



MARTIN DUPLANTIER ARCHITECTES
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Kharkiv School of Architecture

Why a private school in Ukraine?

One should understand the situation of architecture education before the Kharkiv School of Architecture. Pre-determined, conservative and not critically oriented. As I got in contact with the school back in 2016, first as a lecturer, I soon understood that something special was happening. Among all other Ukrainian architecture universities, coming from the soviet system, the Kharkiv School of Architecture managed to create an ecosystem where critical thinking, creative mindset and innovation were on board. I saw the education it was given there was a place for stimulation: it is open to contemporary issues, design oriented and more focused on processes and methodology, than on forms and shapes.

With the war, I feared its relocation to Lviv would threaten its viability. And it did. But it didn't change the DNA of the school, dedicated more than before to the current challenges of Ukraine.

I write this external review for the Kharkiv School of Architecture, as founder of my Parisian office, that gathers about 40 architects, and president of AMO France Architecture Association. Since 2022, I created a Ukrainian office and a charity fund to help bringing attention to Ukrainian architectural heritage, thinking about reconstruction and promote responsible ways to rebuild.

Why supporting the Kharkiv School of Architecture ?

First because the curriculum is extensive, and well thought. I can only talk about design studios, but as in most renowned international schools of architecture, they are here taught by practicing architects, close to the reality of practical life, and able to bring conceptual thinking to students. I have been in contact with several alumni of KhSA, and I can only say that their vision of architecture clearly shows coherent, critical and sensible thinking. It is indeed key to link practice and theory in the training of future architects, as it creates this "moment of culture" embodied in the architecture of an

epoch. Without overwhelming them with regulation, students learn the lexicon, concerns, and language of architecture when studios are led by practicing architects. Their connection to other courses, such as construction or urbanism, brings a deeper vision of a project and creates a coherent understanding of what design means. This holistic approach is essential to the success of KhSA.

There are formal reasons for KhSA success, but there is a well the informal dimension, which at least as important. The energy, dedication, common ground that are coming out of the school spirit are very inspiring and positive.

Not only did the school managed within a few months, to move to another city, it also managed to turn a former canteen into a multifunctional space for model making, teaching, lecturing... this “common space” gathers all the stimulation, people and fluxes, and embodies the spirit of the school where concepts meet practice, where conferences echo studios. This is more than just an “atelier”: an informal space that encourages students to work together, to learn from each other across the years, as much as they could learn from the courses.

Teaching a design studio

I am most familiar with the studio, as a practitioner architect teaching studio courses. My course, “Industrial Heritage and the Productive City” is a current challenge for Ukraine for the 21st century. It focuses on Pidzamche district, a neighborhood very close to the city center, with a rich industrial past, where different uses interact with each other.

The entire course will be conducted in English, but I will be assisted by a Ukrainian architect, Andrii Shtendera, who works at the office.

Original industrial buildings of Lviv Oblast and some national ones will establish theoretical bases for lectures on specific urban interventions, and both built and unbuilt projects were explored within the context of these claims. After a site analysis of the district during the first semester, we will assign different productive buildings to the students. A zoom on the urban potential as well as a fine technical understanding of the building’s tectonics will be conducted in collaboration with the construction course. A framed brief, based on mix of functions with a majority of productive spaces, will be the socle of conceptual phase: we aim at approaching both an existing building and a challenging brief with adaptive reuse and critical reconstruction methods. The development of the concept and a focus on spatial quality, optimization of industrial processes, exploring the potentials of a building, ... will be the tasks of this studio. The combination of weekly short presentations, discussions, and cross courses synergies will encourage students to speak critically about the various scales of environmental design from the building to the city to the region, and to the general responsible reconstruction of Ukraine.

A multi-purpose productive and adapted report will come out of this studio. It should draw the lines of the productive Ukrainian city for tomorrow. The final review will be held offline and online with outside critics.

I highly recommend the Kharkiv School of Architecture for its visionary leadership, faculty, curriculum, and students. The profession of architecture and urbanism will be crucial in the coming years, and these students from the Kharkiv School of Architecture will be leading the change of Ukrainian cities. I could not be more confident in their abilities to rise to these challenges.

I remain at your disposal for any additional information or clarification. I will be happy to assist.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Md' followed by a horizontal line.

Martin Duplantier

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