

# A10



#52

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### (Masterpiece extended)

has begun to take on an almost domestic character – a familiar face now wondering how to start up a conversation with its exotic neighbour. The new building is also a vessel containing a memorable world of meandering promenades, tranquil destinations, unexpected light sources and glimpses of the outside world, both near and far. Against current UK construction orthodoxy, the poured concrete structure defines as well as gives character to the spaces within, composing them with white-painted planes of narrow, horizontal timber-shuttered walls and voluptuous, glassy-smooth sculptural *canons de lumière*. It promises to be the most hospitable of buildings, inviting us to both explore and to dwell within; a setting for, and a retreat from, creative work. (CHRISTOPHER PLATT)

### Reality check

## Compromised conversion

**ALICANTE (ES)** — In A10 #34, we featured the winning proposal of an international competition for the conversion of a disused railway station into a new home for the Casa Mediterráneo, a publicly funded cultural organization that aims to promote relations between countries around the Mediterranean Basin. Now, about four years later, the design by Manuel Ocaña has finally been realized.

Ocaña's original proposal consisted of a wide central space accented in blue, flanked by two new buildings attached to the existing side elevations and hosting an auditorium and office spaces. The design retained the existing external structure, the facade and the graceful internal metal structure, while inserting new, innovative constructions into its interior.

But the global financial crisis and rapidly declining building sector was already a fact in 2010, and in the months following the announcement of the winner, local media and newspapers were quite pessimistic about the future of the project. After some months, construction was halted. Finally, in February 2012, the government again gave the green light to the project and construction proceeded, but with significant changes. The budget was reduced by 90 per cent – the initial allowance of five million was cut to 500,000 euros. The result of this tragic reduction was the elimination of the auditorium and most trans-

formations of the central area, which now functions as an empty blue space available to be rented for private events.

The lateral naves of the former railway station in the Benalúa district have been transformed with the bare necessity of changes to make the space suitable for offices and administrative affairs. This follows a leitmotif of 'less is more' and puts into practice an exemplary economic, environmental and architectural post-production strategy that can be readily readapted and expanded when the economic situation allows it. It has therefore also resulted in a reformed occupation and transformation protocol for heritage-listed buildings; a new scenario in which old buildings and citizens empathize with each other, feeding the flame of memory while avoiding any nostalgic concession. (GONZALO HERRERO DELICADO)

Casa Mediterráneo cultural centre, 2010–2012 **Architect** Manuel Ocaña  
**Architecture Client** Casa Mediterráneo **Address** Oscar Esplá Road, Benalúa Train Station, Alicante **Info** [www.manuelocana.com](http://www.manuelocana.com)



## Energy-conscious tree

**BELGRADE (RS)** — Serbian architect Miloš Milivojević created an elegant design for a public solar charger for mobile devices, developed by the Strawberry Energy company. The design is conceived as an artificial tree that transforms solar energy into electricity, thereby joining the surrounding natural trees in a common struggle for a planet richer in oxygen. Just as a real tree absorbs CO<sub>2</sub> and releases oxygen, making the environment cleaner, the so-called Strawberry Tree Black uses clean solar energy and produces no detrimental substances. In this way, it also contributes to the reduction of global CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and makes Tašmajdan Park, where it currently stands, that much greener.

The steel construction is more than three and a half metres long and four and half metres tall. The square surface at the top of the solar charger is covered with nine thin-film glass solar panels and nine supporting glass panels, which simultaneously act as a roof, protecting against adverse weather conditions. This solar cell structure is itself carried by an artificial treetop of eight steel branches.

A wooden bench large enough to seat a number of people is positioned in front of Strawberry Tree Black. Charging points on stretchy cords hang from a metal bar mounted on the bench, and all the necessary technical aspects for the functioning of the station are placed in a steel box hidden inside the bench. (MIODRAG NINIĆ)

Info [www.milivojevicmilos.com](http://www.milivojevicmilos.com), [www.senergy.rs](http://www.senergy.rs)

