

Domestic Action: Living in a House for Jumpers Giancarlo De Carlo's House for Sichirollo: Ca' Romanino

Urban Design; Physical Geography; Urban Planning; Giancarlo De Carlo; Urbino

/Abstract

This essay interrogates domesticity in a rare example of a dwelling designed by Giancarlo De Carlo.

What makes a Modernist home? Le Corbusier was horrified at how the dwellings of his idealised alpha males contradicted their active lives, being stuffed (as he saw it) with sham and bric-a-brac.

So how does De Carlo represent domesticity for his academic philosopher client? Is Schindler's paradigm 'Shelter or playground' a useful caption for this De Carlo house outside Urbino?

If philosophy is seen as mental gymnastics (the trope of Stoppard's play *'Jumpers'*), is this realised in the literal gymnastic 'climbing frame' of Casa Sichirollo? De Carlo scorns an interior design which 'completes' or forms a role for the client. Here, designing with a humanist, phenomenological focus more on events than objects, his client becomes active subject rather than the passive object of his dwelling.

Philosophical ideas from the *sessantotto* times which produced Casa Sichirollo underpin the argument developed here, particularly philosopher Roger Poole's *Towards Deep Subjectivity* which the author found in De Carlo's library.

Adolf Loos' wariness of photographs was a sense which De Carlo shared, turning architectural experience in the complexity of space and relying on bodily movement in time, into visually beguiling surfaces. This essay, largely without pictorial imagery, is followed by a gallery of images without verbal explanation.

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I have lectured widely across Europe and regularly with Giancarlo De Carlo at ILAUD (1979-2000). Recent exhibitions have been of photographs (in Italy 2018, 2015) and drawings and photographs (in England 2017, 2016). Various books have won awards (on CR Mackintosh, The Crystal Palace, Stirling & Gowan); that on De Carlo, published in French was Centre Pompidou's book for their De Carlo exhibition 2004, remains in print in English with Axel Menges, Stuttgart). Current artwork centres on shared mixed-media projects with artist Ruthie Martin; current writing centres on two books on German-English architect Walter Segal, one with Alice Grahame.

Preface

The relationship of men to modern domesticity was the central theme of an academic conference called 'Men Making Homes'¹ where I first talked about this building 15 years ago. 'Domestic' is not an adjective readily associated with Giancarlo De Carlo. He enjoyed a certain spartanness in his life; his gastronomy was straightforward and unsophisticated: his favourite food cous-cous.² How does he, then, 'make a home'?

De Carlo really only designed two houses, and of these only the first, early in his long career, was and remains a family home³. This essay explores the other, Casa Sichirolo through the ideas embedded in its design, and it tries to move away from an unhelpful producer-consumer paradigm in considering the making of this home.

Domestic action : living in a house for jumpers

In the mid 1960s, two men, a city architect-planner and the politician in charge of that city's planning, were colleagues-in-arms in the social and environmental struggle to renew the historic but tiny city of Urbino in the Marche region of eastern central Italy. At this moment these two began another, joyful and less embattled project. Giancarlo De Carlo, leading Italian intellectual architect of his generation, designed a house for his friend, the philosopher Livio Sichirolo.

1 The two-day closed conference, with contributions, for example, from Alice Friedman on Mies and Edith Farnsworth, and on 'queer space', Johnson's Glass House and Rudolph's Beekman Place penthouse in New York, among others, was co-curated by Dr Lesley Whitworth and Dr Elizabeth Darling, University of Brighton, England, January 2004.

2 In 2001, I invited De Carlo to take part in a favourite 19th century parlour game which asked participants a short list of personal questions. (Karl Marx's replies are well known.)

His answers, written in English, are:"

1.	Your favourite virtue:	AMBITION
2.	Your favourite virtue in man:	IMAGINATION
3.	Your favourite virtue in woman:	ELEGANCE
4.	Your chief characteristic:	CURIOSITY
5.	Your idea of happiness:	DANCING
6.	Your idea of misery:	INERTNESS
7.	The vice you excuse most:	RECKLESSNESS
8.	The vice you detest most:	MEANNESS
9.	Favourite occupation:	DESIGNING
10.	Favourite poet:	GUIDO CAVALCANTI
11.	Favourite prose-writer:	STENDHAL
12.	Favourite hero:	ALEXANDER THE GREAT
13.	Favourite heroine:	ARIADNE
14.	Favourite flower:	DAISY
15.	Favourite colour:	VIOLET
16.	Favourite name:	ANNA *
17.	Favourite dish:	COUSCOUS
18.	Favourite maxim:	GARBAGE IN, GARBAGE OUT
19.	Favourite motto:	HIC SUNT LEONES

* *In Italian. In French or English it loses its intrinsic magic.*

3 Casa Giuseppe Zigaina, Cervignano del Friuli, 1958, recently studied by Dr Alberto Franchini; see his "Un tipo particolare di committente. Zigaina e l'architettura domestica", in *Atti della Giornata di Studi dedicata a Giuseppe Zigaina*, eds. Francesca Agostinelli and Vania Grainsinigh (Udine, Accademia udinese di Scienze Lettere e Arti, 2018).

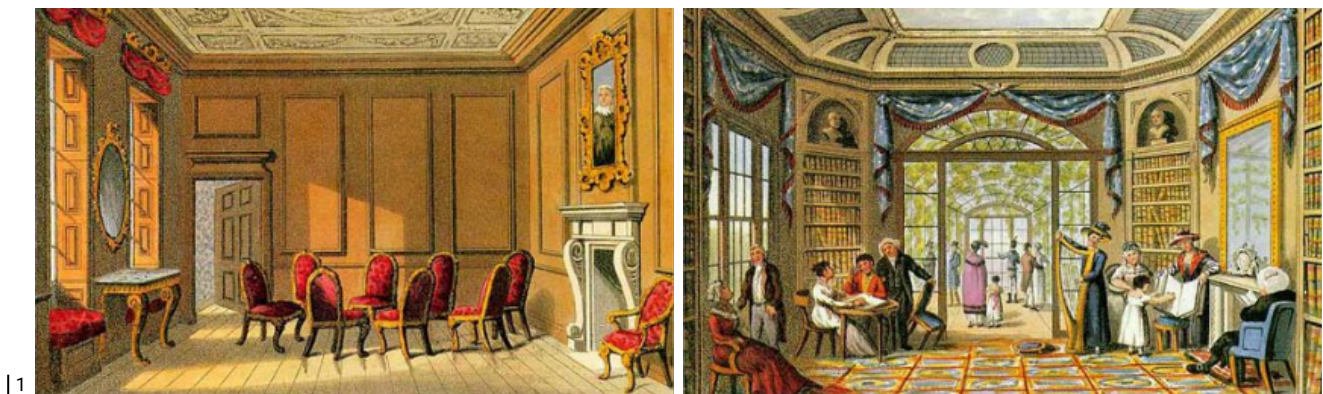
The extraordinary result was so idiosyncratic it might seem inhabitable only by that one man.

Paradoxically, the philosophical position of the architect (resonating with that of his client, professor of philosophy at Urbino University) centred on a role for architectural design as backdrop to creative action. For De Carlo, the designer's role was far from either determining behaviour or representing, far less 'decorating', his client. To De Carlo, domesticity - as inhabitation generally - is an action to be enabled by the setting. The focus is on events and not on objects.

This essay, exploring Casa Sichirollo through the ideas embedded in its design, must first be contextualised. What did this architect mean by 'design', what was he offering his friend, and how was the client expected to engage with it? Where did these ideas about domestic architecture come from.

Context within the Modern

I first presented these thoughts alongside Lesley Whitworth's 'Anxious Homes' issue of *The Journal of Design History* ⁴. Margaret Ponsonby starts that journal's opening essay with a well-known pair of images by Humphrey Repton; I use them, alongside the bedroom of Le Corbusier, as two windows into my thoughts on the possibility of a 'Modern domesticity'. [Fig. 1]



In the Repton pair – 'before' and 'after' as with the flip-ups in his famous 'Red Books' - we see an almost moralising pair of good and bad, of Puginian 'Contrasts'. Ponsonby's text describes them as displays of changing decorative taste in the early 19th century. I read them quite differently, as images of *actions*. She talks of the 'specific uses' being 'expressed through furnishings.' She says Repton's contrast is of the 'bare [masculine] interior' with the 'new, softer, feminised' room. To me, Repton's polemic is much more between, on the one hand, the past: the unified, paternalistic space - 'functional' in the sense of being adequately lit, purposely grouped seating, offering no place for disagreement or individualistic behaviour. And on the other hand, the future: the new perspectival space which is to do with atomised individualisation, with spectacle and separation.

⁴ Margaret Ponsonby, "Ideas, Reality and Meaning", *Journal of Design History* 16, no. 3 (2002): 201-214.

Fig. 1

Humphrey Repton 'Cedar parlour and Modern living room' 1816



Here is an archetypal 'Modern' image. Indeed it is precisely replicated in a contrast of pre- and post-Second World War British schools, for example. Windows to let light in are replaced by windows to look out from. The focus is on the separated groups in multi-polar space, on private social varied interactions taking place within sight of each other; and indeed there is a central notion of creative play.

So what I see in these Repton images are intimations of two types of *activity*, and the possibility of spatial configurations to encourage different events. They don't show me an argument about decoration or consumer commodities, but are about constructing an interior landscape as a background which encourages varied play. That is exactly how I see De Carlo approaching the Sichirollo project; forming a play structure for the serious business of the modern *homo ludens*. [Fig. 2]

The second image which came to my mind is Le Corbusier's bedroom. With the surface-mounted plumbing, the extraordinary, high 'hospital' bed, the bidet under the Leger, the whole ensemble is almost seen as a surrealist installation. Here we see the 'Modern' interior as an extremely sophisticated, idiosyncratic collage of commodities and equipment become art form. Corbusier's wider aim was for the domestic setting to represent the individual, asserting his identity; and the play here is certainly a 'high game' (to borrow the phrase from Lutyens criticism).

One of the more perceptive obituaries of Le Corbusier in September 1965 said 'His amenity was not the amenity of upholstered and cosy comfort, nor, indeed was it austerity in the common sense. He dreamt of light, of the warmth of the sun, of an unforgettable view...'⁵ Not only are De Carlo and Sichirollo sophisticated intellectuals, but Le Corbusier was the youthful De Carlo's aesthetic and cultural inspiration, so this dominant tradition in Modernism cannot but resonate. As we know, Le Corbusier idealised male engineers as 'healthy and virile, active and useful, balanced and happy in their work,' as he revered 'big business men,

⁵ Walter Segal, *The Architects' Journal*, September 8, 1965, 526-530.

Fig. 2
Bedroom of Le Corbusier, 24
rue Nungesser & Coli, (1931-4)



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bankers and merchants.' And he was horrified by how their houses contradicted their existences, their homes being stuffed – as he saw it - with sham and absurd bric-a-brac. In Le Corbusier's own home, the purist interior is austere as a gallery – to an extent expressing the 'théorie du "vacuum cleaning"' espoused by his colleague Amédée Ozenfant. (Yet 'Other cleaners only reach this far', as Richard Hamilton's vacuuming image from a later generation notes, looking ironically at domestic meanings which *can* be layered and applied as collage.) [Fig. 3]

Rather than be represented by this stuck-on consumption, better – they argued – for modern man to have a clean slate. Casa Livio Sichirollo was originally designed, and drawn, without a kitchen. The myth of the men descending from the forest trees, with food to cook on the

Fig. 3

Richard Hamilton 'Just what is it that makes today's homes so different, so appealing?' (1956) The white message on the black arrow in the stair reads: 'Other cleaners only reach this far.'

campfire (under its great red cylindrical 'flame') round which the family eats, is barely beneath that surface of consciousness.

The 'cultural vacuuming' strain in the proselytising Modernism under whose mantle De Carlo grew up, was neatly put in 1930:

We are the creators of furniture for modern times, for the modern man, who, instead of weighing himself down with useless objects, moves freely around his sun-filled rooms, with his mind unhampered by troubles.

We are back to the Modernism of Repton in 1820, and the new English schools in 1950 all over again, here quoted from the trade literature of manufacturer Standard Möbel⁶.

The bric-a-brac and 'useless objects' embodying the layers of meaning of inhabitation were what held man down – let's be frank, by man they really do usually mean just that, men as distinct from women. Man is held back like Gulliver in Lilliput by the myriad little threads of domesticity from fulfilling his true nature; he must, with the aid of Modern architects, come out from the decorated shell into the nature's light.

Alice Friedman's tale of Edith Farnsworth is well known. Waking one morning in the house Ludwig Mies van der Rohe made for her, Farnsworth rises to find herself ogled at by a crowd of Japanese tourists⁷. Modernism allows no room for any anxiety around transparency – nor for being the object of spectacle. In this land of purity and transparency, there are no corners to hide in. We think of Terragni's (1932-6) 'glass-house into which everyone can peer; no obstacles, no barriers, nothing between [people]...' or Meyer and Wittwer's (1926-7) proposed building 'with no back corridors for backstairs deals, but open, glazed rooms for negotiation of honest men...'⁸

One might say there is an intimation of anxiety in the concealment implied by Repton's open door, none in the icy perfections of the merely exposed perspectival clarity with which he contrasts it.

The Modernist strain leading to De Carlo is much more subtle, of course, than any arty minimalist aesthetic. Rudolf Schindler, Frank Lloyd Wright's one-time assistant, argued for example that while traditional shelter's role had been to offer safety from earth, sky, neighbours – described in Schindler's English as 'frightful' - this fright, this anxiety, still remains implicit in our thinking about the home, he argued, and it can and should now be abandoned. Even Schindler's essay title 'Shelter or playground'⁹ could caption the contrasting Repton images with which I began. It might also be a headline for casa Sichirollo.

6 Brochure from 1930, quoted in Klaus-Jurgen Sembach, Peter Gössel and Gabriele Leuthäuser, *Le design du meuble au XXème siècle* (Colonia: Editions Taschen, 1989), 110.

7 Alice T. Friedman, "Domestic Differences: Edith Farnsworth, Mies van der Rohe and the Gendered Body", in *Not at Home*, ed. Christopher Reed, (London: Thames & Hudson, 1996).

8 These quotations are each architect's own description; Terragni of his built Casa del Fascio, Como, Meyer & Wittwer of their competition project for The League of Nations.

9 Rudolf Schindler, "Shelter or Playground", in *R. M. Schindler, Architect*, ed. August Sarnitz (New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1988): 46.

Modernism's domestic aim is nicely encapsulated by Schindler in that essay. There should, he says, be 'private spaces for each to gain a background to life, instead of dens into which to herd the family', at the same time the shared family space should be for group play. He proposes that houses have a 'work and play' room, the space for a new approach to cooking, and that the bathroom now incorporates a gym¹⁰. And he builds on Wright's notions of inconspicuousness and unobtrusiveness, and interiors 'making no special claim upon attention'. This Modernism offers a place for varied action, in contrast to the projection of that 'complete world', the *Gesamtkunstwerk* which was caricatured by Adolf Loos in his essay 'Poor Little Rich Man'; the man who, thanks to the architect, is made complete¹¹.

In the post-war years, after a pre-war Modern generation which built houses as elegant geometric domestic objects, De Carlo follows Loos in being much less interested in the emblematic object (seen from outside), much more interested in spaces for occupation, for convivial living, while allowing, as Loos said, tradition to supply the equipment of the domestic interior.

In a domus where man can express his individuality, furnishings recede, spaces remain. This house, therefore, becomes an intimate landscape - not to dominate and yet be 'shaping' behaviour inasmuch as it is almost nature, a natural setting. It is the natural thing to sit round Zigaina's hearth - the sunken *fogolar* in the house De Carlo designed for him. It is where we sat when I first met him there. It is the natural instinct to climb the rungs set in the wall of Sichirollo's soggiorno. It was the instinctive, first response of the man who unlocked the door and introduced me to this house where he had spent much of his childhood¹². It is the natural thing to sit around around the Sichirollo hearth. At this great red cylinder, Andrea De Carlo nostalgically recalls Sonia Morra grilling him food when a teenager. [Fig. 4]

Enough hints. Let me introduce the building.

10 He of course repeats the mantra: "It must be a basic principle of all interior decoration that nothing which is permanent in appearance should be chosen for its individual charm or sentimental associations, but only for its possible contribution to the room concerned as an organic entity, and as a background for human activity." Rudolph Schindler, quoted in *The Furniture of R M Schindler*, ed. M C Berns (Santa Barbara: Art, Design & Architecture Museum, University of California, 1996): 39-41.

11 Adolf Loos, "Poor Little Rich Man", *Neues Wiener Tagblatt*, April 26, 1900, reprinted in Adol Loos, *Spoken into the Void*, (New York: Oppositions Books, MIT Press, 1987).

12 Andrea De Carlo, friend of the owner, is son of the architect.



4 |

Glancing at the house

This essay need not divert into a pictorial guided tour. Although largely unknown when I first shared these thoughts, the imagery of Casa Sichirollo is today easily found, in *Ca' Romanino: una casa di Giancarlo De Carlo a Urbino*¹³. Architectural drawings and details, many photographs and analytic diagrams describe it well and display it and its moods, elegantly in this book freely available online.

Nor do we offer a formal architectural analysis here. De Carlo's characteristic themes are well known: The power of vertical movement gripped him from childhood, as did the connected spaces and views within ships.¹⁴ He loved to bury deep and to reach up to the sky. If this is most virtuosically demonstrated at Il Magisero,¹⁵ it is brilliantly intimated in miniature a few kilometres from there at

13 *Ca' Romanino: una casa di Giancarlo De Carlo a Urbino*, produced by the associazione culturale Ca' Romanino at the end of 2010 can be downloaded free at <http://www.fondazioneucaromanino.it/pdf/Ca-Romanino-Una-casa-di-Giancarlo-De-Carlo-a-Urbino.pdf>.

14 See John McKean, Giancarlo De Carlo: *Layered Spaces*, (Stuttgart: Edition Axel Menges, 2003) and John McKean, *Giancarlo De Carlo: Des Lieux, Des Hommes* (Paris: Centre Pompidou, 2004), 144-149.

15 John McKean, "Space and society: Il Magistero", in *Masters of Building series, The Architects' Journal* (London), February 13, 2003, 19-35; another version "Il Magistero: De Carlo's dialogue with historical forms", *Places* 16, no. 1 (Fall 2003): 54-63.

Fig. 4

Up: Giuseppe Zigaina, conversing by his fogolar. Down: Andrea De Carlo, gymnast at Ca' Romanino. Both photos John McKean 2000

Casa Sichirollo.

At the same moment as they planned this house, De Carlo's ground-breaking book *Urbino. La storia di una città e il piano della sua evoluzione urbanistica* was completed – the book published in 1966¹⁶, the house finished in 1968. Sichirollo, the university professor and active politician in that city, was 'councillor for town planning', and as such was De Carlo's strongest supporter in this plan and for the proposed projects within Urbino. His house is at Romanino, almost invisible from any direction, on an isolated, wooded crest outside Urbino¹⁷. In 1958 De Carlo had built the home and studio for the painter Giuseppe Zigaina, at Cervignano del



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16 Giancarlo De Carlo, *Urbino. La storia di una città e il piano della sua evoluzione urbanistica* (Padova: Marsilio Editori, 1966), 248-259; Giancarlo De Carlo, *Urbino, the History of a City and Plans for its development* (Cambridge, Mass: MIT Press, 1970). See also McKean, *Giancarlo De Carlo: Layered Places*.

17 This work [De Carlo Project no. 110] was known as 'casa Livio Sichirollo'; not, for example, casa 'Livio e Sonia Sichirollo'. Very little known until now, it was published in A+U, No 48, December 1974. It has been, throughout its existence, the house of Sonia Morra, former wife of Livio Sichirollo. The house today is known today as Ca' Romanino. (Its location is called 'Cavallino' in Benedict Zucchi, *Giancarlo De Carlo* (Oxford: Butterworth-Heinemann, 1992).)

Fig. 5

Ca' Guerla. Photos John McKean 2000

Friuli in Italy's far north-east¹⁸. In 1980 he reconfigured, Ca' Guerla, as a bolt hole, his own family retreat outside Urbino and quite close to here¹⁹. Between these, this house - Casa Sichirollo, soon to become known as Ca' Romanino - completed his forays into domesticity. [Fig. 5]

First a few snapshots.

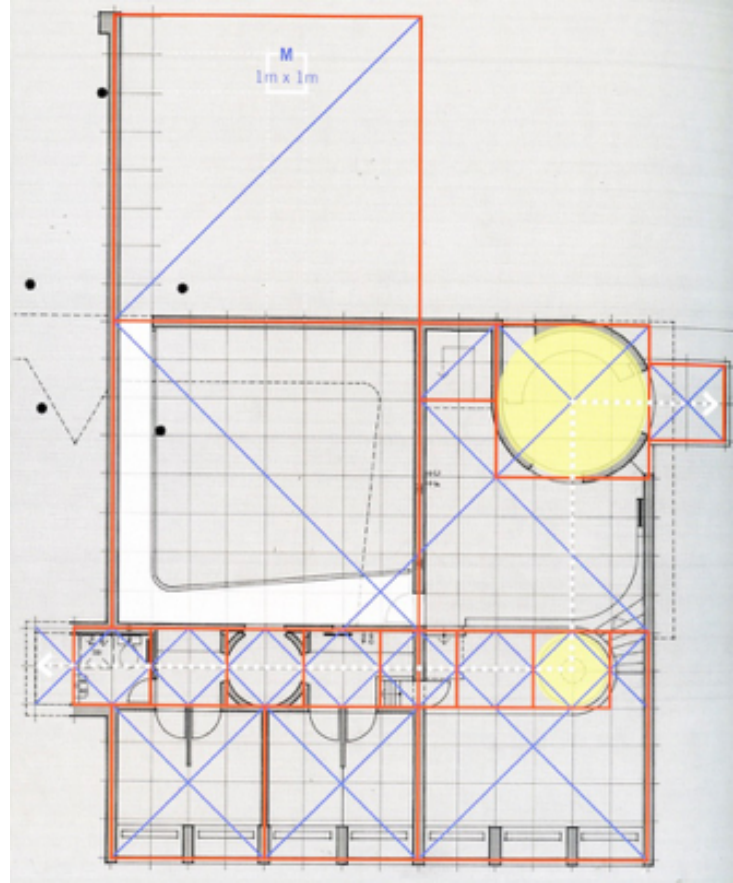
- We climb steeply through the wood until it opens up and a window-wall is glimpsed over the top end of a rising vineyard to the left of the track. Finally the climb eases as we pass close to a blank brick wall, then a curved sheet of blue metal in it before the hill encloses the building, continuing to slope to its wooded summit now close above us. Into this, a narrow, blind crevice is cut which, once entered, turns and we reach two doors. Alternatively if we continue past that crevice, beyond the hilltop to our left, the relief of a tiny green plateau is revealed and here a car can stop. Turning back towards the hilltop, the house now presents itself as an ancient cantina, blue doors and gate to caves dug into the tufa, over which a flight of narrow steps rises to the highest trees, on the hilltop with 360° views to far vistas. Once up these steps, a little path leads round the battlements of this tiny ancient fort. We glimpse the entrances below but are lead directly to another door at this level and, beyond it, onto the gravel of a precipitous roof edge and amazing panorama south towards Urbino. Even before penetrating it, we have met the most complex and ambiguous tiny building imaginable.

- Below, on entering the main door, to our left the study is a calm rotonda, with built-in bench seating and central circular table. Its great curved metal door, as you slowly pull round its weight, can choose to shut off either the main house or the outdoor landscape. The hollow form is echoed to our right in the solid central hearth of the soggiorno (*both are yellow in the plan*), a great 1.5 m diameter red cylinder which provides a focus for cooking the convivial meals – a facility only supplemented by a tiny, top-lit, galley kitchen excavated from the tufa of the hilltop behind us (*a late addition, not on this earlier plan*). [Fig. 6]

- But the plan, with its rigorous geometry is a secondary conceit. The place exists in section. From the entrance, this dining area, we glimpse two concealed descents to the soggiorno, one very steep flight and a curling if more normal one. There are also two ascents from here to the main bedroom level, a very steep ladder and a dog-leg stair. And there are rungs up a wall to reach the shelves of the *brise-soleil*. [Fig. 7]

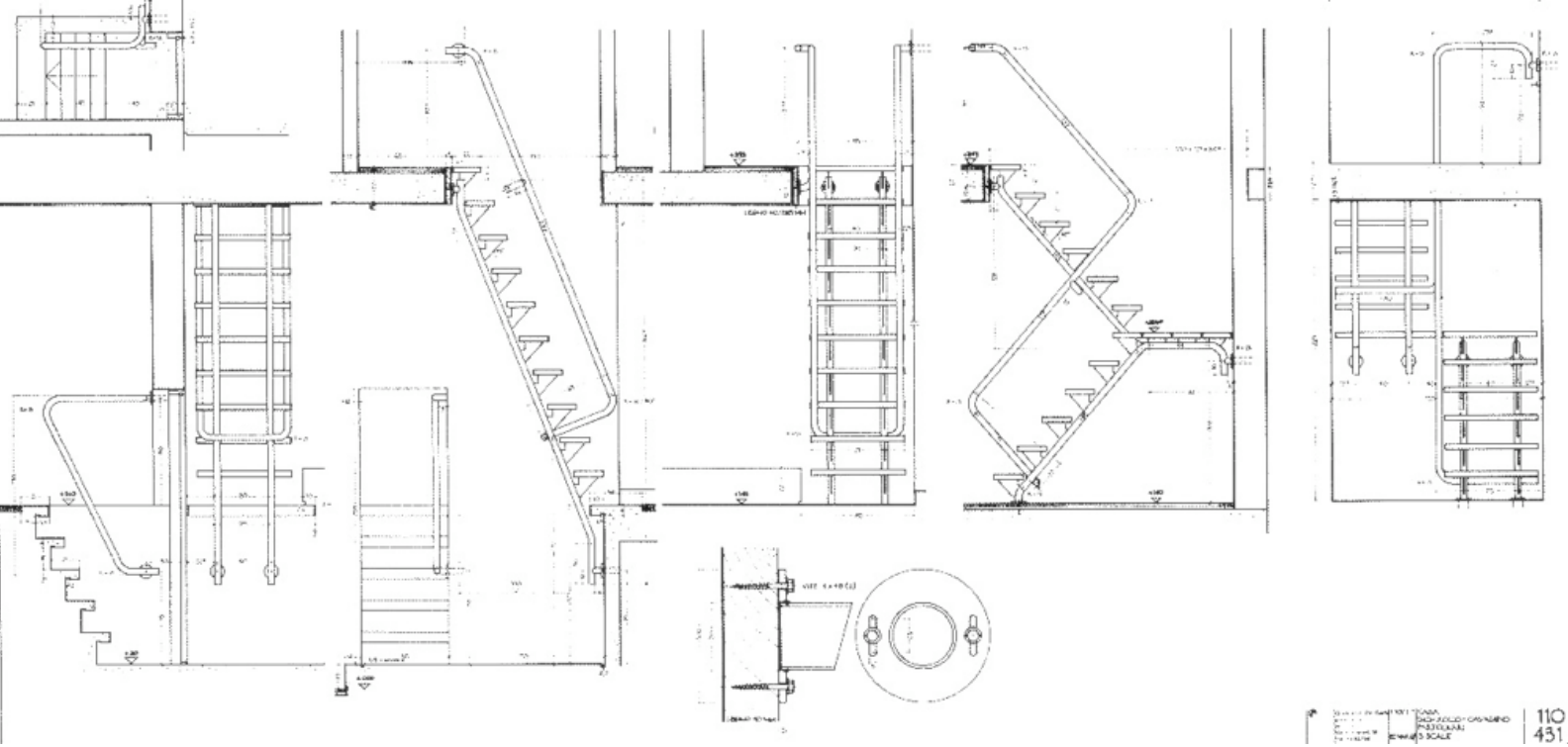
18 Casa Giuseppe Zigaina, 1958, [De Carlo Project no. 55, collaborator Matilde Baffa] was originally at the edge of this small town. Now surrounded by suburban development, its privacy strengthened as Zigaina was able to buy up surrounding plots.

19 Ca' Guerla, on a wooded hillside near to Casa Sichirollo, is built round an ancient outlook tower. The tower is one of a string across the countryside between S. Leo and Urbino. There is a beautiful outlook; De Carlo's Collegi can be seen in the distance.



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Fig. 4
Plan at entrance level – from
Ca' Romanino book



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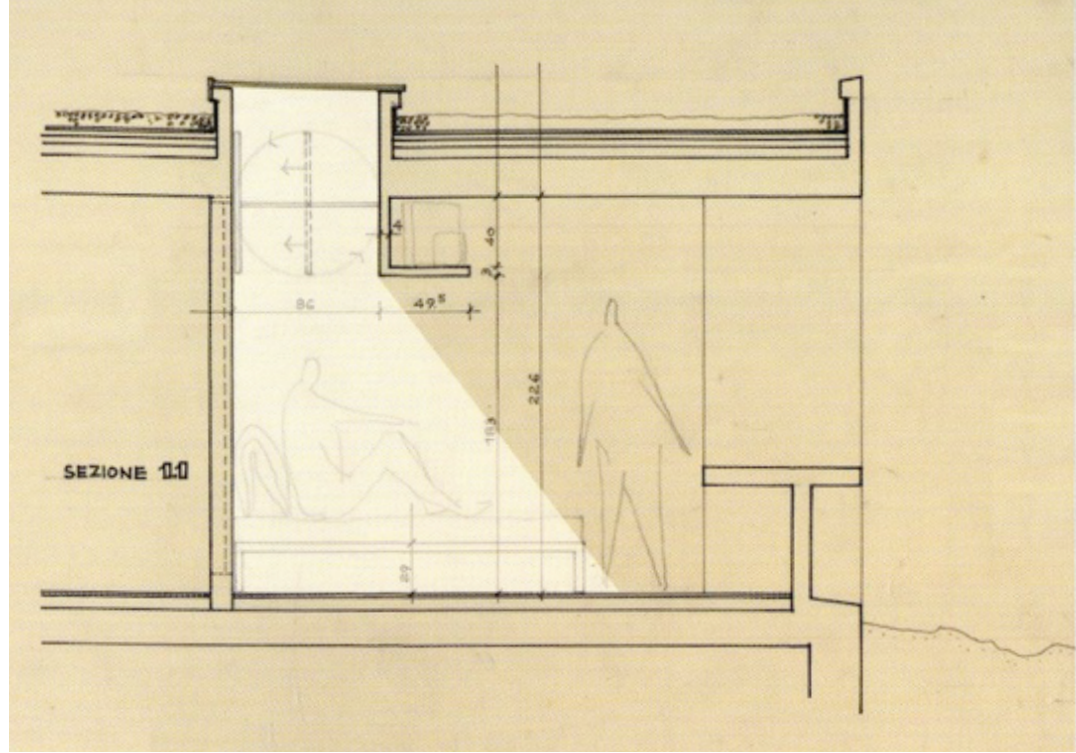


71

- The language of vertical brick and horizontal concrete (as De Carlo was using in the nearby university buildings), is uncompromisingly rigorous here, even to the brick-cased bath. Strategic roof-lights in the guest bedrooms look upwards from the pillow to pine trees, the moon and stars, a view which the child in none of us could forget. [Fig. 8]

Photographs easily mislead – as Adolf Loos repeatedly pointed out – for they create surfaces. De Carlo's spaces are not edged but centred; they are not decorated nor defined by accoutrements layered up against its edges, but they are inhabited. Yet, if it offers a backdrop, a landscape for inhabitation, it suggests a

Fig. 7
John McKean photo & GDC
dwg of stairs



very particular range of inhabitations. It is, after all a most idiosyncratic building – with nearly vertical stairs, walls like climbing frames, rooflights over beds. It is a luxury villa where even the bath itself is clad in raw brick. It is not a luxury of accoutrements, nor are the *arredamenti* reduced to functional ‘necessities’.

Philosophy round the house built on a dynamic balance

That Sichirollo was a philosopher brings to mind *Jumpers*, Tom Stoppard’s play about philosophers, which was built on the conceit of a word-play between the ‘mental gymnastics’ of philosophy and physical exertion in a gym²⁰. For this building is a wonderful playground for both. Literally: red rungs on the living-room wall let one climb up to and between the deep concrete window-shelves, high on the *brise-soleil* wall; these attractions, and the varied staircases and vertically sliding door which separate this world from sleeping quarters, are hugely fun for exploratory occupation by agile monkeys. It is a domesticity of ideas, jumping and creative; where colorless green ideas might sleep furiously.²¹

Having glanced at the constructed interior landscape – the ‘climbing frame’ one might say – of Ca’ Romanino, we can now look more closely at the ideas of architect and client. Onto the Modernist threads I sketched, De Carlo’s personal philosophy builds a humanist, phenomenological perspective. He sees his client as far from being ‘completed by his architect’ (as Adolf Loos’s ‘Poor little rich man’). Here he is active subject rather than the passive object of his dwelling.

20 Tom Stoppard, *Jumpers* (London: Faber, 1972); First performed at The National Theatre, London, 1972.

21 Chomsky’s famous phrase, being grammatically correct while semantically magical



Fig. 8
Bedroom rooflight photo John McKean, GDC dwg from book

De Carlo's spaces are always formed by their centres rather than their edges (though often circle and cylinder are used to imply centralised, gathering spaces), and they are structured by the routes moving between them. They become places - in this case we can say a 'home' - when they act as a stimulus to social activities; when, as De Carlo says, 'people begin to acknowledge the physical configuration as fitting their memories, expectations, needs and imagery, and they enter upon an intense exchange of experience'.²² Thus communication and meeting points are privileged as the 'social condensers' in all his architecture²³, where 'recognisable groups of individuals can recognise themselves, their thoughts and actions, *among other people*'.

De Carlo was convinced that three-dimensional, physical space is the most important reference we have as a human being, to understand and to address our being. 'How could we remember, how tell a story, without reference to the physical space which surrounds our action and our thoughts?'²⁴ While architecture's concerns with the organisation of space involves rationality, method and coherence, he notes that 'it is also a question of form, which requires intuition, invention, evocation, prophecy.'²⁵ And while it will always be deformed and transformed as people take it over, the designed space continues to speak, always leading a continuous dialectic of how it might be used.

Remembering that this house is for a philosophy professor, I refer to one book of that moment which seems to offer some useful hints. In De Carlo's office library, I stumbled across Roger Poole's *Towards Deep Subjectivity*²⁶ came out in 1972, after the house was built of course, and after *les événements* of '68. It was probably bought by De Carlo then; but it was not kept at his home, with all the rest of his cultural memory, with his French and American novels, his copies of the *New York Review of Books*, his intellectual garden. It is the only book I've seen in the whole office library (where it has a number on the spine and is carefully filed and categorised²⁷) that would not be found on the architecture or planning shelves of a university library.

This important philosophical essay offered a damning critique of both the prevailing positivist philosophy and behaviourist psychology dominating Anglo-Saxon thinking at that time. And, developing an exegesis on Husserl, it is much more sympathetic to a phenomenological position, perhaps coming from the author's having taught at the Sorbonne alongside Levi-Strauss, Lacan, Barthes and Ricoeur.

22 Giancarlo De Carlo, *Introduction to ILAUD's second course, ILAUD Second Annual Report* (Urbino: Residential Course, 1977), 8.

23 He uses this Constructivist term happily, at all scales, and most explicitly in the plan for Rimini.

24 Being means being somewhere, as Merleau-Ponty and phenomenologists continually insist. See Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Phenomenology of Perception* (London: Routledge, 1962).

25 Giancarlo De Carlo, Interview, in Benedict Zucchi, *Giancarlo De Carlo* (Oxford, Butterworth-Heinemann, 1992), 159.

26 Roger Poole, *Towards Deep Subjectivity* (London: Allen Lane, Penguin Books Ltd, 1972).

27 under 'class' it said 'vari'

He describes the dominant paradigm in the '60s as treating human beings as mechanisms – as machines governed by rules. This was the paradigm of reductive objectivity from Wundt to Titchener to Pavlov to Watson to B. F. Skinner and the behaviourism of the 1960s. Within its attempts to measure all behaviour and thus allow people to be controlled, it saw surprise and freedom as aberrations to be reduced and eventually eliminated. And thus they would have us understand the human phenomenon: no whole greater than the sum of its conditioned reflexes. Poole quotes Konrad Lorenz in 1970: 'If ... one observes the mental and emotional resistance which the behaviourists have for everything which is not conditioned reflex, one finds, I think, in the background, the ideology of all the current political doctrines...'²⁸.

Now all this fitted very well with De Carlo's political and philosophical position, predicated on the dignity of the active subject who operates intentionally and unpredictably – someone who cannot be controlled, for example, by architectural determinism – and certainly not a client waiting to be 'completed' by his architect. De Carlo began to visit the USA in the mid-'60s, and took part in radical campus debates, alongside professors like Chermayeff and Chomsky (who of course had famously attacked behaviourism in his critique of Skinner²⁹). Poole slams into behaviourist approaches to spatial design, for example accusing Edward Hall³⁰ of allowing no 'possibility that the individual might use space contrapuntally, in such a way as to counter received cultural expectations. The question doesn't arise [in Hall's 'proxemics'] because, objectively, there is no conceptual difference between the signalling resources of animals and men.'³¹

Such consistent reduction only allowed the broken-down and measurable bits of human life to be recognised, with the subjective and unquantifiable data ignored³². Gestures are fitted to a presumed code, '*parole*' to '*langue*' as they said around 1970, rather than a new '*parole*' being allowed its own signifying creativity – as Chomsky argued – being allowed to set up a new signifying nexus in its own creative terms, to stand as the first member of a new '*langue*' which it is trying to constitute and bring into being.

This is where the radical De Carlo and Sichirollo were in the mid 1960s: proposing that towns, just as dwellings, be enabling frames for creative, unpredictable, un-programmed activity. De Carlo's rigorous critique of Modernist reductive determinism underscores his major writings of this period 1966-72. Criticising, for example, the CIAM Congress at Frankfurt in 1929, he lets the 'Frankfurt kitchen' stand for the whole position; and his critique stands at a tangent to

28 Konrad Lorenz, *L'Express*, June 1970.

29 published in Jerry Fodor and Jarrold Katz, *The Structure of Language* (Upper Saddle River: Prentice Hall, 1964).

30 Edward Hall's *The Silent Language* (New York: Doubleday, 1959) and *The Hidden Dimension* (New York: Doubleday NY, 1966) were influential texts in architectural circles in the 1960s when I, as a student, read them.

31 Poole, *Towards Deep Subjectivity*, 60-61.

32 My personal engagement with this issue at that time is seen in the parallel publication of two lengthy building studies, an 'objective' scientific one (of a Glasgow hospital, by environmental (and later leading UK forensic) psychologist David Canter) and my 'subjective' humanistic one (of The University of Essex), and the subsequent lively debate in the pages of *The Architects' Journal* (London) between September 1972 and January 1973.

the received feminist one which we now all know. Close focus on the 'how' of cooking an omelette more economically, with minimum ergonomic movements and thus in the shortest time, he argues, inverts subject and object. The person cooking becomes objectified, the omelette the subject³³.

We can see the attraction of the philosophers of 'deep subjectivity', a term favoured by phenomenologists, which in '68 became aligned with a widespread revolt against the contemporary control structures – with De Carlo at its Italian centre in IUAV, Venice's architecture university. Their processes of objectifying were no longer satisfactory, but were now resented for offending, diminishing and de-humanising us. Their objectivity was old, right-wing, entrenched; its positivist philosophy and behaviourist psychology excluding the thinker from the thought.

Subjectivity on the other hand, which questioned the status of data and its quantifiability, considered wholes not just parts, was life-centred, based on reality and operated in an 'ethical space' (to quote Poole). We would become subject again not an object.

Interrogating the house

We make one last journey through the actual building.

'Those who have no table manners, find it easy to design new forks,' said Adolf Loos. We could argue that, with both Sichirollo and De Carlo, we are dealing here with men of exquisite manners – manners in the sense of Castiglione's courtier (or of his English contemporary William Horman whose motto was 'manners maketh man'); men of integrity and powerfully independent character.

De Carlo scorns 'interior design' as the purveyor of settings, the provider of a wrapping that defines and completes the client. He senses, in undertaking domestic work, a certain stigma attached to it, as it is expected to be offering this kind of stylish dress. For De Carlo, the designed house might allow – even suggest – forms of inhabitation his occupants could never have imagined.

First, it is the opposite of a safe nest. There is nothing safe here at all – from the almost nautical, precipitous array of stairs to the bedrooms which themselves are through routes. It is one thing actively to encourage what Poole calls "contrapuntal behaviour" – ways of acting not going with the established grain. But here the *spatial rules dissolve* – as bedrooms become part of the circulation system, thus dissolving safe privacies. It is a planning shock repeated at Ca' Guerla and even more extremely with the student flats in the Tridente college³⁴. And the

33 It is not irrelevant that De Carlo was no cook and, perhaps Livio Sichirollo likewise. Of course Sonia Morra had a tiny but essential galley kitchen at Ca' Romanino. She quotes De Carlo: '... the dwelling must guarantee a fast omelette, but also the possibility of being able to cook a kebab, couscous, or vermicelli. ... the definition of housing must become much more flexible, and much more adaptable.' (in *Ca' Romanino: una casa di Giancarlo De Carlo a Urbino*, 2010).

34 In the Tridente student housing, each flat, with its group of bedrooms, has a wash room with a suite of WCs, showers and basins – at the far end of which is a blank door, which in fact leads into a different apartment whose main entrance is far from the entrance to the first one, but with which it shares the same washroom.

visual rules dissolve – in a fair-face brick bathroom, door openings cut from floor to ceiling (concrete slab to concrete slab) or all services being surface-mounted, as in Le Corbusier's bedroom. This forms an architecture just as paradoxical as Mies van der Rohe's house with two bathrooms and no bedroom. While De Carlo may claim to be providing the stage for unscripted action rather than for controlled performance, his 'structure' is quite unforgiving of other world views.

Of another building on which he worked at very much the same moment (the Urbino University Law Faculty), he said 'I hope that those contradictions stimulate people and make them think. I believe one goal of architecture is to generate thinking rather than mindless happiness. In a significant space, people must understand that being in there needs to be kept in balance all the time - and there is no definite balance. Each moment of balance is open to another of imbalance, and then balance again, and so on.'³⁵

In his thoughts, the images of flux, of event, of dynamism are ever present.

This house is also assured of not being a safe nest by the exaggerated importance of vertical movement in space – between nearly every room. Vertical movement is so much more active an experience than horizontal movement, as, in this physical action of moving up or downwards, space becomes revealed. De Carlo retained a very clear memory of a first sensory experience of three-dimensional space at the age of six³⁶, and : 'From then on the idea of stair was impressed in my mind and still now it keeps filling my dreams and my thinking. I don't get stimulated by flat places as much as I do by places with different levels.'³⁷

This approach to space is to do with stimulation, being dynamic rather than static, centred rather than edged, space for action rather than passive spectacle. Is stress on identity through action not through things, invested with significance by the active body, is this particularly masculine?

In *Getting back into Space*, the phenomenologist Edward Casey talks of 'two ways to dwell'³⁸.

The one being static and centred he relates to Hestia (female goddess of the hearth), the other being dynamic he relates to Hermes (male prankster, messenger of the gods). One might imagine this house as being particularly dedicated to that male deity, the dynamic Hermes. But then the vast red cylinder, which seems to fill its main space, stares us in the face, its glowing chimney the only totem of the house visible from afar. This is the very Wrightian 'heart', the central hearth. Now here, in essence, is a very primitive, primal, house. It reaches for these pri-

35 De Carlo in recorded conversation with me.

36 One day, aged six and living in a 5th floor apartment in Genova, he suddenly encountered an animal on the stair landing. Appearing like a dog with very long legs and a cat's head, a straight moustache and greenish eyes, it may have been a lynx.

The animal's presence forced young De Carlo to take in his surroundings carefully, to measure the space around him as he tried to find a way to escape. Although no-one believed his story of the lynx, 'that was the first time I had a conscious feeling of the height and width of a place, of the horizontal and inclined planes, of going forward and backward, up and down on a stair.' Quoted in McKean, *Giancarlo de Carlo, Layered Places*.

37 De Carlo in record conversation with me, quoted in McKean, *Giancarlo de Carlo, Layered Places*, 146.

38 see Edward Casey, "Two Ways to Dwell", in *Getting Back into Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993), 107 - 145.

mal feelings: washing under that shower, crouched on that window shelf as if up a tree, sleeping under the stars, and congregating round the fire on which meals for family and friends are visibly being prepared.

De Carlo exaggerates the elements to broaden the range of feelings. The hearth – pumping heart, fire and oven – is vast and red, the actual kitchen a tiny galley. The house's centre speaks of a dynamic conviviality. But this great red cooking fire? While we may be wary of talk of 'gendered space', there is an unavoidable archetype here: the image of later 20th century men who dominate the barbecue but would never be seen cooking in the kitchen. So a virtual outdoors, this space a landscape again: unlike the woman's tiny kitchen (very enclosed, lined with shelves and cupboards and packed with *things*).

The rotonda can isolate itself, as indeed can the guest suite to become an autonomous dwelling. But in the continuous tension between individuality and conviviality, the architect always seems to privilege the social over the individual – the single bedrooms are linked, the privacy of the main bedrooms is contradicted by their being enfilade spaces. (Ca' Guerla, De Carlo's own house nearby, shows the same duality: a clear definition of separate domains. To enter bedrooms you must step over kerbs, and yet they can be through routes.)

De Carlo argues that architecture requires that individuals and groups take responsibilities in the initiation processes, in the production processes, and in the inhabitation processes. Indeed buildings are not so much inhabited, he adds, as 'corrupted by use. And the way use corrupts is the most interesting part of architecture. Positive corruption, the addition of people using architecture as a system of communication, as self-representation - this is the highest goal.'³⁹

Yet, where, in this house, is the space for memory? For the sedimentation of the past – for example, for a non-utilitarian wedding present to be displayed? Are traces of personal affect, beyond the moment of its first inhabitation, in fact removed?⁴⁰) Home making, being the locus for that delicate knitting of relationships which enable household members each to develop creatively and yet hold together, perhaps gets little support from a place so positively encouraging each actively to fly off into their various plays. This thought is pictured, directly, in the Repton double images where I began.

Here, in these forms, was to be the dream house of Livio Sichirollo and Sonia Morra. In 1968, as building work ended, so did their marriage and Livio Sichirollo was never to return here again. That balance of Hestia and Hermes was broken.

Postlude

When I first told this tale, the house was very private and unknown. De Carlo gave me Livio Sichirollo's phone number, but he died before I could make contact. I

39 De Carlo, quoted in McKean, *Layered Places*.

40 Sonia Morra displays fading posters from the *Sessantotto* as if the building were still then.

knew the house a little, thanks to Andrea De Carlo, but had not yet met Sonia Morra. These musings remain alive but are, of course, of their time, floating out on the sea of history, released by subsequent waves. Casa Sichirollo has now lived half a century as Ca' Romanino, the retreat unimaginable as separate from the powerful personality of Sonia Morra. Over a decade, Sonia then became a generous host and a good friend to my wife Mary and to me. Ca' Romanino, even more idiosyncratic than its owner, became an even closer friend when we stayed there, sometimes with Sonia more often on our own, in its hilltop tranquility for continued periods through long summer months, and also at times in winter.

Asked a few years later, I might have worked a rather different story. One about the experience of Ca' Romanino and my body: meals on the shaded picnic table by the steep edge or the private naked summers on this secret hilltop; viewing the stars above my pillow in the little cells or the wonderful landscapes seen from waking in a spacious bedroom upstairs; the sharp shower's angled wall and rooflight or a steamy winter bath in the warm enclosing brickwork; lighting the great fire in winter rain (and happily paying for the much needed replacement central heating boiler); afternoons sitting reading on a high window ledge in the soggiorno, and once watching in astonishment as the great tanker reaches the hilltop and disgorges its oil into the underground tank; watching the stars from the roof and the glorious autumnal colours on the slopes opposite; throwing one door up vertically to retreat to a study or pulling another in a great curve to open the circular table to the landscape. And enjoying all the different routes through this tiny city, so varied and not one of them horizontal. Just as they echo, in microcosm, the famous tiny city nearby. The city, the building, the body, are representations of each other, as Francesco di Giorgio Martini showed in a famous drawing; 'the city is like some large house and the house like some small city', as Alberti echoed.

But time must flow on. Sonia discussed the future of Ca' Romanino with her sister and with friends, and from the eventual decision there came the Associazione Culturale now the Fondazione. Now, over a decade or more, it has become a very different place, as different meanings, seeded by Sonia, layer it anew. Our beloved, so secret, hilltop lawn has become today's unkempt carpark, while the building is somehow reified, become of public value as objet d'art, and inscribed by many enriching readings. Ca' Romanino, open to overnight bookings and written up in the press, is perhaps about to achieve the badge of 'icon'.⁴¹

In 2017, by chance one evening we joined the committee sitting round the dining table – the table of happy memories of laughing with Sonia, her tasty pastasciutta and the rough wine Adriano made from her grapes. But now an iPhone is propped up among papers and glasses of wine on the table between us all. As we talk, Sonia's disembodied head appears, and we greet her again. She is speaking to the committee which cares so well for her house; it is a voice from Milano, but it comes through the ether from a more distant existence.

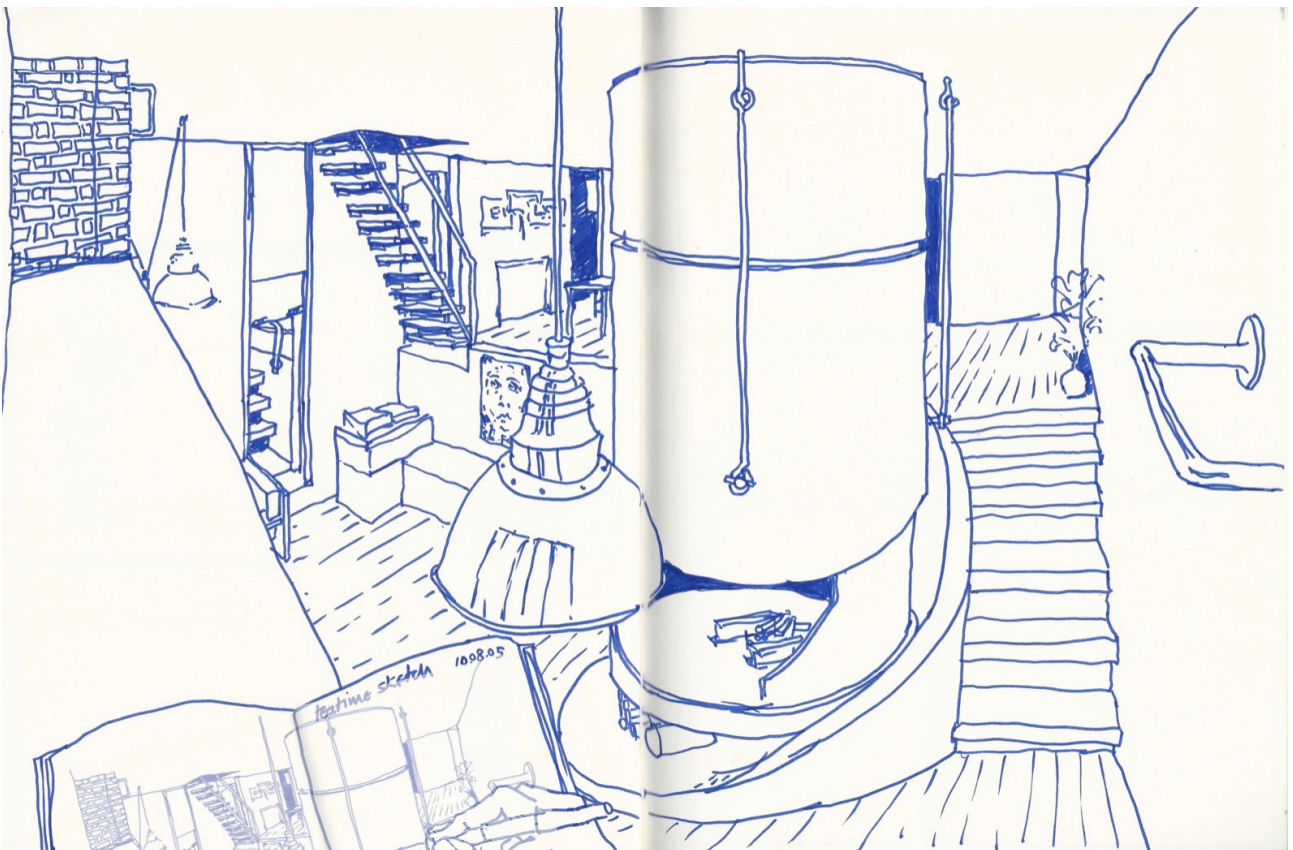
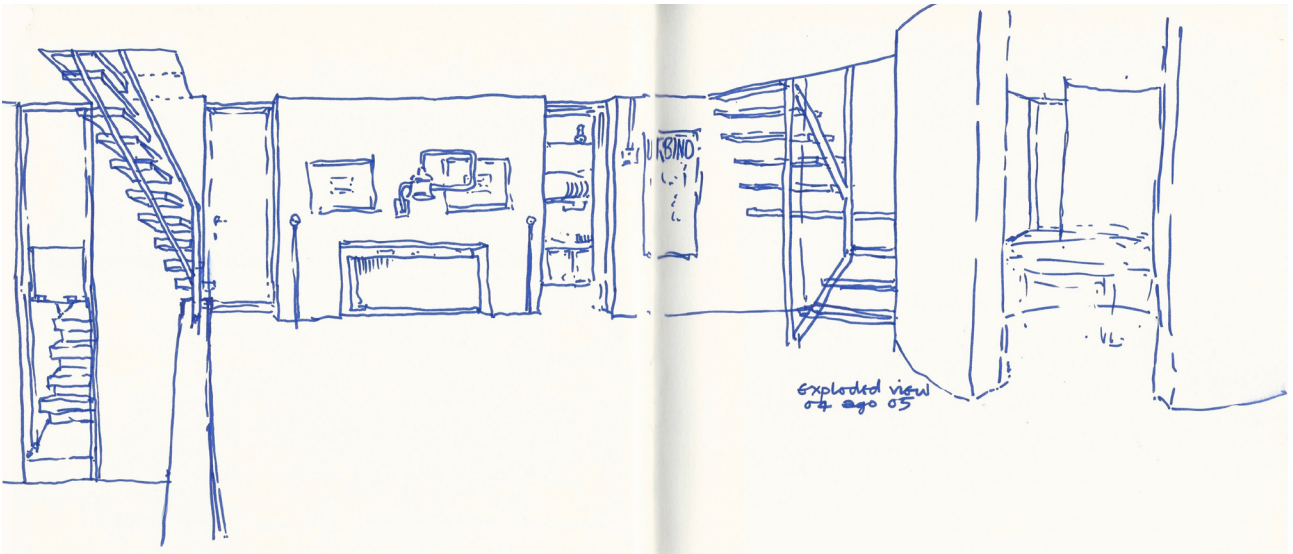
41 It is described by Alessandra Laudati, *Icon Design*, September, 15, 2017.

Ca' Romanino has been her world for half a century, but deep underneath there remain the jumping men, the philosopher and the architect, and their disruption of domesticity. Leon Battista Alberti, it was said, could jump over a standing man. Tatlin's ornithopter bewitched Giancarlo De Carlo in the dream of man-powered flight. Late one summer night I watched Bengt Edman and Giancarlo De Carlo duelling in the street, high up in Urbino, near the palazzo's hidden Alberti façade, elderly architects bouncing on their toes, thrusting with their imagined rapiers. Blink, and the steep cobbled street is dark and silent. The disembodied head on the table also fades. Hestia of the hearth and Hermes the fleet of foot return to their own world. And the frame for contemplative climbing remains pinned to the Romanino hilltop by its bright red omphalos.

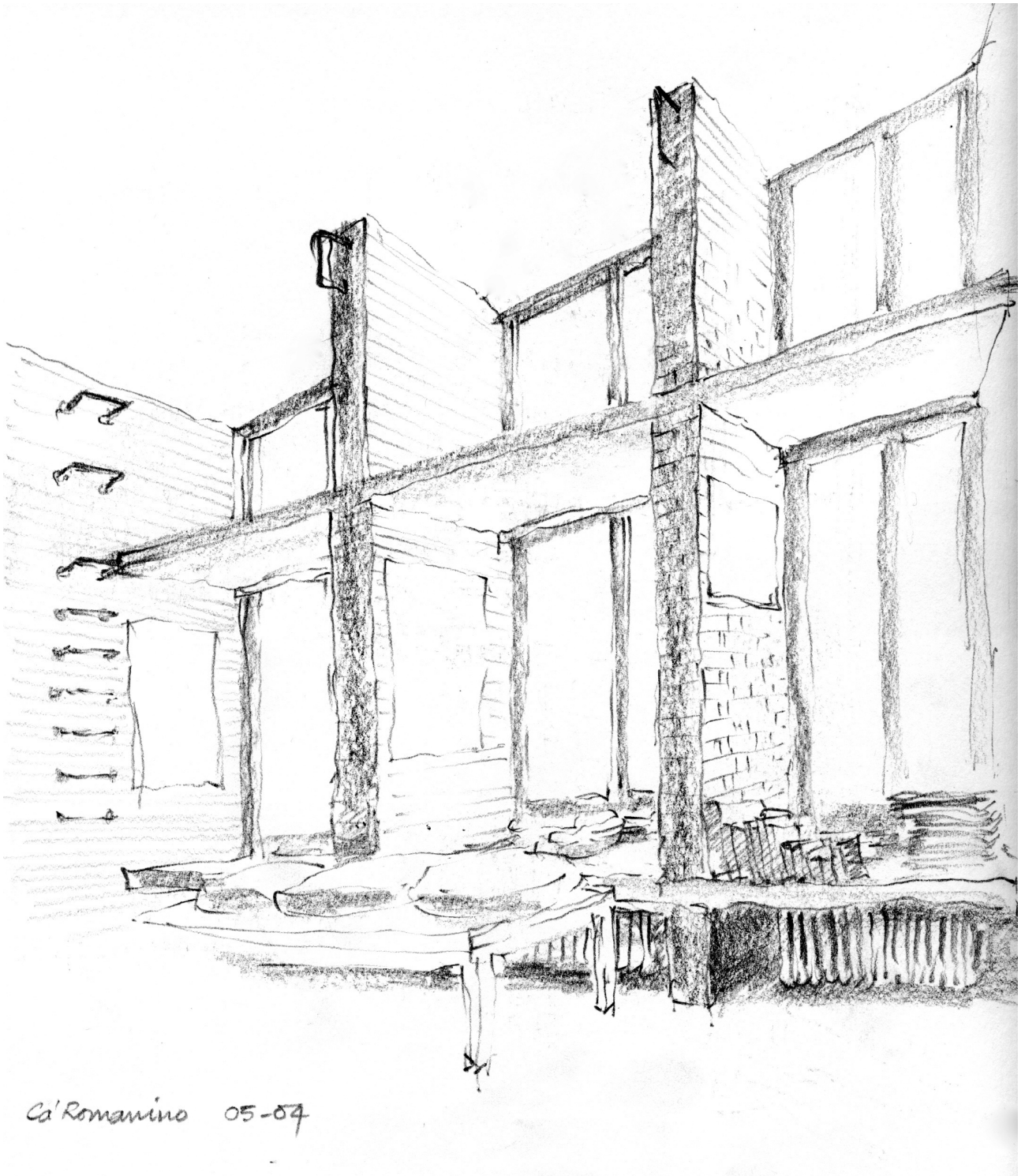
A gallery of photographs and sketches by John McKean.

Giancarlo De Carlo's sketch from the bedroom window in 1983 has been kept by Sonia Morra in the bedroom of Ca' Romanino.

Sketches

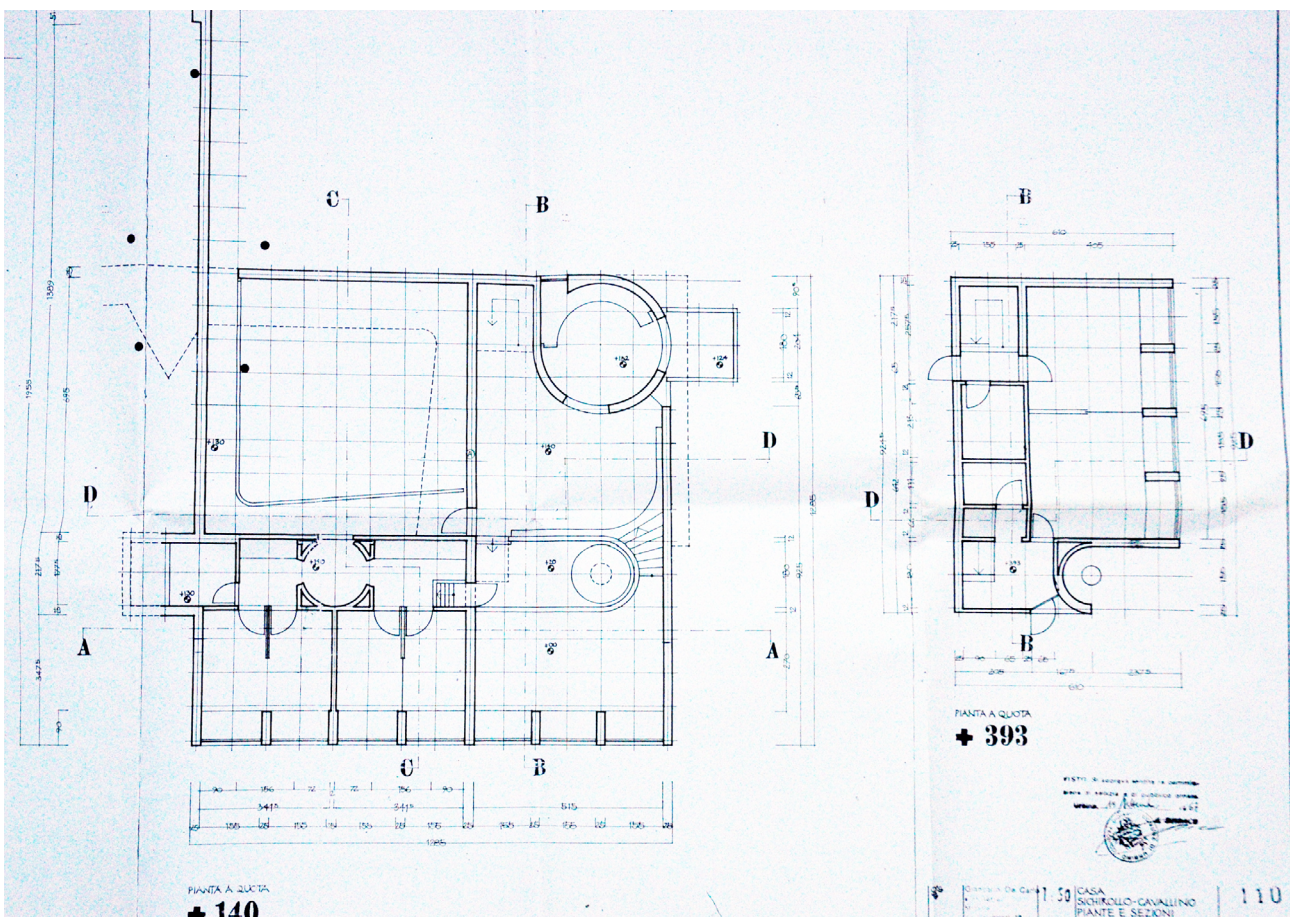


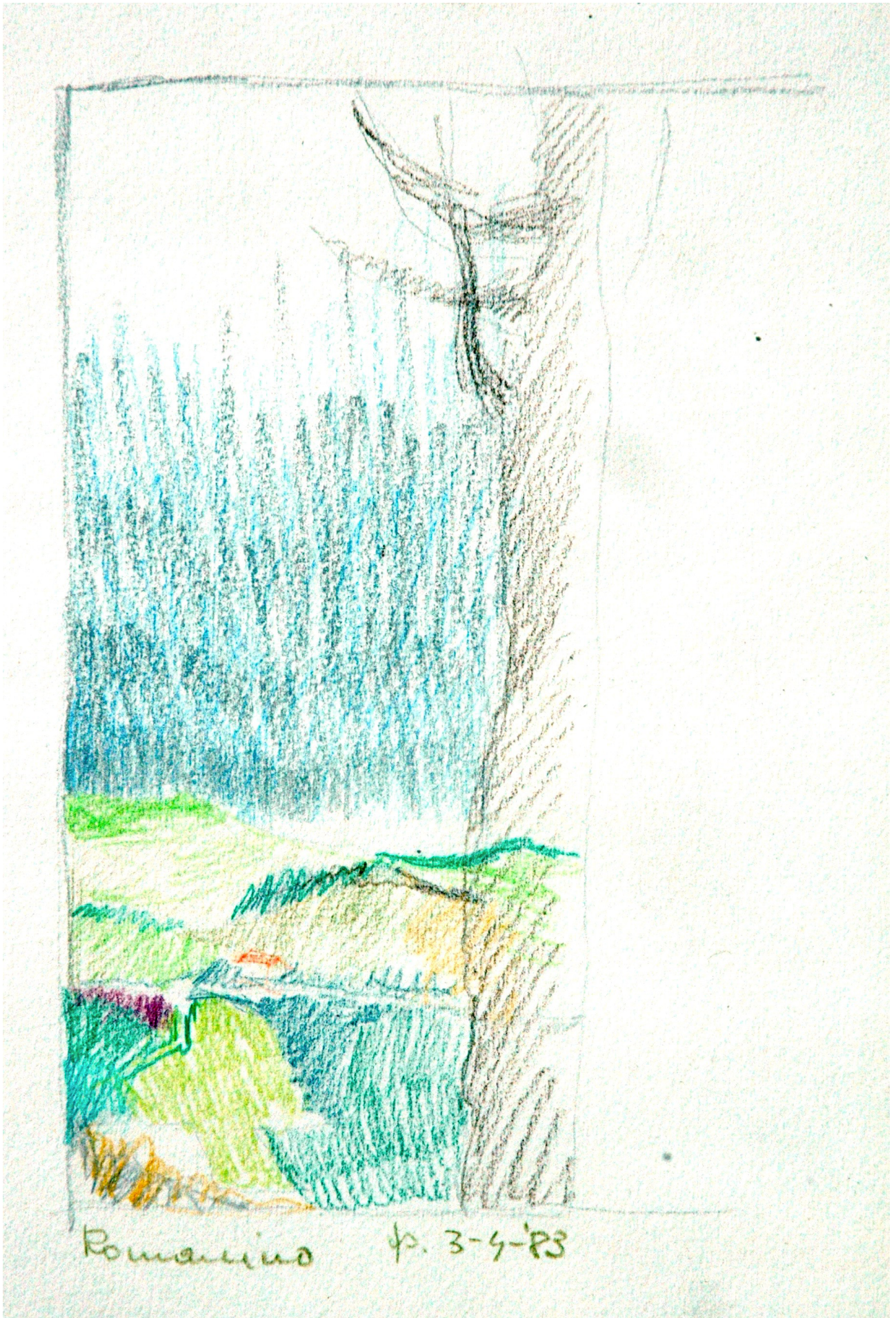




Ca' Romanino 05-87

Project





Romano 3-4-83



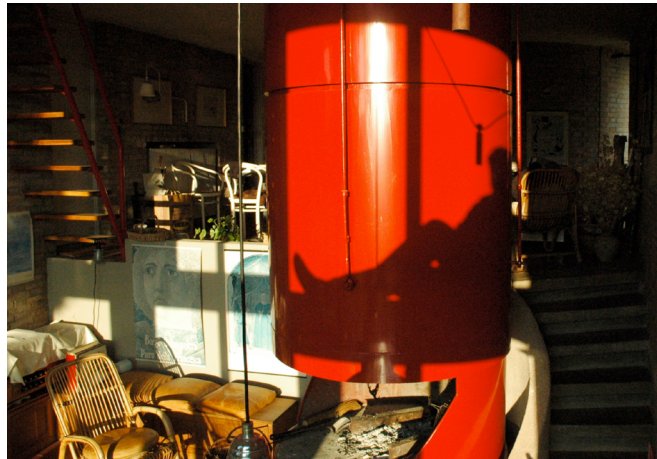


Hall



Living room





Drum



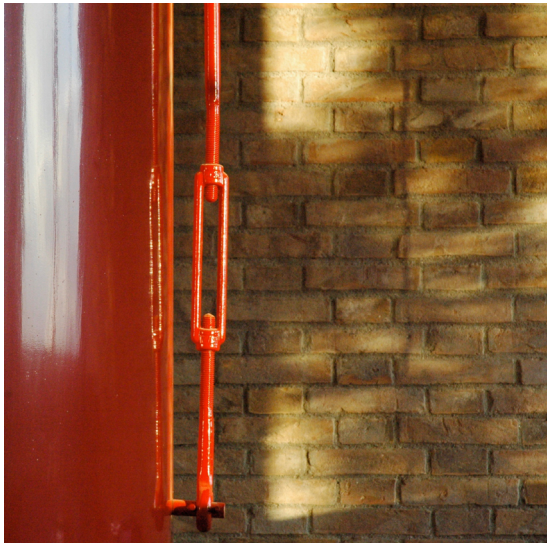
Kitchen



Stair



Details



Edges details

