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Q&A Carlos Ott on His New Sculptural Retreat

▶ The architect Carlos Ott, right, is known for sweeping structures of steel and glass designed for wealthy corporate clients in places like Dubai. But this month he completed a rare residential project, Playa Vik, in his native Uruguay. It is a beachside retreat on the José Ignacio peninsula, with a center structure surrounded by six casitas. It was built for a family, but can be rented as a private retreat.

This seems like a small project for you.

I don't do single-family residences. It takes a lot of time and it's complicated. You have a "he" and a "she," and by the end of the project he and she are no longer related because there are big fights when they have to decide the color of the master bedroom.

Why did you decide to work with this particular "he" and "she"?

They are art collectors and they wanted to create a shape, a form — but not your typical house with four walls and two sloping roofs. For the Playa, they gave me carte blanche, but they wanted to have a specific sculpture or painting or piece of art and a few pieces of furniture included. So it was much more interesting. It was more like designing a museum.

It doesn't look like any beach house I've ever seen.

We call the main house — for lack of a better name — the sculpture. We did it with a completely different geometry. It is roundish, more the design of a sports car, a yacht, an airplane, with a double curvature so it is more like sections of a sphere in glass and titanium, with a large swimming pool that cantilevers into the beach. The result, you may like it or not — and perhaps most people don't like it.

Why do you think people don't like it?

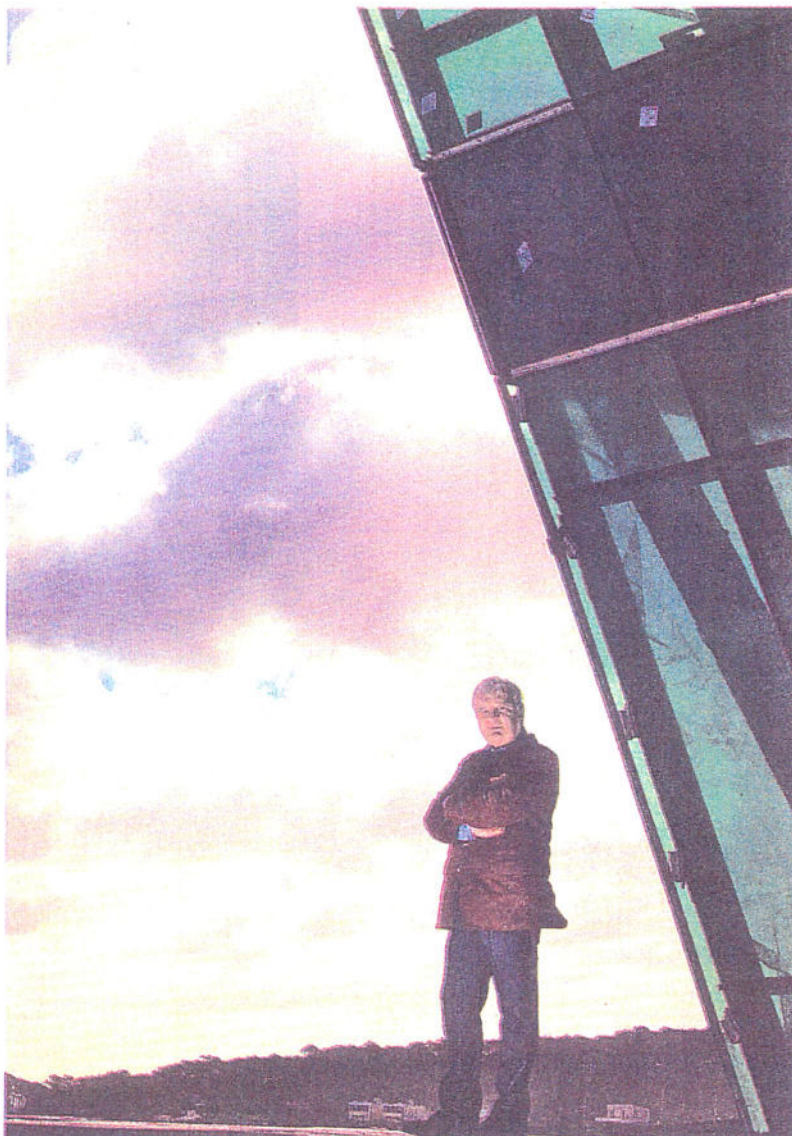
The gentleman who likes his little chateau designed after Louis XIV will not like it because it looks more like his Porsche or Lamborghini than a typical white picket-fenced house. If we added four wheels to the house or two wings, people would like it very much.

It is incredibly modern for a bohemian-chic beach town.

I think it is a house that has been done with very strong intention in respecting the scales and proportions around it. The house to the left is wood, the one to the right is yellow stucco, the other one is Moorish, the other one is brick, the other one is colored steel. There's not a common palette.

How do you think the glass and titanium fits in with that landscape?

I was born there, I know how tough the environment is in Punta del Este. It is one



ABOVE, MARTIN HERRERA SOLER FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES; BELOW, COURTESY OF PLAYA VIK



of the areas in the world with the most salinity in the environment. Any stainless steel immediately corrodes or rusts. Even concrete, with the strong winds we have, the water eventually goes through and rusts the steel within the reinforced concrete.

It's a problem. I felt a very noble material like titanium was a solution. The other solution was natural stone and also glass. It can withstand the elements. The casitas are stone and glass, and the sculpture is in glass, sandstone and mostly titanium. It

won't corrode or change colors and will withstand the environment.

I heard you had help with the design.

The clients' kids were very much a part of the discussion. They asked them how they'd imagine the house, and one of their daughters did a little doodle with the parents' house in the center and little houses around it for each of the children. So we took her schematic design and developed her idea. That's the truth. I asked them to get a percentage.

RIMA SUKI

Information: playavik.com.