

# Architecture for large families during developmentalism: Five houses in Madrid

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Spain underwent its own demographic explosion in the 1960s as a result of a number of causes that were only remotely related to the general phenomenon that occurred in the west after the Second World War. When we talk about Spanish *boomers*, we are talking about people born between 1957 and 1977, quite some time after the Spanish Civil War, or even the Second World War. They were linked more closely to the start of an evolution within the Franco regime that would give way to a second phase, characterised by optimism and economic prosperity, which is often referred to as the era of developmentalism. In this context, the increase in Spain's population came, firstly, from Spaniards becoming more confident about the future, but was also the result of a strong campaign to boost the birth rate, orchestrated by the regime itself, in which economic, ideological and religious reasons converged.

Large families became the social model par excellence in this new stage of Franco's Spain and, inevitably, the issue of assigning space for children in the domestic unit required architects to come up with new organisational solutions to control the relationship between parents and children (and the servants, where applicable), creating their own spaces for each of them where the economic possibilities allowed it.

It is true that, in most cases, this was not feasible, particularly in the construction of social housing –especially collective housing– which was also booming at the time, driven by the desire to eradicate shanty towns.

However, the design of single-family houses for the upper or upper-middle class featured different types of design solutions to the problem of creating a space of their own for the children, which was a large number in many cases, within the domestic structure as a whole. The architects themselves were part of that growing social class that was looking for better homes for their families or those closest to them on the outskirts of the city, a desire that was even more pronounced in the Spanish capital. Some of these single-family houses have been hailed by later critics as examples of

the renewal of architectural taste that brought Spanish architecture back into line with European modernity [Fig. 01].

With this in mind, this article looks at Casa Fisac, Casa Cabrero, Casa Huarte, Casa Carvajal and Casa Corrales. These are well-known examples, in which we aim to focus on the solutions provided by some of the most prominent architects of the time, for their closest circle, to the problem of incorporating an area of their own for children into the domestic setting. These examples give us a good idea of the variety of ways in which children were able to live and grow, as well as the preoccupation with nurturing their intellectual and personal development by providing them with different spaces that could be used for a range of different purposes. The key issue of the relationship between public and private areas within the domestic unit was also enhanced in these houses by the introduction of new relationship patterns between the different private spheres.

## *Casa Fisac (1956): the house that keeps on growing*

Miguel Fisac built his own house on the outskirts of Madrid<sup>1</sup> in 1956, just a year after marrying Ana M<sup>a</sup> Badell<sup>2</sup>. The house was designed as something unfinished that could grow in line with the demands of life. As he himself said: “My house, I mean, where we've lived since we got married, was the start of a house, with the idea of adding rooms to it. And we kept on adding to it [...]”<sup>3</sup>. So much so that this project “has been extended on three occasions: the first two due to an increase in the size of the family, and the third, to add a studio for the architect to work in”<sup>4</sup> [Fig. 02].

The first version of the house had two bedrooms. The arrival of the children, Anaïck, Miguel and Taciana, led to the first extension, with two rooms added on the east side of the house, as well as a new connection to the kitchen, which closed off the courtyard to the north. Despite the size of the operation, the shape of the house was not distorted by extending only one of its ‘limbs’. On the contrary, everything was redistributed to incorporate two new areas for “children”. Firstly, the children's room in the previous version of the project was transformed into a play area, in a clever change of use of the room, replacing what was a hypothetical corridor, while at the same time putting more distance between the areas for parents and children.

Then, the space connecting this new area to the kitchen was widened by extending into the courtyard, thereby creating a new space for the children linked to the living area. This extension, therefore, was built around the courtyard - which was completed, enclosed and enlarged - creating new routes around it that separated how the children and adults moved from their bedrooms to the kitchen. “The dining room, living room and playground were visually linked to the courtyard by means of a studied layout of the openings and the corner buttress that housed the fireplace, but the courtyard acted as a kind of junction, spatially interlinking the different areas but maintaining their intimacy by not allowing

cross views between them”<sup>5</sup>. In addition, the use of stone load-bearing walls for both the interior and exterior finishes of the bedrooms allowed the new facings to be indistinguishable from the old ones by repeating this strategy in the extension.

The second extension made it possible to add two new bedrooms with a bathroom adjoining both of them, now facing west. The third extension would add “a new space, a new living room, linked more to the children's area, but separate, leaving the main living room free”<sup>6</sup>. This prism, which ran perpendicular to the bedroom wing, connected directly to the play area that appeared with the first extension and separated the rest areas. As a whole, after these three extensions, the final version of the house would be 410 m<sup>2</sup>.

In view of the final result, some of the vectors that guided the growth of the house over the years and as the family grew can be identified as follows. Firstly, the degree of intimacy between parents and children is a constant, as shown by the first extension and the subsequent appearance of a new play space (and corridor) in what used to be a bedroom, which now separates the parents' sleeping area from the children's, and is further developed by doubling the connections around the courtyard. This aspect culminated in the last phase, with the insertion of the prism, which functions as a room linked to the bedrooms of the children, but separate from the original one. Finally, the desire to make the children's area more independent can be seen, whether it be for children in the first extension or for adolescents in the third extension, which also shows that the growth of the house was linked to the growth of the children.

## *Casa Cabrero (1964): the barracks-like house*

In 1949, Cabrero won the National Union Delegation Competition in Madrid (better known as Casa Sindical) and started the construction of his own house. To this end, he had acquired two adjoining plots of land in the Puerta del Hierro colony, which would end up being the site of the two houses that the architect built for his own family<sup>7</sup>. He built the first of them, located to the north, looking onto Calle Cabeza de Hierro, in 1954, with a plan for 5 children and a studio. It was designed in a fan shape on the highest part of the land, without touching any of the boundaries of the plots, and leaving a large area of orchard in the lower part of the plot. This layout, which was branded ‘vernacular’ and ‘organicistic’<sup>8</sup> by some critics, may have responded to a desire for self-sufficiency that was closely related to the historical circumstances the country was experiencing [Fig. 03].

The increase in work soon meant that the studio space was insufficient. The number of children was also growing, and the house was becoming too cramped. The architect then undertook the construction of a new house, located to the south, with access from Avenida Miraflores. The new construction was supported by the retaining wall built for the first house, thereby repeating the operation of freeing up a large part of the land on the southern side, where a garden platform and a

tennis court were laid out on different levels. As a result, the house took advantage of the enclave to build a more intimate environment (closed to the outside) that would house a larger studio and rooms for 10 children and the couple themselves.

The house was developed on two levels; a living-dining room and bedrooms on the top floor leading directly onto the garden, and a studio and service area on a semi-underground floor with a slit opening onto the garden and a courtyard at the western end. The L-shaped house had two wings with similar bays but different lengths, with the day area facing the front of the plot on the longest wing and the night area on the perpendicular wing. The former had a number of open spaces, with a retaining wall to the north and open to the south, protected by the large eaves; the latter was organised around a central herringbone corridor that provided access to each of the children's bedrooms, located both to the east and west.

Cabrero used this solution for the privacy of each of his children, with a personal space for each of them, achieving as much privacy as any large family could imagine. Safeguarding individual privacy in a family where the numbers seemed to make that impossible was a far cry from the usual large shared bedroom solutions. At the same time, the combination of cells with shared bathroom space and the children's corridor forming the backbone of the bedroom wing connects the various units with the perfection of a living machine. The parents' bedroom space is only indirectly connected to this space, occupying a prime position in the wing, with a direct view of the garden.

The space that connects this wing to the rest of the house is equally interesting. This is a common space for the children taken up by a large table that we imagine to be multifunctional, next to a transitional storage space that connects to the service kitchen on the lower floor by means of a dumb waiter. Its position at the entrance to the wing and at the end of the day area in the living space, together with its view to the west towards the courtyard on two levels, makes it the hinge that links the relationship between the different inhabitants of the house.

The system proposed by Cabrero, of rooms with a shared bathroom, was finally drawn up in an almost barracks-like layout that arranged the layout of the ten children in a balanced way. However, any similarity to a 'barracks' disappears when looking at it from the outside, thanks to the modular structure of the façade, which is set out in a repetitive proportion. In this case, the definition of an industrially-styled material-construction that rhythmically follows the inescapable repetition of the rooms masks the interior layout with a harmonious, integrated result.

*Casa Huarte in Puerta del Hierro (1965): between courtyards*

In 1965, Jesús Huarte and María Luisa Giménez Altolaguirre decided to build their family home in Puerta del Hierro, on the outskirts of Madrid, and turned to Vázquez

Molezún y Corrales to design and build it. The brilliant strategy of enclosing oneself within a plot and creating one's own landscape solved the awkward relationship with the inhospitable street at a tangent. By protecting the building from noise and prying eyes, and by creating an orchard in which the interior spaces were set out between courtyards, the project also ensured that there was cross-ventilation and the greatest possible comfort for the family during the summer months. The result would be an extensive house that occupies the entire plot with an invented but no less magical terrain and an introverted nature that only underlines the generation of a self-sufficient organism that looks at itself through outdoor spaces [Fig. 04].

María Luisa, who was originally from Cordoba, was pleased that the gardens had a profuse amount of water in the various courtyards (fountains and a swimming pool). These included three in the first sketch, with three different types of function that would organise the rest of the rooms: Parents-relationship; children-privacy; bedrooms-intimacy. The interior uses of the house are distributed between the spaces and the ground floor, with the exception of the private library and the mezzanine bedroom<sup>9</sup> which can be reached via small spiral staircases from the entrance hall and the children's living room.

The living room and children's area were used as corridors, not only by the children but also by the parents themselves, leading to the night area and the more private spaces - the bedrooms - which ultimately share the privacy of the last courtyard to the west of the property. Some details are striking: the special relationship between the parents' bedroom and the boy's bedroom, with a direct passage and the use of the walls in the corridor between the rooms as storage space and a light on the upper level. The apparent spaciousness of these multifunctional spaces (passageway-living room-studio) was achieved by using joinery at the top of the interior walls, connecting the rooms and achieving spaces that, although enclosed, do not appear to be isolated.

Molezún was of the opinion that "you don't need more space than there is on a sailing boat to live in"<sup>10</sup>. The small size of the girls' shared bedroom and the boy's bedroom seems to fit this premise. The project's communal spaces (the children's living room) were of a more generous nature, as was the creation of a playground which, despite being characterised by the word privacy in the architects' first sketches, is visually connected to the parents' courtyard through the dining room, and, in the warmer months, the two courtyards are connected by opening up the sliding doors that divide them. The house is closed to the outside, but is connected via courtyards and viewpoints so that, in Fullaondo's words, "the gardens become courtyards, and these are just an exterior extension of the interior environments"<sup>11</sup>.

*Casa Carvajal in Somosaguas (1966-68): the perfect structure*

The house that Javier Carvajal built for his family in Somosaguas is one of the most

important works of his career. It was designed and built between 1966 and 1968, immediately after the success of the Spanish Pavilion at the 1964 New York Fair, which was awarded the Gold Medal. The architect was at the peak of his professional career at the time, even though he had only just turned forty, and the house was intended to be the perfect answer to his family needs and reflect his stellar status<sup>12</sup> [Fig. 05].

There are many aspects that make this house a masterpiece, resonating with echoes of the architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright and the Alhambra. There is the use of concrete, which is not very common in domestic architecture, but which Carvajal used with a mastery that goes far beyond his potential debt to American brutalism, to create an abstract, mysterious interplay of volumes, contrasting sharply with the chiaroscuro effect of the heavy cornices at the top<sup>13</sup>. And, for the subject at hand, there is the magnificent interior layout and the exquisite way in which the parts of the house are related, multiplying its possible connections almost without corridors.

The only floor in the house is surprising due to its value as a stand-alone visual object. It is laid out with a meticulous, variegated calligraphy that makes the space of each room separate, configuring a dance of lines of different thicknesses in which the concrete walls that embrace and support the house and the partitions that delimit the access areas can be identified. The space flows between these lines, punctuated by a series of sliding planes, which provide a changing configuration of connectivity between rooms.

The device that permits this rich configuration is the presence of two courtyards that wrap around the dining room, forming the heart of the house, and creating a figure-of-eight flow that provides a spatial continuum. It is a resource that evokes the arrangement of spaces in the Alhambra, underlined by the presence of a murmur of water coming from the fountain that occupies the largest of the courtyards.

The house sits on the terrain respecting its topography, with three platforms with three steps between each of them, which contribute to the delimitation of the different rooms that are arranged in continuity around the courtyards.

The children's area is in the south-west corner of the house on the upper platform; it is made up of three bedrooms (two boys and a girl to begin with, and later a fourth would be born in the house) with their corresponding bathroom and storage areas. These rooms are protected by a common L-shaped area for study and play, which is directly connected to the entrance, the parents' quarters and the outdoor garden by means of sliding planes that can be concealed in order to incorporate this space into the general flow and take part in the game of multiplying connections. In the garden, there is a separate platform that expands the possibilities of this common area and increases the degree of independence it gives to the children's area. The design

of the rooms, which overlook this space, is personalised, with an immediate connection between the male rooms, which share a bathroom, and greater privacy for the female room, which has its own bathroom.

This device for controlling privacy is repeated, in a certain way, in the connection with the parents' rooms, which are protected by the library space that acts as an antechamber to the private spaces (although, significantly, it does this for the father's room, while the mother's room communicates directly with the general corridor near the children's area), completing the play of diaphragms that nuances the changing flows.

#### *A few conclusions and a final example*

The difference between the parameters of each house is, paradoxically, the first common characteristic to note, how they are used as a solution to specific family problems. They are all designed from the perspective of closeness to the future users; Casa Fisac, Casa Cabrero and Casa Carvajal are for the architects' own families, and Casa Huarte is for a close friend, so their solutions are not easily exportable.

However, it is possible to identify some of the general issues to which they tried to provide answers, each with its own rationale. Firstly, there would be the need to graduate privacy; of parents from children or of both from the toilet; a major problem when there are many children. This led to the creation of private living spaces (for games or study) for children (Fisac, Huarte, Carvajal, and even the Cabrero house, which is more demanding in terms of size, include a space for expansion that can be used as a dining room or study area), sometimes with a sacrifice of some of the space used for sleeping. The same interior connections that were created in the children's area are also noteworthy for what they contribute to the coexistence between the children themselves; this aspect is particularly significant in Casa Cabrero where, in the absence of expansion spaces, an alternative flow to the corridor is created, connecting the rooms with each other. In the same vein, we can see the multiplication of interior connections in the houses, aimed at keeping the use of the more public areas of the house for adults, which is evident in all of them, or the extension of this autonomy of use for the children's areas to the connection with the exterior; in some examples (Huarte, Carvajal), this even led to the creation of an outdoor space for them, separate from the main garden of the house.

Another interesting reflection would be the changing situation of its users, who are continuously growing, and the implications for the use of these spaces dedicated to them. Although these spaces may have been designed for children, they would soon begin to be inhabited by the adolescents and young people that these children would become, rethinking their relationship with the rest of the house and demanding more privacy than some of the examples we have reviewed gave them (the last extension of the Fisac house was a result of this). The growth of the family unit itself, with the birth of new children,

which is at the origin of Casa Cabrero or in the mutations and additions of the Fisac house, already called into question solutions designed with excessive precision such as Casa Carvajal. This is a clear difference to other spaces designed for children, where the users are constantly changing and are always the same age.

There is another case that makes these problems more explicit. In 1977, José Antonio Corrales finally built the studio house he had been patiently designing since he had acquired the land in Aravaca a long time before [Fig. 09]. His dream was to bring his family residence and studio there. However, his successful professional life delayed the start of the construction work. When it was finally built, Corrales' own account tells us that he found that it was no longer the house his family needed. His six children had grown up, some had already left the family home and the rest were reluctant to move to Aravaca. The result was that, from the very first moment, the couple found themselves alone in a house designed to be inhabited by a lot of people and, soon, they would also end up deciding to return to Madrid. It is a sad story for such a striking house<sup>14</sup> that also serves as an example in this review, because of the way the bedroom package fits in brilliantly while overhanging the rest of the house.

It descends in successive terraces down the slope, following a perpendicular route to the slope, which delimits the living area - to the east - with respect to the study. Corrales designed a command bridge on the first floor, which connected directly with the entrance on one side and with the bathroom on the other, in which the bedrooms were arranged in series to the south, above the terraces. The parents' bedroom with its adjoining rooms was located at the east end and was directly connected to the toilet, which had direct access to the sleeping quarters. The bedrooms of the two sons with a shared bathroom were located to the west, while the four girls occupied the centre of the bridge; on the other side of the corridor, to the north and towards the airtight façade, there was a single room containing a toilet and wardrobes, which served as a common dressing room.

At a time of social and economic growth in Spain, single-family houses were a space for trying out different types of housing solutions. The architects tackled this problem by presenting variations which, as far as children's spaces were concerned, introduced different layouts and spaces (communal and individual) that showed a new focus on the development of the children, as well as defining a period of optimum use of the house itself. These design exercises can still be used today as an example for other types of architecture, particularly domestic architecture, to solve problems that are more or less close to home. In the case of the Madrid environment, in this particularly stunning period, this review raises the rhetorical question of whether it is possible to understand the richness and suggestiveness of this group of iconic houses without taking into account their role as a habitat designed for large families.

1. José María Fernández de Isla described how the couple came to this particular place: "Fisac admitted that they were initially looking for a flat in the vicinity of the Prado Museum, but the high cost in the area made them give up and look for an alternative solution. The architect himself made an amusing remark that the choice of the plot was due to the lack of awareness of his wife, Ana María, who did not mind moving to an area where the only through traffic at the time was rubbish carts and lorries". José María Fernández Isla, "Miguel Fisac, vivienda en Cerro del Aire Arquitecto: Miguel Fisac Madrid 1956", *Arquitectura*, no. 309 (1997): 62.

2. cf. Ana María Badell, "Desde mis recuerdos", *Arquitectura*, no. 305 (2006): 108.

3. Paloma de Roda Lamsfus y Francisco Arques Soler, *Miguel Fisac: apuntes y viajes* (Madrid: Scriptum, 2007), 268.

4. José María Fernández Isla, "Miguel Fisac, vivienda en Cerro del Aire Arquitecto: Miguel Fisac Madrid 1956", *Arquitectura*, no. 309 (1997): 61.

5. Sonia Vázquez-Díaz y Luis Suárez Mansilla, "La estética taoísta en la casa de Fisac en Cerro del Aire", *Boletín Académico. Revista de investigación y arquitectura contemporánea*, nº 4 (2014), p. 43-52. As these authors explained, the courtyard became the focal point of the house in all its phases, both from a morphological point of view and in terms of character, inspired by an oriental aesthetic, which fascinated Fisac at the time.

6. Cónsul Pascual, Yolanda, *Dentro de sus casas*, PhD Thesis, Polytechnic University of Madrid School of Architecture, 2015. The chapter on Fisac's house was published by Cónsul Pascual, Yolanda, and Cecilia Ricci. *Dentro de sus casas: Miguel Fisac. 1.* ed. Buenos Aires: Nobuko, 2019.

7. Francisco de Asís Cabrero Torres-Quevedo, *La obra de Francisco Cabrero, Conferencias en la ETS Arquitectura de Sevilla, 1975, recogidas en Francisco Cabrero 1939-1978*, (Madrid: Xarait, 1978), 15-23.

8. Francisco de Asís Cabrero Torres-Quevedo, *Casa Cabrero en Puerta de Hierro*, (Pamplona: T6, 2002), 17.

9. Initially, as can be read in the report on the project, the bedroom of the only boy was on the mezzanine floor, but this decision was changed on site, moving him to the ground floor next to the shared bedroom of the 3 girls. Vázquez Molezún Legacy, COAM Historical Service, VMP007 Private residence in Puerta de Hierro (Casa Huarte), Madrid.

10. From Jesús Huarte, included in Pablo Olalquiaga Bescós, "Casa Huarte: José Antonio Corrales y Ramón Vázquez Molezún. El concepto de lo experimental en el ámbito doméstico" (PhD diss., Polytechnic University of Madrid, 2014), 51.

11. Juan Daniel Fullaondo, "Corrales y Molezún: en torno a la casa patio", *Nueva Forma*, no. 20 (September 1967): 41-99.

12. The house was designed and built at the same time as Casa García-Valdecasas, for Carvajal's in-laws, on two adjoining plots that were joined together by the garden. Although each house stood alone and were separate, the interplay of variations between them made both houses even more interesting. Cf. A. Espinosa García-Valdecasas, "Trabajar sobre el límite. La casa Carvajal del lugar al detalle" in *Pioneros de la arquitectura moderna española: aprender de una obra*, ed. T. Couceiro Núñez, (Madrid: 2015): 253-255.

13. Cf. Ignacio Vicens Hualde, "Hormigones domésticos", *Arquitectura*, no. 309 (1997): 48.

14. Peter Buchanan called it the most radically modern of 20th century Spanish dwellings, a true *machine d'habiter*. Cf. Peter Buchanan, "La casa Corrales," *Arquitectura*, no. 309 (1997): 54.

Fisac House  
Cabrero House  
Huarte House  
Carvajal House  
Corrales House