The building is located in the upper section of the oldest part of Ragusa where longitudinal streets are running parallel at different levels, following the natural slope of the land and led together by a cross-rows of steps. The current sequence of buildings is the result of combining or subdividing properties and sometimes even modifying the old connections between levels, which once tended to be divided between the ground floor production areas and the upper floor lodgings. The project is about the renovation of a portion of the former where the lower floors were originally used for the production and for the sale of the traditional cheese. Over the years, the building has been transformed and modified several times.

While the previous entrance of the house was located on the northern side where the building faces into a narrow alley, on the southern side, the house rises two levels above the ground. The solution adopted was to create a courtyard by removing a portion of volume from the section of the building facing into the main street.

Therefore the removal could be considered as a strategy for transforming the existing.

Such a decision certainly reduces the living space, but it brings considerable benefits and creates innovative architectural elements, like the corridor between the outer wall and the house that assures privacy.

Moreover, thanks to the new courtyard sheltered from the winds, the whole house receives plenty of sunshine through the openings in the south-facing wall.

Thanks to the natural ventilation, the courtyard acts as a chimney and it allows the improvement of the energy performance of the entire building.

The vertical connections among the different levels, that are located on the northern side, act like a buffer between the main spaces and the coldest wall.

The courtyard, that became the new entrance of the house, crystallizes an attitude that sees rigorous composition as the best way to combine conservation and innovation. After all, a courtyard is an element taken from a well-established building tradition.

The composition of the contemporary grids for the connecting balconies and the recovered elements, in art nouveau, highlights the stark contrast to the weight of the masonry.

The light has a decorative function, projecting the shadows of the grids into the walls that are deliberately kept clear to create space for the variations of light on the architecture.

The interiors are marked by a careful balance between contemporary elements and the recovered traditional materials such as cobblestones and tiles that were removed and reassembled.

The original tanks used for the water storage are re-used as cisterns where rainwater is gathered for the sanitary system and irrigation of the plants of the courtyard which contribute, in the summer period, to the cooling of the house.

Ragusa is located over 500 meters above sea level which is about 20 Km far. While the city suffers the intense heat and dry summer, winter is characterized by intense rainfall events that bring an annual average of about 700 mm and by the blowing north wind that reaches peaks of 30 m/s.

West and east wind mainly blow from spring to autumn.

Latitude: 38°55'45"N
Longitude: 14°43'49"E

Critical points
- Entry brings the alley
- Darkness
- Privacy

Concept
- Main entry through the court

Project
- The light reaches the whole house
- Privacy is ensured by new distance from the neighborhood
- Reuse of rainwater
- Chimney effect

International Prize for Sustainable Architecture
11th competition 2015

Project title: Casa DCS
Project authors: Giuseppe Gori, Valentina Giampiccolo
Construction place: Ragusa (Italy)
Year of completion: 2014
Architects: Giuseppe Gurnieri, Valentina Giampiccolo

Client: Private
Gross Floor Area: 400 m²
Design Team: Valentine Ochspiders, Dario Gulino, Giulia Fletti
Photography: © Filippo Poli

Born in Ragusa in 1977, Giuseppe Gurnieri, after his architectural graduation at the Politecnico di Milano, worked for some years by Maria Giuseppina Greco Cannillo’s studio. In 2009 he opened his own firm in Ragusa. He works on projects in Sicily and Puglia, and also conducts research and teaches at the Faculty of Architecture of KTH University in Stockholm. He received a number of awards and his works are published in trade magazines and books on architecture.

Valentina Giampiccolo was born in Ragusa in 1977 and graduated from the Syracuse Faculty of Architecture. After a stint with Tantum Studio in London, she came back to Ragusa, where she worked with a number of architecture offices. In 2009 she set up G U M with Giuseppe Minardi in Ragusa, which, in addition to architectural projects, organizes and promotes activities in the field of the visual arts.