



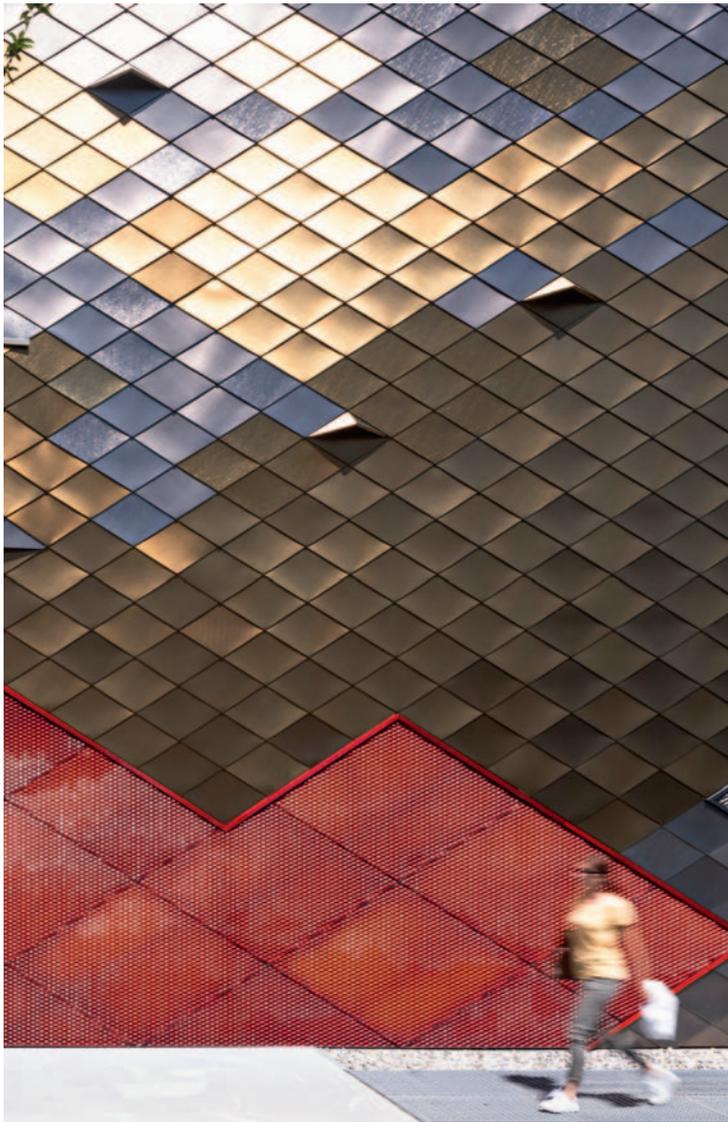
ATP architects engineers, Mint Architecture

## Aleja Shopping Center **Embodying Dragon Symbolism** Ljubljana, Slovenia

The dragon is a mythical creature that symbolizes and protects the city of Ljubljana and so, when a large, new shopping center was designed in the heart of the Slovenian capital, it made sense for the shapes and scales of a dragon to be a source of inspiration. Designed by ATP architects engineers D&R from Innsbruck with Mint Architecture, the complex with three above-ground and two below-ground floors includes relaxation areas, restaurants and other food options, and even indoor sports facilities, along with about 80 shops. The elongated shape, the curved profile and the sweeping entrance area all clearly recall the form of a dragon, a notion that is reiterated through the use of stainless steel and glass tiles for the cladding to resemble a “scaly” skin. This external appearance is undoubtedly the most highly characteristic feature of Aleja. This envelope was created by Pichler Projects, using these materials

right up to the roof in a series of customized solutions that were conceived both in the design office and directly on site (such as the welding techniques). The scaly appearance is produced by using rhomboidal stainless steel panels fitted with safety glass. These panels are placed next to each other, but carefully matched to produce the desired texture and patterns. For this, the use of four different finishes and colors was necessary. The view of the façade is particularly unique because it actually changes as the day progresses, the weather shifts, the moon phases alter and so on. It took roughly 120 tons of steel to create the entire façade, although since the rhomboidal panels were also used for the five skylights on the roof, it took a grand total of close to 300 tons. Although the envelope has undoubtedly importance in creating the identity of the project, with its unique esthetic, it is also

critical in terms of energy performance. For example, the windows and surfaces prevent energy being lost to the outside, or excessive heat transfer to the interiors, depending on the season. The bottom line is that this glazed system might be an extensive expanse covering the façades and roof, but it is also highly efficient, reducing the amount of heating and cooling required, while optimizing the amount of natural light. This focus on minimizing the environmental impact is also found in the system adopted to reduce water consumption that reuses rainwater for the cooling systems and to water the green areas on the roof above the shops. The combination of open, semi-open and closed spaces across the three floors above ground is another specifically designed feature, creating a play of light that reproduces a silhouette on the ground.



Photography courtesy of PICHLER projects



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