

DESCRIPTION

THE RESTORATION OF THE PALAU-CASTELL CLOISTER (Betxí, Castellón)

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Betxí Castle represents an example of a traumatic rupture in the historical memory of the Betxí community and also in the history of Valencia's noble architecture following the demolition of half of its Renaissance cloister in the 1970s.

The monument has survived until the present day as a "valuable yet mutilated relic" in a clear evocation of other references from the same period such as the Almudín de Játiva building (1545-1548. Valencia, Spain) or Vignola's project for Villa Farnese in Caprarola (1559-1564. Italy).

The restoration project is rooted in a deliberate intention to show the work in progress, clearly influenced by the idea of the non-finite.

The objectives can be summed up as follows:

- To restore the Renaissance cloister and its main façade, baring the walls in an exercise of simplicity, entwining existing elements and new interventions through the use of ceramic tiles and traditional techniques.
- To provide an architectural solution that redefines new, previously lost architectural spaces. The existing division becomes the support for a large mirror that 'virtually constructs' the lost half of the Renaissance cloisters, posing a decontextualised setting for the idea of the classic courtyard.
- To reopen the Renaissance cloister to the public as an urban space that encourages artistic creativity and culture, restoring the link between Betxí's community and its cultural past.

The decision was made to use a single material as a tool for the recovery of the cloister, thereby completing the unfinished elements of the traditional courtyard and revitalising the ground floor. The chosen elements were solid handcrafted fired clay pieces measuring 12 cm x 24 cm x 2.5 cm.

The upper gallery of the cloister had undergone an earlier, somewhat radical transformation, following the construction of a staircase in the late 19th and early 20th centuries that hindered appreciation of the cloister space. There was also a mezzanine level at the height of the column capitals that prevented the full interpretation of the classic courtyard. In order to remedy this, the decision was made to eliminate all those elements that were alien to the cloister and to complete those that contributed to the interpretation of the original layout of the courtyard, rebuilding the arch spandrels and the entablatures with the pieces of fired clay, whilst also completing the sloping roof by adding wooden beams and installing ceramic tiles between them.

The existing paving of the Renaissance cloister formed by a concrete screed in the central section and cement tiles on the galleries, was riddled with damp. The sense of disorder on the ground floor was heightened by the existence of various types of paving: concrete in the central section and cement tiles in the galleries. An essential task was therefore to create a uniform floor covering for the ground floor of the Renaissance cloister in order to recover the sense of a centralised space, in keeping with its original nature. The solution adopted was the use of handcrafted fired clay

throughout the ground floor, changing the layout in accordance with the space: the tiles are laid horizontally on the galleries and hallway and vertically in the central space. The area between the columns is differentiated by the use of stone similar to that in the Renaissance *cortile*.