

# CUBA

# Theory and practice of modern regionalism in Cuba

■ EDUARDO LUIS RODRÍGUEZ

**Adapting works to the local physical and cultural context was a major concern for Cuban architects from the mid-1930s to the mid-1960s. This preoccupation was not a new topic in the national architectural landscape, but incorporating these efforts to the modern movement's theoretical and formal framework was. And it is in particular during the 1950s that a most wanted symbiosis between the specifically local and the internationally avant-garde developed with creativity.**

## MODERNITY IN CUBA

THE PATH that led to the 1950s' creative explosion in Cuba was long, extremely rich and varied, both in formal and conceptual terms. At the turn of the twentieth century, after four hundred years of Spanish dominion, the process of assimilating modernity significantly accelerated.<sup>1</sup> Since the nineteenth century, especially the 1850s, Cuban

society had shown a keen interest in being up to date in all fields, including architecture and urbanism.<sup>2</sup> Neoclassicism quickly spread and many changes were introduced in the images of cities. But it is at the beginning of the twentieth century that a combination of different factors allowed the country to fully open up to modernity. Among others, the Spanish government's

Fig. 1. **Eugenio Batista**, *Falla Bonet House*, Havana, 1937–1939.

An early example of modern regionalism, the building, simple and essential, is structured around several portico-facing patios



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Fig. 2. **Mario Romañach**, *Noval Cueto House*, Havana, 1948–1949. The shape, related to the international avant-garde, acquires a dramatic dimension with its wide awnings and the traditional patio re-interpreted in a modern way

withdrawal, the introduction of many administrative and urban improvements by the North American intervention government between 1899 and 1902 and, that same year, the Republic's founding, were events that contributed to the creation of a collective state of mind very favorable to the rapid introduction of radical changes. These were part of the attempt to lessen the differences between the small and still recently colonized island and other developed countries that served as role models, mainly France and the United States.

DURING the first three decades of the century, the pace and intensity of the sequence of arrivals of new architectural styles and trends, hitherto unknown in the local context, were a consequence of the diversification of choices and alternatives, made easier by the exchanges with abroad and the improvements and development of communications, but also and mainly owing to the general wish for change and progress, and to a rejection of the past and assimilation of 'the modern.' The idea was in fact to erase the stigma of having been a colony for too long—significantly longer than most Latin American countries<sup>3</sup>—by continually renewing all of society's components. Thus, modernization came to mean national salvation.



Fig. 3. **Mario Romañach**, *Alvarez House*, Havana, 1956–1957.

The house's lateral facade shows the desire to provide improved conditions of ventilation and protection against the sun, thanks to awnings, porticos, louvers and the raising of significant parts of the roof to allow for the hot air's exit and cross-ventilation

THE ASPECT OF CITIES changed at an amazing speed. Streets were paved, hydro-sanitary systems were renovated, the construction of Havana's Malecón (a long seafront avenue) determinedly grew to the West, buildings steadily increased in height, as well as in quality of materials and construction techniques. Reinforced concrete for dwellings and steel structures for public buildings completely replaced the obsolete construction techniques fashionable during the colonial period. A large number of residential districts was built



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Fig. 4. **Pedro Pablo Mantilla** and **María Teresa Fernández**, *Córdoba House*, Havana, 1953.

The large windows protected by overhangs and the long, open terrace, are solutions that provide permanent and intimate contact with the surrounding landscape. All main rooms have adequate cross-ventilation

surrounding the traditional urban centers. From a stylistic point of view, the nineteenth century's neoclassicism definitely yielded to the neo-gothic and neo-baroque styles of the turn of the century, followed by all the 'revivals' possible, stemming from the eclectic beaux-arts style that became the most widely used formal language. Nevertheless, this style coexisted for fifteen years with art nouveau, before being gradually replaced by the end of the 1920s by art deco, whose apparent absence of historical references and geometrically pure conception were frequently connected to the advent of modernity. In fact modernity had been coming in waves for decades. But there is no doubt that art deco, despite its short life—barely a decade—was a significant step towards avant-garde concepts, and considerably reduced the chronological space between local and universal art.

In formal and functional terms, Cuba raised itself up to the level of developed countries thanks to the modern movement whose ideas started spreading during the second half of the 1920s and whose first significant works were built at the beginning of the 1930s.<sup>4</sup> New shapes, belonging first to the rationalist orthodoxy and subsequently following local variations that unquestionably provided more appropriate architectural solutions, appeared at that time. These new ways asserted themselves during the 1940s and reached their climax in the 1950s, a period of surprising brilliance for Cuban architecture.

THUS, EACH STAGE of Cuban architectural modernity follows the former with haste but without jolts or

omissions. This modernity—despite certain flaws, such as having overlooked the social content inherent to the beginnings of the international modern movement, or insufficiently respecting the environment's preexisting values—was a great and brilliant part of the country's urban and architectural reality, and became an essential component of its cultural heritage, on a par with its colonial architecture.

#### MODERNITY AND TRADITION, THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Initially, the introduction of contents and shapes specific to the modern movement occurred together with a lively debate between those who advocated the rallying to the historical styles and those who championed the need to renew the architectural language to adapt it to this period of changes. The resounding triumph of the latter allowed the complete assimilation of the international style in the 1930s. And this is precisely when another concern, relevant on the cultural level, became more pressing: the issue of 'Cubanity,' and, in particular, the Cuban house.

ONCE THE MODERN MOVEMENT'S renewing ideas were accepted, the question of how to incorporate a rationalist vocabulary coming from countries with different geographic, climatic and cultural characteristics to a local context became increasingly frequent and profound. To a certain extent, these considerations were the consequence of similar debates that had taken place since the mid 1920s in other artistic fields—mainly painting, music and literature. But essentially they embodied an immediate reaction to the construction of a

large quantity of buildings, mostly residential, which, although ostensibly attractive and innovative—dynamic and asymmetrical compositions of large prismatic volumes, interspersed with cylindrical shapes, sometimes on pilotis and with strips of windows running across the façade—often demonstrated the author’s main concern, that is, of belonging to an avant-garde artistic movement, but at the same time forgetting the physical and geographic context wherein his works were erected, widely different from the countries where the new language was born. However, these works, among which many are very successful examples of the international style, were undeniably an important preliminary stage for the modern movement in Cuba, without which it would have been later impossible to give shape to some major realizations.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, the lesser cost and easier construction of these works were consistent with the country’s economic situation in the 1930s, that echoed the 1929 crisis in the United States.

STARTING FROM THE MID 1920s, some significant realizations show that the rejection of anything having to do with Spain, the former colonizer, had made way to a soothing reflection on the local cultural tradition inherited from the protracted Spanish presence in the island. The end of the century’s iconoclasm towards anything Spanish, that came with independence and prompted the substitution of old colonial models by European and North American ones, ultimately disappeared after nearly thirty years of experiments based on foreign vocabularies eventually adopted during the inevitable appropriation and adjustment process, which was not always successful. Such a change in attitudes was favorable to the appearance of a component of the fashionable eclectic style: neo-colonial historicism, one of the local architects’ favorite trends. Many of the more remarkable neo-colonial works, such as Countess of Buenavista’s house (1928), are by the period’s most prominent architect, Leonardo Morales,<sup>6</sup> who, starting in 1910, designed and built a great number of excellent projects that give legitimacy and support to his stance.

MORALES’S ACCEPTANCE SPEECH at the National Academy of Arts and Letters in 1934<sup>7</sup> is as significant as his works—among which the most notable employ an eclectic language—in the sense that it clearly shows that the modern movement was already an accepted fact in Cuba. Morales points out, not without a certain nostalgia, the inescapable character of the process and defines the elements of ‘Cubanity’ that should be incorporated to the modern works, owing not to any kind of commitment to tradition, but rather to the strict necessity of allowing for the physical context. Thanks to its author’s professional prominence, the pioneer and eloquent speech would have huge repercussions and a great influence on the developments of Cuban architecture hereafter.

IN THE SPEECH called “the Ideal Cuban House,” Morales states: “In our city of Havana, buildings that conform to the modern ideas of architects from France and Northern Europe have already been built. But in our architecture do we need to follow the creations of foreigners or use the fundamental principles that guided them? They solved their problems from the point of view of their climatic, economic and social conditions . . . We should not use as a basis for ourselves what they created for Germany and Scandinavia . . . We should not plagiarize, but create something appropriate to our conditions . . . The solution should owe more to the requirements of the Tropic of Cancer and our social Latin American context than to those of the temperate zone, of which we have already wrongly adopted prototypes valid for their climate and for their characteristics—so different from ours—but not for us.”<sup>8</sup>

HE THEN PROCEEDS to list and explain the architectural elements and solutions that, according to him, should be incorporated to the modern Cuban house: he mentions climatic adjustments as a crucial component—mainly the protection against the heat and glare produced by the powerful tropical sun—that should be realized with large eaves for roofs and wide porticos leaning against exterior façades; an appropriate orientation to capture the main breezes; and cross ventilation—that is, with a separate admission and outlet of air—in all of the main rooms, enabled by the interior patio and louvers of mobile laths controlling the outside view and the amount of light entering the dwelling’s depths. On that subject, he notices that: “we have utterly lost sight of what the appropriate atmosphere for the ideal house of the tropics should be . . . Our problem is to modulate light, lessen its glare, soften its brightness. Hence the old louvers [persianas], the awnings, the porticos . . . The portico and patio are the two pillars on which all our architecture was built for four centuries.”<sup>9</sup>

A FEW YEARS PRIOR, between 1927 and 1929, Morales had designed and built the Pollack house, an

Fig. 5. **Frank Martínez**, *Wax House*, Havana, 1958–1959. The limits between indoors and outdoors are almost totally suppressed





Fig. 6. **Emilio del Junco**, architect's house, 1956–1957. The vast porticos function as large open living spaces usually connected to the patio's plants

© courtesy Erick and Paul del Junco

extraordinary dwelling that combined the formal classicist repertoire with elements of the local architectural tradition. These were not merely decorative—as was usually the case with neo-colonial historicism—but were also functional solutions: thus, the large central patio was crucial to all the rooms' ventilation. However, the weight of a classic academic training and of an already long professional career during which he had used the beaux-arts language prevented Morales from giving shape to his new thoughts in modern works of the same value as his eclectic buildings, which was a limit to the potential impact of his theoretical discourse. However, a few years later, one of his disciples, Eugenio Batista, succeeded in realizing projects that elegantly combined a regionalist conceptualization and a thoroughly modern understanding of architecture.

TWO TRENDS EXISTED—one, radical and exclusive, that required emptying modern architecture's body of any reference to local tradition or national identity; the other, open and inclusive, that advocated adjusting the modern postulations to specific conditions—which divided Cuban architects in a theoretical debate that gradually increased while concurrently becoming clearer. On this subject, the famous writer Alejo Carpentier observed: "Thus, one had to be nationalist, but also strive to belong to the avant-garde . . . [It was] a difficult target, given that nationalism always rests on the cult of tradition and that the avant-garde, de facto, meant a break with tradition."<sup>10</sup>

THIS THEME was so important that the controversy reached beyond the professional circles, and spread to the general public in 1936, through the publication of an issue of the influential journal *Social*, entirely devoted

to the Cuban house, where one could read: "When a society undergoes a period of transition, it must make a survey of all its values . . . [to] establish the basis for a new ideology allowing the preservation or rebirth of what is genuinely Cuban."<sup>11</sup>

A survey, carried out by *Social*, the aforementioned journal, on a group of eminent architects, concerned the colonial Cuban house's values and those of its counterpart of the future: ultimately, the major part of the professionals consulted was in favor of incorporating some traditions to the new constructions. A majority also agreed on the factor crucial in promoting 'Cubanness': the adjustment to climate. Although some opinions differed, a common objective was clearly emerging: searching for modernity through identity.

THE FOLLOWING YEAR, in an article published by the journal *Arquitectura* and called "How to orient a house for coolness,"<sup>12</sup> Morales emphasized the need to adjust architecture to local climatic conditions. In 1939, a contextualized and regionalist approach was widely accepted during the First National Congress of Art when it was asserted that: "We need to establish a definition of a typical Cuban architecture born of the specific conditions prevailing in our country, always subjected to the new means of architectonic expression . . . As much in shape as in spirit, it will need to preserve the environmental character of the building's place and region, if the surrounding buildings are permanent constructions and of some traditional value."<sup>13</sup>

NEARLY A DECADE LATER, Manuel de Tapia Ruano ended his report for the First National Congress of Architecture by a call for the development of "a specific architecture, characteristic of our country."<sup>14</sup> Shortly after, two prestigious foreign architects visiting Cuba underlined this requirement in separate interviews with the journal *Espacio*. In 1953, Catalan Josep Lluís Sert

Fig. 7. **Ricardo Porro**, *Abad House*, Havana, 1954. Besides recreating traditional solutions for climatic adaptation, the Abad house also refers to the overt sensuality frequently associated with the tropics

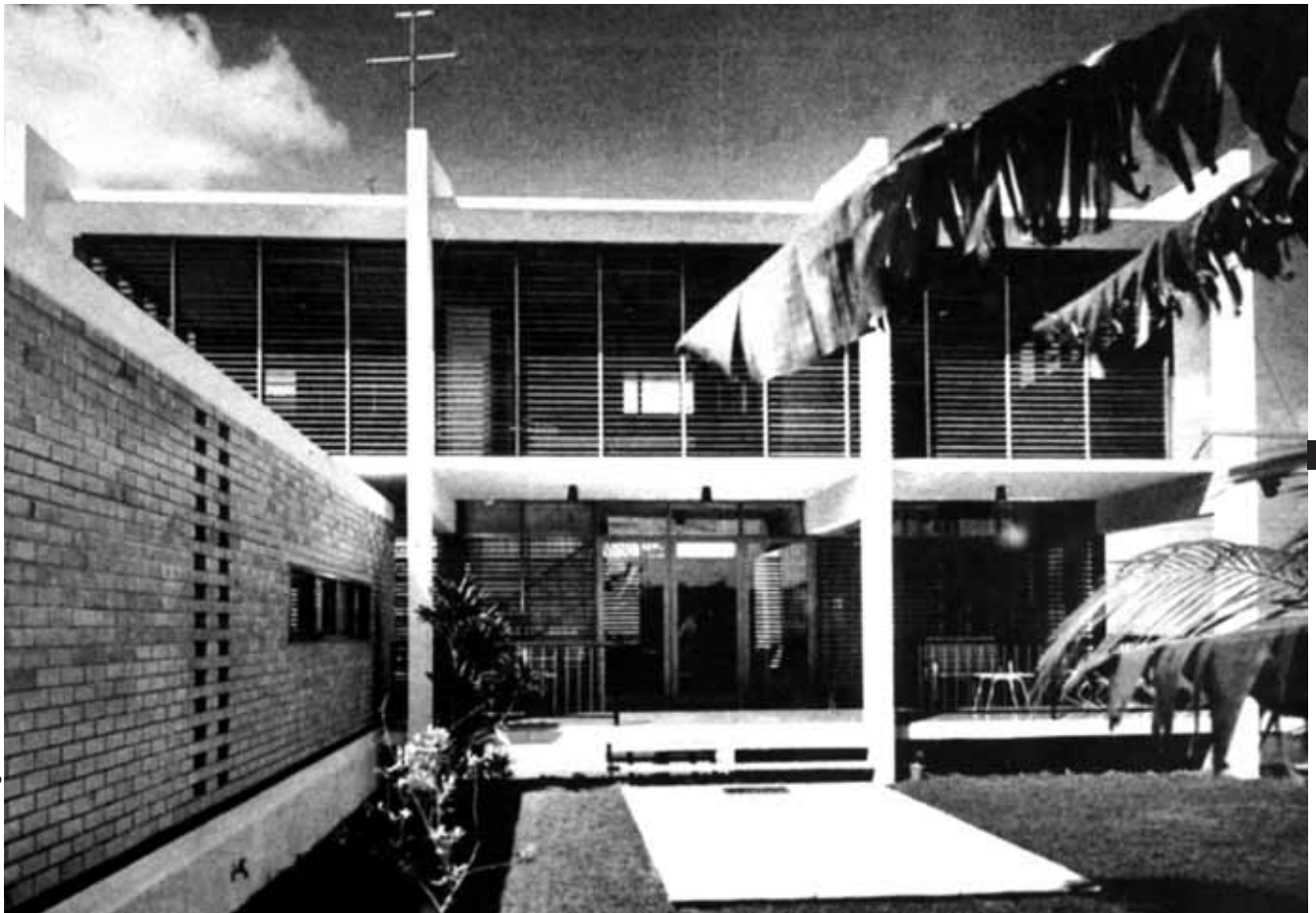


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asserted: "Architecture in Cuba is the architecture of the Caribbean, of the tropics; it answers a climate and is adjusted to specific materials. Architecture cannot be defined as being international or national, but as being regional, and within its region, I find most remarkable examples in Cuba."<sup>15</sup> In 1955, Milanese Franco Albini claimed that the most important issue for architecture was: "the search for an authentic cultural environment in which to insert the architectural works, while also connecting it with tradition . . . By 'tradition,' I mean historical continuity associated with a cultural environment, a tradition of life and customs . . . This tradition of culture must be used with as much liberty of

is to have an architecture less international, more rooted in the local tradition . . . Tradition does not stand for a faithful copy of the past . . . It is the result of a people's way of life, with specific customs and habits . . . It is the perceptible incarnation of their frame of mind. Art must express the particular culture of a given people that lives in a given place. It is the expression of the mutual action between man and the environment in which he develops his life . . ., the expression of the spiritual characteristics common to a people."<sup>17</sup>

AS FOR DEL JUNCO, on his return from an extended stay in Sweden, he pointed out: "From Scandinavia, I have seen



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Fig. 8. **Manuel Gutiérrez**, *Ingelmo House*, Havana, 1953–1954.

A subtle and elegant evocation of nineteenth century colonial neo-classicism, it has vast arcades and large louvers that ensure excellent ventilation

action as possible, by using elements of the past still valid today, but always in agreement with the modern spirit the present time's architect should have. It is not possible to be international . . . Modern architecture must find shapes for different environments, different peoples, different regions. But also be mindful of cultural nationalisms."<sup>16</sup>

Until the end of the decade, three of the most remarkable modern Cuban architects—Ricardo Porro, Emilio del Junco and Eugenio Batista—persistently insisted on the theme. Porro claimed: "Today, architecture has two aims. The first is to have a consistent social content . . . The second

Cuba more distinctly than if I had stayed here and this has allowed me to perceive the rich heritage of the 'criollo'\* architectural style. Yet, we should not copy it, but rather preserve and restore in a responsible way what is artistic and valuable in it, and create a work of continuation . . . We should prevent Havana from becoming an architectural annex of Miami."<sup>18</sup>

The sequence of fundamental reflections around the incorporation of tradition and modernity, from the 1930s

\* Literally, Indian-Spanish mulatto, today, generally used in Spanish-speaking America to describe anything native, indigenous, national, as opposed to what is foreign. —TRANS.

to the 1960s, began with Leonardo Morales's statement, but it was Eugenio Batista who brought it to an end when he wrote: "By making their houses their defense against the torrid sun of our tropic, our ancestors discovered three splendid answers and we would be quite careless not to use this heritage: patios, porticos and persianas, which, being three Ps [the P of 'persianas' standing for 'louvers'] are the ABC of our tropical architecture . . . but we should not make the mistake of thinking that by copying our colonial houses we will solve today's problems . . . Although the natural environment has remained the same, the social environment, however, is different. Climate and landscape are the same, but that is not the case for our customs."<sup>19</sup>

THUS, twenty-six years after Leonardo Morales set down the principles of 'the ideal Cuban house,' and nearly at the end of the movement's period of splendor, Eugenio Batista—who was head of design at Morales's office, had traveled through Europe with him for six months between 1924 and 1925, and had, among others, collaborated to the Pollack house project—considers that it is necessary to continue fueling Cuban architecture's regionalism, the country being located in a geographic

area with powerful natural and cultural characteristics. Batista resumes the essence of Morales's message, re-frames and updates it and, in doing so, illustrates the message with a sum of works, designed by himself or other architects,<sup>20</sup> that are extraordinary examples of the symbiosis between modern and traditional, local and international. More than a decade later, by way of taking stock of his career and ideas, Batista would express the following: "My years of residence in humid tropics and in temperate zones have made me realize that the geographic characteristics of the climate—hot or cold—and of the atmosphere—clear or foggy—shape aesthetic leanings in quite a definite way . . . Understanding this led me to a new and deeper perception of the cultural and stylistic developments of the history of architecture."<sup>21</sup>

#### THE PRAXIS AND ITS RESULTS

The first valid results of the modern regionalist thought that developed for over twenty years were erected at the end of the 1930s; the trend grew slowly during the 1940s, saw many of its best models realized in the 1950s and reached its apex with the five National Art Schools of Cubanacán in Havana (1961–1965), by

Fig. 9. Nicolás Quintana, *Currán House*, Varadero, 1957.

The house's main construction material is a kind of stone typical of the region that is left apparent. The central patio is complemented by a raised terrace where the three loggias typical of colonial houses framing urban plazas are re-interpreted in the modern language



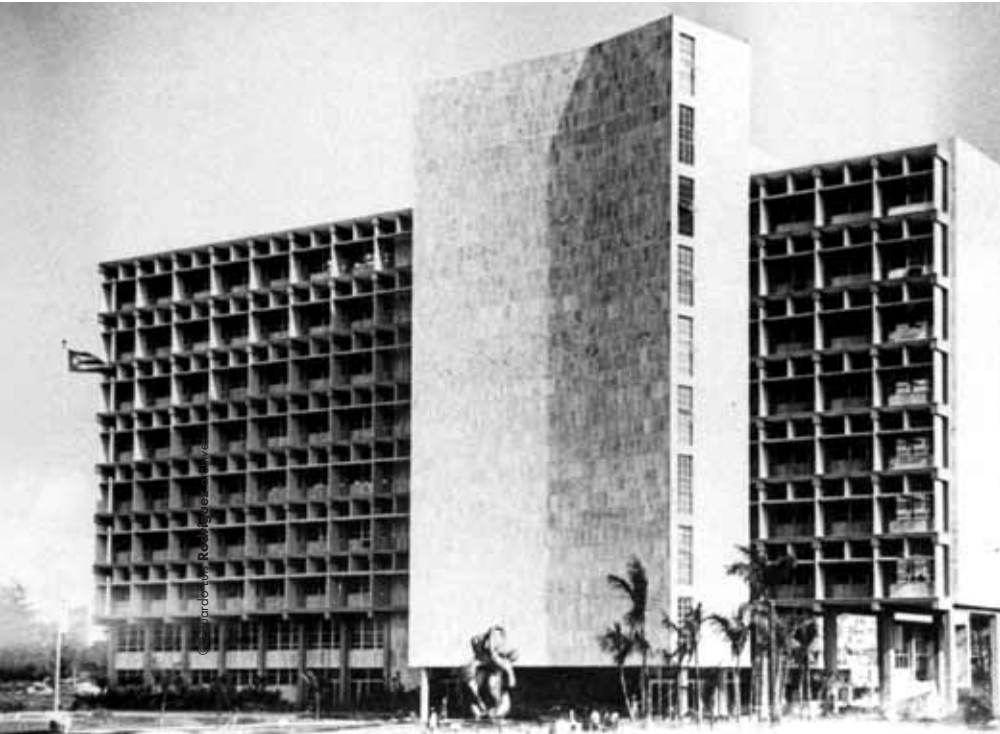


Fig. 10. **Aquiles Capablanca**, *Office of the Comptroller*, Havana, 1952–1953. The composition is balanced thanks to the contrast between the smooth and windowless surface of the elevators' tower and the horizontal block of offices entirely covered with brise-soleils. Both are clad with a local material, Jaimanitas stone

architects Ricardo Porro, Vittorio Garatti and Roberto Gottardi.<sup>22</sup> In addition to Eugenio Batista's example and the reaction against the initial non-critical assimilation of the international style, many more factors had an impact on the trend's entire development. Among others, the following are noteworthy: the economic prosperity that followed World War II and triggered an extended construction boom and allowed builders to experiment new materials, shapes and techniques; the re-appraisal of colonial architecture on the basis of studies and publications by Joaquín Weiss, María Teresa de Rojas, Lydia Cabrera, Francisco Prat Puig, Aquiles Maza and others; the frequent exchanges, in Cuba and abroad, with prominent foreign practitioners such as Sert, Albini, Richard Neutra<sup>23</sup> and Roberto Burle Marx, further enhanced by the disclosure and reception of significant works published or exposed; and the positive influence of other foreign architects such as Erik Gunnar Asplund, Erik Bryggman and Alvar Aalto, and of similar movements in other countries, such as the Scandinavian 'new empiricism.' Brazilian architecture was also influential, but somewhat after the initial shaping of the local regionalist thought in the 1930s. Therefore, this influence was more perceptible in certain details, shapes and architectural solutions in the 1950s than in the movement's initial conceptualization.

STRETCHING OUT on a ten year period contemporary of the movement, Joaquín Weiss, Cuban architecture's most important historian, voiced three assertions that summarize the praxis's developments. In 1947 he wrote: "Our architects are winning the struggle to acclimatize to our tropical country the new architectonic trends, born on foreign grounds and for a large part in Northern climates . . . They are simultaneously developing a new

perception of space . . . by projecting the house towards the outdoors and by introducing something from the exterior environment into the house." Shortly after, in 1951, he declared: "We have left behind us the negative phase of contemporary architecture that wavered between the imitation of foreign solutions, and an arid and inexpressive functionalism, to create with originality and flexibility, in harmony with our needs and natural, geographic and human environment." Finally, in 1957 he claimed that: "The natural and human environment was advantageously employed to acclimatize the procedures laid out by international

architecture . . . Awnings were established as the protection against the violence of rain and sun; louvers reappeared, after having been replaced by glazed openings, inappropriate for the country's climate; terraces and balconies proliferated . . . and it is from this skillful synthesis between what is foreign and what is national that Cuban architecture's specificity comes. Considering to what extent the modern movement has



Fig. 11. **Richard Neutra**, *De Schulthess House*, Havana, 1956. The transparency of the garden facade suggests a total integration of the building with the tropical garden designed by Brazilian Roberto Burle Marx

progressed in Cuba in the past decade, it is possible to claim that Cuban architecture is on the verge of reaching the first rank alongside its Latin American colleagues."<sup>24</sup>

THUS, during a period of nearly thirty years, certain elements and solutions prevailed in Cuban architecture, such as interior patios and porticos, balconies, terraces and bay windows to capture winds at best; the balanced incorporation of indoors and outdoors; vertically proportioned windows with adjustable louvers, protected by wide eaves; brise-soleils; jalousies

in various materials, often wood or ceramics; the use of geometrical and abstract patterns in vividly colored glass to soften light; sloping roofs to ease the draining of rain water, with raised parts for the hot air's exit and cross-ventilation; the use of furniture inspired by colonial heritage, such as wicker armchairs, that allowed for the air's circulation; similarly, folding screens and panels creating virtual and mobile divisions to ventilate living rooms; murals of 'criollos' themes. The exuberant sensuality generally associated with the tropics was also present, created by the dense vegetation of patios and gardens, the intense colors and rough textures of walls, and the bold and sinuous curves of slabs, planters, balconies, swimming pools and other elements. Echoing what the movement's main theoreticians had voiced, most realizations were equal to the most advanced works at international level, creatively combining collective memory and local tradition on the one hand, and modern requirements and the international avant-garde on the other, in a totally cultural perspective, and without being markedly chauvinist.

Fig. 12. **Antonio Quintana**, *Medical Insurance building*, Havana, 1956–1958. The offices in the lower portion of the building are protected against the sun by brise-soleils on the Western façade, and the tower block of apartments conveys a potent sense of chromatism, of reds and purples, and a certain dynamism due to the balconies' composition



THE REVOLUTIONARY GOVERNMENT that came to power in 1959 established new policies that marked the 1960s and completely reframed both architectural practice and thinking. Nearly all of the modern movement's most famous Cuban figures left the country. However, some significant regionalist works were erected in an isolated way when occasionally creativity was heavily encouraged, as was the case with the National Arts Schools previously mentioned or with the National Agriculture Headquarters, designed by Roberto Gottardi (1967–1971). But the gradual politicization of all the components of Cuban society caused extreme nationalism and populism, which ultimately led to denying whatever had been achieved previously, as shown by a document, approved in 1967, which ignored the excellence of Latin American regionalist achievements by categorically stating: "the North American penetration in Latin American architectonic expressions can be observed in . . . the loss of the colonial tradition, because it crushes the potential development of a sense of continuity of the traditional character."

IN ARCHITECTURAL PRACTICE, a trend had already appeared which, in place of the colonial tradition formed and rooted in four centuries of Spanish presence on the island, claimed to recover a so-called pre-Columbian native culture that in reality had left no noticeable traces in the country's architecture, but was felt to be initially 'uncontaminated' by the colonizers. This form of trite and ostentatious 'indigenism' reinstated the use of 'guano' roof constructions—of dried palm leaves—typical of basic native dwellings but outlawed centuries earlier due to the fire hazard caused by the highly inflammable material. Some works, essentially meant for tourism, were built in compliance with the 'neo-taíno'\* aesthetics. But the new circumstances—in particular the radical change in national priorities and the gradual introduction of heavy prefabricated systems, closed and rigid, imported from Eastern Europe—left no room for a modern and profound regionalist thought and therefore definitely put an end to that specific architectural genre.

THE HIGH QUALITY and outstanding cultural significance of the realizations of the thirty years during which the modern regionalist ideas developed in Cuba make that movement one of the most brilliant moments of Cuban architecture. With their works, Cuban architects substantiated Ernesto Rogers's statement: "Modernity does not contradict tradition, it is actually the most developed instance of tradition itself."<sup>25</sup>

And, pushing the point further still, they proved that tradition can be the most developed instance of modernity.

\* The 'taínos' were native populations that lived on the island when Christopher Columbus landed in 1492. —TRANS.

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### NOTES

- 1 For a more detailed analysis of the different aspects related to the assimilation of modernity in Cuba and of the different stylistic vocabularies that followed each other during the first decade of the twentieth century, see Eduardo Luis Rodríguez, *La Habana. Arquitectura del Siglo XX* (Barcelona: Blume, 1998).
- 2 Some significant examples of this twentieth century thirst for modernity are the introduction of the train in 1837, of the typewriter around 1880, of the telephone in 1881, of the public electrical lighting service in 1889, of cinema in 1897—just over a year after the first exhibition by the Lumière brothers—and of the automobile in 1898. In architecture, two major transformations were the introduction of neo-classicism and steel structures.
- 3 Cuba's War of Independence ended in 1898 after the short war between Spain and the United States on the Cuban territory. It led to the resounding victory of the latter, who then established an intervention government on the island, active until May 20, 1902, when the Republic was proclaimed. Other Latin American liberation processes had started and come to an end several decades earlier.
- 4 One of the first works to use precisely the modern movement's formal vocabulary with interesting results was completed in 1931. It was a building block of apartments designed by Pedro Martínez Inclán and built in the central district of El Vedado.
- 5 Some outstanding architects of the modern movement's rationalist stage were Sergio Martínez, Mario Colli, Max Borges (father) and especially Rafael de Cárdenas, who very early on built several absolutely modern houses that also introduced, albeit shyly, some elements of climatic adjustment. Their works can be found in Eduardo Luis Rodríguez, *The Havana Guide, Modern Architecture, 1925–1965* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000).
- 6 Leonardo Morales (1887–1965) graduated in architecture from the University of Columbia, New York, in 1909 and, when he returned to Cuba, became the country's most important practitioner. On that subject, see chapter "La renovación clasicista de Leonardo Morales" in Rodríguez, *La Habana. Arquitectura del Siglo XX*.
- 7 Leonardo Morales, *La casa cubana ideal. Discurso de recepción leído por el Sr. Leonardo Morales, miembro electo de la Sección de Arquitectura, en la sesión celebrada el día 25 de noviembre de 1934. Academia Nacional de Artes y Letras* (Havana: Imprenta Molina y Cía., 1934).
- 8 *Ibid.*, 5–6.
- 9 *Ibid.*, 10–11.
- 10 Alejo Carpentier, *Prologó a Ecue Yamba O* (Havana: Editorial Arte y Literatura, 1977), 11.
- 11 *Social* (Havana: April 1936).
- 12 Leonardo Morales, "Como debemos orientar una casa para hacerla fresca," *Arquitectura* (Havana: December 1937): 24–26.
- 13 "El Primer Congreso Nacional de Arte," *Arquitectura* (Havana: February 1939): 66.

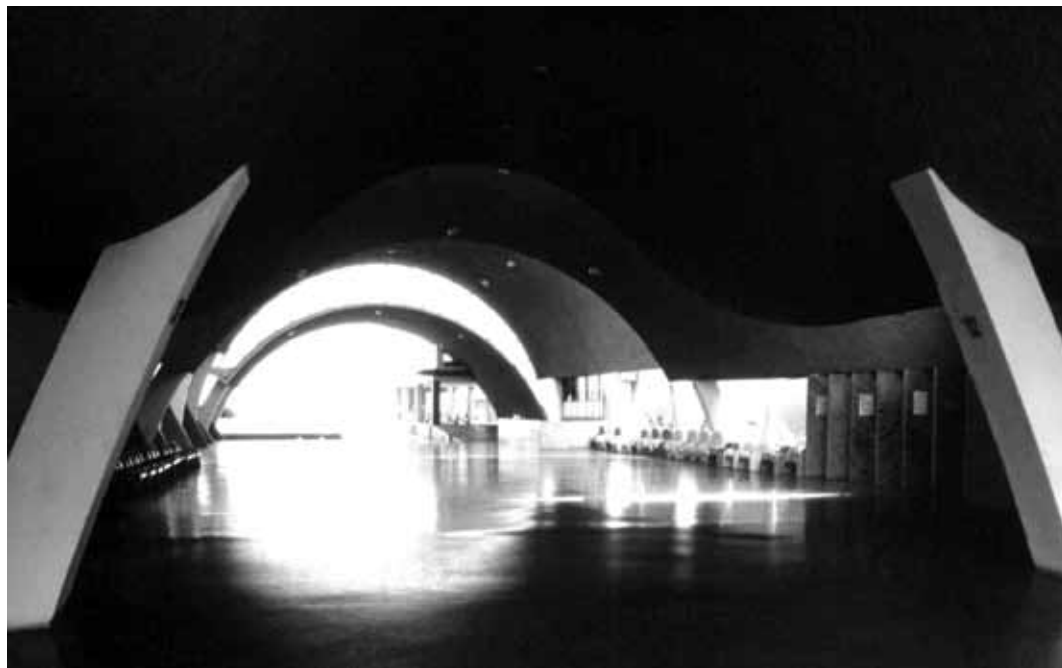


Fig. 13. **Max Borges Recio**, *Nautical Club*, Havana, 1953. As sensuous as the Tropicana Cabaret by the same architect (see *Docomomo Journal* 31: 12) the Club also holds references to the sea, adjacent to the building and the omnipresent protagonist of the local landscape culture

- 14 Manuel de Tapia Ruano, "Tendencia de la Arquitectura Contemporánea en Cuba," *Arquitectura* (Havana, November 1948): 286.
- 15 Reynaldo Estévez and Samuel Biniakowski, "Habla José L. Sert," *Espacio* (Havana: July/October 1953): 18–24. The *Espacio* journal was edited by the architecture students of the University of Havana.
- 16 "Franco Albini opina..." *Espacio* (Havana: May/August 1955): 10–11.
- 17 Ricardo Porro, "El sentido de la tradición," *Nuestro Tiempo* 16 (Havana: 1957).
- 18 Armando Maribona, "No debe convertirse La Habana en sucursal arquitectónica de Miami. Lo que opina el arquitecto Emilio del Junco," *Arquitectura* (Havana: September 1956): 404–06.
- 19 Eugenio Batista, "La casa cubana," *Artes Plásticas* 2 (Havana: 1960): 4–7.
- 20 Besides Batista, the other architects outstanding for their search for a regionalist and modern architecture—albeit in different ways and with different results—were Mario Romañach, Frank Martínez, Ricardo Porro, Manuel Gutiérrez, Nicolás Quintana, Antonio Quintana, Emilio del Junco, Max Borges Recio, Henry Griffin, Alberto Beale, and the firms Cristófol and Hernández Dupuy, Guerra and Mendoza, Arroyo and Menéndez, Cañas Abril and Nepomechie, and Gómez Sampera and Díaz.
- 21 Letter by Eugenio Batista to his daughter Matilde—an architecture student at the time—, dated March 9, 1976.
- 22 On the history and vicissitudes of the National Art Schools, see John Loomis, *Revolution of Forms. Cuba's forgotten Arts Schools* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999), as well as the present issue's article on the subject.
- 23 In 1945, Richard Neutra visited Havana for the first time and gave a lecture called "Life styles." In 1956 in the same city's suburbs, the house of Alfred de Schullthess was completed, which is a masterpiece of modern regionalism designed by the Austro-American architect.
- 24 The three quotations of Joaquín Weiss can be found respectively in his books *Arquitectura cubana contemporánea* (Havana: Cultural S.A., 1947), 11; *Medio siglo de arquitectura cubana* (Havana: Imprenta Universitaria, 1951), 39; *La arquitectura de las grandes culturas* (Havana: Editions Minerva, 1957), 411–12.
- 25 Ernesto Rogers, *Esperienza dell'architettura* (Milan: Giulio Einaudi Editore, 1958), 105.