

## LIVING ARCHITECTURE

DECIO TOZZI

### *Discovering the path*

*My first contact with design was through my father.*

*Although he was a communications engineer he used to design at home for his friends. I used to observe him with delight as he worked at his drawing board and I would sometimes even accompany him to the building sites. It was always a pleasant trip.*

*Later on, when I was a teenager, I became a frequent visitor to the Museum of Art of São Paulo (Masp). Once again it was my father, a man who was sensitive to art and culture who encouraged me. The museum, which was directed by his friend, the professor Bardi and that was located in 7 de Abril Street was where I embarked on my lifelong relationship with the arts.*

*We usually spent our school vacations in my mother's family farm in Itatiba, São Paulo state, where apart from enjoying close contact with horses and nature in general I spent a great deal of time drawing the beautiful landscape of the fields and observing nature's colors, textures, the rhythm of the plantations, the diversity in the fauna and above all the indelible traces of Man's presence that the rural landscape reveals.*

*I was strongly encouraged by my parents and when the time came for me to choose a professional career I was absolutely certain that it had to be related to the arts, a path to the sensitive comprehension of the meaning of life through design features.*

*Gradually, the choice of and the engagement in the architectural profession was delineated. Initially, I was drawn to the profession because of my deep fascination for the considerable prestige that modern Brazilian architecture enjoyed. I remember the book Brazil Builds and other foreigners who revealed to me the ingenuity of the great modern masters of architecture.*

### *Education*

*I initiated my architectural education when I entered the School of Architecture and Urbanism, Mackenzie University in 1955.*

*At that time, Brazil was undergoing a period of great political turmoil because one could glimpse, almost clearly, the development possibilities that lay ahead and that would be opened up through a national effort if the country's forces of production were to be organized and stimulated, based on national unity and consequent harmonious land distribution.*

*Brasília, inspired by President Juscelino Kubitschek, was the major factor boosting inland development of the country and the consolidation of full sovereignty over our national territory.*

*The Architecture course, during the early learning phase, followed closely the setting of the new capital right from our first year at the university when the competition for the plan of the city took place until our last year at the university when the city was inaugurated, in 1960.*

*For five years we studied during the mornings and the afternoons: the Architecture course was very comprehensive as far as technical and artistic disciplines are concerned.*

*The Vila Buarque district, in the city center of São Paulo, housed Mackenzie University as well as several schools connected to the University of São Paulo, including the School of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo (FAUUSP) in Maranhão Street where later I got my master's degree in Architecture in the Environmental Urban Structures area.*

*The climate was favorable for discussions and permanent dedication to our studies and the course on Architecture at the Mackenzie University was directed by the professor Cristiano Stockler das Neves, former mayor of São Paulo and an academic of distinct personality.*

*The young students were, naturally, in favor of the concepts of modern architecture having being enchanted by the work of the great masters Frank*

Lloyd Wright, Le Corbusier, Walter Gropius, Mies Van der Rohe and Alvar Aalto. There were daily debates during classes and this spirit of aesthetic inquiry stimulated us to pursue further studies more and more seriously in order to strengthen our convictions which resulted in a solid global and interdisciplinary education.

While we were still students we undertook works on the design and visual communication fields and took part in open competitions. I designed some posters for the Paulista Modern Art Exhibition and for the Pan-American Architecture and Town Planning Students Congress.

The first professional work was done during the fifth academic year when the Mackenzie School of Architecture Students' Union (Dafam) offered the design of the Paraplegic's House to a charity appeal coordinated by prominent citizens of São Paulo.

Our group of fifth graders won the internal project competition and the design was developed under the guidance of Gregori Warchavichik, one of the major campaigners.

During the time I was developing this design I noticed a certain dogmatism and mechanicism underlying rationalistic principles such as the pilotis, free floor plan, roof-garden, the rigid modulation, the blind walls.

This fact alone generated profitable discussions with one of the pioneers of Brazilian modern architecture. It was a time of intensive questioning that left an indelible imprint on my early career as an architect.

*The first years*

At that time, although the city of São Paulo was already a metropolitan hub it still preserved some of the town planning features which were closely modeled upon the Chicago School characterized by its provincial districts and city center. Perdizes, the district where I was born, presented a singular predominance of cultural and educational facilities with the marked presence of the Dominicans, a pioneering order within the Catholic Church which was composed of priests with a universal knowledge.

On the other hand, the district was also the home for many intellectuals and artists of all kinds as well as some distinguished politicians.

Daily social life was punctuated by an interpenetration of different social classes that were hierarchically distributed along the higher areas of the district, along the hillsides and along the bottom of the valley where poorer people dwelled.

It was a rich and all-inclusive environment that allowed for high education and at the same time fostered contact with the popular cultural production of the countless composers of popular music (samba paulista) that gathered together in neighbourhood squares and plazas.

The Dominicans, inspired by Father Lebre's urban mission actively promoted sociological, anthropological and urban research.

My initial engagement with city life, in São Paulo, was carried out through the mission I undertook in coordinating an architectural group led by Friar Barruel de Langenest, a French Dominican priest, who conducted pioneering research into city slums.

*The university campus*

In the beginning of the 1960s, just after the construction of Brasília, which was a major historic event, the city of São Paul was the scene of another great project-the construction of the University of São Paulo Campus, in the Butantã district.

The master plan for this campus was developed by a group of renowned Brazilian pioneers in modern architecture and the construction system based on a rigorous modular coordination that nonetheless allowed for total freedom of design choice in relation to the formulation of the structure that was to define its architectonic character was developed by the University of São Paulo Construction Fund (Fundusp).

In 1960 the Fundusp commissioned me to take part in a team of architects to design the Criminalistics and Criminology Institute, an institute connected with the university as a complementary agency to be located on the square that

*gives access to the campus.*

*The opening of the first studio*

*In 1961 I decided to start my own private practice.*

*My personal interest in architecture lay in developing a unique work and penetrate an artistic adventure, understood as a universe to be discovered, to the extent that curiously I could sense that each design conveyed the view of a plastic imagery in which light, space and matter constitute the elements of a new and transforming architecture within the conservative scenario in force amidst us.*

*Discussions about economic dependency and the resulting national imbalance led us on to question and reflect on the implications of our responsibilities as architects in responding to social issues raised by these circumstances. The approach that I tried to develop involved creating a design that could harness the forces of nature and thus overcome the adversity of our climate with its excessive daylight and high temperatures with the use of techniques that are already incorporated into our cultural construction processes, such as reinforced concrete, so as to achieve an adequate system balancing man and environment.*

*I studied examples of Brazilian colonial architecture; I did some research on the habitat of African tribes and of tribes of different cultures in order to grasp their wisdom in solving this essential problem that architecture is presented with - the mastery and transformation of the forces of nature.*

*Throughout my professional life the solutions that exploit the natural zenith light not only accomplish this architectural aim but also allow for the breaking up of the traditional rigid spatial organization, in that the freedom of interior space planning opens up opportunities to reveal new spatial relationships in a semantic synthesis, which is experimental, and through this synthesis to achieve a better understanding of and purpose for the relationship between architecture and society.*

*Teaching Architecture*

*One task I have always enjoyed and have undertaken together with my work as a designer and which is almost inherent to the architectural investigation I set myself to pursue is teaching, not only because it is a means of helping those who are taking their first steps in this career but also because I believe that we can learn a lot through teaching.*

*During the 1960s, I started my teaching career as professor of Projects at the School of Architecture and Urbanism of the Mackenzie University.*

*In 1964 several professors had to quit the teaching staff of the university because of the Brazilian political turmoil of that time, and this being so, for a few years I had to turn solely to my career as a designer, but I adopted a didactic approach to my work.*

*In 1970 I was commissioned to work as an associate professor during the constitution of the School of Architecture in Santos, the city where one of my first buildings was erected: the Technical School of Trade.*

*In 1967 I won a national public competition and became professor at the School of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo.*

*Brazilian culture at that period was going through difficult times because of the authoritarian regime that had come to power, and the institutions were submitted to irrational and indiscriminated evaluations. This situation resulted in architecture and architectural education in our country being temporarily deprived of the participation of professionals within this area who were greatly capable and highly cultured and who mounted stiff resistance against the regime through their work as designers and researchers. One has only to check out our cultural work generated during that period to understand the importance of the thesis advanced within design that regarded architecture as a means to improve the global development of the society and of the country.*

*It was only in 1983 that I could join the teaching staff of the FAUUSP and where I had the pleasure and the honor to live together with masters of Brazilian architecture.*

### *The love of the city of São Paulo*

*Those who live in São Paulo soon realize that the city has a plural and colorful character. Such features are quickly brought to notice if you are a young person who is progressively becoming aware of the urban territory that surrounds you, outside your own home where you once lived within your family circle.*

*The multi-ethnic character of the population of the city of São Paulo, which is a world economic and cultural pole, awakens in us a vision of conceptual universality stimulating the interest in different cultures that leads us into a new humanism, plural and multiple, that spreads without losing its cultural identities and that finds within the territory of the city of São Paulo its legitimate expression because it is based on an effective social practice.*

*This scenario leads to a vibrant city full of human warmth in its different forms where human solidarity, contradictorily, is always present.*

*I have always felt a great love of São Paulo and it is with emotion that I recount some moments in which I could take part in the history of its urban evolution.*

### *The slums of São Paulo*

*My first engaged participation in social activities connected with the development of São Paulo was through my undertaking of an interdisciplinary research, under the supervision of Friar Barruel de Langenest, on the issue of subhuman housing. The purpose of this research was to collect an urban and architectonic sample of the actual incidence of slums within the city and to set up its physical features.*

*Because this research exposed to the population of São Paulo the extent of the city's housing problem and also its urban distribution this can be considered as the first public initiative to deal with this issue and it constitutes an important tool for later professional research developments. This research was published in Anhembi magazine edited by the professor of the University of São Paulo, Paulo Duarte.*

### *Vila Itooró*

*In the beginning of the 1970s I was commissioned by the municipality of São Paulo to develop a study on Vila Itooró, also known among intellectuals and academics as the Surrealist Vila, in the Bexiga district.*

*I invited architect, professor and historian Benedito Lima de Toledo, art critic Aracy Amaral, my brother Claudio Tozzi and Julio Abe Wakahara, who are graphic designers, and landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx, to join me in a project team. This group would impart sheer brilliance to this important project on the bizarre architecture of a Portuguese immigrant to São Paulo.*

*I insisted on presenting this project in this book because although it has not been carried out thus far it develops a sensitive and correct approach to the historical heritage issue that will be extremely useful to our colleagues and students facing the same problems, as we have already witnessed.*

*My original intention, when I decided to include this project in this book, was also to raise public awareness about the serious and pressing problem of the loss of their original character that our architectural heritage buildings are facing, and by this I mean both our old and our contemporary buildings.*

*The artistic value and the cultural value of a property are priceless and greatly exceed its commercial value. It is a key document issued by architecture to depict an age and thus society has to carefully protect this means of access to knowledge present in Brazilian cities.*

### *The Preservation of the Caetano de Campos Educational Institute*

*In this brief text about my personal recollections of my professional life and my commitment to the city of São Paulo I cannot leave out an unforgettable episode in which Benedito Lima de Toledo and I took a decisive step to defend the historical-cultural heritage of the city of São Paulo.*

*By the end of the 1970s the implementation of the underground system was under way and the company responsible for it was developing the East-West line. When the construction reached the city center, the República Square, a traditional building was threatened with demolition. It was the Caetano de Campos Educational Institute building by the architect Ramos de Azevedo.*

*The city as a whole got involved in an extensive public debate.*

Newspapers published daily the opinions of specialists and city dwellers. The Caetano de Campos Alumni stoutly defended the preservation of the building and was supported by several cultural and professional associations including the Institute of Brazilian Architects/SP.

We were summoned to a great public meeting by this association. At that time I was working as a consultant to the São Paulo Underground Company (Metrô) in the design of the stations' surrounding areas and Benedito Lima de Toledo, professor of History of Architecture at the FAUUSP, always demonstrating a missionary zeal, was worried about the fate of the city and its history which, as is common knowledge, is so dear to him.

The demolishing shield advanced on the subterranean route towards the 7 de Abril Street and we were notified that when it reached the República Square it would smash into the foundations of the school building thus demolishing it in complete disregard for the alternative solution which could save and preserve the building.

The Engineering Institute announced the great public debate that would address the question and we were aware that this meeting would be politically controlled by the Metrô presidency and by the government authorities that were in favor of the demolition of the building.

This debate became the focus of attention throughout the city.

Since we were aware of the danger that lay ahead and because we had only 24 hours to take effective action Benedito and I headed to the República Square while a journalist from the Jornal da Tarde newspaper waited for us in his office.

We climbed to the top floor of the Esther Building, rang the bell and were greeted by a gentleman, the social chronicler Marcelino de Carvalho, who, when told that it was our intention to photograph the school and the square with a Polaroid camera, replied: "My house is yours, do come in, for I am too a soldier fighting for the preservation of the memory of the city of São Paulo".

He withdrew to the inner part of the flat and allowed us, to take pictures from his terrace.

We immediately developed the photograph and drew on it the alternative solution which was also the one desired by the team of architects of the Metrô. This solution would not only preserve the cultural asset but would also create the large frontal sidewalk that can be seen today so as to integrate the building into the traditional garden of that square and result in an harmonious and unified historical document.

We delivered the drawing with the proposed solution to the journalist to be published the following morning and in the evening we headed toward the decisive assembly that was to take place in the Engineering Institute where we intended to actively take part in the debates.

The auditorium was packed and we sat down. The meeting started and the president of the Metrô announced that according to the regulations applied to that meeting there would be no open debate and that after the company had delivered its report the questions raised should be directed to the chair, in writing, and that they would only become public after a selection was made. We immediately became aware that everything had been arranged so as to assure the demolition of the Caetano de Campos Institute.

After raising our objections against such authoritarian attitude we promptly withdrew from the meeting.

We walked, in silence, for two blocks along the Maria Paula Flyover. We were extremely disappointed and worried.

When we reached the Municipal Library we had the brilliant idea of going to a nearby bar called Paddock where, already recovering from our disappointment, we would have the chance to exchange some ideas.

We knew that we had something up our sleeves: the publishing of the perfect solution the following morning in the Jornal da Tarde.

And indeed, the published news of the real possibility of saving the building from demolition, provided the proposed solution was adopted, was the event that changed the direction of the discussion and made authorities realize that the will of the citizens is always strong in conducting the designs of society.

*When the directors of the Underground Company announced that the solution which preserved the building was to be adopted there was a great celebration. Benedito and I realized, at that particular moment, that the whiskey we had sipped after hours at the Paddock bar had been the victory drink!*

*The Villa-Lobos Park epic*

*In the 1980s I was a professor at the FAUUSP and commuting to the university I used to observe the vast area that was one of the last urban empty spaces within the expanded city center of São Paulo, the spot where we can now see the Villa-Lobos Park.*

*This area was previously part of the sinuous river bed where the Pinheiros river once flowed and which was transformed after the straightening of its banks into a flood plain prone to intermittent dangerous flooding. The situation was*

*Having formulated the concept and outlined the proposal for the new park I contacted the most influential councilmen of São Paulo's municipal council to submit my proposal. They offered their support and were in charge of the coordination, articulation and discussion of the idea with the entire population of São Paulo aside from organizing a press worsened when the owners allowed the commercial exploration of sand which resulted in the formation of lagoons in the excavated areas.*

*Once all the sand had been depleted there came a time when the area became a dumping ground for all kinds of waste, organic and inorganic, thus transforming the site into a real "wasteland" used by the entire city of São Paulo.*

*The serious environmental damage this situation caused was immeasurable, ranging from toxic pollution to the issue of the safety of the population, as well as the question of the swarming mosquitoes that tormented those living nearby and the threat of insect-borne diseases.*

*Taking into account the importance of the area, which was one of the last significant empty spaces within the city, I came up with the idea of proposing the creation of a new park.*

*After conducting some careful investigations into municipal urban legislation I embarked upon the urban epic idea that was the implementation of the Villa-Lobos Park.*

*I designed a contemporary, present generation, park.*

*We know that the first generation parks were designed for strolling and meditation and therefore contained green areas, paths and refreshment areas. The post-war urban sociology changed our concept of the use of free time for enjoyment of the urban populations thus transforming leisure into a free time that also offers opportunities to receive education and culture, replacing uncompromised enjoyment with knowledge and culture.*

*Therefore, the new urban parks, all over the world, consist of theme parks that in addition to green areas and clearings incorporate a program that includes cultural equipment for the enjoyment of the people and appeals to their senses. I chose music as the park's theme and developed the program together with the population of the city because it was 1987, the centenary of Brazilian composer and conductor Heitor Villa-Lobos. Furthermore, the west area of the park was already characterized as a traditional popular music gathering place.*

*Thus the conceptual design of the Villa-Lobos Park was conceived, rightly and democratically paying tribute to the composer. The factors that make up the musical character of the place range from education to public performance equipment. The result is a present-day theme park which is extremely modern and contemporaneous.*

*It is not surprising that the project was awarded the ex-aequo international prize in the Urban Landscape category at the São Paulo IV International Biennale of Architecture, in 2001, and the Belgo-Mineira prize at the Prestressed Concrete Projects National Competition.*

*Having formulated the concept and outlined the proposal for the new park I contacted the most influential councilmen of São Paulo's municipal council*

to submit my proposal. They offered their support and were in charge of the coordination, articulation and discussion of the idea with the entire population of São Paulo aside from organizing a press conference about the question being debated at which he announced the coming of the new urban equipment.

Thus a long decision-making process took place; the city residents tenaciously fought one of the most beautiful battles of wills for the correct and dignified use of an important empty and dangerous area within its territory.

I started to advocate the idea and the plan. For three years I made presentations for athletic associations, community chambers, slums, neighborhood associations, sports clubs, public squares, and political associations of all trends apart from organizing the meetings that took place in the great auditorium of the Santa Cruz School where politicians and businessmen would express their enthusiastic support.

One citizen would speak and immediately enjoy the support of others and so the idea of the Villa-Lobos Park continued to flourish throughout the city and it was warmly greeted by all social classes.

Nevertheless this long human chain was facing great danger. A tactical maneuver was being executed, in the dead of night, to alter the zoning act thus changing the urban land use of the area, from the original Z8-040, that is, very restricted use, to Z-4 which allows for the construction of buildings whose area can be four times the area of the site.

In fact, this fiendish plot to establish a "real estate feast" was being developed concomitantly and it incorporated the project of more than forty tall buildings and a shopping mall. If it were to be carried out chaos would certainly reign within the region since the ensuing high density would boost traffic thus provoking the saturation of the transport network system.

But the greater and irremediable environmental hazard would be that of the urban climate because we would be left with an island of heat absorption that would further increase the desertification of the river valley.

Since the idea of a park promoted unity among the people and the threat was considerable we hastened to consult with the government of the state of the São Paulo, who immediately accepted the idea of the creation of a park and heartily welcomed its adoption.

I marshalled the people for the final confrontation that would soon be inevitable and we had to be prepared.

And in fact, on that weekend, *Veja* magazine carried an article which confirmed that the municipality had been put under considerable pressure and that there were only two possible paths: to provide the city of São Paulo with a "real estate development" which would be hazardous to the environment of the entire region or to provide it with a new cultural leisure area.

What a memorable day!

The Mayor at that time, former President Jânio Quadros, proved once more to be a great statesman when he declared: "Let a park be created for the city" and offered to incorporate a smaller municipal area that would complete the perimeter of the park.

The citizens had won a decisive victory!

For the first time within the region a movement that emerged out of society democratically influenced the future use of a great urban empty space.

It was the victory of a citizen's movement before the enactment of the Citizens' Constitution of 1988.

From that day onwards the history is well known: the implementation of the Villa-Lobos Park was phased, half of the area (350,000 sq m) is already built and the other half will be completed by the end of 2006. The areas reserved for the Musical Center and Auditoria are currently demarcated by grass. These buildings will be constructed at a later date and according to the original design, as is the general public will.

Administration after administration, as the different governors come and go, the park will continue to be constructed until it reaches its final configuration.

We have an example to follow in São Paulo: Ibirapuera Park, 50 years after its

*partial opening was still under construction. Work was only concluded in the current year of 2005 and the original conceptual design conceived by the architects, Oscar Niemeyer and Burle Marx has been carefully preserved. This fact alone avoided the loss of character that could have occurred over the different public administrations that have been responsible for its upkeep throughout these fifty years.*

*São Paulo has set the example and I had the honor of taking a leading part in it. I report this episode of the urban history of the city of São Paulo thinking about young people, so that the younger generations may be inspired to find in their love of the city and the love of its inhabitants the major cause for their professional commitment as architects and citizens.*

*Throughout my professional life I have dealt with several major issues, from individual housing projects to different types of buildings as well as proposals that resulted in major urban interventions and I have always tried to understand and suggest new and comprehensive programs.*

*The method is simple and sound - a critical and selective view, rigorous and attentive, and a poetical level, unrestrained, creative and permeated with hope and generosity.*

*Through critical analysis I endeavor to design using technique as a means to achieve appropriate spaces for the development of good social relations, spaces that strive for beauty and engage in a healthy dialogue with the landscape, and I am positive that this attitude follows the paths of architectural development and the advancement of society.*