

**ENSEMBLE**

**About the Pérez Pita and Junquera houses**

PUBLISHED IN

Junquera- Pérez Pita. Ed. Fundación COAM. Madrid, 2002

## ENSEMBLE

About the Pérez Pita and Junquera houses

Pérez Pita and Junquera, in the manner of Corrales and Molezún, is one of the most prestigious teams of their generation. And although they have done later many very good and very great works, in my memory always appear, when evoking their names, some of their houses that became almost archetypes in their time. From the first small performances in Nerja to their well known Palomeras towers. It is thus curious that now I am commissioned to write a text, precisely about his houses.

And a question that arises when writing about an architecture made by two architects at the same time, is how to understand this phenomenon, like playing the piano with four hands.

Lakmé is a wonderful opera by Leo Delibes that, perhaps, is unjustly little known. And in it there is a passage, perhaps the most beautiful, which has had a great diffusion lately: the dialogue between Lakmé and Mallika that runs in the form of a duet shortly after the beginning of the first act. And there is a moment when they superimpose their voices, with the same melody, but with different lyrics. And the chord is perfect and the effect is very effective, capable of moving us, until the last word "ensemble", where both voices coincide.

Well, that chord between two architects, who do not necessarily have to have the same "letter" although they do it on the same melody, is that of Perez Pita and Junquera. Probably the same as Corrales and Molezún, just to mention the closest Spanish masters of the previous generation, with whom they have so much in common, also in the way of understanding architecture.

And if I had to highlight some of the single-family houses they built, I would highlight three that have always been a reference for me. The Gilman house in Nerja, the one in Corrubedo and the one in calle Novena in Madrid.

### AN ORCHARD ON THE SEA

The Gilman house, which is an addition to an existing one, is the first action of the architects in Nerja, in Carabeo street. Surprising, being a work of the early 70s, a solution so clear, so simple, so emphatic. In a hand-drawn section that appeared in the 1978 issue of Arquitectura BIS dedicated to Madrid, one can see how the central theme is the orchard over the sea. The architects decided, without touching or staining it, to build a bridge so that the orchard passes under the house. As if to tickle it.

The construction is rigorous and impeccable. Two vierendel beams are the walls of this bridge house, and with their verticals they mark a clear order. They are folded horizontally with a light floor and ceiling, and some beams are left free so that the orchard can invade it someday. They are folded vertically with shutters and opaque that close it.

This operation is related to a well-known Baumslager & Eberle house, the Hausler House in Hard, Austria, although they built it much earlier.

On the other hand, the floor plan is also impeccable, with a small turning gesture, of its time, which is recognized here as highly effective. As the architects point out: "they make clear the historical time in which they were built".

The railings with which the house is protected are handled naturally and add an extra point of interest.

I published this house in Young Spanish Architecture in 1984 because I always thought it was great and, over the years, I still think it is a great little piece of work.

The other houses in Nerja are also splendid. The Junquera house already raises the operation of intermediate space, connector or staple as they call it, as the center of the house. And the apartments, and the fifteen white houses. If only all of Nerja had been built by them!

#### AS A BRETON PENTY

I have before me, some images of isolated houses of Breton fishermen of the nineteenth century on the coast. They seem, and in that they coincide with the house in Corrubedo of Pérez Pita and Junquera, like something archaic, that had arisen from the earth or that returned to it, so one and the same thing they are.

Or with another look, one would say that it is a marine animal resting in front of the sea. And if the houses of Nerja were white and light, this one is heavy and dark, like the mysterious Galicia where it is stranded. And if those were clearly Mediterranean, this one is clearly Atlantic.

The floor plan is very precise. A nicely cut rectangle, which at its corner opens its jaws to the sea to catch the beautiful view of the inlet of this land at the end of the world.

The manipulations on the cover skilfully round off the operation. And the materials, the right ones to express emphatically its belonging to the earth. David Chipperfield was telling me one day about his extraordinary spatial experiences in this house. A house of great beauty.

#### A MUSIC BOX

The last house that Pérez Pita built was his own in Madrid. Hidden in a street, Novena, with the name of a Beethovenian symphony. And although the architects describe it as if it were a "staple", I would like to consider it as an intelligent operation of intermediate spaces. The space with which they connect the two houses, they make it the protagonist.

In the central space, the elementary operation of putting a floor, a roof and transparency and continuity. Going back to the south, and flush to the north where the structure extends outside with a canopy with four columns in the garden.

In short, a living space between gardens that for the sake of continuity and transparency get into the house. And there in a corner, a wonderful Kjaerholm stool that Tanis gave to Gloria.

## SOCIAL HOUSING

The single-family houses were the first works with which, in addition to the competitions, such as the very suggestive one in Cordoba, Pérez Pita and Junquera appeared on the architectural scene. And they gave a glimpse of the dedication with which they worked. For with that same commitment, and splendid results, they immediately managed to make their social housing a model for a whole generation.

Yeserías and then Palomeras, and finally La Ventilla, marked a series of first-rate performances.

New floor plan typologies and very clear façade solutions were proposed. In a social housing market dominated by "bulk" housing, those of Pérez Pita and Junquera were branded, and very good.

## FROM THE TRAIN

When leaving the Atocha station on the AVE high-speed train on the way to Andalusia, an architect sees a succession of collective dwellings of all kinds on one side, among which there is a point of reference, like a calm hole that always appears, which are the dwellings of the Paseo de Yeserías. An early work begun in 1975, it offers a facade in which its encounter with the ground and the sky are well resolved, with feet and head, and very elegant traces that were the first recognizable image of its authors.

In the interior they proposed a typological research in which they escape, without breaking them, to the ordinances, proposing a sublimation of the Madrid corrala.

With what they would call a "rationalist attitude", which is pure logic, they concentrated vertical communication cores and wet walls that articulated the general service and circulation spaces.

And finally, they incorporated some impressive paintings by Gloria García in their common areas. A great success.

## LIKE A PIECE OF A CITY

The Palomeras housing project in Carabanchel Alto (1981) was a project of enormous dimensions. It is not easy to undertake such a large project well (130,000 m<sup>2</sup>), with only housing.

Pérez Pita and Junquera pose the problem of how to translate such dimensions to the human scale.

They decided with great success to cut it up in such a way as to create a street with houses at a lower height, on a human scale, and then as a backdrop, what would have been a huge block, they know how to fragment it in such a way that it looks like a set of ordered towers and with an affordable scale.

In the plants, once again, the maximum economy of means, concentrating circulations and installations.

And the result, brilliant, happens to be in this type of housing one of the most exemplary performances in recent years in Madrid.

#### A CERTAIN DETACHMENT

And in the end, just as Corrales and Molezún did with that prodigious set of social housing in Elviña in La Coruña in 1967, Pérez Pita and Junquera, now in full maturity, erected the blocks of La Ventilla with surprising clarity and freshness. All the intensity loaded with intentions of their previous actions with collective housing is transformed here into a simple and serene gesture: a simple ordered structure that is complemented with the constructive elements that each function requires. Nothing more and nothing less.

It connects not only with the aforementioned Corrales and Molezún operation, but also with the social housing actions of the Spanish masters of the 1950s.

#### CONCLUSION

Moneo in his article "28 non-numerary architects" published in the *Arquitecturas BIS* dedicated to Madrid in 1978, when speaking of Pérez Pita-Junquera says:

In his work, there are traces of a technological vision that has its first starting point in Archigram, but which then relies on the permissiveness of some American architectures.

I think the question is much simpler. The certainly American flavor with which the works of our architects were tinged, above all because of Tanis's American connection, which was well manifested in his transit through the magazine *Arquitectura*, did nothing more than provoke a more open architecture, with less severity than that which, for better or worse, almost all the rest of us were doing.

And although our architects did meet the conditions that Moneo demanded of those included in his selection: age, dedication to teaching and critical will, it was the latter, with a certain character of both typological and formal and spatial research, which was evident in all the works of Pérez Pita and Junquera, and especially in the houses we have discussed.

And I will bring up here again his words about Paul Kjaerholm to reapply them to his residential architecture: an architecture that "has no borders, no birth date, no expiration date", a splendid architecture, a first-class architecture.