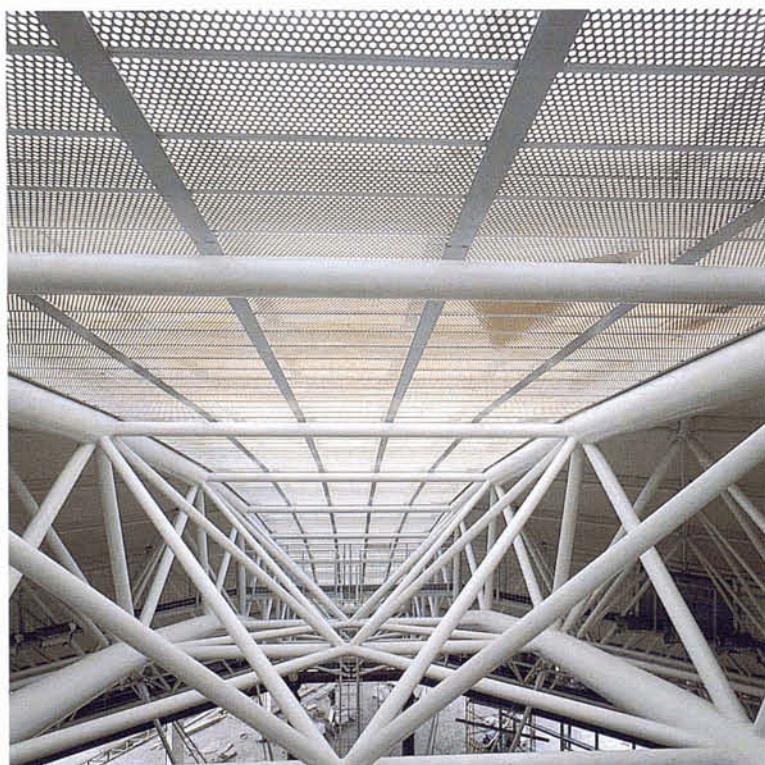


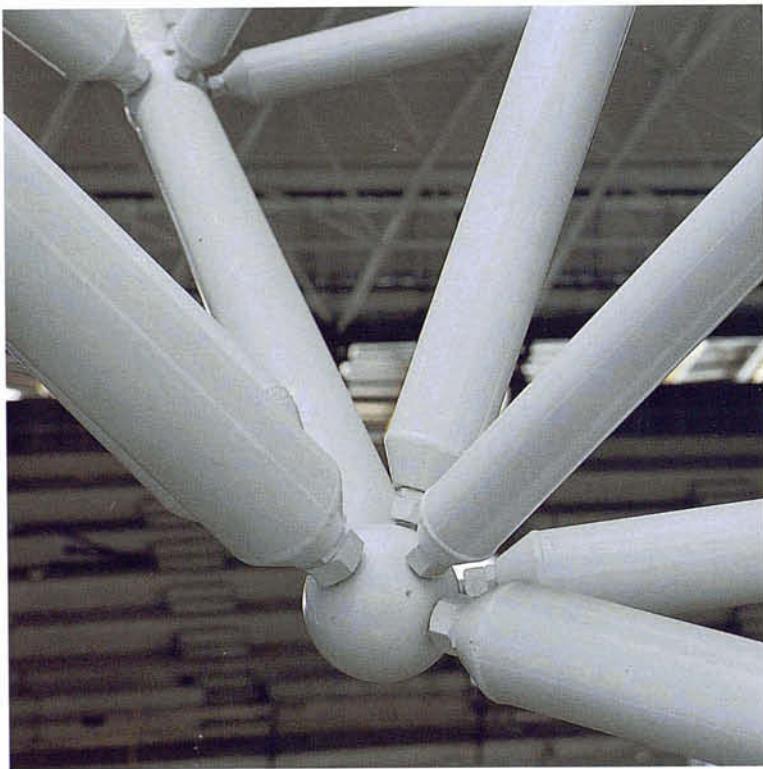
ARCHITECTURE AS A GAME. ISOZAKI IN BARCELONA

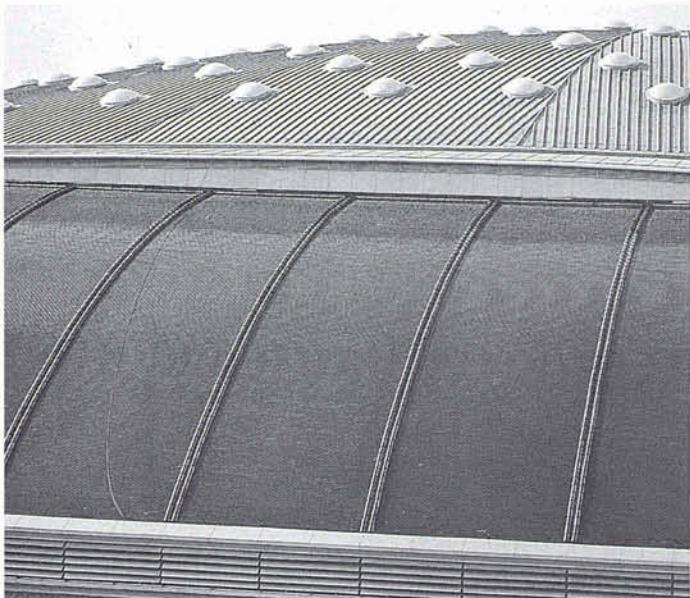
THERE IS NO DENYING THE GROWING IMPORTANCE OF JAPANESE ARCHITECTURE TODAY. IN ISOZAKI'S APPROACH TO HIS WORK IN THE WEST, HE REMAINS FAITHFUL TO HIS ORIENTAL ORIGINS THOUGH WITHOUT FORGETTING THE WESTERN WORLD.



PAVILION SANT JORDI, BARCELONA.

XAVIER GÜELL ARCHITECT





PAVILION SANT JORDI. BARCELONA.

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Even before the International Olympic Committee chose Barcelona to host the summer games of 1992, the city felt an overwhelming need to retrieve the sports precinct for which the stadium had been built, at the end of the twenties, as part of the development of the mountain of Montjuïc. In this way, the "Estadi" and the "Palau Nacional" became the last two symbols to lose their condition of ephemeral architecture after the Barcelona International Exhibition of 1929 and survive to the beginning of our decade: the eighties.

Following the restricted international contest for the development of the sector known as the "Anella Olímpica", or Olympic Ring, the city of Barcelona heard the judges' verdict: the restoration of the stadium would be the responsibility of the architects Alfonso Milà, Federico Correa, Vittorio Gregotti, Joan Margarit and Carles Buxadé;

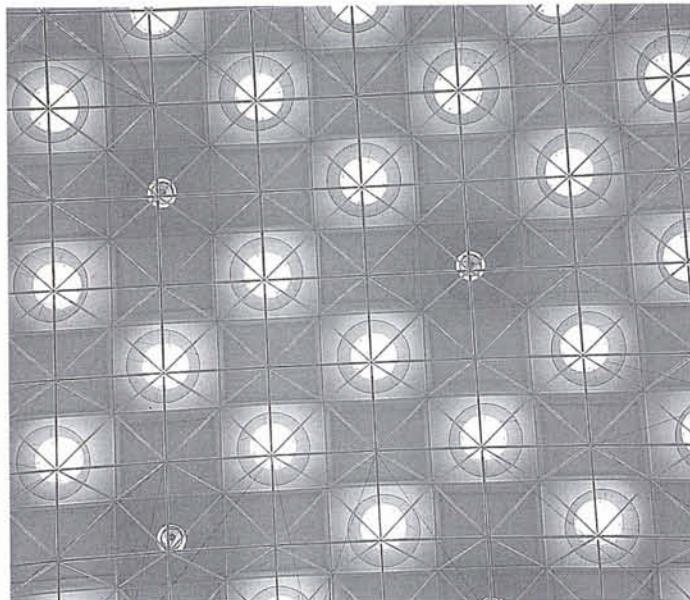
the construction of the INEF (National Institute for Physical Education) was assigned to Ricard Bofill and his Taller d'Arquitectura, and finally, the new Palau d'Esports was to be the work of the architect Arata Isozaki.

Arata Isozaki was born in 1931 in Oita, Kyushu, in Japan. He was a favourite student of Kenzo Tange, with whom he worked on the projects for the 1964 Olympic Games in Tokyo, in particular on the Sports Palace in Takamatsu, between 1962 and 1964.

Isozaki's first plans for Barcelona were to be a result of this collaboration. Very soon new versions appeared, new designs, new ideas, gradually giving shape to a building whose roots lie in Oriental culture, but which faces up to the challenge of the inevitable adaptation to the western world. Isozaki has managed to achieve harmony with Catalan architecture. No doubt he has looked to Modernism, which is recog-

nized as the most characteristic development in contemporary Catalan culture, and come across Antoni Gaudí and his student Josep M. Jujol. From Gaudí he has borrowed those structural and formal elements which leave most room for creativity while at the same time recognizing their links with Catalan architecture. Isozaki wants his work to relate to its location, not only by virtue of its formal affinity to Catalan architecture, but mainly because he is interested in combining high technology with handicrafts in those elements which stand out for their chromatic strength or for their importance in the final result and which provide yet another link between east and west.

The Palau d'Esports Sant Jordi (1986-1990), measuring almost 140 x 120 metres and with a seating capacity of 17,000, comes high on the list of international architecture today, thanks to the dome which forms the roof, and



which was constructed using an articulated, mobile system called Pantadome. The reason I mention this roof is that, throughout the creative process, it received a variety of different shapes, outlines and solutions. It is worth commenting on the asymmetrical design in relation to its longitudinal axis, intended as a transposition of the outline of the mountain of Montjuïc, a characteristic feature of the Barcelona skyline. Other elements of the Palau which should be mentioned are the facades of the four faces, successfully completed with modulated, fine-textured panels; the spacious vestibule, with its stained-glass windows, overlooking the square which is to include a sophisticated sculpture by Aiko Miyawaki, and from which one can appreciate the sinusoidal movement of the roof; the spacious dimensions for the successful distribution of the public, apart from the constellation of holes in the dome, an interesting feature with a

two-fold sporting/urban role, according to whether it is seen at night from the interior or from the exterior.

Taking advantage of Isozaki's presence in Barcelona, the local authorities of Palafolls, a small town near the coast north of Barcelona, commissioned him to design a sports pavilion. The result of this commission is a circular figure with a diameter of 67.5 metres, situated in a new development area.

His approach to the project is startlingly simple. Half of the circle makes up the pavilion itself, while the other half is taken up by entrances and all the other elements involved in the arrival and accommodation of the public at a sports event.

Once past the doorway with its pergolas, we step in onto a hard floor, and after the access to the interior, there is a soft floor which warns us of the relaxation needed before following the efforts of the athletes taking part in

whatever event is going on. Once again, the roof of the pavilion is worth a special mention. Perfectly aligned along the perimeter, it slopes up to give the principle facade the importance it deserves, while taking into account its northerly orientation. A discreet opening at the back lights up the interior with rays of sunlight which are softened to compensate for the heat which is inevitable in any building situated on the Mediterranean coast.

There is no denying the growing importance of Japanese architecture today: an architecture which aims at clarity and substantiality and is essential and paradigmatic. In Isozaki's approach to his work in the west, he remains faithful to his Oriental principles though without forgetting that the western world can also teach him to use the cards which are indispensable for a perfect game: the game of cultured architecture. ■