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Words by *Pip Usher* & Photography by *Name Here*

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The São Paulo home of *Julio Roberto Katinsky* is a living, breathing masterpiece of Brazilian modernism: all curves, concrete and creeping vegetation.

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Brazil's modern architecture movement flourished in splendid isolation. While Europe was mired in the Second World War, it became the vogue for Brazilian architects to design their own family homes, then invite clients over for a cup of yerba maté to showcase their style. Many such houses were built on virgin plots of land. There were no neighbors or planning issues to navigate. With labor cheap and concrete on tap, the architects could run riot.

Oscar Niemeyer, the architect who built the country's new capital of Brasilia in reinforced concrete, did just that. His curvy Casa das Canoas home sums up the era's groovy simplicity. Curvaceous walls bend free-form with a slab of squiggle-shaped concrete sandwiched on top. European and American architects were shocked, revolted and awed in equal measure. In 1949, fellow brutalist João Batista Vilanova Artigas also designed his own home. Modern materials became the star: bare concrete walls, unplastered stone, raw steel and vast panes of glass, all angled into fabulous shapes barely imaginable outside Brazil.

The home designed by Julio Roberto Katinsky in 1972 followed suit. It was his chance to realize insomniac architect dreams and to solve 20th-century problems of security, privacy and searing South American sun with verve and a truckful of concrete.

Guests enter the Katinsky house through the carport. A street gate is locked behind the vehicle, after which visitors cross a threshold into a display case of Brazilian modernism. This urbanist dream is a vision of unfinished stone. Ceilings, struts and a spiral staircase have been poured to order in the São Paulo suburbs. As with so many contemporary Brazilian structures, a concrete jungle gives way to an actual one. Floor-to-ceiling windows overlook a tangled city garden where gunmetal-gray walls are riven by the emerald-green of rainforest trees.

The tropical climate is both friend and foe. Stone trellises play with the sun's rays, so that dappled beams of light reach the upstairs study. The bedroom requires no central heating, but it does need louvered panels that swing outside the giant window frame to allay the midday sun. Back downstairs, the living room ceiling extends into the garden to create a portico of deep shade. The property's cement embrace dispels the fug of the city's shirt-sticking humidity.

How modernism came to Brazil is a tale of the masses, not the few. The 1930s saw rapid urbanization as citizens of many ravaged nations—Syria,





Greece, Romania, Poland—fled west across the sea. In 1936, Le Corbusier arrived in finer style. The Swiss-French architect flew the Graf Zeppelin's Friedrichshafen to Rio de Janeiro service, which offered five nights of silver service en route. He was in Rio to design the city's landmark Ministry of Education and Health. A 30-year-old Oscar Niemeyer assisted with Le Corbusier's plans to build big, bold, functional and tall. (A decade later the duo would work on the UN headquarters in New York with Niemeyer the youngest member of the Board of Design.)

In 1938, the Brazilian nation celebrated its 50th birthday. The planet's fifth-largest country needed more ministries, schools, housing blocks and airports. Niemeyer and his equally youthful colleagues turned to Corbusien concepts of cost-effective living space in the sky. They spurned ostentation and adornment: A surging populace was catered to by a deft, rationalist beauty that became a movement in itself. In 1943, New York's Museum of Modern Art displayed its Brazil Builds exhibition. As Europeans were building neoclassical leviathans—or destroying those in neighboring countries—Brazil was building an architectural New World.

The movement was furthered when Artigas designed the University of São Paulo's Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism (FAU). The building quite literally turned architecture on its head. Skinny cement legs supported six stories of teaching space, all linked by sloping walkways to encourage collaborative chat. Artigas' spatial curriculum influenced a student that would carry the torch further, both in architecture and as an FAU professor. Paulo Mendes da Rocha, like Niemeyer a winner of the Pritzker Prize, built his own futurist house in 1964. Its concrete columns and cement table no doubt influenced another young colleague at the FAU, Julio Roberto Katinsky.

Katinsky retired from lecturing, designing and writing books in 2002. One of the people to briefly meet this link with the nation's architectural past was Milan-based interior stylist Leandro Favalaro, who staged Katinsky's property for a Casa Vogue shoot in 2011. He says, "While living in Brazil I saw hundreds of fabulous homes but this was the best. It had a tropical feeling of the rainforest creeping through the concrete doorframes. You could be in the jungle, not in central São Paulo." Like most Brazilian modernist homes, it had strong, simple and clean lines, yet was near devoid of décor. Favalaro's team had to import their own chairs and design tomes for the shoot.

There's an architectural adage that nothing fades faster than visions of the future. Yet the Katinsky house and its contemporaries have aged well. The movement's buildings look timeless and definitively un-European. In a word, modern.

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