

## VOLCANIC MODERNITY. THE *TEN-BEL ENSEMBLES*, CANARY ISLANDS

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### ABSTRACT.

This article reveals the innovative project mechanisms of the apartment ensembles making up the *Ten-Bel* tourist complex by architects Javier Díaz-Llanos, Vicente Saavedra and Luis Cabrera, the first intervention aimed at building a *landscape of leisure* to serve mass tourism on the island of Tenerife in the 1960s.

This study shows how the aggregate modular system used in the configuration of the various *Ten-Bel* ensembles weaves a spatial fabric that sketches out new ways of using space in tourist installations. It demonstrates how the architects sought out ingenious methods for generating forms of spatial organisation that would permit greater densities, while maintaining a large degree of privacy and intensifying the experiences of the landscape.

The study discovers that the uniqueness and relevance of the *Ten-Bel* apartment ensembles lie in the fact that they define complex residential units that reproduce the open spaces commonly found in urban contexts as part of the architecture itself. The ensembles are a means of interspersing architecture and urbanism, a way of constructing an integral space for tourism that unfolds in the territory as a function of the landscape.

The research concludes that *Ten-Bel's* ensembles forge a singular identity as a synthesis between modern architecture and local culture, constructing a modern space for tourism that preserves and promotes the idiosyncrasies of the vernacular architecture and the volcanic landscapes of Tenerife Island.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

In the 1960s, tourism in the Canary Islands began to expand from its initial roots in the traditional urban tourist centres and started to colonise the pristine volcanic landscapes along the southern coasts with villages dedicated exclusively to mass tourism.

Commissioned by the Belgian Company *Ten-Bel S.A.* in 1963, *Ten-Bel* was the first tourist complex developed in the south of Tenerife Island. The complex was designed by local architects Javier Díaz-Llanos and Vicente Saavedra together with Luis Cabrera following their *Costa del Silencio* Development Plan. The area to be developed consisted of a natural platform covered by lava beds and local vegetation, a region of special environmental and landscape value.

### 2. THE *TEN-BEL* TOURIST COMPLEX (1963–1982)

Given this situation, one of the main objectives of the project would be to protect and exploit to maximum effect the natural landscape in the area. The buildings would be grouped strategically into concentrated, yet sufficiently separated ensembles, so as to create areas of intense development interspersed with open spaces where nature could be preserved in its pristine state (Fig. 1).

The design of the *Ten-Bel* tourist complex is based on a combination of independent apartment ensembles, self-sufficient units offering an alternative to the traditional hotel format. This concept allowed for a phase-by-phase approach to the overall implementation, which took over twenty years to complete, such that the estate would appear com-

plete at the end of every building phase but could adapt to future demands.

*Ten-Bel* is an atypical case in the context of the Canary Islands, in that a single entity, *Ten-Bel S.A.*, developed, constructed and ran all of the facilities of the tourist village. This lent coherence to the project and gave the complex a strong spatial identity beyond the sum of its different residential ensembles.

Generated by a set of modular cubic units, forming spatially complex and seemingly random assemblies, each of *Ten-Bel's* apartment ensembles has its own internal logic, giving rise to widely varied, increasingly complex configurations and uses of space.

The flexible system of adding modules<sup>1</sup> enabled a broad range of formal solutions while at the same time allowing for a systematisation of construction processes required for mass production.

A closer look at three of the apartment ensembles developed in *Costa del Silencio* will explore the design mechanisms applied during the evolution of the *Ten-Bel* tourist complex and show how the project functioned as a laboratory for the development of the modern tourist space in the Canary Islands.

#### 2.1. The *Santa Ana* Ensemble (1967)

The *Santa Ana* was the first apartment ensemble built in *Costa del Silencio* and the experience served as the basis for later ensembles developed in *Ten-Bel*. The *Santa Ana* Ensemble is like a jigsaw of houses and patios interlocking over a modular square mesh. The different apartment units are



Fig. 1. *Frontera Ensemble*.  
© J. Bernadó, 2005.

grouped into blocks, with entrances off public footpaths that criss-cross to form small plazas.

The *Santa Ana* complex offers a range of urban solutions that ensure high-density occupation of the plot while respecting private space and almost completely transforming the plot's natural terrain. This model will be further developed in later complexes such as the *Drago* and the *Frontera* Ensembles to adapt to the new needs of mass tourism and a newfound respect for the untouched landscapes of the island's south.

### 2.2. The *Drago* Ensemble (1967)

This ensemble, which was designed after the *Santa Ana*, is similarly strung together by means of a modular mesh. The *Drago* Ensemble is characterised by the play of light and shade achieved through a staggering of volumes, and the alternation of well-lit and shady areas along covered corridors, which open at regular intervals into a series of courtyards.

The open-air walkway found in the *Santa Ana* is internalised in the *Drago*, transferred into the interior of the ensemble, and the interior patios of the *Santa Ana* are shifted and opened towards the exterior.

### 2.3. The *Frontera* Ensemble (1970)

The *Frontera* (Fig. 1) was the last apartment ensemble designed for *Ten-Bel*. It is the largest and most sophisticated ensemble of the complex. Its design builds on the experience garnered from all of the previous ensembles.

Its different apartment types were created by adding one- or two-bedroom modules to a basic, studio-type model. These types were then arranged and stacked to generate a series of linear bodies distributed along a continuous double strip (Fig. 2). This double strip and the interior passageway that meanders through the open air to the different apartments define the ensemble's public space.

The staggered structure, created by setting back the up-

per floors, converts the upper corridor of the central passageway into a *street-in-the-air*. Across the way, the apartments open through semi-covered terraces with views of the oasis that runs along the ensemble's perimeter, home to a palm grove, and fragments of badlands of thistle and spurge.

Using the U-shape of the *Santa Ana* and the *Drago* Ensembles as its basis, the *Frontera* adopts a more complex configuration, meandering freely through the plot and adapting to the slight unevenness of the land while skirting the sections of badlands left in their natural state. In this ensemble, the focus is on the open spaces, with particular attention paid to the borders between the newly-landscaped gardens and the existing lava beds.

## 3. THE TEN-BEL TOURIST COMPLEX AS A LABORATORY

*Ten-Bel* was the first intervention exclusively aimed at building a *landscape of leisure* to serve mass tourism in Tenerife. To make the most of the opportunities offered by such a comprehensive, long-term project, which took over twenty years to complete, the architects adopted a flexible approach to planning, allowing the experiences garnered in the early phases of development to be incorporated into later planning stages. This empirical, pragmatic approach was in line with the critical position taken by *Team X* as compared to the more universalist positions of the *CIAM*.

The possibility of being able to develop each apartment ensemble in succession converted the ongoing exploration into a form of laboratory, with the various interactions reminiscent of the dual strategy of *dissection* and *reconnection*<sup>2</sup> developed by Candilis, Josic and Woods in their proposals for a new leisure architecture. This emerging project-based culture found its reference in Spain in Rafael Leoz's *HELE Module* and spatial network system.<sup>3</sup> The *HELE Module* consisted of four cubes arranged in an L shape that, thanks to





Fig. 2. *Frontera Ensemble, Diagrams of standard types>sub-ensembles>ensemble.* Drawing by Kevin Lam. © J. A. González Pérez, 2015.

its multiple possible combinations, allowed for an astonishing degree of spatial variety.

Inspired by Leoz's spatial network, in *Ten-Bel*, Díaz-Llanos, Saavedra and Cabrera sought out new methods for generating forms of spatial organisation that would permit greater densities, necessary for the development of mass tourism, while maintaining a large degree of privacy compatible with an intensification of the experiences of the landscape. At the same time, the architects defined new building processes adapted to the isolated conditions and low level of technological development in Tenerife.

The aggregate modular system used in the configuration of *Ten-Bel's* various ensembles weaves a spatial network or fabric that sketches out new ways of using space in tourist installations. This fabric links the individual with the universal, uniting uniformity and diversity, repetition and change, allowing for the creation of building types that respond to the new demands of mass tourism while adapting

to unique local features.

Furthermore, the open system that underlies the formal expression of the project anticipates strategies of architecture employed in the digital age, as it is oriented towards the process, not the final object, and tends more toward differentiation than homogenisation.

The *Frontera Ensemble*, for example, is organised around different sub-ensembles, deployed across space and time in a linear sequence. The *Frontera Ensemble*, is a system, a building of buildings that acquires the maximum degree of serial development and produces a spatial multiplicity through the infinite articulation of a limited number of simple pieces that are perceived in time.

The three-dimensional serial composition represents a conceptual breakthrough in the research that has shaped the combinatorial-modular additive architecture of the *Ten-Bel* ensembles and its complex assemblies of apartments, as the ensembles offer a non-mimetic, astylistic compositional system, which assumes the value of language.

This type of formal experimentalism connects Díaz-Llanos' and Saavedra's work with geometric art, modular or constructive painting and serial music from the 1960s.

#### 4. THE APARTMENT ENSEMBLES — PASSAGEWAYS BETWEEN THE LANDSCAPES

The interrelation between the architectural typology and urban morphology, between architectural typology and landscape, was taken as the starting point for conceiving new urban forms.

The apartment ensembles comprise "complex residential units"<sup>4</sup> whose exteriors reproduce the hierarchy of the open spaces typical of a city, but which here are conceived as part of the whole. The complex syntheses between the built-over and open spaces in the *Ten-Bel* ensembles are both architecture and city at the same time.

From the *Santa Ana* to the *Frontera*, via the *Drago*, we witness a unique transformation of the block (Fig. 3) as an element for configuring urban space. The concave body of the *Santa Ana* Ensemble is progressively transformed into a convex form. The block as morphological unit mutates through a mechanism of syntactic inversion to the point where it unfolds, in the *Frontera* Ensemble, into parallel strips along the relief lines of the landscape. In the interior of the *Frontera's* strips we have the mirrored double open-air public corridor; on the exterior, there are fragments of unspoiled nature.

Furthermore, the *Ten-Bel* estate's layout places special importance on shared landscaped areas and the radical separation of pedestrian and vehicle traffic. The densely built-up fragments of the ensembles are to be seen as concentrations of the footpaths running along a continuous strip of subtropical gardens. The apartment ensembles are thus configured as a space for transit, as passageways between the landscapes, spaces of interrelation, new forms of community.

In the successive development of the different ensembles there is a permanent questioning between interior and exterior, between the small scale of the residential units and the large scale of the tourist infrastructure and the landscape.

As a result of their particular configuration, the ensembles act as inter-scalar devices for relating to the landscape. The territorial framing, the inversion of figure and background and the use of the landscape fragment as an intensifier of meaning are just some of the design mechanisms that have made *Ten-Bel* a model of integration of architecture and landscape:

— Territorial Framing — the Distant Landscape.

Through the collective voids that frame the territory, the ensembles relate to the distant landscape: the volcanic cones of the surrounding area and the Teide Volcano, the scalar and symbolic reference of the island. Through the perception of the image of the Teide, each ensemble connects with the symbolic image of the island of Tenerife.

— Inversion of Figure and Background — the Intermediate Landscape.

The architecture of *Ten-Bel* responds to the figurative demands of nature, which has an active will of its own and produces a syntactic inversion, which will prove key to understanding the architecture-landscape synthesis found here. In *Ten-Bel*, the figure of architecture becomes the background to the figures of nature through a reinforcement of the abstract, where the white volumes of the ensembles act as a neutral background for the figurative vegetation of spurge and thistle.

— Landscape Fragment — the Nearby Landscape.

Small interspersed voids, such as the terraces, mediate between the ensemble and the nearby landscape. The interior landscaped voids of the ensembles, onto which the apartments' private terraces face, are fragments of the natural volcanic landscape, representing the entire landscape of the island.

## 5. THE ISLAND PROJECT — PLACE AS IDENTITY

On the basis of these relationships, manifested at different scales, with the island landscape, *Ten-Bel* develops the idea of the place as identity, of the place as a basis of an *island project*,<sup>5</sup> which is linked with reflections on geography first articulated by the island's avant-gardists.<sup>6</sup>

In his *Third Rationalist Manifesto*, published in the art revue *Gaceta de Arte* in 1932, entitled *The function of plants in the landscape*,<sup>7</sup> Eduardo Westerdahl outlined how to work with the shapes of the island and how to highlight the images of the island landscape through urban rationalism, functional architecture and the use of indigenous plants. With Westerdahl's guidance in mind, the architects paid attention to density, placed limits on occupation levels and

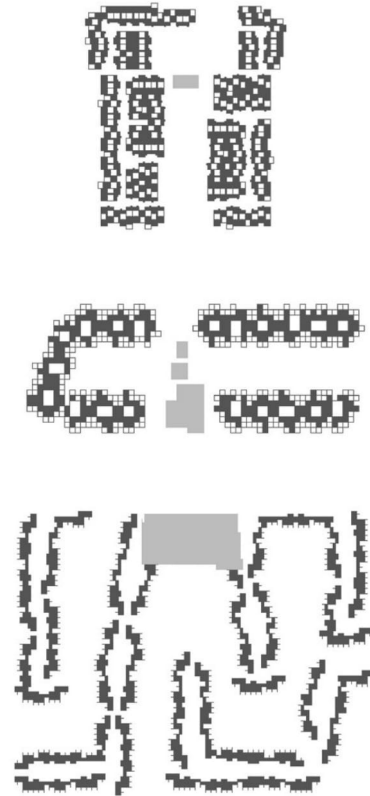


Fig. 3 Diagrams of metamorphosis of the block, Top: *Santa Ana Ensemble*, Middle: *Drago Ensemble*, Bottom: *Frontera Ensemble*. © J. A. González Pérez, 2015.

building height, and adopted an approach of buildings “half-opening” up to the surrounding landscapes and protecting natural lava beds and indigenous plants.

Alberto Sartoris noted the need to “use the air, the light, the greenery, the natural and invented landscapes as one’s own true, unprecedented building materials”,<sup>8</sup> making the most of individual traits and appreciating geographical differences and local features.

With these historic influences in mind, the architects of *Ten-Bel* integrated the landscape completely into the tourist complex’s leisure infrastructure and gave it an active role. The territory, its topography, its materials, its plant life — all these inform the structure of the complex, which is built at the scale of the landscape and derives meaning *in* and *by* the landscape.

## 6. CONCLUSION

*Ten-Bel* approaches the construction of the modern tourist space as a complex, non-linear process. Using the en-



Fig. 4. Left: *El Médano*, Tenerife, 1958. ©M. Brito, Right: *Santa Ana Ensemble, Ten-Bel*, 1972-. ©DLL/S Archive.

semble as a device, *Ten-Bel* defines the new city of leisure by means of a unifying model in which architecture unfolds as a function of the landscape.

Apartment ensembles such as the *Santa Ana*, the *Drago* or the *Frontera* reflect how the tourist model evolved over the period in question: there was a progressive transformation from types of spatial organization and buildings with clear urban references to new, more open forms directly linked to the surrounding nature and landscape.

Furthermore, the disjointed, broken profile of the ensembles' outlines — the result of the irregular aggregation of modules — is employed as a scalar strategy for making the various ensembles appear smaller than they really are, but, what is more, a reference to the popular architecture, common to this part of the island (Fig. 4).

The research concludes that *Ten-Bel's* ensembles forge a singular identity through the empathetic integration of architecture and landscape, constructing a modern space for tourism that links with the scale and idiosyncrasies of the vernacular architecture and preserves and highlights the unique nature of the volcanic landscapes of Tenerife Island.

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#### NOTES

- 1 Fullaondo defines the "additive line" [línea aditiva] as the "line of structures in constant potential growth" [transl. the author], in reference to the thinking of Rafael Leoz & Juan Daniel Fullaondo, "Agonía, Utopía, Renacimiento", *Nueva Forma*, No. 28, 1968, 39.
- 2 "In the first dissecting move, the tourism project was unravelled into its smallest composing entities; be it the simple dwelling cell or even only parts of it. In a second instance these different parts were combined, juxtaposed and superimposed and thus reconnected as a new urban figure", Tom Avermaete, *Another Modern*, Rotterdam, NAI, 2005, 354.
- 3 Rafael Leoz, *Redes y Ritmos espaciales*, Madrid, Blume, 1956.
- 4 Antonio Monestiroli, *La arquitectura de la realidad*, Barcelona, 1993, 74.
- 5 "Artists on the Canary Islands in this period were able to speak, paint and write from, in and about a territory in particular." [transl. the author]. This landscape and geographical reformulation of the island's vision forms the basis for the *island project*. A. Sánchez Robayna (ed.), *Canarias, las vanguardias históricas*, Tenerife, CAAM, 1992, 16.
- 6 "Tourism led to a reflection on the Canarian identity [...] on identity as a cultural trait" [transl. the author]. María Isabel Navarro Segura, "Eduardo Westerdahl y la construcción de Canarias como identidad espacial", *Gaceta de Arte y su época. 1932–1936*, Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, CAAM, 1997, 29–31.
- 7 Eduardo Westerdahl, "Tercer manifiesto racionalista de GA. Tema: Función de la planta en el paisaje", *Gaceta de Arte*, No. 8, 1932, 4.
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# Inheritable Resilience

## Sharing Values of Global Modernities

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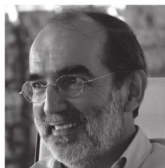


Noemí Gómez Lobo (Spain, 1988) is an architect graduated from the School of Architecture of Madrid (ETSAM). She has received the MEXT scholarship from Japan and completed her doctoral thesis at the Tokyo Institute of Technology at Yoshiharu Tsukamoto Laboratory, where she holds a Research Fellow position. Her investigation focuses on the intersection between gender and the Japanese context, revealing invisible constructs and exploring the relationships between built environment and architectural profession, from the domestic to the urban realms. Noemí, together with Diego Martín Sánchez, is co-founder of *furiistudio*, a young architectural practice internationally awarded in competitions such as European.

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### José Gonçalves

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José Fernando Gonçalves, V.N.Gaia, 1963. Graduated at FAUP, 1988. Pedagogical and Scientific Capacity Exams, DARQ-FCT-UC, 1996. PHD '*Proyectos Arquitectónicos*' UPC Barcelona, 2007. Associate Professor DARQ-FCT-University of Coimbra. Chairman in Design Studio 1 at DARQ-FCTUC. Visiting-Professor at *Facoltà di Architettura* Aldo Rossi, Bologna, 2011–2012. Visiting-Professor at *École Spéciale d'Architecture*, Paris, 2015/2016. Researcher at the Social Sciences Center (CES) — University of Coimbra. Scientific Commission President DARQ-FCT- UC, 2008–10. President of the Portuguese Order of Architects — Northern Region (OASRN), between 2010–2013. Founding Member of the AEAULP, Brasil, 2009. Work published in national and international magazines. Conferences and workshops in Portugal and abroad.

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### Pablo Gonzalez Cal

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Pablo Gonzalez Cal is an Architecture and Urbanism undergraduate student at Federal University of Bahia (FAUFBA), Salvador — Brazil. Interests comprises Modernism, detailing, digital pre-fabrication and pre-cast concrete. Undergraduate research project included architect João Filgueiras Lima's activities at Salvador, where several of his remaining buildings were deeply analyzed and then mapped for further investigations. Former Math student tutor and member of faculty's Junior Company.

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### Juan Antonio González Pérez

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Juan Antonio González Pérez graduated from the School of Architecture, University of Las Palmas de Gran Canaria, Canary Islands, where he has taught Architectural Design since 1993 and where he received his doctoral degree in 2015 for his thesis entitled *The Construction of a Space for Tourism in the Canary Islands*. He has also lectured at the BTU Cottbus, London Metropolitan University, Cooper Union and Harvard University. Juan Antonio is the Founding Director of GPY Arquitectos. His work, which has been shown at the Venice Biennale and the Museum of Modern Art in New York, has received numerous high-profile awards.

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### Franz Graf

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A graduate in architecture of the École polytechnique fédérale de Lausanne (EPFL Switzerland), Franz Graf is Full Professor of Technology at the Accademia di Architettura di Mendrisio and Associate Professor of Architectural Theory and Design at the EPFL. His research explores modern and contemporary construction systems and he has published in major reference works. Since 2010 he has been President of Docomomo Switzerland and a member of the International Specialist Committee on Technology, and since 2012 member of the "Comité des experts pour la restauration de l'œuvre" of the Le Corbusier Fondation.

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\* have been elected not to participate for the 2021 session.