

Richard England's superb monograph

RICHARD ENGLAND - THE SPIRIT OF PLACE

Preface by Maurizio Vitta,
Introduction by Richard England
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L'Arca Edizioni, Milan, 1998.

Architect Richard England has recently rewarded us with his latest publication – the 14th – a superb monograph that focuses on a selection of the vast projects that he has undertaken in the architectural field. This publication offers the reader a chance to see the sculptor, photographer, poet and painter working together in this architect.

The book is about Richard England's creative architectural life and serves as a platform to express his ideology of architecture as well as a manifestation of his love for his native island of Malta. He expresses the latter in the way he describes the natural rock available on the island, the intelligent use of this ethnic stone in an environment of limited and restricted resources, in the way he describes the golden colour of the quarries and the sensations evoked by the visual experience of the individually-cut piling cubes that are bound to form an organic whole in a building.

Richard England expresses the parametres of his search in terms of a philosophy of continuity within change. He writes:

"I have always attempted to graft my buildings to ethnic roots, in the process manifesting my belief that architecture must relate to and evolve from the 'Spirit of Place', but also always be contemporary in its expression..."

The book reflects England's good use of the progressive technological facilities at hand while at the same time demonstrating his respect to the history, heritage and identity of the place. The location serves as the "springboard" for initiating an endless series of sketches that many times are developed by the artist-architect into sensitive drawings (even paintings, before everything goes back to the drawing board) and are interpreted in terms of an architectural design.

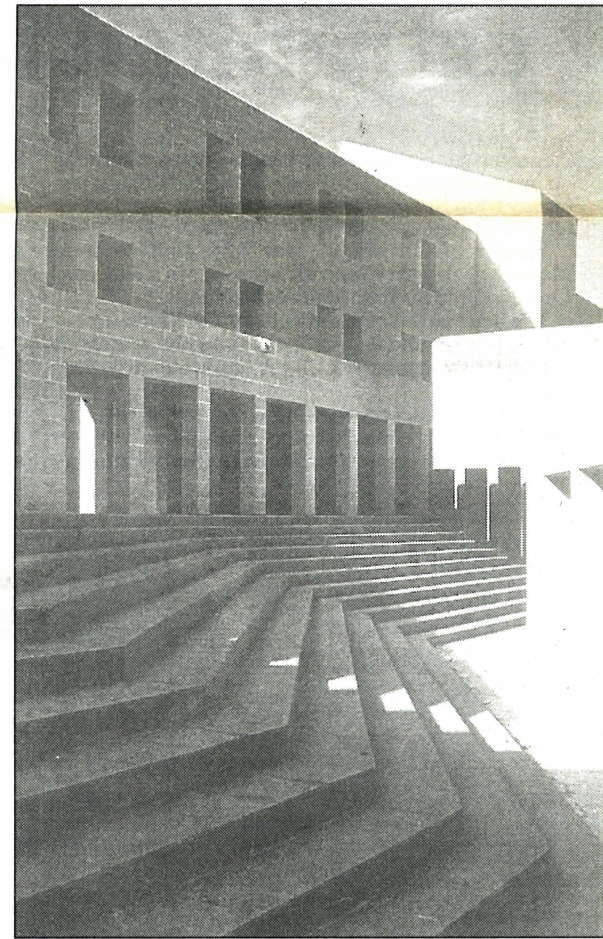
While on a particular site, England studies the geography, the topography, the climate and the materials – what he calls the physical data – but then moves on to the memory data which incorporates the tradition, culture, legend and history of the place. The past is the starting point he brings in the new

Joseph Paul Cassar

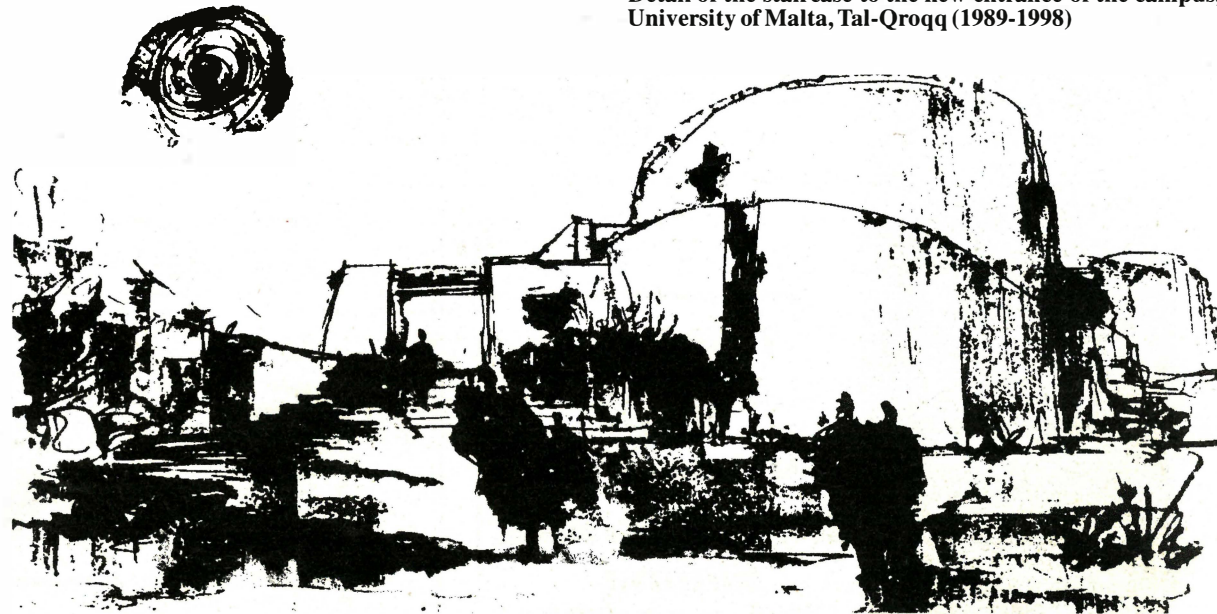
elements but not at the expense of the old.

Richard England works towards striking a balance by drawing the best of tradition and blending it with scientific modernism. This leads to what the artists defines as "respect to the delicate fabric of the particular site" which asks for the architect's humility. Such a process requires an investigation not only of that which is visible in the place but also of those elements which are not easily indetificable and yet make their presence felt on the site. He says: "To know a place one must know its memories."

The monograph is about the author's vocation to understand the place he is building in order to discover in the process what the place wants to become. This lavishly illustrated project shows the architect's mind and heart working together.



Detail of the staircase to the new entrance of the campus, University of Malta, Tal-Qroqq (1989-1998)



Preliminary sketch for church of St Joseph, Manikata (1962-1974)