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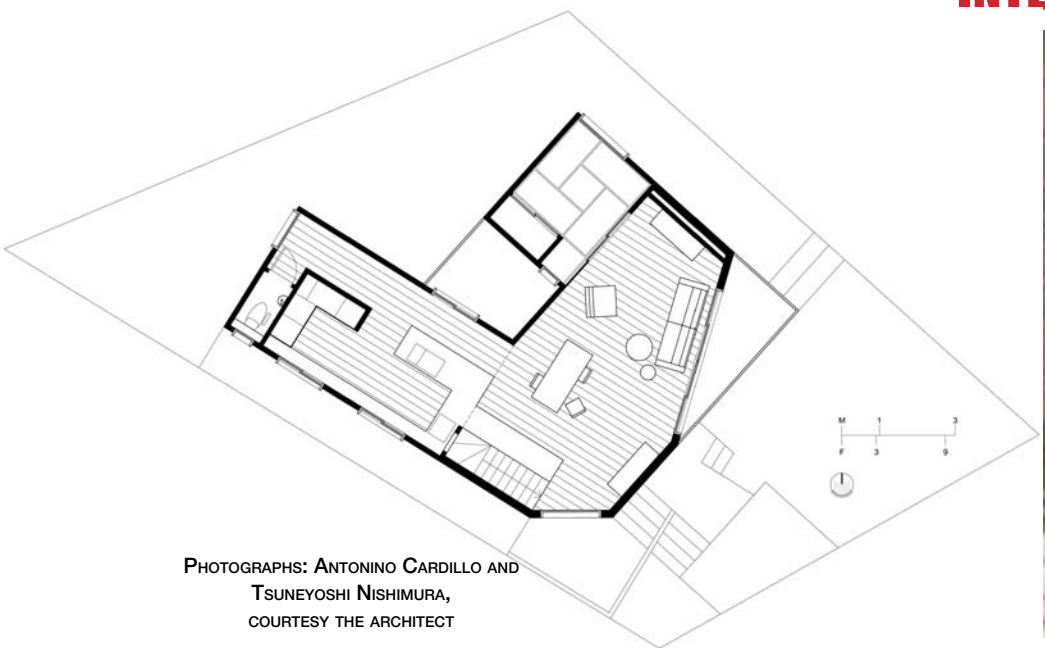
TWO MUMBAI APARTMENTS, one contemporary and the other 30 years old – both filled with art and collectibles

Goan architect Rahul Deshpande speaks a versatile language

Also work by Rajiv Saini, Morphogenesis, Sunil Humane & Verendra Wakhloo

A Yen for your Thoughts?

Italian architect Antonino Cardillo designs 'Nomura 24 House,' a home in Japan – the country's inbred minimalism lending itself perfectly to the architect's philosophy and vision of a desired lifestyle. Giving up his signature curved walls in concrete and vaulted roofs, he adapts his design to suit the innate qualities of timber, the material used here, says Devyani Jayakar.



PHOTOGRAPHS: ANTONINO CARDILLO AND TSUNEYOSHI NISHIMURA, COURTESY THE ARCHITECT

The DNA of an Antonino Cardillo design is quite unwavering. His architectural manifesto prescribes superbly engineered, sculpted spaces…leaving in fact, little scope or even need for 'interior design.' Travertine, concrete, rock…these are a few of his favourite things. There is no potpourri of colours and textures. He also favours modern-day vaulted roofs, recalling the formidable vaults of many historic buildings from the past. For Antonino, the past is prologue to his creative process. History is one of his bigger inspirations – he feels that without memory, one cannot design for the present.

Antonino has worked in Italy, France, Spain, Australia and now, Japan, where a quiet cerebral celebration of 'less is more' is endemic to the nation. Japan's genetic approach to minimalism seems quite perfectly suited to Antonino's relentless stylising…where the space seems to disallow any visible signs of human habitation, lest its 'blank perfection' gets despoiled.

He readily admits that his architecture may not be right for everyone. 'In my house, the interaction with the environment, with the sun, wind, rain and sounds, is much more important than objects or furniture. And I have learned that in space, the relations between things are more important than the things themselves,' he says, adding, 'I would advise those who want a large screen television not to commission me to build their house. They would be disappointed with it.' Dare I add, sotto voce, 'or ***any*** television, for that matter…including hundreds

Japan's genetic approach to minimalism seems to fit quite perfectly with Antonino's relentless stylising…the large seven sided polygonal living room.

of appurtenances of everyday living?' Antonino Cardillo homes are for clients who want to live a more evolved, contemplative, aesthetically frugal life…an idealism which few are able to realise. Pretenders need not apply!

Nomura Koumuten – a real estate builder from Osaka – requested a low budget timber frame house, meant to be resold. Is it the material used which does not offer the swagger customarily seen in Antonino's houses? Or is it the absence of the soaring sweep of a vaulted roof, which makes this space more approachable for lesser mortals? 'Of course the house had to have traditional elements, such as a 'genkan' (an entrance hall to leave shoes), a 'washitsu' (Japanese Room for the tea ceremony) and an arrangement of washrooms following the Japanese order, which is a bit different from European layouts. The house also had to fit into the hilly suburbia context, which contains several individual houses,' says Antonino.

'24' was the number of the plot where the house had to be built. This 24th plot – an awkward trapezoidal shape – was at the top of the hill, surrounded by a beautiful wooded area on two sides, a vacant house plot and the main access road. The house has a timber frame defined in white plaster. The outside flooring was in polished concrete, the inside being made of Japanese hand-planed planks.

The structure is split over two levels and sports whitewashed walls and a sloping pitched roof. 'To overlook the best view over Osaka bay in the public spaces of the house, I preferred to move them (living, dining, kitchen and Japanese room) to the first floor. This ensured that apertures were mainly facing Osaka bay, and that

'In my designs, the interaction with the environment, with the sun, wind, rain and sounds, is much more important than objects or furniture.'

FACT FILE:

Design: Antonino Cardillo architect
Architects: Antonino Cardillo, Yukinori Nagao
Interior coordinator: Antonino Cardillo, Ayumi Taniguchi
Client: Nomura Komuten, Osaka
Site supervisor: Takeshi Suenaga
Site: Takarazuka, Hyogo Prefecture, Japan

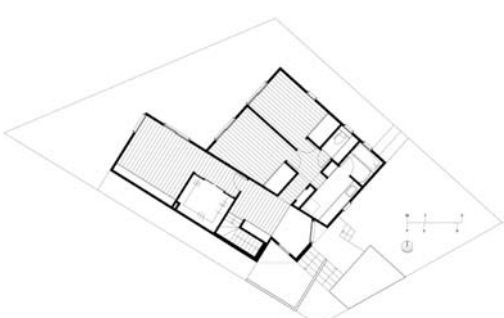
the private zone containing three bedrooms at the ground floor, faced an inner courtyard looking towards the wooded hill behind.

In the plan, the two longer, non-parallel sides of the plot define two right-angled systems, which connecting to the third side, create an incisive, faceted shape. The diverse surfaces mutate the intensity of the light according to the incidence of the sun. Inside, on the first floor, a large polygonal living room with seven sides possesses the inexact quality of certain medieval Italian piazzas, on whose sides the openings – now windows, now doorways – describe the multiple directions of the sun's aspect and travel. The rear wall of the living room, has a warm grey Japanese wallpaper.

The irregularity of the geometry crystallises a willingness for dialogue among the parts which make up the whole: kitchen, Washitsu and window over the bay, foreshortened to avoid direct exposure of the interior to the road. Finally, at the rear, the narrow space created between the kitchen and the Japanese room picks out a small patio, whose windowed sides gather the afternoon diagonals of the sun on the tatami flooring of the Japanese room and reverberating blues inside the kitchen cavity.

These two rooms lead onto the living room through two low doorways cut into the white stretch of a high wall. Almost rationalised grottoes, these bedrooms made of independent light engage with the large polygonal room: dark and azure in the morning, light and warm in the afternoon.

'This work in Japan was my first project with a timber structure. So I needed to revise my design



All the public spaces: living room, dining room, kitchen are on the first floor so they can overlook Osaka bay.

approach. I adopted prismatic shapes which easily adapt to the requirements of a timber structure suitable for an earthquake zone. Furthermore, I had to optimise the small space available (just a little tower upon the road) through a compact building. Accordingly, I avoided using curved walls and vaulted roofs, which have been a recurring feature in my past design works. What I do enjoy very much is to develop a different approach, due to the morphing following the nature of the material used.

'Nomura 24 House is an attempt to explore a potential connection between Mediterranean houses and contemporary Japanese minimalism, the colour white being a preference in both cultures. Increasingly, contemporary Japanese architecture attempts to express complexity through an apparently elementary shape. Starting from this consideration, I tried to identify this quality in the inexactitude that characterises ancient Mediterranean houses and urban voids. My personal approach is to try to create bridges between different cultures, in fact, to homogenise them through a superimposition of worldwide dominant models,' says Antonino.