

The Architectural Review

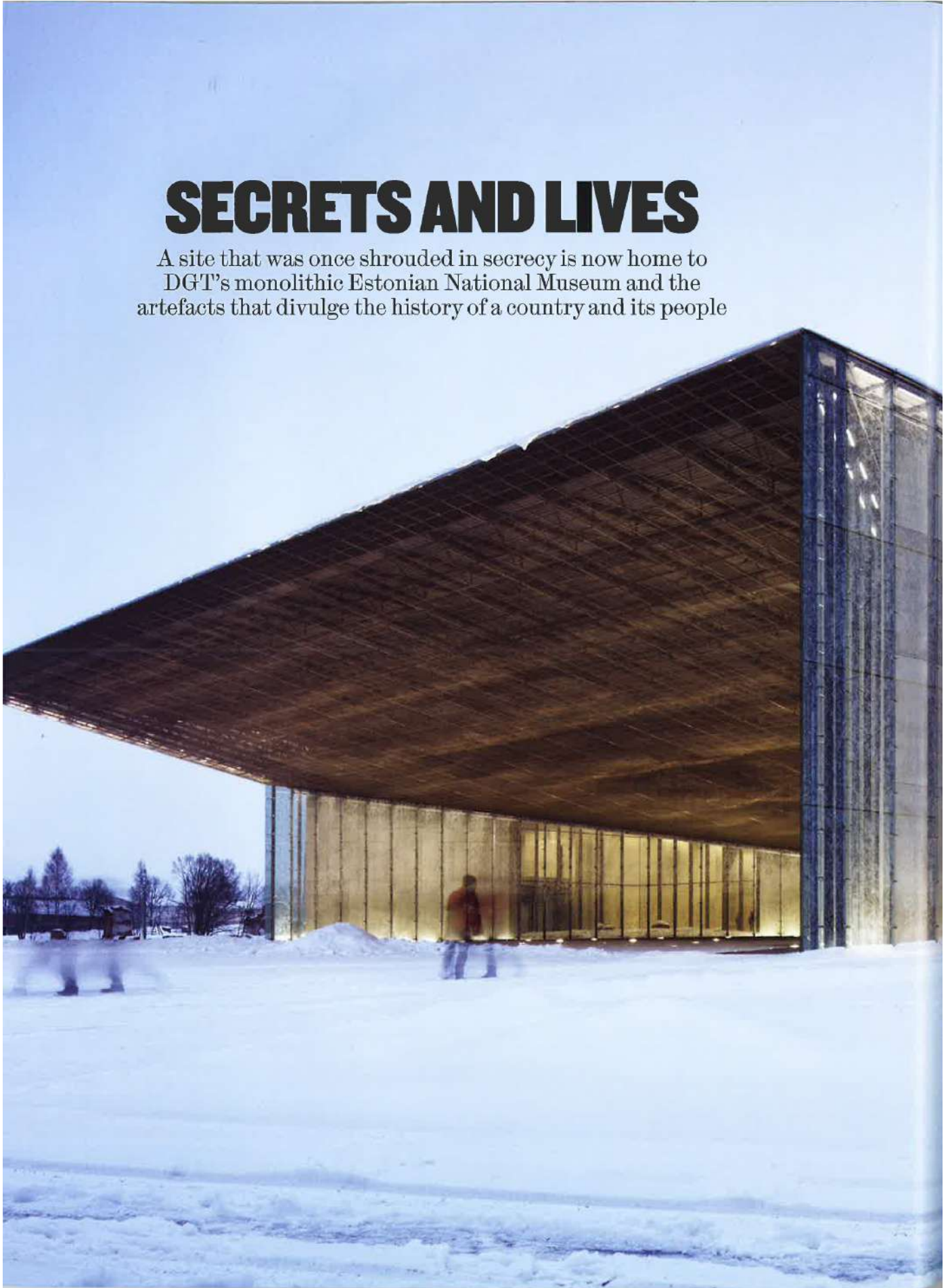


EMERGING



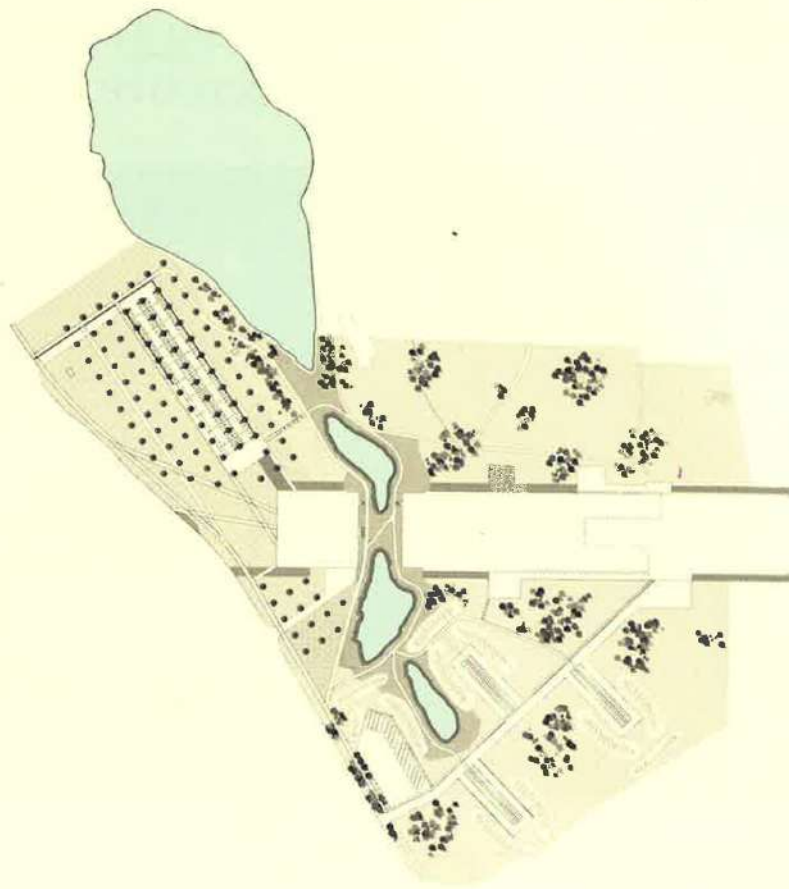
SECRETS AND LIVES

A site that was once shrouded in secrecy is now home to DGT's monolithic Estonian National Museum and the artefacts that divulge the history of a country and its people









Occasionally the emergence of an architecture practice occurs entirely in the shadow of a single vast undertaking, one that may thrust it into the public eye at the time of commissioning but can take a decade to complete. When Dan Dorell, Lina Ghotmeh and Tsuyoshi Tane, founders of DGT Architects, won the competition to design the Estonian National Museum in Tartu – the project that will define them going forward – the practice had not even officially formed. Partner Lina Ghotmeh had just moved back to Paris: ‘I was standing in front of the Centre Pompidou ... the outstanding story of its young architects leading this utopian project into realisation. At that moment, I got a call and learned that we had won the Estonian Museum project.’ The practice has been busy since – entering numerous competitions and creating everything from stage sets to installations – but the completion of the Estonian National Museum this year undoubtedly serves as a dramatic statement of intent.

The museum has a chequered past. Founded in 1909 and devoted to the heritage of the Estonian folklorist Jakob Hurt, traditional costumes, handicrafts and other

artefacts sought to form a material recording of Estonian history and tradition. An attempt to capture history purely through ‘folk’ artefacts (or indeed any attempt by one institution to tell a national history) may raise a few eyebrows and the Estonian National Museum has been no stranger to controversy. Its first permanent home in 1922 was Raadi Manor, home to the Baltic-German Lipharts who were viewed by many as ‘ideologically and culturally revolting’, but who nonetheless helped the museum to garner increasing popularity.

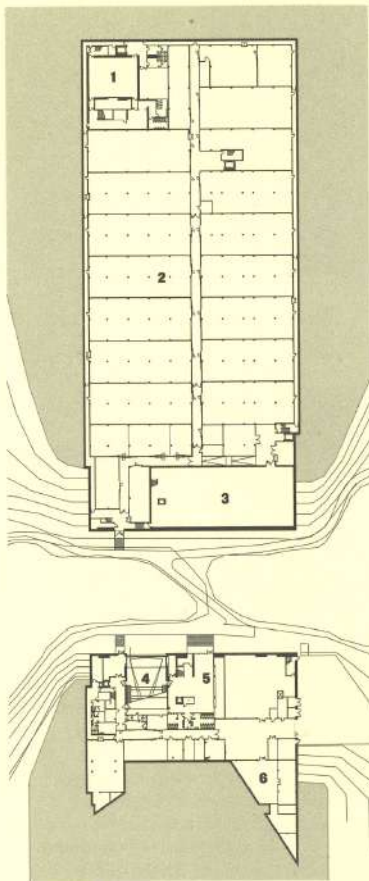
In 1940, 240 acres from the manor’s estate were requisitioned in order to construct Raadi Airfield, which would become the largest of its kind in the Baltic and a major base for Soviet bombing raids. Soon after the 1944 Tartu Offensive Operation destroyed the manor – along with the secrecy of the airfield and its dominance over the city (which foreigners were no longer allowed to visit) – the museum’s collections were stored in churches or other empty spaces.

Launched in 2005, the competition brief for the new museum would have situated the building in Tartu itself, but DGT proposed occupying the former airfield,

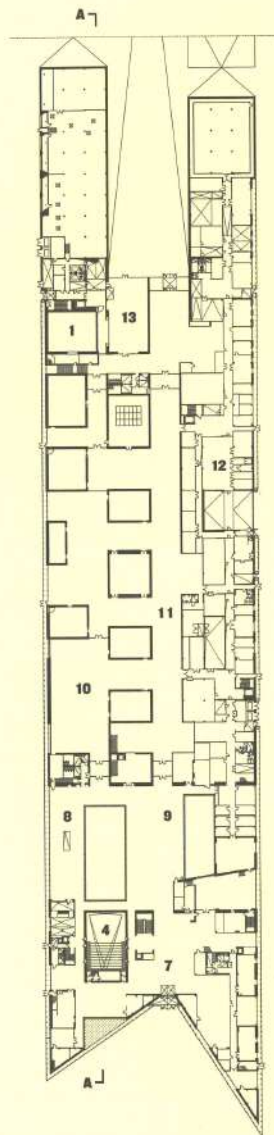
making the act of constructing the museum something of a memorialisation itself and one that also acts to regenerate what the firm refers to as a ‘charged and spatially unique place’. Not pulling any punches, the vast glass groundscraper – housing gallery spaces, a conference hall, public library, auditoriums, classrooms and offices – follows, and rises up from, an old runway, cutting through and opening up this once impossibly secretive place. Here it looms and glows, creating – in what is perhaps the project’s defining moment – a dip in the landscape that brings the visitor underneath the vast form while creating a sheltered courtyard space. This physical act of digging is reflected in Ghotmeh’s description of DGT’s approach – ‘whether a museum, an interior or set design, it is a digging process. A dig for histories, for stories, for traces ...’

The museum structure makes a statement that will likely be stronger than any carried by the objects exhibited within. For what is essentially a firm’s first project, it is massive in scale, bold – and occupies the sort of site few architects will ever get the chance to explore. *Jon Astbury*

‘The vast glass groundscraper rises up from an old runway, cutting through this once impossibly secretive place’



basement floor plan

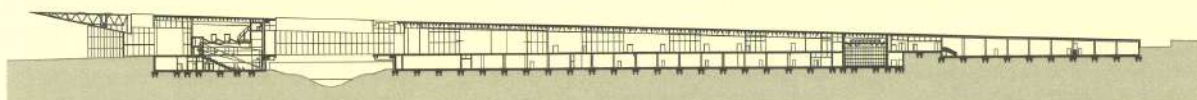


ground floor

- 1 black box performance space
- 2 archives
- 3 Finno-Ugric exhibition
- 4 conference hall
- 5 cloakroom
- 6 technical areas
- 7 entrance
- 8 restaurant
- 9 multipurpose space
- 10 temporary exhibition
- 11 permanent exhibition
- 12 offices and conservation
- 13 café



Architect
DGT Architects:
Dan Dorell,
Lina Ghotmeh,
Tsuyoshi Tane
Local architects
HGA, Pille Lausmäe
**Structural and
mechanical design**
Arup, London
(competition stage),
EA Reng AS, Estonia
(contract)
Photographs
Takuji Shimmura, 1, 3-5
Arp Karm, 2



section AA

