

JOSÉ ANTONIO CORRALES: A HOUSE IN ARAVACA

José Antonio Corrales was born in Madrid 1921 and graduated from the Madrid School of Architecture (at that time one of the only two in Spain, along with Barcelona) in 1948, at a time in which there was a great lack of professionals and thus excellent work opportunities. He started working with his uncle Luis Gutierrez Soto, one of the most notable architects in Madrid, but soon he decided to set himself up independently as he didn't like the idea of all the facilities he would be given because he worked for his well known uncle. In 1952 he founded the professional association with one of his fellow graduates, Ramón Vázquez Molezún, marking the start of a partnership which was to last until the death of the latter, forty years later.

Thus the bibliographic notes nearly always referred to "Corrales and Molezún", who for decades (since the construction of the Spanish Pavilion for the 1958 International Exposition in Brussels) were to become a reference of Spanish architectural modernity, at a time of official historical designs and a large degree of cultural isolation with respect to the rest of the world. We owe the development of an architectural commitment to modern styles to Corrales and Molezún, along with another few architects, which lead to a series of truly interesting projects in Spain, from the enlightening and mature heterodox, and above all, a cultural line which has filled Spanish architecture up to today.

Nevertheless, Corrales and Molezún, partnership was rather untypical, as they always maintained their own independent studios. Both of them alternated their work between combined and individual projects, depending simply on each job. This flexible structure allowed both of them to also work with some of the other most important architects of their generation, such as Sáenz de Oíza, de la Sota, García de Paredes...

Corrales' activity has always been constant, dedicating countless energy to entering competitions (even so today). He himself openly recognises he has dedicated nearly all his life to his work, even sacrificing other aspects of his personal life, and so it is no surprise that when he decided to build his house in Aravaca, he combined both home and studio in one.

José Antonio Corrales built his house between 1976 and 1977 in a residential area of detached houses northwest of Madrid, an area separated from the urban centre by a vast empty green space.

The house enables the cohabitation of a complex residential project for a large family together with his architect's studio, within an ambience of denial of separation, of that which is closed off. The studio, with its possible independent entrance, reflects the transparency of the house, thus emphasising not so much the possibility of isolation, but that of fusion. The most outstanding

characteristic is its space: the very long visuals, the richness of the space which, through slots, the superposition of heights and levels, objects and rooms, result in an eternal and complex multiple, never-ending negativity of a supposed limit between the restraint and the closure of the private area and the enforceability of the public area.

The architect lived there for a few years, but later, for personal reasons, left the house empty, yet not in an abandoned state. Despite the experimental and inventive character of many of its solutions, the house remains impeccable 25 years on. It was recently sold to a family member.

The house is situated in a triangular shaped piece of land, on a slope with southerly views, in between other pieces of land, and entered from its upper level through a long narrow lane which steals the urban "façade" it could have (ideal situation and condition, a hidden enclave, which denies temptations of public show). Laws oblige a separation of at least 5 metres to the sides. These "obligatory" spaces make sense as alternatives to the entrance to the house, as service or extension areas, with no "dead" areas. This is not simply an object "placed in" a space of land, but it is the whole unity understood from the point of view of architecture.

The house steps down in accordance with the terrain, reflecting this movement in the swerves of the roof, through where the house is lit up by the sun and enables the wonderful continuity of the interior. The southern wing extends towards the garden, in a deep and undetermined threshold which protects and graduates the "exterior side" of this area, which once again, is not "what remains empty", but beyond the house, which, being no longer an object, transforms into its capacity to acquire and magnetise the space through the use of the material... this is what we call architecture.

And as with many of the best, the house is not a receptacle which has to be "furnished", nor is it that camouflage (nevertheless, so necessary) in which the "furniture" blends in with the walls. No. Here there is an architectural fact, understood as an integrity of intentions, which makes the distinction between categories difficult. And thus the steps halfway between the step and the chair (which serve as a base of a sofa), which shape this depressed nucleus around which the social meeting area is centred; these different levels which protect or expose, which emphasise the relation of each area with outside; the kitchen box, born from that very floor and which opens up from that other "interior within the interior" toward the central home.

When the house climbs up to the second floor (entrance at half level), there is the wooden board (okumen) which acts as the pavement that rises (only by inertia we commonly call it "staircase"), refusing the straitjacket as it opens like an ambiguous limit of the upper floor, in intermediate spaces difficult to name.

Or when it needs to open towards the sides (uncomfortable due to the presence of the neighbour,

and the neighbour uncomfortable with our presence), far from turning to more or less sophisticated models of “windows”, merely appears another piece of laminated boarding, with the only addition of the minimum mechanisms which enable their movement...

We are thus talking about a “physical” construction (two plus two don’t forget their material, and continue to be four, metallic profiles, boards screwed to the floor and walls, mobile moulded boards which protect from the sun creating ambiguous areas, neutral colours (white, salmon, grey, which do not intend to impose a formal poetic idea). Thus, we talk about a permanent invention, a criticism of terms (façade, border, patio, window, parasol), for this reason more authentic than when, once learnt, we continue doing them.

The fact that the house was built at that time clearly indicates that some architects were able to avoid following the awful tendencies of the terrible disorientation of those time. Corrales has always followed a line of modernity, understood principally from the constructive rigor, and the capacity to find architectural possibilities through new ways of manipulating materials. In the project memories, we only find material descriptions, listing of problems and solutions, presentation of facts.

It has been published little, almost only in monographs about the author, and always with the problem of the difficulty of photographs which adequately show many of the qualities detailed here. Even the exact understanding of the space is difficult though the plans, which, such as with the real space, do not distinguish the limits (or don’t want to).

Perhaps the plan of the roofs is the one which best explains the way of doing things. In the same way he renounces to “a staircase” or “a window”, and chooses a pavement which bends or a board that moves, Corrales renounces to the construction of an object in a landscape, but, without turning to techniques for hiding or chameleonism, opts for looking for some kind of magnetism which constructs a reality; as A+PS would say: “the charged void: architecture”.