

Antoni Gaudí, a lone wolf in European architecture

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ABSTRACT

The works of Antoni Gaudí have often been viewed as revolutionary. In the author's opinion, some of Gaudí's works from the 19th century can indeed be considered not only revolutionary but also the harbingers of the rupture that took place in European architecture at the turn of the century. However, while his later output enshrined him as a brilliant creator with well-deserved worldwide fame, these works were far from architecture's evolution towards a new modernity, and Gaudí finally lost any ties he might have once had with this modernity when he enclosed himself in the Sagrada Família towards the end of his life.

KEYWORDS: Gaudí, revolutionary, harbinger, modernity, architecture

The writer and journalist Vicente A. Salaverri was born in La Rioja in 1877 and moved to Uruguay when he was an adolescent. One of the times he headed back over the Atlantic, he went to Barcelona. It was 1913. After visiting the city and being intrigued by the work of the architect Antoni Gaudí i Cornet (1852-1926), he decided he wanted to meet Gaudí in person and managed to get an appointment. Once back in Montevideo, he published an article in *La Razón* (a newspaper where he often wrote under the pseudonym of Antón Martín Saavedra) entitled "Un revolucionador de la arquitectura, el arquitecto Gaudí y sus concepciones geniales en Barcelona" (A revolutioniser of architecture, the architect Gaudí and his brilliant conceptions in Barcelona). I am not sure whether this noun he used for Gaudí is still valid. The fact is that its adjective equivalent, revolutionary, is one of the descriptors used the most often to refer to Gaudí or his oeuvre in architectural criticism or historiography. Another noun which is often used in these documents is harbinger. However, some experts question the validity of these descriptors when referring to the architect from Reus, at least when applied to his oeuvre as a whole.

In my opinion, some of Gaudí's works from the 19th century can indeed be considered both revolutionary and harbingers. They are revolutionary because of their intrinsic quality and because within the sphere of architectural creativity, they entailed a rupture with the common conceptual, constructive and formal parameters of their day. And they are harbingers because better than any oth-

er contemporary European work, they herald and embody the consummation of this rupture in the last decade of the century; that is, they anticipated works that until now have been considered the triggers of that architectural revolution in Europe by a decade or more.

GAUDÍ, REVOLUTIONARY AND HARBINGER

It was in the penultimate decade of the 19th century – one of those decades, in the unfortunate words of the Swiss historian Sigfried Giedion, "when we can find no architectural work of true value"¹ – that we can consider some of Gaudí's works both revolutionary and harbingers.

Decades earlier, European architecture had solidified the revival of mediaeval languages, in contrast to the classicist or academic vernaculars that had prevailed in the previous century. In some cases, this phenomenon had produced buildings of indisputable interest, as well as – it is undeniable – a hackneyed eclecticism with motley roots that explains, though does not justify, Giedion's radical pronouncement.

In Catalonia, those changes had attained specific nuances when they dovetailed with the resurgence (at least in the cultural sphere) of the calls for the national rights lost in the early 18th century. The buildings of the Universitat Literària, finished in 1873, the work of Elies Rogent i Amat, and the Castell dels Tres Dragons, finished in 1888, designed by Lluís Domènech i Montaner, both in Barcelona, were more representative of the start and end of a stage in which the common folk associated the rights they sought with the peak of Catalan mediaeval architecture.

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That was the context in which the young Gaudí began his architectural production, evincing from the start a desire to break with the established formal codes, not only with classicism but also with the prevailing Neomedievalism in Catalonia. The groundbreaking nature of Gaudí's early work could already be glimpsed in some of the projects he undertook the same year he graduated: the glass case at the Comella glove shop, the design of the flower stall and privy commissioned by Enric Girossi, and the urban lampposts in Barcelona's Plaça Reial and Pla de Palau, commissioned by the Town Hall and crafted in the following year, 1879. All of these works reveal an inspiration unlike the works of his contemporaries.

Furthermore, even though it was a minor project, the glass case at the Comella glove shop was essential in the career of the recently-graduated young architect, since it provided the pretext for him to meet Eusebi Güell i Bacigalupi, who would become his client over the span of around 30 years.² Güell's first commission for Gaudí was the furniture in the chapel that he was then building in Comillas (Cantabria), which was attached to the Sobrellano palace that the Catalan architect Joan Martorell i Montells was building for Antonio López, the first Marquis of Comillas. Designed by Gaudí in 1881, the furniture was made after the chapel was completed in 1883. Shortly after his first commission, in 1882 Güell asked him to design the hunting pavilion in Garraf (Sitges), which, however, was never built. The bleaching room in the Cooperativa Mataronense also dates from that period; it was built in 1883, and Gaudí resolved it with an ingenious roof structure based on wooden catenary arches.

In my opinion, in these early works – and even in those he made immediately thereafter – Gaudí's rupture with the usual architectural parameters emerged spontaneously, not as the outcome of a conscious, planned stance. Nor do I think that he sought to foretoken the global shift in architecture which seemed destined to happen. Instead it was probably the direct consequence of his exceptional creativity, the fruit of an uncontrollable imagination mixed with extensive knowledge of construction.

Soon – just five years after he earned his degree as an architect – Gaudí designed the first works which can be considered both revolutionary and harbingers because of their significance in the history of European architecture. In my view, they include the house known as El Capricho in Comillas (Cantabria) and Casa Vicenç in the village of Gràcia, today a district of the same name in Barcelona, both begun in 1883; and the Palau Güell in Barcelona's Raval district, which was built between 1885 and 1890. As Josep Pijoan said, "since it was the product of a man who at that time lived in isolation from any personal contact with his contemporaries beyond the Pyrenees",³ it was likely that neither Gaudí's European colleagues nor his contemporary critics were aware of his earliest works at the time. However, in the case of the Güell family, the dissemination and hence the impact were quite different. For this reason, we have not hesitated to claim that the

Palau Güell, "in its day, was a milestone in European architecture".⁴ However, international architectural historiography did not begin to realise the historical transcendence of Gaudí's early works until the mid-20th century with the contributions of Bruno Zevi.⁵

In any event, the indisputably revolutionary nature of Gaudí's 19th-century oeuvre does not stem solely from the language he used, in contrast to the typical languages of the day. The architecture – as the architect Nicolau Maria Rubió i Tudurí has mentioned to me personally more than once – should be analysed stripped of the language with which it was materialised, a language which can at times be determined by clients or at least heavily conditioned by the cultural context at the time. The language should be relativised – Rubió told me – in terms of the more essential and permanent values of the architecture.⁶ In a book that is a must-read in order to gain an understanding of Gaudí's architecture, the architects González and Casals provide another clue on how to properly judge it. "If, as has been constant and common in the study of Gaudí, the main objective is merely to provide the keys to the hidden meanings of his expressive intentions, significant facts are ignored which can only be understood if we analyse the way the architect solved infinite practical matters that affect the architectural design as a consequence of its everyday use".⁷ Analysed from this vantage point, Gaudí's 19th-century works can also be considered revolutionary and, in some respects, harbingers.

Three of these "essential values" which Rubió mentioned are prominently present in the three works mentioned above. The first is his imaginative yet effective response to all the problems and conditions posed: the characteristics of the plots of land and their physical environment or surrounding landscape; the functional programmes and clients' ambitions or conditions; and the limitations or possibilities of the materials that could be used. The second is a response based on imaginative constructive solutions (from planning general systems to resolving the "practical matters" which González and Casals mentioned) that demonstrate more constructive knowledge than might be common in such a young architect. And the last and most important is the imaginative conception of the spaces, their sequential relationship, the indoor-outdoor interaction and the perfect adaptation of their organisation and layout to the functional requirements.

El Capricho (1883-1885)

The first work designed by Gaudí which clearly shows his rupture with the languages of the day, indissolubly linked to the brilliant resolution of the essential aspects of architecture, is the summer house that used to be known as El Capricho. He designed it on commission from Máximo Díaz de Quijano – the brother-in-law of Eusebi Güell's father-in-law's brother – to be built in Comillas. Construction on it began in 1883 under the supervision of the Catalan architect Cristóbal Cascante Colom, a classmate

and friend of Gaudí, apparently following a scale model made by Gaudí himself and a design that was exquisitely drawn according to a tiny tile-sized module in both elevations and ground plans.

To adapt the building to the land chosen by the client – a plot with a slope and orientation which made it virtually inappropriate for building – Gaudí planned a functional programme on three storeys. The lower one, which was meant to house the services, was a half-basement opened to the outside through windows bored in the large stone wall which made up the level difference in the steep slope. The middle floor had the entrance, the master bedroom, the large living room, the dining room and other sundry rooms and quarters. Since the main façade faced north, Gaudí designed this storey in a C-shape wrapped around a small courtyard facing south and looking towards the embankment, which meant that all the parts enjoyed cross-ventilation, light and protection from prying eyes. Apparently, the courtyard was initially supposed to be covered with an iron and glass structure. The upper storey, which was also C-shaped, housed the bedrooms and associated quarters. By 1914, the central courtyard was occupied by new rooms, which seriously altered the building's original conception.

In terms of the language Gaudí used to materialise the work, his desire for it to be groundbreaking can be seen even more clearly in the neighbourhood of the palace of the Marquis of Comillas. One good symbol of this is the contrast between the neogothic tower of the palace's chapel and the kind of minaret that Gaudí placed over the entrance door, which itself is a manifesto heralding the new architecture to come. Also revealing is the fact that one of the parameters inspiring this early work by Gaudí was closer to Spanish-Muslim architecture than its Central European counterpart, not to the Orientalising languages of the eclecticism of the day but to the more essential aspects of the architecture: the layout and concatenation of the interior spaces, which forces the viewer to discover them sequentially; the relationship between these spaces and the outdoor gardens; and the refinement of some of the decorative or constructive elements, from the wood-working to the cladding of the walls and ceilings.

In the hands of the Güell family, the heirs to the initial owners, the building was shamefully abandoned. In the autumn of 1976, after the Barcelona press aired grievances about this situation,⁸ the Ministry of Education and Science reminded the owner of his legal obligation to properly maintain the building, which had been declared a monument in 1969. The owner decided to sell it instead. It was bought by an industrialist who tried to oversee its restoration with the intention of repurposing the building as a restaurant, but he soon had to abandon the initiative in the wake of citizen protests. In 1982, the Barcelona press once again reacted,⁹ but the building remained abandoned. In 1986, more than 1,000 signatures were collected in Comillas asking the government of Cantabria to act immediately to ensure the preservation of the building.



FIGURE 1. The tower of El Capricho and the belfry of the chapel of Sobrellano. Comillas (Cantabria). Photo: Antoni González (1971). GMN Archive.

The first initiative to save the building came just a few days later, but from Catalonia. The Provincial Council of Barcelona, aware that the government of Cantabria had the option of purchasing the property, proposed that if this transaction were carried out it would oversee the restoration, with the subsequent option of sharing the building for cultural purposes. In order to close the agreement, a delegation from the Provincial Council travelled to Santander and Comillas in August 1986. Just when all the details were just about sewn up, the effort was thwarted as the owner demanded one million pesetas more than what the government of Cantabria had offered. An unforgivable excuse. The offer from the Provincial Council of Barcelona included the oversight of the jobs by its technicians, following the methodology of its specialised service, which called for archaeological research which would have shed light on the true layout of the building designed by Gaudí. After the owner tried to auction the building in London, deals were made with Japanese investors and the initiative to refurbish the building to house a restaurant was resumed. The restoration was made with budgetary

restrictions, and especially with the difficulty of not having enough information on the initial state of the building and its subsequent evolution. We trust that history has not yet had the last word on the building which prompted a formal revolution in European architecture.

Casa Vicens (1883-1888)

It is possible that the commission – and even the design – for this small building predated El Capricho. However, the construction on Casa Vicens apparently began later, and the house in Comillas was completed much earlier. The design of Casa Vicens was commissioned to Gaudí and the tile manufacturer Manuel Vicens Montaner in 1883. It was a single-family summer home to be built on a plot of land measuring a little over 1,000 m² on a narrow street in one of the urban nuclei in the municipality of Gràcia. On the east side it was bounded by the dividing wall of a convent and on the west by a narrow alleyway without buildings

The architect had some freedom as to where he could place the house on the plot. It could have been a free-standing house in the middle of a garden truncated by the bare wall of the convent on one side and the house that might potentially be built one day on the other side of the alley. However, Gaudí chose a very different solution. He designed a small house that was free on three sides but attached to the convent wall on the fourth, to which it clung “like an immense climbing plant”,¹⁰ in which plant shapes were replaced by architectural shapes. That was his first good decision. The dividing wall as a disturbing presence disappeared, and the garden area was marshalled to yield a more satisfactory use and impact, and would become the image and force around which the entire design revolved, from the inside layouts to the shapes and colours of the façades. To enclose the garden to the west, Gaudí designed a unique structure resembling a fountain or a waterfall that would become the house’s permanent visual horizon, no matter what happened beyond the edges of the plot itself. And on the street side he installed a beautiful wrought-iron grille designed as a grid whose empty spaces were filled with marigold leaves, also made of wrought iron.

The programme of the living spaces was divided into four storeys. The services were installed in the half-basement; the first floor housed the daytime rooms arranged around the dining room (which stretched westward with a covered terrace closed only by graceful wooden blinds); the upper storey housed the family bedrooms, and the attic was the home to the servants’ quarters. No hallways were designed on any floor; instead, there were elementary polygonal halls on the sides of which the doors, which were placed in the corners of the rooms, could be concealed, if desired, allowing connections between them and with the staircase. The interiors of the first and second storeys boast extraordinarily rich decorations and a variety of constructive and formal solutions on the floors, ceilings and walls.



FIGURE 2. Casa Vicens. Gràcia (Barcelona). Photo: author unknown. CEC Archive.

The façades are wholly unique. Gaudí played with several kinds of materials (essentially layers of masonry and glazed tiles in different colours) and a wide array of shapes and volumes. Construction began in October 1883, overseen by Gaudí himself, who was present at the construction site almost every day. It is said that seated in the garden under a parasol, he would give orders and instructions to the bricklayers and artisans, both what they had to do and what they had to undo if he was displeased with the result.

The house belonged to the Jover family since 1899. In around 1924, after buying and tearing down the neighbouring convent and purchasing most of the plots of land around his property, Antoni Jover Puig decided to double the size of the building and reorganise the garden. It is said that he asked Gaudí if he wanted to oversee the project, and that Gaudí refused, arguing that once the convent and therefore the dividing wall were torn down, anything done would detract from his design, since it was conceived with only three façades. The oversight of the project was assigned to the architect Joan Baptista Serra de Martínez, who had designed rental houses in Barcelona which are formally classified within Noucentista classicism and had no association with either Gaudí’s architecture or the ensuing Modernisme. Serra designed the new volume by repeating Gaudí’s solutions in the original house on the new façades, as if he had replaced the convent dividing wall by a large mirror that reflected the master’s project. It is a true historical *faux* which surprisingly no one has con-

demned as such until recently. When Serra showed Gaudí the blueprints, the aged Gaudí did not protest; however, he did proclaim that it was no longer his work.¹¹

Later, the family that owned it gradually divvied up the land into smaller plots and sold the rest of it, where new buildings were constructed at the maximum height allowed, leaving Casa Vicens in an environment totally different to the one in which it was originally built. In 2017, an intervention on the expanded building was completed to make it profitable through tours. All the façades, both the originals and the replicas, as well as the rooms in Gaudí's plan, were mended. However, the rooms lost their original ambiance and meaning after the physical and conceptual removal of the dividing wall that justified Gaudí's project, and were left decontextualised around a staircase connecting the different storeys, which gained disproportionate prominence inside the building. I assume that if Gaudí had seen the blueprints of this intervention, he would have repeated the response that he gave Serra back in 1924.

Palau Güell (1885-1890)

This revolutionary momentum spearheaded by Gaudí culminated with Barcelona's Palau Güell, yet another commission from Eusebi Güell in 1884. In this project, the architect further explored and developed his contributions from Comillas and Gràcia in both functional, spatial, constructive and decorative terms, and he introduced most of the new contributions which would serve as the foundation of his subsequent repertoire.

At that time, Eusebi Güell and his wife Isabel López Bru – the daughter of Antonio López López, first Marquis of Comillas – lived in part of the Palau Fonollar on Carrer de la Portaferrissa next to the Palau Moja on La Rambla, the home of Isabel's parents. In 1884, because of a series of lawsuits with other tenants, the couple had to vacate that palace with the seven children they had at the time. They temporarily moved to the family home on La Rambla, where Eusebi had lived before he was married. Finally, Güell decided to build his own home from scratch, one that better fit the domestic and social life of a large family with such a high social standing within Catalan society. The new residence would be attached to the family home as opposed to in the Eixample, where most of the wealthy families were moving to get away from the increasingly dense and deteriorated old city, even though the Eixample may have been more coherent with the eminence and social status of his family.

With this idea in mind, Eusebi Güell purchased the houses at numbers 3 and 5 Carrer del Conde del Asalto (now known as Nou de la Rambla) with the intention of tearing them down. In 1885, Güell commissioned Gaudí to design the home, and he clearly did so with plans to occupy both plots. He signed the blueprints on the 30th of June 1886. The building permit was granted on the 12th of November, probably after construction had already started, as was common at the time.

When he received the commission from Güell, Gaudí was 33 years old and surely understood that it was an exceptional opportunity. He had already had the chance to experiment with his ideas and solutions in two small homes. But now he had the chance to make a building that was large and socially and urbanistically significant enough to make his break with the historical styles an audible manifesto to be heard far and wide. What is more, he knew his client well: his character, his artistic and intellectual pretensions, his knowledge and of course his resources.

The lack of budgetary constraints made it possible for Gaudí to work on the Palau Güell with the top industrialists, technicians and craftsmen, as well as to use the most ideal building systems and materials. Nonetheless, equally or even more important than the economic resources that Güell made available to Gaudí was the creative freedom that he gave his architect (as he had also done in the church in Colònia Güell). And Gaudí was clearly up to the challenge.

This response entailed three fundamental aspects, in my view. The first was the intelligent implementation of the client's programme: the rational, effective organisation of the spaces from the functional and gender standpoint (the male and female spaces which Adolf Loos would speak about many years later) while overcoming the conflicts and conditions stemming from the plot of land chosen by the client, in a neighbourhood which was clearly conflictive at the time. The second was the provocative treatment of the space and light inside, with the unique inclusion of music as an essential feature. And the last was the proposal of an innovative, unique language yet one that was closely related to the domain of traditional building techniques and quite expressive of the functions and social and urban roles of the building, perfectly adapted to its environs.

The narrowness of the street and the fact that it was in a hostile environment inspired the general scheme organising the interior space: the entire building faced inwards more than outwards, making the central courtyard in the Roman and Islamic tradition – here turned into a covered salon – the essential space around which the entire programme revolved. It is a centripetal organisation that the sober façades (in which solid space predominated over empty space) faithfully revealed. On the other hand, the relatively small size of the plot of land available, as well as the impossibility of attaining the sizes that some rooms needed to host certain social activities, spurred Gaudí to consider intelligent, imaginative solutions: from the vertical superimposition of all the planned uses, yet without undesired cross-circulations, to the visual concatenation of the spaces in order to visually expand them. Indeed, outside the areas where privacy is essential, there are no visually stagnant places in the palace; from any room you can see the adjacent ones in an extraordinary play of transparencies and spatial fluidity (which would become the hallmarks of the Modernisme which had not yet been



FIGURE 3. Façade of the Palau Güell. Barcelona. Photo: Montserrat Baldomà (2013). SPAL Archive (Provincial Council of Barcelona).

born, and even of Behrens' transitional architecture) which in the viewer's eyes sensorially allowed the building's limitations imposed by the location to be overcome.

This deft layout enabled Gaudí to not only masterfully plan the light but also compensate for his client's frustrated dreams. Since it was impossible to fit a concert hall into the limited building, Gaudí rose to the challenge in a subtle, innovative way: by making music an essential element of the architecture. The layout of the different parts of the organ in the central salon and the conception of the roof as an oversized canopy made this space, which became the backbone of life in the palace protected from a hostile environment, a musical instrument writ large.

1887-1890. The second design, completion and dissemination

Gaudí's initial design and the finished product are quite different, more than what was common between official blueprints and built realities. In this case, they hint at a critical decision on the future of the building, which had considerable consequences in the construction process as well.¹² That was most likely when the decision was taken to use the house on La Rambla and the new building together for the family, freeing up spaces in the new building for social and representative purposes. The scope of the changes forced Gaudí to draw up new blueprints,

most likely at the end of 1887, the year when Güell purchased the new plot of land bordering the palace under construction to the south. In terms of the completion of the project, even though the crown of the main façade states that it was sculpted in 1888, the fact is that construction lasted until well into the next year, and some finishing touches were not resolved until one decade later.

I have already said that the dissemination of Gaudí's 19th-century works – and therefore the knowledge of him that the contemporary cultural and architectural circles may have had – was quite different in his first few houses and in the Güell family palace. In the latter, client himself was keenly interested in disseminating the project, not only for his personal and family prestige or professional publicity but, I would say, more importantly for cultural and civic motivations. It goes without saying that the young Antoni Gaudí was also interested in disseminating the projects he had completed. Before it was finished, by mutual agreement the developer and the architect allowed critics and journalists access to the building, as well as photographers, not only from the local media but also from international publications.

One of the first photographic reports of the salons in the palace was made by Adrià Torija Escrig, a Valencian photographer who was living in Barcelona at that time. He published the pictures in the 1891 *Sociedad Fotográfica*

fica Española exhibition organised at its headquarters in Casa Gibert in Barcelona's Plaça de Catalunya. In late 1891, the photographer from the prestigious New York magazine *The Decorator and Furnisher* entered the palace, where he published pictures of the central salon, the musicians' landing and Mr Güell's bedroom. In the text that went with the pictures, W. Lodia – who was accompanied on his tour by Gaudí himself – described the palace as the “most noteworthy of the modern buildings meant for private use on the Iberian Peninsula”.¹³ The New York-based magazine also mentioned it in an article signed by William Morris.¹⁴ Other foreign publications which reported on the Palau Güell during those years were *American Architect and Building News*¹⁵ from Boston, and *Academy Architecture and Architectural Review*¹⁶ from London. Before the century was over, several specialised publications in Barcelona, some of which were present in the leading European libraries, had showcased the project.¹⁷

The ways that the influence of an architectural work is expressed in subsequent works by other professionals, and the influence exerted by its dissemination in publications, has always been very difficult to pinpoint and remains so even today. Therefore, it is not worthwhile to hypothesise about to what extent or through what channels Gaudí's architecture in the last decade of the 19th century influenced or was decisive in the revamping of European architecture in the last decade of that century and the first two of the 20th century. What is beyond question is that Gaudí's architecture predates any expression of the new directions that architectural historiography has detected.

When Gaudí completed that first stage of his architecture with the Palau Güell, it was still years before Victor Horta built Hôtel Tassel in Brussels, which was started in 1893 and until today is regarded by the majority of professionals in the history of art and architecture as the first work in the new European architecture which broke with 19th-century academicism and launched the formal renovation which would culminate in the 20th century.

All the other principal expressions of this new European architecture were indeed started after the Palau Güell was completed. They include Paul Hankar's house in Brussels in 1893; the Vienna underground by Otto Wagner and the Glasgow Herald by Mackintosh in Glasgow in 1894; the Hofatelier Elvira by August Endell in Munich in 1896; the Amsterdam Commodities Exchange by Berlage in 1897; the Glasgow School of Art by Mackintosh, the Sezession Building by Joseph Maria Olbrich and the Majolikahaus by Wagner, the latter two in Vienna and all three in 1898; Peterka's House by Jan Kotera in Prague in 1899; the Paris Métro by Hector Guimard in 1900; Villa Igia by Ernesto Basile in Palermo, Maison Huot on Quai Claude-le-Lorrain by Emili André in Nancy, the house on Elizabetes Street by Mikhail Eisenstein in Riga, and the Grand Hotel Europa by Alois Dryák and Bedrich Bendelmayer in Prague, all in 1903.

Gaudí's other 19th-century works

Throughout the last two decades of the 19th century, in parallel to his work on the projects discussed above, Gaudí was also involved in other projects that are worthy of attention. The first is a series of small or occasional actions in the estate of the Güell family, which are contemporary with and creatively closely related to the houses Gaudí made in Comillas and Gràcia. The Güell estate coalesced with the amalgamation of different farmsteads scattered around the towns of Les Corts and Sarrià, which are today part of Barcelona. They were purchased by the Güell family between 1859 and 1889. In 1883, Eusebi Güell commissioned Gaudí to design a series of buildings and furnishings for the gardens, which had been built between 1884 and 1887. The buildings and elements that still stand today include two pavilions meant respectively for the porter and the stables – joined by the famous gate with the metal dragon sculpture – and the gate that was moved in front of the Faculty of Pharmacy in 1957. Worth noting among the works that no longer stand are the beautiful staircase-lookout point and the fireplace on the terrace of the home, the former Can Feliu country estate, both made of exposed brick inlaid with white tile, as well as the *La Glorieta* lookout point, “resting on the outside wall via a structure of pillars which opened up like a mushroom on the top with a series of struts made with rows of brick”.¹⁸

No less important was the building that was supposed to house Father Ossó's motherhouse and school for Teresian nuns, which was commissioned to Gaudí while he was working on the Palau Güell. It was built in the town of Sant Gervasi de Cassoles between 1889 and 1890. It had a very ambitious design on a shoestring budget, which revealed that Gaudí's creativity was not necessarily dependent upon the client's wealth or prominence. Before he finished the Palau Güell, Gaudí also received the commission from his fellow countryman, the bishop of Astorga Joan Grau Vallespinós, to design the new episcopal palace. Gaudí signed the definitive project in 1889 after travelling to Astorga and soaking in the atmosphere and circumstances of the site and its environs. Construction got underway in 1889 but was interrupted upon the bishop's death in 1893 and Gaudí's refusal to remain at the helm of the project because of a contretemps with the canons. The most interesting part of the design, the roof, was never built. In fact, the building's roof was not constructed until 1909 under the supervision of the architect Ricardo García Guereta. To anyone who equates Gaudí's architecture with his works in Barcelona in the 20th century, the Episcopal Palace of Astorga seems strange, not very “Gaudí-esque”. And the same could be said of another project from around the same time, the Casa de los Botines, which was designed for the textile merchants Simón Fernández and Mariano Andrés. The building was erected within a ten-month span in 1892. When judging these buildings, it is important not to disregard the observations of Rubió i Tudurí



FIGURE 4. Casa Botines, Palacio de los Guzmanes and the cathedral in the background. León. Photo: Antoni González (1971). N Archive.

regarding the architectural languages I mentioned above. In these cases, the language was not imposed or suggested by the clients but instead decided upon by the architect, who took special care to bear in mind their urban environs.

As the century came to a close, two more works by Gaudí were completed, the Celler de Garraf in the township of Sitges (1895-1900) – another commission from Eusebi Güell – and Casa Calvet in Barcelona (1898-1900). The Celler de Garraf is not a minor work, even though it is one of the least-known and visited today. This is no doubt influenced by the fact that it has been attributed to Gaudí's partner, Francesc Berenguer. Bassegoda¹⁹ reports extensively on this longstanding controversy. In my opinion, all one has to do is stroll around the building and enter it to deduce that the design could only be Gaudí's. Berenguer's participation was most likely limited to draughting and to overseeing and monitoring construction.

Casa Calvet – Gaudí's most "Moderniste" (Art Nouveau) project in the more popular and common sense of the word – is paradigmatic of his architectural passion to perfectly resolve all the details (both those that are seen and those that remain invisible, according to one of his principles, as he is reported to have said). One good example in the house on Carrer Casp is the design of the dividing wall – the wall of the light shaft that it shares with the neighbouring property, the crowning of the weather-proof exterior walls – which, in theory, no one would ever see. To Gaudí, all Construction was Architecture. Finally, it would not be right to omit from the list of Gaudí's 19th-century works his participation in the construction of the temple of the Sagrada Família, whose history he joined in 1884. However, since this is a chronological overview, I shall leave this reference for below.

GAUDÍ, A REVOLUTIONARY WITHOUT A REVOLUTION

Gaudí's status as a trailblazer (breaking with not only the past but also the present) is even more obvious in his subsequent output, which includes most of the works that have garnered the architect worldwide fame (Casa Batlló and Casa Milà, Parc Güell, the unfinished church at Colònia Güell and the Nativity façade of the Sagrada Família). In this sense, he did indeed remain revolutionary. However, describing him as a harbinger is less justified. The European architectural context had evolved swiftly. As discussed above, after the Palau Güell was finished but still in the 19th century, other European creators had begun to cultivate new languages, and shortly thereafter, at the start of the 20th century, the definitive break with academicism was gaining momentum along with the popular spread of the phenomenon of Modernisme or Art Nouveau, whose name varied by cultural region. And soon signs would come of a rupture that would be even more radical, virtually without any continuity. Continental architecture, with its rear-view mirror trained on North America, high expectations of the advent and success of new building materials and watchful of the societal changes, began to embark upon new pathways which over the years would lead to the Modern Movement.

In Catalonia, we have tended to believe that these pathways were not new but instead a mere continuation of the previous ones. In the chapter of his book *Historia del Arte* devoted to the genesis of contemporary architecture,²⁰ Josep Pijoan says that "the architecture of Modernism, since before 1890, brought to the modern era the now somewhat forgotten concept that at the time seemed new: constructive sincerity. For this reason – as well as because of

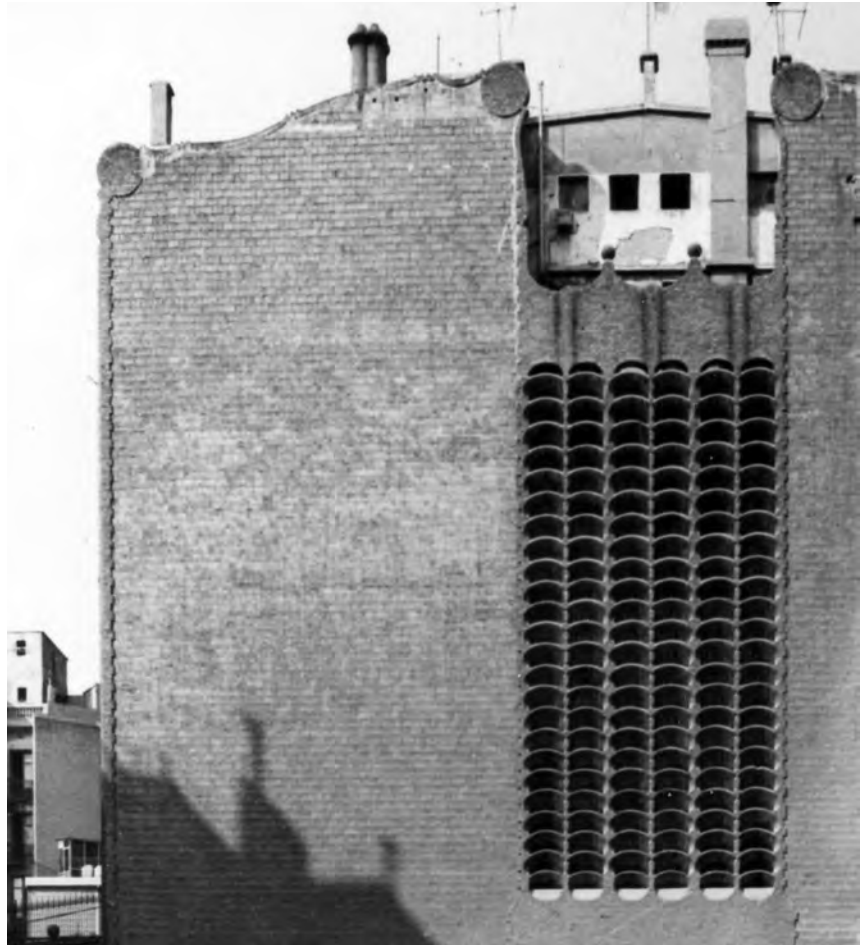


FIGURE 5. Dividing wall of Casa Calvet. Barcelona. Photo: Antoni González (1979). GMN Archive

the inventiveness they displayed – some of the great ‘individualists’ of that style must be mentioned: first, Antoni Gaudí.” Pijoan goes on to the Palau Güell and then Gaudí’s main works from the 20th century to support his claim that “they contribute fundamental factors” to the genesis of modern architecture. And in the sequence of illustrations accompanying the text, he does not hesitate to situate Casa Milà amidst the Chrysler Building and Empire State Building skyscrapers in New York on the one hand, and Perret’s Rue Franklin apartments in Paris and F. Lloyd Wright’s Robie House in Chicago on the other.

I seriously doubt that this version of events is still valid today. I believe that at least in the case of Gaudí, it is not. I think that Gaudí explicitly refused to travel along, to adopt, those new pathways in that second European Revolution, and that in the first Revolution which he had led, at least chronologically, he soon became a “revolutionary” without a Revolution. Recognising that Gaudí’s works in the 20th century followed their own byways different to the ones that other architects embarked upon does not detract from his importance within universal art history as a whole. Many of these Gaudí works are indisputable masterpieces, even if they were not harbingers of the future to come but instead the final apotheosis of an impending, inevitable closure of a glorious era in that universal history.

Gaudí, among the different pathways of the 20th century

In 1901, Lluís Domènech i Montaner signed off on the design for Barcelona’s new Hospital de la Sant Creu i Sant Pau, the first major strictly Moderniste expression in Catalonia and one of the seminal works in Europe at the turn of the century. On the other side of the ocean, in New York, the singular Flatiron Building, the triangular-shaped skyscraper on Fifth Avenue, was nearing completion. It had 22 storeys and was 87 metres tall with a structure made of steel clad with the stone and ceramic characteristic of the Beaux Arts language. It was designed by Daniel H. Burnham, one of the leading representatives of the Chicago School. In Barcelona, Gaudí commenced the new century with the design of the fence for a private estate – which was built in 1902 and still remains standing – called Finca Miralles, and was poised to start construction on Casa Bellesguard and Parc Güell, both in Barcelona.

Casa Bellesguard got its name from the estate that King Martin the Humane purchased in 1408, which the monarch himself christened with this name. When Gaudí took over the project, little remained but a few ruins of the house which was ordered restored by the king born in Perpignan. However, his design was heavily determined by these pre-existing conditions, as was his wont. The feel of the mediaeval fortified house is still palpable. Inside,

Gaudí left testimony to how he believed that the surfaces of vertical walls and ceilings must have been finished: clad in plaster and painted. Gaudí never left inside walls unclad with the exception of those in the basement of Palau Güell, which had been planned as a hygienic insulation area but was instead turned into the stable. All his other interiors with bare walls (those in the crypt at Colònia Güell, the attic in Casa Milà and the upper storey of Casa Bellesguard) have exposed brick simply because Gaudí had to abandon them before they were finished.

Parc Güell, Eusebi Güell's frustrated venture into urbanisation which was then felicitously turned into a city park, is indisputably the masterpiece of 20th-century European architecture, no matter whether it is considered as falling within the final apotheosis of an architecture that was about to slip away into history or whether it is understood – regardless of languages – as a forerunner of modern architecture. The project was not finished until 1914, shortly after the wonderful bench that wraps around the main square was completed, clad with exclusive designs by Gaudí himself, with a few scattered contributions by his associates. Until relatively recently, the park was a wonderful place to stroll and play, especially for the residents of Gràcia, until the exponential increase in tourists adulterated its essence and paradoxically rendered it extremely difficult to visit. The praiseworthy municipal initiative to regulate visitor access has not yet managed to prevent the monument's denaturation (if this will indeed be possible one day). When the famous dragon on the stairs – next to or above which tourists love to snap photos of themselves – was installed in 1903, the different pathways of the present and future of architecture in Europe were intersecting. In Amsterdam (Holland), construction on the Commodities Exchange was being completed; in Nancy (France), Emile André, one of the founders of the Nancy School, was building Huot House on Quai Claude-le-Lorrain; in Riga, Mikhaïl Eisenstein was finishing the most distinguished of the 19 Art Nouveau buildings which he constructed on and near Elizabethes Street in Latvia's capital; and in Paris, Auguste Perret was beginning to build his timeless reinforced-concrete poetry on Rue Franklin.

In 1903 as well, Gaudí began the definitive design of his intervention in the cathedral of Mallorca, a work of extraordinary interest from the standpoint of monument restoration. At a time when Europe was witnessing passionate debates about how monuments should be restored, with clashing theories – properly interpreted or not – inherited from the previous century along with criticism of the practices generated, Gaudí was once again marching to the beat of his own drummer. He defined critical restoration in practice (since he continued to write not a word about what he did or created); he even switched the concept of restoration for intervention, common parlance today. After carefully analysing the building – and particularly the space – he proposed a series of measures which were supported by the liturgy yet

are essentially architectural: the shift of the choir and altarpieces, which had hindered an understanding of the Gothic space; the opening of the chapel in the presbytery and the covered Gothic windows; and the installation of light fixtures on the pillars of the nave at the precise height to visually balance their slenderness and compartmentalise the space, delimiting the part that corresponds to the human scale. The symbolism added to each element, or to its form or justification, is secondary, although fortunately the requirements of the remit (it was a working cathedral, not just a monument), a personal obsession of the architect, did not affect his purely architectural creativity at the time.

As Gaudí was preparing the documentation for his intervention in the cathedral of Mallorca, the painter from Gràcia, Lluís Graner (for whom Gaudí had designed a home that was never built), asked him to design an event venue in a property he had rented on Barcelona's La Rambla, today number 122. It opened on the 4th of November 1904 and was called the Sala Mercè. It operated for three years with shows that today we would call multimedia: screenings of silent films with live sound added, both words and music. This venue is mentioned in all the literature on Gaudí, yet nary an image of the interior had been seen until four postcards were made public.²¹ Years later, I had the opportunity to virtually reconstruct it, which enabled us to confirm that the Sala Mercè was one of Gaudí's "minor masterpieces".²²

Barcelona's Casa Batlló and Casa Milà

The year 1905 was unquestionably pivotal in the revamping of European architecture. With the new Grand Hotel Europa just opened in Prague after being remodelled following the design by Alois Dryák and Bedrich Bendelmayer, in Copenhagen the City Hall designed by Martí Nyrop was being finished, the last great gasp of historicism. At the same time, in Vienna, Otto Wagner – who was overseeing the construction of the Austrian Postal Savings Bank, an extraordinary building at that time – was beginning the impressive Saint Leopold church in the Hospital Steinhof; in Brussels, Paul Cauchie was building his home, whose façade is the quintessence of Art Nouveau; in Paris, Frantz Jourdain was finishing the spectacular La Samaritaine department store; and in Prague, work on what is now the Svatopluk Cech Bridge had started following a design by Jan Koula and Jirí Soukup. In Barcelona, Domènech i Montaner had started the Palau de la Música Catalana, and Gaudí was working on refurbishing the house at number 43 Passeig de Gràcia, which would henceforth be known as Casa Batlló, one of the architect's most successful masterpieces.

Gaudí demonstrated such formal and constructive prowess in this building that just a brief reference to all of his feats would take up the length of this entire article. Nonetheless, those who have seen Casa Batlló – even architecture students – are more likely to have been told more about the presumed symbolism of the forms than



FIGURE 6. Interior of the Sala Mercè. Barcelona. Photo: author unknown (1910-1912). GMN Archive.

their architectural significance. One example is the building's crown. There is a debate as to whether it represents a dragon, either awake or sleeping, but there is no discussion of the reason for its lines. "Both neighbouring houses were already built when Gaudí refurbished what would become Casa Batlló. On the left was Puig i Cadafalch's Casa Amatller, with its peculiar stepped peak, more common in Central European buildings. On the right was a classicist house which at that time was two storeys lower than it is today. Gaudí did not seek discord. Quite the contrary, he sought to harmonise the tops of the three houses, despite their differences in height and shape. To resolve the junction with Casa Amatller, Gaudí designed the cylindrical tower topped by the cross, which enabled him to recess its dividing wall which would have otherwise stood four or five metres taller than the peak of the neighbouring home. On the other hand, the line of the impost on the last balcony of Casa Batlló runs along the dividing wall along the top of the peak of Puig i Cadafalch's house until it dies out in a shared corbel. On the opposite side, a stone rope collects the moulded imposts on the neighbouring house. At the end of the large classical cornice on the top of this building, which used to be two storeys lower, Gaudí installed a stone flag; however, now that the neighbouring building is taller, it seems to have lost its meaning. There is very little symbolism and esoterism on this façade, very little from literature and a great deal from architecture, outstanding architecture.²³

The brutal addition of two more storeys on the neighbouring building (after Casa Batlló had already been declared a national monument) is still a calumny which the city, via the Town Hall, has never set out to resolve. Another blight on the building today is its abusive use (with too many visitors) and the occasional alterations in the façade via advertising.

One year later, in 1906, Gaudí began work on Casa Milà, which is so close to Casa Batlló in space and time yet so distant in concept and language. This house, which is known as La Pedrera (The Quarry), was built from scratch and reflects the modern structural concept of a building with a load-bearing structure holding up the façades or outside walls. According to Françoise Choay, this archetype originated in the Home Insurance Building built in Chicago in 1883 by William Le Baron Jenney, and he considers it "one of the prototypes of 20th-century architecture".²⁴ Just like Jenney 20 years earlier, in Casa Milà Gaudí used a steel structure and stone walls. However, when discussing the 20th century, this French professor was citing not Gaudí but Mies van der Rohe and his disciples and followers all over the world who, to greater or lesser success, filled our cities with buildings constructed of load-bearing structures and lightweight curtain walls.

Obviously, Gaudí's choice could not be compared to this architecture, as it has been so often. Indeed, it is difficult to think of a curtain wall being made from such heavy stones (regardless of whether they represent the waves of

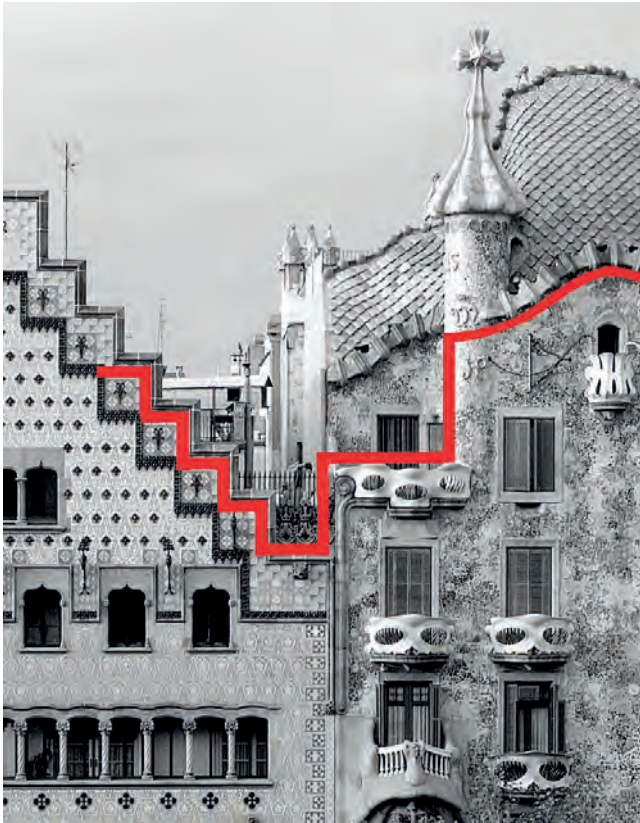


FIGURE 7. Crown of Casa Batlló and Casa Amatller. Barcelona. GMN Archive.

the sea or the flounces of the mantle of the Virgin Mary which were supposed to crown the building). The fact is that Gaudí's solution does not exactly fit what Pijoan said with regard to the "constructive sincerity" which modern architecture and Modernisme shared. On the other hand, today it is proving to be a serious challenge to guaranteeing the building's survival, that is, the survival of a building which is full of formal feats on the façades (with the agitated movement of the stones and the wrought-iron of the balconies, designed by Gaudí himself), the roof (with incredibly suggestive passages), the colourful light shafts and the appealing plaster ceilings in some rooms, all designed by Gaudí as well.

As he was making these two houses, Gaudí was not only overseeing the restoration of the cathedral of Mallorca and construction of Parc Güell, and checking in with the construction on the Sagrada Família, he was also engaged in other initiatives. The most important one was his partnership with the sculptor Josep Llimona on the monument to Doctor Robert, which was unveiled in 1910 at the Plaça de la Universitat de Barcelona; it is currently installed in Plaça de Tetuan and was reconstructed in 1981. Doubt has been cast on Gaudí's clear influence on the project because of a lack of written proof. However, all one has to do is view the architecture of the monument and compare it to the lower part of its contemporary Casa Milà to understand that César Martinell, the architect's main biographer, is right in endorsing his authorship.

During this time, while some intellectuals in Barcelona were proclaiming in their circles and gatherings that *Noucentisme* had been born, the streets and squares of much of Catalonia and its capital were being filled with Art Nouveau buildings. They were designed by architects, contractors or builders, most of them uninvolved in the major events in the history of architecture that were happening elsewhere in the world: Auguste Perret built the garage on Rue Ponthieu in Paris; in Darmstadt, Joseph Maria Olbrich was building the Wedding Tower; in 1908, Peter Behrens began the Turbine Factory in Berlin and Adolf Loos was making the Kärtner Bar in Vienna; and in 1909, Wright built Robie House in Chicago.

Gaudí ventures abroad

Gaudí was not unknown in Europe. His works had been showcased in numerous specialised publications, and his fame was on the upswing thanks to the testimonials of foreign visitors who were particularly attracted by the Sagrada Família under construction. However, there is no news about any exhibition devoted to his output prior to the one held in Paris in 1910. The initiative sprang from a small group of French professionals led by a reputable historian, Gabriel Hanotaux, the Minister of Foreign Affairs between 1894 and 1898 and a professed admirer of Gaudí's work, who had had the chance to visit Barcelona. The architect listened to his idea sceptically, perhaps because he was afraid of failing or not inspiring interest, since he thought that the French did not grasp his works. However, unlike Gaudí, says Martinell, Eusebi Güell expressed his enthusiasm for the idea and offered to sponsor the exhibition.²⁵

The exhibition was held in the gallery of the Société Nationale des Beaux Arts in Paris' Grand Palais between the 15th of April and the 30th of June 1910. Enlarged photographs, scale models and blueprints were exhibited, and a catalogue was published to go with the show. Güell invited Gaudí to travel to the French capital to present the exhibition, but the architect refused. Therefore, by mutual agreement, they entrusted the delicate mission to the young architect Jeroni Martorell i Terrats, with whom Gaudí had a "friendship and professional relationship which", say Raquel Lacuesta and David Galí, "came from the entities and associations [such as the Centre Excursionista de Catalunya] where they met while pursuing similar interests".²⁶ Before Martorell left for Paris, Gaudí gave him concise advice on how to react to the lack of understanding, and even the potential protests, that he might encounter there.

The exhibition was reported on widely in the French press, as Martorell himself explained in the chronicle he sent to *La Veu de Catalunya* published on the 23rd of June 1910, which he took advantage of to express his admiration for Gaudí and his works. Gaudí is, said Martorell, "a crucial figure in modernity in today's architecture". In hindsight, perhaps reality was not quite the way Martorell presented it. Gaudí's works may have reached Paris a bit

late, at least if analysed from the standpoint of the modernity that Martorell mentioned. That same year, 1910, an exhibition of the works of Frank Lloyd Wright was held in Berlin. For whomever had the chance to see or learn about the two exhibitions, the contrast may have been striking, even incontrovertible. If we accept that they were the oeuvres of two masters of architecture, it would not be overly risky to bet on which of the two represented the future. In 1910 in Vienna as well, Loos finished Steiner House and the house on Michaelerplatz, and in Brussels, Josef Hoffmann completed the Stoclet Palace. Likewise, the Central Station by Eliel Saarinen in Helsinki, the City Hall by Ragnar Östberg in Stockholm and Centennial Hall by Max Berg in Munich were all under construction.

The church at Colònia Güell

In addition to running the businesses and industries that he had inherited from his father and fulfilling his duties in his father-in-law's shipbuilding, banking, railway, mining and tobacco businesses, Eusebi Güell also promoted agricultural and industrial businesses. The latter included the textile factory at the Colònia Güell which had been built in 1890 on his farm estate called Can Soler de la Torre in the town of Sant Boi de Llobregat, which was later annexed to the neighbouring town of Santa Coloma de Cervelló.

Even though there is no documentary proof, it is quite likely that Güell gave Gaudí the commission of the overall urban development of the Colònia (the series of factories and the workers' village). This project included plans for a privileged position for the future church which was to preside over the village. The village houses were designed by Gaudí's assistants – Francesc Brenguer and Joan Rubió – under the master's supervision. However, the design of the church was reserved for Gaudí; therefore, I do not believe that he was specifically commissioned to make this design. The date of 1898 mentioned by Ràfols in Gaudí's first biography must refer to when the client and architect began to discuss the need to move the project forward because the chapel at the Can Soler estate, used by the increasing numbers of residents of the Colònia, had become too small. Just as in his house in Barcelona, Güell gave the architect total creative freedom.

Gaudí took years to get the project moving, and the first stone in the church was not laid until the 4th of October 1908. However, the construction overseen by Gaudí did not actually begin until well into 1909, at the same time that the ingenious model funicular structure meant to oversee work was started. That same year, 1909, as a test to be applied to the construction of the church at the Colònia, Gaudí designed and constructed the building meant to house the schools on the premises of the Sagrada Família, the architect's last masterpiece which today has been remade for the third time and moved from its original location.

In the ensuing years, especially between 1912 and 1914, Gaudí worked virtually full-time on the church in the Colònia Güell. Gaudí lived in Barcelona, in a house in

Parc Güell, and had to commute 20 kilometres to the church, first on foot, then with the streetcar, then the train, and finally a cart. Nonetheless, he visited the site more than 600 times; some months, he went there more than 20 times, and some weeks, he visited it six days in a row. A diehard bachelor living in voluntary isolation from social relations, Gaudí could allow himself this degree of passionate dedication to architecture, and in particular to this project, which may have been his most important one. Around that time, he barely visited the Sagrada Família, on which construction had virtually ground to a halt because of a major budgetary crisis.

Construction on the church designed by Gaudí halted in November 1914. The decision was taken by the sons of Eusebi Güell, who were frightened of the cost of the construction, the start of World War I and especially what it meant to make a church like that one in a place and time in which social and labour relations were turbulent (as witnessed in 1909 during the Tragic Week). Gaudí's last visit to the site was on the 3rd of October 1914. On that date, not even the lower nave of the church – known erroneously as the crypt – had been completed, and it still stands today with the inside of the walls and ceiling unclad, counter to the architect's plans. Almost 90 years after Gaudí left, once in-depth historical and material research had been con-

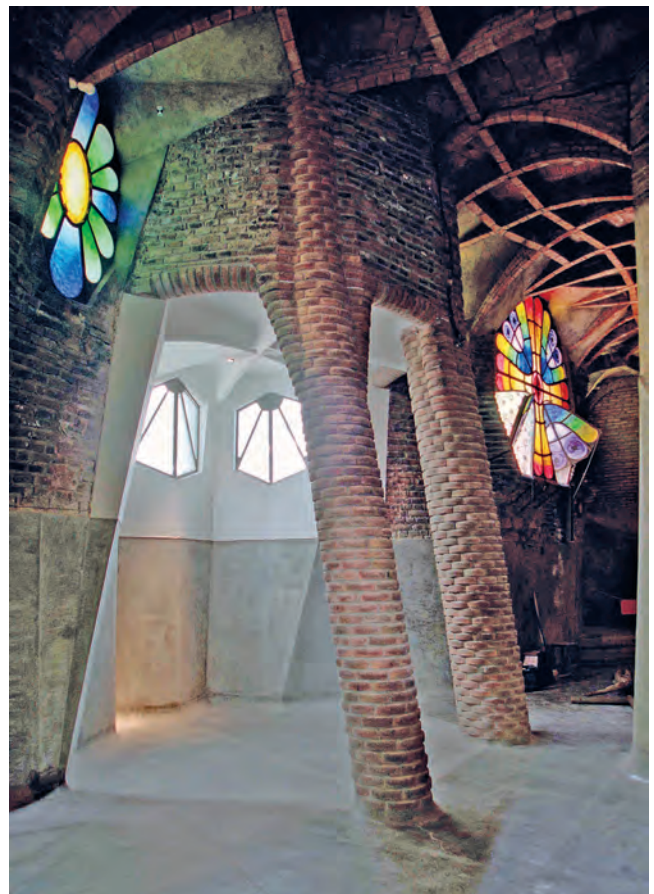


FIGURE 8. Church at Colònia Güell. Chapel of the Holy Christ. Photo: Montserrat Baldomà (2003). SPAL Archive (Provincial Council of Barcelona).

ducted, the reform of the interior was designed and even started in order to bring it closer to the image that Gaudí had designed.²⁷ However, it was never finished either.

THE SAGRADA FAMÍLIA

As I write these lines, the Sagrada Família temple, the building in Barcelona that has garnered the most worldwide fame, is an immense mass in the middle of the Eixample district, a hulking mass of stone – with different colours, textures and patinas – surrounded by huge, bustling cranes and herds of people queuing, taking photos or yawning as someone recites its history. Most of these stories (those recounted inside the hulk as well) are inexact or conceal important nuances of the truth. The most common inaccuracy heard is that the unfinished temple was designed by Antoni Gaudí. Other omissions or tall tales refer to the historical process of its construction, the social significance of the building or the date of its expected completion.

It is a known fact that the driving force and mastermind behind what the temple should be was a devout bookseller, Josep Maria Bocabella, who was poised to fiercely counter any revolution in his time. In 1881, he purchased land in the Poblet neighbourhood of Sant Martí de Provençals (in a presumably speculative transac-

tion, which has not yet been disproven).²⁸ At the same time, he commissioned the design to the diocesan architect, Francesc de Paula del Villar, who came up with a Neogothic design. The first stone was laid on the 19th of March 1882, and the next year, Villar resigned to avoid further battles with the bookseller. This is when Gaudí appeared, barely 30 years old, not too tall, with blue eyes and not much of a reputation in architecture yet. He earned the approval of Bocabella, who would remain at the helm. According to Casanelles, Gaudí's presence at the site was almost anonymous until 1900.²⁹

From the outset, Gaudí chose to carry on with the original project without making a new set of blueprints of the temple. And he never did. He limited himself to improving certain aspects of Villar's project and to designing the eastern façade. The first pencil sketch by Gaudí showing a possible image of the temple as a whole was made in 1905. Shortly thereafter, on the request of the poet Joan Maragall, Gaudí strove to come up with a more specific design for the temple which he was building *sans* blueprints. According to Casanelles, "he responded to the vagueness upheld until then with future vagueness. Even though he didn't do it personally. He left it in the hands of a devout admirer". He is referring to the drawing published in *La Veu de Catalunya* on the 20th of January 1906, which was quite similar to the one that Joan Rubió i Bellver made to



FIGURE 9. Gaudí's Sagrada Família (1884–1926). Photo: author unknown (1926). GMN Archive (Nebreda Collection).

publish in the magazine *Il·lustració Catalana* on the 10th of March of that same year. There are no more drawings or blueprints made by Gaudí – or even by his disciples during his lifetime – with the exception of the sketch that Gaudí himself made in 1917 showing what the lower part of the western façade should be like, scrawled on a scrap of paper which the architect was carrying in his pocket when he was mortally injured. According to Martinell, the overall plan of the Sagrada Família “was only a virtual image in the architect’s mind which was externalised when his orders made it almost visible”.

After three years of seldom visiting the Sagrada Família since he had thrown himself fully in the construction of the Colònia Güell, suddenly without any other private commission, Gaudí finally took refuge in the temple under construction. Enclosed in its premises, determined to resolve a challenge that no longer made any sense in that century, namely “overcoming the Gothic”, and a slave to his own fetishes and obsessions, Gaudí broke off any ties with the evolution of modern architecture. It was a shame, because a genius like him could have contributed a great deal, at least to the debate on what the now-unstoppable revolution entailed. The lone wolf that he had always been shut himself up all alone, meekly, in those premises still permeated with the memory of the devout Bocabella.

“The master’s architectural work [at the Sagrada Família]”, says Martinell, “finished with the terminal cross of the Saint Barnabas tower [1925], or perhaps with the finishing touches on the façade that [the architects] Sugañes and Quintana completed following his instructions. Everything else”, claims the best disciple and biographer that Gaudí has had, “is a continuation of a new stage which he had planned with a new rejuvenating spirit that would benefit his work”. This spirit unfortunately was never unleashed. After 1952, other architects continued construction, remaking models and interpreting photographs of those handful of little sketches by Gaudí (not even the originals, which were lost in 1936). Attributing to Gaudí everything that has been done since his time (no matter how interesting it is or could be) has a whiff of tourist marketing and disparagement of the successive architects, from Domènec Sugañes i Gras to Jordi Faulí i Oller, who have overseen the construction since the summer of 1926.

On the 7th of June 1926, Gaudí was run over by a streetcar on line 30 when he was crossing Gran Via de les Corts Catalanes near Carrer de Bailén. Transferred to the old Santa Creu hospital in the Raval district, he died there three days later. The social, religious and political myth-making of the son of the boilermaker from Riudoms began with his massive burial. But that is a different story.

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BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Antoni González Moreno-Navarro (Barcelona, 1943). Architect (1970). Monument restorer (9th to 20th centuries). Winner of the 1980 FAD award. Public servant (1981-2013). Head of the Monument Service (SPAL) of the Provincial Council of Barcelona (1981-2008). Director of the restorations of the Palau Güell and the church at the Colònia Güell, and of the virtual reconstruction of the Sala Mercè. Founder and president of the Academia del Partal. Publicist and lecturer. Author of *La restauració objectiva. Mètode SCCM de restauració monumental* and a dozen books on history and architecture.