

THINKING, TEACHING, BUILDING

**On the architecture of young Australian architects, Simon Pental and
Stephen Neille.**

PUBLISHED IN

Varia Architectonica. Ed. Mairea. Madrid. 2016

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Among the pleasant discoveries I made in Australia on the occasion of my conferences in Sydney, Melbourne and Perth, was to come across some magnificent architecture by some wonderful architects. In Perth I saw works by Simon Pental and Stephen Neille that I found to be of the highest order. The most striking feature of their works is that in the lines of almost all of them, these architects escape from orthogonality to achieve special spatial qualities by angling their spaces.

Not long ago I wrote "The brain is square," on the occasion of a surprising discovery by a group of scientists at Massachusetts General Hospital. They had discovered that the human brain is made of parallel and perpendicular fibers that cross each other in a square fashion. That the brain is square. They had discovered that the physical connections of the human brain, which had always been assumed to be tangled, after being analyzed by these researchers with the most advanced technology, were surprisingly simple, orthogonal, square. It seems that the brain wiring is organized geometrically according to an orthogonal network of communications, as if it were the very layout of Manhattan. Or like the classic image of a printed circuit, which is what they are.

Simon Pental and Stephen Neille have achieved spaces of enormous interest by changing the classic orthogonality of the plants. Always with full intention and with brilliant results.

This change in the use of the right angle for other different angles, which in others is a superficial desire for meaningless change, is shown in our architects with such rigor that it reminds me of some highly effective formal mechanisms of the Baroque. As when Bernini in the scala regia and in so many of his works, conveniently angles his walls to achieve the desired effect.

And we will now analyze some of his works.

The Fremantle House, a house with rich interior and limited horizon, is a perfect exercise of his philosophy. The exterior adheres to the geometry of the city. But in the interior they seek spatial richness in expression, for which almost no room has all its walls orthogonal. Even in the bathrooms. The result is a serene and calm exterior and an interior with spaces that offer very interesting perspectives conveniently accentuated by light.

The MT Lawley House, unlike the Fremantle House, is dominated by orthogonality, tensioned by the two skylights in the central hallway. The result is a very beautiful house. A functional theme appears here that they will later repeat insistently. The duplication of the living room. Instead of making a large living room, a square they call it, they propose two smaller spaces, more intimate in scale.

It would seem then that the Goosberry Hill House is a daughter house of the two previous ones. On the one hand, the night area belongs to the orthogonal world. And in the daytime area the walls open up to achieve spatially richer spaces. The result is once again of a high quality.

In the Ecolodge project the solution is very clever. A base linked to the ground, as if it were a podium, where the most public functions are developed with great formal freedom. Above it three orthogonal boxes of rooms. All perfect.

In the project for the Parliament House Forecourt, the decision to bury the entire new performance, creating a plinth-like structure that not only does not interfere with the old building, but also enhances its value, is particularly interesting.

The Mosman House is a clear exercise of that space in between so dear to our architects. Each piece, with angled exterior walls and orthogonal interior walls, are arranged as if floating, creating high quality intermediate spaces with interesting leaks and perspectives.

The Claremont House project is based on a very orthogonal floor plan where at some point, as if the accent on a word, the architects leave their personal mark. The interior walls lined with playwood are very beautiful and give great warmth to the spaces. This will also be a recurring theme in their architecture.

The small East Fremantle House project is interesting. Its sloping development with internal steps and with all functions broken down are accentuated by the turning of the two end walls in the bedrooms.

The Carine House presents a theme of great interest: the alcoves, deep spaces linked to the windows that give a more massive, denser character to the space.

The Happy Hans play haus is a minimalist house project, linear and square version that once again, as LC did with le cabanon, proposes housing taken to the limit.

The Darlington House takes as its main theme the movable enclosure of the facades to protect from the sun and achieve greater privacy.

In short, a set of projects, almost all of them houses, houses of exceptional quality. I still remember when, years ago, some people attacked me because I had only built houses. I still think that there is no architect worth his salt who has not built a house that is not in the History of Architecture. Palladio is the Villa Rotonda and Mies is the Farnsworth. Le Corbusier is the Vila Savoie and Libera is the Malaparte House. Meier is the Smith and Koolhaas the Bordeaux House. Well, all the houses that our architects have built are great.

In all of them appear in one way or another the two common points already mentioned: the angulation of the walls and the fragmentation of the functions. There is a clear will in all these projects to divide the spaces. All the functions are broken down and a specific space is assigned to each one. And then they are connected into a new unit. And in this

game of boxes, the accent is placed on the intermediate spaces, what we have called spaces in between. The result is an architecture that, in addition to being magnificent, is clearly recognizable as belonging to its authors.

It is also particularly interesting the way Pental and Neille present their work. The way they give the reasons with which they elaborate their architecture. Far from merely descriptive or very complicated explanations, they explain everything with great clarity, understanding that their architecture, as if it were a table, rests on three legs: thinking, practicing and teaching. To use their words, thinking, practicing and teaching. A firm triad in the face of the whirlwind, the whirlwind of the disorderly architecture that so many today practice. Something in which I deeply agree with them.

And if there were any doubt about their most poetic intentions, they have elaborated a kind of Creed where they link their pretended Beauty to memory, by the hand of T. S. Eliot, to immersion with Loos and Sempere, to movement, with Kahn and Soane, to stillness by the hand of Rothko and to impression with Barragán. They are not bad traveling companions. I would travel with them too.