

ARCHITECTURAL AESTHETICS IN THE 21ST CENTURY: A REVIEW OF AWARD-WINNING PROJECTS IN THE CONTEXT OF ENVIRONMENTAL AESTHETICS

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Abstract. Architecture entered into a new realm by the 19th Century. The shift in architectural perspectives and the forms introduced especially during the last few decades may indicate a novel aesthetic taste. There is a limited number of studies, which sought a better understanding, despite the increased need to analyze the aesthetic domain to make sense of today's architectural design. Aesthetics is a crucial point of departure for both the development, and assessment of architectural product. Since environmental aesthetics transcends the analytical tradition and offers a multidimensional perspective, it may provide a framework to understand and define the aesthetic domain of architectural design. The present study aimed to contribute to the relevant literature and create a conceptual basis for an assessment of today's architectural aesthetics vis-a-vis the theoretical framework introduced by Arthur Earl Stamps in 2010, one of the leading experts in environmental aesthetics. Twelve projects awarded the RIBA Stirling Prize between 2010 and 2022 were analyzed on the bases of eight concepts suggested by Arthur Earl Stamps in 2010 vis-a-vis the characteristics of the physical object. The study results indicated that a novel aesthetic based on human-culture-nature relations and sustainable design was manifest in the projects.

Keywords: *Aesthetic, architectural design, environmental aesthetics, 21st century architecture, award-winning projects.*

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1. Introduction

The last 30-40 years saw digital technologies facilitating the emergence of unprecedented types of forms (Kolerevic & Klinger, 2008) and further, the way buildings were designed, manufactured, and represented radically changed. The new era is characterized by the fact that architects did not merely took advantage of spatial production and form, but also of the productive processes that made up the space (Leach, 2009). Consistently, a number of previous studies suggested that 21st century architecture evolved to accommodate a new paradigm (Carpo, 2013; Leach, 2002; Lynn, 2013; Mehaffy, 2004; Mallgrave & Goodman, 2011; Picon, 2010).

The rise of digital culture also had an impact on the architects' approach to design and their aesthetic conception. An in-depth insight into new aesthetic values may prove to be crucial both for those who create the architectural product and environments, and for the individuals and society who would use it, given the effects of the discipline of architecture on the urban formation and on societies/individuals. This is because a number

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of technological, economic, political, and cultural etc. factors are involved in the course of architectural aesthetics formation and therefore the same may offer important insight that would help understanding the dynamics that make up cities and societies.

Architectural aesthetics was elaborated in multiple contexts from philosophical theories of beauty to stylistic approaches and it was one of the important topics of many thinkers from Homer to Heidegger. Aesthetics embraces human desire to make their environment beautiful and the beauty notion and has always been a very effective criterion in the structural shaping and assessment of architecture (Kuban, 2010). In the context thereof, aesthetics creates a robust form of communication between architecture and the user with evident intellectual and psychological projections. Aesthetic concepts are required to adequately understand and make sense of this form of communication. Nevertheless, it is difficult to reach a consensus as regards the definition thereof on the grounds that aesthetic judgments are highly diverse and peculiar. For instance, the aesthetic values may vary by separate cultures, or that diverse political, social, and environmental parameters may have various impact on human taste (Nia & Suleiman, 2018).

Aesthetics debate is not purely theoretical but also include social and moral domains, yet aesthetics has been largely associated with the philosophy of art. Therefore, aesthetic is the emotional experience that an individual feels about the outline of the objects, by which an individual feels the value of one's own existence upon having sufficient joy and pleasure to satisfy oneself (Caymaz & Hamameh, 2020).

Emerged as a reaction to the fact that aesthetics as conceived by the analytical tradition was more associated to the philosophy of art, the environmental aesthetics is a comparatively recent sub-branch of philosophical aesthetics (Carlson, 2019). Environmental aesthetics challenges the common belief that environmental beauty is a matter of personal taste (Cold, 2001) and hypothesizes that aesthetic experience belongs not only to the field of art, but also to everyday life (Husserl, 1970). Consistently, aesthetics depends on the living or non-living organization that is perceivable in subjective or objective terms (Arenibafo, 2017).

Natural and artificial elements that make up the environment and their harmony with each other constitute a critical topic of environmental aesthetics (Danaci, 2012). Environmental aesthetics has been closely associated with cultural geography and architectural theory (Munasinghe, 2001). Environmental aesthetics constitutes a fundamental framework both for the development of the architectural product and in the assessment thereof given that architecture is a result of the forces that have shaped it over time. As such, architectural aesthetics includes everyday aesthetics and environmental aesthetics along with the conventional topics of the philosophy of art (Fisher, 2015).

The concept of environmental aesthetics emerged during the latter third of the twentieth century, and attracted various disciplines by the early 21st Century (Carlson, 2019) as evident by a number of relevant publications. Studies in landscape, architecture, and many other associated design fields (van Etteger *et al.*, 2016; Forsey, 2013; Parsons 2011; Stecker, 1999; Svabo & Ekelund, 2015) introduced new perspectives to aesthetic approaches.

Arthur Earl Stamps, one of the leading experts in environmental aesthetics, suggested an ambitious theory of environmental aesthetics in his book, "Psychology and the Aesthetics of the Built Environment" (Ewing *et al.*, 2006), and tested his theory by a survey with more than 41,000 people with different demographic backgrounds from 21 countries. Stamps' theory offered a separation between emotions and precise definitions

of physical objects (2000:97) and proposed two distinct "clear concepts" groups for both physical objects and emotions, providing a detailed description of the framework in which those concepts should be considered. As a matter of fact, the main challenge with an aesthetic assessment is the difficulty in distinguishing emotions and design features. As regards physical objects, "clear concepts" provide description limited to spatial relationships and materials only. For the emotions, "clear concepts" are meant to provide description in terms of intensity of pleasure, arousal, and intensity and polarity of influence. As a matter of fact, the only information required for the purposes of an aesthetic evaluation, is how the intensity of pleasure is connected with the physical properties of the projects (2000:97).

Stamps' approach is important for moving the aesthetic debate towards a conceptual ground. Environmental aesthetics may especially provide an important framework for understanding and defining the aesthetic domain of architectural design in the 21st Century. Accordingly, the present study aimed to understand the aesthetics of architectural taste in the 21st century, vis-a-vis Stamps' theory and accordingly investigate 12 projects that received the RIBA Stirling Award between 2010-2012 based on the concepts suggested by Stamps.

The main goal of the study was to suggest a conceptual ground that would facilitate the debate on and assessment of today's architectural aesthetics. The present study also included below sub-objectives:

- Investigate the aesthetic reflections of the 21st Century architecture;
- Investigate design inputs emphasized by the architects;
- Analyze the issues that had an impact on the new aesthetic understanding.

Even though the study investigated a comparatively limited sample, the projects included in the sample received highly prestigious RIBA Stirling Award, and therefore the results of the study will have a valuable contribution in the relevant literature.

2. Material and Methods

The present study aimed to better understand the aesthetics of architectural taste in the 21st century. Accordingly, the theoretical framework suggested by Arthur Earl Stamps was borrowed, and twelve projects, which received the RIBA Stirling Award between 2010-2012 were included in the scope of the study. Stamps proposed two different sets of concepts for the purposes of aesthetic assessment. The first is related to emotions, while the other is related to design features. On the grounds the fact that the projects in question were evaluated/liked and received RIBA awards, it was assumed that the emotions domain of Stamps's dual concepts, had already been completed, and eight concepts as suggested by Stamps to determine the aesthetic properties of physical objects are used as a tool of assessment. The fact that the globally recognized RIBA Stirling Award was the most established architectural award program in the United Kingdom and that the competition and winner projects were comprehensively covered in reputable magazines such as Architects' Journal and Dezeen, justified the selection of the RIBA Stirling Award program as the field of study. Twelve projects included in the scope of the study were analyzed based on technical drawings and visuals against the eight concepts suggested by Stamps. The graphical representation of the methodology employed for the purposes of the study is given in Figure 1.

<p>Environmental Aesthetic It forms an important framework both in the emergence of the architectural product and in its evaluation</p>	<p>Theory of Arthur Earl Stamps Eight concepts suggested by Stamps for determining the aesthetic characteristics of a physical object</p>	<p>Study Field 12 projects that received the RIBA Stirling Prize between 2010-2022</p>	<p>Visual Analyses Analysis of projects technical drawings and visuals within the framework of Stamps's eight concepts</p>	<p>Results In terms of today's architecture; "determination of aesthetic reflections", "putting forward design inputs", "analyzing the issues that determine the aesthetic approach"</p>
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Fig. 1. Study method

The eight concepts used in the assessment are explained below.

Physical object: The physical object concept envisages a set of materials, which are located at select points in a 3D space, including all the spatial associations among the said points. Physical objects entail materials and spatial and temporal forms. (2000:38).

Architectural facade: Terms of silhouette, surfaces, and normals to the facade plan comprise the pillars for a description of architectural facades (2020:39).

Shape complexity: A shape complex is associated with the physical concepts of number of rotations and symmetry in the silhouette (2020:39).

Wholes, parts, details: Each partition, part, trim, ornament, detail, and texture is measured proportionally to the original unit (2020:43).

Subjective measure of visual detail: There are three factors, namely ornament, trim, and texture, and for each factor there are three levels: none, a medium amount, and a high amount (2020:49).

Bulk, massing, facade articulation/The relationship between mass and fenestration: Stamps identified four design features in his survey, including visual space, horizontal or vertical partition, window and facade articulation based on previous studies. The results indicated that the most effective variable was the relationship between mass and visual field. Accordingly, Stamps suggested to take the relationship between mass and fenestration as a basis (2020:53).

Character: Stamps showed via his surveys that character would not need a definition in terms of context, spirits of place, social accords, or other indistinct notions, but instead, offered three design features, including style, number of floors, and type of roof as sufficient to determine the character (2020:58).

The visual commons: Stamps defined this concept as visual accessibility and suggested that nuances in visibility and simple geometries could give a rise to significant outcomes (2020: 64).

2.1. Study Field

12 projects that received the RIBA Stirling Prize between 2010-2022 were identified for analysis in the scope of the study. The RIBA Stirling Prize was named after the famous architect James Stirling and each year awards different projects in various categories and criteria from accessibility to sustainability, and design to vision. For the purpose of the study, the projects that received the Prize before 2010 were excluded. The analyzed projects, name of the relevant building, year of construction, year it received the award, and the architect are given in Table 1.

2.2. A Review of Projects by Stamps' Eight Concepts

In this section, 12 projects that received the RIBA Stirling Prize were analyzed based on 8 concepts of Stamps, including Physical object, Architectural facade; Shape complexity; Wholes, parts, details; Subjective measure of visual detail; the relationship between mass and fenestration; Character; and the visual commons.

Table 1. Projects in the scope of the study

Name of the building	Year of Construction	Year Received the Prize	Architect
MAXXI Museum	2009	2010	Zaha Hadid
Evelyn Grace Academy	2010	2011	Zaha Hadid
Sainsbury Laboratory	2010	2012	Stanton Williams
Astley Castle	12 th Century/2012	2013	Wetherford Watson Mann Architects
Everyman Theatre	19 th Century/2013	2014	Haworth Tompkins
Burntwood School, Wandsworth	2013	2015	Allford Hall Monaghan Morris
Newport Street Gallery, Vauxhall	2015	2016	Caruso St John Architects
Hastings Pier, East Sussex	2016	2017	dRMM
Bloomberg London	2017	2018	Foster + Partners
Goldsmith Street Council Housing	2019	2019	Mikhail Riches with Cathy Hawley
Award postponed until 2021 due to COVID-19 pandemic			
Kingston University Town House	2020	2021	Grafton Architects
Magdalene College, Cambridge	2021	2022	Niall McLaughlin Architects

Maxxi Museum: Stamps' first concept, i.e., the physical object was manifest at Maxxi Museum in the form of concrete walls, steel, and glass achromatic color palette. As regards the architectural facade, the building creates a feeling of infinity thanks to its fluid lines and presents a multiple facade appearance. In terms of shape complexity, there is a lot of rotation in the silhouette. Asymmetrical varied directional generous lines make the silhouette even more distinctive. Parts are not proportional to the whole. As regards the subjective measure of visual detail, ornament, trim or texture is at the none level. Instead, the form itself is prominent. No remarkable texture is visible. Only concrete surface, which offer a clean, clear image are visible. As regards the relationship between mass and fenestration, mass and fenestration are in balance with each other. This approach liberates the mass from being dominant and helps it present a more inviting image. The building features a deconstructive style. The irregularity of the forms creates the visual commons of the structure.

Evelyn Grace Academy: In Evelyn Grace Academy, glass surfaces in dark gray tones and metal frames surrounding those surfaces correspond to the physical objects. Unlike the Maxxi museum, glass walls and steel framing is prominent instead of concrete walls. As regards architectural façade, the soft turning lines in the silhouette become sharpened on the surface. The sharp turns seen on the façade present a locally asymmetrical and sometimes symmetrical layout. As regards the shape complexity, this architectural makes the structure even more vibrant. For the concept of wholes, parts, and details, the structure presents random-looking proportions. There is no trim, ornament or texture on the façade with regard to subjective measure of visual detail. Unlike the Maxxi museum, fenestration dominates mass. This gives the structure a lighter appearance. The building has flat roof lines, expanding horizontally. The most important feature of the deconstructive building is the dramatically inclined walls. Those walls also form the visual commons of the building.

Sainsbury Laboratory: As regards physical object, Sainsbury Laboratory offers a perfect harmony of concrete, wood, glass, and steel. The natural colors of the material

and the balance of warm-cold materials furnish the architectural facade with a calm, consistent, and elegant appearance. The said look is strengthened by the plain and clear silhouette contours dominated by straight lines. In terms of shape complexity, although the structure offers a simpler silhouette view, unlike other structures, sharp declines are still visible in the silhouette. The proportions of parts to the whole suggest a strong modernist approach. Accordingly, the part-to-whole relationship of the building is remarkable. As regards the concept of subjective measure of visual detail, there is almost no ornament, trim, and texture on façade. There is a balanced mass and fenestration relationship. Roof lines are linear, extending the building horizontally. In terms of style, the building possesses a modernist character. Regular symmetric linear repetitions and simple geometries are prominent elements as regards visual commons.

Astley Castle: Astley Castle is a restoration project unlike other projects in question. The project involves in placing a new building placed in the center of the 12th century relic. Therefore, an aesthetic review would require a special focus on interiors. The concept of physical object is of particular importance for this restoration project. This is because of the fact that the choice of materials is an important indication of why the building received an award. The materials in use both exteriors and interiors are local and natural materials. Not only the selection, but also the application and integration of materials is remarkable. There is both a harmony and a distinction between the new and the old. As regards the architectural facade, the historical texture is preserved on the façade and the renewed facade follows the existing ratio and order. For the shape complexity, the façade is set so as to remain faithful to the original silhouette. Each partition, part, detail, and texture is in harmony with the original proportions in the interiors. Those elements, on the one hand, differ from that of the original building in terms of being new, yet on the other hand, they create the impression of a whole in terms of proportion and texture. This allows the old texture to be perceived as an ornament. The building is a restoration project, and therefore analysis would be limited as regards the concept of mass and fenestration. On the other hand, while the architectural character of the 12th century is preserved, the new building is adapted thereto without being hidden. The concept of visual commons is evident in this project as regards the relationship between old and new.

Everyman Theater: The Everyman Theater is also a converted old building similar to the Astley Castle. After a 19th century chapel was converted into a theater in the 1970s, it was renovated as a theater building by Haworth Tompkins. The building possesses interesting characteristics as regards the concept of physical object. Accordingly, the moving sunshades are the material of choice on the façade, covered with life-size human images. For the architectural facade concept, the public façade of the theater features a striking image. Moving sunshades with life-size images of more than a hundred people furnish this façade with a dynamic and eye-catching appearance. As regards the shape complexity, the structure is symmetrical on one side and asymmetrical on the other. Upon a review of the building based on the wholes, parts and details concept, the moving sunshades with visuals on the main façade offer a strong modular layout. Those parts constitute two-quarters of the whole. The triangular details added to the front of the window and extending towards the street on the other façade can be considered as a modern interpretation of the traditional. The texture on the façade is rated as high amount based on the concept of subjective measure of visual detail. As regards the relationship between mass and fenestration, the solid mass has a dominant appearance on the rear facade. In contrast, fenestration dominates the mass on the front. Sustainable design

approaches on the front and the traditional surface of the rear furnish this building with an interesting character. The height of the front is shorter compared to the rear. This may be associated with function of the building at the time it was originally built and the conditions of the period. The concept of visual commons is evident in the relationship between the old and the new in this project similar to the Astley castle. Nevertheless, different façades create different commons. For instance, while the elements on the back façade that extends towards the street constitute the visual commons of the rear façade, life-size human images on the front façade create their own visual commons.

Burntwood School: As regards the physical object concept, the precast concrete panels used on the façade of Burntwood School present a moving image. Those self-shading façade elements are arranged in various sizes and orientations. For the architectural facades, the building is shaped in line with sustainable features and also the physical environment in which it is located. Those non-repetitive precast panels are placed vis-a-vis the structural layout of the plan and the classroom modules. In the context of shape complexity, the silhouette is asymmetrical with gradual declination along the horizontal axis. As regards the concept of wholes, parts, and details, the units on the façade are not in equivalent dimensions and directions. Nevertheless, it is still proportional in terms of its relation to the whole. For the subjective measure of visual detail, the level of trim is rated as medium amount. No ornament and texture is visible. The building does not feature a heavy mass appearance. In this context, the building maintains a balance as regards the relationship between mass and fenestration. In buildings with a modernist character, the edges were beveled with an aim to break the perception of height, and gradual downward declination are incorporated to some buildings. Roofs feature straight, linear lines. As regards the visual commons, precast concrete panels of various sizes and directions on the façades underscore the layout, and thus improve the visibility of the structures.

Newport Street Gallery: The project consists of five buildings and brings together three Victorian era industrial buildings between the two new buildings. The project merges the old and the new, where new facades match the old facades by the choice of material in terms of physical object. The new façades lined with pale red brick are in harmony with the old façades. As regards the architectural facade, the silhouette presents two views of new buildings, one with a distinctive saw-toothed roof and the other with straight lines. The silhouette is in harmony with the old buildings by height. The façade, which reflects the extraordinary proportions of the period features blank walls at the top and the window groups below, contributing to the prominent appearance of the buildings. For the context of shape complexity, one of the new buildings is symmetrical while the other is in an asymmetrical order. Similar approaches are used in harmony with the old buildings in terms of wholes, parts and details concept. In terms of subjective measure of visual detail, the texture is rated as high amount. As regards the relationship between mass and fenestration, the setup is compatible with the buildings of the period. The roof lines of the new buildings, which are shaped in line with the characteristic buildings of the old Victorian era, are not exactly the same, albeit similar in a linear sense. The visibility of the five buildings along the street is further enhanced by the continuity of the buildings and the window openings on the façades.

Hastings Pier, East Sussex: This project included re-purposing of an old wharf area, which was destroyed upon fire, to accommodate a wide range of activities. The wood recovered from the fire was reused in the flooring and the furniture on the deck. Those recycled materials, which are used in line with sustainable design approach add a special

value to the project as regards the physical objects concept. Along with a glazed Pavilion, which is located on the deck and reminiscent of the greenhouses of the Victorian era, rising in a long arc plan, there is also a visitor center included in the project. As regards the architectural façade, both buildings are different from each other by silhouette and surface features. The pavilion serves as a restaurant and has a wide glass façade and two domes at each end of the long sides, where the height of the visitor center, a long rectangle in silhouette, is reduced at one end. Nevertheless, the landscape is a common feature in both design contexts. For the shape complexity, the pavilion is symmetrical and the visitor center is asymmetrical. As regards the wholes, parts, and details concept, there is a prominent modular layout. Texture is an important feature associated with the subjective measure of visual detail concept. This is because the wood texture is intensely felt across the deck. In the sense thereof, the texture is rated as high amount level. The relationship between mass and fenestration is different in the two buildings. While the mass dominates the fenestration in the visitor center, it is the opposite in the case of the pavilion. As regards character, the pavilion suggests Victorian greenhouses with its gable roof and domes on both sides, while the visitor center has a unique style that creates a sense of place and belonging. The most important visual common is the visitor center on the large deck considering the deck as a whole.

Bloomberg London: The project has a striking façade in terms of physical object. The floor-to-ceiling glazing façade is shaded with a series of large-scale bronze fins. The façade is prominent with its visual hierarchy and rhythm. The slope and density change by the orientation in each facade. Consisted of two buildings joined by bridges, the project features a modular façade as regards the architectural façade concept. Façades are almost symmetrical in the context of shape complexity. In terms of silhouette, the building presents a static image. As regards the wholes, parts, and details concept, the structural sandstone frames that shade the floor-to-ceiling windows as partitions are in a modular proportion within the façade. Similarly, the fins, serving as the details that occur within these modules and shade them, are also modular. These artfully, masterfully placed fins on the façades also serve as ornaments. As regards the subjective measure of visual detail, those fins are rated as high amount. Upon a review of the relationship between mass and fenestration, there is a balanced distribution. The buildings feature sustainable design features. Roofs are furnished with straight lines and are compatible in height with nearby buildings. The buildings present subtle, readily conceivable geometries from the exteriors. The fins on the facade constitute the visual commons.

Goldsmith Street Council Housing: In residences designed with a sustainable design approach, material of choice is an important design component. Upon a review with regard to physical objects, the cream-colored brick-framed windows and cleverly detailed bris soleils stand out as significant aesthetic elements on the facades. The façades are enhanced with the front gardens located at the ground level. As regards the concept of architectural façade, those features are suggestive of an aesthetic understanding that integrates with the environment and attaches importance to cultural and historical values. Buildings present a symmetrical silhouette as regards the shape complexity concept. Parts and details are proportional to the whole and thus no prominent and emphasized details are visible. Texture is rated as the high amount level. There is a balance maintained between mass and fenestration in buildings. The project reflects the historical and cultural making of the region in terms of character. The low-rise buildings and the mansard roofs of the elevations at both ends of the linear settlement further emphasized this character.

The materials, forms and layouts are continuous unlike the surrounding buildings, and thus give a rise to important visual commons.

Kingston University Townhouse: Kingston University Town House has interesting features in terms of physical object concept. The row of columns surrounding the exteriors of the building is perceived as a framework protecting the building. Bricks of various shades of red are used on the interior façade. Constructed of reconstituted stone, the exterior of those series of columns reflects the stone façade of the Surrey County Council building at the opposite, while structurally forming exterior cloisters that encourage movement in the exteriors. As regards the architectural façade, that mobility provides the building with an unobstructed space of entertainment. As regards the shape complexity, the front silhouette of the building presents gradual declination in the vertical direction. However, such declinations are not symmetrical. There are prominent rectangles in the façade setup formed by the rows of columns. Those rectangles of various sizes are modular in terms of wholes, parts, details concept. The brick texture of the facade, located behind the column series, which consists of different shades of red, is rated a high level in terms of subjective measure of visual detail concept. As regards the relationship between mass and fenestration, exterior corridors ensure the dominance of the fenestration over the mass. For the character concept, the building offers a modern interpretation of Northern European architecture with its flat roof and externally perceptible floor levels. Those colonnades also make up the visual commons.

Magdalene College, Cambridge: The New College Library of the Magdalene College is remarkable for its materials reflecting the tapestry-like texture of the old College buildings in terms of the physical object concept. The materials of choice include wood and bricks. Those durable and sustainable materials reflect the physical environment enjoying a sensitive historical setting. As regards the architectural façade, regularly spaced chimneys and the gable roofs between those chimneys are remarkable. Those elevations and breaks in the front façade create a vibrant silhouette. For the shape complexity concept, this movable facade is symmetrical. Each partition, parts, detail, and texture offers a modular layout with respect to the whole. In terms of subjective measure of visual detail, the texture is rated as a high amount. There is a balanced relationship between mass and fenestration. The interiors are filled with light, thanks to the clever layout of the fenestration. The building integrates with the surrounding historical texture in terms of character. Chimneys extending upwards on the roof, hipped roofs, and window details are the strong elements that contribute to the visual common of the building.

2.3. Results

For the purposes of the study, 12 projects that received the RIBA Stirling Prize were analyzed via-a-vis eight concepts of Stamps. The results were demonstrative of the fact that those award-winning projects shared certain design features. The results are listed in the table 2 by the concepts of Stamps.

3. Discussion

The present study analyzed 12 projects, which were the recipients of the RIBA Stirling Prize, based on eight concepts of Stamps. It was found that the aesthetic approach incorporated into the architects' designs emphasized the human-culture-nature relations. In the cases of the Goldsmith Street Council Housing, Kingston University Town House, Magdalene College's New College Library, and Burntwood School, the aesthetic

approach was based on maintaining strong ties with the locality, reflecting the traces of social memory, and referencing historical and cultural textures without imitating them. Similarly, the aesthetic elements included the contrast between the new and old materials in use in the Astley Castle project, the roof profiles referring to the Victorian era with a modern perspective at Newport Street Gallery, the reuse of materials bearing the traces of life in Hastings Pier, and the cultural values on the façade of Everyman Theater reflecting the public sensitivity. The permeability between landscape and building was the result of treating nature as an aesthetic element in the case of the Sainsbury Laboratory project.

Table 2. Results by the eight concepts of Stamps

Physical object	As regards the physical object, the projects fell into two groups. The first group included Maxxi museum, Evelyn Grace Academy, Burntwood School, and Bloomberg London projects, which featured concrete, glass and steel as materials of choice. Unlike traditional materials, those materials offer a modern appearance both on the material plane and in terms of their combination. On the other hand, traditional materials such as wood and brick found frequent use in other projects. Those materials with sustainable and ecological features, are also specific to "place" and culture.
Architectural Façade	As regards the architectural façades, Maxxi museum features curvilinear fluid lines, while Evelyn Grace Academy has façade arrangements with sharp angles. On the other hand, Sainsbury Laboratory, Everyman Theatre, Burntwood School, and Bloomberg London projects share subtle, clear, and legible silhouette lines. The façade features are different in each building. In contrast, the facade arrangements are designed so as to integrate with the physical environment in the Goldsmith Street Council Housing, Newport Street Gallery and Magdalene College's New College Library projects. In those projects, both the façade arrangements and the silhouettes maintain features that reflect the history and culture of the region.
Shape complexity	As regards shape complexity, the projects featured both asymmetrical and symmetrical silhouettes. The silhouettes of the Maxxi museum, Evelyn Grace Academy, Sainsbury Laboratory, Burntwood School, and Kingston University Town House are asymmetrical. Those projects sustained mostly straight linear lines and gradual declinations.
Wholes, parts, details	For the wholes, parts, details concept, modular layout was a shared feature in almost all projects. Notwithstanding above, there was no modular layout in the cases of Maxxi Museum and Evelyn Grace Academy.
Subjective measure of visual detail	As regards the concept of subjective measure of visual detail, texture is a common feature in most projects. For instance, the texture of natural materials are prominent as significant elements that improve the visual power of the projects in the Newport Street Gallery, Hastings Pier, Goldsmith Street Council Housing, Kingston University Town House, and Magdalene College's New College Library projects. On the other hand, the facade of the Everyman Theater offers a strikingly visual texture. The Maxxi museum, Evelyn Grace Academy, and Sainsbury Laboratory projects do not feature trim, ornament or texture. In Bloomberg London, on the other hand, fins serve as ornaments on the façades of buildings.
Bulk, massing, façade artic. /The relationship between mass and fenestration	As regards the concept of the relationship between mass and fenestration, there were two approaches adopted in the projects. While the relation between mass and fenestration maintained a balanced in the cases of Maxxi Museum, Sainsbury Laboratory, Burntwood School, Bloomberg London, and Magdalene College's New College Library projects, fenestration dominated mass in the façades of Evelyn Grace Academy and Everyman Theatre. Mass was dominant over fenestration in Astley Castle and Newport Street Gallery projects in line with the existing layout of historical facades.
Character	As regards the concept of character, the Maxxi museum and Evelyn Grace Akademy featured deconstructive designs, where the Sainsbury Laboratory, Burntwood School, Bloomberg London, and Kingston University Town House offered a relatively modern and sustainable approach to design. The original style was preserved in renovation projects. Furthermore, Kingston University Town House, Newport Street Gallery, and Magdalene College's New College Library projects ensured harmony with the historical texture of their physical environment.
Visual commons	As regards the concept of visual commons, the projects fell into two groups: The projects with geometric layouts created visual commons and those with textures created visual commons. For instance, the linear arrangements on the façade of Sainsbury Laboratory, the geometries of various sizes and orientations used in the facade of Burntwood School, the modules and fins in the modules that make the facade of Bloomberg London distinctive, and finally the linear column series used in the facade of Kingston University Town House were the projects, which featured geometric visual commons. The visual commons were comprised mostly of brick and wood in the other projects. In Everyman Theater, these were the visual images.

The projects in question also accommodated sustainable design strategies. In the sense thereof, sustainable design approaches, as well as aesthetic elements reflecting the cultural dimension, were important aspects that determined the aesthetic aspect of those projects. For instance, sustainable strategies were an important design input that shaped

the form and façade in the Bloomberg London project. The use of recovered materials in the Everyman Theatre, as well as the moving sunshades that created a large screen, were not the merely features that made the building sustainable but also served as elements that defined the aesthetic qualities of the building. The aforementioned qualities were a common trait of all the projects in question.

In this sense, the results of the present study are indicative of a new aesthetic understanding in the 21st century, which is based on cultural aspects and sustainable design approaches that include nature. Although certain architects, including Peter Eisenman, Wolf Prix, Harad Rostvik, Lance Hosey, and Peter Buchanan argued that sustainable architectural structures could not be aesthetic at the same time (Frampton, 2011; Hosey, 2012; Jauslin, 2011; Rostvik, 2011), there are other architects, who think to the contrary and even describe that approach as the new aesthetic understanding of the architecture in the 21st Century. To mention a few, Heringer and Roswag (2016) suggested that sustainability and beauty were synonymous. Berleant (2016) underscored that aesthetic understanding had become an important paradigm for sustainability. Yeang (2006) advocated that sustainability would make significant contributions to aesthetic values. As a matter of fact, for Berardi (2013) cultural awareness and inspiration were an integral part of sustainable buildings. Accordingly, a study by Grazuleviciute-Vileniske et al. (2021) showed that sustainability had the potential to revolutionize architectural aesthetics.

Valid for at least for the 12 projects in question, sustainability, both in terms of its cultural aspects and being environmentally friendly, was considered as a source of inspiration in today's architecture. This aesthetic approach, as emphasized by Hagan (2001) can be considered as the expression of a new contract between culture and nature.

4. Conclusions

The ever-changing architectural realm has been reshaped during the last 30-40 years thanks to both the evolution of digital tools and the economic boom. The present study aimed to understand the aesthetics of architectural taste of the 21st century, and accordingly 12 projects that received the RIBA Stirling Award between the years 2010-2022 were reviewed based on the eight concepts introduced by Arthur Earl Stamps. The aesthetic reflections of 21st century architecture can be summarized as follows:

- Mostly sustainable, local/cultural materials with ecological benefits were preferred in the use of materials.
- Rather subtle, clear, legible proportions, straight linear lines, and modular layouts are dominant in façade arrangements.
- The use natural materials such as stone and brick with high visual power were preferred over decorative elements, including ornament, trims, etc. on façades.
- There is a balanced relationship in-between mass and fenestration.
- Sustainable design strategies in ecological and socio-cultural context dominate the designs with regard to the character concept.
- There are two prominent approaches with regard to the visual commons on the façades, namely geometrical layouts and textures.

Architects adopt considerations based on human-culture-nature relations and sustainable design approaches as design inputs. In the new aesthetic approach, for example, historical references are not meant to convey meaning upon changing place and dimension as in the post-modern period. On the contrary, history and culture are

considered a design input to reinforce the connection of the building with its vicinity and to reflect the social memory thereof. This approach also overlaps with social sustainability conception. Furthermore, sustainable design approaches that take environmental and ecological factors into consideration also offer a novel aesthetic image.

The fundamentals of the new aesthetic understanding seem to be associated with certain global issues, including climate change and the related global warming and energy crisis, as well as the strengthening of social cohesion. This new aesthetic understanding with strong ties to social and environmental sustainability can be used by architects, policy makers, and urban planners makers to improve sustainability in the design of future projects.

Although the present study included a comparatively small sample with an aim to understand the aesthetic qualities of today's architecture, may contribute in future studies by offering a conceptual basis. In the context thereof, the study may help close the gap in the relevant literature. The study also provides the future similar studies with a methodology that would help with analyzing different types of architectural projects or comparing award-winning projects from different regions.

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