

Riez (FR)

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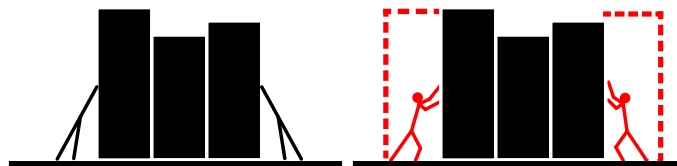
contrefort communal

Starting point – four days in Riez

We spent four days in **Riez**. Four days in which we experienced a town that **radiates incredible charm and evokes fascination for its historic fabric, cultural richness, landscape, and layered history**. And yet, appearing deeply exhausted, weighed down by visible decay and dominated by vacant buildings. There was an atmosphere of resignation and of dormant, overlooked potential. The old town and its social fabric seemed to be unravelling, constantly exposed to the threat of collapse. Leaning against each other and holding each other upright, many buildings were additionally equipped with informal support structures.

Concept “contrefort communal”

And in these provisional frameworks, we identified our concept: Riez requires nothing more than stabilisation, connection and solidarity – a “contrefort communal” on a built and social scale.



new spaces for living

The physical condition of buildings supporting each other becomes the conceptual foundation of the project. **Rather than tabula rasa planning, we propose to strengthen it – with visible architectural interventions that act as social and physical supports.** These elements are not hidden; they remain legible and meaningful, representing solidarity and shared responsibility by offering communal infrastructure and necessary spaces with new characteristic identities.

In this project, the community of Riez is pictured in terms of housing, leisure, education and culture, which all together provide an impulse for living and working in a social society.

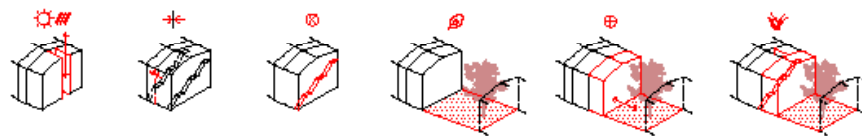
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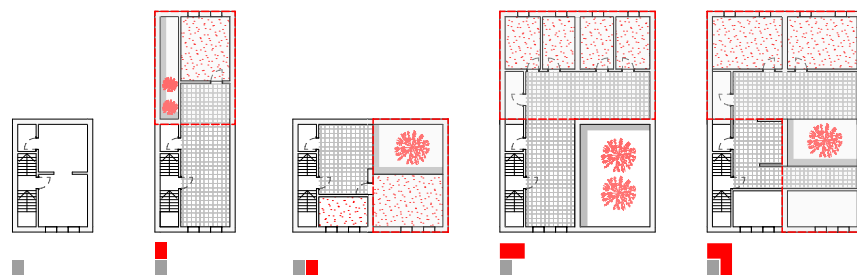
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cluster flats

The existing residential buildings in the town centre have a narrow and dense layout, are vertically structured and allow daylight to enter the rooms from only one side. In this proposal, this structure is not devalued but rather transformed. **The houses are functionally combined to form a vibrant organism.** In this way, the old town becomes a solidary residential structure that enables a diverse and communal way of living.



Through these measures, residential clusters with private refuge and shared infrastructure are being created. **Neighbourhoods are not formed by chance, but through spatial arrangement and social logic.** Older people receive support through neighbourhoods, shared duties and low-barrier structures. Young families find affordable housing and childcare close to their home. Tourists find an authentic and unique living environment that calls for discovery.



The design is intended for permanent living, not for tourist utilisation. However, a lively neighbourhood also benefits from occasional renewal, from external views, from new impulses. This is why individual buildings in the cluster structure are deliberately opened up for short-term but integrated usage such as artist residencies, social initiatives, temporary educational or care projects.

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contrefort communal

beyond housing ...

However, the idea of *contrefort* is not limited to the established residential clusters but extends into the urban structure. Two new buildings strategically flank the village core, forming a built *contrefort* – a spatial reinforcement that expands the idea of community beyond individual housing clusters and their semi-private shared spaces. **This architectural gesture anchors the village while introducing new communal centers that foster interaction and participation on a broader scale.**

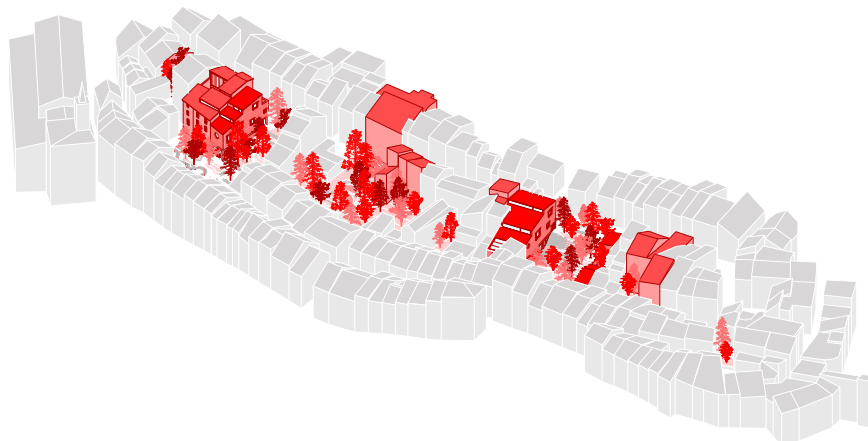
... community center

Situated at the eastern edge of the existing building line, the community center marks a spatial and programmatic culmination. Following the natural topography, it appears as an abstract continuation of the built fabric – a sculpted shell that echoes the village's architectural language. This hollowed-out structure houses a large, flexible assembly hall and provides space for town meetings, theater performances, educational lectures, and celebrations.

The interior extends into the green public space through transparent thresholds, transforming into a seasonal amphitheater and inviting seamless indoor-outdoor interaction. Adjacent facilities such as a communal laundry and workshop further support daily community life by forming a key hub for shared activities and informal encounters.

... community kitchen

The second intervention introduces a community kitchen surrounded by small cultivation plots. At its heart is a large communal table – a modern-day local table – that becomes a focal point for shared meals, food exchange, and informal dialogue. Supplemented by a small-scale gastronomy and occasional barter markets, this space strengthens local food culture and promotes sustainable self-reliance.



contrefort communal

... landscape

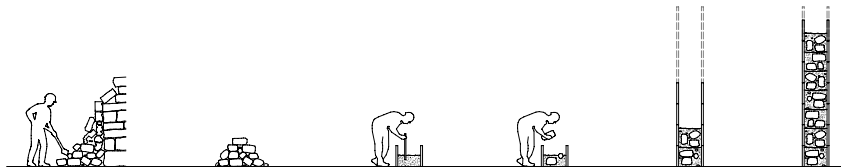
The existing natural growth of the spatial gaps is only enhanced with additional planting of trees and shrubs. Space for accessibility and connection is gently constructed with small elements that follow the natural topography.

... material

The construction method of all new elements are faithful to regional tradition. **Stone walls re-enforced with lime cement.**

We are now incorporating mineral deposits from various local sources of rubble. A significant amount of deconstructed asphalt is produced in areas where green spaces are being expanded. Additionally, interventions in existing buildings require the removal of non-load-bearing structures, which can also be reused. Site inspections have already revealed such materials ready for the taking on several abandoned plots.

This is the accumulated material history of Riez — and it will be reintroduced into the newly constructed elements.



... a Regional Strategy of Activation

These architectural interventions are part of a broader regional strategy aimed at revitalizing rural life. Through minimal yet targeted insertions – prosthetics for existing structures – latent potentials are revealed and activated. **The approach is deliberately small in scale yet high in impact, focusing on the specific strengths of each location:**

Next to the chapel on the hill, a gathering space near the chapel provides the infrastructure for communal celebrations, mountain hikes, and informal outdoor events.

The area around the silo turns into a space dedicated to cultural production and youth activities – including a skate park and event zone – gives room for louder, more dynamic expressions not suited to the village core.

The existing riverside park with its historical excavations is vitalized as a cooling retreat with water access, shaded seating, and improved landscape features, reactivating the public green space as a shared natural resource.

Together, these elements propose a layered, place-sensitive vision for future rural development – where built form, landscape, and community interweave into a vibrant social fabric.