

Cultural Daily

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SPACINGS of The House

Maurice Amiel · Wednesday, August 16th, 2017

Once out of the grotto and into the lean-to, the hut and the house, humans have developed the home space physical and social *duality of interior and exterior*.

Associating that duality with basic *relational opposites of security and insecurity, instrumental and esthetic experience, social representation and cosmic symbolism, and with gender roles differentiation, humans* eventually produced the embryo of formal Architecture out of inhabited space.

These basic relational opposites still stand today in the architectural structuring of that duality, providing *a range of stimulating sensations, enriching perceptions and meaningful use-based experience, subsumed in the notion of “Spacings”*.

Ever since architectural school The House has remained a touchstone of architectural skill, taste, performance and philosophy for most of my generation, and that is why I wish to reflect here on the roots of residential spatial composition with examples taken from the volume on ARCHITECTURE NOW – HOUSES by P. Jodidio.

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A house orphan

I have never inhabited a house of my own design.

I have designed a house for two sisters, one a painter and the other a writer, but that was a school project.

I have designed a house remodeling for family friends, without ever having had the sense to ask whether the remodel had suited them.

The feature image, expressing the *primal sheltering function* of the house against the forces of nature comes close to an imagined ideal house...but is that enough of a criterion to qualify the spacings of The House?

Since any choice of house design, to illustrate what the generic spacings of The House could be, is fraught with preferences based on cultural and personality traits of the person making that choice

... *what values can I consider to be generic of those spacings?*

Accommodate The Hermit and the Dancer

Since it is of human nature to harbor both tendencies, an architect once submitted that residential spacing should accommodate the quiet seeking spiritual core of the hermit, as it should accommodate the energetic spatial invention of the dancer's movement.

Seeking the clearest examples of accommodations of the “dancer and the hermit” in a house design, *I have opted for two houses whose designers faced clear constraints of natural and of social dimensions.*

One worked within a South American *culturally conditioned extroverted relation to natural space*, and a concrete building tradition, and the other within a Japanese *culturally conditioned introverted relation to urban space*, and a stick building tradition.

NOTE: For the sake of realistic representation of these spatial compositions I have used the photographs provided in the referred book and given credits in the text..

The case of the “Kondo house” in Tokyo, Japan.

Makiko Tsukada, Arch.

Photographs: K. Suzuki

REF: ARCHITECTURE NOW! – HOUSES pp 392-395



Kondo House: view from private entry

Upon entering, using the *private entrance to the house*, we note a *double social and functional layering of the ground floor spacing* that reads, from right to left, open dining and kitchen, enclosed reception cubicle, interior court and light well facing the *public entrance* and separating it from the grandfather bedroom at the other end of the ground floor, and from left to right: entries and reception, eating and living, and service area.

What differentiates the parts of the first layering is the contrast between the relative darkness of the eating and living areas vs. the almost crude light of the reception and light well area and grandfather bedroom area behind it.

What differentiates the parts of the second layering is the contrast between the light open risers of the stairs near the private entry area vs. the darker and steeper solid box like stairs of the service area, partly hidden from view by the living and reception cubicle.

Overhead one sees a circulation ring accessible from the two stairs: the open stair near the private entry leads to the parents bedroom, the closed one, hiding a w/c below it, leads to a service area next to the parents bedroom. At its foot a door leads to an exterior service area.

The entire circulation ring and the second floor are suspended from the steel roof structure which also frames sky lights.

All rooms are glass enclosed, but for the bath and w/c areas, because *the only light source into the house comes from skylit light wells*.

The lack of visual privacy traditionally provided by the shoji screens is made up by the distance placed between sleeping spaces. The house, which occupies close to the entire lot area, has minimal side and rear yards, and has barely the necessary windows for ventilation, given privacy concern from neighbors.

Over the “roof” of the reception cubicle one can see the back of an armchair but no apparent stair leading to that “roof” from the circulation ring ... the key to the puzzle is the fact that this ring is also a working area that needs to be separated from the part of the second floor that harbor the child bedroom and associated light well as seen in the image below.



Kondo House: upper levels

The entire volume of the house is visually modulated by interpenetrations of spaces, by light level and light source modulation, and by tactile contrasts as in the open vs. closed risers stairs, etc.

Let us note the absence of the classical Tokonoma near the entry which usually harbors a specimen plant and family memorabilia as the sacred nexus of the house, ***but the presence of the not less classical potted plant in both light wells, could well be considered as meditation inducing items, to accommodate the hermit, along with the choreographed horizontal and vertical pathways of The Kondo House that accommodate the dancer.***

The case of the “View House” near Rosario, Argentina.

Johnston Marklee, Arch.

Photographs: Leonardo Finoti

REF: ARCHITECTURE NOW! – HOUSES pp 234-237



View House: mass, volume and openings

As shown in the image above, the designers of the house sought large openings for the views, and as small a foot print and as accessible and usable a roof surface as possible for ecological reasons,.

The result, with concrete structure finally calculated and volumes functionally attributed, looks like the building shown above where the large curvilinear window on the ground floor is of the living area while the flat rectangular one on the top floor is of the master bedroom. The scooped up oval area with the stairs leads from the top floor to the roof patio.

Such structural sculpturing and resulting internal volumetric must have taken the essential part of design work in order to mutually adjust use to structure and resulting spacings...not discounting the South American tendency to extroversion, the particularly generous site and most probably a good dose of computer aided geometric maestria as shown in the image below.



View House: interior volumetric articulation

First observation we make is the “mimicking” of movement, by the building itself, in the dynamic contrast between the rectangular parts and the curved parts of the building perceivable from both interior and exterior.

The second observation is the clever play of floor levels and ceiling heights leading to the use of stairs and an open mezzanine level corridor, not shown here, but which when combined with the appeal of the exterior stairs produce an irresistible spiraling circulation pattern, through and over the building.

Both compositional elements go a long way to accommodate the spirit of the “dancer”.

How, then, is the more quiet “hermit” part accommodated?

The answer is in the naming of the building: The “View House”.

Since all openings work two ways: it is the “viewing spots” found throughout the house and the roof, that provide the “hermit” spirit places for quiet observation and meditation.

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*While we can say that both “dancer” and “hermit” are universal poetic metaphors, characterizing the search by all humans for meaningful residential spacings, they are nonetheless **culture bound** in their operational and formal development, from choice of materials to traditional structure-form-scale-use relations.*

In a nutshell: think of the Kondo House as an architectural interpretation of the Japanese Kabuki measured and controlled moves and, on the other, think of the View House as the architectural interpretation of the Latin American passionate Tango!

Bibliographic reference

Jodidio, P. ARCHITECTURE NOW! HOUSES – Vol 2, Taschen, 2013

Thiel, P.: *People, paths and purposes – notations for a participatory envirotecture*, U. of Washington

Credit feature image:

The Sandy Bay Farmhouse, Tutukaka Coast, New Zealand

Fearon Hay Arch.,

Patrick Raynolds photographer

REF: ARCHITECTURE NOW! – HOUSES, pp 134

Credit other photos as indicated in the text.

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