



MAURO BARACCO

Mauro Baracco is the founder of Baracco+Wright Architects along with Louise Wright. He is also an associate professor at the School of Architecture and Design of RMIT in Melbourne, as well as the Deputy Dean International.

“ To us it is so fantastic to think that we can operate at the urban scale with landscape. And that the endemic green will be creating spaces that interconnect the architecture of fragments. ”

Baracco is an outgoing, friendly person. He smiled during the whole conversation, gave great advices for life and told me a lot about his experiences. It turns out he can't really separate life from work – everything is connected. His work is extremely delicate, personal, emotional – which works with his personality.

Mauro came from the mountains. He was born in Cuneo, northern Italy. But he left town soon after his graduation – although he loved the town for the landscape, for him it was quite provincial. “I'm a normal person, but maybe I'm not that social. For example I like skiing all by myself, just to be in touch with the landscape [...] I was not completely conscious about this until I met my partner Louise”.

He studied Architecture at Turin Polytechnic. “I was always interested in architecture not only as a practice, but also related to de academy. So since my graduation I worked as a research assistant initially and then as a professor”. At the same time, Mauro was living in Milan, working at Gianni Braghieri – who was associated with Aldo Rossi – while participating at the research group in Turin. He was also teaching at the European Institute of Design. “The collaborations with Politecnico di Milano started later, only a few years ago”.

Baracco moved to Australia in 1995. “I already had some relationship with RMIT because I had started working with them as a visiting professor. So when I went to Australia I got the position straight away. And I met Louise after a few years [...] For us it is very important to go, of course, to exhibitions and visit different places, but at the same time to have walks on the mountains [...] or to go to surf. To really enjoy important elements of the environment. This makes us reflect about architecture.”

It is true. In his lecture he discussed the relationship between the architecture and the landscape. He mentioned his project “The Garden House”, and how his process begin by first changing the landscape, adopting the land, for then placing the architecture.

“That's something that not even many landscape architects do [...]. And I've been part of the Landscape Department in RMIT, so I've been exposed to the Landscape architecture world. I think the landscape architects just want to control and shape the landscape – which for me is a little fake. What we did is we purchased this lot. We walked inside the block and we saw that there was a lot of weedies, but in the corner we saw an orchids – which means the land is good.”

They realised that even there was potential. They camped for two years to understand the block of land, where they shouldn't occupy, where the flood would happen. They took care of it with their own hands so they could cut the bad and pay attention to what was good. In the end they decided to place the house in the area of the plot where orchids were not growing – because it was the area most subjective to flood. That was not a problem, tho: they lifted the house to let the water come in.

“I can only teach what I believe in. There are obvious differences between teaching and practicing – the operational modes are different. But at the same time in terms of conceptual level it is very similar. When I teach, I'm not the type of guy who leave the students to be free. I always come with some ideas, I'm pretty aware of the type of approach that I want to encourage. I normally present my students with many precedents and examples and references – which are obviously in empathy with my way of thinking. For this Workshop I was there from day one making myself part of the process. So you can expect strong attention to the endemic landscape, something to celebrate. At the same time I'm not the type of guy that advocate a life that goes back to medieval times [...] So the question my students are working on are how can we imagine something that is more careful to the nature and the environment but at the same type some productive type of landscape. Some new types of landscape are going to be introduced next to the endemic. We are trying also to address the brief [...] We will talk about an area of connection, the possibility of residential for lower-income... We are thinking about this. Hopefully a good project will come out of this”.

Listening to Mauro, I couldn't help but remember the speech of “Hiding Architecture” Kengo Kuma had at the beginning of his career. But for Baracco, it is not about hiding, but about balancing.

“Very often in the world [...] there is this dichotomy between architects and landscape architects. The landscape architect says ‘I will come later. You finish your building first’. This is why we don't even work with landscape architects anymore. We work with gardeners because they give us the technique. But we became landscape architects. To us, you can't think about landscape architecture without thinking of architecture at the same time – the two things go together.”

A funny anecdote is that Mauro and Louise have an issue documenting their houses. They always resist to take photos of the buildings when they were just finished. Often people ask them if they can publish some pictures. “No, no, no. Wait at least two, three years for things to grow”. And the answer is “But they will be blocking the view!”. “That's what we want. That's how we imagine our architecture”.

But the last question is always the same: How can we get a place inside your office?

“We are very welcoming. But it is very difficult simply because we are very small. At the moment it is just Louise and I. Sometimes when we have more jobs we might grow to three, four... We receive some students from RMIT. But if they want to make a life with us it is difficult. [...] We don't have the amount of job. We are not after that. We consciously decided to be more like an atelier, a laboratory. [...] How can I say? Everyone is welcome to visit and work if they want to work if there is work, but we are small. [...] It is a point of understanding our approach”.