

LEARNING FROM MIES

On the Hubbe House in Magdeburgo, by Mies Van der Rohe

PUBLISHED IN

Casas Ibéricas 4. Madrid 1993

La Idea Construida. Ed. COAM. Madrid, 1996

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"It was an unusually beautiful place to construct". [Es war ein ungewöhnlich schöner Platz zum Bauen].

With those words, Mies Van der Rohe began a text dated August 7, 1935, preserved in its original at the US Library of Congress.

It is a description of the Hubbe House and the place where it is located, in Magdeburg. The project is from 1935 and the house was never built.

I read this text in a splendid document with all of Mies Van der Rohe's writings, some of them unpublished, provided by Fernando G. Vázquez Ramos on his Doctoral Thesis, Madrid, 1993. And with this description appeared a very known drawing, a very expressive diagrama on this never built Hubbe House.

Mies Van der Rohe speaking of the site and delighting in it: in the most beautiful view, in the beautiful trees, in light and in life. The man some people have called "cold" is moved by nature, the landscape, the light. And in transferring, translating, materializing these sentiments through Architecture, he produces the most sublime beauty: "less is more".

Mies plays in dialogue with nature, with Light and with Gravity.

He returns to raise horizontal Light, flowing through the continuity of space. Setting the horizontal plane delicately on nature underlining its beauty and covering it at the exact height with the parallel upper plane. Framing the less adequate views, veiling them with elegant walls.

He returns to direct Gravity, as if he were Nureyev himself, on tiptoe. The upper horizontal plane transmits its loads intensely through those delicate pillars, so characteristic of Mies.

Far from any trite objectualist labels, with his own specific notion of space, he understands nature so well that no other architecture is capable of merging with it to such a high degree.

Even the expressive drawing with which he presents this house has more nature sketched in it than architecture. The one disappears to magnify the other. What more can one ask of an architect in his relationship with nature? Who said that Mies Van der Rohe and his architecture were cold? What other architecture better materializes the calmed air, dressed in the beauty and unused light the poet tells us about?

A Mies Van der Rohe´diagrama, which better could preface a publication dedicated to the Diagrama, thus giving it prestige?

It was an unusually beautiful place to construct. The house was to be erected on an island of the Elba, in Magdeburg, under some beautiful trees with a panoramic view of the Elba.

Only the orientation presented difficulties. The most beautiful view was towards the east. The view to the south did not offer anything and was almost a disturbance. Upon situating the building, these defects had to be corrected.

For that reason, I located the habitable part of the house to the south, closing the views with a few walls which nonetheless allowed the sunlight to pass through. The house was entirely open towards to low part of the river and the garden.

Thus, I achieved not only a good placement, but furthermore I got an interesting contrast between the closed-nearby and the open-far away.

This layout also answers the needs of the client, who lives alone in the house but wants to have a free and hospitable social life. This is also reflected in the internal order of the house. For that reason, there too, the necessary privacy of the closed form is combined with the freedom of the open form of the rooms.

Mies Van der Rohe. Magdeburg, 1935