

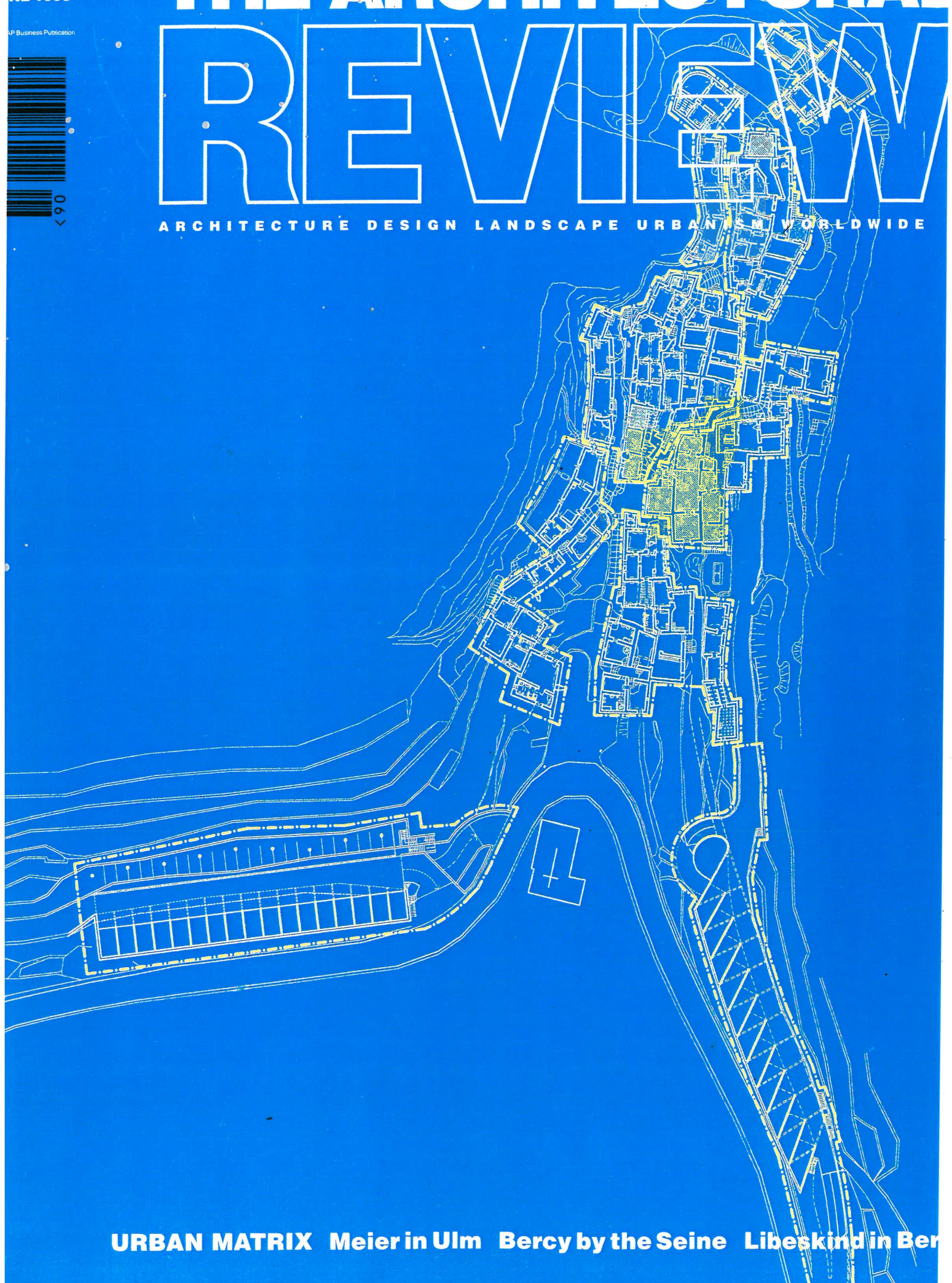
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THE ARCHITECTURAL REVIEW

ARCHITECTURE DESIGN LANDSCAPE URBANISM WORLDWIDE



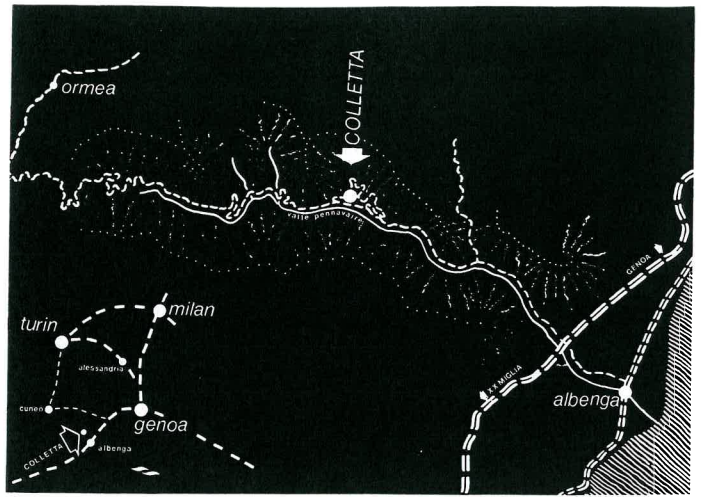
URBAN MATRIX Meier in Ulm Bercy by the Seine Libeskind in Berlin

Colletta di Castelbianco

1,2 From the valley floor, the village appears as a collection of small volumes ranged along the ridge, is buried in olive groves and terraces and the form of the villa follows the outline of the terrace 3,4 Although completely deserted, the volumes of the buildings and external spaces are remarkably intact. They are richly varied as they hug the rugged terrain.

Colletta is 20 km inland of the western Ligurian coast, under the Appennines. It was founded as one of a chain of village between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries and was abandoned in the nineteenth, when its role as a link between the coast and the Piedmontese hinterland became obsolete. Giancarlo De Carlo has been given the wonderful task of bringing the village back to life. Here, he describes the nature of the village and his approach to re-vivifying it.



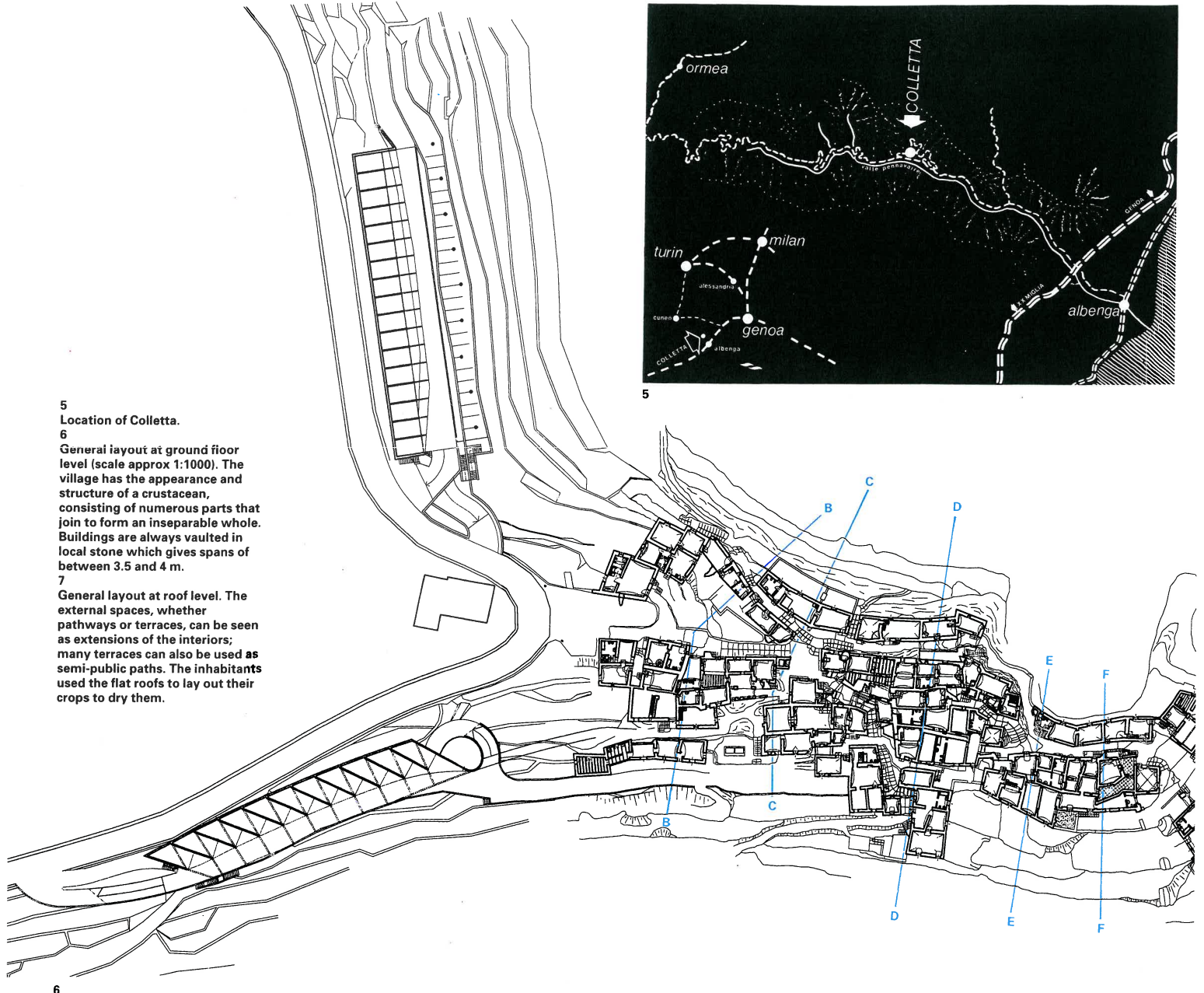


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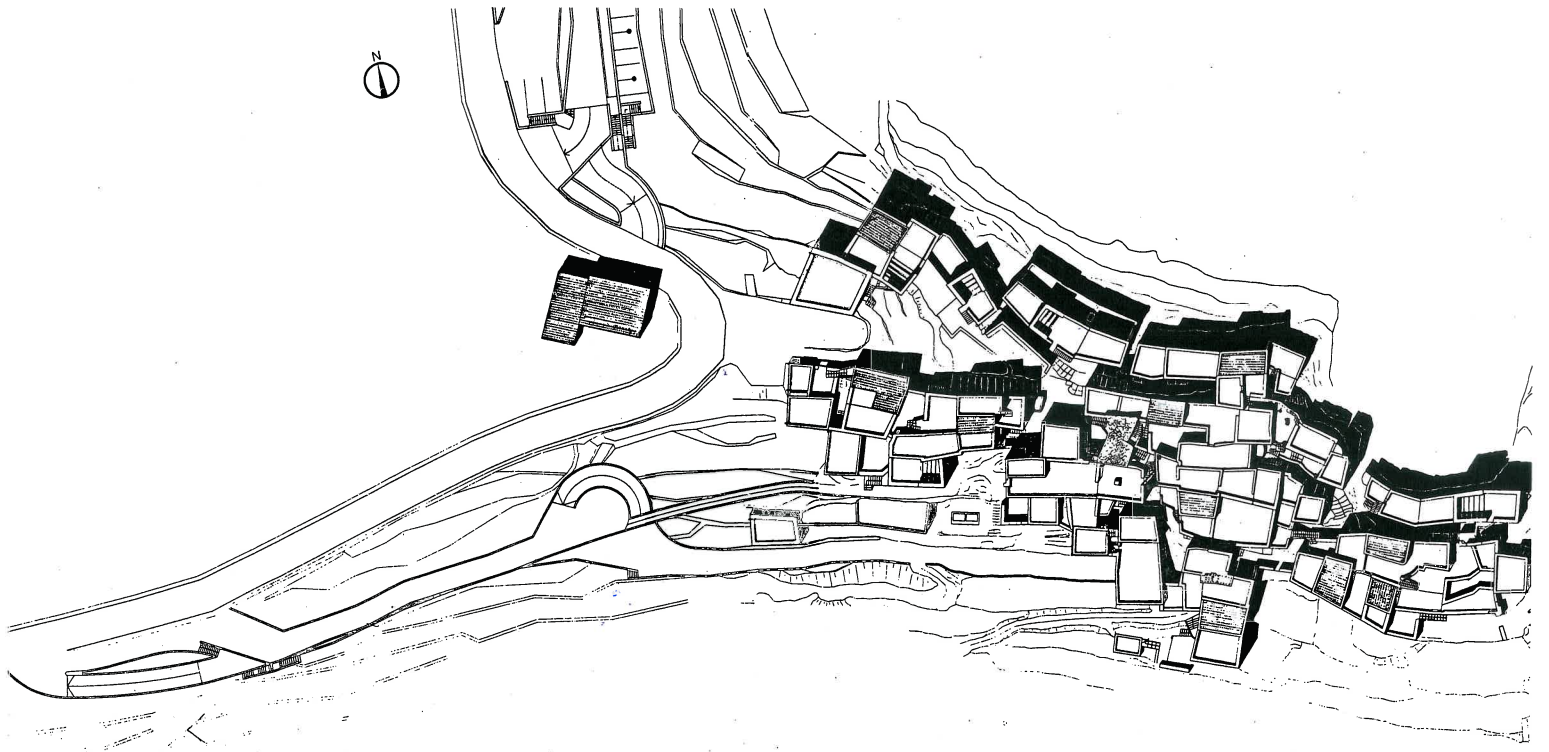
5 Location of Colletta.

6 General layout at ground floor level (scale approx 1:1000). The village has the appearance and structure of a crustacean, consisting of numerous parts that join to form an inseparable whole. Buildings are always vaulted in local stone which gives spans of between 3.5 and 4 m.

7 General layout at roof level. The external spaces, whether pathways or terraces, can be seen as extensions of the interiors; many terraces can also be used as semi-public paths. The inhabitants used the flat roofs to lay out their crops to dry them.



6



The village of Colletta is in the Pennavaira valley and forms part of the commune of Castelbianco in the province of Savona. The closest town is Albenga, about 20 km away. Other coordinates are the airports of Genoa (80 km), Milan (240 km), and Turin (150 km). The village, now wholly deserted, stretches along a ridge about 300 m above sea level. Access is provided by the road from Albenga to Ormea in Piedmont, precisely at the point where it begins to climb towards the Ligurian Appennines.

The village is not immediately visible from the road, partly because it is set back somewhat but mainly because the structure of its buildings is indistinguishable at first sight from the structure of the terraced hillsides so typical of Liguria. The separate cells which make up the houses are about the same size as the terraces, both in width and

height, and they slope down in much the same way. And the colouring is similar, too, both walls and roofs being built of the local stone.

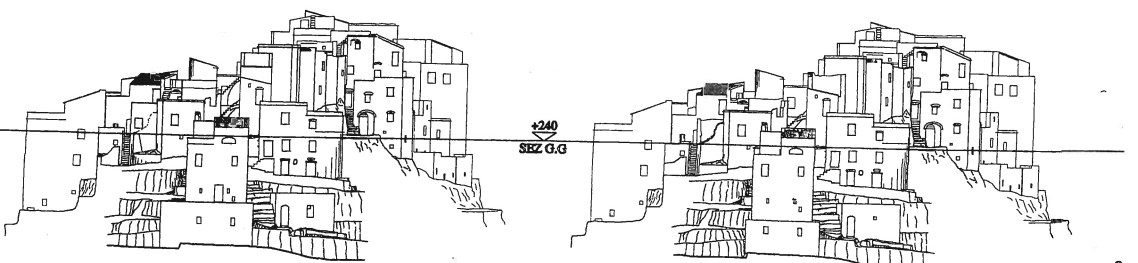
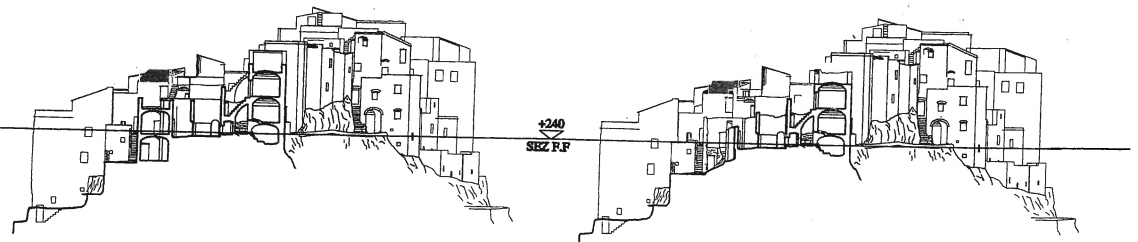
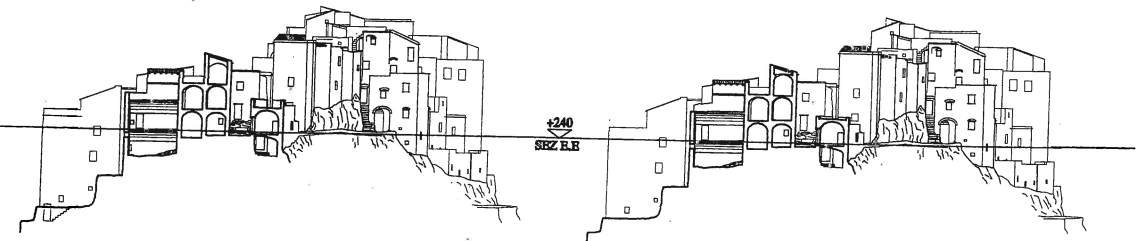
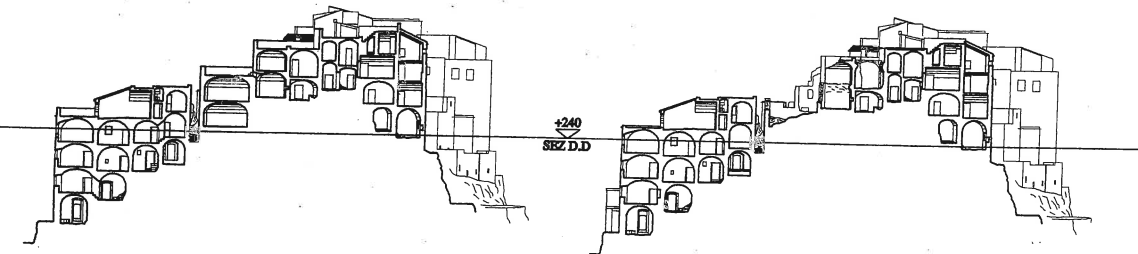
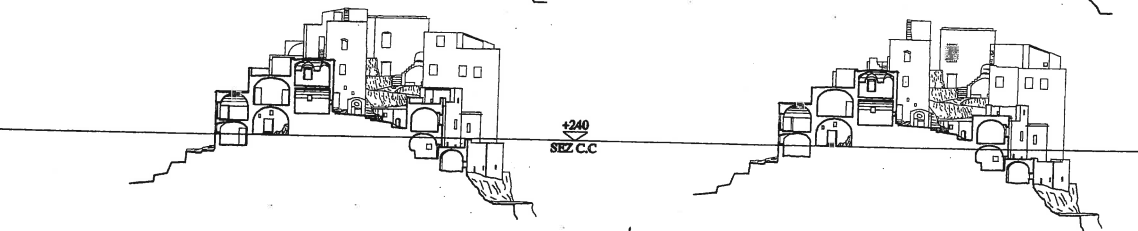
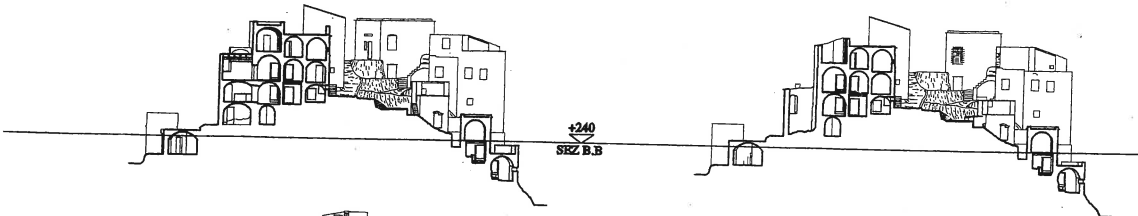
The way the cells are grouped in clusters suggests some crustacean organism which has grown slowly, adapting itself to the support on which it has settled. Each cell merges into those around it on all sides: horizontally, vertically, obliquely, sloping down or climbing up. Small cell-clusters make up the houses, which develop in variable patterns and configurations. What does not vary – or varies very little – is the size of each cell, and this is due to the coherence between the features of the space and the technology used to define it. Apart from the walls, even the vaults are of stone, and this fixes their dimensions within a limited range of variations.



8

Positive and negative versions of typical section.

9
Detailed sections. Actual state to right, proposed changes to left. In essence, the plan is to rebuild only those parts which have collapsed over the last century.



The result is that the homes have no boundaries or rather, they are imperceptible. So it is quite conceivable (and may actually have happened in the past) that houses can be enlarged or contracted into each other, altering their dimensions to suit the needs of the people living in them. Looking at them today from the outside, one of the features they have in common is that, because of the differences in level, each of the houses receives light from all directions; the cell clusters face onto terraces which form the roofs of the cells below, and which no doubt were used as drying floors for farm produce in hot weather. Another important feature is that the open spaces which form the streets, yards and steps all have dimensions comparable to those of the cells which make up the houses. Apart from having the same dimensions, they also join up and form clusters in the same way. This is a very rare feature, especially nowadays, when the correspondence between open and closed, voids and solids, seems lost to architecture.

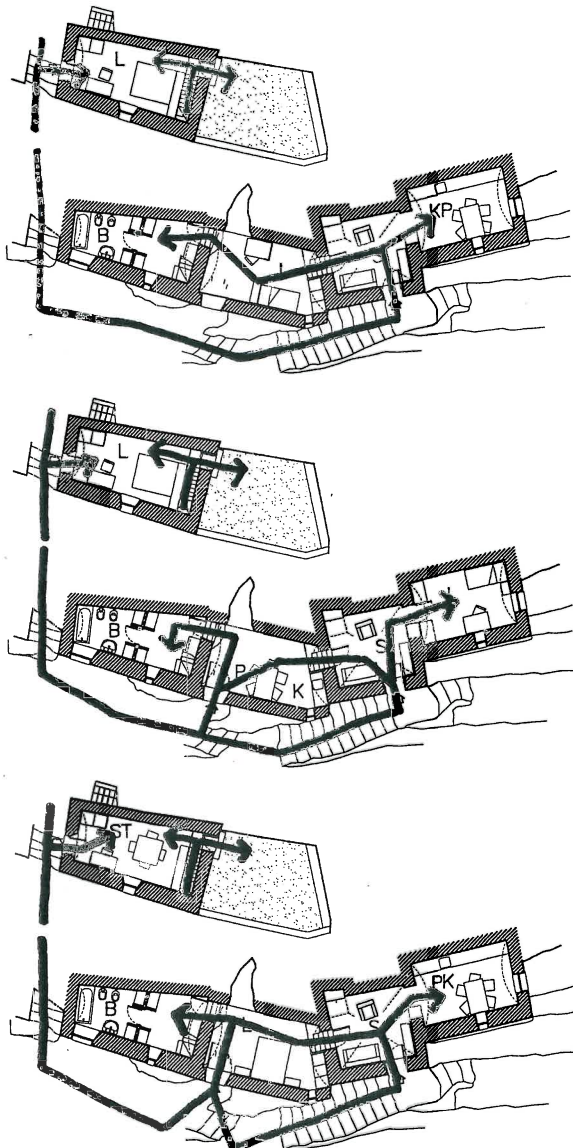
The project aims to reclaim the village and make it inhabitable again. The inhabitants won't be the same as they were – they won't have the same occupations and way of life as the people that used to live here long ago, because the causes which led to the demise of the village still exist. But the inhabitants probably won't be tourists, either – at least they won't behave and travel in the way usually

associated with tourism. They might be people or families who want to return to an immediate and yet comfortable way of life, whether for long periods or holidays, but not necessarily just seasonally.

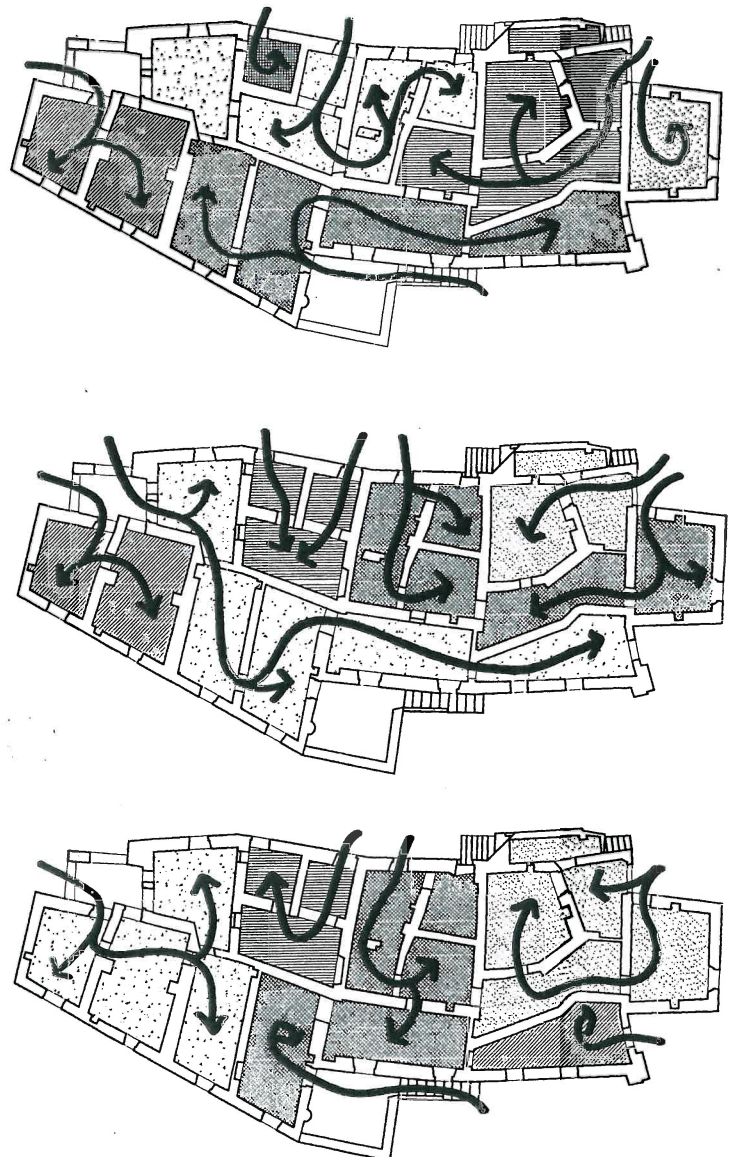
The project involved reconstructing houses of various sizes and kinds without altering the genetic code that had regulated the village's growth in the past. Actually, it didn't take a lot of doing: the logic of the constructional, aggregational and compositional systems had simply to be understood and followed, relating the various parts of the crustacean to one another, as far as possible in keeping with the new demands made on the home; repairing parts that were worn out, and bringing the whole complex as far as possible into line with current planning regulations; providing soft technology in the plant systems, so as to avoid conflicts with the constructional and compositional system, but also making it as sophisticated as possible to offer future villagers the advantages of peaceful isolation and yet regular links with the outside world of the best possible kind.

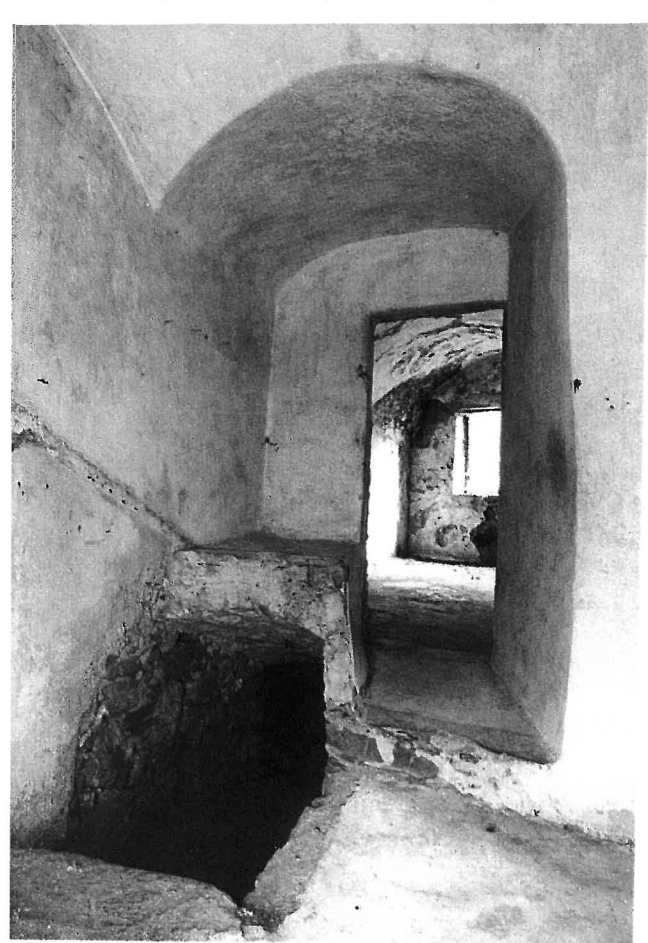
While designing, we had the pleasant surprise of discovering that adaptations were relatively easy and that the crustacean system we were working on was much more docile and responsive than vertebrate systems generally used in contemporary architecture. The essential thing was to understand the genetic code and the ways it

10
Details of three different dwelling configurations for the same sequence of space.

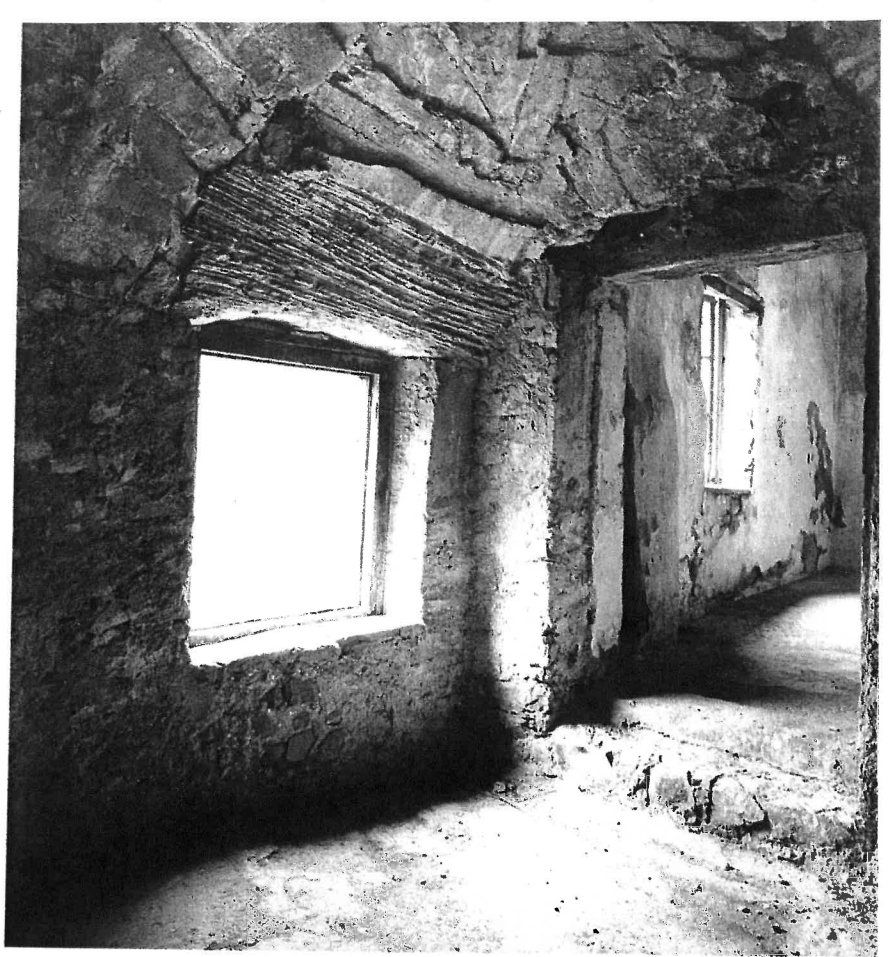


11
Alternative strategies for horizontal uses of space, which...

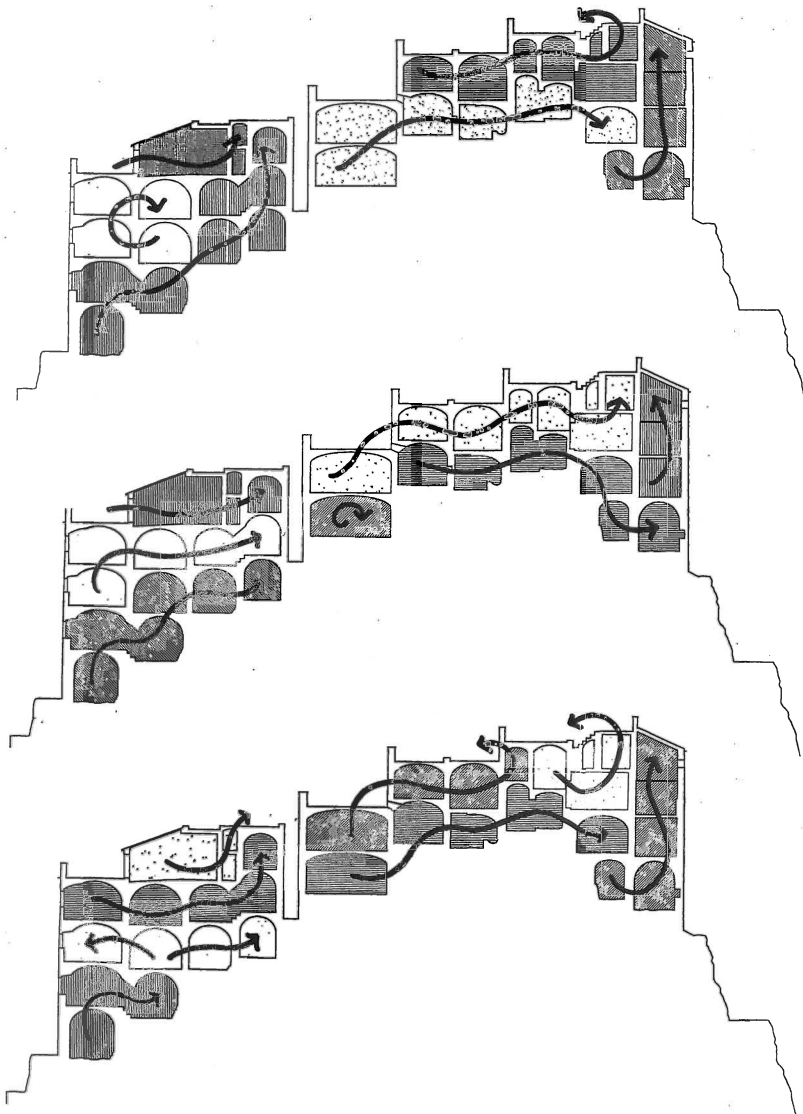




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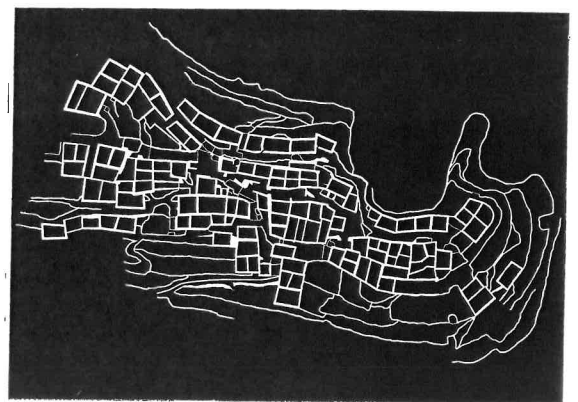


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12
... when combined with different strategies in the sectional plane allow dwellings to be formed in vertical, oblique and horizontal directions.

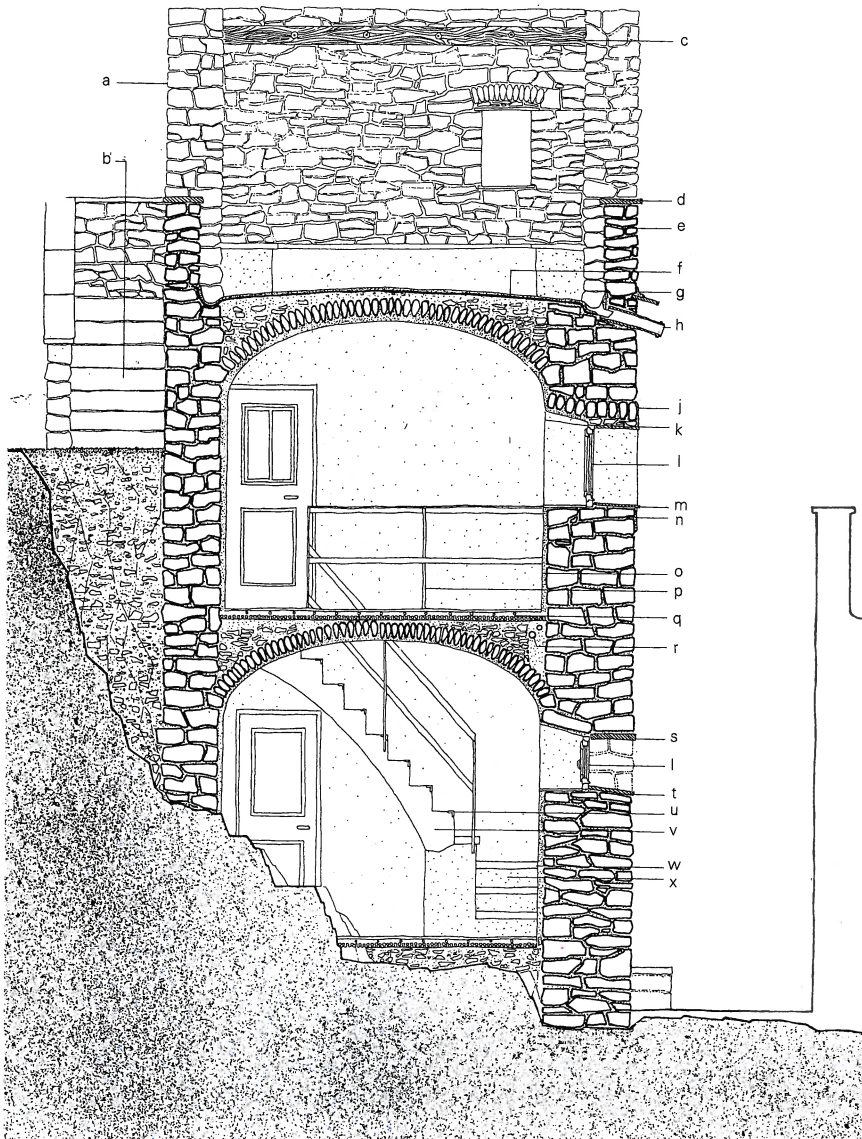
13,14
Spatial sequences under the vaults.

15
Built spaces and open spaces: their reciprocity and strict similarity of form and dimension.



15



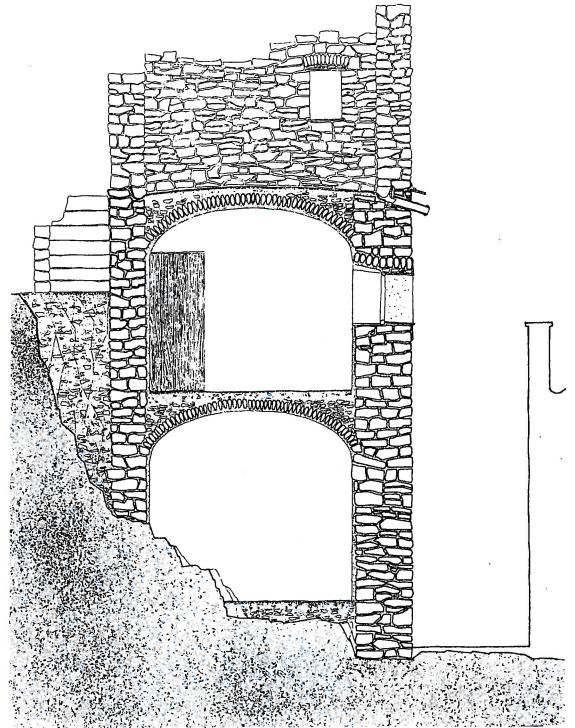


- 16
- a reconstruction of wall in local stone
 - b treads and risers in local stone
 - c 100 x 150 mm timber beam
 - d cap of local stone
 - e parapet in local stone
 - f covering and gutter in waterproof mortar
 - g waterproof mortar
 - h spout in terracotta to match existing
 - j white plastered arch
 - k slate slab
 - l timber window frame painted
 - m slate cill
 - n white plastered surround
 - o porous plaster
 - p steel balustrade
 - q insulated underfloor heating
 - r services distribution treads in local stone
 - s local stone lintel
 - t local stone cill
 - u parabolic arch in concrete
 - v treads in local stone
 - w plastered risers

16 Typical proposed works to...

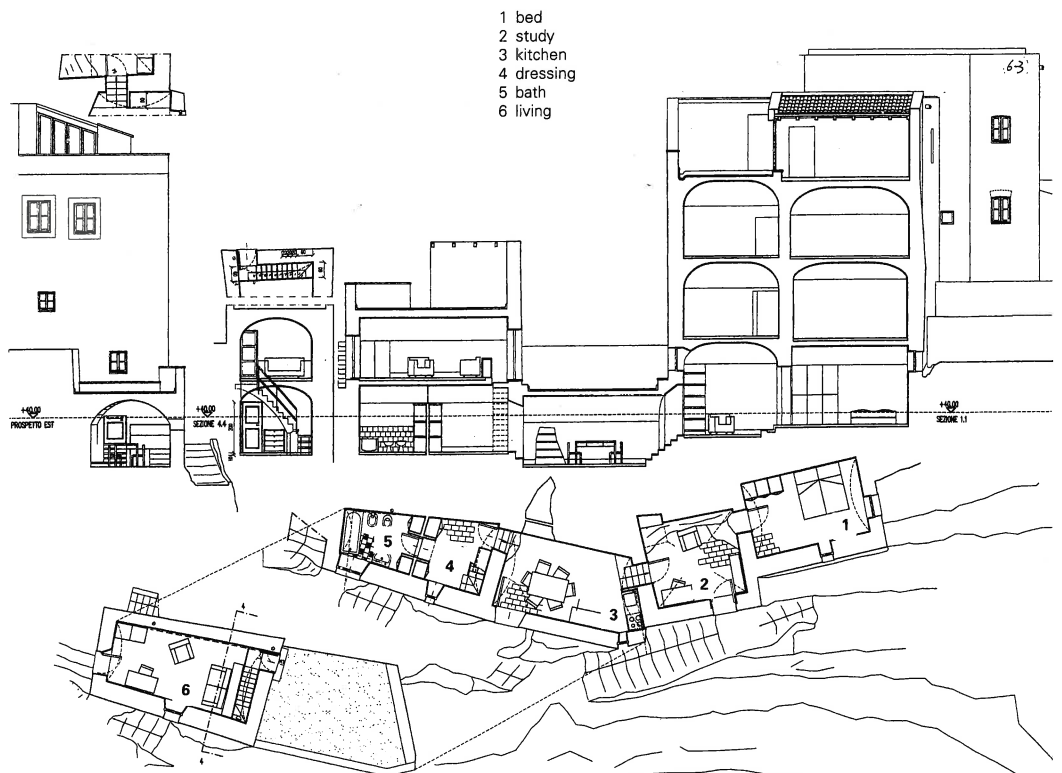
17
 ... structure as existing. Main external difference is insertion of new windows as there was no natural lighting in some rooms. Existing elevations were carefully analysed to establish appropriate solid-to-void ratios and proportions. Traditional constructional methods have been adapted.

18
 One of three prototype dwellings being developed to test compositional system and construction techniques. Experience gained here will influence later development.



17

generated spatial events. The other surprise was to find the confirmation, even more marked than in other cases, that an ancient constructional system of stonework, with its precise rules related to the nature of the materials and the techniques used in putting them together, is more compatible with insertions of advanced hence soft, technology, than the hard technologies generally used in contemporary architecture. The plant systems were conceived with the aim of achieving the maximum efficiency, but easily and without generating bulky volumes or breaches which would have conflicted with the quality of the spaces. GIANCARLO DE CARLO



- 1 bed
- 2 study
- 3 kitchen
- 4 dressing
- 5 bath
- 6 living

18