



Resonant Architecture

As this year draws to a close, the woods that enclose our house are hibernating. Trees sleep upright, but the human has to lie down to relax completely. Why? For us as designers of environment, such investigations are of prime importance. Is not the study of biology the true foundation of an architect?

For the past couple months, I have been writing about the home, exploring the psychology behind such things as doors, entryways, kitchens. But when it comes right down to it, the primary role for a house is to provide shelter. And for this time of year, shelter from the cold, the snow, the dark.

Days are shorter this time of year, nights crisper, an urge to retreat indoors. Yet it is times like these, that the universe is most exposed. Skies are clearest in the cold air, stars brighter as veiling light is contained inside. How often do we gaze up into the heavens, wonder what mysteries are out there?

I suspect not often enough. We have grown accustomed to our warm, tight houses - even if they are dwarfed by an endless sky. We take refuge within for psychological reasons as much as for physical ones. Comfort is more than temperature, insulation more than fiberglass blankets. We retreat to our shelters to escape the vast unknowns.

Humans have been doing this since our beginnings. The history of mankind is our slow progression indoors, isolation, independence. The canopy of trees no longer suffices, our minds seek greater comforts. So, where exactly do we find this shelter within our home?

The master suite - a place to recline, complete relaxation in slumber or maybe immersed in a bath drawn at the end of a long day. Behind a closed door, further separation from even the family, for total solitude - pause.

Distance from the world certainly provides rest for the body and mind. Yet, for the soul to find refuge, something more is needed. The space must speak to you as a person, as a unique individual, all of the memories and dreams that define you. From the ancestors still alive in your genes to the conversation you had with your child this afternoon. A home modeled on these things resonates on a deeper level, filling the longings modern life creates.

In my own home, our master bathroom does this by recalling a trip my wife and I took on our honeymoon. A boat ride into the Grotta Azzurra, a cave that sits at the edge of the Capri Island. Where the Mediterranean Sea flows into the cavern and the Italian sunlight filters through the water, illuminating this internal escape in shades of blue.

Those same shades of blue are captured in mosaic tiles, broken and laid by hand across the floor and up the walls of our bathroom. A shower curtain made of hanging glass plates distort the view of these tiles, the effect of looking through a scalloped surface of waters at sea. And, a circular window brings morning sunlight into the mouth of our grotto, sparkling off ceramic glazes and fragments of mirror mixed in, reminding us of our journey years ago.

Architectural space and materials formed in such a way becomes meaningful to the people who call it home. A sense of grounding, a familiar feeling, a place of belonging. The body, mind and soul come looking for relief and a resonance, tuned individually provides shelter.

Our homes are still made from wood of the forest, roofs keeping off ice and snow, walls blocking out cold winds from the north. But for us humans, this is not enough. We are psychological creatures, which seek emotional shelter too. So this winter season, may your house be warm and by creating new family memories in your home, may your heart be even warmer.

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