Luis Barragán
The Eye Embodied
The somewhat enigmatic title of this text and this book actually has a kind of polysemic meaning. On the one hand (as I will try to show you) it refers to Barragán’s personal development from a young, mainly visually inclined, amateur architect, to an Architect who gradually matured to become the master of a specific type of Architecture, an architecture that tries to involve its users and visitors (bodily and mentally) in a sort of kine-aesthetic (or kine-aesthetic) experience with all their senses. By this I mean the subtle choreography of movement and the sequences of atmospheres (physical and spiritual) that Barragán generated within his Architecture and that its users and visitors will constantly get involved in while experiencing his architectural mise en scène of space and light, material and color, of smell and sound, movement and time. In other words, it refers specifically to the development of the Architecture of Luis Barragán, as a type of Architecture that involves us (often on a subconscious level) in a kine-aesthetic experience with all our faculties of perception and imagination, thus evoking emotions that in turn might spark within us an intuition of beauty.

On the other hand the title also refers to the photographs of Kim Zwarts, as the product of his encounters with Mexico and, more particularly with the architectural oeuvre of Luis Barragán, as presented in this book. Looking at his photographs one senses that within these perfectly composed images of stillness a transformation of reality took place. His precisely framed optic, or better said his delicately masked views of reality, demonstrate that the true magic of his art lies in the adroit re-veiling of reality in order to reveal -or unveil- it to us as a new, a poetic, visual reality. In his carefully composed views it seems as if certain aspects of reality -in terms of space and time- have been sublimated, as in the act of contemplating or meditating, or in a trance, and subsequently transubstantiated in the form of refined photographic images.

---

1 This text is an extended version of the lecture ‘Luis Barragán, The Eye Embodied’, that I gave for the Alvar Aalto Academy in Helsinki, on 7 October 2004.

2 Amateur in the original sense of the word (from Latin amâtor, lover; from amâre, to love) as he who’s original energy is his own free-will and who’s driving force is his love, and not the ‘binding’ vow of the ‘professional’ (from Medieval Latin professus, avowed, and from Medieval Latin professâre, to administer a vow, both from Latin professus, past participle of profiteri, to affirm openly: pro-, forth; + fatērî, to acknowledge). See ‘The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language’.

3 Since I don’t only refer to the ‘kinesthetic’ as ‘the sense that detects bodily position, weight, or movement of the muscles, tendons, and joints’, but also to the idea of aesthetics (or esthetics) in the sense of that which is ‘characterized by a heightened sensitivity to beauty’, it may be better to call it a ‘kine-aesthetic’ (or kine-aesthetic) experience (from Greek κînein, to move + the Greek aisthētikos, of sense perception, from aisthēta, perceptible things, from aisthanesthai, to perceive). See ‘The American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language’.
Barragán’s architecture, like Zwarts’ photography, displays a kind of sophisticated sensual realism; the work of both seems to emit an enticing form of mystery, like two kindred spirits in search of the same goal. It is as though the deepest inspirations of the work of both resounds in the intriguing silence that each oeuvre conveys in its own special fashion.

It is an intriguing silence that I, as an architect, can’t describe in words, and in any case language, except as poetry, is at best only a poor substitute for the reality of art. Since ultimately the reality of art, that is to say the poetic quality it incorporates as a work of art, can only be experienced and as such be known by the observer through unconditional confrontation with and involvement in, the art object itself.

Therefore, when Luis Barragán described ‘Silence’ in his acceptance speech for the Pritzker Price, it is not without meaning that he referred to his Work; his gardens and homes that ‘allow for the interior placid murmur of silence’, and the fountains in which ‘silence sings’. Poetic words and poetic aspects referring to the reality of his art, i.e., his Architecture, which one can only genuinely comprehend through a real and embodied experience of his work. It is thus an experience in which one’s perception, as the polyphony of senses, constantly interacts with one’s faculties of memory and imagination.

In the fore-mentioned speech Barragán also referred to the ‘silent joy and serenity’ that a work of art conveys when it ‘reaches perfection’, and he hints at the silence of ‘Solitude’ and of ‘Death’, as ‘the spring of action and therefore of life’ and thus of art. In other words he referred to the emotional response that a work of art evokes in the observer. He also hinted at the silence of contemplation, the silence of meditation and trance of an artist in action, that is to say, the artist in search for the poetics of his art, the artist in search of ‘perfection’.

Analogous to Barragán as he relates to his work as an architect is the photographer Kim Zwarts, who searches for this ‘perfection’ within and by means of his own work. Zwarts’ attention is directed towards simultaneously discovering and expressing the poetic essence of his art, the art of photography. By so doing, he achieves a direct, spontaneous and emotional response to his images since their evocative power, their poetic quality, lies in the meeting of the photo with the viewer.

For most architects the first encounter with Barragán’s work will probably have been through such enchanting images as those of Kim Zwarts. For me (thanks to Hans Tupker) it was through the images produced by photographers like Armando Salas Portugal and René Burri, as presented in the 1976 publication of the Museum of Modern Art by Emilio Ambasz, that I got interested in Barragán’s work. However, due to the limited spatial information (in terms of accurate plans and sections) supplied by this and other publications, Barragán’s architecture seemed at first to be a purely visual architecture, an Architecture for and of the photographic eye. But it would absolutely not do justice to Barragán’s achievements if one were to just leave it at that. You will find in this book plans, sections and elevations which are part of a broader research project on Barragán’s work in which I try to explore the sort of visual, or rather the scenographic design approach, by means of which
he generated this sort of kine-aesthetic experiences that are characteristic of his Architecture.

Unfortunately, the scope of this text and the limitations of this short prologue do not permit a more in-depth explanation of the scenographic design approach. Suffice it to say that it is a way of designing that shifts from planning architecture, i.e. the architects’ usual way of making almost all design decisions on the drawing board, by using imagination in combination with experience - to directing architecture, which means making a lot of design decisions in situ and on sight, thus directly linking imagination to actual perception.

In other words, as Barragán did within his development as an autodidactic ‘amateur architect’, I will try to explore, within the development of his work, this use and refining of all the senses so that the meaning of the term ‘experience’ becomes not only the knowledge and/or skill so derived but also the sensory act of participating in and apprehending activities, events, objects, thoughts or emotions. For experience, as its etymology tells us, actually means to try, and this trying or testing within the act of designing is an essential aspect of Barragán’s more ‘scenographic’ design approach.

As such I think that we ‘planning’ architects could also gain more insight or intuition by trying out and evaluating the elements of our own work in much shorter cycles then those normally dictated by our practice of ‘planning’ architecture. By so doing, we, like Barragán, would be forcing ourselves to experience more directly and consciously the design decisions we make, and as such we would probably also learn gradually to make our architecture more noble in its simplicity, more erudite in its silence and richer in the experience of its most basic characteristics (the space and light that come for free).

Barragán, who, without doubt I think one can say, was a very visual, or even better said, sensory oriented person, actually cultivated within his work several aspects of the design process that are normally - from the point of view of ‘planning’ architecture - considered ‘inconveniences’. One of these ‘inconveniences’ was described very vividly by the German architect Max Cetto, who worked together with Barragán on a number of projects in the period that Barragán’s work reached its ‘mature’ state in the nineteen forties.

In an interview in 1951 Max Cetto says:
‘The difference in construction in Mexico from what I had been used to in Germany, and during the year of work with Richard Neutra in California, is due to one basic fact: the lack of skilled workmen in Mexico. His tools are poor and house construction is accomplished without mechanical equipment. Considering these and other odds, including the fact that only a small number of foremen are able to read working drawings correctly, the actual completion of so many thousands of houses in Mexico obliges us to give the highest credit to the extraordinary natural resourcefulness, the imagination and the

---

4 Experience: Middle English, from Old French, from Latin experientia, from experiēns, experient-, present participle of experīrī, to try.
passionate addiction of everybody involved in the activities of building. In Mexico houses cannot be built by a complete set of drawings and specifications, as in most European cities and in the United States. If the architect cares to see the building finished according to his concepts, he has to supervise the work every day, playing the part of a general contractor himself. Knowing that even the most careful preparation on the drawing board would not free him from spending at least half his time to put them through on the job, he very often prefers to rely on sketches and oral directions. This method is not as bad as one would imagine. What is lost in efficient preparation is gained in directness of approach, new suggestions coming out of the work in progress, and a flexibility which allows one to make improvements on a moment’s notice.5

Another ‘inconvenience’, from the point of view of ‘planned’ architecture, was the enormous sensual richness of the environment that Barragán had to (and wanted to) deal with (just the opposite of a perfect tabula rasa to plan on). Only imagine the difficulties of planning something in an environment like that of the magnificent lava formations of El Pedregal while at the same time preserving its characteristic qualities such as the ominous shapes of those lava formations, its crevices, caves and its extraordinary natural vegetation. And here I refer only to some visual qualities.

Trying to represent this environment in all its aspects in the form of an accurate map or site plan to work from, as we normally do in ‘planning’ architecture, becomes impossible. From my own experience in re-constructing Barragán’s built projects in terms of plans, sections and elevations, I know how well the verticality of aerial photography in close combination with horizontal (eye height) photography works to provide at least some of the basic visual information you need. I can therefore assure you that the huge aerial photograph of El Pedregal that looked like a sort of mural on the wall of Barragán’s office, was not simply a gadget to impress clients, but rather a fundamental necessity for dealing with some of the essential aspects and qualities of this landscape.

In this project it is not without reason that, in addition to objective aerial photography, Barragán employed the trained creative eye of the human spectator in form of the subjective views, produced for him by the photographer Armando Salas Portugal, or the abstracted views (in the form of paintings, essays and conversations) produced by painters like Dr. Atl, Diego Rivera and Jose Clemente Orozco. It was with these views and insights, in close combination with direct observations on site, that Barragán used to feed his initial imagination, an imagination that was then, in the manner of ‘design under construction’, tested and fine-tuned against the act of experiencing the design in situ. And this very often was a shared form of experiencing, evaluating and then fine-tuning, while on site, when Barragán enlisted the aid

5 Max Cetto, in Arts and Architecture 68, August 1951, pp. 28.
of artists such as Jesus ‘Chucho’ Reyes and Mathias Goeritz and their highly
developed sensitivity for colors, forms, textures and proportions.

The lack of a large variety in products and refined materials, a third
‘inconvenience’ in terms of ‘planned’ architecture, was expressed by Max Cetto
when at the end of the fore-mentioned interview he says:
‘Under such circumstances it seems considerably wiser to renounce certain
ideals of mechanical perfection which we adored in the first years of functional
architecture, and accept the blessings of a rather rustic, handmade and more
human touch, which is probably the most adequate expression of the natural
and spiritual resources of this country.’ However, it seems to me that it was
exactly because of these ‘inconvenient circumstances’ that architects and artists
like Luis Barragán, Max Cetto and Mathias Goeritz produced some of the finest
pieces of 20th century (‘kine-aesthetic’) architecture in Mexico.

But let’s start at the beginning.

My text actually consists of three intertwined strands of information. The first
one deals with the person of Luis Barragán; the second with the spatio-
temporal context that he lived and worked in; and the third with his
architectural work as such.

In his acceptance speech of the Pritzker Architecture Prize in 1980, Barragán
said: ‘My architecture is autobiographical’, thus somehow confirming the
importance of following the available biographical facts in relation to the work.
In an interview with González Gortazár Barragán confessed, ‘I am influenced
by everything I see’. Accordingly, I think that it is equally important to also give
you at least an impression of the spatio-temporal ‘context’, in other words the
cultural, social, political, economical etc., background, that runs parallel to the
development of his personality and against which we have to see his work to
be able to somehow understand it a little better. And finally there is the
architecture itself, which we will try to show to you in this book by means of the
drawings and photographs we made.

THE GUADALAJARA YEARS

Luis Ramiro Barragán Morfín (as the father Lic. Juan José Barragán and
mother Angela Morfín de Barragán named the third of their nine children) was
born on March 9th 1902 in the Parroquia del Pilar in Guadalajara, the capital
of Jalisco and, with its more then 100.000 inhabitants at that time, the second
largest city of Mexico.

---

6 Max Cetto, in Arts and Architecture 68, August 1951, pp. 28.
7 González Gortazár, ‘Tres Arquitectos Mexicanos (entre 1928 y 1936)’, in México en El Arte, nr. 4,
March 1984, pp. 46-56.
Born into one of the land-owning families of Guadalajara’s social elite\(^8\), young Luis, together with his four sisters and four brothers, grew up in both the bustling socio-cultural climate of the city\(^9\) and in the more relaxed rustic atmosphere of the countryside at the hacienda ‘Los Corrales’, which was the family’s estate on the outskirts of Mazamitla. This was a mountain village in the Sierra del Tigre in the south of Jalisco, at the border with Michoacán. As a member of one of Guadalajara’s well-to-do families, it was self-evident that he would spend his vacations in the (then) fashionable lakeside town of Chapala, where the family owned a summerhouse located on the main square.

During his early childhood the socio-cultural climate of Guadalajara that he grew up in was mainly determined by the economically progressive social classes, with on one side the old landowners and merchants and on the other side the new bourgeoisie, often foreign industrialists, shop owners and middle-class professionals. For more then 300 years the city of Guadalajara had been a vital regional centre for trade and agriculture with its own traditional culture and pride. However during the years of the ‘Porfiriato’\(^10\) it had also become an important place for strategic capital investment, thus attracting both money and people from abroad and becoming progressively more capitalistic and extravagant. Through the construction of telegraph-, telephone- and railway-lines\(^11\) and still backed by a relatively stable Mexican government, a church that directed the masses and a social elite that enjoyed life while dreaming of the ‘old world’\(^12\), the city prospered and transformed rapidly in the time that Luis Barragán was born.

However, the slogan ‘order and progress’, embodying Mexican positivism during the early Porfiriato, also started to show its grim face of reality. In fact, the whole dictatorial reign of Porfirio Díaz was marked by the systematic violation of the principles of the constitution of 1857, yet in the beginning the economic success of his policies silenced most of the critics.

There was a modernization scheme to tackle Mexico’s economic backwardness developed by José Ives Limantour and supported by the so-called ‘científicos’ in the regime of Porfirio Díaz, aimed primarily at Mexico’s integration into the world economy by means of export production. Unfortunately, the reality was that the whole scheme was based on the use of foreign capital and technology for the exploitation of the country’s natural resources through cheap domestic labor. As a result, in the first years of Barragán’s life it became evermore clear that during the 30 years of Díaz’s dictatorial reign Mexico’s real and financial

---

\(^8\) A social elite that is best characterized by their traditional conservatism, their firm religious belief in the Catholic Church and their persistent drive for autonomy from the central government.

\(^9\) Where the family resided in their mansion at Calle Pedro Loza 168.

\(^10\) The reign of Porfirio Díaz 1876-1880 and 1884-1910.

\(^11\) That connected Guadalajara to both Mexico City and the rest of the world.

\(^12\) And then in particular of the lifestyles and cultural trends coming from France and Paris.
assets were increasingly concentrated in the hands of a few local and foreign investors.

The army and the ‘rurales’, from the forces of ‘public order’, had gradually developed into the forces of repression for maintaining this supposedly ‘progressive’ system and Diaz used force whenever necessary to neutralize opponents of the regime.

Government seizure of private and communal land had also led to further concentration of landownership and on the downside a further increase of the landless rural population. By 1910 most villages had lost their communal land holdings and a few hundred wealthy families held around half of the country’s most productive land. More than half of all rural Mexicans worked on the huge haciendas for these hacendados. Towards the end of the Porfiriato it became ever more obvious that it was the rural peasantry that bore most of the cost of Mexico’s modernization and that the wealth that flowed into the urban areas only fostered the growth of an urban middle class that had little use for anything Mexican, and instead identified strongly with the European (especially French) manners and tastes adopted by the urban upper class.

Meanwhile, liberal artists, writers and journalists had begun to challenge the regime by pointing out the negative social consequences of Mexico’s economic success. Frequent persecutions, however, led many to seek asylum in the US, from where they issued proclamations that called for the overthrow of Diaz. In October 1910 Francisco I. Madero drafted a plan (the Plan of San Luis Potosí) that called for the people to rise on November 20 of that year to demand the restoration of the democratic principles of the constitution of 1857 and the replacement of Diaz with a provisional government. In this manner ‘the Mexican Revolution’ was born. The Plan of San Luis Potosí was received with enthusiasm by the widespread movements that were already on the verge of rebellion, but unfortunately this ‘Planned Revolution’ was so uncoordinated that when Madero with his band of revolutionaries crossed the border into Mexico on the appointed day he did not find the hoped for rebel armies with which to join and he turned back. The status quo remained in effect until January 1911, when a large-scale rebellion broke out in the north. Madero returned to Mexico to lead the revolution, which sparked similar uprisings throughout the rest of the country. By May 25, 1911, the eighty-year-old dictator Porfirio Díaz submitted his resignation to congress and fled the country for exile in France.

Regrettably, the revolutionaries’ response to Diaz’ flight was as uncoordinated as the ‘Planned Revolution’ itself. For the liberals (many of whom came from wealthy land-owning families) the Revolution meant political change but not a complete change of the established social and economical order. For the revolutionary fighters (mostly hacienda laborers and landless peasants) it meant radical social and economic transformation, especially land reform with the redistribution of hacienda land to the rural villages and peasants.
As a consequence, the aftermath of the Mexican Revolution turned into a chaotic civil-war lasting for about ten-years, during which time the different civil and military leaders fought among themselves as much as they struggled with the problems of governance. This prolonged the ‘military’ phase of the revolution, with the result that the so-called Constructive Phase didn’t start until the period of the Obregón Presidency in 1920. Obregón’s presidency was dedicated to begin to put in effect the objectives of the new constitution agreed upon in 1917 and to build the basis for the next stage of the revolutionary process, that of reconstruction.

Meanwhile, the outbreak of the revolution found Luis Barragán (at the age of eight) attending a Catholic primary school in Guadalajara (which he entered in 1909) and during the chaotic and insecure period following the Revolution he completed his primary and secondary education and the ‘Preparatoria para Varones’ (college preparation studies for young men) at institutions still operated by the Marist and Jesuit orders. Even though the armed battles barely affected the internal life of the city, there would have been a strong sense of insecurity in that period for the Barragán family concerning their estate in the countryside since a key issue of the Revolution had been the issues of the ownership of hacienda land and land redistribution.

In 1919 Luis, in the footsteps of his older brother Juan José Barragán, started his studies at the ‘Escuela Libre de Ingeniería de Guadalajara’, and it was here that two years later (in 1921-22) he started long lasting friendships with some younger students just starting their studies, among them Ignacio Díaz Morales (1905-1992) and Rafael Urzúa (1905-1991), as well as Pedro Castellanos and Enrique González Madrid. On December 13, 1923, at the age of 21, Barragán received the title of civil engineer. According to his own words in that period it was still possible to also obtain the title of an architect with a sort of extra course. ‘… there was a very primitive thing, if I may say so, to study architecture. One would only have to take one or two courses in drawing, one course in art history and I can’t remember if there was one in composition, and then we were required to write a thesis specializing in architecture, and thus in such an easy way, one who had the title of civil engineer obtained the title of architect.’

And he continued:

---

13 Guadalajara was not affected as strongly as other areas.


'I presented works which I had already done as an assistant, house projects and what I had done working in collaboration with other constructors and engineers, my brother Juan José among them. By then Agustín Basave who was in the USA was the one who had to give me his approval for the thesis, which he did. But then I went to Europe for a trip, not thinking of studies; on my return from Europe, were I stayed for one and a half year, the faculty of architecture had disappeared. They still gave the title, they had the approval to do so, but they did not have a program which was sufficiently worthy so that real architects could come out of it.'

It seems to me, however, that there is a kind of paradox in Barragán’s words here. He boarded ship at the port of Veracruz in May 1924, only 5 months after he received his degree as a civil engineer. His close friends Ignacio Díaz Morales and Rafael Urzúa (who started their studies in 1921, two years after Barragán) received the title of architect from the Escuela Libre de Ingeniería de Guadalajara in 1928, at least two years after Barragán returned from his trip to Europe at the end of 1925. So it is probably more likely that after coming back from Europe, although he wanted to become an architect like his friends, Barragán was not in the mood to go back to school again, and decided instead (as he implied in the interview) to become an autodidact.

‘… although there was an advantage,’ he continued in the interview, ‘civil engineering asked for a lot of studies. The base of a civil engineer was already a broad base for those who had the architectural vocation, with this base one could if one had the capacity, develop on ones own.’

According to his own words it was the same Agustín Basave (the one who apparently gave him the approval for his thesis) that awoke in him and his fellow students the interest in the humanities as a counterbalance to the more rationalistic approach found in the study of civil engineering itself.

‘I got interested in architecture through the only architect, with whom we had contact in the foundation course, Agustín Basave. Agustín Basave was a man who awoke a love in the students, a love for the arts in general. His lessons were always very pleasant, all kinds of lessons, even reading and reciting, he taught this in the primary foundation course, he encouraged pupils to write, taught us a lot about history of art and awoke a love for the plastic arts among which he considered architecture and music. Thus Agustín was the one who awoke many of my vocations. This is how I started to be interested in the artistic side (of architecture) for which we had no preparation; but as I had already worked on projects for houses and other constructions with my brother, by then I had gained pleasure for it. And from there with no program or method, which I have never had, started to approach architecture.’

---

16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
So if we try to imagine the state of mind that Barragán was in when he boarded ship in Veracruz in May 1924, to go from the cultural climate of Guadalajara (at that time a city with already around 150,000 inhabitants) to see the metropolises of Europe, we should not think of an eager young architect who wanted to see what the last developments in architecture were about, but rather of a young gentleman from a well-to-do conservative family, going on his ‘Grand Tour’ to see something of the ‘Old World’ and to get in touch with the ‘true’ roots of ‘Culture’. In his own words: ‘The trip to Europe, was a trip where I learned French, visited exhibitions and I did not concern myself with architecture. It was a general vision of art history through the basic notions, seeing the so called cities of art in Europe; an occasion to have an overall look at the national art that, for the most part, had contributed to the writing of history; but I did not study anything in particular.’

Once in Europe, in Spain he visited among other places Barcelona, Andalusia, the Alhambra and the gardens of the Generalife in Granada, he went to Italy to see the villa’s and their gardens, and paid a visit to Greece, but most of the remainder of 1925 he spend in Paris, for a young Mexican like him at that moment the unrivaled capital of culture.

Here he visited among others the ‘Exposition International des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes’ that ran from Saturday, April 25 till Sunday, October 25, 1925, and which, according to his friend Ignacio Díaz Morales, he described on his return ‘in the most deprecatory way imaginable’, recalling that ‘you didn’t know where to look, because wherever you looked you would see offensive things’.

How can we interpret this statement; where did he look and what did he see?

First of all it is important to understand that it was the aim of the Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes to show the world that, after winning the ‘War to end all Wars’ (so the first World-War), French culture and taste would once again lead the way in developing a new ‘Modern’ style. Accordingly, the fair as such was staged with the obvious motive of re-establishing France as the cultural trend-setter for taste and fashion in the post-war world, which for them meant to wipe away any references to the historical styles and to promote a completely new and evolving ‘Modern Style’ coined (after the exhibition) ‘Art Deco’.

---

19 Imagine that till then he grew up in the protective sphere of a conservative and religious family, he is 22 years old, and up to then he didn’t even see Mexico City in his own country yet (his first visit is on the way to Veracruz).

20 Ibid.


22 Remember that the term Avant-Garde is a French invention.
This new style would not only reflect the spirit of the ‘Roaring Twenties’ in Paris, but also show both the highly refined taste and skills of the French artisans and artists, and the countries progressive ideals towards industrialization. Even though the Americas chose not to participate and Germany was not invited, the exhibition was nevertheless supposed to bring together the ‘Nations of the World’ and to show, if not quite a unified front, at least some sense of a developing common aesthetic among the practitioners of the (applied) decorative arts and architecture.

However for any visitor, like for young Barragán entering the fairgrounds along the Grand Palais through the Porte d’Honneur, it must have been immediately apparent that national differences and political agendas had triumphed over any international spirit of solidarity among decorative artists, garden designers and architects. The four most prominent international sites flanking the intersection of the exhibition’s two main axes situated behind the Porte d’Honneur and before the Pont Alexandre III crosses the Seine, were assigned to Italy, Great Britain, Belgium and Japan. The Italian pavilion (designed by Brasini) looked more like a palace then a pavilion. According to two English visitors, it was ‘a monumental horror of illiterate classicism with marble columns and gilded brickwork that would have disgraced Caligula.’ Actually, like almost all national pavilions at that time, it was explicitly symbolic of the nation that it housed. The Italian pavilion (a kind of white, mausoleum-like block, that in terms of style and scale clearly wished to remind one of the glories of Ancient Rome) symbolically announced that Italian fascism (in power since 1922) was the reborn descendant of the resurrected Roman Empire, as Mussolini, whose gigantic head in bronze dominated the central space of the pavilion, had decreed. The Japanese Pavilion (looking like an oversized traditional Japanese house) ‘was picturesque; the British was an ugly amalgam of disparate features; and only the Belgian, designed by Victor Horta, showed any originality’.

In general, the whole Exposition Internationale des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes was a huge, temporary fairyland that would last for just six months, and architects, knowing that they had to make a strong first impression and knowing that their creations would vanish after the fair, gave free reign to their fancies. As a result, the numerous Exposition pavilions, standing in a patchwork of different gardens, were extremely diverse in design and scale, with (as it seems) no coordination between them. It was probably this overkill of disparate pieces of architecture ‘shouting’ for the visitors’ attention that left the strongest impression on the young Barragán, and not so much the subsequently praised pieces of Avant-Garde architecture that he might have looked at, but did not at the time consciously see as being of great importance.

---


These included the Pavillon du Tourisme; situated to the right after the Porte d’Honneur and designed by Robert Mallet-Stevens, it was an elegant composition of plain horizontal and vertical surfaces with a cruciform landmark tower crowned by a plain-faced clock. Mallet-Stevens employed a kind of formal vocabulary not unlike the ‘Neoplastic’ one that the Austrian artist and architect Friedrich Kiesler also used in his exhibition design for the Austrian theatre department, the so-called ‘Raumstadt’ or ‘Cité dans l’espace’. Given a rectangular space in the Grand Palais Kiesler constructed a free-flowing spatial installation by means of a rectangular grid of horizontal and vertical sticks and panels, thus generating a kind of crossover between ‘Neoplastic’ and ‘Constructivist’ principals.

The Soviet pavilion, the so-called ‘Red pavilion’ designed by Konstantin S. Mel’nikov together with Alexandr Rodchenko, was the exposition’s embodiment of such ‘Constructivist’ principles of composition. In terms of nationalistic expression it was probably one of the most unusual in its explicit attempt to reject anything reminiscent of Russia’s pre-revolutionary past, and the contrast couldn’t be more extreme as it was situated directly behind the Italian pavilion. The Soviet pavilion, counted worthy as the winner of the Grand Prix in the Paris exposition, was the antithesis of the luxurious monolithic structures, the ‘Palaces’ that most other nations erected. It was a (necessarily) cheap and light two-storey timber and glass box bisected diagonally by a broad open staircase running all-the-way through. Most of the area of the external facades consisted of plate glass set in a plain and simple prefabricated timber frame, thus permitting every passerby to see (the interior of Rodchenko’s workers club) inside. According to Mel’nikov’s own words: ‘We (Rodchenco and he) were creating ‘anti-palace’ architecture. So we renounced the closed-in spaces that reminded us of palace suites and the expanses of walls, which closed in the narrow world of palace life; we strove to join the interior with the exterior, considering this to be democratic’.  

The open staircase, leading to the exhibition spaces on the first floor, was covered by a decorative ‘constructivist’ structure of two rows of mutually intersecting inclined panels forming visually dynamic X shapes. Towering over the pavilion and situated next to the staircase there was a triangular wooden mast (constructed of three upright beams interconnected by inclined planes

---

25 Kiesler was in contact with the Dutch ‘De Stijl’ movement, about his ‘Raumstadt’ and ‘Vitalbau’ he publishes a text in De Stijl, VI, nr. 10/11, 1925 (pp. 137-147) with the title ‘Manifest. Vitalbau-Raumstadt-Funktionsnelle-Architektur’. In the same issue (pp. 149-150) they also published the ‘Appel de Protestation contre le refus de la participation du groupe ‘De Stijl’ à l’Exposition des Arts Décoratifs (section des Pays-Bas)’, an open letter to the Dutch ambassador signed by a.o.: F. Kiesler and J. Hoffmann (Austria), G. Guevirkian (Persia), D. Sternberg (Russia), G. Perret and Rob. Mallet-Stevens (France), A. Loos (Czechoslovakia), Tritan Tzara (Romania), Kurt Schwitter and Walter Gropius(Germany), F.T. Marinetti (Italy), C. van Eesteren, G. Rietveld, V. Huszar and Jan Wils (Netherlands).

26 And not, as is often thought, in the Austrian pavilion by Josef Hoffmann.

27 Existing tramlines on the site did not allow for a proper foundation.

and beams) carrying the symbol of the USSR/CCCP and the red flag. The whole was painted in accordance with the sketches of Rodchenco in red and grey.

From the very start the ‘enfant terrible’ for the exposition-authorities was the Pavillon de L’Esprit Nouveau. Designed by Le Corbusier and his cousin Pierre Jeanneret, it was in fact a pavilion for the monthly magazine L’Esprit Nouveau. A review launched by Amédée Ozenfant and Le Corbusier in October 1920 proclaiming their joint ideas about the heroic reformation of modern life in the age of the machine by means of the industrial mass-production of ‘pure’ standardized products, and at the same time showing their contempt for the decorative arts as such, as they also did in their books published in that period (‘Vers une architecture’, 1923, ‘Urbanism’, ‘L’Art decoratif d’aujourd’hui’ and ‘La Peinture Moderne’, all 1925).

In January 1924 they applied to the Organizing Committee of the Exhibition for the allocation of a plot and revealed their plans to the chief architect Charles Plumet and to Louis Bonnier, who was in charge of landscaping, but the Committee was not happy with the design and the theme of the pavilion. Their house as a ‘machine à habiter’ was a simple two-sided cubic cell to live in, made up of a two-storey high reinforced concrete frame filled in such a way that about one quarter of the space of the whole volume would be left open towards the front, thus, like a huge two storey loggia, becoming the ‘jardin-suspendu’, the private outside space of the ‘practical machine for living in’.

Actually the proposed design was mainly nothing more than the ‘universal’ ‘cellule d’habitation’ that Le Corbusier had already developed in 1922 as the standardized spatial building block for his first ‘Immeubles-Villas’ project. Inside, according to Le Corbusier, the pavilion would deny all expressions of decorative art and only ‘contain standardized things created by industry in factories and mass-produced, objects truly of the style of today’.

Attempts were made by the Committee to persuade Le Corbusier and Jeanneret to modify their design towards a theme more befitting the ‘exclusive status’ of the exposition. They suggested to them that ‘the home of an architect’ might be a more suitable theme for the magazine’s pavilion. Accordingly, the Pavillon de l’Esprit Nouveau had been allocated a site tucked

---

29 Like the pavilions for magazines like Art et Decoration, Art/Goût/Beauté, Fémina, Le Home du Jour, La Renaissance, Monde Illustre, L’Intranigeant and L’Illustration.

30 Two sides have to stay blind so the cells can be stacked next and on top of each other.

31 Attached to this cell-unit was an annex in the form of a rotunda containing detailed studies of large town-planning schemes, the ‘Plan for a Modern City of 3.000.000 inhabitants’ of 1922 and the ‘Plan Voisin de Paris’ of 1925.

32 L’Esprit Nouveau also didn’t have much of a budget to build the fairly large pavilion they proposed.
away in the corner of two wings of the Grand Palais, a fairly large plot with some trees that could not be cut down.\(^{33}\)

Le Corbusier refused the idea of a new theme, but did make some vague promises to the Committee while complaining about the poor landscaping and visibility of the plot from a distance. Construction of the pavilion (actually the last to be erected on the exhibition grounds) finally started in April 1925, just a little before the official opening of the Exposition. The officials were probably more concerned with hiding the construction work still going on from public view while the exposition was already in full swing than they were with trying to isolate the Pavillon de l’Esprit Nouveau from its surroundings with a 6-meter high enclosure and hide its controversial standardized ‘industrial’ architecture, its content of mass-produced mechanical ‘equipment’\(^{34}\) and the controversial urban projects presented in its annex.\(^{35}\)

As Le Corbusier in his Œuvre Complète would like to make us believe when he writes:

‘It was only owing to the presence of M. de Monzie, then Minister of Fine Arts, who came to inaugurate the Exhibition, that the Committee agreed to remove the 18 ft. high palisade it had had erected in front of the pavilion to screen it from the public gaze.’\(^{36}\)

In fact, the Minister of Fine Arts Anatole de Monzie\(^{37}\) opened the exhibition within the Pavillon de l’Esprit Nouveau and not the Art-Deco Exposition itself on Friday July 10, 1925 (the latter had already been opened more then two months earlier on Saturday April 25). It is therefore likely that the officials agreed to take the fence away only because of the fact that the construction process of the pavilion had finally finished and not, as Le Corbusier implies, because the Minister of Fine Arts had intervened.

Anyhow, as I said before it was probably the overkill of disparate pieces of architecture ‘shouting’ for the visitors’ attention that left the strongest impression on the young Barragán, and not so much these pieces of Avant-Garde architecture that subsequently received great praise. As we don’t know

\(^{33}\) That is why there is a tree growing thru its roof; it was build around this existing tree.

\(^{34}\) A term Le Corbusier uses on purpose in relation to the Pavilion’s content instead of the word furniture.

\(^{35}\) The ‘Plan Voisin’ de Paris’, the urbanistic project named after Gabriel Voisin, the car and airplane constructor who donated 25000 Francs to build the Pavillon.


\(^{37}\) Anatole de Monzie is a relative of Gabrielle de Monzie and also a close friend of Gabriel Voisin and Michael and Sarah Stein, who were friends of Le Corbusier. At that moment (July 10th) Anatole de Monzie is Minister of Public Instruction and Fine Arts, in Painlevé’s Second Ministry -that lasts from 17 April till 29 October 1925- and from October the11th onward he will also be the Minister of Justice for 18 days; before, in Herriot’s First Ministry -from 14 June 1924 till 17 April 1925- he had been Minister of Finance for two weeks, and in Painlevé’s Third Ministry -from 29 October to 28 November 1925- he will become the Minister of Public Works.
when and how often Barragán visited the exposition it is even questionable that he actually saw the Pavillon de l’Esprit Nouveau in reality. It is more likely that he later looked at images in publications to study it.

So, in this case, what did he see? Well, his friend Ignacio Díaz Morales explicitly referred to a garden specifically created for the exhibition by Ferdinand Bac, and to its publication in the magazine L’Illustration of October, 1925. I presume that he referred to the publication ‘L’Art des jardins à l’exposition des arts décoratifs’, by Ferdinand Bac, in L’Illustration, of August 8 (not of October) 1925. This was not a publication of a garden designed by Bac, but rather an article Bac wrote about several gardens in the Exposition. Among the ones described in a positive way and thus illustrated with aquarelles by Tony George-Roux, are ‘Les jardins de pavillon de la Ville de Paris’ (by M. Forestier), the ‘Jardin Moser’ (by Marrast), the ‘Jardin des Alpes Maritimes’ (by Société des architectes de Sud-Est) and the ‘Jardin des Oiseaux’ (by Laprade), which are all situated to the left of the Porte d’Honneur only a little further then the pavilion of the weekly magazine L’Illustration, ‘Journal universel, Sciences, arts, industrie, commerce’.

It therefore may well be the case that it was here, in these relatively tranquil looking gardens, with their different levels, their steps and pergolas, that the then 23 year old Barragán became interested in the gardens and writings of Ferdinand Bac. Bac’s gardens had been published in the magazine L’Illustration before: his ‘Villas et Jardins Méditerranéens: Les Colombières’, was published in the Christmas issue of L’Illustration, in 1922; and ‘Les Colombières, une œuvre architecturale et décorative de Ferdinand Bac’, was published in L’Illustration, February 23, 1924.

In the year 1925, next to the fore-mentioned publication, Bac also had two books published that Barragán obtained—‘Jardins enchantés. Un romancero’ and ‘Les Colombières. Ses jardines et ses décors’. He probably also acquired the publication ‘L’art des Jardins’, in Revue des Deux Mondes, of Sept. 15, 1925, before returning to Mexico some time around October 1925.

Next to his discovery of the work of Bac, I presume that the Spanish pavilion (designed by M. Bravo), also left a certain mental and visual impression on him. It was a pavilion crowned by tile covered awnings and pergolas, not...
unlike those that appear in Barragán’s early work, and in terms of typology, it was a pavilion that dwelled upon certain ‘Moorish’ elements, such as the spacious central patio that first generated an atmosphere of tranquility which was then punctuated by a water jet fountain in the middle.

Those, I presume, were the kinds of ‘novelties’ that a young and still quite provincial Barragán could somehow understand by means of his own experiences and images from back home. He would have understood these more than the aforementioned ‘Avant-garde’ architecture that he might have looked at but somehow did not yet ‘see’ at that moment.

Barragán’s return seems to be marked by two somewhat traumatic experiences: the death of his mother at the end of the year (probably she died just before his arrival) and, as he said, he found out that ‘the faculty of architecture had disappeared,’ meaning he couldn’t receive his degree as an architect (yet). Even though ‘they still gave the title, they had the approval to do so,’ as he stated in his interview from 1962, ‘they did not have a program which was sufficiently worthy so that real architects could come out of it.’ In other words, he was probably not interested in going back to school again to study architecture like his friends. ‘On my return,’ he continued ‘I worked for a year again with my brother’ (the civil engineer Juan José Barragán). He was charged with the canalization of the area of the lake of Chapala.

It is in this period around 1926-27 that the ideological differences concerning the post-revolutionary role and influence of the Church plus the Land Reform started to play an important part in the daily life of Guadalajara. On one side there was the power of the central government, from 1924 till 1928 in the hands of the more radical president Plutarco Elías Calles, and on the other side there were the Provinces that, after the Obregón Presidency (1920-24), gradually started to feel how their power -- still in the hands of the more conservative forces represented by the wealthy landowners and the Catholic Church -- started to slip away from them.

42 Since the idea of the exposition was to show its visitors from all over the world what the new ‘style’ would be.


46 Ibid.

Despite the fact that the presidency of Álvaro Obregón was dedicated to start to realize the objectives of the constitution of 1917, its agrarian policies still proved to be quite conservative, based on the belief that the Mexican economy could not afford to forego productivity for the sake of radical agrarian reform. As a consequence of this the redistribution of land proceeded rather slowly, which didn’t upset the wealthy landowners too much, but did disappoint the more radical revolutionary fractions.

In contrast, however, Obregón’s minister of education José Vasconcelos acted very dynamically in building more than 1000 rural schools and establishing more than 2000 public libraries. In his aim to integrate indigenous people into Mexican society through education, he dispatched hundreds of teachers to remote villages to teach them basic skills of reading, writing, calculation and also history. Because of this one has to take into account the fact that history\textsuperscript{48} had to somehow replace religion, which means that the traditional foundation of people’s education performed by the religious orders was gradually replaced with the ideological bias and agenda of the central government. In keeping with that program for emancipation, Vasconcelos also believed strongly in instructing the illiterate masses through images, so for that purpose he commissioned numerous works by muralists to decorate public buildings while depicting important events in Mexican history and the ideals of the Revolution from a post-revolutionary point of view.

After the presidency of Obregón, that of Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-28) followed a more radical agenda. Public education facilities continued to expand, which means that during his presidency another 2000 schools were built, and he finally implemented Agrarian Reform by distributing more than 3,2 million hectares of land, in addition to developing agricultural irrigation and credit facilities. One can imagine that, as a consequence, the wealthy landowners where gradually getting more worried about their properties. The major crisis that developed in 1926 (slowing down the implementation of the Agrarian Reform), however, stemmed from other causes. It was the archbishop of Mexico City (José Mora y del Río) who called upon all Roman Catholics not to follow the religious provisions of the constitution of 1917 that Calles decided to implement fully. These provisions included the prohibition of all religious processions, the prohibition of the church’s educational establishments, the closing of its convents and monasteries, and other limitations on the Church’s role. When on July 31, 1926, the Church went on strike\textsuperscript{49} and the Liga Nacional Defensora de la Libertad Religiosa declared a governmental boycott, revolts (starting in December 1926) where the result. In the provinces (among them very prominently Jalisco and Michoacán) bands of

\textsuperscript{48} As one can imagine in a post-revolutionary era: the history of Mexico’s pre-Columbian beginnings, its colonial past plus the pre-revolutionary times of its independence (and then prominently within those the suspect role that the Catholic church had played within those periods) and then, as can be expected, the history of the Revolution promising a bright future.

\textsuperscript{49} Meaning that no sacraments were administered, for a period of three years.
militant Roman Catholics, known as Cristeros, started to attack government officials and facilities and burning down public schools.

One can imagine that in this period within Guadalajara the more conservative forces of Church and bourgeoisie (Guadalajara was the most active ideological and political centre during the Cristero crisis) join forces in their attempt to gain more cultural and political autonomy for the province of Jalisco. As the local bourgeoisie and intelligentsia again realized, one of the most peaceful and strongest means to do so, was to continue working on and strengthening one’s own cultural identity and expression, a tactic that the ‘Tapatíos’ had already been using for a long time in their continuous struggle for more cultural and political autonomy from the capital Mexico City.

Soon after the revolution began (in 1912) a group of young intellectuals—among them, artists, writers, engineers, architects, lawyers, journalists and politicians—united in Guadalajara as the ‘Centro Bohemio’ and became responsible for the city’s intensive artistic, political, social and educational debate. They, like their intellectual predecessors in the time of the Porfiriato, went in search of what was called the ‘Anima jaliscana’ (the Jaliscan soul of the Tapatíos), and the ‘cultura tapatía’ (their own independent cultural identity, based on the concrete traditions that distinguished the people and the land of Jalisco).

In the second half of the 1920s during a period of flux, the time seemed to be ripe for the next generation of intellectuals to follow the footsteps of their predecessors, and one could see how the same type and mix of young intellectuals continued to search for, devise and establish Guadalajara’s own cultural identity and expression.

If one looked more specifically in terms of architecture, one could find among the members of the Centro Bohemio the architect Agustín Basave, who according to Barragán has had such a strong influence on him and his friends during their education, and the engineer Aurelio Aceves (another of their professors at the Escuela Libre de Ingeniería de Guadalajara). So it was not surprising that around 1927-28 Barragán and his friends Rafael Urzúa and Ignacio Díaz Morales, as the next generation of young intellectuals, followed the path of Agustín Basave and Aurelio Aceves. Among this new generation we also find architects and engineers like Pedro Castellanos Lambley, Enrique González de Madrid, Juan Palomar and Luis’ brother Juan José Barragán.

50 Among them Agustín Yáñez, Mariano Azuela, Alfonso Gutiérrez Hermosillo, F. González León, E. González Martínez, Antonio Gómez Robledo, Enrique Martínez Ulloa, Efraín González Luna, José Arriola Adame, José María Servín, José Clemente Orozco, Jesus ‘Chucho’ Reyes Ferreira, Ignacio Díaz Morales, Rafael Urzúa, Pedro Castellanos Lambley, Enrique González de Madrid, Juan Palomar, Juan José and Luis Barragán.

51 Among them, José Guadalupe Zuna, Xavier Guerrero, Carlos Sthal, Amado de la Cueva, Juan de Dios Robledo, Carlos Orozco Romero, Joaquín Vidrio, Alfredo Romo, Agustín Basave, Aurelio Aceves, Manuel Martínez Valadez, Enrique Díaz de Leon, Juan Antonio Córdova and David Alfaro Siqueiros.
Rafael Urzúa and Ignacio Díaz Morales received their degrees as architects in 1928 (in September and October, respectively) and Barragán became an independent ‘architect’ in 1927-28. The first project that can be attributed to him is the renovation and expansion of the house of Licenciado Emiliano Robles León. It was probably also at this moment that Barragán became more aware of the fact that he was not really trained as a designer and that, if he (like his younger friends Ignacio Díaz Morales, Rafael Urzúa and Pedro Castellanos) wanted to be an ‘architect’, he would also have to play a role on the stage of Guadalajara’s cultural development. In Barragán’s case this meant the role of ‘the one that had traveled’, ‘the one that had seen what was going on in the world’, thus the role of the ‘theorist’.

As we saw before, at this stage of cultural development Guadalajara with self-confidence and yet conservative searched for its own identity and cultural expression, distancing itself from the one favored by the central government in the ‘deafening, superficial metropolis’ of Mexico City. In terms of architecture this meant finding a kind of tranquil, basic but noble ‘style’ in accordance with the ‘rhythm’ of Guadalajara (the more conservative rhythm of the old cultivated bourgeoisie). Or as Enrique Martínez Ulloa, an important member of the aforementioned group of intellectuals wrote at the end of the twenties: ‘He who arrives here feels the intimate, seasoned rhythm, to which the life of the city beats. It is an introverted city, so to speak, of interior life … Those who succeeded in adapting to the rhythm of this city, realize that nothing else will bring as much satisfaction. In the populous, highly trafficked cities like Mexico City the rhythm of the city is so accelerated that man, even while keeping busy, never succeeds in keeping up. In Guadalajara the life of man and that of the city move to the same rhythm’.

The ‘theoretical’ sources to find this tranquil, basic but noble ‘style’ were the books that Barragán brought from Europe. As he said himself: ‘When I got independent I had already an interesting preparation. I bought a lot of books in Europe, books about art and architecture that interested me… Then I continued in the same way collecting books, I had already the connection and started forming an art library, which was what we could say helped me to conserve the vocation for the architectural profession. I also subscribed to architectural magazines, so I was informed of the latest movements, that is about (I came back from Europe 1925) from 26 to 28 or 29, when I worked, in all this there was no well known interesting movement in Guadalajara even when there was one already in Europe… I bought books

---

52 Originally the term theorist meant ‘he who had seen’, or ‘he who had witnessed’. In terms of etymology: theōrōs from theā, seeing, spectacle, and horaō, I see. Theōroi were a kind of ambassadors to sacred festivals who left their native city to attend festivities elsewhere.

53 As in that time the capital Mexico City is described by Efraín González Luna, another member of the group of intellectuals (and later client of Barragán) in Guadalajara. See Riggen Martinez pp. 34.

about North African architecture which is based on a house with a patio, houses of great happiness, happiness in the interior; and of a noble exterior, to contain the life that we have in our provinces, not so much now as we did before, this kind of life still lived in Guadalajara or in Zapotlán. It interested me very much to make houses, residences, the interior life, trying to interpret what each person needs, I was trying to inculcate a certain taste on my houses from which the patios come, and all what came from Spain, and what has influenced the whole province, even when it has not the characteristic arches, one says this is 'morisco'. This is not needed, but the basis the arrangement has a great similarity.\(^{55}\)

The existing **house of Emiliano Robles León**, on the corner of Calle Francisco I. Madero 607 and Calle Pavo 218, Sector Juárez was exactly that, a typical colonial house, square in plan with rooms arranged around a central patio, and now Barragán in his first independent project had to renovate and extend it.

He proposed to extend the house with an L-shaped volume, containing a garage, the service and servant’s rooms and staircase. In the existing patio he placed a typical ‘Moorish’ element, a circular fountain that overflows in a square reflection pool and further he added specific ‘Mediterranean’ details like a wooden pergola, a parapet for the roof terrace (set off from the plain wall of the patio with roof tiles that are also used to cover it on the top) and colored wooden railings and gratings, including a gate that subtly fences off the main staircase from the patio. The stylistic vocabulary Barragán used for the renovation of the Robles León house is actually that which he borrowed from the Spanish pavilion on the Art Deco exposition and the illustrations that he found in the books of Ferdinand Bac.

At that moment (1927), for a young and now ‘independent’ Barragán, Bac and his ‘theoretical’\(^{56}\) work offered an answer to both his (then) pressing personal questions: how to produce ‘architecture’ without an ‘official’ ‘academic’ education, and how (as an intellectual and ‘architect’) to find a cultural expression for the Jaliscan identity in the form of a ‘tranquil, basic but noble’ architectural ‘style’? In the interview from 1962 he described it as: ‘I also made another discovery: the gardens made by Mr. Ferdinand Bac who was a writer and an architect, I bought some of his books which I gave (in 1927)\(^{57}\) amongst others to Nacho Díaz Morales and to Juan Palomar.’ And he continued:

---


\(^{56}\) Barragán did not see Bac’s gardens until 1931.

\(^{57}\) According to the dedication in Díaz Morales’ book Barragán gave it to him in 1927, and not immediately after he returned from his trip to Europe at the end of 1925.
'Then also the taste for gardens was a kind of liberation from traditional things because in gardening imagination can be used and that helped us to forget the academism also existent in architecture. One forgets the academism, to create a garden, much more liberty is allowed to create a magic environment, that allows the architect who designs gardens to express the imagination one can use, and then it comes back to the part of how this imagination can be used without diminishing the value of the environment in which a construction is built, creating a special ambiance.'

For the 25 year-old Barragán, Bac is the perfect example of how a man of culture (as Barragán likes to see himself) can also be a ‘successful’ designer (even as an untrained ‘amateur’) and a ‘respected’ (‘French’) intellectual, who is dealing with the same sort of ‘important’ questions about cultural identity within ‘modern times’, as he and his young friends in Guadalajara.

In the publications about the ‘ambient settings’ that he designed, Bac (like Barragán also considering himself an ‘apprentise dans un métier’) came to the conclusion that he could come to a kind of universal or higher form of expression, by choosing, as he writes in Les Colombières. Ses jardins et ses décors:
‘...among forms sprung from the Mediterranean, stripping them of anything betokening the over-defined traits of time, religions and realms, creating an obvious enough synthesis of them to recapture the ancestral signification that united them all in a single family, steeped in the same sea, the same climate and the same original culture.’

In other words, on the one hand he rejected the sort of avant-garde desire for novelty that the concept of ‘Modernity’ started to introduce in that time, while on the other hand he also rejected the sort of fundamentalist submission to academically defined ideal styles, referring to specific cultural groups or historical periods.

Over and over again Bac tried to make clear in his writings that for him really the only thing that counted was the conserved ‘knowledge of experience’ generated by the age-old interaction of the human beings with their ‘local’ environment. For Bac this ‘local’ environment was the Mediterranean (the same ‘sea, climate, original culture’), where somehow every wave of colonization (Greek, Roman, Arab, etc.) had left its truly experienced knowledge in one way or another within the natural and cultural landscape. For Barragán and his intellectual friends this ‘local’ environment is the nature and culture of the ‘provinces’ of Jalisco and Michoacán, where among others these predominantly ‘Mediterranean’ people (in form of the Spanish and the French) had left their experienced knowledge, a knowledge (and this was their quest) to be discovered in its existing culture and then revived in its contemporary expression of a ‘local’ and at the same time ‘universal’ ‘style’.

‘Style’, in Bac’s search for the ‘Rénovation de l’Architecture Méditerranéenne’, is as he writes in his introduction to Les Colombières: ‘...faire un bouquet de tous ses souvenirs, un assemblée.’

In other words, a pastiche, a synthesis of (in essence) relaxed, simple architectural elements stripped of any connotations that might link them to anything other than the most fundamental human ‘sentiments’ and experiences.

By means of the elusive scenographical spaces he designed, Bac wanted to create (as he writes) ‘une architecture de sentiment’. This meant that in his work as an ‘amateur’ garden designer and architect, he was constantly in search of an architecture based on feelings and emotions, and as such defined by poetic words and concepts like ‘harmony’, ‘beauty’, ‘mystery’, ‘fantasy’, ‘memory’, ‘magic’, ‘enchantment’, ‘amazement’, ‘nostalgia’, ‘imagination’, ‘serenity’, ‘intimacy’, ‘solitude’ and ‘silence’, these however before their deeper meaning became encapsulated in easily consumable clichés. In a way this search for ‘une architecture de sentiment’ also became the inspiration that

---


63 As quoted in Riggen Martínez, pp. 92.

64 As quoted in Riggen Martínez, pp. 93.
drove the evolution of Barragán’s thoughts and work; it was the search for ‘an emotional architecture’, as Barragán’s friend Mathias Goeritz would later term it.

But before Barragán’s work reached maturity, before his ‘eye’ became an ‘embodied eye’, his work was to go through several phases of development.

The first phase, that which started with the restoration and extension of the Emiliano Robles León house in 1927-28, is the phase in which the ‘eye’ still plays a dominant role in the transposition of images and architectural elements. These are stylistic elements in the beginning, mainly found within the illustrations of Bac’s publications and the other books and images that Barragán brought with him from his trip to Europe, plus images of ‘local’ elements, which are then fused into a pastiche like architectural scenography that, in that period, he and his younger friends were starting to explore by means of their first designs and completed buildings.

The functional typologies in terms of organization and plan are all quite simple and clear and mostly very similar from one project to another. This means that the things initially explored by them deal more with the external ‘look’ of the building and not so much yet with the internal ‘feel’ of the spaces, or so it seems in the beginning. But one should be careful here, because the sequence of approaching the house, entering the garden through the gate, following the path towards the entrance portico, entering the spaces for daily living and then penetrating further towards the more private spaces for living, like the roof-terrace or the garden, is a constant factor in almost all the houses. However the ‘scenographic’ sequence of spaces and atmospheres, built up as such, is constantly a different one.

If we assume that these young architects were also gradually improving the consciousness of their perception, it might very well be that they constantly (at least subconsciously) explored the changes in the experience of this ‘scenographic’ sequence. But let’s not go too deeply into this here before seeing what Barragán designed in this period.

Besides the Robles León house in 1927-28, Barragán also designed and executed two houses for Adolfo Robles Castillo in 1928. These were Two independent houses situated next to each other and forming a single architectural volume and composition which is set back from the corner of the street by means of a garden wall and a small strip like front-garden that runs around the main house on three sides. The main house, which is the larger of the two and designed for Adolfo Robles Castillo’s own use, has its address on the Avenida Ignacio L. Vallarte 1095. Its carport and the entrance of the other house, which the client wanted to offer for rent\textsuperscript{65}, are situated at the Calle Argentina 27, Sector Juárez.

\textsuperscript{65} The rental market was a secure business, which was in the hands of the well-to-do families, they imposed regulations, prices and controlled the growth of the city. See Riggen Martínez pp.20.
The entrance portico of the main house, which is prominently situated on the corner of the avenue and the street, literally refers in terms of form, proportion and details, to one of Bac’s illustrations of an entrance porch belonging to the garden and villa at Les Colombières. The layout of the houses is very simple, the main spaces (living-room, dining-room and studio cum library plus the entrance portico) are situated on the two most prominent sides of the central stair hall, and the kitchen and the service rooms are on the other side of the stair well. On the first floor we see the same concerning the situation of the servant quarters and main bedrooms plus the relatively large roof-terraces. The whole is adorned with glazed tiles, colored latticework and wrought iron grills, inspired by the ones found in the illustrations of Ferdinand Bac.

Using a formula similar to the one of the double house, in 1928-29 Barragán also built two houses for Ildefonso Franco on the corner of Avenida de la Paz 2207 and Calle Simón Bolívar 224, Sector Juárez. These two independent houses are mainly one-story houses with large roof-terraces on top. Here, too, the volume is set back from the street by means of a garden wall and a small strip-like front garden towards the street. At the house where Ildefonso Franco resided this garden runs around the corner, gets deeper towards the avenue and transforms into a heightened terrace in front of the main entrance. The two driveways towards the garages set back on either side, free the houses in such a way that it seems to be a single free standing volume on a corner lot. The extra high parapet near the corner of the roof-terrace not only gives some extra privacy from streets, but it also echoes the garden running around the corner and the intersection of avenue and street. This simple volumetric composition is decorated with ‘Mediterranean’ elements, such as the penthouse above the entrance, the little wooden chapel containing a statue of the local patron saint, the Virgin of Zapopan, on the heightened corner-façade towards the avenue, and the niches and the colored wooden moucharabíes adorning the side façade and the service room above the garage.

Another ensemble of two houses designed and executed by Barragán in 1928-29, is the one normally indicated as ‘two rental houses for Emiliano Robles León’ on the corner of Avenida de la Paz 1877 and Calle Colónias, Sector Juárez, the same client whose existing house in the historical centre of Guadalajara Barragán had previously renovated and extended. Contemporary photographs show that these two houses were not built at the same moment, and that first the house on the corner was built and probably immediately after that the house, also known as the ‘house for doctor Medina’, next to it. These are also one-storey houses with large roof-terraces and a layout similar to that of the house built for Ildefonso Franco. Both houses are organized in two parallel wings, one containing all the bedrooms, and the other lining up the entrance portico with the living room, dining room, kitchen and services. Since both houses face the avenue and only the one on the corner can receive light into its bedrooms from the street, it was necessary to set the two houses apart by means of a patio, thus allowing light
into the bedroom-wing of the other house. Two arches are introduced, spanning the widths of the patio in the front and the back, to spatially define the patio and to bind the houses together into one ensemble again. Also, the simple volumes of these two houses are adorned with style elements such as niches and arches, giving the whole a kind of North African look.

In the same period Barragán also did a set of small rental houses: in 1928 a house on Calle Prosperidad 74, Sector Liberta; in 1928-29 two houses on Calle Liceo 329 and 331, Sector Hidalgo; a house on Calle Pedro Loza 517, Sector Hidalgo; and in 1929 two rental houses for González Luna on Calle Zaragoza 265-267, Sector Juárez. The limited dimensions of the lots mainly determined the layout of these small houses’ floor plans, which was constantly based on a patio with rooms distributed around it in form of an L or a C. Although insignificant in the totality of his œuvre, what is interesting in the layout of most of these houses is the way that one enters. From the street one enters via a relatively dark corridor-like hallway and after a few steps passes into an open vestibule that then flows into the bright central patio with its traditional fountain, attracting both the eye and the ear of the visitor. This is a sequence of entering not unlike the one that Barragán will employ later in his own house in a very subtle way.

Probably the most important work for him in that period were the larger one-family houses that he designed and executed in the new residential districts west of the historic centre, since these commissions prove that (even without the title) he was accepted as an ‘architect’ by some of the most influential people of the local cultural and political scene.

According to some notes that Barragán wrote in 1931 for a publication about four of his executed works in Guadalajara, it must have been 1928 when Licenciado Gustavo R. Cristo, the mayor of Guadalajara, commissioned Barragán to design and build a villa for him on the corner of Calle Pedro Moreno 1612 and Calle Marsella, Sector Juárez. The house stands on a lot bordered by three streets that are clearly defined in terms of hierarchy by the architecture and layout of the house: its front façade faces south towards Calle Pedro Moreno, with a lower, slightly protruding volume with large elliptical arches containing a portico and a higher, watchtower-like, volume with ‘Moorish’ features generated by its ‘crown’ of crenellations, that addresses the corner of Calle Pedro Moreno and Calle Marsella towards the south-east. However, what is strange is that the beginning of the entry sequence does not address that corner and in addition the tower does not, as one would assume at first, contain the stairwell. It isn’t even a watchtower or belvedere since (as far as I could find out) there is no stair leading up to its roof. It might be that all this had to do with his preferred orientation of particular rooms towards certain directions. One can for instance see that in this period Barragán normally

---

prefers to orient the living quarters towards the west and the sleeping quarters towards the east.

However, even more interesting in the study of all these larger one-family houses is the way in which Barragán modulated the sequence of architectural elements and spaces that will lead the visitor from the public realm of the street, via the living quarters, to the more private realm of the garden or the roof-terrace. Since later on we will see that it is the mastery of this spatial and atmospheric modulation of architectural elements and spatial zones that makes him a virtuoso in that he plays upon our experience of ‘architectural’ space providing a kinesthetic or ‘kine-aesthetic’ experience incorporating both our perception and our imagination.

In the Cristo house the modulation of this sequence was particularly interesting in the vertical direction. Although the site the house stands on was marked off with a garden wall and its volume was set off from the streets and the neighboring lot by means of the driveway and the front- and side-garden, Barragán actually placed the living quarters upon a relatively high plinth or base, thus making the margin between the public and the private realm even stronger. This meant that a visitor, after passing through the first wrought iron gate at the driveway, was initially confronted with a (freely accessible) front- and side-garden to the right, including a terraced fountain that marked the corner. Next, in approaching closer towards the house, one reached a second, much higher wooden gate, blocking off to the right a kind of caged-in staircase carved out from the mass of the plinth and leading upwards towards two terraces situated on different levels and screened off from the garden and the street by a wooden trelliswork.

From the first terrace a flight of steps to the left led one directly to the entrance portico and the front door. Alternatively, one could choose to continue straight up to the second terrace and to step into the second part of the porch to the left, where the visitor could then sit down for a while (as though in a waiting room) and look back through the trelliswork over the garden and into the street in front of the house. From the entry porch one entered via an ornate door into a small (relatively dark) vestibule, before passing under another smaller elliptical arch into a salon of double-height, that mainly received its light from windows placed high above.

The sequence, penetrating deeper into the house from here, could continue in three directions. The first was towards the lower dining room to the left, with in the back of it the kitchen and the service patio. Second led towards a low corridor-like vestibule to the right, which in turn led into a first patio and from there, via an elliptical arch, into a second larger patio with a fountain, and

---

67 As I said before, maybe it would be better to call it a ‘kine-aesthetic’ experience (from Greek kînein, to move + the Greek aisthêtikos, of sense perception, from aisthêta, perceptible things, from aisthonesthai, to perceive) since I do not only refer to ‘kinesthetic’ as: ‘the sense that detects bodily position, weight, or movement of the muscles, tendons, and joints’, but also to the idea of aesthetics (or esthetics) in terms of that which is ‘characterized by a heightened sensitivity to beauty’.
from there it spiraled, via a large room with a high slanting ceiling (which might have been have been a garden- or smoking-room) back into the low corridor again. The third passed up a sort of grand staircase located next to the entry that cantilevered into the salon, which could lead either to a room in the tower (which probably was a study cum library) and from there to a roof-terrace in the front of the house, or, via a corridor to a large roof-terrace with low parapets in the back of the house, which was connected via a small flight of steps and an arched entry to a second much smaller roof-terrace completely enclosed by walls at its end.

Since this enclosed roof-terrace is situated on top of the service quarters over the garage and can also be reached via the stairs in the service patio, it might well be that this was only a roof-terrace for drying the laundry. Yet even so, as a private space, open mainly to the sky, it seems to allude to the experience of the enclosed roof-terrace that Barragán will later realize on top of his own house.

The Cristo house, with its massive watchtower crowned with crenellations and its relatively small outside openings, looks at first sight as if it drew its inspiration from images of desert fortresses or castle-houses in North Africa, places that had to be able to defend themselves against the outside. It is interesting that the defensive aspect of it is further reflected in the whole entry sequence to reach the top of the massive plinth that the house stands on, and in the fact that the original photographs showed that the elliptical arches of the larger patio were initially closed off. Only later these arches were opened, thus giving the viewer within the private patio the possibility to look over the side garden and the street through a turned wooden trelliswork (this colored trelliswork also contained a gate that led to the heightened terrace of the side-garden). I don’t know why it was that the arches were initially closed-off, a sort of ‘dry moat’ (camouflaged as garden) was created around the house (of the mayor) by means of the plinth and the garden wall, and such an intricate sequence of gates and doors was set up to enter the house. It might however be possible that this had to do with the rather unstable political situation in Guadalajara in 192868, because in that period the central government and the Cristeros were still engaged in acts of terrorism against each other. It was not until 1929 that the Cristeros were compelled to lay down their arms and accept most of the government’s terms.

The other large one-family house that Barragán designed, and executed with the help of his friend Rafael Urzúa,69 in 1928-29, is the house for Enrique Aguilar on Calle Manuel López Cottila 1505, Sector Juárez, a house that in

68 Also remember that in defiance of the ‘no-reelection’ principle, president Calles supported Obregón’s bid to recapture the presidency in 1928 (also the year in which the presidential term was increased from four to six years, the ‘sexenio’). Obregón won the election in 1928, but was assassinated by a ‘religious fanatic’ before he could take office, which means that Calles chose one of his supporters, Emilio Portes Gil, as interim president (from December 1928 till February 1930).

69 Who got his title of architect in September 1928.
terms of its decorative details has a lot in common with the Ildefonso Franco house of the same period. It uses the same sort of penthouse cover over the roof-terrace door, the same small pieces of wooden railing within the wall of the roof-terrace’s parapet and the same colored wooden moucharabies adorning the side façade. Also, the two driveway gates facing the street are literal transplantations of Bac’s gate at Les Colombières.

In contrast to the southward facing Cristo house, the Aguilar house faced (the house is demolished) north, but it addressed the street in a similar way with a lower slightly protruding volume containing an arched portico and a higher tower-like volume, which (this time) contained the stairwell (as one would expect). The whole is a morphological composition of variously sized block-like volumes placed against each other on top of a (partially carved out) plinth-like base that finds its volumetric expression in the low garden wall. A garden wall topped with a wrought iron fence runs around the edge of the base that the house seems to stand on.

If we have a look at how Barragán modulated the entry sequence in this design we can see that the different ‘stations’ in the sequence were similar to those in the Cristo house, but that the ‘scenography’ he built up was a different one. Approaching the house one would realize that the tower and the oblique lines of the outside staircases addressed the right\(^{70}\) entry gate. Behind this gate, via the (seemingly carved-out) overlap area of the driveway and the front-garden, one diagonally approached the front staircase. Going up this flight of steps, enclosed between parapet walls, one reached a platform in front of the portico, with a wooden trelliswork cum railing overlooking a fountain that seemed to be carved out from the massive volume of the ‘plinth’. This was the point where a visitor unwittingly came onto a kind of axial spine suspended between the fountain in the front and a fountain at the rear of the house, an abstract mental vector that in plan materialized as a corridor running north-south and which organized the layout of the house with the living quarters to the west of it and the sleeping quarters to the east. In this instance it was again the way in which Barragán modulated the spatial scenography along this and other vectors that was interesting.

Via the low porch and the front door one entered a double-height vestibule that received light via an ocular window high up. In front of the visitor this vestibule opened up into to the salon by means of a high arched slit, placed slightly asymmetrical in relation to the centre of the entry door. The salon, however, would still be ‘fenced-off’ from the vestibule by means of a barred door set in a high trelliswork of turned wooden bars, not unlike the ones found in churches (in Spain and Mexico) dividing the side chapels from the space of the main church. Stepping through the barred door one entered a double-height salon that received its light primarily from arched windows placed very high up in the volume (two sets of three facing west and east). From here there were again several vectors that penetrated further into the house.

---

\(^{70}\) There are two similar driveway gates, but the left one leads around the house, via a driveway fenced off from the garden to a second garage in the back of the house.
Straight ahead, via a corridor lit from above, one reached an enclosed patio with a fountain and then an arched loggia enclosing a tree. Diagonally to the right one reached the dining room, which was connected to the kitchen and the service quarters via an antechamber. One could also continue via the grand staircase to the right of the vestibule that led up to the roof-terrace over the portico or proceed via a mezzanine-like gallery that passed through the volume of the salon to the study and library, which again was connected to the roof-terrace on the eastside of the house.

Of additional interest was the more public route that led from the portico up the staircase at the outside of the tower and via a door at the midlevel of the interior stairwell towards the study (or working room) of the owner. In fact the whole entry area, with its outside and inside staircases, the loggia, the vestibule and its different levels, was a kind of spatial sorting device for the different types of visitors and guests that might come to the house.

The stock market crash that began on a black Friday in October 1929 and deepened in the ensuing months also had immediate repercussions in Mexico. In the fore-mentioned interview with Ramírez Ugarte, Barragán remembers: ‘...about 1928, 1929, there was no architectural work in Guadalajara. I gave up architecture for a year and I dedicated myself to gaining money with an oil-mill and some other silly business.’ By this ‘other silly business’ he probably refers to some kind of deal he tried to work out in Mexico City, where he stayed in October and November 1929, and ‘whereby we (Ignacio Díaz Morales and he) will be able to come and work in Mexico City this coming year with a sure success.’ The deal, however, didn’t work out.

The beginning of the year 1930 brings another somewhat traumatic experience for Barragán: the death of his father in a hospital in Chicago (USA) where Luis had accompanied him in January to undergo treatment for his illness. His father had an operation in February, but, although this surgery initially looked successful, he died in March.

And then, as Barragán said: ‘...after I returned from the USA there was a period of another two years in which I was occupied liquidating the hacienda’s properties, or better to say before the ‘Agrarismo’ liquidated my family’

---


72 Letter dated November 9, from Luis Barragán in Mexico City to Ignacio Díaz Morales, from the personal archive of Ignacio Díaz Morales in Guadalajara. Also quoted by Marco de Michelis in ‘Luis Barragán, the Silent Revolution’, pp. 50.

What he refers to is the ongoing threat and acceleration of the Agrarian Reform in the late twenties and early thirties, which was premised on the idea that in the future capitalism would remain dominant in the countryside. Initially this Agrarismo was designed to serve the political purpose of stopping peasant rebellions and to abolish the supposedly parasitic, 'traditional' latifundism, however at the same moment the land grants to peasants were seen as only a ‘transitional’ measure, part of the process of dismantling and expropriating the great estates and haciendas. The vision of Mexico's rural future envisaged by the post-revolutionary reformers was always one of large-scale, modern agro-industries and prosperous medium-scale private capitalist farms.

Accordingly, until 1934, which means before the large-scale land reform of Lázaro Cárdenas the entire policy of the Agrarismo was intended to be purely

---

74 The Agrarian Reform Act of 1915 and the constitution of 1917 laid the groundwork for dramatic changes in Mexico's land tenure system. On January 6, 1915, General Venustiano Carranza began the agrarian reform process by decreeing the immediate return to their original owners of all communal lands improperly seized since 1856. Carranza, who became president in 1917, also decreed that previously landless villages receive title to lands expropriated from private hacienda owners or to excess government land. These principles were later incorporated into Article 27 of the constitution of 1917. Article 27 and subsequent legislation established the 'ejido', or communal landholding, as the primary form of land tenure in Mexico. These documents established that the nation retained ultimate control over privately held land, which could be expropriated and redistributed in the public interest to ‘campesinos’. The ejido, or communally farmed plot, emerged as the uniquely Mexican form of redistributing large landholdings. Under this arrangement, a group of villagers could petition the government to seize private properties that exceeded certain specified sizes (initially 150 hectares for irrigated land and 200 hectares for rain-fed holdings). Assuming a favorable review of the petition, the government then expropriated the property and created an ejido. The state retained title to the land but granted the villagers, now known as ‘ejidatarios’, the right to farm the land, either in a collective manner or through the designation of individual ‘parcelas’. Ejidatarios could not sell or mortgage their land but could pass usufruct rights to their heirs. In the longer term, private property would replace the state property associated with land reform: the ejido. Ejidatarios, the beneficiaries of land reform, only received rights to use the land in legal theory, and could not alienate it as if it were private property: if an ejidatario could no longer farm his or her land, and had no successors in the family able to do so, the plot should revert to the community for redistribution to some other potential beneficiary.

Mexican administrations have varied widely in the importance accorded to the ejido. During the 1920s and early 1930s, policy makers typically viewed the ejido as a transitional system that would lead to small private farms nationwide. For example, President Plutarco Elías Calles (1924-28) described the ejido as a school from which ejidatarios eventually would graduate as private farmers. Given this perspective, policy makers encouraged ejidos to divide their lands into individual parcelas. See a.o. http://countrystudies.us/mexico/.

25 Lázaro Cárdenas, president of Mexico from 1934 to 1940, proposed a completely new model for the ejidos. Peasant agriculture would be the basis for agricultural modernization, and the preferred form of the ejido was the large-scale collective type, though Cárdenas did, in fact, create many new individual ejidos as well. Cárdenas also changed the agrarian legislation so that land could be redistributed to landless laborers on haciendas, peons who had never belonged to rural villages, which had previously had communal land, taken away under the liberal reforms of the mid-19th century or simply stolen by haciendas. This was a much more radical land reform program, which promised to make the peasants the masters of the Mexican countryside. Under Cárdenas, much more land was redistributed to peasants than under all the previous post-revolutionary governments put together. As a result of the Cárdenas reforms, a substantial number of ejidos were created which enjoyed prime quality agricultural resources, irrigation works, and in some cases, control of agro-industrial facilities run as cooperatives. So Cárdenas's government created a sector of land reform peasants who were theoretically capable of producing substantial commercial surpluses in the sense that they were given the land and water needed to do so. Under Cárdenas, they also received state credit, the financial resources needed to valorize their physical resources, investment by the state in infrastructure (roads, canals, etc.) and technical assistance. See http://www.les1.man.ac.uk/multimedia/mexican_land_reform.htm.
temporary, a transitional arrangement within which peasants were seldom even given written titles to their land. Under the rule and strong influence of Plutarco Elías Calles in particular between 1924 till 1934 this strategy of implementing the land reform was also used as a way of keeping the peasants, the ejidatarios and campesinos dependent on the state and harvesting their votes for the ruling party. So even if the Barragán family did not want to do so, it was wiser to liquidate their hacienda’s land holdings in the Siera del Tigre. This probably entailed selling parcelas of land to the campesinos and peons working for them, which would then give them the possibility of actually owning their plot of land and not be part of a transitional arrangement with the state. To have waited for the moment that the campesinos and peons would petition the government would have meant the Barragán family’s losing its property through expropriation by the state.

In the early thirties, besides dealing with his family’s business, Barragán also designed and executed (again together with Rafael Urzúa) his third one-family villa: the house for Licenciado Efraín González Luna on Calle José Guadalupe Zuno Hernandez 2083, Sector Juárez, that dated from around 1930-31. The lawyer Efraín González Luna (1898-1964) was not only an important Catholic intellectual and influential politician who had sympathized with the Cristero movement, in that period he also was one of the leading figures within the intense artistic, political and social debate that took place in Guadalajara; a debate, as we saw before, that was interested in the foundation and the evolution of Guadalajara’s own cultural identity and its expression in all sorts of cultural phenomena like literature, painting and architecture.

By the end of the armed phase of the Cristero conflict, which was apparently resolved with the ‘Accords’ in 1929, a group of Catholic intellectuals founded ‘El grupo sin número y sin nombre’ that among others started the publication ‘Bandera de Provincias, Quincenal de Cultura’, in which González Luna published many articles critical of the state of art and culture in Mexico and his translations of among others Paul Claudel, James Joyce and Franz Kafka. For the young Barragán, González Luna was more than just a friend and client. He

76 Plutarco Elías Calles was perhaps Mexico’s strongest political figure since the Díaz dictatorship, who after his own presidency in 1928 exercised behind-the-scenes control over Mexican politics through the actions of three presidents who where essentially his puppets.

77 Formerly Calle del Bosque.

78 The ‘Accords’ also meant a kind of betrayal of the Catholic Church towards the Landowners, because with the ‘Accords’ the Church (to save its own interests) gave the central government free reign in executing its agrarian land reform, the Agrarismo.

79 The five initiators of the group are: Alfonso Gutiérrez Hermosillo, Agustín Yáñez, Esteban A. Cueva Brambila, José Guadalupe Cardona Vera and Emmanuel Palacios. The first among those to show adhesion to the group and often also collaborate with them in the magazine are: Efraín González Luna, Julio Jiménez Rueda, Agustín Basave, José Rolón, José Arriola Adame, José Guadalupe Zuno, Saúl Rodiles, Manuel Martínez Valadez, Aurelio Hidalgo, María Luisa Rolón, Carlos Stahl, Ixca Farias, Antonio Gómez Robledo, José Ruiz Medrano, Lola Vidrio, José Cornejo Franco, plus architects like Ignacio Díaz Morales and Luis Barragán.
also was a sort of intellectual mentor (a kind of older brother) refining Barragán’s conception and perception of ‘what is truly Mexican’, or better said, what the real ‘core’ of ‘artistic vitality’ is, as González Luna wrote in relation to the search for the vital core or the ‘true inspiration’ of all cultural phenomena: ‘…but what we need to seek out in the realm of art is the eternal motive, its core substance, rich with messages for all men, applicable today as well as tomorrow.’

These are words that also seem to echo Ferdinand Bac’s ideas about the ‘knowledge of experience’ that might be discovered in the existing expression of those cultural phenomena and then revived in a contemporary expression of a ‘local’ and at the same time ‘universal’ ‘style’.

But let’s return to the one-family house that Barragán designed for Efraín González Luna. In terms of layout this house (also north-facing) was almost a copy of the Aguilar house and apart from the difference in the decorative vocabulary used by Barragán, its main differences were the height of the two streets that border the lot in the north and the south, and the less monumental vestibule and salon, which generated a different spatial scenography. In this case the volumetric ‘plinth’, defined by the garden wall, was lower and only dealt with the front of the house because of the significant drop of the lot towards the garden in the south, which was also significantly larger then the one in the Aguilar house. The González Luna house addressed the street in a similar way with a lower slightly protruding volume containing an arched portico and a higher tower-like volume, which contained the stairwell. The whole morphological composition of differently sized block like volumes placed against each other on top of a plinth-like base was the same.

If one had a look at how Barragán modulated the entry sequence in this design one could see that the different ‘stations’ in the sequence were similar to those in the Aguilar house, but that again the ‘scenography’ he built up was a different one. Approaching the house one would realize that here, too, the tower and the oblique lines of the outside staircases addressed the driveway gate. Behind this, one diagonally approached some steps carved out from the plinth. Ascending these three steps, one reached the top of the plinth above where a stepped platform then led into the portico via the first arch (the second one was fenced-off with a wooden trelliswork towards a fountain that seemed to be carved out from the massive volume of the ‘plinth’). Via the low porch and the front door (that according to Ignacio Díaz Morales came straight from a stage-set of the Ballet Ruse) one entered this time a low vestibule that received light via a set of stepped slit-windows facing north over the roof-terrace on top of the portico.

---

80 Efraín González Luna, ‘Problemas de la Literatura Mexicana’, in Bandera de Provincias 6, as quoted in Riggen Martínez, pp. 36-37.

81 A vocabulary in search of ‘what is truly Mexican’ to use González Luna’s words.

82 As he showed to me during a conversation in 1988 by means of a book about the Ballet Ruse.
In front of the visitor this vestibule then opened towards the salon by means of an arched passageway, placed slightly asymmetrical in relation to the centre of the entry door, thus addressing the centre of the salon. This time the salon was ‘fenced-off’ by means of a kind of low gate and the salon was only one storey high, receiving its light from a set of stepped slit-windows placed high up facing east and a lower window, facing west. From here there were again several vectors that penetrated further into the house. Straight ahead, via a corridor lit from above, then through a barred door and via a flight of steps down, one reached an enclosed patio. That in turn led via some more steps to a pavilion-like loggia that from its raised position overlooked a jet-fountain and the garden in the back of the house. Diagonally to the right from the salon one reached the dining room, which is connected to the kitchen and the service quarters via an antechamber. One could also continue from the salon via the grand staircase to the right of the vestibule that led up to a kind of reception room with a vertical slit-window (later this rooms was changed into a private chapel with a large arched window) before one reached the library cum study of Efraín González Luna. From there one could then reach the roof-terrace with its pergola and the private quarters of the owner.

Like the Aguilar house this house also had the more public route that led from the terrace in front of the portico up the staircase at the outside of the tower and via a door at the midlevel of the interior stairwell towards the reception room and the study (or working room) of the owner.

Now we see how a set of almost equal sequences, in terms of their ‘stations’, produced a large amount of different but comparable experiences, in terms of the architectural scenography that Barragán generated in each of the projects. Actually this was the way he, the ‘amateur architect’, learned and taught himself: with each sequence that he designed and built, he trained his powers of observation plus tested and refined the relationship between his initial imagination and his actual perception of the realized space and atmosphere. In other words the ‘inner eye’ and the ‘outer eye’ were gradually starting their embodiment in both the man and his work.

If one looked at the ‘style’ of the house Barragán designed for Efraín González Luna, one could see that the decorative elements he used in the early thirties were gradually picking up more and more abstract elements alluding to images of Mexico’s vernacular architecture. Most striking in the González Luna house was probably the kind of ‘crown’ on top of the stairwell that looked like that of a bell-tower (not unlike the one’s you can find in the cliché image of a fortified church in a tex-mex western), or the abstracted window holes and slits.

We can see the same phenomenon even better in the remodeling of his family’s summerhouse located at the Avenida Madero 411, next to main

---

83 As we can also see in the other projects he builds in the early thirties like the Cristo house in Chapala.
square, in the lakeside town of Chapala. This design and its execution, which he entrusted to his friend the engineer Juan Palomar y Arias, also dated from around 1930-31 and showed how he transformed the kind of monumental symmetrical ‘look’ of a small neoclassical pavilion-palace, which was adorned with pediments and pilasters (not unlike a town-hall in a small city that has to address the main square) into an apparently accidental sort of asymmetrical street façade of a relatively modest Mexican village house.

The existing façade consisted of two lateral volumes crowned with pediments flanking the recessed entrance façade that one could only reach via a small forecourt, fenced-off by a wrought-iron trelliswork and a gate contained between two ornate pylons. The remodeling consisted of erasing all the neoclassical ornamentation from the façade, closing some windows and filling the space of the forecourt with a new (only slightly recessed) block containing the new entrance and staircase. The whole new entrance façade played in an almost graphic way with a set of vernacular motives and the initial symmetry. At first sight the two slightly protruding volumes on the side and the cornice of small triangular apertures that horizontally chained them together above the door created an idea of a symmetrical background for the central façade. On these the entry door down to the right seemed to find a counterpoint in the semicircular window on the top left-hand corner, as also happens counter diagonally with a stepped graffito scratched into the façade, echoing the staircase behind.

In late February or early March 1931, Barragán traveled to New York where he would stay for a period of about three months before traveling further on to Europe. The reason for this trip to New York and then to Europe is not clear, but might be found in the socio-cultural environment around ‘El grupo sin número y sin nombre’ and the magazines ‘Bandera de Provincias, Quincenal de Cultura’ (led by Alfonso Gutiérez Hermosillo) plus ‘Campo’ (directed by Enrique Martínez Ulloa), that Barragán and his friends were part of. The short-lived publication Bandera de Provincias dedicated an edition to the work of José Clemente Orozco and in number 4 (June 1929) his friend Ignacio Díaz Morales wrote an article that commented (in a critical tone) the written and built work of Le Corbusier. This suggests that, on one hand in terms of architecture, there was a notion of, and also an interest in, the more progressive architectural ideas of the time, the ideas of the so-called ‘Modern Movement’ represented by the work of Le Corbusier and others like ‘that interesting group called Bauhaus’ (that they got to know through the foreign magazines that Barragán had subscribed to).

84 Where in the same period he (probably) also restructured the summer residence of Gustavo R. Cristo, at Calle Zaragoza 307.

85 The available contemporary pictures show that the remodeling went through several stages, since in one of the photographs one can see that the originally arched windows were maintained in the first phase, only later they became square.

86 24 editions from May 1929 till the end of April 1930.
'Nevertheless in the 30ties is when one got to know the Le Corbusier movement and all those people who come from France, which I had already carefully read, I even discussed then through friends,...'\textsuperscript{87}

On the other hand, however, it seems that there was also a growing demand for more intellectual reflection and then in particular a more critical reflection, one that was rooted in local tradition (as represented by the work of Orozco) upon all those developments within post-revolutionary Mexican society and its cultural climate, that were coined as ‘Progressive’, ‘Modern’, ‘International’, ‘Rational’, ‘Functional’ or just ‘New’.

Concerning the development\textsuperscript{88} of the architectural climate in both Guadalajara and Mexico City we should also not forget that it was only in the year 1929 that Mexico City witnessed the realization of its first ‘Modernistic’ buildings, a double house for the families Behn and Zollinger on Calle San Borja 733, by the Swiss architects Hans Schmidt and Paul Artharia, and the house designed by Juan O’Gorman for his father Cecil Crawford O’Gorman on Calle Jardín 88, in San Angel Inn, the same area where shortly after in 1931 Juan O’Gorman was going to build the most famous icon of modern architecture in Mexico, the house annex studio for Diego Rivera on Calle de Palmas and next to it, connected with a little bridge, the house for Frida Kahlo on Avenida Altavista 161.

During his stay in New York Barragán got in contact (and became friends) with the painter José Clemente Orozco (1883-1949), a fellow Tapatio,\textsuperscript{89} who next to Diego Rivera and David Alfaro Siqueiros was one of the three leading Mexican muralists initially supported by José Vasconcelos (between 1922 and

\textsuperscript{87} Alejandro Ramírez Ugarte, ‘Conversación con el Arq. Luis Barragán en la Ciudad de México’, typescript, November 1962, preserved in the Barragán Foundation, Basel/Birsfelden Switzerland.

\textsuperscript{88} Mexico’s ‘Modern’ architecture is mainly born out of a group of young architects and students that take education in their own hands. At the beginning of the twenties the education at the architectural section of the Escuela de Bellas Artes was still mainly in the hands of the architects of the Porfiriato, with their eclectic and neo-colonial background. And the first contact that the students got with the ‘Modern Movement’ was via some foreign architectural magazines in the library, like: Moderne Bauformen, L’Architecte, The Architectural Record and L’Architecture Vivante. From 1924 onwards articles and illustrations of the work of ‘Modernist’ architects like Dudok, Mallet-Stevens, Mendelsohn and Le Corbusier can be found in Mexican Magazines such as Excésior and Cemento. In 1924 a group of 16 young students, among which: Juan O’Gorman, Mauricio Campos, Álvaro Aburto, Leonardo Noriega, Salvador Roncal, Francisco Arce, Jesús Rovalo, Javier Torres Ansorena, Carlos Vergara and Enrique del Moral, founded an independent design studio under the guidance of the architects José Villagran Garcia, Carlos Obregón Santacilia en Pablo Flores, a design studio that later on would become the base of the so-called ‘Radical Functionals’ of the early 1930ties. After the student revolts of 1929 the architecture department gains its independence from the Escuela de Bellas Artes and becomes the Faculty of Architecture of the Escuela Central de Arte Plásticas. See Israel Katzman, ‘Arquitectura Contemporánea Mexicana’, Memorias VIII Instituto Nacional de Antropología & Historia, SEP Mexico, 1963.

\textsuperscript{89} He was born in the town of Zapotlán el Grande (today Ciudad Guzmán) in Jalisco on November 23, 1883. His family moved first to Guadalajara and then to Mexico City, where he arrived at the age of seven in 1890. He began classes at the San Carlos Academy to become a painter but at first wasn’t convinced that he could make a full-time career out of art. So he studied agriculture for three years and worked as an architectural draftsman only to return to the academy in 1906 and remain there until 1910.
1926) to make murals for the Escuela Nacional Preparatoria. However, Orozco’s work was less direct in its understanding and less folkloristic and populist than that of Diego Rivera. It was instead more contemplative and asked more from the observer in terms of knowledge and reflection than just a quick look. The ‘message’ of his works was often ambivalent and based on religious and mythological iconography, by means of which he put those celebrated revolutionary forces and ideals of progress and mechanization in a much more critical perspective than did Diego Rivera. It was in consequence of this lack of artistic recognition (in Mexico City, which on the other hand attracted the attention of his provincial compatriots in Guadalajara.) and the, in his eyes, over appreciation of Diego Rivera, that from 1927 to 1934 he went into a kind voluntary exile to the US where, with the help of Alma Reed and Eva Palmer Sikelianos (who ran the Delphic Studio Gallery), he got several exhibitions and commissions.

In 1930 he was commissioned by the Pomona College in Claremont, California, to do a mural in their Frary Hall. This became his celebrated creation of ‘Prometheus’, illustrating his contemplations about both the positive and the negative aspects of men’s ability to create his own world by means of the ‘technical knowledge’ and the secrets to creating technical artifacts that mankind gained when Prometheus stole the secret of fire from the Artificer of the Olympian Gods, the blacksmith Hephaistos.

When Barragán met Orozco in New York in 1931, the painter was executing a (70 m²) mural, called ‘Mankind’s Struggle’, in the hall of the ‘New School for Social Research’ (at 66 West 12th Street), and in which he depicted his ideas about the unity of races and the human drive to realize ideals, while at the same time also alluding to its other side, the mechanization and dehumanization of life in the great metropolis. It was through his new friend Orozco, with whom he had many conversations during these three months, that Barragán also came in contact with the Austrian artist, exhibition designer, theatre architect and theorist Friedrich Kiesler (1890-1965). Friedrich Kiesler was not only another member of New York’s artistic community at that time, but also a key member of the European Avant-Garde.

Kiesler, an artist by training, was as well a kind of ‘amateur’ architect who in the early twenties produced ‘spatial visions’ in the form of stage-sets and exhibition designs (like his ‘electro-mechanical’ stage-set for W.U.R. in Berlin, his ‘Raumbühne’ in Vienna or his ‘Raumstadt’ for the Art Deco exhibition in Paris mentioned before) that attracted the attention of the international Avant-Gardes of that time.

In this manner, in the twenties Kiesler became friends with artists and architects like: Adolf Loos, Hans Richter, Theo van Doesburg, László Moholy-Nagy, El...
Lissitzky, Mies van de Rohe, Fernand Léger, Amédée Ozenfant, Tristan Tzara, Tommaso Marinetti and Le Corbusier.

In the months before Barragán met him in New York and had several conversations with him, Kiesler had been back in Europe\(^\text{91}\) for the first time since he went to New York in 1926\(^\text{92}\), and there, according to the calendar of his wife Stefi Kiesler, he was almost every day in contact with Theo van Doesburg and had several meetings with Piet Mondrian, Edgar Varèse, Alexander Calder, Hans Arp, Michel Seuphor, George Vantongerloo, Fernand Léger, Oskar Kokoschka, Tristan Tzara and Le Corbusier.\(^\text{93}\)

Back in the US Kiesler also had a meeting with Frank Lloyd Wright in November 1930, and in January 1931 he attended one or more lectures by Richard Neutra (like himself, also an Austrian living in the US) in the ‘New School for Social Research’. As we have seen before, at that time this was where Orozco was working on his mural.

By January 1931 Neutra would also have just returned from a lecture tour through Europe via China and Japan (where among others he gave lectures in Tokyo and Osaka, at the Bauhaus and many other places in Europe) to promote, besides his own work, the new American architecture, as he had already done in the books that he had previously published: ‘America: Die Stilbildung des neuen Bauens in den Vereinigten Staaten’ of 1930 and ‘Wie Baut America?’ of 1927. Neutra had also been the American delegate at the Congrès Internationaux d’Architecture Moderne, the CIAM III meeting of 1930 in Brussels that focused on the theme of land planning and spatial organization of housing, with particular attention to the issue of low-rise ‘garden city’ sprawl versus high-rise urban density. Upon his return to New York he was then asked to give a set of lectures, which means that on January 4 he gave a lecture entitled ‘The New Architecture’ and on the following three successive days he inaugurated the recently completed auditorium of Joseph Urban (an other Austrian architect living in the US) at the ‘New School for Social Research’. He delivered well-received lectures (illustrated with his and others’ work) on ‘The Relation of the New Architecture on the Housing Problem’, ‘The American Contribution to the New Architecture’ and ‘The Skyscraper and the New Problem of City Planning’.\(^\text{94}\)

Barragán’s interest in all this was not only getting directly in touch with the intellectual discourse about the direction that the development of architecture and urbanism should take within ‘Modern times’. For him, so it seems, even more important were the images that run parallel to the development that

---

\(^{91}\) Between August 12 to October 18, 1930.

\(^{92}\) Kiesler came to the US, because he was asked by Jane Heap to make a International Theater Exposition, or better to say to show his ‘Internationalen Austellung neuer Theatertechnik’ of 1924 for Vienna, in New York.


Neutra had sketched out in his books and lectures. For instance, in his book ‘America: Die Stilbildung des neuen Bauens in den Vereinigten Staaten’, of 1930, Neutra presented (like he will probably also have done in his illustrated lectures) the relatively unknown works of the Californian architect Irving Gill as some early master pieces of American ‘Modernist Architecture’. In this book Neutra showed among others Gill’s Horatio West Court housing complex of 1919 in Santa Monica and the Dodge House of 1914-16, on King’s road in West Hollywood.

For Barragán the images of these pueblo-like plain square volumes, featuring modernistic ribbon windows running around corners, next to traditional arched porticos, must have been like the discovery of a missing link between the sort of abstracted traditional architecture (the ‘heavy’ earthbound buildings that he had been making up to then in Guadalajara) and the more ‘Modern’ architecture (the crisp white architecture that seemed to be so ‘light’ and ‘visionary’ that it was as if it floated above the earth) propagated by the Avant-Gardes in Europe for all sorts of so-called ‘progressive’ reasons. Not only will we see that Barragán after his return from New York and Europe, adopted many of the stylistic features he found in Gill’s (‘heavier’) works for the projects he was going to build in the early thirties, in Guadalajara, he also adopted several stylistic features of Neutra’s (‘lighter’) works (like the Jardinette Apartments of 1927 and the Lovell House of 1927-29) for the buildings that he was going to construct in the mid and late thirties in Mexico City.

With all this in mind we have a clearer understanding of the nature of the intellectual atmosphere that not only surrounded Barragán, but also colored his vision before he went to Europe for the second time. As he expressed it himself in the interview of 1962:

‘During my absence from Mexico I got to know a lot of people in Europe and passing via New York I met someone very important to me, José Clemente Orozco. He was then living in New York, where I spent some months. During that time I also got acquainted with some vanguard architects, such as Federico Kiesler, Austrian, who was as important as Neutra, even if he was not

---

95 Irving Gill had come to California in the 1890s after working alongside F. L. Wright in the Chicago office of Louis Sullivan. He practiced an architecture that drew its inspiration from the indigenous Pueblo architecture of the Southwest and a stripped Colonial architecture from the Spanish Mission period. The crisp, abstract cubistic geometry of Gill’s buildings, with their flat roofs and ribbon windows, aligned him in the eyes of Neutra with the architecture of the ‘Modern Movement’ or the work of Adolf Loos.

96 In his lectures he probably also some other projects like for instance: the Banning House that Neutra had photographed, the Lewis Courts of 1910, in Sierra Madre, the Cossitt Cottages of 1910, in San Diego, the Powers Flats of 1913, in Los Angeles, the La Jolla Woman’s Club of 1912-14, in La Jolla, the Scripps House of 1915-16, in La Jolla, the Morgan House of 1917 in Los Angeles, the Raymond House of 1918, in Long Beach, or the Clarke House of 1919-21, in Santa Fe Springs.

97 Interesting in this respect is also the replica of a work that Orozco created in 1930 called ‘Pueblo Mexicano’, which still adorns the low wall between the living room and the library of Barragán’s later house at Calle Francisco Ramirez. In an issue of Artes de México (no, 23, March-April 1994, p.29) Barragán describes it with the following words: ‘He painted shadows where light goes and light where shadows go; this is something that goes beyond what we see, it is something magic. That is why the painter depicts it, because he can go far beyond physical limits and show us what we cannot see. It contains an important lesson in architecture for us to learn’. 
so well known in Mexico, and who had an even stronger character than him. Kiesler commissioned Orozco with the famous murals for the New School for Social Research. I kept on seeing him together with José Clemente Orozco those three months in NY and the conversations we had with Kiesler were very interesting for me. Actually he gave me a book about what has to be done and what can’t be done, a book edited with cross-outs showing ugliness and vulgarity, the tasteless and all those senseless things that got built at that time; and also showing what should be done so a work would take the right way; a ‘functionalism’ that Kiesler understood very well, it means, a functionalism of the construction function as a machine to be used by man, and the functionalism to develop the spirit and to live peacefully as well.’

The book that Barragán referred to here was probably the publication ‘Contemporary Art Applied to the Store and its Display’ of 1930, in which Kiesler tried to explain what he meant by ‘psycho-functional effect within architecture’, the term he coined while referring to his design for the Film-Guild-Cinema, built in 1928-29, at 52 West 8th Street. As he wrote: ‘The whole planning of the design for the Film Guild Cinema in New York was totally based on the demand for functional practicability. The ‘psycho-functional’ effect is not only expressed by lines, surfaces and forms, but also by materials and colors. Glass has another psychological effect then leather, wood another one then metal. The same also counts for the coloring. Function and usefulness on their own don’t produce a piece of art. ‘Psycho-Function’ is the ‘more’ that transcends usefulness, that which turns a functional solution into Art.’

What Kiesler actually did in the Film-Guild-Cinema was to also turn the whole space of the auditorium into a kind of theatrical stage-set, within which a dynamic scenography of atmospheres could be generated and manipulated by means of light-projections and other theatrical lighting effects using the walls and the ceiling of the auditorium, thereby inducing in the public a kind of psycho-emotional response in accord with the type of film they were going to see. As Kiesler himself stated: ‘The whole building is a plastic medium, dedicated to the Art of Light.’

Although there is no proof that Barragán paid a visit to the Film-Guild-Cinema, it is plausible that he did while he was in New York since his Cine Jalisco project for a cinema on Calle Colón in Guadalajara in 1934-35 also made some vague references to Kiesler’s cinema. More important in all this, however, is the fact that Kiesler, by means of his conversations, writings and works, actually introduced Barragán (who nevertheless was still mainly unaware of it) to the realm of the sort of architectural ‘scenography’ achieved

99 Ibid, pp. 118.
100 Around 1930 he already worked together with his brother Juan José Barragán on a project for a cinema called Cine Colón, on Calle Colón between Avenida Juárez and Calle Manuel López Cotilla.
by the ‘psycho-functional’ effects (as Kiesler called it) of lines, surfaces, forms, materials and colors, and also by theatrical effects of lighting, thus not only choreographing people’s movements in space but also their emotions.

At the same moment we should also not forget that it were in fact the visionary stage designers and theater theorists Adolphe Appia and Edward Gordon Craig that, already at the beginning of the 20th century, had laid the foundations for this sort of architectural scenography.

For his Film-Guild-Cinema Kiesler in fact adopted Appia’s concept of the ‘Espace rythmique’—spaces, defined in the most elementary and abstract form by the light and the shadows that become visible on the horizontal levels of the floors and ceilings, plus the vertical surfaces of the walls. For Kiesler the architecture of the Film-Guild-Cinema consisted of atmospheres and spaces that should freely flow-over into each other architecturally. They could guide, on a sort of subconscious level, the choreography of movements and the sequences of different atmospheres that visitors would go through while experiencing the mise on scène of space, light, shadow and movement. In other words, the ‘architecture of the cinema as such’, that they as visitors, in expectation of being ‘immersed’ in a particular film, were involved in with all their faculties of perception and imagination.

Barragán, so it seems, only gradually became aware of the potential that this architectural scenography discovered by Appia and Craig had, when applied to architecture itself. We could even say that it was Barragán who actually unwittingly re-discovered it by means of his work in the forties. But let’s not jump to conclusions.

During his stay in New York Barragán also had a meeting with Lawrence Cocker, the editor of ‘Architectural Record’, which resulted in a small publication of some of his works in September 1931, and with Richardson Wright, the editor of ‘House & Garden’, resulting in a publication in the October issue of 31. All this implies that another part of the reason for his trip was to see if he could get some publicity for his work. He must have shown photographs of his early works in Guadalajara to those editors, and also his ‘Escrito de New York: Ideas Sobre Jardines’ (an article mentioned by Riggen Martínez) which he apparently wrote in June 1931 while he was in New York, might have been part of this quest for publicity.

Barragán left New York in June, for his second trip to Europe where, among other places he visited the gardens of Les Colombières in Menton and had a

---

101 So both publications came out while he was in Europe between June and November 1931. In a letter from Paris on October 3, 1931, to Ferdinand Bac, he also mentions that he sent these two editors Bac’s book ‘Les Colombières’.


103 On June 2 or 18, Riggen Martínez refers to a letter of Barragán to Urzúa dated June 2, 1931, that indicated that he left for Europe on that day (footnote 73, pp. 53); in the biography on p. 250, he indicates June 18, 1931 as the day that Barragán went to Europe.
meeting in mid-August with its designer, Ferdinand Bac, whom he admired greatly. According to the later correspondence in which Bac complimented Barragán again on his architectural works, it becomes clear that during their conversation he showed Bac some photographs of his projects in Guadalajara. If in turn one looked at the sketches and specifically the notes that Barragán made of Bac’s work in Menton, it seems that he was in particular interested in the colors used by Bac.

Barragán’s European trip also took him to Germany, where he visited Munich, Berlin and Stuttgart. It is therefore likely that here Barragán among other things had a look at the exhibition estate of the Weissenhof Siedlung, which was built near Stuttgart in 1927 as a sort of manifesto of the ‘Modern Movement’ that soon after its completion achieved fame (some would say, notoriety). These crisp geometrical stuccoed volumes with their flat roofs were designed by those architects whom Barragán referred to (in the interview) as ‘that interesting group called Bauhaus’, namely, Behrens, Gropius, Mies van de Rohe, Oud, and Le Corbusier.

On his second trip to Europe Barragán also briefly met Le Corbusier, or as he said himself: ‘I went to Europe and on that occasion had only one conversation with Le Corbusier.’

According to Marco De Michelis ‘he probably visited several major works of Le Corbusier’, in and around Paris at the end of October 1931, such as: the Villas Savoye and Stein- de Monzie, the Cité de Refuge and the penthouse for Charles De Beistegui, at the Avenue des Champs-Élysées.

But if they left a lasting impression on him is difficult to determine. The Cité de Refuge at the end of October 1931 was (if anything) probably not much

---

104 According to Bac’s dedication in Barragán’s issue of ‘Les Colomières’ this was August 16, 1931.

105 There is a letter from Bac to Barragán, dated November 21, 1931, in which he says: ‘You gave me great pleasure with your beautiful photos...I am also moved by the sentiments that you expressed about my persona...I would like to come to Mexico to see your architecture.’ Document archive, Fundación de Arquitectura Tapatía AC. As quoted in Riggen Martínez pp.121, footnote 22.

106 It seems that in his sketches he copied some of the illustrations from Bac’s books and made notes about the colors of the different elements.


108 See Marco de Michinis in: ‘Luis Barragán, The Quiet Revolution’, pp. 45 + footnote 37, who refers to Louise Noelle, ‘Luis Barragán. Búsqueda y creatividad’, op. cit., p. 23, who in turn recalls that at the Tapatía Architecture Foundation of Guadalajara there are three autograph notes by Le Corbusier, dated 30 October 1931, requesting the owners to allow his Mexican guest to visit their homes and explaining how to find the Cité de Refuge.

109 Of 1929-31, in Poissy.

110 Of 1926-28, in Garches.

111 The Cité de Refuge was commissioned by the l’Armée du Salut and completed in December 1933, actually Le Corbusier himself dates it 1932-33, which indicates that if at all it can’t be more then a
more than just a building site. The Penthouse of Barragán’s fellow countryman ‘Charles’, or more properly Carlos De Beistegui on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées, had probably just reached its completion in October 1931 and it might be that its immensely rich cosmopolitan occupant had only barely moved in. If this was the case and Barragán visited the house, it might have been an interesting surprise for him to see how its eccentric owner used his ‘residence d’un soir’ designed by the famous Le Corbusier. Since it was not so much a ‘machine à habiter’, ‘a machine for living in’, but more of a ‘machine à amuser’, i.e., ‘a machine to entertain’.

Count Carlos De Beistegui, who received his noble title from the King of Spain, was actually the son of the former Mexican Ambassador in Spain and probably one of the wealthiest people to be found in Paris at that time. His father, before becoming ambassador, had gathered an enormous fortune through his silver mines, and his son later on inherited this fabulous wealth. As a member of the ‘cosmopolitan class’ and a real bonvivant he not only had to divide his time between Paris, Biarritz, Saint-Moritz, Contrexéville, Venice etc., but he also had to entertain, because ‘noblesse oblige’. A good part of this entertaining was his Penthouse overlooking the Champs-Élysées and the Arc de Triomphe, his ‘residence d’un soir’, for which he had at least six different designs made by Le Corbusier between June 1929 and February 1930 (not to mention the designs made for the penthouse by Andre Lurçat, Robert Mallet-Stevens, Gabriel Guévrékian and Jean-Charles Moreux). For De Beistegui, who liked the surreal, it had to be a real machine à amuser, equipped with gadgets like a camera obscura with a periscope to overlook Paris (hence the pun, ‘Paris Scope’), electrically operated hedges that would slide away to reveal the Tour Eiffel on the touch of a button, electrically driven partition walls, or a metal projection screen that enfolded automatically while a crystal chandelier moved out of the way and a film-projector came out of the wall, thus to entertain his guests.

The whole thing becomes even more surreal if we read that Le Corbusier in his œuvre complète boasted about the 4000 meters of electric wiring that went into the house and we also know that there was no electric lighting, since De

---

112 The penthouse, actually a remodeling of the two top floors of an existing structure into a ‘residence d’un soir’ for De Beistegui, was (it doesn’t exist anymore) located at the Avenue des Champs-Élysées 136, on the corner with the Rue Balzac and it occupied the floors 6 and 7. In 1929 De Beistegui, also an amateur interior designer, wanted to have a ‘residence d’un soir’ in Paris to give parties, and at the same moment he wanted to try-out the ‘Modern’ style, so he commissioned several well known architects to make a design for his penthouse (initially they didn’t know that they were in competition with each other), among them: next to Le Corbusier, Andre Lurçat, Robert Mallet-Stevens, Gabriel Guévrékian and Jean-Charles Moreux.

113 Its periscope was installed between April and July 1931 and during the summer the staircase had to be rebuilt. See Timothy J. Benton, ‘Le Corbusiers Pariser Villen’, Deutsche Verlags-Anstalt, Stuttgart, 1984, pp. 220.
Beistegui wanted his residence d’un soir to be lit only with real candles in candelabras mounted in front of mirrors which in turn were placed in elaborate picture frames hanging on the walls. All of this should give one a hint of what De Beistegui (seeing himself as an interior decorator) did with the interior in terms of furniture and decoration after he moved into the penthouse. The penthouse had several roof-terraces on different levels, with hedges running around that functioned as parapets.

Most intriguing of all (also in relation to the roof terrace in Barragán’s own house built later on) was the chambre à ciel ouvert, actually the upper most roof-terrace of the house hidden in a cube like volume clad with stone, that one could only reach via a flight of cantilevering steps next to the rounded volume of the camera obscura. Standing at the top of these stairs one had the possibility to open a stone door, thus entering a room completely enclosed by man-high walls but open to the sky. The floor of this surreal room was covered with a carpet of grass, opposite from the entry one would see a fireplace with an ornate mantelpiece, and above the enclosing walls one would only see a fine selection of Paris’ monuments, such as the Arc de Triomphe, the Sacré Cœur and the Tour Eiffel.

To make it even more surreal for his guests De Beistegui used to ‘decorate’ the room, by putting an elaborate clock and candelabra on top of the mantelpiece and putting a framed mirror above it, reflecting the horizon of the room on the other side; next to the fireplace you might also find a life parrot on a stand, in front of it the metal furniture specially designed for the house by Emilio Terry, and against the wall to the right of the room a sumptuous stone dressoir, and sometimes one might even find valuable old paintings hanging on its outside walls.

So if it is true that Barragán visited the penthouse of Carlos De Beistegui (Charlie for his friends), it will be clear that he didn’t see the kind of Le Corbusier he would have expected to see beforehand.

Barragán, presumably with his mind full of new impressions, returned to Mexico, more specifically to Guadalajara, in November 1931. After eight months of being away from all family business, Barragán found himself back with the aftermath of the ‘Great Depression’ (that also hit Guadalajara hard), back to the ever-growing threat of the Agrarismo and back into the still smoldering Cristiada that in 1932 expressed itself more specifically in the form of an educational crisis. In other words Barragán mainly got back again, into the business of liquidating his family’s properties in terms of the land and the buildings of ‘Los Corrales’. The available documentation shows that in the two years following his first encounters with ‘modernistic architecture’ during his trip to New York and Europe, there was almost no work...
in Guadalajara\textsuperscript{114}, not even for an architect with two international publications to his name now.

Even if Barragán had received some design work in that period, it might have been quite difficult to apply the new ‘modernist’ vocabulary that he became acquainted with during his trip. The reason for this might be found in the fact that in Guadalajara ‘modernism’ as a new architectural style was very likely to be associated with the architecture of the central government and in particular with the architecture of schools.

In October 1931, Lic. Narciso Bassols had been appointed the Secretario de Educación Pública (Secretary of Public Education, SEP), so the one who had the task of speeding up the process of public education, meaning speeding up the building of ‘new’ schools, not only in terms of numbers, but in concert with that also speeding-up the secularization of the traditional educational system and its infusion with socialist ideals.

Of course in the aftermath of the Cristiada, in 1932, this led to a political crisis in Jalisco concerning the issue of education, which was still mainly in the hands of the religious Orders. As a consequence, between 1932 and 1935 the Governor of Jalisco, Sebastián Allende, had to face a crisis in every aspect of education, which lead to the closing of the University in 1933, and of 51 out of 86 schools in 1934. The new Secretary of Public Education, Bassols, also faced the task of speeding up the process of building ‘new’ schools in terms of buildings, and was (so it seems)\textsuperscript{115} strongly advised by Diego Rivera to adopt the functionalist techniques, used by (among others) the architect of Rivera’s own house and studio, Juan O’Gorman, to construct more and much cheaper schools within the same period of time.

As a result, Bassols adopted the idea of a ‘socialistic functionalism’ in terms of architecture (propagated by a.o. O’Gorman, Alvaro Aburto, Juan Legarreta, José Villagrán García) and in 1932 appointed Juan O’Gorman as the head of the Oficina de Arquitectura de la Secretaría de Educación Pública, and as director of the Departamento de Construcción de la SEP. The upshot was that in a period of less then two years Juan O’Gorman, besides being in charge of restoring 29 schools, also had to design and build 24 primary schools in the Distrito Federal and one in Tampico, Tamaulipas, and an Escuela Técnica, or polytechnic (for whose Department of Building engineering O’Gorman and José Antonio Cuevas also wrote the educational program, its curriculum and its organization).

\textsuperscript{114} Around 1933 it seems that he restructured the (now demolished) house of Carmen Orozco, in collaboration with Juan Palomar y Arias, on Calle Manuel López Cotilla 1034, Sector Juárez, and made a design for a wooden music Pavilion on the Plaza at Chapala.

All of those ‘new’ schools (meaning those opposed to the ideas about education nurtured in Jalisco and Guadalajara at the time of the crisis) had ‘modernistic’ buildings in architectural style, which probably also was seen as opposition to certain ideas about architecture that in terms of ‘style’ had to express Jalisco’s own independent cultural identity.

According to his friend Díaz Morales, Barragán was in the process of ‘getting out’ to Mexico City when at the end of 1933, an architectural competition for the site of the Escobedo prison was announced. From around 1845 the enormous building of the Penitenciaria de Escobedo, had occupied the former vegetable gardens of the Convento del Carmen at the western edge of the city and had separated the historic center of Guadalajara from the new areas of the city’s expansion towards the west by obstructing the principal east-west thoroughfare, Avenida Juárez. It was decided that the building, which hadn’t been in use since 1930, would be demolished and that the area bordering the prison known as the Parque de Escobedo would be converted into a park commemorating the revolution and furthermore that the rest of the land, along Calle Rayón, Calle de Jesús (now Calle Marcos Castellanos) etc., would be subdivided into residential lots.

This new Parque de la Revolución was to be a new spacious urban park west of the important intersection of Calle Escobedo (now Avenida Federalismo, running north-south) and Avenida Juárez, thus becoming the principal entryway to the new residential developments in the west. The prospect of this Parque de la Revolución becoming a new and crucial public space within the fabric of the city situated next to the historical center naturally turned those new residential lots of the subdivision along Calle Marcos Castellanos and Calle Rayón into a potentially safe area for speculative investment. We should not forget that in that period the money that the landowners, among others, generated via the liquidation of their large agrarian estates, needed to be reinvested.

Investing it in well-situated real estate was a secure business, because ever since the revolution the rental market of Guadalajara was firmly in the hands of the families that controlled the local economy. It was therefore only logical that in the first half of 1934 clients like Emiliano Robles León and Efrain González Luna, who had already commissioned Barragán before to design rental houses for them, or Mrs. Harper de Garibi, commissioned him to design rental houses for those new residential lots situated at Calle Marcos Castellanos and Calle Rayón. In other words, in 1934, besides entering the


117 The Escobedo prison was the result of the idea of the young lawyer Mariano Otero presented to the Governor of the State, José Antonio Escobedo, to construct a modern penitentiary in Guadalajara. The Initial planning was done by the architect Carlos Nebel and modified by the architect Juan Ramón Cuevas.

118 1934 Rental house for Mrs. Harper de Garibi at Calle Rayón 121, Sector Juárez. 1934 House for Mrs. Harper de Garibi, Calle Rayón 129, Sector Juárez. 1934 Rental house for Lic. Efrain González Luna,
Parque de la Revolución competition (together with his brother Juan José) Barragán also suddenly had enough work to stay in Guadalajara for another year.

What is especially interesting in all this is the way in which Barragán dealt with the ‘Choice of Style’ for these rental houses and the design of the park, in other words how he dealt with the smoldering conflict between the ‘Local’ and the ‘International’ Style. Significantly, ‘Elección de estilo’, ‘choice of style’ was the title he used for the brief explanatory essay (dated 3 July 1934) that accompanied his and his brother’s competition entry for the Parque de la Revolución, which was themed ‘Evolución’ (Evolution). In it Barragán tried to explain how the ‘modern’ style was a logical outcome of the ‘evolution’ of Mexico’s architecture in the ‘modern’ era after the revolution. It seems that Barragán faced a conflict in which, on the one hand, he wanted to stay in synch with the developments of architecture in terms of (‘international’) style, yet on the other he also had to deal with the opinion of the cultural elite of his hometown.

As I described it earlier, Guadalajara’s conservative cultural elite was still very hesitant in adopting the ‘Modern style’ because this ‘style’ was easily associated with the central government and its (official) architectural expression of those problematic ideas it had concerning the secularization of Mexico’s education and health care system, both of which had traditionally been in the hands of the more conservative religious orders. So what Barragán did in the design of this set of five rental houses was actually illustrative of his argument on the evolution of style. By making variations on the same theme he showed how the same type of house could evolve from a house in a more ‘local’ style, to being a house in the vocabulary of the ‘International’ style.

This becomes clear if one looks at the initial design drawings of the rental house for Lic. Emiliano Robles León, on Calle Marcos Castellanos (dated April 1934). The design still showed several traditional features like an arched window, a metal clad front door with a pattern of nails and a decorative balustrade of turned wood, for the French balcony window of the studio above the garage, all of them features still referring to the more ‘Mediterranean’ style of Ferdinand Bac. The old photographs of the design as built, however, show that the built version didn’t get the initially planned door, didn’t employ the turned wooden balustrade and also received a type of bathroom window different from the one initially planned. The door became a kind of square grid

---


120 The same as the one he used before in the French balcony window of the restructured summerhouse of his family in Chapala.
of wood and glass, the French balcony with its balustrade became a simple window cut out from the plain front façade above the garage, and the bathroom window was converted into a set of four cubic holes arranged in a square.

Thus, from the initial design to the actual execution he stylistically developed the formal vocabulary of the Robles León house from the sort of ‘Mediterranean’ style à la Bac, towards a stylistic vocabulary that referred much more to the kind of ‘pre-modern’ style of Irving Gill in California. This was a stylistic vocabulary that had attracted the interest of Richard Neutra in such a way that he showed the work of Gill in his books and lectures every time he talked about the development of modern architecture within the United States. A ‘pre-modern’ vocabulary that would also have interested Barragán, because for him it might have been like finding a missing link between the ‘local’ colonial style and the more ‘international’, ‘modern’ style. Since Irving Gill had developed this ‘pre-modern’ vocabulary at the beginning of the century in California by means of the abstraction of the (‘local’) colonial vernacular to its bare volumetric essentials and by stripping it from its ornamentation, or rather by abstracting and transforming its ornamentation into pure geometrical forms, thus achieving a stylistic vocabulary not unlike the one that Barragán and his friends Urzua and Díaz Morales had developed until the thirties. The houses on Calle Rayón also showed this tendency.

That which is more interesting in all this, however, is the initial design for the Rental house for Lic. Efraín González Luna (dated June 1934) that is just 10 meters away from the Robles León house on Calle Marcos Castellanos. The initial design drawings of this house featured a typical ‘modernistic’ style, as can be seen from the shifted window of the studio running around the corner of the volume, or the typical fine mullions referring to ‘modern’ metal windows that would make the interlocking volumes of the house look much lighter and crisper, as also its open metal railings did. By showing the same type of house, next to a (more heavy) ‘local’ and ‘pre-modern’ style, he could even adopt the (light) Neutra-like look of the ‘International’ style.

Actually, all five houses were basically the same in terms of typology. All sites had a front towards the street of about 10 meters wide and all were 16 to 17 meters deep. Between a small 3 to 4 meter deep front yard (fenced off from the street by a low wall and a little gate) and a small 3 to 4 meters deep patio in the back (surrounded by high walls), one found the two-story, 10 by 10 meters, block of the actual house that was raised from the level of the street for about 70 centimeters and mostly having a roof terrace on top. Protruding from it in the front there normally was a slightly lower block (around 4 meters wide and 6 meters deep), containing a relatively low garage on street level, with over it a studio space and on top of that a roof terrace. The whole

---

121 Only the rental house for Mrs. Harper de Garibi on Calle Rayón, 121, misses the protruding block containing the garage and studio, which probably deals with the finances, since the house is designed in such a way that these extra spaces could still be added in a later stage.
arrangement actually was a clever split-level system of two blocks linked to a central stairwell at the intersection of the two blocks and the entry axis.

The way in which Barragán did build up the ‘scenographic’ sequence of spaces and atmospheres is also interesting. Although the layout of the houses in terms of plan was basically the same, the spatio-visual scenography that one would experience by going towards and through the houses, constantly differed. Approaching the Robles León house, one would first notice the two interlocking volumes of the house, and then a balcony with a closed parapet running the full width of the entry façade and below it the large semicircular window of the living room and a low wall fencing off the front yard. Looking at the protruding block the eye would be attracted to the garage doors, made up of boards joined together in a geometric pattern V shapes, and would then wander up towards the square studio window and the roof-terrace. In approaching to enter one would notice the wall fencing off the front yard and then a low wooden gate with an open star in its center, situated next to the block of the garage. Behind it one would then be confronted with a small flight of steps leading up to the front door under the overhang of the balcony, which would present itself as a geometric grid of closed wooden bars with open glass squares in between.

Entering the house via a small corridor-like vestibule one would be confronted with the first two steps of a staircase protruding sideways from behind the wall that divides the garage from the hall. In the direction opposite the implied staircase one would see a large arch that opened the hall towards the living room. Being lead further into the spacious hall one would notice the light falling into it from above. Then, as a guest, one would be invited to enter the space of the living room via the arched passageway to the right, and as a visiting client one would be led up the first flight of steps to the left towards the studio (going straight one would find the ante-chamber and next to it the kitchen). Entering the living room one would notice a second arched passageway dividing the space of the living room from the dining room, thus echoing the semicircular window in the front façade. Entering the studio, via the landing on top of the first flight of steps to the left, one would be able to look straight out the square window onto the street and the park in front of the house.

Overall, in terms of plan and section the spacious hall, situated in the center of the house, connected all the major spaces horizontally and vertically. Actually it was a kind of atrium-like stairwell with closed railings, located in the center of the house and bringing light into the otherwise dark heart of the house via a window placed above the roof terrace of the studio.

In contrast, approaching the Gonzales Luna house (which in terms of plan was basically the same) one would be confronted with a simple open metal gate, a square living room window, no closed balcony running all the width, but a balcony with an open railing of vertical bars. This type of balcony, by not running the full width, added a certain dynamic to the façade, as did the corner window of the studio and the outside staircase leading diagonally from
the lower to the higher roof terrace in the front. In the interior one would notice that there was no arched passageway dividing living and dining room (although there was a curtain), open rather than closed railings on the stairs and a studio that actually looked out onto street and square diagonally via the corner window.

What we will see later on is that Barragán often used ‘morphed’ variations of this typology, thus every time learning and improving the ‘kine-aesthetic’ qualities of its spatio-visual sequence. Just to give you an example, studying the stairwell of Barragán’s own house (dated 1947-48) and the way in which he gets the light to penetrate the central hall from above will show you that its roots are to be found in the split-level shift of the garage and the studio, a method earlier employed in these simple houses of 1934.

It seems, therefore, that Barragán’s initial wavering in ‘Choice of style’\(^\text{122}\) between the ‘local’ or the ‘international’ found an anchor point in July 1934, the moment that his and his brother’s ‘modernistic’ design won the competition for the Parque de la Revolución. This also meant that at this point, probably during the process of its construction, he dared to change the stylistic ‘look’ of the initial design (approved that April) for the Robles León house. Later, he also dared to present a ‘modernistic’ design for the González Luna house (approved on July 10, 1934).

The winning design for the Parque de la Revolución by Barragán and his brother Juan José consisted of an open public space (of about 180 by 155 meters) enclosed by Calle Manuel López Cotilla to the south, Calle Pedro Moreno to the north, Calle de Jesús - now Calle Marcos Castellanos - to the west and Calle Escobedo - now Avenida Federalismo - to the east. The Avenida Juárez, the east-west thoroughfare, bisected this space and the continuous traffic flow going through was slowed down by a spacious traffic circle in its center. The proposed park (many trees still had to be planted, there were only at that time a few trees towards Calle Escobedo) was further divided up in four quadrants, each with its own programmatic theme that was placed in the center of the quadrant and reached by a system of diagonal walkways crossing the green within the quadrant.

The center of the northwest quadrant would have a circular bandstand consisting of a simple round platform (about 9 meters in diameter) with two opposite flights of steps leading up. The edge of the platform would be secured by a tubular steel railing similar to the once used on ocean liners. In the evening the platform would be lit by four lampposts placed on top of the platform.

The center of the northeast quadrant was marked by a large circular parasol, a mushroom-like concrete structure (about 5 meters in diameter), with an integrated circular bench at its base.

\(^{122}\) The title of his text for the design of the Parque de la Revolución, dated July 3.
The center of the southwest quadrant would be occupied by a circular fountain (about 8.4 meters in diameter) stepping up in two levels and culminating in six jets of water shooting up around the concrete globe that defined its middle. The water coming down from the jets would be collected in a first circular pool and then cascade over its edge into a second larger pool.

The center of the southeast quadrant was defined by another round parasol-like structure with a metal railing on top and a round concrete bench at its base. Actually, this was the slide for the children’s playground, a round platform raised (about 4 meters) from the ground by four round columns grouped in the center. A long narrow staircase showed the children the way up to the platform from where they could then choose one of the three slides to go down again.

Next to the slides this playground was equipped with seesaws, swings, teeters and sandboxes. One could also rent toys from the supervisor’s office, which was located in a booth beneath the semicircular pergola of a ‘modernistic’ looking building occupying the southeast corner of the playground. A small, curved building that also contained a comfort station and a stand for the sale of refreshments.

A two-meter high wall with triangular recesses and holes, looking more Art-deco then ‘Modern’, enclosed the whole playground itself while the main entrance towards the west was defined by a kind of zigzag wall painted aluminum silver. This zigzag wall contained the entry gates, set in the middle of a vermilion red zigzag grille. In front of the entrance to the playground there was a large circular pool embraced by two large L-shaped benches. The counterpart to this circular pool, on the other side of Avenida Juárez and in-between the two southern quadrants, was a cross-shaped fountain that connected the two northern quadrants.

Barragán used red- and ochre-pigmented concrete for the pavement the benches and all the other fore mentioned furnishings of the park. Thus, even though the use of concrete as material was ‘modern’ and the service building had a ‘Modernistic’ look, it seems that Barragán did not opt for the color palette usually associated with the ‘international style’ but instead remained faithful to a more traditional and local palette. A look at the colored drawings that he and his brother submitted for the competition entry will bear that out as well. In ‘Elección de estilo’, the text appended to the entry for the competition of the Parque de la Revolución, he wrote:

‘Every architect should interpret and develop the architecture that goes with the time he lives in. Moreover, in the study presented here the modern style is indispensable, since the park should not only be a frame, but a part of a monument to the ‘revolution’, and if for that purpose styles of other periods were used, either colonial or some other romantic style, the result would be absurd and mean decadence from the architectural point of view.’

—

In other words, he was trying to influence the opinion of the intellectual and cultural elite of his hometown concerning the ‘evolution’ of a style as something that is alive within a culture, while on the other hand, by means of the design, showing them that a harmonious ‘marriage’ between the ‘local’ and the ‘international’ style might be possible.

The Governor of the State, Sebastián Allende, finally inaugurated the Parque de la Revolución on February 28, 1935.

THE MEXICO CITY YEARS

In March 1935, at the age of 33, Barragán finally moved to Mexico City where he would reside for a few months at Calle Madero 34, then later in October 1935 at Calle Florencia 70. In December 1939 he takes up residence in one of his own apartment buildings at Calle Elba 56. The reason for his move to the Capital was, as we have already seen, to improve his prospects of finding commissions and probably also to place himself in a better real estate market in which to invest some of his own liquid assets.

In that period Mexico City (in contrast to Guadalajara) was growing ever faster. Starting with the increased inward flow of people from the other states during the years after the revolution, the federal Capital had grown from about 800,000 inhabitants in the year 1900, to 1,200,000 by 1935. From 1935 to 1940 its population would grow to about 1,500,000. By 1935 its industries had increased tenfold in size and importance compared to 1920, which also created a large demand for new residential districts for the ever expanding urban middle-class. This led to the establishment of the subdivisions of Juárez, Cuauhtémoc, Roma and Condesa, followed by San Angel, San Rafael, Tacubaya, Hipódromo and Chapultepec.

At the same time it became clear to the government of Lázaro Cárdenas that the rapidly expanding Capital of Mexico lacked a long-term strategic urban


125 The election for the 1934-40 presidential sexenio was won by Lázaro Cárdenas, the popular state governor of Michoacán. A former brigadier general of the constitutionalist army, who proved to be politically strong and popular enough to gain independence from Plutarco Elías Calles, who had been president from 1924-28, but after had exercised control over Mexican politics from behind-the-scenes till 1934. Once in office Cárdenas ordered the resumption of the land reform that through the orders of Calles had come to a near halt in the early thirties. It was of an unprecedented scale, which means that in the course of six years, he distributed almost 18 million hectares (more than twice as much land as all his predecessors combined) to two-thirds of the Mexican peasantry through the system of communal farms or ejidos. During Cárdenas’s presidency also the relations with the church started to improve, since Luis María Martinez, the archbishop of Mexico encouraged Roman Catholics to be more sensitive to the social and economic welfare of society, even though national education continued to be secular and had become socialist in its emphasis. Cárdenas’s boldest act however was the expropriation of all foreign oil operations on Mexican territory in March 1938, which he legally based on the constitutional claim to national ownership of all subsoil resources. This expropriation, although a significant political victory for Cárdenas, in the coming years would cost Mexico dearly in terms of capital flight and foreign investment.
plan to manage this growth as well as proper zoning regulations for dealing with the details of development such as usage, location, open and built-up space, height, volume etc. All this resulted in a lot of speculative development, meaning that most of the plots in the subdivisions were bought by people who wanted to invest in speculative housing, whether for rent or for sale.

The Swiss architect and town planner Hannes Meyer\textsuperscript{126} described the situation as follows:

‘…here in terms of building construction we have a boom. Everywhere there is building activity going on, old structures are demolished, money is invested in plots of land, and new streets are created. The standard for housing in particular for the middle-class is high, and I think that here you find more good ground-plan solutions then in the USA. On the other hand mostly everything is executed in a much cheaper way, without heating and without modern kitchen equipment. For that reason a house is relatively cheap. Most of the buildings are created by speculating engineers. In total there are around 150 architects in this town, so about one per 10,000 inhabitants. But they have difficulties to maintain an office, as far as I can see from my friends. None of them has employees. Everything they have to do by them selves. I don’t know the circumstances of the contractors. Some of my students live from designs, which for minimal money, they make for entrepreneurs and small speculators.’\textsuperscript{127}

In 1937 Ester Born’s article in the Architectural Review entitled ‘The New Architecture in Mexico’ described the way of working of these architects as follows:

‘In Mexico there is no such restriction as applies in the United States against the architect undertaking contracting work. Special conditions in Mexico, moreover, almost compel him to do it. There are no responsible firms that make contracting their business, and the architect who wants his building properly put together must either build himself or actively superintend subcontractors who work for him. Engineering firms, which do a large part of the building in Mexico, habitually do their own contracting, and competition requires the same of the architect. The procedure is most favorable in the field of small structures. By doing their own building young architects rapidly learn better methods. A number of young architects work year-in year-out in the speculative field, usually with their own capital or as partners in small concerns. In almost every case the houses built by these architects are better designed and better constructed than the straight ‘builder’ product, and would contrast most favorably with our speculative developments in the United States. The young architect thus finds an opening through a business depending not on the

\textsuperscript{126} In August 1938 Hannes Meyer had been the delegate for Switzerland at ‘XVI International Housing and Town Planning Congress’ in Mexico City, which was organized by a committee with Carlos Contreras, José A. Cuevas and Carlos Tarditi. After which he is asked by the government of Lázaro Cárdenas to become the director of the newly found Instituto de Urbanismo y Planificación at the National Polytechnic Institute.

whims of particular clients but on the housing market in general. Success comes from knowing houses rather than ‘knowing people’. Moreover, most of his transactions yield him a profit to be plowed back into an expanding business. Larger structures, on the other hand, require a more specialized organization. The architect who attempts his own contracting there ‘has to spend too much time counting bricks’, as one of them put it, not to mention time spent on legalistic disputes. For this reason even in Mexico many architects prefer to put the building of their larger jobs in the hands of others (sometimes other architects with larger organizations).

Obviously, the circumstances under which Barragán had to work from 1935 onward were not only more competitive, but he also had to do more things by himself, and in many instances even for himself, if his work was to represent a certain quality in terms of ‘Modern’ architecture and be recognized by the Architectural Record in the person of Esther Born.

The structures he would build in the coming five years can roughly be divided in two categories: houses and apartment buildings.

Most of the houses that he would build in the different new subdivisions of Mexico City between 1936 and 1940 were speculation houses based on the type that he had already built in the blocks next to the Parque de la Revolución in Guadalajara in 1934. For example, the Speculation House on Avenida Tamaulipas 51, in Colonia Hipódromo and the Rental House on Calle Río Guadiana 3, in Colonia Cuauhtémoc built in 1936, and one of the Houses that he built in 1936-37 for Dr. Arturo and Esther Figueroa Uriza, use the same typology. Another example is the Rental House on Calle Sullivan 57, in Colonia San Rafael.

The houses Barragán built in Mexico City differed from those in Guadalajara mainly in terms of the stylistic vocabulary, which now, through the use of fine metal window frames, became more ‘Modernistic’. In addition, the volumetric play of the different blocks in the Mexico City houses was not so pronounced since the deep front patio that characterized the Guadalajara houses was reduced to a kind of recessed portico only as deep as the balcony.

As for the scenographic sequence of spaces that characterized the houses in Guadalajara, the main difference in the Mexico City houses was the space containing the stairs. In the Guadalajara houses the stairs were located in a kind of vertical atrium-like space that defined the centre of the house in terms of space, light and the direction of movements. In contrast, the same space in the houses in Mexico City was reduced to a mere functional stairwell, or better said to a staircase (partly screened off by a wall) that, like the wardrobe,


129 Let not forget that among his colleagues in Guadalajara he had a certain status, while in Mexico City he was one among many others.
defined a corner of the living room. This was the result of pushing back the block of the garage and studio into the main block. By so doing Barragán gained more space for the depth of the back patio garden and it became possible to directly reach the kitchen in the back via the garage in the front.

However looking at the four small one-family houses next to each other, in the Colonia Condesa, from 1936130, the Rental House for Mrs. Corcuera, widow of Alcázar, on Avenida Mazatlán 130 (dated 1936-37), the House for Josefina Chávez Peón de Ochoa, on Avenida Río Mississippi 61, in Colonia Cuauhtémoc (dated 1937), or the House for Dr. David Kostovetsky, on Avenida Nuevo León 103, in Colonia Hipódromo (dated 1938-39) it seems that he was not really happy with a mere staircase. In these houses, that in terms of typology are a second variation on the Guadalajara theme, he situated another atrium-like space with light coming from above via a skylight and containing the staircase on the other side of the house, in effect, between the living and the dining room and not between the garage and the kitchen.

It is very likely that Barragán in the case of some of these relatively small houses was himself acting as a speculating engineer/architect. According to Ester Born in 1937, the Speculation House in Colonia Hipódromo could be described as follows:

‘This is a house typical of the activity of many architects in Mexico, where there are no legal or professional restrictions to prevent an architect from being his own contractor or engaging in speculative building. The house represents, moreover, the better class of speculative dwellings built in Mexico. Construction is commonly reinforced concrete frame, brick walls, and stucco exterior walls. No method of heating is provided except a fireplace. The kitchens always have a simple built-in charcoal stove, and usually in addition an electric stove (there being no gas in Mexico City). An electric refrigerator is standard equipment in all new houses. A maid’s room or possibly two are always provided, and a laundry, usually on the roof, where the clothes are dried in the sun. A small garden and a garage are thought to be essential in this type of house.’131

In terms of layout the Rental House on Calle Río Guadiana 3 in the Colonia Cuauhtémoc is the same as the Speculation House, with the exception that this one has an extra room on top of the studio over the garage. Barragán built this particular house on a plot of land nine meters wide and 20 meters deep, facing east towards Calle Río Guadiana, and costing 6,300 pesos. According to its publication in 1937 construction costs were 18,700 pesos, so the total outlay was 25,000 pesos. In that times on the rental market this middle--class residence would bring the owner about 300 pesos per month.132 (Clearly,

---

130 Consisting of a Rental House for Abraham Goldefer, on Avenida Mazatlán 114, a Rental House for M. Pilar Uribe, at Avenida Mazatlán 116, and Two Rental Houses for Raul Ortega Amezcu, at Avenida Mazatlán 118.


speculating with real estate was quite a safe way of investing money for people who had to somehow protect their assets against an unpredictable inflation, which was all too common in the unstable political and economical climate at the time, and not only in Mexico.)

In terms of color (according to its publication in 1937) the exterior and interior of this Rental House was mainly crème, with vermilion-red window frames and railings on the upper floors, while the doors and windows on the ground floor where painted beige. The result of this and other ‘Modernistic’ houses gives one’s impression a slightly different perspective than that which one usually has from looking at the old black and white photographs.

Taking into consideration all the single-family houses that Barragán designed and built in the period between 1935 and 1940, there are two that stand out. The first one is the House for I. Pizzaro Suárez, on the Paseo de la Reforma 1630, in Colonia Las Lomas de Chapultepec. This large single-family villa, which Barragán built in 1937 in collaboration with his brother Juan José Barragán, represented his first ‘Modernistic’ version of the large houses he had built before in Guadalajara. And it would also be his last since the second large single-family house, the House for Eduardo Villaseñor, on Calle Reina 139, in Colonia San Ángel, designed and built in 1939-40, seems to mark the end of his interest in the ‘Modernistic’ or ‘International’ style. In this house he started to return to the kind of abstracted ‘vernacular’ style that he had used in the early thirties in Guadalajara.

Referring again to the ‘Modernistic’ Pizzaro Suárez Villa of 1937, it is interesting to note the fact that there are photographs of it from December 1937 (just before the house was be occupied by the owner) showing Barragán and Richard Neutra standing in front of the house. This not only documents Barragán’s first meeting with Richard Neutra, but also suggests that Barragán was somehow convinced that Neutra might like the house. That would not have been surprising since many of its stylistic features seemed to refer to Neutra’s own work, for example, the widely published Lovell House in Los Angeles, of 1927-29, or the (House Beautiful prize winning) Sten House in Santa Monica of 1934. Neutra was actually invited to come to Mexico City by Carlos Contreras to give a lecture on December 21, but he used the opportunity to see something of Mexico and to meet people. Among those he met were also Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo and Juan O’Gorman, as we can read from his impressions in a letter to his wife Dion:
‘… on the sunny street, I meet the immense, the colossus Rivera and soon afterwards his diminutive, black haired doll, his wife. Later I meet O’Gorman.’ The Riveras ‘drive me in their car through the endless metropolitan region...’

133 Both houses are demolished and up to now the only material I know of are a few photographs, which don’t give me enough information to be able to reconstruct them in terms of plans, sections and elevations.

Barragán, impressed by Neutra’s lecture, sent a transcription of it to his friend Díaz Morales and arranged for Neutra to go to Guadalajara and participate in an architecture convention in Chapala, organized by Díaz Morales.\textsuperscript{135}

We can also recognize the interest that Barragán had in Neutra’s work (in terms of ‘style’) in the \textbf{Two-family house} he realized in 1936 on Avenida Parque México 141-143, overlooking the Parque Hippódromo and located in the Colonia Hipódromo de la Condesa. On a very restricted plot with a frontage of only about 8.3 meters (facing west) and a depth of 14.75 meters (much smaller than the dimensions of the aforementioned one-family houses) he had to design and build two speculative houses. This means that he had to come up with a typology for a middle-class house, with all its necessary spaces, that was only 4.15 meters wide and about 12.7 meters deep and that would distribute all these spaces over four levels. The result was a division into three zones with all the rooms that needed direct light (or access) situated at the front and the back façade and all the spaces that didn’t need direct light in the middle zone.

On Approaching these two houses one hadn’t the impression that they were basically the same because Barragán gave the architectural composition (that worked as a unit) an asymmetrical appearance by means of his treatment of the corner. He generated this corner by shifting the upper part of the façade out of the actual borderline of the plot and putting it perpendicular to the lines that define the width of the plot. The slight asymmetry created by his treatment of the left corner was then counterbalanced and amplified by vertically extending the façade of the right house. The doors of the very narrow garages and the two entrance doors where slightly recessed from the projecting overhang of the upper façade.

The ground floor of each house contained an entrance ‘corridor’ (open to the garage) leading to the staircase in the center, a rather narrow garage with a workspace behind it for the maid and then the maid’s room. The maid’s room overlooked a small patio in the back and she could reach a roof terrace (situated on the third floor) via a spiral staircase to do the laundry.

Going up the main staircase to the first floor one turned into a corridor that connected the living-room, overlooking the park in the front, with the dining-room that faced the patio in the back. This corridor also gave access to a small walled-in kitchen in the central zone of the house that was ventilated and received a little light via a lightwell above it.

On the next floor the corridor cum landing of the staircase received some daylight from the small light well situated in the central zone of the house next to the bathroom, which in turn was also connected to it to receive air and light.

\textsuperscript{135} Correspondence between Barragán and Díaz Morales from December 12, 1937 to January 3, 1938.
The front and back zones respectively contained the master bedroom and a children’s bedroom. On the floor above one would find the central zone occupied by a studio that received light from the light well and the open terrace cum solarium situated towards the front. To the back one found the partly covered roof-terrace for washing and drying clothes. The maid could reach it from the patio via the spiral staircase, as I mentioned before.

This crisp and light-looking reinforced concrete structure with its stucco façade was painted white, featuring thin crème colored window frames and metal work, with here and there some contrasts painted in blue. As such it not only represented Barragán’s predilection for in this case a Neutra-like (Californian) ‘International’ style, but it also hinted at the types of design problems he would have to resolve in his projects for apartment buildings. These problems—or ‘challenges’—stemmed from the fact that his clients, who had generally commissioned these buildings for speculative reasons, demanded optimal use of the available space on the plot that they had invested in. For Barragán, this meant that he had to deal with a high density of relatively small rooms and spaces that all needed access, light and air. The solution of which was normally found in the clever placement and use of patios and light wells.

In its most basic form, having to deal with a relatively narrow and deep plot between other buildings, he would put a patio in the back and have the centre of the apartments ventilated and lit by a light well servicing all the floors. A good example of this principle can be found in the Apartment Building of Mrs. De la Parra, widow of Verduzco, on Calle Río Elba 38 (formerly 70), in Colonia Cuauhtémoc. Here Barragán had to deal with a plot 8 meters wide (facing west-southwest) and 23 meters deep (so in comparison with the Two-family House this plot is just only a few meters deeper. Optimizing the use of space here meant putting four apartments on top of each other with the servant’s quarters located above that.

As in the Two-family house Barragán used a typology of three zones, in this case situating the bedrooms towards the front (overlooking Calle Río Elba), and the living and dining room towards the back façade (overlooking a 7.2 meter deep patio). The middle zone would be reserved for the communal stairwell, the light well, and around them the main kitchen, the service kitchen (cum breakfast room) and the bathroom.

On the ground floor towards the street one would find (from left to right) the communal entrance leading to the communal stairwell, then the professional studio that was connected to the ground floor apartment and next to that its garage. This ground floor apartment also extended deeper into the patio, thus

---

136 Other projects featuring certain stylistic resemblances with Barragán’s Two-family House where the Apartment Building, at Calle Estocolmo 14, in Colonia Juárez, from 1937, and the project for an Apartment Building and two Houses for Dr. Arturo and Esther Figueroa Uriza, on Calle Sullivan 61, 57, 55, in Colonia San Rafael, that dates from 1939.
enfolding a small patio garden by means of its library, living room wing and a bedroom.

On top of that one storey extension Barragán planned a terrace for the first floor apartment. The top floor, given that most of the apartment buildings didn’t have an elevator, would house the rooms for the maids and other servants, plus the spaces and roof-terrace for washing, drying and ironing laundry.

In 1939 immediately next to this apartment building (on the right), at the corner of Calle Río Elba 50 with Calle Río Atoyac, Barragán had to build an Apartment Building for Margarita J. de Sánchez. This corner plot had a front of 16 meters towards Calle Río Elba and a front of 23 meters towards Calle Río Atoyac. On the ground floor the front at Calle Río Elba, running part way around the corner into Calle Río Atoyac, was used for two commercial spaces, with the communal entrance in-between. Further into Calle Río Atoyac Barragán situated three garages. The last part of that front houses the bedroom of a small apartment whose living room overlooks the patio garden in the northeast part of the plot. Entering the building via the communal entrance at Calle Río Elba, one had to go up a few steps, then, via a portal and a corridor, one would come into a hall that was lit from above via a light well situated next to the stairwell.

But before going up the stairs one would first have to pass the booth of the concierge. From there the staircase would first go straight up before turning to the right and coming into the corridor that gave access to the three apartments situated on the first floor. In terms of direction only the living room of the corner apartment would overlook the two streets and have a balcony. The living rooms of the other two apartments overlooked the patio in the back. Proceeding up the staircase (that received its light from the side via the light well), one would pass another two identical floors, before reaching the top floor. This, again, only housed the rooms for the maids and servants, the storage spaces, plus the spaces and roof-terraces for the washing, drying and ironing of the laundry.

As we have seen before Barragán also was an architect who, once having developed a typology that functioned, would use it over and over again. So it won’t be a surprise to see that the corner typology, which he used in 1939 for the aforementioned apartment building at the corner of Calle Río Elba 50 and Calle Río Atoyac, is also used in the Apartment Building for Mrs. Carmen García Rulfo de Cristo, on the Avenida Río Mississippi 65, at the corner of Calle Río Lerma, in Colonia Cuauhtémoc. Some sources say it dates from 1937, although the technical drawings are dated October

---

137 Barragán was also the designer of the buildings on the other side of the street, so the Apartment Building for Antonio Jacques, on the corner of Calle Río Elba 52, and Calle Río Atoyac, from 1939, and the Apartment Building, on Calle Río Elba 56, that he himself lived in from December 1939 till the second half of 1943.
November 1940. Here the site available was 15 by 22 meters, with the longer side facing Calle Río Lerma (i.e., south southeast) and the narrow side facing the Avenida Río Mississippi (east northeast).

Interesting differences can again be found in the scenography of the entry sequence. Approaching the building one would first notice the celebration of the corner by means of a kind of parapet cum planter that juts out from the façade on the level of the roof-terrace, which was itself situated on the corner and defined by a kind of floating cornice. Then coming closer the concrete marquee that runs around the corner above the commercial spaces would take over and direct the visitor to the entrances. The public entrance would again be situated between the two commercial spaces at the ground floor facing the more important Avenida Río Mississippi.

The entry as such was indicated by a set of steps and a portico. In this case, however, the corridor, leading the visitor or the dweller to the central stairwell, was broader than that of the aforementioned apartment building. Also there was no light coming directly from above into the hall, since the light well was projected behind the stairwell, and also the position of the concierge was less strategic in relation to the start of the stairs. All the rest was about the same except from the fact that you could see that Barragán tried to gain a little more space for the apartments by pushing the main part of both façades forty centimeters outward into the street and that he tried to create two separate (partly covered) communal roof-terraces at the corner, which he could only achieve by building one apartment less and situating the servants quarters on two levels around a small second patio.

What is interesting in this is that from the outside these apartment buildings often gave the impression that the top floor (especially the one’s situated on corner plots) housed a large penthouse with a fantastic terrace and roof-garden overlooking the corner. And when we take into account the possibility that Barragán did indeed visit the penthouse that Le Corbusier designed for Charles de Beistegui in 1931, then he would certainly have had an impression of the relative tranquility, the view, the open air and other qualities of habitation, provided by this type of dwelling above of the bustling metropolis. It seems, however, that the lack of an elevator, the necessity to house the servants that every middle-class family would have, and (in terms of speculation) probably the lack of a large market for this type of house, didn’t give him that many possibilities to really experiment with it.

The first time we can see Barragán trying to incorporate the roof-terrace directly into the main spaces for living was on the top of the five-storey Apartment Building for Alfonso Barragán, located on Avenida Río Mississippi 33, in Colonia Cuauhtémoc, which dates from 1936-37. This.

---

138 Barragán was also the designer of the now demolished apartment building at the corner of Avenida Río Mississippi and Calle Río Atoyac, for Mrs. Concepción Ribot, dated 1940.
however, was just a very small one-room apartment with a kind of alcove for sleeping.

The best possibility for experimenting with the idea of the penthouse occurred in 1939-40, when Lorenzo Garza commissioned him to design and build an Apartment Building on Avenida Parque (Plaza) Melchor Ocampo 40, in Colonia Cuautémoc.

This apartment building (which, as he did with many buildings of that period, he built in collaboration with José Creixell as his engineer) represents a third type of apartment building, the type that has three sides available for façades to receive light and air. In this particular case Barragán had to deal with a site that had a slightly curving main front facing almost north towards Parque Melchor Ocampo, a park-like plaza in the form of half an ellipse that had been bisected diagonally. The second front, a good 20 meters wide, was facing east-northeast towards Avenida Río Mississippi, and the third front of almost 21 meters faced south-southeast towards Calle Río del Panuco. In this typology Barragán employed two light wells of roughly 4 by 4 meters, one to get some light and air into the back of the two L-shaped apartments that he planned to put on the corners of the block, and the second to get light and air into the apartment zone he projected to run the full depth of the site from Parque Melchor Ocampo through to Calle Río del Panuco.

In between these light wells he situated the central stairwell and a small corridor to access the apartments. The whole in terms of economy of space is very clever since he managed to reduce the access space to a minimum.

In relation to the idea of the penthouse, the two top floors (of the in total 5 story’s) were the most interesting since here Barragán managed to realize two ‘penthouses’, each running over two floors.

In the corner apartment facing Parque Melchor Ocampo, he projected a spiral staircase that connected the main living spaces with a covered roof-terrace, which in turn extended into an uncovered rooftop garden overlooking the corner. This was the apartment that came closest to the idea of a penthouse. The other corner apartment also had a staircase leading up to a covered terrace and a roof-garden. However, this staircase was not situated within the main living spaces, but rather was linked with the entrance area because from here it not only led up to the roof-terrace, but also to a studio space.

The ground floor of this apartment building contained a large commercial space along Avenida Río Mississippi, a set of 7 garages accessed from Calle Río del Panuco, a separate garage accessed from Parque Melchor Ocampo,

139 Another example of this type is the Apartment Building for José Mojica (dating according to some sources from 1937-38, although some sketches are dated 1941), a little further on at Avenida Parque (Plaza) Melchor Ocampo 12, bordered by Calle Río Nazas and Calle Río Ganges in Colonia Cuautémoc. A project probably built in collaboration with José Creixell as engineer, although there are also drawings of a not executed design for this site mentioning A. Ramos Salido as collaborating architect.
plus a small ground floor apartment facing the park. The communal entrance was located between this apartment and the garage facing the park.

Approaching the corner of the building situated at Parque Melchor Ocampo and Avenida Río Mississippi would give one the impression that the block along Avenida Río Mississippi (although both where clad in artificial stone) was a separate block placed next to a building facing the park. This was not only caused by recessing the park façade of the first block and making it lower, but also by treating the two façades differently.

The first block along Avenida Río Mississippi looks ‘light’, while the second block, with its bent façade facing the park, looked much more closed and ‘heavy’. Enhancing this effect was a kind of dynamic twist given to the first ‘lighter’ block by the longitudinal balconies that projected out from the side façade, the ribbon windows that ran around the corner, as also the floating cornice over the open roof-gardens did.

Immediately next to this apartment block on Avenida Parque (Plaza) Melchor Ocampo 38, Barragán, in collaboration with the German architect Max Cetto and José Creixell as their engineer built a project for Carmen and Paz Orozco that required a building with four painter’s ateliers. In this project, dated 1939-40, the architects had to deal with an irregular and not very deep plot, facing north, which in terms of lighting is ideal for a painter’s studio. To get some light and air (for cross ventilation) in from the back as well they projected a patio in the southwest corner of the plot. The ground floor level contained a garage as wide as the studio above, the stairwell, the communal entrance and a small commercial space, which was also the width of the studio above.

The four studios that are paired on two levels around the central stair well are double height spaces with large windows to the front and a mezzanine level (which can be accessed by means of a small spiral staircase) in the back. In the studios to the left the facilities and service areas were projected on two levels.

140 Perspective drawings of the initial design actually show that Barragán planned the façade towards the park to recess in three steps, thus to follow the curve of the site. These drawings also show that not only the corner apartments should have balconies towards the park, but also the one’s to the right of the entrance.

141 Max Ludwig Cetto was born in Koblenz, Germany on 20.2.1903, so he was only about one year younger than Barragán. Cetto studied from 1921 till 1926 respectively at the Technical Universities of Darmstadt, Munich and Berlin. At the latter he studied with Hans Poelzig and graduated as an architect and engineer in 1926. From 1926 to 1931 he works for Ernst May in the famous Siedlungsamt in Frankfurt, where a.o. he worked together with architects like Mart Stam, Bernard Hermkes and Werner Max Moser. In 1928 he was one of the founder-member of CIAM. After a kind of inner exile between 1933 and 1938, he moved to San Francisco in June of 1938, where he worked in the studio of Richard Neutra (dealing a.o. with the Sydney Kahn House) before he settled in Mexico in May 1939. Where he worked together with José Villagrán Garcia (39-44 as building supervisor of the Children’s hospital), Jorge Rubio (39-40 Hotel San José Purúa, Michoacán, 1940 House in Calle Santa Veracruz.) and Luis Barragán (1939 Building with Four Painter’s Ateliers and 1948 Two Showcase Houses in the Jardines del Pedregal). His own works comprise of: 1945 Wolfgang Robert Paalen House, San Angel, 1947 Quintana House, San Angel, 1949 Cetto House, San Angel, 1951 Roberto Berdeco House.
in the back, receiving light and air via the patio. The studios to the right where laid out in such a way that the pantry and the bathroom would receive light and air via a set of windows in the front façade, thus producing a pattern of alternating windows with those of the stairwell around an imaginary axis of symmetry. This subtle play of symmetry and asymmetry, starting with the entrance, ends with the large horizontal aperture cut out from the façade on the top level, hinting towards a rooftop garden.

On the one hand this crisp white building of 1939-40 containing four painters studios came closest to the kind of ‘Purism’ that Le Corbusier had been exercising in his design for the Studio of Amédée Ozenfant (in Paris 1922). On the other hand, as I mentioned before, Barragán seems to be coming back to the kind of abstracted ‘vernacular’ style that he had used in the early thirties in Guadalajara in his design of the House for Eduardo Villaseñor, also dated 1939-40. This seems to indicate that somehow he started to waver between ‘styles’ and that he was slowly coming to a point of artistic and intellectual maturity that prompted him not to ‘follow’ (the ‘style’ of the time) anymore, but rather to find out what was really important for him-self within architecture.

Middle age was nearing and also the signs that the times where changing. In the early forties the negative economic effects of President Cárdenas’s expropriation of all foreign oil operations on Mexican territory in 1938 and his accelerated land reform could also be felt in the speculative building market of the Capital. Not only did Mexico suffer from the disruption of its commerce with the US and Europe, but its agriculture also had to endure a setback because the communal farms did not really provide economies of scale and often even lacked the resources and the credit worthiness required to obtain loans from the banks. Moreover, Europe had been at war since 1940 and it would not be long before the US, too, would be involved in World War II.

On December 13, 1941, Barragán wrote in a letter to his friend Ignacio Díaz Morales that he was running out of cash since he still hadn’t sold some plots of land in the Colonia Cuauhtémoc.142 He had probably bought those plots in the late thirties for speculative reasons, intending not to build on them for himself (although he may have considered this at the very beginning), but sell to potential investors who would obtain the land from him together with his design for the building.

In the conversation that Barragán had with Alejandro Ramírez Ugarte, in 1962, he remembered this period as follows:
‘I came to Mexico to work in 1936. And then I frankly started working as an architect, getting commissions for houses, some buildings never big things. Until in 1940 I realized that more money was to be made on real estate, helping the client to find the site and passing the costs including the professional fees (for the design). I had become very demoralized by most

clients, because they would make use of the projects without paying the proper honorarium, or they would talk to you with a patronizing tone, as if they were doing you a favor by giving you work, which meant almost always dealing with a number of deficits and humiliating meanness... The conclusion: earn little money; give a lot of service and spent unpleasant moments with clients. So I gave up the profession in 1940. I dedicated myself to speculating with real estate and within this activity I started building on those sites to be sold. The years between 40’s and 45’s passed with this kind of real estate transactions without having built residences which were worthy of being mentioned in terms of volume or freedom.\textsuperscript{143}

The keyword in this is the last one, ‘freedom’. By giving up architecture as a profession (meaning to serve and to be dependent on his clients and their whims) he became an independent ‘amateur’ again. This also meant that now he could start to experiment, more in the nature a free artist than as a fee-for-task architect, and could discover for himself just what was important in architecture. As he had found out in the years past, most of his clients here in Mexico City were not interested in ‘good’ architecture representing certain cultural values, but only the financial profit of their investment, thus giving him little scope for artistic expression.

Although the economical circumstances during the late thirties and early forties were subject to the pressures of insecurity and change, the artistic and intellectual climate of Mexico City at that time was bustling. Many foreigners had already come to Mexico, often in pursuit of more political or creative freedom, and many would follow in those years because of the approaching war in Europe. Most of them, although often only temporarily, became part of, and left their influence on, the artistic and intellectual scene; or better to say ‘scenes’ in plural, since as one can imagine there would always be different force fields of opinion and ideology, like for instance those surrounding figures such as Diego Rivera or José Clemente Orozco.

Barragán’s friendship with José Clemente Orozco that had begun in 1931 in New York was further consolidated after Orozco’s return to Mexico. Some sources (although this is an undocumented attribution) even mention that Barragán was the co-designer of the House and Studio that José Clemente Orozco built for himself on Calle Manuel López Cotilla 814, in Sector Juárez, in Guadalajara. They also list Barragán as co-designer (likewise an undocumented attribution) for the House and Studio that Orozco built in 1940 on Calle Ignacio Mariscal 132, in Colonia Tabacalera, in Mexico City.\textsuperscript{144}

\textsuperscript{143} Alejandro Ramírez Ugarte, ‘Conversación con el Arq. Luis Barragán en la Ciudad de México’, typescript, November 1962, preserved in the Barragán Foundation, Basel/Birsfelden Switzerland. It seems that in his recollection of that period everything has shifted by about a year, since according to the facts he moved to Mexico City in 1935 not 1936, and also the projects that he refers to are mostly dated around 1939-40.

\textsuperscript{144} If so, it would be very likely that some prove might be found in the letters preserved in the Díaz Morales Archive, since Barragán in that period had a lively correspondence with his friend about the restructuring of two churches near Guadalajara, Jalisco. The Restructuring of the Amatitán Church,
Another figure linking Barragán to the artistic and intellectual scenes and to their foreign influences was Manuel Alvarez Bravo (and his wife Lola), the photographer(s?)\(^{145}\) he employed to take pictures of his work, for instance the House for two-families of 1936 and the Eduardo Villaseñor House of 1939-40. Manuel Alvarez Bravo, one of Mexico’s most important photographers and in that period together with people like Rivera, Orozco, Tamayo and Siqueiros, a member of the Mexican Artists Union group, had met the photographer Tina Modotti (Edward Weston’s companion and model) in 1927, after which she not only started to influence his work but also to support him by finding him paid work as a photographer.\(^{146}\) In 1930-31 Manuel Alvarez Bravo was cameraman on Sergei Eisenstein’s uncompleted film ‘Que Viva Mexico’. And after meeting André Breton\(^{147}\) in 1938, the founder of Surrealism commissioned Bravo to do the cover for the catalogue of the forthcoming Surrealist exhibition at Gallería de Arte México in 1939.\(^{148}\) Breton also published several of Bravo’s pictures in the surrealist magazine ‘Minotaure’.

This is just to give the reader an impression of the artistic and intellectual climate of Mexico City that Barragán, too, was in touch with\(^{149}\) at the time he liberated himself from the dependence on the profession of architecture.

In 1940-41, for speculative purposes Barragán had bought several adjoining plots in Colonia Tacubaya, forming a large piece of land along the Calzada Madereros (now Avenida Constituyentes) overlooking the Bosque de

---


\(^{146}\) Until 1930 he worked as an office clerk in the Department of Power and Transportation to earn his money.

\(^{147}\) André Breton had come to Mexico to meet a.o. Leon Trotsky (who in that period was still living in the house of Diego Rivera or alternatively that of Frida Kahlo). He ‘discovered a country in which singing is the breath of life’. In 1938 together with Trotsky he writes the Manifest ‘For an Independent Revolutionary Art’, which for tactical reasons is signed by Breton and Rivera. Further Trotsky and Breton found the ‘International Federation of Independent Revolutionary Artists’, together with the magazine ‘Key’, which was only published twice, in January and February 1939. Also a double issue of ‘Minotaure’, no. 12-13 ‘Nationalism in Art’, was completely dedicated to Mexico, with an article of Breton ‘Souvenirs du Mexique’ and a.o. work of Diego Rivera, Frida Kahlo, Posada and pictures of Alvarez Bravo. Already before Minotaure had published prints of Posada and in Minotaure 11 an article by Jaques B. Brunius, ‘Dans l’ombre où les regards se nouent’, with photographs of Sergei Eisenstein’s film ‘Que Viva Mexico’.

\(^{148}\) The photo, one of his best-known pictures ‘Good Reputation, Sleeping’ of 1938 (a naked girl laying alongside some dangerous abreojos cacti on an indigenous blanket, only wearing some gauze bandages around her ankles, upper legs and belly, leaving her breasts and pubic area uncovered) was not used since the censors considered it pornographic.

\(^{149}\) Barragán’s strong religious believe always prevented him from becoming part of the more militant artistic and intellectual scenes that often promoted governmental ideology in exchange for power and influence.
Chapultepec to the north, and located between Calle General Francisco Ramírez, in the east and Calle General Méndez to the west. He was not investing in one of the more upscale new subdivisions of Lomas de Chapultepec or Polanca, where most of the speculative investment was being made, but rather in an unassuming traditional old neighborhood of working-class housing. In fact, what he was actually investing in was the long-term potential of the site, with its long side overlooking the Bosque de Chapultepec and its close proximity (literally, ‘spitting distance’) to the ‘Residencia Official de los Pinos’, the presidential residence in Chapultepec Park.

But, as every speculator knew, it would take time and one would have to show what the potential qualities of the site were before this speculative investment would start to pay off. Hannes Meyer in a letter to his friend, the Swiss Architect Paul Artaria, described a particular strategy of land-speculation as follows: ‘It is a form of land-speculation when people buy a plot of land and then simply develop the wall around it and the garden within (without a house) and then sell it for three times as much.’

It is noteworthy that Hannes Meyer, in this letter from 1949, was actually referring to the plots of land in the subdivision of the Jardines del Pedregal that Barragán was developing for himself between 1945 and 1952-54, together with the brothers Luis and José Alberto Bustamente as co-investors. This is noteworthy since I don’t think that this particular land-speculation-strategy was very common among the usual speculators because it required time (to let the garden grow) and somebody with the vision needed to see the potential of the ‘bare’ plot without the garden and yet at the same moment appreciate its value with the garden (and this then in relation to the time it was going to take to create it).

So it may very well be that Hannes Meyer in his letter to Paul Artaria was describing a specific land-speculation-strategy actually developed by Barragán in the early forties because this was exactly what Barragán did with the land that he had bought at the Calzada Madereros. At an unusually slow pace, compared to the work he had done before in Mexico City, he developed, between 1940 and 1943, a set of four gardens that later became the repeatedly published Jardines in Calzada Madereros / Avenida Constituyentes.

Between 1943-45 Barragán did the same thing with a piece of land he had bought on Avenida San Jerónimo, which was adjacent to El Pedregal and would become the famous Urraza Garden plus the Three Private Gardens built for Mr. Bermúdez and Mr. De la Lama in El Cabrió. In addition to creating those gardens, Barragán also started to create a house and a garden for himself at Calle General Francisco Ramirez 20-22 in which he would live from 1943 to 1948, before selling it to the silversmith Alfredo Ortega and moving to

---

his new house and studio next door on Calle General Francisco Ramirez 14, built between 1947 and 1948.

So it was that from the early forties onward this first ‘home’ and these gardens became the ‘laboratory’ for his spatio-visual experiments in architecture, and as such they represented a crucial turning point in the development of his œuvre. Barragán’s first ‘home’\textsuperscript{151} was actually the result of a ‘recherche patiente’, the plot he chose for himself was L-shaped with its main part situated at the southeastern end of the large piece of land he had bought. It faced Calle General Francisco Ramirez with a narrower wing in the back running north towards Calzada Madereros. The existing walls and structures erected on the site had been surveyed and would be re-used as far as possible. He would also do this with the topography of the plots intended to become the garden, which included a system of underground passages and caves of a former sand quarry that still had its entrance on Barragán’s ground, but actually stretched beyond his property and under Calzada Madereros / Avenida Constituyentes.\textsuperscript{152}

Interpretation of the material in the archive of the Barragán Foundation indicates that he constructed his first home in two main phases, but with a lot of changes and tests of different solutions both during construction and after the house was ‘completed’. In essence, this was not so much a ‘planning’ architect at work as it was a ‘directing’ architect who (like a kind of Dr. Jekyll) was his own test subject. The initial design showed an introverted patio house situated on a plot in the utmost southeast corner of the site, roughly 24 meters deep and 15 meters wide, facing east towards Calle General Francisco Ramirez.

Its layout was like an inverted letter L, with two wings enclosing a patio that had two levels connected with a flight of steps. The wing running parallel to the street contained mainly service areas--the garage, the entry plus stairway, the kitchen, a bathroom and probably a guestroom--while the wing that penetrated into the depth of the plot contained a salon for dining and a living room that ended in a kind of glazed loggia that gave the appearance of having been dug out from the higher level of the patio. In fact, the design for the house did not yet have a direct relation\textsuperscript{153} to the gardens that Barragán had started designing to the side and back of it. The first floor of the initial design

\textsuperscript{151} Federica Zanco mentions that: ‘He re-used part of a small existing structure, at first perhaps simply to house his growing library and create a sort of urban refuge with a small annexed dwelling for the servants’. Federica Zanco, ‘Luis Barragán: The Quiet Revolution’, in ‘Luis Barragán, the Quiet Revolution’, Skira, Milan 2001, pp. 84. So it might well be that it wasn’t intended to become his new home from the beginning, but more a kind of studio cum library, since the plan of the main room on the first floor shows a space glazed towards the north and towards a large roof terrace in the west.


\textsuperscript{153} Overlaying this initial plan with the survey of the existing structures, especially the walls that were incorporated in the design, would show that there where some existing openings in the walls (not registered in the initial plans) giving access to the gardens.
contained the service areas and the maid’s room parallel to the street, while in the recesses of the other wing he planned for the bedroom, the bathroom and a large room with a roof terrace diagonally overlooking his property. This room was probably intended to become his library cum studio, since there was also a small ‘hidden’ staircase connecting it directly to the living area down.

In the second phase he extended the house with a north wing along Calle General Francisco Ramirez, with the result that the garage and entrance (in the initial design situated next to the kitchen) were replaced by a service kitchen and a new entrance, and that the house was extended with a new wing containing a dining room, a room probably intended to house a chauffeur (that, however, became a salon overlooking the garden), a double garage and a servant’s entrance. This arrangement indicated that next to the service areas he also wanted to keep the more public spaces of the house parallel to the street. However, more interesting is the extension he projected towards the depth of the site, going beyond the initially closed back wall of the introverted patio house. That is because this was not just an extension in form of a built volume but an extension in form of a sequence of atmospheric spaces comprising of a large loggia and beyond that a system of gardens, terraces, ponds and patio’s on different levels, interconnected by paved pathways and flights of steps.

It would even be better not to speak of gardens, but rather of garden-rooms since walls of green defined each of these levels as an enclosed spatial entity. In effect, a viewer strolling through the gardens, while experiencing all the different scenographic sequences, would never be confronted with outside architectural form, but only with atmospheric modulations of interior space. To achieve this effect Barragán even ‘camouflaged’ the outside form of the wing of the house penetrating the depth of the garden by covering its façades with cacti, ivy and other lush greenery. Anyone approaching the house from the street would see a similar ‘camouflage’ effect since the only public façade it had didn’t show anything out of the ordinary in terms of style or composition that might refer to a house designed by an architect (or even stronger, to the architect’s own home).

With its plain façade, its barred windows placed up high, and its slightly recessed front door, this house was probably as anonymous as most of the other houses in the neighborhood. It was only behind the front door that a sequence of atmospheric modulations of its enclosed spaces would start to unfold for a visitor, a guest or a good friend. These three subtly different categories of ‘intruders’ however could each be linked intelligently to specific sequences, thus only penetrating up to a certain point into the different ‘privacy’ levels of Barragán’s own ‘home’.

As I said before, Barragán was the master of an architecture that tried to involve its users and visitors (bodily and mentally) in a sort of ‘kine-aesthetic’ or ‘kine-aesthetic’ experience with all their senses. That is to say, the subtle choreography of movements and the modulation of sequences of different
atmospheres (physical and spiritual) that he generated within his ‘architecture’ constantly involved the beholder. On one hand this was an architectural mise on scène of space and light, material and color, smell and sound, movement and time, but on the other hand (in the case of his own home) it also was a more private and secretive, narrative mise on scène of signs and symbols, obsessions and desires, fears and fascinations, typical of every ‘autobiographical-house’.  

Anyone entering the house would proceed via a relatively dark corridor into a perpendicular corridor that received its light from a grated window high up to the right. Going into the direction of the light would lead the visitor to a dining room with a ceiling of two crossed beams, a view that overlooked a part of the garden, and a door leading to a kind of salon with a fireplace.

Instead the darker direction would ultimately lead to what was probably the guest room, but before reaching the corridor leading there one would be blocked by the first two steps of a staircase situated opposite the door leading into the more personal wing that penetrated the depth of the garden. Behind the door one would find the music room opening up to the right and lit by a grated window that was recessed into a deep bay of the wall overlooking the garden to the north.

Passing straight through the music room, guided by a line of shelves and drawers, one would go on to the next wooden door (having to its left another grated window overlooking the patio), which opened into the space of the library. The library was a space lined with the same type of bookshelves on the left and also at the rear (incorporating the doors to the music room and to a small staircase up to the master bedroom), and to the right a sort of grated bay-window overlooking the garden, before leading over into a kind of perpendicular oriented room with a fireplace on the right and a sort of glazed loggia towards the left.

The terminal wall of that room was constructed of rough squared stone blocks, which would initially halt the direction of movement, but would then also start to question this initial inclination to halt. Since it showed a flight of wooden steps (without a landing) leading in the direction of movement, towards a relatively low and wide solid wooden door (divided horizontally in two like a ‘Dutch’ door or a ‘stable’ door). Thus suggesting that one’s journey through the house could even penetrate deeper into the domain of the owner.

---

Behind this door one would enter a kind of outside living room, a large loggia (with simple wooden furniture, palm leaf mats, a painting of the ‘Annunciata’, the skull of a bull, a chest, a cross and an antique statue of an angel). Proceeding further via some steps the visitor would see that the loggia opened up into the depths of the garden (or to the left, towards an enclosed garden and the patios situated to the south side of the penetrating wing, thus leading back to a sunken loggia in front of the guest quarters).

Penetrating from here still further into the very depths of the gardens towards the back and to the right, would probably have been perceived as a form of initiation, an initiation which would guide the initiate via a set of paved pathways and flights of steps through a sequence of green spaces on different levels. Within this flow of spaces, resembling terraces carved out from the earth and clearings cut into the vegetation, there were the sculptures, the sculpture-like misshapen trees, the sunken pool in the back, the overflowing basin towards the right end of the garden, and other objects-- ‘objets trouvés’, such as a cactus growing out of a squared block of stone on the first clearing--that became the dramatic focal points attracting the curiosity of the observer while the stairs and pathways guided his movements, thus pulling him ever further into the depths of this fantastic garden.

Probably the most intriguing detail was a staircase which at first sight seemed unspectacular situated parallel against the back wall (in the middle of the wing of the garden towards Calzada Madereros/Avenida Constituyentes), that would first lead up to a landing and then (perpendicular to the initial ascending movement) descend between two walls and into the earth before coming to a small door. This door actually was Barragán’s private entrance into the ‘underworld’, i.e., the corridors and caves of the abandoned sand quarry.

The only eyewitness account of this ‘underworld’ comes from the Mexican writer and poet Salvador Novo who, personally invited and guided by

---

155 A kind of surreal scene, which was probably full of symbolic and mythical connotations, not unlike the those that Carlos De Beistegui created for his guests in his Corbusian penthouse on the Champs-Élysées in Paris. Also very interesting in this respect is Federico Zanco’s observation of the symbolic Angel-Virgin duality that was ‘repeated obsessively inside and out’. ‘Amidst the shrubs of the adjacent patio, arranged around a brick fountain, the Annunciation reappeared in three-dimensional form – thanks to more fine colonial sculptures glimpsed in the half-light.’ Or ‘in the music room where a Madonna marks the entrance to the living room (library), from which (through the open door in the back wall) can be seen the loggia containing the angel’. Like ‘on the central lawn where another stone Virgin stands, white against the red background of the buttressed wall, gazing imploringly at an angel with its back to her that is set on high, on top of the chimney that rises like a stele over the terrace built above the living room and library.’ See Federica Zanco, ‘Luis Barragán: The Quiet Revolution’, ‘, in ‘Luis Barragán, the Quiet Revolution’, Skira, Milan 2001, pp. 85.

156 Salvador Novo (1904-1974) was a poet, writer, dramatist, translator and historian, born in Mexico City. Along with Xavier Villaurrutia, he founded the literary journals Ulises (1927) and Contemporáneos (1928). He was an active participant of the renewal of Mexican literature in the first half of the century. He is considered to be one of the most skillful prose writers of the ‘Contemporáneos’ generation. As a poet he started his career at an early age. He had a love affair with the poet Federico García Lorca that he celebrated in his poems. Which also means he was a controversial figure in Mexican society, but an accepted one. He defied machismo by making almost no effort to conceal his homosexuality and tried to influence and educate Mexican public opinion about the naturalness of homosexuality. He was even accepted by the Mexican government and he held official posts related to culture, was elected to the
Barragán, visited the house and gardens on the 5th of July 1943, a few months before Barragán actually moved into his new ‘home’ somewhere around mid-October of 1943. As Salvador Novo recalled:

‘Luis reserves one last surprise for his visitors... A small secret door in the garden leads to the catacombs. These are the underground passages of the sand quarries, which are part of the property, and I would suspect extend beyond it so that as you venture into these underground tunnels, illuminated here and there by torches hidden between the stones, you may even be under the road. Suddenly you are halted by a spectacular sight – a column of sunlight in the centre of a rotunda. Twenty or thirty meters above a glazed aperture admits this strange light, which Luis intends to use in one of his forthcoming projects to surreallyistically illuminate a horse skeleton that is being assembled for him.’

It is difficult to say where Barragán’s interest for this kind of surreal mise en scène came from, but it is very likely that his contact with Jesús ‘Chucho’ Reyes Ferreira influenced it. According to Antonio Riggen Martínez it was in 1940 that Barragán met ‘Chucho’ Reyes. Jesús ‘Chucho’ Reyes Ferreira was an artist, collector and esthete who not only became a good friend, but also an important advisor to Barragán on Mexican Academy of Language, and had a TV show where he talked about Mexico City’s history.

157 In a letter to Díaz Morales dated 24 September 1943, he had written: ‘if you come to Mexico City I shall invite you to Madereros where I hope to move three weeks from now’. As quoted by Marco De Michellis in ‘Luis Barragán, the Quiet Revolution’, Skira, Milan 2001, pp. 65.


160 Jesús ‘Chucho’ Reyes Ferreira was born on October 1882 in Guadalajara as the third of the four children of Lic. Don Ventura Reyes Zavala and Doña Felipa Ferreira Flores de Reyes. His father originating from Atotonilco el Alto in Jalisco, held a bachelor degree in philosophy and studied from 1854 to 1862 at the University of Guadalajara to become a Lawyer, but he did only work a few years as such. He became a teacher of history and Rector of the Liceo Católico de Guadalajara. Next to that he was a collector of art and antiques, which also influenced his son Jesús. At 15 Jesús, ‘Chucho’, started working in ‘La Casa Pellandini’, a store for artist materials, artwork, furnishings and antiques, where he also got in contact with a lot of artists. Here one of his jobs was the mise on scene of the display windows. Already at that age he showed to have a particular sensitivity for colors, textures and materials, plus the talent to grasp the atmosphere in which for instance to display the latest Art-Nouveau products that had just arrived from Europe. In this period he became friends with Alfredo Vázquez, ‘el Mago’. Like his father also ‘Chucho’ had a certain instinct for collecting all kinds of intriguing and beautiful objects and antiques. And he showed a great interest in all kinds of ‘theatrical’ displays, like the rituals of religious festivals taking place in baroque settings, or indigenous and popular festivities taking place in more vernacular settings. In 1912, after the death of his father in 1911, he starts his own shop cum artist studio, together with ‘el Mago’, Alfredo Vázquez, not only selling all kinds of objects and antiques, but also making decorations on silk paper (papeles de china) for festivities. In Guadalajara ‘Chucho’ also decorated the well-known café ‘Mont Parnasse’ and assisted as set-designer and scenographer in theatre, ballet and opera productions featuring grand names like the dancer Anna Pavlova and the cellist Pablo Casals. According to certain sources he moved to Mexico City in 1927, others indicate 1938 to be the year that he started to live in the Capital for ‘personal reasons’ (meaning his homosexuality, also ‘Chucho’ Reyes like Salvador Novo made almost no effort to conceal his homosexuality). It seems that in 1938 he first lived for a period in the house of Francisco Yturbe, before obtaining a house for himself in...
aesthetic questions. From the early forties onward Barragán often commissioned him to give his advice about matters such as colors, textures, and furnishings of designs. Besides that, ‘Chucho’ Reyes also always had an instinct for (and was a dealer in) antiques and all kinds of beautiful and/or strange objects ranging from baroque silverware to articles made by indigenous craftsmen. Barragán would have known that since in Guadalajara he had been in business together with Alfredo Vázquez, ‘El Mago’, the husband of Barragán’s sister Luz. It is therefore no surprise that Barragán often commissioned ‘Chucho’ to find specific objects or furnishings for his projects; he may even have commissioned him to acquire some of the objects and antiques in his new ‘home’.

Most important, however, was the fact that Barragán had found somebody, in the person of ‘Chucho’ Reyes, whom he could use as a sounding board for his work and a source of advice in fine-tuning the final result. This role was critical because in ‘directing’ architecture as opposed to ‘planning’ architecture one relies much more upon one’s intuition and thus (in the double sense of the word) one’s experience, since intuition is nothing else than embodied experience. Reyes, who was 20 years older than Barragán and an autodidact to boot, had been cultivating his own ‘gut-feeling’ over many years. In relation to certain aspects of Barragán’s work Reyes embodied the intuition that Barragán, a real ‘amateur’ in the original sense of the word himself, wanted to somehow achieve for the whole scope of his architectural work. And to do so Barragán needed reflections from very sensitive people who would be straightforward and honest enough (like ‘Chucho’ Reyes and later also Mathias Goeritz) to communicate to him their first impressions and gut-feelings and then be able to somehow analyze these gut-feelings together with him to be able to come up with alternatives that could be tested out in situ.

This arrangement facilitated the fine-tuning of the end-product of Barragán’s architectural expressions, the ‘kine-aesthetic’ experience of the spatio-temporal installations that he constructed within that period. To put it concretely, these ‘installations’ were the gardens or spatial atmospheres in which on one side he tried to involve its visitors bodily, with all their senses, and on the other side mentally, with their faculties of imagination and memory. This was the ‘luxury’ of the ‘amateur’ that Barragán could afford and enjoy, as expressed in the words of Salvador Novo:
‘Luis Barragán has abandoned the construction of buildings, which has made him so much money, for the hobby of gardening, which has given him so

1941. This was a traditional old house with a central patio, that he started to remodel and furnish with the objects and antiques he had collected over many years, and which until then were stored at his sister’s house in Guadalajara. It was likely that in that period he also started to get in contact again with people he knew before from Guadalajara, but who where now living in Mexico City, like for instance the poet Carlos Pellicer and also Luis Barragán. Among the people he was in contact with in Mexico City are also names like David Alfaro Siqueiros, Roberto Montenegro, Jorge Enciso and Diego Rivera, through which he met André Breton. In 1942 he became friends with the Russian painter Marc Chagall, who lived in the US from 1941 till 1947, but who was in Mexico in 1942 for the mise on scène of the ballet production ‘Alleko’. See a.o. Lily S. De Kassner, ‘Jesús Reyes Ferreira, Su Universo Pictórico’, Colección de Arte 34, Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México / Coordinación de Humanidades, Mexico 1978.
much happiness. Still very young, he can already devote himself to the luxury, generally reserved for the elderly, of ignoring the disagreeable problem of subsistence, and working assiduously on that which everyone should work, that is, what one likes to do.\textsuperscript{161}

Yet Barragán the ‘amateur’ was still a visionary speculator able to see the potential of a ‘bare’ plot and its value in relation to the time and effort it was going to cost to turn it into a garden. While as a real ‘amateur’ creating his gardens beside a small church known locally as La Capilla along Avenida San Jerónimo, between 1943 and 1945, his attention was drawn to the wide expanse of Lava, south of the three linked gardens\textsuperscript{162} he was working on. This was the vast, undeveloped lava field known as \textit{El Pedregal} (the Stony place).

As Keith Eggener reports in his thorough research on the Pedregal:

‘By 1943 he began buying property in the Pedregal and working on his gardens at El Cabrío. Soon after wanting to extend these gardens, Barragán found that the adjoining land was part of the Rancho de Contongo and that its owner would only sell it as a whole. This amounted to about 3,500,000 square meters, or 865 acres. Considering the land to be of little practical value, the owner was willing to let it go for a few centavos per square meter (10.75 square feet). Barragán was intrigued, and owing a much to the land’s low cost and availability as to his enthusiasm for its rugged charm, he decided to buy it. Unable or unwilling to face the financial risks of developing the property alone, Barragán invited the brothers-realtors José Alberto and Luis Bustamente to form the corporation Jardines del Pedregal de San Angel.\textsuperscript{163}’

The sublime charm and hostile beauty of this ‘mal pais’, this badland, had not only fascinated many hikers, but by then had also attracted many artistically inclined visitors like the writer Federico Gamboa in 1903, the poet Carlos Pellicer, and early on the painters Joaquín Clausell, José María Velasco, José Clemente Orozco, followed by Diego Rivera, ‘Chucho’ Reyes and especially the painter and vulcanologist Gerardo Murrillo (better known under his pseudonym Dr. Atl)\textsuperscript{164}, plus the photographer Armando Salas Portugal, many of whom were by the mid-forties friends and associates of Barragán.


\textsuperscript{162} These where three linked gardens called El Jardín Urraza (the Urraza garden), La Torre (the Tower), and El Cabrío (the Goat’s pen).


\textsuperscript{164} Gerardo Murillo, born in Guadalajara, Jalisco on October 3, 1875, studied painting in his hometown under Felipe Castro and Félix Bernardelli. After studying briefly in the Fine Arts Academy of Mexico City, in 1897 he went to Europe on a grant of 1000 dollars from President Diaz himself, to whom he had been introduced in 1896. He traveled in Europe studied next to Italian frescoes, philosophy and law at the University of Rome and collaborated with the Italian Socialist Party and with the newspaper Avanti. He also went on foot from Rome to Paris and after that to Madrid. He was profoundly influenced by the impressionist and Post-impressionist movements and went to hear the lectures of Henri Bergson on art and Leopoldo Lugones baptized him as Dr. Atl (the nahuatl word for water). Soon after his return to
Barragán had met the then still amateur photographer Armando Salas Portugal in 1944, at a small exhibition on landscape photography in Mexico City’s Palacio de Bellas Artes, where the later was showing images he had recently made on walks through the rugged lava area of El Pedregal. Barragán, fascinated by the images, purchased several of Salas’s photos and commissioned him to take more of the still un-developed ‘badland’. In another exhibition, presented in 1944 by Carlos Pellicer at the Palacio de Bellas Artes, Barragán encountered the drawings and landscape paintings of Gerardo Murillo, better known as Dr. Atl, who by means of his work was constantly searching for the ‘essence’ of a landscape.

Accordingly, in early 1945 Barragán also commissioned the elderly painter Dr. Atl in addition to Salas Portugal to produce images capturing the ‘essence’ of the Pedregal. As Sallas Portugal recalled in his conversations with Keith Egggener in 1994:

‘Barragán would nearly every morning for four months in early 1945, drive to the site with him and Dr. Atl at his side, on the way talking about the day’s work ahead. Sometimes Barragán would stay with either or both of them, walking, talking, watching them work, asking questions, and making suggestions. While other days he left to oversee the design or construction work proceeding elsewhere, or to meet with bankers or realtors, publicists or government officials, before returning to take Salas and Dr. Atl back to the city for dinner and more conversation.’

Guadalajara in 1903 he went to Mexico City again, and a.o. organized an art exhibit for the magazine Savia Moderna, which sponsored the most brilliant young people of that time. Francisco de la Torre, Diego Rivera and Ponce de Leon exhibited their first works finishing with the so-called pompier style. He promoted folk art, wrote autobiographical texts, scientific, political and artistic essays. He became friends with Joaquín Clausell (Mexico’s best known Impressionist painter). Dr. Atl also painted the first modern murals in Mexico with a substance he himself had invented for use on a wide variety of surfaces including plaster, fabric and board, the so called Atlcolors. Atlcolors are solid resin-based pigments still manufactured today and enjoying widespread popularity for the relative ease with which they can be used. After another trip to Europe, Atl returned to Mexico only days before the outbreak of the First World War. He had gotten interested in volcanology, a study that he had started in Italy in 1911, and after his return he started to study them in his painting. He frequently climbed Popocatépetl and Ixtaccíhuatl. This attraction for the volcanoes led him also to be a witness of the birth of Paricutín (1943). He recorded the phenomenon and made notations and paintings which he exhibited the following year in the Palace of Fine Arts and which he used to illustrate the book, ’Como nace y crece un volcán, el Paricutín’. A firm admirer of vast landscapes, Dr. Atl adopted the curve perspective proposed by Luis G. Serrano, and initiated air scenery; that is, geographic landscapes taken from airplanes. As a maximum economy of elements, he introduced the sfumato, which permitted him to fix the environment and distance. An untiring walker, he next to José María Velasco and Joaquín Clausell, was one of Mexico’s most important landscape painters. His work as a promoter of artists and intellectuals was also valuable. In the field of literature, his Cuentos de todos los colores (Stories of All the Colors), hallowed him as one of the best narrators of that stage in history, to a great extent also for his clever use of the vernacular language.


Old photographs preserved in the Barragán Foundation also prove that Barragán made many hikes accompanied by Dr. Atl and Salas Portugal to explore the terrain and to somehow get in touch with its sublime qualities. This was not as easy as it would look in hind sight, because Barragán (in this case dealing with a site so enormous -in the end he had to deal with about 6 million square meters- that as an architect he could not grasp it within the abstract code of a site plan) had to find a method of working that would be able to deal with both ‘planning’ its infrastructural layout and scenographically ‘directing’ its architecture.

The method he developed was as personal as it was ingenious in using the artistic and technical means he had at hand. What he did was combine the pan-optic view, the all-seeing vertical view of the planner (represented by the aerial photographs he commissioned periodically to the Compania Mexicana Aerofoto), with the syn-optic view, the horizontal compiling, or better said, abstracting view of the artist/photographer (represented by the images commissioned to Dr. Atl and Salas Portugal) that had to grasp, or rather ‘frame’ the ‘essence’ and not the ‘totality’. Salas in his conversation with Keith Eggener recalled:

‘… that Barragán asked him to begin at El Pedregal by making what he called ‘objective’ photos. These (according to Eggener) where broad views, sometimes in color, of the landscape and the new constructions on it under different atmospheric conditions… Following this, Salas was to produce what Barragán called ‘abstract’ views… These last offered visually appealing compositions but little architectural or contextual information.’

This was also confirmed by Federica Zanco’s research:

‘… with the negatives and above all the original prints of Armando Salas Portugal kept by Barragán we see a gradual reduction in the angle of the shots. They change from wide-angle documentary shots to a small number of viewpoints (and their respective counter shots, photographed repeatedly with minute variations in the light, contrast, depth of field and, later, color before then being corrected during printing and cut according to instructions frequently written on the back by Barragán himself.’

It might even have been that Barragán’s way of working found an echo in the fact that Dr. Atl, a firm admirer of vast landscapes and together with José María Velasco and Joaquín Clausell, considered to be one of the most important Mexican landscape painters, later initiated and pioneered an entirely new school of landscape painting, the ‘aerial’ landscapes, by painting vast tracts of Central Mexico from the air with the aid of borrowed Pemex helicopters.


Barragán (who in his first five years working as a speculating architect/contractor in Mexico City, had gained a lot of experience the hard way) and also experienced real-estate developers such as the Bustamente brothers knew that having a great vision, a method to achieve it, plus the financial and technical means to execute it, would not be enough to turn this enterprise into a success. Working on this scale they were well aware of the fact that they would also need government backing, and the best means would be to get the head of the (almighty) ‘Program Department’ and author of the ‘Master Plan for the Federal District’, Carlos Contreras (also the president of the Asociación Nacional para la Planificación de la República Mexicana), on their side.

Better still would be to also get the support of Miguel Alemán Valdés, the new President of Mexico\(^\text{169}\), who’s six year term, from 1946 to 1952, roughly covered Barragán’s involvement with the development of the Jardines del Pedregal de San Angel, ‘El lugar ideal para vivir’ (the ideal place to live).

The Alemán administration was known for its promotion of industrialization and economic growth by embarking on an extensive program of infrastructure improvement, meaning for instance that by the end of Alemán’s sexenio (six-year term of office) in 1952, Mexico had four times as many kilometers of paved roads as it did in 1946.\(^\text{170}\)

Another achievement of the Alemán administration was the initiation in 1947 and completion in 1952, of an enormous new, government-funded university campus, the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), on a site just east of El Pedregal in what was then suburban Mexico City. This resulted also in the improvement of major roads (like Avenida Insurgentes and Avenida Revolución) leading south towards the projected Ciudad Universitaria and (via Avenida San Jerónimo) to the Jardines del Pedregal.

Indicative of Barragán’s good connections to Miguel Alemán are some personal photos from around 1946, preserved in the Barragán Foundation, showing the President of Mexico in a lively and pleasant conversation with Barragán and others sitting in the loggia of the Barragán/Ortega house.

According to the ‘Master Plan for the Federal District’ drawn up by Carlos Contreras (as it was published in 1937 in the Architectural Record)\(^\text{171}\), the area of the Pedregal was actually destined to become a National park. However, by

---

\(^{169}\) He followed Ávila Camacho who’s Sexenio (1940-46) roughly covered the years of World war II, in which also Mexico got involved by May 1942.

\(^{170}\) See http://countrystudies.us/mexico/36.htm, ‘The Alemán Sexenio, 1946-52’, Source: U.S. Library of Congress. Where it also says: ‘... Alemán’s administration became noted for its tolerance of official corruption. The government's growing involvement in the economy provided ample opportunities for kickbacks and other forms of illicit enrichment, and several senior government officials became wealthy while in office.’

1943 Barragán had begun buying property in the Pedregal, and especially after obtaining 3.5 million square meters jointly with the Bustamente brothers, and commissioning Dr. Atl and Salas Portugal (in early 1945) to capture its ‘essence’ in images, it must have been clear to those attracted by the rugged beauty of the Pedregal that some kind of building activity could be expected soon.

Against this background, by October 1945, Diego Rivera had drafted a short essay called ‘Requisitos para la organización de El Pedregal’, discussing the potentials of (as Rivera calls it) ‘the site of a possible new city’ that might well become ‘the finest residential zone in the city of Mexico’. What is strange about the essay is that it started with aspects of a more technical nature, dealing with its climatic characteristics and the quality of its ground that did not need expensive foundations to build on or be at risk of flooding. These are aspects one would expect from a text written by an engineer or a city planner/architect, not a painter.

The second part of the text contained a set of guidelines dealing with some strict conditions necessary to achieve the conservation of both its climatic geographical characteristics and its unique appearance as a landscape of the sublime. So as not to destroy the natural beauty of the Pedregal, one of the conditions was that its natural vegetation had to be preserved and that a small part, and only a small part, of the lava mantle of each housing lot (that should be no less than 10,000 square meters) should be used for the extraction of stone. In order to attain the architecture’s material homogeneity, the local lava stone had to be used for the building of the high perimeter walls of the lots that would line the streets and also for the façades of the houses to be built behind them. In terms of form and style, one of the strict conditions was that only flat roofs would be allowed, and that buildings had to be low and should look ‘modern’. To supervise all that Rivera called for the establishment of an aesthetic council.

On the 3 July 1949, while the selling of lots and the construction of the first buildings in the Jardines del Pedregal de San Angel had been already in progress for more then a year, the Mexico City Newspaper Novedades (next to the text ‘Requisitos para la organización de El Pedregal’ that Diego Rivera had written by October 1945) published an article with the title ‘A Cargo del Arquitecto Carlos Contreras: El Pedregal de San Angel en el Distrito Federal’, with a plan for the subdivision of the Pedregal de San Angel that Carlos Contreras had drawn for Luis Barragán as early as 1946.

---


173 See Keith L. Eggener, ‘Luis Barragán’s Gardens of El Pedregal’, Princeton Architectural Press, New York, 2001, pp. 25-26. In his lecture ‘Gardens for Environment: Jardines del Pedregal’ given on 6 October 1951 in Coronado California (published in the Journal of the American Institute of Architects, no. 4 April 1952, pp. 167-72) he paid tribute to the role played by Carlos Contreras in the planning of El Pedregal (through him he was invited to the conference). Here Barragán said: ‘This work has required linking this zone with the city, and to accomplish this I asked Arquitecto Contreras to plan the layout of my subdivision so that beside the original character of the
The plan was similar though not identical to that which was by this time already being built (the curvilinearity and complexity of the initial road plan had been reduced) but it showed that Barragán also had a close connection with the very experienced (and influential) Carlos Contreras to support him in the fields of planning and legislation. This was necessary to be able to turn a vast area initially destined to become a national park into ‘the finest residential zone in the city of Mexico’. Next to the plan of Carlos Contreras, someone, probably Barragán himself, using Rivera’s initial essay had written a text entitled: ‘Anteproyecto para el reglamento de las construcciones que se construyen en el fraccionamiento del Pedregal de San Angel destinado a zona residencial’, ‘Preliminary project for the regulation of building construction at the Pedregal de San Angel subdivision, destined to be a residential zone’, in which he described more precisely the construction regulations to achieve ‘architectonic harmony’.

In a letter to the Swiss architect Paul Artaria in Basel, dated 14 April 1949, Hannes Meyer left a kind of professional eyewitness report:

‘I praise the Pedregal, the vast lava field in the southeast of Mexico City created by the eruption of volcano Xitli about 6000 years ago. While up to now this stony dessert had been respected by the development of the city as ‘impossible to be opened up’, the initiative of the architect Barragán has now led to a partial opening in form of a ‘Großgartensiedlung’, which started a year ago. In summer 1948 the ‘land’ would cost 4,25 Pesos per square meter, today you cant get anything under 9 to 12 Pesos per square meter. The Pedregal, in contrast to the surrounding landscape, has a very special fauna and flora. Since there is almost no humus, except from that in the crevices, there are no trees. Instead you find particular flowers and shrubs that are able to survive in an area without water. The subdivision of the land happens in lots of no less than 4000 square meters. Many are 7000 – 10 000 square meters, which means a very open form of settlement with a density of 8 people per hectare. Technically the whole shows very special problems: depending on location the crust of lava is between 7 and 12 meters thick and can have a very different consistency, partly good firm stone colored grey, partly porous tuff like), partly foam (espuma), in which the lava in the becoming is dispersed in many smaller stones. By means of the sales contract the owners where obliged to use the same material, meaning these lava stones, for all approximately 3 meter high garden walls. Today the area with all its stone perimeter walls looks like an archeological site. A cubic meter of wall costs in reality 16 Pesos, and as such it is cheapest and most obvious to built everything with this local building material available on every lot. One doesn’t need any foundation, but simply puts the house on the lava. The development company took care of a good water supply system. Within (the confines of) the lots the water pipes are often

landscape, we might be able to build up a development for private gardens: one for each house, limited and enclosed by walls, trees and foliage to screen the view from the outside and from neighboring houses.’ Later Contreras was mentioned only occasionally in publications relating to El Pedregal.

The document in the Barragán Foundation was unsigned and undated.
laid on top of the lava. The wastewater everybody has to take care of himself by means of a drainage pit dug into a porous part of the lava. We don’t have any frost. The main problem is the transport in of humus and filling material, to develop roads and gardens. Under the lava crust, so on a depth of 10-14 meters, one finds a bright ocher or umbra colored sand, or very bright red burned by the white-hot Lava. This sand that appears at the edges of the lava, is used as road surface, thus generating a wonderful combination with the violet-grey of the lava. Trees one can only plant if one brings in humus to fill up the deep crevices. Which means it is better to plant cacti, yuccas and the like that can stand the heat and the aridity.\footnote{Hannes Meyer, ‘Bauen und Gesellschaft. Schriften, Briefe, Projekte’, Fundus Bücher 64/65, VEB Verlag der Kunst, Dresden, 1980, pp. 307-308. In relation to the rapidly rising prices of ground that Meyer mentions 4.25 Pesos in the summer of 1948, 9-12 in 1949, it was interesting that in 1950 advertisements for El Pedregal showed a square meter price of 18-22, in the advert in Excélsior of 8 July 1951 prices had gone up to 25-35 Pesos per square meter. So a factor of about 6-8 in three years and according to an ad in September 1956 a square meter would cost 100 to 160 pesos, by 1957 it was 200 Pesos per square meter and in March 1958 between 200 and 300 pesos per square meter, meaning that in financial terms the enterprise was a huge success for the investors, since in that period Mexico’s rate of inflation was relatively low and the Peso a stable currency.}

As Barragán well knew, in order to, to imbue potential dwellers with a heightened experience of inhabiting nature as paradise, publicity by means of seductive images was one important tool for turning this enterprise into a success, and another was actually showing (in reality and on a one-to-one scale) how the sublime qualities and wild beauty of such a landscape could be domesticated and as such exploited. Therefore, the first things to be designed in 1948 and realized by 1949 were the Lote Muestra, a complex of demonstration gardens (situated next to the intersection of the Avenida de las Fuentes, (the main entry route) and Cascada), two demonstration houses and the main entrance plaza, the Plaza de las Fuentes.

This Plaza of the Fountains was located at the intersection of Avenida San Jerónimo and the new Avenida de las Fuentes, directly across of the gardens of El Cabrío, and its initial function actually was to attract the attention and curiosity of the people passing by, while driving on the Avenida San Jerónimo. It was like a grand entry gesture addressing Avenida San Jerónimo and as such referring to something ‘important’ yet still hidden, located at the end of the drive (the Avenida de las Fuentes that bisected the vast lava formation, which’s sharp vertical edge lined the south side of Avenida San Jerónimo).

The plaza as such was a large (more than 28.5 by 100 meters) smooth, slightly ascending concrete surface divided up in 2.2-meter squares, with some larger squares left free for trees. The space of the plaza was delimited towards the north by the course of Avenida San Jerónimo, to the east by a long wall more than 4.5 meters high and painted white (or pale grey), and to the west by a long row of iron pickets that defined the edge of a reflection pool with in its centre a fountain intermittently shooting jets of water into the air against a background of massive lava boulders and volcanic-stone walls framing the contours of the mountains in the distance. Towards the south the actual
threshold between the ‘outside’ (the entrance plaza) and the ‘inside’ (the continuation of Avenida de las Fuentes) was defined by two large pivoting gates (4.5-meters high and about 6.6-meters wide) placed in a fence made of square iron tubes painted with fluorescent paint of a bright cherry red color.

In this way, people who wanted to satisfy their first curiosity about such a strange grand-entry gesture penetrating the edge of the vast empty lava crust running parallel to Avenida San Jerónimo could drive onto the plaza and have some first initial photogenic glimpses of what might lay behind those high walls, and those contorted rock formations ‘growing’ out of the smooth concrete surface, that not only paved the plaza in the front, but also the drive that continued behind the glowing red fence, before vanishing from view in a gentle curve behind another fantastic lava formation.

Interesting, too, (since there is no rational or functional program prompting its form) is the scenography of the ‘stage’ that Barragán created (as he would also do in the future) with the aid of his artist friends. He would consult ‘Chucho’ Reyes to advise him in the use of color, while Salas Portugal would guide Barragán, by means of his photographs, in what views to frame and how to accomplish this, thus guiding the placement, direction and size of walls and other architectural elements within the design. In the course of this project also the sculptor Mathias Goeritz became important as an interlocutor and partner concerning aspects of spatial composition and proportion.

Barragán’s friendship with the German artist Mathias Goeritz\(^\text{176}\) had started in October 1949. Goeritz (who also had a degree in art history) was called by

\(^\text{176}\) Mathias Goeritz (4.4.1915-4.8.1990) was born in Gdansk/Danzig Poland/Germany. He studied art at the Kunstgewerbeschule in Berlin Charlottenburg as well as Art-history at the Friedrich Wilhelm University in Berlin, where he got a degree in Art-history. In 1933 he left Germany to go to Switzerland, where the painter Jörg Spiller introduced him to the circles of the Surrealists and Dadaists in Basel and Paris, which strongly influenced his work that by then was still rooted in the tradition of German Expressionism. In 1941 he moved to Spain and from there to Spanish Morocco, where in 1942 he married Marianne Gast, she was a photographer and writer. Via Granada in 1946 and Madrid in 1947, in 1948 he got to Santillana del Mar, where, inspired by pre-historic cave-paintings, he founded the Esquela de Altamira in the old Palace del Marqués de Santillana, which earned him recognition among Spanish painters. Back in Madrid in 1949 he was asked by the Mexican architect Ignacio Díaz Morales, the founder of the new School of Architecture at the University of Guadalajara, to become the professor for Art-history, which was soon followed by him also teaching a course on visual education, based on principals explored at the Bauhaus, and strongly influencing Mexico’s new generation of architects. However before reaching Guadalajara in October 1949 he met Barragán in Mexico City and became one of his best friends and most valuable advisors. Together with his wife Marianne he spend New Year and a day of ‘educación visual’, on the day of the Epiphany in Barragán’s house at Calle Ramírez 14.

Once in Mexico he was very active in writing, organizing conferences and exhibitions on the work of for instance artists Moore, Klee, Tamayo and Reyes. He writes an article ‘El arte en el Pedregal’ for the newspaper El Occidental to appear on 19 February 1950. And between 28 September and 14 October 1950, there is an ‘Exposición de pinturas y esculturas de Mathias Goeritz’, at Galería Clardecor, Paseo de la Reforma 226, Mexico City, where he shows a.o. El Animal and El Otro Animal, as prototypes for the concrete sculpture. In 1953, commissioned by Daniel Mont, a great admirer of his work, Goeritz designed and built the experimental museum El Eco (the Echo) on Calle Sullivan in Mexico City, which he considered (next to the written manifesto about it) to be his built manifesto towards an ‘Emotional Architecture’. The El Eco was inaugurated in September 1953 and this work would, via its idea about the ‘estructura primaria’, also influence the ‘Minimal Art’ of the sixties. Around 1953-54 Goeritz settled definitely in Mexico City, where in 1954 he was appointed the head of the Workshops for Visual design at the National School of Architecture at the University of Mexico. In 1956 he was asked to organize the new
Barragán’s old friend Ignacio Díaz Morales to teach art history (soon followed by a course on visual education, based on principles explored at the Bauhaus) at the newly founded Architecture School of the University of Guadalajara, but before reaching Guadalajara he spent a few days in Mexico City, had a meeting with Barragán and together with him visited El Pedregal.

It might have been that during that visit they came to the conclusion that within the spatial composition of the Pedregal’s entrance plaza there was something missing. That ‘something’ could fulfill the ambivalent roll of being a figurative and at the same time abstract element, acting not only as a mediator between the natural (the lava formations and vegetation) and the artificial (the architectural composition), but also as a kind of pre-historic ‘ambassador’ for, and ‘guardian’ of, the Pedregal, giving the principal entrance plaza a sense of life and scale.

This ‘something’ became Goeritz’s ‘Animal del Pedregal’ sculpture, inspired by a prehistoric animal figure that was found by archeologists etched into one of the rocks at the Pedregal. This 5-meter long and man-high concrete sculpture that looks like a sort of mythical chimera (a kind of snake or turtle transforming into a horse or a dog and vice versa), is situated in the southeastern corner of the plaza and, backed by a 4.5-meter high wall and a fluorescent red fence, it must have given the plaza a surreal feeling of life and of scale (not unlike what one experiences when looking at certain ‘metaphysical’ paintings by Giorgio de Chirico). As most of the photographs from that period prove, this sculpture soon became the element depicted in the foreground against the harmonious fusion of nature and architecture (that Barragán’s design wanted to be) in the background.

Passing the double gate at the end of the Entrance Plaza and driving up the Avenida de las Fuentes curving gently slightly to the right, one would come to some of the first houses constructed within this vast barren field of lava, situated to the left of the avenue at numbers 10 and 12 (now 130 and 140). These where two houses commissioned by Barragán (as a the representative of the development company) to the German architect Max Cetto, with whom he had worked together before in 1939-40 on the design for the Four Painter’s Studios at Plaza Melchor Ocampo. A preliminary design by Cetto for the house (probably also intended to be a demonstration house) of the successful and respected young lawyer Lic. Eduardo Prieto López, which was dated February 1947 and situated on the very prominent site at the intersection of Avenida de...

---

177 A second service entrance was located between Paseo del Pedregal and Calle Fuego, which consisted of an picket gate made of square steel tubes and a low metallic ring, painted bright fluorescent red, that functioned as a traffic circle.
las Fuentes 180 and Cascada (opposite the Lote Muestra, the complex of demonstration gardens on the other side of Avenida de las Fuentes), linked Cetto to Barragán already relatively early in the development of the Pedregal.

In exchange for helping Barragán with the design of those demonstration houses, Cetto also received a building lot on Calle del Agua 130.178

Built, as I said before, as part of the Pedregal’s promotional campaign both houses (the designs were dated May 1949, so construction should be around 1949-50), the ‘Casa Chica’, the small house on Avenida de las Fuentes 130 (originally 10) and the ‘Casa Grande’, the large house on Avenida de las Fuentes 140 (originally 12), were there to show in reality and on a one-to-one scale how the sublime qualities and wild beauty of the Pedregal could be domesticated.

Although their initial names in early office documents suggested otherwise both houses were comparable in size, but the ‘Casa Grande’ was somehow more spectacular in the way it built up a (nature-architecture) dialogue with the indigenous lava formations. This also meant that it became the more widely publicized one within the promotional campaign, which used Salas Portugal’s poetic images of the houses for ads in illustrated newspapers and magazine’s, to induce prospective clients/dwellers with a heightened experience of inhabiting nature as paradise.

The first Demonstration House, the ‘Casa Chica’ (which was later bought by Teresa Romero de San Cristóbal) at Avenida de las Fuentes 130, addressed the street by means of a portico recessed from the long straight property wall facing northwest and lining the street. Passing a small porter’s cabin that overlooked the portico via a small square window, one would enter into a large open patio, defined in the back by a double carport to the left and next to it an enclosed pool filled by a screen of water falling down from a kind of awning that covered a paved path leading from a door to the side of the entrance hall to the carport. Approaching the house after entering into the patio one was guided by a long canopy, and one would go slightly upwards while passing a small pergola-like patio to the right followed by the blank wall of the house’s service wing. Following a sort of base that seems to grow out of the ground by some slowly ascending steps in the strip of pavement under the canopy, one reached an entrance portico that converted into a corridor lit via a string of small quadratic windows placed flush with the ceiling above.

This corridor would then lead one into a hall with a large window that overlooked the reflection pool situated to the left. In the back there was a low

---

178 The house Cetto built here for himself and his family was actually the very first house built in the Pedregal. By early 1949 he realized a small one-story house, with a rough-finished reinforced concrete frame, walls of lava rubble, pine planks and a flat roof. He and his wife left the site as natural as possible, so the floor plan of the house adapted to the rock formation on and in which it nestled itself perfectly, like also the garden, designed and planted by his wife Cathrin, did. In 1952 a second floor with an extra bedroom and the architect’s studio, was added to the house.
wall covering a small flight of steps leading to an opening and the sleeping quarters behind that, and to the right one could access the double-height living room. Entering this enormous living room, parallel to a thick, rough stonewall containing the fireplace, one would get a first fantastic view over the hitherto unseen garden via a huge gridded window.

The dining room was situated on the other side of the wall with the fireplace and extended into the garden via a large loggia facing the swimming pool. Next to the dining room one would evidently find the service wing of the house, containing a pantry, kitchen and storage spaces at ground floor and servants’ quarters plus a roof terrace cum service patio on the floor above. The wing with the bedrooms and bathrooms was situated on a higher terrace at the back of the house and overlooked the lava formations in the depth of the lot, except from the master bedroom, which had a window to the side.

The house next door, the ‘Casa Grande’ at 140, was more spectacular because on this lot the ‘flow’ of the lava formations made a sharp curve towards the street, which meant that the layout of the house had to confront some rock-hard circumstances in its discussion between architecture and nature. (The lava at ‘Casa Chica’ ran further back and parallel to the street, and was thus less important for the layout of the design) This Demonstration House was first bought by Julio Davis and then in 1951 by the painter Roberto Berdecio and his wife Marian (they lived in it till 1970). Max Cetto wrote about it in his book ‘Moderne Architektur in Mexico’:

179 The Painter Roberto Berdecio was born October 20, 1910 in Sucre, Bolivia. Berdecio's father was a diplomat and author. Berdecio completed primary school in Argentina. On completing high school, he worked for four years in an insurance company, after which he began to paint. Since 1930, he has devoted himself exclusively to painting; he is self-taught. Upon his return to Bolivia, he traveled throughout the country, as far as Matto Grosso, Brazil, painting and studying the country and its people. Returning from this journey in 1932, he held his first exhibition of painting in La Paz. In 1934 he came to Mexico City and joined L.E.A.R., the Liga de Escritores y Artistas Revolucionarios. In 1936, went to New York, along with Luis Arenal, as one of Mexico's delegates to the First Pan-American Congress of Artists against War and Fascism. He remained in New York and organized the Experimental Workshop of Modern Techniques in Art, with David Alfaro Siqueiros, Luis Arenal and Antonio Pujol. In 1938 he painted two murals in the Workers' Library, New York City. 1939 solo exhibition in Delphic Studios, New York City. In 1940 he received a Guggenheim Fellowship awarded for new uses of perspective and new concepts of space in painting. He had a solo exhibition in Raymond Galleries, Los Angeles, and made a Mural painting in the Spanish Center, Fresno, California. In 1941 he had a solo exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art, San Francisco and returned to Mexico where he made portable mural paintings for meetings. In 1944 he traveled to Peru and Bolivia and was a delegate to the Congress of Latin-American Confederation of Labor, in Cali, Columbia. In 1945 he taught a course in painting at Sarah Lawrence College, New York and returned to Mexico in 1946. Since 1947 Berdecio has collaborated with T.G.P., the Taller de Gráfica Popular (that was founded in 1938 after the L.E.A.R. went to pieces) and has been a member since early in 1948. From 1949 onward the T.G.P. also published a bi-lingual magazine, editor of which was the architect and city-planner Hannes Meyer, who between 1947-49 was the (unpaid) technical director of La Estampa Mexicana, together with his wife Lena Meyer Bergner he also designed the layout and typography. Roberto Berdecio also was a founding member of the ‘Sociedad para el Impulso de las Artes Plasticas,’ Mexico. See http://www.graphicwitness.org/group/tgp.htm and Hannes Meyer, ‘Bauen und Gesellschaft. Schriften, Briefe, Projekte’, Fundus Bücher 64/65,VEB Verlag der Kunst, Dresden, 1980, pp. 361-369.

'This residence was built by the land corporation for publicity and sales purposes. Unfortunately, even before an occupant was found, the leitmotif of the house was timidly given up. The bank of lava which surrounds the swimming pool on the west and south and then goes through the house was originally intended not only to support the bedrooms on the top floor, but also to run as an exposed rock wall under the gallery of the living room, terminating at the other side of the house, near the entrance, in a natural curve. After the rock formation in the living room was chiseled out, the whole idea lost its organic continuity. On the first (ground) floor of the house there is only a very large and high living room and a dining room and kitchen; on the top floor there are bedrooms, a library, and servants’ quarters. The bricks are roughly plastered and originally were painted light pink and chocolate brown.\textsuperscript{181}

Although the layouts of both houses were similar, the scenography of this one was different. It addressed the street in a different way since it was not placed perpendicular to the property wall lining the street, but rather parallel to the wall bordering the property next to it. This prompted a solution for addressing the street that was more spacious. Here, before entering the cover of the portico, one had to pass a small transition zone that attracted the view towards a reflection pool behind a trelliswork. Past the long row of wooden doors for people and cars (seen from the inside, and also closing off the little porter’s cabin) one would enter into a deep open patio that, because of its continuous pavement with square lava tiles, seemed to continue beyond the carports formed by the service wing that bridged it in the middle.

To the right a low trelliswork with a thick floating beam above it framed the reflection pool seen from outside. The eye would first follow the water overflowing via a narrow channel into a kind of sunken step well, and then catch a view of the garden with the rocks. Directed by a heavy beam, part of a long guiding wall that already started in the entrance portico, one would reach a canopy and a plinth-like path (one step up from the surrounding pavement) leading the visitor under the perpendicular-bridging servants’ wing in the directions of a rock formation.

The combination of seeing that this slightly raised pathway came to a stop against this brightly lit rock formation, plus its embracing form echoed by the guiding wall breaking off to the right at a ninety-degree angle to the right would convince every visitor that he had reached the entrance. Penetrating then via the door and a small vestibule (giving access to pantry and toilet) deeper into the entrance hall one would experience the area opening to the left into a higher space. Initially, from here the eye would have followed the rock formation (that Cetto talked about), but since that was chiseled out, the eye would now probably follow the dynamic movement of the grand staircase (that

received light from above), which continued in the rhythm of the railing of a mezzanine cum gallery spanning the full depth of a double-height living room.

Once in the huge living room the view was directed (by the perspectival lines and surfaces of the of the gallery, the floor, the enclosing walls and the ceiling) through a window spanning the full width and height of the room, towards the rock formation that embraced the swimming pool on two sides. The frame and mullions of this enormous window (containing a door) were painted bright red, so in combination with the purple-black lava, the green grass and the blue of the water, it must have been quite a view for a visitor.

The right side of the living room was formed by a thick wall containing the fireplace, with the dining room behind it and its covered terrace facing the garden and the patio again. The studio and the bedrooms were upstairs and (as with the previous house) all but the master bedroom faced the depth of the plot, which featured a kind of cockpit like bay window to the southwest overlooking the garden.

In 1949-50, the period that Max Cetto was dealing with these two demonstration houses commissioned (and supervised) by Barragán, Barragán himself was also dealing with ‘demonstration’ projects: the Pedregal’s representative entrance, the Plaza de las Fuentes and a House for the ‘representative client’, the house for the young, prominent and successful lawyer Lic. Eduardo Prieto López, a little further up the Avenida de las Fuentes, at number 180.

Although the Prieto López house had many things in common with the Demonstration Houses designed by Cetto, its ‘look and feel’ was different. Cetto’s Demonstration Houses still had the kind of crisp and refined look of large ‘International Style’ houses, whereas Barragán’s Prieto López house is not only more rustic in its appearance (the exposed wooden beams of the ceiling, the massive wood doors, the rough-plastered wall surfaces and the heavy wooden furnishings) it also conveyed another feel of scale. The main living spaces of the Prieto López House were roughly 1.5 times the size of those of the Demonstration Houses, which (as one can imagine) had an effect on the proportions of everything that had to make these spaces habitable, from the proportions of the furniture to the sizes of doors and stairs.

Esther McCoy, after speaking with Barragán in 1951, reported that Prieto López had asked the architect for a dwelling comparable to his own in Tacubaya. By the end of August 1948, Barragán had moved into his new house at Calle General Francisco Ramírez 14 (next to his former house on Calle General Francisco Ramírez 20-22, which he had sold to the silversmith Alfredo Ortega), so in his conversation with Esther McCoy he was probably referring to his new house and to the fact that he used the design and

---

construction of the Prieto López House as a second case study dealing with his idea of time, place and circumstances within ‘contemporary’ Mexican architecture. Since speaking about his own house in Tacubaya he said: ‘I constructed my house to satisfy my personal taste, which is the solution of two problems: first to create a modern ambient, one that is placed in and is part of Mexico, and is basically influenced by the architecture of the ranches, villages and convents of my country; and second to utilize primary and rustic materials required for modern comfort.’

Approaching the Prieto López house coming up Avenida de las Fuentes meant approaching a rough wall constructed of lava rubble lining the road (this in contrast with the more refined plastered entrance walls of the Demonstration Houses). At first it would seem that the wall would start to recede to grant space to some vegetation, but then one would notice that the recession of the wall (just before it would run into a higher volume constructed of the same material containing the kitchen and service wing of the house) gave way to a covered entrance portico slightly protruding from it.

By way of the large wooden doors of the low entrance gate, one entered an austere empty patio, defined by high plaster walls in the front and to the right. In so doing one entered a much more rustic space, a space lacking the elements that gave the entrance patios of the Demonstration Houses their more refined feeling of scale, that is those elements such as the steps, the canopies, the pools and the views that also modulated the entry sequence of the Demonstration Houses in a much more subtle fashion.

Turning to the right in the entrance patio just after its completion one would have seen a huge façade with a relatively small double entrance door, made of horizontal wooden boards and set flush with the surface of the façade, plus a large vertical strip window to the very right. This door would open inward, immediately putting a visitor within a large entrance hall, so in the beginning there was almost no spatial modulation of the entry sequence from outside to inside. Barragán later added a low horizontal block (containing next to the main entrance, a wardrobe, toilet and service entrance) placed in front of the initial entry façade. It served as a kind of entrance pavilion with a low recessed double door that gave way to a low vestibule before one gained entry into the 6-meter high hall (thus modulating the entry sequence to become more dramatic in terms of scale).

This huge, and with its exposed wooden beams, rustic hall, measuring 14.5 by almost 4.5-meters, contained three stairways: to the right a 2.5-meter wide flight of steps (that received light via the large vertical window of the entrance

---

183 ‘I want to avoid the word ‘modern’, and I therefore don’t talk about ‘modern’ architecture but ‘contemporary’ architecture, in the sense that it belongs to our time’. See Damián Bayón, Luis Barragán, ‘Luis Barragán y el regreso a las Fuentes’, Plural, September 1975, pp. 46.

façade) leading to a massive wooden door that gave access to the dining room, and to the left a double flight of steps spanning the whole width of the hall, on one side a relatively dark staircase going down and on the other side a staircase enclosed by parapet walls leading up towards the living area. The huge wall in front (and the direction of the exposed wooden beams of the ceiling that continued inwardly) would give a visitor stepping into the hall the first indication of how to continue his entry sequence without, however, revealing too much of what lay ahead yet.

To the right this frontal wall was closed off (except for the massive door blocking the steps) while to the left it looked as though a piece of the wall had been cut out (as with a giant knife), leaving just a beam and a parapet to frame the (as yet, still unseen) living areas behind. Guided first by the wooden sculpture of an angel carved by Mathias Goeritz and the horizontal lines of the wood covering the top of the parapets, a visitor ascending the stairs would soon turn his view to the right towards the living areas and from there to the large window at the back of the living room.

This large window framed a lawn enclosed by trees (situated on the same level as the living room) and in the rear by the gentle contours of the mountains towering over them, thus drawing the gaze from elements in the foreground slightly upwards and then into a deep perspective of objects in the far distance. However, upon going further into the living room a picture frame window situated to the left would start to attract the visitor’s eye. But this window would pull the gaze down towards the reflecting surface of a swimming pool situated almost 4.5-meters below and from there via the rock formations of the garden towards the distant horizon. In terms of a ‘kine-aesthetic’ experience that a visitor to the house would go through, Barragán played on the element of surprise by using a sharp drop in the lava formation to give the living room wing (by means of its placement on the edge) two distinct characters: a more ‘safe’ (and ‘grounded’) one towards the depth of the lawn and then the landscape in the distance and a more ‘dangerous’ one perpendicular to that.

The glass in the window facing east towards the pool was flush with the outside of the façade and it ran all the way down to the floor without any railing, being lower then the other windows but still 2.75-meters high and more then 4-meters wide. On the opposite side of the living room this ‘dangerous hole’ was echoed by the ‘stability’ of a massive block containing the fireplace as the centre of the homestead. Behind this massive volume (that acted like the vertical trunk of the house, carrying the beams of the roof and rooting it in the rocks below) one found the dining room, which was connected via the three panels of a large massive wooden door to a separate breakfast room next to the pantry and the kitchen in the service wing.

Retracing one’s steps back to the landing of the staircase one would notice a door that opened into to a relatively wide corridor (2.85-meters in width and 3.35-meters in height) leading to the two-storey bedroom wing, which faced south towards the pool. Framed by the opening of the door one would see that
a carefully placed roof light at the end of this relatively dark corridor gave the back wall (and everything displayed in front of it) a more dramatic effect, thus attracting the observer’s attention and directing the view away from a small door at the end of the corridor leading (via a narrow gallery) to the servant’s quarters. These servant’s quarters were placed on top of a double garage in the northeast corner of the entrance patio and separated from the bedroom wing by a service patio.

The staircase from the entrance hall down led to a perpendicular corridor (3.4-meters in height), which was fenced off towards the left by a 2-meter high pivoting screen made of wood (leading to the lower floor of the bedroom wing); to the right the corridor would end in a garden room or studio overlooking the terrace and the pool via a large metal window of which the two middle parts could be opened by sliding them to either side.

Stepping out onto the terrace, and after looking back from the garden, one would be confronted with the dramatic visual dialogue between the clear rectangular volumes of the house and the rough lava formations protruding from under the base-like platform of the terrace, touching a corner of the swimming pool before penetrating the plastered walls on ground-level. In other words one would be looking at the scenography of building and site, of the regular and rational versus the irregular of nature, as it were, emphasizing the dramatic relationship between the manmade homestead and its natural setting and how this drama would lend character to men’s inhabiting the Pedregal (‘the ideal place for living’).

Besides two ‘unknown’ houses Barragán was also involved in the design of the Plaza del Cigaro, initially called the Plaza de la Torre, before he broke with the development company of the Jardines del Pedregal in 1952 or 1953. This was a slightly slanting rectangular plaza of 21 by 61 meters at the southwest corner of Avenida del Cráter and Calle Agua and spatially defined by the two streets, respectively, to the southeast and northeast, and an angle formed by a long wall to the northwest and a shorter wall to the southwest. Towards the southeast he projected the cylindrical water tower that gave the plaza its name. This concrete tower would, according to the design made by José Creixell (dated June 1950), have a diameter of 5.3 and a height of 28-meters. The design of Creixell showed a simple cylindrical volume crowned by five rings of square pigeonholes at the top. One would be able to enter via a door-opening and a staircase spiraling up along the inside of the cylinders wall would lead the visitor to a platform 2 meters under the tank. The underside of the concrete water tank looked like the underside of a globe fitting perfectly within the width of the tower. This half globe was pierced in its center by a cylinder 70

\[185\] Later the size of the pool was reduced since water kept leaking away via the porous rocks.

centimeters wide running up through the water tank. By means of a metal ladder one could climb up through this cylinder towards a viewing platform on top of the water tower.

In terms of scenography and spatial composition the verticality of the cylinder and its placement was a kind of counterbalance to the horizontality of the perspective that would draw the gaze of the observer towards the horizon. In the actual design of the plaza in 1956 Barragán started to experiment with the idea of an enforced perspective. The top of the two walls defining the southwest corner of the plaza would be kept horizontal, which in combination with the gradual rising of the surface towards this corner, resulted in a kind of enforced perspective focusing on the point where the two walls met.

In a letter accompanied by six drawings and a memorandum, addressed to J. Rafael de Regil and Manuel de la Mora of the Jardines del Pedregal de San Angel S. A. (dated 5 April 1956), Barragán described two design proposals for the plaza. One showed a paving pattern in which the lines of the joints form an orthogonal grid parallel to the direction of the two walls; however, the spacing between the lines would become gradually narrower as they drew closer to the walls, which resulted in a kind of enforced perspective. The second proposal would even go further in intensifying this effect by means of a paving pattern in which the lines of the joints (like in the construction of a perspective within a perspective) would project towards two vanishing-points situated behind the walls. This would give the whole spatial composition a very strong verticality by means of the tower, which would be dynamically balanced by a strong horizontal vector pointing towards the vanishing-point in depth.

However, the design of the tower by Creixell and the plaza as Barragán envisioned it, with its checkerboard pavement of orange and natural cement-colored ‘squares’ separated by 6-centimeter wide cement joints filled with little pieces of lava stone, wasn’t executed according to those specifications. As a design it nevertheless showed that Barragán was more interested in the scenography of a space then in the rationality of its planned production. A ‘planning’ architect probably wouldn’t see the possibilities offered by the pattern of joints to manipulate the image and the feel of a space, but would instead think about the fact that it would be easiest to pave the plaza with equally sized concrete squares.

Barragán’s use of an enforced perspective to achieve a certain spatial effect, (which in turn had to influence the beholder’s experience of the plaza) not only identified him as a ‘directing’ architect, it also showed the influence of Barragán’s conversations with the artist friends. In this case the influence came from Mathias Goeritz since Goeritz had used the same means before in his ‘Experimental Museum’, El Eco of 1953. In his ‘Manifest for an Emotional Architecture’ Goeritz wrote:

‘The land where El Eco stands is small. It was given an impression of greater depth by means of walls 20 to 36 feet in height and by a long corridor narrowing at the end (the floor was also lifted and the ceiling lowered); the
corridor floor's wooden boards follow the same tendency, narrowing more and more, and ending almost at a point.”

Goeritz, whose early work had been rooted in the tradition of German Expressionism, was well aware of the possibilities for manipulating men’s perception of space offered by the use of oblique lines and surfaces, whereas Barragán normally would have a predilection for orthogonal lines and forms. Goeritz’s El Eco was an ‘Experimental Museum’ that not only involved its visitors in the ‘kine-aesthetic’ experience of an expressionistic space, it also was a kind of laboratory in which certain aspects of these ‘kine-aesthetic’ experiences were tested by Goeritz on a one-to-one scale, just as Barragán had started to do within his own house and his gardens.

Barragán’s initial approach to improve the ‘quality’ of his work was a form of learning by doing the same plan typology over and over again while varying the scenography of a building’s look and feel, thus modulating its experiential sequence. In his mature work he also relied on a form of learning by doing, but this time (as with Goeritz) it was actual experimentation and reflection with the help of his artist friends like, ‘Chucho’ Reyes, Mathias Goeritz or Armando Salas Portugal.

In his mature work it probably became ever more clear to Barragán that architectural ‘quality’ in his case meant the subtle choreography of movements and the refined modulation of the sequences and the atmospheres (physical and spiritual) that he generated within his ‘architecture’. Alternatively, as I said before, the intensity of the (often subconscious) ‘kine-aesthetic’ experience that Barragán would involve its users and visitors in with all their faculties of perception and imagination, evoked emotions that in turn might spark an intuition of beauty.

As I described it earlier, starting with the design of the gardens on Calzada Madereros and including his own first house on Calle General Francisco Ramírez 20-22, Barragán’s ‘architecture’ became introverted, and it seems that the extraverted architectural form of the building with its stylistic make-up was not so important for him anymore (as it had been before), but only the atmospheric modulation of its ‘inside’ spaces, which included the outdoor spaces of the patio’s and the gardens. We even saw that Barragán somehow ‘disguised’ the outside architectural form of his first home, using techniques of camouflage to let it ‘disappear’ within (blend into) its surroundings.

While working on the Pedregal project, Barragán in January 1948 also made a design for a house on Calle General Francisco Ramírez 14, next door to his first home, the house that became his private laboratory in which to experiment with all kinds of changes and so to study their influence on our—the viewers’—‘kine-aesthetic’ experience. The first design (dated 31 January

---

1948\textsuperscript{188} indicates that the house was initially designed for a Señora Luz Escandón de R. Valenzuela, but by the end of August 1948 this house had become Barragán’s new home.

The initial design in terms of typology showed an enlarged version of the speculation houses he had designed in both Guadalajara and Mexico City from the mid thirties onward, only now the house would have a double garage, a large double height living room cum library with a mezzanine, and a large roof terrace. The initial design, however, omitted the garden, and like the speculation houses its living room only overlooked an approximately 3.5-meter deep enclosed patio in the back.

The reason why Barragán moved from his former home to this one is not clear, but from the moment he decided to do so he also changed the initial design. He extended the projected house with a studio, thus becoming the new house and studio of Luis Barragán located at Calle General Francisco Ramírez 14-12, and he extended his new home in the back with a garden enclosed on two sides by the walls of his former gardens. He had by then sold his former home to the silversmith Alfredo Ortega, but he kept the right of access to the gardens of his former home via a rustic wooden door located between the buttresses of the massive wall that divided his new garden from the old one.

From the outside Barragán’s new home again somehow blended with its surroundings. At first sight there was nothing special that would indicate that this was the home of a by now ‘famous’ architect. Approaching the house from the south and looking upward one might have noticed a kind of sculptural interplay of volumes between a vertical ‘tower’-like volume with some square pigeonholes (containing the water reservoir plus the servant’s stair), the higher volume of the servant’s quarters set back from the street and the lower volumes of the mezzanine and its roof-terrace defined by the contour of the street façade. Another unusual element one might have noticed would have been a large square window protruding from the façade more then 3-meters up from the street. One would find this type of window in buildings like chapels of convents, but not in normal houses.

One entered the house via a plain metal door that mimicked the metal doors and transom windows of the double garage. Thus, entering a relatively wide but quite dark corridor, one would be drawn towards the light visible through the hole of the door placed asymmetrically at the end of a flight of steps leading to the central stairwell cum atrium-like hall of the house. Stepping into this atrium-like hall (looking to the left and up) one would notice that the light penetrating the depth of the house actually came from a large window and a door placed higher up in the wall that guided a railing-less staircase to an in-between landing before continuing further up to the first floor.

Upon entering the hall one would find a set of doors. In front a door opening into the dinning room with to its left the door that led via a little vestibule to the antechamber and the kitchen. Turning to the right after stepping into the hall and passing the wardrobe located to the right one would be confronted with a relatively wide but low passageway before entering the double height living room cum library. A low wall blocking the view ahead would lead the eye towards an enormous gridded window of 4.5 by 4.5-metres, placed in the far left corner of the space that one had just entered.

After a first glimpse of the garden in the back of the house, the eye would probably go up to the exposed waxed wooden beams running parallel with the length of the space. Two large concrete beams divided the space into three zones: the living area with its fireplace overlooking the garden via the enormous gridded window and a shaded terrace in front, the middle zone partly enclosed by a low wall, which was a more intimate place to sit and write, and the area with the high gridded window protruding towards the street that contained the library. The ceiling of this area would continue parallel to the street over the mezzanine, thus giving the total double height space the form of an inverted L.

By taking a railing-less staircase made of massive boards acting as risers and treads that cantilevered from the guiding wall one would reach the mezzanine level located behind a man high wall and a wooden door at the end of the stairs.

This mezzanine level that initially acted as a studio to receive people, could also be reached via the first landing at the end of the staircase in the hall. In the speculation houses a door located here would immediately give access to the studio. However, in the case of Barragán’s new home a visitor would first enter a roof-terrace before (on the left) coming to a glazed screen and a door located under a canopy leading to the studio located on the mezzanine level of his library.

Following the stairs in the hall further up to the next landing giving access to the sleeping quarters to the left, would bring one to another hall. From here an L-shaped staircase located at the other end of the hall led to a roof-terrace placed over the double height space below. This roof-terrace was one of the places that Barragán together with his artist-friends used to experiment and reflect.

Initially this roof-terrace had relatively low parapet walls and an open wood railing towards the garden in the back, as shown in the oldest photographs of the house. Later photographs then show how a closed wooden railing was tried out, or how the effects generated by different heights of walls were tested, and further images also showed a large wood cross mounted against an inside wall of the roof-terrace. In other pictures this appeared as though it were plastered over.
The form this roof-terrace took at the end, with its high walls forming a ‘chambre à ciel ouvert’, reminiscent of Charles de Beistegui’s roof-terrace, had far-reaching structural implications since these high and heavy walls couldn’t be constructed on top of the sort of wooden awning cantilevering out over the terrace in front of the large gridded window that overlooked the garden. To achieve this extra walls needed to be built to support the weight of these massive walls, which probably also meant that this was the moment that the large gridded window was replaced by a large window divided only in four quadrants by mullions forming a large cross.

Photographs of different periods also showed that the color scheme of this roof-terrace changed regularly. In addition, also the roof-terrace leading to the Barragán’s private studio on the mezzanine was roofed over and turned into an extra room.

Barragán’s professional studio (next door of the house) also changed during the years. In the oldest photographs one could still see that it initially had a large glass window overlooking the patio in the back, but this large glass surface was replaced by a massive wall, probably in the period he was dealing with the restructuring of the roof-terrace and the garden window of his house.

Another interesting aspect of his own and also all his other houses, is the way in which the servant’s quarters interact, or better to say don’t interact with the main spaces of the house. In Barragán’s own house the servant’s quarters are located on the third floor and these can only be reached by a spiral staircase located between the garage and the kitchen, in the tower-like volume that also contained the water tank.

Within the evolution of the design for his own ‘new’ house he manipulated the lay-out of the servant’s quarters in such a way that in the end these became completely introverted (initially these still overlooked the garden), which was possible through the use of two enclosed service terraces on the roof that also acted as light wells for the servant’s rooms.

As I said before, his home also was his private laboratory for experimenting around with all kinds of changes, thereby to studying their influence on one’s ‘kine-aesthetic’ experience. This means that retracing the evolution of the house would be an impossible task because Barragán was more a ‘directing’ architect who tested and changed things on sight and on site than he was a ‘planning’ architect who in terms of space and time was disconnected from ‘reality’ and thus restricted to communicating a projected ‘reality’ via drawings. In that sense Barragán’s subtle choreography of movements and his refined modulation of the sequences and the atmospheres (physical and spiritual) generated within the ‘architecture’ of his home, represented a long process of trial and error, or rather of testing and reflecting. This process can only be retraced in a fragmentary manner, using Barragán’s initial intentions recorded in the drawings of the design and the evidentiary material of old photographs.
recording certain moments in the progression to the relatively stable state that the house achieved in the mid-fifties.

Beyond the kind of major changes I described before Barragán made many small changes or tried new ideas that were probably even more important, since they dealt with the actual fine-tuning of the spatial sequences and atmospheres. There were in fact too many for me to be able to point all of them out, but a few should be mentioned, such as the parapet walls in the central hall.

The initial design drawing showed a staircase without a handrail and just a low parapet wall on the second landing. Also, the L-shaped staircase on the other side didn’t yet have the wall that would later hide it; it even looked as though the hall was initially conceived as an atrium open on the top.

A later design drawing showed the planning of a handrail on the second part of the staircase and a higher parapet wall to fence off the hall, the L-shaped staircase however would still be in full view at the back of the hall. Later, this handrail on the second part of the stairs became a wall that acted as the perpendicular continuation of the high parapet wall that fenced off the hall. It was probably the introduction of this wall (and the closing of the access towards the roof-patio) that prompted the positioning of a ‘Mensaje’, a canvas covered in gold-leaf by Mathias Goeritz, in the corner of the walls guiding the staircase, thus making it an integral part of the architecture.

Another set of small changes dealt with the man-high partition ‘walls’ screening off the middle part of the double-height space. In the initial design drawing there was no trace of anything spatially defining and modulating this middle zone. In the later design drawings one saw the appearance of some half-height walls. However, in the old photographs one could see that the low ‘wall’ leading towards the cantilevering staircase in the library was at a certain time a wooden bookcase, and that also a wooden gate and a wooden screen where added at a certain moment to block the direct view from the living area to the library.

For a visitor the ‘kine-aesthetic’ experience of Barragán’s home was a kind of cinematic experience leading fluidly from one carefully designed scene, or spatial fragment to another. These scenes would not have a fixed sequence, as in a movie, but rather they were like spatial fragments that could be combined,


191 Mathias Goeritz between 1957 and 1960 made a series of these Mensajes, canvasses covered with gold and silver-leaf, which he dedicated to Barragán to express his affection for him. In 1960 Barragán also became the godfather of Goeritz’s son Luis.
like in a carefully designed park or garden, in a multitude of combinations, thus producing a variety of sequences going back and forth. This also implies an enormous amount of scenographic fine-tuning that could not be ‘planned’, but only achieved by a ‘directing’ architect (an embodied eye) on ‘sight’ and on site.

One of the many (although probably one of the most poetic) eyewitness accounts of one of these scenes, or spatial fragments, is from Louis Kahn: ‘In his house, a great window looks out to a garden which has the feeling of a fragment of natural landscape captured out of context by a high wall which itself is completely covered with green. Only a narrow laid with recinto, a rhinoceros hide looking stone adjoining this window is paved. No paths, no flowers, just wild wind-blown grass. In the clearing is a very large bowl carved out of the same dark hard stone filled to overflowing with water. A source tipped with a rotted splinter of wood breaks the flow of water and each drop as it falls looked like a silver tear making spreading rings of silver falling over the sides of the great bowl wetting all around the stones under it. The black stone is the alchemist. Out of the Odyssey in nature of the stream from the tiniest mountain sources, thru the varied grooves of its path in light the shade he selected the darkest place of its dance on the rocks to sense silver of water in a dark bowl and brought it home to contribute to the sense of silence which as even in the song prevails in all of his house.’

It must have been in late April 1966 that the American architect Louis Kahn visited Barragán in his house in Mexico City to ask his advice on the drawings and specifications made according to Barragán’s proposal for the plaza between the two central buildings of the Salk Institute in La Jolla, California, which was designed and constructed by Kahn between 1959 and 1965.

Kahn had contacted Barragán by phone in January 1965 to ask him for advice about the central plaza of the Salk Institute. Barragán visited the site in February 1966 and, as Kahn recalled: ‘I asked Barragán to come to La Jolla and help me in the choice of the planting for the garden of the Studies of the Salk Laboratory. When he entered the space he went to the concrete walls and touched them and expressed his love for them, and then he said as he looked across the space and towards the sea. ‘I would not put a tree or a blade of grass in this space. This should be a plaza of stone, not a garden.’ I looked at Dr. Salk and he at me and we both felt that this was deeply right. Feeling our approval he joyously added ‘if you make this Plaza, you will gain a façade – a façade to the sky’.

But let’s not jump ahead in chronology: Barragán designed and built his own ‘new’ home in 1947-48, in other words before the designs by (and for) him in

---

192 Louis I. Kahn, ‘Silence’, in VIA, Ecology in Design, the Student Publication of the Graduate School of Fine Arts, University of Pennsylvania, no. 1, 1968, pp.89

193 Ibid.
El Pedregal, but he kept on changing it during the years, before its structural evolution started to stabilize somewhere in the mid-fifties. It must have been somewhere in 1952 that Barragán went to North Africa to visit Morocco and the southern Sahara together with Mathias Goeritz. In 1952 Barragán also traveled to Europe to participate in the International Congress of Landscape Architects in Stockholm in June and he probably stayed in Europe till the end of November 1952.\(^{194}\)

Besides dissociating himself from the company in charge of the development of El Pedregal, the Jardines del Pedregal, S.A., around 1952-53, Barragán also made a design for the house of an old friend in Guadalajara, José Arriola Adama at the Avenida de las Rosas 543, in the Chapalita district of his home town, constructed, however, without his direct involvement on site. In early 1953 Barragán, by now a ‘famous’ architect, was asked by the Mayor of Mexico City, Ernesto P. Uruchurtu, to develop an idea for the redesign of El Zócalo, as the Plaza de la Constitución, Mexico City’s central square was called. I will not describe it here, nor will I describe his Parque Azteca Project of 1954, dealing with the redevelopment of the eastern end of the Chapultepec Park in the heart of Mexico City, since ultimately neither of these prestigious projects was realized.

Barragán’s next major work was the renovation of the convent plus the design and construction of a Chapel for the Capuchinas Sacramentarias del Purísimo Corazón de María, on Calle Hidalgo 43, Colonia Tlalpan, in the south of Mexico City. The whole project was composed of three stages: the restructuring of the preexisting buildings starting around 1953-54; the construction of the chapel at the end of the nineteen fifties (the chapel was finished in 1960); and in the late seventies the renovation and extension of the wing that contained the cells of the nuns, which concluded the project. Barragán not only donated his own work but he also financed the whole project (probably with some of the money he must have received when he dissociated himself from the Jardines del Pedregal, S.A.) as a gift to the order of Franciscan nuns, whose patron saint he admired for his cultivation of beauty and nature.

The preexisting convent occupied a deep lot situated near the Tlalpan’s main square in a densely built-up area. It consisted of two patio-gardens and an orchard contained between two longitudinal wings to the east and the west side of the north facing lot. The building facing the street towards the north (containing parlors) received a remodeled entrance and passageway, which would lead visitors towards an entrance patio enclosed by high white walls. Passing the first massive wooden gate that faced the street would normally entail entering into a relatively dark under-passage via a small door integrated within the main entrance gate. This passageway, which was lit by a transom window above a set of four massive wooden doors at its end, gave access to a

\(^{194}\) In his Memo Torres Satélite he mentioned seeing the towers of San Gimigniano in Italy in 1951, which might actually be 1952.
kind of portico before culminating in the bright white entrance patio, which featured a huge cross protruding from its terminal inner façade.

Upon closer inspection, the aforementioned portico could also be interpreted as being part of a cloister (the sort of continuous covered outside walkway built against buildings surrounding a central courtyard) since it not only gives access to the patio paved with black basalt, but also it led via a flight of stairs on the left to a kind of covered catwalk towards the entrance vestibule of the chapel. A perpendicular flight of stairs to the right led through a corridor fenced off from the patio by a diaphanous concrete latticework painted in bright yellow and towards two parlors, the sacristy and the transept of the faithful.

Stepping onto the patio one would notice not only a broad flight of steps straight ahead, leading up to a platform located at the foot of the white wall with the protruding cross, but a water basin located immediately to the right as well. This water basin was in terms of position and height a bit like a profane version of a holy-water font located at the entrance and at hand-height. Square in form and painted black, it acted as a reflection pool whose water would either overflow its rim, thus forming a perfect horizontal mirror (often covered with flowers floating in it), or it be diverted via a spout into a small drain-basin.

Guided by the canopy and a kind of wainscoting of horizontal boards along the lower part of the longitudinal wall of the cloister, or, if one choose to go the more obvious route via the patio, directed by a planter (acting as a retaining wall for the heightened walkway under the canopy) and then up the flight of broad steps straight ahead, one would come to a heavy, double-leaved wooden door that gave access to the relatively low and dark wood-lined entrance vestibule of the chapel. To the right, a massive pivoting door set in a low wooden portal would open into the space of the chapel, a kind of magic space bathed in silence and half-light, a space lit by invisible light sources which lent its orange to yellow space an almost tangible consistency. The eye of the visitor entering the nave on the right side would initially be attracted by the altar area and more in particular by a large triptych covered in gold leaf reflecting light. Its largest central square (3.5-meters wide) formed the background for a monstrance placed on a base in the center of the altar\textsuperscript{195}, and the two smaller panels of the triptych would be folded slightly forward as to embrace the altar. The off-center way of entering the nave gave the space a kind of dynamic twist to the left, which was further enhanced by the two orange-colored walls forming the left hand corner of the chapel. These 9-meter high orange walls formed the continuous background of the triptych straight ahead and a more then 4.5 meter high freestanding cross painted orange situated in a sort of niche perpendicular to the left, a lateral space or transept that received its light from the side. Because all the other walls like the ceiling of the central nave were painted white, this angle of orange walls that

\textsuperscript{195} Later this monstrance was placed between two shelf-like gilded lids protruding from the central panel of the triptych, thus framing the monstrance against the same orange background as the whole triptych.
stretched further than the width of the nave, transformed a visitor’s perception of the space in a kind of dynamic spiral focusing upon the altar and the monstrance.

The far right hand corner of the chapel showed a wooden trelliswork flush with the right wall of the central nave and painted white like the nave itself. It separated the transept of the faithful from the principal nave of the chapel. Penetrating further into the chapel and turning around would reveal the hidden light sources. The gold-leaf panels of the triptych reflected the yellow light entering the chapel through a stained glass-in-concrete window placed high up at the back of the choir loft. The loft was also separated from the principal nave by a white grill spanning the full width of the chapel. The freestanding cross received its lateral light via another amber colored glass-in-concrete window facing east. This relatively narrow vertical strip placed deep in a wedge-shaped space (containing a small integrated ‘secret-door’ leading to the cloistered area) let the morning sun reflect off the oblique white wall and cast its light from the side onto the walls embracing the altar and the cross.

The entrance vestibule of the chapel, which was like an enclosed wooden box placed within a larger box, would also show a door to the left, leading to a large hall containing the staircase up to the choir loft, plus the work rooms and service areas of the convent.

Passing this hall, which was already part of the cloistered area, one would step outside and come to a slightly raised passageway that led to the kitchen, the refectory and the cells of the convent. The refectory was a long space, lit from the west by windows overlooking the garden, and furnished with long pinewood tables and benches placed on slightly raised platforms lining the walls, thus surrounding a small wooden platform placed slightly off centre, with a lectern and a brightly pink painted cross, squeezed between the platform and the ceiling like a strut.

A normal worshiper would follow Mass taking place in the chapel from the transept of the faithful. To do so, he would have to go from the portico up a flight of steps made of black basalt lava and follow the corridor fenced off from the entrance patio by a large yellow grill. Then passing through a pivoting gate, which was placed under a massive wooden lintel, he would come to a narrower corridor with large wood floorboards. At the end of this corridor a massive wooden wall-bench would guide the faithful to the left, towards a double door that gave access to the back of a small lateral chapel separated from the main chapel by a grill spanning the whole width of the space.

In front of this grill a slightly raised platform receiving light straight from above would form a kind of threshold space that gave the priest performing Mass the possibility to reach the sacristy (to the left) via a kind of sluice formed by a wooden screen towards the faithful and an ‘invisible’ gate in the trelliswork towards the nuns in the chapel. Watching Mass being performed on the altar from the side, the frontal view of the worshiper was the laterally-lit, orange
cross against the orange background of the opposite ‘transept’, seen via the bright white trelliswork lit from above. This faint orange cross, seen through the white bars of a trelliswork and only visible because of an invisible light source from the side projecting its shadow on the wall behind the altar, found its echo in a wooden cross missing the head, in effect a wooden T against the side wall of the transept of the faithful. Whatever its symbolic meaning might have been it does show clearly that Barragán in its double role as architect and patron controlled every detail of the mise on scène.

While working on the renovation of the convent and the design of the Chapel for the Capuchinas Sacramentarias del Purísimo Corazón de María in 1955-57, Barragán also drew up the design for the Gardens of the Hotel Pierre Márquez in Acapulco (dated 1955-56) and he designed and constructed a House for Antonio Gálvez as well.

In 1955 Barragán was commissioned to build a house for the Gálvez family at Calle Pimentel 10, Colonia Chimalistac, San Ángel, in the south of Mexico City. On a site roughly 34 by 68 meters facing west towards one of the narrow cobbled streets of Chimalistac (originally a village outside the urban area of the Capital) he had to place a house between some majestic eucalyptus trees occupying the site. The result was probably his best house ever, since he could not rely on having time to fine-tune the initial design of the house, as he had been able to in designing and gradually constructing his own home, and he could not rely on the overwhelming size and scale as he did in the Prieto López House.

Approaching the house from the southwest one would see a set of white surfaces, walls and volumes, staggered behind each other. Then the view of the beholder following the direction of the walls would be confronted with a pink surface perpendicular to the white walls. This pink surface would continue in the ceiling of a canopy and even up its edge, while the material of the sidewalk would continue in the horizontal surfaces of the steps rising up out of the pavement and showing off their vertical surfaces painted in black. This flight of steps would lead to a portal with a massive wooden door painted white (except for a single unpainted square centered around the lock) and pivoting inwardly, thus aligning one’s view in depth with the edge of the pink canopy overhead that would guide the visitor further in.

Once inside, the view would go to the right following the light reflected from a large white lateral surface with some terracotta pulke pots in front, and, guided by the continuation of the pavement, the gaze would be directed towards the eucalyptus trees and the green in the patio. Stepping up to a slightly raised platform paved with basalt lava, one continued under the pink canopy towards a kind of portico, which to the right was slightly recessed and clad with wood. The wainscoted wall of the portico contained a long bench, which at the far end stepped up to become a table, while the vertical boards that lined the inside of this guiding wall continued perpendicularly to form the frontal wall terminating to the right, just in the front door of the house.
Entering under the canopy and then passing via the relatively dark portico through the pivoting door, every visitor would have been surprised, since one had suddenly stepped into a brightly lit entrance vestibule. The enormous amount of light one would notice came almost paradoxically from a huge window located to the right in the façade that one had just transgressed, but having just come from outside the visitor would realize that had not previously seen any window at all. This apparent paradox was caused by the white wall that had guided one’s view out towards the front patio; this wall actually covered a fountain cum reflection pool visible only from the entrance vestibule and hall via a large (4 by 3.7 meter) window subdivided by mullions forming an asymmetrical cross.

This fountain was probably one of the best examples to prove that Barragán was more a ‘directing’ architect then he was a ‘planning’ architect. The initial plans of the house didn’t show the huge wall (7.4-meters wide and 6.3-meters high) hiding the fountain and the window, thus indicating that this element was introduced during the construction process of the house, as were also many other elements.

From the low entrance vestibule the house would roughly split up into two wings. To the left was a longitudinal volume containing the service spaces, with a service patio cum driveway on the ground level, a double garage flanked by smaller service rooms, the kitchen, and, protruding towards the garden in the back, a studio cum guestroom. The lateral volume towards the right contained all of the more private spaces for the family.

The low entrance vestibule was the continuation of the portico coming from outside with its pink ceiling and basalt lava pavement. From here (via a door and a small lower zone under the staircase above) the entrance vestibule continued ahead with a similarly paved but higher white corridor that separated the service wing from the living areas, and led directly to the service quarters to the left and ahead the studio cum guest room plus the garden.

From the entrance vestibule turning to the right one would first enter a little zone, still paved with basalt lava, that was defined by the beginning of an enclosed\textsuperscript{196} staircase (made of the same black material) to the left and the first section of the large window to the right. Guided by the big window overlooking the reflection pool and a corner of the front patio, one would step onto the massive waxed floorboards of the reception-hall.

Once in this hall, an angle of closed white walls would direct the visitor to an apparently frameless wooden door recessed deep in the opposite left corner of the hall. Having passed this door-opening directed by the pivoting door, the visitor would be standing in the music room cum library of the house, a room

\textsuperscript{196} In the initial plan this zone was not paved and the staircase was an open flight of steps leading to a landing overlooking the hall.
that received its light from a long clerestory window that spanned the whole upper part of the opposite wall, until it was stopped by a massive block protruding from the back wall, thus dividing the totality of space in two zones.

Guided by a low white wall flush with the front of the massive block and running parallel to it on the opposite side, a large, massive wood surface protruding from the wall (the door, the door-frame of the reception-hall, a double door and its frame, all detailed in such a way that they were sitting on the wall, not in it, and presenting an unbroken wood surface when closed), the view of the visitor would turn left towards the light falling through a huge window overlooking the garden.

Going further one would probably notice that the ceiling of the living area was higher and that the concrete awning over the large garden window and a garden wall protruding out from the back wall of the living area carefully framed a majestic eucalyptus tree. The actual sitting area was situated behind the low wall, a large nook spiraling back towards a fireplace contained in the massive block.

That double door invisibly incorporated in the large wood surface against the longitudinal wall of the music room and living area would open up into the lower dining room. This, together with the breakfast room next to it, overlooked the garden towards the east, while the view (when entering from the living area) would be guided by the long white wall of the service wing visible through the window and directing the eye towards a bright blue vertical piece of wall in the back of the garden.

Going from the entrance vestibule upstairs one would first pass a frameless canvass laminated with gold leaf, another of Mathias Goeritz’s Mensajes, situated in the corner of the first covered landing. The stairs turning left would then open up overhead and enter into a large vestibule receiving light from a long trellised clerestory window in the wall of the stairwell. Going forward one would zigzag through a kind of wave-guide of screening walls to come to the parent’s quarter located over the service wing. These consisted of an intricate weave of rooms and passages lit by two bay windows forming a kind of recessed chapels of light.

Turning towards the right one would come to the first children’s rooms (each with its own bathroom), turning further one would confront a flush wooden ‘façade’ containing two doors, the left leading to another children’s room, the right to a flight of wooden steps ascending towards a large completely secluded roof-terrace.

At its in-between landing this staircase gave access also to another children’s room to the right, a room with a large terrace window (framed with a concrete canopy) that overlooked its own private roof terrace surrounded by high walls.
In terms of ‘kine-aesthetic’ experience this house was a set of folded ‘strips’, meaning surfaces stretched vertically and horizontally distinguishable by their color and their material (bright pink, white, saffron yellow; black basalt lava, natural waxed wood and rough plaster) that were interwoven with each other in such a way that by means of their overlaps they would constantly form continuous sequences of spaces as one followed them going through the house.

Just stop for a minute and try to picture the vertical white walls at the outside, the pavement of the sidewalk going up and in, and the pink interior of the entrance wall going over into the ceiling of the canopy. The pink of the canopy then continues horizontally while the black basalt lava and the vertical wood take over from the horizontal pavement and the pink wall.

This was a kind of ‘neoplastic’ design principle that was also evident in the breaks in the continuity, for example, the black basalt going over onto the wood floorboards was bound together by the large window overlooking the reflection pool, the door-leaf then guiding through the opening in the wall. Or consider the jump in height of the ceiling between the music room and the living area, which was bound together by the wooden band of doors overlaying the white wall.

Even the saffron yellow ceiling of the living room that continued outside in the concrete awning framing the large terrace window could be read as the element binding interior and exterior together while the floor goes from wood to basalt.

The next major work Barragán realized in Mexico City\textsuperscript{197} was the project for the \textbf{Torres Satélite}, the Satellite Towers on Federal Highway 57 to Querétaro\textsuperscript{198}, which he designed and constructed in collaboration with Mathias Goeritz in 1957-58.

In 1957 the architect and urban planner Mario Pani commissioned Barragán to create a kind of ‘symbol’ for the Ciudad Satélite, the satellite city that Pani had planned (at that time well) outside of the built-up area of Mexico City, but easily accessible by means of the Querétaro highway.

One should keep in mind that at the end of the sexenio of President Ruiz Cortines (1952-58) that followed the Alemán administration (1946-52), Mexico had gone through three consecutive administrations that pursued pro-business policies, thus departing significantly from the agrarian populism practiced by Cárdenas. Mexico’s economy had been growing with the help of government support (like the official devaluation of the Peso, which helped to encourage

\textsuperscript{197} Between 1955 and 1957 Barragán also did several projects in Guadalajara, which I will not discuss here, and a house on the beach at Majahua in the state of Colima, which is destroyed.

\textsuperscript{198} At present called Super Carretera Mexico-Querétaro.
investors from abroad) and also increases in import-substitution industrialization had generated rapid growth in urban areas.

Actually Mexico’s population more than doubled in less than thirty years, from 16 million in the mid-thirties to 34 million in 1960. The resulting population pressure as well as the concentration of services and new jobs in urban areas stimulated massive urban migration, as one can imagine, most notably in and around Mexico City. This meant that the proliferation of urban shantytowns in the capital’s outskirts became a growing problem, visible along the principal thoroughfares into the capital.

A solution to this problem was sought in the building of satellite cities with easy access to the capital, yet fostering strong identities of their own. So it was not surprising that Pani, working together with El Banco Internacional Inmobliario, S.A., asked Barragán to create a ‘symbol’ clearly identifying the first Ciudad Satélite with ‘a grand visibility and commercial attractiveness’. 199

Pani’s initial idea, however, was a monumental fountain to be situated on the traffic island cum entrance plaza that divided the highway marking the exit at the southern entrance of the Satellite City. It seems that Barragán had argued that the identifying characteristic of a city was its silhouette, its ‘sky line’ of towers, cupolas or minarets, thus implying that the ‘symbol’ should be a vertical piece. Barragán, together with Mathias Goeritz, who between 1955 and 1957 had been making sculptures dealing with the theme of towers (like ‘las siete torres’ of 1956), worked on the project by means of sketches and three-dimensional models.

Goeritz’s initial sketches showed groups of differently colored vertical elements (Red, black, yellow, blue and pink) inhabiting several of the traffic islands between the exit and entrance routes of the traffic intersection. Later models and sketches show a group of differently colored vertical elements based on trapezoid sections, only occupying the principal traffic island in between the lanes of the highway leading out of the city and the lanes coming in. In their final form these vertical elements became a set of five towers with triangular sections varying in size and ranging in height from 30 to 52 meters. They were erected even before construction of the Satellite City itself had started, meaning that in 1958 one could see a kind of surreal ritual taking place, the birth of a group of five (functionless) concrete towers in the middle of nowhere, every few days growing with one more layer before the mobile formwork would be moved up again to cast a new layer of concrete on top.

Set on a slanting surface the towers look like a set of cleaving chisels staggered behind each other in the middle of the highway. Approaching the towers from the city in the south meant coming from below and gradually driving-up towards them in a straight line; initially attracting the eye as a stable focus.

point in the distance, they slowly start ‘moving’ if one comes closer. First this ‘movement’ was caused by the gradually changing perspective which initially rendered the second tower from the right to truly be the highest, but because the towers are standing staggered behind each other on a sloping surface and are also different in height, on approaching them, the perspective would start to render the tower in the foreground to grow quickly larger, while also the differences in actual height between them would become evermore relative.

Then in passing them from the side one would first get views penetrating between the vertical prisms, before these would start to look like freestanding concrete blades not having any thickness at all. Coming from the other side by approaching them from the north, they would initially look first like a set of slender square towers varying in height, before starting to look like massive rectangular blocks seen from the side. Over the years the colors varied (probably with advice of ‘Chucho’ Reyes): initially, three of the towers were yellow, one was white and one was orange; later two of them were painted white and the three others were red, blue and yellow; and just before the Olympics in 1968 they were painted in different shades of orange to red.

Somehow, after 14 years of fruitful artistic collaboration (and 5 years after the construction of the Torres Satélite), an initially futile conflict arose between Barragán and Goeritz about the authorship of the towers, but it kept on simmering for several years.

It started with the publication of a monograph on the work of Goeritz in 1963, containing a caption next to an illustration of the towers mentioning Mario Pani as the architect in charge of the urbanistic scheme and Barragán as its landscape architect. This conflict (Barragán in publications being indicated as its landscape architect and in reverse Goeritz, next to Barragán as its creator, being indicated as sculptor) heated up with the issue of Arquitectos de México number 21, in 1964, the publication of the book ‘Five Mexican Architects’ by Clive Smith in 1967 and came to an eruption in 1968, when the organizing committee of the XIX Olympics published a photograph of the towers and pointed to Goeritz as its creator. It was for this reason that Barragán wrote a memorandum concerning the artistic authorship of Las Torres de Ciudad Satélite, dated 27 May 1968.

However, before this conflict about the Torres Satélite arose, Barragán by 1958 had gone in business again with the brother-realtors José Alberto and Luis Bustamente and some other investors for the development of an area further north on the Querétaro Highway, at the Puente de las Arboledas, as it was called. This rural area near the village of San Mateo Tecoloapan had attracted their attention by the beauty of its landscape and its vicinity to the highway connecting it directly to the capital. In this new satellite city they wanted to create a settlement that would attract an upper middle-class clientele by harmoniously combining the residential areas with some leisurely sports activities characteristic of an upper-class lifestyle, such as playing golf or horseback riding.
Barragán, besides being a co-investor, was commissioned to plan the general layout of the subdivision and (like in El Pedregal) to establish a set of building regulations. A passionate horseback rider himself, Barragán, planned a relatively dense residential zone (mainly courtyard houses back to back and next to each other on lots roughly 10 by 25 meters) that would gain its character of exclusivity through the carefully landscaped public routes specially designed for riders and pedestrians, while at the same moment ensuring that its commuting upper middle-class inhabitants would get in and out by car smoothly. So it was not surprising that Barragán’s design concentrated on the mise on scène of the routes and the stations (often the intersections).

Starting with the junction-bridge and slipways of the highway exit, the Puente de Las Arboledas (dated 1958-59), which was not only planned for the speed of commuter cars, but also designed, like the Satellite Towers, to give the new development a strong visual identity addressing the speed of the cars passing by on the Querétaro highway.

Barragán envisioned two monumental fountains (shaped in plan like drops of water) situated along the highway guiding the traffic bound for Las Arboledas in a fluid line onto the stone-faced embankment of a bridge crossing the Querétaro highway. The dynamic form of the bridge and the concrete guardrails lining the slipways and the bridge, initially painted red at the outside and ochre on the inside, guided the traffic to a monumental roundabout (adorned in one of the designs with a reflection pool and a large vertical sculpture).

From this roundabout one of the main streets branching off and sloping slightly up was the Avenida de los Deportes, which at its summit, the point were it would merge with the Arboleda de la Hacienda (now Avenida Hacienda), was marked by a large red wall to the right, the Muro Rojo. This long tall wall (painted brick-red) not only guided the fluid movement of the cars, but was also conceived as the entrance to an equestrian club, thus showing an intricate division of routes guiding two roads for car traffic around it, and at the same moment providing access to the club via an aperture that lead to a ramp for the horses and a staircase for the pedestrians behind the wall. The Arboleda de la Hacienda, like several public spaces in the development a kind of avenue with a wide landscaped strip in its centre, led up towards the Paseo de los Gigantes (initially called Calzada de los Gigantes), the same type of avenue with a double row of tall eucalyptus trees lining the strip in the middle (actually the drive way of the preexisting hacienda) which, like the strip behind the Muro Rojo, was reserved for horses and pedestrians.

This monumental drive way was marked by two public focal points. The first one was the Plaza del Campanario, marking the point were the Avenida Gaviotas encounters the Paseo de los Gigantes and widens it with a kind of esplanade which featured a fountain cum pool for horses, the Fuente del Campanario. Being next to a kind of grandstand of some concrete steps facing
the earthen plaza, this was often used for equestrian demonstrations and celebrations. Fenced off from the earthen plaza and the monumental avenue next to it by some freestanding palisades (4 meter in height), both the pedestrians as well as the riders with their horses could find a place for repose here. The riders might guide their horses down into the pool via a sloping surface paved with pebbles, while pedestrians could sit with their backs to the palisade watching and listening to the water falling down into the pool via a gutter like spout projecting outward from a rust-red wall. This, again, was part of the walls enclosing a slightly raised terrace (painted rust-red) protruding into the pool and occupying its southwest quadrant.

The focal point at the end of the Paseo de los Gigantes, was the Plaza del Bebedero, featuring the Fuente del Bebedero, a long black reflection pool cum watering trough for the horses, placed flush with a huge freestanding white wall (roughly 10 by 15 meters high). This white wall actually terminated the perspective of the abolished driveway, which culminated at this point in the perspectival convergence of the two lines formed by the monumental eucalyptus trees.

Recall, for comparison, Barragán’s design for the Plaza del Cigaro in the Jardines del Pedregal, where the horizontal vector did not aim at the vertical element of the Cigaro Tower, but ‘missed’ it on purpose, thus creating the tension of a kind of compositional equilibrium between the horizontal (the enforced perspective created by the converging lines in the pavement) and the vertical, the cylindrical tower.

In Las Arboledas project, the strong horizontal vector of the natural perspective, established by the observer’s eye and its vanishing point on the horizon (whether on the height of a pedestrian’s eye or on that of a horse back rider) and guided by the old trees, did not miss the vertical element. Instead, here the vertical wall acted as a kind of interface terminating the view of the beholder, but at the same moment also bouncing it back while revealing some of nature’s more metaphysical qualities in terms of the ever changing light and shadows falling through the trees on the wall’s surface, while nature as time passes. The two walls forming the backdrop for the freestanding white wall (the left one higher then the right one) were painted blue, thus establishing a kind of horizon in front of which the monumental trees would go over in a set of lateral walls and longitudinal seats to the left and a closely-set palisade of wooden posts to the right.

---

200 It seems that the name Fuente del Campanario, Fountain of the Bell-tower, was chosen to refer to the sound of the water falling down into the pool.

201 In some of the design drawings its color is blue and the watering trough is projected to its right. See Federica Zanco, Ilaria Valente, ‘Guide Barragán’, Barragán Foundation / Arquine + RM, Switzerland/Mexico, 2002, pp. 155.

202 These design drawings also show that Barragán took these different heights into account.
The freestanding wall was set on a square surface paved with small stones stretching from one edge of the wall to the other were it touches the side of the long watering trough. This black concrete trough (43.5 meters long and 2.3 meters wide) was made in such a manner that the water would overflow its perfectly horizontal edge, thus stretching the surface of the water to become a long silver mirror redoubling everything within the observer’s angle of view. The water overflowing the edge of the reflection pool would be collected in a narrow gutter running all around, before being pumped in again from below. This resulted in a kind of surreal effect, meaning that one could only see the water run down the slightly rough sides of the trough, but one would not see the any movement in the water’s mirror-like surface.

As in the Jardines del Pedregal, the investment formula initially functioned, the golf course of La Hacienda was constructed southwest of the Arboleda de la Hacienda and there were two equestrian clubs, the Club Hípico La Hacienda at the opposite end of the Paseo de los Gigantes and the Club Hípico Francés, the French Riding Club (of which also Barragán was a member), located in Los Clubes.

**Los Clubes** was another subdivision immediately north of Las Arboledas that Barragán started working on in 1961 and he kept on dealing with till 1972. The layout and sizes of its lots were clearly intended to attract an upper-class clientele, preferably a caballero or cavalier clientele, associating itself with the noble equestrian lifestyle of the privileged social class. Probably not only for the fun of the sport, but also for promotional reasons, Barragán in 1963 projected the course for a steeplechase tournament\(^2\) over the area. The course would start in Los Clubes, then, after meandering the grounds of the Club Hípico Francés, would continue via the bridge or a jump over the small stream of San Mateo, towards the Paseo de los Gigantes and from there southwards where it would meander over the northern part of Las Arboledas before turning back to Los Clubes.

As this design of 1963 clearly shows, the elements that later gave the subdivision of Los Clubes its public identity weren’t there yet. By this I mean the **Fuente de los Amantes**, the Fountain of the lovers, and the **Porton Servicio**, the service gate that terminated the access route to Los Clubes on its northern border, defined by the Camino vecinal de San Mateo Tecoloapan (now Avenida Benito Juárez).

One would normally reach Los Clubes, in Atizapán de Zaragoza (San Mateo Tecoloapan) via the same route leading from the Querétaro highway to the Arboleda de la Hacienda, coming to the intersection with the Paseo de los Gigantes (going to the right would lead to the Plaza del Campanario and the Plaza del Bebedero) one had to go left and then immediately right again towards Calle de Verdín. On this street the bridge over the small stream of San Mateo.

Mateo and a gateway marked the southern entrance to the subdivision. The street would continue till the perpendicular running spine of Los Clubes, the Calle Manantial Oriente. This double dead-ended spine had only one other street connected to it a bit-further to the east, the Calle del Parque leading to the northern entrance of the subdivision.

The beginning and the end of this Calle del Parque were marked, respectively, by the Fuente de los Amantes and the Porton Servicio, Barragán’s public focal points that would have to give the classy gated-community of Los Clubes its visual identity. Barragán’s design for the Fuente de los Amantes, dated 1966, was conceived as a pool where the riders on their horses could wade through and water them. Occupying the northwestern corner lot at the intersection of Calle Manantial Oriente and Calle del Parque, it was backed by two delimiting walls to the north and the west painted bright pink. In front of those there would be a surface paved with large pebbles, a kind of ‘carpet-like’ strip that by simply sloping down and then up again would form a pool and mark a narrow zone crossing the smooth surface of the street to the south.

On top of this surface, marking its northwestern quadrant, Barragán erected a composition of two perpendicular walls painted earth-brown. The north-south facing wall on the top extended into a beam cum aqueduct-like gutter that projected out over the other wall and fed the pool with a powerful stream of water. Two old wooden troughs placed on ends at the edge of the southeastern corner of the pool gave the fountain its name, the Fountain of Lovers, since these troughs looked like the sculptures of human beings (a vertical block with a little round block on top) like those Mathias Goeritz had been making in the mid-fifties.

The service entrance (also dated 1966) marking the other end of Calle del Parque was initially a composition of a freestanding pink wall and a pink cube (containing a porter’s lodge) with between them an enormous wooden gate divided in three parts, each covered with solid wooden planks set at a forty-five degree angle. This volumetric composition was put on an equally wide ‘carpet’ of stone strips that proceeded towards the intersection (marked by the fountain), dividing as it went into three bands: a street surface and two parallel sidewalks. Not too much later a parallel wall was added and the small square apertures at the ‘inside’ were closed, so the porter could only survey the ‘outside’ of the enclave.

The (secret) highlight of Los Clubes, however, became the Quadra San Cristobal, the stud ranch and house of Folke S. Egerström, located between the grounds of the Club Hípico Francés to the east and Calle del Parque to the west. The project that Barragán, in collaboration with Andrés Casillas, designed and built between 1966 and 1968 for Swedish-born horse lover Folke S. Egerström (1921-2002) and his family, consisted of a house and a complex of stables, barns and grounds for the breeding and training of thoroughbreds. What they designed together was a kind of grand stage for promenading horses, with a corresponding scale in terms of architecture.
However, approaching the Cuadra San Cristóbal via Calle Manantial Oriente and seeing its low windowless white street façade, one would not suspect what lay behind. The long white façade with its milk-chocolate-brown plinth would gradually recede from the tree-lined street in several steps before a perpendicular wall (with metal letters saying ‘Cuadra San Cristóbal’) would guide the visitor in. A kind of front yard paved with narrow strips of stone, a tree and a long block-like bench would lead the visitor towards a recessed portico with a large wooden gate. Past this gate one would enter a second covered portico before stepping out on to the entrance patio paved with square tiles of brownish basalt lava. From here the view would first be drawn to an opening left free between a long red wall coming laterally in from the right with water spouting out at its end, and a large white wall coming in from the left. Through this opening one’s view would penetrate into depth via a surface of water, fed by the water coming from the red wall, and a group of trees, before terminating against a huge pink wall with two vertical incisions.

As its name Quadra San Cristóbal already symbolically indicated, its heart couldn’t be anything else then a somehow agitated surface of water looking as if one could only cross it by means of the help of a ‘giant’, thus referring to Saint Christopher\textsuperscript{204} in the form of a horse carrying people across a raging stream. If one wanted one could read the elements of the Saint Christopher legend also in the group of trees (staffs planted in the ground) behind the pool, interrupting the visitor’s view on the entry axis before one could notice the two huge vertical incisions placed symmetrically on either side of this axis (Christopher’s problem of choice) in the huge pink wall of the hay barn terminating the view. Perpendicular to this north-south axis, a visitor would later find out that the pool was crossed by an east-west axis marking the view from the center of a small door in the resting quarters cum Club house of the riders to a piece of wall again symmetrically dividing two apertures, this time two gateways within the long pink wall that divided the grounds of the house and the ranch in a more public part in front and a more private part behind.

After this first visual revelation, however, the scale of the space would still be the scale of the house situated to the left (not that of the ‘giants’). Turning to

\textsuperscript{204} ‘The legend says: A heathen king (in Canaan or Arabia), through the prayers of his wife to the Blessed Virgin, had a son, whom he called Offerus (Offro, Adokimus, or Reprebus) and dedicated to the gods Machmet and Apollo. Acquiring in time extraordinary size and strength, Offerus resolved to serve only the strongest and the bravest. He bound himself successively to a mighty king and to Satan, but he found both lacking in courage, the former dreading even the name of the devil, and the latter frightened by the sight of a cross at the roadside. For a time his search for a new master was in vain, but at last he found a hermit (Babylas?) who told him to offer his allegiance to Christ, instructed him in the Faith, and baptized him. Christopher, as he was now called, would not promise to do any fasting or praying, but willingly accepted the task of carrying people, for God’s sake, across a raging stream. One day he was carrying a child who continually grew heavier, so that it seemed to him as if he had the whole world on his shoulders. The child, on inquiry, made himself known as the Creator and Redeemer of the world. To prove his statement the child ordered Christopher to fix his staff in the ground. The next morning it had grown into a palm-tree bearing fruit.’ See http://www.newadvent.org/cathen/03728a.htm. The etymology of Christopher refers to the Late Latin Christophorus, from Late Greek Christophoros, ‘Christbearer’.
the left one would see a white wall terminating the entrance patio which was defined by a long service building to the left (containing the entrance portico, carports, servant’s quarters and service spaces) and the white volume of the house to the right. One would enter the house via a flight of three steps towards a platform that, guided to the right by the back wall of the entrance patio, would lead the visitor into a relatively dark portico cut into the crisp white volume of the house. Passing through the front door one would enter a large hall, which to the left gave access to the children’s wing and the more private spaces overlooking an enclosed garden with a swimming pool.

Behind the back wall of the entrance patio one would find a large veranda cum gallery that ended in a kind of baldachin covering the part of the pool were one could sit and relax. From the entrance hall to the right one would find the kitchen and the service quarters, accessible through the servant’s quarters above via a separate staircase. The grand staircase visible in the hall would lead to the master bedrooms and a roof-terrace, all situated over the living areas below. To reach these living areas from the hall one would be led around the back of the grand staircase to the right, into a kind of corridor, which at its end would open to the left revealing, through a huge window, a magnificent view of a purple gate situated in the far distance between the two perpendicular pink walls that defined the northwestern corner of the plaza for the horses. Going further into the living area one would recognize the entry to the dinning room to the right and a little further also the entrance to a studio. This studio could also be reached from outside via a flight of three steps visible already from the entrance patio the moment one had entered the complex.

It should be evident that not going towards the house, but instead following the attraction of one’s eye after entering the complex, a visitor would be drawn forward towards the surface of water, the group of trees and the pink wall, all visible in the distance between the opening left free by the white wall of the house and the red wall of the stables. In so doing, one would be guided ahead by a low hedge to the right and, next to the large dining room window cut into the side-façade of the house, one would start to notice a flight of steps rising up out of the pavement and leading to a raised platform (paved with the same brownish lava tiles) jutting out from the line of the side-façade and being backed by the white wall coming in from the left. Going still further ahead would bring into view a recess, indicating the outside entrance to the studio.

The lateral white wall of the house coming in from the left, like the stopping of the pavement and the end of the low green hedge, not only indicated the end of the house, but also indicated the termination of the human scale and the beginning of a scale for Saint Christopher-like ‘giants’, that is, the horses carrying riders. Standing at this edge a first time visitor time would get a feeling for the sheer scale of this plaza designed for the promenade of horses. In front, a visitor would see an enormous square surface of water vanishing behind a huge red wall, out off which a thick stream of water spouted in an arch, thus not only interfering with the horizontal perfection of the water’s surface, but also with the silence this plaza emanated. The space around this wading and
watering pool for the horses was defined by a long (5-meter high) pink wall running parallel with one’s view to the left and an 8.4-meter high pink wall with two deep, dark incisions (the south façade of the hay barn) which would terminate a visitor’s view in front. The gap (in terms of unequal heights) left between this longitudinal and transversal wall, was closed of by a (3.1-meter high) purple screen cum pivoting gate, made of sheet metal.

Going further, the visitor’s view and movement would be guided towards the left by the long pink wall, leading him around the pool in the direction of the purple gate. While doing so the gaze would first turn to the left through the two large openings cut into the wall, and this was inclination reinforced by a perpendicular pink wall that folded backwards from the second gate-way-like opening in the wall. The visitor would continue to scan the view in front of him, guided by the large pink façade of the hay barn and going from the purple gate, through the two large dark slits, to a square window on the top, until his gaze would be drawn to the right towards the box stalls for the horses.

This was a relatively low horizontal building with a sloping roof sitting between the pink volume of the hay barn cum farm hand quarters (indicated by the square window) and the volume of the thick red wall. Passing between the long pink wall and the two massive wooden hitching posts towards the purple gate, one’s view would also slowly start to turn back towards the volume of the red wall, the jet of water spouting out from between the two walls defining the sides of its volume, the wading pool receiving the water and the group of trees forming the plaza’s center.

Walking in the grooming gallery under the projected overhang of the stable’s roof one would again experience a change of scale, this time a scale mediating between the horses and the human beings, since here man and horse would stand next to each other. The best place to actually observe the ‘super-human’ scale of a horse including its mounted rider was the clubhouse cum resting area for the riders, which was located at the end of the grooming gallery next to the thick red wall. This clubhouse would have two large gate-like wooden doors that could pivot open completely\textsuperscript{205}, providing the riders a fantastic view over the pool towards the two apertures in the long pink wall. Towards the left the red wall would obstruct the view, but its converging lines would guide the eye towards the horizon of greenery framed by the apertures in the long wall.

This long pink wall in turn would direct the gaze to the right along its surface towards the pivoting purple gate, which (if opened) would direct the eye back in stages, from the gate to the long black hitching posts and via the group of trees (standing in a square of low walls) towards the center of the wading pool.

\textsuperscript{205} Interesting is also the fact that seen from inside the right door could also be opened ninety degrees, thus forming a continuous wooden surface with the wood lined wall at the inside. Opposite of this wood faced wall a square window in the red wall would give the riders not only another view out, it would also reveal the thickness of the red wall.
This provided the best place to study the ‘super-human’ scale of a horse (including its rider), so frontal while coming through one of the large apertures and then seen in profile when promenading against the background of the long pink wall. Most spectacular, however, would still be the view of a horse (like Saint Christopher) carrying its rider through the wading pool while the jet of water gushed into it from the red wall and agitate light blue surface.

In fact, the bottom of the pool was like a paved ‘carpet’ of small stone strips running from the gallery cum veranda in front of the clubhouse, first horizontally, and then without any interruption down into the pool, where after covering its deepest area (the water would touch the belly of the horse) it would start to gently slope up again towards the front and the right. At its end there was a similarly paved strip like ‘carpet’, now very narrow and leading to the right in-between the two massive wooden hitching posts. If one thinks in terms of choreography it would probably be directing the rider and his wet horse into a new promenade, only this time in a narrower spiral around the group of trees in the center of the plaza.

In terms of ‘kine-aesthetics’ or ‘kine-aesthetics’, the Cuadra San Cristóbal, like the fountains of Las Arboledas and Los Clubes, were spatial experiments dealing with the modulation of scale. They were spatial contemplations in the original sense of the word; so on the one hand they were unique spaces defined by outstanding elements (natural or artificial), thus ‘cutting’ a piece of space out from the grand scale of the natural space surrounding us, and on the other hand they were intended for careful observation and possible reading or meditation of the god-given signs of nature.

The scale of these projects formed an enormous contrast to the House for Francisco Gilardi Rivera, which Barraquén designed in collaboration with Alberto Chauvet, in 1975-77. This house situated at Calle General León 82, in Colonia San Miguel Chapultepec, not too far from his own house, brought him back to the scale and type of houses he had been dealing with in the last five years of the nineteen thirties.

This house, like his last houses in Guadalajara and those he built in the late thirties in Mexico City, also had to be planned on a site 10-meters wide and a little more than 34.5- meters deep. Relatively speaking this was not a small site, since Barraquén had already proved that on such a site he could build a one-family house, a two-family house, and even something like five apartments and more on it, but in terms of scale the Gilardi House was still the smallest house he built in the period that his work was at its best.

Approaching the house, facing the street towards south-southwest, one would notice a cubic volume painted bright pink, placed on a dark base and situated flush with the sidewalk. The structures next to it would be lower, but since they also defined the edge of the sidewalk, a visitor would get the impression of being in a densely built-up street. Coming from the east one would also notice that the pink volume was missing a cubic piece in its top corner and one would
see a square window protruding from its front façade, also the only window in its street façade filled with glass painted translucent yellow. A pink beam slightly protruding from the façade would divide the upper volume from the dark base made of black basalt lava and dark wooden boards grouped diagonally in squares. Passing along the two massive wooden doors of the garage one would come to a recessed portico lined with black basalt, which via a step would lead to a heavy wood door pivoting inwardly.

The floor outside paved with black basalt lava, but beyond the door it would turn to amber colored marble and the color of the ceiling, outside pink, would turn to white like also the guiding wall to the right. The other side of the relatively dark corridor would be lined with wooden boards and integrated within would be the doors of the wardrobe and the toilet. Guided by the light at the back of the white wall and ceiling, one would enter into a bright white light well, a hall, lit via a roof-light from above, containing a staircase lining its walls on three sides. The steps of this massive looking white sculpture-like staircase were covered with wooden boards and it would not show any kind of handrail, thus going up one would not only follow the stairs one would also stay close to the wall lining the outside of the C shaped staircase. Upon reaching the second landing a parapet wall would give a visitor enough courage to also go up the last few steps towards the floor of Francisco Gilardi’s private living area.

After the last step of the staircase, to the left of the landing there would be a small door (painted pink on the outside and white on the inside) leading to a set of roof-terraces, straight ahead one would enter a large living room with a fireplace. Light would penetrate this room from a window to the left, which overlooked an imposing jacaranda tree, and from the right through a large window cum sliding door that led from the room to a zone covered by a concrete awning invisible from outside, and then over into an enclosed patio painted bright blue at its inside. Although situated towards the street this patio would provide perfect privacy via its one-storey high parapet walls. Next to it would be the library cum study of Gilardi, which was connected to the street via the protruding window with the glass painted translucent yellow that one had seen before while approaching the house. Further up one would find the master bedroom and a guest room, each with its own bathroom.

The most exiting sequence, however, was not the route going up to Gilardi’s more private quarters, but to be invited to the more secret program his house featured.

One could also go straight from the stair- cum light-well. A flight of steps and an initially insignificant-looking plain door painted white would lead the visitor into a corridor lit by an array of vertical slits. Within the corridor a door to the right would lead to the kitchen, but one would not even notice it because the eye would be dazzled by the yellow color of the light coming into the corridor through the slits. Actually, the corridor was painted white; only the wall with the
array of slit windows and their glass would be painted or tinted yellow, thus bathing the whole corridor in a glowing yellow color.

At its end the corridor terminated in a double door painted white which would swing open into a kind of vestibule defined by the height of the ceiling, before revealing a view towards a bright blue background wall in the back. Coming closer to the opening at the back of the corridor, the eye would start to be attracted by a radiating red wall moving into view from the right, which at a certain moment would reveal itself to be a freestanding red wall in a bright light blue to green pool that covered the whole breadth of the space terminating the ground-floor level of the 10-meter wide lot. Entering this unexpected space one would start to realize that this was Francisco Gilardi’s dining room cum swimming pool, the more public living area of his house where he would receive his visitors (one should know that he was in the advertising business). Entering the room further would turn the view of the visitor around towards the light coming from an enclosed patio, framed by a set of glass sliding doors and a concrete awning (together with a step defining a small covered veranda towards the outside). This patio’s width was defined by a white wall with an array of yellow strips (the apertures lighting the corridor) to the right, and by a double height wall to the left, painted the same purplish color as the blossom of the jacaranda tree forming the center of a composition and attracting the visitor’s gaze towards the back of this patio.

The rear of the patio, itself backed by the pink rear façade of the house perforated with two horizontal windows to the left, featured a kind of niche recessing from the paved area of the patio between the volume of the kitchen to the right and a lower wall fencing off the service patio to the left. A niche (a bit like those one would find on a much smaller scale in traditional Japanese houses) which was animated with a composition of some huge stone balls in front, a platform with a set of terracotta pots on top and at its center the preexisting jacaranda tree.

After all his scenographic experiments using different stylistic elements in the houses he designed in the late nineteen thirties, the scenographic ‘magic’ of this ‘small’ house was generated by the element of surprise and alienation.

Like Barragán’s own houses, this house, too, was in one sense an introverted house, a house for contemplation and as such a completely ‘interior’ house, but in another sense it did not disguise itself with ‘camouflage’, it did not really blend with its surroundings (like Barragán’s own houses had always done). On the contrary, it was a house that, as a space for dwelling and thus for the experience of peace and tranquility, actually advertised the quality of its indifference to the metropolis.

In the period that Barragán was working on this (in my view his last) house he became ill and in 1975 he underwent major surgery. At the same time, the Museum of Modern Art in New York was preparing an exhibition dedicated to his work, which was opened in 1976. By now in his early seventies, Barragán
the ‘amateur’ architect was becoming an architect of name known also outside the milieu of artists and intellectuals in Mexico. He began to receive prominent commissions not only in Mexico but also in the USA. And like every true ‘amateur’ he couldn’t simply stop living his passion, so in 1979 he joined forces with the young architect Raúl Ferrera, with whom he had collaborated before on the El Palomar project in Guadalajara and the Faro del Comercio Project in Monterrey, and founded ‘Barragán + Ferrera Asociados’ (an association he would leave in 1982-83).

In Washington, D.C., on June 3, 1980, Barragán received the Pritzker Prize, an extremely prestigious award (considered to be the equivalent to a Noble-Prize for architecture) awarded by the Pritzker-Hyatt Foundation in Dumbarton Oaks. After this he received many other awards and laudations. After a long period of illness Luis Barragán Morfín died on November 22, 1988, at his house at Calle Francisco Ramírez 14, in Mexico City, after which his mortal remains were moved to the Pantheon of Mezquitán in Guadalajara.

EPILOGUE
As I mentioned before, because of the limited spatial information (in terms of accurate plans and sections published) combined with such enchanting images, Barragán’s architecture seemed to be a purely visual architecture at first, an architecture for and of the photographic ‘eye’.

In his seminal booklet ‘The Eyes of the Skin’ Juhaani Pallasmaa, while referring to a collection of philosophical essays entitled ‘Modernity and the Hegemony of Vision’206, builds up a critical argument against the ocularcentrisme in modern architecture, when he writes:
‘The fact that the Modernist idiom has not been able to penetrate the surface of popular taste and values is due to its one-sided visual emphasis; Modernist design has housed the intellect and the eye, but it has left the body and the other senses, as well as our memories and dreams, homeless.’207
He thus criticizes an architectural praxis in which buildings are turned into mere image products detached from any existential sincerity, as well as the over-emphasis of the so called intellectual and conceptual dimensions of architecture.
It seems to me that it is exactly this sort of one-dimensional ocularcentrisme and its symptomatic expressions in society and architecture that Barragán also acted upon in his time208. In his gradual architectural evolution the ‘amateur’ Barragán actually developed a multi-dimensional ‘eye’ at the moment he converted those so-called ‘inconveniences’, within a praxis of ‘planned’


208 One only needs to read his address before the California Council of Architects and the Sierra Nevada Regional Conference, ‘Gardens for Environment, Jardines del Pedregal’, on October 6, 1951, in Coronado California, as published in the Journal of The A.I.A., April 1952, p.p. 167-172.
architecture, into the ‘advantage’ of a ‘directed’ architecture, that is an architecture that was existentially grounded in the concrete plastic and spatial experience of the body and the senses. I therefore think that Barragán’s architecture can indeed be called an architecture of the ‘eye’--it is a ‘scenographic’ architecture--but here I am talking about an ‘Embodied Eye’ and an architecture of (and for) an ‘eye with senses’. It is in effect an ‘eye’ that not only looks but also sees, an ‘eye’ that touches and feels, an ‘eye’ that hears and tastes, and so an ‘embodied eye’ in the sense of Merleau-Ponty.209

On page 8 of the aforementioned booklet Pallasmaa writes: ‘...it is important to survey the role of vision in relation to the other senses in our understanding and practice of the art of architecture’210 And that is exactly what I tried to do with my research on Barragán’s design approach. This however was not as easy as it sounds, because before being able to say anything meaningful about his ‘scenographic’ design approach, it was necessary to re-construct almost all the projects in terms of the ‘code’ of ‘planned’ architecture, that is in plans, sections and elevations. And since the projects changed during their actual construction (and also after) it is almost impossible to just rely on any so-called original drawings in Barragán’s archive. Furthermore, he often idealized the drawings that were made for the publications afterwards, so these too do not convey a fully accurate picture. In order to get as accurate a three dimensional representation as possible of the projects in terms of plans, sections and elevations, it was necessary to combine all the material that was at hand in the form of drawings, aerial photographs, publications, on-site measurements (if still possible), and every other image available. Following that it was necessary to check and counter check all available ‘evidence’ like a detective211, counting tiles and finding out their size, determining measurements and positions by reconstructing the perspectives within the photographs, and even measuring the shadows in aerial photographs to determine the height of a particular wall or the depth of


211 To be able to execute this kind of ‘detective’ work however I am indebted to a lot of people, first of all the inhabitants of Barragán’s buildings who granted me access to their private spaces, to everybody that published anything on Barragán, and I am especially indebted to Federico Zanco and Emilia Terragni of the Barragán Foundation, for granting me access to the archive, for their incredible knowledge of each of the projects and for helping me with everything I asked them. In this sort of research-projects time can’t be calculated, but I have to thank I.C.A.R.U.S. (the International Center for Architectural Research and Urban Studies), the Stichting Fonds voor de Beeldendekunsten, Vormgeving en Bouwkunst and Aachen University, for granting me the time to do this research. I have to thank Jacques De Coster for editing my English. And last but not least I have to thank all the volunteers (and I try to name them with the risk of forgetting somebody: Lars van Es, Angelique Niesten, Guido Neijnens, Marcel van Neer, Mira Heinze, Mark Michaeli, Leen Habets, Harold Hermans, Hugo Pricken, Anniek Gehlen, Eddie Garritsen and especially Eckehart Esters and Ivo Rosbeek) who helped me over a period of more then 10 years to get all these projects into the computer and onto the paper.
a specific fountain. Thus, even in the process of re-constructing Barragán’s completed projects one could fairly speak of ‘The Eye Embodied’.