



# ARCHITECT OF A NEW WORLD

PHOTOS: BENJAMIN A. MONN

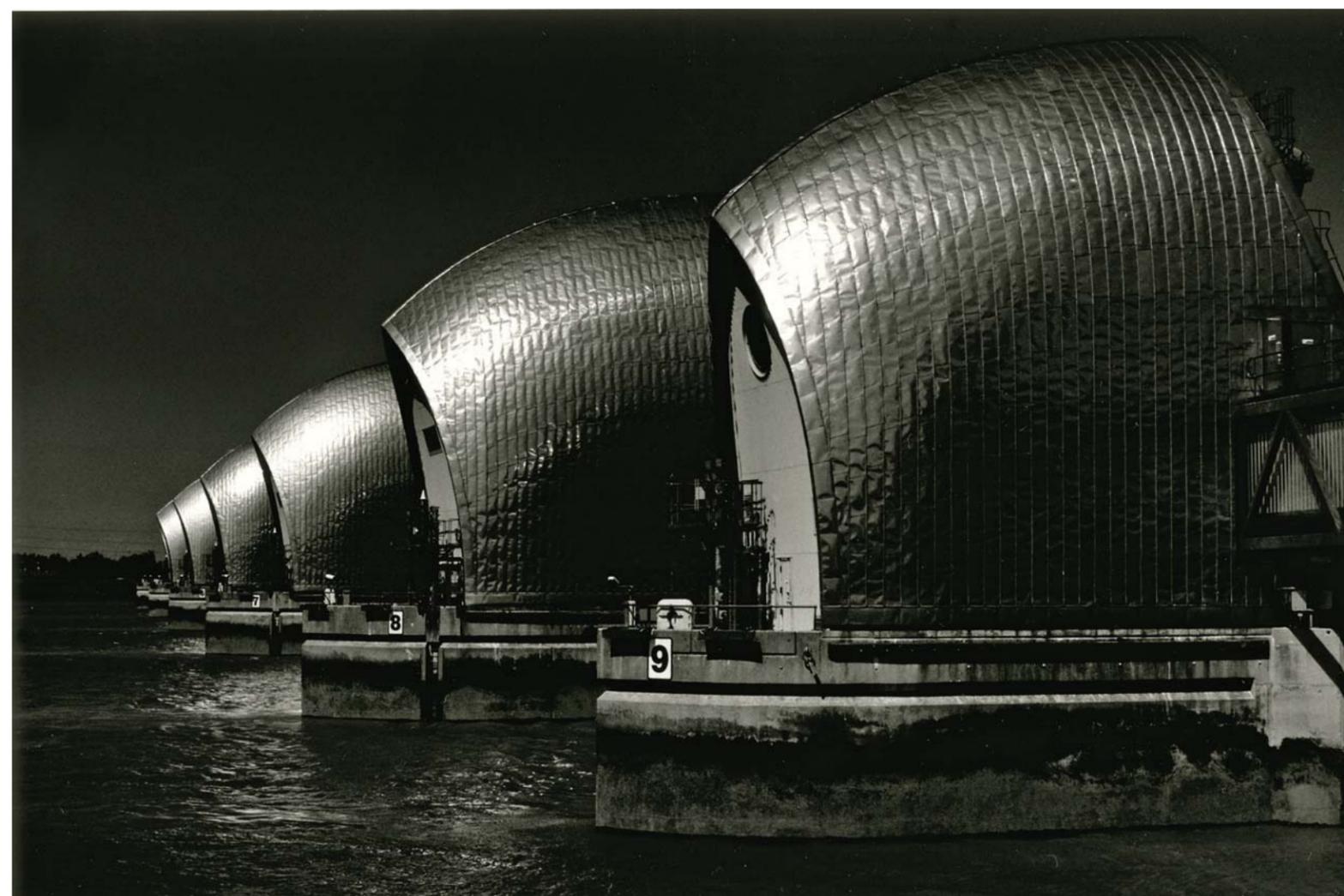
Young photographer Benjamin Monn has a particular way of marrying impulse with structure. Equipped with a Leica R8, he travels the world over on a quest for unusual architecture – sometimes with a definite plan for his subject, other times leaving everything up to chance. His burning desire is to create an anthology of contemporary architecture. And to transform the photographs he takes into imaginary spaces of his own.

The sculpture 'Light of the East' stands  
on a traffic island in Pudong in Shanghai – 2006

The National Bank of Dubai  
by architect Carlos A. Ott (left)  
was opened in 1997. The  
façade is warped and creates  
fascinating reflections – 2006



Lucky shot: Monn came  
across the 'Thames Barrier'  
(1984) flood control structure  
on the outskirts of London by  
chance – 2005





Inside the Zurich law institution, opened in 2004. It was designed by Spanish architect Santiago Calavatra – 2006

Key piece: the New Pinakothek interior in Munich was designed by Stephan Braunfels. This is Monn's best-selling photograph – 2002





London 'City Hall' by Norman Foster (left) was opened in 2002. The stairwell in the foreground belongs to a separate building. The hand-rail leads the viewer to a new perspective – 2004



Stairwell of 'Jantar-Mantar' observatory (opened 1734) in Jaipur, India (above) – 2006; Templo Debod, Madrid, from the fourth century (below left) – 2005; the dome of the New Pinakothek – 2007





The central signal tower in Basel (above) was built by Herzog & de Meuron in 1998. Monn photographed it at night with a long exposure – 2006



Giant, accessible strips of marble at the 'Jantar-Mantar' astronomical observatory (right). It is considered one of the world's most culturally independent and timeless buildings – 2006



Designed by Frank O. Gehry, the 'Vitra Center International' in Basel stands in the middle of a rather unspectacular residential and industrial area – 2006

All things build upon others. Everything has a multitude of purposes. It all fits together eventually, one way or another. For someone who has a tendency to think on several levels simultaneously, this rings especially true. Benjamin Anthony Monn boards the train where others get off. One of his passions is rearranging something old and turning it into something new. In fact, this is something of a family tradition; raised by a graphic-artist mother and painter/music-producer

spent two years working under the auspices of producer Roman Kühn, learning how to use Avid editing systems, honing his eye and experiencing the film business first-hand. To this day, Super 8 remains his preferred medium. Having gained some insight into the world of pictures, he decided to do an apprenticeship as a foreign language correspondent. "This would allow me to work from anywhere in the world," he explains. Monn is a keen traveller who apparently sees

Since then, Monn has been oscillating between customers in the commercial and artistic worlds, slowly turning his passion into his bread and butter. Early photographic attempts are still lying idle. From extensive travels in India (2006) and South Africa (2005) he returned with a wealth of photographs rich in colour and detail. The latter gave rise to four dummy copies of a picture book entitled 'Africa by Bus', an allusion to the album by reggae legend Bob Marley. His snaps

discovered his fascination for lines, structures and contrasts. The photo on page 65 was the cornerstone for his later work.

Monn finds most of his subjects in modern contemporary architecture, trying to capture as much of it as possible. His goal is ambitious: to create a black & white anthology of modern architecture. "As far as I can tell, nothing like this has ever been done before," he says. On his quest for form he frequently comes across the big names of the

mounts his Leica R8 camera with various lenses: the Elmarit-R 28 mm f/2.8, the Summicron-R 50 mm f/2 and the Apo-Summicron-R 90 mm f/2 Asph. The hours he sometimes spends setting up his equipment for the right perspective are matched by the time he'll while away philosophising with his maths professor friend about whether or not the 'right perspective' can be quantified in numbers. "In my opinion," he says, "there is only one perspective of each subject that will

opens up new possibilities. Abstract form is versatile and can leave the viewer completely disorientated, and Monn embraces this in his work. Harking back to his editing days, he uses a computer to create collages, transforming parts of a façade into a new object. The architecture is dissembled, rotated, mirrored and flipped upside-down. "I build my own rooms for the eye to wander around in," he says.

Benjamin Anthony Monn has already learned to wander skilfully between art



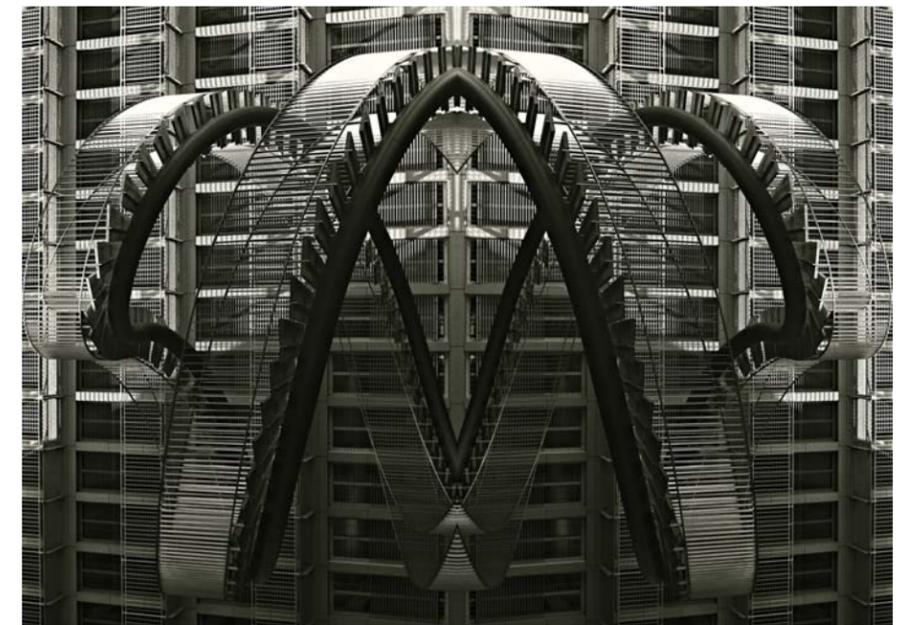
The hourglass-like stairwell at the art museum of Bonn, Germany, designed in 1987 by Axel Schultes – 2005



A minimalist graphic representation of the seats of 1972's Olympic racetrack in Munich – 2005



Room for fantasy: reassembled façade elements by architects Tadao Ando and Renzo Piano – 2007



Collage 'Helica', taken from the façade of an office building using a stairwell by an unknown artist – 2005

father, there was always room for experimentation in Monn's home.

Monn, born in 1978, has been attracted to pictures ever since he can remember. It was inevitable that one day he'd start making imagery of his own. "I've always bubbled over with ideas about how to make pictures better and different," he says. After finishing school he delved into the world of motion film, where he

little point in waiting around. After his apprenticeship, he took his experiences in film and leapt into photography. With no reply from the photo design school 'Lette Verein', Berlin, he spent 2002 to 2003 working as a photo assistant at 'Art in Action', a photography studio in Munich. This was where mentor Monika Sedlmayr put him on to advertising and interior photography.

from Rajasthan might still be waiting to be discovered, but there is so much to do in the meantime – why wait? Today, his journey appears to have taken him in the opposite direction. His current perspective is more abstract and pure.

In September 2002, Monn photographed a section of the museum 'Neue Pinakothek', right after it opened in his hometown of Munich. It was then that he

architecture scene, but this is not what inspires him. Big names or small, interior designs or exterior – it doesn't really matter. What matters is form, and the interplay between light and dark.

Monn has a clear vision about how he wants to compose his subjects. When he is working his restless dynamism transforms into pure concentration. He prefers to work with a strong red filter and

deliver the result I'm looking for." It might as well be his photographic creed. Monn's photography is all about looking beyond the immediate image; as he takes the shot, he will already have envisioned what he'll be doing with it afterwards.

His photos do not mark the end of an artistic home stretch. Instead, he sees them as essential to the next step of the process; the abstractness of the subject

and acquirer. "Buyers aren't interested in printed computer files – they want real prints," he says. And so he commissions specialists to expose his Photoshop files onto negatives, distributing his print-outs in highly limited editions. "Everyone sees something different in my pictures," Benjamin Monn explains. And no-one knows what he'll do with them next.

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