

Wallpaper*

INTERNATIONAL DESIGN INTERIORS LIFESTYLE

ISSUE 100
MAY 2011
£12.00
ISSN 0950-0804
www.wallpapermag.com



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SECRET
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Concrete mix

With a tropical blend of modernism, San Juan architect Nataniel Fúster has created light, space and drama in this renovated urban home

Puerto Rico may be better known for sun, sea and Ricky Martin, but to the design-orientated, more sophisticated eye, the country contains hidden architectural gold. Although the tiny Caribbean island has a rich legacy of Spanish colonial architecture, there is more to see than Andalusia-style cobblestone streets, pastel-coloured buildings and cute balconies. Puerto Rico has a substantial contemporary vernacular presence (see W 48), and local architect Nataniel Fúster is one of the biggest advocates of a blend of styles that make the island's contemporary architecture unique. With more than 15 years' experience and a Harvard doctoral degree in his pocket, 40-year-old Fúster set up Fúster + Partners two years ago to put his own ideas into practice: 'following the tradition of the Caribbean, using a mélange of styles, based on the principles of modernism'.

THIS HOLE HOUSE
This picture, Casa Delphin features perforated concrete panels that screen off the outside world, but allow light and air to circulate. Above right, light from concrete skylights and panels illuminates the open-plan living area and the swimming pool.

The interior space was opened up, and on the ground floor a swimming pool was set within an open-plan living and dining area, assisting with natural cooling. Addressing another of the clients' concerns, natural light filters through the GRC panels' openings as well as the playfully angled, deep, cylindrical concrete skylights. Fúster's influences include Oscar Niemeyer and Carlos Raúl Villanueva. The skylights reference Le Corbusier's roof openings and natural light planning at the Palace of Assembly in Chandigarh, India. Fúster admits similarly Le Corbusian inspiration in his use of clear forms and concrete in designing the shell of the house, as well as the use of open-plan space to increase light and functionality. Casa Delphin's clean, blocky volumes support the architect's claim that Puerto Rico has, next to its sultry white beaches, an intrinsic modernist identity: 'I think that modern architecture, in its most radical expression, is authentically tropical. ★ www.fusterpartners.com

PHOTOGRAPHER: JAMES RICHARD; WRITER: ELLIE STRAZAKI

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