

# Mezaràt in the Spotlight

“When is the Act of Moving Matter a Transformation of its Significance?”

## **Restoring Movement: Reimagining the Fornaci di Caldé through Culture, Architecture, and Memory**

The goal of my graduation project is to restore and give new meaning to the ruins of an old quicklime factory called *Le Fornaci di Caldé*, located on the shores of Lake Maggiore in northern Lombardy, Italy. This area was once one of the most industrialized lakefronts in the country. Today, however, it is changing. More and more, it is being developed for tourism—especially by German and Swiss visitors—through new buildings, hotels, and shops. These changes are reshaping both the economy and identity of the region.

Although tourism can bring new life to abandoned industrial areas, it also poses a serious threat. Many historic factories and industrial sites are being destroyed to make space for luxury homes and commercial buildings. This kind of development erases important parts of local history and culture. Unfortunately, this could also happen to the Fornaci. But the ruins are much more than just abandoned structures—they are rich in geological, architectural, and cultural meaning. This project aims to highlight that value and show how the site can be transformed in a way that respects its history while looking to the future.

## **A Divided Territory: Between Luxury and Stillness**

Today, the area around the Fornaci is divided. On one side, luxury homes are built for wealthy tourists who only stay for short periods. On the other side, the local people are left without public spaces or activities that bring them together. The area feels increasingly quiet and disconnected. The project asks how architecture can help bridge this gap—how it can bring back vitality to a place that has lost its sense of community.

## **Bringing Back a Cultural Mound: Stories from the Past**

The factories of Caldé and nearby Porto were once full of life, day and night. Even after work ended, people stayed out late, gathering in bars and taverns. One of the most interesting parts of this life were the *cantastorie*—storytellers who often worked in the factories. They created lively performances, mixing imagination and local traditions. In many ways, this was a form of spontaneous theatre. These performances were more than just entertainment; they created a shared culture that was deeply connected to the place and the people.

This cultural energy is what the project wants to bring back. By creating new spaces for theatre and performance inside the old factory, we can restore not only the buildings but also the creative flow that once defined the area.

## **The Project: A Cultural and Spatial Strategy**

Through physical modeling and sketching, I developed a masterplan centered around two main elements: a *school of theatre* and a *theatre*. These two buildings are supported by other spaces needed to make the site function, such as a festival square, a boat dock, a canteen for the school, and an office for the theatre. Together, they form a small cultural district within the ruins of the factory.

## **Restoring Flows: Rethinking Movement and Connections**

In the past, movement on Lake Maggiore was essential. Boats carried goods and people between towns and across the lake. But since the factories shut down, much of this movement has stopped. The project rethinks the idea of movement in several ways:

1. It proposes to bring back lake transportation, connecting the Lombard and Piedmont sides of the lake.
2. It reconnects the towns of Porto and Caldé with new walking paths.
3. It creates internal routes that connect the mountain, the lake, and the factory ruins in meaningful ways.

The old Fornaci buildings are linked by two types of paths: one is direct and practical; the other is slower and winds through nature. Along this second path, natural materials found on-site—like piles of rock and broken concrete—are left as part of the landscape, creating a poetic link to the past.

Inside the buildings, circulation also plays an important role. The theatre has a straight, processional path, reflecting its formal character. The school, on the other hand, is based on a circular route, encouraging flexible movement and interaction. These forms were inspired by the structure and logic of the existing ruins.

## **The Role of Material: Stocking as Meaning**

One of the strongest themes in the project is the idea of *stock*, or storage. All around the site, you can see traces of material—raw and processed—stocked or abandoned. The ruins, the piles of debris, and the mountain wall all speak of a past defined by extraction and accumulation.

The project uses this idea of material in two different ways:

- On the lower level, material is structured, shaped, and reused in new construction.
- On the upper level, material is left more natural and unprocessed, becoming part of the landscape.

Even in the technical details of the new buildings, the idea of storage is expressed through dry construction techniques that rely on gravity and layering. The relationship with the old structures is always one of addition, not subtraction: nothing is demolished, but rather extended, reused, or framed.

## **Architecture That Evolves Over Time**

The project questions the usual way buildings are designed—focused only on their beginning. Instead, it considers what happens *after* a building is finished. How does it grow, adapt, and change? This is especially important in places with deep historical roots like the Fornaci. The buildings are made to be flexible and resilient, able to host different uses over time.

## **The Theatre School: Learning Through Transformative Spaces**

The theatre school carries forward the site's industrial legacy—not by producing lime, but by producing knowledge and culture. The building keeps an industrial feeling, with large open spaces connected in a loop. With two staircases and no long corridors, people can move freely. Even if one space is in use for a lecture, the others can still be reached. It is a space that feels intimate but also powerful, encouraging creativity and learning.

## **The Theatre: Framing the Landscape**

Visitors enter the theatre through a separate volume, then rise via a circular staircase or an elevator placed inside one of the old kilns. A long corridor—built as an extension of the existing structure—leads to the main performance space, which opens up to the surrounding nature. The theatre is made to be open and flexible. It can host indoor shows, outdoor festivals, or even simply offer a place to sit and watch the lake. Like the utopian visions of designer Ettore Sottsass, the structure becomes a tool for seeing and experiencing the world differently.

## **Recoding the Future of the Lake**

Today, Lake Maggiore feels distant, like a place frozen in the past—tied to old tourism and forgotten industry. But its location is strategic: close to major cities like Milan and Turin, and near important cultural events like the Locarno Film Festival. With the right vision, the lake could take on a new role. The Fornaci, which once stored raw material and organized the flow of goods, can now become a site for cultural production and movement.

Building a theatre in this place is not just about performance—it is about giving voice to the territory. This project sees architecture as a *framing device*, something that helps people see what is already there in new ways. The beauty, energy, and creativity already exist. What's missing is a machine—a structure—that can reveal and support them.

### **Conclusion: Toward an Architecture of Movement**

If architecture is always seen as the act of creating something entirely new from nothing, it risks becoming a self-referential exercise—detached from place, history, and meaning. In contrast, by applying the concepts of *flow*, *stock*, and *code* as introduced by Deleuze and Guattari, we can recentre architectural discourse on the processes of production—on what architecture generates, on what it accumulates and preserves, and on its real transformative power in the world. This perspective shifts the focus from creation as novelty to architecture as a movement of accumulation, adaptation, and reactivation.

Adopting such a methodology opens up important design possibilities. By identifying and analyzing the residual flows—of people, materials, and memory—that still exist in a site, we can deeply understand the original function and potential of existing structures. This can allow architects to propose minimal, low-impact interventions that re-functionalize spaces without erasing their identity.

In my own project, for example, by refusing to distinguish strictly between flows of people and flows of matter, I was able to give new life to the former factory through subtle spatial and programmatic modifications. Rather than rebuilding or demolishing, I worked with the logic of what was already there. The stored knowledge embedded in the site—its materials, structures, and memory—offered the possibility to reclaim the space without further extraction or violent transformation. In this way, architecture becomes a practice of re-reading, re-coding, and re-using, rather than replacing. It becomes a tool to frame and enhance what already exists, generating meaning and movement from within.

In the end, this project aims to support a more forward-thinking and sensitive approach to architecture. It encourages us to design with change in mind—to accept complexity and time as part of the process. The Fornaci di Caldé can become a space where memory and movement meet, where the past is not erased but transform, and where architecture helps create a more open, creative, and alive future for the Lago Maggiore.