Domus is proud to present its first 100+ Best architecture firms, the result of a complex operation worthy of 90 years of architecture and design exploration. Our approach follows a new paradigm of associated life, where architecture is a central if not crucial point of discussion. But Best architecture firms 2019 is more. It is the latest phase in the metamorphosis of Domus, a magazine that is evolving into an ecosystem of contemporary knowledge and competencies, an open workshop where the critical review of architecture and design is expressed in diverse and complementary learning experiences – magazine, website, social media, focus topics, themed forums and data analysis – in a word, investigation. Our intent is to make Best architecture firms 2019 the first of a yearly outline of the state of the art of a field that has never been as important as now. The compilation aims to be a well-honed tool, indispensable to the different communities that have always formed the Domus mainstay: architecture and design professionals, public officials, elites and enthusiasts (not in order of importance).

When we began conceptualising the guide, we were aware of the risks of the undertaking. We did not want a consumer product undistinguishable from the many offerings of the “culture industry”. In order to construct an authoritative source of reference, we adhered to the unique formula that has been serving us as an elevated standard. We asked the last ten editors-in-chief – plus the current one – to compile a selection of architecture firms known for cultural innovation. In exchange, we promised them anonymity. The result is a rich array. Of course some names are missing, mainly the above-mentioned Domus editors. That's a question of style, an omission we wish to reward by stating here that they fully belong to our Best Architecture Firms. Otherwise, they would not have been chosen to conceptually lead Domus.

Walter Mariotti, editorial director
Domus's selectors

Flavio Albanese
How did I go about choosing the world's best architects? Number one, I tried to avoid any excess of patriotism, and so I broadened my field of research well beyond Italy and without difficulty. I was able to choose architects from ten different countries. Number two, I tried to avoid my personal feelings and friendships getting in the way, and I also tried not to be self-referential. Three, I did a survey among the architects working in my firm (man) of them are either young or very young). Four, although I do consider architects' designers — that is, those who work on all projects — interesting, I focused on personalities whose talent has been tested on large scale architecture, believing that they are exclusively based on (fundamental) beautiful furniture and objects is not enough. Five, I searched through my visual memory (paper records, word and journey) to retrieve images that over the last months have left a sign, a lasting sign, in the sense that in my opinion they have made a significant contribution to architecture's time-honoured and extraordinary history.

These principles I want to add a brief message in the bottle:
1. Say no more than you say yes.
2. Do more competitions and less high society.
3. Remember that a great project also comes from a great client.
4. Expose of who are those who are famous (only) on Instagram.
5. Don't settle for renderings, always go on site, visit it from inside and outside, from far away and from very close, and be with the people.
6. Embrace not only complicated but complex challenges.
7. Avoid short-cuts.
Joseph Grima

What is the definition of a successful architect? On the face of it, the answer is obvious, especially as we are in the midst of the 21st century. With the convergence of multiple technologies, new materials, and new ways of working, there are new opportunities for architects. But what does it mean to be successful? Is it simply the ability to design buildings that are functional and beautiful? Or is there something more to it? Is it the ability to think creatively and to solve complex problems? Is it the ability to communicate effectively and to work with others?

Winifred Maas

Our societies are threatened by a form of technological change that is disruptive, dramatic, and irreversible. The pace of change is so rapid that it is difficult to keep up. The impact on our lives is profound, and it is not just in the way we work, but also in the way we live. The changes in the way we communicate, the way we travel, the way we shop, and the way we entertain ourselves have all been affected.

Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani

Drawing up a list of the 30 most important architectural practices of our time could be considered an exercise in reflecting on our personal predilections: who, today, makes the architecture that I like the best? It could be considered an attempt to chronicle the latest names who's in the limelight, who come up when discussing big names in architecture? Finally, it could be seen as a kind of packaging from the history of contemporary architecture. I am only interested in the third option, but it is also the reason that most disturbs me. All of history has been biased, the subject of manipulation that may or may not be evident; but the history of architecture over the last hundred years is distinguished by its shamelessness. One needs to think of the exaggerated explanations and resounding omissions of a Nikolaos Papanicolaou or a Bruno Zevi. They stem not only from particular geographical and cultural points of view, but also from the necessary credit given to influential figures of contemporary architecture such as Walter Gropius or Frank Lloyd Wright. Today, the partiality of the historiography of contemporary architecture is a relatively recent development.

Alessandro Mendini

I have chosen individual architects or teams. They belong to various different areas and geographies and operate in profoundly different contexts. From being rooted in hyper-technological cultures, or in situations of emergency and difficulty, from luxury to emigrant, from minimalist to romantic.

Deyan Sudjic

When architecture critics start a magazine, and even in this post-print era, it still happens, they do it in the hope of turning the world upside down. I know I did, a long time ago, when a group of us started a magazine called Blueprint. As is usually the case, the result of doing what we could to undermine the reputations of a previous generation of designers, architects, and so on, by implication, the natural generation of critics too. We were championing a group of names drawn from our contemporaries, to help them in their struggle to supplant their predecessors.

And of course, as they floated apparently effortlessly to the top of the professional tree, so would we. Now we wait with more or less resignation for another generation to dispatch us, in electronic basins, 140 characters at a time. Or, if we are lucky enough, we contemplate finding our own discoveries and finding a fresh generation to champion, if necessary, repeating the same trick once more in a few years' time. Fascinating are the natural means for one generation to be edged out of the way to make room for another. But they're only the most reliable of critical judgments.

I hope that by the time I got to Oxus, I had managed to acquire enough of a perspective to understand that it is much more interesting to explore the new architectural landscape. Despite the pessimism of the world which authoritarianism seems to have liberal values on the run, in which social media has turned into a digital lynch mob spreading falsehoods about everything from global warming to vaccination, this is a fascinating moment for architecture. This generation has kicked off the 1980s' interest in form making, rediscovered the social dimensions of architecture, and the continuing relevance of materiality. At the same time, this is a moment when the nature of architectural practice has been transformed by scale offices of several hundred employees rarely producing work of interest when I began my career. That is no longer the case. Equally, the horizons of contemporary architecture were once narrowly defined by geography, again, something that is no longer the case. We are all the better for it.
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Cibic Workshop

Principal
Aldo Cibic

Associates
Chuck Felton, Diego Lucchini

Staff
Ljuba di Paolo, Martina Ortoleva, Susanna Slossel

Established in
1989 (as Cibic & Partners)

Office
Milan

www.cibicworkshop.com

In Aldo Cibic (Schio, Italy, 1955), we recognise the Italian design tradition that enjoys tackling objects on diverse scales – alternative, visionary urban planning concepts like Microrealities (2004) and Rethinking Happiness (2010), both of which were presented at the Architecture Biennale in Venice; interiors; and objects for De Castelli, Paola C. and Venini.

Cibic aims to give his projects a soul, seeking vitality in the relation with materials, the way rooms promote interpersonal contact, or in architecture that communicates with the existing surroundings. Having been one of the initial partners in Sottsass Associati in 1980 and a founding member of the Memphis group in 1981, Aldo Cibic has a propensity for experimentation and a dynamic relation between space and people, often by way of contrasting colours and materials, and eclectic cultural references. The above-mentioned urban planning concepts and the boutique hotel Savona 18 Suites (2017) located in theNavigli area of Milan show how he uses the built environment as a way to tell stories and catalyse moments of sharing in collective life. To further a new awareness of public space, Cibic turned his office Cibic & Partners (founded in 1989) into Cibic Workshop in 2010, where he conducts multidisciplinary research focused on the creation of sustainable architectural designs that improve entire areas while stimulating our cultural, emotive and ecological conscience. Aldo Cibic teaches at the Milan Polytechnic, the IUAV in Venice and Domus Academy in Milan. He is an honorary professor at Tongji University in Shanghai.

Valentina Croci

Microrealities, 2004 (photo Andres Otroo)