

What I like about you



Photography: Clare Cousins

Bianchi House • 1973

Riva San Vitale, Switzerland

Architect: Mario Botta

I recently visited the Bianchi House at Riva San Vitale on a mini Mario Botta pilgrimage with dear friends Mel Bright of Make Architecture and Amy Muir of Muir Architecture. I knew little about the house until we started looking into what Swiss projects we might fit into a single day trip from Lake Como the day before.

The house is sited at the end of a small road through lush forest on the outskirts of Riva San Vitale in Switzerland. Approaching on foot, the first glimpse is of the flame red bridge peeking through the trees. Located on a steep slope that descends to Lake Lugano, the four storey concrete-block tower is accessed by a structurally expressive pedestrian bridge, establishing a dynamic relationship between landscape and the built form. While we were there the rain cleared, and with low hanging clouds the house sat mystically in the landscape. Built for a family of four, a square plan organised around a central spiral staircase allows diverse views as you move vertically through the house. The carved tower volume creates spaces of varying height, permitting views from the road, through the structure to the lake beyond.

Although we only experienced the house externally, the clarity of Botta's design expressed principles we seek in our own practice – working with the topography of the site, context driven elevations, framed views, a sense of anticipation, humble use of materials, modest scale, and an expressive structure with a strong connection to landscape.

Our visit to Bianchi House (not to mention Botta's Mountain Church that we saw earlier that day) reinforced the value of visiting buildings in person and the inspiration they bring to our work, even if only experienced from the outside.

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