

Indian Villas in the Valencian Landscape (Spain): *Casino del Americano*



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Abstract After the phenomenon of emigration from Ultramar, a new architectural style, known as *Indiana* architecture, appears mostly located in the Canary Islands and the northern provinces of the Peninsula. This particularity makes of our case of study an exclusive construction of this emergent social class in the Valencian landscape. *La Quinta de Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes*, also known as *Casino del Americano*, is a recreational villa that since 1869 forms part of the Benicalap neighbourhood, and whose architectural and construction characteristics make it a property of great heritage value, and one of the last Indian villas in the city of Valencia. Due to the lack of bibliography, information will be mostly obtained through the study of the building. The graphic surveying is the main working method, which has an intrinsic value because of the danger of collapse of the building. The main aim pursued by this research is to present a historical, stylistic and constructive study, as well as a definition of the main characteristics of Indian architecture, through the most representative case of Indian villas in the city of Valencia.

Keywords Recreational villa · Graphic surveying · *Casino del Americano* · Indian villa · Valencian landscape

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1 Bourgeois Villas and Casinos in the Valencian Landscape. Indian Architecture: Indian Villas

The historical landscape of Valencia's orchard has its origin in the configuration generated during the Islamic era, characterized mainly by a complex network of ditches and roads. However, the territorial organization has undergone changes throughout history, being able to highlight three major periods that have determined different operating schemes associated with an architectural typology, its form of population and territorial distribution. Originally, the *andalusí* type orchards, (8th–13th centuries), where great extensions of orchard predominated, linked to each one of the *alquerías* (farmhouses) representative of a population unit and associated to a transit or irrigation channel. After the Christian conquest, the period of feudal orchards began (13th–19th centuries), in which a social transformation was made in terms of the water management and control, a fact that affects the territorial physical arrangement and their habitable spaces. And finally, the bourgeois gardens (19th–20th centuries) where fragmentation of the extensive territories took place to give birth to small land fragments, originating in this way the great dissemination of small residential architectures [1].

The 18th–19th century industrial revolution is associated with a change in the social model of the time, which is implicitly reflected in the architectural type. The landscape of the Valencian orchard before the 18th century, under the dominion of a feudal model, is characterized by the presence of two types of traditional architecture, such as the *alquería* and the *barraca*, whose origin was linked to the exploitation of the landscape. However, with the bourgeois revolution, new archetypes flourished in the Valencian territory, such as the country or orchard house, as a consequence of the fragmentation of the feudal latifundia, and the bourgeois village or pleasure village. These last models arose before the desire of the high bourgeoisie to have large gardens surrounding their residence. Depending on the size, cost and appearance, we can identify them as suburban mansions, casinos or villas and recreational villas.

Recreational villas and casinos are defined as holiday period residences of families with greater economic capacity and social position, in the city's surrounding areas, bordered by orchards and an idyllic landscape. The versatility of the architects, the different stylistic influences, the margin of creativity that the architects have due to the high possibilities of their clients, their personal whim and the freedom of the municipal norms as regards to these buildings, provoked a great variety of types.

These are exempt buildings, around which there is a private environment based on fenced gardens for closing off the estate. Their main features are: the square layout or Greek cross plan, the basement accessed by a staircase, its organization on one or two stories, an attic if they have sloping roofs, in addition to a tower or *miramar* for the contemplation of the landscape [2].

Our case study presents a unique characteristic of a movement that emerged in Spain towards the mid 19th century and the emigration to the Americas. Emigration

to Ultramar is a phenomenon that is registered in the period between 1855 and 1930. The underlying reasons for this tendency resided in a period of conflicts, governmental instability and economic crisis that, along with the population surplus, promoted a set of measures to favor emigration. These new policies had an impact in very specific areas of the territory, in particular, the Canary Islands and the provinces of the north and northwest of the Peninsula such as Asturias, Cantabria and Galicia and to a lesser extent Barcelona, Madrid, etc. [3]. This social class, after obtaining fortune in Ultramar and returning to its native town, will be known as Indian or “American”, and will seek to capture its new social status and acquired success through the construction of their new residences; it is what will be known as Indian architecture. This is defined as: *“The set of buildings whose construction (...) has been financed with money of American origin (...) are intended for stable housing of their owners and in cases of migrants with a more solid financial position, the villas respond to a scheme of second residence or recreational house, of temporary and summer occupation, to share with another main house, located in the urban nucleus”* [4, 5].

The majority of these constructions were solved with the participation of the masters of works, since the services of an architect were demanded by great fortunes as a sign of high social position and thus counting on the guarantee that the house presented an exclusive design, far from the catalogued constructions (Fig. 1).

Regarding the architectural style, numerous studies conclude that there is no particular language attributable to Indian architecture, that is, this group will



Fig. 1 *Casino del Americano*. Current status

configure their residences on the foundations of the native bourgeoisie in which it is inserted, incorporating connotations, customs and constraints due mostly to the rural location of these villas. Standing out among the most characteristic elements the presence of galleries and viewpoints, arcades and verandas, façades and roofs crowned by attics, ornate combs where the construction date was inscribed, initials of the owner's name or allegorical reliefs to his origin, garret and turrets.

However, in these recreational villas, if there is a characteristic element, that would be the garden. The Indian garden is generally for recreational use and contemplation, but sometimes complemented for productive purposes by planting fruit trees and crops. This is defined by the combination of three elements: the symbolic tree, garden and orchard. The symbolic tree of the Indian condition is the palm tree. They are arranged in pairs presiding over the front space between the residence and the main road, although they can also be planted isolated and integrated with other trees or defining an avenue. Other exotic species that can be found are araucarias, thujas, ligustrums, magnolias, cedars, chestnuts and pines.

These residences surrounded by gardens, tree masses and orchards create a unique environment around the main building capable of producing shade in summer, purifying the environment, creating a place of relaxation and being an element of comfort and prestige. Associated with this landscape is the enclosure of the property, constituting the external element of the property, proof of the success and quality of the house, hence it becomes one of the most ostentatious elements.

The garden, in imitation of European styles, follows two trends: the garden of French origin or the romantic English garden, although we find mixed solutions in which the French garden coexists in the front facade with the picturesque garden with abundant and exotic species in the posterior (Fig. 2).



Fig. 2 Elevation drawing of the *Casino del Americano*

2 Case Study: *Casino del Americano*

El Casino del Americano, also known as *La Quinta de Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes*, is a recreational villa that since 1869 forms part of the Benicalap neighborhood, in Valencia's North orchard, and whose architectural and construction features make it a building of great patrimonial value, and one of the last Indian villas in the city of Valencia.

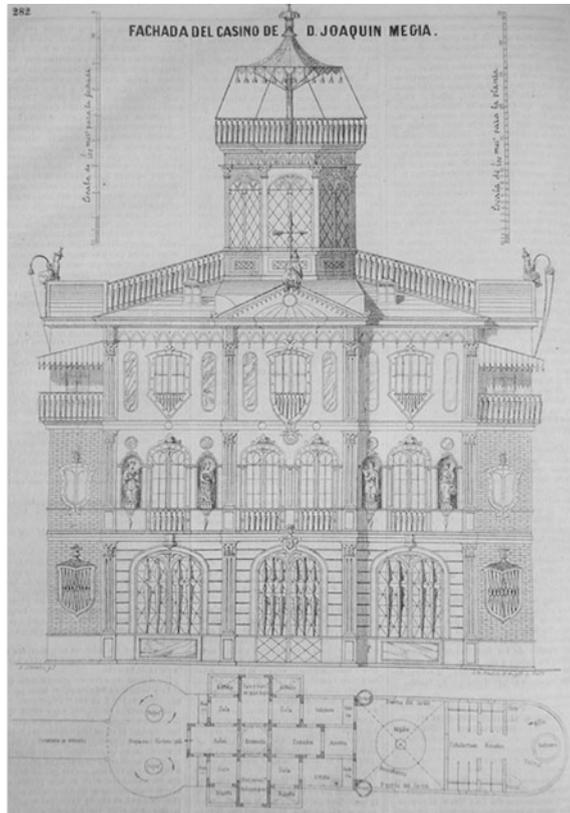
Valencia's orchard has been morphologically estructured by means of four elements: the plot of ditches, the road network, the population centers and the parcel organization. That is where *El Casino del Americano* gets integrated, coexisting in its immediate surroundings with historical and traditional buildings, such as the *alquerias de la Torre* and *dels Moros*, remains of the *Molí de Pallús* and the layout of the Tormos ditch, but also with others examples of casinos or villas such as the well-known *Palacete del Rosal*, constituting a consolidated and characteristic image of this neighborhood, as impressions of the architectural, cultural and historical past.

So, this emblematic construction, defined within the scope of the typology of summer residence of the high bourgeoisie, with the connotations and characteristics of a villa, along with the conditioning of its owner's origin, make it an exclusive work of great interest, which is in an advanced state of deterioration despite being one of the last examples of this architecture in the city of Valencia (Figs. 3 and 4).

Fig. 3 Valencia's city map in 1883 [6]



Fig. 4 Print from the magazine “El Artífice” 1869



Historical analysis: Family chronological axis

Originally named *Quinta de Nuestra Señora de las Mercedes*, it is known as “Casino del Americano” due to the origin of its wealthy primitive owners, from the Americas. Joaquín Megía y Ortega, a native of Granada, was a soldier assigned to the Island of Cuba, where he married a wealthy Havanan, Mercedes González Larrinaga y Cruz. After retiring from the army, Joaquín Megía along with his wife Mercedes and her son Jacinto, moved to Valencia in 1865, where they bought three hectares of land in the Benicalap orchard and ordered the construction of a recreational village (1869), surrounded of beautiful and exotic gardens so that his wife felt like in her native land. The master builder Manuel Piñón was responsible for building this residence.

In April of 1876, the proprietor D^a Mercedes dies, beginning the discrepancies between her husband and her son, which lasted for three years, until in May 1879 the division and liquidation of assets of Mercedes’ inheritance was executed, bequeathing *El Casino* to her husband. However, he had decided to retire to his birthplace in Granada, and therefore resolved to sell his belongings in Valencia. After the sale of a first batch of land plots at the beginning of 1881, Jacinto Gil de

Fig. 5 Canvas print by José Peris in 1890



Fig. 6 Postcard 1965
(Ana M^a Reig)



Avalle (son of D^a Mercedes) acquired from his stepfather the part of the remaining lands, which he could barely enjoy, since a couple of years later, in July 1885 he died, and the property of this estate passed into the hands of his widow. *El Casino* then passed into the hands of Mercedes' granddaughter, Ángeles Gil de Avalle, who, after not leaving any descendants, decided in 1941 to sell *El Casino* to the Valencian industrialist Plácido Navarro Pérez [7]. During the 1980s, it was rented as a school center. And from the 1990s, it was transformed into a pub-disco. Finally, after its closure, it entered a process of abandonment and deterioration as a result of multiple lootings. It was in 2011 when it became a municipal property of the Valencia City Council, after an expropriation worth 3.5 million euros. The mansion was occupied on many occasions suffering from damage and fire, which is why most windows and doors have been bricked over (Figs. 5 and 6).

Formal description: The garden and the villa

As a result of the new trends and tastes towards the end of the 19th century, there is a variant of the orchard-garden associated with the villas of the bourgeoisie, whose changes reside in the following premises: “(...) *the main variation lies in the change of the house from the perimeter fence to the interior, occupying a position centered on the plot. It maintains the axial composition, the relationship between the house and the pond, the presence of ornamental species around it and the access road, although other elements change their orientation, such as the pergola and the garden elements that come to occupy the front (...) Towards the 80 s, aesthetic gardens with new exotic species will be strengthened, and the main axis and the interior roads become promenades with benches*” [8] (Fig. 7).

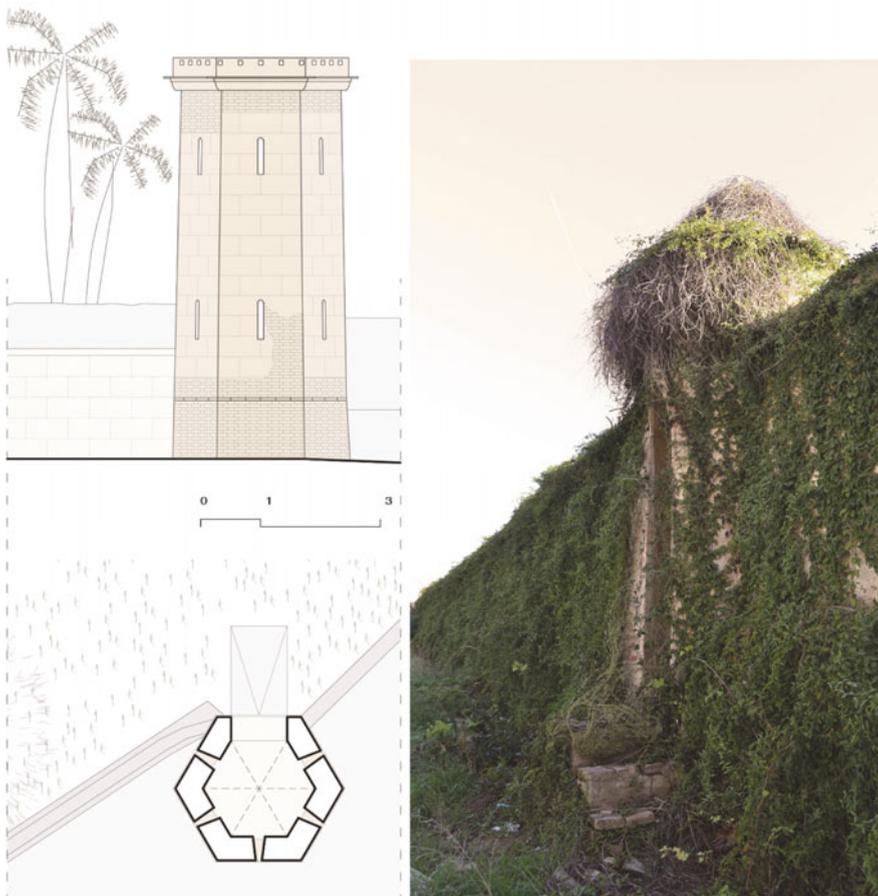


Fig. 7 Turrets of the perimeter fence

Considering the definition of bourgeois style orchard-garden, different elements can be identified in the plot, such as:

- The fence or perimeter fence. The villa has a symmetrical composition around a longitudinal axis in a south-north direction. It is formed by openings made of cast iron gates on an ordinary masonry sill with a lime mortar lining on which a mock ashlar is made. Each vain is articulated through small casting columns. In addition, located in the longitudinal axis, the access door is arranged, with an elaborate metal lock between pilasters of solid brick clad, and topped with an ornament, with two lions as guards, that at present have disappeared.

The primitive enclosure was more delayed, so that it was crowned at the corners by two turrets. These hexagonal layout towers have an ordinary masonry wall with lime mortar and reinforcement in corners with solid bricks. The rest of the body, based on a solid brick factory, has a cladding and simulated ashlars following the style of the rest of the enclosure and a top finish with a crenellated body. In its interior small arched vaults are highlighted.

- Main axis and paths. They are what define the formal composition of the garden. The main path constitutes the symmetry axis of the composition. The geometric garden is organized on each side of the axis, based on the traditional division into squares, crossed by orthogonal axes of secondary paths in whose intersections there are little squares or roundabouts, as haven spaces. In addition, the paths used to be slightly raised to produce the sensation that the side vegetation was a tapestry on which one walked.
- Vegetation. In a mixture between the native and exotic styles of plants, we would find a garden invaded by Valencian species such as orange, lemon, pine, cypress and palm trees as well as low plantations such as roses, thyme and rosemary, and a place reserved for exotic species such as araucarias, magnolias and chestnut trees to satisfy the wishes of their owners.
- Characteristic elements: these were the pergola, animals, and water. In the main axis, stands out the presence of the pergola, formed by eight vains based on casting columns over brick masonry dies, with vaulted shapes and invaded by trellises creating an illusion of light and shadows.

The third element was the presence of animals. In our study case, we observed the existence of two birdhouses or aviaries of polygonal plant with a cover based on palm leaves and protected with wire mesh.

On the rear façade, we find a patio with a square floor plan with lateral accesses to the garden and, in the center, a water cistern for the collection of rainwater or fountain. In addition, there was water in continuous movement through the ditches that crossed the property and allowed irrigation.

Behind the patio, the residence is completed with a series of buildings or auxiliary pavilions such as stables, yards and a pigeon house or henhouse.

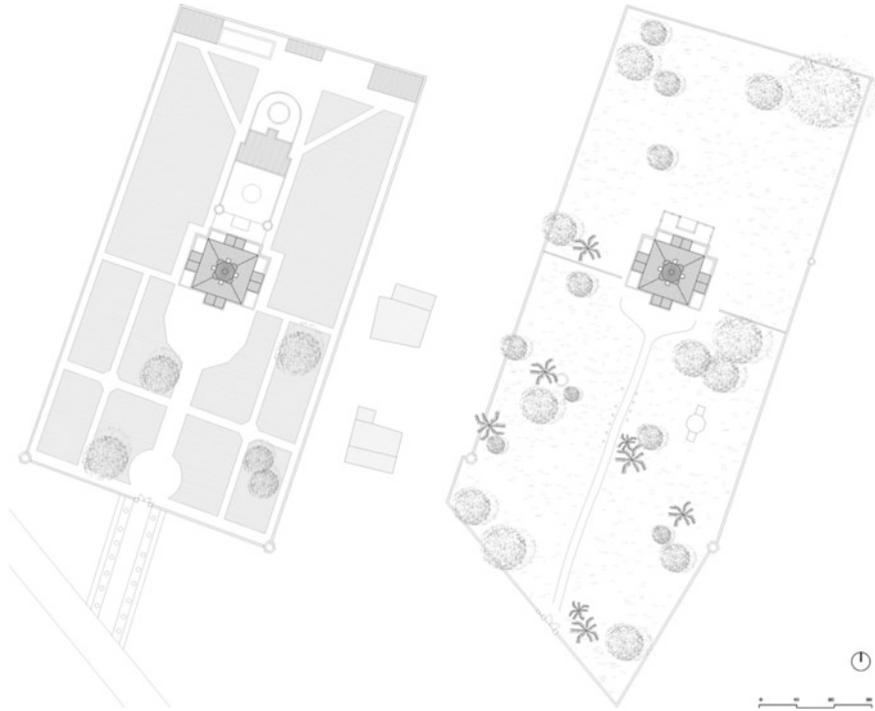


Fig. 8 Comparison of the organization of the plot and garden between the hypothetical state (left) and current state (right)

In the representation of the plan of the municipality of Valencia of 1929–1944, in the final part of the property, appear a series of agricultural buildings such as the gardener’s house, *alquerías* and ponds (Fig. 8).

With respect to the residence, the first graphic reference is found in the magazine *El Artífice*, number 36, published on December 5, 1869. In this publication, in addition to the representation of the plant and façade of the project, there is a description that reproduces the article “Valencia in progress” published in the *Prophetic illustrated calendar, previously Pata de Cabra, for the ancient Kingdom of Valencia 1870*: “(...) everything is prevented in its distribution despite not being able to be counted among the number of the great palaces; and without enumerating the halls, rooms, bedrooms, private living room, dining room, kitchens, library, waiting and weapons room, galleries and service stairs, which constitute the owner’s home, contains, a billiard room, two private living rooms, and several departments for the maids on the second floor; and in the ground floor, quarters for the doorman, gardener and other servants, cellar, tack room, hall and bathrooms, coach house, kitchen, etc...; a large inner patio with a water cistern in the center, elegant and spacious stables, and a yard for the breeding of several domestic animals” [9].

Volumetrically it consists of a ground floor, noble or main floor, a second floor, and a loft or attic under the sloping roof, being crowned in the center by a lookout tower or *miramar*. This tower is topped by a walkable terrace, from which the sea level horizon may be observed.

The residence has a square floor plan in which another is superimposed in the form of a Greek cross. The floor composition is based on the nine-square system.

On the ground floor, it is known that there was a Corinthian oratory on the west arm and the main staircase on the east arm, and completing the distribution we find rooms for the doorman, gardener and servants, cellar, tack room, living room and bathroom, coach house and kitchen.

From the noble floor we have more detail, since its distribution is shown in the original plan. In the arm looking out to the main façade is where the great hall would be located, at the end of the rear façade the dining room with exit to the roof that overlooks at the patio, and next to this the kitchen. At the east end, we find the main staircase. It is an imperial staircase with a first wide flight that rises and then divides into two symmetrical flights going back. On the landing, a service staircase starts, of a single section, which connects to the first floor, and from which a passageway is taken over the main staircase, which faces the start of a second staircase with three sections that connects with the second or servants floor. The anteroom on which the staircase disembarks, presents a dome with a lantern over four pendentives and a small “drum” (Fig. 9).

On the pendentives we find some pictorial decorations based on oval portraits of relevant characters like the painter Diego Velazquez; Christopher Columbus,

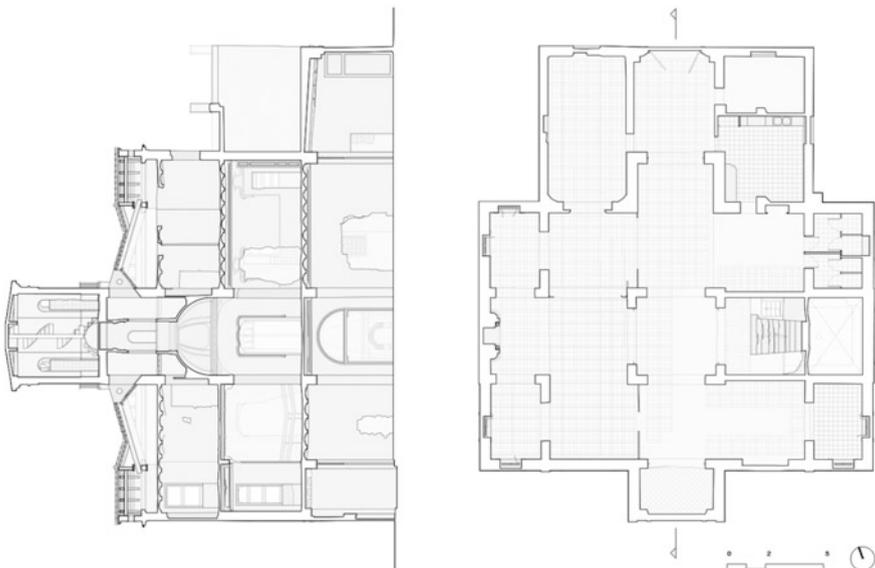


Fig. 9 Ground floor and section. *Casino del Americano*. Current state

discoverer of the Americas and land of origin of the owners; Gonzalo Fernández de Córdoba, a nobleman, politician and military Andalusian; and the writer Miguel de Cervantes.

The rest of the dependencies of this floor are occupied by the bedrooms located in the four corners, in addition to other rooms, anterooms, private sitting rooms and galleries.

The second floor is intended for the living areas and bedrooms of the servants, in addition to presenting a billiard room and two private sitting rooms. From the south chamber, a linear staircase starts, running above the spherical dome and disembarking in the central core where the lantern is located. This small room with a square floor plan has openings in the form of a window with semicircular arches on each of its sides, which can be seen on the roof as skylights. To this element is superimposed the *miramar*, of octagonal layout, which is accessed from a staircase that follows the same footprint as the previous one. In this last level, we found a double spiral staircase that allowed access to the *miramar's* upper passable terrace.

Finally, we would like to point out that in the *Casino's* printed image, the floor appears flanked on the back by two circular towers at the corners, inside which the word staircase is written. At present, there is no trace of their existence, and the only representation we have of them, is in the 1929–1944 map of the municipality of Valencia of the Geographic and Cadastral Institute (Figs. 10 and 11).

Fig. 10 Imperial staircase.
Ground floor



Fig. 11 *Miramar's* double spiral staircase



Regarding the configuration of the building envelope, the element of which greater documentation is available is the main façade, finding the oldest image in the magazine “El Artífice” of 1869.

In this façade plane, all the elements are ordered from a vertical symmetry axis. In the composition, a basement consisting of the ground floor, a body formed by the main floor and the second floor and a top level formed by the attics and the gable roof, on which the *miramar* is found. The floors are highlighted by a superposition of Corinthian pilasters in the corners, which support entablatures that reveal the horizontal division.

The central composition shows a plinth with a mock ashlar work and large vains with basket-handle arches, except for the second floor, whose vains are materialized in the form of a shield. As for the ornamentation, “simulated” niches stand out with the classic sculptures of the noble floor, a medallion or rosette where appear the year of construction of the residence (1869) and the presence of sculptures crowning the pediments. The sculpture of the central façade features a weather vane, while those of the lateral façades have pulleys that raise and lower the awning of the terraces.

However, on the sides of the façade, where the presence of exposed brick stands out, there are some windows with shields topped with the iconography of a helmet, and terraces with rails in the shape of “pointed umbrellas” that are covered by the awnings.

The roof has two dormers for lighting and ventilation of the space below. From the *miramar*, a spire shaped mast supporting an awning stands out.

Finally, on the description found in the magazine “El Artífice”, the comment made about the color is of particular interest: “(...) *the color of the façade is somewhat bold, lacking therefore the smoothness that would much enhance a remarkable building (...)*” [9].

3 Methodology: Obtaining Three-Dimensional Model in Heritage Conservation

In order to develop this research, scientific and rigorous guidelines and phases of work were established, with the aim of obtaining a high-precision three-dimensional model on which to develop graphic documentation as an inverse project before the likelihood of collapse of this property, currently in an advanced state of ruin.

In addition, due to the scarcity of documentary sources and publications on the property, we decided to resort mainly to the information provided by the main source, that is, the building itself through graphic surveying as the most important analysis tool.

Subsequently, with the graphic documentation, we have been able to develop the historical, stylistic-compositional, constructive-material and pathological analysis in order to obtain a thorough diagnosis of the property, and to successfully face the subsequent phases of rehabilitation and enhancement. This work methodology has been addressed in three phases:

1. **Historiographic research.** In this first phase, a review of all existing documentation has been carried out through the bibliography (magazines, books, articles...) related to *El Casino del Americano* and its architectural context, and through the study of documentary sources, information screening from the archives available in the city of Valencia, and the review of historical cartographies and aerial photographs.
2. **Field work.** After obtaining the necessary permits to access the interior of the municipal property, during the first visits, a photographic catalog was made, in addition to obtaining sketches and drawings, and carrying out a general data collection through direct measurement.

After this first approach, we proceeded to analyze the characteristics of the property, selecting the method through which to carry out the graphical survey of the current state. We decided to apply 2D photogrammetry and image rectification since it is one of the most economical and effective methods to obtain

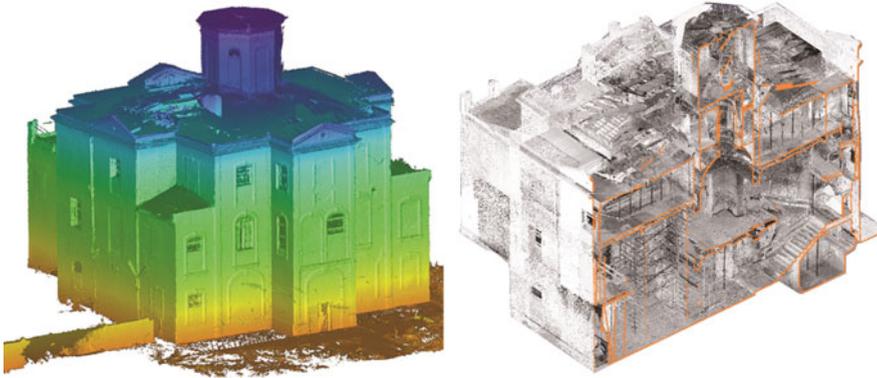


Fig. 12 *Casino del Americano*. Point cloud

drawings at scale of facades with flat geometries, while we used a 3D laser scanner to obtain the three-dimensional model due to its interior spatial complexity [10].

We must highlight the difficulties encountered during the lifting phase, due to the poor state of preservation of the building, discovery of fallen slabs, interiors with insufficient lighting, shores that generated shadows during the sweeping of the scanner and trouble accessing some rooms (Fig. 12).

3. Processing of data and information. In the phase of registration and data management, we proceeded to the alignment of all the stationings made, that is, the processing of the point clouds to obtain the building's 3D model, using Autodesk ReCap 360 software. From this model, we were able to draw the two-dimensional plans to scale that will provide us with accurate information regarding the current state of the building (Figs. 13 and 14).

4 Conclusions

The architecture carried out during the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century in the surroundings of Valencia, stands out as a reflection of the changes taking place at the economic and social levels. A clear example of this is *El Casino del Americano*, though it can not be conceived without the landscape that surrounds it, both the one in which it is inserted and the one that it is associated to it. This is what makes up the Valencian rural landscape of the time, a characteristic landscape that unfortunately no longer exists and this fact is also reflected in the property itself.

The recovery of the original image where these architectures were conceived is not feasible since it has been absorbed by urban expansion. Notwithstanding,

Fig. 13 Textured point cloud section

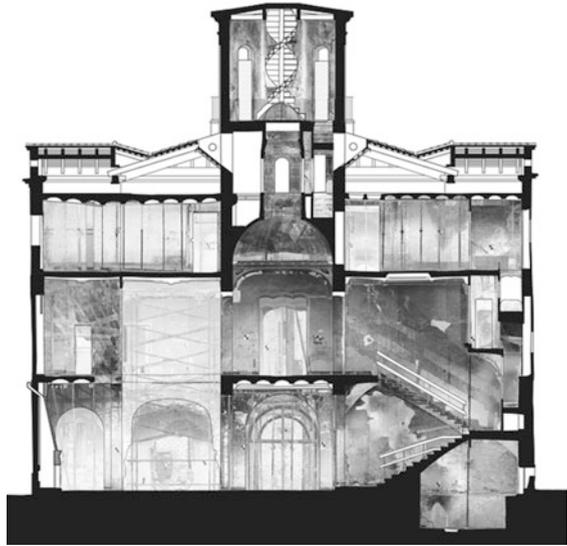


Fig. 14 Photogrammetric elevation



the immediate environment or landscape which, along with the architecture still present, could recover the essence of a particular time and its historical and cultural values.

Examples of similar recoveries are the gardens and villas of Monforte and Ayora, which with similar characteristics, and having been inserted into the urban fabric of the city, have recovered their essence.

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