

The Porch as a Threshold in Between Architecture and Landscape Architecture

Igor B. Plevitzky's Birdcage (1949) and the Florida Tropical Home

Abstract

This paper examines the spatial, material, and tectonic transformation of boundaries and thresholds in the Russian émigré architect Igor B. Plevitzky's Birdcage House to argue that this house was tropicalized through a blurring of boundaries between elements of architecture and landscape architecture. The Florida Tropical Home was based on the idea of spatio-temporally expanded thresholds between the inside and outside, creating a series of semi-open loggias. Florida architects — Marion Manley, Robert Law Weed, Igor B. Plevitzky, Rufus Nims, and Alfred Browning Parker — revolutionized the idea of the Florida Tropical Home through a disruption of the conventional distinction between boundaries and thresholds, and architecture and landscape architecture. Plevitzky's blurring of boundaries between the binary categories of boundaries or thresholds, architecture or landscape architecture, and inside or outside culminated with the design of the Heller House, popularly known as the Birdcage House, which was featured in *Life* magazine in 1950 and the Museum of Modern Art's exhibit *Built in USA: Post-War Architecture*. Plevitzky took the screened porch — the liminal space in the house between the inside and outside — and transformed it into an envelope that was wrapped around the house. This paper argues that the transformation of the boundaries and thresholds between the inside and outside caused the blurring of boundaries between architecture and landscape architecture in the Birdcage House. It further argues that the Birdcage House became the discursive threshold where the divergent trajectories of postwar modernism dissolved.

Keywords

Birdcage House, Florida Domestic Architecture, Florida Tropical Home, Igor Polevitzky, Miami Architecture, Tropical Architecture