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# Contemporary Heritage Lexicon

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## Chapter 14

# Contemporary Ruins: Form and Nature in Eduardo Souto De Moura's Houses

Gabriel Braulio Botasso  and Simone Helena Tanoue Vizioli 

**Abstract** This chapter aims to investigate the intricate relationship between form and nature in contemporary Architecture, focusing on the works of renowned Portuguese architect Eduardo Souto de Moura. By examining three of his notable houses—Gerês House (1980), Baião House (1993), and Moledo House (1998)—this study delves into the interplay between architectural form and the surrounding natural environment. These houses, uniquely intertwined with historical layers and geographic context, establish an enduring connection between the artificial and the natural. The presence of pre-existing ruins in these works acts as a mediator, seamlessly integrating the architectural compositions with their surroundings. Through a meticulous analysis, this chapter illustrates how these dwellings become not only homes but also new ruins that merge harmoniously with nature. By exploring the singularities of a place, informed by its historical layers and geography, the study illuminates the understanding that Architecture can be considered a second nature. Ultimately, this investigation sheds light on the profound implications of the relationship between form, nature, and history in contemporary architectural practice.

**Keywords** Ruin · Eduardo Souto de Moura · Gerês House · Baião House · Moledo House

### 14.1 Introduction

When nature and artifact coexist in perfect equilibrium, the supreme state of the art is reached—the silence of things [1]

A work of Architecture can be understood as a relation of times, in which matter and memory conjoins to create new places for the contemporary being. Through

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the arrangement of architectural elements such as walls, floors, and ceilings, a work establishes a rich and intricate connection with the natural environment and the specific geography of a place. These elements become repositories of meanings and historical layers, composing a certain landscape. Each work commences with a place and its respective program, which bound and broaden themselves, establishing a positive encounter: on the one hand, the architectural program is bounded by the features of a place; on the other hand, they open different means of materializing it, broadening it, vice-versa.

This place is never devoid of significance or uniform in its qualities; instead, it embodies the tangible, physical manifestation of history, carrying within it traces of its own past. Historical layers are accreted, and are convened, objectively and subjectively, in the design process. Therefore, a work stems from one place, but also builds another. In this dynamic, an indelible relationship is formed between artificial and natural elements, where the built form and nature intertwine—artificiality pervades the surroundings, while nature pervades the Architecture.

Once its circumstantial relationship with history is overcome, architecture acquires, in a lasting manner, other values linked to its form. In this sense, it can be said that architecture itself becomes geography: it is where history is deposited and accommodated. [...] Architecture becomes inseparable from a way of life and becomes part of the human landscape [2] (our translation)

Through discourses and aesthetic appropriations, Architecture intervenes in places, considering aspects ranging from the political and social to aspects related to nature and landscape. The place, used as a reference for Architecture in its formal constitution, presents broad possibilities of configuration, ranging from (1) detachment from reality—abstraction, counterposition, autonomous form, which, nevertheless, is only possible through the observation of reality—to (2) a project guided by the material, geographical, anthropological, and social complexity of the places themselves (a connection without which the construction loses its character).

In the first case, inspirations are triggered by external elements to the site, in an abstract sense, and this reference is something not previously defined—by denying the surroundings at the moment of its composition, it can be an element that challenges such a state, proposing a rethinking of conventional relationships between Architecture and place. In the second case, design propositions make use of the energetic potential of the place, that is, its matter—whether natural and/or artificial (landscape, topography)—suggesting forms, conditions of occupancy, uses, being decisive in its definition. In both cases, the work will recompose the place or integrate with it. “The identity between architecture and place is so strong that it tends to anchor the time, to make it fold upon itself, to subject it to geography” [2] (our translation).

Over time, the constructed form seamlessly integrates with the natural environment, becoming a ruin that embodies both history and nature. In this case, Architecture acts as a second nature. In an interview given to the authors in 2013, Portuguese architect Eduardo Souto de Moura (1952-) suggests that when Architecture becomes indistinguishable from nature, it reaches its highest potential, as

it becomes anonymous and enters the realm of history, thereby dispensing with narratives.

According to Machado [2], Souto de Moura's oeuvre manifests a clear dialogue between the Modern and the Historical, reflecting a comprehensive understanding of the city in both space and time. Each work is situated within its context, demonstrating a profound awareness of the physical layers and the temporal, subjective dimensions accumulated over time. This relation of times is also emphasized by Dal Co [3], who argues that the architect's work reinforces the sense of history while simultaneously expanding the scope of contemporary expression.

As per Santos and Silva [4], Souto de Moura presents an ontological inquiry into what Architecture is. “In their apparent formal simplicity, Souto de Moura's buildings weave intricate references to the characteristics of the region, landscape, place, and architectural history” [4] (our translation). This attention to the site in which each work is inserted is akin to an act of resistance, characteristic of the so-called “Porto School”, to which he is historically connected. It is a school based on a mental (methodological) construct that draws support from the physical world but goes beyond Geography and topography. “Solid and deeply rooted, the architecture of the Portuguese master draws inspiration from traditions to reassert its own identity in a globalized world” [5].

## 14.2 “Porto School”: The Place as Resistance

Whether approached from the perspective of *genius loci*—finding the spirit of the place—or from the Khanian perspective of seeking what the building wants to be, the site is in the Porto School an artificial, cultural entity, laden with a desire for a previously formulated architecture [6] (our translation)

Without intending to provide a historical or critical overview of the construction of the modern canon, it is a fact that this historiographic object was built around the discussions held by its core, which took place in the International Congresses of Modern Architecture (CIAMs), incubators of a coordinated movement in search of a “cleaner architecture,” devoid of ornamentation and detached from history (advocating for *tabula rasa*). However, despite the promises made in the 1920s of a new society, an industry at the service of avant-gardes, absorbing and proposing their incorporation into Architecture, the reality in the 1940s was the repetition of war, the devastation of cities, and the shortcomings of modern Architecture in upholding its previous tenets.

Taking into consideration the works of Nikolaus Pevsner (1902–1983), Sigfried Giedion (1888–1968), Leonardo Benevolo (1923–2017), Reyner Banham (1922–1988), and Bruno Zevi (1918–2000) in their attempts to legitimize and anchor the Modern movement, establish certain commonplaces, and develop a historiography of the modern period (each in their own way), what distinguishes modern Architecture is a new sense of space and the aesthetics of the machine, embodying the *Zeitgeist*



(spirit of the time). Form and space in accordance with the era of the machine, thus defining the essence of modern Architecture.

However, one must question: how can Architecture be stabilized in harmony with its time, in sterile and undifferentiated spaces? Forgoing individual character in the name of the collective (as advocated in the Manifesto of La Sarraz, 1928), the universal Man and the Architecture that would reconstruct what the First World War had ravaged were not successful propositions. One of the most significant criticisms of the Modern Movement was the loss of identity in cities and the depletion of the meaning of Architecture itself. Its ideological core was subjected to rigorous scrutiny and faced piercing interrogations.

In this context, fissures and contradictions are found beneath the cloak of cohesion within the Modern Movement, bringing investigative vigor to the field of Architecture and Urbanism. In the post-World War II period, proposals for revising the Modern Movement were characterized. In the Portuguese context, the aim was not to restore the Modern substrate post-war, but to examine what emerged from the gaps it left.

### 14.2.1 "Português Suave"

Various architectural concerns emerged during the transition from the 19th to the 20th century in Portugal, between 1880 and 1940, encompassing both the height of Modernism and the awareness of a housing crisis in European cities. According to Teixeira [7], within this timeframe, three distinct periods in Portuguese history can be identified: "[...] the last decades of the constitutional monarchy until 1910; the republican regime from 1910 to 1926, and the Estado Novo, born after the 1926 revolution" [7] (our translation).

With the establishment of the authoritarian regime known as *Estado Novo* (the military coup took place in 1926, and the *Estado Novo* was implemented in 1933), it assumed control of construction, establishing in the country what is known as "ephemeral Modernism." It was an architectural approach based on German and Italian productions, countries aligned with the Portuguese government: the renewal of what was disturbed by the First World War would occur through Architecture and its reformulation.

However, faced with the government's failure to control the architectural production of the country—a fact further exacerbated by the adoption of styles belonging to other countries with different realities—Portuguese architects against the Regime decided to gather in the 1940s with the aim of organizing debates and meetings about the Modern in the country, giving rise to the first specialized publications in the architectural field. Fernández [8] refers to this period as the "*Português suave*" era, characterized by the resurgence of eclecticism amidst conceptions that were somewhat "Modern," or at least attempts that aimed in that direction. By embracing the Modern, Architecture would become the element of unity and national identity. In the late 1940s, there was a reorientation of the architectural practice in the country—in terms of thinking, teaching, and practicing Architecture—seeking a

more humanistic approach to Modern Architecture in the country (stemming from a critical review of the Modern Movement). The impacts of this shift in attitude also occurred within the CIAMs, in which the Portuguese group participated (referred to as CIAM Português or CIAM Porto). "In a period of restlessness and instability, Portuguese architecture strives to combine the first signs of modernity within a cultural context strongly influenced by tradition" [9] (our translation).

### 14.2.2 Way of Doing, Way of Thinking

It was a matter of recovering the history of the city, the history of architecture, accepting the responsibility of placing our cultural past as an irreplaceable and indispensable element for the construction of the future, establishing the present object as the mediator between the two times. It was a matter of reconciling erudite architecture with popular tradition, in a specific context and as a response to it, countering international architecture [10] (our translation)

Amidst this context, Portuguese architects choose to reassess the architecture previously practiced in the country while establishing guidelines for the future. Rethinking architecture meant reestablishing the connections between buildings and individuals, reconnecting social issues with architecture—a stance that had been largely unexplored by the modern movement, not only within the country but in its universal sense. The revision of approaches aligned internationally with the discussions held within the CIAMs. As mentioned earlier, the CIAMs began to debate new approaches after the end of World War II, emphasizing more humanistic aspects, which were also evident in Portugal.

In Portugal, there was a gathering of architects who advocated for the reinterpretation and adaptation of the Modern Movement within two groups: ODAM ("*Organização dos Arquitetos Modernos*", or Organization of Modern Architects, created in 1947) and the School of Fine Arts of Porto (which would later become the Faculty of Architecture of the University of Porto - FAUP). Among the key figures, notable names include Mário Bonito (1921–1976), Arménio Losa (1908–1988), Viana de Lima (1913–1991), Keil do Amaral (1910–1975), Carlos Ramos (1897–1969), Octávio Lixa Filgueiras (1922–1996), and Fernando Távora (1923–2005).

Upon being appointed as director of ESBAP in 1952, Carlos Ramos put forth proposals for the overall reform of the institution's education, surrounding himself with young graduates rather than older professors. He also incorporated assistants, ensuring broad freedom of action (including figures such as Fernando Távora). The debate was encouraged not only at the national level but also internationally within the CIAMs, where they participated with revision proposals based on their experiences in Porto. In 1957, Ramos successfully implemented his educational reform (proposed in 1950), which gradually became integrated into the school, bringing about a change in direction within the so-called "School of Porto" towards a "modern humanist" approach [11] (our translation), an architect who was not only concerned



with technical or scientific matters but also cultural, social, and critical aspects [12] (our translation).

The attention to social and cultural issues in the country, with a critical awareness, finds validation in the extensive "Inquiry into Regional Portuguese Architecture" (or "*Inquérito à Arquitectura Regional Portuguesa*"), conducted throughout the country by students and faculty members of ESBAP under the coordination of Távora and Filgueiras. They gained recognition for representing the spirit of the architect that the School of Porto sought in its revision. The teams were composed of three architects and divided into six zones across Portugal, conducting research for three months: Zone 1: Minho; Zone 2: Trás-os-Montes; Zone 3: Beiras; Zone 4: Estremadura; Zone 5: Alentejo; Zone 6: Algarve.

According to Alves Costa [10], the Inquiry was carried out with the intention of formalizing the concept of a national Architecture that the regime sought to instill in the population. It aimed to find what would be the traditional Architecture of the country, blurring the boundaries between the popular and the erudite. In the face of this initiative, two perspectives emerged: the first one used regional Architecture to reject the rationalist Architecture that was being introduced in the country as the mandatory language by the fascist government; the second one studied the results of the surveys to explore their methodological issues, with the aim of applying these insights in future housing responses for the country, based on an understanding of its reality.

This process revealed both the rationality of vernacular constructions and rendered the contradiction between modernity and tradition obsolete—something that Portugal and its architects proved could be amalgamated. "Portuguese architecture is a cross-roads of cultures. It is in the way it interprets external models and adapts them to its reality that we find its specificity" [10] (our translation). The 1960s are perceived as a period of national desire for self-discovery and valorization of local culture, establishing strong connections between modernity and tradition. The country is elevated to international levels, with its architectural production recognized for its quality.

Subsequently, in 1976, the historic edition of the magazine *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* is published, dedicated entirely to Portuguese architecture and its merit. Between 1960 and 2000, a way of doing, a way of thinking known as the Porto School was consolidated: far from being a mere sum of formal codes, it was, in fact, the transformation of a shared understanding of the phenomenon of architecture into a pedagogical project [6]. It is a School that starts from the site, the existing morphology, the local tradition, rather than pre-established academic models [6].

The French magazine *Architecture d'Aujourd'hui* published two issues dedicated to Portuguese architecture. The first, in 1976, focused on Portugal and the SAAL (Support to Local Housing Program). The second, in 1980, was the first monograph dedicated to Álvaro Siza. These two issues were highly significant. Interestingly, through a foreign magazine that highlighted projects still under construction and recently completed ones, we were able to discover Portuguese architecture [13] (our translation).

Simultaneously, as Portuguese architecture captured the attention of international specialized critics, the Revolution of April 25th, 1974 (also known as the Carnation Revolution, or "*Revolução dos Cravos*") took place. The military regime ("*Estado*

*Novo*"), which had been in power in the country since 1933, was overthrown, establishing a democratic regime thereafter. Consequently, the relationship between pedagogical practice and political issues was emphasized: the School entered a "crisis," awakening new hopes for the professional and political practice of Architecture. A collective basis for discussion was established to reflect upon the housing crisis that the country was once again experiencing. In response, the SAAL program (Local Ambulatory Support Service, or "*Serviço de Apoio Ambulatório Local*") was created in 1974 by architect Nuno Portas, who was then the Secretary of State for Housing and Urbanism in the First Provisional Government. Amidst this context, Eduardo Souto de Moura emerged as a prominent figure in the field of Portuguese Architecture and Urbanism.

### 14.3 Eduardo Souto De Moura and the Poetic of Ruins

The ultimate goal is for the work to become autonomous and enduring in relation to time, that is, to be poetry. There is no architect who does not aspire to create poetry... in a mineral sense [14] (our translation)

Eduardo Souto de Moura studied Architecture at the School of Fine Arts of Porto in the 1970s (graduating in 1980). In addition to the academic context, the period of his education was characterized by intense questioning of the principles of the Modern Movement and the Athens Charter: where were the concerns for local realities? According to Angelillo [14], this generation was marked by being raised under the influence of the great masters while dismantling the dogmatic certainties of the Modern Movement, particularly regarding technological and social progress. "From the early houses to the large public buildings raised later, the oeuvre of Souto de Moura is a critical revision of modernity's legacy" [5].

This is reflected in Souto de Moura's trajectory: there was an academic reality that predominantly advocated for the "illegitimacy of design"—that is, a design that imposed itself on the environment—and the entire theoretical support was based on the premise that reality should be observed for Architecture to be realized, or that an understanding of history was necessary to intervene in a historical context. However, there was a lack of theoretical tools for accomplishing this, in his opinion: "I therefore had excellent professors who introduced me to structuralism and linguistics, teaching me to analyze and understand the structure of things in order to act. But this is not everything in architecture" [15].

While still a student, Eduardo Souto de Moura collaborated in the studio of architect Álvaro Siza Vieira from 1974 to 1979, from whom he inherited, for instance, the technical rigor and the understanding that cities are like museums, where different periods are juxtaposed. This matter "[...] requires close attention to minimal topographical accidents, to the reality of things (as Cézanne said). It seeks out a good setting, not in imitation of what already exists, whether natural or built, but as a



balance between the natural and the artificial" [1]. Regarding the period he worked with Siza and the balance between the natural and the artificial:

When I started working with Siza in Sicily, we went one week to Rome to draw, in the Viollet-le-Duc tradition. This exercise had an impact on me, because until then I wasn't fond of ruins. But not for the ruin as a romantic gesture, but as "construction in waiting": the ruin can be everything, the gaze shifts and you never know where it ends or begins [16]

During his second year of undergraduate studies (1972–1973), Souto de Moura also had the opportunity to engage with another one of his major influences, the Italian architect Aldo Rossi. A professor asked the students to read and comment on Rossi's text "*Architettura per i Musei*," which, to Moura, seemed like a reactionary text because Rossi exposed subjective factors in his projects, unlike what Moura had been learning in his course. From that point on, he committed himself to the idea that Architecture should remain rooted in history. Additionally, after reading "The Architecture of the City," Souto de Moura started looking at the city through a different lens and began designing his works with instruments he had never had before, such as literary and primary sources. "I remember that my first reaction, with Rossi's book in front of me, was to realize that I had at my disposal real planning instruments" [15].

[...] what I liked about Aldo Rossi is that he gave the opportunity to do projects with specific instruments. Because during the first years we went out on the street to draw, but the truth around us was like a wall, we didn't understand anything, and we ended up drawing a car, a bicycle, a plane passing by... And after Rossi's book where he talks about types and morphologies as work tools, I don't want to say that we went from nothing to synthesis—this is nonsense—, but we could already hierarchize and codify what we were seeing, and from there go on to designing" [16] (our highlights)

Considering the aforementioned issues (among many others), it is possible to observe that the beginning of Souto de Moura's career occurred during the "last breath" of the Modern Movement, which Milheiro (2006) considered as "[...] a response to a need rather than a linguistic reflection" [17]. The architect builds upon the foundations of the Modern Movement, expanding its principles, challenging its norms, and pushing its boundaries. At the same time, he positions himself beyond regionalism. Both of these aspects resonate in his works, yet his architecture represents an architectural exploration that transcends these definitions.

One of the most emblematic aspects of his oeuvre is the ability to bridge the Modern, the history, and the Portuguese regional context. His work is modern yet deeply connected to history; it is local, but at the same time, it is also international. It is "[...] a tenacious journey from the roots that go deep into the local humus to the branches that spread across the global skies" [05]. It is through the intersection of these concepts that this text is conceptualized.

### 14.3.1 The Past that is Present

Souto de Moura is seeking to understand how formal structures endure over time, discovering their role in the transformation of territory and the reasons for their continued persistence throughout the history of cities" [1]

The work of Souto de Moura, renowned both nationally and internationally—as evidenced by his receipt of the Pritzker Prize in 2011—is permeated with numerous questions, allowing for multiple layers of interpretation. Among them, the natural-artificial relationship stands out as one of the most significant. Grande [18] highlights five projectual syntheses of Souto de Moura, two of which are directly related to the present text: (1) the inseparable relationship between nature and building, wherein artifice captures and reinvents nature; and (2) the ruin-support relationship, where the use of ruins becomes a deliberate design choice (whether habitable or not). As per Fernández-Galiano [16],

The work of Eduardo Souto de Moura is traversed by two axes at the intersection of which crystallize the exact forms of this demanding architecture: **memory**, nourished by the wide culture brought by travel and reading, but also deposited on the traces of territories and the already built; and **matter**, present in the geology of landscapes or the archaeology of cities, but equally affecting the technical constraints and the tangible residues of biographical experience [16] (our highlights)

It is noticeable how Souto de Moura's works engages in two fundamental dialogues: the first being between form and nature, and the second between the different temporal layers of the city. In this regard, ruins play a significant role as they represent a past that is present, a continuous overlapping of the city's layers. Through these ruins, one can understand and perceive the temporal and spatial unity of Architecture. Over the years, the forms that withstand the test of time reveal their most essential aspects, where history and nature coexist despite the ravages of time. While a ruin may not fully unveil itself, it can still provide hints and paths for interpretation.

According to Simmel [19], the ruin highlights the fact that new forms and forces, derived from nature, have grown and established a unity between Architecture and nature, wherein each nurtures the other; one is the substance for the survival of the other. Despite representing abandonment—whether by the forces of nature or the negligence of society—ruins still evoke a certain allure. But why is that? According to the author, the ruin is a human creation that, in the end, is perceived as a product of nature.

The initial balance between nature and Architecture is disrupted by the ruin, but through intervention, the balance is restored. Therefore, while ruins evoke allure, they also express a sense of peace as they become integrated into a landscape. "Undoubtedly, that tranquility is easily associated with another reason: the character of the past inherent in the ruin. It is the site of life from which life has departed—this is not simply a negative aspect or an added thought" [19]. Even though a past life has separated from it, a new life will become associated, connecting individuals, the



work, the landscape, and the world. Its isolation is deeply intertwined with human existence.

As per Schleifer's analysis [20], Rossi and Moura both hold the view that a ruin, although having lost its original meaning, can serve as material for a new project. "Souto de Moura firmly asserts about the ruins, 'I oppose the notion that monuments cannot be touched. Architecture is a living entity that changes on a daily basis'" [20] (our translation). The architecture crafted by the Portuguese architect is profoundly rooted in the lines of the territory, displaying a meticulous consideration for the broader context.

Therefore, by integrating ruins as part of the available elements for intervention, within the site, they are understood as another element of the design, alongside others. One of the fundamental elements in this process is topography, the site as a particular geography (including the ruins): "It is in geography (or in the site as geography, whose particular and unique topography, including any preexisting conditions, constitutes the core of the problem to be solved) that Souto de Moura finds the strongest motives for typological choice" [1]. According to Carlos Machado [1], Souto de Moura considers the context as a whole in his projects, encompassing natural elements and built elements alike: gardens, agriculture, natural relief, clumps of trees, watercourses, supporting walls—all of this is already part of the design.

In an interview with the architect, he states:

When I'm asked to design a house or a project in a specific site, I have to visit the site and understand what is wrong with it. [...] The site, in principle, is natural, it is nature, even if it is a city; therefore, it has a deficiency in something, and I will introduce a kind of "antidote" to compensate for what is lacking. Architecture is always against nature; it can never copy nature. It can be based on nature, but it cannot be analogical or copy and provide a response to compensate for something or correct something that is absent in that site, in that place [21] (our translation)

### 14.3.2 Contemporary Ruins

The works presented here are part of the initial phase of architect Eduardo Souto de Moura's domestic approach (1980–2000), when he sought to deepen the discussion of the Modern Movement in association with the use of local materials, not solely for regionalist arguments (that is, distancing himself from the shadow of the "*Inquérito à Arquitectura Regional Portuguesa*", 1961, or "Inquiry into Regional Portuguese Architecture"), but for its plastic expression. According to Milheiro [17], "Souto de Moura turns to residential projects to test 'deviations' from that modernist vein, allowing him to reconnect with an abstract image of 'Portugueseness'" [17] (our translation).

These works are emblematic in terms of the relationship between the past and the present, between natural and artificial, between ruin and intervention, exemplifying three distinct approaches of the architect towards ruins: **Gerês house—restoration** (where the ruin is completely occupied, used as the envelope of a new dwelling); **Baião house—operationalization** (where the ruin is integrated into the

new structure, operationalized to serve a new additional purpose to the project, as a garden); **Moledo house—demarcation** (where the ruin is utilized to demarcate the new project, near the entrance of the site).

[...] it was a time at which Portugal was starting to grow with the economic aid of the European Community, and my clients were sons of well-off families, though with another mentality, and they wanted a young architect. Many of the commissions were for the family, for cousins, aunts and uncles. These houses gave me a vocabulary, a "calligraphy" to undertake other works [16]

In addition to the issue of ruins, it is possible to notice that these works share other similarities—characteristics of the houses in northern Portugal that the architect designed—such as regular prismatic forms constructed in concrete, flat slabs as roofing, single-story structures, continuous glass surfaces, the use of dry-joint stone masonry (a traditional technique in the region that involves using smaller stones to fill the gaps between larger stones). "[These works] bear witness to the pleasure of seeing, and feeling, the atmospheric dimension of distance, as well as the way in which nature/world is apprehended through architecture" [3] (our translation).

### 14.3.3 Gerês House (1980–1982)—Restoration

#### General Data

*Geographic coordinates:* 41°39'07.9"N 8°11'51.2"W (see Fig. 14.1);

*Address:* CM1394 Road, 342, Caniçada e Soengas, Vieira do Minho, Portugal;

*Client:* J. Marques;

*Building size:* 30 m<sup>2</sup>.

The Gerês ruin restoration was the first built project by architect Eduardo Souto de Moura, taking place between 1980–1982 (although during the same period, from 1980–1984, the architect also worked on the project for the Braga Municipal Market—"Carandá Market"—which also involved the issue of ruins, but in a different approach). The nature provided for the project an abandoned barn structure: 30 square meters distributed within a trapezoidal shape, consisting of three thick stone walls and one open face (the largest face), facing the Cávado River; its smaller face, facing the street, had only one door; the roof was collapsing. From the initial tension created by the ruin, an abandoned structure in the mountains, the architect developed the project for a weekend house for his client (see Fig. 14.2).

The new project restored the balance between ruin, nature, and constructed form through continuity. The intention was not to create a clash between the new and the old but to establish an intervention that was minimally impactful in terms of form and visuals, something "natural." A new door was installed, maintaining the same dimensions; the ceiling height was preserved; the open face facing the river remained transparent, with steel-framed sliding glass screens (full-height glazing)



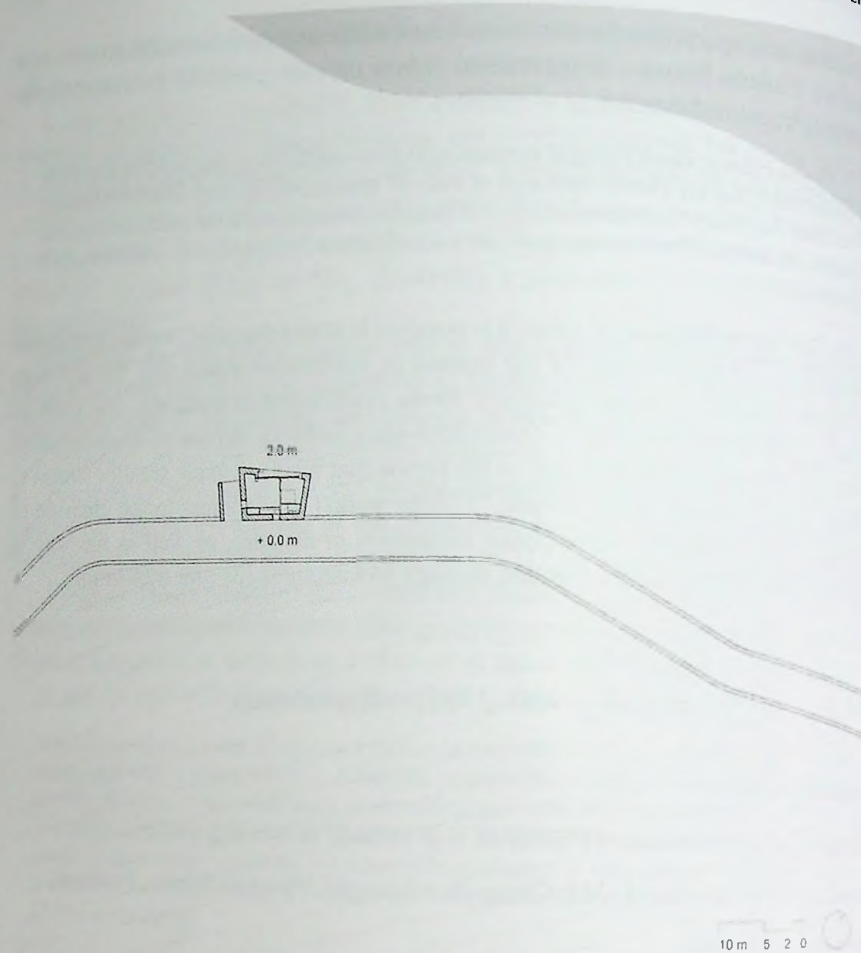


Fig. 14.1 Gerês House's location. Source Francisco Peppe, 2023. The Gerês ruin restoration is the foundational moment of a complex and dense relationship with nature and history [3] (our translation)

designed to create minimal interference, allowing for an uninterrupted enjoyment of the landscape. Internally, the project includes a living room + kitchen (which can be concealed by a panel), a bedroom, and a bathroom (see Figs. 14.3 and 14.4). As per Frampton [5], this work,

[...] will synthesize overnight, as it were, the syntax of Souto de Moura's initial domestic manner, that is to say the combination of flat-roofed concrete prisms with steel-framed, full-height glazing, invariably combined, in one way or another, with traditional dry-stone walling. This is a poetic of ruins to which he will return repeatedly in one single-storey house after another and never more forcefully, and delicately, than in the Casa em Baião of 1993 [5].

Through the restoration of the Gerês House, Souto de Moura created an intriguing work: it both has a sense of allure as it is a project of a house within an old ruin,

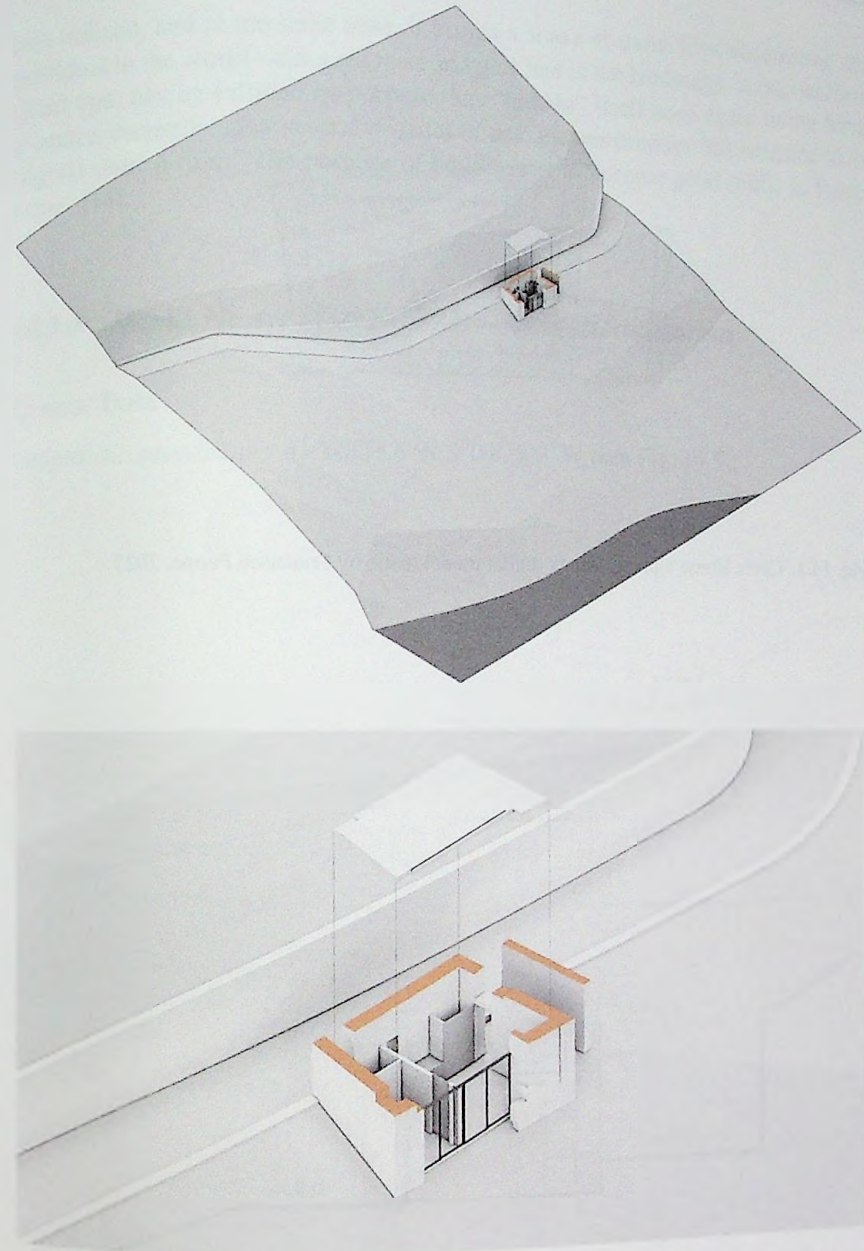


Fig. 14.2 Gerês House's axonometrics. Source digital model made by Francisco Peppe, 2023



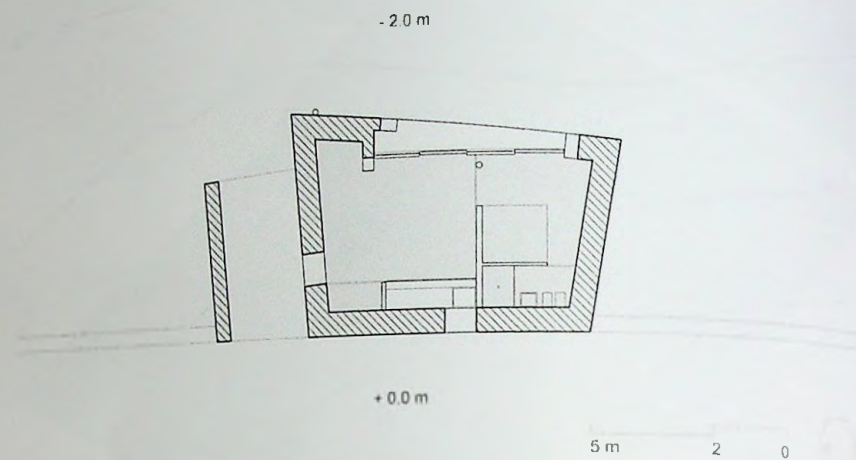


Fig. 14.3 Gerês House's plant. Source digital model made by Francisco Peppe, 2023

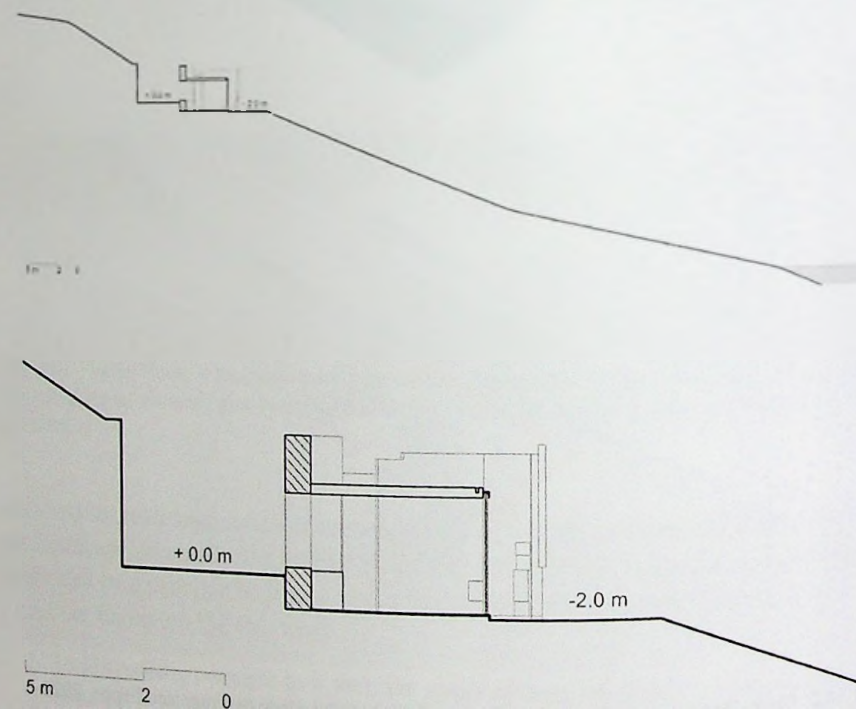


Fig. 14.4 Gerês House's section. Source digital model made by Francisco Peppe, 2023

fully utilized, and at the same time, it brings a sense of tranquility, connecting the individual to the world—the gaze rests and gets lost in the landscape. It is a timeless object that, having fulfilled its purpose, has “hidden” itself once again in the form of nature: currently, after several decades of use, the construction has returned to its original state, a ruin. “The purpose of buildings is to become good ruins, as Perret wrote” [14].

#### 14.3.4 Baião House (1990–1993)—Operationalization

##### General Data

Geographic coordinates: 41°05'51.6"N 8°04'28.2"W (see Fig. 14.5);

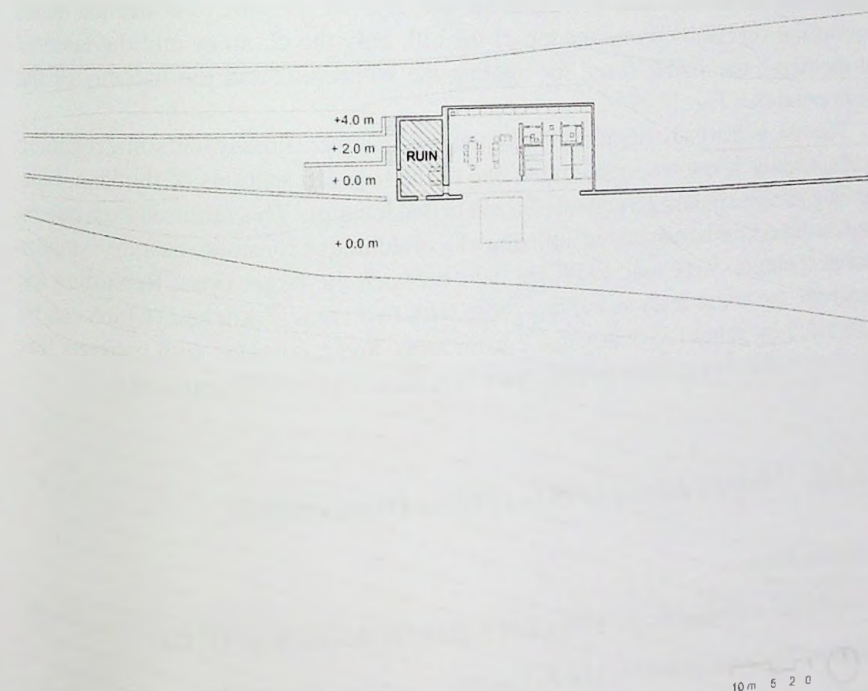


Fig. 14.5 Baião House's location. Source Francisco Peppe, 2023



*Address:* São Domingos Street, 925, Vale de Cerdeira, Baião, Portugal;

*Client:* Jorge Queirós Neto;

*Collaborator:* Francisco Vieira de Campos;

*Structural consultant:* José Manuel Cardoso Teixeira;

*Building size:* 120 m<sup>2</sup>;

*Lot size:* 21.000 m<sup>2</sup>.

The Baião House was also designed as a weekend house with minimal dimensions, similar to the Gerês ruin restoration. On the site, there was a ruin of an old two-story house—already deteriorated over time—that was considered by the architect as a design element, something to be preserved and operationalized as a garden attached to the smaller side of the house (see Fig. 14.6).

As for the house itself, once again, the intention was to make the intervention as “natural” as possible, allowing the house to blend into the terrain: the rectangular volume is submerged in the ground on three of its sides, leaving one façade facing the Douro River, composed of glass panels with reflective film, precisely with the purpose of reflecting its surroundings and further concealing the structure, making it part of that natural scenery (see Fig. 14.7).

The chosen roof was a waterproofed slab covered with soil and grass, effectively concealing the house: upon arriving at the site, it is not possible to notice the house amidst the vegetation. From the top of the hill, only the chimney and the lanterns of the house are visible (used for lighting the bathrooms and the hallway of the bedrooms) (see Fig. 14.8).

The site, which had a significant slope towards the river, already had some retaining walls, and the house was nestled into one of the terraced sections of the land, reinforcing its sense of being a natural element in that location. This required excavations and earthworks to be carried out, utilizing a local technique for stone masonry: smaller stones (pebbles) were used to fill the gaps between the larger ones. Regarding the program, the house features a living room with two areas + kitchen (which can be concealed by panels), 3 bedrooms, 2 bathrooms, and a corridor with cabinets that serve as wardrobes outside the bedrooms (see Figs. 14.9, 14.10 and 14.11).

### 14.3.5 Moledo House (1991–1998)—Demarcation

#### General Data

*Geographic coordinates:* 41°51'06.8"N 8°50'43.6"W (see Fig. 14.12);

*Address:* Travessa do Souto, 154-A, Cristelo, Caminha, Portugal;

*Client:* António Reis;

*Collaborators:* Manuela Lara; Pedro Reis; Nuno Rodrigues Pereira;

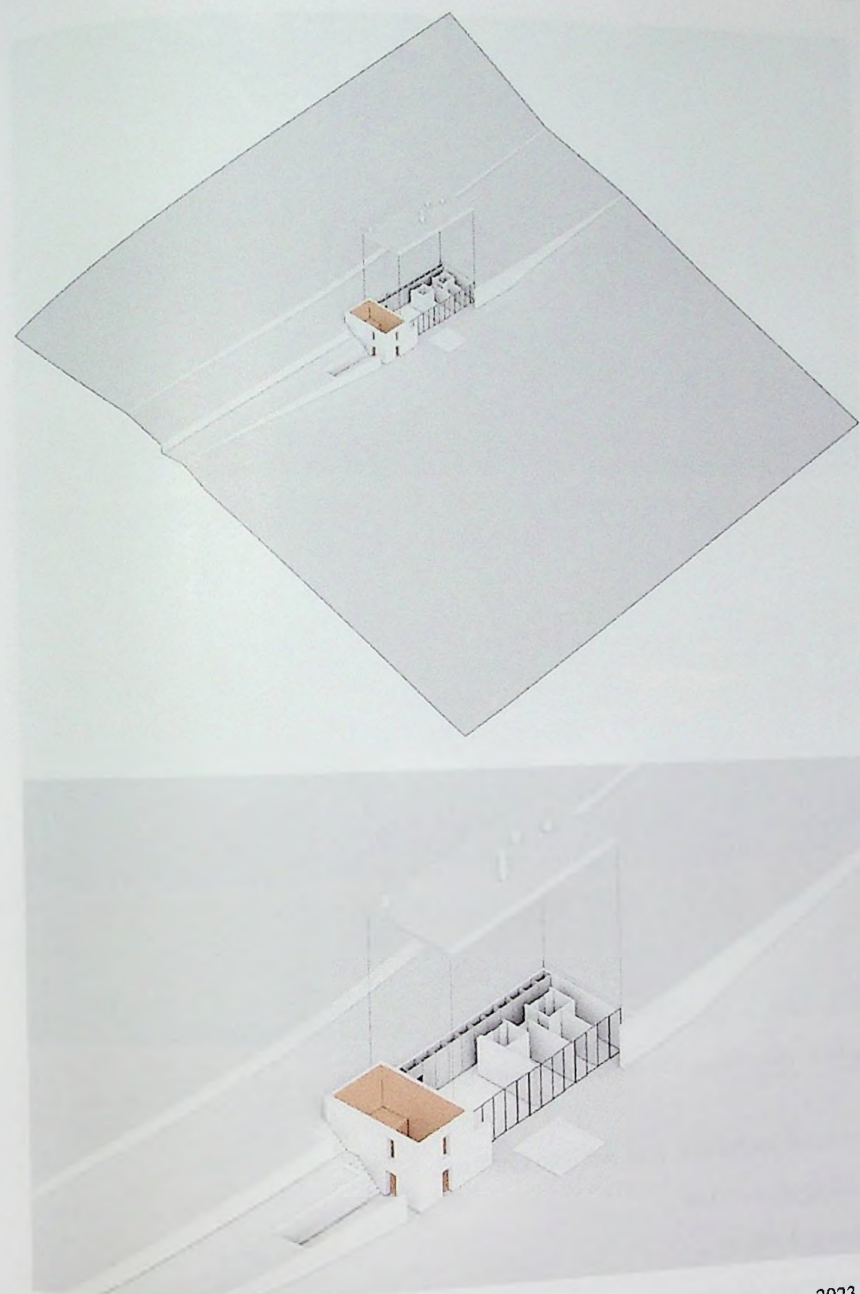


Fig. 14.6 Baião House's axonometrics. Source digital model made by Francisco Peppe, 2023





Fig. 14.7 Baião House's frontal facade. Source Botasso, 2023

Structural consultant: José Adriano Cardoso;

Building size: 180 m<sup>2</sup>;

Lot size: 9.990 m<sup>2</sup>.

In Moledo, the integration was effortless. The house is well integrated into the landscape because I designed the landscape, not just the house [21] (our translation)

The Moledo House is situated on a plot of land that needed to be reconstructed and redesigned due to the presence of large rocks and existing rock walls, which were one and a half meters tall and posed challenges for the construction of the house (the land was previously used as arable land). In response to this, Souto de Moura decided



Fig. 14.8 Baião House's roof. Source Botasso, 2023

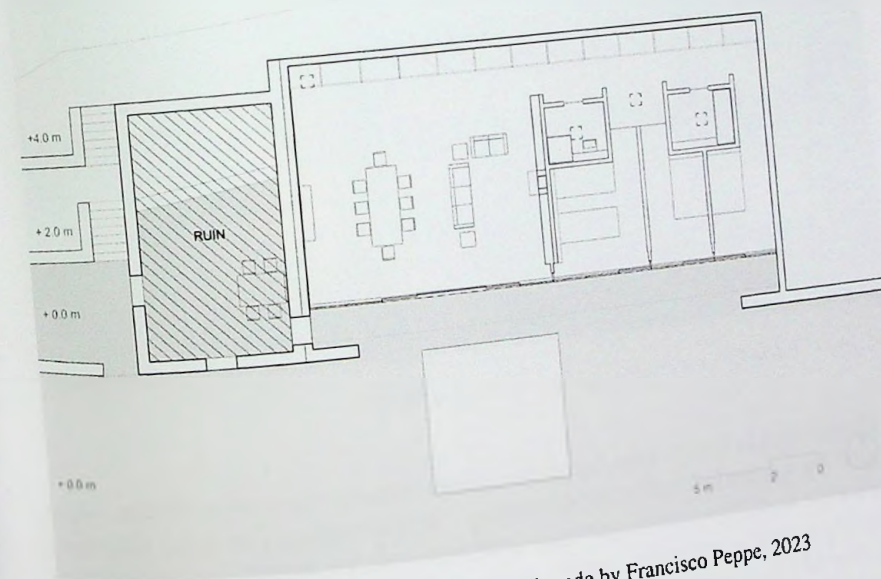


Fig. 14.9 Baião House's plant. Source digital model made by Francisco Peppe, 2023



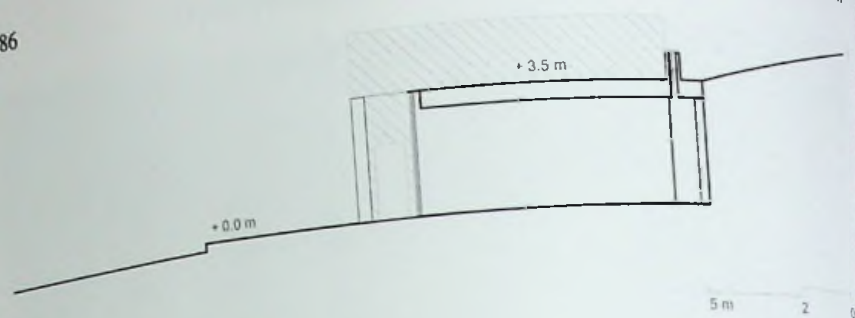


Fig. 14.10 Baião House's section. *Source* digital model made by Francisco Peppe, 2023



Fig. 14.11 Baião House's inside view. *Source* Botasso, 2023

to change the platforms every two units, approximately every three meters, which created the appropriate height for the ceiling. "It is something I do a lot, which is: I prepare the land, I prepare the existing conditions—which are not pre-existing, they are post-existing—so that the solution fits the site and the land" [21] (our translation) (see Fig. 14.13). The rock outcrops and steep slopes were determining factors in the design of the house, emphasizing the architect's strong consideration of geography (or the site) in the typological choices.

The ruin, which marks the entrance to the slope, was preserved; the house was designed, therefore, inserted in one of those terraces, like a roof that landed amidst



Fig. 14.12 Moledo House's location. *Source* Francisco Peppe, 2023

the rocky outcrops, leaving the larger sides open and transparent due to the floor-to-ceiling glass frames. On one side, in the front, there is an infinite view of the sea (already at the border with Spain); on the other side, in the back, there is a view of the excavated rock. This roof is one of the most important elements of the project, as it connects the house to the original terrain, restoring the balance between Architecture and nature. Moreover, it is the only visible element of the house for those standing at the highest part of the land—the roof rests on the stones and directs the gaze beyond, to the vastness of what lies ahead (see Fig. 14.14).

The glass facades create a radical contrast with the concrete slab roof (consisting of a concrete slab with a waterproof layer, thermal insulation, and a rigid gravel layer), as well as with the stone walls and the residual rock in the background. There is a clear exploration of the plastic potential of each material—stone, earth, landscape, and air. The essence of the place resided in the stone and the variations in elevation, which the architect interpreted and made evident in the design. In terms of



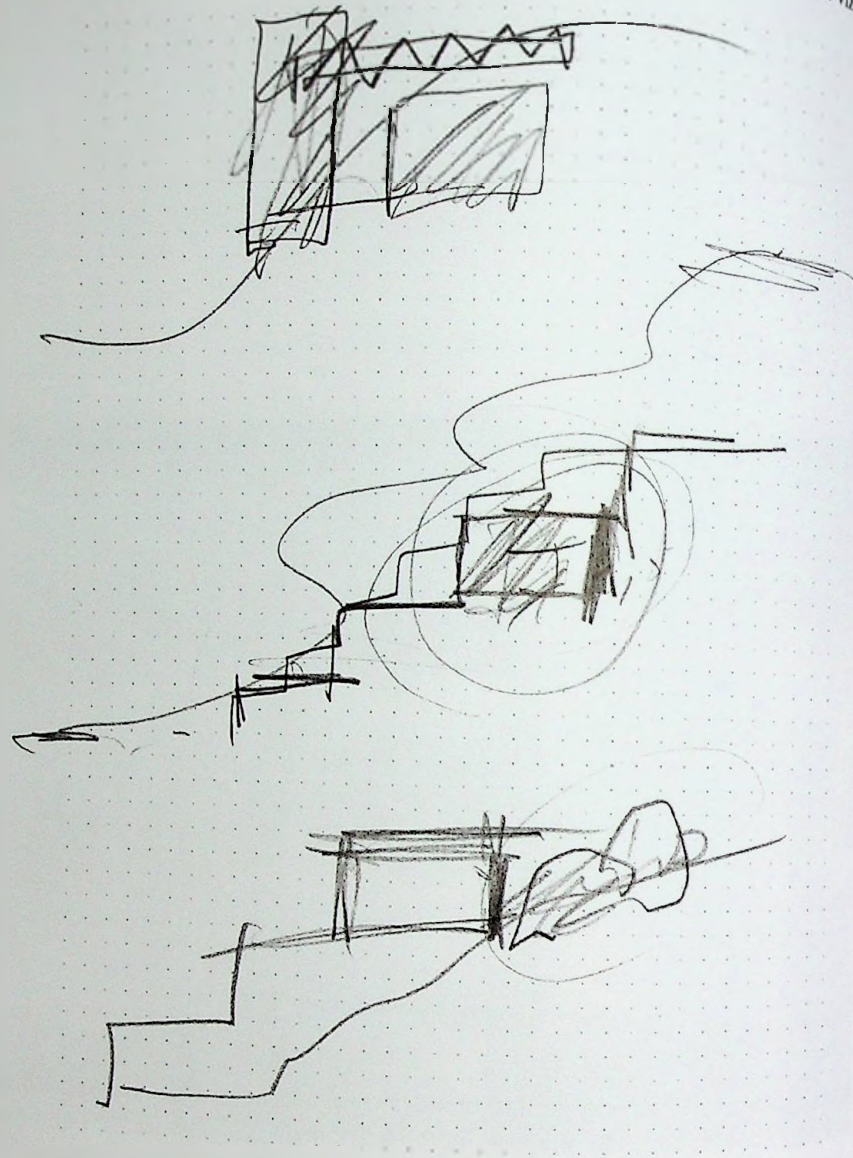


Fig. 14.13 Sketches of Moledo House by Eduardo Souto de Moura. Source Botasso, 2023

the program, there is a living room with two areas, a kitchen + service patio, three bedrooms, and two bathrooms (see Figs. 14.15 and 14.16), along with a distribution corridor leading to the private area and a courtyard at the back, featuring a rock landscape.

The work is a constant contemplation of the horizon—whether it be water, stone, or air—through which the individual confronts the world and its vastness directly. It is a territorial work that connects the place to the world, not just an isolated element in the city. The work connects materialities, scales, and times.

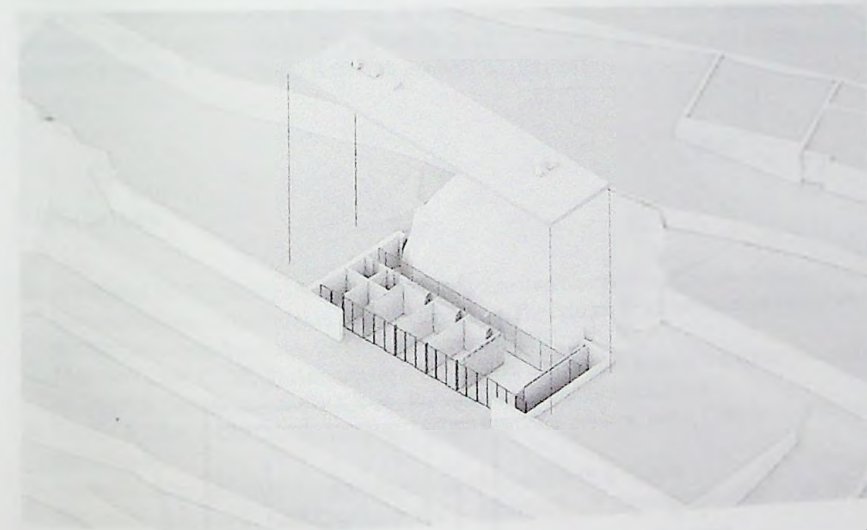
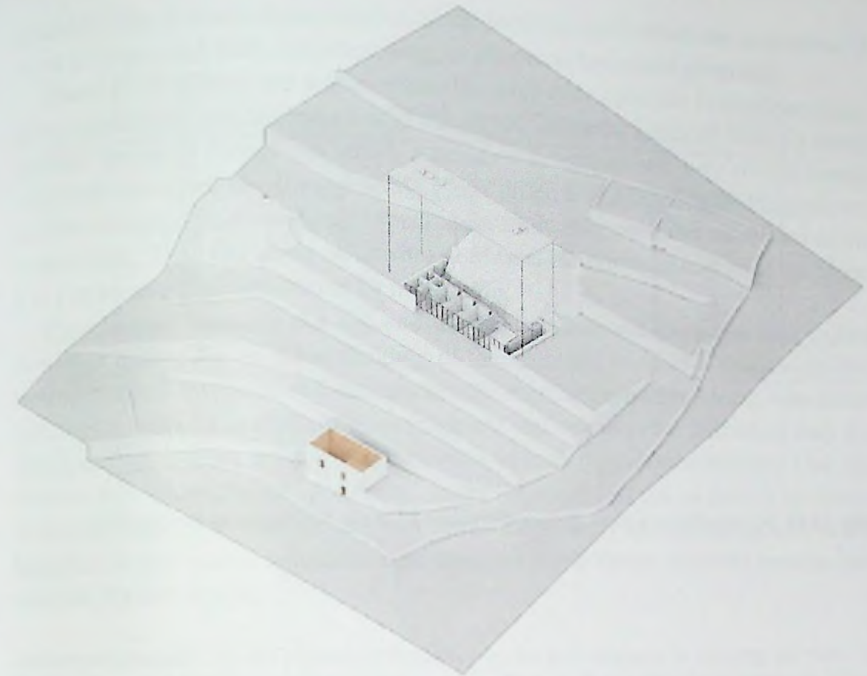


Fig. 14.14 Moledo House's axonometrics. Source digital model made by Francisco Pepe, 2023

#### 14.4 Final Considerations

Above all, these are works in which the landscape plays a crucial role, starting with the major lines of the territory. In other words, their fundamental material is simultaneously natural and artificial. In these works, the reorganization of place is primarily



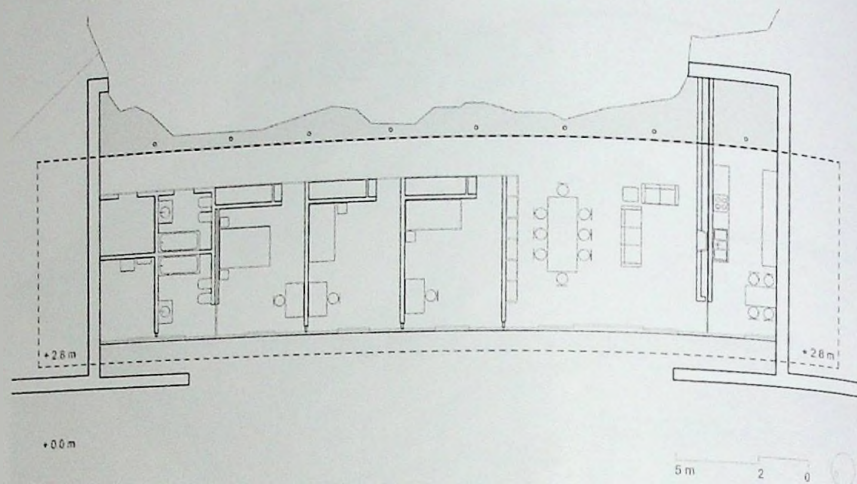


Fig. 14.15 Moledo House's plant. Source digital model made by Francisco Peppe, 2023

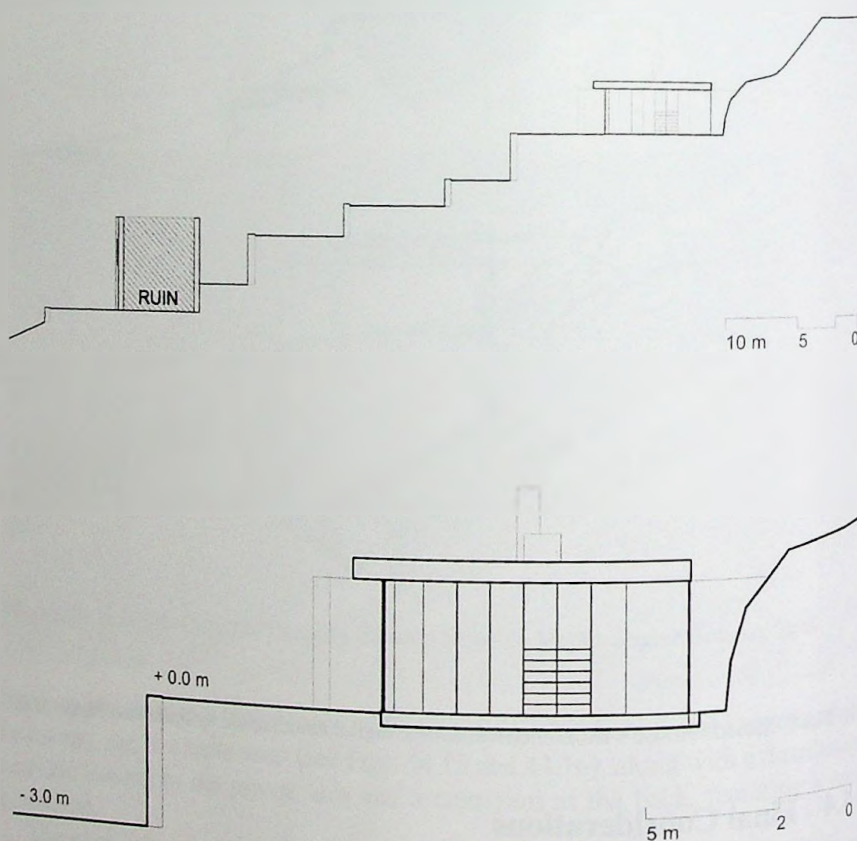


Fig. 14.16 Moledo House's section. Source digital model made by Francisco Peppe, 2023

guided by the distinct characteristics of the location itself, which are understood in terms of space and time, encompassing its historical layers and geography.

These three houses are works where the gaze rests upon the Portuguese mountains, connecting the individual with the world. Eduardo Souto de Moura's works are like "fields of forces", in which a situation is reorganized: they are not merely responses to a context—they generate a new order, a contrast. The buildings do not provide complacent answers to a specific location: they possess a visual and tactile architecture. The roughness of finishes confronts the potential energy of the place. It is a process of recomposition or integration.

The contrast between the old and the new architecture gives rise to a unified form that allows for an understanding of the historical material it encounters. The tension created by the built form restores the existing balance in nature, which also becomes a work of architecture—a fragment that connects the individual with the world, embracing the unique characteristics of each transformed territory. One can observe this "character of anonymity" in the mentioned works, as there is an almost deliberate attempt to conceal the built form, dissolving it into the topography of the hillsides. In this poetic relationship between form and nature, the ruins serve as raw material for the design.

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## Chapter 15

# The Dialectic Between Ancient and Contemporary in the Restoration of the Tower of the SS. Quattro Coronati Monastery in Rome

Michele Asciutti

**Abstract** The restoration of the thirteenth-century tower of the monastery of SS. Quattro Coronati in Rome was created from a multidisciplinary perspective, with particular attention to the use of a language that is both traditional and contemporary for the reintegration of the walls that constitute the reading text of the architecture, responding to the most current principles in field of restoration. The project redefines the spaces and volumes while respecting the ancient state of fact, but proposing a new version that meets the contemporary needs of using the premises according to the concept of integrated conservation. The most modern sustainability needs were taken into great consideration, with the use of recycled and natural materials, coming from the archaeological excavation of the tower, the latter being a main characteristic of traditional architecture, as well as particular attention to increasingly perfectly integrated, which, as demonstrated in several recent studies, can also be obtained with passive systems and traditional techniques used appropriately. These interventions were pursued in compliance with the concepts of distinguishability, minimum intervention and reversibility, declined with respect to the evaluation of the historical and aesthetic aspects of the building, with particular attention to the authenticity of the material and aimed at restoring a unitary but stratified image of the monument.

**Keywords** Restoration · Medieval tower · Reading of the masonry · Distinguishability · Recovery of materials · Sustainability

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