

A women's house for Imloul, Morocco

People_Places_Culture

It is a strong sun that greets us at the end of last November in Marrakech, Morocco.

Leaving the airport, we find Giulia to welcome us and after the exchange of smiles between those who had been planning this trip for some time by slalom between the restrictions due to the pandemic, we head to the taxi and immediately set off on the journey.

Direction Imloul, province of Ouarzazate.

Right from the start, leaving the glittering Marrakech behind us, the landscape begins to open up and with it, as we continue our journey, the soul of the buildings that from now on would have accompanied us throughout our journey becomes more and more evident: the earth!

At first the walls on the sides of the roads, some fallen plaster revealed its essence, then, a few hours by car further on, some scattered huts, then a few more groupings of houses and then, while we were crossing landscapes with increasingly decisive colors, here we are the first villages begin to appear... all around is earth!

Traveling with me are the architects Giulia Ventre, president of *Terre à Terre asbl* and Luigi di Pietro, with whom I share *Studio2111*.

Founded in 2020 in Belgium by a group of architects from different geographic backgrounds, *Terre à Terre asbl*'s mission is to create new opportunities for communities through participatory architecture by promoting the use of natural materials and consolidating the use of traditional construction techniques with a contemporary approach.

Studio2111 is the architectural firm founded by the architect Fabrizio Carola which focuses on the design and construction of structures with curved surfaces (arches, vaults and domes), with a preference for organic shapes, sensitive to the use of local resources and which stretches towards zero-waste construction sites, without ever neglecting the bioclimatic study of inhabited environments.

After almost a day of travel, interrupted by the inevitable tea break, in the late evening we finally arrive at our destination. Waiting for us is the

architect Martina Petrosino, vice president of *Terre à Terre*.



The village of Imloul is located between the Atlas Mountains and the Sahara desert and develops along the Dadès river, where there is also a palm grove, a source of various benefits for the village itself (food, timber for construction, climate mitigation). The abundance of clayey soil, combined with the reeds of the palm grove, become the main materials of which the houses are built. Most of the village's population is *Amazigh*, Berber.

The project for the women's house in Imloul, currently under construction, promotes the enhancement of women, local development and local traditions. It was born on the initiative and promotion of the *Terre à Terre asbl* association and aims to redevelop and complete a clay artefact, which will host the *Association Féminine du Dawar Imloul* for carrying out primary training and start-up activities.



Terre à terre invites and involves *Studio2111* to actively participate in the project with particular reference to the solution of the roofs, absent in the current state and for which the studio proposes to create vaulted structures.

As with any social project, the initiative has received the patronage of various national and international associations, including *ANAB*, as well as the *municipality of Schaerbeek* where *Terre à Terre* is based.

The *Association Féminine du Dawar Imloul*, chaired by the young Meryem Bahsine, aims to improve the position of women, lead them to achieve economic independence and provide mutual support.

An example of participatory planning. The peculiarity of the initiative is, in fact, the decision-making process, which takes place with the participation of the community of Imloul, more precisely with the women, who were involved and listened to throughout the project and which led to the collective approval of the project proposal currently under construction.



Fundamental in this process was the role of Latifa Oumlul (founder of PermaAtlas), who, as interpreter between the various languages involved in the meetings, ensured that, by avoiding the use of linguistic mediation by men, they could be carried out only among women and therefore to allow a totally free and confidential comparison.

The entire project was then extended to the men of the *Association Naktachef*, in the figure of Mohammed Hamada and of the *association of maleéms* in the figure of Allal Elarifi to share and evaluate the various aspects of a practical nature and who were involved in the economic part, for the construction site accounting, for which transparency and sharing between the various associations was absolute and all the actors were fully involved.

The design proposal of the vaulted roof was also submitted to the women of the village, who at first showed uncertainty about the dome shape as it was associated with typical elements of the sacred architecture of the place. Following further meetings and with appropriate revisions of the project design and in the relationship of this with the existing building, approval was reached.



Like the rest of the village, this artifact is also made of raw earth, with the rammed earth technique. In the current state of the first inspection, the building appeared with a development on a single level, within which there were different elevation changes. Free of plaster, the structure has been exposed to seasonal weather for some time.



After the architectural and material reliefs by the architect Aurora Fanti and the interior designer Auranne Leray (both partners of *Terre à Terre*), before intervening with the general project, on-site investigations were carried out to understand the quality of the construction, any deterioration of the existing structures and not least the presence of stone foundations.

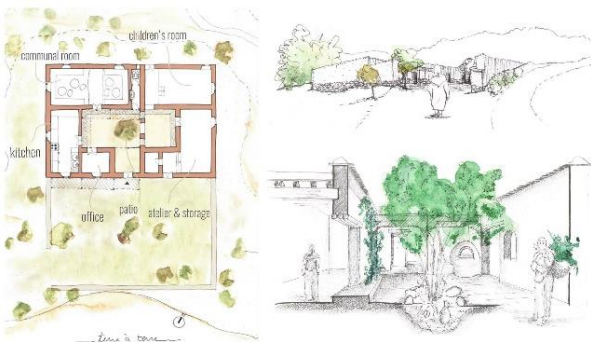


An artifact emerged that first needed restoration works (for example, work on the foundations) and then completion and redevelopment. The presence of an irregular, weak and poor quality mesh of pillars, together with the verification of the non-clamping of some cantonal, meant that

the roof, initially designed to be supported by the existing structure, was built independently.

It is thus, therefore, that the vaulted roof, made of adobe, has its own structural system like a second skin and rests on a deck of arches completely detached from the existing structure.

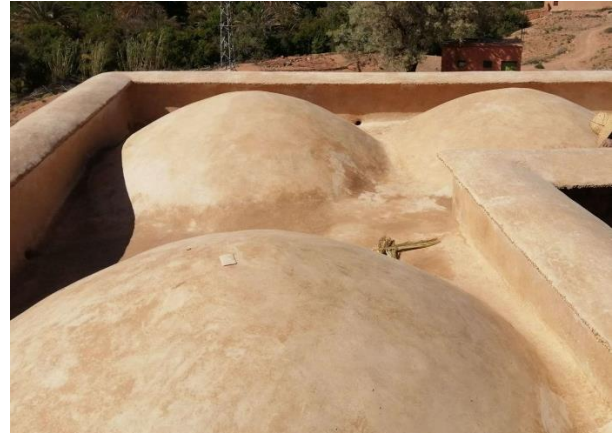
The project therefore envisages a redistribution of quotas, which now become one and of various areas that contemplate work environments and environments in which to meet and care for children, distributed around a central atrium, which is accessed from a fenced courtyard. The vaulted roof and other pergolas in the entrance courtyard complete the building.



During the project and in the construction phase, they are the crowning glory of the existing one also to mitigate the visibility of the domes from the outside (this is the compromise underlying the approval on the vaulted solution). In this way, the whole will enjoy a surprise effect that it begins to perceive already in this intermediate phase: looking at the building from the outside, the impression someone will have will be that of being in front of a building not so different from the others surrounding, but, when someone enter the various environments, the amazement of being inside welcoming vaulted rooms is clearly perceptible.



At the beginning of the building site, the *maleéms* were trained in the construction technology behind the domes of *Studio2111*.



Another element was to calibrate the entire development of the roof in such a way as to always use the same ribs and thus lighten the economic impact, which would have been different if you wanted to use a roof made of wood, reeds, earth and plastic as per local tradition.



The border blockade that occurred in December and which forced the *Terre à Terre* and *Studio2111* team to fall back home, meant that part of the construction site was managed online, via video and images on the mobile phone. Nevertheless, although there has been an inevitable slowdown in the work schedule, to date, thanks also to the reopening of the borders and the return to the site of the architect Martina Petrosino and the interior designer Auranne Leray, the construction site continues.

To allow the women's association to be able to start using the places and therefore to work and produce to support themselves, *Terre à Terre*, in concert with the women of the *Association féminine du Douar Imloul*, has decided to focus on the kitchen and common room environments. They are therefore proceeding with the interior finishes such as plasters, floors, as well as with the supply of the first furnishings. The proposal to break up the construction site and complete a part of it pending subsequent funding has found immediate acceptance among women who are already starting to move although there are still elements to be completed.



The hope is that this women's home will be ready and usable as soon as possible so that the activities planned by the Moroccan association that organizes them to train women and to generate income can exist at full capacity. Among the aims of the association there is that of initiating exchanges of knowledge and experiences also with associations of other villages. It is for this reason that a women's house becomes essential to make this all begin!



Project sheet

Project location: Imloul, Ouarzazate province, Morocco

Promoter: association Terre à Terre asbl
www.terreaterre-asbl.wixsite.com/website

Beneficiary: Association féminine du Douar Imloul (Morocco)

Comprehensive project for the recovery and redevelopment of the existing: Terre à Terre asbl (Belgium)

Roofing project: Studio2111 (Italy)
www.studio2111.com

Construction site team: Terre à Terre asbl, Studio2111 and Association Naktachef (Morocco)

Partners: Municipality of Schaerbeek (Belgium)
www.1030.be/fr, Maison des Femmes di Schaerbeek (Belgium)
www.facebook.com/MaisonFemmesHuisVrouw
 Studio2111

Patronages: Association Naktachef, PermaAtlas (Morocco) www.perma-atlas.com/en/home/ ANAB (Italy) <https://www.anab.it/>, Erbivera (Italy) <https://erbivera.it/>

Video presentation:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=olJfWijiBrI>

To support the project: <https://terreaterre-asbl.wixsite.com/website/support-us>

Arch. Stefania Vestuto

A special thanks goes to the Terre à Terre and Studio2111 teams for contributing to the writing of the article.