

interiors\_style\_architecture\_design

# PERSPECTIVE

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# Climb every mountain

An unusual single-family dwelling in Bex, Switzerland, draws its inspiration from the snow-capped peaks of the Bernese Alps

TEXT: SUZANNE MIAO PHOTOGRAPHY: COURTESY OF SAM VOLTOLINI ARCHITECTURES

Towering above the valley of the Rhône river towns of St Maurice and Evionnaz is the Dent de Morcles. At 2,970m high, Morcles once inspired the 'fortresses' of bygone Swiss military strategy. Today, it serves as the inspiration for an unusual, sharply angular home which was the brainchild of Swiss firm Sam Voltolini Architectures (SVA).

With its pinnacles and sheer cliff faces, Morcles is itself a complex example of nature's own architecture, and it was this which drove SVA founder Sam Voltolini to create a home which would adopt a contextual posture in terms of both the mountain range it looked up to, as well as the

agricultural zone in which the structure is located.

"This type of architecture puts the emphasis on its surroundings; not just its direct surroundings but also on a larger scale with regards to its further layout and geological environment," says Voltolini. "The relationship, in this case, with space on a larger scale, is of the essence. The five facades of the house are in harmony with the surrounding constructions, unaffected by their distance."

The Bex municipality in Vaud, where this home is located, is the site of a productive salt mine; the soil is rich in minerals and the essence of the place, the result of erosion and change, is expressed in

rough rocks and stones. "It was a question of questioning what was already there," says Voltolini. "The specificities of the context will challenge an action; an intervention regarding a site, thus resulting in the transformation of the environment."

Located on the bed of a dried-up river, deposits of stone and mineral aggregates were used in the cement for the building. Using a special chemical technique, the thin pellicle of the cement surface was partially removed in order to reveal the different stones and the characteristics of their colour, on which the light reflects and vibrates.





**above** Winter creates a whole new aura for the house, which blends in with the muted tones of the season thanks to the grey of its outer walls  
**opposite page** A closer view of the completed home in summer reveals a roof covered with grass, reinforcing the ties with the surrounding landscape



**above** In the far distance are the Bernese Alps, which played an instrumental role in determining the shape and form of the house  
**opposite page, clockwise from top left** The interior of the home features natural stone walls. Natural light pours in through the large skylight • The sharp angles of the roof clearly recall the mountain range which inspired Sam Voltolini in his design for the building • Early renderings of the Box project show the progression through form and function drawn from the setting of the home

Looking for all the world as if it had been carved from a single block of stone, the building stands apart from its more traditionally-styled neighbours. Angled to make the most of the natural light from the south and the east, large windows break up the somewhat austere and imposing façade; while the decision to cover the roof with grass also helps soften the stark appearance of the house and links it strongly to the greenery of the garden and nearby orchard. Indeed, from the road, the main visual impact is provided by the roof: living and breathing, shaped almost like a directional arrow pointing towards the mountain range.

"The idea is one of nature taking over its dues. The vegetation in this instance enables a better integration of the construction in into its environment," Voltolini explains.

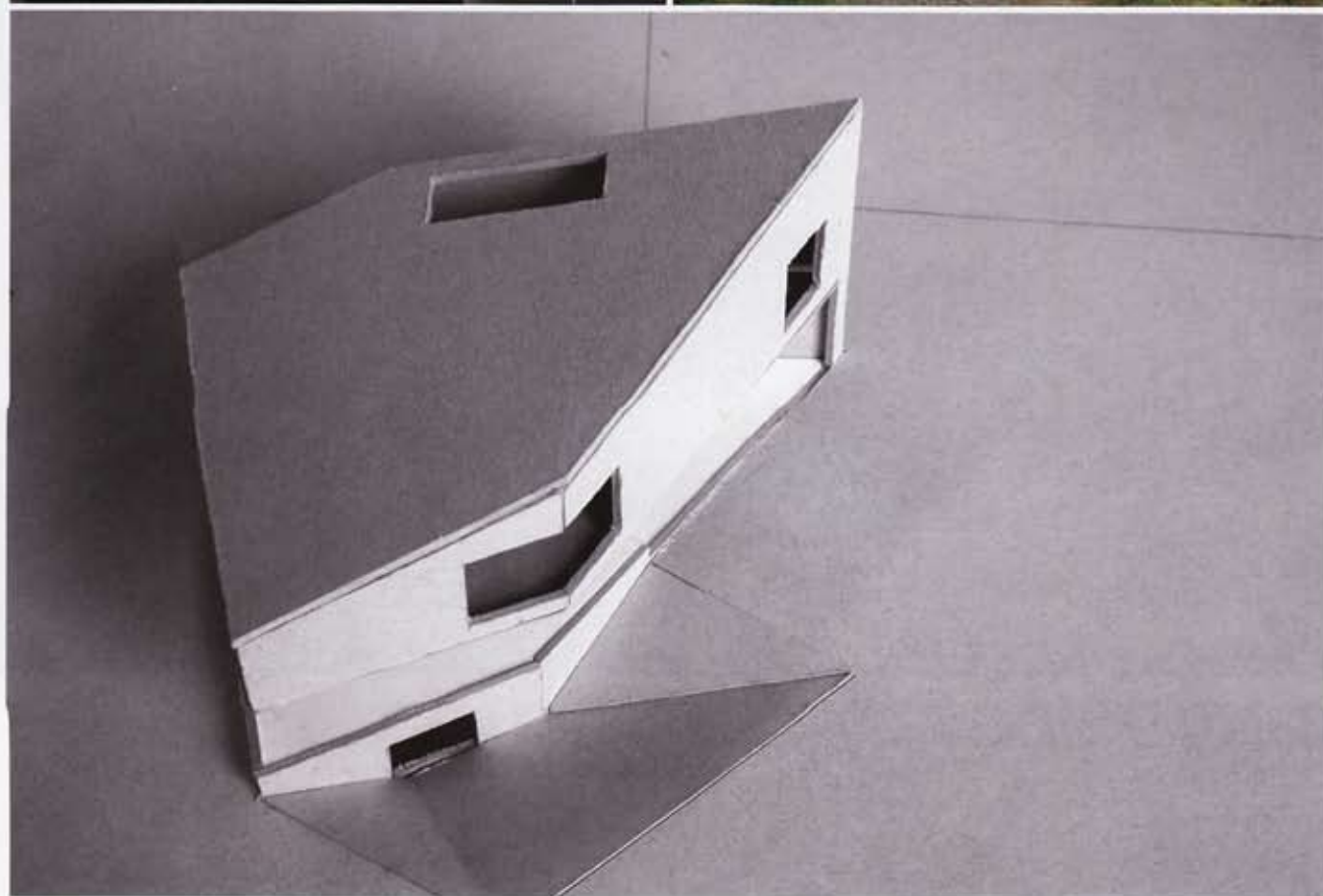
This means by literally changing a point of view — that is, looking at the site from another angle — the house reveals a different aspect which answers and embraces its environment through shape and form. Developed over two and a half levels, the interior of the home matches the tone of the outside, with the use of simple, clean lines and natural materials for flooring and wall cladding.

"The concrete was treated in the same way for the interior and exterior, creating a relationship and continuity between the spaces and therefore erasing the boundaries between the outside and inside; the living and garden spaces," says Voltolini.

The unusual design approach has, seemingly against logic and the odds, achieved symbiosis with the landscape, establishing its own particular identity while creating a most unexpected poetry.

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above The house nearing completion; the stones and rocks piled up in the foreground were just some of the elements which informed the design of the structure

## 又一山戀

瑞士貝克斯的一間獨立住所充滿隱居世外的感覺，設計靈感來自一片白茫茫的阿爾卑斯雪峰

圖文：SUZANNE MAO 攝影：SAM VOLTOLINI ARCHITECTURES 攝

位於聖莫里斯和Evolène小鎮的薩河山谷上游，聳立了兩千九百七十公尺的Dent de Morcles山峰，這裡曾經一度是瑞士軍事要塞重地。今天，這裡已成為民居所在，瑞士Sam Voltoini (SVA) 建築事務所在此設計了一幢外形獨特、呈多角形狀的房子。

Morcles陡峭的山峰及嶙峋的峭壁，示範出大自然的建築可以如何精妙與妙。SVA的創辦人Sam Voltoini因此深受啟發，在此興建一座配合大自然雄偉地勢、順應山巒起伏的房子，附近所在地更可以種植農作物。

Sam稱：「通常這一類房子，重點都放在其周邊的環境，除了所在地更要考慮到地理上的布局。建築室外無限大的空間，就是今次設計的中心思想。房子的五幅外牆跟四周環境很是匹配，沒有因距離問題而造成不和諧的感覺。」

房子位於沃州自治市貝克斯，當地出產豐富的礦產，土地肥沃又多礦物。可是，因土地過稠而變質，形成大量粗糙的石頭。Sam說：「這地方的前身，甚至他的用途，絕對值得一再思考。具體的地理環境影響建築的每一個行動，興建始終是對所在地的一種干預，其程度會改變一個環境。」

房子位於乾涸的河床上，廢棄的石塊及礦物積聚，正好當作建築物的水泥材料。利用特

別的化學技術，去掉水泥外層的部份薄膜，在燈光映照之下，石塊各自呈現它們的質感及色彩。

環顧世界各地的建築物一般都用整塊石材興建，這房子理所當然地跟鄰近尋常的建築不同。為了善用東西兩面的天然光，最大的窗戶從樓頂卻不失氣勢的外牆開出。天台鋪上草皮令房子的冷硬線條看上去輕柔了，遙遠呼應綠油油的花園及附近的果樹園。從路邊看過去，另人眼前一亮的就是這綠意盎然的天台，似方向指標的形狀彷彿一直指向山巒。

Sam解釋：「這設計概念全然是大自然賦予的。一片植物與草叢，令建築更能融合周遭的環境。」

所以只需要命名其實地從另一角度看，視野／觀點就完全不同。你會發現房子尖峭的形態是對大自然的一種回應。兩層半高的房子內外一致，設計調子相同，使用簡單整齊的線條、地板及外牆亦鋪上天然的物料。

Sam指出：「室內室外使用的混凝土也用同樣手法處理，刻意營造空間的延續感，這裡外外及花園渾然成為一體。」

這個設計，不合一般邏輯常理，卻跟地理環境出奇地配合，房子彷彿天生就存在，早就佔有一個大自然獨特的定位，更意想不到地展現無限詩意。E