



INSTEAD OF A TYPICAL SWISS GARDEN AT GROUND LEVEL, THIS HOUSE FEATURES A PATIO THAT HOVERS OVER THE SLOPING SURFACE OF THE SITE.

THE PERFECT VIEW

ON AN UNUSUAL SLOPING PLOT, DIETHELM & SPILLMANN ARCHITEKTEN REALIZES ITS CLIENT'S LOFTY ASPIRATIONS.

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‘IT’S RATHER STRANGE TO BEGIN
WITH A HUGE PLOT AND TO
CONSTRUCT A FLYING PATIO ONE
FLOOR ABOVE THE GROUND’

– Daniel Spillmann –



01 TO MAXIMIZE THE SPECTACULAR VIEW,
THE ARCHITECTS PUT ALL LIVING SPACE
ON THE FIRST FLOOR, PERCHED ABOVE
THE GARAGE.

02 THE BOXED-IN PATIO HAS A RETRACT-
ABLE AWNING.

What was the secret of making this house more than simply a villa with a nice view?

Daniel Spillmann: To generate a maximum amount of living space with a minimum amount of money, we had to keep it simple. What’s more, the client, a single 40-year-old computer consultant, does not represent the average customer. To give you an idea, he can only sleep in a completely dark room, so he didn’t want windows in the master bedroom. We had to put an element of simplicity into the design that would fit not only him but also future residents. **Alois Diethelm:** And I would never call this house a villa. It’s in a village among rather small wooden houses from the early ’70s. From the outset, we wanted the house to fit in with those homes.

Were you inspired by the site?

Spillmann: To be honest, when I first visited the site I thought we had reached the back of beyond. I had to check with the client to make sure he wasn’t talking about a vacation house. Somehow the site conveyed the pleasurable feeling of being on holiday – and it still does. Since it was one of the last properties in the

area without a fence, I thought it was important to keep the characteristic flow of the pasture as it moves across the hillside.

Diethelm: Obviously, we wanted to build as high as possible, because at ground level you can see nothing but the neighbouring houses. Actually, it was the client himself who had done the necessary research. Before buying the land, he fixed a camera to a balloon in an attempt to discover the altitude at which the marvellous panoramic view begins.

Did the client have any other extraordinary requests?

Spillmann: The first day he came to our office, he brought a book of houses by John Lautner – the perfect starting point. One of the most exciting things about Lautner’s architecture is its correlation to nature, the way he encloses the given environment and exaggerates its particular qualities. He gives his clients the impression of having their own private vista. I like that. **Diethelm:** Most of the client’s requests derived from the site. As the panoramic view is available only from the first floor and we were not allowed to build over two storeys high, we had »



to extend the living area horizontally. And with no reason to make the cellar and the garage as big as the living area, we designed a house with a distinctive overhang.

Quite an innovative arrangement of space, isn't it?

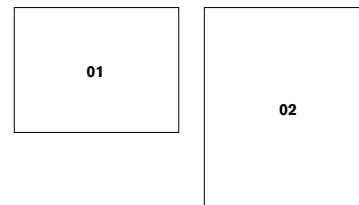
Spillmann: A standard Swiss house has a basement and a landscaped garden. In this case, an inhabitable ground floor did not make sense, so we omitted both basement and garden. In cultural terms, denying the occupant a private garden is more a matter of courage than of invention. It is rather strange, after all, to begin with a huge plot and to construct a flying patio one floor above the ground instead of using that space as a garden.

Can you tell us about the framework?

Spillmann: Basically, we built a concrete core that supports a wooden shell. While the massive core acts as a thermal buffer, the wooden shell provides good thermal insulation. The two side walls work as high beams and cantilever about 5 m on both sides. The roof, floors and end façades hang between these two high beams. »

‘THE MAIN DESIGN EFFORT WAS A VIRTUOSO HANDLING OF THE BUILDING CODE’

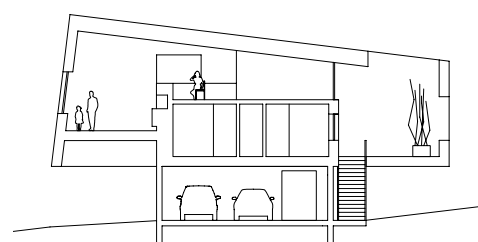
– Daniel Spillmann –



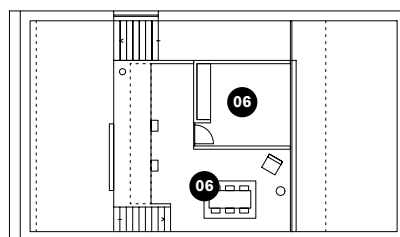
01 DOING YOUR HOMEWORK. THE CLIENT TESTED AT WHAT ALTITUDE THE SURROUNDING VIEWS COULD BE FULLY ENJOYED BY TYING A CAMERA TO A BALLOON.

02 HALLWAY LEADING PAST THE BEDROOMS AND UP TO A KITCHEN WITH A VIEW.

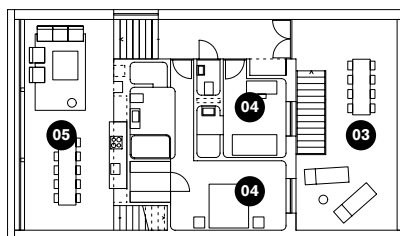




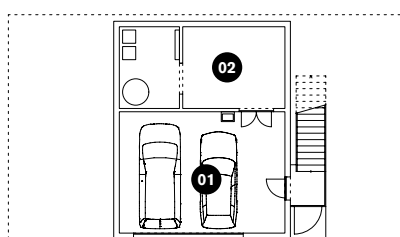
LONG SECTION.



MEZZANINE.

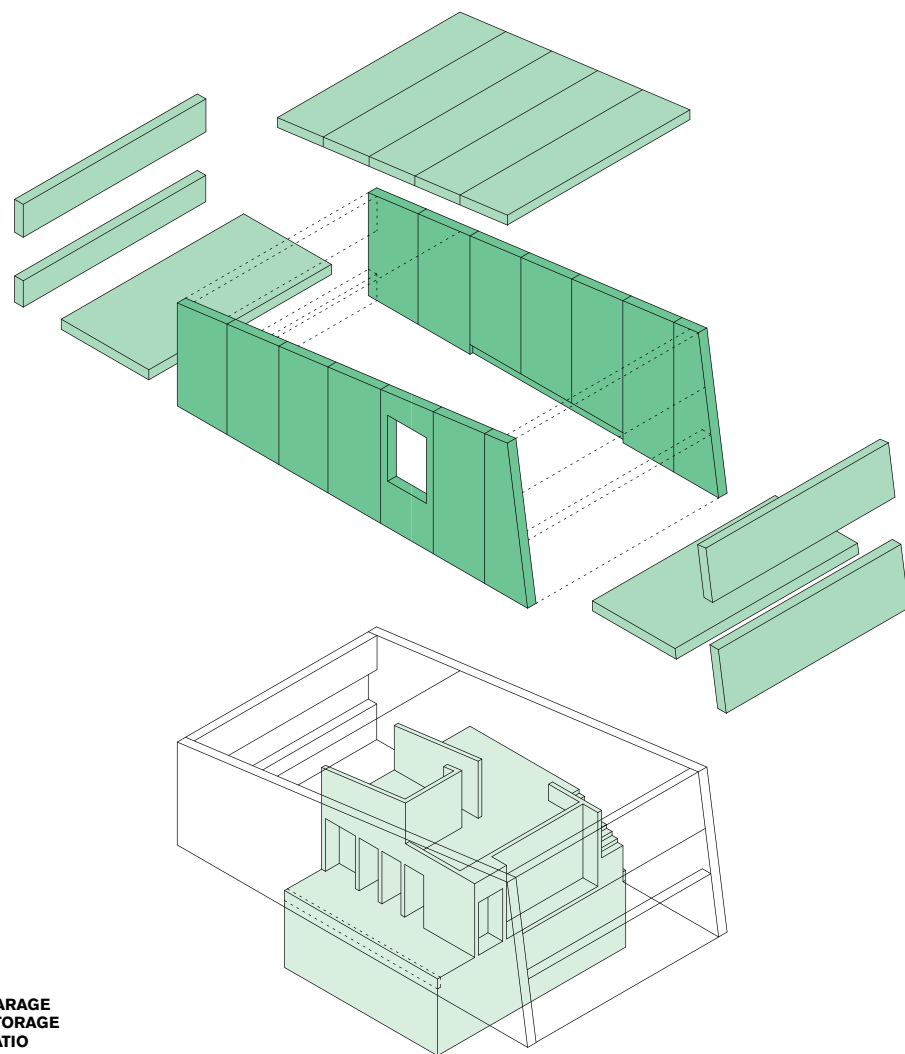


FIRST FLOOR.



GROUND FLOOR.

EXPLODED VIEW.



01 GARAGE
02 STORAGE
03 PATIO
04 BEDROOM
05 DINING / LIVING
06 STUDY

Diethelm: Although the structural concept is fairly simple, the accessibility of the site presented us with a major challenge. We knew from the beginning that neither a concrete-transport truck nor a heavy hauler would be able to drive up the hillside. Each building element had to be as big as possible yet small enough to be conveyed to the site. In the end, we had agricultural tractors deliver some of the materials.

Swiss construction has an excellent reputation, but we also know that the country's building rules are strict.

Spillmann: Frankly speaking, the main design effort was a virtuoso handling of the building code. We had to comply with the maximum – quite limited – height of eaves and ridges, even though the higher the building the better the view. It's a basic building conflict. We solved it by using the regulations to our advantage. You have to read the sloped façade as part of the roof, which means the panoramic window is, in fact, nothing other than a skylight. With this interpretation of the building code, we deliberately pushed the reference towards early

buildings of Mostelberg, from the late '60s, a typology featuring big roofs with eaves reaching the ground.

Diethelm: Initially, we wanted to cover the façade and roof with deep-violet translucent panels made from corrugated plastic. Depending on the lighting conditions, this materialization would have afforded a glimpse of the courtyard and the split-level living room. But the authorities – basically a voluntary board of nonprofessionals – imposed restrictions on the materials and colours of exterior cladding. They asked for some kind of natural or handcrafted materials: materials associated with the traditions of this rural environment.

And you decided on an environmentally-friendly approach, making use of solar energy. Is this a trend among architects in Switzerland?

Diethelm: One could say that erecting environmentally-friendly buildings in Switzerland is a current trend. This trend was initiated, however, far less by architects than by industry. It's industry that supplies the products and offers solutions. In this case, our decision to build a passive house had to do with the bearing structure. After we



found that we would need roof panels of about 40 cm to build a 10-m-wide space without columns, it was a small step to making a house based on passive energy, as the 40-cm-thick cavity could easily be filled with insulation. We covered the entire roof with solar panels and selected 36-cm-thick mineral wool to insulate the building. The house generates more energy than the client consumes.

Do you have a favourite detail?

Spillmann: The most beautiful detail is the irrelevance of details. Although it may not look like it, in this house most details are straightforward. We've added no innovative interventions, which is what Swiss architecture is known for. It's more about the *promenade architecturale* – about experiencing the house with its different levels and perceiving the presence of the inaccessible environment.

What have you learned from this project?

Diethelm: That we can respond to changing conditions. Normally, we establish the appearance of a house quite early on by gearing the type of construction, the materials and the textures to

'MOST OF THE CLIENT'S REQUESTS DERIVED FROM THE SITE'

– Alois Diethelm –

one another. Basically, we did the same here, but when the client saw the realized masonry – which was to be left exposed – he asked us to plaster the walls and paint them silver. And after he saw the walls of the core painted silver on the exterior, he wanted the concrete ceilings to be painted silver, too. Ultimately, we decided to paint the ceiling of the guest room pale gold and that of the master bedroom ducat gold, thus transforming these private spaces into veritable treasure chests. «

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01

02

01 THE MEZZANINE LEVEL.

02 LIVING ROOM.