

ON  
**VACATION  
ARCHITECTURE**

IN NONSEASONAL  
PLACES

OR

**TIMELESS HOMES  
OF OCEANIC AND  
MEDITERRANEAN  
EUROPE**

ON  
**VACATION  
ARCHITECTURE**

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**TIMELESS HOMES  
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On Vacation Architecture in Nonseasonal Places. Timeless Homes of  
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Bucharest, Romania  
2024

**sd.**



CHARIOT

**SORINA DUMITRU**  
D. Arch.

BUCHAREST, ROMANIA  
2024

To Maria,  
who constantly reminds me  
about the importance of savoring  
ordinary moments like they are all  
extraordinary.

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## Preface

This series of books is something I've put together for anyone who wants to build a space. Not just any space, but a very special space. A space in which you can rest, socialize and create. A space where you can truly be present, where time flows differently. These are timeless spaces, spaces that, for us, come alive, while making us truly feel alive.

You may have had this feeling not necessarily in your own home, but on vacation. There's something magical that happens to us when we go on vacation. The food tastes better, the sky looks prettier, we look sexier. During that brief period of time in which we are away, we develop different thought patterns. We start to notice things around us, things about ourselves, things about each other. Sometimes, we even try to bring home our new discoveries, our new way of living. Of course, they don't always translate as well back home. This series is intended help you with that.

Time for me to introduce myself. I'm an architect with neurodivergent tendencies. I sometimes get fixated, even obsessed, with architecture, specifically how buildings transform over time. I obsess over Brutalism, the glorious architectural style that never was. I ruminate about decrepit malls, at first being the go-to place for teenagers, later on becoming a sort of poorly lit liminal space for people running errands. I fixate on techno rave venues, many of them formerly industrial buildings converted into giant event halls. I'm fascinated by the lifespan of buildings and how, even if the materiality of them is permanent, it is finite, just as ours are.

After completing my PhD on adaptive architecture, I've spent the last year traveling, studying, taking pictures and flying my drone over places and buildings in some very popular vacation spots. I've been collecting all this data in order to develop a collection of best practices for designing timeless architecture, specifically focusing on homes. The particular niche of vacation architecture is, to me, a sort of residential architecture but on steroids. Vacation homes are houses in which we spend considerably more time. They are backdrops for social events that take place on a daily basis. They are places in which we feel a little different than back at home. Arguably, we feel a little bit more ourselves.

If back home time seems to be passing by faster and faster each year, when we are on vacation, living in these temporary homes, time seems to stand still. This is what's

called The Vacation Paradox. It is caused by us experiencing unique events every day, making each of them memorable, as opposed to the repetitive days we experience at home, days which ultimately makes us ask ourselves where all the time went.

For vacation architecture, especially in nonseasonal places, time stands still. The buildings themselves come alive when we feel most alive in them. We feel most alive in them when we share memorable experiences with our loved ones. Vacation architecture is timeless. It also provides us with memories that last us a lifetime.

## Introduction

Has anyone noticed how quickly new buildings start looking old? The facades deteriorate, the roofs are only guaranteed for 10 years, interiors have to be redone every 5 years and so on.

Then you go on vacation and rent out an AirBnB in a building that's over 100 years old. You visit large, monumental buildings that get renovated every 50 years. The restaurants you go to have damaged limewash<sup>1</sup> all over the walls. And they're undeniably so beautiful.

Why is that?

In 1979, landscape architect Christopher Alexander wrote a book titled "The Timeless Way of Building".<sup>2</sup> He states that, in order for a building to be timeless, it has to look (and work) like it naturally grew from the surroundings.

---

<sup>1</sup> Limewash is a wall finishing technique in which lime is mixed with a water suspension and applied to indoor or outdoor architectural surfaces, resulting in an uneven texture of shades of white, however flat to the touch.

<sup>2</sup> Alexander, C. (1979). *A Timeless Way of Building*. Oxford University Press

Almost like the building itself is alive. In a forest, you wouldn't mind dry leaves or rotten tree bark on the ground. In the same way, you wouldn't mind the building materials looking a little distressed. To make a building look "alive", architects must seek out and implement what Alexander calls "a quality without a name." This book, together with many other books after it, tries to reverse engineer the common sense of vernacular architecture in parallel to nature itself.

I'm a practical person so for me the guidelines were sometimes too abstract. While the author provides many design tools for timeless architecture, the "quality without a name" of course remains unnamed. I needed something a little more practical.

[1] While growing up, my family used to travel a lot by plane. I was very young and so the itinerary was considered not to be my concern. They didn't always tell me where we were going. It's ok, I was 3. The way I figured out where we were about to land was looking at colors. The color of the sky, the color of sunlight reflected in the buildings, the specific green of those particular trees, the colors of the rocks I could see at a distance.

Each place had its own color palette. Even the color of the sand we use in concrete is specific to the local environment.



[1]

Later, when I started rendering in architecture school, I found out that is, in fact, a thing. Photon mapping<sup>1</sup> rendering algorithms work properly if you give them lots of information regarding the natural setting. Each place on earth has a certain color scheme, depending on humidity, foliage, topography and geographical coordinates.

Then perhaps “the quality without a name” can also mean, among other things, following the local color scheme. Using local materials, paying particular attention to sun movement, using locally sourced plants, placing them in a specific hierarchy, borrowing from the local natural environment.

Why should you care, though?

Well, if you’re reading this, we’re not so different. You value your free time. You enjoy traveling. You choose the traveling destinations carefully. There are certain places you prefer. When you return home, you might actually try to integrate what you’ve seen in your own home. It doesn’t translate so easily but there are some actionable steps we can try:

1. we can see
2. we can understand what we see
3. we can decipher what we see
4. we can synthesize what we see
5. we can transfer the essence naturally into our own homes, thousands of miles away.

---

<sup>1</sup> In computer graphics, photon mapping solves the rendering equation for integrating light at a given point by simulating refraction using quantifiable parameters related to natural characteristics.

People have spent centuries trying to separate Nature from their own shelters. I think we now have the capacity, both technically and intellectually, to start bringing it back into our homes in a way that not only does not compromise our own comfort, but actually enhances it.

Christopher Alexander mentions that the quality without a name is something that exists in buildings everywhere in the world, regardless of natural setting, historical context or style. The unquestionable beauty of these buildings is related to something that exists in all of us. A resolution of an inner conflict. An integration that lays dormant within us and needs to be awakened. The quality without a name is what makes places come alive. Places which are alive make us feel alive.

\*

This book studies Vacation Architecture, specifically in nonseasonal places. I chose this particular type of architecture to study because, for me, it’s the best kind of housing. Vacation homes are designed to be enjoyed, not just used. They are a perfect mix between universal comfort and local heritage. Moreover, nonseasonal places, such as the Tropics, Southern Europe, the Mediterranean coast, can lend themselves as architecture laboratories in which designers can experiment the distinction between indoors and outdoors. As time spent outside expands, so does the

outdoor buffer between interior and exterior. And that's where the magic happens.

- [2] The nonseasonal places in this book are just a very small part of the entire World. They will be studied from West to East, starting in some islands in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean all the way to the eastern end of the Mediterranean Sea. Aside from the natural setting, history plays an important role in the cultural heritage of the studied homes, implicitly having an effect on the shape of the buildings. In relation to shape, specific regions will have specific spatial typologies and specific spatial organization.



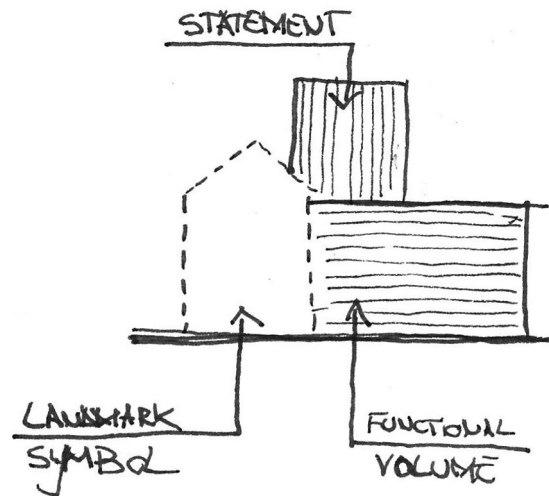
[2]

I know, these words sound pretentious. They are, in fact, very simple concepts which will be explained at the beginning of the book and used as design tools to study and reverse engineer the examples of architecture. At the end of each chapter, you will have a few key takeaways which you can implement into your own homes or projects, whether you are a professional or just really passionate about architecture.

To put it simply, the main chapters will be organized by region. Each region for each region we will discuss:

- Natural setting
- Historical context
- General design solution for homes
- Contemporary interpretations
- Key takeaways

It is not a coincidence that the vast majority of the examples studied are results of an architectural process called adaptive reuse. Usually, specifically in urban settings, this process is a way of revitalizing buildings that have fallen into obsolescence. To put it simply, buildings that did not stand the test of time, either by state, function or general disrepair, go through a series of transformations. Instead of demolishing it, architects and developers work together to keep, revitalize and reuse parts of the building that are considered historically or culturally relevant. [3]



[3]

The adaptations we study in this book are more or less transparent, in the sense of honesty in relation to the interventions themselves. We will encounter extensions, physical adaptations, functional adaptations and conceptual reinterpretations of local, traditional homes. I've mentioned before that the use case of Vacation Architecture is interesting from the point of view in which it is not only housing, but also a place for socializing. It's a home that you share with family and friends for a brief period of time. A home in which sometimes you have to pull out your laptop and do a little work. A home for your entire universe.

The point of the series is to further refine anyone's perception on vacation architecture. Ideally, by the end of it, you will have a set of design tools that you can use either in your own home, or your rental, or a home you're trying to rent out, or a project you're doing for a client or a friend, or even your ideal bucket-list dream home. These tools will probably stick to you for the rest of your life. If not, at the very least, you'll have an extra layer of enjoyment for your vacation settings.

# O.

## Spatial Typologies and Spatial Organisations

### Introduction

Before we start with the seemingly heavy architectural concepts, I want to begin with a story.

Most of my adolescent years, I wanted to be a veterinarian. Of course, like most children, I loved animals. I still do. At the time, however, I also understood what it meant to practice medicine on animals. Since I was about 10 years old, I would read scientific articles about diseases, about canine orthopedic surgery and so on. I was invested.

Then, when I started 11th grade, my highschool sent me and another girl from my class to Greece, on a type of young leadership program. During that month, we studied together with some teens from other highschools in

in Bucharest. It's important to mention that the educational program was heavily career oriented. So everytime a new professor introduced themselves, they would go around the class and ask each of us what careers we wanted to pursue. Of course, their reaction to my veterinarian career path was wholesome. They thought it was cute.

There was one boy from another highschool that was very certain what he wanted to be - an architect. Every time he said that, all the adults were very impressed by his choice for such an intellectual and prestigious career path, as well as his certainty. Their reaction stuck with me, even after we finished the program and arrived back home. I started looking into it. I didn't even know what architecture was. 'How hard could it be', I told myself. It turned out to be pretty hard, especially if you have no prior background to anything related to visual communication, construction, or law. But here I am.

The point of this story is for you to understand that knowledge, no matter how abstract or complex, is ultimately a skill. If it's a skill then it can be practiced. If it can be practiced then you can become good at it. Consider this chapter your introduction to architectural design.

Why are spatial typologies and spatial organizations so important in design?

Naturally, it took me several years to understand what architecture is. It's an abstract notion that for many could be difficult to grasp. Architects have very clear responsibilities however they have fluid, individual work flows. This is one of the reasons why architecture can be difficult to teach. Architecture universities have different ways of teaching design and the methods keep constantly changing and updating.

I am thankful for this. When I was a student, the idea was to immediately start with design research. Iterate, iterate, iterate. Receive feedback, critiques and start over. It was a lot of work and many times frustrating.

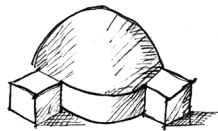
Returning back to architecture university as an assistant professor, I've had the opportunity to see how the teaching method has changed in a positive way. Before jumping into architectural design, students now go through spatial classifications.

Here they are, two distinct classifications, developed several centuries apart, still valid.

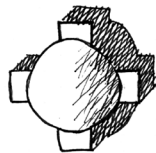
## Spatial Typologies

Around the year 1800, French architecture teacher Jean-Nicolas-Louis Durand<sup>1</sup> anticipated the impact the Industrial Revolution would have on building construction. He and his students embarked on drawing a giant database of already constructed buildings, categorizing them according to their spatial qualities. Durand was a Neoclassical architect, so the list below had to be slightly modified in order for it to be used as a design tool for first year architecture students.

### 1. Centralized Space



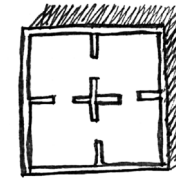
This is a centralized space.



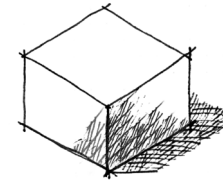
Elements are arranged around a central point.

<sup>1</sup> Durand, J. (1830). *Recueil et parallèle*. d. Avonzo

### 2. Chambered Space

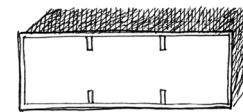


Interior is subdivided into similarly sized spaces that communicate directly through doorways.

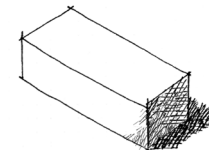


We notice this typology in Italian palazzos.

### 3. Linear Space

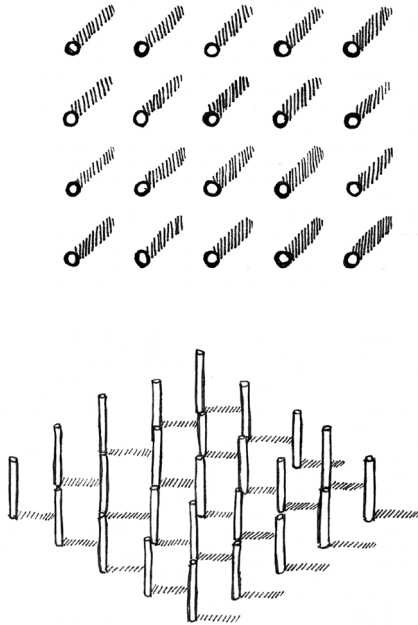


In a linear space typology, space is elongated with elements along a perceived pathway.

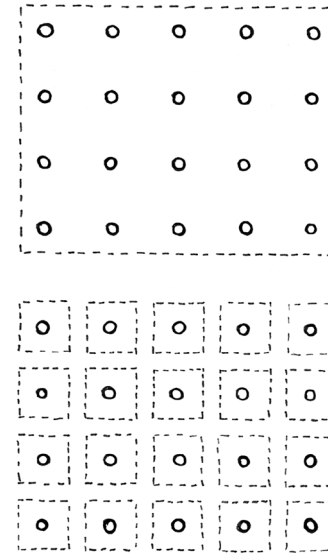


We notice this typology in Italian palazzos.

#### 4. Hypostyle Space

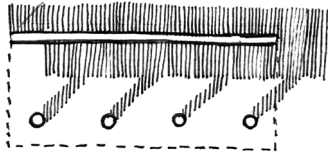


A hypostyle space is just a space filled with pillars or columns. No walls, no other elements.

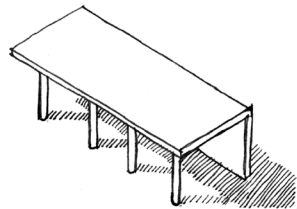


The vertical elements usually support some type of unified roof. The roof can also be subdivided into individual units corresponding to each column.

## 5. Portico

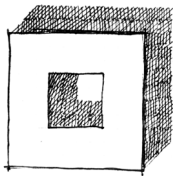


A portico is made of a single row of columns or pillars supporting a roof.

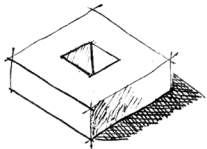


These porches can either be open to the sky or have some sort of roof structure covering it.

## 6. Courtyard



A courtyard typology is a negative space surrounded on all sides by parts of the building.



A courtyard can either be open to the sky or have some sort of glass structure covering it.

## Spatial Organizations

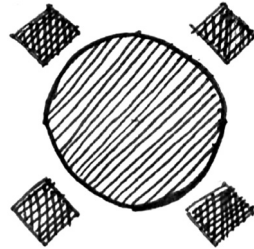
Almost 300 years later, architect lecturer Francis Ching writes an architecture handbook titled *Form, Space and Order*.<sup>1</sup> The book is filled with concise texts and many diagrams synthesizing a vast collection of design tools for architects.

If one were to synthesize the Ching's book, there are the only 5 ways to organize a building:

1. Centralized
2. Linear
3. Radial
4. Clustered
5. Grid

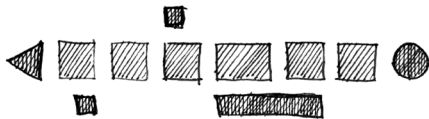
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<sup>1</sup> Ching F. (1996). *Form, Space and Order*. John Wiley & Sons Inc; 2nd edition



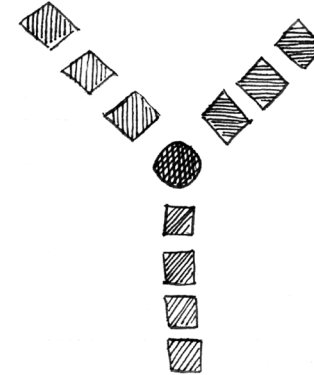
1. Centralized

Similar to the centralized spatial typology, elements are arranged around a central point. The primary central point doesn't have to be round, but it must have several axes of symmetry. The elements are arranged concentrically and the central point is also the largest element of the ensemble.



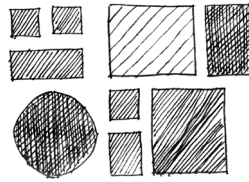
2. Linear

An elongated space that may have intermittent elements or end point elements.



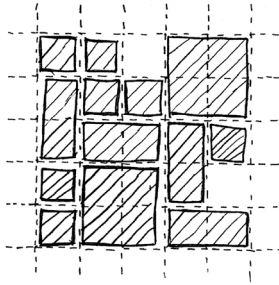
3. Radial

This is not a centralized organisation. It can, however, be a collection of linear spaces arranged radially in relation to a central point. The central point does not exceed the size or importance of the radially arranged elements.



#### 4. Clustered

Elements of different size and importance are put together in sub assemblies which may or may not be connected to each other.



#### 5. Grid

Elements are sized and positioned in relation to an invisible grid. The architect establishes a single unit of measure and each element's size is a multiple of this single unit.

### Conclusion

Spatial typologies are primarily used to design the inside of buildings, having effect on the outer shell as a consequence. Spatial organizations, however, are systematic ways of placing several types of architectural units in relation to one another. For a building, the spatial typology is oftentimes in direct relation to the spatial organization and vice versa.

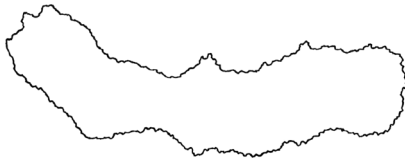
These tools may seem abstract but they are actually very useful. They allow us to design coherent architectural spaces. Coherence is very important in architecture as it directly impacts not only how we perceive it, how easily we understand how to use it, but also how it may evolve over time. We should always look at newly constructed buildings as open ended questions. Their adaptability is what keeps it usable over the passage of time.

Each example of vacation architecture will have a standardized list of characteristics in order to better understand their spatial typology as well as their spatial organizations. The purpose of this listing is to better understand the architectural objects themselves and assess whether there are certain aspects that can be translated and integrated into our own homes.

# I.

## Sao Miguel Azores Islands, Portugal

### Introduction



We begin the journey in the furthest western part of Europe - the Azores Islands. Halfway from continental Europe towards America, these volcanic islands are an autonomous region of Portugal.

We visited the Azores in the month of January of 2024. At first, while planning the trip, I was reluctant. I noticed that it was right in the middle of the Atlantic Ocean, on the same parallel with places where it's full on winter, with snowfall, icy roads and below 0 temperatures. Great, I figured. We'll be traveling several thousand kilometers to get to spend all of our time indoors.

We had a 3-hour layover in Lisbon where we joined up with some of our friends. The flight from Lisbon to Sao Miguel island is 2 hours and 30 minutes. In January, it was a very

bumpy ride. I think this is when I've experienced some of the strongest turbulence in my entire life. I could see my soda fly out of my cup, perfectly vertical, then drop back down, without spilling a drop.

To get my mind off this, I decided to read one of the books I've prepared on my phone, on the Books app. The book was 'No Bad Parts' by dr. Richard Schwartz. Unknowingly, I've just picked the perfect book for this trip. For those unfamiliar with his work, dr. Schwartz is a psychologist specialized in something called "parts therapy". His theory states that all of us have multiple personalities and that it is not a pathology. We just develop several different personas when dealing with particularly painful situations in childhood. Each chapter expanded a theory, offered a transcript from a therapy session and finished with an exercise that you can do alone. I figured I could do one or two of these mental exercises during the 2 hour flight.

While the plane was rattling, bouncing around in the air in the middle of the night, I decided to address the part of me that thinks I am not creative, the part that thinks I am talentless and should not express any ideas. Probably the combination between the turbulence and the meditation exercise from the book made me have a breakthrough. I had remembered something from childhood. When I was about 3 years old, an age when kids do a lot of singing and drawing and rhyming, I gifted a piece of artwork to a loved one.

---

1 Schwartz R. (2021). *No Bad Parts*. Sounds True Adult.

The loved one criticized it, said it was really bad, as a matter of fact, and threw it away. Of course, recalling this experience now as an adult, I realized the reaction had nothing to do with me or my artwork. But during that meditative state, I became that kid again. I must've been crying because when I lifted my gaze from the book, I saw a very worried expression on my friend's face. I immediately started laughing which worried him even more, and then decided to leave the book down. Shortly after, we landed on Sao Miguel island.

The timing for this experience was perfect. It was then when I decided to actively start studying Vacation Architecture, scientifically, the same way I conducted the research for my PhD. And here we are.

### Natural setting

The Azores provide a very unique natural environment. The volcanic origin of the islands implies very steep hills, a complex relief consisting of high peaks with very low valleys, sometimes including perfectly round volcanic lakes. Specific to the volcanic geology is the very dark soil and large black, porous rocks -

[1]

The climate is particularly mild for such a northerly position. The main influence is the surrounding ocean, together with the Gulf Stream. Temperatures have a slight seasonal variation while humidity remains high all year



[1]



[2]

round. It's a pretty wet and cloudy place.

- [2] The rich volcanic soil together with the mild temperatures, high humidity and indirect sunlight provide a very unique habitat, particularly for plants. Deep green forests cover the rolling hills while species of palm populate the more flatter areas. Even though it may look wild, the vegetation found today in the Azores is not endemic - much of the biome has been eradicated as a consequence of human activity on the island.

As you may have already figured out, the natural color palette of the Azores consists of deep greens from the foliage, black accents from basaltic volcano rocks, ridiculously blue skies - that is, when they are not overcast. The resulting color of the surrounding ocean is more of an emerald green.



### Historical context

To keep it short, with causation in mind, the Portuguese called this archipelago their own at around 1426. Its position was an excellent marine halt halfway towards the American colonies. Consequently, one could only imagine what went on there.

Later on, during the 18th century, Europeans started to see the potential it had as a vacation destination. Writers and poets would spend their time here, including Mark Twain, Chateaubriand (the writer not the meat) and Prince Albert of Monaco. And, of course, more recently, Steve Jobs.

- [3] Being so far from continental Europe, Azorean architecture did not go through all those phases we see in Portugal, Spain, France or Italy. We do, however, see a lot of Neo Gothic - the newer version of Gothic architecture in which they kept all the palatable parts in an optimized construction. The Neo Gothic architecture we see here was imported through church models and later on implemented
- [4] in institutional buildings. The Azorean Neo Gothic style is quite unique, characterized by the contrast between the white stucco on the facades and the black ornaments and structural elements made of volcanic rock. The Result is quite dramatic, evocative of the natural setting.



[3]



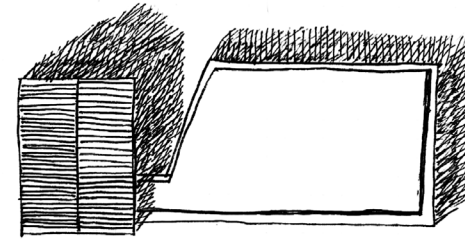
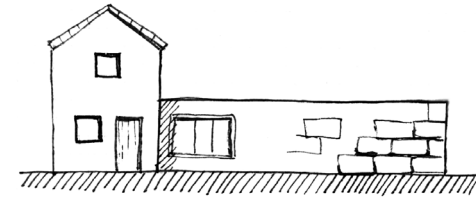
[4]



[5]

### General Solution

- [6] The vacation home specific to the Azores Islands is unofficially named “Casa Acoriana”. Facades are mostly white stucco with black stone ornaments or structural elements. The base and sometimes yard pavement, translating towards the interior can also be rectified basalt rock. Upper floors are mostly wood structures. The roof is inherently Mediterranean, a wooden structure with pantiles.
- [5] In recent years, the Azores have become a sought after vacation spot. For the locals, this meant converting their garages or storage units into guest homes, oftentimes expanding with additional constructions or one extra floor. As I’ve mentioned before, we call this process adaptive reuse in architecture and it produces truly unique, authentic results.



### Casa Acoriana

- **Shape:** box, isolated
- **Spatial Typology:** chambered, linear
- **Spatial organization:** clustered
- **Functionality:** seasonal home, multi-family, storage
- **Location:** Atlantic Ocean archipelago
- **Materials:** volcanic rock (basalt), white stucco, wooden beams, pantile roof

### Key Takeaways

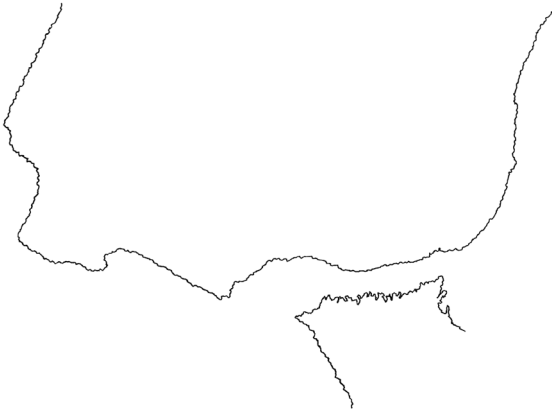
1. You can import specific ornaments as long as you use local building materials.
2. Local building materials also dictate the scale of construction. Don't exceed what's natural to the environment so as to not produce a strong negative impact.
3. Instead of building a gigantic house, start small and add smaller buildings, connected through indoor hallways. This way, the scale of the construction remains the same, and so does the connection between indoor and outdoor environments.
4. You can use materials differently, in accordance with their physical characteristics. If some materials are more durable, use them for structural elements. Keep them exposed in order for them to be distinguishable from lesser materials such as stucco.



[6]

## 2.

### Alcochete Lisbon, Portugal



#### Introduction

One cannot deny how much geographical position has shaped Portuguese culture. They host the oceanic entryway towards Europe, they have several types of coastal regions, their exposure towards the ocean is much larger than that of their neighboring country - Spain.

The home we're studying is located in the wider metropolitan area of Lisbon. We went there after our trip to the Azores, at the beginning of February of 2024. The climate is mild so we got to spend a lot of time outside. So did other tourists. Lisbon is one of those all year round destinations so don't expect much lower rates or smaller crowds in so-called "off season" times of the year.

Because of this all year round mild climate, I've noticed something in the Azores which was also prevalent in Lisbon

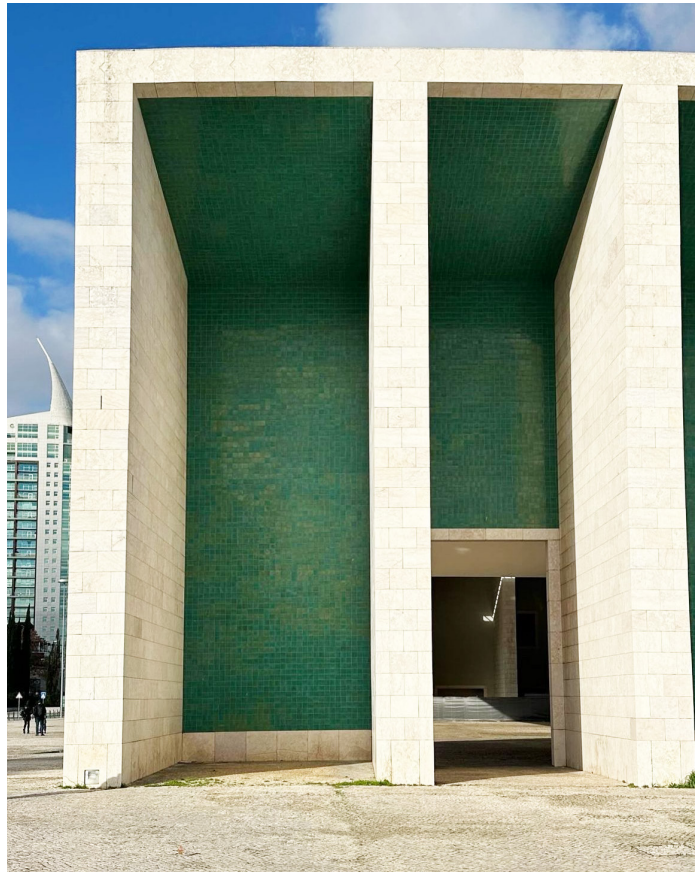
as well: the use of colorfully glazed ceramic tiles all over the building facades. Some had only a few tiles depicting a story, like a type of street art, while others were completely covered, their glossy finish reflecting the winter sun's rays all around the building. Outdoor ceramic tiles are something that can only be pulled off in places with very mild winters, as temperature variations cause the tile adhesive to expand and contract, eventually shattering the ceramic tiles.

- [1] Probably the most surprising presence of ceramic tiles was on the facades of the Lisbon Pavilion. During architecture school, students often draw this building because it's iconic. The shape is easily recognizable, the structural solution is unique but, most importantly, the drawing perspective is easy to construct. Although we both knew it well from the many times he had to draw it for school, my friend and I were very surprised to see the building in real life, as it was very different from what we've imagined all these years. Of course, this is usually bound to happen, as architecture photography is often highly edited and sometimes the images stray far away from the building itself. Many times in a negative way, however this wasn't the case.

First of all, what surprised us was that it was a lot bigger than we'd imagined, when we were students, drawing people and foliage around it, trying to give depth to the drawing. Secondly, despite its grandiose scale, there was extra attention given to the tactile nature of the facades, specifically around the entrances.



[1]



[2]

There were porticos, there were custom made ceramic tiles in shades of green and red, this distinction correlated with the cardinal orientations. Moreover, the white finish was not simply white plaster, but a beige conglomerate of sand, plaster, quartz and seashells. The Lisbon Pavilion was a lovely surprise as it blended the large scale, iconographic, starchitecture style of the 1990s with the tactile nature of traditional Portuguese building materials and finishes. [2]

While the Lisbon Pavilion is obviously outside the scope of this book as it is not an example of Vacation Architecture, its subtle design traits reflect the same strive towards timelessness that the homes we study tend to achieve. Ultimately, it is a blend of global universality with covert, local specificity.

### Natural setting

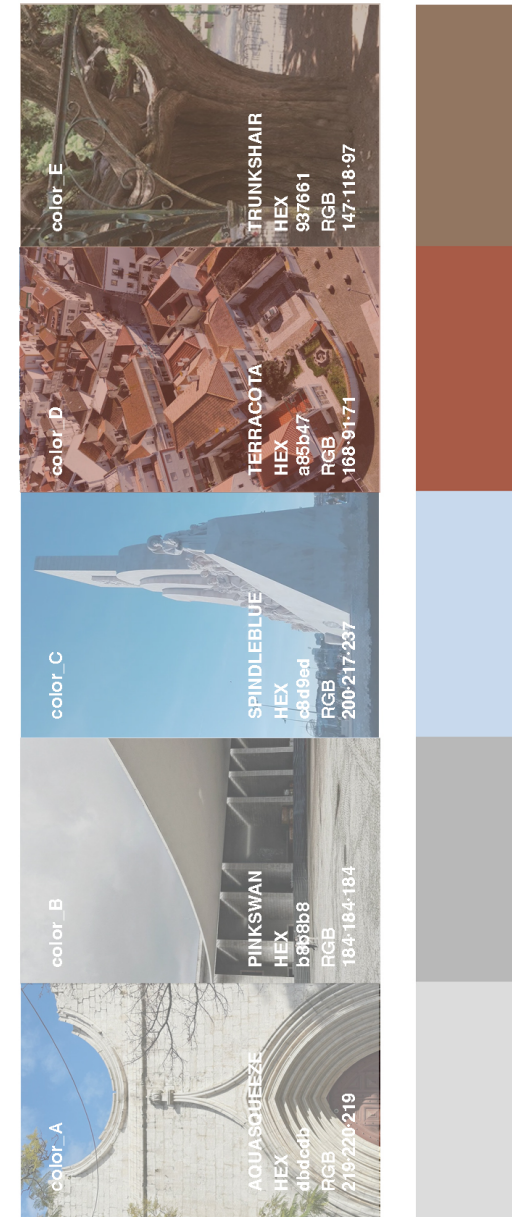
The home we're studying is located in the wider metropolitan area of Lisbon. Lisbon is one the oldest cities in the world. It is the westernmost major city in continental Europe. It has a very unique position. Although benefiting from direct access towards the Atlantic Ocean, it's shielded from the ocean itself, orientated towards the East and South-East, opening towards the Tagus River - the longest river in the Iberian Peninsula.

This position, together with the mild Mediterranean climate, has offered many unfair advantages to the Portuguese for thousands of years. For a very long time, it's been a place where city dwellers could thrive. As such, there is no trace left of the original natural setting, but the unique overall yellowish look of limestone facades against the clear blue skies. Yellowy-orange sunsets remind us that we're not too far off from Africa.

### Historical context

Portuguese culture is widely shaped by its geographical location. Historically they are excellent oceanic navigators and fishermen. Consequently, fisherman towns are widely spread on the coasts of Portugal.

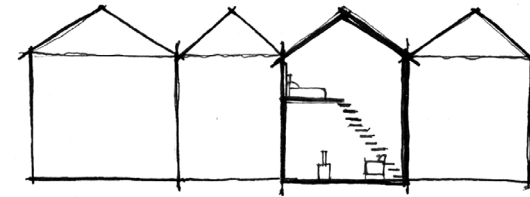
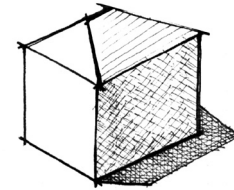
While the city of Lisbon is located on the northern bank of the Tagus River, the southern bank is home to a less densely populated area. Alcochete, this particular town, is a fisherman town and probably the best place to have fish in the entire continent.



### General solution

Fisherman towns are densely populated with row houses and narrow streets. The houses act as seasonal homes for the fishermen. As a result, they are small and modest, mostly used as storage and not so much as housing per se.

Over the past decades, fishermen have no longer been practicing their traditional profession the way they have been for millenia. As is the case with many other agricultural processes, fishing has too become industrialized, rendering the fishermen's houses obsolete. This is an opportunity for adaptive reuse - an architectural design process in which, to put it simply, a building that used to be something, becomes something else. In this case, a fisherman's house becomes a vacation home.



### Casa de Pescador

- **Shape:** small box, completely linked to neighboring constructions
- **Spatial Typology:** chambered
- **Spatial organization:** grid
- **Functionality:** seasonal home, minimal storage
- **Location:** flat or steep shorelines
- **Materials:** plastered brick, stone ornaments, wooden beams, pantile roof, very few medium sized windows



[3]



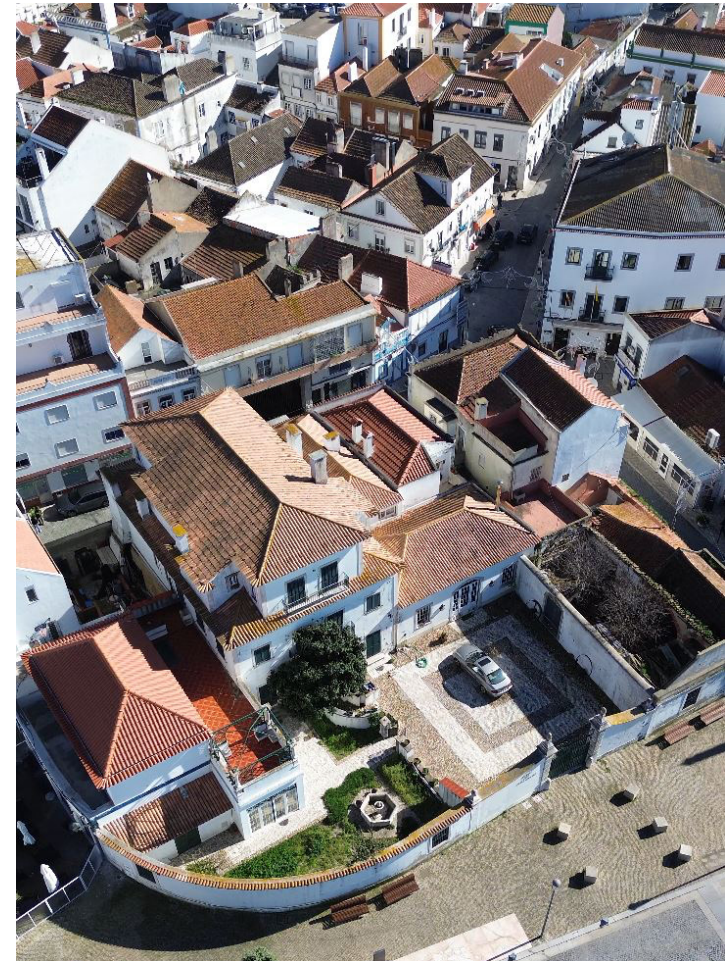
[4]



[5]

### Key takeaways

1. When a building becomes obsolete, instead of completely demolishing it, you can adapt its interior in order for it to provide comfort to its occupants while not altering the original look of the town
2. Detaching the outer shell from the functional structure will make the space inside more flexible. You can add an extra partial floor to further expand the usable surface area.
3. Nothing is sexier than a “sleeper” building. At first glance, it’s a simple, traditional, modest house. Inside, however, it’s a fresh, clean, contemporary scandi-influenced space.
4. Extremely neutral styles like Japandi, Wabi Sabi or Organic Modern for the interior go well with any type of exterior, setting or cultural heritage. This is due to the the minimalistic approach, the use of natural materials and neutral color palette.



[6]

# 3.

## Spain Mainland, Iberian Peninsula



### Introduction

The entire Iberian Peninsula has a rich history. A rich history of fighting over territory. For the past several centuries, it's safe to say that Christianity has won. Regardless, a thousand years of territorial conflicts has undeniably shaped what we consider today as traditional architecture.

When I first traveled to Spain, more than a decade ago, I could not believe such a country could exist. Beautiful scenery, the loveliest beaches in the world, delicious yet low effort food, friendly, warm people speaking a language I could understand. The perfectly balanced mix of beauty and simplicity had completely mesmerized me. It is with this thought that I will continue with my next story.

We visited Southern Spain in late August of 2023. While the region is particularly hot, due to its southern position as well as being so close to Africa and the Sahara desert, late summer and early autumn is a pretty good time to visit. It wasn't windy and there was no rainfall so I was very excited that I could spend a lot of time flying my drone around, studying the vacation homes and the way they insert themselves into the natural landscape.

One of our accommodations, the finca described later in this chapter, was set in an area of farmlands, close to the sea. I was very fortunate to have brought the drone. I could see the rolling hills with mango trees, I could understand the position of the homes on the property and how they offered an excellent vantage point over their surrounding plantations.

One afternoon, we parked our rental close to a beach in order to grab a late lunch. The temperature was fairly hot and so I decided to leave my passenger window slightly open so as to let some air in. That way, I figured, the inside of the car would be bearable once we finished our meal and decided to drive away. We had a lovely seafood meal in a tavern on the beach and walked back towards the car. My friend opened the trunk of the car to get something. The trunk was completely empty. Our towels, clothes, the drone, everything was gone. I realized that it was my fault. Leaving the window cracked made possible opening the locked doors from the inside, with a stick.

A result of this was that the drone footage was all gone. I only have 30 seconds of highly compressed footage from the drone landing. This is the only failsafe the drone had, in case you lost it, so you could see where it landed. Surprisingly, GPS is not available if the phone is not connected to the drone, via remote control. All that technology and yet such a major design flaw. Despite this, we went to the police station anyway and they managed to lift some unknown fingerprints from our rental car. Needless to say the police did not contact us after that.

Another result was that we almost got beaten up by a local. Next to the parked car was an ice cream stand, a woman selling the ice cream and a man just hanging out. There were no other people in sight. I don't remember exactly how we came to the conclusion that the guy stole our stuff but I do remember the guy running after my friend and almost punching him in the face, only to be interrupted by noticing me trying to open the trunk of his car, then proceeded to chase after me.

I don't know if it was the ridiculous situation or the beers I had at lunch, in any case I just burst out laughing. The guy was dumbfounded; so was my friend. They both immediately stopped and looked at me like I was psychotic. I have a scientific conclusion to draw from this: Spain is so beautiful that not even the prospect of getting beaten up by a local will spoil your good mood.

## Natural setting

The name of the Iberian Peninsula derives from the Ancient Greek word Iberia which wasn't used to describe a distinct area or population. Unofficially, the word comes from the name of the river Ebro, the second largest river in the peninsula after the Tagus river - the one we crossed in Lisbon.

The natural setting given by the mild Mediterranean climate, the two large rivers, coastal lines on both the Atlantic and the Mediterranean and its proximity to Africa made it a nice place to develop the first human establishments. The Iberian Peninsula houses prehistoric human settlements dating back to the Paleolithic era.

The southern region is most relevant to the architecture we're currently studying. It's a fairly mountainous region, with steep hills extending all the way to the Mediterranean coastline.

The climate in the southern region is dry, almost categorized as desert climate. This, together with the presence of iron oxide give the region a distinct barren landscape, with reddish rocks, yellow limestone and scarce vegetation consisting of pine trees, olive trees and low bushes. The sky is a pale blue, as the mountains lock in part of the humidity coming from the coastlines and the sand rises from wind. As a consequence, the Mediterranean water appears dark blue.



## Historical context

The architecture we're particularly interested in is the one specific to Andalusia, the southern part of the Peninsula. Its name derives from the name Al-Andalus, the name given to the entire peninsula during the 700 year-long Muslim rule, starting in 719 and ending in the 1400s.

Traditional architecture is, as a result, a hybrid between Islamic architecture and Byzantine architecture. Islamic architecture has many passive solar strategies to mitigate extreme heat while Byzantine architecture uses stone structures and masonry work.

As deriving from this rich traditional background, there are several types of vacation architecture we can study.

For the sake of this present exercise, we will be studying the following Spanish typologies:

1. **Cortijo**, typical for mainland Spain;
2. **Hacienda**, well known in former Spanish colonies;
3. **Finca**, local Spanish estate, often times seen on the island of Ibiza as well;
4. **Alqueria**, a cluster of rural housing.

## 1. Cortijo

Cortijos have a very introverted architecture. They are typically closed off from the surroundings while the spaces are arranged around a courtyard. The name "cortijo" comes from the Latin word cortihulum which means courtyard. Roman urban homes were mostly clustered, tightly packed. Larger ones had a courtyard that provided sheltered outdoor space and natural lighting for the indoor spaces.

Courtyards have been used for several centuries as a passive cooling strategy in Islamic architecture. Many times, the courtyard had a shallow pool that cooled the air which circulated through the surrounding indoor spaces. The most important example is Alhambra, the Islamic architectural ensemble in Southern Spain, which includes several courtyards linked together, providing passive cooling strategies as well as shelter against potential enemies. [1]

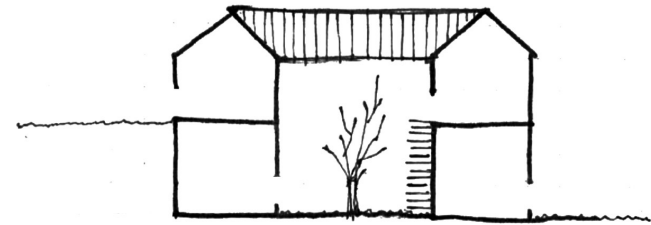
Nowadays, we usually see these types of houses isolated in the hills, a context in which the cooling effect is more important than the safety aspect. In vacation architecture, various adaptations of the cortijo can be observed. In some cases, one side may be removed in order to create a U-shaped building. In other cases, the corners are removed in order to create multiple entryways from the outside as well.



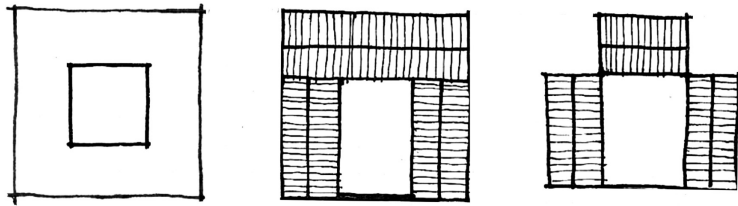
[1]

Cortijos are mostly low in height, having a single ground floor. More recent variants may also have an extra floor, however, if the building is too tall, the lower floors are compromised because of perpetual shade. Multi-level cortijos are mostly found in mountainous areas in which they act as a terraced structure, accessible from more than one side.

While at first glance, the cortijo is an introverted space, closed off from the surrounding environment, it can be considered a precursor to biophilic architecture. The negative space in the heart of the construction is just as important as the indoor spaces themselves. The courtyard is, thus, a hybrid space between interior and exterior.



[2]



[3]

### Cortijo

- **Shape:** box with center removed, isolated or linked
- **Spatial Typology:** courtyard
- **Spatial organization:** centralized
- **Functionality:** multi-purpose housing, controlled access, safety
- **Location:** mainland Spain, Andalucia, mountainous regions
- **Materials:** plastered brick facade, wooden beams, small windows, pantile roof

### Key takeaways

1. Water elements such as ponds, fountains or pools passively cool off the surrounding air.
2. You can design the shape of a house in order for it to provide shade in specific areas during the day.
3. Exterior windows are overrated provided you have a central biophilic element like a courtyard or garden.
4. Pay attention to the cardinal points. There will be some areas that are always sunbathed while others are always in shadow. Plan your spaces and materials accordingly.



[4]



[5]



[6]



[7]

## 2. Hacienda

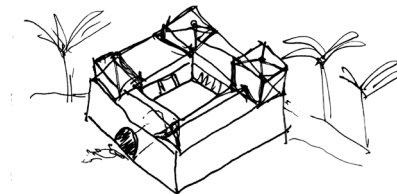
The safety of the courtyard was heavily used in colonial times. Spanish colonial homes, known as haciendas, are large estates, doubling as vacation homes as well as large scale farms. The term hacienda derives from the Spanish verb hacer (to make), as they were meant not only to house Spaniards but also to produce goods for exporting.

In a hacienda, the indoor spaces are arranged around a private courtyard that can only be accessed through a guarded gate. Many times there are two or more successive courtyards as they are considerably larger than cortijos.

If cortijos are considered single family units, haciendas can host several isolated groups: owners, visitors and an entire staff of working hands. The vast spatial requirements of a hacienda sometimes implied taller structures as well, integrating towers on each corner. Parts of these structures serve as vacation homes for colonizers. As such, the beauty of these spaces was just as important as their function. Many times, we see Classical decorative elements integrated into the facade, elements such as columns and moldings.

People have been using the term hacienda increasingly more, especially in the post-pandemic traveling wave, most of the time describing examples of Mexican homes. In a hacienda, the indoor spaces are arranged around a private

courtyard that can only be accessed through a guarded gate. Originally, a hacienda had two or more successive courtyards as they are considerably larger than cortijos. However, more recent examples are much smaller in size. Smaller groups of 2 to 4 individuals can live in these newer adaptations.



[1]

### Hacienda

- **Shape:** several boxes with center removed, linked
- **Spatial Typology:** courtyard, portico, chambered
- **Spatial organization:** grid
- **Functionality:** multi-purpose housing, controlled access, safety
- **Location:** Mexico, Puerto Rico, Columbia, Colonial Spain; hilly regions, flat regions
- **Materials:** white stucco, concrete, various sizes of windows, wooden beams, pantile roof

### Key takeaways

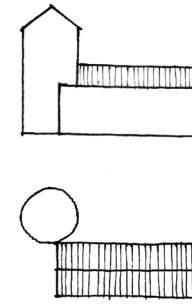
1. If we were to start colonizing other planets, the interplanetary architecture would probably look a lot like haciendas.
2. Sooner or later, the uprising will come. So plan your home accordingly.
3. Classical elements such as columns and moldings may look good but only in small amounts and only if there are no other surrounding buildings.

### 3. Finca

Originally, the term was used to describe Spanish estates. More recently, it started being heavily used in the real estate market, describing a certain typology of vacation homes usually surrounded by a large plot. Many times, we see this plot as a farm, an olive tree plantation, a fruit orchard or for raising livestock.

Some recent examples of fincas are good examples of adaptive reuse, particularly in the Spanish mainland. For example, a traditional finca might be a main building, rectangular shaped, to which a tall cylindrical volume has been attached, the latter originally used as storage for grains or hay. For vacation architecture, a finca may be adapted,

transforming the storage unit into a guest house. The result is surprising and unique. Fincas are usually positioned at top of a hill to better observe the entire estate. The tallest part of the finca, the converted silo, offers a vast perspective not only over the estate, but over the surroundings as well, many times even overlooking the Mediterranean coast.



[1]

### Finca

- **Shape:** box with tower attached, isolated
- **Spatial Typology:** chambered/linear, portico
- **Spatial organization:** clustered
- **Functionality:** multi-purpose housing, vantage point, surveillance, storage
- **Location:** Spanish mainland, Balearic Islands, hilly regions
- **Materials:** exposed limestone, ceramic tiles, small to medium windows, pantile roof



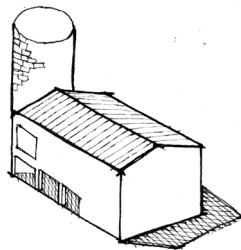
[2]



[3]

### Key takeaways

1. Figure out what the best vantage point is in your own project. Then enhance it, make it cozy, in order for people to spend a lot of time there.
2. The base of a home must always be covered with locally sourced materials, in order to make it seem like it grows out of the existing environment.

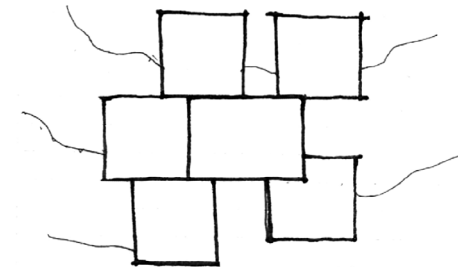


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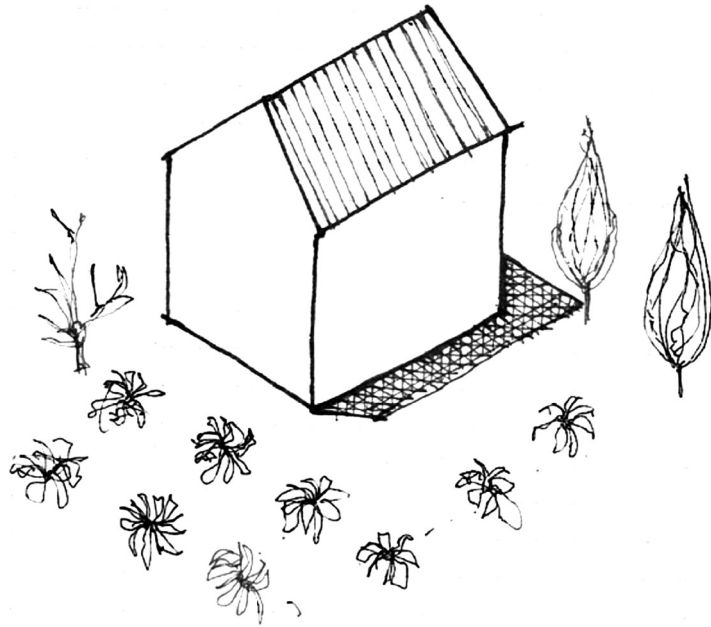
### 4. Alqueria

The subject of interest is not necessarily the houses themselves but the way they cluster together to form small citadels. The ones in mountainous regions are tightly packed and terraced, with narrow streets. In contrast, further away from the major cities, there are rural clusters that generate a small rural community made of a few isolated houses exploiting the surrounding lands for agricultural purposes such as farming or raising livestock.

These clusters are known as alquerias. They are present in both Southern Spain and Portugal - known as alcarias, a word which we can often find in the names of small villages. Alquerias are mostly obsolete. Over the past decade, they have been subject to renovations and repurposing, being adapted into restaurants or accommodations.



[1]



[2]

### Alqueria (ES) / Alcaria (PT)

- **Shape:** several boxes linked
- **Spatial Typology:** chambered
- **Spatial organization:** clustered
- **Functionality:** housing, close to zones of interest (monasteries, farmland), safety, community, production
- **Location:** Southern Spain (mainland), Portugal (mainland)
- **Materials:** plastered brick, limewash, Moorish tiles, small windows, pantile roof

### Key takeaways

1. Not all rural estates belonged to nobility. In fact, most of them were just regular farmers providing for the nearby cities. As such, whatever anyone tells you, these are not castles.
2. If you plan on building something on a steep hill, you might want to consider building a cluster of terraced boxes instead of one big thing. The resulting transitional spaces give the entire home complexity with many types of spaces to enjoy.
3. Don't be afraid to use ceramic tiles outside the bathroom or kitchen. If installed on a southern facing wall, they can reflect heat while at the same time adding luminosity to the space.



[3]



[4]

# 4.

## Mallorca Balearic Islands, Spain

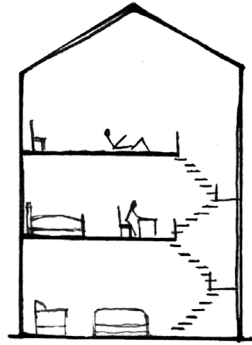
### Introduction

Social media often depicts Mallorca as being the most beautiful vacation spot in Europe. The clear blue water, golden sand beaches, pine tree forests and unique architecture makes it immediately recognizable. The iconic Mallorcan vacation architecture is just as recognizable.

We visited the island of Mallorca in late January of 2023. We went as two couples, ready to enjoy some food, hiking and quiet time together. While the winters are fairly mild, 10-14 degrees Celsius is not exactly bathing suit weather. Consequently, our accommodation was a stone row house in the mountain village of Valdemossa. This seemingly windowless fortress home came alive once we started living there. The building footprint was small but it had a total of three floors. This gave us plenty of space to spend time



together as well as time apart. I could do my daily exercise on the top floor while my friend was having a Zoom call on the middle floor, during which one of the guys could be watching TV in the living room while another was in the kitchen preparing some tapas for everybody.



[1]

This experience helped me see the distinction between residential architecture and vacation architecture. I came to the conclusion that a vacation home is not exactly a home. What came to mind was the term Third Place. Sociologist Ray Oldenburg 'defines it as a type of public space in which socialization is, above all, the most important activity. If our homes are First Places, our workspaces are Second Places, then Third Places are places in which we spend our free time, sharing it with likeminded people.

1 Oldenburg, R. (1999). *Great Good Place*. Da Capo Publishing (3rd edition)

Vacation architecture is, thus, all of the above. It is a First Place as it is our home for a set period of time; it is a Second Place when, sometimes, we have to set up a laptop on one of the tables and do a little remote work; it is a Third Place, as we share it together with friends and family during our holidays, sharing both leisure time and pleasurable activities in a generous, inviting space.

Our accommodation in Valdemossa is not a typology I consider specific to Mallorca, and therefore will not be studying in this chapter. However, its functionality proved to be extremely relevant for the entire genre. It is this exact functionality that works both as a whole as well as fragmented that is specific to Mallorcan vacation architecture.

### Natural setting

Mallorca is the largest of the Spanish islands. It's part of the Balears, a small archipelago in the Mediterranean. It's off the coast of the Spanish Costa Brava, the French Riviera, not far from the Amalfi Coast in Italy. These are probably the most beautiful coasts in the entire world, all bunched up in a small area of the Mediterranean Sea. Europeans are truly lucky.

Mallorca has a diverse topography, with mountain ranges,

hilly regions and flat plains. It has a Mediterranean climate with dry, sunny summers and mildly rainy winters. There's something about the bright blue waters, beige stoney shores and humidity that make the sunsets have a pink hue.

### Historical context

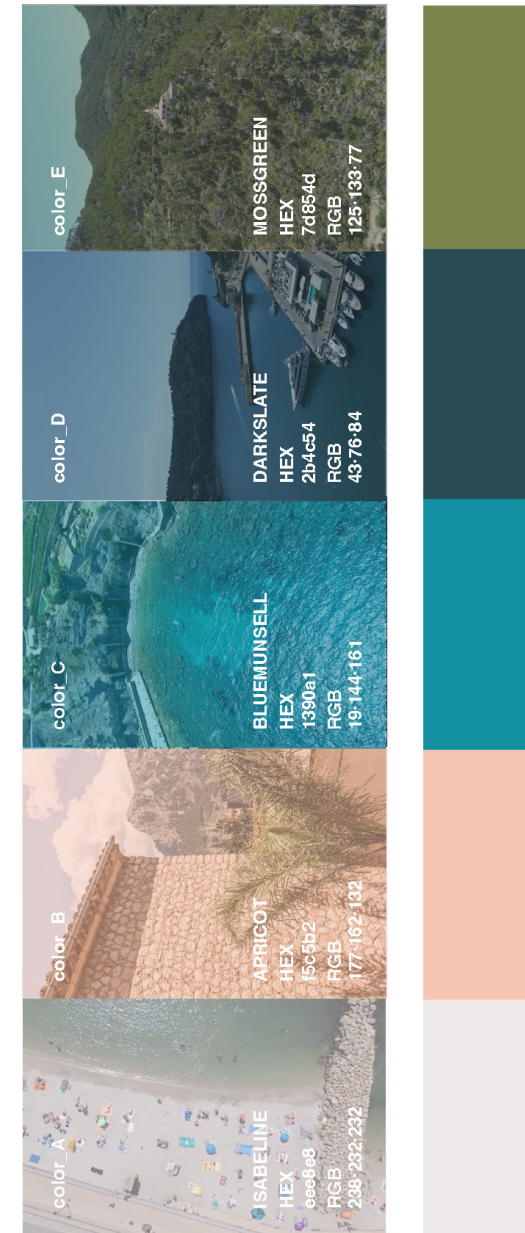
A large island relatively close to shore, Mallorca has a rich history of development and conflict as well. Under the Islamic regime, agriculture was thoroughly developed. Later on, the Balearic Islands were frequently under attack. It was only in the 1950s when tourism began to flourish.

### General solution

The presence of limestone and coquina - a sedimentary rock made mostly of marine biome makes stone a widely used building material for houses, castles and towers. Mallorca has a rich heritage of row houses with stone facades, especially in mountainous areas.

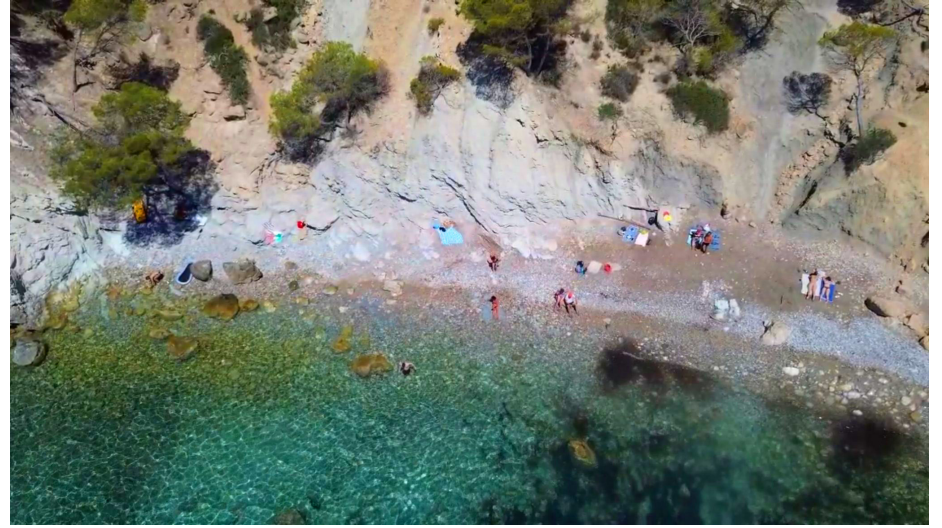
The Mallorcan traditional estate is unofficially called *possessio*, as in property that includes a main house, a *casita* (smaller house) and sometimes a mill.

The structures are simple while an exceptionally large attention to detail is present. A consequence of island life. Windows and doors use arches more frequently as lintels.





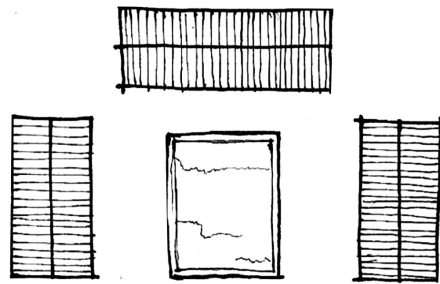
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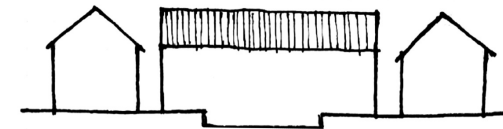
[5]

### Possessio

- **Shape:** several boxes, detached or linked
- **Spatial Typology:** chambered, portico
- **Spatial organization:** clustered
- **Functionality:** multi-purpose housing, production
- **Location:** Balearic Islands, flat or hilly regions
- **Materials:** exposed limestone, small windows, large windows with shutters, pantile roof

### Key takeaways

1. In vacation architecture, spaces for social interaction are more important than bedrooms. Bigger living rooms, larger terraces outweigh bigger bedrooms.
2. Seemingly awkward spaces generated from weird angles actually make the house integrate itself better in the natural surroundings. The homes seem like they grew out of the soil.
3. Window shutters are an effective passive solar strategy.
4. Use different surface materials and textures to differentiate functionality.
5. Use natural materials: brickwork, wood, linen, limewash. If your floors are made of concrete, don't cover it up.
6. You can layer fresh, well kept surfaces with distressed surfaces. Lower sections of an interior should be polished while higher sections such as ceilings can be left distressed.



[6]

# 5.

## Apulia Puglia, Italy

### Introduction



Italy will probably require an entire book all on its own. Its richness in history, culture, natural settings and experiences is something unique to the entire world. Picking out only one type of vacation home would do the Italians a great injustice.

For this chapter I've decided to offer not memories from travels but a project from a former student I worked with. Her name is Roxana and she graciously allowed me to include her drawings in this book.

Roxana is one of the most hardworking people I have ever met. We worked together during her first year in architecture school. The project they had to do is to understand several typologies from different places, to blend them together and create their own hybrid. Roxana chose

two seemingly different typologies, blending them together in a very coherent piece of architecture.

The first typology was of Egyptian origin, from 20th century architect Hassan Fathy. He created these intricate, gridlike structures entirely out of brick. The buildings had a cellular typology and individual domed roofs.

The second typology was the one of the traditional Italian trulli houses. These were stone structures, organized as clusters, initially built as grain storage by Italian farmers.

As is the case with many architecture students, Roxana went through several revisions during her project development. Some were useful, some were not. At times it seemed to me that her coordinator, my boss, forgot what he initially told her and kept taking her project in different directions. This happened twice a week.

Keep in mind that, at the time, Roxana was in her first year of architecture studies. For those of you who don't know, our university forbids any type of digital drawings during the first year. As such, Roxana had to draw the entire brickwork of her project by hand. Each time it changed, each time she had to draw the entire structure all over again, showing how each brick lay on top of one another.

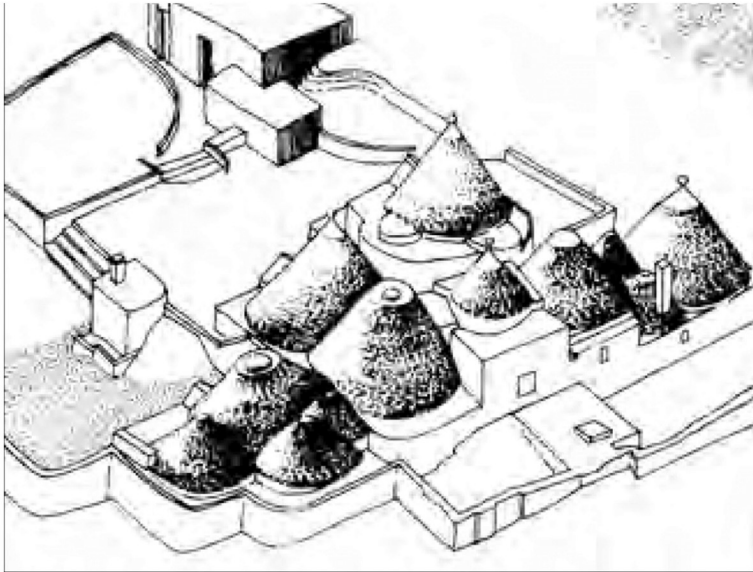
By the end of this 6 week project, Roxana must've redone her brickwork for around 10 times. If I recall correctly,

after all this effort, her final grade was around a 7 or 8 out of 10. Again, as is the case with most architecture students, it was the final result that got graded and not the entire effort she had made, all her consistency to show up twice a week, all brickwork done by hand, no sleep the night before. In a context like this, going back and forth aimlessly between current suggestions and prior suggestions from the coordinator, the result is often something neither of them really wanted. Not only is it not a spectacular piece of architecture, but it doesn't even represent the original creative idea of the student. From this, the student mostly learns how to manage heavy workloads over a short period of time. This is why I keep saying that architecture school is where creativity goes to die. Well, this is one of the reasons.

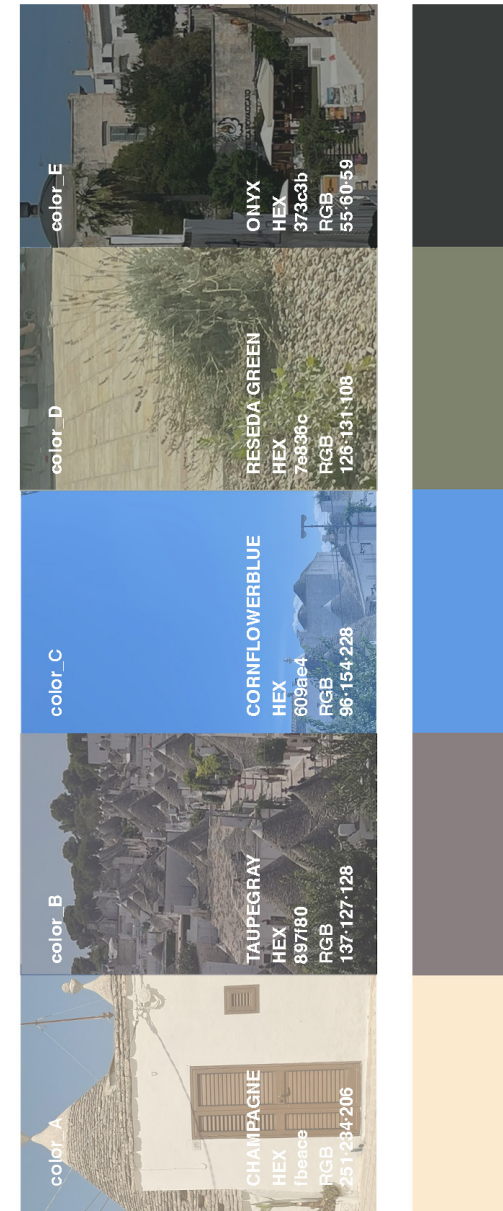
Looking back to the history of Italian architecture, this is probably how the Renaissance came to be. In theory, Renaissance architecture was supposed to be evocative of Classical architecture, the one built by ancient Romans and ancient Greeks. It was supposed to "tidy up" the allegedly messy parts of Medieval architecture. In reality, Renaissance architecture proved to be a standardization, a flattening visual imagery, applying only isolated, at times even misunderstood elements of Classical architecture. The flattening occurred on a very rich and diverse visual culture that Medieval builders provided, making each column unique, inserting symbols of their families, of their heritage. But, like I said, Italian architecture deserves its own book and so this is where I end my unpopular opinion and resume the subject of vacation architecture.

### Historical context

Written historical documents describe the area as a vast forest in the 14th century, mentioning human dwellings only as late as the beginning of the 17th century. This is a period of a very divided, fragmented Italy and so one cannot know for sure if the historical documents are accurate or not.



[1]

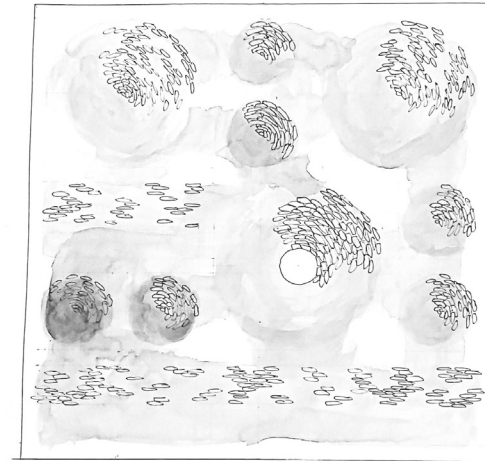


### General solution

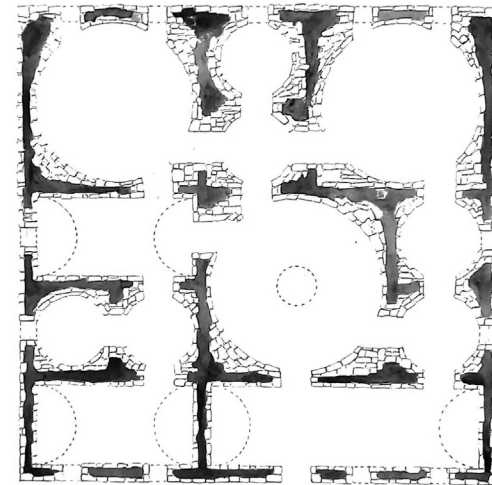
The trulli are an excellent example of adaptive reuse in architecture. There are many theories around the origin of this type of house. Almost all of them revolve around the problem of high taxation of houses in the Apulian region. Originally, they could have been built as storage units for grains during Medieval times in the Italian peninsula. Another theory suggests that, by using dry stone walls as a method of construction, this implied that the owners could easily dismantle the buildings before an inspector could see it.

Currently we see these types of houses in highly densified towns in the Bari region, close to wineries. Most of them were built during the 19th century and have not been dismantled since.

While they offer a very unique village landscape through their conical, stone roofs, the interior spaces are what make them truly spectacular. High vaulted ceilings with small windows and curved walls give the impression of being in the tower of a Medieval castle. The impeccable white stone walls make the interior more luminous. The trullo house is something unique, recognizable, memorable, on any person's travel bucket list.



[2]



[3]



[4]

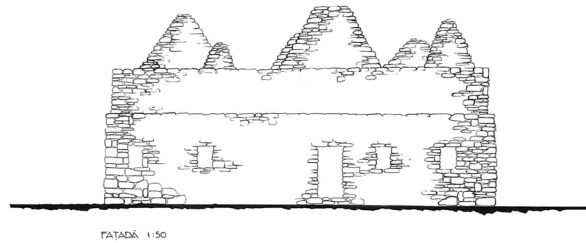


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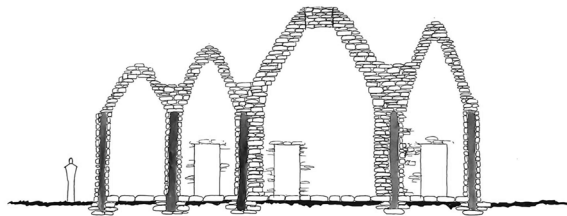
### Key takeaways

1. Use as much pure white as possible in spaces that have small quantities of natural light.
2. Leave one structural element exposed, in order for the natural texture to be visible. For example, if you have a reinforced concrete beam going through your home, let it have a concrete texture.
3. If you have an original concept that you love, don't stray too far away from it. It's better just to simplify the project than to add complexity that might distance it from the original concept. There is absolutely no shame in starting over, from the basic elements that matter the most.

[6]



[7]



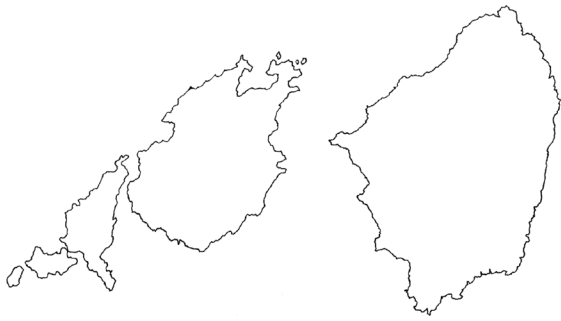
### Trullo

- **Shape:** several boxes, detached or linked
- **Spatial Typology:** cellular
- **Spatial organization:** clustered
- **Functionality:** seasonal home, storage
- **Location:** Puglia, Italy
- **Materials:** plastered walls, exposed brickwork, rough stone, small windows, may include wooden shutters, conical roof

# 6.

## Cyclades Aegean Sea, Greece

### Introduction



Greece is a very special place filled with very special people. They are probably the friendliest people you will ever meet on the entire European continent. They are the best storytellers.

When I started putting this book together, I first approached it the same way I approached my doctoral thesis. I started writing it in a scientific manner, addressing the physical aspects of the buildings, the context in which they were built. The architecture was presented in a deductive fashion. The homes were presented as case studies, each of them having their own file, while aspects of it were classified in a standard manner.

The thing about books is that, well, anybody can write one. However, writing a book that people would actually want to

read is not an easy task. This book was turning out as sterile, lacking vivacity and authenticity. It was missing the mark of readability.

I read somewhere that the way people learn the easiest is through storytelling. After reading this, the quote from Benjamin Franklin took a whole new meaning:

*Tell me and I forget. Teach me and I understand. Involve me and I learn.*

For many years, I interpreted the “involvement” as being practical - one learns by doing. While that may be the case, involvement can occur on other levels as well. You can involve someone emotionally by being transparent, being vulnerable, and being authentic. When we tell stories from our experiences, people get involved as they can better relate, they can even imagine, mentally visualize what we aim to convey.

Before visiting Greece, I thought that this was impossible for me. As you may recall, I thought I am not creative enough, that I have no stories to tell. I thought I was simply a scientist presenting findings. To this day, I cannot read through an entire book of non-fiction.

We arrived in Greece in August of 2024. I noticed there were stories everywhere. Stories about mountains, about islands, about cities, about gods, about food, about mythical

creatures. There wasn't any aspect of life that did not have an underlying tale giving it more depth, more meaning.

I decided to indulge myself in Greek mythology and so I picked up *Greek Myths*<sup>1</sup> by Charlotte Higgins. As far as Greek mythology goes, this book was different. In the introduction, Higgins states that all stories are made up stories, and so we can do whatever we want with them. This collection of myths has a more feminist interpretation, as most Greek myths have strong misogynistic underlying tones. She argues that stories told by women are just as, if not even more valid than those told by men. All women, either mortals or goddesses, were the ones in charge with weaving the textiles that everybody wore in those days. It took several months to complete a single piece of cloth. Imagery was often sewn in the fabric, containing parts of well known ancient stories. These intricate tapestries correlated with the intricate stories are how the expression “weaving a story” came to be. Her book is, therefore, filled with feminist interpretations of classical Greek myths. I found this very refreshing and, above all, very freeing. I was now able to tell my own stories.

This is what Greece does to you. It offers this beautiful natural landscape, a magical history with physical remnants one can classify as proof and a friendly environment in which to enjoy it all. It allows you to dream, to indulge yourself in supernatural stories. It reminds you that maybe you're a little more than just flesh and bones. It makes you truly come alive.

1 Higgins, C. (2022). *Greek Myths*. Vintage (2nd edition)

## Naxos

In order to really take in the Greek experience, I decided to drive to the Cycladic Islands and do what people call “island hopping”. The Cycladic Islands take their name from the fact that they sit in a sort of radial position. Naturally, they arrange themselves on a kind of circular route, unwinding themselves as you go deeper southwards into the Aegean Sea.

Our first stop was Naxos. From what I noticed while planning the trip, Naxos seemed to have the most greenery out of all the islands. Being late August, I figured the transition from mountainous mainland Greece to the dry, barren islands would be a little leaner this way.

It turned out that Naxos was pretty barren as well. The greenery you can notice on Google Earth is actually comprised of low shrubbery, and not pine forests or something typical to the rocky island coasts. However, what hits you is the specific smell of the greenery. It’s sweet, a little spicy. The heat wave together with the strong Cycladic winds of late August only enhanced these smells, making it almost like a religious experience.

Naxos has the highest peaks out of all three islands we visited. The Cyclades themselves are, morphologically speaking, actually a set of mountain peaks belonging to a range that was submerged under water about 5 million years ago. This gives Naxos a unique natural setting. Naxos is an islands of extremes, surrounded by water with that specific turquoise blue color, sandy beaches, and steep rocky cliffs towards the middle of the island. You can experience all these on just a short 20 minute drive.

[1]

I mentioned it being almost like a religious experience, which it was, not only because of the natural setting, but in a traditional sense as well. Almost every mountain peak, no matter how small, steep, difficult to climb, had a small orthodox church built on top. One would think this could seem invasive to the natural setting but that’s not the case. Their scale is appropriate, perfectly fitting the correlated peak. Their domes complement the hilly region. The result is well balanced, even flattering to the mountainous environment.

[2]



[1]

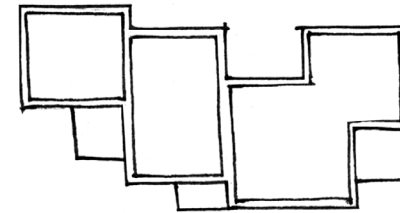
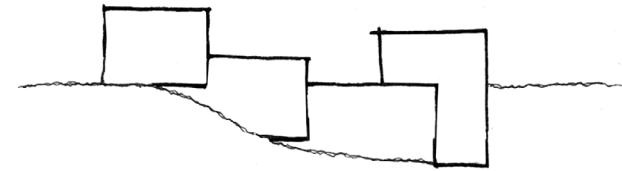


[2]

### General solution

The way the sharp edges of manmade structures are blended, chamfered, with rounded bevels, is something very specific to the seemingly boxy Cycladic House. The architecture is so functional, comprised of a simple box for each necessity (living room, kitchen, bedroom). The use of materials is so natural, with exposed stone walls for structural reinforcement and immaculately white plaster for the surfaces with which we come in direct contact.

Thick walls and small windows give the interior passive cooling. The indoor spaces are small and the terraced gardens generously spread all around the building. It becomes obvious that we are supposed to spend more time outdoors, eating, drinking and having a good time together, in large, noisy groups. The Greeks really have made an entire culture around free time and the Cycladic House is the physical manifestation of this.



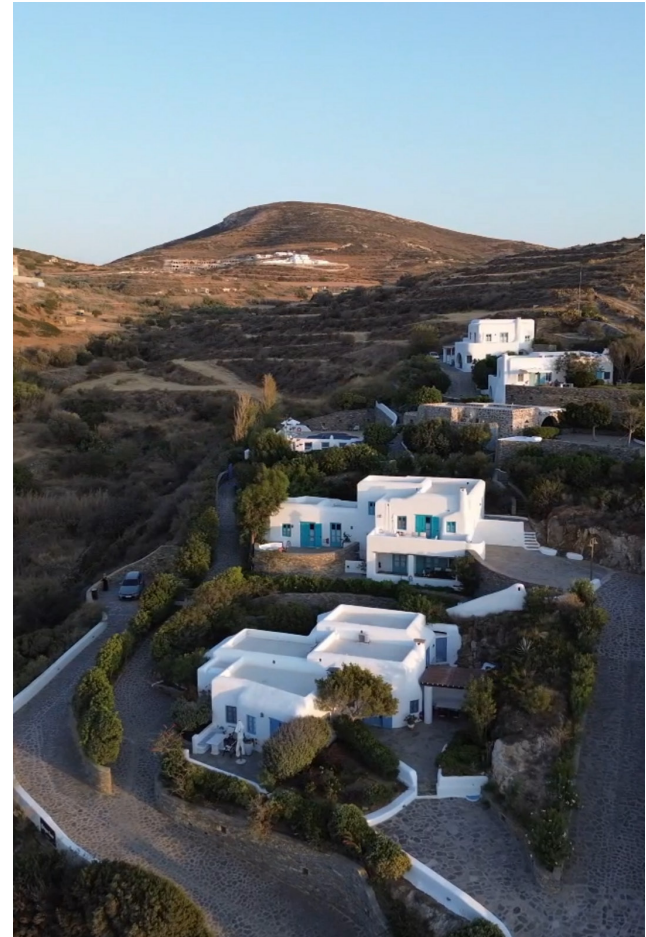
[3]

### The Cycladic House

- **Shape:** several boxes, detached or linked
- **Spatial Typology:** chambered
- **Spatial organization:** clustered
- **Functionality:** seasonal home
- **Location:** Cyclades, Greece
- **Materials:** plastered walls, small windows, painted blue or green with wooden shutters, flat roof



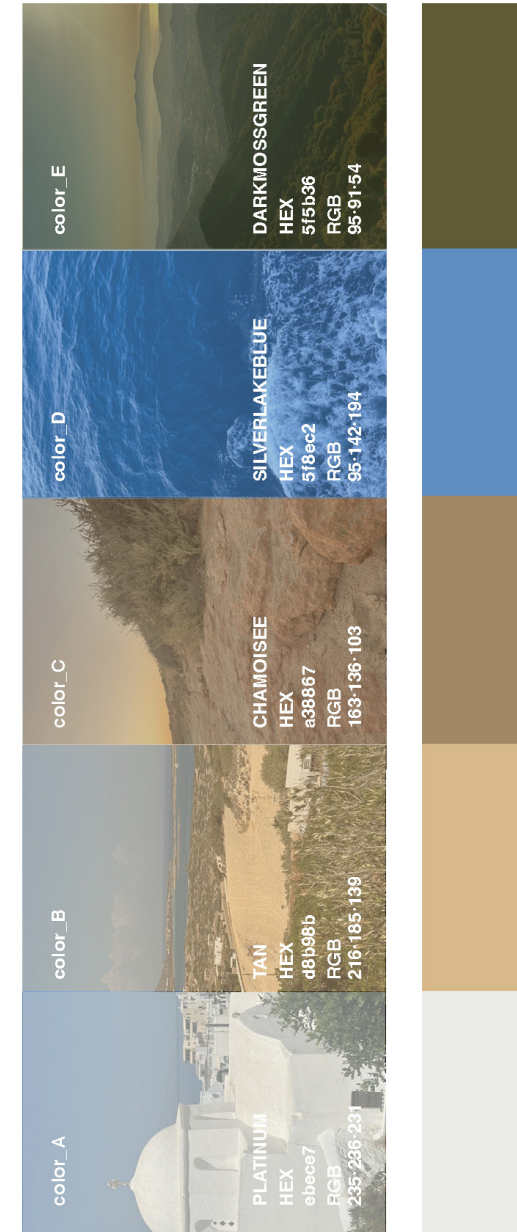
[4]



[5]

### Key takeaways

1. Think of what surfaces you touch and what surfaces you never touch. Distinguish them accordingly.
2. You can mix together opposing shapes, as long as you have a cohesive color scheme. You can combine sharp edges with perfectly round geometric shapes, boxy furniture with beveled edges and so on.
3. Intentionally size your spaces. If you spend a lot of time having friends over, the living/dining room is the most important room in your home. If, on the contrary, you love to spend Sundays in bed, then that is the most important room in your home. You assign importance by giving extra space as well as adding extra care in the decoration, integrating multiple elements that can be switched around easily.
4. All homes should have the possibility of extending the indoor spaces outdoors, easily.



## Paros

While we were getting ready to pack and leave Naxos for Paros, our host told us ‘What a pity. The nightlife on Paros is not as good as the one on Naxos.’ We laughed. There was no nightlife on Naxos either.

Paros is a 30 minute ferry ride away from Naxos. Seeing it from afar every night from our terrace in Naxos, we figured Paros would have a dry landscape, with even fewer trees than Naxos.

We were wrong.

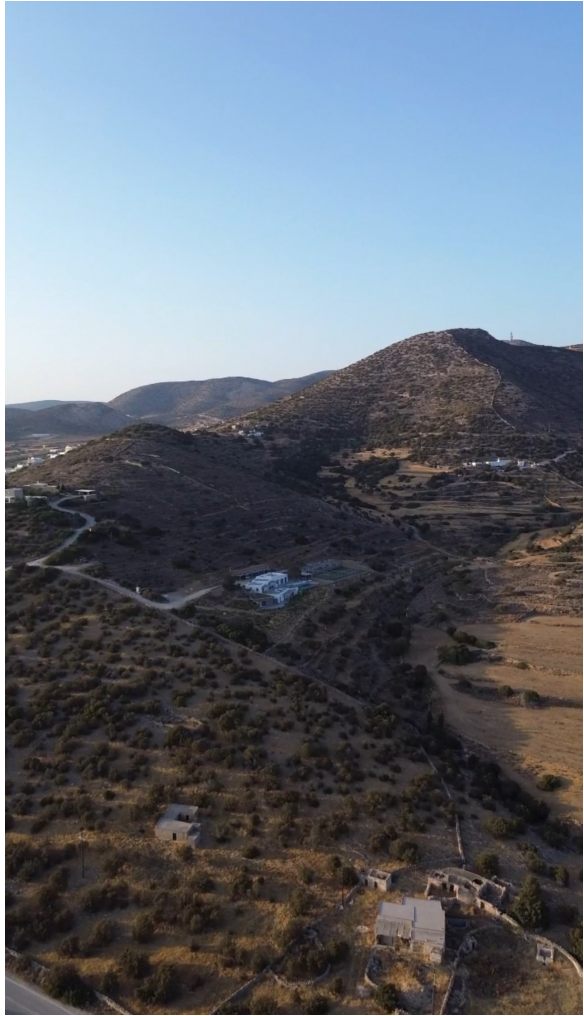
- [5] Surprisingly, there was a lot more greenery on Paros than expected, albeit planted greenery with intricate irrigation systems. Paros is a more popular tourist destination, and it shows. The roads are better, the vegetation is handled with more care, and there are many more vacation rentals as well. At first, the popularity of Paros seemed a little arbitrary, but after spending several days on the island, I realized what was causing this. There are beaches lined up on the entire shore. If you drive your car around the island, you can stop virtually anywhere and enjoy a nice beach. Some more populated, with beach bars and restaurants, others completely deserted, where you can even take off your bathing suit without anyone noticing. Most importantly, every single one of them was beautiful, safe and clean.

Given its popularity, Paros is where you can find many contemporary examples of vacation architecture. Most of them are reinterpretations of the traditional Cycladic home. The contemporary version is bigger, sleeker and it’s interesting to see how the basic components of the Cycladic House scale. Some translate better than others.

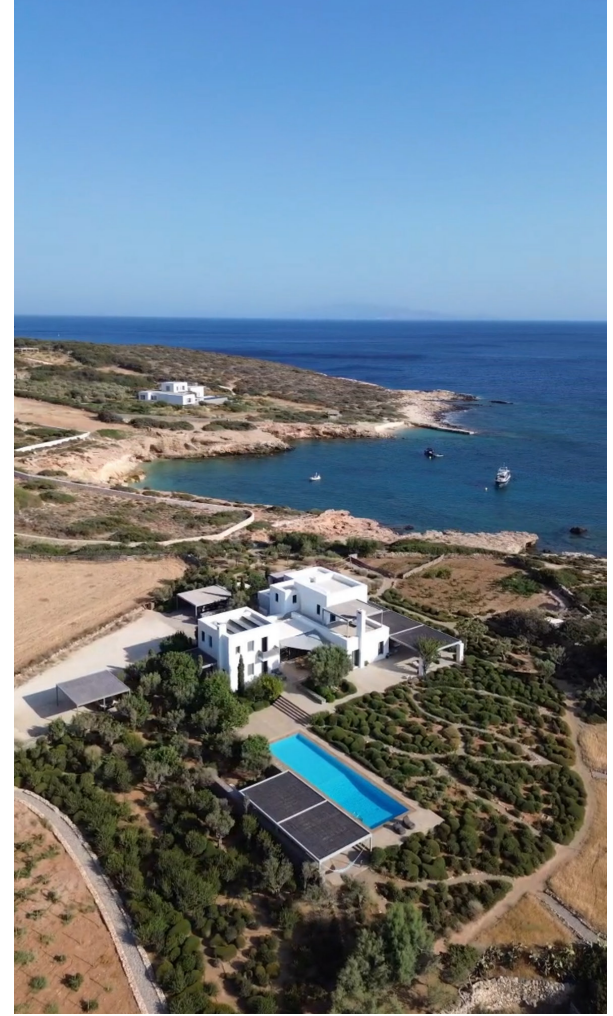
In some cases, the limit between indoor and outdoor has been difused, making a spectacle out of the liminal space between the two.

In others, the Cycladic House proportions are kept while the entire ensemble is uniformly scaled. In this case, the resulting liminal spaces begin to lack human scale, becoming more like glorified parking spots instead of gardens dedicated to social gatherings.

[6]



[6]



[7]

### Nikos Valsamakis

Aside from studying the Cycladic House as vacation architecture, the reason why I planned on spending so much time in Greece was to see architecture designed by Nikos Valsamakis. Valsamakis is one of my all time favorite architects. His designs are timeless, unobtrusive. The homes seem like they've been there for either 5 years or 500 years. The surfaces, the textures, the materials, the spaces, everything comes together not only to make a finite architectural object, but more of a prosthetic for the natural setting. The resulting architecture acts like a shelter but not as a barrier between humans and the environment, while offering several degrees of separation between human activity and the virgin landscape.

[8]

On Paros, we had the chance to see a Nikos Valsamakis interpretation of the Cycladic House. I can honestly say that it stood out from all the other contemporary interpretations.

Being a luxury accommodation, it was drastically scaled up, in order to house up to 12 people. The way Valsamakis managed to properly scale up a Cycladic House was to give more importance to each of the boxes, separately. Instead of being directly connected, the units are linked together through a passageway, acting like a secondary element to the three dimensional composition. While the composition seems unassuming from uphill, being relatively

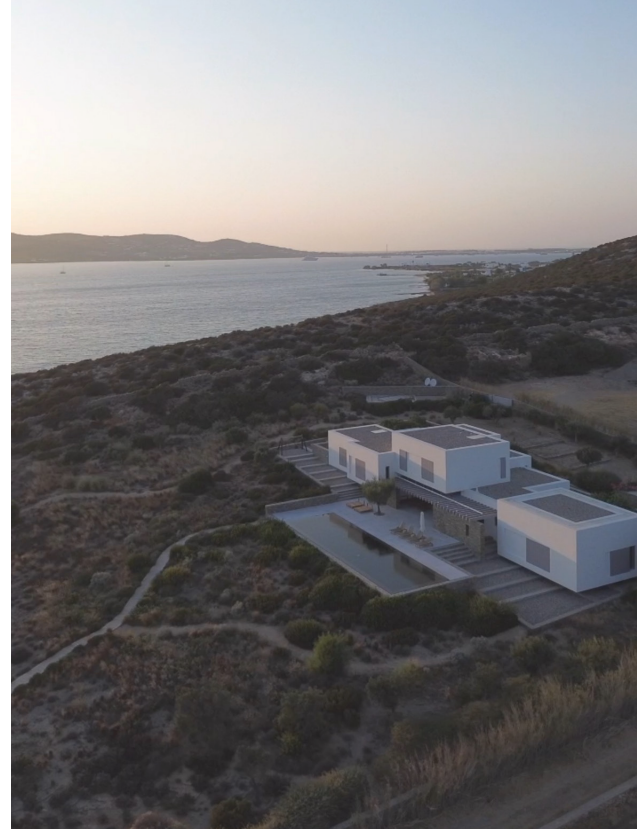
closed off towards the street, it opens up towards the garden and ultimately, towards the sea. The garden itself is a well planned composition, beginning as a well structured landscape project close to the house, becoming less organized, almost wilder, as it goes further away from the home, towards the sea.

However, probably the most Valsamakis out of all the design aspects is the fact that the boxes themselves are not in direct contact with the landscape. They seem to be levitating. This simple design gesture creates an honest distinction between the house and the natural landscape, ultimately making us pay more attention to how we conduct ourselves in nature, reminding us to intervene as little as possible, just letting it do its own thing.

[9]



[7]



[8]

## Antiparos

Antiparos was the island that started the entire planning of the trip. When researching the architecture of Nikos Valsamakis, there were several vacation homes on Antiparos more recently constructed. I started looking into the island and I figured out it's more of an exclusive destination, priced accordingly. There was no way for me to spend several weeks on Antiparos for research purposes only; I just could not justify those funds.

During my research, I reached out to DOMa, an architecture magazine based in Athens. I found they have several Valsamakis homes in their archive. Mr. Nikos Soulis, the editor in chief for DOMa, graciously replied, mentioning something that I didn't fully understand at the time:

*“Antiparos has only one village, it is interesting though that its castle is made of houses, not walls.”*

When we got there and I saw the type of vacation architecture specific to Antiparos, I began to understand.

## Katikia

Historically, the Cycladic typology of linked boxes, built close together, was a way of protecting the people against maritime invaders. Citadels had walls, castles had motes. The Cyclades had tiny houses, linked together.

Every time you approach a new island, on the ferry, you notice this citadel made of tiny, white houses, neatly packed together, sitting on a hill. You can see this on each and every Cycladic island. This type of house is called “katikia”. They develop organically, as two structures flank a common courtyard and, as the family grows larger, structures keep being added until the courtyard is completely closed off. The name comes from the Mori word “kaitiki” which means “guardian”. [9]



[10]

Thousands of years later, the need for protection remains unchanged. Today's invaders are, now, nosy tourists. Of course, I was one of them.

Antiparos has one main road that crosses the island from north, where the main village and port are, to south, where it reaches a dead end. The eastern half of the island is only reachable by boat or helicopter. That's where celebrities like Tom Hanks spend their summers.

On the eastern side, there are a few scattered beach bars and accommodations. You can barely see them from the road, as most of them are actually buried in the hill. The spatial typology is similar to the Cycladic fortified villages however, instead of building walls, contemporary architects decided to dig underground, creating hidden indoor spaces arranged around a terraced courtyard.<sup>1</sup>

It's important to mention that one of the natural tourist attractions on Antiparos is a cave. In order to visit it, one must descend 411 steps, 85 meters respectively, on a narrow route underground. When I looked at the specific type of vacation architecture present in Antiparos, I thought about the feeling I had while descending into the Cave of Antiparos. The inside of the cave was dark, deep, unchanged for thousands of years, unaffected by exterior conditions. I wondered what feeling one has when waking up in the morning in one of those enormous, underground, luxury vacation homes.

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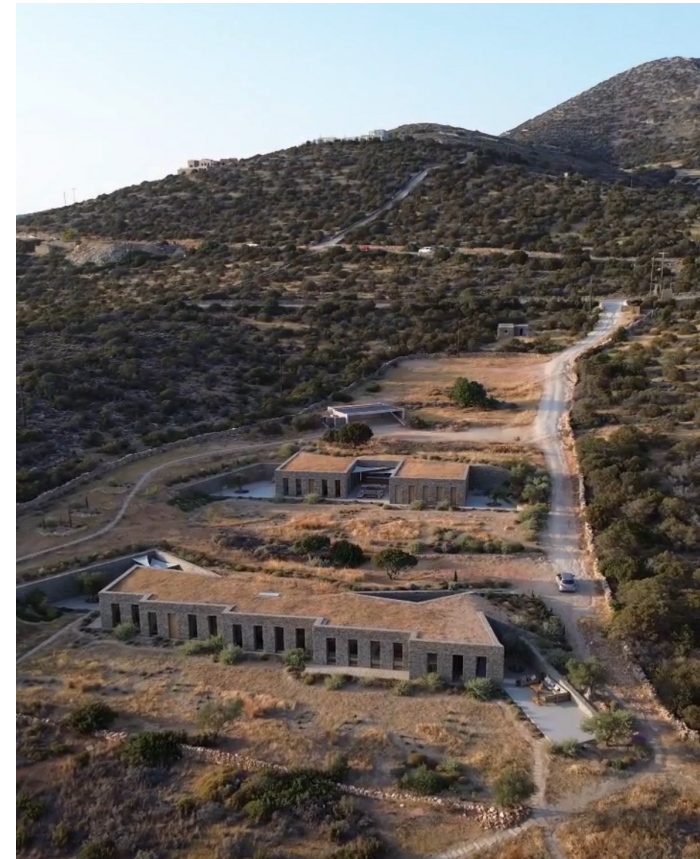
<sup>1</sup> Buried homes as vacation architecture are also very present in Paros. Some examples listed are from Paros and not Antiparos. However, I figured that this type of home is specific to Antiparos and so for the sake of the book's structure, I've decided to include them as Antiparos vacation architecture.



[11]

Pop culture would classify these types of buildings as “evil lairs”. Hidden within the natural landscape, blending together with rocky cliffs, on a secluded island, these gigantic structures represent the contemporary version of castles. They are an extreme use case of the type of blend we have studied throughout this book, the blend between functional modernity, contemporary high tech, traditional spaces and locally sourced materials. The blend between universality and locality. The ultimate blend between natural environment and manmade structures. It is with this typology that we end this volume of the Vacation Architecture series.

\*



[12]



[13]



[14]

## Conclusion

This book is the result of a correlation between a scientific approach to the built environment and personal experience of free time. My academic research revolves heavily around the behavior of architecture over longer periods of time. Architecture is simply a reflection of our present culture, beliefs, ways of life. These are aspects that have both fixed, timeless characteristics as well as ever changing tendencies.

When I first moved out of my parents' house, I moved into the apartment that used to belong to my grandmother. It was the apartment in which both my mother and my uncle grew up in. Later, it was the apartment in which my brother spent his first year of life. For over 50 years, that apartment remained unchanged, providing shelter for several generations.

I moved in long before the remodel was completed. I slept on the floor, I had friends over. I didn't have a bathroom door so we all had to wait outside while one of us was using it. That project came alive before it was completed. The furniture was built around the events that took place in the apartment. The result was an optimized solution, coming from testing, from experience.

My second apartment was larger. There was a clear idea that this was to be my home for several decades, to raise my own family there. It took me 7 years to complete, much to my parents' discontent. During those 7 years, I kept testing ideas. I had a minimal amount of furniture that I kept moving around. The living room became a bedroom, the bedroom became a gym and so on. In my parents' view, I was living in an unfinished home. In my view, no home is ever truly finished. Eventually, I considered I reached an optimal layout for the apartment. I ended up selling it to a young family. They mentioned several times how much it suits them perfectly. Perfectly optimized.

Each chapter of the book had a list of practical take-aways that could easily be implemented in anyone's home. If there is anything I would like you to remain with, it's the idea to plan your home not according to furniture, but in accordance with yourself. Take into consideration the way you move around, if you like having guests, if you enjoy cooking, if you love animals. To some, a living room is also office space. To others, it's a home gym. It can even be the extension of the kitchen.

During all these travels, I could not help but think about sustainability and the environmental impact that this type of leisure activity ensues. Most of the places were only reachable by plane and car. Most of the places were on islands, some closer to shore, but some of them very far away. I've seen buildings made out of local stone and wood. I've also seen many unfinished reinforced concrete structures, abandoned worksites that had no building permit.

I saw people. Lots and lots of people. People wearing flip flops in the supermarket, people brought by boat to otherwise secluded beaches, people in the outdoor sulfur baths in January, many people in the Cycladic ports, people on the tallest peak on the island where, of course, there was a restaurant.

What I haven't seen that much is garbage. It would seem that the beauty of these places makes everyone humble and respectful towards the natural setting. Except in Greece. There was garbage in Greece, mostly on the side of the road, sometimes even on the beaches or in the forests.

What I also saw in Greece was wild fire. I was driving on the freeway, north from Athens and I could see not smoke, but giant flames, taller than the buildings they were slowly creeping up towards. Later that day I saw giant cargo helicopters coming down towards the sea and filling up their hanging pouches with what seemed like a very small

amount of sea water, then turning around, headed towards the source of smoke. It made me wonder how effective this was.

[1] I saw windmills in Spain that didn't work. I saw solar panels in Greece covered with dust. I saw Sao Miguel, the main island of the Azores, one of the cleanest places on earth due to a very low population - the same island on which virtually no endemic vegetation is present as it was eradicated and replaced with whatever the Portuguese chose at the time. There is a superb monument next to the Furnas research site, on Sao Miguel Island. From afar, it seems like an array of severed tree trunks, tree stubs, the only remains after deforestation. When you get closer you notice that the array is actually made of concrete cubes. They look more like tombstones for the eradicated endemic vegetation on the island.

The carbon footprint of traveling is undeniable. While we do not see its effects with an untrained eye, this type of crowdedness affects wildlife presence, ultimately affecting biodiversity. Moreover, the Mediterranean Sea is the most overfished sea in the world.<sup>1</sup>

It's clear to me that some things shouldn't be scaled up. One of them is tourism. Having a better understanding of the spaces we temporarily occupy might have a positive impact on environmental awareness as well.

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1 Mrowiec, A. (2018) *Overfishing and Pollution Have Trashed the Mediterranean*. Oceana

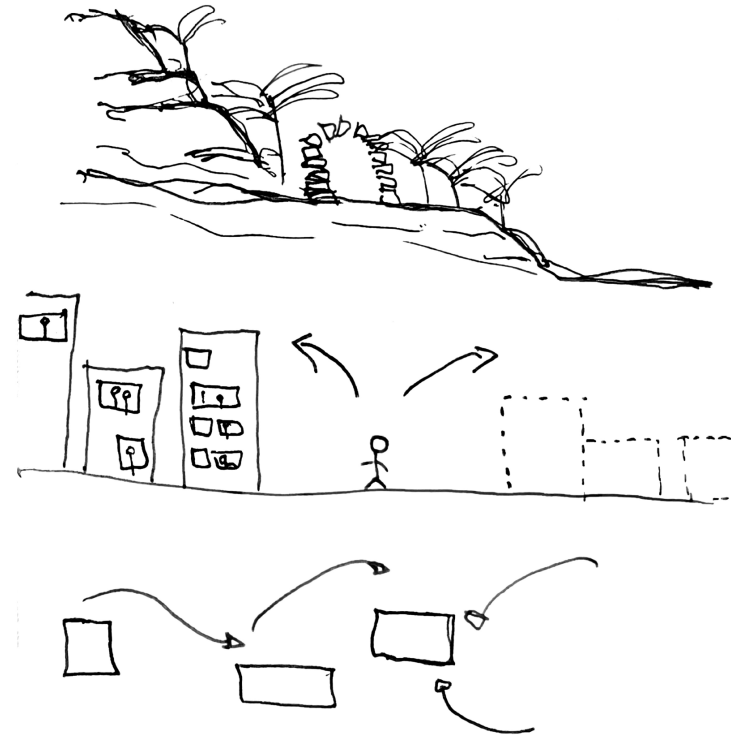


[1]

The first time I ever heard about sustainable architecture I thought it was the dumbest, most disingenuous thing ever. The only way to practice sustainable architecture, I thought, is if we move back to the caves. No, in fact, not even that. We should probably kill ourselves.

Then I learned about the lifespan of a building, ways to extend it, ways to repurpose it, ways to adapt it. How to pay close attention to how buildings are used in order for them to provide optimal functionality for several generations of users.

True sustainability in architecture is about properly using the built environment as efficiently as possible. A real timeless way of building is that of flexibility and adaptability. Leave room to move around, hold space for change and, above all, be true to yourself.



## Acknowledgements

This book would not have been possible without contributions from many people that are dear to my heart. I'd like to thank everyone who, instead of seeing it as a self indulging act, expressed interest and gave more support than anyone could ever hope for.

I hold so much consideration for Nikos as he was so open and immediately replied with helpful information regarding Greek architecture, Valsamakis and the Cycladic houses. The final chapter of the book would not have been possible without his help.

Irem is the best partner anyone could ever ask for. She understood the concept, pushed for excellence and would not allow me to settle for less. Beatrice has a special place in my heart. I have much respect for her work and her vision and the utmost gratitude for offering her century old timeless house to play a part in the construction of the universe this book belongs to. Nicoleta and her infinite patience offering unlimited possibilities for bringing this book into physical form.

Sebastian for showing a genuine interest the very first time I mentioned out loud that I want to write a book about vacation architecture. Vlad for saying that he doesn't even care what the book is about but cares about me writing one. Dana for accidentally helping me identify that vacations are a part of my personal brand and making me see how I can translate bits and pieces of architecture theory in a manner that is both enjoyable and useful to readers.

Andreea for insisting I remain true to myself and use drawings from my sketchbook as they are more expressive and authentic. She single handedly made me overcome my anxiety for publishing my personal creations.

Anda, Radu, Francesca and Paul for having so much patience, sometimes in really bad weather, while I flew my drone around places and spaces we visited together. Mugur for providing both the physical space, from the Atlantic Ocean all the way to the Aegean Sea, as well as the mental safe space in which this book could come alive.

Most importantly, all the people that offered their feedback directly or indirectly, simply by reading all my newsletters, watched all my content, and reacted to all my stories on Instagram. This book was put together with the feedback I collected from all of you over the course of one year.

Thank you.

## Outro

### The Story of My Ugliest Tattoo

During late summer of 2024, I spent two weeks on the Cycladic Islands of Greece. It was a memorable experience so I wanted to bring home some special souvenirs. I decided to get a tattoo on each island we stayed on. We visited 3 different islands however one of them did not have a tattoo parlor. So I got two tattoos, one on Naxos and one on Paros.

Tattoo parlors on the islands have a funny schedule. The one on Naxos was open 24/7 - in the sense that you could schedule one at any hour of the day. The one on Paros opened at 18:30 and closed at 21:00. I figured there were some interesting people running these parlors. However I wasn't too hopeful about their skill level, as these are probably some basic tourist traps.

On Naxos I got an inner lip tattoo. I had a specific word in mind, written in a specific style. I scheduled it, went in, and the artist first proposed some fonts. She then ended up drawing it on an iPad after a napkin sketch we spontaneously did when we got there. I negotiated with the team about the size of it (they won). She used a modest, battery powered, entry level tattoo gun. It turned out to be one of my favorite tattoos. I love it.

On Paros, the only tattoo parlor I found had good reviews, mentioning it was in business since 1986. Damn, I thought. It has to be at least as good as the one on Naxos. Probably better. I didn't prepare anything, just a photo of a marble basorelief with the cross I wanted to get. Small, on my index finger.



[1]

When I got in, there were newspaper articles posted up on the walls mentioning this tattoo artist who started all the way back in 1986. I asked him if he could do the cross. He said 'Of course. I've been tattooing since 1986.' I give him the picture and ask if he needs anything else. He confidently says no.

Then he proceeds to open the picture in Photoshop. I thought that was reassuring. Until I figured out he only used it to crop out the cross and print out the photograph. He prints it out on an A5. Keep in mind, I mentioned "index finger".

'I think it's too big', I said.  
'Yeah I know, I've done this many times.'

My guy takes out a ruler and a ballpoint pen and sloppily draws the outline of the cross. I mean it was bad. The lines did not intersect.

I did not say anything because, you know, I trust the process.

He scans it, resizes it, prints it out and then traces the outline by hand, no ruler this time, on transfer paper.

At this point it looked like a mentally disabled 5 year old drew it up. It was uneven, crooked, imprecise, shitty.

I figured he was only going to use the outline for scale and, like, freehand it or something. So I let him transfer it onto my index finger. After that, my guy pulls out what must have been the most expensive looking tattoo gun I've ever seen. I mean the thing had an LED display. He uses not one, not two but three types of needle. Because of this, I was pretty confident it would turn out OK.

We go back and forth a little bit about whether it should be filled in or just the outline.

'Let's see how it looks and we can fill it in afterwards,' he said.

Bad. It looked bad. I blamed it on the fact that there were probably two outlines, one from the transfer paper and one from the tattoo gun.

'Maybe we can try and do a shade so it looks 3D,' he said. 'Yes, let's try and do that.' At this point, I wanted the experience to end more than I wanted to leave with a proper tattoo. I was already thinking about some friends back home who could help repair this piece of shit.

After giving it some shade, It was worse. I said 'It's OK. Can we try and make it even?' He looks at it, mildly surprised and says 'Yeah, sure, no problem.'

This is the result.



[2]

I paid the guy 80 euros, thanked him, walked out, then immediately started laughing. I had made history. I had just gotten my ugliest tattoo.

I guess it's only fitting that this particular tattoo turned out to be a fiasco. The image is taken from the remains of a church I visited on Naxos. Of course, on this lovely plot, at the top of the hill, it wasn't always just a Christian church. The church itself was built on top of an ancient Hellenistic temple.

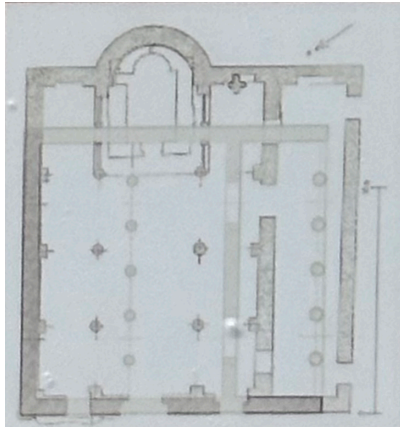
Now, don't get me wrong. Like any other basic white chick, I find ancient ruins really boring. I'm not a fan of visiting sites with, like, one single basic structure still standing, a pile of rocks next to it, reading a long ass clumsy translation of what the intention of the temple was supposed to have been (allegedly). I prefer reading about them indoors, looking at sketches, sketching them out myself. This time, however, I insisted on visiting this particular temple. I had just read a story about the goddess it was built for - Demeter. I thought the synchronicity was kind of cute. Demeter was the goddess of agriculture. You could really see that in the temple's style. Patterns were deliberately made a little more roughly. They were supposed to look a little more modest, low key, as something you would find on a farm. Only this was entirely made out of marble. Entirely out of marble. The steps, the columns, the pillars, the beams, even the pantile roof. All white marble. And so they used different textures to differentiate building elements.

[3]



[3]

- [4] Almost a thousand years later, the Christians totally botched this ancient temple to clumsily erect an ill-fitting church on the same spot, with complete disregard of how the temple itself integrated in the surrounding environment.



[4]

There is a point to this story. The totally relaxed, laid back way the tattoo artist in Naxos was just trying to do a good job and offer a good experience was in complete opposition with Newspaper Guy in Paros.

I see tattoos as complementary to one's body. I don't get big pieces so they don't conflict with the natural curves of my body. I get accent pieces that accentuate my body's features. This, of course, is a personal preference.

well. Sure, it is a built environment, a man made structure, a piece of technological equipment. But it's supposed to help us better experience the natural setting. It's not supposed to be the main character of the stories in our vacations - we are.

The tattoo I got on Naxos is symbolic of the architecture I saw on Naxos. The homes were not too big, not too small, not too deeply buried in the hills, had just enough yard, just enough greenery so as to not require too much irrigation. The homes were there for you to help better experience the island: the views, the wind, the stars, having a meal on the terrace with your loved ones.



[5]

At the same time, the tattoo I got on Paros is exactly the way many vacation houses are on Paros. Overpriced, overhyped, clumsy and completely out of place. At first glance, you can notice how they take their origins from Cycladic Architecture. However their shapes, their scale, their materials, their proportion and the way they integrate in the natural setting is so far removed from the original concept of the homes. This causes them to simply be just rentals, and not homes. They fail to truly come alive. As such, not only are they not timeless, but their lifespan is as long as that of their house appliances. They have planned obsolescence.



[6]

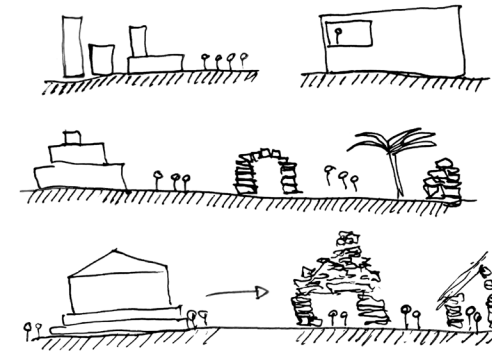
When we drove around the island of Paros we could see more than a few concrete frame structures that had never been finished. I thought about people buying land and starting construction on a vacation home as a profitable business, not realizing the true cost of something like that and not having the finances to finish it. That architecture was dead on arrival. On the horizon, they resemble ancient Greek temples. Destined to be contemporary ruins.



[7]

The homes, the church, my tattoo. All botched from lack of understanding. The failure to understand the natural setting, the natural environment, a natural way of being. All while overhypeing a series of gross misinterpretations attributed by man, the propagation of which eventually becomes culture. Louder voices persevere while discrete voices fade away with time.

Buildings that come alive are buildings that make us feel alive. And we feel alive when we are most present in our bodies, during special moments that take place in a pattern of events. All hail Christopher Alexander and The Church of Timeless Way of Building.



[8]

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