

**Episode 2,416: Why Is Everything Ugly?**

**Guest: Dino Marcantonio**

**WOODS:** Okay, so let's talk about the problem of ugliness. And when we get to this problem of ugliness, we're going to talk a bit about modernism. And modernism in architecture is its own thing.

But there's modernism in all different areas. There's modernism in theology. There's modernism in the arts. There's modernism in music, which, I guess, is a subset of the arts.

But one thing that I think they seem (at least to this dumb layman) to share in common, is, really, a contempt for the aesthetic sense of the average person.

And they seem to take a wicked pleasure in having a sense of superiority to these people: *You're too stupid to appreciate what I've done here. You're too stupid to appreciate my art. You're too dumb to appreciate my music that makes no sense.*

Or whatever. And I wonder, do you feel like there is – is there a kind of arrogance, let's say, at the heart of some of the architecture that we see these days? Am I overstating it? You can tell me. We're old friends. You can tell me.

**MARCANTONIO:** Listen, I think that the layman's reaction to architecture is, for the most part, absolutely accurate, and architects do not give it enough credit. I don't know if I would say that a majority of architects actually have ill will.

There's a funny comedy video out there about a guy who's playing an architect who actually wants you to hate him personally, because he hates you personally. Most architects are not actually doing that, to my knowledge. At least, I have not come across them.

I think that they're just trying their best to do what they think is what makes sense in the context. And now there are some who just sort of write off the layman's reaction to what is perceived to be ugliness. They believe that they are the professionals, just as a doctor is a professional.

And you're not going to ask a layman for medical advice, you ask a doctor for medical advice. So, when it comes time to building a building, the belief can be, in some, that the architect is the professional. And just trust your professional and he will give you something that is good.

And you don't see that yet? Just trust him and maybe eventually you will.

**WOODS:** Yeah. I don't necessarily mean that they're all haughty and they're walking around motivated by hatred all day. But what I mean is, if I were to strike up a conversation with an architect and say: *You know what I really would love to see? Is a revival of X*.

He would just put his head in his hand like: *Oh my gosh, what in the world?* And again, maybe it's not hostility toward me.

It could be more a matter of: *This guy doesn't understand my field at all. He wants to take things that belong to a bygone era, or to another geographical location, and artificially transplant them where they don't belong.*

There's a part of me that can hear that.

**MARCANTONIO:** No, I think that you're absolutely right. A majority of them would think that you're a nostalgist, and you're misunderstanding, and you just need a little bit of education.

Where, if you were in his position, with his education and dealing with the facts on the ground as he saw them, you would probably do the same thing.

But I think that an architect is suffering himself from a misunderstanding. And that's why I do something – and there are a small group of architects just like me, who do something fundamentally different.

But I think it's based on essentially a misunderstanding of the nature of architecture, the nature of beauty, and I think that there are probably some deeper philosophical problems there as well. So, this problem have roots that go back hundreds of years. That is not fully appreciated, I think, by my profession.

**WOODS:** I was reading today a little bit about this stuff. And I found – apparently there was a survey done (I don't know how long ago) in Sweden among Swedish architects. And it turns out that the great majority of them themselves live in buildings that were constructed before 1930.

And so, the author of this article (himself, an architect) says: *So, it almost seems as if modernism is something you do to other people. It's like the schoolteachers who send their own kids to private school. It's the same kind of principle.*

**MARCANTONIO:** Yeah. I don't think that it's because there is a sadistic impulse there, and not a corresponding masochism. But I think that basically what's happening there is when it comes to your private home, that is seen as the domain of self-expression.

And when it comes to buildings that populate the city, that are not entirely private, like government buildings, cultural buildings, office buildings, there, your personal self-expression is not appropriate.

So, if traditional architecture, what the layman would call (what I would call) "beautiful architecture", is your self-expression, that is okay. So, that is why for the most part, architects who practice traditional-looking architecture are doing work in high end residential.

There's still a lot of work that's happening there. But when it comes to office buildings and stuff like that, then you're looking at a different environment. But self-expression, I think, is basically what it comes down to.

When you look at the nature of architecture, if you think of it as symbolic construction, and if you think of beauty as the visible expression of the invisible nature of a thing, then you start getting into some territory that is a problem for the modern mind, for two major reasons, I think.

One is the modern mind is dominated basically by a kind of pragmatism. And at the same time dominated by, I guess, what would call – and I apologize if I'm going to offend some philosophers here – subjectivism. Which is to say, if you want to try to discuss or think about ideas that are above what can be measured by science, then you're getting into a subjective area.

So, when you're talking about public buildings, private self-expression is not the place for that. You're going to have to rely more on a pragmatic philosophy. And if there's any room for anything higher than that, when you start getting into meaning, questions of meaning – especially public meaning.

Then, I believe – and I could be wrong about this – the impulse is basically try to make as much space for as many people as possible to put into the building their own subjective interpretation. And so, you start to see what I would call abstract expressions. You see that in painting and sculpture. You also see it in architecture.

I hope that made sense.

**WOODS:** Yeah, it does. But maybe instead of just dancing around it, I should just ask you to tell me your understanding of what modernism is. Because a modernist might well say something like: *Look, I understand the aesthetic sensibilities of people.*

*I can't satisfy everybody's, but what I can do is provide a living space for a human population that is vastly larger than it was when the kind of architecture everybody claims they like was being built. I'm able to do that.*

*Because of modernist construction methods, I can build higher. I can build in a way that's more dense. I can accommodate actual people. And it may not be the prettiest building in the world, but it's something*.

So, they could say that kind of thing. But what exactly is this movement all about, would you say?

**MARCANTONIO:** Well, let's first take a step back even from that, in order to understand modernism. Because you want to understand what modernism was reacting to. So, let's think about, what is the nature of architecture? What is architecture?

So, imagine your favorite building. Let's imagine Saint Peter's, some magnificent work of art on which there is general agreement that it is very good. It is a good work of architecture. So, say Peter's, the Hagia Sophia, the Pantheon, the Parthenon, take your pick.

And compare that to a very perfunctory construction, like a warehouse building. This is an example that I like to use. When you look at a warehouse building, all it's basically doing is keeping the weather out in order to be able to store things.

So, it just serves a purely pragmatic function. Whereas a building like Saint Peter's is doing more than just keeping the rain out and keeping the weather out so that people can go inside and attend services. It is speaking to you on a symbolic level.

You look at the facade of Saint Peter's and there's all kinds of sculpture there. There's magnificent sculptures representative of columns that seem to be supporting what's called pediment, which looks like a roof, all at the very symbolic level.

These are not literal structures that are shown. They're all symbolic, whereas the warehouse has none of that. And then you could divide the kinds of symbols that architecture employs into five categories. So, at the most basic level, architecture organizes things.

For example, when you walk into Saint Peter's, you see the important things on the center, most importantly the altar with the famous baldacchino by Bernini. You walk into the Hagia Sophia, and it would have been the same thing.

You walk into Saint Mark's in Venice – you walk in and there's the altar. So, the altar, because it is in the middle, it is the most important thing. And then the less important things are on the periphery. Whereas if you go out to a warehouse, that's not necessarily the case.

They may be housing a priceless work of art, but it really doesn't matter where it is, as long as it's high and dry. There will be some number that tells you where it is when you're trying to locate it, but its actual location in the organization is not symbolically important.

So, organization, I think, is the first way that architecture expresses the inner, the hidden nature of the thing or the institution that is being housed. The second level would be geometry. So, if you think again about Saint Peter's, you see most spectacularly its dome.

So, the dome is a completely unnecessary geometry. Why did they build it? Well, they wanted to symbolize heaven. The dome symbolizes the sky. And there's other ways in which it is expressive, geometrically. In plan, it's shaped in a cruciform way.

And also, the sides relate to one another in ways that are easily expressed using whole numbers, in order to symbolize the unity of the whole. The warehouse, on the other hand, does not have any special geometries that symbolize anything, and whether one side is longer than another side really doesn't matter by how much.

Again, it's just serving a purely practical function. The third way architecture symbolizes is through symbolic structure. So, if you can imagine in your mind's eye Saint Peter's, or any building of importance, pretty much, that was built before the 20th century, you will see on it what look like columns on the facade.

They're not actual columns. They don't literally support the roof. They're just representational of columns. And they're not ordinary columns either. They look like they are alive. If you look at the columns on the facade of Saint Peter's, they look like bouquets or bunches of flowers that have been lashed together at top and bottom.

And they're miraculously supporting beams that also seem to have sprung to life with leaves and flowers and eggs and tongues and all kinds of forms that suggest that the structure is alive. The fourth way that I think architecture expresses the hidden nature of an institution that it's housing is what I call 'graduation".

Which is to say, the more important the building, or the part of the building, the more expensive the materials will be, the more expensive the kind of construction will be, the more permanent the construction will be, the scale will be more monumental.

If you can imagine in your mind's eye all the buildings of your favorite city, like Paris or Rome, and you just arrange them in a line from most important to least important. You will see that they are graduated in the sense that the most monumental is going to be at the left side.

The most important buildings will be the most monumental, the most expensive, the most luxurious materials. And at the other end of the spectrum, you're going to have the least permanent materials, the least expensive materials, the lowest scale in terms of monumentality.

And then finally, architecture expresses the hidden nature of the institution it's housing through types. And types is most easily explained if you think of how a city is divided into its respective institutions. And each of its institutions is represented by a classification of building.

That sounds very highfalutin. All I mean is you have church buildings, you have townhouse buildings, you have courthouse buildings, libraries, theaters. These are classifications, and they have a certain appearance that they all have in common.

And so you can look at a church and you will recognize it to be a church. And nobody needs to tell you that it's a church. So, because you have a certain degree of cultural familiarity, you know what to expect when you come across a church.

And you are able to look a building at a building and say: *That looks like a church to me.* Or: *That does not look like a church to me*.

And if you see a building that looks like a church and it's housing a parking garage, you will find that to be inappropriate because the type is not expressing accurately the nature of the institution that's within it.

So, this was pretty much the way I think architects (and people in general) thought architecture's job was until the enlightenment period, essentially in the 18th century, when we started losing faith in the idea that we could have ideas higher than what could be measured, higher than what was pragmatic.

So, as pragmatism starts to take hold – now, this has a good side. I mean, we start making factories and we start creating things very cheaply, and we can feed a lot of people. The corresponding architectural idea for that is "form follows function".

The idea being, how do I justify the forms that I'm looking at on a building? Or if I'm designing it, how do I justify the forms? So, if I have a pragmatic mindset, it seems to me that the more honest way of building a building is to show off its pragmatic aspects.

At the same time, you want to deal with the higher ideas, but because those get privatized through idealism, you get into abstract expressionism being combined with that.

So, today – let's go back a step. In the late 19th century, when pragmatism had taken hold, essentially, they had lost sight of why they were making buildings look like they had always looked. And the ornament was seen as superfluous to the purpose of the building.

If we're building an office building, why should I be putting columns on it that have leaves and things? What's with all these ornaments? That is not functional.

So, because they couldn't explain this to themselves, they suddenly stopped doing it, and they looked, rather, to the machine for a source of their symbolism – the machine and also industrial processes.

So, this is why you get, for example, Mies van der Rohe's Seagram Building on Park Avenue, a famous monument to modernism. Which, rather than showing columns with leaves and all kinds of life-suggesting forms, you just have I-beams stuck on the outside, because the I-beam was this wonderful symbol of progress and industrial capacity and production.

So, there was just a search for meaning, essentially. So, I think that that is fundamentally the impulse behind modernism. Now, the layman looks at that and thinks: *Well, gosh, I don't know if that is a faithful representation of the nature of the institution.*

When I think of human flourishing, I think of more than just the number of widgets I can produce or the cost/benefit analysis. It seems that we just sort of have a natural intuition that we're meant for more important things than that, and higher things than that.

So, that does not really compute for a modernist's mind. They have difficulty putting that together. If there is space being made for those kinds of aspirations, there you would see the industrial forms and the industrial connotations mixed with a kind of expressionism.

So, you'll see Frank Gehry's Disney Concert Hall, for example, which is all stainless steel, very high tech, but it's a very free form, very expressive facade. Which, I think the intent was to leave a space for the viewer to have some kind of aspiration beyond the industrial process.

But that's about as much as the modernist I think is able to offer. That's all that we've seen so far. Anyways, I hope that was not too long-winded.

**WOODS:** No, no, not at all. No, that's very important. So, where does this leave architects today? Now, most architects are not sitting around talking about the philosophy of architecture. And I suspect, as with most professions, they go about their work in a relatively mundane way.

But I know that you, being a person of ideas, are thinking about this kind of thing all the time. So, what makes your approach, then, to designing a building, different from, let's say, that of most of your peers? And what's the source of the difference?

**MARCANTONIO:** I am approaching architecture from a traditional perspective. Which is to say, if I am trying to design a building that belongs to a certain type – I'm trying to build a house. I'm trying to build a church. I want it to look like a church. I wanted to look like a house.

This doesn't mean that I'm following some kind of a formula. What it means is that I am working with the expectations that people are bringing to the situation. It reminds me of – it think it was TS Eliot who said that all works of art form like a coherent body, all related to one another.

And when a new work of art comes along, the entire body shifts slightly all the pieces in relation to one another, and it creates a new whole. So, that's the intent that I bring to the work. And while it's true that architects are not thinking of this consciously, things are happening at an unconscious level.

The market is simply demanding that it happen, in some respects. I think in the 1960s and '70s, you'd be very hard pressed to find an architect who could do or was willing to do traditional work. Today it's a whole different world.

If you want to find an architect who can do traditional work, they are out there. So, a tremendous amount of progress in the revival of traditional architecture has been made in the past 50 years.

**WOODS:** I recall – didn't you do a design for presumably what was going to replace the Twin Towers? Didn't you submit something for that?

**MARCANTONIO:** No, I did not participate in that, but a number of traditional architects did participate in that. What I did do after 9/11 was submit a memorial for the Pentagon.

**WOODS:** Oh, is that what it was? Okay.

**MARCANTONIO:** Yeah. And that got some favorable press in the *Wall Street Journal*, thanks to Catesby Leigh, who was a great advocate. There was a nice display that was put on, and fortunately my submission was not selected. But the fact that it got any attention at all I was grateful for.

**WOODS:** Yeah. Okay, so that's what I was thinking of. That's okay. So, I'm trying to be fair here. I can understand somebody who says there's something wrong with – let's say you walk down the streets of Vienna and you're just struck.

I mean, even some of the most mundane buildings seem more impressive than anything you see in your hometown. And it's just a delight of the senses. And then let's say your hometown is Beijing and you say: *I want Beijing to look exactly like Vienna*.

We all know there's something wrong with that. Like, that shouldn't be. I want Beijing to feel like Beijing, even though Vienna is objectively beautiful. So, there is something about architecture that has to, in some way, be giving artistic voice to a culture, I suppose, at the same time.

**MARCANTONIO:** Oh, yes. Absolutely. So, there's two things working at the same time. So, when I went through the five levels, the five ways in which architecture can express symbolically, four of those I would describe as "natural". And in that sense they are universal.

So, when you're talking about organization, it is pretty much universally recognized that the center is more important than the "not center" – or the edge, the periphery. So, if you have a building or an object in a building that's important, you put it in the center.

That could be in the center of an axis, that could be in your line of sight, whatever. Or if you're just locating a building, you locate it in an important site which would occupy, sort of – it would be sort of an ideal center, if the context were a city.

If you're talking about geometry, geometry is also universal. Everybody knows what a circle is. Everybody knows what a triangle is. Everybody knows what a square is. Everybody knows what the ratio 1 to 2 is, 2 to 3, 3 to 4.

These kinds of proportions, you find them absolutely universally throughout history, without exception in any culture whatsoever, Beijing to Washington DC. Also, this idea of symbolic structure, the idea that structure is represented symbolically, it's not literal, and that it's ensouled or given life with leaves and petals.

You see that from Beijing to Washington DC. You see it everywhere except in the most primitive of cultures where that idea has not developed yet. The same thing with graduation, the idea that greater monumentality applies to more important institutions.

Now, when it comes to building types, there you require some kind of cultural literacy. And because the people in Beijing are aware of their history, they are going to bring some expectations to whatever new building comes along.

And so, a new building must feel as if it belongs to Beijing. It has to get into the conversation that pre-exists that building. If you want to think of all the previous works of art as engaged in a dialogue, a massive conversation, you have to enter that conversation.

So, you don't walk into Beijing suddenly speaking German with an Austrian accent. You go in there speaking Chinese – speaking Mandarin, I suppose.

**WOODS:** Well, then let's think about somebody who doesn't like modern church architecture and says: I only wish I could have a church that might have been built in 1745 or something. I wonder if an architect today might view that as me saying: I want Vienna to be in Beijing.

Because that's a matter of a geographical location, but that's not, in theory, all that different from wanting to push something forward in time and saying: *I want this temporal thing. I want mid-18th century architecture in my church building today.*

Maybe that would also seem like – well, for one thing, at some point we have to be original. We can't just keep building 18th century churches over and over again. And likewise, we can't build the kind of colonial buildings in colonial Boston over and over and over and over again.

And at some point, it has to evolve a little. But then I think the response to that might be, when I look around at modernist architecture, it doesn't look like an organic evolution. It looks like a bunch of people got together and decided this is what they were going to build, and the rest of us had to just take it.

**MARCANTONIO:** You are absolutely correct that the art must evolve. That is, you want to see new things. You don't just quote the past. Now, the funny thing is, a lot of times when these revivals occur, they begin ostensibly as a pure revival – think of the Gothic revival of the 19th century.

But as you are reviving, unconsciously, you are editing. You just don't realize that you're doing it. So, while there was a Gothic Revival, there is no mistaking, whatsoever, a 19th century Gothic Revival building from a medieval building.

They are miles apart, even though the 19th century architect was doing his darndest to build as the medievals did. He was editing unconsciously, so, taking out the parts that he didn't like and keeping the parts that he did like.

And then, of course, there are the means at your disposal in the time in which you live. So, when you're in the 19th century, you've got 19th century technology at your disposal. The labor conditions are going to be different.

All kinds of things are different, and these are naturally going to have their effect. So, even if you're trying your hardest to do a complete reproduction, you're actually probably not going to get it. It's going to look like a work of architecture from your time period.

In a hundred years, people will see the kind of things that people in the mid or early 21st century liked, and that will be obvious. But I think that we need to do a little bit better than that, we do need to do more than just try to revive.

What we do, I think – or, the best approach is to look at history like a laboratory, and you see all the buildings in in the laboratory as experiments. And they were trying new things, testing effects, and some of the experiments were not successful and some of them were successful.

And so, you adopt the ones that work, the parts that were successful. So, this is the natural editing process. And you hope to do new experiments that turn out to be successful. So, the best architects among us will be very successful with their experiments.

Michelangelo's architecture, for example, was the architecture of a genius. Or Bernini or Borromini, these were guys who looked at the laboratory of the history of architecture, and they were really pushing the boundaries.

And they showed how the rules that were suggested by the laboratory could be written in a more complex way.

**WOODS:** Well, you seem to be, I don't know, maybe a little more sympathetic to some of your colleagues whose outlooks are different from your own. But I can't help sharing a comment from a professor – I think he's in the UT system, University of Texas, maybe San Antonio. His name is Nikos Salingaros.

**MARCANTONIO:** Oh, I've met Nikos. Yes. I know his work.

**WOODS:** Okay. Well, here's this. He and a colleague of his coined a term, "architectural myopia". And he says that he coined this term to describe (and these are his words) *"...the curious and alarming phenomenon whereby someone who has gone through architecture school can look at a horrid, inhuman structure and declare it to be great architecture.*

*Such persons literally cannot see what is right in front of them. The corollary is also frightening. Those same people look at older historical and vernacular structures and totally miss their intense degree of embedded life and humanity. To such people, old means useless, shameful, and marked for elimination."*

Is he overstating the case or what?

**MARCANTONIO:** Well, it is surprising what happens in architecture school. I suppose you could say.

**WOODS:** It didn't happen to you, though.

**MARCANTONIO:** It didn't happen to me. I was a rebel. I gave my professors a very hard time. I kind of feel a little bit bad about that in my old age.

But again, it comes back to – I think I try my best to be sympathetic to those with whom I disagree and try to understand how they got to where they are, assuming that it doesn't come from a place of ill will, they're just trying their best.

And basically, at root, there's simply, I think, a philosophical problem that has deep roots. It doesn't mean that we have to become philosophers in order to solve the problem. I do actually think that the theory will follow eventually, but it's going to take some time.

And I think that the most effective way to midwife the birth of the theory or the mainstreaming of the theory (because in many respects it exists already) is to encourage the market for this kind of architecture.

I don't want to sound too cynical here, but universities do have as a priority placing their students in the workforce. And if there is a strong market for traditional architecture, they will find the theory to teach students traditional architecture that gets them placed to the workforce.

You already see that happening in some institutions. I hope to see more of it, and I think that we will.

**WOODS:** All right. So, obviously, Dino, you and I are having our regular Sunday lunch together having been discontinued so many years ago because I moved away, has caused you to become a far more pleasant and agreeable person, you know?

**MARCANTONIO:** [laughing] Tom! But you're one of the most agreeable people I know.

**WOODS:**  That's very kind of you, but I want to go after these SOBs. I mean, these cities are ugly – or, not cities, but these buildings. Like, you go to all these European cities, you know where everybody wants to visit, and you know where they don't want to visit.

You know where they want to live, and you know where they don't want to live. I mean, like, we all agree on this and yet we still get rotten architecture all the time. That's how I feel.

**MARCANTONIO:** I would go after the architecture. I would definitely go after the work. So, one area where I feel we're being a little too sympathetic is in the world of preservation. You will have some buildings that are just so offensive.

Offensive in the sense of not just causing a visceral response in people, but just when thinking about beauty and how the purpose of a building is to represent the hidden nature of the institution that it is housing, these buildings are just such a lie.

They're just such a misrepresentation of the nature of their institutions that it's just wrong to preserve them.

But there is a strong element, a strong current in the preservation world that says: *Yeah, I'm all for preserving 18th century beautiful stuff, 17th century beautiful stuff, but I'm also in favor of preserving stuff built in the 1950s. If it was a monument and if it's important, I'm in favor of preserving it.*

And to that, I say just take a bunch of photographs and document it so that the academics in the future can study it. But gosh darn it, it really is ugly. We don't need to keep that.

**WOODS:**  Right. Well, the thing is, of course, the preservation movement is very much intertwined with local governments, because the local government will designate something to be a monument that can't be touched.

But if you didn't have that, I think what would happen is if you build something that's truly beautiful in a way that moves people, they will make sure it gets preserved. Whereas if you build something hideous, it may pass. And that is the judgment of mankind on it.

**MARCANTONIO:** Well, let's not forget the origin of the preservation movement, which was the demolition of Penn Station in New York City, an absolute monument, a really beautiful building, one of the masterpieces of the firm McKim, Mead & White.

And because that building was torn down, to everybody's shock, and despite protests, the preservation movement was born.

**WOODS:** I did not know that origin story.

**MARCANTONIO:** Yep. So, the preservation movement had to be created so that we would not destroy buildings. So, we can thank the preservation movement for the fact that we've still got Grand Central.

We've got that big MetLife tower behind it now, they would have demolished Grand Central soon after Penn Station was demolished. But it's thanks to the preservation movement (and of course, Jackie Onassis, who at the time was a great advocate for the preservation movement) that we still have Grand Central and other monuments around today.

Now it's gone a little bit on steroids. I think that they need to dial in their purpose here. I don't think that we should be preserving buildings which do not enhance the beauty of our cities.

**WOODS:**  Let me ask you one more thing. I want to get hostile Dino Marcantonio to come out, okay?

**MARCANTONIO:** The demon inside me, Tom?

**WOODS:** And I think I have put my finger on exactly the topic that'll do it. And that is modern church architecture, particularly in the Catholic Church. Now, I'm sorry. You are not going to persuade me that this is just a disagreement that we're having on non-ideological grounds, this is just a matter of architectural diversity.

Absolutely not, you can try all day long to convince me of that, Dino. There is an ideological campaign behind these hideous churches. I mean, remember what you were telling me about a warehouse? These look like warehouses, and they're not supposed to.

So, what do you think is going on? Are you really going to try to give me a benign explanation for the hideous churches that we've got?

**MARCANTONIO:** [laughing] I am.

**WOODS:** No, you are not! No, you are not. You are expelled from the *Tom Woods Show*.

**MARCANTONIO:** Well, what happens is – the Roman Catholic Church in particular, I won't speak to other churches. I'm familiar with the workings, somewhat, of the Roman Catholic Church. They're trying their best to reach out to people.

And so, when they want to build a monument, they want to speak a language that people understand, I suppose. They want to be seen as engaged. And so, they will naturally look to the profession.

It's very similar to a person requiring legal advice or medical advice, they're just going to go to the profession. And the profession is going to respond to them overwhelmingly: *You've got to do a modern church.*

**WOODS:** Okay, okay, stop right there. So, I see what's happening. You're going to exonerate the architect, saying he's simply carrying out what the establishment of the institution wants him to do. Is that is that going to be your line of argument?

**MARCANTONIO:** No, no. I'm not exonerating the architect, the people I'm exonerating...

**WOODS:** Because I'm almost willing to exonerate the architect. He is doing what the SOBs want him to do. But what my point is, they have sick architectural ideas, Dino.

**MARCANTONIO:**  I am thinking, particularly, for example, of John Paul II when he wanted to build the Church of the Millennium at Rome. The person who won the competition was Richard Meier, and he ended up building a church that just looks like a typical Richard Meier construction.

Naturally, if you hire Richard Meier, you're going to get a Richard Meier building. So, why did they hire Richard Meier? I think there's really only one reason. Richard Meier is a famous architect.

He was at the height of his fame in the early 20th century, and would the Vatican have hired a traditional architect that the world did not know or was not familiar with?

It would be seen as an unusual move, I would say, from a – dare I say, from a pastoral perspective.

**WOODS:** [laughing] No, no no! I cannot accept this. Because there is no – could you imagine if you transported Pope Saint Pius X into the year 2000, he would say: *I will take the most obscure guy who's laboring in the field before I will hire this monstrosity.*

*And yes, you know what? It will be an unusual move, but that's what I do as Pope, I do a lot of unusual things. And you know what? This commission might elevate this traditional architect to the level where he belongs.*

That would be the right answer.

**MARCANTONIO:** Well, you may have a point about Pius X, but the church was hiring modernist architects right from the beginning, right from the 1920s and '30s, so before the Second Vatican Council.

And I think that the motivation was very simple. It was not too complicated. It simply was, they wanted to be modern. They wanted to speak with a modern voice. Now, I don't know that there's anything more than that.

Now, I do not doubt that there may have been a few who had more sophisticated motivations, who thought to themselves: *I am interested in moving theology in a certain direction, and the architectural cognate of that is the following.*

**WOODS:** Yes, the "architectural cognate". Now, that's a very good expression. For example, if I were to go out to the cathedral that Roger Cardinal Mahony presided over in the 1990s, it's just barren.

And I mean, is it barren just by accident? *We accidentally made it barren. Sorry. We really want to encourage popular piety, but just by mistake, we made the thing barren.*

**MARCANTONIO:** It's pretty hope-sapping. That is true.

**WOODS:** "Hope-sapping" is another good term.

**MARCANTONIO:** I don't know if Roger Mahony was going for hope-sapping. I think at the time he just wanted to hire a famous architect. And he wanted to be respected. He wanted to do something that would be respected by the profession.

Now, Roger Mahoney's theology is outside of my area of expertise, so I won't go into that on your show. If you come to New York and we go for drinks, we will go into that. But I think that – let's say if we wanted to put a charitable interpretation on what was happening, I think that that's the way to look at it.

Now, I will say that I have certain ideas, theological ideas (again, outside my area of expertise), that do have a cognate architecturally. And if you don't like the theological ideas, it does make sense for you not to like that architecture that is its cognate.

So, in that respect, when people see traditional architecture coincidentally commissioned by orders and clerics who have a more traditional mindset, that is coherent.

**WOODS:** Well, all I want to do is sit here and denounce people like the old days, Dino.

**MARCANTONIO:** [laughing] I apologize, Tom. Dare I say I've mellowed?

**WOODS:** Looks that way! But your knowledge of and love for what you do comes through in everything you say about it. So, I want to leave on this note. Suppose there's somebody out there who has a project in mind.

Maybe it's a house, but maybe it's a building that serves some other purpose. And maybe the architects he's talked to just seem uninspired or are going to produce the same kind of building he can see millions of copies of as he drives down the street.

But he'd like something with a little bit more tradition and flair to it. Maybe he wants a Dino Marcantonio building. Where should he turn?

**MARCANTONIO:** He should turn to Dino Marcantonio. Just Google me.

**WOODS:** Yeah. Okay. Good, good. All right. Yeah. Dino Marcantonio, it's just the way it sounds. And it's right here in the description of the video, too. You can find it right there and on the show notes page, TomWoods.com/2416. You can find it there, good old Dino Marcantonio.

But yes, I mean I'm sure you accept commissions.

**MARCANTONIO:** Of course.

**WOODS:** I mean, what else do you do as an architect?

**MARCANTONIO:** That's right. I do mainly high-end residential work and ecclesiastical work as well.

**WOODS:** How about that?

**MARCANTONIO:** I've done all kinds of building types over my career. So, as long as it's traditional. If you're looking for some kind of a shard that's shooting out of a facade, I'm not your man.

**WOODS:** No, but you can find a lot of people like that, probably within 100 yards of where you're sitting. But if you want the real deal, Dino Marcantonio. You know what? We've got to talk a little bit after we finish here.

But thank you very much, Dino. I get to New York maybe four times a year, we should have lunch.

**MARCANTONIO:** Sounds good. Looking forward to it. Tom. Thanks for having.

**WOODS:** Me. Or dinner with drinks, because it sounds to me like that's a more interesting conversation.

**MARCANTONIO:** That would give me more time, and it would give you more time to find my buttons.

**WOODS:** Okay. Thanks again. Appreciate it, Dino.