



LA CASA

ESPACIOS DOMÉSTICOS
MODOS DE HABITAR

ABADA EDITORES

LA CASA

ESPACIOS DOMÉSTICOS MODOS DE HABITAR

II CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL CULTURA Y CIUDAD
GRANADA, 23-25 ENERO 2019



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La Casa. Espacios domésticos, modos de habitar
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Repetición y geometría: la casa del pintor Zigaina diseñada por el arquitecto Giancarlo De Carlo

Repetition and Geometry: The House of the Painter Zigaina Designed by Giancarlo De Carlo

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Resumen

En 1958, el arquitecto Giancarlo De Carlo diseñó la casa para el pintor Zigaina en un pequeño pueblo del norte de Italia. Principalmente conocido por sus teorías urbanas y su participación en el Team X, el arquitecto De Carlo en este proyecto interpreta una visión moderna de la casa singular. En esta casa encontramos el tema compositivo del uso de un solo elemento, en este caso el octágono, repetido y ampliado varias veces. A partir de la agregación de estas repeticiones, a través del elemento del techo inclinado - un elemento único que dicta el sentido horizontal de la casa - encontramos la unidad de la vivienda. La comunicación debate el tema del espacio doméstico unifamiliar en la modernidad a través del ejemplo de la casa construida por De Carlo. El objetivo es relacionar las cuestiones de composición del proyecto analizado con el proyecto de la casa unifamiliar en el moderno, destacando la nueva concepción de espacio de la casa, fuertemente ligado a la tradición.

Palabras clave: repetición, geometría, modernidad, tradición, De Carlo

Bloque temático: El proyecto doméstico como núcleo de la modernidad: casa singular y vivienda colectiva, del Movimiento Moderno al siglo XXI

Abstract

In 1958, the architect Giancarlo De Carlo designed the house for the painter Zigaina in a small town in the north of Italy. Mainly known for his urban theories and his participation in the Team X, the architect De Carlo in this project interprets a modern vision of the single-family home. It is a house with separated rooms, connected through small spaces like corridors. These spaces are covered by a gable roof. The unity of the house is obtained through the decomposition of the spaces - aggregates - and the recomposition of the elements with the large roof. The paper deals with the design of a single-family home in the Modernity through the example of the house built by De Carlo. The aim of the research is to relate the composition issues of this project with the issues related to the project of the single-family house in the Modern, highlighting a new way to face the topic of the house, strongly linked to the tradition.

Keywords: repetition, geometry, modernity, tradition, De Carlo

Topic: *The domestic project as the heart of modernity: the single, one-off house and collective housing, from the Modern Movement to the 21st century*

Introduction

Giancarlo De Carlo was an Italian architect, designer, theorist and teacher at the schools of Architecture in Venice, founder of the ILAUD International Laboratory of Architecture and Urbanism and of the magazine *Spazio e Società*. His tireless theoretical activity - combined with professional experiences - has made him a leading figure in the Italian architectural scene in the years from the 50s to the end of the last century. His fame is associated mainly to his works in Urbino and his theories on the city and on the citizens active involvement in the urban transformations and in the house's themes.

Since the beginning of his career he separates himself from the teaching of the Modern architects, looking for an idea of architecture and town that - although it has treasured the doctrines of its predecessors - could be modern following the real needs of the contemporary and of its inhabitants.

For this reason when he was a young designer in 1956 he leaves the editorial office of Casabella Continuità because he is contrary to the "continuity" line established by his director Ernesto Rogers, participates at the last meeting of CIAM in 1959, he moves away and joins the emerging group Team X. In these years he outlines his personal position on the issues about the Modernity and his legacy in the national and international debate.

The project of the House for the painter Giuseppe Zigaina is particularly interesting within De Carlo's work because it is a sporadic example. In fact De Carlo has designed not many single-family houses and his greatest fame is due to the study on collective residences and to his researches involving the inhabitants in the design's process.

Zigaina House was also designed and built when De Carlo took a position within the international debate about the relationship among Modernity and the traditional architecture and about the way to live in the modern city and in a modern house. This house is published in the magazine *L'architettura. Cronache e storia* together with another project designed by De Carlo, a building of public housing in Matera.¹

This project designed by the Italian architect is also presented at the CIAM of Otterlo - together with the project of housing in the Comasina neighborhood in Milan - and it is subject of harsh criticism that CIAM participants bring to De Carlo - as well as the rest of the Italians architects: Gardella, Magistretti and Rogers - for being traitors of the purity of modern language in exchange for a return to the tradition: «of cornices and pitched roofs, of vertical cuts in facades and of the use of traditional materials».²

The experience of the Zigaina House thus becomes, in the De Carlo's work, emblematic of a personal way of thinking about the architecture and about the legacy of modernity. In a period of time where the international debate on architecture, in which the Italian architect himself is a protagonist, wonders about the same topics showing the critical issues and the difficulty of reaching a unique synthesis.

¹ Renato Pedio, "Abitazioni nel Friuli e in Lucania". *L'architettura. Cronache e storia*, n.° 50 (1959): 514-523.

² Angela Mioni and Etra Connie Occhialini, eds. *Giancarlo De Carlo. Immagini e frammenti*. (Milan: Electa, 1995), 29. Translation by the author.

1. The relationship between the architect and the customer-artist

The architect De Carlo and the painter Zigaina were bound by a friendship. At the *X Triennale* organized in 1954 by De Carlo with Ludovico Quaroni and Carlo Doglio, Zigaina is invited to participate with his work *La Trebbiatura*, a great neorealist painting inspired by the rural world.

As the painter said, he had shown De Carlo a farmhouse that was located in Cervignano del Friuli, near where his house would be built, as an example of his idea of a dwelling and to explain his aspirations for his space to live and work:

The first thing I asked De Carlo was to design a simple, basic house. - says the artist - And to explain this better, I showed him - when he visited for the first time the site - an old farmhouse on the outskirts of Cervignano: a very low house with the shape of a U to close a large tree in the inner courtyard where the roof protrudes around the perimeter to form a portico supported by plastered pillars. It was perhaps a naive vision from the point of view of the architectural form, but its character was clear, unequivocal.³



Figure 1: View of the house from the outside
Source: Pedio, "Abitazioni nel Friuli...", 514

De Carlo responds to the customer's requests with the project of a house where traditional elements blend into a modern language.

On the magazine *Abitare* - where both are interviewed - they talk about a shared work at a time when the expressive and artistic interests of both coincided. In the interview, based on the topic of the relationship between the designer and the client, De Carlo remembers that:

During the works, especially during the construction of the house, our coincidences have acted; and together, often in a close dialogue, we have tried to solve some problems that seemed important to us. For example, that of getting sober and direct treatments of the materials and basic relationships that establish an agreement between the hardness and sharpness of the Friulian environment.⁴

³ "La casa del pittore Zigaina". *Abitare*, n° 11 (1962): 24. Translation by the author.

⁴ "La casa del pittore...", 20. Translation by the author.

Instead Zigaina in his interview at first criticizes his designer, accusing him of not having fully responded to his needs and of making intellectual manipulation of the popular culture, in the continuation of the interview instead tells how, beyond the clash on some issues during the construction of the house, he has never questioned the project of De Carlo, always demanding a scrupulous fidelity to his drawings during the works.

Albeit the main object of the two interviews is the question of the house furnishing– and both, De Carlo and Zigaina, agree that the people who live in the house and not the architect choose and define it - and from their words we understand that the Zigaina house is based on comparison about the topic of the house, the living and the relationship between the tradition and the Modernity, in which they have shared the same spirit, although with different ways and judgments about the outcome.

A few years later, Zigaina, in collaboration with the architect Ado Buiatti, expanded the house with the addition of four new pavilions - such as the new garage and guesthouse - and changes the studio's windows to create a greater scattered light. These changes don't alter the building designed by De Carlo; the outdoor space, however, is compromised by the annexation of two adjacent lots and the expansion of the property to about 11000 m² with the removal of the edge built by De Carlo and the transformation of the garage into a new room with a space for guests.

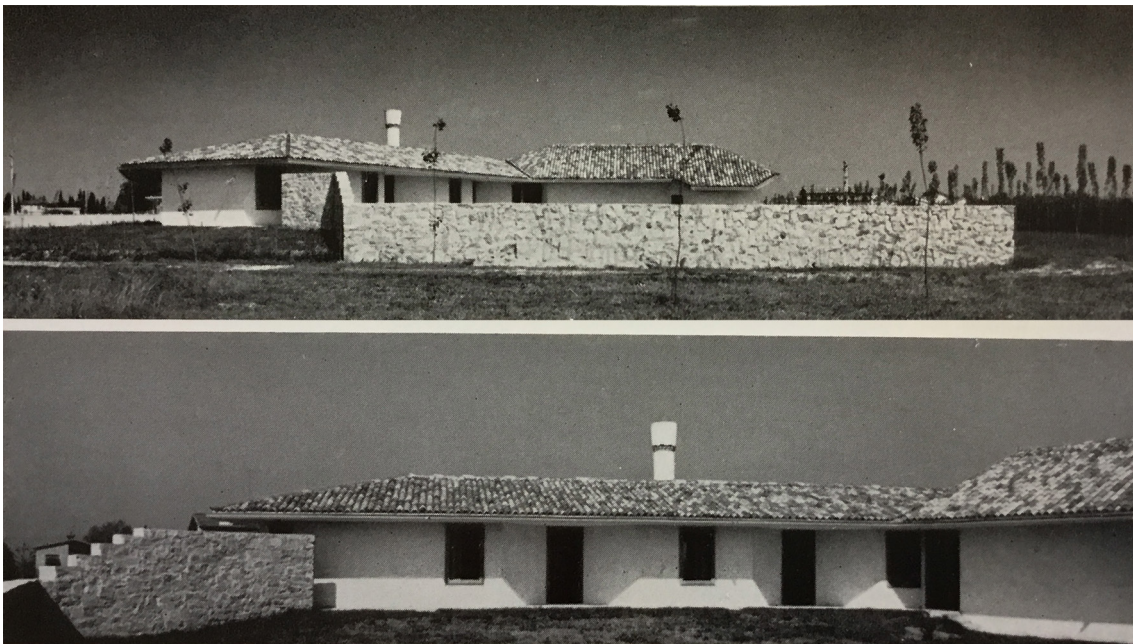


Figure 2: : View of the house from the outside.
Source: Roberto Aloï, *Ville in Italia* (Milano: Hoepli, 1960), 166

2. The design of the house

The house designed by De Carlo for the painter Zigaina is located in Cervignano del Friuli, a town in the province of Udine, in the north-east of Italy.

The house was originally built on a plot of 2500 sqm, with an interior space of 250 m². Around it is surrounded by a garden.

The house is characterized by the organization of six distinct units of polygonal shape. The volumes are organized on three geometric axes. The first is the heliocentric axis and on this there is the real core of the house made in sequence with the bedrooms, the living room and the dining room; the second is the vertical axis in the north direction and on this there is the painter's studio; on the third axis there is the kitchen. In the intersection between the three axes there is the main entry of the house.

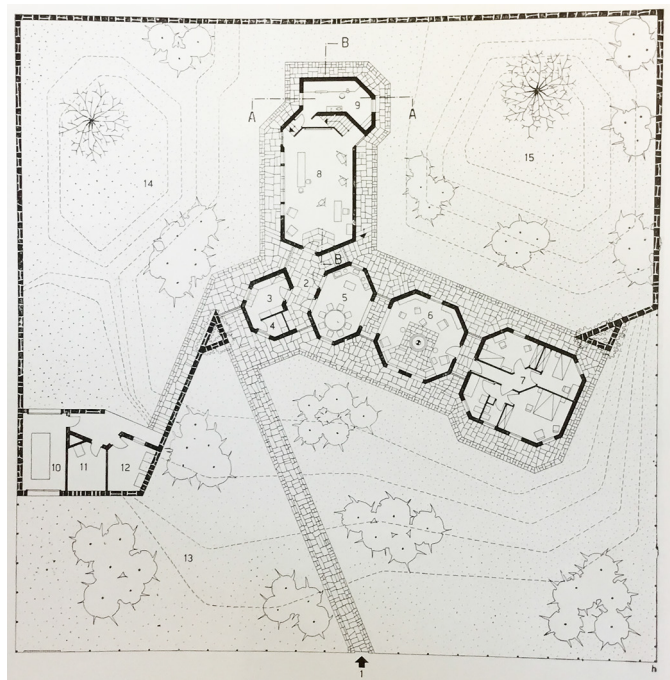


Figure 3: Plan of the house
Source: Aloï, *Ville in Italia...*, 167

The axis on which there is the kitchen is pointing in the direction of two other pavilions, outside the house, but inside the garden that are the garage, the laundry room and a small technical room.

The three axes divide the garden in three different spaces. The first garden is a private space that overlooks the bedrooms, the dining room and the living room. The second garden is another kind of private space which overlooks the garage and the laundry room with the pedestrian path that connects it with the main entrance of the house and also connects the entrance of the house with the small kitchen. The third garden, which connects the garage and the laundry room with the bedrooms, is crossed by the pedestrian path that connects the street to the main entrance of the house. This garden is the only one open to the street while the other two are separated - on the edge of the lot - from the outside with walls made of karstic stone thrown into molds and left rough. The painter's studio - placed on a lower floor of about 50 cm - is separated, on both its sides, by the first and the second garden through two walls.

The units of the house are surrounded by a circular pedestrian path that connects to the two pedestrian access paths to the house, the one from the street and the other one connecting the garage and the laundry. The paths are made of slabs of flint that partially enter into the house, in the interstitial spaces connecting the separate units. The units of the house have a height of 2.40 meters, with the exception of the painter's studio. Here the space is divided into a large room that is the study, of 4.25 meters in height and in a little room, where there is a laboratory,

reached from the studio through a few steps that lead to a lower level and a guest bedroom with bathroom on the upper floor reached by a ladder.

The different units of the house are covered by the unique element: the pitched roof made with tiles. The cover protrudes from the volumes below.

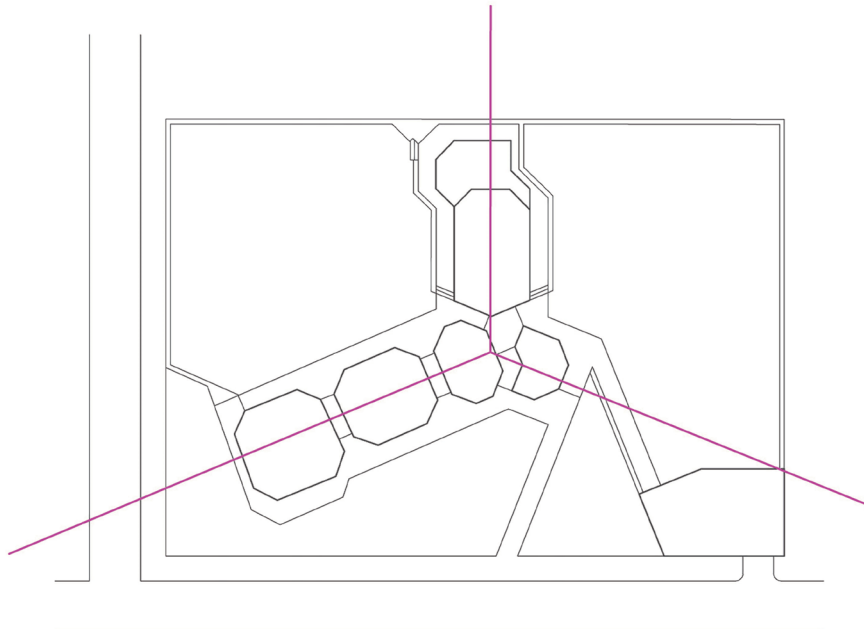


Figure 4: Project axis
Source: L. Smeragliuolo Perrotta

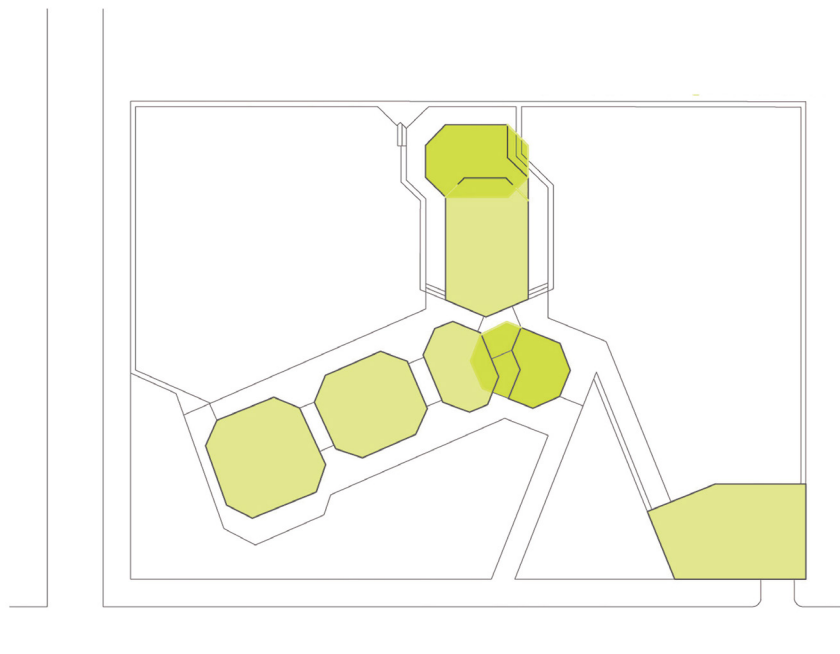


Figure 5: Project geometry
Source: L. Smeragliuolo Perrotta

3. Design issues

The geometry that underlies the composition is characterized by the repetition of the modular element that changes in size, growing and changing even in its internal proportions. The project of the Zigaina house is based on a single geometric element, the octagon. The octagon is used as a basic shape, changing in size according to the different spaces.

The geometric element is repeated several times along the lines of the composition. The units of the house aren't aggregated adjacently but are spaced from each other by filter spaces that are repeated without modifying their size.

The composition is characterized by the variation of compact and empty spaces; the compact spaces are the rooms that make the house, while the empty spaces are the small interstitial spaces that connect them. Compact and empty spaces give rhythm to the composition. The continuous sloping roof collects, underneath, the singular spaces with a single and unifying gesture.

The sleeping area is organized in three bedrooms and two bathrooms, with the entry from a central space. On the heliocentric axis, next to the sleeping area, there is the living room. Here De Carlo uses a traditional element of the Italian Region Friuli Venezia Giulia - the central fireplace - as a shelter space where people can be together. The fireplace is placed at a slightly lower level, obtaining seats around it. The dining room and the kitchen are on two different axes. In the geometric intersection of the two elements - and in particular in the cutting of the kitchen volume - the main entrance to the house is obtained. From the entrance it is possible access to the painter's studio placed along the north axis at a lower level.

The unity of the house is obtained through the decomposition of the spaces - aggregates - and the recomposition of the elements by the large roof. The interstitial spaces between the elements of the house are the connection between the elements themselves and also they connect the house to the garden. They are decompression spaces within the rhythm of the sequence of the house, but they are also points of views that cross the house transversally. The house designed by De Carlo for the painter Zigaina is located in Cervignano del Friuli, a town in the province of Udine, in the north-east of Italy.



Figure 6: The living room
Source: Pedio, "Abitazioni nel Friuli...", 519

4. Conclusions

The house for the painter Zigaina has often been associated by architectural critics to Wright's influences on Italian architects linked to the school of Venice, such as Carlo Scarpa, Angelo Masieri and Marcello D'Olivo, which - like De Carlo - had worked at individual house projects in the same geographic area where the Zigaina house is located. According to Brunetti and Gisi, the planimetric organization, and in particular the units of the residence that are aligned along the heliocentric axis in a symmetrical way and then that open in contact with the polygon of the kitchen creating the entrance of the house towards the garden, is a sign of the Wright's style.⁵ Instead, for Benedict Zucchi the Wright's influence is not directly in the formal sense:

Wright's plans were always rigorously structured around a grid – but in the way the composition of the building has been thought of in a relation to the activities it contains: 'house' and 'studio' are dedicated separated wings and the individual rooms of the house are visibly differentiated.⁶

Beyond the influences that are attributed in retrospect by the commentators to his work, certainly De Carlo in this house, although small and modest in relation to his other works, had felt the need to search for an expression and a character of the living. His comments and his questions - which are reported in the description of the house in the magazine *L'Architettura Cronache e Storia* - are in fact aimed at the search for this expression:

We wanted the feedback before that in Matera, here in Cervignano: "individual" house, for a friend, and a painter friend, and in a land full of local suggestions and modern ferments, and on the other hand among the "houses of the surveyors": a dangerously free topic. Distorting the landscape with a provocative and imaginative house? Here the basic modesty is betrayed. Give into the vernacular solution? Betrayed culture. Suffering the objective conditions, not only, that is, the physical ones (like the aquifers that have forbidden the cellars), but the elementary nature of the lot, the deaf cubism of the "little houses", the anonymity? Betrayed, tout-court, the craft. Where is the agreement between modesty and personality? How to qualify the environment without stressing it; the expression without intensifying it; the singularity without making it ordinary? And how to blend a hard and rigorous fundamentals with the creativity that the issue and the customer search? The risk of contradicting itself is very strong: before the figurative outcome, it is the style level, the consistency of the fundamentals, which now is important⁷.

In this house De Carlo wrote, with a modern language, a way of living. He decomposed the house into small entities held together through the articulation of the interstitial spaces and brought together by the pitched roof made with traditional materials and techniques that collects the elements of the composition. The interstitial spaces, the small corridors or filter spaces between the volumes, are the modern reinterpretation of the crossing room. The crossing of the house, however, is not only in the longitudinal sense, but a system of transversal relationship between the spaces, principally of visual, is constructed, «the exterior filters through "passing through lines"».⁸

⁵ Fabrizio Brunetti and Fabrizio Gesi, eds., *Giancarlo De Carlo*. (Florence: Alinea, 1981), 111-113.

⁶ Benedict Zucchi, *Giancarlo De Carlo* (Oxford: Butterworth, 1992), 181. Translation by the author.

⁷ Pedio, "Abitazioni nel Friuli...", 517. Translation by the author.

⁸ Pedio, "Abitazioni nel Friuli...", 518. Translation by the author.



Figure 7: View of the painter in the garden through the filter spaces
Source: "La casa del pittore Zigaina", *Abitare*, n.° 11 (1962): 27

The interstitial spaces that link the external spaces of the house are enclosed spaces that are accessed from the rooms of the house and overlook the inner garden of the house. These spaces have a strong relationship with the exterior, highlighted by the continuity of the flooring that in the internal spaces is in slats of larch wood while the connecting spaces and the external path are a continuous surface in slabs of flint.

In the design of this house the relationship with the tradition is shown through the choice and the way of materials are used but also in the elements that characterize the spaces like the *fogolar*, the central fireplace in the living room of the Friulian tradition. In this house - as Renato Pedio writes: «the local elements (the fireplace, the big hollow bricks, the plaster worked with a trowel) are part of a rigorous, introverted, cultured and apted result: that is the aim of De Carlo».⁹ Pedio, on the magazine *L'architettura. Cronache e storia*, commenting on the project of the public housing in Matera, talks about a challenge by the architect de Carlo where: «the building embodies much more deeply the principles that inspired it. If Cervignano is a collected challenge. Matera is a confirmation of a style».¹⁰

The house for the painter Zigaina is therefore an experience in which De Carlo embryonically shows some important keys of his thought. Here De Carlo returns to an idea of a traditional

⁹ Pedio, "Abitazioni nel Friuli...", 518. Translation by the author.

¹⁰ Pedio, "Abitazioni nel Friuli...", 520. Translation by the author.

home, using local materials and construction techniques but reinterpreting them in a modern way. The underlying thought, confirmed by his later works, is that at the basis of architecture there must be the need to build a dialogue between tradition and modernity. Reading the city, the place, the local culture becomes the basis of the project. And the architecture - like the city is a complex and stratified system of signs - is the construction of a process that is built with the interaction of its instruments such as geometry, shape control, rhythm, the alternation of compact and empty spaces and a use of materials that support their nature.

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