

“ARCHITECTURE IS ESSENTIALLY A LANGUAGE OF
SPACES,
A POETRY OF FORMS,
SOUNDS, TEXTURES, LIGHT, COLOR AND LIFE...”

So says contemporary Mexican architect Miguel Angel Aragonés in *Aragonés*, his lavish new monograph (Rizzoli; \$75). The hefty 448-page, nearly one-foot-square tome supports that definition, with stunning color photographs laid out alongside English and Spanish text which the book's designers have shaped into blocks that echo the architect's angular forms.

The first English-language monograph from Miguel Angel Aragonés shows off the contemporary Mexican architect's work — including a residenceTK called Cumbres de Santa Fe (2009) in Puebla, Mexico — in the best possible light. Photo by Víctor Benites



Introductory essays, including a forward by the architectural critic Michael Sorkin, contextualize the work that Aragonés, 51, has completed over the course of more than a decade — he first started turning heads in earnest around 1999, with the completion of his Laureles House, in Mexico City — and identify him as a member of the Mexican and Latin American architectural vanguard.

Subsequent chapters with titles like “Boxes Of Light,” “Metamorphosis,” “Experiencing Silence” and “Simplicity” further hint at what this enigmatic, self-taught, publicity- and accolade-averse architect has accomplished. The projects featured in the book are mostly residences — sybaritic havens in bustling Mexico City — as well as a condominium complex and the notable Hotel Encanto, in Acapulco, completed in 2012.

One of the architect’s more recent projects, Hotel Encanto (2012) has become a pillar of Acapulco’s high-design hotel resurgence. Photo courtesy of Nicola Lorusso, Joe Fletcher, MAA



In one of his own essays, Aragonés invokes the likes of Dan Flavin, Josef Albers and Mark Rothko, and when looking at the book’s full-bleed color images, the influence of these artists is clear. Almost magically lit, full of elegant, geometric lines and curves, and decorated in high International Style, his structures read like abstract modernist paintings.

In the broadest sense, Aragonés’s oeuvre must be viewed through the lens of

Mexican Modernism, championed by that architectural great, Luis Barragán, and his disciple Ricardo Legorreta, both of whom reinterpreted for Mexico what Le Corbusier, Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius, et al, codified as “modern architecture” in Europe.

Indeed, the differences between Northern-Germanic modernism and its Mexican manifestation are profound. Mexico is the land of the sun, and in that country, the

grayer tenants of Functionalism and the notion of houses as “machines for living” (as Le Corbusier put it) are rejected in favor of light, color, warmth — elements that register as human, playful, sensuous and in harmony with nature. Despite an overlay of Eurocentric tendencies, a deeper, Mayan-Azteca substrate is eternally present.

The solids and voids in a Mexico City house named Tecas 43 (2006) recall a painted modernist composition. Photo courtesy of Nicola Lorusso, Joe Fletcher, MAA

The all-white surfaces of Acapulco's Encanto Hotel become blank canvases for light and shadow, blending the structure with the sea beyond. Photo courtesy of Nicola Lorusso, Joe Fletcher, MAA



In this tradition, Aragonés carves out spaces from massive cubes and solid forms, paints with colored lights as if walls were canvases and plays with the juncture of art and architecture while incorporating a who's who from Mexico's contemporary creative scene.

His transitions between interior and exterior spaces are seamless; the structures are fully integrated with their natural environment. Terraces, courtyards, gardens, laurel and eucalyptus trees growing inside further blur the divisions. Mirror-like reflecting pools transform mass into weightlessness and invert ceilings and floors. Something that appears to be solid turns out to be a void.



An atrium court at Cumbres de Santa Fe illustrates Aragonés's ability to combine indoor and outdoor spaces. Photo by Victor Benites



A view of the architect's Eucaliptos 65 house (2004) in Mexico City reveals his penchant for playing around within (and even beyond) the confines of Functionalist modernism. Photo by Nicola Lorusso

The house called Texas 43 (2008), in Mexico City, has a prodigiously scaled wall pierced with a geometric labyrinth of rectangular and square window openings, creating a Mondrianesque play of light and shadow. In Cubos (2005), harp-like cables suspend a staircase below a glass floor. When viewed from a certain angle, the appearance suggests a Mayan temple. In its living area, an outsized marble hand of Buddha rises against the dense cityscape.

The ultimate proof of his mastery of lighting is Acapulco's recently completed Hotel Encanto, where high-tech systems bathe surfaces in a calibrated spectrum of colors. Sudden punctuations of texture bring warmth and sensuality to the otherwise white-on-white expanse. Michael Sorkin describes its "painfully luxurious wood, a surface of polished marble...a sudden shape, a bulging sinuous curve, a graceful arcing roof; or some simple surrealistic event...an architecture full of magic." Encanto hovers in a liminal space between sea and sky.