

Re-inventing yourself



Mexican architect Michel Rojkind approaches people with great enthusiasm, recognizing that one needs constant contact with others to develop oneself, and that mutual influence can lead to many opportunities. “We want to bring people together, jointly get new things started, and in this way create something good,” said Rojkind.

“People have always been afraid of contact with others – it’s fear of the unknown,” said Michel Rojkind as he began his speech. “Especially in the past 50 years there has been a sort of puritanism, cloaked as hygiene.” As a Mexican, he is particularly conscious of the importance of contact with others – on one hand, because close contact is unavoidable where he lives, in Mexico City, and on the other, because Mexicans habitually embrace each other as a social gesture.

“Being in contact with others, however, remains a constant challenge,” said Rojkind. Even maintaining contact with oneself can be challenging at times. Humans always tend to decide on a certain course of action, although sometimes it might be better to go several ways at once. That’s why the 41-year-old had no problem starting out simultaneously as an architect and drummer – even though many of his professors advised him to concentrate on one profession or the other.

“We love design, regardless of scale – big or small – we love design.”

True to his philosophy of “always new,” in his first architectural partnership Rojkind tried not to be restricted to a single area. Still, the work routine became too comfortable, and he decided to separate from his partner and seek a new direction. Michel Rojkind presented several projects which prove that such a step into the unknown can be exceptionally productive. He collaborated with the Dane Bjarke Ingels on the New Tamayo Museum in Mexico City. “We discussed the project by Skype, and when we were asleep here in Mexico, we knew that our colleagues in Denmark were hard at work. At the end of their day the project came back to us and we con-



Danish architect Bjarke Ingels contributed to the presentation of his colleague Michel Rojkind.

tinued the work.” Just as diverse as the team behind the project were the requirements for the building, which serves as a museum and an art storage facility. Bjarke Ingels confirms: “It was exciting to see the Mexican context from the perspective of a Dane.” The design task was like that of any museum – to harmoniously merge the artists’ wishes for sleek and functional spaces and the museum director’s desire for an iconic building. Yet beautiful architectural concepts must always be rooted in reality, as the team of architects came to acutely feel at a certain point. Rojkind: “Now the museum had everything – except for a site.”

“That’s what I like about sustainability – it’s not only about how much energy you save, it’s also about what you’re giving back to the city.”

Rojkind presented a second Mexican project, a building for the food company Nestlé – another example of how seemingly unpromising contact with others can lead to satisfying results. The competition brief merely called for an access road for school buses to reach a Nestlé chocolate factory. “We did some research and found out that there was no chocolate museum in Mexico City. That’s absurd, considering that the Aztecs were the inventors of chocolate.” So Rojkind brashly proposed to expand the project by adding a museum. His argument: It’s a way that the company can give back something to the people. “That’s also an aspect of sustainability,” says Rojkind. Nestlé accepted his proposal under one condition: the building had to be finished within two and a half months. “We worked three 8-hour shifts per day,” told Rojkind. “We explained the work to the first shift, then to the second, then the third, and then the cycle repeated. And we had to work with materials that were available because there was

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simply no time to order anything else. We did the landscaping with what was left over on the construction site.”

Rojkind loves not only the challenge but also the risk, even though he has suffered misfortune with this penchant. He recounted an episode in Kuwait: four firms were flown in for a design competition; the stay was not even 24 hours. Afterwards, years passed, and finally the four competitors began sending each other e-mails to find out who won. It turned out that the entire exercise was pure speculation.

“I always talk about digital design but local labor.”

“I swore to myself to never again work for this client,” told Rojkind – “but I didn’t remain firm.” The second project with the same client also turned out to be a hollow proposition in the end. “Experiences such as these show me how important it is to seek contact and exchange with others. We are part of a generation of architects who no longer want to be specialists. We want to bring people together, jointly get new things started, and in this way create something good. The better you know the strengths and weaknesses of others, the better your chances are to form teams that can create valuable projects.”



Michel Rojkind is Founder and Principal of Rojkind Arquitectos, based in Mexico City. The company was recognized by Architectural Record as one of the leading ten “Design Vanguard” firms in 2005. Michel Rojkind’s work seeks new directions in architectural practice by evoking common identities through the exploration of uncharted geometries that address questions of space, function, technology, materials, structure, and construction methods related directly to geography, climate, and local urban experiences. His Nestlé Chocolate Museum in Mexico won the International Architecture Award (2008) as one of the world’s best realized designs and it was nominated for the British Museum Award (2008) for the ten best buildings of 2007. Rojkind will be a Member of the Holcim Awards jury for Latin America in 2011.