

Mario Botta - architect of modern castles

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Helvetia : magazine of the Swiss Society of New Zealand**

Band (Jahr): **79 (2013)**

Heft [1]

PDF erstellt am: **22.07.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-943731>

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Mario Botta - architect of modern castles

In keeping with the theme of the three castles of Bellinzona, this article discusses how Mario Botta, Ticinese Architect of renown, is designing castle-like buildings around the world.

Mario Botta was born in Mendrisio in 1943. After serving an apprenticeship as a technical draughtsman in the offices of architects Carloni and Camenisch in Lugano, he attended the Liceo artistico of Milan. He went on to study architecture at the University Institute for Architecture (IUAV) in Venice, with Carlo Scarpa and Giuseppe Mazzariol, obtaining his degree in 1969. It was at this point that he took practical training at Le Corbusier's architectural firm in Paris, where he met Louis I. Kahn. Encountering these two major figures of the "Brutalist" style left a strong impression on him.

In 1970, Mario Botta opened his own architectural firm in Lugano, and began building single-family houses in the Ticino. Soon, he was carrying out commissions the world over. There are some 300 buildings of his design. These include the *Museum of Modern Art* in San Francisco.

They also include the *Watari-um Gallery* in Tokyo, the *Cymbalista Synagogue and Jewish Heritage Centre* in Tel Aviv, the *Centre Dürrenmatt* in Neuchâtel and the *Berg Oase Wellness Centre* in Arosa, Switzerland.

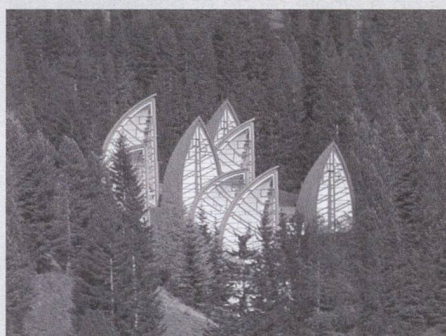
In parallel to his architectural projects, Botta teaches around the globe, including at the *Ecole Polytechnique Fédérale* of Lausanne and, as one of its co-founder, at the *Accademia di Architettura* of Mendrisio. He is the recipient of numerous international prizes. Mario Botta himself generously contributes to the store of literature on his oeuvre by writing numerous articles and monographs on architecture. The first single-family house he designed in Stabio (1965-1967) already illustrates the strict "brutalism" to which he adheres (an architectural style that favours pure geometric forms, steel, glass and, above all, exposed concrete), in line with Le Corbusier's style.

Botta, however, has developed his own, signature idiom of geometric forms: strict cubes, cylindrical forms based on a circular plan, little and big *oculi* in the walls (appropriated from the buildings designed by Kahn in Dacca), wall openings running from top to bottom, and rectangular stairwells. The construction's general shape always determines the shape of any additions to the building. The lighting is precise, arriving mainly from above, and the sides are designed to allow a play between shafts of light from different sources, thus conveying an impression of elegance and lightness. Another major aspect of Botta's approach is that he seeks to interact with regional elements, paying heed to the history and topography of each location and, frequently, availing himself of local materials.

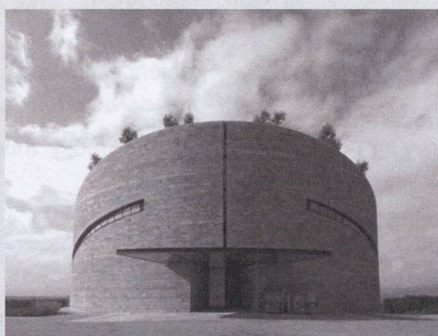
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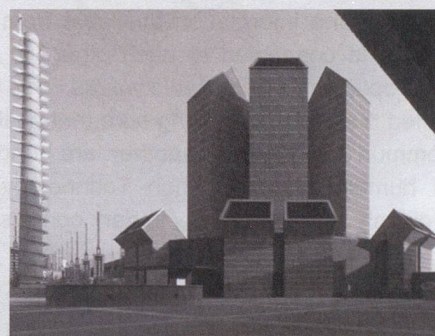
Mario Botta design gallery



Wellness centre – Berg Oase, Arosa, Switzerland



Petra Winery in Suvereto, Italy



Church of Santo Volto, Turin, Italy

Fotos: www.botta.ch



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