

A BRIEF PROFILE OF LINO BIANCO

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Abstract. Lino Bianco's career as an architect, academic and diplomat is not much reviewed. This article gives a background of his work mostly in architecture practice and theory especially on this philosophy of architecture. It is based on publications and on the first-hand knowledge of the author on Bianco which extends over 10 years. The article includes concluding remarks which looks at the future.

Key words: Lino Bianco, Malta, architecture, sitesynthesis, geodesign.

1. Introduction

A colleague in the profession whose main area of study was conservation was Sir Bernard Feilden (1919–2008). He had published an article on one of his associates who was a generation younger (Feilden, 2004). Stimulated by this article, I thought of writing this piece on Lino Bianco, an architect, academic and a diplomat from Malta who, like Feilden, undertook his education at The Bartlett School of Architecture, University College, London.

Besides the numerous bionotes which are available to Bianco's various positions in academia and in diplomacy (<https://iaa-ngo.com/portfolio-posts/lino-bianco/>; <https://foreign.gov.mt/en/embassies/nr/pages/lb/lino-bianco.aspx>; <https://www.um.edu.mt/profile/linobianco>), the publication by Oleinic is the most detailed (Oleinic, 2022a). This article refers to this publication but, as a much senior colleague at the International Academy of Architecture (IAA) and a veteran academician of the IAA than Bianco, I will include further personal observations

on his practice and theory of architecture and urban design.

2. Background

2.1 General

I first met Bianco when he was elected professor of the IAA in 2012. The latest was in 2022 when giving a set of lectures on philosophy of architecture at the Faculty of Architecture, Urban Planning and Design of the Georgian Technical University (GTU) (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. A conversation of the author with Lino Bianco (left) at my architectural design studio in December 2022.

I remember the late Academician and President of the IAA, the eminent Bulgarian Architect Georgi Stoilov, the architect of the Buzludzha Memorial House and previously Minister of Architecture and Public Works of the People's Republic of Bulgaria, introducing him as the youngest candidate for the election to professor of the IAA in 2012. He was seconded by Academician Richard England, the most prominent architect from Malta and Vice-President of the IAA.

Bianco comes from a humble background. Although coming from a middle-class family, his first job was as a factory operator working during night shifts while studying for a philosophy degree. Afterwards he studied architecture and building engineering at the University of Malta where he was a pupil of England. His postgraduate education in geology was at the University of Leicester and in architecture at The Bartlett School of Architecture. He got his doctorate in architecture from the University of Architecture, Civil Engineering and Geodesy, Sofia.

After giving a biographical note, Oleinic talked about his architectural practice and his academic research (Oleinic, 2022a). She groups his research into three areas: architecture, philosophy and geology. She refers to his several published scientific articles in terms of these areas. He also published *The Ring Metaphor and the Spirt of Sofia and Other Essays* (Bianco, 2022), a book which received a worldwide review (Aquilina, 2022; Briffa, 2022; Carpov, 2022; Morariu, 2022; Oleinic, 2022b; University of Malta, 2022). Besides being endorsed by England, Juhani Pallasmaa, Ashraf Salama and Augustin Ioan, this book has a study of Bianco's work by the

philosopher and cultural theorist Valdimir Gradev and a foreword by HM King Simeon II. This gives an idea of the place Bianco has in academia.

2.2 Professional and diplomatic recognition

Oleinic concluded that "the humanistic, multi-disciplinary education of Lino Bianco marks his approach to the work. Rather than being a monomath which is typical in contemporary society, he is a polymath with expertise in a number of disciplines. He has a wide-ranging knowledge in a number of disciplines supported by academic degrees from recognised universities. As a Renaissance man, he bridges various professions to generate ideas and apply them, thus ideas acquired through his philosophy studies are applied to architecture and geological sciences. His varied publications demonstrate the versatility of his scientific reading, intellectual gymnastics in practice. Professor Bianco is cultured not only as a result of this education but also by means of his various commitments both at centres of learning and as a diplomat. His various professional appointments are a witness to his holistic approach which pushes the typical boundaries of the individual occupation" (Oleinic, 2022).

During the General Assembly of the IAA of 2012 Bianco was elected professor. A professorship at the Academy is a high honour and acknowledgment of a special contribution to the profession. In 2015, on my recommendation, the Faculty of Architecture, Urban Planning and Design of the GTU conferred upon him Professor Honoris Causa for his contributions to architectural practice and education (https://gtu.ge/Eng/News/?ELEMENT_ID=4219). Daniel Libeskind was granted this title prior Bianco

(<https://gtu.ge/Arch/en/faculty/honorary-professors.php>). Bianco was appointed by the Council for Quality Assurance of Ecuador to judge the academic level of their journals (<https://www.um.edu.mt/newspoint/news/2020/12/lino-bianconewappt>) and to review the only PhD programme in architecture in Georgia which is offered at the GTU (<https://www.um.edu.mt/newspoint/news/2022/02/umacademic-appointed-reviewer-of-architecture-phd-programme-in-georgia>).



Fig. 2. A Home for an Architect, Zabbar: Elevation (The Editor, 2013).

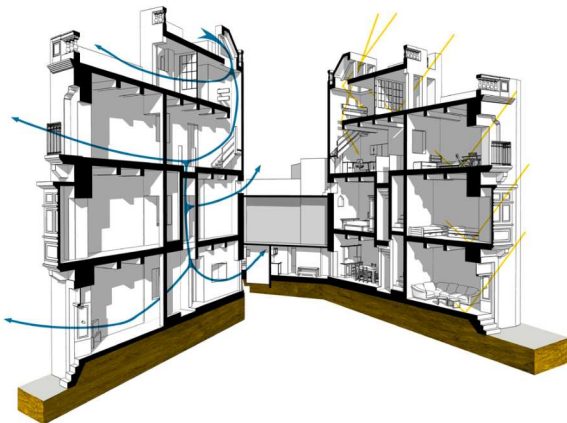


Fig. 3. A Home for an Architect, Zabbar, Malta: Sectional perspective (The Editor, 2013).

His design awards include two for which he received a special prize at InterArch for realised projects in Malta: 'A Home for an architect' (2012) (Fig. 2 and Fig. 3) and 'A Home of Time and Memory' (2015) (Fig. 4 and Fig. 5) (<https://iaa-ngo.com/2012/12/interarch-2012/>; <https://iaa-ngo.com/2015/12/interarch->

2015/). His design for a proposed redevelopment of Via Roma, Agazzano, Italy, came third (Fig. 6) (https://europaconcorsi4.rssing.com/channel-8499982/all_p3.html).



Fig. 4. A Home of Time and Memory', Nadur, Malta: Prior extension (top) and as constructed (bottom) (Bianco, 2012).

Bianco was awarded the Order of the Madara Horseman (First Class) by the President of the Republic of Bulgaria in 2018 for his significant involvement in the advancement of bilateral cooperation between the Malta and Bulgaria (Department of Information, 2018; Republic of Bulgaria, 2018). He was granted the Cross of Commander "Pro Merito Melitensi" by the Sovereign Military Order of Malta in 2019 for the service of humanity (Department of Information, 2019), and appointed Member of the Order of Merit by the President of the Republic of Malta in 2021 for working towards a better environment and planning practice in Malta (Department of Information, 2021).

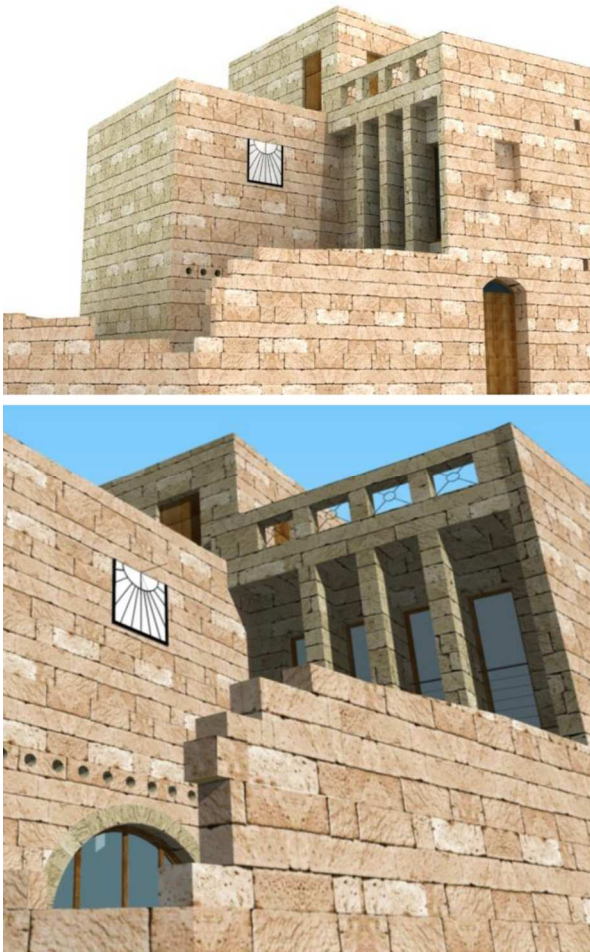


Fig. 5. A Home of Time and Memory', Nadur, Malta: Computer generated images (<http://www.lino-bianco.com/>).

3. Architecture defined

3.1 Lectures at InterArch

Because of the worldwide pandemic, InterArch2018 was the last World Triennial of Architecture held in Sofia, Bulgaria, in 2018. I came first across Bianco and his work at InterArch2012, the XIII World Triennial held in 2012. The star architect for the event was Daniel Libeskind. Bianco, being the youngest among the professors of the IAA was one of the last to make a presentation about his architectural work (Fig. 7). Not typical of architects whose presentations are more about themselves than their work, he presented few modest projects, and spoke about projects of other architects which he confronted finishing his

presentation by arguing that architecture complements creation and thus architects should participate in creation and not destroy it: “architects are not rapists but co-developers with the Creator” (Bianco, 2012).

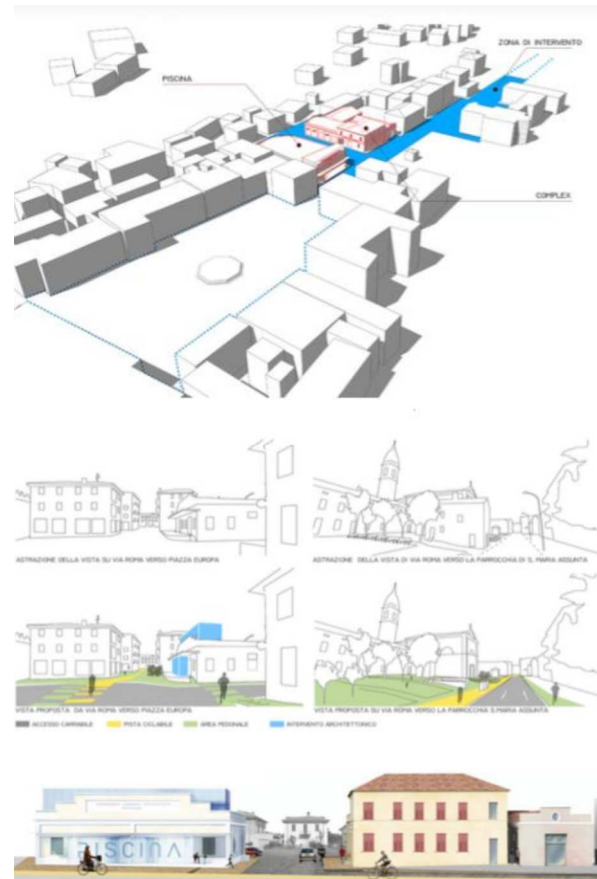


Fig. 6. Proposed redevelopment of Via Roma, Agazzano, Italy: Computer generated images – aerial perspective (top), sketches illustrating interventions (middle) and elevation along the principal road (https://europaconcorsi4.rssing.com/channel-8499982/all_p3.html).

The XIV World Triennial, held in 2015, had a very definite subject: values in architecture. Similar to other triennials, the conferences/presentations of the various architects focused on their architecture, past and present works. Bianco’s lecture developed his theme of 2012 but it was more participatory and a thought experiment which involved a questionnaire (Bianco, 2015). He shared

the results during InterArch2018, the XV Triennial of Architecture, and which are also included in published articles (Bianco 2018a, Bianco 2018b, Bianco 2018c).



Fig. 7. A chat between Daniel Leibeskind and Lino Bianco at InterArch2012.

In all his lectures at the triennials of architecture, Bianco always acknowledged his former dean at the University of Malta as an inspirational personality in his development of understanding architecture especially on England’s emphasis of contextualism and regionalism in architecture.

3.2 The architecture of sitesynthesis

History and theory are the basis of Bianco’s philosophy of architecture, an approach to sustainable architecture based on sense experience through the eras. In an article in the *Journal of Applied Engineering Sciences* Bianco proposes a design approach which he called sitesynthesis; “this proposed approach forms the foundation of a holistic design methodology grounded physically in the geographical location of a given community and metaphysically in the spirit of place derived from sense experience” (Bianco, 2017a). He claims that the architecture of sitesynthesis goes further from the idea of geodesign, that is, “the context of our geographic space conditions

what and how we design (that is, how we adjust and adapt to our surroundings), has been with us since the beginning of time” (Miller, 2012).

Sitesynthesis is the sum of the different aspects which the site is made of: nature, culture and people. It generates natural, cultural and social landscapes, which are the result of sense perception though the ages, “sensescapes through timescapes”. The site is a physical location “in geological, archaeological and historical time” (Bianco, 2017a) (Table 1).

Table 1. Sensescapes arising from the respective exteroceptive sense culture (Bianco, 2017a).

Senses	Culture	Sensescape	
ophthalamoception	visual	visualscape	y ₁
audioception	auditory	soundscape	y ₂
gustaoception	taste	tastescap	y ₃
olfaoception	smell	odourscape	y ₄
tactioception	touch	tactilescape	y ₅

The architecture of sitesynthesis (s) “is the integration of the physical and metaphysical characteristics of a given site over time. It constitutes the essence of a particular location in space and time”. s is made up of these sitescapes which are a function on each sense and its relative sensescape, through timescapes:

1. geological (t₁),
2. archaeological (t₂), and
3. historical (t₃).

Thus, he defines the architecture of sitesynthesis in terms of **Y**, the sense by environs matrix, and **t**, the vector of timespaces, by the following mathematical formula:

$$Y := \begin{pmatrix} y_{1n} & y_{1c} & y_{1s} \\ \vdots & \vdots & \vdots \\ y_{5n} & y_{5c} & y_{5s} \end{pmatrix}, \quad t := \begin{pmatrix} t_1 \\ t_2 \\ t_3 \end{pmatrix},$$

$$Y := g(t), \text{ and } s := f(Y),$$

Therefore,

$$s := f(g(t))$$

where

$y_{1n} \dots y_{5n}$ correspond to each sensescape with respect to the natural environs,

$y_{1c} \dots y_{5c}$ correspond to each sensescape with respect to the cultural environs, and

$y_{1s} \dots y_{5s}$ correspond to each sensescape with respect to the social environs.

Bianco's preoccupation with architecture as an act of co-creation, his preoccupation of development versus speculation, is the source of this definition: "The symbiotic relationship between the natural, cultural and social environs which sitesynthesis endeavours to attain is mutualistic rather than parasitic, a relationship from which society and the site both benefit rather than the former benefiting at the expense of the latter" (Bianco, 2017a).

4. Closing remarks

Lino Bianco is an architect by vocation and a teacher at heart. Besides lecturing in Malta, he also teaches at a number of universities worldwide. Although not a diplomat by profession, he is a bridge builder between nations mostly where he is an ambassador. He established agreements for university teachers and students exchanges with Bulgaria, Romania, and Moldova. One such agreement is with the Faculty of Architecture, Urban Planning and Design of GTU.

Although he has a future in developing his architectural and diplomatic work, I hope that Georgia will continue to feature in his research interests. Until now, he is the foreigner who published

most scientific articles (Bianco, 2017b; Bianco, 2018d; Bianco, 2020a; Bianco, 2020b; Bianco 2021) and reviews (Bianco, 2016; Bianco, 2019) on contemporary architecture in Georgia especially on my former student and uncompromising and exceptional colleague who passed away during a lecture Shota Bostanashvili (Davitaia, 2014).

5. About the author

Vakhtang Davitaia (1934-) is an academician, professor and former Chairperson of the Department of Architecture, Georgian Technical University. He is an Honorary Professor of Mal del Plata National University, 1987 (Argentina) and of Architectural College Jalisco State, 1988 (Mexico), and was visiting professor of Ball State University, 1989, 1991 (USA). He is also Honorary Fellow of American Institute of Architects, 1991, and Honorary Member of Union of Architects of Bulgaria, 1994. He published about 200 articles and was involved in around 250 architectural projects. A short list of his professional positions, main implemented projects, exhibitions, books and awards is available at the website of the International Academy of Architecture (<https://iaa-ngo.com/portfolio-posts/vakhtang-davitaia/>).

Acknowledgement

Given the limited knowledge of English language I would like to thank my daughter Maia Davitaia, Professor and Head of the History and Theory of Architecture Unit, Faculty of Architecture, Planning and Design, Georgian Technical University, for the translation and preparing the article in this format. Fig. 1 was taken by her.

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Received: 1 February 2023 • **Revised:** 6 March 2023 • **Accepted:** 8 March 2023

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