„YASKE“ Sushi Bar

Kharkov, Ukraine

ARCHITEKTUR
Drozdov&Partners

BAUHERRSCHAFT
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Sushi bar, Kharkov

Drozdov&Partners cut the Gordian knot of history with a fascinating play of light and glass.

von Kseniya Dmitrenko

Drozdov&Partners claim that their projects are wholly contextual. But in the case of the Yaske sushi bar, the relationship between the building and its location at the beginning of Leninsky Avenue is not so easy to define. In the 20th century this area became a major architectural battlefield between Russian constructivism and Stalinist socialist realism. Standing near the new bar you can see the side elevation of the famous Gosprom building: a classic example of constructivism, it was intended to serve as the powerful engine of modernization that would give birth to the New City of Kharkov. In part it did: in the late 1920s serried ranks of grey concrete housing blocks arose behind the Gosprom’s vast back. In the 1930s this advance was abruptly halted and even distorted as pompous decorations appeared on many of Kharkov’s constructivist buildings, symbols of the change of political regime. Yaske stands on the scar left by this fierce battle, in the open corner left between two pseudo-classical giants, facing the unadorned facades of the smaller-scale buildings on the other side of the road.

It seems that the architects did not look for compromises here. Instead they illuminated the historical confusion with powerful gestures that take Yaske from the pragmatic level of „edifice“ to the poetic category of „sculpture“. They started off with the old modernist idea of the total penetration of internal space into the exterior. „We tried to leave this corner open, as it was before construction. Integrating the interior into the exterior was also an attempt to give quite an expensive sushi bar a more public character,“ says Oleg Drozdov. What lends Yaske landmark quality, however, are not the fully glazed facades of the rectangular, ground-floor volume (toilets, kitchen and service rooms are the only interior areas hidden from view), but rather the striking contrast between the gentle transparency of this volume and the monumental impenetrability that characterizes all the surrounding buildings, regardless of style.

This total transparency – extending to the smallest detail in the interior including plastic stools and the almost invisible needle-like legs of the tables – turns into

something completely different with the coming of evening, as the internal space of the sushi bar is flooded with the bright light of the lamps. Then the glass walls turn into screens which reflect every thing and person inside the bar as well as their slightest movements. Watching these multiple projections, clients are seduced into narcissistic self-contemplation, while outside the surrounding buildings turn into indistinct masses so that only the bright Yaske firefly seems to live in the darkness of the night.

The second defining feature of Yaske’s striking appearance is the karaoke room on its upper level. This ellipsoid volume, raised on three slanting piers, is conceived as a contrast to the lower regular volume, not only in the sense of form but also because of its more private character. The only transparent detail of this part of the building is a horizontal window, a kind of a porthole intended for controlled observation of the outside world. The privacy of the karaoke room is further emphasized by its deliberately limited accessibility. An elegant spiral staircase leads to a narrow hole through which visitors pass into the cabin one by one. Unlike the solid and smooth furniture in the bar, the furnishings of the karaoke room appear to be made of soft and tactile fabric. The cool halogen light on the ground floor is exchanged for a warm, soft pink glow.

At night the ellipse undermines the modernist honesty of the building: its supports vanish so that it appears to hover in clouds of light. The literal obscurity of the karaoke room also has a metaphorical dimension that is not unambiguous. Oleg Drozdov sticks by his claim that his work is contextual: according to him the elliptical form was a reaction to the nearby crossroads as a space of permanent movement and change. This explanation does not prevent one from seeing in it a prototype of a Chinese traditional lantern or, alternatively, a variation on the popular high-tech spaceship theme. To an orthodox Christian the upper part of Yaske might bring to mind a church dome – an association which gives this supremely secular building a faint aura of sacrality.

DATENBLATT

Architektur: Drozdov&Partners (Oleg Drozdov, Vladimir Balkashin, Arthur Goga)
Bauherrschaft: Bristella Ltd.

Funktion: Hotel und Gastronomie

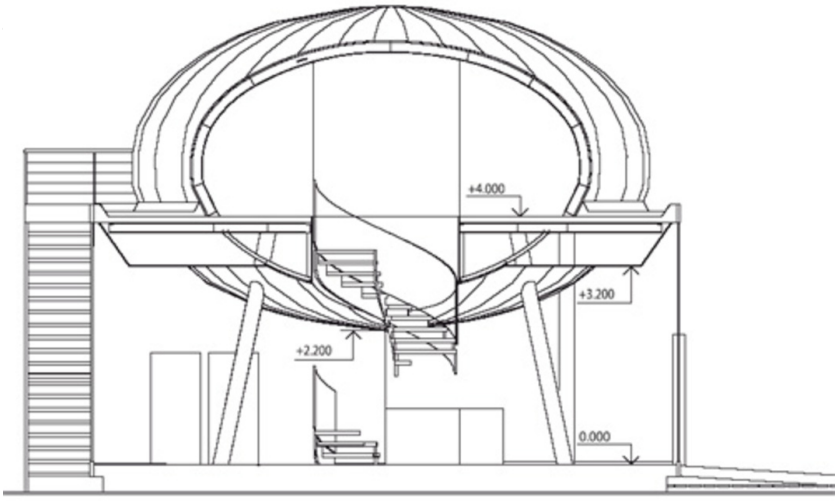
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