

yunomi

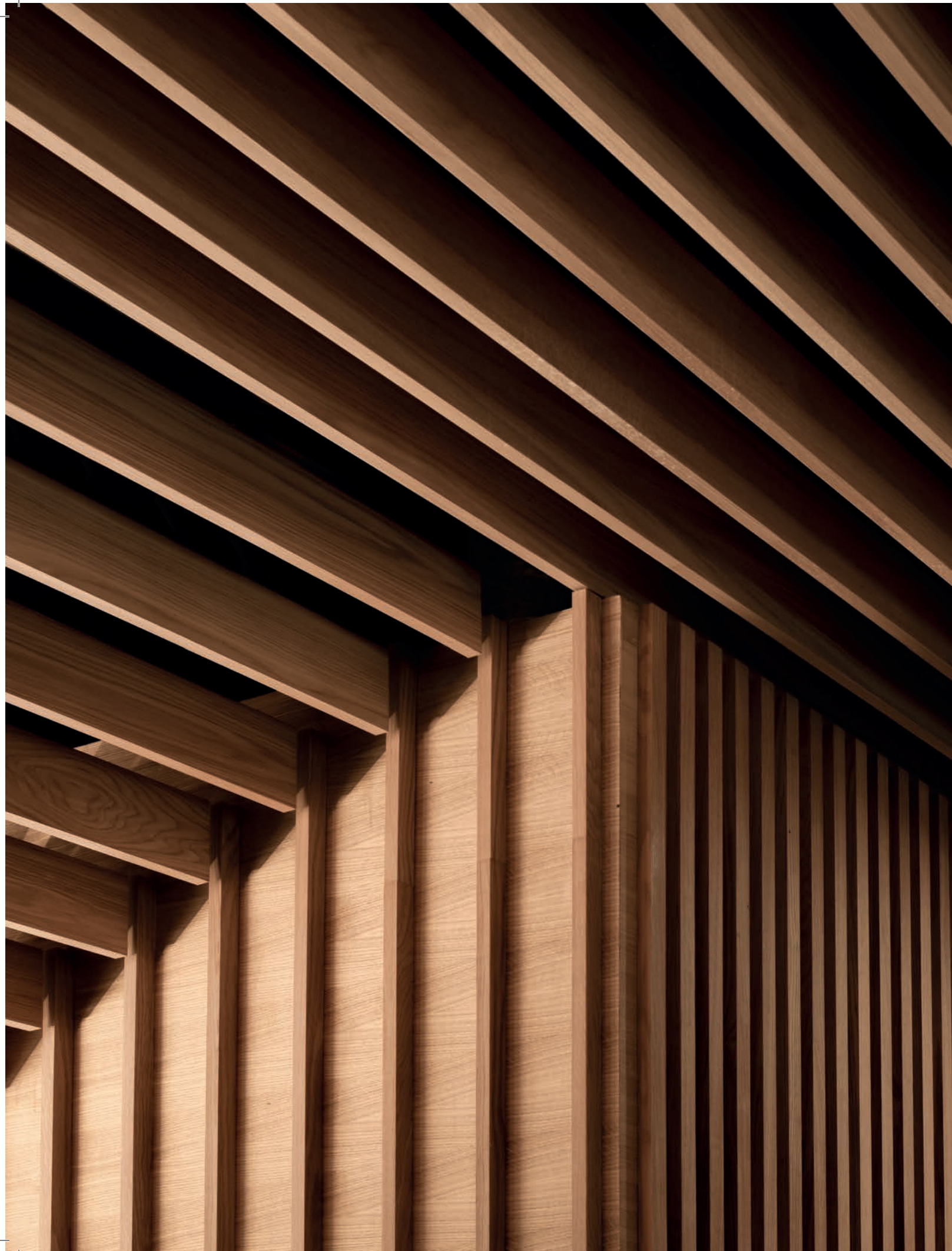
yunomi

Aad Bos
Alexander Sporre
Alireza Razavi
Anne Kent Rush
Caurie Putnam
Chris Naylor
Christian Coigny
Claude Moser
Florian Gadsby
Ingrid Hofstra
Leander Riedl
Leigh Patterson
Libby Borton
Lucy Augé
Maggie Chiang
Magnus Carlsen
Marie Boyard
Nicholas Dawes
Peter Letzelter-Smith
Remco Merbis
Romain Gaïa
Ruedi Staechelin
Simone Bosse
Thomas van Schaik
Yannick Pelletier
Yasu Kakegawa

01



01

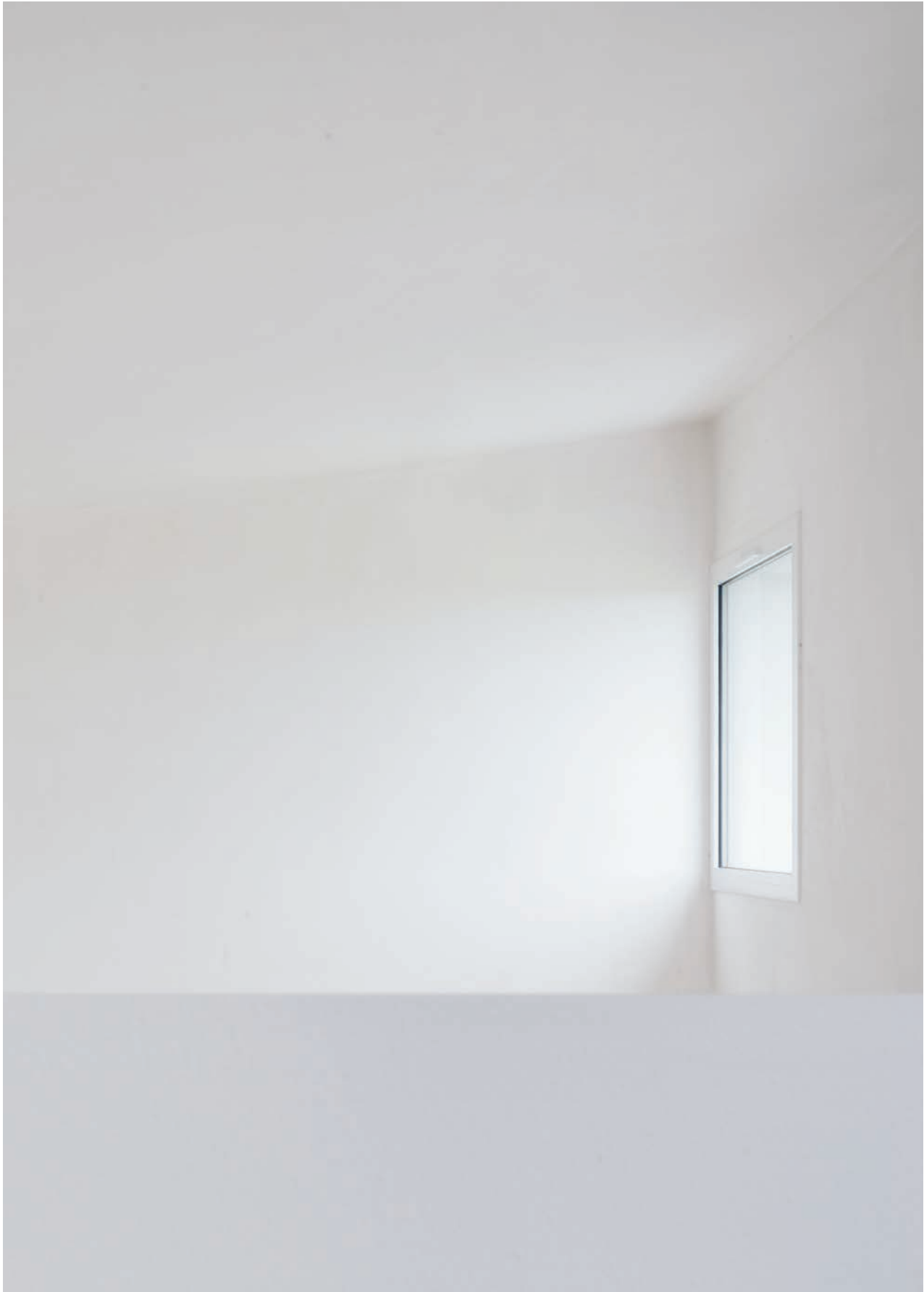


On Architecture, Familiarity & Beauty

WORDS
ALIREZA RAZAVI

PHOTOS
SIMONE BOSSI

Alireza Razavi on
the perception of
architecture



“To practice space is thus to repeat the joyful and silent experience of childhood; it is, in a place, to be other and to move toward the other... Kandinsky dreamed of: ‘a great city built according to all the rules of architecture and then suddenly shaken by a force that defies all calculation.’”

“More than its utilitarian and technocratic transparency, it is the opaque ambivalence of its oddities that makes the city livable.”

“La ritualisation raffinée des gestes élémentaires m’est ainsi devenue plus précieuse que la persistance des paroles et des textes, parce que les techniques du corps sont mieux protégées de la superficialité des modes.”

Michel de Certeau – The Practice of Everyday Life

It happened at the 2016 Architecture Biennale in Venice. A video was running at the Arsenale showing a newly built space and garden (I believe it was in East Africa) which the journalist was visiting with the host. Finishing the tour, she spread her arms and said: “Look at this lovely place.”

I have been lucky enough to work with great people in my career. I have lived and worked on three continents and I have been fortunate enough to attend places of higher education in different countries. However, never in my academic or professional years, have I remotely come close to the notion of a “lovely place”.

I cannot think of a more un-radical, un-intellectual wording (definitely insulting to some design professionals) and I think anyone involved with architecture would be hard pressed to recall a single instance in which they came across these two words combined together from someone with a “higher idea” of architecture. A “lovely place” sounds girly and flowery at best. Definitely off-limit for a self-respecting architect, male or female.

Yet, when I heard them it instantly struck me that –as an architect– there could not have been a more honest way of expressing the positivity and purpose of a space. That this very simple statement covered and synthesized a vast spectrum of human needs, regardless of scale, program, budget or philosophical standing. In other words that building “lovely places” meant to create spaces of affect and beauty. (Beauty in itself is an outright decadent concept, obsolete romanticism).





In recent years, critical thinking in urban planning & architecture has all but shrunk to a debate about sustainability, technology and the architect as a social prophet. If performance is the new dogma, technology is its church.

Discussing the virtues of (digital) technology has been center stage for three decades. Yet it mostly has been a fertile ground for a discourse on formalism: geometric prowess under the guise of performative architecture celebrating the new found ethos. Cities and buildings looking smart or facing doom.

Disclaimer: architecture is by essence technological so this is by no means prehistoric nostalgia, rather asserting that transformative and lasting impact in architecture is of a different, more complex, nature.

The Zeitgeist is fraught with pitfalls and co-opting tools and concepts from other industries hardly makes one relevant. Building technology has a very high obsolescence rate whereas balance in design, when reached, seems to have none. Again, this is not to say that designs should disregard energy codes, rather assert that without its primal ambition, architecture is pointless; engineers (and very soon AI) far surpass architects at sheer building performance.









Architecture draws upon the rituals of daily life. Practicing space is central to our experience of architecture and its language. What I am interested in is the notion of beauty in the context of familiarity. Domestic, intimate and ultimately the collective conscience of it.

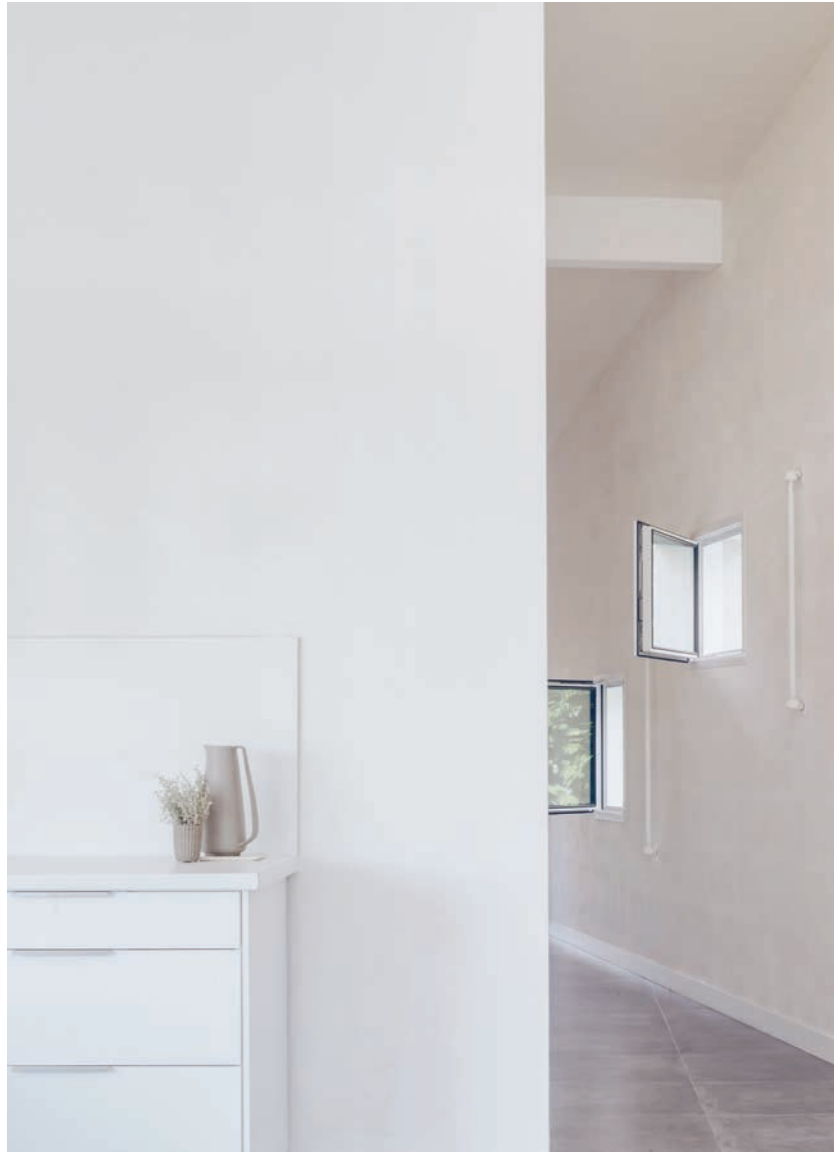
Spatial domestication and the slow transformation of perception have created a distinct culture (that of space) tooled with a new objectivity and gradually, with its own history.

The ability to understand and experience our environment is what makes architecture unique. A subjective framework, spatial appropriation, a necessary familiarity of environments, landscapes, habits. Artefacts servicing affect and ultimately poetic beauty.

Beyond the very problems it tries to solve (a notion dear to Mies) architecture's objective is to preserve an affective link with the built environment, to be an interface with nature and allow life in society through the artefacts of daily life. Without its poetic value, architecture is merely construction and without the craft associated to it, only improvisation.











Architecture modifies our perception of space, as much as a drawing or painting is first and foremost a transformative process, so a specific idea about the subject can manifest itself.

Intuition – the sum of all experiences – often guides through the path of creation, one that is necessarily transformative to be successful and the genealogy of space cements the collective experience.

Familiarity and domesticity may not be part of the contemporary techno-lexicon but they have thus far been instrumental in defining architecture, “science wedded to romance” as Louis Sullivan put it.

This fascinating layering of technique and intuition defines architecture, not as a measure of success for a single design, but rather for something greater and more collective to take place.

