

# sometimes when I visit the city for the first time I feel like I've already been there



**Guy Perry** – an architect and urban planner, Investment Environments (INVI)

**Izabela Blimel: How did it happen that you started working in Poland?**

**Guy Perry:**

I began working in Poland in 1999 when I was a senior vice president with TrizecHahn, an international real estate company based in Canada, which at that time had a strategy to develop large mixed-use projects throughout central and western Europe. I was in

charge of some of the largest and most challenging projects. Miasteczko Wilanów was one of these. So, in 1999, I began working on a master plan of the site in front of the palace. Later I also began working on other projects, primarily in northern Poland – in Gdynia and Sopot, where we worked on a tennis centre and oversaw the design and construction of a water park with one of the largest Spas in Central Europe. We are also working on one of the largest private residences in Poland.

**What architectural style will be typical for Miasteczko Wilanów?**

As allowed by the Local Development Plan, which I participated in creating in 1999-2000 – the community will primarily be constituted of three-to-five-story buildings that will create a neighbourhood of places – spaces between buildings will be as important as the buildings themselves.

USCE tower, Belgrade, Serbia & Montenegro



Those buildings close to the Palace will quietly and elegantly respect the Royal enclave, though they may not be strictly classical in style. They will be designed by many local architects collectively these buildings will create a very human scale.. This is consistent with the expectations of the majority of residents of the local borough as confirmed by their responses to a questionnaire drafted specifically for the purpose of understanding the wishes of the locals. Buildings located further may have a more modern and individualistic aspect. Miasteczko Wilanów is to be a coherently planned yet multifaceted district of Warsaw for future residents and people working there. It will have abundant public and private parks, pleasant streets will be complemented by bicycle paths as well as equestrian trails. Shops, cafés, restaurants, and cinemas shall shape the streets and plazas of the town center.

**What do you think about Warsaw's architecture?**

Warsaw has had a pretty challenging recent past. The last hundred years

have been quite difficult because of the wars and the subsequent political situation. The city had to rebuild itself and some of the rebuilding was quite successful particularly during the 1950's, However, from the 1960's onward the rest consisted of modernist towers or block set in poorly maintained parks, which we now consider not to have been the best way to rebuild cities, very rarely, after the war were neighborhoods created. Even during the 1990's Warsaw has little quality architecture to show from a great deal of foreign investments. But I believe that it is not just a question about the architecture. According to the classification of the image of cities around the world, Warsaw does not show up as anything special. New York and Hong Kong are business cities. Barcelona is a cultural city. Helsinki a telecommunications heavyweight. Budapest is a rising technology city, even Tallinn is perceived as quite progressive, but Warsaw is simply the capital of Poland, which may be enough in itself. However, it is not seen as a city with a specific driving vision behind it that is going to make it a leader in a particular area. Warsaw as capital of a very important

country, will continue to receive investment. I am hoping that it will be used to make the city a capital for not only Poland, but a leading city in central Europe. However, I would say that today it does not yet have that image. To be honest, Madrid did not have it either, 30 years ago. Maybe Warsaw is like Madrid 20 or 30 years ago but the difference is there is no competing Barcelona. Madrid and Barcelona have always competed, which, on one hand, made each of them stronger, since they had to fight for divided investments in Spain. Warsaw is in a singular position. Silesia, which highest concentration of population area, is primarily in a post-industrial state and is having difficulty finding its new economy, as is Lodz. There are also wonderful cities like Wroclaw, Poznan, Gdansk and Krakow, that as of yet do not compete with Warsaw. So, Warsaw has the potential to become very strong – it must however determine its position on the global stage.

**Is Paris the most beautiful city in the world?**



Novy Karlín, Prague, Czech Republic



Hiszpania, Palma de Mallorca, Palma Moll Vell, rewitalizacja

I'd say it is for me, personally, because it is close to my heart. I lived there for many years and have family there. What I like about Paris is its density and scale, which is both grand and human at the same time. The quality of the public spaces in that city are unparalleled. The texture of each district is so rich and complete for day – to – day life. I also I like the fact that the metro is so convenient to use. These things make it a wonderful livable city. There are so many surprises in Paris, as well. When you open the doors to a courtyard, you discover some things that you never see from the outside. Yes, I do find Paris a very attractive large city.

I also very much like Tokyo. It is perhaps the worlds most inspirational city for contemporary design ideas. Much of what we consider cutting edge in Europe or the States today, I had a chance to experience in Tokyo almost 15 years ago when I was working there. It is very modern but surprising-



Oreanda Dolna Villas, Yalta, Ukraine



Francja, Var Community, golf course, project with Kajima Cor

ly human. People have an image of Tokyo as a Megapolis and not a pleasant place to live. But it is really like a giant village. When you break it into neighborhoods it is a human scale city. The average height of buildings in Tokyo is only two floors, while in Paris it is five or six. But, you may have a forty-story tower next to a wooden house yet it is often done carefully because the tower can only be placed there if it does not create a shadow on the house for more than a certain number of hours a day. So, it is very interactively composed like a Japanese garden. This urban morphology is basically the fabric of the city. It was very interesting to see that some of the thinking that enters into garden planning also carries over into the way the city is organized. An example is that you may see a tower next to a little house, just like a big tree next to a certain kind of shrub. And, it is a specific type of shrub that can thrive next to that tree. It is the same case in terms of the fabric of the city of Tokyo. There is an organic order that is not immediately evident but if you really study the way the city is organized, you'll find there is an underlying logic in it.

I would also say Barcelona is a very exciting medium-sized city, which was able to transform and modernize itself without losing its tradition. I think it is very important. I was fortunate to be involved in this transition when I was working on the facilities for the Olympic games.

### **Coming back to Warsaw, what do you think about the Metropolitan project by Foster?**

Most of Foster's buildings are excellent, in addition, JEMS, the local firm is one of the best in Central Europe. Hines, the developer is one of the best on the planet. I think it is a quality building in a key location in the city. In this situation I believe it was the right decision to not build a classical building. It would be inappropriate because of the modernist nature of the Victoria (now Sofitel) hotel across the plaza. Perhaps, the only reservation that I might have would be that it is a little bit too far north in Warsaw to attract the premier tenants, it might have rented more easily near Plac Trzech Krzyży, if such a site existed. The top

embassies are there and the people who are the real leaders and economic movers of the community tend to be more in the south of Warsaw – the best neighborhoods are there and will continue to expand in a southward direction with the development of Miasteczko Wilanow.

### **And what is your attitude to your work?**

I have always wanted to help shape and preserve the environment. The reason I used this term is because it is not only about buildings for me, but also about the places between them. It is about how neighborhoods are created, how the city is connected. So, it is just as much about how to make a nice street or plaza as it is to make a nice building. When I was very small, I would spend my time drawing imaginary cities. It was a very strange thing for someone 7 or 8 years old. When I wasn't inventing my own cities I would spend my time memorizing plans of cities all over the world. So, sometimes when I visit the city for the first time I feel like I have already been there. For me, it has always been interesting to see how cities evolve, how they differ, why sometimes they grow or contract.



Private Villa, Cannes, France



Japonia, Osaka, Toko Marine - Osaka Business Park

I think, in Europe we will see more contracting cities. We also see them in America., where we have a strange phenomenon of cities shrinking in population but growing in size. This is very dangerous and inefficient because you have to drive everywhere, the air and environmental quality is compromised and we consume much more energy. So, though it may be good for some businesses, it does little for the quality of life or health of the people. Though this trend is beginning to reverse itself in some American cities like Portland, Oregon, cities like Warsaw are picking up America's old bad habits. We must be careful not to drive backwards into the 20th century.

I also have to mention that when I was a student, I studied architecture, of course, but also urban planning and

civil engineering as well as diplomacy because when you do large projects, it is as much about diplomacy as it is about technology or creativity. It is really about understanding different people and what is important to them. For example, in Wilanow we promote a traditional and coherent town plan to compensate for the missing neighborhoods in Warsaw that were destroyed during the war. This is not a problem in Prague, for example, where the old city ensures a strong urban fabric. So, in cities like that, we design more contemporary environments because the city can accept and often needs a carefully contrasting approach. Warsaw's modernity is more difficult because the city has little historic fabric with which modern architecture can play off of and complement

### What is your main style in architecture?

I would say smart growth is the key focus of our practice, we consider building to be a privilege, to not be considered lightly. We create designs that attempt to compliment the environment and elevate people's awareness of the place and it's people. Style for me is an outgrowth of context. In any case I believe that a good modernist should have strong classical roots, this is important when confronted with prime sites. Whatever the „style” we make elegant, timeless buildings that are environmentally and economically intelligent. Whether it is a water park or an urban community, these factors effect peoples well – being.

### You mean they are perfect buildings?

I think perfection is a difficult world to use for any subject because it is relative. Things are always changing. They need to change. For me, a perfect building is the one that is still loved and inspirational in 50 years. That is something people enjoy and it helps to make a better neighborhood and better community. It is not just a building. There has to be a very good relationship between the building and its context, be it manmade or natural.

### Can you find a city in the world similar to Warsaw?

I think each city has its own character I believe that Warsaw is primarily a European city and it has much to learn from other European cities. I would say there is a lot to learn from the reconstruction of Berlin as well as from cities like Kiev that actually are quite unnoticed.. Berlin has been redeveloped in many successful ways although it has not always been successful economically because of a different concept of money and lending that exists in Germany. They do not look for short term returns as much as in Poland so they are able to make substantial investments that might not be able to be built here. There is a sense of purpose in the rebuilding of Berlin which may have faded in Warsaw since the period after the war. I think Kiev is one of the most beautiful cities in Europe. The amount of green space and the way the river sits in the city are



Lookyanovka Shopping Center, Kiev, Ukraine

remarkable. Beaches are 5 minutes from the city center. It is magnificent. Warsaw might also want to enhance it's relationship to the river. There is a lot to learn from that neighbor to the east as well as from the other capital to the west.

There is also a more American attitude toward urbanism (or sub-urbanism) in Warsaw than in most European cities. The towers in the centre and the sprawl of the city, the notion of space and distance, it is absolutely more American. The scale of the roads is also more American. If that is the case, Warsaw should look at what is happening in America today, not 20 or 30 years ago. My biggest concern is that the ideas exported from America to Warsaw are really the ones from 20 or 30 years ago. If you look at cities like Chicago, it is increasingly an urban city which is focusing on redeveloping its center. It has some of the worlds tallest skyscrapers but I still think it is a very human city. If you were to take a close look at Chicago, you could find many ideas about tower making, street making and about rebuilding neighborhoods that could be applied in Warsaw. But, we should never forget that we are in Europe and, fundamentally Euro-

pean cities are more sustainable, Warsaw has to be a European city.

### What is the most important thing for you in architecture and urbanism?

I would say that architecture is about creating harmony with the natural environment, the community and the people that are using the building. That means that each project is approached on its own terms. In Central Europe there is an imperative for smart growth. We must learn from the successes and mistakes of more advanced economies. Sometimes we must also realize that being „behind” may mean that we are „ahead”: for example America is now burdened with energy intensive 20th century cities that cities like Warsaw can ill afford to replicate. One of my roles in Central Europe is to share my global experience to help avoid some of the most costly mistakes that have been made in other parts of the world and to encourage a profoundly contextual approach to shaping the environment.

**Thank You**

### Guy Perry - an architect and urban planner

Investment Environments (INVI), set up by Guy Perry in 2000, has master planned the Miasteczko Wilanow community. The company is in charge of design and development strategy for entire project. In order to ensure a diversified yet coherent urban environment, Guy Perry has invited a wide range of Poland's most successful architectural studios to design and provide a human scale texture to Miasteczko Wilanów town center. He also oversees the intervention of dozens of practices throughout the 169 hectare site.