

RICARDO



▲ Camino Real Hotel (Mexico City, 1968).

Ricardo Legorreta Vilchis, one of contemporary Mexican architecture's most talented, prolific, renowned, recognizable creators, died in Mexico City on December 30, 2011. He had had a particularly intense year: he turned 80 on May 7; on July 18, the Mexico City government paid him well-deserved homage; on September 22, he was awarded an honorary doctorate by the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM); and on October 19, he was awarded the *Praemium Imperiale* by the Art Association

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of Japan. All these honors were added to the many others he had received over his more than 50-year career.¹

From a family of prominent bankers, Ricardo decided to break with family tradition in 1948 and enroll in the UNAM's National School of Architecture just after he turned 17. At the same time, he began working as a draftsman in the offices of José Villagrán García, considered the father of modern architecture in Mexico. Ricardo would soon head the workshop, and after he got his bachelor's degree in 1953, he was taken in as a partner by Villagrán. In the early 1960s, he decided to found his own firm, Legorreta Arquitectos, with his colleagues Noé Castro and Carlos Vargas.

LEGORRETA

An Explosion of Color in Contemporary Architecture

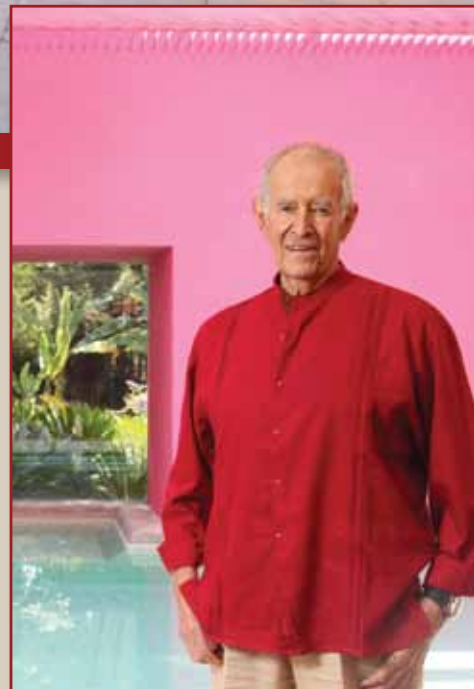
Juan Ignacio del Cueto Ruiz-Funes*

Allen Vallejo



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Ricardo Legorreta ▶



Yasuhiro Yejima



▲ Westin Brisas Hotel, Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo (Guerrero, 1981).

In the course of all these projects and in several private residences that he built at the same time, Legorreta distilled a language of his own, inspired by traditional Mexican architecture.

His first projects as an independent professional were in the world of industrial architecture: the SF de México factory (Mexico City, 1963), the Smith, Kline & French Laboratories (Mexico City, 1964), and the Automex factory (Lerma, State of Mexico, 1964) display his effort to give them an unusual aesthetic quality, also shown at the Guadalajara IBM factory (Jalisco, 1975) and the Renault assembly plant in Gómez Palacio (Durango, 1985).

For the corporate headquarters of Celanese Mexicana (Mexico City, 1968), he tried a novel structural system and created an urban landmark, although few people associate the building with its designer because it is not in the style that made him famous. Legorreta's characteristic language began to show up in the design of his own offices (Mexico

City, 1966), and was consolidated in the Camino Real Hotel (Mexico City, 1968): his pattern of low bodies around patios, colorful walls, and generous spaces. This innovative project, which integrates the work of visual artists of the stature of Mathias Goeritz, Alexander Calder, Rufino Tamayo, or Pedro Friedeberg, broke the molds of that period's conceptualization of hotels. For that same hotel chain, he built other successful complexes in Cabo San Lucas (Baja California Sur, 1972), Cancún (Quintana Roo, 1975), and Ixtapa-Zihuatanejo (Guerrero, 1981), all of which are respectfully integrated into the coastal landscape in an inspired way.

The most important commissions in that period, including these hotels, came from the National Bank of Mexico (Banamex). In 1972, Legorreta was asked to remodel the Iturbide

Palace on Madero Street (Mexico City's historic downtown), built in the eighteenth century by baroque architect Francisco Guerrero y Torres, to turn it into the headquarters for Banamex's Cultural Institution. His intervention in the building, simultaneously respectful and daring, restored its dignity and turned it into one of the country's liveliest cultural centers. He was also charged with building headquarters for Seguros América (América Insurance) in Mexico City (1976) and Banamex in Monterrey (1982).

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solid predominated over openings, generating powerful geometric volumes linked together by patios, wide hallways, and double heights, creating cozy atmospheres of great visual quality where "the real luxury is in the space, not in the materials."²

TWO INFLUENCES, ONE LANGUAGE

His work merges two of the most representative trends in modern Mexican architecture, functionalism and emotional architecture, inherited from his great teachers, José Villagrán and Luis Barragán. When asked which of the two had more influence on his work, Legorreta said,

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▲ Sheraton Abandoibarra Hotel (today Meliá Hotel, Bilbao, Spain, 2004).

Jaime Ardiles Arce



Fernando Cordero

▲ Remodeled Iturbide Palace (Mexico City's historic downtown, 1972).

If I had to assign professional parentage, I would be inclined to divide it evenly between the two. . . . [Villagrán] had a solid influence on me; his teachings have been the basis and foundation of my architecture: he taught me, among many other things, the seriousness of work, the transcendence of professional ethics. . . . I met Barragán a long time later, and I was not his pupil, . . . , but his friend. He was the antithesis of my teacher who, together with my father, handed down to me the rigor and discipline that point to everything I did in my life. My approximation to Barragán gave my creativity wings. But, without Villagrán's principles, I would have achieved little, very little.³

And he adds, "The least of what Luis talked to me about was architecture. . . I was inspired by the quality of his life, his perfectionism, his immaculate proportions, his refinement."⁴

We would have to add to these influences, that of painter Chucho Reyes, "the master of color, the one who

Polychromy became one of the most recognizable characteristics of Legorreta's work, although his greatest merit was knowing how to transport the concept of "emotional architecture" into the monumental scale.



Yona Schiley

▲ Student Center (Education City, Qatar, 2011).



Lourdes Legorreta

▲ San Antonio Central Library (Texas, 1995).



Lourdes Legorreta

▲ Fort Worth Museum of Science and History (Texas, 2009).



▲ Ricardo Montalbán's house (Los Angeles, 1985).

taught us everything.”⁵ Polychromy became one of the most recognizable characteristics of Legorreta’s work, although his greatest merit was knowing how to transporting the concept of “emotional architecture” into the monumental scale, which in Barragán had not transcended the sphere of the home.

EXPORT QUALITY

The crisis unleashed by the bank nationalization decreed by outgoing President José López Portillo in 1982 had big repercussions on the firm’s upward climb. For the rest of that decade, it only built one more project in the country, the Renault plant in Durango. The lifesaver for the architect came from the neighboring country to the north, hand in hand with Ricardo Montalbán, the successful Mexican actor settled in

Hollywood. Montalbán asked Legorreta to build “a house in Los Angeles that would represent Mexico in a modern, but not ostentatious way.”⁶

Montalbán’s home (Los Angeles, 1985) was Legorreta’s first project outside Mexico, and its spectacular “Mexicaness” opened professional doors to him in the United States, where he received so many important commissions that in the end they came to more than 30. The first were the master plan for Solana (Texas, 1985), an enormous complex of offices, hotels, and stores spread over 650 hectares; the Rancho Santa Fe (New Mexico, 1987); and the Children’s Discovery Museum in San Jose (California, 1989). But his unstoppable international expansion, which led him to build on four continents, came when Víctor Legorreta became part of the firm as partner and project leader. The 1990s were beginning and Legorreta Arquitectos was on the rise.



Lourdes Legorreta

▲ Metropolitan Cathedral of Managua (Nicaragua, 1993).

FROM THE LOCAL TO THE
GLOBAL: LEGORRETA+LEGORRETA

In 1990, Gustavo López Padilla, an insistent, shrewd critic of our architecture, published a sentence in one of his journalism articles that probably influenced the architect's career: "The challenge Legorreta is facing is enormous, since he could get worn out and lose his freshness —and there are a few indications of this— or he could find a different vein to pursue that would give him new impetus."⁷ We do not know if Legorreta read this comment, but it is the case that around

that time he found that new vein, very close to him, that gave him new impetus: his youngest son, Víctor, born in Mexico City in 1966, had just finished his bachelor's in architecture and joined the firm.

During the administration of Carlos Salinas de Gortari (1988-1994), Legorreta once again received large commissions in Mexico, outstanding among which are the MARCO, Contemporary Art Museum (Monterrey, 1991); the *Papalote* (Kite) Children's Museum (Chapultepec Park, Mexico City, 1993); the Autonomous University of Nuevo León library (Monterrey, 1994); and the master plan for the National

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Katsuhisa Kida

▲ Legorreta+Legorreta offices (Mexico City, 1966).



Lourdes Legorreta

▲ MARCO Museum (Monterrey, Nuevo León, 1991).

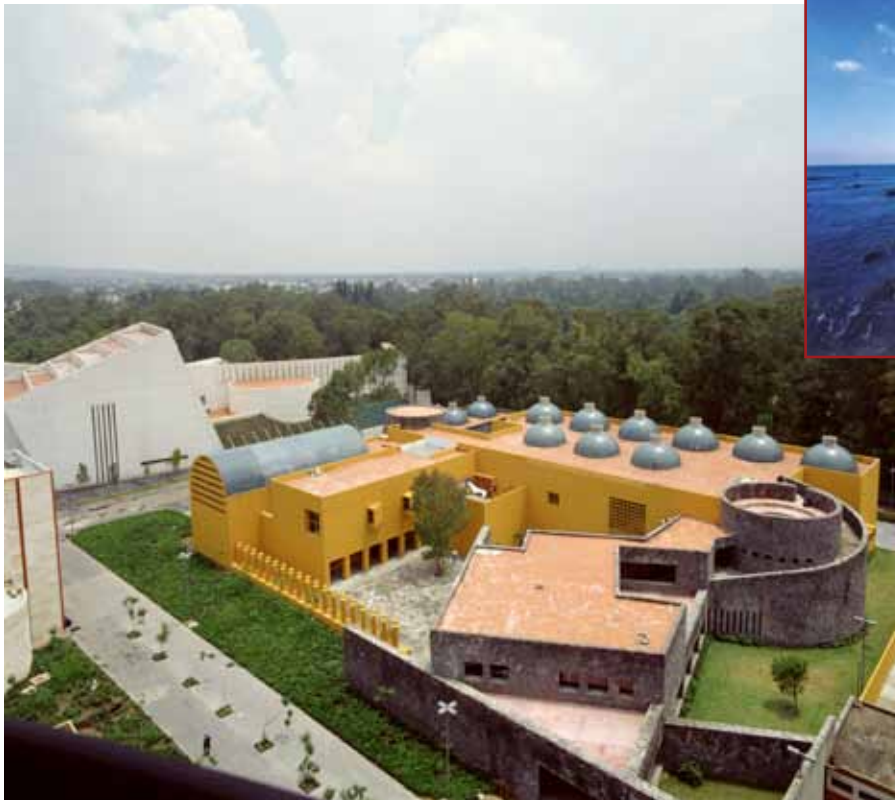
Center for the Arts (Mexico City, 1994), for which he also designed the school of visual arts, the research tower, and the building for shared services. Internationally in those years, he designed the new Pershing Square (Los Angeles, 1993) and the Metropolitan Cathedral of Managua (Nicaragua, 1993), which was one of his favorite projects and his only experience in religious architecture.

After this boom, a new national crisis struck in December 1994, and the firm managed to weather it with projects like the Televisa Corporate Headquarters (Santa Fe, Mexico City, 1998) and several private residences, but above all with the work done in the United States: the libraries in San Antonio (Texas, 1995) and Chula Vista (California, 1995); the

San Jose Tech Museum of Innovation (California, 1998); the Santa Fe Visual Arts Center (New Mexico, 1999); university centers (Stanford, 1997; UCLA, 1998; and Chicago, 2001); and several private residences in California, New Mexico, Nevada, and Hawaii. At the end of the 1990s, his stamp traveled to the Far East with a home he built in the city of Zushi (1998) on the shores of Japan.

With the new millennium, Legorreta Arquitectos became Legorreta+Legorreta, when his son Víctor took over as GEO and the head of design, turning it into a dynamic business bringing in new partners (Adriana Ciclik, Miguel Almaraz, Carlos Vargas, and Miguel Alariste) and a staff of 70 architects. Since then, it has been unstoppable, almost frenetic.

The Mexican Pavilion at Expo 2000, the World Fair in Hannover (Germany, 2000) is the work that marked the turning point in the firm's development and detonated an explosive decade with over 50 projects built, more than half abroad.



▲ National Center for the Arts (Mexico City, 1994).



Katsuhisa Kida

▲ Private residence (Zushi, Japan, 1998).

Lourdes Legorreta



Lourdes Legorreta

▲ Mexican Pavilion at Expo 2000 (Hannover, Germany, 2000).

The BBVA-Bancomer Tower, a twenty-first-century architectural landmark, will be the posthumous legacy that Ricardo Legorreta will leave to the city of his birth and that he declared himself to be fervently in love with.



Cristiano Mascaro

▲ Matão Hacienda (São Paulo, Brazil, 2005).

The Mexican Pavilion at Expo 2000, the World Fair in Hannover (Germany, 2000) is the work that marked the turning point in the firm's development and detonated an explosive decade with over 50 projects built, more than half abroad: in the Americas (the United States, Central America, Brazil), Europe (Germany, England, Spain, Greece), Africa (Egypt), and Asia (Israel, South Korea, Qatar). In Mexico, the works commissioned in this period include the Santa Fe campus of the Monterrey Institute of Higher Learning (ITESM) (Mexico City, 2001) and the San Luis Potosí Labyrinth Museum (2008). But undoubtedly, the most important is the Juárez Complex (Mexico City, 2003), whose two powerful towers housing the new headquarters for the Ministry of Foreign

Relations and the Federal District Superior Court and interior plaza with its magnificent sculpture-fountain by Vicente Rojo, changed the urban landscape surrounding the Central Alameda.

Legorreta's health began to fail in the last years of his life. After receiving the *Praemium Imperiale*, he had a relapse that forced him into the hospital in Kyoto. He returned to Mexico to spend his last days with his family; early on New Year's Eve 2011, the sad news of his death was announced. One of the last works he saw finished was the building for the Graduate Studies Department of the UNAM School of Economics (University City, Mexico City, 2010), built on the outskirts of the University Cultural Center. At his death,



Allen Vallejo

▲ UNAM Graduate Studies Department building of the School of Economics (Mexico City, 2010).



Barry Nelson

▲ BBVA executive office tower (Mexico City, currently under construction).

he left 20 or so projects underway; the most important, undoubtedly, is the BBVA-Bancomer Tower now under construction on Reforma Avenue in Mexico City, a project done in partnership with well-known English architect Richard Rogers, his great friend. This twenty-first-century architectural landmark will be the posthumous legacy that Ricardo Legorreta will leave to the city of his birth and that he declared himself to be fervently in love with. ■■■

NOTES

- ¹ Outstanding among them are the gold medals awarded by three of the world's most prestigious architectural associations: the International Union of Architects (1999), the American Institute of Architects (2000), and the Pan-American Federation of Associations of Architects (2005).
- ² Miquel Adrià and Jose Castillo, *El verdadero lujo está en el espacio. Últimas entrevistas con Ricardo Legorreta* (Mexico City: Arquine, 2012), p. 25.
- ³ Ana Terán, *Tras los pasos de Ricardo Legorreta. Dime por dónde andas y te diré qué ver* (Mexico City: AEditores, 2012), p. 99.
- ⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 269.
- ⁵ Adrià and Castillo, *op. cit.*, p. 21.
- ⁶ Cecilia Durán, "Considera Ricardo Legorreta que arquitectura hay una sola: la buena," "Cultura," *La Jornada* (Mexico City), December 2, 2007.
- ⁷ Gustavo López Padilla, *Arquitectura mexicana contemporánea. Crítica y reflexiones* (Mexico City: Designio, 2008), p. 108.