

THE BEST HOUSE: RADICAL, SIMPLE, BEAUTIFUL

About Alberto Morell's Querol House

PUBLISHED IN

Poetica Architectonica. Ed. Mairea. Madrid. 2014

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I was recently having a drink with Massimo Vignelli in New York when he suddenly blurted out: "The best house I have seen in recent times is by a Spanish architect: an exposed concrete box, just concrete, all concrete. Radical, simple, beautiful. He was referring to Alberto Morell's Kessler House, his best known work.

Alberto Morell has been a professor at the School of Architecture of Madrid, UPM, for many years. He teaches Projects at the ETSAM where he has a great predicament among students who are fascinated by his classes. One always wants to be a student of his. And those who have been his students to continue being so. He masters the art of seduction, with his teaching and with his works.

Vignelli unconsciously repeated the adjectives that astronaut Neil Armstrong had used to describe the Earth from the moon "radical, simple, beautiful".

So radical, simple, beautiful is also the Querol house, the new house built by Alberto Morell in Nairobi. And, as when John Heijduk described Libera's Malaparte house as "A house that comes to me", identifying the work with its creator, our architect and all his architecture are also like this new house: radical, simple and beautiful.

Once again the box. That box defended by Lubetkin in his writings as the summit of the best architecture. In this case, in this box, in this house, crossed by a few walls with the cleanliness with which the arrows cross Mantegna's San Sebastian. The walls enter and exit in the Miesian way, achieving a spatial tension that is not easy to achieve and which is reached here with the utmost naturalness.

The floor plan, outside and inside the house, is all wood. It looks as if Alberto Morell had set Robert Frost's poem:

Whose Woods these are I think I know
His house is in the village though
He will not see me stopping here
To watch his words fill up with snow

The tremendous platform of the exterior wooden floor goes into the box and up through stairs and shelves until it reaches the ceiling. Or quite the opposite. It looks like the entire wooden interior spills outward into an impressive ligneous platform that our architect can't resist digging out to plant trees and water. All controlled and measured and perfect. Rarely has wood, as a materialization of nature emerging from the ground plane, been so well understood.

Says Seamus Heaney in his accurate poem The Riddle:

Which would be better, what sticks or what falls through?
Or does the choice itself create the value?

For in this house, in this case, both the thick, strong, exposed concrete that remains above and the powerful wood that rests below after the finer sieve are well ordered. It seems as if a sieve had been made between the top and the bottom, as if it were the gold of the sands of the Tagus imagined by Cervantes in his beautiful prologue to Don Quixote. After the sieve, everything is gold above and below in this house.

This is a house, the best house, as Vignelli said, the best house. A house that is rooted in nature and imposes itself on nature, as the best architecture has always done. At the limit of the limit.