

Hercules^ casa

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Issue II

Meanwhile
back at home



My first religious experience of architecture was at the Mies van der Rohe designed Neue Nationalgalerie in Berlin. The orderliness of such vast enclosed space was enthralling. If working within a set of limitations makes the end result stronger, then air itself was made more substantial by being enclosed this way. I was in college at the time. Now that I've lived a little, and the old rules have become looser guidelines, now that I can allow for some coloring outside the rigidity of it all, Paul Rudolph has emerged in my imagination as the greater genius. Having studied under Walter Gropius at Harvard, he was well equipped to follow in the grand International tradition. He became engrossed with the play of light and scale, how buildings related to humans both inside and out. He was concerned with the soul of a building.

Rudolph's first religious experience of architecture took place at the age of 22 when he visited Frank Lloyd Wright's Rosenbaum Residence, one of his Usonian houses, in Florence, Alabama, in 1940. Wright employed his signature method of compression and expansion in the home. You first enter into a small brick hallway from the low cantilevered carport, and then into a generously proportioned living room—a room which Rudolph described as, "one of the most sublime spaces in American architecture." There were many similarities between the two architects, and you can see the influence of the Rosenbaum project even in the Modulightor townhouse. There is nary a flat wall to be found, both men having used light to suggest the continuation of space to an efficient yet graceful end.



The Rudolph Affair

Wright and Rudolph were cosmically linked by more than mere influence, each having been maligned at some point in their careers by the architectural establishment of the day. It seems a shame that the peer review structure of academia, necessary in the sciences and humanities, should apply to aesthetics. The Yale Art & Architecture building, which had once put Rudolph on the map, was later shunned during the height of Postmodernism as too brutal. Brutalism has had something of a comeback lately, both Rudolph's Yale building and its sister across campus, the Yale Art Gallery building by Louis Kahn (completed in 1953) have been heavily instagrammed as of late. Perhaps we are living in a post trend world, where people are concerned with projecting their individuality outwardly, but seeking collectivity in how they share it. One thing doesn't have to be out of style for another to come into style. If the internet has been good for anything, it is the democratization of taste.





Rudolph and Wagner, deep appreciators in their own right, were avid world travelers, and spent years collecting objects that still adorn the East 58th Street townhouse. Among the collections you may encounter while there: ribbed wooden washboards from Japan (a gift to Rudolph from a gracious host), wallet sized wire bicycles on three custom lit shelves in the elevator—purchased all at once from a vendor in England who then happily packed up his stand for the day, a Picasso maquette for a concrete sculpture that was never built, and another maquette attributed to Picasso, miniature Egyptian antiquities displayed in a horizontal case which had originally sat above the mantle in the Beekman Place living room, a wall of neatly lined Mexican milagros on plexiglass panels, two opposing groupings of Moroccan textile combs, an assortment of farm tools resembling a frenzy of sharks and a similarly industrial grouping of antique apple peelers. The legacy of Paul Rudolph, at the very least, is one of wonder.

Stylist David de Quevedo
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