Finding Casa Malaparte

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The first precedent I ever used for inspiration on a project was the Casa Malaparte. It is a modernist house designed by Adalberto Libera, for an artist upon the island of Capri, Italy. It is a rather unimpressive brick building built with a relatively open floor plan and very few decorative design features. As a first year student, it was a massive letdown to have such a building be my precedent. In short, the Casa Malaparte is ugly and fairly boring, but its surroundings are beautiful. The more I studied the house and its relationship to the site, the more I grew to appreciate the beauty in its simplicity. It was a turning point in my education where I realized that a simple, clean form could be very beautiful. I also learned a very important lesson about the process of work and the learning experience that you gain from it. Visiting this first precedent, which I have grown to love, became one of my goals in life.

I REALIZED THAT A SIMPLE, CLEAN FORM COULD BE VERY BEAUTIFUL

During my semester abroad in Rome, I was afforded a chance to visit the island of Capri on a class trip. As soon as I heard these plans, I had only one destination on the island that day, Casa Malaparte. We set out early, bussing from our hotel to the harbor ferry that would take us from Napoli to Capri. The trip took forty five minutes, but was pleasant due to the fantastic weather. Once we landed in the harbor, we disembarked and began exploring the island. My first goal was to find a map. Fortunately for me there was a tourist information center, where I picked up a map for free. I then set out with some friends towards the first waypoint on the road to the Casa Malaparte, the town
center of Ana Capri. The roads on Capri were especially narrow and were comprised completely from cobbles or bricks from the mainland, and were intersected by stairways to expedite travel up the sides of the mountains. We started walking up the switchbacks towards the city center, when we found a set of stairs that seemed to cut through the villas and resorts, skipping the long circuitous route of the switchbacks. We immediately became disoriented and were soon walking off course through some of Capri’s famous lemon groves. We soon found our way back on course and made our way into the rather disappointing town square. From here my companions and I had a quick photo looking down at the harbor, a glance at the map, and set off down the road to the Casa Malaparte.

One interesting fact about roads in Europe is that they change names and/or direction without indicating so on a map. This little piece of information was especially true of the roadways on the island of Capri. This became a problem at one of the first intersections we came to. We became lost immediately after leaving the town square, but fortunately for us we had found our way back onto our desired road by accident, a fortunate mistake. We realized the error, and soon began exploring the other roads at each intersection. This strategy led to further delays, as well as undermined our trust in our map. We soon approached a scenic overlook that is built into the side of the hill in front of a restaurant. It has a fantastic view of the sea and the far side of the island. We paused for another photo opportunity, then consulted the map for directions. It said the road continues from this point on further towards Casa Malaparte, but the overlook appears to be a dead end. We track back to the last intersection in the road and take another stair up a hillside to a parallel road that ultimately leads to another dead end. It didn’t seem as if I was going to make it to my goal. We started to trudge back to the road we were originally on when we ran into a resident on the island. We asked for directions, and she pointed us down the road back towards the scenic overlook. We immediately decide she misunderstood us, but she repeats her instructions to us with more gusto than previously before and insists that we continue down that path. We walk back to the overlook, where after further exploration, we find that we needed to walk around the corner of a building and tree that hid our desired path. This near imperceptible entrance is further obscured by the fact that our focus was drawn to the beautiful vista instead of the path. We start down the road again, which is noticeably narrower and almost immediately begins to hug the edge of the hill.

I have walked more than halfway across this island to reach this point on my journey, but we have turned the corner of the island and now are walking along the crags of the mountains on the west end of the island. The road we were walking along was always narrow, crooked and hilly. But now it has transformed into a small path cut into the side of the mountain with a guardrail that prevents one from falling down the jagged mountain face. My companions and I continue to walk the path that now follows the contours of the earth as it snakes around the ins and outs of the mountain. Now, I must mention that I have a fear of heights, which, when the guardrail starts to diminish along with a drop in the quality of the path, becomes an issue. But despite my fears, our scenery is beautiful in an unearthly way.
We round the mountain to where there are giant teeth shaped rocks sticking out of the sea. It is one of the most beautiful pieces of scenery I have ever seen. I stride forward, believing that now I can truly reach my goal, because the map says that the house is just around the next jut in the coastline. While walking down this path I began to notice that the guardrail has slowly dissipated into a curb on the edge of the path, and with my fear of heights this is incredibly unnerving. I begin to sweat profusely, but I steel my reserve to soldier on. The path is becoming rougher and rougher and as we turn around the jut in the mountain, the side of the path just over the curb turns into the edge of a cliff. This was the end. I was thinking that there was no way I was going past this point on my odyssey, but through a gap in the trees I could see Casa Malaparte practically glowing in the sunshine upon its perch above the azure field of the Mediterranean. At last I was in sight of my objective! My spirits were soaring as I laid aside my fears about the road and continued on. And just as quickly as my spirits had been raised, they were dashed. The pathway was under construction up ahead, we could go no further.

I had failed in my quest to reach Casa Malaparte. As I walked back I realized that I had been so focused upon the path that I was walking, I had ignored the immense beauty of my surroundings. That was the true beauty of Casa Malaparte. The house was built in such a remote and beautiful area to emphasize the beauty of the process of reaching this point. And once you have reached the comforts of the house, all views face back towards the beautiful coastline where the journey took place. My journey is still unfinished, but now I am traveling with my head up enjoying my surroundings as I walk towards my destination.