



Gypsy Architecture

With texts by Renata Calzi and Patrizio Corno and photographs by Carlo Gianferro. 160 pp. with 180 ill., 242 x 297,5 mm, hard-cover, English
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The fact that there is Gypsy architecture may surprise quite a few people, for Gypsies are regarded as nomads who roam through the world and settle now here, now there, never stay long in one place, and consider everything that normal citizens find important to be an unreasonable restriction of their freedom. Nevertheless, in southeastern Europe, there exists a remarkable architecture created by Gypsies. It seems to have been created from a dream: Unreal, abstruse, and colourful, it is a composition of all the architectural styles of this world.

Uninfluenced by any deeper knowledge of architectural culture, each family head chose the style, size and finishings on the basis of his own personal tastes or memories of travels, houses and things seen in other countries. The result has been the creation of bizarre and fantastic jumbles of buildings that it is hard to classify in terms of western stylistic features. Very often the houses are the result of enormous jigsaw puzzles created from an assembly of images or photographs of various different buildings, and their execution precisely follows these crazy guidelines, perhaps because they are incomprehensible to those carrying out the project.

Otherwise, how could one possibly explain Indian-style roofs crowning neoclassical buildings, mansard roofs on structures of improbable style, Frenchified Chinese pagodas, heterogeneous assemblies of diverse and contrasting elements.

The structures, the villas gradually soften their bizarre and fantastic imagery the closer they are built to European countries. Undoubtedly, the cultural influence of neighbouring countries already immersed in the culture and lifestyle of Europe has helped to »contaminate« the owners and bring their dwellings, the expression of their wishes, more into line with the ruling culture.

What, however, remains staggering is the quality of the execution of the complex decorations, of the architectural elements and buildings that are very often contrasting, of widely differing façades surmounted by steeping roofs of no practical use whose only function is to represent, through their lack of proportion and absolute needlessness, the financial and social power of the family. Besides pieces of sculpture that are undoubtedly ritual and symbolic and originating from Indian culture, suns with spiny rays, various forms of pinnacle, geometrical moons, zoomorphic decorations, the tops of the roofs bear metalwork inscriptions giving the date of building and the name of the family or that of the wife, symbolizing a desire for display and the proclamation of ownership.

Renata Calzi and Patrizio Corno are architects based in Milan. Carlo Gianferro is a photographer living in Rome.

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Panorama of the town of La Ciuria, Romania, from the terrace of the house of Bulibasha Stanescu.

Gypsy houses in Ivesti, in the Romanian province of Moldava.



Detail of the façade of an enormous, castle-like villa in Liesti, which is occupied by a family of just three. Several families of birds happily occupy the roof.



Small houses with colourful applied decorations in Ivesti.

Small houses with colourful applied decorations in La Ciuria.

