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From Superyacht *to* Superhouse

“Great buildings that move the spirit have always been rare. In every case they are unique, poetic, products of the heart.” – Arthur Erickson

Words by Julia Brandon

Home is where the heart is, as they say, and it's the combination of humble bricks and mortar brought to life through passion, experience and vision that creates that ever-so-important hub where life happens. It's central to our existence, it's what grounds us, gives us emotional and physical, not to mention financial, security. But it's also a canvas for self-expression, an outward projection of our inner personalities.

The same can be said for the body of work produced by architects. Although often tailored to an existing client, the starting point for any design is the shaping of a dream, the capturing of an idea on paper with the aim of eventually, and successfully, translating it into a solid construction.

For Magnus Ström of Ström Architects, that dream is to create a 'Superhouse'. A unique concept driven by pure architecture, but also inspired by the design and finishing of world-class superyachts – something Magnus came to be fascinated with when he worked in an architecture practice next to Dubois Naval Architects. The similarities and crossovers that architecture and naval architecture lend to each other have become particularly on-trend of late, but for Ström, the positive influence of superyacht design on his own contemporary style of work means the 'Superhouse' has been a long time coming.

"I worked in an office next to Dubois for a period of eight years, and I was always seriously impressed by the design of their yachts," says Ström. "Part of that clearly came from my background in sailing, but it was also something else; I was impressed by the design, the scale, the detailing, the quality and the engineering, but also the overall feel that the yachts evoked. I thought, "Why are we not designing houses like that?"

It was then that the seed for the 'Superhouse' concept was first planted. Having set up his own architecture practice five years ago, the aim was always to design Superhouses for a very distinct market, in exactly the way Dubois design yachts for very select clients. Realising the many parallels between the disciplines, Magnus decided to really set the wheels in motion for the design – helped by his growing friendship with Ed Dubois.

> "Being inspired by someone or something else allows us to influence our own work with other people's ideas, visions and ambitions. This ultimately forces all of us to think differently about the questions we ask about our work."

Currently, a concept house inspired by the work of Dubois is well underway. Influences and ideas from other sectors, such as the motor industry, watches and travel add to the luxury appeal and exclusivity of its design. From the framing of views and the way that the spaces flow from one to another, to the use of superior materials and precise detailing, this 'Superhouse' feels both luxurious and familiar. But a definite starting point and big design driver, says Ström,

was the location – a private bay in the Balearics:

"Location will always be important to a client, but what is also really important is a beautiful site, and how a house interacts with its location. For this project, a connection with the sea was inevitable, while the ground floor walls are clad with local stone that anchors the house to this specific area."

One thing is clear, however. This is not an attempt to design a superyacht on land. Whilst working hard to incorporate the design aesthetics, performance and superior engineering that Dubois is renowned for, Ström's borrowing of naval architecture principles is subtle and always relevant.

"Whilst yacht and house design are worlds apart in many ways, we share an eye for detail and the need to balance the luxury of space with the practical constraints of meeting a brief and constructing a living environment," he says. "The architecture [of the Superhouse] is unashamedly contemporary and the use of materials is of great importance. Luxury to us is the opposite of vulgarity. We focus on space, light, proportion and material. We strive to find luxury in simplicity."

For Ström, the experience of being on board a superyacht is created by the fact that the smallest of details has been considered; that the clients' needs are met before they are aware of them, and executed to the highest possible standard. But far from any clumsy nautical anecdotes, the spaces within the Superhouse, as well as its exterior plans, are designed so that they can be used intuitively, and so that they celebrate their idyllic location.

"Sliding screens that disappear into the floors and walls is something that I took directly from the flush decks and opening transoms of superyachts. These provide differing environments as needed – sleek and closed-down for a minimalist appearance, or opened-up to reveal functionality, storage and flexibility."

The intention is for the house to be built from in-situ cast concrete. This ensures it is durable and can withstand its exposed location. For external walls, the concrete is mixed with a ground white marble aggregate, which is then polished to achieve an incredibly smooth and hardwearing final finish, that has a shimmer and sparkle to it; the smooth surface also self-cleans with rain.

One of the main design features is the 50m swimming pool that stretches alongside the house between the beach and the open-plan living space. "When viewed from inside it forms a visually seamless transition between the pool surface and the sea," says Ström. "The pool tapers to a thin edge towards the beach, minimising the impact when seen from afar."

In recent years, acclaimed architects, such as Norman Foster, Zaha Hadid and John Pawson have turned their hand to designing one-off superyachts – "architecture on the sea", but a central difference to these collaborations and what Ström is looking to achieve is the focus on private dwellings, rather than the large commercial side of architecture. It's a pushing of boundaries on a more personal level:

"I envision creating Superhouses around the globe, tailoring the architecture to its environment. Be it a country house in England, a penthouse in New York, a unique ski chalet in St. Moritz, or a beach house in Thailand. I want to push the design of Superhouses to generate different ideas and come up with something new. It's about getting out of your comfort zone, trying new things, and delivering something that is exceptional. I think that is very exciting."

For further information, please visit
www.superhouse.me | www.stromarchitects.com

IMAGE DETAILS

Opening spread: A fire pit is the focal point of a comfortable seating area sunken into the long infinity pool.

Pages 54 and 55, clockwise from top left: The composition of volumes defines spaces and a limited palette of materials evokes a sense of luxury that is derived from architectural simplicity.

A 50m long infinity pool lies parallel to the elevation of the house. Timber decking defines lounging and dining areas around the pool, in contrast to the limestone flooring that creates a seamless transition from the indoor living area to the outside.

A sculptural helical staircase makes a physical and spatial connection to the first floor. A roof light above the staircase emphasises this element and provides natural light for the gallery above.

This page: The Superhouse has a long, low profile, referencing the unobstructed horizon as seen from the house. The first floor volume is distinctive with bedrooms to either end, and a blank wall in the middle housing a gallery. This blank wall is structural, allowing a clear span with no columns underneath and enables the entire living room to be exposed to views of the sea. Sliding windows disappear into wall pockets, keeping the view clear.