



Sliding off the hill

Johan Annerhed, Maria Papafigou, and Marie Kojzar of OOK Architects demonstrate masterfully how to marry nature and architecture in the most balanced way. The Patio House is a summer residence of a family with kids, located on the Greek island of Karpathos, a 22-hour boat ride from Athens. Opening onto the Aegean Sea, the dramatic plot has a direct view on the beach of Afiarti and is delightful thanks to the porous cliffs and sparse bushy vegetation. "The most complicated point was the island's remote location and the fact that the landscape was very sensitive to any alterations", reflects Papafigou. The architects' main goal was to leave the landscape as untouched as possible. They designed the house to reduce the intervention into the landscape to a minimum. This task was not easy, due to the textured character of the cliffs that reach directly into the sea.



Patio House, 2018
Karpathos, Greece

Karpathos' untamed natural beauty forced the question of how to place a house into this spectacular scenery, which was the starting point for the design process. Aiming at "enhancing its qualities without altering its character", the architects envisioned a minimalistic geometric single-storey volume, which they gently placed on the top plateau of the plot instead of mimicking the natural context. For them the landscape and architecture should be two distinct and even quite contrasting elements that by would merge visually over time. At the core of the house is a patio, while the arrangement of spaces is dictated by the stunning vistas. The placement of numerous differently sized windows was precisely planned to frame the unique views. The architects envisioned a cantilevered structure that plunges into the surrounding landscape, which not only echoes but also contributes to the dramatic character of the site. It was supposed to augment the experience and to create the illusion that the house is hovering over the sea. Given the size of the minimalistic cube, the visual effect is strong, both from the outside as well as from the interior perspective. The house is adjusted to the height differences on the site – part of the building has been raised and as a result creates an independent wing, which is allocated for guests.





Seeking views



Bio Founded in 2010 by Felipe Croxatto Viviani and Nicolás Opazo Marchetti, the Chilean practice specialises in residential architecture. The team has gained recognition for original realizations that are envisioned with respect for and in a dialogue with the surrounding context. They perfectly combine minimalist formal language with texturally rich materials.

La Loica and La Tagua are cosy summer spots that take their names from typical regional bird species. As often happens, a limited budget can become a powerful motivation instead of creating obstacles. Optimising the floor area of these lovely summer houses resulted in a significant reduction of the foundation costs, which made a huge difference given the steep slope (La Loica is 24 square metres and La Tagua is 34). The architects, Felipe Croxatto Viviani and Nicolás Opazo Marchetti, proposed the compact two-storey cabins for a spectacular yet challenging slope. “The site was definitely a major influence, and contemplation is a fundamental part of the project”, they explain. “We tried to relate the user with the environment by seeking views towards the Pacific Ocean and the rocky formations in front”, they add. As much as the landscape suggested the placement of large openings, strong winds from the south in Matanzas called for the outdoor terraces to the north. Accessible through fully opening glazed doors, the terraces significantly enlarge the living space and create an additional connection with the natural context. The inhabitants can enjoy fresh air while sheltered from the disturbance of the wind.

The structure of each cabin is based on wooden pillars, thanks to which the two-storey space has a loft character. Both levels are smoothly connected and planned to create the impression of a spacious interior. The small floor area required a precisely and practically organised room arrangement – on the ground floor the architects planned all living spaces with the kitchen, bathroom, and dining room. A more intimate bedroom is located in part of the top level, the rest of which remains open to create a double height space downstairs to use during the day. The exposed wood, natural materials used in the furnishings, and a boat-like staircase linking both floors create a special atmosphere for these coastline summer retreats.



**Casa La Loica & Casa
La Tagua, 2018**
Matanzas, Chile





One of the challenges during the construction was installing the windows, which, due to a combination of their significant size and strong winds, behaved like sails. The inclination of the hill did not make this operation easier. "We had to hang them from the rooftop and place them in their final position from there", recount the architects. Generous openings are an important part of both cabins. Installed so that the owners can fully benefit from the views, the large front window opening onto the sea and the horizon line is practically a glazed wall which invites the landscape inside. As the houses are located just in front of the famous, large 'Lobera' rock rising from the sea, the view framed by this window is spectacular. The top level also received extensive glazing, with transparent walls providing extensive panoramas towards the north and south.

The 40° angle of the terrain also required a deep foundation system that was eventually executed in concrete, which was produced higher on the road level and then delivered to the not-easily-reachable site. Recycled oak sleepers were used for the exterior cladding, due to their long-term resistance to the weather conditions and natural look that blends the architecture into the natural beauty of the site, which remains unaltered. Both cabins can be accessed only through a narrow staircase along the steep hill, leaving the landscape intact.

A refuge on a peak



The twelve-square-metre Alpine Shelter Skuta looks incredible, immersed into the rocky peaks of the Slovenian Kamnik Alps. This inventive design was conceived by students led by Spela Videcnik and Rok Oman of OFIS Architects within an architectural design studio at the Harvard Graduate School of Design. The main goal was to find a perfectly functional solution for a shelter at an extremely high altitude. The extreme weather conditions, including large temperature differences, strong winds, and heavy snow fall, as well as the rocky terrain were some of the biggest challenges. The plot was also not easily reachable, which in a way helped determine that the architects would work with a pre-fab technology. To envision the structural components, the team worked with engineers from London-based AKT II. "The bivouac is an object that represents a basic human necessity, a shelter. It is a symbol of refuge," explains the OFIS studio. "The outer form and choice of materials were chosen to respond to the extreme mountain conditions, and also provide views of the greater landscape," they add. To install the structure on the plot just below Mountain Skuta, the architects used a helicopter. In an obstacle-free and rapid construction process, the shelter was put in place without disturbing the natural context, as respect for the site was a major factor in the shelter's design.

The highly resistant materials perfectly suit the local climate conditions, while the shape is in line with the mountainous landscape (the design scheme was invented by students Frederick Kim, Katie MacDonald, and Erin Pellegrino). The volume has been divided into three functional zones, which find echoes in the three-module structure. The entrance and a storage area as well as a tiny space for preparing food occupy the first part, the second is made for socialising and sleeping, and the final one includes only bunk beds. Thanks to this flexible planning, the shelter can accommodate up to eight guests, who can enjoy jaw-dropping landscapes through the glass walls on each end of the building.



Bio OFIS Architects was founded in 2000 in Ljubljana by Rok Oman and Špela Videčnik. The architects have been teaching at the Harvard University Graduate School of Design in Boston since 2014. Their portfolio comprises innovative projects for the public and cultural spaces as well as offices, as well as residential architecture.



Concrete geometries

The massive and complex volume of La Cuesta House projects from the Sierras Chicas hills in the Córdoba region of Argentina. To adjust to the abrupt decline of the plot, the building is developed on three floors with the structure cantilevering from the hilltop. The entrance to the house is not connected directly with the street but leads through a pedestrian bridge (creating a shaded driveway underneath). It arrives at the upper terrace with water fountains and a large bench to enjoy a 360-degree panorama of the valley. The top level gathers the social spaces and offers the best views, the middle one is designated for the primary bedroom, while the bottom floor houses the secondary bedrooms and a playroom, and also offers an intimate patio for private family activities.





La Cuesta House, 2015
La Calera, Córdoba,
Argentina

Amid moonlike scenery



One cannot imagine a more impossible location for architecture than the Marmarole mountain range in the Italian Dolomites. A rocky saddle at the height of 2667 metres above sea level is not easily accessible, nor does the terrain make a practical foundation. High altitudes naturally feature an extreme climate, while the vast mountainous landscape, which certainly is a scenic frame, is a challenging perspective to deal with in the design process. “The Bivouac Fanton is a project of proportions between absolute and measure, a minute work that finds its dimension in the possibility of perceptive amplification; living inside of it means placing oneself between the lenses of a telescope, it is the attempt to frame the space, to circumscribe it, making it a work of connection between man and the environment, to define a caesura capable of finding a temporary border to the landscape, a form of progressive compression of rocks, light, wind and snow,” state the architects. Amid this out-of-this-world scenery, the Bivouac Fanton looks like a robotic machine sent to space to explore the surface of Mars.



Bivouac Fanton, 2021
Dolomites, Italy







On a bedrock



The Rock, 2018
Whistler, British
Columbia, Canada

“Before placing pen to paper, we spent five days on the site, absorbing its characteristics: The weather, the topography, the fauna, distant views, etc.,” remarks Jay Gort of Gort Scott. “This appreciation of the site has been critical to the design, siting, and arrangement of the building. For example, the proposed dining area enjoys the western light and views over the lake and the bedrooms enjoy a particular view to a distant mountain to the east through the trees,” he adds. It is exactly due to this practice that the way The Rock has been set in the context of the Canadian mountain resort of Whistler is truly exceptional, especially given its significant size. A complex rocky foundation became a plot for the multi-level volume. Envisioned to act as an extension of the existing landscape, the house and the surroundings really are, as Frank Lloyd Wright said, “each the happier for the other”. The house rises from the rock and is oriented in various directions, divided into a six-bedroom residence and a two-bedroom guest house. While the bottom part of the volume is made of concrete, the upper levels are made from timber, which relates closely to the topography and woodland immediately adjacent. Made with great respect for its surrounding environment, the structure, except for the solid base, is transparent through its substantial windows on the first floor level and the semi-transparent wooden second floor with extensive outdoor space.





