

THE BUILDING

The Fundació Antoni Tàpies was constituted in 1984 with the aid of Barcelona City Council, the Autonomous Government of Catalonia and the Spanish Culture Ministry, though it did not finally open its doors to the public until June 1990, once restoration and rehabilitation work had been completed on the building that was to house it, formerly the headquarters of the Montaner i Simon publishing house.

The Montaner i Simon publishing house was the first outstanding single project completed by the Catalan Modernist architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner (1849-1923). It was built as part of the first great expansion of Barcelona's Eixample district.

Barcelona began to expand in 1854 when the central government finally gave in to repeated petitions for the old city walls to be demolished. Later, a Royal Ordinance in 1859 approved the construction of the Eixample district in the land left empty outside the walls. That same year, the City Council announced a competition to urbanise this land. Although the first prize was originally awarded to the architect Antoni Rovira i Trias, the plan put forward by Ildefons Cerdà was finally given the go-ahead. The Cerdà Plan proposed urban organisation starting out from the old quarter and forming a grid of wide interconnecting streets and crossed by two diagonal axes, Avinguda Meridiana and Avinguda Diagonal, and one horizontal axis, Gran Via, and becoming the new city centre. Cerdà imagined an equalitarian space – without any social hierarchy – combining housing and work, conceiving islands of houses distributed on two parallel lines, low in density and separated by green spaces.

Growth was slow during the first ten years in which the Eixample district began to expand, but the volume of new constructions increased considerably between 1870 and 1886, when even the streets more distant from the centre underwent rapid development. In the centre of the new district, detached, single-family houses began to disappear, replaced by low blocks of flats. The first businesses now began to be built, including the Montaner i Simon publishing house, completed between 1881 and 1885. As business activities grew in importance in the centre of the district and population density increased, the original Eixample constructions were replaced by much higher buildings that finally occupied even the green spaces.

Apart from being, along with Antoni Gaudí's Casa Vicens, one of the few remaining examples of a way of building that has now been lost, the Montaner i Simon publishing house also exemplifies the passing of an eclectic architectural style popular in the 19th century and the emergence of a new style, Art Nouveau, or Catalan Modernism. Lluís Domènech i Montaner and Antoni Gaudí established the architectural bases defining two different forms of development: Gaudí embodied an "expressionist" current, whilst Domènech i Montaner was more inclined towards rationalism.

Domènech i Montaner drew up the plans for the Montaner i Simon publishing house in 1879. The building embodies many of his concerns about architecture, which he did not see as an autonomous element, but as linked to a given social and historic context. He set out these views in an article published in the magazine *La Renaixensa* in 1878, entitled "En busca de una arquitectura nacional" ("Looking for a national architecture"). In it, more than reaching definitive conclusions or providing specific answers, he posed for the first time a series of questions about the need for a national architecture that was also, at the same time, an expression of the concerns of the new modern age.

Like many early Eixample buildings, the Montaner i Simon publishing house is three storeys high. The façade is organised as a harmonious network of vertical and horizontal elements. It is divided into three clearly differentiated sections, a central body and two symmetrical side sections. The main entrance is flanked by two towers, whilst the sides are divided by pilasters that segment the façade into seven vertical sectors. The façade is also divided into three horizontal bodies, corresponding to the three storeys: the entrances and iron grille over the lower part of the façade, a large section with round arch high windows and, finally, a line of windows on the upper floor, three on either side of the central section.

A longitudinal section of the building would enable us to distinguish between the solid, rather conventional body of the façade, with its flat roof; the modern industrial unit adjoining it, originally covered by a skylight, allowing light to enter directly into the ground floor, the basement and the production plant; and a lower third body in the courtyard of the island.

Stylistically speaking, the façade combines influences both classical (the central door and the two symmetrical side sections) and Moorish (the use of bricks, Mozarabic elements and a geometric composition reminiscent of Arabesque decoration).

Work had already begun when Domènech i Montaner decided to modify the original project for the façade, drawn up in 1879. The first important element in the façade is the masonry frieze under the series of horizontal windows at the top, covering the pilasters and even the two towers. The frieze, decorated by

ornamental tiles with a white background, links the first curve of the high windows on the ground floor with the square windows on the floor above. On the stained glass of these square windows can be found the original idea of adding columns to the façade: the column is suggested by a double metal strip, whilst a single strip marks the split column. The Doric fluting is represented by wrought iron, which, together with the geometrical patterns at the top of the window, is reminiscent of Arabic decoration.

The crowning of the building takes its inspiration from medieval architecture: here, battlements reinforce the pilasters, merely decorative at this point, whilst the helmet and the trumpeting angel (which Domènech i Montaner had already used on the binding of the *Llibre d'Or de la moderna poesia catalana* in 1878) are allegories of tradition – expressed by the helmet, referring to Catalonia's glorious past as a nation – and modernity – the trumpeting angel heralding in some new development, a new book.

The façade also features another series of symbolic elements emphasising the industrial modernity of the publishing house and the quality of its productions: beneath the helmet and the trumpeting angel are three terracotta busts on classic pillars, representing three great literary figures, Dante, Cervantes and Milton, in a tribute to the classics Montaner i Simon were publishing at the time. Accompanying these sculptures are four plaques emblazoned with the names of Maltebrun, Lafuente, Secchi and an unknown fourth, lost in the early-20th century, all of them authors who used printing technologies to publish their studies. Just below these are three toothed wheels suggesting industrial age mechanisms. The central wheel features an eagle, perched on an open book and crowned by a star. The toothed wheel is the publishing company emblem, whilst the star crowning the eagle may suggest commercial success. The name of the Montaner i Simon publishing house, in ornamental Gothic letters, adorned by floral motifs, is found in the archivolt over the main door.

Technologically speaking, this was the first building in the city centre to use bare brick, a light, ductile material frequently used in the industrial sector, and iron which, thanks to its strength and lightness enables larger, more open spaces to be created on upper floors. A third important material was glass, an element used to close which brings into play a series of chromatic effects that can be seen in the windows of the façade and the library, as well as being a source of natural lighting. Although the materials used are eminently industrial, the building takes a palace structure, with its central impluvium.

In terms of type and spatial organisation, as the façade indicates, the building is formed by three storeys. These are the semi-basement, ground floor and first floor. The first two, high and supported by cast iron pillars, were the well-appointed main floors, whilst the upper storey, clearly much smaller, was used for internal activities and as office space. From the main entrance, used only by the public, a metal staircase in the centre led down into the basement, whilst two staircases on either side led up to the first floor. The staff and tradesmen's entrances were on the right and left, respectively, of the main door, and led straight down to the floor below.

On the ground floor were the public services: completed publications were stored at the back, whilst to one side were the packaging and dispatch sections, as well as the accountancy department and the cash desk. In the centre was a great opening surrounded by an iron railing decorated with the two points of star joined by wheels adorned with floral motifs and closed by two friezes, one above and one below, decorated with intertwining floral elements, and which connected this floor with the basement below. The printing machines were in the very centre of the basement, where there was most light. Around them were the composing and binding sections and the machines that prepared the paper for printing. On the ground floor, the different work sections were divided using wooden structures and glass partitions, whilst the basement was not sub-divided in any way.

Antoni Tàpies visited the Montaner i Simon building for the first time in 1984. Although it had been abandoned for years and the original structure had fallen into disrepair, he immediately saw its extraordinary spatial and structural qualities, making the building suitable for creating the emotional atmosphere Tàpies sought with his work and that of the other artists the Fundació would exhibit.

The work of rehabilitating and refurbishing the building was carried out under the direction of Roser Amadó and Lluís Domènech Girbau between 1986 and 1990. In it, the building was adapted for its new use as a museum whilst the original structure was conserved. The existing floors were reorganised to meet the new needs. The first floor continued to be used for offices, whilst on the ground floor the bookcases in the old storeroom of the publishing house were used to house the Fundació library and the opening connecting this floor with the basement was also conserved. Due to its easy access and spaciousness, the semi-basement was converted into the principal public area. To this end, it was restructured using fixed parallel panels dividing the space into continuous sections. An auditorium was also built at the rear as a venue for lectures, seminars, film seasons and other activities. Finally, a basement was built underneath to create space for storage and more exhibition rooms. Regarding access, new staircases were installed to

communicate the different areas. Moreover, a terrace was built over the auditorium to recover the original exit onto the “island” courtyard, which had been blocked by adjoining constructions.

To ensure good lighting in the exhibition rooms, the central skylight, which enabled sunlight to enter directly, was replaced by a new roofing system, a triangular canopy.

In order to raise the height of the building, which had become closed off between the party walls of the adjoining houses, and to emphasise its new identity, an intervention by Antoni Tàpies was required and so the roof was crowned by a sculpture, *Núvol i cadira* (Cloud and Chair, 1990), created with the technical cooperation of Pere Casanovas. This sculpture, supported on eight long projecting girders that follow the structural order of the façade, is made from silver anodised aluminium tubes and stainless steel mesh. It is 12.7 metres high, 24 metres long and 6.8 metres deep and represents a great cloud from which rises a chair – a motif frequently found in Tàpies’ work. In this context, the chair alludes to a meditative attitude, thought and the aesthetic contemplation. The sculpture, which does not impose on the façade but somehow hovers over it so as not to take away its personality, has gradually become an emblem of the Fundació Antoni Tàpies.

The Fundació Antoni Tàpies building, declared a historic monument in 1997, features new approaches to space that the architect Lluís Domènech i Montaner used later in other projects and included taking care to ensure good lighting and appropriate distribution of spaces. The adaptation of the building to its new use conserves and highlights these architectural criteria.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Amadó, Roser and Lluís Domènech. “La Fundació Antoni Tàpies, Barcelona, 1986-1988”, *Documentos de arquitectura* 7 (Almería, 1988).
- Borja-Villel, Manuel J. “La Fundació Antoni Tàpies”, *Fundació Antoni Tàpies* (Barcelona: Fundació Antoni Tàpies, 1990).
- Casanova, Rossend. “Estudi de diversos elements de la Fundació Antoni Tàpies de Barcelona” (unpublished, Barcelona, 2000).
- Cirici Pellicer, Alexandre. “El edificio de la editorial Montaner y Simón”, *Cuadernos de arquitectura* 52-53 (Barcelona, 1963).
- Fuchshuber, Gregor. *L’edifici de la Fundació Antoni Tàpies* (Barcelona: Sàpic, 1992).
- Montaner, Josep M. “El depósito del mundo. El cuadrado dentro del cuadrado”, *El Croquis* 46 (Madrid, December 1989-January 1990).
- Rogent, Francesc. *Arquitectura moderna de Barcelona* (Barcelona: Parera Editores, 1899).
- Tàpies, Miquel. “Introducció”, *Fundació Antoni Tàpies*, op. cit.