

Written and photographed by JEAN-PIERRE GABRIEL

FORCE OF NATURE

Floating above the Ionian Sea on the island of Paxos, Octopussy villa is a gentle architectural manifesto authored by Gestalt Architects. Accessible by boat, the house submits to the landscape, reconciling built form with outer beauty.

This page the pool area of this home on Paxos island; landscape design by Siegbert van Reeth.





These pages in the living area, vintage **sideboard** by Jorge Zalszupin; vintage **armchairs** by Paul Geoffroy; F675 Butterfly **chair** by Pierre Paulin for Artifort; **artwork** by Jean Dubois.



From a boat, the full scope of the project can be grasped. The architecture, encompassed by the landscape, stretches, unfolds, coils; the building inserted between the garden and forest. “We wanted to offer a total experience that gently invites us to leave our daily lives behind,” states the team at Antwerp-based studio Gestalt Architects.

To fully experience Octopussy villa, an all-terrain vehicle departs Gaios, the main port of Paxos. It takes the steep paths that descend a hill until a staircase is discovered — it opens onto a patio. From this moment on, the interior and exterior merge, as if the living space represented a transition between patio and garden, the latter announcing the blue sea.

“We are on the eastern coast of Paxos, facing the mainland,” says Gert Voorjans, who co-designed the interiors. “The magic of Paxos begins in Corfu. Get off the plane, set foot on the airport tarmac, reach the port in a few minutes. The taxi boat is waiting for you, the captain wakes up the engines. The two-hour crossing takes you away from the land before approaching the green island, so-called because it is covered with a million olive trees.”

Paxos is an ocean of greenery surrounded by the waters of the Ionian Sea. The geographical location was a determining factor in the implementation of the villa’s architecture. The edge of a cove on which the house is anchored is oriented north-east. Not only does the sunrise on the mainland-side offer moments of great beauty, but it also means the house is quickly shaded. “From a purely technical point of view, we were able to provide natural ventilation, hence the large sliding bay windows that disappear into the walls,” Voorjans explains. This management of fresh air without intervention is an ‘anti-tech’ manifesto. It is reinforced by the flat green roofs which, it is proven, lower ambient temperatures by several degrees.

The living space and most of the bedrooms face the sea. The gardens were designed by Siegbert van Reeth, and the vegetation begins right next to the house, confirming a desire to immerse the building in its environment. To complete this verdant immersion, Jean-Philippe Demeyer of JPDemeyer&Co was called upon. Demeyer designed the ceramic tiles that were made in Italy, their shades of green animated by orange notes that frame the sea-facing openings and form an additional link between land and water.

For Voorjans, “Paxos is unlike any other Greek island... we are far from clichés. This state of mind is amplified by the Gestalt architects, who have deliberately erased the built form. We imagined the interior fittings in this sense: the marriage of monastic sobriety and luxury, the latter residing in the purity of the materials that is revealed to the touch. The oat-coloured wall coating, Designs of the Time linens and handcrafted bronze door handles.”

“In other words,” he says, “we have placed ourselves in an atypical Greece. We have extracted ourselves from the canons of colour, from the usual blue and white, and instead drawn inspiration from nature. Each room has its own colour: the sage, the foliage of the olive trees, the ochre of the rock. It is clear that the relationship with the outside world is omnipresent.” Laying on one’s bed, he says, “your gaze is immersed in a small oasis”.

The kitchen has two openings, one leading towards the patio, the other is a window, above the benchtop and a teak sink, that frames outer views of eucalyptus and prickly pear cladodes. Says Voorjans: “[Architect] Edwin Lutyens was known for placing wooden sinks in the pantries adjoining kitchens. Beyond the beauty and feel of wood, he saw practical sense in it... fewer dishes were broken than in a stone or ceramic sink.” Dialogue with the owners was fluid, even when confirming these Arte Povera or ‘poor art’ choices. In fact, Voorjans designed their two other houses — one on the Belgian coast, the other in Antwerp.

Leaving this place before boarding the boat back to Corfu, the legend of Paxos comes to mind. In Greek mythology, Paxos was born from a passion. Poseidon, with a blow of his trident, separated the island from the mainland and took it a few miles south to create a ‘love nest’ that he shared with Amphitrite, his wife. gestalt-architecten.be

Opposite page in the outdoor area with a view of the Ionian Sea, ceramic tiles designed by Jean-Philippe Demeyer.





These pages in another view of the living area, bronze **coffee table** by Maison Armand Jonckers from Zaventem Ateliers; vintage **armchairs**; **lampshade** customised by Gert Voorjans; **artwork** by Jean Dubois.





These pages, from left on the patio, pedestal tables from Soho Home; olive trees, Judas trees, eucalyptus and prickly pears. In the dining room, vintage teak table; 1970s Brutalist chairs; artwork by Johan van Dijck.







These pages, from left one of the villa's bathrooms. In one of the bedrooms, Designs of the Time **bed linen**; custom **reading light**; vintage Scandinavian **armchair**; vintage kilim **rug**; **artwork** by Jean Piaubert; **wall sculpture** by Minoru Kano.





These pages the outdoor area overlooking the pool.