



Frank Lloyd Wright's unexecuted Project for the Masieri Foundation, 1952



Contemporary View of the Site, ca. 2010

## Design for the Masieri Foundation, Venice

### Introduction

The Masieri Foundation was proposed by a Venetian family in memory of Angelo Masieri, an architect and associate of Carlo Scarpa, who was tragically killed in an automobile accident. The objective of the Foundation as initially conceived in 1952 was to foster the study of architecture in the city of Venice in his memory and in association with the Istituto Universitario Architettura di Venezia (IUAV).

The centerpiece of the Masieri legacy was to be the design and construction of a study center for students that consisted of eighteen residential units and other amenities such as a library, dining facilities etc.. Towards this end the family generously bequeathed their small but strategically placed wedge of property on the Grand Canal at one of its critical turning points called "in volta di canale". The site, which is adjacent to the late 16th Century Palazzo Balbi, had an existing structure of modest architectural dimensions. Meanwhile the intersecting smaller canal contains a variety of smaller structures, almost all of them residential. In many ways the site acts as a pivot or transition element occurring as it does between the architectural formality of the grand canal and the vernacular building along its flank.

The family sought and finally obtained the services of Frank Lloyd Wright who designed a scheme according to their wishes for the site, the only project in Italy to reach such final form by

Wright. Amidst a great deal of controversy, the Wright project was halted by the authorities for "non conformance" with the predominate architecture of the city. After remaining dormant for some years, Carlo Scarpa was given the task of designing the foundation building in the late sixties on the same site and with essentially the same program. Again the project was hampered by official "interference". The project was partially completed on the interior and can be visited to this day.

## Problem

Our design problem will be to revive the program as originally given and design a new Masieri Foundation on the same site. Although the Wright and Scarpa projects are documented (and you should become familiar with each) you are asked to design the center *based on your own architectural judgement and principles*. Besides the rather difficult and obvious issue of conformance (or non-conformance) with the architecture of the city, there is the more fundamental question you will confront, namely the appropriate and intelligent design of an institution devoted to the study of architecture on a prominent urban site in one of the most architecturally celebrated cities in the world.

Some issues we will be confronting during the quarter are:

- urban context and site response including aspect and prospect, adjacency to important historical monuments and sight lines which cross the site and must be respected.
- materials and structure giving special attention to Venetian building technology which may (or may not) be appropriate to use.
- the facade, its compositional relationship to tectonic and symbolic issues of representation.
- light and its modulation on the interior, reflectance off water as a special Venetian condition.
- Venetian building traditions and typologies which may influence your design such as the *portego* (central hall), *mesa* (mezzanine), and *altana* (roof belvedere).

## Program:

You are to assume that at least 12 student residences are to be accommodated with necessary bathroom, storage etc. There should be space for a library of adequate proportions along with a communal dining facility and kitchen. One or two seminars rooms or a larger meeting room that is divisible into two is desirable. Italian codes allow one conveniently placed stair; you should provide an elevator as well to ensure accessibility to all levels.

The site hand-out will provide information about site boundaries and other critical information. You are asked to work in metric as this was required of both Wright and Scarpa.

