Urban densification implies an unavoidable paradox: in order to allow more people to live in it, it is necessary to disrupt something existent. Thus, in established neighborhoods with suitable facilities, new massive housing will always compete with the possibility of having left everything as it was before. This project is an opportunity to discuss this condition from the point of view of architecture, without implying with it to leave aside other aspects of a manifold problem.

At first, the challenge for the office was unclear: to experiment and add value to a large volume already defined by a real estate project that, genuinely, sought to maximize its built area.

The volume in question was required to be ‘massive’ in several aspects. As regards its physical features, the project had to be conceived as a single 25-storeys mass, conditioned by the gradients and shadows allowed by current regulation. On the other hand, in its human requests, the project had to answer a strong demand from a certain age and socioeconomic sector that had led to a massive emigration to the area, with 424 apartments (mostly 35 m²). Third, in its quantitative features, the figures that shaped the volume were also large, both in terms of money, of square meters and number of clients (or dwellers).

Faced with this reality, we decided to enhance the volume’s massiveness through the geometric control of its bays and balconies that, in a way, always represent the dwellers own individuality. Previous experience with this type of projects proved that the differences would be unconsciously externalized in the color of the different curtains. Within the grid, the domestic life of its occupants would create a mosaic of changing colors at a large scale.

In an attempt to complement that future chromatic composition, massive and involuntary, the silent surfaces of the tower were used as a canvas.
MARSINO ARQUITECTURA
Santiago, Chile

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Planta primer piso
First floor plan
E. / S. 1:500

LEYENDA / LEGEND
1. Hall recepción / Reception hall
2. Sala multiusos / Multipurpose room
3. Local comercial / Commercial area
4. Acceso vehicular / Vehicle access
5. Acceso peatonal / Pedestrian access
for individual artistic expression. Unlike what is usually expected from such a project, ornament would not be volumetric but pictorial. The resulting geometric composition was conditioned by a discourse between the massive and the particular, the individual and the collective, the partial and the whole.

In its current state, the user-inspired facade operation – a joint venture with Estanpintando collective – covers with artistic intention the tower's mathematical, profitable matrix. The action pursues singularity, trying to build an urban landmark in justifiable terms for the client.

As a counterpoint to the massive, the volume disappears at street level, opening its courtyards to the passer-by, offering an intimate, closer scale.
Marsino Arquitectura

Regional practice formed by architects, designers, engineers, sociologists and related disciplines, based in Santiago and with a branch in Lima. Led by architects Jorge Marsino and María Inés Buzzoni, its designs have been awarded at the architecture biennials of Chile and Quito, as well as the Bienal Iberoamericana de Arquitectura y Urbanismo BIAU. In 2011, its building Liceo Técnico Profesional La Florida was chosen as one of the five Exemplary Education Establishments worldwide by the Center for Effective Learning Environments (OCDE). The practice has been also awarded the third place in the Work of the Year 2016 granted by Archdaily for its Department of Physics Building at the University of Tarapacá and the nomination of the same project to the Mies Crown Hall Americas Prize MCHAP 2016.
EDIFICIO PATIO CHILÓE

Arquitectos / Architects: Marsino Arquitectura (Jorge Marsino, María Inés Buzzoni, Francisco González, Andrea Crestani)
Ubicación / Location: Chiloé 1221, Santiago, Chile
Cliente / Client: Inmobiliaria Focus
Ingeniería estructural / Structural engineering: Bascuñan & Maccioni
Construcción / Building contractor: ebco
Instalación sanitaria / Mechanical engineering: TEFRA
Instalación eléctrica / Electrical system: ieg
Pintura mural / Mural: Constanza Larenas, Trinidad Guzmán

Materiales / Materials: Hormigón armado / Reinforced concrete
Presupuesto / Budget: US$ 700/m²
Superficie construida / Built surface: 27.796,1 m²
Superficie terreno / Site surface: 2.193,4 m²
Año de proyecto / Project year: 2013
Año de construcción / Construction year: 2015-2017
Fotografías / Photographs: Nicolas Saieh, María Inés Buzzoni
Texto / Text: Renzo Marsino
La vida doméstica dentro de la grilla

GABRIELA GARCÍA DE CORTÁZAR
Profesora Asistente Adjunta, Escuela de Arquitectura,
Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile,
Santiago, Chile

At Matta Sur neighborhood, dozens of high-rise buildings have emerged in recent years. All of them large, all very high, all fully occupying their plots and the maximum volumes defined by regulation, all standing out among the small buildings representative of the area. This landscape of isolated towers is the product of urban renewal policies prompted by the Concertación in the nineties and new subway lines. The latter were what likely turned the gaze of real estate companies into the area, which until then had been out of scope of the so-called development. However, it did not go unnoticed: it’s hard to ignore the occurrence of one of these towers, let alone of dozens of them. Once organized, the neighborhood’s residents submitted an application to the National Monuments Council, who in 2016 had declared the neighborhood as a Typical Zone (Decree n° 210, 2016). As a result, Santiago’s Regulation Plan changed, establishing a maximum building height of fourteen meters and the impossibility of erecting detached buildings among continuous one.

The Patio Chiloé building, by Marsino Arquitectura (2013), was designed following former legislation, built while the law was being passed and is now being delivered to its dwellers (2018). It would be impossible to build Patio Chiloé today, but there it is, along with its companions, with its twenty-four stories high, five-story base within continuous building and, on top of it, nineteen floors of detached towers in two sections with consecutive setbacks. The building has 424 apartments, whose surfaces range from 20,83 m² to 50,19 m². Some of these apartments can benefit from the State housing funding. When occupied in its full capacity, 1053 people could live in this building at the same time, without considering the floating population around the complex. Patio Chiloé is only one of the dense, colossal, massive towers that now populate the capital’s center and is one of the towers that changed radically and forever a once traditional neighborhood. Given this, the tower and its mates not only concentrate people, but also critics.

Within this context, both the architects’ discourse and the Patio Chiloé building try to cultivate a certain virtue. The architects speak of their task as “adding value” to the real estate project, which largely translates into a ground floor open to the public, accommodating a combination of commerce (three commercial premises) and open spaces at street level. On the other hand, facades – the next element exposed to the public eye – is where the greatest efforts are focused: they were
designed as a grid of square-shaped openings, which can be either windows or terraces; some of these openings were painted inside with varied bright colors, quoting perhaps Le Corbusier’s *Unités d’habitation*. The north facade has a mural painted by an artists collective.

The building as an object does not cease to be strangely pleasant, its formal restraint welcomed amid the festival of facade elements of other towers in the area. However, as architecture is bluntly insufficient: its social will is disappointingly external, its commitment to the quality of life of “clients (or inhabitants)”, sadly mediocre. The firm’s critical practice begins and ends with the most superficial elements of the building and does not involve its interior: the apartments are eminently standard in their distribution and most of them decidedly tight. This architecture project, whose mission is to house at least 424 subjectivities, give space to 424 intimacies, welcome 424 citizens who spend their day working and moving around the city, unconsciously reproduces those models it tries to distance itself from.

However, is this architects’ responsibility?

Understanding such architecture as different from the one taught at universities is fundamental: this is not the architect-artist’s territory, whose mission is to create a unique, unrepeatable object; whose final product – the building – seems to exist outside the market. The real estate apartment exists mainly as a consumer good and its low-cost reproducibility is at its essence.

The space for architecture, then, is that between the maximum allowed by current legislation, translated into a theoretical volume, and the maximums determined by the investors’ market studies, likely collected in an Excel sheet. The architect draws, with maximum dedication and possible quality, what is already predetermined by the letter of the law and the market numbers. Thus, the space of architecture is neither the void enclosed by planes, nor the sculpted solid, but the stiff space between the legislation’s straitjacket and the pressure for profit. It is not surprising, then, that the field where Marsino operated was the building’s façade and its ground floor. These are simply the dimensions of creative freedom allowed by real estate architecture.

Within this logic, Patio Chiloé is thus a better building: on the one hand, it has allowed starting a conversation, entering the arena of disciplinary discussion through its publication. While the references for the facades’ grid are questionable, there is a willingness to work on the aesthetic presence of the great built mass in a conscious way – which is undoubtedly a public service. At the same time, by exposing the design ideas and decisions that shaped it, introduces a subject avoided by the academy – given its harshness: no architecture school teaches how to work in the real estate field or, still, to find project opportunities (or critical positions) there.

Finally, Patio Chiloé materializes – through its evident aesthetic-will façade – the narrowness of the actual space for architecture within the real estate market, comprised between the state’s incentives for densification and the market’s own greed.
The building could be a call to arms. It could be read in two different ways: either we get rid of the virtuous pretensions certain architects adduce and we dedicate ourselves to play by the rules without preaching, producing for real estate managers buildings that endure, work and are beautiful, or we question straitjackets and market pressures and we strive to expand the field they impose, with the aim of redefining it. Buildings will continue to be built, if not in Matta Sur in some other soon desirable commune. The question is whether they’ll be designed after the letter of the law, the numbers of the market or the drawings of the architect.

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**Notas / Notes**

1. Previously, this area was only served on its west side by Line 2; today, Line 6 goes right through its center (Persa Bio-Bio) and future Line 3 will also have a station here.

2. Prices of the apartments start at 1993 UF, so your buyers can opt for the Section 2 subsidy (housing up to 2000 UF). See https://www.portalinmobiliario.com/venta/departamento/santiago-metropolitana/6202-patio-chiloe-nva

3. Estimated by counting number of beds, all beds occupied. When, on the contrary, one person per bed is considered – regardless of how many people the bed is for – the final number is 633 people.

4. Which is still seductive. See the website or https://www.plataformaarquitectura.cl/cl/875211/number-conversacionesfau-s-marsino-arquitectura

5. Here, we must ask ourselves: what’s behind these aberrant maxima? Of course, the sum of theoretical volumes generates a possible city that, the more massive it becomes, the more profit it produces for its districts in terms of contributions.

6. The architect’s description names two photographs as a reference: a press photo of ‘vertical ghettos’ at Estación Central – a dubious ‘inspiration’, to say the least – and a photo by Andreas Gursky. Although the aesthetics of Patio Chiloé as registered by Nico Saieh’s drone is close to Gursky’s photographs, it is not possible to compare the German artist’s project, who registers elements ‘as found’ (following Bernd and Hilla Becher) with the production ex professo of a volume with similar aesthetic. If the Bechers photographed Germany’s postwar industrial landscape and Gursky the landscapes of neoliberalism, the comparison for Marsino is not very auspicious. On the Bechers, see Tom Weaver’s interview with Hilla Becher. AA Files 66 (2013).

7. Within the field of residential architecture, since the urban and social aspect has been, on the contrary, widely studied. Within the few approaches from architecture, it is worth mentioning the theses developed at the Design and Research Studio Profanations (UC, 2017), taught by Francisco Díaz and Manuel Corrada (See the works by Paulina Montero and Emma Vidal). It is also worth mentioning the work by Diego Rossel and Victor Arnault at their FaU, U. de Chile studio, on typologies for densification.

8. It would be necessary to add the following: choosing local representatives who think the city ethically, applying common sense within practice as revising architect or similar involved at the Doms, participating as both citizen and professional of debates on regulatory plans. The boundaries between architecture and politics are certainly blurred.

9. As stated by Pier Vittorio Aureli ‘It is precisely an architecture that wants to be too good that becomes far more oppressive than an architecture that makes clear its own questionable premises.” P. Vittorio Aureli, A Spectacle of Deepest Harmony. What is Good Architecture?, Case 90 (2013) 7-12.