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SWISSHOUSE XXXIV

Galbisio, Ticino, Switzerland
Davide Macullo Architects

Photography by Alexandre Zveiger

There was an era, in the late 20th century, when the word 'Ticino' automatically conjured associations of architectural innovation and quality in the minds of architects anywhere. Particularly in the genre of houses and small buildings, Ticino became something of a mecca for students and aficionados, who would trek to the region's beautiful foothills and villages to admire the innovative formal experiments springing up there. This new house in Galbisio follows in that tradition, with a bold, sculptural composition of concrete walls that express the explosion of a cubic form. In the shadow of the medieval castles of Bellinzona, this sheltering cube aspires to offer psychological protection from the chaotic energy of the modern world, even as it engages with it through openings and framed viewlines. The 'blades' of the projecting walls, which thrust outward vertically and horizontally in dissimilar orientations, take the role of remnants from earlier times and structures, both resisting and allowing relationships with the exterior realm. They are fragments and gestures both, and they simultaneously act in concert to compose a spatial and volumetric whole. The cube at the centre of all this formal energy represents the calm centre, which can cradle a secure and serene lifestyle.

The plasticity of the scheme is self-evident: Swisshouse XXXIV juts out of its sloping site like a late-Modernist landmark... without explicit domestic character. It might be a small museum or corporate seat of some kind, particularly as its glazed openings are shyly concealed from the context. The expressive concrete fins float, thrust, hang, loom and dominate every side of the form. They are unquestionably handsome and well proportioned. And the house navigates its hillside site with finesse – clearly a lot of careful thinking attended the site planning of the project. Inside, the protective nesting that is meant to occur is perhaps less evident, at least explicitly, as the plan continues the explosive dissemination of the facades and massing into the layout of rooms. In this sense the scheme is very consistent, but it begs the question of just how nurturing the house is. Then again, dramatic views outward to Ticino's extraordinary scenery, carefully organised by the plan and the shard walls, alleviate any heaviness to the large-scale planimetric manoeuvres. And who is to say what constitutes comfort nowadays, anyway? Perhaps even our definition of feeling secure has evolved in this age. In any case, this Swiss house is as bold and strong as our times seem to demand.



