Photography can be understood as a visual register made on a specific moment, as much as architecture publication can be seen as the register of debates and discussions of a particular time. Starting from the project archive of 99 issues of ARQ, this selection does not aim to show how selected buildings have aged but rather how our perception of them has done it.

Most of the architecture magazines that us photographers relate to – whether commissioned or recycling previous works – have usually three obsessions. The first is praising – it is difficult to find something that is negatively introduced. The second is that they are passionate about everything new. The third is that they prefer to show the work of proven architects. This means that, at least for magazines, architecture’s editorial consumption is closer to the codes of ‘lifestyle’ world (fashion, design, and so on) than to the journals of other more self-critical disciplines. It’s hard, for example, to imagine an economics journal that publishes exclusively examples of public policies that it considers good or successful.

In this context, the possibility of revisiting projects published over thirty years ago has an obvious element of interest – since at least breaks with the dynamics of the new. The course of time also provides a better perspective to assess whether something ended up being really good or not. Last – an element no less morbid – it allows seeing how our local architectural avant-garde developed over time.

While going through the list of projects published in ARQ since its inception, number one and number two are places that I relate to on a daily basis: Nuevo Centro and Plaza Lyon, by Larrain Murtinho y Asociados. Instinctively, then, I searched chronologically for other projects with similar features, that is, projects that are part of my inventory on Santiago. And although I tried a little less banal, more sophisticated way of establishing
PUEBLO DEL INGLÉS

Wenborne, San Martín y Browne Arquitectos
1978

Publicado en / Published in
ARQ 04 (junio, 1981): 8
CENTRO NUEVO
Larraín Murtinho y Asociados
1982
Publicado en / Published in
arq 04 (junio, 1981): 8
a selection criterion, I realized that the most effective way was through this ‘looking for what’s familiar’ kind of approach – including the good, the bad and the ugly.

With this selection system, two groups were quickly assembled. One with the aforementioned projects by Larrain Murtinho y Asociados (both completed in 1982), to which was added the Pueblo del Inglés (1978) by Enrique Brown, published in the magazine’s fourth issue. The second group of projects, most of them published in issue number 25, are corporate typologies made in the first half of the 90s. In between them, nothing.

The first group follows an attempt to develop new retail architecture schemes in a way that were integrated to the city and accommodated other programmatic needs, such as offices or housing. It was a response – also in a postmodern fashion – to the issues concerning commercial architecture in the form of ‘caracoles’ [spiral-shaped structures] that began to be built in the mid-1970s. As it happened with the ‘caracoles,’ such pursuit was abruptly interrupted once the mall was consolidated as the only solution that real estate developers were able to articulate in their heads.

The second group corresponds to projects developed on the first half of the 90s, at the beginning of Chilean political transition. This set of projects published (celebrated?) in the ARQ of the time belong to a kind of corporate architecture that very well stands for everything that was yet to come. That is, although they were all carried out during the first post-dictatorship democratic government, none of them are public. On the contrary, they were all a sort of celebration of the enforcement – now in democracy – of the new neoliberal paradigm: the hqs of a financial holding, a tobacco company, and a telephone company. An international hotel chain is added to the list and, perhaps to emphasize the point, the group also includes Santiago’s ‘World Trade Center.’

Architecture as a discipline has always had the ability to adjust itself extremely well to the time. After all, commissions never come from those who are losing. In its first issue, as an editorial statement, ARQ says that it seeks: "Precise observation. The moment when we build a school." Well, the year was 1980 and the place was Chile, and the truth is that is hard to find that moment in the magazine’s first issues. The first three editions are mainly focused on academic activity and student-teacher relationship. It is only in its fourth issue that the gaze moves outside the school and the focus is on... commercial buildings.

While this denial of a broader context may seem almost violent when looked at a distance, the aforementioned projects still maintained a civic interest for interacting with the city, endorsing it and not withdrawing from it. It is hard to know what would have happened to Santiago if the experiments of that first group had not been so abruptly interrupted. What we do know is what happened to Santiago after the second group of projects succeeded. ARQ
PLAZA LYON
Larrain Murtinho y Asociados
1982
Publicado en / Published in
ARQ 04 (junio, 1981): 8
EDIFICIO CONSORCIO VIDA

Enrique Browne, Borja Huidobro
1993

Publicado en / Published in
ARQ 25 (enero, 1994): 18-21
EDIFICIO CCT
AV. EL BOSQUE
Mardones Arquitectos y Asoc.
1991
Publicado en / Published in
ARQ 17 (julio, 1991): 28-31
HOTEL HYATT REGENCY
Alemparte, Barreda y Asociados
1992
Publicado en / Published in
ARQ 22 (diciembre, 1992): 14-17
EDIFICIO LA INDUSTRIA
Abraham Senerman Lamas,
Juan Echenique Guzmán,
José Cruz Covarrubias
1994
Publicado en / Published in
ARQ 25 (enero, 1994): 8-11
EDIFICIO CORPORATIVO DE LA COMPAÑÍA DE TELÉFONOS DE CHILE

Mario Paredes, Luis Corvalán, Jorge Iglesis, Leopoldo Prat
1995

Publicado en / Published in
ARQ 25 (enero, 1994): 15-17
Architecture studies at the Architectural Association in London, where he began his career as a photographer. In 2008 he moved to Santiago and founded Estudio Palma.