

ANDROMEDA

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There have been a number of architects who have designed utopian communities and, in particular, megastructures. One of them, Paolo Soleri, has proposed very large symmetrical structures that can house thousands of people. You were one of the first interns to work for him back in the early sixties. Is that right?

Yes, I was an apprentice - that's what we were called back then - to Paolo for about sixteen months. I worked on construction projects at the Cosanti Foundation in Arizona. I also did some ink drawings of several Arcologies including one of the first: Novanoah. It was a great experience for me.

What do you think of the concept of Arcology, an entire city contained in a single structure, forty years later?

Forty years? Has it been that long? Amazing. I always believed it was an idea with great merit and worthy of further development. It certainly was consequential or we would not be discussing it forty years later. Nonetheless, I have been seriously criticized for advocating it over the years, mostly by other architects. I think it was Gallileo who said, "We all see the same thing. The difference is in what we believe we see." Most people are offended by the concept, whereas I have always been intrigued. I suppose that's understandable.

What do you mean, understandable?

Many people have told me they would not want to live on the bottom side of Hexahedron or Arcube or in some of the more monumental Arcologies. Actually, I'm not sure I would, but that's irrelevant because by the time one is built, I'll be ashes in a small container. I think the fact that Paolo resorted to structurally demanding forms in

exploring three-dimensionality was good. It got everyone's attention. It certainly got mine. Urban implosions are absolutely necessary but, in my opinion, they must be done a bit more gently, more like a gentle squeeze, at least initially.

Have you developed the idea on your own?

This has been no easy matter. For example, a young man is apprenticed to a shoemaker to learn how to make shoes on his own. That's fine. But designing my own Arcology was considered to be sacrilegious, really, because it is an original concept. Nevertheless, I did design two macrostructures when I was a graduate student at MIT in the late sixties that approximated an Arcology. However, with some very important differences.

Is your most recent proposal for Andromeda, a good example of a macrostructure?

Yes. Actually, I designed it some years ago. The idea came to me from seeing tower bridges, especially the famous one in London. In many tower bridges the center span can be elevated so ships are able to pass under it. In Andromeda, the connecting 'bridges' are proposed to be built at grade, then elevated into place making the complex of buildings a unified whole. It is composed of a number of interconnected buildings, each intended to be designed by a different architect. A few years ago, Architect, Mutsumi Yoshifusa, one of my former associates, took me to see Hiroshi Hara's beautiful Umeda Sky Building in Osaka, Japan. It is actually two buildings connected at the top by a 'bridge' that, coincidentally, was also built at grade and lifted into place. I believe that is where the urban landscape is headed, toward three-dimensionality.

So, Andromeda is more like one of today's traditional cities?

Yes, a little like Manhattan, but much more compressed and the main buildings are a bit taller. The individual buildings are connected at multiple levels so upon completion, it functions as a single homogeneous city structure, an eco-city.

Like an Arcology. What's the difference?

Andromeda can be built incrementally. That is a very significant difference. It is more analogous to an organism that grows but is, nevertheless, complete at every stage of its growth. The increments in Andromeda are obviously much larger than cells in an organism; a natural condition we can never duplicate.

So, Andromeda is more organic, to borrow a word from Frank Lloyd Wright. Speaking of Wright, what about his proposal for a mile-high building?

Not so good, sorry. It inspired me to get involved in architecture, but I'm glad it was never built. I would not like being up there. I'm sure if Mr. Wright were alive today he

would reconsider the idea. Of course, it is only conjecture on my part, but he might have developed it into four interconnected, quarter mile high buildings. Don't get me wrong, Mr. Wright was a genius.

You seem to like Manhattan.

I love Manhattan. I just don't like the miles of urban sprawl that surround it. On the contrary, Andromeda grows to an optimum size, then stops. Just like an organism. Just like you and I. It is surrounded by an extensive park, farms and open land held in trust by the community.

So, in a way, going up is good. It preserves nature.

Yes, the biosphere is very fragile and must be preserved for future generations. The exploitation of verticality is good only if it leads toward three-dimensionality and this is important. The quest for height for the sake of having the tallest building in the world is a totally irrational ego-trip by large corporations trying to impress us. Freedom Tower, proposed for the World Trade Center site in New York City, is no exception. That site should be a World Peace Plaza similar to the one I designed- but I am digressing. Sorry.

It seems Andromeda is not just a design of a particular city. It's a prototype for many. Is that right?

Exactly. There are limitless forms, sizes, configurations and number of structures in any single complex including the various ways they are connected. A single complex can accommodate thousands of people, hundreds of thousands or even millions.

How high would the tallest buildings be?

I imagine half a mile or about 2,500 feet would be a maximum height for the larger cities, but initially, a bit over a thousand feet; 110 stories seem to be just about right. Some cities could be smaller, of course.

I notice the roofs of all the buildings in Andromeda are flat. Is there a reason for that?

Yes, that's because they are all living roofs. The ground plane is simply elevated so that from many parts of the structure, people can walk outside onto gardens and patios, even as high as 110 stories in the air. Green roofs help preserve the biosphere. They allow photosynthesis to continue uninterrupted. When seen from above, Andromeda will be a green city. Actually all buildings should be integrated with their natural surroundings. They should be "one with nature" as Mr. Wright said. Architects should be more like magicians; first design a beautiful building and then make it disappear.

Excuse me, what's the outer circle of Andromeda comprised of?

There are a great number of lower buildings only 5 stories high or so, which border both sides of a canal that encircles the entire complex, including the park. All rainwater is filtered through the green roofs and ultimately, flows into this canal which has walk-way sand cafes along each side.

Do you think Andromeda will be built in your lifetime?

Maybe, with your help. Why not? But then, I've always been optimistic. Actually, I had a dream the other night that I was at a ground breaking ceremony for Andromeda in China, coinciding with the opening ceremony of the 2008 Summer Olympics in Beijing. Nice dream until my dog, Mason, woke me up and here I am, back to reality. In any case, even if Andromeda is not built, I am certain that similar concepts designed by others will be realized. It's inevitable. It must be done for the welfare of our planet and for the sake of future generations.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Inglese.

Thank you.