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DESIGN DIARY

INTERNATIONAL

Jae Ko:

**FROM CASH REGISTER
TAPE TO THE HIRSHHORN**



From a graduate-school assignment to the Hirshhorn's permanent collection, how Jae Ko turned an ordinary roll of paper into a lifelong material practice.

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DESIGN DIARY
INTERNATIONAL

FOUNDER'S NOTE

A woman on an island in Maryland has spent thirty years turning cash register tape into sculpture. A designer in Belgium sawed his way to a career using one sheet of material and nothing else. A manufacturer in Foshan has built his entire business on refusing to let a single approved dimension move without written sign-off.

None of these people set out to make a statement about limits. Jae Ko didn't choose paper because it was symbolic; she bought a roll of tape because it was cheap and already a perfect circle. Marc Meeuwissen picked up a handsaw because he wanted to make something entirely on his own terms, and the saw itself started making decisions he hadn't planned on. Rokan Liu didn't set out to write a philosophy of manufacturing; he just got tired of watching a good sample turn into something else by the time it reached the fifth phase of a rollout and built a system to stop that from happening again.

We have built this issue around people and objects that seemed worth a closer look, and only afterward did we notice how many of them had arrived at the same conclusion from completely different directions, that the tightest boundary, chosen carefully or discovered by accident, is usually where the real work actually starts.



(Founder—Design Diary International)

DECOR

FURNITURE

ART

DESIGNER

PROJECT

BRAND PROFILE





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IN THE FRAME

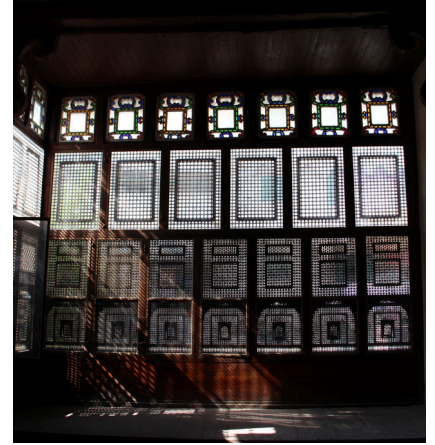
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FASHION DESIGNER

Tan France

has stepped into furniture with his first collection, an 18-piece line for Castlery spanning living, dining, lighting, rugs, décor, and accessories. Castlery co-founder Declan Ee frames the collaboration as a meeting of "two outsiders, each at home between different worlds," pairing Singapore's own hybrid design identity with France's cross-cultural upbringing. For France, the collection centres on home as something created rather than found, pieces meant for the table where everyone gathers, the sofa sunk into after a long day. Standouts include the Kagan Sofa, Anaya Tea Table, plush Rumi Accent Chair, and the sculptural Rayan Mirror, each balancing form, function, and cultural texture.

castlery.com



FOUNDER

MARC MEEUWISSEN

*of
Dear Objects, Belgium*



The Designer Who Builds With One Sheet and One Saw

He spent years designing corporate identities and the physical work that came with them, a bar counter here, a ticket desk there, all built to someone else's deadline. Eventually he built a second practice with none of those limits attached. What he learned surprised him: total freedom wasn't the answer. A single rule was. Alisha Maindola speaks with Marc Meeuwissen of Dear Objects, ahead of his continued run of collectible-design showings across Europe, about restriction, imperfection, and a future he's not sure human intuition survives.



Corporate identity work paid Meeuwissen's bills for years. It also came with a ceiling. A theater café needed a counter. A lobby needed a divider. Each brief arrived with a client attached, and a client meant a deadline, and a deadline, he's since decided, is usually where good work stops rather than where it finishes. "Without a client, you have the opportunity to continue that process until you've achieved the best possible result. Only then, in my view, can you reach a level that's worth investing all your time and energy in." Dear Objects exists because he wanted to keep going past the point where a brief would normally end.

Freedom didn't arrive as clarity, though. He calls the early period a rudderless adventure, a head full of half-formed ideas with nothing steering them. Should function outweigh form? Make it himself, or have someone else fabricate it? Does the story behind an object matter more than its shape? None of these resolved quickly. What did arrive, gradually, was a method rather than an answer: limit everything down to one material, worked by one tool, by hand. Sawing a single sheet of timber-based board turned out to sharpen his instincts rather than box them in. "The more you realize what is not possible, for example, sawing a circle, the more focused and inventive the design process becomes." One sheet. One saw. One object. That line became the entire premise behind BRUTALISTA, his best-known series, and close to a founding document for everything Dear Objects has made since.

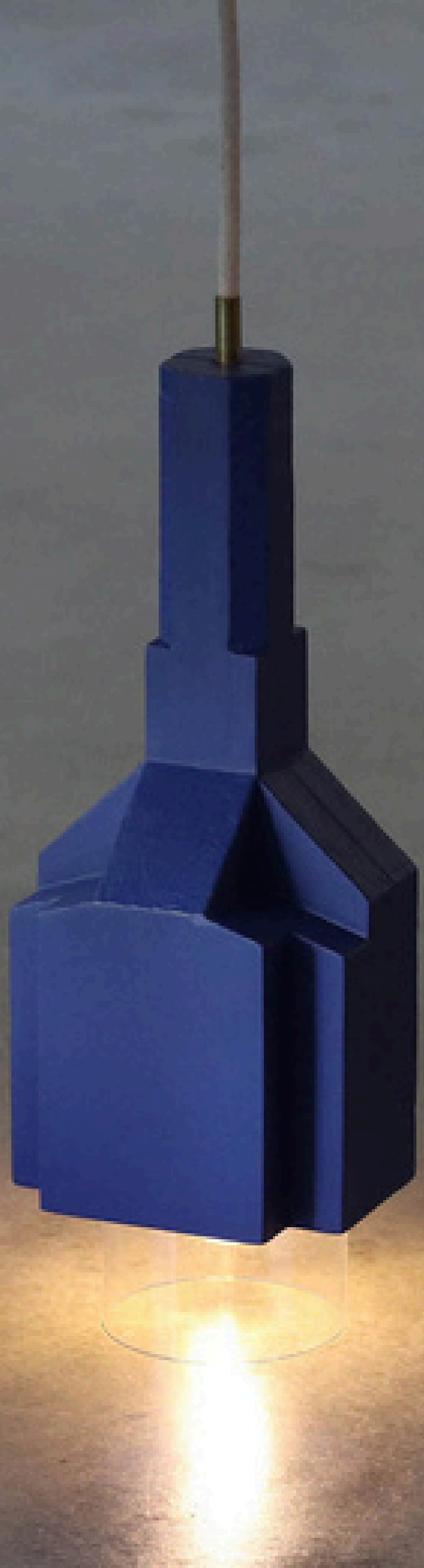


Working almost entirely by hand wasn't only practical. It was a small act of positioning. His earliest pieces read less like furniture and more like short stories told in wood, objects built around a single memory or observation rather than a functional gap in a room. He named that first series I Tell You What I Saw, a fairly direct admission that after years spent producing polished visuals for other people's brands, he finally wanted the images to be his own.

Object, sculpture, and architecture—Meeuwissen doesn't bother drawing lines between them. What he's chasing is a form powerful enough to stand on its own, and that, in his estimation, is the one trait every designer, sculptor, and architect he respects actually shares. Technique is a means, never the point. Even the word "object" gets used deliberately, less as a category than as an exit ramp, a way to dodge the flatter, more limiting language of "chair" or "table" and skip the tired debate over whether something counts as art or design. Call it an object, and it gets judged purely on its form.

Most designers sketch first. Meeuwissen reaches for a material he doesn't fully understand yet, often one being pushed to do something it wasn't built for. That habit produced MAKE AND BREAK, a series built on Viroc, a cement-bonded chipboard that borrows concrete's strength and wood's flexibility without behaving quite like either. Nobody, including Meeuwissen, can fully predict how it fractures under pressure. Rather than hide that unpredictability, he built the series around it. Layers get stacked into a single mass, then broken apart by hand, and the resulting fracture line is now the series' signature, proof that a material can teach a designer something a sketch never could.

Even inside Dear Objects, direction took time to find. Total freedom, it turns out, guarantees very little. Was storytelling more important than form? Did making the piece himself actually matter, or was conceiving it enough? These weren't questions he answered at a desk. They answered themselves slowly, through the physical act of making, one broken panel or badly cut sheet at a time.





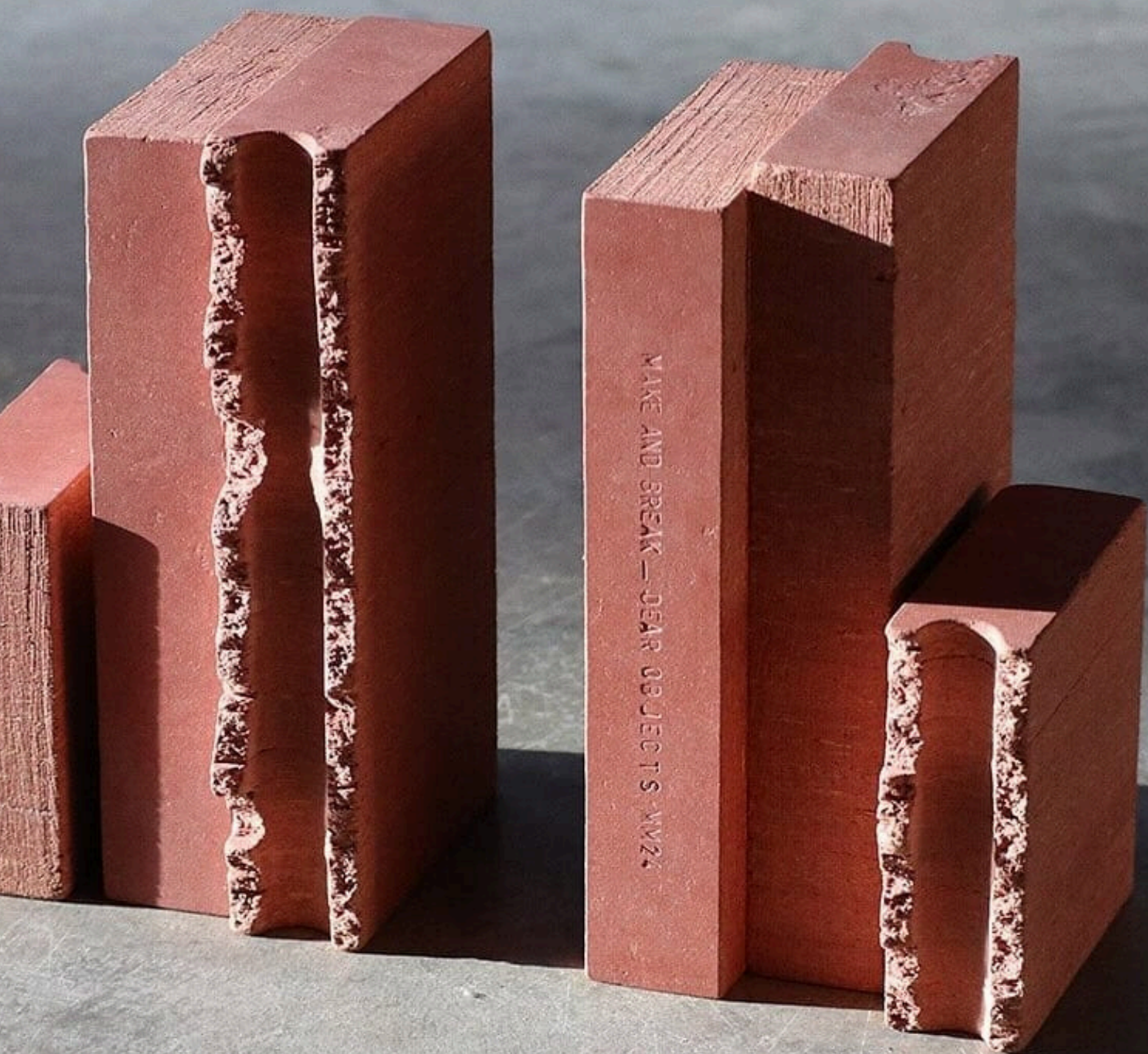


Ask Meeuwissen why visible process matters so much to him, and the answer sounds closer to ethics than aesthetics. He wants no gap between how an object looks and how it was actually built, no hidden step smoothed over for presentation's sake. That's what first drew him to Marcel Wanders' Knotted Chair and later to Dirk van der Kooij's Chubby Chair, two objects whose form simply can't be separated from the specific, visible process behind them. It's also why he leans into imperfection rather than sanding it away. A hand tool leaves a mark that functions almost like a signature, evidence of one specific person at one specific moment. He preserves that quality even where machinery enters the process. High-speed waterjet cutting, his mechanical stand-in for a handsaw, still leaves an irregular trace on every cut, since speed, angle, and material density shift constantly through a single pass. Even the machine, in his hands, leaves fingerprints.

Knowing when a piece is finished, he says, isn't really knowledge at all. It's a decision. Either he can live with an object as it stands, or pushing it further would achieve nothing, and whatever comes next belongs to a different piece entirely.

His years in graphic design shaped how he still builds form today, more than most people would guess. He constructs three-dimensional work the way a layout designer builds a page, stacking flat shapes until they resolve into volume, working first through scale models glued together from layered cardboard or wood before scaling up into whatever sheet material he's committed to. Photographing those models early, he's found, tends to expose a design's weak points long before a full-size version exists. A genuinely strong object, in his view, has to hold up from every single angle, not just the one that ends up photographed.

Anish Kapoor comes up when he talks about influence, specifically *Leviathan* at the Grand Palais. So do Herzog & de Meuron's Reading Pavilion in Jinhua, the painter Bernard Frize, and video artists Richard Mosse and David Claerbout. Different disciplines, same trait, according to Meeuwissen: each one builds a self-contained universe strong enough to make a viewer lose track of time and place, disorienting and poetic at once. He's precise about the distinction he wants drawn here. They didn't shape his worldview. They enriched it, and he clearly considers that a meaningfully different thing.







Brutalism as a philosophy still matters to him, but narrowly, specifically where it intersects with honesty about materials. Eco-Brutalism is where he sees that idea land hardest today: buildings that refuse to hide their environmental cost behind decorative cladding and instead show their raw materials and life cycle plainly. That same instinct governs how he separates desirability from meaning. Form and color chase trends, collect quick approval, and fade. Meaning asks more of a viewer and tends to last longer, though he won't call the two opposites, pointing to Rietveld's Red-Blue Chair as proof a single object can hold both at once. Meaning itself can take several shapes; functional, ecological, narrative, social, and visual appeal play a legitimate part in all of them. It's only when visual appeal is the entire story that he's willing to call something, flatly, art or bad design.

On artificial intelligence, he doesn't soften his answer. He hopes human intuition keeps distinguishing people from what a machine produces, but he's genuinely worried it's already losing that fight, that people are quietly outsourcing their own instincts to a system's instead. Technology itself hasn't diminished creative possibility, he's careful to add, and he isn't interested in rejecting it outright. What matters is intent. Used deliberately, as a tool rather than a shortcut around judgment, technology still leaves space for one designer to stand apart from everyone else reaching for the identical tool.





Sustainability threads through nearly everything else he says, though he resists collapsing it into a single question. Real effort is going into new materials, biocomposites, earth concrete, recycled plastics, but whether any of it scales to real manufacturing volume remains, in his words, genuinely open. For him, sustainability starts closer to home, with the relationship between a person and an object they own. Something built to age well. Something expensive enough that a buyer thinks twice before an impulse purchase, and repairs it rather than replacing it once it's theirs. His material choices track that logic exactly. He favors engineered wood sheet materials over solid timber because they simply use less raw wood, plywood especially, and singles out Valchromat, an MDF variant built from residual branches and wood chips bonded with organic resin, as proof that a material's upfront ecological cost can be offset by a long lifespan and minimal upkeep.

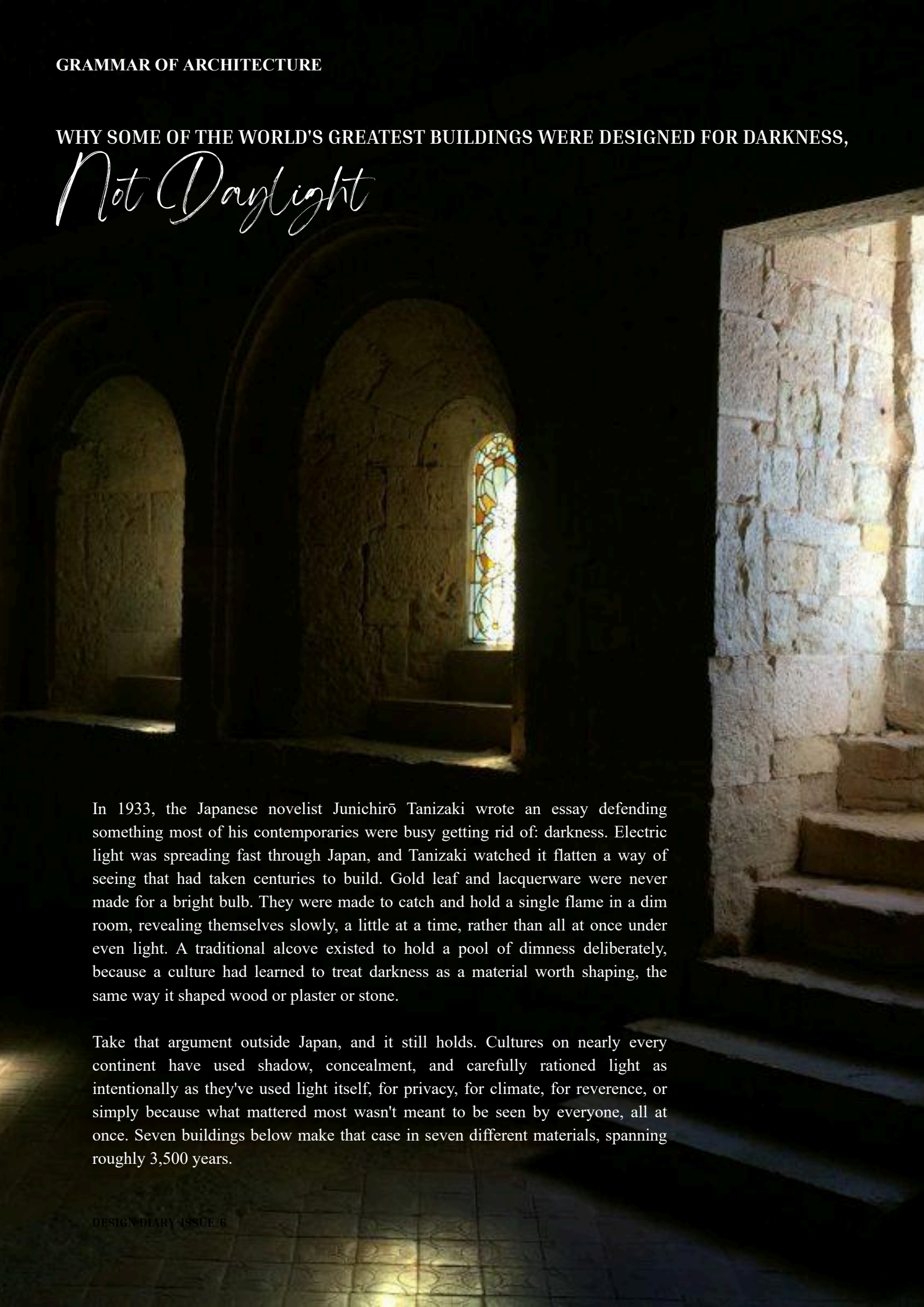
He's not interested in pretending collectible design floats above the contradictions of a consumer economy just because it makes less of everything. More practicing designers naturally means smaller production runs, almost by arithmetic, and tools like 3D printing now let individual makers work in small batches without a factory behind them at all. But he won't dodge the obvious tension either: making new objects while genuinely arguing for sustainability will always sit a little uneasily together, a contradiction he thinks applies to nearly everything people make, not design specifically. His own response stays practical rather than philosophical. Waste gets minimized where he can manage it. Offcuts get sourced secondhand. He visits manufacturing plants directly, looking for material they're already throwing away.

His real worry about the future isn't a materials question at all. It's access. Work made by a designer's own hand costs more than most people can spend, and Meeuwissen doesn't dodge the implication that collectible design risks becoming, gradually, something only the wealthy actually get to own. He doesn't offer an easy fix for that and doesn't pretend to have one.

Asked what he'd want the next generation of designers to take from his own approach, he deflects the premise slightly, calling it a little presumptuous to assume anyone should learn something specific from him. If there's anything worth taking, he offers this instead: commit to one bold idea, strict enough to shape an entire visual language, and let that single rule act as a compass for whatever comes next. One sheet. One saw. One object. It's the same rule that built his first BRUTALISTA piece, years ago now, and by his own account, he's never needed a second one.

WHY SOME OF THE WORLD'S GREATEST BUILDINGS WERE DESIGNED FOR DARKNESS,

Not Daylight

A photograph of a dark, arched interior space, likely a church or a historical building. The walls are made of rough-hewn stone. A small, narrow stained glass window is visible in the distance, casting a warm, colorful light into the dark space. The floor is made of stone tiles. The overall atmosphere is mysterious and ancient.

In 1933, the Japanese novelist Junichirō Tanizaki wrote an essay defending something most of his contemporaries were busy getting rid of: darkness. Electric light was spreading fast through Japan, and Tanizaki watched it flatten a way of seeing that had taken centuries to build. Gold leaf and lacquerware were never made for a bright bulb. They were made to catch and hold a single flame in a dim room, revealing themselves slowly, a little at a time, rather than all at once under even light. A traditional alcove existed to hold a pool of dimness deliberately, because a culture had learned to treat darkness as a material worth shaping, the same way it shaped wood or plaster or stone.

Take that argument outside Japan, and it still holds. Cultures on nearly every continent have used shadow, concealment, and carefully rationed light as intentionally as they've used light itself, for privacy, for climate, for reverence, or simply because what mattered most wasn't meant to be seen by everyone, all at once. Seven buildings below make that case in seven different materials, spanning roughly 3,500 years.

SANA'A'S TOWER HOUSES,

Yemen

Pre-Islamic origins, present form largely 16th–19th century

Sana'a's tower houses rise as high as nine stories, stone below, sun-dried brick above. Above the main window sits a *qamariya*, a semicircular fanlight originally cut from thin slices of translucent alabaster, later replaced in many houses by coloured glass set into carved gypsum tracery. Below it sits a second window, the *mashrabiyyah*, and a wooden lattice box that opens for air and closes for privacy, historically doubling as a cooler for food and water and letting women watch the street without being watched from it.

The pairing does two separate jobs. The lower window handles air and view. The upper one handles light alone, filtering harsh desert sun into a warm, coloured gloom rather than letting it in whole.



LE THORONET ABBEY,

France

Consecrated 1176, Cistercian Order

The Cistercian order built its churches on an argument for subtraction: no figurative sculpture, no colored glass, no ornament beyond what the structure required. Le Thoronet, raised in rough-cut local stone with almost nothing decorative anywhere in it, is one of the purest surviving results of that discipline. Its windows are narrow, deeply set, and few, letting light in as thin, angled shafts that shift slowly across the stone through the day instead of flooding the nave at once.

Architects have made something close to a pilgrimage out of visiting it. Le Corbusier studied the abbey in the 1950s and wrote about the relationship it builds between mass, proportion, and light. John Pawson later devoted an entire photographic study to it, drawn to the same quality Tanizaki described in a different tradition entirely: a building whose power depends on the eye slowing down and adjusting, learning to read a nearly dark room rather than being told everything at once.



ROYAL TOMBS OF THE VALLEY OF THE KINGS,

Egypt

c. 1550–1070 BC, New Kingdom period

Nothing in this survey uses darkness more literally than the royal tombs cut into the Theban hills. New Kingdom pharaohs were buried in rock-cut corridors, some descending more than a hundred meters, structured as a sequence of halls growing progressively darker and narrower toward the burial chamber. A temple was built to be seen and entered by the living. A tomb was built to be sealed, and its architecture reflects that fully: no windows, no oculus, and no daylight anywhere past the entrance once the tomb closed.

What light existed during construction came from oil lamps, supplemented by workers bouncing sunlight deep into the corridors using polished copper mirrors, then finishing detail by lamplight where the mirrors couldn't reach. The result is a building organized almost entirely around an absence, since its real intended audience, in Egyptian religious belief, was the dead traveling through darkness toward the afterlife, not a living eye at all.



BAYT AL-SUHAYMI,

Egypt

Core structure 1648, expanded 1796

Cairo's Ottoman-era merchant houses share a device with Sana'a's tower houses, built from a different material logic entirely: the mashrabiya, turned-wood latticework covering windows and balconies, breaking daylight into hundreds of small, moving fragments across interior floors and walls. Bayt Al-Suhaymi, one of Cairo's best-preserved examples, uses mashrabiya screens throughout its upper floors, particularly around the qa'a, the main reception hall, where women of the household could watch gatherings below without being seen.

The screens do more than manage privacy. Finely spaced turned wood slows airflow just enough to cool it before it enters a room, a passive climate response common across the hot, dense cities of the Ottoman Mediterranean long before mechanical cooling existed. But the defining effect stays visual: a room lit not by a window but by hundreds of tiny apertures working together, none admitting enough light on its own to flatten the space into full illumination.



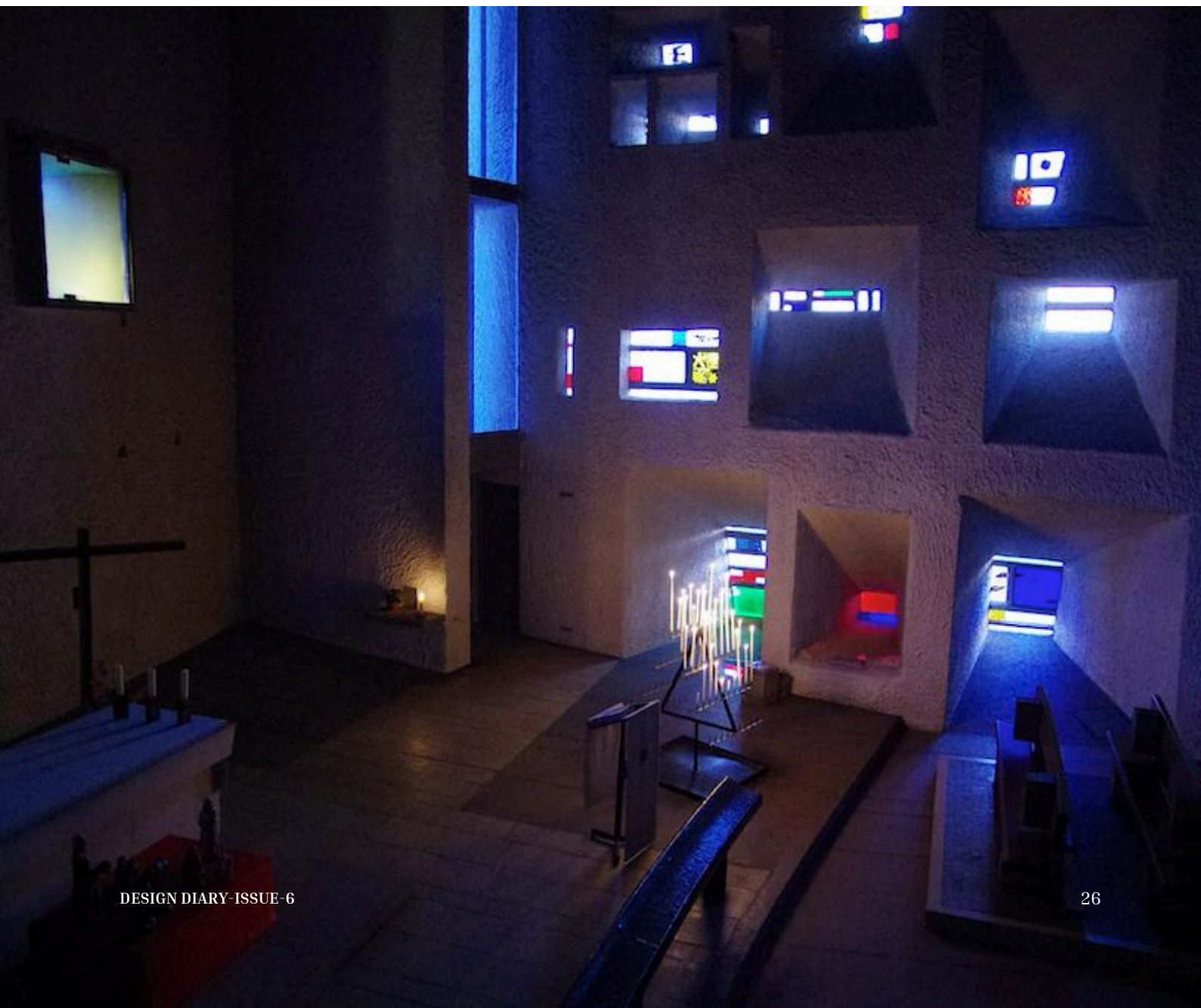
NOTRE-DAME-DU-HAUT,

France

Completed 1955, Le Corbusier

Ronchamp's south wall runs nearly ten feet thick at its widest point. Le Corbusier spent months designing the irregular scatter of openings punched through it, each splayed at a different angle, some clear, others hand-painted by him in red, yellow, green, and blue. Because the wall runs so deep, none of these function like a conventional window. Light entering has to travel through a long, angled shaft of concrete and coloured glass before it reaches the interior, arriving diffused, tinted, and considerably dimmer than the daylight outside.

Inside, the effect reads closer to candlelight scattered across dark stone than to a lit room, small, irregular points of coloured brightness set against deep shadow. Le Corbusier also left a ten-centimeter gap where the curved roof meets the walls without touching them structurally, a horizontal crack of light he allowed to slip through deliberately. The building's most famous light exists specifically because the walls around it are thick and dark enough to make a small amount of admitted brightness feel considerable.



SHEIKH LOTFOLLAH MOSQUE,

Iran

1603–1619, Shah Abbas I, Safavid Dynasty

Built without a minaret or a courtyard, the Sheikh Lotfollah Mosque served as Shah Abbas I's private mosque, reached by a corridor bent at an angle to correct its orientation toward Mecca without that adjustment showing from the public square outside. Its single domed prayer hall takes daylight from only one ring of windows set low in the drum, a deliberately narrow source for a room otherwise built almost entirely from glazed tile.

That restriction is the whole point. The dome's cut-tile mosaic, worked in turquoise, cream, black, and gold, was calibrated so its color shifts through the day depending on how the limited light strikes it, cool and luminous in the morning, warmer by afternoon, in a room whose physical form never changes at all. More windows would have simply lit the tilework evenly and left nothing for the light itself to do.



THERME VALS,

Switzerland

Opened 1996, Peter Zumthor

Peter Zumthor has called Therme Vals a place of enlightenment that reveres shadow, and the description holds up literally. Built from layered slabs of local Valser quartzite, set partly into the hillside above the region's only thermal spring, the baths take almost all their light from narrow gaps cut into the stone ceiling, admitting thin, shifting bands into an otherwise dim, cave-like sequence of rooms.

Zumthor has spoken about designing the baths around bathing as a slow, unhurried ritual, and the dim light is central to that pacing, forcing the eyes to adjust and letting touch, sound, and temperature carry more of the experience than sight does. The stone holds warmth the same way it holds shadow, and the two work together, a room dim enough that the body's other senses take over from the eye. Zumthor won the Pritzker Prize in 2009, and Therme Vals remains the building most often cited as proof of what he calls atmosphere, material, and light designed as one decision, not two.

Every ceiling in this survey's companion piece was built to say something clearly: gold leaf, painted stars, and cut tile catching light so a viewer below understood exactly what a civilization believed. These seven buildings argue something quieter and harder to pull off well: that a room can also speak through what it refuses to fully show, that privacy, reverence, coolness, and mystery are all things architecture can build out of managed dimness rather than its absence. Tanizaki treated shadow as a material a culture had learned to work with on its own terms, not a failure of light. Across five continents and roughly thirty-five centuries, these seven buildings suggest he was describing something much larger than one country's taste. He was describing a tool architecture has always had, and one most buildings today have simply stopped reaching for.



Rohan Lin

of **SANIKB, FOSHAN**

*The Manufacturer Who Treats a Spec Sheet
Like a Promise*



His factory floor in Foshan has been shipping kitchen and bath fittings into homes and hotels across North America for twenty-five years. He talks about ceramics the way an engineer talks about aircraft parts, in tolerances, revisions, and accountability, not trends. Alisha Maindola of Design Diary International speaks with Rokan Liu of SANIKB about why certification has to happen before tooling, what it actually takes to keep 1,860 units consistent across five phases, and why cost is no longer where Chinese manufacturing wins.



Twenty-five years ago, price, tooling capability, and volume were enough to win a buyer over. That's not where the conversation starts anymore, according to Rokan Liu, who's watched the expectations around him shift from what a factory could produce to what it could be trusted to protect: market-specific compliance, revision-controlled drawings, and product data that doesn't change shape between one production lot and the next. Manufacturing itself has changed jobs, in a sense. It used to mean adapting a domestic design for export. Now it means building a product around how a specific market installs it, uses it, lives with it, which means industrial design, plumbing interfaces, cabinet clearances and finish tolerances all have to be worked out together rather than solved one after another.

SANIKB runs its own ceramic and fireclay plant in Foshan and sources everything else—faucets, quartz, and stainless steel—through a network of audited partners. "Our role is not simply to fill a container," Liu says. "It is to translate a buyer's brief into a controlled product specification and then protect that specification through sampling, certification, production, inspection, packing, and repeat orders." Behind that division sits a fairly simple observation: no single factory can credibly claim mastery over every material it touches. Ceramic answers to body formulation, glazing, and kiln control. Faucets answer to metallurgy and plating. Quartz and stainless steel carry their own capital demands entirely. So SANIKB keeps the category closest to its identity in-house and holds its partner network to the same bar it holds itself, an arrangement Liu is careful not to let sound like outsourcing. Auditing a supplier, in his framing, isn't the same as handing them responsibility. SANIKB still owns the approved specification, the bill of materials, the inspection criteria, and the corrective-action process, whoever's actually running the line.



Certification is where that discipline gets stress-tested. SANIKB holds cUPC and IAPMO approval for the U.S. and Canadian markets, and for Liu, that isn't paperwork tacked on at the end; it's a design input from the first sketch. Wait until after tooling to think about it, and the usual outcome is delay, redesign, or a certified sample that no longer resembles what actually ships. So the destination market gets defined precisely up front, drawings and materials get checked against what that market requires, and once a configuration is approved, nothing about it moves casually. "A component, dimension, or material cannot be changed casually simply because it looks equivalent," he says.



Ask Liu about the multi-phase hotel refits and residential developments SANIKB supplies, sometimes running to thousands of units, and he'll tell you the hard part was never getting the first approved unit right. "It is making the final unit, months later, match the same intent." An approved drawing, a locked colour standard, a golden sample every subsequent piece gets measured against, all of it exists so a small improvement introduced halfway through a rollout doesn't quietly become a mismatch by the final phase. One project he cites, 1,860 units delivered across five phases, turned out to be less about manufacturing volume and more about something closer to information discipline, cartons correctly identified, replacement protocols already sorted before the first shipment even left the dock.









The product development process follows a similarly stubborn sequence. A buyer's brief becomes a requirements document before any design work starts, so ambiguity gets resolved early instead of surfacing expensively once tooling is already cut. Concept, CAD, design-for-manufacture review, each stage happens before a design earns the status of what Liu calls the golden sample, the reference every later unit gets measured against. As he puts it, the entire sequence exists to prevent what he calls tooling first, solving later. "Tooling should confirm a resolved product," he says, "not become the place where unresolved decisions are discovered."

Selling into markets as different as U.S. big-box retail, the Middle East and Latin America is where most brands start to blur into something generic, chasing what Liu calls a cosmetic average. His answer is to split every product into two layers instead: a core idea, proportion, geometry, the task it's meant to perform, and a market-specific configuration, mounting method, plumbing interface, packaging, that adjusts without touching that core. A basin, in his example, can hold the same visual character everywhere even as its drain and dimensions shift to suit a regional installation standard. "The better approach is a disciplined platform," he says, "one clear product logic with controlled regional variants."

Trade shows function less as trend-spotting for SANIKB and more as structured research. Liu goes into KBIS and Expo Revestir with specific questions already set, then comes out having logged the objections installers keep raising, the material pairings buyers won't stop asking about, the gaps nobody's filled yet. Some of it turns into a new product brief. Just as often, it turns into a decision not to chase something. "Disciplined product direction," he says, "is partly about knowing what not to add."

Where does Chinese manufacturing actually win over the next five years? Not on cost, in Liu's telling, which has been the industry's calling card for decades. He points instead to accountability, the ability to combine design, compliance, reliable data and after-sales support without losing control as programs scale, something he thinks matters more as buyers carry leaner inventories and launch more regional variants than they used to. "The companies that make that capability transparent, and accept responsibility from the first drawing through the replacement part, will become long-term product partners rather than interchangeable vendors."

Twenty-five years in, that's still the thing Liu keeps circling back to. Not the sink, not the finish, not the show floor, but the promise sitting behind the spec sheet, and whether it holds all the way to the last container.

sanikb.com

PUBLIC ART

The Very Many

Moonrise, Chattanooga, Tennessee,
United States by Marc Fornes



Fact File

Project name: Moonrise

Studio: Marc Fornes / THEVERYMANY

Typology: Public art, permanent pavilion / civic installation

Location: Wheland Foundry Trailhead, Chattanooga, Tennessee, United States

Commissioned by: Public Art Chattanooga

Structure: self-supporting double-layer aluminum shell

Material: 3 mm aluminum strips, hand-riveted

Method: computational form-finding, machine-cut components, hand assembly

Photography: Keith Isaacs





Marc Fornes / THEVERYMANY has installed Moonrise, a permanent public structure at Wheland Foundry Trailhead in Chattanooga, commissioned by Public Art Chattanooga, and the studio is insistent on one point above all: that it should be read as a civic space rather than as a sculpture. The name signifies the moment the moon rises, transforming a familiar landscape, serving as a metaphor for the project at the intersection of art and architecture. From a distance, in the photographs, the dome reads as a fragment of lunar surface, and only up close does it resolve into a system of interlocking aluminum strips, each said to be three millimeters thin and riveted by hand into a self-supporting double-layer shell.

The studio's central argument is that the structure and the aesthetic are the same thing. THEVERYMANY has spent more than a decade working between computational design and physical fabrication, and it presents Moonrise as a continuation of that line, citing Buckminster Fuller's principle of doing more with less and reworking geodesic logic through algorithmic form-finding. By the studio's account, the geometry is generated rather than drawn, with each component shaped by code, cut by machine, then carried to the site and assembled like an oversized three-dimensional puzzle so that rigidity and span come from the interlocking precision of the parts rather than from mass. It is a coherent description of the method, though it is also the studio's own framing of its work, and a visitor has no way to read the algorithm off the finished surface.

The fabrication logic, as explained by the studio, is what does the structural work. The double-layer shell distributes loads across the entire surface, preventing any single strip from bearing excessive stress, while riveted connections between the skins provide necessary depth. The continuous surface is actually two interconnected skins, and the circular openings are designed to remove material while maintaining structural integrity, each calibrated to surrounding load paths. The photographs reveal the two-layer depth at the cut edges of the openings, supporting the account, though only engineering can verify the precise structural behavior.

The experience the project trades on is one that changes with distance, and here the images and the claim line up reasonably well. From across the park the dome reads as a single white object dense with texture, its shadow patterning the plaza. At middle distance, the apertures open up, turning the scene permeable and allowing light and sky to pass through, while wide shots of cyclists clearly show this shift. Inside, the openings frame fragments of sky, cloud, and tree, and the riveted surface overhead becomes a field of fine detail. The source material claims the structure produces a genuine slowing-down in the people who pass through it, and while the photographs do show visitors seated and looking up, whether that deceleration is real or simply a well-staged photo set is exactly the sort of claim a press image cannot settle.





The relationship to the site is one of the more persuasive threads, partly because the studio underplays it. Wheland Foundry Trailhead, named for a former metal foundry, establishes a subtle connection between the site's industrial past and the project's rivet-assembled metal structure. Fornes does not, by the account given, make the reference explicit, which is to the project's credit, since the resonance reads as contextual rather than literal. It is the kind of connection that works precisely because it is not spelled out.

The civic claim is the one worth pressing on, because it is the project's own headline. Fornes states that Moonrise is designed for gathering, rest, and reflection, with circular concrete seats orienting people toward the dome to support this purpose. The structure is permeable enough to enter, large enough to shelter a group, and open enough to keep a connection to the park. Whether it actually performs as everyday civic infrastructure, somewhere residents return to across seasons, is something only time and use will show, and the freshly completed, sun-populated-to-lightly-populated photographs cannot stand in for that record.

It is also worth noting what the framing leaves out. There is no public figure here for cost, fabrication time, or how the thin aluminum and its many riveted joints are expected to weather Tennessee's seasons over years of outdoor exposure and public handling, all of which matter for a structure that stakes its case on permanence and minimal material. The studio's roster of commissioners, from luxury brands to a place in the Centre Pompidou collection, is offered as evidence of seriousness, but it is reputation rather than performance data, and a civic structure ultimately has to answer to maintenance budgets and weather as much as to design pedigree.

Moonrise is a permanent structure at Wheland Foundry Trailhead, built through more than a decade of computational design and fabrication work by THEVERYMANY. The studio positions it as civic space rather than sculpture, built for gathering, rest, and reflection, with circular concrete seating oriented toward the dome. Its long-term use and durability under public conditions remain to be seen as the site sees continued visitation.

COVER INTERVIEW

Jae Ko, Maryland

*The Artist Who Turned
a Roll of Cash Register
Tape Into a Career*





She works alone on an island, feeding rolls of paper onto a wheel the way a potter would work clay, decades of instinct deciding how tight or loose a single roll needs to be before it becomes something else entirely. Shweta of Design Diary International speaks with Jae Ko, ahead of Striated, her debut solo exhibition in Belgium, about the classroom assignment that became a career, the trees and glaciers that reshaped her sense of form, and why she'd rather leave a work unexplained than tell you what to feel.



Jae Ko's earliest education wasn't in sculpture at all. She trained at Toyo Art School in Tokyo through the early 1980s in commercial design, packaging, hand lettering, illustration, and book layout, work that paid but rarely asked the questions she actually wanted answered. Four years of that was enough, and she moved to Wako University for a fine art degree instead, chasing something she calls simply more intriguing and more attractive than solving other people's design problems. Even then, paper hadn't left her. Through her twenties she built floor-to-ceiling installations from stacked rice paper and twenty-by-fifty-inch sheets, and experimented with heated acrylic plates bent into wave shapes to print on the same material, work that survives now only in old photographs.

Asked when she first knew paper was her material, she resists the idea of a single turning point, describing it instead as something closer to a drift than a decision. "There was no single moment I knew paper was my material," she explains. "It was a slow transition from a sheet to draw-on to the creation of a form." That gradual shift found its clearest expression a decade later, in 1996, partway through her MFA at the Maryland Institute College of Art, when a class assignment on circles sent her into a shop for a roll of adding machine tape, ordinary cash register paper, mostly because it was already a perfect circle and cost almost nothing. She slit the roll open with a knife and dropped it into a pool of ink and water, watching how the shape held or failed under that pressure, then started unrolling it by hand and winding it back up looser than before, over and over, learning through repetition exactly how much tension a roll could carry before its character changed completely. She still calls that, plainly, her aha moment.

Those years between finishing at Wako in 1988 and completing her MFA in 1998 weren't formal training at all, and she's matter-of-fact about what they taught her instead: less about technique, more about survival. "I have learned about those things I had to give up and how difficult it is to survive being an artist," she reflects. Early wall pieces from that period were dyed first with natural pigments, saffron and indigo, before she settled into watercolor. Joseph Beuys comes up as a reference point when she talks about that time, not for the material he used but for what it carried, and she draws a careful distinction between the two: where felt held the weight of Beuys's own postwar history, rolled paper for her carries something older and more communal, tied to centuries of paper's place in Korean, Chinese, and Japanese craft. By the early 2000s, flat work had started to feel like a boundary she no longer needed to respect. She wanted to see all the sides of a piece, a hunger for dimension she traces partly to the Bristlecone Pine, a species that survives past four thousand years, bent and twisted by wind into forms that endure the punishment rather than break under it.

The connection between her two core materials runs deeper than most people notice on first look. Sumi ink comes from burned wood, and paper comes from trees, so the two share an origin before they ever meet on her worktable. Put that observation to her directly, though, and she waves off any suggestion of a deliberate concept behind it. "My core inspirations come from nature, so it all fits," is as far as she'll take the thought, treating the overlap less like a clever idea worth unpacking and more like something that was bound to be true from the start.

Her studio process today still runs closer to an industrial workshop than a conventional sculpture practice. Tightly bound rolls of tape get fed onto a spindle mounted to what is essentially a pottery wheel, sometimes paired with a second, manually operated turntable running alongside it, and as the wheel spins, the paper reloads itself looser than it started, built up roll after roll until it reaches two or three feet across. From there she bends and twists the mass by hand into shape, soaks it in water carrying sumi ink as colorant, and lets paper's own tendency to swell under moisture do part of the sculpting, an effect she compares, almost fondly, to the childhood trick of dropping a paper straw into water and watching it curl. Once a shape holds, she seals the back in glue and pulp and leaves it to dry for weeks or months, slowly enough that it stays rigid once mounted, at which point she can turn it over and saturate the surface with further color. Her palette runs conservative by instinct, an ultramarine blue she keeps returning to after years mixing water-based inks shipped over from Korea, or, just as often, the raw white of unaltered paper, chosen because it holds the shadow systems she builds into a piece, the gaps between rolls and folds carrying as much of the work as the paper itself.





Larger installations are governed by an entirely separate discipline. Ko builds a precise scale model of a space first, then orders paper and controls its looseness to match what the model already told her would work. Force of Nature, her 2011 installation at The Phillips Collection, used hundreds of earth-toned kraft paper rolls that kept settling and shifting under their own weight for the full run of the show, changing the way an actual landscape does, gravity finishing part of the composition after she'd finished her own. The same logic carried into Shiro and Escalante at Grounds For Sculpture in 2015, built from white recycled paper this time, and later into Flow at the Contemporary Arts Museum Houston, where she drew on ice formations near her own home to hold something cold against a Houston summer that runs steamy from June through September. Pressed on exactly when a piece stops being a sculpture and becomes something larger, her answer comes without hesitation: "They only become environments when they leave the wall."

Her sources have widened well beyond that one landscape over the years, pulling from repeated trips through the canyons and stratified rock of Utah, Colorado, and New Mexico, and later from Newfoundland, Labrador, and Alaska, where glaciers left as deep a mark on her as anything in the American desert had. Asked how three very different cultures, Korean, Japanese, American, quietly shape how she sees form, she frames it as an advantage rather than a tension to resolve. "The things I have learned from one culture I can apply to the next," she notes. "I can combine the vast American landscape with the more urban Japanese or Korean." She's just as careful not to let any of it read as environmental advocacy dressed up as art, positioning herself less as an activist and more as someone presenting landscapes already reinterpreted and enhanced through her own hand.



That instinct toward restraint runs through how she talks about control itself. Asked how much of her process is deliberate and how much is letting the material do what it wants, she doesn't hesitate: accidents are part of how she works, and a piece that came out exactly as planned would have taught her nothing worth learning. The same philosophy carries into how she thinks about the tensions running through her own practice, caught between East and West, writing and sculpture, and the organic and the architectural. Rather than resolve any of it, she'd rather sit inside the friction. "Geological forces and tensions are the point," is how she puts it, not something to smooth over on the way to a tidier statement. Nor is she plugged into whatever's trending, online or otherwise. Working alone in a studio on an island, she describes herself as unmoved by popular media culture, digital or otherwise, artificial intelligence included, shaped instead by the ocean outside her window, the glaciers she's seen firsthand, and the stratification she studies in landforms, natural media rather than the manufactured kind.

That reluctance to over-explain carries straight into *Striated*, opening this October at 22MUSE in Antwerp, her first solo exhibition in Belgium, running from 23 October through 28 November. The title borrows its meaning from geology, thin parallel grooves and layered strata built up over time, and mirrors the slow, accumulated logic of her own process closely enough that it barely needed translating for the show. She won't predict how visitors will feel walking into the room, pointing out that she's never worked inside that particular gallery before and that every space pulls something different out of the same material once she's standing inside it.

Here's that paragraph reworked, flowing into the close we already built, so the whole ending reads as one continuous landing rather than a list of facts followed by a quote.

That same unsentimental streak runs through nearly everything she says about the shape of her career so far. Two grants landed at very different moments, the Pollock-Krasner Foundation Grant in 2002 and the Anonymous Was A Woman Award a decade later, and she talks about both without any of the reverence you might expect. One covered her studio bills. The other simply moved things forward. It's the same practicality she brings to the pieces that leave her altogether, work that now sits permanently in the Hirshhorn or The Phillips Collection. She doesn't think about them much once they're gone, she says, mostly because she trusts they've landed somewhere they're meant to be. Even a question aimed at her insecurities gets turned gently aside. Asked what unfinished work keeps her up at night, she brushes the premise off entirely. "Not sure how to answer this question," she says, "but I sleep well." And when asked what architects and designers might see in her sculptures that a purely art-world audience wouldn't, she doesn't offer a theory to fill the silence. She's simply interested, she says, in whatever conversation unfolds between herself and whoever happens to be standing in front of the piece.

Ask her to imagine designing a building instead, and she doesn't pause to consider it. "I don't build buildings," she says. "I built sculptures." It isn't a rejection so much as a boundary she's never felt the need to test, the difference between something people move through and something they simply stand in front of. Buildings ask to be lived in. What she makes asks only to be looked at, sat with, returned to, and left to mean whatever it means to whoever's standing there that day.

It's a fitting place to leave her, given how the whole conversation started, with a roll of cash register tape bought for a few cents because it happened to already be a perfect circle. Thirty years on, the material hasn't changed nearly as much as what she's learned to do with it: unroll it, wet it, twist it, let it dry into something with weight and shadow and its own quiet argument for what paper was always capable of becoming. *Striated* will be the latest test of that instinct in a room she's never stood in, with visitors she can't predict. She seems entirely at ease not knowing how it lands. That, more than anything else across this conversation, is the real throughline, not the material, not the method, but the willingness to keep handing the work over and trusting it to speak for itself.

More on Jae Ko's exhibition *Striated* is available through [22MUSE](#).

A SLICE OF UBUD

*Varca, South Goa, India
by Natasha Kumar and
Abhijit Sawant*

Fact File

- Project Name: A Slice of Ubud
- Typology: Residential Villa
- Location: Varca, South Goa, India
- Built-up Area: 3,000 sq ft
- Principal Designers: Natasha Kumar, Abhijit Sawant
- Interior Design & Styling: Studio Tilt
- Landscape Design: Studio Tilt
- Photography: Manthan Yadav





The 3,000 sq ft villa sits in Varca, on Goa's southern coast, built for a family of four and shaped by a brief that leaned toward Balinese sensibility while staying grounded in its Goan setting. Studio Tilt handled the interiors and landscape, working alongside architects Natasha Kumar and Abhijit Sawant on a house where light, water and vegetation carry the design rather than sit as decoration on top of it.



The plan runs north to south, a decision that keeps daylight diffused and even through the day and lets cross-ventilation work with the region's tropical climate. Large openings and high ceilings support that same goal, and this framework becomes the mechanism through which the house lets nature in, not as a finishing touch but as something built into how the plan works.

Water announces itself early. The pool sits directly behind the foyer, visible on arrival, setting up the relationship between the built house and what surrounds it. A water body then runs into the center of the plan, easing the transition between common areas and private ones. Rising through this same zone, in the double-height living and dining space, a frangipani tree grows under a skylight positioned to let daylight move across the interior over the course of the day, the tree and the light working as a single spatial idea rather than two separate features.

Living, dining, and kitchen occupy the ground floor as one continuous, open space, holding visual contact with the outdoors throughout. The living area sits close enough to the pool for a tactile relationship with the water, while the open kitchen and its breakfast table are positioned for daily, shared use. Toward the rear, the pool extends further and meets a jacuzzi, and together they form a threshold, both physical and visual, between the communal spaces and the master suite.







The upper floor holds the more private program: a family lounge, a guest room, and the children's bedrooms at either end. The sloped, overhanging eaves and large openings established on the ground floor carry through here, and a window in the daughter's room looks back down into the living space below, tying the two levels together visually.

Materially, the house works with restraint. Beige stone cladding runs from the interior through to the pool backdrop outside, keeping that transition seamless, with green and blue accents pulled from the surrounding landscape set against the neutral base. Natural materials, the water elements and the shaded volumes of the house combine into an environment built for a specific kind of sensory calm.





The Balinese references built into the brief show up as spatial decisions rather than surface style: water bodies are threaded through the plan, there's an inset living area, and continuity is kept between indoors and out. Adapted to a Goan tropical climate, these choices also carry the house's climate-responsiveness and energy efficiency, rather than functioning as reference points on their own. Architecture, interiors, and landscape were developed together from the start, and the result treats the boundary between inside and outside as something meant to dissolve, letting the house read as an extension of the ground it sits on.

CASA EM MELIDES

Grândola, Portugal by Sabrab Architecture

Fact File:

Project: Casa em Melides

Typology: Residential

Architecture: Sabrab Architecture

Interior Design: Sabrab Interior Design Atelier

Location: Melides, Grândola, Portugal

Area: 500 sq. m.

Key materials: Natural lime plaster (Fassa Bortolo), Margres stone flooring, concrete-textured ceilings

Lighting: Artemide

Fixtures and sanitaryware: Gessi

Furniture: Sabrab (sofas, kitchen); Vitra (Eames and Barcelona chairs)

Photography: Ivo Tavares Studio





Sabrab Architecture has completed a 500-square-meter residence in Melides, in Portugal's Alentejo region, working around a stand of mature cork oaks rather than clearing the site to build. The project takes cues from the region's traditional building forms, reworking them through more contemporary construction rather than copying their appearance directly.



The clients, a family based internationally, asked for a house that could serve two different purposes at once: a quiet retreat for time alone and a space equipped to host guests without feeling stretched between the two functions. Sabrab organized the house as a series of low volumes that step across the site's existing slope instead of flattening it first, finished externally in lime plaster supplied by Fassa Bortolo. Keeping the building's profile low and the layout worked into the terrain rather than against it, the design avoids the visual weight a larger single volume would carry on the same plot.

Wide glazed sections run along much of the house's length, positioning the surrounding pine and cork oak trees as a constant, deliberate part of each interior view rather than something glimpsed occasionally. The connection to older Alentejo building methods, thick perimeter walls, muted earthy coloring, and deep roof overhangs for shade shows up here in updated form, still functioning as climate protection rather than serving as a purely visual reference. Ceilings finished with a rough concrete texture and floors laid in Margres stone both respond to daylight differently depending on the hour, giving interior surfaces a changing quality across a single day.





The interior design carries the same restraint. Custom-built timber cabinetry sits alongside a black stone kitchen island, with fixtures from Gessi throughout, together keeping the spaces understated without tipping into bareness or unfinishedness. Artemide light fixtures add warmth to the dining and living spaces once the sun goes down. Furniture selections, a mix of pieces made by Sabrab and modern classics from Vitra, including Eames and Barcelona chairs, were chosen with long-term use in mind rather than short-term trends. Colour stays deliberately muted across every room, leaving the view of surrounding trees to supply most of the visual variation instead of the furnishings themselves.



Outdoors, a pool is set into a timber deck at one edge of the property, stretching the usable living area beyond the house's walls and softening the boundary between built structure and forest. Fixed seating runs along the deck's edge, supplemented by freestanding loungers, giving the exterior areas the same level of planning applied to the rooms inside.

At night, the house takes on a different presence. Each low volume stays lit from within, visible individually against the surrounding dark landscape rather than reading as one continuous illuminated mass. The result is a house whose scale sits comfortably within its site rather than working to be noticed from it.

SURF HOUSE

Levanto, Italy by llabb

Fact File:

Project: Surf House

Typology: Residential

Architect/Studio: llabb

Location: Levanto, La Spezia,
Liguria, Italy

Area: 104 square meters

Key materials: Oak blockboard
millwork (lacquered and clear-
coated), deep blue lacquer,
natural oak herringbone parquet,
Levanto red marble, travertine

Photography: Anna Positano |
Studio Campo

In a 1930s beach apartment in Levanto, Genoa-based llabb worked around a constraint most studios would have tried to design past. Load-bearing masonry partitions meant the plan couldn't be reconfigured, so the entire brief, three bedrooms, two bathrooms, a remote-work study, a kitchen, and a living room, all within 104 square meters, had to be absorbed by furniture rather than by moving walls.



The apartment sits in a historic seafront villa known locally as the Blondet house, part of an early twentieth-century development 12.5 meters from the beach. It was commissioned by Erika and Morgan, a family from Orange County, California, who chose Levanto specifically for its distance from the Cinque Terre crowds rather than proximity to them. The studio described the town's appeal in its own words: "Levanto feels alive. Alive with year-round residents, with families who have been coming to the sea for generations." The original polychrome marble entrance ramp, including locally quarried Levanto red marble, was kept intact and became the starting point from which the rest of the interior builds.

What holds the apartment together is a single continuous band of custom oak millwork, partially lacquered in deep matte blue and partially left with a clear acrylic coat, built across two construction phases. It runs uninterrupted through the plan: kitchen cabinetry, dining bench, TV unit, bookcase, storage niches, a changing niche in the corridor, the children's beds, a desk, a fold-down bed in the study, built-in wardrobes, and the headboard in the main bedroom are all part of one system. llabb calls it the project's throughline, "deep blue and oak that runs through the entire apartment like a long wave stretching toward the horizon."

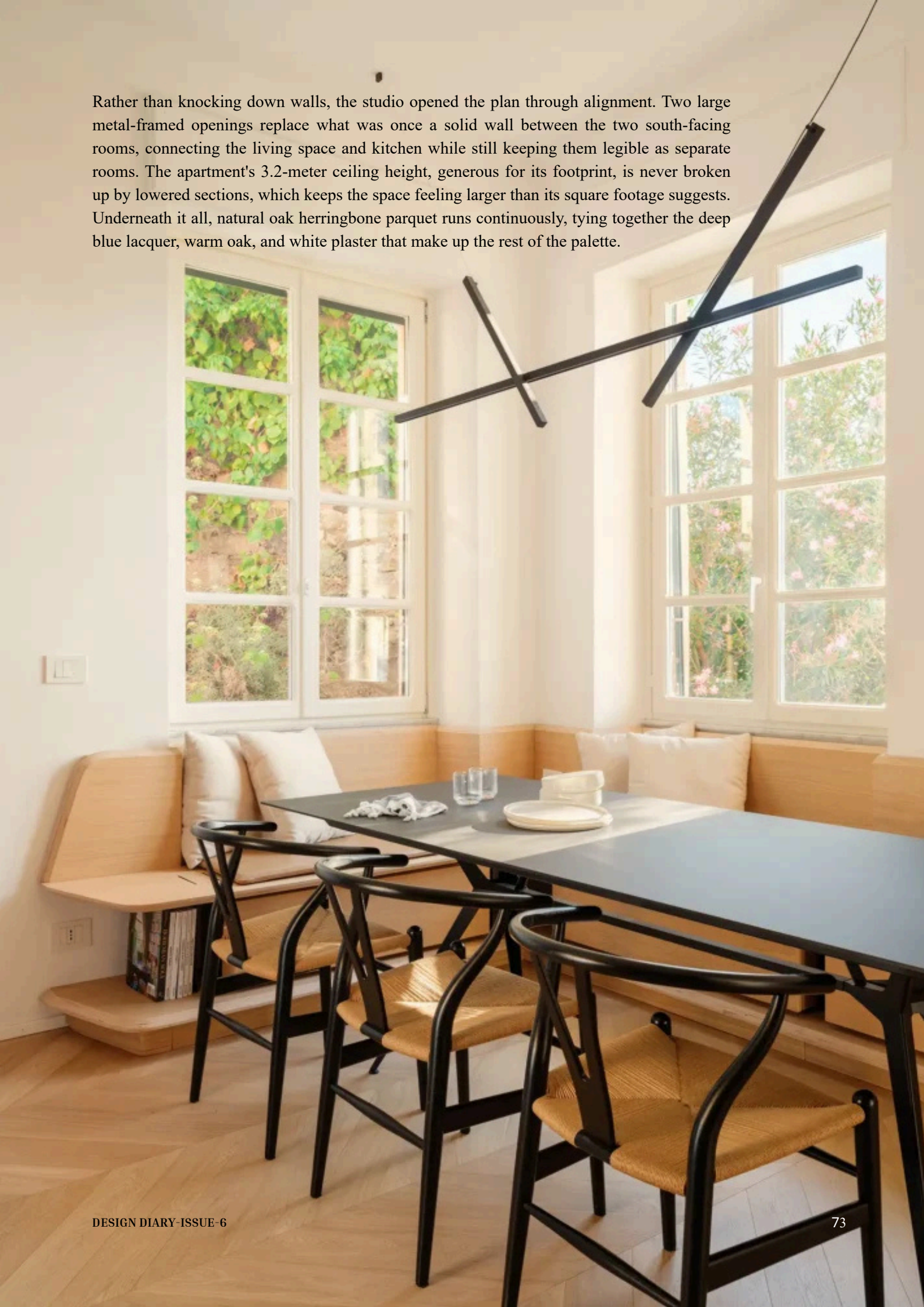
That same wood shifts character depending on where it lands. In the living and kitchen zones, it's precise and restrained, closer to nautical joinery than domestic cabinetry. In the children's room, it loosens considerably: curved bunk bed profiles, rope netting strung across the upper level, a deep blue painted ceiling, and metal support brackets shaped to reference surfboard fins. llabb began as a carpentry workshop before it became an architecture practice, and this room is where that history shows through most clearly.







Rather than knocking down walls, the studio opened the plan through alignment. Two large metal-framed openings replace what was once a solid wall between the two south-facing rooms, connecting the living space and kitchen while still keeping them legible as separate rooms. The apartment's 3.2-meter ceiling height, generous for its footprint, is never broken up by lowered sections, which keeps the space feeling larger than its square footage suggests. Underneath it all, natural oak herringbone parquet runs continuously, tying together the deep blue lacquer, warm oak, and white plaster that make up the rest of the palette.



The two bathrooms take deliberately different directions. The master bathroom leans darker and more controlled, with a Rexa space-saving washbasin and black metal fittings. The second bathroom is warmer, built around a custom travertine washbasin designed by Ilabb with an oak base made by Falegnameria Ratto in Genoa. Both stay within the same material logic as the rest of the apartment rather than treating finishes as a separate decision.



Furniture throughout was chosen to sit quietly alongside the millwork rather than compete with it: Carl Hansen CH24 chairs, an Extendo Balance table, a Ditre Italia Sanders sofa, and a Carl Hansen CH07 armchair. As the studio put it, "The extensive millwork leaves little room for additional large furniture pieces, and this approach was the only way to accommodate all the required functions within just 100 square meters." That's really the core of the project: the apartment works not despite the millwork taking up so much of the floor area but because it does, folding storage, circulation, and furniture into one continuous piece.

The risk with a single material running through an entire apartment is that it starts to read as surface rather than structure. Surf House avoids that mostly through contrast, the shift between lacquered blue and raw oak, and the shift in tone between the restrained joinery of the living areas and the looser, more playful built-in furniture in the children's room. Whether that playful register still feels right once the children outgrow the bunk beds is a separate question, one this renovation doesn't have to answer yet.

HOUSE IN LAS ROZAS

Madrid, Spain by Fran Silvestre Arquitectos

Fact File:

Project: House in Las Rozas

Typology: Residential

Architect: Fran Silvestre Arquitectos

Location: Las Rozas de Madrid, Spain

Photography: Fernando Guerra



On a sloped site in Las Rozas, just outside Madrid, Fran Silvestre Arquitectos has built a house out of five distinct cylinders, each one carrying a different part of the program. One holds the bedrooms, another the living area, a third combines the garage with vehicular access and a wellness zone, a fourth contains the pool and technical facilities, and a fifth marks the entrance. The studio designed the house so that the geometry of the five cylinders directly dictated their functions, ensuring each one clearly reflects its purpose.



Getting five cylinders to sit comfortably on a hillside meant cutting each one obliquely at the top, which does more than one job at once. The angled cuts let the volumes settle into the slope without heavy excavation or retaining walls, and at roof level they resolve into a pitched form, a typology the region more or less expects, while each cut faces a slightly different direction depending on which volume it belongs to. That variation isn't just a formal flourish. Because each cylinder's angled roof captures light from its own orientation, the bedrooms, the living spaces, and the wellness volume all end up tuned to different daylight conditions rather than sharing one uniform pitch across the whole house, a calibration the studio has approached before, in a different climate, on its WELL-certified Camiral House in Girona.



Between the cylinders, the plan breaks its own rule just once. A small courtyard forms where orthogonal walls meet at 120-degree angles, representing the one rationalist move within an otherwise curved system. It's a modest space, but it does a fair amount of perceptual work. Because the surrounding walls meet at angles instead of running parallel, light and shadow shift continuously through the space over the course of a day, so the courtyard reads differently at nine in the morning than it does in late afternoon, without a single material in it changing.



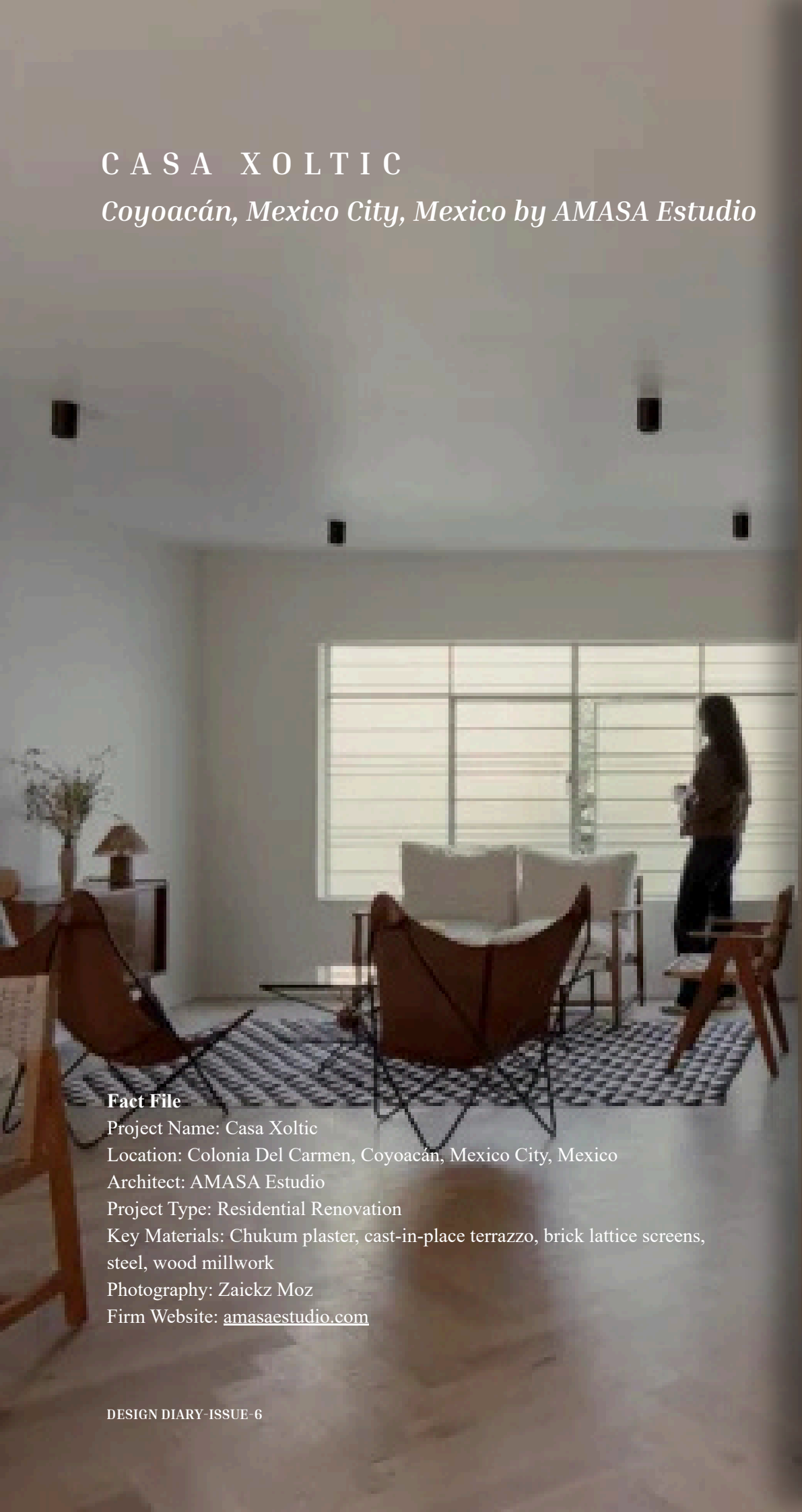
The house also opens toward the Sierra de Guadarrama, though the more interesting decisions happen at the scale of each individual volume rather than the house as a whole. Two of the cylinders get their own private courtyards, shielded from wind and outside view, while a third opens directly onto a terrace instead. It's a strategy the studio has tested elsewhere, distributing privacy and exposure unevenly across a plan rather than treating the whole house as a single gesture, as in its Villa 95 in Sotogrande. The same instinct, resolving issues cylinder by cylinder rather than house by house, also carries through the roof cuts and the courtyard, and reappears in the studio's Villa 18 in La Moraleja, suggesting that it is less an isolated choice here and more a working method to which the practice keeps returning.



The studio points to Andreu Alfaro's sculpture *Homage to Brancusi* as an intuitive starting point for the project, not as a literal formal source, but as a way of thinking through how curved, separate volumes might still read as one composition. Whether that reference explains the design or simply dresses up decisions already made for structural and site-driven reasons is worth sitting with rather than accepting outright.

CASA XOLTIC

Coyoacán, Mexico City, Mexico by AMASA Estudio



Fact File

Project Name: Casa Xoltic

Location: Colonia Del Carmen, Coyoacán, Mexico City, Mexico

Architect: AMASA Estudio

Project Type: Residential Renovation

Key Materials: Chukum plaster, cast-in-place terrazzo, brick lattice screens, steel, wood millwork

Photography: Zaickz Moz

Firm Website: amasaestudio.com

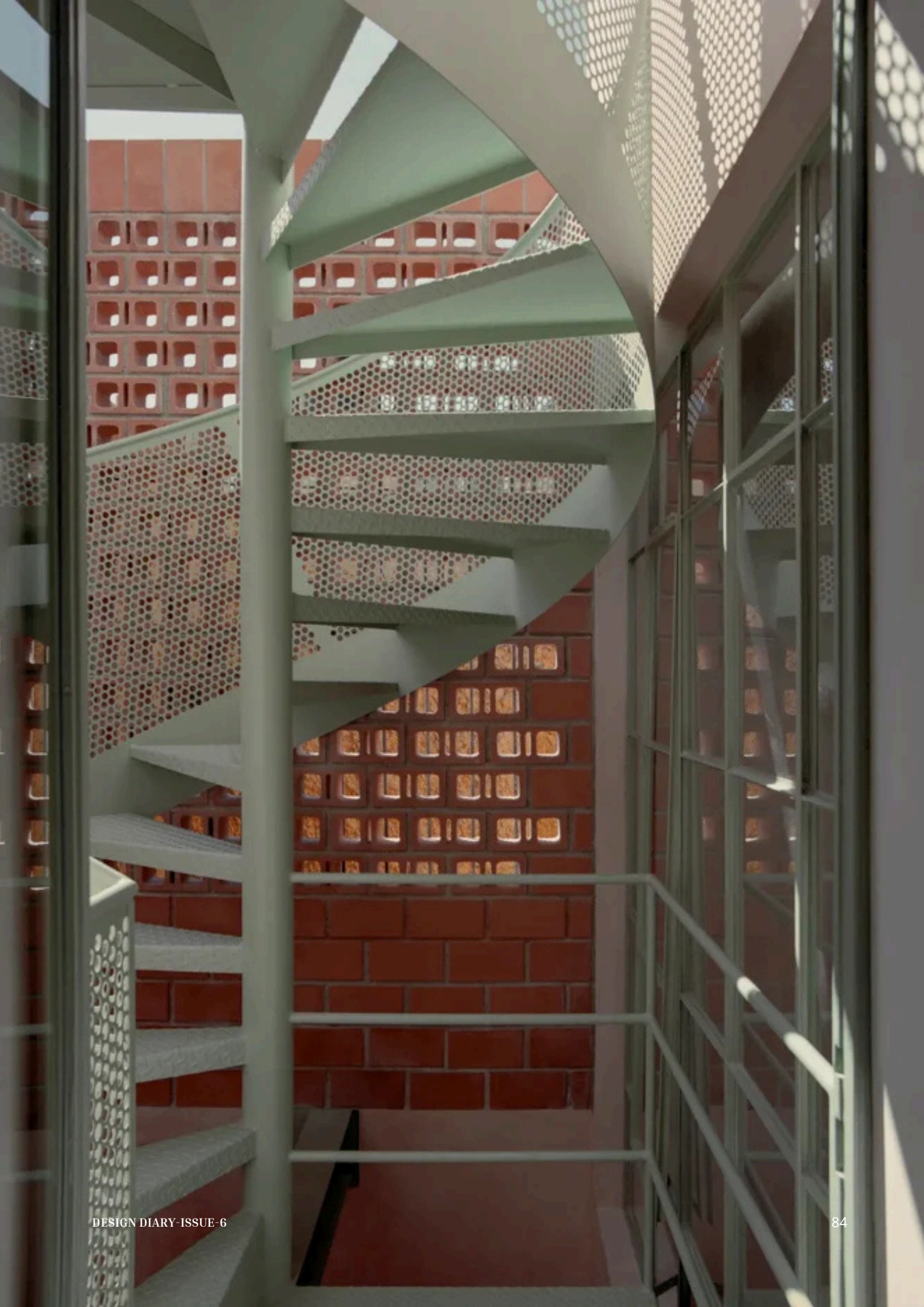


AMASA Estudio's decision to rehabilitate a 1940s house in Colonia Del Carmen, Coyoacán, represents an urban position in a city where development pressure typically leads to demolition and replacement. The house had a solid structure and clear domestic proportions. What it had lost through decades of piecemeal alteration was spatial logic, and restoring that logic rather than replacing the building was the project's central argument.



The entrance reconfiguration establishes the methodology before the interior opens. Rather than building additional walls to create a threshold between the street and the social spaces of the house, AMASA Estudio designed a custom millwork system, a continuous wooden element running floor to ceiling that integrates storage, filters direct views from the street, and sequences the arrival without any new construction. The piece does the work of architecture through furniture, compressing the entry in a way that makes the subsequent openness of the plan legible. The studio developed a comparable intelligence around thresholds and domestic transition zones in two previous Coyoacán projects, Casa Sofia and a residence for painter Daniela Riquelme.

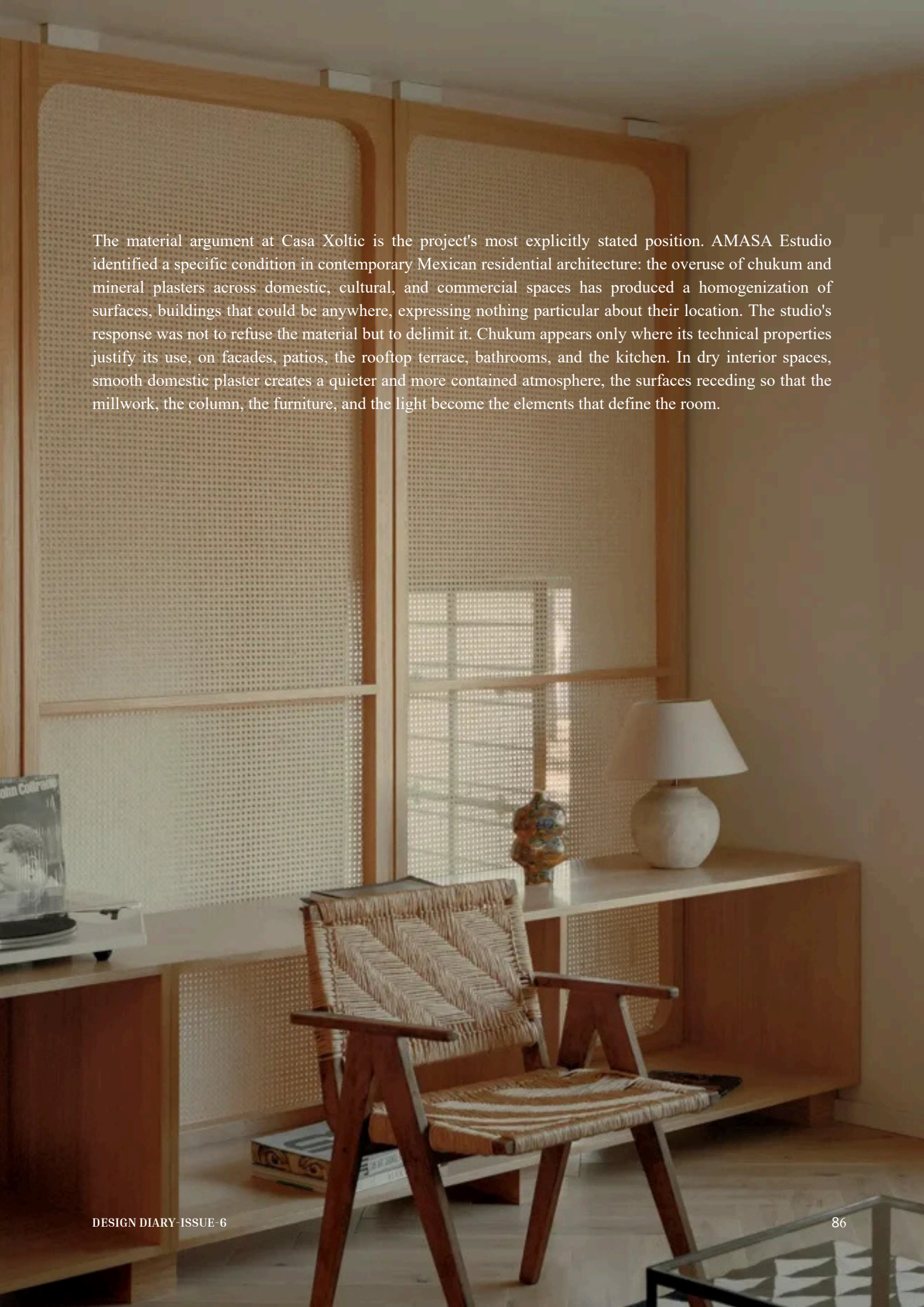
The kitchen sits at the center of the ground floor as a spatial connector between interior and exterior, finished in cast-in-place terrazzo that reads as a continuous surface tying the living room, dining area, and patios into a single thermal and visual system. Cross ventilation and visual depth run the full length of the level. The patios in this plan are not incidental outdoor spaces appended to the house but structural components of its organization, and the terrazzo floor that extends between them makes that relationship physically legible. AMASA Estudio treated the kitchen not as a service room at the back of the plan but as its anchor, and the open sequence that flows from it in both directions carries the logic of that decision throughout the ground floor.



Vertical circulation was rebuilt from scratch in a way that reveals the project's structural intelligence. The main staircase handles the connection between the ground and first floors. A new cantilevered steel stair, painted in the same sage green that runs through all the ironwork of the house, resolves access to the rooftop terrace independently, anchored by a single structural beam and requiring no intermediate columns that would otherwise fragment the patios below. The result is a circulation system in which each level connects to the next without interrupting the spatial quality of the one below, and the rooftop terrace arrives as a natural consequence of the section rather than an afterthought added on top. The spiral stair with its perforated metal treads sits against the red brick lattice wall, the geometry of the stair and the geometry of the screen in deliberate dialogue.



Light was the dominant constraint in the original north-south-oriented plan. AMASA Estudio introduced new openings and expanded visual connections between spaces, but the principal strategy was the deployment of brick lattice screens to carry east-west light through the volume. The screens do not simply filter light but redistribute it, the house shifting across the day from soft and diffuse in the mornings to laterally sharp at noon to warm and reflective in the afternoon. This is the functional output of the screen strategy, and it is what gives the interior its different quality at different hours.

The photograph shows a contemporary interior with a warm, minimalist aesthetic. A long, low wooden cabinet with cane backings serves as a backdrop. In the foreground, a wooden armchair with a woven seat and backrest is positioned. To the left, a record player sits on a wooden surface, with a vinyl record featuring John Coltrane's 'A Love Supreme' on top. To the right, a white ceramic lamp with a simple conical shade sits on the cabinet, next to a small, colorful ceramic vase. The floor is made of light-colored stone tiles, and a portion of a glass coffee table with a geometric pattern is visible in the bottom right corner.

The material argument at Casa Xoltic is the project's most explicitly stated position. AMASA Estudio identified a specific condition in contemporary Mexican residential architecture: the overuse of chukum and mineral plasters across domestic, cultural, and commercial spaces has produced a homogenization of surfaces, buildings that could be anywhere, expressing nothing particular about their location. The studio's response was not to refuse the material but to delimit it. Chukum appears only where its technical properties justify its use, on facades, patios, the rooftop terrace, bathrooms, and the kitchen. In dry interior spaces, smooth domestic plaster creates a quieter and more contained atmosphere, the surfaces receding so that the millwork, the column, the furniture, and the light become the elements that define the room.

For the exterior surfaces, the studio selected a soft pink chukum finish chosen for its luminous behaviour in a temperate climate and its dialogue with Coyoacán's vegetation. The studio has noted that Coyoacán has long been defined by color, citing iconic references such as the Casa Azul as demonstrations of how color operates as urban identity. The pink of Casa Xoltic is not illustrative of that history but calibrated by it. The restored ironwork throughout the house, the glass roof structure over the patio, the spiral stair, and the entrance framing, all in sage green, produce the chromatic counterpoint that activates the pink, the combination shifting across the day and anchoring the house to its specific environment.



All elements, the millwork, the ironwork, the cast terrazzo, the brick screens, and the applied finishes, were designed specifically for the project and executed on-site by Mexican artisans using durable materials and manual processes that allow the house to be maintained, adapted, and repaired over time. AMASA Estudio frames craft not as an aesthetic preference but as a constructive position, one that takes the long life of the house seriously as a design requirement.

DYMAK HEADQUARTERS

Odense, Denmark by BIG Bjarke Ingels Group

Fact File

Project Name: Dymak Headquarters

Typology: Commercial

Location: Odense, Denmark

Architect: BIG Bjarke Ingels Group

Client: Dymak

Project Size: 2,800 sqm

Certifications: DGNB Gold, Heart and Diamond

Key Materials: Mass timber, clay tiles, clay mortar, eelgrass, recycled paper fiber, photovoltaic panels

Photography: Rasmus Hjortshøj, COAST, courtesy of BIG

Firm Website: www.big.dk



Dymak, a Danish supplier of natural building materials, commissioned BIG to design a headquarters that would do more than house its operations. The brief called for a building that could demonstrate, at full architectural scale, the materials the company supplies. The result, completed in Odense and certified DGNB Gold, Heart, and Diamond, is a 2,800-square-meter workplace in which timber, clay, cork, eelgrass, and recycled paper fiber are not finishes applied to a building but the building itself.



The site sits between the industrial outskirts of Odense and the wetlands surrounding Glissholm Lake, at one of the main gateways into Denmark's third-largest city. BIG positioned the headquarters as a circular form that mediates between the emerging industrial district behind it and the natural landscape opening toward the lake. The plan is organized around a central courtyard conceived as a green amphitheater, with broad-stepped brick seating, native trees, flowering perennials, grasses, and herbs, creating a shared outdoor room that functions as the social center of the workplace. Brick paving runs continuously from the interior out into the courtyard and the surrounding landscape, the material carrying the connection between inside and outside without any change of surface.

The roof is the building's defining element. Its undulating surface rises toward the northern forest to frame views of the landscape and the lake while cascading southward to provide shade, improve the indoor climate, and reduce noise from the nearby road infrastructure. Bjarke Ingels has described the geometry as similar to a Möbius strip, a continuous form in which the roof rises and falls without any clear beginning or end. Across this surface, approximately 880 custom-shaped photovoltaic panels are integrated, the solar strategy made possible by the same geometry that gives the building its silhouette. From the aerial view at dusk, the copper-toned roof reads as a single continuous disc with a crescent opening above the courtyard, the building glowing from within along its full curved perimeter.



The structure is built primarily from mass timber, clay tiles, clay mortar, and eelgrass, materials chosen to reduce embodied carbon through their natural and low-impact properties. The timber-and-glass facade wraps the full circumference of the building in a rhythmic grid of vertical fins, the density of the fins adjusted by orientation: closer together on the south facade to reduce heat gain and more open toward the north to maximize natural light and views. Inside, the mass timber structure is exposed throughout, the warm pale grain of the wood visible in columns, beams, and ceiling surfaces across every level. The ceilings are finished in recycled paper fiber panels that soften acoustics while maintaining the natural material register of the interiors. Walls and surface finishes throughout use Dymak's own product range, with cork, clay, and eelgrass appearing in details and linings that allow employees and visitors to experience the materials at the scale of a complete building rather than a sample board.



The ground floor accommodates a showroom, photo studio, and fitness facilities alongside the double-height entrance lobby, which opens directly toward the courtyard through full-height glazed doors. The lobby has large glass globe pendant lights hanging at varying heights, the curved mezzanine above it supported on the mass timber structure with a black steel balustrade following the arc of the circular plan. Upper levels hold open-plan offices, meeting rooms, and informal lounges that look down into the courtyard through the full-height glazing. The stepped brick terracing that surrounds the courtyard outside is visible from every level of the interior, the outdoor seating integrated into the landscape as a series of planted tiers that double as an informal amphitheater for company gatherings.



Rainwater management is handled above ground rather than hidden in infrastructure, open channels, and landscaped basins collecting and distributing water across the site as a visible element of the landscape strategy. Roads and parking have been integrated into the surrounding site planting, making the approach to the building feel more like a landscape arrival than a car park.



For BIG, Dymak HQ showcases how environmental performance and architectural expression can serve the same purpose rather than competing for priority. The circular plan creates a protected, daylit, and socially connected workplace. The sculptural roof generates energy. The natural materials reduce embodied carbon. Each is also a spatial and sensory decision, and the building works as well as it does because none was treated as a technical requirement separate from the architecture.

HIDDEN SPA – WATER HOPE

Cam Ranh, Vietnam by IDEE Architects

Fact File:

Project: Hidden Spa – Water Hope

Typology: Hospitality (Spa and Wellness)

Architect: IDEE Architects

Location: Bai Dai, Cam Ranh, Khanh Hoa Province, Vietnam

Area: 3,000 sq. m.

Key materials: local natural stone, timber, bamboo, exposed concrete, planted roof, water features

Photography: Trieu Chien

IDEE Architects has completed Hidden Spa – Water Hope, a 3,000-square-metre wellness complex set beneath the sand dunes of Bai Dai on Vietnam's south-central coast. Conceived as landscape architecture rather than a standalone building, the project uses water, shade, and planting to shape a cooler, quieter microclimate within a demanding coastal site. Completed in 2025 for client Amiana Cam Ranh, it was later named the 2026 Architizer A+ Awards Jury Winner in the Hospitality – Spa & Wellness category.



Rather than levelling the dunes to make way for construction, the architects shaped the spa as a continuous curved structure that follows the site's existing contours. The roof rises and falls with the terrain, forming a planted surface that visitors can walk across while the rooms themselves sit partially concealed below. This keeps the building's apparent scale low and lets the dune landscape stay the dominant visual presence on site, rather than competing with it.

That low-profile approach also shelters the interior and circulation spaces from the coast's strong winds. Shaded passages, enclosed edges, and gradual shifts in level create a sequence of compressed and open spaces throughout the complex, so visitors discover the architecture gradually through movement instead of encountering a single dominant facade on arrival.



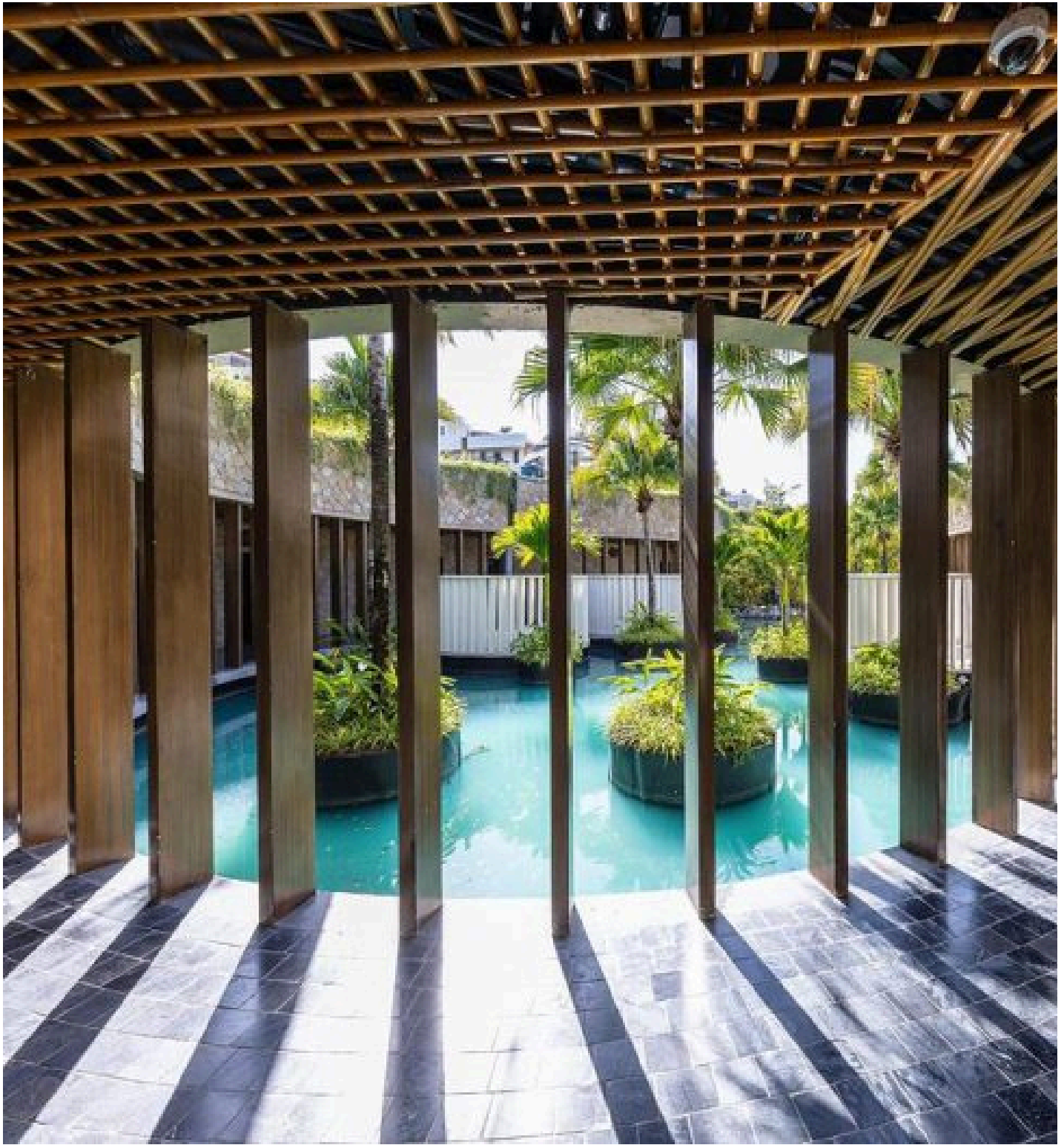


Reflecting pools, planted islands, and sheltered walkways run through a water courtyard that ties the rest of the plan together. Water here does more than decorate the space: its presence tempers the immediate environment, marking a clear shift from the dry dunes outside to the cooler landscape within. Treatment rooms, mud-bath spaces, and circulation routes all connect back to this courtyard, with sightlines kept open to planting and sky throughout. Light bounces off the pools onto stone surfaces, air moves through open corridors, and humidity becomes part of how the space feels rather than something mechanical systems are asked to eliminate entirely.

Local stone, timber, bamboo, and exposed concrete make up the material palette, chosen for their durability on a site exposed to salt air and heat. Thick stone walls add thermal mass, while bamboo-lined ceilings and open corridors support natural ventilation through the complex. Every material choice stays deliberately subdued, leaving shadow, water reflection, and vegetation to carry most of the visual character instead of the architecture itself.

Overhead, the planted roof reduces solar heat gain while visually continuing the surrounding dune terrain, effectively disguising the building's footprint from a distance. Rainwater collected off the sloped roof gets reused for irrigation, and the design minimised excavation to limit disruption to the original landform, treating these choices as part of the design method itself rather than sustainability features added on afterwards.





One mature tree that stood on the dune before construction began was kept in place, with the building's layout adjusted around it. The addition of shade, water, and vegetation transformed the previously exposed ground into a lush green area, integrating the project with its pre-existing landscape.

ZOLAND EMEI RESORT

Emeishan, China by Studio J. Bridgland

Fact File:

Project: ZOLAND Emei Resort

Typology: Hospitality

Architect/Studio: Studio J. Bridgland

Location: Emeishan City, China

Area: 2,900 sq. m. (2,516 sq. m. indoor space)

Key materials: Hand-chiseled textured concrete, Leshan gray roof tiles, cedar framework, Emei Mountain schist stone, washed stone, green granite

Photography: Jonathan Leijonhufvud



In Emeishan City, Studio J. Bridgland has turned a cluster of dilapidated structures into ZOLAND Emei Resort, a boutique mountain retreat built through restoration rather than new construction. The project covers 2,900 square meters, with 2,516 square meters of indoor space, and was completed in 2025. At dusk, the resort appears subtly nestled in the forest, its dark, staggered volumes revealed only by warm light spilling from scattered windows.



That restraint carries through at every scale of the project. The buildings follow a staggered, village-like arrangement that recalls stone dwellings set into a hillside, with pitched roofs and deep eaves reworked through a contemporary lens rather than copied directly from vernacular precedent. Studio J. Bridgland kept the material palette and massing restrained throughout, letting the mountain setting set the scale and rhythm of the built form instead of designing against it. Several of the resort's structures carry green, planted roofs that blur their edges into the surrounding hillside from above, while others sit low and largely hidden, their presence marked only by a single lit window cut into an otherwise dark, textured façade.

At the entrance, hand-chiseled textured concrete gives the façade a rough, tactile surface, introducing a material language built around craft and permanence rather than polish. That same fluted, ribbed concrete reappears elsewhere on the property, on a smaller freestanding pavilion set beside a still reflecting pool, where a single figure moving along a narrow stone path is the only sense of scale against the building's blank, textured walls.



A central courtyard functions as the resort's social core, framed on all sides by architecture and mountain views. An ancient Zhennan tree, the oldest and tallest in the valley, stands at its centre surrounded by a reflecting pool, anchoring the space and giving it continuity independent of the buildings around it. Elsewhere on the property, water performs a similar function at night, when illuminated glass volumes cantilever out over dark reflecting pools, their warm interior light doubling in the still surface below and turning the architecture itself into part of the landscape composition.







The dining hall pairs traditional Leshan gray roof tiles with a cedar ceiling framework, while its walls are built from schist stone sourced from Emei Mountain, tying the structure to the geology of the site through material rather than reference alone. Under its steep, timber-raftered ceiling, the room is lit by clusters of dark, textured cylindrical pendant lamps hanging low over long stone-topped tables, with oversized seasonal floral arrangements set at the table ends. The rough stacked-stone wall anchoring one side of the hall catches raking light through the day, giving the room a shifting quality that changes with the hour.





Guest suites sit at the highest point of the property, clad in washed stone and set beneath a lifted green landscape that keeps the building largely hidden from the exterior. Inside, floor-to-ceiling windows open onto the surrounding mountains, turning each room into a fixed point for looking outward. Bedrooms are finished in warm, muted tones, with dark timber-beamed ceilings overhead and a sunken, terraced platform that steps down from the bed toward a deep sectional sofa positioned directly against the window, so the room reads as a continuous, low-lying landscape of its own rather than a series of separated zones.





The bathrooms extend this material logic through deep red local stone, alongside dark wood-paneled walls, slim vertical wall-mounted light fixtures, and rounded black stone vessel basins set into timber consoles. A freestanding tub sits close to the window, positioned so that bathing and the surrounding forest remain in direct view of each other. Outdoors, a stone pool finished in washed stone and green granite carries the bathing experience directly into the surrounding terrain, with little separation between the built pool and the landscape around it.

There's a meeting and gathering space within the resort too, a long, narrow room finished in dark plaster with a single deep window cut into its far wall, framing a dense wall of greenery beyond. Perforated brass panels flank the window on either side, catching low light, while a long wood table runs the length of the room beneath a sculptural brass centrepiece, its form loosely echoing branches or coral. Bench-style dark leather chairs line both sides, and a lit channel runs along the base of the walls, giving the otherwise dark room a low, steady glow.



Across the resort, Studio J. Bridgland treats the act of restoring existing structures as inseparable from the experience the finished retreat offers, building a place designed around slowness rather than quick visual impact, one where the architecture recedes into the forest by day and glows quietly within it after dark.



Kartell reworks its Plastics sofa, Trix pouffe by Piero Lissoni, and Philippe Starck's Cara armchair in Liberty fabrics engineered for outdoor use, durable, weather-ready, and available in two geometric prints and one floral. Offered across sage, rust, beige, yellow, and blue, the collection brings refined, relaxed style to outdoor living.

kartell.com



Citta's Wool Blanket brings generous warmth in New Zealand wool, lightly brushed for a soft, lightweight feel, finished with a short fringe for an elegant touch. Sized for effortless layering, draped over a sofa or the foot of a bed on cooler evenings.

citta.com



Koked's Poppy Bronze Rug pairs a smooth wool base with sculptural bamboo silk reliefs and subtle lurex accents for added depth. A large-scale, asymmetrical poppy motif unfolds in rich golden tones, lending the piece a refined, glamorous edge.

bykoked.com

CHANNAPATNA, KARNATAKA (INDIA)

The Toy Town

BUILT ON A BORROWED TECHNIQUE





Wooden toys are not a Channapatna invention, or even an Indian one. Turned and lacquered wood has appeared across cultures that developed the tools and techniques to shape it, from Russia and Germany to Japan. What makes Channapatna unusual is not the wooden toy itself, but what happened when a technique associated with another tradition took root in one small town and, over generations, became inseparable from its identity.



Located roughly sixty kilometers from Bengaluru, Channapatna is known locally as Gombegala Ooru, or Toy Town. Its brightly colored wooden toys have become one of Karnataka's most recognizable craft traditions. Yet the story of how the technique arrived in the region is less straightforward than the familiar version suggests.

The most repeated account traces the craft to Tipu Sultan, ruler of Mysore from 1782 to 1799. According to the story, Tipu received a lacquered toy from Persia, was intrigued by the technique, and invited Persian artisans to train local craftsmen in wood turning and lacquer work.

The connection, however, is difficult to establish with certainty. Some researchers question whether Tipu personally brought Persian artisans to Mysore or whether his role was instead connected to the expansion and export of a craft that was already being practiced locally. Tipu's interest in overseas trade and in promoting Mysore's indigenous goods is well documented, but the precise origins of the Channapatna technique remain less certain.

What is clear is that the technique eventually took root in Channapatna and developed a character of its own.

There is another figure in the story who receives considerably less attention.

Syed Bawa Saheb Miyan, known locally as Bawas Miyan, lived in the early twentieth century, more than a century after Tipu Sultan's death. He travelled to Japan in 1904 and again in 1909 to study lacquer and toy-making techniques. On returning to Channapatna, he established a school to train unemployed local youth in the craft.

Several artisan families in Channapatna credit Bawas Miyan and his son-in-law, Syed Yedulla, with helping transform the craft into a larger production center. Their influence is arguably more direct and better documented than the Tipu connection, even if it has received less attention.

The history therefore involves more than a single moment of royal patronage. It is also a story of knowledge travelling between places, being adapted by local craftsmen, and eventually becoming part of the identity of a particular region.

The material itself is closely connected to the area. Craftsmen traditionally work with hale mara, or ivory wood, botanically known as *Wrightia tinctoria*. The wood is valued for being soft enough to turn easily on a lathe while retaining a fine grain that takes color well.

The seasoned wood is shaped on a lathe into the required form, whether a doll, animal, bangle, or stacking toy. The color comes from lac, a resin secreted by the lac insect, historically gathered from trees in the forests around Channapatna. Today, it is largely sourced from other states, including Tamil Nadu.

The lac is heated on a wooden stick until it becomes pliable. It is then blended with color before being applied to the spinning piece of wood. A final pass with dried palm leaves burnishes the surface and gives the finished object its characteristic sheen.

The process has evolved over time. Some workshops now use motorized equipment alongside traditional foot-powered lathes. The essential relationship between spinning wood, lac, and hand skill, however, remains central to the craft.

What makes Channapatna particularly interesting is how completely the technique became part of the place. Whatever its original route into Mysore, it was adapted over generations through local knowledge, materials, tools, and ways of working.

A 2021 study estimated roughly 4,000 artisans working in and around Channapatna, across approximately 250 homes and 50 small manufacturing units. The craft includes independent artisans as well as workers in registered toy-making businesses, with women forming a significant part of the workforce.





The tradition has also faced its share of pressures. Mongabay's 2024 reporting on the region noted a downward trend in traditional lacquerware as younger generations move away from the trade. Craft researchers have called for continued investment in innovation and market visibility to keep the tradition economically viable for the artisans who continue to practice it.

Channapatna toys carry a Geographical Indication tag recognizing their regional identity, but that recognition does not by itself resolve the question of how the craft will move into its next generation.

That may be the more important story today. The challenge is not simply to preserve a technique exactly as it was but to ensure that the people who possess the knowledge can continue to make a living from it.

Channapatna offers an unusual example of how craft traditions evolve. A technique may arrive from elsewhere, but that does not mean its identity remains elsewhere. Over time, materials change, tools change, markets change, and new generations reinterpret what they have inherited.

What remains is a craft so closely associated with one place that its origins have become almost secondary to what happened after it arrived.

The story of Channapatna, then, is not simply about where the technique came from. It is about how a community absorbed it, adapted it, and eventually made it its own.



DESIGN DIARY

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