

DESIGN
METHODOLOGY

SCT Estudio de Arquitectos

ES BALUARD

MUSEU D'ART MODERN I CONTEMPORANI DE
PALMA

RUSSELL RICE

"SOME BUILDINGS SHOUT ...
others just need to whisper"

Vicente Tomás (SCT Estudio de Arquitectos) — during guided tour of the MoMA in
Palma de Mallorca, Oct 2010

BACKGROUND & APPROACH

Working primarily on the island of Mallorca Ángel Sánchez-Cantelejo and Vicente Tomás, of SCT Estudio de Arquitectos, have built an excellent reputation in the last 15 years. Their buildings are rich in nuances and at one with their surroundings, while equally speaking of the practices' commitment to the philosophy of the modern movement.

Though it is not at the top of their design agenda, sustainable design ideas are subtly incorporated into most of their projects. These tend to be passive solutions, which act to keep the buildings cool in Mallorca's hot summer climate through orientation and shading, with intermediate spaces – courtyards, porches and terraces, utilized to good effect.

APPROACH TO MoMA (Museum of Modern Art in Palma)

Upon entrance to the Museum of Modern Art in Palma de Mallorca, one is instantly struck by the imposing presence of the fort walls. This is the point where the old cities' boundary met with the sea at its western edge. Meeting with Vicente Tomás, one of the project architects, for the day and being shown around this great site was a fascinating experience.

It was clear that Vicente is very proud of the new design and also equally proud of giving this magnificent old structure back to the inhabitants of the city.

The approach the architects took in their collaborative work with Luis and Jaime García-Ruiz was to respect the history of the site, trying to address it rather than conceal it. In fact this building celebrates it in a way that a faithful reconstruction or pastiche architecture never could. Vicente spoke of the wall as "*a powerful force on the site*" and explained that they realised early on in the project that it was more powerful than anything they could ever achieve, not only in terms of its historic significance but also the pure scale and sense of solidity of the 600 year old structure.

"If you try to fight against the wall – you will lose"



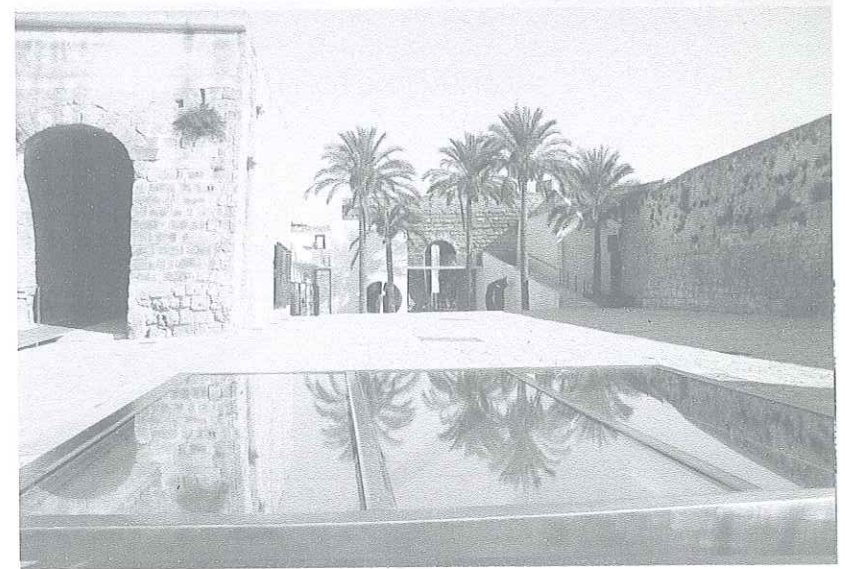
RESPONSE TO CONTEXT

Vicente first spoke of the site conditions, as they were when they took the commission. The fort had been effectively lost to the general public as it had been filled with earth between the 9 metre high battered walls for nearly 400 years and in 1963 severe flooding led parts of the wall to collapse and ruin. The general public could not walk through the site, nor could they walk on top of the fort walls to enjoy the view, thus *"the fort acted as a barrier from the city to the sea"*.

Reconnecting this link was the initial spark of an idea for the scheme. The architects wanted to make a route through the site so that everybody could experience this grand gateway to the cities historic frontage. This meant keeping a large proportion of the site open with a series of interconnecting public and semi-public spaces.

This decision was to lead to a number of realizations and discoveries, which would go on to inform the design throughout the process. These unknown factors were revealed when a full structural investigation and excavation was performed on the walls, showing their condition to be in urgent need of structural reinforcements if they were to remain standing and visible / accessible to the public.

The architects methodology in response to this was one of not trying to hide this necessity but rather to celebrate it with commanding yet moderately scaled modern clean concrete walls which act in their simplest form to hold up the old walls. The architects have managed to turn this necessity into the key to a dialogue between old and new, which acts to dictate the architecture of the whole project. This method of turning what some might see as a negative into a positive, is the most admirable part of the architects response to the site, and is again evident in their treatment of the medieval water cistern underneath the site (of which they had very little idea about at the start of the project).



GENERATING FORM

From the start of the design process SCT will often use a structural module to generate room sizes and to give spaces appropriate proportions. This methodology is clearly evident in their 1997 house in Santa Margarita, where the 1.35 x 1.35m of the in-situ concrete panels is responsible for shaping the entire project.

The other main generator in this project was the use of materials in creating a language for generating an 'imposing yet simple volume'. In this project the architects used three concrete walls to define the ground floor and external spaces, while creating views and leading the occupant through the site with interconnected courtyard spaces relating to the internal rooms. A timber clad box rests on these walls, 'thereby establishing a dialogue between the solidity of the concrete and lightness of the wood and the fragility of the glass'.

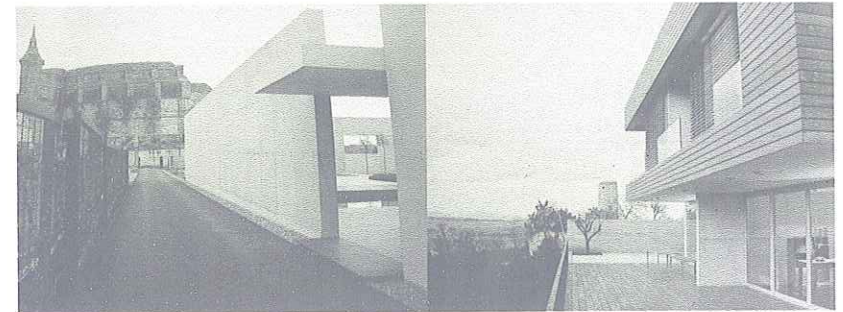
In the MoMA the contextual history of the site was the main form generator. SCT are very clever in the way they respond to existing buildings in other projects too, such as in the Balearics Bar Association Headquarters, which fits seamlessly into a high density urban context and improves upon the existing building.

As mentioned above, the fort walls were the key driver in MoMA scheme. Despite the superb juxtaposition of materials with bright white concrete and glass against the rough sandstone walls, the architects took the subtle approach to form, restricting the scale and height of their intervention so that it was not competing with the historic walls.

Vicente explained that he felt the building in this case required the approach of *'not 'here I am', but 'I am not here'.* The new buildings' height never protrudes above the fort walls allowing the visitor to follow the route through the gallery spaces culminating in a roof terrace which gives access to the original fort wall and uninterrupted views of the city.

However, I feel that Vicente's description is not completely accurate as the building is only hidden on the sea front side and even then manages to subtly make itself known to the passing public.

The only visible part from the sea front in the original design was a persuasive glass wall, which extends beyond an arched opening in the wall, leading visitors to the museum entrance. Another suggestion of the interest which lies beyond is the way the building is lit at night to reflect off the white walls to be visible from the other side of the fort.



CIRCULATION - INTERNAL / EXTERNAL

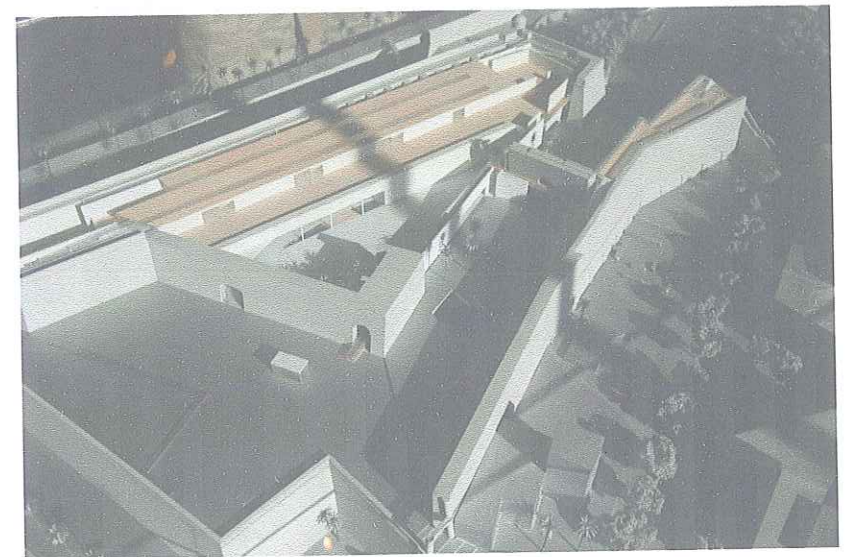
"If you have to redesign or move your buildings circulation route then you should just start again because something has gone wrong."

Vicente believes the circulation of a building should be the key design driver from the start of the project. This began in MoMA with the square outside the museums entrance, housing eye catching sculptures and bringing people through to an external public courtyard between the fort walls, which is linked to a semi public museum courtyard. The fluidity of this spatial sequence sets up necessary divides without the visitor being consciously aware of the boundaries. The same is true within the planning of the museum. A central circulation spine of the building, which takes the form of an indoor street, connects the whole building vertically and horizontal both physically and visually.

Due to the fort wall enclosing the new building on three sides, the museum only has one aspect from which all of the museums requirements for entry, exit and servicing must be met. This central circulation core was crucial to the design of a functional museum, as it allows deliveries of expensive artwork to be unloaded and transported easily around the museum without the users being aware of the service entrance.

The oblique angled walls, which are present throughout the form of the building, were generated by the angle created by the fort wall where it meets the sea front and turns back towards the city. The architects have rigorously applied this form generation to every space within the museum, even down to the toilet cubicles. This is particularly evident when you get to roof terrace and external courts where you are visually reconnected to the fort walls.

The circulation route then proceeds to lead the visitor, down a series of gentle sloping ramps within the circulation spine with views and points of interest which make the visitor barely aware of the fact that they have descended 9 meters into the basement of the museum. Here an expansive white walled gallery space leads the visitor through to a starkly contrasting large vaulted stone, dimly lit, exhibition space which was constructed in medieval times and was used as a water cistern to supply the ships that arrived in the port of Palma.

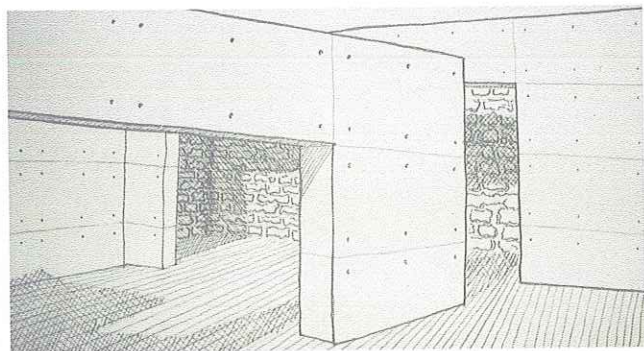


MATERIALITY & COLOUR

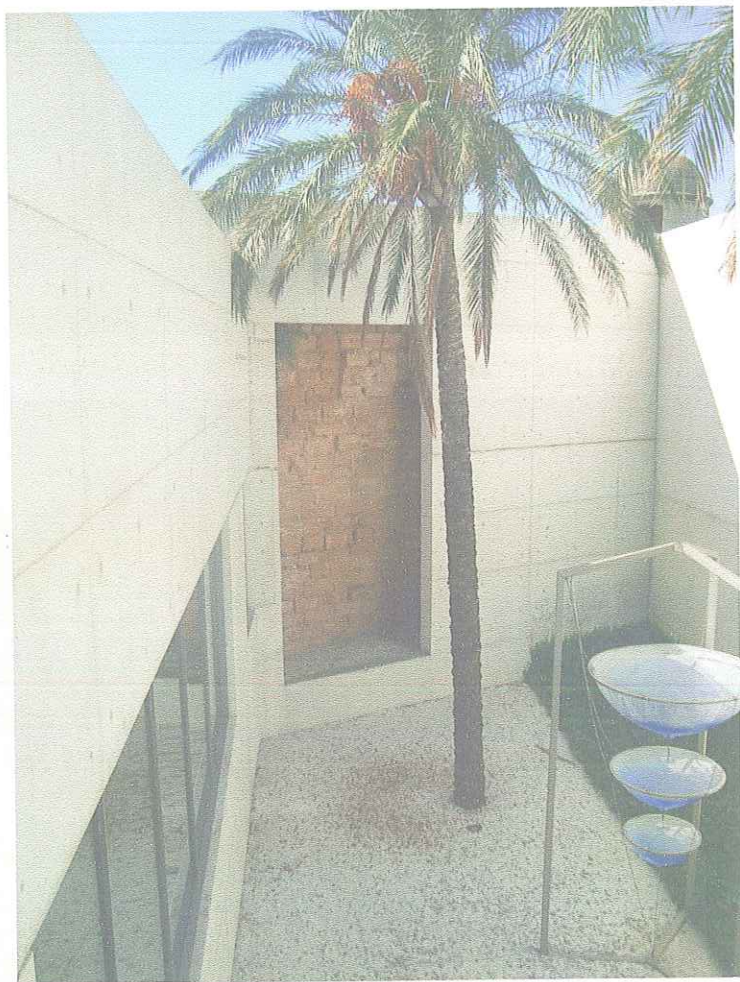
The materiality dialogue in both their house in Santa Margarita and MoMA is a major feature of the SCT Estudio de Arquitectos methodology. Throughout their work there is always a simple palette of materials, which complement and respond to each other in the way the architects employ them. Concrete is often used for its functional simplicity in providing a structure, which is also the external and internal finish. This gives their work honesty and integrity while also aesthetically creating a striking contrast with large sheets of glass or the naturally softer appearance of timber. SCT also utilize features in metal and planting within many of their schemes, 'contrasting the movement of its arrangement and composition with the forthrightness and directionality of the concrete'.

Their use of colours could be said to be restrained, if present at all. They prefer to use black, white and grey, with the most contrast and interest present in the natural colours of materials such as wood and stone. Vincent explained that this is a conscious decision within his partnership with Angel. *"Colours come in and out of fashion so we prefer to play it safe, although I'm not saying this is the best way. Just the way we do it."* This gives their buildings an elegant and sophisticated feel and allows them to create exciting internal spaces with clever use of light and shadow.

SCT sometimes use small amounts of red, as in their social housing scheme 'Viviendas Colectivas' in Palma. The strips of red under the access decks break up the monotony of these two identical blocks, highlighting the staggered pattern of the dwelling entrances, behind a metallic grill façade.



LAYERING



DETAIL



SERVICES

Structural concrete is the final finish in the circulation spaces of MoMA, while a separate service wall allows lighting and venting to be concealed within a rendered finish in the gallery spaces. These run vertically between floors to make it easier to provide specific lighting effects required for some of the exhibitions. As well as service runs, these walls also conceal entrances to glass display cabinets in the entrance to museum, which are used to promote a new exhibit.



STUDIO FM+P
Study field trip to Palma - Oct 2010

PARTNERSHIP

Ángel Sánchez-Cantelejo and Vicente Tomás have clearly built a relationship of trust and understanding over the years of working together. Vicente believes that this trust is vital to their work and means that they rarely argue over design ideas.

"If Ángel is sure that it should be this way, we do it that way and move on quickly. If he says 'I think this would be good but I'm not sure', then we will sit down and go over the available options".

Vicente says that if his partner says he is sure about something, then he knows he must have good reasons to be, so it doesn't need to be questioned.

"We spent a weekend changing a scheme because we were unsure whether we had designed the best solution. When we came back on Monday and looked at it again we realised that the design we had on Friday was still the best. So never throw out your old drawings!"

