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DECEMBER 2019

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The Entertaining Issue

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ITALY

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Perspicacity and new perspectives at a glass-walled lookout in Piedmont

On the highest hill overlooking the north Italian town of Biella, Teca House stands like a modernist monument, a glass box astride iron columns and cement planes. Designed by Federico Delrosso, a Biella-raised, Milan-based architect, the contemporary edifice emerges from the low vestiges of an 18th-century stone silo. Its transparent walls overlook oaks and chestnut trees, with the sharp mountain peaks at the gateway to the Alps visible in the distance. 'As a child, everyone dreams of building a treehouse,' says Alberto Savio, the yarn industrialist who commissioned Delrosso for the enterprise. 'This is our treehouse.'

THE HOUSE'S WRAPAROUND BALCONIES, ACCESSED THROUGH SLIDING GLASS WALLS AND BORDERED BY LOW GLASS SURROUNDS, EXPAND THE LIVING SPACE BY A QUARTER

In Italian, *teca* means 'display case'. Inspired by Philip Johnson's 1949 Glass House – which was designed as a display case for the minimalist domesticity it contained – Teca House is a display case for what it exteriorises. The glass walls that enclose the house slide back, opening the interiors to the surrounding woods. The interior dimensions, only about a 60 sq m footprint in total, expand by a quarter when adding the wraparound balconies of the cement platform, girded by a barely perceptible glass barrier at its edges. The flexibility renders Teca House party-ready, turning the intimate space – where Savio >>



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and his wife Lorella like to read, work, do yoga, and occasionally house a guest for the night – into an extended open area that flows into the outdoors.

For Teca House's inaugural gathering, a celebration of the couple's 30th wedding anniversary in June, 80 guests arrived at sunset to fill its deck and garden, and crowded around a local blues guitarist who performed in the living room. Even with 40 chairs arranged around the space, there was still leeway for guests to dance.

Just uphill from the couple's longtime residence (which they still use as their primary home), Teca House sits on a plot of land that was once covered by vineyards. When the Savios expanded their property last year, they discovered the dry-stone wall remains of an old farmer's depository. What could be done with something so beautifully historic yet so thoroughly damaged by time? Savio offered a blank slate to Delrosso, who extrapolated from the ruins a set of floating platforms, partially rebuilding the»

ABOVE, THE SITTING AREA IS FURNISHED WITH DELROSSO'S 'HASHI' FLOOR LIGHT FOR DAVIDE GROPPI, AND HIS TRAPEZOIDAL CHAIRS FOR HENRYTINI. THE BESPOKE COFFEE TABLES MIRROR THE FORM OF THE HOUSE, AND CAN TRANSFORM INTO DINING TABLES. LEFT, THE KITCHEN IS SET DISCREETLY INTO THE HOUSE'S CENTRAL CORE.



LEFT, A QUEEN-SIZE BED FOLDS OUT OF A PALE BIRCH WOOD WALL CABINET TO CREATE A GUEST BEDROOM AREA. BELOW, THE OLD FARM BUILDING'S STONE WALLS WERE PARTIALLY REBUILT TO ANCHOR THE GLAZED GROUND-FLOOR OFFICE.

This crystalline box of a house, with triple-pane glass, an underground heat pump, underfloor heating, and electricity from photovoltaic panels, even achieves top-rated energy efficiency.

An underground level affords room for guests or catering services, with wide iron box frames around the window openings, piercing the rocky ramparts that define the plot. Savio keeps a desk on the smaller ground floor, where the glass walls rise up from the stones of the old farm building, surrounded by a garden of dog rose, bay laurel, strawberry trees, and hawthorn by landscape architect Anna Scaravella, who selected wild-looking plants to echo the forest at its borders. From the narrow iron-walled stairway, the ascent to the top floor opens up to a church-like grandeur as the cement platform and glass walls launch viewers into an apparently floating platform in the landscape. The structure, supported by six black shafts, is so elemental in its iron, cement, and glass construction as to almost disappear.

It's this disappearing act that allows Teca House to be a space for both peaceful solitude and festive crowds. Its destiny, according to Savio, is to become the site of cultural gatherings. After selling off his yarn business, part of Biella's significant textile industry, he feels a sense of duty in this new mission. 'It's up to those who can to create sites for culture,' he says, lamenting the political and economic failures in Italy that have stemmed creative opportunity. 'Our society has been suffering for years, but if we create these places for exchange, who knows what it might lead to?' ★

federicodelrosso.com

stone walls to form the base of a starkly modern construction. 'I like to revive history with signs of today,' says Delrosso. 'The house is small but complex, and incorporating the fragments of the previous structure was the most complex part of all.'

A push at Philip Johnson-style concealment made the design even more complex, with everything, even a queen-size fold-down bed, hidden behind the pale birch wood cabinet doors and waxed black iron plates that gird the house's 1.5m core. The refrigerator, oven, washing machine, pipes, and even a tiny platform lift, are out of sight, privileging the clear woodland view from one side of the house to the other. The sitting area is equipped with Delrosso's chopsticks-like 'Hashi' light for Davide Groppi, his trapezoidal chairs in charcoal velvet, and stackable iron stools for Henrytimi, and low coffee tables that mirror the form of the Teca House in miniature, and transform with a swivel to become dining tables. Elsewhere, Delrosso's Compasso d'Oro-winning 'Nulla' lights for Davide Groppi – small coins of soft, recessed light set shallowly into the ceiling – illuminate the space.

