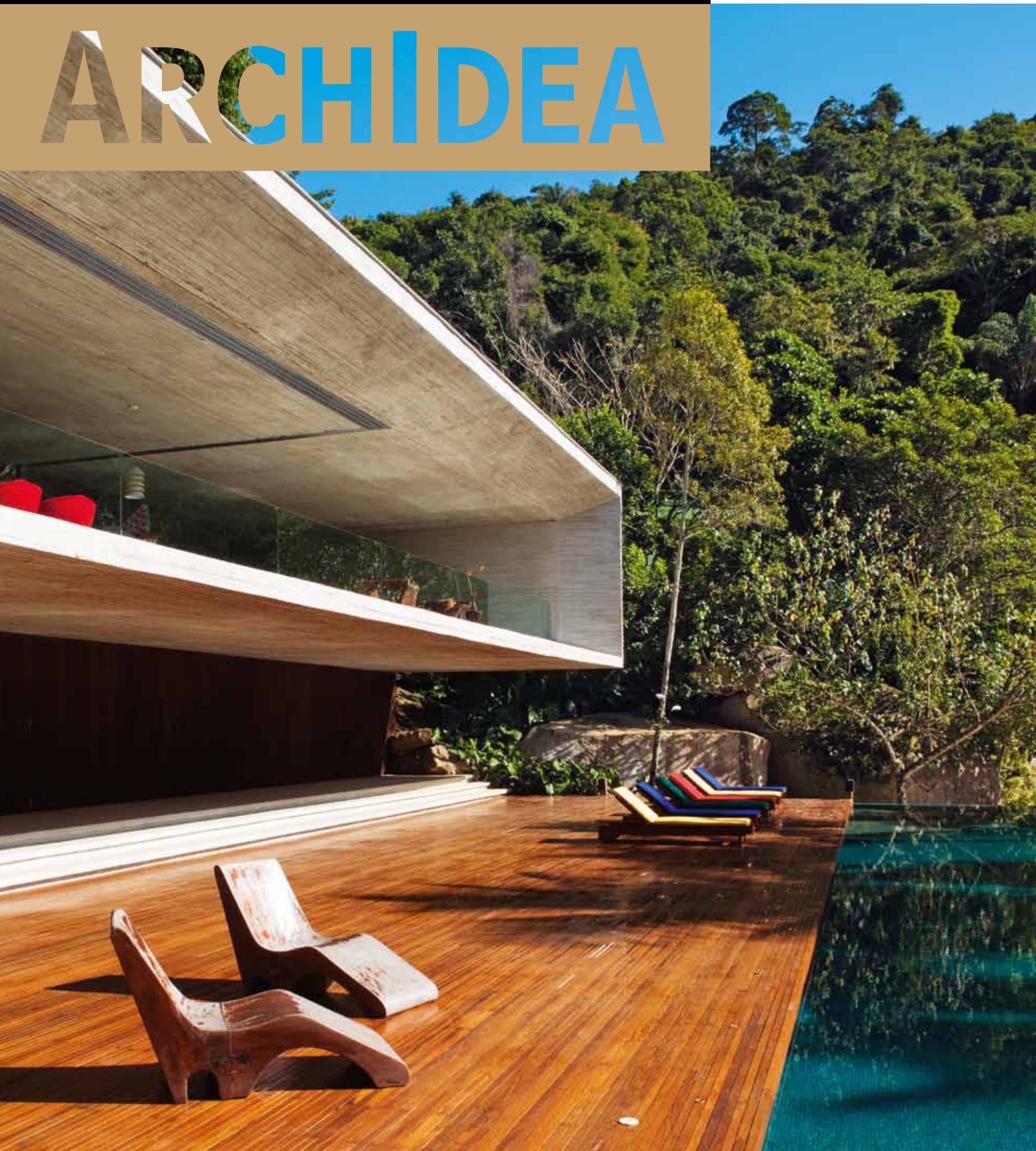


INTERVIEWS  
KOGAN / ARAVENA / IGLESIA  
#47 / 2013

SOUTH AMERICA EDITION

# ARCHIDEA



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The architectural approach of one of the leading architects of Brazil, Marcio Kogan, shows some intriguing contradictions. He pushes the design of a house to the limit, but at the same time he advocates simple solutions that are sustainable.



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For his social housing projects, the Chilean architect Alejandro Aravena has redefined the notion of quality as a capacity to increase in value over time. "I want to reduce design to its bare bones, to what cannot be further deconstructed."



## 16-21 INTERVIEW RAFAEL IGLESIA

"I work with verbs instead of objects." The Argentinian architect Rafael Iglesia is passionate about architecture, but entirely on his own terms, breaking with standard concepts and conventions. "I continually question everything, even the most widely held truths of architecture."



## 22-35 PROJECTS

The interiors of several projects involving the use of floors and furniture surfacing from Forbo Flooring are included as a form of inspiration. The projects are located in various parts of the world and show the many possibilities provided by Forbo's products.





MARCIO KOGAN:

**'IN  
BRAZIL  
WE LIKE  
TO DO  
THINGS  
THE EASY  
WAY'**

Photo: Romulo Fialdini

The architectural approach of one of the leading architects of Brazil, Marcio Kogan, shows some intriguing contradictions. He pushes the design of a house to the limit, but at the same time he advocates simple solutions that are sustainable. “In Brazil we like to do things the easy way.”



Paraty House, Paraty, Brazil (2009)  
Co-architect Suzana Glogowski, interior design Diana Radomysler  
Photo: Nelson Kon

The architecture of the Brazilian architect Marcio Kogan of Studio MK27 (São Paulo) comes close to perfection. The overall design is of a rare purity and is detailed with the utmost precision. It is clearly the work of an architect who has architecture in every bone, in every cell, of his body. So it is surprising to learn that Kogan started his career as a movie director. “My father was an architect, a modernist. He used to take me to building sites and that was when I became an architect. But by the time I was 16, I was cutting class to watch films. I saw *The Silence* by Ingmar Bergman and it set me on a different path altogether. Seeing the film was an epiphany: I had a new goal in life and it was film, not architecture. It wasn’t until many years later, when I had already been working for some time as a film director, that I returned to architecture. That was mainly because it was very difficult to finance movies in Brazil at the time.”

- Let’s start with the design process. How do you interact with the client?

“Although things have started to change and we have been getting larger commissions lately, our main output has been houses. Not all architects like designing houses.

You have a very close relation to the client, and you often have to be a bit of a psychologist. We have had plenty of psychodramas play out here, for example with divorces and new marriages. It’s not easy to deal with these situations, but I like it a lot. Some of my best friends are former clients. Clients tend to be addicted to the solutions they already have in their houses. We listen to them, but we try to distinguish between attachment to an existing situation and what they really want deep down. At the start of my career, I couldn’t stand it when a client insisted on having changes made to a design I already believed in. Later on, I realized that there is not just one but a dozen solutions to a problem. If the client doesn’t like my proposal for the design, I don’t keep pushing my idea, but I look for an alternative approach that we both like.”

- Looking at your houses, though, they seem closely related and form a very coherent oeuvre. So how do the wishes of the client find their way into the design?

“We have our reputation and we have our portfolio, so when a client comes to our office he knows what to expect.



Punta House, Punta Del Este, Uruguay (2011)  
Co-architect Suzana Glogowski, interior design Diana Radomysler  
Photos: Reinaldo Cóser

But it is very hard to balance the wishes of the client with the quality of the architecture. We put a lot of effort into that in this practice. The biggest compliment we can receive is for the client to tell us he is pleased with the result. Myself, I am never really satisfied with it. I never arrive to see a house we have just completed and tell myself it's fantastic. All I can see are things we could have done better – the proportions, the general feeling, the details. Sometimes you start building a project but by the time it is finished, four or five years later, your outlook has changed and you have different interests or opinions.”

- Your architecture is firmly rooted in modernism. In fact, we could classify it as part of a wider Brazilian Modernism. Why are Brazilian architects so keen on the modernist style?

“Brazilian Modernism originated in the late nineteen-thirties. Le Corbusier visited Rio de Janeiro and left sketches for a new Ministry of Culture and Health. A group of young architects designed the building using his sketches, but they transformed it into something more Brazilian, more sensual. The outcome was almost magic: that one project sparked off the birth of Brazilian



Studio SC, São Paulo, Brazil (2011)  
Co-architect Suzana Glogowski, interior design Diana Radomysler  
Photos: Nelson Kon

Modernism. It wasn't exactly the same as International Modernism, among other reasons because of the climate. Our tropical conditions made different solutions possible. And we continue to develop this style, now of course with a contemporary look and using new technology."

- For fifty years, Oscar Niemeyer was the hero of Brazilian architecture. How do his younger colleagues deal with such an eminent predecessor?

"Although he was widely admired, his dominance was not easy for us. Most of the prestigious public commissions went to him in the last few decades. Paulo Mendes da Rocha and Lina Bo Bardi received a few but Niemeyer had the lion's share. Cities were keen to have his designs because of the strong symbolic value of his work. His architecture made Brazilians proud of themselves – of their identity, their economy, their creativity and their modernity. During the military dictatorship, many architects became involved in politics and the struggle for liberation. The consequence was a lost generation of architects. This situation has changed somewhat in recent years because of Brazil's booming economy. A lot of very good architects are now emerging, especially in São Paulo."

- What did Niemeyer mean to you?

"As a student I hated him – not just his monopoly but his work. This was in the late seventies. I had a different outlook on architecture. It was not only his work that I disliked, but the architecture that was being taught at the university. The same designs of the forties and fifties were



being reproduced over and over again. It was a purist approach which strictly followed the rules. But I wanted to do new things, new architecture. I felt I was ready to take the next step in the development of Brazilian Modernism. I consider my work to be more international, more open to foreign influences."

- One of the main differences between you and Niemeyer is the way you use materials. How did this fascination with building materials start?

"The first projects of this office were white, ascetic boxes. About fifteen years ago, a client asked me to design a house that was not a white box. That client changed my architecture. I love that kind of input, when someone pushes you to another place in life. I liked the result because the house had a nice, warm ambiance. That was



## CASA TOBLERONE, SÃO PAULO

The majority of Marcio Kogan's work with Studio MK27 consists of private villas. This is not unusual in Brazil and other larger South American countries. On a continent where income disparities are huge and where the state generally has little money to spare for architecture, distinctive designs are made largely for the financial elite. Architecture may play some part as a status symbol, but flaunting one's wealth does not seem to be a significant factor in South America. It is, rather, that the rich wish to surround themselves with comfort and beauty. Poverty is still widespread despite the economic resurgence, so the better-off are inclined to keep a low profile and create their longed-for Garden of Eden behind concrete perimeter walls. This is the irony of wealth in present-day South America: those who have it must hide from the outside world. But hiding it is something one can deal with in a grand way, for example by asking Kogan to design a house. Legible in every one of Kogan's villas is how comfort and beauty can be expressed in architecture. Their designs are all mutually related and they all declare the same interests and strategies, the same perfectionism and the same meticulous detailing. But Kogan applies these qualities differently every time according to the particularities of the site and the client's wishes and cultural background. Characteristically, he combines a near-obsessive use of building materials with the greatest possible abstraction of the planar forms that delimit the space. Whether wood, concrete or Corten steel, the deployment and treatment of the material is taken to such a generous extreme that

it has an abstract quality and hence makes an immaterial impression. The result seems unreal, capable of existing only in a dream or in a film. It is this ambivalence that makes his villas so exciting. They have that abstract quality which the early modernists aspired to, but they achieve it, not so much through the celebrated white plane, as through the specific material and the refinement of its utilization.

The starting point for each of Kogan's designs is a simple structure. This is clearly so in the case of Casa Toblerone, a villa in São Paulo built for a Brazilian businessman and his Japanese wife. It has a structure which is not only simple but creates freedom: two rows of steel columns support two horizontal concrete slabs. The social, ground-floor section of the house is surrounded by glass. The floor continues under the glass, visually uniting the interior with the surrounding garden and thus maximizing the sense of living space within the protection of the concrete outer wall. The kitchen, laundry room and pantry are contained together in a volume which looks like a wooden box slid into the interior. Greater privacy was required for the bedrooms and bathrooms on the first floor, and these are therefore screened behind panels of wooden strips. The windows behind them can be opened to thoroughly ventilate the whole floor, and the panels can be folded back to provide an even higher level of ventilation – not unimportant in a city with a humid subtropical climate. A palm tree rises through a hole in the main concrete slab of the first floor. It is as though everything in this house revolves around a dialogue with nature.



Casa Toblerone, São Paulo, Brazil (2011)  
Co-architect & interior design:  
Diana Radomysler  
Photos: Nelson Kon

where my passion for materials started; I found I loved the texture and the tactility. Besides, building white houses in São Paulo is not really a good idea because they stay white for no more than about two years due to the air pollution.'

- It is striking how you treat materials like concrete, stone and wood. You manipulate them so that they seem less real, less material. What are you aiming at with this?

"We started by treating concrete in a new way. Concrete was the expressive material of choice in Brazilian architecture until the nineteen seventies. Then it became unfashionable and the knowledge of using it expressively went into a decline. But there is more to concrete than its structural qualities. So we started experimenting with its expressive possibilities, for example in the Paraty House where the wood grain of the shuttering remains visible in the surface of the concrete so it looks a bit like wood itself. We also try to give brickwork and stone walls a subtle treatment that gives them a lighter appearance. I always strive for a soft balance in my designs, a subtle equilibrium between lightness and materiality."

- Your walls often look more like screens than like walls. Is this an influence from your experience with making movies?

"I learned a lot about architecture from making movies. One thing was the importance of light and the effect it has on people's mood. Another was the part played by emotion in making an interesting interior, with surprises and different sensations in different parts of the house. The horizontality of my designs is also an inspiration from film making. It has to do with the width of the screen: the first question a cameraman asks the director is what framing he has in mind. I try to create a view that is as wide as possible. Horizontality gives you the feeling of openness, of a larger

space. A horizontal house is open to its surroundings. That matters a lot in São Paulo because the property is usually enclosed by tall concrete walls for security reasons. To provide a sense of space, I try to create the maximum openness to the garden."

- This horizontality, combined with the prominent use of subtly manipulated materials, produces a curious ambivalence in your houses. On one hand they have an explicit materiality, but on the other they have an ethereal emptiness. What are you trying to achieve?

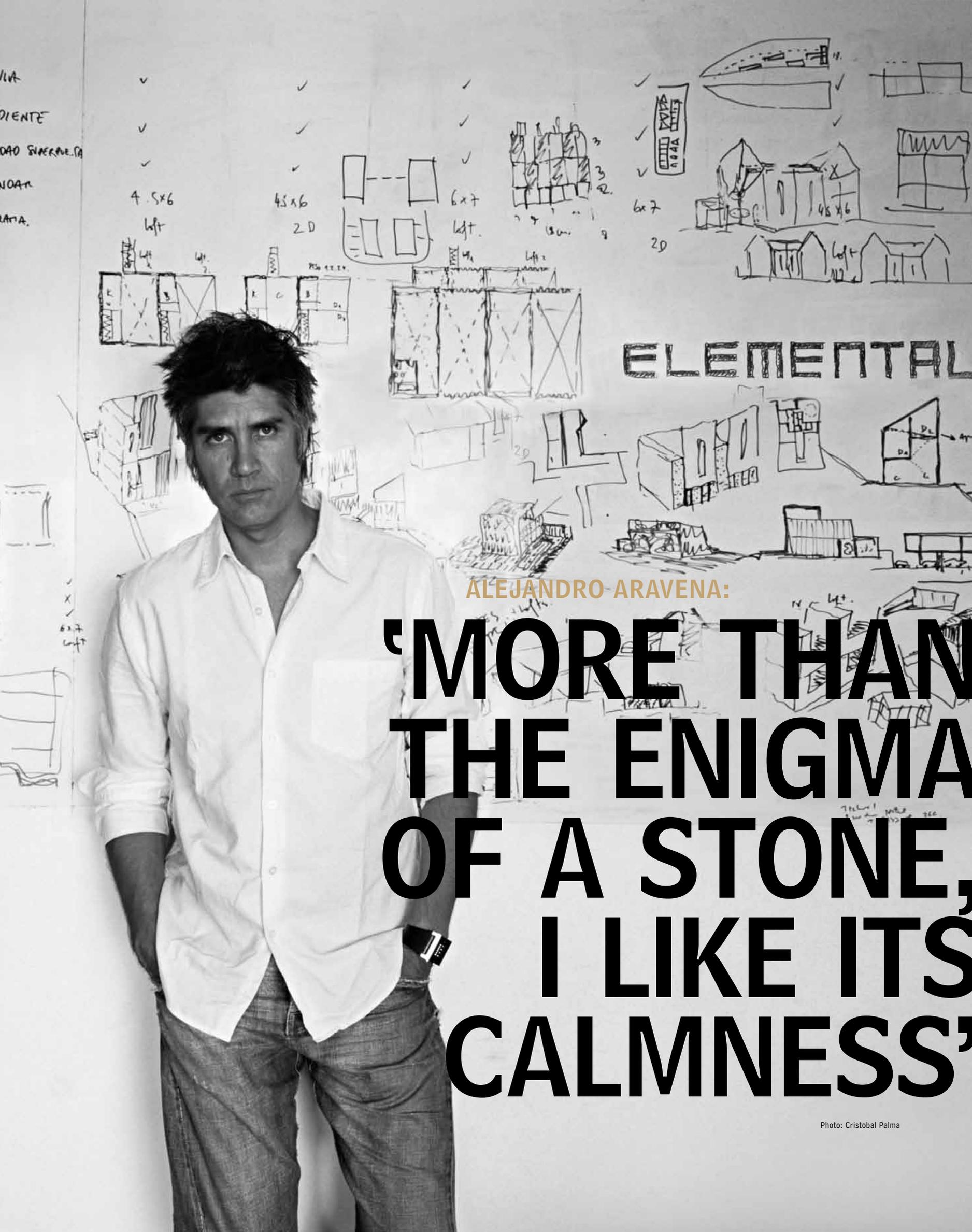
"I am keen to create a new architecture, but I don't want to design houses that look too much like museums. Still, I like to push the design of a house to the limit so it has something in common with museum architecture. But I require it have to have warmth and intimacy too, so that it works well as a container for domestic life. I try to consider what effect my architecture will have on the way people live. So some extent I think of a house design in the same way as a screenplay. I try to figure out how people will move from one space to another, as a montage of film scenes."

- Niemeyer was devoted to curved form in his architecture. You never use curves, only straight lines and rectangles. Why is this?

"It's because of the Brazilian situation. We have to do architecture on a tight budget, so we avoid complicated structures. You could say that here in Brazil we prefer doing things the easy way. The Toblerone House is a good example. I tried to achieve the simplest structure imaginable, perfection in simplicity. I think this is the message that emerges from the architecture of Brazil, Chile and Portugal, three countries that are closely related architecturally. Simplicity is best: simple solutions that are sustainable. You won't find contorted architecture in these countries because they give the priority to honest, uncomplicated design."



V4 House, São Paulo, Brazil (2011)  
Photo: Nelson Kon



ELEMENTAL

ALEJANDRO ARAVENA:

**'MORE THAN  
THE ENIGMA  
OF A STONE,  
I LIKE ITS  
CALMNESS'**



Monterrey Housing, Santa Catarina, Mexico (2010)

Photo: Ramiro Ramirez

**For his social housing projects, the Chilean architect Alejandro Aravena has redefined the notion of quality as a capacity to increase in value over time. “I want to reduce design to its bare bones, to what cannot be further deconstructed.”**

It seems like an oxymoron: to being a star architect by not being it. To travel all over the world, give lectures, exhibit and do projects and proposals, but in a field that rarely generates heroes – social housing. But the Chilean architect Alejandro Aravena has managed to achieve this status in the wake of Elemental, the Chilean organization he founded in to design and produce housing for the poor. His simple but visionary idea was to build “half a good house” instead of a small, single dwelling. His recently published book *Elemental, Incremental Housing and Participatory Design Manual*, gives an exhaustive account of the philosophy, principles and projects of Elemental, as well as the lessons to be learned from the projects that has been executed in Chile and abroad.

His strong commitment to social housing is unusual, he admits. “Architects consider it uncool. The architectural schools portray social housing design as something to be done by those who are not successful. Government and society implicitly send out the same message. Nobody wants to pay for the time that social housing needs to be designed. The problem with social housing is not so much the lack of money for each living unit, but the lack of money to pay for the professional hours required to tackle the most difficult and challenging questions. Therefore a change of the architectural paradigm is needed. If you think of architecture solely as an art, social housing does not normally qualify. But if you consider architecture as the strategic use of form to synthesize the complexity of the

built environment, then social housing is the most desirable ultimate challenge.”

- How did you come up with the basic idea of Elemental, to build “half a house” for the poor?

“It’s important to note that the proposal is to build half of a *good* house instead of a small mediocre one, not simply half of a house. The idea started with accepting Chilean policy as it was; which meant a subsidy of 7,500 dollars with which we were expected to buy the land, provide infrastructure and build the housing units. The best we could do was provide a space of about forty square meters. We had to provide a bathroom, a kitchen, a living room, a dining room and one bedroom in those forty square meters. At first we thought it would be impossible to produce anything good in this way. The market approach to providing houses for such a low budget is to reduce and displace the existing model. Starting from a standard middle-income house, they shrink the design to forty square meters, and then build it on the city margins where land costs next to nothing. That is pretty much the case all over Latin America; the cities build huge areas of poverty-belt housing far away from jobs and other opportunities.”

“The first shift in our thinking was, instead of considering forty square meters as a small house, why don’t we think of forty square meters as the first half of a good house? The next question was which half should we build. We decided that we ought to use the public funding to provide everything that families could not do on their own. To add on



Constitución Housing, Constitución, Chile (under construction)  
Photo: Elemental



Photo: Cristobal Palma



Iquique Housing, Iquique, Chile (2004)  
Photo: Tadeuz Jalocha

the second half, we counted on the resourcefulness of the families to build it for themselves, which is common practice in Latin America. Secondly, it's normal when you buy a house to expect its value to grow over time. But that does not apply to social housing. Because the house is generally situated on the city outskirts, it is allowed to deteriorate and its market value inevitably declines. This is a result of the Chilean government approach to social housing: once you get a subsidy to buy a house, you become the owner of it. It would be much better if this transfer of public funds to private individuals were to go into an asset which rises in value, so that social housing becomes an investment instead of a public expense. We did research on how to achieve this increase of value. We realized that quality was not equivalent to a bigger house. Instead, we redefined housing quality as the capacity to gain in value over time."

- What is the architect's role in bringing about these changes?

"These changes can be achieved only through design. The architect's contribution may be summed up as designing dense, low rise projects without overcrowding and with a possibility for extension. The housing has to be low rise in to avoid high maintenance costs; and it has to be dense, in order to build it feasibly on expensive but well located land. The task is complex because you have to speak the language of economics, of finance, of policy and even of the social conditions. In that equation, the social aspect is crucial. Half of our project programme is not going built by us but by the house occupiers. So we had better engage with the families, to talk with them and to agree how to split tasks – who's going to do what. Amid that complexity, I guess architecture can have a big say. Architecture is capable of synthesizing complexity without reducing it. It is also able to organize information, so that you can move towards a solution and not just make a diagnosis. The end result has to be that good enough that I would like to live in it myself. This is the ultimate criterion for what we do in our office, even more than technical standards or policy indicators."

- Elemental is cooperating with a university and an oil company? Why?

"The biggest problem in social housing is that nobody pays for quality professional time. So in our search for funding we contacted the Chilean Oil Company, which gave us the seed capital to operate until we became self-supporting.



Anacleto Angelini Innovation Center, Santiago, Chile (2012)

Image: Elemental

Gradually, though, it was not just money, because they also helped us to become a professionally operating company. The university allowed us to work on the projects instead of teaching, and facilitated our access to other disciplines such as engineering and public policy. What social housing needs is professional quality, not professional charity.”

There is something of a renaissance in contemporary Chilean architecture of exceptional quality. A lot of good architecture has been published in international architecture magazines in recent years. “There are several reasons for this revival,” Aravena explained. “In the eighties, the final decade of the Pinochet regime, it was hard to get hold of information. Magazines were scarce and so were books. Despite itself, the period of dictatorship had a few advantages, among which was that we were protected from postmodernism. I remember studying Van der Laan, Souto de Moura and Siza through the few books the professors were able to bring to the classes. Instead of being bombarded with the latest postmodern bullshit, we learned of a relatively timeless architectural idiom as something to be appreciated. There was also economic stability, which enabled young architects to get commissions, including for small private houses. I think that Universidad Católica played a crucial role too. Everybody was a profes-

sor or a student there at some time: Fernando Perez, Teo Fernandez, Rodrigo Perez de Arce, Izquierdo and Lehmann were professors, and Radic, Puga, Klotz, Irarrazaval and Acuña were among the students. This created a very stimulating and appropriate environment for us.”

- How would you describe what is typical Chilean about this architecture? Is there a Chilean aesthetic or a distinct Chilean attitude to architecture?

“What is typical is a balance between austerity and sophistication. The intellectual education was strong at the Universidad Católica, but there was also a healthy pragmatism. We were expected to make work that speaks for itself. It did not have to be interesting, but good and precise. There was also a scarcity of resources, even for those working for wealthy clients. That was another filter against arbitrariness. I am very proud of the good things that are happening in Chilean architecture. It produces a feeling of rising to the challenges, and of not being alone in striving for high quality designs.”

- You yourself are receiving more and more commissions outside the field of social housing. Are these a sequel to the Elemental projects in any way?

“I would say it’s the other way around. In 2000, when I was invited to teach at Harvard, I had no idea what a subsidy was. Prior to that I had only made institutional projects,



St Edwards University, Texas,  
USA (2008)

Photo: Michael Hsu

mainly educational buildings for the Universidad Catolica. That was when we came up with the idea of doing social housing, but we never stopped designing other kinds of buildings. We train our design muscles on projects like the building we are currently designing for Novartis. That puts us in good shape for participating in the demanding sport called social housing. A transfer takes place of our form-making skills to a specific field, the one in which design is reduced to its bare essentials, to what cannot be further



Photo: Cristobal Palma

deconstructed. That is what the name Elemental stands for; it is like a chemical element in that it cannot be decomposed. I had the chance to do projects where nothing could be taken out without losing something else. It's a point at which any designer would like to arrive, and we were lucky enough to have been trained in social housing to reach that point. The same attitude of synthesis and irreducibility applies when we are dealing with high budget and highly complex projects."

## SAN JOAQUIN TECHNOLOGY CENTRE, SANTIAGO

Alejandro Aravena first gained his reputation through his simple but bold idea of building half-houses for the poor. He rarely speaks about aesthetics, because social engagement and an instrumental attitude towards architecture are his primary motives. This makes it all the more interesting to examine those of his designs which do not fall into the social housing category. They involve more than finding pragmatic solutions to housing shortages, since other architectural concerns such as contextuality, functionality and aesthetics become relevant. In the private sector too, he clearly stands out for the ingenuity and originality of his solutions.

One such architectural invention is the San Joaquin Technology Centre, which Aravena designed several years ago together with Charles Murray, Alfonso Montero and Ricardo Torrejón for the Pontifical Catholic University of Chile in Santiago. The university required a building for everything connected with computers. Besides offices and laboratories, it would mainly provide classrooms where students could work on computers. Aravena and his colleagues wondered what consequences this task would have for the architecture. In the old days, a classroom was a space that was ideally bathed in daylight, but was clearly less functional in today's world: students working at a computer are better served by a building with a not too transparent outer skin.

That the Technological Centre looks like a tower within a tower is no mere architectural frivolity. This seemingly formal solution has a functional origin. A curtain wall of coated, reflective double glass would have been the obvious choice for filtering the fierce sunlight, but that would have been too expensive and too vulgar, and would have made the building dependent on energy-guzzling air condi-

tioning. The architects decided to distribute the functions of the facade over three layers: an outer skin of glass to repel wind and rain, an internal concrete shell to temper the light and provide cooling, and an empty cavity between them. The cavity has an opening at the top through which warm air can escape, providing continuous natural ventilation to the building. The building costs worked out at thirty percent less than the double glass equivalent, and the projected energy consumption of the building was also significantly lower.

The glass shell is wider at the base and tapers upwards, a feature which also contributes to the natural ventilation effect. But this, together with the splitting of the upper part of the tower, is also an aesthetic choice on the part of Aravena and his fellow architects. It disrupts the mass of the volume. The fused towers, stalwart and dynamic, mark the place of the campus in the city.

Equally unmistakable is Aravena's concern for the user. As in his student residences for St. Edward's University in Austin, Texas, the building holds its ground amid the surroundings like a fort, yet is simultaneously generous to the student community that it accommodates. Aravena does not believe in education administered solely through computers. Much discussion took place among architects in the 1990s about the replacement of physical space by virtual space, but people remain physical beings who sometimes wish to look one another in the eye. Aravena and his colleagues therefore aimed to create space for what they term informal education – the conversations that take place between students and with their teachers. To stimulate these interchanges, their design includes wooden slopes, a public bench and a corridor of no less than ten storeys in height.



La Ruta del Peregrino,  
The Crosses Lookout Point,  
Las Cruces, Mexico (2011)  
Photo: Iwan Baan

- In your designs you seem to be intrigued by the building as a monolith, which tries to protect itself and the community it shelters against a hostile environment. How do you look upon your work yourself? Do you have a fascination for a building as a thing that does not express immediately what it is, but tries to stay "alien", to be an enigma?

"I do recognize the monolith part, but not the hostile environment as a generator of form. I am more interested in

timelessness. And in something that is a kind of paradox: designing a thing, not an object. The Argentine architect Rafael Iglesia says that the difference between the two, is that an 'object' has a project, but a 'thing' doesn't. If you find a stone that is of the right size and shape to sit on, it becomes a chair. But it was not designed as such. I would like to achieve that level of naturalness in my designs. I know it's impossible, but still. More than the enigma of a stone, I like its calmness. That is what I am looking after."



The Siamese Towers, San Joaquin  
Technology Centre, Santiago,  
Chile (2005)  
Photo: Cristobal Palma

RAFAEL IGLESIA:

'I DON'T LIKE  
ARCHITECTURE,  
I LIKE DOING  
ARCHITECTURE'

Photo: Gustavo Frittegotto

**“I work with verbs instead of objects.” The Argentinian architect Rafael Iglesia is passionate about architecture, but entirely on his own terms, breaking with standard concepts and conventions. “I continually question everything, even the most widely held truths of architecture.”**



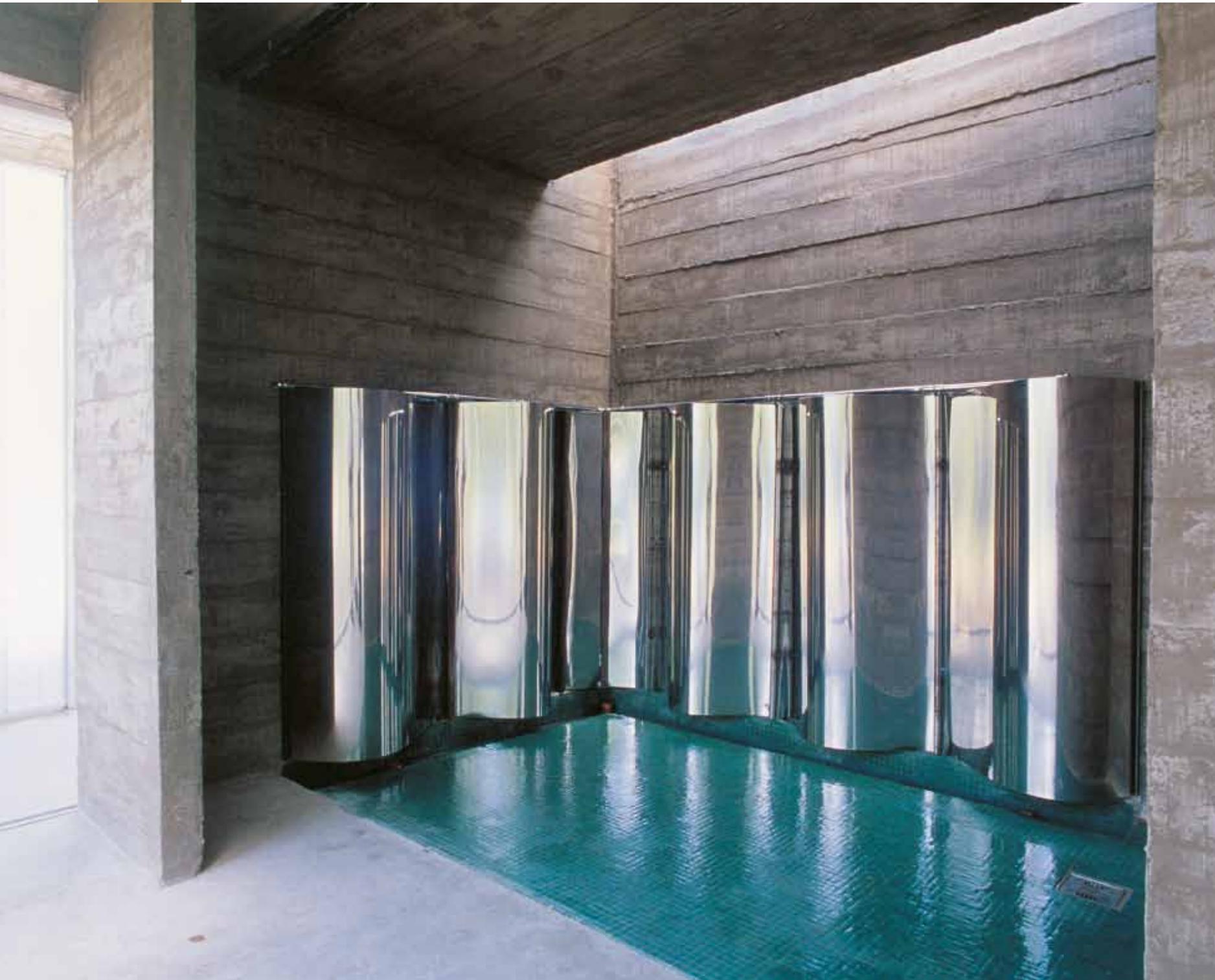
P.R.O.A.R. fertility clinic, Rosario, Argentina

When passing the fertility clinic it is hard to resist a smile. You recognize yourself in the reflecting front, your form bulging and stretching absurdly as you move. The historic building across the street receives the same distorting mirror treatment: it has improbable curvatures, strangely vase-shaped windows and exuberant, surging eaves. It is simple but very effective, and typical of the kind of architectural trick that the Argentinian architect Rafael Iglesia is fond of playing. Sometimes his work comes close to an art installation. In his studio in Rosario – more like a garage than a conventional architecture studio – he explained his interest in mirrors and the various games he plays in his architecture.

“For the fertility clinic I decided to not care too much about the buildings on either side. Instead, I focused on the building opposite, a monumental building with protected status,” he explained. “I made the front wall of

the clinic into a distorting mirror by giving it a cladding of polished steel. A character in a story by Argentinian writer Jorge Luis Borges abominated mirrors because they reproduce mankind. This association between mirrors and reproduction played a part in my ideas for this centre for reproductive health. Not only does it deform the images of those who pass by, like in an amusement park hall of mirrors, but at night the reflection of the nearby street light resembles a sperm cell. The monumental building opposite is remodelled by reflection into something like the architecture of Gaudí. I used a similar distorted reflection in the restrooms in the Park of Independence. The mirrors have an undulating shape, so when a guy takes a pee his apparatus looks bigger than it is.”

- Your work has been published in several international publications. Still, it's surprising that so few



Restrooms and birthdays celebration pavilions at Parque de la Independencia Park, Rosario, Argentina



Argentinian architects have featured in periodicals in recent years compared to architects from Chile, Brazil, Peru, Colombia etc. Why is there so little international exposure of Argentinian work?

"There isn't much to show. Argentina has had some great avantgarde architects like Clorindo Testa and Mario Roberto Alvarez, but not much has happened since then. Not even Testa and Alvarez were particularly well known internationally. Their main projects were in Buenos Aires. Architects based in Buenos Aires nowadays tend to look overseas, especially to Europe; the capital practically denies being part of Latin America. There are better architects in Paraguay and Chile than in Buenos Aires. In Argentina, Rosario is currently the most important city for architecture. Here we are much more Latin-American in outlook. Some architects here are internationally recognized, and talented young architects are emerging. Outside Argentina we get more recognition than inside. I am more often asked to lecture abroad than in Argentina."

- How did Rosario obtain this prominent position? Is it a matter of architectural education?

"It started with the establishment of Grupo R, a movement independent of the official architectural schools. The official school was very old fashioned and self absorbed, and hardly any of its alumni published their work internationally. A few decades ago a group of friends started meeting to discuss architecture and invite architects from abroad. It wasn't because they had a common style or approach – every one had a different role and a different architectural signature. Besides friendship, what they shared was above all a profound interest in architecture."

- But surely they must have something in common architecturally? Don't they at least share something we could call Argentinian?

"The Argentinian people are on the whole more a geographical phenomenon than a historical one. What identifies us is not so much the past as our geographical space, especially the Pampas. We think in terms of distance instead of time. When you ask for directions in many countries people will say it's five minutes away, but here we say it's three blocks."

- Does the vastness of the Pampas influence your architecture?

"I am not affected by the landscape. Landscape is what I *do*. I work conceptually, but I aim to put my ideas into practice. I work with verbs instead of objects. For example I would say 'to sit' rather than speak of 'a chair.' The same applies to my architecture in general. I don't like architecture, I like doing architecture. When I travel, I don't find it necessary to visit all the architectural showpieces. I fall in love with women, not with buildings. Once, in Barcelona, I went to see the Mies van der Rohe pavilion. My main pleasure was to imagine how I would have done the building myself – perhaps with hanging walls, walls that don't touch the floor anywhere. Also I asked myself why the pavilion was not square. After all, a square would be more logical than a rectangle, because it has less perimeter and more surface. I assume Mies considered the rectangle more modern;

a square would have been too classical or too traditional. So his pavilion is wonderful but not logical."

- Isn't it strange to choose architecture as your playground? After all, it has to be used by people, and it is also very costly and always financed by others.

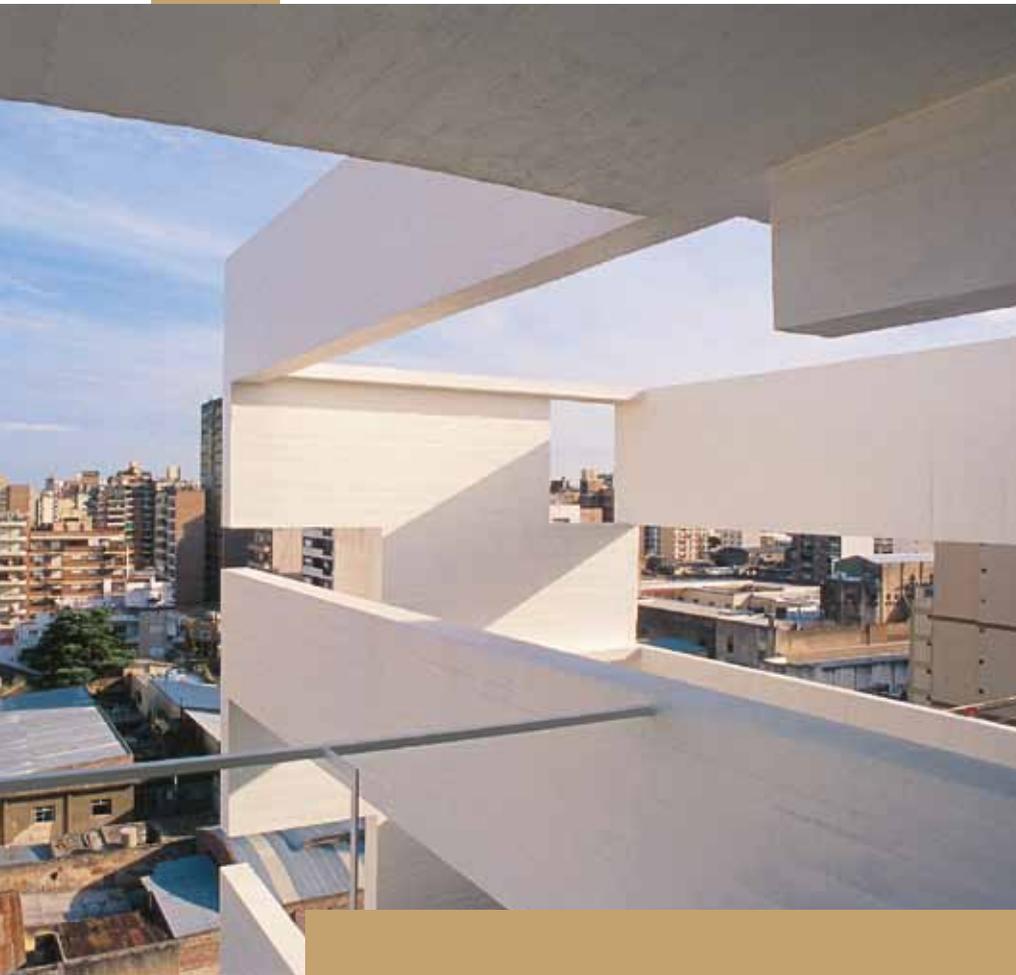
"I like to make victims of course [grins]. But no, it's not just about me, it's not just a game. It's a way of provoking a dialogue with the users. I feel committed to them and I want them to have as much freedom as possible. I try to interpret what they want and translate it into terms of space. At the same time I try to make clear to them what is coming in the future and to incorporate that future in the present. Today furniture has become more important. We tend to spend more time indoors, with the computer, so in my opinion it doesn't make sense to design a typical apartment with a bedroom, a dining table, etc. Children eat alone. Lifestyles are changing. Architecture is always a projection of the future, and architects have to be forecasters."

- So where does the dialogue with the user start? Is it through interaction with architectural attributes like gravity, openness and closedness, and inside and outside?

"Yes, I connect to users, among other things by playing with gravity and showing how it operates. My inventions make people see and feel the importance to architecture of junctions, of light, and of what light does with space. You could say that I transform the building from an object into a verb or activity. I am interested how people inhabit a space. I try to intensify that experience, so I make a space



Casa de la Barranca, Buenos Aires, Argentina (2001)



## ALTAMIRA APARTMENT BUILDING, ROSARIO

In his undemonstrative but ample oeuvre, Rafael Iglesia plays with the elements that make architecture what it is. Each project can be understood as an essay on some aspect of architecture. You might conclude that his work is “architects’ architecture”, but in fact he plays such a fascinating game that anyone can be surprised by, and enjoy, the results. Time and time again, he places question marks over things that we would normally take for granted. His architecture does not push itself forward, and you could pass it by with barely a second glance. But, almost unconsciously, you start wondering what is open and what is closed, where inside starts and outside ends, what is a window, a door or a wall, what is the significance of the choice of building materials, which elements are loadbearing and which are structurally freestanding. Above all, whenever he gets the chance, he shows us how the force of gravity which every building must resist really works. He reverses roles so that the building stands upright owing to, rather than despite of, gravity. It recalls the way a practitioner of a martial art such as judo overcomes his opponent by exploiting the latter’s own power. In this way his architecture automatically raises the basic question of how a building functions as a building.

The Altamira Apartment Building in the city of Rosario, Argentina, illustrates how refined Iglesia has become at this game. Narrow and unassertive, it nestles against a tower block of a kind you see everywhere in Rosario. Modestly, it leaves the dignity of the monumental building on the opposite side unimpaired. If you stop to look, however, you will notice that the building consists of an abstract composition of white rectangles, distantly reminiscent of the Dutch art and architecture movement *De Stijl*. The various rectangles are oriented horizontally and vertically,

leaving openings for terraces and windows. They give an impression of being exempt from the law of gravity. They are not exempt, for course, but the composition of rectangles does not immediately disclose how their weight is supported. It takes a while to figure that out.

Examining the building more closely, you will see that it is bereft of commonplace solutions at all levels of detail. For example, the low wall that separates the sidewalk from the space behind it does not adapt to the slope of the street but instead adheres obstinately to its strictly horizontal rectangularity, floating increasingly above the ground towards one end. Large slabs of rough slate embedded in the gravel remind us of the natural origin of the entrance paving material, while humourously evoking the Spanish expression “a stone on your path” (figuratively, a stumbling block). The lift appears to lack a door; instead a white slab shields it from view. The Altamira Apartment Building is also marked by a complete absence of conventionally-designed doors. Everything is expressed in a vocabulary of only two words: slabs and openings. Another surprise is that on ascending to an upper floor you first go outdoors; access to all the apartments and offices goes via a terrace.

On the upper floors, too, we see rectangular slabs and nothing else. The slabs continually play different roles; they either support one another or do not; they may meet up or keep some distance. The result is not only a liberated space but, deeper down, an essay on the fragility of staying upright – for a building as much as for the human frame. The builders were so impressed by this sense of fragility that, unasked and in complete contradiction to Iglesia’s concept and drawing, they added beams as extra reinforcement for the slabs.

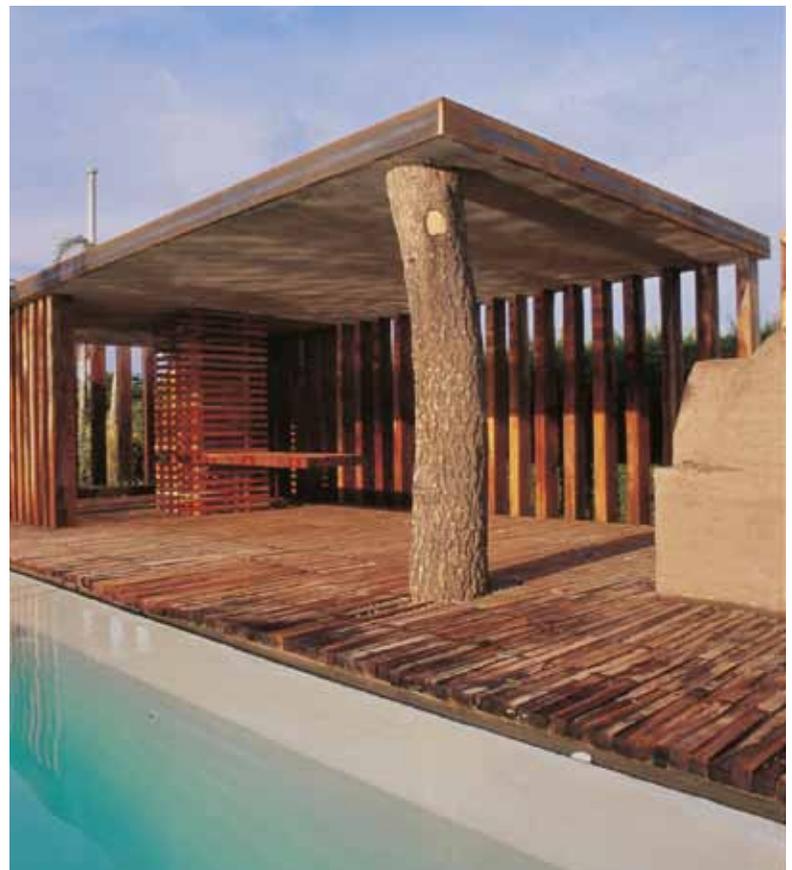


Altamira Apartment Building,  
Rosario, Argentina (2001)

in which actions can develop. I continually question everything, even the most widely held truths of architecture. Architects are presently in a crisis but architecture isn't. Architects are challenged by the fact that we now live in a digital world. Space, or at least what we used to think of as space, has become less relevant. We are now forced to learn something we didn't know before."

Although Iglesia is concerned with the future, the architectural elements with which he plays his games have been part of architecture for millennia. There is nothing pretentious, fashionable or futuristic about his work. On the contrary, it is basic, simple and firmly rooted in modernism. When asked why he concentrates on those architectural elements, he explains that he wants the users to remember and reevaluate them. Gravity, for example, is still essential to architecture even now that we live in a digital era. "Borges was able to combine both past and future in a single sentence or a paragraph. He manipulated time and space in his stories. I try to do the same in my architecture, with the same irony as he used in his writings. Sometimes I think I would have been happier as a writer than as an architect."

"Traditionally architects have used structure to delimit space. A space becomes legible through columns, floors, ceilings and walls. But I question structure in my work, and only a trained eye can see how I play a game with it. In the Altamira apartment building, for instance, the downward forces are labyrinth-like instead of acting in a straight line. This makes you more aware of the importance of gravity and way the building deals with it. I disrupt the conventional concepts of a door, a window or a stair in the same way as Le Corbusier did in Villa Savoye. These concepts are liberated as much as possible, so that architecture is no longer defined by them but by movement – by activity, by coming in and going out. In that respect I feel an affinity with painters such as René Magritte, who loved to invert familiar concepts of depiction, or Jackson Pollock, because he brought gravity into painting. Not everyone will probably notice all the tricks that I put into my architecture, but as in a good novel people will have



Quincho, Rosario, Argentina (2005)

the feeling there is something hidden, something still to be discovered. This applies even to myself, because what I do, or at least part of it, originates from the unconscious. So often I do not discover what I myself have done until after the building is completed."

Photos: Manuel Cucurell and Gustavo Frittegatto

# PROJECTS

Should you like to see more of these Forbo Flooring projects visit our website at [www.archidea.com](http://www.archidea.com)

Colorex Concept 200252



Colorex Concept 200281



Colorex Concept 200272



Marmoleum Dual tile t3075



Marmoleum Dual tile t3120



Marmoleum Dual tile t2621



## HOSPITAL ISRAELITA ALBERT EINSTEIN

Location **São Paulo, Brazil**  
Engineer responsible **Fernanda Mozes**  
General contractor **Afonso França Construtora**  
Installation by **RD PISOS**  
Flooring consultant **Mauro Ortis**  
Flooring material **35000 m<sup>2</sup> Sarlon Tech Sparkling, 3500 m<sup>2</sup> Colorex, Marmoleum tiles**



Photos: Antonio Rocha Matos



# ATÇÃO PRODUÇÕES GRAFICAS Office

Location **São Paulo, Brazil**  
 Architect **Sérgio Camargo**  
 General contractor **Y&R Propaganda LTDA**  
 Installation by **RD Revestimentos**  
 Flooring consultant **Rubens Alvarenga**  
 Flooring material **335 m<sup>2</sup> Flex Design**

Photo: Nelson Kon



Sarlon Tech Sparkling 43220



Sarlon Tech Sparkling 43237



# NEW TECHNIK Electronic industry

Location **Ribeirão Pires, Brazil**  
 Architect & floor designer **César E Ivanda**  
 Installation by **Fourpisos**  
 Flooring consultant **Rubens Alvarenga**  
 Flooring material **570 m<sup>2</sup> Colorex EC, 490 m<sup>2</sup> Sarlon Tech Sparkling, 62 m<sup>2</sup> Marmoleum Real**

Photo: Marcelo Barbosa de Souza



## NEW LIBRARIES IN BAUHAUS DESSAU

Location **Dessau, Germany**  
 Architect **REINER BECKER ARCHITEKTEN BDA, Berlin**  
 Flooring contractor **Landesbetrieb Bau- und Liegenschaftsmanagement Sachsen-Anhalt**  
 Installation by **Schülers Fußbodentechnik**  
 Flooring material **1200 m<sup>2</sup> Walton Cirrus**



Photos: Werner Hühmacher



Walton Cirrus 3352

Reiner Becker, architect of the new Bauhaus Library, described his thinking about the colour scheme. “We aimed to reproduce the functional and atmospheric use of colour in the original Bauhaus. The colours were selected with much thought and limited to a small range. The basic colour which sets the mood of this building is that of the linoleum, which is in a subtle Berlin Red. We chose it because it is a pleasantly warm tint which avoids making the rest of the interior look blue by comparison. It is also

a fresh colour with an elegant, muted effect. As in earlier projects, we consulted Le Corbusier’s colour palette. One of his colours corresponded closely to Berlin Red so it seemed ideal for the Bauhaus Library. The only other bright colour we used was a sparingly used Neon Green, for example in the wall boards and the panels alongside the reading tables. Those were the only colours we needed. All the rest is in tones of grey and white, giving the building dignity and restraint.”



Photo: Holger Talinski



## ARCHIDEA

Allura Abstract A63672



Tessera Alignment 208



Tessera Alignment Highlights 236



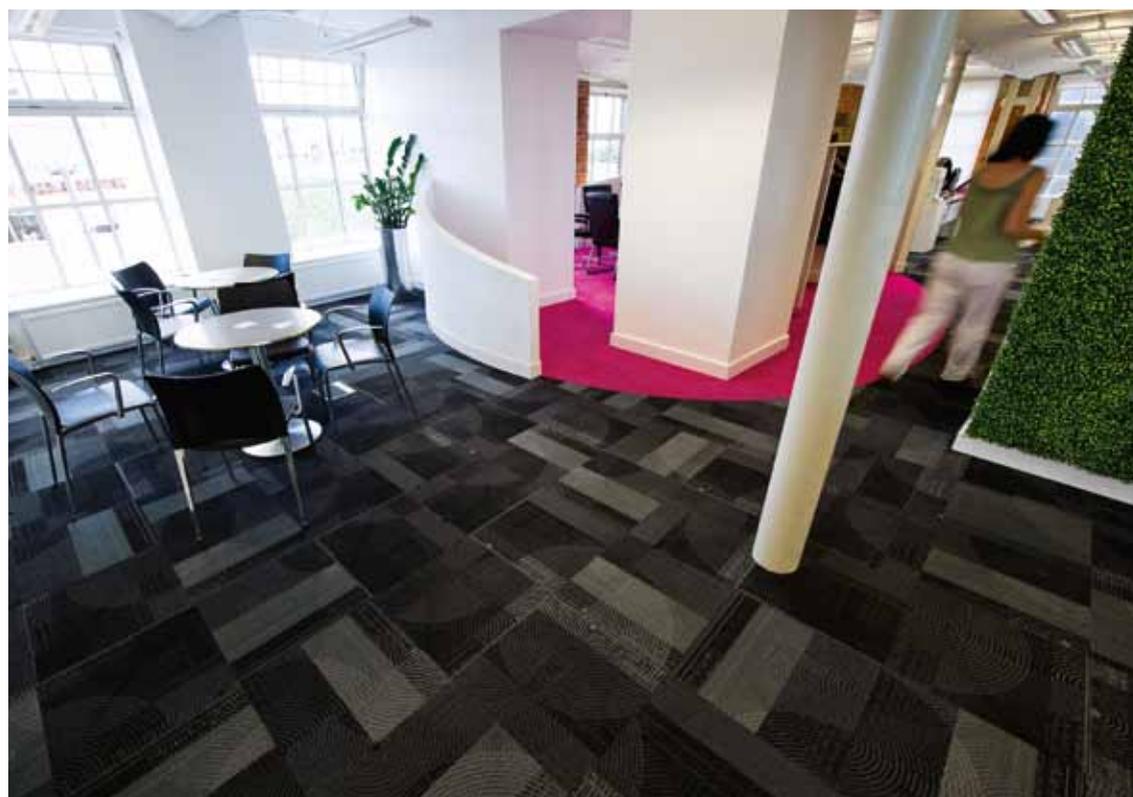
## LEASEPLAN Office

Location **Slough, UK**  
Interior designer **Crisp Designed Ltd.**  
Flooring contractor **Crisp Designed Ltd.**  
Flooring material **3600 m<sup>2</sup> Tessera Alignment, 140 m<sup>2</sup> Tessera Alignment Highlights, 400 m<sup>2</sup> Tessera Helix, 480 m<sup>2</sup> Westbond, 160 m<sup>2</sup> Allura Abstract, 135 m<sup>2</sup> Eternal**



Mark Crick, Design Director of Crisp Designed Ltd.:  
“The overall workplace atmosphere was very important and the brief was to ensure the staff felt good about coming into the building – that they got a buzz in the working environment, which would increase staff interaction and productivity.”

Photo: Newspics



Tessera Circulate 1600



Westbond 9532



## MEDIA.COM Office

Location **Leeds, UK**  
Interior & floor designer **Atul Bansal, Sheila Bird Group**  
Flooring contractor **Fresco Interiors**  
Flooring material **350 m<sup>2</sup> Tessera Circulate, 100 m<sup>2</sup> Westbond**



Photos: Ant Clausen



## SIÈGE SOCIAL FM GLOBAL Office

Location **Paris La Défense 92, France**  
 Interior architect **Cabinet Tetris**  
 Building contractor **FM Global**  
 Flooring contractor **LMC 93**  
 Flooring material **2500 m<sup>2</sup> Tessera Alignment and Tessera Alignment Highlights**

Photos: Alexis Paoli



Tessera Alignment 208



Tessera Alignment 231



Tessera Alignment 233



Tessera Alignment 234



**ARCHIDEA**

Flotex tile Silica 333044



Flotex tile Seoul 375073



Flotex tile Seoul 375052



Flotex tile Palma 380074



Flotex tile Penang 382114



## PITT MEADOWS PUBLIC LIBRARY

Location **City of Pitt Meadows, BC, Canada**

Architect **TRB Architecture + Interior Design**

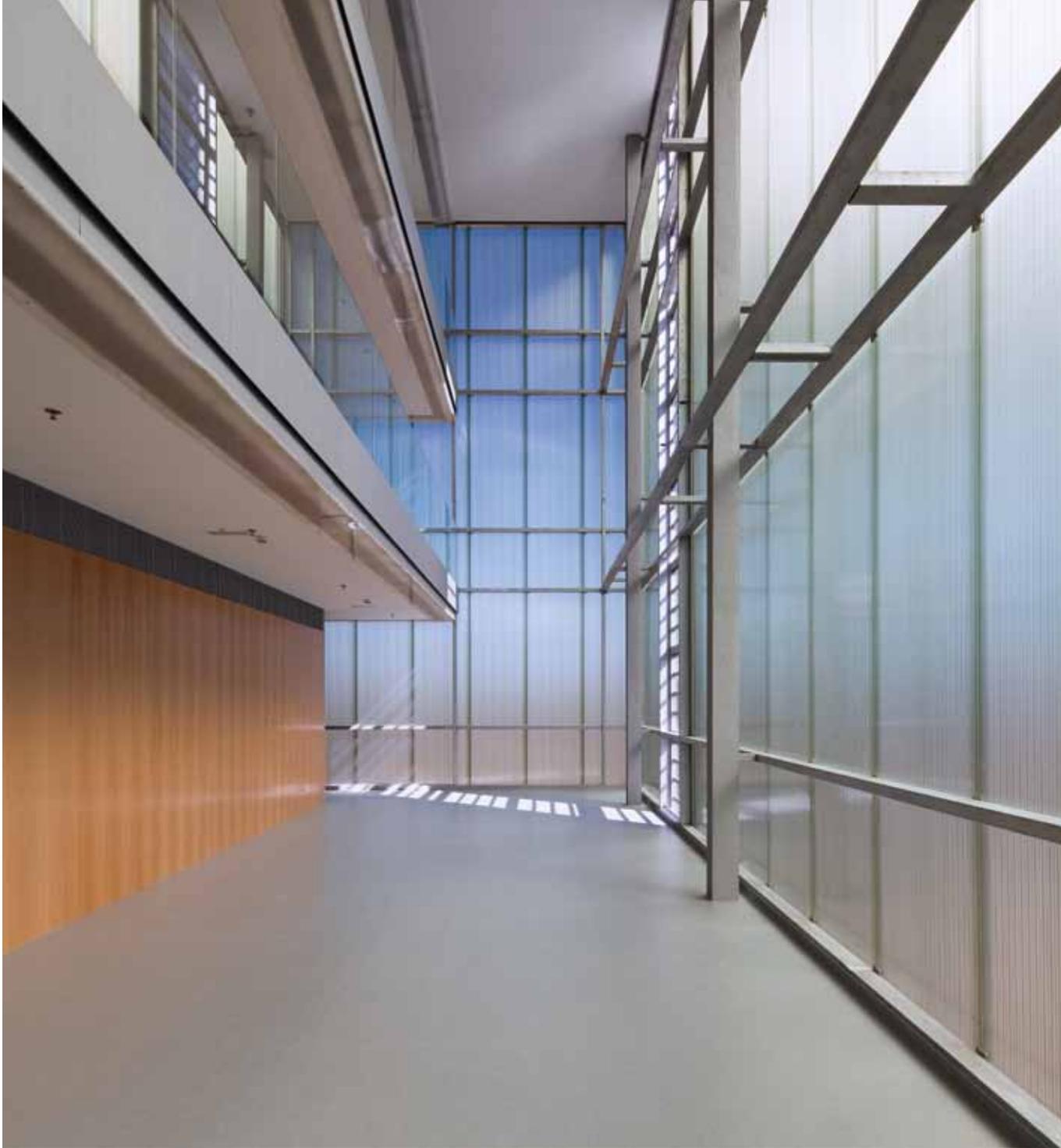
General contractor **CDC Construction Ltd.**

Flooring contractor & installation **DL Watts Flooring Ltd.**

Flooring material **740 m<sup>2</sup> Flotex tiles**

Photos: Michael Elkan Photography





Sarlon Tech Sparkling 43222

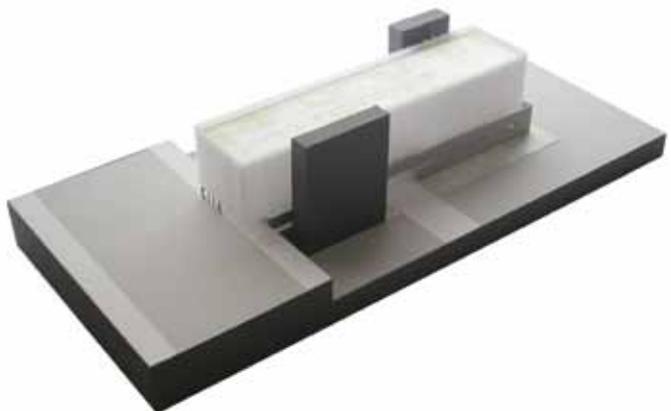


# CAMPUS MIGUEL DELIBES

Location **Valladolid, Spain**  
Architect **Rodrigo Almonacid Canseco**  
General contractor **Dragados**  
Flooring consultant **Plásticos y techos**  
Flooring material **3000 m<sup>2</sup> Sarlon Tech Sparkling**



Photos: Lluís Casals/Rodrigo Almonacid





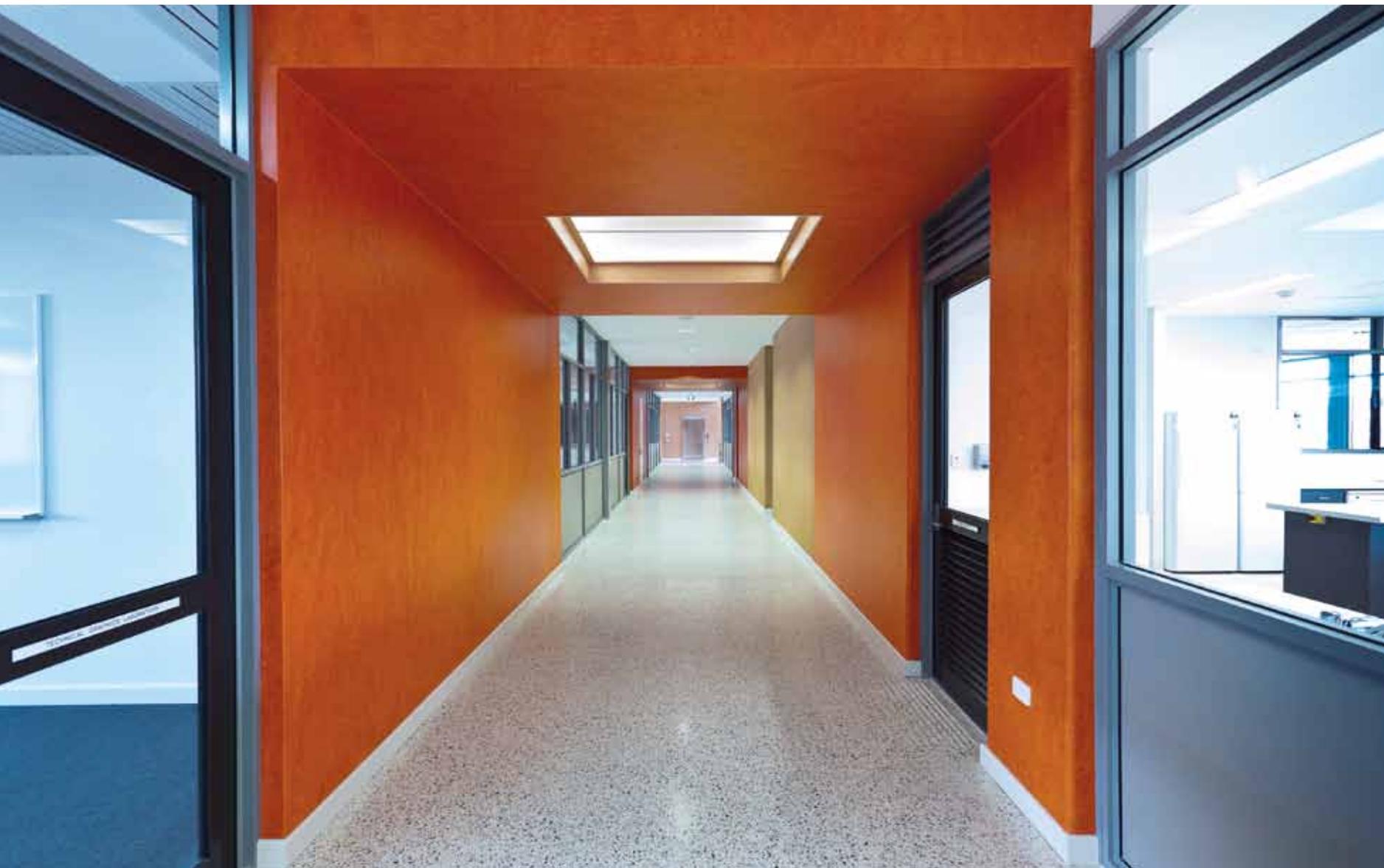
## ASHDALE SCHOOL

Location **Darch, Australia**  
Architect **Donaldson + Warn**  
Building contractor **EMCO**  
Flooring contractor & installation **Floorwise**  
Flooring material **150 m<sup>2</sup> Marmoleum Real used for walls and ceiling**

Photos: Con - Shutterworks  
Photography



Marmoleum Real 3126





## BILFEN KURTKÖY PRIMARY SCHOOL

Location	Istanbul, Turkey
Architect & floor designer	Nermin Özkök
General contractor	Bilfen Eğitim Kurumları A.Ş.
Commissioned by	Füsun Razak
Flooring contractor & installation	Anil Zemin Market San. Ve tic. LTD. Şti.
Flooring material	552 m <sup>2</sup> Marmoleum Sport, 1579 m <sup>2</sup> Marmoleum Real, 1556 m <sup>2</sup> Marmoleum Fresco, 398 m <sup>2</sup> Artoleum Striato, 71 m <sup>2</sup> Marmoleum Ohmex, 146 m <sup>2</sup> Marmoleum Decibel, 236 m <sup>2</sup> Complete Step, 460 m <sup>2</sup> Surestep Star, 354 m <sup>2</sup> Flotex Classic

Photos: Ziya Sandıkçıoğlu



Marmoleum Real 2795



Marmoleum Real 3224



Marmoleum Real 3126



Marmoleum Real 3055



Marmoleum Sport 83055



Marmoleum Sport 83120





# APARTMENTS SALES OFFICE WATERLANE

Location **Gdansk, Poland**  
 Architect **AKO Architekci**  
 Interior architect **Roger Kostarczyk**  
 Flooring material **50 m<sup>2</sup> Allura Wood**

Photos: Michal Piotrowski



Flotex HD Cord 520011



# HOTEL VILLA PARK

Location **Siedlce, Poland**  
 Interior architect **Architektonica**  
 Flooring material **600 m<sup>2</sup> Flotex Classic, HD and Sottsass**



Photos: Piotr Tolwinski



## NEDERLANDSE SPOORWEGEN Transport

Location **240 Dutch intercity trains, The Netherlands**  
 Interior designer **Puur Ruimte**  
 Flooring contractor **NedTrain B.V.**  
 Flooring material **25000 m<sup>2</sup> Marmoleum Striato special**



Photos: Erik Poffers



Marmoleum Striato 5218

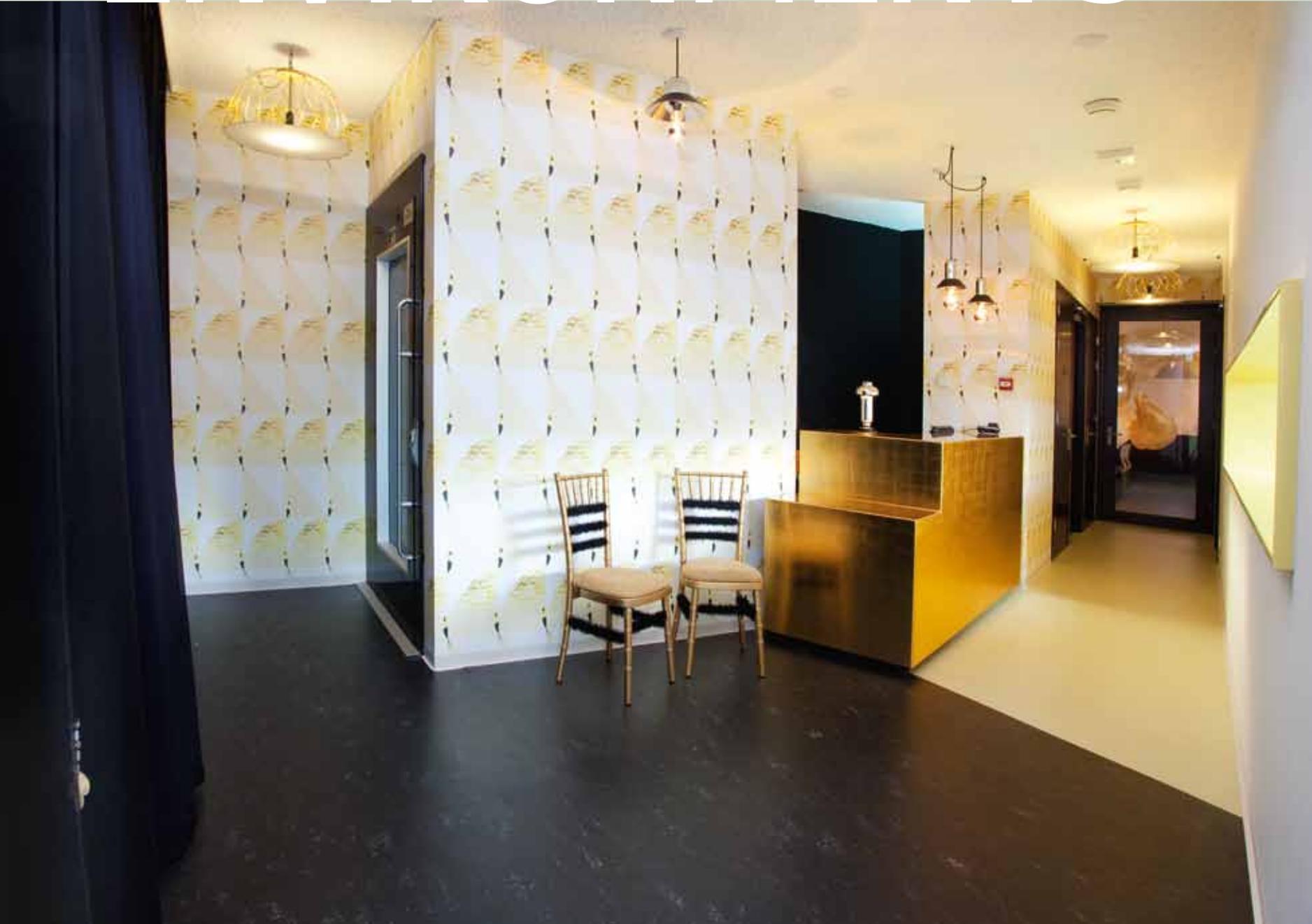


Marmoleum Striato 5217

Forbo's research and development department, working closely with the production department, has developed a special fire-retarding version of the Marmoleum Striato floor covering. It was a demanding project because the material has to be

mounted on aluminium sandwich panels, which can radiate considerable heat in a fire. The new floor covering withstood all the prescribed fire safety tests. The first trains with this flooring are now in service on the Dutch railways.

# CREATING BETTER ENVIRONMENTS



## MODEZ MODE & DESIGN HOTEL

Location **Arnhem, The Netherlands**  
Architect **Nexit Architecten Addy de Boer**  
Interior designer **Studio Piet Paris Amsterdam**  
General contractor **Kuipers Bouw**  
Flooring contractor **M2M3**  
Commissioned by **Dormio**  
Flooring material **450 m<sup>2</sup> Unexpected Nature of linoleum, Corklinoleum, Bulletin Board**



Photos: Erik Poiffers



Marmoleum Real 2939



Unexpected Nature 3566



Corklinoleum 1108



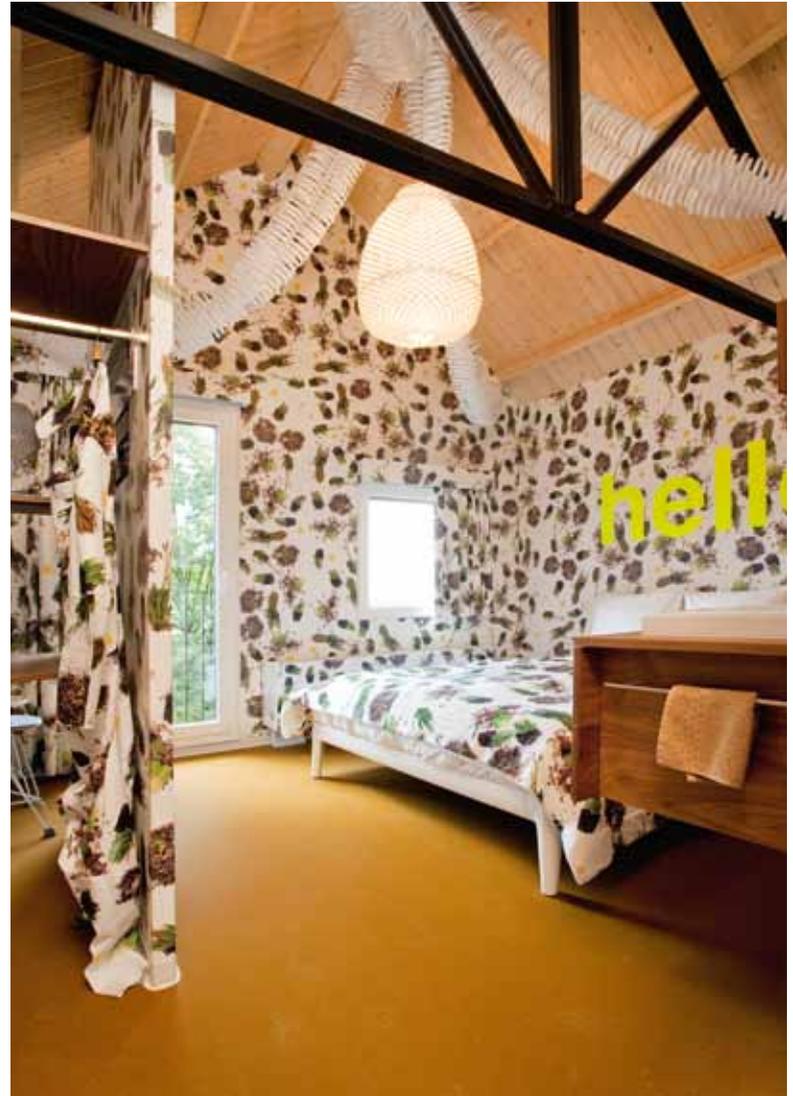
Unexpected Nature 3577



Unexpected Nature 3564

Creating better environments begins with caring for the environment.  
In this section Forbo Flooring is presenting unique projects which feature better indoor environments.

Piet Paris: "In the room designs we aimed for a balance between aesthetics and craftsmanship, and between the natural, sustainable materials and using them in an unexpected way. Originality, that's what it was about."



#### HOTEL MODEZ – UNIQUE FROM CEILING TO FLOOR

The well-known Dutch fashion illustrator Piet Paris was asked to be the art director and concept developer for Hotel Modez. He invited thirty Dutch fashion and other designers to design different hotel rooms. The floor is an essential part of the room designs, Piet Paris explained. "There must be something to see when looking down, as well as at eye height. A hotel floor also has to withstand wear and tear, and we were keen to revive craftsmanship and natural materials as core concepts. So using Forbo's Marmoleum was a logical choice." The main products used in Hotel Modez were from the Unexpected Nature series, which consists of 18 designs based on the patterns and colours of nature.

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