SUBTRACTIONS AND DISSONANCES IN THE DESIGN VISION OF SIMONE MICHELI

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Simone Micheli – DESIGN VISION – 60 years of life at the ADI Design Museum in Milan, on display until Septtember 30th, 2024, showcases a selection of products and video images to convey the essence of Simone Micheli's projects. We interviewed him to learn more.

Simone Micheli
Flounder Simone Micheli Architectural Hero

SIMONE MICHELI ARCHITECTURAL HERO

For internationally renowned and award-winning architect Simone Micheli true luxury is a 'synthetic project'. A concrete and literal synthesis between man, space, and time. Therefore, not opulence nor maximization, but wonder, rigor, and linearity. These are also the elements of Simone Micheli – *DESIGN VISION* – 60 years of life exhibition project, on display until September 30th, 2024, at the ADI Design Museum, marking the architect's 60th birthday and 35 years of an acclaimed career. The 35 design pieces showcased, accompanied by video images, bring to the visitors' attention the deep meaning of Micheli's architecture: a simplicity that navigates the complexity of our present, while also anticipating the future, with a deep understanding of the past. This is a simplicity that emerges from a process of hybridization. A process made of contrasts and formal dissonances, which over 35 years has remained consistent, in a methodological continuum that defines Simone Micheli's signature. It is an operation of wonder that, in the end, raises more questions than answers. Yet, we managed to get some answers from Simone Micheli, to be found between the lines of this extensive interview.

Private Villa, Reunion Island, France (in progress)
Image copyright: @Simone Micheli Architectural Hero

Sky Villa, Izmir, Turkey (in progress)
Image copyright: @Simone Micheli Architectural Hero

If you were to identify the lines that best delimit your professional identity, which would you mention and why?

In my projects, I have always sought a synthesis between technique and humanistic dimensions, offering spaces that both move and stimulate thought, while maintaining a high level of functionality. Since the start of my career, I have kept a consistent approach: to overcome stereotypes by seeking hybridization and contamination. What has changed over time is the growing awareness of environmental and social challenges, which have made sustainability an even more central component of my work. My mission today is to simplify the complexity of the contemporary world, translating it into fluid, material forms that engage both intellect and emotions.

"Translating the complexity of our time into semplicity": this is one of the central themes of the exhibition. What are the major complexities of our time?

We live in an era where complexity arises from multiple factors: technological evolution, climate change, globalization, accelerated urbanization, and increasing social inequality. These phenomena generate challenges that cannot be addressed solely through technical solutions. A humanistic vision is needed, one that interprets the desires of contemporary humanity and its relationship with the environment in a harmonious way. For me, complexity also lies in the coexistence of cultural diversity and individual needs. My work seeks to address this through the essence of simplicity, which means making everything accessible and understandable, but without sacrificing depth and intellectual richness.

Flok House, Firenze, Italy
Image copyright: @Maurizio Marcato

Sea House, Viareggio, Italy
Image copyright: @Ugo Ehlein

How can architecture be a vehicle for simplification? What does 'simplicity' mean to you?

Architecture can be a vehicle for simplification when it transforms complex spaces and objects into accessible, intuitive, and human experiences. For me, simplicity does not mean trivialization or reduction to simplistic schemes, but it is a process of subtracting the unnecessary to allow the essential to emerge. It means creating spaces that communicate directly, that are functional yet capable of transmitting deep emotions and meanings. Simplicity is synonymous with balance between form and function, a union of beauty and utility, without redundancies or superfluous decorations. In this sense, architecture can be a clear and powerful language, capable of addressing society's needs with solutions that do not overwhelm, but enhance the quality of life.

In a statement that goes against the common trend of integrating architecture with its context, you affirm: "Always design in deliberate dissonance with the context". What do you mean by this?

For me, designing in deliberate dissonance with the context means not passively submitting to pre-existing conditions, but rather seeking to create a vibrant and distinctive dialogue with the surrounding environment. Dissonance is not an act of rebellion for its own sake, but a means to break traditional schemes and propose uniqueness, capable of stimulating reflection and new experiences. In a standardized architectural context, a work that challenges conventions becomes a tool for disruption, introducing new perspectives and meanings. It is a dissonance that enriches, creating contrasts that bring out new harmonies, because only through innovation can the architectural language evolve.

Zenith Nice Hotel wellness centre, Nice, France
Image copyright: @Ugo Ehlein

Sense is Simple Exhibition, Triennale Milano, Milan, Italy
Image copyright: @Ugo Ehlein

How has the concept of luxury in architecture evolved from the beginning of your career to today?

The concept of luxury has changed radically in recent years. In the past, luxury meant opulence, the display of wealth, and expensive materials. Today more than ever I believe that the luxury is the ability to choose every day and every moment where to live, to continually reinvent one's space. It is not immobility or habit, but freedom, movement; it is a light and exhilarating thought. In architecture, new luxury is tied to the basic desire to reclaim the small beauties and truths, the intimacy of sensations. It is tied more to voids than to fullness, not to opulence but to transparency. New luxury is being oneself and owning – while not owning – a place where one can be themselves. New luxury is visual harmony combined with inner harmony. It represents a renewed relationship between space, man, and time.

What are today's most interesting fields of architecture research? What are the new frontiers in this world?

The most interesting research fields in architecture today involve sustainability, technological innovation, Artificial Intelligence, and Virtual Reality, which are transforming the world, offering immersive experiences and new opportunities. The greatest challenge is finding solutions that respect the environment, either through the use of recyclable materials and low-energy-impact solutions, or through resource optimization. Architecture must address new social needs, creating inclusive and sustainable spaces that can adapt to changing lifestyles and cultural shifts. In my opinion, architectural research has never been so interdisciplinary and complex, but this is also what makes this era extremely stimulating for those, like me, who believe that architecture can and should improve the world. Today, it is essential to balance automation with human input. These technologies do not represent a threat to creators but rather an accelerator of daily innovation.

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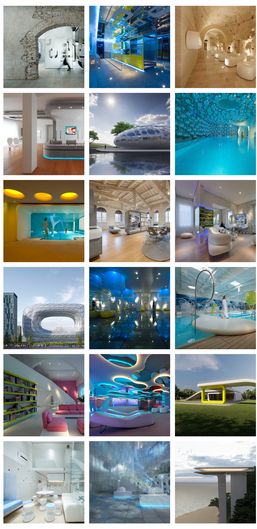

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