

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
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Honors theses

Treehouse: a room for thought

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Living in a treehouse is an intriguing topic that adds old but at the same time current questions to housing. Dwelling on a tree, an idea bound to a primitive and romantic image, can reflect wishes of estrangement from ordinary life to rediscover more natural paces and to fulfil a feeling of escape really present in contemporary society, more and more characterized by virtual spaces and trips. It represents a return to a childhood dimension; it's a privileged observation point, lonely but not isolated, since there's a real contact with the world. The idea is that this place belongs to everyone both in reality and in fancy.

Dwelling is a fundamental matter in architecture and it always faces the problem of the relationship between *man and nature*. This is a relevant, ever present topic since today's environmental problems persistently pose the question of a healthy way of life and of respecting nature; a nature intensively exploited by now. In the political and cultural field the want of a man-sized dwelling, encouraging a pleasant running of time and being ecologically sustainable, is making its way. This basic theme introduces closely related questions such as the use of materials, the natural resources exploitation and the waste problem. All these questions must be fit into a general thinking about methods and structural materials, eco-compatible and safe for man and nature.

Consequently my thesis develops on two sides: the investigation of the deep reasons for a need of living different from the usual one on one hand, and the structural materials on the other hand.

Wishes of escape and mobility applied to dwelling dimension were born and developed in the 60s and the 70s, during the radical architecture and the architectural nomadism avant-gards. The ideological and social conditions of that time are certainly different from those which underlie today's revival but that movement laid the basis for new living designs.

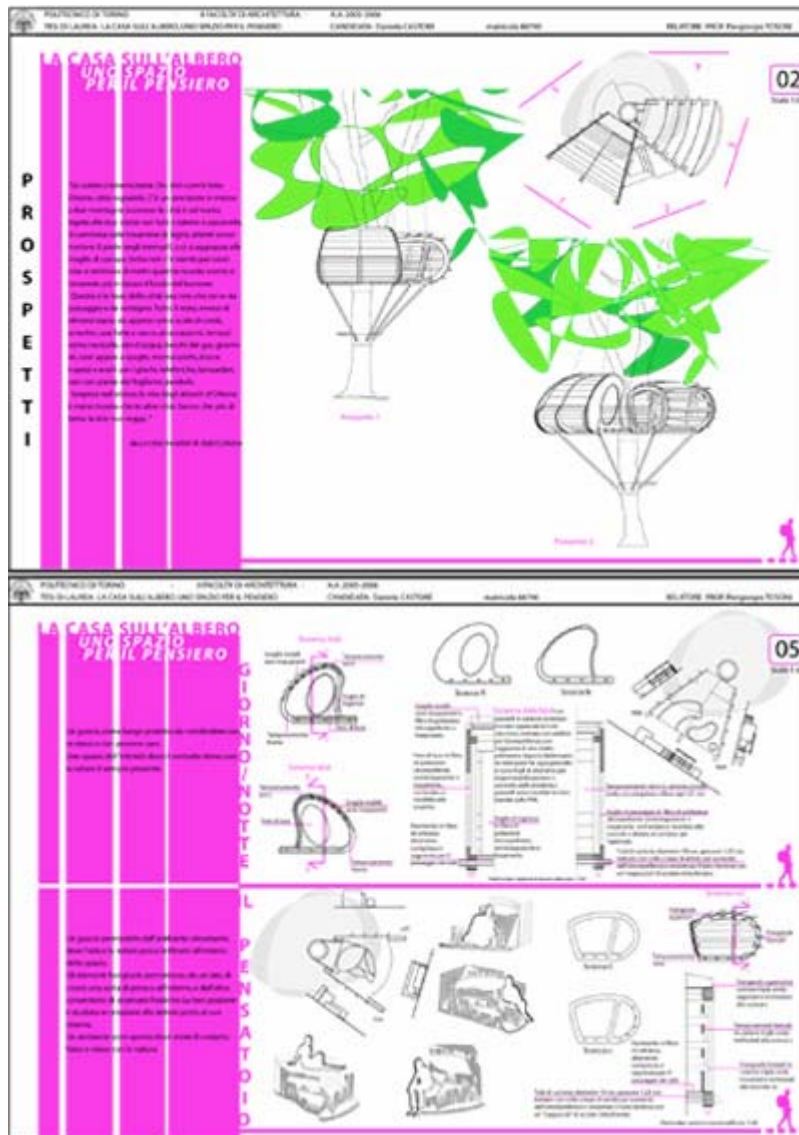
Investigating distinctive aspects of architectural designs of that time let us understand how mobility, weightlessness, flexibility, inexpensiveness and self-sufficiency represent the foundation for many contemporary designs of minimal dwelling units, the so-called **microarchitecture**.



Another feature of my thesis is the drawing up of a treehouse project. The planning comparison has also implied a research on the materials to employ, selected on the base of some main characteristics: eco compatibility, manufacturing and elements assembling ease, weightlessness. These issues suggested the use of **cardboard** as a well-grounded hypothesis. In actual fact this poor and ephemeral material represents a valid option to traditional materials, especially for short life cycle products. By searching and analyzing design, urban equipment and architecture case studies (Westborough School in UK, and Shigeru Ban's projects) it was possible to identify intrinsic makings of the material.



The use of cardboard prevails in the project though it was necessary to use steel for the structural elements since the structure had to be under strain. My “treehouse” is a meditation shelter: a place where to stay for thinking over and observing nature. The strength of the “treehouse” theme and of the design is to look for both in the self-construction feature, which remarks the playful aspect of the design, and in the fact that it is a little scale architecture: the small extent becomes synonym of friendly space, of testing ways of living, searching use of materials, studying the psychological and environmental impact. Attaching importance to intimate dimension, getting rid of hard-set functional needs may be an exciting and positive exercise of thinking, on a planning level.



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