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→ The vertical red-and-white bar code stripes break up the facade and lend the building a human scale.



Supermarket, Riga

GMARP have turned a simple supermarket into a contemporary local landmark.

LATVIA — TEXT: ANITA ANTENIŠĶE, PHOTOGRAPHY: MĀRTIŅŠ LABLAIKS

In Riga, there is a story behind every new project. Sometimes the story is sad, sometimes joyful, and sometimes it encapsu-

lates the entire history of modern times. Ziepniekkalna is one of several large Riga suburbs built in the early 1980s. It is located on the

southernmost edge of the capital. Most of the flats in such suburbs are owner occupied, as a result of a privatization process carried out in the 1990s. The land under and near the buildings is either privately or municipally owned, and it forms a rather picturesque patchwork. In the 1980s, amenities in these large suburbs were poor. Today, new, commercially operated services are filling that gap, including in Ziepniekkalna where Rimi, one of Latvia's leading supermarket chains was keen to build a store.

They chose a small, trapezium shaped lot opposite the existing retail and services area, a site previously occupied by a petrol station.

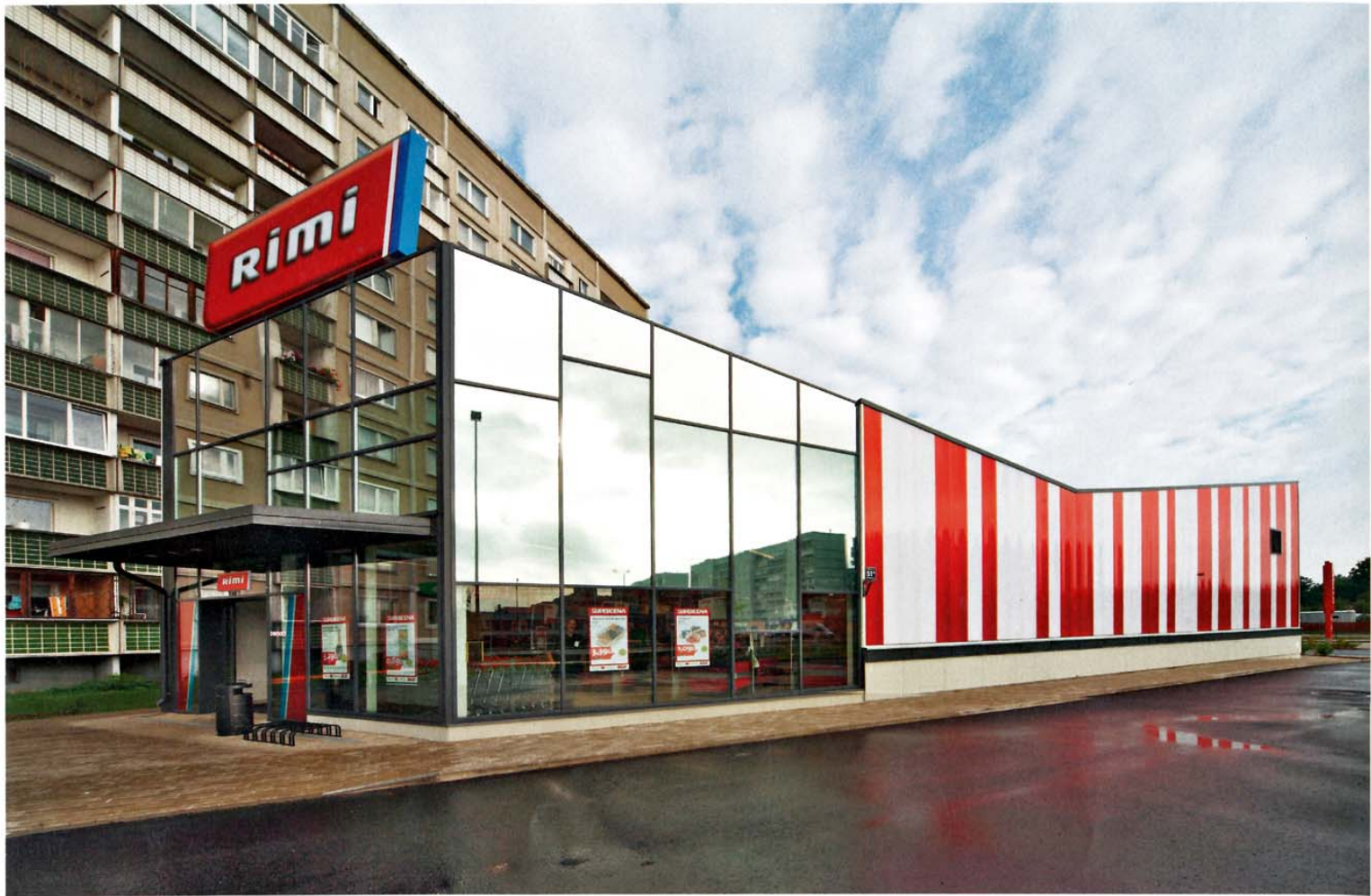
On this occasion they engaged a young architectural practice that was eager to turn the challenge into an asset. The plot was small, there were underground traffic engineering cables that needed to be taken into account, and there was a long list of dos and don'ts. They were required to design a car park that would also provide access to existing shops

on the ground floor of the adjacent 10-storey residential building. As the narrow corner of the site protruded into the area's main pathways, a small public space was required in front of the new building. There were to be no rooftop building services and the supermarket volume had to step back ten metres from the residential building. And on top of all this, the building needed to be a bit special, unique, in order to compete with its rivals on the other side of the street. There was no

way the architects could resolve all these issues with a traditional supermarket box and, to make matters worse, the available ground floor area fell short of the required 825 square metres of floor space.

To meet this challenge, the architects decided to move all utility rooms to the second level of the steel-frame building, above a shopping area and facing away from the main street. To balance the volume, the entrance area on the main street and the pedestrian

paths were also raised, creating a high, glazed entrance lobby that appears much larger and more spacious from inside, while on the outside it helps the building merge with its surroundings. The building's roof slopes towards the middle from both sides, creating a dynamic skyline from the street and from the neighbouring apartment building, while the roof with its skylights becomes a fifth facade for the building. All the technical equipment is hidden on a balcony above the →



↑ The roof slopes towards the middle from both sides. ↓ Entrance lobby



(Supermarket, Riga)

delivery entrance, facing away from the main street.

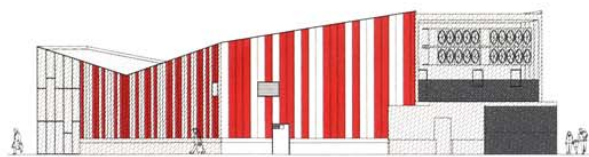
But the first thing that meets the eye, is the bright and cheerful facade, whose huge vertical red-and-white stripes were derived from that ubiquitous symbol of consumer culture, the bar code. The vertical stripes break up the facade and lend the building a human scale. The double-skin facade has an outer layer of polycarbonate sheeting, an inexpensive insulating and finishing material. Apart from the thermal advantages of a double facade, there is a bonus in the form of the supermarket's lighting plan. Energy-saving LED lights installed behind the semi-transparent polycarbonate illuminate the facades during the darker hours – the main shopping time for most people – radiating a cheerful but low-cost welcome for customers and passers-by alike.

When completed, the building took the general public and most professionals by sur-

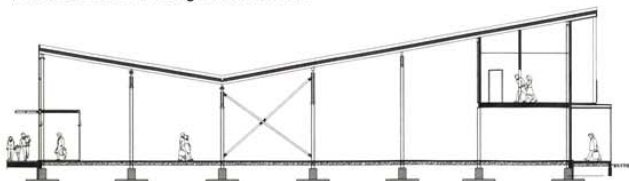
prise. On one hand it was seen as a powerful and unmistakable landmark for a rather grey and architecturally impoverished neighbourhood, bringing new hope for the diversification and modernization of commercial public space in housing areas from the recent past. On the other hand there were concerns about locating a supermarket so close to a residential building – a debate related to a more general critique of building regulations and urban planning during the previous years of rapid economic growth. However, the general public has reacted very positively to the newcomer: the open space in front of the building is used throughout day, and the building has not yet been daubed with graffiti, to the great surprise of both the architects and the owners of the building. ←

'RIMI' SUPERMARKET, 2007–2009

Architect: GMAP, Renārs Putniņš and Atis Auziņš
Client: Plesko Real Estate
Address: Valdeķu iela 51a, Rīga



↑ East elevation ↓ Longitudinal section



↑ Ground floor

