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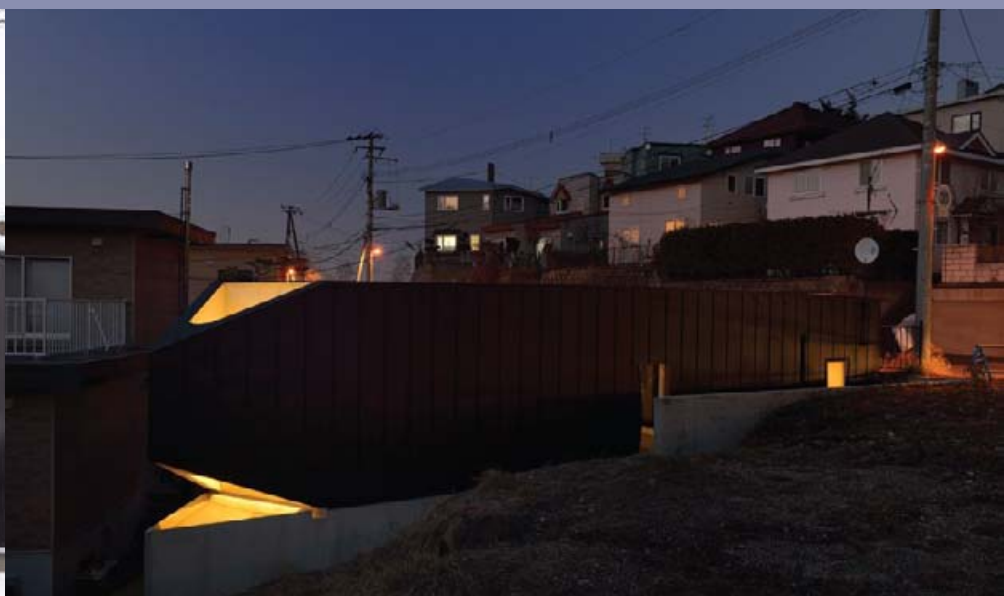
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Triangular House

Sapporo, Japan

Katsuaki Asaka





Japanese architect Katsuaki Asaka was faced with a dilemma when he was commissioned to design a house in Sapporo. The site was on a gentle slope and there were already numerous houses surrounding it. With privacy at the forefront of his thinking, he didn't want the home's residents to become fish in an aquarium for their neighbours' amusement. The solution: an introverted structure of concrete and dark siding that resembles a slice of chocolate cake from the outside, but with sun-filled courtyards and naturally lit spaces on the inside.

It could be argued that this 'triangular house' can only exist in Japan, where the wide acceptance of abstract forms in residential typology invites further experimentation. The tight corner created by a triangle's tip makes for an awkward space in a small structure wanting in square footage. Asaka positioned the tip at the lowest part of the site and shaved off the top and bottom corners to create a lightwell into the living area; it transforms the most unusable part of the triangle into a peculiarly framed low view. In snowy Sapporo, the natural brilliance reflected off white surfaces is further exaggerated here without the sometimes annoying glare from a picture window.

The upper part of the home is its front and reads like an open box, yet due to the small windows surrounding its perimeter, there is a disconnect between what the facade implies and what the house follows through with. The facade is a tease. Or is it? With no views worth mentioning, the most important things are natural light and privacy. By keeping interior spaces open – there is only a tatami room that is somewhat enclosed by sliding timber doors along with the lavatory – and through clever positioning of cabinets to act as dividers, functions are carved out while retaining an overall sense of fluidity.

Materials are kept simple, with light-coloured hardwood floors, white paint on walls and dark timber doors. The home's simple furnishings and lack of decoration lets its form and non-parallel walls take centre stage; the only concession to a spot of colour is a wall of shelving designed to showcase a massive collection of CDs. With help from Azusa Maeda of construction firm Foresta Corporation, Asaka's triangular house is a pragmatic architectural response to the human desire for a corner sanctuary of one's own within a crowded urban centre.