

LIGHT IS MUCH MORE

PUBLISHED IN

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LIGHT IS MUCH MORE

An architect starts to be a real architect when he or she discovers that light is the central theme of all architecture. Every day that passes, I am more certain of the truth of this statement, which I wrote and published more than fifteen years ago.

LUXURIOUS MATERIAL

Light is the most beautiful, the richest and the most luxurious of materials used by architects. The only problem is that it is free, within everybody's reach, and as a result, we do not value it sufficiently.

Architects of old used marbles and bronzes and modern architects use steel, special plastics and different kinds of glass. All trying to make buildings capable of persisting in man's memory, persisting in time. And only those architects worth their stuff, the masters, have understood that light, precisely light, is the principle material by which architecture becomes capable of overcoming time. That is how Hadrian when he constructed the Pantheon, and Anthemius of Tralles and Isidorus of Miletus when they erected Saint Sophia, and Mies van der Rohe when he built the Farnsworth House understood it.

EMOTION

And in order to make light present, to make it solid, shade is necessary. The appropriate combination of light and shade tends to awaken in architecture its ability to move us profoundly; it can even bring tears to our eyes as it summons beauty and summons silence.

Throughout the past years, many of my students have visited the Pantheon in Rome and have written me a postcard saying, "I cried". Those who did not cry do not write me. That was the deal we made in class, and my students continue to uphold it.

When the employees of Caja de Granada –the Granada Savings Bank– in Granada entered my building for the first time to work, some were deeply moved and cried. I always go to see them every time I return there.

And when the queen of Spain entered the building to preside an awards ceremony, she was generous enough to praise the loveliness of the light that filtered through the space. And the press reprinted her words. She understood perfectly that light is the central theme of all Architecture.

LIKE SALT

In my classes, I have often compared light with salt. When light is meted in doses with care and precision, like salt, the stew of architecture reaches its best state. Too much

light undoes and dissolves the tension of the constructed space. And too little, leaves it bland, mute. Just as the lack of salt in cooking leaves the food tasting insipid, the excess of salt ruins it. In general, nearly all architects overdo it with the salt, in their use of light.

QUALITY OF LIGHT

And if the quantity of the light used is important, its quality is no less so. That is what History has always shown us. When architecture, thanks to steel that allows opening large holes and glass that allows closing them, replaces the concept of the mastery of solid light with that of transparence, a profound revolution occurs.

In the Pantheon of Rome, the architect's wisdom leads him to frame the greatest quantity of light with the greatest quantity of shade. And thus, the luminous circle is surrounded and enclosed by the deepest shade, which makes that divine light from above even more luminous, if that's possible.

In Saint Sophia in Istanbul, the brilliant architects open a crown of high windows through which not only direct light pours in, but also indirect light, reflected off of its profound white jambs so that the rays of light crossing in the air look almost like a miracle.

In Farnsworth House, the architect, with the same wisdom as his predecessors, but now with knowledge of steel and glass, decides to propose absolute transparence. And there, the light as it is suspended in air evokes that "breath of a soft breeze" by which the prophet describes the presence of divinity.

WHAT FOR

Thousands of books could be written about light. I recommend those by Henry Plummer and the works of Le Corbusier. In these brief words of introduction, I don't intend more than, once again, to reclaim light's tremendous value as a first and a principal material with which we architects work. And one that is conceded to us freely every day. To remain in the memory and hearts of the people. To make them happy with architecture.

MY WORKS IN LIGHT OF LIGHT

I will try to shed some light on the understanding of light in my works.

The Gaspar House in Cadiz, a Hortus Conclusus, is a house full of shade in which the four large hollows of the corners allow the passage of a silent light in a clear operation of transparence in order to achieve continuity with the space contained by the patios.

The Turegano House in Madrid, a white and cubic cabin, is a box through which sun pours in from the South in streams. The special light of the West, which we capture at dusk by means of a large picture window open at the highest point, is a lesson learned from the houses of Pompey, which use the same mechanism.

The Asencio House in Cadiz uses the effective mechanisms of Turegano House in greater dimensions but as the orientation is different, the large picture window opens here in the ceiling like a large skylight through which abundant light pours in.

The De Blas House in Madrid, Belvedere, develops an operation of transparency to take advantage of the spectacular landscape offered to us in the front. Thus, the landscape is underlined, giving it special value. Below, inside of the podium full of shade, a square picture window opens, framing this landscape and at the same time distancing it.

The Centro BIT in Mallorca, the secret garden, is a nearly biblical garden of 24 powerful orange trees enclosed within a box of travertine marble and open to the sky. To provide it with shade in order to work, it is covered with a light ceiling in an operation of the utmost transparency.

The Granada Savings Bank (Caja de Granada), in Granada, impluvium of light, is in addition to many other things, one interior cubic box of glass and alabaster set in the middle of a larger box made of reinforced concrete, with 9 potent skylights shaped, sized and placed so that the sun crosses the space everyday in such a way that the light is accompanied by beauty and silence.