

ALBERTO CAMPO BAEZA

5 April 2010

Foreword – Phaidon

I first met Alberto Campo Baeza on a trip to Madrid in 1979. He was at the beginning of his career, and I can't help but still think of him as a young architect. Today he has the same vitality and enthusiasm that he had then, though the work has matured in a way that has been a delight to behold. He has become an architect of international stature and distinction, a master practitioner and teacher. Alberto's many built projects in Spain, Italy, and now the United States continue to amaze by their purity, their strength and their deeply felt dedication to modernist principles of architecture.

On a second visit in 1988 with my young son in tow, Alberto and I spent some time together looking at architecture in Madrid. In the mix of all the historic work we were seeing he showed me the newly completed Turegano house, a beautiful white cube and a sublime exercise in minimalism. Looking back on those early residences, one can see that Campo Baeza has always been, to borrow a phrase from American sports parlance, a "big game player," no matter the scale. He had the prescience to recognize opportunity, select his clients carefully, and work in contexts within which it was possible to forge unforgettable relationships between the built and the natural environment--- all extremely difficult feats for any young architect. From the outset of his career there has been an understanding and command of the history of architecture that brings a startling lucidity and substance to the work. The clarity of architectural ideas expressed in Alberto's buildings have ranged in scale from small but beautiful residential structures like the De Blas house to cultural facilities such as Andalusia's Museum of Memory in Granada, an addition to his earlier large scale achievement, the Caja General Bank Headquarters.

Campo Baeza's is an architecture of understanding and investigation, of intellect without mannerism. Critical to the impact of his work are a clear distinction between what is natural and what is man-made and a pitch-perfect articulation of elemental tension between solid and void, indoor and outdoor space, light and volume. The strength of form and composition, set against the backdrop of two cathedrals of Cadiz, an industrial neighborhood of Majorca, or an escarpment on New York's Hudson River Valley establishes a connection that is at once powerful and calm.

Gravity, Space, Light, and Time are all intertwined as forces in Campo Baeza's work. There is no more powerful way to mark time than to speak in the language of light, which is ever-changing. The light in Alberto's work is by turns bathing, piercing, dappling, and always brilliant. His investigation of light and mass is vital not only to the success of his career but also to the identity of what modern architecture continues to achieve. Architecture for our time evokes a feeling of what is important to us today, but good works of architecture also capture an

enduring quality. It is a simple idea, but that pride of place and profound sustainability is the key difference between creating spaces with a life beyond our own and creating structures that ultimately become part of the past. Alberto is interested in that enduring quality. Exacting attention to detail, from geometry to proportions to materials, has been consistently evident in his work from his days as a student to his current work in progress. While his style seems to be immune to trend or fashion, this is not to say his work is not bold; his excellent proposals for the Mercedes Benz Museum and the Copenhagen concert hall are the forceful and daring work of an artist at the height of his powers. I have noticed that while the single family homes have led to cultural, public, and commercial projects of international significance, Alberto has continued to create spaces for pre-schools and day care centers, most recently the much-lauded Benetton Centre in Treviso, Italy. This is a wholly appropriate expression of his ideas on architecture: a simplicity and discipline that connects with young minds, which have no threshold for false notes or contrivance. Here both space and occupant are joined with the past and the future.

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