

Minimum Documentation Fiche

composed by regional working party of CAMPANIA, Italy

01. Picture of building



Depicted item: Casa Oro
source: photo by Angela D'Agostino
date: 2015

1. Identity of building

1.1 current name of building

Casa Oro

1.2 variant or former name

Casa Oro

1.3 number & name of street

27, via Orazio

1.4 town

Napoli

1.5 province/state

Napoli

1.6 zip code

80122

1.7 country

Italy

1.8 national grid reference

40°49.25'N 14°13.08'E

1.9 classification/typology

Housing

1.10 protection status & date

Protected according to the law "Codice dei beni culturali e del paesaggio" ai sensi dell'articolo 10 della legge 6 luglio 2001, n. 137 (Decreto Legislativo 22 Gennaio 2004, n. 42), since 4th November 2004, Ref.n°030679 Ministry of Culture MIBAC.

2 History of building

2.1 original brief/purpose

The house was commissioned in 1934 by Augusto Oro, a Neapolitan physician, who had bought the estate on a steep tufa cliff facing the sea and wanted to have a new house built for himself. Luigi Cosenza shared the project with Bernard Rudofsky. The house was completed in 1937.

2.2 dates: commission/completion

Commission 1934

Completion 1937

2.3 architectural and other designers

Luigi Cosenza, Bernard Rudofsky

2.4 others associated with building

Adriano Galli (structures designer)

2.5 significant alterations with dates

According to Ms Marilù Oro's report, in 1948 some refurbishments were carried out after the American military occupation of the house during World War II. The walled garden, in the west end of the house, was covered with a floor slab in order to gain some bedroom. Some interior subdivisions were made in order to rent out some flats.

After 1957, when the owners had moved to Spain, the covered garden facing the sea was closed. Some extra rooms were excavated inside the tufa cliff and some new windows were cut into the tufa lower façade.

Following the earthquake in 1980, structural reinforcements were made with no care for the original details of the house. Among them: a couple of steel beams was added under the western projecting volume and a thick invasive curb was built along the perimeter of the three terraces, undermining the clearness of the pure volumes of the house.

In 2005 the house was divided into six flats.

Between 2006 and 2008, following the enrolling in the protection list, some restoration was carried out according to a restoration project drawn by architect Andrea Cosenza in agreement with the Ministry of Culture MIBAC and signed by the Property in February 2006: the previously added beams and curb were removed; two vertical glass brick panels above the main entrance as well as two glass brick skylights along the main corridor, which had been previously removed, were restored.

2.6 current use

The house is currently divided in flats that serve as dwellings.

2.7 current condition

Good. Waiting for the forthcoming restoration works expected to be completed by the Property.

3. Description

3.1 general description

The house is developed along the cliff side and can be described through the relationship between the tufa basement, mostly made by means of excavating and re-shaping the natural cliff that hosts a lower level, and a suite of white pure volumes, which lie above the rocky face. Along the in-between space, the sheltered garden on the lower level, the covered terrace under the volume of the bedroom, the uncovered terraces on the two upper levels, the external gallery for the guests, the main interior garden are designed as a variety of external spaces. All of them have a view onto the bay of Naples.

All these different masses, voids and volumes are linked by means of longitudinal promenades.

3.2 construction

The house is composed of two main formal as well as constructive systems: the former is the tufa cliff that was arranged, reinforced with masonry retaining walls and buttresses, and excavated to gain some interior spaces and gardens; the latter is made of clear boxes, with a reinforced concrete skeleton, finished in white plaster. Some constructive elements (see § 4.1) are original and daring with respect to the usual technical skills in that region at that time.

3.3 context

The house is located along a steep cliff facing the bay of Naples, on a long and narrow plot. The main front is on the south side, facing the sea, while the almost blind rear elevation is in front a long retaining wall below the via Orazio.

4. Evaluation

4.1 technical

High value. The house is a simple and daring building at the same time. It is balanced owing to the pure geometry of its white volumes and daring for lying onto a ground that was not considered suitable for building by most people, for its functional layout and the experimental use of several, at that time, groundbreaking building elements: two slim steel columns supporting the projecting volume of the main bedroom, actually daring in the 1930's if compared to the local technical skills; avant-garde finishing material as glass blocks, linoleum flooring and thin metal profiled fixtures (known as *ferrofinestra*). Other noteworthy features are the polychrome *Vietri* glazed tiles flooring, representing the Bay of Naples, and the furniture (none is left now) specifically designed for the house.

4.2 social

High value. A new lifestyle for a modern as well as archetypical way of living matches an unconventional and innovative architectural design. The rooms are aligned along a curve, following the road above, and compose a house that contains other houses. The space is unitary, but can be lived in parts. There are separate ways for the owners, the guests and the servants, which cross each other just when and where it is strictly functional and needed.

4.3 cultural & aesthetic

High value. The house is a manifesto for a modern way of living. White and pure volumes are outlined onto the yellow ochre tufa cliff and play several variations on the theme of the relationship between inside and outside. In the house, a perfect synthesis between formal research and technical innovation is carried out, according to a concept of continuity with the tradition in Campania and of belonging to European modernity; a perfect synthesis is achieved between a

formal expression, linked to the figurative avant-garde, and the realization of the idea of architecture as an autonomous construction.

4.4 historical

The project was published in “Casabella” in 1936 and, immediately after its completion in 1937, in “Domus”. Since then it has been widely acknowledged and has become a milestone in residential architecture. The house has been a significant reference in the debate about modern and traditional architecture in the Mediterranean basin and especially in the Islands in the Bay of Naples.

4.5 general assessment

Although the house was somehow altered through times and the site has undergone major changes, the architecture is still vivid and effective in its strategic and scenic location. The most severe changes have been finally almost completely cancelled by the restorations and the general present state is quite faithful to the original.

5. Documentation

5.1 principal references

COSENZA Luigi e RUDOLFSKY Bernard, Una villa, in «Casabella» n. 100, aprile 1936.

PONTI Gio, Casa a Posillipo, in «Domus» n. 120, dicembre 1937.

COSENZA Luigi, Storia dell’abitazione, Vangelista Editore, Milano 1974.

MOCCIA Francesco Domenico (a cura di), Luigi Cosenza. L’opera completa, Electa Napoli, Napoli 1987.

DE FUSCO Renato, Posillipo, Electa Napoli, Napoli 1988.

MOCCIA Francesco Domenico (a cura di), Luigi Cosenza. Scritti e Progetti, Clean Edizioni, Napoli 1994.

BELFIORE Pasquale e GRAVAGNUOLO Benedetto, Napoli. Architettura e Urbanistica del Novecento, Laterza, Roma-Bari 1994.

GAMBARDELLA Cherubino, La casa del mediterraneo. Napoli tra memoria e progetto, Officina Edizioni, Roma 1995.

CASTAGNARO Alessandro, Architettura del Novecento a Napoli, ESI, Napoli 1998.

BUCCARO Alfredo e MAININI Giancarlo (a cura di), Luigi Cosenza oggi 1905/2005, Clean Edizioni, Napoli 2006.

STENDARDO Luigi, Luigi Cosenza: la casa Oro tra tradizione e modernità, in BECCU Michele e FICARELLI Loredana (a cura di), La casa dei maestri. L’architettura domestica del Movimento Moderno, Mario Adda Editore, Bari 2007.

BALLER Inken, HENDREICH Evelin, SCHMIDT-KRAYER Gisela, Villa Oro, Westkreuz Verlag GmbH, Berlin 2008.

VIOLA Francesco (a cura di), Villa Oro. Una ricerca per l’abitare. Mostra documentaria e grafica, Arte Tipografica Editrice, Napoli 2009.

COSENZA Giancarlo, Arquitectura *con* arquitectos. Una conversación a lo largo de cuarenta y seis años, in AA.VV., Desobediencia crítica a la modernidad, Centro José Guerrero Granada, Granada 2014.

TALAMONA Marida, La Casa Oro à Naples, “notre plus belle construction moderne dans le registre des villas”, in AA.VV., Domus Mare Nostrum. Habiter le mythe méditerranéen, Hotel des Arts Centre Méditerranéen d’Art Conseil General Du Var, Toulon 2014.

http://www.luigicosenza.it/doc/opere/03_villa_oro.htm

Archives

Archivio Cosenza, via Mergellina 226, Napoli

Archivio di Stato di Napoli, Fondo Luigi Cosenza (Sistema Informativo Unificato per le Soprintendenze Archivistiche SIUSA Archivio Luigi Cosenza MIBAC:

[http://siusa.archivi.beniculturali.it/cgi-](http://siusa.archivi.beniculturali.it/cgi-bin/pagina.pl?TipoPag=comparc&Chiave=359061&RicFrmRicSemplice=cosenza%20luigi&RicSez=compleksi&RicVM=ricercasemplice)

[bin/pagina.pl?TipoPag=comparc&Chiave=359061&RicFrmRicSemplice=cosenza%20luigi&RicSez=compleksi&RicVM=ricercasemplice\)](http://siusa.archivi.beniculturali.it/cgi-bin/pagina.pl?TipoPag=comparc&Chiave=359061&RicFrmRicSemplice=cosenza%20luigi&RicSez=compleksi&RicVM=ricercasemplice)

5.2 visual material attached

01_Casa Oro. The house just built in 1937. South elevation. [Courtesy of Archivio Cosenza].

02_Casa Oro. The model made by Amon bros., Wien 1935. [Courtesy of Archivio Cosenza].

03_Casa Oro. The building site in 1936. [Courtesy of Archivio Cosenza].

04_Casa Oro. The three southern terraces and the walled garden: volumetric layout. [Courtesy of Archivio Cosenza].

05_Casa Oro. The West front, 1937. [Courtesy of Archivio Cosenza].

5.3 rapporteur/date

Andrea Cosenza, Angela D'Agostino and Luigi Stendardo, March 2015

6. Fiche report examination by ISC/R

name of examining ISC member: date of examination:

approval:

working party/ref. n°: NAI ref. n°:

comments: