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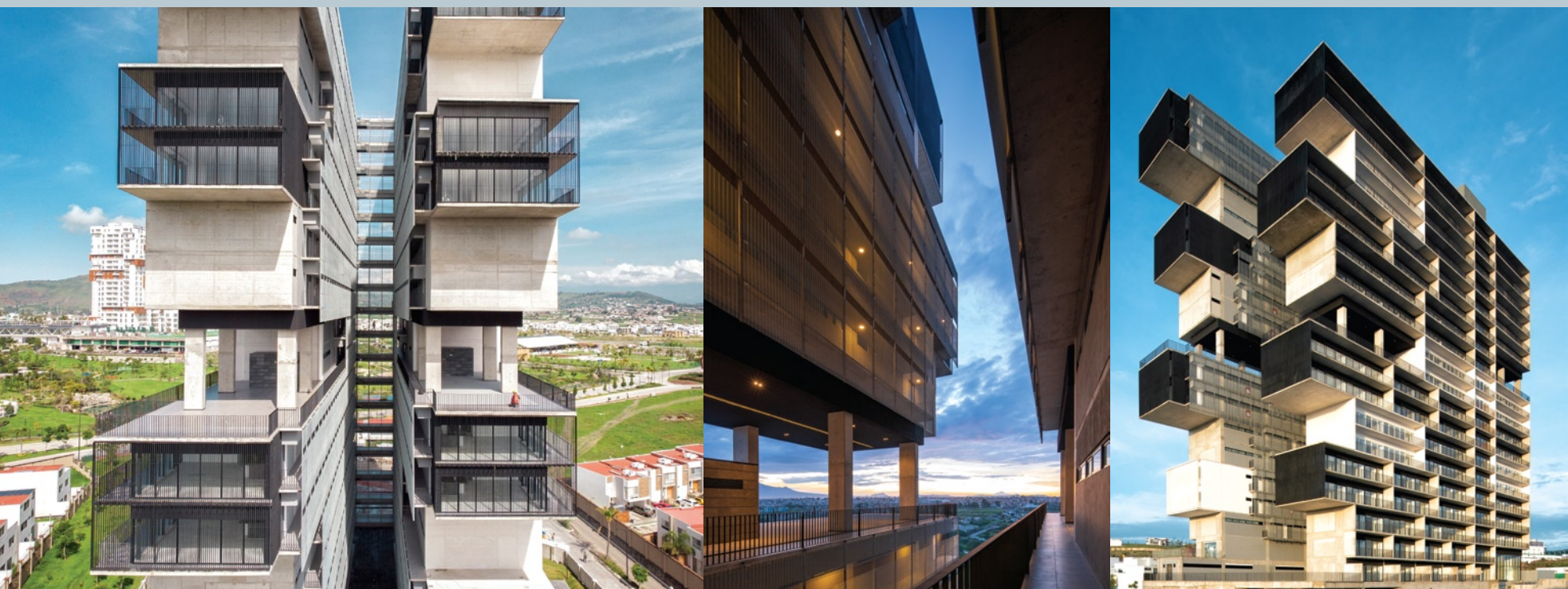
HK\$80
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TALL TWINS

AMANI

Puebla, Mexico
Archetonic

Photography by Yoshihiro Koitani



This giant housing slab is composed of two parallel bars of narrow proportions set across a gap of space that comes across as a domestic canyon for its residents. The building rises above its context - a developing mixed-use quarter of the city - like a landmark, and is anything but retiring. It is a bold concrete superstructure with serrated ends, black and white tonal accents, and simplified, economical facades of glass and balconies. In truth, the project appears much more grand and ambitious than its actuality, which is a very neat trick by the architects. The 226 apartments of modest size stack up to 22 floors, one upon the other. Most enjoy double-exposure thanks to the skinny cross-section scale of AMANI. You get a view out, and another into that shady chasm in the middle, plus the valuable attribute of cross-ventilation. Most of the units are two-storeys, with internal staircases. The access corridors are expressed behind metal mesh screens, running along the atrium, a nice - and cheap - solution.

There are common areas and amenities expressed as architectural dollops around the main form. The slabs are only 9m wide, an advantageous dimension for a single home. At some of the ends, large cantilevers thrust out paired floors for dramatic effect, saving the large-scale massing from banality. There are generous green gardens (4,000 sqm worth) and open spaces for the residents, possibly as an antidote to the hard surfaces characterising AMANI. At about mid-height the bar buildings offer huge sky terraces for common use; spaces that are exciting aeries high above the surroundings. Vertigo-sufferers will avoid them, but kids and others will be thrilled.

The character, materials and details of AMANI are raw and strong from bottom to top. But it is that central void, shady, looming, slightly scary, that is the showstopper of the place. Residents will love it or be terrified, but no-one will forget it for a moment. The smartness of the scheme is how much it derives from quite little. Nothing luxurious or structurally taxing, yet from every angle, the project takes centre stage.

