inside mnm

minimalist interiors

Foreword by Toyo Ito

Jaume Nasple and Kyoko Asakura

inside

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minimalist interiors

Edited by Nasple & Asakura

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Toyo Ito

Sakurajousui K House

Toyo Ito & Associates, Architects
e-mail: mayumi@toyo-ito.co.jp

Completion date: **2000**
Location: **Tokyo, Japan**
Floor Space: **1174 ft²**

Photographer: **Tomio Ohashi**

Born in 1941, Toyo Ito graduated from the Tokyo University department of Architecture in 1965. After a brief time of working for Kiyonori Kikutake Architect and Associates, Toyo Ito set up his own studio, "Urban Robot," in Tokyo in 1971. In 1979, the name of the firm changed to its present one, Toyo Ito & Associates, Architects. The architect created the basis for new concepts of life in large population centers with his renowned domestic constructions, "White U"(1976), and "Silver Hut"(1984). He also developed the vision of large mobile-city communities with the "Pao Projects," such as "A dwelling for a Tokyo Nomad Girl" (1985). His most recently acclaimed project, "The Sendai Mediatheque," completed in 2001, is a powerful work where Toyo Ito lucidly demonstrates his enthusiasm for impermanence and ambiguity.

Sakurajousui K House, located in Tokyo, was built for a married couple, the project being a totally experimental aluminum house. As the result of long research with engineers, the aluminum house ended up achieving a more delicate space than the usual structures built in Japan with the use of reinforced concrete. Since a space composition similar to a wooden structure was also possible to conceptualize, according to Toyo Ito, the aluminum house is quite suitable as a small residence. One should pay close attention to its unified finish and structure.

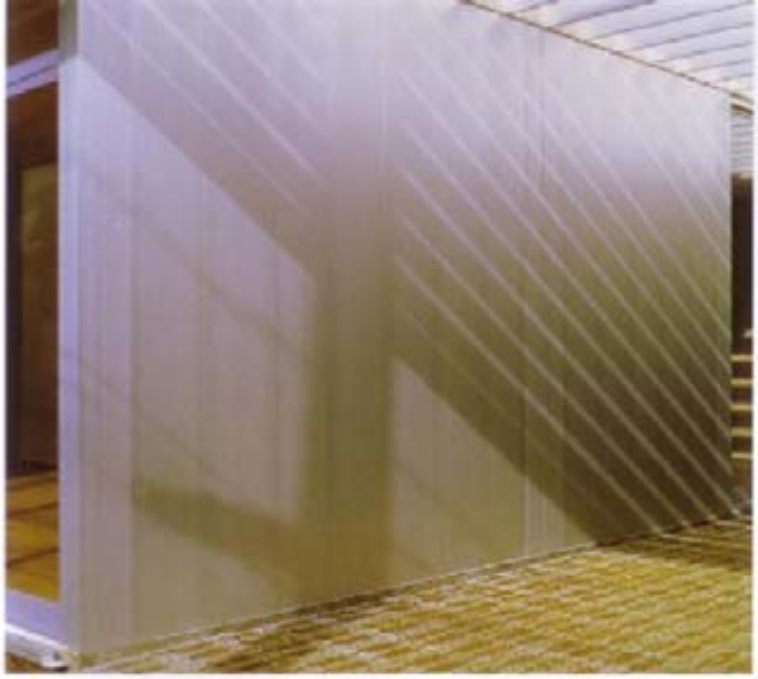
Toyo Ito, when designing this project, had a feeling that he was approaching more the field of industrial product designing, like designing vehicles, rather that doing pure architecture. The weak point of the project, argued Ito, is the challenge of soundproofing. Although some improvements could be made in this respect, the architect contends that there is great potential in aluminum housing. It is recyclable, lightweight, and easy to assemble, therefore quite appropriate to use as temporary housing for refugees in disaster areas, or to be used to build an annex on the roof or a terrace of a building. Compared to the wooden structure of a Japanese house, it is more open and airy. Toyo Ito maintains that one of the new prototypes of housing systems available in the future should definitely be the aluminum house. <<

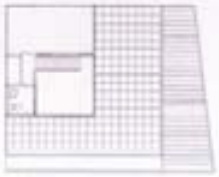
>> POTENTIALITIES OF ALUMINUM

First Floor Plan

Elevations

All structure was made out of aluminum, becoming the first aluminum house in the world. The architect's intention was to realize a light and comfortable space for living.





Second Floor Plan

Elevations

All common living space, including the bathroom and the kitchen, is situated in the first floor, while the guest room and the roof terrace are located in the second floor.

Thanks to the structure of aluminum, and the effect of the Patio-like sunroom, the inner space becomes bright, in a fluid connection just as if it were one single room.

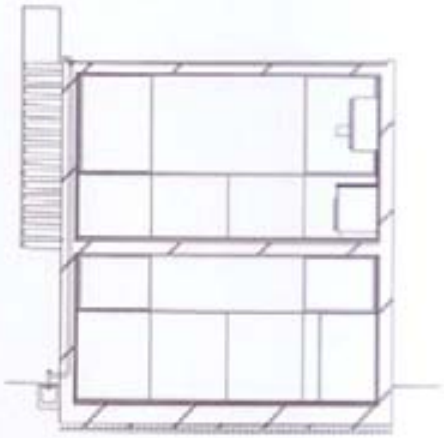
Toyo Ito

Yutenji T House

Toyo Ito & Associates, Architects
e-mail: mayumi@toyo-ito.co.jp

Completion Date: 1999
Location: Tokyo, Japan
Floor Space: 1595 ft²

Photographer: Shinkenchiku-sha

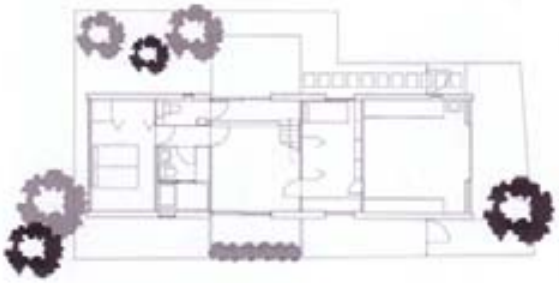


Section

>> LIGHT AND TRANSPARENCY

Elevation

Despite being built with concrete, glass and wood, the space conveys a lot of airiness and lightness.



First Floor Plan

Tezuka Architects

Wall-less House

Takaharu and Yui Tezuka Architects • Masahiro Ikeda
e-mail: tez@sepia.ocn.ne.jp
url: www.tezuka-arch.com

Completion date: 2001
Location: Tokyo, Japan
Floor Space: 2581 ft²

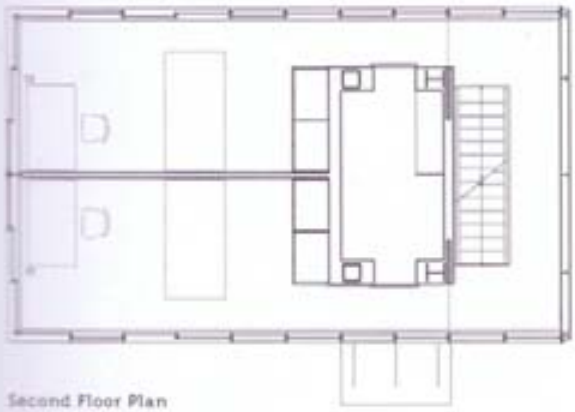
Photographer: Katsuhisa Kida

Takaharu (Tokyo, 1964) and his wife Yui (Kanagawa, 1969) Tezuka established their own architectural atelier in Tokyo in 1994. Previously, they had respectively worked in Richard Rogers' studio in London and studied under Professor Ron Herron at the University of London. Tezuka Architects have, at present, become one of the most emblematic young architectural Japanese studios. Among their most representative work are projects like "The Wood Deck House," which received an award from The Tokyo Society of Architects; "Kawagoe Music Apartment;" "Machiya House;" "Megaphone House;" "House to catch the Sky;" and "Roof House," which was awarded the Yoshioka prize and the 2002 Japan Institute of Architects price.

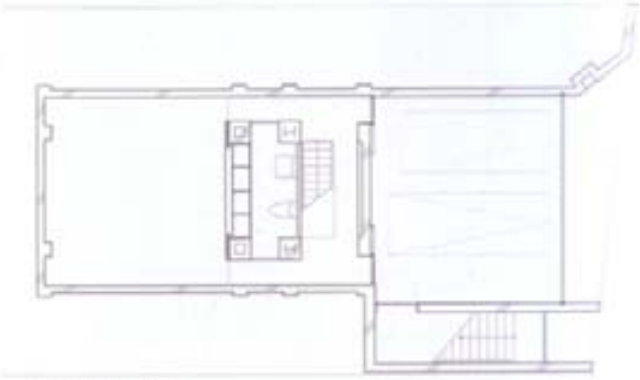
Tezuka's main motto is to try to turn their client's most bizarre and whimsical dreams into reality. That explains the wide variety and range of their works. Depending on the type of site of the project and the needs of their particular client, each building adopts a very specific and marked character.

As for the Wall-less House, the large site is in a dense residential neighborhood of Tokyo's Setagaya district. The building is located in an area that provides a rare opportunity, according to the architects, to open the house completely to the surrounding landscape, an environment reminiscent of a retreat villa in the countryside. Occupying only 20% of the site, the dwelling leaves ample space around it for a truly open, continuous space, or a "truly wall-less house." Using a lightweight steel and a load-bearing frame structure, the axial loads are distributed through only a utility core in the center and two thin columns, therefore opening the living space to the outside completely on all sides. The floors, thus, float in the air, surrounded by trees that help provide for greenery as well as privacy. <<

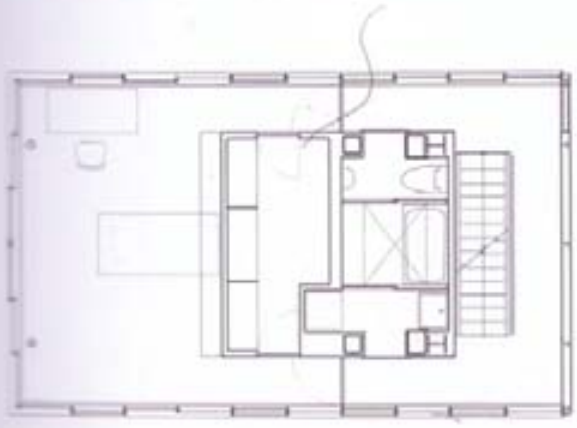
>> FEEL LIKE FLOATING IN THE AIR



Second Floor Plan

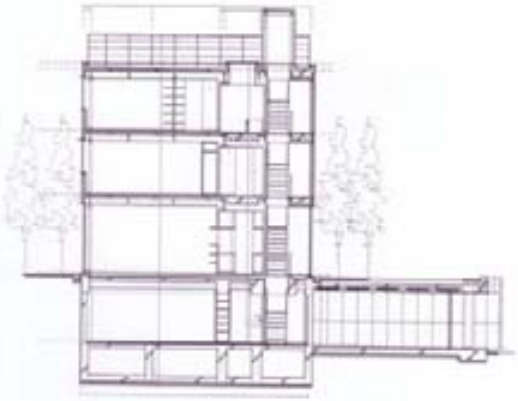


First Floor Plan



Third Floor Plan

The house is supported only by a central core and a pair of extremely thin columns. Thus, there is no wall on the ground floor level and the internal space extends 360 degrees out on to the garden.



Section

Site Plan

Thanks to an effective top light, the bathroom becomes a cozy and a cheerful space. Despite being in central Tokyo, the inhabitants can feel nature and the change of seasons all the time.

Right: View of Tokyo from the terrace.

milligram studio

Kamakura

milligram studio / Tomoyuki Utsumi
e-mail: info@milligram.ne.jp
url: www.milligram.ne.jp

Completion Date: 2002
Location: Kamakura, Japan
Floor Space: 926 ft²

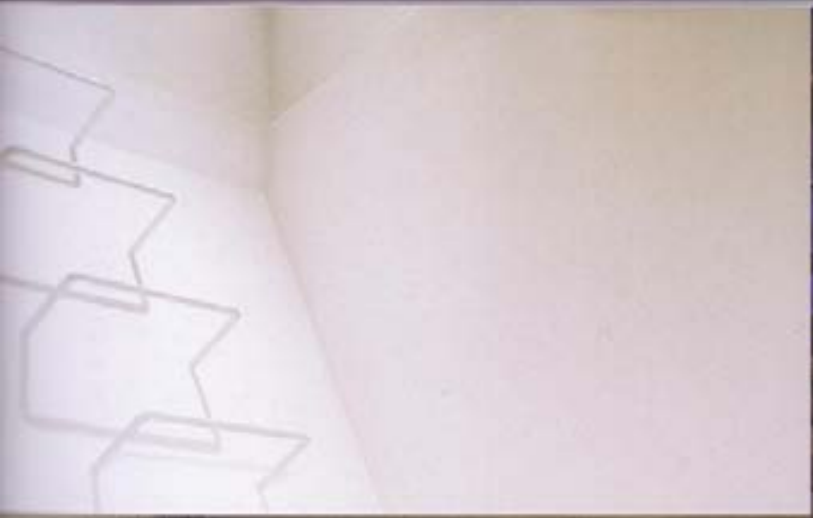
Photographer: Takeshi Taira

Tomoyuki Utsumi (Mito, Japan, 1963) is a graduate from The Royal College of Art in London, England and Tsukuba University in Japan. After setting up his own studio in 1988, he soon became one of the most prominent emerging architects based in Tokyo.

The location of the "Kamakura" house lies along the path leading to the mountain promenade of Kamakura. The old Buddhist temple, "Jokumyohji", is located north of the site. The site used to be the front garden of the neighbor's house. Several trees, such a maidenhair tree and a tall cherry tree, are still planted there. Since the site is located in a designated conservation area of the historical city of Kamakura, the house location was established according to the position of these existing trees. People living in Kamakura believe that conservation creates history. The young owner of the house, a native of the city of Kamakura, decided to preserve the city's history by allowing the trees to remain in the area.

For the construction of this tiny house, neither special methods nor any novel materials were used. Because of the client's special request, the house presents a unique form, with the pitch of the main roof designed so as not to disturb the symbolic cherry tree.

A flat, one-story level inserted under the roof, with a front garden, places the site at a plane level with the surrounding cityscape. The main ground floor floats slightly off the ground, while an upper floor and a lower floor are accommodated under a sloped roof. In order to make this three-dimensional space composition more attractive, several loopholes that connect different levels are created, so that it becomes possible to wander all around the house. Every corner is given a characteristic mark. They are interconnected with each other at a crossing point of two axes. As a result, this compact house gives the impression of being more spacious than its actual floor area. With the small balcony devised on the rooftop, the owner can enjoy picturesque views of the temple under the moonlight with the mountains in the background. <<

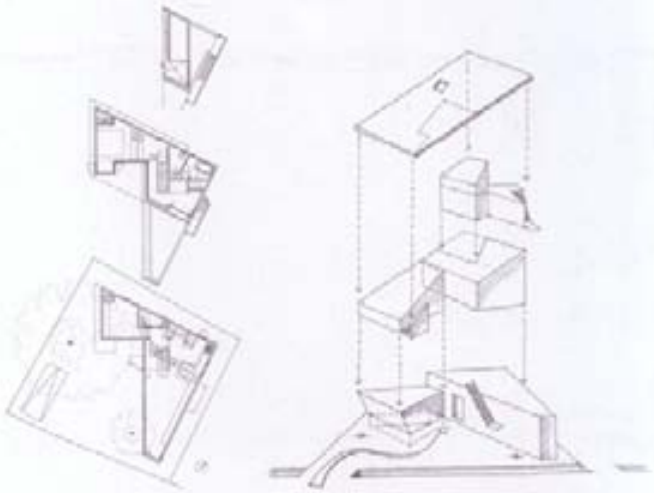


>> INTEGRATION WITH THE SURROUNDINGS

View of the façade and the garden. The site is located in a designated conservation area of the historical city Kamakura, thus the house was designed to be integrated to the surroundings.

Above: View of the study room characterized by its triangular roof .

Night view of the house. The main roof was designed not to disturb the symbolic cherry trees. The owner can enjoy picturesque views under the moonlight from the small balcony on the rooftop.



Plans and Axonometric

The kitchen and the bathroom were designed functionally with a fresh color scheme. Through the plans, you can see the unique form and construction system of the house.

The house is commonly called "a tag house", because there is a passage all around it so that children may play inside. Thanks to this passage, the inner space of the house looks larger than its actual size.

milligram studio

House in Senzoku

milligram studio / Tomoyuki Utsumi
e-mail: info@milligram.ne.jp
url: www.milligram.ne.jp

Completion date: 2002
Location: Tokyo, Japan
Floor Space 1213.41 ft²

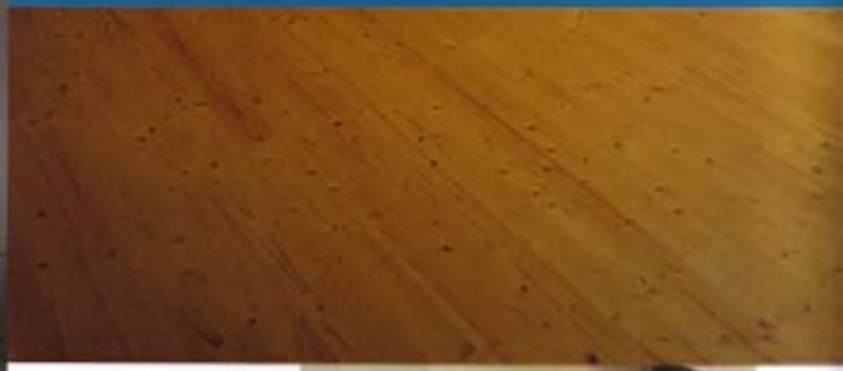
Photographers: Takeshi Taira / Satoshi Asakawa

The site of the House in Senzoku is located in a quiet residential area in the center of Tokyo. Boasting plenty of tall, preserved ancient trees and a large front garden, the old house in its surroundings shows the vestiges of what used to be an area teeming with individual houses, each of them located in plots of about 4304 ft² each. Nowadays, low-rise apartments and a heterogeneous mix of buildings lie in these former larger plots, which in time have been divided and subdivided into ever smaller pieces of land, thus forming a present-day Tokyo urban landscape.

The site of The House in Senzoku reminds us of a flag shape. The alley of the house (the flagpole), with a 7 ft wide access to the road, is 66 ft from the road itself to the main area of the building. This main rectangular space can be reached after passing through the long and slender tunnel that forms the alley. Though the architects have made the most of it, the area has very little marginal space left. The slight difference in height, between the house and its neighboring building, acts as a psychological and optical boundary between them. The spectacular and rational shape of the entrance of this dwelling provides a new elevation to its surroundings.

Natural light comes into the living premises only from the highest area of its southern section. Contrary to its first impression from the exterior, the structure of the building has a complicated composition, with five different levels forming the whole living area. The main bedroom is located in the semi-basement so as to secure privacy for its owners. In the upper level, from the kitchen area, its dwellers can look down to the lower level where the living room is situated. Despite the limited space, stairs have been wisely positioned connecting all levels with the exterior. The architects devised the simplest method of partitioning spaces, by means of two long theatre-like curtains. The divisions are aided by a high-tech heat insulation and air-conditioning system that accommodates to the diverse and occasionally extreme seasonal weather conditions in Japan. «

>> THEATRICAL EFFECT OF CURTAINS



The impressive approach to the house was realized by taking advantage of the unique flag shape of this site.

View of the kitchen, playing the leading role of the house.

First Floor Plan

Second Floor Plan

Site Plan

Schär-Valkanover House

Blum & Grossenbacher
e-mail: office@schaerholzbau.ch
url: www.schaerholzbau.ch

Completion date: 1998
Location: Grossdietwil, Switzerland
Floor Space: 2259.60 ft²

Photographers: Francesca Giovanelli and W. Schaer Holzbau, AG

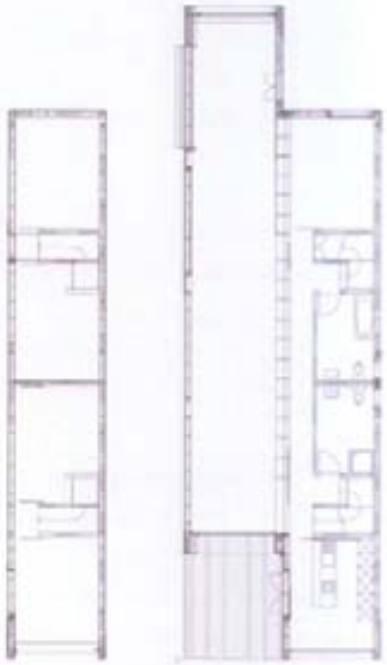
The Schär-Valkanover House, located in a residential and business area of Grossdietwil, Switzerland, directly bordering an agricultural zone, was completed in 1998. Next door, Walter Schär, who is quoted from vom Baum zum Raum, directs a modern carpenter's workshop that has belonged to the Schär-Valkanover family for four generations.

On the Fischbach, in an idyllic little valley where a mill, and later a sawmill once stood, more than a dozen wooden buildings per year are prefabricated today with a technique that allows them to be put on site within a few hours. Aside from this, the business continues on with the craft of classical carpentry.

Collaboration between Walter Schär, contractor and owner of the house, and the architectural office of Blum & Grossenbacher, has already been going on for several years. Their first jointly planned and executed wooden buildings date back to the mid-1990s.

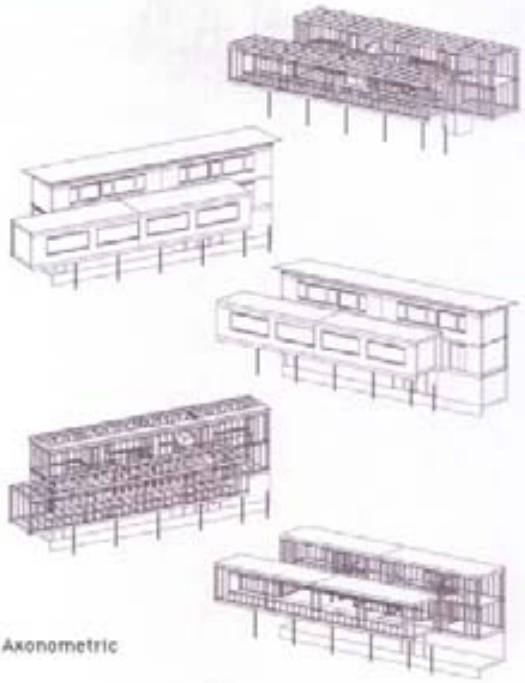
Regarding the Schär-Valkanover House, the points of departure for the project were the need for individual space for the five members of the family, their decision to live in the immediate vicinity of their workplace, and the fact that there happened to be a remaining empty plot of land owned by the family close to the workshop.

The building's external appearance is one of two long volumes pushed together and running parallel to the valley dominated by the small river. With three levels altogether, the north volume is of greater height and it houses the compartmentalized structure of the bedrooms and facilities. Attached to this volume, on the southern part, a one-story bay rests on thin columns, providing an ample, open space as the main living room of the house. The entrance hall, a tiny domestic workshop, and the boiler room are located on the ground floor. The main level incorporates the kitchen, the office, and two bathrooms running parallel to the large living and dining room. According to Walter Schär, the house in all of its simplicity is less of a house than a multifunctional object of use. It is the result of an excellent and practical combination of prefabrication techniques and handcrafted finishing. <<



Third Floor Plan Second Floor Plan

>> VERSATILITY OF WOOD AS MATERIAL



Axonometric

Sections

Elevations

Left: Night view of the house. Integration of its modern façade to the countryside.

Details of the inner space. Its handcraft finish give the house added warmth and originality of character.

Ai Wei Wei's House

Ai Wei Wei
e-mail: aixx@sohu.com
url: www.archivesandwarehouse.com

Completion date: 1999
Location: Beijing, China
Floor space: 5380 ft²

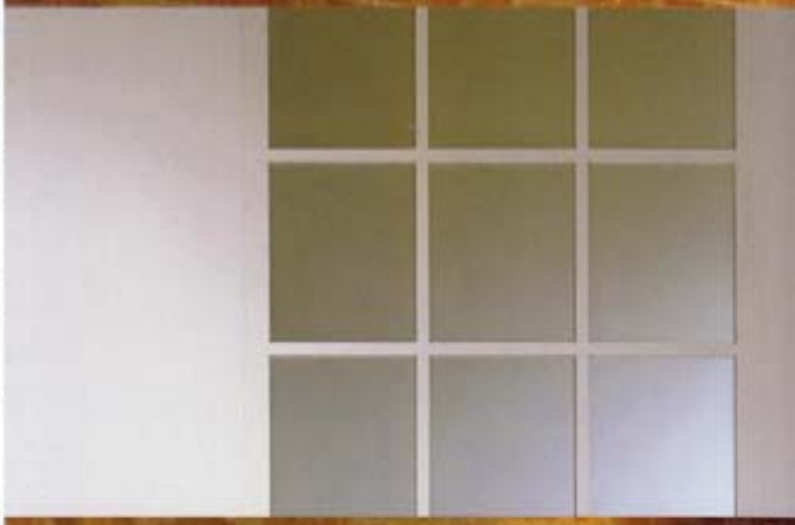
Photographer: Ma Xiaochun

Ai Wei Wei was born in Beijing in 1957. Following his studies at the Beijing Film Institute in the late seventies, he moved to New York where he entered the Parsons School of Design and Art Student's League. After living in New York for thirteen years, he returned to his home city, Beijing, where he now resides.

In Beijing, Ai Wei Wei works as an artist, architect, landscape designer, and interior designer. Through his landscape design, he has recently completed the site of "The Commune" by The Great Wall Project. As a conceptual artist, his works have been shown in China and in the United States. Ai Wei Wei is also the author of well-known books such as The Black Cover Book (1994), The Grey Cover Book (1995), and The White Cover Book (1997). These publications are characterized for having made a considerable contribution to the awareness of contemporary art and a much needed platform for conceptual artists in China.

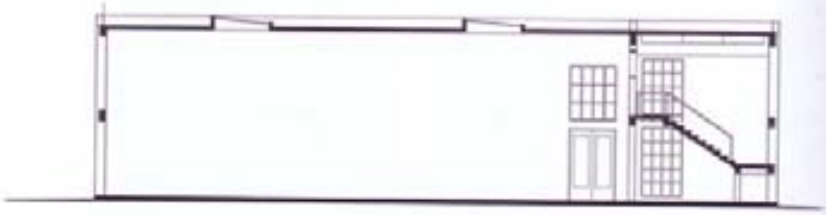
At present Ai Wei Wei continues to explore contemporary artistic values and conceptual issues in his workshop studio in South Beijing. Some of his projects include blue and white porcelain-based works, traditional furniture-based work, as well as photographic work based on "The Lunar Festival" and its Eclipse in 1997.

The Ai Wei Wei's house project, designed by the artist himself, comprising both his own studio and private dwelling, has a total floor area of 5380 ft². It consists of a reinforced concrete skeleton-frame structure – left exposed internally – with reddish brick infill panels. An out-skin of grey facing bricks is drawn over the structure and articulated with carefully proportioned window openings. The principal element of the scheme is the two-story studio space set at right angles to the living tract. The windowless studio receives daylight solely from two skylight strips above. The number of materials used was reduced to a minimum. Ai Wei Wei contends that, when designing his own studio, he took special care of the scale, proportion, and the proper usage of the basic materials, since these, he believes, are the most important elements of architecture. «



>> THE SPIRIT OF PROUD TRADITIONS

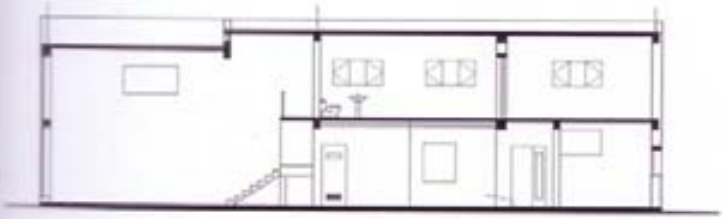
The house was built with local materials.



Section

First Floor Plan

The studio was designed to absorb effectively plenty of natural light from the ceiling.



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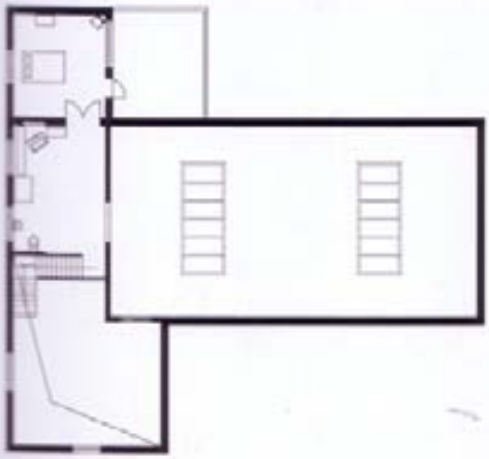
First Floor Plan



Second Floor Plan

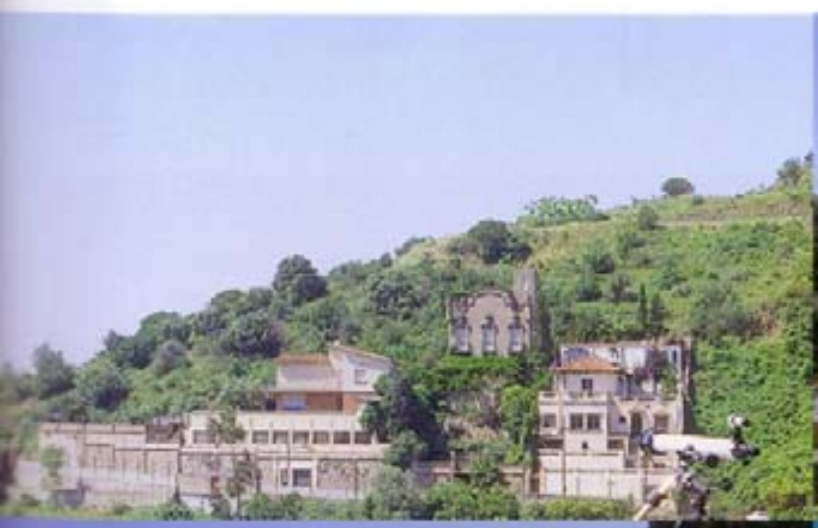
Elena Mateu Pomar

Casa A-M

Elena Mateu Pomar
e-mail: e.mateu@coac.es

Completion date: 2001
Location: Barcelona, Spain
Floor Space: 2152 ft²

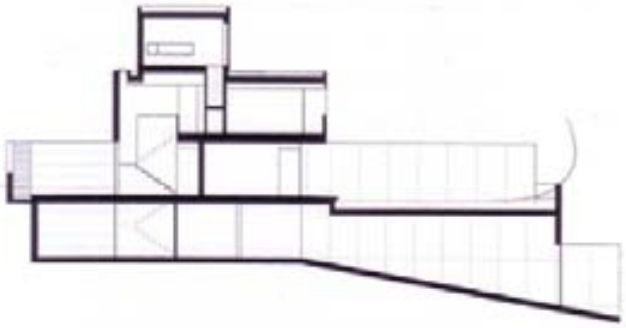
Photographer: Nuria Fuentes



>> CHALLENGE TO THE TOPOGRAPHY

Elena Mateu Pomar was born in Barcelona, Spain in 1964. After earning a degree in architecture at Barcelona's Escola Técnica Superior d'Arquitectura, she set up her own partnership practice in the city, where she has been very active with rehabilitation and new architectural residential projects. She teaches at the Universitat Internacional de Catalunya, Barcelona, Spain.

The site of Casa A-M is situated in Montclar Street in Barcelona, on the hillside of Collserola Mountain. The plot has a triangular shape, with a marked difference, sloping 43 ft between its upper part and the street level. Despite being a large piece of land of about 10760 ft², from an urban development point of view the land was not suitable for building, hence the architect could only design a dwelling of 2152 ft² on the gradient. The architect first placed the platform, that was to be the ground floor of the house, on the uppermost part of the site, thus enabling it to gain access to the upper level in order to enjoy the scenery below. The dwellers can enter the garage of the house through a steep ramp. The ground floor level can then be reached through the exterior stairs and a tiny bridge that crosses the English patio situated on the garage level below. Once in the hall, a staircase leads to the various floors of the house. On this floor, one finds the kitchen and a living room that extends into a terrace together with a semi-buried library lighted by means of a second patio. The upper floor incorporates the different bedrooms of the house, each with its own terrace facing south. From this level, its dwellers gain access to the back garden connected by a staircase to the swimming pool located on the ground floor. On the second floor, a large studio room, belonging to the daughters of the house owners, boasts a large terrace where one relishes in the astounding vistas of Barcelona. <<



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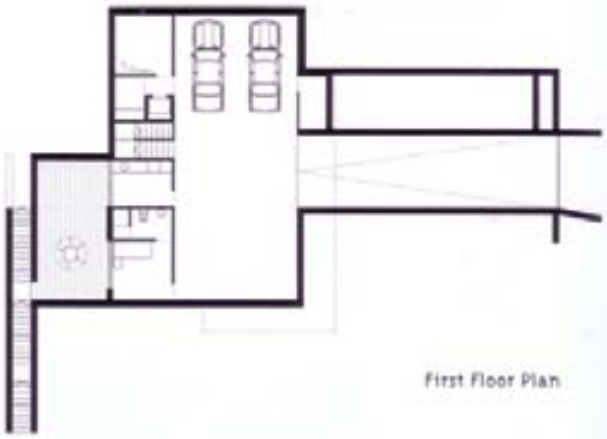
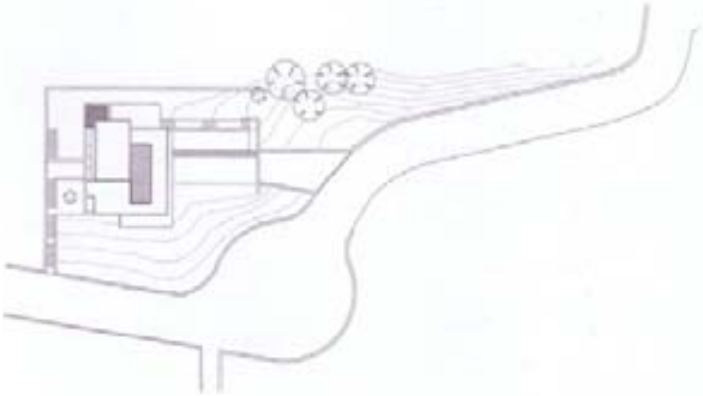
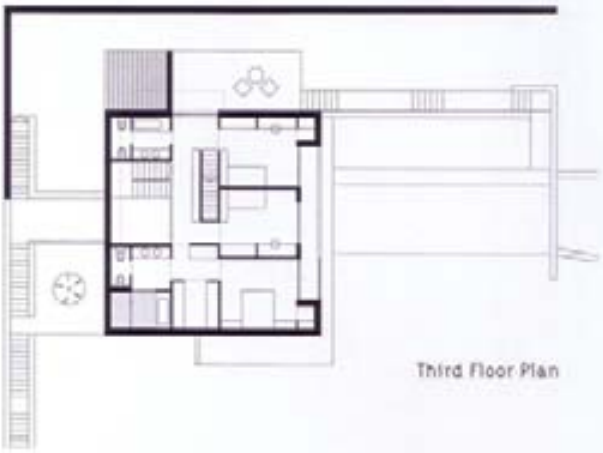


First Floor Plan

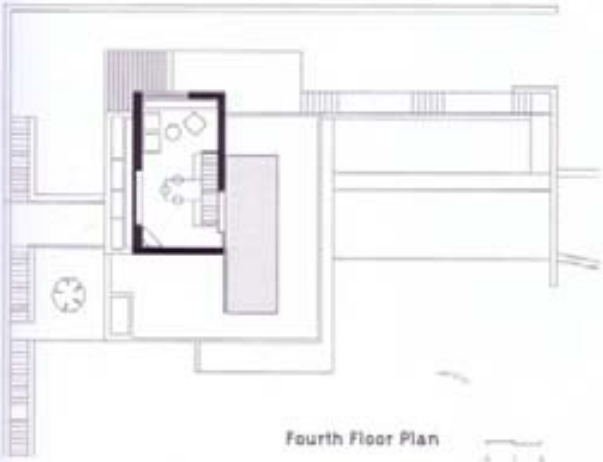


Site Plan

Second Floor Plan



Third Floor Plan



Fourth Floor Plan

Alexander Residence

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Completion date: 2001
Location: Southampton, New York, USA
Size: 2000 ft²

Photographer: Eric Laignel