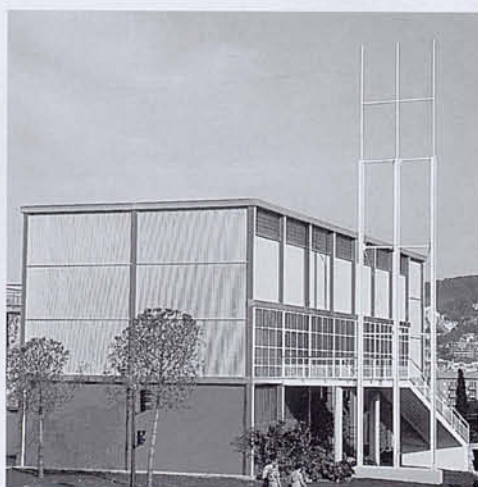




RECOVERING ARCHITECTURE



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BARCELONA PAVILION, J. LL. SERT AND L. LACASA (1939).
REBUILT BY M. ESPINET - A. AUBACH - J. M. HERNÁNDEZ
(1992)

THE RECOVERY OF OUR HISTORICAL HERITAGE HAS BEEN
FUNDAMENTAL IN ROUSING COLLECTIVE MEMORIES AND HAS
MADE A LEADING CONTRIBUTION TO THE REDISCOVERY OF A PAST
WHICH WILL ONLY BE A TANGIBLE GUARANTEE OF THE PRESENT
THROUGH THE MATERIALITY OF ITS SIGNS.

ADOLF MARTÍNEZ I MATAMALA



PATI DE LES DONES. FORMER CHARITY HOUSE, BARCELONA. ARCH. H. PIÑÓN AND A. VIAPLANA

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Catalonia, like the rest of the nations of Europe, has a considerable quantity of buildings of good quality which have become signs of our collective identity. This wealth is a product of the logical accumulation that has taken place over centuries of history, from early Greek constructions to more recent contemporary work. But it can also be attributed to the need our way of life generates of inhabiting, or being in a place with which we can identify, which we can feel part of as the recipients of a past and of a project. This existential need for historical reference points—which probably looks to the past for the stable values lacking in the contemporary world—leads to a constant increase in cultural interests. Hence the shift in society from an attitude of ignorance and unconcern as regards the accumulated heritage to one that values vestiges of the past as cultural goods, an attitude that is often exaggerated and sometimes owes more to the age of the work than to its intrinsic quality.

Nevertheless, this situation, common to the whole of the old world, has a particular political significance in our country. The end of the dictatorship and the beginning of the transition to democracy and home rule, which took place in Catalonia twenty years ago, set off an exciting collective process of identification with the idea of nationhood, which was inseparable from our recently recovered liberties. In this context, the recovery of our historical heritage, as well as of the institutions, traditions and ideas that had been dormant since the Spanish civil war, was fundamental in rousing collective memories and made a leading contribution to the rediscovery of a past which can only be a tangible guarantee of the present through the materiality of its signs.

The selection of buildings and urban complexes for which protection is requested is based on a system of values which varies over the ages and which depends only on the relations established between men and their surroundings. Over the ages, this system of values has swung between

exalted conservation and confrontation with tradition. This unresolved conflict is the central issue in the debate on strategies for action on the heritage; a debate which is present in our country and which is being presented here through a discussion of some of the questions it raises. One approach sets out to assess the essential value of historical buildings, questioning the convenience of maintaining or renewing a specific function for these buildings other than the transmission of their symbolic value. Whatever the case, using historic sites involves structural work which will cause changes to the building's appearance. These changes can only be assessed on the basis of variable criteria that fluctuate from one moment of history to another and from one culture to another. In addition, we have to remember that total conservation is impossible, since even the most respectful restorations cause changes in the object being preserved. From an extreme point of view, therefore, it would be legitimate to defend the decay and ruin of a monu-



GERMAN PAVILION, MIES VAN DER ROHE | REBUILT BY THE ARCHITECTS C. CIRICI, F. RAMOS AND I. SOLÀ-MORALES (1984)

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ment as an added value to be preserved, part of its very meaning as a testimony of the passage of time.

The repairs to the former monastery of Sant Pere de Rodes, a foremost work of Catalan Romanesque art, provide a good example of how an intervention of great poetic content can be undertaken with the right degree of radicalism and sensitivity to establish an honest and direct dialogue with the monument. After the Benedictine community abandoned the monastery at the beginning of the last century, the progressive degradation of the buildings was aggravated by the looting and destruction of its sculptural and documentary patrimony. More than a building, Sant Pere de Rodes is a magnificent ruin which the architects J.A.Martínez-Lapeña and E.Torres have set out to consolidate by exploiting its aesthetic charm and establishing itineraries and basic services that help visitors to understand the extent of the construction. The new building work takes the form of a series of specific interventions of a minimalist nature, whose

formal approach and texture contrast with those of the already existing constructions without being an obstacle to their appreciation. The same tone can be seen in these architects' work of consolidation and restoration on the castle of Bellver in Palma de Mallorca.

An illustration of the opposite tendency is the restoration of the Roman theatre in Sagunt, the work of the architects G.Grassi and M.Portacelli, which has given rise to one of the bitterest controversies of recent years as to the criteria on which preservation of the heritage should be based and the limits to which it should be taken. Sagunt, close to the city of Valencia and probably an Iberian settlement, was one of the most important cities on the Peninsula's Mediterranean coast during the early days of the Roman Empire, probably the third in size following Tarraco and Cartago Nova. Proof of its magnificence is that, like Tarraco, it had two buildings for large-scale entertainment: a circus and a theatre. The basic criterion for the restoration was to re-

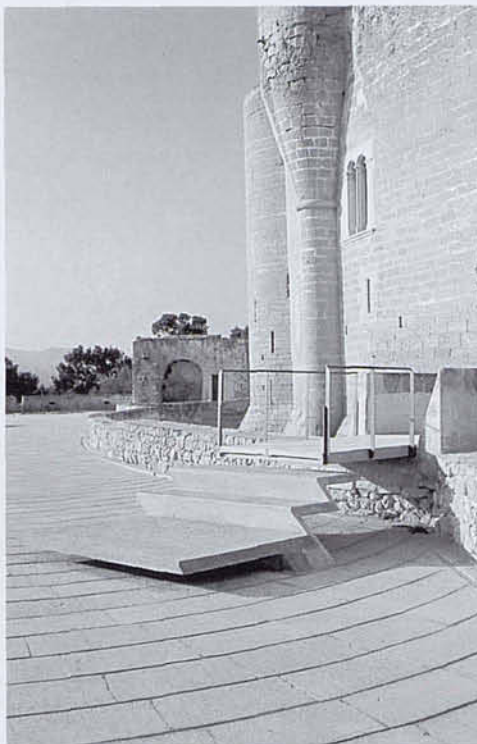
cover the functionality of the Roman theatre by rebuilding the seating in white stone and, in a radically unorthodox move, building a new stage over the remains of the Roman construction. The existing architecture is here understood as historical material with which it is legitimate to work from the present.

This approach raises another of the central questions in the debate on intervention in architectural remains: historical material is seen as the context with which it is necessary to establish a conflictive dialogue, over and above mimetic reconstruction and stylistic exactness. The historical object is valued as a tectonic reality in which the intervention supposes a further layer added to the accumulation of moments and the remains deposited over the course of time. The legitimacy and convenience of this sort of intervention depend on the subtlety of the relationship between new and old. In projects to enlarge historic buildings the type of dialogue the new architecture establishes with the old becomes more evident. If his-

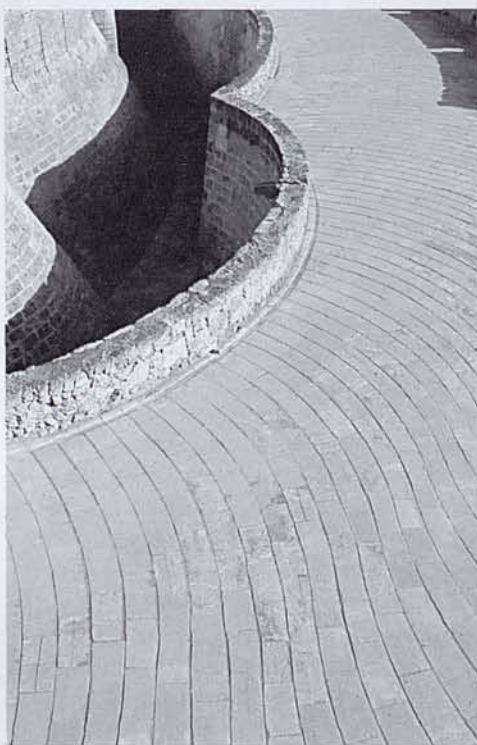
torical architecture provides the frame for all conservation work, this condition becomes especially important when it comes to extending a building. The existing construction has to be seen as a developing organism. Its internal logic is projected beyond the original limits to condition and bring to life the new architecture.

The enlargement, conversion and restoration of the Palau de la Música Catalana, one of the most interesting examples of Catalan Modernist architecture and the work of Ll.Domènech i Muntaner, was planned from the viewpoint of the necessary modernization and reconditioning of a concert hall. However, the work goes beyond these considerations and centres on recovering the building's spatial structure and correcting the conflicts with its immediate surroundings. Reducing the length of the unfinished neighbouring church made it possible to recover one of the chief features of this concert hall, which is attached to other constructions but was planned as a free-standing public building. The conversion by the architects O.Tusquets and C.Díaz has turned the glass wall planned by Domènech as a false interior façade into a true façade which harmonizes with the new service building and its elegantly contextualist architecture.

The work by the architects H.Piñon and A.Viaplana on the building known as the Pati de les Dones in the old Charity House in Barcelona shows an approach aimed at avoiding confrontation with the already existing building, thereby circumventing problems in compositional relations. The resolution of the large subterranean vestibule, the volumetric clarity of the new building forming the north wing of the courtyard, juxtaposed with the original building without interfering with it, and the immateriality of the new glass façade overlooking the courtyard, with an inflection in the form of a cornice, are aspects characterizing the strategy of this project.



CASTELL DE BELLVER. PALMA DE MALLORCA. REBUILT BY THE ARCHITECTS J.A. MARTÍNEZ LAPEÑA AND E. TORRES



CASTELL DE BELLVER. PALMA DE MALLORCA. REBUILT BY THE ARCHITECTS J.A. MARTÍNEZ LAPEÑA AND E. TORRES

The sum of operations for the conversion of the Casa de la Caritat, part of the plan to clean up and restore Barcelona's Raval district, has turned the cluster of buildings built up during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries around the former Carthusian monastery into a new cultural and artistic centre. The demolition of part of the historic complex of buildings freed the site on which Barcelona's new Museum of Contemporary Art has been built, the work of the American architect R.Meier. The radical nature of the intervention in this sector is argued for by the wish to create an important centre of activities capable of bringing new life to a severely run-down area of the city centre. Operations affecting the heritage often form part of strategies responding to interests that have nothing to do with the actual valuation and preservation of the works. This in itself is recognition of the importance that reconditioning monuments can have in the development of public projects. The precise reconstruction of historical buildings is the paradigm of this sort of situation, since here one sees most clearly the capacity of the present for rebuilding the past and appropriating it as a secure value outside the market. One of the most emblematic moves in Barcelona's candidacy for the 1992 Olympic Games was the decision to recondition, in spite of its functional inadequacy and its poor state of repair, the old Montjuïc Stadium built in 1929 on occasion of the Universal Exhibition and a symbol of the city's Olympic aspirations frustrated by the Spanish civil war. The consensus between the different public administrations and influential sectors of Catalan society to rebuild the main hall of the Gran Teatre del Liceu – a symbol of the city's cultural life, burnt down in 1994 – exactly as it was can also be seen in this light.

This sort of reconstruction leads us to the debate on the authenticity and originality of historic buildings. In the same way that culture can reinvent traditions and even history itself, it can also reinvent monu-



SANT PERE DE RODES. REBUILT BY J.A. MARTÍNEZ LAPEÑA AND E. TORRES



SANT PERE DE RODES. SERVICES. REBUILT BY J.A. MARTÍNEZ LAPEÑA AND E. TORRES

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ments. We could say that the ruins of a building, which are no more than a vestige of the original building, can come to acquire a meaning of their own as a ruin and, therefore, a new authenticity. However, the reconstruction *ex novo* of a historical building can acquire the value of authenticity as a way of reappropriating a referent from the past endowed with a new collective significance.

The reconstruction of the German pavilion from the 1929 Universal Exhibition in Barcelona and the Spanish pavilion from the International Exhibition in Paris in 1937 are examples of the documentary and political value attached to "newly authentic" monuments. In both cases the reconstructors have had to fight to obtain durable buildings—an essential category in any monument—while at the same time preserving their character as ephemeral exhibition constructions.

The reconstruction of the German pavilion, an emblematic work by Mies van der Rohe recognized as one of the funda-

mental landmarks of modern architecture, represents the culmination of a long process begun in Barcelona in 1954 which received the support of the architect himself. Rebuilt by the architects C.Cirici, F.Ramos and I.Solà-Morales, it was inaugurated in 1984 on its original site in the Park of Montjuïc in Barcelona. Its recovery materializes Catalan culture's unbroken link with the European avant-gardes. Known all over the world as the Barcelona Pavilion, it has become a symbol of the city's international projection and of the recovery of its commercial and cultural openness to the world. The reconstruction of the Spanish Republic's pavilion, the work of the architects J.Ll.Sert and L.Lacas, represents not only the recovery of one of the most significant works of Catalan rationalism, but also of one of the most powerful cries for help made to attract the attention of the world to the tragedy of the Spanish civil war. Amongst many other works of art, the original pavilion exhibited pieces which

were built or painted specially for the occasion and today are considered of great significance in the history of modern art, such as Calder's *Mercury Fountain*, Miró's *Catalan Peasant and Revolution* and Picasso's *Guernica*. The pavilion, originally built in the gardens of the Trocadero in Paris, was reconstructed by the architects M.Espinet, A.Ubach and J.M.Hernández in the new Vall d'Hebron park in Barcelona on the occasion of the 1992 Olympic Games.

My aim here is not to judge results, so much as to comment on approaches, approaches that start with the doubt that arises when tackling an old topic from a new perspective, with a new feeling for the past. The debate, which is still going on all over the world, has not taken place in our country on paper or in conference halls, but on the drawing table and in the works themselves. And its results, abundant, varied and of differing quality, are today an important part of our historic architecture. ■