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HOW DESIGN CAN HELP TO  
CHANGE A CITY'S APPEAL









/ WORDS PEARLIE TAN

# 40 YEARS IN THE MAKING

Built in the 1970s, these three seaside villas were recently restored and unified by their original architect.



Overlooking the hypnotising cerulean waters of the Costa Smeralda, on the island of Sardinia, a complex of villas is discretely camouflaged in a landscape of tall pines and Mediterranean scrub.

Up close, the aesthetics are surprisingly rooted in brutalist architecture and constructed from exposed concrete and rusted steel.

What sets these villas apart is their semi-hypogeum design; they are nestled

into the earth with green roofs that keep them partly hidden.

The architecture is bold, yet the volumes are deeply integrated in the landscape, with a focus on concealing rather than revealing.

Conceived and designed by architects Ferdinando Fagnola and Gianni Francione in the 1970s, the new owner purchased three of the five original villas in 2011 and Fagnola was recommissioned to renovate the buildings in collaboration with Italian architecture firm PAT.



Completed in March 2018, the new hallmark of these villas in Sardinia is the unity of the complex.

What was designed as separate had to be integrated – both physically and in terms of architectural language – for its new purpose as a family home.

#### **A BRUTALIST AESTHETIC, SET IN NATURE**

The original project was guided by the desire to integrate the built environment into the natural landscape.

According to Fagnola, the villas were designed to establish an almost mimetic



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relationship with nature, a far cry from the Mediterranean vernacular that was popular during the 1970s.

Concrete was chosen for the shell of all the buildings, blending in with the rocky landscape and evoking the megalithic nuraghe towers found on Sardinia.

Fagnola explains that the sculpted forms of the complex “slit the ground like wedges, generating an open series of relationships and spaces... Their mysterious and severe forms are designed to relate to space and the orography of the ground”.

The new construction criteria was to unify the villas into a single, integrated work to create a home for a couple with five children and their guests.

By joining the separate villas, different spaces are created, allowing for public and private interaction, while regrouping the architectural organism that was initially conceived.

“The playful function of a house by the sea convinced me to design an open architecture, broken up into many volumes... a multipurpose central area and many other small closed spaces, but in the open air,” says Fagnola.



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The entire complex has been joined only on the outside, with no interior corridors, which had a decisive impact on landscape design and involved a great deal of work removing boundaries and sewing paths.

### THREE VILLAS, ONE FAMILY HOME

The master bedrooms, kitchen and main living areas are housed in Villa 1 which is

/ 1  
The patio of Villa 1, with iroko planks flooring made by Lualdi, looking out to the sea.

/ 2  
The living room in Villa 1 has a skylight that lets in the daylight.

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/ 3  
The master bathroom in Villa 1 that looks out to a lawn of green.

/ 4  
The new recreation complex with sauna, Turkish bath and an outdoor Jacuzzi inspired by the avant-garde Superonda sofa.

connected to Villa 3 by a new staircase and system of walkways.

Private spaces are delimited by concrete walls, while shared areas allow people to come together easily.

Villa 2 has undergone the most significant transformation with one of the buildings replaced with a sort of urban axis, delineated by a wooden walkway.

This connects the rooms to the new recreation complex with sauna, Turkish bath and an outdoor Jacuzzi inspired by the avant-garde Superonda sofa that was designed in 1966 for Poltronova by Archizoom Associati.

In addition to guest rooms and open living areas, Villa 3 now contains a Montessori-inspired playroom.

The dynamic interior is scaled for children's activities, featuring PVC flooring and customised modular oak tables. It is complemented by an outdoor adventure path suspended among the maritime pines.

### COLOURFUL AND GREEN

The villas are exposed to aggressive maritime elements so the materials used externally must be able to withstand the

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harsh conditions, age gracefully and also have camouflaging qualities.

"The use of each material is always linked to a specific function," says Fagnola.

Warm iroko hardwood planks have been chosen for the new cladding, partitions and outdoor decking, along with durable basalt floors and corten steel doors and window frames.

The exterior has also been softened with accents of blue and pink paint, which act as a counterpoint to the cement and steel.

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The exterior, in this case of the outdoor spa in Villa 2, is softened with accents of pink. The cheerful chaise lounge from Paola Lenti is perfect for soaking it all in.







**VILLAS IN SARDINIA, ITALY**

**LOCATION** / COSTA SMERALDA, SARDINIA, ITALY  
**COMPLETION** / 2018  
**PROPERTY AREA** / 3.5HA  
**VILLA 1 AREA** / 680M<sup>2</sup>  
**VILLA 2 AREA** / 485M<sup>2</sup>  
**VILLA 3 AREA** / 360M<sup>2</sup>  
**ARCHITECTS** / FERDINANDO FAGNOLA + PAT. ARCHITETTI ASSOCIATI  
**CONTRACTOR** / C8P COSTRUZIONI, OLBIA  
**LANDSCAPING** / TECNOVERDE, OLBIA  
**STRUCTURAL CONSULTANT** / BUONOMO VEGLIA SRL, TORINO  
**M&E CONSULTANT** / STUDIO FORTE, ALBA (CN)





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/ 6  
The 25m pool in Villa 2 is surrounded by plush furniture from Paola Lenti and edged with stone.

/ 7  
The bold, slanting form of Villa 2 is interrupted by floor-to-ceiling glass.



The interiors feature sustainable, natural materials including resilient cork floors and colourful mosaic tiles in the children's rooms. The floors in the master bedrooms are cotton carpet, complemented by limestone and iroko bathrooms.

Custom furnishings in iroko wood can be found throughout the villas, echoing its use in the exterior.

As the villas are partially submerged into the ground and blanketed with green roofs, the bioclimatic design provides natural insulation and reduces energy requirements while creating a comfortable microclimate.

One of the strategies to conserve

water is through landscape design, reducing lawn areas and planting drought-resistant vegetation.

"It was a project of great complexity, both in technical terms and in dealing with the municipality," says Fagnola, referring to the rigorous architectural and zoning regulations along the Costa Smeralda.

"We were lucky to find open-minded people who understood what we were trying to do: moving away from the vernacular pastiche to propose a kind of architecture which could be exemplary of a way of building in coastal areas while blending in with the surroundings."