

## PREFACE

Roland Schweitzer grew up at the crossroads of divergent sensibilities, all of which were marked by the idea that architecture was a moral construct. He was born in 1925, 20 years old at the liberation of Europe and earned an architectural degree in 1953. These facts along with his Alsatian origins continue to reinforce the ethical dimensions of his approach.

Apart from the strong "Mediterranean sun" of Le Corbusier, at its zenith with the inauguration of his *Unité d'habitation* in Marseille in 1952, and later the Notre Dame Chapel at Ronchamp and the Convent at La Tourette, there is in Schweitzer's work a trace of the constructive discipline instilled in him by August Perret, a perfect expression of a certain French Cartesianism, the industrial experiments of the engineer Jean Prouvé, and finally the American work of Mies and Breuer (which he discovered in magazines), the teachings of the Japanese and, especially, of the Scandinavian school.

From Japan, it was less the primitivist expression of Kenzo Tange, reminiscent of the Jomon period, or the Metabolists who influenced him, but the serious research that attempted to link modern expression with traditional construction, notably of the structural frame and timber. The Scandinavians, with whose works he is fully familiar, have given him their calm humanism, austere sensuality and craftsman's attention to details of construction. It is also due to the particularities of the building types he has dealt with that his work shows a strong ethical quality : youth hostels, family vacation villages, facilities for education, health care and social services, and social housing. All these projects were developed in a multi-disciplinary environment, in dialogue with teachers, physicians, and sociologists, so that these and other users could participate in shaping their constructed environments.

Schweitzer is an "architect of materials", an architect of honest materiality (rigorous, slim, with readable assemblies of concrete, brick, glass and wood). He has a feel for nature and landscape, and a firm knowledge of traditional housing and framed structures that is used with great discipline. Finally, he is a creator of buildings of a particular beauty which are peaceful, orthogonal and worked with accents, small dissonances and shadow effects. His assemblies of buildings are well articulated, harmonious with their sites, and show great attention to the treatment of exterior spaces. He often sets buildings on pilotis so as to preserve the nuances of the natural terrain. Beyond the assemblies one can perceive a science of rhythms, perfectly tuned to a musical concept of his esthetic.

The consistent work of Roland Schweitzer is one of the most beautiful demonstrations of this peaceful modernity, of the age of the universality of contemporary architecture, which arrived between the proclamations of the avant-garde generation and the collective trauma of postmodernism. It symbolizes a moment in time when architecture had confidence in itself and in the direction the world is heading.

François Chaslin, Architect, Critic