100 Häuser für 100 Architekten Europas
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Because of its private and intimate character, the interior has never attracted much attention. This low level of interest can perhaps be accounted for in terms of the short-lived nature of interiors. Private fittings and furnishings are tied to the necessity of meeting the current, subjective, specific and thus fugitive and changeable needs of the occupants. Criticism of architecture, by contrast, seeks to identify permanent manifestations of general and collective values, of a kind such as architecture can comprehensively include and harmonise, and does not recognise in the private space any values specific to the field. This criticism does not count the peculiar features of the interior, its constituent features, or its compositional principles – in short, everything that distinguishes the interior from other spaces and lends it an autonomous nature.

If, however, we examine the issues involved in the establishment of domestic space, the questions that arise time and again are those concerning relations between the public and the private, the collective and the individual, the spectacular and the intimate. There is no doubt that the private has always existed, since in every age there has been at least one zone protected from the intrusive gaze of strangers, an area reserved for more personal and intimate activities, even if its boundaries have been variously demarcated according to period and culture. It is this circumstance that constitutes the true foundation for inquiry into the nature of domestic space. What follows in the present book is not an exhaustive presentation of individual works by a certain number of architects, but it does afford a hitherto unavailable, "transnational" panorama that differs substantially from what readers will encounter when leafing through the usual histories of architecture.

This project, which showcases the residences of some of the most significant twentieth century European architects, aims not only to make visible an aspect of our culture that has hitherto been neglected by scholars, and to promote a public esteem and valuation of this cultural property, but also, ambitiously, to help assure the preservation of this shared international heritage.

The fact that it is indeed a shared international heritage, despite the location of the houses in specific places and thus their positions in specific national identities, is impressively documented in the present publication. The residences selected here reflect a new, transnational, inter-cultural dimension, in which mutual influences and thematic absorptions can be seen clearly prevailing over national traditions. The manifold network of connections linking the lives of these architects enriches their homes and affords concrete proof of the impossibility of confining a cultural praxis such as interior architecture within fixed geographic boundaries.

A further concern of this book is to liberate architecture from its function as a utility and to highlight its quality as a "hybrid cultural praxis". Its argument, presented to a wide public not consisting only of specialists, is that the private space is distinctly capable of absorbing cultural development. If we are better to understand the cultural and political frame of influence around the history of architecture, and to comprehend the ongoing interchange of thoughts, ideas and values that has been the hallmark of the modern era, we must of necessity take a close look at the houses architects have created for themselves. This is no act of voyeurism, nor any kind of intrusion into the private sphere.

Private spaces not only reflect the manifold living requirements of a particular time, they are also invariably both the transmitter and receiver of influences, styles and crossovers. In examining them, we are able to place the fashioning of interior spaces in a larger context, one that transcends the national boundaries within which that context has

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3 The present publication includes the work done by the MEAM Net research group at the Politecnico di Milano in collaboration with 27 institutions Europe-wide. This work, titled ‘One Hundred Houses for One Hundred European Architects of the 20th Century’, bore fruit in a travelling exhibition and a website (http://www.meamnet.polimi.it).
The transnational character of interior architecture, and its signifi-
cance as a hybrid cultural praxis, has been expounded by Chambers as
follows: “The journey back into one’s tradition, just as the journey out-
towards another, is perhaps altogether more fragile and frac-
tured operation than our history and culture would have us believe... No
tradition exists in isolation, it invariably cites/sites others.” This state-
ment invites a new scrutiny of the interior of the house, the seemingly
inviolable threshold of the private sphere; indeed makes a house a home.
Moreover, the culture of interior spaces has all too often been
equated with the history of architecture or of interior architecture. This
involves a failure to grasp that the distinctive characteristic of domestic
space consists precisely in transcending the historical facts of both, without
being the product of their conjunction.

Although the evolution of the interior is intimately connected with
the history of architecture – and with that of interior architecture, to
which the interior belongs – it also has a distinctive individual character
of its own. This individuality is manifested in the combination of forms
and gestalten in the constituent elements that determine the nature of the
living place, including essential fittings and furnishings. The spaces are
bound up with the lives, requirements and wishes of the people who
have conceived and then realised them. This relation of the form of
the interior space to the life conducted in it is a fundamental feature. And for
this reason it is impossible to assess the significance of the forms
without taking the occupants, and their needs and sensibilities, into
account.12 An architect who designs a house or even simply its interior
is taking on a delicate assignment that requires him to relate various
kinds of information to one another, and to harmonise them. He trans-
lates them into a constructed form, in the hope of establishing the subtle
and difficult synthesis of form and life.13

In the specific case of architects’ houses, we can furthermore iden-
tify a “more sturdy relation between occupant and dwelling... which
allows us to determine the real, actual intention prevailing in the organ-
isation of the daily living space and the private work space. That this
applies not only in the case of architects, but is evidenced by ex-
amples such as Paolo Nervi’s apartments in Santiago and Valassova,
Giancarlo de’ Manzoni’s Villa Vittoria in Gardone Riviera, heated Castle in
San Simeone, or the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum in Boston.”14
As sites, architects’ houses always engage two lines of interest:
they are works, and they afford biographical testimony to their cre-
ators.14 Insofar as this is so, the anthropological interest taken in cultural
products in architects’ houses is a fit area of research. One must concur
with Adriano Cornoldi: “The study of residences designed by architects
for themselves shows that, from the very core, the designs pursue an
aim that ranges across a rich, nuanced spectrum from a condition of ab-
solute involvement to one of the utmost detachment. That aim may be to
do with making a statement, one that leads to the building of a resi-
dence of one’s own, free of anyone else’s intentions, much in the spirit
of a poetic manifesto. For Eliel Saarinen, Gerrit Rietveld, Robert Mallet-
Stevens, Günther Domagk it is the statement of a new idiom; many use
it to bring word of a new life style; be it one that prompts enthusiasm, as
in Joseph Maria Olbrich or Konstantin Melnikov; be it one at once more
free and more composed, as in Luigi Figini or André Lurçat; or be it a
more down-to-basics style, as in Clemente Holzmeister or Ralph Erskine.
For Jean Provancher, Angelo Invernizzi and Arne Korsmo it is the ‘unique’
opportunity for a technological experiment. Auguste Perret’s venture is a
demonstration of entrepreneurial daring. The sheer pleasure of dwelling
is particularly expressed in the apartments of Erik Wilhem Bryggman,
Umberto Riva and Enric Miralles and in the houses of Gunnar Asplund,
Daniele Calabi, Akar Aalto, Juan Navarro Baldeweg and Mario José
Van Hie.”14
One can add that in houses of such uniqueness, the architectural
achievement is by no means at odds with the occupants. Unlike cases of
cautious quest or of free experimentation, architecture is here invariably
deployed as a means, not an end. The resolve to place praxis and theor-
etical speculation at the service of man and his requirements by no
means issues in bankruptcy of the form or content of the architectural work,
but rather in its further evolution. The needs and expectations of the
occupants are satisfied without robbing innovative drive of its verse.
Also, this happy union of private requirement and architectural
ambition is increasingly being forfeited, as we see in publications where
the visual realm of the interiors coincides with the will of the
designers. They confirm the hegemony of objects over people, presenting to
the public vacuous models of living bereft of meaning.

The present compilation intends, with resolve and perhaps just a little
presumption as well, to supply the legitimation for the very existence of
a theory and poetics of interior design that proposes practicable solu-
tions. The object is to promote understanding of architecture that pays
regard both to the occupants and to the ideas of the designers.

6 Cf. G. Teyssot (ed.), Il progetto domestico. La casa dell’uomo: archetipi e prototipi, catalogue
presented to the international conference ‘One Hundred Houses for One Hundred European Architects of the 20th Century’, October 2001, Milan Triennale.
7 Cf. I. Chambers, ‘Le fondamenta disturbate e il linguaggio degli habitat infestati dai fantasmi’,
Difference, catalogue presented to the international conference ‘One Hundred Houses for One Hundred European Architects of the 20th Century’, October 2001, Milan Triennale.
10 Cf. A. Cornoldi, ‘Le case degli architetti’, paper presented to the international conference ‘One
Hundred Houses for One Hundred European Architects of the 20th Century’, October 2001, Milan Triennale.
12 Cf. G. M. Dallabona, ‘La casa dell’abitare’, paper presented to the international conference ‘One
Hundred Houses for One Hundred European Architects of the 20th Century’, October 2001, Milan Triennale.
The landscape of the interior is determined and characterised by objects that satisfy the needs and expectations of the occupants. It is these objects that make a space into a room.\(^{17}\) A house without objects is an empty house, incapable of accommodating life. That is the message conveyed by the interiors of the houses of Peter Behrens or Josef Paul Klee, of Vittorio Gregotti or Franco Albini, or of Carlo Mollino or Ignazio Gardella. The beauty of the furnishings and objects may be relative, and subjective, but they are no less significant for that: it is precisely the absence of these things that is the hallmark of a prison cell.\(^{14}\) Maurizio Boriani observes: ‘The sturdy relation that obtains between the spaces, the objects, and their meanings, is known only to the occupants and frequently not even to them, since a part is played by psychological considerations that are not always clear but indeed must sometimes be unconsciously sidestepped.’\(^{19}\)

The fittings and furnishings bear silent witness to the act of living, and it is thanks to them that the occupants are able to enjoy rooms that were empty when the house was as yet uninhabited. The fittings and furnishings are true settlers: together with the objects that enter the interior of a dwelling when one takes possession of it, they transform spaces into locations that are readymade for life.\(^{19}\) The distinctive character of the objects and furnishings in a house, their disposition in the rooms, their associations with each other, strong or less so, the order (or disorder) in which people live in a house, can express a person’s personality as well as a letter, a work of art, or social behaviour.\(^{21}\)

In a particular degree, houses or apartments designed by architects for themselves are places of exchange and of cultural production. They not only afford an opportunity to observe how the relation between built form and the act of living has been established; they additionally elucidate a historical legacy that has hitherto remained almost entirely in the dark. Seen thus, the architect is not only a man of technology, professionally deploying a specialised form of expression within a defined field of operation, but an intellectual who, like a writer, musician or any other artist, interprets communicable cultural values.\(^{22}\)

If we are successfully persuasive in arguing that the significance of architects’ houses lies in their high cultural value, and thus helping them toward the recognition they merit, the fraught issue of some sort of museum preservation does indeed seem the only option for a heritage subject to constant wear and tear.\(^{21}\) Boriani is thinking along similar lines when he writes: “In this case, preservation must be understood as the attempt to forestall dereliction and the associated loss of memory, by eliminating the factors that cause or accelerate it, in the full knowledge that any and every object we preserve for posterity can be nothing but an approximation to the original, even if it is our task to assure for the future the greatest possible use of the object (and hence also the greatest possible understanding of it).’\(^{14}\)

Though the processes of preservation and restoration involved in architects’ houses do not fundamentally differ from those other buildings require, the buildings do pose additional problems. The technical and structural aspects need to be taken adequately into consideration. Boriani comments: “Among the questions raised by the preservation of modern architecture, that of the materials and the experimental building techniques is one that occasions considerable problems ... The ‘best houses’ in particular (frequently the residences of the architects and artists) merit preserving in their original state, in order to document the structural ventures, whether successful or not, even if this involves a lower level of functionality measured by today’s standards.”\(^{25}\)

A further consideration is that architects’ houses and apartments, as privileged locations of the private sphere, are not necessarily capable of transformation into public spaces. Even so, the number of houses adapted to a new museum role is growing constantly, and some already

\(^{17}\) G. Ottolini, V. del Prizio, La casa attrezzata, Naples, 1993
\(^{18}\) A. Cornoldi, ‘Le case degli architetti’, ebd.
\(^{19}\) Cf. M. Boriani, ‘Le case degli architetti. Conservazione, restauro e ricostruzione?’, ebd.
\(^{22}\) Cf. M. Boriani, ‘Le case degli architetti. Conservazione, restauro e ricostruzione?’, ebd.
\(^{25}\) Ibid.
serve as benchmarks, such as Pierre Chareau’s Maison de Verre in Paris or Frank Lloyd Wright’s house in Chicago. These examples point up a difficult compromise, in the attempt to pursue restoration within existing parameters and regulations whilst at the same time following the unusual desire not to transform the dwelling into a “museum”, in so far as the domestic character that sets it apart from other objects and defines it as a place of living and culture is to be preserved.

In raising the question of the museum character of dwellings, we are again foregrounding cultural discourse. In the course of history, the endeavour to give rhetorical embodiment to the power of knowledge has led the design of museums into an ongoing process by which frontiers are transgressed and purposes modified. This has gone hand in hand with that other process by which, over centuries, access has been extended from a privileged group of users to the broad masses. Despite the greater permeability of their boundaries, and the change in their roles, museums still adhere to architecture as a display of public power. They have become places where a governance obtains that does not exclude but, rather, is based on a national identity in which any individual can recognise himself. In this sense, the museum is indeed the institutional location where the occidental memory is given representative display, especially the memory of the social group that produced it – affording a precise image of the dominant culture.

The present publication wishes to endorse a different identity for museums. Our approach adopts a spirit cognate with that of Marie Louise Pratt’s idea of the “contact zone”, that place where people separate from each other geographically and historically make contact by entering into mutual, interactive relations. In this spirit, realising an architectural network by transforming twentieth century European architects’ houses into museums constitutes a true challenge for the future.

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26 Ebd.