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ARCHITECTURE

Francesco Dal Co

# Tadao Ando per/for/pour François Pinault

DALL  
ILE SEGUIN  
A  
PUNTA DELLA  
DOGANA

FROM  
ILE SEGUIN  
TO  
PUNTA DELLA  
DOGANA

DE  
L'ILE SEGUIN  
A  
PUNTA DELLA  
DOGANA



**French magnate François Pinault restores the historic customs house as a venue for contemporary art. Tadao Ando comes up with a design for a Venice suspended in the sea, combining historical memory and innovation.**

François Pinault, the French businessman and magnate, chose the Dogana da Mar as the location for the new Punta della Dogana Contemporary Art Center. The original version dates from the 15th century. Currently it is being restored under the supervision of Tadao Ando, who began by restoring Palazzo Grassi and is now continuing his work in Venice. A common thread runs through the old buildings he restores, never exaggerating, with an ever-fresh, different approach, giving them a contemporary function and appearance. The book tells the story of the 'conservative but unblinker' restoration work conducted by the Japanese architect, but also looks in depth at the beginnings of the project. It is regarded as the child of a 'father' ('without whom it would not be possible', in the words of Renaissance architect Filarete), namely the man who commissioned it, and a 'mother', the architect who created it. Ando has been restrained in his approach to the Punta della Dogana, conserving the strong character of the building and respecting the original architectural features. In keeping with the past and in line with the present, Ando has designed alternating reinforced concrete baffles which split up the exhibition space and, in contrast, highlight the materials and features of the original building. The book, beautifully illustrated with photographs showing the gradual development of the project right up to its completion, contains interviews with the commissioner and the architect. The vision of contemporary art and architecture in the modern world finds a useful and coherent application in the work of Tadao Ando and Pinault's new exhibition in Venice which, with the inauguration of the new gallery, will become its permanent home.

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**FRANCESCO DAL CO**  
FOURTEEN QUESTIONS.  
**TADAO ANDO**  
FOURTEEN ANSWERS.

**FRANCESCO DAL CO** You are an architect of some renown, can you tell us how you first met Francois Pinault? And what works did he commission from you? Did you know him before you took part in the competition for the construction of the Centre of contemporary art on the île Seguin in Paris in 2001?

**TADAO ANDO** In 1996, I was commissioned by the fashion designer Karl Lagerfeld to design his studio and private house in Biarritz. He is a very interesting «artist» with a strong will. When I met him for the second time, he asked me if I was interested in designing a winery in Chateau La Tour owned by Mr. Francois Pinault. Even though unrealized, since the renovation of the winery was not allowed due to legal restrictions, this project was an opportunity to get to know Mr. Pinault. Soon after, an international competition to design the Fondation Francois Pinault pour l'Art Contemporain in the île Seguin was held and I participated besides Jean Nouvel, Rem Koolhaas, and Steven Holl. Fortunately I won and proceeded with the project with Mr. Pinault.

**FDC** How did the complex story of the failure to carry out your project for the île Seguin influence your relationship with Pinault?

**TA** The abandonment of the project for the île Seguin was due to uncertainties on the execution schedule for the project, caused by some administrative problems of adjustment regarding the construction of a road and bridge to the island and the infrastructure. Since it was neither Mr. Pinault's nor our fault, there was no negative influence on our relationship and thus Mr. Pinault generously invited me to design the Palazzo Grassi renovation in Venice, just two weeks after the cancellation of the project in the île Seguin.

**FDC** After Francois Pinault decided to acquire Palazzo Grassi, what were the guidelines for your project for the refurbishment of the building? What relation is there between your work on the interior of the palazzo and the project you drew up for the adjacent «teatrino», which is a significant «appendage» to Massari's original building?

**TA** The Palazzo Grassi renovation was started in the summer of 2005 and opened in the spring of 2006. The plan of this project was to renovate a building of the late eighteenth century and convert it into a contemporary art museum, where I was requested by Mr. Pinault to do minimum refurbishment. Due to stringent restrictions, I removed decorations that had been added during previous renovations to recover the original design by Giorgio Massari and added very minimal new elements. In this project, I pursued the theme of the clash and encounter between the old and new (historical architecture and contemporary art). The «teatrino» is a subordinate project of Palazzo Grassi and the renovated building will be used as a gallery and lecture hall. Since the Punta della Dogana's construction started, we

provisionally suspended proceeding with this project.

**FDC** The work Pinault has commissioned in Venice is rather different in character to most of your construction projects. If I am not mistaken, before your work on Palazzo Grassi you had worked on the adaptation of an old building only once before - that is, in 1992-2000, when you did the designs for the Benetton Fabbrica near Treviso. There, however, the historical structures you had to deal with were rather less significant in nature than those you had to tackle in Venice, when working on Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana. Can you explain the differences in strategy you followed in these different circumstances? What were the essential decisions you had to take when approaching the work in Venice? And to what extent would you say those decisions are representative of the sort of approach contemporary architects should adopt when called upon to intervene in historic buildings? And finally, would you say that the experience acquired in working on the Benetton Fabbrica bore new fruit in your work on Palazzo Grassi and Punta della Dogana (if I am not mistaken, you used the technicians and assistants that you had already encountered when working on the earlier project)?

**TA** Commissioned by Mr. Luciano Benetton, I visited the site of Fabbrica for the first time in 1992. The aim of this project was to renovate and refurbish an old Palladian villa built in the seventeenth century and convert it into an art school for young spirited students from all over the world. Prior to Fabbrica, I worked on some renovation projects in Japan. One of them is the Nakanoshima project aiming at the restoration of the «Nakanoshima Public Hall» built over ninety years ago in the centre of Osaka City on a delta of the Dojima River. The project was conceived as a symbol of «new energy» and consisted in inserting an abstract but organic oval-shaped hall called «Urban Egg» into the old building. Even though the project was unfortunately not realized, I have kept on supporting this idea of renovating the island through a range of different interventions and media. I have also realized some renovation projects of historical buildings, including the Oyamazaki Villa Museum in Kyoto and the International Library of the Children's Literature in Tokyo, where I tackled the theme of dialogue between history and modernity. Both the renovation for Palazzo Grassi and the Punta della Dogana were realized by the Italian people's pride and attachment to their own traditional culture and history. I always aimed at creating new spaces in dialogue with the existing historical buildings. This is also the case for Fabbrica, where I took great care in reading and understanding the local history.

**FDC** What would you say were the most significant differences between the approach adopted when working on the refurbishment of Palazzo Grassi and the approach behind your

designs for the redevelopment of the Punta della Dogana complex?

TA In the Palazzo Grassi renovation, I tried to create a new world within the limits of the framework of the existing building, by refining the building down to its original state and enhancing the space with a minimum of elements. On the other hand, in the Punta della Dogana renovation, to some extent I had more flexibility to design new spaces. My aim was to provoke a dramatic clash between the old and new by inserting a space confined in concrete walls inside the existing structure; an exercise that highlights the series of historical layers, bringing forth a sense of clarity and understanding, instead of covering or destroying history.

FDC In your designs for the Centre at Punta della Dogana what aspect of the old building did you try to exploit most fully?

TA It was indeed a very demanding project due to the stringent restrictions on the renovation, but now I think it was a challenging opportunity for me to pursue the objective of producing a space with a fresh spirit inside the old building.

FDC In designing the Centre at Punta della Dogana you did not know which works of art would be exhibited there. Of course, you were familiar with the Pinault collection, but not exactly which pieces would come to Venice. Given that they are works of contemporary art, one can easily envisage that they will all be rather varied «objects», differing substantially in size and in the sorts of techniques involved in their creation. How much did this point influence your project designs? To what extent do the exhibition spaces you have laid out exist independently of the works that will be exhibited within them?

TA We were not informed of the detailed plan of the art work to be displayed beforehand. However, it was not a big problem to design the exhibition spaces since we knew that art works by some thoughtful and authentic contemporary artist including Jeff Koons, Damien Hirst and Hiroshi Sugimoto would be exhibited inside.

FDC Given that you have already had various opportunities to design museums destined to house works of contemporary art, let me put the above question in more general terms: to what extent do you see your architecture as entering into a dialogue with works that are expressions of artistic experimentation? You favour the use of a few, well-chosen, materials - for example, exposed surfaces of smooth, polished concrete are a leitmotif of your buildings - whilst contemporary art draws upon a whole range of media and materials; it is envisaged in spatial terms that seem to result in it expanding, «invading» the space that one might say belongs to architecture proper. How do you envisage this contrast, and how do you react to it?

TA By inserting contemporary art, which is an entirely self-sufficient entity, into my architecture, a space with vitality will be

created. I think this «chemistry» is more dramatic in the renovation projects of historical value.

FDC Do you see points of contact, of interchange, between the experimentation of contemporary artists and the work of contemporary architects? If so, could you identify them, discussing them with specific reference to your own work?

TA I always try to see and experience new art works. In particular, I never miss the latest works of today's representative artists such as Jeff Koons and Damien Hirst. Their ideas are really audacious and are always a stimulus for me. There are many contact points between contemporary art and architecture, especially since both are highly intellectual and creative activities. Nevertheless I have to acknowledge that there is a big abyss between both as well.

FDC Your architecture seems to be posited upon the repression of what we might call the «fear of repetition»; it highlights a certain stability of values, including tactile values and visual effects. In effect, it would seem to be the exact opposite of what one finds in a museum dedicated to contemporary art, which constitutes the very backbone of Francois Pinault's collection.

TA My approach in designing a museum is not to create a space suitable for exhibiting general contemporary art. As I mentioned earlier, outstanding contemporary art is a self-contained entity that creates its own world. In order to provoke a clash between the art and my architecture, I try to design the museum to exist as a separate entity, which corresponds with my own sensibility. I think a new culture is born when different viewpoints collide in one place.

FDC To what extent do you think you share the interests of such a passionate collector as Francois Pinault? What would you say were the reasons why you have become the favourite architect of a collector like him?

TA I don't know if I am Mr. Pinault's «favorite architect», but it seems to me that now he is in the spring of his life. I really sympathize with his mind-set of constantly trying to create a new world with passion. We share this attitude of always pursuing our own objectives.

FDC E.S. Welch argues that, in the first half of the fifteenth century, Filarete's discussion of the relationship that binds together patron and architect envisaged a virtual family of comprising «father-patron», «mother-architect» and «child-building». To what extent would you say such a family model of the relationship is still valid?

TA I do think the family model described by Filarete might still be appropriate nowadays. Building unquestionably implies a collaborative process based on communication, respect and trust. But more than a modern family model, of father, mother and child, I think a wider definition of family would be more precise. It should include grandparents, cousins and

friends; the patron and the architect alone cannot procreate a building by themselves.

FDC Giovanni Rucellai, patron of Leon Battista Alberti, would give a very effective account of the aims of a patron in his Zibaldone: «There are two main things which men do in this world. The first is to invent and create. The second is to build». Do you think one can still identify men as driven by these aims?

TA Unfortunately the passion and drive of many people nowadays has been diminished and I don't think the very classic definition by Leon Battista Alberti reflects today's general dull identity. I personally think that creating architecture is a process of creating new worlds. It is a process that reflects one's sensibility. Architecture is neither something to be consumed nor a means of supporting the economy; it is in fact an expression of the authentic human need for creation.

FDC One last point I am curious about. Amongst your designs for the Punta della Dogana there is one clear quotation: the gates you designed for the large doorways giving onto the Grand Canal are veritable copies of those which Carlo Scarpa designed for the Olivetti shop in St. Mark's Square. Why did you decide upon this explicit tribute to Carlo Scarpa?

TA Carlo Scarpa was a revolutionary architect because he created his own architectural manifestation in a very illustrious, selective, and sensitive way. While effectively employing the Italian traditional stucco, stone, iron, and craftsman's skills, he tried to find new architectural manifestations. Without neglecting the past he skillfully preserved the different layers of history, and in the most creative and illustrious way he quoted and brought references from the past and even from other cultures. It is well known that he had a deep interest in Japanese culture and architecture, and I think he masterfully quotes it in his own work. This admiration might be similar to my own admiration for Italian architecture and cities. Scarpa was also very knowledgeable about the technical aspects of architecture and he selectively used a wide range of materials and technologies. The doors of the Olivetti shop aimed to display the capacity and quality of Italian craftsmanship. I have studied, and assimilated Scarpa's architecture and I am quoting his way of building a new world and attitude towards architecture.