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Swiss House Rossa

Rossa, Calanca Valley, Switzerland

Daide Macullo Architects

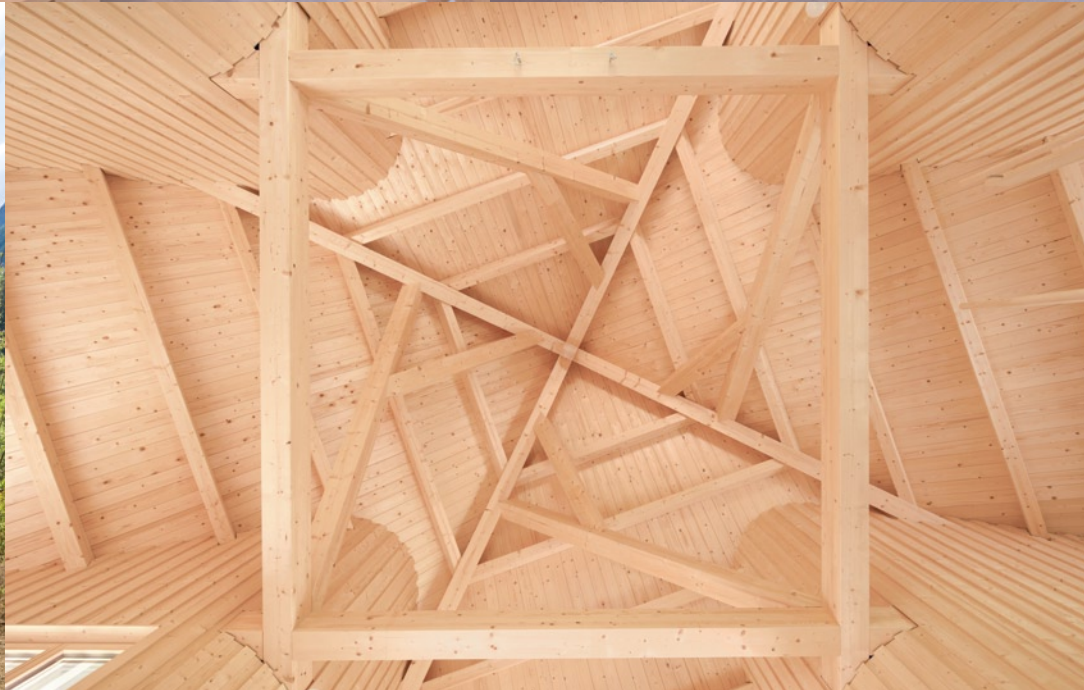
Photography by Alexandre Zveiger

A quixotic, puzzle-like residence nesting on the edge of a Swiss hamlet of arresting beauty, this 300 sqm house bows to traditions with its fingers crossed; it invites age-old references and looks unlike any you've seen before. A symmetrical Greek cross in plan, the four-storey building culminates in a 'torqued' roof that presents itself with drama on the interior, but more subtly on the exterior, as a wiggly line of parapet. The convention-tweaking begins in the facades: a pink-and-mint-green, rounded-corners surface strapped with white vertical timber boarding. The corners curve in a wide radius, and this, together with the rises and falls of the parapet height, deliberately blurs the audacity of the transverse organisation of the mass. The four arms of the cross are 'melted' as they turn 90 degrees, so that their recesses are as important to the reading of the mass as their projections. To put the final touch on that ambiguity, the two pastel colour tones surf across the walls like waves of syrup.

Inside, things get clearer... and weirder. The house is organised on three primary levels plus a mezzanine. A ground-level basement accessible from the yard is constructed in reinforced concrete, but everything above that is knotty pine wood, right down to the furniture, so that in the voluminous upper hall, it feels as if one has wandered into a private church space owned by some fervent, minimalist carpenter. Oversized, mullionless window apertures grace multiple surfaces; each is placed to frame specific views of the village outside, or the mountains or river gorge beyond. To look up at the roof, with its flying beams and trusses and rafters, is the climax of it all, and underscores one of the most curious effects of Swiss House Rossa: it seems to instantly expand in size the second you pass the threshold from outside to inside. This is probably due to the fact that on the exterior, the four 'wings' are seen as positives, whereas inside they are of course 'negative' voids. But there is no denying the power of the upper hall. And, lo and behold, the cruciform plan turns out to be unexpectedly practical for the organisation of a family home. Solving access to the mezzanine bed lofts with simple ladder-stairs, the four bays each seem to naturally claim their use, and furnish pockets of more intimate space within the huge open whole.

Certainly, Davide Macullo is up to more than it first appears here. The relentless uniformity of the blond pine boards may nod to Swiss material tastes, but it





also goes a long way to toward increase the abstraction of the spaces into a single, almost monolithic entity. As if, perhaps, you'd crawled into a gargantuan tree trunk that had been carved out by a mad whittler. This works in tandem with the apparent illogic of the roof's structural framing, the giant window openings, the smooth concrete floors, and so on.

One is dying to know what the neighbours, ensconced in their *Sound of Music* film set of a village, complete with pitched tile roofs and proper formal conformity, thought of Swiss House Rossa as it was nearing completion. But then let's not forget Switzerland in the 20th century gave rise to some of the most radical – and rational – innovations in residential architecture anywhere. This candyfloss addition to that catalogue certainly treads its own mountain path, but the fact that it occurred at all ultimately seems quite logical.

