Reflection P5

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Theme
"The House of wine" in the town of Oia.

Mentors
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My graduation project was about the design of "The house of wine" in Santorini. The project consists in designing a winery on the exact same location where old quarries once were placed on the outskirts of the village Oia, situated north of the Greek island Santorini. The attention is focused on ways that a cultural landscape, a landscape of great importance can be treated and even preserved.

But before drawing lines and erecting walls it was of paramount importance to get acquainted with some key characteristics of the area and region and most importantly with the legacy of the local architecture.

Santorini is one of the Cycladic islands in the Aegean Sea and alike the others it is characterized by an arid landscape over which strong winds do not permit the growth of trees and long vegetation. In addition to that, and unlike the other islands, Santorini is the remnants of an ancient Volcano exploding in the mid second millennium BC. All this ingredients make Santorini a rough and hostile place in which the population had to device shelters out of rooms half dug in the surrounding pumice and constructed of local stones and whitewash. As a consequence, the rooms are well isolated from the scorching summer temperatures as well as the cold winter ones. Because the winery is on this island it was important to explore thoroughly this architecture in such a way to fully understand the hosting surrounding. Therefore, the vernacular architecture in general but more specifically of Santorini was researched and its most dominant characteristics and elements were discovered.

Nowadays, this unique type of architecture has gained great value on the eyes of people and as a consequence many attempts have been made to mime and reproduce it. This attempt gave birth to the neo-vernacular style, which is just a formalistic imitation of the vernacular architecture, and definitely an example to be avoided.

Once the general architecture of the island was covered, I felt that it was also important to get acquainted with the location over which the building would be placed. The quarries are positioned right next to the town Oia having a big height-difference and as a consequence, they strongly demark a boundary between the town and the remaining surroundings. This separation has a strong impact on the local landscape and for this reason I wanted to explore the ways a boundary can be transformed from a separating element to a connecting one: explore the boundary as an architectural concept.

Moreover, as the winery is constructed over an area where old quarries used to exist I found the need to retain and not forget the history of the location, a brief study has been performed on the underground architecture and all the aspects connected with it.
So after doing a research on all the issues I mentioned above, I had to decide and clarify what are my ambitions, my vision for the design project. Having first tried to analyze the reasons of the current way of building in Santorini I needed to take a clear position about my design as well and the way I handled all these fragile matters.

Nowadays, Santorini is being built up in the same way as the rest of Greece is. The mass production of modern constructions, demanded by and directed at a consumer-oriented public, is absolutely alien to the architectural process itself. A quite barbarous repetition is reproduced at a very fast rate and even worse, this is done in the name of preserving tradition and under strict building legislation. Virtually the same type of building is applied, with the same vocabulary, that is limited to the repetition of architectural elements, the vault, the arch and the long narrow openings on the facades, all the element that have the label of "tradition" on them. In Santorini one sees in all its glory, the dead end into which an application of only morphological rules leads. The devotion to pseudo-traditional morphology must be the result of tendencies, which begin from the need to preserve the cultural past. Today however, the majority of these attempts end up in a nostalgic imitation of styles and image.

In a very "sensitive" location that can so easily be destroyed or blossom, issues concerning the relationship between building and landscape or contemporary construction methods and tradition are very crucial in my project.

Mass, corrosion, void, diversity, imperfection, contrasts. All these, are archetypal types that can be read and found in the island of Santorini. How does a contemporary intervention stand next to them? How does it become part of them? My answer is not based on the form and only the form. New materials are introduced, such as corten steel, contemporary ways of construction are used, but always having as a solid foundation the knowledge that I have acquired from the local way of constructing.

An important characteristic of my site is its exposure to the strong winds, especially north winds that blow all year round and northeastern winds during the summer. The building must become a protection shield against the forces of nature, protecting the people, instead of something that needs to be protected with the help of people.

The sculpting of the mass - which also refers to the local technique of cave houses - a process that happens from outside to inside can be parallelized with the traditional way of constructing, but using different methods and tools.

The open space will become unifying element, connecting the outdoor with the indoor area, accommodating public functions and use. The idea of "community" revives again, and my building becomes the medium for this.

To sum up, the attention to my project mostly focuses on matters such as:

• Using methods and materials that do not exhaust but rather employ natural resources.

• Connecting history, tradition and vernacular – anonymous– architecture with contemporary ways of designing, always through existing terms and vocabulary.

• Enriching the process of construction through expressing the identity of the natural and cultural landscape.

• Restore lost ties and relationships within society through architecture and built environment

• Reconnection of human with nature

Today it seems as if time has stopped. Always obsessed with the same forms and shapes, always obsessed with the image, our built environment is lacking imagination and creative inspiration. We treat our buildings as something
static and unchanging. Is this a way to express our fear and insecurity? Perhaps, the nostalgia for the rural landscape and try for the rebirth of the tradition that has been lost is the result of our disconnection from nature and a desperate try to reconnect with it, to win it back, to become again part of it.

We are only imitating, with no respect to the past, no respect to the tradition. The desire to return to another age leads to the rejection of the future. We idealize the past, reject the future and re-construct a present based on unstable foundations ready to collapse. We turn our back on the future and create a hermaphrodite present, incapable of expressing the meaning of our times. My dream for this project is to become a small pebble of a promising future.