

Gradanin-esteta Aesthetic Citizen

Aida Bratović

dipl. ing. arch.

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Sažetak U ovom tekstu Aida Bratović istražuje historijske uticaje njenog odrastanja u Sarajevu na njen rad i karijeru u Velikoj Britaniji i širom svijeta. Ovaj rad razmatra kako ljepota i tradicija, uz uvažavanje modernih potreba, oblikuju savremene projekte. Njen rad inspirisan je kulturnim naslijeđem, historijom i ličnom pričom. Izmještanje, bilo da je uzrokovano sukobima, ekonomskom nuždom ili ličnim izborom, duboko utiče na profesionalni razvoj. Njeno putovanje predstavlja primjer kako raseljavanje može biti istovremeno izazov i pokretač inovacije u arhitektonskoj praksi. Filozofija dizajna Aide Bratović temelji se na pripovijedanju i ličnom iskustvu, spajajući porodične naslijeđene predmete i spašene artefakte sa savremenim formama kako bi stvorila prostore koji izazivaju emocionalni odjek. Oslanjajući se na arhitektonsku fenomenologiju, dizajn vidi kao izraz sjećanja, mjesta i ljudskog iskustva. Njeni enterijeri često su spoj starog i novog na način koji djeluje spontano, ali je duboko promišljen. Rezultat je arhitektura koja ne samo da funkcioniše, već i govori – pričajući priče o otpornosti, identitetu i kulturnom kontinuitetu.

Ključne riječi kulturna baština; historija; *genius loci*; enterijeri; kulturološki identitet; dizajn.

Abstract In this story, Aida Bratović explores the historical influences of growing up in Sarajevo on her work and career in the UK and worldwide. This paper reflects on how beauty and tradition, with the incorporation of modern needs, shapes contemporary projects. Her work is inspired by cultural heritage, history and a private story. Displacement, whether due to conflict, economic necessity, or personal choice, profoundly impacts professional development. Her journey exemplifies how displacement can serve as both challenge and catalyst for innovation in architectural practice. Bratović's design philosophy is rooted in storytelling and personal experience, merging heirlooms and salvaged artefacts with contemporary forms to create emotionally resonant spaces. Drawing from architectural phenomenology, she sees design as an expression of memory, place, and human experience. Her interiors often juxtapose old and new in ways that seem spontaneous, yet are deeply intentional. The result is an architecture that not only functions, but speaks — telling stories of resilience, identity, and cultural continuity.

Keywords heritage; history; *genius loci*; interiors; cultural identity; design.

1 Kako je sve počelo

Prozor moje sobe u porodičnom domu gledao je na kuću. Bila je drugačija od ostalih kuća u komšiluku, s velikim ugaonim prozorima i kalama zasađenim u betonskim žardinjerama. Po obliku prepoznatljiva, s jednostavnim četvorovodnim krovom, ali ipak nekako drugačija. Onima koji su imali sreću da zakorače iza njene kapije kuća je otkrivala svijet suptilne ljepote s malim bazenom, drvenim paviljonom s pogledom na zgradu parlamenta i Hum. Voćnjak, prepun svakakvih plodova, pružao se gotovo do obale Miljacke. Kao dijete koje je odrastalo u Sarajevu 70-ih, nikada nisam bila u sličnoj kući. Nije bila impozantna veličinom, niti raskošna kao austrougarske vile u našem komšiluku, niti je nosila historijsku ljepotu tradicionalne osmanske kuće u Kečinoj ulici, gdje je moj otac odrastao. Ipak, ta kuća je u meni ostavila neizbrisiv trag. Imala je savršen sklad tradicije i modernosti, spajajući udobnost savremenog života s toplinom i prepoznatljivošću historijskog naslijeđa sarajevske kuće u mahali.

Unutra je svaki detalj djelovao promišljeno, svaki prostor je osmišljen da bude funkcionalan i udoban. Na

1 How It All Started

The window of my childhood home looked out on to another house. It was different to the other houses in the neighbourhood, with large corner windows and calla lilies planted in the window boxes. Familiar in its shape with a simple hipped roof, but still somehow different. For those fortunate enough to step beyond its gates, the house revealed a world of quiet beauty, with a small swimming pool and a wooden gazebo offering a view of the parliament building and Hum hill. Its orchard overflowed with every fruit imaginable and stretched almost as far as to the Miljacka river bank. As a child growing up in Sarajevo in the 70's, I had never seen a similar house. It was not imposing in size, not grand like the Austro-Hungarian villas in our neighbourhood, nor did it carry the historic beauty of the traditional ottoman houses on Kečina Street where my father grew up. Yet, the house left an indelible impression on me. It was the perfect balance of tradition and modernity, seamlessly combining the comforts of contemporary life with the warmth and familiarity of heritage.



Ilustracija 1a *lijevo* Kuća Šamanek, izvorno stanje, eksterijer. Izvor: Privatna arhiva porodica Šamanek/Lačević.; **1b u sredini** Enterijer kuće Šamanek, izvorno stanje. Izvor: Privatna arhiva porodica Šamanek/Lačević.; **1c desno** Kuća Šamanek danas. Izvor: Bratović, 2024.

Figure 1a *left* Šamanek House Original Exterior. Source: Šamanek/Lačević Family Private Archive.; **1b middle** Šamanek House – Original Interior. Source: Šamanek/Lačević Family Private Archive.; **1c right** Šamanek House Present State. Source: Bratović, 2024.

prizemlju je bila djevojačka soba i otvor između kuhinje i trpezarije. Veliko stepenište vodilo je ka otvorenom spavaćem bloku s preprostorom, garderoberom i toaletnim stolom postavljenim ispod visokih prozora, stvarajući prostor za ogledalo. Dužinom južne fasade prostirao se doksat s modernom sećijom idealnom za čitanje s koje se pružao pogled na dolinu u kojoj se prostiralo Sarajevo. U podrumu su se nalazili vešeraj i garaža sa zelenim krovom i unutrašnjim pristupom preko stražnjeg stepeništa, pa čak i mali bazen sa strane, namijenjen pranju tepiha i sušenju veša.

Nisam shvatila sve do mnogo kasnije koliko je ta kuća oblikovala moj vlastiti put. Tek kada sam, godinama kasnije, posjetila Villu Necchi Campiglio u Milanu, osjetila sam sličan dojam, taj rijedak osjećaj da kuća može predviđjeti i podržati život sam po sebi. Kao i kuća porodice Šamanek, Villa Necchi je djelovala promišljeno, namjenski, i ukorijenjeno u životima onih koji je nastanjuju.

U toj kući je živio rođak mog oca, a njegova supruga Mirjana bila je arhitektica i kćerka Emanuela Šamaneka, poznatog među prijateljima kao Emčo. Gospodin Emčo, praški student i nekadašnji dekan Arhitektonskog fakulteta, izgradio je tu kuću za svoju porodicu 1939. godine. Upravo je on mom ocu preporučio plac pored njihove kuće, rekavši da bi bio idealan za njegovu porodičnu kuću. U to vrijeme Mirjana je bila tek diplomirana arhitektica i napravila je prve nacрте za našu kuću. Međutim, dizajn je bio previše ambiciozan i skup za mladog doktora i njegovu rastuću porodicu. Planovi su na kraju pojednostavljeni i preradio ih je još jedan očeв prijatelj, iskusniji arhitekt Vedad Hamšić.

Naša porodična kuća izgrađena je u modernističkom stilu, s referencama na tradicionalne doksate, s čistim linijama, djelimično ukopana u brdo i pozicionirana tako da maksimalno iskoristi pogled preko Vrbanja mosta na impozantnu zgradu parlamenta i Hum. To je bilo početkom sedamdesetih, u vrijeme velikih ideja i ograničenih sredstava. Tada su se pratili jednostavni oblici, poštovalo se pravo na pogled, a komšije su znale jedni druge po imenu.

Danas tog pogleda više nema. Nove komšije su nadgradile još jedan sprat, blokirajući naš pogled prema parlamentu i rijeci. A pogled na prelijepu kuću Šamanekovih sada je posve drugačiji. Ali to je, možda, priča za neki drugi put.

Ova priča istražuje hipotezu da odrastanje u arhitektonski lijepom i historijski bogatom okruženju smanjuje sklonost ka nasilju i destruktiji. Naša zajednička historija, a posebno rat 90-ih, dodatno mi je učvrstila ovo uvjerenje. Osnovna pretpostavka jeste da su arhitekti

Inside, every detail felt purposeful, every space designed for both function and comfort. There was a maid's bedroom and a hatch connecting the kitchen to the dining room. A sweeping staircase led unexpectedly into an open-plan bedroom suite with a dressing room and dressing table set beneath high windows to offer space for a mirror, an anteroom, and a long bay window with a seat ideal for sitting with a book and gazing over the valley where Sarajevo spread beneath. In the basement, there was a laundry room and garage with a green roof and indoor access through the back staircase, and even a small side pool dedicated for carpet cleaning and laundry drying.

I didn't realise until much later just how deeply that house had influenced my own path. It wasn't until I visited Villa Necchi in Milan years later that I experienced a similar feeling — that rare sense that a house could anticipate and accommodate life itself. Like the Šamanek house, Villa Necchi felt intentional, thoughtful, and grounded in the lives of those who inhabited it.

My father's cousin lived in the house and his wife was Mirjana, an architect and the daughter of Emanuel Šamanek, known to his friends as Emčo. Mr. Emčo, a Prague student and Dean of the Faculty of Architecture in Sarajevo, built this house for his family in 1939. He was the one who told my father about the plot of land next to their house, saying it would be perfect for a new home. At the time, Mirjana was a newly graduated architect, and she drafted the first plans for our family house. But the design proved too complex and costly for a young doctor and his growing family. The plans were eventually simplified and reworked by another of my father's friends, a more experienced architect by the name of Vedad Hamšić.

Our family house was built in the modernist style, but echoing tradition with bay windows and clean lines, set partially into the hill, positioned to take full advantage of the views across Vrbanja bridge, the striking parliament building, and the hills opposite. That was in the early seventies, a time of ambitious ideas and limited means. Back then, simplicity in form prevailed, the right to a view was respected, and the neighbours knew each other by name.

Today, that view is gone. The new neighbours have built an extra floor, blocking our line of sight towards the parliament building and the river. And our view to the beautiful Šamanek house is very different. But that, perhaps, is a story for another time.

This story explores the hypothesis that growing up in an architecturally beautiful and historically rich environment reduces tendencies towards violence and destruction.

po prirodi stvaratelj, a ne uništitelj. Estetski značajno okruženje njeguje građanski ponos, društvenu koheziju i osjećaj pripadnosti; ljepota se u ovom kontekstu vidi kao smirujući i civilizirajući utjecaj.

Nije slučajno što države i gradovi, najviše slavljene zbog bogatog arhitektonskog naslijeđa, imaju više studenata arhitekture nego drugi. Njihovo kulturno i estetsko bogatstvo razvija ono što bi se moglo nazvati "estetskim građanstvom", u kojem pojedinci bivaju oblikovani ljepotom okruženja, a zatim i sami doprinose njegovom očuvanju i razvoju. Za mene, jedna kuća, ispunjena historijskim značajem i arhitektonskom gracioznošću čak i zbog njene tragične destrukcije, predstavljala je formativni utjecaj, i na kraju inspiraciju za karijeru posvećenu stvaranju i očuvanju ljepote.

Sarajevo, sa svojom arhitektonskom slojevitosti i bogatom historijom, duboko je uticalo na moju estetsku senzibilnost i kreativnu filozofiju. Jedinstveni arhitektonski narativ ovog grada pomogao mi je da razumijem prostor, kulturu i transformativni potencijal dizajna.

Izloženost takvom okruženju prirodno potiče prostornu radoznalost, ne samo kroz cijenjenja postojećeg, već i kroz težnju da se ta ljepota reinterpretira i nadogradi, kako bi inspirisala druge. Na taj način arhitektura postaje više od fizičke pozadine, ona se integriše u svakodnevni život, obrazovanje i lični identitet. Ideja očuvanja historijske ljepote uz prilagođavanje savremenim potrebama, arhitektura kao most između tradicije i inovacije, ostala je vodeće načelo u mom radu do danas.

2 Između Sarajeva i svijeta: arhitektonsko obrazovanje uoči rata

Godine 1988. upisala sam prvu godinu Arhitektonskog fakulteta u Sarajevu. Bio je to trenutak "između svjetova", između zaostalog optimizma iz vremena Zimskih olimpijskih igara 1984. i sve očitijeg političkog raspada Jugoslavije. Mnogi mladi arhitekti tada su napuštali Sarajevo privučeni mogućnostima koje su nudili gradovi poput Beča i Londona. Među njima se isticao Mladen Jadrić, čija nas je inostrana karijera fascinirala. Njegove priče o radu u ateljeu Coop Himmelb(l)au, gdje su se završni materijali za pekaru na kojoj su radili birali bacanjem kocke, savršeno su oslikavale duh dekonstruktivističkog eksperimenta.

Arhitektonski diskurs kraja 1980-ih bio je pod snažnim utjecajem imena poput Coop Himmelb(l)au, Zaha Hadid, Franka Gehryja, Petera Eisenmana i Daniela Libeskinda. Njihova djela, predstavljena na izložbi *Deconstructivist Architecture* u njujorškom MoMA-i 1988. godine, izazivala su ustaljene ideje o formi, strukturi i prostornom skladu. Za mnoge od nas na fakultetu u Sarajevu, njihovi radovi predstavljali su prozor u neki, kako nam se tada činilo, mnogo uzbudljiviji svijet.

Dok se svijet okretao ka fragmentaciji i provokaciji, arhitektura kasnih osamdesetih u Bosni, poslije punog elana predolimpijskog perioda, dodatno suspregnuta lošom ekonomskom i političkom situacijom, postajala je sve tiša, pomalo zagušena. Lokalni postmodernizam djelovao je neubjedljivo u oštroj kontrasti s modernističkom tradicijom prethodnih decenija.

Our shared history and the war in the 90's has enhanced this view. The underlying premise is that architects are inherently creators, not destroyers. Aesthetically significant surroundings nurture civic pride, and a sense of belonging; beauty, in this context, is seen as having a pacifying and civilizing influence.

It is not coincidental that countries and cities celebrated for their architectural heritage, produce more architecture students than others. Their cultural and aesthetic richness cultivates what might be termed "aesthetic citizenship," in which individuals are shaped by, and in turn contribute to, the beauty of their built environment. For the individual at the centre of this story, one house, adorned with historical significance and architectural grace, and also perhaps because of its unfortunate end, served as a formative influence, ultimately inspiring the pursuit of a career dedicated to creating and preserving beauty.

Sarajevo, with its geographically layered architectural history, has had a profound influence on my aesthetic sensibilities and creative philosophy. The city's unique architectural narrative helped shape my understanding of space, culture and the transformative potential of design.

Exposure to such an environment naturally cultivates spatial curiosity, encouraging not only appreciation but also the aspiration to replicate and elevate this beauty, thereby inspiring others. In this way, architecture becomes more than a physical backdrop; it integrates into daily life, education and personal identity. The idea of preserving historic beauty while adapting to modern needs, architecture as a bridge between tradition and innovation has been a guiding principle in my work ever since.

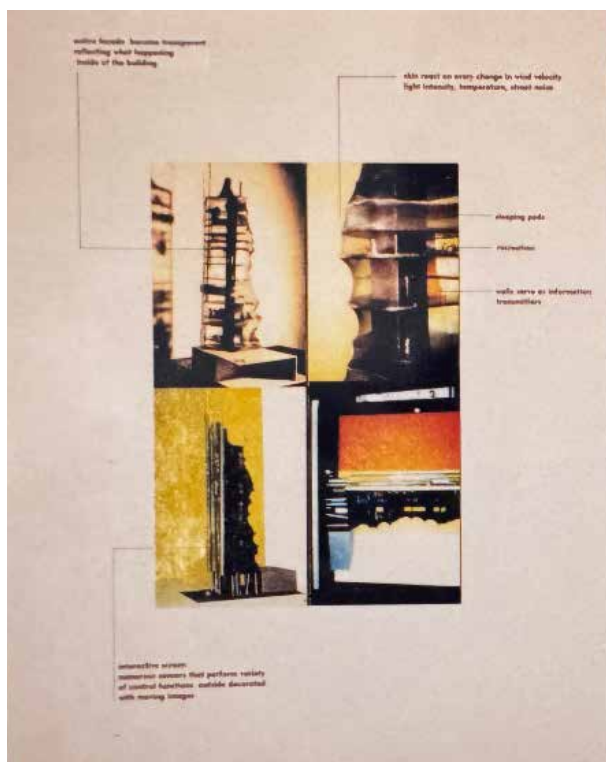
2 Between Sarajevo and the World: Architectural Education on the Eve of War

In 1988, I entered my first year at the Faculty of Architecture in Sarajevo. It was a moment suspended between the residual optimism of the 1984 Winter Olympics and the socio-political unravelling of Yugoslavia. Many young architects left Sarajevo, drawn to the opportunities of cities like Vienna and London. Among them stood out Mladen Jadrić, a rising figure who captivated our imagination with stories of working at Coop Himmelb(l)au, where material finishes for a bakery were determined by rolling dice, an anecdote that perfectly captured the spirit of deconstructivist experimentation.

The architectural discourse of the late 1980s was dominated by figures such as Coop Himmelb(l)au, Zaha Hadid, Frank Gehry, Peter Eisenman, and Daniel Libeskind. Their work, celebrated at the 1988 MoMA exhibition on deconstructivist architecture, challenged conventional ideas of form, structure, and spatial harmony. To many of us in Sarajevo, their designs represented an exhilarating new horizon.

Yet, while the world turned towards the fragmented and the provocative, architecture in late 1980s Bosnia — despite the forward-thinking legacy of the pre-Olympic period — began to feel unexciting and subdued. The strain of local postmodernism stood in stark contrast to the dynamic modernist tradition of earlier decades.

Faced with this tension, I found solace and inspiration in Bosnian modernism. Architects like Juraj Neidhardt and



Ilustracija 2 The Bartlett School of Architecture UCL, rad na postdiplomskom studiju. Izvor: Bratović, 1996.

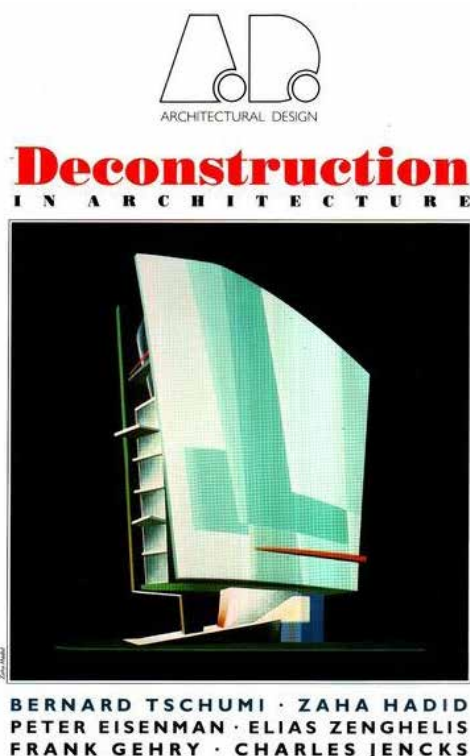
Figure 2 The Bartlett School of Architecture UCL, Diploma project by Aida Bratovic. Source: Bratović, 1996.

Suočena s tim razdorom, pronašla sam utočište i inspiraciju u bosanskom modernizmu. Arhitekti poput Juraja Neidhardta i Dušana Grabrijana duboko su se bavili domaćim graditeljstvom, dok je i sam Le Corbusier hvalio bosanske kuće. Posjeta Svrzinoj kući, s njenim intimnim avlijama i prostornom logikom oblikovanom religijom i društvenim životom, potvrdila je, za mene, vrijednost autohtone arhitekture. Oduvijek sam vjerovala da su kuće s unutrašnjim dvorištima jedan od najciviliziranijih oblika urbanog življenja.

Kao studentica koja je došla iz gimnazije, bila sam posebno privučena estetskim i filozofskim dimenzijama arhitekture. Slobodno crtanje postalo mi je omiljen predmet: od preciznog izučavanja grčkih radova i akvarelnih prikaza jonskih stubova do skiciranja mahala i starih kuća po Vratniku.

Uticaj određenih objekata na moj arhitektonski identitet ne može se dovoljno naglasiti: Svrzina kuća, Ronchamp kapela Le Corbusiera, džamija u Visokom arhitekta Zlatka Ugljena, te Muzej Sir Johna Soanea, svi su na svoj način doprinijeli razvoju mog estetskog senzibiliteta.

Iako sam cijnila intelektualne provokacije dekonstruktivizma ostajala sam privržena redu, proporciji i ravnoteži, naravno interpretiranim savremenim jezikom. Antihistorizam i vizuelna disonanca dekonstruktivističkih radova nikada nisu u potpunosti odgovarali mom senzibilitetu, baš kao ni pastiš pristup postmodernizmu. Više me zanimalo usklađivanje lokalnog konteksta s



Ilustracija 3 Naslovnica časopisa Architectural Design (AD), Deconstruction in Architecture, 1988 — specijalno izdanje posvećeno je teorijama i projektima dekonstruktivizma u arhitekturi. Izvor: archive.org/details/deconstructionin0000dran/mode/2up

Figure 3 Architectural Design (AD), "Deconstruction in Architecture," 1988 cover page – special issue covering deconstructivist theory and projects. Source: archive.org/details/deconstructionin0000dran/mode/2up

Dušan Grabrijan had engaged deeply with the vernacular, while Le Corbusier himself praised Bosnian houses. Visiting the Ottoman houses, with their intimate courtyard spaces and spatial logic shaped by religion and social life, reaffirmed for me the value of indigenous architecture. I have long believed that courtyard houses represent one of the most civilised forms of urban living.

As a student coming from a classical gymnasium, I was drawn to the aesthetic and philosophical dimensions of architecture. Life drawing became a beloved subject of mine: from the precise study of Greek orders in watercolour renderings of Ionic columns to sketching the winding streets and Ottoman houses of Sarajevo's neighbourhood, Vratnik.

The influence of particular buildings on my architectural identity cannot be overstated — Svrzo House, Le Corbusier's Ronchamp Chapel, Zlatko Ugljen's mosque in Visoko, as well as Sir John Soane's Museum each contributed uniquely to my evolving design sensibility.

Although I admired the intellectual provocations of Deconstructivism, I remained drawn to order, proportion, and balance, albeit interpreted through a contemporary lens. The anti-historicism and visual dissonance of deconstructivist works never fully resonated with me, nor did the pastiche of postmodernism. I was more concerned with harmonising local contexts with formal integrity, navigating between the universalist tendencies of the International Style and the specificities of place-based design.



formalnim integritetom, balansiranje između univerzalnih tendencija internacionalnog stila i specifičnosti dizajna utemeljenog u lokaciju.

Utjecaj religije na arhitekturu i prostorne tradicije ostao je stalna fascinacija. Koncept *genius loci* – razumijevanje i poštivanje duha mjesta, za mene je ključan u stvaranju prostora koji izazivaju osjećaj pripadnosti i značenja. Enterijer sarajevskog Hotela "Holiday Inn" je, primjerice, bio izraz takve osjetljivosti. Referenciranje lokalnih tipologija, poput "cirkus placa" i unutrašnjih *piazza*, nudilo je poetičan urbanizam ugrađen unutar same zgrade.

Završne godine na fakultetu bile su obilježene sve većom političkom nestabilnošću. Istovremeno, privlačnost velikih svjetskih gradova postajala je sve jača. Tek mnogo kasnije sam mogla u potpunosti cijiniti vrijednost naše tehnički orijentisane edukacije sa snažnim naglaskom na statiku i konstrukcije. Upravo to znanje kasnije nam je omogućilo da lakše pronađemo zaposlenje. Ipak, tada smo žudjeli za intelektualno stimulativnijim kurikulumom. Humanistički predmeti bili su potcijenjeni; pored tehničkih predmeta, s predmetima Opštenarodna odbrana i samoupravljanje, te Marksizam, mada kasnije preimenovan u Sociologiju naselja, ostavljali su prostor za intelektualnu prazninu. U tom kontekstu, predmet Arhitektonsko projektovanje 1, koji je predavao profesor Zlatko Ugljen, izdvajao se kao izazovan i transformativan. Mada su ustvari Rajka Mandić i Ognjenka Finci, koje su vodile praktični dio nastave, imale najveći uticaj na razvoj moje kreativnosti i radoznalosti.

Jedan od najzapamćenijih zadataka je bio projekt obdaništa koji su nam dopustili da smjestimo u svemir. Upravo taj rad omogućio mi je prijem na postdiplomski studij na Bartlett School of Architecture (UCL). Intervjuisao me je Sir Peter Cook, jedan od arhitektonskih idola, kojeg je fascinirala zamisao: kako bi izgledali ljudi odgajani bez kulturnih uticaja, naslijeđa ili geografskih granica? Naš rad je tvrdio da oslobođanje od normi i fizičke lokacije može rezultirati slobodnijim duhom i dubljim razumijevanjem. Inspiracija za projekat bio je film Wernera Herzoga *Enigma Kaspara Hausera*, koji me je tada duboko dojmio. Moja arhitektonska filozofija se od tada razvijala, i mnoga ranija uvjerenja su se promijenila. Ipak, to iskustvo je učvrstilo osnovno vjerovanje koje i danas negujem: arhitektonsko razmišljanje — kritičko, konceptualno i spekulativno — predstavlja neophodnu osnovu za bilo kakve projekte.

Prelazak na Bartlett u početku je bio zbunjujući. Prvi semestar je bio u potpunosti posvećen teorijskoj analizi, što je predstavljalo oštar kontrast u odnosu na tehničku strogoću našeg obrazovanja u Sarajevu. Na Bartlettu, činilo se da niko nije bio posebno zainteresovan za konstruktivne detalje ili tehničke sisteme. Često konačni rezultat čak nije morala biti konvencionalna građevina. Ipak, ova promjena mi je omogućila da istražim arhitekturu kao intelektualnu disciplinu, oblikovanu ljudskim iskustvom, historijskim kontinuitetom i poetskom osjetljivošću — kako to naglašavaju radovi Libeskinda, Anda, Zumthora, Alda Rossija i Louisa Kahna.

U konačnici, moje arhitektonsko putovanje odražava stalni odnos i pregovaranje između specifičnosti kulturnog i prostornog identiteta Sarajeva i širokih mogućnosti koje nudi globalni diskurs. To je putovanje oblikovano podjednako mjestom i maštom, sjećanjem i transformacijom.

The influence of religion on architecture and spatial traditions also remained a central interest. The concept of *genius loci*, understanding and respecting the unique spirit of a place is, to me, essential in creating spaces that evoke belonging and meaning. The interior of Sarajevo's Holiday Inn, for instance, was an example of such sensitivity. References to local typologies, like the "circus platz" and internal piazza, offered a poetic urbanism embedded within the building.

Our final years at the faculty were marked by growing political instability in the country. Simultaneously, the gravitational pull of global cities was becoming stronger. Looking back, I could not yet appreciate how valuable our technical education, with its emphasis on civil and structural engineering, would become. It provided a strong foundation that later made us highly employable. Yet, at the time, we craved a more intellectually stimulating curriculum. The humanities were underrepresented; courses including National Defence and Marxism, later renamed as Sociology, left us longing for richer conceptual engagement. In this context, the subject Architectural Design 1, taught by Professor Zlatko Ugljen, stood out as both challenging and transformative. Rajka Mandić and Ognjenka Finci led the practical component of the course, and had a profound influence on nurturing my creativity and curiosity.

One of the most memorable projects was designing a kindergarten that they allowed us to set in outer space, which eventually earned me admission to the postgraduate diploma program at the Bartlett School of Architecture, UCL. I was interviewed by Peter Cook, one of my architectural heroes, who was intrigued by the project's premise: imagining children raised without cultural influences, heritage, or geographic constraints. My theses argued that extrapolation from norms and physical location could result in a free spirit and humans with a deeper understanding. The inspiration behind the project was the *Enigma of Kaspar Hauser* by Werner Herzog, a film that fascinated me at the time. My architectural philosophy has since matured, and many of my early convictions have shifted. Nevertheless, that experience affirmed a core belief I still hold: architectural thinking, critical, conceptual and speculative, is the necessary foundation for any meaningful building.

Transitioning to Bartlett was disorienting at first. The initial semester was entirely dedicated to theoretical analysis, in stark contrast to the technical rigor of our Sarajevo education. At Bartlett, no one seemed interested in structural details or services. Often, the outcome didn't even have to be a conventional building. Still, this shift allowed me to explore architecture as an intellectual discipline, one shaped by human experience, historical continuity, and poetic sensibility, as emphasized in the work of Libeskind, Ando, Zumthor, Aldo Rossi, and Louis Kahn.

Ultimately, my architectural journey reflects a continuous negotiation between the specificity of Sarajevo's cultural and spatial identity and the expansive possibilities offered by global discourse. It is a journey shaped equally by place and imagination, memory and transformation.

3 Rat i dolazak u London

Izbijanje rata u Bosni i Hercegovini 1992. godine iznenada je prekinulo moj akademski put. Bila sam na posljednjoj godini studija arhitekture i pripremala se za diplomski kada su nemiri eskalirali. Naivno vjerujući da će se sukob brzo završiti, odlučila sam posjetiti prijatelje arhitekta u Londonu, s namjerom da provedem nekoliko mjeseci u muzejima i na izložbama, a zatim se vratim kući da završim studije.

Stigla sam u London u aprilu 1992. godine, noseći samo ruksak i 200 funti. U tom trenutku nisam bila ni studentica ni arhitekt, ni turistkinja ni građanka. Ubrzo sam postala izbjeglica bez državljanstva, jer je država čiji sam pasoš posjedovala prestala da postoji.

Mi, koji smo dolazili iz zemlje koja je britanskoj javnosti uglavnom bila nepoznata, često smo se suočavali s nerazumijevanjem i stereotipima. Jugoslavija se često pogrešno poistovjećivala s Istočnim blokom. Postavljana su pitanja poput: "Jeste li imali centralno grijanje?" ili "Jeste li imali televizore?" Naš dolazak je izazivao interes, ali i sumnju. Bosna, ranije u Velikoj Britaniji spominjana samo u kontekstu atentata na Franza Ferdinanda, sada se pojavljivala u vijestima kroz prizore zločina nezapamćenih od Drugog svjetskog rata. Slika o nama postajala je sve zamršenija i konfuznija. U zemljama poput Austrije ili Njemačke, arhitekti iz bivše Jugoslavije možda su nailazili na nešto više razumijevanja, zahvaljujući geografskoj i kulturnoj blizini.

Moj dolazak koincidirao je s jednom od najgorih recesija u Velikoj Britaniji – tržište nekretnina bilo je u kolapsu, što je dovelo arhitektonsku profesiju u totalnu krizu. Preko 80% arhitekata bilo je tada nezaposleno. Diplomci arhitekture imali su malo nade za pronalazak posla; arhitekti domaćini, oboje kvalifikovani i talentovani arhitekti, nedavno su izgubili posao i razmišljali su o emigraciji u Austriju, ili promjeni profesije. Mnogi mladi profesionalci okretali su se preživljavanju kroz poslove u ugostiteljstvu. Moja ušteđevina potrošena je u prvih mjesec dana na osnovne potrebe i telefonske pozive jer sam stalno provjeravala jesu li mi živi roditelji i prijatelji u Sarajevu. S neriješenim imigracionim statusom, moj svakodnevni život sveo se na pitanje opstanka.

Upravo tokom jedne od potraga za poslom dogodio se slučajni susret koji je promijenio tok mog života. Jedan ljubazan menadžer restorana, nakon što je saznao da nemam iskustva u ugostiteljstvu, ali da imam završenu prvu fazu studija arhitekture, predložio je da kontaktiram njegove prijatelje koji su nedavno dobili veliki arhitektonski projekat i možda im treba pomoć.

Taj prijedlog doveo me do biroa Timothy Hatton Architects, gdje mi je Tim ponudio probnu sedmicu pošto nisam imala portfolio da mu pokažem. Baka Timove supruge Daske bila je Hrvatica, što je znatno olakšalo objašnjavanje mog porijekla, nije bilo potrebe da razbijam predrasude o tome da li imamo struju, umjetnost ili kulturu. Nakon što sam prvi dan uspješno nacrtala geometrijski uzorak za kameni pod vile u Toskani, ponuđen mi je posao.

Tim Hatton, diplomac s Cambridgea i Harvarda, radio je s arhitektonskim velikanima poput Josépa Luísa Serta u New Yorku, a kasnije i sa Powellom Moyom, i sa Sir Sandyjem Wilsonom na projektu Britanske biblioteke. Pokazao se kao velikodušan mentor i inspirativan saradnik. Zahvaljujući porodičnim vezama biro je imao

3 War and Arrival in London

The outbreak of war in Bosnia and Herzegovina in 1992 abruptly disrupted my academic path. I was in the final year of my architectural studies, anticipating graduation, when hostilities escalated. Naively believing the conflict would soon subside, I decided to visit architect friends in London, intending to spend a few months immersed in museums and exhibitions before returning home to complete my studies.

I arrived in London in April 1992, carrying only a backpack and £200. At that moment, I was neither a student nor a practicing architect, neither a tourist nor a citizen. Soon, I would become a stateless refugee without a passport, as the country I once belonged to ceased to exist.

Coming from a country largely unknown to the British public, Yugoslavia was often mischaracterised as part of the Eastern Bloc, and we were frequently confronted with ignorance and stereotypes. Questions such as whether we had central heating or televisions at home were not uncommon. Our arrival was met with interest, but also with suspicion. Bosnia, only ever mentioned in history books through the assassination of Archduke Ferdinand, started to feature in the news showing atrocities unseen since WWII, forming a confusing perception of us. Meanwhile, in countries like Austria or Germany, architects from the former Yugoslavia perhaps encountered a more nuanced reception, owing to geographic and cultural familiarity.

My arrival coincided with one of the worst recessions in the UK, marked by a collapsed housing market which left the architectural profession in absolute crisis, with over 80% of architects unemployed at the time. Architectural graduates had little hope of finding work; my hosts, both trained and talented Bosnian architects, had recently lost their jobs and were considering emigration or work in unrelated fields. Many young professionals turned to survival jobs in hospitality. My own savings were depleted within the first month, having been spent on basic necessities and long-distance phone calls to check on my family and friends in Sarajevo. With an unresolved immigration status, my immediate existence revolved around survival.

It was during one of my job-hunting excursions that a chance encounter altered the course of my life. A kind restaurant manager, upon learning that I lacked experience in hospitality, but held a Part I architectural qualification, suggested that I reach out to friends of his who had recently secured a major commission and might be in need of assistance.

That recommendation led me to Timothy Hatton Architects, where I was given a trial week. The grandmother of Tim Hatton's wife, Daska, was Croatian, which made explaining my background considerably easier; there was no need to dispel assumptions about basic amenities or cultural sophistication. After spending the day successfully drafting a geometric pattern for a stone floor for a villa in Tuscany, I was offered a position.

Tim Hatton, a graduate of Cambridge and Harvard, had worked with architectural luminaries such as Josép Lluís Sert in New York and later with Powell Moya and Sir Sandy Wilson on the British Library. He proved to be both a generous mentor and an inspiring collaborator. The practice, aided by family connections, attracted a remarkable



Ilustracija 5 kolaž Kuća u zapadnom Londonu, projekat STUDIOAida. Izvor: Simon Brown, Aida Bratović, 2024.

što spaja klasičnu arhitektonsku edukaciju s modernim senzibilitetom dizajna enterijera.

Moj rad karakteriše sinteza bosanskog naslijeđa i iskustava stečenih u Velikoj Britaniji i svijetu. Često uključujem elemente koji odražavaju moje kulturno porijeklo, stvarajući prostore koji rezoniraju kako s ličnom tako i s kolektivnom historijom. Na primjer, u mojoj vlastitoj kući u Londonu, koja datira iz kasnog viktorijanskog perioda, integrisala sam porodične uspomene i artefakte koje je moja majka uspjela spasiti iz naše porodične kuće u Sarajevu tokom rata. Time sam željela naglasiti važnost sjećanja i identiteta u dizajnu. Lično iskustvo potpunog gubitka imovine tokom rata pretvorilo me je u strastvenog kolekcionara umjetnina, namještaja, tekstila i keramike. Materijalne stvari su nekad važne, one su uspomene, stvari do kojih je ljudima stalo. Moja majka je rizikovala život da iz razrušene kuće, koja se nalazila na prvoj liniji fronta, spasi umjetničke predmete. Ja sam željela da ti spašeni komadi pronađu svoje mjesto u Londonu, u mirnoj i smislenoj koegzistenciji s viktorijanskim namještajem i savremenim dizajnom, i komadima iz 20. vijeka koje su dizajnirali arhitekti i dizajneri čiji senzibilitet dijelim. Sakupljanje lijepih stvari je u ljudskoj prirodi, ono je podsjetnik na to kako smo živjeli i ko smo.

Koncept arhitektonske fenomenologije, o kojem je diskutovao Christian Norberg-Schulz u knjizi *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology in Architecture*, također je snažno uticao na moje razmišljanje. David Seamon

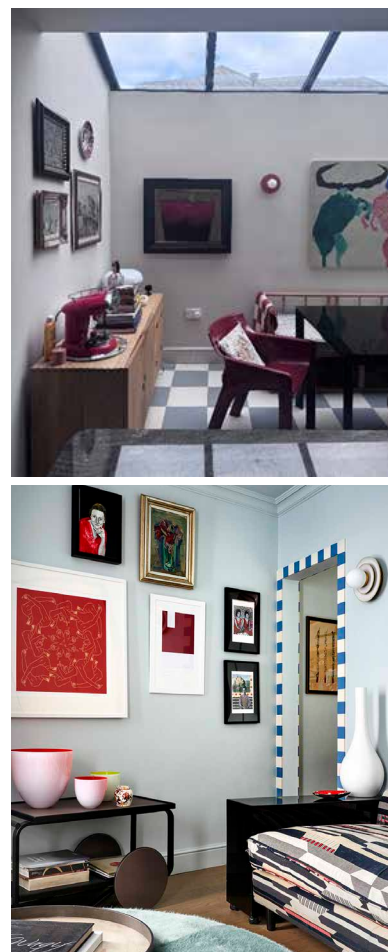


Figure 5 collage House in West London, project by STUDIOAida. Source: Simon Brown, Aida Bratović, 2024.

commitment to blending classical architectural training with contemporary design sensibilities.

My work is characterised by a synthesis of my Bosnian heritage and my experiences in the UK. It often incorporates elements that reflect my cultural background, creating spaces that resonate with personal and collective histories. For instance, in my own, late-Victorian London home, I integrated heirlooms and artefacts salvaged by my mother from our family house in Sarajevo during the war, emphasising the importance of memory and identity in design. My personal experience of losing all my possessions during the war made me become an avid collector of art, furniture, textiles and pottery. Material things matter; they are memories, things people care about. My mother risked her life rescuing objects of art from our house which was on the frontline in 1992. I made sure these rescued pieces found their way to London to live a peaceful and meaningful coexistence with Victorian furniture, as well as with other mainly 20th century pieces designed by architects and designers whose sensibilities I shared. Collecting is part of human nature, it is a reminder of how we live, and who we are.

A concept of architectural phenomenology that Christian Norberg-Schulz explores in his book *Genius Loci: Towards a Phenomenology in Architecture*, also shaped my thinking. David Seamon defines phenomenology as the 'descriptive and interpretive explication of architectural experiences, situations and



Ilustracija 6 kolaž Projekat enterijera u Londonu, STUDIOAida.
Izvor: Rachael Smith Photography, 2021.

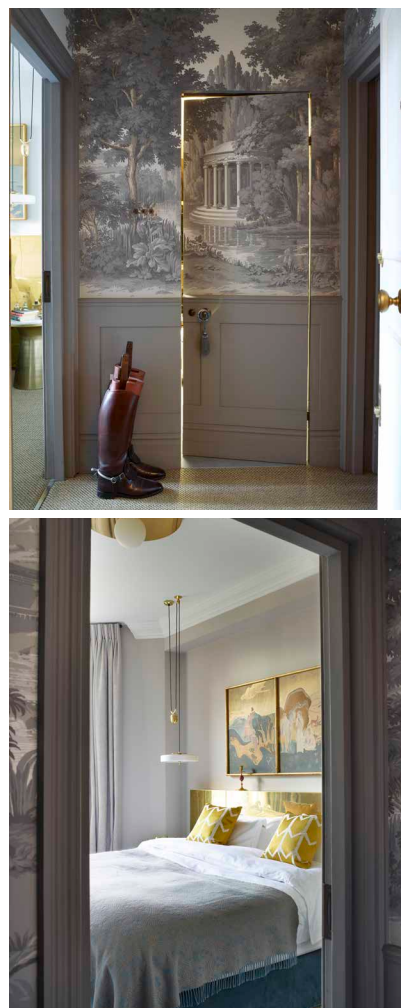


Figure 6 collage Interior Design Project in London by
STUDIOAida. Source: Rachael Smith Photography, 2021.

definiše fenomenologiju kao "deskriptivno i interpretativno objašnjenje arhitektonskih iskustava, situacija i značenja koja proizlaze iz karakteristika i osobina kako izgrađenog prostora tako i ljudskog života". Naglasak je na ljudskom iskustvu, porijeklu, namjeri i historijskom promišljanju, mada ja fenomenologiju vidim više kao način razmišljanja i stvaranja, a ne kao definisani pravac u arhitekturi. Studije ponašanja u prostoru također su mi važne, istražuju odnos između ljudskog ponašanja i izgrađenog prostora, kako dizajn utiče na ponašanje, i kako ga možemo poboljšati kroz bolje razumijevanje načina na koji ljudi koriste prostor. Dok moji radovi uključuju elemente fenomenologije temeljene na iskustvu i percepciji, moj dizajnerski pristup često narušava tradicionalne forme, suprotstavljajući staro i novo, ponekad na neočekivan način, kako bih izazvala emocionalni efekat. Moji enterijeri često djeluju kao slučajne kompozicije, ali arhitektura koju stvaram uvijek je priča o ljudskom iskustvu.

Moj pristup dizajnu je orijentisan na korisnika i vođen narativom. Vjerujem u stvaranje prostora koji nisu samo funkcionalni, već i pričaju priču, često dizajniram unikatne komade sa zanatlijama da bih postigla tu dubinu i jedinstvenost. Ova filozofija ogleda se i u mojim projektima, poput transformacije jednog stana u Knightsbridgeu, gdje sam spojila porodične naslijeđene predmete s modernim elementima kako bih odrazila multikulturno porijeklo klijenta.

meanings as constituted by qualities and features of both built environment and human life'. The emphasis is on human experience, background, intention and historical reflection, interpretation and poetic and ethical consideration, but I see phenomenology rather as an orientation towards thinking and making than a defined movement in architecture. Environmental behavioural studies in architecture investigate the relationship between human behaviour and the built environment, how design can influence human behaviour and how to improve design by understanding how people interact with spaces. While my work incorporates elements of phenomenology based on experience and perception, my design approach deliberately disrupts traditional forms, juxtaposing new and old in a balanced way often unexpectedly, to create an emotional impact. Often my interiors seem like a chance juxtaposition, but my architecture is always a story of human experience.

My approach to design is both client-centric and narrative driven. I believe in creating spaces that are not only functional but also tell a story, often designing bespoke pieces with artisans to achieve this goal. This philosophy extends to my projects, such as the transformation of a Knightsbridge flat, where I melded family heirlooms with contemporary design elements to reflect the client's multicultural heritage.

4 Izazovi i otpornost

Moj profesionalni put jasno oslikava izazove s kojima se suočava arhitekta u izbjeglištvu, od kulturne adaptacije, ponovne izgradnje profesionalne mreže, do snalaženja u različitim zakonodavnim i regulatornim okvirima. Međutim, moja karijera istovremeno pokazuje otpornost i sposobnost da se različita iskustva iskoriste kao prednost i obogaćenje arhitektonske prakse. Kroz ove izazove oblikovala sam poseban dizajnerski stil, onaj koji spaja i suprotstavlja kulture, historije i lične narative. Nadam se da moj primjer može poslužiti kao inspiracija drugima koji su prošli ili počinju sličan put, da pokaže kako raseljavanje ne mora označiti kraj karijere, već može biti okidač za novu kreativnost, dublje razumijevanje prostora i širu perspektivu u dizajnu.

5 Zaključak

Kvalitet mog obrazovanja u BiH i u Velikoj Britaniji, zajedno s bogatim i raznovrsnim historijskim arhitektonskim okruženjem u kojem sam odrasla, opremio me ponosom i samopouzdanjem, kao i uvjerenjem da imam interesantnu priču za ispričati i nešto vrijedno za ponuditi, čak i kada se suočavam s oštrom konkurencijom u velikim sredinama. Izložba *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980* u MoMA u New Yorku 2019. godine pokazala je svijetu da bogata i raznolika baština naših zemalja ima izuzetan kvalitet i težinu, te da mnogi naši sunarodnjaci prave značajne doprinose na području arhitekture širom svijeta. S druge strane, u mnogim dijelovima svijeta, uključujući i Veliku Britaniju, broj studenata arhitekture opada. Ovaj trend se uglavnom objašnjava dužinom studiranja, godinama potrebnim za sticanje kvalifikacija, niskim primanjima nakon diplomiranja, te sve strožim propisima u radu. Međutim, u vremenu erozije demokratskih vrijednosti, opasne politike i kontinuirane destrukcije, bilo ekološke, urbane ili etničke, arhitekti kao kreatori i mislioci potrebni su više nego ikada zbog svog umirujućeg i civilizacijskog uticaja, a još važnije, zbog svog aktivnog djelovanja.

Moj profesionalni put pokazuje kako raseljavanje, iako disruptivno, može biti i transformirajuće. Integriranjem svojih bosanskih korijena s iskustvima stečenim u Londonu i širom svijeta, razvila sam jedinstven pristup arhitekturi koji cijeni pričanje priča, kulturnu baštinu i personalizirani dizajn. Moj rad i razmišljanje možda skromno doprinose arhitektonskoj sceni, ali nadam se da nude uvid u potencijal profesionalaca koji su izmješteni, te kako se mogu unaprijediti i razviti na drugačiji način i prilagoditi novim okruženjima.

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4 Challenges and Resilience

My journey underscores the challenges displaced architects may face, including cultural adaptation, reestablishing professional networks, and navigating different regulatory environments. However, my career illustrates resilience and the ability to leverage diverse experiences to enrich architectural practice. My story hopefully serves as an example of how displacement can lead to the development of a distinctive design voice that bridges, combines and juxtaposes cultures and histories.

5 Conclusion

The quality of my education, and the significant and diverse historical built environment I grew up in, armed me with the knowledge, confidence and the conviction that I have an interesting story to tell and something to offer, even when facing the fierce competition of much larger and more successful countries than ours. *Toward a Concrete Utopia: Architecture in Yugoslavia, 1948–1980*, an exhibition at the MoMA in New York in 2019, showed to the world our rich and diverse heritage; and many of our architects are making waves and significant contributions in different countries. Conversely, in many parts of the world, including the UK, the number of architecture students is in decline. This trend is largely attributed to the long duration of study, the number of years required to gain qualifications, low post-graduation remuneration, and increasingly demanding work regulations. Yet, in a time of eroding democratic values, dangerous politics, and the continuous destruction of the environment, architects as creators and thinkers are needed more than ever for their pacifying and civilising influence – and most importantly their action.

My career demonstrates how displacement, while disruptive, can also be transformative. By integrating my Bosnian roots with my experiences in London and worldwide, I have cultivated a unique architectural approach that values storytelling, cultural heritage and personalised design. My work provides a small contribution to the architectural landscape, but I hope it offers insights into the potential of displaced professionals to innovate and adapt within new environments.

