

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
SECOND SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
Master of Science in Architecture for Sustainability
Honors theses

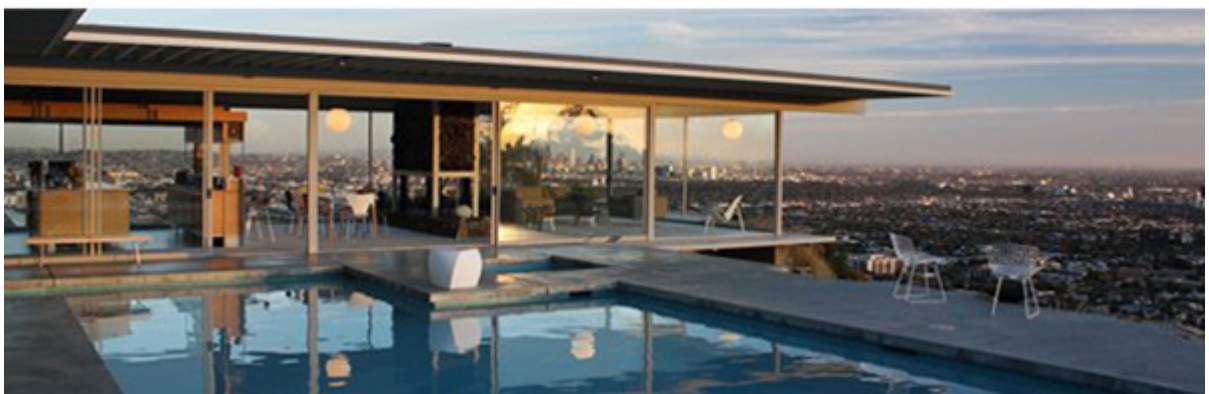
Minimalism in contemporary architecture between abstraction and *high tech*.
Case studies

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With this thesis I've wanted to follow the history of minimalism in architecture looking at some private houses. Starting from Mies van der Rohe and Pierre Koenig in the 1950s, to the works by the most contemporary architects such as W. Sobek, B. Myers, K. Kuma, A. Campo Baeza by analyzing the similarities, differences and evolutions considering the different countries and cultures they belong to. The first part of the thesis is concentrated on comparing Farnsworth House by Mies van der Rohe and CSH #22 by Pierre Koenig. First of all the historical period they belong to has been studied, followed by a careful and detailed analysis of the architecture. The approaches and philosophies that characterize the projects of these two architects are different.



Mies van der Rohe, Farnsworth House, Plano, Illinois, USA, 1951.
Pierre Koenig, CSH #22, Los Angeles, California, USA, 1960

From one point of view Mies van der Rohe, famous for one of his mottos: “*less is more*”, tries to create contemplative and neutral spaces through an architecture based on an honest use of materials and integral structure, with special attention paid to architectural detail. One typical example is Farnsworth House.

From another point of view Pierre Koenig, a famous American architect, whose work can't help but be seen in the Case Study House Program by John Entenza in California, which CSH #22 belongs to, built by Koenig in 1960. The aim of the architect is to build for ordinary people, offering something better, low-cost and built within a short period of time. The most important idea is “standardization”.

By comparing these two works you can find the principles on which contemporary minimalism depends. This means the will to eliminate everything superfluous, looking for an essential and pure elegance.

After a chapter concentrated on the principles of contemporary minimalism and its development, I moved on to an analysis of four works by the contemporary architects mentioned at the beginning: House R128 by W. Sobek, Montecito Residence by B. Myers, Water/Glass House by K. Kuma and de Blas House by A. Campo Baeza. It has been possible to study all these projects thanks to contacts by e-mails with their firms.

The second part of the thesis is concentrated on these four works, chosen for their minimal architecture, where you can see the passage of technology very well in Sobek and Myers, and the depth of spirituality, in Kuma and Baeza.



Werner Sobek, House R128, Stuttgart, Germany, 2000.

Barton Myers, Montecito Residence, Santa Barbara, California, USA, 2009

House R128 by W. Sobek and Montecito Residence by B. Myers show the technological evolution in respect to the houses by Mies and Koenig, respecting the concept of minimalism. These two houses look like real *"machine for living"*, which adapt very well to the contemporary world, a world that must be fast, efficient and perfect to surreal limits. Here the object seems to have been stripped, leaving just the skeleton of an organism, a bare outline of the architecture.



Kengo Kuma, Water/Glass House, Atami, Shizuoka, Japan, 1995.
Alberto Campo Baeza, de Blas House, Sevilla La Nueva, Madrid, Spain, 2000

Instead Water/Glass House by K. Kuma and de Blas House by A. Campo Baeza express a softer and more spiritual sentiment, connecting to the aesthetic ideals seen in Farnsworth House. The aim is to transmit a feeling of peace, equilibrium and tranquility, almost as a way to escape from the frenetic modern world of today, *"a house for the soul"*.

The thesis concludes with a chapter comparing all six works, and closes with an attempt to understand if it is really possible to consider minimalism as a more human architecture which aims at a simplicity and pureness of lines, or if it is an approach where excesses distance man from his real nature are always present.

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