

I could tell by the tone of my father's voice, his vivid descriptions of the events he had witnessed there, the way he described the exact location of the stage in the yard, that he was emotionally tied to this building. This particular space had to have significance in the collective memory of more Mostarians. It consisted of too much history to simply be another forgotten relic of wartime. I would talk to taxi drivers and waiters about it, slowly redirecting the conversation towards my curiosity. Mirroring each other, their responses referred to a place now tucked into their nostalgia, where they would spend their younger years listening and dancing to music. The older generations remembered it instead as the place for *prosvjetnih radnika* or "educators," to gather and philosophise, share ideas, and eat lunch together in the ground-floor cafeteria. Others recalled it as the university library or *čitaonica*, "reading room," where one could spend hours sitting and reading in the quiet, surrounded by books. In its earliest life, it was the home of Mujaga Komadina, Mostar's first mayor (1909-1918). After World War II, when private buildings were nationalised through the introduction of socialism, Komadina's villa went to the city. He, too, was a proponent of books, libraries, and community.

No one smiled as they told me about the place. Melancholy trickled through their recollections, as they mourned the loss of a space that once played such an important part in the lives of the people of this town. I would look for some sign in their eyes that my hope transferred onto them—that they also believed that the building's revival might restore some of Mostar's former glory. But most locals were disillusioned, and dismissed the idea that anything would go back to what it once was.

A HARSH REALITY

I would later discover that this building, like many others, is trapped in a political vortex. Two universities are claiming rights on the land, and the family of Mujaga Komadina is simultaneously hoping to regain possession of what once belonged to them. It is a seemingly no-way-out dimension where opposing forces engage in a never-ending game of rhetorical ping-pong about what belongs to who and why. In the meantime, locals, having become exhausted by the dead-end discussions, have stopped noticing. It's a harsh remnant of Mostar's public planning collapse which began after the war, when public institutions began to disintegrate in the 1990s. Along with them, so did Mostar's bureaucratic governance around land-zoning, roads and infrastructure, and cultural development. In its place, private construction projects flourished.

An example is that of the former *Hotel Ruža,* "Hotel Rose." It highlights how specific spaces that are prominent in the collective memory have been transformed into symbols of Mostar's economic reliance on tourism—an unsustainable activity. Hotel Ruža was a small, two-storey building located just outside of the Old Town. When it was completed in the mid-1970s, it was an architectural sight to behold. It was modern, sophisticated, and intimate, a place for honeymoon retreats, staycations and gatherings. After its destruction in the war, its ruins were bought out by an investor to transform it into a Marriott hotel.

The Marriot Hotel, set to open in 2022, stands on the location of the former Hotel Ruža.

"It was like an entire doll's house was built on top of a single lego piece."

The *Herceg Stjepan Kosača*, "Croatian Lodge," houses Mostar's public library.

Several months later, giant pillars went up, walls were filled, and 182 rooms slowly added. It was like an entire doll's house was built on top of a single lego piece. Once the glowing Marriott sign was lit up, a kick to the gut was felt by all those who knew Ruža—of its intimacy, of how close it felt to the community.

It is a harsh new reality, watching what was once a small establishment return as a giant hotel conglomerate, positioned where it can not be avoided. It serves as a stark reminder of Mostar's crushed economy, and its attempts to save itself by focusing on tourism and attracting foreign private investment. The Marriot building site was at the centre of a growing public discussion about how such a lengthy project could manage to usurp a public road which leads into our most prized area. The city's historic heart, where cobblestone streets and copper workers reign supreme; where history and authenticity are meant to be protected—as stated in its establishment as a UNESCO world heritage site.

Corruption follows on the heels of conflict. Mostar is not the only place where we see this unfold. In post-war contexts worldwide, disputes over land, reconstruction, and zoning rights are exactly what is being negotiated when talks of revival arise. With weakened economies, it is common for outside influence to step in, and for geopolitical competition to take place. In post-war Syria, as reported by the European Council on Foreign Relations, reconstruction is being used as a way of "consolidating the regime's victory," and the sale of privately owned land to regime-affiliated businessmen is taking precedence over a "needs-driven" approach. Meanwhile, Russia's restoration of the Arch of Triumph in the city of Palmyra shows the important role foreign countries often play in the reconstruction of historical artefacts. According to the Middle-Eastern outlet Al-Monitor, many look to Russia's involvement with suspicion, seeing it as a move to increase its influence in the area and to show off worldwide. As the Syrian example shows, the economic and political vulnerability of post-war contexts present outside investors with easy opportunities to pursue their interests. The interests of citizens, meanwhile, often get lost in this process.

RECLAIMING THE CITY

Look, here is where I had my first kiss. That building, that's where you were born. There, right where you're standing, used to be a train station. Our personal histories are defined by our physical surroundings, and changes in the landscape can be felt by us all. But for a diaspora, it is a particular situation. War erases the visible markers of our identity. Upon returning to the place we left, we are confronted with a rearranged version of what once represented familiarity. No longer a repository of memories, the physical space—or what is left of it—becomes an open wound, a source of melancholy. It is an alienating experience, like returning home to find that someone has moved the furniture around without you knowing. From the outside, as spectators, it is hard to grasp such loss: of homes, of sense of space, to outside circumstances—to war.

Standing in the backyard of the old youth centre, I asked my father about the sycamore tree in the middle. Here stood a symbol, something that had made it through, that had not died or been destroyed. Something stronger than anything the war could touch. A symbol of resilience in the face of destruction, the hope that life can continue amidst the ruins. We did not know in that moment how our lives would unfold: that some months later, upon finishing my studies in Oslo, I would return to learn about our town on my own terms. I would "attend," as a local described it, the priceless *Mostarska škola*—the Mostar school of life. We did not know that I would stay, find love, or become pregnant. I did not know that these places dear to my father would begin to carry weight in my own life, as I drew my own path through our hometown. The bench on the *Setalište*—the walkway—where I would meet my partner for our first date, the cultural centre where I would hold workshops and attend concerts, the children's puppet theatre where I would beg my friends to see plays with me. We did not know that three years later, my father would retire in the United States, and that he would return to Mostar, too.

He began the slow process of consolidating the place that lives on in his memory and the current state of our surroundings. Now, it is me who is illustrating the landscape, painting for him the changes I have noticed. Without being burdened by the memories of the past, but with an imagination open to how the future could be. WW

Wheel & Spoke Cities

research by Jennifer Sizeland

From better health and road safety to improved economies, researchers are finding the benefits of taking your bike left, right and centre are endless. When safe cycling is addressed via new, bike-friendly infrastructure, this increases uptake and helps our towns and cities move faster, stay cleaner and healthier. Join us for a spin!

Seville's €32 million investment in its cycling network was used by 40,000 more people per day compared to its €600 million metro extension.

Seville transport improvement projects

METRO	CYCLING NETWORK
€600 million	€32 million
30,000 people/day	70,000 people/day

The COVID pandemic increased cycling in Europe between 11% and 48%, depending on the country.

1/5

100 million out of 500 million Europeans use their bicycle as a mode of transportation.

Every kilometre cycled results in a **64 cent** profit to society.

Every kilometre driven by car costs society **71 cents.**

Cycling can help to reduce congestion and emissions in cities.

A three-metre wide lane moves **2,000-6,500 cyclists** per hour compared to **700-1,000 people going by car.**

3m

Blue cycle lanes were found to be the safest colour in Denmark ...

... while in Norway, red cycle lanes performed best.

Many women feel safer when cycling than walking. Being able to control route, speed and time of travel, makes it easier to avoid or escape street harassment.

ROUTE TIME SPEED

Safe and permanent cycleways ...

... increase cycling by 23% ...

... reduce injuries by 40-65% during the morning commute ...

... could help to prevent 10,000 premature deaths per year across Europe, thanks to the health benefits of cycling.

by

VALENTINA VIVONA

How the inclusion of homeless women in research is changing services provided to them

Home First

“The experience of domestic violence is near-universal among homeless women. Yet this is rarely taken into consideration in the design of the services provided for them.”

In the huge Library of Gender Studies—a feminist non-profit organisation in Prague—Alexandra Doleželová struggled to find any data on women’s poverty in her home country of the Czech Republic. After sharing her thoughts with friends and fellow activists, they decided to take the matter into their own hands. They would carry out their own research, starting by visiting emergency homeless shelters in the Czech capital.

The more they spoke to the emergency shelter workers, the more they felt that something did not add up. Only after having conversations with five homeless women, did a clearer picture start to emerge. Doleželová explains: “Almost all of them were fleeing domestic violence. Some were afraid of sexual harassment in the facilities where they were staying, but none of the workers in the shelters knew about this. They told us that they were unaware of any gender-based violence in the facilities. Basically, because they had never talked to them.” In 2012 Lexa and her friends founded Jako doma (“Homelike”), the first NGO targeting gender-specific homelessness in the Czech Republic.

Recent studies from across Europe confirm that the experience of domestic violence is near-universal among homeless women. Yet this is rarely taken into consideration in the design of the services provided. Emergency shelters for homeless people usually consist of dormitories, which are either separate or mixed, and shared living spaces, such as living rooms, basic hygiene facilities, and a kitchen or canteen. People who stay in these facilities enjoy little privacy.

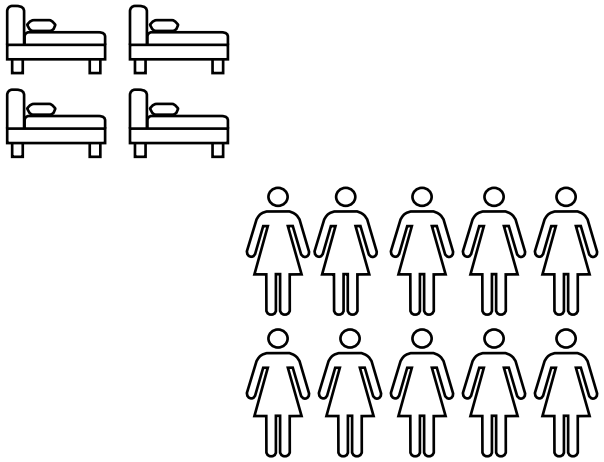
“Homeless women aren’t comfortable living side by side with 25 men, especially if they have been in abusive relationships,” says Dalma Fabian, gender and health policy officer at the European Federation of National Organisations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA). However, as emergency shelters are defined as “low-intensity” support services, social workers are not required or trained to offer individual help to the people they are hosting. The European Commission reports that social or psychological counselling is only provided in selected facilities across the continent. Women-only shelters are few and far between; the extent of such services in Europe is unknown.

In 2014, the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women (known as the Istanbul Convention) set out standards aimed at preventing gender-based violence, protecting victims of violence, and punishing perpetrators. It established that a minimum of one bed per 10,000 inhabitants should be made available to survivors of domestic violence in specialised temporary refuges. In 2019, according to a Women Against Violence Europe (WAVE) network study in 46 European countries, an average of 62% of beds were still missing.

Simone Schiavinato has been a social worker for 15 years in Treviso, a city of just over 80,000 inhabitants in the north-east of Italy. He recalls that women rarely showed up in the canteen where he worked, while the emergency shelter run by his cooperative La Esse was male-only. Homelessness did not seem to affect many women, accord-

ing to his experience. That changed once the cooperative began to integrate gender equality services. In 2020, it opened a Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG) support centre. He says: "It was an internal awareness process. We realised that the existing facilities didn't meet the needs of women." Last December, La Esse, together with the local section of Caritas and the cooperative Una casa per l'uomo ("A home for the human being"), launched the self-financed project Sosta sicura ("A safe break"). It aims to offer shared apartments in social housing to 23 women who are experiencing social and financial hardship. "The pandemic has increased the number of women in emergency housing and women at risk of housing exclusion due to job instability or critical family situations. Yet their condition is not entirely visible," Schiavinato explains. "This project is a gamble, maybe it won't work. But I am positive that it will."

In 2019, there was still a 62% shortage of shelter beds for survivors of domestic violence across Europe.



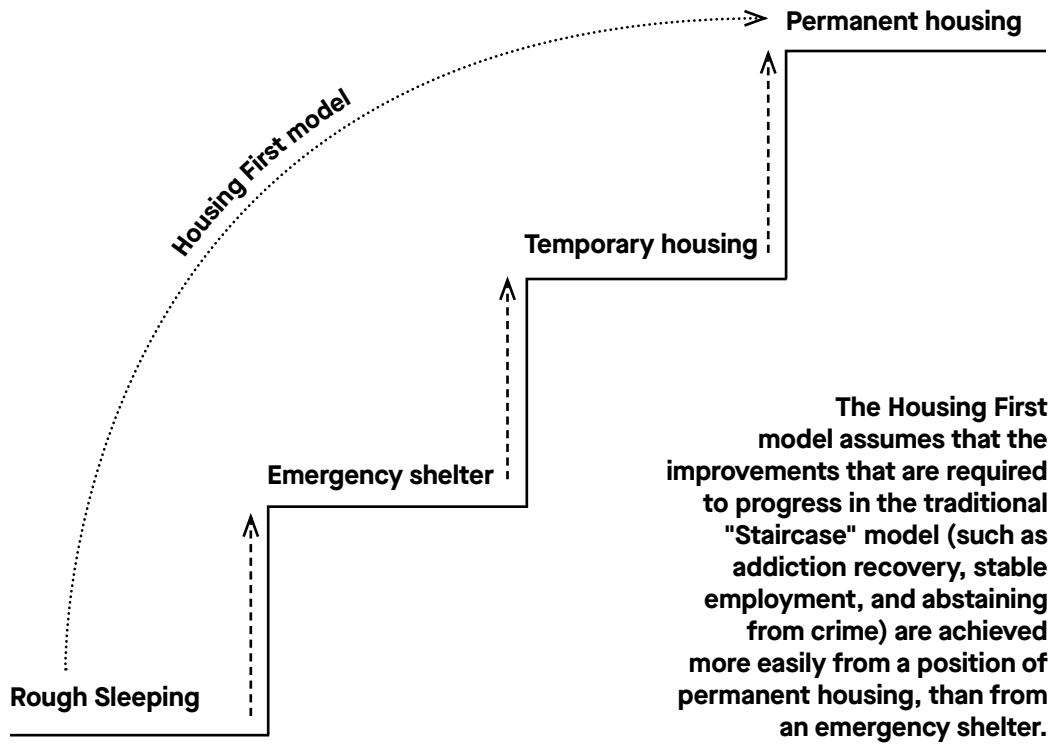
The colloquial Italian word for a homeless person is *barbone*, which literally translates to "long-bearded man." It is indicative of the tendency to think of homelessness as a male-only problem. The latest national statistics, from 2014, estimate that women make up 14.3% of Italy's homeless population. Yet, researchers only surveyed people who sleep rough or stay at the emergency shelters. The picture this data paints is therefore incomplete. It fails to take into account temporary refuges for survivors of domestic violence, and the women who rely on their network of friends, relatives and acquaintances in the hope of avoiding the streets and shelters altogether. As professors Joanne Bretherton and Paula Mayock note in the 2021 report *Women's Homelessness: European Evidence Review*, this is a common pattern among women in situations of housing instability.

Most statistics in Europe are similarly based on limited data sets and tend to underestimate the phenomenon of women's homelessness. But there is one exception: the Finnish Housing Finance and Development Centre has counted "hidden" homelessness in its annual statistics since 1987. This includes people in temporary living situations, such as staying with friends or relatives. Such data allowed Saija Turunen, research manager at the social housing provider Y-Foundation, to uncover that although homelessness in Finland was decreasing, the share of homeless women was growing. In 2018, she set up NEA to address this problem. An acronym for *naiserityisyys asunnottomuustyössä* ("Women-specific homelessness work"), as well as a Finnish women's name, it was the first project in the country aimed at understanding and tackling women's homelessness. According to Turunen, professionals working in the homelessness sector were the project's main beneficiaries. In a few years, the share of homeless women stabilised. Turunen explains: "The numbers went up for a few years because gender-informed practices were lacking." There are no women-only shelters in Finland, where even refuges for survivors of domestic violence are open to all genders.

Though the project ended in 2020, many of the outcomes remained. One of them is Trauma-Informed Care (TIC) training for homelessness sector professionals. TIC is especially important when dealing with survivors of domestic violence, because it seeks to avoid replicating the dynamics of abusive relationships in the design of the services offered. Turunen says: "Now we are developing more suitable housing solutions for women." Finland is the only country in Europe where the total number of homeless people has declined, from around 20,000 in the 1980s to just over 4,000 today. Progress is partly due to a system that enables early detection of homelessness and, mostly, to the implementation of the Housing First model.

"Mothers often hide their homelessness, as they fear having their children taken away."

Developed in the early 1990s by Dr Sam Tsemberis in New York for people who were living on the streets, the Housing First model provides housing as the first support measure. It draws on the principle that housing is a basic human right. In the traditional homeless management system—commonly referred to as the "staircase system"—housing is the final reward for those who manage to solve personal issues, like finding a job or treating addiction. Most people are unable to climb the necessary steps to rehousing, staying in a permanent state of homelessness. Fabian from FEANTSA summarises: "The staircase system requires you to swim without water."



The Housing First model assumes that the improvements that are required to progress in the traditional "Staircase" model (such as addiction recovery, stable employment, and abstaining from crime) are achieved more easily from a position of permanent housing, than from an emergency shelter.

Though Finland is the only European country which has adopted Housing First as the national strategy to end homelessness, similar initiatives exist across Europe. Three women and three men are currently the beneficiaries of a Housing First pilot in Treviso, which La Esse has managed since the beginning of 2021. They live in two separate apartments in the same building. Schiavinato comments: “Cohabitation isn’t easy, but we couldn’t afford self-contained apartments.” He is proud of the beneficiaries’ accomplishments: “Unemployed for over ten years, one of the women found a job shortly after entering the apartment.” At the opposite end to emergency shelters, Housing First provides high-intensity support on a daily basis. Depending on the needs of each of the beneficiaries, they are directed towards one service or another, while no conditions are placed on them. Schiavinato is one of four social workers who work closely with the six beneficiaries of the pilot. He says: “It's up to us to put the pieces together. I can’t rule out that some might need help throughout their life.” He’s pessimistic about the state of the housing market: “Social housing is insufficient and the private housing sector can be inaccessible, particularly for a single mother.”

Mothers often hide their homelessness, as they fear having their children taken away. In Greater Manchester, United Kingdom, Lindsay* was pregnant when she accessed Threshold—the first Housing First project in Europe specifically targeting homeless women—after reportedly not having a fixed abode for 18 months. With a history of abuse and having had her two children removed due to her struggle with drug and alcohol addiction, Lindsay didn’t trust public service professionals. Despite receiving intensive support within Threshold and making significant progress, her baby was eventually also placed in foster care. However, Lindsay was grateful to her social worker for helping her regularly visit her child. She says: “If I’m having a really bad day, I struggle leaving the baby.”

*name changed

Finland's homeless population has dropped from 20,000 in the 1980s to 4,000+ today

Her story shows the trauma women may have experienced by the time they engage with adequate services. “Housing First works extremely well with women with multiple and complex needs,” says Louisa Steele, Housing First and Homelessness coordinator at UK charity Standing Together. Inspired by the Threshold pilot, Louisa and her team took two years to build partnerships with housing providers. With this experience in hand, they launched the Westminster Housing First pilot for female survivors of domestic violence in Westminster, the London borough with the highest number of rough sleepers. She comments: “The housing market is the biggest barrier, so building solid partnerships is a crucial part of the process.” One of the key indicators for evaluating Housing First projects is the tenancy-sustainment rate: the beneficiaries’ ability to meet the costs of their accommodation. The results of Threshold’s pilot were in line with broader evidence on Housing First—a tenancy-sustainment rate of 80%—while in Westminster they were even more positive at 87.5%. Standing Together is a co-founder of the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA), a unique accreditation process for housing providers which aims to create effective systems for early detection of domestic abuse. It enables survivors to remain safely in their homes where it is their choice to do so, or to keep their tenancy status if they relocate.

Research finds that women generally, and those with children in particular, seek to conceal their unstable living situations because of the perceived stigma associated with being homeless. Fabian from FEANTSA states: “Women are likely to feel that they haven't met the expectations of society. Shame is preventing many from accessing services. Services should empower women instead of judging or victimising them. They should tell them that it’s not their fault if they are homeless.”

Back in Prague, breaking the stigma of homelessness among women is one of Jako doma’s main objectives. One of the ways it sought to do this was the project Cooks Without Homes—a regular event where homeless women cook for the public and present their culinary skills at street markets and festivals across the country. It earned such a good reputation that, in 2017, they opened a restaurant. “If someone enjoys the food the women cooked and praises them, it may be the first time they hear something nice,” Doleželová remarks. “These activities boost their self-esteem while fighting stereotypes.” Four years ago, Jako doma also opened a day support centre where most social workers are former homeless women. Thanks to this job, Zuzka—one of the first women the NGO supported—finally found the apartment where she now lives with her partner. Doleželová says: “We want to show that poverty is a systemic rather than an individual failure.” WW

“We want to show that poverty is a systemic rather than an individual failure.”

by
MIRIAM PARTINGTON

The future of architecture is all around us

Waste World

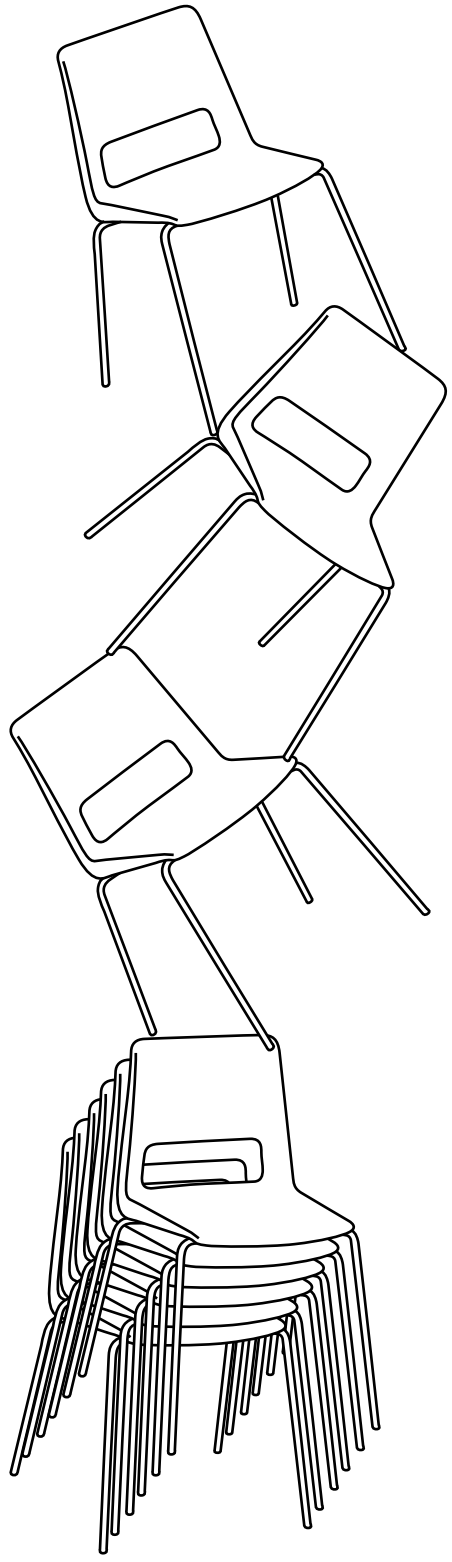
Buildings keep us warm, allow us to gather, and are often sites of idea-generation. They are places of residence, comfort and safety. But they come at a huge environmental cost. **The construction industry accounts for 38% of global energy-related CO2 emissions**—11% of which results from producing brand-new materials such as steel, cement and glass, according to the Global Alliance of Building and Construction.

Some architects are taking a different approach. Instead of building with raw materials extracted from the earth, they're using what we have in abundance: waste. One example is Stian Rossi, an Italian-Norwegian architect at architecture and design firm Snøhetta. In 2019, Rossi worked with Norwegian furniture-making conglomerate Nordic Comfort Products (NCP) to remake its R48 classroom chair, a design classic, using 100% recycled plastics from Oslo's fishing industry. The practice is now embedded in its production process. NCP converts worn-out fishing nets, ropes and pipes from local fish farms into tables and chairs for schools and offices.

This example, Rossi believes, is a starting point to create a wider narrative. "You can't just do something niche, it's never going to be enough," he says. "You have to go in at industry level at work at scale." Rossi has shared his knowledge of building with waste materials with several organisations. He is convinced that if architects partner with companies as "experts, consultants and creative collaborators," they have a chance of popularising new techniques and planet-friendly materials.

Rossi is not the only architect on a mission to make their field more sustainable. In the town of Sinandro, Italy, design studio GISTO turned structural elements of a former military base destined for demolition—including ventilation fixtures, air duct covers and kitchen hoods—into tables, partitions and shelves for the Multiplo research project. In London, design studio GoodWaste collaborated with department store Selfridges to transform its scrap wax, steel and acrylic into lamps, candles and vases. Barcelona-based startup Honext has developed a sustainable building material by combining enzymes and cellulose taken from the waste streams of paper production.

Using waste as a resource challenges the conventions of architectural design. Traditionally, architects learn to make use of scarce natural materials without questioning their environmental or social impact. They rarely stop to think about what alternative materials they could create from waste—that could be more robust, long-lasting or sustainable. This stems from the education that architects and designers receive. "Architects have a superficial knowledge of materials, their properties and the impact they have in the value chain, which is why there has been little innovation so far in producing sustainable building concepts," says Rossi. "Students get a book and learn the words and the principles and the materials available. But they're never asked to rethink wood or concrete."



SNØHETTA'S S-1500 CHAIR

"Universities are heavy systems. To change them is painful."

—Stian Rossi

Lecturing at universities in Norway, Rossi hopes to "switch the mindset" of future architects. For waste to become internalised as a resource in design practice, he believes, it needs to become a staple of curriculums being taught in schools and universities. But this could take time. "Universities are heavy systems. To change them is painful," says Rossi. We need people brave enough to experiment with materials to find innovative uses for them, and collaborate with others across industries to make them mainstream.

"Part of it comes down to architects demonstrating to others that it's possible," says Rossi. "Architects need to be curious about the materials they see in front of them. They should ask themselves, 'how can I utilise this stuff that we have just lying around?'" WW

"When you see one of our toy[illegible]me-thing goe[illegible]off in the bac[illegible]our brain and [illegible]nk: *Yeah, this[illegible]lly sexy an[illegible]y want it*

What is it like to design for people's pleasure? Bremen-based FUN FACTORY is the only sex toy manufacturer that designs and produces its toys in Europe. Are We Europe spoke to Kristy Stahlberg and Simone Kalz, who lead the company's communications and product development teams, to find out more. They spoke to us from the "Smartballs Room" in their headquarters—named after one of their famous toys.

"When you see one of our toys, something goes off in the back of your brain and you think:

Yeah this is really sexy and I really want it!"

an interview with
FUN FACTORY

by
TAMARA LEVY

The Pleasure Producers

So, how does a sex toy come to life?

We always have a lot of ideas. We have a really creative team, and a community of nice customers and end consumers who constantly give us feedback. Sometimes they even make drawings themselves and send them in, and occasionally we take their suggestions on board. So we always start with a lot of questions, discussions and talks with different people. We talk with our buyers, asking them what they want. We talk with our creative people about how it could look. And then we talk with doctors—urologists, gynaecologists and sex therapists. We work with a huge network of people which is super interesting—and sometimes very weird! But we want to be sure that we're giving the end consumer something they like and that makes sense.

So the initial stages are very easy, but once you put all the ideas together and start working with the designers, it's a long process. Some ideas may not really be suited to the body. With those that are, once we move into the construction phase, we go to the model-maker, make a prototype, and test it with our user groups. Depending on the toy, we may have between 20 and 500 anonymous testers. We ask them many questions, such as how they used it, whether they have experience with sex toys, and so on. They give us very detailed feedback and we take that information to go back to the drawing board and make the toy better. Then, we repeat the process. Whether it's single people, couples, different age groups and different countries—we test our products hundreds of times with all kinds of people, until everybody's happy!

What does inclusive design mean to you?

In the sex toy industry, you mostly find gendered toys. You have toys for women, and toys for men. For marketing purposes and SEO [search engine optimisation, ed.] keywords, we still use those categories, too, but we hope that will change soon. As a manufacturer, we design products primarily for the body. For the inner or external clitoris, for the perineum, the penis, or the prostate—we try to think up products to fit certain hotspots.

If you have a light touch vibrator, for example, you can use it anywhere. You might want to stimulate your body internally or externally. Another example is a cock ring. If you don't have a penis, you can use it with your finger. Our designs are versatile, and we encourage people to be really open-minded when it comes to stimulation and exploration, so they discover entirely new ways to use our products through play.

What's the biggest challenge when designing sex toys?

The most important thing is to make something that people will love from the first time

they see it. Creating a product that speaks for itself and that gives people the impulse to buy it—and use it! We want our products to talk to people in the same way as a plate of beautifully arranged food makes you want to eat it. That's why we always aim to have a professional design language that people recognise. This means the same button or logo, the same interfaces, along with similar looks and shapes. We have a series of details, such as different diameters, especially curves—we won't bore you with the exact numbers—so that when you see one of our toys, something goes off in the back of your brain and you think: Yeah, this is really sexy and I really want it! And then, once you have it in your hand, you can appreciate how it feels. Is it heavy? Is it light? Is the surface smooth or sticky? Press the button and give it a wake-up call and you're ready to go.

Why did you choose to manufacture your sex toys in Europe?

Derek and Michael, who started FUN FACTORY 25 years ago, lived in Bremen, and that's still where we are today. For us, this has many advantages. Having our product development teams and our production facilities in the same place means that when we have a new idea, we only need to walk down the corridor to get someone to put it into 3D, and show it to the model-makers across the hall. In the same way, whenever there is an issue with production—like if a machine isn't working, or a batch of silicone isn't behaving as it should be—we can react to that really fast, solving problems and making changes. For a factory, that's the best production process you can have. It is also the most sustainable thing we can offer the industry and our customers, because we don't have to fly to faraway production plants. We outsource certain processes, like assembling technical parts or packaging, to local companies and people who support us. Of course, we pay European wages and respect European working standards. But we're part of a community, and that is really important to us.

What is it like to design for people's pleasure?

It is the greatest job in the world! But it comes with a lot of responsibility. We're talking about people's bodies, the G-spot, the P-spot, the A-spot, the clitoris, from the inside, from the outside. There's a lot of very specific knowledge that goes into these toys. For example, how the prostate works, and how the blood flows and how it can be stimulated in a pleasurable way. We need to know and think about how things work, in scientific terms, to find out how we can help people get off. So it's really important that we're aware of the power that comes with our knowledge. And it's not enough to make something that looks good and is functional. In the end, what we put into the products are feelings. Because you have to really love what you do.

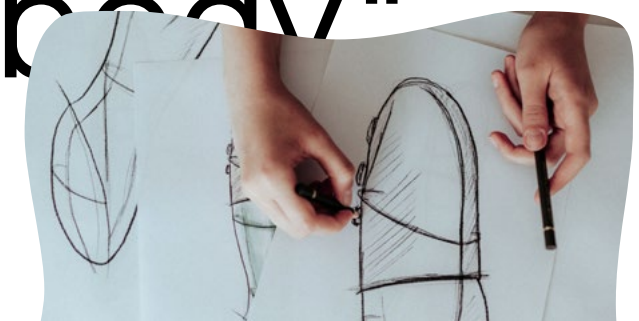
Why do you think sex toys are more popular today?

Women, and people in general, have started to speak more openly about their desire and their lust. They've started to explore and experience that they can have a great sex life. That they can get a toy or ask for a partner to touch them where they want to be touched, and to have the sex that they want. We see this in relationships, too. Many couples come to us asking for sex toys for vaginas, vulvas, penises, or for the anus. So the understanding of what good sex looks like has changed for many people. Of course, not everybody likes what we do. It makes some people uncomfortable. But all we want to do is to help people have a little bit more fun. We really don't want to claim to be a substitute for a partner. Our toys are a plus, an add-on! We want to get the message out that if you know your body, or if you change your routine, you might get a fuller, broader, more satisfying orgasm. People today want to live more intensely. This starts with food, with exercise—and also with sex!

"In the sex toy industry, you mostly find gendered toys. We design products primarily for the body."

According to a 2017 survey, Denmark, Greenland and Sweden were the three top European countries for sex toy use.

From 2019 to 2020, the global sex toy market grew by 26% percent thanks to COVID-19



"In the sex toy industry, you mostly find gendered toys. We design products primarily for the body."

by HWA PYUNG YOO

Dress to Express

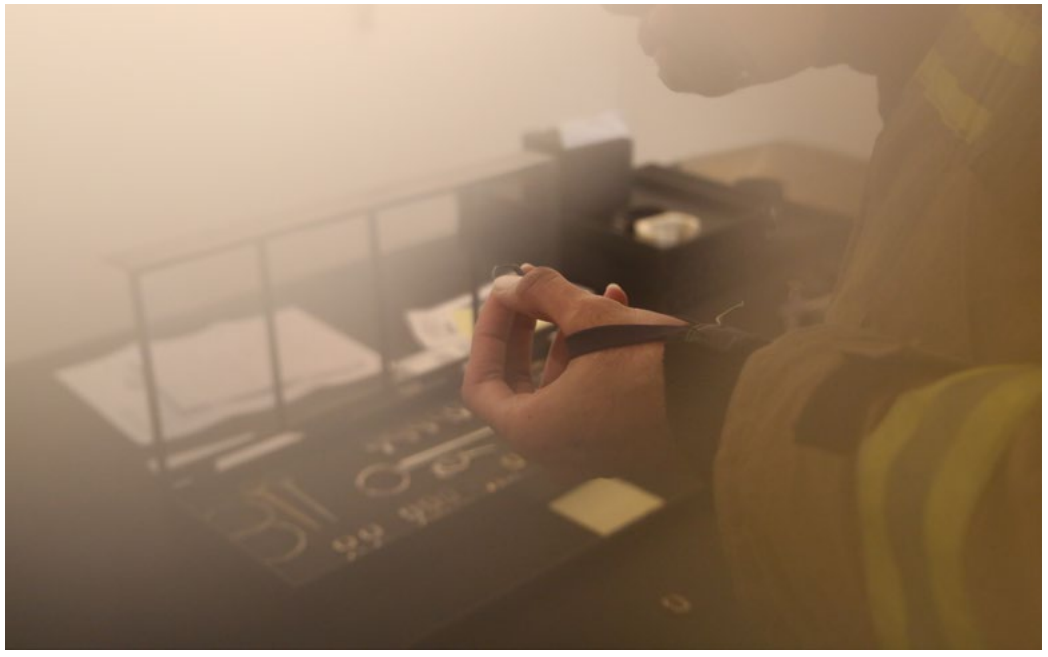
Journeys of emancipation through fashion

My mother tells me that when our family arrived in the United States, I turned my seven-year-old back to the class each time the teacher gathered us in a circle. I would tear up the papers with their nonsensical writing and scribble over each assignment. The language made no sense to me, and my embarrassment showed through resentment.

Each time I've moved to a new country where I did not speak the language, I have fought the urge to let myself slip into that shame. Fashion has helped me express myself in lieu of words.

In Paris, I met Vincent Frederic Colombo. The fashion designer and artist founded his line C.R.E.O.L.E as a way to create the references he was lacking. "Ever since I was a kid, I rejected many things because I didn't want to be placed in a box. I feel like it's still my leitmotif," Vincent says. Born on the archipelago of Guadeloupe, Vincent first grew frustrated with stereotyped Creole identities while looking at postcards of the Caribbean. He began designing clothes that pushed back, not to reach a new definition of Creole identity, but to challenge the need for a definition.

For Vincent, fashion design is a method of escape and resistance. "I think for many fashion designers, their work is a type of introspection. They explore an aesthetic they



were exposed to as kids and try to recreate that perfect vision."

Seven different mood boards mark the starting point for Vincent's designs: style, casting, techniques, graphics, hair and make-up, accessories, and graphic design. "The mood board is like my Bible. It is my basis." Vincent uses them to test the ideas and messages he wants his clothes to convey.

An emerging theme for his new collection is the Lion of Judah, a reference to Rastafari culture. Vincent embroidered his own design of the image, using beads, onto a hoodie. "It's interesting to work on the aesthetic and

play with this fluidity, to create a dialogue with what's supposed to be Rasta."

Before studying fashion design, Vincent studied sociology and anthropology. For him, making clothes is as much an intellectual conversation as it is a creative exercise. Each reference, each detail, adds to the universe Vincent envisions. The hemline of the hoodie ends slightly above the waist to contest gendered affiliations, the use of tartan fabric confronts British colonialism, the threading exposes traces of the collarbone to infuse sexuality with workwear. The Lion bears witness to the symbol's Judaeo-Christian and African heritage.

"We are not mood boards. We are not models. We are not trends. We are not a moment—we are a movement." Quotes from activist-artist Alok V. Menon are scribbled throughout Vincent's notebook. "People want the aesthetic of diversity, but they don't actually want us."

Also a DJ, vogue dancer, and party planner, Vincent takes these words to heart in his life and work. His music blends genres, his parties integrate communities, and his clothing brings together styles associated with clashing social identities. It resists being put in a box. Designing for fluidity is C.R.E.O.L.E's ethos. It is about capturing movement and practising dialogue, challenging the notions of uniformity and agreement we have internalised, and that so many of us feel uncomfortable with.

While aiming to capture Vincent's movements, the joy that lights up his face when he's at work, I felt inspired. To resist that fear of exclusion, to confront the shame I learned. Through the clothes I wear, I express the intimate parts of myself—acknowledging even parts I did not know. They are a culmination of the music, friends, and circumstances which shape my actions and visions. I realise now that there is greater shame in not knowing your own language than that of others. *W*

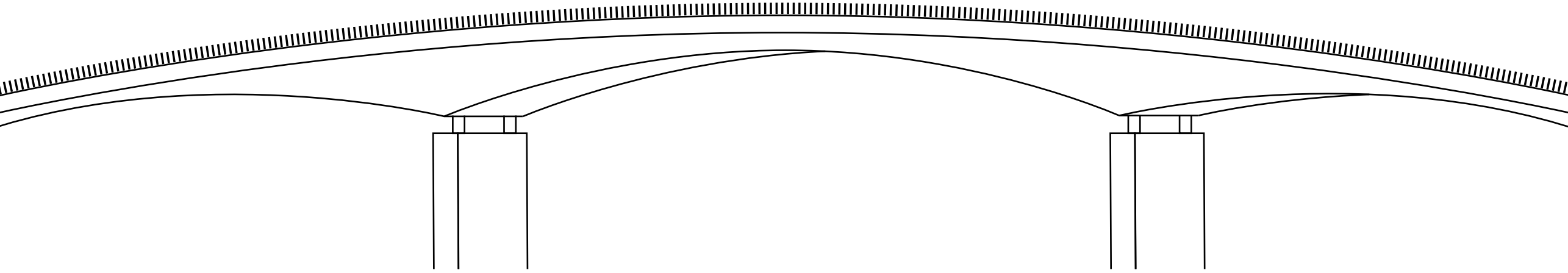
by

SIMON LOWE

Design for Life

The Future Foyle, and the challenge of urban design for mental health

“When the project came up, I knew we had to take it,” says Professor Jo-Anne Bichard about Our Future Foyle. The urban intervention aims to redesign the river area in Derry, Northern Ireland. In the city with the highest suidice rate in the UK, the Foyle and its namesake bridge are notorious spots for people taking their own lives. The Northern Ireland Public Health Agency (PHA) commissioned a team of designers to revitalise the area, and prevent cases of suicide.



Before she was Professor of Accessible Design at the Helen Hamlyn Centre for Design in London, Bichard designed merchandise for bands. One of them, That Petrol Emotion, hailed from Derry. Bichard would visit the city regularly. “I loved the people, especially their sense of humour,” she says. “I had friends I could talk to about the city.” Those conversations led to a strong engagement with the local community, which in turn inspired the design ideas for the Future Foyle project.

At one community workshop, Bichard and her team learned of a famous local story. In 1977, at the height of “The Troubles”—when the streets of Derry were marred by sectarian violence and division—a lost orca whale, fondly nicknamed “Dopey Dick,” was spotted swimming in the Foyle. The river is an emblem of the religious divide between Protestant unionists residing in the east bank and Catholic nationalists on the west. As locals gathered along the riverbank hoping to catch sight of Dopey, for a short while, communities on both sides of the river came together. This inspired Ralf Alwani, a designer and architecture researcher at the Royal College of Art, to create a space for research and engagement in the shape of a whale in 2016. “The response was amazing,” said Alwani, speaking to *The Guardian* in 2018. “We began to understand how Dopey Dick, coming at a time of conflict for the city, still resonates as a positive memory. So then we began to think about how the project could create what we hope will be a new, positive memory.”

But generating a sense of positivity around something as serious and tragic as suicide is a difficult challenge. Mental health experts within the PHA advised Bichard not to talk about suicide directly. Their guidance suggested that highlighting an association between a place and self harm often leads to more attempts. Throughout the engagement process, it was nonetheless clear that locals were very aware of the problem.

Europe counts approximately 128,000 deaths by suicide every year. For each suicide, another 20 attempts are made.

"People would tell us the river had an association with suicide," says Bichard. "The city has a saying, 'I'm about ready for the Foyle,' indicating periods of stress, highlighting how embedded the river is within the city's well-being."

Alongside engagement with residents, the team also sourced their ideas from the natural world. "The landscape surrounding the Foyle Bridge is absolutely stunning," says Bichard, recalling times spent walking and documenting along the riverbank. "We took some amazing photos of reed beds against a dramatic sky." That was when they came up with a crucial idea. They would use the grace and beauty of the reeds to alter the atmosphere in and around the bridge, regenerating its soul and creating a connection to the nearby living world. At the same time, they would erect a seemingly unintentional barrier to prevent people from jumping.

"Derry was still emerging from the trauma of The Troubles and typical suicide prevention barriers were somewhat fortified," admits Bichard. The design they produced, known as "Foyle Reeds," is "an interactive arts piece that also just happens to tackle suicide behaviour rather than highlight it." The artificial reeds will tangle and weave across the bridge at different heights, the tops swaying in the wind. Using digital technology, part of the reeds will be illuminated, changing colour as movement along the bridge is detected by sensors. Due to be completed in 2023, Foyle Reeds promises to become a landmark piece of design—a permanent and uplifting art installation and public safety measure, inspiring and protecting the citizens of Derry.

The issue of mental health is a serious concern for communities throughout Europe. According to the WHO, suicide is the cause of approximately 128,000 deaths in the continent each year, and for every person who takes their own life, a further 20 attempt to do so. It is a problem that particularly affects young people. Suicide is the leading cause of death amongst 10-19 year-olds in low-income European countries and the second leading cause of death in Europe's wealthiest countries. Aside from medical services and helplines, design solutions can help alleviate this crisis.

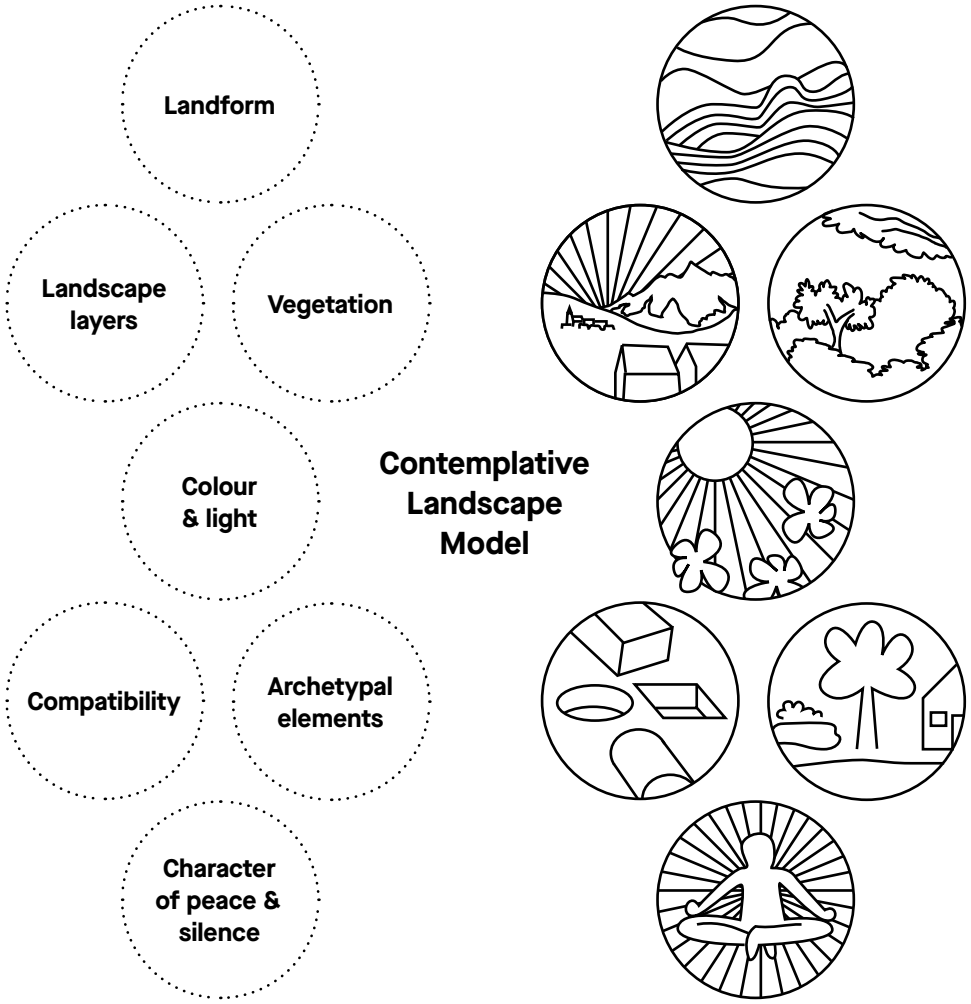
The UK based think tank, The Centre for Urban Design and Mental Health, provides research and ideas alongside reports from cities all over the world, highlighting the benefits of this approach. It believes building mental health into the design of our urban environments is the key to "a healthier, happier urban future."

In Sweden, a recent study of youth suicide also emphasises the importance of urban design when considering space. Charlotta Thodelius, a researcher at Chalmers University of Technology in Gothenburg, wrote a paper about the way our built surroundings can affect health outcomes and the number of suicide cases among young people in Sweden's cities. She believes that understanding the method and mindset of young people who take their own lives is essential to finding the best ways to improve urban spaces. "They are spontaneous and act very impulsively. They might not want to actually die, they just want something to stop," says Thodelius, referencing studies of youth suicide in her country. "It might be something that has been going on for a while, but it can also be something that, as adults, we might find quite trivial—breaking up with a partner, fighting with parents, doing badly in a test, or being gossiped about." According to the academic, it is often transitory moments of personal anguish, rather than underlying mental health issues, that elicit tragic, extreme responses.

This impulsive tendency amongst young people makes buildings such as high-rise towers and bridges, especially in depressed or isolated urban spaces, hotspots for suicide. Theodelius argues that if similar structures could be redesigned to avoid the type of spontaneous action young people might take in times of crisis, the number of suicide cases would significantly drop. "There are good reasons to modify the built environment around known hotspots and try to avoid creating new ones in city development," says Thodelius. "This requires input from engineers, city planners and architects." But crucially, Theodelius points out, these modifications must be carried out sensitively, with thought given to the mood of the surrounding space. "A bad example would be a bridge with unattractive suicide nets. This can easily stigmatise a place, and make the general public avoid it. A better example is a bridge with a fence covered in plants and flowers. This doesn't affect a place in the same way—instead of being perceived as a suicide prevention measure, it can be seen as something to simply make the place nicer." This approach reflects that of Bichard and her team in Derry. It attaches importance to the mood and feeling an area elicits rather than just focusing on the physical structures within it. As cities and towns expand or modernise, the built space must be designed beyond practical solutions, to alleviate negative feelings.

"As cities and towns expand or modernise, the built space must be designed beyond practical solutions, to alleviate negative feelings."

"As a species, we are still not too well-adapted to living in urban, built-up environments," says Agnieszka Guizzo, a landscape architect who grew up in Warsaw, Poland. She remembers the long, dark winters of her childhood and the impact they had on her mood. Whilst studying in Porto, Portugal, she became fascinated by the relationship between the brain and our lived environment. She eventually co-founded NeuroLandscape—a team of researchers and professionals from across Europe who aim to help improve the mental well-being of citizens residing in urban landscapes. They organise community projects based on the latest neurological research linking urban design and mental health. Guizzo believes that growing urbanisation across the world can have a negative impact on our



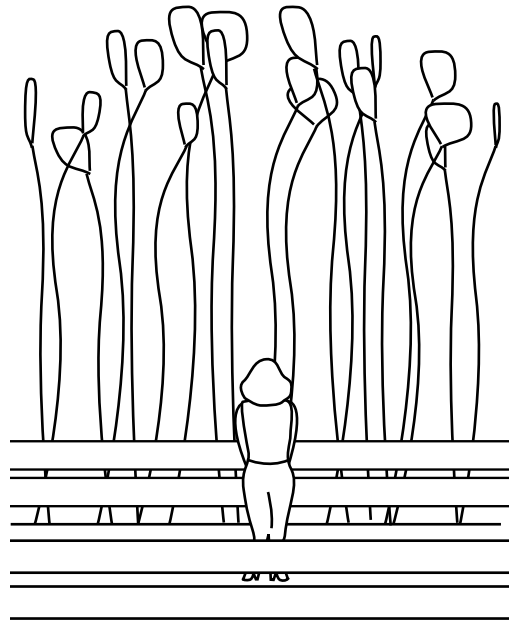
well-being. Our evolved unfamiliarity with urban structures is, according to her, "likely the reason why living in cities is associated with much higher risk of mental illness such as depression and anxiety than living outside of cities."

Her team has created a "Contemplative Landscape Model," which measures and defines landscape aesthetics. The model consists of seven categories—including landform, vegetation, colour and light, character, layers of landscape—and can assess any landscape in terms of its "contemplative" qualities. "Some specific features present in the green space seem to 'work' better for our health than others. Surprisingly not all of them are related to plants and trees, but also other things like, for example, far-away views," says Guizzo. To score highly, a landscape requires qualities such as an undulating landform with natural lines and broken or warm colours that allow light and shade to be visible, as well as seasonal, changing vegetation and a clear compatibility between the natural and created surroundings. Guizzo's company even provides a service that allows organisations or individuals to complete a survey which gives a landscape, such as parks or institutional settings, a contemplative score. "I would advise planners and designers to incorporate as much natural asymmetry as possible in their designs," says Guizzo. "It makes a lot of sense when you consider the evolution of our nervous system. Euclidean geometry—which posits that symmetry and straight lines occur naturally, ed.—is artificial and relatively new, while natural geometry expressed by fractals, for example, is more familiar to our brains." Guizzo's own research shows how brain activity alters when we are exposed to different window views. When high up, looking out at a wide, green landscape that would score highly in the Contemplative Landscape Model, brain patterns associated with positive emotional states appear to be more common than when looking out a window on lower-level floors, with less of a view.

Back in Derry, Bichard is hoping the familiarity and natural geometry of the Foyle Reeds will have the desired mood-altering effect and bring calm and beauty to the river area and its people. Perhaps the Future Foyle project will be the first of many public health and design initiatives across Europe. If this is the case, Bichard warns, it will be important to protect the environment and reflect the unique qualities of every community through local engagement. "We are in a really interesting but urgent time," says Bichard. "We have a major mental health problem, especially amongst young people, but we also have a climate crisis to consider—solutions can't come encased in plastic." The Foyle Reeds are a permanent structure made from aluminium, a highly sustainable material. The 800-metre illuminated, sculptural barrier considers both people and the planet.

Today, more than ever—thanks to a deeper understanding of the effect of our surroundings on our mental health—there is an opportunity to employ design as a means to enhance our lives and even save lives. "I think that we have enough evidence to start designing in a way to cause less harm to people," says Guizzo. "For many years, cities were designed without consideration to human health, or if any, it was limited to sanitary matters. I believe that soon there will be a re-evaluation of priorities by our urban managers and there will be more health-promoting interventions." With the unveiling of Future Foyle, this re-evaluation has already begun. *WW*

"We have a major mental health problem, but we also have a climate crisis to consider—solutions can't come encased in plastic."



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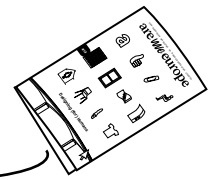

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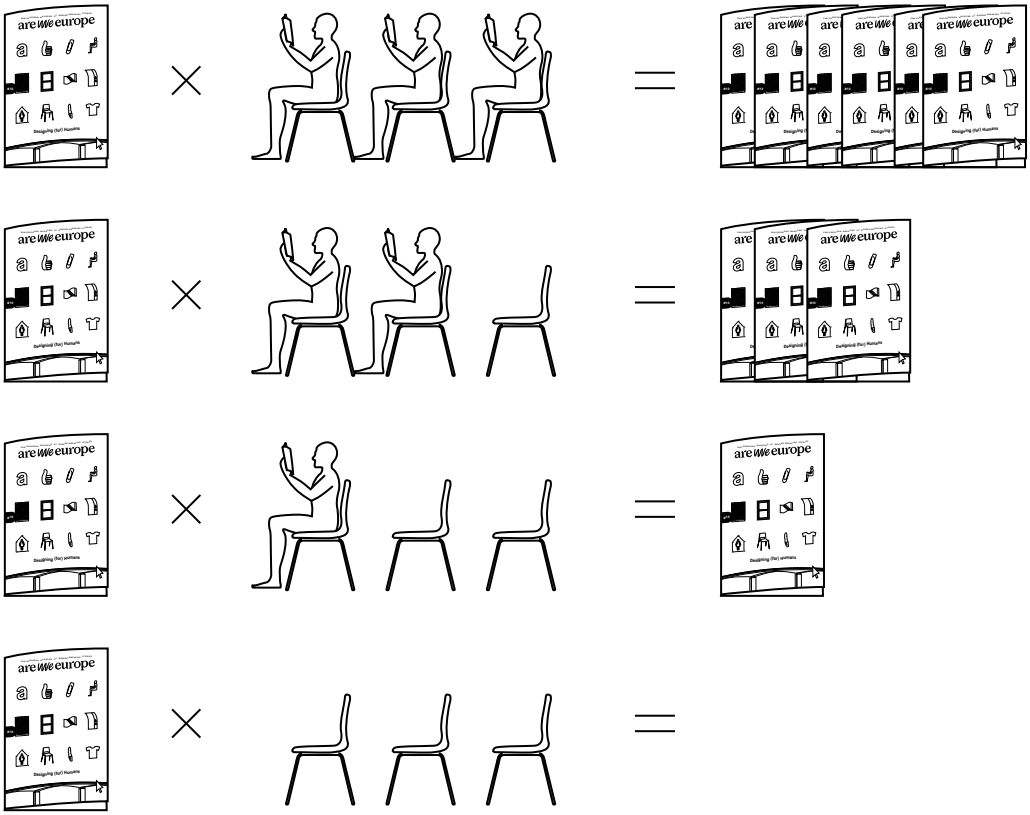

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