

icon

MONTHLY MAGAZINE OF THE YEAR

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E.S.

Ettore Sottsass
 A life in colour

The biodesign revolution
 Mario Botta's Turin church
 Donald Judd on furniture

Plus work by UNStudio, Stuart Haygarth, Weiss/Manfredi and design fairs in Cologne, Paris and Stockholm

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News

A golden window

reflects glimpses of the wild landscape and rolling hills

upstate New York, home to Amsterdam-based practice UN Studio's first building in America. The two-storey house, called Villa NM,

is two hours' drive from New York City, situated at the top of one of the most prominent hills in the area.

The form of the 300sq m villa, built for a family of four, responds to the location. The building splits into two bands – one following the slope of the hill, the other raised above it. The central vertical axis, which contains the bathroom, kitchen and fireplace, forms a twist shape. As well as structurally supporting the first-floor cantilever, this twist provides a column-free space for fluid movement. Large



windows around the perimeter allow the family to enjoy 360° views of the surrounding landscape.

Although it looks like it has been cast in concrete, the house has a steel frame, with simple plaster used internally and strips of timber to form the central twist. The exterior is sprayed concrete, a cladding technique familiar in this area of the US.

The internal knotted movement of the building is similar to that in UN Studio's 2006 Mercedes-Benz Museum in Stuttgart (icon 037). "It is incredibly open but very inclusive," says principal Ben van

Berkel. "As we used in the Mercedes, it is one gesture – one building, one knot."

Van Berkel was conscious of the role the American rural retreat played in distilling the concepts of modernist architects, and cites one influential example. "When Phillip Johnson was alive I met him many times and we often talked about the Glass House," he recalls. "The most important part of that house is the fireplace. It is actually one column, a circular brick element which also keeps the toilet – it's super inclusive." He links this idea to the central, structural twist in VILLA NM.

Another strong concept for van Berkel was that of creating "after images" – he wanted to prompt memories of the spaces that reveal themselves after time. "A building that gives you straight images is not the most interesting," he says. "It's important that there are imprints like you get from reading a good book. There should always be more memories you like to come back to." †

Beatrice Galilee

Previous page:
The gold-tinted glass
of the east-facing
windows
Below: The building is
split between an
upper and a lower
volume, connected

with a "twist" in
the centre
Bottom: The stairwell
is a central feature,
from where all the
communal spaces of
the home can be seen

