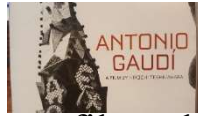


Lecture 2 - Trencadís

[Hiroshi Teshigahara film: ch.15 – Güell Palace]



After obtaining his degree in architecture, Gaudí's first design as an architect was **his own roll-top desk**. Here we find characteristics that would carry through the his work for the rest of his life: **top-loaded massing perched atop narrow, short supports**, as in the arches of the Poblet Monastery; **parabolic section**; **decorative applied metalwork**; in the form **of flora and fauna** – snakes, lizards, praying mantis, birds, butterflies and bees within ivy and sprigs of bay; and **functional above all** contortions of form.



The desk was significant for another reason – constructed at Eudaldo Punti's workshop, one day while visiting the shop to discuss its fabrication, Gaudí was **introduced to Eusebi Güell** (admired Gaudí's second place glass display cabinet design for glove maker Esteve Comella at the 1878 Paris World Fair), Barcelona's **largest industrialist, the Güell factories manufacturing textiles**, Catalonia's principal product (while Spain was mostly agricultural). The Güell family were "**indianos**", entrepreneurs who made their fortune in the Americas. In particular, like many of the Barcelona industrialists, Joan Güell (Eusebi Güell's father, who passed away in 1872) **made his fortune in Cuba and Puerto Rico, trading with the colonies** controlled by a Catalan network of economic interests, **established by wealthy families related in marriage** (Eusebi Güell married the daughter of the first Marquis de Comillas, Jacint Verdaguer's Catalan poem L'Atlàntida written in his honor, the Marquis and Joan Güell were memorialized with statues bookmarking the ends of the new Passeig de Colom running along the waterfront. Poets, painters and architects were retained to create the propaganda for their legacies.). The merchants and shopkeepers on these islands and the commercial ships supplying them from Spain, were monopolized by the Catalans. **All of this capital from overseas, fueled the investment in land and industries of Barcelona**. These slave-based colonies never gained their independence from Spain, despite several attempts, however Barcelona's economy was deeply affected by the loss of Cuba and Puerto Rico to the United States in the Spanish-American War of 1898.

Eusebi Güell was **a patron of the arts** (seated at his desk in 1900, heading the committee of the Jocs Florals literary competition; also founder of the La Renaixença periodical), “**a true gentleman**, of princely spirit, reminiscent of the Medicis of Florence.” **He was thrifty** to the extent he would cut off unused portion of writing paper, but **generous to a fault when it came to works of art** or beneficence. In a time when the Modernista artist and intellectuals were urging the bourgeoisie a greater consumption of artworks, the conversion of art into commodity in a market, **Güell sought to re-establish the figure of patron**, making the artist dependent both in their output and the subjects of their work. Yet, Barcelona had become bourgeois in excess, not sufficiently aristocratic and lived in ignorance of Catalonia’s glorious past. There were few palaces in the true sense, too many bourgeois villas. Güell was resolved to not be bourgeois, but a gentleman, one who still traveled in horse drawn carriages, in an industrial age with streetcars.



In 1883, as a member of the **Sociedad Cooperative Obrera Mataronesa**, Gaudí **designed and built his first parabolic arch**, a wood structure forming a machinery shed for bleaching fabrics. The cooperative was one of the first in Spain, a **pioneering approach to manufacturing that could have seriously threatened the oligarchy of Barcelona’s textile families**. It is no surprise therefore, a year later he left the cooperative, when he was given his first commission from Eusebi Güell for the horse and carriage stables of his country estate.



A year later in 1885, two years after being named the new architect for the Sagrada Família, his **growing confidence was visible in his bold design for the dragon gate** (fabricated in Vallet workshop) and his **re-design for the Sagrada Família**, departing from the original architect’s (Villar y Lozano) Gothic design. This was the **height of Gaudí’s dandyism, abandoning the workers cooperative for an aristocratic lifestyle**, dining on fine food, taking in the opera, smoking cigars at the late-night street cafés. His growing relationships with the cultural intellectuals, Güell included, discussing Catalan heritage and artistic traditions, made him the ideal architect for Count Güell palace (he was **named the Güell family architect**).

It was during this period that Gaudí was constructing Casa Vicens and was in the practice of arriving on site in an open-top carriage, without descending or taking off his gloves, he would spread out the plans on his lap and imperiously direct work from the street. Further, he would **edit the building, tearing down walls and entire rooms, as if it was merely a plaster sculpture or cardboard maquette**. It was described as typically Spanish, where artists go on **the principle of ‘seeing how it will turn out’**, beginning with **only a vague notion of what they are going to produce and an absolute confidence in their own abilities, in their innate genius** and therefore capable of creating either a masterpiece or some stupendous monstrosity. In the case of Casa Vicens, this fantastically expensive way of working, drove the homeowner to the verge of bankruptcy. However in the case of Güell’s townhouse, which was to be more than a villa for the newly found bourgeois industrialist, he was to build a palace for the wealthiest industrialist, who saw himself as a gentleman aristocrat. Therefore, **money was no object** in creating the greatest splendor Gaudí could dream up. And, Gaudí took him to task. Once when Güell returned from a trip, his accountant complained “I fill Don Eusebi’s pockets and Gaudí then empties them,” handing Güell a pile of bills. Annoyed by the accountant’s interference, he replied, “Is that all Gaudí has spent?”



Güell located his palace in the old town of Barcelona, just off the Ramblas, its main thoroughfare with the city’s most prestigious mansions of the 18th century. The remodeling of their country estate completed, where the Güell family resided most of the time, **the palace in town would be used for more formal social events, concerts and receptions**, such as the Spanish royal family received in 1888 with the Barcelona Worlds Fair (and presented with demands for Catalan autonomy). The Palacio Güell was not set out to be of the age of wrought iron, but to be timeless, hence its columns of masonry (80 cm dia. in basement). And, **of extraordinary quantity of craftsmanship** – more than 125 columns, each with a uniquely designed and sculpted capital. An **extravagant display of the time spent in labor**, more than the labored objects themselves. Güell sought to build a palace to rival the luxuries of Palau Moja, the property of his brother-in-law, the Second Marquès de Comillas, Claudio López y Bru, just up the street west of the Ramblas.



(Lady at Eden Concert, 1903)

Despite this part of town's rich history, at this time it was **the part of town filled with vice**, "the fowl slime of city sewers, those wasted by disease, degeneration, wanderers without family or homeland, vagrants, tramps and beggars, heads crawling with lice, dark spirits at the mercy of animal instincts, whores, cretins, madmen, thieves," **a neighborhood under constant threat of TB, absinthe, syphilis and abject poverty**. Across the street was the notorious **Eden Concert**, a variety theater of pantomime, slight of hand, and cinema. On the second floor was a brothel, run by **Madame (Carlota) Valdivia**, the subject of **Picasso's blue period** painting **La Celestina** (1904), painted in his studio next door, which he occupied just two decades later.



It is no surprise therefore, in contrast to the joyous, colorful façade of Casa Vicens, that the **front elevation of the Palácio Güell would be austere, made of grey Garraf marble, a stern face confronting the cold streets**. Here the **decorative ironwork of the imposing paired gates earn their keep, protecting the treasures found inside**.



Arriving by carriage, Gaudí brought the **stables inside**, down a ramp to the basement. For the first time in Barcelona, guest could pull inside the safety of the house, before stepping out of their carriage and up the flight of stairs, to be received on the Mezzanine.



A Venetian Palazzo, squeezed into a narrow site, set apart from the street as if sitting on the Grand Canal. Despite the nod to Venice with the elevated projection of the Main Floor, this palazzo was unmistakably Catalan with the two meter high display of Catalan pride between the two arc gates. Wrought iron depicts the four bars of the Catalan flag, surmounted by a **phoenix taking flight – a symbol of the Renaixença (Catalan renaissance)**.



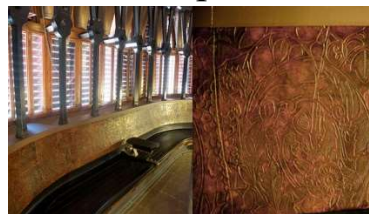
However here, the bird stands atop a helmet crowning the flag, an allusion to Jaume I, the 13th century king whose conquest of Valencia and Mallorca marked the beginning of Catalan's Mediterranean expansion. The bat (rat penat, often mistaken as a winged dragon), is found on the crest of Jaume I and repeated at the highest point of the house, atop the lantern on the roof. Here again, as in the gate of the Güell country estate, layered metaphors of Hercules, Jaume I and the Renaixença. The house in its solidity and mythology, seeks to be the foundation for the spirit of Catalonia, within the Güell palace.



Yet, as in the dragon gate, here the bat is also celebrated, sitting atop of the house, the highest minaret 45 meters above the roof. It is not Hercules or Jaume I that is represented figuratively, the defenders of the Golden Apples in the Garden of Hesperides, rather it is the winged dragon, that threatens to steal all of the garden's treasures. In 19th century Barcelona, that dragon was Güell and the garden was the Spanish colonies supplying tobacco, slaves, molasses and rum, along with the Catalan industries of mining, steel and textiles. These entrepreneurial industrialists were just an extension of the long historic tradition illustrated in L'Atlàntida, legitimizing Catalan plutocracy.



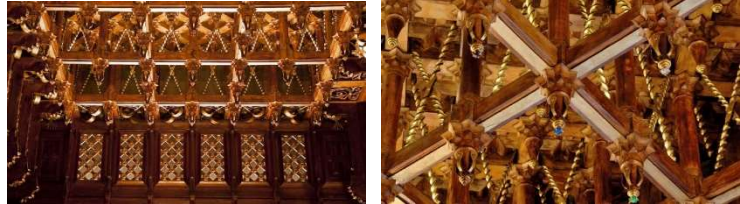
And, in the Güell palace, we find the winged dragon throughout, from the Catalan crest centered on the main entry to the top of the rooftop central spire.



Inside the dragon's lair, is the guarded garden of treasures, sconces and candelabras attached to marble walls and beaten copper sheets (Gaudí's first trade).



Ebony, tortoiseshell and ivory fragments were inlaid meticulously into wood. One room eucalyptus, the next beech, while Islamic-derived sequences of marquetry in pearwood, palisander and padouk.



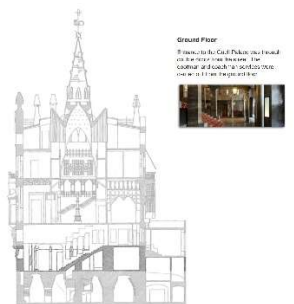
Carved wood ceilings in the salons, with applied silver and gold leaf to the polychrome beams.



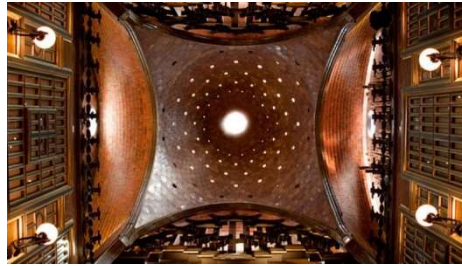
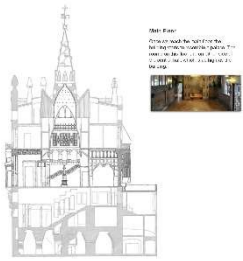
The **ironwork weaves its way throughout the house like ivy**, literally attaching itself to the walls and columns.



The artwork is not hung on the walls, but becomes part of the walls, becomes the house. Mosaics, stained glass, and mural paintings by Aleix Clapés **turn the corners**, not as traditionally centered on wall space. A sense of solidity is created, temporality has been removed, the most inalienable of possessions, in a culture of consumption.



Situated on a small lot (18m x 20m), adjoining his father's house (Joan Güell), the **building developed vertically**, through 8 levels. From the ground floor entrance hall, a central stair arrives on the mezzanine with the office from which Güell directed his businesses.



A side stair up to the main floor, with dining room and sitting rooms laid out around a domed central salon 20 meters high (9m x 9m), pushing up through three floors. The heart of the house, here concerts (a love of music from his mother's family, the Marques), parties and receptions were held, as well as religious ceremonies.



On one occasion, in 1893, premiered **Hymn of Apollo**, a composition discovered from 138 B.C. at Delphi. Played in the central salon by a full orchestra and choir accompanied by the organ built into the house, it was a metaphor for the eclectic style, with melodies moving in short intervals, disjointed rhythmic sequences, continuously returning to a keynote.



From the salon, a transverse open stair leads to a balcony to hold the musicians overlooking the hall behind wooden screens. An Arab hammam, where the caliph could peer down unobserved on his harem of heavenly delights. In the corner a discrete door accesses a stair to the family bedrooms on the floor above and servants' quarters on the top level.



On the roof, Gaudí's first terrace, with a cluster of 18 decorated chimneys and ventilator shafts, each unique in material and shape, made from the waste of the building site – shards of glass, marble, tile, the remains of a lime kiln. Combined at random in ingenious and fanciful forms, displaying artistry from rubble. The leftover remnants from the work are put to use, no waste, as in nature. Redeemed of its condition, cleansed of its sin, raised to the highest point on the roof.



Completing the metaphoric cosmos, from the bowels underground in the stables, the main floor salon as earth, the star filled dome sky overhead, natural light filtering through the punched perforations, and the roof terrace as triumphant heaven with the central spire covered in Triassic limestone, an **axis mundi**, the founding order, place of sacred communication with God. All enshrined within a single structure, a **spiraling processional vertically**, from the earthly sins to the heavens above, Palau Güell offers redemption, resurrection for a worldly Prince.



The **parabolic arc**, adopted by Gaudí as a signature motif, becomes an elevated spiritual curve which tends to rise like a flame through the house. Confronting the public on the street in the paired front doors, then inside emerging from the columns, springing forth everywhere, to a grandiose crescendo in the cupola of the main salon, before fragmenting into the swift spirals of the rooftop chimneys – a **total work of art, thematic and integrated**. The variety in materials and design, every column, every chimney, every room, with a unique design, not just an exotic exuberance, but **an expression of individuality**, the riches of the king of industry holding court in his Catalan palace.

[10 MINUTE BREAK]



In early 1887, Gaudí received word from **Bishop Grau** in Astorga of the need to build an **Episcopal Palace** and the Bishop, who he knew from Tarragona, suggested Gaudí's name as architect. With construction work underway on both Casa Vicens and Palacio Güell, Gaudí had no time to travel to Astorga (Northwest corner of Spain, full day travel), so he asked the Bishop to send photographs of the **local monuments, books on local history, site details** and impressions of the **vernacular styles**. By the end of the year, Gaudí had sent the Bishop a design.



Once construction had concluded on Casa Vicens and Palacio Güell, Gaudí made a visit to Astorga, where he found his initial feelings for the terrain, based on the **materials the Bishop had sent him, had misled him**. He rapidly modified his designs for the Episcopal Palace. By the summer of the next year, in 1889, construction began. The design was **Gothic in style**, as was traditionally considered the appropriate style for religious buildings at that time. In the basement we find the heavy brick supports, reminiscent of Palacio Güell's basement stables, but here more refined and taking **from the Poblet Monastery, the pointed arch atop short, narrow columns**.



On the main floor, we find a signature feature in Gaudí's work, which we also saw in the front façade of Palacio Güell, **paired arches, here accentuating the single column standing alone in the open space**.



But it is on the exterior, that we find the **first hint of the sculptural plasticity** Gaudí would develop in his future works – a **splayed triple arches on the entry**, that flared out forward supporting a mediaeval style balcony turret.

Constructed at the start of winter in 1890, Gaudí made the trip to Astorga to oversee the raising of the portico. **Carved of white Bierzo stone**, the size and shape of each piece made it nearly impossible to support with the wooden cradle built to temporarily hold the stones in place until the arch was complete. Under Gaudí's direction the **arch collapsed, drawing a crowd of towns people** surrounding the construction site to watch the spectacle, thinking it madness to attempt such a feat. By sunset, moments before snow set in, Gaudí had the arch reconstructed, only to collapse a second time. So then, Gaudí took to **rebuilding it a third time, with his own hands, which was to finally stand firmly**.

Over the next 4 years, Gaudí visited the site 11 times to oversee the work. During those trips, he spent much time **discussing Catholic liturgy with Bishop Grau, debating its reform, becoming more conservative since the late 1860s**.



One morning, walking through the local cathedral, they **disagreed on the canopy** over the altar. Gaudí suggested that it be removed, as it **distracted from the life-sized figures carved in high relief** (**Gaspar Becerra's** marble retablo from 1562). The Bishop reminded Gaudí that the **canopy was an essential part** of Catholic dogma and drew attention to the regal dignity of the Holy Sacrament of Communion.



But, Gaudí insisted that the **carved mantle supported by the angel figures already achieved that aim**. The Bishop responded, "Perhaps you are right in this, at least a little bit right." Gaudí replied, "In this and in everything!" The Bishop offered to pass the suggestion along to the **Sacred Congregational on Ritual**, whose reply was **"under no pretext whatsoever could they allow the suppression of the canopy, a liturgical piece of irreplaceable expressiveness."**

Ironically, in this current picture of the cathedral, the **canopy has been removed**, likely the result of a **liberalizing Catholic Church in the 20th century**. However of more interest, **Gaudí who was more radical in the thoughts of his youth, would grow to become more religiously conservative over his lifetime**, in a large part from these discussions he had with Bishop Grau during the construction of the Episcopal Palace. At the end of his life, he stated that **this exchange was probably the most influential period in his professional life**.



It was during this time, that Gaudí **began work on the Nativity façade** of the Sagrada Família, which we will get into more detail in the last lecture, However, you can see the **influence of the Astorga Cathedral's carved figures** on Gaudí design and placement of the figures in the Nativity façade.



And ironically, inside the Sagrada Família, we find **Gaudí converted to Bishop Grau's view of the liturgy, by the accentuation of the canopy** in Gaudí's design for the altar. In fact, **behind the altar, we see the absence of sculptural decoration**, as was seen in the Astorga Cathedral. Here Gaudí has **let the churches' structure, the stain glass windows and the organ's pipes provide a backdrop**. But, the canopy, fitted with **electric lighting**, a new innovation of his time, is clearly the most dominate element of the space, even **overshadowing a restrained, modest altar**.

In this period, the late 1880s and early 1890s, we see Gaudí transitioning from the anarchy of his youth to the religious figure of his later adult life. These religious commissions affected his artistic sensibilities and in **1899 he joined the Cercle Artistic de Sant Lluc**, founded by one of his sculptors (**Josep Llimona**), an organization to promote Catholic art. Through the 1890s a rivalry had developed between the **bohemian modernistas**, defended by (**Santiago Rusiñol** (Barcelona painter and poet) and **Picasso**), and this new found **religious inspired art promoted by Gaudí and (Ricard) Opisso** (Tarragona illustrator and painter). To the bohemians, the religious art that was best illustrated in Gaudí's sculptural work on the **Nativity façade, was seen as sanctimonious**. The Cercle Artistic members saw the liberal works of the **bohemian artists to be art for art's sake, bankrupt**.



Gaudí **despised and distrusted the progressive young artists** of Barcelona and he soon became a target for Picasso's satirical pen. In a letter to a friend, written by Picasso in 1900, he said, "If you see Opisso, tell him to send Gaudí and the Sagrada Familia to hell." In small drawing made in 1902, titled Hunger, a family stands in front of a bearded figure atop a mount, with classical busts at his feet. The inscription reads, **"Very important! I am going to talk to you about very important issues relating to both God and Art."** The peasant father replies, **"but my children are hungry!"**

Picasso's drawing captures a common sight during the construction of the Nativity façade on the Sagrada Familia – Gaudí was always happy to explain to visitors the **religious significance behind each of the sculpted figures on the façade, dedicating his artistic work to his highest client, God.**



His religious fervor reached its peak in 1894, when after the death of his friend Bishop Grau, he resigned from his work on the Episcopal Palace and nearly died himself, from a **strict observance of a Lent fast**. Gaudí's last trip to Astorga was to create a headstone for Bishop Grau's grave, taking a stone from the Episcopal Palace.



Reflecting on the death of Bishop Grau, Gaudí reveals an insight into his understanding of **trencadís, the broken tile mosaics**. He said, "Do you know why I knew that the Bishop was dying? I found him so beautifully transformed that I had the idea that he couldn't live. He was beautiful, too beautiful. All of his personal character had disappeared: the lines of his face, his color, his voice. And perfect beauty cannot live." The **fracturing of tiles, no longer perfect, makes visible the character of the lines and colors, brings the tiles to life**. This is the **living architecture** Gaudí sought to **create through the materials and methods of construction**, through his innovations such as trencadís mosaics.

One of the visitors to construction site for the Nativity façade, was **Father Enrique Antoni de Ossó**, who was constructing a convent on the northwestern outskirts of Barcelona. The building had been already been designed (by builder **Joaquim Codina Matalí**) and started construction, (2 meters high), but **after seeing Gaudí's work on the Nativity, Father Ossó wanted him to finish it**. So, like the Sagrada Familia commission, Gaudí inherited an existing plan and in the case of the convent, a very tight budget.



Gaudí began work on the **Saint Teresa convent** in 1888, while he was still constructing the Episcopal Palace in Astorga and just completed Casa Vicens and Palacio Güell, **all three of which had exorbitant budgets, working with the most precious materials**. With the convent, he had to be more resourceful. But through these **limitations, it brought out greater creativity** and a **return to his Catalan traditions in brickwork, an inexpensive but versatile material**.



On the exterior, is the same **vertical massing, articulating upward** as we saw in Casa Vicens, created by the repetition of slender parabolic windows and roof projections.



At their peaks, are **ornamentations as we saw on the roof top** of Palacio Güell.



And at the **corners, the same articulation** as in Casa Vicens, with an **upward movement, voided at the bottom, increasing in mass and decoration at the top**,



including a **helical column of brick** foreshadowing things to come in later works. And, mounted at the highest point, on the corners, Gaudí's **four armed cross**. This would become his signature, carried forward in his works. Here he reinvents the cross, one that is **three-dimensional in space**, no longer the traditional two-dimensional, flat two arm cross.



In his search to make architecture more **plastic, dimensional, alive**, he has created a cross that can be **viewed from any perspective**, always presented facing the viewer. Unlike a two arm cross that has a front side and back side. On a building, the backside would be exposed, creating an inferior side to space. A four armed cross, **every side of space is elevated**, made sacred.



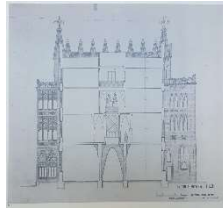
With the convent, we also find him **infusing religion into the architecture through symbolism**, in the detailing of **decorative accents of iron and ceramic**.



However inside this building, we find the source of Gaudí's originality, as he stated, **"Originality is to return to the origin, so that the original is precisely that which returns with new means to the simplicity of first solutions."** (1892) Here we find Gaudí building with simple brick, to create a complex form, his parabola. And, by constructing this arch with the traditional Catalan **single width coursing**, he can **afford to repeat these arches in multitude**, taking advantage of perspective to create an **elongated sense of space**, as we saw in the Poblet Monastery.



And, by modulating the natural light brought in from the side, he has added a spirituality to the space, all with the simplest means.



In section, we see the talent of his craft. On the lowest level, a central parabolic arch, with flanking supports flaring out at the tops to carry the paired corridors on the next floor. By separating the circulation hall into two, he can introduce an exterior shaft of light and air, down into the heart of the building.



And more importantly, with an internal court for this hall to circle, he creates a space for a meditative walk in contemplation, for the nuns to reflect in prayer on their spiritual quest. The functional requirements for a sacred space, celebrating modesty, by transforming the most utilitarian of elements, the circulation hall.



Next week we will see in the lecture on Park Güell, Gaudí's use of this same device in a parabolic arbor that circles his own house, which would filter in the sunlight and air, while creating a privacy screen from the public park, as he would take daily walks, contemplating and meditating in prayer.