



# dekleva gregorič arhitekti

# Profile



METAL RECYCLING PLANT  
Pivka, Slovenia, 2005-2007

SHOWROOM PERTOT  
Trieste, Italy, 2006-2007



Prizes such as the International Architecture Award 2009 from the Chicago Athenaeum Museum or the "Europe 40 under 40 Award" for young, upcoming architects are nothing new for dekleva gregorič arhitekti, nor the attention that comes with them. They recently received two other awards: for the metal recycling plant in Pivka, Slovenia and the Pertot bathroom showroom in Trieste. At first sight these projects might have little in common. But they share the same approach and design strategy. "Challenging the obvious" is the motto embraced by Tina Gregorič and Aljoša Dekleva and is applied to object design, buildings and urban planning concepts alike: The space to be designed is dissected, structured and shaped – generally on a model; the context is analyzed, its boundaries explored; imaginary users are devised and materials tested. They themselves often joke about their investigative and systematic, at times pragmatic approach. "Our buildings have to be smart, but naturally we also want them to be attractive."

Tina Gregorič won competitions and realized her first such projects while she was still studying in Ljubljana. Aljoša Dekleva, a graduate of the same architecture faculty was a partner at Enota, another young, Slovenian architect's office. Together the couple went to London to the Architectural Association (AA). They completed their studies with a project that attracted international acclaim "Negotiate my boundary!" – a study of individuality, participation and mass production in house construction. Staying in London was a definite option for them. But they both wanted to build and Slovenia offered and still offers good opportunities for young architects to realize their own ideas. In 2003, they decided to establish their own office, and chose the relatively small Ljubljana as their base: Trieste and the Adriatic coast are just an hour away, the Balkan not much farther; Venice, Zurich, Munich and Vienna are within striking distance. A whole wealth of differing cultural influences.



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### XXS HOUSE

Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2002 – 2004

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**Aljoša Dekleva and Tina Gregorič**  
in conversation with Peter Zöch

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Their office is just a few minutes away from downtown Ljubljana, where the city's most famous citizen, Jože Plečnik, left his traces amongst other things in the Three Bridges and the covered market halls. Around the corner is the Miklošič Park designed by another famous local architect: Max Fabiani designed the square and model building after the 1895 earthquake.

Tina Gregorič and Aljoša Dekleva do not want their office to expand at all costs, and have kept their team a manageable size. They would rather turn down a job than be obliged to take on a not so interesting project for financial reasons. Their very first building, the XXS House not only filled the pages of international architecture magazines, but also demonstrated the architects' tenacity in getting their ideas accepted and realizing their plans. The unusual weekend house in the city for a couple from the country is in Krakovo, a listed medieval fishermen's village in the heart of Ljubljana. The purist design met with opposition from the authorities. The architects had to go to the highest authority, in this case the responsible ministry to get the project accepted. They succeeded.

Some 80 percent of the contracts of Dekleva Gregorič stem from open competitions. At present they and their seven staffers are working on several of projects at different realization phases. There is the university campus in the coastal town Izola, a residential project with just under 200 apartments in downtown Ljubljana, or the master plan for a onetime tobacco factory. The already completed residential project L in Sezana was also the result of a competition. As project developers they reinterpret the traditional settlement models in a model that sets a counterpoint to an uncontrolled, omnipresent overdevelopment: an ambitious project.



# Interview



Aljoša Dekleva and Tina Gregorič  
in conversation with Peter Zöch

We are sitting on the second floor of a house dating back to the *gruenderjahre* at the conference table in the office-library. Tina Gregorič and Aljoša Dekleva are currently working with their team on another competition. Yet they take the time to talk at length. Their answers and thoughts complement each other, they are evolved, complemented, placed in relation and combine to produce a harmonious whole. You imagine their joint design process runs along similar lines ...

Your projects were recently on show in an exhibition in Hamburg entitled “Wild wild East”. How do you feel about such labels?

**Tina Gregorič:**

We feel and indeed have never really felt Eastern bloc either in the architectural or in the cultural realm or the political arena. But you get used to this categorization ...

**Aljoša Dekleva:**

You get used to this categorization even though we have always enjoyed a great deal of liberty in Slovenia. For example, as a child I saw “Flash Gordon” at a movie-theater in Trieste. I grew up not far away from there and probably spent more time there than in Ljubljana.

**The first project you realized, the XXS House in Ljubljana featured in numerous publications in the entire world. Were you surprised at the amount of press coverage you got?**

We feel and indeed have never really felt Eastern bloc either in the architectural or in the cultural realm or the political arena.



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## XXS HOUSE

Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2002 – 2004

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### Aljoša Dekleva:

Yes, of course. The XXS House received more attention abroad than here in Slovenia. The project is part of a discussion that may not be new but is nonetheless interesting. How should we build in a historic environment and how are we to respond to preserved or listed buildings. This is also a major topic for the media and architects outside Slovenia.

### Tina Gregorič:

Really it all started with the Six-Pack exhibition, a traveling show about young, Slovenian architects. It was shown abroad before the house had even been completed. While we were receiving international awards the reactions in Slovenia tended to be mixed. I even remember reading somewhere that the house had received a prize for "Bunker Architecture" ...

**You are saying the XXS House had an impact on international discussion? On how we should deal with historical substance?**

### Aljoša Dekleva:

Yes, that was remarkable. Foreign magazines always featured the house with images from outside, a view of the street, with the house as part of the environment. They were not just interested in the building as an aesthetic object, but also what the object really means and what it relates. And how you build in a certain setting and a defined context. This is also how we understand our projects, we always refer to the context.



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Aljoša Dekleva and Tina Gregorič  
in conversation with Peter Zöch

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Every project is an experiment for us, whose origins and outcome we constantly question.

**Referring to the XXS House the critic Maja Vardjan wrote: "A private house often remains the only field for experimentation open to architects in Slovenia." You are also doing research in other projects, on varying scales. Has the situation in Slovenia altered or have you since altered your approach?**

### Tina Gregorič:

Fundamentally, every architect wants to try things out. And every project is an experiment for us, whose origins and outcome we constantly question. It is about volume, context, the materials or the like. In the 1960s there was an interesting regional direction in our modern architecture history, "contextual Modernism". We are not alone in citing this period, a majority of the young generation of Slovenian architects does the same.



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**HOUSING L**  
Sezana, Slovenia, 2004-2005

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Why is architecture different from other arts? Because it incorporates people.

**Aljoša Dekleva:**

We do not see architecture as a service we provide but rather as a creative act. Holiday homes offer us the greatest liberty to be creative. The owners tend to be less open to experimentation when their regular house is at stake. After all, they spend more of their time there. (The XXS House is actually a weekend house in the city for a couple that lives in the country.)

**So how would you personally define good architecture? Could you express that in words?**

**Aljoša Dekleva:**

Naturally, you can best communicate what you understand by good architecture by building it. Good architecture must respond to the context, what is already there – either the buildings in the area, social circumstances, the materials or the political setting.

**Tina Gregorič:**

Another essential aspect for us is how the user is involved and how the space responds to him. I think it is naïve to create a space for interaction without considering the context, the subtle relationships. Why is architecture different from other arts? Because it incorporates people. A book does not exist if it has no readers; it is the same for art. And this is all the more so for architecture. Architecture does not exist without people [to use it].

**You work on different scale projects from object design via interior architecture through to urban planning. Does your approach differ depending on the scale of the project?**

**Tina Gregorič:**

Our fundamental approach is always the same: whether it is a door knob or urban planning. We just ask different questions. For example, in small projects we think more about the materials.



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**HOUSING L**  
Sezana, Slovenia, 2004-2005

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**Aljoša Dekleva and Tina Gregorič  
in conversation with Peter Zöch**

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We try to integrate sustainable principles but without producing a typical model solution as the anticipated outcome.

**How do you handle the topic of sustainability in architecture?**

**Aljoša Dekleva :**

“Don’t build anything if you want to be sustainable!” is the first thing that springs to mind. It was the lead story of an architecture magazine not so long ago. Of course, it is an issue: If this society is to survive then we must behave in such a manner that the entire system can survive. We must try out new things. For our metal recycling plant, for example, we constructed a building that can be completely recycled.

**Tina Gregorič:**

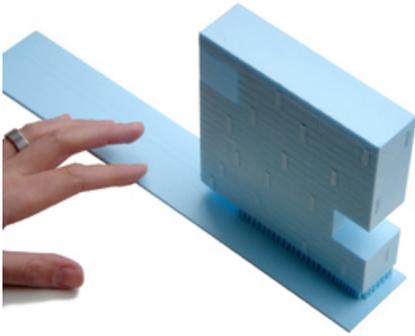
You should not get lost in small details as regards sustainability in architecture but see things more globally, in relation to urban planning. The first questions you should ask are: Do we really need to build so much? How can we recycle buildings? Are there alternative usage models? We need a more in-depth discussion – more than the question about photovoltaic systems on roofs. We try to integrate sustainable principles but without producing a typical model solution as the anticipated outcome.



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**METAL RECYCLING PLANT  
Pivka, Slovenia, 2005-2007**

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Can you describe how you go about your work? Is the design process team work?

**Aljoša Dekleva:**

It is always team work, but not just by the two of us, the entire office is involved. We discuss all the ideas and questions. When we were designing the door handle there were only two proposals in the end...

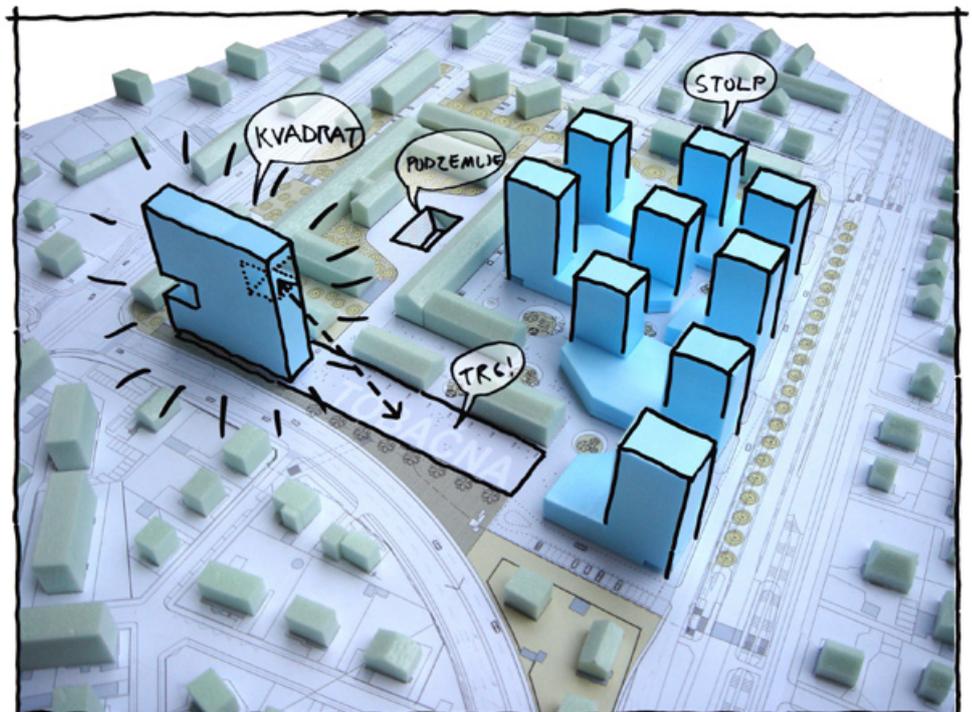
**Tina Gregorič:**

We always work with models. That facilitates the discussion over architectural proposals and spaces. What's more, computer models are a useful tool. In fact, there is always a series of analog and digital models that we work with simultaneously.

**Aljoša Dekleva :**

We need the digital version for the technical realization while the classical model helps us develop the spatial ideas. It enables direct feedback, especially in a group discussion.

TOBACCO FACTORY AREA  
Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2008-



You studied in London and Ljubljana. Which city had a stronger influence on you?

**Aljoša Dekleva:**

Well really everything you do has an influence on you. So both places are of equal importance. In London gaining international experience played a major role for us—more than the additional qualification.

**Tina Gregorič:**

Distance makes you more critical. When you have spent a certain time abroad you question your status, your work and your situation at home. Our time in London was a luxury. For one-and-a-half years we could concentrate on and research a single thing. At home we always have several projects on the go simultaneously. Living in a metropolis certainly influenced us to the extent that today we have to visit another city every three months at least.





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**SHOWROOM PERTOT**  
Trieste, Italy, 2006-2007

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Temporary places of residence simply offer an ideal basis for experimentation.

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**CONTEMPORARY VILLAGE**  
Dol pri Vogljah, Slovenia, 2008-

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**Aljoša Dekleva:**

Generally, individual buildings influence me more than cities. I cannot say this nation produced good architecture or this architect is good, but rather this building interests me. In other words we relate much more to certain buildings and products rather than persons or cities. For example, you could say that Jože Plečnik has influenced us. But it is actually the staircase in a church he designed that we remembered when we designed the stairs for the XXS House.

**Do you have a favorite project and why? What would you like to build?**

**Aljoša Dekleva:**

I like the bathrooms showroom in Trieste best. It was simply a fun project. The Pertot brothers were looking for something unconventional and were very open to new ideas. And I still like it a lot. You can go there and push toilets around in a circle. Whenever I go there I shove a toilet around, as all the fittings are on steel trolleys.

And I would like to see our contemporary village realized. Because it is my home. It simply has to be built so we can show that high-quality housing development is possible. We would like to show that you can preserve typical development forms that have come about over centuries and still live in a contemporary house.

**Tina Gregorič:**

I would like to design a kindergarten and a small hotel. When you re-define spaces used for education you can influence people's development. It is really important architecture because an entire generation spends so much time in kindergarten and school. A small hotel for the reasons we discussed earlier. Temporary places of residence simply offer an ideal basis for experimentation.

*Peter Zöch conducted the conversation.*

*Peter Zöch studied Landscape Architecture in Vienna and Manchester, as well as Communication Management at Danube University Krems. He is a member of the editorial staff at the international specialist magazine Topos, The International Review of Landscape Architecture and Urban Design, is a book author and specialist journalist working for daily newspapers and specialist media. In 2009 he was guest critic of the Architectural Association for Landscape Urbanism.*

# Works

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## XXS HOUSE

Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2002 – 2004

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## HOUSING L

Sezana, Slovenia, 2004-2005

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**SHOWROOM PERTOT**  
Trieste, Italy, 2006-2007

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**METAL RECYCLING PLANT**  
Pivka, Slovenia, 2005-2007

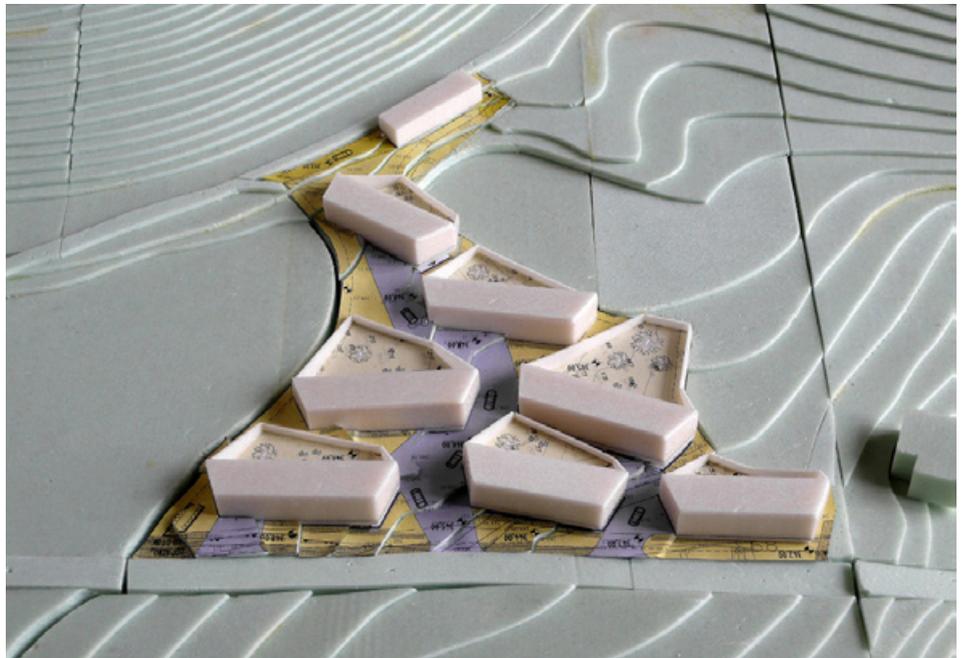
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TOBACCO FACTORY AREA  
Ljubljana, Slovenia, 2008-



CONTEMPORARY VILLAGE  
Dol pri Vogljah, Slovenia, 2008-



CASA GRANTURISMO  
Silves, Portugal, 2008-

