

CONTINUITY AND NATURE IN THE ARCHITECTURE OF ALBERTO CAMPO BAEZA

At the gates of the 21st century, we witnessed the spectacle that some architects offer as they bend the walls and fold the floors of their works. Against the vertical logic of gravity and the horizontal reference of the floor plane, they fold the “landscapes” they’ve created and defend theories only they find defensible and that are barely understood outside of a context in which logic seems to have no place.

The themes of Continuity and Nature appear in their design projects, even as they employ complicated mechanisms to carry them out. Pleats, new territories, fractals, liquid spaces and data-landscapes are commonly used in these architectures. The continuity of space does not necessarily imply a constructive continuity of the same material. Vertical elements have always been independent from horizontal elements and have evolved in a different manner. To try now to unite them, presenting architecture as a body of formal experiments and procedures supported by technology, in the media and in theory, seems to lead to the madness of forms and spaces in which we now live.

In the midst of so many conceptual diagrams, proto-functional abstractions, de-codifications and fluids, it may seem strange to speak of classical architecture, to speak of Space, Light, Matter and Measure. And yet, there are still architects who seem to construct with these concepts. Resoundingly and clearly.

Continuity and Nature already appear in classical architecture. When the mass of the Parthenon is observed drawn against the Mediterranean landscape, its light, its perfect proportions, and the horizontal plane on which it is set, one can easily appreciate the relationship between Greek architecture and nature.

The Greek architects, as a first operation, create a horizontal plane that refers to one of the most important elements that has the greatest presence in their landscape and in their lives: *the sea*. They construct podiums that recall the horizontal line of the sea in order afterwards to set their temples on top of them, like “*ships on the sea*” and establish complex relationships between them and their surroundings.

They know the climate they inhabit and incorporate open spaces, protected areas and porticos that become filters for the view of the landscape through their columns.

In a subtle and delicate manner, the temples contrast with the natural backdrop and at the same time incorporate nature into their constructed space. However, this constructed space is an exterior space because the interior space of the temple does not exist and what does, “the *cela*”, is the place of the gods and there is no room for man in it. All activity takes place outside, around the temple, among the columns, on the podium.

It was 1992 when Campo Baeza constructed his last house; seven years have passed now since that magical Casa Gaspar. Then, a horizontal plane already existed, by which, with no more than walls, and between them, an architecture was created that turned itself over to an interior space, due to the wishes of the owner and the conditions of the surroundings.

Continuity and Nature appear clearly in the Casa Gaspar, if in a very different way from what is now presented in Casa Blas, his most recently constructed house.

Because nature does not exist in Casa Gaspar, it had to be created. With the aroma of the lemon trees in the courtyards, the reflections of a sheet of water and the suggestive view of the pine trees and the sky through the whitewashed walls. These walls exclude the context at the same time that they heighten the immediate, accentuating the presence of the grounds and the tree, and also include distant space, the pines and the sky. Thanks to the wall, one can imagine what there is behind it and thus create a new world on a luminous and tranquil grounds.

Because the continuity of space is partial and only exists here where the glass meets, nonetheless, thanks to the placement of the trees and the stone floor that covers the entire surface of the floor plan, its presence is felt throughout the entire house. The vertical walls construct a horizontal space, and their movement from the interior to the exterior enclosure clearly contributes to establishing the desired exterior-interior-exterior continuity of the space. The outside space is contained between walls in order to then produce an extension of the inside space towards this controlled exterior, making the two merge into one.

Alberto Campo Baeza's latest project constructs a horizontal plane, as the Greek architects did centuries before: with poetry, precision and emotion.

The floor plan delimits a podium and a white and light roof underlines it. Both horizontal walls construct a horizontal space full of nature and light.

The stereotomic concrete podium, where the areas for sleeping and eating are developed, is organized clearly with one face to the north of served elements and a back to the south of service elements. The tectonic nature of the steel and glass cube that takes advantage of the views of the distant horizon and the immediate surroundings is proposed as the areas for living and thinking. To look and to dream.

The effective mechanism of operating by contrast is used in this house, to find in opposition the best spatial qualities and materials possible.

The concrete prism, strong, convincing, and unfussy, "imperfect in its appearance"- as de Sota said when recalling a visit from Le Corbusier to his Unit of Habitation of Berlin-expresses the material and construction in a clear manner.

Nature is incorporated in this volume in the form of three different situations. Nature abstracted in light and sky from the small high openings situated in the south. Nature transformed into the reflections that the water dug out at one of its ends produces. Water, also present in the Gaspar House, establishes a subtle balance between the created plane (the podium) and the supported plane (the roof). And Nature framed inside of the wall by means of the openings cut out in it to the north. Only one of them changes its dimensions.

The steel roof is a plane capable of creating space and the glass box equips it. The plane is sustained by eight double profile, U-section steel columns, 226 cm. from the plane of the podium. Plane and columns are all painted white. The "white table" thus created in contrast to the concrete podium, reveals a precise and perfect construction—continuing the de Sota quote, made almost "by Germans always tending towards perfection."

Nature is present here in the entire space. While from the interior of the podium, “one sees landscape”, above it “one sees oneself in the landscape”. In this way, it is not possible to separate the podium from the plane. Because the understanding of the space of one is closely related to the experience of the space of the other.

Just as a ship enhances the seascape, as Oíza said, the Blas House, far from destroying the landscape, elevates it by proposing a different way of experiencing it.

Immersed in nature, on a lot oriented towards the north and with a more than fourteen meters slope, upon arriving one perceives it as no more than the white floating plane, so that, as one ascends, the concrete prism is revealed and one finally contemplates the entire plane in its splendor suspended by the light.

The spatial intensity defined between the two planes is brutal. In such small dimensions, many different spatial situations are produced (water, exterior, exterior-roof, interior-exterior) whose limits appear blurred and confused. These limits in the Gaspar House appear constructed and are clear and even so, the continuity of the space is also present. In both houses, a continuous and horizontal space is constructed without folds or fractals, in which nature acquires extraordinary importance.

The experience of the continuous and horizontal space is intimately tied to the light falling on its limits. In this way, the glass box becomes a “box of walls” with wholly opaque matter when it is observed on its plane, or it disappears, making the inside outside when seen perpendicularly, and it becomes entirely transparent. Furthermore, it is decentered on the podium, moving towards the north, advancing towards the distant landscape of holm oaks and mountains.

Whether between vertical walls or between horizontal walls, creating nature or starting from it, starting from a horizontal plane that already exists or creating one where it doesn't, Alberto Campo Baeza brings the timeless value of architecture into his work. Beyond the periods, fashions and styles, flying over time, he constructs a Greek temple at the gates of the 21st century and transforms its closed “*cela*” the massive, dark, secret of the gods, into a transparent and luminous box for the pleasure of man.

He constructs a horizontal plane to float in the air.

From it, one has access to the sky, the clouds, the breeze. In the light.

From it, one sees only nature in continuity.

And its visual experience produces a feeling of distance and of peace.

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