



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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Registro de una mirada, Cape Cod House	1981
Jorge Gabriel Molinero Sánchez, María del Carmen Vilchez Lara	
La casa como metáfora del viaje. Fotógrafos y arquitectos en Mallorca	1993
María Josep Mulet Gutiérrez, Joan Carles Oliver Torelló, María Sebastián Sebastián	
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Casas de vacaciones en Italia durante los años treinta del siglo XX *Holiday Houses in Italy in the 1930s*

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Resumen

Durante de los años treinta del siglo XIX las casas de vacaciones despertaron la curiosidad de los arquitectos italianos que les destinaron expresamente una sección en la exposición de la vivienda en la Trienal de Milán (1933). Las cinco casas presentadas en ese evento mostraron cómo la arquitectura moderna, a través de un actualizado lenguaje en composición y tecnología, podía satisfacer las exigencias de los nuevos estilos de vida en la sociedad contemporánea. En los años siguientes, este tipo de edificación fue reinventado totalmente, reemplazando al conocido *villino signorile*, expresión despreciativa usada por los contemporáneos para indicar las casas de vacaciones construidas hasta aquel momento sin estilo y con muy mal gusto, que llegaban a producir graves pérdidas en el paisaje natural. El artículo describe un cuadro de las experiencias de las obras realizadas que contribuyeron a la determinación, en la cultura de aquella época, de la imagen de la casa de vacaciones ideal, una imagen que, por su riqueza de valores, se ha mantenido sin cambios hasta el día de hoy.

Palabras clave: casa para vacacionar, arquitectura en italia, paisaje, naturaleza

Bloque temático: La casa: mitos, arquetipos, modos de habitar

Abstract

During the 1930s, holiday houses provoked a lot of attention from italian architects, who dedicated to it a particular section at the Exhibition of Housing during the V Triennial in Milano (1933). The five houses presented at that event demonstrated how modern architecture, with a compositional and technological renovated style could satisfy the needs of the new lifestyles of the contemporary society. During the following years, this type of building was totally reinvented replacing the famous "villino signorile": a pejorative term with which contemporaries identified holiday houses realized up to then with no style and with terrible taste that damaged the natural landscape. The article outlines all the project experiences that have greatly contributed in determining within the culture of the time, an image of the ideal holiday house, an image that for its greatness in terms of values has remained practically unchanged till today.

Keywords: holiday house, architecture in italy, landscape, nature

Topic: The house: myths, archetypes, ways of living

Introduction

In conjunction with the development of the modern movement in Italy, criticism regarding traditional architectural models that were still conceived with shapes and symbols of the past was accentuated. Among these building types, was also included the holiday house that up to then was named by the contemporaries “villino signorile” to indicate that it was meant to be a dwelling of the middle-class society, away from the city, realized according to styles non longer existent. The Exhibition of Housing during the V Triennial in Milano (1933) which hosted five holiday houses realised with a modern style, marked the beginning of a decisive turnover in the evolution of this type. From then, specialised media, such as architectural journals, aboveall *Domus*, promoted a strong campaign in favour of the holiday house conceived with all innovative criterions and able to satisfy the needs of every type of clientele. In only one decade, thanks to the effort and work of architects such as Gio Ponti, Eugenio Faludi, Enrico A. Griffini, Piero Bottoni, Luigi Cosenza, Bernard Rudofsky, Adalberto Libera, and many others, the old “villino” was completely superseded. On the basis of the bibliography and of the journals of that time, projects that best represent the new holiday house which have marked a fundamental phase in the history of the culture of modern housing in Italy have been examined.

1. Holiday houses and standardised types at the Housing Exhibition

During the 1930s, Italian architecture went through a period of conceptual, stylistic and technical transformation of great importance which led to the forming of a new architectural appearance that had vast repercussions also on the customs of that time. This transformation of the architecture, as Gio Ponti in 1933 wrote, was fruit of three stages of phenomena:

- a) a social and civil evolution, already intensely present, thereby perfecting the needs of life of various classes;
- b) a true technical evolution given to the development and application of new materials, to new applications of traditional materials, to the introduction of more efficient mechanical means of building;
- c) a more complete approximation of the characteristics of a few modern buildings conceived as functional organisms leading to the characterizing of types.¹

In this frame of renewal, a prominent position goes to the “holiday house” which in a period of only ten years, was totally reinvented overriding the type named “villino signorile”: a pejorative term with which the contemporaries identified holiday housing realized without style and with poor taste capable of giving even the surrounding landscape a dreadful reputation.²

Contributing to the crisis of the ideology of the “villino” (imprinted in the mentality of many people of the society of that time) was first of all the Housing Exhibition of the V Triennial of Milano in 1933 and consequently specialized media, such as architectural journals which brought to the attention of developers houses planned in an all-round innovative way and capable of satisfying the needs of whichever type of client.

At the Exhibition, for the first time, five “holiday houses” were exhibited and developed by Architects Eugenio Faludi, Enrico A. Griffini and Piero Bottoni, financially sustainable and of

¹ Gio Ponti, “Editoriale”, *Domus*, n.° 61 (1933): 2.

² Gio Ponti, “Case per vacanza”, *Domus*, n.° 66 (1933): 291-292.

simple realization (a house by the lake or by the sea, a house in the hills, a house in the mountains, a beach house and a country house) (Figure 1.1).

The dimensions vary from 48 to 92 Sqm, of which a few were dismantable and easily transportable (a house by the lake or by the sea by Faludi, a house in the hills by Griffini, Faludi and Bottoni); others had a permanent structure having been built in masonry (a house in the mountains). Their price varied from a minimum of 16,000 Lire to a maximum of 35,000 and the timing of realization started from a minimum of 8 days to a maximum of 14. The materials used were wood, masonry, corrugated asbestos, magnesite, cinder blocks, visible Mannesmann tubing, Litoceramics (comparable to Klinker, but produced in Italy).³

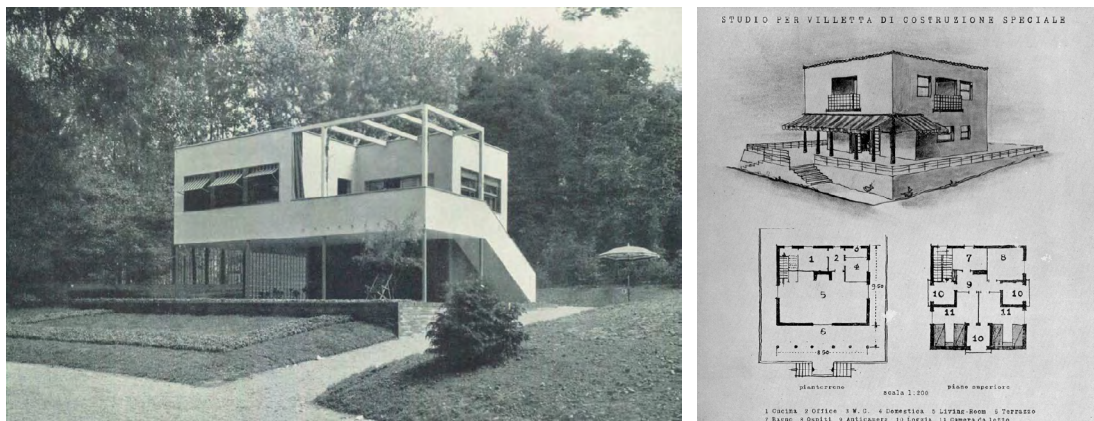


Figure 1.1: Beach house, Exhibition of Housing during the V Triennial in Milano

Source: "Case per vacanza", *Domus*, n.° 66 (1933): 296

Figure 1.2: Federico Schmidt, A study for a special "villa"

Source: "Al mare ai monti...una villetta per tutti", *La Casa Bella*, n.° 42 (1931): 47

It is precisely for their characteristics that their success was recognised and appreciated also among critics. According to Siegfried Giedon (1933) they represented the better and more successful part of all the Exhibition of Milano while according to Cornelius Van Esteren, they demonstrated how also in Italy, functional architecture was progressing well.⁴

After the Exhibition, the argument relating to the holiday house, as it had been idealised and presented, progressively began to arouse the interest of the public and of developers, not only because they represented a "nazionale" problem, as Gio Ponti (1940) would have said, but also because of its technical and figurative qualities that rendered it accessible to everyone.⁵

As of 1931 in the journal titled *La Casa Bella*, a few projects regarding the "villette" for holidays of the Architect Federico Schmidt appeared which had the quality of being affordable and easily realized having all the standardised elements (Figure 1.2). Apart from these purely technical aspects, these projects identified on a component level, a few elements considered necessary in a "holiday house", among these: the informality of the internal settings, the presence of a big lounge area (meant as the central nucleus of the house, similar to the living-room of English houses) opened to terraces, porches or balconies; the use of building materials able to protect

³ Ponti, "Case per vacanza...", 293-300.

⁴ Giancarlo Consonni, "Quattro case per vacanza alla V Triennale di Milano", in *Piero Bottoni. Opera completa*, ed. by Giancarlo Consonni, Lodovico Meneghetti and Graziella Tonon (Milano: Fabbri Editori, 1990): 204.

⁵ Gio Ponti, "Problemi italiani dell'abitazione al mare", *Domus*, n.°152 (1940): 19.

from the heat and from the cold. The houses of Schmidt (according to the author) had already been widespread in central Europe for twenty years.⁶

Analogous solutions, however, as we have seen were also displayed at the Exhibition. On the other hand, away from the group of the five holiday houses, other types of buildings that had analogue characteristics to those of Schmidt were present, but more interesting on the level of appearance. An example is the "little house" in wood by Emilio Lancia, of approximately 90 Sqm, nearly entirely reproducible.⁷

Furthermore, within the commercial circuits, more economic models were available, but always standardised, as "La capanna in legno" (the wooden cottage) by the Viennese Architect Niedermoser and the "Casetta smontabile" (the dismantable house)⁸ by Enrico Griffini who paid a great deal of attention to the internal decorations designed for the occasion by Architect Guido Frette.⁹ At the same time, diagram models of the "casa del sabato", (the Saturday house) intended as a small villa in the hills or some other place to have a short holiday started to appear in a few journals. It is the case of *Domus* which published a collection of 11 plans designed by various architects (Faludi, Stefano Zwirn, Grunzweig, Gerskenberger, Pleiffer, Farkas, Kotsis, Silverio, Hytonen and Lunkkonen, Worle).¹⁰

2. The ideal house between myth and reality

Standardised or not, the holiday house became a leitmotiv of a few journals of the 1930s, contributing in diffusing the taste for modern architecture. Always at the Exhibition of 1933 a few houses in masonry were displayed (along with others) from the more brilliant rational architects of the country. One of the most interesting, for its elegance and simplicity of its architecture, was "La casa del sabato per gli sposi" (Saturday house for couples) by Piero Portaluppi and the BBPR group (Figure 2.1).¹¹ It presented a particular plan formed by a rectangular body (comprising a bedroom) finishing up with a semi-circular setting (which included the lounge area), dominated by a prestigious eolic staircase (realized in marble by Ornavasso) which connected to the solarium on the rooftop. Around the staircase, a big platform in a semi-circle completed in the open area the geometrical design of the lounge room. The external surfaces of the walls were plastered and painted light green.¹²

The consensus that these types of buildings were having induced the staff of the journal *Domus* to publish with a certain frequency, both images of holiday houses (constructed) and projects for ideal clients, designed by emerging architects, among which Gio Ponti, the then leader of the same journal. Each of them could offer his own personal vision of one's ideal holiday house, by

⁶ "La casa per le vacanze settimanali", *Domus*, n.° 31 (1930): 60-61; "Al mare ai monti...una villetta per tutti", *La Casa Bella*, n.° 42 (1931): 46.

⁷ "Casetta in legno per le vacanze", *Domus*, n.° 68 (1933): 416-417; Giancarlo Palanti, "Casa di legno per vacanza", *Edilizia Moderna*, n.° 10-11 (1933): 24-27.

⁸ "Capanna in legno", *Domus*, n.° 81 (1934): 46-47.

⁹ "Una casetta smontabile", *Domus*, n.° 137 (1939): 76.

¹⁰ "Caratteristiche comparate di alcune piccole costruzioni per le brevi vacanze", *Domus*, n.° 77 (1933): 6-7.

¹¹ Architects Banfi, Belgioioso, Peressutti e Rogers.

¹² "La casa del sabato per gli sposi", *Domus*, n.° 68 (1933): 409-411; Agnolodomenico Pica, *V Triennale di Milano, Catalogo ufficiale* (Milano: Ceschina, 1933), 633-635.

publishing to generate among the architectural culture of the time, the “myth” of the isolated house among nature. In fact, the natural environment, retained in all of its projects, a determining role, so as to inspire the geometry of the same building. In other words, nature and the landscape (above all wild) became part of the domestic settings.

Significant is the project of Ponti for a house planned along a stretch of high shore, rocky and bordered with pines at Riviera di Ponente (Figure 2.2). It defines a long, low and white parallelepiped suitable to the shape of the site and endowed with a big central setting that faces the sea.

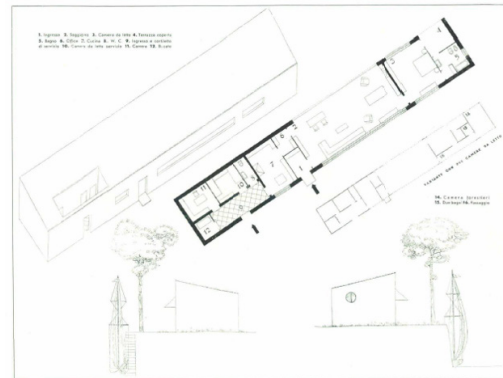
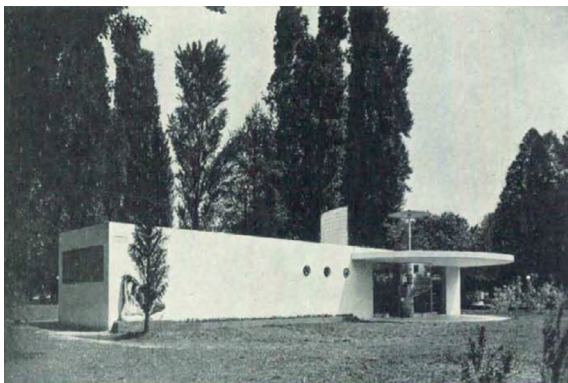


Figure 2.1: Piero Portaluppi and the BBPR Group, Saturday house for couples

Source: “La casa del sabato per per gli sposi”, *Domus*, n.° 68 (1933): 409

Figure 2.2: Gio Ponti, Beach house, project

Source: “Una casa al mare”, *Domus*, n.° 89 (1935): 9

As the same author refers, it was idealized «for people who loved to live in direct contact with nature and with simplicity».¹³

Even the house planned by Luigi Cosenza and Bernard Rudofsky for an imaginary friend was located in an unique and spectacular place, a cliff of the coast of Positano (Figure 3.1). The authors would write:

This is a house for a healthy and secluded life near the stupendous views of our islands and coasts of the Tyrrhenian. Not middle-class building exhibitions (the notorious “villino”), but an honest dwelling for a pure and blessed evasion from the city preoccupations.¹⁴

With these words, the idea and the shape of the authors’ ideal house is condensed: two sharp parallelepipeds up against a natural cliff, one entirely in limestone masonry, the other plastered and painted white. The attic which covers and binds them is hollow in the central part which permits the vegetation (magnolia and fig) to miss the building and grow inside the large lounge area, completely opened facing the landscape.

In reality, the type of houses built into cliffs were not very popular given the difficulty to build in coastal zones subjected to the protection of the environment as of the mid-20s. Nevertheless, audacious and out of the ordinary realisations under a compositional profile were not absent. The more renowned among them is without doubt, the house of the writer Curzio Malaparte

¹³ Gio Ponti, “Una casa al mare”, *Domus*, n.° 89 (1935): 8-9.

¹⁴ “Una villa per Positano e per.... altri lidi”, *Domus*, n.° 109 (1937): 12-13.

(Figure 3.2) realized on a “wild” promontory of the island of Capri (1938-1942).¹⁵ It was designed by the architect, Adalberto Libera, but was modified while work was in progress by the same client that wanted to give the house, an image of himself. The building is composed of low volume and a wing built into the cliff; to the regularity of the three fronts, on which there are a series of windows that depict the settings with a landscape, in contrast to the one towards the ground, untypically closed by a unique steep spiral staircase which connects the roof-terrace (solarium) to the ground. Casa Malaparte, thanks to its particular architecture perfectly in harmony with the setting and for its interior, conceived according to the taste of the client, represents one of the more significant buildings realised in Italy in the 1930s.



Figure 3.1: Luigi Cosenza and Bernard Rudofsky, A “villa” for Positano, plastic of the project

Source: “Una villa per Positano e per.... altri lidi”, *Domus*, n.° 109 (1937): 11

Figure 3.2: Adalberto Libera and Curzio Malaparte, The Malaparte House, Capri, 1938-1942

Source: Cesare de Seta, *L'architettura del Novecento* (Torino: Utet, 1981): 96

Even the holiday house built into a cliff in Cannobio (1936) on Lago Maggiore, planned some years before by Luigi Vietti, is a reflection of the author's strong will power to anchor it to the nature of the terrain, so as to include in his house, the images of an unique and spectacular landscape. Named, La Roccia (1930),¹⁶ the building has the shape of an irregular round terrace comprising of three levels facing the lake. The house, as the author writes, is:

aggrappata alla roccia, si confonde con essa nella parte basamentale e viene ad inserirsi nell'ambiente naturale che la circonda, realizzando quell'accordo fra natura e architettura che è ragione estetica essenziale in questo genere di costruzioni: effettivamente un volume così esattamente geometrico è tale che l'accordo risulta per “opposti”, e sarebbe interessante il discorso sulle due tendenze architettoniche in questi casi: o cercare un armonia anche conservando un autonomia di forme come in questo caso, o cercarla attraverso una certa “imitazione della natura”.¹⁷

¹⁵ Marida Talamona, *Casa Malaparte* (Sesto S. Giovanni: Clup, 1990); Talamona, “Casa Malaparte. Capri”, in *Architettura del Novecento. Opere, progetti, luoghi*, ed. by M. Biraghi, A. Ferlenga (Torino: Einaudi, 2013), vol. 2, 277-283.

¹⁶ Paola Veronica Dell'Aira, *Luigi Vietti* (Firenze: Alinea, 1997), 98-100.

¹⁷ [Translation of the author: Anchored onto the cliff, it confuses itself within the basement part and is inserted in the natural setting which surrounds it, realizing an agreement between nature and architecture which is an essential and reasonable appearance in this type of building: in effect, a volume exactly geometrical is such that the agreement results as “opposing” and the argument relating to the two architectural tendencies in these cases, would be interesting: or look for harmony, preserving autonomous shapes as in this case, or look for it by a certain “imitation of nature”]. “La Roccia”, *Domus*, n.° 114 (1937): 2.

These interesting reflections of Vietti render the idea better of what was once the orientation of planners with regards to the relationship between nature and architecture, a core argument for the construction of a holiday house. It is precisely on this aspect that at the end of the 1930s, the journal *Domus* intensified the publication of projects for imaginary clients, in which major importance to the private green areas and to the architectural culture of the places was attributed.

3. The binomial of nature-architecture

The cardinal element of all these projects (realized or non) are represented by the binomial of “nature-architecture”. The plans chosen were the result of a careful study of the characteristics of the places and of the local technical construction culture. Thus, implying above all, great appreciation for nature and for the landscape. Every holiday house needed to be different from the other given that they arose in different places:

Le une, infatti, non potrebbero essere sostituite dalle altre [...] non devono essere accettati i banalissimi schemi del cosiddetto “900”, pronti ad ogni diversa occasione. Non esistono schemi ripetibili, soprattutto in costruzioni di questo genere. Da un vivo amore sincero per la natura devono nascere ogni volta queste forme, in una loro emozione originale. La casa si affaccia ogni volta a diversi panorami: diverse esigenze si pongono a chi abita la pianura o la montagna.¹⁸

The beach house idealized in the 1930s is different from the house in the mountains or from the house in the countryside. Generally, it is an isolated building, sometimes surrounded by greenery, characterized by simple and white volumes. It has thick walls, low settings, vivid and relaxing colours, shady porches and interior furnished with simple furniture. An idea of this type of house that should appear as an element of landscape, is offered by numerous projects by Gio Ponti (published in *Domus*) from Villa Marchesano a Bordighera, by the same architect, built in 1938 based on the house for Riviera di Ponente model abovementioned.¹⁹ In these projects, the settings are organised around a big lounge room facing the sea and the openings on the perimeter walls are created in relation to the views of the landscape. The use of neapolitan ceramic tiles for paving (with white and blue diagonally striped design in the house at Bordighera), the plastered wallspainted white,²⁰ cut out niches from the thickness of the walls, re-evoked a desired mediterranean architecture.²¹

With the same practical and rational values, a “real life” environment was also conceived in the house in the mountains as well as the house in the countryside, published in journals in the 1930s. Not flamboyant and pretentious villas, but pure geometry of the volumes, big windows and porches able to “absorb” the light and the colours of the landscape. The architecture is integrated with the vegetation of the garden forming a single varied setting able to offer to those

¹⁸ [Translation of the author: In fact, one could not be substituted by the others [...] banal plans of the so-called “900”, ready in every different situation must not be accepted. Repeatable plans do not exist, above all in constructions of this type. From a sincere passion for nature, these shapes need to be born, in one of their original emotions. The house faces different panoramas each time: different needs for those who live on the plains or in the mountains is addressed]. “Due progetti di ville al mare”, *Domus*, n.° 140 (1939): 30.

¹⁹ Gio Ponti, “Proposta di una casa al mare”, *Domus*, n.° 138 (1939): 40-49.

²⁰ Gio Ponti, “Una casa al mare”, *Domus*, n.° 138 (1939): 34-39.

²¹ Ponti, *Problemi italiani...*, 19-20. See also Lucia Miodini, “Il progetto domestico della casa all’italiana e il dibattito sulle origini mediterranee dell’abitazione moderna”, in *Immaginare il Mediterraneo. Architettura arti fotografia*, ed. by Andrea Maglio, Fabio Mangone, Antonio Piza (Napoli: Artstudiopaparo, 2017), 167-177.

living there to intimately enjoy life among nature.²² Also in these houses, the internal spaces were in direct contact with the external spaces and the lounge area constituted the central key area of all the plan.²³

Even after their modern style had become part of the landscape as a natural complement,²⁴ in some projects, a certain sense of belonging to rural architecture is noted (farmhouses, peasant houses, etc.),²⁵ thanks to the studies of Architect Giuseppe Pagano published in 1936.²⁶

An idea of how the house in the mountains should have been is given by the one realized in Gravellona Toce, named "Il Ronco" (Figure 4), built on the basis of the project by Luigi Vietti in 1930. It is a narrow and long building realized using modern materials such as reinforced concrete as well as traditional ones, (walls in masonry and wood). Even here, the lounge area faces the landscape by a very big window.²⁷

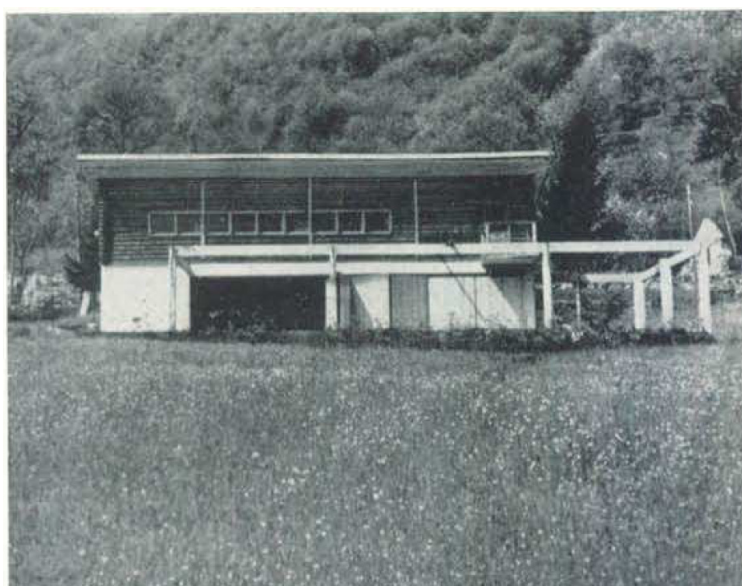


Figure 4. Luigi Vietti, Il Ronco, Gravellona Toce, 1930.

Source: "Una invidiabile casetta in montagna", *Domus*, n.° 109 (1937): 6

The typical characteristics are also found in other constructions in the mountains such as that of Luigi Daneri a Borgo Fornaci (Appennino Ligure).²⁸ Conceived in a rational way, this house reveals a modern «limpida e schietta» (clean and sharp) style in which the elements adopted to the setting, such as the type of roofing and the covering in wood of the walls, appear to be natural solutions.²⁹

²² "Una casa per le vacanze", *Domus*, n.° 124 (1938): 22.

²³ "Casa di campagna nel Varesotto", *Domus*, n.° 129 (1938): 18-19.

²⁴ "Costruire nel rispetto della natura", *Domus*, n.° 136 (1938): 54.

²⁵ Gio Ponti, "Progetto di una villa in montagna", *Domus*, n.° 127 (1938): 54-55.

²⁶ Giuseppe Pagano, Guarniero Daniel, *Architettura rurale italiana* (Milano: Hoepli, 1936).

²⁷ "Una invidiabile casetta in montagna", *Domus*, n.° 109 (1937): 6-10; Dell'Aira, *Luigi Vietti...*, 66.

²⁸ Attilio Podestà, "Una casa minima appenninica", *Domus*, n.° 168 (1941): 16.

²⁹ Podestà, "Una casa minima...", 16.

In general, the publicity produced during the 1930s regarding holiday houses brought the planners closer to an issue of great importance: build modern buildings in relation to nature as to safeguard the landscape also for touristic purposes.

After the World War II, during the years of economic boom, this issue was confronted with major vigour by environmentalists that tried to defend the uncontaminated coastal areas from mass construction for touristic purposes.

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