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Research on Casa Malaparte

Project Date: Curzio Malaparte bought just over twelve thousand square feet of land on the island of Capri in 1938. The project was finished in 1942.

Project Location: The villa is located on the eastern side of the Isle of Capri, Italy. It is situated on the summit of Punta Massullo, a rocky ledge 32 feet above sea level that overlooks a breathtaking panorama of the Gulf of Salerno. “It can only be reached by a four-kilometre walk along a narrow winding footpath, or from the sea via a steep flight of steps cut into the rocks.” Malaparte described the scenery of the land where his villa was built as, “the wildest, most solitary and dramatic part of Capri, in the part which faces the south and east, where the island loses its human quality and becomes ferocious, where nature expresses itself with an incomparable, cruel strength, there was a promontory of an extraordinary purity of line, a rocky claw flung into the sea. No other place in Italy has such a broad horizon and such a depth of feeling. It is a place clearly intended for strong men, free spirits….There was no house in this place. I would be the first, then, to build in the midst of that nature.”

Architect: Casa Malaparte was conceived by the Italian Rationalist architect Adalberto Libera, and today it is considered to be one of his finest works. Whether the majority of the work was done by Libera or by Malaparte himself is unknown.

Project Size: The house is on two floors, with the upper floor occupying exactly half the area of the ground floor and terminating in a large solarium-terrace which faces inland. The building is 28 metres long (approximately 301.38 square feet), but only 6.6 metres wide (approximately 71.038 square feet).

Biographical information about the architecture: “Approached by land, Villa Malaparte first presents itself from above and sideways, giving a view of the roof-terrace with its curvilinear screen and broad staircase, which looks like a kind of two-sided theatre. The villa then disappears until one is actually ascending the monumental staircase. The entrance to the villa, now located in the base, consists of a rectangular opening cut into the wall, with a frameless glass door opening on to a small hall and wooden staircase which leads up to the vestibule of the piano nobile. Opposite the entrance is a small rustic room occupied by a large stove, table, and wooden benches, looking very much like the interior of a typical mountain lodge. To the left of the entrance and under the stairs, is the kitchen, and from there a narrow staircase leads down into the basement, with storerooms entered through transparent glass doors, each with the room's function etched onto it. To the right of the entrance, opposite the kitchen, another glass door, marked 'Ospizio' (guest quarters), leads to the central corridor and guest quarters. At the top of the stairs a quite narrow door with elaborately worked panels acts as the entrance to the vast central hall. Strikingly simple in plan, the room is eight by fifteen metres in size and has two axes, which creates the impression of a double symmetry. But on closer inspection one sees that this is gradually distorted by the disposition of a number of architectural elements. The floor of rough stone flags reinforces the impression of an outdoor public space. Four enormous plate-glass windows (again without casings) are set into the wall, their smooth curved mouldings framing spectacular views of the landscape. Revealing the distance between nature and the
viewer, they provoke a sublime anxiety. The transverse axis of the hall was defined by a Fazzini sculpture (since removed), placed between two of the windows, and a fireplace on the opposite side. The fireplace hearth incorporates a window of fireproof Jena glass, giving a view through the flames, as if on to a burning sea. Like the windows, the fireplace frames a mythical world, in which fire and water are reconciled.

At the centre of the wall opposite the entrance to the main hall is a door that picks up the longitudinal axis of the villa and leads deeper into its mysterious voids. Behind it is a T-shaped antechamber of corridors, the corners of their intersection defined by a pair of book-cases with snake-like curves. At the end of the longitudinal corridor are two identical doors, the left one opening into the 'favorita's' bedroom, the right one into Malaparte's. Each room has a single window overlooking the sea and a magnificent bathroom of black and white marble, while the Favorita's room also has a corner fireplace.

A door in the far right-hand corner of Malaparte's bedroom opens into the most private space of all, his writing room, which is lined with tiles bearing a lyre motif (designed by Alberto Savinio). The transverse axis lies between two opposite windows, while a third one is the only window to take up the longitudinal axis of the villa, projecting it into the infinity of the horizon. In the corner opposite the door is a tower-like stove, and at the far end is a bookcase and desk, where Malaparte, seated on the curved niche with his back to the door, exerts his power over the villa. “For Villa Malaparte, almost all of the interior spaces are inside the cliff and there are only small and discrete openings out. The finite views you get from the inside provide a counterpoint to the infinite that the rooftop solarium exposes you to. It is both an introverted refuge and the ultimate prospect. The building itself is simply a platform with a stair that has some rooms inside it. It’s an archaic, primitive building.”

Biographical information about the Residents: The owner, and inspiration, of Casa Malaparte was Curzio Malaparte (1898-1957). He wanted a “modern” house, at a time when many people were convinced that classicism was the only style able to embody the spirit of the new Imperial Rome. As a result of his input in the project, the final result was a building that reflected the true nature of Malaparte himself. In fact, one of Malaparte’s nick names for the house was “casa come me” or “house like myself”. He was a hyperindividualistic poet, a near schizoid, a tinkerer, a public figure, an entertainer, an entrepreneur, a seducer, and master of the machine. Malaparte saw himself first and foremost as a writer and intellectual, whose most potent weapon and best defense was his pen, it is in his adventurous and turbulent life, and the way he dramatized it, that the key to the meaning of his villa resides.
The approach is intended to be from the sea and up the cliff on the south side—reinforcing the wildness and interiority of the building.

East Elevation

North Elevation

West Elevation
conceptual sketch by Libera

http://www.tokinowasuremono.com/shop/w/w063-102/w064.jpg
Lower Level Plan

First Floor Plan: service quarters and guest rooms
- Entrance (from sea)
- Entrance (from below)
- Living Room
- Study
- Two bedrooms
- Tiny window looking out

Second Floor Plan: Malaparte's apartment, large living room, two bedrooms, and a study

Villa Malaparte
Cape Massullo, on the south coast of Capri
Adalberto Libera
1938-1942
Resources

