

Architectural Design and History

**Spaces of Memory.  
Commentaries  
on 21st Century  
Buildings**

edited by Luigi Spinelli

**FrancoAngeli**

The Bookseries *Architectural Design and History* intends to explore the relationships between architectural design and the contemporary city, with a particular focus on the contexts where urban transformations relate to the preservation and promotion of historical heritage. By intersecting various theories, techniques and practices, the contributions aim at unfolding the complex identity of the architectural culture, fostering connections and exchanges among different disciplines, and enhancing a strategical and evolutionary conception of architectural heritage.

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Elena Montanari

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6	<b>Memory Exercises</b> Luigi Spinelli	III. Memory and Architecture
	I. Memory and Design	
20	<b>Andrew Berman.</b> <b>Memory and Discretion</b> Luca Cardani	210 <b>Elisa Valero Ramos.</b> <b>Two or Three Things</b> <b>I Know About Her Work</b> Luigi Spinelli
38	<b>Renzo Piano.</b> <b>Two American Art</b> <b>Museums</b> Federico Bucci	232 <b>João Luís Carrilho da Graça.</b> <b>Experimenting</b> <b>with Permanence and</b> <b>Transformation</b> Barbara Bogoni
68	<b>José Ignacio Linazasoro.</b> <b>Matter and Memory</b> <b>of the Built Environment</b> Renata Cristina Mazzantini	254 <b>Quintus Miller and</b> <b>Paola Maranta.</b> <b>Morphology of the Care</b> Vittorio Longheu
96	<b>Paolo Zermani.</b> <b>The Conscious Thriftiness</b> Massimo Ferrari	270 <b>Ricardo Bak Gordon.</b> <b>Architecture as Inhabited</b> <b>Space Between Past</b> <b>and Future</b> Christian Campanella
112	<b>Alberto Campo Baeza.</b> <b>Construction as</b> <b>a Manifesto of</b> <b>Architectural Theory</b> Emilio Faroldi	IV. Memory and Interpretation
	II. Memory and Narration	
136	<b>Guido Canali.</b> <b>The Semantic</b> <b>Interpretation</b> <b>of Displaying</b> Marco Borsotti	294 <b>Fernando Tabuenca</b> <b>and Jesús Leache.</b> <b>Palimpsestic Architecture</b> Elena Montanari
164	<b>Pierre-Louis Faloci.</b> <b>Camera Obscurae</b> <b>to Display</b> <b>«Difficult Memories»</b> Federico Bucci	320 <b>Tony Fretton.</b> <b>Calculated Ambiguity</b> Angelo Lorenzi
182	<b>Philippe Prost.</b> <b>«L'Espace du Vivant»</b> <b>Between Memory</b> <b>and Innovation</b> Elisa Boeri	342 <b>Renato Rizzi.</b> <b>«To Be an Architect You</b> <b>Must Be in the Grip of an</b> <b>Obsession»</b> Claudia Tinazzi
		362 <b>Álvaro Siza Vieira and</b> <b>Eduardo Souto de Moura:</b> <b>A Dialogue on Architecture</b> <b>and Memory</b> edited by Barbara Bogoni
		376 <b>Authors</b>

**Alberto Campo  
Baeza.  
Construction as  
a Manifesto  
of Architectural  
Theory**

Emilio Faroldi

«When men set out to bring beauty into his buildings architecture was born». These are the words of Frank Lloyd Wright in the opening of the volume *La Suspensión del tiempo. Diario de un arquitecto*<sup>1</sup> written by Alberto Campo Baeza and published in 2017.

In his book the author reflects on the period of *utilitas, firmitas, venustas*, and memory, quoting characters and works dear to him, and declaring beauty as formal choice of artistic use. Recalling the words of his friend Massimo Venturi Ferriolo, we can reaffirm that beauty of living gives quality to places, realities that we contemplate by living in them; they are *garden landscapes* whose aesthetic experience is based on the inseparability between life and contemplation. Contemplation of the living environment cannot be separated from dwelling in it: we act in the space observed and we grasp the result of our action for better or for worse.

Architecture indeed represents an unparalleled opportunity for mutation that tends towards improvement. It is difficult to comprehend as now how and when it adheres to consensus and trend logics and/or, on the contrary, when it constitutes an element of dissonance towards the customs of an era.

The cultural exile to which the construction problem underwent, the parallel resolution between the designed world and the realized world, with evident reverberations on the relationship between the theoretical contributions and the applied actions, determine incisive disciplinary reconsiderations in terms of architectural practice and its conceptualization.

In such cultural context the research of Campo Baeza defines a common ground between compositional and constructive ambit, overcoming exclusively idealistic-formal approaches or attitudes aimed at observing limited technical and material variables.

Campo Baeza is a great architect, as well as master for entire generations of students: primary exponent of a Madrid school of *hacer arquitectura* that focuses on the relationship between *theory* and *practice* of the project. An architecture educator able to make theory through the built work which, by autogenesis, derives from the theory itself.

There are no ambiguities: you can *be an architect* or, equally, you can *act as architect*. Campo Baeza is an architect and, at the same time, works as an architect: this is a privilege reserved for a few.

An architect who, by making theory through the built work, appoints the latter as a real programmatic manifesto: a treatise on architecture that has become reality. His spatial thought is the result of an intellectual action.

Precisely on the word *construction*, composing together, lies the thought of Campo Baeza and his search for the absolute. A carpenter who becomes a poet: just like Tekton in the work of Sappho. Or again, a poet who becomes a carpenter: a soldier of architecture in search of beauty.

The concept of tectonics seems to him to be a pleasant obsession: the architectural project is both intellectual and technical action, since its conception, which is related to the construction's order and founded on a subtle and deep-rooted technological knowledge.

The observation of the professional reality in which Campo Baeza operates, together with that of his various colleagues and students whom he manages to gather with wisdom and love, highlights the almost «artisan» approach of his work. A cultural attitude not casual, not suffered but pursued and safeguarded by the advent of malformed methodological and project management approaches, due to the complexity of the reality in which we operate. A design poetics rooted in the classic values of our discipline and aimed at a technological knowledge with a contemporary meaning. A humanist architect understood as a man of knowledge, within an approach to culture pursued through the wise translation of historical and technical evolutions.

The relationship between professional and didactic experience, and the commitment in the diffusion of theory and criticism are the expression of an architecture whose successful outcome is inextricably linked to the balance between material and immaterial, between scientific and humanistic principles, between matter and poetics.

In *La idea construída*, his theoretical manifesto, he writes: «I would like my ARCHITECTURE to be / As PRECISE as Bernini's, as luminous. / As NATURAL as Barragàn's, architecture for the man./ As *DESHABILLÉ* as Le Corbusier's, as strong and powerful. / NOT for the purpose of becoming famous / But to make man happy. / NOT to be photographed / But to be lived. / NOT only for this time / But forever»<sup>2</sup>.

The careful observation of Mies' work, reversing the paradigm and the point of observation, conveys doubts and disciplinary tor-

ments that are answered, at least as far as I am concerned, in the architectures of Campo Baeza which inevitably manage to dissolve that detachment from the reality of everyday life to which architecture should however aim.

The essence of *hacer arquitectura* exhibits the cognitive process of its project in the roots and not in the leaves of an imaginary building tree. Elementary doubts, spontaneous questions that require simple and therefore difficult answers.

It arises spontaneously to ask whether we are today spectators of a logical and intuitive process that still sees function originating form, or does form take on greater degrees of autonomy? Should we think of a modern antiquity or a model of ancient modernity?

And again: what weight does the image of architecture have towards an increasingly haunting architecture as image? And is it conceivable that an architectural project still exists or is now overwhelmed by the architecture of the project, that is, by its process?

In summary: what is the language of our time?

Our era, its demands, are better identified in the opacity and the solidity of the tectonic mass or in the transparency and lightness of the information society?

Campo Baeza's architectures reassure, comfort, seek and find clear, exact answers to the foundational questions of today's architecture.

In his work, the immediate expression of the «enclosure archetype» is represented by the wall, which identifies the original expression of the building. The wall: transition point, convergence of tensions between inside and outside, becomes for Campo Baeza the true architectural event.

Likewise, the façade: a border between the confined space and the external environment, performs the primary functions of physically delimiting the space, as well as filtering the building-city-landscape relationship. Limit between private conditions and public stage representation: architecture reveals its basis and proposes itself within urban fabrics or converses with the landscape through characters that represent the moment of encounter between internal spatial articulation and place measurement. Think in this sense of the *House of the Infinite* in Cadiz, Andalusia.

The etymology itself of the term *façade* is connected to the theme of the courtly and representative function: in Greek it is expressed with the word πρόσωπον (*prósôpon*, i.e. person) which has as its second meaning that of theatrical mask and, by analogy and reverberation of concept, the relative abstract meaning of «external appearance». In Latin, moreover, the terms *mask* and *façade* are identified with two distinct words, although in the term *frons, frontis*, in addition to the meaning of «forehead, face, feature, physiognomy», the figurative one of «look, external appearance» is found.

From a figurative point of view, the architecture of Campo Baeza is defined by the characteristics of its perimeter, by the construction rules and by the materials that represent it to weave a *fil rouge* with classicism, while condemning its sense of freedom. Thought flies to the famous headquarters of the *Caja Granada* (2001) and returns, in a metaphorical and diachronic exercise, with the memory of the *Pantheon*.

Using the words Ernesto Nathan Rogers wrote in 1960: «The present work serves as a link between the past and the future; it is not a moment of rest but the obligatory point of passage of history, from yesterday to tomorrow. The guarantee of the validity of today's work is precisely in obliging history to go through new inventions»<sup>3</sup>.

Classical architecture found in natural elements the tools to make its image «alive»: light, shadow, colours, vegetation, time and its work in the aging process. Campo Baeza's architecture identifies its presupposition in the reinterpretation of these elements: a reinvention and a Pirandellian renew that finds its essentiality in the cradle of classicism. The reduction of the limit between truth and fiction, between real and artificial, is attributable to the severe and rational tectonic articulation.

A technological and constructive truth that refers to the works of the classic and that through his «thinking with hands» first become *modern* and, in parallel, *contemporary*.

Campo Baeza states that: «Neither Mies van der Rohe nor Le Corbusier have ever copied, imitated the form or language of the Acropolis or the Parthenon, yet they have always known that there is a need to have one's roots embedded in history, not to copy but to know. And his wisdom is necessary. This wisdom, which is knowledge of history, is also knowledge of technology»<sup>4</sup>.

The concept of transparency, from a semiological point of view and in an empirical form, contrasts and alternates with the idea of body and heaviness, linking itself in an allegorical form to the theme of lightness. The opacity and transparency relationship in Campo Baeza's architecture refer to the antithetical combination of heaviness and lightness, between eternity and relativity of existence. His constructions remain perpetually suspended in an alternation of transparency and opacity, of liquidity and solidity, but even more of purity and severity, incorporating both properties internally.

«Reason, therefore, is the main tool of the architect: architecture cannot be defended as “artistic” or even as pure reason. Architecture is reason accompanied by knowledge of technology»<sup>5</sup>.

In all of this, the «suspension of time» leads to abstract concepts which it is up to the architect to transform into matter. «For the future, for the present and for the past — as he reported during a recent interview — I always hope to find beauty. Beauty as a mirror of truth, as Plato said in a dialogue with Saint Augustine. Humanity is hungry for beauty».

In his search for «concreteness in abstractness» and, at the same time, for «abstractness in concreteness», there is no duel between *ethics* and *aesthetics* and beauty is not necessarily attributable to effect and amazement. His architecture affirms this with great clarity.

Campo Baeza — paraphrasing one of his recurring quotations — is a Don Quixote who fights for the survival of architectural quality, in a scenario characterized by the continuous transformation and evolution of economic and production logics. An essential cultural battle aimed at preventing part of the built works from being irreparably compromised in the «translation» step of the project.

The history of Campo Baeza is, even before the story of an architect, the story of an intellectual who teaches by learning and learns through teaching, faithful to the logic that sees the teacher as the synthesis of three essential conditions.

As he says, it is necessary to KNOW, KNOW HOW TO TEACH and WANT TO TEACH, considering KNOWLEDGE, PEDAGOGY and COMMITMENT as synonyms of MEMORY, UNDERSTANDING and WILL.

In architecture the same principle applies:

YOU MUST TRY TO DO ARCHITECTURE — says Campo Baeza — with FEELING and MEASURE, INTERRUPTION and DECISION.

He believes «Architecture is an intellectual action that needs TIME»<sup>6</sup>.

«Teaching is luck. Teaching is a gift, because you learn more than you teach. As a teacher I try to convey architecture through what I am doing, not because my work is special but because I think it is the most precise and direct way to teach. Teaching and planning are not easy, but for me it is what allows me to continue “sharpen the blade”. Unfortunately, it takes a long time and the difficulty lies in not being able to sometimes choose what to do. Especially for young people. However, staying in academia, even if it requires sacrifices, is worth the effort. My teacher Alejandro de la Sota, with whom I had a special relationship, had advised me, once finished my studies, to stay out of university for five years to work and then return to university, to teach. Freedom is the key word»<sup>7</sup>.

His idea of architecture pursues the idea of *construction* as a centre of gravity of architecture, as a physical place and aspiration to which architecture unequivocally tends.

The construction, therefore, as a material synthesis of architectural theory, of its unchanged laws, and of its changing status.

In the introduction of the above-mentioned book, *La idea construida*, Campo Baeza states that: «Architecture is the IDEA materialized, with measures that relate to man, the centre of architecture. IT IS A BUILT IDEA. The history of architecture, far from being only a history of forms, is basically a history of constructed ideas. Forms disintegrate over time, but ideas remain, they are eternal»<sup>8</sup>.

He places the *built ideas* — and therefore his theories — in front of his own figure: architecture always comes before the architect.

There are two approaches to designing. One which works by subtraction of matter: a sort of architect sculpture that digs in the mass to bring out shapes and spatiality. Another which, on the contrary, works by addition, juxtaposing elements capable of having a sense accomplished in themselves and an absolute sense as a whole, through conforming relationships that one creates with the other. A sort of architect musician who composes by putting in sequence and in a wise relationship a few elements — the twelve notes — through harmonious, melodic and separated by pauses — the voids — to which he attributes equal importance to the notes — the solids.

The performance of a work by Campo Baeza follows the architectural score with precision and musical sense. In this sense, the theories of Nelson Goodman — an American philosopher who relates the creative musical act, the architectural one and their different execution methods — reverberate.

Execution is transformed — as by an impalpable miracle — into creation.

Creation: a magical word for Campo Baeza. A word around which the entire solar system of architecture revolves. It is no coincidence that the architect Baeza and the theorist Baeza, precisely in the word *creation*, meet.

They find an inscrutable point of reference and meeting in the profound theories of Stefan Zweig, Austrian philosopher, but also writer, journalist, playwright and poet, who held lectures between 1939 and 1940 in New York and Buenos Aires, entitled *The Secret of Artistic Creation*, trying to make sense of the miracle of the idea behind any artistic form.

Campo Baeza claims that it would be enough to replace the term artistic creation with architecture that everything would work equally well. His works stand out for their embarrassing consistency that often constitutes the fragility of the architect's work.

His works — as Paul Valéry's *Eupalinos*<sup>9</sup> would say — sing and continue to sing over time. In Valéry's work, Campo Baeza interprets both the figure of Eupaline, a refined lover of form and beauty, as well as the figure of Tridone, ship builder and profound connoisseur of instances of technical nature.

So what are the ingredients of his architecture?

Architecture — he says — is like good food: to be a good cook, you must use ingredients that are often well known. It is therefore the way of harmonizing the ingredients that transforms a normal diet — building — into an act of haute cuisine — architecture.

In the works of Campo Baeza, the themes (i.e. the ingredients) are those rooted in the history of the discipline and are unchangeable in architecture: the *ground link* and the *relationship with the ground*; the *section* as a space-revealing tool; *light* as a solid architectural element; the definition of the *elements* proper to the architectural phenomenon: the *context*, the *function*, the *composition*, the *construction*, and,

last but not least, *essential nature* — the «more», therefore, with «less» — as absolute sense of Architecture.

In February 2014 Campo Baeza published an essay dedicated and addressed to children, entitled *Quiero Ser Arquitecto*<sup>10</sup>, and dedicated to all those who have a dream and who want to build this dream.

In this short, but very clear text, he explains that architecture is comparable to «going up and down a staircase»: you can take two steps to go up but can't take two to go down. The text is intended to clarify what it means *to be an architect* (meaning by architect: a creator, a thinker, a builder). Translating these terms: the architect is a dreamer, an artist, a technician, who works similarly to a doctor, a chef, a poet.

A text that could be useful to introduce in our schools, in the presentations of our degree courses in the academic field as it brings the heart of the problem to the centre: doing architecture is a *job*.

Precisely in wanting to reaffirm architecture as a profession and in the action of looking for a way to understand its constructive and poetic essence, dwell the thought and talent of an architect who elects coherence and commitment, also social, to necessary pieces to become an architect by being an architect, promoting the architectural theory manifesto construction: the work of architecture as a book built to strive for eternity.

1 A. Campo Baeza, *La suspensión del tiempo. Diario de un arquitecto*, Fundación Arquia, Barcelona; Catarata, Madrid 2017.

2 «Me gustaría que mi ARQUITECTURA fuera / Tan PRECISA como la de Bernini, tan Luminosa. / Tan NATURAL como la de Barragán, para los hombres. / Tan DESHABILLÉ como la de Le Corbusier, tan fuerte y tan potente. / NO para alcanzar la fama / sino para hacer felices a los hombres. / NO para ser fotografiada / sino para ser vivida. / NO sólo para nuestro tiempo / sino para siempre». A. Campo Baeza, *La idea construida*, COAM, Madrid 1998, p. 41; trans. *The Built Idea*, Oscar Riera Ojeda Publishers, Shenzhen 2015, p. 58.

3 «L'opera presente serve da tramite tra il passato e il futuro; non è un momento di sosta ma il punto obbligato di passaggio della storia, dall'ieri verso il domani. La garanzia della validità di un'opera odierna è proprio nell'obbligare la storia a passare per le nuove invenzioni». E. N. Rogers, «Memoria e invenzione nel design», *Casabella-Continuità*, 239, May 1960, p. 1; now in E. N. Rogers, *Editoriali di Architettura*, Einaudi, Turin 1968, pp. 137-149.

4 «Né Mies né Le Corbusier hanno mai copiato, imitato la forma o il linguaggio dell'Acropoli o del Partenone, eppure hanno sempre saputo che c'è bisogno di avere le proprie radici afondate nella storia, non per copiare ma per sapere. E questa sapienza è necessaria. Questa sapienza, che è conoscenza della storia, è anche conoscenza della tecnologia». M. P. Vettori, «Cultura tecnologica, teorie e prassi del progetto di architettura / Technological culture, theory and practice of architectural design. Jesús Aparicio, Jesús Donaire, Alberto Campo Baeza and Ignacio Vicens y Hualde», *TECHNE, Journal of Technology for Architecture and Environment*, 13, 2017, p. 348.

5 «La ragione, pertanto, è il principale strumento dell'architetto: non si può difendere l'architettura come "artisticità" e nemmeno come pura ragione. L'architettura è ragione accompagnata dalla conoscenza della tecnologia». Ivi, p. 349.

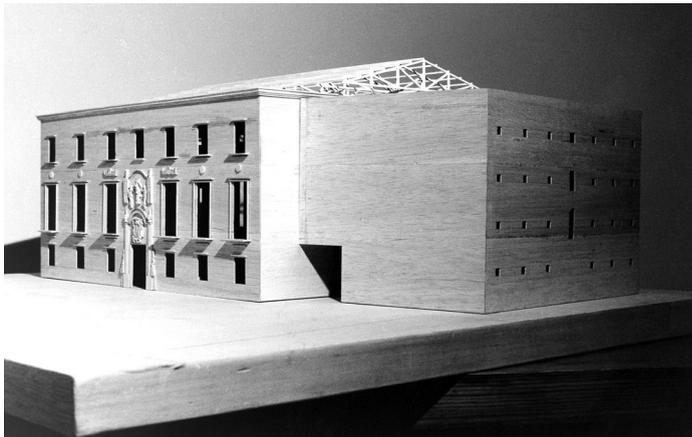
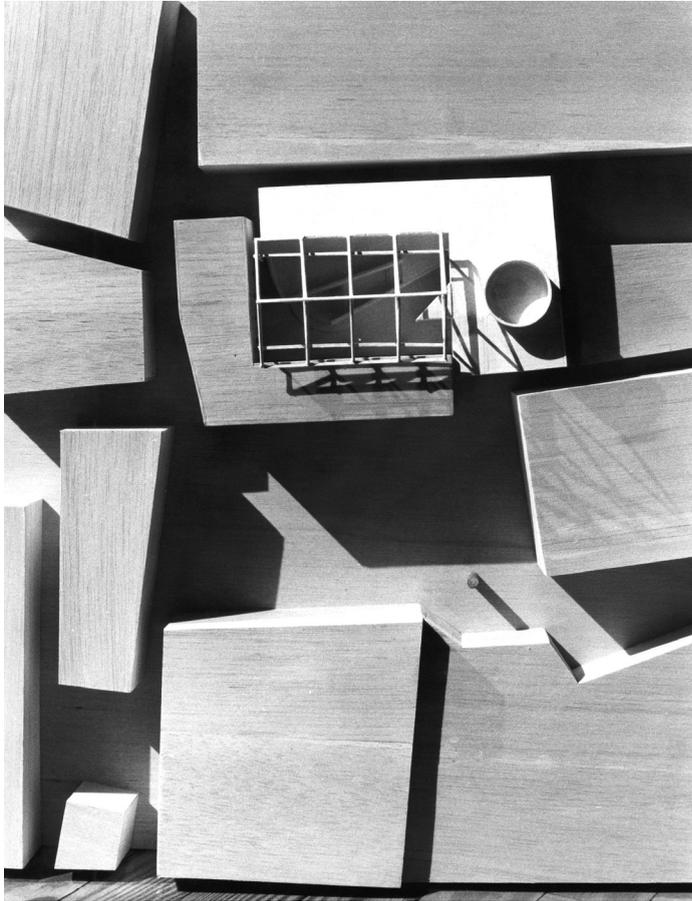
6 «L'architettura è un'azione intellettuale che ha bisogno di TEMPO». Ivi, p. 352.

7 «Insegnare è una fortuna. Fare didattica è un regalo, perché s'impara più di quanto s'insegna. Come docente cerco di trasmettere l'architettura attraverso quello che sto facendo, non perché la mia opera sia speciale ma perché penso sia la via più precisa e diretta per insegnare. Insegnare e progettare non è facile, ma per me è quello che mi permette di continuare ad "affilare il bisturi". Purtroppo, richiede molto tempo e la difficoltà sta nel non poter talvolta scegliere a cosa dedicarsi. Soprattutto per i giovani. Tuttavia, rimanere nel mondo accademico, anche se richiede sacrifici, vale la pena. Il mio maestro Alejandro de la Sota, con cui avevo un rapporto speciale, mi aveva consigliato, una volta finiti gli studi, di stare fuori dall'università per cinque anni per lavorare e poi ritornare in università, per insegnare. La liberà è la parola chiave». Ivi, p. 351.

8 «[Arquitectura] Es idea materializada con medidas que hacen relación al hombre, centro de la Arquitectura. Es idea construida. La Historia de la Arquitectura, lejos de ser solo una Historia de las formas, es básicamente una Historia de la Ideas Construidas. Las formas se destruyen con el tiempo pero las ideas permanecen, son eternas». A. Campo Baeza, *La idea construida*, op. cit., p. 6.

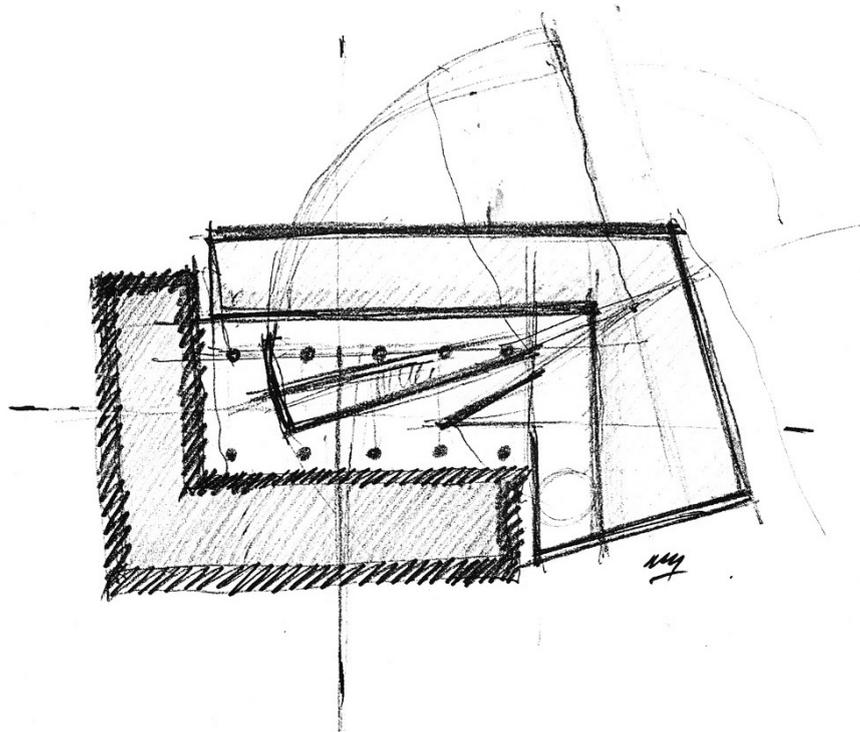
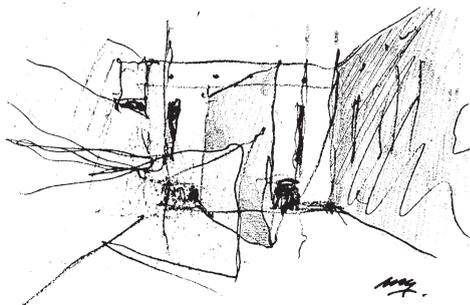
9 P. Valéry, *Eupalinos ou l'Architecte*, Nouvelle Revue Française, Paris 1923.

10 A. Campo Baeza, *Quiero Ser Arquitecto*, Ed. Mairea-UPM, Madrid 2014; trans. *I Want to Be an Architect*, AMAG, Madrid 2014.

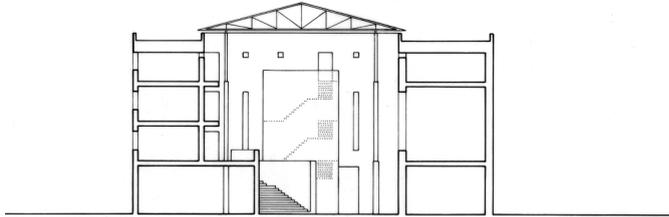
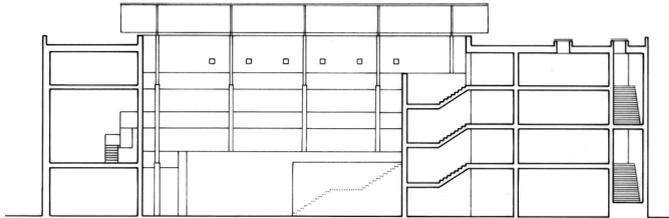
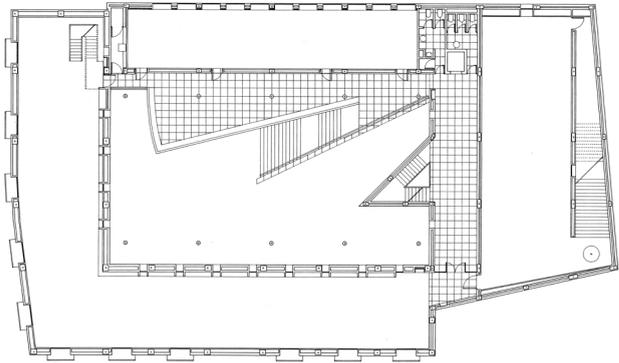
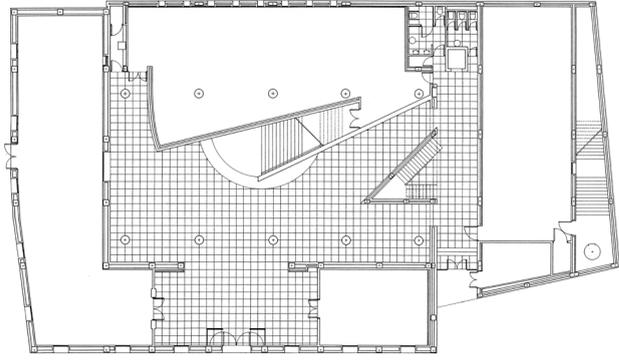


Alberto Campo Baeza,  
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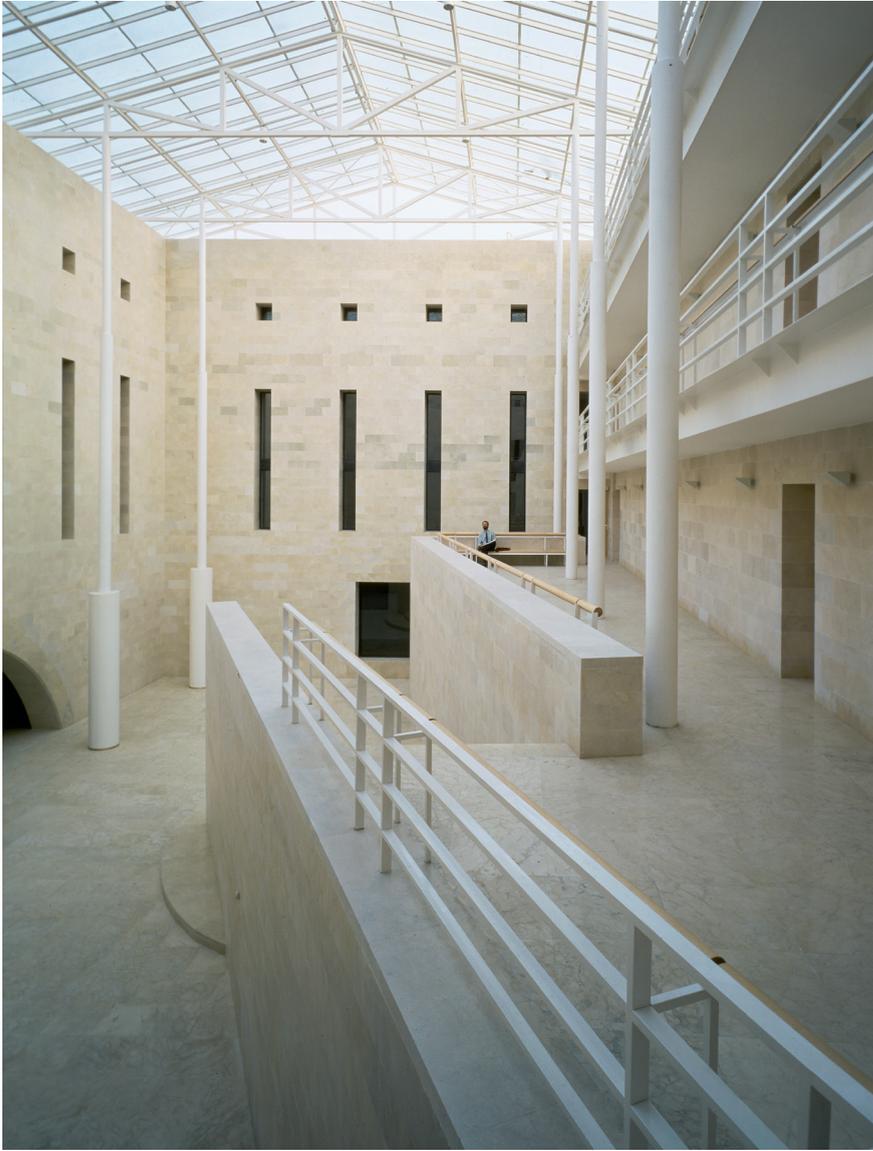
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The architect's sketches  
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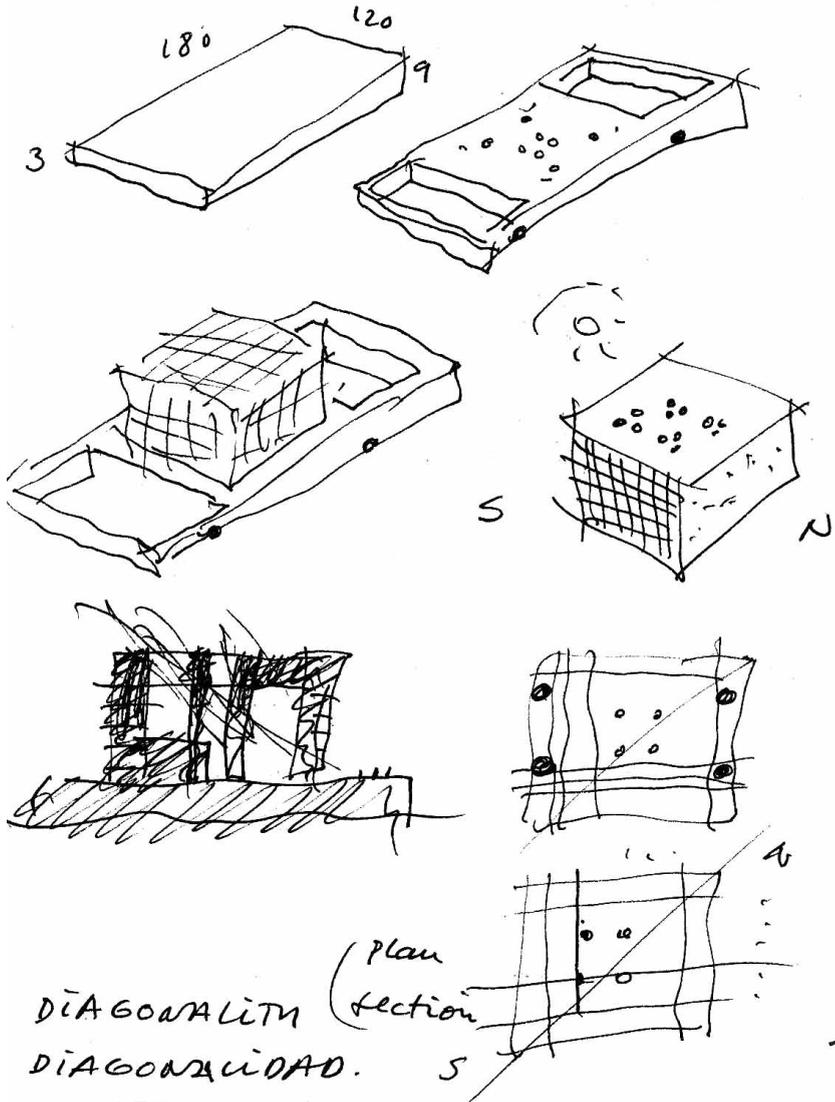
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Ground floor and first floor plan,  
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The hall © Alberto Campo  
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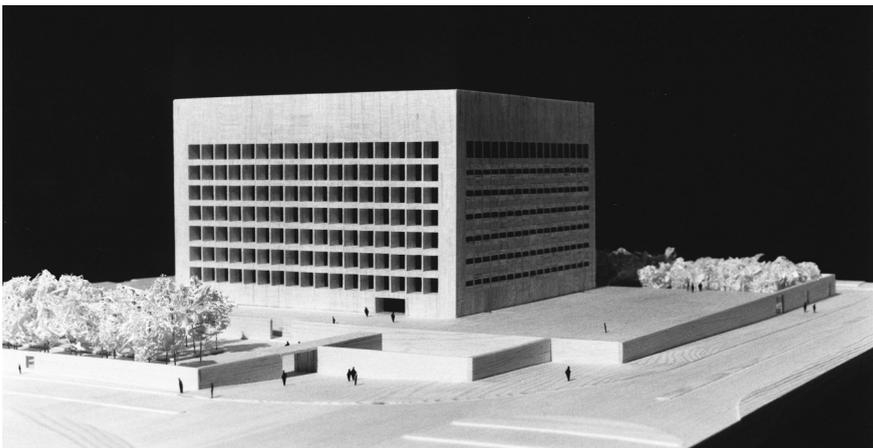
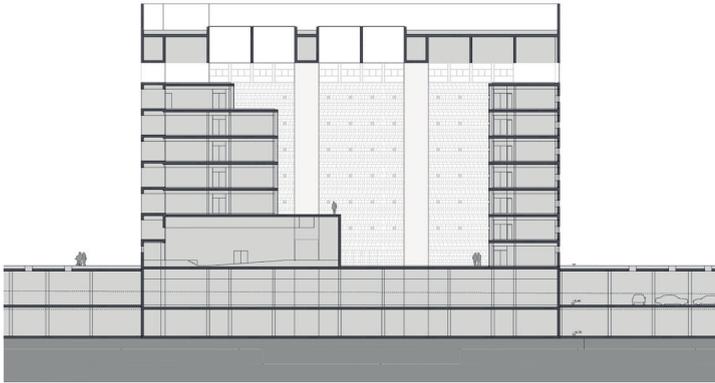
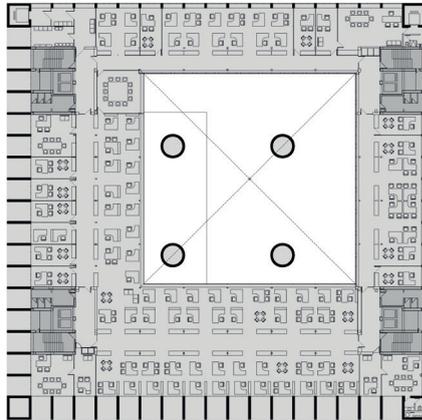
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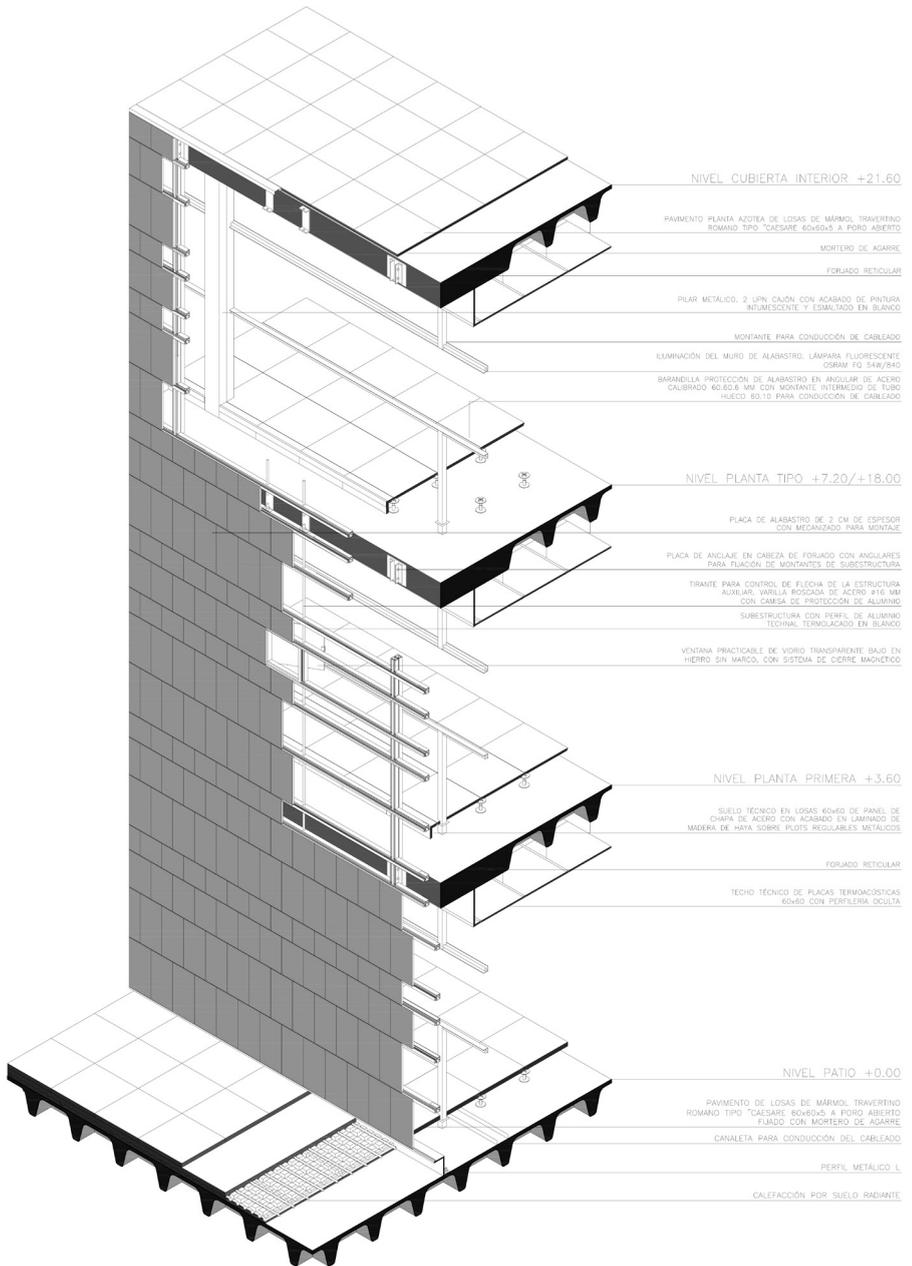
Alberto Campo Baeza, *Caja Granada* (Granada, Spain 1992-2001)

68

The architect's sketches  
© Alberto Campo Baeza.



69 70  
First floor plan, section and  
scale model © Alberto Campo  
Baeza.

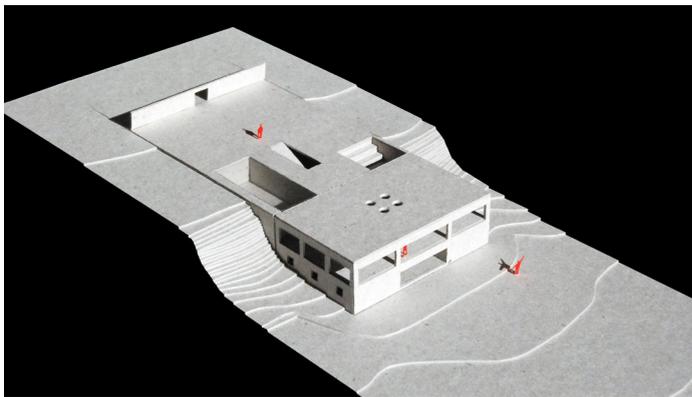
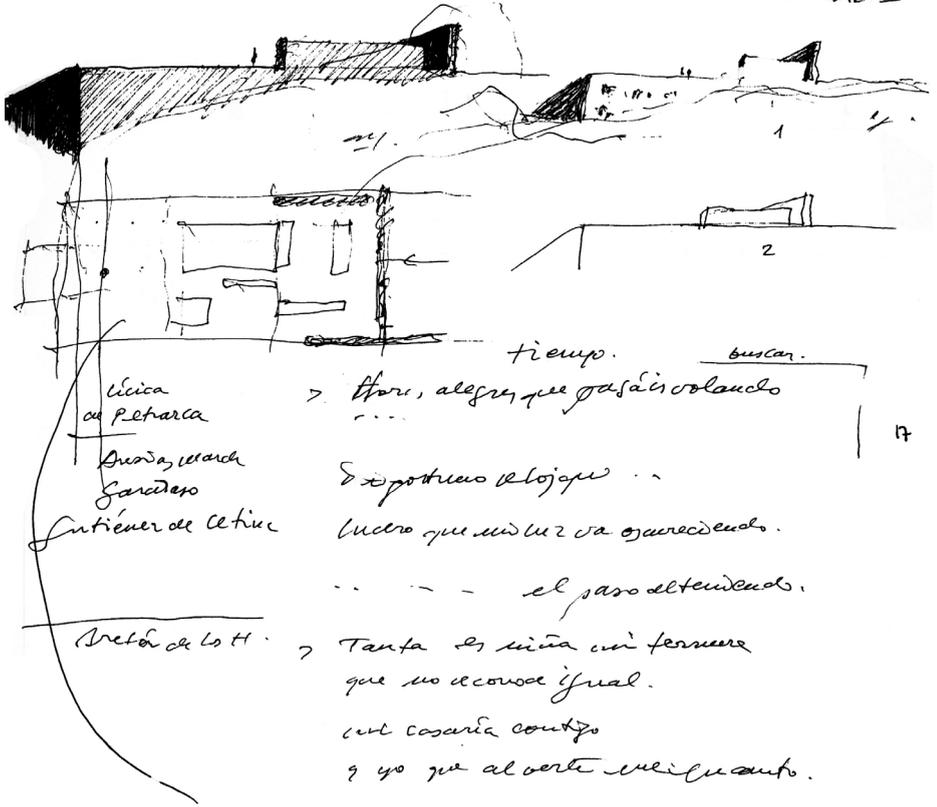


**71**  
 Structural details of the  
 travertine wall © Alberto  
 Campo Baeza.



**72**  
The hall © Alberto Campo  
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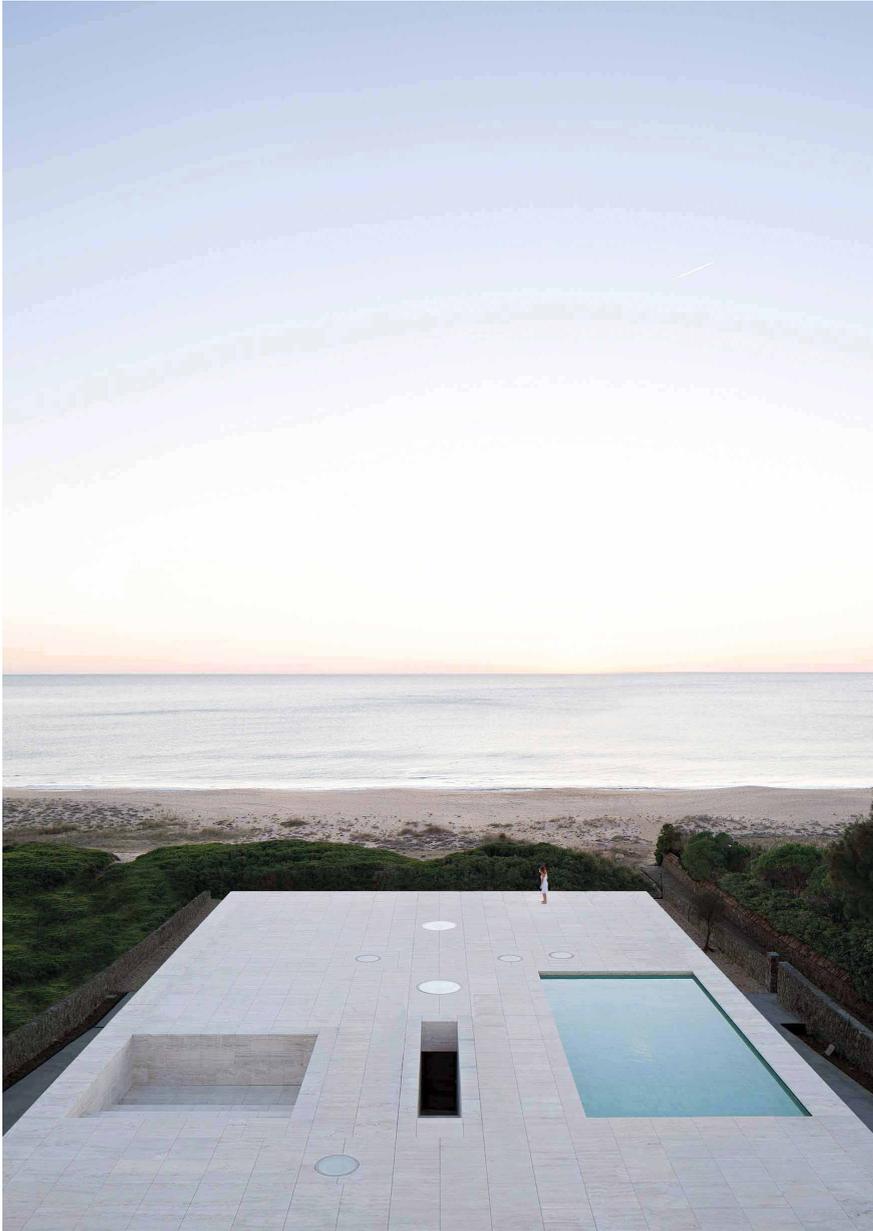
House in ZAHARA CADIZ



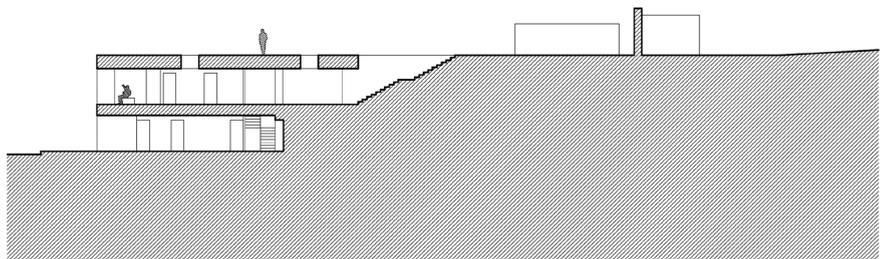
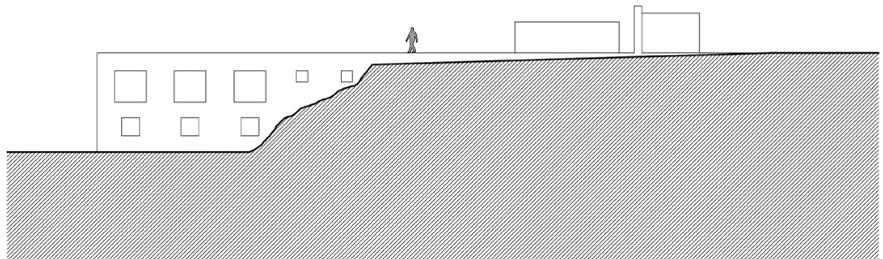
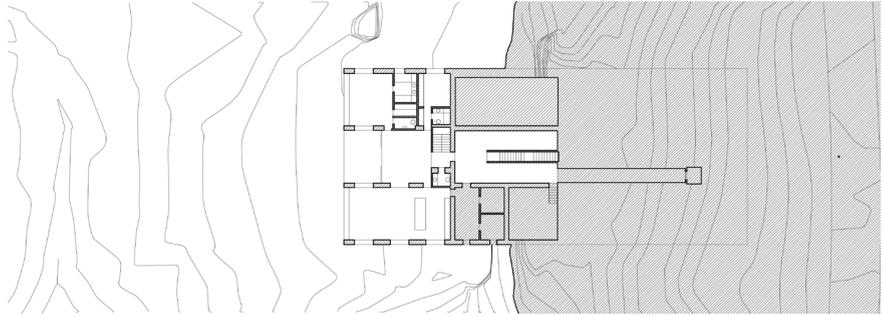
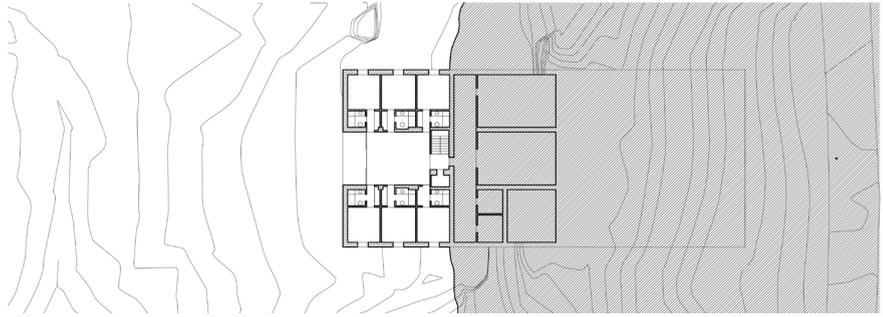
Alberto Campo Baeza, Casa del Infinito (Cádiz, Spain 2012-14)

73

The architect's sketches and a scale model © Alberto Campo Baeza.



**74**  
The roof © Alberto Campo  
Baeza.



**75**  
Plans and sections  
© Alberto Campo Baeza.



**76 77 78**  
Exterior and interior views  
© Alberto Campo Baeza.

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The sixteen essays explore the work of a selection of contemporary architects who have developed different interpretations and uses of memory: Andrew Berman, Renzo Piano, José Ignacio Linazasoro, Paolo Zermani, Alberto Campo Baeza, Guido Canali, Pierre-Louis Faloci, Philippe Prost, Elisa Valero Ramos, João Luís Carrilho da Graça, Miller & Maranta, Ricardo Bak Gordon, Tabuenca & Leache, Tony Fretton, Renato Rizzi, Eduardo Souto de Moura and Álvaro Siza Vieira.

The authors are part of the scientific community running the international Master of Science at the Mantova Campus of Politecnico di Milano; the selected works refer to the many protagonists of contemporary architecture who have lectured within the *MantovArchitettura* programme — a cultural project organized by the University to foster the exploration of the relationships between *Architectural Design and History*.



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