

## The “Anchored Mirror” set into the Basque-coast rocks



THE “ANCHORED MIRROR” SET INTO THE BASQUE-COAST ROCKS



At the entrance to Saint Sebastian bay, at the foot of Mount Urgull, in Spain’s Basque region, the “Anchored Mirror” public convenience is a new landmark on the Paseo Berria paved walk. Designed by the French architect Robert Latour d’Affaure, the slanting building seems to emerge from the very mountain into which it is so deeply set – as though a result of some tectonic shift. The image is not entirely fanciful, in fact, since the building is anchored into the stone with 25 ground anchors, sunk to a depth of seven metres. Adorned on all sides with a polished stainless steel mirror, the building plays other tricks on

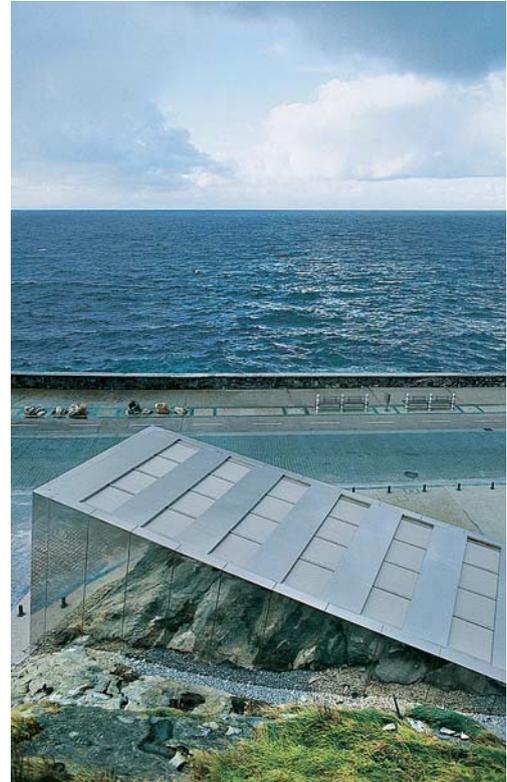
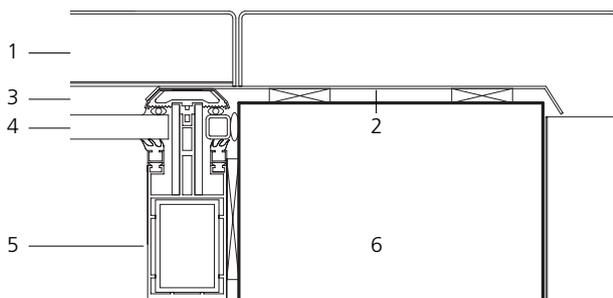
- Location plan  
Scale 1:2000
- 1 “Anchored Mirror”
  - 2 Paved walk
  - 3 Sculpture by Jorge Oteiza
  - 4 Santa Clara Battery
  - 5 Cantabric sea



*Near the beach, an unusual public convenience in stainless steel reflects the surrounding landscape. With great art, a mere toilet facility has been transformed into a monolith emerging from the rock.*

Vertical cutaway of the wall  
scale 1:5

- 1 Sandwich panel  
stainless steel, grade 1.4404, 2 mm,  
mirror polished  
compressed polystyrene  
white-painted metal inner sheet
- 2 Stainless steel cladding capping,  
grade 1.4404, 1.5 mm
- 3 Rainwater escape channel
- 4 Honeycomb polycarbonate 16 mm
- 5 White-painted aluminium profile
- 6 Concrete wall



the passer-by. A glinting dot when seen from across the bay, the “monolith” reacts to light in an infinite variety of ways when viewed at closer quarters. Due to the almost perfect flatness of the material, the parallelepipedal form shimmers with multiple reflections of the surrounding landscape, existing in osmosis with nature.

The mirror-polished stainless steel has all the properties necessary to resist marine-environment corrosion – especially vital in view of the strong winds here. Painted graffiti will not adhere to its surface, while scratched graffiti would hardly be visible. The concrete building is covered by vertical panels, 1 m wide. In fact, these panels are “sandwich” cassettes, 4.5 m high and 5 cm thick, hand-assembled with a metal inner sheet and an insulation. These fold round to envelope the

wall-ends, forming a right-angle. All fixings are non-visible. The glazed roof – in polycarbonate – is punctuated by a structure of stainless steel strips that match the facades and act as a sun baffle.

The monolith’s natural overhead lighting makes for a unified, dynamic interior space. The atmosphere of this white space gives a feeling of weightlessness. But, with the slanting entrance tunnel, its layout has surprises in store. For, like an Inca temple, this air-lock perfectly frames the sun setting over the sea at summer solstice. To minimize impairment of this vision, the round, centrally pivoted door opens sidelong, at an angle that is also calculated to afford wind protection. Only very strong tides would require it to be closed during the day, making the building submersible.

*Looking likely to tip over in a strong sea-wind or an earth tremor, the building nonetheless stands up to all the elemental forces encountered at this spot.*

The door's two sides are covered with stainless steel, to enrich visitors' experience by playing on their reflections as they enter the building. "A thousand eyes (and the world) will gaze into this mirror..." reads the text by the writer Bernardo Atxaga, laser-etched in Basque on the door. The inscription seems also eloquent of the architect's desire to take a seemingly prosaic project and create a microarchitecture reflective of the Basque aesthetic identity, while honouring the nature of the site. In San Sebastian, his building suggests above all a new way of entering into dialogue with the nature.

*Fixed during the day, the door-lens moves aside to offer visitors a glimpse of the horizon and of the activity on the paved walk.*



*An opalescent light bathes the interior of the toilets, thanks to the overhead polycarbonate glazing and the thermoformed "tunnel of light", lit by the stainless steel door.*

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