

## City by a gentleman

# 'Time has come to repair and cover sins of the past'

Herman Grech, Ariadne Massa



**A model of the new entrance to Valletta.  
Photo: Chris Sant Fournier.**

The nation finally got to see the new-look entrance to Valletta last night, which the Prime Minister said would be delivered within budget and on time.

Lawrence Gonzi said he was determined to challenge sceptics who doubted whether one of the most ambitious initiatives by a government could be completed within the four-year deadline.

Designs for Valletta's City Gate €80 million project, sketched by world-renowned architect Renzo Piano, were unveiled during a simple but effective ceremony in Republic Street.

The new Parliament building will be elevated on stilts over Freedom Square and take on a more compact appearance than the current House; the Opera House site ruins will be transformed into an open-air theatre and City Gate will be demolished to create a more modest and meaningful entrance, while restoring Republic Street as the capital's spine.

"All this started 25 years ago. It didn't work then, so why should it work now you may ask. This is a better scheme; it is about civic pride, there is nothing private. Before we were trying to mix the sacred with the profane," Mr Piano told the 1,000 guests gathered to watch his presentation.

"We have learnt the lessons and we are better architects today; we are listening more to the little voices... by listening to the weak voice of the ruins we needed 25 years to understand," he said.

Mr Piano said it was quite unusual to expose so much of the project at this early stage and it showed the power of dialogue. The designs were created after six months of ping-pong discussions with the government.

Dressed in an open-neck shirt, which contrasted with the formal attire of the officials and guests, Mr Piano spoke passionately about his love affair with Valletta. He spoke about how he never liked City Gate, because it looked like a motorway that was going nowhere, and how he felt it was "fake" to try and rebuild the ruins.

The government's original proposal to switch Parliament to the former opera house site was shelved after it was deemed too small. A modern opera of conventional size would equally not fit in this place considering today's requirements for rehearsal, backstage facilities and accessibility, besides generating exorbitant running costs.

Thirdly, the ruins of the opera house had achieved the status of a monument and this was why Mr Piano felt the plans should embrace the ruins' memory by consolidating them and dignifying them into an open-air theatre for 1,200 people.

Lawrence Gonzi promised the works for the "beautiful, exciting and adventurous" project would start early next year in an attempt to complete the project by the end of this legislature.

He encouraged the public to visit the exhibition of models and designs at the Archaeology Museum during the next month, as he underlined the need to gauge people's opinion.

Infrastructure Minister Austin Gatt smiled when he described how in the longest dialogue in history, the country was at least united in wanting to get rid of City Gate.

"The time has come to take decisions, not only to repair and cover the sins of the past, but to satisfy our generation's responsibility to leave a witness of our times," he said.

Freedom Square, currently a car park, would become the platform for Malta's building of liberty, Parliament, which to date functioned from borrowed premises. He said it deserved to be located in the street that epitomised the country's identity.

The same way Valletta bore the signature of legendary architects Francesco Laparelli, Ġlormu Cassar, Romano Carapeccchia, Stefano Ittar, Pietro Paolo Floriani and Edward Barry, the future would flag the flair and art of Renzo Piano.

"This is not a government project, but a means of returning the heritage to the people," Dr Gatt said.

The Labour Party issued a statement after seeing the designs and said it would adopt a positive attitude to the project even if it had been completely left out of the process.

## **The proposals**

### **City Gate**

- Bridge will be restored to its original 1633 dimensions, giving a full view of the ditch.
- The simple structure will be just eight metres wide and will be open to the sky.
- The street crossing above will be demolished and two large and gently sloped stairs, reminiscent of the dramatic staircases flanking the gate before the creation of Freedom Square, will lead from both St James' and St John's Cavaliers down to Republic Street.
- Designs will give back to bastion walls original expression of depth by enhancing the feeling of narrowness while at the same time opening up the view to the perspective of Republic Street.
- Gate and ditch will be connected through a redesigned stair and an exterior, panoramic elevator that provides the experience of the depth of the ditch and leads to the gardens below.
- Car park below will be eliminated and replaced by garden.
- The gate itself will be monumentally shaped and flanked by high, framing blades of steel.

### **Parliament**

- The Parliament building will shift from the Palace to the parking area currently occupying Freedom Square.
- The transparent ground floor of the building will host a state-of-the-art interactive Museum of Maltese History and Political Development.
- The new construction will distance itself from St James's Cavalier giving back to this historic structure its original shape.

- The new building is made of two massive volumes of stone, supported by stilts that recede from the façade to create an impression of suspension in air.
- The East block will house mainly the chamber the West, all administrative offices for MPs. They are separated by a central courtyard. This court is shaped in such a way to allow views through it from the street of St John's Cavalier.
- The Old Railway tunnel will be connected to the sunken garden in such a way as to make it available for public use.
- Building will be equipped with heat pumps to avoid the necessity of external cooling towers or additional boilers.

### **The Opera House site**

- All existing stone work will be preserved and some of the existing scattered fragments will be reused to complete and embellish the ruin.
- A new, light skin or façade will define the space, supported by a surrounding alignment of steel masts and columns.
- The masts will carry removable walls, lighting systems, acoustic and sound equipment.
- The theatre is envisaged to host 1,200 people.
- When the theatre is unused, the area works as an open piazza with a shallow stepped seating deck, totally accessible and offering the view towards Castille, to the churches of St Catherine and Our Lady of Victories and St James Cavalier.
- The translucent wall elements shall be constructed in such a way, that they can enclose the space but also remain sunken, so that performances can be held in extraordinary scenery of some of the city's best buildings.
- Smaller backstage areas will be created in the vicinity.

-----

### **Comments**

Aaron Nind (1 day, 7 hours ago)

If we had the choice to vote for what emblem would be on our coins shouldn't we equally have the choice to vote on this type of momentous project .... ?

Anthony Said (1 day, 11 hours ago)

Well done to this MAXI PROJECT. For me it is very near to perfection. Very near, yes ! Only because this ONCE IN A LIFETIME OPPURTUNITY would have been perfect, if

whilst entering this wonderful City , and on one side after a majestic entrance you have the house of Parliament , the opposite side needed also an amendment so as to cover another sin of the past. I cannot see a block of flats in front of the House of Lords or Montecitorio ! People there should have been offered a decent alternative residence, preferably in Valletta so that Mr Piano could have completed his masterpiece 100 %. And I am sure that Renzo thought about it !!!

jcmicallef (1 day, 12 hours ago)

@A.Borg

In agreement with your proposal of turning the present terminus into a piazza, with gardens, perhaps and anything that could give our City credit.

Why all the crying for open piazzas? well, maybe I'm crying for piazzas because I've seen so many of them abroad - not that I traveled much, just a dozen different european cities - but open spaces ppl a good break, a chance to relax and reflect. We do not have so many parks like London, or Piazzas like Barcelona. Don't you feel 'boxed in' when you get back to Malta from abroad?

Personally, it is something I really miss, and found that this feeling is shared by a good number of friends. Why should we restrict ourselves to the original concept - which was to keep the Turks out? Our city is meant to welcome people in.....

Back to the present bus terminus, I wonder if enough funds would be available to tackle that eyesore next? Fingers crossed.

Philip Schembri (1 day, 12 hours ago)

flus fil-hela, min ser ihallsu lil Piano, mhux ahna ic-cittadini mit-taxxa li diga inhallsu. x'sar minnu il-pjan li kien ghamel hu stess lura fis-sebghinijiet, x'sar minnu l-pjan li ghamel il-perit Richard England? bissibli Piano u England biss jezistu. jew qieghed isir dan l-istorbju kollu mill-Gvern sabiex jaljena lil Poplu mit-tghaffig li gabna fih. Fejn hu bieb il-belt? fejn hu it-teatru rjal? milli jidher toqba kien u toqba ser jibqa it-tetru rjal, proposta ghal teatru li jiddependi mill-elementi tat-temp! tad-dahq dal-pajjiz. il-karozzi li jidhlu il-belt issa fejn ser imorru, minn fejn ser jghaddu? it-triq ezisitenti issa ser tispicca, ser tispicca ukoll il-parkegg ta pjazza helsien. ser issir parkegg taht l-art.?ghaliex flok pjazza helsien ma jghamilx, gnien mimli sigar ghaliex dan neqsin minnu fil-belt, u tahtu parkegg taht l-art, mela parlament mhux ninqadew b'dak ezisitenti. Konsultazzjoni tfisser li ggib ukoll l-ghaqda f'pajjizna mhux politika sfrenata.

A.Borg (1 day, 14 hours ago)

Why many are crying for piazzas? The original plan of Valletta from Laparelli was a grid and rigid, the only open spaces were in front of the Palace and in front of the Cathedral, not even were we have the National Library [piazza Regina] as originally it was an orchard. So going back to plan Freedom square should be built to keep the continuation of Republic Street as proposed by Piano.

If anything needs to be proposed as a garden or a piazza IMO should be outside the bastions not inside ... the bus terminus should be planned better or as once was proposed to be done underground with a garden on top ... that would be another facelift to the City!

Anthony Pace Gouder (1 day, 14 hours ago)

The title would be more fitting if it read :

"THE REPAIR AND COVER OF PAST SINS WITH SINS OF OMISSIONS ! "

N.B. The most glaring ,foolish omission is leaving A FORTIFIED CITY without a GATE? !

This is AN EASY WAY OUT SOLUTION by this eminent , world renowned (?) architect. Eliminating, in the process , a most efficient access road into the CITY . This is sheer Madness . That proposed Panoramic Elevator running along the FACE OF THE OLD BASTIONS is Scandalous and an INSULT . A Modern version of the HORSE OF TROY. In this case left there outside the WALLS as the CITY has been breached (torn open) by a 'single' gentleman R.P. !!! The irony is that.he says .... He really loves the CITY .

Dr. Melvyn Mifsud L.L.D. (1 day, 14 hours ago)

A city for gentle men and women .... by a gentleman.

Interesting ideas have been put forward. however one is not too sure about the concept of the open air.

Rest assured people in the future will feel the same is somewhat incomplete .... and might take it upon to themselves complete the works by roofing it .

Once again - I still contend that among our local gentle women and men, a Maltese blend from the architecture field should not be discarded . And we would all stand to gain - all around.

Whether the learned Maltese's contribution would be in toto or in parte ( in whole or in part) .

Or is it too late ...

Just a thought -

Should they have been discarded from the outset ... or is there still room for their design input or idea.

Peter Bonnici (1 day, 17 hours ago)

The majority of comments within, welcome Renzo Piano's multi-project design. However I am of the opinion that not only the present Police Station should be demolished to create an open space for the original entrance to Auberge d'Italie, but the whole structure presently occupied by BOV.

Also St John's Cavalier should regain its architectural and histotic dignity by exposing same through the elimination of the social housing structures that are a serious of the sins created during past administrations. Valletta has a considerable amount of used properties where these families could be reallocated. I am sure that the Government Property Division could easily identify such empty houses.

Also I agree that on the side of the new theatre in South Street, inappropriate business signs could be done with and an adjustable movable roof structure could be added on, to cater for the specific needs for particular events.

jcmicallef (1 day, 17 hours ago)

after decades of neglect and bad decision making, almost anything will make Valletta look better.

One of the ugliest things is the housing building which never had its place there. Have you ever entered a historical city in Europe and when looking up found blocks of apartments facing you????? I wonder if they will remain. I'll pop over to the Museum for a closer look.....

I have only one reservation about this project - in a country, and city, that lacks open spaces, building Independence Square will give it a claustrophobic feel, in my humble opinion.

I'd have preferred an open space/square, possibly with a fountain or monument of some sort or an open sculpture gallery, but closing it up with the 'flying' parliament....well, we'll have to see...perhaps a parliament instead of the old opera house would not have been so bad after all, instead.

Simon Borg (1 day, 23 hours ago)

Personally I find the new plans for City Gate somewhat distasteful. The paper on Monday read that the plans were praised however I've yet to meet anyone who has done so far. Something of this magnitude should really be put to the people to decide and not the MPs.

My vision of Valletta would be to open up all the auberges and palaces to the public, and have the ministries and so on located in Floriana, as an administrative capital, and keep Valletta as the cultural centre. Floriana would be to Valletta what Ankara is to Istanbul

iCocker (2 days, 5 hours ago)

@ Mr DeBono Where is Independence Square? Never heard of and I get into Valletta daily! Let us not forget one thing that finally we are getting rid of the parliament in the GM Palace, having the Armoury relocated to its original place [around Europe only few original armories are still in their original place] and have back the grid pattern originally designed for Valletta back! And have back the grand palace to its splendor and free from carparks! If you think the designs are that modern, IMO I think also that all the ex-colonial structures have done worst to be out of style in the city, BUT they show a passage of time and a mark in our history, now it is time to leave ours and tie up our past, present and start moving to the future! Something nowadays in Malta we are wasting with all the concrete jungles we have created ... thank God people like Piano might open our eyes and teach us again that with our FRANKA we still can do masterpieces! As a student of design I think this is a lesson for our future local projects ...

Mario DeBono (2 days, 10 hours ago)

My opinion:

- (1) Valletta should be restored as much as possible to original shape of buildings & design
- (2) City gate must be a gate, resembling original gate - not a breach in the walls
- (3) Proposed parliament building is too modern to fit in the scenery - I doubt the welcoming potential of massive stone blocks standing on air - and homing parliament!
- (4) Parliament should be housed in some other already existent or appropriately built baroque building - an existent baroque building could have its inside rebuilt for the new purpose it would be intended to serve

(5) Independence square - if left unbuilt - should certainly be turned into a real square - and there is a huge potential for having a welcoming square in that space with lots of interesting spots - perhaps having some green touches too!

(6) I am for having the new theatre rebuilt on the original designs - of course making up for the original acoustic and other defects - I believe this is doable through modern technology

lino farrugia (2 days, 16 hours ago)

Let's rename Valetta- the Aztec City.

Paliament on entering our Historic City. Do we not have enough politics in our lives? Scaffolding on the remains of our opera House? Is it going to be functioning in Winter. YES...BRILLIANT PIANO IDEAS. CONCRETE AND SCAFFOLDING IN A BAROQUE CITY.

THIS IS A COMPLETE DISASTER, WHATEVER ANYBODY SAYS.

THIS IS GOING TO BE A SHAME FOR CENTURIES TO COME.!

AWFULL!

R Chetcuti (2 days, 16 hours ago)

While everyone is entitled to his opinion be it positive or negative, I must ask the following: Why on earth does half the country have to be negative about everything all the time??! I am sure that most of you commenting here haven't even had the decency to go have a look at the designs, yet you are still commenting here as if you are experts. (Well, I can understand this point, since you are all understandably world famous architects and designers!!)

My only concern to the designs is the traffic impact this will create since the existing road above the gate is being removed. I would like Mepa to carry out a traffic assesment report on this. I just hope this project will have a ripple effect on Valletta as a whole, in that, it sets the ball rolling to restoring old buildings and rejuvenate other areas such as the Burger King arcades, Evans Building, St Elmo, and Valletta's perimetre buildings and housing projects of the early 60's.

Jennifer Mifsud (2 days, 17 hours ago)

absolutely ugly. the original design - before city gate was transformed in today's monstrosity - should have been implemented, and slowly slowly changes to accommodate Piano's idea... but to give a modern facelift to Valletta defies its historical grandeur. Sorry to say, this is another blow to Valletta's amazing history. La Vallette must be tossing and turning in his tomb.

MichaelNeville Cassar (2 days, 17 hours ago)

It looks like the fortress of Troy and where is our old operra house????????????????????????????????????

John Izzo (2 days, 18 hours ago)

Whilst i have nothing against the development of citygate,though I have some reserves,like the narrowing of the entrance and the removal of the street above, the government should concentrate more on the Power Generation problem and invest money in the power station first before ditching millions of Euros in this project.We are

already two years behind the proposed extension of Delimara Power Station which should have been ready and commissioned by the end of 2008. What happened two weeks ago can happen anytime and this will cost our country far more millions of Euros than the amount that's being boasted about. Wake up all previous bloggers especially if you run a business and stop being so impressed by cheap propaganda like this.

T. Gauci (3 days, 1 hour ago)

i don't like the city gate and the theater. city gate should have a bridge. i prefer if the designer would come up with something else like modern city gate. the flats will ruin the landscape. 6/10 for this project, they can design something better than this.

Charles Sammut (3 days, 4 hours ago)

"The Labour Party issued a statement after seeing the designs and said it would adopt a positive attitude to the project even if it had been completely left out of the process."

I can well understand. The only new thing which this project will create is the parliament building to house this overstuffed institution. One can imagine that the PLPN will agree on this.

Otherwise, the Opera House ruins will effectively remain ruins. What is now City Gate will become a gap and we shall plant some shrubs in the ditch. St James Cavalier will be hidden and all parking disappear (good idea this). Last but not least, the modern steel and glass panoramic elevator would jar terribly with the bastions. Hideous does not even begin to describe it. La Vallette must be turning in his grave.

But Drs. Gonzi and Muscat will have their new playhouse. And we pay.

Raymond Sammut (3 days, 4 hours ago)

@ Brian Farrugia

No need to worry about Carnival floats. I always held the view that floats should be smaller and of better quality. They can also be re-routed via Castille starting from Floriana. By the very nature of Carnival, the possibilities are endless. And no need to restrict Carnival to Valletta, even though it was born in Valletta. I see no reason, for example, where for just one year at least, floats could be paraded at Ta' Qali. It's up to enthusiasts to come up with ideas.

Raymond Sammut (3 days, 6 hours ago)

Overall, this seems a good proposal for the St James side of the City Gate. Replacing car parking with good architecture and gardens, and making the new theatre more amenable rather than elitist, are most notable. Two points need, I think, especial attention.

1) Why only "some of the existing scattered fragments will be reused to complete and embellish the ruin"? My opinion is that ALL existing fragments (at least those of significant architectural value), wherever they are, must be collected and restored to the historic site. The government needs to make it clear to everyone that possession of these artifacts is illegal and must be returned by current holders.

2) I am hoping that Renzo Piano is taking into consideration the historical fact that Malta is earthquake prone. "Massive volumes of stone, supported by stilts" to me sound like

asking for trouble -- unless precautions and thorough structural testing are first undertaken. Usually structural engineers mount these stilts on rubber absorbers.

brian farrugia (3 days, 6 hours ago)

Mela b`pont ta 20 metru wisa, kullhadd jabat ma xulxin biex jidhol sal belt..... u issa b 7 metri wisa il que ser ikun minn hdejn bieb il bombi biex tidhol il belt..... u ejja Renz , stennejt xi haga ahjar minghand l aqwa perit tad dinja.

Alexander Morana (3 days, 7 hours ago)

The new building is made of two massive volumes of stone, supported by stilts that recede from the façade to create an impression of suspension in air.

Ok so then this whole project must be full of air, right? Come on Renzo couldn't you come with something much better than this? Creating another Maltese political kazin right in the heart of Valletta? As if there aren't enough of them?

charmaine magro (3 days, 7 hours ago)

I do believe that Malta deserves to have its beautiful capital city restored to the grandeur it deserves. Since I have not seen the plans, I cannot comment, however everyone knows about the huge parking problems that exist in valletta, especially for those working in the government departments, and for people who have to visit valletta because of these same departments. Why not pinpoint a huge tract of land somewhere, say ta Qali, and build and house all the government departments there, in order to avoid further inconveniences for the public? Secondly, will the Central Bank have to be rehoused, now that the road in front of it will be destroyed?

Marica Zammit (3 days, 8 hours ago)

This has got to be some kind of joke right? Ouh! It's not apparently!

I'm all for modern art and architecture but the designs for the new parliament site and theatre do not fit in with Valletta's character. The old theatre should be built exactly as it was before it was bombed.

A city built by gentlemen for gentlemen and about to be destroyed by one gentleman.

Galea. L (3 days, 8 hours ago)

A.Busuttil

Have a look at <http://www.timesofmalta.com/articles/view/20090628/local/tough-budget-decisions-ahead> for your answer.

To all those who are in favour of the project.

Will MEPA somehow make changes to Piao's plans as it does to all applications by Maltese citizens?

Will MEPA now issue permits to normal Maltese citizens within six months and not take years on end as it does now?

Seeing that it is a MODERN project in an OLD city, will MEPA now allow the use of aluminium and modern building materials in old town's areas as it is allowing MODERN buildings that jarr in an OLD city?

Will it allow aluminium and other modern building materials in Valletta itself?

Answers MEPA. Answers.

c. camilleri (3 days, 8 hours ago)

Il-veru Maltese gemgem. Many projects including those of Piano in other cities did not go well with the populace but afterward became world attraction. The Pompidou centre comes to mind.

Brian Farrugia (3 days, 8 hours ago)

u il karnival fejn ser naghmlu.....lol....

J. Zammit (3 days, 8 hours ago)

@Etienne Vella

While I understand your comments since my opinion was very similar to your initially, I've come to agree with the notion of having a building because:

1. A piazza is supposed to be a place people from all locations converge to, while Freedom Square is simply a parking space that people pass by on their way to work;
2. Historically the area we know as Freedom Square was built; and
3. When I saw the designs at Valletta Piano notably shaped the building to converge from the side walls of St. James' Cavalier. Go look at the exhibitions. What I'm trying to explain is noted with red dotted lines. I hope I explained well.

Anyway in brief I support the plans because they're grounded in research. They'll do justice to Valletta.

M Camilleri (3 days, 9 hours ago)

Just one practical comment to make... with St George's square, Freedom Square, The Ditch and the Yellow Garage no longer available and the park and ride scheme not up to scratch, where are people meant to park when visiting Valletta?

Ministers are lucky enough to have drivers but for those of us who have to walk and park, the prospect of walking onto Valletta from Floriana in the searing heat is daunting. Lets hope the next project to be announced is a well thought out solution to this problem.

K.M. Fiorentino (3 days, 10 hours ago)

I fully agree with Etienne Vella's remarks.

MARK MIFSUD BONNICI (3 days, 10 hours ago)

Dr. Gonzi might be seeking recognition through this project. However after seeing what Renzo Piano proposed, I suggest he employs a new architect or risk being remembered as the person who approved the ruining of Valletta.

Flying parliaments, insignificant entrances and open air theaters are not exactly what many expect. One of the few remaining unspoiled fortified cities are no room for experimenting with ideas that are more suitable for modern urban environments.

Would Dr. Gonzi care to quantify what this attempt and the previous Piano attempt have cost the taxpayer so far. I am quite sure they equal the cost of rebuilding the old opera house twice over and relocating parliament to one of our derelict forts or palaces had we employed the services of one of our very talented local architects.

But as usual, we elect our politicians, who in turn think they earned a free hand to dictate all that's best for us all. It's no wonder our politicians are always smiling.

Gordon Refalo (3 days, 10 hours ago)

I think that the proposed project is on the whole a very positive one. My only reservation is City Gate. I still think it should be a gate and not a breach. The government was planning to restore the bastions near the Lower Barrakka which were breached when the periphery road was made. Now we're making another breach ?

C. Schembri (3 days, 10 hours ago)

@ Henry S Pace:

You have got it all wrong!

"this design is absolutely not for our Capital City Valletta. This design would be appropriate for a newly but (sic.) town." ... So, you might be suggesting immitating the antique? That is not so wise. When re-designing a built environment, immitating past structures would be considered as a Kitsch (Bad Taste). Its either the original or something which is undeniablely the opposite to it.

The ruins (the sculptured stones) of the old opera house are scattered about Malta... such as in Junior College (back area, at least when I was there some five years ago), and in Marsa Sports Grounds next to the Netball courts.

The comment "Buildings in the form of boxes are not appropriate for our capital city." is totally incorrect... isn't Valletta made up of blocks?! The new structure would be reflecting the city's Genius Loci (the Spirit of the Place).

A Big Thumbs Up to R. Piano! My full Support!

v.pulis (3 days, 10 hours ago)

I am against not having a gate to the entrance of valletta but I am trying to be positive. So think about the threat fom the pigeons as you enter the city which has now been obliterated. That is one very good reason not to build another gate!

Etienne Vella (3 days, 10 hours ago)

I like what Piano did with the opera house and the city gate.. BUT THE REST IS MADDNESS! Remove what remains of the square and put parliament in the middle! The only way to really dignify the entrance to the capital is to make freedom square double the size of what it is today; By removing all the arkades and flats that occupy the space.

The square would have the powerful St.John and St.James buildings on each side (with the gardens next to them as proposed by Piano) and a fountain on each side of the square to complement perfectly with the capital's symmetry. I really hope that in the coming days, this government will explain why it felt that this was not an option - and reconsider things.

This great square, together with the proposed city gate and magnificent open theatre would prove to be the perfect backdrop for the anniversaries coming up.

There are many options on where parliament can be relocated, anyway, this can be done at a latter stage - it is not urgent.

John M. Grima (3 days, 10 hours ago)

Please allow me to add my two cents worth.

Regarding Mr. Piano's design/model: The parliament Building? Great. very sensible. Excellent place too, finally. The City Gate? All right. you've seen one gate, etc.... The Opera house? Says only one thing: "NO MONEY LEFT FOR THIS, (UNIMPORTANT), PROJECT. MAYBE SOMEDAY."

Jimmy Magro (3 days, 11 hours ago)

One big question:

How come MEPA will approve the projects in less than six months when for an ordinary citizen to widen a window it takes MEPA more than four years? Is this another case taken from "Animal Farm".

One small remark:

I think that Dr. Austin Gatt meant Fort St. Elmo yesterday when he began to walk along Republic Street and not Fort St. Angelo.

Henry S Pace (3 days, 11 hours ago)

Yes, it is a beautiful design however, please this design is absolutely not for our Capital City

Valletta. This design would be appropriate for a newly but town .

Professor Piano failed to tell us from where he will be getting the ruins (the sculptured stones) of the old opera house dismantled by the Labour Government in the 1955-58 Administration.

An open air theatre as he describes it would be ideal for dog-fights and cock-fights .

I am sure that this would be filled to capacity in the summer breeze.

Buildings in the form of boxes are not appropriate for our capital city.

It also appears that the road over the city gate would be discontinued. The traffic would be unable to proceed into Valletta via Hastings Gardens. It appears that such traffic access would only be through St Paul's Street or via the ring road. Can Prof. Piano tell us something about this throughfare.

Dr Gonzi and Dr Gatt think it all over again because peoples' money is going down the drain.

Frank buhagiar (3 days, 11 hours ago)

What a breath of fresh air!!! Prosit Renzi Piano. Finally we have the designs. Amazing. We will have a beautiful entrance that is both spectacular and welcoming. Valletta is not defending itself anymore, it is welcoming everybody. As for the critics...well when a monument is erected for you i might just start listening to your gemgem! till then!!!! Wake up and see the beauty that Valletta will be.

Denis Catania (3 days, 11 hours ago)

lol. Lol

Jeff Inguanez (3 days, 11 hours ago)

I watched on television yesterday and in 20 minutes, elegantly and succinctly, Renzo Piano put paid to all this noise by a small group of people who just want to return to the past - well-described by Piano as 'fake'.

When Valletta was built it was the most modern city in Europe. The Knights used the latest technology, a modern layout, and all new materials of the time they could lay their hands on (and afford).

That's precisely the spirit Renzo Piano has encapsulated in his excellent designs.

This is a city (and the symbol of a country) looking forward to its future, open to new opportunities, and that has everything it takes to be at the best international levels in design and architecture.

Yesterday I was proud to watch, and proud of both Renzo Piano and of Lawrence Gonzi who keeps showing us why he deserves to be our Prime Minister - because of his integrity and vision.

Saviour A Ellul-Bonici (3 days, 11 hours ago)

I am greatly intrigued by the vast architectural acumen of so many of my compatriots and although Manwel Dimech was not exactly my favourite I find one of his quotes highly appropriate. Loosely translated it goes something like this: 'When the Maltese are thirsty do not supply them with fresh clean water but give them a pail of brine.' Yes let us reject Renzo Piano's masterpiece and let us have some Maltese kitsch instead. Yes indeed we have a tradition to keep.

Randolph Peresso (3 days, 11 hours ago)

Piano's project is truely inspiring and intelligent.

It is Contemporary. No one, who is sane, could have imagined something not Contemporary, but yet, it respects Valletta's ethos. Well done!!!

J.Bonnici (3 days, 12 hours ago)

'Within budget and on time' HAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA

A. Zahra (3 days, 12 hours ago)

There are numerous open air theatres in Europe:I will mention just a few of the many in Italy: the Circo Massimo, the Terme di Caracalla and the Colosseum in Rome, the Arena di Verona in Verona, the Teatro Greco in Syracuse come to mind. In France too, mainly in Provence, numerous such theatres exist. I have personally been to performances in the Arenas in Arles and Nimes. Incidentally the Arenas there are smaller scale Colosseums dating back to Roman times. In Greece too there are many such theatres.

I must say I like the project.

T Cassar (3 days, 12 hours ago)

Why did we choose Renzo Piano again for the same project that was regurgitated so many years ago? Is he the only genius around? Why was'nt someone else assigned this task once Piano's ideas and creativity do not match those of the general public?

Godwin Cassar (3 days, 12 hours ago)

Oh eff off Effie. How can you possibly call the designs "just stone structures with no architectonic values"?!  
And weren't the cynics all worried about excessive use of steel and glass??

Thank God we've got a proper entrance designed at last. Out with the social houses and arcade too by the way!

Adrian E. Camilleri (3 days, 12 hours ago)

I think I will go with May Bonello's comments i.e. "The Sunday Times' editorial put it best: the only negative we can possibly mention in this project is the fact that the social housing and arcade opposite Freedom Square won't be transformed with the rest of the entrance to our magnificent city." However, it is never too late to get this incorporated. Piano's plans for the transformation of our main entrance to Valletta is simply magnificent, and the quicker one starts work on it so much the better. As for the idea of an 'open' theatre, to include the remains of our 'opera house' is also very much acceptable. Need one remind them on similar sites elsewhere, i.e. the Colosseum in Rome etc! We shall henceforth be welcoming tourists coming to Malta to see Piano's magnificence! What a site! Now for that dreaded bus terminus; please get that place in order ASAP as well! Thank you Prime Minister for finally getting such a long-awaited project off the ground. Where your predecessors have failed miserably, you have succeeded, and for that we thank you sincerely. Now for the next one - the reform of MEPA.

A.Busuttil (3 days, 12 hours ago)

u flus??????????

Charles Sammut (3 days, 12 hours ago)

All those suggesting the demolition of the horrible block of flats above the equally horrible shopping arcade are forgetting one thing. The occupants of those flats translate into VOTES.

St James Cavalier will now be hidden behind a haphazard and grotesque , I mean modern, conglomeration of halls and offices to satisfy Gonzi's personal ambition to move parliament to this last open space in Valletta. Wouldn't the Main Guard have been good enough? Apparently not for our very own Roi Soleil and his entourage.

While all this money is being squandered, we continue to break our backs and cars on roads not even fit for a third world country. As the Italinas would say, "Qualcosa non quadra."

F Bajada (3 days, 12 hours ago)

probably if in the 1970s, Renzo Piano proposed the construction of the Centre Georges Pompidou, the super intelligent people present in Malta would have said that it is horrible and everyone would have designed it better. The Centre Pompidou has had over 150 million visitors since 1977!!

please, i ask the 400,000 architects present in Malta to give Malta's capital city to give her the possibility for a historic and modern!!!

"on the contrary there is nothing to joy about.just stone structures with no architectonic values to keep with the same line of these great city.Imma [ma nafx x'tista tmaqdar].how supid can you get sometimes"....nistiden dan il persuna li ghamel hafna progetti madward id dinja u li huma famuzi biex jamel proget al malta ukol

M Mealclaff (3 days, 13 hours ago)

I cant see why Valletta gate cant be restored to it's original design.

I would think this is the obvious thing to do.

All this stuff will look very dated in years to come...Then we will have a new design again.

No..The old Original design must be re instated.

Chris Ebejer (3 days, 13 hours ago)

And should these pseudo modernist intellectuals are now pleased with an odious scaffolding supporting some kind of metal partitioning erected over just 60 years old demolished building.

And where is the City gate design? Should now we call this breach a contemporary design? It's the same case of the Emperor's new clothes story.

These proposals are nothing but a sign of a decadent society that accepts everything without good taste and a lack of aesthetics. Beauty is a joy forever.

I shall never and cannot express the approval and appreciation for this project as for many cultural lovers; this is a sin against our culture and an insult to Valletta. A project like this is the kind to be found in Beijing or Malaysia but not in a European Valletta.

Chris Ebejer (3 days, 13 hours ago)

This project shall be listed in history as the Piano's Paprata!

Is it possible that there are many who still do believe, if someone is famous so he's the right person? I would have given Piano a chance yes, designing the airport or Tignie, but not Valletta.

And I didn't attend for this presentation yesterday although I was invited as a matter of fact that I whole heartedly disagrees and cannot applaud the idea of leaving those brutal flats and erecting a parliament at the entrance of a Noble city.

And all those who claimed that Barry's neo classical architecture didn't compliment with Valletta, Ghandhom il-wicc issa jghidu li dan il-binja imtajra hija kompatibbli?!

m debono (3 days, 13 hours ago)

It's like I said before. Thanks and good bye Arch. Piano...

1. The ruins should be built to host it's former glory. The excuse of "not enough space" does not hold water. The interior is large enough to host anything to anything. We definately need a large interior space in Valletta for cultural activities.

2. Parlament should remain were it is.. having a big square in front of it.

3. City gate... well I have mixed views but definately it's better then it was, but I still sustain that it should be as was originally planned when La Vallett built it.

effie carbonaro (3 days, 13 hours ago)

@karl spiteri

on the contrary there is nothing to joy about.just stone structures with no architectonic

values to keep with the same line of these great city. Imma [ma nafx x'tista tmaqdar]. how stupid can you get sometimes

Mary Bonello (3 days, 13 hours ago)

The Sunday Times' editorial put it best: the only negative we can possibly mention in this project is the fact that the social housing and arcade opposite Freedom Square won't be transformed with the rest of the entrance to our magnificent city.

Kudos to Piano and our Prime Minister!!!

Ethelbert Schembri (3 days, 14 hours ago)

I'm not going to comment on the design because if I am against or even if in favour now it is useless to comment because "il froga saret" and by the way this GOV handles public consultation, again it is totally useless to comment.

After all they are just going to use public money that is OUR money for this project.

Let us hope that this project doesn't end up like SMAR CITY "tutto fumo niente arosto" like our GonziPN GOV.

Thanks Architect Renzo Piano but from all the hype the GOV put around your name you could come with something better and hope that you haven't got any political pressure.

S. Camilleri (3 days, 14 hours ago)

I had earlier commented that we need to stop whinging and give Piano a chance ... at least until we get to see what exactly will rise up..!

I'm disappointed to see that the only decent things going for this project are the demolition of today's gate and the rehabilitation of the opera house as a theatre incorporating the ruins.

Why however, a theater that can be enjoyed only in good weather? And most of all, why another building in one of the few open spaces of the City. Couldn't Piano have come up with an architecturally pleasing open space a la Barcelona? And the cherry on the cake ... we are losing the opportunity to demolish a monstrosity of the socialist era.. that ugly block of an overpopulated ghetto. I'm sure these people could have been given alternative accomodation elsewhere.

Joe Cassar (3 days, 14 hours ago)

Mr Karl Spiteri says he does not know where to start criticism.

How about the fact that the "opera house" site will resemble nothing so much as a permanent building site?

Adrian Cardona (3 days, 14 hours ago)

Go ahead and start the works. Enough of going back to the past every time. Valletta is a living city, and should be treated as one.

Nothing is mentioned about the horrendously ugly City gate shopping arcade and the equally monstrous government flats sitting on top like infected warts. Are they going to be demolished, or will be they allowed to stay there and make a mockery of the whole project?

Josette Buttigieg (3 days, 14 hours ago)

Does that mean that the white BOV bank facade behind the theatre will still be seen from freedom square?

M Borg (3 days, 14 hours ago)

Hmmm would take a while to get used to this architecture, but I like it! Finally something different and exciting to Malta. However I would have also included the left part of the piazza (where there is Burger King etc) and the social housing flats on top of it..they surely don't fit in this project!

John Zammit (3 days, 14 hours ago)

I have to be blunt by saying that this is a project which reflects our state of mediocrity. The Entrance to Valletta has always been unique. I do not like pianos project, Because his projects are accepted in Dubai and other emerging new modern countries does not mean we fit the design. Valletta is an old city and deserves a gate which should be restored to its original way. We do not need carnivals in Valletta, but with this project it will only be creating a daily one non stop. I hope and urge the prime minister to see common sense and avoid another farce. I fully agree with Mario Tabone Vassallo. Restoration as it should be will re vamp the city. Whoever wants a dubai in Valletta can knock elsewhere. We have a right to have our Capital as it was before not take it to some science fiction film studios to make some people rich!

wally vella-zarb (3 days, 15 hours ago)

"The new (Parliament) building is made of two massive volumes of stone, supported by stilts that recede from the façade to create an impression of suspension in air."

A Freudian slip or is it a subtle, tongue-in-cheek, reminder that parliamentarians' feet do not touch the ground as they are detached from the reality that surrounds them? Having said that, all in all, I like the proposed arrangement of the new Parliament.

Incorporating the ruins into the new theatre facility is a logical, almost predictable, solution. Noise pollution may readily be solved through the addition of secondary vertical panels that can overlap the primary ones whenever this is deemed to be necessary, rather like the concept of vertical blinds. The Achilles' heel, however, remains the absence of a roof. Here again, a solution exists if the concept is extended to incorporate movable panels made out of translucent polycarbonate; not cheap, but nothing out of this world. It could well be this solution that could make the facility work.

Edwin Cachia (3 days, 15 hours ago)

Apprezzajt hafna illi l-parlament ser ikun ukoll accessibli ghal pubbliku bl-ewwel sular tieghu ikun muzew tal-istorja u politika.

Malta ghandha storja li ghandna niftahru biha. ghandna nkunu kburin li ser ikollna post fejn il-kisbiet taghna bhala maltin ikunu esebiti u apprezzati minnha u minn min jigi jzurna.

Ga qed nohlom, nara - l-Goerge Cross, id-digriet tal-indipendenza, l-ewwel kostituzzjoni maltija, l-ewwel bandiera li telghet fuq il-monument tal-helsien, it-trattat li bih dhalna fl-Unjoni Ewopeja , l-ewwel muniti tal-ewro maltin .... tal-genn !!!!

Karl Spiteri (3 days, 15 hours ago)

Jien minhiex la jien perit u l-anqas designer. Imma ma nafx x'tista tmaqdar minn dak li ghamel Piano.

Qas nista nimmagina mill-lhiema perspettiva tista tmaqdar.

Ejja naraw x'ghandna bhalissa ? Ilna 60 sena niddiskutu fuq dan l-imbierak teatru. Hazin jaghmel il-Gvern jekk jerga joqghod idawwar u nahlu l-hin. Dan il-progett misshu jibda mill-gimgha d-diehla.

Ammirajt lill-Prim Ministru kemm hu ambizjuz. Hekk hemm bzonn nies b'vizjoni u possittivi mhux nies li jlabalbu fil-vojt.

Hector Mamo (3 days, 15 hours ago)

Naqbel ma Dominic Zerafa ! Missu tinstab soluzzjoni ghal parti l-ohra fejn hemm il-flats.

Fi ftit snin ohra, il-Belt ser tkun l-aqwa belt fl-Ewropa, bil-progett tal-main gaurd li diga beda. IL-progett ta' Piano, bil-palazz bl-armerija terga tmur lura f'posta !!!

X'enormita. Alla jtini l-ghomor biex din il-holma narha titwettaq...

Francis Borg (3 days, 15 hours ago)

This project is a holistic approach to many issues over the years. However what struck me first is the main idea of removing the GATE thus opening the City to all rather than hiding it. The bridge although still fully functional reverts back to a scale that is appropriate with the rest.

The two bastions will now dominate the scene and the Parliament building will sit in sympathy with the angular surroundings. The open air theatre is both novel and functional and the use of the ditch below will complete the whole project in the third dimension. Good show and let us hope it will carry the support of the population at large because after all it is their project.

Carmelo Dalli (3 days, 15 hours ago)

I just came from the exhibition at the Archeology Museum. The design, the details are fantastic.

Everyone should go and see before comment. You don't imagine, the detail, the technology, the ideas, Renzo Piano came with.

The Theatre, can be transformed to host any type of culture event. The City gate and the ditch completely transformed.

Even the Parliament Building, with the latest energy efficient technologies of the so called Green Building. It's amazing.

The feeling in the hall where the project was exhibited this morning was of amusement !!

Sandro Pace (3 days, 15 hours ago)

As a common citizen with little architectural knowledge, I have only reservations about the theatre. While not arguing that it must be same as before, this is like that the money has been finished, and it has been left uncomplete.

OK it is probably what the country can presently afford, and there is not such a big market for such activities, but an open air theatre cannot be considered serious for classical or unamplified representations. They sound better and fuller in a good

acoustically designed theatre. Not taking into considerations the weather. So ok, perhaps all the money was absorbed by the parliament and the rest, as a govt. choice, but please dont call that thing a theatre, let alone a national theatre. It is some seats and a palk surrounde by steel rods.

Christopher Pollard (3 days, 15 hours ago)

Have the necessary road alterations been made public as well? If the bridge over the top of the gate is demolished then it will have knock on effects for the road layout. What a shame that the opportunity to make a rail link between Valletta and the park and ride scheme hasn't been grasped at the same time as this major redevelopment.

Domnic Zerafa (3 days, 15 hours ago)

Nixtieq li fil brief kien hemm inizzel li jnehhi dawk il flats u l-arcade ghax huma ha jkerhu l-progett u l-belt.

Mario Tabone-Vassallo (3 days, 15 hours ago)

Meta jinghad li wasal iz-zmien li jissewwew u jitghattew id-dnubiet ta' l-imghoddi, kieku mxejna fuq il-pjan ta' qabel, issa konna nkunu nsewwu d-dnub li kien suggerit ghall-Pont il-Belt. Li jsir lift minn barra ma hiex ideja hazina. Ma dan ser ikun hemm iehor il-Barrakka; filli xejn u filli tnejn. Ilu sittin sena jinghad li ghandu jissawwar gnien fil-foss tal-Belt. Ma hiex ideja li tistona. Kienu saru xi sforzi dghajfa. Izda qatt xi hadd mill-ghorrief mexa minn Marsamxett sal-Port il-Kbir? Nara riskju li dal-gnien jispicca mhux frekwentat hlief ghall-abbuzi. Li jinzerghu sigar bhal fil-foss ta' l-Imdina, haga ohra. It-telf ta' lok ghall-ipparkjar dejjem thassibni, kif thasseb lil kull min mixghuf bhal min joqoghod SPB fejn kotra ta' postijiet ghall-ipparkjar intilfu ghall-imwejjed tal-barrijiet. Ghad li naqas it-ticrit propost fil-blat, xorta bqajna bla bieb. Swar kwazi intatti, jixirqilhom tisewwa l-gerha fihom billi belt Barokka jerga' jkollha bieb Barokk. Ma jaghmilx sens xi hadd jghid li jinhtieg insewwu gerhiet ohra f'das-swar [bhal ta' taht il-Barrakki] u wara jkabbar gerha f'Bieb il-Belt. It-telf ta' triq minn fuq il-Bieb, m'hix tragedja, izda jinhtieg jitqiesu l-effetti taghha. Qed nisma' l-istess argumenti tas-sittinijiet u nibza' li naghmlu paprata tixxiebah. Kont wissejthom dakinhar u qed inwissi issa.

Joseph Saliba (3 days, 15 hours ago)

Reading this article and the factbox makes me realise the enormity of thi project - it is truly going to elevate Malta and our capital city and project it around the world - the schematic design of piano is a blend of contemporary whilst repecting the past - the designs and buildings will set a new standard of green buildings - it is truly a national project which will stimulate the economy as well created hundreds of jobs...this is a vision and government walking the talk...thumbs up