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interview with winka dubbeldam, founder of archi-tectonics

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winka dubbeldam, founder of archi-tectonics
portrait © designboom

winka dubbeldam, assoc. AIA, is the founder and principal of archi-tectonics (<http://www.archi-tectonics.com>) based in new york. she has lectured extensively and taught at the masters programs of columbia university, NYC, harvard, cambridge, and cornell, and currently holds the position of professor and chair of the graduate department of architecture at penn design, philadelphia (<http://www.design.upenn.edu/architecture>).



designboom had the opportunity to talk to winka about her work at the recent mextrópolis international festival of architecture (<http://www.mextropoli.mx>) in mexico city organized by arquine magazine (<http://www.arquine.com>).

DB: what made you want to become an architect?

WD: I lived with my parents until I was seventeen and in that time we moved house fifteen times. both my brother and I became accustomed to growing up in construction sites and houses that were being remodeled. my brother became an engineer and I became an architect so I'm sure the way we grew up influenced our job choices... we were very aware of our environment and how architecture worked in different contexts and how it defines your lifestyle, whether you live in the city or the countryside.



siki im pavillion, arnhem mode bienale 2011

siki im, who carries his own line of haute couture asked archi-tectonics to design his pavilion at the arnhem fashion biennale 2011.

more (<http://www.archi-tectonics.com/projects/siki-im-pavillion-arnhem-mode-bienale-2011/construct#sthash.Cjcg41NU.dpuf>)



DB: how would you describe your approach to architecture?

WD: we often take on big projects that encompass many smaller projects. at first I was interested changing two dimensional walls into three dimensional environments and then we started exploring the inflections that thinking brings to other scenarios. in the context of the city we're constantly pushing the boundaries to try and understand exactly how environments affect people and how people change environments.



ports 1961: the bund

for the ports1961 shanghai flagship store, archi-tectonics were inspired by the two important factors which helped create shanghai and in particular the bund, namely its history as an international port and its use of the art deco style.



as the art deco moved over the years away from the soft pastels and organic forms of art nouveau and embraced influences from many different styles of the early 20th century, including modernism and futurism...



they chose to continue this progression and developed a fluid, organic environment for this new ports1961 flagship store.



DB: what important lessons have you learned over your career?

WD: buildings should have some character, some details that people can relate to. if the space is lacking personality people will find it hard to enjoy. I have come to realize that we don't function perfectly in square boxes – because we ourselves are not square boxes. if you fragment spaces you get much more beautiful light, sound behaves much better and the environment around you becomes much softer and we react much better to this. but I have also learned that you can also push this too far, I remember working on a project with peter eisenman (<http://www.eisenmanarchitects.com/>), we made some inclined floors too steep and the tilt was discomfoting, so we had to take a few steps back and understand a flat floor has it's benefits! it was interesting because even if you want to play with form, in extreme ways you do need some perfectly straight walls or flat floors to get your axis.



schein loft

located on the edge of soho, NYC, a former six- story warehouse is renovated, with a new 11 story 'smart loft' building wrapping up and over it.



the introduction of modern architecture creates a nice contrast; its innovative folded glass curtain wall allows an amazing view over the hudson river.

more (<http://www.archi-tectonics.com/projects/schein-loft/construct#sthash.FMlr0IXs.dpuf>)

DB: what do you think your strongest skill is?

WD: I'm quite bad at being a boss in the typical sense, so delegation is something I've become good at. my office is very horizontal in terms of management and responsibility. I like my office to be a strong network of strong independent thinkers. people who are responsible for themselves, they know what they need to do and I try my best to let them get on with it without too much interference. I like the team to work with me not for me. ultimately architecture is all about teamwork, the scale of projects we work on require many talented people because we're going from huge scale projects like cities, down to the smallest details such as fixtures.



17 john street

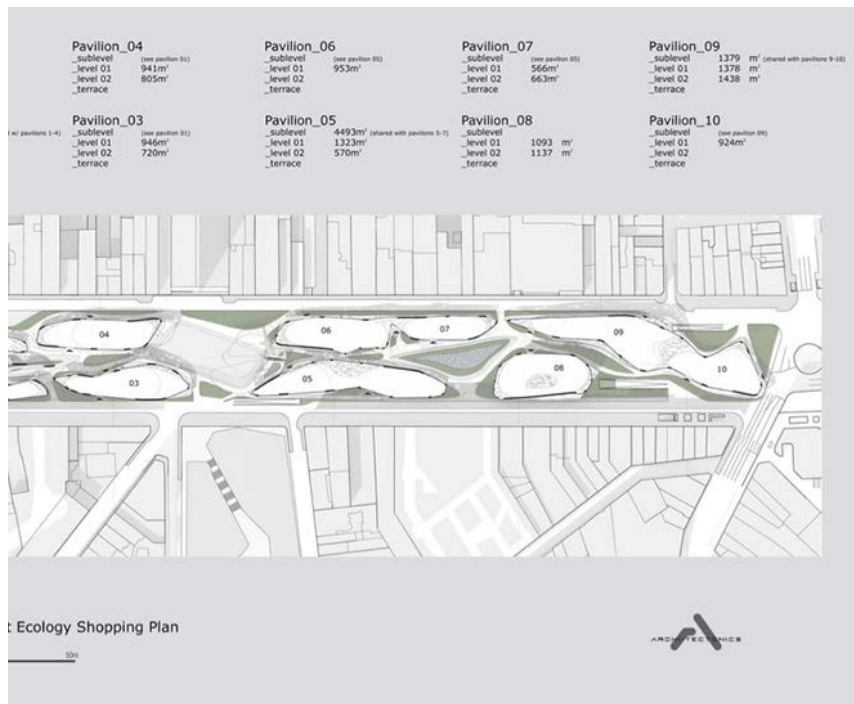
17 john street, located in downtown manhattan next to the new fulton center transit hub, is an extended stay residence designed to service the ever growing financial district.



archi-tectonics is currently in the design phase for the building, which combines the existing building with a 10 story 'glass crystal' which will showcase the stunning views of Manhattan. This high-end residential building, offers a rooftop pool and high-end amenities. The client, Prodigy Network, is a leader in crowd-funding projects, and 17 John will be a great example of one of the first US crowd-funded buildings. more (<http://www.archi-tectonics.com/projects/17-john-street/render#sthash.zxdeyiux.dpuf>)

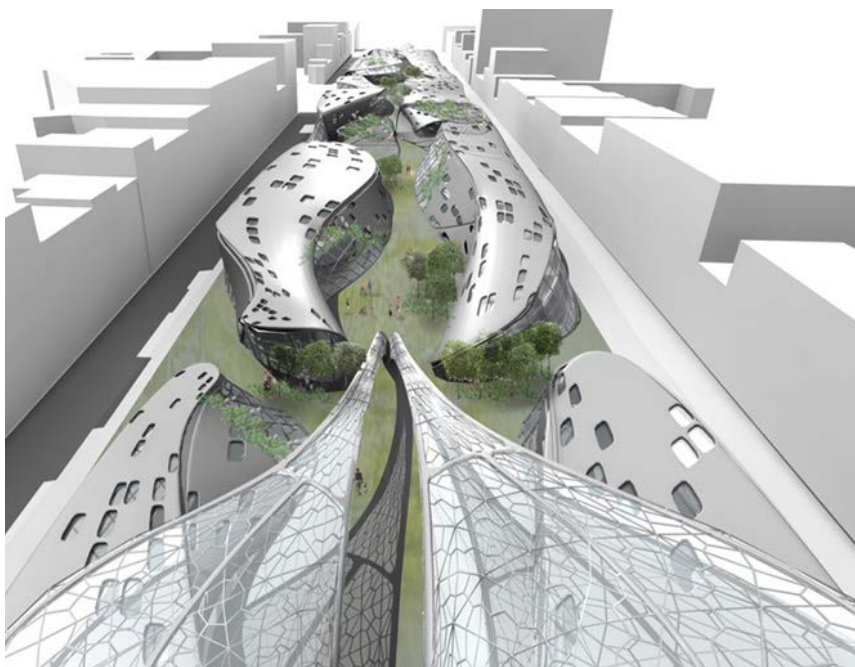
DB: is there a particular stage within that process that you enjoy the most?

WD: there's two. one is being at the construction site observing a building take shape. another is when we develop details such as a surface and it's in the development stage. when you are just getting it to the right balance trying to achieve the specific quality you are looking for, when the results are still rough but you can see the potential - that's an exciting moment. I really enjoy this process of refinement and crafting something. I think what both of those stages have is this sense of becoming, I like observing that transformation.

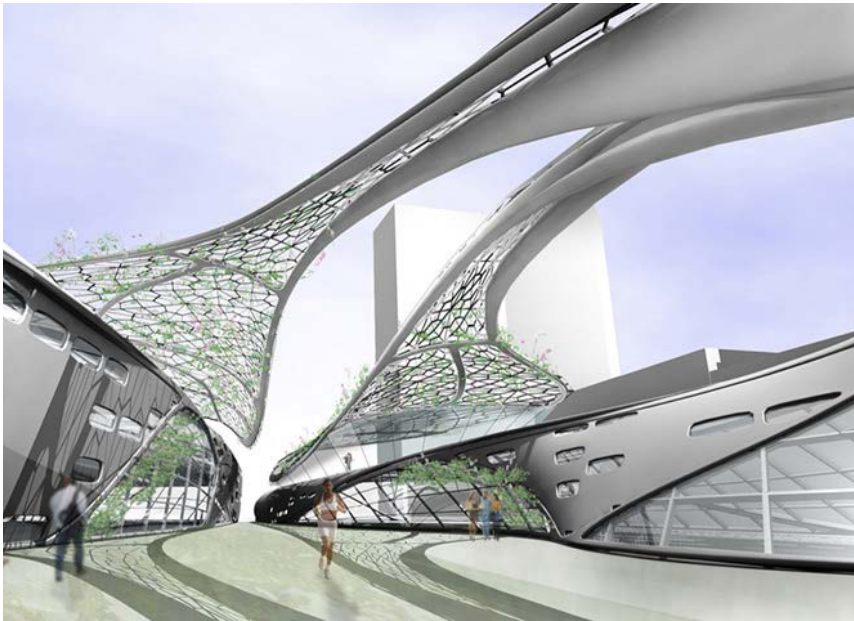


avenue de la toison d'or, brussels

a 'green' experience incorporating green walls, greenhouses with orchids, bamboo, etc, to separate a series of shopping pavilions and to allow for filtered daylight.



the pavilions are connected below the ground level and separated in the park, where large wings hovering above provide sun shading or rain protection while strolling from one pavilion to the other.



the pavilions in the park are developed as a 'green' zone, both in the sense of green nature and incorporated nature [greenhouses] and in the sense of a self - sustaining unit.



solar collectors provide energy, collected rainwater provides water for the green park and greenhouses and also expresses itself in fountains providing cooling through 'misting'.

more (<http://www.archi-tectonics.com/projects/smart-ecology/render#sthash.t4dQUakJ.dpuf>)

DB: do you have any superstitious beliefs or rules that you work by?

WD: yes, I'd say that I'm quite superstitious actually. in terms of work, I will never give a set of drawings to a contractor until I'm completely sure they are final because one mistake can easily snowball into many problems. architecture is all about the compromise of control and letting things go. of course you can never be completely in control, so what I do is try to get things into the best position they can be to 'live' on their own, to take their own path.



new rochelle waterfront gateway competition

retaining the pollution, adding healthy soil, introducing storm water retention, and alternative energy through windmills will change this industrial site into a productive landscape.



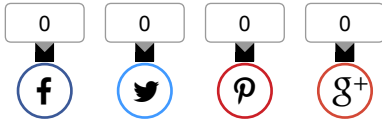
the landscape is articulated as a set of strips with different textures (grasses, plants, gravel, bushy strips, etc.), thus providing a stunning pattern and color shift in the landscape.

more (more<http://www.archi-tectonics.com/projects/new-rochelle-waterfront-gateway-competition/render#sthash.Knnixsm.dpuf>)

DB: what do you want to do in 2014 that you have never done before?

WD: to be surrounded by water. I recently bought a new home in brooklyn where I can see the whole bay around me. I'm not sure what that means but I feel great when I'm by the water.

andy butler | designboom



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MEXTRÓPOLI 2015 - international festival of architecture, mexico city (<https://www.designboom.com/architecture/mextropoli-2015-international-festival-of-architecture-mexico-city/>)

feb 10, 2015

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