Multifocal Monuments

A Traveller's Guide

Introduction

The multifocal technique has become immensely popular in recent years, with reports of many important research findings, and widespread adoption for clinical use. It is fair to say that it has had a major impact on visual function testing.

Like many successful scientific and medical discoveries before, it has also been a source of inspiration for artists from around the world. Members of the multifocal community are frequently surprised to find yet another example as they travel.

One of the most refreshing and pleasing aspects of discovering such monuments is the realisation that they are not restricted to the parts of the world in which the technique is established. They can be found almost anywhere on the globe. The manner in which the conceptual values of multifocality can cross national and cultural boundaries, and the way in which its essential, almost spiritual, multifocal qualities can excite artists of widely differing cultural backgrounds must be a great source of satisfaction to its inventors.

Here, we are privileged to present a selection of these monuments for your enjoyment. They are arranged simply in the order of their discovery, with no attempt at classification. Further, no guarantee is given as to their authenticity, but we have tried to give a fair and balanced presentation of the better-established theories regarding each one. All information has been supplied in good faith; any errors or misrepresentations are entirely the fault of the editor.

All that remains for me to say at this stage is a huge "thank you" to all the, often unknown, artists around the world whose work has been such a source of pleasure to me, to the world-wide multifocal community and to art-lovers everywhere.

Colin Barber

Nagoya, Japan

In this modern masterpiece, located outside the JR station south entrance, the monument-makers' art has, perhaps, reached its highest peak.

The shiny stainless steel used in its construction symbolises the purity of the mathematical approach, and the way that the individual steel elements curve around so that their ends can never be seen parallels the way that complete understanding of the technique always eludes the student.

It is also rich in colour symbolism. At night the surrounding neon signs are reflected on the monument, mimicking the appearance of a whole host of clinical conditions. It is claimed that if one starts at a point directly in front of the station entrance and walks around the monument in a clockwise direction, the full range of conditions for which the multifocal ERG offers a definitive diagnosis can be seen in the reflections, in order of their publication.

Some find this claim a trifle fanciful.

Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia

This splendid monument dates from the attempt to break into the neurological market, which explains the unusual colour coding of the peak, with white at the top and blue at the base.

Set in beautiful flower gardens to symbolise the "joy of multifocal testing", the monument is extravagantly large with many rooms inside it, each one dedicated to a particular mode (and joy) of testing.

Sadly, the construction of the monument used up almost all of the launch budget, and only the small sum of 35 ringitts (approx. $10) was left for advertising and field support. Consequently no "neurological" systems were ever sold and the monument is currently used for offices.

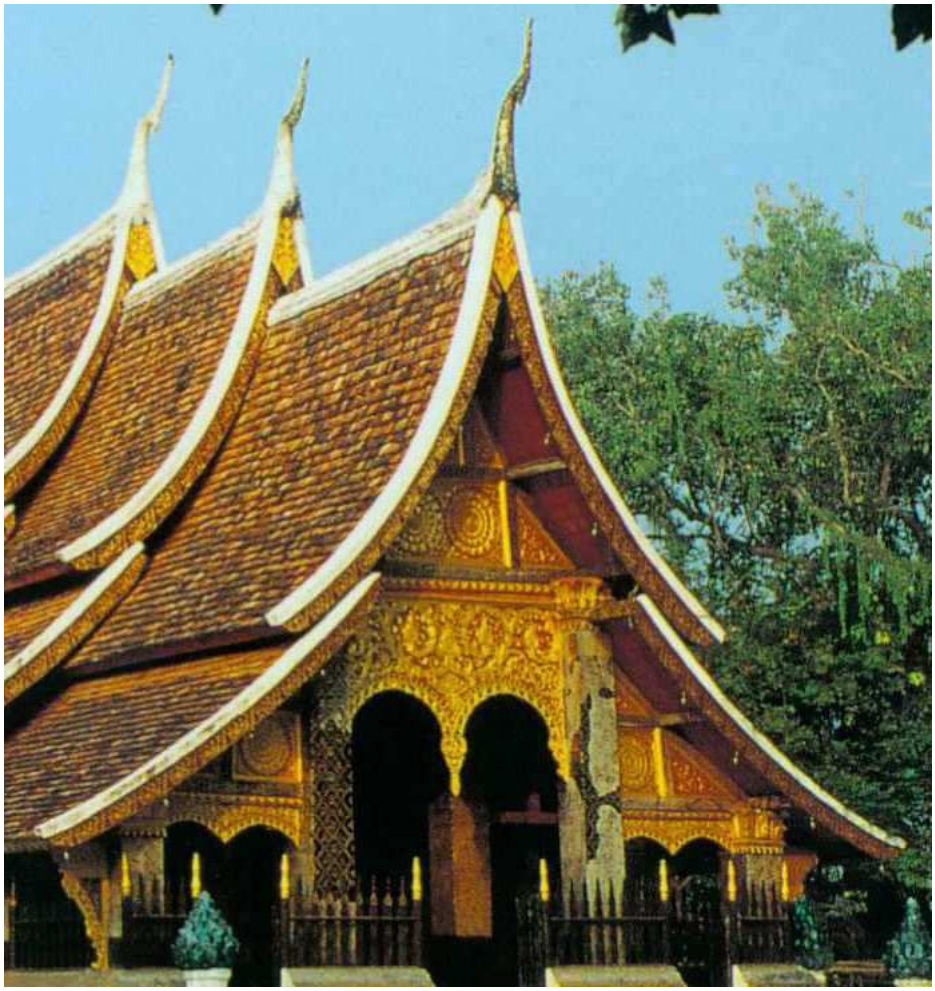
Fuji National Park, Japan

By far the largest of the monuments discovered to date, this is also the most controversial. Proponents point to the authentic colouring (with white at the top and green at the bottom) as proof of its authenticity, and even suggest that the date on which this colour mapping was made available commercially (1986) indicates the date of construction of the monument.

Detractors claim that the existence of pictures of the monument on bank notes, in woodcuts and so on, some hundreds of years earlier, casts doubt upon this interpretation. They further point out that the so-called monument has roads and buildings on it.

Far from being discouraged, believers maintain that the presence of a snack bar and tourist gift shop at the level of $25nV/deg^2$ is an allegorical representation of the subjugation of science to commerce. In an annual protest ceremony, they occupy all the seats in the snack bar without buying anything, and sing multifocal songs.

This ceremony has become a tourist attraction in its own right.



Luang Prabang, Laos

Most observers agree that this is the oldest of the known monuments. Its great antiquity is attested by the fact that its "multifocality" is expressed only at the gable end of the monument and is essentially two-dimensional. The artist's inspiration is therefore believed to have arisen from one of the very earliest versions of VERIS®, which offered a z-axis, 2-D scalar product display (no longer available as an option).

It is generally accepted that the monument was constructed for King Say Setthathirath, although there is no suggestion that he actually used the multifocal technique himself. The most widely held theory is that monks were trained in its use. The date of construction is put at 1559/60.

If correct, this means that Erich Sutter is much older than he looks.

Oxford, England

This monument was found embedded in the wall of a church in University grounds. It remains the only solid evidence for the school of thought that the technique was invented in England but, as so often has happened with ideas from this country, developed and exploited elsewhere.

Looking at the monument, it is not difficult to see why this might have been the case. The church was built in the 1950's but, even for that period, the display depicted in the monument is dated and fussy. The curious colour-coded representation of quadrant response amplitudes is difficult to interpret, and the inclusion of both blind spots in the single display is, frankly, confusing.

The sales slogan: "virtute et fide", though worthy, is hardly snappy and there is no record that any of these systems were ever sold.

No wonder these people lost an empire.

Paris, France

The appearance on the market of the French (Metrovision®) multifocal testing system has revived claims that the technique was invented in France. There are even suggestions that Charles de Gaulle's famous cry of "Vive Québec, vive Québec, libré" was a reference to the tax-exempt export status of such machines from France to the province, but it is difficult to find a non-Québecois who supports this view.

More persuasive is this impressive monument, erected in 1889, and arguably portraying a multifocal peak. The uniform grey colouring is explained by the elegant, if slightly surreal, notion that the colour representation is this monument is provided by the background. Thus it changes from green (vegetation) to blue (sky), with an occasional white (cloud) signifying a maximal value.

The whole thing has a certain "je ne sais quoi" about it.

Glasgow, Scotland

This modest monument is a powerful symbol of local pride in the grandeur of the multifocal technique, having been modified from an existing public monument to mark the emergence of the now-celebrated Glasgow School of Multifocal Testing. A potent symbol of the fusion of old and new, and of harmony between science and art, the sight of the Duke of Wellington proudly wearing the Multifocal Crown has become synonymous with the city of Glasgow, and is a landmark recognised and admired by millions around the world.

Late on Saturday nights, after the pubs have closed, local multifocal-lovers gather round the monument, often braving the cold and rain, to perform their weekly rituals of respect. One of the bravest, cheered on by his mates, will attempt to climb the statue and touch the crown, while singing football anthems loudly and tunelessly. It is believed that the monument possesses miraculous properties and that this ritual will protect the person's retina from injury, especially during Celtic-Rangers football matches.

The colour-coding of the Multifocal Crown is believed to portray a unique retinal condition brought on by the popular Glaswegian diet of deep-fried Mars Bars and Irn-Bru.

Further contributions are welcomed!

Multifocal Monuments are scattered throughout the world, often appearing in the most unlikely of places. If you come across one in the course of your travels, please share your pleasure with the multifocal community at large.

Send a picture of it to: **colin.barber@gmail.com**

Any background information and descriptive narrative that you can supply will also be welcome, although the publisher undertakes to carry out further research on such aspects as he wishes, and reserves the right to edit any contributions as he sees fit.

All contributors will be fully acknowledged in the resulting publication.

The contribution of Sarah Muscat (Glasgow) is gratefully acknowledged