

100+

best
architecture
firms
2019

domus

100+

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

There are many, a great many, architects, all very different and spread far and wide.

They have the same immanent problem: to worthily carry out with the job they are called upon to do.

It is a complex and articulated job, affected by social emergencies, matters of aesthetics and the need to find compromises. Compromises that nobody wants to consider, the eye of the needle of architectural practice.

And in this crowded world, someone finds a way to make things work, to gracefully make a mark on this old earth's crust, already filled with built things.

Small works of cosmetic surgery, accepting the inexorable passing of time, addressing the inevitable, unescapable final account.

The small workshops of young architects are still happy places of shared experiences, while the multinationals of architecture crumble the dreams and aspirations of those who are part of it: they come across as alienated offices, highly-specialised and without vision, devoured by unexpressed energies.

Then when the scale is expanded and pieces of city are put forward in a single moment, the risk of gigantism and a design imposed without participation becomes the price that all pay.

When instead, by lucky happenstance, through different processes and in different ways, a practice gives rise to a dignified work of architecture, one has the feeling that it is has overcome the challenge with the present and made an encouraging mark for the future.

These lucky architects, therefore, manage to smile and to feel less impotent in this complicated and fascinating universe that surrounds us.



Mario Bellini

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 any 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 (many of them are either young or very young). Four: although I do consider archi-designers – that is those who work on all scale projects – interesting, I focused on personalities whose talent has been tested on large scale architecture, believing that notoriety exclusively based on (undoubtedly) beautiful furniture and objects is not enough. Five: I searched through my visual memory (paper records, web and journeys) to retrieve images that over the last months have left a sign, a long-lasting sign, in the sense that in my opinion they have offered a significant contribution to architecture's time-honoured and extraordinary history.

To 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. Beware of 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 shortcuts.



Stefano Boeri

To observe the current panorama of international architecture and attempt to build a list – exhaustive and inclusive – of recent trends, to come up with a "Who's who", might seem to be something simple and almost banal. In reality, addressing such a complex and kaleidoscopic panorama makes it almost impossible to find univocal rules. We have therefore come up with a system of criteria, divergent and dissimilar so as to try and reconstruct fragments of a highly complex and uneven landscape.

1. Delocalisation/Diffusion: there are no longer nerve centres of creation and action.
2. Divergence: there are no longer fixed guidelines, in fact there is a wide spectrum of forms of interventions, methodologies, thoughts and forms of work.
3. Disorder: studios are organised in a dispersive fashion, bringing together different fields and inputs, expanding their practice.
4. Local over global: the great return of the vernacular and artisan, fruit of local thought (without however excluding geographical displacement)
5. Rebellion: social themes have regained strength, architecture is crossed with politics, ecology, society and development.
6. The rise of the small: the strongest revolutions occur without making a noise. Small-scale practices are disrupting the landscape.



François Burkhardt

Since the early 21st century, the organisation of architecture firms has been changing with the accelerating pace of increasingly invasive digital technology, a fact that in itself is not negative for the profession's evolution. More worrisome is the priority attributed to the expansive dynamics of a liberal and globalised economy, which has entirely modified the relation between architecture and society, substituting our concern for social emancipation and the decrease of inequality with our haste to reach a simpler aim: the increase of profit.

This profound transformation has had important consequences for the priorities of decision making. Above all, it has modified the ideals and goals pursued by the profession.

The role of the architect has been reduced almost solely to the coordination of architectural planning processes. To this loss of image and professional freedom we must add the sense of suffocation produced by bureaucratic regulations and our dependency on increasingly managerial clients determined to assert their economic interests.

Today, the architect would need to free himself from these paralysing factors in order to participate actively in programmes devised to have a positive effect on the urban, social and ecological fabric. There are two big challenges open to our trade. The first is preserving the environment, reducing energy consumption and raw materials – in a word, the general diminishment of consumption. The second is guaranteeing constructions a longer life. Both challenges require taking part more forcefully in the battle against land and building speculation. In order to take on such ethical, political and social aspects, seeing the urgency of the matter, an increased compactness of the different professional orders is needed toward seeking a shared change of orientation with broad participation. No longer is it wise to undertake individual action within the single professions, rather we must create a bona fide political movement that is organised and developed on several levels.



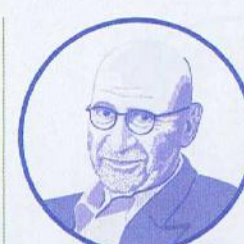
Michele De Lucchi

Today architecture makes sense if it looks for the significance of buildings, of living together, of attracting people and envisioning a better future.

All architecture that does not plan something good for the future, that causes us distress when we see a crane destroying more pieces of world, that is based solely on the interpretation of building regulations and technical standards – in other words everything that takes architecture far from the world – is of no use.

Among the architects I have selected there are practices that are not strictly architectural ones, such as Assemble, a collective with a multidisciplinary approach that I chose because it views architecture as a reference point for human beings to give value to their presence on Earth.

Architecture is also experimentation: it is the search for something more evolved, richer and more seductive in terms of the environment in which we live. Technical possibilities and the force of human imagination today lead us to think up new spaces, new forms, new settings: the work of artists such as Olafur Eliasson or creators of installations like Studio Heatherwick, who give priority to the social impact of their work, is also a contribution. This research, even if it does not directly produce habitable spaces, enriches the imagination that enables us to look to the future with more positive eyes, full of faith in the potential of humans to live and survive on the planet.



Nicola Di Battista

In January 1946, Ernesto Nathan Rogers became the editor-in-chief of *Domus*, appointed by the publisher Gianni Mazzocchi to substitute Gio Ponti, the magazine's founder. Rogers began his committal to his new post by taking a clear stand, adding the subtitle *La casa dell'uomo* ("Man's home") to the journal's cover. Unequivocally, it stated the main interest of the magazine's content under his leadership (*Domus* issue 205, January 1946).

This was early in the postwar period, and the country's reconstruction was of absolute primary concern. But for Rogers, motivations were even stronger and more complex: there was a pressing need at the time to reconstruct the very idea of habitation.

When I was appointed editor-in-chief of *Domus* in 2013, I too felt the urge to add a subtitle. For me, it was *La città dell'uomo* ("Man's city"). Although conditions were entirely different from the postwar circumstances, the need to redefine the purposes and the to-do list of architecture as a discipline was an undeniable priority. The decision to refer to "the city of people" brought us to concern ourselves not only with the physical city, both built and under construction, which was definitely at the centre of our interests, but also the *tout ensemble* of thoughts, actions and professions that sustain it and make it possible.

In substance, it regarded everything that allows humankind to determine what might be the buildings most suitable to its wish to inhabit the Earth in a conscious and responsible way. Seeing the current conditions of the world, we believe that these issues are what must be central to the architect's work today – work that must once again seek something that will give back sense to our efforts. Materially, our craft comes into its own with the built results, but it searches and finds its deeper, more necessary meaning only in thought that can sustain it, where "material world and spiritual world are joined as one," as Adriano Olivetti once said (*Città dell'uomo*, Edizione di Comunità, Milan 1960).

**Joseph Grima**

What is the definition of a successful architect? On the face of it, the answer is obvious, steeped as we are in the cult of the architect-hero with commissions on multiple continents, an office with more employees than they can recall the names of, and a status as household name nurtured by an almost daily presence in the media. Upon reflection, it seems our assumptions around the notion of success are almost entirely quantitative, with little consideration for the possibility that any of these values might not be universal.

Given our assignment here was to come up with a dozen or so names that to our minds represent a 'radical cultural shift in architecture', I would like to submit that there is no gesture more radical in architecture today than questioning the canon of success in our profession. I would like, for a moment, to turn away from the obvious criteria of age and generation, or of geographical location, or even design philosophy, and for a moment invite readers to focus on a group of individuals who – in different ways – have defined through their work new paradigms of success in the practice of architecture. Some are indeed household names, and some have large offices – these are not in themselves antithetical to rethinking success. But they have all found ways to pursue an ideal that is not purely quantitative, and that is something the architecture of the 21st century desperately needs.

**Winy Maas**

Our societies are threatened by a form of lethargy, dramatic climate change, decreasing resources, huge income inequality, extensive political/social disagreement, rapid population growth, substantial food, water, energy and oxygen consumption, by globalisation, and by menacing outbreaks of populism and nationalism.

If there is a threat (and there certainly is one), we need an agenda to defeat it and design disciplines must provide a range of products that meet this agenda. From Dutch Structuralism to contemporary Landscape Urbanism, my selection includes a wide range of practices spanning object design, buildings, cities and entire territories because, after all, everything is urbanism.

Some of the architects I chose were once eager young designers; some others are eager designers today. But all of them have dealt – and keep on dealing – with everyday architectures, with the cities we inhabit, with today and tomorrow's stages of human endeavours, routines and pleasures. I share their concerns about the homes we inhabit and their belief in the capability of public initiative to respond to collective aspirations. Their designs generate experiences, provoke amazement and help improve our emotional state.

All of them have addressed the future city in their work and many are currently dealing with the difficult task of merging ecology and design. My selection includes authors trying to model urban growth and to design hybrid natural systems and urban developments – authors who effectively understand cities as habitats.

As the Earth enters the Anthropocene, we are confronted with the issue of design of the planet as a whole. I hope that all my colleagues will accompany me in the necessary undertaking of bringing the global agenda back to the forefront.

**Vittorio Magnago Lampugnani**

Drawing up a list of the 30 most important architectural practices of our times could be considered an exercise in reflecting on one's personal predilections: who, today makes the architecture that I like the best? It could be considered an attempt to chronicle the latest news: who's in the limelight, who comes up when discussing big names in architecture? Finally, it could be taken as a kind of extract from the history of contemporary architecture. I am only interested in the third option, but it is also the option that most dismays 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 in particular by its shameless partiality. One needs only to think of the exaggerated explanations and resounding omissions of a Nikolaus Pevsner or a Bruno Zevi. They stem not only from particular geographical and cultural points of view, but also from the reckless credit given to skilled self-representations of architects such as Walter Gropius or Frank Lloyd Wright. Today the partiality of the historiography of contemporary architecture has reached atrocious levels. The geography of architectural production is now completely global and therefore immense, cultural directions are dissolved in myriads of different positions and for the most part autistic, abandoned to themselves by an absence of criticism. And exhibitions of architecture, cleverly managed by communication professionals, are increasingly seductive and inconsistent. A choice of contemporary architecture practices that aspires, albeit with a playful wink, to a rigorous historical base, inevitably comes up against this unsettling situation and mirrors its fragility. Symptoms of this are the absences from our list and presences difficult to justify. Such inconsistencies are not oversights or errors: they are symptoms of the aporias of the history of architecture today. It mortifies me to think I am partly responsible for this profound inadequacy. I am consoled by being so together with a group of colleagues most of whom I am bound to by esteem, in some cases by friendship and all by a magazine that I still feel, 20 years after directing, is a little bit mine.

**Alessandro Mendini**

Mariam Kamara
Beniamino Servino
Aldo Cibic
Kuehn Malvezzi
TAMassociati
Urban Think Tank
Juli Capella
Gary Chang
TYIN tegnestue Architects

I have chosen individual architects or teams. They belong to very 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 emigrants, from minimalist to baroque language. All these designers, in my opinion, have great intuitive, methodological and design qualities, while not following the formula of the Archistars. The result is an eclectic panorama that mirrors on the one hand the international nature of their work, always responding to the dictates of the Web and this kind of hyper-knowledge, and on the other hand their intention to remain connected to their own places of origin, including languages, techniques and artisan symbols. My choice has been made from a very large range of architects and this makes me think that it may be possible for social architecture to truly bloom in the future.

**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 very long time ago, when a group of us started a magazine called *Blueprint*. As is usually the case, this took the form of doing what we could to undermine the reputations of a previous generation of designers, architects, and so, by implication, of a previous generation of critics too. We were championing a new 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 haikus, 140 characters at a time. Or, if we are quick enough, we contemplate knifing our own discoveries and finding a fresh generation to champion, if necessary, repeating the same trick once more in a few years' time. Fashion cycles are the natural means for one generation to be edged out of the way to make room for another, but they don't always make for the most reliable of critical judgements.

I hope that by the time I got to *Domus*, I had managed to acquire enough of a perspective to understand that it is much more interesting to explore the wider architectural landscape. Despite the pessimism of a world in 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. There is a generation that has tired of excessive 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 produced 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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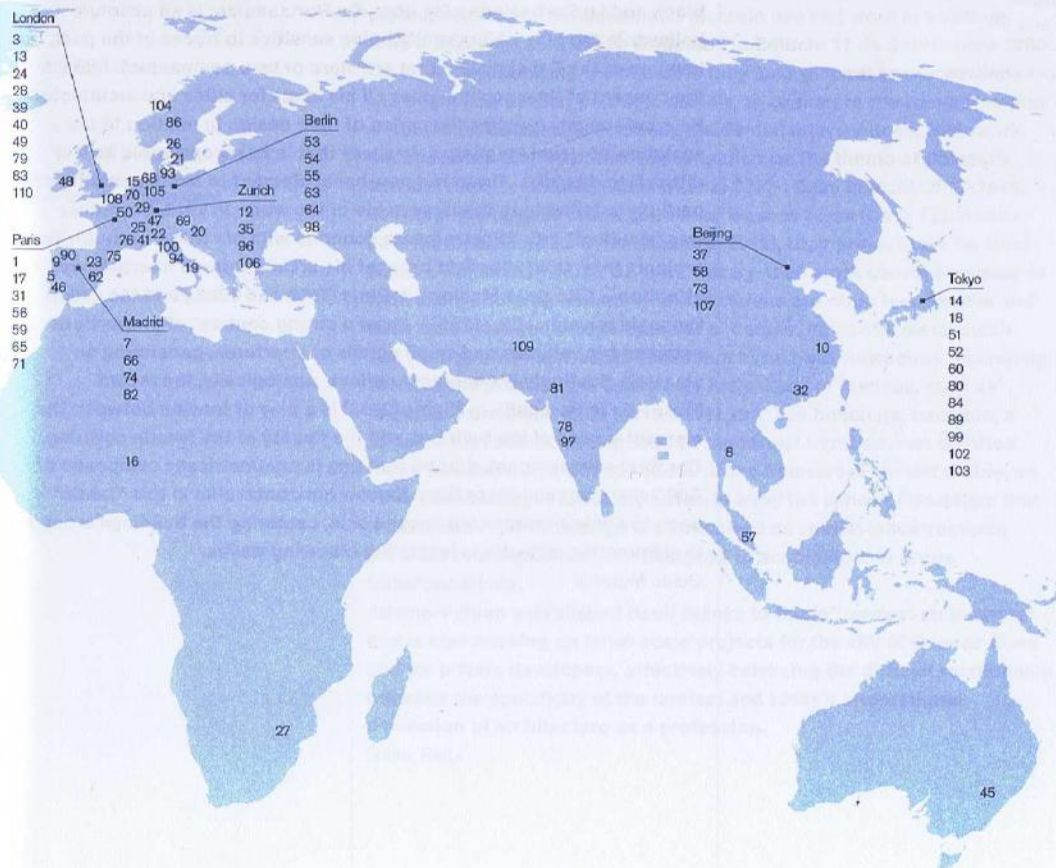
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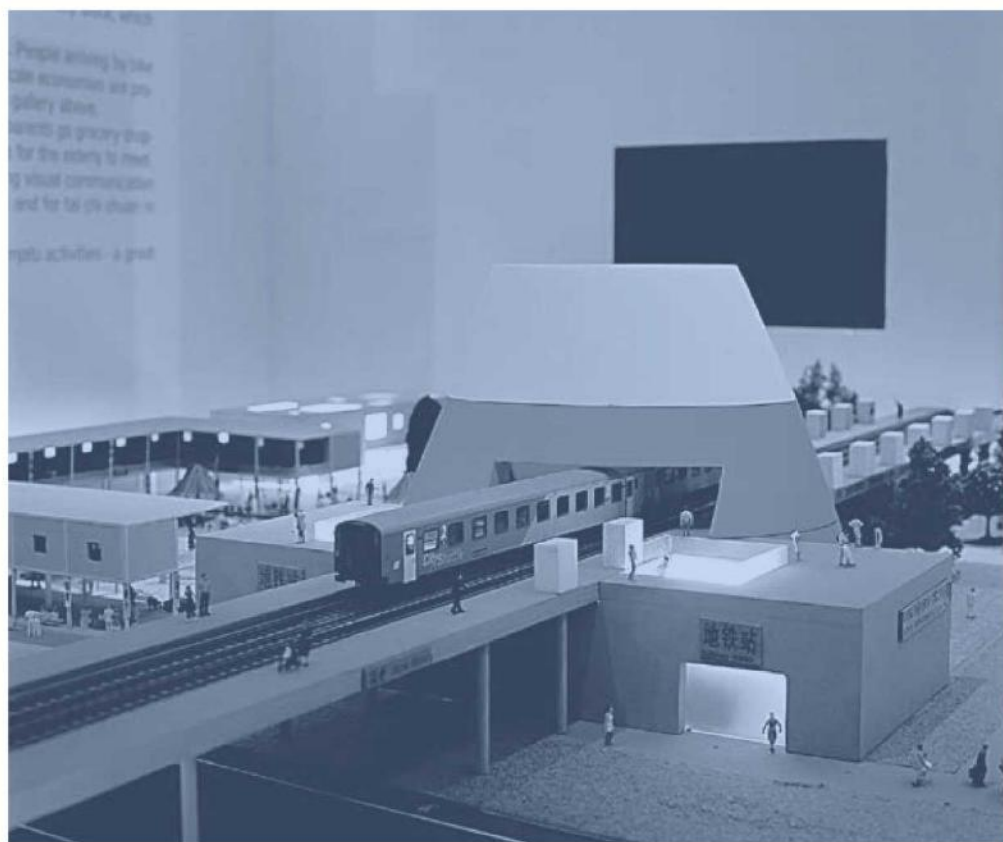
Established in

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 the Navigli 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