

A
HOME+DESIGN



*The
Summer
of Style*

Scott Mitchell

By LINDSEY SHOOK

Photography by STEWART SHINING

Courtesy of SCOTT MITCHELL STUDIO

With over 20 years of experience building an internationally acclaimed portfolio, Scott Mitchell is known for designing structures that draw from antiquity and modernist influences including Richard Meier and Charles Gwathmey, and the work of Louis I. Kahn and Rudolph M. Schindler. He is the author of *Scott Mitchell Houses* (Rizzoli) and is actively engaged in the arts community as a patron of Desert X and a member of the advisory council of The Glass House. Here, we share a recent conversation with him on what drives his work and passion for life.

Which modernist architects influenced your design philosophy the most? Louis Khan—because he is a poet of light and materiality and a master of creating emotional experiences through spaces. Also Rudolph Schindler—because of his elegant appreciation of materiality and the clarity with which he framed spaces.

How have your early encounters with antiquity influenced the way you approach modernist design principles? Khan spoke of how ruins were the measure of good architecture. Growing up in the Middle East for part of my childhood exposed me to ruins. In places like Wadi Rum, I saw 2,000-year-old aqueducts eroding into nature and found such romance in how nature overtakes man's work in time. During my teenage years I lived in Japan and was really impacted by Shinto architecture and the way nature is honored and celebrated by its framing. Architecture becomes a device for framing.

How would you describe the Studio's design philosophy, particularly in terms of how it bridges traditional and modernist architecture? The most important thing for me in our firm's practice is to use architecture as a device to elevate the human spirit. It's all about creating experiences that connect nature with humanity. In terms of bridging traditional and modernist architecture, you have to remember modernity is more than 100 years old. So by definition, modern architecture is antique. The lines are blurred today. What most people think of when they refer to modernism versus traditional architecture is to



refer to a flat versus a pitched roof. That has been my observation. The reality is there is nothing more modern than in the expression of wood in a 200-year-old Pennsylvania barn. I would challenge any structural engineer to find a better use of material—so in that regard it's like Ludwig Mies van der Rohe with concrete and steel. Again, the lines are blurred.

In what ways did working with Richard Meier and Charles Gwathmey shape your understanding of space, scale and materiality? Both Charles Gwathmey and Richard Meier were and are renowned for their rigor and for creating rich, layered experiences through geometric expression. Their work, to me, was always about responding to light and materiality through a geometric language—executed beautifully and poetically.

Why did you get involved with Desert X and how has it influenced your practice? I got involved in Desert X because I am really attracted to its mission. There are two things that I really admire: art being accessible to everyone—there's something very inclusive about the way Desert X presents its art installations—and the works are

often large and related to landscape intervention, which is something that I relate and respond to because of their architectural scale. I'm excited to be supporting the organization and its 10th anniversary edition next year.

Favorite hotel in California? If you'll please allow me to jump over a couple of states I'd like to cheat and take us to the desert of southern Utah. It is the most elegant piece of architecture as a hotel that I have ever experienced, as though a surgeon inserted it into the landscape with a scalpel. It's Marwan Al-Sayed's Amangiri. I think Marwan is a profound student of nature. I really look forward to California having such hotels, and I'm available if anyone wants to hire me and would love to tag team one with Marwan.

If you could design a home for anyone (dead or alive) who would it be? Louis Khan, because I would so cherish the opportunity to spend time with him, for him to guide and teach me, and to learn from him as an architect.

If you weren't an architect, what career would you pursue? A bonsai professional.