

**THE DESIGN BAR BOOM
IN BARCELONA DURING THE 1980s**

by

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Department of Industrial Design

1993



NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN
Faculty of Design
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Introduction

In Barcelona and the surrounding region of Catalonia the legacy of Gaudi, Miro and Dali is everywhere. In the introduction to *New Spanish Design* Guy Julier states:

Modern furniture from Barcelona is manufactured with the same indigenous skill that Gaudi used; graphic designers often employ fresh Miroesque motifs in their work; Dali's sense of the burlesque is widespread. Many designers however are experimenting with new forms...(Julier, 1990, p.34).

During the mid 1980s a group of designers made a significant contribution to this period of experimentation with a series of interiors. This thesis will focus on what has been called the "design bar boom" in the bars, clubs and restaurants of Barcelona during the last ten years. Examples have been chosen to trace this from its origins through to its aftermath. The designers responsible for these are Eduardo Samso, Alfredo Arribas, Javier Mariscal, Pepe Cortes and Daniel Freixes. The nature of this design phenomenon will be the subject of the thesis: how these interiors were designed, what inspired the design and where the ideas came from. The thesis will analyse why it was more than just a passing fashion and why it acquires a permanence and occupies a definite role in the development of a culture. As with all design in Barcelona there is no single definitive style to these interiors but rather a series of unifying or common factors. In contrast with design in Ireland, Barcelona design is an issue in everyday life. It is real, accessible, alive and an inherent part of society, as can be seen walking the many streets of Barcelona covered by paving stones designed by Gaudi. This thesis will show how these interiors continue this tradition with the saturation of imagery in Barcelona design. It will also demonstrate that bars and clubs are excellent examples in developing design as there are no real constraints on the designers and hence they have the freedom to experiment to finally formulate an enduring style of design. Before analysing the interiors in depth the reasons why this boom in bar design occurred will be given and also why it took place in Barcelona.

Chapter 1:

The Background to and the Designers of the Barcelona Bar Boom.

Apart from the nature of the design of the interiors there are many reasons why this design phenomenon occurred. Firstly, the fact that we are dealing with bars and restaurants, the two most important locations for social interaction within the Spanish culture. The Spanish conduct their social life almost exclusively outside the home, hence it comes as no surprise that there are reputedly more bars in Spain than the rest of the EC combined. Eating and drinking and the interaction it involves is the most important part of Spanish culture. And by nature, culture and the enjoyment of culture in its various forms are essential to the Spanish way of life.

Having established why bars and restaurants are the subject of such attention we should now ask- why Barcelona? During the Franco era the city was heavily punished for being the last Republican stronghold. Huge restrictions were placed on artistic or cultural activities in the city. One of the advantages of this was that a huge budget for public development from this period which was left untouched (Coad, 1988, p.29). It is not surprising then, that in the post-Franco era there was no other region in Spain willing to assert themselves with such conviction, vigour and flair as the Catalans.

This began in 1980 with the appointment of Oriol Bohigas as Director of Public Works following the first democratic city council elections since the 1930s. The choice of Bohigas was significant, as during the 1960s he and his colleagues were forced into a cultural underground by a government whom were constantly favouring the more conservative Madrilenos for any large scale architectural commissions. With the spotlight now firmly fixed on Bohigas and the others they were bound to impress. Steering clear of a grand master plan, the urban renovation programme was treated as a series of individual projects. Almost every public space was designed by a different studio. This leaves a city characterised by the diversity of each project. But for this discussion the most significant part of Barcelona's urban renaissance is the unofficial commercial spin off of the development programme. This was concentrated on renovating the interior spaces of the city, devoted mainly to night-life.

The final reason for the design bar boom's occurrence in Barcelona is perhaps the most interesting and it lies within the character and aspirations of the Catalans. Due to their own culture, language and geographical location between the Mediterranean and the French frontier, they have always considered themselves very different from the rest of Spain. Talking to any Catalan, particularly the residents of Barcelona they will

shamelessly admit that they consider themselves much more European than the rest of Spain, more cosmopolitan, more chic. This attitude leads to a certain amount of pretension on their part which is probably best summarised by Javier Mariscal and Alfredo Arribas: *In Barcelona people go out to see each other. In Madrid people go out to meet each other* (Julier, 1991, p.131).

At the beginning of the 1980s the economic climate in Barcelona (as in the rest of Spain) was in a transitional period. Although plans were being laid for reshaping the city, they would take many more years to implement. Therefore architects graduating from the schools of Barcelona would find few opportunities in their profession. The fashion industry was the first to escape the grip of recession. The exclusive fashion outlets emerging in Barcelona gave an opportunity to some of these architects to begin shaping commercial interiors which would lead to them being at the forefront of the design bar boom within five years. At its peak, with the excitement surrounding the bar interiors, the names of the designers became as synonymous as the bars themselves. Five of these designers and some examples of their principle interiors have been selected for further discussion- Eduardo Samsó: *Nick Havanna* and *Network*; Alfredo Arribas: *Network*, *El Gambrinus* and *Las Torres de Avila*; Javier Mariscal: *El Gambrinus* and *Las Torres de Avila*; Pepe Cortes: *El Tragaluz* and Daniel Freixes: *Zsa Zsa*.

Eduardo Samsó

Samsó graduated in architecture from the Escuela de Arquitectura de Barcelona in 1980. Still in his twenties he had absorbed quite an array of influences but was also prepared to utilise in his designs, observations from everyday life in Spain. Being an unapologetic supporter of bullfighting he is equally ruthless in his approach with some of his furniture designs which are a parody of this element of stereo-typical Spanish cultural identity. In his *Bregado* sofa of 1987 the piece is distinctively shaped and upholstered in the form and fabrics of a matadors attire. His rug named *a las cinco de la tarde* (the time at which bullfights traditionally commence) is circular in shape, similar to a bullring and also has similar divisions printed upon it.

One of Samsó's first interiors was the *Bis de Bis* shoe shop in 1983. Here, he was primarily playing with images by placing shoes everywhere except where one would expect to find them. Early experimentation with geometry, scale, and the texture of materials is also evident. In 1984 he completed the interior of the *Jean Pierre Bua* fashion shop. The following year he won a competition to design the interior of the *Nick Havanna* bar, where he mixed his favourite styles of the modern movement with an influence of post modernism. In 1987 he collaborated with Alfredo Arribas to produce the *Network* cafe/bar which earned them the FAD design award in the same year.

Alfredo Arribas

Like Samso, Arribas graduated in architecture at the beginning of the eighties but the most significant of his early projects were of a more architectural nature than those of Samso. Between 1985 and 1987 he worked with Miguel Morte on the *Casa Pastor* residence in Barcelona. The building involved complete interior refurbishment. In this sense it was similar to the bars and clubs which were to follow, other similarities were that the overall space was completely enclosed bearing very little relationship to the exterior. During 1986 and 1987 he worked upon the *L'Hort de les Monges* bar and restaurant at Cabrils outside Barcelona.

It was here Arribas demonstrated his problem solving skills, as he was presented with a labyrinth of buildings separated by stairways and walkways, all on different levels without any focal point between them. His solution to the problem was to reconstruct a medieval tower between them with a typically Catalan spiral staircase joining all levels. In this project there was also limited exterior lighting similar to that of *Casa Pastor*, which also required the careful positioning of doorways and windows within the tower. In 1987 Arribas was involved in his first bar interior as director of architecture in the *Network* cafe/bar with Eduardo Samso. The harsh aesthetic appears to have been influenced mostly by Samso as in the same year Arribas was seen to be progressing to a neo-baroque style starting with the interior of the *Electra* fashion shop. In the shop's interior polished teak floorboards run diagonally to play with perspective. This type of visual play continues with a stairway leading up a wall to nowhere. The walls contain pedimented classical columns and the area is segregated by perforated steel screens. A proffered form of Arribas surfaces in the elliptical shapes of mirrors and lights and also in the patterns of the rough plaster walls. This neo-baroque style was enforced by the *Velvet* bar which commenced later in 1987. The following year he mixed the modernism of *Network* with the sensual style of *Velvet* to produce what *ARDI* magazine called the *Acropolis of leisure*, the *Louie Vega* night club complex at Calafell near Tarrogon (Coad, 1990, p.63). Constructed over 3000m² of terrain, it contains gardens, terraces and pools all connected by steps and pathways to the separate buildings which house the bars, discos and lavatories. Arribas is at the height of this profession for this type of work involving the highest quality materials, furniture and fittings. It is not surprising then, that the following year he was working on the immensely luxurious *Il Pallazzo* hotel in Fukoka, Japan. By this stage Arribas had been propelled onto the international stage for his talents as an interior designer rather than as an architect. He appears to be not particularly happy with this type of recognition and as far back as 1988 he has hinted at this. In an interview with Rick Poyner he comments on interiors that: *If the space is good you don't have to design within* (Poyner, 1988, p.24) explaining that many of the flamboyant devices used in *Velvet*

were used to correct deficiencies in the original space. This may explain why, following Velvet, his projects became larger and larger emphasising his problem solving skills on a more architectural basis as seen in *Louie Vega* or later, in 1990 with the Las Torres de Avila nightclub (a collaboration with Javier Mariscal). His relationship with Mariscal is a strange one as they have such a conflict of styles that the result of their El Gambrinus restaurant in 1988 may have been a little too much for Arribas. The visual domination of Mariscal's contribution may be one of the reasons *he is in no hurry to have the place photographed* (Poyner, 1988, p.24). Yet two years later they appear to have struck the right chord with *Las Torres de Avila* which many consider to be the ultimate designer nightclub.

Javier Mariscal

Mariscal was born in Valencia in 1950 and moved to Barcelona at the age of twenty. There he has lived and based his work since. Initially he trained at Barcelona's Massana school in graphic design but here found it difficult to specialise in any one aspect of design. Mariscal's disillusionment with the specialised nature of a design school is not surprising considering the variety of work from his prolific output. This culminated recently in Cobi, the olympic mascot for the Barcelona games. But he has also designed graphics, interiors, fabrics, furniture, lighting and even items such as bed linen and shoes. Mariscal's distinctive style can be seen best in the childish scrawl and strange perspectives of his fine art painting (*fig.1*) which can be compared to the earliest of his cartoon strips. Mariscal has come along way from his beginnings as a cartoonist and likewise, his work. It is now possible to buy some of his earlier cartoon characters cast in aluminium and sold for exorbitant prices at *Vincon*, Barcelona's most fashionable shop.

It was Mariscal's furniture which first brought him to the international stage when he was asked to exhibit at the 1981 Memphis exhibition in Milan. It was here he presented his *Hilton* trolley of typical curious appearance, which has remained one of his most popular pieces. Previous to this he collaborated with Pepe Cortes to design the *Duplex* stool (*fig.2*), first seen in the *Duplex* bar in Valencia in 1980.



fig.1

Fine art painting by Mariscal.

The *Duplex* stool is an excellent example of the working relationship between Mariscal and Cortes which has proved extremely successful ever since. Mariscal admits that the stool was very difficult to make from his spontaneous sketchy drawings, basically a seat supported by three legs, one straight, one wave-like, and one curved. Mariscal speaks

Handwritten notes on a yellow sticky note, including the word "Society" and other illegible text.

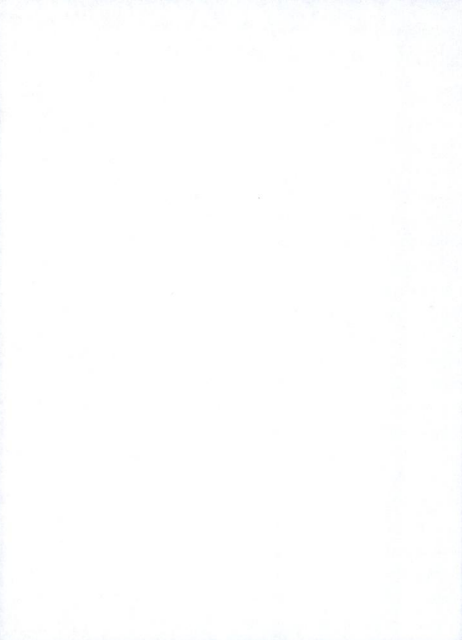
very highly of Cortes' technical knowledge and initially relied on him to provide *gravity* to his frivolous sketches in order to settle them into three dimensional pieces of furniture: *els meus dissenys tenen sempre el problema de la gravetat* (BCD, 1990, p69). Both have worked together for so long now that Mariscal believes that they can now design with the roles reversed whereby Cortes is the creator and Mariscal himself has acquired the knowledge of how materials relate and the physical and mechanical connections between them. The most recent example of their capabilities is the *El Tragaluz* restaurant with Mariscal as director of graphics and Cortes designing the interior. Mariscal has been involved in interiors as far back as the *Merbeye* bar in 1978. His most recent and probably most remarkable interiors would be those on which he collaborated with Arribas: the *El Gambrinus* restaurant in 1988, most famous for Mariscal's forty foot lobster on the roof and also *Las Torres de Avila* in 1990. Both of these could be seen to represent the climax of the design bar boom in Barcelona.



fig.2
Duplex bar stool.

Pepe Cortes

In 1966 Cortes graduated from the Eina design school in Barcelona after *a brief and unsatisfying encounter with architecture* (Julier, 1990, p34.). Five years later he was a member of the *Grupo Abierto* who were responsible for the revolutionary instant city created on the island of Ibiza for the ISCID conference in 1971. In 1981 he contributed to the Milan Memphis exhibition with Javier Mariscal and continued their partnership with furniture exhibitions such as *Muebles Muy Formales* for *B.D. ediciones de diseno* in 1983. In 1987 he was responsible for the interior of the *A/2* clothes shop in Manresa (fig.3), an early example of his simple and some times understated style. Rough stone is combined with smooth plaster frescoes (provided by Mariscal) and a characteristic combination of materials can also be seen in the polished wooden floor and metal staircase. The most substantial feature of the shop is a huge piece of bedrock uncovered during the excavation of the basement. Cortes demonstrated his skills of turning existing obstacles into assets of the interior by cutting stone steps into it and using it as the centre piece of the theme for the basement, that of an archeological dig. His most recent interior, *El Tragaluz* restaurant also demonstrates this ability to utilise existing obstacles but the project is best summarised by Mariscal (who handled the graphics):



El manejo de binomias de este tipo ha permitido a Pepe Cortes practicar en Tragaluz sus pasiones profesionales favoritas: la combinacion y el invento

El Tragaluz gives Pepe an opportunity to practice his favourite professional passions, combination and invention (Mariscal, 1991, p161).



fig.3
A/2 clothes shop

Daniel Freixes

Born in 1947 he studied architecture at Barcelona University for ten years. During this period Freixes had a rather unusual pastime and source of income- puppetry. So talented was Freixes with his puppets that following his representing Spain at an international festival of puppetry *he wondered if he had made the right decision in studying architecture* (Readhead, 1990, p40.). Finally it was a job offer from Vincente Miranda (his partner ever since) that convinced him to make a full time career of architecture. In 1983 the partnership designed their first noteworthy interior, *Bar 33*. *Bar 33* showed Freixes' capability to manipulate lighting and hence the interior space in his own witty fashion. Six years later this was executed to maximum effect in the *Zsa Zsa* bar which also reflects a new maturity to his work. Having produced such impressive interiors, Freixes, similar to Arribas is primarily an architect and hence prone to frustration by the limitation of interior schemes. But as demonstrated in *Zsa Zsa* if any one can exploit an interior to the fullest, it is he.



Chapter 2:

Communicating Imagery as a Backdrop to a Journey Through the Night

The first two interiors to be discussed in this chapter, *Nick Havanna* and *Network*, are of great significance as they marked the transition from the extremely austere and minimalist bar and club interiors which had proceeded them such as *Otto Zutz* and *Universal*. The designers Eduardo Samso and Alfredo Arribas pushed their interiors beyond this minimalism into a collection of visual codes. Although they could never be classed as minimalist they were nonetheless typified by an overall harsh aesthetic. This led to the *onda fria* (cold wave) of bar interiors which drew their inspiration from these. *Velvet*, the other interior to be discussed in this chapter represents a reaction to these with a much warmer approach to the interior.

Nick Havanna (Bar) built 1986 Designed by Eduardo Samso

From its unveiling in 1986 it was clear that the *Nick Havanna* bar had many innovative features which other bars were to follow. Apart from the overall concept it was also Samso's meticulous attention to detail throughout the bar which was ground-breaking material. Particular attention was paid to the lavatories (*fig.4*), yet again setting a trend which many designers were to follow. Rejecting the normalised functional approach to such tasks the resulting lavatories were large and spacious with cascading water flowing over mirrored urinals and wash hand basins presented as objects of worship.

In the bar the harsh modernist interior is thrown against a flavour of the American Wild West. This is provided by a cowhide bar surrounded by saddle-like stools which one mounts rather than sits upon. The latter being the only reference to *Nick Havanna*, imaginary cowboy hero, pioneer of the West. But the fact that the bar stools were included in the bar is significant in itself. The *Frensi* stool produced by *Transatlantic* is a very provocative piece of furniture (*fig.5*). The triangular shaped seat is supported by three steel rods, one of which is topped by a phallic looking knob available in the colours pink, purple or red. But the *Frensi* stool is also very much a designer item and by paying a little extra for your drinks you get to sit on it. It is this type of designer experience, which has since become commonplace, that has infiltrated design into Barcelona society.

On the whole, it is a cavernous space with a variety of seating to segregate areas within the bar, each also representing the stages within ones night. Moving from the saddles at



fig.4
Lavatories at Nick Havanna



fig.5
Frensi bar stool



the bar to the dance floor where no seating is provided to terraces overlooking a bank of thirty television screens, each section is quite distinct. A more relaxed atmosphere is provided by plush leather seating separated from the rest by a wall of glass.

The bar is full of curiosities such as slot machines selling paperbacks, a pet snake which appears occasionally and Samso's own video fixation, fulfilled by the wall of televisions (fig.6). If this is narrative architecture, then its visual language is fragmented in theme and dense in content. But the factor which ties together the whole project is the lighting. As the different projections of light pick out patterns in the smoke filled space, the main intentions of the project are realised. This intention is to bring the atmosphere of a discotheque to a bar and to make socialising in such a place a visually indepth activity.

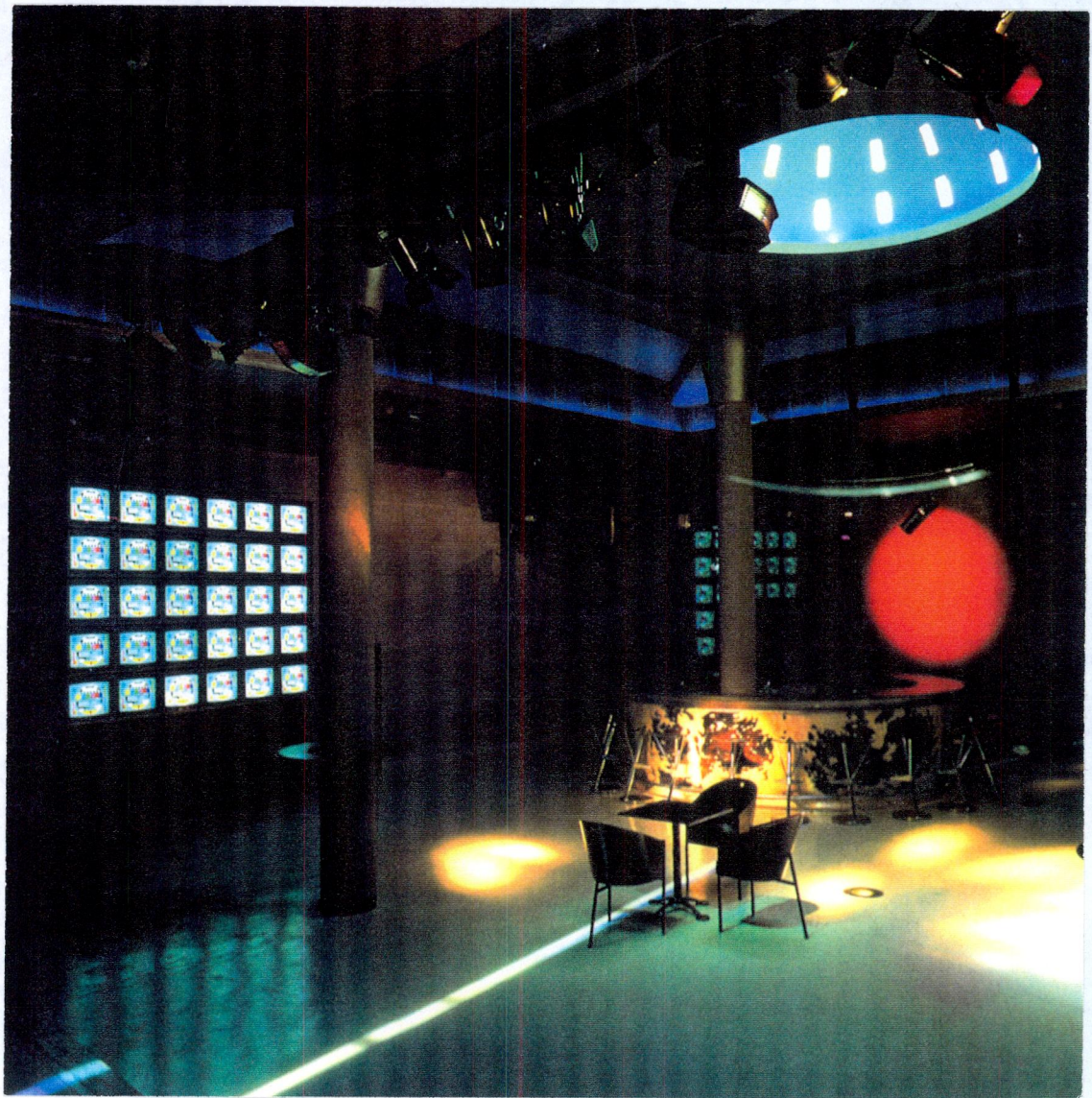
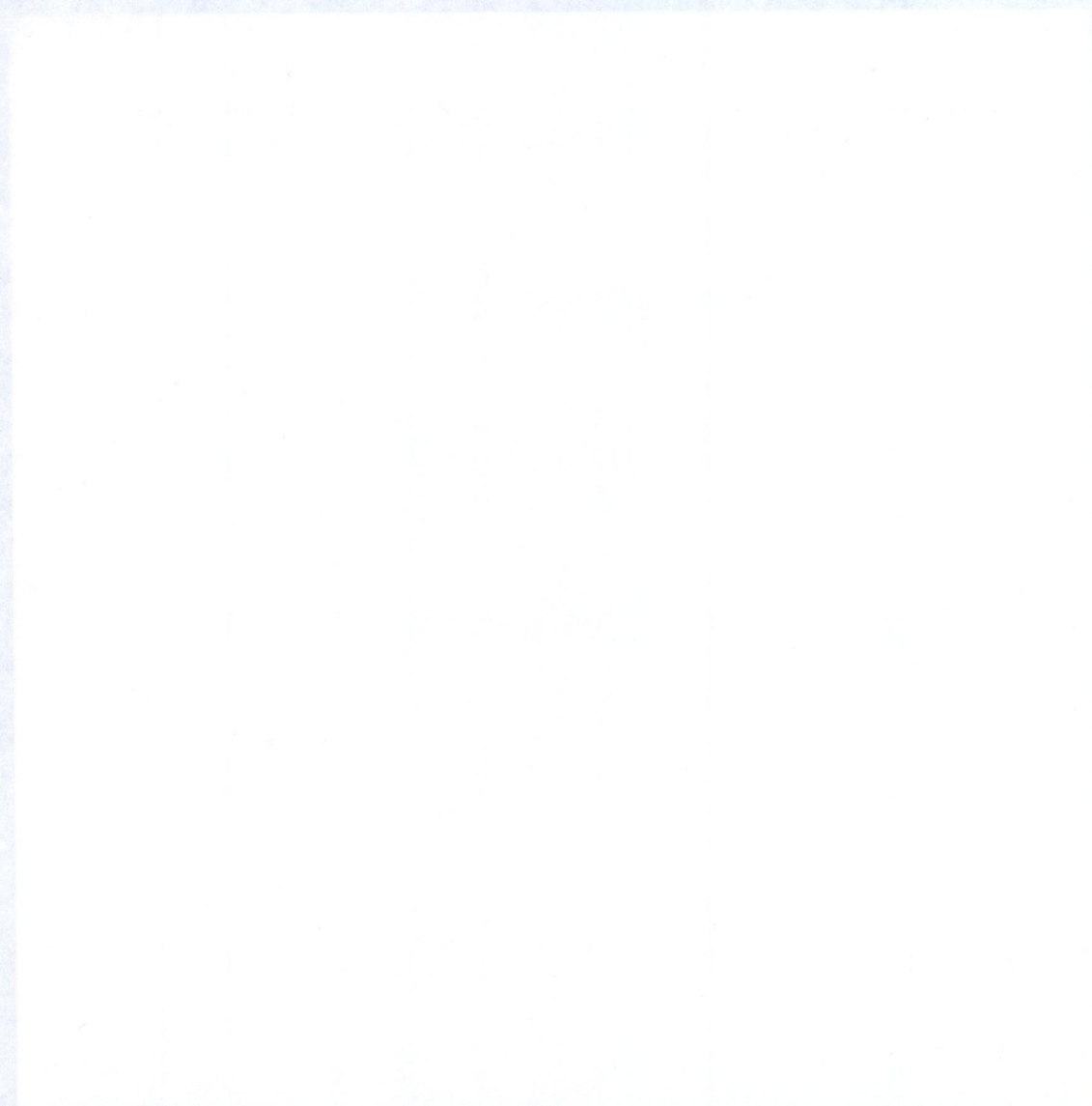


fig.6

The bar of Nick Havanna overlooked by a bank of televisions



Network (Cafe/Bar) built 1987/88

Designed by **Eduardo Samsó and Alfredo Arribas**

Following the completion of *Nick Havanna*, Samsó collaborated with an architect who had been admiring its design, Alfredo Arribas. The result was the high-tech, cafe/bar/restaurant *Network*. Arribas directed the overall project and planned the architecture, yet it was his first venture of this kind thus Samsó was needed for the lighting, sound and certain aspects of the interior.

There is no doubt that *Network* draws heavily upon the influences of science fiction films such as Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* and in particular Ridley Scott's *Blade Runner*. Incidentally both films have a cult following in Spain. The resulting eating experience is just as exciting as the socialising was in *Nick Havanna*. Samsó yet again indulged in his favourite fixation but this time on a post nuclear script. Embedded in the bare concrete sloping walls is a head sized television set above each table (fig.7).

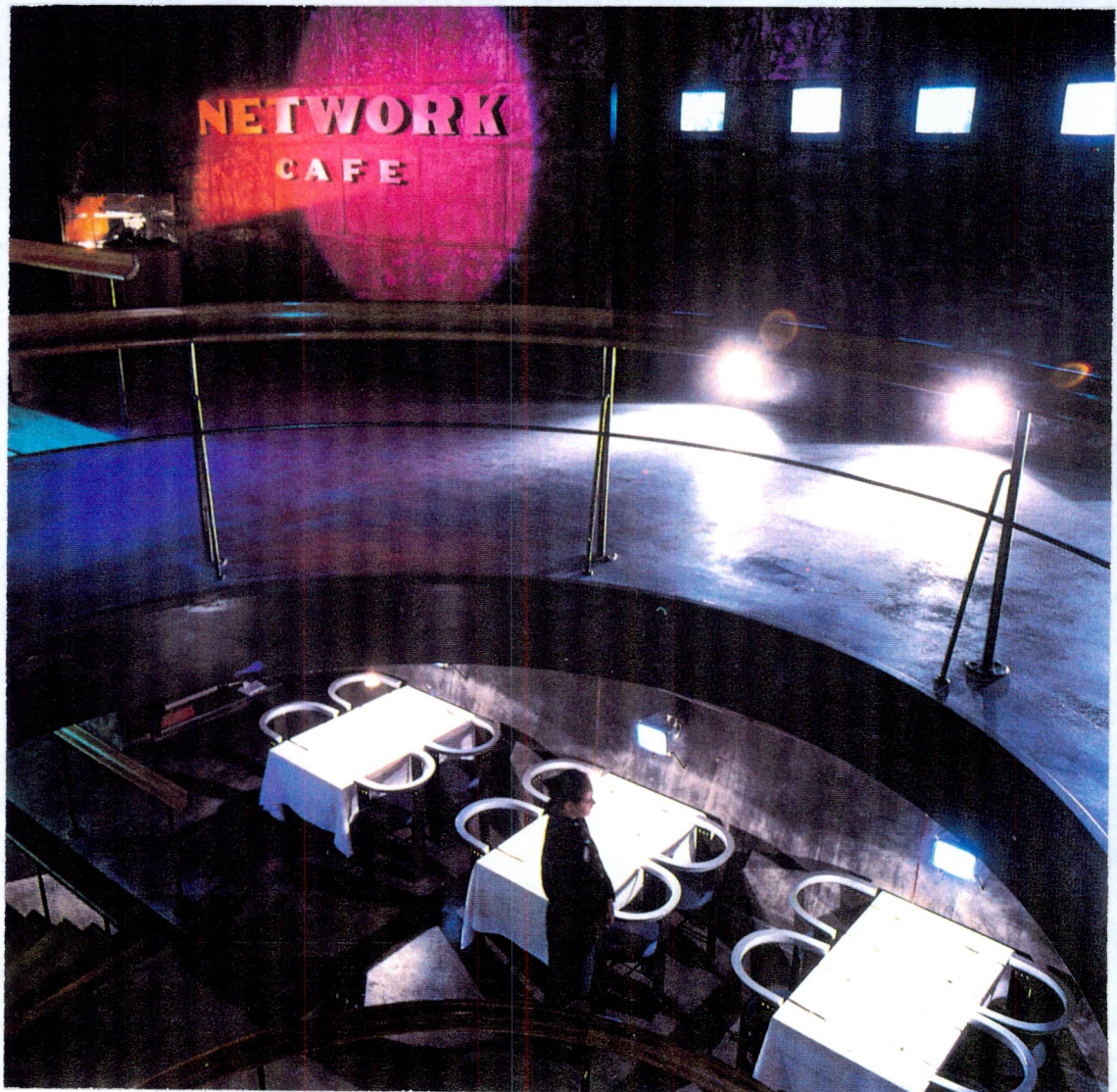


fig.7
Dining area of Network



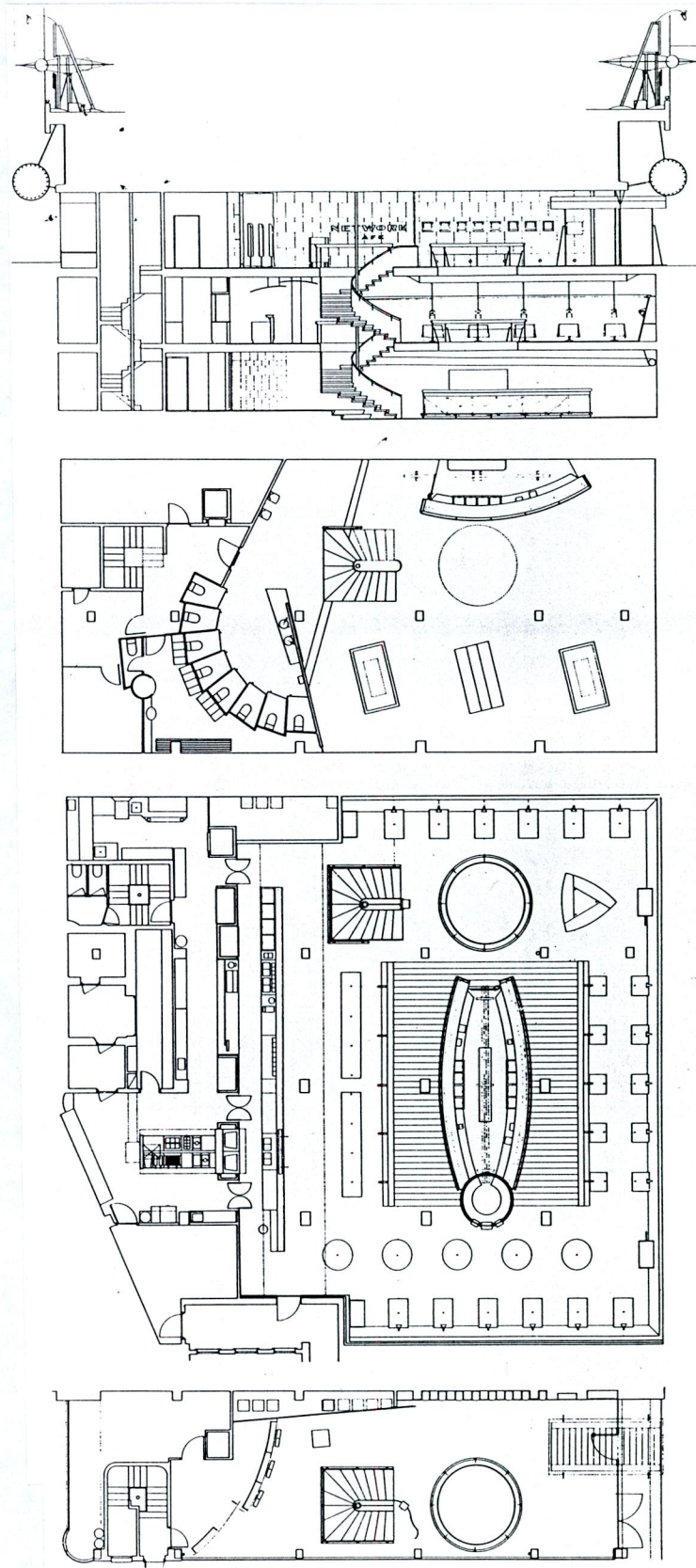


fig.8
Longitudinal section and floor plans
of Network



These unnerving flickering images while you eat is a little like confusing Orwell with the fifties idea of individual juke boxes in American diners. But despite the very inhuman bunker-like scene, considered thought was also given to the human factor. Again, as in *Nick Havanna*, this was due to a very clever arrangement of furnishings by Samso. Eye contact is unavoidable, as is overhearing others at neighbouring tables due to their layout. Singles, while dining are also placed opposite each other and for large groups of people there is the provision of a huge triangular table (fig.8). On this social engineering Guy Julier comments:

So successful was this social type of engineering that in the early days of Network, that- as customers mixed so easily, moving from one table to another- became difficult for the waiters to keep up with the movement and get the bills right (Julier, 1990, p.135).

It may not be a very subtle method of encouraging social interaction but nonetheless it works and in keeping with every aspect of *Network* it leaves nothing to chance.

From the street little of the building is visible as the entrance is at ground level and both of the other floors are underground, enhancing the bunker feel as one descends the spiral staircase into the depths of the restaurant. Architecturally the most striking element is a vast circular atrium which runs through the centre of the building, from top to bottom and allows all three floors to communicate visually (fig.9).

The overall aesthetic is so harsh that it gives rise to a subtly unnerving dining experience due to more than just flickering television screens. One of the reasons is that the fantasy science fiction film set translates uneasily into a real life recreational space. The other main reason is the use of materials, ranging from high-tech (televisions) to primitive (bare concrete) and all of this connected by bare metal floors with sheet metal being beaten into counter tops, the latter being particularly evident in the bar area (fig.10). To add to the striking appearance of a clash of materials wood has been used for the steps of the spiral staircase and for the hand rails on all of the balconies (fig.9).

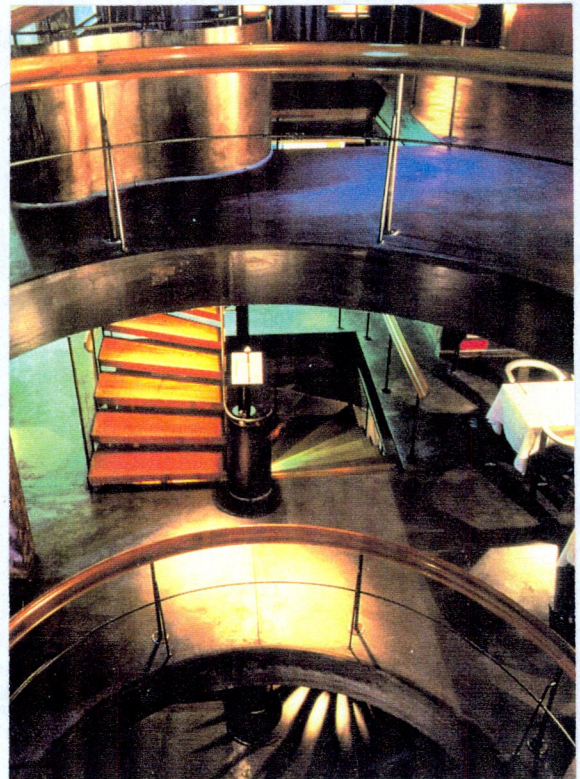


fig.9
*Balconies around the circular atrium
through the three floor levels at Network*





fig.10

The bar of Network complete with bare metal floors and counters

As with *Nick Havanna* the lavatories are worth a mention, their unisex cubicles are arranged in a semi-circle with minimal privacy being offered by, it must be said, very elegant floor to ceiling etched glass doors (*fig.11*). All of this culminated in the exclusive *FAD* design award for the interior in 1987.

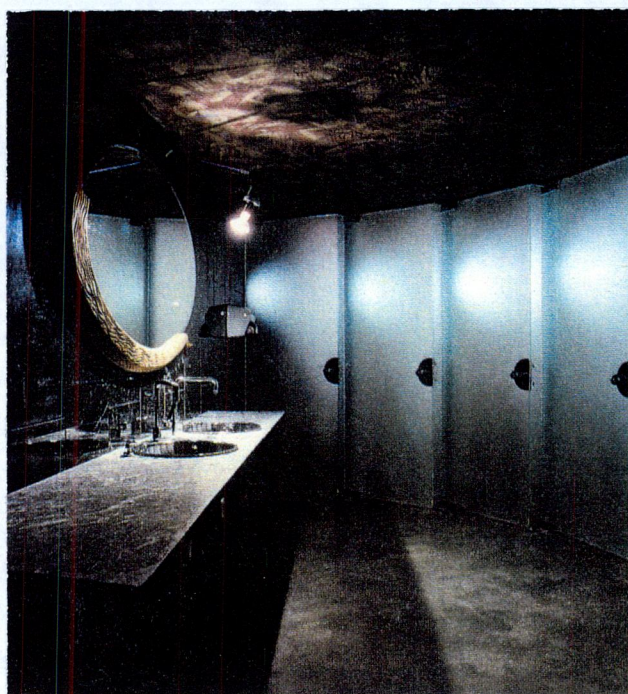


fig.11

Unisex lavatories at Network



Velvet (Bar) built 1987/88
Designed by **Alfredo Arribas**

Continuing his recently developed interest in bar interiors, Arribas followed the *Network* with *Velvet*. *Velvet* is a bar which as *Network* derives some of its inspiration from a cinema production, although it is much less pronounced. Apart from its name the only flavour of David Lynch's *Blue Velvet* are the velvet drapes (albeit deep red).

Arribas appears to be playing a game of semantics: although the interior appears to rework old themes, everything is in fact new. His functional style has allowed the use of these artistic witticisms amongst the familiar looking aspects of the interior. The overall gaudiness amalgamates pushing his cabaret atmosphere to the very limits of kitsch.

As with a lot of clubs located in the *Eixample* area of the Barcelona, little or nothing is visible from the street. Even attempting to see through the portholes of the substantial steel entrance door is quite difficult. But once the hard steel doors and the cold night air gives way, you immediately enter upon a sumptuous array of colours and texture, two large oval forms covered in pieces of red velvet beckon you inward and downward (fig.12).



fig.12
Interior view of the entrance to Velvet



Immediately it becomes apparent that this is not going to be anything like the cold modernist aesthetic of *Network* or *Nick Havanna*, so much so that it represented a reaction to these type of interiors. Although, the warmth of its colours and textures does not mean it's devoid of its own piece of high tech architecture. This comes in the form of a Norman Foster- type glass ramp suspended on cables leading into the depth of the club (*fig.12*). It is this type of contrast which leaves the club defying classification.

The juxtaposition of colours and textures continue with rich red velvet drapes behind the bar, either side of the entrance ramp and hanging alongside rough stone walls. A polished teak circular dancefloor is surrounded by slate flooring and golden wood is also used for some of the backgrounds (*fig.13&14*).

The seating is all of the one style, that taken from a 1950s design by Carlo Molino. The seats could be said to have an overall organic form. Yet a more specific, and accurate, description of the shape is that it is a direct reflection of the posterior placed upon it. For the stools the cushioned oval shaped halves are supported on spider thin legs and for the chairs an identical pair of halves are added as a back support.



fig. 13
Dance floor and seating at Velvet



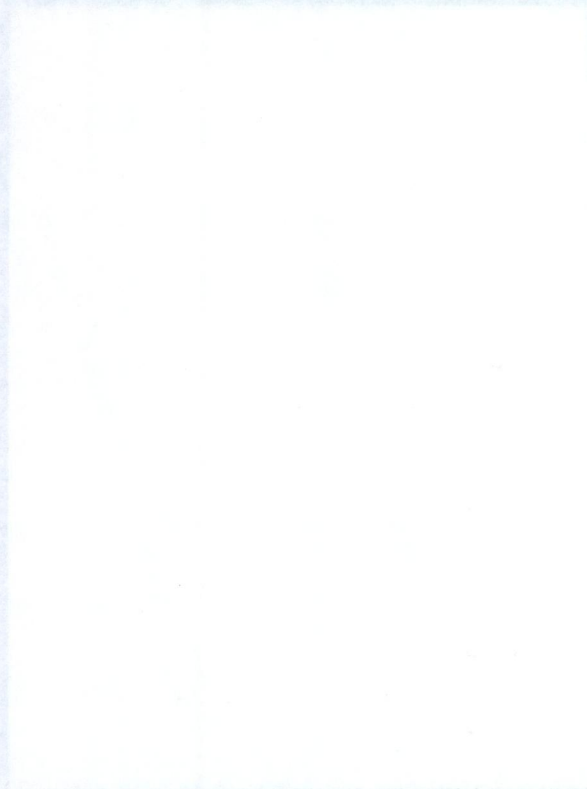
fig.14
The bar of the Velvet

During this period in Barcelona bar design continued with the same freedom of experimentation in imagery and styles applied to *Nick Havanna*, *Network* and *Velvet*.. This culminated with two interiors in particular, which follow in the next chapter.

The lavatories take those of *Network* a step further by adding translucent walls to the already translucent doors and as with *Nick Havanna*, stainless steel handbasins are placed in front on completely mirrored walls (fig.15). Emma Dent Coad comments that this is a recurrent device of Arribas'- *not to encourage lingering* (Dent Coad, 1990, p.63). Coupled with the cacophony of styles presented in *Velvet* it is difficult to argue against this. Yet there is something about this interior which makes you come back for more. Its as if the sensuous colours and textures, even the warm orange-coloured spotlights tend to dominate the subconscious.



fig.15
Mirrored walls and stainless steel handbasins of the lavatories at Velvet



Chapter 3:

The Ultimate in Narrative Architecture

The frenzy of activity and interest in bar and restaurant interiors started and typified by those mentioned in the last chapter reached a crescendo before the end of the decade. This chapter will focus upon the two examples which represent this best. The *El Gambrinus* restaurant by Alfredo Arribas and Javier Mariscal, and also by the same partnership, the immensely impressive *Las Torres de Avila* nightclub.

El Gambrinus (Restaurant) built 1988

Designed by Alfredo Arribas and Javier Mariscal

When Barcelona's seafront was developed in 1988 a prerequisite for the plan was to build six *chiringitos* (seaside huts) along the *Moll de la Fusta* water front, housing bars, cafes and restaurants (*fig.16*). Structurally each is identical, all having a large curved roof signifying a wave flowing over the walls. But the design of each was carried out by different groups. The most spectacular of these was designed by Alfredo Arribas and Javier Mariscal. The unmistakable feature of the restaurant is its enormous smiling lobster which resides on its roof (*fig.19*). But in contrast to the frivolous fibre glass lobster, the interior is immaculate.

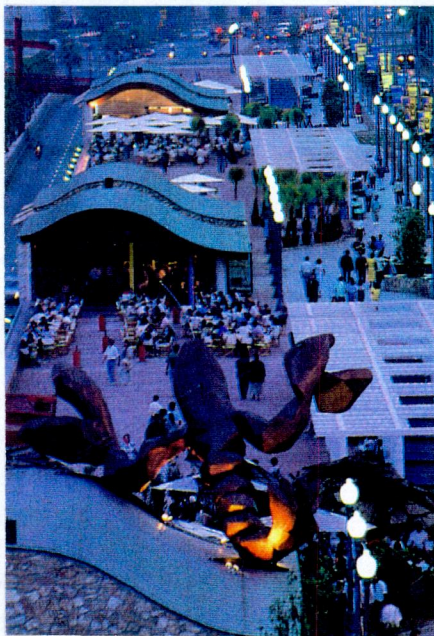


fig.16

The Moll de la Fusta waterfront

The interior is conceived around an imaginary film script, but this time it's the imagery of an ocean liner cruising the high seas (*fig.17*). The elegant curving form of the bar is remarkably similar to that of a ship's hull, right down to its wooden construction. Very simple circular stools (designed by Pepe Cortes) fixed to the floor surround the bar in perfect symmetry, echoing the portholes of the hull. The polished wooden floor gives the impression of a ship's deck and the theme continues with a large piece of curved glass similar in shape to a ship's bridge. To ensure that diners are convinced they are at sea, the curved wooden ceiling rolls overhead in the exact form of the wave like roof. The floor to ceiling windows are of frosted glass and are engraved with Mariscal's creatures and sea weed keeping *terra firma* at bay by giving an underwater effect. If it is the Arribas' immaculately controlled detail that dominates the interior, then it is sheer Mariscal mayhem let loose outside.



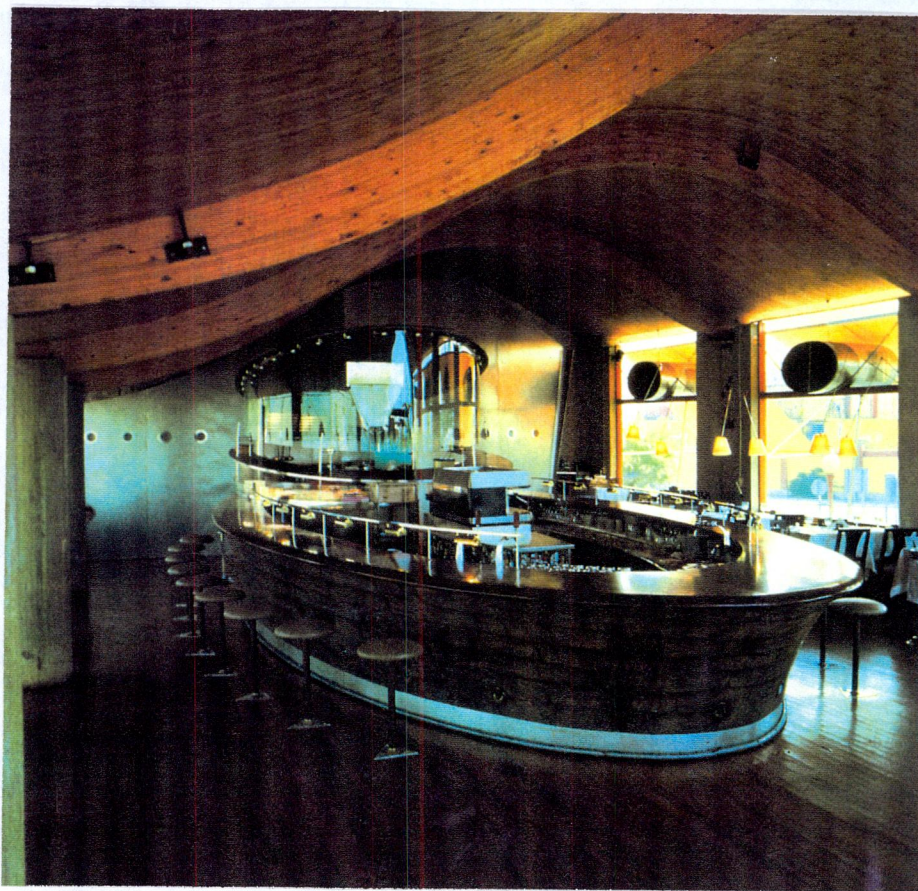


fig.17
The interior of El Gambrinus



fig.18
The terrazza of El Gambrinus



In marked contrast to the comparatively restrained interior is the shipwrecked terrace outside (*fig.18*). No two pieces of furniture are the same as all appear to have been assembled from the ship's wreckage. Mariscal's detail of shellfish and octopuses clinging to the metal chairs is ingenious. The parasols shading the driftwood tables are similarly ad-hoc, made of tattered fabric, wood and metal.



fig 19
The giant fibreglass lobster on the roof
of El Gambrinus

Both designers have placed very few limits on representing the imagery of their imaginations. Although Mariscal's contribution would at first sight appear to outdo that of Arribas' well executed interior it is nonetheless clear that in restaurant design this type of narrative architecture had reached its peak. It may prove impossible to surpass the depth of imagery involved in *El Gambrinus* with another restaurant. But as far as night-life is concerned the same partnership surpassed themselves with the *Las Torres de Avila* nightclub.



Las Torres de Avila (Nightclub) built 1990

Designed by **Alfredo Arribas and Javier Mariscal**

The ultimate product of Barcelona's design bar phenomenon is the hugely extravagant *Las Torres de Avila*. Here Arribas and Mariscal have blended every possible designer experience with £3 million pounds worth of music system (Julier, 1992, p.20).

It is situated high upon the magical hill of Montjuic, overlooking the whole city and port. The building is located in Pueblo Espanol, essentially the world's first theme park. Built for tourists as the quintessential Spanish village, the fortified gatehouse to the village is a re-creation of the two medieval towers at the entrance to the town of Avila (fig.20). Creating a nightclub in two abandoned towers may seem a daunting task but it is also a testament to both designers capabilities, the result being the world's most amazing night spot.

A stone walled gothic exterior provided the starting point for the project. Both Mariscal And Arribas admitted to being shocked at encountering merely a facade. Mariscal recalls:

But since there were no rooms or even floors it meant that we could do anything and had the freedom to dream (Nieswand, 1991, p.88.).

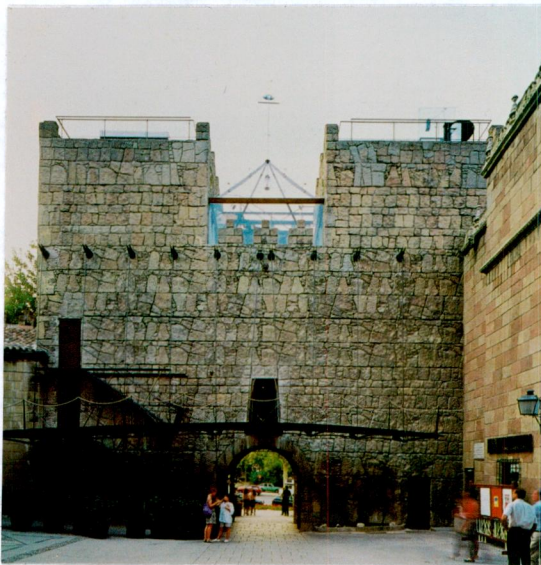


fig.20
The exterior of Las Torres de Avila

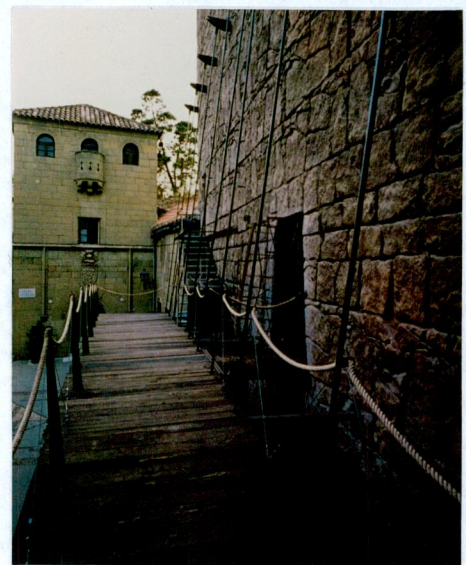
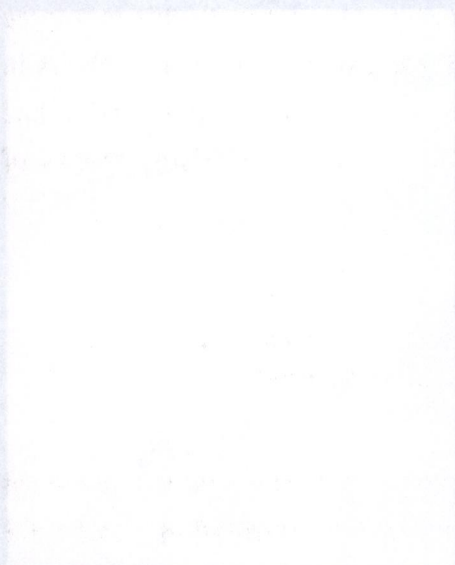


fig.21
Wooden entrance ramp

The nocturnal adventure of frequenting this particular night-spot begins upon entering. A sloping wooden ramp suspended on cables from the towers leads to the first floor entrance (fig.21). Already the building's spatial tricks begin to play with the mind. Whilst ascending the ramp, Indiana Jones style, the doorway appears to lack sufficient headroom for negotiation. But as you continue along a bridge, the entrance complete with flashing lights comes into view. The journey continues along a transparent



transparent drawbridge and strobe lights continue to flash as if to confuse the mind for making the next decision. This is the central core of the building and provides the route to entering either tower. As you choose which way to turn you are constantly under observation from a giant eye projected onto the ceiling by laser and reflected below your feet in the glass floor.

At this point the designers seized upon the primary guiding factor the towers provided. This being two identical but entirely separate spaces. What ultimately arose was one space representing positive, the other negative. It was a natural progression given that they were asked to create two bars with two doorways, separated by twin spaces, ironically all to be executed by two very different designers (*figs.23&23*).

It is this distinctive play between masculine and feminine, day and night, sun and moon which provides the magic of the building. The central core is the opposite to the two contrasting towers in that it represents unity, the cohesion between them both. This houses the most unnerving of bars with a steeply sloping floor, set high in the arch between the towers it is surrounded by glass on all sides. Overhead is yet another glass eye presiding as its apex. Yet most of the drama is provided by two floor to ceiling windows overlooking an eighty foot drop to the ground. On either side of the glass pyramid is the spectacular roof terrazza providing a breathtaking view of Barcelona (*fig.24*). On the left hand side, that of the night, sits a black dome covered by brightly lit stars and comets with a crescent moon at the top (*fig.25*). Beneath this is a large void which contains a shell-like wall that encapsulates a group of tables and chairs in the centre (*fig.26*). The wall is covered by dazzling optic fibres on the outside and illuminated by star-like lights on the interior (*fig.28*). It is here Mariscal speaks of when he says:

The light is different, cooler in the moon tower, and under the dome are the same stars that hang in the sky; You can sit beneath it and watch the sky revolving overhead. (Nieswand, 1991, p.88.)

Although pleasant to gaze overhead it can be disquieting to glance below where a glass floor fluctuates between appearing solid and sheer transparency, opening up to view the bar below in an instant (*fig.27*). The effect is due to one of the many computer controlled lighting sequences.

Within the tower dedicated to the sun the, atmosphere is naturally warmer. This is provided by a globe suspended through a hole in the canopy which overlooks the gallery, bathing it in warm rays of light (*figs. 29&30*). Adjacent to this is a glass cylinder which runs the full height of the building. Suspended within this is a globe which rises and falls mimicking the appearance and disappearance of the sun.

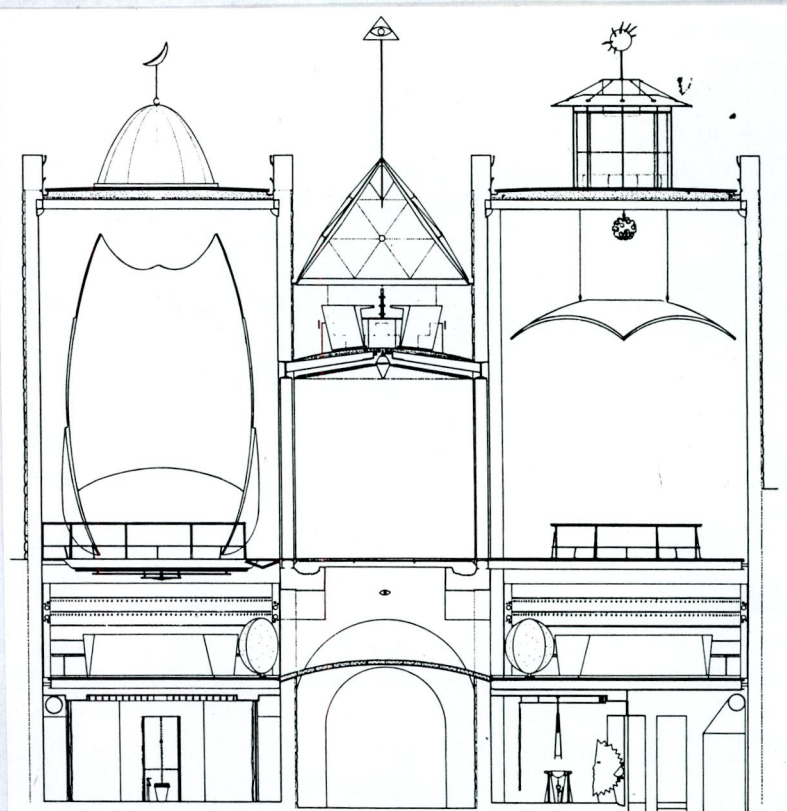


fig.22
Longitudinal section through the towers

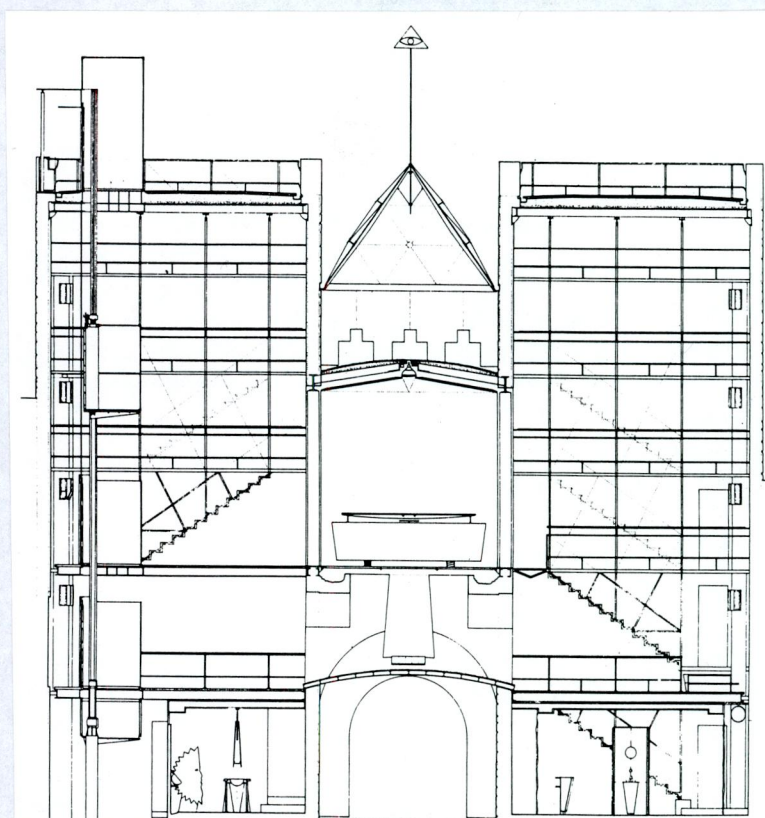


fig.23
Longitudinal section through the central core

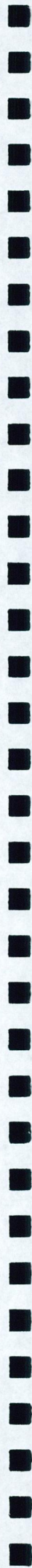




fig.24
The night sky of Barcelona from the
rooftop terrazza

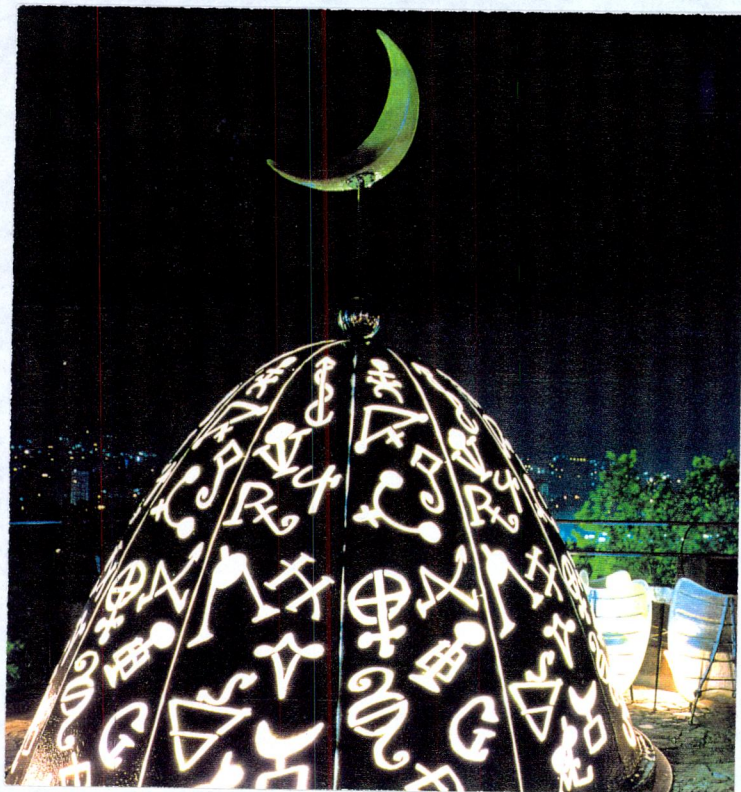


fig.25
The dome of the moon tower
decorated in Mariscal's symbols

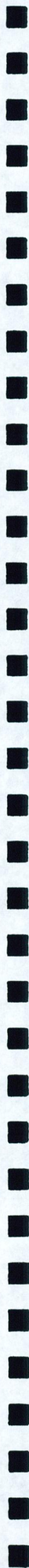




fig.26
The shell-like structure within
the moon tower.



fig.27
The bar area below the gallery
level in the moon tower



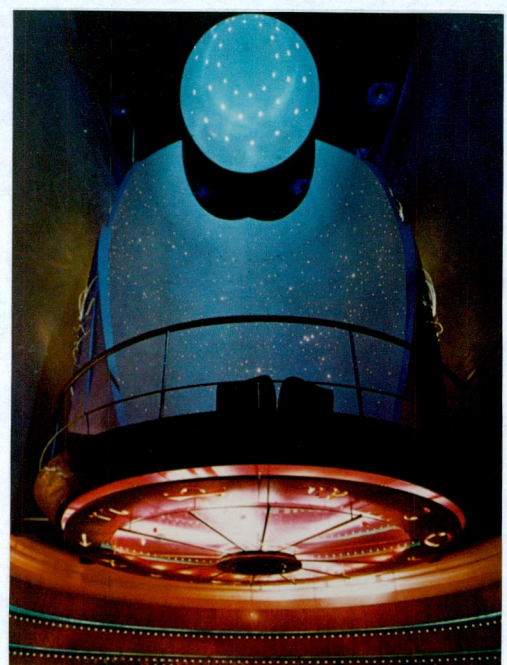
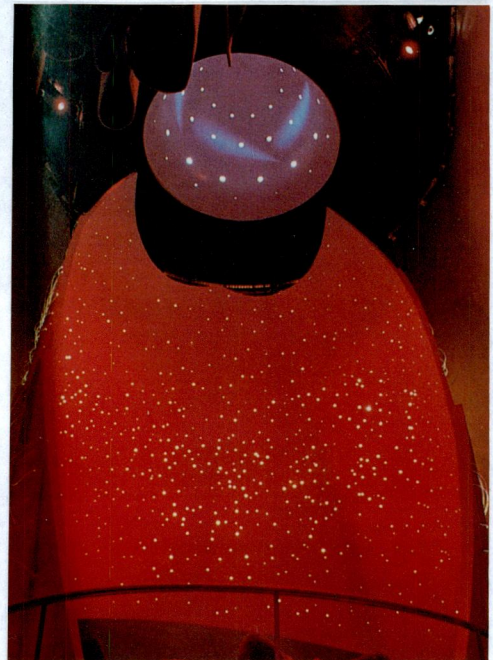
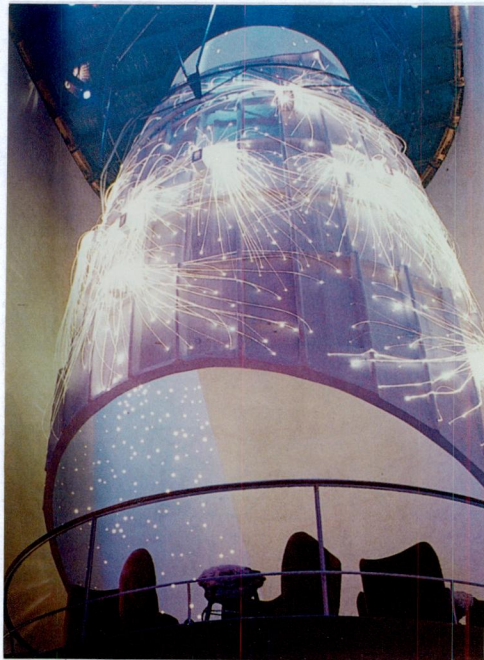


fig.28
One of the lighting sequences
in the moon tower





fig.29
Gallery level in the
sun tower

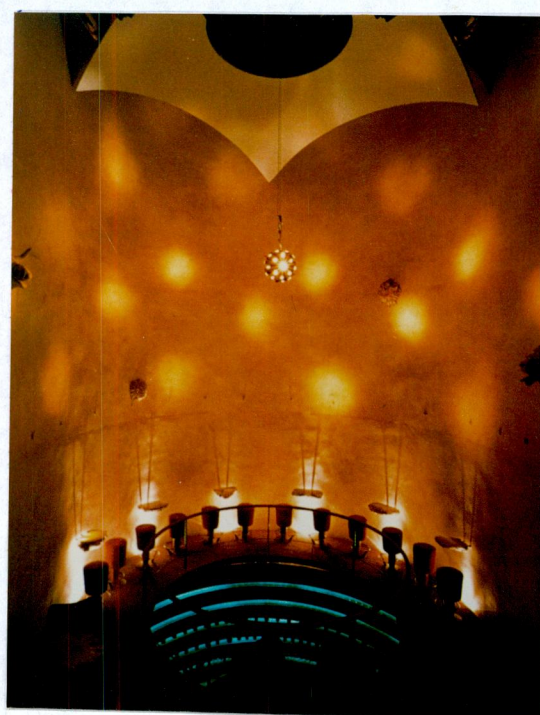


fig.30
Warm lighting in the
sun tower.



The lavatories are of immaculate appearance, characterising Arribas' attention to detail. But it also interesting to note that some of Mariscal's spontaneity is evident in the manner of the washbasins supports (*fig.31*), reminiscent of the *Duplex* stool (*fig.2*).

If we were to leave aside for a moment all of the newly created structures and effects, the most fundamental reason for the club's drama comes to the fore. It is that the interior has been remodelled to retain almost intact the original volume of the exterior. Within this, all newly created structures have been suspended, disturbing a little the simplicity of the huge volume of both cylindrical voids yet accentuating their dramatic effect. In this aspect Arribas' architectural background becomes the dominant force. Similar to the complexity of his *Louie Vega* project he has successfully overlapped all of the individually suspended levels within the structure (*fig.32*).

If the latter are the primary contributions of Arribas, then it is the vast wealth of symbols, fantasy imagery and quirky furniture which is unmistakably Mariscal (*fig.33*). It is these characteristic additions, such as the numerous nocturnal creatures which appear from the walls which create the storybook element of the atmosphere, ensuring that the patrons are provided with a truly fantasy adventure through the night.

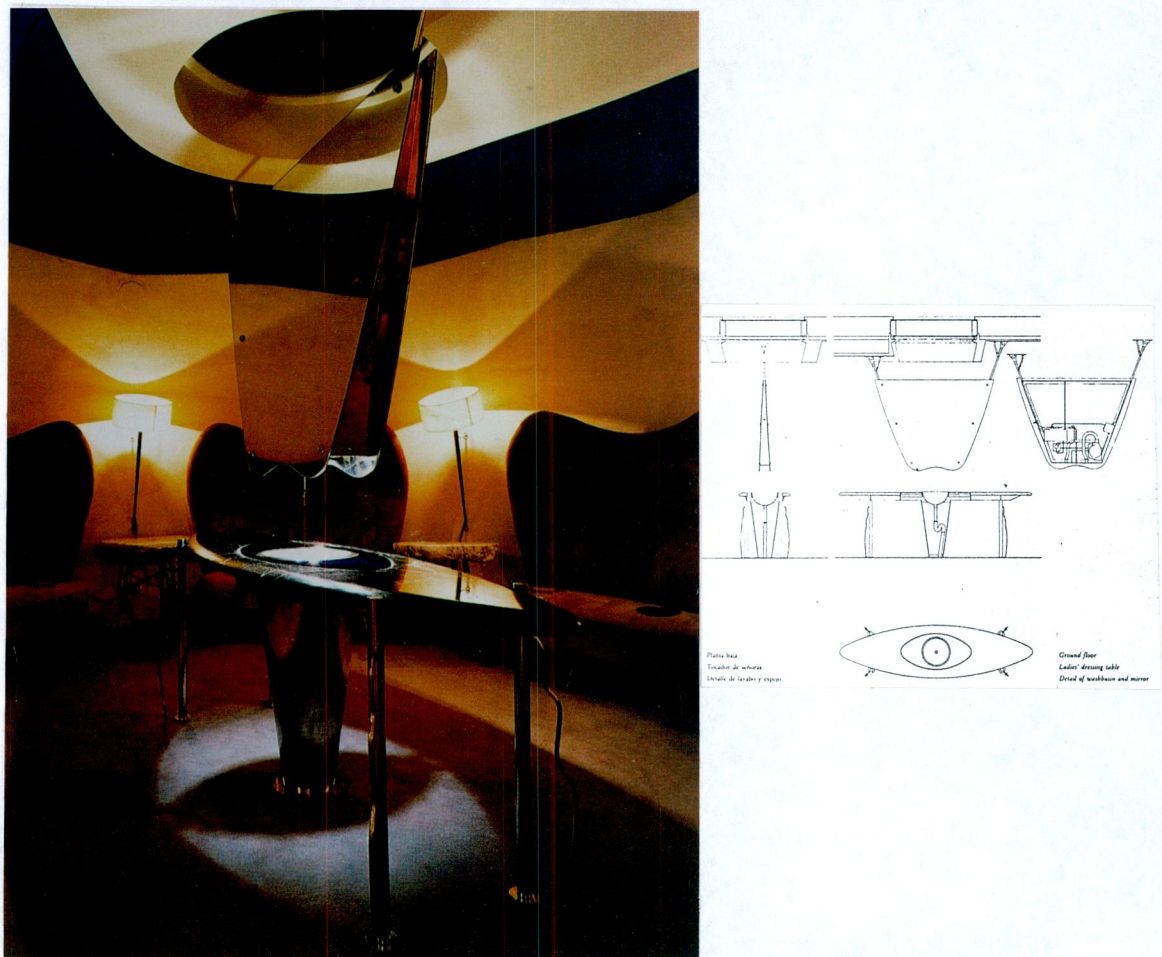


fig.31
Detail of the wash basin in the lavatories
at Las Torres de Avila





fig.32
The various levels within
the structure of the
central core

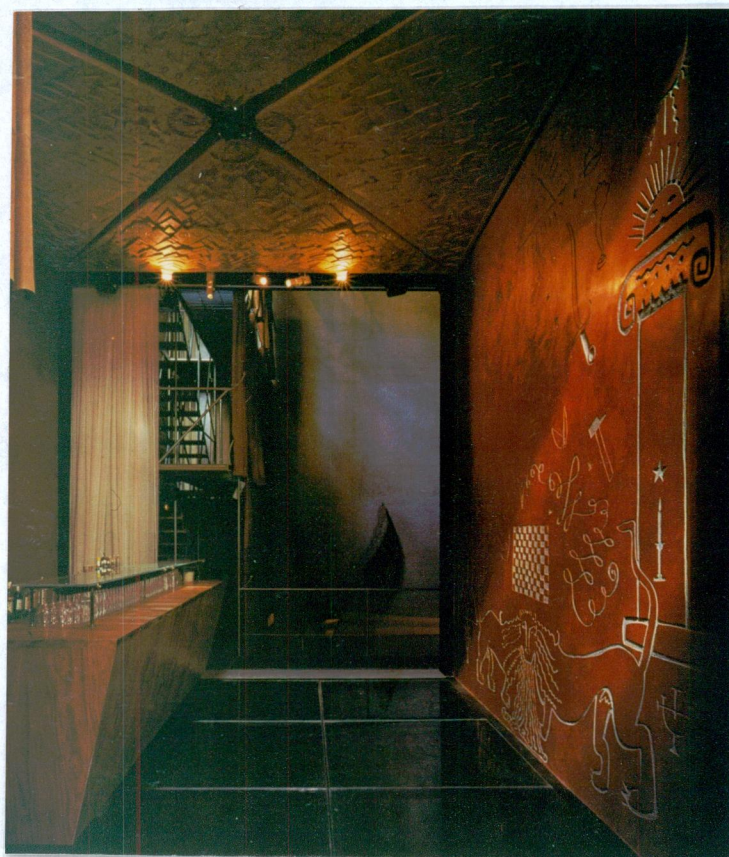


fig.33
Mariscal's graphics on
the walls of the
central core



Las Torres de Avila gives away little from the exterior, yet once the sun sets over the city of Barcelona a whole world of contrasts, suggestions, colours, textures and images appear. As Mariscal comments: *it is a closed box which wakes up at ten and dozes off at daybreak* (Mariscal, 1991, p.125). Arribas and Mariscal have stretched the concept of a bar as far as it can be taken. Passing from one tower to another, sipping a drink, contemplating Barcelona beneath the heavenly bodies of Avila, who could argue that its designers have not created the club to end all clubs.

Following the astonishing results of El Gambrinus and in particular, Las Torres de Avila, there was a notable change in the approach to designing these type of interiors. The designers appeared to place constraints on the final visual impact of the interiors, resulting in a more subtly impressive atmosphere. In the next chapter two classic examples of this are analysed.

Chapter 4:

Formulating a Style for the Future

The increasingly remarkable interiors of Barcelona's bars, clubs and restaurants could not have lasted for ever and as we have seen in the last chapter reached its peak. Therefore we must pose the question: where does that leave this type of design? And what can be seen as the long term implications of the bar boom? What follows are two examples of a more contemplative mature style which has emerged from the wild excesses which proceeded it. Firstly there is *Zsa Zsa* designed by Daniel Freixes in 1989 followed by Pepe Cortes' *El Tragaluz* restaurant, both of which have set a precedence for bar and restaurant design into the nineties and beyond.

Zsa Zsa (Bar) built 1989

Designed by **Daniel Freixes**

In the late seventies and early eighties Daniel Freixes and Vincente Miranda were involved in the design of some bar interiors which culminated in 1983 with *Bar 33*. *Bar 33* was significant in that it that it used standard materials but combined them in a rather unusual fashion. There was also a careful treatment of space by a manipulation of lighting. Although there was a period of six years, during which, Freixes avoided bar interiors, when *Zsa Zsa* was completed in 1989 the aforementioned qualities continued to be of importance to his work.

Freixes, like most of the designers in question is primarily an architect and during this six year period he returned to projects of a more architectural emphasis. Therefore it is not surprising that the resulting *Zsa Zsa* has been designed from an architectural viewpoint. Freixes believes this work has a maturity which gives the project a certain permanence and creates a more enduring space. He comments also that *the overall form is far more important than the objects placed within it* (Readhead, 1990, p.46). This attitude is quite significant as it signifies the change in priorities in designing bar interiors.

Zsa Zsa is located in the same area of Barcelona as *Velvet* and it is situated in a similar *Eixample* building with a long narrow site identical to that of *Velvet* (figs.34&35). There are also two entrances on either side of a central wall (which contains the access to the floors of the building above), but following that, the similarities with *Velvet* ends.

In the layout of *Velvet*, Arribas first broke up the long rectangular site with ramps, steps, partitions and doorways. He also incorporated a completely circular dancefloor with

the bar and seating arranged in a semi-circular fashion around it. In complete contrast to this, the layout of *Zsa Zsa* is remarkably simple.

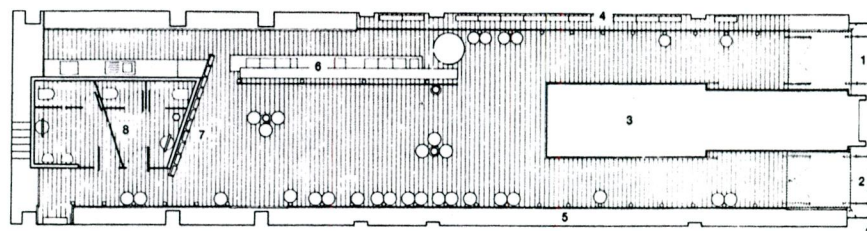


fig.34
The floor plan
of Zsa Zsa

Floor plan

Key to plan
1,2 Entrance
3 Central wall
4 Glass showcase
5 Crate and mineral store
6 Bar
7 Rear screen
8 WCs

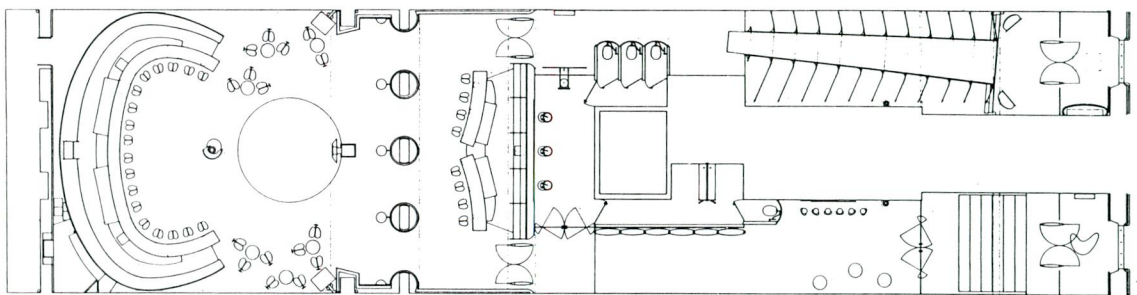


fig.35
The floor plan of Velvet

One of the primary considerations was soundproofing the club to protect the residents above and in the adjacent buildings against the noise levels. The resulting format could be described as a box within a box. This solved the soundproofing problem but was also the cornerstone for the visual appearance of the interior (*fig.36*).

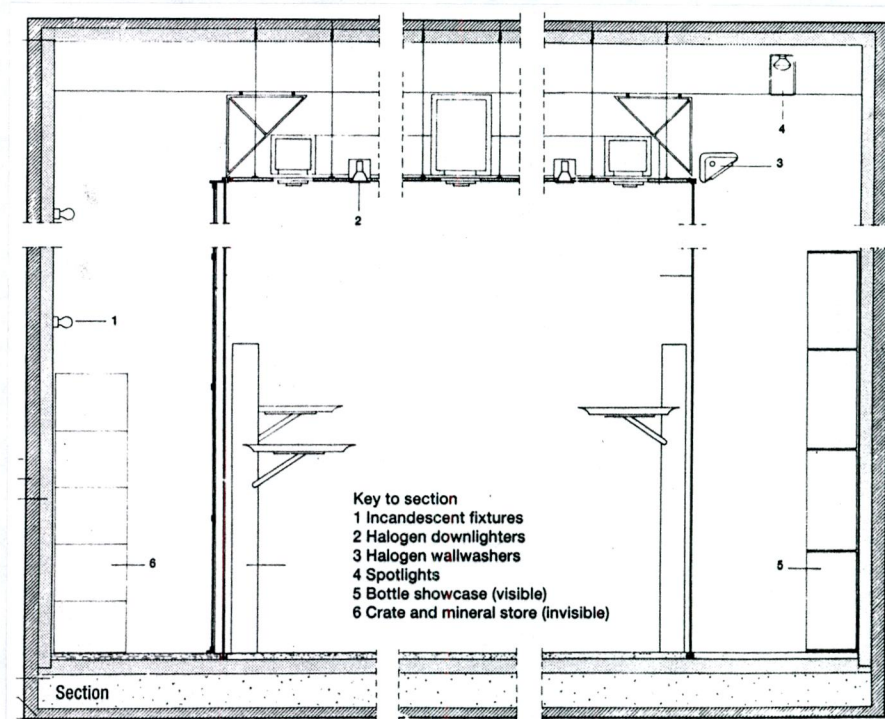


fig.36
Section through the ceiling and
exterior walls of Zsa Zsa





fig.37
The right hand entrance corridor
to Zsa Zsa.



The "inner box" maintains the simple rectilinear shape of the main walls with two floor to ceiling walls of reflective glass. The one adjacent to the right hand entrance is a backdrop to the bar and allows a vast selection of spirit bottles to be displayed between the glass and the rough white breeze blocks of the exterior wall (*fig.37*). The other glass wall next to the left hand entrance is in effect translucent as directly behind it is a birchwood veneer which conceals the unsightly crates of beer and soft drinks.

The most basic form of lighting in the bar is provided by uplighters mounted around pillars and gives an almost non-descript dark and gloomy effect. At this point it is difficult to define the extent of the size or the limits of the interior space. Although at first appearing unremarkable, this is in fact a neutral stage in an ingenious lighting sequence which sees *Zsa Zsa's* interior undertaking chameleon-like transformations.

When the right hand wall is lit from above by both wallwashers and spotlights, the selection of spirit bottles suddenly appear from behind the previously mirrored glass in bright white light and all of this is reflected in the opposite glass mirrored wall (*fig. 38*). But then as the lights above the bottles dim, the incandescent lights behind the translucent birchwood of the opposite wall begins to glow and the whole room is bathed in a rich yet soft golden light (*figs. 39&40*). It is the warmth of this light which compensates for the cool steel fixtures and furniture (*figs.41&43*).



fig.38
Reflections of the spirit store
in the opposite wall.





fig.41
Stainless steel columns
with uplighters.

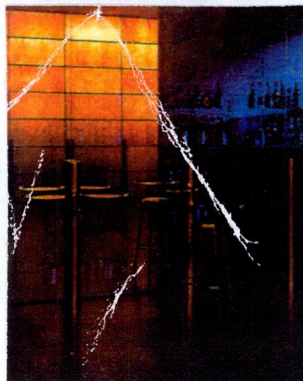


fig.39
Reflections of the lighting
behind the birchwood veneer
wall.

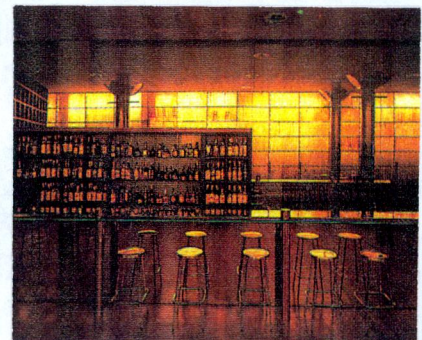


fig.40
Reflections in the wall behind the
bar of the opposite wall

This sense of comfort is not just confined to the bar area. In the entrance corridor when the shelves of bottles are not visible the mirrors reflect the rich carpet collage on the other side of the corridor (*fig.42*). These rugs, initially placed there for acoustical considerations are now a very welcoming sight and upon entering have a very calming effect on both the eye and ear. The predominantly steel fixtures and furniture are at times very clever, an example being the numerous waiters trays used as uplighters mounted on columns. The trays are also mounted on the walls and act as small tables (*fig.43*). Yet all of these objects are sufficiently unobtrusive as to conform to the attitude of Freixes when he says:

*I'm far more interested in the actual quality and
relationship of materials than in their forms*
(Readhead, 1990, p42).

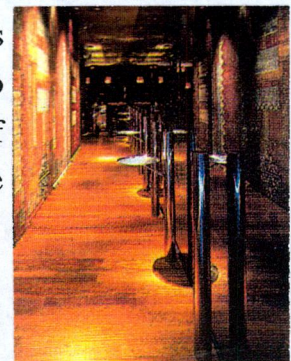


fig.42
The carpet collage and
its reflections opposite.



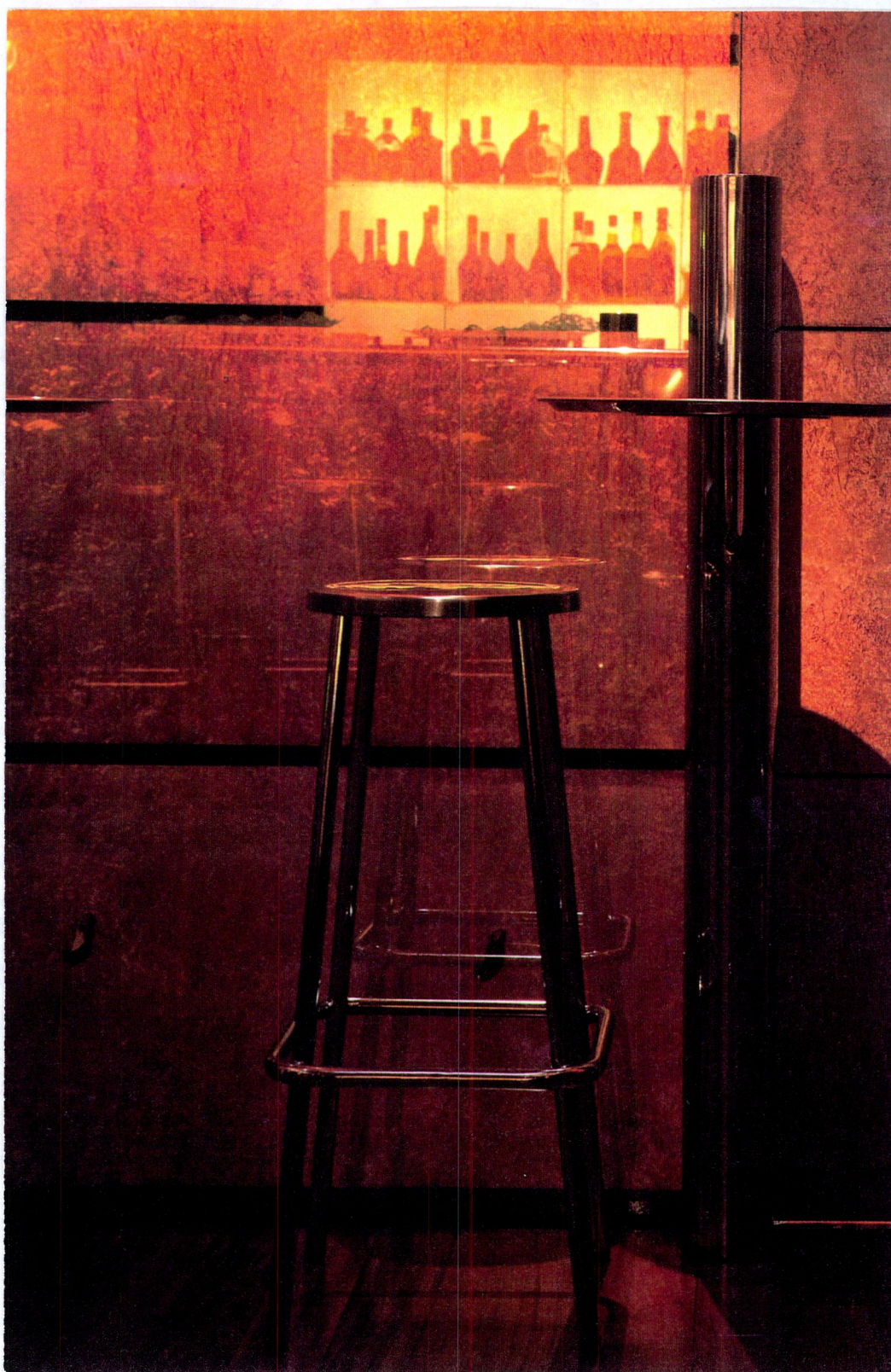


fig.43
Stainless steel stool with drinks tray
mounted on the adjacent column



Although relatively small in size *Zsa Zsa's* interior is truly remarkable. Yet this overall chic and elegant appearance has been possible due to the careful unindulgent approach which still can provide for the ingenious devices so typical of the best of Barcelona interiors.

El Tragaluz (Restaurant) built 1990

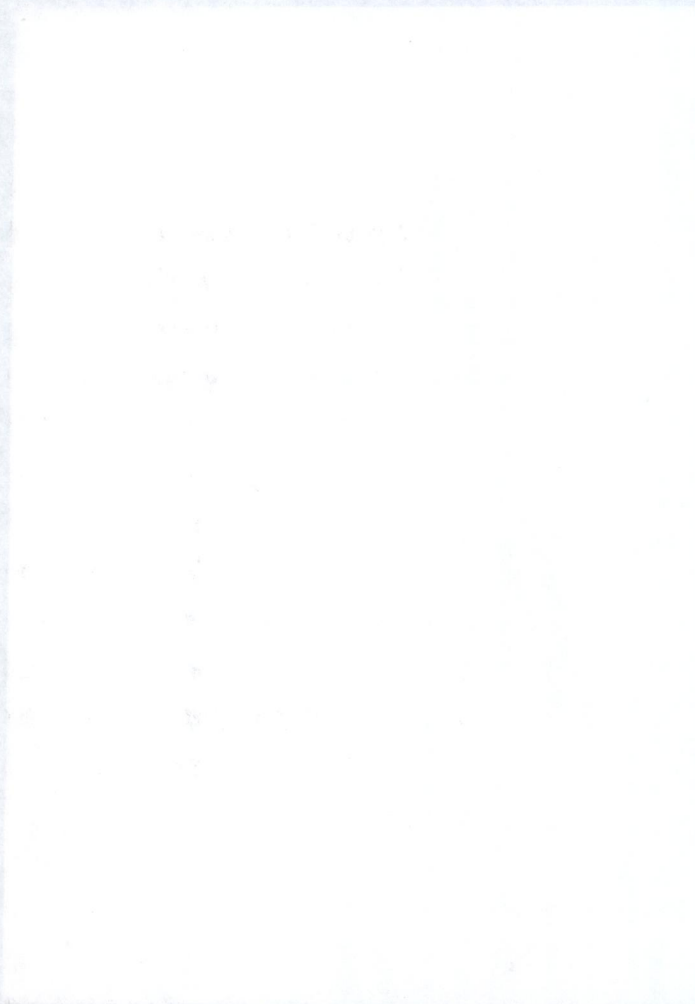
Designed by Pepe Cortes And Javier Mariscal

El Tragaluz is the most recent example of the more reflective attitude to design as seen in *Zsa Zsa*. It was constructed at a time when architects and designers began to look back on the unbridled excess of the bar boom. Interestingly it was designed by two of the designers at the height of the eighties bar boom: Mariscal and Cortes. Cortes had himself produced a product of the bar boom at Mollerussa (a town about 130kms. from Barcelona) in the shape of the huge restaurant/discotheque: *Big Ben*, a typically high-tech bunker exported from Barcelona. The strongly architectural approach to *El Tragaluz* could not have yielded a more different result (*fig.44*).

A unique feature of the restaurant's design is the manner by which it commenced, from the roof down. The first step was to completely gut the old building and install a glass ridge roof following the roofline of the original building. What remained inside was one large space which Cortes structured on several levels (*fig.45*). The primary distinction is made between two separate eating areas, *Tragarapid* (eat quickly) and *Tragaluz* (eat lightly). The director of graphic design, Mariscal was responsible for naming the two areas in keeping with the manner of dining (*fig.46*).



fig.44
Main dining area of El Tragaluz



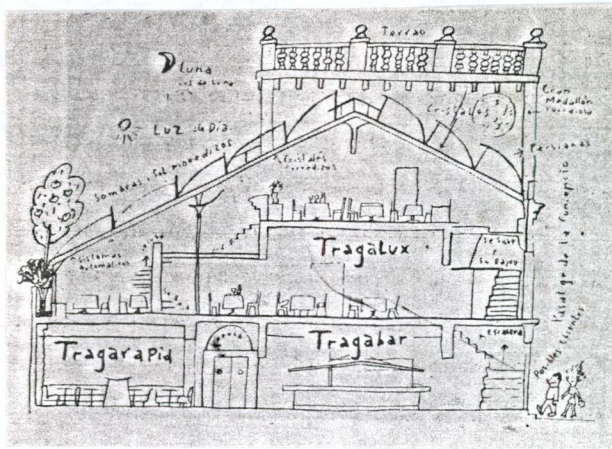


fig.45
Typically frivolous Mariscal sketch of
the dining areas

fig.46
Longitudinal section through
the restaurant

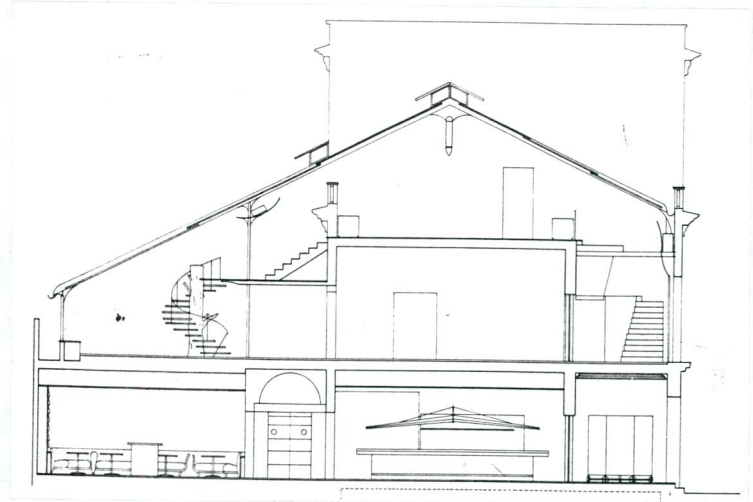


fig.47
The Tragarapid area complete
with Gaulino stools

The *Tragarapid* area on the ground floor is one large open space and the fast food nature of the service is reflected in the single dining table that runs the length of the room. *Gaulino* stools by the Catalan furniture designer Oscar Tusquets surround the table on either side (fig. 47). The higher one goes within the restaurant, the more comfortable the surroundings and the more impressive are the engineering aspects of the architecture.

On the first floor the dining tables are well spaced from each other on thick woven rugs above a polished wooden floor (fig.48). On either side of the tables are glass walls and at the gable ends of the building the walls are decorated by typical scrawling Mariscal symbols of food and wine imagery. The architectural feature which dominates the



room most impressively is a spiral steel staircase which winds around an old tree trunk to a gallery level suspended from the roof (*fig. 49*). From here one ascends further by stairs (*fig.50*) into the apex of the roof where the most luxurious salon and bar area is located. The seating around the tables is plush and armchair-like whilst the air of luxury is enhanced by the rich textiles and patterns of the floor rugs (*fig.51*). The restaurant takes its name from this area with a clever play of words by Mariscal as *Tragaluz* also means skylight. The whole of the top area is completely covered by the glass roof with a system of automatic blinds incorporated to filter the heat and sun (*fig.51*). The project engineer Jesus Jimnez was responsible for the technical aspects of the roof and stairways (*fig.52*) and also was involved in the design of a circular cloakroom made of perforated steel (*fig.53*).



fig.48
Main dining area with
individual tables spaced from each other

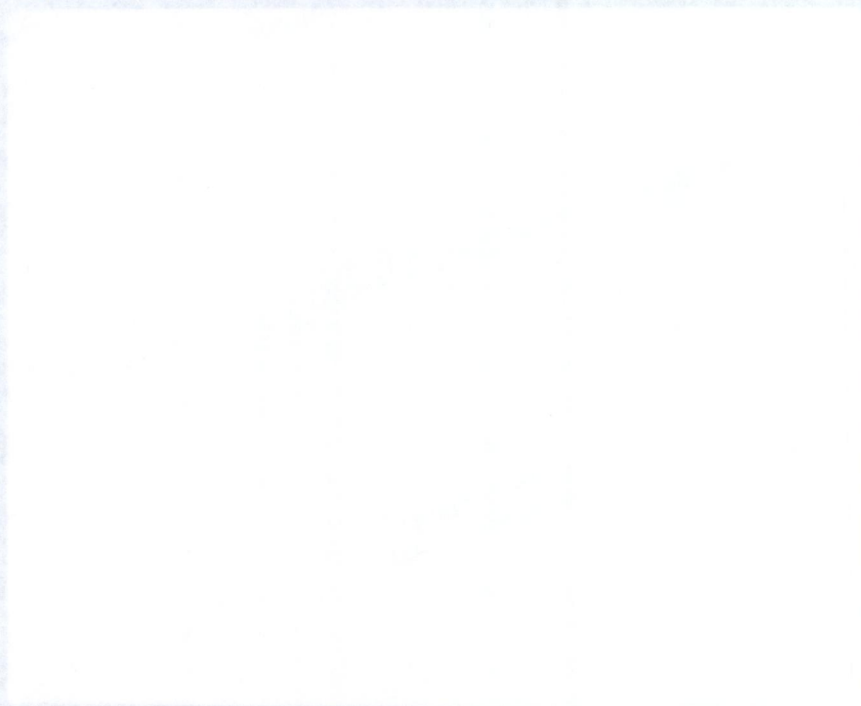




fig.49
Spiral staircase leading to
a gallery level



fig.50
Stairs from the gallery level
to the upper salon





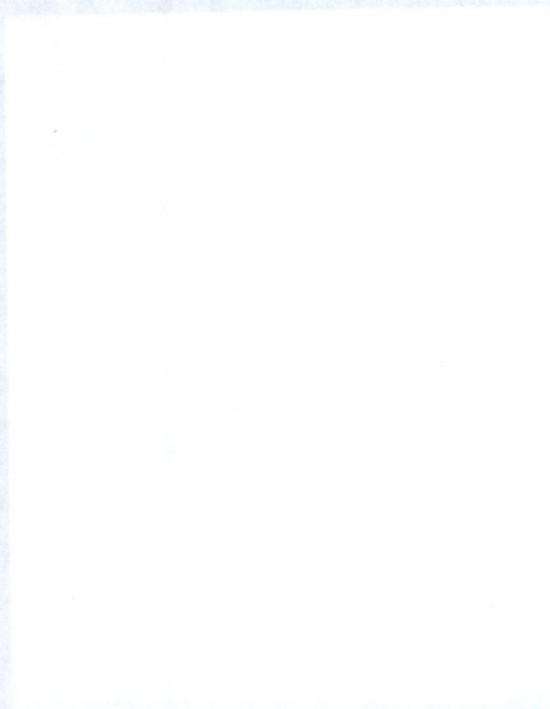
fig.51
Upper salon area
with automatic blinds
installed in the roof



fig.52
Steel
staircase.



fig.53
Circular
cloakroom.



The overall impression given by the design could be said to be: its obvious comfort and modernity, the baroquequeness of its materials and textures, the functionalism of ideas such as the dumb waiters which link the kitchens and finally a traditional air of Spanish dynamism and flair. It was commented that:

Con espiritu de cocinero improvisando ingredientes Pepe Cortes ha ensamblado maderas africanas con alcañtarras, metales calientes con mosaicos modernistas, murales arcádicos con estucos, cristales con hardware.

This was done with the spirit of a chef improvising his ingredients, Pepe Cortes has assembled warm metals with modernist mosaics, arcadian murals with stuccoes, glass with hardware. (Mariscal, 1991, p.170.)

Combining his own engineering skills with Mariscal's characteristic decoration he has reached an equilibrium between functionalism and baroque which will prove very popular with the clientele of Barcelona. *El Tragaluz* is a classical Spanish mix of traditional values and modern technique at which they excel and points to a very interesting future for bar and restaurant interiors to come (fig. 54).



fig.54

El Tragaluz is a classical Spanish mix of traditional values and modern technique.

Conclusion

Not all architecture or design is accessible to every one. But the type of interiors discussed in this thesis are, the work is taken beyond the constraints and limitations of art galleries, auction houses and private collections. The key element throughout the examples given is their accessibility to the public. This gives the design in these interiors the same position of permanence in the developing mass culture of a society as Gaudi's paving stones have had on the streets of the city since the turn of the century. In Barcelona where there is a predominance of bars and restaurants that are experimental in design and accessible to all, a new design culture has been created that helps to further the boundaries of design in the city generally. This equally could be applied to any city where such a culture is encouraged to develop, and this is perhaps the most important lesson to be learned from the Barcelona experience of the 1980s.

The nature design bar boom was the result of experimentation with communicating imagery and creating a more enduring style. The benefits from the freedom of expression of earlier work allowed designers to address more technical or functional aspects of the design as was seen in *El Tragaluz*. The main reason why the imagery of these bars will outlive their own life span and continue to permeate into designs of the future is the strong emphasis placed on the communicative element. The other reason for their survival is with the courageous and highly experimental designs, that they have achieved the status of monuments. The *Las Torres de Avila* night club is approaching the status of a work of art, whereby people come to gaze in wonder at its achievements. From the viability point of view, projects of this scale can not continue to appear. Therefore the progression of the design bar boom could be summarised as follows: Having begun with the stark modernism of *Nick Havanna* and *Network* the designers then explored a more sensuous approach with *Velvet*. These methods were combined and expanded in *El Gambrinus* and *Las Torres de Avila* and the designers finally settled down to applying the knowledge gained from the initial avant-garde projects to great effect.

To return to the area of visual awareness, it was seen how the clubs encouraged human interaction by stimulating the senses into a state of alertness, although sometimes using disturbing devices (such as flickering television screen in *Network*), the effect is to make one aware of the level of detail involved thus thoroughly integrating the person into the experience. Even when certain devices are used and objects created to compensate for deficiencies in the space (as in *Velvet*) they are nonetheless *treated in a sculptured fashion, shining in space like little architectural anomalies* (Fitoussi, 1989, p.117.). When objects were not created specifically for the interiors, "designer items"

were sometimes utilised. This meant that items such as Philippe Starck chairs (*Nick Havanna*), or Eliel Saarinen furniture (*Network*) can be demystified and the validity of its position in a real environment questioned.

To conclude this thesis in highlighting the largest contributing factor to a "Spanish Style", it would be the ability of individual designers to traverse the boundaries between art and design, which is the one single factor that unites the work. All of the designers have typified this in one form or another, whether it be Samso's element of irony in his furniture designs or Mariscal constantly reworking his themes and making fun of them. This method always assures a connection between the audience and the subject, whether it be a sofa or a night club. The sheer depth of imagery means the audience can empathise with elements of the appearance of the design.

The sad side effect of the bar boom is the watered down application of styling to Barcelona's traditional, vernacular bars. But the overall effect can be seen as much more positive. A significant factor is that all of this occurred when an air of seriousness was pervading in Barcelona and in Spain generally, the country was expected to show a serious face to the world: by restoring confidence in international eyes it could help lift the country of recession. But as seen, there is always and should always be a place for creative people who choose to reject the reverence for domestic convention: with the effect that their work ultimately placed Barcelona on the world stage at the forefront of design.

Yet all of this without betraying their sense of tradition, Francis Ambriere asks:

Does not a sincere respect for tradition consist of knowing how to adapt to an ever-changing world while remaining faithful to the principles that went to make up the true values of our labours?
(Coad, 1990, p. 19)

By concentrating on design which is available and appreciated by all, the designers who were the subjects of this thesis have assured that their city will continue to develop with the flamboyancy associated with Barcelona throughout this century.

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