In any homogeneous group of buildings, it will be necessary at some time or another to replace one of them with a new building. It may be for a variety of reasons: an existing building may have been gutted by fire, it may have become dilapidated beyond repair, or the owners may simply require more room.

The shape and size which the replacement takes will usually be determined by the location and will be dependent on a number of factors, such as the wishes of the site developer, the architect’s competence and assessment of the task, the rules and regulations dictated by the local community. The physical situation of the site will also determine to a large extent what solutions which will be feasible.

Since there are many ideological and philosophical conceptions concerning infill architecture, the solution which is ultimately chosen will often be controversial and subject to debate. Almost without fail phrases like “an expression of our time” and “the demands of the present day” will crop up in the ensuing discussions. It is indeed a moot point whether people are capable of paying proper attention to “the spirit of the age” when it concerns their own time. It is easy to defend the argument that “the spirit of the age” can only be recognised from another point in time: that it is the outcome, in other words, of the cultural struggle which has taken place within a period, where, for example, the product which has resulted from opposing conceptions about the form of a new building can be compared with other contemporary achievements.

Even though the new development at Bryggen in Bergen is so close in time to the present that we cannot claim any historical distance from it, it provides an excellent example of infill architecture which was the result of exhaustive discussions. During the preceding controversy a great variety of possibilities were put forward. This can
La raison pour laquelle tant d'énergie a été déployée au sujet de Bryggen est bien simple. Cette partie du quai dans le vieux port hanséatique de Bergen est un site d'intérêt historique et architectural de grande importance. La majeure partie de l'ensemble, datant du début du XVIIIe siècle, a été inscrite sur la Liste du Patrimoine mondial de l'UNESCO en 1980, en compagnie des monuments et sites les plus prestigieux du monde.

Les problèmes d'architecture intégrée n'étaient pas nouveaux dans ce quartier, on les retrouve tout au long de son histoire. Même les plus anciens bâtiments étaient déterminés par les limites de terrains et les techniques de construction. Après l'incendie de 1702 qui détruit en grande partie la fin du Moyen Âge, les bâtiments qui succédèrent gardent un caractère médiéval, à la différence près que la paroi en planches qui protège le ronds des murs depuis le XVIIIe siècle n'existait pas au Moyen Âge.

Entre 1899 et 1912, la partie sud fut entièrement rénovée. Les nouveaux bâtiments sont non seulement en harmonie avec les dimensions des anciens, mais aussi avec le matériel de construction. De nouveaux matériaux comme la brique ou le granit sont introduits. Néanmoins cette nouvelle section du quai avec ses entrepôts, ses boutiques et ses bureaux, est un exemple réussi d'architecture adaptée. Le motif caractéristique des anciens bâtiments est conservé dans le忍不住 toires en dent de scie de la façade sur le port. Ensuite de nombreux détails de l'architecture médiévale en pierre, inspirés des villes de la Hanse sur le continent, furent introduits, établissant ainsi à la fois la liaison avec l'architecture en place et le milieu culturel étroitement associé à l'histoire du quai.

La situation était à peu près semblables aux précédentes en juillet 1955, quand une partie du vieux quai fut de nouveau démolie par un incendie. Il s'agissait encore de remplacer les constructions détruites par de nouvelles. Mais en plus, il s'agissait aussi de décider du sort de la partie épargnée par l'incendie: un groupe de bâtiments classés, mais dans un état de délabrement avancé et dont la survie n'était pas évidente. Finalement en 1963 la décision fut prise de les sauvegarder. Ceci posait déjà les conditions de l'évolution future.

La chance a voulu que ce site soit d'un intérêt archéologique tout spécial. Selon la loi, aucune construction ne pouvait être entreprise avant que le terrain n'ait été complètement foulé par les archéologues. Les investigations qui devaient se terminer l'année suivante commencèrent donc en octobre 1955, et continuèrent sans interruption jusqu'en 1968. En réalité elles ne furent véritablement achevées qu'en 1979. Nous savons maintenant que le temps ainsi gagné a été un instrument déterminant.

En principe, il y avait choix entre plusieurs alternatives:

1. Une reconstruction totale des bâtiments originaux.
2. De nouvelles constructions ne tenant aucun compte des bâtiments anciens.
3. De nouvelles constructions adaptées aux anciennes, mais de formes nettement modernes.
4. Un pastiche - c'est à dire des bâtiments neufs ayant l'apparence des anciens.
5. Une combinaison de plusieurs alternatives.

Avant de passer à l'analyse de ces différentes possibilités il est utile de brosser le tableau de la situation telle qu'elle se présentait à l'époque: Le port est une longue baie étroite qui va jusqu'au cœur de la cité. Vu de face, le site se présentait ainsi: en commençant par la gauche, autrement dit au nord, un cours - une sorte d'avenue large et
2. New development which took no account of the surrounding buildings;
3. New development adapted to fit in with the adjacent buildings, but clearly modern in design;
4. Pastiche architecture, i.e. new buildings designed to appear old;
5. Various combinations.

When reviewing these possible solutions, it is important to remember the situation at the time. Seen from the harbour, which is a long narrow bay cutting into the heart of the city from the south-west, we would have had the following picture: Beginning at the left hand, there is a wide space simultaneously combining a broad public thoroughfare and firebreak, a very characteristic feature in Bergen’s city landscape. To the right lies the area devastated by the fire, to the left a variety of large buildings in brick or stone, and at the back the dominating and characteristic west end of Bergen’s oldest standing building, the twelfth century church of St Mary’s, with its west front flanked by two high towers. South of the church lies a museum, built in 1976 to house and display the archaeological finds from the excavations in Bryggen. The site is surrounded by remains of some of the medieval houses that lie in situ inside the museum. Bryggen’s Museum was designed by the architect Øyvind Maurseth. To the right we see the great open site left after the fire, stretching for more than 70 m along the waterfront, and now in the late seventies fully covered by new development. This is bounded on the right by the early eighteenth century wooden warehouses which survived the fire, ten narrow buildings with horizontal weatherboarding, only three storeys high and with their characteristic gables facing the harbour. The architect in charge of these buildings was Håkon Lie and he was in charge of the project in 1877. The gables facing the harbour, giving the characteristic zig-zag roof line. What they do not have in common is their size and use of building material. Let us now look at the five possible solutions mentioned previously and consider what would have been involved in the redevelopment of the site at Bryggen.

1. Total reconstruction of the original wooden buildings

This was surely a Utopian solution, at any rate if it implied an exact replica built with similar materials. Original buildings of the same type are still standing on the adjacent site, so that any idea of a museum-like reconstruction was really unnecessary. The floor area in such a development would be so limited that the project would hardly be financially viable. Moreover, the functions which were envisaged, such as shopping malls and a hotel, require extensive fire precautions which would not be compatible with an exact reconstruction.

2. New development taking no account of the surrounding buildings

This proposal on the other hand, was a highly realistic one. Throughout the 1950s and 1960s various schemes were suggested which in no way harmonised with the surroundings. Even high-rise blocks were proposed, since the site’s central location and correspondingly high market value invited an intense development. The only positive argument, which could possibly be put forward from a conservation point of view, would be that it would increase the cultural and historical value of the authentic wooden buildings on the adjacent site and thus increase the pressure to place these under a more consistent and stringent form of care and preservation. But this increase in cultural value would hardly compensate for the destructive effect such a development would have had for the whole of the harbour district.

3. New buildings designed to fit in with the existing ones, but clearly modern in their design.

This was a solution which sounded attractive, considering the location with the two existing groups of buildings forming two independent blocks, each clearly a product of their own time, yet clearly integrated. If this proposal was chosen, the problem would be to define the standards which would be necessary to achieve a satisfactory juxtaposition with the other two groups of incendies. A reconstruction exacte n’était donc pas compatible avec le projet.

De nouvelles constructions ne tenant pas compte des bâtiments existants.

Ce projet, bien au contraire, était tout à fait actuel. Plusieurs solutions de ce genre ont été suggérées au cours des années 50 et 60. On proposa même la construction de bâtiments en hauteur pour exploiter au maximum un terrain en plein centre. Le seul argument positif, s’il en est, du point de vue de la conservation, était que de telles constructions rendaient le vieux quartier de Bryggen encore plus précieux et obligeraient à prendre des mesures de sauvegarde encore plus sévères. Mais ceci ne pouvait en aucune manière compenser l’effet désastreux d’un pareil projet sur l’environnement immédiat.

3. Nouvelles constructions adaptées aux anciennes, mais de forme nettement moderne.

Cette solution était tentante, compte tenu des deux groupes distincts déjà existants, chacun représentant clairement des époques différentes. Il s’agissait alors de définir le modèle sur lequel il fallait se baser pour obtenir une juxtaposition satisfaisante. En d’autres termes, il fallait choisir entre le bois et la brique. Le choix des dimensions était plus compliqué. Si les nouvelles constructions étaient aussi hautes que celles en brique, la partie centrale en bois serait complètement écrasée. Même si certaines constructions en hauteur pouvaient être acceptables à l’extrémité nord du terrain, il fallait cependant prendre en considération l’église Ste. Marie. Néanmoins une chose était sûre, les façades vers le port devaient répéter le motif en dents de scie.

4. Le pastiche.

Les nouveaux bâtiments pouvaient être des répliques de l’un des deux groupes existants, ou bien des reconstructions basées sur les relevés conservés des bâtiments incendiés, sans pour cela être construits en rondins.

5. Solution mixte.

Comme le lector l’a probablement déjà deviné la solution finale fut un compromis. Après plusieurs tentatives pour obtenir un permis de construire en hauteur, dans les années 50, un projet de constructions basses fut préparé en 1962. Ce projet prévoyait un centre commercial et un terrains d’autobus ainsi qu’un parking au sous-sol. Les architectes de ce projet étaient Aall et Løkland. Ils présentaient un nouveau projet en 1974, cette fois
The roof over the part of the new hotel containing the reconstructed buildings. The transverse roof edge is a result of the large through-rooms on the upper floor.

same height and with the zig-zag silhouette of the gables. This was a feature which was now lost, but could it be re-created in some way?

Despite its idealistic wishes, the Historic Monuments Office accepted the project, which was nevertheless shelved owing to the crisis in the tanker shipping industry. The debate consequently cooled down. However, not all the shipowners had been affected by the crisis and with considerable financial donation from the international shipping magnate and native of Bergen, Erling Dekke Ness, the building of Bryggen Museum went ahead and was opened in 1976. As mentioned previously, this was also designed by Maurseth. Thus modern architecture was introduced to Bryggen.

Nineteen-sixty-two saw the foundation of Stiftelsen Bryggen (The Bryggen Foundation), a trust with the idealistic aims of preserving the surviving old buildings of Bryggen. In 1978 the trust approached Maurseth with a request to design a new building on the still-open site incorporating the re-erection of the original warehouses, an idea which had been launched by the Historic Monuments Office four years earlier.

When new investors caused interest in the hotel plans to be revived, it was natural that Maurseth should be selected as architect. And in the meantime ideas about infill architecture and adaptation to existing buildings had begun to receive a more sympathetic treatment.

Maurseth's new design incorporated saddleback roofs. The whole complex was divided into two main blocks. The rear part of the site would be occupied with a modern building in red brick, whose layout reflected the long narrow warehouses on the original Bryggen properties. The roof-level stepped down towards a transverse glass-covered street or passage which separated the rear part of the site from the smaller front section with its waterfront façade. This part would consist of a reconstruction of the buildings which had stood there before the 1955 fire, constructed in concrete but with wooden walls and roof. Detailed measured drawings existed of the original warehouses.

This solution where an obviously modern building adapted to an existing environment was combined with a pastiche—a modern concrete structure disguised as a continuous row of wooden warehouses facing the waterfront—was subsequently realised, admittedly only after hard discussions involving the architect, the site developers and the Central Office for Historic Monuments. Maurseth, however, is willing today to accept full responsibility for the final result.

The project has its critics. Some feel that it is difficult to comprehend the history of the building, since the main façade does not automatically indicate the period to which it belongs. Others find it hard to accept the open plan of the upper floor which contradicts the apparent structure indicated by the waterfront façade of a series of small buildings. The transverse passage through the heart of the complex, which is partly for fire-precautionary reasons, is criticised on the grounds that it is an entirely foreign element on a site which was characterised by long parallel rows of buildings separated by narrow passages running up from the waterfront. It was also for fire reasons that the warehouse adjacent to the surviving group on the south side was not reconstructed, with the result that there is now a gap in what had originally been a continuous façade. Many react to the fact that on entering the new building they are suddenly confronted with the exteriors of apparently old wooden houses. It is also maintained that Maurseth would have been quite capable of designing a modern façade which nevertheless could show respect for the special demands of the site and its preserved buildings, so that the "modern" for once could come into its own.

It is hoped that this account has demonstrated that almost any proposal for the Bryggen site would have been met with counter-arguments, while at the same time justifiable reasons could have been found to defend it. This serves to emphasise yet again the need for a thorough analysis of the purposes and aims of conservation, so that it is possible to deal with any specific course of action can be clearly perceived and evaluated.

Finally, there should not be any doubt that the Bryggenhotellet project as it was finally realised in 1982 has many warm supporters, and this was made eminently clear when the Hotel was awarded the Europa Nostra prize for good architecture in 1984.