



Mascheroni:
Maestro
of
Minimalism

TRAINED UNDER RICHARD MEIER, 32-YEAR-OLD ITALIAN ARCHITECT JACOPO MASCHERONI MAXIMIZES THE TENETS OF MINIMALISM BY CREATING BESPOKE ENVIRONMENTS THAT FUSE CLEAN LINES, COOL COLOR AND VOLUPTUOUS SPACE WITH STATE-OF-THE-ART TECHNOLOGY.



The Italian architect and designer Jacopo Mascheroni is clear on his way to becoming the leading light in a new era of extreme minimalism. The 32-year-old precocious talent fits his rising reputation as naturally and comfortably as his clients do the bespoke environments he has painstakingly crafted for them. After breathing in the modernist air as a student of architecture and industrial design in his native Milan, Mascheroni headed to the States to train under Stanley Saitowitz, before setting his sights on the reigning King of minimalism — Richard Meier — with whom he worked for four years in New York.

“It might sound absurd to someone who knows the work of Richard Meier, which is super clean, but it wasn’t clean enough for me,” he explains of his decision to set up his own company, JMA, in Milan, just shy of his 30th birthday. Peter Reichegger, a property developer who met Mascheroni on one of his projects (Jesolo Lido, an 83-unit resort near Venice designed by Richard Meier), immediately perked up to the young architect’s brimming talent. **Sick of the mish-mosh style of his mansion in the mountain town of Campo Tures, Reichegger commissioned Mascheroni to give it a makeover.** Neither man, however, was prepared for the aesthetic revolution that ensued. From the custom-designed Corian counters, computer-controlled recessed lighting and consummate elegance of cool colors and clean lines, what was initially intended as a “minor intervention” was transformed into a stunning blueprint for a new age of architectural abstraction.



My definition of luxury:

“Being able
to choose.”

If luxury were ...

An object.

A private pool cantilevering over a gulf in the Mediterranean sea.

A moment.

Just before falling asleep with the ocean waves as the soundtrack.

A person.

Someone who's driving over 200 km/h.

A place.

The port of Monaco.



How did you first begin working with Richard Meier?

My goal was to move to New York and also to move a step up from the type of projects that I was doing. I decided to take a week or two to interview in NY and had the opportunity to meet Mr. Meier. He interviewed me himself and we just chatted about different things before even talking about architecture. I remember I had my photography portfolio and for half of the time just showed him my pictures. The position was my first choice. In Italy, Richard Meier is a big star and at the time there was much attention generated around the church he was designing in Rome and other bigger commissions in Europe. I told him that since I was Italian I could perhaps be working on the Rome project and he accepted.

What do you admire most about his style?

First of all, I've always been attracted to the light in buildings and of course the color white. Richard Meier says — and I can't agree more — that white is the color of all colors. It's a color that constantly changes: with daylight, the seasons, the weather. Being inside a white space, be it a house or a public building, you experience all of these different emotions any time of the day.

How does your creative vision differ from his?

One of the reasons why I decided to open my own firm is that while his buildings are always perfectly done, somehow they are stuck in the past. He started his career in the 60s with stunning houses, and did some museums in the 70s and 80s, but there were very few new ideas being generated or innovation going on. What I really wanted to try, and what I really pushed hard on my projects like with Jesolo Lido, was something that's a step forward.



What for you is that step forward?

The entire architectural world and the materials that we use are in constant change, and this allows us to experiment with new things, from materials and schemes to concepts of living. It might sound absurd to someone who knows the work of Richard Meier, which is super clean, but it wasn't clean enough for me. In NY I was exposed to other fields like fashion and design, and I started to recognize my style in the minimalist fashion of Helmut Lang and Jil Sander, or in the furniture designs of Poul Kjaerholm. In terms of ideas for my own projects, I began to envision which clothing would hang in the closet, the furniture and silver that would complement the space. Richard Meier's approach was too traditional; I wanted to move forward.

When one thinks mountain homes, rich dark woody elements come to mind. The open floor and minimal all-white design for the Campo Tures home is a challenge to tradition. What inspired the design?

The owner's concern was to change the layout of the house and to bring more light into the space. Since really tall mountains surround the home, in winter, night falls early in the afternoon as the sun slips behind the mountains. If you want to spend some time in the house, you have to turn on all the lights. As a result, I wanted to try to catch as much light as possible. But by doing so there were concerns about privacy. Our solution was to rebuild the perimeter wall of the house by pushing it all the way to the property line, so that they could see through and enjoy the entire back area outside yet still feel private. We also turned the deck into a backdrop to be viewed from the inside. I wanted to give them the impression of always being in contact with nature.



I always wanted them to experience what was happening around them so as not to feel confined to a mountain cave, huddled inside, observing the outside world through tiny windows.

It is more like an urban loft space than a traditional rural mansion. Was it your intention to merge minimalism with nature?

When people see the space they very often can't believe that it's in the mountains. I wanted to break that rule that in the mountains you have to be confined and have wood everywhere, traditional furniture, small openings. I don't see why modern or minimalist architecture has to be a penthouse in a big city. Why can't it interact with a more natural setting? It's my goal to do really clean architecture that still feels warm, cozy and comfortable.

How do you create that warmth in a living space with such cool colors, clean lines and open space?

You could have the best-designed space, but if the lighting is wrong it can produce a feeling of discomfort, like being in a box rather than a house. I always try to spend as much time as possible on the lighting design to try to keep it warm. For this project, given how much time the family spends with the lights on, the lighting design was really half the project. The other half was to work on the structural and product materials, such as the custom-designed maple floors and furniture fabrics, for their impact on the acoustics. Acoustics are extremely important when creating a space in which you want people to feel at ease. Acoustics are not just influenced by sofas and rugs but the way you construct a dry wall, and the materials you use for the floor.



Did you design everything in the house?

It's all custom-designed including the tables, side tables, desks, fireplace and kitchen. The only thing I didn't design was the sofa and chairs. Being able to control all of the various pieces of the puzzle really does make a difference in the end, because everything has been done for the same goal, for the same person, for the same space. I want to know everything about the person, how they eat, what time they go to sleep, what are their habits, all the details of their life to be able to answer their needs.

What attracts you to the architectural power of purity and simplicity?

For me a clean space is a place where you can disconnect from your day at work, forget about the traffic if you live in a city. I really envisage the house as a place of intimacy and privacy, a space for relaxation and refec-tion. It's kind of a romantic notion of mine that I bring into my work. It can also be a place of meditation. I'm influenced a lot by Japanese architecture and tradi-tion. To be able to meditate you need to be in a non-dis-tracting environment, but one that is also comforting. My goal is to put those two elements together in my work.



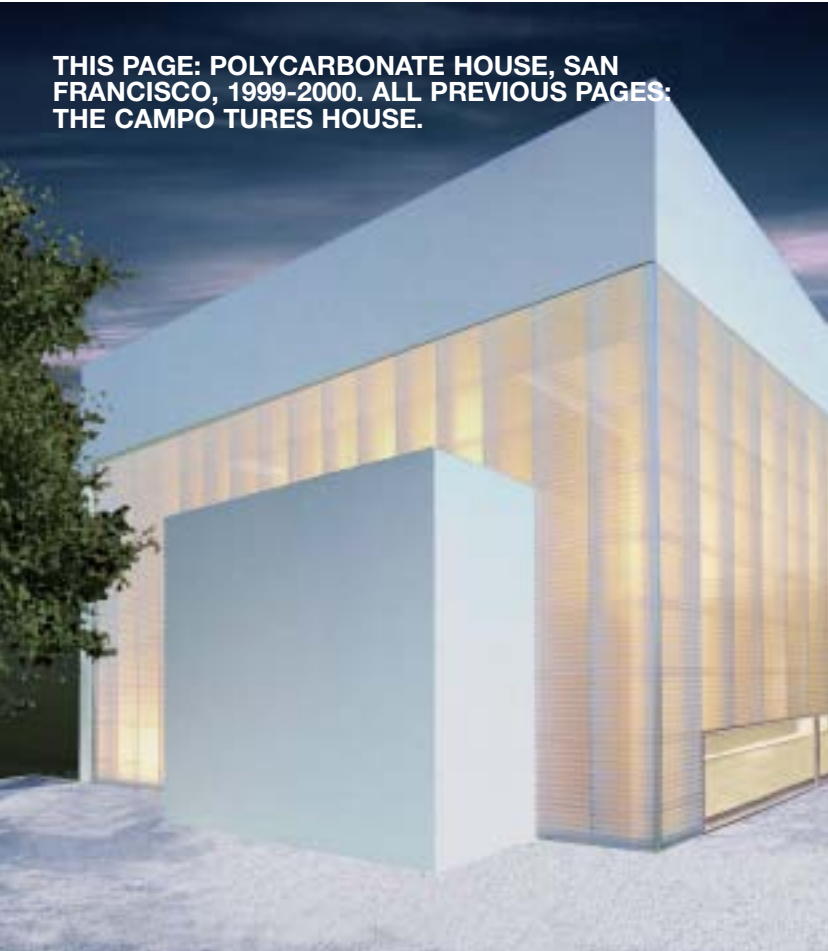
With all of that open space and windows, how do you keep the temperature warm? Is the house eco-friendly?

It is environmentally friendly because by opening up the south-facing facade we catch the sun and heat as much as we can with natural light. We've basically created a microclimate by installing a radiant heating system that runs under the floors, and along the walls and ceilings throughout the house. Additionally, the glass facades have a perimeter radiation grille that pushes heat up from the floor and around the surface of the glass, creating a barrier of warmth. Lastly, we've custom-designed two types of fireplaces, a gas fireplace and a traditional wood-burning fireplace. Warm air from the gas fireplace goes into the gypsum box above and radiates heat throughout the entire room.

How have you incorporated new technologies into the design?

First of all it's fully automatic. There's a touch-panel central computer that controls the lighting, music, heating, shades and alarm. The best thing about the system is that you can program the settings to create certain ambiances for a romantic dinner, party with guests, movie-watching or breakfast with the kids, etc. It's a German system called iBus. Another impressive thing is the audio-video system. There's a central server in one of the cabinets that controls all of the TVs and speakers. We've also incorporated some new "invisible" speakers that are plastered into the dry wall so that you hear the sound without seeing the source. The effect is amazing.

THIS PAGE: POLYCARBONATE HOUSE, SAN FRANCISCO, 1999-2000. ALL PREVIOUS PAGES: THE CAMPO TURES HOUSE.



What are you working on now?

We've got two new projects at the moment. One is a large residential complex in Milan that Mr. Reichegger is developing. It's a 35-unit condominium. One part is the transformation of an existing factory and then there is a new building. We are just starting the design so it's going to take a while. Another project we're starting is a house in Rome. We also have a project that is just about finished near Lake Como. It's a loft on two levels that's in a former monastery. I'm really happy with the project, perhaps even more so than with the Campo Tures house because it was conceived as one thing from the beginning. The scheme, plans and spaces are much cleaner.

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