



Las Gaviotas



CASA LAS GAVIOTAS: AUDACITY THAT MAKES SENSE OF SPACE

DON AND ALICE WILLFONG
OWNERS

ARCHITECT JUAN MANUEL MUNGUÍA
PROJECT

JUAN PABLO STONE
CONSTRUCTION

JEAN PHILIPPE ARMENTA
LANDSCAPE

Architecture is an adventure shared by client and architect, in equal measure. «For the adventure to become a work of art, mutual understanding must develop on many levels: intellectual, aesthetic, emotional and cultural. When that is achieved, the result is a very pleasing one,» Juan Manuel Munguía assures us, and Las Gaviotas, the house named for the soaring flight of seagulls, attests to the fact that his statement is not merely words.

And if that relationship doesn't grow, he adds, the stronger elements win; either the financial power and cultural obstinacy of the owner, or the craft – and craftiness – of the architect.

This house is completely candid about the way in which owners' and architect's interests came together, and about the geometry that was their focus. Instead of hiding these, it accentuates them: there is no trepidation about straight lines, circular forms nor expansive surfaces; neither is there any shyness about honoring whoever came up with a particular plan. There is a sense of composition, of space and form and freedom, without blushing at the idea of emulating, interpreting, or evoking. The shared adventure has been a success. «I believe in the forces of geometry, and in the forces of light.»

Juan Manuel says that in addition to the participation of the client and the architect, there is another determining factor for success: the land. «Las Gaviotas is placed on the brink of a cliff almost seventy feet high – a nearly vertical rock face – with a natural presence so strong that it might make anyone nervous

Not a patio that looks out to sea, but which has the indulgence and effrontery to be a completely private space - lulled by the waves' measured rhythm from afar.





about playing with it, trying to imitate it.» The site itself dictates, and depends upon the sensitivity of the people involved to listen to its dictates, not to turn a deaf ear.

Angular stone

The jumping-off point for the project was a dream Don had, in which he imagined the remains of an old hacienda, lost and rediscovered on the site where Las Gaviotas now stands. «The challenge was to construct this image using contemporary forms and systems, without losing its essence.» With this in mind, the central patio, «while not confined within elements of symmetry, achieves balance through a series of architectural traditions,» in a free, asymmetrical composition that is completed by the garden. «The landscaping has a very strong formal *raison d'être*, which was foreseen from the project's beginning.»

The house extends a bold welcome, which engages the spirit of anyone who crosses its threshold: here there is an intimate patio, with a very long swimming pool – so isolated from the ocean that one simply intuits its presence by listening to the sounds of the surf. «This is not the first time that I have kept the the ocean from taking center-stage; I consider curiosity and mystery to be necessary ingredients in this life. And the coastal landscape is so generous, so wide, that if we did not enclose it in a kind of shadow box, a frame of reference, it would vanish, escape, get lost. Or it might become overwhelming: controlling it is our architectural task.»

At the end of the patio rises a rectangular mass of stone, reaching towards the sky. Everything about it speaks of gracefulness, and everything around it: the doorway, the palm trees on both sides, the metal lanterns.

Its presence alone is imposing, its power displayed when the two heavy wooden doors are opened and the ocean appears within their sturdy frame. There at the end of the property, before it reaches the water, is a triangular swimming pool – shaped like the prow of a ship – that seems about to launch itself in the bay.

This is the central motif of the structure; recalling the old hacienda from Don's dream, but speaking in its own language. The owners are sensitive enough to find a spiritual voyage within this economy of forms.

Along the interior patio, with its extended swimming pool, the library rises unhesitatingly, in the shape of a cross: with two entrances to the garden, two windows, and a central area topped

*With neither a competitive spirit
nor an imitation of nature's riches, this house
is simply energized by its surroundings.*





by a pyramid. The hallway is an open palapa, its wicker window treatments tied with rawhide. A cleanly-designed staircase leads to the second floor bedroom. It is evident that the owners know and collect art, and such details are simply more clues to their character.

Healthy tension

Within the main room, volume is accompanied by simplicity. This area has two moods, one introverted and the other directed outdoors. «It had to convey an important sense of undivided space, but on the other hand, the demands of life in this climate required that it be partly covered, and partly exposed.»

They chose an invisible material, the airiest possible. «The glass works well, but it had to be structured in a special way.» They opted for a web of stainless steel and tension cables to hold the twenty-four pieces in place, «always with the goal of its being barely visible, but also having the responsibility of supporting this transparent membrane.»

The ceiling is profusely decorated with uninterrupted geometric design, «the glass appearing as if by accident, with its shapes and tones lending a sense of playfulness.» The stone staircase – together with the doorway, palm trees and lanterns – is a tribute to verticality, an invitation to gaze upward and allow one's spirit to be enraptured by color.

Decoration

«Architecture consists in spaces, and decorating them is what aligns them with man; it makes aesthetic enjoyment possible.» Thus the architect felt it necessary to participate in the design of the furnishings, and the forms he developed were also geometric: pure, proportioned, vintage. He had them made in mezquite, and they pay homage to the wood itself; conceptual inertia which transcends the inner environment and restrains decorative objects.

«Man is the great protagonist, and this is how we ought to view architecture; to such a degree that the décor must speak of meeting the residents' every need.» This house has no empty spots whatsoever, and lacks nothing.

«Quality of life does need to be accompanied by many things; we each carry an experience of vitality within us, in our spirit and intellect.» As Juan Manuel understands architecture, «The fewer the distractions, the greater possibility there is of experiencing that life force.»

*The language of the home's interior
is simple and discriminating,
and serves a particular function – nothing more.*

