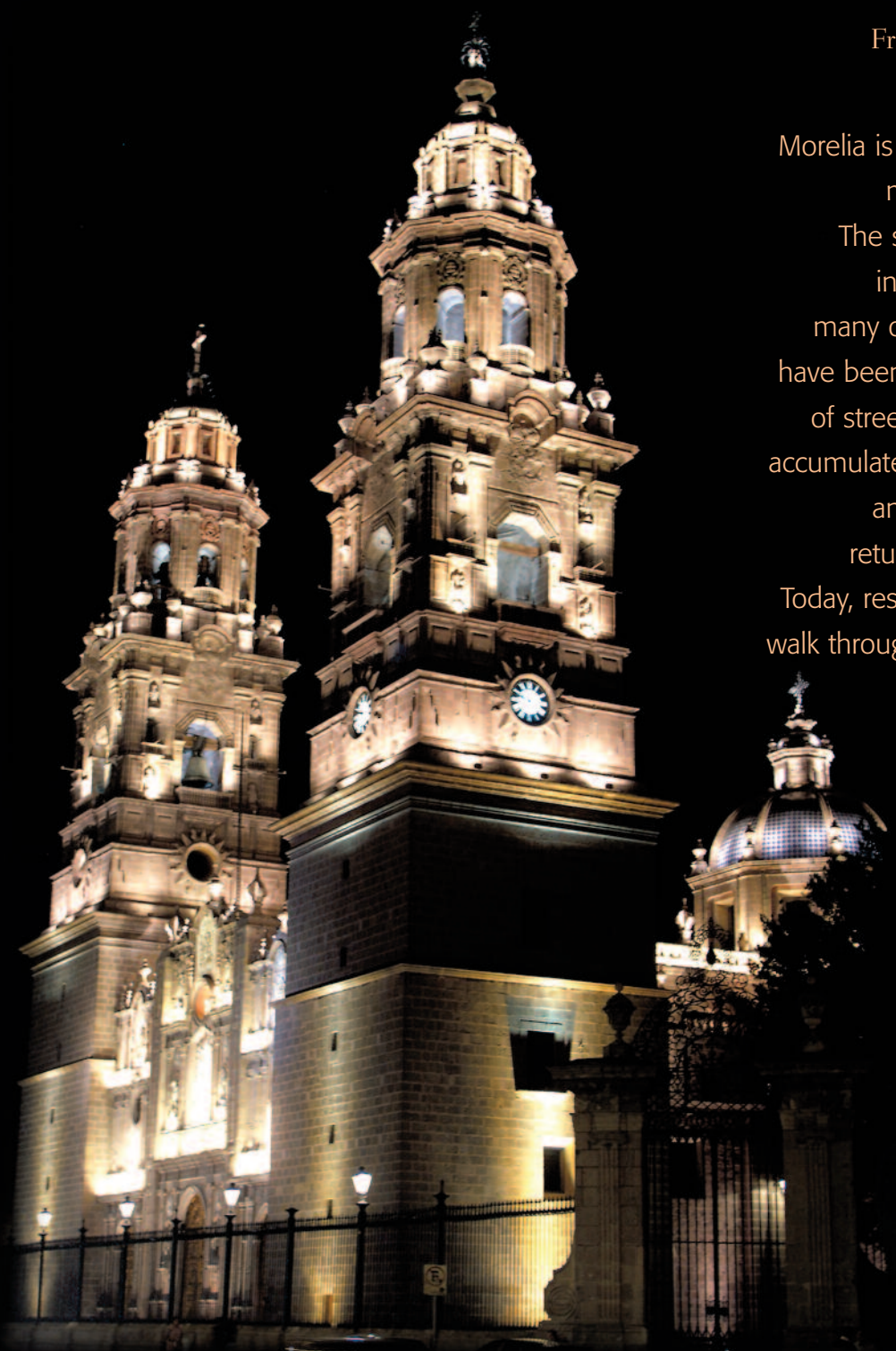


Morelia The Imprint of Time

Francisco Xavier Tavera Alfaro*

Morelia is one of Mexico's oldest and most majestic colonial cities. The streets, plazas and buildings in its historic downtown area, many of them over 400 years old, have been rescued from the invasion of street hawkers and garbage that accumulated with the passage of time and uncontrolled growth, and returned to their early splendor. Today, residents and visitors alike can walk through it unhindered to uncover the imprint of its history.



Capital of the state of Michoacán and seat of the county of the same name, Morelia was founded May 18, 1541, by order of the first viceroy of New Spain, Antonio de Mendoza. To pay homage to the hero of Mexican independence, dubbed “the Servant of the Nation,” José María Morelos y Pavón, born in the city September 30, 1765, the state’s second legislature decided in September 1828 to call it Morelia. This replaced Valladolid, the name it was given in late 1577 or early 1578 by order of Felipe II of Spain.

Morelia is located in what was the central part of Guayangareo Valley, in a natural depression flanked by the Central Sierra mountain range, running east to west. The old part of the city is built on a slight hill that slopes down in all four directions, surrounded in good part by two streams. From the end of the sixteenth century on, its benign climate and fertile soil made it a good place to set-

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tle for landed gentry, merchants and the vast clergy, both secular and regular. They built huge mansions, beautiful public buildings, churches and spacious monasteries that gave Morelia the look of a distinguished criolla city of exalted lineage.

The original lay-out, done from 1541 to 1543, was designed prior to the criteria and norms that the Spanish crown decreed for the cities of the New World. Therefore, it turned out to be a modern lay-out, for its time, influenced by the urban ideas of the Renaissance. Thus, in accordance with the piece of land where it was erected, the city is laid out in square blocks with an irregular outline, as architect Ricardo González Garrido has observed.

In modern times, Morelia has spread outward in all four directions creating neighborhoods that are not very uniform. During its four and a half centuries, its inhabitants have left a mark that, like Penelope’s cloth, has been repeatedly woven and unravelled. This imprint in time has been and continues to be the reigning norm for its police



Deniel Munguía

Patio of the Palace of Justice.



Daniel Munguía

The Melchor Ocampo Plaza. In the background the cathedral.



Elsie Montiel

The Church of the Nuns.



Daniel Munguía

The Government Palace.

and good government, the life style of its inhabitants, its language and its slang, its gastronomy. But the first thing that strikes the eye are its buildings and walkways.

The most accessible of these are its public walkways, its plazas, its little squares, its parks and *alamedas*. They are public plazas that have served to provide pleasant, happy, frolicsome living and have sometimes turned into fora for political discussion. The old squares in the city's old neighborhoods—now with gardens and almost all of them next to some of the local churches, like the San José, El Carmen, Las Rosas, Capuchinas or Soterraña Churches—evoke an ancient tranquility, like that described in the pages penned by Michoacán author Alfredo Maillefert. As he says, they are “an anchor in time” where time seems to be suspended.

In the very heart of Morelia are two plazas: the Plaza of Martyrs has a kiosk erected in the style of the times of Porfirio Diaz and is surrounded on three sides by porticos with their two-story houses, most of which have now been turned into businesses, lawyers' and doctors' offices and little shops; the smaller one is named after Don Melchor Ocampo, having previously been called Peace Plaza. Between the two is the cathedral, whose cornerstone was laid August 6, 1660, and was finished in 1774 in a contained, non-exuberant baroque style. Among its treasures we find a monumental organ played year in and year out in May during Morelia's international organ festival.

Across from the cathedral is the Government Palace, which from 1770 to 1859 housed the Tridentine Seminary College. The walls of the top floor and the stairway built in the second half of

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Kiosk in the Plaza of Martyrs.

Daniel Munguia

the nineteenth century were painted by artist Alfredo Zalce. On the main street, Madero Avenue, west of the large plaza, several architecturally and historically important buildings surprise the visitor. One is the San Nicolás College where Don Miguel Hidalgo, the Founding Father of Mexico, was a student, professor, treasurer and rector. Continuing with the memory of Hidalgo, on the opposite side of the street, on the second block down is a house with a beautiful interior where he stayed in October 1810 when he had already become generalissimo of the Americas and from where he decreed the abolition of slavery in the territories of a colonial New Spain that was already beginning to fade.

Next to the San Nicolás College is the University and Public Library in what was once the Company of Jesus Church, the proud owner of a rich

collection of old books, among them several *incunabula*. Next door, toward the north on Nigromante Street, is one of the city's most beautiful buildings, the Clavijero Palace, a Jesuit holding from 1580 until their expulsion in 1767.

Toward the west along the same main avenue, several houses and the Mercedes Church give testimony of Morelia's architectural beauty. Along this same street toward the east are many buildings that testify to the importance of the local architecture. Among them are the Church of the Nuns and the Federal Palace next door, which came out of two different periods and architectural styles. Further to the east, the street broadens out and to the north there is a beautiful garden at the center of which we find a fountain designed by artist Manuel Tolsá, previously located in the Plaza of Martyrs. Here is the Tarascan Fountain with three exits to

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Daniel Munguía

Alfredo Zalce's mural in the Government Palace.



Elsie Montiel

Aqueduct.



Elsie Montiel

Clavijero Palace.



Daniel Murguía

Tarascan Fountain.

the east, bordered by the higher arches of the city's colonial aqueduct. The central exit gives onto the Friar Antonio de San Miguel Boulevard, undoubtedly one of the city's best public walkways. It is crowned by the Sanctuary of Guadalupe and, in a wide open space bordering on a nearby forest, there is a large roundabout with an equestrian statue of Generalissimo Don José María Morelos y Pavón, the hero who gave his name to the city. Both his houses, the one where he was born and the one he had built to live in, are in the city's historic downtown and are considered true shrines to the homeland.

Getting to know Morelia is to enjoy an on-going lesson in Mexican history. Other undoubted architectural attractions are the buildings that were originally built as schools, almost from the time the city was established. The founders of the fledgling town used their city council to open the San Miguel College under the academic guidance of the first Franciscan friars. This institution was given a great deal of property so that its income could pay for the expense of educating the children of the Spanish and some indigenous, sons of the local

strongmen who settled in the neighborhoods built to provide labor for the burgeoning Spanish population. In 1580, when the Pátzcuaro cathedral was transferred to Valladolid, the Royal San Nicolás Obispo College, founded by Vasco de Quiroga, was also moved and merged with the San Miguel College. San Nicolás grew and also operated as a training school for priests. A short time later, the fathers from the Company of Jesus arrived and founded the San Francisco Xavier College and its church. In 1770, the Tridentine Seminary College was founded with professors from the San Nicolás College. During the colonial period, the Franciscan, Augustinian and Carmelite monasteries each had their schools to train those who were going to take their habits.

San Nicolás was closed when the insurgent war began in 1810, and reopened in 1847 as a lay institution called the San Nicolás de Hidalgo National College. It was a high school and also had schools of medicine, phlebotomy, pharmacy and law. Between 1729 and 1737, Bishop Don Juan José de Escalona y Calatayud founded the Las Rosas Conservatory for the education of little girls

LOCATION AND COMMUNICATIONS

Morelia is located at an altitude of 1,951 meters above sea level and 19°42'00" north, 1°50' west of the Tacubaya meridian, or 101°11'00" west of the Greenwich meridian. Its annual mean temperature is 19° Celsius, with extremes of 38° and 3° Celsius. The population is over 900,000.

The city has been linked to the country's capital since 1883, and since the 1940s, a picturesque highway has crossed several towns in the state, linking it to Mexico City and Guadalajara. Other wider highways, built later, also connect Morelia with those two important cities. Also, highways hook up the city with the dynamic towns of the Bajío region, many cities of the state's Tierra Caliente region and the Pacific coast.

Efficient airline services put Morelia residents in close touch with Mexico City, Guadalajara, Tijuana, Uruapan, Lázaro Cárdenas, Los Angeles and Chicago.

and the promotion of music. After having been a religious institution, today it is a lay school called the Las Rosas Musical Conservatory, which has contributed to strengthening Morelia's musical tradition.

Concerned about women's education, the government founded the Girls Academy in 1886, a precursor of the Normal School, providing it with two buildings: one that currently houses the Michoacán Museum and the other that was originally a monastery for the San Diego Franciscans and today houses the School of Law.

In 1918, Governor Ortiz Rubio founded the San Nicolás de Hidalgo Michoacán University, which has constantly expanded the number of its schools, departments and institutes. The city is also home to the Latina de América, Vasco de Quiroga and Morelia Universities, a campus of the Monterrey Technological Institute of Higher Learning and the Morelia Technological Institute. So Morelia's academic and cultural life parallels that of other major cities in Mexico. **NM**



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Facade of the Las Rosas Conservatory.

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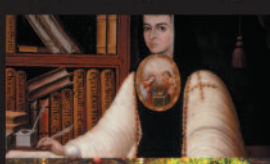


Session I: May 17-18
Monday: 11:00 a.m. - 7:00 p.m.
Tuesday: 10:00 a.m. - 6:00 p.m.

Session II: July 2-3
Friday: 9:00 a.m. - 5:00 p.m.
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Session II: October 22-23
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