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# Music Holl

*Inspired by a never-performed symphony he discovered in a book by avant-garde composer John Cage, architect Steven Holl has designed a masterful home and gallery in Seoul that fuses architecture and music.*

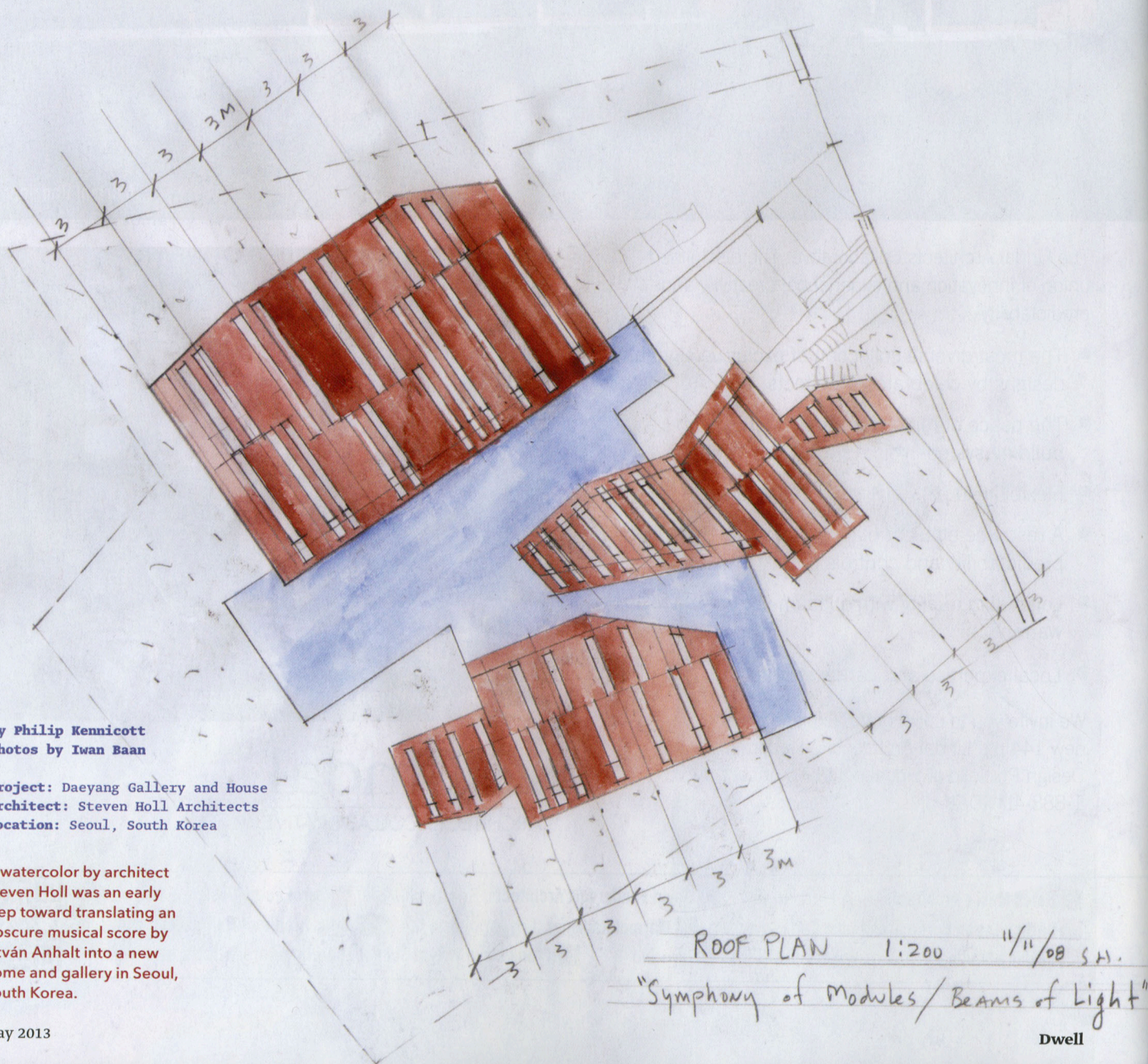
It took István Anhalt five years to compose his massive 1967 *Symphony of Modules*, and, when it was finished, he estimated it would take at least 50 hours of rehearsal for an orchestra to master its mere 28 minutes of music. Today, the score and its supporting materials—diagrams, charts, graphs—occupy four large boxes; the symphony has never been performed.

Yet it has had an odd afterlife, unheard but never entirely forgotten. In 1969, the composer John Cage published Anhalt's sketch of the symphony in his collection *Notations*, a volume of scores culled from other composers and a now-iconic catalog of innovative ways to transcribe music. And in 2008, inspired by Cage's book, *»*

By Philip Kennicott  
Photos by Iwan Baan

**Project:** Daeyang Gallery and House  
**Architect:** Steven Holl Architects  
**Location:** Seoul, South Korea

A watercolor by architect Steven Holl was an early step toward translating an obscure musical score by István Anhalt into a new home and gallery in Seoul, South Korea.

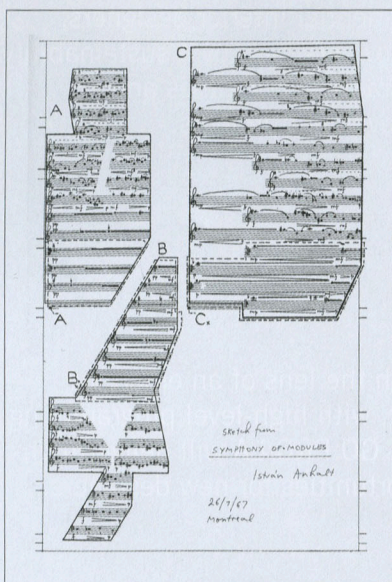




When viewed from above, the Daeyang Gallery and House (below) is nearly identical to the sketch Anhalt made for his *Symphony of Modules* (bottom), though Holl has filled Anhalt's negative space with a pool of water.

*"For me, it's more interesting when the art space is connected to the living space and the pavilions but has still got its austerity and purity. You're not just hanging art in your bedrooms, which is different."*

—Architect Steven Holl



architect Steven Holl used the blocky and shard-like shapes of the sketch as inspiration for a house and art gallery in Seoul. Rising on a hillside in the South Korean capital, the copper-clad pavilions that define Holl's 2012 Design Review Award-winning Daeyang Gallery and House are based on the mysterious polygonal shapes of Anhalt's symphony.

Created for the head of a prominent Korean shipping company, Holl's architectural study in geometry, light, and Zen-like austerity is neatly tucked into one of the city's most fashionable districts. One pavilion serves as an entryway, another contains the residence, and the third is used for gatherings. A plane of water intersects and connects with the gallery space beneath. As visitors climb a staircase in the glassed-in entry pavilion, they

pierce the flat, thin pool, which links and unifies the three forms.

"This house doesn't have an outside," says the 65-year-old Holl, who teaches a course at Columbia University about the relationship between architecture and music. "It has an inside that is an outside."

Throughout Holl's career, music has given him the liberty to think in ways that transcend the purely rational. His *Stretto House* (the "stretto" is the overlapping of answer and subject in a fugue), in Dallas, from 1991, was inspired in part by the work of Hungarian composer Béla Bartók. And in his writing, he strives for a holistic approach to architecture that draws on non-Western thought, literature, science, and the lexicon of mystics. "Eternities exist in the smallest detail," he writes, stressing "the



Clad in copper panels that Holl had fabricated by the Kansas City, Missouri, company Zahner, the house is daylit by a host of rectangular skylights (inspired by the musical staff) punched through the roofs and the pool's floor.

urgent need of a thought-to-feeling bridge today."

The history of the relationship between architecture and music has suffered, over the centuries, from Johann Wolfgang von Goethe's (1749–1832) wonderfully eloquent but historically contingent summary: "I call architecture frozen music." Goethe was borrowing from an earlier writer, F. W. J. Schelling, and, although poetic, the metaphor was a product of its time. The idea of frozen music made sense in an age when one "read" a building primarily by looking at its facade, where the rhythm of windows and doors, columns and pilasters did indeed seem to parallel closely the orderly statements and resolutions of classical composers.

Though the two forms do share a similar vocabulary—"articulation," "composition," "contour," "contrast," "development"—they don't necessar-

ily use the terms in the same ways. Musical material doesn't need to be tested for strength and durability. A symphony may bore listeners, but it's not going to collapse catastrophically. A building may even be structured in "movements," but there's no guarantee the visitor will experience them in order, the way that a concert audience hears an evening-length work.

In the past century and a half, the long age of columns, porticoes, and orderly marches of windows has yielded to the eccentric, sculptural forms of Zaha Hadid, Daniel Libeskind, and almost every architect who isn't courting a reputation for traditionalism. Buildings are no longer apprehended in a glance at their front but experienced from all angles. "It is a sensibility," says Holl, "becoming more acutely aware of how we experience things." Architecture, he explains, is felt and understood by the "subject-body," which moves through space. Music, for him, is a powerful metaphor for the dynamic unfolding of experience.

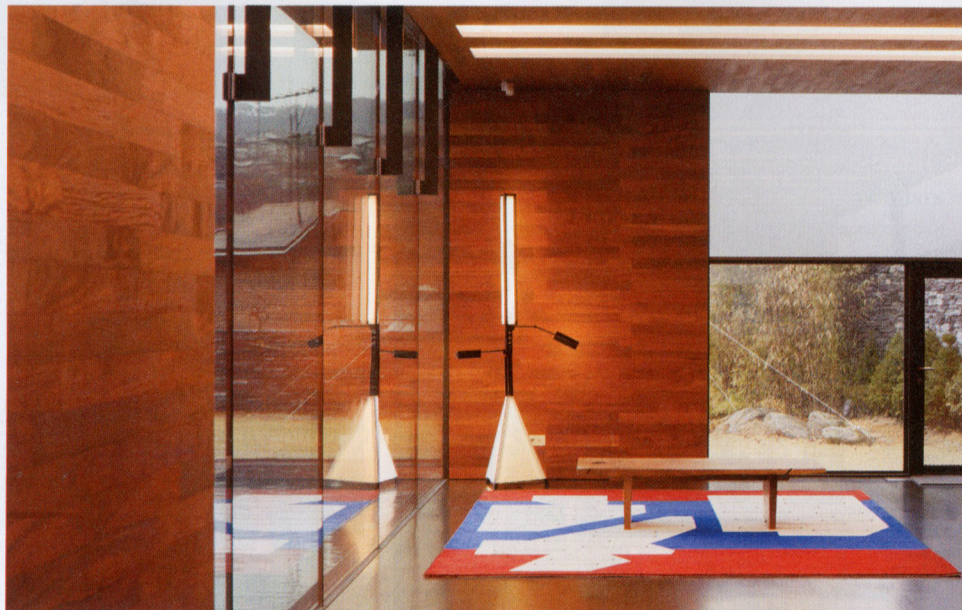
Music also focuses Holl's deeper concerns about architecture, a profession that he worries has become too dependent on the computer and satisfied with its static representation in traditional media. After finishing ►

*"Let's organize the building as a graphical score and bring light in where the staff would be. That became the jumping-off point, where the water unites everything that's in the landscape. It came together in like a week."*

—Architect Steven Holl







Holl designed seven rugs specifically for the home. One, above, shows the building's interplay of structure and water (also seen below); the architect also designed the light fixture next to it. In the tearoom (above right), Tre 3 chairs by Angelo Mangiarotti for AgapeCasa surround a Trienna table by Ilmari Tapiovaara for Artek.



[dwell.com/copper-on-water](http://dwell.com/copper-on-water)  
Visit our website to see a pair of short films Holl's office commissioned on the Daeyang Gallery and House.



the Daeyang Gallery and House, Holl spent \$10,000 for architectural filmmakers Spirit of Space to produce two films that move through the house, exploring its relationship to light and the progression of spaces. It was an effort to capture the house's internal musical geometry.

"Architecture is moribund," says Holl. "It has to do with people looking at it as computer shapes. One way to think about it more deeply is to think about it as a sequence."

Holl is not alone in harboring what often seems like an institution-wide frustration with the static nature of architectural thinking or in his dream of connecting rooted structures to the fluidity of musical consciousness. Antonino Cardillo, a young Italian architect, argues that just the material substance of a finished building isn't the thing that matters.

"I see a building as an instrument that expresses architecture through time in the way it responds to light and also to other phenomena: wind, rain, sound, people's voices, and other elements," says Cardillo. His 2008 House of Convexities, set in a field near Barcelona, Spain, was inspired by the union of music and motion in flamenco dance, by the dynamic of sudden bursts of motion and stopping that characterizes the form.

An impressionistic sonata when compared with Anhalt's thorny compositions, the Daeyang Gallery and House is full of subtle notes and nuance, including several custom furnishings that Holl designed specifically for the structure. Riffing on the idea of staff lines on a musical score, Holl designed rectangular punctures in the various roofs and in the central pool of water to allow bars of light to dance and play on the interior. In the underground gallery space, the sky breaks through from above, lighting the entire space naturally.

Though Holl acknowledges that his appropriation of the score was wholly graphic, there is a curious footnote to his use of Anhalt's sketch of the *Symphony of Modules*. After the Daeyang Gallery and House was finished, Anhalt's widow contacted Holl's firm to say how pleased she was that someone had remembered her late husband's music. And she pointed out something that Holl was unaware of when he borrowed it: *The Symphony of Modules* was inspired in part by the composer's experience of English architecture, especially the 13th-century Salisbury Cathedral.

"The immense expanses of gray stone and structural lines...so unfussy and serene," wrote Anhalt in 1965. "How to translate this into music?" ■■