

REANIMATE

ID

LOCATION: POLITIA-ATHENS, GREECE
YEAR: 2010-
TYPE: RESIDENTIAL
SIZE: 355 m2
STATUS: COMMISSION

CREDITS

PRINCIPAL ARCHIECT: KOIS STELIOS
PROJECT LEADER: KOIS STELIOS
DESIGN TEAM: MARIELINA STAVROU, NIKOS PATSIAOURAS, GIANNIS KECHAIDIS

The project is the renovation of a single detached family house located in the suburb of Politia in northern Athens. Our clients a couple of young professionals inherited the house built in 1980's. The building was spacious and well placed within its plot but it had some serious issues. The volumetric composition was not articulated at all and various mending and additions in association with the scruffy landscape gave a cluttered busy un resolved image.

We chose to do drastic changes in order to 'relocate' the building in its location and adjust its architecture to meet the needs of the residents. The location, Politia is an upper market suburb of western Athens. Since the late 19th century Politia and the neighbouring Kifisia were attracting the rich and prosperous Athenians who spend their holidays there. It was the nature, the green scenery the clean air the cool breezes that made it so popular. Since then many things have changed, it has been progressively populated since the 1960 but fortunately it has not lost its character completely.

The design process initiated with the architectural cultural context analysis. Kifisia and Politia are characterized even today by the grandeur of the houses from a previous era. During the period 1880 until 1930 a series of luxurious villas, a typology until then unknown to Greece, were built by European and Greek architects who imported western design traditions and mannerisms. The picturesque villas were stylistically a fusion of romanticism and classicism characterized by influences from Swiss vernacular architecture, castles and towers of the middle ages and generally stylistic additions that were not based on the local tradition but were borrowed mainly for their semiology and romantic iconography that was associated with them. The most prominent architect of that era was the Saxon Ernst Chiller.

Our clients from the beginning stated that they wanted a house with character and distinct atmosphere that would allow the users to be in contact with the wonderful surroundings while it

would be practical, functional and could cater for their needs. Their previous residence was a place stuffed to the brim with heirlooms and the legacies of previous generations. Although they wanted to relieve themselves from unwanted clutter they wanted to keep a collection of objects in their new residence as artefacts of family history and collective memory.

The existing structure's position within the site and the main volumetric decisions were of some merit but the internal zoning, layout and circulation were lacking in clarity coordination and

coherence. Other problems and deficiencies concern the various additions and decorative elements added over the years that gave a house an obstructed confused appearance.

The design process initiated with the redefinition of the program and the reset of the programmatic zones. The communal spaces, living, dining and kitchen were situated on entry level while the private quarters were situated on the first floor while the services were gathered on the underground floor. Furthermore the façades were adjusted to accommodate the new functions and to acquire a clear well defined appearance. The façades were cleared from overhangs and the most of balconies and larger vertical openings replaced the smaller punctured windows. The front façade's openings are the larger and were clearly outlined with balsatina rock. The façade from fragmented and discontinuous acquired a rather eclectic formal unity governed by the newly established axial relationships. The entrance of the site was redefined and a linear path to the entrance of the house was cleared. The side and rear façade were fitted with conservatories that bring light in the house and provide passive heating during the cold months acting as winter gardens. These green areas also allude to horticultural tradition of the area.

The study of light and shadow were of paramount importance during the design process. The way darkness succeeds light in a perpetual hunt is depicted through the newly formed windows to the interior and the user become the spectator. The light on the walls allows for a shifting time line along them, connecting a sense of the day's passage with the life within the residence. Natural and artificial light is part of our architectural arsenal, allowing focusing attention and increasing awareness. Light from different directions in the living room of the 'Reanimate' residence emphasizes the proportions and the volume of the space as well as the textures of various materials.

The material used were natural and were chosen for their texture and visual appearance. We wanted materials that will age and weather, whose wear and tear will add to their appeal. Balsatina volcanic rock which was used as flooring and façade element was chosen for its rough porous texture and its colour. Other materials are sandblasted oak wood for the herringbone patterned French floors, brass and steel for the custom windows and fittings, Bukhara stone for the restrooms and glass for various surfaces. The aesthetic impact of the interior relies in the contrast between the rough and the smooth.

The creation of the garden follows similar aesthetic principals as the residence. The selection of plants was based upon their aesthetic and sensory qualities manifested by their phylotaxy, colour, texture and smell. We envisaged a garden that would not focus on formal horticultural stereotypes but one that would have a rather informal character chorotaxicaly and playful disposition. The plants change following the seasons giving a unique appearance every time and allow the residents to experience this change. An anchoring is established both in time and place.

The house gives the overall impression of simplicity whereas in fact architecturally it is quite a complex creation. The ethos of the project is that luxury in architecture is not extravagance, rather it is simplicity. Lack of clutter, clarity and a sense of calm are the dominant ingredients of this design approach.