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Author(s): Federica Zanco, Marguerite Shore and Lynda Klich
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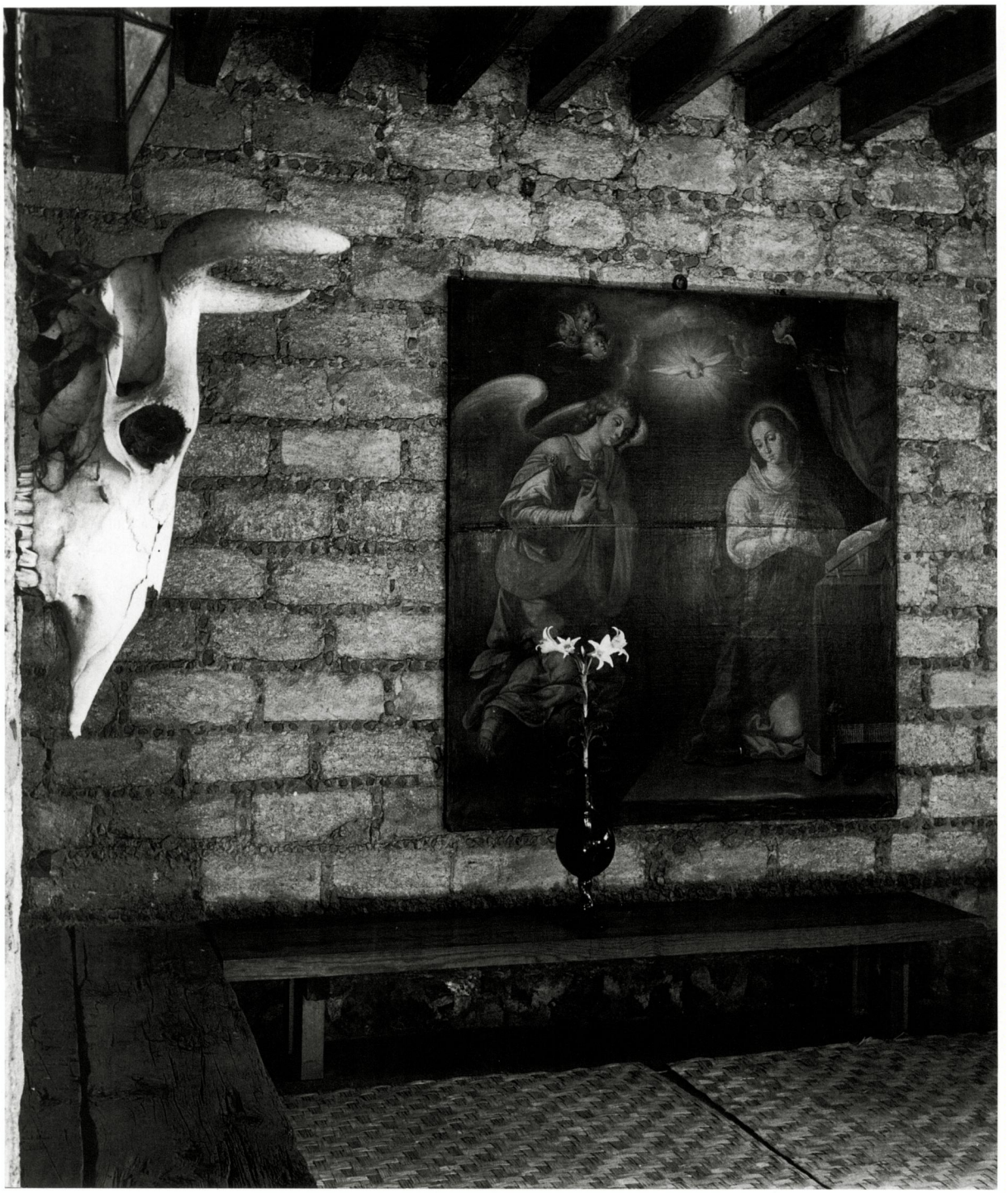


fig. 1
Barragán/Ortega House, Calle Francisco Ramírez 20, Mexico City, 1940–43. Sunken loggia. Photograph by Armando Salas Portugal.

INWARD OUTWARD: BARRAGÁN IN TRANSITION

Federica Zanco
Translated by Marguerite Shore and Lynda Klich

Federica Zanco lives and works in Basel, Switzerland. She has a degree in architecture from the Venice University Institute of Architecture, where she also earned a Ph.D. in architectural composition. She has served on the editorial staffs of the publications *Ottagono* and *Domus*. She is founder and director of the Barragan Foundation, in Birsfelden, Switzerland, and has curated the exhibition "Luis Barragán: The Quiet Revolution" (Vitra Design Museum, Weil am Rhein, Germany, 2000; and Palacio de Bellas Artes, Mexico City, 2003) and served as editor of the accompanying publication. She is also a contributor to several architecture and design magazines.

The architect Luis Barragán Morfín (1902–1988) won international acclaim in the course of a career that spanned from the 1920s to the 1980s. Over the decades Barragán passed through a number of discrete phases that culminated in a mature period beginning in the late 1940s when he started work on the Jardines del Pedregal housing development in Mexico City. The goal of this essay is to reveal the connections between the early part of his career and his mature period by considering some of Barragán's less well-known projects, undertaken in the late 1930s and early 1940s, especially his first house-garden in the Tacubaya neighborhood of Mexico City (fig. 1). Together, these projects can be viewed as transitional works: they combine many of the elements the architect had developed in the formative stages of his career and, at the same time, contain the seeds of the masterpieces he created beginning in the late 1940s. The common thread among these transitional projects, in which the artist consistently experimented with the relationship between interior and exterior spaces, is a desire to develop an architecture that is at once contemporary and traditional.

The Career of Luis Barragán

Barragán's early career was marked by two trips abroad that shaped his direction as an architect. Born in the conservative city of Guadalajara to a family with vast land holdings, he completed his studies at a local engineering college. Along with some friends, he took a trip to Europe from 1924 to 1925 that constituted an artistic and architectural awakening.

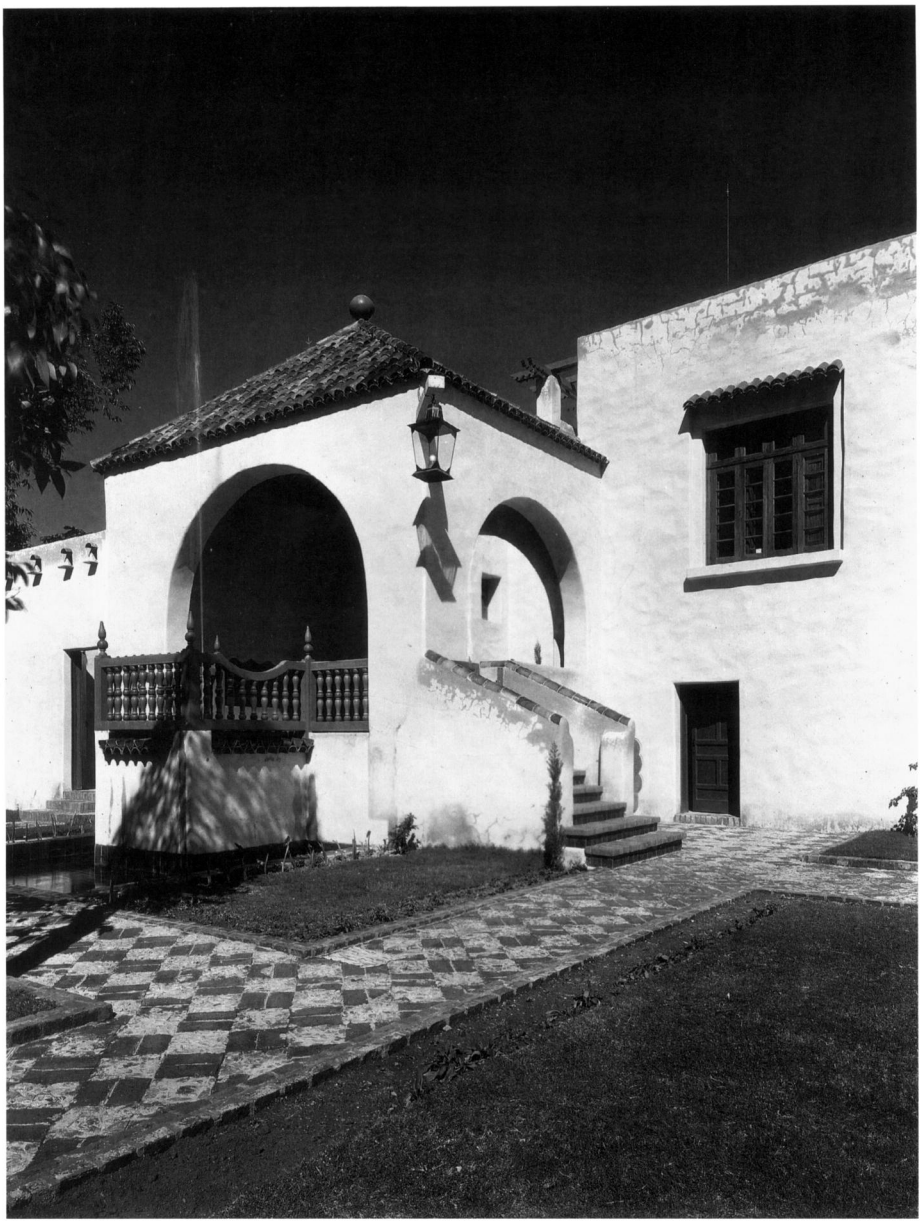


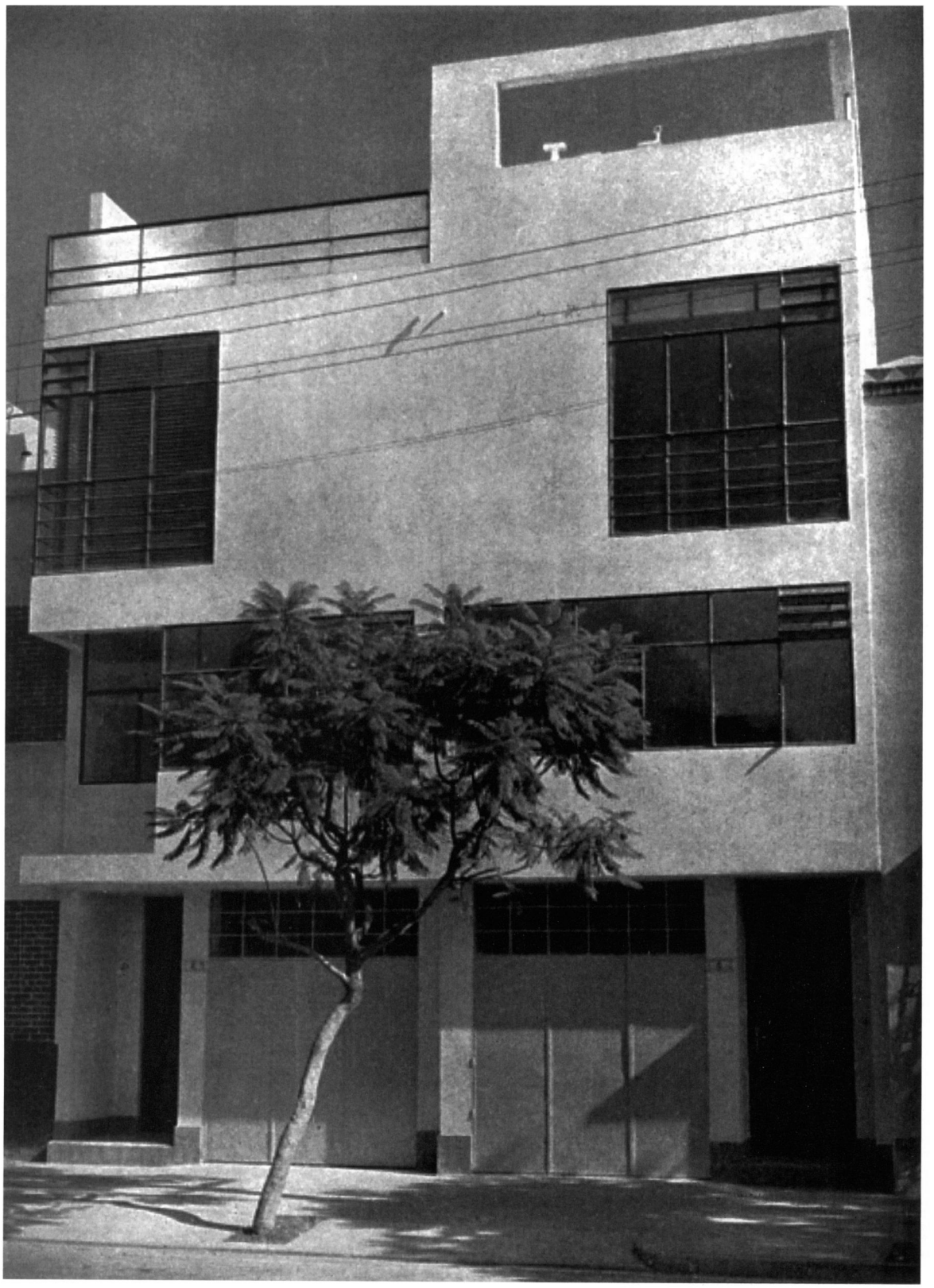
fig. 2
González Luna House, Guadalajara, 1929.

Particularly striking for Barragán were the monumental complex of the Alhambra in Spain and, above all, his sojourn to the Exposition Internationale des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes, held in Paris in 1925. From the cosmopolitan artistic center of Paris, Barragán returned to the provincial reality of his native Guadalajara with fresh ideas, new personal contacts, and many books. Two volumes, in particular, he acquired in several copies to distribute to his friends and young colleagues: *Les jardins enchantés* (The Enchanted Gardens) and *Les Colombières: ses jardins et ses décors* (Colombières: Its Gardens and Its Decorations)—both by Ferdinand Bac, an obscure landscape artist, novelist, dandy, and bon vivant.[1]

fig. 3
Barragán House (after renovation), Chapala, 1931.

After his return to Guadalajara, and under the influence of these European impressions and publications, Barragán began to elaborate a formal language based on a longing for a "Mediterranean identity," which he believed Mexico shared thanks to the legacy of Spanish colonialism. His first experiments, little known residences and small urban dwellings designed for the cultured bourgeoisie of Guadalajara, seem directly derived from Bac's directory of romantic illustrations. Bac evidently supplied Barragán and his young colleagues, including Ignacio Díaz Morales, Rafael Urzúa, and Pedro Castellanos, with a model for spare architectonic compositions articulated with classicizing elements such as balustrades, arched windows and doors, loggias, and window grills (fig. 2). Their style, which became known as the Tapatía school of architecture, proposed an alternative to the ornately decorated historicist pastiches of Beaux-Arts inspiration then in great vogue in post-Revolutionary Mexico.

Little by little, Barragán elaborated a highly personalized language by integrating some of these Mediterranean motifs with vernacular themes and elements familiar to him from their copious presence in the traditional rural constructions of the state of Jalisco. These vernacular elements included roof eaves covered in terra cotta tiles, sometimes glazed; simple wood handrails; small votive pavilions; small triangular ventilation openings extracted from adobe brick walls; and the overall use of piercing, contrasting colors that enliven roughly whitewashed surfaces (fig. 3). Defined space, in the new vocabulary of Barragán, became more and more clean and geometric, almost abstracted in contrast with the powerful shadows created by the deep loggias and balconies.



In 1931, after the death of his father, Barragán made a second trip to Europe, stopping in New York City before crossing the Atlantic. In New York he met the Viennese architect Frederick Kiesler and visited repeatedly with muralist José Clemente Orozco, who had left Mexico in 1927. Orozco's departure from Mexico had much to do with the preference that the Mexican government afforded to Diego Rivera in important mural commissions. Rivera was inspired by an idealization of indigenous culture and prioritized local subject matter over foreign influence, which began to have a negative connotation for Mexican artists; Orozco for his part sought out alternative sources of inspiration, more abstract and innovative. His investigations had a formative influence on the young Barragán.

Enriched by the ideas of his New York contacts, Barragán continued to France, where he visited Bac's gardens of Les Colombières in Menton, as well as Le Corbusier's studio and some of the famous architect's other recent works in Paris. The trip included stays in Germany and Italy and concluded in May 1932. Informed by this direct contact with the European avant-garde, as well as by a collection of important publications (his vast library included books by Le Corbusier, Robert Mallet-Stevens, Adolf Loos, and the catalogues of the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA) exhibitions "Modern Architecture" (1932) and "Bauhaus 1919–1928" (1938)), Barragán began to adopt the principles and formal codes of modernism, filtered through his interest in Mexican architectural and artistic debates.

Barragán returned to work in his native city, where his situation was complicated by having to deal with family affairs, especially the liquidation of the large estate imposed by agrarian reform. He made the decision to move to the capital in 1935, partly to escape the limits of a stagnant cultural and social context. During the last years of the 1930s, Barragán had a busy practice designing residential houses and apartment buildings in Mexico City in a functionalist style derived from the influence of Le Corbusier and other European modernists (fig. 4). But this period also brought the disappointment of finding himself managing, with difficulty and anxiety, the speculative interests of a now-limited clientele, principally derived from his Guadalajaran contacts, a group of people who preferred inexpensive construction and were little interested in his ambitions to incorporate expressive and abstract elements into his works. These clients, according to Barragán, were only interested in "architecture that can be sold and that gives a return on their investment, at a great profit."[2]

fig. 4
House on Avenida Parque México, Mexico City, 1936–37.

At the beginning of the 1940s Barragán made a radical move to separate his own artistic course from the necessities of a clientele of strangers. Intending to profit from the economic opportunity offered by an extremely fluid real estate market, he began purchasing large amounts of land for himself. (This position might seem inconsistent with the ethic of a free

profession, as the latter is understood in Europe or the United States, but it was quite common in twentieth-century Mexico, and still is today.[3]) This decision afforded him independence from both private patrons and public commissions, with their inevitable political complications. It also led to a characterization of Barragán as an autonomous figure, one who pursued aesthetic purism in isolation from the great undertakings in urbanization, infrastructure, and social reform conducted in post-Revolutionary Mexico—a portrayal probably appreciated by the architect himself.

Barragán's achievements as a peculiar real estate developer-cum-architect reached their peak with his work on the design of the exclusive residential development known as Jardines del Pedregal (1945–54). This project completely transformed a vast, uninhabited land (over 1,250 acres) that he had acquired around 1945, and won approval in Mexico and abroad (fig. 5). What came to be appreciated in the climate of post-war culture was the capacity of Barragán's designs to express a renewed national identity, one that was hitched to the train of international modernism but did not succumb to European or North American cultural imperialism. Avoiding literal allusions to the pre-colonial past so dear to the post-Revolutionary narrative, Barragán proposed an architecture that probed the encounter between the vernacular tradition filtered by the colonial Spanish inheritance—or better, the "Latin" tradition in general—and the vocabulary of international modernism. The characteristic concreteness of his constructed forms in his mature works merged with the abstract immateriality of lights, colors, and textures that were diffusely present in popular architecture, and thus in the collective memory of the country.

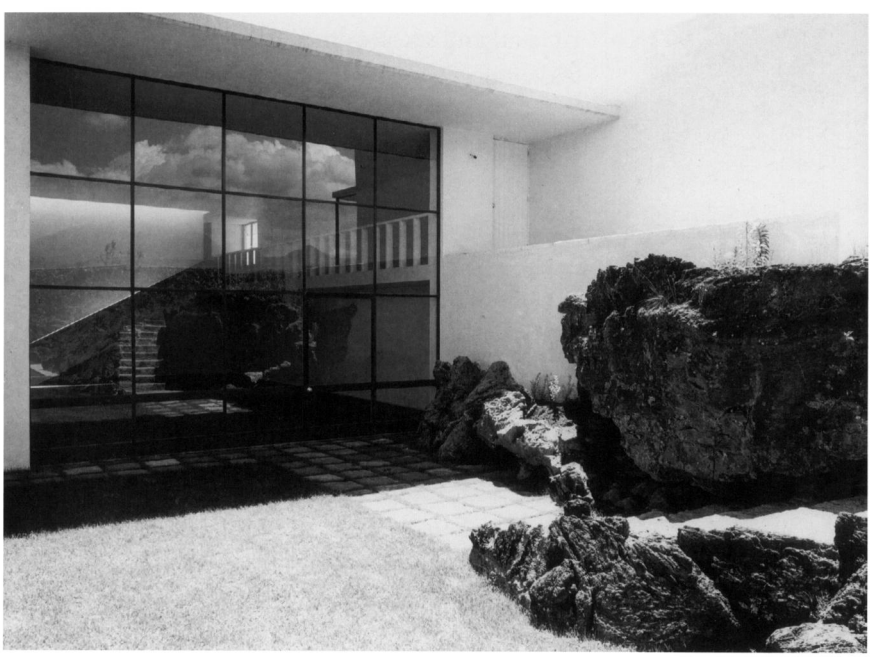


fig. 5
House at Avenida de Las Fuentes 12, 1949–50, Jardines del Pedregal, Mexico City. Photograph by Armando Salas Portugal.

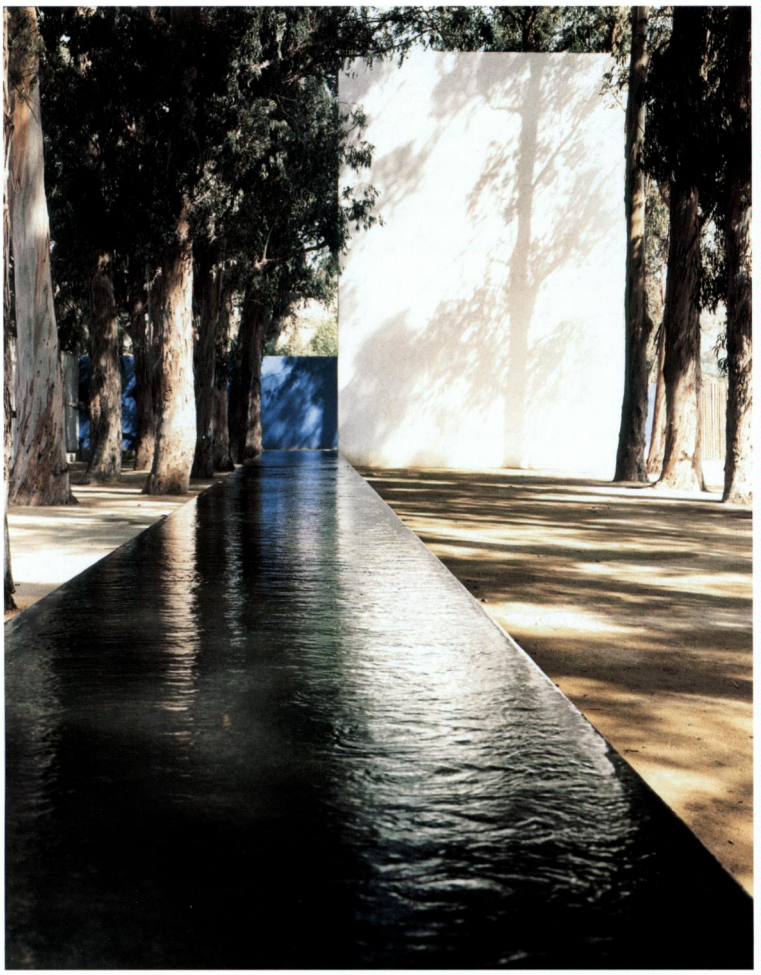


fig. 6
El Bebedero, Las Arboledas, Mexico City, 1959–62. Photograph by Armando Salas Portugal.

In his architecture, which was considered to generate a sense of mysticism, Barragán also sought to integrate simple, sculptural forms with nature. His buildings thus came to be viewed as an artistic expression of intrinsic *mexicanidad* (Mexicanness) that was deeply personal and bound to the specific context, and at the same time was capable of establishing a timeless and universal resonance.

Despite the praise Barragán won in the post-war years, a time of relative obscurity followed, punctuated by some criticism of the more picturesque and sculptural aspects of his work. To some critics, these elements were incongruous with the vast infrastructure and social intervention programs that Mexico still seemed to need. In 1976, however, the monographic exhibition—purely photographic—prepared for MoMA by Emilio Ambasz recovered, justified, and canonized an interpretation of Barragán's work as emotive and autobiographical. Ambasz also edited the companion publication based on a series of conversations with Barragán himself, in which the architect diminished the importance of his early experiments and the influence of international modernism, and limited the focus to the key works of his mature period, such as the Jardines del Pedregal, his own private residence (1947–48), a chapel (1953–60), and further exclusive residential developments like Las Arboledas (1958–63) (fig. 6) and Los Clubes (1961–72). The awarding of the Pritzker Prize in 1980, accompanied by acclaim for "his commitment to architecture as a sublime act of the poetic imagination," definitively consecrated this vision of Barragán's work.[4]

The projects mentioned in this essay—villas, gardens, and the first home the architect designed for himself, all undertaken in the late 1930s and early 1940s—establish an argument against the linearity that is commonly attributed to Barragán's creative trajectory, abetted in part by Barragán himself. Because some of these projects were unrealized, others unpublished or scantily documented and later demolished, they are less

well-known than much of the architect's work. In these transitional projects, however, one can find an intersection of gestures from the architect's past with the iconic and recurrent elements, in gestational form, of his more famous mature work. They offer, then, a means to identify the sources of the change of direction that would take place between Barragán's functionalist buildings in Mexico City in the late 1930s and the projects for which he became internationally known after the Second World War; and they show that these latter works grew out of a selective synthesis of the earlier phases of the architect's career, rather than representing a clean break from his past work. The projects considered here reveal, finally, that the attention to the private aspects of buildings, including intimate spaces for meditation (especially integrated into landscapes and gardens), symbolism, and the harmonic possibilities of interiors and furnishings—features generally attributed to his later work—were already in evidence by the beginning of the 1940s. These elements, so evident when one directly experiences Barragán's work, are associated with a less evident but equally careful attention to the economic and practical demands of construction, probably derived from his direct involvement with the real estate market.

The Transitional Projects

In early December 1939, Barragán, who had been living and working in Mexico City for about four years, moved to Calle Elba 56, one of the functionalist-inspired apartment buildings he designed during this period (fig. 7).[5] He remained in the apartment at Calle Elba for four years. We do not know much about this brief period, except that this time induced a radical change into his ideas and work: from the routine of an architectural practice marked by the lesson of modernism and in service to Mexico City's exponential urban growth, to a conscious and clear choice to use the lands he had purchased to build personal creations that were unencumbered by the outside demands of clients.[6] By doing so, he redeemed a freedom of design that allowed him to explore his ideas for an expressive architecture.

Since his move to Mexico City several years earlier, Barragán had pursued an eminently pragmatic professional practice, concentrating on designing speculative apartment buildings for his Guadalajara-based clientele. The buildings Barragán designed and whose construction he directly managed generally had four or more stories, with flat roofs, strip windows, linear and projecting roof terraces and balconies, and sober facades in artificial stone and plaster. Together, they defined long urban curtains along the main thoroughfares of emerging neighborhoods such as Cuauhtémoc, Roma, Condesa, and Hipódromo. Barragán skillfully integrated these buildings into their urban surroundings with the innovative concave forms of "folded" facades that account for the irregular street edges of the sites (fig. 8).

fig. 7
Apartment houses on Calle Elba, Mexico City, 1939–40.

fig. 8
Painters' studios and apartment house for Lorenzo Garza at Parque Melchor Ocampo 38 and 40, 1939–40, Mexico City.

fig. 9
Luis Barragán's apartment at Calle Elba 56, Mexico City, 1940.

The furnishings of Barragán's own apartment in the Calle Elba building show that the architect was, even during this period, not content to remain within a uniformly functionalist idiom. He furnished the apartment in a simple style that suited the rectilinear, spare, and practical nature of the spaces in the apartment. But rather than selecting modernist, factory-produced furniture of the sort featured in the illustrated magazines that he collected, he relied on forms and techniques tied to the rustic tradition of the Tapatía period, updated in a contemporary key, which he rush-ordered from his own carpenter in Guadalajara (fig. 9). The architect sent drawings for several tables and other pieces, along with precise instructions regarding the quality and dimensions of the rough wooden planks to be used, and a few, but essential, construction details. He asked his friend Díaz Morales, a Guadalajara native and former Tapatía colleague, to monitor the production. The correspondence between the two friends related to this small carpentry project clearly illustrates the importance Barragán gave to the fine craftsmanship of these simple elements. In one letter, he advised: "I absolutely do not want to worry about the expense of having things perfectly executed, in terms of both quality and the dimensions of the wood."[7] He would take these furniture and design elements with him to his subsequent residences, helping to define a consistent approach to the creation of austere interior atmospheres.

Even during the late 1930s, Barragán managed to work on a few commissions that enabled him to explore expressive possibilities that he could not address in the apartment buildings designed for his Guadalajara clients. He designed with particular care two villas, quite different from each other in layout and form. The delicate evolution that occurred from one building to the next seems to embody a first tentative transition from a formal vocabulary derived from the modern movement to the necessity of recuperating the typical forms and signs of tradition.

The first project, for I. Pizarro Súarez (a client about whom very little is known), was completed around the end of 1937 and the first months of 1938 (fig. 10). It was very probably inspired by the work of Richard Neutra, who was shown the house by Barragán during a brief visit to Mexico City. The slender window frames, ample flat plastered surfaces, and metal parapet articulate an intentionally narrow and purified vocabulary. The exterior is composed of clean, roughly cubic elements, including a wide corner window and a balcony that juts out and overhangs the entranceway. The volumetric forms of the building stand starkly apart from the empty surrounding space—a typical suburban yard. The house departs from Barragán's earlier buildings that took into consideration the margins of the plot, and is thus an inversion of the mature style for which he is internationally noted. The fenced outdoor space merges visually with the expansive urban landscape of the recent, upscale neighborhood of the Colonia Lomas de Chapultepec, extending beyond the site.

fig. 10
Pizarro Suárez House, Mexico City, 1937.

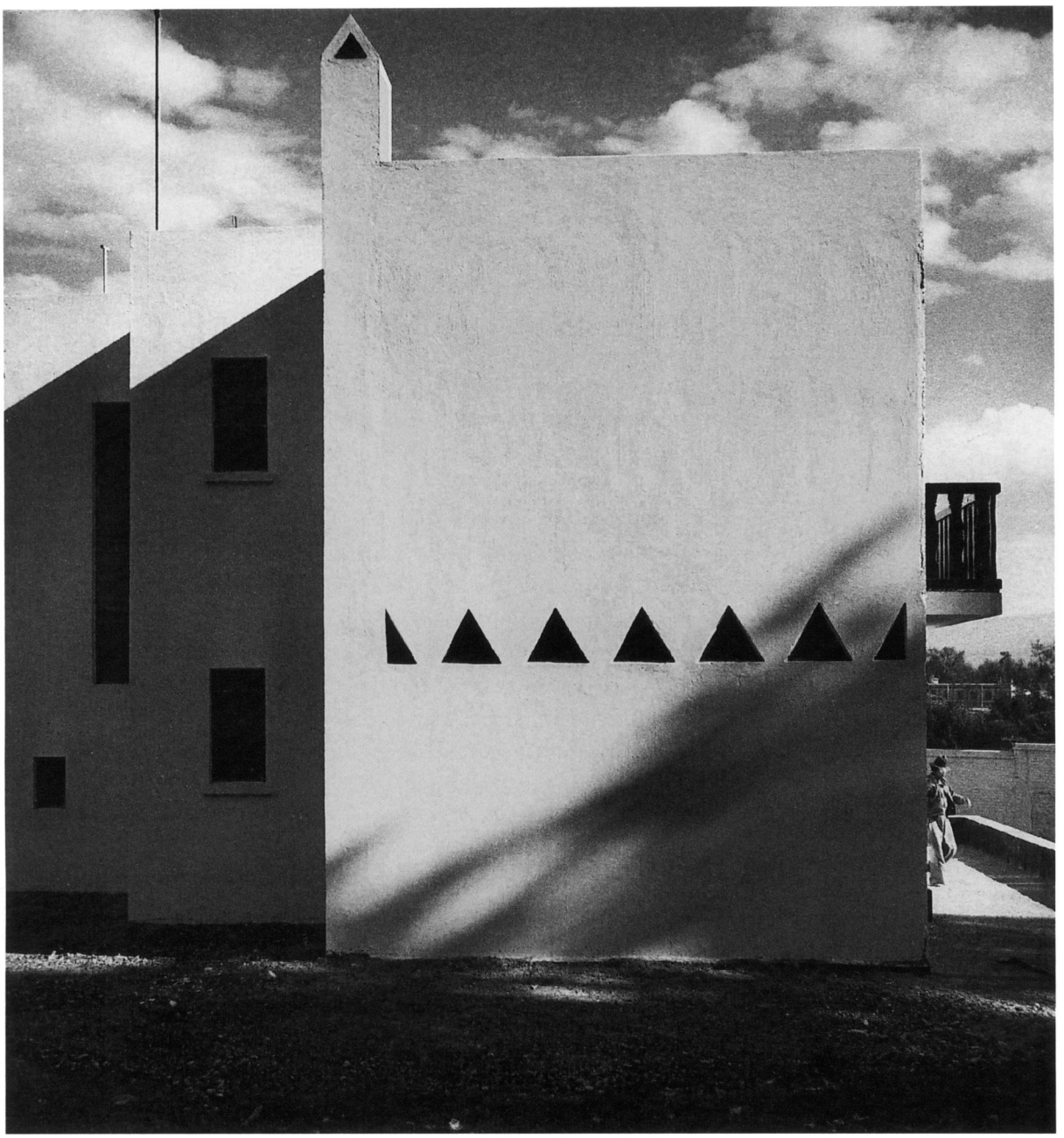


fig. 11
Villaseñor House, Mexico City, 1940.

The second residence, probably completed between 1939 and 1940, was for the client Eduardo Villaseñor, an economist, banker, publisher, and government official (fig. 11). This villa, about which up to now there has been very vague and insufficient information, was in Colonia San Ángel, a picturesque suburban neighborhood. Of this project only a few loose photographs of the exterior remain, probably taken by Manuel Álvarez Bravo. While these photographs are not sufficient to reconstruct the plan entirely, they do attest to a return to (or an underlying continuity in) the elements of the markedly vernacular vocabulary that Barragán had already

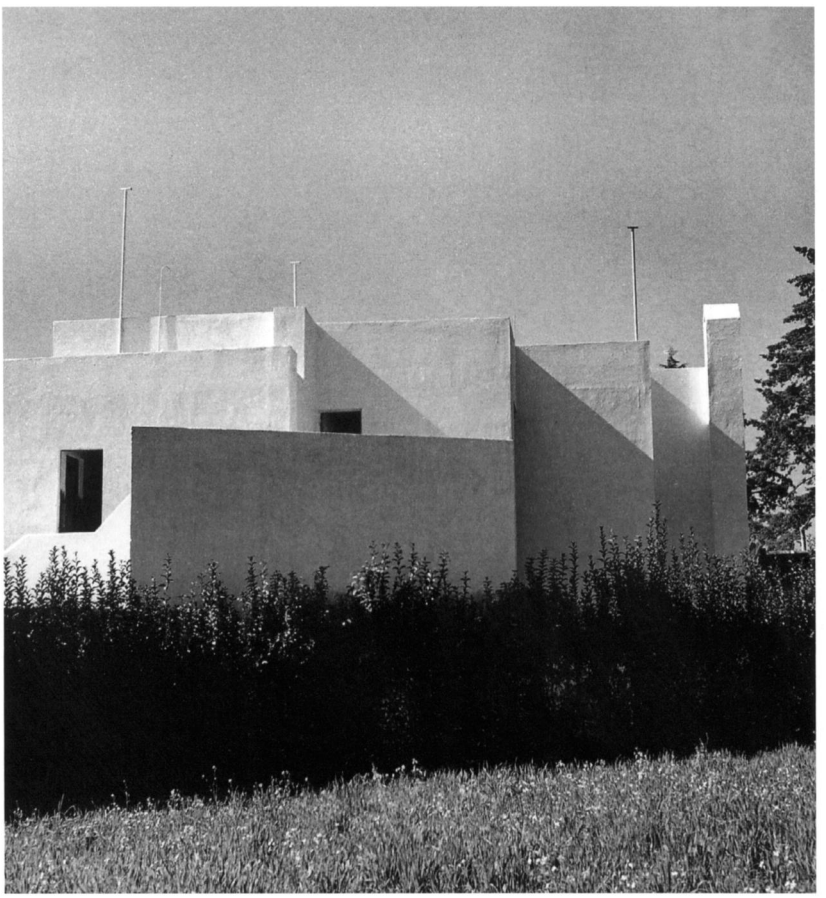
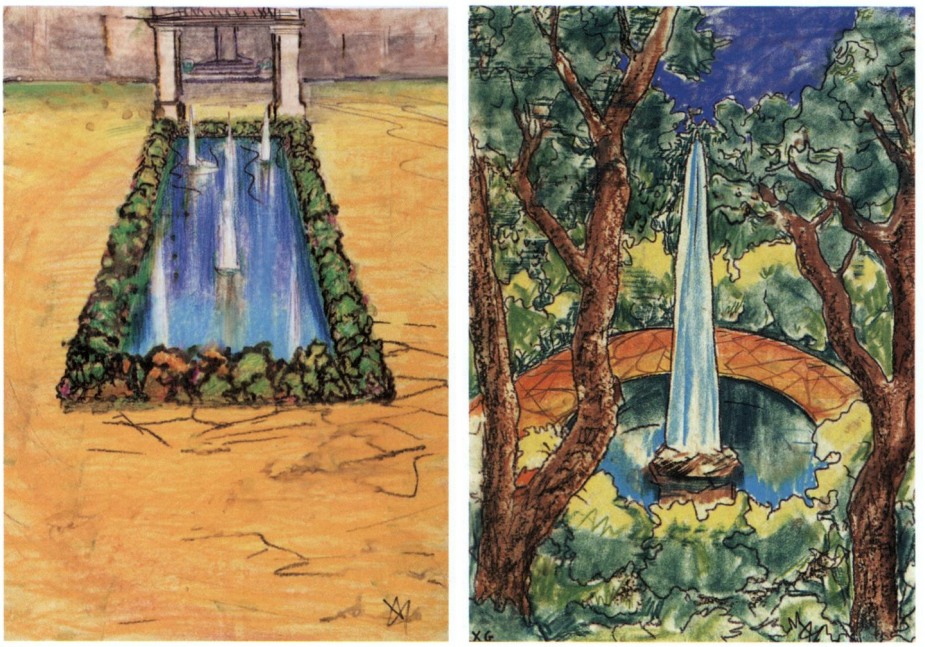


fig. 12
Villaseñor House, Mexico City, 1940.

tried out in youthful projects in Guadalajara, such as the villas realized for Enrique Aguilar (1928), the González Luna family (1929) (fig. 2), and Gustavo Cristo (1929), and for the radical renovation of his own vacation house in Chapala (ca. 1931) (fig. 3). Deep incised triangular holes match the traditional triangular crowning of the chimney, both hearkening back to the vernacular elements the architect had borrowed for his projects in Guadalajara a decade earlier. The photographs reveal that Barragán alternated clear and uniform planes and created precise, deep areas of shadow with a reciprocal recession and shifting of volumes (fig. 12). A long projecting balcony defined by a simple wooden railing facing onto the garden indicates that Barragán probably tried to integrate the structure with the surrounding space.

These two buildings, both evidently relying upon a relatively high budget and ambition, must have assumed a certain importance in Barragán's eyes. Thirty years later, he wanted to send his only copies of these photographs to MoMA, in order to have them included in the 1976 publication by Ambasz. Correspondence between Barragán and MoMA during the preparation of the publication suggests that there was a lengthy and careful editing process related both to the selection of published projects and to the information that was included, through which the architect strove to control such an important presentation of his work.

Another little-known project, while of uncertain date and location, seems logically to belong to the group of works carried out during this transitional period. The remodeling of a garden attached to an existing villa owned by Antonio Bermúdez, at one time a director of the state oil company, Pemex, is known only through remaining drawings, which were signed by the artist Xavier Guerrero, who probably was involved in



figs. 13, 14
Bermúdez Garden, 1944. Drawings by Xavier Guerrero.

the project as a consultant or a collaborator (figs. 13, 14). We do not even know if the project was actually completed, but its design stands out because of its distinctive characteristics. The garden, enclosed around the perimeter by an artificially-aged high wall that completely isolates it from its surroundings, is treated as a clearing, free at the center, and densely planted along the borders. The fountains and decorative elements—including trellises, columns, porticos, and obelisks—that punctuated the space closely connect with Barragan's early works. His usual Mediterranean repertoire seems to have been revived with renewed energy, its themes brilliantly articulated thanks to new solutions and details. In fact, one can recognize the basis for an approach that would be developed in later projects such as the gardens of Avenida San Jerónimo (1943–44) and those of El Pedregal. Although some sources place this project in the late 1940s, the drawings suggest a likely date in the early 1940s—as it is difficult to imagine such a marked return in later times to a more naïve and figurative expressive manner after the start of the vast and visionary Pedregal enterprise, with its sophisticated remodeling of the landscape.[8]

Together, these projects manifest a continuous reflection on the theme of the garden, or more generally, the relationship between interior and exterior. In the villa and city apartment building projects that Barragán elaborated between the mid-1920s and early 1930s, especially in Guadalajara, the construction on the plot left, when possible, only strips for single frontal or lateral flower beds. At the same time, the design work concentrated mainly on the definition of a central or posterior patio, as

well as on a system of terraces and stone paving. Toward the end of the 1930s, in the series of functionalist buildings created in the capital, Barragán concerned himself with creating and integrating open spaces through the skillful articulation of regressions, balconies, and terraces.

Barragán's voyage over the next decade, the 1940s, was characterized by a progressive movement from attention to projections toward a better equilibrium between interior and exterior, as well as innovative ways of organizing open spaces and enclosing traditional rooms. He came up with new ways of relating patio elements and hybrid interior zones (loggias, stone paving, interior gardens, and terraces) to the natural context (even if urban) and the climate in which he was working. The definitive step came with the realization of his first house-garden.

The House-Garden in Tacubaya

Díaz Morales recalled that in 1939 Barragán announced: "I don't want to continue to depend on clients, I want to be my own client."[9] In 1940 he began acquiring a patchwork of properties in Tacubaya, a working-class neighborhood in Mexico City located at the edge of the Chapultepec forest. He remodeled some preexisting residences and reorganized the parcels into larger plots, some of which he sold. The remaining portion constituted a fecund terrain of experimentation where, between 1941 and 1943, Barragán oversaw the creation of the first residence that he specifically designed for himself and the vast garden surrounding it. The house-garden was the first project that allowed him the freedom from clients and landowners he desired. There he could synthesize and express the basic ideas that would define the masterpieces from his mature period. An exquisitely individual, private, almost dreamlike experience, the house-garden is a contradictory jumble of objects and symbols that reveal the extent of Barragán's creative potential. Like all dreams, this work was destined to be forgotten soon, overshadowed by the more consistent and "tidy" images of Barragan's second and definitive dwelling and attached studio, realized in an adjacent plot between 1947 and 1948, a project that was consciously conceived, presented, and promoted as a permanent manifesto of his architecture.

The first house, into which he moved in early October 1943, was carved out of the remodeled preexisting core of a simple and small vernacular structure already on the site.[10] The most rustic and rural characteristics, such as the rough plaster exterior walls, were maintained and even accentuated, almost as if Barragán had rediscovered the very essence of a link to a local and permanent tradition that was immune to the heady modernization of the surrounding city. At the same time, the house's blocky and spare forms suggest a dialogue with the now unavoidable lesson of the European avant-garde.

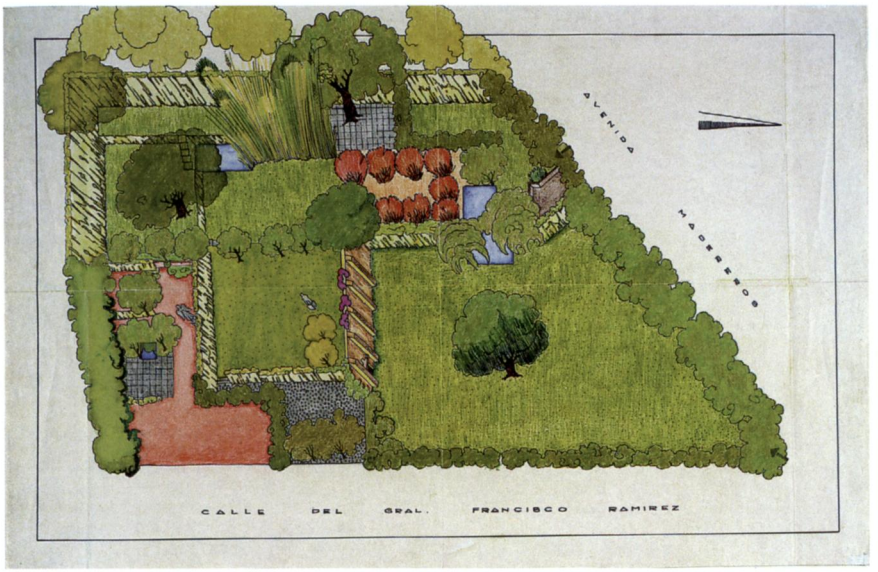


fig. 15
Gardens on Calzada Madereros, Mexico City, 1940–43.

The decision to live in the house was probably not made in advance, but evolved over the course of the entire operation. The architect seems to have completed the structure in stages, beginning with a modest body, most likely on one floor. Barragán even downplayed the importance of the building; in his correspondence with his friend Díaz Morales, he referred to it as nothing more than a "*casita*" (little house).[11] He gradually raised, expanded, developed, and treated the house almost as if it were a part—albeit volumetric and solid—of the vast and highly compartmentalized gardens, which clearly constituted the most spectacular and far-reaching aspect of the entire project (fig. 15).

In the garden, Barragán created a series of open and closed spaces, on different levels and with varied shapes and characteristics, resulting in a system of unique but related private and secluded areas that give an overall structure to the terrain. He incorporated aspects of the preexisting space, which was formerly used as a sand quarry and was characterized by trenches, massive containment walls, passageways, and galleries. He created reflecting pools, foreshortened perspectives, and clearings, added statues, and built new walls to make an expanding series of contained spaces. With new construction, found objects, and the integration of various original aspects into the general development of the site, he produced unexpected sequences that evoke a surrealist-inspired interior landscape.[12]

In the residence, both the covered exterior areas, such as the loggias, and those open to the sky, such as the terraces, patios, and flat roofs, became part of the progressive linking of horizontal planes, positioned at different levels, with fragmented spaces that characterized the overall appearance of

the property. Barragán approached each of the articulated spaces with concern for movement between the individual parts of the complex: from room to room or level to level, whether covered or uncovered, interior or exterior. The result is a modular series, articulated above all by thresholds and transitions. Carefully chosen forms, materials, and objects attain an expressive quality and move beyond entirely practical considerations of physical separation or passage between interior and exterior.

By conceiving the space in this way, Barragán referred to the manners and customs of rural and provincial habitation, where ample rooms looking out on a patio guarantee privacy from the street and protection from inclement weather. Loggias, terraces, passages, and balconies, in turn, develop a system of spaces for living and repose (fig. 16). They are not necessarily limited by closed volumes, but instead are capable of interacting—even if in distanced and protected fashion—with the exterior setting. House and garden are correlated, private, and introverted systems, totally controllable compared to the chaos of the street and the city, which remain distant on the other side of the containment walls.

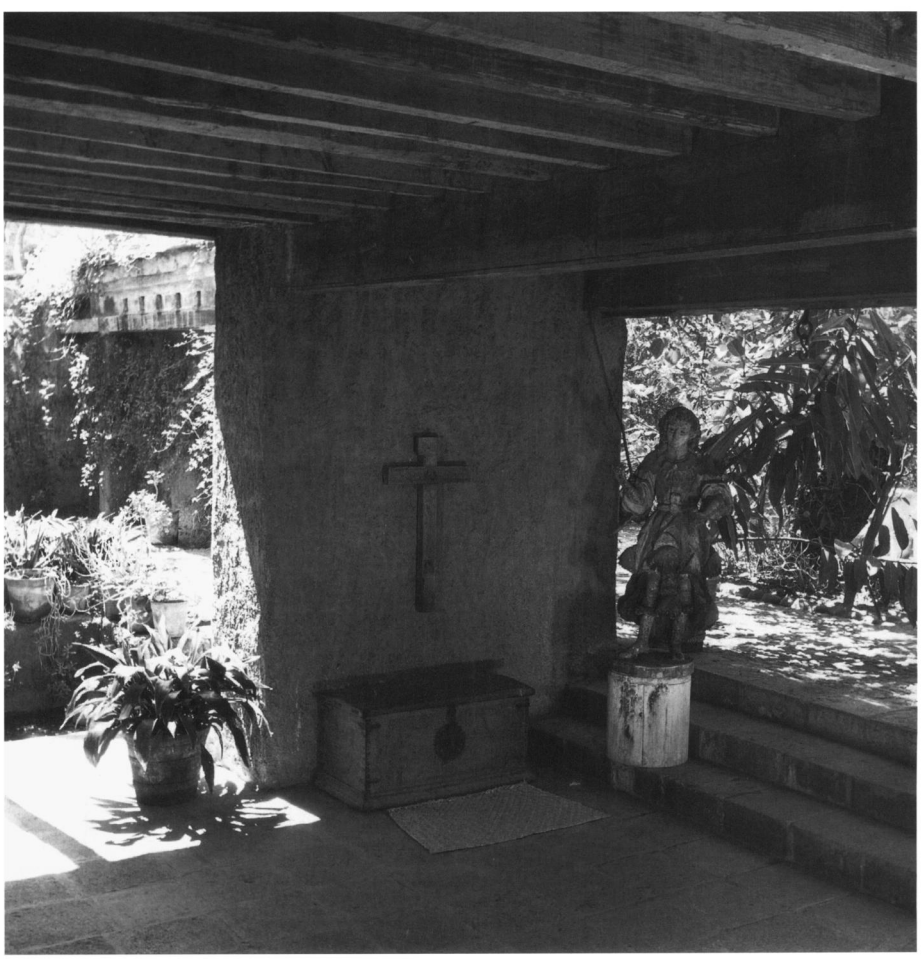


fig. 16
Barragán/Ortega House, Calle Francisco Ramírez 20, Mexico City, 1940–43. Sunken loggia. Photograph by Armando Salas Portugal.

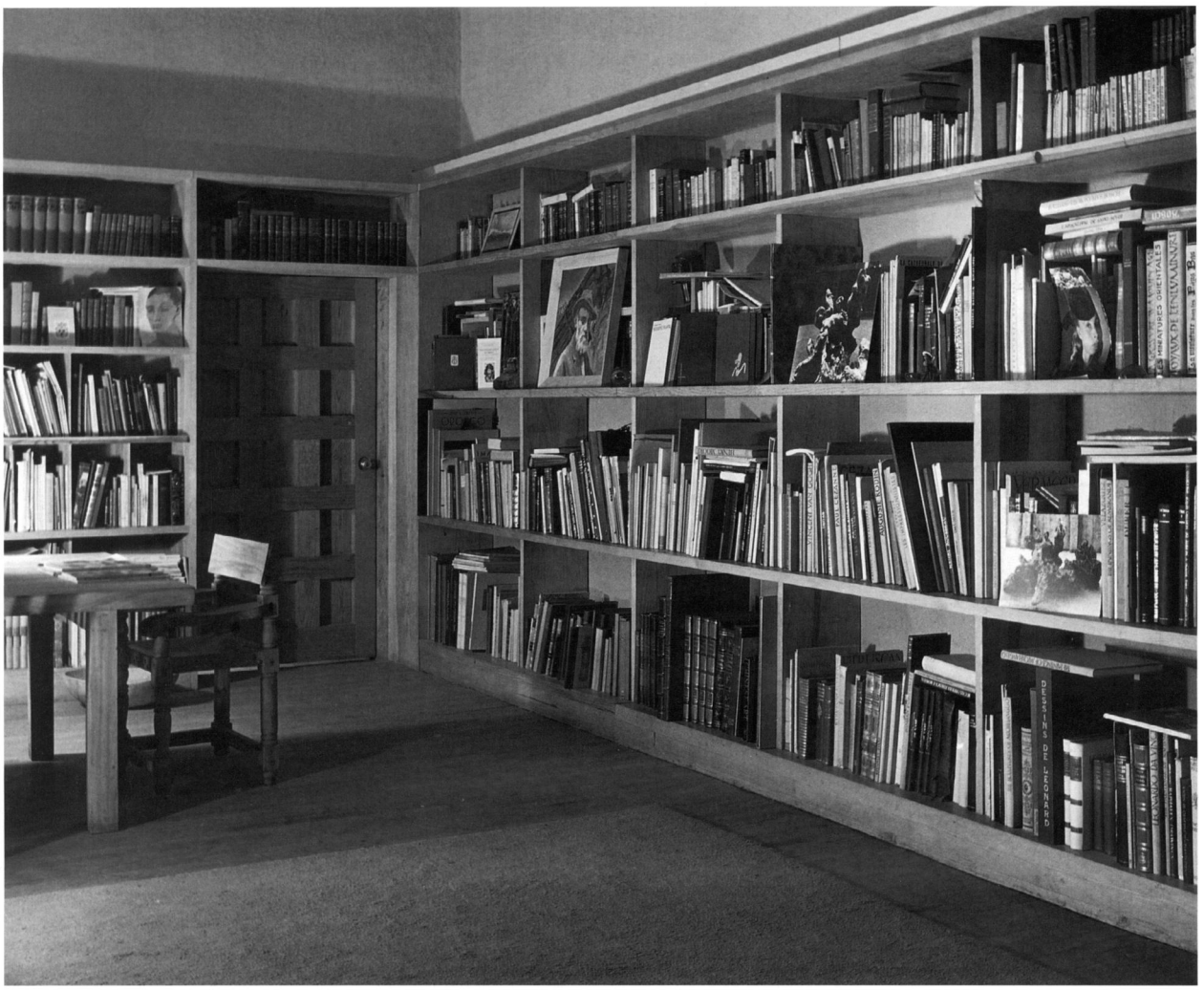


fig. 17
Barragán/Ortega House, Calle Francisco Ramírez 20, Mexico City, 1940–43. Library. Photograph by Armando Salas Portugal.

In the domestic interiors, the furnishing elements—both fixed and moveable—include pieces made earlier for the Calle Elba apartment, created *ad hoc* and completed by others with Barragán's direction. For example, the supporting unit of solid and regular shelving in the imposing library—Barragán's persistent metaphorical representation of the cultivated man—constitutes a repertory of rectilinear elements (fig. 17). Carpentry details for furnishings, doors, and windows echo the modularity of the complex as a whole. He would later transfer furnishing elements, which included the library's sturdy unpainted wooden shelving, simple work tables, and massive lecterns of ecclesiastic inspiration, to the second house-studio built on the site in 1947–48. He also would replicate or adapt them, with very few variations, for subsequent private residential projects.

The unifying quality of the simply styled, built-in wood furnishing and details extended into the architecture itself. The decorative objects, carefully selected to enliven the available spaces, were therefore invested

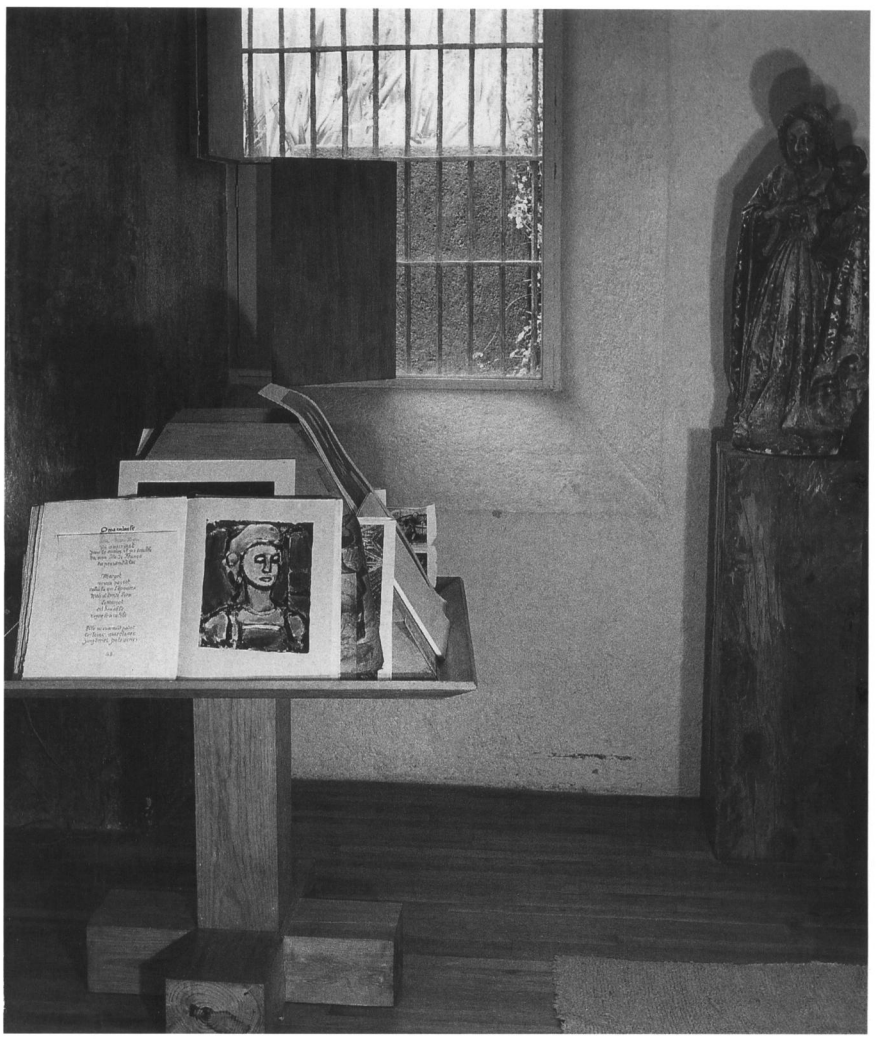
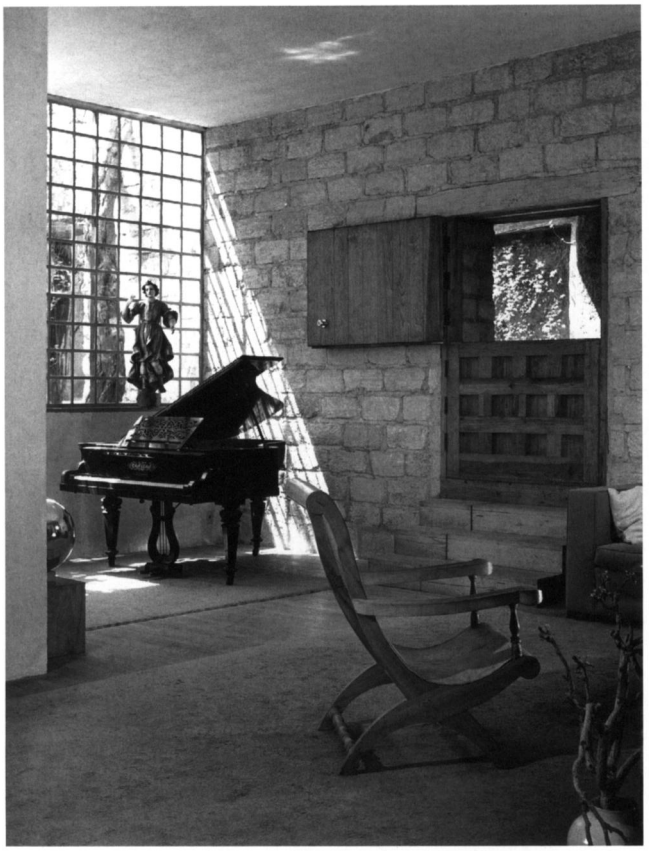
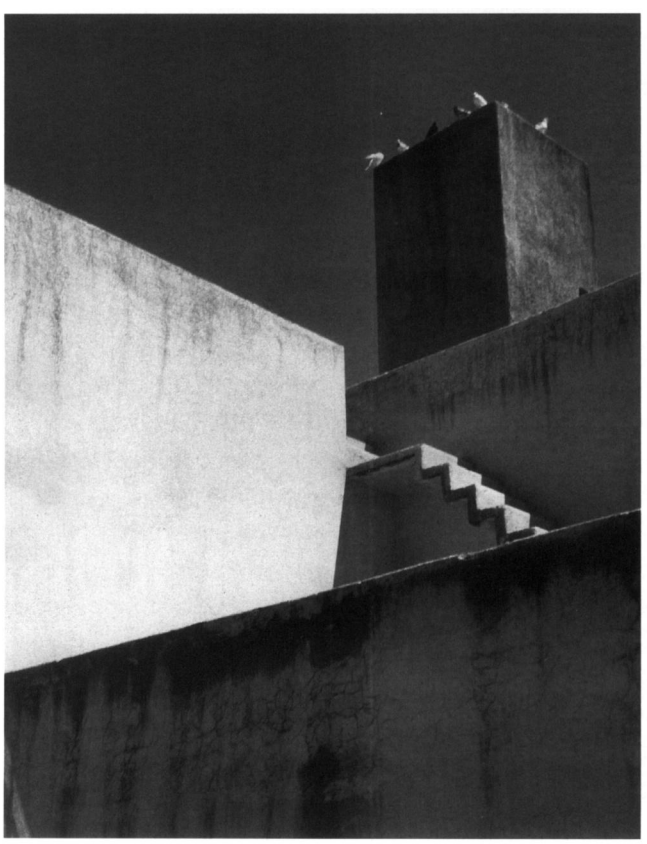


fig. 18
Barragán/Ortega House, Calle Francisco Ramírez 20, Mexico City, 1940–43. Music room. Photograph by Armando Salas Portugal.

with a special expressive role (fig. 18). Some, in particular, had a symbolic-religious character and highlighted the metaphysical aspects of the space, while others are more markedly worldly or domestic. For example, Barragán organized and installed the deep loggia facing onto the paved patio almost like an open-air chapel. A Corinthian capital salvaged from demolition work in a church, an ancient crucifix, various sculptures from the colonial era, and some reproductions of classical sculptures all contributed in substantial fashion to creating the feeling of reverie and surprise that was so strongly recommended by Bac, Barragán's old maestro.[13] Always, Barragán tied these objects to a sense of belonging to a timeless past, and they, in turn, stripped his structure of the moralizing positivism of the modern movement.

The building nonetheless makes dense allusions to the formal repertory of modernism, such as geometric volumes and flat roofs, and to such characteristically modernist concerns as technical details and functional





comfort. Indeed, he combined and merged these qualities with traces of the preexisting construction and its traditional structures in adobe and local stone. The uneasy formal and functional integration between past and present did not seem to constrain Barragán at all. Nor did he hesitate to incorporate possible additions, extensions, and insertions of elements, such as large glass industrial windows, that, to all appearances, are extrapolated from the functionalist vocabulary that he had apparently absorbed and from which he freely drew (fig. 19).

Barragán collected and installed religious or secular objects of reference that in some way seemed significant to him and integrated them freely into the house. He juxtaposed a projecting linear stairway of Corbusian influence, as well as large window-walls that alternate with deep windows or overlapping double doors, with rustic materials and finishings that evoke the haciendas and colonial monasteries of rural Mexico, rather than the purified vocabulary of the avant-garde (fig. 20). The structure thus assumes a sense of universality, a characteristic that later was essential for establishing the autobiographical interpretation of his work that made it emblematic of the Mexicanist canon established after 1945.

From an ideological and chronological standpoint, the Tacubaya house-garden bridges two significant and apparently antithetical moments in Barragán's career: the creation of the series of functionalist buildings in the late 1930s, and the apparently sudden abandonment of the modernist language in the masterpieces of his mature period.

fig. 21
Barragán/Ortega House, Calle Francisco Ramírez 20, Mexico City, 1940–43. Walled garden connecting to the inner patio. Photograph by Armando Salas Portugal.

The house-garden's fundamental value as a transitional work has not, heretofore, received the critical attention it merits. At Tacubaya, Barragán articulated the simple, almost "given" structure with heterogeneous design and decorative elements. Though these are less easily identifiable and reproducible than the iconic vertical walls, springs, and fountains that characterize the later works, they reveal a preference for establishing within the structure a figurative and referential universe. The early experiments of the Tacubaya house-garden thus helped him to clarify and refine this strategy, setting in motion surprising developments in his subsequent work. It is not by chance that many of these later projects rely either on the extraordinary sculptural power of the natural elements—volcanic rock, wood accents, and local flora—or on the evocative force of vast, empty, abstract, meditative spaces.

Generally considered a break with his past activity, the project for the Tacubaya house-garden was an attempt to establish a sense of continuity between the different experiences Barragán had addressed since the beginning of his career. The decision to concentrate on the garden—a sort of marginal, "free zone" in terms of ongoing architectural discourse—granted him precisely that degree of freedom he needed in order to reexamine ideas about habitation, which until then had been monopolized by the ideology of the modern. Barragán shifted the ideological basis for his work from the realm of the industrial and functional ethos, which by nature is objective and thus collective, to an exquisitely aesthetic and utterly individual ethos of emotion, one aroused by the private staging of natural and artificial elements (fig. 21). He once stated: "For me, this passion for gardens has been a sort of liberation from many traditional things, because in gardens one can use one's own imagination and this helps to liberate oneself from architectural academicisms and offers much more freedom."[14]

fig. 19 (opposite top)
Barragán/Ortega House, Calle Francisco Ramírez 20, Mexico City, 1940–43. Living room. Photograph by Armando Salas Portugal.

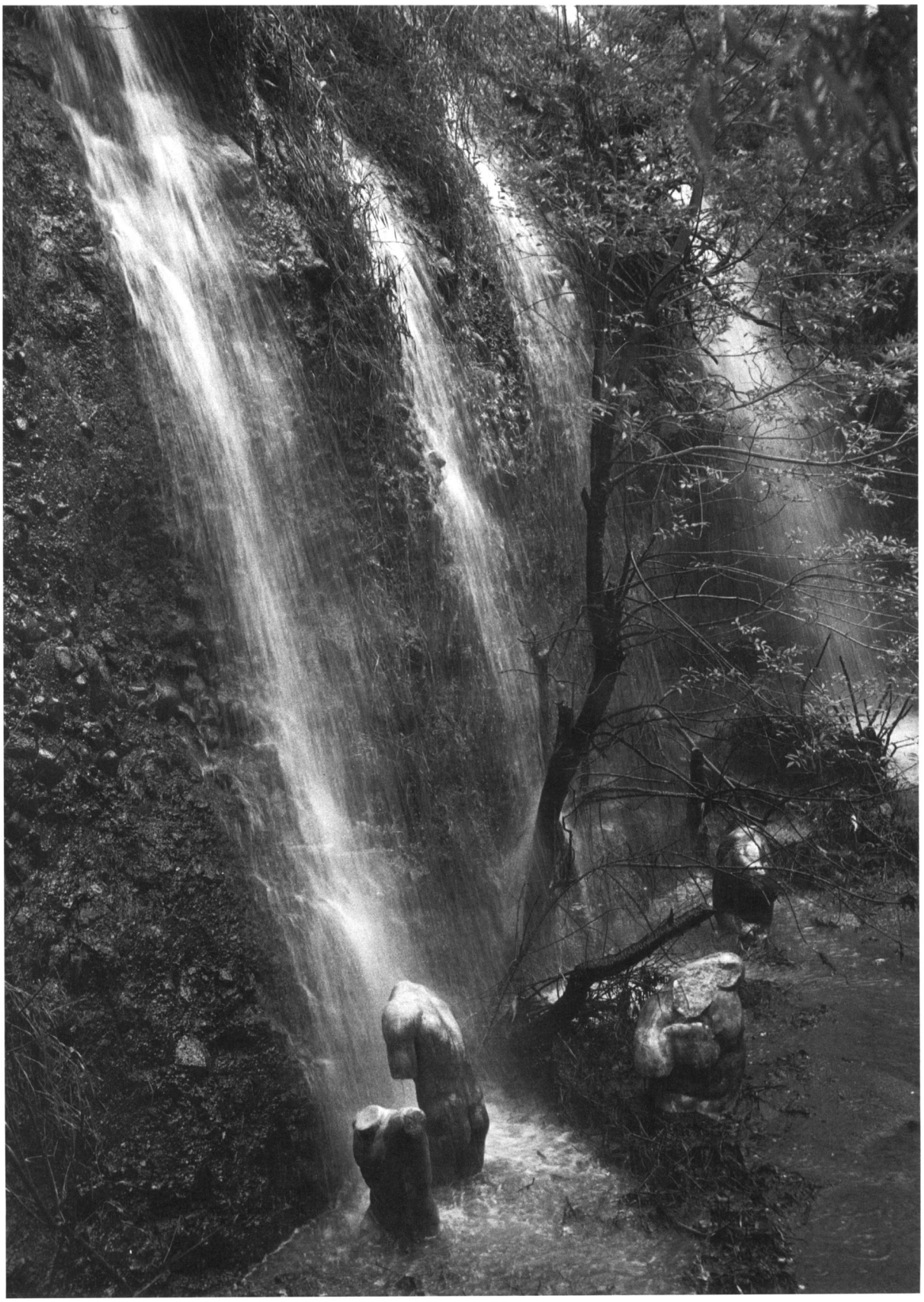
fig. 20 (opposite bottom)
Barragán/Ortega House, Calle Francisco Ramírez 20, Mexico City, 1940–43. Roof terrace. Photograph by Armando Salas Portugal.

fig. 22
Gardens on Avenida San Jerónimo, Mexico City, 1943–44. Photograph by Mary Saint Albans.

Conclusion

Immediately after completing the Tacubaya house-garden, in fact, Barragán embarked on the design of a new garden project, on a triangular lot that he had purchased along the main axis of the Avenida San Jerónimo. Working together with local gardeners and laborers and without guidance from formal plans, he developed the ideas that were already in evidence in his design of the Tacubaya house-garden. Barragán created on this territory a number of diverse environments, taking into consideration the varied natural vegetation and topography (which ranged from large flat zones rich with water to very arid and rocky areas) and existing peasant structures. These elements interacted with the architect's own interventions—a long tree-lined avenue through one wooded zone; a series of reflecting pools; the strategic placement of classical statues; walkways lined with rustic wood railings; a tall stone wall, with imposing wooden portals, running throughout the gardens; and a water conduit animated by cascades (figs. 22, 23). The construction of the Avenida San Jerónimo gardens taught Barragán an important lesson about the integration of architecture with nature: that built

fig. 23 (opposite)
Gardens on Avenida San Jerónimo, Mexico City, 1943–44. Photograph by Mary Saint Albans.



elements inserted into Mexico's timeless organic spaces could easily seem foreign and misplaced. So, he later wrote: "What I have tried to do is make my work there like a leaf fallen from a tree, as if it were the intention of the wind."[15] It is precisely this seamless merging of the natural and the constructed that Barragán achieved at the later Jardines del Pedregal, which was built on a vast ancient lava field, that characterizes the work of his mature period in general.

The Tacubaya house-garden and the Avenida San Jerónimo gardens, both projects Barragán created for himself, became models for the considerably more vast later residential developments and residences meant for the emerging class of successful entrepreneurs and government bureaucrats. Barragán designed the homes so that house and garden, whether on a small or a territorial scale, remained the privileged field of activity for his clients' bourgeois social practices. His construction and occupation of the Tacubaya house-garden enabled him to refine his understanding of the relationship between exterior and interior, the importance of transitional spaces, and the expressive possibilities of decorative elements. The garden, especially, held significance for its direct link with a strongly needed sense of belonging, one that could counter the estrangement induced by the fast pace of modern life. It is the only element of the Tacubaya project that he recognized on the occasion of Ambasz's publication for the MoMA retrospective. In the photos, the residence vanished and only the garden remained. It was an element that, as Barragán himself suggested, essentially allowed him to contain the entire universe.[16]

The transitional projects, the Tacubaya house-garden and the gardens he created at Avenida San Jerónimo, were neither organic nor theoretically structured. The seemingly spontaneous approach that Barragán took to these works attests to a certain continuity in and awareness of his search for a personal and innovative synthesis, to which he would give tangible form toward the end of the 1940s. With the creation of his second, and iconic, house-studio on the Tacubaya site (1947–48) and with his structured plan for El Pedregal he managed to create a manner that, in addition to being recognized as exquisitely his, was communicated, reproduced, and finally exported as both modern and Mexican. Both of these later projects, in terms of their actual importance and their media impact, definitively marked Barragán's subsequent career. Indeed, his own control of images of these later projects shaped perceptions of his work and his design attitude that still prevail today.

NOTES

1. Ferdinand Bac, *Jardins Enchantés, Un Romancero. Avec 36 jardins en couleur* (Paris: Louis Conard Libraire-Editeur, 1925) and *Les Colombières: Ses jardins et ses décors commentés par leur auteur avec 60 planches en couleurs* (Paris: Louis Conard Libraire-Editeur, 1925).
2. Luis Barragán, "Reflexiones sobre la arquitectura moderna en México, DF y EEUU," September 1938; published in Antonio Riggen Martínez, *Luis Barragán: Escritos y conversaciones* (Madrid: El Croquis Editorial, 2000), 20.
3. See the introduction to Max Cetto, *Modern Architecture in Mexico. Arquitectura moderna en México*, trans. D. Q. Stephenson (New York: Praeger, 1961).
4. Jury citation for Barragán's 1980 Pritzker Prize, http://www.pritzkerprize.com/laureates/1980/jury.html, consulted April 2009.
5. A Letter from Barragán to Ignacio Díaz Morales, November 24, 1939, states that within a week he will move "without fail" into the new apartment at Calle Elba 56; Ignacio Díaz Morales archive (IDM), Guadalajara, Mexico.
6. Howard F. Cline, *Mexico: Revolution to Evolution 1940–1960* (London: Oxford University Press, 1962), 103–5, 348; and Diane E. Davis, *Urban Leviathan: Mexico City in the Twentieth Century* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1994).
7. Letter from Luis Barragán to Ignacio Díaz Morales, November 3, 1939, IDM. Various letters between Barragán and Díaz Morales from November 3 to December 14, 1939, include such instructions and comments regarding the execution of the requested pieces of furniture.
8. The collaboration between Barragán and the Cuban furniture designer Clara Porset—Guerrero's wife—began in the very last years of the 1930s, so it is likely that Barragán's friendship with the latter began around this time as well.
9. Cited in Fernando González Gortázar, *Ignacio Díaz Morales habla de Luis Barragán: conversación con Fernando González Gortázar* (Guadalajara: Editorial Universidad de Guadalajara, 1991), 59–60. As for the difficulties he initially encountered, Barragán confided to Díaz Morales that he found himself short of cash, having failed to sell some lots located in the Colonia Cuauhtémoc. Letter from Luis Barragán to Ignacio Díaz Morales, December 13, 1941, IDM.
10. In late September 1943, Barragán told Díaz Morales that he would be moving to a new house within three weeks. Letter from Luis Barragán to Ignacio Díaz Morales, September 24, 1943, IDM.
11. Letter from Luis Barragán to Ignacio Díaz Morales, August 26, 1943, IDM.
12. See the description offered in Salvador Novo, *La vida en México en el período presidencial de Manuel Ávila Camacho* (Mexico City: Conaculta, 1994), 145–46.
13. In addition to the two books by Ferdinand Bac brought back by Barragán to Guadalajara from his trips to Europe, an article by the same author was exceptionally interesting to him: Ferdinand Bac, "L'art des jardins," *Revue des Deux Mondes*, September 15, 1925: 380–97.
14. Cited in Ramírez Ugarte, *Conversación con el Arq. Luis Barragán en la Ciudad de México*, typewritten text, November 1962, full-length version preserved at the Barragan Foundation, Birsfelden, Switzerland; partially translated into English and published in Enrique X. de Anda Alanís, ed., *Luis Barragán: Clásico del silencio* (Bogotá: Escala, 1989).
15. Luis Barragán, "Precisiones sobre 'El Cabrío'," in Riggen Martínez, *Luis Barragán*, 31.
16. Luis Barragán, "Formal address," in *The Pritzker Architecture Prize 1980: Luis Barragán* (The Hyatt Foundation, 1980).