PHILIPPE SAMYN - DESIGNER EXTRAORDINAIRE - 1948-2026



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Philippe Samyn has gone to join the architects' Valhalla.

It still has not entirely registered that he is no longer there, no longer drinking his endless cups of black, black, coffee, in his airy offices in the leafy, perfectly landscaped gardens, near the *Quartier Prince d'Orange*, bow tie and groomed hair exactly in place, his inquisitive look turned piercingly on each eruption into this Sanctum.

I only realised now that I knew very little about him, or his early life, or even how old he was. Those kinds of things didn't seem to have much place in the kind of relationship we had. I knew he had a brother, and that he greatly admired Albert Frère, but that was as personal as it ever got.

The friendship with Philippe goes way back. I am referring of course to his multiple collaborations with the International Polar Foundation. I must have met him more than 20 years ago. Possibly 2003 or 2004. In fact, I measure "Philippe Time" by the projects, the ideas, the heady intoxication of imagining future builds, and

exotic techno-architectural creations.

He gave us generously of his time and I never realised how very unusual that was. My first experience of working with him, we collaborated on a project for the Polaris Climate Change Observatory to be built on the Campus of the University of Toronto.

It was wonderful to thrash out ideas with someone who didn't instantly pour cold water on "unusual" concepts. He would emerge with something to top even my most exaggerated extrapolations into imagining new solutions to deliver really extreme demands like for instance innovating towards flux management as a way of generating energy to deliver building "services". On one occasion, we came up with a "Techno Sunflower" which harvested light and chanelled it along pipes into a museum type space to illuminate exhibits. The project didn't pan out, but that little gem is still waiting to find a new garden elsewhere.

Our most iconic collaboration was on the Princess Elisabeth Antarctica in 2007, leading to the building of a Zero Emissions Research Station in Utsteinen, East Antarctica in 2007-2009. Bringing Philippe in to help when we were thrashing around trying to find a way forward, was a life saver. His effortless balancing act for the project brought together every type of instrument required for the project, like a "*Chef d'orchestre*" urging the very best out of every participant, he delivered the Symphonic finale that we were hoping for.

He introduced us to the best of the best in every realm of modern construction arts.

He never lost his composure. There was never a moment when he was dishevelled or discourteous, despite the fact that he worked seven days a week and demanded the same of the young architects who came to work for him in this competitive environment that ripped their idea of work life balance to shreds, but gave them an *entrée* into another realm, that of scintillating ideas brought to life. Only the best could survive, the hardiest and the most tenacious. I doubt I would have survived as his student, but I got to learn from him in a privileged bubble.

Despite his eccentricity, he was an incredible teacher, and working alongside him was like taking a crash course in architectural engineering where multiple disciplines could be harnessed to deliver something which was a hybrid between a machine and a building in the classical sense, minus of course bricks and mortar. He knew how to deliver beautiful works.

It was intoxicating to work with someone who would effortlessly pick up on what was required to deliver the outcomes being sought. Not that we ever considered that we were clients making demands.

We were first and foremost very strange siblings, in a World where ideas created fraternity. Like siblings, we fought incessantly over detail, with periods of "*froideur*" but eventually everything would resolve in great beams of light from an idea exploding into the exact right place, at the right time.

Our last project, the Andromeda Project, was unveiled in April in Luxembourg. He demonstrated that he was at the top of his game. His excitement and enthusiasm gave us that added energy that was going to be needed to carry through this gargantuan project, bringing together multiple countries, and multiple institutions to deliver an embodiment of an immensely important symbol. That of international cooperation, and humanity pointing to an age of light, and not an age of destruction and stupidity.

The Andromeda Earth Observatory was to be the crescendo. He tuned up the brass section, the horns are playing, there will be a section with strings and flutes, and somewhere along the line this will happen because he has already laid the groundwork, and we have begun to recruit the orchestra.

Philippe will be there for the ovation, sporting the pin on the right lapel, smiling with that exuberance of his when something has exceeded his expectations.

A hard act to follow is our Philippe. He will probably re-model Valhalla for Circularity.

- Nighat Amin for IPF

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