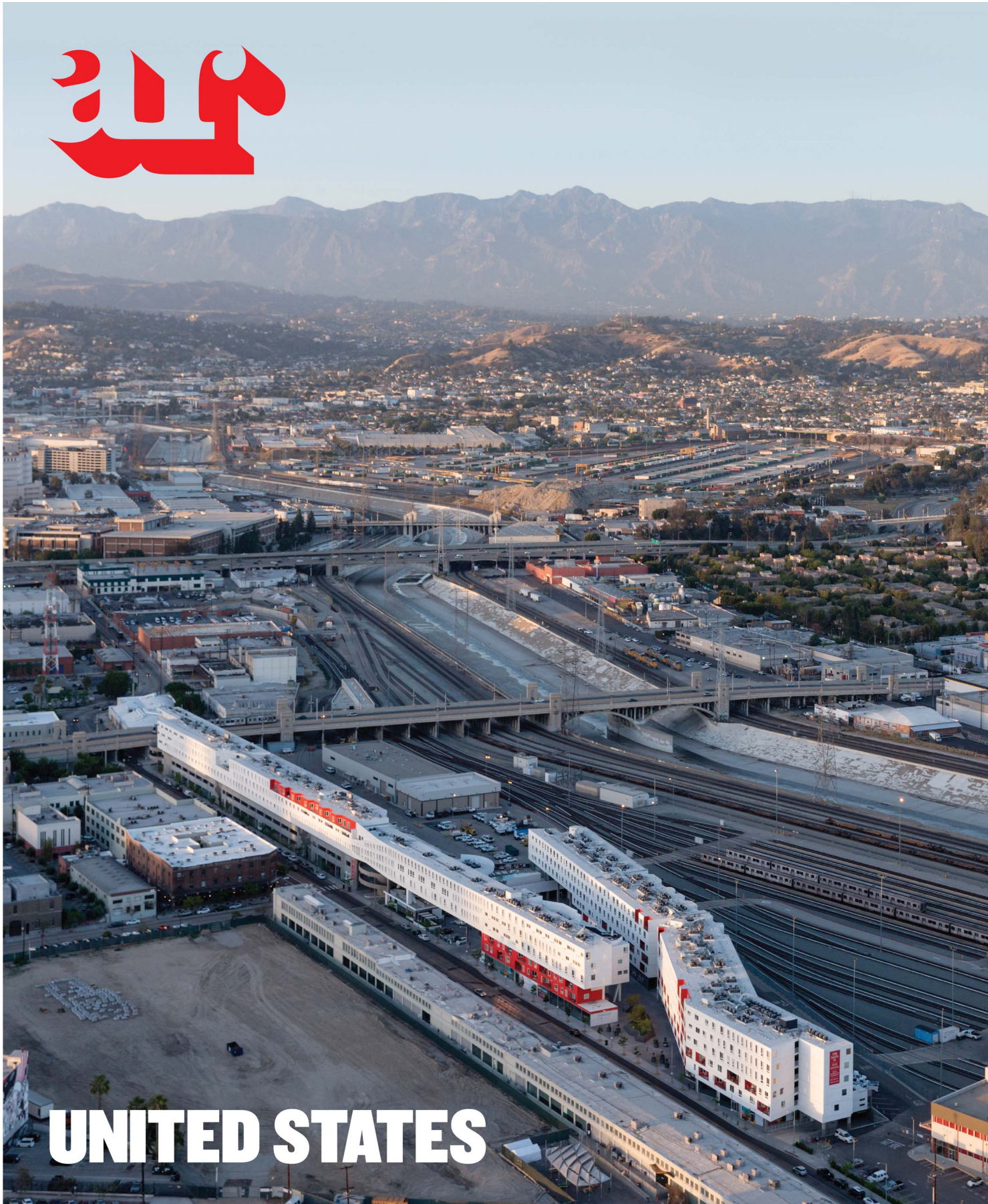




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UNITED STATES | RENZO PIANO | STUDIO GANG ARCHITECTS | DAVID ADJAYE | SHIGERU BAN | MICHAEL MALTZAN | TYPOLOGY | SWIMMING POOLS | COLIN HOWE



UNITED STATES



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TYPOLOGY SWIMMING POOLS

Sites of ablution, illicit heavy petting, athleticism, surveillance, leisure, racism and death: pools bring people together stripped of status symbols, but in ways profoundly marked by wider social conditions, writes *Tom Wilkinson*





REAPIX

There are few buildings through which one can literally float: space stations and swimming pools are about it. This sensory exceptionalism does not stop at dislocation from gravity, and the caress of the water that facilitates it, but extends to the aural – there is nothing like the din of a full pool; the olfactory – the evocative smell of chlorine, with perhaps a hint of musty lycra that lingers on your skin; and the visual, with the play of reflections completing the pool gestalt. Toss in the unusual experience of social nudity, and the utopian character of the swimming pool is revealed. Hockney’s painting *A Bigger Splash* conveys it well: the transitory motion of water, trace of a vanished body, against the more permanent architecture, all reduced to flat bright planes by the Californian sun.

But though pools are symbolic sites of freedom, where we can drop social constraints along with our trousers, they have a darker side. Their utopianism is restricted by official ambivalence: provided to improve the body of the populace through hygiene and exercise, they are strictly supervised to prevent us straying into unproductive pleasure. Co-bathing has generally been banned throughout the history of pools, apart from in first-century Rome and the postwar West, and recent events in McKinney, Texas, remind us that the pool – symbol of American freedom – is polluted with racism: as Jeff Wiltse argues in his book *Contested Waters*, it was the fear of contamination by black bodies that led to the post-desegregation boom in backyard pools. At its most dismal, the pool can also be a grave: *Sunset Boulevard*,

the nightmare twin of Hockney’s American dream, is narrated by a body that is *definitely* there, floating face-down in the pool he’d always wanted.

Most of our experiences of pools are thankfully more prosaic than this. But the architecture of pools can elevate a quick dip into something that might even remind us that the pool has its origin in sacred sites of ablation. One of the earliest surviving pools is a 5,000 year-old brick tank at the ancient city of Mohenjo-daro in modern Pakistan. It was presumably used for ritual purification, a function that was equally important in ancient Greece, where baths were incorporated into sacred sites as well as into gymnasias.

It was Rome that turned pool building into a secular art, thanks to its aqueducts and concrete vaulting. The provision of infrastructure was a vital role of the empire, and contributed to its lasting success by improving public health – and public relations. The Baths of Diocletian in Rome were the grandest example: a huge complex completed around AD 306 that included a library, gym, shops and restaurants. The remaining section, converted into a church by Michelangelo, features several examples of swimming pool design’s gift to all architecture, the thermal window. The core functions of a Roman bath were a frigidarium (a cold room with a plunge pool), a tepidarium (a lukewarm room), and a caldarium (a hot room). There might also be a natatio or swimming pool, and visitors would progress through these facilities accompanied by plenty of oiling and scraping, gossiping, networking

(Previous page, left) the bathing traditions of Rome and the Islamic world mingled and continue in Budapest. The Gellért baths are the grandest in the city, a fabulous sequence of tiled subterranean chambers in Secessionist style completed in 1918 (Previous page, right) the ‘Watercube’ designed by PTW Architects for the 2008 Beijing Olympics was underused and so it was converted into a water park in 2010. It is now the second most visited attraction in the city, after the Great Wall

(Above) reconstruction of the Baths of Diocletian in Rome, completed in AD 306. The concrete-vaulted complex covered 120,000 square metres and could supposedly host 3,000 bathers (Below) the leaded domes of Sinan’s 1580 Kılıç Ali Paşa Hamam in Istanbul, studded with ‘elephant eye’ windows. The building was restored in 2011 by Cafer Bozkurt Architecture



CAFER BOZKURT ARCHITECTURE

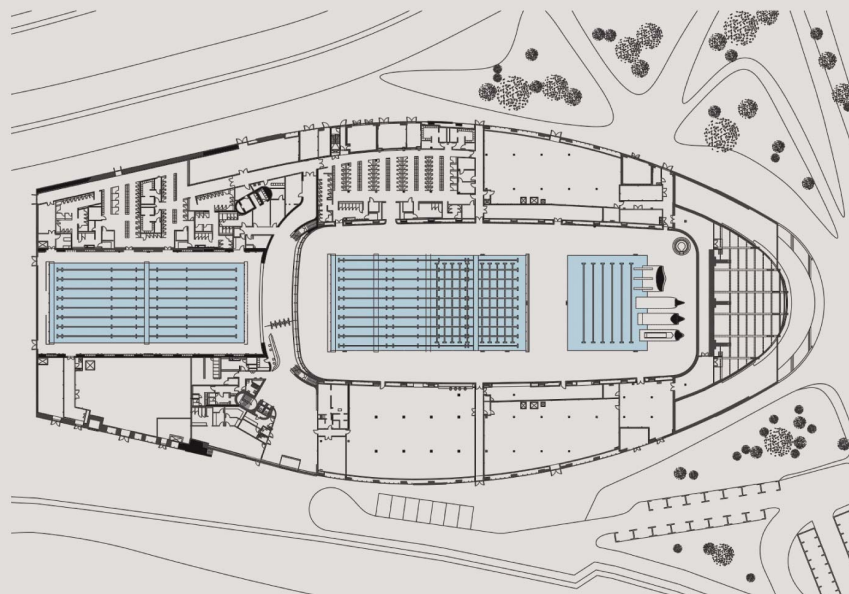
PETER ZUMTHOR THERME VALS, SWITZERLAND, 1996

Zumthor's slightly spooky, slightly kinky (leather curtains?) series of steamy caverns drills down towards the geological source of the healing waters at Vals. The stacked stone walls, labyrinthine plan and moody lighting filtered through layered glass create a chthonic atmosphere that reminds visitors of the cultic origin of bathing: this is so much more, the architecture claims, than just a fancy hotel spa (although that is indeed what it is). Nevertheless, the carefully deployed palette of materials – bronze, gneiss, terrazzo, leather – creates a meditative atmosphere of great sensory sophistication beneath the surface of the alpine meadow. On the roof terrace, meanwhile, an outdoor pool allows swimmers to float freely among the mountains.



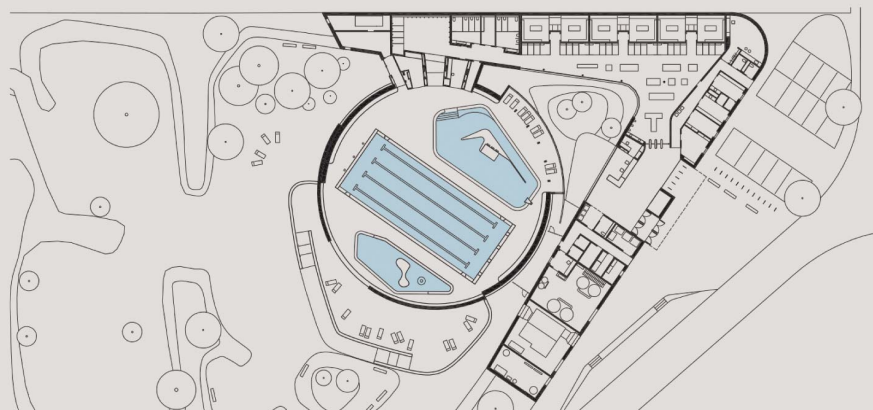
ZAHA HADID LONDON AQUATICS CENTRE, UK, 2012

The Olympics have produced a number of spectacular pools, including Kenzo Tange's cable-draped Tokyo pool, Günter Behnisch and Frei Otto's membranous structure for Munich, and Zaha Hadid's whale-like aquatics centre in London. The latter has been criticised for its lumbering roof, which certainly does not have the economical elegance of Frei's canopy, but once the two great 'water-wings' housing the spectator stands were removed, the building was transformed from ugly duckling to swan – although the relocation of the entrance to a small side door was an unfortunate decision. Nevertheless, it is an undeniably impressive place to swim, full of natural light. Behind the main pool there is a diving pool with high boards, and in another room a smaller training pool. Visitors disrobe in a unisex 'changing village', a common feature of contemporary pool design.



URBANE KULTUR PISCINE TOURNESOL, LINGOLSHEIM, FRANCE, 2014

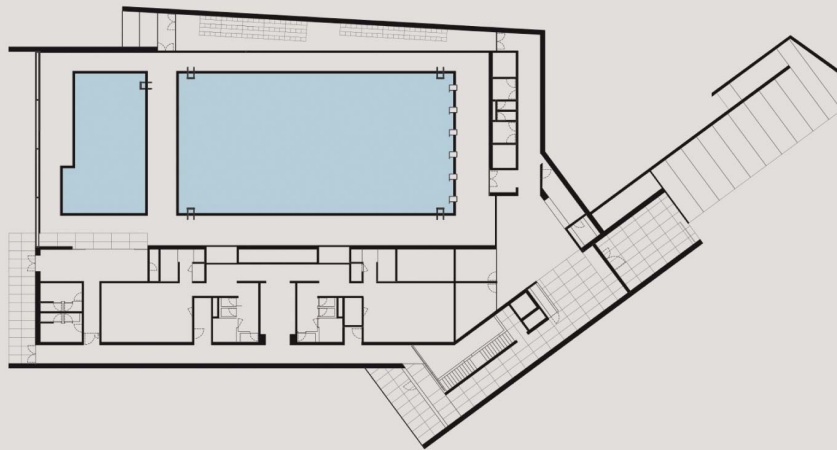
After performing badly in the 1968 Olympics, France initiated a programme of building '1000 pools'. Throughout the following decade, between 600 and 700 pools were constructed, including 183 'Piscines Tournesols', a type developed by Bernhard Schoeller. These domed buildings constructed from prefabricated panels have a section that swings open to expose swimmers to the sun, so creating a hybrid indoor-outdoor pool that can be modulated according to the season or weather. Today, many of the Tournesols are in poor condition, so the successful refurbishment of an example in Lingolsheim provides a potential model for future projects. The architects have retained the dome, but added a boomerang-shaped extension to house changing rooms, offices and services.



JEAN-BAPTISTE DORNER

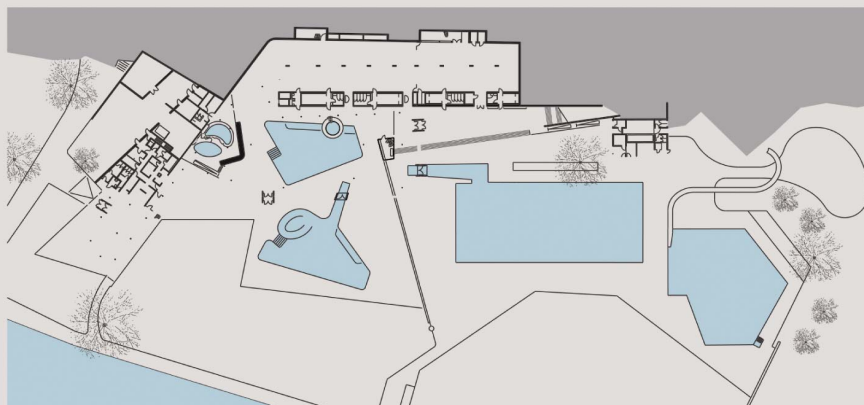
TOPOS ATELIER DE ARQUITECTURA MUNICIPAL POOL TABUAÇO, PORTUGAL 2008

Municipal pool as Stadtkrone: this is the pinnacle of the pool as urban feature, and for a town of just over 6,000 people. The improbable location of the building affords striking views, and yet this is a facility for all, unlike the infinity pools of exclusive hotels. Having ascended the shallow steps of the ramped approach, visitors enter a shaded letterbox aperture. Inside the shuttered concrete outcrop, cool marble and wood form a low-key foyer, through which you pass into the pools: one 25m lap pool and a smaller training pool. From here, all attention is directed towards the glazed end of the building, which looks out over the rolling countryside.



4A ARCHITEKTEN THERMAL BATH, BAD EMS, GERMANY, 2012

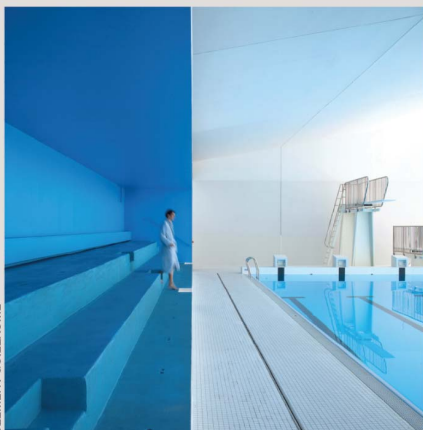
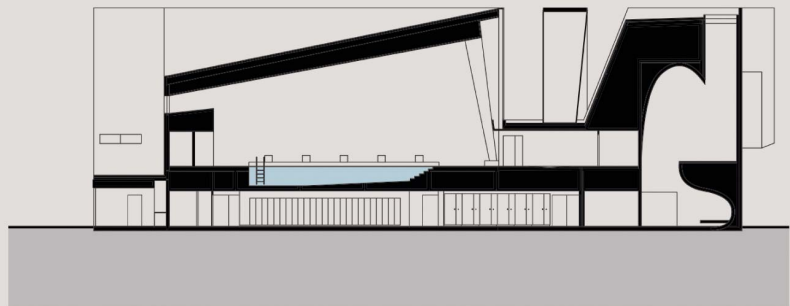
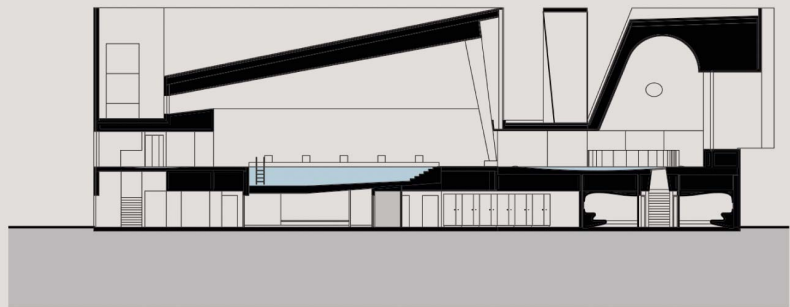
A new thermal bath has been constructed on the site of an earlier facility next to the River Lahn outside the German town of Bad Ems. The plan is a collage of overlapping Scharounian lozenges, which accommodate pools and saunas on the ground floor, and a gym and treatment rooms on the upper level. From here, patrons can access a roof terrace. Throughout the building, wonky pilotis and mosaics in a variety of primary shades promote an atmosphere of airy relaxation, while extensive glazing on the river side and two outdoor pools create an interpenetration between the architecture and the landscape beyond.



GUIDO KASPER

DOMINIQUE COULON ET ASSOCIES MUNICIPAL POOL, BAGNEUX, FRANCE, 2014

A 1950s municipal pool in a Parisian banlieue has been extensively renovated to expand the facilities, improve energy efficiency and create a serene centre for the local community. The original building with its two pools was pared back to its structural framework, and then rehoused in a new insulated skin, with a glazed curtain wall along the pools. The changing rooms were relocated to a basement beneath the pool, from which they borrow heat. A large extension was also added at the front in fair-faced concrete, which accommodates a paddling pool, sauna, solarium and hamam in a series of voluptuously curved spaces, which contrast to the rectilinear original building. On top, a large roof terrace provides space for sunbathing.



CLÉMENT GUILLAUME

