

Studio — Saxe

Press Release
Sinfonia Verde
2024



A SECLUDED HOME IMMERSED IN THE SIGHTS AND SOUNDS OF AN ANCIENT RAINFOREST

Overview

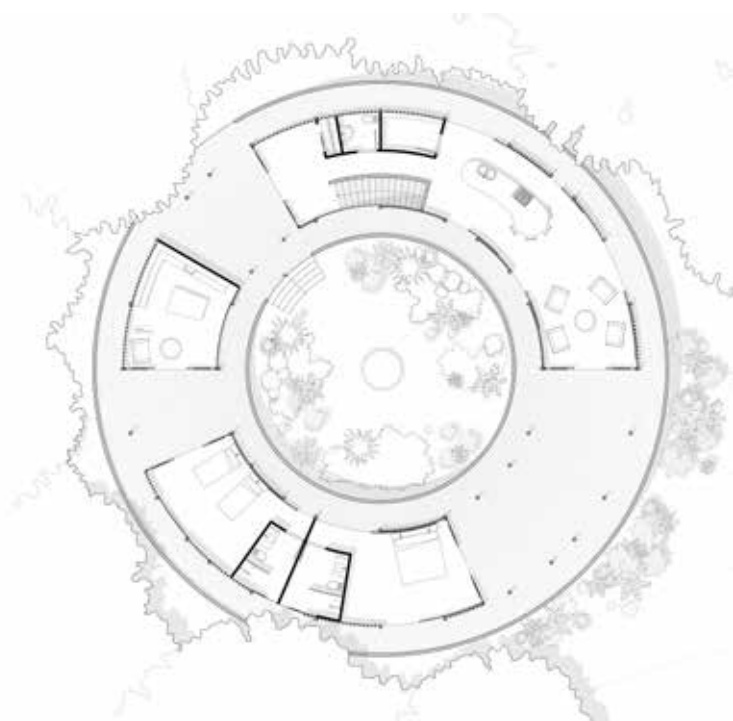
In the depths of the Osa Peninsula, a giant tree fell to the ground. For the first time sunlight penetrated the dense canopy, revealing a rare glimpse of the blue sky above. The natural clearing it created offered a place for two researchers to build their off-grid home, surrounded in every direction by the vibrations of the wild.

Location: Carate, Peninsula de Osa, Costa Rica

Date of completion: November 2022

Client: Private

Area: Approx. 400m²



Concept

The rainforest is a complex multi-layered environment, where the density and darkness can be disorienting. An opening in the foliage provides a moment of clarity, revealing the towering heights of trees. This panoramic experience inspired the design of the home, which takes the shape of a disk with an oculus at its center. On its periphery the house interfaces with the forest, while its core provides a sanctuary from the wilderness.

From this elevated platform, residents are immersed in the sounds and rhythms of nature, transitioning throughout the day like a symphony.



Design

Our design intention was to highlight different perspectives of the environment. While the home is on a single level, the terrain around it descends steeply. One side aligns with the forest floor, while the other is raised high above the ground. The perimeter walkway takes visitors from moss-covered roots up to the treetops, where scarlet macaws forage among the branches.

The home features two bedrooms, a combined living room and kitchen, and a laboratory-library, interspersed with shaded outdoor terraces from which to observe wildlife. With the likes of jaguars and howler monkeys in the vicinity, the central courtyard offers a calm space in the midst of an untamed ecosystem.

An expansive roof structure shelters the house from the region's intense rain and sun. The hyperbolic form directs rainwater towards the sides, where it cascades into natural streams. Slatted screens allow fresh air and the forest sounds to permeate the home, while the wooden ceiling radiates from the center, extending outwards.





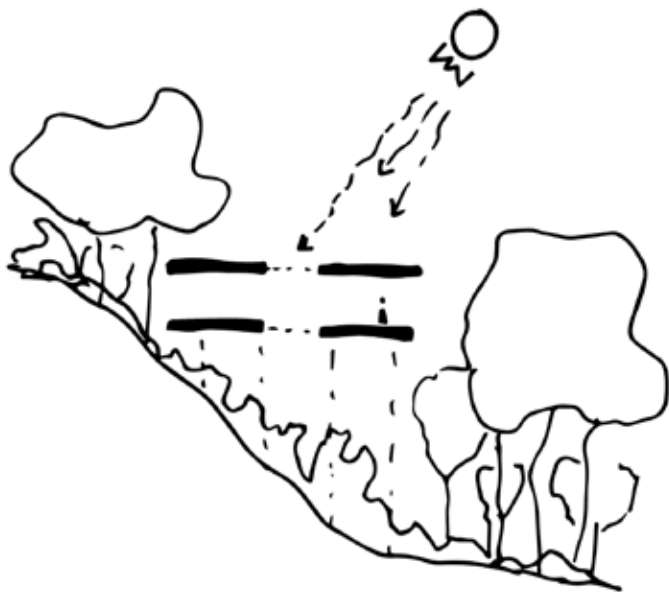


Sustainability

Building in proximity to Corcovado National Park, which hosts approximately 3% of the planet's biodiversity, demanded a sensitive and responsive approach. The house was scaled to a minimum footprint to avoid removing vegetation around the clearing. It was raised on stilts with narrow footings to prevent disruption to the groundwater and allow animals and root systems to cross below. In a region characterized by extreme heat and humidity, our goal was to create a comfortable living environment without mechanical cooling. This was achieved by raising the home off the ground and including louvered openings to encourage passive ventilation. The white insulated roof helps keep the house cooler by reflecting sunlight and reducing heat absorption.

The home is entirely self-sufficient, generating power through a photovoltaic array and a hydro turbine in a nearby stream, which also supplies drinking water. Energy-efficient lighting and responsibly sourced materials, such as teak and cork, further reduce the environmental impact.

The residents contribute to the preservation of the area by monitoring wildlife, propagating native plant species, and leading initiatives to restore nearby coral reefs.







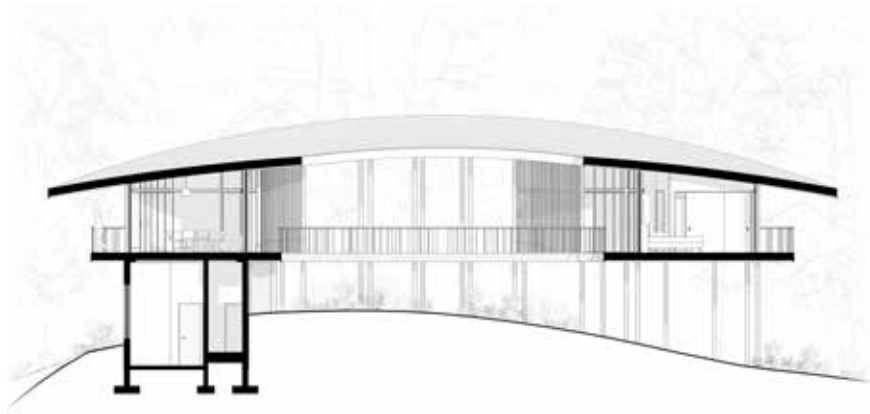


Construction

Building in a remote and challenging location required careful planning and adaptation. In an earthquake zone, with high precipitation, dramatic temperature differentials, salt in the air, and threatening wildlife, it was crucial to work with a local contractor who knew these realities and had the resourcefulness to overcome them.

With no electricity or water connection on the property, and only a narrow footpath for access, all resources had to be transported over rivers and mountains by truck and then carried to the site. Prefabricated steel components were prepared in advance, delivered during the dry season and assembled by hand. The dynamic roof form was created with a woven grid of uniquely pitched beams, and was then covered with fiber cement boards and a durable membrane to withstand the harsh environment.

After construction, the site was replanted with native vegetation, which will eventually envelop the home, absorbing it into the natural surroundings.








We first visited Costa Rica in 1992 and were drawn back every year by the beautiful people and landscapes. In 2002 we bought property in a remote region of the Osa Peninsula. The land had been altered by ranching, and as the forest regenerated, we found ourselves spending more and more time in the rainforest than on the beach.

When we thought about building, we approached Saxe because of their beautiful designs that worked with the environment rather than against it. Ben Saxe immediately asked why we were building in the forest rather than near the beach, and the answer was easy: the forest sounds.

Studio Saxe's architects took this seriously and designed a place to immerse people in the natural sounds and lighting and biodiversity of the rainforest. At first, we were hesitant of the round design, but it absolutely creates that immersion. A walk along the 360 degrees of the platform constantly shifts your attention: from skyline to secondary forest, to earthy terrain, to primary forest, and back again to skyline. And along the way, the shifts in wildlife, lighting and sound create that rich subtle immersion in Costa Rica's biodiversity that simply cannot be captured without a visit.

- Client's Words



Architecture: Studio Saxe
Partner: Benjamin G Saxe
Project Architect: Frederik Dolmans
Builder: Gabriel Reyes
Electromechanical Engineer: CIEM
Structural Engineer: GUIDI Estructurales

— About us

Benjamin G. Saxe set up his own practice in San Jose, Costa Rica in 2004, with the aim of exploring our relationship with the natural environment through architecture. Since then, Studio Saxe has grown into an award-winning international practice made up of a multidisciplinary team, creating buildings and spaces by blending technological innovation with handcrafted techniques to form truly sustainable designs. Founded on the belief that buildings must connect to their landscape – whether a tropical paradise or a concrete jungle – Studio Saxe brings a global attitude to solve local problems. Ideas and techniques from around the world can be harnessed to benefit communities, both at home and abroad. Local traditions and identities are explored and developed, ensuring a process whereby we learn from the past and build for the future.

The dedicated architects and designers at Studio Saxe uncover new design solutions for every project, treating each building as an opportunity to improve methods and approaches, responding to specific places. Working alongside clients and collaborators, the studio continually seeks new forms and functions that blur the boundaries between natural habitats and inhabited space.

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