

Editorial

A new era finally dawns on Valletta

This is a momentous week for Valletta or, rather, the entrance to the city.

On Saturday, Genoa-born Renzo Piano unveils his plans for the new City Gate and its immediate environs, namely Freedom Square and the Royal Opera House ruins. He will not only publish his sketches but, more importantly, Mr Piano will explain the philosophy behind the whole project and that, one augurs, should be good enough reason why his effort, backed by long years of experience, world successes and evident architectural genius, ought to win widespread support. It should also fire the enthusiasm of all those who, rightly, have been insisting on an entrance fitting a city that is also a World Heritage site.

It does not mean that everybody should or, indeed, would agree with everything he says and proposes. However, his undoubted expertise and the professional manner in which he goes about his business will surely allay fears that have often been expressed when certain projects are proposed, one recent glaring example being the St John's Co-Cathedral museum extension. Because of the way in which that project was communicated to the public, almost a fait accompli forced down many people's, including staunch objector', throat it led to resistance. And, as usually happens, resistance begets more resistance and the project had to be stopped and did not even go through the whole development process.

The City Gate project seems to have been handled in a different manner. True, when announced by the Prime Minister late last year he did say, perhaps unwisely, that Parliament would be moved to the Royal Opera House ruins. That opened a can of worms. To his credit, Lawrence Gonzi later specified that nothing was writ in stone.

What few realised was that, as the public debate raged on whether the Royal Opera House should be rebuilt as it once stood or whether it should serve as a theatre or a Parliament building, Mr Piano and his men were conducting studies in the area, including excavating part of the road to see what lies beneath. What is more, Mr Piano himself evidently spent a lot of time in the area and reflecting about what lay before him and what Valletta had "to say".

In this issue, The Times carries an interview it had with Mr Piano a few days ago in his studio in Paris (video highlights of the interview can also be seen on timesofmalta.com throughout the day and a video recording of the whole interview will be posted this evening).

In this interview, Mr Piano makes two statements: one that the crucial Parliament building will be constructed on Freedom Square and, two, that the opera house ruins

will be retained, embellished and turned into an open-air theatre seating 1,200 patrons and which also could offer opera. He explains that, though open air, the proposed theatre would be well protected.

What is immediately evident here is that Mr Piano did not restrict himself to the ideas Dr Gonzi had expressed when he first announced the project. He went beyond and strove to strike a balance and explained his reasons why this balance is necessary.

Mr Piano makes a very significant point in his interview when he warns that history is best betrayed when one comes up with a fake. It is against that background that his project should be viewed.

TF

Comments

martin borg (10 hours, 4 minutes ago)

Like many others I wait with bated breath to view and read Renzo Piano's designs and philosophy regarding the revamped entrance to Valletta.

Your editorial gives cognisance to the fact that Piano has spent substantial time on the ground getting a 'feel' of the entrance to the city and it is to be assumed that his designs will reflect his findings.

It would be naive to expect that his end result will be accepted and acclaimed by all and sundry. Many of Piano's works elsewhere have resulted in controversy.

Whatever the case, its about time that Malta bites the bullet and progresses towards the removal of the current eyesore that goes by the name of City Gate, giving our capital city the entrance it deserves.
