

Errare Humanum Est.
Errors, Mistakes and Failures
in Design – Execution – Use

COORDINATOR:
Prof. Dr. Arch. Ana-Maria DABIJA

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© COORDINATOR: Ana-Maria DABLIJA

© AUTHORS: Fani VAVILI, Artemis KYRKOU, Paola DE JOANNA, Antonio PASSARO, Radu SFINTEȘ, Anda-Ioana SFINTEȘ, Valentina CETEAN, Radu FĂRNOAGĂ, George TUDOR, Dragoș MATEI, Ala BUZILAN, Casian CIUREZU, Andreea PETRE, Mara ȘERBAN, Irina TATOMIR, Maria Alexandra GHICA, Monica DRĂGHICI, Andreea Elena ISTRATE, Silviu-Daniel ARNĂUTU, Irina SARĂU, Ana-Maria AVRAMESCU, Adelina BURULEA-DRAGOȘ, Elena GUGUILĂ, Eliza VOICULESCU, Andreea DĂNILĂ, Catrinel PASCU, Ioana SCĂRLĂTESCU, Marta ZDRENCIUC, Elena CLAPAN, Mara IANCUȘ, Simona MARICA, Azaria Bianca RUSU.

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for Prof. Em. Dr. Arch. Emil-Barbu Popescu

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FOREWORD

First it was an optional course, some 20 years ago, in the last year of study; then it moved to the Master's programme; then back as an undergraduate course; eventually it was eliminated and I reinvented it, as a workshop, in my last year as a professor in the "Ion Mincu" University of Architecture and Urban Planning, in Bucharest, Romania.

In fact, it was a logical development, in three acts, of the Architectural Detailing Courses: the mandatory two-semester course was followed by an optional course on Contemporary Products and Systems (which, in fact, illustrated the use of details in subassemblies) and everything was wrapped up in a last part of the trilogy: Mistakes and Failures in Design – Construction – Use, an optional course that was emphasizing the consequences of poor design / execution and maintenance.

Part of this theory is written in the book *Failures of the Building Envelope*, published at Editura Universitară Ion Mincu, in Romanian language – in fact a synthesis of the early courses.

Some failures are recurrent; therefore, it is worth mentioning the causes, so that they can be avoided. There is a world of mistakes and faults that can be made, why repeat the same old ones? We can be creative in this field as well (and, as an expert in building pathologies, I had the chance to see that human imagination has no boundaries in improvising solutions that lead to... failures).

Almost from the beginning, the idea of the course was to bring together, in the class, professionals from different areas: architects, engineers, geologists, different specialists in building components... to speak about failures in their field of activity. Therefore, it was a lively and interactive course, very much appreciated by students as well as by the guests. And yes, it takes courage and responsibility to speak about your mistakes (and, believe it or not, architecture is also the art of compromise). What I always told my students is that the first sign that you are on the way of becoming an architect is when

you... see; when you understand what is happening, when you can tell right from wrong and intention from failure. One thing that I have learned – and it was a motto of the course – is that we can only see what we can understand (sad but true). As previously mentioned, although much appreciated by the students, the course was dissolved a few years ago.

During the first semester of the Academic year 2022-2023 – my last year as professor in the “Ion Mincu” University of Architecture and Urban Planning – I had the surprise of my life when some of the students from the optional course of Contemporary Products and Systems declared that if I organize something... they will come. Really? This group of young and enthusiastic students made me think: what should I organize for them, if they want to continue to listen to me!? And this “seed” germinated: why not organize a workshop? Somewhere nice, where we would be together and learn and visit and enjoy...

...and the idea was passed on to Anda and Radu Sfinteş, my wonderful team who backed up many of the projects I carried out in the University as Professor, Vice-Rector and later as Director of the Center of Architectural and Urban Studies.

...and Răzvan Dobre, the director of Glamour Floors, stepped in and offered us a lovely location in Satul Banului, in Prahova, with the possibility of visiting architectural monuments like the Potlogi Palace, the Little Trianon Palace in Floreşti, the Bellu House in Urlaţi, the fabulous jewels that are the Măgureni and Filipeştii de Pădure churches, painted by Pârvu Mutu, and other restored or abandoned historic sites.

...and why not benefit of the knowledge and experience of professors from abroad – with whom I have collaborated throughout the years and who gracefully accepted to come and take part in the workshop... So the team grew with Prof. Em. Dr. Arch. Fani Vavili from the Aristotles University, Assoc. Prof. Dr. Arch. Paola De Joanna from Federico II University in Naples, Adjunct Prof. Dr. Arch. Artemis Kyrkou from the International Hellenic University...

...and as we deal with building materials, why not have a geologist to speak about the failures in architectural stone choices and products... and we benefitted of the knowledge of Dr. Geol. Valentina Cetean from the Geologic Institute...

...and let's add some specialists from the building product market – the ones that were my guests in many lectures throughout the years: Dragoş Matei from AGC Glass, Vasile Urzică from Daw-Benţa, Marius Olteanu from Siniat...

...and as we are so close to a factory of architectural Aluminum Systems – Alumil – why not see it and have a presentation from their staff...

...and as we are in a rural environment, why not have an architectural competition on the revitalization of a community space...

So the workshop became a multi-faceted studio, where old and new, correct and failed, work and play, sun and rain intertwined in five days, two months of home-work and a jury session for the students' outcome.

As always in the past decade, I am thankful to Assist. Dr. Arch. Radu Sfines̃ and Lect. Dr. Arch. Anda Sfinteş who took the lead and managed the teams of students during the workshop and in the phase of the students' competition.

And, last but not least, I am forever grateful to Prof. Em. Dr. Arch. Emil-Barbu Popescu, whose help and support kept things going and led to the success of this endeavour. Unfortunately for us all, he will not see the outcome of this complex workshop. This book is dedicated to him.

Prof. Dr. Arch. Ana-Maria DABIJA
corresponding member of
the Technical Academy of Romania