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Statement

ON REAL ESTATE DEVELOPMENT

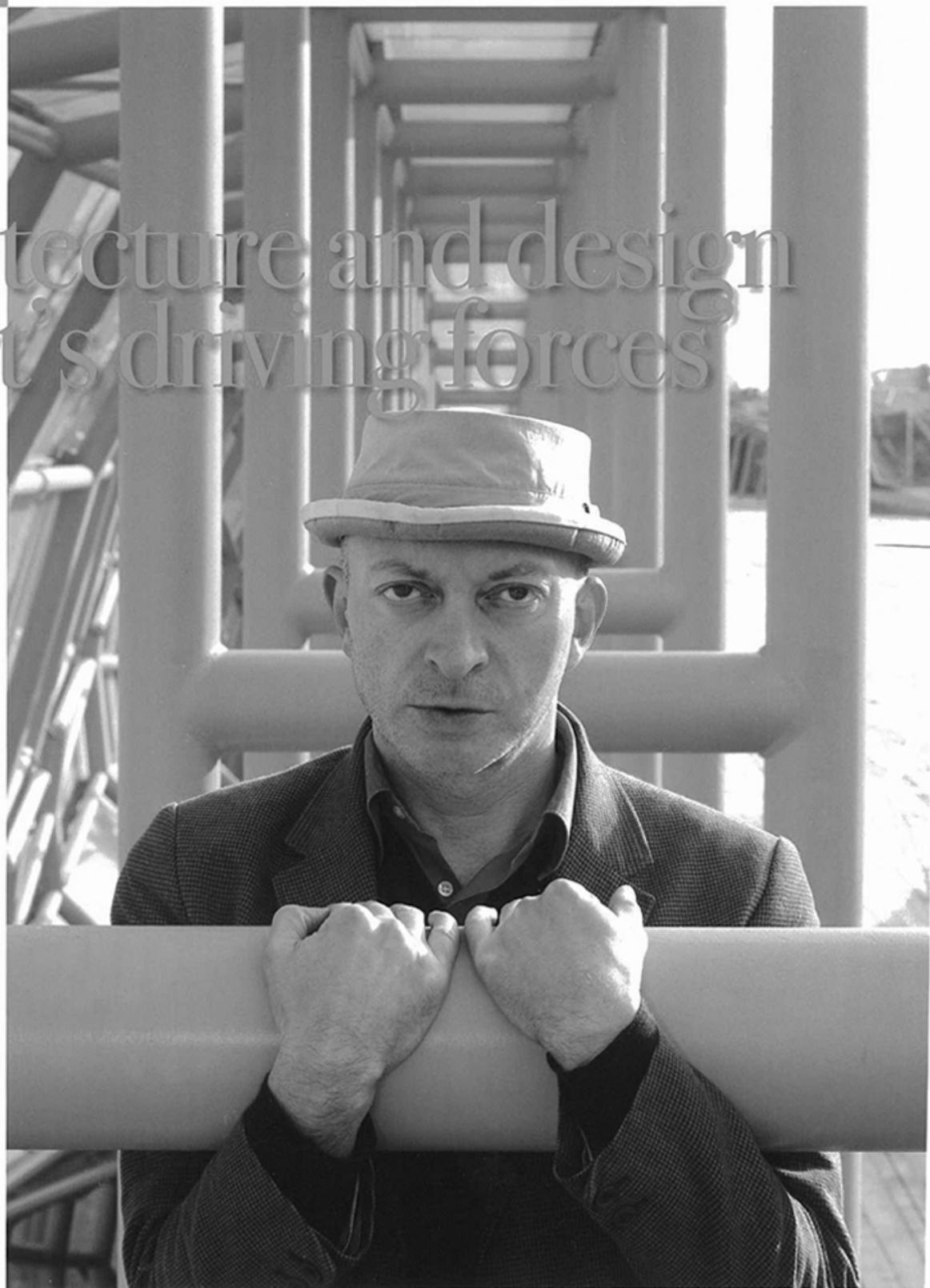
CURATOR
FABRICE
BOUSTEAU:

Architecture and design
are art's driving forces

CHRISTIAN
BIECHER:
'I USE FORM AS
A KIND OF
PROVOCATION'

PROFILE:
DANIEL
LIBESKIND'S
ARCHITECTURE
OF MEANING

ING 
REAL ESTATE





‘Designers
concentrate on
the object, I look
primarily at how
that object
affects a space’

ARCHITECT AND DESIGNER CHRISTIAN BIECHER:

Specialist

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■ INTERVIEW

Form gives structure to ideas, says the French architect and designer Christian Biecher. From small utensils to complete urban areas, in his extensive and varied oeuvre form is paramount.

BIECHER IS A 'GLUTTON' IN THE DESIGN WORLD. ACTIVE in the United States, Asia and Europe in particular, he designs areas, buildings, interiors and products, from hospitals to mobile phones, to libraries and lighting, furniture and cutlery. There is little Biecher has not gone into. As an architect, a designer or, some say, even as an artist. He finds that amusing: 'I'm certainly not an artist, if I were I wouldn't be concerned about the context I work in, with all its constraints. And that certainly does engage me. I am primarily an architect, an architect who designs buildings, interiors and objects, all with the same level of respect. Because I work in various disciplines, I force myself to shift from the one scale to the other. That's instructive and keeps me on my toes.'

RUSSIAN DOLLS

Though Biecher dislikes pigeonholing things, he realises there is an obvious difference between architects and designers: designers are often unassuming, whereas architects often behave as if they rule over their creation. But that is just outward show. And there are differences at the production level: 'The logic is different. You don't duplicate a building, but that's precisely what you do with a piece of furniture or mobile phone. So in design, aspects like reduction and compression also play a role when it comes to keeping production costs manageable.'

But, says Biecher, the crux of the matter is that architects are not predestined to design buildings all their life, just as a designer does not have to stick to creating objects: 'Take those Russian dolls. The smallest doll fits in a bigger one, which in turn fits in another one that's a little bigger, and so on. I see it this way: someone sits on

in space

BY RUUD SIJERINGS
PHOTOGRAPHY: CBA, PHILIPPE PROVILY/
DE BEELDREDAKTIE

a chair, works in an office, that office is located in an environment and that environment fits in an even larger whole, the neighbourhood, the city or the world. Each element is part of one large space and all are related to one another.'

SHAPE AND FORM

According to Biecher, form is the essence of the tangible, visible world around us: 'It all starts with form. Shape is the physical expression of form. While form is also physical, it is primarily the intellectual basis of shape. Form gives structure to an idea.'

During his architectural training in Paris form was taboo. For Biecher that was almost like a red rag to a bull, he has, as he says, been into form ever since: 'I also use form as a kind of provocation. When I was a student it was a sin to think in terms of form. It all had to be conceptual. I don't believe in that. When I first became an architect I won a prize with my design for a library in the South of France. After that I simply had to do something different. I went into ceramics, because I needed to be able to put my hands into clay. I needed that in order to "extend" myself in physical forms. Not as a therapy, but to get a balance. Form is also a constant thing. Even if human beings become extinct or if all the languages disappear, form will still be there.'

HOLISTIC VIEW

Biecher bridges the gap between architecture and industrial design, he combines construction and innovation, technology and implementation. You could even call him a total designer. As developers graduate from buildings to areas, so Biecher is increasingly with aspects of the living environment. Given his holistic view of architecture and design, one would expect his mindset to be far broader than that of architects or designers who stick to their chosen profes-

sion: 'Designers concentrate on the object itself, my main concern is how that object affects the space. I think my architectural training has something to do with it. My starting point is always the space.'

A good illustration of Biecher's thinking and approach is to be found in the Fauchon Restaurants, a global restaurant chain for which he did the interior design. The chair he designed for them is not so much a designer chair as a piece of furniture made specifically for that place. Biecher certainly did not intend the chair to become a worldwide hit afterwards: 'It really is a piece of architect-furniture, suitable for Fauchon. I couldn't possibly design a chair a month just like that, I wouldn't know how to. I designed the Fauchon chair for a certain moment in a certain space, for the comfort of the people who experience that particular moment. Only after that did it become an icon.'

URBAN ACUPUNCTURE

You might regard his fascination for products from the human living environment as a kind of zooming-in. But Biecher also zooms out. For an extension to La Grande Motte, a town built in the 1970s on the south coast of France, he has gone into area development: 'There, as the leader of a team of landscape designers and urban planners, I can put my experience as an architect and designer to good use. I find that combination important in such a situation: I see the buildings before me as well things like street lighting or waste bins. For an area developer it is even more important to create opportunities for events and encounters. Look at it as a sort of urban acupuncture: you stimulate activity at a great number of points and all those activities together make up your physical environment. My background as architect and designer is helpful here. One of my obsessions is creating possibilities for social interaction. Not in a virtual world like Facebook, but physically, in the built environment. In the real world you can touch something or someone, you see the light reflected, you drive past buildings, things are tangible. That really blows my mind.'

In that respect Biecher also saddles himself with a certain responsibility; as area developer he is the one who can create context: 'That feels like a huge responsibility! If I say things

'The evolution of the world with all its surprises and constraints is my field'



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CHRISTIAN BIECHER

After graduating in 1988 from the Ecole Nationale Supérieure d'Architecture de Paris-Belleville, Christian Biecher worked as assistant to the French-Swiss architect Bernard Tschumi. In 1997 Biecher founded his own firm: CBA / Christian Biecher & Associés. Since then he has great number of diversified works to his name, from restaurants, hospitals and office buildings to furniture, fabrics, lighting and other products, many of them put into production by top brands like Christofle, Lancôme, Baccarat and Bernhardt Design.



'It all starts with form'



must be physical, then I also have to make sure they work. That is a heavy burden, but it's a great honour as well.'

ZOOMING OUT

Yet Biecher is content in a role that allows him, along with his specific design work, to get an almost 'helicopter view' of projects: 'I don't know what I'll be doing in five years' time, but I do know that the evolution of the world with all its surprises and constraints is my area of expertise. I am working on increasingly large projects, in terms of area and time. I like that, because it usually means I have more time and space to reflect on them.'

In a sense, Biecher is following an unconventional path.

While many of his colleagues specialise in specific areas, he wants to take an increasingly bigger and broader approach to things. One of his favourite models is the British architect David Chipperfield: 'He makes huge projects, employs hundreds of people, has offices in different countries, but he hasn't forgotten how he got there. He spent years designing small shops, nothing special. But that gave him the kind of modesty you need when you look at large urban projects. After that he was ready for the large scale. That really appeals to me, looking from the small to the large, zooming out ever further. Modesty is a precondition for being able to get close to the psychology of projects, and therefore of people in particular.' <<<

From left to right: Chaumon chair for Drucker; Trois Roses crystal vase for Baccarat; Fauchon Casablanca; Drop cutlery for Christofle; Starship in Prague.

