

ALPINE COPPER IN CONTEXT

In complete contrast to the previous project, this House in Ticino, southern Switzerland – Commended in the Awards and featured in the last issue of Copper Forum (27/2009) – is a modest building forming an integral part of its Alpine setting. But it is also firmly rooted in a developing heritage of important modern movement houses in Ticino and rigorously carries through its essential character from concept to detail. Its architect Davide Macullo made the following presentation at the 2009 Awards event.

CONTEXT

Ticino is located in the southernmost part of Switzerland, an area characterised by a pre-Alpine landscape of peaks and deep valleys. Early in the 20th century, “cultural immigrants” began moving to the area, including some of the great modern movement architects with ideas and projects that sought to explore a new way of building in this Alpine context. The Anatta House (1) was built early last century to house a family that was part of this community of foreign intellectuals who had settled in this territory in order to enjoy a way of life in harmony with nature. This house is the first sign of modernisation in a rural area. It introduces large horizontal planes that contrast with the landscape and uses the concept of framing the landscape through large openings.

Many other architects of the modern movement have attempted to deal with the area: Neutra, Breuer, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe are some that proposed projects here. Neutra’s Tuia House (2) and Bucerius House (3), both built in the 1960s, adopt the modern construct in emphasising the horizontal and create an object that detaches itself from its context. The Koefer House (4) by Marcel Breuer, built not far from those of Neutra, again adopts the idea of horizontality and, in addition, uses planting as an integrated element of the project.

With the second generation of Ticinese architects, we see a shift in attitude whereby the relationship of the building to the land-

scape becomes much more dominant. We see a move away from the horizontal planes towards a volumetric architecture that rises up from the terrain, allowing the landscape to continue to roll with its natural contour. The Rotalinti House (5) by Galfetti is an example of this. Rising up as an extension of the rock and dominating the landscape, it places the constructed volume as the new protagonist of the place.

In a similar way Botta’s architecture (7) dominates the landscape as an element inserted between the earth and the sky, recalling a memory of a building anchored to the ground as a solitary bastion. In the 1970s, we see the emergence of another approach to building in the landscape with local architect Luigi Snozzi’s Kalman House (6) which places the dominant object within the folds of the landscape. Since the early 1970s urban development in the area has witnessed a rapid growth – a growth that still shows no signs of slowing. The existing modern models described here continue to be emulated by speculators and there is no longer a distinction between the fabric of the urbanised valleys and that of the natural slopes. Both areas are dealt regarded as the having the same or, at best, similar, building typology.

But, in today’s climate, this attitude requires reassessment. It needs to become one more of reading and working with the existing folds and lie of the land, rather than one of reproducing past models, detached from their context.



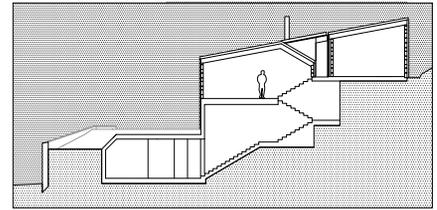
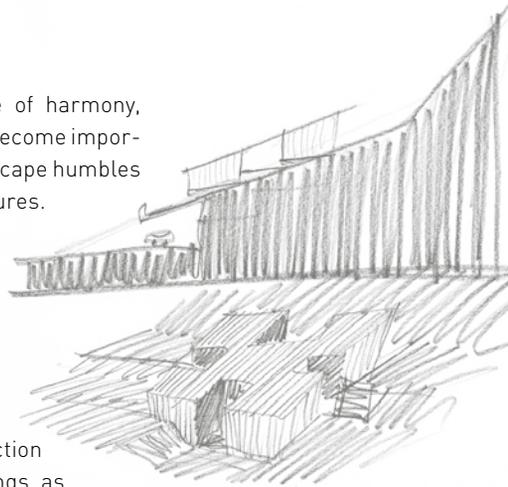
8-9. House in Carabbia

CONCEPT

The approach advocated here is one of harmony, where the smallest of folds in the land become important and where the majesty of the landscape humbles even the greatest of architectural gestures.

The house is characterised as a series of small monolithic volumes perched on the natural slope of the land and is surrounded by nature. The site was previously home to a cluster of typical old rural buildings and elements of the new house echo this. The new construction retains the footprint of these old buildings, as four volumes with a 14 meter-square ground perimeter and, with its sloped roof recall the form of these former structures.

The design concept fits into the contextual argument in as much as its constructed volumes embrace the land organically. The construction follows the slope in a fluent sequence of spaces, each relating to each other and to the surrounding landscape. In order to relate an identity and a language to the inhabitants, the project has a strong and precise geometric form. The living spaces at different levels ensure that all the surrounding natural landscape can be 'lived in'. All spaces - even at different levels - have a direct relationship with the external environment. The landscape appears to flow through these volumes that become protected living spaces: a continuation of the green environment integrated into the house.



COPPER

The house follows the principles of building with organic recyclable materials such as wood and copper. In addition, parts of the house such as the foundations and basement have been constructed in reinforced concrete. The emerging structure is made of wood and clad with copper. The cladding is made up of copper plates and the facade elements, in stretched copper mesh, also act as a rain screen. The vertical pattern of the copper mesh cladding renders the construction system visible and reduces the scale of the building.

The use of copper in the House in Ticino highlights how extraordinary a material it can be when its transparent and reflective characteristics are exploited. It gives a depth to surfaces whereby across the day they are continually rendered differently, much like a monochromatic painting. As the sun moves about the house, each surface is constantly morphing colours. Used in this sense, the material demonstrates an unexpected expressiveness.

