

Mexican architecture: a conversation with José de Yturbe



The architect José de Yturbe seeks “the dialogue between the site and the building, the changing daily echo between light and shadow, the light modulated by shutters, the naive color of the small town walls, a view encountered,

the shadow of a pergola that betrays time, the serene, the gentle and austere, where ‘less is more.’”

His current projects are on the coast of Nayarit and Valle de Bravo, in the state of Mexico. They combine beauty and utility with the surrounding

landscape. *Voices of Mexico* presents the following interview with the architect José de Yturbe.

● *What is architecture to you?*

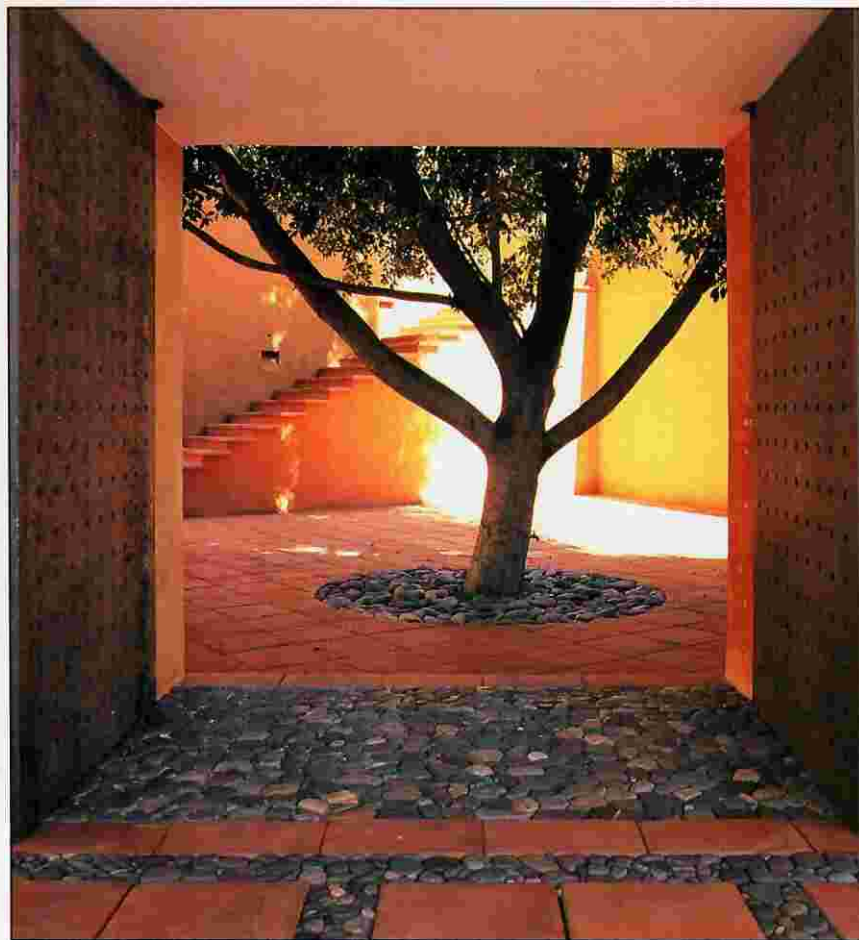
■ What I attempt to accomplish as a designer is architecture, not just construction. The difference between the two concepts consists of the fact that architecture, besides being functional and meeting a set of requirements, includes art, it is creative, it offers something new.

● *Which architects have influenced your style?*

■ My architectural style is the result of a mixture of the present, past and future. From the present, the beauty and functionalism of modern architecture; from the past I have extracted the tradition learned from my teachers in Europe during the year I spent with the architect Luigi Moretti, and later in Mexico from Luis Barragán.

● *What is the difference between Mexican architecture and others?*

■ I think that simply through being architecture, it all fulfills the same function. Mexican architecture, like all others, carries out similar functions resulting from specific architectural programs which are virtually the same as anywhere in the world, despite the fact that works vary from one to another due to the materials used in their construction.



House in Valle de Bravo.



Golf club in Malinalco, state of Mexico, designed by Javier Sordo Madaleno and José de Yturbe from Sordo Madaleno Arquitectos.

● Which architectural tendency has had the most influence in Mexico?

■ The Spanish, Mediterranean influence has been the most palpable within Mexican architecture. Thanks to present-day communications, we are seeing all kinds of influences today. The Mexican style is based on a mixture of cultures. Mediterranean influences joined with the Colonial heritage in shaping our style: a great deal of color, broad spaces, light and natural materials.

● Do you prefer pure or eclectic styles?

■ In this case I understand purity to mean the simple and straightforward, and eclectic to mean an elaborate

mixture of styles. I consider my architecture to be purist, but full of minimalist ideas that intermingle, forming a style and a way of thinking. It is interesting to pose this question as well in terms of the old and the new, the Classical and the Romantic. Goethe, probably the best poet of all time, expressed this sentiment for the contemporary poets of his day: "I call what is healthy Classical and what is sick Romantic. Much of what is new is not Romantic simply because it is new, but rather because it is weak, sick and infected; while the old is not Classical because it is old but because it has strength, it

is fresh, proud and healthy." I think this entire comment can also fit architecture completely.

● Is this kind of architecture the same for all regions and climates?

■ Each region and climate has its own architecture. I think it's impossible to make different architectural programs fit the same characteristics, since each of them will have very different formal representation.

● Is it an architecture for housing only?

■ Many people have the unfortunate habit of identifying Mexican architecture according either to somber tomes or "pueblito" (small town) colors. I think Mexican

architecture goes far beyond this. I think Mexican architecture is what is made in Mexico, without signposts or traits of any kind.

● *What does Mexican architecture propose for multi-family dwellings or low-income housing developments?*

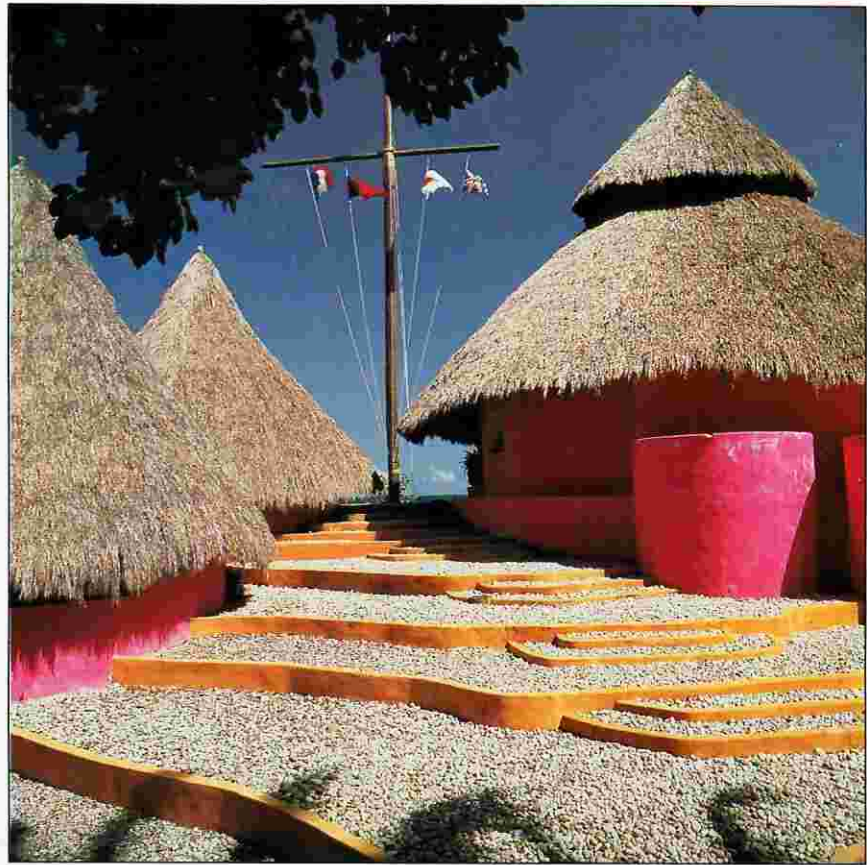
■ Low-income housing faces the problem of costs, and thus it is difficult to identify multi-family projects with others, since construction methods and spaces are necessarily minimal.

● *What is the importance of patios in Mexican architecture?*

■ The way I see things, they are all important. The patio is the basis for circulation. It could be the most important area in a building.

● *What kind of materials do you prefer to use?*

■ The simplest, the traditional Mexican materials, such as mortar surfaces with color, adobe, wood, tile, etc. Nevertheless, I think each type of building may involve a change of materials, since an office building is not the same as housing.



House in Patzcuaritos, Nayarit.



Hotel Westin Regina, Los Cabos, Baja California Sur (Javier Sordo Madaleno and José de Yturbe).

● *Is there an architectural solution for a city as large and populated as Mexico City?*

■ No way. All you have to do is look at it to see that there's no order or system. I think all the world's urban planners should study Mexico City, since I think it's the only city in the world which includes absolutely every type and genre of urban design in existence, but all mixed together and therefore completely unsuccessful. It would be important to do an analysis of the buildings which have played a decisive role in Mexico's architectural history.

● *Does Mexican architecture have an important place with international architecture?*

■ Mexican architecture is very poorly publicized. I think that Mexico has great architects whom the world has yet to discover, but the time will come when they will be. ✕