

**Special mention. Architecture category**

**El Camino de la Almazara (The Mill Pathway)** (La Artejuela, Castellón, Spain)

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**DESIGN REPORT: EL CAMINO DE LA ALMAZARA (THE MILL PATHWAY)**

“El camino de la Almazara” was an entry in a call for tenders by Castellón Provincial Council. In this project, set in the rural surroundings of La Artejuela oil mill and the village of Arañuel, in Alto Mijares, ceramic materials have been used to regenerate a series of urban spaces.

The project is based on observation of existing uses by the village’s inhabitants and visitors. It does not aspire to alter the existing path, but to subtly improve on it by offering a richer experience along the way and a more satisfying visit. The route runs by the millstream and millpond, passing through spots with strong historical reminiscences: the oil mill, washhouse, pergola, benches and vantage points that define the landscape.

The idea was to carry out minimal restoration work, using something akin to keyhole surgery. The ruins of the oil mill were strengthened with metal girders and the rubble from the roof was re-used to make a new floor. At specific intervals along the pathway, semi-circular benches invite walkers to halt, converse and rest for a while opposite vantage points here and there that overlook the millpond.

A small concrete half dome protects the river-facing side of two garages from water erosion. The dome gives way to a washhouse, which has regained its natural productive role. The water trough is once again accessible and a pergola covers it all, evocative of the old structure, today reinterpreted with branches and the leaves of deciduous trees.

The path crosses the inside of the oil mill, passing a metal threshold that marks the entrance. Inside, strategic openings frame views of the landscape, and a semi-covered courtyard, featuring both reclaimed and new beams, introduces visitors to the mill and press, demonstrating their heritage value. Rounding it all off is long tile-clad bench, accompanied by a set of steps between different levels and, as a final tribute to the past, a cantilever beam and rope to jump into the millpond under the fig tree.

From our very first visit, we realized that materials were key to the project. This privileged setting called for the use of natural materials, able to fit in with the existing ones without dominating it all. That is why we chose extruded stoneware due to its resistance to frost and temperature changes and its natural shade of colour, which fades into the landscape.

Thanks to the versatility of its different formats, it could be used along the whole route in different layouts, with 12×24.5cm tiles on the main path and 24.5×24.5 and 12×12, 6×6 formats and 52×28,5×22cm special tile pieces for the edges.

Overall, this is a project with minimum intervention work, aimed at upholding the history of the place while also fostering community life. It is made up of a succession of spaces for conversing and observing and enjoying the landscape, rousing users' interest in the place. The ceramic materials link up each landmark along the route, and, as the sun rises each day, they blend naturally into the landscape.

### **Ceramic materials used in the project**

Exagrés (Gresán, colour: Albarracín)