

An aerial, black and white photograph of a mountain valley in the Alps. The terrain is rugged and textured, with a central valley floor and steep, rocky slopes. The lighting creates strong shadows and highlights, emphasizing the topography.

ARCHITECTURE IN THE

# ALPS

HERITAGE AND DESIGN



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22

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**ARCHITECTURE in the ALPS**  
Heritage and design

edited by Davide Del Curto, Roberto Dini, Giacomo Menini

 MIMESIS

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**Mountain architecture.**  
**Histories, perspectives, controversies**  
Giacomo Menini

*The cultural landscapes of the Alps*

Mountain architecture presupposes a close dialogue with nature. At high altitudes, architecture is drawn against the sky and has a direct link with the slopes and woods, the rocks and rock faces. Yet beyond the relationship with nature, the relationship with the history and culture of places remains. The Alps have been inhabited since time immemorial and people have transformed them by building a great variety of cultural landscapes: it is enough to observe the many paintings of the Alpine landscape which alongside nature depict people, their homes and their jobs.

In the encaustic or hot wax paintings that adorn the *Salone d'onore* (Hall of Honour) of the Sondrio Provincial Authority building – by Gianfilippo Usellini (1934) – one may observe the landscapes of the Valtellina transformed by traditional economic activities such as wheat and vine growing, livestock farming, granite and serpentine schist rock quarrying and forestry. Each of these landscapes is populated by men who are distinguished by specific customs and life habits. An image of the Valtellina which is certainly different from that of any other mountain landscape, in Europe or in Italy. Were we also able to perceive its sounds and flavours, we would also notice an infinite variety of differences in languages and legends, in music and rituals, and in food and drinking. The Alps are thus distinguished not only by a variety of natural landscapes but also by a large variety of cultural landscapes

In the 1970s, the anthropologists Eric Wolf and John Cole described

«hidden frontiers»<sup>1</sup>, those invisible boundaries that have eluded the homologation of national states and which separate neighbouring Alpine valleys where the languages spoken, houses built and food consumed differ from one to the next. Villages in the Trentino region that speak a romance language, where houses are built in stone, one heaped upon another, lie just a few kilometres from German-speaking villages where houses are built separately in wood. Tret and St. Felix are two villages in the Upper Val di Non (Alta Val di Non) that have responded in a similar way to shared environmental imperatives, yet in which «the existing contrasts in the social and ideological sphere are striking at the same time»<sup>2</sup>. A close comparison of cultures reveals an unexpected complexity in Alpine societies.

### *Modernity and recognisability of landscapes*

These varied worlds preserved a clearly recognisable identity until last century. Subsequently, industrialisation and above all the advent of the consumer society brought about transformations which we cannot ignore today. When new systems of production and invasions of tourists were imposed upon traditional cultures, it sparked processes of hybridisation which modified an age-old situation. The landscape, too, underwent profound changes: road, rail and hydroelectric infrastructure was superimposed upon the patterns of fields and pastures; sanatoria permanently associated mountain areas with the idea of health and rest, while the need for new hotel accommodation set urban architecture alongside rural, with new buildings and new visions which modified the landscape being superimposed on historic buildings.

Modernity has tended to cancel out differences between traditional cultures, to make them fit in with new models and plunging them into a profound crisis: it is a historical reality in which returns to the past or easy ways out cannot be found. This statement, nevertheless, does not exempt us from the responsibility of interpreting reality in order to establish the projects of tomorrow. In every context, modernity has brought about specific transformations, superimposing itself upon traditional landscapes. In most cases the new picture has not managed to erase the previous one completely, and it is still possible, against the light, to make out the pattern of traditional landscapes. Indeed, it may be said that in many cases this pattern has had a decisive influence on the transformations imposed

1 J. W. COLE, E. R. WOLF, *The Hidden Frontier: Ecology and Ethnicity in an Alpine Valley*, Academic Press, New York 1974.

2 *Ibidem*.

by modernity. It is necessary, therefore, to provide a new interpretation of reality, one which also takes into consideration the contradictions of history, in order to counter the threat of the permanent homogenisation of the Alpine environment.

«Protecting landscapes means keeping their recognisability alive»<sup>3</sup>, Gion Antoni Caminada has written, quoting Lucius Burckhardt. Architecture always engages with a place, with a specific, context, with the peculiarities of a landscape. Edoardo Gellner said that an architect, before moving a stone in any place, should develop a profound knowledge of it:

an architect cannot move immediately from one setting to another with an unchanged attitude and cultural assumptions. A piece of architecture [...] is not an abstract thing, an aesthetic fact per se, which can be placed here or wherever, but is something that must grow in relation to its environment, with the physical forms of the place, since a history which modifies the structure of the area and its many relations forms part of the context as a whole.<sup>4</sup>

This statement is certainly the result of Gellner's cultural leanings, which were influenced by the work of Frank Lloyd Wright and the theories on organic architecture which were spread in Italy by Bruno Zevi after the Second World War. Gellner sought a balance between the built and natural environment, and was convinced that local examples of rural architecture were hives of precious teachings in this regard: a way of engaging with the landscape which nevertheless should not be confused with «misunderstood theories of empathy» and with «folkloristic mimicry»<sup>5</sup>: a lesson for the present could be drawn from tradition, and not models of already-given forms to be copied in a sterile fashion.

Today we cannot delude ourselves that thorough knowledge of traditional architecture can be a sufficient arsenal for the architect who is building in such a delicate setting as the mountain environment, or that this knowledge ensures designs which can achieve a balance between construction and nature. Nevertheless, a knowledge of the place remains one of the fundamental prerequisites of architectural design, from knowledge of its built heritage to the shape of planted fields, routes along the valleys and popular traditions, extending to the forms of the natural landscape and all of those elements which contribute in a positive way to the construction

3 *Col zuffel e l'aura dado*. Gion A. Caminada, edited by B. Schlorhauser, Quart Verlag, Lucerne 2005, p. 132.

4 Quoted in F. ACHLEITNER, *Edoardo Gellner e un "paese di fondazione" nel Cadore*, in *Edoardo Gellner. Corte di Cadore*, Skira, Milan 2002, pp. 9-10.

5 *Ivi*, p. 10.

of the landscape. Such elements can perhaps be considered “pretexts” – as Bruno Reichlin has stressed – which architects used to anchor their projects. They are pretexts which in any case may help to keep the recognisability of a place alive and avoid the homogenisation of the modern world.

### *The mountain house*

Reality can be interpreted from as the basis for architectural design, depending largely on individual sensibilities. Nevertheless, among the themes that can be investigated in order to know a landscape, that of the house plays a major role. For architects, the theme of the mountain home has become a key theoretical and imaginative issue.

In the twentieth century, geographers and historians were the first to turn their attention to rural and mountain homes: the former focused on the role of the home within the agricultural landscape, while the latter sought to grasp the meanings of the house as part of investigations into material culture and “minor” histories. Other scholars have concentrated their attention on other aspects still. To remain on the subject of the mountain dwelling, and specifically the Swiss mountain house, it is enough to note the differences in the approaches of Jakob Hunziker, Heinrich Brockmann-Jerosch and Richard Weiss<sup>6</sup>. The first was a linguist who by analysing the names assigned to the different parts of the house has developed an exemplary typological survey. The second was a botanist who transposed the evolutionary method from the natural sciences to studies on rural houses, identifying archetypes and primitive types. The third was a folklorist who adopted a functionalist approach in his studies of popular tradition, explaining the forms of the house in terms of environmental conditioning and reasons for use.

Each of these studies has its strengths and weaknesses, and each one is characterised by a single subject of study and by various interpretations of its meanings. Moreover, in these interpretations, it is possible to discern a number of cultural orientations which have also influenced architecture. In Hunziker’s studies it is possible to make out an approach which – borrowing once again from Reichlin – I would define as “culturalist”<sup>7</sup>, specifically because it focuses on language, customs and popular traditions. Yet the

6 J. HUNZIKER, *Das Schweizerhaus nach seinen landschaftlichen formen und seiner geschichtlichen Entwicklung*, Verlag H.R. Sauerländer, Aarau 1900-1913; H. BROCKMANN-JEROSCH, *Schweizer Bauernhaus*, Hans Huber, Berne 1933; R. WEISS, *Häuser und Landschaften der Schweiz*, Eugen Rentsch, Erlenbach-Zürich 1959.

7 See B. REICHLIN, *Die Moderne baut in den Bergen, Quando gli architetti moderni costruiscono in montagna* in C. MAYR FINGERLE (ed.), *Neues Bauen in den Alpen*,

approach that has fascinated modern architects the most is undoubtedly the functionalist approach, at least from the 1920s onwards. Indeed, French geographers adopted such an approach well before Richard Weiss. And – as Aldo Rossi has pointed out – Le Corbusier’s *machine à habiter* seems to share more than one similarity with the rural house, compared to a piece of farming machinery by Albert Demangeon<sup>8</sup>.

For architects, the choice of the point of view often becomes the driving force behind design. Studies conducted by architects on mountain houses are almost always design-oriented, in other words aimed at drawing a lesson or an operational guideline from reality. Naturally, as for other scholars, interpretations may be different and focus on the most disparate aspects. Just as construction aspects may be more important for one, typological aspects may be more important for another and stylistic elements for others. Analysis of the different interpretations can become an opportunity for knowledge and exploration of traditional architecture, but may also provide a framework of references for the study of modern architectural styles and their relationships with tradition. It is therefore interesting to analyse the studies which, starting from the nineteenth century, a number of architects have developed on the subject of the rural house and mountain house.

### *Viollet-le-Duc and the chalet question*

Eugène Emmanuel Viollet-le-Duc was a frequent visitor to the Alps, and the mountains appeared to him as gigantic medieval monuments, imposing constructions possessing an original perfection corroded by time<sup>9</sup>. An original perfection that may not even have ever existed. In his *Dictionnaire raisonné*, under the entry “Maison”<sup>10</sup>, the mountain house is considered a medieval monument: its condition of isolation has saved it from “academic corruptions”, and it is to it that we must look in order to rediscover those principles of truth and purity which will be needed to re-establish the discipline of architecture. The chalets of the Alps seem to be the last vestiges of a style that was widespread in medieval buildings, from

*Architettura contemporanea alpina*, Birkhäuser, Basel-Boston-Berlin 1996, pp. 89-90, no. 4 p. 128.

8 A. Rossi, *L'architettura della città*, Marsilio, Padua, 1966, 1970,<sup>2</sup> 1973,<sup>3</sup> Clup, Milan 1978, 1987;<sup>2</sup> new ed. CittàStudi, Milan 1995, p. 147.

9 E. E. VIOLLET-LE-DUC, *Le massif du Mont-Blanc, étude sur sa constitution géodésique et géologique sur ses transformations et sur l'état ancien et moderne de ses glaciers*, Librairie polytechnique, J. Baudry, Paris 1876.

10 E. E. VIOLLET-LE-DUC, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XI au XVI siècle*, vol. 6, B. Bauge – A. Morel, Paris 1857, pp. 214-300.

which the structural and construction features emerge strongly, unmasked by decorative elements. This reference is not meant to be an invitation to initiate a revival, but rather an attempt to rediscover in the past the founding principles for the houses of a modern nation.

In this way it may perhaps be possible to justify Viollet's paradoxical statement that the chalets of the Swiss mountains would seem to be «exactly the same as those on the slopes of the Himalayas and in the valleys of the Kashmir region»<sup>11</sup>. This statement is contained in an educational text for young people, *Histoire de l'habitation humaine*, and is necessarily anecdotal in nature. In the tale, primitive humans are helped by two supernatural figures – Epergos and Doxi – to build their own dwellings. The two figures oversee their progress, accompanying them on their migrations from India to Europe. This is why the Swiss chalets are the same as the Himalayan ones: not because they constitute a response to the same environmental conditions, but because they reawaken – thousands of years later – the memory of ancient migrations, as evidenced by the endurance of certain construction models. The anecdote reflects a belief that building cultures are extremely resistant and capable of surviving the centuries, and thus worthy of representing the identity of a people better than any other sign.

When Viollet-le-Duc build a chalet in Chamonix in 1872, he seemed to be guided by the same spirit. From a typological perspective, his *Chalet de la Cote* is a modern apartment house, on three floors and separate accommodation units, while the construction elements reference the Alpine tradition, with their combination of parts in stone and parts in wood. Viollet's attitude can thus be placed within that “culturalist” current to which I have referred above, while not excluding the improvements that progress may bring. Indeed, his attitude is not totally conservative, which would have prevented him from devising the revolutionary cast iron structures with which we are familiar. Yet looking at the house in Chamonix, we cannot fail notice – as Jacques Gubler has written – a veritable «manifesto of regionalist architecture»<sup>12</sup>. The chalet would become a children's sanatorium in the 1920s, until its demolition in 1977<sup>13</sup>.

*Chalet de la Cote* should nevertheless not be confused with the fashion for the “Swiss chalet” which spread throughout Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. Jacques Gubler demonstrated – with reference to Hitchcock, among others – the British and German origin of the “Swiss

11 E. E. VIOLLET-LE-DUC, *Histoire de l'habitation humaine*, Berger-Levrault, Paris 1978, pp. 360-361.

12 J. GUBLER, *Viollet-le-Duc et l'architecture rurale*, in *Viollet-le-Duc. Centenaire de la mort à Lausanne*, Musée historique de l'Ancien-Evêché, Lausanne 1979, pp. 112-113.

13 C. BOYMOND LASSERRE, *Deux anciens preventorium à Chamonix: le Miremont et les Soldanelles*, [www.blogdesvireesculturelles.fr](http://www.blogdesvireesculturelles.fr).

style”<sup>14</sup>, while Jean Michel Leniaud and Michel Verne have highlighted the French roots of the chalet<sup>15</sup>. Whether the Swiss chalet was invented in London or Paris, the fact remains that it is a projection of the urban imagination onto the mountains, and not the product of a local native culture. The urban culture of the nineteenth century extrapolated from the mountains a number of reassuring images, using them for the picturesque little houses and cottages that adorned the gardens and parks of aristocratic residences. The most refined versions were soon set against those connected with the commonplace. After inspiring the birth of this model, mountain areas saw it return as a phenomenon. Echoing popular opinion and cliché, in fact, over the course of the twentieth century the Alps were invaded by bourgeois dwellings and hotels dressed up as little mountain houses, a fashion which continues to exercise its influences in the contemporary world.

### *Pagano and the battle for the flat roof*

Another interesting figure is that of Giuseppe Pagano Pogatschnig. In many ways, Pagano’s approach to the rural and mountain house can be compared with that of Viollet-le-Duc: he too sought in farmers’ houses a primitive purity and structural clarity. The absence of decorative frills and the presumed functionality of the rural dwelling are further elements that attracted his attention. Yet the aspect which I wish to highlight is another: it seems that Pagano built his interpretation of rural architecture commencing from the image that he had formed for himself of modern architecture, and which he wished to legitimise at all costs with an antecedent. The pure buildings, the lack of decorations, the asymmetrical composition: these were all elements which he wished to incorporate into rural houses<sup>16</sup> and which coincide with a number of formal “precepts” of the new architecture. It is interesting to note, in this regard, how Pagano considered the terrace or flat roof the most advanced form of roofing in rural architecture. Pagano’s arguments tend to make this form appear to be the result of a natural process of evolution, and in any case it is difficult not to discern their biased scope, aiming to disguise with the mask of reason a

- 14 J. GUBLER, *Nationalisme et internationalisme dans l’architecture moderne de la Suisse*, Editions de l’Age d’Homme, Lausanne 1975.
- 15 J. M. LENIAUD, *Le chalet suisse. Nostalgie d’un type primordial ou utopie constructive*, in «Bibliothèque de L’École des chartes», t. 63, 2005, pp. 203-204; M. VERNES, *Des alpages aux banlieues, le chalet innombrable*, in «Architecture intérieure Cree», n. 315, 2004, pp. 30-39.
- 16 G. PAGANO, W. DANIEL, *Architettura rurale italiana*, Quaderni della Triennale, Ulrico Hoepli, Milan 1936.

preference already conferred upon the flat roof from the outset.

Of the many issues raised by modern architecture in terms of construction, «none has stirred up so much passion as the flat or pitched roof issue»<sup>17</sup>. While functionalist architects justified this choice in terms of concrete, utilitarian reasons, Heinrich Tessenow pointed out that the preference accorded by the Modern Movement to the flat roof was due above all to the «wish to achieve the greatest possible degree of purity in architectural forms»<sup>18</sup>. Mies van der Rohe himself admitted that the battle for the flat roof was «actually ... only an exterior battle»<sup>19</sup>.

The flat roof slogan also had an influence on mountain architecture, particularly in the construction of the Alpine sanatoria. Rudolf Gaberel, one of the designers of the sanatoria in Davos, had made the battle for flat roofs one of the causes of his architecture. Gaberel considered fundamental what he defined as the «principle of snow conservation»<sup>20</sup>. Modernity had made the spaces below the roof heated and inhabited, whereas tradition dictated that they were cold and unoccupied. This led to the rapid melting of the layer of snow on the roof, particularly the lower layer, with the risk of it sliding off onto the ground and the formation of ice on the gutter. Snow could also constitute an effective insulation layer, and it was a good for it to be conserved on the roof for as long as possible.

The flat roof, however, is not the only solution to prevent the inconvenience of sliding snow. Already at the beginning of the twentieth century flat roofs were being built with the system of the double or cold roof, with a ventilated air cell located between the layer of tiles and the structure, preventing rapid melting of the snow. The pitched roof has continued to be an adequate solution for building in the mountains, and is not necessarily less efficient than a flat roof. The choice of one solution or the other should therefore be linked to figurative reasons as well.

### *Rural architecture and national identity*

Besides functionality, there was another reason that spurred modern architects to consider the vernacular tradition. In the 1930s, the need to found modern architecture on an established tradition, which did not only follow international models, led several architects to seek points of reference

17 E. MAY, *Das flache Dach*, in «Das Neue Frankfurt», no. 7, 1927, p. 149.

18 H. TESSENOW, *Das Dach*, in «Das Neue Frankfurt», no. 7, 1927, pp. 199-202.

19 L. MIES VAN DER ROHE, *La battaglia per il tetto piano*, unpublished manuscript of 1927, translated from the Italian translation in V. PIZZIGONI, *Gli scritti e le parole*, Einaudi, Turin 2010, p. 43.

20 E. PÖSCHEL, *Das flache Dach in Davos*, in «Das Werk», April 1928.



within their own national borders. As these reference points could not be found in the monumentality of stately architecture, already the prerogative of the heavily criticised academies, the “alternative” source of the rural, popular tradition remained.

In 1930s Italy the issue was keenly felt, in large part because of the peculiar political climate. Indeed, one of the criticisms levelled at Italian Rationalism by its detractors was its presumed love of all things foreign. The search for a rootedness and an “italianness” was part of the missions that the rationalists set themselves in order to give legitimacy to the new architecture<sup>21</sup>. Giovanni Michelucci, for example, published a series of articles in «Domus» in which he attempted to individuate the «points of contact between ancient and modern architecture». He included references to the farmhouses of Tuscany, alongside a modern house in a drawing, with the purpose of «showing how “very new” forms, those which an uncritical public defines as Nordic, or “German”, to be precise, actually have roots here, in our own clear, serene tradition»<sup>22</sup>.

The questions of rootedness and identity are posed in different terms today: no longer framed by nationalist rhetoric but rather differences between local regions. The need to keep the recognisability of landscapes alive to which I referred at the beginning may perhaps rediscover important points of reference in the examples just cited. Indeed, modern Italian architecture of the 1930s and the immediate post-war period produced a number of works capable of reinterpreting local traditions, without closing themselves off from international innovations.

### *Pagano's Alpine architecture*

The studies which Pagano developed on the subject of the rural house influenced his design work, in which he pursued the “operational” principle which I mentioned at the start. An example can be found in the holiday home which Pagano designed and built in the Alpine foothills in the Lombardy region, near Viggiù. This house, which dates to 1940 and was the last one built by Pagano, was described by the designer himself as «a modest little house». The principles of ordinariness and simplicity predominate in it, almost as if to confirm the definition that the designer had conferred upon

21 See M. SABATINO, *Pride of Modesty. Modernist Architecture and the Vernacular tradition in Italy*, Toronto 2011; J. F. LEJEUNE, M. SABATINO (edited by), *Modern Architecture and the Mediterranean. Vernacular Dialogues and Contested Identities*, Routledge, London 2010.

22 G. MICHELUCCI, *Fonti della moderna architettura italiana*, in «Domus», n. 56, 1932, pp. 460-461.

the rural house as unpretentious architecture, «filled with modest, anonymous beauty», which takes its place within the landscape naturally. The little house consists of a number of simple forms in wood with a framed structure mounted on a concrete base. The outer walls are “buffered” with wooden beads arranged vertically. Two wall sections in stone help to brace the structure and anchor it to the ground. The windows are arranged freely along the walls and the structure is covered by a single, slightly sloping roof. The decision to use a single pitched roof appears to be a compromise between a flat roof and a pitched roof, and is in any case a type of roof that is widely used by modern architecture in the mountains, beginning with Franz Baumann’s Hotel Monte Pana, through to the villas built after the Second World War by his friend and partner, Gino Levi-Montalcini.

Indeed, it was together with Levi-Montalcini that he had designed Villa Colli in Rivara, in the Canavese area, in 1929. This other villa consists of a simple walled form covered by a hipped roof, with the first floor surrounded by an uninterrupted portico. The materials used are simple and traditional, with plastered walls, a slate roof, parapets and pillars of the portico in wood.

Yet Villa Colli also exhibits clear references to the international culture and modern architecture which were gaining notoriety in Italy too. Specifically, in the section above ground and in its relation to the garden a reference is found to Winslow House by Frank Lloyd Wright, built in the Chicago countryside at the end of the nineteenth century. The interior, in contrast, displays certain Viennese features, drawing in particular on 1920s architecture by Adolf Loos.

Villa Colli’s rustic face is in contrast linked to a revival of elements from the local tradition, presaging precisely those themes which Pagano would tackle some years later in his examination of the rustic house<sup>23</sup>. The continuous portico of the first floor, from up close, recalls the large openings of the haylofts and balconies for drying in the farms of the Canavese area. In the porticos of the rural houses in the Alps it was possible to admire the contrasts between the heaviness of stone and the lightness of the trellises in wood, between the fullness of the basement and the opening of the haylofts: the roofs of these buildings, supported by slender pillars, seemed almost to float in the sky. In the same way, the roof of Villa Colli seems to lift off of the floor below, achieving the same effect that Wright had obtained by including a dark band in the decoration of the top floor of his Winslow House. For modern architects building in the mountains, local tradition becomes a new figurative point of reference, to sit alongside those

23 E. LEVI-MONTALCINI, *Gino Levi-Montalcini architetto a Torino*, in «Atti e Rassegna Tecnica della Società degli Ingegneri e degli Architetti in Torino», n. 2, 2003, pp. 16-18.

originating from the international culture.

The two examples in question are extremely different from each other: Villa Colli draws on figurative elements of rural architecture and international modernity, placing them within a classical typological conceptual framework; the house of Viggiù takes a further step forward, abandoning all classical compositional schemes and rescuing from rural architecture the typical juxtaposition between buildings, disregarding rules pertaining to hierarchy and symmetry. In both of the examples we find clear references to the rural tradition, to such an extent that these two houses seem to be transformations of the rural houses photographed by Pagano. A transformation which not only involves elements and references drawn from tradition but also elements of international modernity.

### *Transforming tradition*

It is precisely to this theme of transformation that I would connect a number of observations made by Friedrich Achleitner in the context of one of the Sesto Val Pusteria Alpine architecture awards. Speaking of Casa Khuner by Adolf Loos in Payerbach, he points out the Viennese architect's respect for place, which is expressed in his use of local materials and construction techniques. However, these points of reference are reduced to a sort of «matrix, a shorthand sign reduced to a small number of notable features, and then through a purifying hail of radical transformations, turning them into a modern example of an urbane, upper middle class country house»<sup>24</sup>.

In the same way, completing the picture painted by this brief essay, which began with Usellini's encaustic paintings, I feel that I am able to detect a similar attitude also in Giovanni Muzio who designed the Sondrio Provincial Authority building. In the pre-project phase, he made a "journey to the Valtellina", gathering information on and sketches of monuments, traditional handicraft production and materials used for local construction. The figures collected a sort of canvas upon which the project would be written. The building features stone cladding which recall the dry stone walls of the Valtellinese tradition, alongside portals, coffered ceilings and iron grilles drawn from the noble palaces of Teglio and Tirano. All of these elements, through a "purifying hail", are transformed into a metaphysical architecture inevitably marked by Muzio's style.

In conclusion, it can be said that knowledge remains a fundamental

24 F. ACHLEITNER, *Architettura alpina. Prima e dopo Edoardo Gellner*, in C. MAYR FINGERLE (edited by), *Neues Bauen in den Alpen, Architettura contemporanea alpina: Premio d'architettura 1999*, Birkhäuser, Basel-Boston-Berlin, 2000.

prerequisite for establishing contemporary architectural design, and the essential remains that of conserving the recognisability of Alpine landscapes. Nevertheless, knowledge of the place appears not to be enough.

If we were to repeat the “journey to the Valtellina” embarked upon by Muzio in the 1930s, so well represented in by Usellini in his hot wax paintings, we would find the situation completely transformed and a Valtellina that is completely unrecognisable. The reasons are complex and cannot be analysed in a few lines. However, mention may at least be made of the failures in planning which have always witnessed concertation between public and private interests and which have not prevented the spillover of private interests. The public interest, in other words protection of the landscape, has sought a lifeline in building restrictions and regulations, which have proven totally ineffective.

Architecture, in the face of all of this, has seemed and continues to seem powerless. Yet faced with a disastrous situation, one may perhaps attempt to build a new image of the landscape through ideas, as has often happened in the cities, where, in various historical periods, large-scale planning has been counteracted by a number of architectural ideas that have modified the overall image of the city, such as in the case of Vrin with the work of Caminada and potentially in other contexts. It is necessary, therefore, to continue to foster ideas, and to continue to analyse and spread good examples of architecture. An incentive, in short, to continue to study, think and design.

*On page 18*

Fig. 1. Multiple arch dam in Val Venina



Fig. 2. Gianfilippo Usellini, *Encaustic paintings in the Hall of Honour at the Palace of the Province of Sondrio, 1934*



Fig. 3-4. Stone house in Val di Rezzalo. Before and after renovation

*On the next page*

Fig. 5. A 14th century wooden house in Nantua. Source: E. Viollet-le-Duc, *Dictionnaire raisonné de l'architecture française du XI au XVI siècle*, Paris 1894, tome sixième, p. 258





Fig. 6. Rural House. Rivara Canavese





Fig. 7. Giuseppe Pagano, Gino Levi-Montalcini, *Villa Colli*, Rivara Canavese, 1929-1931

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