

**THE HOUSE OF THE FOUR ELEMENTS**

**About a Paulo H. Durao's house in Pedrogao**

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The FIRE is in the center of the house, surrounded by the EARTH that embraces it and on the same EARTH on which the house sits firmly. Then in front the AIR trapped between two planes with a firm column that gives support. And at the edge, at the limit of the world, the WATER with which to wash away the faults of life.

This is how a poet friend expresses himself about this essential house, so essential that it is possible to recognize in it the four fundamental principles which, according to the primitive philosophers, constitute the bodies. FIRE and EARTH and AIR and WATER, of which Empedocles spoke, and with him the whole of Philosophy, are present here with all the strength that Architecture gives them.

It is beautiful to be able to describe a house in this way, clearly and distinctly, as if it were a thought, an idea. A house that is the first work of an architect who is young for his age and wise for the depth of his knowledge.

In the center the FIRE. It would seem that the architects have forgotten that this is the focus and center of life. That, around it, primitive man gathered with his people to warm themselves, to eat and to talk at length and to sing, in the heat and the LIGHT that generates such a mysterious element. And it is not only the heat but also the light and the power to eat what fire is capable of transforming, make fire an essential element in life. That of primitive man and ours.

The rooms of this house, more than rooms, are as if the EARTH itself wrapped everything around the FIRE. It would seem that a cave has been dug, that is what this house is. And with the same EARTH is built the podium on which the house sits. EARTH that is translated with the powerful concrete.

The house, from the front, opens all of it to the AIR. And the roof is supported by a single main column that thus, alone protagonist, acquires a great strength. And the glass, transparent and clean, disappears.

And at the end, at the edge, at the limit of the world as our poet says, the WATER. A pool rather than a swimming pool, formed with the same concrete walls, defines the main plane with radical precision.

Every year I usually start my classes by giving my students the exercise inherited from Alejandro de la Sota, the teacher, of a dream house. So that they learn to dream, to dream, to try to make those dreams come true. It would seem that Paulo Durao, in his first work, would have built a dream house, he would have made a dream come true. A beautiful house built with only the four elements.

Rilke wrote in his Letters to a Young Poet: "You must admit that you would die if you were deprived of writing". Paulo Durao works with this intensity in Architecture. With the intensity of true creators.