



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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«Un pedazo de cielo... y un espacio de mar incluso sin nadie»: villas de Luigi Moretti

A «Part of Sky and a Part of Sea, Even Alone»: *Luigi Moretti Villas*

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Resumen

Entre el 1932, el año en que comenzó su carrera como diseñador, y el 1973, año de su muerte, Luigi Moretti concibió una treintena de proyectos de villas. Entre algunas muy famosas y otras menos conocidas, estas obras denuncian una indudable continuidad de reflexión sobre este tema de proyecto, destacando una estrecha unión con las expresiones de arte abstracto. Pero, sobre todo, ponen en escena una idea de la arquitectura como refugio, que en la poética de Moretti asimila el proyecto de la casa individual al edificio sagrado. Una idea vinculada a la concepción fenomenológica del espacio, como entidad sensible, cambiante y compleja, diseñada de acuerdo con la percepción y experiencia del sujeto. Un refugio que, siendo protección de las “hostilidades” del mundo, representa una conquista contra fuerzas contrastantes. Así concebida, la casa suaviza los movimientos inquietos de la vida humana: este mecanismo está rodeado por la acción de cortar «no por orgullo, sino para vivir un pedazo de cielo... y un espacio de mar incluso sin nadie».

Palabras clave: Luigi Moretti, villas, espacio

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

Abstract

Between 1932, when his career as an architect began, and 1973, year in which he died, Moretti conceives about 30 housing projects. Some famous, other one less known, these projects show an undoubted continuity of reflection on this topic; and they also show a connection with the abstract art that the Roman architect promotes, in the same years, on the pages of his magazine Spazio. But above all, they realize an idea of architecture as a refuge, which assimilates the project of villa to that of the sacred building in Moretti's poetics. An idea connected to the phenomenological conception of Space, as a sensitive, changing, complex entity, designed according to the perception and experience of the subject. A shelter that is protection from the “hostilities” of the world, that is conquest against conflicting forces. In the house, the final destination is a «part of sky and a part of sea, even alone», in the church it's the sacred space of the altar. But in both cases, the aim is to «enhance the human status to contemplation, to a sort of vivid loss [...] and enchantment».

Keywords: Luigi Moretti, villas, space

Topic: The house: myths, archetypes, forms of inhabitation

Introduction¹

Starting from 2005, with the imminent occasion of his birth centenary, several initiatives have been dedicated to the critical reading of Luigi Moretti (1906-1973), Roman architect over whom the accusation of betraying his rationalist beginnings have weighted, being a member of the fascist regime first and involved in right-wing intellectual games later, other than Bruno Zevi's terse judgement of him being a «computer blocked by the decadent movement».²

As known, Moretti has been Mussolini's architect, for whom he has conceived the private gymnasium at the Foro Italico, being nominated at only 30 years old responsible for the whole complex's plan, in place of Enrico Del Debbio. During the 50's, then, entrepreneur, publisher and art dealer at the same time, he refused the role gained by man of his fellows in Rome, involved in the project of several public neighborhoods subsidized by the "public hand". The reading of his work has, furthermore, gained a further interest on the background of the phenomenon which Luca la Rovere has defined a non-stopping passage from the «unconditioned accession to the antifascist paradigm to the acceptance of a new stereotype constructed by the self-exculpatory and opportunistic sublimation of the past».³



Figure 1: Luigi Moretti in his studio in Palazzo Colonna, Rome
Source: Archive Luigi Moretti. Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma

1. Luigi Moretti villas and the artists

Between 1932, when his career as an architect began, and 1973, year in which he suddenly died not far off the shores of Capraia, Moretti conceives about 30 housing projects, specifically

¹ The topics in this paper have been expressed in Italian at the *2nd Foro de Arquitectura y vida cotidiana en México. Capítulo Nápoles*, which took place July 9 and 10th 2018 at the Università Federico II Department of Architecture.

² Bruno Zevi, "La scomparsa di Luigi Moretti. Computer inceppato dal dannunzianesimo", *L'Espresso*, 29 luglio (1973); now also in Bruno Zevi, *Cronache di architettura* (Rome-Bari: Laterza 1979), 1041.

³ Luca La Rovere, *L'eredità del fascismo. Gli intellettuali, i giovani e la transizione al postfascismo, 1943-1948* (Turin: Bollati Boringhieri, 2008), 11.

villas.⁴ Some of these are renowned and thoroughly studied, such as the ones on Santa Marinella coastline, thought to be part of a unique ideational path lasted about fifteen years, and recognized not only as his own masterpieces, but in general of the whole Italian architecture from the Twentieth Century.⁵ Others are, instead, less known. But the whole corpus highlights a continuous thinking on this typology much more marked than about Moretti's whole production.

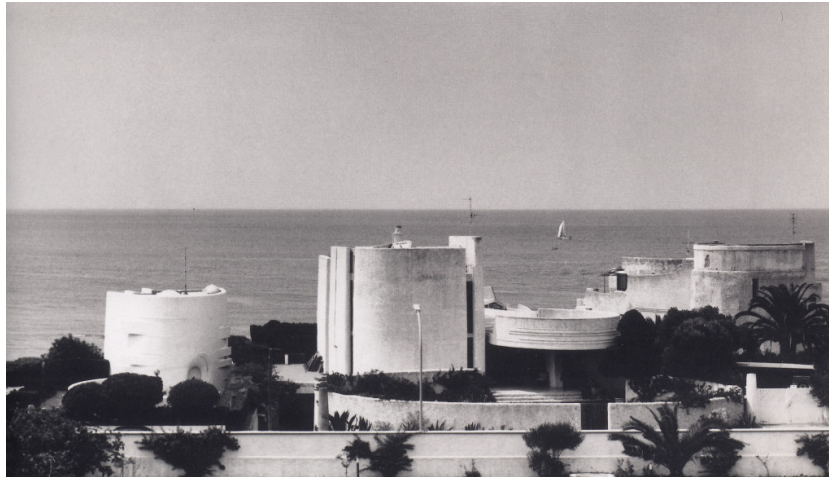


Figure 2: La Califfa, La Saracena and La Moresca villas in Santa Marinella. View from the road to the sea
Source: Archive Luigi Moretti. Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma

«Symbol of a glamorous Italy with the strong will of stating itself, even through the aesthetic-formal distinction of its own concept of house»,⁶ the villas mark a tight bond with those expressions of abstract art which the architects promotes beginning from the 50's on the pages of his *Spazio* magazine, founded with the aim of discussing across all artistic disciplines. The magazine, of which only 7 issues have been published between July 1950 and January 1953, is the sublimation of Luigi Moretti cultural seek, as well as the complete expression of his theoretical project. In fact, since the beginning, he appears interested to the possibility of interpreting each and every real phenomena according to abstract models, surpassing the disciplinary fields.

Furthermore, alongside the magazine activity, an art gallery with the same name, opened together with the French critic Michel Tapié, Moretti is amongst the first to make known the names of Lucio Fontana, Giuseppe Capogrossi, Alberto Burri or Roberto Crippa. The artists, without intervening all in the realization of the villas, influence not only the formal lexicon but also the conceptual matrix. And after all, it was Moretti himself to believe in the mutuality of relations between forms of art and architecture, when in the *Spazio* pages he used to match details of portraits and paintings to contemporary buildings, such as to highlight formal

⁴ The topic of Luigi Moretti villas has been focus for *Luigi Moretti: tutte le ville*, curated by Carmen L. Guerrero, Salvatore Santuccio and Nicolò Sardo, which took place in 2009 at the GIL house in Trastevere. See: Carmen L. Guerrero, Salvatore Santuccio and Nicolò Sardo, *Luigi Moretti. Le ville disegni e modelli* (Rome: Palombi, 2009).

⁵ Besides the mentioned work and the monographic work Cecilia Rostagni, *Luigi Moretti 1907-1973* (Milan: Electa, 2008), for the Santa Marinella villas clear reference is made in Marco Mulazzani's article, "Luigi Moretti: la Califfa, la Saracena, la Moresca. Le ville dove le storie si intrecciano", *Casabella*, n.° 669 (1999): 63-81. See, also: Annalisa Viati Navone, *La Saracena di Luigi Moretti fra suggestioni mediterranee, barocche e informali* (Mendrisio-Milan: Mendrisio Academy Press-Silvana Editoriale, 2012).

⁶ Salvatore Santuccio, "Luigi Moretti e l'abitare in villa", in *Luigi Moretti. Le ville disegni e modelli...*, 18.

convergences as to clear — as he wrote — «the routes, centuries-old and always same of that attitude which we call art».⁷

Of Giuseppe Capogrossi, whom he maybe meets for the first time at the Biennale di Venezia in 1948, the Roman architect is interpret, estimator and collector: to his regards, as well as towards theorists of French mathematician Evaristo Galois, he feels a special affinity: huge paintings by Capogrossi are blatantly clear in almost all the photographs of his studio in Piazza Santi Apostoli (Moretti owned at least three), or in his gallery Spazio in via Cadore.⁸ And *Spazio* (the magazine) shows constant attention to his art, since issue number 2, in which Burri's name is pointed out as well. Of the latter, in 1954 during the gallery's first exhibition titled *Caratteri della pittura d'oggi*, Moretti hosts *Filo verde* and a *Sacco* from 1954; while in 1955, in the Parisian review *Individualità d'oggi*, *Sacco B* from 1953 with plastic parts is inserted: and these were the years in which parliamentary questions investigate the possibility of the sacco in art. Claire Falkenstein, on the other hand, was never mentioned on *Spazio* pages but permanently exhibits some of her thread-shaped sculptures at Moretti and Tapie's gallery entrance, whom wrote the texts for her personal exhibition's catalogue in 1958, but most of all she's the author of the renown gate over the sea in the Saracena in Santa Marinella. The architect constantly glorifies the artist from Oregon's capability of transforming in structures surfaces which neglect themselves in the act of existing.

It is to be cleared that Moretti believes so strongly in relations reciprocity between forms of art and architecture, that according to what he stated the architect-man does not exist, but only the artist-man. Architecture's aesthetic dimension is, so, the main topic of his research, constantly challenged with relevant sensibility towards perceptive aspects: the essence of architecture lies on the sentiment linked mainly to the capability of "hearing", while operating in art consists in the act of communicating and expressing a structure.

In Moretti's poetry the drawing of a house becomes, so, an art form itself, in which the portrait of its inhabitant meets the architect's aesthetic theory. This point of view is clearly visible since his earliest pieces of architecture.

2. Shapes

Thus, the small villa he plans in Tivoli in 1932 can be read as the translation of a metaphysical painting. The model's photographs, in which the severity of facades' openings and continuous walls is glorified by the white classic statue's position, clearly recall the solitary urban settings in De Chirico, Morandi and Sironi's paintings.

The house for hunting and fishing, planned between 1939 and 1943 in Brioni, Dalmazia for Hierarch Ettore Muti, D'Annunzio's «Gim dagli occhi verdi» (green-eyes Gim), dissolves with its openings the boundary between inside and outside, similarly to Alberto Burri's collage in which surface manipulation, carving and burning model space and shape.

⁷ Luigi Moretti, "Trasfigurazione di strutture murarie", *Spazio*, n.° 4 (1951): 16.

⁸ On the topic, see: Letizia Tedeschi, "Algoritmie spaziali. Gli artisti, la rivista 'Spazio' e Luigi Moretti, 1950-1953", in *Luigi Moretti. Razionalismo e trasgressività tra barocco e informale*, ed. by Bruno Reichlin and Letizia Tedeschi (Milan: Electa, 2010), 136-177; Francesca Valentini, "Marginalia. Presenze di artisti contemporanei nelle rubriche di Spazio", in *Luigi Moretti. Razionalismo e trasgressività...*, 178-185; Carmen L. Guerrero, "Art in the work of Moretti", in *Luigi Moretti. Architetto del Novecento*, ed. by Corrado Bozzoni, Daniela Fonti and Alessandra Muntoni (Rome: Gangemi, 2011), 149-154.

In the roman villa conceived in 1953 for Count Jacopo Marcello, the plan's matrix again recalls Capogrossi compositions' energy, as well as the movement expressed on the exterior wall appears to be the architectural transposition of his symbols, repeated and manipulated.

Even the Califfa's plan, drawn in 1967 for the Pignatelli d'Aragona, proposes a sign referred to Capogrossi's: the comb. Then, here the facade shows rounded angles that provide sculptural qualities; but the adoption of a rich texture, rough surfaces, limited color range and circular geometries, can be linked to Fontana's canvases as well, in which material corrugations suggest space's infinite extension beyond its surface. And even in the Gomez-Mena house at L'Habana — which in 1958 signs the architect's fortunate beginning on the international scene — masses' dynamic emphasis, through the juxtaposition of circular planes, recalls the repetition of Capogrossi's sign; but, same as in other villas, again there are ripples as in Fontana, or the relations between voids and fulls, and the material character of Burri's surfaces.



Figure 3: “Mediterranean” signs in the Villa La Saracena in Santa Marinella
Source: Archive Luigi Moretti. Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma

In some strong passages dedicated to Santa Marinella incomplete triptyque, Luigi Moretti highlights that the soul of his houses is Mediterranean, «to the point of touching the Arabic house taste, dense, which smells of freshness»: and basically the full-grain rendered plaster cladding, and a whole repertoire of shapes and signs, echoing Mediterranean cultures, that contribute to such character.

3. A proper refuge from the world's hostility

But without a doubt the *leit-motiv* of his projects is to be located in the contraposition of the “closed” facade towards the street and “opened” towards the inside or the landscape. It's a topic on which much has been written, especially beginning from the widely quoted comment that the architect dedicates to the Califfa project:

We have to love the “Other”. It's a voice which grew up with us since our youth. To love it, we shall know it, see it in a space that allows to define its shape; a mysterious shape, mirroring ourselves towards which welcoming is supposed to be natural as breathing [...] But where's the “Other”? [...]

Today we only know there's "people". People that we care of, people that breathe noise, that does not know us, people, we cannot love. So what ca I do? [...] I seek without contempt, maybe with grieving humbleness to close myself [...] and leave a narrow path, hope, that it can filter an "Other" to welcome. And I cut for myself, not for pride, but for the will of living, a part of sky and a part of sea, even alone.⁹



Figure 4.1: Villa La Califfa in Santa Marinella

Figure 4.2: View of the "closed" front facing the street and the "open" front facing the sea

Source: Archive Luigi Moretti. Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma

Therefore, on the pages of *Spazio* Moretti defines the house as one of the most fascination topics of contemporary architecture as «scope belonging with jealousy to man [...] mythical fortress against which adventures and facts stranger to the world hit».¹⁰ The appearance shall be, consequently, strong but welcoming, gentle and defensive, dignified and domestic at the same time: several shapes but a single grace.

Symbolic in that sense is the Saracena, drawn between 1954 and 1957 for his friend, the reporter Francesco Malgeri; a «jealous, enclosing affection, thoughts, beautiful women, for unsatisfied and restless men»¹¹ house, with a «close and introverted, and open towards the whole world»¹² character. Despite Gio Ponti, on *Domus* magazine, asked himself if the powerful structures that close towards the street are for defense from an external menace, or if they come from Moretti's ancestral love for the "wall", from which to take spaces «pour rêver architecture et vivre son rêve», convinced as he is that those elements are «spaces' supporting and division strength and that the secret of construction lies in each of its component wall's ease of reading, houses' primordial belonging in any architectural emotion».¹³

Practically the poetry of juxtaposition between closed and opened facade, as we see in each of his landscaping houses, comes out already in 1932 with the villa in Tivoli project, in which the

⁹ Luigi Moretti's text on the villa named La Califfa has been published for the first time in: Agnoldomenico Pica, "Due opere di Luigi Moretti", *Domus*, n.° 482 (1970): 6-16. The autograph text is kept at the Archive Moretti – Archivio Centrale dello Stato of Rome.

¹⁰ Luigi Moretti, "La casa dell'«Astrea». Architettura di Luigi Moretti", *Spazio*, n.° 7, (1952-1953): 45; the article by Luigi Moretti is signed S.

¹¹ Luigi Moretti's text in: Agnoldomenico Pica, "Due opere ...", 6.

¹² Luigi Moretti's text in: Agnoldomenico Pica, "Due opere ...", 6.

¹³ Gio Ponti, "Tre architetture di Luigi Moretti. Una villa sulla costa tirrena: La "Saracena" a Santa Marinella", *Domus*, n.° 419 (1964): 3.

architect applies the idea of a sequence of spaces in increasing illumination, which from the “jealous” side along the street ends in the living and dining areas towards the terrace to south. The term “sequence” is not casual, because in Moretti’s poetry architecture shall materialize a sequence: supposed to be not only function of space but even of time, that can be understandable only «by a sequence of glimpses, as a unique drama of weight and supports, of strength and shapes, planes and lines, that progressively develop to a higher end»,¹⁴ requiring long reading times, besides the memory of the previously perceived signs and spaces.

In the house conceived between 1939 and 1943 in Brioni, Dalmazia, of the Hierarch Ettore Muti the building appears, on one side, as a sort of long wall, a unique juncture, while on the other side, opened and slightly curved to grant that each area has a perfect view towards the sea. Here Moretti sets the ambiguous play between inside and out: loggias, pergolas, and trellis make up the house’s emanation, extensions, result of a flux that destroys the classical meaning of “staying inside”. The house comes out and the idea of “staying inside” loses strength. At the same time the Califfa — commissioned, as the Saracena, by the Pignatelli d’Aragona family — is closed and dour to the street, ad explodes open towards the sea.

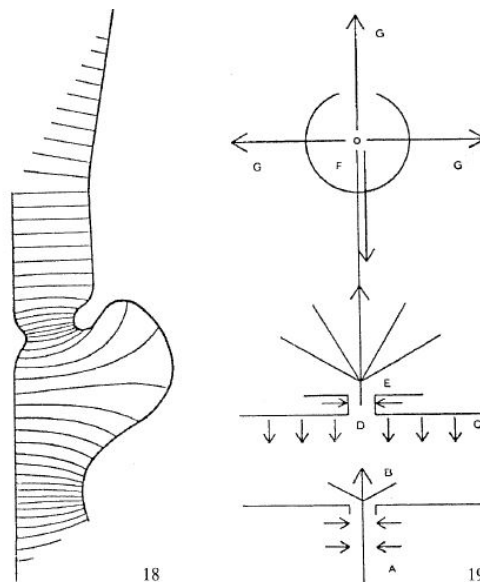


Figure 5: The different distribution of psychological warnings promoted by the expansion or contraction of masonry, comparable to the distribution of lines of force in a magnetic field
Source: Luigi Moretti, “Strutture e sequenze di spazi”, *Spazio*, n.° 7 (1952-1953)

The Moresca proposes the exact same ornaments and the same game: the closed tower slightly signed by horizontal repetitions, is juxtaposed by rooms, obsessively facing the sea; conceived as his own house, the architect will never see it complete, as it was finished only 8 years after his death.

The individual house — «working and resting place, space closed to protect the loved ones, friends and books»¹⁵ — is according to Moretti a proper refuge created to protect from the world’s hostility. And the thought of architecture as a refuge, bonded to a phenomenological

¹⁴ Luigi Moretti, “Strutture e sequenze di spazi”, *Spazio*, n.° 7 (1952-1953): 9.

¹⁵ Luigi Moretti’s text in: Agnoldomenico Pica, “Due opere ...”, 6.

conception of space as a sensible, fluid and complex entity, always related to something or someone, designed in function of the subject's perception and experience, which often rises from his thinking.

If the haven idea implies roofing's fundamental role — “solid in weight and certainty” and mindful of Michelangelo's teaching of the “top fills”—, the shelter idea must reproduce the so-called “human mechanism”, which is the alternation of “compressions” (or “oppositions”) and “decompressions” (or “liberation”), «which in their origin, in nature's hostilities and reception, and then forever, made up one of the formative sides tough breathing of the human structure». ¹⁶ This is the only way that space can soften the two contradictory stages of human life. With this aim, it has to be moulded according to rhythm and sequences founded on fundamental parameters of shape, size, light density and energetic (or psychological) pressure.

So, the conception of individual house is developed in analogy with sacred buildings. In fact — Moretti writes — the house is «the only space that abstracts us from daily life with others and from its big and mean adventures», ¹⁷ and the church is a place of protection, in which anguish and disturbance which we always carry are diluted thanks to the thanks to the cut towards the world of daily perceptions. In his mindset, house and church can be both defined as «similarly structured elements (if not even identical)», because the routes at the base of the corresponding design processes have similar relations. Starting from mathematician Evaristo Galois's theories — the first to use the term “group” to define the set of element's possible permutations — Moretti states that the world has to be considered as a set of relations, regardless of the thing itself: which means that shape does not exist by itself but it's given by the set of differences, linked by a specific order that makes up its laws, and which can be expressed as mathematic relations.

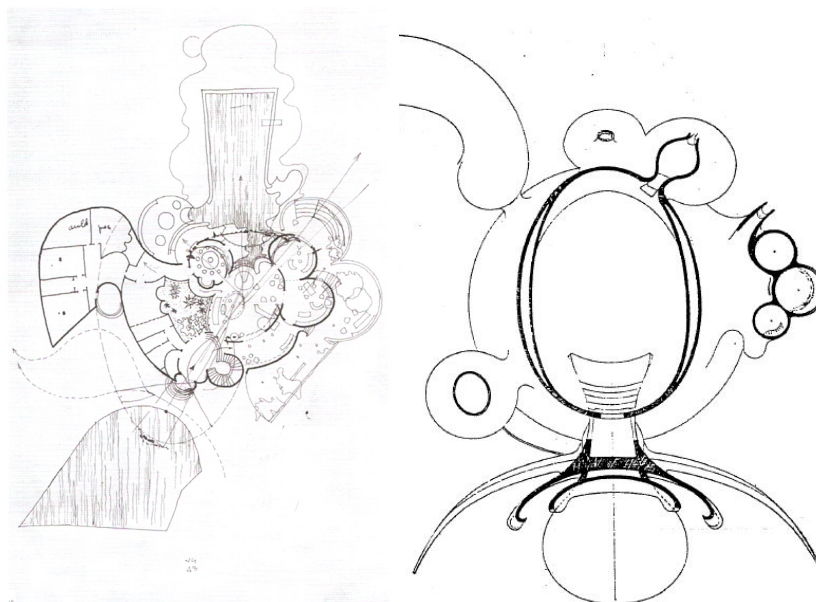


Figure 6.1: Villa De Angelis in Grottarossa

Figure 6.2: Sancta Mater Ecclesiae council church in Rome. Plans
Source: Archive Luigi Moretti. Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma

¹⁶ Luigi Moretti, “Strutture e sequenze...”, 9.

¹⁷ Luigi Moretti's text in: Agnoldomenico Pica, “Due opere ...”, 6.

As specified in the known article *Struttura come forma*¹⁸ (Structure as shape), a piece of architecture is made up of the «generated order» of relations that take place between plastic, constructive or functional values, and the forces and modes that determine and rule them. And the unchangeable destiny that relate house and sacred building is a path developed in depth, capable of generating a chain of perceptive and psychological reactions accompanying the visitor through different phases of emotion, touching a maximum value from which to descend down to contemplation. A sequence of spaces, symbol of the process through which the visitor is lead to the abandon of any resonance with the world and the conquest of an ideal dimension, and in which each function matches with different light strength and a precise role in structural mass.

4. Space in the villa, space in the church

The Saracena's spatial sequence — inspired to Pompeii's Roman architecture amongst others — is the development of an original idea in which a small entrance appears, *fauci*, that connects to a circular patio surrounded by a wall; slightly moved from the axis is the vestibule; beyond, the great atrium, slightly splayed, introduces to a side in the garden and to the other in the other great glass gallery, from which the rectangular living room is reached, opened towards the sea.

A similar structure is at the base of Sancta Mater Ecclesiae council church: here the mediation space between outside and inside marks the principle of the detachment from daily life's disorder and the welcoming phase; the *fauci*, moment of highest emotivity, is the symbol of the outer world total abandon; the chamber is redemption, and the area of the altar is the emotion of divine intuition.

So, in the house, the final destination is the quoted «part of sky and a part of sea, even alone»,¹⁹ in the church it's the sacred space of the altar. But in both cases, the aim is to «enhance the human status to contemplation, to a sort of vivid loss [...] and enchantment».²⁰

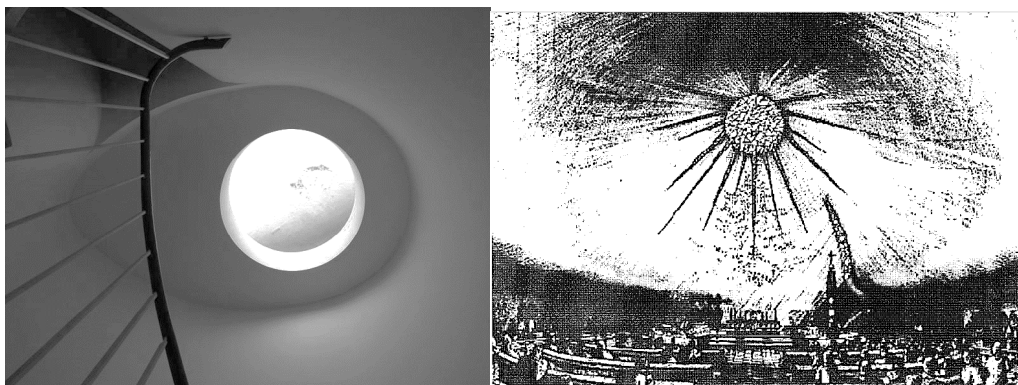


Figure 7.1: The stairwell in Villa La Califfa in Santa Marinella

Figure 7.2: View of the altar in Sancta Mater Ecclesiae council church in Rome

Source: Archive Luigi Moretti. Archivio Centrale dello Stato di Roma

¹⁸ Luigi Moretti, "Struttura come forma", *Spazio*, n.° 6 (1951-1952): 21-30.

¹⁹ Luigi Moretti cit. in: Agnoldomenico Pica, "Due opere...": 6.

²⁰ Luigi Moretti, "Forme astratte nella scultura barocca", *Spazio*, n° 3 (1950): 20.

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