

# Ezquerra and *lejanista* architecture

*If the garden is paradise, the house must come as close as possible to it in its appearance, and be a paradise as well.*

The Koran.

**E**xpert in the art, architecture and archeology of Egypt and the Mediterranean, as well as European and Middle Eastern architecture, José Luis Ezquerra exalts taste, fantasy, feeling and emotion. His architecture, with a strong Mudejar influence—exquisitely white and framed by nature—is sweet and human, made for man himself.

## Villas

La Atalaya, Coral and Casarena, located on the Manzanillo coast, form a trilogy of homes for tropical vacations, elegantly built by José Luis Ezquerra. Each is unique, suiting the personality of its owner.

Villa La Atalaya, designed for Robert and Margarita Garza Sada, was the first to be built and left a strong

imprint on the architecture of the area. The ironwork of the balcony and fences is shaped like intertwined stems of plants; vegetation has grown freely around the house, embracing it. Reserving space for nature has been a constant in Ezquerra's designs.

Villa Coral was born of the dream of its owner (a businessman from Houston, Texas): "I saw it emerge from the bottom of the ocean, like a coral reef, with all sorts of marine life hanging from its sides as it gushes water and lichens, until it rose to a height from which, like a fantasy castle, one could gaze out on the sea." The roofs of the villa's six apartments were inspired by the Duke of Bomarzo's stone garden in Tuscany, except that instead of monsters, Villa Coral is full of crustaceans and sea shells.

Villa Casarena owes its name to the fact that it is covered in sand, which was applied with a base of resin and egg white to achieve a very



Villa La Atalaya, Manzanillo, 1977.

original and pleasing result. Each wall was built with stucco, arches and special friezes, and each bathroom contains tiles designed by Ezquerra's company; the models were destroyed so that no copies would exist. The floorstones were brought from lime sedimentation strata in Puebla's Atoyac River.

Another elegant seaside residence is Villa Salamandra, in Nuevo Vallarta, Nayarit. The stairs are the most striking architectural element. What is their significance? Ezquerra responds: "The union of sky and earth, as in the Babylonian ziggurats, pre-Hispanic pyramids and castles of all periods." The villa is owned by Rubén Mereles and his wife, Louise Noelle.

*José Luis Ezquerra, creator of the famous Hotel Las Hadas, is considered one of the most renowned architects working in the Mexican "lejanista" style. The residential and tourism projects he has designed, full of symbolism, are a great contribution to the cultural and artistic richness of Mexico.*

Ezquerro's international work includes the design of Villa Toranzo in Madrid, where he discovered that the kind of specialized bricklayers required no longer exist. Thus the central cupola of the living room had to be built with concrete and not with brick. "Fortunately this trade still exists in Mexico, where it is relatively widespread," comments Ezquerro.

He also designed Villa de Cartes and the Villas Albanas in Horseshoe Bay, Texas. The latter means "white villas," and originates in the traditional summer villas built in past centuries by prominent Italian families in the hills of Albany, near Rome. Dozens of deer live peacefully around the houses.

For José Luis Ezquerro, designing, building and decorating

homes for people, as well as living in them, are spiritual acts. His houses are truly homes, full of detail, inviting one to enjoy life.

#### The architecture of fantasy

In the course of over three decades of professional work, Ezquerro has collaborated in tourism development in several parts of the world.

In his opinion, tourism projects should provide visitors with as much fantasy as possible: "The world of leisure must be diametrically opposed to everyday reality, providing the visitor with a complement to his freedom of spirit. We cannot forget that fanciful spectacles have always attracted millions of people, bringing gigantic benefits. Disney World, Epcot Center and Las Vegas are

examples of this fantasy, which human beings yearn for."

This was one of the factors Ezquerro took into account in the architectural design of Las Hadas (The Fairies), the hotel which put Manzanillo, Colima "on the map," thanks to the magical effect it had on international tourism. Several movies and television series have been filmed there, including *Ten* and *Green Ice*, and its style has been imitated in other parts of the world.

"Las Hadas was built as a village, with private suites connected by lanes, squares, hibiscus and bougainvillea arcades, and stairways leading down to the beaches. Its architecture is unique. It unites the spiritual, the traditional and the functional with the aesthetic, to

### Ezquerro y la arquitectura lejanista

José Luis Ezquerro

Universidad Popular Autónoma del Estado de Puebla  
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Spain's Royal Academy of Language says that *lejanía*, *lejano* and *lejos* come from the Latin *laxus*, which means great distance; distant or remote in time or place; the vista or aspect of a person or thing seen from a certain distance; a way of perceiving something.

*Lejanismo* has to do with the look or appearance of architecture, as seen from a certain distance. Nevertheless, this vision of the distant is not exact. It does not attempt exactitude of theme or form in the same way as archeology or photography. It means not merely contemplating the past but doing so with nostalgia for a lost art.

The term *lejanismo* arose at UNAM in the 1950s: "I remember Pere Miret inspiring the group [Department of Architecture, Class of '53] with this new spirit, and José Luis Ezquerro, full of creative zeal, feeding the new trend with constant ideas" (José Luis Marín de L'Hotellerie, *Excelsior*, December 7, 1989).

This university environment had an enormous influence on Ezquerro: "The Catalan Pere Miret, a colleague in the Department of Architecture, spoke of *lejanismo* as something nostalgic, antagonistic and contrary to the rationalist currents of the time, for some Spaniards were unsympathetic to the Saxon theories that were denaturing Hispanic tradition.

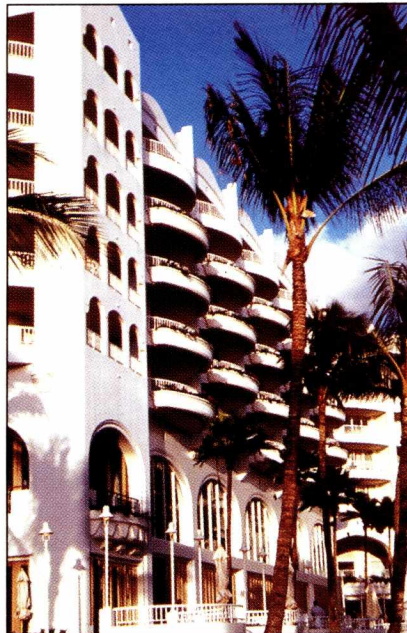
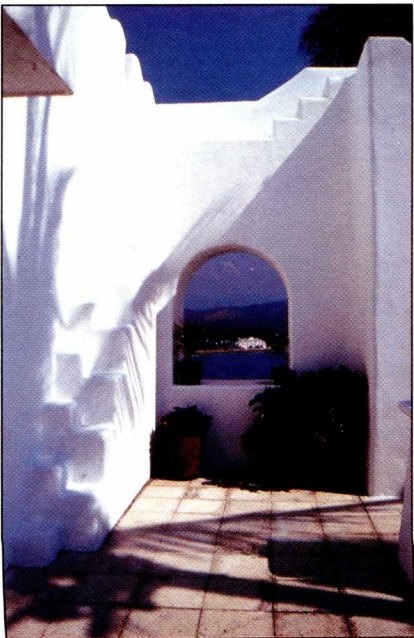
"These Spanish immigrants, some of whom came as exiles and others for different reasons, adopted Mexico as their own country. A number of them were imbued with the ideas of Gaudí and Sorolla. A fascination for the Impressionist look of Mediterranean light was part of their nostalgia; those were their lands and their distant memories. That was the first time I heard of *lejanismo*. The prospect of sharing those ideas of freedom and cultural roots resonated in me and penetrated my mind indelibly."

Thus Ezquerro's *lejanismo* provides a glimpse of the past and represents a surrealistic expression of its sensations and distant cultural feelings, both Western and Eastern. This implies the freedom of creation, "with nostalgia for lost art."



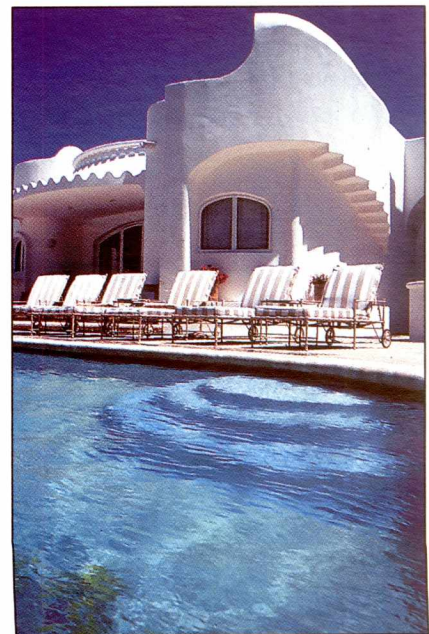
*Villa Casarena is covered in sand (arena), Manzanillo, 1979.*

*Villa Coral, Manzanillo, 1979.*



*Hotel Kea Lani, Hawaii, 1986-1992.*

*Villa Salamandra, Nuevo Vallarta, 1987.*





*Hotel Royal Solaris, Cancún, 1985.*

obtain a beauty that cannot be conceived these days by the most demanding investor” (Martine Valluy, *Vogue*, October 1977).

Ezquerro’s most important work can be found in Colima. In addition to Las Hadas, he designed and built the

Club Maeva and Sierra Manzanillo hotels, which are similar to the Atalaya, Coral and Casarena villas.

Because of his experience and good taste, he was commissioned to design the “Master Image Plan” for San José del Cabo (in the state of Baja

California Sur), and the El Soldado de Cortés “megaproject” in Sonora, which is presently under construction. The goal was to increase the prestige of these important tourist centers.

In collaboration with Fernando Barbará Zetina, he also participated

## José Luis Ezquerro

José Luis Ezquerro de la Colina was born on February 2, 1934, in Boó de Guarnizo, Santander, Spain, and has lived in Mexico since he was twelve years old. He graduated from *UNAM*’s National School of Architecture in 1963 after presenting a thesis entitled *Toward a Latin Renaissance*, in which he denounced the rationalist tradition of the Bauhaus, which at that time dominated architecture schools throughout the world. “My initial radicalization was literally caused by the boredom that the simplistic geometry [of Bauhaus] produced in me, the rigidity of its outlines as opposed to any possibility of freedom,” he notes.

In her prologue to Ezquerro’s book, Louise Noelle of *UNAM*’s Institute of Aesthetic Research comments: “Unlike the majority of his classmates, his thesis did not deal with any specific building, but with a historically —and philosophically— inspired subject. Thus he began his professional life rich in knowledge, nostalgia and desire to find his own creativity.”

## The tree of my beliefs

*I believe in God.  
That is why I proclaim sublime  
faith and inspiration.*

*I believe in the Trinity.  
That is why I like geometry and  
the order of Bernardo of  
Clairvaux, Palladio and Gaudí.*

*I believe in the Spirit.  
That is why I am filled with  
enthusiasm by the passionate  
Baroque light at Tonantzintla,  
El Pocito and the Chapel of  
Rosario.*

*I believe in Light.  
That is why I use white, which  
is the luminous synthesis of  
the spectrum expressed in  
Monet, Sorolla and Vasarely.*

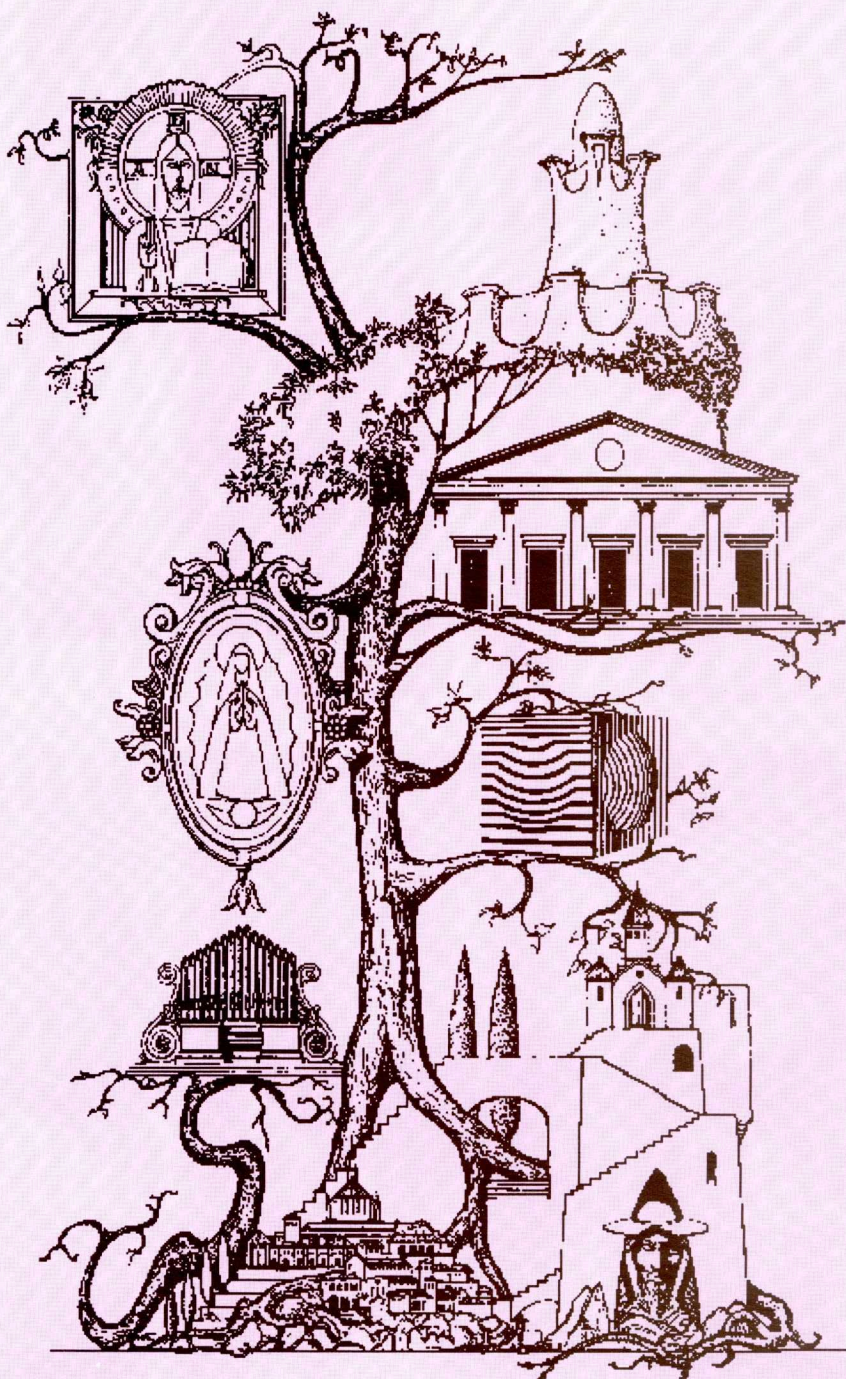
*I believe in the Creation.  
That is why I am impassioned  
by the possibility to recreate it  
shown in the freedom of  
Respighi, Vivaldi and  
Debussy.*

*I believe in Man.  
That is why I am reflected in  
the historical emotion of Mont  
Saint Michel, Dubrovnik and  
the Alhambra.*

*I believe in Illusion.  
Because, since it is not pure  
reality, it allows me to work  
with the dreams and utopias of  
García Lorca, Remedios Varo  
and Don Quijote.*

*I believe in Architecture.  
To which I have dedicated my  
whole life, with a profound and  
certain vocation... and of which  
I believe that:*

*For all these reasons, it is and  
must continue to be a sublime  
expression of love!*



*Drawing by José Luis Ezquerro Borobia.*

**José Luis Ezquerro**  
Mexico City, 1992. In my studio "Del Molino"  
in the Year of Our Lord 1992, 500 years after  
the appearance of a New World.

in the design of “archeological villas” at Chichén Itzá, Uxmal, Cobá, Teotihuacan and Cholula. This project was important because—despite the great archeological richness of our country—there are very few lodgings for “cultural tourists,” whether they be Mexican or foreign.

Before giving free rein to his creativity, Ezquerro researches the roots and culture of the places where his projects have been commissioned. “This is a principle on which I base my *lejanista* philosophy, while avoiding the sterile, bad taste of ‘copy-catism.’ In designing buildings it is important to apply one’s own accumulated weight of aesthetic feeling.”

Thus Kea Lani Hotel, located in Maui, distinguishes itself from the rest



Inside a room  
at Villas Albanas.

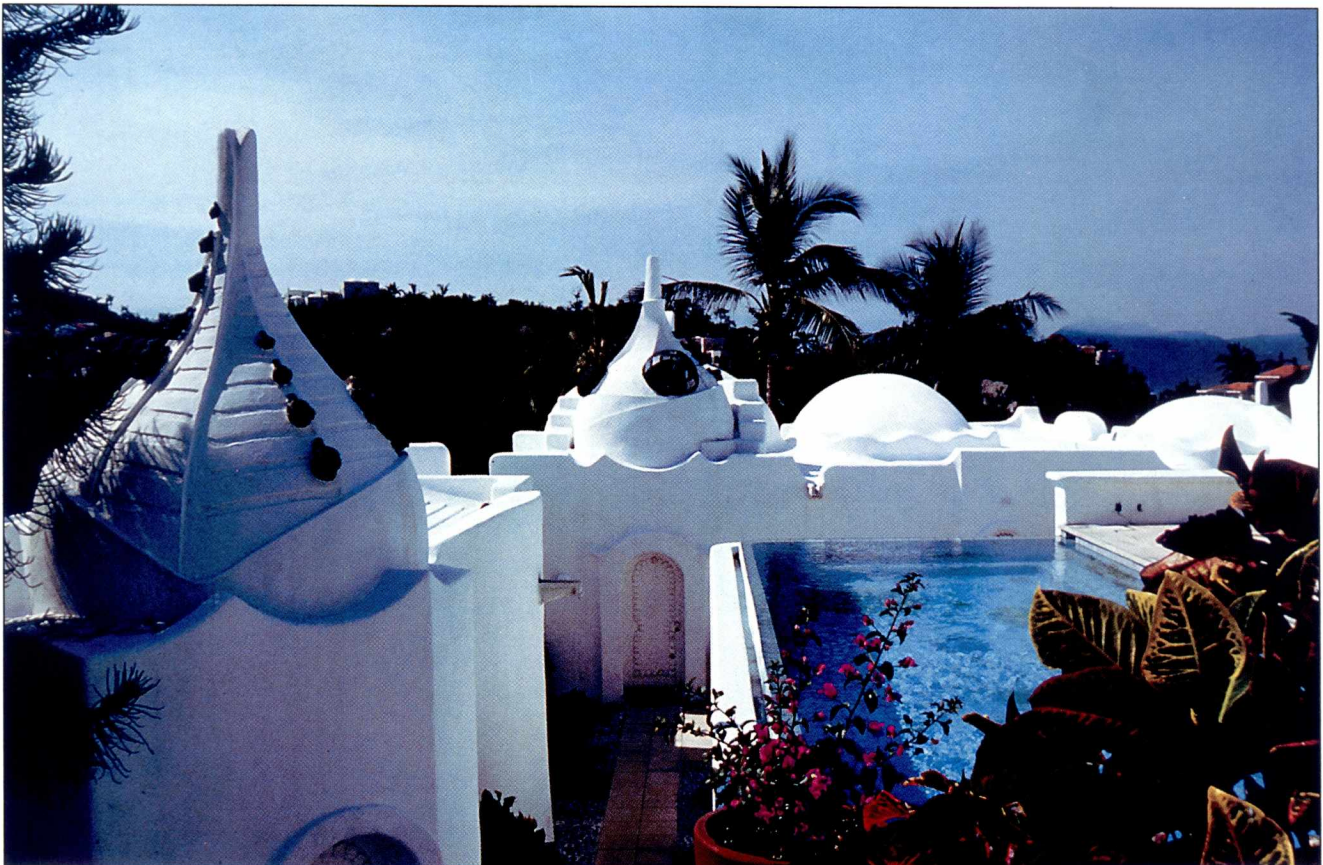
of the hotels in Hawaii, since it is inspired by local architecture from before the post-war U.S. cultural invasion. An example of “vernacular” architecture is the Iolani Palace—the only royal palace in the United States—built in 1882 in Honolulu by King Kalakaua.

Currently, Ezquerro is working on the “Shkirat Club” project in Morocco, a hotel-marina in Berenice, Egypt—on the Red Sea coast—and the private residence of Sheik Kamal Adham in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.

*Voices of Mexico* is proud to provide a look at the magical, symbolic world of José Luis Ezquerro, distinguished graduate of the National University of Mexico **M**

Marybel Toro Gayol

Managing Editor.



Villa Coral is full of crustacean and sea shell designs.

Photos by Pedro Ezquerro Borobia.