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BINAA: Making Architecture in the 21st Century

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Abstract

This essay details the founding, early stages, and recent projects of BINAA (Building, INnovation, Art, and Architecture)—a forum for collaborative architecture practices.

Architecture today is not about singularities but about collective thinking. To think outside of the box, which most architects aim to do, thus means to think outside of the expected circle of architects; it means to engage people from different disciplines: engineers, businessmen, workers, craftsmen, users, in order to understand their unique perspectives. How can one combine all of these different perspectives in the creation of one architectural piece? The way a craftsman perceives an idea, for instance, is different from how an engineer or a manufacturer perceives it (Fig. 1). And yet, all of these perspectives somehow do come together in the end...how does that really happen?



Fig. 1. Team BINAA. Designing *Interia/Nobis* Project. 2015. Photo credit: BINAA.

We are so used to seeing the final product: the park, the bridge, the building, without ever considering what was the process that helped bring the different perspectives of those involved together into one complete product. How was this final product really made? These were the questions I was asking myself as BINAA—a platform that showcases the architectural process and gives voice to all different disciplines and perspectives involved—was starting to take shape.

Originally, of course, BINAA was just a concept: I was looking back at my education, my work experience in architectural firms, my contacts with colleagues and friends, the inspiring conversations with Edwin Chan, who taught me how to look from the perspective of all actors involved in the theater of architecture. His approach really stuck with me. In time, I wanted to put these big ideas into practice (Fig 2).

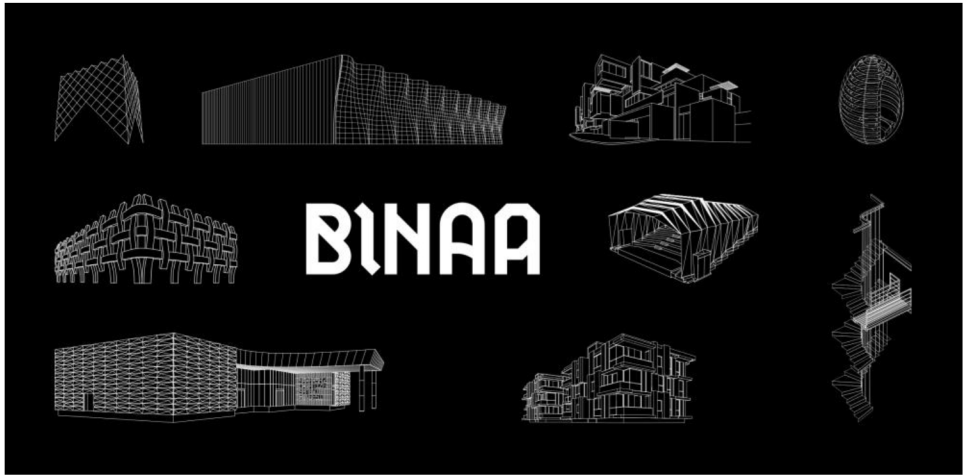


Fig. 2. BINAA Website, Icons. Source: www.binaa.co.

The name came to me suddenly. In Turkish, BINA means a building. But for me it was a convenient acronym that would allow me to brand the big ideas into something concrete: BINAA: Building, INnovation, Art, and Architecture: a forum for artistic and architectural conversations and collaborations was born! It was 2012, and I was in New Haven, Connecticut, practicing in an architecture firm. In addition, I was working on a project in Bursa, Turkey—*The Weave*—the signature building for a big textile company in Yildirim. Lots of collective thinking was involved in imagining and putting together *The Weave*, and consequently, BINAA. *The Weave* became BINAA’s kickoff project (Fig. 3).

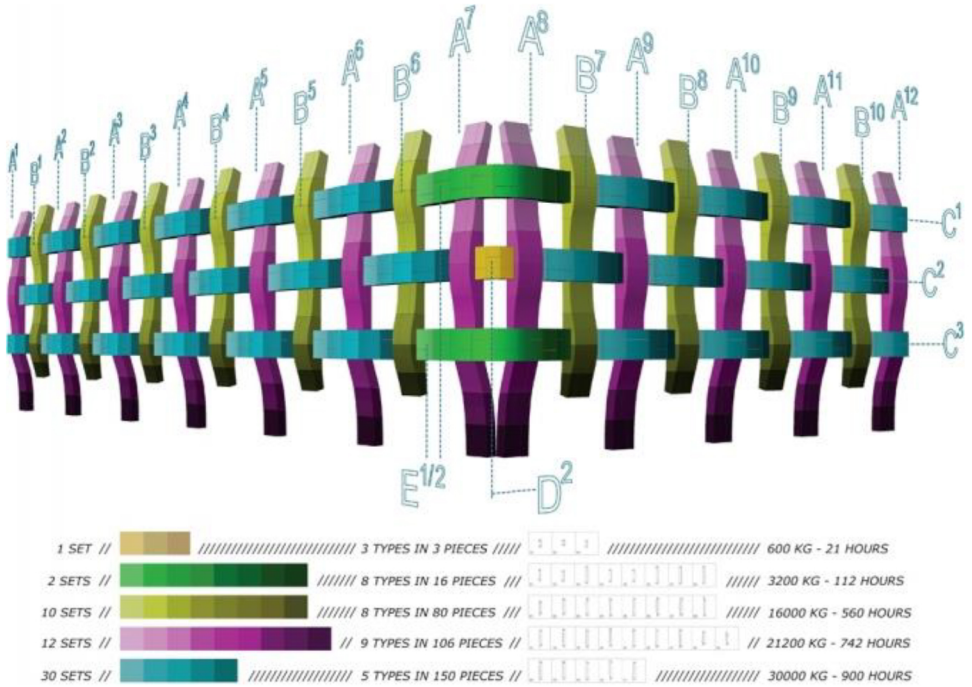


Fig. 3. A 3D construction model of *The Weave* project for Bursa, Turkey. 2012. Source: www.binaa.co.

At first, BINAA was about dreaming: to work in a collective environment, to learn from each other’s perspectives, to observe how different perspectives come together in the making of one final piece of architecture. I was working for a company and planning other work, for myself. I didn’t have the infrastructure to support BINAA. So, I started talking to people, to see their interest in an organization of this kind. The feedback they gave me was clear: the idea is cool but how are you going to make it happen?

To make your imagination come true, you have to believe in yourself. But you also have to believe in other people, you have to have the right tools, and you have to have the budget. To make your ideas materialize is a difficult process. And you simply cannot do it alone. You need collaborators. You need a network. Matthew Fineout was my main collaborator with *The Weave*, for example: he had the experience; I had the enthusiasm and connections: we were consulting each other constantly (Fig. 4).

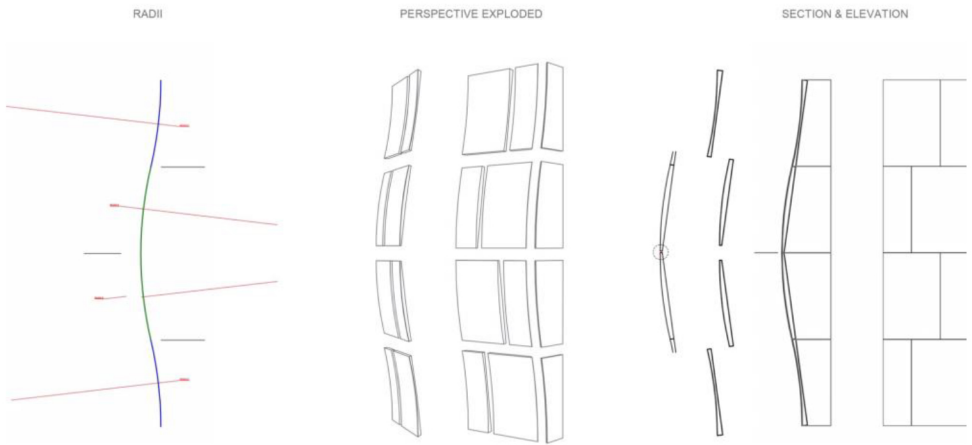


Fig. 4. Stone types. *The Weave* Project construction, 2012-2014. Bursa, Turkey. Photo credit: BINAA.

A big challenge I faced in those initial stages was that I was trying to introduce global thinking to a local setting. I was trying to introduce concepts and the way to get things done to Bursa, where it had not been done before. It was difficult to make people believe in your idea, to propose something new, to get the resources...especially in a place where people live day-by-day. But I saw this gap as a potential and I tried to push the idea of design and design culture into a labor culture (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5. *Argul Weave*. Completed in 2014. Bursa, Turkey. Photo credit: Thomas Mayer.

It took me two years to construct BINAA's framework and website. My main objective was to showcase the processes of collaboration, to share all this with others, and to inspire young designers: a digital portfolio through a website seemed like the most appropriate form. A graphic design company helped create a 3D archive where we could organize BINAA's projects: feature their unique modes of experimentation and showcase the processes involved in their creation: expose the difficulties, how different people and perspectives connect, tell the story behind the product. That was BINAA's mission.

Between 2012-2016, we completed several important projects, locally and globally. Of course, there are always challenges: you constantly have to convince people of your ideas...this takes time...it also takes time to meet visionaries. In Turkey, design, art, and architecture are difficult to sustain, difficult to celebrate. The economic and political problems make accomplishing all this hard. You have to create on very difficult terms here. And yet, it has been so exciting to see others inspired by your projects, starting to believe in the importance of design, art, and architecture. From here, we can inspire the rest of the region, the country, the world.

It is truly amazing when the goals of BINAA coincide with the goals of our clients. Take the *Interia/Nobis* project: our client is trying to bring all

furniture businesses under one umbrella in a signature building where people shop, spend time, but also interact with new ideas of the top floor, which will be dedicated to exhibitions, seminars, lectures, and research dedicated to design (Fig. 6). The goal here is to help connect young designers with businesses, to help bridge the design world with the commercial world. The modern streetscape-like interior and skylights, and the 200 meters long metal exterior aim to create not only a shopping center but a social space (Fig. 7).

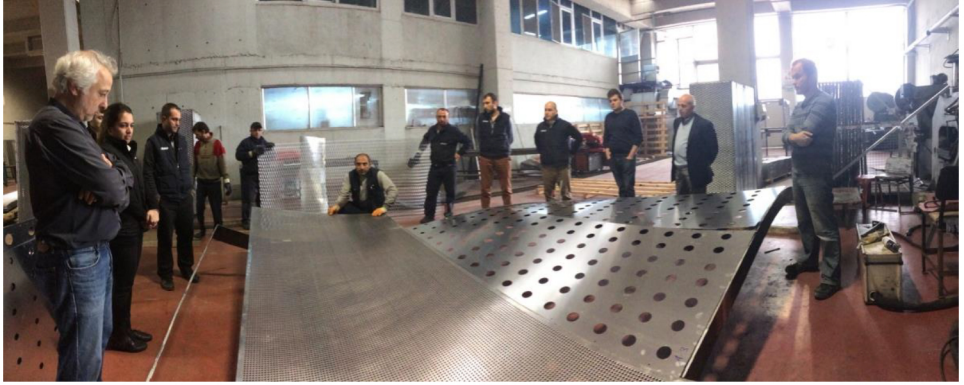


Fig. 6. Matthew Fineout, consulting metal façade construction at @Kassol Engineering, 2015. *Interia/Nobis* project in Dudullu, Istanbul, completion 2017. Photo credit: BINAA.



Fig. 7. *Interia/Nobis* project, under construction, completion 2017. Dudullu, Istanbul, Source: www.binaa.co.

BINAA is not only focusing on urban centers. Rather, we are interested in locations where architecture and design are not a priority, where they don't exist. By bringing them to the table, we are encouraging communities to look around and at themselves in a new way. For example, our current Headquarters

Project, situated in the Hinterland, some two hours away from Istanbul in the Sakarya region, will be an iconic project for the area: a headquarters and a conference hall for an Industrial Zone, it unites the vision of their management and engineer with our architectural vision (Fig. 8). By being an exemplary structure in the area, it will engage people into a new way of looking.



Fig. 8. Front of *Sakarya Industrial Zone Headquarters and Conference Hall*, Sakarya, Turkey, under construction, completion September 2016. Photo credit: BINAA.

A new way of looking, of course, leads to a new way of knowing. A new and unexpected presence, such as a building, creates a unique character for the area and provokes people's thinking: they become curious about the end product: How did this structure come about? What is the story behind it? What collaboration took place behind the scenes? The façade is very important is triggering these questions (think of Le Corbusier "freeing" the façade of a building). The façade is the interplay between exterior and interior; it opens one world into another. The façade is how a building performs, how it expresses itself, similarly to how a garment makes a fashion statement: it is the building's character. BINAA believes that a building's façade should express not only the building's character but also the building's function. We really focused on that with *The Weave*, with its carefully shaped stone facade.

In our new building, the façade is made of metal thus representing a vital element of its function in the Industry Zone. The light of day changes the look of the metal exterior throughout the day, and so, the building's character changes all the time (Fig. 9). From the outside, you don't see the windows of the building, but once inside, you do see the outside from the windows, which are hidden under the metal. Thus, the façade is both beautiful and functional, and the building—not just a structure but also an artwork.



Fig. 9. Back of metal façade changing with daylight. *Sakarya Industrial Zone Headquarters and Conference Hall*, Sakarya, Turkey, under construction, completion September 2016. Photo credit: BINAA.

Coincidentally, the building's mission is the convergence of various industries and people, just like BINAA's mission. All that will open the minds of people to the great potential of Turkey's Hinterland. And the role that design and architecture can play in beginning to realize that potential.

What is unique about Turkey's Hinterland is its history and geography: it is at so many crossroads and layered with so many different cultures. How do you design with so much history in mind? Over time, lots of bad construction and road planning took place here, with no consideration of design, in poor conditions and with sporadic financing. Our goal is to change all that: engage new design and architecture to create structures that are fresh and inspiring; to open up jobs for the locals, who can enjoy working on these projects and feed their families.



Fig. 10. *Serdivan Housing*, Serdivan, Sakarya, Turkey, under construction, completion October 2016. Photo credit: BINAA.

The challenges of running BINAA as an architecture studio and an online forum that reaches across fields and countries are not small: one is, of course, the compartmentalization of various projects. As a small team of five: three architects, including myself; an engineer; and a graphic designer, we rely on having less but more talented and efficient people. Another is, finding people who share in our mission, including visionary investors who can finance this kind of work. Because, the truth is, to make great architecture happen, you need a great designer and a visionary investor/client to come together (Fig. 10).

So, working at BINAA is extremely dynamic and demanding as you orchestrate, communicate, design, engage in conversations, discover new perspectives, share ideas with others, train good designers that can understand and perpetuate this kind of collaborative work, all the time. You need a lot of discipline, a lot of energy, a lot of flexibility, a lot of creativity, and a lot of open-mindedness, to do this every day...And you need a lot of mobility: our signature quality is the fact that we are not stuck in an office at all: our work happens both inside and outside the studio, as learning happens anywhere: at the construction site, a business meeting, a quarry, an industry fair...Like a good chef who searches for the perfect ingredients early in the morning, then slices, marinates, and cooks for hours, in order to serve the perfect meal at dinnertime, at BINAA we search patiently but persistently for new approaches, perspectives, skills, ideas, in order to deliver the optimum design and architecture to our client.

About the author

Burak Pekoglu is a Turkish architect and the Founding Director of BINAA (Building, INnovation, Art, and Architecture)—a platform for collaborative architecture practices—www.binaa.co. He holds a Master of Architecture from Harvard Graduate School of Design. Email: burakpekoglu@gmail.com