BYZANTINE HOUSE

AGHIA SOPHIA, MANI, GREECE

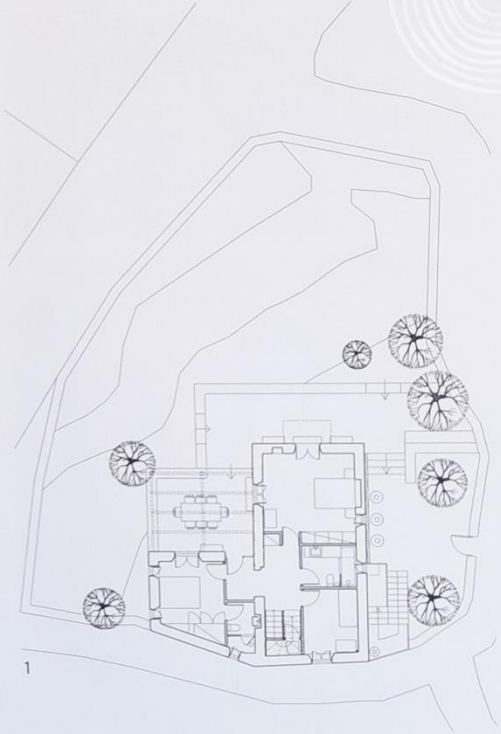
AIOLOU ARCHITECTS

Located within the southern Greek village of Aghia Sophia, parts of which date back to the 15th century, the Byzantine House enjoys stunning views both to the sea and up to the Taygetos Mountains that overlook the village from the east. Two stone walls were all that existed on this plot, the remnants of a house in the village. Amazingly, the entrance - with carved stone arch and key stones adorned with a mysterious sculptural relief of animals - had survived the ravages of time.

It was later discovered that the original phase of the house and part of the ruin were of Byzantine origin, dating back to the 17th century. A long planning procedure involving many negotiations with archaeological and building authorities led to a set of restrictions on how and what it was possible to build. The ruin and all materials found onsite had to be integrated into the design of the house, thus helping to tie the house to its local surroundings and create a unique home that respects and maintains a link to its past forms and materials. The footprint of the original building, dug into the local bedrock, also had to be maintained and thus determined the form and volume of the new building.

The main living spaces were retained upstairs and incorporated in an open-plan design allowing for the full view of the open roof and openings to all the featured views from around the room. The reclaimed floor was bought from a ruined church in Turkey and was probably originally a deck in a boat. The stairs begin in wood and change to stone at the lower level, where they meet the multiple-coat cement floor finish achieved by careful sanding, so that the different tones of each layer show

The exterior stone walls have been built using stones found onsite and new stone from the same quarry that the original material came from. They include bits of ceramics from the site, as did the original walls, and also the sculptural relief of animals around the entrances.



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1 Lower level floor plan
2.3 View of southwest façade
4 Upper-level living room
5 Central fireplace with built-in storage benches for firewood

Photography: Kyriaki Dovinou and Lefteris Miaoulis
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