

In search of creative origins

25/09/2025 Slovenian identity in the language of contemporary architecture. Architect Špela Videčnik studied with Zaha Hadid and teaches at Harvard. And yet she draws her inspiration from Slovenia's roots. From its people. Its realities. And the magnificent landscape that we also discover on our journey in the all-electric Porsche Macan.

The air is crisp, almost sharp. We shoot out of turn 23 in the all-electric Macan and onto the high plateau of the Julian Alps, breaking free from the wall of fog. Suddenly, a clear view. Our minds go completely still. And we witness a breathtaking beauty. The Vršič Pass lies before us. Fifty hairpin turns twist their way up from the town of Kranjska Gora to Slovenia's highest drivable mountain pass, then wind down to the village of Trenta in the Soča Valley, which shimmers below in every imaginable shade of fall.

Next, we head to Bohinj, the first stop on our road trip through Slovenia, where we meet a woman who is currently playing a key role in shaping the country's creative scene: architect Špela Videčnik. Since founding their architecture firm, OFIS Architects, in 1996 with her partner Rok Oman, and with offices in Ljubljana and Paris, the duo are among the most exciting newcomers in the field of “Slow Architecture".

But that's just a little teaser for now. The powerful torque of the Macan lifts our spirits as we return to the road and tackle the last hairpin turn before the Soča Valley unfolds before us. Original stone bridges repeatedly lead over the Alpine river Soča, whose unusual blue-green hue creates a captivating contrast with the fall reds, earning it the nickname of the "Emerald River". The river accompanies us and the Macan through Triglav National Park, interrupted only by a few spectacular suspension bridges.

We meet architect Špela Videčnik

Hundred winding kilometers further on, after passing Lake Bohinj, we reach Hotel Bohinj on the eastern slope, where architect Špela Videčnik awaits us. Špela not only shows us some of her signature works, but also gives us a first impression of the places and people that shape the country.

The architect intentionally starts her tour with us in the heart of the Slovenian Alps, at the alpine luxury hotel that could almost be considered the essence of her work. The concept plays with volume, wood and space for encounters. Confidently independent. Airy glass surfaces and a wood facade made of gray-stained larch define the appearance, providing an insight into what inspires Špela Videčnik.

More than Zaha Hadid, under whom she studied during her master's program in London, or her teaching positions at Harvard Graduate School of Design, Hong Kong University and the University of California, Los Angeles, it is the Slovenian landscape and its original character shape her projects.

Focus on the landscape and the history

Local realities should be preserved and maintained. Contemporary architecture, yes, but harmoniously integrated. When Špela starts a new project, she embraces what already exists and immerses herself in it. Instead of looking for trends on social media, she focuses on the landscape and the history of the area. This is how the legend of the wanderers was captured in a logo form, brought to life in patterns on walls, curtains and chairs. She uses traditional larch in either whitewashed or black-charred form, following centuries-old techniques of hand-charring wood. This is Slovenian identity translated into the language of contemporary architecture.

You won't find a rigid design blueprint forced onto all her creations. Instead, identity is preserved — an essence drawn from the region's materials and history. Her work consistently reflects a focus on sustainability and the desire — no almost an imperative — to honor regional materials and traditions. Revitalization and craftsmanship. Evolution instead of revolution. The shape of the hayrack — a traditional wooden hay-drying structure — are reimagined as sculptural art that reappears throughout the hallways of Hotel Bohinj.

Landscape and nature serve as roots — providing support, balance and stability. Unpretentious. Serene. The architect exudes the same quiet composure as we make our way back to the Slovenian capital together. She speaks highly of Ljubljana and also praises architect and urban planner Jože Plečnik, who

significantly influenced the city's design in the 19th century. Owing to Slovenia's compact size, much of the country's creative energy is concentrated in its center. A close-knit circle of Slovenian poets, designers and architects fuels vibrant exchanges and mutual inspiration.

Courage to play with materials and colors

The city center, mirroring the people of Ljubljana, avoids any grandstanding, allowing its beauty to speak for itself. Completely at peace with itself. The influences of Austria, Venice and the Balkans become clearly visible as the architect heads towards another of her works: the Boutique Hotel AS. While its exterior, as is typical of Špela's works, blends harmoniously into the city center, the interior delights with thoughtfully designed spaces that create both volume and intimacy, and with an enticingly eclectic mix of materials. Surprisingly, the design of the facade facing the intimate garden is almost avant-garde.

Špela gained this courage to play with materials, colors and shapes in her youth — driven in part by necessity, as the limited availability of resources in Slovenia at the time demanded creativity.

Špela embraced it as an exciting challenge and the basis for her creative work and achievement. Today, as an architect from this fascinating and still relatively undiscovered country, she is met with respect — an intriguing outsider in the best possible sense.

As with the success of her professional career, she brings the same humility to being a mother of three in the male-dominated field of architecture. How does she manage to do justice to both tasks? Špela doesn't understand the question. "In Slovenia, mothers have worked for as long as I can remember. The childcare system is designed for equality. Why should I be disadvantaged in any way?" Why should anything stop this woman? This became evident early in her career when, already upon graduating, she won two architectural competitions for large-scale projects — yet still had to wait two more years for her official certification. Špela remains unfazed, instead displaying a calm, grounded demeanor. The architect does not find inspiration in the striking works of places like New York, but rather in the history of the places where she creates her work.

To see the world and return with new awareness — Špela is always drawn back to tranquil Slovenia, its landscapes and mountainsith her children. At the well in the village center, where the cows rest when they are driven down from the pasture in the evening. We, too, are drawn back to Lake Bohinj with the Macan one last time. To the emerald green water and that magically peaceful stone bridge. The sun has already set. The place is deserted. Quiet. And as we reflect on the roots of this place and its significance to the people, only the lonely wooden boat is reflected on the smooth surface of the lake.

Info

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