

A HOUSE ON AN OLIVE GROVE · MARRAKECH



Villa Zitoun

A CONCEPT MONOGRAPH

the olive villa

VILLA ZITOUN

A modern villa *on a working olive grove.*

Four acres of silver Picholine on the Haouz plain, a tad outside Marrakech, the High Atlas holding the southern horizon. A single long, low bar of warm plaster set into the trees. This book walks it, room by room, from the road to the grove.

PROLOGUE

A long, low horizon of ochre plaster laid across the top of a gentle rise in an old olive grove, single-storey and almost blind to the road, its western face opening in three tall bays of glass held in a deep loggia the afternoon sun cannot reach.

The roof is a single thin plane, its fascia a crisp shadow-line. The walls are hand-troweled lime the colour of the dry earth they stand on, so the building looks quarried from the site rather than set upon it. One old olive, kept where it grew, stands in the gravel forecourt against the blank entry wall.

There are no arches, no tilework, no carving anywhere the eye can find. Only mass, shade, a thin sheet of still water along the base of the loggia, and the grove running away to the foothills. It reads at first glance as a serene contemporary house. The Morocco is felt, not seen.

I

SECTION ONE

The Land

The grove is a working grove and it stays one. The house takes only what it needs. What changes as you approach is not the trees but the discipline: the grove tightens into rows, then gravel, then a few deliberate specimens and a sheet of still water, then loosens out again.



PLATE I · THE GROVE & THE SEGUIA

A shallow rill in warm stone leaves the house and runs a short way into the trees before it joins the grove's own irrigation channel. Mature Picholine Marocaine on the offset grid; agave, aloe, rosemary and lavender in raked honey gravel; one deep-magenta bougainvillea against a blank plaster wall, the single strong colour outside. No lawn anywhere.

THE PALETTE

Walls are the finish.

The whole house is built from five materials and nothing else. Warm ochre lime, coarse and matte outside, polished to tadelakt within. Travertine, filled and honed, never shiny. Oiled oak, mid-toned, its grain left visible. Bronze, unlacquered, allowed to age to a soft brown. Undyed linen and wool in sand, cream and charcoal.

The Morocco lives here, in the plaster and the light, and the material does the work no ornament is asked to do.

01 LIME PLASTER

Hand-troweled limewash without; tadelakt within, warmer in the wet rooms.

02 TRAVERTINE

Warm ivory, filled and honed. Floors, pool deck, the carved tub and bench.

03 OILED OAK

Joinery, doors, the long dining table, the platform beds.

04 BRONZE

Tapware, pulls, fittings, the window frames. The only metal.

05 LINEN & WOOL

Undyed. One warm note allowed: a madder kilim in the study.





THE ENTRY

A dim passage, then the light.

Dark after the bright forecourt, a low tadelakt gallery runs the depth of the bar. A single deep niche is cut in the plaster, lit only by a high slot, holding one plain terracotta oil jar. Not a mihrab and not decorated: a shadow box in plaster, the one built grace note of the whole house.

FURNISHING

One long limewashed-oak bench; a runner in undyed wool; honed travertine underfoot. The passage opens at its far end straight into the great room and the grove beyond.

THE GREAT ROOM

The whole west wall slides
into the wall and the room
becomes the loggia.

Honed travertine runs unbroken to the pool. A pair of low oatmeal-linen sofas, a raw-oak plank low table, a bronze floor lamp, a deep cream-and-charcoal wool rug. The fireplace is one clean rectangle cut in the plaster, no mantel. The grove is the art.



THE KITCHEN & DINING

One monolithic travertine island, near three and a half metres, sits against warm oak cabinetry under a plastered hood. Bronze tapware, a bronze gooseneck, an induction plate set flush. A deep clerestory slot pulls north light in a hard raking bar across the plaster wall.

THE TABLE

One long solid-oak table seats ten, drawn up to oak spindle-back chairs with woven-rush seats; a single linear bronze pendant runs its length.

The light arrives once a day and crosses the wall like a sundial.

THE STUDY

The one warm colour in the house.

Floor-to-ceiling limewashed-oak shelving holds one wall. A leather-and-oak sling chair, a plain oak desk, a bronze task lamp. A deep-set west door gives onto a small walled reading court with a single olive.

A NOTE ON THE KILIM

The madder-red kilim on the floor is the single warm colour permitted indoors. Everywhere else the palette holds to sand, cream and charcoal, and lets the grove's silver-green be the only strong note, and it comes from outside.



II

SECTION TWO

The Private Wing

The wing folds forward off the south end of the bar, turning its shoulder to the road and the sun. The suite, the carved-stone bath, and the hammam sit half-buried against the rise, cool and dim, reached from the bedroom and from the pool terrace both.



THE PRIMARY SUITE

A plaster platform, undyed linen, and a wall of glass onto the pool.

Walls in a warmer honey tadelakt; oak nightstands; two low bronze pendants on long cords. The glass slides away to a private screened terrace, the pool, and the grove running to the foothills.

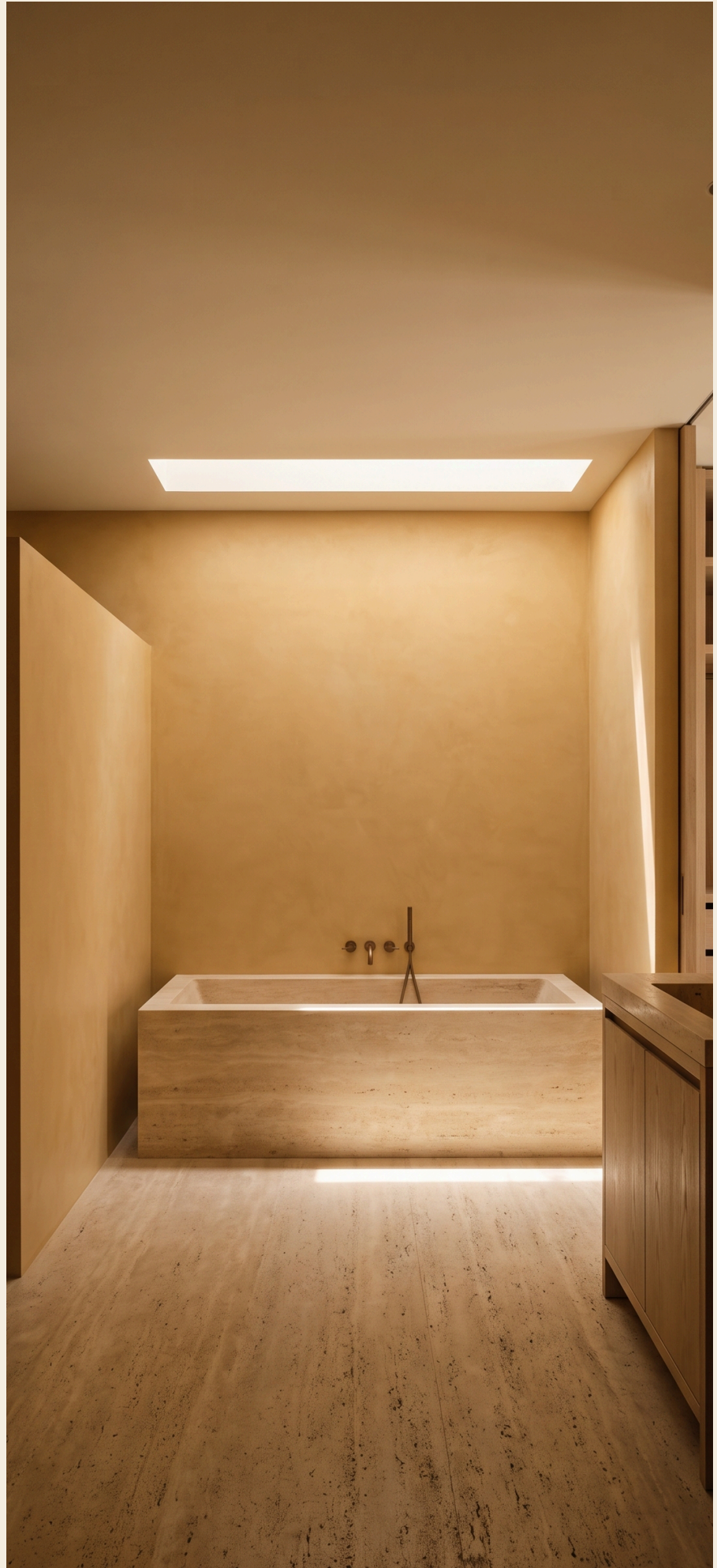
THE BATH & DRESSING

Tadelakt at its purest.

A tub carved from a single block of travertine sits below a high light slot that lays one bright bar across the honey plaster. A wall-mounted bronze filler; a walk-in shower behind a plaster screen; twin oak vanities with travertine tops and bronze fittings.

DRESSING

Limewashed-oak joinery runs through to the suite, and a plaster wall away, to the hammam.





THE HAMMAM

*One round oculus, one moving
disc of light.*

The one room where the bathing tradition is explicit, and still there is no tile. Warm grey-rose tadelakt, cooler than the rest of the house on purpose. A carved travertine hot bench, an aged bronze bucket, a plaster plunge holding still water, a bronze spout. The plaster and the light do all of it.

THE GUEST ROOMS · ONE

Furnished as a real room, never a spare.

A plaster platform bed, undyed white linen, an oak nightstand with a bronze task lamp, an oak bench, a deep wool rug. A corner window opens the room straight onto the silver grove.



GUEST TWO · NORTH-LIT

Deep slot windows lay bright bars across the plaster. A platform bed in oatmeal linen, a tan leather-and-oak sling chair, a bronze floor lamp, an oak side table.



GUEST THREE · THE SNUG

The smallest room doubles as a snug: a built-in linen daybed set into oak shelving, cream and charcoal cushions, a low window to the grove, a small bronze lamp on an oak block.

III

SECTION THREE

The Grounds

The loggia, the pool, and the barn sit on the plinth's west edge and out among the trees. Every element of water is still or slow. Every seat is placed in real afternoon shade. The luxury is shade, and the sound of water moving slowly, and hot rosemary at four in the afternoon.



THE LOGGIA

The shaded threshold, the whole Moroccan idea, in modern language.

The roof plane is carried out past the glass on slender warm-toned piers. At the foot of the great-room glass runs a single silent line of still water, the courtyard fountain reduced to one channel, reflecting the soffit and the sky. Travertine daybeds in oatmeal linen; the pool and the grove beyond.

ON THE WATER

No fountain, no basin, no jets. One still line at the glass, and a dark sheet you can swim in, set to look into the trees. The restraint is the luxury.



PLATE II · THE POOL TERRACE

A long dark-lined pool set flush in warm travertine, its far lip a negative edge reading as a line against the grove. No coping stands proud of the deck. Travertine loungers in linen; a single old olive kept at the terrace corner for its shade. The pool is the foreground of the grove.



THE BARN & Paddock

The house's language, stripped plainer.

Ochre limewash, a flat roof, a deep shaded run on slim piers, three oak half-doors. It sits well off, downwind and downhill at the grove's edge, behind a screen of cypress, so from the terrace the eye reads grove, then a dark vertical of cypress, then foothills.

THE Paddock

The paddock is simply the grove, fenced and grazed. The horses live under the olives and the olives shade the horses. Fencing is oiled-oak post-and-rail, understated to near-invisibility. A plain stone trough, fed from the seguaia, sits inside the water language of the whole garden.



THE STABLE YARD

A working farm, lived in.

The barn opens along its shaded run: three oak half-doors thrown back, a saddle and a coiled rope on the rail, a hay net and a plain wooden bucket to hand. A chestnut mare stands in the run; a dark bay waits in the paddock light. The gravel yard is ochre decomposed granite, the paddock the grove floor itself, grazed low.

SHADE & PLANTING

Shade comes from carob and a broad mulberry over the yard, with fig and pomegranate at the tack-room end and a grape vine trained along the barn's working face. Lavender, rosemary and blue plumbago run the walls; a prickly-pear hedge holds the paddock corner. No oleander anywhere near the horses.

THE SCREEN

A single line of cypress closes the view back to the house, so the eye reads grove, then a dark vertical, then the foothills.



THE WALLED GARDEN

A kitchen garden, ordered four- square.

Behind a dust-and-honey limewash wall, a still travertine basin catches the sky where the two gravel paths cross, and a warm-stone rill carries the water down to a flush oak gate. Cypress marks the four corners; the beds are drip-fed at the root, the rill the old channel made visible.

The garden reads inward and quiet: a walled room open to the sky, four beds ordered around the water, planted for the kitchen rather than for show. Its productivity is the Morocco whisper – a working Haouz farm garden in a modern, restrained hand.

CITRUS

Maroc Late and Washington Navel orange, Clementine and Nadorcott mandarin, Beldi lemon, a bitter orange for preserving – espaliered along the warm wall.

HERBS

Spearmint (*na'na*, the tea mint), coriander, flat-leaf parsley, wild thyme (*za'atar*), sage, basil, and a hedged block of rosemary.

ROSES

Heat-true Tea and China roses, and a low hedge of the Damask rosewater rose, *Rosa × damascena*, off the hottest wall.

ON THE WALLS

Grape, fig and pomegranate trained flat to catch the held heat.

Held in the hedge, never on the land.

A clay tennis court in ochre-red *terre battue*, the one court colour that belongs to this earth, set beside a single hard court in a muted grey-green. Dense Italian cypress hedges the long sides; rosemary and *Lavandula dentata* skirt the bases; the ball-stop is a dark mesh set inside the cypress, gone at fifteen paces. From the grove the eye reads olives, a dark hedge, then the foothills. No silver cage anywhere.

Villa Zitoun

the olive villa

A design fiction. The villa in these pages exists only in this book: an invented modern house of some seven thousand square feet on four acres of working olive grove, a tad outside Marrakech. Warm modern, and Morocco a whisper. Two gestures only carry the whisper: the still water line along the loggia, and the single carved niche in the entry.

The register is Studio KO restraint, Chipperfield material honesty, Andō light discipline, Van Duysen quiet planning. The grove is the art.