



Compared to general buildings, is there any difference in designing sacred architecture?

Conceptually we believe there is no difference, architects design spaces to fulfil the necessities and requirements of the client, the “firmitas, utilitas et venustas” of Vitrubio (version Perrault) ... but in this case, we have a very special client, God.

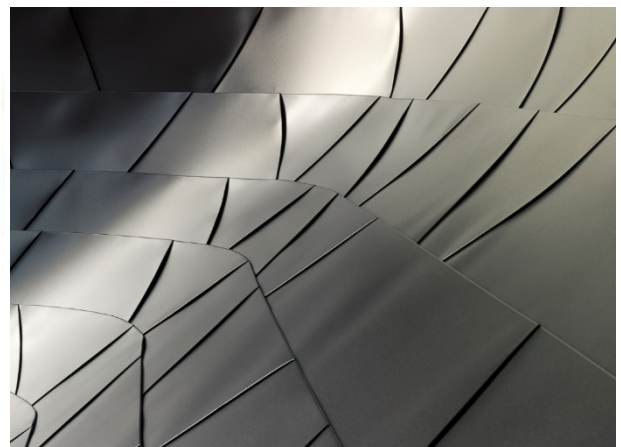
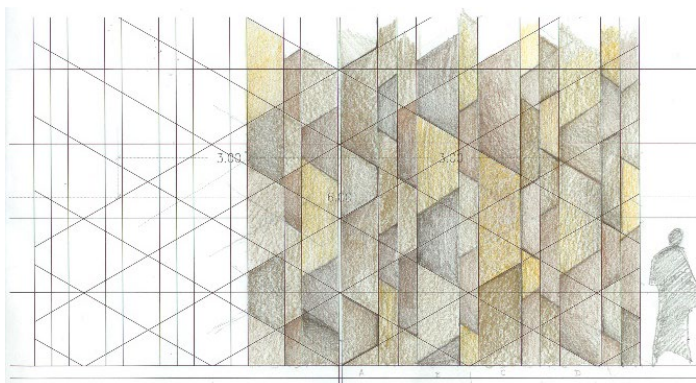
Of course, we take care of the place where it is going to be located, its “Genius Loci”, the people who are going to live it, to use it and to visit it, social and culturally... as any other building.

It is a space for celebration but, first, to speak with God; that is the reason why it has to be a special place, somehow unique and, more than anything else, transcendent. So, in fact, in the end, there are important differences in designing sacred architecture.

We can read at the bible, Acts 17:24, “The God who made the world and everything in it is the Lord of heaven and earth and does not live in temples built by hands.” but, because of it, the temple is more a “Domus ecclesiae” than a “Domus Dei”. That is the reason why we understand that the temple should be a contemporary space, with cultural references, knowing that the base of the culture is the tradition. The development of architecture has allowed throughout the times to change the proportions of interior space, its lightening, acclimatization, acoustics... nowadays, for example, we have a new aim: to improve the sustainability of the temple.

Even more important, sacred spaces have to fulfil, the difficult balancing act to allow the user to communicate with the rest of the community of believers as well as to concentrate and to be “alone” in the intimacy with our Creator.

People use to feel more themselves or identified in contemporary spaces than in “classical” ones, much more formal and distant. We think that sacred architecture has to be representative but, of course, inside of the actual world.



So, focus on contemporaneity, “care” is a key point in the way to handle all the items shaping the space, not only the building. The way you approximate, how is it appearing and what is disappearing meanwhile you get closer, and what do you feel when you enter has to create the atmosphere to reveal the space transcendent.



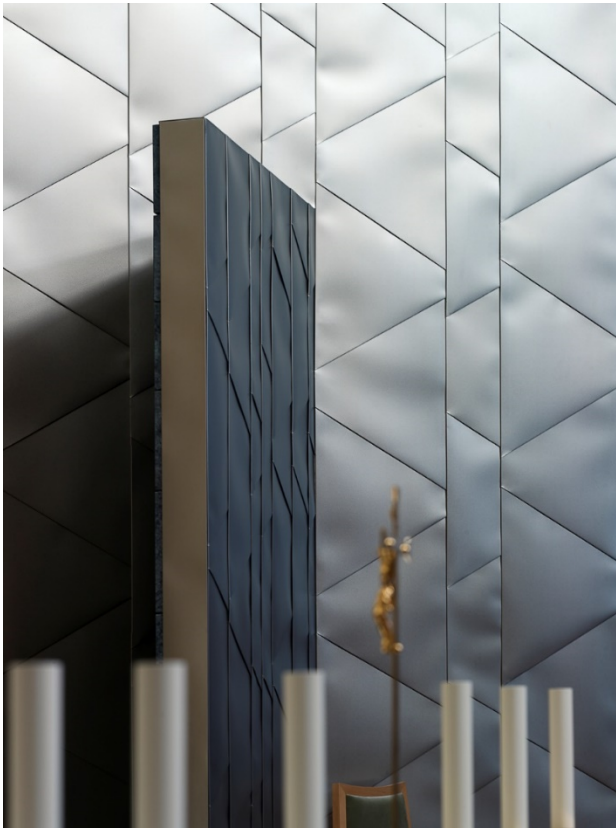
The exterior is answering to the “Genius loci”, the 50 years old school, a series of buildings out of bricks, designed by different architects and built as the school was growing. The new Oratory shows a brick podium and a zinc volume on it. Just another building but slightly different...

The interior is the surprise: It is a building for children, and their families, for everyday school activity and for very special celebrations that the kids will never forget. It is a warm space that they visit almost every day; it is a space where they feel “at home”.



We believe that to get the right scale has been very important; the changing natural light and the different materials as well, using them to define all the spaces that the Catholic Church differentiates in a temple. The architecture, in this very special case, has to explain to the kids where they are and has to allow them to feel comfortable. Elements, for example, the stained glass windows, are helpful to concentrate and meditate, rather than to distract.





The Spanish sacred architecture has been involved in the Catholic European tradition, with more than 1.500 years of history. And Catholic architecture has always meant the “State of the art”, in the strict meaning of the words, in Europe and, later on, in America.

Spain has the singularity that it has been the country where three cultures had been living together for a long time. Christian, Arabic and Jewish cultures were almost five hundred years exchanging knowledge and influencing architecturally one to another. Córdoba or Toledo have valid examples of it.

In Spain, as in Europe, the most important building in a big town or a small village has always been a church, either Cathedral or Chapel. The technical achievements of the time were appearing and developing in this kind of buildings.

Only in the last century, civil architecture was overtaking this role. Public buildings began to appear and to get important, much more than churches. But still, we had great examples in modern architecture. In the end, the progressive laicism of the societies was confirming the actual characteristics of sacred architecture, not only, in Spain.

The globalization has influenced this as well. Many different religions are present in our society and the representative does not exist anymore.

We think that the idea of meeting (and staying) point has to improve. Having visited throughout the years, all around the world, many temples of different religions: Buddhist, Shinto, Hindu, Jewish, Muslims, Orthodox, Protestant, Catholic... with their singularities and differences, the aim of creating a special space, to feel “individual” but inside a community, in general.

We should think about how to achieve that you feel “at home” there, where you could invite a friend, even if he is not thinking like you.

There are already some spaces created under these principles but still not connected to the societies, probably because they are too abstract and maybe out of scale. To create a multicultural sacred space is nowadays a dream, but a worthy one, that in the near future should not be very far away if we really want to diminish tensions and get more tolerant to each other...

