



# LA CASA

ESPACIOS DOMÉSTICOS  
MODOS DE HABITAR

**ABADA EDITORES**

# LA CASA

## ESPACIOS DOMÉSTICOS MODOS DE HABITAR

II CONGRESO INTERNACIONAL CULTURA Y CIUDAD  
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<b>Presentación</b> .....	XIX
Juan Calatrava	

#### BLOQUE TEMÁTICO 1

### **Arquitecturas de la casa: el espacio doméstico a través de la historia**

<b>Lo público y lo privado en la forma urbis de Santiago 1910. El espacio doméstico en el Canon Republicano</b> .....	22
Josep Parcerisa Bundó, José Rosas Vera	
<b>La Alhambra habitada. Experiencias del paisaje desde el espacio arquitectónico..</b>	37
Marta Rodríguez Iturriaga	
<b>Housing and Children: Architectural Models from the Modern Movement</b> .....	48
Alexandra Alegre	
<b>Högná Sigurðardóttir. La misteriosa marca indeleble del origen</b> .....	59
Julio Barreno Gutiérrez	
<b>Las casillas de peones camineros y su implantación en la costa del sudeste de España</b> .....	73
Antonio Burgos Núñez, Juan Carlos Olmo García, Francisco José García Castillo	
<b>El <i>palazzo all'italiana</i>, de la casa del príncipe al principio urbano</b> .....	82
Michele Giovanni Caja, Maria Pompeiana Iarossi	
<b>The City and the House: Going Back to the Future</b> .....	95
Antonio Alberto Clemente	
<b>Traditional Urban Housing at Alentejo's "Marble Area"</b> .....	104
Ana Costa Rosado	
<b>La consolidación del cuarto de baño en las viviendas de la ciudad de São Paulo, Brasil</b> .....	117
Clarissa de Almeida Paulillo, Tatiana Sakurai	
<b>La cama <i>amueblada</i>: del objeto a la estancia</b> .....	126
María de Miguel Pastor, Carla Sentieri Omarrementería	

<b>The Spaces, the People and the Ways of Being at Home in the North of Portugal in the 19th Century</b> .....	136
Alexandra Esteves	
<b>Casa de John Soane en Londres (1792-1827). Luz, iluminación y patrimonio</b> .....	143
Rosalía Fenutría Aumesquet, José Joaquín Parra Bañón	
<b>Rita Fernández Queimadelos. Los proyectos de viviendas realizados en la DGRD (1943-1946)</b> .....	154
Paula M. Fernández-Gago Longueira, Eduardo A. Caridad Yáñez	
<b>Arqueología urbana en Barcelona: aproximación a los espacios domésticos entre los siglos IV-VI</b> .....	167
Francesc Xavier Florensa Puchol	
<b>Memoria e identidad: el espacio de almacenaje en el imaginario doméstico</b> .....	178
Marta García Carbonero	
<b>Between Doorkeeper Apartments and Housemaid Rooms: Ways of Living in a Changing Lisbon</b> .....	188
María Assunção Gato, Filipa Ramalhete	
<b>La casa popular de zaguán, patio y corral. Habitabilidad y protección para el siglo XXI</b> .....	196
Vidal Gómez Martínez, Blanca del Espino Hidalgo, María Teresa Pérez Cano	
<b>Casa en transformación: cocina y tecnología en el siglo XX en Cuenca (Ecuador)</b> .....	206
María Augusta Hermida, María José Cañar, Guillermo Mauricio Torres	
<b>Granada: la arquitectura doméstica de la ciudad cristiana</b> .....	218
Carlos Jerez Mir	
<b>Consideraciones históricas sobre la casa tradicional gallega y otras construcciones adjetivas</b> .....	230
Francisco Xabier Louzao Martínez	
<b>Modern, Rationalist and Mediterranean: Residential Architecture during the Italian Colonization in Libya</b> .....	236
Andrea Maglio	
<b>El confort en la vivienda canaria: de la arquitectura tradicional a los EECN</b> .....	250
Eduardo Martín del Toro	
<b>Instalaciones de la casa: el espacio doméstico en el siglo XX en España a través de la tecnología</b> .....	261
César Martín-Gómez, José Manuel Pozo Municio	
<b>El diedro casa   ciudad en la arquitectura nobiliaria de Sevilla: la plaza del Duque</b> .....	272
Pedro Mena Vega	
<b>Un primer acercamiento a la <i>Quinta Nova da Assunção</i> en Sintra</b> .....	282
Iván Moure Pazos	

<b>The Construction of “Minho’s” Domestic Space in Portugal’s 18th Century.....</b>	294
Flávia Oliveira	
<b>Arquitectura moderna en la ciudad histórica. Adalberto Libera y la casa Nicoletti (Roma 1932).....</b>	302
Carlos Plaza	
<b>Casa Bellia en Turín: nuevos espacios para la burguesía.....</b>	315
Alice Pozzati	
<b>Live-Work Architecture. Learning from Peripheral Neighborhoods of Rio de Janeiro.....</b>	327
Ana Slade	
<b>The Relationship Between Inhabitants and Vegetation in the Houses of Maceió in the 19th.....</b>	339
Tharcila Maria Soares Leão, Josemary Omena Passos Ferrare, Veronica Robalinho Cavalcanti	
<b>The Home and the World: Domestic Dynamics of the Postwar American Suburban House.....</b>	350
Luísa Sol	
<b>El hogar de Telva. Miradas femeninas al interior doméstico español 1963-1975.....</b>	360
Jorge Tárrago Mingo, Cristina Sunga Zamora	
<b>La casa jesuita en Granada: el Colegio de San Pablo.....</b>	371
María del Carmen Vílchez Lara, Jorge Gabriel Molinero Sánchez	
<b>La habitación en la arquitectura agraria granadina.....</b>	381
Eduardo Zurita Povedano	

## BLOQUE TEMÁTICO 2

### **El proyecto doméstico como núcleo de la modernidad: casa singular y vivienda colectiva, del Movimiento Moderno al siglo XXI**

<b>Habitar el arte: la casa del coleccionista como modelo experimental de espacio doméstico.....</b>	394
Ángeles Layuno	
<b>Domesticidad Mediterránea vs. Modernidad americana de Posguerra. Sert y Rudofsky.....</b>	411
Mar Loren-Méndez	
<b>Tradiciones en las políticas de vivienda pública.....</b>	422
Josep Maria Montaner Martorell	



<b>De la Weissenhoff a Oporto, un camino de servicio</b> .....	430
José Manuel Pozo Municio	
<b>Le Corbusier's <i>Immeuble-villas</i> and an After Lunch Remembrance</b> .....	441
Marta Sequeira	
<b>Le Corbusier. <i>Une science de logis</i></b> .....	454
Jorge Torres Cueco	
<b>La casa productiva. Propuestas para la autosuficiencia alimentaria durante la República de Weimar</b> .....	470
David Arredondo Garrido	
<b><i>Modernità y mediterraneità: sincretismo habitacional de Luigi Figini y Gino Pollini</i></b> .....	482
Emilio Cachorro Fernández, Cristina Medina Valverde	
<b>El <i>piano Fanfani</i> en Roma: la torre de viviendas y la casa patio</b> .....	496
Ana del Cid Mendoza	
<b>Feet on the Sand: Living Spaces in Apartment Buildings by the Sea in Maceió, Brazil</b> .....	510
Camila Antunes de Carvalho Casado, Maria Angélica da Silva	
<b>Atomic-age Housing. The Fallout Shelter in Cold War America</b> .....	521
Chiara Baglione	
<b>De la manzana a la supermanzana. Recuperación e innovación en la cultura urbanística</b> .....	531
Raimundo Bambó Naya, Javier Monclús Fraga	
<b>La ventana y el balcón sobre avenida Providencia (1931/1981): evolución y permanencia de la arquitectura doméstica</b> .....	544
Pedro Bannen Lanata	
<b>Towards the Modern Block: Evolution of an Urban Type in Kay Fisker's Prewar Architecture</b> .....	554
Guia Baratelli	
<b>La casa en Isle of Wight (1955-1956) de James Gowan, austeridad en la modernidad británica</b> .....	566
Alicia Cantabella Gallego	
<b><i>Villeggiatura</i> urbana: una residencia secundaria en el núcleo urbano de São Paulo</b> .....	576
Sara Caon	
<b>Otredades en la habitabilidad de un Monterrey moderno: primeros edificios de departamentos como alternativa a la vivienda unifamiliar</b> .....	586
María de los Ángeles Castillo Soriano, Alberto Canavati Espinosa	
<b>Brutalismo doméstico. Un espacio para la contemplación</b> .....	597
Rubens Cortés Cano	

<b>La Casa Barata dos Santos como experimento, por Nuno Portas y Nuno Teotónio (1958-1962)</b> .....	608
Mª Ángeles Domínguez Durán	
<b>Exploraciones cartográficas comparadas de paisajes residenciales: polígonos vs periferias ordinarias</b> .....	620
Isabel Ezquerro, Carmen Díez-Medina	
<b>The House as Experiment: House in Sesimbra (1960-64) by Portas and Teotónio Pereira</b> .....	634
Hugo L. Farias	
<b>La piedra en la casa moderna</b> .....	645
María Ana Ferré Aydos	
<b>Las casas unifamiliares no construidas del programa <i>Case Study Houses</i></b> .....	657
Pauline Fonini Felin	
<b>Modern Housing and Duplex Apartments: Study of Discourses and Practices of a Typology</b> .....	670
Sabrina Fontenele	
<b>Polígonos de vivienda. Relevancia del diagnóstico en la regeneración urbana de espacios libres</b> .....	681
Sergio García-Pérez, Javier Monclús, Carmen Díez Medina	
<b>A City of Order: on Piccinato's Ataköy</b> .....	692
Esen Gökçe Özdamar	
<b>Paisaje y ciudad en las viviendas de la Universidad Laboral de Almería</b> .....	702
José Ramón González González	
<b>La imagen de arquitectura en la construcción del subconsciente colectivo</b> .....	713
Carlos Gor Gómez	
<b>Prácticas Concretas</b> .....	725
Pablo Jesús Gutiérrez Calderón	
<b>Tropical and Colonial: Single Houses as a Modern Lab in Angola and Mozambique (1950-1970)</b> .....	737
Ana Magalhães	
<b>Casa y Monumento: Roma habitada</b> .....	748
Sergio Martín Blas, Milena Farina	
<b>Las viviendas para empleados realizadas por las grandes empresas en la España de la posguerra</b> .....	760
Miriam Martín Díaz, Enrique Castaño Perea	
<b>Lecciones de Louis Kahn: la sala y la casa en Rogelio Salmons y Livio Vacchini</b> ...	771
Clara E. Mejía Vallejo, Ricardo Merí de la Maza	

<b>Interior Biopolitics—Domesticity as Mass Media in the Making of Swedish Social Democracy</b> .....	783
Carlota Mir	
<b>El arte de lo doméstico. Las casas de Alison y Peter Smithson</b> .....	795
Carmen Moreno Álvarez, Juan Domingo Santos	
<b>La vivienda colectiva como reactivador de hechos de vida urbana</b> .....	806
Sebastián Navarrete Michelini	
<b>The Façade as an Interface in the Housing Architecture of Rio de Janeiro: Design Repertoire</b> .....	819
Mara Oliveira Eskinazi, Pedro Engel Penter	
<b>Manuel Gomes da Costa. La casa algarvia del arquitecto</b> .....	831
José Joaquín Parra Bañón	
<b>A Wealth of Typological Solutions from the Twenties: Vienna and Frankfurt</b> .....	842
Alessandro Porotto	
<b>Un pueblo entre los muros de un cortijo</b> .....	856
Ana Isabel Rodríguez Aguilera	
<b>This House Is Not a Home</b> .....	872
Ugo Rossi	
<b>Los dibujos de Rafael Leoz sobre vivienda social</b> .....	883
Jose Antonio Ruiz Suaña, Jesús López Díaz	
<b>La calle sube al edificio. Vivienda en galería en Madrid, 1949-1956</b> .....	897
María del Pilar Salazar Lozano	
<b>Casas como células. La metáfora biológica y los nuevos hábitats plásticos, 1955-73</b> .....	908
Massimiliano Savorra	
<b>El hogar que envejece</b> .....	918
Marta Silveira Peixoto	
<b>Repetition and Geometry: The House of the Painter Zigaina Designed by Giancarlo De Carlo</b> .....	928
Luisa Smeragliuolo Perrotta	
<b>Plinio Marconi's Public Housing Projects between Innovation and Historical Continuity</b> .....	938
Simona Talenti, Annarita Teodosio	
<b>Casas patio y bloques: las formas de la vivienda para la ciudad moderna, Arica 1953-73</b> .....	949
Horacio Enrique Torrent Schneider	

<b>Doméstico y prefabricado: vivienda unifamiliar en Collado Mediano de Alejandro de la Sota</b> .....	961
Miguel Varela de Ugarte	
<b>Modern Living: Particularities in Rio de Janeiro</b> .....	971
Denise Vianna Nunes	
<b>Equipando la casa moderna. España, 1927-1936</b> .....	982
María Villanueva Fernández, Héctor García-Diego Villarías	

### BLOQUE TEMÁTICO 3

## La vivienda contemporánea desde el punto de vista patrimonial

<b>Un carmen en el barrio del Realejo de Granada</b> .....	997
Ricardo Hernández Soriano	
<b>T y Block House, dos viviendas en Nueva York</b> .....	1007
Antonio Álvarez Gil	
<b>Experimentos de casas en el paisaje. Lo cotidiano y lo sublime</b> .....	1020
Rafael de Lacour	
<b>Cooperativas vecinales para la recuperación patrimonial de barriadas. Sixto (Málaga)</b> .....	1031
Alberto E. García-Moreno, María José Márquez-Ballesteros, Manuel García-López	
<b>Domesticidades del proyecto social del Régimen a través de los poblados de Bárcena (León)</b> .....	1043
Jorge Magaz Molina	
<b>La casa como memoria viva: injertos domésticos en ruinas vernáculas</b> .....	1055
David Ordóñez Castañón, Jesús de los Ojos Moral	
<b>PAX – Patios de la Axerquía. Rehabilitación urbana y de casas-patio con procesos cooperativos</b> .....	1068
Gaia Redaelli	
<b>La casa contemporánea en el cine: estrategia de difusión y promoción del patrimonio cultural</b> .....	1080
Iván Rincón Borrego, Eusebio Alonso García	
<b>Rehabitar después de Habitar</b> .....	1092
Conceição Trigueiros, Mario Saleiro Filho	

BLOQUE TEMÁTICO 4  
**La casa: mitos, arquetipos, modos de habitar**

<b>Notas sobre la casa como jardín.....</b>	1104
Xavier Monteys	
<b>Interiores de exteriores. La otra raíz del habitar.....</b>	1116
José Morales Sánchez	
<b>Género y modos de habitar en la Andalucía del siglo XIX.....</b>	1127
Juan Manuel Barrios Rozúa	
<b>La casa veneciana, desde fuera.....</b>	1139
Francisco A. García Pérez	
<b>Muerte de la ciudad y desintegración de lo urbano. La casa como refugio.....</b>	1151
Juan Carlos Reina Fernández	
<b>The Home and Its Transformations in the Daily Life of a Brazilian Social Housing Complex.....</b>	1164
Fernanda Andrade dos Santos, Eda Maria Góes	
<b>El jardín secreto de Luis Barragán.....</b>	1177
Paloma Baquero Masats, Juan Antonio Serrano García	
<b>A «Part of Sky and a Part of Sea, Even Alone»: Luigi Moretti Villas.....</b>	1189
Gemma Belli	
<b>La cocina como principal motor de cambio en la vivienda moderna y contemporánea.....</b>	1199
Juan Bravo Bravo	
<b>Casa contra arquitectura, Bernard Rudofsky y el “arte de habitar”.....</b>	1212
Alejandro Campos Uribe, Paula Lacomba Montes	
<b>El espacio doméstico en las exposiciones: nuevos conceptos durante la 2ª mitad del s. XX.....</b>	1224
Manuel Carmona García	
<b>La cocina-moderna en la vivienda colectiva española de la primera mitad del siglo XX.....</b>	1236
María Carreiro Otero, Cándido López González	
<b>Espacios de sombra y aire, transiciones en la arquitectura mediterránea.....</b>	1248
Antonio Cayuelas Porras	

<b>Habitar los hospitales: el bienestar más allá del confort</b> .....	1259
Pilar Chías Navarro, Tomás Abad Balboa	
<b>La cocina genérica: del marco físico a la atmósfera esencial</b> .....	1272
José Antonio Costela Mellado, Luis Eduardo Iáñez García	
<b>The House of Silence: The Franciscan Dwellings in the Colonial Convents of the North-East of Brazil</b> .....	1282
Maria Angélica da Silva	
<b>Arquitectura y jardín en la vivienda doméstica española del movimiento moderno</b>	1294
Manuel de Lara Ruiz, Carlos Pesqueira Calvo	
<b>The Italian House vs The American House. Decoration and Life-Style in the 50's...</b>	1309
Elena Dellapiana	
<b>Casas de vidrio – 1950: análisis de cuatro ejemplos coetáneos</b> .....	1321
Ana Esteban Maluenda, Héctor Navarro Martínez	
<b>Microarquitecturas a medida. Experiencia de arquitectura social</b> .....	1330
Antonella Falzetti	
<b>The Made-to-Measure House: From an Ideal Home to a Palace Between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> Centuries</b> .....	1341
Maria Teresa Feraboli	
<b>Holiday Houses in Italy in the 1930s</b> .....	1351
Adele Fiadino	
<b>Habitar la materia: apilar Cerdeña. Casa de vacaciones en Arzachena, Marco Zanuso</b> .....	1361
Mario Galiana Liras, Miguel A. Alonso del Val	
<b>1978. La Gran Casa, o sobre el interior en la obra de Enric Miralles</b> .....	1372
Carolina B. García Estévez	
<b>Donde termina la casa y empieza el cielo</b> .....	1384
Ubaldo García Torrente	
<b>Green Housing Dream. From Welfare Equality to Deregulation and Desire: Understeshöjden, 1989</b> .....	1397
Andrea Gimeno Sánchez	
<b>The “Medieval House” of Coimbra: Archeology of Architecture in the Demystification of Archetypes</b> .....	1407
António Ginja	
<b>La casa de luz tenue. A propósito de Alvar Aalto, Luis Barragán y Antonio Jiménez Torrecillas</b> .....	1418
José Miguel Gómez Acosta	

<b>Un análisis de la casa excavada-subterránea basado en la Sintaxis Espacial.....</b>	1428
Antonio J. Gómez-Blanco Pontes	
<b>King's Foundation: House, Power and Modernity in King Manuel I's inventory (1522-25).....</b>	1440
Luís Gonçalves Ferreira	
<b>“Raumplan-dwellings”: domesticidad y espacio en proyectos de Sejima-SANAA..</b>	1449
Aida González Llavona	
<b>La casa moderna en Cereté, una lección patrimonial.....</b>	1461
Massimo Leserrí, Merwan Chaverra Suárez	
<b>When a Big House Opens Its Doors: The São Marcos Hospital in Braga (17th-18thCenturies).....</b>	1471
Maria Marta Lobo de Araújo	
<b>El mito de la casa pompeyana entre los siglos XIX y XX.....</b>	1478
Fabio Mangone, Raffaella Russo Spina	
<b>Tiendas de campaña en Marte.....</b>	1493
Josemaría Manzano-Jurado, Santiago Porras Álvarez, Rafael García Quesada	
<b>La casa patio tradicional de la medina marroquí.....</b>	1506
Miguel Martínez-Monedero, Jaime Vergara-Muñoz	
<b>La forma tectónica de la casa: lo ontológico frente a lo representacional.....</b>	1518
Alejandro Muñoz Miranda	
<b>Habitar el cerro: la casa del arquitecto Bruno Violi en Bogotá.....</b>	1530
Serena Orlandi	
<b>Comida a domicilio.....</b>	1541
Nuria Ortigosa Duarte	
<b>Domestic Topographies: The House of Lino Gaspar, Caxias, 1953-1955.....</b>	1551
Maria Rita Pais	
<b>La ritualidad higiénica como domesticación espacial en el arte contemporáneo....</b>	1563
José Luis Panea Fernández	
<b>The Housing General Histories and Classes in Literature.....</b>	1572
Fabrizio Paone	
<b>“Paraísos” en el armario: homosexualidad y negociación doméstica en la California prebélica.....</b>	1587
José Parra-Martínez, María-Elia Gutiérrez-Mozo, Ana-Covadonga Gilsanz-Díaz	

<b>Profundidad espacial. Abriendo el muro. De la habitación sin nombre al jardín de invierno.....</b>	1599
Marta Pérez Rodríguez	
<b>Rooms. Aldo Rossi and the House in Ghiffa: Symbol, Dust and Desire.....</b>	1609
Michelangelo Pivetta, Vincenzo Moschetti	
<b>La colina habitada: características morfológicas y modos de habitar el campo.....</b>	1620
Luigi Ramazzotti	
<b>El <i>studiolo</i> como teatro de la mente.....</b>	1632
Jaime Ramos Alderete, Ana Isabel Santolaria Castellanos	
<b>Modos de habitar en contexto de montaña: la región oriental del Atlas en Marruecos.....</b>	1641
Miguel Reimão Costa, Desidério Batista	
<b>La casa en Santiago de Chile a fines del siglo XVIII: valores materiales y simbólicos.....</b>	1652
Marisol Richter Scheuch	
<b>Hombres de condición inquieta y despegada: el fascinante espectáculo de la precariedad.....</b>	1660
Carmen Rodríguez Pedret	
<b>Maid Rooms and Laundry Sinks Matter: Modern Houses in a Non-modern Context.....</b>	1671
Silvana Rubino	
<b>Inquietante domesticidad.....</b>	1679
Alberto Rubio Garrido	
<b>Houses for Whom? Between the Habitat and the Inhabiting, on Henri Lefebvre's Quest.....</b>	1688
Teresa V. Sá	
<b>Una casa es una «machine de l'émotion».....</b>	1698
Javier Sáez Gastearena	
<b>Espacio doméstico e higiene. Políticas del habitar en Sevilla entre los siglos XIX y XX.....</b>	1710
Victoriano Sainz Gutiérrez	
<b>La vivienda de los fareros, entre la casa y la máquina.....</b>	1720
Santiago Sánchez Beitía, Fernando Acale Sánchez	
<b>Naturalezas en la intimidad; acerca del jardín en los espacios domésticos contemporáneos.....</b>	1732
Juana Sánchez Gómez, Diego Jiménez López, Isabel Jiménez López	
<b>Cármenes, pequeñas historias domésticas.....</b>	1743
Juan Antonio Sánchez Muñoz, Vincent Morales Garoffolo	



<b>Algunas casas modernas: de la caverna al hogar</b> .....	1755
Rafael Sánchez Sánchez	
<b>Recuerdos de una escalera. Experiencias domésticas desplazadas en la obra de Siza</b> .....	1764
Juan Antonio Serrano García	
<b>¿No habitar es modo de habitar? Siglos de permanencia de mitos y criminalización</b> .....	1778
Sonia María Taddei Ferraz, Evelyn Garcia da Cruz, Paula Andréa Santos da Silva	
<b>Tres modos de habitar la casa popular: cereal, vid y olivar</b> .....	1787
Salvador Ubago Palma	
<b>La expresividad de la racionalidad: La casa estudio para Diego Rivera y Frida Kahlo</b> .....	1800
Luis Villarreal Ugarte	
<b>Habitar en Iberoamérica</b> .....	1811
Graciela María Viñuales	

#### BLOQUE TEMÁTICO 5

### Miradas externas: la casa en la pintura, el cine y la literatura

<b>Habitar la aventura: casas de Jules Verne</b> .....	1824
Juan Calatrava Escobar	
<b>Casas vacías, olvidadas y recordadas: arte, literatura y memoria</b> .....	1836
Marta Llorente Díaz	
<b>La villa Arpel: machine à habiter, “donde todo se comunica...” (Mon Oncle, J. Tati, 1958)</b> .....	1850
Antonio Pizza de Nanno	
<b>El relato doméstico desde una estrategia vertical</b> .....	1855
Agustín Gor Gómez	
<b>Fondos de escena en el cine de Ozu</b> .....	1868
Carlos Barberá Pastor	
<b>Habitar tras la Transición: los hogares cinematográficos de P. Almodóvar y A. Gómez</b> .....	1879
Ruth Barranco Raimundo	
<b>Espacios domésticos en transición y la ciudad moderna en Ohayo (1959) de Yasujiro Ozu</b> .....	1888
Bernardita M. Cubillos Muñoz	

<b>La casa Stahl, una vida de ficción</b> .....	1898
Daniel Díez Martínez	
<b>Habitaciones para la escritura: el autor y su espacio de trabajo</b> .....	1909
Tomás García Píriz, F. Javier Castellano Pulido	
<b>Ámbitos privados de la residencia colectiva en el imaginario cinematográfico español</b> .....	1920
Josefina González Cubero, Alba Zarza Arribas	
<b>Los registros de la luz. Vermeer y Hopper</b> .....	1929
Luis Eduardo Jáñez García	
<b>Allí reside el tiempo, mi infancia. La cabaña telúrica de Andréi Tarkovski</b> .....	1940
Alejandro Infantes Pérez, Javier Muñoz Godino	
<b>La casa, la calle y el territorio. Narraciones fotográficas de Guido Guidi</b> .....	1951
Marco Lecis	
<b>Entre la literatura y el cine. La casa de Sokúrov en <i>El segundo círculo</i></b> .....	1961
Pablo López Santana	
<b>Habitar un espacio, contemplar un paisaje: mujer, jardín y arquitectura doméstica en China (desde el siglo X hasta el XVIII)</b> .....	1972
Antonio Mezcu López	
<b>Registro de una mirada, Cape Cod House</b> .....	1981
Jorge Gabriel Molinero Sánchez, María del Carmen Vílchez Lara	
<b>La casa como metáfora del viaje. Fotógrafos y arquitectos en Mallorca</b> .....	1993
María Josep Mulet Gutiérrez, Joan Carles Oliver Torelló, María Sebastián Sebastián	
<b>La mirada indiscreta: la ventana en el cine como generador de emociones</b> .....	2004
Patricia Pozo Alemán	
<b>El telar es el cuerpo, el cuerpo es la casa</b> .....	2016
Anita Puig Gómez	
<b>El espacio doméstico en el cine de Jacques Tati: del bloque tradicional a la vivienda sobre ruedas</b> .....	2024
Helia de San Nicolás Juárez	
<b>Fisonomías arquitectónicas. La mediatización de casas de personalidades en Galicia</b> .....	2034
Jesús Ángel Sánchez-García	
<b>Mujeres y jardines en la China clásica: espacios domésticos en <i>Sueño en el Pabellón Rojo</i></b> .....	2046
Beatriz Valverde Vázquez	
<b>Notas autobiográficas de los autores</b> .....	2054

## **Vivir moderno: particularidades en Rio de Janeiro**

### *Modern Living: Particularities in Rio de Janeiro*

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#### **Resumen**

El presente artículo analiza el proyecto de dos edificios residenciales modernos –el Jarau (1935) y el Florida (1938)– diseñados por el mismo arquitecto, en la década de 1930, respectivamente para dos barrios de Río de Janeiro (Brasil): Copacabana y Flamengo. La ocupación residencial vertical de esta ciudad sucedió de forma diferente entre los barrios debido a varios factores, como la historia de su ocupación y el hecho de que sus habitantes iniciales pertenecieran a extractos sociales distintos. A través de las mismas categorías de análisis (implantación, planta baja, volumetría y fachadas y programa de necesidades), este trabajo busca evidenciar los puntos convergentes y divergentes de las soluciones espaciales de las dos edificaciones, teniendo como fondo las peculiaridades del proceso inicial de verticalización en Río de Janeiro.

**Palabras clave:** vivir moderno, edificio de apartamentos, verticalización de Río de Janeiro

**Bloque temático:** El proyecto doméstico como núcleo de la modernidad: casa singular y vivienda colectiva, del Movimiento Moderno al siglo XXI

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#### **Abstract**

*This article analyzes the design of two modern residential buildings –Jarau (1935) and Florida (1938)– created by the same architect in the 1930s, respectively, for the neighborhoods of Copacabana and Flamengo in Rio de Janeiro (Brazil). The vertical residential occupation of the city occurred in a differentiated way in the neighborhoods due to several factors, among them the history of its occupation and the fact that its initial inhabitants belonged to different social extracts. Through the same categories of analysis (implantation, floor plan, volumetry and facades and program of needs), this work seeks to highlight the convergent and divergent points of the spatial solutions of the two buildings, having as background the peculiarities of the initial process of verticalization of the city of Rio de Janeiro.*

**Keywords:** modern living, apartment building, verticalization of Rio de Janeiro

**Topic:** The domestic project as the heart of modernity: the single, one-off house and collective housing, from the Modern Movement to the 21st century

## Introduction

This article examines two apartment buildings designed by the architect Firmino Saldanha from 1935 to 1938 in the neighborhoods of Copacabana and Flamengo –both in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. According to Lobato Correa, It is assumed that «the urban landscape is always social, that is, the result of culture acting upon nature, of agents and their interests transforming the space».<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the role of these agents is seen as an important conditioning factor in the verticalization process that occurred in Rio de Janeiro in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This process caused the transformation of the city's skyline into different moldings across neighborhoods, depending on the agents involved in each region. In addition to pointing and relating the urban, spatial and tectonic features of the abovementioned buildings, this paper will try to relate them to the agents that act in the verticalization process of the area: the social group that predominates among their inhabitants and the history of the places.

Aldo Rossi (2001) stresses the importance of reflecting about the relationships between place and man, and about the history of the place. The author affirms that once the locus is established, it starts influencing the individuals and the collectivity in some way. In conclusion, the place and its history may be considered as conditioning factors for the way of living in a site. From this perspective and taking into consideration the same categories of analysis (implantation, floor plan, volumetry, facades and program of needs), this article seeks to evidence the convergent and divergent points in the spatial solutions of the two buildings, having as background the peculiarities of the initial verticalization process of Rio de Janeiro.

## 1. Initial verticalization process of the city of Rio de Janeiro

In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many factors contributed to the need for, and erection of high buildings in Rio de Janeiro as a modern and elegant way of living, especially the modernization of the construction techniques in Brazil and the greater offer of means of transportation, which enabled the expansion of the urbanized area towards the coastline neighborhoods. The growing fondness for sea bathing and for a healthier lifestyle have also helped associating the idea of modernity with the skyscrapers in the coastal neighborhoods (South Zone).

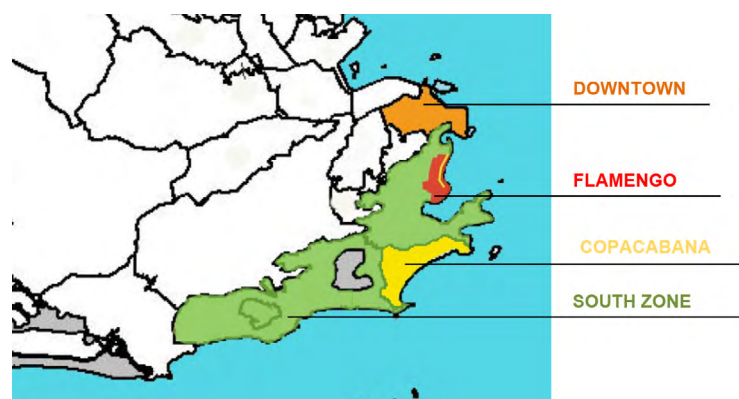


Figure 1: Part of the current map of the city of Rio de Janeiro  
Source: LAURD/PROURB/UFRJ (2014)

<sup>1</sup> Roberto Lobato Correa, *O espaço urbano* (Rio de Janeiro: Ática, 1993), 55.

The city's verticalization process started in the beginning of the 1910s, along the coastline of Downtown, but it was more widely spread in the 1930s. In Downtown, the buildings were mostly commercial or residential and commercial at the same time. In the coastal neighborhoods, the initial vertical occupation occurred in a more intense and residential way. However, in each different neighborhood, the apartment buildings got specific characteristics. This was due to several factors, including the history of the places and the fact that their inhabitants belonged to different social strata:

The sophistication that characterized the Copacabana neighborhood [...] was not strong enough to quickly threaten the primacy of the ancient residential regions across the Guanabara Bay, which, during many decades, have competed with the Atlantic neighborhoods for the wealthiest segments of the carioca population. Botafogo, Laranjeiras, and, above all, the coastline of Flamengo and Morro da Viúva, have persisted as refuges of essentially urban and elegant apartments for many years. Copacabana dwellers, in turn, were left with the status of living by the seaside.<sup>2</sup>

A deeper study<sup>3</sup> has shown two phases of the initial residential verticalization process in Rio de Janeiro. The first one is the experimentation of the new program of needs towards housing, which resulted in varied architectural responses. What they had in common was the target audience –the middle and upper classes– and the participation of the site's owner in the construction of the buildings. Many times, they were designed for their owners to live there and rent the remaining units as a source of income.

From 1937, new design and construction standards were set in the city through the first Construction Code, which laid down more specific guidelines on project licensing. Although it was more restrictive, it established height limits and regulated practices, contributing to the development and maturing of the civil construction sector. This is proven by the great number of buildings erected after the Decree was published. In this phase, the neighborhoods of Copacabana and Flamengo were more densely inhabited and a greater similarity among their apartment building projects was detected, in relation to both the program of needs and the aesthetic response. In order to understand the peculiarities of the architectonic responses that arose in these neighborhoods, a brief history of their occupation and verticalization process is presented in the following sections.

## 2. Copacabana neighborhood

By the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Copacabana was a sand pit, distant from the urban area and poorly inhabited. Its occupation intensifies with the construction of a tunnel connecting the neighborhoods of Copacabana and Botafogo. In the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Copacabana was sought by a rising middle class, which became the main target audience of modern vertically collective housing. In this neighborhood, the apartment buildings not only incorporated technological innovations (running and hot water, imported sanitary ware, etc.), but also established a more practical and modern way of dealing with habitation (smaller and more rational internal spaces), becoming a symbol of well-being. Consistent with Lilian Vaz, «living in

<sup>2</sup> Paulo Marins, *Habitação e vizinhança* (São Paulo: Cia.Letras, 1998), 94.

<sup>3</sup> Refer to Denise Vianna Nunes, "O processo inicial de verticalização da Praia do Flamengo: uma análise tipo-morfológica dos edifícios de apartamentos de luxo" (tesis doctoral, Universidade Federal do Rio de Janeiro, 2014), 328, [https://sucupira.capes.gov.br/sucupira/public/consultas/coleta/trabalhoConclusao/viewTrabalhoConclusao.jsf?popup=true&id\\_trabalho=2012727](https://sucupira.capes.gov.br/sucupira/public/consultas/coleta/trabalhoConclusao/viewTrabalhoConclusao.jsf?popup=true&id_trabalho=2012727).

an apartment building in Copacabana in the 1930s meant being modern, that is, living modern». <sup>4</sup> The connotation of modern back then was exclusively associated with the innovations incorporated into the building and with its location. Xavier, Britto and Nobre «affirm that Jarau building (Copacabana, 1936), designed by the architect Firmino Saldanha, was the first residential building built in Rio de Janeiro according to Modern Architecture concepts». <sup>5</sup>

### 3. Flamengo neighborhood

Flavio Villaça (1978) and Brasil Gerson (2000) state that, between the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, this region of Rio de Janeiro was inhabited by a social group with high purchasing power: initially, people belonging to the Portuguese court; with the advent of the Republic, the diplomatic corps of the Embassies, given the proximity with Catete Palace (the seat of the Brazilian Federal Government from 1889 to 1960). The main feature of this group was a strong attachment to the place, having remained there even when the urban area expanded to its surroundings. These particularities have provided the neighborhood with the status of well-being and of living in an elegant, luxurious and fundamentally traditional and aristocratic way.

Flamengo is a coastal neighborhood too, but closer to downtown. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, it was occupied by small ranches, which were dismembered and gave place to mansions. In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, these mansions were replaced by luxurious apartment buildings. In the 1930s, the neighborhood had already some eclectic and pre-modern buildings. In this period, the traditional families that lived in Flamengo were also partners of the companies in charge of allotments and construction works in the city –in addition to acting in the industrial and trade sectors. Therefore, they were among the agents of the initial verticalization process in progress. Within this context, Florida was erected. It was the first building with luxurious duplex apartments in Rio de Janeiro.

### 4. The buildings Jarau (1936) and Florida (1938)

Jarau is located in a corner site. Soon after the street stretches were opened, in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, small residences have quickly emerged in the site. Approximately 30 years later, they were demolished and gave place to the building. Jarau was built and sold under the incorporation system, which had never been adopted in Brazil. With a modern lexicon, its project has introduced the use of the piloti, the structural rationality, the clearance of the ground floor (based on Corbusier's forms), a facade free from ornaments and with straight lines, and the big fenestration spans with balconies with masonry sills. This is the project by Saldanha that led to the greatest number of publications. The book *Brazil Builds* (1943) highlighted the ground floor, the sliding Venetian blinds (known as Copacabana Venetian blinds) and the hollow latticeworks made of reinforced concrete (which used to protect the northwest facade from the sun and became a typical of his works). The plastic and functional result of the latticework was

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<sup>4</sup> Lilian Vaz, *Modernidade e moradia. Habitação coletiva no Rio de Janeiro. Séculos XIX e XX* (Rio de Janeiro: 7Letras, 2002), 85.

<sup>5</sup> Alberto Xavier, Alfredo Britto e Ana Luisa Nobre, *Arquitetura moderna no Rio de Janeiro* (Rio de Janeiro: Rioarte/Fundação Vilanova Artigas, Pini, 1991), 35.

also mentioned by Roberto Segre as «an interesting volumetric articulation in the corner window».<sup>6</sup>



Figure 2: Jarau building, 1940s and 2014  
Source: Azevedo, Moura & Gertum Construction Company (1948) and D. Vianna Nunes (2014)

Technical Data:

**Location:** Copacabana, Rio de Janeiro  
**Site area:** 530 m<sup>2</sup>  
**Typical floor area:** 340 m<sup>2</sup>  
**Floors:** Ground floor plus 10  
**Apartments:** 20 duplexes (2 per floor)

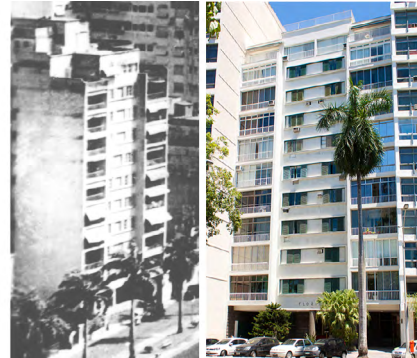


Figure 3: Florida building in the 1940s and 2014  
Source: G. Ermakoff Archive (1940) and J. Magnus Pires (2014)

Technical Data:

**Location:** Flamengo, Rio de Janeiro  
**Site area:** 790 m<sup>2</sup>  
**Typical floor area:** 560 m<sup>2</sup>  
**Floors:** Ground floor plus 10  
**Apartments:** 10 duplexes (2 per floor)

The businessman Octávio da Rocha Miranda took the initiative of dismembering the land that had belonged to his family for many decades in order to build two apartment buildings. One of them is Florida, which, in spite of being turned to Flamengo's aristocrats, has a different aesthetic and programmatic response. Without giving up the comfort and the state-of-the-art domestic facilities at the time, the architect was coherent with the architectural aspects he had been adopting and proposed lines and elements inspired by the canons of Modern Architecture, as well as an unprecedented program of needs in the luxurious apartment buildings of Rio de Janeiro: the duplex apartment. The building's ground floor has a piloti, a plain slab and a main facade with straight lines and free from ornaments. The building is portrayed in two pages of *Brazil Builds* (1943), with emphasis to the quality of the sliding awning windows made of Venetian blind strips and glass in the central portion of the facade. These elements and the balconies with grated guardrails contribute to the thermal comfort of the apartments, a very relevant aspect in the agenda of the Brazilian Modern Architecture.

#### 4.1. The building in the plot: implantation

Due to the reduced dimension of the urban plots and to their high valuation on account of the proximity with the coastline, the buildings in the South Zone of Rio de Janeiro were implanted following the boundary lines, which contributed to the formation of the so-called corridor street. That is also the case of Jarau and Florida. The form of their plots is similar to a trapezium and allowed for a triangular front retreat occupied by a garden, from the implantation of buildings with an orthogonal genesis.

<sup>6</sup> Roberto Segre, "Os caminhos da modernidade carioca (1930-1980)", en *Guia da Arquitetura Moderna no Rio de Janeiro*, coord. por Jorge Czajkowski (Rio de Janeiro: Casa da Palavra, 2000), 14.

Jarau has a rectangular floor plan, with an accretion in the smaller facade so that the site's border was reached. It occupies, in projection, the entire stretch of the two streets where the corner plot is located. However, on the ground floor, only the vertical accesses and small service spaces are closed. The remaining spaces are characterized only by the presence of the pilotis. Thus, the horizontal access from both streets is possible. The prism solution was adopted at the back of the plot to ventilate and illuminate all the compartments.

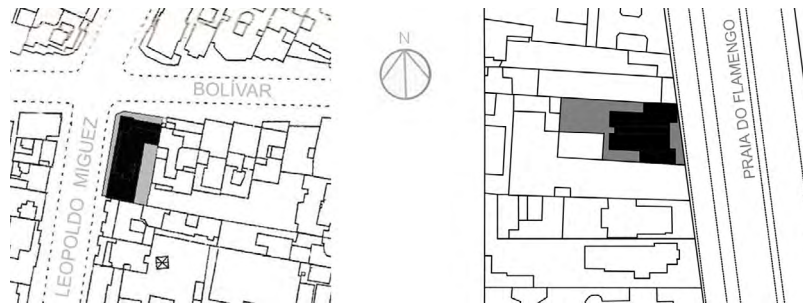


Figure 4: Implantation of Jarau and Florida buildings, scale 1:2000  
Source: L. Vieira (2018)

Florida is formed of two juxtaposed solids supported by pilotis. The smaller one, which is square, is far from the borders, allowing for generous openings meant for illumination and ventilation. The superior quality of the environmental comfort and of the privacy factor is clear in this arrangement, but it demands a wider site. The architect had already employed a similar solution in outros projects of the same period. The main horizontal access is through a white marble staircase, which provides it with some magnificence.

#### 4.2. The building and its organization: the floor plan

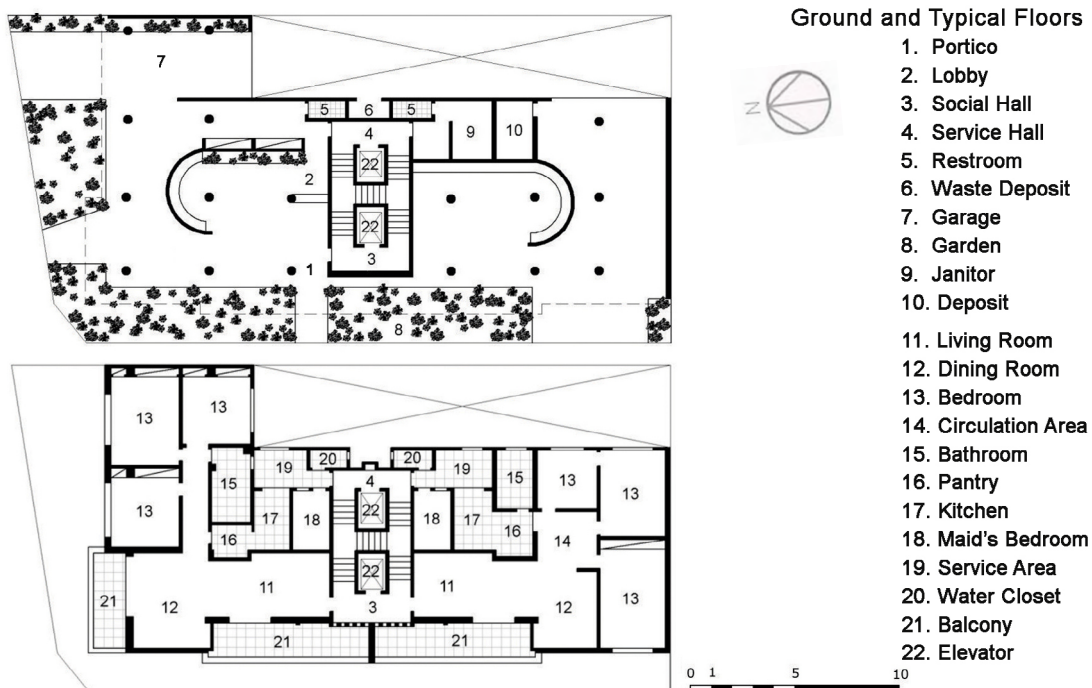


Figure 5: Ground and typical floors of Jarau building  
Source: M. Vieira (2008)



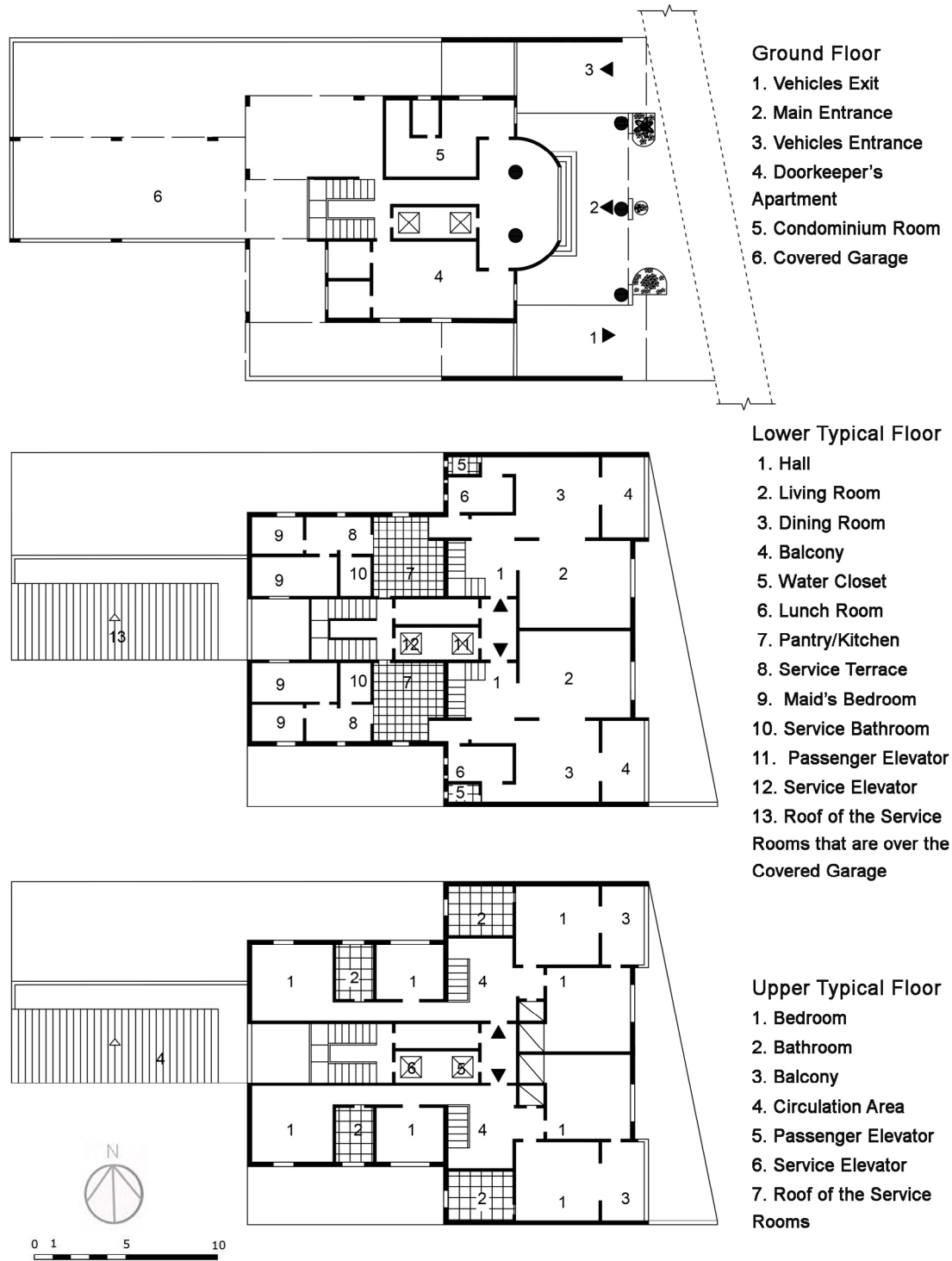


Figure 6: Floor plan of Florida building's ground, lower typical and upper typical floors  
 Source: L. Vieira (2018)

In both buildings, the Corbusian lexicon may be noticed in the treatment given to the ground floor plan. In Jarau, it is more evident, since the building is in a corner site: piloti structure, free public space with benches, presence of the vertical circulation areas and small deposits only. At that time, the presence of a shelter for vehicles was not required by the legislation. Although there were still few cars in the city, Florida was designed with a space at the back of its grounds meant for the covered garage and for the boiler, central air-conditioning and trash burning facilities. Those were luxurious technological items at that time, but were present in many buildings in Flamengo neighborhood.

The typical floors of both buildings evidence an orthogonal intent, even though subject to symmetry. The floor plans are constituted by a central core –the vertical circulation areas–, two elevators and a staircase for all apartments. Large balconies, Copacabana Venetian blinds and latticework protect the facades from the sun in both buildings. Combined with glass, these window frames illuminate the buildings' stairs and halls.

#### 4.3. The building's spatiality: Volumetry and facades



Figure 7: Jarau's facade and latticework and Florida's facade  
Source: D. Vianna Nunes (2014)

The facades designed by Saldanha translate the modern concept of unicuity with the plan: simplification, orthogonality, sense of order. This was one of his significant contributions to the constitution of the modern language associated with apartment buildings in Rio de Janeiro. The buildings have a prismatic volume and the balconies generate movement in the facades, as a counterpoint to the big sliding awning windows vertically protected by Copacabana Venetian blinds. In the case of Jarau, the external sharp corner solution was softened by the use of hollow latticework, forming a checkered panel that filters the sunrays. This solution is a reference to the Brazilian traditions, to elements extracted from the colonial architecture, such as the *muxarabi* (Moorish balcony protected by a wooden grating). In the words of Firmino Saldanha:

This latticework was created by us and its use became a necessity. Soon after the first latticeworks appeared, they were largely spread, since they provided a fresh environment without prejudice to the view. When I built Jarau, there was a concrete latticework in the facade and the plants coiled up on it. The elements of Brazilian tropical architecture incorporated at that moment were those with a specific function, especially as heat attenuators: big balconies, latticeworks.<sup>7</sup>

The project of Florida building was innovative because it sought an alternative to the staggering of the last floors required by the legislation, and a higher height limit without prejudice to the pure prismatic form. The building's position, inclined in relation to the frontal clearance, allows the central volume to fully lift (since it has the required clearance), and the two side volumes to follow the height limit with uncovered balconies. The difference in the volumes position in

<sup>7</sup> Firmino Saldanha, *Interview conducted by Milton Teixeira* (Rio de Janeiro: 1985).

relation to the frontal alignment of the site results in the facade movement. The balconies of Florida are garnished with parallel iron gratings, and open towards the east facade in a balanced way, generating empty spaces in the front plan and conveying a sense of depth to the volume. This solution is more sophisticated and expensive, compatible with the building's target audience. In general, the balconies in Copacabana consisted of colored masonry guardrails, as in Jarau.

In the ground floors of both buildings, we can notice the presence of piloti-under-slab structural systems. In Jarau, there seem to be beams under a plaster cover. In Florida, whose budget is supposed to have been higher, the slab is plane, and the main facade presents three round columns. There are two other columns in the space meant for the lobby, which are independent from the masonry.

#### **4.4. The hierarchical structure of the building: program of needs**

This work shares with Tramontano (1993) and Villa (2002) the idea that the program of needs of the Brazilian apartment buildings has its genesis in the spatial organization of the *Hausmannian* apartment. This apartment, in turn, derives from transformations of the architectonic type *hôtel particulier*, having inherited, among other aspects, the tripartite division into social, intimate and service areas; and the separation of the buildings' horizontal and vertical accesses into social and service entrances. This division is consistent with the Brazilian social organization, which segregates employers and employees since colonial times. That is why the internal spaces of the apartments intended for the family (the so-called intimate areas) in Florida are quite distant from those occupied by the servants (the so-called service areas). In such case, they are in different floors, as they used to be in the mansions of the region in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In Jarau, this separation is less evident, due to both the intent of reducing the areas and rationalizing the circulation areas, and the nature of the building's target audience – a rising middle class that was not much attached to ancient customs, that was eager for changes, and that was more focused on the idea of a practical and modern life.

In spite of the modern lexicon of the facades and ground floors, the internal spaces of both buildings are still very compartmentalized. The social area of Florida consists of a reception and distribution hall, which connects this social area with the intimate and service sectors. Going through this space, we get to the visit room, dining room and balcony, lunchroom and water closet. In Jarau, the spatial connections are simpler: the lunchroom, the water closet and the entrance hall are not present. Moreover, the areas of all ambiances are smaller.

The number of bedrooms is commonly used in Brazil to qualify the apartments, at least with respect to its size and target audience. The greater the number of bedrooms, the more exclusive is the apartment. Florida's bedrooms are larger in area and number.

Given their association with hygiene and health, the bathrooms became the most modern areas of the Brazilian homes in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. They were given imported sanitary ware, colored or marble tiles, nickel metals, mirrors, bathtubs and individual showers. With areas much larger than those seen nowadays, and naturally illuminated and ventilated, these bathrooms had separate shower and bathtub. The apartments in middle-class buildings, such as Jarau, used to have one bathroom. In Florida, there were two, being one of them directly connected with one of the bedrooms, forecasting the adoption of suites, which are very common presently.

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the clothes were often sent to external laundresses. Therefore, a space exclusively intended for washing them was a luxurious item, so much so that

it was mentioned in rent and sale ads. The program of needs of the service area of both buildings included a space for washing clothes (the service balcony or terrace), in addition to a pantry, a kitchen, a maid's bedroom and a maid's bathroom. The pantry was a room supporting the kitchen and the dining room. That was where the utensils were kept, where the dishes were finished during the banquets and where the family ate quick meals. It rendered the domestic chores more comfortable, and the family meals cozier. However, the area was extinguished afterwards for space economy reasons. In Jarau, it also serves as an access to the kitchen; and in Florida, it is attached to the big kitchen area (25 m<sup>2</sup>).

In the beginning of the carioca verticalization process, the maid's bedroom and bathroom were located in the same place where they were in France: the roof. Nevertheless, with the valorization of the top views –enabled by the elevator– the maid's area was integrated into the typical floor plan. The middle class apartments, like Jarau's, had one such area. In more sophisticated buildings, there were two or more maid's areas. Some constructions had sheds at the back of the plot as well. In Florida, there are two maid's rooms in the service area, plus one on the ground floor for the chauffeurs. This arrangement had already been tested in the spatial organization of the Mansions, being a deep-rooted custom among the Brazilian single-family homes. Only recently it has been set aside.

## **5. Final considerations**

This article sought to evidence that, even when they are designed by the same architect and in the same temporal cuts, the architectonic objects show particularities according to their contexts and target audiences.

The middle class that moved to Copacabana had no tradition with the place. They were looking for a practical and modern life, and their homes should reflect this spirit. This was similar to the North-American lifestyle, which became virtually hegemonic in Brazil after World War II. Thus, their circulation areas are more direct, and many areas are reduced or suppressed.

The luxurious apartments in Flamengo neighborhood are generous and well-tended spaces. What was sought was the answer to the well living requirements of a privileged group, whose dwellings had already incorporated all the technological conveniences of the time. As pointed by Villaça (1978), their demands were turned to luxury, comfort and exclusiveness. The duplex apartment typology, already adopted in the search for spatial and cost economy in social projects, was successfully associated with the luxurious apartment buildings too. These buildings, such as Florida, stood out due to their uniqueness and comfort.

Since Flamengo had deep-rooted traditions, it took longer for the neighborhood to receive buildings in line with the Modern Movement. It was just in 1950 that Guarabira building, projected by the Roberto Brothers, was erected. Therefore, Florida, built in 1938, may be considered a pioneer in the neighborhood. It is modern when it comes to its language and to the use of state-of-the-art technologies of that time, even though it sought to offer the same comfortable spaces the mansions used to have. The ambition of being considered a modern building is also expressed in its name.

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