

Haciendas in the State of Hidalgo History and Art

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On the southern plains of the state of Hidalgo, among magueys, nopal cacti and a *pirul* tree or two, high old stone or adobe walls jut out of the ground, the

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remains of large buildings, some in ruins or abandoned and others partially standing or occupied by their owners. They are noteworthy not only for their size, but for the watchtowers that seem to guard their fronts, for their architecture and the refined ornamentation of their facades, with oval

windows, Moorish balconies or neo-classical portals often contrasting with the stark rural landscape. The wealth of their chapels compete with the region's most important churches. The state of Hidalgo has about 200 of these singular complexes, called *cascos de hacienda*, or the central build-



ings of the hacienda, including the main house.

VICEROYAL OPULENCE

Haciendas originated in the colonial period. In their search for wealth, the

Spanish conquistadors became *encomenderos* by royal decree, the lords of indigenous towns that had to pay them tribute. When the indigenous population declined drastically in the sixteenth century, the tribute that the conquistadors' sons and grandsons received also dropped precipitously, and

they began to seek other sources of wealth, which they found in the ownership and working of the land. Through *mercedes*, grants of land, rents or noble titles by the crown as a reward for services rendered or a simple favor, an individual could accumulate hundreds of hectares.¹ The hacienda became the



Tecajete Hacienda. Peaceful patios filled with flowers and trees are common features in Hidalgo's haciendas.

At the foot of a volcano of the same name, Tecajete Hacienda's superb colonial architecture is still impressive.



The chapel, a peaceful refuge and a delight to the eye.



The drawing room, witness to four centuries of conversations.

agricultural and cattle raising production unit par excellence until the twentieth century when social and political processes obliterated it. The last heyday of Mexico's haciendas came during the *Porfiriato* (the regime of Porfirio Diaz from 1876 to 1911). Despite many being abandoned after the 1910 Mexican Revolution, their ruins bear witness to their stateliness and luxury. The ones

saved from destruction are of interest to the visitor as testimony to a very important stage in Mexico's history.

THE APAN PLAINS

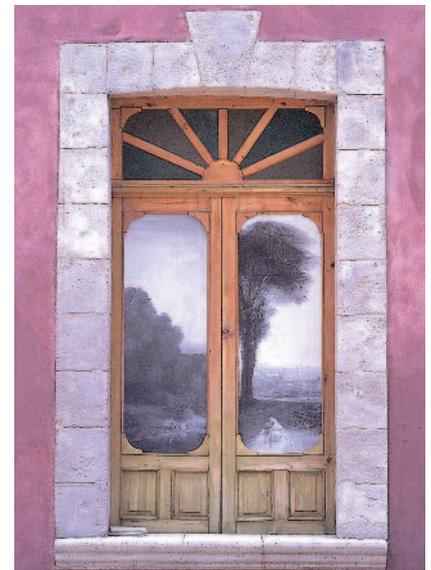
The southern part of the state of Hidalgo, known as the Apan Plains, about 70 kilometers northeast of Mexico

City, has always been good land for growing maguey plants. The haciendas in this area, surrounded by immense maguey fields, used them to produce *pulque*, a traditional Mexican drink. *Pulque* is made by fermenting the sap of the plant, called *aguamiel*, or "honey water." Workers called *tlachiqueros* went from plant to plant collecting the *aguamiel* (*tlachique* in Nahuatl), and

The economic boom provided hacienda owners with the funds to indulge their desire to show off, using a broad variety of ornamental styles on their chapels and "big house."



The Santiago Tetlapayac Hacienda has been the location for several movies.



they took it to special buildings called *tinacales*, or fermenting sheds, where they poured it into large leather recipients. As the days passed, the fermenting liquid became *pulque*, which was then emptied into casks and sent to consumers, mainly in Mexico City. It was so profitable that the hacienda owners amassed great fortunes and created large companies that came to

control hundreds of *pulque*-selling establishments in the country's capital. Some even built their own railway lines to hook up to the main commercial railways in order to distribute their product.

This economic boom provided hacienda owners with the funds to not only improve the production buildings (fermenting sheds, stables, patios and workers' quarters), but also to indulge

their desire to show off, using a broad variety of ornamental styles on their chapels and "the big house" where they lived with their families.

A VISIT TO SOME HACIENDAS

The Santiago Tetlapayac Hacienda, 17 kilometers southeast of the town of



Tetlapayac Hacienda dates from the colonial period.

At the end of each day, the peons and *tlachiqueros* sang a song of praise to God and the Virgin Mary known as the *alabado* before a small altar.



The Santiago Tetlapayac Hacienda's chapel is an excellent example of the popular Hidalgo baroque style.





The wisdom and flavors of at least two cultures met in the kitchen.



Tlachiqueros at work, immortalized in a mural by Ernesto Icaza.



Tetlapayac's *tinacal* still stores all the vats, tools and utensils needed to make *pulque*.

Apan near the border with the state of Tlaxcala, dates from the colonial period. Its enormous doorway, flanked by two tall watchtowers, leads to an immense patio that holds the small workers' houses and the corrals for the cattle. At the back, the red walls of the two-story big house can be seen. To the right

of the entrance is the fermenting shed, large enough to comfortably hold under its arched roof all the vats to store the *pulque* and all the tools and utensils needed to make it. At the end of each day, the peons and *tlachiqueros* sang a song of praise to God and the Virgin Mary known as the *alabado* before a

small altar. The painter Ernesto Icaza (1866-1935), famous for his scenes of work in the countryside, was hired to paint three murals on these walls illustrating the entire process.

Perhaps the most important room in the entire complex was the office, where the owner and his administrator kept



The San Antonio Tochatlaco Hacienda dates from the nineteenth century. Its name means “in the rabbit’s brook.”



Haciendas like Tochatlaco had their own railway lines to transport the *pulque* to the commercial train station.

detailed records of the hacienda’s financial, material and human resources. Tetlapayac has preserved the original office furniture, the account books as well as old maps and photographs from the *Porfiriato*.

The central part of the hacienda is an elevated garden, a sort of terrace, oppo-

site two series of arches. On the southern end is the chapel, an excellent example of the popular Hidalgo baroque style. Its entrance has two levels capped with decorations and flanked on either side by slim columns; over the entry arch are two full high-relief figures of archangels. The upper window has

small baroque columns. The tower and dome are also decorated in the baroque fashion, but in stucco; the walls and interior vaults boast brightly colored reliefs.

The central altar has a seventeenth-century gold-covered wooden altarpiece that originally had paintings, which were stolen in 1995, but still preserves an old equestrian statue of Saint James the Apostle.²

Because it is so beautiful, this hacienda has been the location for more than a dozen movie shoots. Russian director Sergei Eisenstein filmed *¡Que viva México!* there in 1931 and some of the scenes from *The Mask of Zorro* were filmed there in 1997.

The Chimalpa Hacienda, 10 kilometers to the west of Tetlapayac, dates at least as far back as the eighteenth century, as is shown by the baroque ornamentation on the facade of one of its two chapels. The other chapel was built in the early-twentieth-century neo-Gothic style. The name “Chimalpa” is derived from the Nahuatl words *chimalli*, meaning “shield,” and *pan*, meaning “over”; so *chimalpa* means “in the place of the shield.”

The hacienda’s many buildings were added at different times to a long central patio: granaries, *tinacales*, stables and more patios, all ended up forming an intricate labyrinth, making it one of the region’s largest rural architectural complexes. The hacienda was painted by Mexico’s celebrated landscape artist, José María Velasco, in 1893, with the Popocatepetl and Iztaccíhuatl volcanoes in the background.

The name of the San Bartolomé de los Tepetates Hacienda may well refer to the terrain on which it is built: *tepetate* means “hardpan” or “bedrock” a brittle rock used to make lime. About



Tochatlaco. A kitchen that has seen almost three centuries of culinary history.



Tochatlaco. The furniture and decoration of all the rooms are from the beginning of the twentieth century.

15 kilometers northwest of Chimalpa, San Bartolomé is one of the region's oldest haciendas, as shown by written records from the sixteenth century. Tradition has it that it was Hernán Cortés himself who began its construction; it later passed through different hands. Its livelihood was based on the cultivation of barley and corn, *pulque* production and hog raising. Its main patio is surrounded by hallways lined with slim stone columns. The chapel has been remodeled and therefore no longer pre-

serves its original decoration. The main house was rebuilt in 1845 and later, the granaries, the hacienda store (the equivalent of the company store), the peons' houses and the watchtowers were remodeled by architect Antonio Rivas Mercado (1853-1927).³

Tecajete Hacienda, 40 kilometers north of Tepetates, was built in the sixteenth century at the foot of a volcano of the same name. A spring born here feeds the aqueduct built by Friar Francisco de Tembleque that went all the

way to the town of Otumba, 32 kilometers away. Tecajete was a typical *pulque*-producing hacienda, owned by General Manuel González, president of Mexico between 1880 and 1884.

Also designed by architect Antonio Rivas Mercado, the main facade has two enormous watchtowers that dominate a closed patio around which the chapel and other buildings were erected.

The San Antonio Tochatlaco Hacienda, dating from 1840, sits 10 kilometers east of Tecajete. In Nahuatl, its name means "in the rabbits' brook." The chapel, granaries and *tinacales*, as well as the big house, all give onto a large closed patio. The rails of a small tram go up to the entrance. The furniture and decoration of all the rooms are from the *Porfirian* period: the living room, dining room, bedrooms and kitchen still look like they did more than 100 years ago. The interior patios are not very large, but very cozy. A bowling room attests to the owners' hobbies. Outside the main house are the old stone walls of the peons' houses. The corrals and the well only supplemented the economy of this hacienda specialized in *pulque* production.⁴ ■■

NOTES

¹ Gisela von Wobeser, *La formación de la hacienda en la época colonial. El uso de la tierra y el agua* (Mexico City: Instituto de Investigaciones Históricas-UNAM, 1983), pp. 11-25 and 49-67.

² José Vergara Vergara, *El barroco en Hidalgo* (Pachuca, Hidalgo: Gobierno del Estado de Hidalgo, 1988).

³ Virginia Armella de Aspe, *San Bartolomé de los Tepetates. Historia de una hacienda* (Mexico City: Diesel Nacional, 1988).

⁴ Marco Bellingieri, *Las haciendas en México. El caso de San Antonio Tochatlaco* (Mexico City: INAH, 1980), pp. 43-76.