



Primeros Muros	4
Functionalism	11
Signature Architecture	15

## In search of the photographic architecture of Luis Barragán

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## Introduction

Luis Barragán (1902-1988) was a Mexican architect, active between the mid-1920s and late 1980s. His work became known internationally after being displayed in a photo-slide exhibition in the Museum of Modern Art of New York (MoMA) titled “*The Architecture of Luis Barragán*”<sup>1</sup>, directed by Emilio Ambasz in 1976; and soon after in 1980 for being the second laureate of the Pritzker Architecture Prize<sup>2</sup>. His architectural practice can be studied in three distinct periods. First, what Juan Palomar calls his *primeros muros*<sup>3</sup> or first walls stage between 1927 and 1935, which is here studied through a 1935 article in the *Architectural Review* (New York). Second, the rationalist stage between 1936 and 1940, studied through the first and second issues of *Arquitectura y Decoración* (México); and finally, the Signature Architecture period between 1940 to 1976, studied through the August 1951 issue of *Arts & Architecture* (Los Angeles).



From left to right: Journal covers. The Architectural Record (1931), Arquitectura y Decoración (1937) and Arts & Architecture (1951).

The chronological division presented here has been continually accepted in lectures and publications regarding the architecture of Luis Barragán.<sup>4</sup> It is a logical taxonomy that encapsulates the clear succession of architectural languages and approaches seen in the work of Barragán, while also reflecting important turns of events in his personal life, which would reflect in the material qualities of his work and its photographic portrayal.

In an attempt to answer the course's questions “*is architecture defined by photographs*” and if so “*when did architects start designing for photographs?*” this essay will explore the photographic depiction of the work of Barragán in its different stages using three corresponding journal articles as case studies. It will be stated that his involvement in real estate development and speculation were important elements for the conception of his earlier work in Guadalajara and the canonical work of the Casa Estudio. The prior will be demonstrated through a comparison of the photographs taken by Roberto Salcedo Magaña in the early 1930s and by Armando Salas Portugal in 1950. I will attempt to establish a relationship between the work of Salcedo Magaña to the last stage of Barragán's career. In that sense, Signature Barragán Architecture is said to be designed from a synthesis first obtained from a photographic image and built to replicate that synthesis, as an observable architectural characteristic.

For this essay to help understand the role of architectural photography in the perception of the built environment, as well as its production and historiography, the photographs, texts, and even the context of each journal and magazine has to be taken into consideration altogether as a unit. Removing them from their context and analyzing them as detached illustrations is counterproductive for the argument here established. Different elements within the journals as a whole can be traced and compared with known historical facts in order to contribute to a broader understanding, in this case, of the architecture of Luis Barragán, the Mexican architectural, cultural, and political scene of the 1950s and the overlapping histories of modernity as represented in print publications.

## Notes

1 See Emilio Ambasz, *The Architecture of Luis Barragán* (New York : Boston: Museum of Modern Art ; distributed by New York Graphic Society, 1976).

2 The first laureate of the prize given by the Hyatt Foundation was Phillip Johnson in 1979. Barragán is, to this day, the only Mexican architect to have been awarded the Pritzker Medal. Another point of contact between the Pritzker Prize and Mexico was the 1991 award ceremony held in the Palacio de Iturbide, a colonial palace in central Mexico City, where Robert Venturi received his own medal. See “Laureates” in the Pritzker Architecture Prize website. <https://www.pritzkerprize.com/laureates> (last consulted on January 2nd, 2023)

3 Juan Palomar Verea (1956) is a Mexican architect, writer and teacher in the Instituto Tecnológico y de Estudios Superiores de Occidente in Guadalajara, Jalisco. He collaborated with Alberto Kalach in the Vasconcelos Library from 2000-2007. Palomar has been a devoted scholar of the architecture of Luis Barragán and presided the Fundación de Arquitectura Tapatía Luis Barragán (1988-2001). He recently published an anthology of texts that builds on the personal and professional life of Barragán in a refreshing, poetic prose. See Juan Palomar, *‘Barragán por Palomar’*, Diego Orduño ed. (Guadalajara: Artlecta, Impronta Casa Editora, 2022).

4 The current state of Barragán’s known oeuvre is based on the 1995 book *“Barragán: Obra Completa”*, or its 1996 english edition *“Barragán: The Complete Works”* which features texts by Alvaro Siza, Antonio Toca Fernández, Juan Palomar Verea and Luis Barragán himself. It was the first publication to “encompass the architect’s entire range of works and projects”. See Editor’s Note in *“Barragán: The Complete Works”*, Raul Ríspas, ed. (London: Thames and Hudson, 1996) 5.



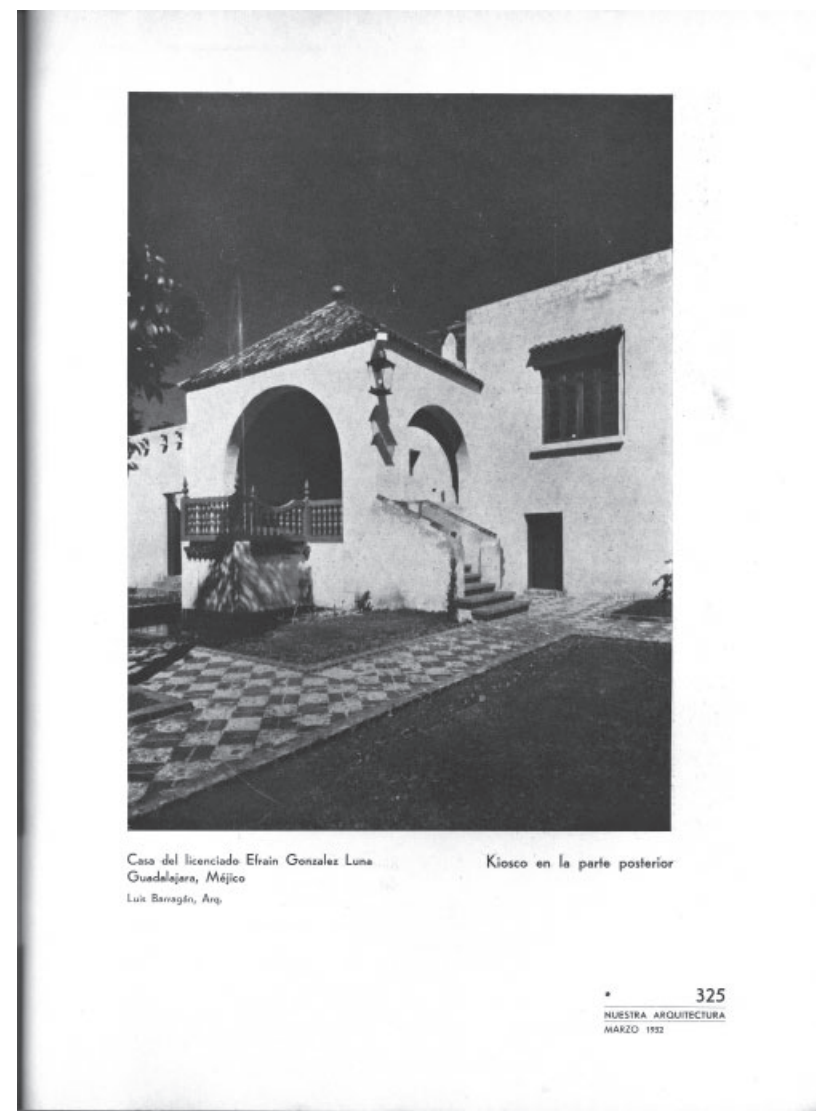
## Three stages of the work of Luis Barragán, Architect:

### ***Primero, los Primeros Muros***

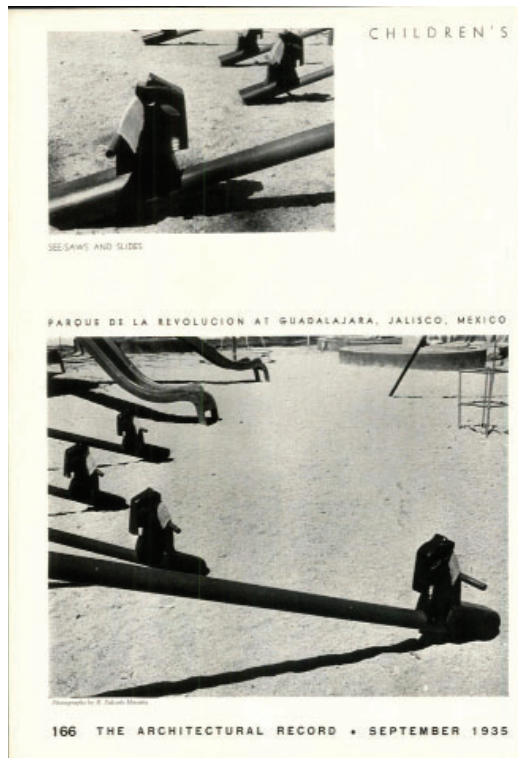
Guadalajara, Jalisco. 1924.

Luis Ramiro, the third son of the Barragán Morfín family graduates from the Escuela Libre de Ingenieros. His father, the *Licenciado* Barragán, owns the Hacienda de Corrales, or *Corrales Estate*, in Manzanilla de la Paz, Jalisco, a town located 115 kilometers away from the city. The agricultural business of the haciendas is suffering a series of transformations after the supposed end of the Revolutionary War<sup>1</sup> but continues with its operations. Even though it's still a thriving endeavor, it soon will come to an end, and the “*extensive land ownership*”<sup>2</sup> of the Barragáns, along with their fortune, will cease to exist in 1936. At this moment, however, the family still holds a comfortable position in the *tapatío*<sup>3</sup> society and most relevantly in the economic environment of central Mexico. It is therefore natural for the *Licenciado* to celebrate his son becoming an engineer, and rewards young Luis with a long trip to Europe to “*complement his experiences and give him a vision of the old world*”.<sup>4</sup> He is now the second professional engineer in the family after his older brother Juan José. Luis will soon leave for the Veracruz port, passing through Mexico City for the first time on his way to a France-bound ship. His future, both personal and professional, awaits expectantly.

Back home from Europe, after some small appointments, the young Luis Barragán received his first formal commission in 1927. He was consigned by Mr. Robles de León for the remodeling of his house in the Parroquia neighborhood of Guadalajara. This was a house built at the beginning of the century that followed the norms of the typical Mexican houses: a *zagúan* or hallway



Kiosk in the González Luna House in Guadalajara, published under “*Carpeta de Arquitectura Mexicana*” or “Mexican Architecture Portfolio” in *Nuestra Arquitectura* (Buenos Aires, 1932). This feature also shows the projects and photographs of the house for Mr. Gustavo R. Cristo and for Mr. Enrique Aguilar. Also published in *The Architectural Record* (September 1931) and *House & Garden* (October 1931).



at the entrance, a central patio with rooms surrounding, and a second patio on the rooftop for the service and domestic tasks. In essence, Barragán re-directed the light that entered the house in various ways. For the first time, he exploited the ideas he had been processing since his European trip, particularly those from Ferdinand Bac's *Jardins Enchantés*. He would further explore these ideas on the following commissions, which are better known and very well documented. These are the houses for Efraín González Luna (1928), for Gustavo R. Cristo (1929) and for Enrique Aguilar (1931).

A few years later, in the early 1930s Juan José, Luis' older brother, was awarded the construction of a new park in the Escobedo Gardens, a piece of land neighboring the Escobedo Penitentiary in central Guadalajara. The Penitentiary comprised an area of about 8 blocks. Due to its closeness to the Metropolitan Cathedral, it was an obstacle to the development of the western side of the city. Therefore, the prison began being deconstructed in 1911 and was definitely demolished in 1933.<sup>5</sup> The land was freed for investors to develop housing and infrastructure. Juan José Barragán decided to take charge of the construction works of the Park and partnered with his architect brother, leaving him in charge of the architectural project. In 1934, Barragán would also design and construct three houses in a block surrounding the park. One was built for an unknown client<sup>6</sup>, a second, for Mr. and Mrs. the Harper de Garibi, and the third, for a rental house for his first client, Mr. Robles de León.

The Parque de la Revolución was featured in a 1935 edition of the *Architectural Record* in a *Portfolio of Special Building Types*, and then again in a special edition titled "The New Architecture in México" in April of 1937.<sup>7</sup> The photographs of the 1935 issue are credited to Roberto Salcedo Magaña, a young draftsman that produced drawings for architectural projects, topographic studies, and details of machinery.<sup>8</sup> Salcedo Magaña shared an office on Corona Street with Juan José Barragán, making him a comfortable choice for illustrating the Park.

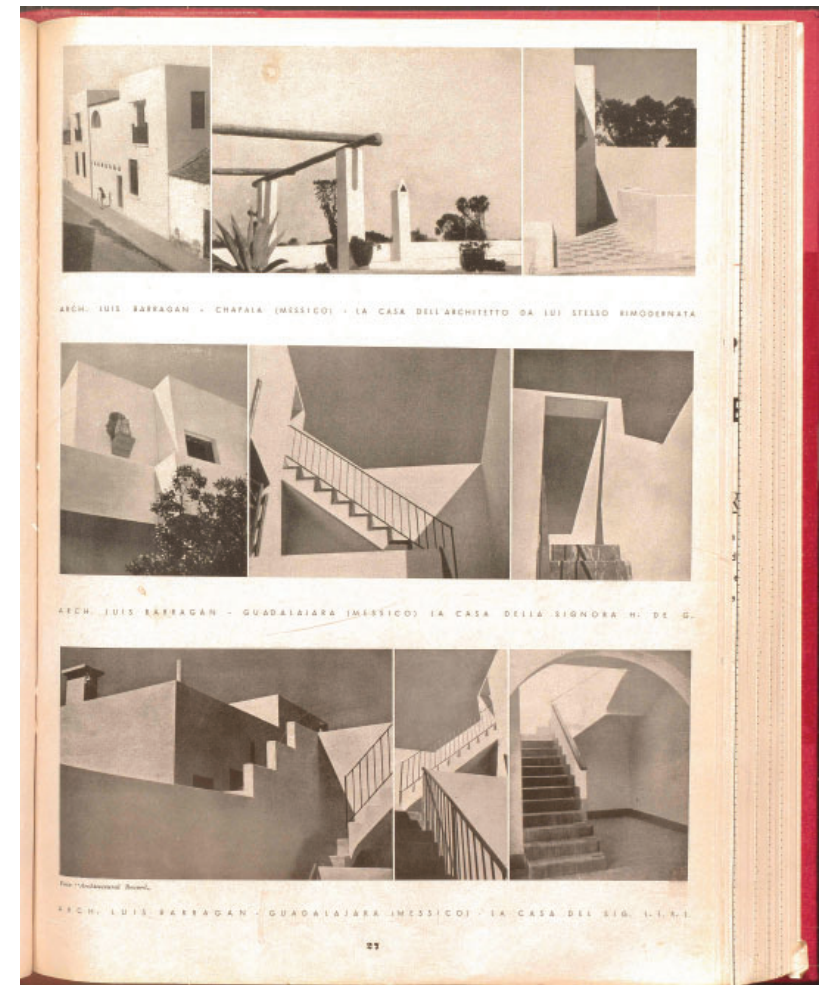


In her recent study of the photographers of *tapatío* modern architecture, Dr. Claudia Rueda Velázquez makes an interesting note that shines a light on two issues encountered in the research done in anticipation of this essay.<sup>9</sup> First, the lack of architectural photographers in Guadalajara before the foundation of the School of Architecture of the Guadalajara University in 1948.<sup>10</sup> It was only after its first generations started to graduate that the alumni became specialized photographers or architect-photographers. Before the foundation of the School of Architecture, it can be presumed that architectural photography was more a hobby or secondary profession than a full-time occupation for anyone in Guadalajara.

This fact makes the case of Roberto Salcedo Magaña more interesting, especially because his work has been hard to track down. Most publications of the time would credit photographers in a list of contributors on the first pages of the issue, making the task of determining the authorship of each photographic image quite complicated, especially without an archive of the work of such photographers. In the case of Salcedo Magaña, being an amateur photographer also makes him less available as a historical figure, even when his images illustrate relevant buildings of early Mexican Modernity in publications such as the *Architectural Review* and *Domus*.<sup>11</sup>

The photographs by Salcedo in the 1935 *AR* issue depict the Parque de la Revolución in a refreshing way. Despite his lack of professional training, he had a photographic sense that allowed him to present architectural compositions enhancing geometry and light. His images are an attempt at the *new vision* style, and he had a good grasp of this approach, but the Parque de la Revolución deemed it challenging to produce interesting details. Conversely, Barragán's domestic works marked a great opportunity for him to create impactful photographs that were by themselves very appealing, and, at the same time, he documented the architectural projects in a way that successfully communicated the architectural features that a journal cares to see.

For the January 1935 edition, a few months earlier than the Parque de la Revolución was published, 16 of Salcedo Magaña's photographs were published under the title "*Recent Work of a Mexican Architect- Luis Barragan*". The article featured images of two houses around Parque de la Revolución, the Rental House for Mr. Robles de León and the Harper de Garibi's, along with the remodeling of Barragán's family house in the Chapala Lake.<sup>12</sup>



Page 27 of *Domus*, August 1937 featuring the Chapala, Harper de Garibi and Robles de León houses. Photographs by Roberto Salcedo Magaña. Courtesy of the RIBA Library.

RECENT WORK  
OF A MEXICAN  
ARCHITECT—  
LUIS BARRAGAN



THE ARCHITECT'S OWN HOUSE (REMODELED)  
AT CHAPALA, A LAKE RESORT IN MEXICO



THE ARCHITECT'S OWN HOUSE (REMODELED) AT CHAPALA, MEXICO

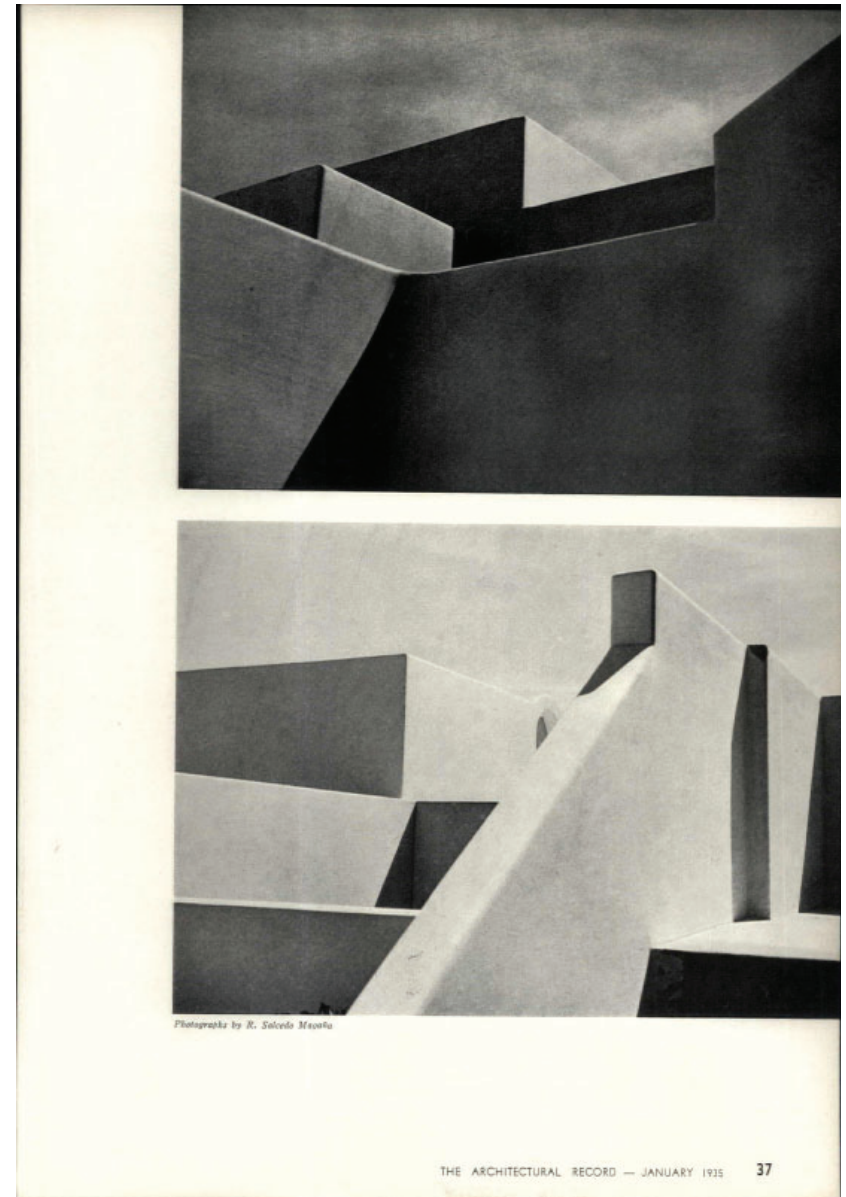


After studying the publication of the Parque de la Revolución and the *Recent Works together*, it's notable that Barragán was attempting to integrate ideas from his first voyage to Europe, which were further consolidated in a second trip in 1931, after the death of his father. On the second trip, Barragán passed through New York for a few days, and then made his way to France where he finally met Ferdinand Bac, a key reference for his past endeavors as a young architect. He apparently also met Corbusier and attended a couple of lectures.<sup>13</sup>

An additional result of his trip to Europe could have been the decision to keep Salcedo Magaña as his photographer. Each of his frames is carefully composed, showing very specific geometries at the exact moment of the day when the light is strong enough to produce the desired shadows. Salcedo Magaña's interest in the photography of the *new vision*, which originated in Germany, is palpable in the images included in the January of 1935 issue of the Architectural Record. On his side, Barragán was probably trying to reconcile functionalism and his interest in something that may be called "the ethics of the rancher and the aesthetic of the rural". *"Before any given architectural problem, he would ask himself ¿cómo lo haría un ranchero?"* that is, "how would a rancher do this?". According to Palomar, Barragán:

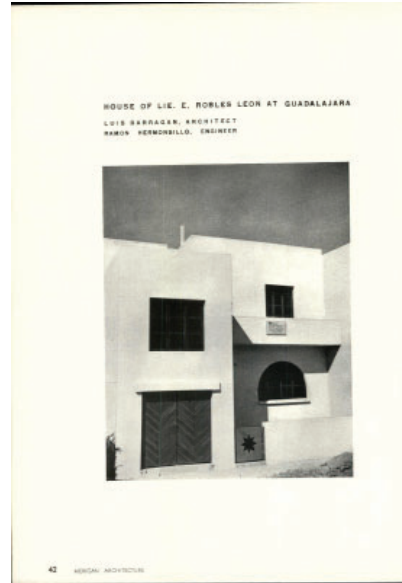
*"Was referring to the traditional collection of wisdom that can be found in the rural constructions of diverse latitudes, where it is necessary to resolve constructive problems with physical soundness, efficiency, and natural beauty."*<sup>14</sup>

Arguably, the beauty Barragán was interested in obtaining through architecture was more intricately linked with the relation of space and nature, or of architecture and its context. This reveals the reasons behind the first layout of the feature, showing the Chapala house. First, an image of the facade taken from the south, with the low neighboring house to its right, and a man wearing a sombrero walking in front. Second, a photograph taken from the north, where the south corner of the neighboring house is included, but, more importantly, the two towers of



Spread of The Architectural Review, vol. 77. January 1935. Photographs by Roberto Salcedo Magaña.





the San Francisco parish can be observed in close proximity, encapsulating the traditional context of this small Mexican town through different elements. I believe the true relevance this house had for Barragán was probably the direct relation it had to the town and the Lake. After all, Barragán was trained as a civil engineer and specialized in hydraulics. Water was always important as an element of architecture and landscaping, and would hold a privileged place later in his life. At this point, however, the best he could do was to remodel the rooftop of the family house near a lake to hint at his interest in the element.

In parallel, the Harper de Garibi and Robles de León houses seem to be isolated from an urban context too, despite being in the center of Guadalajara. The high-contrast images show an intense and empty sky and clear walls, probably achieved by the use of a filter to enhance the contrast. This allows Salcedo Magaña to create images of the open-air stairs and empty door-frames on top, which could suggest that the architectural elements are detached, almost sculptural volumes. The photographs, in the *new vision* style of Salcedo Magaña, focus on details of volumes and light. Only the facades and the images of the staircases (also published in *Domus*) share hints of the functionalist approach of the time. These photographs are probably suggested by the architect, who needed to communicate the transitional elements of his design. For these shots, the photographer possibly had to go through previous attempts in different angles (speculatively not different cameras, being that he was not a professional photographer) and decided on one that presented the second flight of stairs connecting to the rooftop more clearly.

The Chapala, Harper de Garibi, and Robles de León houses, especially seen through the lens of Salcedo Magaña in the *Architectural Review*, are refreshing views of Barragán's early work. The architect and the photographer are building, altogether, an image of a building that doesn't exist entirely as the physical construction nor as the photographic image. Barragán will use the ideas derived from Salcedo's work to feed his later ventures, after going through an interesting and speculative phase outside of his native Jalisco.

## Notes

- 1 James D. Cockcroft, *Precursores intelectuales de la revolución mexicana, 1900-1913*, 23a ed (México: Siglo Veintiuno, 2002).
- 2 “Chronology” Barragan Foundation, accessed January 2nd, 2022. <https://www.barragan-foundation.org/luis-barragan/chronology>
- 3 *Tapatío* is the demonym of Guadalajara, Jalisco. It is used to refer to anything related to Guadalajara and the Jalisco Highland region. It comes from the nahuatl “tlapatiyōtl”, the monetary unit used in the region before the Spanish invasion.
- 4 Palomar, Juan, ‘*Barragán por Palomar*’, 39.
- 5 CMS, “La Guadalajara Que Se Fue,” *El Informador*, Noticias de Jalisco (El Informador, October 6, 2017), <https://www.informador.mx/cultura/La-Guadalajara-que-se-fue-20171005-0133.html>.
- 6 Presumably, this house might have been a rental for Barragán himself.
- 7 Park of the Revolution in *The New Architecture in Mexico*, Abril 1937. 40-41.
- 8 Claudia Rueda Velázquez, ‘Fotógrafos de La Arquitectura Moderna Tapatía’, *Bitácora Arquitectura*, no. 41 (13 September 2019): 38, <https://doi.org/10.22201/fa.14058901p.2019.41.70673>.
- 9 Rueda Velázquez, ‘Fotógrafos de La Arquitectura Moderna Tapatía’. 40.
- 10 Fernando González Gortázar, *La fundación de un sueño: la Escuela de Arquitectura de Guadalajara*, (Guadalajara: Universidad de Guadalajara, 1995) 144.
- 11 In these publications, for example, his name is mentioned in a note, and repeated in a couple more pictures, making the authorship of the remaining images an ambiguous fact.
- 12 Remodeled in collaboration with Juan Palomar Arias.
- 13 Palomar, Juan, ‘*Barragán por Palomar*’. 48-49.
- 14 *Ibid.*, 424.

## Second, the Functionalist Stage

The Land Reform was one of the most important consequences of the Mexican Revolution. It aimed to dissolve the large land states of the haciendas, and the Barragán family suffered from it. The implementation of the secularist and anti-clergy laws from the Constitution became the cause for a second conflict known as the *Cristero War*. The catholic church, with a strong presence in the state of Jalisco and deeply embedded in the social and political life of the Mexican provinces, financed the *Cristeros* to fight against the Mexican Army. In Guadalajara, the violence of the conflict escalated quickly, and along with the liquidation of his familiar fortune, it became an unwelcoming environment for LB. He decided to leave Guadalajara and emigrated definitively to Mexico City in 1936, decided to “*broaden his horizons and build a new fortune*”<sup>1</sup>.

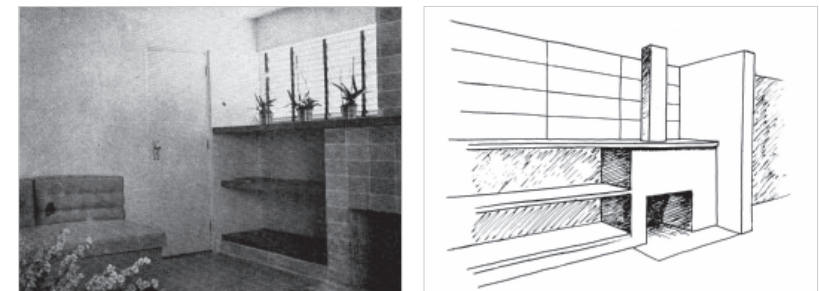
His entrepreneurship is notable in this period. From 1936 to 1940 Barragán had 28 commissions in Mexico City.<sup>2</sup> Most of them were located in the Colonias Cuauhtémoc and Condesa, which used to be both part of the Condesa de Miravalle *hacienda* from the year 1700 to the early 1920s.<sup>3</sup> In the heart of the Hipódromo-Condesa neighborhood Barragán built Two Family Houses, a remarkable project that shows the interest and abilities the architect-engineer had for minimum housing, site management, and speculation.

The Two-Family Houses were published in the first two issues of *Arquitectura y Decoración*. They were two adjacent and mirroring houses built in one single plot, each of 4x12 meters. The magazine first published the Houses in the *Interior Decoration* section,



Four spreads from the first issue of *Arquitectura y Decoración* (1937) featuring the interior design of the Two Family Houses in Colonia Hipódromo Condesa. Photographs by Lola Álvarez Bravo.





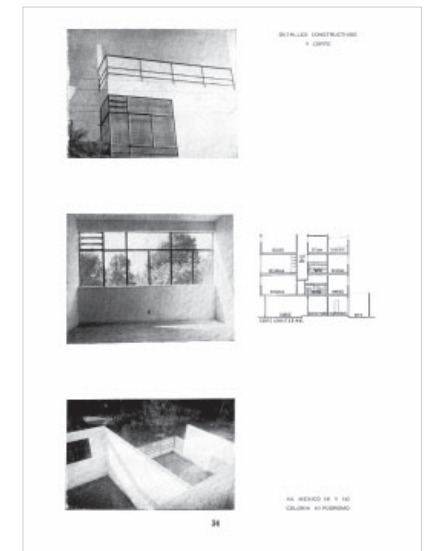
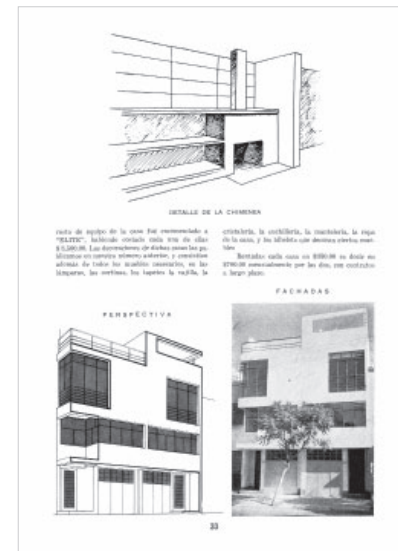
Two Houses details: interior photograph by Lola Álvarez Bravo against a perspective drawing of the chimney.

which was commissioned to the ELITE studio by Luisa P. de Guieu. She is said to make the most out of the reduced space through the logical placement of the furniture along with an adequate proportion that gives each room an impression of being larger than they were.<sup>4</sup> The interior decoration was part of the budget, which would be made explicit in the next issue, and showed how a profitable building like this did not need to lack elements of luxury. The photographs are uncredited but sources show they were taken by Lola Álvarez Bravo,<sup>5</sup> and they are evidence of the statements made by the journal. The same happens for the interiors of the house of Mr. Gustavo Maryssael in Guadiana 3, in the Colonia Cuauhtémoc, published in the next issue along with the Two Houses.

Compared to the Maryssael House and the interior design of the Two Houses, the photographs of the architectural projects published in the no. 2 of Arquitectura y Decoración do not reflect the same idea of comfort. They appear so different in expression that the coverage of the interior does not seem to correspond to the architectural coverage. The photographs of the Two Houses are uncredited and accompanied by elevation, perspective, and detail drawings as if the photographs could not convey the whole idea of the building.

These projects detail the speculative phase of Barragán's work, broadcast for exposure and gaining commissions. The previous interests of synthesis is nowhere to be seen, but it is only from these experiences that he would develop his work into his Signature Architecture. Most importantly, these projects would give him the funding needed to "give up" his architectural practice and pursue a different lifestyle.

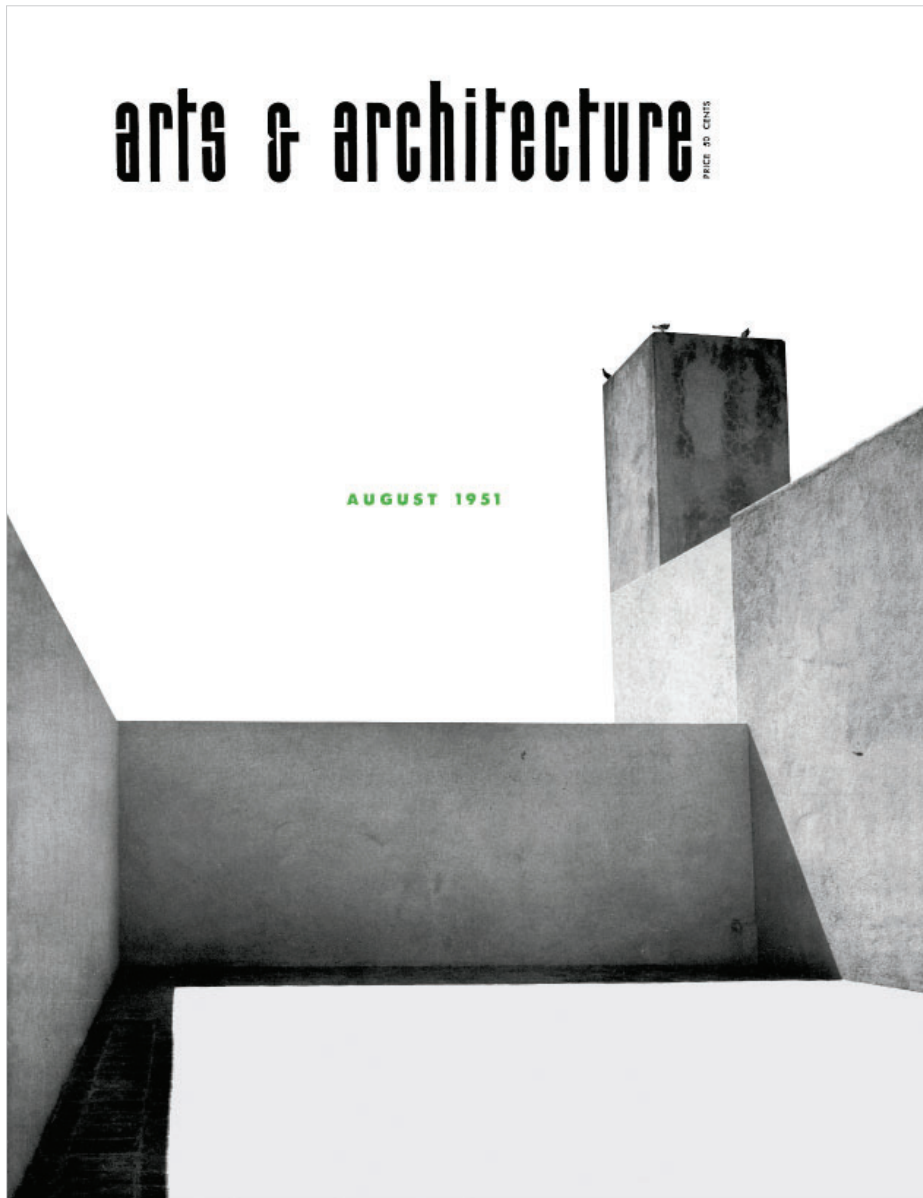
In 1940, Luis Barragán sent out a message to his clients and friends, kindly informing them that his practice was finished, having been an architect and constructor in México City for the past four years, and shared he would dedicate his efforts to other purposes.<sup>7</sup> This was another way of saying he would stop taking these sorts of commissions to focus on projects that allowed him to explore the interests he stopped pursuing after leaving Guadalajara. This change can be linked to the purchase of two estates: first “El Cabrío” in southern Mexico City. Deep in the volcanic rock landscape of the south, this piece of land would be the place where Barragán began exploring his interest in gardening and landscape, and it would also be the starting point of the Jardines del Pedregal suburb. The second plot was in Madereros Street in the Tacubaya neighborhood, where he would, for the third time, build two adjoining houses.



## Notes

- 1 Palomar, Juan, 'Barragán por Palomar', 54
- 2 Antonio Ruiz Barbarín, 'Rationalist Stage', in *Barragán: The Complete Works*. 79
- 3 In the first years of the XXth century this area began to be urbanized partially until its total expropriation, marked by the inauguration of the Parque México and Parque España in 1927. The hippodrome built by the Jockey Club of Mexico in the area was shut down in 1920, but the race track was kept#. The central area became the Parque México, and the ring that encloses it is Avenida México. A second outer ring is now the Amsterdam Avenue, and the area around it the Hipódromo-Condesa neighborhood. See María González de León, "De Cuando Había Un Hipódromo En La Condesa," MXCity (MXCity, November 22, 2020), <https://mxcity.mx/2016/04/la-verdadera-historia-del-hipodromo-la-condesa/>.
- 4 'Decoración Interior', *Arquitectura y Decoración*, no. 01 (August 1931): 15.
- 5 Silvia Segarra Lagunes, 'Mobiliario En El México Del Movimiento Moderno: Razones y Procedencias', *Res Mobilis* 10, no. 13-3 (29 June 2021): 188 (30) <https://doi.org/10.17811/rm.10.13-3.2021.170-189>.
- 6 'Rationalist Stage', in *Barragán: The Complete Works*. 80.
- 7 Palomar, Juan, 'Barragán por Palomar'. 56.





### ***Last, the Signature Architecture***

After buying the large state in Madereros (now Constituyentes) in 1940, Barragán began to build the first house for himself using a pre-existing vernacular-style building.<sup>1</sup> Now known as the Casa Ortega, this house has all the elements of his mature work. The house is L-shaped and opens to the vast gardens that he designed in room-like settings, a clear reference to the Alhambra in Granada. Seven years later he decided to build a new house in one of the garden areas that bordered Madereros Street. Using a crooked California pepper tree as a parting point, Barragán started to build his definitive house in the 900 m<sup>2</sup> plot.<sup>2</sup> Casa Estudio, as this house would be known, was transformed over time, “as if it were a kind of laboratory”,<sup>3</sup> and evolved in parallel to other iconic Barragán projects, in particular to the Jardines del Pedregal suburb, in close proximity to the El Cabrío estate.

The link between both projects was immortalized in the August 1951 issue of Arts & Architecture dedicated to Mexican architecture, with a particular focus on the recent development of Jardines del Pedregal. The issue featured a special coverage of the suburb and 6 houses designed in it, along with Casa Estudio. This four-page spread titled “*Jardines del Pedregal de San Angel*” includes 7 uncredited photographs by Armando Salas Portugal,<sup>4</sup> who is considered to be Barragán’s official photographer at this time.



## JARDINES DEL PEDREGAL DE SAN ANGEL

"After thousands of years there has been discovered one of the most beautiful spots in the Valley of Mexico, El Pedregal. It can be described only as a sea of great waves of lava, suddenly solidified, and which as it cooled off formed numerous crevices.

"This fifteen square mile lava bed, formed some five thousand years ago by the eruption of Xitle, is now the site of Mexico City's unique and beautiful housing development, Jardines del Pedregal de San Angel.

"The discoverer of El Pedregal and of its potential value as a residential zone is due primarily to Architect Luis Barragan. He has created out of his talent and his toil a marvelous garden in an arid land covered by volcanic lava, and has indeed brought water to the rocks.

"There exists a special interesting type of vegetation in El Pedregal, the palo bobo tree, rock flowers, cacti and succulents, all nourished in the soil deposited during thousands of years.

"The development of Jardines del Pedregal in this unique and exotic atmosphere is a special type for residences or villas placed on the site in such a manner as to preserve the natural contours of the terrain and its plastic beauty.

"A few years ago some architects proposed the construction of the University of Mexico City in El Pedregal, using zones not covered by lava, and this idea has culminated in the great work of the university project now under way.

"The directors of the project are architects Enrique del Moral and Mario Pani, the executive director Architect Carlos Lazo. The University of Mexico City in El Pedregal will be officially opened November, 1952, and architects from many countries will be invited."—CARLOS CONTRERAS

To obtain an harmonious relationship between volcanic rock formations and architectural design in El Pedregal, certain restrictions have been placed upon construction and landscaping.

All houses are required to be of contemporary design. (The style known as "California Colonial" is expressly forbidden.)

The minimum lot is to be approximately one acre, and the area of the house not exceed ten per cent of the total area of the lot, the rest to remain in gardens and free spaces.

The lava rock is to be protected, the amount to be removed to facilitate building or for use in roads and walls being limited to the immediate and minimum need. Only a part of one of the three lava caps which constitute the one hundred foot thick basaltic blanket may be removed.

Native vegetation is to be preserved, and other planting is required to follow the natural lines of the terrain.

The first house in El Pedregal was constructed in 1945. At present 42 houses have been completed or are under construction. Thirty two more houses are in the design stage. Seven hundred lots have been divided.

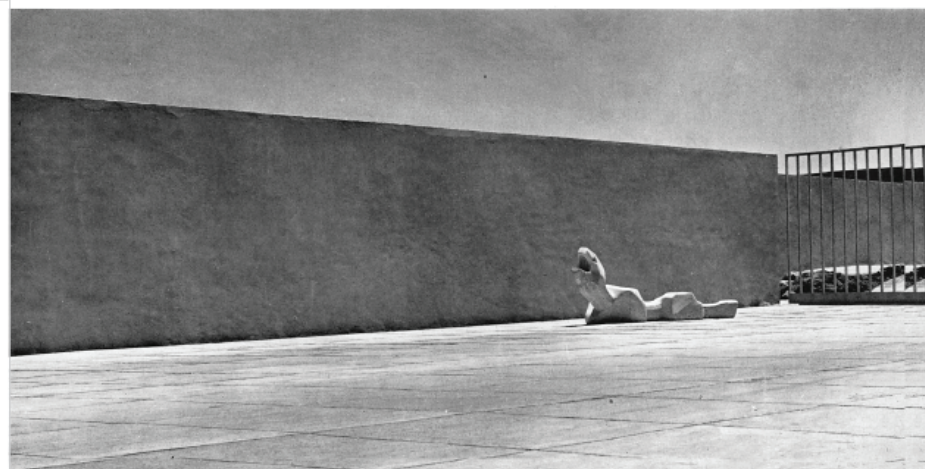
Two thirds of El Pedregal will always remain in gardens.



*Opposite page, left: Looking from El Pedregal across its choppy black sea of basaltic rock to Mexico's great landmarks, the peaks of Ixtaccihuatl (The White Woman) and Popocatepetl.*

*Right: The lava formations are protected by tract restrictions.*

*Below: Concrete sculpture by Mathias Goeritz in the entrance court of El Pedregal.*



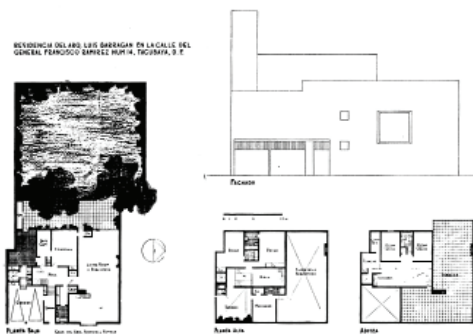




## LUIS BARRAGAN

"I constructed my house to satisfy my personal taste, which is the solution of two problems: first, to create a modern ambiente, one that is placed in and is a part of Mexico, and is basically influenced by the architecture of the ranches, villages and convents of my country; and, second, to utilize primary and rustic materials required for modern comfort. "I have used a reinforced concrete frame and concrete block, and in the living room-library I have used 8x10 commercial pine beams.

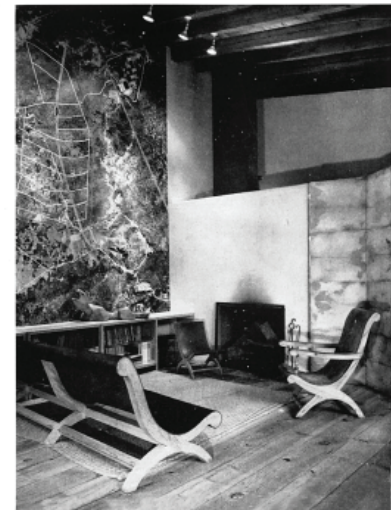
"I have left large plain walls without window openings, both for plastic beauty and because they are required for book shelves, pictures and furniture. By the use of large wall surfaces one can also obtain spaces with varying luminosity, which creates an ambiente more comfortable and intimate."



Upper left: Studio terrace; lower right: Living room facing garden.

Opposite page, upper left: Deck on top of house; right: Stairway from library to mezzanine-study. Risers and treads of stairway are anchored into the masonry wall. Below, left: Garden elevation showing living room with 16-foot ceiling. Outdoor canvas curtains shield glass. Right: Studio with aerial map of El Pedregal. Leather chairs are butaques.

The site for the house is a 100-foot front lot on a narrow street in Tacubaya, an outlying section of Mexico City. The house has been placed flush with the street and stretches the full length of the frontage. Following the lot line on both sides, it forms a rectangle 50 feet wide. The flat lot is 140 feet deep and all important rooms face the garden which extends back 90 feet. The garden is walled on three sides with a convent-type buttressed wall of plastered adobe.



PHOTOGRAPH BELOW AND RIGHT BY ELIZABETH TIMBERMAN



Three of these photographs are landscape images or show small interventions as stairs built onto the rocky formations of the public gardens; the other four portray the Entrance to the suburb. There is also a composition of portraits taken by Elizabeth Timberman of Barragán sitting in his studio as he is being asked for his comments on "*his approach to Architecture in México*", where he shares his thoughts "*on what makes an excellent house*".<sup>5</sup>

The following spread shows the Madereros house leading the 6 projects that actually are in the suburb. The fact that this house was included in this context, despite being 11 kilometers away from the suburb, reveals how both projects were part of one single endeavor for Barragán, and how he wanted to share them as one expression of his "*taste*"<sup>6</sup> and his "*modern ambiente, one that is placed in and is a part of México... influenced by the architecture of the ranches, villages, and convents... and to utilize primary and rustic materials*".<sup>7</sup> The interior photographs later taken by Salas (in color) represent the taste and ambiente Barragán was referring to and were used as advertisements for Jardines del Pedregal, depicted as "an ideal place to live".

However, in these first photographs the Casa Estudio still had not grown into the overwhelming building it would become in upcoming years and decades. In that sense, these first photographs taken by Salas cannot communicate the characteristic Barraganesque synthesis. Salas captures the studio and the main room, both still open to the garden, the interior facade, the living room, the suspended staircase, and the terrace in an interesting way, but not in a contundent manner, as Salcedo Magaña did. It may be due to the configuration of the house as he photographed in 1951. No surprise this initial setting did not last long. Barragán made constant modifications to the interior decoration and to the architectural composition, dividing the main room to create three different spaces and changing the proportion of light that entered each area. Most importantly, the roof terrace suffered several modifications to the height, material, and color of its borders. The photographs included in



Advertisement for Jardines del Pedregal using a photograph by Armando Salas Portugal. "The ideal place to live". Unknown.

this issue of Arts & Architecture do not truly reflect the Signature Architecture expression, maybe except in the cover image of the terrace, which has been strongly adjusted in contrast to reveal a more exciting play of lights and volumes. It is then hard to affirm that this stage of Barragán was already shaped by the architectural photograph.

## Notes

- 1 "Ortega House (Formerly Barragán House)", in *Barragán: The Complete Works*. 91
- 2 Palomar, Juan, 'Barragán por Palomar'. 57
- 3 "Luis Barragán House and Studio", in *Barragán: The Complete Works*. 113.
- 4 The photographs are uncredited in the magazine. I presume Salas Portugal and Barragán had an agreement in which Barragán owned the photographs and did not credit him. However, the pictures are credited to Salas in "*Barragán: The Complete Works*" and in the first issue of *Espacios: Revista Integral de Artes Plásticas y Arquitectura* (Mexico City)
- 5 'Jardines Del Pedregal de San Ángel', *Arts & Architecture*, August 1951, 23
- 6 "I constructed my house to satisfy my taste". 'Luis Barragán', *Arts & Architecture*, August 1951, 24.
- 7 'Jardines Del Pedregal de San Ángel', *Arts & Architecture*, 24.

## ***A brief closing note***

A hypothesis that lead the research for this brief essay was that Barragán shaped his work, in particular his House and Studio, to achieve one specific kind of photographic image. This understanding would have been a natural consequence of his involvement in the architectural market (i.e., the design and construction business) first in Guadalajara and then in México City. An underlying idea was that by the time his career took a turn into larger scale residential projects (c. 1940), Barragán knew the impact photographs (in print media) had on real estate speculation. For this, he would have used his own house as a model to advertise the suburban endeavors in the South of Mexico City. My idea was that the spaces that make up the House were ambiguous and contradictory in function, but effective symbols of an idea of the modernist Mexican spirit, especially when seen through the photographs taken by Armando Salas Portugal.

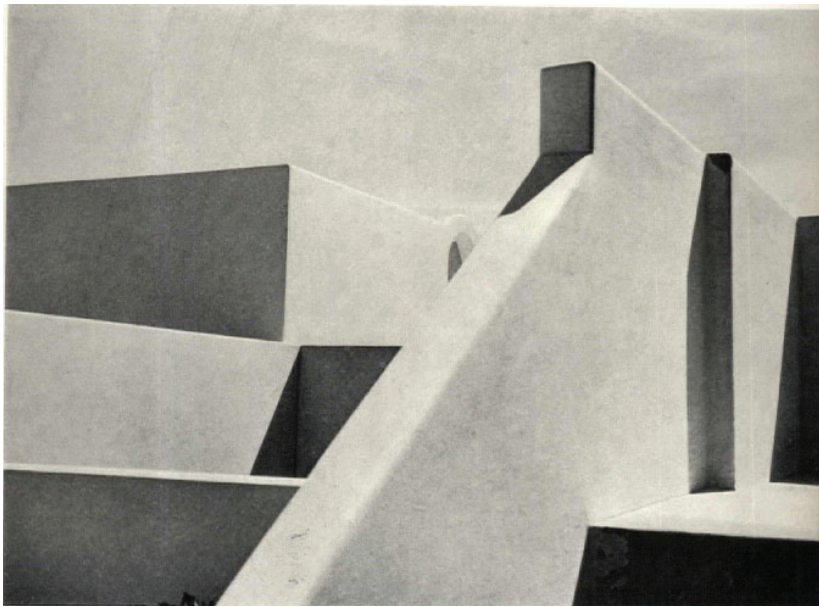
The reader might notice that this hypothesis is inconclusive in the essay. A reason for this is that after consulting the different periodicals previously mentioned, the presence of Roberto Salcedo Magaña started to seem as one early and important reference for the future definition of Barragán's work. It can be presumed that in his first works as an architect, which are categorized here as the *primeros muros* stage, Barragán began to define his architectural expression through simple interventions to pre-existing buildings. Remodeling, or "fixing" as the *tapatío* engineers called it, created an opportunity to design from the starting point of traditional architectural arrangements. And despite being remodeling projects, the design decisions Barragán took were certainly original from the beginning. However, it's only in the photographs taken by Salcedo Magaña that they acquire Barragán's signature.

In this light, a new hypothesis was raised: that the photographs of Salcedo Magaña showed Barragán another condition of possibility of his work, one that he had not seen before, that expressed something truly compelling for him. Then there is a natural progression of the last projects in Jalisco and his Signature Architecture in México City that can be seen clearly through the photographs taken by Salcedo and by Salas. Furthermore, knowing Armando Salas began his career focusing on landscape photography, it could be argued that his first photographs of architectural projects (both interior and exterior) were directed by Barragán to achieve the same as Salcedo Magaña's did in the AR's *Recent Work*, *Domus* and *Nuestra Arquitectura*.

If this was the case, then it's a pity there is no archive for Salcedo Magaña, and that the studies around Barragán are so rooted in Salas' photography. Of course Salas' work is a beautiful portrayal, but it is also one of the very few (if not the only one) significant contemporary documentations of the architecture of Barragán. How much of the relevance put into Salas' series *The Architecture of Luis Barragán* comes from the buildings themselves? And how much of Barragán's relevance comes from Salas' photographs?

The Signature Barragán Architecture gains an interesting layer when it is seen as the evolution of a synthesis first obtained through the work of an amateur photographer. The search of the photographic architecture of Luis Barragán starts from that layer. It goes from the first works, all the way to the mature stage, and in this essay stops at the first photographs of the House and Studio. In that point, c. 1942, the House is still not designed for photography. Now, that search points to another possible query. Knowing Casa-Estudio was the permanent architectural testing ground, an ever-changing, even living laboratory turned into labyrinth, it may have become a true expression of Photographic Architecture (i.e., architecture that is designed for photography). However, at this point in time and still in this query, one could conclude that the House and Studio, and other buildings by Barragán (Los Clubes, Casa Gilardi, Casa González Prieto) are Photographic Architecture, however they are not designed for being photographed, rather than being designed from one specific kind of photographic image.





Houses by Luis Barragán. Photograph by Roberto Salcedo Magaña, c. 1930.



Detail of the Fountain of the Lovers in Los Clubes. Photograph by Armando Salas Portugal c. 1968-1975.



The terrace of Casa Estudio, photographs by Armando Salas Portugal.