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Contemporary Vernacular: Re-Valuing Performance and the Architectural Skin

Jessica Mangin
University of Pennsylvania

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The vernacular is not simply a vestige of pre-Industrial Revolution eras, but of a practical, climate-conscious building approach that is gaining relevance due to today’s rising energy concerns. The connective dialogue between architecture and environment produces a responsive, locally conditioned design that cannot be standardized, aligning with building standards such as the Passivhaus in Germany. Like the vernacular, Passivhaus and similar performance standards utilize environmental cues and intelligent building strategies rather than mechanical systems to achieve the same indoor comfort as legacy building stock, but with less energy. By exploring European advancements in building envelopes, materials, and technologies, the engagement between vernacular and contemporary architecture and the relevance of past solutions to modern building problems becomes clear. Armed with past resources and present technological capacities, architects are asked to re-value what architecture means today. Is it “modernism” or saving the planet? The boundaries of architecture and its social responsibilities must be redefined, in a way that integrates performance metrics as a design opportunity as opposed to a limitation.