

OE House/Casa OE, Alforja
Fake Industries Architectural Agonism + Aixopluc
2016
The Tale of Two Houses



The OE House is a montage. The clients wanted a double house, so they could move from one half to the other, according to their state of mind. They did not like to spend their holidays traveling; they preferred to move downstairs, and do it for real, closing the quarters above. We provided them with two well-known domestic environments—the open frame of the case study houses for the hedonistic pleasure of the warm season, topped with the interiorized existentialism of Le Corbusier’s Maison Jaoul for the windy moths in la Sierra de Montsant. We did it literally. The resulting exquisite corpse—wrapped by the most Spanish architectural prop of all: the persiana—ensures the schizophrenic differentiation of modes of habitation as much as it negotiates the impossible encounter of both types.



The OE family wanted a masia with two houses in one: a summer house on the ground floor and a winter house on the first floor, on a hazel tree field at the edge of Alforja, a rural town with a climate more extreme, cold and windy than the rest of the el Camp region. We researched the local rural constructions typologies and a seasonal membrane that responds to daily weather changes. Learning from anonymous neighboring case studies but also from far away examples such as Maison Jaoul or the first Case Study Houses, we reached a crossroad between a masia (traditional Catalan rural home) and a peasant's storehouse. Developing open source systems and interchangeable ingredients, exploring two tangent extremes between archaeology and innovation: we reclaimed the almost forgotten volta catalana local technique, and adapted industrialized components that came from afar, so that the house could be built in twelve months. Choosing the wrong contractor slowed this process down to four and a half years. In the meantime, the bank reduced 30% the initial agreed loan. In order to save the house, we explored a radically optimistic management of adversity and uncertainty, where each setback was an opportunity to build a cheaper and better made home, with a breath of collage and bricolage air. The clients, the OE family lived right in front. Each summer, in the construction site, they played and bathed among the hazel trees, camped on the roof, while their new home slowly grew. This long shared resilience test has given us a close engagement with their family, the builders and craftsmen. To celebrate it, we invited everyone to a calçotada, (traditional winter feast) where we cooked and had fun together.