

The heritage of the Modern Movement in the conformation of the city. The Casa Guzmán of Alejandro de la Sota

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Abstract. *The “Casa Guzmán” of Alejandro de la Sota, Master in the Spanish Modern Architecture, has been recently demolished. From where are we coming and where are we heading in the building of our cities? This cultural catastrophe is a symptom of the way in which the new metropolis evolves, reckless, adrift... “Let the single family household be the test tube, the microscopic preparation of the great experiences”. The Casa Guzmán means the resolution of the constant worries about the habitat. There, Sota materialized topics such as the relation of human being with nature, the order and the freedom of movement, the space flexibility and many other topics which are translated and reflected in the architecture of greater scale, in the city itself. Where are we then the architects? We are the responsible ones of the becoming of our heritage, of keeping safe the great architecture and constant evolution of our city. The heritage of the modern movement becomes fragile in this speech. Let’s bet for it, for our culture. We should anticipate, as Le Corbusier in the safeguard of the Ville Savoie, with that productive attitude. The maintenance of our Heritage and therefore the increase in the value of urbes, begins with the formation. By now, a long distance of the path has been traveled by organism such as Docomomo or the Alejandro de la Sota Foundation, who spread and make accessible the architecture of the XX century. But there is still plenty of the way ahead. Let’s follow Sota’s advice: “Protect the heritage not with ordinances, but with sensitivities. That is the only way”..*

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Introduction

That brief but intense work of Benevolo, “The projection of the modern city” started with strong affirmations; That Modern Architecture, almost from its origin, shows “the distinctive features of scientific research”, that “modern architecture must suggest a new type of city that can be opposed to the traditional” (Benevolo, 1978). It then describes the new city as the aggregation of a number of models proposed by the M.M. in answer to those of the neoconservative city. It analyzes them under the concept of “type of building” born in CIAM 2 and 3, especially residential, which classifies as follows:

1. House Laminar.

2. Blocks built to redents.

3. Isolated housing. Not only villas, but prefabricated houses, transformable and transitory cells.

4. Housing blocks in a row.

5. Half-height blocks (as criticized as adopted).

6. Skyscrapers.

7. Public buildings also based on repeatable elements, such as teachers.

8. Public buildings that are not repeatable or “singular”.

Alejandro de la Sota, proves once again his modern conviction in the recently demolished house Guzman. “That the single-family household as theme is the test tube, the microscopic preparation of the great

experiences” (Alejandro de la Sota, 1967). House Guzman is the resolution of constant concerns about living. There, Sota materialized topics such as man’s relationship with nature, order and freedom of movement, spatial flexibility, the possibilities of new materials, and many other issues that are translated and reflected in the larger architecture, the own city.

The Casa Guzman is a great lesson about the respectful implantation of the new architecture in a new fragile atmosphere, in this case the Guadarrama landscape, but its message could be extrapolated to interventions in cities, contextualization and respect for preexistence, as a goal that has been present since the beginning of the project.

The House Guzmán. The Architecture and its value.

An in-depth analysis of the Guzman House is carried out now, in order to keep alive its memory, but above all to underline the contributions that comprise this house made on a human scale, linked to man, at the service of whom we should always build the city.

The house is analyzed in its original state and in the state before being demolished in the past year. The study is carried out under the parameters of the validity, in terms of spatiality, materiality and climate. The results of the research, contrast with the outcome of this work and motivate a series of questions about the future of architecture.

Enrique Guzman, an aeronautical engineer of great character, commissioned Alejandro de la Sota, friend and architect of already great prestige, his family home. This was to be built on a plot located in the Urbanization of Santo Domingo, Algete. The plot of Mr. Guzman was in a privileged place, on the edge of the urbanization with excellent views of the Guadarrama.

“The plot of this house is a rectangle with the largest dimension perpendicular to the road, where it has access, a rectangle that falls on its opposite side over the only great landscape of the Jarama river basin. The highest point is on that ledge above the landscape; There will be the house”(Alejandro de la Sota, 1989).

The setting is located in Callejón del Jarama nº6, about 30km north of Madrid. Bordered on the east by the river Jarama and west by the river Guadalix, the area is known as the Atalayuela de Algete. The gentle topography falls from the Sierra de Guadarrama towards the south and abruptly to meet the river. Traditionally this area is considered one of the most genuine Spanish landscapes, frequented by artists like Sorolla and mentioned by writers like Machado “Isn’t you, Guadarrama, old friend, the Sierra gray and white, the mountain of my Madrid afternoons that I saw in The blue painted?“(Antonio Machado, 1912).

The plot is located on the eastern edge of the urbanization, right on the bank above the Jarama basin. The Master places the house on the plot; Behind it leaves the rest of the urbanization (then virgin of construction) and the sierra, to its front, that has south-east orientation, looks at the exquisite landscape of the river.

Sota drew different versions of an idea that debugged in the project finally built. The implementation in the field is key in the project. “We speak from time to time of the specific weight of a construction for a given. Let the house float, rise, fall and remain in its quota; The house is a solid floating in a magma and she alone will fix that quota. It is necessary to be an observer of the up and down to the final building. Thank you home!”(Alejandro de la Sota, 1989).

The house Guzman was thought rumbling, looking out over the imposing landscape of the Jarama. The access to the plot, is produced by the back of the house. From there the terrain invites you to walk around it and surround it in a conch and upwards. Always on a carpet of vegetation you reach the top; the roof of the house, from where it dominates a great panoramic of the Jarama. This idea of implantation that finds the reason in the functional organization of the house, existed from the first version, as we see in the memory of the project written in 1971: “It is thought that the rest is united to the enclosure, to the hiding in the land and the active life, on the contrary, to its dominion. The house is projected clearly differentiating the two zones: half-buried the part of dormitories, to which is added, for convenience of use, the



Figure 1.
The site of Casa Guzmán in 2015

one corresponding to the service with its union to the dining room and protection to the play of children. It is avoided the half - buried in the parts of the living houses of height - play of children and dining room - services - with openings to its level, patios, that neutralize and vivify them. Only the large room is dominant on the ground and is also glazed to increase this feeling of activity and communication with its surroundings - plot. Other areas of garage, facilities and warehouses still lower (...). Living this house is a consequence of itself. It is lived in the part integrated to the plot, with domain and peace of the field - surroundings and empty or patios, swimming pool and housing covers equally incorporated -, all "acaracolada" house that opens and closes on itself. Landscaping the deck is part of this desire that the field should be highly respected. With its capacity, with its good living, this house has little presence and this likes as formula of life. To be fully - today is said to be realized or to be able to be realized - and not to disturb, being nobody, as much happens"(Alejandro de la Sota, 1970)

The Guzman house is an example of architecture that is apprehended in movement, according to the space-time principle, that Giedion emphasized in the villa Savoye. As is the case in the city, at every step an event is discovered or one has a sensation, which

only the architect has the power to give. Sota wanted to introduce the exterior in the interior, wanted the landscape, the environment was in the day to day participating in the house. From the top, from the top of the house you can access the "watchtower"; A warm library in which we find the landscape, framed in a corner window. When descending from the summit inside the house, Sota surprises us with a living room totally connected with the garden that we traveled before. "Due to the good climate in spring, summer and autumn, the living area is very open to the outside. Terraces linked in different heights. Study of the whole in very relation to the landscape"(Alejandro de la Sota, 1989). The central key of this house is the intimate relationship between exterior and interior that the Master achieves. "The good thing about today is that we can make an open house, open, that it closes, closes. It seems to be silly but that's right, that's the big news. To be inside your house and that the garden penetrates in it, that you do not stumble when passing on that inside-outside. Then come all those other things of situation of quota for views, dominion, self recollection, etc .; those other things of orientation and so many others of everything: security. It is very important to feel good in all of it, in every corner "(Alejandro de la Sota, 1972). The thresholds

or intermediate spaces that extend the interiors to the exterior are very important. A series of vertical and horizontal sliding planes generate changing and flexible spaces that appear and disappear with ease. On the one hand, the use of the same plateau pavement Burela inside and outside. On the other side, the separation of the carpentry plane and the marquee plane, confuses the limits of the house. To materialize “the great novelty”, Sota has a carpentry of champagne colour and Thermopan glasses made by the aeronautical company CASA. The room can be so open that it fuses with the outside. It is the materialization of one of the Master’s concerns about living; how to bring nature closer to man in everyday life. It is a teaching, always trasladable to the large scale. Why gardens exist? How should it be? What relationship should they have with buildings? Another of the peculiarities of the architecture of Sota is the constructive coherence. Thus, all these spaces described, which correspond to the day zone, and are facing the landscape, are built with light structure. In contrast, the night area, located behind the house, are made with concrete structure. They confront, the daytime spaces, more ample and luminous with the nocturnal zones, smaller and with dim but light. This constructive coherence appears in Sota’s work from the grand scale to the detail, and seems to be the result of an always logical reasoning that questions the why and the how



Figure 2.
South perspective of Casa Guzman in 1974.

before drawing a line and of course long before placing a brick.

As a summary of the house, Sota chooses an image showing two comfortable armchairs, in the shade of an awning and on the warmth of a carpet, making feel the breeze come from the background landscape. The longed desire for “being well” that the architect always wanted for architecture was finally materialized.



Figure 3.
Southeast perspective of Casa Guzman

A visit to the house in 2014. The Heritage and its value.

During the investigation, a visit to the house and an interview with the owner were made; Enrique Guzmán, the son. With more than 40 years old, the Casa Guzmán needed some maintenance work to make it livable. Some of the pathologies that had to be solved before restarting the life of the house were pointed out: the awnings did not run well, the finish of the corner window was degraded by the entrance of humidity, some Burela platelets that cover the external enclosures of the housing had been lost and air conditioning facilities were obsolete. On the other hand, the architectural walk described above was repeated in situ and we discovered and confirmed the values of this small-scale architecture. Enrique related some anecdote that reflects the will of the architect that the landscape and its enjoyment are part of the daily life; The north wall of the library was named “the wall of lamentations”. The horizontal window of this parameter was thought to a height such that when being seated in the step of the library could be observed the Mountain range. Due to the difference in height between Guzman and Sota, this wall was made and retracted until the window height was reached and the Sierra was introduced at home. In addition, something that was impossible to decipher on the planes was discovered; It is an architecture truly tied to its territory. As has been mentioned, the house is located in an urbanization on the outskirts of Madrid and it could be said that Casa Guzmán is an example of how to build a city. It is thought under the conditions of its surroundings, respects the preexisting landscape that surrounds it and adapts to it with coherence, without mimetisms or false imitations. From the point of view of the site, it managed to cope with the passage of time without being affected by the surrounding transformations. The surroundings of the house Guzman was filled with the passage of time. In 1974, when the house was built, there were few urbanized plots, and in a matter of 20 years the land was swollen. However, the situation of the plot right on the edge of the building land and the good work of Sota, allowed the time did not start the calm, views and isolated atmosphere



Figure 4.
Exterior-interior of Casa Guzman.

of the world that was breathed in the house Guzman. It draws attention from the street the nonexistent presence of the house. Currently, the urbanization is populated by sloping roof cottages and other more recent and minimalist. When arriving at the alley of the Jarama nº6 there was no house, but a barrier of vegetation; yellow poplars, green spruce and a concrete block wall of 1 meter high buried under yellow leaves that delimited the plot without showing what was behind.

The study of the house in the state in which it was in 2014 was intended to decipher its validity. In spite of needing logical interventions of updating the house was effective from the spatial point of view. Proof of this is the Casa Trigo, a replica of Casa Guzman in La Florida, which its owners say “is very comfortable to live in”.

A house that is inhabited tends to be preserved in better conditions than one that is less inhabited. “We are at a time when the remodeling, rejuvenation of so many buildings is being carried out in so many cities, and in cases with truly satisfactory results; It is necessary that next is thought since next year must be enabled a budget for the new maintenance of what has not been maintained tube to be restored. Do not go back to a new story repeated, to a new beginning”(Alejandro



Figure 5.
Terrace of Casa Guzman in 2014.

de la Sota, 1987). It is necessary and urgent to protect our heritage and to save the culture of the atrocities that are happening and that have no turning back.

In search for solutions

“The house was cold, sad and it cost me a fortune to keep it”. These words of Enrique Guzmán son were the headline of the news of the demolition of the architecture of Sota. Where were the architects, who did not know how to anticipate and solve the normal requirements of the owner in a sustainable way?

Reuse is the only way to keep 20th century architecture alive. Maristella Casciato, who was director of Docomomo International, said: “The challenge is to project the transformation without betraying the heritage that the architects of the Novecento have left us” (M. Casciato, 2009). One of the keys to preserving our heritage, and even more so, the Modern Movement, is to keep it permanently alive and for this it is imperative to accept the need to evolve and transform within the limits of the logic of the work itself.

The disappearance of the Guzman House, after the Aversú and many others of the Spanish

Modern Movement, indicate that there is no awareness in Spanish society towards this type of heritage. The disparity of owners disposes architecture to the fate of the destiny. Therefore, it is necessary a proactive attitude on the part of the group of architects, that anticipates to the events, case by case. Sota would say: “Our evils, our needs are not so easy to know for ourselves ... That people are interested in things is good only to a certain extent; Hobbies of masses only football and bulls; The others are always, or should be, of minorities, and these have to put their knowledge at the service of others” (Alejandro de la Sota, 1980). It is the responsibility of the architects, to create an interest in society for this type of architecture, to form about its value and to promote viable solutions. We create an interest, just as there is an interest in classic cars, there is a clientele and a sector that is responsible for recovering original engine parts for those cars to work. Let’s do it. How different it was in Villa Savoie! The icon house of the Modern Movement, which is now a museum of its own, was also threatened with demolition in the 1960s. However, at that time the world of architecture and art mobilized to defend it and secured their safeguard mobilized and led by Le Corbusier himself. On the verge of being demolished by social ignorance perhaps for



Figure 6
South perspective of Casa Guzman in 2014.

temporary closeness, but today no one would hesitate to mourn his absence.

Conclusion

A few days ago, it was emphasized in the IV Congress of Pioneers of Modern Architecture that it is necessary to know our past to know where we are going. The Modern Movement, its successful research and progress, are our latest architecture, as to how to shape the city. It is therefore part of our memory and identity. Protecting and preserving the good architecture of the twentieth century is urgent, so as not to lose the thread of our past and present, to know where to go in the future. Once again, we find in the words of the Master the clues on how to proceed “to protect the heritage not by ordinances, but with sensibilities is the only way” (Alejandro de la Sota, 1990).

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