Located at a relatively high altitude on a flattish plain, Mahallat is an ancient town in Markazi province in central Iran that has benefited over the centuries from an abundance of thermal springs and surrounding mountains boasting a multitude of stone deposits. Today, the latter accounts for more than 50% of the local economy in the form of stonecutting factories and stone export. However, more than 50% of the stones worked, totalling some 365,000 tons per year, are discarded during the process.

The project aimed to redress this situation and successfully demonstrated – locally and abroad – that the recycling of discarded stone is not only cost-effective, energy-saving and environmentally friendly but can also be aesthetically pleasing and innovative.

The five-storey mixed-use building, comprising two ground-floor retail spaces and eight three-bedroom apartments above, stands slightly higher than the city centre and is visible from afar. It presents innovative facades of recycled stones, which are very durable, need little maintenance, facilitate insulation and temperature control, protect the building against rain and allow it to breathe. The pierced perimeter walls of the communal courtyard and some freestanding interior walls are also made of these discarded stones, which are variable in shape, size and colour but have a distinctive uniform thickness.

The addition of triangular stone protrusions on the two shorter fronts ingeniously creates rectangular rooms inside the apartments, overcoming the restrictions of the irregular shape of the lot, and at the same time sheltering smaller windows below them and animating the facades. Larger windows have wooden shutters, inspired by old Mahallati doors, that fold back along rails and allow residents to control light, temperature and privacy levels and that are also a distinctive feature of the exterior.

The interiors feature distinct private and public areas, while communal space is provided in the minimally landscaped courtyard and panoramic rooftop area.

Emulating strong sharp forms found in the quarries nearby, the austere presence of the building – enlivened by the play between abstract volumes and massing, shadows and voids, textures and colours, contemporary design and traditional concepts – has already become an icon in the town and a model for new directions in contemporary building design.
APARTMENT NO. 1
Mahallat, Iran

CLIENTS
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ARCHITECT
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STRUCTURAL ENGINEER
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MECHANICAL ENGINEER
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PROJECT DATA
Site area: 420 m²
Ground-floor area: 260 m²
Cost: 660,000 USD
Commission: August 2007
Design: August 2007–December 2007
Construction: January 2008–August 2010
Completion: September 2010

RAMIN MEHDIZADEH
Born in Ahwaz, Iran, in 1976, architect Ramin Mehdizadeh gained his Master’s Degrees in Architecture at the National University of Iran, Tehran, and in Real Estate Development at Columbia University in New York. During his time with Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, New York, in 2007–08, his projects included the schematic design drawings, the design development drawings and the construction document drawing sets for Moynihan Station Redevelopment (Penn Station), New York, for Madison Square Garden, and also for the National University of Singapore in 2008 and for Mumbai International Airport, India, the same year. From 2009, with his partners, he founded Architecture by Collective Terrain (AbCT), a full-service international architectural firm based in Tehran, Seoul and Washington DC, specialised in projects in Asia and the Middle East. The design of Apartment No. 1 in Mahallat gained Mehdizadeh first place in the Grand Me’mar Award, 2010. This project has been published in many international architectural magazines, such as Architectural Design, The Plan and Atlas: Architectures of the 21st Century – Africa and Middle East 2012, and is illustrated on many architectural websites. Mehdizadeh was also awarded the World Architecture Community Award, New York, 2008, and the plaque of the first ranked Architect of the Year, 2010, Tehran, Iran.

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