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Narrating Shared Futures

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Abstract

This visual essay features students' projects from the MSc2 design studio 'Transdisciplinary Encounters: Narrating Shared Futures' offered at TU Delft Faculty of Architecture in Spring of 2022, which served as an inspiration for this issue of *Footprint*. Designed and taught by the issue editors, Aleksandar Staničić and Angeliki Sioli, the course combined cultural heritage and literary narratives to ask students: How can places of memory be rethought using literary techniques, so that they provide the ground for new meanings to emerge and get shared across different cultures? Seven visionary architectural projects featured in this essay, offered their responses to this pertinent question that is fundamental for narrating, imagining and, ultimately, creating shared futures.

Keywords

Visual essay, architectural education, MSc2 design studio, TU Delft, imagining shared futures

In the way it was traditionally set, before we got involved, the MSc2 design studio 'Transdisciplinary Encounters' – offered by the Chair of Methods of Analysis and Imagination at TU Delft's Department of Architecture – was a laboratory to examine the productive relations that can be established between architecture and other disciplines. These may be artistic disciplines, providing instruments such as literary description, choreography, montage and scenario writing, or disciplines from the line-up of social sciences, providing fieldwork techniques related to social-spatial practices and user behaviour. The studio allows students to experiment with various methods coming from the study of these disciplines in order to obtain innovative instruments for the development of architectural analysis and imagination. Based on the definition of architecture as a cognitive practice, trans-disciplinarity offers fresh insights and innovative viewpoints to appraise age-old architectural questions, but it also provides valuable counter-hypotheses and criticism

against architectural conventions and canons, challenging the notion of disciplinary autonomy in the production of architectural knowledge.

In Spring of 2022, we, the editors of this thematic issue, got invited to combine our research interests in cultural heritage and literary narratives and create a new edition of this MSc2 design studio. Together with students, we investigated how places of memory can provide the ground for new meanings that can be shared across different cultures and times. We studied and unpacked past stories, analysed and examined present narratives, imagined and created future scenarios, all in relation to selected places of memory. We used literary sources to look into the previous life of cultural heritage sites, employed narrative techniques to interpret their current conditions, and incorporated design and writing methods to propose new possibilities for these very sites.

The students were invited to explore, examine, and discover the intricate connections between places of cultural meaning and literature, and the potential of literary methods to address such topics as architectural experience, use and imagination. We started from the premise that literary language has the capacity to dwell on the complexities of spatial experience. Evocative literary descriptions of spaces, whether in novels or poetry, often provide detailed information of how people experience architecture. While in architecture the visual and the formal tend to be dominant, literature often describes other sensory perceptions of spaces with great detail and intensity, focusing on other aspects of experience that remain largely untouched in architectural discourse, such as atmosphere and memory. Literary narratives often reveal the social aspects of space; it is through the literary accounts of places that we can learn how they are used. Exploring the relationship between the activities of characters and the spatial setting of the novel allows architects to consider the life of a building after its

inauguration: a life marked by changing uses and users. Finally, novels can often be seen as sketches of another world, balancing between reality and imagination.

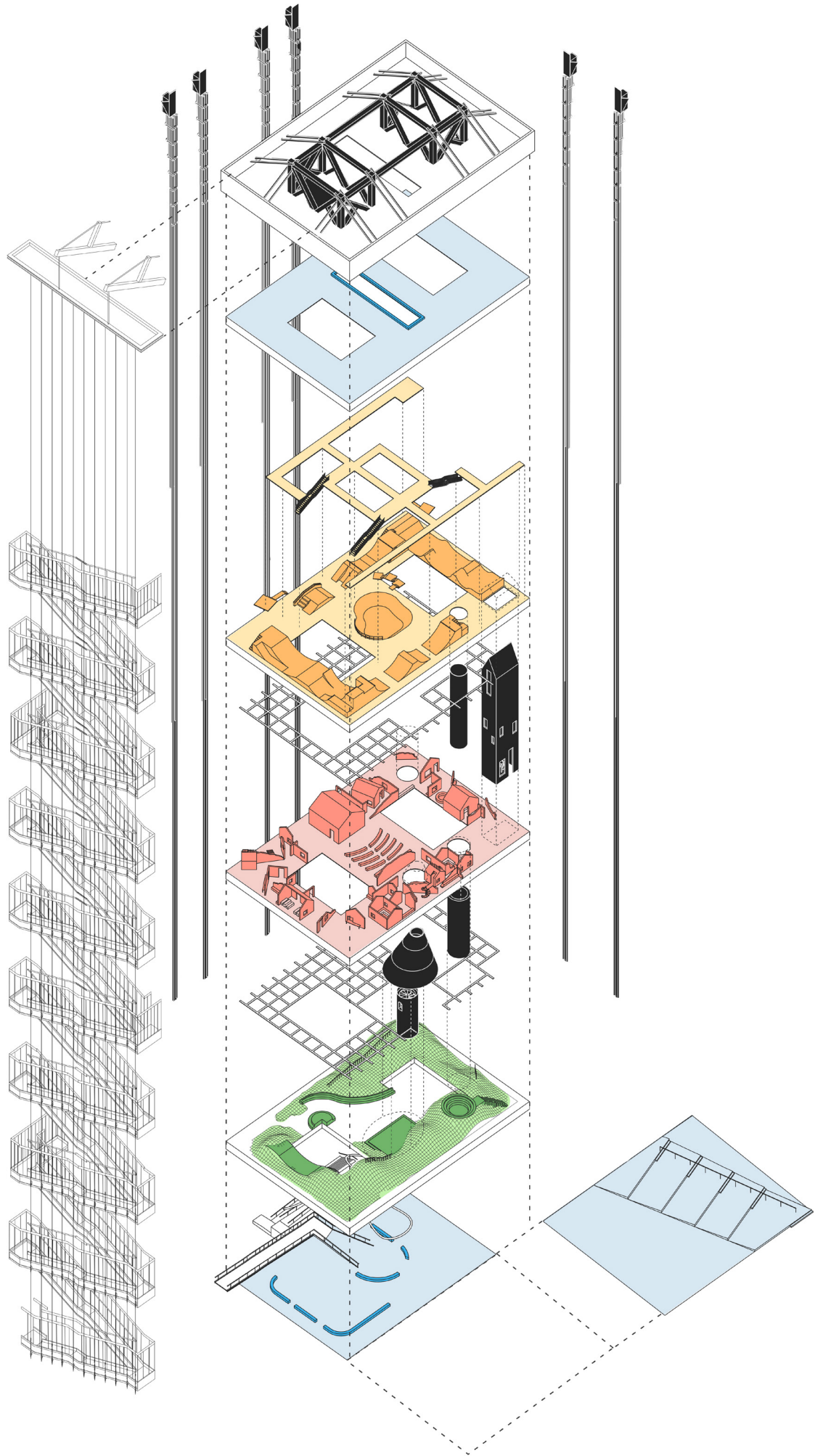
Eleven students offered their responses to the proposed studio setup. A selection of these projects, seven in total, is featured in this visual essay. Ranging from small scale interventions to large urban visions, projects show the creative power of deep emotional connections, vivid memories, and rich stories associated with those places of (formal and informal) heritage. They also show the readiness to rethink those places through the eyes of strangers, to open them for re-evaluation by others, to adapt them and make them accessible to other people and their cultures. This article, and the entire issue, is also an homage to our students, the passion with which they approached the task, their kind occasional disagreements that broadened our own horizons, their humour, and their inexhaustible imagination. Thank you.

Anna Maguire

For decades, the public square in front of the Central Bank building was an important social space for young people in Dublin. However, after the building's redevelopment, the square was privatised into a sunken shopping centre – a move indicative of the city's attitude towards public spaces. My project instead imagines the building's redevelopment into a public space, a vertical maze encouraging spontaneous meetings and informal interactions.

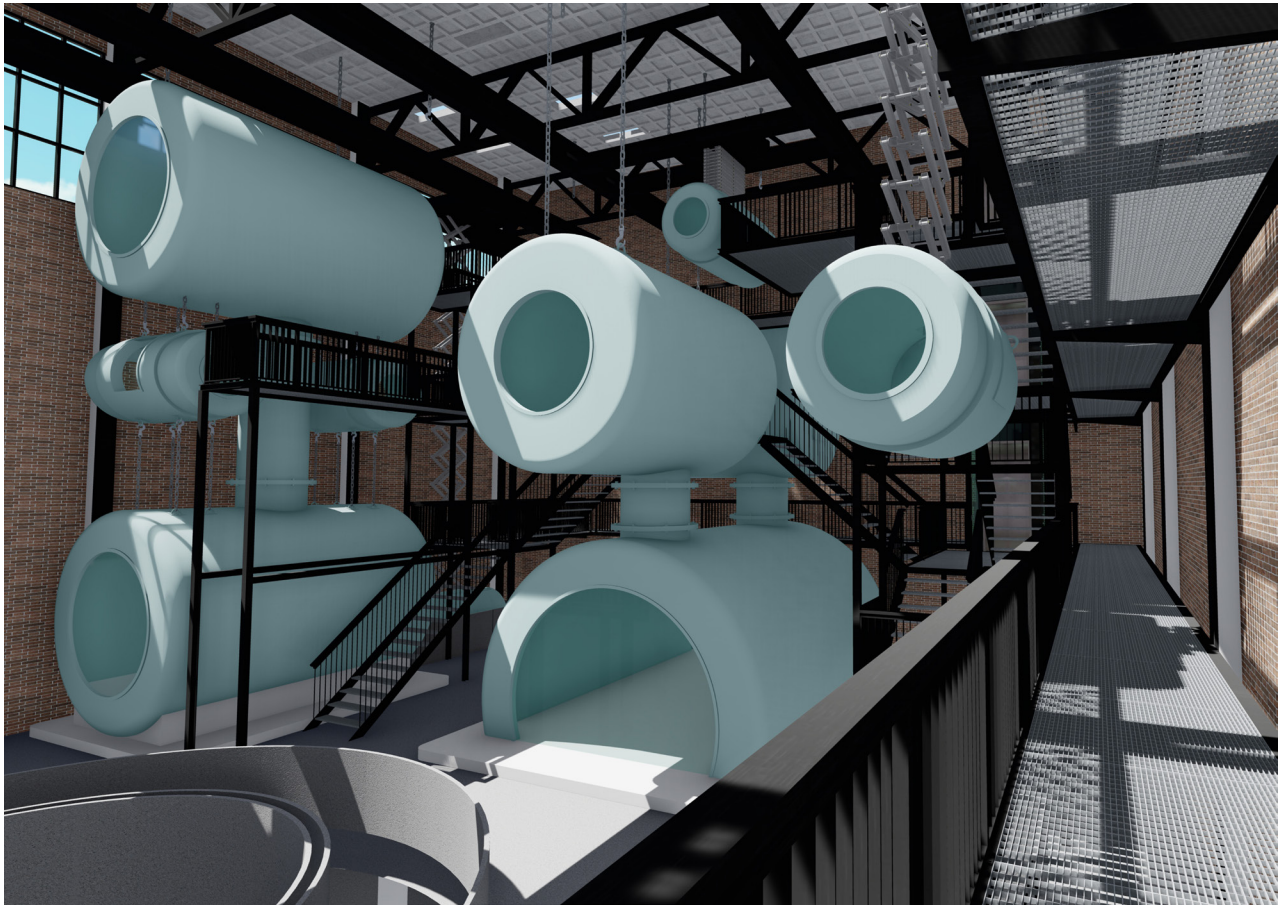


As you ascend the building, the spaces become more intimate with each floor providing room for distinct cultural activities (and thus communities) in the city: a stage, a theatre, a skate park, and a gallery space. The floors, though mostly separate, are connected at points by large sculptural interventions that puncture the rigid structure of the existing building, allowing for auditory, visual, or spatial connections between spaces and communities.



Daphne Naaktgeboren

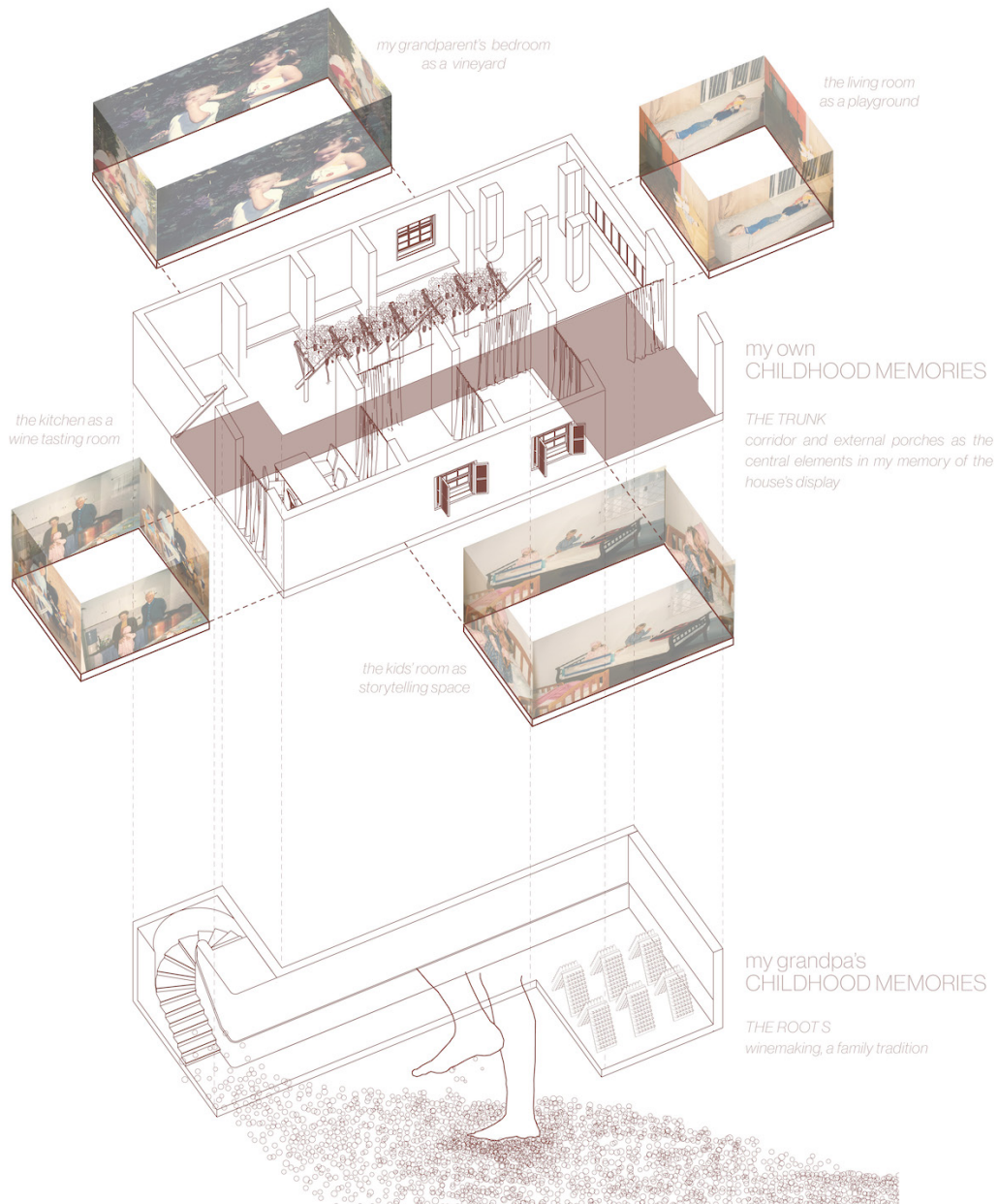
Where past meets present and future: former power plant, current theatre hall, and future pod-system hotel. Even though the original function of the building has become redundant in today's society and that of the future, its mechanical characteristics remain. The machinery that was part of the building's old life is reincarnated in its future as pods, retaining their organic rounded shapes and mechanical details. Retaining elements of the past gives rise to a conversation between the time layers of a building.



Helena van Swaay De Marchi

The project *casinha* (small house) consists of an intervention on my grandparents' house in Jundiaí, located in the countryside of São Paulo, Brazil. Architecture is approached as an extension of nature, in this case represented by the vineyard landscape, with the intention of spatially translating my grandfather's and my own childhood's memories. In this sense, the ultimate goal of the project was to enable us, in the words of Juhani Pallasmaa, 'to perceive and understand the dialects of permanence and change, to settle ourselves in the continuum of culture and time.'

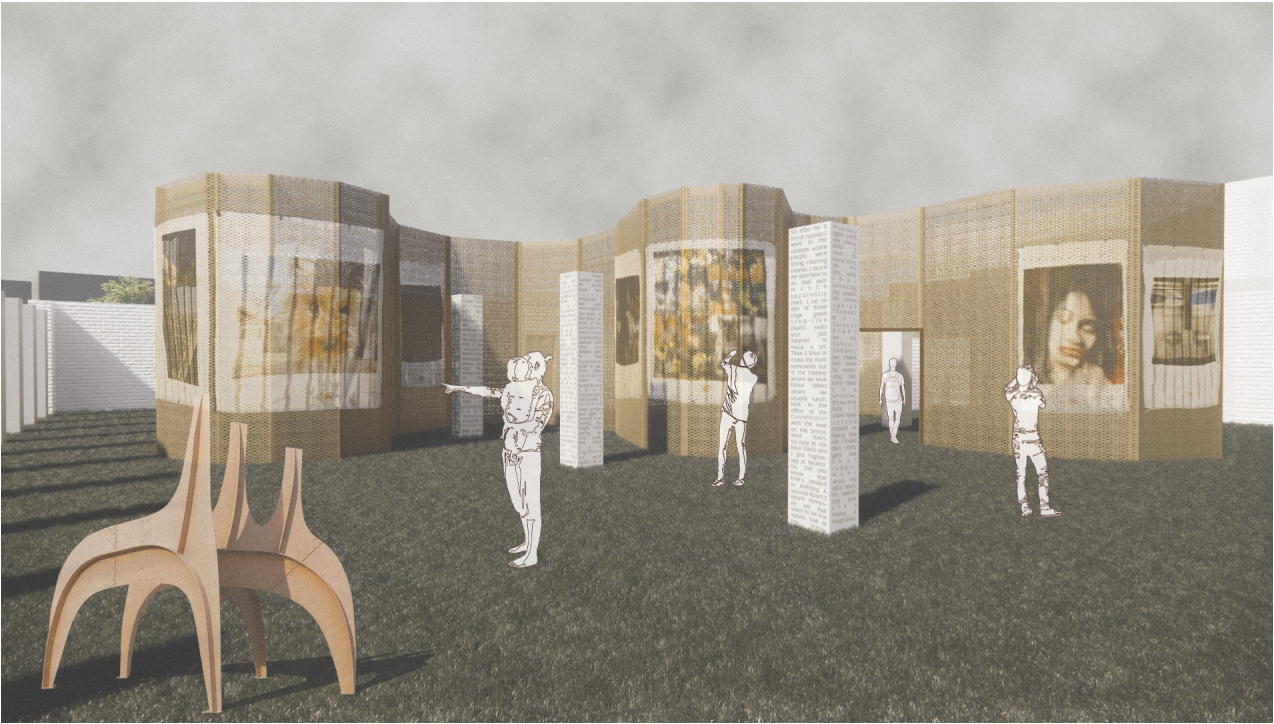
The unadorned architectural style of the existing bare brick walls and the new wooden roof was consciously chosen to emphasise the landscape and to reflect the simplicity of immigrant family life in the 1930s. The synthetic bird netting, typically used to protect grapevines, is used for the curtains in the interior space, its transparency and juxtapositions creating a sense of spatial thickness, changing the sensation of movement and light. The coexistence of temporalities is spatially conveyed by the contrast of the linear man-made timeline, expressed in the vineyard landscape, and the memory timeline, reflected in the sinuous paths formed around wall fragments in the house's interior.



Isa van der Bijl

Rodenborch Continuum is about the reinterpretation and transformation of a former high school into a community centre incorporating an outdoor art exhibition. The school walls are reimagined to create a new composition of rooms. The created spaces are enclosed with a lively outdoor agora, designed to engage all visitors to pause, remember, reflect and connect.

A notable feature within this project is called the non-room. The glass has engraved sentences, reminding the visitor to 'please look, don't touch'. It is a reinterpretation of a previously exclusive meeting room that was not accessible to student. It was strictly meant for teachers, but now all visitors are invited to observe but prohibited from entering.



Mateo White

The Paillon River, a Mediterranean river that fluctuates between summer tranquillity and the cataclysmic floods of winter, meets the sea in the city of Nice. It was covered in the nineteenth century and entombed by concrete tunnels. This project imagines a near future where the Paillon runs dry and the harsh sun of the south forces cultural events underground. A square pavilion is proposed, surrounded by a park on the old footprint of the river, offering access to the tunnels directly below.

The tunnels are imagined as spaces for informal cultural events alongside official exhibitions from the nearby modern art museum. Openings are cut in the walls, and walkways are suspended centimetres above the last remains of the river. When and if the rain returns, the art pieces are left to wash away, leaving open spaces for festivities to return the following summer.



Nicola Caporaso

The city of Benevento, nestled between the Calore and Sabato rivers like a miniature Mesopotamia, has been inhabited since ancient times. Its origins have been intertwined with pagan culture and mystical rituals, fostering an enduring aura of mystery and infamy, particularly associated with tales of witches' Sabbaths. In 697 AD, Bishop Barbato of Benevento, seeking to eradicate pagan practices, famously ordered the uprooting of a large walnut tree, believed to be a site of demonic gatherings, yet legends persist of Lucifer resurrecting it overnight in a hidden location, perpetuating the dark allure of the city. Reimagining the abandoned villa Perrotta as this clandestine site of occult gatherings, its former grandeur and present decay merge with the spirit of local witches, infusing the space with a haunting mystique, echoed in the incantation: 'Ointment, ointment, take me to Benevento's walnut tree, over water and wind, beyond all ill weather'.



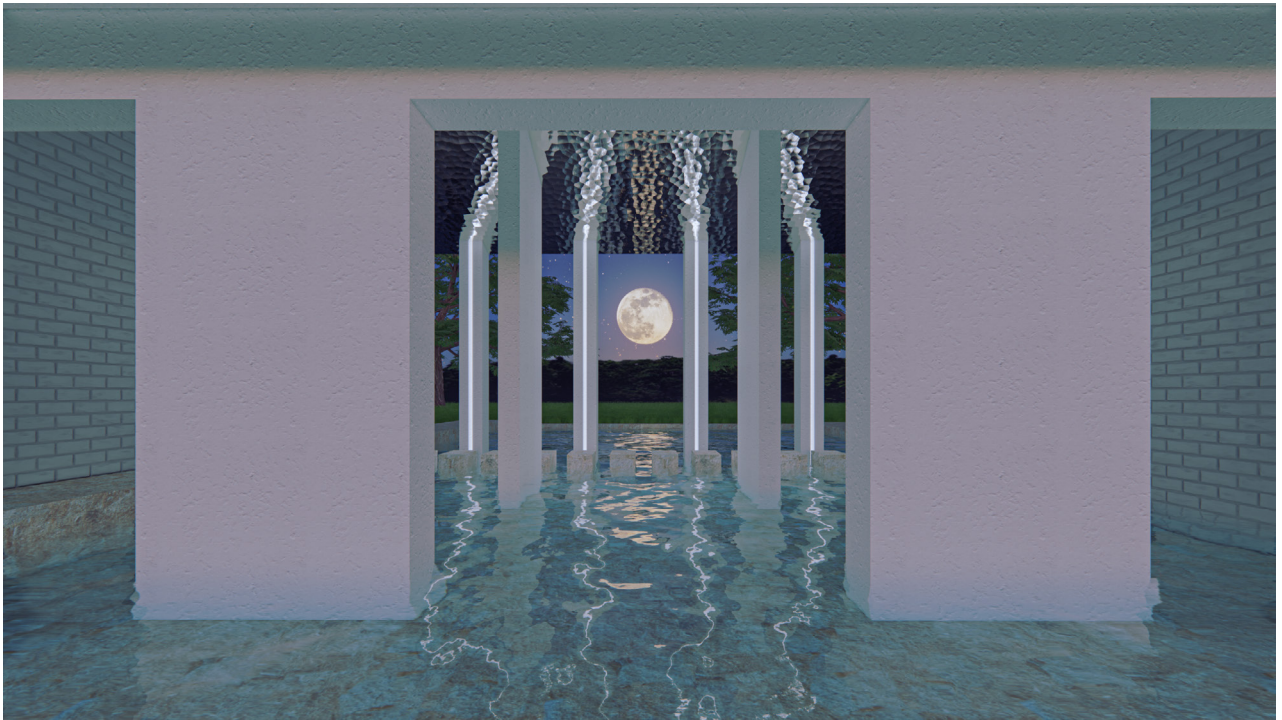
Architectural section drawing of a building with a large tree and classical figures.



Architectural section drawing of a building with a large tree and classical figures.

Ana Suso Jimenez

Built in 1961 by Manuel Suso and Stelia Dominguez, Petequí is a house located in Jamundí, Colombia, and has served as a home, gathering space and sanctuary for the Suso family for four generations. In all its modesty, the essence of this place lies in the family's stories as told and remembered by its members, often through the objects that are found in and around the house. After the death of its founders Manuel and Stelia, both of who have found a resting place under a tree on the site, the house has gained a new purpose and meaning for the family. It is now a place of peace, rest, and remembrance. The purpose of the architectural intervention is to transform the site into a burial ground and a memorial space, bringing to the fore its spiritual importance.



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