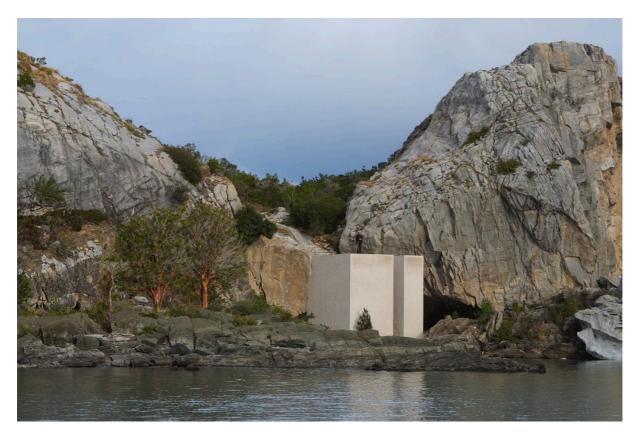# By Design | Inside a Remote Island Made of Marble, an Artist's New Abode

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Not Vital says about his remote island NotOna that a lonely flower or a single arrayán tree can form a new experience in your life — akin to taking your first step. An arrayán tree pops against the white concrete of Big Stairs, pictured here after the rain. *Photograph by Cristian Orellana; Produced by Gay Gassmann.*

In the middle of the Lago General Carrera, a lake that stretches from Chile to Argentina, the Swiss artist Not Vital has crafted another minimalist yet innovative home for himself. He bought one of the 13 islands there in 2008 — "It is not big, and it is not small," he says — and has been working on it since 2009. This month, he finally finished the quiet little island, which he has named NotOna, the first photos of which are featured here.

Approaching the remote body of land from the water, it seems as though NotOna is exactly what you'd expect of an island near Patagonia: an uninhabited rocky terrain dotted with grass, trees, flowers and caves. But closer inspection reveals that it's actually an island of marble, a material not ideal for erecting structures upon. So, true to the style of his other projects around the world — like the home in Agadez, Niger, made entirely of local materials, or the small house in a park in Sent, Switzerland, which is topped with grass and disappears into the Earth with the press of a bu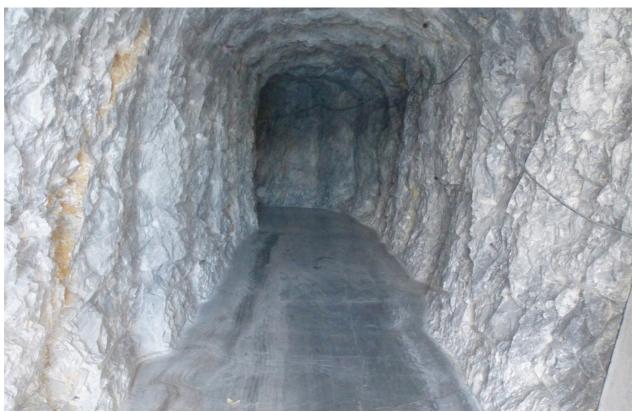tton — Vital respected the habitat first and foremost. He treated the marble the way artists before him have for centuries and carved what he calls the NotOna Tunnel out of it. The 50-meter sculpture, which stretches from one side of the island to the other, serves as his "house" here. And instead of discarding the marble stones he tore out of the belly of the island, he repurposed them to fill Big Stairs, the large, white concrete box that registers like a port or entryway on the water's edge. It contains a bare triangular room, accessible by the NotOna Tunnel.

Vital runs through the NotOna Tunnel, from one end of the island to the other, to catch the first glimpse of the sun and the moon. "You spend a lot of time chasing them," he says. *Photograph by Cristian Orellana; Produced by Gay Gassmann*

Like the towers he built in Agadez, Niger — one for watching sunsets, one for protection from sandstorms and one for watching the moon — this tunnel has a purpose. "You watch the sunset, from the inside world, that's the reason why this tunnel was formed," he says. "No sound, no noise, no smell, no phone. The womb of the earth. Since childhood I wanted to enter the world, the stone, to be inside, to be protected and see the world from within. The surface was not enough for me it seems. Maybe that's why I wanted to be a sculptor after all. A habitat where you see the stunning outside, the lake so blue it almost hurts your eyes — and in the front, the glacier of St. Valentin, 50 kilometers in length. The house is joining the outside world for good, it seems. And I am there inside, so small." When staying on NotOna, Vital sleeps in the tunnel on a mattress covered with a sleeping bag. He shares the place with a single mink and, possibly, a fox.

The NotOna Tunnel is "a single 50-meter-long slab of white marble so smooth you can slip," explains Vital about his "house" on the island, which he describes as "a castle in the ground without a king or queen or slave." *Photograph by Not Vital; Produced by Gay Gassmann*

The blue waters of the Lago General Carrera, where NotOna is one of 13 islands, abut both Chile and Argentina.*Photograph by Cristian Orellana; Produced by Gay Gassmann.*

Vital shares the island with a wild mink and, possibly, a fox. *Photograph by Cristian Orellana; Produced by Gay Gassmann.*