

Futurismo 2.0 – The Emerging Wave

“A refocused look into the future of the built environment.”

A hundred years ago, Italian writer Filippo Tommaso Marinetti published his rather fanatical “Futurist Manifesto” in the French newspaper *Le Figaro*, exposing readers to the movement’s disdain of the “antiquated” past and its celebration of, among other things, technology, speed and man’s ultimate conquest of nature.

“I Futuristi,” as the Italian group’s followers were called, validated their convictions by revamping every domain of artistic endeavour from architecture and design to literature, music and cinema. Antonio Sant’Elia is the most synonymous architect affiliated with “Il Futurismo.” His series of perspective drawings illustrate a vision of how the supremacy of technology could shape the built environment to come.

This coming February 2009 will mark the centennial of the birth of Futurism. During this anniversary, architects and creatives alike should reaffirm, if not establish, a commitment to architectural ideals that will better serve the

significant issues of today as well as tomorrow. This “pledge” will need to proclaim an even greater focus on the use of sustainable technology, a total reduction of the use of materials through more efficient design, as well as a greater emphasis and responsibility placed upon the individual building and the function each edifice must bear in the overall societal-scape. These essential areas of emphasis will help lay the cornerstone for Futurismo 2.0.

In order to maintain architecture’s future eminence as a relevant and vital service to society, architects of the next wave will need not only to decipher ever more complex urban matrices, but also to take on a greater position in the promotion and adaptation of advanced building technologies. Architects also will need to produce works that are better woven into the existing fabric, which in turn, will bolster both the micro and the macro environments. Large-and-small-scale campaigns alike also will need to implement 100 per cent sustainability as well as produce urban movements of social consciousness towards the increasingly changing demographics.

The shape of this sustainability is already being seen in net-zero energy buildings, which must be regarded as merely a first step along the path towards the future. Along this ecologically responsible path, the next phase is for all structures to have a net-gain energy capability, which would transform buildings into mini local power plants for a surrounding community’s energy needs.



Bradley Wheeler

To produce power, the shell of a building will have to take on the additional task of not only sheltering and insulating the interior envelope but also of being an integral part of the entire green system. Prefabricated, unitised in-fill sections will serve as both interior and exterior skin while absorbing solar gain and converting it on-site to provide for a building’s energy needs. These integrated wall units will wrap an edifice in sheathing of solar collection plenums, which will use nanotechnology to manoeuvre millions of exterior micro surfaces (think tiny fish scales) to optimise solar-capture angles. Thanks to these minute manipulations of the façade, the skin will appear to have a continuously changing texture, depending upon the time of day and season of the year.

Spaces within dwellings and larger scaled projects must also respond to the future’s needs. Concepts about the function of space will need to be more variable, thus allowing people greater options to accommodate their own lifestyle. Interiors will have to be designed for multi-use, allowing end-users options for

rapid transformation through flexible and movable non-load-bearing partitions.

Roofs and their function will contribute greatly to Futurismo 2.0. Green roofs will harvest all rainfall upon a structure and be stored in large tanks, similar to what is happening today in Tucson, Arizona. For this next evolution, the captured water will need to be purified on-site, and used for the building’s water requirements.

Finally, architecture will need to expend greater effort in education and communication. Public perception of architecture often has been vague and ambiguous. People outside the industry realise that architecture is about buildings and their form, but little else. (Even during the Renaissance, architect Leon Battista Alberti wrote about the architect’s responsibility to educate the client.)

Architecture will need to do a better job of conveying the impact it has on all our lives, as well as speak to the discipline’s intricate problem-solving and critical orchestration skills...skills that will play even greater roles in the future. ●●●

Bradley Wheeler is an internationally published architectural photographer and writer based in Los Angeles.