

Marte.Marte

– *Excuse me, which way to paradise?*

The brothers Marte are the young Turks of the Vorarlberg architecture scene, rebels of a sort from the formal straight-jackets of their Baukunstler elders. Here Austrian writer, **Otto Kapfinger**, explores what sets Marte.Marte apart

It isn't just the penchant for solid concrete that sets M.M. apart from the mindset of the agile Vorarlberg architecture scene. M.M.'s idea of the ideal house is fundamentally different to the ideas of most other teams in the area, and they also interpret building tradition in a radical and independent way. They therefore achieve results which make universal statements going beyond all regional thinking. This is reflected in the lively international response to their work. During a recent visit to M. House in Rankweil, M.M. said: 'We want to have a place where we like to be outside, not inside the house, but out in the open. That is the ideal place to live, to work, to do everything – and ideally a building should make that possible. Open space is very important to us.' This may be astonishing at first glance since M.M. seem to fit best into the category of introverted, minimalist concrete purists if one cites their enthusiasm about castles, cloisters and such. Their architecture is the tangible opposite of the coziness and case-like quality of old and new buildings in Vorarlberg, and it seems to contradict their statements.

The aforementioned sentence, however, gives us a clue to a theme which recurs in all style and design aspects of M.M.'s construction and which goes beyond what was discussed around earlier pieces of their work. Even in their early work, such as F. House in 1997, M.M. noted that they use walls; their solidity is an elementary measure to create clear borders between the inside and outside. They are filters and layers with angles, frames and paneling. These borders mark the line between any open surrounding space and a protected territory that can be individually defined. The wall theme, the bordering of a milieu, the hermetic sealing off of a hortus conclusus characterises various M.M. projects. It is precisely M. House and the building in Röthis – both feature a body of water and greenery as the centre and emotional middle of their facilities – that make the derivation of archetypal house visions evident.



There are various basic housing concepts. One of the oldest and most successful is the atrium typology, which in turn can be traced back to the myth of paradise. It was Bernard Rudofsky, among the many proponents of the courtyard house, who made the clearest reference to paradise by the use of the ancient Persian term *Pairi-Daeza*: the splendid walled gardens of Persian princes. Such a protected open space in nature was the symbolic mini-maximum that is needed for everyday residential happiness according to Rudofsky. The walled-in exterior space, open to the sky was more original and valuable, livelier and more inspiring than a roofed room. A drawing from 1946 shows Rudofsky's paradise in a nutshell: four solid walls frame an open air room with a grass floor on which stand a piano, a bed, a tree, two chairs and a set table. These are the requisites for hedonistic homemaking.

Let's describe the house in Röthis, the house in Rankweil and Stefan Marte's own house in Dafins keeping this aspect in mind. The house in Röthis defines a