



Refusing to put life in a box

Ross Architecture & Design is the award-winning studio that rejects squares in favour of organic shapes and materials, aiming to promote a freer, healthier everyday life. “We don’t walk in straight lines on the beach or in the woods,” says co-founder and head architect Pål Ross. “So why on earth do we insist on living in square houses?”

By Linnea Dunne | Photos: Ross Architecture & Design / Design©Pål Ross

“People from Småland are known for their persistent approach to business,” says Pål Ross. “I sometimes think that this is my key strength – and perhaps my greatest weakness. I’m incredibly bad at giving up, but thanks to this perseverance and skill I have done what people thought impossible.”

Judging by the awards and accolades, people are impressed. Most recently, the Ross studio was announced as one of the winners in the European leg of the 2013 International Property Awards, stating that the



Pål Ross, Head Architect and founder of Ross Architecture & Design.

winners “increase the beauty” of their cities. And beauty, it seems, is a recurring

theme in the Ross history, as the firm’s Villa Victor in Östersund was voted the most beautiful villa in the country back in 2009.

Art and engineering

The son of a gifted artist and grandson of a factory owner, Ross developed an appreciation for both aesthetics and technology early on. But the family’s plans for him disintegrated when an international company bought its weaving factories, leaving Ross with the epiphany that he could instead combine his love of art and engineering to make the world a more beautiful place.

Ross graduated in 1992, facing a harsh economic climate and high unemployment amongst architects. Working as a teacher at a Waldorf school, he met his now-wife, Deirdre. “I married an architect, not a teacher,” she said upon dis-



Opposite and above: Villa Victor, the most beautiful house in Sweden. Photos: Mikael Damkier

covering his graduation project, determined to share her husband's rare talent with the world. And so, in 1996, Ross Architecture & Design was born.

Putting a silver lining on everyday life

In a move typical of Ross's innovative ways, the firm entered a market that had traditionally been a no-go area for architects in Sweden: the private home market. Saturated with prefab homes, this holy grail welcomed Ross with doors wide open, and close to 250 unique homes later, the industry has surrendered to the fact that it was wrong.

Three recessions have passed since the studio's inception, yet it has never seen a quiet day. Creating houses that combine the classic with the modern, always in tune with nature, Ross carefully takes the lives of his clients into his hands with a promise to brighten up their everyday life, or, as he

refers to it, "direct an endless choreography." A far cry from the sharp corners of prefab homes, he wants to create a flow in which people can move naturally. "Nothing is square by nature. People aren't square, we don't move in squares – building homes that are square is illogical," he insists.

These days, a Ross imitation can be recognised a mile off, and there are plenty out there – an endorsement, the architect assumes. Naturally, the knowledge and experience of actually building a property gives him a distinct advantage: "It certainly makes it easier when you're trying to push the boundaries. You know just how far you can go before it becomes practically impossible."

Satisfaction guaranteed: live in a work of art

But more than just a skillset, the power behind Ross architecture lies as much in

the process – one described by the man himself as "mad," mainly because it guarantees a happy customer every single time. It sounds near cathartic, starting off with a number of interviews to pinpoint who the customers are, what makes them tick, and how they live their lives; everything is taken into consideration, from winds and views to the way nature casts shadows at different points throughout the day.

"Then I hibernate. No phone, no internet, no family – I get into a flow where I forget about time and place, and I just work." In addition to that priceless flow, you get top quality: from the tiles in the bathroom to the lighting throughout, the assumption is that only the best will do. A safe investment, which, as Ross puts it, allows you to live in a work of art.

A calling to change lives

Having conquered the private home market and proved his point, Ross is now broadening his views in the hope of improving the lives of many more thousands of people than he ever could with villas alone. Aqua Serena, a holiday resort development with eight flats in southern Turkey, marks the studio's first venture abroad.

At the same time, Ross is itching to transform the concept of the nursing home: "This is my calling. Nursing homes are all about care, of course – but prison-like environments make for a certain type of behaviour. What if we created work places where you just can't be sad and angry?" It is a question worth considering, and one that goes a long way toward explaining the market-leading, award-winning position of Ross Architecture.



Left: Drawing of the holiday resort development Aqua Serena in Turkey.

Right: Work in progress at Aqua Serena in Turkey, the first ever Ross development abroad.

For more information, please visit:
www.ross.se