



SK NITRA (SK) — Two-and-a-half years after Barak architects' challenging design was featured in A10 #13, the Cheese House is finally standing in the historical centre of the city of Nitra.

The contemporary reality of building in historic city centres is a problem for architects everywhere. In this case, the lengthy approval procedure and precarious construction phase were closely related to the fact that the site is part of a heritage preservation zone.

The historic monuments board raised numerous objections to the cheese-like organic membrane of both front and rear facades as it appeared in the competition proposal: a perpendicular geometry was considered *de rigueur*. Moreover, additional excavation of the site was ordered in support of the board's claim that the historical value of the site takes priority over contemporary design gestures. When traces of an ancient tannery workshop were discovered in the underground layers of the building site, the board used this to bolster its demand that the architect redesign the facade so that it would be more in keeping with the context.

Happily, the architect achieved an unprecedented compromise whereby he obeyed the strict rules imposed on his design while still managing to come up with a solution that allowed him to wrap his commercial building in a cheese-like envelope. Many types of material were tested before the architect finally settled

on transparent plexiglas for the second skin in front of the otherwise banal perpendicular structure of metal-framed glass. Also unprecedented were the wind tunnel tests in which a full-size prototype of each piece of the jigsaw of the cheese facade was exposed to a 150 km per hour wind in order to certify the robustness of the plexiglas elements and their anchoring system. The most precarious phase of construction – another precedent – consisted of assembling the entire steel structure of the load-bearing grid in a horizontal position off site, transporting it to the site, mounting it on the building and fixing the plexiglas elements in place.

Thanks to the semi-transparency of the yellowish skin, it is quite clear that this is just a curtain wall in front of a solid orthogonal facade. At the end of this lengthy and very well publicized realization process, an otherwise modest commercial office building gained a 'tasty' and trendy image while the general public gained more insight into the often hidden discussions and conflicts between architects and the historic monuments watchdog. (MARIA TOPOLCANSKA)

Cheese House, 2006–2009. Architect: Barak Architects (Viktor Sabik, Marek Sumichrast). Client: Domea. Address: Mostna Street, Nitra. Info: www.barak.sk

