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The coexistence between tourism and landscape: Stazzo Pulcheddu by Alberto and Aldo Ponis in Sardinia (Italy)

The demand for tourist accommodation in idyllic locations, which has increased since the pandemic era on, has resulted in the construction of buildings and infrastructure that prioritises the satisfaction of new needs over the preservation of landscapes and their ecosystems. It is therefore essential to examine case-studies that have already harmoniously succeeded in the harmonious integration of their architecture into nature, as exemplified by the Stazzo Pulcheddu, designed by Alberto Ponis in collaboration with his brother Aldo, in the northern coast of Sardinia. The resort, designed by Alberto Ponis in collaboration with his brother Aldo, evokes a clear ecological sensibility and aims to preserve the most characteristic distinctive natural elements of the landscape. The project proposes an architecture that is dispersed throughout the plot and takes the vernacular architecture of Gallura as its reference point, specifically the 'stazzo'. This docu-

ment aims to provide detailed information on the Stazzo Pulcheddu, faithful to reality, in order to elementarily transmit disseminate in a simple way the concepts that nourish Alberto Ponis' architecture

Keywords:
landscape; topography; Alberto Ponis; Sardinia; resort.

INTRODUCTION: THE TURISTIC EXPLOITATION OF LANDSCAPE

An increase in housing demand in paradisiacal rural settings, far from urban stress in contact with nature, came from the second half of the 20th century on. In recent times, this phenomena increased at CoVid-19 pandemic times, when people were forced to stop their frenetic contemporary lifestyle and decided to return to these natural settings increasing the demand for new tourist locations. In consequence, new residential buildings and infrastructure has been erected to meet the new housing and leisure needs. Unfortunately, these transformations of the territory are occasionally disrespectful with the regional landscape and the culture. This results in architectural projects that appear detached from the environment, which means that once they are built, they will have irreparably altered the ecosystem. In light of the aforementioned, it is imperative to comprehend precedent case-study wherein architectural and natural elements have been harmoniously merged.

The pressure of the Real State that we can feel nowadays in the territory reminds us of the origin of Contemporary Mediterranean resorts which find their origin in the economic boom that ensued the Second World War and led to the democratisation of tourism in Europe. Consequently, the coastal landscapes of the Mediterranean basin underwent a significant transformation with the construction of new residential complexes to host the growing middle class. This significant influx resulted in the displacement of the elite of the European society, who were compelled to find new locations to spend their leisure time, which, at the same time, led to the dislocation of local inhabitants who were forced to leave their homes.

Although the island of Sardinia was described by David Herbert Lawrence as "untameable", far away from the Mediterranean routes and lacking of history (Lawrence, 2000, p. 33) and it had been overlooked for centuries captivating few geographers and adventurers, it became the new jet-set holiday destination, especially since the

establishment of the Alghero-London connection -around 1955- and particularly from the 1960s onwards. Among this economic development, there were carried out territorial transformations in the northern coast of Sardinia aiming to offer the European socio-cultural elite a new holiday destination stand out. Its vast coastline "were largely obliterated by a layer of coarse buildings which left only the most obvious features of the landscape intact; the biggest olives and the most dramatic rocks". (A. Ponis, 1980, p. 35).

The pre-existing settlements were rural, located in the inland regions and lacked any connection to the sea and. Their elevated situation protected them from the inclement weather, such as strong winds from the north or the malaria epidemics which only ceased in 1950. (Tognotti, 2009, p. 1460). Some plots closer to the sea, which had been used as pastures, were bought at a reduced price by foreign investors who took advantage of the socio-economic situation of the region. In these plots, they built some of the most popular tourist resorts in the island such as Consorzio Costa Smeralda, Porto Rafael or Costa Paradiso. For the design and urbanisation of these resorts many renowned international architects who had been previously involved in similar tourism developments, such as the Côte d'Azur, were called (Posocco, 2017, p. 392). The vacation homes erected in these locations imported the image of ideal coastal villages that contrasted with the vernacular character of traditional Sardinian constructions (Peghin, 2019, p. 94). This new avant-garde that evocated the natural by a cavernous appearance was named as "Smeraldino" and was promoted by architects such as Jacques Couelle, Savin Couelle, Luigi Vietti and Michele Busiri Vici among others.

Alberto Ponis, a Genoese architect who, contrary to the majority of the architects working in the Sardinian resorts, opted to relocate in the commune of Palau after a brief work experience in London, opposed with his work to this emerging trend. His architecture distanced from the "Smeraldino" style by vindicating the vernacular tradition of Sardinian constructions and its rela-

tionship with the landscape. In Stazzo Pulcheddu, a tourist complex designed by Alberto Ponis in collaboration with his brother Aldo, the architectural elements are integrated into the natural environment. This is achieved through an adaptation of the constructions to the granite topography and the Mediterranean vegetation of the island's north. The diverse structures that form the complex demonstrate an evident influence of regional architectural systems, specially those utilized in the "stazzo" of Gallura, which have their roots in the island's agricultural heritage and can be found spread throughout the inlands.

Stazzo Pulcheddu distances itself both from the mimetic organicity of the villas "Smeraldinas" and from the rationalist trend that created countless holiday homes along the coasts of the "mare nostrum" during the 1930s. Although the last also sought to dialogue materially and visually with the regional constructions, the misuse of contemporary materials made clear the difference with the local building tradition. Furthermore, the utilisation of large elevated concrete platforms as well as "pilotis" -such as the ones we can advert in Eileen Grey's house E-1027 (1926-27) in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin or in Nikos Valsamakis's house in Anavyssos (1961-63)- distance physically and visually the inhabiting experience from the land. Thus both entities, the artificial and the natural one are understood as two distinct entities rather than as one continuous dialogue between two elements.

Methodology: Analysis of the site following Ponis' steps.

In the following paragraphs it is put forward an analysis of Alberto Ponis's Stazzo Pulcheddu as a paradigmatic example of the symbiosis between architecture and nature by studying the systems used to integrate the construction into the site. Firstly, there are described the initial appearance of the site delving into the primitive landscape with its vegetal and rocky components, the remains of the peasant constructions and the project developed by Alberto and Aldo Ponis. This depiction is followed by an explanation of the project resources and compositive logic used by Ponis' brothers

to articulate the resort in the complex landscape. In an initial step, the text delves into the logic used to territorially adjust the site to the exigences of the resort. Then there are described the strategies applied in the domestic scale to adapt each building to the specific site where they are placed is analysed.

The text is accompanied by images, made by the author, based on the planimetric documentation found in Studio Ponis and consulted during the visits to his archive as well as that found in specialised publications to analyse the primitive landscape. Additionally, this information is based in the topographical information provided by the Regione Sardegna through its official website.

For the elaboration of these images the documentation of the project has been studied, carefully analysing the planimetric data hosted at Studio Ponis as well as the articles published in the most relevant architectural magazines' archives of the 70's. Furthermore, this data has been synthesized in a graphical information indicating, over a topographical basis coloured in orange which makes reference to the appearance of the granitic substratum, the different features of vegetation, views, rocks and architectural pre-existence found in Mount Pulcheddu. This information is superposed to the urban structure of the Stazzo Pulcheddu.

The objective of this analysis is to present a reliable representation to effectively convey the singular characteristics of Ponis' architectural approach in order to apply the knowledge extracted from it to other contemporary projects.

THE LANDSCAPE OF MOUNT PULCHEDDU

The Stazzo Pulcheddu (1975-1982) is situated to the north-east of the hill that names the residential complex -Mount Pulcheddu-, a few kilometres away from Palau, occupying an area of approximately 28 hectares. The original landscape is made up of an arid granitic substratum covered by small and medium-sized bushes of Mediterranean species, collectively known as "macchia".

<http://disegnarecon.univaq.it>

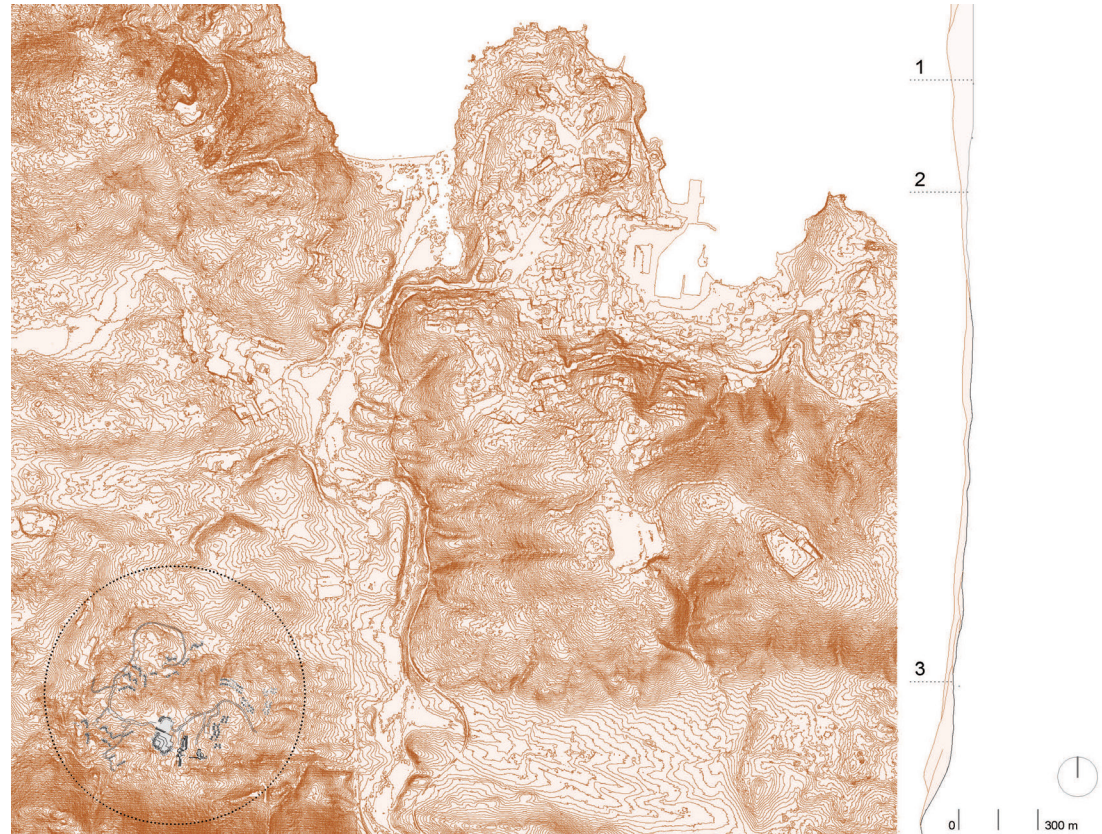


Fig. 1 - Left: Stazzo Pulcheddu site plan. Right: territorial section [1] Sea level/ [2] Palau/ [3] Stazzo Pulcheddu. Drawing made by the author.

The elevated location, the absence of large natural elements and the granitic substrate expose the constructions to the aggressiveness of meteorological agents that affect the area: the suffocating summer heat and the winds from the north. The latest, which are frequent during the cooler seasons, sculpt the vegetation and the sinuous rocky shapes with a slow and continuous erosion over time. [Fig.1]

The plot, previously occupied by shepherds, was used as farmland. While using productively these

lands the rocky and natural elements were maintained. As a result, a coexistence between agricultural exploitation, the raw environment and modest residential architecture erected by peasants was stabilised. The area was modified by the delineation of the plots in small walls of local stone with a regional technic known as "muro a secco". There were also built structures with residential and productive functions; the distinctive "stazzo" of Gallura. These vernacular buildings that are characterised by gable roofs are expanded ac-

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.20365/disegnarecon.33.2024.15>



Fig. 2 - Plan of old "muri a secco" traces. Drawing made by the author.



Fig. 3 - Visual relations and wind direction plan. Drawing made by the author.

According to the needs of the inhabitants, comprise a repetitive sequence of cells constructed with granite load-bearing walls, with a span of approximately 5 metres, (Baldacci, 1985, pp. 17–30). The remains of these interventions which discreetly altered the qualities of the original terrain were incorporated in the design of Stazzo Pulcheddu as a memory of the site's legacy. The composition establishes a dialogue with the surroundings that succeeds to connect the constructed with the regional memory and the site's history. [Fig.2] The resort differs from other contemporary projects on the northern coast of Sardinia. Firstly, its distance from the sea suggests an alternative experience to the one proposed in the dense resorts of the Costa Smeralda, "which seeks to go



Fig. 4 - Framed panorama from Stazzo Pulcheddu's "residence". Photography by the author.

beyond the stereotypes of coastal tourism and overcome the superficial and reductive vision of homo ludens" (A. E. Ponis, 2021, p. 40). Its elevation, comparable to the location of the defensive structures on the northern coast of the island, provides visual control of the area and guarantees the enjoyment of the best panoramas. [Fig.3,4] Its implantation follows clear ecological premises and seeks the minimum urbanisation allowing the coexistence between architecture and natural environment.

For the development of the residential complex Alberto and Aldo Ponis got inspired by contemporary works with similar conservationist objectives like the Sea Ranch (1963-1965). The Californian project coordinated by Lawrence Halprin in collaboration with a group of architects -including MLTW and Joseph Esherick-, was considered for "its interpretation of the natural environment, traditional building typologies and the genius loci" (A. Ponis, 2003, p. 14). Moreover, its location has parallel physical attributes with Stazzo Pulcheddu: a rocky terrain covered by vegetation of medium dimensions and a characteristic natural wilderness. (Juanes Juanes, 2017, p. 54).

Following the steps of the Californian project, Stazzo Pulcheddu considers the data compiled in an environmental investigation as well as the information found in a detailed urban plan (Brandolini, 2006a, p. 104). Both reports were similar to the ones previously made by Alberto Ponis for the Yacht Club path in Punta Sardegna (1965). The aforementioned documentation, which analyses the topography of the Mount Pulcheddu, the visual relationships, the grid of "muri a secco" that divide the land, the vegetation -detailing its species and size-, and the disposition of the emerging rocks allowed the definition of a perimeter for the intervention. The heart of the intervention consist in a small, flat plateau situated on the aridest area of the site. Its strategic location allows the conservation of the vegetation. Its polygonal shape is protected by buildings disposed around the perimeter and the rest of the constructions are situated around them. They all descend accompanying the inclination of the slope except from the

southern side, which is delimited by a mountain. By doing so, the emersion of the natural elements is allowed. [Fig.5]

The spatial dispersion of the programme forced the construction of networks to guarantee access to the complex. In opposition to the common transformations in these kinds of developments which usually go over the line in the urbanisation of the territory, in Stazzo Pulcheddu a single ascending road was constructed. It's trace run from the access point, situated a few kilometres before reaching Palau, to the upper square. From this point, additional minor roads that lead to park and ride were set, facilitating access to the different building. For joining the different areas is mandatory to traverse the landscape by walking, evoking the behaviours that arise when going down expansive, flat terrains, such as a golf courses (Brandolini, 2006c, p. 101). Furthermore, the dispersion of the project programme and the modest urbanisation allow for the growth of vegetation and the percolation of water into the ground.

The configuration of the buildings situated around the central plaza is conditioned by their orientation and the location of the most advantageous panoramas. Firstly, the constructions that enclose the plaza are radially disposed around the perimeter of the square, fit into ribs that accommodate essential services and terraced residential units. Their arrangement forms an enclosure that safeguards the public space while opening the views of the houses to the best panoramas. The design strives to establish a modest urbanity in conjunction with nature through a system of green platforms that descend together with the buildings, following the gradual slope of the terrain.

Then, the remaining housing typologies, among which we can find the "residence", the courtyard houses and the grouped single-family houses, are situated on the hillsides surrounding the plateau. Each of these typologies is associated in small groups made up of the repetition of the same type, which adapt to the topography. [Fig.6] The sequential aggregation of these cells is based on the modular repetition of the 'stazzo'. This results in the creation of a unified and "identifiable architec-

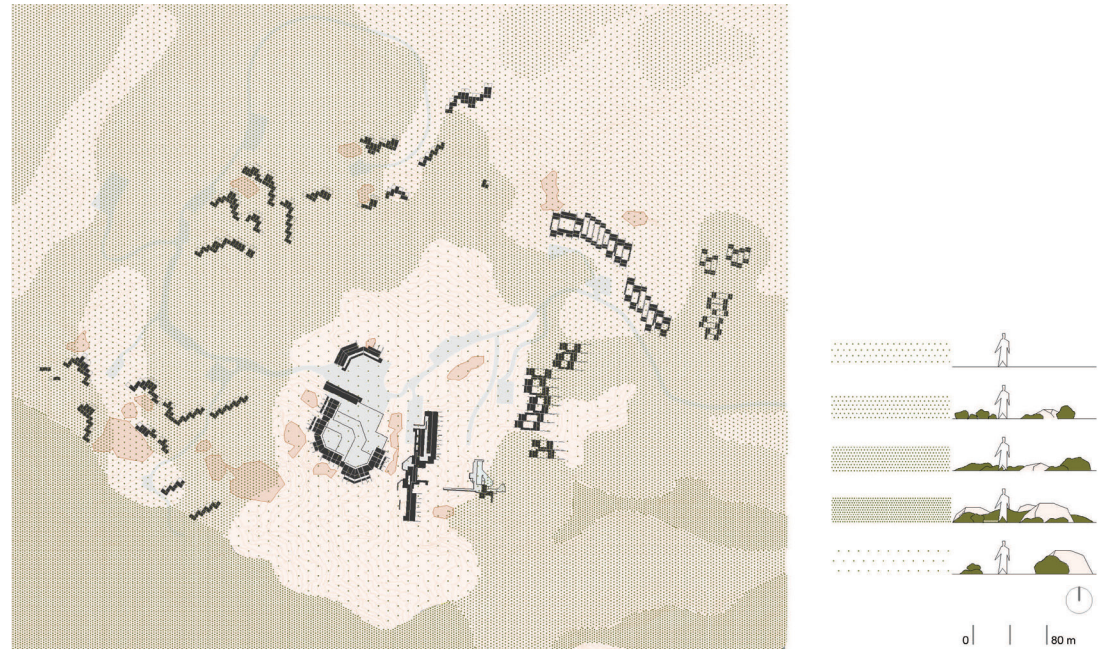


Fig. 5 - Plan of density of vegetation in different areas. Drawing by the author.

tural language within a clearly defined landscape context" (Tagliacollo, 2021, p. 126), which unlike many residences designed in the "Smeraldino" style, which often imitate the surrounding rocky terrain, these structures emerge from the topography, seamlessly integrating into the site.

PROJECT STRATEGIES IN STAZZO PULCHEDDU

The integration of Stazzo Pulcheddu in the landscape is achieved through a two-scale design approach. Initially, it encompasses the adaptation of the tourist complex's typologies and infrastructure to the enclave in a territorial scale. Then, the precise adjustment of individual buildings to the immediate landscape is designed.

The initial decision was simple: to divide the project into different cells, made up of a succession of units of the same typology, with the aim of ac-

complishing a minimum urbanisation. The separation between the individual dwellings is made by structural axes that create a rhythm. In addition, these load-bearing elements guarantee the independence of each building and also take part in their integration in the site allowing the necessary displacement or rotation. The final appearance is similar to that of Alexandros Tompazis' Hotel Akti Myrina (1970) in Limos; a small village of vernacular constructions that harmoniously fills the landscape, making also possible the identification of each of the small cells that form it.

The different typologies descend around the geometric centre defined by the plaza of Stazzo Pulcheddu. The public space is located in an area surrounded by ancient granite walls, the remains of which are perfectly integrated into the environment, creating a balance between the natural and the artificial. The gentle slope of the land is



Fig. 6 - Stazzo Pulcheddu's isometric. [1] Plaza and perimetral buildings/ [2] Residence/ [3] Patio- houses 1ª phase, 90 sqm/ [4] Patio- houses 2ª phase, 70 sqm/[5] Patio- houses 3rd phase, 60 sqm/ [6] Grouped single-family houses/ [7] Sports zone. Drawing made by the author.

followed both by the plaza, which adapts to the soil through a series of platforms, and by the surrounding buildings. The articulation of these two elements creates a "space as a theatre for domestic activities". [Brandolini, 2006b, p. 11] which evokes some of Denys Lasdun's works, such as the Royal College of Physicians in London (1964). In these architectures developed by the British architect, as in Stazzo Pulcheddu's plaza, the rise of the platforms hides the horizon, that in the case of the Sardinian resort is hidden by the rise of the mountains on its southern side. The final image is based on the superimposition of planes. The uniformity of the architecture around the square is broken by a crossroads that divides the space into zones, each with a different use. While the upper level is made up of the dwellings, the lower one, located on a flat terrain, contains the services.

Spread through the hillsides we can find the "residence", the patio-houses and the aggrupation of single-family houses. The first typology, the "residence", lays closely to the square. It comprises a series of cells arranged in a row, parallel to the line of one of the original "muro a secco", which remains standing on the opposite side of the road. The residential and common units, unified under a single roof, are positioned on platforms to align with the topographical slope, thereby affording each of the cells to enjoy the views from the mount [Fig 7].

In contrast, the patio-houses are constructed to follow the natural contours of the topography, respecting the main traces of the remaining granite walls and the most outstanding natural elements. In some instances, these structures are employed to enclose and safeguard the dwellings. The conjunction of these elements gives rise to a series of blocks, the recessed facades of which serve to adapt the dwellings to the topography. [Fig.8] The grouping of single-family dwellings finally descends, continuing the inclination of the southern slope. The union of the dwellings is organic and comprises three models, one composed by two cells while the other two are made up by three, one of which is broken into an 'L' shape. The dwelling rotate in plan generating an organic pattern that



Fig. 7 - Communication open spaces in Stazzo Pulcheddu's "residence".
Photography by the author.



Fig. 8 - Stazzo Pulcheddu's Patio-Houses. Photography by the autor.

allows the adaptation to the topography. The composition is analogous to Jørn Utzon's Kingohusene (1956-58) in southern Sweden. However, in the open model proposed by Stazzo Pulcheddu, the role of the courtyard in each of Utzon's dwellings is represented by the portion of landscape enclosing each cellular addition.

THE "CASA ASSOLUTA": THE DEFINITIVE PROTOTYPE

The topographical irregularities prompted the Ponis brothers to consider the typologies of housing. As a consequence, they devised a malleable prototype that could adjust to the particularities of the site, following the main purpose of the project: conserve the existing landscape. The logic of "casa assoluta" solves the adaptation of the programme to the inclination of the soil and avoids the emerging natural elements. The linear residence, which will serve to define the courtyard houses of Stazzo Pulcheddu, is constituted by two blocks, one at the front and one at the back, with a central courtyard that can be adapted like a hinge to the slope of the land. (Brandolini, 2006a, p. 102). The two bands, equipped with the day and night zones, are placed between longitudinal structural axes – similar to the ones of the public plaza – are separated by a short pause; a courtyard of variable dimensions that allows the emersion of the rock and vegetation [Fig.9]. Each of these load-bearing elements is reminiscent of the silhouette of a stazzo with the profile of a house with a gabled roof. They are the image of the resort and make a direct reference to the regional identity [Fig.10]. The adaptability of the "casa assoluta" serves to exemplify the translation of the system of platforms used in the territorial composition to the domestic scale. Furthermore, the principles espoused by this typology are also present in the smaller scales of the other typologies that make up the Stazzo Pulcheddu, which also make use of voids or platforms to succeed in their adaptation to the terrain.

For example, the 'residence' is designed to adapt

to the topography by incorporating the voids that comprise the collective distribution spaces in both the longitudinal and transverse directions to locate the staircases that connect the different levels. Furthermore, each dwelling within the 'residence' incorporates an interior staircase that once again adapts the dwelling to the slope of the terrain. This results in a development in three levels for those dwellings situated in the most unfavourable locations. Additionally, the natural elements, such as rock and vegetation are integrated into the design through the use of recesses in the façade which follow the rhythm of the structure, generating a zigzagging profile evident in the communal and distribution areas.

In the patio-houses, adaptability is achieved through the literal utilisation of the prototype of the "casa assoluta" and the displacement of the dwellings in the direction of the structural axes while the aggrupation of single-family houses, this adaptability is manifested in the subdivision of the programme into small units. Each of these houses rotates and shifts with respect to the neighbouring ones, adapting to the topography and nature, thereby generating an organic image that allows the inclusion of the original natural elements.

CONCLUSIONS

The Stazzo Pulcheddu of Alberto and Aldo Ponis represents a paradigmatic example of integration into the natural environment. As demonstrated through the images that accompany the text the configuration is based on adaptation to the landscape forms, the meteorological agents and vestiges of past architectures. All of these elements constitute the memory of the place and are constantly referenced by the construction even with the name of the project itself, "Stazzo Pulcheddu". The configuration of each module is subordinated to the natural and historical memory of the place and acquires subjective nuances by the orientation of each cell to contemplate the best panoramas. The convergence of a logical with a hedonistic mo-

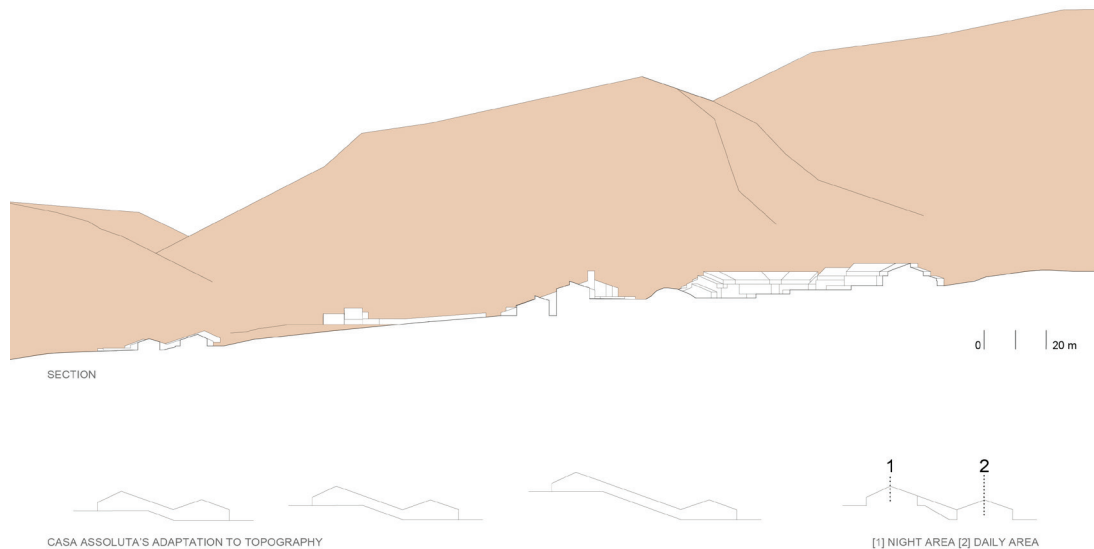


Fig. 9 -Top: General section of the project's adaptation to the site. Bottom: diagrams of adaptation the different slopes of "Casa assoluta". Drawing made by the author. [1] Night area [2] Daily area.



Fig. 10 - The structural house-shaped walls of "casa assoluta". Photography by Francisco Cotallo Blanco.

tivation suggests a coexistence between humans and nature by a controlled anthropisation.

The proximity between these two different worlds enables the residents of Stazzo Pulcheddu to benefit the proximity with natural both psychological and physically that can be appreciated when visiting the site or through the photographs that illustrate this article. Some of the direct consequences of this therapeutic way of life include the enjoyment of optimal air quality, which is beneficial for the respiratory system, the reduction of stress, and the increase of physical activity, which is a result of the necessity to walk imposed by the fragmented design.

The process of designing the resort is based on a preliminary analysis of the site similar to the one made for this paper, which Alberto Ponis had previously employed in other projects and which represents a fundamental aspect of his construction methodology in northern Sardinia. Furthermore, this approach to working demonstrates a special attention both towards the landscape and the regional identity of Gallura.

Moreover, the studies conducted throughout the project culminate in the formulation of a novel typology. The "casa assoluta" will stabilise the basis of further holiday houses of regular matrix created by Alberto Ponis along the northern Sardinian coast, particularly in the locations of Costa Paradiso and Punta Sardegna. The continuous reference to the "stazzo" of Gallura ensures the integration of the construction into the landscape and the regional culture. Furthermore, the constant connection with the surrounding landscape suggests a new housing model which harmonises the coexistence between contemporary tourism and the traditional agricultural settings of Sardinian constructions.

In conclusion, the Stazzo Pulcheddu, designed by Alberto and Aldo Ponis, represents paradigmatically the transition between the rurality of Sardinian culture and contemporary living. It proposes a coexistence in dialogue with nature in a natural enclave.

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In conclusion, the Stazzo Pulcheddu, designed by Alberto and Aldo Ponis, represents a transition between the rurality of Sardinian culture and contemporary living. It proposes a way of living in a natural enclave in dialogue with nature.

NOTE

[1] The tourists of that age found an arid soil and practically inaccessible where the inhabitants lived in the inland making their modest way of living out of farming (Dechmann, 2016, p. 37).

[2] Alberto Ponis goes to London in 1960 after finishing his studies in the Florence School of Architecture. Since then he collaborates in the studios of Ernő Goldfinger and Denys Lasdun up to 1964, when he definitely relocates to Sardinia (Brandolini, 2014, pp. 18–19).

[3] Most of the constructions were made of local Stone and lime finishes, characteristic of Mediterranean architecture. For example, Villa Mandrot (1931) by Le Corbusier “introduced the primitive texture of the Provençal genius loci” (Lejeune & Sabatino, 2010, p. 4) using façades raw Stone, which are normally hidden under a layer of lime in the vernacular architecture of the region.

[4] In the mediterranean houses of 1930’s are usually found traditional constructive systems – such as stone or lime finishes- which are integrated in the contemporary construction made of concrete.

[5] In the Sardinian coast, specially in the northern side, there are still found several defensive constructions which are a consequence of the politic instability that affected the island for centuries. (Baldacci, 1985, p. 1).

[6] Alberto Ponis visited the Sea Ranch in 1973 while travelling around the United States (Brandolini, 2015, p. 88).

[7] The group of architects was originally composed by Charles Moore, Donlyn Lyndon, William

Turnbull y Richard Whitaker.

[8] The pathway of the Yacht Club originally consisted in the rehabilitation of an Napoleonic bunker and its conversion into a restaurant. Alberto Ponis decided to complete the Project program with a sinuous pathway that passing between the rocks and the vegetation of Punta Stropello. Among the documents that describe the track we can find the ones that detail the physical characteristics of the landscape, it’s topography and it’s vegetation. See the plans available in Drawing Matter Collection (DMC) (A. Ponis, 2018).

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