

Umberto Minuta  
**The living of Mario Botta**

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Author: *Mario Botta*

Title: *Abitare*

Subtitle: *Conversazioni e scritti di architettura*

Book Series: *Pensiero dell'architettura*

Language: *Italian*

Publisher: *Christian Marinotti, Milan*

Characteristic: *dimension 17x24 cm, 183 pages, paperback*

ISBN: *9788882731649*

Year: *2016*

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The volume of Mario Botta is a successful attempt to retrace, through writings and reflections, fifty years of work. The author draws the reader's attention to his most cherished topics of architecture, from the space of living, to the spaces of the sacred, from the importance and the beauty of the European city to the urban contradictions of our time.

He also hints at his commitment to the foundation of the Academy of Architecture and the theatre of architecture in Mendrisio. Above all, however, we can read the long and articulate chapters in which the author explicitly acknowledges the influence of the Masters: people like Le Corbusier, Carlo Scarpa and Louis I. Kahn, who had accompanied him in his architectural work.

Through detailed arguments and clear and linear reasoning, his writing deals mostly with the themes of living. He explores the link between light and architecture, the relationship between the work and the cosmic values of the surroundings, between the architectural project and the project of the public space, as central issues in the progress of architecture and as a technical answer to the non-material needs of a community.

The lessons he learned from the Masters are reinterpreted and filtered. Carlo Scarpa, for example, is mentioned in the dialectic between history and project, and Mario Botta, in the end, affirms the nonexistence of restoration without pure invention.

His work is a constant tribute to the Corbusian architecture, which become able to grasp the future towards a new beauty of the living space, and the cooperation with Louis Kahn in Venice, a forerunner of the limits of technological progress.

The work is structured around precise reflections on the author's dearest themes. In the chapter Light and Gravity, Mario Botta emphasizes the importance of light in any architectural work: light generates space, without light there is no space.

The space generated by light becomes the soul of the architectural work. Light is a natural entity existing beyond the architectural fact, which in comparison with the built work finds its *raison d'être* in the passage of time.

Light is both the visible sign of the relationship between the work and the cosmic values of the surroundings, and the element shaping the work in the specific environmental context. It joins architecture and context.

In the chapter about Public Space, the culture of the project together with

the urbanistic thought must come to terms with the critical conditions presiding over the space of human life, struggling with the disturbing environmental crisis.

The architectural thinking will have to question the ethical dimension of collective life by asking to face the civil dimension of the project according to the canons of spaces and architecture such as to define authentically civil social contexts.

Marginalization, negativity and lack of identity models underlie the unverified relationship between public space and associative life. However, the architectural and urban traditions of the entire Western world are made great by this combination, which has become a memory of tradition in our cities.

In a delicate historical moment in which a process of loss of identity and globalization prevails, the author deals with the theme of the European City. The search for a possible identity goes through the sense of belonging to a territory, and therefore to a natural reference to the image of the city. Today the city, as a reference point within a physical territory, rediscovers some traits of its own history. The condition of the urban center, which collects both history and memory, suggests to the citizens some intuitions that help them feel reassured in rediscovering much of their identity. The space around us becomes a territory of memory, with a history that belongs to us and we recognize it as part of our being.

According to Mario Botta, the city becomes a great lesson in architecture as it offers the teaching that it is not possible to live without a past, and that the territories of memory become an essential condition of living in the present.

When writing about the sacredness of space, the author refers to those experiences starting from the post-1968 climate in which a process of desacralization of space was opposed to the traditional sacredness of the rite. Interpreting the divine home within the fabric of a man's house becomes a task that every architecture of the sacred has always faced.

The theme of the sacredness of a place different from any other becomes a condition of expression of symbolic values, compared to the everyday urban pattern. The history of the sacred places is also the story of an architectural space that evokes incommensurable emotions that are capable of giving rise to new emotions. A special case is the completeness of the monastery, which in the tradition of the European city used to enjoy centrality with respect to the buildings of the surroundings.

In the final part of the essay, the author addresses the Masters. In the era of computer design the virtual line can no longer communicate sensitivity and express any differences.

The work of the present generation is totally detached from the Scarpa tradition, according to which construction stems from the artisan knowledge that influences images, forms materials, skills and poetics of space. Carlo Scarpa's design is cognitive, ours is miserably representative.

Two totally different worlds, two different approaches.

Talking about Carlo Scarpa, the author underlines his sensitivity to the materials, able to draw the best from even the poorest, like great architects such as Borromini, Michelangelo and Raffaello. Knowing how to do architecture was a way of serving humanity.

Mario Botta was a boy from Le Corbusier's workshop, in his atelier in Venice for a new hospital project.

Interpreting and creating new proposals able to capture the future and shape it in a new spatial order, traditionally starts from transformations in progress and allows the Corbusian architecture to become a point of references in the architectural culture of the 20 century.

Finally, a tribute to the relationship with Louis Kahn who suggested inter-

preting architecture through the most secret aspects. Architectures speak through silence, prompting man to rekindle other men's memory. Botta's architecture inherits the new visions of Louis Khan along with his ability to go beyond the problems and the intuition of the limits of technological development.

In these days of happy decline and slow time against global hypervelocity, despite nostalgic images of a lost time and peaceful visions of attractive TV spots, history and tradition remain caretakers of a certain primacy of architecture.

Precisely, architecture and its composite elements remain the absolute witnesses of spaces capable of resisting the globalization process and its loss of subjective self-identity.

Beyond these two extreme offers, the social purpose of building through the growing approval of its main characters, as well as the formal and material, but also theoretical, artistic and utopian specificity, of having to reinvent the background for a social ritual, as ancient as the history of the city, seem to vanish.

The author therefore pushes forward the desire to foreshadow renewal strategies in the debate on architecture, retracing and reviewing through writings and reasoning, his fifty years of work.

Together with didactics and research of the Mendrisio Academy, Botta intends to further strengthen the debate on discipline and give visibility to the new transdisciplinary interests that influence and determine the architectural project and the social role of architecture itself.

Taking the past and putting it into perspective for the future is a fundamental question.

In the themes tackled by Mario Botta, the desire to involve the city, history, and memory is part of the architectural composition itself. Architecture plays a fundamental role in affirming the concept of identity and, at the same time, it gives the chance to spread the values of architecture, the ability to create heritage alongside the old and not over the ancient.

Identity research between history and project, but also balance between urban typology and morphology, appear indispensable in a nowadays context, appear necessary to suggest new interpretations for the project of future urban landscapes, to invent unique places, in the face of urban areas, which are characterized by social decay, dispersion and lack of identity.