Given its nature, an expansion should always take a position on physical preexistences (either friendly, indifferent, defiant, and so on). However, it is not obvious that the design for a house expansion should also take a position on intangible pre-existences (such as discipline, culture, history, and so on). The example shows an attempt to extend not only a house but also the constellation of precedents that the commission follows, even if only in a small autonomy redoubt.
The project is the second intervention on an old adobe tenement house located in a field in Talagante, 40 km away from Santiago. The operation involved changing the main entrance, removing all public spaces within the previous volume and redistributing the original enclosures. The new patio and pavilion were organized around an eighteen-meter high walnut tree, under whose shadow all the family’s daily life has developed, despite the area being split from the old dwelling’s reception spaces.

The house’s first expansion – built by the couple themselves fifteen years ago when they only had one child (now they have seven) – was a mimesis operation in which a new, displaced volume extending the roof replicated the country house imaginary. The second intervention – now presented – considers as a significant pre-existence not only the rural house
but also its setting, especially this singular tree. Therefore, the operation is nothing like the previous ones nor it is restricted to increasing built surface (as a pragmatic response to new domestic requirements); instead, it tries to modify the house’s relational system to amplify its nexus with the garden, and specifically the walnut tree.

The pavilion is built on a square plan with a treated pine structure, and an identical regime of opacity/transparency on three of its facades. The fourth one is attached to a corridor that connects to the original structure, adding interior space and breaking the monotony of the central plan. Based on regular 6 x 6” pillar grid and a system of trusses supported on also 6 x 6” pillars, the plan stipulates homogeneous dimensions that, however, allow for different distributions. The ceiling accentuates empty spaces between trusses, distributes the central skylight’s light and replicates the roof plan geometry: eight triangles resulting from the 45º-rotation of two squares. One of the rooms in the new pavilion accommodates a desk and a small library, which were detached from the rest of the common spaces. The patio builds the space in-between, providing a solid ground that allows prolonging the interiors during summer, defining a new access and gathering the group of volumes around the walnut tree, which gives the name to this intervention.

1 Giorgio Morandi. Natura Morta, 1952
2 Imagen de proyecto / Project Image
3 Alberto Cruz, Juan Purcell, Sala de Música. Ciudad Abierta de Ritoque, Chile, 1972. © Felipe Fontecilla
4 Alison y Peter Smithson, Yellow House (proyecto no construido). Primer premio Shinkenchiku Competition, Japón, 1976.
Subordinating the architectural design to the tree’s presence reminds of some of Alison and Peter Smithson’s projects, such as the Garden Building in Oxford (1967-70) or the un-built Yellow House (1976). The first one, as their own advance on the idea of ‘as found’; the latter, as an ideal project that engenders its own constraints and equates built form to green form.

Detaching the new building to define a distance that could work for both a patio access and a north sunlight entrance for the new pavilion had the difficulty of connecting these two autonomous pieces. Louis Kahn’s composition strategy as well as his geometric definition of each element, related this modest intervention with architectural topics that were considered relevant to the challenges of this case.

Actions such as the manufacturing of an empty space or the use of a new chromatic palette applied to all volumes, taken from Giorgio Morandi’s still life, sought to provide coherence to the complex without resorting to the mimetic maneuvers of previous interventions. ARQ
Planta emplazamiento / Site Plan
E. / S.: 1: 5,000

Corte AA / Section AA
E. / S.: 1: 250

Elevación sur poniente / South west facade
E. / S.: 1: 250
Planta vivienda original / Plan Original House
E. / S.: 1: 250

Planta vivienda intervenida / Plan of interventions
E. / S.: 1: 250

LEYENDA / LEGEND
1. Hall de acceso / Access
2. Estar – comedor / Living room
3. Cocina / Kitchen
4. Escritorio / Studio
5. Dormitorio niños / Childrens’ bedroom
6. Baño / Bathroom
7. Sala niños / Multipurpose room
8. Dormitorio principal / Main bedroom
9. Dormitorio servicio / Service room
10. Terraza / Terrace
Defining the expansion of an old country house as a ‘pavilion’ allows architects to take refuge in a rather permissive realm within the discipline, freeing themselves from mere programmatic resolution typical in these kind of commissions so as to explore pure architectural operations and articulate, within a limited space, a wide range of references – the Smithsons, Kahn, ucv, among others – admitting with it the survival of architectural subjects. The pavilion thus becomes a redoubt.

However, being safeguarded under the ‘pavilion’ imaginary is not free from debts, as it entails the need to ‘design distances’ that enable the required independence. The first one corresponds to the central patio that separates the old from the new, the volumes thus linked through a processional corridor configuring the new main access. The second is the pavilion itself and its austere wooden box, which has symmetrical facades regardless of their orientation; the blue shade selected for the opaque elements – in contrast to the dark brown of the pre-existing ones – reinforces the detachment. The third one is designed vertically, as the volume is placed on 27 quarry stones that secure the pavilion (with metal studs passing through), raising it 2 inches from the rough concrete foundations. The last distance is originated at the heart of the plan, where a square drawn in the wooden floor rotates 45 degrees with respect to the general plan, while pillars in the four corners build a structural slab on which the trusses rest. The free open plan turns thus opposite to the fixed, closed structure of the existing house.

Finally, the walnut tree on the west not only stands out for its key role and its ability to rearticulate the whole, outlining the patio while defining the entrance – which is already a lot – but also, for its fulfillment of the entrusted task: to soothe the distance between the old house and the new pavilion. ARQ
PABELLÓN DEL NOGAL

WALNUT TREE PAVILION

Arquitectos / Architects: Emilio De la Cerda Errázuriz, Pedro Correa Fernández
Ubicación / Location: Camino Ochagavía, sin número. Talagante, Chile
Clientes / Clients: Gerardo Alcalde, Carmen Ochagavía
Construcción / Construction: Oscar Alcaino, Juan Vega
Emballeteado de cubierta / Standing seam metal roof: Orlando Godoy
Materialidad de la estructura / Structure materials: Pino impregnado 6x6” / Treated 6x6” pine structure
Terminaciones / Finishing: Emballeteado de zinc, ventanas pvc con termopanel, piso ingeniería, tabla pino, acero, baldosa hormigón.

Standing seam zinc, pvc thermal panel windows, engineering floor, pine boards, steel, concrete tile.

Presupuesto / Budget: us$ 385 / m²
Superficie construida original / Existent built surface: 145 m²
Superficie de la obra nueva / New built surface: 80 m²
Superficie de terreno / Site surface: 3.000 m²
Año de proyecto / Project year: 2013
Año de construcción / Construction year: 2014-2016
Fotografía / Photographs: Stephannie Fell

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