

# BUILDING



# PARADISE

CALLWEY

## DEAR READERS

Attention! This is not a travel guide. It is a travel journal with personal impressions and an attempt to analyze Lanzarote – its nature, structure, development, and potentials. These are observations born from the need to understand a place that is both unique and surreal. BUILDING PARADISE is intended to be a personal handbook, enriched with the portrayal of all the places I've visited. Or as a headline: News from Nothing.

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## ARRIVAL

It is January 1st, 2012. Severely hungover, I sit in the rental car on my way to Playa Blanca. The sun makes the asphalt gleam, draping over my face like a silk scarf. Passing copy-and-paste housing blocks with all the charm of a locker room. The New Year's Eve party still thunders through my body. Dinner at a friend's house turned into an excessive night – an evening culminating in our attempts to coax Strawberry Daiquiris out of a blender, which eventually ended with repeated dilutions of rum. The recipe grew increasingly adventurous and ingredient-rich over the hours, making it almost impossible to trace the origins of my current pain.

The past year had been painful overall: my father's stroke in August and his ongoing coma, the leap into self-employment without the protective cushion of being a student, and projects that promised much but drained even more. The Queen once referred to her *annus horribilis* – 1992 – and in 2011, I suddenly understood what she meant. A period in which nothing works, life is seasoned with misfortunes and catastrophes. As if overnight, you lose your sense of balance – stumbling aimlessly into nothingness.

It was time to step back, see something new, and reflect. But finding a place, discovering it, and claiming it for oneself is no small task. Instagram was still in its infancy, and the world hadn't yet been entirely stripped of its mystique. In the end, I landed on this island – filled with notions born of stories and a not-too-serious online search. Volcanoes, Manrique, German expats, and the colors white, black, green.

But what intrigued me most about Lanzarote was the rumor of its emptiness. The absence of vegetation. Only lava and sun. A free space for endless thoughts. The idea of a reset. Fasting – only this time abstaining from experiences and being alone with oneself.

Let me be clear: I'm not here to extol the virtues of esotericism. But stepping into a place born of unique origins and speaking its own organic language – distinct from a mainland European perspective – left a lasting impression on me. Having lived in Berlin since 2004, one eventually begins to accept the rules of a place one once resisted inwardly. It takes time. And it takes understanding. Tracing threads to their origins to understand why things are the way they are – or have become – naturally carries a longer history in European cities than on a volcanic island, where survival was paramount. (In the end, Berlin remains a riddle anyway.)

During the first 14 days on the Canary Islands, I began to wonder why these places remain trapped in the mass-tourism perception of the 1970s. It's the domain of a specific generation and certain nations. Despite its potential – and in Lanzarote's case, despite unique architectures that, for me, perfectly capture what it means to observe, analyze, and translate as an artist and designer.

Back then, I wondered why there wasn't a suitable book reflecting this place – in all its beauty and all its repulsion. This book is my attempt at a personal analysis of a location whose radical conditions have spawned radical responses. It is an exploratory journey in five chapters, mapped to geographical regions, probing the tension of how paradises are created, how they are interpreted, and what parameters define them.

What does nature dictate?  
What does humanity add?  
What does humanity take away?  
What does nature reclaim?

# I POST-APOLLO MYTHS



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Paradise  
under Construction

The first route begins north of the capital, Arrecife, with the Fundación César Manrique. From there, I follow the same road heading north towards Teguise. Perched on the Guanapay volcano high above the village is the Castillo de Santa Bárbara, a fortress offering an impressive view of the landscape. Returning south, I head to Nazareth, where the LagOmar house, designed by César Manrique, is nestled into a mountain—a place with one of the most amusing stories. Next, I make my way to Costa Teguise on the coast, where the Paradisus Hotel sits prominently in the bay. This is a compelling route, connecting two of César Manrique's residential works and passing through a village that has a utopian sister on the coastline.

## NAKED PARADISE

Lanzarote is not the first island that comes to mind when defining the term „paradise.“ In the biblical sense, the Garden of Eden is a place teeming with lush nature, animals, fruits—and a few naked people. However, I discovered that Lanzarote has its own spot for nudity, founded by Germans: Charco del Palo. During a house tour there, I wasn't prepared to see that the free-body culture had made it all the way to this island. While looking out from the house, I suddenly noticed: a man strolled by, completely nude, carrying his groceries, and waved to a couple starting their day by hanging laundry. Also naked. And very German. The gardener guiding me through the house explained that buying the house meant buying into the community. A question mark on my face. “Yes, people here like to shop naked. They've created their own little paradise,” he added. He also mentioned that he was no longer allowed to water the garden because the owners wanted to save water before selling the property.

The property, advertised as a spacious villa, is one of the most absurd real estate listings I've ever seen. A small Fort Knox, fitted with bars on all windows and doors—like the ones seen on stores after closing hours. Lots of space, far too much space, but only one bedroom. The floor plan resembles a Swabian single-family home, complete with a two-story library without windows. A stately garage for two mid-range cars, a massive indoor pool, and a dining area in a lava stone grotto round out the ensemble. Despite a prime waterfront location, the view seems irrelevant in this 1990s abomination—a house by the sea without a sea view, because someone forgot the windows. Paradise points: zero.

Although this house, surrounded by sea and nudity, didn't make it onto my wish list, I became curious about how this type of paradise manifests. The village center, dating back to the 1970s, with its small supermarket, resembles a community center with bulletin boards, board games to borrow, and a tiny library. The supermarket offers an incredible selection of German products, giving a taste of the culinary rituals of this enclave.

My walk through the village took me past pubs reminiscent of small German towns, meticulously decorated gardens, and living rooms with windows overlooking the street to watch who's passing by. Greetings are exchanged. This seems to be a version of paradise that exports a sense of home and combines it with the perks of being abroad: sun, beach, nudity. A paradise full of irony. It isolates itself from the outside world and, in its timeless detachment, could just as well take place in a studio—a perpetual staging of life under the sun.

was reminded of the beach opera in the Lithuanian Pavilion at the 2019 Venice Biennale, staged by filmmaker Rugilė Barzdžiukaitė. In a Venetian warehouse, beach life was reenacted: men, women, and children lounged on chairs and towels, singing arias in turn. Viewed from three meters above, it was both fascinating and revealing. You wrestle with whether you'd like to join or prefer to stay distanced. As for Charco del Palo, I am certain: this is not my paradise. Yet it leads me to the question of whether paradise is always a contrast to something. Paradise defines itself by the presence of beauty and the absence of ugliness. But where does beauty begin, and where does ugliness end? Lanzarote highlights this contrast. The unreal, life-hostile craters and lava landscapes versus the

human-driven utilization, whether agricultural or tourist. Someone who also enjoyed being naked – at least that's how it appears on many images – is one of our protagonists on Lanzarote.

César Manrique was born in Puerto Naos, the old harbor of Arrecife, on April 24, 1919, not far from the San Ginés Lagoon, as the son of the sales representative Gumersindo Manrique and his wife Francisca Cabrera. Growing up with three siblings – his brother Carlos, his sister Juana, and his twin sister Amparo – he experienced Lanzarote intensively from childhood on. The summers were spent with the family in Caleta de Famara, a fishing village in the northwest of the island, where the rugged cliffs and changing weather left a lasting impression on him. At the age of 23, he exhibited his first work in Arrecife, marking the beginning of his artistic career.

In 1945, Manrique attended the Academy of Fine Arts in Madrid, where he obtained his master's degree in drawing and painting in 1950. In the Spanish capital, his artistic direction unfolded, and he encountered the avant-garde movements of his time. In 1954, he founded Spain's first gallery for non-figurative art in Madrid with Fernando Fé. However, after the early loss of his partner, Pepi Gómez, he moved to New York in 1964, where he immersed himself in American art. His engagement with Abstract Expressionism, Pop Art, and Kinetic Art profoundly influenced his work.

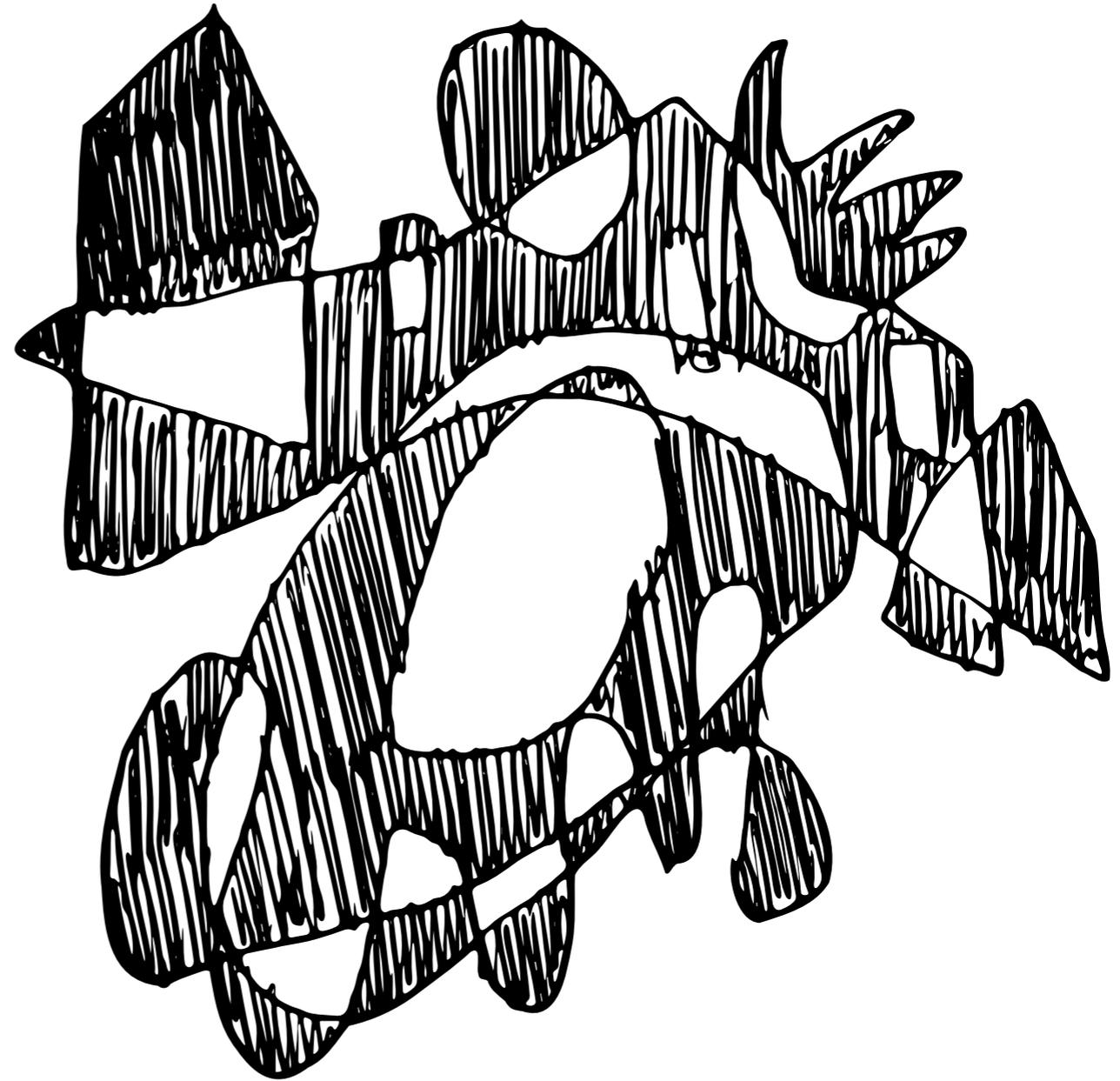
In 1968, Manrique returned to Lanzarote, determined to transform his home island into a unique space for art and culture. In collaboration with Pepín Ramírez Cerdá, the president of the island government, he advocated

for an architectural style that preserved traditional building methods and kept mass tourism in check. With the Monumento del Campesino and other works that combined local elements with avant-garde ideas, Manrique significantly shaped the appearance of Lanzarote. (In my opinion, an important aspect of César Manrique's career is that an old family friend had become president of the island government in the meantime, thus enabling a multitude of projects. Regardless of how one evaluates this – it proves that architecture and art are capable of creating identities for places. Of course, this can also work in the negative case.)

Manrique gained particular fame through the creation of his own house in Tahíche, which was built amidst volcanic bubbles and reflected his artistic philosophy of symbiosis with nature. In 1982, he founded the Fundación César Manrique here. He also worked to promote art on the island, for instance, through the cultural center El Almacén and the art gallery El Aljibe, which served as international meeting points for art enthusiasts.

Manrique's influence on Lanzarote was far-reaching. With his commitment to sustainable tourism and the preservation of the island's cultural identity, he helped secure Lanzarote's designation as a UNESCO Biosphere Reserve in 1993. On September 25, 1992, Manrique lost his life in a traffic accident. The roundabout at the accident site is now adorned with his wind chime in Tahíche.

# Fundación César Manrique

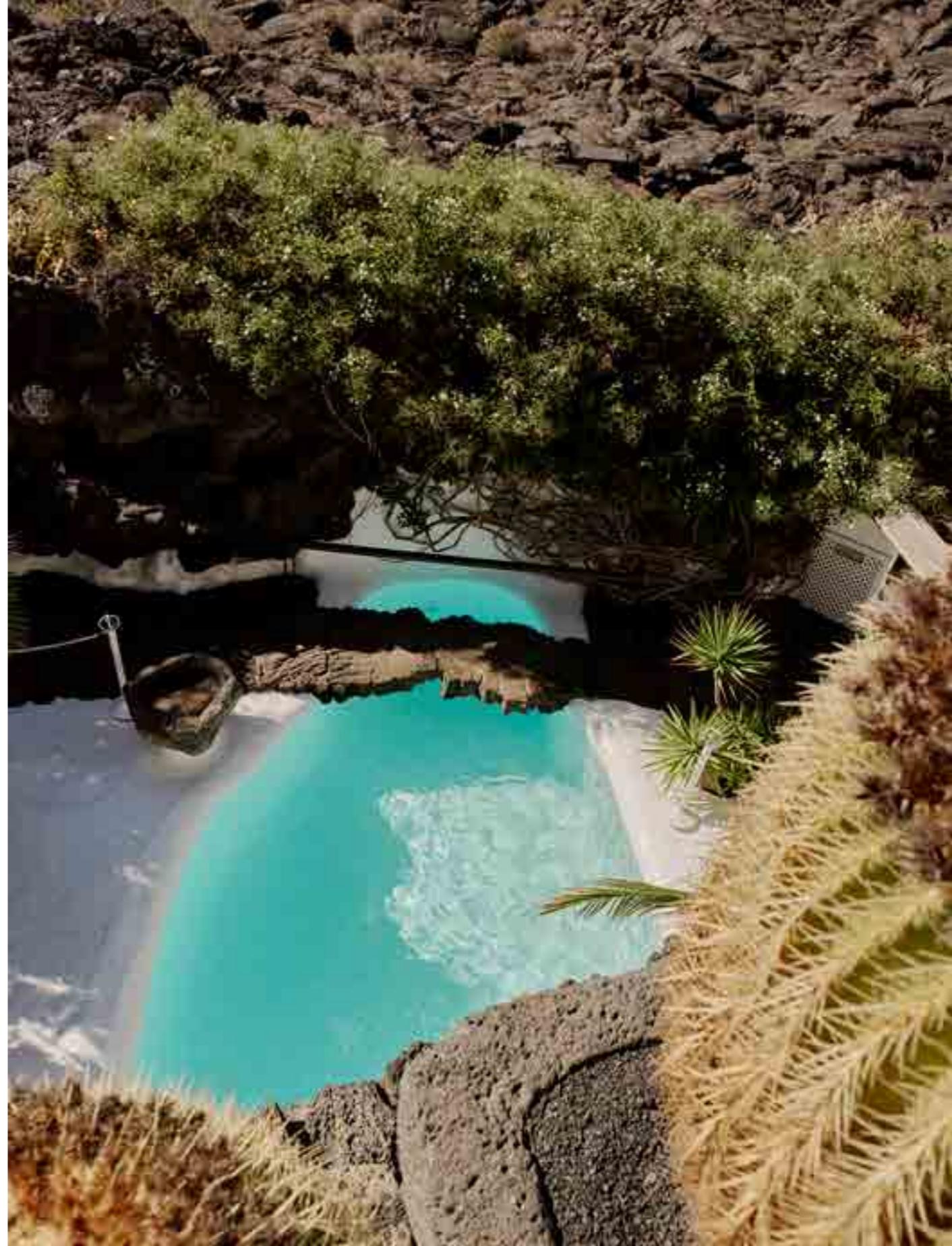


A

I'd like to start my tour with something truly beautiful: the Fundación César Manrique in Tahíche, one of his former residences, built on five lava bubbles. It epitomizes his philosophy of merging the natural landscape with the local architectural vernacular. You can't help but think of a Ken Adam set for a James Bond movie. From the former living areas, you descend into the caves, which have been converted into living spaces. These form courtyards with pools and offer framed views of the landscape. Manrique is said



to have discovered the property while passing by. A fig tree emerged from the lava flow and seemed like a sign for him to build a house there. It seems that one just needs to recognize such signs. Apparently, the landowners had already realized that they wanted to gift the land to Manrique, as it was considered unusable. There were no restrictions regarding space either. And so, he designed the house and discovered the cavities within the lava. I would call it a lottery win.





The most iconic feature is likely the rectangular window through which lava appears to flow into the house—a dramatic fusion of landscape and architecture. Great design thrives on contrasts. The first contrast emerges from the interplay between traditional Canary Island architecture, referenced here, and contemporary responses like large window panes, mirrors, and white marble floors. But it's in the basement where the real party—quite literally—begins.

**BUILDING PARADISE – Lanzarote** invites you on a personal journey across the barren, volcanic island as seen through Fabian Freytag's eyes. In the tradition of César Manrique, he shows how architecture, furniture, and landscape interventions can shape a very personal kind of paradise. Amid volcanic stone, light, minimal flora, and quiet corners, Cluster Architecture and the utopias of the 1970s echo in the designs, while the passage of time and shifting ideas of paradise redefine how we perceive and create spaces. A book about stillness, atmosphere, and the art of transforming the unnoticed into a singular, intimate paradise.

**CALLWEY**