



Fig. 1. A view of the Marina Grande Bay from the Sant'Anna Institute in Sorrento, with the Vesuvio volcano and the city of Naples emerging from the morning mist.

Building Beauty Dispatch #4

June 19, 2018

In the Classroom and Out in the Field

The inaugural year for Building Beauty has come to a close. It has been a year of intense learning and making in a beautiful and inspiring place, and we want to thank all of you for being a part of it. We would like to highlight for you three projects that the students have worked on over the last couple of months: the HOME event, the bench project, and the building of a trullo as part of the summer school in Cisternino, Puglia:

HOME Design Event

Created by Duo Dickinson, this event included students from Building Beauty, the University of Hartford, and the University of San Francisco in an interactive program to explore the deeper meaning of home. Thank you very much to all Building Beauty Advisors who acted as reviewers for this special event – your participation was instrumental to the program's success. As a follow-up, the Connecticut chapter of the AIA has mounted an exhibition of the work produced for the HOME event, so if you are in the Hartford area this summer, please stop in to take a look. One of the winners of the event is Building Beauty student Ana Jancar (see her winning design below). For more information on all of the entries and links to the live events, please click on this link:

<https://buildingbeauty.org/home-summary>

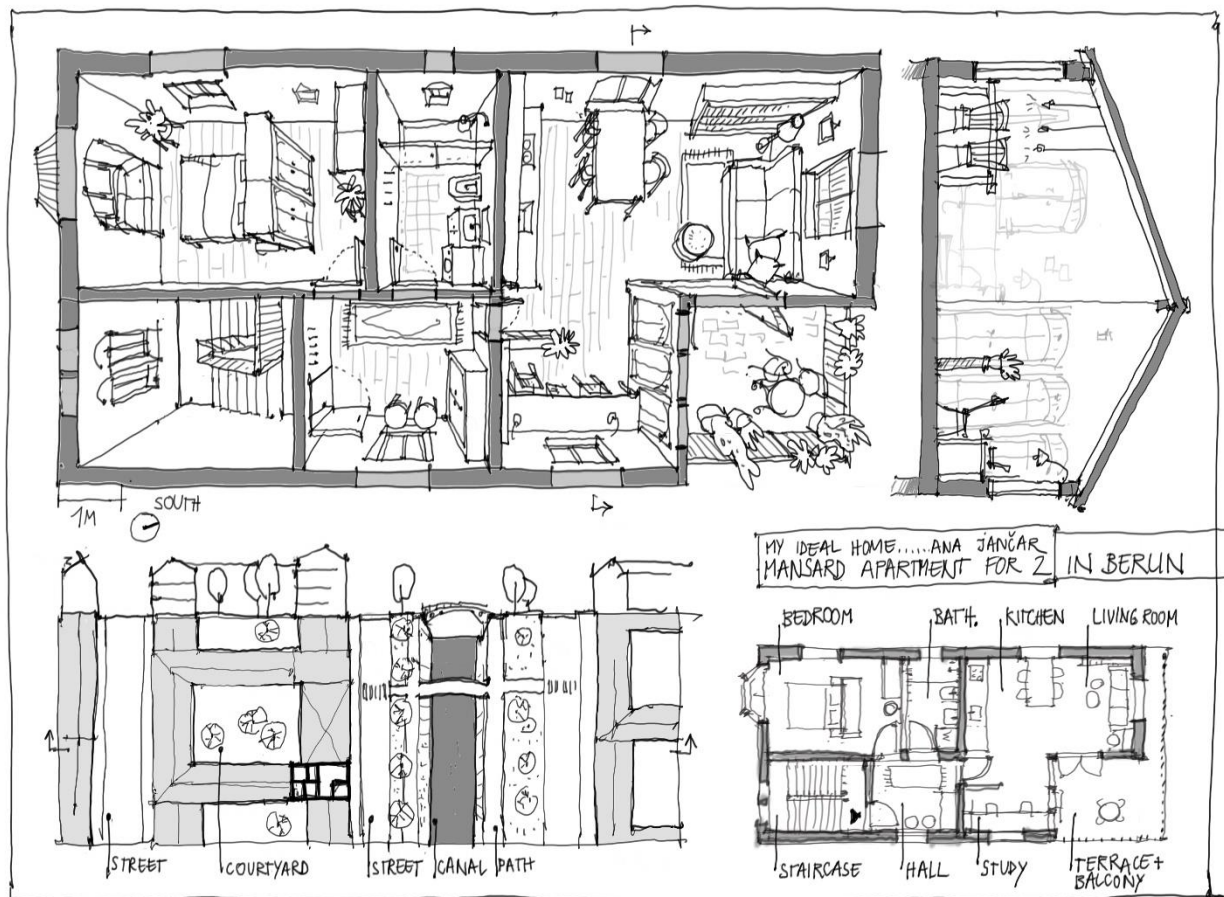


Fig. 2. Ana Jancar's winning HOME design

Bench Project

The designing and making of the bench to be presented as a gift to the garden at Sant' Anna was the final project for the students. It was a culmination of what they have learned throughout the year. They describe the entire process in the Learning Journal – here is an excerpt from it that summarizes their thoughts after the project was completed:

“With the inaugural year of the Building Beauty program now behind us, what can we see and say about building, beauty, and the building of beauty? Before we joined this program, each of us, for our separate reasons, was drawn to it by the rare opportunity to engage in both. We were excited to have found an architectural program that doesn't shy away from the topic of beauty, and dares to approach it directly; and that doesn't only approach architecture conceptually, but also through a physical engagement in the act of building.

Learning from Christopher Alexander's *The Nature of Order*, his book series which forms the backbone of this program, was profound, insightful, and transformative – on a professional level, and on a personal level. It addresses so many unanswered questions about architecture, about today's world, and about our possible place and role within it, that by the end of studying it, you cannot remain the same person you were when you started out. And yet, although indispensable, this is not where the most essential value was.

Similarly, learning and experiencing construction techniques was both fun and invaluable. From the small scale to the larger scale, we benefited from our work with carpets, pottery, tile-making, sculpting, masonry, and plastering. Beyond mere technique, we acquired a maker's mindset, and absorbed the value of careful attention. But the most meaningful insights came from the juxtaposition of the two: building *and* beauty; theory *and* practice. Their fusion together has mutually deepened our understanding of both.

Through our work on the design and construction of our bench, especially from mockups to realization, the meaning of beauty began to shine through. As our work progressed, we gradually realized that there truly is such a thing as wholeness, that it's something real and tangible, not just a theoretical concept. When it is present, it can be *felt*, just like the life of a living being can resonate with us when our eyes meet theirs. Therefore, by engaging in the act of building, of putting together stones and mortar day after day – not just menially, but in a conscious search for this quality of wholeness, beauty, and life – you eventually discover that it actually exists. You discover that you can feel it in your body, and you can feel it in your soul. And this feels quite different than only seeing it with your eyes or knowing it in your mind.”



Fig. 3. Building Beauty students enjoying the finished bench complete with a working fountain. From left to right: Harsh Desai, Ana Jancar, Alex Sabo, Michelle le Roux, Saman Moien, Bryan Mock, Luis Vidal.

Please see more photos and descriptions of the process in the Learning Journal here:

<https://buildingbeauty.org/learning-journal>

Building the Trullo in Cisternino, Puglia

The summer session took place in Cisternino, a town in Puglia, where the students and some faculty participated in a ten-day building project to build a small trullo (it takes 50 days for an experienced *trullaro* to build one that is house-sized). They went through all of the same construction steps and were able to finish in time. Here is an excerpt that describes some of their experiences:

“The construction of a trullo involves building a cylindrical exterior wall to define a square interior space, followed by a conical roof to cover it. Both are made of limestone, with one interior layer and one exterior layer, and the gap between the

layers is filled-in with smaller stone debris. But the lengthiest process is the construction of the exterior layer of the conical roof, which begins only after the inner layer of it (which defines the ceiling view) is already built. From this point on, circular rows of manually-shaped stones are added one after the other. Each stone is placed at a slight slope outwards to drain rainwater, so that the entire thickness of the cone functions as a large rainwater drainage system. The conical shape of the overall structure is ensured by using an ancient hi-tech method for determining where to place the stones: a tall vertical stick in the center of the structure, with a cord attached on top, which can be stretched all around the perimeter to mark the outer edge of the cone at all times. Making an architects joke, we couldn't help ask Mario whether it would be possible to place the stick at a different angle so as to end up with a modern variation of a trullo. His answer, which came with a puzzled face, was "Why?". That told us all we needed to know.

We managed to stretch the end quite successfully, but obviously not to avoid it. The summer school, too, had to reach an end. It was a good balance of activities, and an opportunity to spend more time together without the pressure of having to finish our bench project or our personal assignments. Isolated in this distant land for 10 days, sitting together for meals around the large communal table, or even spread around each doing our own thing on a rainy afternoon – it just felt like a continuous, large-family gathering. Now this family has to say goodbye, we each return to our separate countries and lives, and we'll have to find new ways to maintain what we've created here together. Hopefully, next year this family will grow further with new members, with new people who choose to dedicate themselves to the search for beauty – people who, in a world that thinks that beauty is unimportant, still dare to follow their hearts and remind us all that beauty, if understood and done correctly, is indistinguishable from life itself."



Fig. 4. The finished trullo.

Please see the Learning Journal for more information:

<https://buildingbeauty.org/learning-journal>

Thank you all very much for your support and encouragement this year – please do continue to spread the word about the program as we still need students for next year's class.

<https://buildingbeauty.org/>

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Have a wonderful summer!

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