

Rough!

Sam Marshall

I saw a fantastic performance by a band of 10-year-old school students playing Herbie Hancock's Cantaloupe. Really loose and rattly. Just a basic band. But it was a sensational rendition that I don't think experienced session musicians could have played better, because the piece was so strong and so distinctive. Louis Armstrong or Tom Waits's voices, and Hendrix's "Star Spangled Banner" at Woodstock, are other such examples of rough in music. Rough, yet powerfully valid.

Ages ago I had a dream that got me interested in roughness: driving through a tall-walled lane in China, lined with people cheering and waving red flags as we drove past. The very rough walls had red handkerchief-sized flags all over them about two metres apart, fluttering in the breeze. Solid, stoic, aged versus fresh, bright, alive and moving. The closest built form of this I have seen is Wang Shu's Ningbo Historic Museum (1). My wife recently gave me a ceramic work by Luke Ryan (2) which runs parallel with the energetic roughness of ceramicists Brian Rochefort and Takuro Kumata. This rekindled my interest.

The aged, the discarded, the weathered, the imperfect, the messy, the blurry, the broken and the abandoned are of interest to me and generally ignored. But let's tackle roughness here.

Our ancestors' first shelters were rough, naturally formed caves. In contemporary times the roughness maestro, Ensemble Studio, play with a contemporary version of this in Ca'n Terra, where the idea of the 'naturally formed' is flipped, the space being a disused man-made quarry.

Much beautiful roughness is covered up for the sake of smoothness—the antithesis of rough. Most materials are smooth, this being the easiest way to manufacture and guarantee uniformity. It's hard to tell a machine to make something rough, irregular and with variety. Understandably, smooth appeals when it makes contact with our bodies, whereas we usually find rough somewhat annoying. 'Soft' is another extreme opposite of rough. The dictionary says that rough 'lacks gentleness'... nice description.

An intellectual or functional roughness (not sloppiness) suggests one that is bold, strong and perhaps loose. As for me, I reject the notion that smooth is a sign of the refined. The examples here, however rough they

may be, serve my purposes to demonstrate the notion of contrast.

Age Here, the decline to disorder is recognised. Run-down, decayed buildings provide dialogue between the ages, with roughness in contrast to, and as a stage, for slick-clean smooth buildings or interiors (3). Carlo Scarpa was a master of respect for such relics.

Repurposing In seeing the beauty of decayed fragments, and recognising the damage done to the environment when producing new materials, new form can be created with repurposed materials. (4)

Restraint Respect for what remains is provided with minimal intervention for access, stability and appreciation. (5)

Fearsome protectors External facades staunchly express strength in protecting important contents, while accepting the construction process and forthcoming decay. (6)

Honesty of material The exterior and internal materials are one. (7)

Product of the construction process A clear understanding of the construction process and its extrapolation allows the management of finishes and new processes. Corb's off-form concrete, especially when curved, relished in rough formwork and the use of unskilled labour.

Mounded earth gave the Truffle its external concrete mould shape, while easily-eaten-by-cows hay bales created the interior. (8 & 9)

Local tree trunks made the internal concrete formwork, only to be burnt out leave their ghosted impressions. (10)

Successive concrete pours pose a messy problem for most. For Lina Bo Bardi, this was foreseen, accepted and relished in. (11)

Genius of landscape A landscape imposing its genius on a building determines the degree of roughness. If a building is rough, it has a high chance of complementing the landscape. Materials from the site provide the best fit if camouflage is intended. (12)

Back to the cave Space is created by cutting into the Earth. No exterior. (13)

Roughness has a place and should be embraced as an architect's friend. There's roughness in everything. Rough and smooth fit together, just like light and dark, up and down, yin and yang, male and female - one can't be without the other. ■



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1 Wang Shu's Ningbo Historic Museum, Ningbo, Zhejiang, China.
Photo: Jadranko Marjanovic Mare.

2 Ceramic work by Luke Ryan. Photo: Sam Marshall.

3 House E/C by Portuguese architects SAMI-architects.
Photo: Paulo Catrica.

4 Tinshed, Redfern, Sydney, Australia by architect Raffaello
Rosselli. Photo: Sam Marshall.



5 Turó de la Rovira is the remains of an anti-aircraft embattlement, and then a shanty town, in Barcelona by architects AAUP + JDVDP. Photo: Billy Maynard.

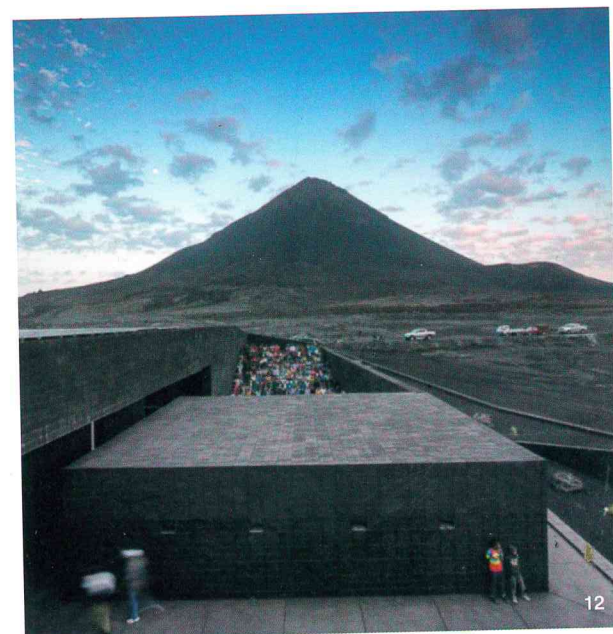
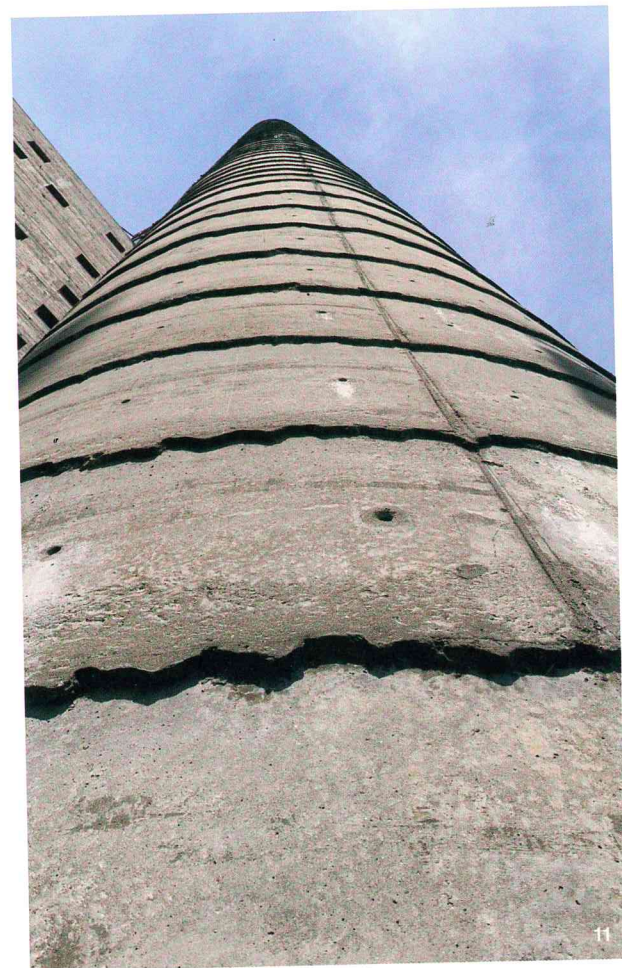
6 Bauzium in Goseong-gun, South Korea by architects Kim In-cheurl + Archium. Photo: Park Young-chaе, Jun Myung-jin, Thierry Sauvage, Kim Jemin.

7 SawMill House, Yackandandah, Australia by architects Archier Studio.

8 Truffle at Costa da Morte, Spain by Esamble Studio. Photo: Roland Halbes.

9 Truffle diagram by architects Ensamble Estudio / Antón García-Abril.





10 Bruder Klaus Field Chapel, Mechernich, Germany by architect Peter Zumthor.
Photo: Mano Panombalan.

11 SESC Pompeia, San Paulo Brazil by architect Lina Bo Bardi. Photo: Phillip Arnold.

12 Fogo Natural Park Venue, Fogo, Cape Verde by architects OTO. Photo: Public domain.

13 Ca'n Terra, Menorca Spain by architects Ensamble Estudio. Photo: Ensamble Studio.