

IBRAHIMOVIC AND ARCHITECTURAL AMBITION

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SOMETHING HAS BEEN on my mind about *architectural ambition* since I read an article by “a science guy,” pursuant to an amazing soccer goal that captured the attention of the sporting world. The goal was (is) discussed as being (perhaps) “the greatest goal ever scored.”

It was scored by Zlatan Ibrahimovic, playing for his native Sweden against England in an International Friendly Match in 2012. An article by the *UK Telegraph’s* Assistant Comment Editor (and science writer) Tom Chivers was entitled, “Zlatan Ibrahimovic and the Audacity of Genius: Why Be a Fiat when you can be a Ferrari?”¹

It is so difficult to describe the goal in words, it really is best if you view a video online (search for “Zlatan Ibrahimovic’s Stunning Bicycle Kick”). But even if you never see the goal, all you need to understand is that people were seriously asking, “Was it the greatest goal ever scored?”

For the curious: here is my best attempt to describe it:

1 The ball arrives in the air from Sweden’s zone.

2 The ball is cleared by England’s goalkeeper with his head, since he’d left the goalkeeper’s area.

3 Ibrahimovic, seeing the England keeper out of his area, spins around with his back to England’s goal, leaps into the air and executes an overhead “bicycle kick,” 35 yards over everyone and into the England goal, for the fourth time. Sweden won 4–2, and all Sweden’s goals were scored by Ibrahimovic. After this goal though, everyone – including the England fans present – stood to applaud it.

Amongst the post-goal chatter was included the article by Tom Chivers, who aptly stated, “It’s the sort of thing you wouldn’t even try, unless you believed yourself to be extraordinarily good.”

For Aspiring Architects:

To me, the lesson an aspiring architect can draw from this particular soccer play is that one needs to be willing to take bold risks because nothing great will happen if you do not. I especially believe an architect needs to be audacious in the architectural ambitions of every project. And a great deal of that audacity is driven with confidence, as the Chivers article’s title posits: “Why Be a Fiat when you can be a Ferrari?”

Caveats:

Two alarm sirens immediately go off in my head as I hear myself suggest that “aspiring architects” be *audacious* and *confident*, as if a profession so driven by individual ego needed a shove in that direction.

The first alarm siren relates to the *audacity* of architectural ambition: because if you’re

an “aspiring architect” not seasoned by time, you might think I’m saying that we should be making bold architectural gestures at every opportunity. That couldn’t be further from what I mean: I mean to say that you should always set out with the highest order of audacity in your *ambition*.

At every stage and opportunity, from the design concepts to the final detail execution, you should always aspire to do the best possible thing – and be audacious in that ambition. Time and experience will teach you that clients, sites and specific constraints are all different, so your response must always be measured. While the “... Fiat ... Ferrari” question might (incorrectly) suggest I’m a proponent for making Guggenheim Bilbaos at every corner, in fact, sometimes the boldest architectural ambition results in the quietest and most anonymous edifice. And it might require more courage, conviction and confidence to be restrained than the opposite.

The second alarm siren concerns *confidence*, as it pertains to pursuing the audacity of architectural ambition. While confidence is the fuel for the pursuit, it is a double-edged sword.

Zlatan Ibrahimovic definitely had enough confidence in his abilities to attempt to kick a soccer ball in a way that made people debate whether or not the goal that he scored was the greatest ever scored – in all of the goals scored in all of the soccer games ever played. And isn’t that a great reminder of what can be achieved when you have the confidence to be audacious ... and it works out.

Because sometimes it doesn’t work out, and maybe a footballer falls down and gets a ribbing from teammates or the press for being audacious.



ABOVE. ZLATAN IBRAHIMOVIC AT THE EURO 2012 MATCH AGAINST FRANCE, 25 JUNE 2012. PHOTO CREDIT: DMITRI NEYMIROK; SOURCE: FOOTBALL.UA; COPYRIGHT: KIRIL KRIZHANOVSKY WIKIMEDIA COMMONS. FAR LEFT. PHOTOSHOPPED SCREENSHOT BY ANTHONY PROVENZANO.

Soccer is a game; in architecture, the mistakes last for a very long time. As Frank Lloyd Wright said, “The physician can bury his mistakes, but an architect can only advise his clients to plant vines.”²

Tom Chivers speaks to the science parallels: “They laughed at Columbus, they laughed at Fulton, they laughed at the Wright brothers. But they also laughed at Bozo the Clown,”³ said Carl Sagan, pointing out that almost all the brave outsiders flying in the face of scientific consensus are not the new Galileo, they’re just wrong. But every so often one of them is Galileo: willing to say the apparently ludicrous because

their data, and convictions, lead them to it. They should see the odds and think: I’m probably wrong, I’m going to look like an idiot, I should stay quiet. But they don’t.

For an aspiring architect, gathering lessons along your career path, you will be wrong many times, especially in the beginning. And that confidence fuelling audacity might also be fuelling the very reason(s) you will be wrong. Mastering the correct balance might very well be a lifelong pursuit.

My note to all aspiring architects is that while they might not actually be the next Le Corbusier (in the same way that all soccer players will not be Zlatan Ibrahimovic): they should be just as audacious in their ambitions.

Anthony Provenzano is Principal of Anthony Provenzano Architect and a Regular Contributor to OAA Perspectives. Anthony Provenzano Architect is the only Canadian Firm listed with the German Sustainable Building Council (DGNB).

NOTE 1. <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/news/tomchiverscience/100189964/zlatan-ibrahimovic-and-the-audacity-of-genius-why-be-a-fiat-when-you-can-be-a-ferrari/> **2.** NEW YORK TIMES MAGAZINE (4 OCTOBER 1953), http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Frank_Lloyd_Wright **3.** BROOKA’S BRAIN (1979), P. 64, http://en.wikiquote.org/wiki/Carl_Sagan

