



BEAUTIFUL DEFECTS

Perfection is hard to achieve. But do we really want to be surrounded by perfection, write **PAULA AGIUS** and **KATJA CASSAR**. That would be really quite boring, right? The interiors photographs in this feature are of the Schindler House in West Hollywood, designed by R. M. Schindler - www.schindlerhouse.org

The closest thing to perfection can be found in nature. And even in nature, sometimes it seems as though there is a combination of different imperfections which create a different sort of perfection or something quite close to it. To give an example that is directly related to the construction and decoration of the interiors of homes, no two pieces of real, natural wood are the same. The grain varies from one piece to another. Yet you will find people who are upset by this, who demand regularity of wood grain in nature, and who will actually opt for synthetic 'wood' rather than the real thing just so as to be reassured by the formulaic pattern of the artificial grain.

But irregularities in nature are natural, and so they are expected and more usually accepted. When it comes to manmade materials, like concrete or plaster and paint, defective areas occur. And people find this far more upsetting. They see it as a shortcoming, a fault, a disruption to the flow of perfection.

Let's not use the word 'defect'. Perhaps saying 'irregularities' would be better, because it doesn't sound quite so negative. Sometimes, in our work as architects, we wonder how we can define the difference between an unacceptable defect and an acceptable irregularity that actually lends to the beauty of the thing in the same way that a slight irregularity or flaw can make what would otherwise be a blandly beautiful face, or even an unexceptional one, strikingly eye-catching.



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These slate tiles are all the more beautiful because they are irregular.



Imperfect plaster can lend warmth and depth to walls which is lost when the finish is as perfect as a piece of paper.

Randomness is irregularity and irregularity is randomness. Randomness is a distinctive characteristic in nature. There is nothing symmetrical or perfectly constructed about jungles and rain-forests. Plants and trees grow with wild abandon, at random, wherever seeds happen to fall. But they are enormously beautiful and their beauty lies in their very randomness, their wildness. That ease of flow, that visual differentiation, give comfort to the human eye. The beauty of natural materials, like wood, stone and marble, is that each piece is distinctive and unique. Every material has its own story.

It is important to be loyal to the interior architecture and the chosen palette of materials and objects. Not only considering the way they look, but also the way everything communicates together, creating a dialogue. The elements should be allowed to convey their own message, but collectively contribute to the atmosphere of the space. It has become acceptable, for instance, for the wires of a light fitting to be part of the composition of the fitting itself. It is all right, desirable even, for the electrical cord to hang down from the ceiling. It is the way it is meant to be.

Whilst writing this, we found it easier to talk about natural imperfections, as they are far more accepted and a lot more common. If you stop and take a look around you, you will notice there are imperfections everywhere. By this, of course, we don't mean the imperfections of sloppy production or shoddy workmanship. Hardened drips in the paintwork are not beautiful defects but a slapdash job.

No matter how much we may plan the detail on paper, in most cases, acceptable imperfections are the result of the finishing process of manmade materials during the course of works. It is quite all right for a concrete ceiling to be left exposed and display traces or

imprints of the timber shutter that was used during construction. That's part of the desired look. Corten steel is actually rusted steel, but it can be and has been used many times in a number of ways, like facade-cladding and panelling, signage and even railings. But glass, on the other hand, is meant to have absolutely no imperfections. Imperfections in glass are considered to be unacceptable defects and a defective pane of glass will be thrown away without a second thought. It's the same with any imperfection that creates risk or danger, or which compromises the intended purpose of the



The irregularities in a concrete shutter imprint.



material. A defect in a pane of security glass, for example, is actually a weakness. With textiles, rips and tears would be unacceptable defects, but mottling or vagaries of colour in hand-dyed or natural-dyed cottons and linens are 'beautiful defects' which are an integral part of the thing itself.

All these imperfections go through their own natural process, and when they are present and acceptable, they result in a composition which belongs uniquely to that specific interior, that can never be repeated.



The beauty of this natural teak glows from its irregular patterning, the hallmark of nature.

Looking at the wrinkles on an old person's face, it is fascinating how each and every line is defined and looks like it belongs there, almost telling a story about that person's life. You can tell whether he or she has been mainly sad or mainly happy throughout life. Buildings old and new are made more personal, more relevant to the owner, by their flaws and imperfections. By amalgamating highly finished surfaces with some attractive irregularities and elements of highly individual style that speak of the owner's character and preferences, a more personal and familiar feel is created, a special space that is really home.

This in no way means, as we have said, that bad workmanship is acceptable – not at all. In our work, we strive for perfection in practicality. But what exactly is perfection? As with beauty, there is the classic standard, which in the human face includes absolute symmetry. But how many times have we seen an entirely forgettable symmetrically beautiful face, but then been captivated by a face that is irregular but at the same time stunningly beautiful? And it's not just faces, either – rooms decorated with perfect symmetry are tedious. It is the wondrous touches that break the symmetry that make for the beauty of some of the most high-impact interiors.

We often have these discussions between ourselves and with our clients. People often think, in theory, that what they would most like is a pared-down minimalist setting like a showcase house, with every surface bare and every detail measured out. It is only when they get what they think they want that they realise they are alienated by their surroundings, that those surroundings are not comfortable and do not portray a fullness and richness of life, that they feel temporary and without depth. Beautiful defects, randomness and irregularity, make a home – indeed, they make any space far more welcoming.

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