

THE FIRST YEAR ARCHITECTURE STARTER GUIDE.

What I would learn, use, read and study before starting architecture school - and during the first year.

CONTENTS.

Tap a section to jump directly to it.

03	Who I am
04	Before you start
05	The four tools
06	My project workflow
07	Revit
08	Visoid
09	Photoshop
10	InDesign
11	Ritual of the Circle / concept + site
12	Ritual of the Circle / plan + section
13	Ritual of the Circle / room + detail
14	Where I would learn
15	How I would start a project
16	Where I would look for references
17	How to study a reference
18	Buildings I would study
19	Books near my desk
20	Crits + semester rhythm
21	Workbook
22	Starter checklist

I'M DARIA ZYGINA. AN ARCHITECT.



MY ROUTE

Bachelor in Architecture / Germany

2.5 years in practice

Master's in Architecture / Switzerland

This is not a universal architecture-school manual. It is the professional system I would give my younger self if I had to start again.

THE PRINCIPLE

Do not try to know everything. Build a clear workflow, learn a small number of tools properly, and spend more time understanding buildings than collecting images of them.

**FIRST YEAR IS NOT A TEST OF WHETHER YOU ALREADY KNOW
HOW TO BE AN ARCHITECT.**

It is where you build the habits that make every later project easier.

YOU DO NOT NEED TO KNOW EVERYTHING.

Your first year is about learning how to think, test and communicate - not collecting software and architectural vocabulary.

01 LEARN ONE WORKFLOW

A strong sequence of decisions will save you more time than knowing ten programs badly.

02 LOOK AT REAL BUILDINGS

Plans, sections, details, materials and everyday use matter more than a beautiful hero render.

03 PRINT EARLY

A drawing that feels perfect on a laptop can completely fail at A1.

04 KEEP YOUR PROCESS

Save sketches, failed versions, models and diagrams. They show you how your thinking changes.

05 ASK SPECIFIC QUESTIONS

'How can I make it better?' is too broad. 'Does this entrance sequence work?' can actually move a project forward.

I WOULD LEARN ONLY FOUR TOOLS FIRST.

These are not the only good programs. They are the tools I personally use, so these are the ones I can genuinely recommend.

01 / REVIT

Design + coordinated plans and sections.

02 / VISOID

Visual direction + architectural visualisation.

03 / PHOTOSHOP

Post-production + collage + graphic control.

04 / INDESIGN

Boards + portfolios + final storytelling.

DO NOT COLLECT SOFTWARE.

Build a workflow you can repeat from brief -> project -> presentation.

THE PROJECT SHOULD LEAD THE SOFTWARE.

- 01 READ THE BRIEF
- 02 DEFINE THE QUESTION
- 03 COLLECT REFERENCES
- 04 SKETCH + TEST
- 05 REVIT
- 06 CHOOSE VIEWS
- 07 VISOID + PHOTOSHOP
- 08 INDESIGN

THE QUESTION AT EACH STEP

BRIEF

What is actually being asked?

REFERENCES

What do I need to learn?

MODEL

Does plan + section work?

VIEWS

What needs to be understood?

LAYOUT

What should be seen first?

LEARN REVIT AS A DESIGN TOOL.

I would learn plan and section together from the beginning. The model is useful only if it helps you make architectural decisions.



WHAT I WOULD PRACTISE FIRST

- 01 levels + grids
- 02 walls + openings
- 03 stairs
- 04 rooms + furniture
- 05 plans + sections
- 06 simple sheets

DO NOT OVERMODEL

Model what you need to make the next decision.
First year is not a BIM competition.

CHECK PLAN + SECTION TOGETHER

A convincing plan can still produce a weak space.
The section usually tells you faster.

RITUAL OF THE CIRCLE / FLOOR PLAN / COMPLETE DRAWING

VISUALISE AFTER YOU HAVE A POINT OF VIEW.

A beautiful image should clarify architecture, not convince you to stop questioning it.



RITUAL OF THE CIRCLE / COMPLETE COURTYARD RENDER

MY ORDER

- 01 Decide what the view needs to explain.
- 02 Export a clear architectural base from Revit.
- 03 Use references intentionally: material, light, mood.
- 04 Explore visual directions in Visoid.
- 05 Choose and refine instead of generating endlessly.

A GOOD RENDER CANNOT RESCUE A PROJECT YOU DO NOT UNDERSTAND.

PHOTOSHOP IS NOT JUST FOR MAKING IT PRETTY.



RITUAL OF THE CIRCLE / COMPLETE RENDER

01 HIERARCHY

Control what the eye sees first.

02 ATMOSPHERE

Light, people and texture should support the spatial idea.

03 COLLAGE

A fast collage can test an idea before a polished render is worth making.

04 DIAGRAMS

Simple graphics are often stronger than over-designed ones.

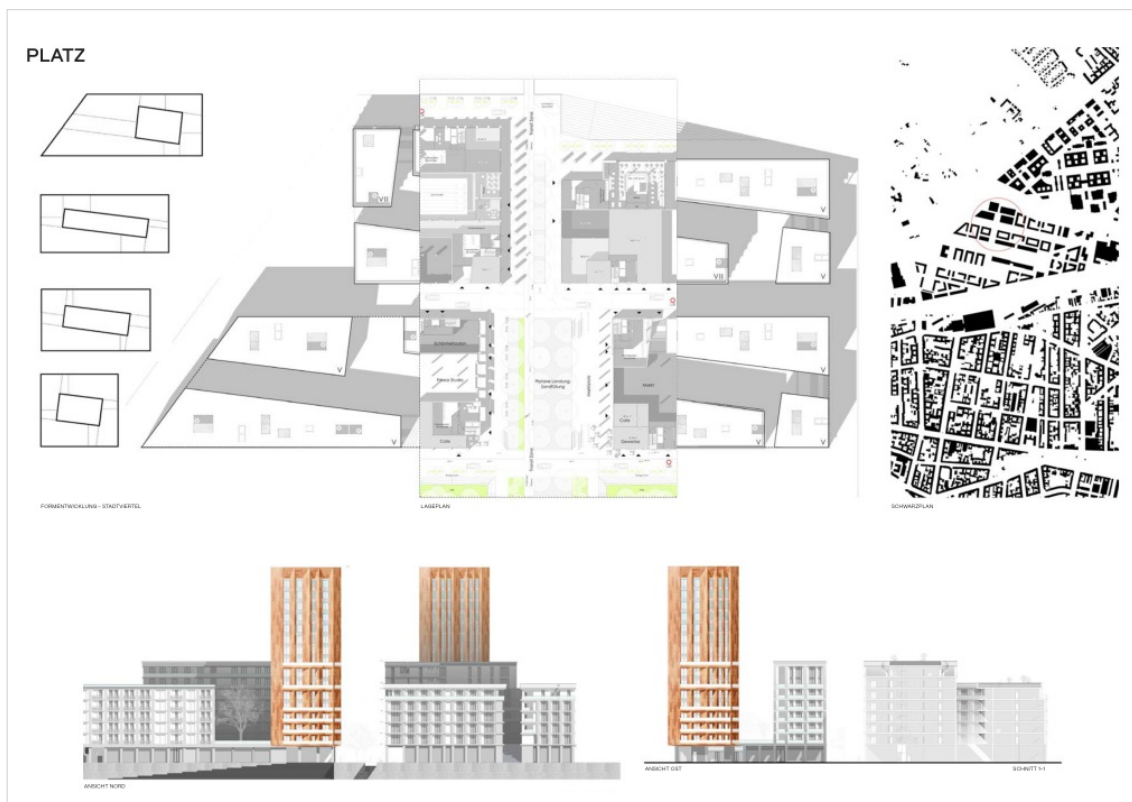
05 FINAL CONTROL

Colour, contrast and consistency before layout.

LEARN COMPOSITION BEFORE EFFECTS.

YOUR PRESENTATION IS PART OF THE PROJECT.

InDesign is where I would learn to edit: hierarchy, sequence, white space and what deserves to be large.

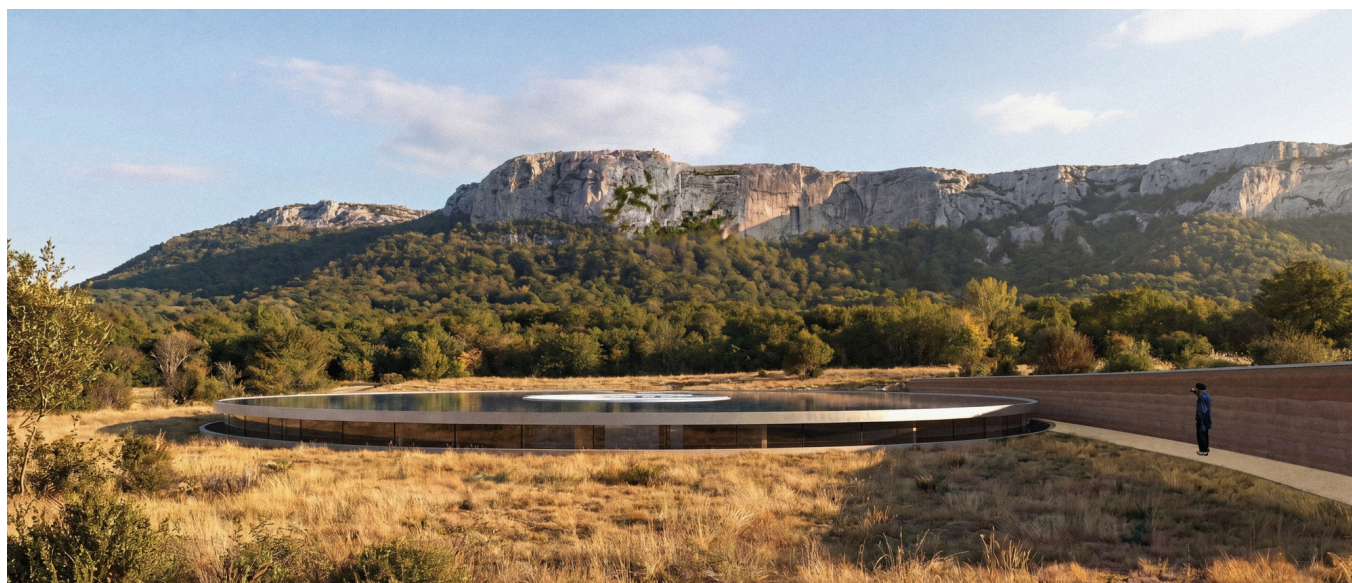


WESTHAFEN / COMPLETE PRESENTATION PAGE

- | | | |
|----|-------------------------|--|
| 01 | ONE HERO | Decide what should be understood first. |
| 02 | ONE GRID | Use alignment instead of decorating empty space. |
| 03 | FEWER FONT SIZES | Typography should organise, not perform. |
| 04 | WHITE SPACE | Do not fill every centimetre. |
| 05 | PRINT TEST | Always. |

ONE PROJECT. ONE IDEA. MANY SCALES.

I want to show this as a project workflow, not as a collection of final images.



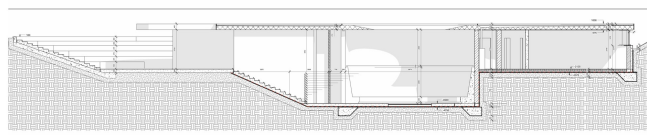
01 / EXPERIENCE FIRST

The project begins with the relationship between landscape, retreat and a slower sequence of arrival. Before details, the project needs a clear spatial intention.

WHAT TO NOTICE

- 01 the building sits low in the landscape
- 02 the circular form organises movement
- 03 architecture and landscape are read together before the room

PLAN + SECTION HAVE DIFFERENT JOBS.



SECTION / COMPLETE DRAWING

PLAN

Organisation, sequence, programme, circulation and the geometry of the central space.

SECTION

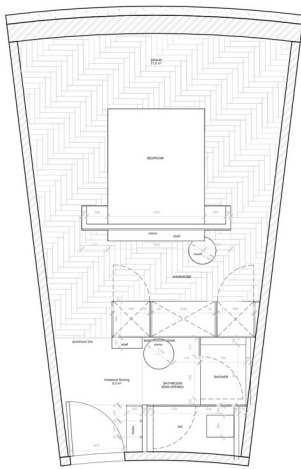
Level changes, ground, light, structure and the relationship between interior and landscape.

FIRST-YEAR EXERCISE

Take one project you admire. Cover the images. Try to explain the idea using only one plan and one section.

THE PROJECT GETS MORE PRECISE.

The closer the scale, the more specific the decisions become.



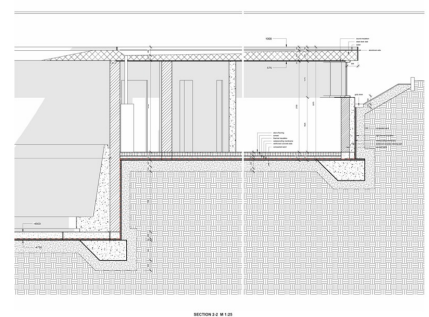
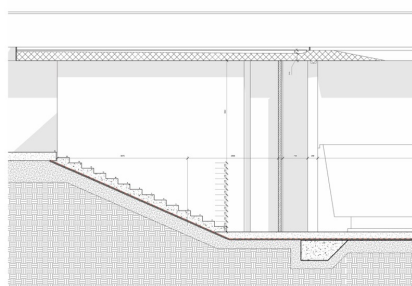
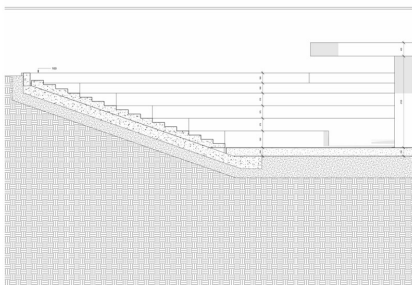
ROOM SOLUTION M 1:25



ROOM SOLUTION / COMPLETE PLAN + COMPLETE RENDER

WHAT CHANGES?

At room and detail scale, proportion becomes material, junction, build-up, drainage and the exact way someone touches the architecture.



SECTION D & E 1:20

DETAIL STUDY / THREE COMPLETE DETAIL DRAWINGS

COURSES I WOULD ACTUALLY LOOK AT.

My rule: learn one thing, use it immediately in your current project, then learn the next thing.

OT 0 DO 10 / @ot0do10

I have personally tried their courses. I would use them when I want a structured architecture-specific learning path.

BEST FOR: structured architecture learning

[OPEN RESOURCE](#)

SOFT CULTURE

Architecture-focused software education. Useful when you want software taught through actual design tasks.

BEST FOR: software through architecture

[OPEN RESOURCE](#)

GROMARCH

Nastya Grom is an architectural designer and a friend of mine. I especially like her approach to visual storytelling and architectural graphics.

BEST FOR: visuals + graphics + workflow

[OPEN RESOURCE](#)

DO NOT SAVE 200 TUTORIALS.

Finish one focused course and use it on a real project.

DO NOT START WITH PINTEREST.

Start by understanding the problem. Inspiration becomes useful only after you know what you are looking for.

01 WHAT IS THE SITE DOING?

Light, access, slope, neighbours, noise, views, existing structure.

02 WHO IS THIS FOR?

Imagine real routines, not an abstract 'user'.

03 WHAT IS THE ONE IDEA?

If you cannot explain it in one sentence, it is probably not clear enough yet.

04 WHAT MUST THE PLAN SOLVE?

Circulation, privacy, daylight, dimensions, thresholds, storage.

05 WHAT MUST THE SECTION SOLVE?

Height, light, levels, structure, relation to landscape.

THEN LOOK FOR REFERENCES THAT ANSWER THOSE QUESTIONS.

BUILD A BETTER ARCHITECTURE INTERNET.

Pinterest is useful for discovery. It should not be your entire research method.

DIVISARE

Search by typology, architect and architectural element. Useful when you need actual built references.

[OPEN](#)

DRAWING MATTER

Architectural drawings, archives and drawing as a way of thinking.

[OPEN](#)

KOOZARCH

Conceptual work, representation, interviews and critical design thinking.

[OPEN](#)

THE ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW

Criticism, essays and buildings beyond fast image consumption.

[OPEN](#)

MY RULE

Save less. Open more plans, sections and details.

DO NOT SAVE A BUILDING. DISSECT IT.

- 01 What is the plan doing that mine is not?

- 02 Where is the main circulation sequence?

- 03 How does the section bring in light?

- 04 What is structural and what only looks structural?

- 05 Where do materials change - and why there?

- 06 How does the building meet the ground?

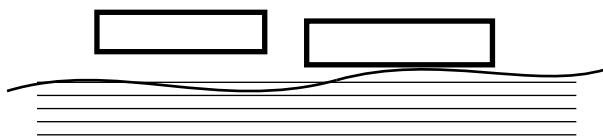
- 07 What happens at the door, window, corner and threshold?

- 08 What would still be good if the render was ugly?

A REFERENCE IS A QUESTION YOU CAN LEARN FROM.

SIX PROJECTS. SIX DIFFERENT LESSONS.

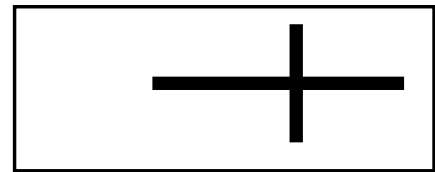
These are study diagrams - not reproductions and not to scale. Tap [SOURCE](#) to open a visual reference.



ALVARO SIZA
LECA SWIMMING POOLS

STUDY: building + landscape

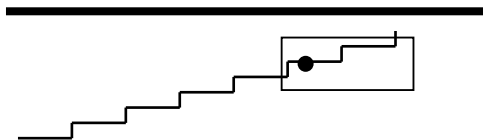
[SOURCE](#)



TADAO ANDO
CHURCH OF THE LIGHT

STUDY: light as architecture

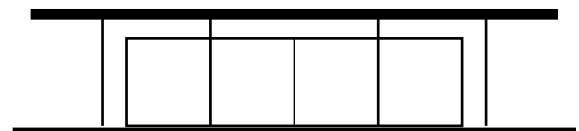
[SOURCE](#)



CARLO SCARPA
CASTELVECCHIO

STUDY: junctions + stairs

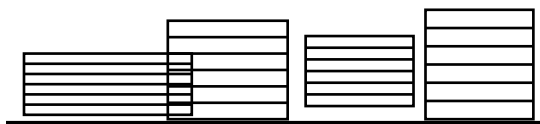
[SOURCE](#)



MIES VAN DER ROHE
NEUE NATIONALGALERIE

STUDY: structure + proportion

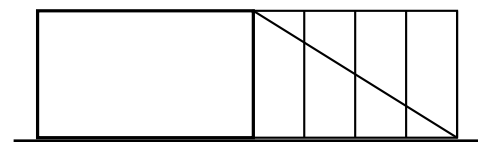
[SOURCE](#)



PETER ZUMTHOR
THERME VALS

STUDY: material + sequence

[SOURCE](#)



LACATON & VASSAL
GRAND PARC BORDEAUX

STUDY: generosity + reuse

[SOURCE](#)

SIX BOOKS I WOULD KEEP NEAR MY DESK.

You do not need to finish them before semester starts. Read slowly and return when a project gives you a reason.

01 / EXPERIENCING ARCHITECTURE

Steen Eiler Rasmussen

proportion / rhythm / perception

02 / LESSONS FOR STUDENTS IN ARCHITECTURE

Herman Hertzberger

space / use / project thinking

03 / THE EYES OF THE SKIN

Juhani Pallasmaa

architecture beyond the image

04 / ATMOSPHERES

Peter Zumthor

material / sound / temperature / mood

05 / A PATTERN LANGUAGE

Christopher Alexander et al.

spatial questions / everyday life

06 / CARLO SCARPA: ARCHITECTURE IN DETAILS

various studies

junctions / craft / physical precision

DO NOT READ ARCHITECTURE TO SOUND LIKE AN ARCHITECT.

Read it because your next project needs a better question.

ARRIVE WITH A QUESTION, NOT A PANIC.

FOR A CRIT

- 01 **START WITH ONE SENTENCE** What is the project trying to do?
- 02 **SHOW THE RIGHT DRAWING FIRST** The clearest drawing, not necessarily the prettiest.
- 03 **ASK ONE SPECIFIC QUESTION** Make it possible to give you useful feedback.
- 04 **WRITE FEEDBACK DOWN** You will not remember everything afterwards.
- 05 **DO NOT CHANGE EVERYTHING** Separate useful criticism from personal preference.

A SIMPLE WEEK

MON	define the question
TUE	references + fast options
WED	model / plan / section
THU	choose + develop
FRI	rough print / export
WEEKEND	edit + look again

A CRIT IS NOT A VERDICT ON WHETHER YOU ARE TALENTED.

BUILD YOUR FIRST PROJECT SYSTEM.

Type directly into the fields in a PDF reader that supports forms. It also works as a print worksheet.

01 / THE BRIEF

What is actually being asked?

02 / THE QUESTION

What is the one spatial problem I am solving?

03 / THE SITE

What must I respond to?

04 / THE USER

What everyday routine matters?

05 / REFERENCES

What do I need to learn from them?

06 / NEXT DECISION

What exactly do I need to resolve next?

FIRST YEAR STARTER CHECKLIST.

- ☐ Install Revit and learn the basic interface.
- ☐ Create one tiny practice model - not a full project.
- ☐ Learn Photoshop selections, masks, layers and adjustment tools.
- ☐ Learn pages, grids and paragraph styles in InDesign.
- ☐ Bookmark 3-4 architecture reference sources you trust.
- ☐ Study one building properly: plan + section + detail + photos.
- ☐ Create a clean folder and file-naming system.
- ☐ Set up automatic backups.
- ☐ Remember: you are allowed to be a beginner.

MY FIRST SEMESTER REFERENCE LIST

3 ARCHITECTS

3 BOOKS

3 REFERENCE SOURCES

NEXT SOFTWARE SKILL

YOU DO NOT NEED TO ARRIVE ALREADY KNOWING HOW TO BE AN ARCHITECT.

You need curiosity, a system for learning, and patience to make one decision better at a time.