

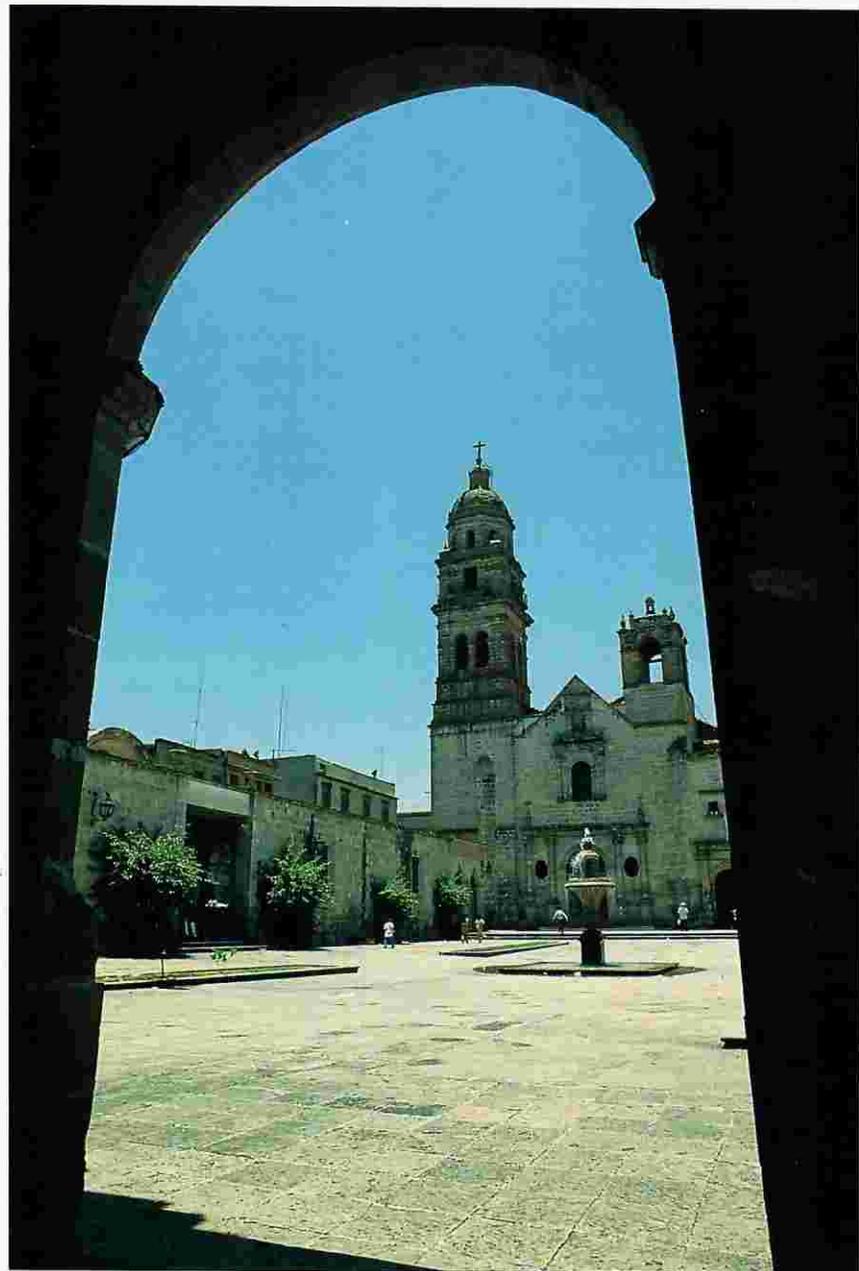
# Morelia

*Rosalía Santín\**

**T**he city of Morelia, capital of the state of Michoacán, was founded in the valley of Guayangareo in 1541. At that time the city was called Nueva Ciudad de Mechoacán, and was founded in line with orders issued by Viceroy Antonio de Mendoza and carried out by Juan de Alvarado, Juan de Villaseñor and Luis de León. The first designs for the city are credited to the architect Juan Ponce. In 1545 the city's name was changed to Valladolid; it was changed to Morelia on August 23, 1828 in remembrance of General José María Morelos y Pavón.

The Colonial period brought a great economic, social and artistic growth to Valladolid. The public and religious buildings constructed then bear witness to this era's vitality. As with the whole state of Michoacán, the city benefitted from the labor of an educated clergy. The state-wide foundation of towns organized around convents, the development of irrigation and other improvements in agriculture and urban life testify to the work of Franciscans, Augustines and Jesuits.

The Napoleonic invasion of Spain and the abduction of the king gave rise to doubts about the legitimacy of the Spanish government and the hegemony of



*Church of San Agustín.*

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the Spaniards in New Spain. The first conspiracies took place in Valladolid, which —under the protection of Querétaro's Chief Magistrate Domínguez— provided the basis for Miguel Hidalgo's insurgency of September 15, 1810.

As the insurgents traveled through Michoacán they were joined by numerous volunteers, prominent among them the priest José María Morelos, Hidalgo's disciple from the College of San Nicolás, where he had been the rector. As is well known, Morelos successfully organized the war; distinguished by military and political genius, this fighter for independence wrote, in his *Sentimientos de la nación* (Sentiments of the Nation), a proclamation of what the foundation of the new country should be.

Agustín de Iturbide, also from Michoacán, achieved an accord between the insurgents Bravo and Guerrero and the most sensible royalists, under the *Plan de Iguala*, which led their army to victory and the proclamation of Mexican independence in 1821.

During Mexico's Independence epoch, the struggle between Liberals and Conservatives was of great importance. Prominent thinkers engaged in ideological polemics, among them Melchor Ocampo, governor of Michoacán, one of the authors of the Constitution of 1857. He also followed Benito Juárez in the Liberal government's peregrinations and was one of the most important ideologues of the Reform Laws.

Other important Michoacán natives, such as Salvador Escalante and the generals Francisco Mújica and Lázaro Cárdenas, participated in the Revolution initiated by Francisco I. Madero in 1910. Cárdenas became President of the Republic, as did Pascual Ortiz Rubio, also from Michoacán. General Cárdenas, who carried out the oil expropriation of 1938, is remembered as an exceptional statesman.

#### Places of interest

While the entire state of Michoacán has a rich historical and cultural past, the capital is without a doubt the most

representative of the state's Colonial splendor. Many of the magnificent public and religious buildings from that era have been preserved, providing the key landmarks of the city. The following monuments of Morelia's artistic and cultural heritage are worth visiting.

The *Cathedral* (17th-18th century). The greatest expression of Michoacán Baroque: sober Baroque. As Elisa Vargas points out in her work *Las portadas religiosas de México* (Mexico's Religious Facades), the construction project was the creation of the Italian architect Vincenzo Barocio de la Escayola, who began work in 1660 and directed the project until 1690. In 1707 he was replaced by Juan Silva. The Cathedral's dome, built in 1715, is the work of Juan Antonio de la Cruz. The facades were finished at the same time as the towers, in 1744, according to the date inscribed on the main facade, composed of three doorways and built by an architect from Puebla, José de Medina. The facades as well as the church transepts have stone pilasters. Important bas-relief work can be seen in the second and third sections. Only the final cornices provide a small echo of the 18th-century buildings of New Spain's capital (Mexico City). The magnificent towers, with octagonal first and second floors, are composed along the same flat and geometric lines which characterize Morelia Baroque.

Inside, the altars in front of the aisle are attributed to the architect Zápari. The choir stalls, composed of 73 carved chairs, were completed in 1706. The main altar was made in 1707 and consisted of three parts with 24 spiral columns and 12 statues. The pulpit is another beautiful and valuable piece.



Isabel Montejano.

Handicraft and candy market.

Francisco de la Cruz was the silversmith who crafted the presbytery lamp and the chorus presbytery corridor, also made of silver. Today only the silver monstrance remains (it can be found in the main altar), sculpted and covered in relief, in the style of the majestic monstrances of the Spanish Renaissance.

*San Francisco Convent* (16th century). Located to the east of the Cathedral, this is a Renaissance-style Franciscan convent, founded after 1531 and finished in 1610. It has a beautiful cloister and, due to architectural similarities, is attributed to the unknown creator of the church facade in Tzintzuntzan, Michoacán. Today the convent houses the Casa de las Artesanías de Morelia (Morelia Crafts House).

*San Agustín Convent* (16th century). This is the second Renaissance-style convent built between 1550 and 1620. It is more sober and classical than the previously mentioned convent, and has a courtyard surrounded by doorways, where today you can eat delicious, traditional Morelia-style enchiladas. This convent is located behind the Cathedral.

*Del Carmen Convent* (17th century). After the 16th-century monasteries we find the year 1619 inscribed on the first Baroque facade of this enormous convent of the barefoot Carmelite nuns. Created by Friar Andrés de San Miguel, the architect Francisco de Chavira also lent his hand to the work. The convent includes mystical cells, an interesting crypt and a large central patio with a fountain that supplies water to the two wings of the beautiful enclosure. During the 17th and 18th centuries the Convent of Carmen was the seat of the College of Moral Theology; during the War of



Pastor Ojeda.

*Morelos Museum.*

Independence it served as a prison for the Valladolid conspirators. In 1839 the interior was remodeled, replacing the Baroque altarpiece with a Neoclassical one. The government appropriated the convent in 1833 and it became the quarters of the first State Cavalry Corps. During the years of the Reform the orchards were divided and sold. During the post-Revolution period the convent was the site of the Seminary up until 1956. Between 1974 and 1978, the building was restored in order to house the Casa de la Cultura, home of the Michoacán Cultural Institute. The convent church is the Minor Seminary of Morelia's Archdiocese.

*Las Monjas* (18th century). Another of the city's architectural jewels, this church dates from 1778. It is a typical religious temple, with matching facades and a lovely tower. Las Monjas is located on Madero Avenue, the historic center's main street, which runs east to west.

*Las Rosas Convent* (18th century). Located across the street from the State Museum, in front of a small, traditional plaza. A splendid convent whose facade was finished in

1757 and whose elements were greatly influenced by the Cathedral. The entablature provides ample space for reliefs of saints, and between the border and the pilasters we find phytomorphic caryatids, religious medallions and reliefs.

The convent church preserves a beautiful choir with iron grillwork and one of the few churrigueresque altarpieces left in Morelia. Today Las Rosas houses the city Conservatory.

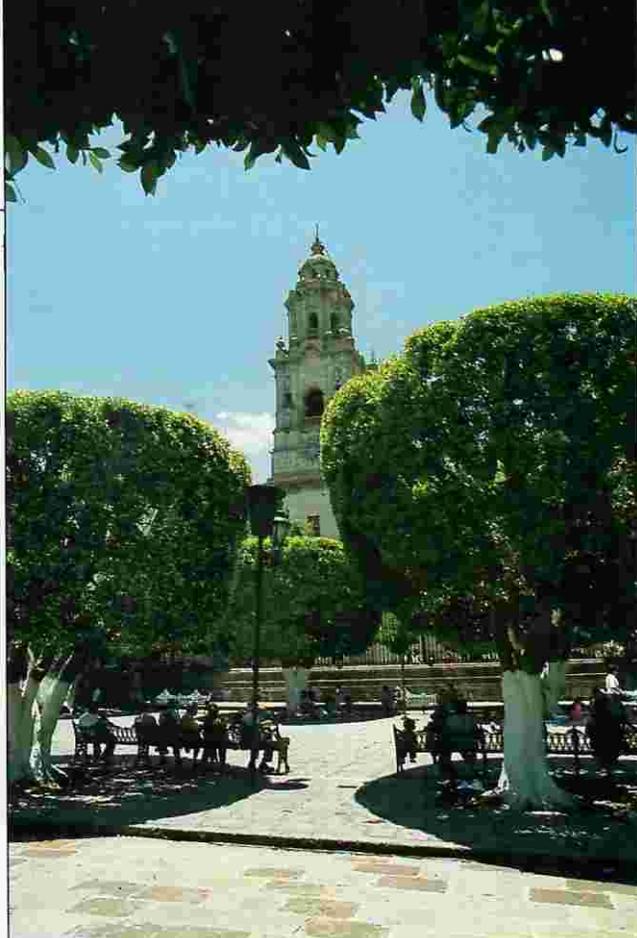
*La Merced* (18th century). Another churrigueresque facade belongs to this church, with enormous stipites and a classical entryway.

*San José* (18th century). This church is one of Morelia's great works. A monument of considerable height, with bell-shaped towers like those of Mexico City's Cathedral, it adds splendor to the enchanting natural sunken park nearby.

*San Diego* (18th century). Located at the end of the lovely street of Fray Andrés de San Miguel, which evokes a Colonial street with a number of sober homes, stands the temple of San Diego. Today the Sanctuary of Guadalupe, it was built

*Plaza de Armas (central square).*

Pastor Ojeda



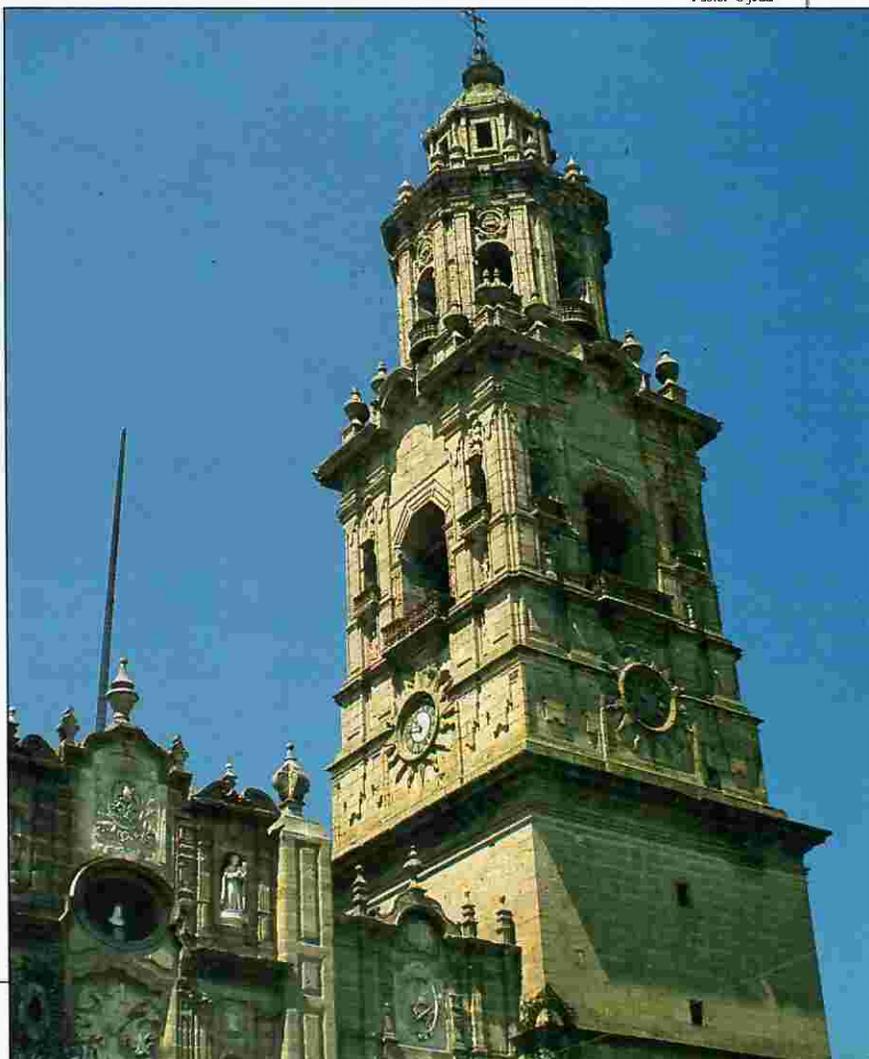
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*Fountain at the Church of San Agustín.*

*Morelia Cathedral.*



in 1716. The naves are profusely decorated with glazed tiles with designs of flowers, scrolls, fleurons and pineapples. The composition of the facade is traditional with the classical door and semi-circular window, accompanied by pilasters on both sides.

*La Casa de las Artesanías.* After visiting the main churches in Morelia, it is worth spending some time in the Casa de las Artesanías, which is found in the Convent of San Francisco. Each community in Michoacán is known for its own type of handicraft, with time and authentic creative expression shaping each of the crafts we find displayed here. For example:

Pottery from Capula, Tzintzuntzan, Cocucho, Santa Fe de la Laguna, San José de Gracia, Patamban and Tlalpujahua.

Woodwork from Paracho, Ahuirán, Sevina, Zacán, Uruapan, Cuanajo, Erongaricuaró and Tocuaro. They also make stringed musical instruments: guitars, violins, violas, cellos, double basses and *guitarrones*. The selection of wood is very important to achieve the proper color, texture and form.

Lacquered handicrafts from Pátzcuaro and Uruapan.

Metalwork from San Felipe de los Herreros, Pátzcuaro and other places.

Textiles from Jarácuaro, Zacán, San Lucas Pío and hats from Sahuayo.

Stonework from Tlalpujahua, Patambicho, Tzurumutaro and Morelia.

*Fiestas and fairs.* In Michoacán there are religious festivals, competitions, exhibits, fairs and markets every month of the year. In the towns there are candles, archways aromatic with *guinomo* and *cempasichil* flower festoons, and the taste of *nurte* tea and *charanda* liquor. The murmur of prayers and the yells

of people celebrating echo against altars, where the magic of devotion is a daily act in the towns of San Nuevo Parangaricutero, Cherán, Ihuatzio, Zitácuaro, Zacán, Angahua, Pechátaro, Opoeco, Quiroga and Jarácuaro.

#### *The Government Palace.*

Previously the Tridentine Seminary, this building faces the Alameda. Solid and architecturally beautiful, it features great arcaded patios and curious, Oriental-style crests on the corners of the main facade. The palace houses murals by the great Pátzcuaro painter Alfredo Zalee. One of them, in the staircase, is titled *Independence, Reform and Revolution* (1956). Other murals show different events of historical importance, as well as features of the state of Michoacán. The final one depicts the peasantry's struggle against bureaucracy.

*The State Museum.* Housed in a beautiful Colonial building with a central patio and two wings, it includes exhibition halls displaying handwritten testimonials, pre-Hispanic and Colonial objects from the state's various cultures, as well as objects bearing witness to Michoacán's development in the 19th and 20th centuries. An interesting 19th-century pharmacy is located at the museum's entrance; the furnishings and pharmaceutical equipment are worth seeing.

#### *Museum of Contemporary Art.*

Recently named the "Alfredo Zalee" museum in homage to the distinguished painter from Michoacán, the museum is situated near the city's aqueduct. There are exhibits of painting, sculpture and other domestic and foreign artistic works. The museum has fostered an important artistic movement and is located in a late 19th-century house, built in the center of a lush park known as El Bosque.

*San Nicolás College.* The seat of the Universidad Michoacana de San

Nicolás de Hidalgo and today a preparatory school, this building is only a few blocks from the State Museum. At this time the university is housed in one modern building, with facade archways that evoke the Colonial architecture of Morelia.

#### *The House Where Morelos Was Born.*

Morelia is a city with a large student population; thus, this house located on Alzate Street in the historic center has been made into an important library. Inside we find reference books for students and significant archives well-catalogued by the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH). The property, as part of Mexico's historic legacy, has been excellently restored.

Walking through the city, it is a pleasure to admire the beautiful and stately Colonial homes in the historic center, with their large windows, balconies and doorways that are sometimes open, allowing us to enjoy the interior gardens or flower-filled patios.

Traveling outside Morelia we come to lovely areas such as Pátzcuaro, the beautiful magical-mystical city of Spanish design, with its enormous plaza, perhaps one of the most attractive in Mexico: La Plaza de Tata Vasco. On the banks of Lake Pátzcuaro we encounter other charming towns, rich in history and in the handicrafts mentioned above: Tzintzuntzan, Santa Fe de la Laguna (where Vasco de Quiroga founded the first "huatapera" or health center), Ihuatzio, Tzurumutaro, Jarácuaro, Erongaricuaró, San Andrés and San Jerónimo Purenchécuaro, among others.

Beyond Pátzcuaro, on the road to Uruapan, there is a luminous but little-known lake, the Lago de Zirahuen, a miracle of nature offered us by Michoacán. ❀