

PROJECT MEMO

The panel of judges valued the idea of inserting a new interior inside an existing building, creating an elegant yet simple architectural solution for the house. The sense of a quality setting is achieved through the highly specific and coherent use of ceramic tiles which generate a warm environment. The sense of integration is the result of the combination of building systems and textures that create a sense of continuity with the existing architecture.

See the video

DESCRIPTION

This is a traditional village house with an elongated narrow floor plan between two boundary walls that opens up onto a kitchen garden at the rear. The house was in a ruinous state, the result of general neglect and the passing of time.

Luz, the owner, wanted a light-filled house in keeping with the presence of the kitchen garden and that reflected a love of the outdoor life. The central section of the house had no natural light or ventilation, making it unsuitable as a living area.

These conditioning factors, coupled with a limited budget, determined the drawing up of a simple project strategy, namely to completely empty the interior, leaving just the stone façades and boundary walls, creating a whole new interior layout arranged around a courtyard.

There are times when a contemporary approach is not so much a matter of using cutting-edge materials, but rather of putting local know-how to savvy use, taking advantage of solidly reliable natural materials that are in keeping with the economic and geographical context. And this was precisely one such occasion.

Four structures staggered at varying levels were erected around the courtyard. Each of these 'trays' is put to a single use, forming the kitchen, living room, 1st and 2nd bedrooms. Presiding over the courtyard is a birch tree, placing the living room and the kitchen between the greenery of the interior and that of the kitchen garden. The living room and kitchen are crossed by the stairway, thereby preventing the circulation from invading the bedroom spaces, which are located between the courtyard and the main façade. Each bedroom has its own ensuite bathroom which opens up onto the courtyard and which can be accessed from both the bedroom itself and the corridor. 15 x 15 cm glossy white glazed ceramic tiles were used on the bathroom walls. In addition to their hygienic and water-proofing properties, they reflect the leaves of the tree and the light from the patio, therefore doubly enhancing the overall effect.

The choice of a deciduous tree guarantees shade in the hottest months of the year, whilst in winter allowing the sunlight to enter and warm the rooms. It also acts as a visual filter between the rooms. The metal grid that acts as a walkway surrounds the entire courtyard, thereby allowing for two-fold interior-exterior circulation. In addition to its function as a walkway, it also doubles up as a bench, thereby extending the room programme out towards the courtyard.

Both the structure and the construction are of an almost overwhelming simplicity. The project unabashedly displays its outward appearance, forming a bold and deliberate contrast with the irregular textures of the boundary walls and the stone, which have been whitewashed. The aim was to create a setting in which the red tones of the ceramic tiles and the deep green leaves of the birch tree inevitably catch the eye, allowing the light that filters through these materials to create the various hues and shades that are cast on the walls and floors

throughout the day. The ceramic tiles themselves added the desired texture and richness of colour, thereby doing away with the need for painting or drop ceilings.

The existing gaps on the façade limited the position of the new floor slabs, making it necessary to create a structure edge that would not overly restrict the open interior heights. The solution adopted was a single grid structure using IPE 100 beams, with 1 m grooved and tongued ceramic boards resting on the lower edges. By adding a compression layer the resulting structure is a mere 15 cm thick, therefore creating a sensation of lightness from the courtyard that contrasts with the solid rugosity of the boundary walls.

The entire ground floor is clad in an all-encompassing layer of red Catalan tiles, which match the roofs and bring out the tones of the grating around the tree. The summer living room is situated on the ground floor at the back of the house, designed so that it can be opened up entirely onto both the courtyard and the kitchen garden, allowing the inhabitants to fully enjoy the sensations created by the cooling breeze on lazy summer afternoons.