

**LORENA ALESSIO DESIGNS THE RETREAT FOR SILENCE**

**IN THE ASTI HILLS**

The Retreat for Silence is a project in progress by architect Lorena Alessio, commissioned by the Salus Hominis Foundation based in Piovà Massala (Asti). It foresees the realisation of a structure where the Guest will be able to live an experience in contact with nature, in total privacy and isolated in silence in a place that calls for meditation.

The Retreat for Silence will be located in Montiglio in the hills of Asti and will be a structure without foundations to allow it to be easily moved. The very light material that is poplar plywood perfectly matches the aim of flexibility.

The project stems from significant design experience that the architect Lorena Alessio has gained over the years, particularly when studying innovative poplar buildings. These buildings are made of structural plywood without screws and are designed to hold up with an interlocking joint system called PoplyHouse. The most significant and emblematic illustration of this experiment is the new 160 square metre company showroom in Canale di Cuneo of the Piedmontese company E. Vigolungo s.p.a - a manufacturer of poplar plywood panels, which won first prize at the AESS (Agency for Energy and Sustainable Development in Modena) - as a new sustainable building. A project that resulted in the book published late 2021, 'Designing with Structural Plywood. From Accupoli to PoplyHouse', which paved the way for a variety of design hypotheses to implement the use of the PoplyHouse system, including the **Retreat for Silence**.

The Retreat for Silence was conceived as a completely autonomous and self-sufficient building with photovoltaics, solar energy, water collection and a battery in case of energy shortage. It was decided to create a building without foundations that would stand on the ground thanks to metal roots and that, once dismantled, could be relocated.

The Retreat for Silence has a surface area of 25 square metres and evokes a profound religious symbolism in its exterior and interior design. Furthermore, it was reinterpreted with a contemporary approach, adapting the typical Romanesque characteristics of the region to the functionality and shapes aimed at optimising the building's performance. The shape therefore echoes those of Romanesque architecture in the Asti area and, as in Romanesque architecture, the hermitage turns its 'apse' eastwards to catch the morning light. On the inside, the shapes are asymmetrical to relate the building's internal functions. The decision to arrange the living spaces on the south side is again linked to the necessity of enjoying the light and warmth of the sun during the day. The space inside is further intended for meditation: here, light arrives from above and from the various sides of the building in an embracing manner.

Inside the hermitage, the space is therefore open and bright, the walls can slide, the partitions are made of transparent fibreglass mesh and the light effects recall those of the church. The hermitage is designed to be fully equipped with the necessary services.

The space is developed within a tripartition enriched by symbolic elements: the first block connects the exterior to the interior of the building. It is accessed through an entrance designed with a staircase that can serve as a seating area for contemplating the surrounding beauty and enjoying contact with the external landscape. The entrance is a filter between inside and outside.

The central space is dedicated to personal care: there is a bathroom area and a table positioned close to the wall, a space for reading and studying. A sliding door separates the room from a third area, the sacred area, located at the back of the building, this semi-hexagonal space is characterised by its embracing atmosphere with a tatami. The brightness of the sacred area is enriched not only by the central glass window in the apse, but also by two roof openings on the north and south sides that create striking light effects.

The Retreat for Silence is being designed as part of the larger 'PoplyHouse' project, which offers a new construction solution for modular structures, suitable for different functions.

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