

# FORMATION

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## WARM UP THE WINTER WITH A LOOK AT WHAT ARCHITECTS DO ON THEIR HOLIDAYS



From the Ancient Greek ruins of the Acropolis perched above Athens to Peter Zumthor's remarkable museum of modern art in Köln, FORM staff have been off visiting various corners of Europe, tempted by some of the great architecture of the last 25 centuries.

Starting with the earliest building visited, the Parthenon was completed in 432BC at the Acropolis in Athens and continues to dominate the skyline of the city today. Built to give thanks to Athena, the city's patron goddess, for the salvation of Athens and Greece in the Persian Wars, the building was officially called the Temple of Athena the Virgin, with "Parthenon" coming from the Greek word *parthenos*, meaning "virgin."



Moving forward to the 9<sup>th</sup> Century when the castle was built and to the 13<sup>th</sup> Century when the royal palace was established, the Moorish delights of the Alhambra tower above the Spanish city of Granada. With the intention of amazing the visitor, almost every surface of the walls and ceilings, no matter how small, is covered with decoration and to maximise the effect of this, many intricately decorated internal columns have been added which are in fact false and have no structural purpose.



Moving onto the 16<sup>th</sup> Century, Venice's stone-built Rialto Bridge, which replaced earlier timber bridges, was completed in 1591. This makes a perfect spot to watch the sun go down over the Grand Canal as the chaotic mix of Vaporetti, gondoliers, stylish river taxis and all manner of delivery boats tussle for space, weaving in and out of one another in what looks like an accident waiting to happen, but which seemingly never does. The Rialto bridge caused some controversy when it was built, with some predicting that it would soon collapse into the Grand Canal like its wooden predecessors. More recently, and equally controversially, Santiago Calatrava's new bridge across the Grand Canal (the first for more than 70 years) opened in September 2008.





We come next to the Corbusian masterpiece of the chapel of Notre Dame du Haut in Ronchamp, considered one of the most important buildings of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century, which was completed 1954. The chapel is a place of pilgrimage, as much for Architects as for the religious variety. A series of small and often brightly coloured windows punched through the deliberately thick walls provide a dim but animated light to the modest interior, whilst the three towers provide a source of indirect ethereal light.



The newest building visited, Peter Zumthor's museum of modern art, was completed 2007, but it is only partly a new building, as parts of the former St. Kolumba parish church over which the museum is built date back to the Roman and Merovingian periods. Zumthor has made it possible to walk through an archaeological timeline as layers of the bombed out church's history are peeled back and revealed, whilst the feel of the space remains resolutely ecclesiastical, helped in part by the grids of small, square perforations in the thick new masonry walls that allow small shafts daylight to animate the scene, with shades of Ronchamp evident. Up above this, the two floors of gallery space are beautifully detailed and finished to an extremely high standard.



### Play of light

**What ties many of these seemingly disparate buildings together is the recognition by their respective Architects of the importance of light in the experience of the building, with daylight used as a key architectural component. That and the fact that they are nowhere near a beach...**