



No. 1

Casa Malaparte

Curzio Malaparte

Capri

Initial Project 1938

Realized 1943

For a very long time attributed to Adalberto Libera, the Casa Malaparte has, in recent years, changed authorship and is now more widely believed to be the work of Malaparte himself. From Libera's own rejection of the work, the lack of communication between the two throughout most of the project, to Malaparte reminding us that this was, in fact, his own production, done without the help of architects or engineers -- except for legal issues, legal formalities, it becomes easy to accept this new attribution of work. Malaparte called it a "house like him" and, less famously -- his portrait of stone. Often paralleled in order to understand the architecture, I intend here to take the opposite route; understand Malaparte's life through his house.

Perched high up on Punta Massullo, in the Italian island of Capri, stands a monument. It's hard to reach -- if not almost impossible. You arrive by boat, and once close enough, you can't miss it. There it stands, by a remote cliff on an isolated island. A stone monolith emerges from the rock in an almost promethean way, with a few very small openings that pale in comparison to the massiveness of the construction. From its profile you see a monumental staircase leading to the roof. At first glance you could mistake it for a memorial or an observatory, but it isn't -- it's a monument. It seems to have been there forever, carved straight in the rock, only its color gives it away. A bright red that makes it seem a little out of place -- although it makes a substantial effort not too. Its archaic qualities betrayed by its extravagance.

Its progress broke all the rules and by all accounts shouldn't have happened. Being out of place isn't just a visual observation -- it is a feeling ingrained much deeper in the building's story. The site was protected and construction forbidden; the money used for its planning and erection was diverted from external funds; the project itself wasn't supposed to be a villa; and the villa wasn't supposed to look that way. And yet there it stands, perched high up on Punta Massullo. The lonely sculpture seems to be screaming for attention, with its bright color and monumental stance. Unfortunately, no one is there to hear it, and you

can almost feel sorry for it for having gotten itself in this situation. It desperately wants to be noticed and remembered, but without the encumbrance of dealing with others. In its own way, it is a work of contradictions. There is little doubt Anthony Vidler would have a field day describing all of its seemingly uncanny aspects.

You reach the bottom of the precipice and step off your transport. A winding little path continuously steps up from the ocean, you can't really discern the top, although you see the red monolith slightly emerging from the shrubs and rocks. You start your journey, and go up and away; the thought crosses your mind that this climb should be done on your knees. Ninety-nine steps later, you arrive at the top, tired, everything you knew was left behind. Cleansed of your past, you can go forward. From its base, the building isn't as intimidating and the entrance is almost quite picturesque with its stone porch; if it wasn't for the metal bars on every window by the ground-floor.

Once you step in the building -- and not through any grand entry like the monumental longitudinal stairs would have you believe, but through the small side-entrance, you find the barest, naked interior. For such a spectacular building on its dramatic site, the entrance is quite frankly disappointing. It's dark, uninteresting, a few small rooms and amenities all lined up one after the other along a corridor -- it almost makes you wonder if it was worth all that effort. But as soon as you take the small stairs that lead to the first floor, you understand. You understand why someone would go through all that. You are welcomed by the enormous main room, an almost completely empty space with four immense openings on each of its corners. For the time this place was lived in, they weren't even covered with glass panes, but left completely open, allowing the elements to enter the space. You notice the massive wood frames surrounding them, only to realize that windows aren't actually fenestrations, they are in fact canvases served to get rid of any introspection the space might have had. The space isn't here to show you itself, but rather to make itself as unremarkable as possible and show you everything else. It's telling you a story; the story of oth-

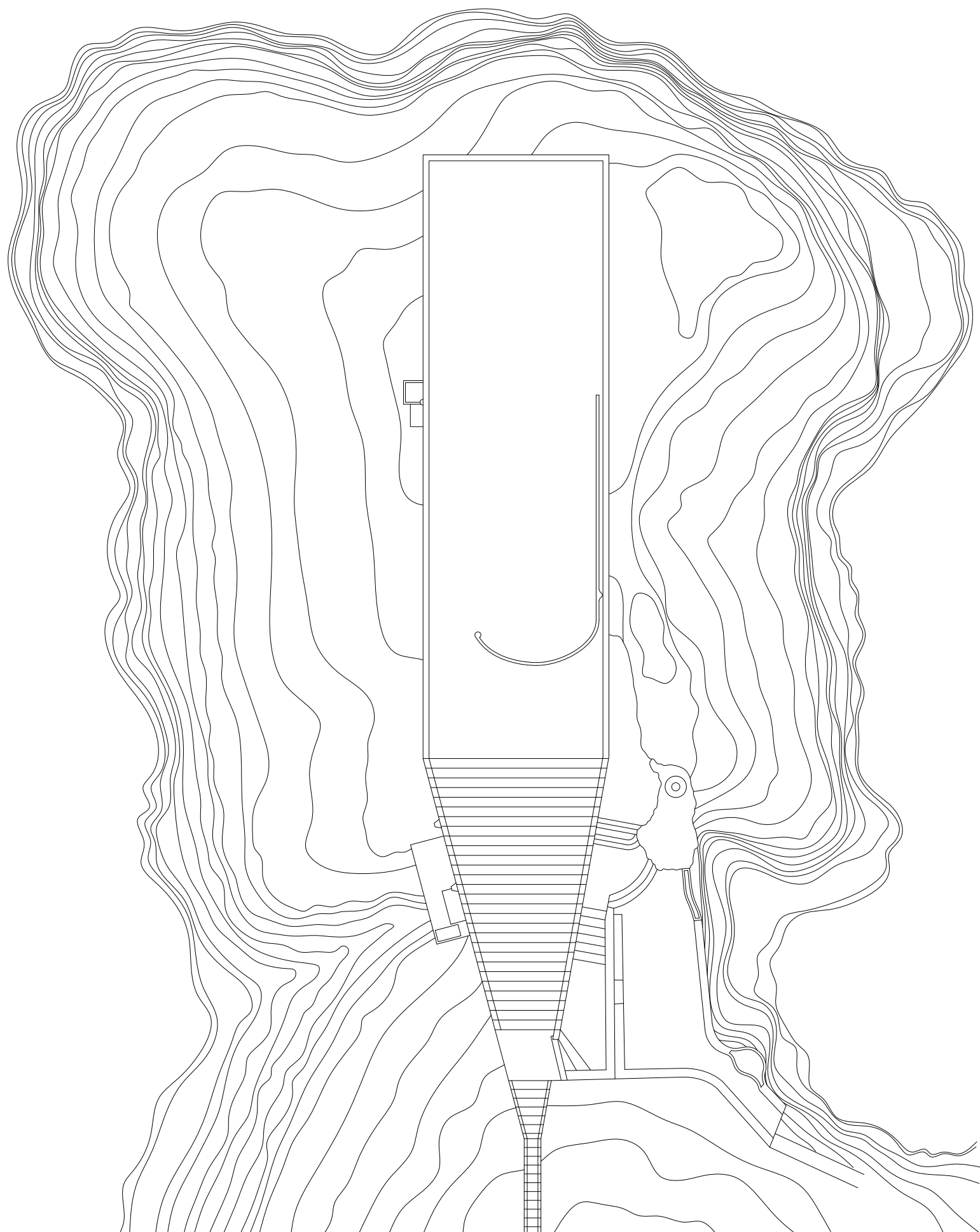
ers by showing them to you. The story of the landscape, of the island and its people, of nature and of life. And it does so without any concessions or restraints, it simply shows things the way they are. Some like it, some might not, but the red monument doesn't seem too bothered by that. It simply does. You feel like such brutal honesty could almost get it in trouble.

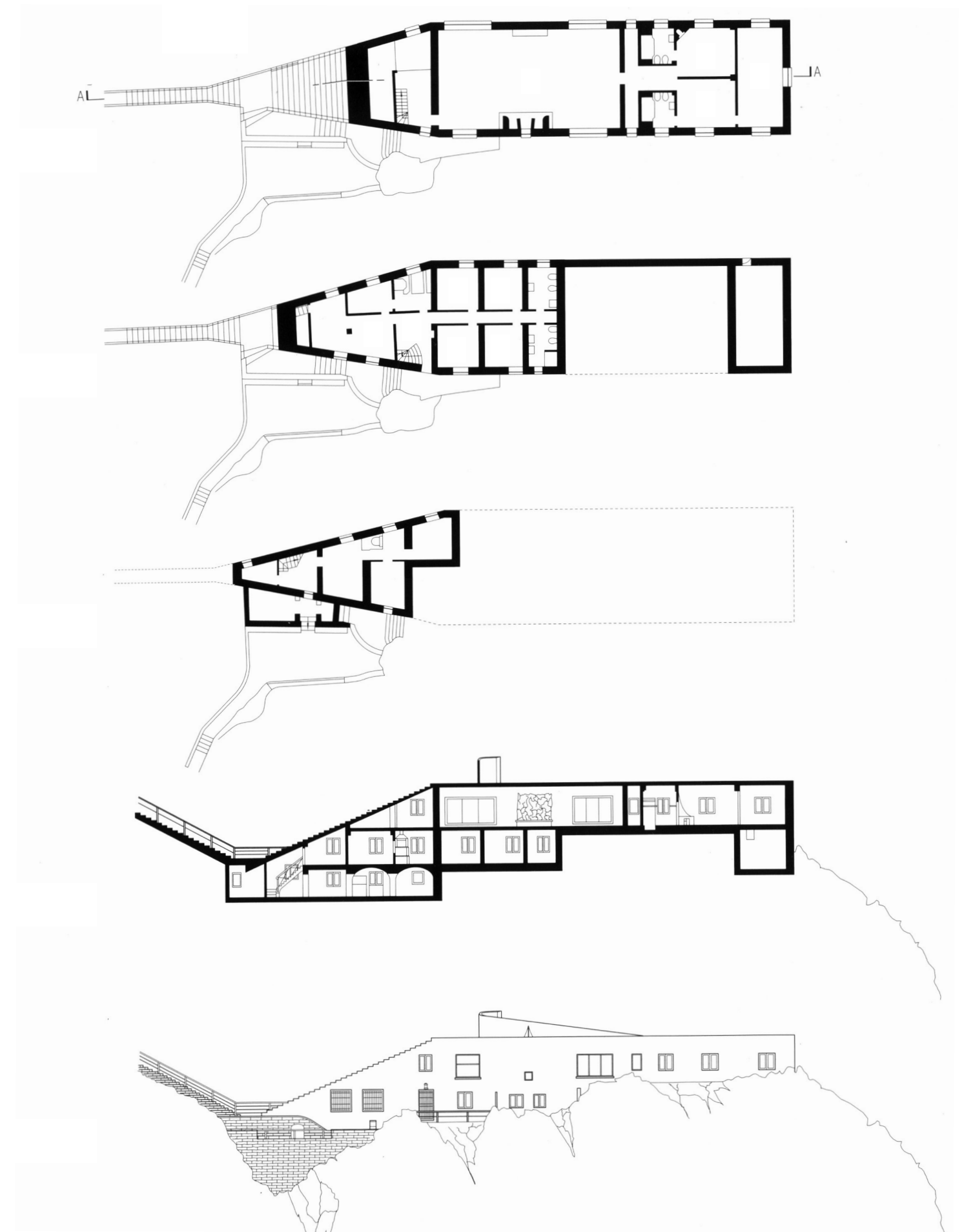
Past the main room you find yourself in a small, perfectly symmetrical hallway, with a bathroom and bedroom on each side. A space with clear personal boundaries, surely. What isn't noticeable -- unless you enter the bedroom on the right, is the one-sided access to a study situated behind both rooms. You step in. There are three small windows; one on each side of the building and one at the very front. You take a seat.

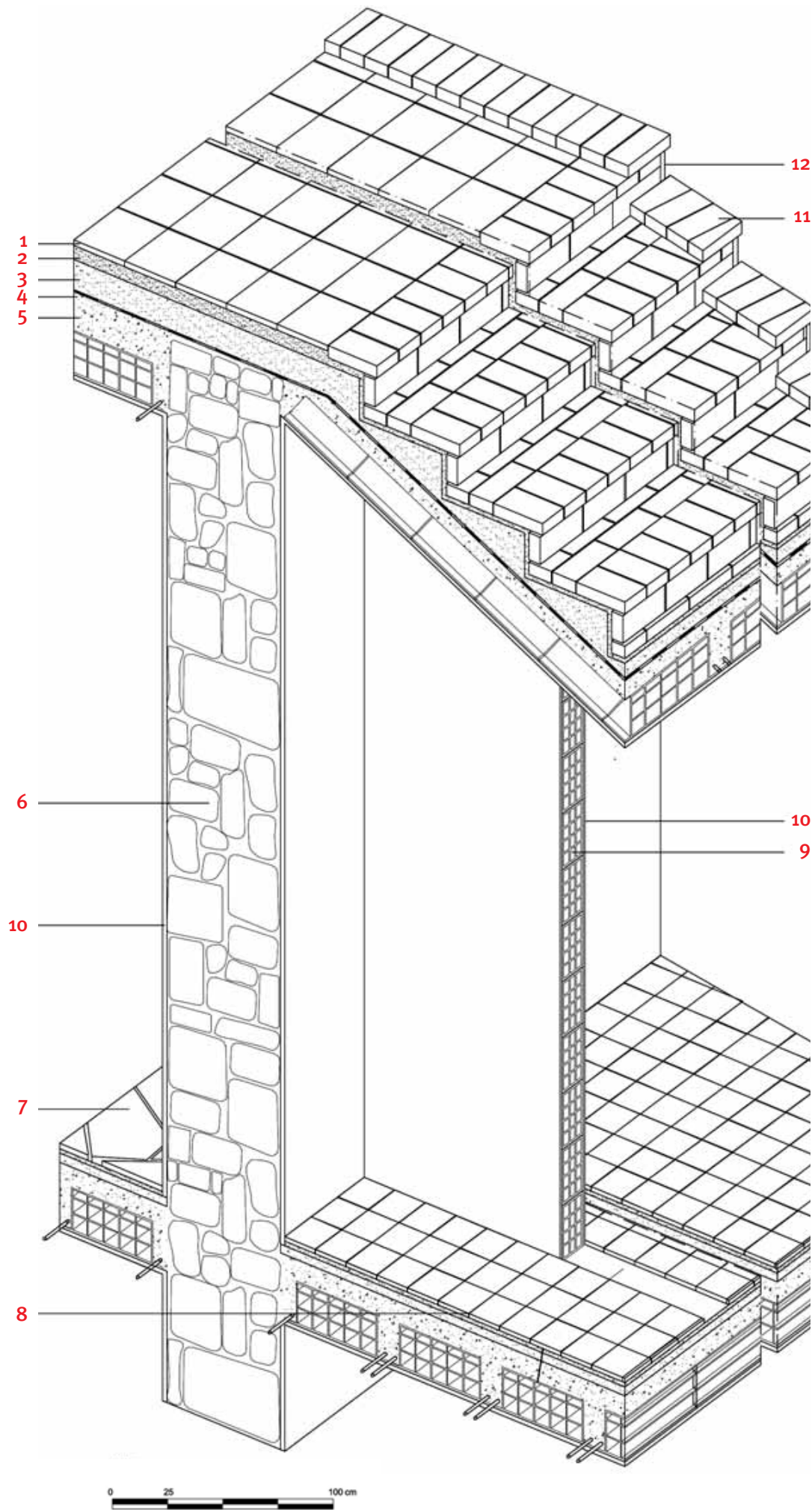
You face the ocean and contemplate. Directly in front of you is the town of Messina in Sicily, some 180 miles away. And in between, sky, water. Too much sky, and too much ocean. It's the perfect place to gather and clarify your thoughts and feelings, away from the world, from people and in a way even from Capri herself.

You decide to head back, your mind clear and body at peace. This time you leave by land, and not the ocean you came from. At the bottom of the stepped roof, an almost indiscernible path disappears into the vegetation, and so, with it, you leave this spectacular object behind and head back to town. Ahead of you lies a four hour walk back to civilization, but it's part of the journey you set yourself to.

On your way back, the experience you just went through stays in your mind, and you keep thinking about what you just saw, who might have built such an extraordinary monument in the middle of nowhere, was it a high ranked diplomat? A president? A king? Why was this place built? Is the owner buried under it? Whomever it might be, if he was anything like the site you just visited, he must have been someone truly great.







Dettaglio assometrico del nodo solaio di copertura – parete portante – scalinata.

Legenda:

1. piastrelle quadrate in laterizio (25x25 cm)
2. malta cementizia di allettamento
3. massetto in calcestruzzo di pendenza
4. guaina impermeabilizzante
5. solaio in laterocemento gettato in opera
6. muratura portante in pietra
7. pavimento in lastre di arenaria
8. pavimento in piastrelle di maiolica (15x15 cm)
9. parete in elementi di laterizio forato
10. intonaco civile per interni
11. mattoni pieni in laterizio
12. intonaco civile per esterni





