

elisa valero studio
i n t e r n s h i p



Honours Programme
ASA | Advanced School of Architecture
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internship report
elisa valero studio

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building a place

architecture on a human scale



Above: the façade of the studio at Calle Belén 17 in Granada.

Below: the traditional wall construction technique of the neighborhood in which the studio is located, taken as a reference for the façade design.

This report documents the educational and professional experience undertaken during the internship carried out at the Elisa Valero Ramos studio, within the framework of the *Advanced School of Architecture* programme. The programme includes a 500 - hour internship abroad, with the aim of deepening and developing architectural design skills, preferably within a high - level professional context.

While searching for a studio to which I could send my application, I reflected on the various personalities I had the opportunity to encounter, albeit briefly, during my academic journey. At the beginning of the 2024/2025 academic year, Professor Elisa Valero Ramos delivered the lecture zero at the Mantova Campus, where I am enrolled in the Master's Degree programme in *Architectural Design and History*. The memory of that lecture, together with the exhibition organised within the Mantovarchitettura festival *Elisa Valero. Luce e Materia* — which particularly impressed me — encouraged me to further explore her work, also through the reading of some of her publications. I therefore decided to apply to this studio after reading the book *La teoria del diamante e il progetto di architettura*,¹ in which I was especially intrigued by her definition of architecture as a discipline that must be *precise*. To achieve such precision, architecture must be grounded in the relationship between *light* and *matter*, inseparable elements that Elisa Valero Ramos demonstrates she can balance with remarkable sensitivity.

Fortunately, Elisa Valero Ramos accepted my application, allowing me to complete the 500 hours of internship at her studio.

1 | Elisa Valero Ramos, *La teoria del diamante*, LetteraVentidue Edizioni, Siracusa, 2021.

The *Elisa Valero studio* is located in Granada, in Andalusia, in the south of Spain. It is situated in the Realejo district, one of the oldest and most characteristic areas of the city, together with the Albaicín, just below one of the most significant architectural complexes in Europe: the *Alhambra*. It is a place where history and architecture profoundly shape every moment of urban life and, in turn, also my experience in this fascinating city.

Contrary to what one might expect, given the studio's international reputation, its scale is relatively small and the working environment has a strongly familial character. There are two permanent collaborators, alongside temporary figures. Some of these are collaborators who take part consistently in research projects or architectural competitions and contribute to the studio's work for limited periods. Others are interns, also in connection with Elisa Valero Ramos' ongoing academic activity at the *University of Granada* and as a visiting professor at the *Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio*, the *Politecnico di Milano*, the *University of Valencia* and other Spanish universities. During my experience, I collaborated with a student from the *Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio*; the work presented below is the result of a shared effort. It was an opportunity to engage with a method completely different from my own, recognizing and understanding its potential.

The studio, designed by Elisa Valero Ramos herself, is a true *laboratory of light*, as defined by Carlos Martí Arís.² Living and working in this space for four months was, in itself, a significant lesson in architecture. It represents the materialization of her approach to design: a *precise* place, where every space is proportioned and each element is dimensioned in relation to the human scale, coming to life through a careful and conscious use of light. I came to understand how architecture must be *precise* in this sense: every element and every space possesses a form, a measure and a coherent and deliberate luminous quality.

Beyond expressing Elisa Valero Ramos' architectural thinking, the studio also embodies a constant drive toward experimentation and research, which characterizes all of her projects. It stands as a bridge between academic activity and professional practice — fittingly located next to the Faculty of Architecture at the *University of Granada* — and is further distinguished by the technical solutions employed in its construction, which are particularly interesting and significant.

2 | Carlos Martí Arís, "Laboratorio di Luce" in *Housing*. Elisa Valero, Editrice Libria, Melfi, 2018.



Inside the studio at Calle Belén 17 in Granada

Above: interiors of the studio, respectively Elisa Valero Ramos' private office, the shared workspace and the meeting room.

the untangible material light in architectural design



Above: the cover of the third edition of *La materia intangible*, published in Spain in 2019. The book was first published in 2004 and also published in the United Kingdom in 2015.

During the internship carried out at the studio, and in relation to the profile of my Master's degree — the course *Architectural Design and History* at Mantova Campus — I was given the outstanding opportunity to contribute to the translation of one of Elisa Valero Ramos' most well-known books, *La materia intangible*.³ This book represents the evolution of Elisa Valero Ramos' doctoral thesis and has been published in three editions in Spain and one edition in the United Kingdom. It is also scheduled to be published in Italy this year, following the translation.

As suggested by its title, the book addresses the theme of light in architecture by considering it as a true building material, capable of actively participating in the design process, rather than as a outcome or consequence of it.

The text thus offers an original perspective on a fundamental theme in architecture, as the light. My experience at the studio allowed me to explore this aspect in depth, which throughout my studies had often been treated as a secondary result of the design method. In Elisa Valero Ramos' studio light constitutes a constant and central presence within the process.

The importance of light in her architecture, and the way it contributes to the design, is effectively described in the words of Carlos Martí Arís and Francesco Dal Co, who write, respectively:

3 | Elisa Valero Ramos, *La Materia Intangible: La Luz en la arquitectura*, General de Ediciones de Arquitectura, S.L., Spain, 2019.

Elisa Valero, avvalendosi di un sottile intuito e di uno sguardo perspicace, ha inteso sin dal principio come la luce faccia parte degli ingredienti essenziali dell’architettura. [...] Nel suo lavoro c’è una difficile naturalezza che inizialmente rimanda ad un mondo di forme allentate e statiche; ma quando queste entrano in azione, cioè quando qualcuno attiva l’edificio e questo inizia ad agire come un diaframma che calibra la propria luce interna, tali forme si tendono, gli elementi materiali si profilano e mostrano la distanza che li separa; lo spazio assume la giusta misura e la tonalità che ne esige l’uso.⁴

Non si può aggiungere molto a quanto Carlo Marti Aris ha scritto a questo proposito, se non insistere sul fatto che i modi con i quali Elisa Valero Ramos si avvale della luce non mirano a sfruttare l’energia per svelarne le qualità dei corpi che avvolge, ma a trattarla come un mezzo analogo ai materiali che usualmente si impiegano nelle costruzioni. [...] (Le opere di Valero Ramos) esprimono la convivenza, che sarebbe inappropriato definire dialettica, tra il materiale e l’intangibile, tra la materia pesante e l’enrgia senza massa, che configurano spazi le cui componenti non appartengono al medesimo statuto ontologico. [...] Quelli con i quali Valero Ramos progetta le sue case sono gesti misurati e maturi, come lo sono quelli che consentono non soltanto di vivere accanto alla quotidianità, ma di scoprirvi, invece, come diceva Virginia Woolf, “moments of being”.⁵

As mentioned earlier, I contributed to the translation of the book and this opportunity allowed me to reflect more deeply on the role of light in architecture. I could summarize these months as a highly stimulating series of “lessons of light”, explored through projects, readings and conversations with Elisa.

4 | Carlos Marti Aris, “Laboratorio di Luce” in *Housing. Elisa Valero*, Editrice Libria, Melfi, 2018.

5 | Francesco Dal Co, “Eleganza nella quotidianità” in *Casabella*, n.973, September 2025.

6 | Elisa Valero Ramos, “La natura architettonica della luce” in *La materia intangibile. La luce nel progetto di architettura*, Editrice Libria, Melfi, 2026.

It is precisely this relationship between the *tangible* and the *intangible* — effectively described by the authors mentioned above — that has constituted the core of my internship experience at Elisa Valero Ramos’ studio.

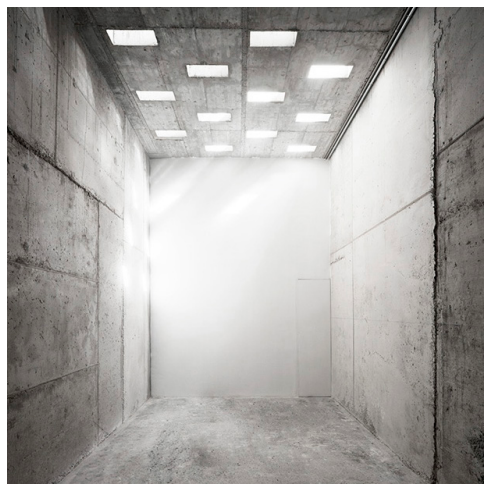
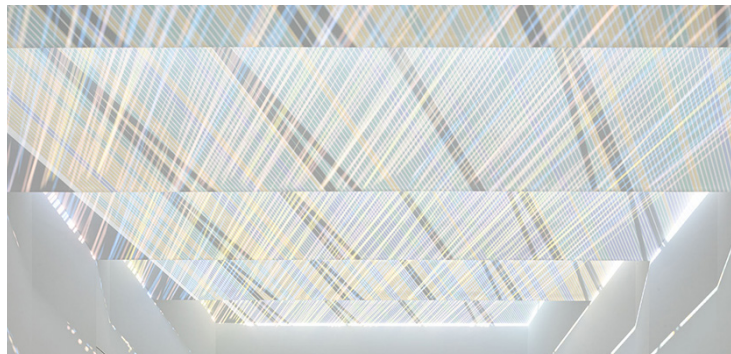
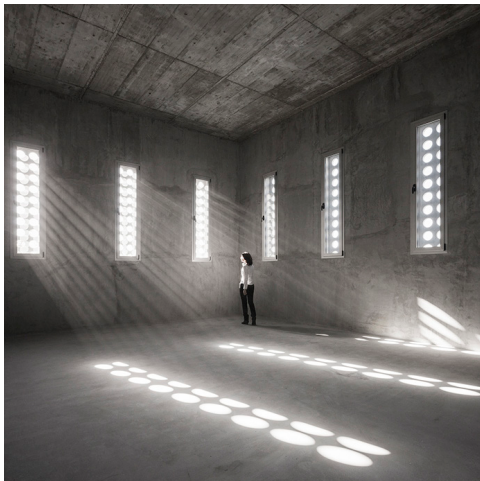
Below, I recall one of the passages I considered most significant in the book, which demonstrates and describes how light plays a central role in making a place *habitable*: a principle that architects should always keep in mind, and one that Elisa consistently conveyed to me throughout these months.

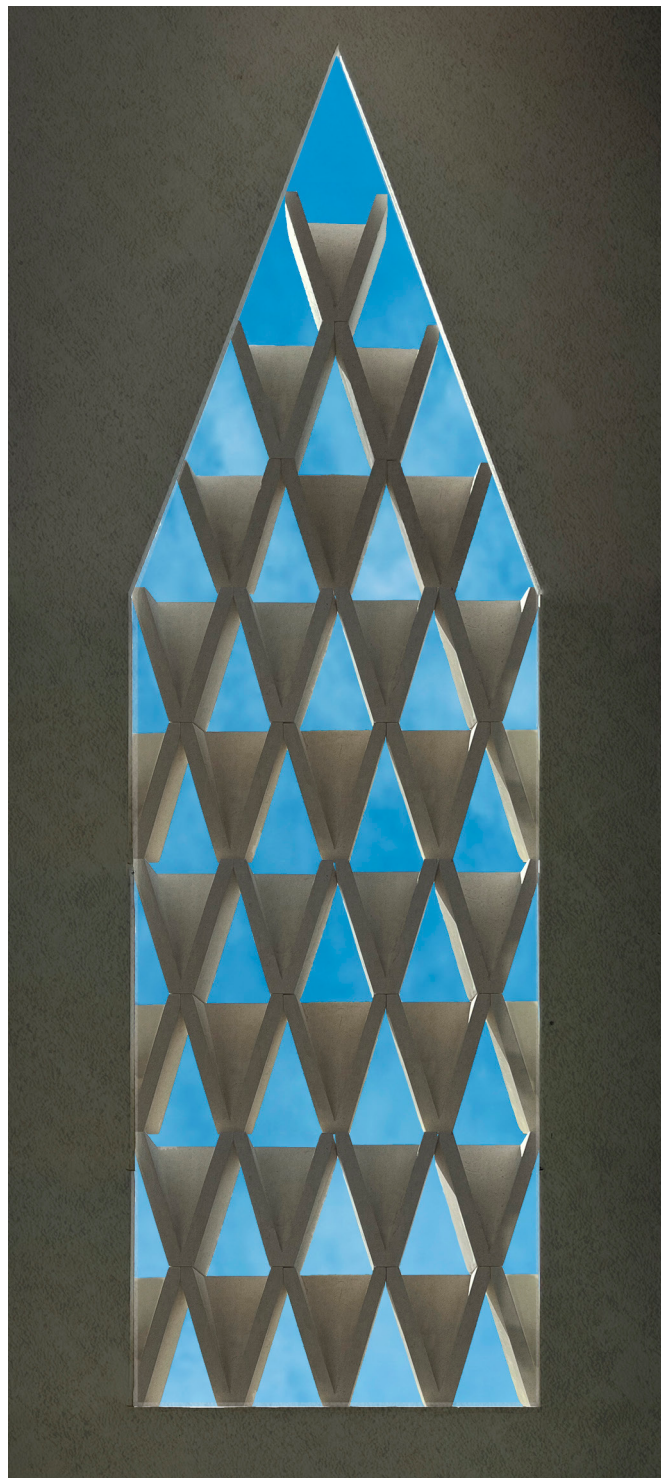
Illuminare uno spazio significa rendere possibile la vita al suo interno. Il modo in cui lo spazio viene illuminato determina in larga misura le sue caratteristiche e la sua qualità.

Se pensiamo che l’architettura abbraccia tutte le condizioni di un determinato spazio, incluso ciò che lo rende abitabile, allora lo spazio deve essere considerato in relazione alla luce. Per creare uno spazio in cui le persone possano vivere piacevolmente, per prima cosa dobbiamo riconoscere che l’essere umano è naturalmente portato verso la luce. Quasi tutte le forme di vita sulla terra dipendono dalla luce del sole; siamo guidati da essa. Se uno spazio è progettato per essere confortevole e per funzionare bene, allora deve interagire con questo componente vitale, intangibile e invisibile che ci permette di vedere. La luce è gratuita, pur essendo il più prezioso di tutti i materiali a disposizione dell’architetto.

*La luce naturale è un materiale indispensabile e solo attraverso la sua corretta gestione si possono ottenere i migliori spazi pensati per la vita.*⁶

The following pages presents a selection of photographs, available on the studio’s website, showcasing Elisa Valero Ramos’ works, where light always consistently plays a central role.





Above: a collage for a shading and water collection system for a cathedral in Tanzania, developed through photomontage from the design prototype of the technical element.

t h e t a n g i b l e m a t e r i a l

architecture for a planet in transition

This internship was an intense and formative experience, extending beyond my contribution to the translation of Elisa Valero Ramos' book. While the design outputs are not presented here, what follows reflects the path I undertook: a series of lessons drawn from practice, research and daily work within the studio. Through this experience, I was able to engage closely with an approach to architecture grounded in precision, light and material awareness, gaining insights that continue to shape my understanding of the discipline. But above all, I realized how deep the concept of *sustainability* in architecture can be.

Between Research and Practice

The *Elisa Valero studio* can be seen as a hybrid practice, situated between professional work and academic research, where architectural design develops through a *continuous dialogue* between practical application and theoretical reflection. In this sense, the activity of the studio does not limit itself to the production of architecture, but extends into a broader field of research and experimentation.

As previously mentioned, Elisa Valero Ramos' teaching activity is intensive. During my internship, I also had the opportunity to follow the work of the course *Architectural Design in Historical Context*, taught at the Mantova Campus of the *Politecnico di Milano*. In particular, the discussions highlighted the collaboration between the UNESCO Chair in Mantova and the one in Granada,⁷ through which research

⁷ | Both universities, being located in cities of outstanding cultural significance and characterized by the presence of UNESCO World Heritage sites, are engaged in research projects aligned with the guidelines of supranational organizations.

and projects are carried out, especially in international contexts such as Tanzania, where she has developed several interventions and to which I also had the opportunity to contribute. This includes the design of a shading and water collection system for a cathedral, illustrated in the photomontage shown alongside. This experience taught me how architectural design can become a form of applied research, capable of engaging with complex environmental, social and cultural conditions that are distant from our own, where, however, a strong sense of *humanity* and an openness to experimentation must remain central.

Exploring Experimentation and Sustainability

Another key aspect of this research concerns the study of *materials*. Alongside the theme of light — a foundational element in Elisa Valero Ramos’ design thinking — matter assumes an equally decisive role. It is no coincidence that the exhibition held in Mantova, mentioned earlier and titled *Elisa Valero. Luce e Materia*, effectively synthesizes this dual focus. Light and matter are not treated as separate elements, but as inseparable components of a single design process, capable of shaping architectural space.

Elisa Valero Ramos’ entire body of work is characterized by a continuous exploration of materials and their *sustainability*, always in relation to her academic activity. Her projects make full use of the potential of prefabricated systems, as illustrated by the works presented in the latest issue of *Casabella* dedicated to her.⁸ During my internship, I had the opportunity to follow — although not directly participate in — the development and design of a new prefabricated system featuring an alternative reinforcement method to metallic materials, later applied in several design proposals across both public and private contexts, in which I then took part.

Beside is an excerpt from an interview made for the exhibition mentioned above, leaving Elisa’s words to explain the deeper meaning of her architecture.⁹

8 | Francesco Dal Co, “Eleganza nella quotidianità” in *Casabella*, n.973, September 2025.

9 | Federico Bucci et al, “Un’intervista a Elisa Valero” in *Elisa Valero. Luce e Materia*, Publi Paolini, Mantova, 2024.

La relazione con la luce è fondamentale nel tuo lavoro. Come pensi debba essere l’architettura oggi?

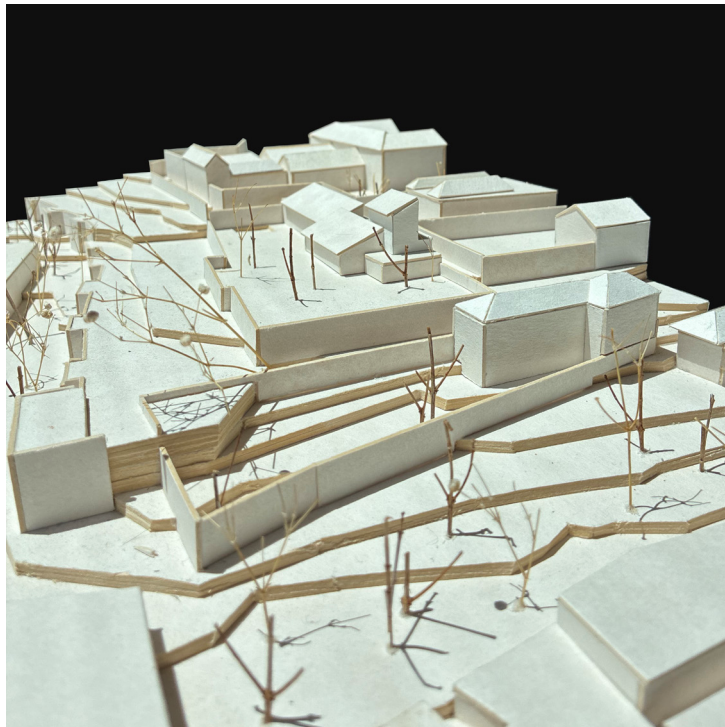
Penso che l’architettura sia fatta per risolvere i problemi delle persone, non per produrre oggetti o per creare solamente monumenti: essa è fatta per risolvere i problemi della vita quotidiana. Se qualcuno mi chiedesse come penso che debba essere l’architettura adesso, direi che dev’essere un’architettura amabile.

Non abbiamo bisogno di molti simboli ed elementi iconici: mi sembra che dobbiamo essere capaci di produrre un’architettura “cogente”, sensata, dove il meno è meglio; ed è importante perché siamo responsabili del futuro del pianeta. Questo è un grave problema adesso: questa crisi medio ambientale è quello che fa sì che la mia ricerca ora sia molto pratica. Cerchiamo di ridurre l’impronta ambientale di carbonio di un materiale molto economico. Il primo materiale e il più economico del mondo in architettura è la luce. La luce naturale. Senza luce non è possibile avere architettura. Subito dopo, in questa preoccupazione per il futuro del pianeta, nell’ottica di questo impegno per lasciare ai nostri nipoti il mondo così bello come noi l’abbiamo trovato, abbiamo bisogno di un cambiamento urgente. Per questo penso che con la ricerca dobbiamo imparare un nuovo modo di fare le cose, perché come stiamo operando, oggi, non è sufficiente.

Siamo molto responsabili, noi architetti, ingegneri e tutti i professionistiche lavorano sul territorio, di quello che sta succedendo. Il mio apporto, seppur piccolo, cerca di essere un esempio di come sia possibile trovare un altro riferimento. Stiamo lavorando con un calcestruzzo senza acciaio e con prefabbricati che possano risolvere problemi in paesi meno sviluppati. Siamo a Granada, dove le condizioni ambientali di scarsità di sole e umidità (abbiamo l’umidità del Sahara), non ci permette di disporre di alcuni materiali da costruzione come il legno, come invece accade nel Nord Europa. Inoltre, abbiamo una forte accelerazione sismica che si traduce, in architettura, in un’importante esigenza strutturale.

Per queste ragioni lavoriamo e sperimentiamo tecniche costruttive legate all’uso del calcestruzzo (molto economico, è il secondo materiale più utilizzato nel pianeta) e la sfida per noi, oggi, è quella di pensarlo come un materiale che possa diventare sempre più sostenibile.

Questo sarà importante: pensare al futuro imponendoci di dare un nostro contributo affinché questo necessario cambiamento avvenga davvero.



Model of a design proposal in the Albaicín district of Granada. The project was inserted into a historically significant context, for which Elisa Valero Ramos proposed a solution that is consistent with the characteristics of the place while remaining contemporary.

The proposal respects the urban morphology of the city and the tradition of the *Granadan cármenes*, reconstructing voids from existing volumes and introducing new volumes only in a selective manner, in order not to disrupt the urban balance.

Architecture Rooted in Reality

As I have already anticipated, I was particularly struck by Elisa Valero Ramos' idea that architecture must be *precise*. The design work developed during the internship, especially through the study and drawing of several residential projects, provided an important opportunity to understand what it means to conceive architecture at a *human scale*. It is an architecture that originates from a clear and precise idea and translates into spaces carefully designed in relation to how they are lived.

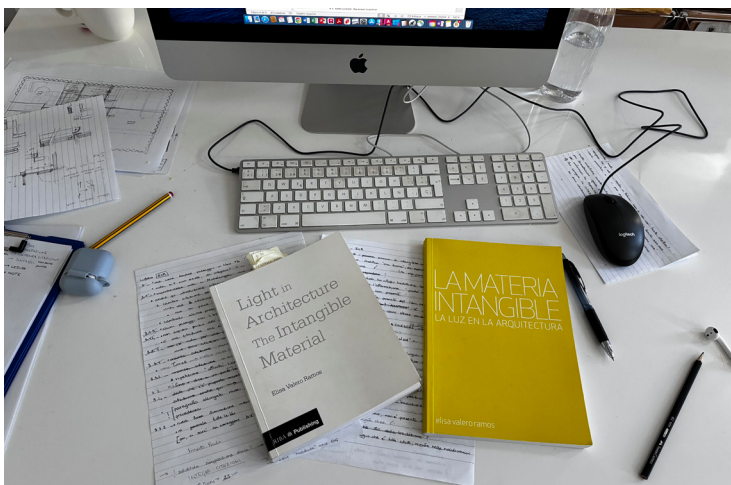
I observed how every design decision, even at the smallest scale, contributes to shaping the quality of spatial experience. In this sense, I understood how the careful design of an apparently secondary element, such as a piece of furniture, can significantly influence the way a space is inhabited, completing and enhancing the project. Likewise, even a single space or architectural element, if properly calibrated, can determine the overall quality of an entire building.

This is especially evident when designing for what is often considered a "vulnerable" user group, such as the elderly and children — contexts with which Elisa Valero Ramos has frequently engaged in her work and with which I was also able to engage during my internship.

At the same time, this attention to detail extends to the larger scale of urban design. I learned that designing with precision does not mean imposing oneself on the context, but rather establishing a balanced dialogue with it, respecting its characteristics and contributing to strengthening its identity.

Within this perspective, *sustainability* also takes on a broader meaning: it is not limited to the study of materials, but primarily concerns the ability to design with awareness, measure and responsibility, across different scales and themes. More broadly, it means living with an increasing awareness of what Elisa Valero Ramos defines a *small planet*, for which we — especially as architects — must feel responsible for in our design. Every decision should be made accordingly: to be sustainable means to be conscious and *precise* in every choice.

The following pages feature a selection of photographs taken during my time at the studio, combining desk work with site visits, model making and participation in conferences and exhibitions in Granada.



a n d a l u s i a

mediterranean character



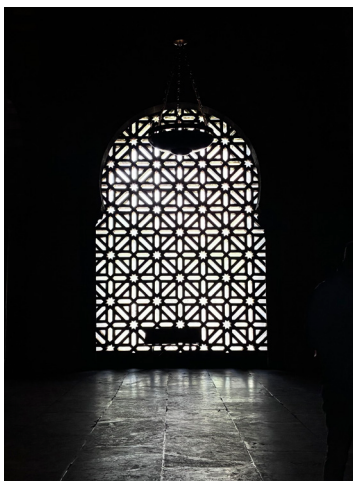
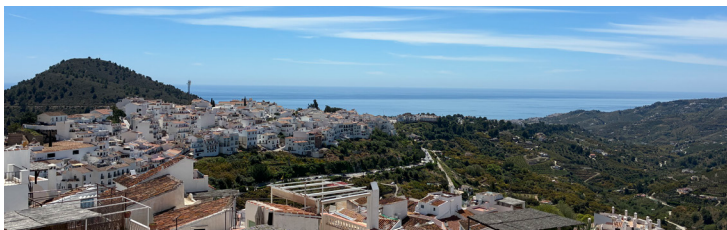
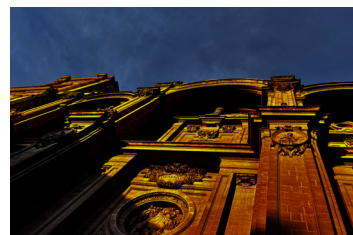
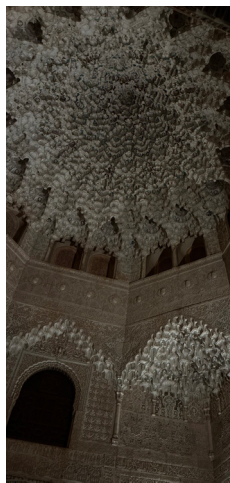
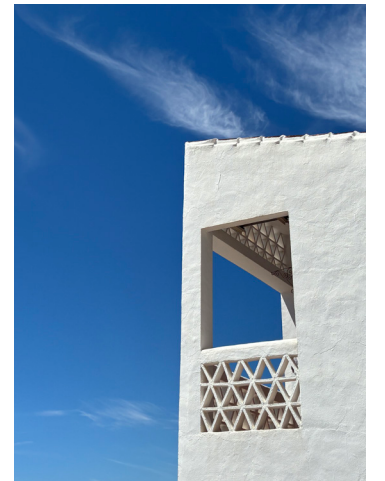
Above: map showing the places visited during the stay in *Andalusia*.

During my stay in Granada, I had the opportunity to visit Andalusia. This region is extraordinarily rich in history and cultural stratifications, characterized by breathtaking landscapes that range from urban architecture to natural settings. It is a fully Mediterranean territory that also embodies a profound encounter with the Arab world, evident in its forms, materials and construction techniques. This coexistence of traditions contributes to defining a unique identity, capable of expressing — through architecture and the built environment — a complex and fascinating history.

It is a context in which the *Mediterranean* character is strongly perceived, *shaped by light, materiality and a deep sense of humanity*.

My experience allowed me to further explore these fundamental concepts of architecture, both within the studio - through my work with Elisa Valero Ramos, as outlined in the previous pages - and outside it - through the opportunity to live in a place so different from my own, the north of Italy, yet one that welcomed me and, at the same time, expanded and deepened my understanding of what I was learning during the internship.

On the following pages, a selection of photographs taken as personal records of interesting architectural works (more or less well-known) and details observed during the travels.



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