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097

MEGASTRUCTURES

July 2011

STEVEN HOLL

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LONDON TOWERS

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KITCHENS AND BATHROOMS

36-page design report, including kitchen and a profile of Jaime Hayon



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DEATH AND LIFE OF THE SPACE FRAME

NEW

Concrete House II

WORDS:
Luke Tebbutt

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A house near Madrid presents the softer side of concrete by merging it with the landscape and playing with light and shadow



Spain's relationship with concrete hasn't always been pretty (just look at the Costas), so this house near Madrid might have looked like architecture's answer to Night of the Living Dead, emerging from the ground to avenge all those timeshares – but in fact it's designed to show the material's friendlier face. "People used to be afraid to use concrete in a facade, but this house shows that it can be visually kind," says Ruben Diaz from A-cero, the practice that designed it.

The architect dyed the concrete dark grey, textured it using wood formwork, and part-buried it beneath grass and plants to make it look like part of the landscape, which chimes with the client's brief for a sustainable family home. To this end, solar panels provide all the electricity and hot water, and the vegetation on the roof, which requires no watering, provides insulation, keeping the building cool in summer and warm in winter.

Wedges extend from the facade and double as ramps to the roof, and are mirrored inside, with the kitchen, dining table and cooker hood built by A-cero in similar shapes. ➤

Above and right
The concrete has been dyed dark grey and part-buried in the landscape



The wedges also split sections of the garden, creating a play of open and closed spaces, of light and shadow.

It's a common theme in A-cero's houses, which often combine wide, open spaces with narrow corridors, like Richard Serra sculptures in concrete, each one appearing to be carved from a single form, with landscaping and furniture incorporated into the design.

"We take inspiration from art and sculpture," says Diaz. "Our philosophy is that the architecture has to continue in the interiors, and the landscape, to create a coherent project."

The practice also recently designed a range of affordable prefabricated homes, providing contemporary architecture for the less solvent (with prices starting at €89,900) – though there's no such restraint in this house. In addition to the seven bedrooms and bathrooms, it has a spa and gym inside, a small lake outside, and an underground car park that looks more like a nightclub, with LED strip lights built into the ground.

And guess who owns it? A property developer, of course. **X**

Right and below
The kitchen, dining table and extraction hood mirror the shape of the facade wedges

