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EXPERIENCING THE FLOWS OF NATURE

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Abstract

This article reviews a hot spring spa located in the south of Chile and discusses the contribution of this project to the development of a particular route to sustainability that is highly grounded in a poetic sensitivity to nature and culture. *Termus Geometricus*, the work of architect Gerardo del Sol, is an interesting example of an architectural intervention that overlays subtle ecological design principles in a place of outstanding beauty, where the result not only respects, but also celebrates nature. The architects' first concern in the design process was "to discover what is in the place", above and beyond the geographical or cultural aspects.

Principles of environmental design included the use of local materials and local labor, low energy strategies and a general approach to favoring the crude experience of nature towards the limits of comfort. Buildings are barely heated and naturally ventilated, while there is limited provision of electricity, which encourages the experience of the wind, sun, rain and the magnificent beauty of nature. The conclusions stress the fact that there is a new wave of tourism facility in Chile, which has achieved a surprising commercial success by combining careful design, sound environmental principles and natural potential oriented to exalting the experience of place.

Keywords: Environmental Design; Place; Nature; Hot Spring Spa.

INTRODUCTION

Latin American architecture is developing its own route to sustainable development, one that is highly grounded in a poetic sensitivity to nature and culture. On this continent, environmental design strategies focus mostly on the use of local materials and technologies rather than on high-tech imposed solutions. Based on a history closely linked to the territory, Latin America is a land of varied and exuberant geography, where the great original civilizations were absent or destroyed, and therefore an extensive process of colonization and development has unfolded a process which even today seems incomplete. This is a land of recondite places and unique landscapes, in which architecture seems only a humble and fragmented testimony of man, a land where man's settlements came into being and developed without careful planning, at the whim of his impetuous urge to explore, because of the socio-economic fragility of its countries.

Latin American architectural historians speak of architecture in this continent as presenting a constant oscillation between the "spirit of the time" and



Fig. 1. Detail of the hot spring spa "Termus Geometricus"

the "spirit of place" (Browne, 1998). The "spirit of the time" refers to the European architectural styles that have been adopted extensively, albeit in a delayed and tempered manner, with minimal intervention from local cultures, scarce adaptation to climate and only basic application of modern construction techniques. On the other hand, the "spirit of place" is expressed through simple, intuitive vernacular architecture, using local craft skills and

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Fig. 10. Building facade.



Fig. 11. Building facade.



Fig. 12. Building facade.



Fig. 13. Building facade.



Fig. 14. Building facade.



Fig. 15. Building facade.



Fig. 16. Building facade.

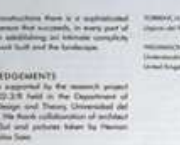


Fig. 17. Building facade.

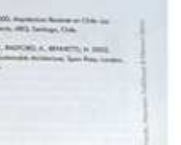


Fig. 18. Building facade.

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