

# JOSEP PUIG I CADAFALCH. MODERNIST ARCHITECT



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HIS WORK AS AN ARCHITECT, SEEN AS A CONTRIBUTION TO THE LANGUAGE OF MODERNISM, CAN BE PLACED BETWEEN THE YEARS 1895 AND 1911. DURING THIS PERIOD, PUIG CONSTRUCTED THE EXAMPLES THAT CHARACTERIZE HIM AS A MODERNIST ARCHITECT. HOWEVER, HIS WORK DID NOT END HERE, BUT INCLUDED HIS PARTICIPATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS CONNECTED WITH THE 1929 EXHIBITION.

XAVIER GÜELL ARCHITECT



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**T**his article brings to a close the series devoted to Modernist architecture in Catalonia. Having already discussed Antoni Gaudí i Cornet and Lluís Domènech i Montaner, **Catalònia** now takes a look at the life and work of Josep Puig i Cadafalch. At the same time, I would remind readers of the article on Modernist architecture published in **Catalònia** No. 4.

Once again, we are dealing with a versatile figure: architect, art historian, archaeologist, researcher and politician. Of the Domènech, Gaudí, Puig trilogy, it is the last who shows the most extensive training and whose oral and written work has reached the largest international audiences.

Born in Mataró in 1867, he graduated in Physics and Mathematics (University of Barcelona, 1883-88), received a doctorate from the University of Madrid (1888-89) and qualified as an architect at the Barcelona and Madrid schools in 1889-91.

Having completed his education, his first contact with the professional world took place in Mataró, where he occupied the post of municipal architect from 1889.

His work as an architect, seen as a contribution to the language of Modernism, can be placed between the years 1895-1911, the first date corresponding to the construction of the house at No. 3 bis of the carrer Montsió in Barcelona,

known as the "casa Martí". His second was the Casarramona factory at Nos. 36-44 of the carrer Mèxic, also in Barcelona. During this period, Puig was responsible for the buildings that characterize him as a Modernist architect, though as we shall see, his work did not end here, but included his participation in the development projects connected with the 1929 exhibition.

The first project mentioned above, the "casa Martí", is better known as the "Quatre Gats", since the ground floor was occupied by Pere Romeu's cabaret of that name, a meeting place for the painters Casas, Rusiñol and Utrillo, and central to the understanding of pictorial Modernism as well as the newer ideas of people like Picasso and Nonell, or the musicians Albéniz and Granados. It was here that Puig put forward a language descended from neo-Gothic, though with new elements that come closer to the world of ornamentation.

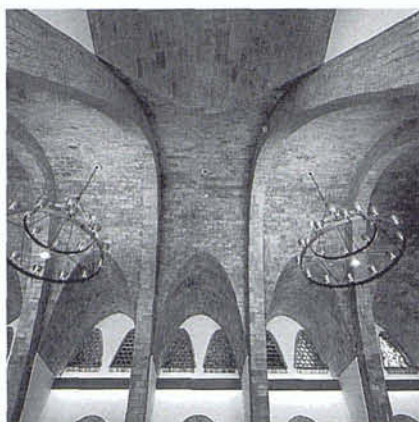
Next in chronological order comes the work he carried out at Argentona between 1897 and 1900, which consisted in knocking three village houses into one for his own use as holiday accommodation.

Puig was enormously attracted by this project, and his approach to the conversion of an existing structure produced bold, enriching results. In 1899, and also in Argentona, Puig built his first large house, for the Garí family, on the El Cross

estate. This project was to be the prelude to the work which earned him recognition and immediate acceptance among the Catalan bourgeoisie. The distribution and size of the house could have made it awkward and uncomfortable, but by skilfully playing with different materials and textures, as well as with the colours, the architect produced pleasant, comfortable effects, vibrating with different tones of light.

After this date, we have to move to Barcelona and, needless to say, to the *Eixample*, where Puig built his most important work: the "Casa Amatller" at No. 41, Passeig de Gràcia (1898-1900); the "Casa Macaya", at No. 114, Passeig de Sant Joan (1901); the "Casa Quadres", at No. 373, Avinguda Diagonal (1904), and the "Casa Terrades", also known as "Les Punxes" (The Spikes), at Nos. 416-420, Avinguda Diagonal (1903-1905). The first two are examples of blocks of flats, characterized by a rational distribution of different rooms around a central, square courtyard setting off the staircase leading to the first floor. The design of the staircase is in keeping with its importance.

The "Casa Amatller", next to Gaudí's "Casa Batlló" —built later— uses stepped gables to play down the dimensions of the principal facade, as happens in Flemish architecture. Puig at this time was playing with the language and formal elements of



Gothic architecture, as can be seen in the framing of the openings in the facade and the use of two doors to distract attention. If we go on to look at the ornamental work, we see how the arrangement of the openings in the facade in this house is accurately balanced. The formal work of the "Casa Macaya" consists in the composition of the facade, framed on either side by large towers that separate it from the adjoining buildings.

The "Casa Quadres" and the "Casa Terrades" are very different. The first has two facades: one on the Avinguda Diagonal and another, much less noticeable one on the carrer Rosselló, a successful design which fits in perfectly with its surroundings.

The "Casa Terrades" is the only example of free-standing Modernist architecture in Barcelona. The distribution in this house is perfect, since the reception rooms and the bedrooms are all at the front, while the service rooms look onto interior ventilation wells. A corridor links the two areas. The size of this building, its situation and the boldness of its lines are some of the many elements worth pointing out in this example. The decoration is not remarkable.

The last building we shall look at is the Casarramona factory (1911), at Nos. 36-44, carrer Mèxic (at present a National Police barracks and in a very poor state of conservation). What stands out most

about this building is the use that Puig makes of the industrial architectural style which dominated in Catalonia from the second half of the nineteenth century. Using bricks as his one basic material, he produces a surprising range of formal elements. The tower's fragile elegance makes it an example that should be very carefully preserved.

At this point I would like to make an important observation. In 1927, Puig wrote, with reference to the Cerdà plan and his project for the plaça de Catalunya, "In architecture, as in music or the theatre, the artist is only directly and personally involved with one part of his work; afterwards he has to build it, and until he's built and directed the work in all its details, with the countless contributions of draughtsmen, sculptors, painters, bricklayers, stonemasons, blacksmiths and carpenters, more diverse than the musicians of an orchestra and more varied than the complex team on and behind the stage, he has not completed his work."

Later on, in response to the public outcry that followed the central government's imposition of Ildefons Cerdà's development plan (1859), he wrote, "The plan of the city that results from so much empty talk is the new city we live in; it fills me with indignation to see how the bungling Cerdà dares to cut across the living flesh of the old city, destroying interesting monuments as he grafts his chessboard

squares onto the original structure of the old city".

This perfectionist approach, coupled with his views in defence of the old city, fully in keeping with Catalan nationalism, provides an opportunity to mention his contribution to the study of Romanesque art. In 1909, 1911 and 1918, in collaboration with Josep Goday, Puig published the three volumes of *L'Arquitectura Romànica a Catalunya*, with the support of the Institut d'Estudis Catalans. In 1930 he published *La geografia i els orígens del primer art romànic*.

Puig i Cadafalch, as I said at the beginning, also took part in politics. He was on the Barcelona City Council from 1902-1905, Barcelona deputy from 1907 to 1910, provincial deputy from 1913 to 1923 and President of the *Mancomunitat de Catalunya* from 1917 to 1923, where his most important task was the continuation and extension of much of the work started by the first president, Prat de la Riba.

Following the *coup* by Primo de Rivera, Puig was completely discredited and sacked from his post as architect for the Universal Exhibition of 1929. In spite of this, he designed and built the palaces of Alfonso XII and Victòria Eugènia, and the site's overall development followed the plan drawn up by the architect, who died in Barcelona in 1957. ●