

functions.

Thank you, Mr. Gobernador, for having given back to the people of Guanajuato a restored and functioning Teatro Juárez!

THE OLD VELASCO HOME IN PUEBLA

By José Miguel Quintana

During the second half of the seventeenth century a house was built in Puebla which is still important for its handsome architecture and for the high degree of its residents. It was located on the former Calle Mesones, now No. 213 Avenida 8 Oriente.

This property, once a part of the grounds of the Hospital de San Pedro, was purchased in 1724 by Captain Sebastián Alvarez de Casaprima, the owner of haciendas and sugar mills in the district of Orizaba, who was a notary of the Inquisition, a judge of alcabalas (transit taxes) and a steward of the parish church of Orizaba.

For nearly two hundred and fifty years since then the property has remained in the same family until it was acquired by marriage by Don Pablo José Almendaro de la Borbolla, mayor of Puebla in 1847, whose daughter, María Josefa, was joined in marriage in 1863 to Don Dionisio de Velasco y Carballo, who in 1870 was the promotor of the Jesuit Foundation for the Colegio Católico.

The facade of this house on Calle Mesones, like most of the important private buildings built at that time, consists of three stories: the ground floor with a huge vestibule in the center, with a gate studded with bronze bosses and framed by imposing and severe carved stone jambs and a lintel which has at either side an inner door providing access to the hall porter's quarters, or "accessorias", a mezzanine with four windows, one over each doorway, provided with delicately wrought iron grilles, and the "altos", or upper and principal floor, with five balconies, of which the middle one is more prominent with its stout railing also of wrought iron, which in itself is a work of art. The facade is crowned by a molded cornice with a pediment bearing the Velasco arms. All the outer walls are covered in the traditional and very distinct Puebla "petatillo" (herringbone) style with bricks and tiles.

The rectangular patio surrounded by two tiers of arches on three sides shows an arrangement of its mass which is in harmony with the distribution of the surrounding volumes. It is remarkable how the lower tier of arches rises considerably above the capitals of the supporting columns before beginning to curve, a trick of the builder to achieve sufficient space to reach the necessary height, let in light to the mezzanine, and preserve a proper proportion with the upper arches which are much lower. The great staircase, located at a corner of the patio, deserves special attention; it is in perfect balance with the other elements.

This home was preserved without any important changes until early in the present century when Don Francisco de Velasco y Almendaro restored it and gave it its present appearance.

As a prophet of colonial architecture, as José Ignacio Conde might have said, he wished to beautify his home, modernize it, emphasize its stateliness, and give it a more typical Puebla style appearance by sheathing it with brickwork and tiles. To this end he modified the facade, preserving its original lines but covering it with bricks and tiles. He respected the old patio and in order to live with the times he furnished and decorated the parlor in the Louis XV style which was then fashionable. The decorator was Marchand, who as Velasco y Al-

mendaro says in his "Autobiografía," sought to blend Spanish Colonial with the prevailing French style.

The tiles used for both exterior and interior decorations were obtained from two magnificent eighteenth century houses which were at that time being torn down, like so many others, to be replaced with others in that fin de siècle style which in its own right has become characteristic of Puebla and deserves to be protected.

Don Francisco de Velasco y Almendaro took care to respect the original design of the residence as much as possible, and so set by far the earliest example to those who would later share his interest and respect for the typical old Puebla buildings. He as well as his home have been enshrined in local history as exponents of dignity and good taste.

Recently another member of the family, Don Dionisio de Velasco Polo, bought the old house at Mesones 11 and has restored in a way that emphasizes its unique features. Conscious of the changed times in which we live, he realized that this architectural jewel should not be exclusively enjoyed by a single family and converted it into the manorial Hostal de Velasco.

He reinforced the building in the parts that needed it, added a second patio at the back, covered the main patio with an enormous glass marquee which makes it functional without impairing its original appearance, and lastly furnished the residence with period furniture to achieve an architectural and artistic harmony which is in shining contrast to so many ruined or mutilated buildings scattered throughout the city.

It is remarkable that this residence should have remained so long in the hands of a single family and been kept up by them as its home, and that in the present century two of its owners should have restored it without regard for expense, impelled by a desire to preserve one of many masterworks which are the pride of a city which should be declared in its entirety a national monument, as has been recently proposed by the International Council of Monuments and Site.

The second restoration was carried out under the care and supervision, and most especially the loving attention, of its present owner, Don Dionisio de Velasco Polo, with the technical services of Architect Arturo Tapia and with Antonio Melgoza as resident engineer and with the artistic supervision of José Ignacio Conde Díaz Rubín.

Contadero, D. F., March 1973.

THE ITURBIDE PALACE

By Clementina Díaz y de Ovando

In 1779 the architect Francisco Guerrero y Torres undertook the reconstruction of the Palace of the Marqueses de Moncada in Calle de San Francisco, today Avenida Francisco I. Madero, in México City.

This opulent palace has had many different owners and uses over the years in the course of which it has suffered several modifications. It was the residence of Don Agustín de Iturbide who left it on June 21, 1822 to begin his short and ill-starred career as emperor of México. For this reason the building has been called "the Emperor's House", the "House of Iturbide", and more recently "the Iturbide Palace."

Between 1830 and 1834 it was a dormitory for students of the School of Mining and on this account was remodeled. When the students departed the Marqués de Moncada rented the property to the government as an office building. The lottery, whose operations had been assigned to the support of the San Carlos Academy (of art) had its headquarters there and it also housed the

studios of Pelegrín Clavé and Manuel Vilar who were respectively the directors of the departments of painting and sculpture of the same Academy.

On the death of the Marqués de Moncada in 1850 Don Anselmo Zurutuza bought the palace from his heirs for a price of one hundred thousand pesos and turned it into a hotel and the offices and a depot for his prosperous stage coach lines. A patron of the arts and a protector of artists, he enriched the palace with a collection of paintings.

Zurutuza died on July 26, 1852 and Don Isidoro Adoné as his sole heir inherited the hotel which he continued to operate.

Newspapers published toward the close of 1855 carried announcements regarding the grand reopening of the Hotel de Iturbide which would take place on March 1. The new hotel would also provide a restaurant and a bathing establishment. The first famous visitor to put up at the new hotel was José Zorrilla, the Spanish poet and playwright. At the close of the same year Don Benito Juárez took a room at the Iturbide.

In 1856 Don Isidoro Doné sold the building and hotel establishment to Don Germán Landa, who made extensive alterations to make it a luxury hotel equal to the finest hotels in Europe and the United States.

A few comments and anecdotes will serve to give a slight idea of the Hotel de Iturbide's importance as a center of the capital's social life in the second half of the nineteenth century.

On January 1, 1861 Generals Santos Degollado and Felipe Berriozábal, who were lodged in the hotel, watched the victory parade of the Liberal Army from a balcony.

During the empire of Maximilian the elegant "Frenchies", or sympathizers of the French invasion used to gather there to drink gin cocktails and sherry cobbles. They could also have their corns pared by Sr. D. M. Schlosser or by Sr. and Sra. Predal, chiropodists who attended their clientele in Rooms 34 and 86 respectively.

With the triumph of the republic in 1867 the hotel advertised its 160 rooms costing from 6 pesos to 80 pesos per month, as well as a bathhouse, bowling alleys, upholstery, excellent service and high quality cabs for hire.

One of the novelties introduced by the Hotel Iturbide was a "café cantante" "which opened at seven o'clock on the night of February 16, 1869 where "living statues" and chromotropes were shown and French songs were sung. For a modest "peseta" (25 centavos) customers could enjoy hot chocolate, or ice cream, or a liqueur and relax. At the end of each tanda (show) the salon was cleared before the beginning of the next one. Many curiosity hounds attended the opening, and since they were ignorant of this type of amusement, many took off their hats every time the curtain went up, just as though they were in church. But the dandies soon recognized their error and that in a café cantante there were no formal rules. Ignacio Manuel Altamirano commented on this in his weekly article in the February 18, 1969 issue of "El Renacimiento" and Guillermo Prieto also published a witty vignette of this café cantante.

In view of the protests of the clientele, which balked at paying two reales (bits) for each show, the management advertised that as of February 23 the functions would not be broken up into tandas. The proprietor promised his customers that the price of a ticket entitled the bearer to coffee au lait, hot chocolate, an iced cream, pastry, a sangría, or a milk punch.

But in spite of such offers, the café cantante was a failure and by April 6 had been put up for sale. The idea of eating while watching what we today call a floor show did not appeal to the Mexican taste and attendance fell. It is hard to tell why on this occasion the

dandies disdained the spectacle and refused to slavishly follow French fashions.

But still this fractured attempt to provide live entertainment in a restaurant can be considered as the first Mexican example of a cabaret which is such a feature of our modern life.

At the close of April 1871 gaslighting was installed in the hotel and the management proposed to freshen the place up with little marble fountains and bowers for dinning which it was hoped would improve the beauty of this "almost regal mansion."

In 1872 the Hotel Iturbide had the finest restaurant in the city, run by Carlos Recamier, the emperor of restaurateurs. In addition to marvelous cooking the decor was very pleasing. One dined in a sort of Tivoli with artificial waterfalls, flowers, and caged songbirds. It was a miniature paradise where the hours slipped away "in an extasis of champagne." It was the spot for people with expensive tastes and a willingness to spend money.

In May 1872 a buffet lunch and a magnificent billiard parlor were installed on the ground floor. The buffet served all sorts of wines and liquors, cocktails, sandwiches and lunches, and customers enjoying such magnificent surroundings could well imagine themselves transported to the Cafe Pernier in Paris.

Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, "Duque Job," in one of his delightful and inimitable chronicles published in 1880 describes his fondness for the restaurant of the Hotel Iturbide where, "thanks to its magnificent cuisine, Doctor Veron might well dine, if he came back to life, and challenge Brillat Savarin . . ." He goes on to invest the chef Carlos Recamier with the title of "Henry the IV of the casserole" and declares him worthy of a gold medal with the bust of Heliogabalus.

"Recamier," he adds, "wants to found a royal dynasty of the groaning board . . . When the father dies, (May God preserve him for many years!) let some heir proclaim from the highest balcony of the Hotel Iturbide, 'The King is dead! Long live the King!'"

Distinguished visitors continued to make their stay at the Hotel Iturbide. The outlawed Prince Juan de Borbón who arrived in mid-1876 caused the greatest stir but there were many famous stage performers and more than one international rascal. The patio was the place to meet or ogle singers and ladies of the chorus and those males who did so were affectionately known as "chicks", "roosters", "turkeys", or "eagles" according to age and track record.

The Iturbide was a center of lively activity because it was well located in the middle of everything important to its gilded clientele, jewelry shops, dress establishments, and that aristocratic gathering place for high society, the Jockey Club.

In 1890 the hotel was bought by Don Francisco Iturbide who in 1898 commissioned the architect Emilio Dondé to modernize it. These alterations, in the opinion of the art critic Manuel G. Revilla, did not change "the appearance of a splendid Spanish palace." In the following year Revilla published an exhortation for a show of "care and conservation toward other buildings of the viceregal period threatened with disappearance."

In the guidebooks published at the close of the century and the beginning of the next one the Hotel de Iturbide continued to advertise itself as one of the best and most luxurious in México City.

On June 5, 1921 an exhibit of the paintings of the Mexican artist Roberto Montenegro was inaugurated with the attendance of President and General Alvaro Obregón and distinguished intellectuals and members of high society.

In 1925 the hotel's telephone numbers were listed in the directories, Mexicana Neri 225 and Ericsson 21-49 whose brevity fills us with nostalgia for a smaller, more

pleasant, and more livable city.

On June 30, 1928 the Hotel Iturbide closed its doors and for many years afterwards it was occupied by shops and offices.

By governmental decree the palace was declared a national monument on February 9, 1931. In 1966 the Banco Nacional de México bought the property for the offices of its subsidiary Financiera Banamex, S.A. And on March 24, 1972 the new tenants moved in to a restored and gloriously improved headquarters.

The so-called Iturbide Palace is one of the most typical examples of baroque civil architecture in México and particularly in México City in that it displays the very specific characteristics of the palatial mansions of its day.

The frontispiece for example, rises a full two stories on the facade to cover the ground floor and the mezzanine, the former now occupied by fashionable shops today pompously called "boutiques". The height of the doorway gives the passage through it of the owner of the house and his guests the nature of a royal entrance.

The effect of immense dignity which the doorway provides is repeated inside the building by the arcades, above which rise the two stories of rooms around the central patio. The overall effect is of airy lightness, as though the building were floating in the air and not anchored in the marshy subsoil of the city, somewhat like those baroque angels which seem to lack solid substance and defy the law of gravity in this strange city which so greedily devours its ancient monuments.

Ever since the sixteenth century towers have been added to buildings in the city, at first from fears of an Indian rebellion, and later, when this dread had passed, as a classic feature of baroque architecture. Battlements were replaced by ornate carvings and cannon by gargoyles, as in the examples of the Calimaya Palace and the Torre Cossío palaces, which are fine specimens of riotous baroque fantasy.

In the Iturbide Palace a unique departure occurred: two towers were provided, joined together by a row of arches, to produce a "loggía", or rooftop observatory in which we can imagine the residents of the mansion in the eighteenth century taking their ease and enjoying the fresh air and fine views of the valley which are now only memories.

Another attractive feature of the palace which is characteristic of the city's baroque mansions is the upward prolongation of the door and window jambs like arms upraised to take the weight of cornices and pinnacles. In the Iturbide palace they are so richly carved and vibrant that the entire facade appears to be rare and incredible embroidery reproduced in stone.

The architect Francisco Guerrero y Torres designed and built for us in this structure one of the most admirable and astonishing palaces of the eighteenth century.

Fortunately the palace has recovered its ancient splendor thanks to its correct and thorough restoration, correct because the guiding policy has been to follow the international custom in preserving and restoring the original design while replacing lost elements with modern ones which harmonize with the whole and are inspired by it. Thus, the pavements, doors, furnishings and other accessories have been replaced with modern materials and manufactures.

However, these new introductions are exposed to the scrutiny and criticism of modern experts. And most specialists in these matters consider that the presence of the fountain with its mediocre design is an unfortunate intrusion on what is otherwise an excellent restoration of a superb architectural triumph. Some critics state that the sooner it is removed, the better.

In all other respects the technical and monetary efforts expended and the good taste shown in this restoration have won the highest praise for the Banco Nacional de México and its architects.

And in closing, we can parody the words of Manuel Gutiérrez Nájera, the exquisite "Duque Job" who prophesied the creation of a royal house of the gastronomic art in this same Iturbide Palace, in wishing that the directors of the Banco Nacional de México might establish in it a "royal house" for the conservation and safekeeping of the many monuments threatened with destruction by indifferent private interests and uncaring governmental and ecclesiastic authorities.

THE TURN OF THE CENTURY HOUSE CURRENTLY OCCUPIED BY AFIANZADORA INSURGENTES

By Flavio Salamanca

It is beyond question that contemporary artistic and cultural expressions should be based on a series of norms and values derived from the historic legacy of the past which make up our present day environment.

And so, in the midst of our daily concern with problems of modern architecture it is a pleasure to turn our eyes back to a happy moment in the defense and appreciation of cultural values which indicates an improved awareness of their worth and a sharpened sensitivity toward them.

The turn of the century house which is occupied by Afianzadora Insurgentes is a sample and an example of how old buildings can be conserved without clashing with contemporary architecture.

But it is important to stress that any modification of an old building calls for taste and talent in order to bridge the gap between past and present, between an era of stable concepts and our modern age which clamors for new forms to express new yearnings.

The restoration of this turn of the century house which is occupied by Afianzadora Anáhuac encourages us to believe that a new appreciation of bygone architectural styles can be achieved, and that it is a matter of cold common sense to fight against the destruction of buildings which are winning new recognition by art lovers.

And so the preservation of this building is palpable evidence of how art of other days can be made to serve the demands of modern living.

In addition, it is a building which has recovered its former personality and functions thanks to a wise restoration, and so is again a useful element to the community.

In short, this is the future use to which we must put the architecture of the past.

