

POLITECNICO DI TORINO
SECOND SCHOOL OF ARCHITECTURE
Master of Science in Architecture
Honors theses

MEDITaction

Project of a Zen cultural center (meditation and martial arts)

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My degree thesis is born from a personal interest. I have been practising martial arts for years and I thought that merging study and life's experience was the most stimulating way to conclude my school-career.

Martial arts and meditation are two complementary aspects of the Zen culture, but often they are separately approached in Western countries. From the idea to cure this gap was born the project of a cultural center where the two souls of the Zen can interact and in which Western and Eastern culture can merge, not to lose their mutual peculiarities, but to enrich each other.

To achieve this target I developed my preliminary investigations at 360°, in order to better understand the Japanese culture and the martial arts. Particularly useful was the meeting with Father Luciano Mazzocchi, Xaverian missionary who lived for many years in Japan and then founded a dialogue's community between Christianity and Zen.



These theoretical analyses were fundamental to find a place in Italy that on the one hand adapted to the morphological and cultural characters of Japan and the other was familiar to the West people, in order to make easier the way toward the Zen. Since water is often protagonist in Japanese buildings, I looked for places with lakes of small/middle dimensions, not too popular, but easily accessible.

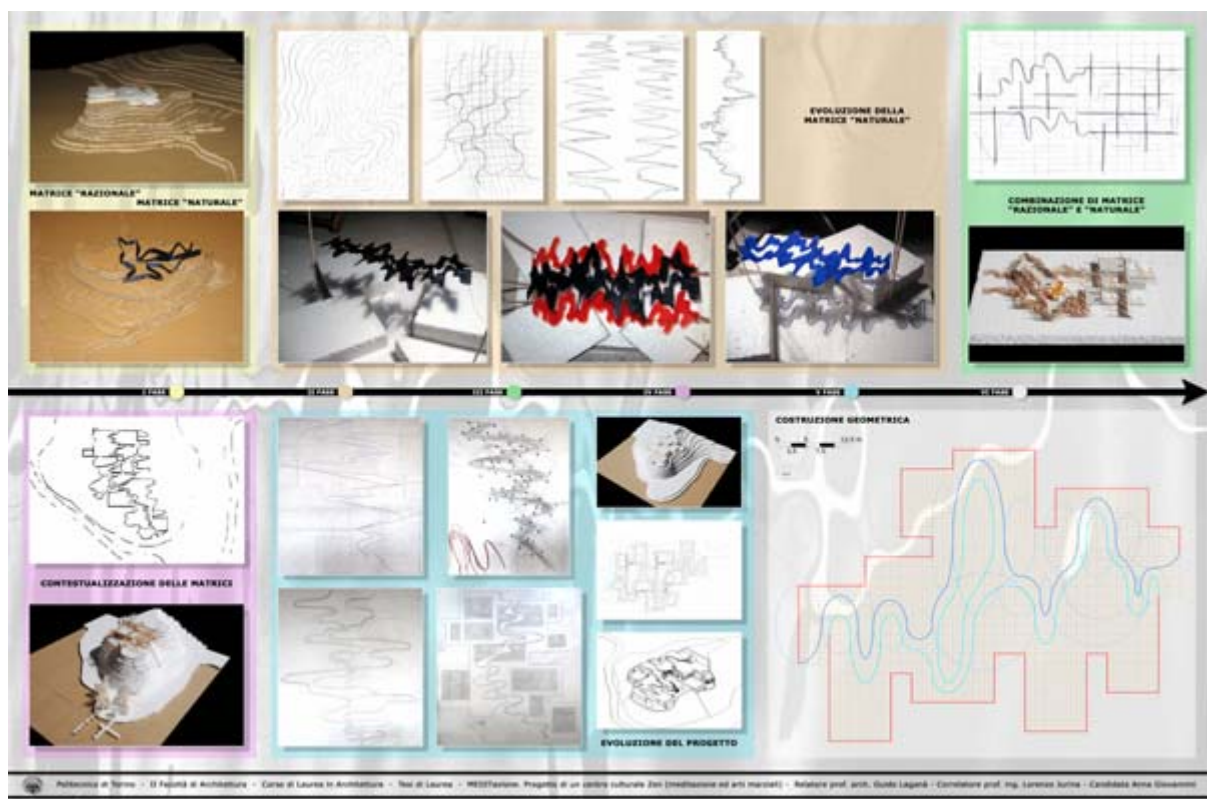
I chose Sirio Lake because I was struck by its beauty and because it is placed in the territory of the Ivrea's *Serra Morenica*, a country remarkable for history, nature and cultural vitality.

By identifying some Zen key-concepts (empty space, *ji ji mu ge*, fusion of spirit and matter, intuitive knowledge), I understood how the Japanese space is conceived, with particular reference to the traditional house, whose main features are: apparent simplicity, linearity, importance of the *enclosed* space, preference for nature, versatility, lack of fixed furniture, importance of the floor covered by *tatami*.

Just from the repetition of the *tatami* it was born one matrix of the project, named rational because it bases itself on a geometric shape and individualizes a closed and artificial space.

Nevertheless, the two souls of the Zen underline the inherent bivalence in the world. Chaos and control, action and quiet, instinct and reason are couples of opposite terms that induced me to look for a new matrix that converses, coming into conflict, with the rational matrix.

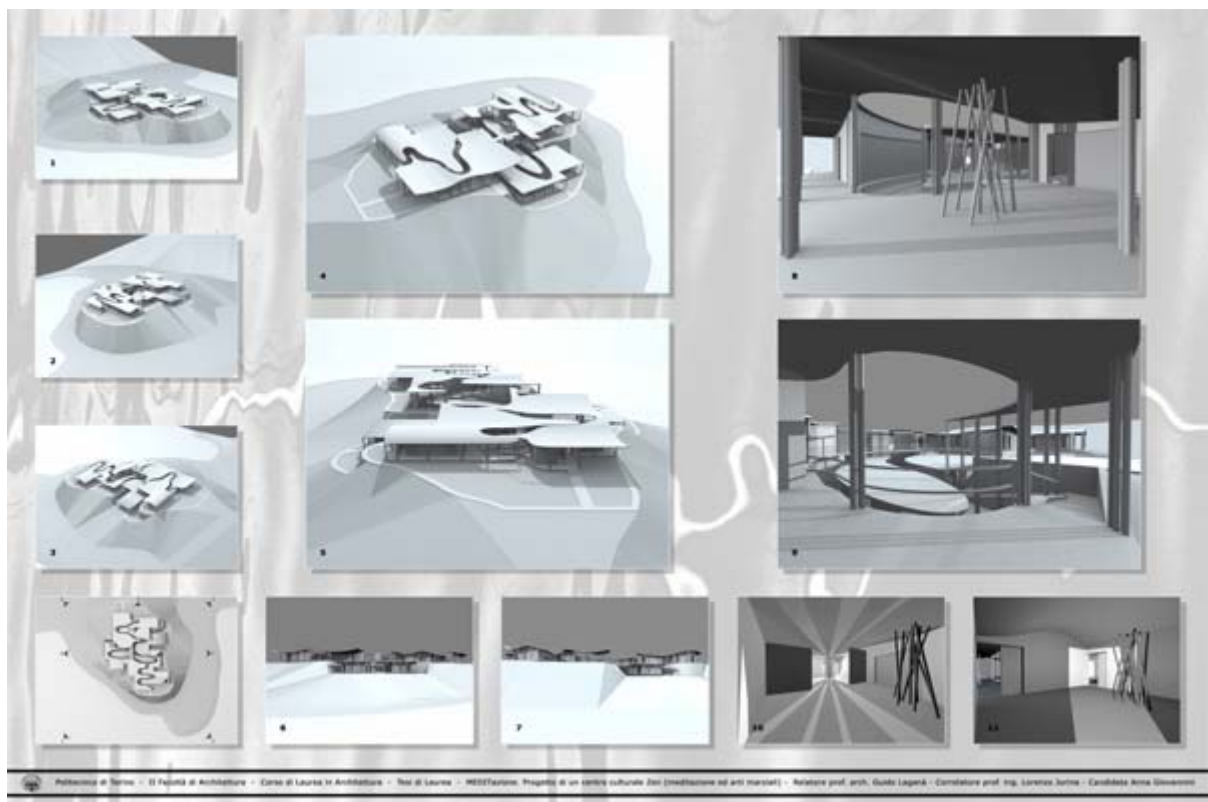
I looked for this matrix in nature and more precisely in the reflection on the water, concept that metaphorically unites all the elements and that has an aesthetical and cultural pregnancy, very important in the Japanese culture.



Merging these two matrixes, I drew up the architectural project through the use of many sketches and intuitive plastic models. I finally finished the project identifying the topographical orientation and the best panoramic points and applying the Japanese traditional distributive system, called *stormo di oche in volo*.

In a physical and metaphoric journey that starts from the earth and from the everyday world and walks towards the calm of the lake's waters and the separation from the daily problems, I put in the point nearest the hinterland the structures of guests' reception, followed by those for group activities (training in the martial arts, collective meditation, refreshment and overnight). Finally you reach the environments destined to a deeper individual retreat, that can be expressed both in the meditation and in the martial art. It can occur in the closed places, in the verandas towards the lake and in the garden.

The building is split by the curvilinear profile of the reflection at whose center runs a shallow stream of water, symbol and synthesis of the idea that guided me in the project's creation.



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