

# Mexican Architectures



COEDI MEX

# Introduction



Bancrecer Talpan Computer Center: Jaime Varon Shirino, Abraham Metta Cohen  
Photo: Alberto Moreno Guzman, Paul Czizrom

Like architecture, criticism is bound to evolve continually in search of adequate parameters for each moment....

Is it possible to assess such a disconcerting scenery in traditional terms, or is it not, at present, a specific task of criticism to understand and somehow order its intrinsic meanings, in a provisional suspension of judgment?

Manfredo Tafuri<sup>1</sup>

## 1. Recalling the original statement.

The end of the millennium is a time for reflection. A change of year may not imply substantial modifications but it does create an atmosphere for meditation. Today debate is rife about selecting the most important book, figure or achievement of the century or the millennium. Conjecture is in the air, simultaneously reconsidering past and future. In synthesis, there is a good excuse to speculate on the present situation of Mexican architecture and the direction it is heading for.

This volume, intends to produce a graphic inventory that depicts Mexican architectural production. At a later stage, the idea is to generate a written reflection by inviting scholars who are usually interested in the subject to participate.

## 2. The purpose of the project.

The first purpose of this book is to register and publicize the architectural production of all contemporary trends in composition, conveying a survey of Mexican architecture at the end of the century within the formal trade of construction. The second objective is to induce a process of reflection through an inspiring organization of the published material.

For many years architectural practice in Mexico did not leave much room for thought. Between the 1940s and the 1970s, accelerated urban growth created plentiful possibilities for professional development. There were few architects and abundant work, an exceptional scenario that nevertheless was not the best for theorizing.

During this period, few books and specialized journals were published in Mexico. Architects had limited opportunities to show their work. Publications rewarded only consecrated professionals, for this entailed peer recognition.

The scene has changed during the past ten years and new publications have surfaced. Periodicals generally have limited press runs and a precarious subsistence. They do not often survive long enough to reach maturity, and they

fold after a few numbers for lack of economic resources. With few exceptions, magazines rely largely on the support of educational institutions or of small groups of professionals that share a common architectural proposal. Some others find financial backing in an architect's wallet. Perhaps the most celebrated case is Mario Pani, who maintained *ArquitecturaMéxico* magazine for forty-two years, from 1938 to 1980.

The reasons for publishing have also evolved. Today it is not necessary to wait many years to publish one's work. Access means to job opportunities have changed slowly, and young architects need to publish their work to achieve recognition and create new openings.

In the midst of this evolution it is necessary to overcome the stage of publication to enter frankly into the field of interpretation. This book may not be the proper medium for lengthy discussions, which shall take place later. Nevertheless the intention to organize the projects by composition trends seeks to induce interpretations that may become useful in a subsequent phase.

In general terms, reflection on the subject has increased steadily during the past three decades. Profound studies on various periods have nurtured a retrospective insight, but interpretation efforts center mainly on the past and attention to recent products is scarce. There is a general perception in our milieu of a need for architectural criticism, but for various reasons, analysis has not flourished because the interpretation of current production remains a ban to be lifted.

Existing books on Mexican contemporary architecture suggest either a diachronic or a synchronic approach, generally focused on a single composition trend. The most frequently discussed trend has been rationalism, the prevailing point of view since 1937 when Esther Born<sup>2</sup> published *The New Architecture in Mexico*. This vision persists through the writings of Jose Villagrán<sup>3</sup>, Carlos Obregon Santacilia<sup>4</sup>, and Israel Katzman<sup>5</sup> among others, who in various ways consider rationalism to be the epicenter of Mexican architectural creation, like a tower whence to observe the profession's development.

## PART ONE: RATIONALISM

a message for the reason





## An austere, sober and moderate rationalism

Lightness, transparency, clarity in composition, honesty in the expression of materials and construction systems. Steel, glass and concrete are the assets of an architecture fond of axial composition and sparing colors that advocate the play of light, shade and contrast.

This language of globalization sets the tone for efficiency and productivity, and renews an interest in international culture.



Bancrofer Tlalpan Computer Center: Jaime Varon Shirino, Abraham Meta Cohen



Photo: Paul Czibrom

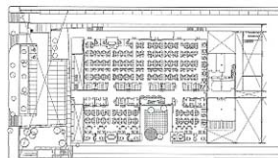
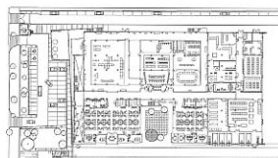
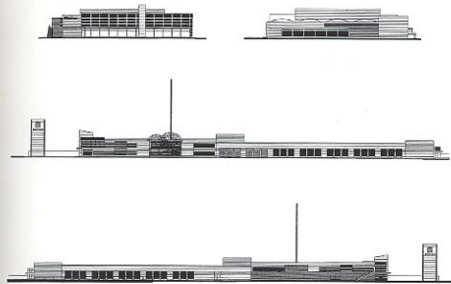
# Bancrecer Tlalpan Computer Center

Jaime Varon Shirino  
Abraham Metta Cohen

Photography: Alberto Moreno Guzman  
Paul Czitrom  
Location: Mexico City  
Date: 1997

The concrete shell of a building dating from the 1960s houses the facilities of this banking computer center, which was completed in two stages. The first consisted of the reutilization of the structure of columns, beams and slabs to lodge the computer center and its service areas on two levels. The second phase involved the construction of office and service spaces in former warehouses. An array system generates spaces that enlarge and reinforce the original structure to accommodate new functional requirements. The design integrates glass volumes and aluminum panels that depart from the usual typology of computer facilities and achieve a balance between aesthetic, functional and security considerations.







# Bancrecer Corporate Building

Jaime Varon Shirino  
Abraham Metta Cohen

Photography: Alberto Moreno Guzman  
Location: Mexico City  
Date: 1996

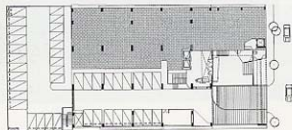
Located in a densely built area, a concrete skeleton, abandoned during construction in the late 1980s, was renovated and turned into the bank's corporate headquarters. The structure recedes from the edge of the plot. This allowed the inclusion of a series of volumes and surfaces that extend from and into the existing structure and improve the scale of the building in relation to the street. The building acts as a backdrop or a cube containing a series of architectural elements. The bank appears as a new volume of distinctive geometry butting against the blue glass curtain wall facing the existing building, its surface playfully accented by an off-center office on the upper left corner.



PLANTA DE SOTANO I

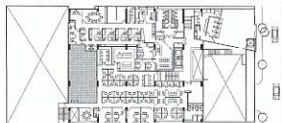


PLANTA BAJA





PLANTA 1er. NIVEL



PLANTAS 2do. Y 3er. NIVEL

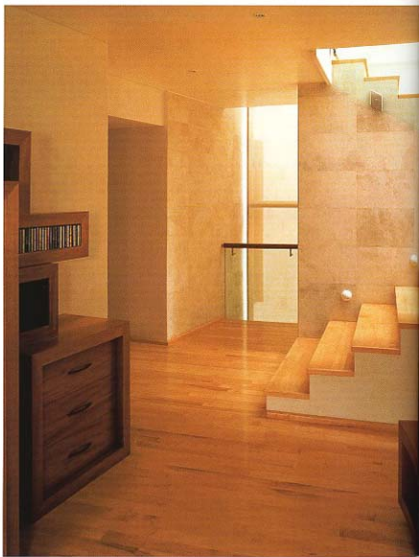
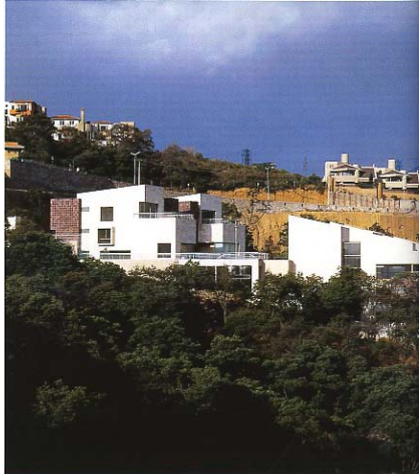


# Housing Compound in Lomas Country Club

Abraham Metta Cohen  
Jaime Varon Shirino  
Alex Metta Cohen

Photography: Alberto Moreno Guzman  
Paul Czitrom  
Location: Mexico City  
Date: 1997

These four houses are adapted to the topography of the land and encircle a central garden that generates interconnected open spaces. The two houses on the higher end of the plot are entered from the ground floor while those below have their entrances on the upper level, with all living areas overlooking the central garden. Design elements, such as the triple-height windows on the courtyard between each block of houses, are repeated in all the houses to achieve an overall unity in the compound while fulfilling the fundamental requirement of conveying an individual character to each one. The geometry of massive volumes, based on cubes and prisms laced with glassed surfaces, alternates the use of unpolished travertine marble and purple quarry stone. The houses have a vertical organization. Their internal spaces, enriched by the play of domes, double heights, half-levels and windows of various rhythms and sorts, revolve around the staircases.





# Villa Nautilus

Jaime Varon Shirino  
Abraham Metta Cohen  
Javier Artaloitia  
Robert Brown

Photography: Alberto Moreno Guzman  
Location: Acapulco, Guerrero  
Date: 1998

Located on a steep slope with a view over the bay, the villa acts as a landscaping element and reinterprets the topography through volumes that grow out of the ground and condition their position to the shape of the land. The vestibule interrupts the formal and spatial system of a series of interrelated prismatic blocks; it intersects the composition, linking the house to the street. Corridors and parapets for solar protection penetrate living areas, conveying rhythm and movement. To the West, service areas confined in enclosed shapes block the sun's rays and serve as a filter. The rotating volumes allow a variety of views over the bay and landscape according to their particular height and orientation, and to the decreasing height of parapets.



