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Swiss casual elegance

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↑ The roof folds downward, underlining the separation between glass and roof.



↑ The wooden bar structure adds an extra dimension to the play of surface textures.

Pavilion, Grammichele

Marco Navarra shows his fascination with unconventional materials and the unfinished.

ITALY — TEXT: LUIGI PRESTINENZA, PHOTOGRAPHY: PEPPE MAISTO

The Fitzcarraldo Pavilion, designed by Marco Navarra, head of Navarra Office Walk Architecture (Nowa), is located inside the Valle dei Margi agricultural tourism complex in Grammichele, a fruit-growing region in the Province of Catania in southeast Sicily. The pavilion, used for breakfast and bar service, is flanked by a pre-existing building used as a restaurant; the final result is an open court that looks out over the orchards. The name Fitzcarraldo, a tribute to the eponymous hero of the 1982 film by German director Werner Herzog, carries connotations of a ship, a decontextualized insertion in this agricultural context. This idea of a floating object is suggested by the form of the building: a glass box that sits lightly above the earth, as opposed to being rooted in it. In fact, the pavilion floats on a thin concrete slab that is itself raised above the gently sloping ground plane.

Although inspired by Mies van der Rohe's Farnsworth House, the Fitzcarraldo Pavilion does not share its minimalist approach. This is evident in the choice of supporting structure: square, reinforced concrete pillars on one side, and round, terracotta-clad columns on the other. The two kinds of support are not aligned – there are eight columns and only five pillars – and their diameters also differ. This structural irregularity is used to explore the beam and column principle and to give the impression that the slab above is self-supporting. Further attention is drawn to this aspect by the irregular soffit of the exposed slab, which was obtained by pouring the concrete in a very unusual way: 100 x 140 cm recycled printing plates were laid above the standard wooden formwork a few centimetres from the top surface. Resting on only a few points, the weight of concrete immediately deformed the plates. The result is an irregular, 'crumpled' surface with a decidedly rugged appearance that is the antithesis of the 'perfectly smooth' surfaces that are usually preferred today when building in exposed concrete.

'What interests me,' says Navarra, 'is the unfinished, rather than the finished. Together with the vast potential of the non-conventional reuse of materials! This is a direction that Macro Navarra, professor at the University of Syracuse in Sicily, has been pursuing for some time in his personal work. His primary fascination is with the creativity of Mediterranean countries, so clearly demonstrated

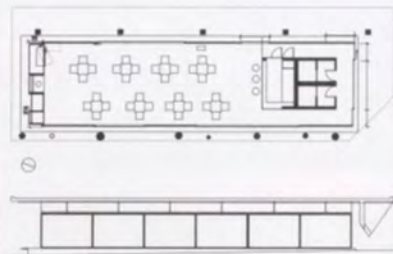
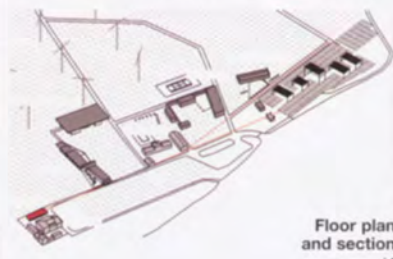
in processes of renovation and reuse. Unlike their richer northern neighbours, they are more inclined to recycle and mix, to produce hybrids of evolved and rudimentary technologies creating new objects and improving existing ones, often within an entirely original conceptual horizon of duration, function and performance.

In the Fitzcarraldo Pavilion this approach can also be observed in the polished concrete paving, which contains fragments of lava stone and additives of coloured oxidized pigments; or the exterior paving made up of strips of marble off-cuts. There is also the terracotta cladding of the columns – some smooth and some milled – realized on a turning lathe. It's a modern design based on a local method of working ceramic vases (nearby Caltagirone is a centre of ceramic production).

The pavilion's final distinguishing feature is its roof, which folds downwards at one of its four corners. Had it been built horizontally and projecting out over the path, it would have hindered the passage of agricultural machinery. However, treated in this manner, it becomes the pretext for underlining the separation between the roof and the glass walls below. Further reinforcing the effect of a folded sheet of paper resting lightly on its supports is the cladding of brightly coloured tiles which interact with the bright Sicilian sunlight. ←

PAVILION, 2006–2007

Architect: Marco Navarra
Client: Agriturismo Valle dei Margi
Address: Valle dei Margi, Grammichele (Catania)



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