RUDIMENTARY ARCHITECTURE

PHOTO–GRAPHIC DESIGN METHODS
I want to thank all the great people on Ringön that I got to know during this year. Thank you for all the support, inspiration and high quality craft beer.
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After my bachelor’s degree in 2015 at Umeå School of Architecture, I have now for the past six years worked as a graphic designer, art director and photographer at various design studios, advertising agencies and architecture firms. For the past three years, I have worked with graphic design and photography within architecture, which is absolutely the most ultimate combination of disciplines I know.

Recent Employments

2022  →  Graphic designer, Okidoki
2019 – 2022  Graphic designer/photographer, Liljewall
2018 – 2019  Art director, Momentum Sverige
2016 – 2018  Graphic designer/photographer, Bolt Kommunikation
2013 – 2015  Bachelor degree Architecture and fine arts
             Umeå School of Architecture
This thesis explores artistic and technological overlaps between architecture, photography, and graphic design. It uses techniques from all three fields as a way to both analyze an existing building stock and develop a particular design process that draws from this analysis. The aim is to enrich architecture with ways of looking and of documenting as well as with particular design sensibilities that take cues from photography and graphic design. My interest in this topic is influenced by a trajectory of work that straddles these fields and by my professional background as a photographer and graphic designer.

Graphic design, photography and architecture have a lot in common and create synergies when they overlap in a supporting symbiosis with each other. As architect and theorist Jesús Vassallo recently has noted, architecture and photography share an interest in certain compositional and representational traits, including typology, frontality, and realism. This is evidenced in the work of photographers such as Philip Schaaroe or Bernd and Hilla Becher, and in the work of architects such as MOS or De Vilard Vinck Taillieu. Spanning both documentation and speculation, the thesis develops through observing, representing, cataloging, and designing.

The thesis begins with a study of the architecture of Ringön, an old district in the former industrial harbor of Gothenburg. The buildings of Ringön have for a century developed a clear graphic sensibility due to the use of colorful industrial materials such as corrugated sheet metal in different profiles and scales. Analyzing Ringön’s anonymous but expressive architecture is akin to discovering and conceptualizing the undesigned - defining and framing symmetries and playful compositions in the expression of the buildings created by accident in the pursuit of optimal functionality. By making observations in this district, I use the collected catalog to define the ingredients that make up Ringön’s character. The character of a place can, in terminology gleaned from graphic design, be translated into a graphic identity or design manual which becomes a framework and a compacted overview of core elements. This manual is used as a design guide through the project.

The purpose of the collected observations is to develop a speculative design project based on the catalog of features and techniques, placed on a vacant site in the heart of Ringön. The design project aims to be a building proposal where the character will be in conversation with Ringön’s existing spirit and the intent is to use previously used methods to translate and extend the discoveries and findings I have gathered along the way.

Keywords:
Photography, graphic methods, character
At the end of the 19th century, a canal almost two kilometers long was built from Göta Älv (Gothenburg river) all the way to Kville. The canal was named Ringkanalen and in this way Ringön is born. Two bridges lead over Hisingen, a railway bridge and a drawbridge. A part of the canal was filled in when the Götaälv bridge was built in 1939. The rest of the canal disappeared in 1958. Even though Ringön is no longer an independent island, the name remains. Today Göta Älv is about 200 meters wide and 5-10 meters deep.

As early as 1935, a boat towing company, Bogser Sven AB, and a huge boatyard, Gotenius Varv, moved to the island and they are still there. In the 80’s a lot of people interested in car and motors found Ringön. Then it rolled on. Due to poor connections and the fact that the buildings on Ringön were not sufficiently maintained, the area slowly and surely began to be forgotten, and more and more premises were empty and abandoned.

Today when you walk towards Ringön, you walk by a long main street filled with hard-working trucks, company cars and garbage trucks. If you enter an smaller street that goes down to the river you are suddenly surrounded by old, small industrial buildings. All covered in corrugated metal sheets in different bright colors. Red, blue, yellow and gray lacquered metal facades, which together form a jungle of different car and boat workshops, welders, large anonymous warehouses and small hatches in the wall that offer smocked fish with potatoes for lunch. Sometimes it smells like coffee, sometimes paint and boat tar and sometimes garbage from the big recycling station, Stena Recycling, a block away.

The four meter high old workshop gates rise up along the streets and make you feel small. When a gate suddenly opens, it feels like a wall is disappearing, and suddenly you’re standing in the middle of a boat restauration. Most of the buildings have no windows placed at human level. The windows that exists are placed on a high level, on the ceilings or above the gates. You would rather call them apertures than windows, as their main function is to give the workshops daylight, rather than expose the business to the street or the other way around.

Rudimentary refers to the character of the buildings - which can also be described as primitive, simple and basic form. You can also use the word deadpan which refers to dry humor as you can sense some kind of humorous feel in the almost awkward appearance of the buildings.

A PROGRESSIVE AND RUDIMENTARY NEIGHBORHOOD

GOTHENBURG 1:10 000

RINGÖN

GÖTA ÄLV

BACKGROUND

SITE - RINGÖN IN GOTHENBURG
A UNIQUE AND VALUABLE DISTRICT
AS A PART OF THE CITY

In 2016 an municipal organization, Saltet, started an operation called Alleviating Oasis at Ringön, supported by the City of Gothenburg through and Business Region Gothenburg. The main discussion was about the difficulties from the city to see the value of Ringön and what moves in the borderland between establishment and subculture. They claim that the district has unique and valuable qualities that are important for Gothenburg as a city, and that places like this are the basis for a city to feel exciting, vibrant and contemporary.

Saltet made an inventory of the area to see what there was a need for, and what a development plan could look like for the at that point forgotten and empty neighborhood. Saltet’s vision is that Ringön can put Gothenburg in motion, and they also want Ringön to become a place that challenges and attracts exploration, during both day and night. The most important prerequisite for this project to succeed was low rents and that the buildings on Ringön is allowed to remain and not be torn down. Today there are still empty premises on Ringön, but not as many as before. As a result of their work, more companies with creative activities are moving to Ringön. Breweries, film studios, gardens, sewing factories, co-working spaces, restaurants, bars, music studios, etc. A time-limited building permit is being worked out in 2018. The laws mean, among other things, that it is now legal to open an evening restaurant on the island, and also that existing premises can be used for other activities than traditional industry.

Saltet’s founder, Johan “Red Top” Larsson, believes that it is all about providing opportunities to create space and freedom for individual initiatives. Low rents give people the courage to try new ideas. He also claims that it is the wild brains, the stubborn, the resourceful, the over-optimistic, the dreamy and the drifting islanders who will make Ringön magical. The district’s strange and unique mix is unlike any other district in Gothenburg. And not other industrial areas either. Johan also wants to make it clear that the idea of Ringön’s development is not about removing the existing industrial activities from the area. He believes that it is the interplay and mix of activities that creates the successful and unique Ringön spirit.

An important checklist was made by Saltet with three points, which are now part of the city’s governing document:

1. Do not demolish anything on Ringön
2. Support the companies that already exist on the island
3. Add new creative activities on vacant spaces
JESÚS VASALLO
Architect and writer

Jesús has recently noted, in his recent books, that architecture and photography share an interest in certain compositional and representational traits, including typology, frontality, and realism. In his book, Seamness (2017), he describes and demonstrates collaborations between architects, photographers and visual artists who develop methods to depict and reflect architecture made from fragments of reality. Among other things, he has said that, – Architecture and photography share an interest in certain compositional and representational traits, including typology, frontality, and realism.

HILLA AND BERNT BECHER
Photographer duo (active 1972–2009)

The photography duo Hilla and Bernd Becher are best known for their photo collections of old and disappearing industrial architecture around Europe and North America. During forty years of photography, they managed to create large documentary photo collections of industrial structures, water towers, gas tanks and factories.

It is clear that Hilla has worked in the commercial photo industry in the way the architecture is portrayed as sculptural objects in the pictures. The buildings are carefully centered in a frontal angled perspective usually with a blank background which makes the silhouettes of the object appear extra prominent. It’s a challenge to grasp the scale in the picture, as people or other obvious scale references don’t appear in the pictures. This abstract way of portraying makes me read the industries like a sculpture. Somehow the form and character are enhanced and emphasized through their style. The frontality of the choice of perspective, and the fact that the fund is usually free from other objects, makes their image collections extremely informative and clear.

PHILIPP SCHAERER
Photographer, visual artist and architect

Philipp has been teaching at various Swiss universities and has also worked at Herzog & de Meuron’s offices. His way of portraying, communicating and interpreting architecture emerges in a free-thinking, graphic and multidisciplinary way. He stays on a level between fiction and reality where his art can still be read as real photographs that reflect reality. In the Bildbauten series (2007–2009), Schaerer creates imaginary buildings through photo collages, using building components and realistic textures in assembly. You get the feeling that Philipp has a large photo library of different objects and textures that works as a catalog. From the library he carefully picks selected items and creates well-thought-out and mathematically composed façades. The components are seen as ingredients, and the result reflects a building with a strong character based on the qualities of the selected components.

MOS ARCHITECTS
Architecture studio, New York

MOS Architects is a New York–based architecture studio, founded by Hilary Sample and Michael Meredith in 2003. The architects work commutes between different residential buildings, cultural institutions, training places and retail premises. They also work with exhibitions, installations, furniture and objects. They collect their works in their own books.

Their work have a strong graphic sense in the architectural expression, and you notice that they work a lot with color, shape and silhouettes in their architecture, which makes it extra interesting to analyze and look at. The graphic essence is also evident in how they portray and document their architecture in both completed projects and models.

BACKGROUND
REFERENCES
RINGÖN SURVEY AND EXPLORATION
Spend time on Ringön by renting an office space in the middle of the district throughout the semester (p. 18–19)

↓

PHOTOGRAPHY
Photography as a method. Collecting an image bank (p. 20–31)

↓

3D MODELLING
Observations and explorations of existing building (p. 32–45)

↓

GRAPHIC MANUAL
Guide that becomes a framework and a compacted overview of core elements in the project (p. 48–63)

↓

DESIGN PROPOSAL
Develop a design project based on collected observations and catalog of features and techniques. Its character will be in conversation with Ringön’s existing spirit and the intent is to use previously used methods to translate and extend the discoveries and findings I have gathered along the way (p. 64–85)
Already in the autumn of 2021, when I decided to work with Ringön in the thesis, I knew I needed to spend time getting to know the neighborhood in depth. As I began my research and flipped through the local businesses in the area, I found a creative collective, Kolgruvan, that rented out office spaces. The idea of having close access to the district and the network of people there felt valuable for the project and the research. The fact that the owner of Kolgruvan was involved in Ringön’s development was just a big bonus for me.

Kolgruvan is an old chocolate factory at Ringön that has been renovated and rebuilt by the owner Fredrik Wernér. Environmental thinking has been striking since day one. One example of this concept is all the screws that have been unscrewed have been used again. Also Volvo’s old bus stop from Tornånder has become transparent walls in the main space. The creative business concept is reflected in the people of Kolgruvan as well. In the wood workshop you find two furniture carpenters. In the space above you find an app developer and next to him a creative duo who develop the collaboration between Nordic queer artists. On weekends, events such as fashion shows, company parties, lectures and concerts are held.

In my opinion, it takes a lot of time and curiosity to really understand an area, how it works and the character of it. You need to stay in the area for different hours of the day to discover different sites, qualities and areas for improvement. The area’s character vary between different seasons, and different times of the day, which I have tried to catch and portray in photography between December and May. I also believe that a place can change in your eyes when you add the people staying there and the way they get the area in motion. I have visited most workshops and shops in the area to talk to people who have seen Ringön’s development over the past ten to fifteen years. By hearing their stories and personal visions for the future of the area, I have been able to take part in different opinions and angles to look at the area’s situation.
During this semester, I have chosen to build up an image bank of Ringön. I have partly used it as a base material and template when I modeled certain buildings in the area to get all the important details at the right place. By carefully selecting an image collection of Ringön, you can in a simple and clear way communicate and highlight what you consider relevant and important in the project. Such as specific details or situations that are unique in that particular area. You can easily explain a specific situation by showing a carefully selected section of the facade. Despite the worn-out expression, I’m willing to agree that a picture is worth a thousand words.

Architectural photography is not necessarily about wide angle pictures that captures an entire building. It’s more a search for the idea and your own perception of the experience. Going through a building by framed sequences is an effective way to understand how the building communicates. Exploring piece by piece, Architecture provide the opportunity for the viewer to make their personal interpretations of the experience, which are experienced in different ways depending on the angle, situation and personal references.

To portray architecture in a frontal angle is a photographic aesthetic that characterizes the subjects presented at a front view perspective to the viewer. When the representation of an object becomes flat, it removes the feeling of depth and sense of 3D that perspective usually emphasizes. As the object is presented at the perpendicular angle we start to approach the feeling of 2D in the image. Symmetries and the relationship between components of the facade are suddenly emphasized and you get a clear overview of the expression of the facade.

As an architectural photographer, it has been interesting and varied to document the everyday and passed by situations. It’s a challenge to capture and search for what’s not obvious in the frame. It turned out that the simple and undesigned suddenly became complex when you gave it attention.

Photo equipment: Sony A7III / Sony E 35mm f/1,8 OSS

BLUE CORRUGATED SHEET METAL FACADE ON RINGÖN
I have also done a 3D exploration of existing buildings in the district. To reflect an existing building in a 3D model is a good method to understand and highlight the building’s identity. In this method I’m aiming for the frontal expression again and the search for symmetries and axial and randomized compositions on the facades. 3D modeling also gives you a volume study and a good overview of the existing color palettes. As a method, it is reminiscent of portraying architecture through photography, but here you instead build up the image piece by piece. 3D modeling of existing buildings automatically becomes a volume study where you get to know and specify the proportions of the facades, specify materials and also get an overview of the color palettes.

By making observations of the area, I’m creating a catalog of elements and situations to define and frame what I find exciting and interesting about Ringön, and also the character and the qualities of this place. The methods I’ve tried so far are for example photography and 3D modeling existing buildings. I feel that it is effective to work in front view, as it gives a clear picture of the object - an elevation drawing. I feel that you get a better understanding of the composition and proportion of the object from this view. I’ve been using this frontal mode in both the photographs, 3D modeling and will also continue with it further on developing the design project.
RINGÖN OBSERVATIONS

Analyzing Ringön’s architecture is like discovering the undesigned by defining and framing symmetries and playful compositions of the buildings created in the pursuit of optimal functionality. Ringön is built up by a collection of components and objects, which are used to compose the character we experience today. Some objects you recognize from other buildings, while others feel extremely site-specific and unique. After six months in the district, I have listed observations that are typical of the area, and which I take with me into the design process as a recipe and framework for the design. Here are some of the most relevant observations:

Low-rise buildings, usually in 1-2 levels. Maximum 8 meters high, and in some cases 12 meters.

Various pipes and odd chimneys and ventilation solutions that peek out from walls and ceilings. Sometimes they help you understand the business in the building, but most of the time they just make you more confused.

Clean and recognizable color palettes that recur on all streets in the area. The main colours of the district is blue, yellow, red, orange and light gray.

The metal facades are usually mounted vertically, and sometimes horizontally. Sometimes both variants of sheet metal come together on the same facade.

Simple and clean volumes. Irregularly placed ridges that creates playful roof silhouettes. On the short sides, you often find simple and clear symmetries in the facade that are naturally put together according to the function of the workshops.

Most buildings do not have windows at street level. Windows usually occur above the large gates, or where the wall meets the ceiling. Apertures for daylight is often found on the roofs in different shapes.

The lack of windows creates large and closed facades, which makes it difficult to understand and read the interior and how many floors there are.

Most buildings contain businesses that require large gates. The older gates are always facing north. An abrupt and playful shift in scale happens between the large industrial gates and the small human doors which are often found next to them.
RINGÖN CATALOG

MASSING

GABLE ROOF
SIDE GABLE ROOF
CENTRAL SKYLIGHTS
CLERESTORY

ARC PROFILE
WORKSHOP CONNECTED OFFICE VOLUME
M-SHAPED
REPEATED SHAPE

APERTURES

GATES

VENTILATION

ARMATURE
3D EXPLORATION
MODELING EXISTING BUILDINGS

3D EXPLORATION
BUILDINGS AT RINGÖN
M.I.R (MADE IN RINGÖN)
SHOP AND PRINTING STUDIO
RINGÖGATAN 13

3D EXPLORATION
MODELING EXISTING BUILDINGS
3D EXPLORATION
MODELING EXISTING BUILDINGS

KONDITOREI BORGSKOG
BEST FIA IN TOWN
STÅLVERKSGATAN 4B

M.I.R (MADE IN RINGÖN)
SHOP AND PRINTING STUDIO
RINGÖGATAN 13

3D EXPLORATION
BUILDINGS AT RINGÖN

BORSKOG
3D EXPLORATION
MODELING EXISTING BUILDINGS

PLUMS LAGERBUTIK
KAYAK STORAGE
JÄRNMALMSGATAN 7

KOLGRUVAN
COWORKING COLLECTIVE
KOLGRUVEGATAN 12
The character of a place can, in terminology gleaned from graphic design, be translated into an identity or graphic manual which becomes a framework and a compacted overview of core elements. A graphic manual describes a concept and a character from a graphic perspective. It’s also a powerful tool that provides rules and frames for the graphic look. This manual is used as a design guide through the process.

Colour palettes are set for the district and also a suitable project specific palette. Since the Ringön metal blue color is the most important in the concept, a shade color palette is developed to create variation in the specific color tone (p. 48).

Through the manual I’ve developed a graphic shape and silhouette to bring into the design process, based on building types, silhouettes and other observations from the catalog (p. 50).

As a graphic designer you always need to test the manual on a detail to make sure that colors meet in a pleasant way, and that materials and shapes go together and match your idea of the concept. One test shows a window detail meeting the curved metal facade (p. 52–53).
CURVED ROOF SHAPE
REPEATED SILHOUETTE
APERTURES ON HIGH LEVEL
ASSEMBLED VOLUMES
Window detail, meeting facade with curved metal profile.
DESIGN PROJECT

DESIGN PROCESS

With a rich library of collected observations I'm now starting to translate and develop a speculative design project based on the catalog of features and techniques, placed on a vacant site in the heart of Ringön. The design project aims to be a building proposal where the character will be in conversation with Ringön's existing spirit and the intent is to use previously used methods to translate and extend the discoveries and findings I have gathered along the way. The plot is centrally located connected to an important intersection that both contains and leads to popular public places. The selected site is the only empty space on Ringön, as the previous building unfortunately burned down in 2019.

The facades are designed in divided sequences, which are then put together as a whole. It has been given a strict and symmetrical expression in corrugated metal in three different scales, but at the same time you will find random compositions and with recognizable objects that create a randomness in each elevation.
FACADE SEQUENCES
COMPOSITIONS OF ELEMENTS
ELEVATIONS
COMPOSITIONS OF ELEMENTS

NORTHWEST
With a rich library of collected observations I'm now starting to translate and develop a speculative design project based on the catalog of features and techniques, placed on a vacant site in the heart of Ringön. The design project aims to be a building proposal where the character will be in conversation with Ringön’s existing spirit and the intent is to use previously used methods to translate and extend the discoveries and findings I have gathered along the way. The plot is centrally located connected to an important intersection that both contains and leads to popular public places. The facade is more closed towards the street, as other buildings in the district, but opens up to the courtyard.

Since I have talked to a lot of people in the district, I know they are in need of a shared event building. The function of the building is focusing on music events, but also allows other activities such as lectures, markets, exhibitions and similar activities that promote Ringön’s network and future vision.

The program consists of:

- A big main stage
- Backstage
- Space for 1500-2000 visitors
- Connected food court
- Generous kitchen for pop up restaurants
- Large gates that open up to the courtyard
- Biergarten
- Space for outdoor activities
- A dock for boat guests

(Plan drawing p 70)
FACADE FRAMING
COMPOSITION AND METAL PROFILES

FACADE PROPORTIONS
FACADE FRAMING
COMPOSITION AND METAL PROFILES
REFLECTION / DISCUSSION

THESIS QUESTION
To answer the thesis question, I think I just scratched the surface a bit regarding these photographic techniques used in the architectural process. There’s clearly not one specific answer to this question. I already knew it before I started this project, but by repeatedly asking myself this question throughout the process has been a good exercise to keep on searching for new ways of working.

THE ROLE
I feel that the graphic role is starting to take hold in the architecture industry now, but this has not always been the case. There has for long been a small need in the offices, and in special cases a graphic designer has been hired for a couple of weeks to help with individual projects and competitions. Today, it is still seen as an expensive support function in larger offices, but I think it will become a permanent role in the near future once we have tested and seen the benefits of this expertise as a tool in the industry. I also hope that it becomes more common to work as a hybrid architect and graphic designer. That the difference between these professions is blurred and that it becomes a more common way of working in the industry. I am pleased to be able to test my graphic skills in the architectural process in this thesis, and I hope to develop more methods forward in hybrid roles as an architect, photographer and graphic designer.

THE PASSED BY RUDIMENTARY ARCHITECTURE
A design shaped after random contexts, such as vernacular architecture, is difficult to imitate as long as you have not decided the function of the building. I developed the program quite late in the process, when I initially focused a lot on the expression of the facade and the catalog. This made it difficult in the beginning to start designing the catch the right essence. When the catalog began to take shape and I carefully noted observations in a list, the project began to develop in the right direction to reflect Ringön’s character.

Analyzing the undesigned architecture at Ringön has been a playful and creative process. Early in the process, I had a feeling that it would be a challenge to understand the architecture on Ringön and to translate and extend it in my own interpretation. My realization now afterwards is that it was a bigger challenge than I thought. It turned out that the simple and undesigned suddenly became complex once you gave it attention.

RINGÖN
Of course, the city needs to grow and expand. The question is based on whose interest things are happening. I hope that more people see the value and uniqueness of Ringön, and the potential of letting it continue to grow wild as an exciting district in Gothenburg. I personally see Ringön as an ancient rainforest that has been designed for a long time. If it is destroyed, it is not possible to rebuild it. All materials and incredible environments that you find here can be used and used as is, with a few simple adjustments.

One of the most beautiful things about Ringön is that it is an area where industry and culture actually go together. One example is when the organization Status Queer had a big party in the area, they asked a guy at an adjacent construction company if he could be their door guard, which he happily did. That is still called the “island” I think is reinforced in the fact that people actually cooperate with each other as if it were in an actual island. Is it the small-scale that makes it possible? I want to thank Ringön for this semester, and look forward to many summer evenings with a cold beer in my hand with the noise from Gotenius Varv in the background.

HOW CAN WE USE THE TECHNIQUES AND METHODS OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND GRAPHIC DESIGN AS DESIGN TOOLS IN ARCHITECTURE?
BOOK

ARTICLE


WEBSITE

THANKS TO
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