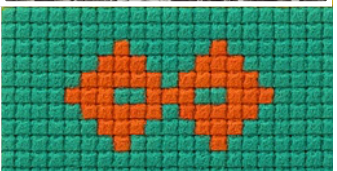
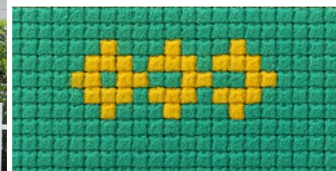
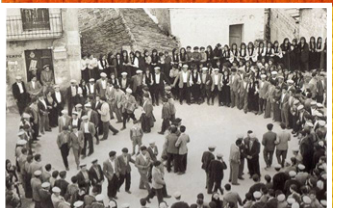


THROUGH CRAFT AND CARE

Reclaiming Civic Ground in Mamoiada



Reflection Matteo Saba

THROUGH CRAFT AND CARE – REFLECTION

“Through Craft and Care” represents a year-long effort to understand the profound complexities surrounding rural areas. The project’s central premise is to directly address the conflict between economic pressures causing emigration and a local identity fighting against cultural commodification and preservation, attempting to reconcile the past, present, and possible futures for these territories. The project takes place in Mamoiada, a town in the mountainous region of Sardinia, an area characterized by centuries of relative isolation, abruptly connected, whose urban and social fabric have been scattered by modernization . The resulting architectural proposal is a network of interventions—a shared productive and social infrastructure centered around winemaking—that aims to reweave the town's fragmented social and urban fabric through renewed community ownership and tending of space.

The initial research explored Mamoiada’s logic of development and sustain across the centuries, revealing a fragile equilibrium rooted in its collective spaces. This system was defined by an intricate interdependence where houses blended with the street, and the town seamlessly blended with the landscape, operating on a logic of subsistence economy, and therefore reliance on the surrounding resources. The contemporary decline is marked by the fragmentation of these hybrid urban spaces in favour of zoning and residential intimacy, leaving the historic center in an ambiguous state: partly abandoned, yet holding onto "fragments of liveliness" during community events.

The relationship between research and design was fundamentally reciprocal. My initial fascination with the town's embedded complex, age-old system of interdependence with its surroundings and its community was the engine of the entire thesis. This core logic was amplified by the study of wine production, from cultivation to communal consumption, confirming it as one of the keys cultural and economic ritual still holding the system together.

The critical turning point came when I realized my role was not to impose a predetermined solution but to act as an innovator: to radically look, understand, and respect what the community was already doing, offering architectural support and strengthening those existing relationships through a shared urban facility.

Subsequently, the process of designing the interventions around Piazza Europa began to influence the research in return. The spatial and logistical prerequisites of the communal winery—specifically the need for thermal stability, efficiency across three complex levels, and material continuity—demanded a rigorous investigation into materiality and construction. This exploration led to the selection of the concrete-stone aggregate and vaulted systems, with a lightweight wood system sitting on top of this heavy material, grounding the aesthetic, logistical, and climatic performance of the architecture in the local context.

While the project ambitions have remained the same since my initial fascination, I didn't expect the architectural solution to evolve so drastically.

Initially, I assumed that solving a social issue would require architecture to "fix" it by creating complex social and economic spaces.

The surprising realization was that the answer was not found in complexity, but in simplicity and intentionality. I never expected the answer to be simple, targeted interventions, nor did I foresee the need for the heavy, grounded approach to construction. The core shift was the realization that architecture didn't need to "fix" anything, but rather needed to create simple, meaningful spaces that also serve as productive parts of the town. This meant intricately uniting the town and territory through radical, yet simple interventions that offer people the space and capacity to reflect on the value of their surroundings, helping them see that what is already there is as important as what is being added. This validated the core belief that letting people be free to think and stay where they want can lead to even greater, enduring value.

The title itself, "Through Craft and Care," is not only the ambition of the final project but also a concise description of the methodological approach employed. This involved a careful, considered, and respectful engagement with a context often approached with generalized solutions. The core value of this methodology was the continuous mediation between contradictions, by "stitching" back the fragmented pieces of the town, trying to make sense of what was and what is, between future prospects and today's problem. In general, the approach I used was able to make the coexistence of many topics and themes that would have been retained contradictory possible: I always envisioned the space to be a community, multi purpose facility, and yet I wanted the wine production to be protagonist. I wanted to create a space that was productive in its nature in the city centre, I wanted to have a production specialized system like wine making and yet I wanted the square centrality and the permeability of the building to coexist. I believe that the role of an architect who wants to innovate is to work with these ambiguities and make it possible that two very different things can work together and generate synergies that were not considered before.

The academic and societal value of "Through Craft and Care" lies in its contribution toward designing places where a community can belong, rather than simply designing a building for production. Furthermore, the design care as much for the town's urban fabric and the surrounding landscape as for the community. This required abandoning preconceived notions and prioritizing a thorough respect for context. The resulting architecture extends the town into the building, in an extremely site specific intervention, allowing people to claim and live it.

While production is a core aspect, the design ultimately provides collective, flexible spaces—not just specialized production facilities. This open nature ensures the building is used by everyone and does not command use, but rather

allows the inhabitants to interpret, occupy, and use the space however they please, generating community ownership and tending.

One of the main values of the project's results is defined by its replicability and proliferation across the urban fabric and in similar contexts. The traditional model of scaling up a productive building—increasing size and productivity—is deliberately rejected as incompatible with this site's nature and limited expansion room. Instead, the project is conceived as a kickstart for a new communal paradigm by offering new cooperative economic and social models where the value of communal bonds and effort is far greater than the produce itself. The project acts as a proof-of-concept for leveraging the abundance of abandoned, underutilized sites that challenge the town's topography. By articulating the program across these discrete locations—using their specific characteristics to its advantage and reactivating the spaces in between—the idea can be scaled to a town-wide network of mid-sized, collective facilities. Crucially, it demonstrates a broader, transferable logic: that the unused power of space can be unlocked through micro-interventions, generating distributed, and socially cohesive urban system that successfully counteracts the narrative of decline.

Throughout the year, what I believe influenced me and the project the most was the notion of “looking carefully.” Learning the reason and history behind the urban fabric imbues every piece of work with profound meaning: from a simple house built brick-by-brick by a parent, to a kind gesture made fifty years ago whose echo still informs community memory. What I observed for a year has been the entire horizon for generations past living only within the town. Everything surrounding us is not just built environment, but a treasure of countless stories that will outlive us.

This year long project has inspired me to be an architect and a professional that cares about the people he's crafting a space for, and in return to the people who I will work for I want to return a great dosage of care. I want to be an architect that tells a story, that unveils existing connections, an empathetic professional who will be able to surprise its clients, and be surprised when I noticed and find a very ordinary thing that for another person is or was of great importance, dignifying and give value to that (extra)ordinary thing. I want to be an architect which is able to see and is able to show to other people, as many as possible, the beauty of simple things, the beauty of something that in its simplicity is able to embody a great amount of thinking, aswell as help people value what they have.

Matteo Saba, 04.12.2025