

Deconstructivist Architecture: “I never try to make anything beautiful.”

by [Christopher Miller](#) (December 2020)



The never-completed and now-abandoned *City of Culture of Galicia*, Galicia, Spain

One question which often circles my mind: will the future of architecture be bleak or full of promise? On one hand, I am optimistic. A minority of voices are starting to be heard acknowledging the damaging effects of contemporary urban environments, also the body of evidence accumulated in more recent years hailing the psychological benefits of traditional architecture is welcomed news. But at the same time, I have little faith in architecture's redemption. It cannot be ignored that countless acres are currently being covered in

parking lots and lifeless concrete condos at a startling pace. The scale of this enterprise can be almost too much to bear.

Unfortunately, the woes facing architecture today was highlighted in a recently published article. It was [announced](#) that Peter Eisenman—famous Deconstructivist architect—was awarded the [2020 Kanter Tritsch Medal](#). The prize is awarded to an “architect who has changed the course of design history, with a particular focus on the areas of energy conservation, environmental quality, and/or diversity.” While it is not clearly stated how Eisenman has affected these areas, I can say with absolute certainty that Eisenman is in no position to be awarded prizes.

Deconstructivists like Eisenman have in many ways ruined the reputation of architectural professionals. Deconstructivists do not wish to render the world a more beautiful place to live. Their ultimate goal is to create an architecture which is alienating, and anxiety inducing. For roughly one hundred years architecture’s demise has been extensively recorded, but the age of Deconstructivism will be remembered as one of its worst periods. However, clever marketing would like you to believe that Deconstructivists are heralding a new era of golden architecture; this, of course, is humbug.

Eisenman is considered a sort of high priest among Deconstructivists. Frequently cited for being one of the most important 21st century architects, Eisenman has swooned many professionals. Chair and Miller Professor of Architecture, Winka Dubbeldam said:

Peter always pushes the boundaries of architecture and has given architects so much to think about over the past 50 years. And then there is his stunning built work: Who else could have created the Holocaust memorial in Berlin? It is such a social space of healing.

In spite of the laurels, Eisenman's career is full of troubling details, which are too great to ignore. Not only are his works fantastically awful and crossed ethical boundaries, Eisenman openly confesses his indifferent attitude to the welfare of his users.

Eisenman was born on August 11th, 1932 to Jewish parents. He attended post-secondary school and eventually earned his Ph.D. from the University of Cambridge. His first glimpse at recognition happened when he became a member of the *New York Five* in the 1970s. Around this time Eisenman's designs were usually white exterior surfaces in simple geometrical shapes, much in the vein of Le Corbusier.

Eisenman around this time was commissioned by Suzanne and Richard Frank to design a 1500 square foot home, which was completed in 1975 and called House VI. Eisenman designed the home with no care for utility, technology, aesthetic value, or context; he was only interested in his "geometrical transformations." The result was a sort torture chamber. Noteworthy peculiar features: an upside down staircase (of no obvious use); a glass section in the floor, wall, and ceiling, preventing husband and wife from sleeping in one bed; a useless column which hovered above the dining table separating dinners. Some years later, the house suffered terrible roof leaks and assorted other structural problems, requiring an expensive two year renovation.

Other than being a bizarre home, House VI represents a new journey for Eisenman. The style for which he is known would come years later, but he had successfully taken on for the first time—or at least first documented—an attitude which placed users at the bottom of his hierarchy of importance.

A highly successful exhibition was held in 1988 in New York's Museum of Modern Art. It was described by Philip Johnson, curator of the exhibition, in the book *Deconstructivist Architecture*:

It is a confluence of a few important architects' work of the years since 1980 that shows a similar approach with very similar forms as an outcome. It is a concatenation of similar strains from various parts of the world.

Eisenman was invited as one of the exhibition's contributors, and along with others, displayed models and renderings. Eisenman was given the opportunity to design the first major public Deconstructivist building which was completed in 1989.

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