

TOWARDS A PICTURESQUE CITY: THE USE OF COLOR IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF MARIO JOBST

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ABSTRACT

The development of contemporary Serbian architecture is largely marked by the complexity of styles, forms, techniques, and technologies, as well as experimentation in the field of colors and forms. Architect Mario Jobst (Belgrade 1940) stood out as one of the prominent protagonists of the author's branch of architectural inventiveness. From the beginning of his design career in the seventies of the 20th century until the present day, Jobst nurtured an authentic expressive system, simultaneously developing it in wholes and fragments alike. The recognizable author's signature of the architect is primarily based on his usage of bright red color, accompanied by inherently striking constructions and applied forms. Unquestionably talented and extensively creative, he designated a colorful decorative layer in established, architecturally complex, but coloristically often homogenous neighborhoods. Effective urban rappers were proclaimed by the originality of the built fabric.

The paper focuses on the use of color in Mario Jobst's architecture, its representation, regularity systems, and contexts of perception based on the creation of a visually refined vivid environment. In accordance with the fact that architecture is simultaneously an art and a technical science, its setting cannot be limited to museum and gallery spaces, but in the case of implementation, it is materialized in the urban fabric. Following the above, the role of an observer of the architectural work is taken by every person who is in its immediate vicinity, which makes it possible to explain the effect that the colorful architecture of Mario Jobst causes not only in professional, scientific, and circles of the interested public but also in the wider strata of citizens and passers-by.

KEYWORDS _ *Architecture, urbanism, Mario Jobst, color, decorativism*

INTRODUCTION

The development of architecture in the area of post-war Yugoslavia was simultaneously oriented towards the reparations of the damaged fund and the cultivation of the collectivist spirit. The destruction caused during the Second World War by the occupying forces covered a wide range so during the peacetime period construction was started in accordance with the new, socialist sociopolitical order. The territory of the People's Republic of Serbia, and especially Belgrade as the capital, took on the role of a permanent construction site in the following decades. The area of New Belgrade emerged as a new urban and administrative center, where the architect Mario Jobst (1940) created striking buildings at the end of the century (Fig. 1).

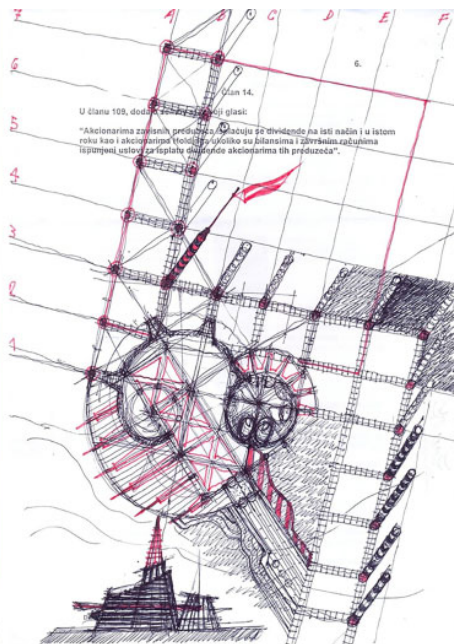


Figure 1: Mario Jobst. Photography taken by the author, March 24th 2025; **Figure 2:** Mario Jobst, architectural drawing, source: Маневић 2016: 20.

Generations of architects educated during the sixties of the 20th century met with lecturers of progressive vocations. In addition to nurturing the collectivist spirit and the school of housing, the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Belgrade produced numerous experts focused on original architecture and experimentation, among whose ranks Mario Jobst was placed. He enrolled in architecture studies in 1962, after the conceptual and generational debates had already ended, and the primacy was taken over by the founders of new ideas who formed the spirit of improvisation (Маневић: 8). He graduated in 1971, and already during his early creativity work began to cultivate the use of raster in design, which later became one of the recognizable features of his work (Manević 2007: 6). After studying architecture, he worked briefly in the Belgrade branch of the Karlovac company *Jugoturbina* (1971-1972). At the beginning of the seventies of the 20th century, the architect Milica Šterić (1914- 1998) expanded the architectural section of *Energoprojekt*, where Jobst started working in 1972 (Manević 2007: 10). As Manević pointed out, the 1970s marked a period of learning and investing in the problems of complex construction work so that during the 1980s Jobst developed a personal author's expression (Маневић 2016: 11). Jobst's tendencies towards sculpturality, experimental forms and richness of color were already hinted at in his earlier works, which is why he introduced sophisticated visual benchmarks into the architecturally complex blocks during the execution of the buildings.

THE USE OF COLOR IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF MARIO JOBST

Architectural culture in the domestic area carried a long tradition of decorative refinement, which was nurtured transgenerationally directly and sporadically in the works of individual creators. Decorative and coloristic principles appeared in the works of creative builders as established dominants, temporary experimental outbursts, or particular elements. The diversity of the architectural heritage was conditioned by the historically complex periods of occupation, war, and peacetime, therefore the mechanisms of the search for expression in Serbian architecture were materialized through multiple stylistic heterogeneity. At the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries, the decorative refinement of buildings once again became the dominant characteristic of architecture in the Serbian cultural sphere (Manević 2003: 10).

Jobst experimented with colors and materials during his complex multi-decade creative oeuvre, whereby red color is visually predominant both in his projects and in the objects he produced. Drawings, sketches, and projects illustrate the nature of an architect who, in addition to a stable technical layer, nurtured design and color creativity, constantly striving for visual change, expression, and dynamism (Fig. 2). The structural assemblies of his works are composed of fixed elements in their original form, as well as complex variations of planes, masses, and surfaces. Cultivating the synesthetic perceptual model, he used color in a particularly binding way to the material, and according to his own understanding, white is inherently stone, blue in the form of glass represents the sky, and red is the color of pouring steel in ironworks (Dukić, Interview 2025). He strongly believes that red expresses joy, strength, love, and fire and that it marks *the spirit of the place by marking the place and matter* (Jobst 2000: 14). He also believes that the mutual influence of beautiful literature, painting, design, and tradition is inextricable and that nothing in the art should be *taken for granted* - therefore neither should architecture, which is simultaneously technical science and art (Jobst 2000: 14). Per the set premise, he treated architecture sculpturally, relying on the relationship between open and closed space, dynamism and mobility. Jobst's cultivation of coloristic-decorative principles is complex in meaning. On the one hand, he perceives red as the strongest color, while on the other hand, it is a refined form of stop-sight "stani-pogled", which is represented in icon painting. He was also fond of free drawing, as well as children's drawing, which resulted in the implementation of elements such as steel roosters, which indicated the residential purpose of the building (Dukić, Interview 2025).

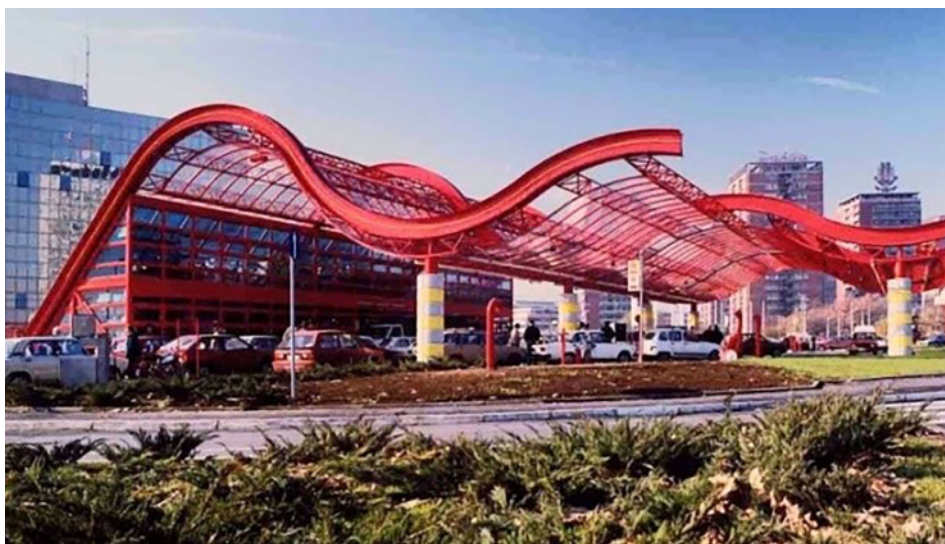


Figure 3: Mario Jobst, "Dejton" in New Belgrade, source: <https://kaldрма.rs/simbol-teske-decenije-i-dalje-je-naziv-dela-grada/>

Innovative architectural solutions in Jobst's oeuvre were equally nurtured through all the typologies he devoted himself to, and the architect's unique dynamic and coloristic treatment was also appreciated for the design of gas stations, among which the former Novobeograd station of *Jugopetrol* "Dayton" (1992-1995) stands out. The limited content of the closed part of the space corresponded with the development of the semi-open, which visually dominated the surroundings in the form of strong red waves and yellow accents (Manević 2007: 15). Dayton's canopy represented the dominant motif of the composition, and its undulating motion enhanced by bright red was an urban rapper at the entrance to the area of New Belgrade (Маневић 2016: 12). Mastering the principles of visual *softening*, Jobst contrasted the existing strong verticals and horizontals of New Belgrade with undulating forms that, following the coefficient of natural light, gave the impression of movement. Per Jobst's understanding of blue as inherently related to glass, and further - to the sky, the change in the visual identity of the purposefully red *Dayton* resulted in the degradation of construction and form (Fig. 3) (Dukić, Interview 2025).

Architectural historiography has greatly enabled the study of the architectural works of creative architects to not be limited exclusively to works materialized in space, and generations of researchers have tried to glimpse at the overall work of builders made up of carefully classified technical documentation, as well as drawings, sketches, competition, and conceptual projects. Empiricism has shown that projects with the highest rate of author's personal expression remained on paper, or were softened during construction so that only a smaller percentage of the work was executed under the architect's original vision. In the case of the creative charge of the architect Jobst, based on coloristic and decorative offshoots, among the most experimental solutions are dynamic, formally disjointed, and colorfully bold projects such as Hotel *Karuga* for the Fyodorov eye clinic in Russia (1992), Urbanistic-architectural solution of the center of Jagodina (co-author: Vladimir Marković, 1993), Urbanistic solution of the center of Kaliningrad (co-author Vladimir Marković, 1994), Gas stations *Jugopetrol* in Bor (1996) and *Jugopetrol gas stations* in Niš (1997). As one of the frequent coloristic and stylistic constants in Jobst's oeuvre, the projects that were supposed to be realized in Russia, as a rule, were inspired by the legacy of constructivism (Dukić, Interview 2025). As constructivism represented a revolution in architectural theory and practice and a fertile ground for experimentation in form and form, as an architect preoccupied with dynamics and movement, Jobst found inspiration there (Jakovljević 2003: 6). The architect cherishes a special personal affection for the *Karuga Hotel project* for the Fyodorov eye clinic following the effect of joy that an individual could feel after experiencing the movement and color of architecture after eye surgery (Алфировић 2013: 82).

RED COLOR IN THE URBAN LANDSCAPE OF NEW BELGRADE

Goethe (Johann Wolfgang von Goethe 1749-1832) in his *Color Theory* in 1810 presented the idea of the influence of color perception on the experience of emotions in humans and declared yellow, red-yellow, and yellow-red indications of positive feelings. In the 20th century, the theory was clinically observed by Goldstein (Kurt Goldstein 1878-1965), showing that red and yellow colors are stimulating and that they take on the role of the carrier of perceptual focus (Elliot & Maier 2014: 97). Based on their postulates, the latter theorists, within their own scientific fields and expertise, further deepened the issue of correlation between the visual and psychological aspects of *warm colors*. Personal perception, prevailing taste, and ways of cultivating visual perception are some of the elements of the perception of *beauty*. In addition, the colorfully enriched architecture is often rated as *pleasant* and *pleasant to look at*.

The frequency of the use of color in the urban landscape, both in primary and secondary architectural-urbanistic elements, as well as for marketing purposes requires responsibility and understanding of the impact on the quality of the urban environment. The set of environmental and spatial factors conditioned a set of regularities in human perception, whereby the presence of red color is inherently kinetic (Molanaie 2017: 12). The use of bright colors in architectural design affects the legibility of space - color is one of the elements that initiate a better quality of life in cities (Jaglarz 2023: 7).

In the case of New Belgrade, the use of bright shades of red at the level of optical perception creates the impression of a heterogeneous urban fabric. By introducing strong colored visual elements contained both in particular masses and in secondary furniture and accents, the found urban core is redefined, primarily created with the help of abundant use of natural concrete. The existing dominant color in the form of the green color of the park areas is complemented by red, initiating enhanced spatial dynamics. Color in architecture evokes direct reactions in the viewer.

Depending on numerous factors, among which the methods of application, shades, saturation, and contrast stand out, passers-by experience a degree of *satisfaction* with the environment, or *disapproval*. At the end of the 20th century and during the first decades of the 21st century, the area of New Belgrade was changed multiple times concerning the previously built matrices. In accordance with the transitions and changes that occurred in the modern age, the architectural-urban complex suffers constant complication and a lot of color oversaturation - primarily physically manifested in the abundant use of marketing expression. Despite this, Jobst's residential and business buildings in Block 12 stand out as permanent visual dominants materialized in the planned garments of New Belgrade.

CASE STUDY: BLOCK 12 IN NEW BELGRADE (1995-2005)

The residential and commercial buildings in Block 12 in New Belgrade were inserted as a new benchmark of New Belgrade, and the establishment of another center of citizens' gathering was announced as a solid unit. The urban matrix of the Block 12 complex was supposed to give birth to a solution to the problem of the lack of a square in the area of New Belgrade, and the importance of the location and the specific ambiance spoke of the need for a different architectural expression (Jobst 2000: 14). Building G in Block 12, located on the eastern wing, represented the initial phase of construction, followed by the central office building F and building E, which closed the western side of the square. The central space is flanked by the urbanistic positioning of buildings G and E in a reminiscent manner, while their architectural treatment with certain protrusions is similar. The building at the head also took on the form and decorativistic characteristic of Jobst, but a visual calming effect is noticeable, which in the optical perception plays the role of a kind of counterweight when observing the entire sequence. As object G was the starting point for the further shaping of Block 12, the observation of its architecture can be applied to a wider area. It is envisaged that the steel structure supporting the balconies of buildings G and E in Block 12 will be associated with full sails in motion, thus achieving the effect of architecture in motion (Fig. 4-6).

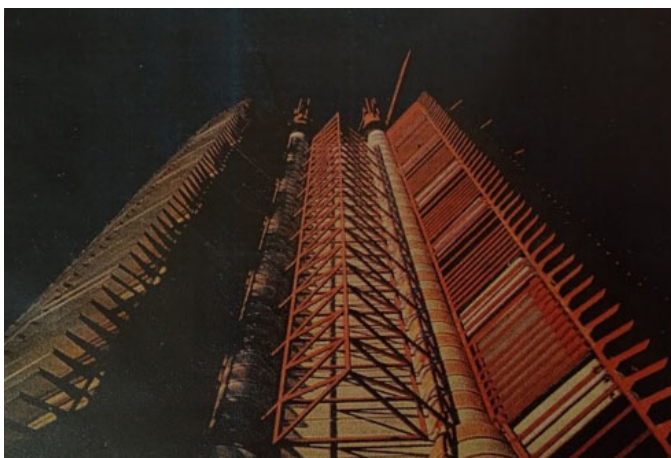


Figure 4: Mario Jobst, Building G in Block 12, New Belgrade, source: Bojana Mariček, second award for slide collection, published in: Политика, June 3th 2005: 17.

The size of the building required an architectural interpretation based on the postulates of *decomposition* - reducing the building to human-like dimensions. The used elements visually dematerialized the corner, turning it into a *sfumato cube with an impressionistic distribution of light and fluid contact with the sky, the background of the park, and other objects*. All the facades differ in their treatment, with the most prominent facade of building G oriented towards the park towards the Palace of Serbia, which is color-complimentary against the green areas (Jobst 2000: 15). In contrast to the formless dematerialization of the expressive-coloristic scheme and movement, there is the emphasized symmetry of object F, which gives the space the necessary solidity (Маневић 2016: 41). The original project for building F was complex and rounded, in the form of a ship-like silhouette, but the architect realized that its construction would introduce visual disorder into the block and that it was necessary to create a building that would present balance, equilibrium and peace (Алфировић 2013: 83). The color coefficient of the built tissue dictates the correct perceptual rhythm: red-white; white-red; red-white, with the central object representing a strong link. If the complex backbones of the block are viewed as a tension assembly of colors, materials, formal experiment, and multi-layered association - the central part is calm and the center of optical balance.

By using an abundance of details, Jobst gave the objects character through the subsequent sculpting and dispersal of the primary mass, moving away from the *Less is More* postulate implemented in architectural culture by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe (1886-1969). The way of applying the intricate design is coordinated with the treatment of accents and minute details. Secondary architectural-urbanistic elements in the form of contact with the sidewalk, planters, and greenery on the lift-houses were carefully worked out to realize a different life in that space. He also strove to aestheticize and incorporate inherently utilitarian elements into the urban landscape in harmony with the rest of the built fabric. In accordance with that, he purposely designed spaces for air conditioners in the form of red boxes so that they would not disturb the relationship on the facade (Dukić, Interview 2025).



Figure 5: Mario Jobst, Building F in Block 12, detail, New Belgrade, source: <https://www.dizajnzona.com/forums/topic/97347-moderna-arhitektura-u-beogradu-crvenkapa-nbgd/>

According to the testimony of the architect, the house must be the inspiration, protection, and something personal, and the atavistic architectural drive is expressed through the uniqueness of the object that the individual chooses for housing. In the case in question, he sought inspiration for the design of the apartments on the corner in the design of his own house, intimating the future space. On the linguistic side, it is important to refer to the terminology that Jobst uses in everyday speech -

the architect calls all residential objects *houses*, evoking a traditionalist-intimist character. In line with that, confirmation of Jobst's premises about inspiration is represented by instances in which future tenants purposefully aspired to choose these buildings as a place to live. Also, the instinctive positive reaction of children to the colorfully refined architecture of Jobst, which is based on the concept of *play* and *joy*, is noticeable (Dukić, Interview 2025). By projecting strokes of complex architectural-visual values, Jobst strove to give every individual the opportunity to find *a part of joy in the growth and metamorphosis of the city in which they live*. Accordingly, passers-by gained the privilege of perceiving and choosing another example of the author's architecture in the complex stylistic diversity of Belgrade, which, from their point of view, will represent a symbol of *beauty* (Jobst 2000: 16).



Figure 6: Mario Jobst, Building E in Block 12, New Belgrade, source: rememberingyugoslavia.com

CONCLUSION

Mario Jobst, as an architect of unquestionable talent, a wide range of knowledge, and an intricate sense of space, greatly contributed to architectural heterogenization. Through stylistic complexity and experimentation in the field of a range of colors and shapes, he nurtured an authentic expressive system. Jobst's creative oeuvre is dominated by the use of red, which took precedence both in drawings and in project documentation and materialized objects. He treated architecture sculpturally, nurturing the principles of dynamism and movement of space. Decorative-coloristic treatment, innovative architectural solutions, intricate details, and the synesthetic principle stood out as a set of regularities in his work.

In the case of New Belgrade, by introducing strong colored visual elements, he redefined the found city core, primarily created with the help of the abundant use of natural concrete. He gave character to objects through intricate design, sculpting, and dispersing primary masses. He devoted himself to minute details in the same way as to primary masses, creating an eloquent total design. Jobst believes that a house must be an inspiration, protection, and something personal, and guided by this principle, he created architectural solutions with strong layers of meaning. By designing buildings of complex architectural and visual value, he enabled tenants, users of business and commercial spaces, and passers-by to *find joy in the growth and metamorphosis of the city*. In accordance with the above, it is concluded that the architect Mario Jobst contributed to the picturesqueness and property of *positive optical perceptions* of the urban fabric of the New Belgrade blocks.

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