

CasaBloc

DWELLING | T11 |

A Symbol
of Rationalist Architecture
in Barcelona



The Casa Bloc (1932-1939) is a set of blocks of apartments for workers promoted by the Catalan authorities during the Second Republic (1931-1939). Today considered a symbol of rationalist architecture in Barcelona, it represented a new way of dealing with the issue of housing for those most in need and also of understanding locally the approaches that at that time, at an international level, were breaking with the old tradition and finding new solutions. Ideas such as practicality, economy of spaces and materials, socialisation or emphasis on the concept of community took shape in a new construction logic embodied by this building, the paradigm of social housing.

In January 2010, the Institut Català del Sòl (INCASÒL) and the Institut de Cultura de Barcelona (ICUB) signed an agreement to turn Dwelling 1/11 in the Casa Bloc

into a museum. The initiative aimed to recover the structure and original appearance it had lost over time, opening it to the public in order to explain the innovation of its approach eighty years ago.

INCASÒL and ICUB through DHUB have worked together on this project, the former on the architectural aspects and the latter on those related to documentation and the museographic project. The purpose was twofold: on the one hand, to repair, removing from Dwelling 1/11 everything that its residents had added over the years and that had spoiled the original idea, while restoring and replacing what actually existed when it was built. On the other hand, to inform, explaining its characteristics (ranging from materials to uses) and what it meant within the architecture and society of its time.

The on-site works office in Dwelling 1/2 in a photo from 1935.

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Workers' Housing, the History of a Need

In the late 19th century and early 20th century, Barcelona, like in many other cities worldwide, witnessed the emergence of a highly important debate for contemporary society as it questioned the precarious habitability conditions of workers' dwellings. At that time, this debate was gaining strength among institutional bodies, mainly because of the social and moral responsibility involved, especially in the cities, where people did not always work and live in the best conditions.

As pointed out by Josep Maria Rovira and Carolina B. García in the book *Casa Bloc* (Mudito & Co., Barcelona 2011), at that moment 50,000 people lived in Barcelona crowded in deficient constructions called

barraques, which led the local press to call it *Barracopolis*. The desire to tackle this issue emerged alongside the demographic movements, which resulted in large waves of immigration from the countryside to the city.

In order to meet this demand, the city finally built dwellings for workers and considered where to locate them, either inside or outside the city, and how. It was clear that the problems of sanitation and habitability had to be resolved, but so did those of access, transport and socialisation, along with defining the needs of working class areas.

This debate evolved and, in Barcelona during the years of the Second Republic, the Government of Catalonia and Barcelona City Council made a commitment to social housing, understood as a single space where basic needs could be met.

The authorities reflected on the programme that should govern it, about how to build and where, as well as other aspects, defining the minimum living space and basic needs (in relation to the individual and community), the buildings (materials, construction systems, etc.) so that the construction and maintenance costs were feasible (and therefore possible) and also who would be responsible for its implementation.

In Barcelona, the first example of social housing conceived in functional terms resulted in the Casa Bloc, sponsored by the Government of Catalonia and designed by the architects Josep Lluís Sert (1902-1983), Josep Torres Clavé (1906-1939) and Joan Baptista Subirana (1904-1978), all three members of GATCPAC, the group heralding Catalan avant-garde architecture.



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The plot where the Casa Bloc was built in early 1933.

© Courtesy of Josep Lluís Pichot

GATCPAC, the Pioneers of the Modern Movement in Catalonia

In 1929, the Barcelona International Exhibition showed the duality of the architecture of the time: on the one hand, the official architecture anchored in the past, of pretentious lavishness and inheritor of a 19th century academicism; on the other, the new trend based on simplicity, logic and reasoning. The National Palace, a work by Eugeni Cerdà and Enric Catà (which today houses the National Art Museum of Catalonia), perfectly illustrated that lapsed architecture, a pastiche of the past which had nothing to do with the innovative approaches of the 1920s, perfectly embodied by the German Pavilion designed by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe. In Zaragoza, on 26th October 1930, the GATEPAC

(Group of Spanish Architects and Technicians for the Progress of Contemporary Architecture) was founded, organised into three sections: the northern based in the Basque Country, the central based in Madrid and the eastern in Catalonia. Out of the three groups, the Catalan section was the only one to adopt its own name, GATCPAC, which stands for Group of Catalan Architects and Technicians for the Progress of Contemporary Architecture. Also created in 1930, its members would form a leading group in the architectural panorama, probably the most active of the three, with the objective of promoting mainly rationalist avant-garde architecture, thus connecting with the European currents of the time.

GATEPAC also conceived and produced the journal *A.C. Documentos de Actividad Contemporánea*, a platform to disseminate its ideas, commitments and



affinities. The twenty-five issues released between 1931 and 1937 were published in Barcelona and the editor-in-chief and main writer was Josep Torres Clavé. The publication covered architecture but also interior design, photography, cinema, town planning, graphic design or the international congresses and meetings of modern architecture (such as CIAM and CIRPAC). Its pages served to publicise the objectives and programme of the group, graphically explained through drawings, photographs and scale models, and the works by other architects close to its ideas, such as Marcel Breuer, Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, Walter Gropius and Otto Haesler. The publication is today considered one of the fundamental documents for the study of our avant-garde.

In Catalonia, GATCPAC promoted these new ideas and welcomed everything which could be useful to

Cover of issue no. 11 of the journal A.C. from 1933 with the scale model of the Casa Bloc.

Disseny Hub Barcelona. DHUBdoc

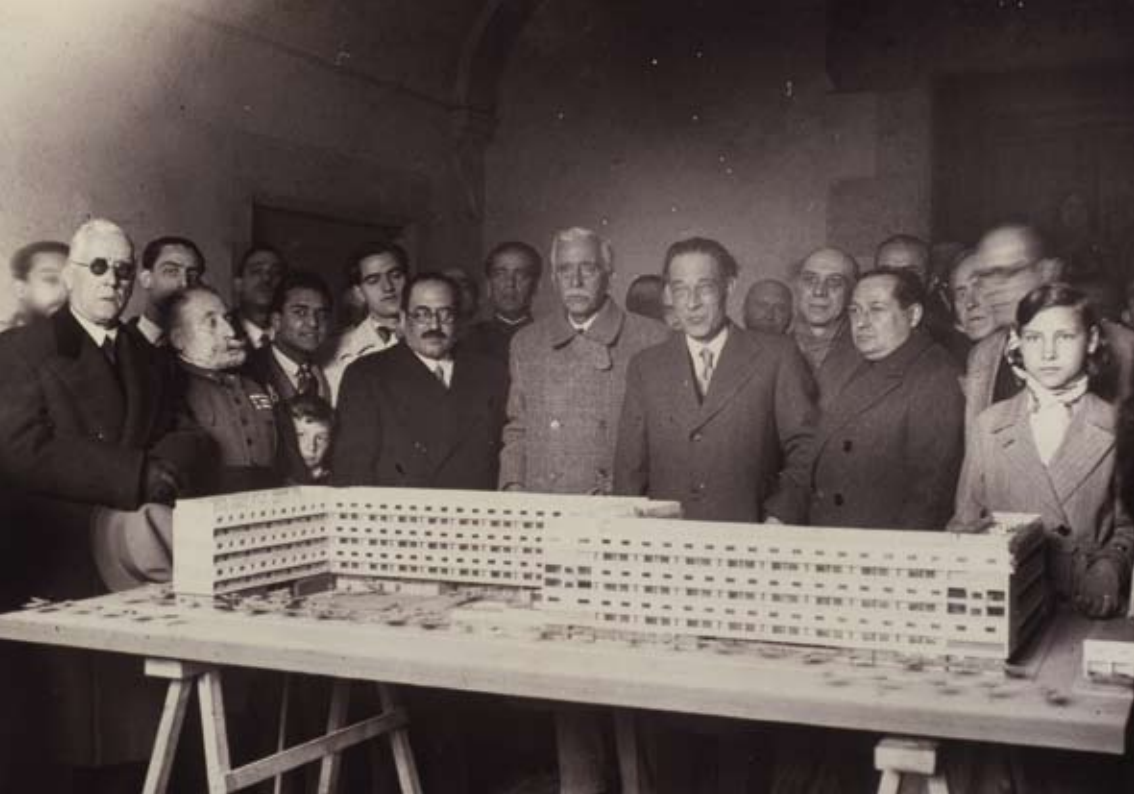
its philosophy. Its members developed this initiative between 1931 and 1938, coinciding with the years of the Second Republic, through works led by architects such as Josep Lluís Sert, Josep Torres Clavé, Antoni Bonet i Castellana, Raimon Duran i Reynals, Germán Rodríguez Arias, Joan Baptista Subirana i Subirana and Sixt Illescas i Miros.

In terms of the problem of social housing, the principles of GATCPAC were applied to the location, transport, urbanisation, use of space or the seriation of habitable units, with which they sought to resolve several problems, such as sanitation, lack of natural light or socialisation. A set of ideas which they developed in the Casa Bloc, an example of a modern residents' unit following the European movement and its endeavours to re-found the cities based on the parameters of functionality.

The group was quite active and some of its members designed several projects together. Along with the Casa Bloc (1932-1939) by Sert, Torres Clavé and Subirana, there was the Anti-Tuberculosis Health Centre (1934-1936) by the same architects. GATCPAC also worked on several projects which were never undertaken but have been major paradigms of the group, such as the Vall d'Hebron Hospital (1936), the Barcelona urban planning project (1932-1934) known as Macià Plan (prepared in collaboration with Le Corbusier), and the project of the Rest and Holiday City (1933) in Gavà, as well as theoretical works on different construction and typological aspects, such as the school and the hospital. It should be pointed out that Sert, an outstanding member of the group, designed the Spanish Pavilion for the 1937 Paris World Exhibition, better known as the Republic Pavilion.

The President of the Government of Catalonia, Francesc Macià, and the Mayor of Barcelona, Jaume Aiguader, in front of the scale model of the Casa Bloc on 12th March 1933, on the day they laid the first stone of the building.

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The Antecedent: the Group of Workers' Houses

In Barcelona, in the early 20th century, the so-called *cases barates* (cheap houses) were built, groups of dwellings located in different points of the city, often on the outskirts and close to manufacturing or industrial centres.

Faced with that construction model, GATCPAC launched a completely original proposal: the Group of Workers' Houses (1932-1933), a set of ten small single-family terraced houses with garden, lower floor and upper floor. They were built in passeig Torras i Bages, in the district of Sant Andreu, by Sert, Torres Clavé and Subirana at the request of the Commission for Workers' Housing, a body of the Government of Catalonia. The small houses, with a

modern spirit and in keeping with rationalist architectural guidelines, served as a trial for the development of a programme of workers' housing with the support of public bodies which, at the same time, would also provide the basis for the development of economic legislation and establish the basic technical characteristics for these types of dwellings.

During its construction there was monitoring of the builders' working hours and the amount of materials used, data that would serve to determine the exact cost of the workforce and material. Moreover, in order to save money, they tried to solve the problem of cost through minimum land use and building dwellings with an upper floor. The habitable area was 70m² (35 per floor plus a little garden).

As a result of this Group of Workers' Houses (which no longer exists today), the Institute Against Forced

Unemployment, also part of the Government of Catalonia, approved a new project for a group of workers' dwellings to be carried out by the same architects on a neighbouring plot. Given that in this case it required an economy in keeping with the needs of the residents, the architects decided to group the dwellings in different blocks, using the previous formula of lower and upper floor and designed the new ones as duplex units. This is how the Casa Bloc was born.

The philosophy of this new building, with 207 dwellings, was disseminated from the pages of the journal A.C. in issue number 11 of 1933, where on the cover featuring the scale model of the building we can read its justification: "A mean and miserable concept of life has presided over the construction of workers' dwellings in our country, thereby resulting

in an unacceptable standard. The standard dwelling can be small but cannot exclude fresh air, sun and unencumbered views. Elements that every individual needs and which society cannot deny."



The Group of Workers' Houses soon after completion.

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Transforming the Concept of Dwelling to Adapt it to a New Idea of the City

GATCPAC was, in the words of Oriol Bohigas (“Hom-enaje al GATCPAC”, *Cuadernos de Arquitectura*, 1960), “the personal and self-denying work” of the architects Sert and Torres Clavé. In fact, based on their objectives and programme, at the end of 1932 they designed the Casa Bloc, a project in which Cristòfor Alzamora also participated. Subirana was in Madrid and would not join the project until later.

The proposal was quite original and had nothing to do with the social housing which had been built in the city until that time. The size of the land, 170 metres along the side of passeig Torras i Bages and an average of 53 metres wide, allowed them to construct blocks of apartments, opting for an “S” shape,

with a total of five interlinked units which were the result of superimposing the type of dwelling previously tried in the Group of Workers’ Houses.

Access to the different blocks was through four large stairwells with lifts leading to the three levels where there would be walkways. The entries to the dwellings would be arranged along these walkways, which would not pass in front of bedrooms or dining rooms but by the laundry areas and kitchens. These would have high windows so that it was not possible to see inside while offering perfect ventilation.

The walkways would be located on the side with fewer hours of sun and would connect the different blocks, which would be arranged like a Le Corbusier *redent*. This architectonic fretwork form, visible in the project of the Macià Plan (1932) in which the Swiss architect participated, would have allowed

continuation of the “S” as many times as necessary, repeating a practical and functional pattern. It is, in short, a proposal for a new building typology that puts forward a new city landscape. It is an alternative that takes into account the relation between the new building and the resulting urban morphology, suggesting therefore a new model for 20th century Barcelona contrasting, but not opposing, the 19th century Eixample layout. The “S” shape made it possible to have two large squares in the interior spaces of the land, as well as to locate the dining rooms and terraces of the dwellings on the sunniest part of each block (facing east or south) and provide ventilation at the front and back. The aspects related to air renewal recall the concept advocated at that time by the Belgian architect Victor Bourgeois (1897-1962). The project mirrored modern Central European archi-

tecture and was inspired by dwellings already built in the major capitals, such as Berlin, as shown by the photographs and plans preserved at the Barcelona Administration Archive attached to the documentation. In fact, the Casa Bloc would be a trial or, as Antonio Piza states in the catalogue of the exhibition “G.A.T.C.P.A.C. A New Architecture for a New City” (MHCB - COAC, 2006 Barcelona), the building would be conceived as “a housing *experiment*, an avant-garde innovation in the framework of the Spanish construction production of which everybody is fully aware, and which is an attempt to apply the principles debated and agreed within the CIAM congresses.” The architects also wanted to provide the building with all the services that such a social project required, so they planned to place on the ground floor, at street level, spaces for a consumer cooperative, a public library,

public baths, workshops and storehouses, shops, a coffee shop, two swimming-pools (one for children) and a nursery. No school was planned as it was op-

posite the Ignasi Iglésias municipal school, with a capacity for three hundred children and a large playground, which could be extended in keeping with the



The President of the Government of Catalonia, Francesc Macià, and the Mayor of Barcelona, Jaume Aiguader, laying the first stone of the Casa Bloc on 12th March 1933.

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number of pupils. In December 1932, Sert, Torres Clavé and Alzamora studied a solution for the Casa Bloc. Three months later, on 12th March 1933, the President of the Government of Catalonia, and the Mayor of Barcelona, laid the first stone of the building. Its construction began forthwith and soon after its structure could be seen: a steel framework which was divided into compartments with bricks for the different apartments. This structure was supported by *pilotis* separating the building from the ground. This allowed the maximum freedom on the ground floors, where they had planned to place the communal services. Some sections were left open to provide residents with an empty space offering a wide horizon. It was also built following an open floor plan and a free façade, meaning non-supporting walls that could be designed as the architect wished.

The surroundings of the Casa Bloc during its construction.

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After the Spanish Civil War

Dwelling 1/11, like the others in the Casa Bloc, suffered the effects of the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War. Although the works continued despite the conflict, soon after they came to a standstill when they were nearly completed. The Government of Catalonia, therefore, could not give the dwellings to the workers. After the war, the building was abandoned until Barcelona Provincial Council became its owner, once the Government of Catalonia was abolished by Franco's dictatorship. Then the building was completed and, from 1940, it was occupied by military officers, widows and orphans of military officers. Meanwhile, the three fellow architects had followed different paths: Torres Clavé had died at the front defending the Republican faction, Sert had emigrated to the

United States, and Subirana remained in Barcelona. The dictatorship completely overturned the situation. The minimum standard dwellings, conceived for workers, were allocated to military officers who adapted the interiors to their tastes, covering any sign of the GATCPAC architects, the architects of the Republic, with paintings, wallpaper or tiles.

Moreover, the block along passeig Torras i Bages on the corner of carrer de la Residència was reformed (the dwellings were unified and the walkways were closed, thereby undermining the original project) in order to install a home for widows and orphans of military officers of the Fourth Military Region which was opened on 17th December 1942. This block was administered by the Dominican Sisters of the Anunciata. On 10th June 1943 on the ground floor of Block 1 (in carrer de l'Almirall Pròixida) the Codolà i Gualdó

This photograph from 1934 shows the construction by blocks and the metallic structure used.

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School was inaugurated, which also occupied part of the square. In 1948, with the objective of housing families of national policemen, a new block of dwellings was built on the other square, which from then was enclosed. This building was popularly called *Bloc fantasma* (Ghost Block) and, to provide it with a communal staircase, the original staircase of the Casa Bloc was perforated and linked to it. The interior of the square was privatised and the Armed Police built, among other facilities, two stables there.

For many years no improvement was made to the Casa Bloc and it was not until the reestablishment of democracy that its restoration began.

In 1986, the architects Jaume Sanmartí and Raimon Torres restored Block 1 and the interior of two staircases at the request of Barcelona Provincial Council, which that year also demolished the stables.



The building was returned to the Government of Catalonia in 2000; previously, in 1992, it had been listed as a Good of Cultural Interest in the Category of Monument. In 1997, INCASÒL, Barcelona Provincial Council and Barcelona City Council signed an agreement for its conservation. As a result of this agreement, INCASÒL entrusted the architects Víctor and Marc Seguí with the restoration project.

Sequence of the three buildings: the Group of Workers' Houses in the foreground, the Casa Bloc in the centre and the *Bloc fantasma* in the background, in a photograph from the 1960s.

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It was then when the emergency reparations on the façades were undertaken given their bad condition. In Block 5, occupied by the home of widows and orphans of military officers, they worked on the exterior to adapt it to the whole and interior improvements were made. The remaining Blocks 2, 3 and 4 were restored by the Government of Catalonia. In general, the works focused on the façades, roofs, communal facilities, lifts, staircases and structure. The ground floors were occupied, among other facilities, by the Casa Bloc Day Centre for Elderly People and the Casa Bloc - Barcelona Toy Library. The process ended in summer 2008 with the demolition of the *Bloc fantasma* and the recovery of the two squares. At present, the dwellings are rented and some form part of Barcelona City Council's programme for people at risk of exclusion.

Demolition of the *Bloc fantasma* in 2008.

© Courtesy of SEGUIARQUITECTURA SLP





Dwelling 1/11

Located in Block 2, floor 1, door 11, Dwelling 1/11 is in form the same as the remaining dwellings in the Casa Bloc, although in this case it has only two bedrooms and others have three or four, a variable envisaged to adjust them to the needs of families. All are duplex apartments and have a usable surface area that varies according to the number of bedrooms.

Dwelling 1/11 measures 60m².

The internal layout is very simple and clearly distinguishes the public part from the most intimate and private. Thus, on the lower level there is the entrance, a corridor leading to the laundry area with a shower, the kitchen, the toilet with washbasin, the dining room and a terrace, and on the upper level there are two bedrooms. The architects, opposed to apparent luxury, avoided placing any unnecessary element which could give it a pretentious appearance. Likewise, they avoided wasted spaces as they considered them unnecessary.

The project did not envisage any inside court, so that all rooms overlook the exterior, with natural light and ventilation. Moreover, there are openings in the two sides of the block, which allows easy transversal ventilation, the only one effective.

The dining room with an added door closing the entrance corridor before the restoration. On the staircase, the risers of the steps are covered with tiles and the handrail is covered with wood. Next page, its current state.

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Entrance

The two water and electricity meter boxes, both with their small wooden door, are on the left and embedded in the wall.

The entrance door is made of wood, has a circular wrought aluminium peephole with a large diameter lens and a handle with lock.

Corridor

The corridor leads straight to the dining room. On the right, there is the laundry area with the shower plate and, further in, the toilet with washbasin. The kitchen is on the left.

There is a false plaster ceiling with reed grid-work that continues towards the dining room.

Above the entrance door there is a small cupboard with a wooden door that conceals the water and electricity pipes.

The electricity cable is protected by Bergmann tube

which is concealed by the false ceiling. This system is used throughout the apartment.

The floor is covered with plain grey hydraulic tiles and is the same for all rooms. The walls and the ceiling, like the rest of the dwelling, are painted with very pale sky blue distemper.

Laundry area and shower

The laundry sink and the shower plate share a small space. Both pieces are located in this humid area of occasional use and are separated from the toilet by a wall that does not reach the ceiling, aiding ventilation and allowing light to enter from the window overlooking the walkway.

The laundry sink is a piece of concrete placed on a built-in structure and is quite large, 66 x 75 cm, enough to wash clothes. Next to it there is a white steel fired enamel shower plate, 80 x 70 cm, which is placed directly on the hydraulic flooring. Small legs raise it to

22 cm from the floor to improve drainage. To avoid humidity, the wall has three layers of enamel paint.

The shower nozzle is made of nickelled brass, like the taps. The ceiling is not plastered, exposing the Catalan-style vaults.

Toilet

It has the basic elements for the daily hygiene of the residents: a porcelain washbasin, a piece of marble to protect the wall from splashes and a bevelled mirror. Next to it is a vitrified porcelain WC, which has an open cistern hanging at an appropriate height to achieve a good flush.

Kitchen

A rectangular room, it has a built-in worktop and is finished with glassed tiles from La Bisbal (18 x 18 cm), incorporating the main elements of the kitchen: a sink, a wrought iron stove (built-in and with a small door)

which worked with coal and a space to place a range. The wall above the worktop is half-covered with white tiles from Valencia (20 x 20 cm).

Underneath the window there is a built-in larder finished with tiles from La Bisbal on the shelf and base. It is closed with doors which have small metal ventilation grills.

Over the sink there is a wooden plate rack. The ceiling is not plastered, also exposing Catalan-style vaults, and there is a smoke exhaust tube for the range.

Dining room

Located in the centre of the dwelling, leading off the corridor and overlooking passeig Torras i Bages, it is the area connecting with the bedrooms on the upper floor, as well as the exit to the terrace through a three-leaf folding door opening outwards and extending it. The walls, partitions and ceilings are painted with distemper.



Terrace

It faces east to receive the sunlight and is enclosed by a rail with iron wire mesh. Three slatted shutters ensure privacy and regulate the sunlight.

The flooring is made of square red stoneware tiles arranged discontinuously.

There is a vertical panel of fibre cement cladding between the dwellings, for separation and to preserve privacy.

Staircase and landing

A semicircular staircase with steps and iron banister leads to the landing on the upper floor, a small square area.

The staircase is interesting for its simplicity and austerity. The steps are of Italian style, single pieces and pre-manufactured with artificial stone. The banister consists of metallic tubes of different diameters which form the balusters and the newel post, which becomes the handrail, while the baserail is the only flat part. The banister is painted with a primer surfacer and two layers of blue oil paint.

Dwelling 1/11 with the terrace incorporated into the dining room and with the modified ceiling, walls and flooring before the restoration. Next page, its current state.

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Double bedroom

This is the sunniest room as it is located on the eastern side. It is bigger than the single bedroom and overlooks passeig Torras i Bages.

It has a two-leaf window with shutter, which both preserves privacy and shades the room. The wood-

en box that houses the shutter is visible inside as are the strips and the mechanism holding them.

Single bedroom

It is smaller than the double bedroom and it was meant for the child or children of the family.

From the window we can see the walkway, the street and the interior square. Although this window is smaller, it ventilates the room perfectly.

The wooden box of the shutter, the strips and the mechanism holding them are also not built-in and visible from inside.

The double bedroom had parquet flooring laid over the original hydraulic flooring, a moulding on the ceiling and the walls covered with wallpaper. Next page, its current state.

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The Museologic Project, the Restoration of the Original

The project to restore the original elements has followed criteria included in the record of Declaration as Cultural Good in the Category of Monument in keeping with what is provided for in Law 16/1995. Moreover, before suggesting any action, bibliographic, archive and architectonic research was undertaken on the structural and construction aspects.

After the end of the Spanish Civil War, the Casa Bloc underwent several transformations, some very serious and partially irreversible, and others which were dealt with in the restoration after 1997. Some spaces have never been as planned, such as the communal areas on the ground floor where, as the work

remained incomplete, from the 1940s the GATCPAC proposals were dismissed with the exception of several shops underneath the part along passeig de Torras i Bages.

Moreover, the system of vertical accesses and walkways was substantially altered and physically blocked, thereby undermining the purpose of the original project. Likewise, the lifts planned for the four main areas of staircases did not work until recently (except in Block 5 aimed at the home for widows and orphans of military officers) given that, originally, after being installed they were dismantled and removed.

As for Dwelling 1/11, the transformations it has undergone have also been quite typical of other dwellings in the Casa Bloc, and have focused on knocking through to the terrace to extend the dining room,

enlarging the bathroom by using the laundry area, remodelling the kitchen, changing the flooring and modifying interior coverings.

The action undertaken in 2011 has consisted of returning Dwelling 1/11 to its initial state as it was in 1939 and the completion of the works on its façade and walkway, which were not carried out in previous works (1997-2008).

Removal of added elements

The first actions in Dwelling 1/11 aimed at removing added or superimposed elements. This is the case of the ceramic flooring and skirting board on the lower floor and the parquet flooring and wooden skirting board on the upper floor that covered the original hydraulic mosaic, which has also been re-covered. In the kitchen, toilet and the area under the

staircases, the tiles covering part of the vertical partitions and the mortar roughcast were also removed, as were the non-original woodwork, all the sanitary appliances and modern installations, the wallpaper



Tests to eliminate additions to a staircase riser.

© DHUB. Photograph by Rossend Casanova



and plaster from the walls (the dining room and bedrooms), the ceramic riser on the stair steps and the wooden covering of the handrail, the gas and water pipes and the electricity installation. On the façade of the terrace, the fake gable-end and the built-in and wooden additions have been removed.

Coverings

In terms of coverings, the walls in the kitchen, toilet and laundry area, over their entire surfaces, had to be roughcast, and the courses above the kitchen worktop were tiled. All the interior walls have been plastered and the damaged parts of the false ceilings have been reconstructed with the exception of those in the kitchen, the toilet and the laundry and shower area, where the Catalan-style vaults are exposed.

The recovered kitchen with the sink, the built-in stove and the range.

© DHUB. Photograph by Lourdes Jansana



The metallic profiles of these vaults have been painted with enamel and the plaster vault with distemper. The remaining surfaces, both interior and exterior, vertical and horizontal, roughcasts, plaster walls and false ceilings, have been painted with two layers of primer surfacer and two finishing layers with paint of the same type originally used.

The lower part of the shower wall has been painted with three layers of enamel paint, thereby protecting the wall from humidity, as in the original.

The restored exteriors have also been roughcast, as have parts of the walkway. When restoring the terrace, its dividing wall was thermally insulated as it is shared with the sitting room of the neighbouring dwelling. The same applies to the terrace ceiling in relation to the bedroom on the upper floor.

The toilet with the original sink, marble and mirror.

© DHUB. Photograph by Lourdes Jansana



Floorings

Given that the lower level had lost its original flooring, the new one was replaced with hydraulic mosaic tiles recovered from a vacant dwelling. The pieces were knocked into place with a mallet on mortar and a bed of sand. A ceramic covering added to the artificial stone rise of the staircase steps has also been removed.

Before paving the terrace floor, we chose to insulate it with LBM in order to avoid filtrations through the ceiling of the premises below.

Windows and doors

Part of the original woodwork and ironwork, which had disappeared in Dwelling 1/11, has been replaced. This is the case of several doors (laundry area, toilet and kitchen), small doors (water and

The original laundry sink and shower plate.

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electricity meters and larder) and the folding door of the terrace (including the frame and fanlight). All this woodwork has been restored and repainted.

The original ironwork (door handles, hinges, peephole, shutter winding, etc.) has also been restored. Specifically, the door handles are made of aluminium and tubular profile.

The doorframes have no moulding and were embedded in the partitions wall during construction, so that the structure itself serves as a finishing.

Finally, the dividing wall between the toilet and laundry area had to be reconstructed, given that it was removed by the previous residents to turn the whole space into a bathroom. The façade frame that separates the dining room from the terrace, which had also been removed some years before to enlarge the dining room, has been reconstructed.

Protection

Both the terrace and the staircase rails, which were heavily deteriorated and had lost the protective paint, have been repaired. The rust has been removed, and they have been cleaned and painted with two protective layers and two satin synthetic enamel layers of the same colour as originally used. We have also worked on the grilles of the kitchen windows and the laundry area overlooking the walkway.

Water and electricity installations

Work has focused plumbing and sanitary appliances, and electricity. A lead pipe open plumbing installation from the meter in the small closet to the outlets has been installed. The sanitary appliances and taps similar to the originals have been installed, partly taken from vacant dwellings.

As for electricity, the basic interior electrical installation has been installed from the meter until the sockets using Bergmann tube, exposed on the walls and concealed in the false ceilings until the light fittings. Switches and electricity boxes similar to the original ones have been placed, and the installation has followed the plans of the time and the tests made in the dwelling itself.

One of the objectives has been to recover all those original elements which over time had disappeared for several reasons or had been replaced.

We have carefully examined the documentation of the time (mainly plans, texts and photographs), looked at dwellings in the Casa Bloc that still had these elements or had altered little, carried out tests and studies of materials and benefited from the memory of those people who were born in the house itself or

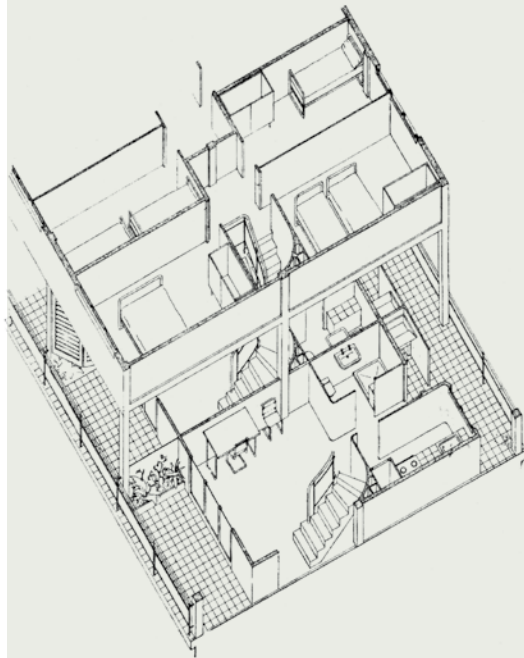
went to live there at an early age, seventy years ago. Thanks to all this information, everything original has been restored and everything added has been removed, and any new installations and additions closely follow the originals to be as faithful as possible to the work of GATCPAC.

Fittings and fixtures

The kitchen worktop, stove, sink and the larder have been restored with the original pieces recovered from a vacant dwelling and we have followed the plans and references to the fittings and fixtures that exist in two dwellings of the building. We have also placed a range from the 1930s, manufactured in Barcelona by José Mingrat.

Other elements have been acquired following the models of the time identified, such as the taps, copper

pipes, electricity cable, Bergmann tube or switches, all original from the 1930s. When replacing different elements we have taken into account the “Standard elements in construction” that GATCPAC designed and promoted from the first issue of the journal A.C.



Axonometric projection of a standard dwelling published in issue no. 11 of the journal A.C. in 1933.

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An Approach to GATCPAC-Inspired Furniture

For the dwelling of this rationalist building we have considered furniture in keeping with the philosophy advocated by GATCPAC, based on practicality and harmonious simplicity. The group highly regarded tubular structures (clearly of Central European origin), which were combined with wood for the most diverse pieces of furniture. In fact, its shop M.I.D.V.A. (Mobles i Decoració per a la Vivenda Actual) at 99 passeig de Gràcia offered, among the different pieces, furniture designed by themselves and others, such as those by the Finnish architect Alvar Aalto, the French firm Stylclair (which marketed models by the Hungarian architect and industrial designer Marcel Breuer) and the Viennese firm Thonet.

Moreover, in A.C. they promoted, and even advertised, companies such as the Madrid-based Rolaco which marketed furniture made with steel tubes. In the same journal, the group also heralded the “Mobiliario Standard tipos GATEPAC”, a set of pieces they designed themselves and that they believed appropriate for the needs of modern life.

Tables, sideboards, chairs, shelves, beds, bedside tables or wardrobes were described, illustrated and reproduced in several issues of A.C. This furniture has become characteristic of GATCPAC and the architects used it in their buildings. This can be seen in a house in carrer Muntaner (Sert, 1930) or in the studio of the architect Germán Rodríguez Arias (1931), or even in more simple spaces, such as the *Dismountable house for the beach* (1931) or a rented house in carrer Rosselló (Sert, 1930).

Dining room, comprising a table with linoleum top and metallic tubular legs, a sideboard with sliding doors and metallic tubular feet, and Thonet folding chairs. Photograph published in the journal A.C. as “Mobiliario Standard tipos GATEPAC”.

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Finally, in 1937, the Institute Against Forced Unemployment asked Bartomeu Llongueras i Galí (1906-1994) to design several pieces of furniture for the Casa Bloc.

Llongueras' designs are preserved at the Historical Archive of the Official Association of Architects of Catalonia (COAC), including several sketches (with notes by Sert and possibly designed by him) and drawings forming a set of plans based mainly on Central European designs of tubular pieces of furniture.

However, the Spanish Civil War truncated this project because the new residents were not offered specific furniture and each family finally used pieces according to their taste and economic means.

We decided not to produce the designs by Sert and Llongueras, mainly because many of the elements essential to complete them were not detailed (ma-

terials, colours, fittings, assembly, etc.) and because the most developed plans, ink on vegetal paper, do not provide specific indications about their construction, which would have finally meant inventing them. Moreover, many of them lack established measurements and, in several cases, are only outlined.

In this house-museum project we decided to place those pieces of furniture that were of interest to GATCPAC and followed its philosophy. They are practical pieces of furniture, aesthetically honest and realistic in terms of their use, and which avoid any dogma or style of the past.

We have placed two types of pieces: those by several foreign architects and companies in which they were greatly interested or had already incorporated in other works, and those which have been purpose-made following the instructions of the "Mo-

biliario Standard tipos GATEPAC” published in A.C. Given the GATCPAC premise that the furniture had to be simple, lightweight, transportable and easy to clean, we have used several pieces that follow its philosophy and standard furniture bearing in mind the people they were targeted at.

Dining room

In the heart of the dwelling, in the room shared by all its members and used to eat and sit, we have arranged the pieces indispensable for these purposes. The ceiling light, originally in the centre of the room, marked the position of the table. It is a model designed by Marcel Breuer in 1933, rectangular with linoleum top and straight steel tube legs. It is surrounded by four folding chairs by the firm Thonet which the architects had used in several dining room



The dining room and the staircase after the restoration

© DHUB. Photograph by Lourdes Jansana



projects. This chair model could be found in the shop M.I.D.V.A. and, among other places, it could be seen in 1933 on the GATCPAC stand at the Barcelona Fair. The ceiling light has a glass globe, an element that the GATCPAC frequently used in different spaces. The room also features a wooden sideboard with iron tubular legs. In this case, we have manufactured the piece in keeping with the plans published in A.C. It has two horizontal compartments, each of them with sliding doors, as shown by the information of the time. It has a pine frame with veneered chipboard covered by 4 mm of the so-called Guinea wood. On the back, it is tongued-and-grooved with a central stile. It has been painted according to the instructions of A.C. with black and pale pink enamel paint, and blue pale paint for the legs.

The wooden sideboard with iron tubular legs

© DHUB. Photograph by Lourdes Jansana



DESIGNER: Marcel Breuer
 MODEL: 91
 YEAR: 1933
 PRODUCTION: Embru, Switzerland
 SIZE: 73.5 x 120 x 80 cm
 MATERIALS: Wood, steel and linoleum

© DHUB. Photograph by Xavi Padrós

Dining room table

This table is a design by the Hungarian architect and industrial designer Marcel Breuer (1902-1981), considered one of the great masters of the modern movement. He studied at the Bauhaus school in Weimar (Germany) when Walter Gropius was its director.

The table was produced by the Swiss company Embru (founded in 1904 in Rüti, Zurich) and distributed by the Zurich-based firm Wohnbedarf AG. Its design is in keeping with the new simplicity in furniture formulated since the 1920s.

It is a very light and functional table. The top is covered by black linoleum on a structure formed

by tongued-and-grooved veneered chipboard in a pine frame. The frame border has field maple veneered chipboard along its exterior perimeter. The four straight legs of chromed steel tube are screwed to the lower part of the board with angular metal profiles. The linoleum allows it to be cleaned easily and the designers of the modern movement advocated it as a hygienic material which also made the use of tablecloths unnecessary.

Double bedroom

In the bedrooms, both the double and the single, we have placed contemporary furniture, if found, and other pieces that have been reproduced following the GATCPAC standard furniture published in A.C. This is the case of the wardrobe, with two doors and big enough to store bed linen and several items of clothing. The size, shape and finish are based on a photograph and the published instructions. To manufacture it we have also born in mind the construction systems of the time and, for this reason, we have analysed several pieces of furniture from the 1930s and by the members of GATCPAC, such as those by Germán Rodríguez Arias.

The wardrobe is divided into two vertical compartments. It has been made in the style of the 1930s; that is, with a pine frame with a beech lath and



Wardrobe of varnished Guinea wood with two doors and metallic tubular feet, according to a photograph published in the journal A.C. as "Mobiliario Standard tipos GATEPAC".

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veneered chipboard covered by 4 mm of Guinea wood. The back is tongued-and-grooved with rails. We have used return screws to join and 12 mm dowels to fix. The doors are made with a bridle joint frame, open directly with the key and have embedded locks. The legs are made of curved iron tube. The inside follows the A.C. photograph with a shelf and a clothes rail in one half; the other half has been left empty. For its construction, we have used machinery of the time, specifically a band saw and a universal machine.

In an axonometric projection published in A.C. we can see wardrobes of the same size for all bedrooms, either double or single.

We have also placed a custom-made bed, with curved tube and following the instructions published in A.C., accompanied by a bedside table, a chair and



their respective hand-made woven wool mats. We have hung a ceiling light from the 1930s with a glass globe, of simple geometrical shapes.

The wardrobe in the double bedroom

© DHUB. Photograph by Lourdes Jansana



DESIGNER: Gebrüder Thonet team
 MODEL: B 751
 YEAR: 1930
 PRODUCTION: Gebrüder Thonet, Austria
 SIZE: 46.5 x 81 x 48 cm (unfolded)
 46.5 x 4.5 x 91 cm (folded)
 MATERIALS: Wood and iron

Folding chair

This lightweight and very functional folding chair is a piece of furniture that the members of GATCPAC used frequently, both for dining room tables and desks and even for stands and the M.I.D.V.A. shop.

Its design is by the Viennese company Gebrüder Thonet, which distributed it worldwide. On this occasion, the piece comes from the shop Grifé & Escoda in Barcelona (it was the general agent in Spain) as recorded on a plaque placed on the back (it reads carrer Ferran, number 36), and a second reading "Registered model". On the rear left side of the seat is the series number 3641 (each chair had its own).

In the DHUB collections there is a folding chair (MADB 135.388) of the same model produced by Thonet-Mundus from Vienna, Austria.

This chair has become a contemporary classic thanks to the rationalist, clean and very current design combining the practicality of the folding structure with a wide comfortable seat. A success that has meant that Gebrüder Thonet has reproduced it several times.

Single bedroom

We have placed a wardrobe of the same characteristics as in the previous case. The bed is a German model quite common at the time. The headboard and the footboard are made from steel tube, as published in A.C., and it is accompanied by a bedside table which has been manufactured following the information published in the journal: it is made with tongued-and-grooved veneered chipboard in a pine frame, the drawers have a solid beech wood front and are assembled with rabbets, the handles are of nickelled brass and round, and it is varnished.

We have also hung a ceiling light from the 1930s with a glass globe. The mat is of natural wool and hand-woven, and the bed linen is original from the 1930s. Both follow those published in A.C.



Single bedroom comprising a Thonet metallic bed accompanied by a bedside table with two drawers, a small wardrobe and metallic tubular feet, published in the journal A.C. as "Mobiliario Standard tipos GATEPAC". Down, the single bedroom. Disseny Hub Barcelona. DHUBdoc - © DHUB. Photograph by Lourdes Jansana



DESIGNER: Thonet-Mundus team
 MODEL: B 61
 YEAR: 1930
 PRODUCTION: Thonet-Mundus, Austria
 SIZE: 45 x 79 x 55 cm (unfolded)
 45 x 88 x 5 cm (folded)
 MATERIALS: Wood and steel

© DHUB. Photograph by Xavi Padrós

Folding chair

The metal pieces of furniture, mainly tubular, revolutionised furniture during the 1920s and 1930s, both because of their production (fast and economic) aspects and their qualities and aesthetics. Tubular furniture was soon popular, mainly in Central Europe.

This folding chair was produced by the well-known tubular furniture company Thonet, the historical Austrian firm known worldwide for its pieces of bentwood furniture. Thonet incorporated metal into its products and treated the steel tubes with a special chemical process, while entrusting the design of its furniture to reputed architects (such as Marcel Breuer, Le Corbusier and Mies van der Rohe), thereby achieving solid and practical models of functional shapes.

In the case of this chair, the lacquered finish is an excellent protection for steel, as it makes it resistant to knocks and scratches, and is easy to clean. All the wooden parts (such as the seat and the back) were produced in black (with glossy or matte finish) except if a different colour was requested.

The Thonet-Mundus chair, a classic example of modern furniture, comes from the Barcelona dwelling of Germán Rodríguez Arias (1902-1987), founding partner of GATCPAC and outstanding architect who designed significant rationalist buildings in the city.

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In January 1992, the General Directorate of Cultural Heritage of the Government of Catalonia listed the Casa Bloc as a Good of Cultural Interest in the Category of Monument. The restoration carried out since 1997 received the Special Mention of the 2008 Ciutat de Barcelona Awards in the category of Architecture and Town Planning.

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