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PROJECTS

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Twin villas in Costa Rica

Luca MF Fabris

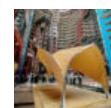
Identical in their structure, different in their colours, the two small villas designed by the Czech architect Dagmar Štěpánová in Costa Rica float above the tropical vegetation, and face onto the Pacific. “They have the ability to take you into another dimension: they communicate the energy of being able to live without limitations”

Two small structures surrounded by jungle, at an altitude of 300 metres above sea level, jut out towards the endless expanse of the Pacific Ocean. They are the Achioté villas, twin buildings intended for short lets located at Uvita, in the vicinity of the Costa Rican town of Playa Hermosa. In designing them, the Czech architect Dagmar Štěpánová – founder of the studio FormaFatal – has listened to the terrain. “Although the villas are only 12

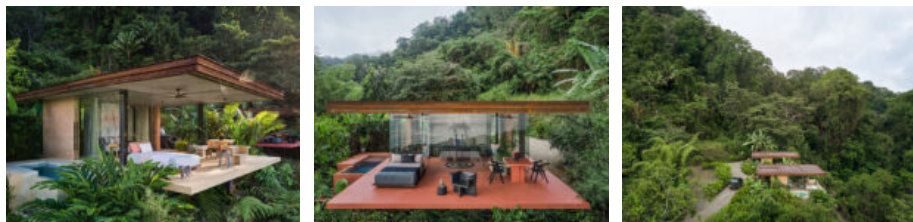
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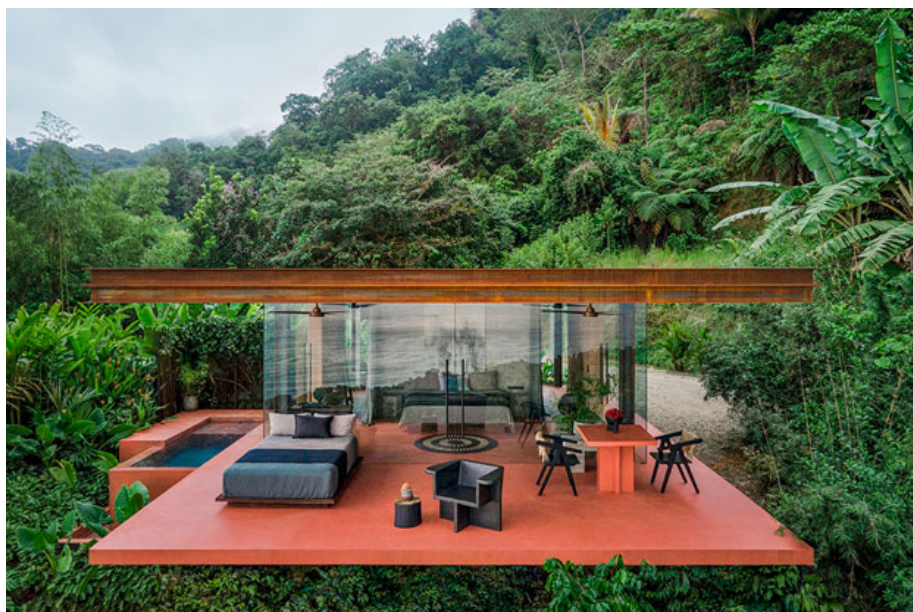
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metres apart,” she says, “each of them has clearly different vibrations that I have interpreted in the choice of colours as representation of opposites, of yin and yang”: sandy tones for Jaspis, terracotta-red for Nefrit. In every other way the two structures are identical, with a minimal design that recalls Mies van der Rohe: two very thin lines – the floor slab and the roof – appear to float in the air, in part thanks to the floor-to-ceiling frameless sliding glass walls which dematerialize the boundary between the living spaces and the luxuriant vegetation.



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“My intention was for the houses to be sustainable,” continues Štěpánová. So she adopted the technique of rammed earth, the first time it has been used in Costa Rica: at the sides of the structures three walls were built out of a mixture of the clayey material that was excavated from the site with a small proportion of cement. To build them, the architect turned to the Brazilian Daniel Mantovani, founder of the Terra Compacta company, who decided to test the resistance of this construction technique to the climatic conditions of the tropics for months with a full-size mock-up.



Nefrit Villa in shades of red: the external space is fitted with concrete furniture and a bed that serves as a chaise-longue. (ph. BoysPlayNice)

After the test was passed with flying colours, the two structures took shape, divided into a terrace overhanging the slope, a bedroom, a kitchen and a bathroom, making up a total of 90 square metres each. The pile foundations were cast in situ along with the monolithic floor slab. On top of this level, utilizing formwork mostly constructed by hand, were erected the vertical wall of concrete that separates the bedroom from the kitchen and the walls of rammed earth, all reinforced and connected to the structure of the roof, with the additional support of four steel pillars set at the corners of the room. The monolithic roof has a framework of flat beams, visible only from above, and its perimeter is bounded by a double ring beam, that serves as a cornice. The ceiling has grooves in which are set the tracks of the sliding

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doors, the mosquito net and the curtains that surround the bed. The floor is finished with a non-slip cement screed that extends as far as the overhang, which has no parapet. On the west side of each villa there is an infinity swimming pool, also built of concrete, as are most of the fixtures made to measure for these spaces, which open up brazenly onto the boundless landscape.



The bedroom of Jaspis Villa: on the ceiling, the grooves made at the time of its casting house the tracks of sliding doors, curtains and mosquito nets. (ph. BoysPlayNice)

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