

Cini Boeri



Cini Boeri (1924–2020)

Cini is the person who introduced me to architecture and inspired me to dream of designing – with joy and passion – the spaces that surround me.

During my high school studies, I went once or twice a week to help with paperwork in her studio, while observing with child-like fascination her office's hectic and inspiring atmosphere. Cini was like a volcano, sparking energy wherever she turned. She talked about each project with a shining light in her eyes. It didn't matter what the scale or function was of the project: in her view, both details and large spaces deserved the same level of commitment. Head-strong, she never seemed afraid of revolutionising the reality around her. She simply could not stop designing. And this continued until her last days.

As a woman and an architect, I would like to thank Cini for innovating the way we live and design. I also encourage my friends and colleagues to learn from her practice.

This article forms a chapter in a series formulated to shed greater light on the practices and innovations of leading women architects. The series is the result of the conversations and collective editorial work of a group of female colleagues and friends who want to highlight the work of women heroes who inspire them.

While discovering more about the œuvres and design principles of four female architects – Cini Boeri, Margaret Staal Kropholler and Kate Macintosh – we also came to realise our true motivation behind the project was a shared desire for an increased diversity of role models.

I believe that her work, particularly her interiors and house designs, has only become more relevant during this strange Covid-19 pandemic year, when our home became our whole world and kingdom. In fact, it is the perfect time for us to reclaim our own homes, not only as inhabitants but also as active users.

This edition of Local Heroes will focus on how Cini revolutionised living typologies and the objects we use in our daily life – whether it is as architects, designers or simply inhabitants. After covering some of her life and background, we will then explore her theoretical work, and how she applied this research to her architecture and design.

Biography

Cini Boeri was born in 1924 in Milan. She grew up near the beautiful Sant’Ambrogio district with its famed basilica. Here, she went to school until the war made it impossible. Raised by an anti-fascist family, her childhood was shaped by the war and her involvement in the *guerra partigiana*, the partisan war aimed at overthrowing the fascist regime.

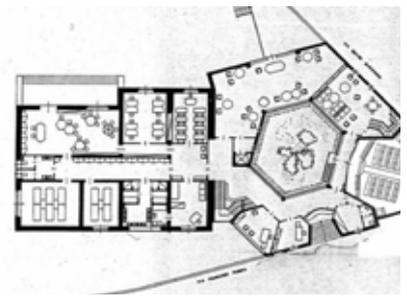
During her high school years, Cini moved with her family to Gignese, a village in the mountains close to Como, where many Milanese citizens had fled. During those years, she took part in the Resistance based from here. Civilian supporters would risk their lives daily by hiding weapons in their food or clothes, or by secretly taking in soldiers into their homes. This political background gave Cini the fearless personality of a fighter – one who would go on to battle conservative traditions and a world designed for males. The ingrained democratic values from this time would also later shape her liberal and avant-garde approach to design and architecture.

After the intense years of the war, Cini moved back to the city and started studying architecture at Politecnico di Milano in 1945. She graduated in 1951, as one of the very few female architects. During her studies she had also become a new mother to her first child. Directly after her graduation, Cini did an internship at Gio Ponti’s studio, and eventually started collaborating with Marco Zanuso in 1952.

The years at Zanuso’s office would prove formative for when she established her own practice, surrounded

“After my graduation people would call me Miss or Missus with respect, but very rarely was I called Architect.”

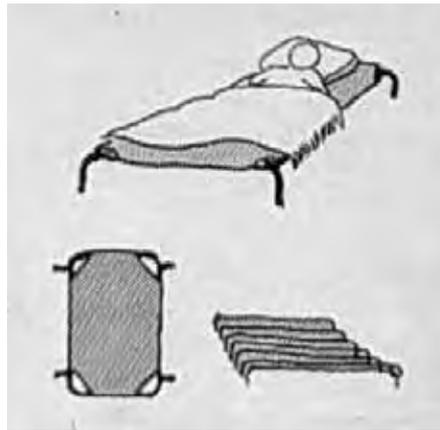
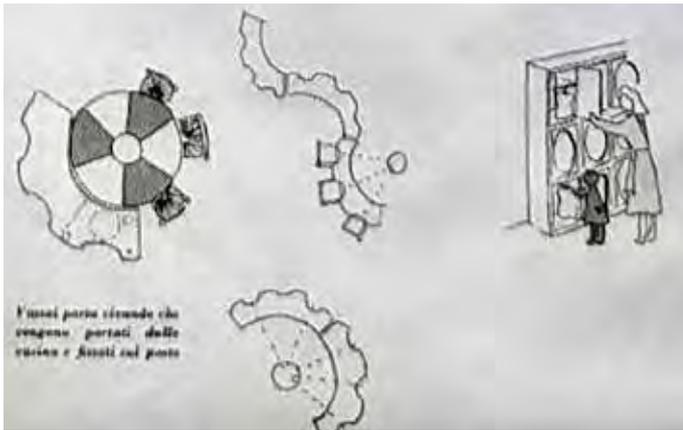
⊙ E. Rasy, *Scoprirti donne nella vita e sul lavoro*, 1996



Plan of Pensionato delle Carline (Archivio Zanuso)



Interiors of Pensionato delle Carline (Archivio Zanuso)



Kindergarten for single mothers in Lorenteggio, 1956

as she was by interesting projects and talented colleagues. Her first collaboration with Zanuso was a kindergarten for single mothers in Lorenteggio. Later, she designed the interiors of two educational facilities: Carline Institute and a kindergarten in Gubbio. As you can see from the pictures and sketches, these projects were designed and furnished ad hoc and meant to answer the needs of very specific users: children in the case of the kindergartens, and a community of young girls in the case of Pensionato delle Carline.

During these years, Cini developed her approach of applying psychological and behavioural analysis of the users as a design tool and starting point for many of her projects.

In 1963, after 12 years of collaboration with Zanuso, Cini decided to open her own studio, despite the surprise and judgement of Milan's male-oriented architecture scene. Cini wanted to pursue her own path, one which would give her the freedom to choose what she worked on, rather than being stuck in those roles considered suitable for female architects.

“We should not talk anymore about the right to own a house but the right to use a house.”

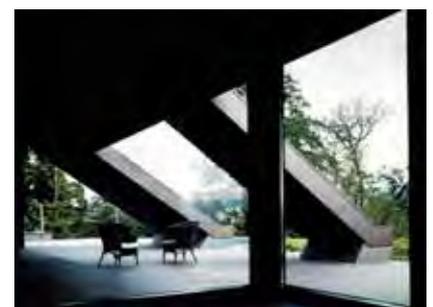
© E. Rasy, *Scoprirsi donne nella vita e sul lavoro*, 1996. From the book *Cini Boeri, architetto e designer*, compiled by Cecilia Avogadro, Silvana Editoriale, 2004



Private house Casa in Alsazia,
Porrent Ruy Switzerland, 1989.
Photos by Gabriele Basilico,
Archivio Cini Boeri

Her first jobs as an independent architect were renovations of shop interiors and a few apartments in Milan, along with some family houses on Lago Maggiore. The work was just enough to hire a secretary and a technical drawer, rent a studio, and start a new adventure. Soon, Cini started to get involved in product design, collaborating with Arflex, with whom she had previously worked at Zanuso's office. Her studio grew and so did the variety of the projects – with museums and many different design objects (see p.33-40) entering the mix. Her work culminated by winning two Compasso d'Oro, one of the most globally acclaimed awards for architects and designers.

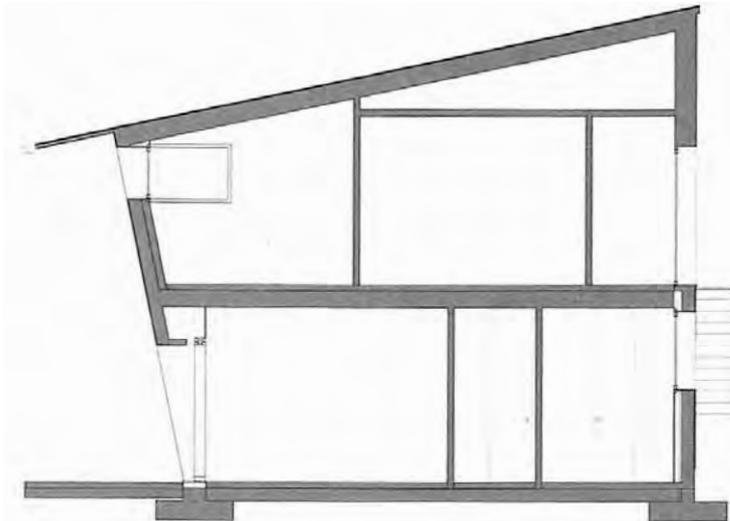
Cini's contribution to contemporary architecture and design also included theory, research and exhibitions. For example, she was involved in the Triennale of Milan exhibitions (such as 'The New Domestic Landscape', see images on p.8). Passionate about sharing her knowledge, she was also lecturer from the 1980s at the Polytechnic University of Milan where she taught the courses 'Architectural Design' and "Product and Industrial Design".



Design principles

Cini's works range widely in terms of scales, shapes and materiality. Yet, they all share similar radical principles. Before exploring her works, I would like to direct your attention to those core principles that guided her design process and choices.

At the basis of her practice, there's a clear drive to reinvent the traditional and pre-established designing typologies. This is visible in all the varying scales found in her work: from sprawling urban villas, to small apartments and the industrial design objects. The unifying element of all these projects was therefore not some formal language but rather a joyful gift of freedom to the user.



Private house La Sbandata, Sardinia 2004. Section and photo from Archivio Cini Boeri



Private house La Sbandata, Sardinia
2004. Plans from Archivio Cini Boeri



Torre Aragonese, Ghilarza, Oristano
1978-1981. Photo from Archivio
Cini Boeri

This way of designing is comparable to a political manifesto: an invitation for each inhabitant to become an active user of the object and/or space. In this sense, we can see her houses, apartments and design objects as “systems” offering flexibility and freedom. Their design encourage the user to experiment and actively make these their own. Depending on the scale of the project, this principle may be translated in various ways – for example, as independent entrances and paths for a house, or an ingrained flexibility when it comes to seating.

Another theme that was deeply explored within Cini’s practice is the previously mentioned psychological aspect of the user. She sought to answer the question: what is the intrinsic relationship between the house and its inhabitant? Cini, in her interview to *Abitare* (July 2002), stated that psychology was always the starting point of her projects. Only after thorough research and understanding the client’s personality, would she then elaborate on the different user needs, transforming them into a conceptual starting point for her designs. Her goal was to guide the client to adapt to a simple, open and light spaciousness. She wanted to push the limits of the clients’ habits to the point when they begin to question the way they live.

Lastly, I would like to point out the importance of the relationship between the building and its surroundings. The environment defines the character, atmosphere and materiality palette of Cini’s architecture. After carefully studying the characteristics of the scene where the building will fit, Cini would then define the architectonic language – daring to bring these choices to the very extreme and with every detail. Thereby, the resulting architecture seems to have been grown by the surrounding rocks, forests or hills themselves.

Theory and Practice

‘Le Dimensioni Umane dell’Abitazione’

Cini used deep theoretical research to form the basis of her practical design work. Her commitment to giving lectures and contributing to publications and exhibitions corresponded to a need to communicate and share her joy and passion for design.

“My work for a new client has always the psychological approach as starting point.”

© Interview with *Abitare*, July 2020

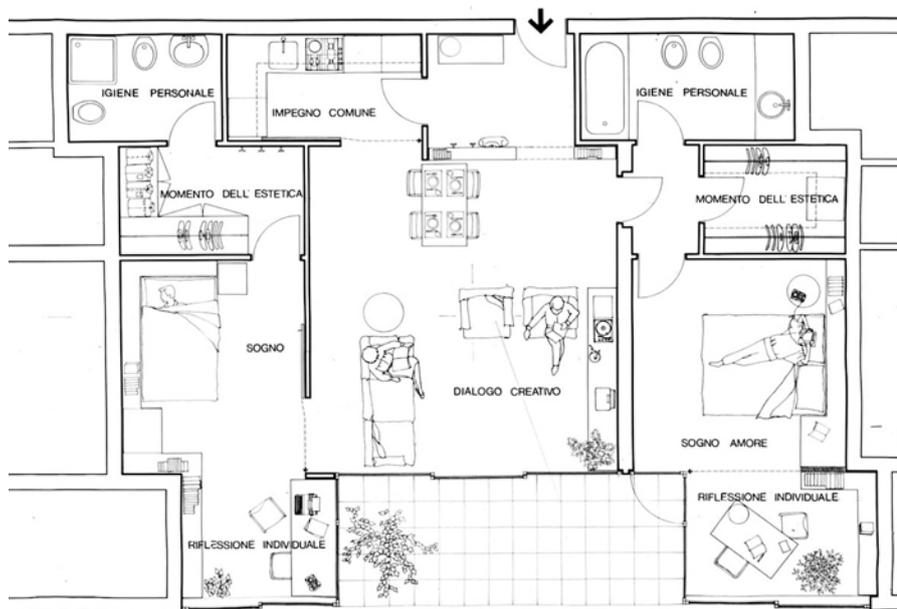


Cover of *Le dimensioni umane dell’abitazione*, written by Cini Boeri and published by Franco Angeli, 1981

Cini's research into what defined quality in housing design, gave shape to the book *Le dimensioni umane dell'abitazione* ('The Human Dimensions of Living'), which she wrote and published in 1981. She saw it as a response to the new architectural challenges of contemporary society, such as density and individual independence – themes that remain extremely relevant in today's urban planning and housing typologies.

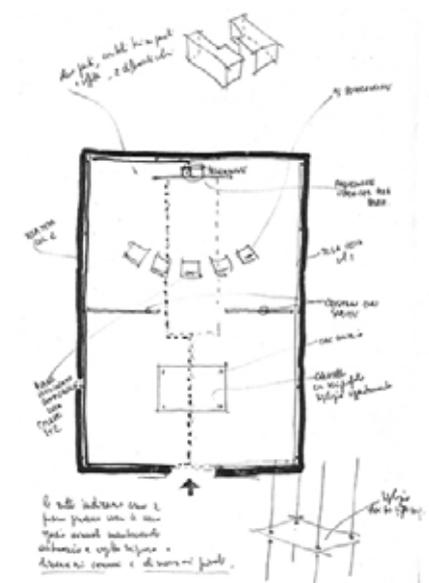
“I tried to teach my students how to work, to improve living conditions rather than to promote your own ego.”

© Cini Boeri Architetto e designer, p.94



Drawing for *Progetto domestico*, exhibition at Triennale di Milano, 1981

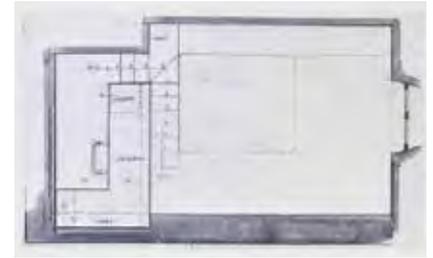
What are the minimum dimensions we need to live a quality life? How can we best organise the available limited spaces, given the new family typologies that have developed? How can we become active users of our homes rather than passive inhabitants? These are some of the questions that Cini wanted to address in her short design manual – themes that were also often the starting points for her own architectural projects.



Sketches for *Progetto Domestico*, Exhibition at Triennale di Milano, 1986

Cini was particularly interested in designing houses that met the needs of new urban inhabitants. From the 1950s, many new types of households began to populate Milan: students, friends living together as flatmates, single mothers, bachelors. But the city was not yet ready to host these varied groups. Until then, houses in the city centre were built following the conservative typology of the bourgeois family. According to the traditional Milanese apartment typology, most of the space was devoted to hosting guests. The *salone*, the living room, was the heart of the apartment – the pivot around which the whole plan revolved. As a consequence, private rooms were nothing but the residue of the representative space.

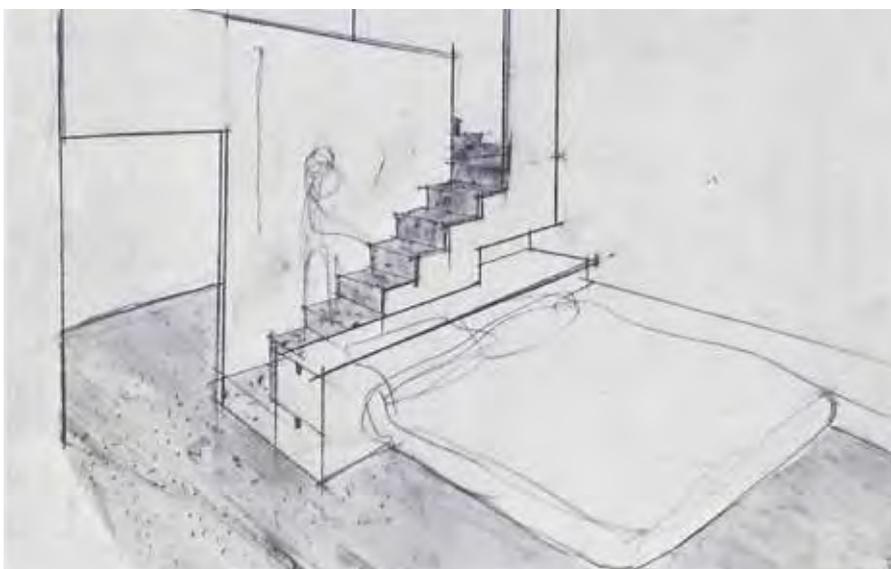
Hand drawn plans and axonometry, from the book *Le dimensioni umane dell'abitazione*, 1981



Was this typology still relevant for the inhabitants of Milan? How could the architect optimize the apartments in a very dense city, in order to provide a comfortable home for everyone? And lastly, how can architecture adapt to the new needs of the city and its inhabitants?

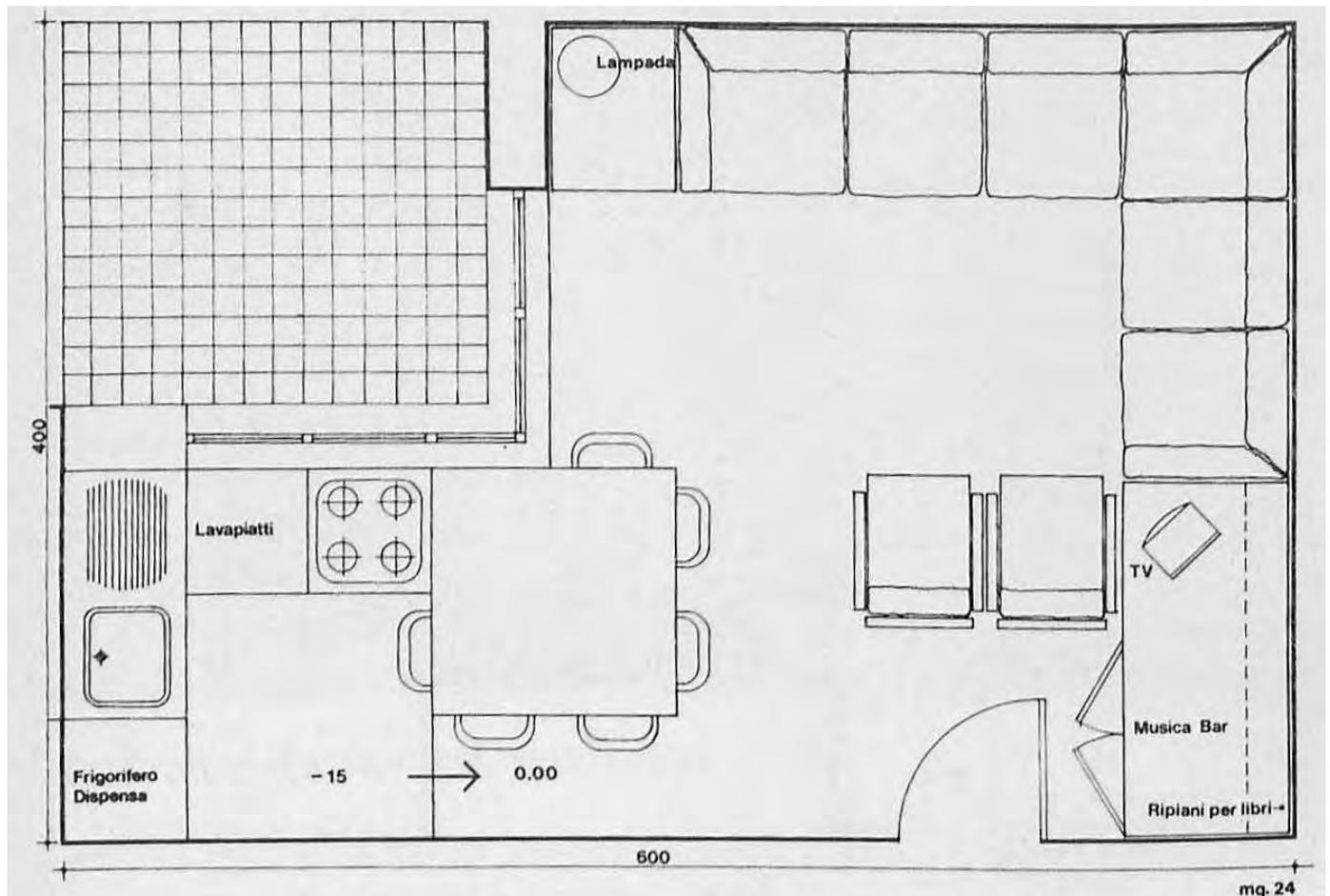
In order to answer these questions, Cini's first revolutionary step was to shift the priority from representative to private spaces. The architect was radical in pointing out that this Milanese *salone* typology was but a bourgeois mask that we must remove. According to Cini's point of view, the actual inhabitant must come first, not the visitor.

So, the question became: *How can we turn representative rooms into living spaces, and thereby reclaiming the home for the inhabitants?*

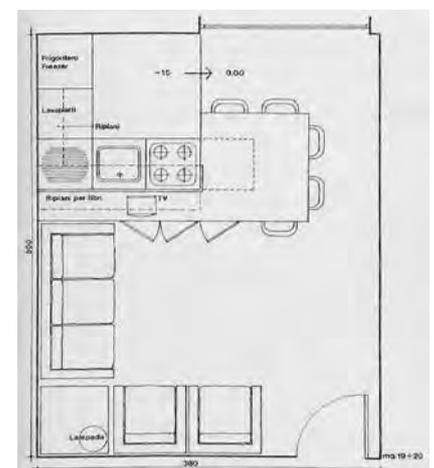


Hand drawn studies of a “tuttosoggiorno”, a hybrid living room, *Le dimensioni umane dell’abitazione*, 1981

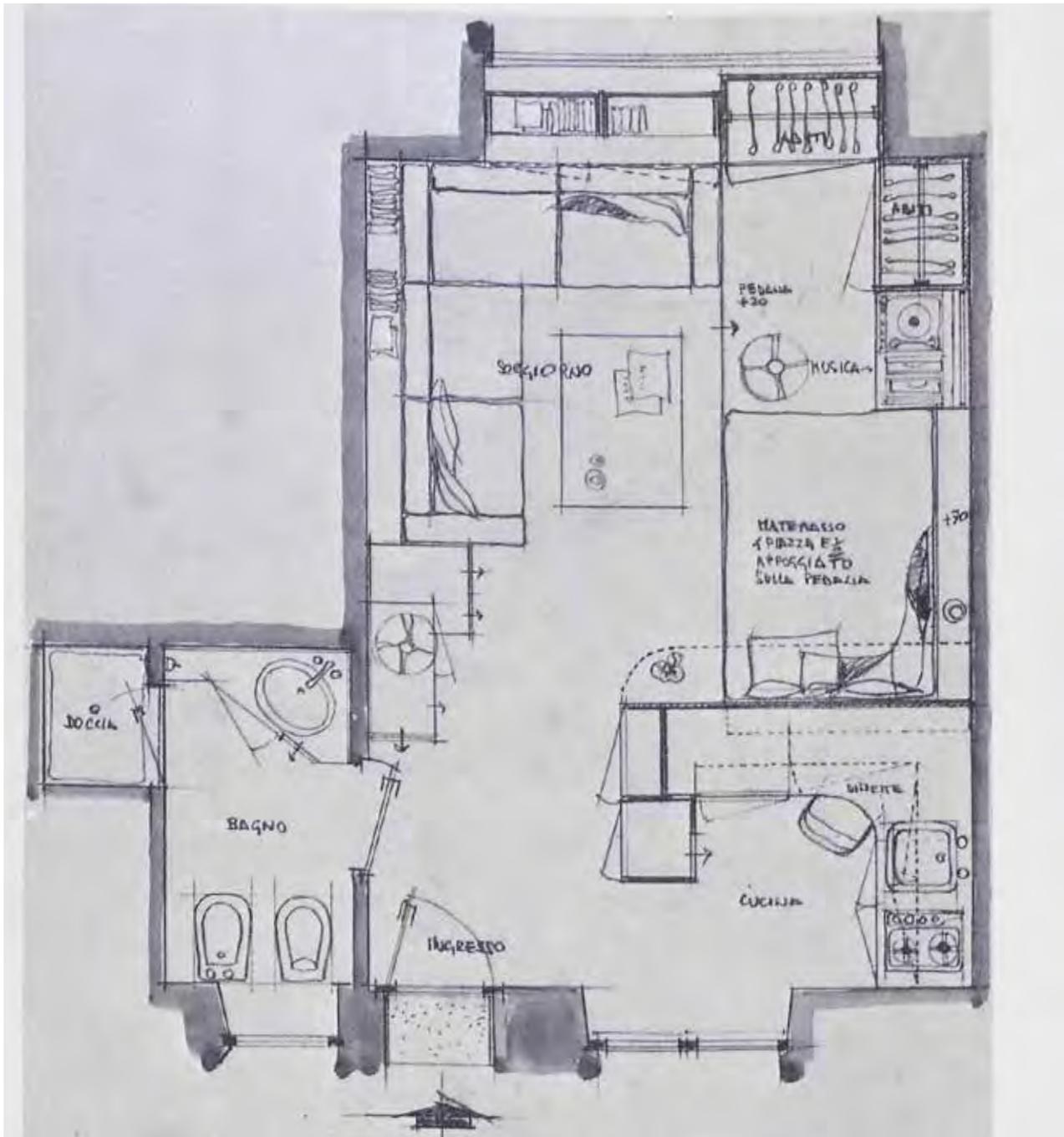
According to Cini, spaces should continuously transform and adapt to the needs of contemporary times – to be a hybrid conglomerate that each inhabitant can reinvent at will. Through sketches, schemes and texts, Cini showed us various ways to reinvent the representative spaces, integrating them with daily activities. Instead of separated and closed rooms, she proposed multi-use spaces that are open and generous. By combining different activities in the communal areas, we can save space and make each room constantly alive.



Instead of the rigid *salone* typology, Cini proposed a *tuttosoggiorno*, a “whole living” room space. Such a living room would incorporate both entrance and kitchen, where guests can either sit or take part in the cooking ritual – a concept which was ground-breaking for Italian society at the time. She moulded a multileveled and multifunctional space, that offered a flexibility in daily household functions thanks to sliding doors and mountable furniture. According to this vision, the living room should be a playground, ready to adapt and host a varied number of activities.



Apartment for a single man, Milano, 1971, 27 m². Hand drawn plan, from the book *Le dimensioni umane dell'abitazione*, 1981



“*Tuttosoggiorno*” is a hybrid space that hosts multiple functions in an extremely compact manner: each design specifically answers to the activity that the inhabitant performs. Whether it’s cooking, sleeping or listening to music, each moment of private life deserves to have its own inviting and useable corner. In order to create spatial variety in such a limited open space, Cini introduced variations of height as a recurrent element in her designs.

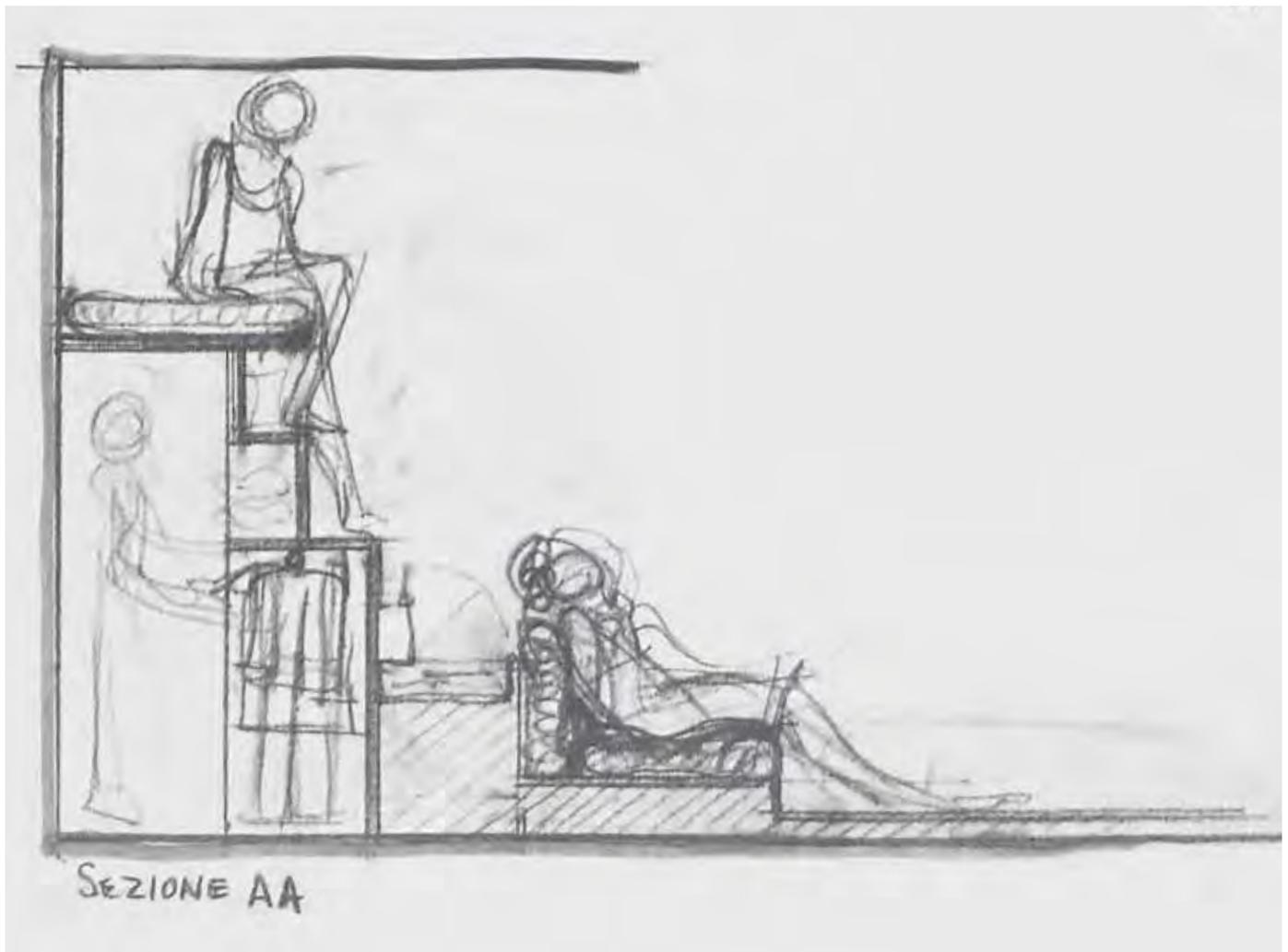
Many of Cini’s first works were commissioned by new kinds of citizens in Milan – young professionals, single people, hybrid families – which pushed Cini to reinvent the formal principles of housing typologies.

Hand drawn sections, from the book *Le dimensioni umane dell'abitazione*, 1981



Through the revolutionary eyes of Cini, the house becomes a system, which can be tailored for its user's needs – rather than a copy of a traditional typology imposed through generations. The ultimate goal of such a hybrid house is to give room to that most precious of commodities: private spaces. At any moment inhabitants should be able to find comfort in their own company with spaces where they can rest, read, listen to music, make love, argue or study. Having the option to retreat was the pivot around which the modern Milanese apartment should revolve, according to Cini.

As a result, much attention was now given to the most simple and recurrent daily activities. In the case of the smallest apartments, this meant creating nooks, for example by playing with heights or corners, to ensure that there was quality space for different types of activities. In a way, Cini as an independent woman architect was not only claiming space for herself but for each inhabitant of a particular house – thereby transforming architecture into a political manifesto.



La Rotonda

Isola della Maddalena, 1966

In 1965, Cini was asked by a client to choose a spot on the island of La Maddalena in north Sardinia to build their holiday home. On a little Boston Whaler motorboat, she explored the coast of the beautiful island, meter by meter, until she found what she thought was the perfect spot: Il golfo dell'Abbatoggia.

The house, located on a steep slope, rises from the sculptural Sardinian rocks. Its mass, seemingly shaped by the strong winds, is defined by the central patio. This is the heart of the house, around which the other spaces are playfully organised. The communal living area acts as a pivot for two autonomous microcosms: the family nucleus (on the left part of the circle) and the guest areas (positioned on the right part of the circle).

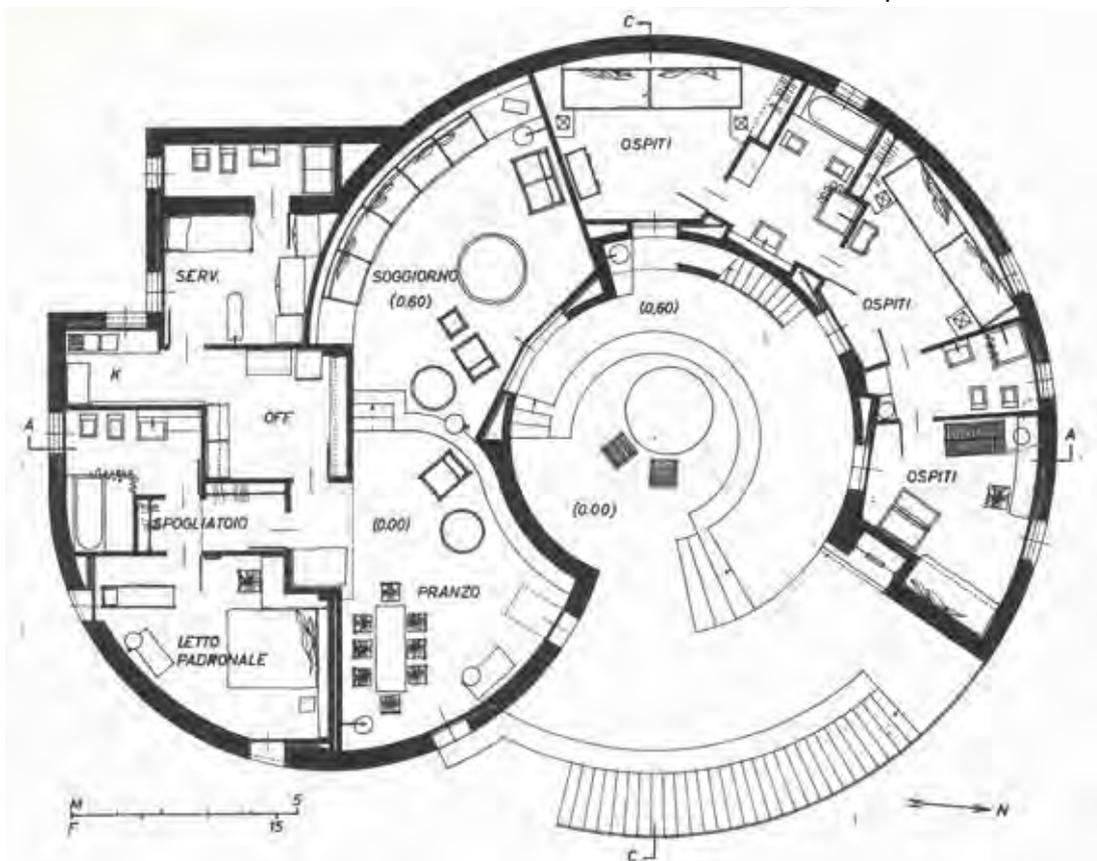
Directly under this inhabited floor, a volume functions as water reservoir, which not only solves any water shortages during the dry summer months, but also allows the house to rise further above the surrounding rocky landscape.

Family Houses

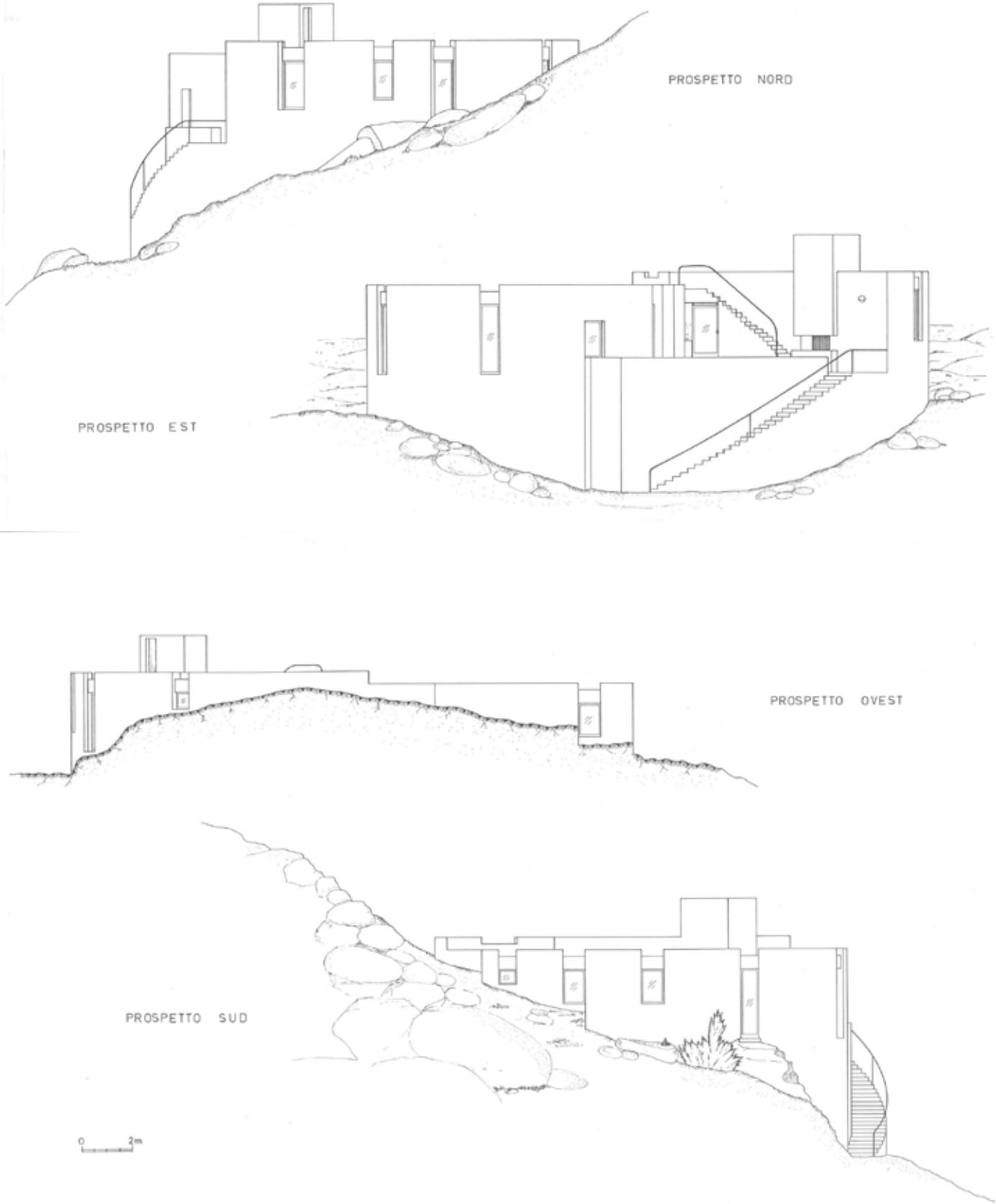
In this selection of projects, we will explore larger living typologies. They involve different kinds of users, such as bigger families and the inclusion of guests. Special attention is also given to the relationship between the building and the landscape.



Villa la Rotonda, 1966, photos and plan from Archivio Cini Boeri



Casa La Rotonda La Maddal'ena
(Sardinia) facades from 1967,
archivio Cini Boeri



As a consequence, the bottom of the building presents no openings, and thereby enhances its massive and sculptural presence.

The small windows, like vertical cuts in a fortress, are carefully designed with a recessed lintel, reminiscent of the crevices in the surrounding rocks. Larger openings are placed in the patio, sheltered from the wind and offering a view of the bay.

The walls, thick and rich in texture, include a system of circular stairs that allows the inhabitants and visitors to experience the landscape from different heights – roof, patio or terraces. To make the connection with the landscape even stronger, grinded local rocks were added to the plaster covering the solid concrete structure. The horizontal surfaces are painted with a lighter textured plaster to keep the building cooler during the warm summer days.



Villa la Rotonda, 1966, photos from Archivio Cini Boeri



Casa Bunker

Isola della Maddalena, 1967



Casa Bunker, 1967, photo of the front facade, Archivio Cini Boeri

Directly after La Rotonda, Cini built a house for her own family in the same gulf. This time she chose a more exposed location, closer to the water and where the gulf opens up to offer a view of the island of Corsica. This positioning and the irregular terrain defined the building's shape, character and dynamism.

In order to protect the inhabitants from the strong winds, the house has a compact shape – as “a stone between stones”. Island residents named this house “the bunker”, which was a fitting name for this domestic fortress built with tilted and thick concrete walls. The positioning of this massive volume naturally created three exterior communal spaces, each answering to the needs of a different moment of the day. The veranda is a natural extension of the kitchen, enclosed and protected by the rocks. The wooden terrace offers a prominent view of the gulf and is surrounded by typical

“I was my own client, and more than anything else there were also my three kids. This house reflected the quality of those most beautiful days we lived there, in absolute autonomy and with the great joy of being together.”

© From the book *Cini Boeri, architetto e designer*, compiled by Cecilia Avogadro, Silvana Editoriale, 2004

Casa Bunker, 1967, patio and living room, Archivio Cini Boeri



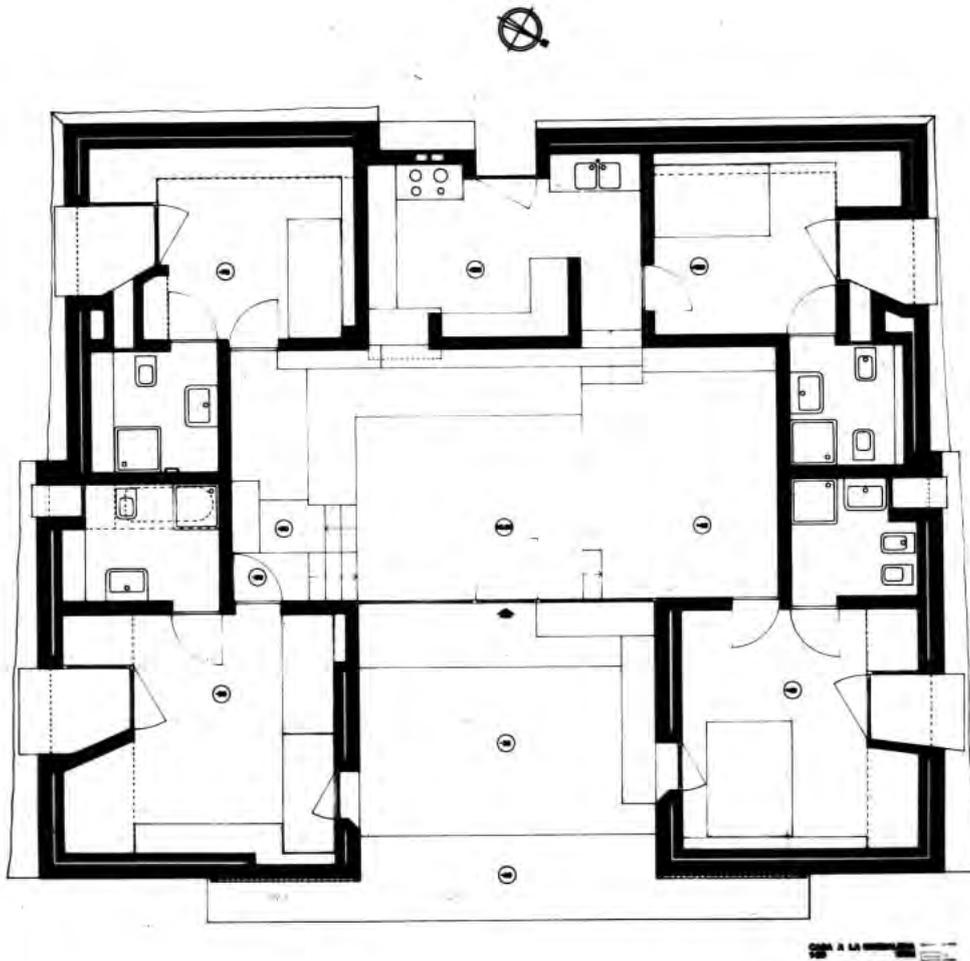
Sardinian low vegetation. Lastly, the patio, acting as an extension of the living room, is once again the connecting element between the different individual spheres. It is carved within the mass of the volume, giving an embracing “C” shape to the house.

Cini gave special attention to each inhabitant’s independence. Each room has its own toilet and access to the outside. In this way, the guests or different family members had complete autonomy. Thereby, sharing time together became a choice rather than a forced interaction. To enhance these different “microcosmos”, each room is located on a slightly different level, following the irregular heights of the landscape. In this way the landscape enters and shapes the house, creating variety and giving intimacy to the different levels.

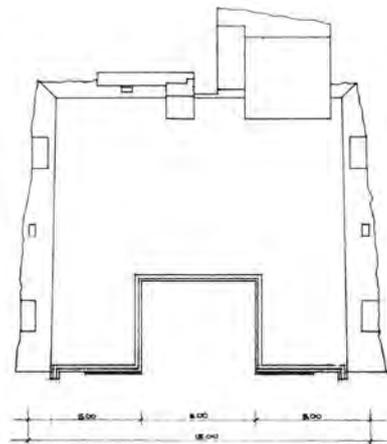
The living room acts as the heart of the house by bringing together all height variations. The different levels also meant the architect could play in creating sitting areas, intimate niches and customised bookshelves.



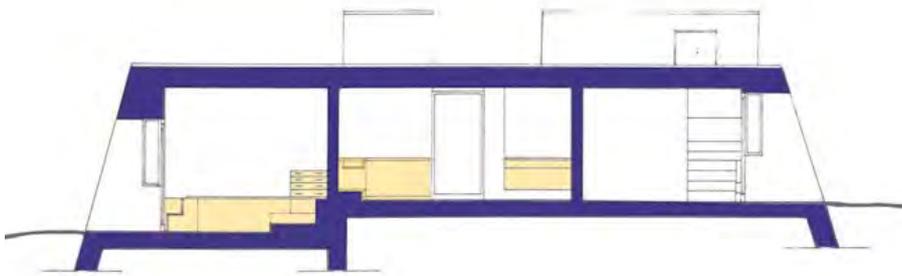
Casa Bunker, 1967, plan,
Archivio Cini Boeri



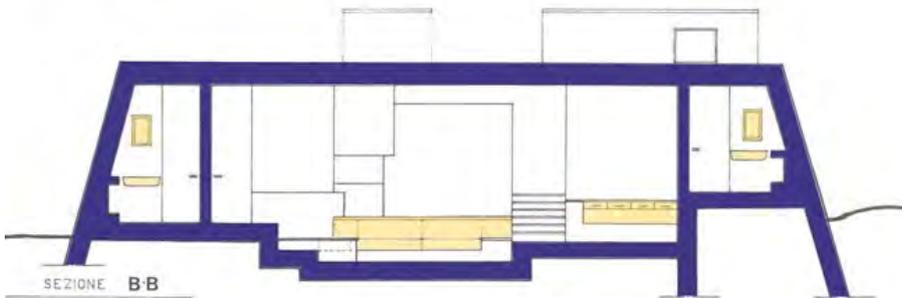
Casa Bunker, 1967, roof drawing,
Archivio Cini Boeri



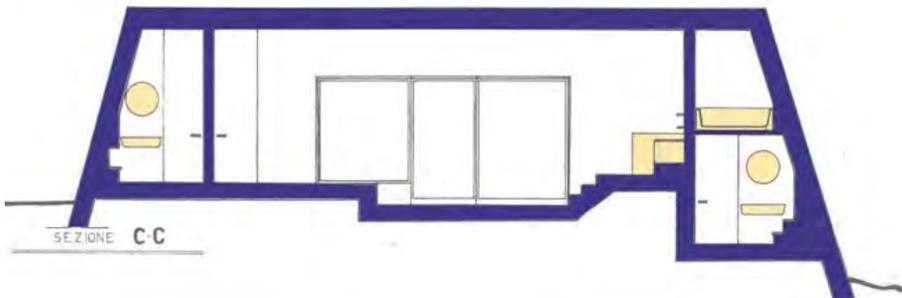
Casa Bunker, sections,
from Archivio Cini Boeri



SEZIONE A-A



SEZIONE B-B

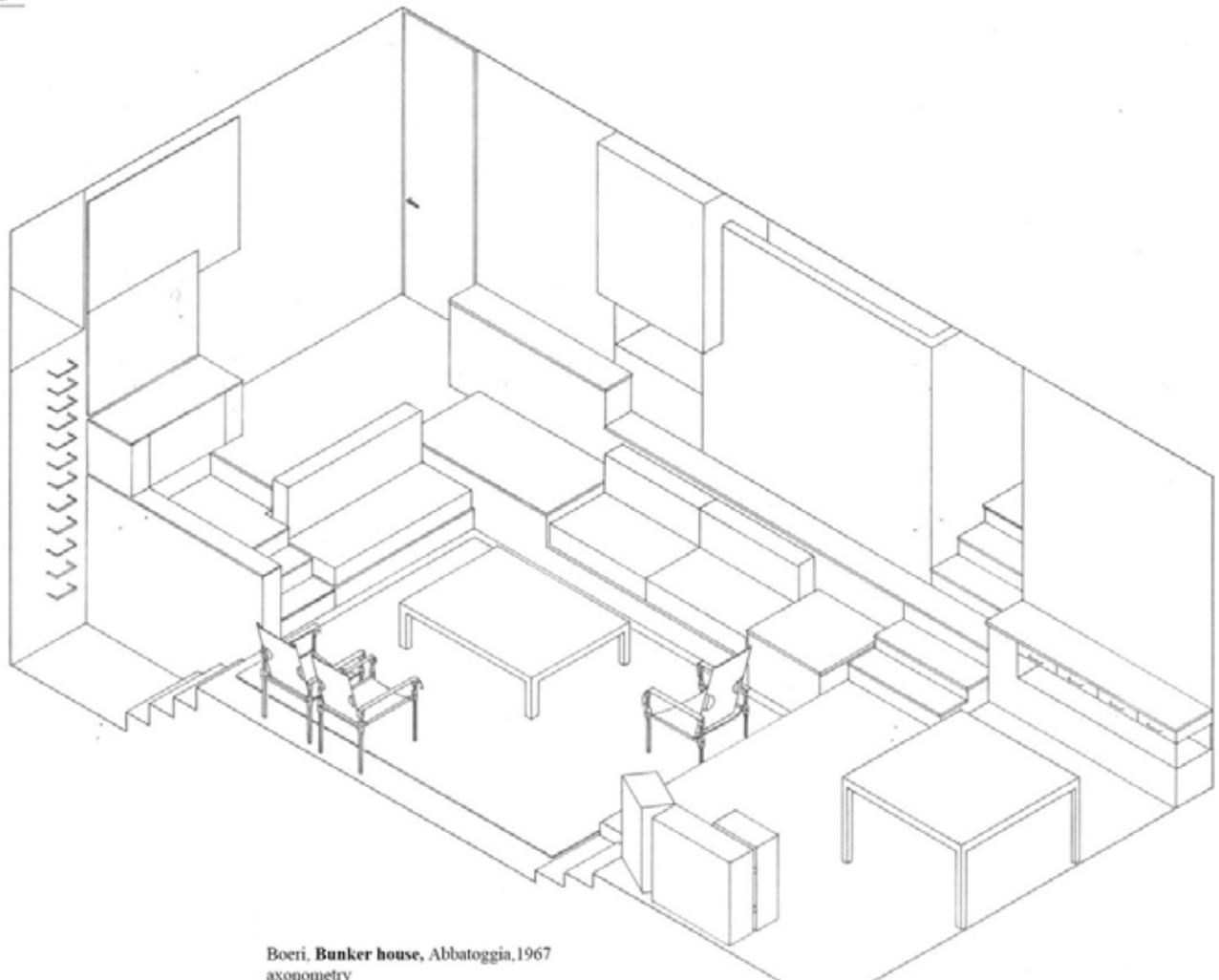


SEZIONE C-C



946. Drawings completed for Corso di Arredamento e Architettura degli Interni II, Prof.
1987-1988.

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Boeri, **Bunker house**, Abbatoggia, 1967
axonometry

R. Besana, A. Nava, Richard Neutra, Kaufmann Desert House, 1946, Drawings completed for Corso di Arredamento e Architettura degli Interni II, Prof. Gianni Ottolini, Arch. Vera de Prizio, Politecnico di Milano, A.A. 1987-1988.

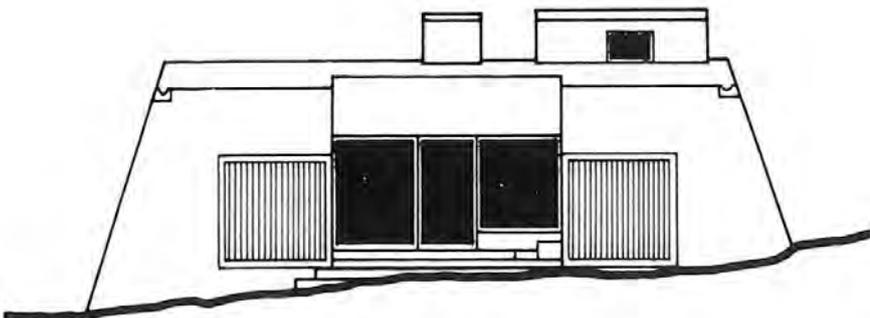
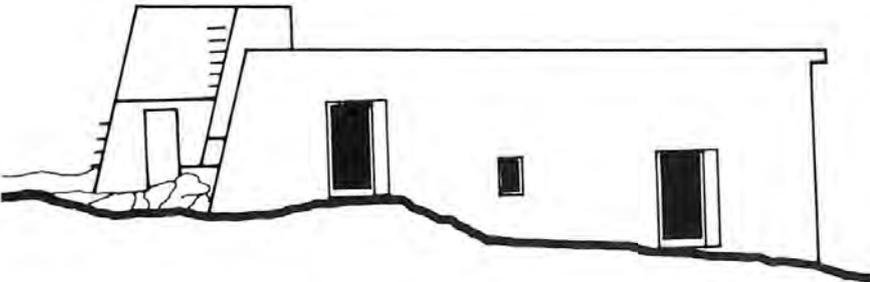
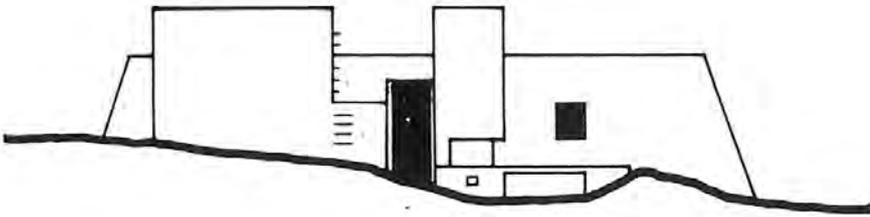
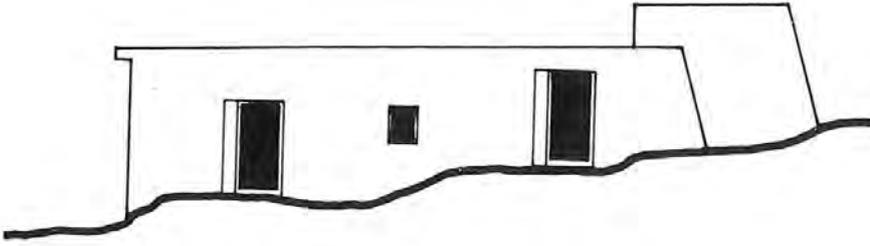


Casa Bunker, 1967, axometry
and photo of the front facade,
Archivio Cini Boeri

Casa Bunker, 1967, photos of the building process, from the book *Cini Boeri architetto e designer*, Silvana Editoriale, 2004



Casa Bunker, 1967, facade drawings,
Archivio Cini Boeri



“It was built with very few means, therefore with essential materials and taking advantage of all the different levels that the rocks were offering.”

© From the book *Cini Boeri, architetto e designer*, compiled by Cecilia Avogadro, Silvana Editoriale, 2004



The massive walls are painted in a very dark grey, reminiscent of a nautical varnish. The openings, as you see in the drawings of the facade, vary in proportion and positioning, playfully adapting to the different heights of the terrain. The frames are positioned on the interior side of the facade, carving a deep hole and enhancing the massiveness of the thick, sloping walls. The frames are dark and filter the sun through the typical Sardinian wooden shutters.

Casa nel Bosco

Osmate, 1970

La Casa nel Bosco, even though it's aesthetically very different from the previous family houses, clearly shares their formal principles. Once again, the house is shaped by its surroundings, in this case it being the heart of a birch grove close to Varese. When designing the building's shape, Cini consciously chose to destroy as few trees as possible. Therefore, the plan revolved around the pre-existing birches – embracing them.



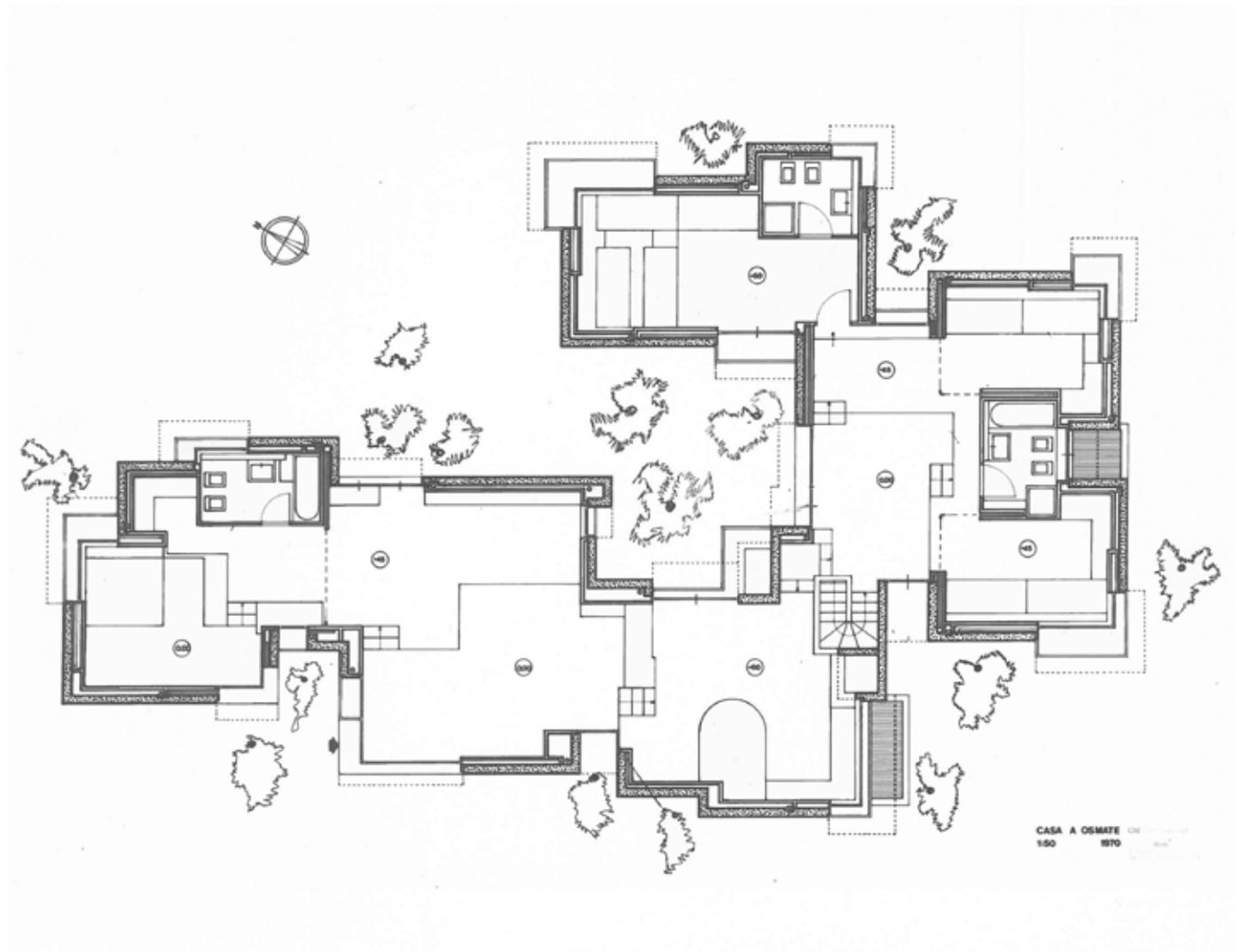
Casa nel Bosco, 1970, facade's photo Archivio Cini Boeri

This labyrinthine shape allows the architect to minimize the internal partitions: the perimeter concrete wall functions both as an exterior skin and as spatial organiser. When extra partitions are needed, the architect resolved them with big sliding surfaces or height differences. The result is a fluid and continuous sequence of spaces, which play with different views and glimpses. As in “La Rotonda”, the plan offers two poles: one for children and/or guests, and one for the parents.



Casa nel Bosco, 1970, interior photos, Archivio Cini Boeri

This was a very innovative organisation of space: any Italian family in the 1960s would expect to have sleeping areas of parents and kids close to each other. Cini, strongly believing in the importance of giving family members their own independence, once again rejected this traditional spatial organisation. The big windows, with different heights and proportions, are positioned both in the open corners and in the niches, creating different compositions.



“Such a beautiful forest, that I decided not to disturb it. The plan of the house had to unfold in between the birch trunks, letting the image of the trees enter the house.”

© From the book *Cini Boeri, architetto e designer*, compiled by Cecilia Avogadro, Silvana Editoriale, 2004

Casa nel Bosco, 1970, facade's photos, Archivio Cini Boeri



The facade reflects the verticality of the trees through vertical marks of the formwork, which was made with planks. This rich texture visually connects to the birch bark. Many interior details seem to be in playful dialogue with the trees and the forest.



Casa Nel Bosco, Osmate 1969.
Coloured photo from the book
Cini Boeri architetto e designer,
curated from C. Auogadro for Silvana
Editoriale, 2004. Black/white photos
from Archivio Cini Boeri

Casa su tre livelli

Vigolzone, Piacenza 1992–93

The chosen location for the house was a hilltop, next to an abandoned farmhouse and a beautiful tree. The initial intention was to keep the pre-existing brick building and integrate it with a larger building. But the brick walls crumbled during the construction and the architect decided to rebuild the brick walls.

The building is made of two parts, with each having its own strong visual language and materiality. The first, as tribute, has the same red bricks of the original farm house. It also inherits the same positioning and width (6 meters).

The second building, maintaining the same width of the brick building, has different materiality and floor heights. Located on a natural slope, it is built from wood. The two buildings are connected on the higher floor by a suspended veranda. Depending from where the visitor approaches the house, the views of the building are very different. Yet all views are reminiscent of the “casolare” typology. This is a very traditional homestead typology and very common to the Italian countryside. The very compact building offers two independent nuclei. The interiors are extremely simple, both in terms of partitioning and in the choice of furniture.

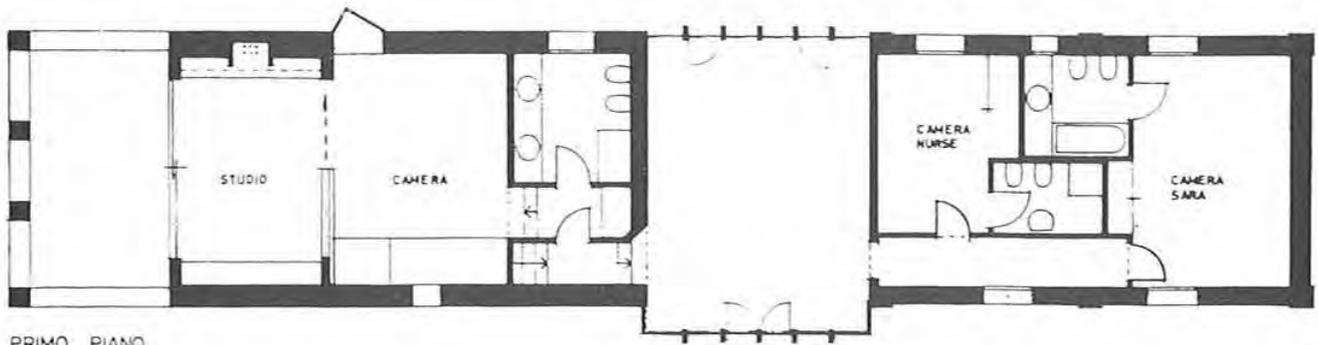


Casa su tre livelli, 1992, photo of the pre-existing “casolare”, from the book *Cini Boeri architetto e designer*, Silvana Editoriale, 2004

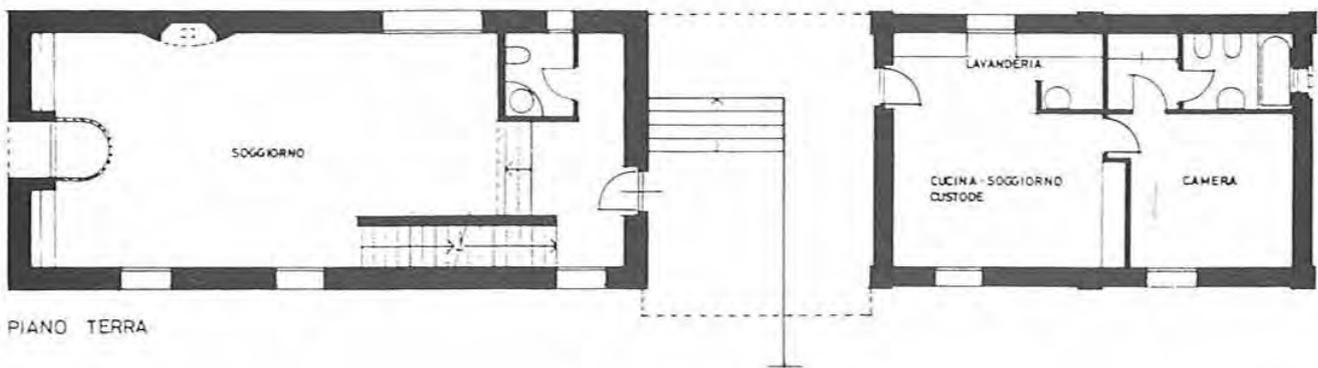
Casa su tre livelli, 1992, photo of the long facade, Archivio Cini Boeri



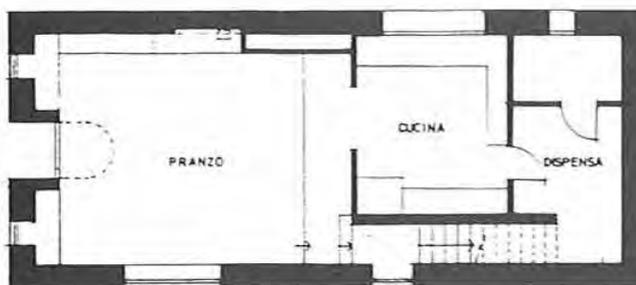
Casa su tre livelli, 1992, plans of the villa, from the book *Cini Boeri architetto e designer*, Silvana Editoriale, 2004



PRIMO PIANO



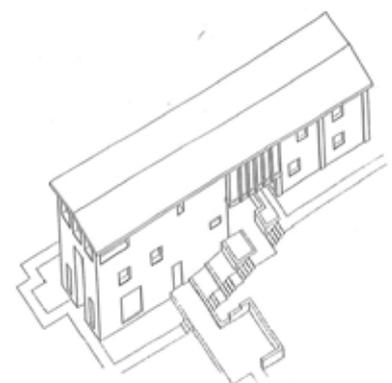
PIANO TERRA



SEMINTERRATO

The position of the openings creates a playful composition on the long facade, with square shapes that offer painting-like views of the landscape.

The narrow wooden facade facing the valley has elongated and vertical openings, which emphasise a symmetrical composition, as you see in in the photo on the next page,



Casa su tre livelli, 1992, axonometry, from the book *Cini Boeri architetto e designer*, Silvana Editoriale, 2004

Casa su tre livelli, 1992, facade photos, Archivio Cini Boeri



Industrial Design

This concluding article focuses on works of industrial design, which the architect produced throughout her life. These objects echo her larger architectural work: despite the difference in scale and function, they still display the same principles of flexibility and freedom in functionality.

Cini's adventure in industrial design started during her years at Zanuso's office when she became involved with Arflex and designed furniture for various projects. Once she opened her own studio, she continued working with Arflex, and extended her collaborations with brands such as Knoll and Gavina. Her project Strips was awarded an Compasso d'Oro in 1979 (later she won a second Compasso d'Oro for her entire career).

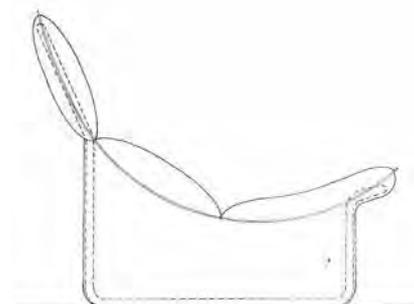
Each object is an invitation for the client to explore new and more simple ways to live – to *use* these objects instead of just *owning* them. In this sense we can talk of Cini's design as pure *avant-garde*, because of her desire to reinvent traditions and reconnect each object to its essential functionality.

Part of her research into the *essential* and *functional* was inspired by the needs of contemporary production. The market of the post-war era was looking for objects that could be produced in a simple way and sold to a wide range of clients. However, we find this quest for flexibility in both her economical and more luxurious objects.

In this sense Cini spoke of her projects as “systems” rather than objects: systems that users could freely adjust and make their own through daily use, and adapt as our own lifestyles evolve. In addition, Cini managed to combine this intrinsic functionality with a certain playfulness and joy that invited the user to live life in a lighter and more enjoyable manner.



Lampada 602, 1968, Arte Luce, made from PVC tubes, Archivio Cini Boeri



Section for seating Taboga, Arflex, 1972, Archivio Cini Boeri

“Design and architecture travel on parallel paths. They should both answer to social, ethical and technical principles, while responding to the constant changing of life.”

⊙ From the book *Cini Boeri, architetto e designer*, compiled by Cecilia Avogadro, Silvana Editoriale, 2004

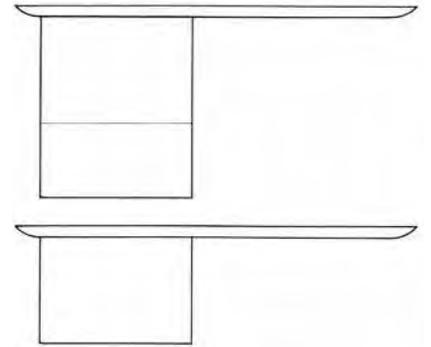
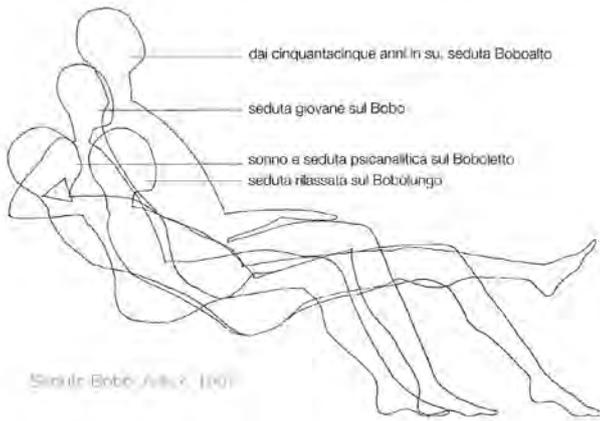


Table Lunario, 1970, Archivio
Cini Boeri

Lamp Ditto, 1982, Tronconi, Archivio
Cini Boeri

Bobo, Bobolungo e Boboletto
Arflex 1967, drawing and photos
from Archivio Cini Boeri



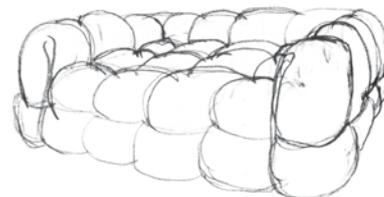
“A playful dress-up
game, soft and
practical.”

© From the book *Cini Boeri,
architetto e designer*, compiled by
Cecilia Avogadro, Silvana Editoriale,
2004

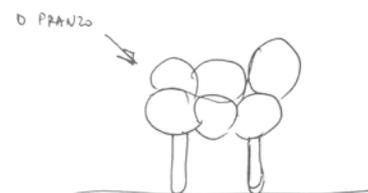
Strips

Arflex, 1972

Sketches and photos of Strips, 1972,
Arflex, Archivio Cini Boeri



POLTRONCINA
DA ALBERGO o CAMERA LETTO



The Strips series was commissioned by Arflex as a collection of objects that would be easy to produce, sell and adapt to different functions within a compact apartment. With this series, Cini was seeking to disconnect elegant sofas from its roots as a symbol of the bourgeois conservative class.

In order to fulfil these goals, Cini started her design process inspired by the softness of an old-fashioned duvet. The soft surface is transformed into an extremely practical covering, which can be easily removed, washed or changed thanks to its playful and contemporary zipper.

Her research resulted in a series of beds, armchairs and sofas made of polyurethane foam blocks, without any rigid structure and with a removable hinged cover. Simple to fabricate, they can adapt to different functions, solving the challenges around small apartments. For example, a sofa can be unzipped to become a comfortable bed.

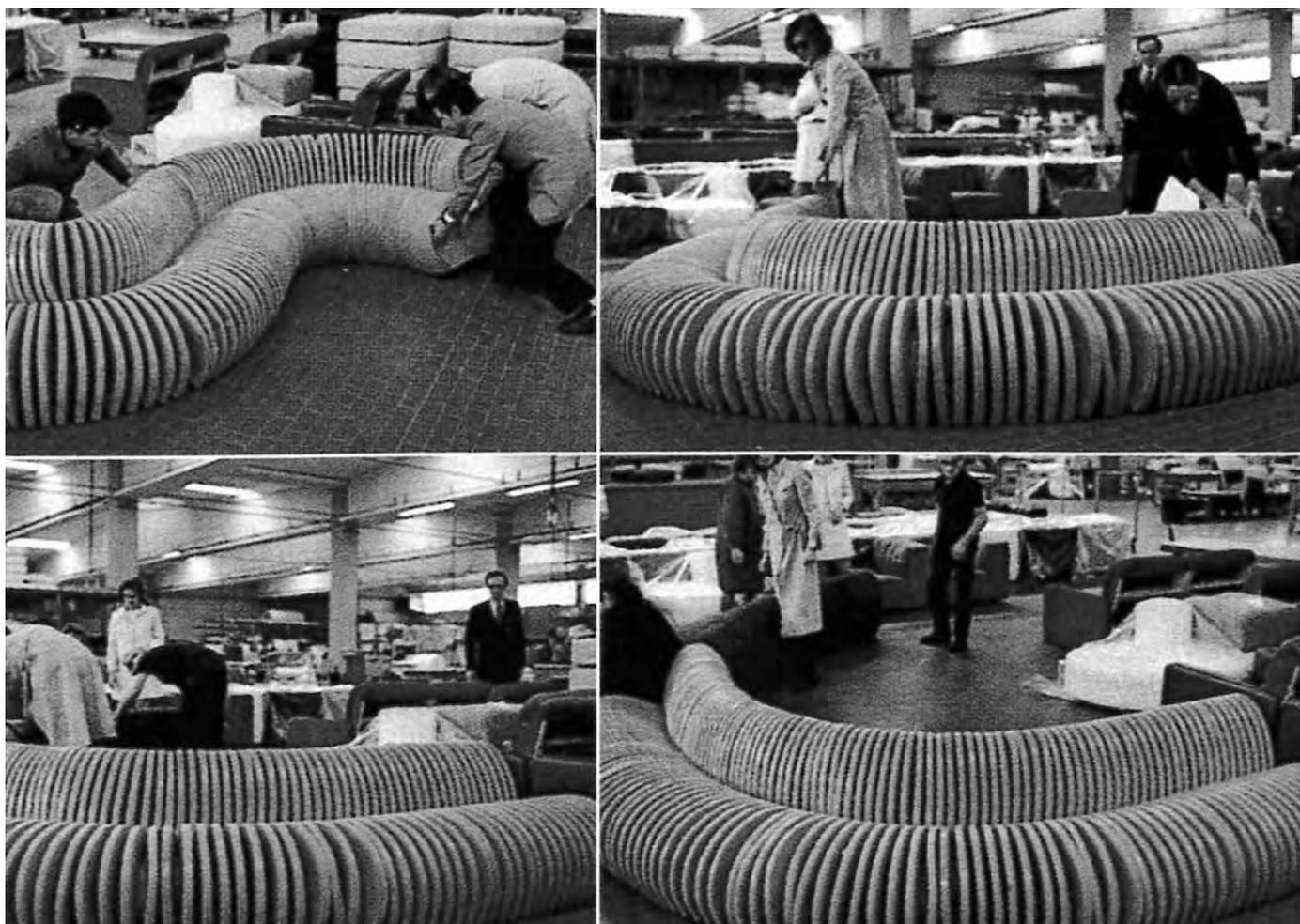
As a whole, Strips was embracing, comfortable and bare of any unnecessary decorations – a playful response to the rigid, expensive and over-decorated sofas of the traditional Italian living room.



Serpentone

Arflex, 1971

Serpentone, photos, 1971, Arflex,
from the book *Cini Boeri architetto
e designer*, Silvana Editoriale, 2004



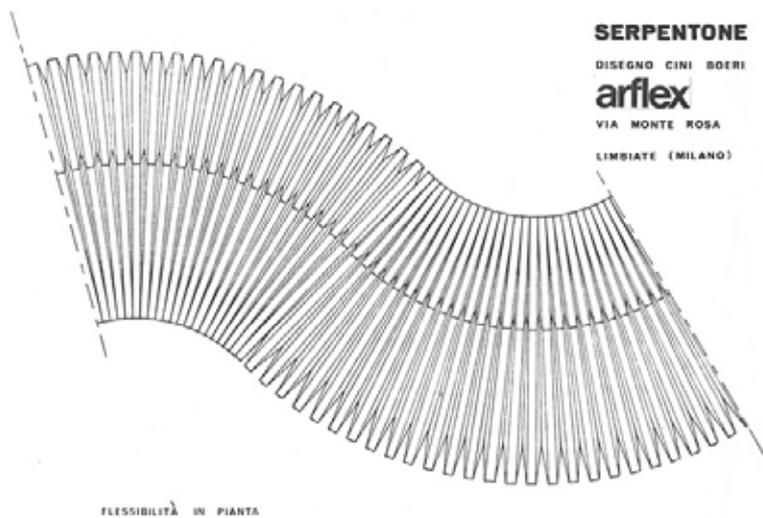
This continuous sitting section was sold by the meter and resulted from Cini's research into simplicity and essentiality in design. Almost a political design manifesto, it sought to be non-superfluous and answer real needs of the public – “a public who wears blue jeans and had thrown away their ties”.

When proposing this project to Arflex, the architect asked for the company's commitment to produce a vast series or nothing at all. As a result, the “Serpentone” could be sold in lengths of one meter or three kilometres, and could be laid out straight or curved depending on the desires of the customer.

In terms of materiality, the architect chose to experiment with polyurethane foam because of its softness, flexibility and low cost. Its lamellar section allows the object to become flexible and create concave and convex curves.



Serpentone, photos and plan, 1971, Arflex, from the book *Cini Boeri architetto e designer*, Silvana Editoriale, 2004



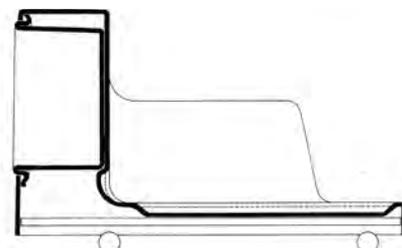
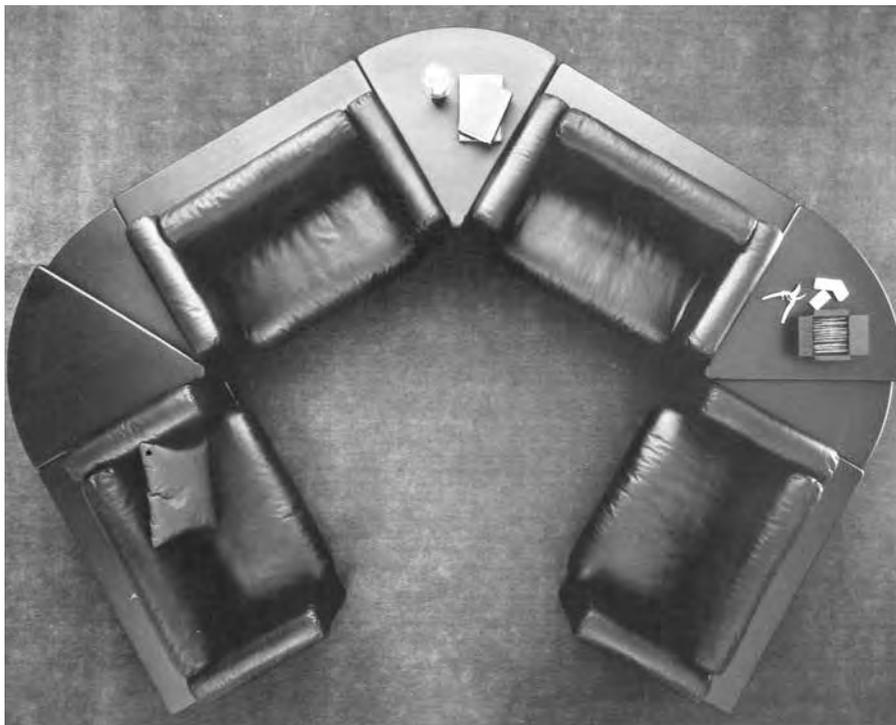
**“This is my proposal:
to never possess
objects, but rather
to use them.”**

© From the book *Cini Boeri, architetto e designer*, compiled by Cecilia Avogadro, Silvana Editoriale, 2004

Gradual Systems

Knoll, 1970

Gradual System, plan and photos,
1971, Arflex, Archivio Cini Boeri



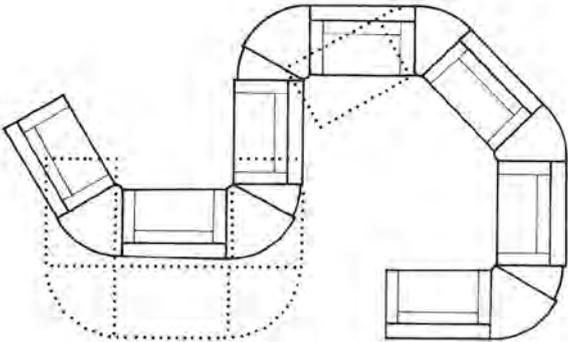
Designed by Cini for Knoll, the Gradual collection continued to explore the endless modularity of Serpentone but then with a more refined design and materiality.

The name suggests the flexible nature of the project, which aims to adapt to the constant change of the users' life and needs. Each sitting element is connected by a triangular side table which functions as a hinge.

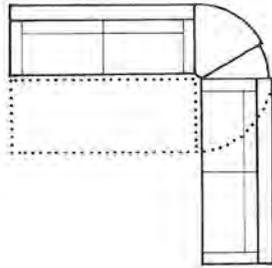
The sitting arch is adjustable, which allows the furniture to adapt to the space or the kind of intimacy the user wants to achieve. Once again, the user is invited to play an active role in how the object is used. You could not just buy or sit in "Gradual Systems", you had to make it your own through adjusting, repositioning or shaping.

"I have always tried to offer something different than what is already available on the market, something more fitting to the inhabitant's life – a life that keeps on changing."

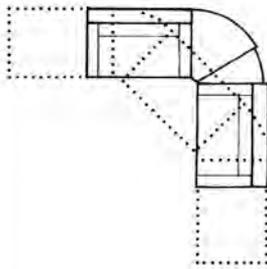
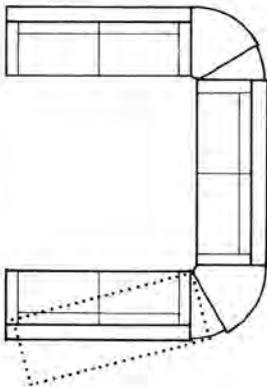
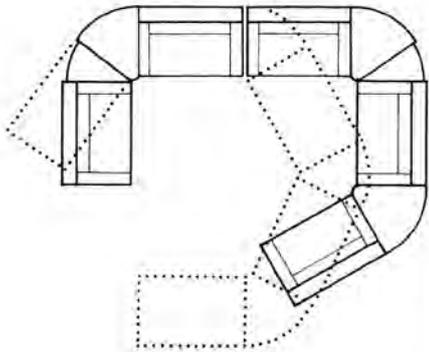
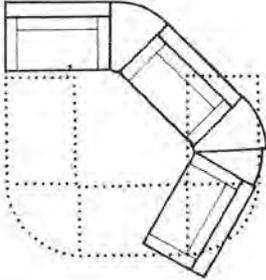
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Gradual System, Knoll



Knoll International 1970



Conclusion

Unfortunately, this article was published too late for Cini to read it. She passed away in September 2020 at age 96. Nevertheless the timing of this publication is quite special. It accidentally coincides with my leaving of Office Winhov, a collaboration that started seven years ago, through a Local Heroes article written by Joost Hovenier.

This beautiful circle is closing, and yet I bring with me all I learned from my heroes. I wish Joost and Cini were here to read this article. Thanks to Joost, Jan Peter, Uri and my passionate colleagues for these years full of joy, dreams and details.

I would also like to give a special thanks to the Boeri family and their archive, and to the wonderful team of women who supported me while writing this article. Our communal search for role models opened my eyes and brought me to pick up my pen and tell Cini's tale. I am looking forward to hearing about your role models.



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