

JORN UTZON, A GIFT FROM GOD

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Jorn Utzon has died. Jorn Utzon is one of the greatest European architects of the second half of the 20th century. In Mallorca not even two weeks ago, we celebrated Utzon with an International Meeting in his honor. Peter Davey, Richard Weston, Adrian Carter, Lene Tranberg, Elizabeth Tostrup, Michael Asgaard, Joana Roca, Jaume Ferrer and myself, not only celebrated the master with working meetings at Can Lis and Can Feliz and at the Miró Foundation, but on the last day, as a family gesture, we wrote him a postcard with our hearts that will be the last text that the master may have read.

2

In 2008 we celebrated Jorn Utzon's 90th birthday. And I must say that for me it has a special meaning. My father just turned 100 years old on November 5, in very good physical and mental health, in very good humor and with extreme generosity. And with many points in common with our architect. In an interview in the Diario de Cádiz, the newspaper of the city where he lives, he confessed that he is like this "because I love human life and consider it a divine gift".

And when I read in Richard Weston's magnificent book about Jorn Utzon, the master, his statement: "Being an architect means having a wonderful profession: For me it has been a gift from god", I remembered my father. Both of them, both of them, besides agreeing in their gratitude to divine Providence, are people of great coherence. They both have that clear, clear-eyed look that makes clear to the four winds that coherence of life that one would like to have. Of my father, as a good surgeon, I would emphasize his capacity for analysis, and of Utzon, as an exceptional architect, his capacity for synthesis.

I remember how the first news about Utzon came to me, to those of my generation, from the hand of a very young Rafael Moneo who worked with Utzon when the Sydney Opera House and who was our teacher in 1967. He told us about the Skane "L" shaped housing project in 1953, and I even think I remember that we got to draw them. It is also possible that they were some of its derivations, those of Bjuv in 1956 or those of Elsinore in 1956.

Moneo had worked with Utzon in 1961. It is said that as a letter of introduction he brought the master a couple of bottles of a very good Rioja wine. Utzon, who knew how to appreciate and liked good wine, could not refuse such a request. When Utzon was awarded the Pritzker in 2003, Moneo, who had already been awarded the Pritzker before, generously confessed that "it had moved him more than the one he himself had received".

It is also said that when the Pritzker committee went to visit UTZON for the first time in Denmark in 1997 with the intention of awarding him the Prize, the master, dismissive, did not receive them and they decided to give it that year to Sverre Fehn.

3

When in 1992 the young architect Alberto Morell, who had been one of my best students and who now teaches with me as Professor of Projects at the ETSAM, tried to work with Utzon, I sent him a letter of recommendation accompanied, vain of me, by the last publication that had been made to me at that time. The attempt was unsuccessful. I should have advised him better to have brought a few bottles of good wine. But soon after I received a curious request for a job: Jesper Ravn, a young Danish architect working in Utzon's studio asked him what to do that summer. The master, smiling, gave him my publication and asked him to come and work with me in Madrid. You can imagine that I was not able to say no to such praise.

With Jesper Ravn we made a great friendship that lasts because, as an architect and also as a person, he is exceptional. After that summer of internships, both Alberto Morell and I proposed to visit the master together in Mallorca. To see him and to try to get him to show us Can Lis and Can Feliz.

And by golly we made it. Utzon summoned us and received us punctually and affectionately. He showed us each and every corner of the house, of Can Lis. He finished by offering us an orange juice and we took some pictures with him. As nobody wanted to be left out of that picture, we put the automatic on the camera. When the shutter sounded, the master made a little movement. The result was a nice picture where we all look happy and UTZON can be recognized behind a big flower, a hibiscus that almost covers him. Picardy and wisdom of the master.

4

As a result of that visit I wrote a short but intense text about Can Lis with the title "Más Mar" where I analyzed the house and the effective mechanisms that the master had used there to achieve that true masterpiece. It was published in the newspaper El País and in some other media. And as the text is short, I cannot resist transcribing it:

"MORE SEA"

On that now distant and calm day of placid summer light, Jorn Utzon, the master architect, was silently attentive, sitting in his bulrush chair, at the works in progress of his already mythical house in Porto Petro. The master inside, outside the sea and the sky of insulting beauty. The architect in the shadow, the landscape in the light.

The luminous scene was framed by the constructed shadow. Constructed and precisely defined in the openings of the large, sensitively square windows.

The shady interior space was higher than usual. What architects have called a double-height space. The openings, with the dimension that marks the human figure.

Lintel, jambs and threshold, were the four sides with which the frame was assembled, glorifying the very impressive exterior nature: nothing less than the entire ancient Mediterranean Sea was enclosed there. The spectator was enraptured before a supreme work of art.

But the architect thought, still seated, that there was too much sky. That the sea of Majorca was of unparalleled beauty. And that he had abandoned the Nordic mists of Copenhagen for that which was present there in front of him with such infinite calm. And that if he was there, it was because he wanted that sea. More sea.

And the wise creator invented a simple architectural mechanism so that the sea would prevail. And to make the luminous Mare Nostrum forever, trapping it in that frame of shadow. With the ancestral wisdom of an old druid, he put the stones in trunk. On a journey, as the connoisseurs would say. He tilted the lintel to the precise line. He staggered the jambs, as if he were twisting the leaves of a door, until he reached the exact position. And he maintained the horizontal magnet of the threshold, to give the sea support. On the outside, a simple glass that cannot be seen and disappears.

Like a magician who knows the secrets of the control of space, and he knows them well, the master touched all that with his magic wand and, ¡Ale hop, the spell was cast: the light there was so well stretched, that there is much more sea there today. More sea than sky. And an immense beauty. Utzon, the master.

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And recently, I had the honor of being invited to be part of the tribunal that was to judge a doctoral thesis on Utzon, by the architect Jaime J. Ferrer Forés. He was the efficient cause of the recent International Meeting that I mentioned at the beginning of this text celebrating Utzon. The splendid Thesis, today converted into a paperback on Utzon, is an essential document on the master. Everything is there. And today, here, our heart is filled with sadness for the death of Jorn Utzon, the master.