JAMES BOND
IN WORLD AND POPULAR CULTURE

The Films are Not Enough

Edited by

Robert G. Weiner
B. Lynn Whitfield
and Jack Becker

Second Edition

CHAPTER FIVE

JAMES BOND - A TRUE MODERNIST?

UDO GREINACHER

Alarm bells and siren bursts interrupt the focused atmosphere of clipped and precise orders given in the control room. Bond has just pulled the radioactive rods beyond their safety limit, causing the reactor coolant to overheat just as the Mercury rocket roars off Cape Canaveral's spaceport. As the panicked personnel attempt to flee the control room, Dr. No tackles Bond, fighting to regain control of the reactor. To no avail. Bond succeeds in pushing the doctor into the boiling water of the reactor. Dr. No's mechanical hands lose traction, his body slips below the boiling surface... Smoke billows next to the piers where Bond and Honey Ryder join countless panicked employees in their search for a vessel that will allow them to flee the island. When Bond notices a little dingy ready to depart, he jumps from the pier, lands in the boat, and throws its operators over board. He and Honey take off just as the first explosions tears apart Dr. No's futuristic underground laboratory. Fire, and clouds of black smoke fill the screen...

Modern structures rarely survive any encounter with 007. In his films, they are flooded, set on fire, or blown up in an ever-grander series of finales that announces James Bond's victory over schemes of world domination or destruction. Nevertheless, Bond scholarship is rather silent when it comes to architecture and design. This essay establishes architecture's importance in Bond films and analyzes the role it plays in their narrative structure as well as its roots, its potential, and the need for its total destruction at the end of the movie.

With few exceptions, Bond movies build up to a grand finale in which the villain's lair is completely destroyed while Bond thwarts their evil plans. The hideouts are either programmed to self-destruct, bombed by 007 himself, bombarded by allied forces, or struck by a laser during the final showdown. Why does saving the world necessitate the demolition of

the meticulously designed hideouts that display amenities and technology not available to most of us? Is Bond an enemy of Modern architecture?

Steve Rose, architecture critic of *The Guardian*, traces Bond's problem with architecture back to his creator (Rose, 2008). He claims that Ian Fleming was incensed when two Victorian homes on his street were demolished to make way for modern villas, and decided to retaliate in print. He named the gold-loving megalomaniac in one of his stories after Erno Goldfinger, the villas' architect, who was famous for his designs of two new offices, the *Daily Worker* newspaper building and the headquarters of the *British Communist Party*. Goldfinger tried but failed to stop the appropriation of his name, and was later reported to have "left imprints of his 'cloven hoof' all over London" by *The Guardian*.[1] Indeed, the vilification of Goldfinger follows Fleming's practice of selecting and transforming parts of his own experiences for use in the Bond series. Several of his characters are based on past acquaintances with whom he had had a falling out, such as George Ambrose Scaramanga (*Man with the Golden Gun*), a fellow student from Eton College, and Tom Blofeld (several books and films, Bond's most enduring enemy), like Fleming a member of the London gentlemen's club *Boodle's,* and also a former Eton student.

Despite his reported "scathing views of modern architecture" (Rose, 2008), Fleming's very descriptive and colorful writing limits itself to a brief description of the Moonraker base as an "ugly concrete world" (*Moonraker,* 144) and Las Vegas as the home of "a new school of functional architecture, 'The Gilded Mousetrap School'" (*Diamonds,* 135). In the novels, Bond generally defeats his opponents without the mass destruction of property, spectacular mayhem, and the pyrotechnics prevalent in the films. Indeed, the climactic scene in *Dr. No* is strikingly different from its filmic adaptation. With almost juvenile pleasure Fleming describes Dr. No's burial under a mountain of bird manure:

> "At the first brush of the stinking dust column, Doctor No had turned. Bond saw the long arms fling wide as if to embrace the thudding mass. One knee rose up to run. The mouth opened and a thin scream came up to Bond above the noise of the engine. Then there was a brief glimpse of a kind of dancing snowman. And then only a mound of yellow bird dung that grew higher and higher" (*Dr. No*, 210).

In *Licence to Thrill*, James Chapman gives several reasons for the differences between *Dr. No*, the novel, and its filmic adaptation. The producers wanted to update the story so that it would appeal to young post-war audiences, and thus referred to a number of recent misfires in

America's space program. They also attempted to fill a gap in the prevailing film culture by combining the tradition of the British spy thriller with Hollywood production values and spectacle. Terence Young, the film's director, declared that they felt the need to "heat up" an otherwise "childish," "grade B thriller." *Dr. No* [1962] then became the template for subsequent Bond films. They each introduce 007 in a dramatic opening sequence, which in later films becomes a mini-adventure with fast-paced stunts at spectacular locations. This is followed by a brief gun-barrel and credit sequence before the main story begins. The films end with the spectacular demolition of the villain's lair and Bond's rescue. Although many stray markedly from the written texts, both films and novels interweave structural oppositions into the plot to keep the story moving: opposition between characters (Bond vs. villain(s), Bond vs. girl); ideologies (Soviet Union vs. the Free World, England vs. non-Anglo Saxon countries); and values (consumption and austerity, duty and sacrifice, luxury and discomfort, loyalty and disloyalty) (Chapman, 2000). The opposition of characters and values makes it possible to update any part of the films without altering the overall narrative of the Bond series.

Successful filmic adaptations visually describe and dramatize characters, places and actions much more elaborately than their literary counterparts, which can draw on the imagination of the reader. In the Bond films, both the environment and the sets have been indispensable tools for developing and articulating the villain's character. In contrast, Bond's persona has been defined foremost through his actions, his gadgets, and his progressively more elaborate stunts. The adaptation of his character for the films exaggerates but remains true to Fleming's portrayal of Bond as an "essentially conservative hero, a defender of the realm, committed to preserving the institutions and society of his country" (Chapman, 2000: 29) who, when not on assignment or at headquarters, spends his time in the fashionable Chelsea neighborhood.

Fleming doesn't mention Bond's living quarters in most of the novels. *Moonraker* and *From Russia with Love* contain a description of his flat on the ground floor of a converted Regency house, but in general the action takes place elsewhere. In the movies, glimpses of his home are equally scarce. In *Dr. No*, Bond encounters Sylvia Trench playing "sexy golf" in his apartment upon his return from a gambling club; and in *Live and Let Die* [1973] Ms. Caruso, an Italian secret agent, spends the night at Bond's flat. When M arrives at 5:47 in the morning, Ms. Caruso hides in the wardrobe while Bond distracts M with his new espresso maker. In both films the interiors are unremarkable combinations of French Empire and

English mid-Georgian styles, a look generally associated with men and masculinity.[2]

By keeping his living situation unmemorable and his essential characteristics somewhat general—British spy, middle-aged, virile, interested in the consumption of luxury goods such as caviar, rare bottles of wine or champagne as well as fast cars and fast women; and by repeating the same clichés such as "martinis shaken, not stirred," Bond becomes a timeless presence for the franchise. This allows the series' producers to update the character without having to create a new Bond every time. While each film has room for a new villain, the creation of a single Bond allows the producers to account for slight differences in detail while guaranteeing that "all of the Bonds in the various novels and movies are the same character" (Skolnick and Bloom, 2006: 82).

The disregard for Bond's living situation stands in direct opposition to the detailed and prominently featured set designs for his opponents. From the beginning, the designs of the villain's base of operations have been spectacular and have played a major role in each film's narrative. The locations of these hideouts are always hard to reach. Some are submerged under water (*The Spy Who Loved Me*, 1977) or hidden within a crater (*You Only Live Twice*, 1967). Others are situated in an exclusive retreat high in the Alps (*On Her Majesty's Secret Service*, 1969) or on a remote island (*Dr. No*, 1962 and *Man With the Golden Gun*, 1974). Although Fleming doesn't describe the hideouts in great detail, in his sixth novel he allows Dr. No to state why such elaborate, out of the way compounds are necessary:

> "Mister Bond, power is sovereignty. Clausewitz's first principle was to have a secure base. From there one proceeds to freedom of action. Together, that is sovereignty. I have secured these things and much besides. No one else in the world possesses them to the same degree. They *cannot* have them. The world is too public. These things can only be secured in privacy. You talk of kings and presidents. How much power do they possess? As much as their people will allow them. Who in the world has the power of life or death over his people? Now that Stalin is dead, can you name any man except myself? And how do I possess that power, that sovereignty? Through privacy. Through the fact that nobody *knows*. Through the fact that I have to account to no one" (Fleming, 1958/2002: 135).

Unlike traditional representations of power such as castles, cathedrals, or houses of assembly, the villains' lairs do not command a central, highly visible location. They neither express their roots in history nor attract the viewer with the splendor of intricate facades. In fact, they are not designed

to impress from afar but to dominate from within. Here the classical design tools such as axis, symmetry, scale, and ornament give way to an interiority dominated by technological advances and purely functional designs. These typically feature sleek surfaces, moving elements, and the elaborate play of light and shadow. The films use these design elements—all staples of Modern architecture—to help portray the structural opposition between Bond and the villain.

Modern architecture provides a perfect visual metaphor for the Bond villain. "What is the archetypal Bond villain if not a modern architect?" asks Steve Rose, who points to Hugo Drax's desire to create a new civilization in space (*Moonraker,* 1979), and Stromberg's plan to wipe out world cities for an underwater Atlantis (*The Spy Who Loved Me*). This need to "'improve humanity by wiping out the messy status quo and replacing it with some orderly, rational utopia" is a common goal of the villains in Bond movies (Rose, 2008).[3] Many modern architects have also been accused of setting similar goals. Indeed, Modern Architecture has often been criticized for its bold departure from previous stylistic periods and their ties to specific cultural regions and political epochs. In fact, Modern Architecture—like Fleming's villains—has no clear national origin. Modern Architecture, also called the *International Style*, emerged from the creative cross-fertilization of German, Czech, French, Russian, Dutch and Swiss ideas and projects.

Soon after its inception, the *International Style* was perceived in America as a "somewhat frightening sign of progress driven by technological and scientific advances" (Rosa, 2000: 160). It was deemed inappropriate for most residential settings, because Americans did not want to "start from zero as members of the Bauhaus [had] suggested" (ibid: 159). Instead, they were motivated to "keep up—not to supplant—with the Joneses" (ibid). Hollywood, on the other hand, immediately adopted the *International Style* for the residences of its elites, and supported modern architects such as Rudolph Schindler, Richard Neutra, and John Lautner. After World War II, when the country was united by a common fear of total annihilation from atomic bombs, the classification of "Modern" became synonymous with inhumane and potentially destructive power. Therefore, Hollywood had to alter its use of modern architecture. It began to give Modernism a sinister role in its movies. For years to come, modern domestic settings would be reserved for "characters who are evil, selfish, obsessive, and driven by the pleasure of the flesh" (ibid).

The list of modern buildings used as homes for movie villains includes a broad range of notable modernist structures. In Palm Springs, a villa designed by Stewart Williams becomes a luxurious retreat for a gangster

boss in *The Dammed Don't Cry* [1950]. In Los Angeles, a pimp/pornographer resides in Richard Neutra's *Lowell House (LA Confidential* 1997], while an Asian gangster boss lived in Frank Lloyd Wright's *Ennis House* (*Replacement Killers*, 1998). In addition, John Lautner's *Jacobsen House* overlooking the San Fernando Valley serves as a corrupt cop's reward for his misdeeds in *Twilight* [1998] (Andersen, 2003). Most likely the best-known example for the practice of associating modern design with reprehensible characters is the *Vandamm House* in Alfred Hitchcock's *North by Northwest* [1959]. Like the villains' hideouts in later Bond movies, this mansion near Mount Rushmore is precariously sited in a remote area and ultramodern in its design.[4] The *Vandamm House*, however, was not designed by a modern architect, but by several set designers.

The majority of modern hideouts used by the Bond villains were also created specifically as film sets. Sir Ken Adam, the production designer for many films in the series, is credited with the visual style that went on to become the trademark of the Bond films. Adam grew up in "the Berlin of Max Reinhardt..., of the modern architects, of the painters Groz, Otto Dix, Klee and Kandinsky" (Frayling, 2005: 7). From an early age, he experienced expressionism in film and theatrical design. He watched the construction of Emil Fahrenkamp's functional-style *Shell House* and, in 1928-29, met the Modernist icon, Mies van der Rohe, who drew up plans for the family's new sporting-goods store on Friedrichstrasse. After the family was forced to relocate to England during Hitler's reign, Adam studied architecture at the Bartlett School in London. There he rediscovered the designs of Erich Mendelsohn, one of Germany's premiere expressionist architects. However, Professor Richardson, the head of Bartlett, strongly encouraged him to design in the more traditional Queen Anne or Georgian style (ibid: 18).

Ken Adam's chance to rediscover his expressionistic roots came in 1961, when Terence Young hired him as production designer for the first Bond movie. Young gave him free reign, but almost no budget, to develop the look of *Dr. No*. Adam had always wanted the "chance to create [his own] form of reality," slightly ahead of its time when it came to engineering, and electronics (Frayling, 2004). He designed sets with simple, inexpensive forms that expressed their spatial qualities through strong metal and stone textures, and at the same time continued Hollywood's tradition of using modern architecture for the expression of evil. According to Adam, it was the total lack of money that contributed to one of the film's most memorable sets: the interrogation room where Professor Dent receives his orders from Dr. No. With no time and only

500 £ in the budget, Adam created one of his most minimal yet most expressive sets: a platform, a low ceiling, and an oculus covered by a crate that cast a cross-patterned shadow over an otherwise grey set. The set was made all the more impressive as the disembodied voice of Dr. No can be heard in the foreground.

The inspiration for some of Adam's futuristic sets came from existing structures, while others came from his fertile imagination. The encasement of Dr. No's fusion reactor looks like Albert Kahn's designs for industry, but Adam must be credited with the design of the reactor itself; no such facility existed at the time. His designs for the Fort Knox interiors in *Goldfinger* [1964] were also based on pure speculation. The sets appeared so real that United Artists was inundated with angry calls from people demanding to know why a British team was allowed to film inside Fort Knox where even the President of the United States was not allowed to enter (ibid). Adam pushed architectural design even further with the space sets for *Moonraker* and the interiors of Stromberg's underwater residence in *The Spy Who Loved Me*. Adam's genius lay in his ability to take the rational modernist aesthetic and give it a sexy, futuristic edge. With the rocket launch facility hidden in a volcano in *You Only Live Twice* [1967], Adam's brand of modernism began to influence the film's narrative. After a location mentioned in Fleming's novel (a medieval castle with a poisoned garden) could not be found in Japan, Adam suggested that it would "be fun if our villain [lived] in one of these disused craters" the scouting team had just discovered (ibid). From there emerged the idea of missiles within the crater, a clear departure from Fleming's novel. This led to the construction of a million dollar volcano for a movie whose story was ultimately determined by its sets.

Throughout twenty-two installments, the expressively modern interiors designed by Ken Adam and, later, Peter Lamont successfully reflect each villain's character. Every design element utilized embodies the absolute power sought by Bond's enemies, and visually communicates the evil nature of their schemes. Often, horizontal strip windows are used to symbolize the total control of the horizon. In addition, highly visible, repeated structural supports are utilized to suggest the infinite expandability, not only of the building, but also of the villain's power. Soundlessly moving partition walls and facade elements allow the villains to control the size and shape of their spaces, while surveillance cameras, intercoms and projection devices allow for depersonalized control of the compound and staff. Efficient monorails facilitate the transport of an army of robot-like employees who execute the villain's orders.

Some tools of enforcement are hidden in plain view and become part of the interior's design. Shark and piranha fish tanks introduce a natural element into the otherwise starkly functional interior, but become fatal traps for those who antagonize the villain. Electric chairs, hypnotizing intercoms, and poison gas outlets are also part of the deadly infrastructure. Expensive surfaces such as marble floors, wood-paneled walls, and chrome or polished steel ceilings create a corporate look that reinforces the professional nature of the criminal organizations. They also provide a foil for the antique tapestries, paintings, and furniture the villains collect to showcase their wealth and power.

Bond's power is not defined by the spaces he inhabits, neither his own, traditionally furnished apartment nor his luxurious hotel suites. Rather, it lies in his mobility, his spycraft, and in the gadgets that extend the capabilities of his physical body (Willis, 2003). Ultimately, the tools available to him are superior to the villain's, not because of their sophistication or power, but because of their flexibility. While the villains' gadgetry is usually part of the compound's architecture and remains fixed, Bond's gadgets travel with him, ready for use in any setting. Both the villain's architecture and Bond's gadgets tend to be concealed, but the secret underground or underwater constructions in remote locations come at a huge price. In contrast, the insertion of ever-smaller devices into everyday objects can be undertaken by almost any rapid prototyping lab at a fraction of the cost. At the end of each movie, both the villain's compound and Bond's gadgets are used up or destroyed, but only 007 can easily return another day, fully equipped for another fight.

Bond's gadgets not only guarantee his victory, they also place him at the forefront of current trends towards concealment, miniaturization, hybridization, and mobility. With each film, the gadgets become increasingly more sophisticated. Their transformation is also reflected in the evolution of "Q's" role, especially how he is portrayed in the first three films. Introduced as "the armourer" in *Dr. No*, he becomes "the equipment officer" in *From Russia with Love*. By *Goldfinger* the role of the gadget designer is fully developed, and, due to its importance, referred to by letter only (O'Donnell, 2005: 62). "M" gives the orders, but "Q" makes their execution possible. This development is paralleled by the equipment presented to Bond, from a new gun (*Dr. No*), to an attaché case that hides various weapons, defense mechanisms, and money (*From Russia with Love*), to the Aston Martin DB5 that adds mobility and camouflage to the mix (*Goldfinger*). The gadgets used in later movies become smaller, more powerful and more versatile, and continue to follow the established themes of camouflage, miniaturization, mobility, and hybridization.

Recent architectural designs have picked up some cues from the Bond narrative. Camouflage already exists in mirror-faced office towers that reflect the facades of their neighbors. It has reached a new level since the introduction of the cloaking device used in *Die Another Day* [2002]. The same technology that allows the Aston Martin to hide in plain sight now drives the digitally created elevations of Jean Nouvel's Concert Hall in Copenhagen, Denmark. In addition, decades of refinements in the miniaturization and mobility of Bond gadgets have fostered an appreciation for flexibility as seen in the Museum of Modern Art's *Home Delivery: Fabricating the Modern Dwelling* show of 2008.

The exhibit showcased five small, one-off, prefabricated houses that could be easily dismantled and rebuilt anew. Finally, the ubiquitous watch cum laser/saw/magnet/communication device/detonator hybrid finds its architectural equivalents in the foldout constructions of Hans Peter Wörndl and in the minimal hybrid living environments of Andrea Zittel. Wörndl's *Gucklhupf* House [1993] is a solid, plywood-clad cube that allows occupants to push, slide, rotate, or pivot walls in order to have completely flexible interior spaces. They can be altered as needed to catch the light and present different views as the day progresses. Zittel's *A-Z Living Unit* [1992-94] is a highly compact system consisting of elements that pivot, telescope, and rotate in order to reduce basic living activities to a 200-square-foot space (Sollins, 2002). A more recent development, the *A-Z Homestead Unit* [2001], reduces the shelter to a 63 square foot footprint. The construct is temporary and portable, can be assembled by two people in a short time, and doesn't require building permits (Zeiger, 2002). Although each of the examples responds to a different trend, they provide a compelling alternative to the traditional conception of a building as a fixed entity that should serve its purpose for at least thirty years.

Bond's contribution to the architectural discourse goes beyond his relentless destruction of modern architecture. Indeed, he adds another structural opposition to the series' basic formula of good vs. evil: the technological gadget versus the architectural setting. He challenges the rigidity of traditionally designed architectural spaces and helps further the case for a more accommodating design approach that incorporates temporal change, flexibility and multi-functionality. As long as the Bond films continue to follow Ken Adam's desire to remain slightly ahead of current technological developments, they will be able to serve as a source of inspiration for future architects.

References

Andersen, Thom director. 2003. *Los Angeles Plays Itself*. Thom Andersen Productions/Submarine Entertainment.

Chapman, James. 2000. *License to Thrill: A Cultural History of James Bond*. New York: Columbia University of Press.

Fisher, James. 1998. "Goldfinger. He's the man with the modern touch." Arts & Entertainment - The Independent accessed 9/10/2009. http://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/architecture-goldfinger-hes-the-man-with-the-modern-touch-1174530.html.

Fleming, Ian. 1955. *Moonraker: a James Bond novel*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.

Fleming, Ian. 1956. *Diamonds are forever: a James Bond novel*. New York: Penguin Books, 2003.

Fleming, Ian. 1958. *Dr. No: a James Bond novel*. New York: Penguin Books, 2002.

Frayling, Christopher. 2004. "Sir Ken Adam - Filmsets are Forever." http://www.berlinale-talentcampus.de/story/19/1519.html. Accessed 9/8/2009.

Frayling, Christopher. 2005. *Ken Adam and the art of production design*. New York: Faber & Faber, Inc.

O'Donnell, Patrick. 2005. "James Bond, Cyborg-Aristocrat" in Edward P. Comentale, Stephen Watt and Skip Willman eds., *Ian Fleming and James Bond: The Cultural Politics of 007*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press.

Rosa, Joseph. 2000. "Burning Down the House: Modern Homes in the Movies," in Mark Lamster ed., *Architecture and Film*. New York: Princeton Architectural Press.

Rose, Daniel, 2008. "Steve Rose on the architecture of James Bond films | Art and design | guardian.co.uk." http://www.guardian.co.uk/artanddesign/2008/nov/04/james-bond-architecture. Accessed 7/14/2009.

Skolnick, Deena and Bloom, Paul. 2006. "The Intuitive Cosmology of Fictional Worlds." in Shaun Nicholas, *The Architecture of the Imagination: new essays on pretence, possibility, and fiction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Snadon, Patrick. 2009. Personal interview conducted by the author on September 11.

Sollins, Susan, executive director. 2002. *Art: 21 - Consumption*. PBS

Willis, Martin. 2003. "Hard-wear: the millennium, technology, and Brosnan's Bond," in Christoph Lindner ed., *The James Bond Phenomenon: A Critical Reader*. Manchester University Press.

Zeiger, Mimi. "Living A-to-Z." *Dwell* vol.3, no. 2 (December 2002): 61-67.

Notes

[1] Goldfinger's rare post-war private houses share the fate of modern architecture in the Bond series. In 1995 the English Heritage refused to recommend the listing of "one of the two most significant" post-war private works by the architect, which was subsequently demolished to make way for a bungalow (Fisher, 1998).

[2] According to Patrick Snadon, Professor of Interior Design at the University of Cincinnati, Bond's apartments are "traditional [interiors] with combinations of French Empire and English mid-Georgian, but very few Regency touches" (Snadon, 2009).

[3] Such all-encompassing goals are largely absent in Fleming's stories. The missile in *Moonraker* is intended to destroy London, not to build a new civilization in space, and the 1962 novel *The Spy Who Loved Me* shares only title and main characters with the 1977 movie. The schemes for World Domination in *GoldenEye, Tomorrow Never Dies*, *The World Is Not Enough,* and *Die Another Day* are not based on Fleming's novels, but are original scripts.

[4] The house also recalls another famous house of the time - Pierre Koenig's *Case Study House #22* overlooking Los Angeles.