

THE ARCHITECT'S NEWSPAPER MARCH 18, 2015

CASA OSA



THE WINEMAKER'S HOUSE



COURTESY OBRA

OBRA Architects works out of a snug loft space in Tribeca. Nearly every corner and surface is brimming with models, drawings, and delicate sketches. It is a fitting space for the 12-person practice, whose diverse body of work—including cultural institutions, schools, pavilions, residences, and emergency housing—reflects a sensitive, hands-on approach that values unfussy, contextual design.

The two founders, Pablo Castro and Jennifer Lee, established their firm in 2000 after working together at Richard Meier & Partners, and then later at Steven Holl Architects. While often flying under the radar, they have worked on some high profile projects, such as their winning installation, BEATFUSE! for the MoMA/P.S. 1 Young Architects Program in 2006. Together, they

have accumulated an impressive portfolio that demonstrates their ability to conceive modern, yet often vernacular-inspired buildings, that quietly respond to place, and which are born out of a fluid, ever-evolving process.

“Sometimes there is a crystal clear idea that comes out the first day you start thinking about something and then everything organizes around that. And other times, that idea is not so crystal clear and you have to pull it out of thinking and feel through the work itself,” explained Castro. “So in a way, the work gets ahead of the idea and by doing the work, the idea develops.”

In the last few years, Castro and Lee have expanded their practice, opening up an office in China, where much of their work has been based. This surge of commissions

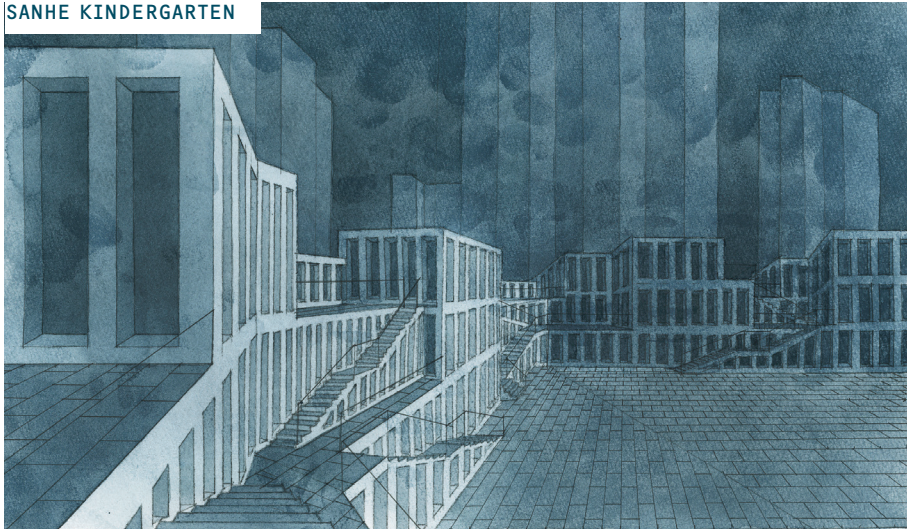
evolved out of an invitation they received in 2008 from artist Ai Weiwei, along with 100 other international architects, to participate in a project called ORDOS100. Since then, they have participated in a number of exhibitions and completed several projects in China, including the Inside Out Museum in Beijing and prototypes for emergency housing called RED+HOUSING organized by the National Art Museum of China.

“It is good sometimes not to know exactly what you’re doing so you don’t close yourself off to possibilities you otherwise might not consider. We try to make it a relatively rational process but there is a fair amount of the unexpected,” said Castro. “It is about enticing the unexpected or the unanticipated to come forward.”

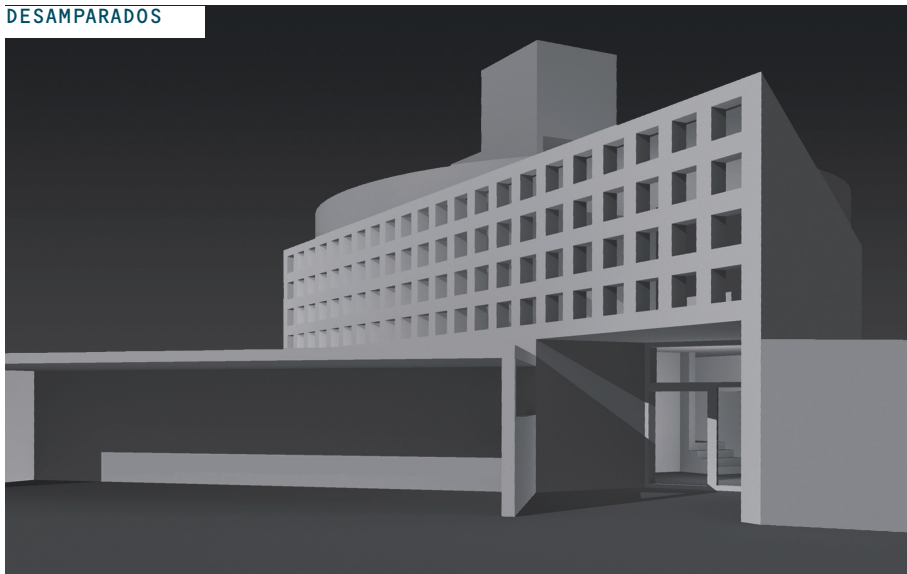
NICOLE ANDERSON



## SANHE KINDERGARTEN



## DESAMPARADOS

CASA OSA  
OSA PENINSULA, COSTA RICA

This far-flung retreat, sited on a former mango farm, in the middle of the rainforest was built for a nature-loving doctor and his family. The firm sought to engage with the tropical landscape by building a house, composed of a series of open rooms, which extends from the top of a hill down to the bottom, looking out onto Golfo Dulce to the east and the Pacific Ocean to the west. Each space is connected through stepped ramps, shielded by a sloped roof, enclosing two gardens. These walled green spaces are designed to protect the owners from the poisonous snakes that emerge at night. The temperate climate allows for the house to be fairly exposed to the outdoors, with a completely open living room and simple fenestration in all three bedrooms, outfitted with just netting and louvers. Understated, yet modern forms and locally sourced materials—such as reinforced concrete, stucco, and wood from native trees—define the structure, while keeping it within a tight budget.

THE WINEMAKER'S HOUSE  
SAN JUAN, ARGENTINA

Designed for a winemaker and his wife—who also happens to be OBRA Architects principal Pablo Castro's father—this compact, yet airy two-story home, situated in the arid wine country of Argentina, employs strategies to take full advantage of the region's intense light. The house, made up of rectangular volumes, subtly melds the outdoor spaces with the interior. On the ground floor, where the dining room and living room are located, a prominent stairway carves geometric shapes into the space as it rises above a pool of water and leads up to the bedrooms, as if "crossing a lake" explained Castro. The light then bounces off the pool and enters the stairwell, casting long shadows as people walk up and down, reminiscent Castro said of Marcel Duchamp's *Nude Descending a Staircase*. The 1,200-square-foot house is primarily constructed of reinforced concrete and brick, with the facades rendered in a white stucco and wood windows made by a local cabinetmaker. Trellis

structures create leafy enclaves where vines snake up the sides of the house.

SANHE KINDERGARTEN  
SANHE CITY, CHINA

Part of a large residential development outside of Beijing, Sanhe Kindergarten is a thoughtful response to the country's prescribed set of standards for pre-school education, by emphasizing light, space, and efficiency. Composed of 18 classrooms for 550 students, the 59,200-square-foot building is configured into three wings designed to make the scale more comfortable for small children. The classrooms, facing the south, are designed to emulate a New York City loft with high ceilings, abundant daylight, an elevated sleeping mezzanine for nap time (to save teachers time from having to constantly rearrange furniture), and direct access to areas of recreation through terraces or entries out to the playground. Terraces are connected through exterior stairways to permit fluid movement between the indoor and outdoor spaces so students can interact more freely. Tying the building into the local architectural landscape, the firm clad the facade in a grey-blue brick that is commonly used throughout Beijing.

DESAMPARADOS  
SAN JUAN, ARGENTINA

Located in a new residential neighborhood on the western edge of the city of San Juan, this seven-unit apartment complex is positioned on a diagonal to extend the length of the facade, allowing for more windows to maximize light while mitigating solar gain. A matrix of small, equally spaced windows provide views of the Andes Mountains and keep the sun at bay during the summer. Built in brick and finished in cement stucco, the 5,000-square-foot building is painted in white to further reduce heat absorption. Two triangular gardens to the north and south of the building, including thorny mimosa trees, create a shaded reprieve for tenants on the ground floor. A circular planter encircles the rooftop terrace, which also features a small pool, barbeque pit, and gazebo for eating.

Architect: Skidmore, Owings & Merrill  
Structural Engineer: WSP Cantor Seinuk  
Photograph: Tex Jernigan

World  
View

While the world watched, **One World Trade Center** grew in both height and symbolism, its 1,776-foot crystalline form bringing unmatched views back to Lower Manhattan. A redundant structural steel frame, the result of creative collaboration between **Skidmore, Owings & Merrill** and **WSP Cantor Seinuk**, ensures that its safety is as substantial as its stature. Read more about it in **Metals in Construction** online.

 **Steel Institute of New York**

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