

ITALIAN UNIFICATION

FORTY YEARS AFTER CREATING A CLUSTER OF UTOPIC VILLAS ON SARDINIA, AN ARCHITECT RETURNS WITH A NEW TEAM TO COMBINE THREE OF THEM INTO A SINGLE RETREAT.

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THE NORTH VILLA



When Ferdinando Fagnola co-designed a series of avant-garde Brutalist villas on the Sardinian coast in the mid-1970s, he had no idea he would return one day with a group of younger architects to transform a trio of them into one home for new owners. Each villa consists of seemingly discrete, half-buried concrete volumes emerging from the earth. A Spun chair by Thomas Heatherwick for Magis is oriented toward the sea.



Approaching by land or sea, one could easily miss these three villas on the northeast coast of Sardinia. Attuned to the environmental sensitivities of the 1970s, when they were designed by Turin architects Ferdinando Fagnola and Gianni Francione, they rise almost reluctantly from the earth, their Brutalist wedges half-rooted and dispersed, woolly with shrubs. This spring, four decades after the villas were built, Fagnola returned to the island, joined by a team of younger architects from another Turin studio, PAT., to finish off a series of restorations—ranging from a fresh color palette to adding new bedrooms—commissioned by the current owners. The result is a single vision refined and elaborated on by two generations of designers: environmentally committed, aesthetically bold, and built to foster a quasi-communal lifestyle. “New forces bring new ideas,” Fagnola says. “I was happy to see architecture I did forty years ago rejuvenated by young blood.”

In 1975, the scion of one of Italy’s wealthy industrialist families commissioned Fagnola and Francione to develop five sculptural villas near the sea on the famed Costa Smeralda. But halfway through, financial pressure led him to sell their naked structures to individual buyers, who finished the construction themselves. The results varied and often broke with the architects’ intent. One villa was subdivided into multiple units and covered in granite, for instance.

Fast forward to 2011, when a new pair of owners scooped up three of the villas and nine acres of land. Eager to realize the original architectural vision, they invited Fagnola to restore, modernize, and unify them into a single retreat. Francione had moved to Bali in the intervening years, but Fagnola was still in Turin, where he formed a new partnership with PAT. >



In a guestroom in Villa 1, an original 1970s bed by Fagnola is paired with a new Tab T lamp by Flos and Yves Klein blue walls (above). Opposite, clockwise from top: Canted asymmetrical ceilings and a mix of concrete, steel, and iroko wood define the main living area; a Tizio

lamp by Richard Sapper sits on a custom desk; in the master bathroom, oversized windows and an Agape mirror pull the outside in; the master bedroom features a bed by Antonio Citterio, Papiro floor lamps by Sergio Calatroni, and a Diamond chair by Harry Bertoia for Knoll.



Villas in Sardinia: The North Villa



ARCHITECTS
Ferdinando Fagnola + PAT.

LOCATION
Costa Smeralda, Sardinia, Italy

- A Living Room
- B Office
- C Bedroom
- D Lounge
- E Patio
- F Laundry
- G Kitchen
- H Dining Room

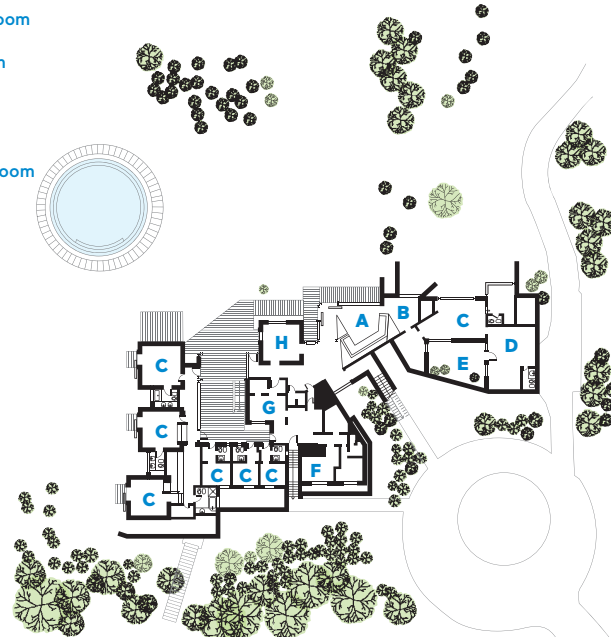
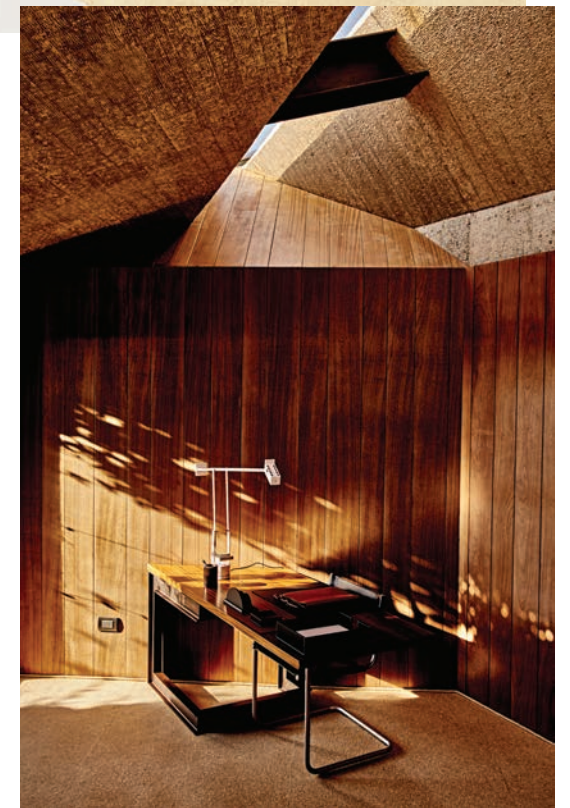


ILLUSTRATION: LOHNES + WRIGHT



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THE SOUTH VILLA

**“FOR US, *THE ENVIRONMENT*
WAS PARAMOUNT. WE WANTED
THE VILLAS TO DISAPPEAR.”**

FERDINANDO FAGNOLA, ARCHITECT



The structures are sprawling yet largely imperceptible. Like its counterparts, Villa 2—containing guest bedrooms, a spa, and a network of outdoor havens—extends into the hillside, cloaked in energy-saving green roofs. The new landscaping cuts water usage on the property by 70 percent compared to previous levels.

It was a unique opportunity for the 12-year-old firm to put some ideas of the counterculture back into play, says PAT. architect Andrea Veglia. “In the ’70s, the radical utopian visions of the late ’60s had begun to leave some disenchanting,” he says—but not Fagnola and Francione. “When we first visited the villas, we found an almost forgotten example of an architecture that was able to incarnate those radical ideas in convincing and powerful ways.” Veglia recalls, citing the villas’ total lack of nostalgia for Italian traditions.

The team, which called itself F+P, set out to integrate the three structures for the new owners, who have five children and wanted to be able to host large groups for extended stays. The home’s functions are now dispersed over all the buildings—angular steel and concrete structures clad in iroko and cedar—and, in between them, in shared open-air spaces.

Under the new layout, each building includes guest quarters and a pool (overall the resort-like complex can accommodate up to about 30 people), with Villa 1 containing the owners’ rooms. A spacious patio built partly into the earth outside Villa 2, along with the vaulted living room in Villa 1, form the social core of a compound whose design is intended to encourage a sense of community. And because private areas can be accessed only through public space, and not all the private spaces have kitchens, guests congregate naturally in common areas for meals and activities.

Villa 3 even has a Montessori-inspired playroom where kids can paint, model clay, or, just outside, follow a rope bridge suspended in the trees. Villa 2 is a kind of playroom for grown-ups, dominated by a spa and a Turkish bath. The building is newly bisected by a pathway that unites the three structures, a straight path that the team calls the project’s “urban axis.” Fagnola admits that inserting the walkway would >

Villas in Sardinia: The South Villa



ARCHITECTS

Ferdinando Fagnola + PAT.

LOCATION

Costa Smeralda, Sardinia, Italy

- A Dining Area
- B Mechanical Room
- C Massage Area
- D Turkish Bath
- E Patio
- F Snow Room
- G Sauna
- H Bedroom
- I Living Room
- J Service Building

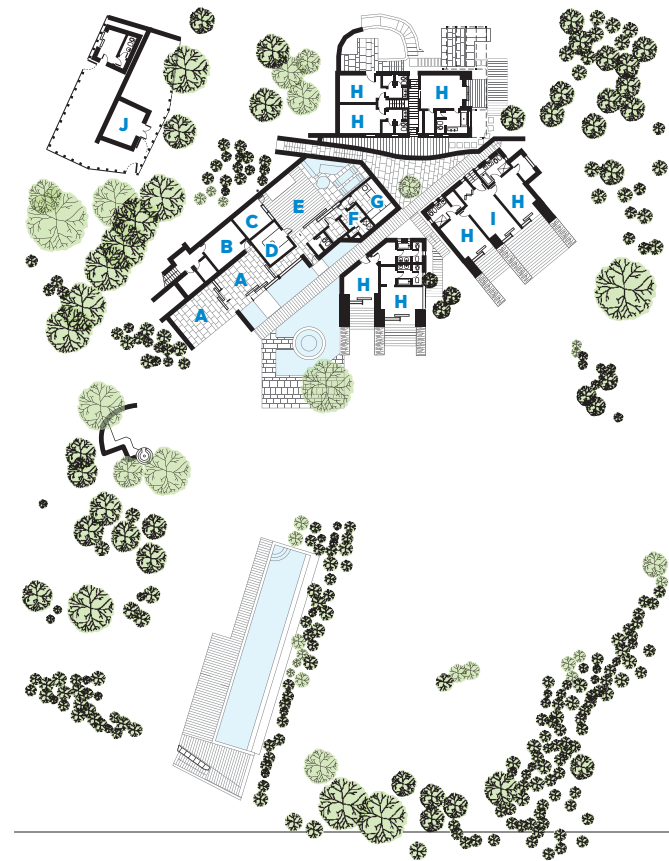
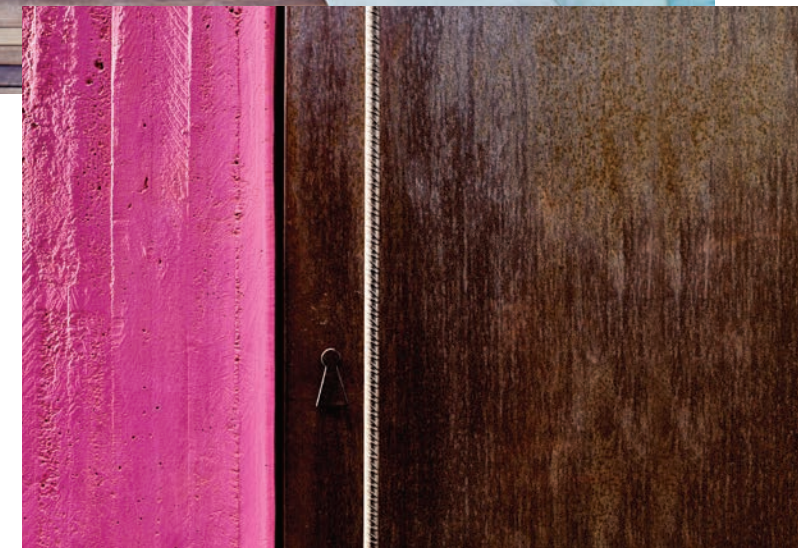


ILLUSTRATION: LOHNES + WRIGHT



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A new basalt walkway with iroko decking glides between a waterfall cascading off Villa 2 and a pool with squiggly steps (top). All across the property, blocks of jewel-toned color meet raw materials, like a hot pink concrete wall next to a Cor-Ten

steel door with a rebar handle (above). The sheltered courtyard (left), known as the “piazetta,” is a favorite gathering spot. The swanky mid-pool conversation pit (opposite) was added by the new owners during the renovation.

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THE EAST VILLA

“THE FACT THAT *IT IS NOT EASY TO TELL WHO DID WHAT IS A TESTAMENT TO THE FACT THAT ARCHITECTURE IS A COMPLEX AND COLLABORATIVE EFFORT.*”

ANDREA VEGLIA, ARCHITECT

Villa 3, seen here, is newly connected to Villa 1 by a series of stairs and walkways. At the request of one of the new owners, who had previously established a Montessori school, it includes an educational playroom for kids. Like the other villas, it also features guest quarters and a pool.

not have occurred to him 40 years ago, but it turned out to be a “brilliant” way to resolve the distribution of functions.

In many ways, the villas were ahead of their time in their emphasis on sustainability, a term that was just coming into broad use when they were built. “In Italy, 1968 was a defining moment for the architect, who was not an artist anymore, but someone who works in society,” Fagnola recalls. “The message was that respect for the environment was a paramount value for society, and this became the basis for our work in Sardinia.” From the start, Fagnola and Francione embraced passive design measures, like tucking the buildings partly underground and using low-maintenance materials like turf, wood, steel, and exposed concrete. Today, new eco-conscious landscaping—smaller lawn areas, native Mediterranean scrub, and roofs furry with grass-like weeds—takes this principle further, reducing water consumption by 70 percent compared to prior levels. The team also updated the villas by adding high-efficiency mechanical systems, thermal insulation, electronically controlled sunscreens, and low-emission glazing, which earned the project Italy’s highest possible energy rating.

The interiors are grand yet inviting. High-ceilinged rooms have a sculptural modern look, while walls cant inward in some normal-height rooms. Furniture from Knoll, Paola Lenti, and Living Divani coexists beside custom pieces, restored from the 1970s or newly designed. The renovation linked certain materials to certain functions: cork for living room floors and children’s rooms but carpet for others; mosaic tiles and Corian for the kids’ baths, wood and stone for the adults’. The team also introduced basalt to the spa’s material palette. “Basalt has a link to an old, noble Sardinian building tradition, from Romanesque churches to the Nuragic architecture of the Bronze Age,” says Veglia. “It seemed a perfect fit in this project, which veers away from the Mediterranean vernacular and its romantic use of pink granite.”

That said, the PAT. team did add color as a counterpoint to the existing neutral tones of earthy concrete, grainy wood, and metal beams. “For [Francione and me], the environment was paramount—we wanted the villas to disappear,” Fagnola explains. “I had spent my life looking for the right shade of gray, and suddenly, when they said, ‘Let’s make this wall pink,’ it was a cultural shift.” Spaces inside and out now feature emphatic blocks of color: hot pink painted concrete, aubergine plastered walls, triangular teal paneling, and baths tiled in lilac, blue, scarlet, and yellow. Some reference palettes used by architects Luis Barragán and Le Corbusier. Fagnola, warming to the idea, even surprised the team with an Yves Klein blue guest room.

At first glance, it is tempting to attribute the more far-out features—certain colors, a conversation pit in the middle of a pool, an outdoor cinema—to maximalist 1970s tastes, but these were new additions. “The fact that it is not easy to tell who did what,” Veglia says, “is a testament to the fact that architecture is a complex and collaborative effort.” ■

Villas in Sardinia: The East Villa



ARCHITECTS
Ferdinando Fagnola + PAT. LOCATION
Costa Smeralda, Sardinia, Italy



The communal area of Villa 3 (below and opposite, top) features slatted iroko walls, a modular sofa by Piero Lissoni for Living Divani, and a coffee table by Studio Guscetti for Fioroni; the patio dining chairs are by Dedon and the iroko wood table is custom. Outside, the limestone-encircled pool (opposite, right) was updated as part of a broader landscape renovation. The roofs are planted with rosemary, myrtus, westringia, and more (opposite, bottom left). “The way these villas blend with the environment gives a taste of what sensitive coastal development could be,” says PAT. architect Andrea Veglia.



ILLUSTRATION: LOHNES + WRIGHT

