

The studio

The studio is a thinking instrument, a delicate balance of talents, energies and expectations that infuse every project, from sketch to site.

In this hive of activity, reams of sketches and models invade the space and mix together with the inking printers, making the choices and the changes.

It is the place of our architecture, where we experience the spaces we want to build.

It starts with the gestures of childhood. I imagine a child that raises his arms up high and lets them fall again theatrically in order to describe his house. Like a primitive dance, with his body he carves out an atmosphere from the landscape, he defines his territory and builds his wall. This child has thought of an architecture.

Architecture is not bound to its author but to the emotions it can convey. As you approach the Temple of Heaven in Beijing, you notice how such a simple thing as a grey stoned pathway can offer such a sense of lightness. It is like floating on air, losing your sense of gravity. You realise how a careful and refined manipulation of scale can transform an idea, making man feel like he is at the centre of the world.

The Treasury of Atreus in Greece. It is like taking a glimpse into a tomb. The evocative power of the passage from life to death is rendered with an extraordinary refined synthesis through the union of a precise idea and the balanced execution of the work. The solid beauty of the structure ignites the ancestral emotions, evoking a sense of a return to the womb.

In our work, we try to reveal the mysteries of a place by creating spaces that open both to the seductive horizons and the details in nature. It is a way to stimulate an intimate, introspective reaction. We can experience and enjoy the distant landscape by having a piece of it close to us; we can have the horizons in the details. It is calming and reassuring. There is no need to build spaces to look at, rather spaces where we can see different perspectives of ourselves.

If your living space corresponds with how you feel, you have a sense of harmony with the environment. Living like this creates the gift of time and the sensation of living longer. When a person leaves a space forever, he leaves behind his traces. The space he occupied will be host to other lives. Objects, nature and buildings survive us and the brevity of life teaches us what our priorities should be.

... I can still sense the flavour of the cosmopolitan streets of the great European Renaissance cities and ports that once put Europe at the centre of the world; a world of explorers and city founders. Today, probably more than before the atmosphere has changed, it is lighter, freer; thanks to the speed of communication there is a sense of detachment, everyone is close to everything. We feel at home in a place where we hear at least four languages.

Man is both nomadic and sedentary, he lives an extraordinary journey, and he travels more than he stands still. When we stop somewhere, we graft ourselves to a space, a place that gives rhythm to our journey. This space opens up to the real world but can also welcome us into its intimate world when we travel or when we fall in love.

We never lose the habit of living but live on the branches from where we fly to our dreams. Stemming from the duality of man is the idea that architecture should address the notion of rapprochement. The closer you come to something, the city, the house, an object, it transforms, revealing its secret worlds.

Symbols represent the emotions and as such are useful for learning. Fathepur Sikri (15c. India) is built with bright red Agra limestone. With this single material, used for everything from its foundations to decoration, it evokes an energy and a respect. The capacity to transform religious symbols into elegant stone gives us the sense that we are part of a portrayal of the human soul and its relationship to the community.

The sketch leaves us the freedom to enjoy the unknown. This unawareness, this freedom, has an intrinsic purpose in that it allows us to discover new emotions. Before you learn the name of a tree, try to grasp its beauty, then maybe learn its correct name in a foreign language you might never repeat. A sketch is intuitive and immediate. Draw without thinking and you will discover things that you could not describe with words.

Drawing reveals who you are and how much you change. Just as with children before adults intervene, we start something without knowing what it is or where it will take us. For the architect it is a healthy expression of power, once you understand it intuitively, you can build it.

You begin to understand the importance and significance of these ingenuous drawings. They are a kind of secret script. The lines that are traced are like the constellations in the sky, they are never seen in the same way. They have different depths and degrees of definition. You constantly find in them new constellations because some traces are more brilliant than others. Unlike the stars however we are not seduced by the lines, but what lie between them. The landscape within which we move and the life that occupies the space.

We are seeing a major transformation of people in this era of virtual - the extension of the self; it changes the relationship we have with our instincts. The constant use and evolution of technology filters the physical and emotional conditions of our introspective relationships. The continuous development of these filters makes us conscious, in real time, of our evolution. Man's relationship with his own physicality remains essential, as does his relationship to the built environment. The more we travel in virtual spaces, the more that built spaces serve to keep us tending between earth and sky.

Walls and openings are the clothes of a person, wrapping them up and at the same time freeing them. They mark the gradual shift from the public life to the intimate, passing transitional and transparent spaces, that expand the intimate spaces out to the social and welcoming world. Inside and outside don't really exist, when you are in the house, the division between the internal and external is just a notion of hot and cold, calm or storm, wet or dry. When we are alone and surf the web, or read a book or concentrate on something, we feel we are inside; our minds are distant so our body 'dresses' itself with the house to feel secure and protected.

We are connected to our environment, grafted to it, we are transplanted, and we fit. We multiply like flowers with their pollen. We can feel the roots under our feet penetrating the earth. We fall in love with a place where we find a sense of stability and balance, even in metropolitan spaces. Experiencing the excitement of the artificial world leads to the building of an imaginary natural world.