

People, not only places.



Rural building in Salento countryside, Morciano di Leuca, Apulia, Italy

luca zanaroli architects



".... the building and its environment are one; planting trees in the ground surrounding the building, as furnishing the building itself, acquire a new importance, since they become elements in harmony with the interior space in which people live. The place (the construction, the furniture) - and also the decoration, as the trees - everything becomes one thing in the organic architecture... synthesis to which every aspect of living converges, and puts itself in harmony with the environment. This is precisely what posterity will define organic architecture".

Frank Lloyd Wright

The comprehension of the place, the analysis of needs, the study of light and volumes and the experimentation of materials are essential elements of the planning process, as well as the constant check of these elements is fundamental during the implementation process of the work. I've always considered the planning phase, that one in which the intuition arises and the idea evolves, as inseparable from the fulfilment moment, that one in which the idea becomes a palpable shape within the space. These two moments are part of the same creative process.

I consider architecture as a spatial art, capable of modelling surfaces and volumes with the same principles of perception and visual communication of painting and carving, which does not reduce itself into a simple visual component, but which is also related to the feelings that living the space (besides seeing the space) is able to convey. In this sense, the project is a focal element of the entire process of transformation of the environment and of the space. The project, in anyone of its components, permits to handle and control the complexity of the transformation: from the first sketches to the working-out of the detailed design. But it's in the detailed design that the work, at first only imagined and seen during the planning stage, comes to life and becomes totally usable and understandable through all of our senses. Because of this reason, the planning phase and the implementation stage are part of the same process and cannot be separated. The first one strictly depends from the other one: the two moments continuously influence each other within a constant feedback of information.

I think architecture has not the sole purpose of responding to the basic needs of people and to satisfy their biological necessities; I do not believe it should only take care about arranging the space and responding in functional terms to the specific and particular human needs. Architecture has also the task of giving "sense" to space and matter, to reveal their spiritual substance and to explain the true essence of things. Whether it deals with a new building or with the renovation of an existing structure.

In addition, architecture must strive to create a system in equilibrium between artificial environment and natural environment. Through the integration of the various elements composing them, the two environments become a part of a single, organic architectural space.

In this sense, architecture and landscape are no longer distinct categories. They complement and contaminate each other up to produce an assimilation of the built project with its surroundings.

The "sensuality" of the architectural space, as its material and immaterial component, inextricably combines itself with the symbolic references that art is able to generate, pushing man beyond, or better, through sensory perception to spiritual perception, producing physical pleasure and mental wellness.

This aesthetic, which is also my personal approach to architecture (even more humanistic than scientific), combines art - in all of its expressions - with people's life and with the environment in which they live.

The creative process is something constantly evolving, an ongoing research that may, indeed must, lead to results and to forms of expression always different and innovative, and above all sustainable.

In this work, the methodological approach reflects the considerations made so far.

The project concerns the renovation of a rural building abandoned for years, to be used as holiday home and refuge for a professional couple who live and work throughout the year in a city in the north of Italy. The objectives to be achieved with the restoration project were clear. That was to enhance the historic and representative character of the building, of traditions and local lifestyles, revising and interpreting the various elements in a contemporary way, in an attempt to keep a simple and bucolic, but at the same time warm and comfortable, atmosphere. It was also necessary to foster some virtuous attitudes in the end users, such as taking care of the place, recalling the simple measures of country life, to avoid waste and consumption and to affirm the concept of environmental health and well-being: some sort of ecology in the daily gestures.

The difference between a city and another, between a road and another, between a territory and another, is no longer only in architecture and in its formal symbols, but in the human presences, intrusive, living, cells carrying diversity, exceptions, deep cultural information.



The main theme was the comparison with an existing architecture endowed with a strong, symbolic value and with a unique landscape, both expression of the character and of the culture of that area. The combination of these two elements represented in my opinion the "genius loci" of the site. I tried to put myself in a state of "listening", to understand the sense of the place. I think it's important to adopt a balanced, but not imitative, relationship with the models of tradition, avoiding self-referential citations, pursuing a creative reinvention respecting the connection with the marks of the region and with traditions.

Therefore, the sustainability of the project could not only cover the technical and structural aspects of the transformation intervention, but, in terms of memory, was also expected to concern the recovering methods of the characters of the past, recovery conducted in a contemporary key, that is refusing a banal philological approach, which often ends up in "falsifying history".

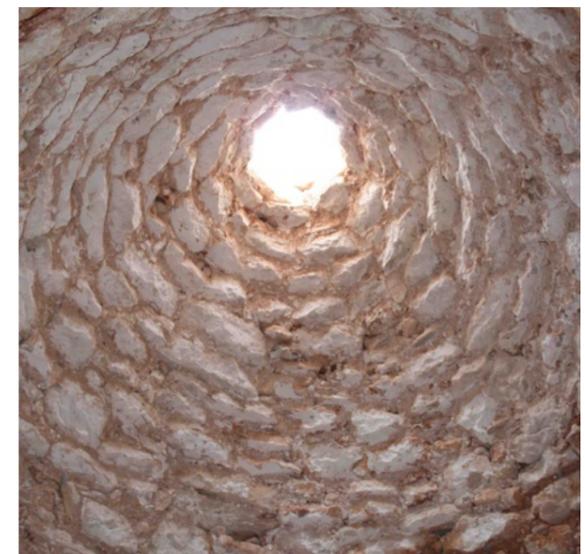
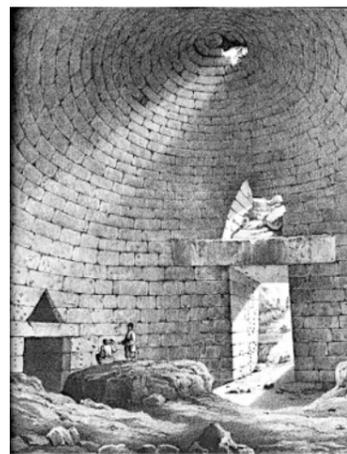
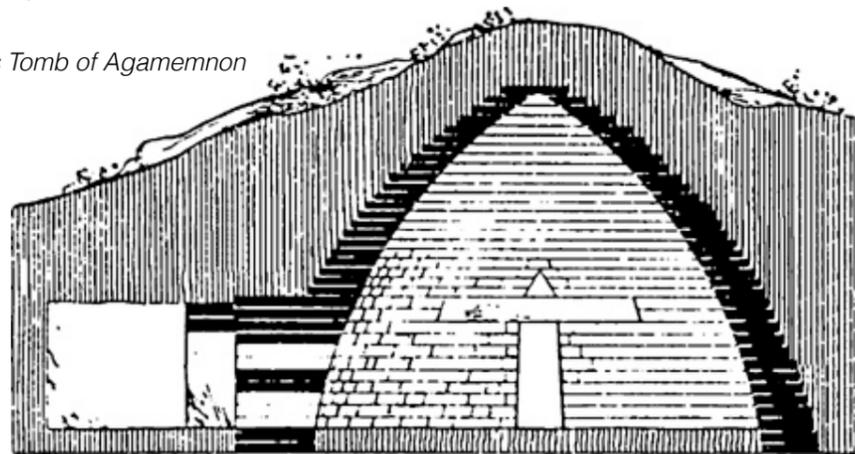
On the other hand, it was my intention to promote the perception of continuity and simplicity of the architectural composition for a harmonious integration in the landscape, against pure stylistic formalisms.

The thing that immediately struck me of the building and the location was its "monumental nature". Not for any special artistic or architectural value (it is actually a construction rather rudimentary and poor), but for its strength and expressive power, which is typical of the nature and of the culture of that area. That was when I decided that the restoration project should have had the purpose to preserve the charm presented from the beginning.

Typical example of rural dry stone architecture of the southern Salento area, the building is, in fact, composed by two constructions of different type and coming from different periods, adjacent but originally not communicating. The oldest one, the so-called "pajara", dating back to the 18th century, has a truncated conical shape on two terraces, with a circular plan and a domed ceiling. It was used all year round as a store for retaining tools and wood. At a later date (around the end of the 19th century) a larger building was added, called the "liàma", characterized by a truncated pyramidal shape, with a quadrangular plan and a barrel vault ceiling, used as a refuge and seasonal home for the field workers. Often, as in this case, a large oven was built near the house, where the bread used to be cooked or the figs with the almonds used to be baked after they had been sun-dried, laid out on some cloths on top of the flat roofs, which could be reached by small stairways dug into the stone walls.

The construction techniques were jealously handed down from father to son, from the few farmers experienced in the implementation of these shelters. Generally, the structure was built where the rock emerged from the ground, so that the rock itself could be used as flooring. Planted a stake in the center of the building to be constructed, concentric circles are drawn with a rope, on the basis of the expected height and thickness of the wall. Then, the stones from the ground are overlapped, as in the construction of a dry stone wall, developing the perimeter walls and taking care to give them a slight slope. The space between the inner and the outer wall is filled with some more stones and tinier material, mixed and compacted with the most clayey part of the soil. For the construction of the dome (tholos) of the "pajara", concentric rings of flat-shaped rough stone are raised, mostly elongated, forming increasingly smaller circles, projecting into the interior. These segments are arranged with a completely dry-stone technique and stabilized with smaller stones; the hole remaining at the top is covered with a thick slab of stone or left open.

Tholos Tomb of Agamemnon



Each project arises from a specific context which determines its uniqueness (see Norbert Schultz's "Genius loci").

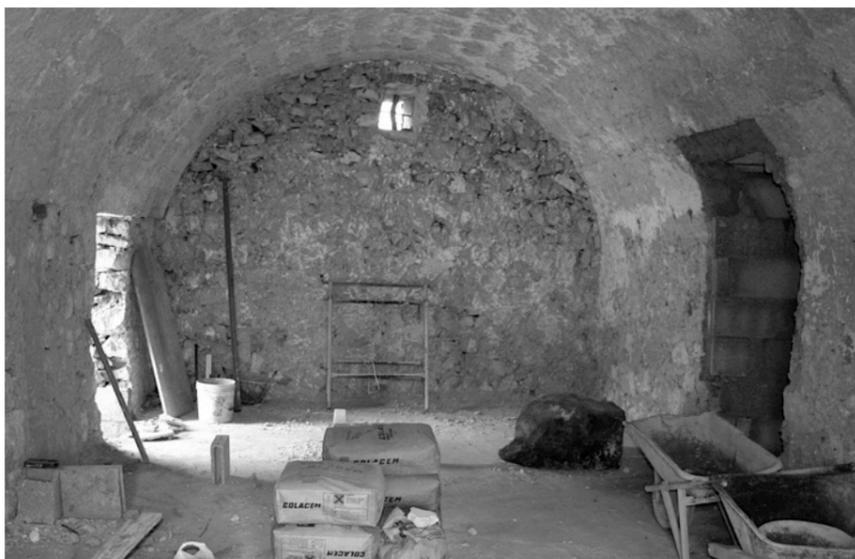
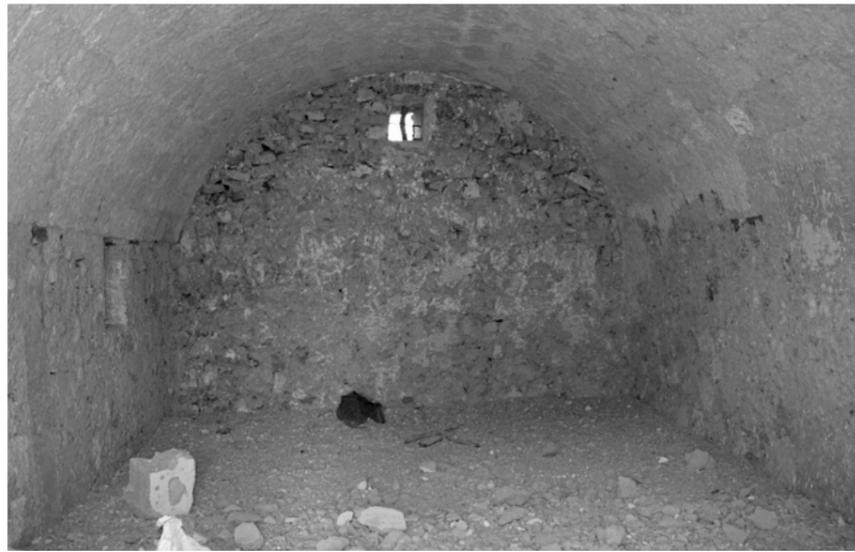


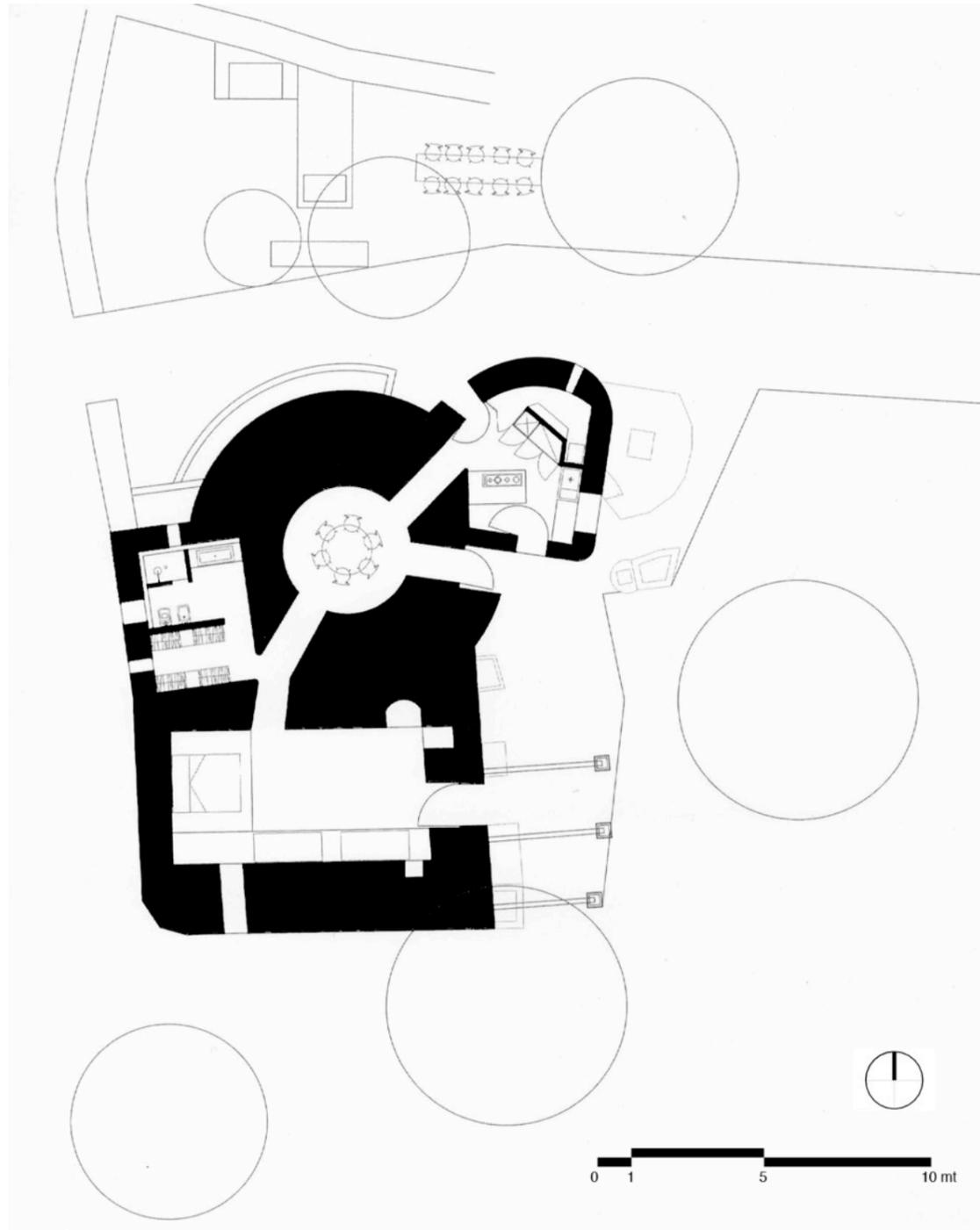
Finally, the roofing is made on the previously built terraces, fitting together the flat stones and inserting clay in the interstices, where mosses will eventually, naturally grow. This technique provides a respectable waterproofing and natural insulation.

The design principle of the false dome reminds of the "tholos" constructions, such as the famous tomb of Agamemnon or the Sardinian Nuraghe, even for their outward appearance. Yet, similar types are scattered throughout the Mediterranean basin, albeit with different shapes, such as in Pantelleria, in the Balearic Islands, in the Swiss Alps, in Croatia, all characterized by a common factor, which is a massive presence of stones in the soil.

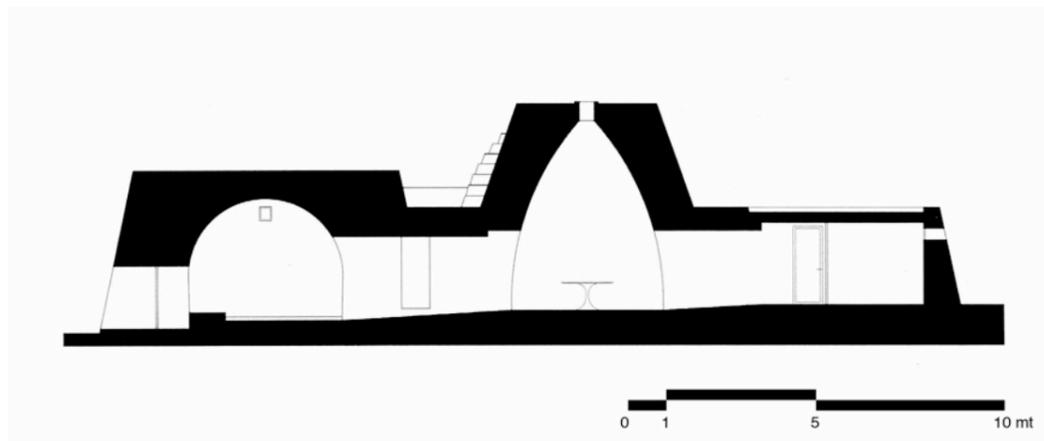
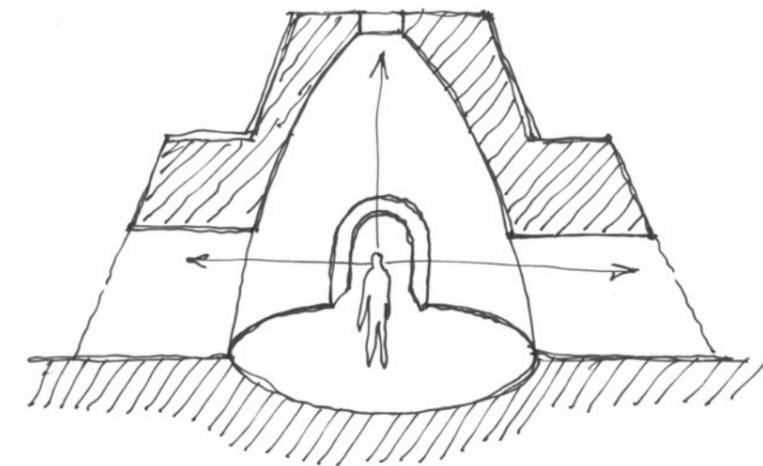
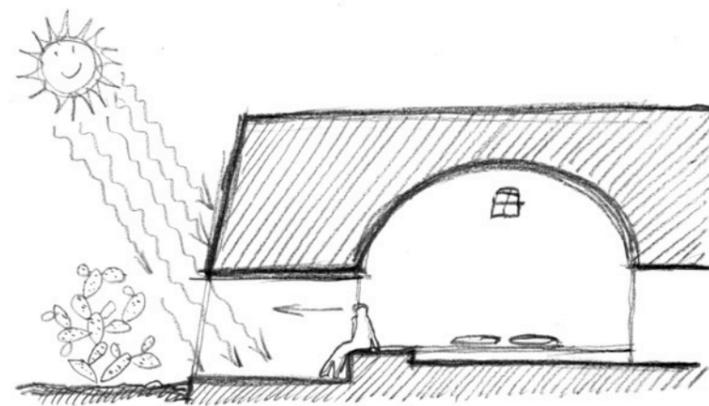
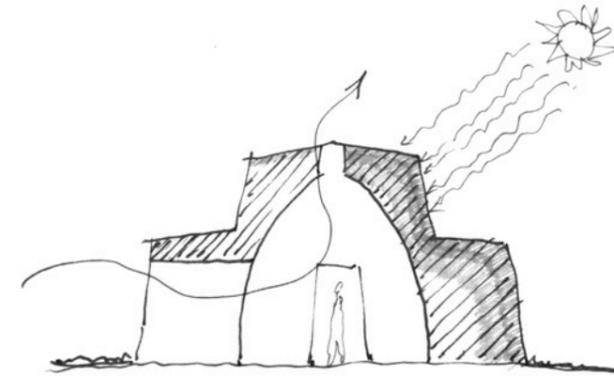
The inner part of the "pajara" can be reached from the outside through a corridor as long as the thickness of the wall. Several are the types of architraves supporting it: the most common one is made of two contrasting stone blocks that form a set of triangles which transmit loads to the ground, while sometimes a single stone element is preferred, or, in more recent buildings, the round arch. Other elements are made in the thickness of the wall, like the stairs to reach the terraces, the watering trough for the beast of burden, or, on the inside, the niches for storing the provisions and the lamp.

On the outside, there is often "lu sittaturu", a small horizontal element with a sitting function, which used to serve as an evening meeting place for the family and for the other people who lived in similar buildings nearby. In this case, the seat is topped by a light pergola, covered with vine stocks and supported by some columns made of irregular tufa blocks, working as summer heat protection. Also, but rarely, the seat is equipped with a high backrest, which also serves as a protection from the wind.



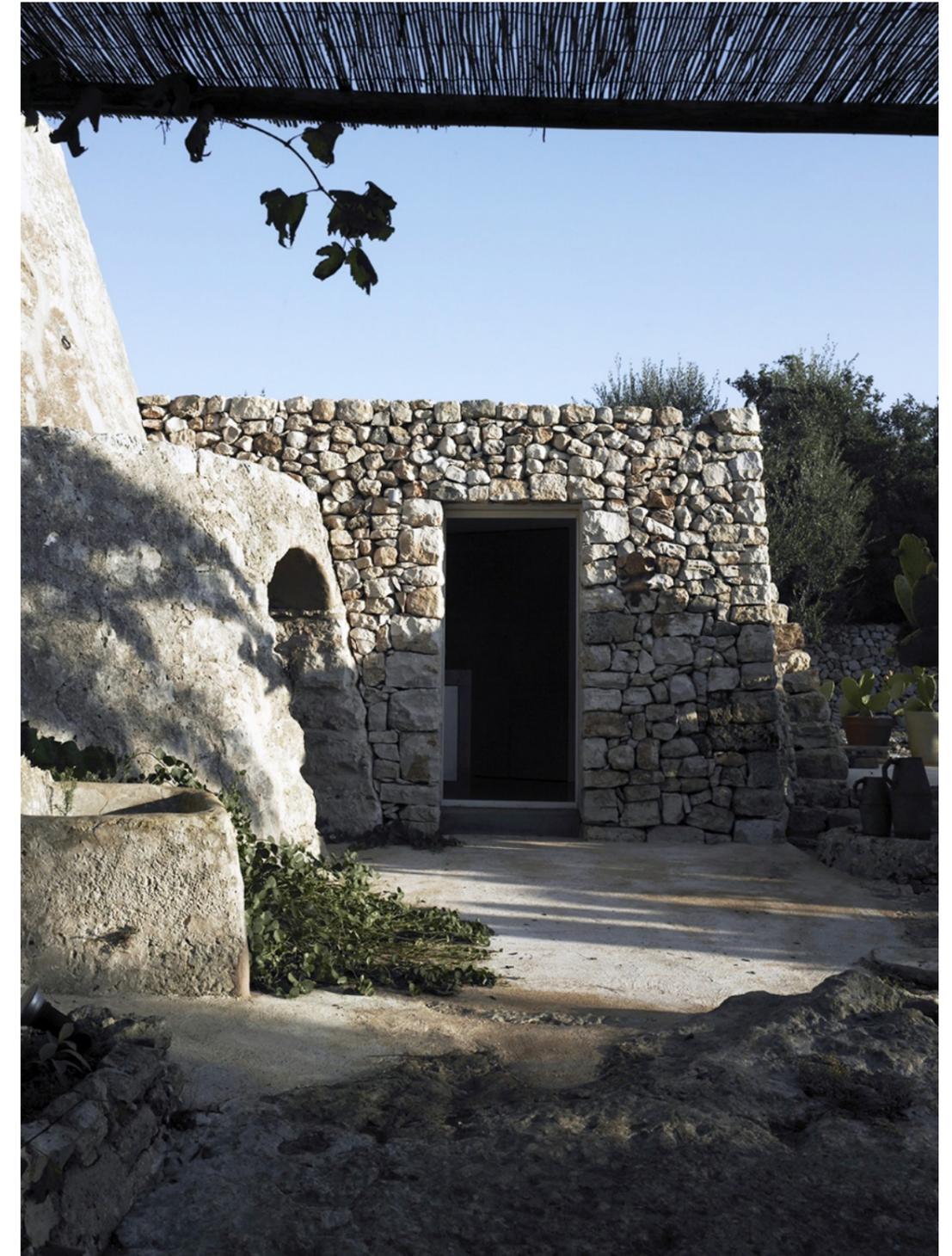


The local people used to hang out in this place, so they knew it well. The old people still tell me about the summer evenings when they all used to get together here, after a day spent in the fields, men, women and children, playing, singing and dancing, telling stories sitting on the stone benches, which can still be found at the entrance of the "liàma"; or, moreover, about the nights spent sleeping on the straw beds placed directly on the floor. It was in fact a costum to sleep on sacks filled with straw or leaves of maize. Some houses were equipped with a bed of stones ("lattèra"), or made of wooden planks with the dried plant of legumes or the stem of the beat barley on top; hemp cloth was rarely used and some farmers used to lay down with their clothes still on.

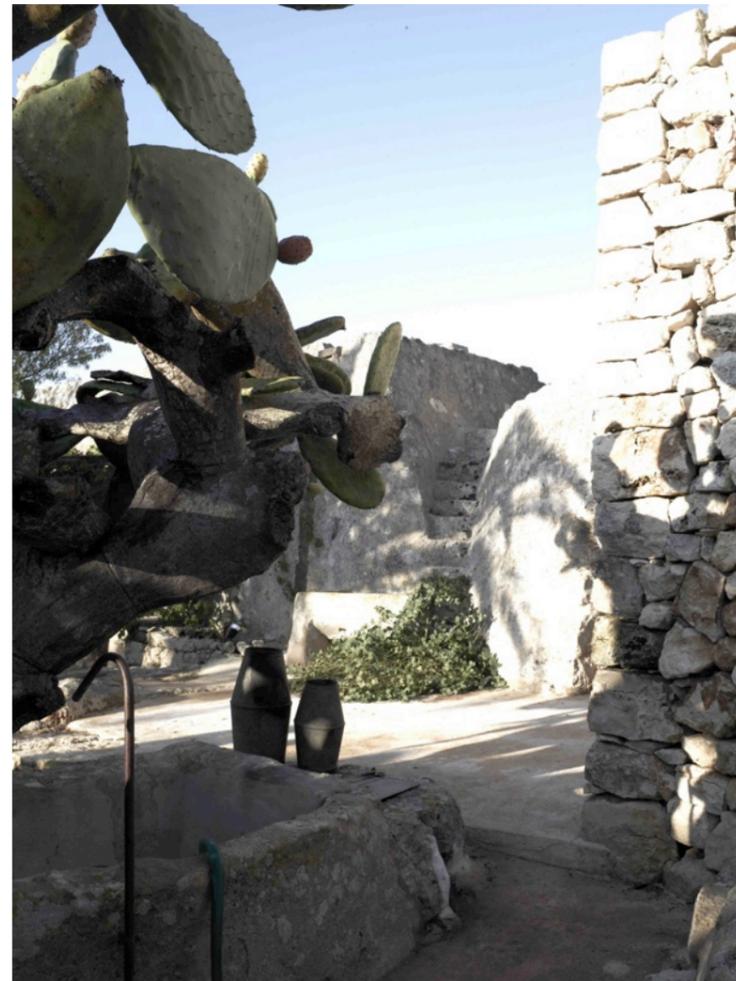


"Landscape" designates a specific part of the territory, as perceived by people, whose character derives from the action of natural and/or human factors and from their interrelations."

Article 1 of the European Landscape Convention. Florence 2000



I particularly love the relationship with the land, and in general with the nature, that emerges in such a physical and direct way from the daily living acts like sleeping. The decision of removing the beds and the furniture of the house comes probably from that, from the desire to regain some sort of physical contact with the ground.



"Production without appropriation, action without self-imposition, development without domination"

Laozi - 4th century BC

"The building was born for a rational need of protection, but, from its very beginning, the emotional need of beauty and the moral need of creating an environment were implicit in it"

Ernesto Nathan Rogers



The building had been abandoned for years and was in very poor condition. The oven was virtually collapsed and there were large damp patches on the interior walls due to water infiltration. Luckily, the greater part of the building had resisted and that special patina left by the time on the outer walls, which I have kept with due respect, was still recognizable.

The kitchen has been built in the collapsed oven volume. A small extension has been made, in order to gain the bathroom and the annexed closet. Finally, all the interior rooms have been connected with long corridors carved into the thick walls (sometimes even digging without knowing where they were going to peep out), joining the different level floors through slightly inclining ramps in order to emphasise the idea of spatial continuity. The proposal was to avoid any clear interruption or sharp edge and to minimize the vertical partitions, allowing the light and the air to enter as much as possible inside.

In order to achieve the desired result, the choice of the external façade was decisive. On the one hand there was the need to ensure an adequate level of comfort and security, on the other to achieve the total integration and fusion between the interior space and the outer one, regarding the natural surrounding environment as an integral part of the character and the identity of the place.

It was also necessary to use elements able to integrate the existing architecture with minimal impact, but at the same time able to stand out visually and to qualify the project in terms of design, function and performance.

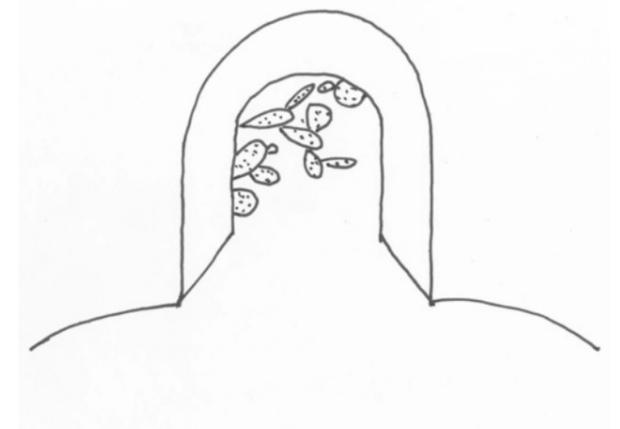
White epoxy powder coated steel frames were used, recessed into the walls, in order to reduce their visual impact from the outside.

The use of glass coverings allows at any time of year to enjoy the light, which is truly unique and special here.



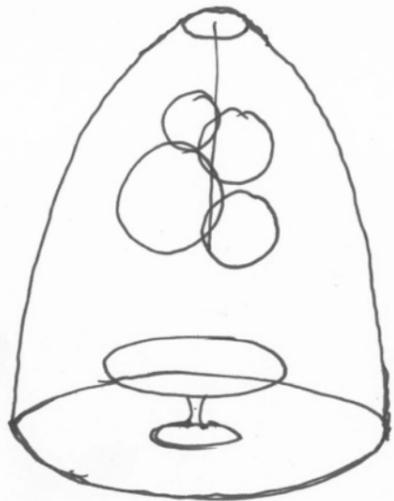
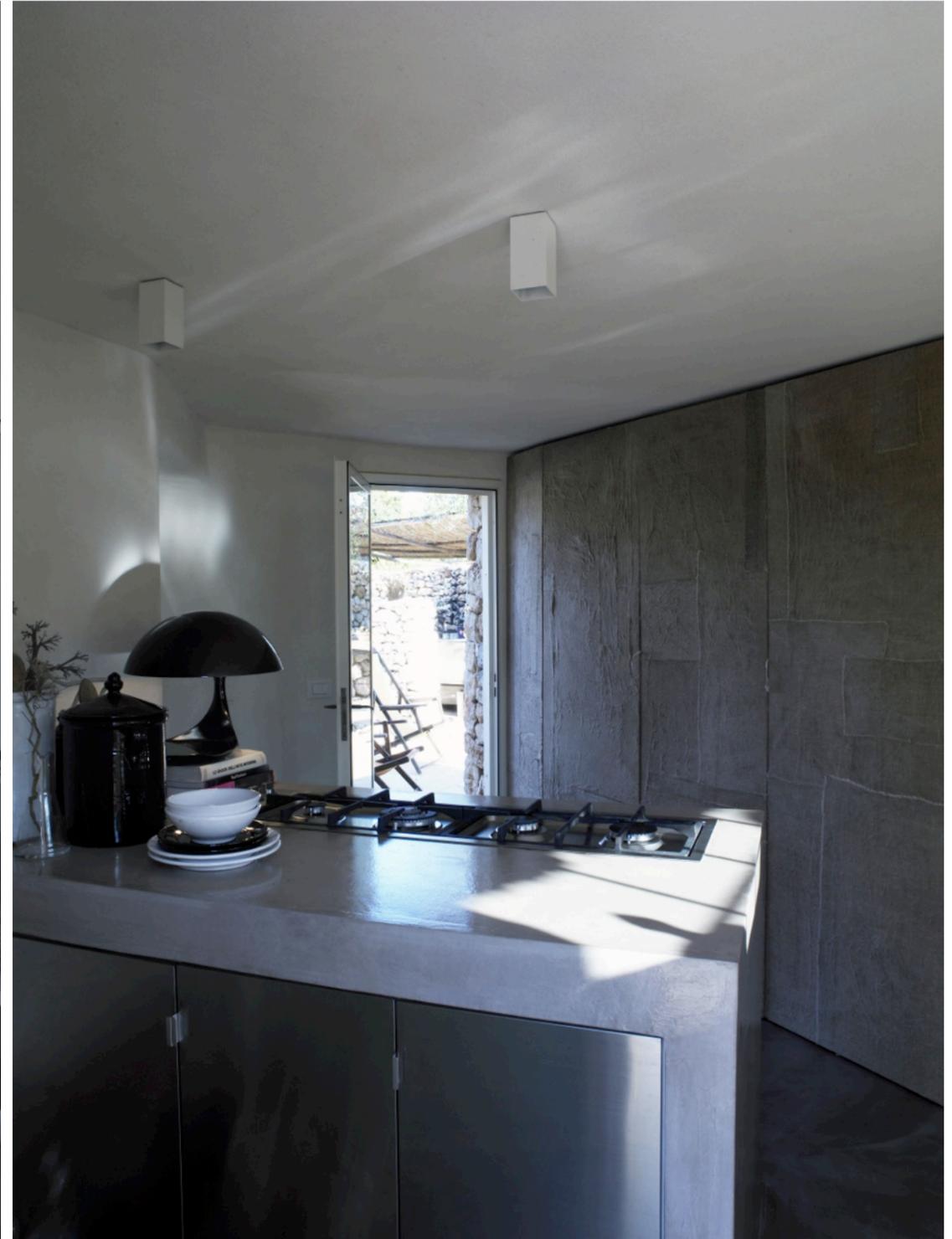
The interior surfaces, both the floors covered with cementitious mortar and the plaster made with lime and tuff, bind the different volumes and gently reflect the natural light coming in from the numerous openings, conveying it to the innermost parts of the rooms.

The theme of the "window" assumes different connotations, according to its vocation as visual vector or as light collector. The choice of the interior finish materials, along with a proper sizing of the rooms, promotes a balanced and interesting visual projection to the outside.

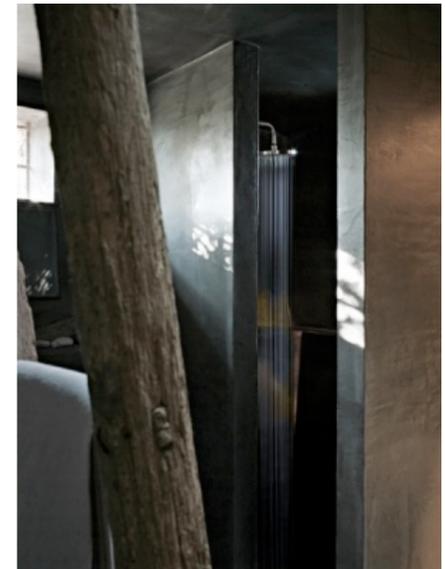


"Thinking of the margin as an area of research on wealth coming from the blend of different environments"

Gilles Clement - Manifesto of the Third Landscape



The interior design is characterized by the decision of “contaminating” the rural atmosphere by using some "metropolitan style" materials, colors and furnishings, able to harmonically fit in with the context, thanks to their neutral and minimal appearance, and to enhance its original quality and nature without altering them. The surfaces and the textures are enlivened and shaped by the light and by the reflections of the surrounding landscape. The color should not be considered as an element added later, but must assume a design value, from the creative phase. The pursuit of the lowest environmental impact suggests the use of colors drawn from the traditional materials, related to the surrounding landscape and local culture. They don't necessarily need to be natural colors, but a pied succession of tones and surfaces able to herald the place. The oxidation, the growth of vegetation in the pores or any other form of contamination of nature into the architecture, despite their different levels of development, can constitute virtuous processes in the penetration of the landscape.



"By looking at the landscape it is possible to understand much about the man who lives in it. By looking at the man it is possible to understand much about the landscape he lives in."

M. Giovannini



The furniture is minimal and is an integral part of the building, as organic architecture with everything. Every object is a local poor handicraft and is a result of a meticulous research through the region, while I personally designed the art works, as the sculpture in rusted wire suspended on the dining table, privileging recovery materials.

The final result can be considered as a synthesis between rustic simplicity and understated elegance, or even, on the contrary, the contrast between the unchanging perfection of shapes and the erratic imperfection of things.

Light and air constitute the soul of the space, the built environment and the natural one are part of a single architectural space, which is the result of a continuous research on the essence of shapes and materials.