

CHARLES ROSE ARCHITECTS INC

CRITICALcommentary

Foreword

In Henry James's novel *The Europeans*, the protagonist's relatives come to visit America and comment on the openness of the New England countryside, referring to it as an "uncastled" landscape. Charles Rose's architecture seems to have sprung from a similar sentiment. Rather than dominate the site and its surroundings, his architecture habitually seeks the contours rather than the crest. Whether the topography is dramatic or subtle, Rose's instinct is to reinforce the geometries of the site, at times making the viewers more aware of the landscape than they might have been otherwise.

Rather than idealizing architectural form, Rose privileges that landscape's tendency to singular expression. Above the structures, the roof planes invariably hover, seeking not the level of the horizon but the exceptional forms of the landscape without as well as the flow of activities within. Moreover, his structures generally meet the ground in a subtle way, feathered into the landscape by walkways and terraces, rejecting the formal podium which so often defined the relationship between classical architecture—as well as classic modernism—and nature. While his architecture most certainly has urban implications, Rose's work to date is most convincing in its ability to make an Arcadian vision legible.

Rose's attitude toward the modern past is expanded by a sense of freedom with geometry. While Breuer and Le Corbusier cautiously departed from their strict sense of geometric form in the 'butterfly' roofs of the exhibition house in the garden of MoMA and the Erasuriz houses in Chile, respectively, Rose's manipulation of form more fully embraces a catalogue of prismatic strategies. Even so, this expansive attitude is never detached from the logic of construction. Digital design has opened up a whole new vocabulary of geometric possibilities, yet Rose's work is not defined by geometric complexity per se, but tethered to the norms of the construction industry prevalent today. While we may live in a world that is only knowable through the physics of relativity, our day-to-day experience—particularly how we make things—is more familiar. As Italo Calvino noted, "the heavy machines still exist", if they are now controlled by weightless bits. In Rose's architecture, the philosophical impurity of Calvino's observation is made a virtue.

Terence Riley, formerly The Philip Johnson Chief Curator of Architecture and Design, Museum of Modern Art from the monograph, *Charles Rose, Architect*, Princeton Architectural Press, 2006