



Carlos Campos  
Photo: Author's archive

# Carlos Campos

INTERVIEW, VALENCIA 04\_06\_2022

He has been an architect since 1978, settling himself as an independent professional with the firm that bears his name. He has carried out professional works for the public administration, in the City Council of Valencia, within the Urban Projects Office, and for the Regional Government of Valencia, as a heritage advisor in Valencia and Castellón regions. Since 1989 he has been an associate lecturer in the Department of Architectural Projects within the School of Architecture (ETSAV) at the Polytechnic University of Valencia. He has participated as a speaker in several seminars and symposiums on architecture and architectural rehabilitation and has been invited to international workshops on heritage preservation. He has published his work and some of his activities in several architecture journals and conference proceedings. He is a person who feels comfortable in architecture, whether heritage architecture, residential, educational or other types of architecture. He is a Full Member of the Royal Academy of Fine Arts of San Carlos in Valencia. His work includes the refurbishment of the old Slaughterhouse in Valencia, the Church of San Martín in Valencia, the Church of Sant Jaume in Vila-real, the Circus Theatre in Albacete, the Sanctuary of La Balma in Castellón, the Boil d'Arenós Palace, the Church of El Carmen in Valencia, as well as the refurbishment and technical supervisor of the Church of San Nicolás, the Regional Administration School in Toledo, etc. As a member of the Urban Projects Office of Valencia City Council from 1986-1988, he has participated in and directed various important urban planning projects.

On this occasion we are fortunate to interview one of the most important and interesting architects on the Spanish scene, a person of great versatility in his professional development as demonstrated in his projected and executed works. A person who feels, like we said before comfortable in architecture, whether it be heritage architecture, residential, educational or other types of architecture.

As soon as we have entered the post-pandemic period, we have been concerned, with the articles in this issue, to shed light on a series of experiences and situations that have occurred during this period, all from a holistic point of view.

Thus, we have sought to address, among others, the issue of Flexibility in Architecture from the city to the habitat, from villages to isolated constructions, descending from an urban or general scale to the flexibility of living spaces, that is, to the scale of our dwellings. And not only in the context

of the habitat, but also in other technological installations.

It is not just a question of exchanging, changing or transforming, the context is complex because the needs arise from the demands of the multiple variables that we are experiencing today, ... displaced persons, the need to provide shelter and protection for refugees or from the constriction of space in our homes during the pandemic ... the different family model from the standard family of a married couple and three children, then two ... has given rise to a new reflection on what the housing of the future should be like, what criteria we should prioritise: taking into account energy consumption, designing and building in a technological way that generates the minimum amount of waste, designing with deconstruction and dismantling in mind, analysing and putting the Sustainable Development Goals into practice, thinking about the circular economy,

the relationship with the exterior space in new projects, the revaluation of abandoned or sparsely inhabited villages, etc. These are going to be challenges that will have to be resolved in our favour; and this is precisely where the Bruntland report of 1987 comes in, in which we are cited as the ones in charge of leaving a better legacy to our future successors.

Transforming an “old” house from the 60’s can be a valid recovery to create a new, more attractive product... and not a market product where the first thing (due to the needs of change and adjustment to the new tenants), is to enter into demolition. There are currently many forms of action, all of great interest and surely of social benefit.

**Luis Palmero:** *So, how can they be adapted, or what strategies can we consider on an urban and housing scale in contemporary architecture? Is there a possible architecture or management for this new way of living?*

**Carlos Campos:** Perhaps in order to achieve the objective of flexibility that you suggest, the first thing to do would be to do away with the abundant regulations that we have at all levels (state, autonomous, municipal...), often contradictory and always in pursuit of controlling everything, in what is uncontrollable, such as the varied ways of life today. This would definitively break the current rigidity of housing, leaving open the possibility of making architecture adaptable to each case. One might think that this would lead to an empty, insipid architecture, and one should be careful with this. I understand that architecture can always provide the future user with possibilities that he or she might not even have suspected. That is the job of the architect, to explore possibilities that the user will later make his own in different ways.

**LP:** *How in this new distribution of spaces, the design of the interior and the connection with the exterior space can influence individual or collective living, valuing the demands of everyday domestic and working life (teleworking)?*

**CC:** Indeed, in a less designer-driven architecture, the role of detailed design is very important. It is what will determine to a large extent the function or comfort, but always supported by the basis of space (of architecture in short) which determines the visual connections, the light, the shade, the air, everything we need to live.

I am concerned that the “design”, i.e. the complementary elements, are the ones that determine, on their own, the atmosphere of the home and its capacity to create the scenarios of our lives. Perhaps the two concepts should be merged again in the figure of the architect. The greatest architects have been those who have understood that space, architecture, and its “furnishing” were complementary and necessary, one and the other. A recurrent case in this sense is Adolf Loos, whose projects acquire a great warmth in their environments through the material definition of the cladding and the furnishings themselves. But we could have the same sensation in works by Aalto, Lina Bo Bardi or in the more domestic Gaudí of Palacio Güell.

**LP:** *When we talk about flexibility, adaptation... can this have the same dignity as permanent architecture, that is to say, can we maintain the same canon, the same aesthetic recognition, as that of a permanent architecture...?*

**CC:** This is a very interesting issue because it allows the debate on the permanence of architecture, one of its values that has been historically pondered.

First of all I would like to say that of course I understand that architecture designed with “new” parameters, which reflect a multifaceted character to serve today’s user can and should have the same dignity. It should have it because the designer understands that architecture must confer dignity on the person who uses it. What happens is that the variability of use, in a world like today’s, is much greater than what has historically been the case and therefore its “permanence” is subject to its usefulness.

We must not lose this historical quality of the permanence of architecture, because through it we recognise the landscape of our lives, and that is very important. The cities we live in are also “stages” that we need to recognise for our own history. Architecture will remain, even if it has undergone the most diverse vicissitudes and modifications. That is why I believe that one of the most interesting moments of architecture is when it becomes a ruin, when it loses its function and some of its parts. In this second case is when the “mystery” appears in the ruin, which is the cause of its most powerful attraction... but that would be the subject of another conversation.

**LP:** *You have designed and built several important restoration works of historical and artistic value Monasterio de Santa María de la Valldigna, Sede de la Bolsa de Valencia ...what are the technical difficulties you have encountered to achieve, for example, the*



Figure 1 | Circus Theatre main façade. *Photo: Author's archive.*



Figure 2 | Conservatory of Albacete .Photo: Author's archive.





Figure 3 | Swimming Pool and Thermal Centre in Albal, Valencia. Photo: Author's archive.

*maintenance of the façades when the existing building is emptied, in works of great heritage importance? What has been the greatest difficulty you have had to overcome in maintaining, for example, cases of this type, and how do these “invasive” elements (structural reinforcements) affect the existing construction?*

**CC:** The first thing is to study whether this “emptying” is necessary when the façade is to be maintained. In other words, when we are going to intervene in a building of historical-artistic value, we must carry out an analysis of the building in order to understand its characteristics and physical conditions. Then comes another aspect: if leaving only the skin of the building is logical considering the functional conditions that one wants to “impose” on the building, ..., or is it really not necessary to impose them, but rather to reconcile a new use with what the building allows.

The notable effort that has been made in our country since the 1970s to conserve our architectural heritage has sometimes clashed with the need to use

it, sometimes inappropriately, without considering the consequences. I believe that the Administration should carry out prior studies of the buildings it acquires, often to prevent their disappearance, in order to adjust the intended programme to the formal and constructive characteristics.

What I mean by all this, in relation to your question, is that the conservation of parts of the structure of the building to be rehabilitated allows for a less traumatic solution than its complete emptying and, consequently, the way to link the façade that is conserved with the interior structural body. This is from a purely constructive point of view. But there is another aspect as important as the previous one: whether the envelope to be conserved is compatible with the later life of the building, or whether another more suitable use should be programmed, as I mentioned earlier.

Purely epidermal conservation is perhaps the renunciation of considering the other lives that a building can acquire. Other possibilities should be



Figure 4 | Escuela Administración Regional, Toledo. Photo: Author's archive.

considered before falling into a façadism that is no longer sincere, and hides the necessary seams of aesthetic surgery. Faced with such a situation, I understand that we should broaden the degree of our appreciation of the building's components, so that as much as possible is preserved, with the understanding that these preserved parts will build at least part of its former architecture, not just its mask.

**LP:** *Don't you think that in some cases with these interventions you may be betraying the historical memory of the building?*

**CC:** If the intervention is essential for conservation, the main objective of the rehabilitation/restoration, I don't think that conceptually it can be considered a betrayal of its memory. Most of the buildings that have come down to our time have had interventions of one kind or another, precisely in order to be able to continue "living". The concept of intervention may be justified; the way it is carried out is another matter. In this sense, each case is unique and we must think

carefully about the "way" without losing sight of the "objective".

**LP:** *What are the criteria or principles that inspire your heritage rehabilitation and enhancement projects and how do you combine new interventions with pre-existing ones?*

**CC:** I mean that if with the interventions of your projects at the heritage level, these can be understood as stratifications that add value to the constructions, instead of making a minimal intervention...that is to say, just to keep it standing and little else...

**LP:** In all cases... should they be permanent or do you think that they can always be removable in the future, i.e. dismantled...?

**CC:** In the field of architecture, each case is unique and this is also true for intervention on pre-existing buildings. When faced with a rehabilitation or restoration project, we always try to assimilate the





Figure 5 | Circus Theatre. *Photo: Author's archive.*

documentation and data that the building can offer us. Unfortunately, it happens that this research, particularly the documentary research, requires time that is not available when the project has to be developed on the basis of the time schedule described in the corresponding contract.

Often all this has to be done in record time, at the risk of lacking sufficient data on the building.

The criterion for intervention, from a global point of view, is always to understand that our intervention is going to be one more episode of the building, which

will be added to those already accumulated throughout its existence. Hence, the modesty of what is done must always be an argument that prioritises what exists. This does not mean that in certain circumstances the need to intervene does not acquire a certain forcefulness. We could not often solve problems of constructive stability or compositional restitution, for example, without adding a forceful architecture that solves them, technically or visually.

The question of “removable” interventions has to do with what I said before. If there are doubts, for example due to a lack of sufficient information on the



Figure 6 | Circus Theatre, interior view. Photo: Baltanás.



Figure 7 | Urban space, Tavernes Blanques. Photo: Author's archive.

problem to be solved, it is a reasonable criterion to do it in a way that at another time and in other circumstances could be undertaken with other means or in another way. It is clear that in these cases, it is easier to apply it to finishing issues than to structural problems. Therefore, I would again apply the principle that each case is unique.

**LP:** *I wouldn't like to overlook some new or partially new construction projects, such as the Circus Theatre in Albacete, a very attractive project both inside, with respect for the pre-existing construction elements, improved with a new ideation and the idea of new elements and materials on the outside, new but contained in the sense that they respect and identify the previous construction...*

*What is the challenge in the choice of materials: are there main and secondary materials with their own independent function, or are they to be identified with others in different positions and uses in a relationship that never loses the identity of the project?*

*In 2020, the EU worked on the guideline of circular construction, due to the great environmental, economic and social impact, all under the umbrella of green building...*

**CC:** The case of the Circo Theatre is based on its own urban situation, which did not allow the building to be extended. On the other hand, its façade had been modified successively, with low-quality residential buildings that had erased its history and presence in the city. This is why the demolition of this access body and its replacement by a new volume that would adequately resolve the function, the articulation with the body of the hall and stage, which were preserved, as well as re-establishing the presence of a singular building in the urban image, taking into account the lack of constructions of historical value in the city. For this reason, the use of new materials, mainly glass and wooden panels in the new entrance area, and even its formalisation, is intended to make a statement in a nondescript urban environment. On the other hand, the body of the stage and the roof of the hall are clad in a "classic" material such as copper sheeting, which,



Figure 8 | La Petxina sports and cultural space. Photo: Author's archive.

in addition to relating it to its history, gives it a visual quality that did not exist before.

But other similar cases could be explained, as in the “La Petxina” sports complex in Valencia, a rehabilitation of the city’s old slaughterhouse. In this case it is through new volumes, with different characteristics in terms of use and materiality, that the visual control of the surroundings is sought, whose urban planning considered the disappearance of this great and interesting example of 19th century industrial architecture. These newly built volumes are in keeping with the programme planned by the City Council, without forgetting their important urban objective of controlling the party walls that would be visible from the adjoining building, as well as adapting their dimensions to the general volumetry of the immediate urban space. In this way, an attempt was made to organise the surroundings, giving the parts of the building that are still standing, the beautiful buildings designed by the architect Luis Ferreres at the end of the 19th century, a greater presence. In this case, the use of materials, both inside and outside, adopts that character of neutrality

that I mentioned earlier as a basic criterion for the coexistence between the new and the pre-existence.

**LP:** *Nowadays, is it possible to think effectively about designing taking into account that from the genesis of the project it is done in a circular way? If so, with what instruments, with what construction technology?*

*Do you think we are really in a position, in a position to face this? Because the intentions are very good, but do we have the materials, the technology to be put into effective practice and to meet these requirements...?*

**CC:** The thought of sustainability, circular economy and other concepts that today surround our lives, around global problems, have a particular interest in the rehabilitation of architecture. The reuse of what has already been built is an important step in the rationalisation of resources, which is why I consider that beyond the aspects of conservation for purely theoretical reasons, of undoubted interest, it is an undoubted path for the future. Like any new situation, it requires the experience of putting its theory into practice. Hence the



Figure 9 | Health Centre Guillem de Castro, Valencia. Photo: Author's archive.

answer to the question you ask is one of long-term optimism. As things stand at present, I doubt that there is a construction market that will allow us to progress at a good pace in the formation of this practical experience.

New materials need time to prove themselves, and that is a slow process. So welcome them and allow us to experiment. But in the meantime, why not use old materials in new ways, wouldn't that be the most realistic and most certain process of that sustainability that is announced to us at every step, but which not all those who preach it believe in?

**LP:** *You have been dedicated for years to teaching ...for the training of new architects, the academic situation of future architects is on trial, the latest technological trends and the professional social sphere are not being implemented or are lagging behind... what do you consider essential when it comes to teaching, or incorporating into the contents and teaching*

*programmes? What improvements or strategies do you suggest for these cases...?*

**CC:** I have been teaching projects for more than thirty years at the ETSAV. During this long period I have been able to observe a certain decline in student training. This may have been due to professional crises, which inevitably lead to a crisis of interest in architecture. Also in the successive variations in the curricula which, in my opinion, have not always been in the best direction, which should always be the training of the student.

It is obvious that during the years of university education, an extensive knowledge base should be provided, allowing students to get to know most of the aspects that make up architecture. But there is a training gap that students have been telling me about over the years: the lack of practical knowledge in an eminently practical discipline. It is obvious that this transmission of knowledge has to be done through the



Figure 10 | Old flour factory rehabilitation for the Gobierno de Castilla-La Mancha office, Albacete. Photo: Author's archive.

teaching staff, the only ones who can have this experience in their work. The exposition of the problems and their solutions would be the fundamental basis for overcoming the lack of student experience. But the approach to the work, as the final stage in the production of architecture, is something exciting, which can help to overcome the inevitable stages

**LP:** *On the other hand, if you were to hire an architect to work in your professional studio, what skills or attitudes are you interested in?*

**CC:** Today it would be unthinkable that an architect who wants to join the professional life does not know the immense “technological arsenal” that is available. But I think that, although it is necessary, it cannot be the most important thing. An architect who wants to work in this exciting profession must be open to the knowledge that is offered in the daily practice of a studio. It is really in this period that he will learn to be an architect

and will understand many of the theoretical teachings that were latent (and sometimes misunderstood) in his academic phase. And all of this without undue haste, even though we live in an age in which everything is planned at an accelerated pace.

The most important thing is an interest in architecture, which must be translated into a constant search for the improvement of the work done. Non-conformism is a trait of youth that must be preserved not only in those who are starting out in the profession, but also over time, trying to find the best solutions to the many problems we face.

*Luis Manuel Palmero Iglesias*