

## ***Ciudad Blanca, a modern proposal in 1960s tourism***

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### **Abstract**

*In 1960 Juan Huarte invited Francisco Javier Sáenz de Oíza to visit the sites in Alcúdia, Mallorca where he intended to promote a new city for tourism. The result of that ambitious urban design project, produced by the Navarrese architect and by a recently licensed Juan Daniel Fullaondo, was ultimately reflected in one of their most important architectural contributions to the architecture of tourism: Ciudad Blanca (White City).*

*If the role of the architect is important in the telling of this episode, the role of Juan Huarte is no less important as a promoter of the idea and as director of the real estate company Huarte Inmobiliaria S.A. and director of the Huarte construction firm (developer and contractor for the Ciudad Blanca project). The relationship between both protagonists and tourism in Mallorca continued with the construction of a hotel and the expansion of Juan Huarte's house on Formentor Bay.*

**Keywords:** Sáenz de Oíza. Huarte. Ciudad Blanca. Alcúdia.

### ***Regarding an image***

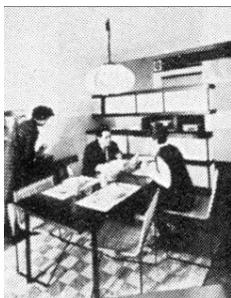


figure 1

A couple having tea in a small designer dining room. In the meantime a third person adjusts the cushions of the sofa... The photograph shows us an environment of tranquility and quietude, a world of vacations that in 1967 was finally within the reach of a Spanish middle class.<sup>1</sup>

This is one of the photographs that illustrate the permanent display booth for the sale of condominiums in one of the most notable examples of tourism architecture built in Spain, the *Ciudad Blanca* of Alcúdia. In it, the design of the furnishings in the first place, the design of the linking of spaces (bedroom, toilet, kitchen, living room, terrace) at different levels to each other and the design of the external image of the building itself and its relationship with the immediate context, are attributed in capital letters on the very display panels to Sáenz de Oíza.

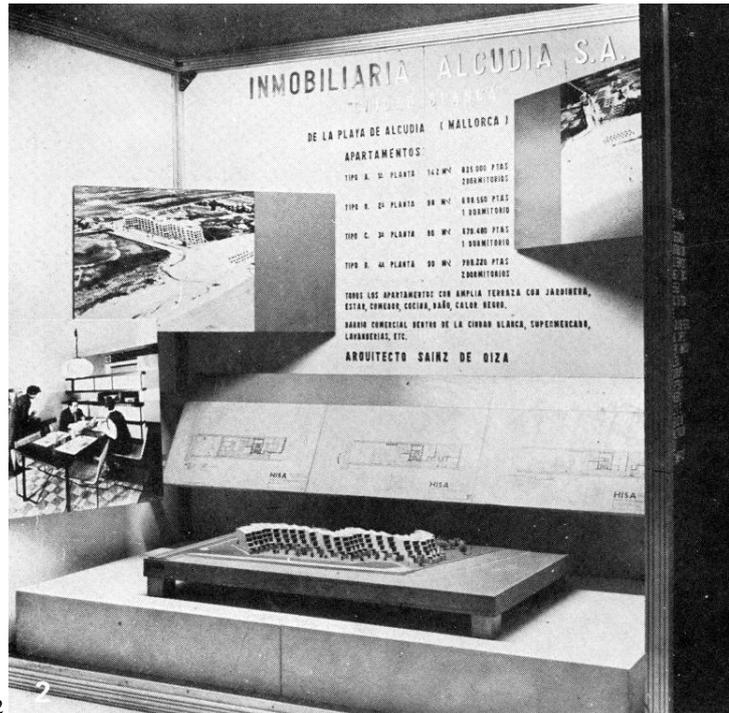


figure 2

The architect used as a catchword. The architect sells. Or that is what HISA believes, the developer of the Huarte group that promoted the project. And HISA does not hesitate to highlight the efforts made by the architect, by the contractor and by the developer, to build this model of condominiums in which many of the uncertainties of the moment are reflected and that the citizen can acquire for the moderate price of 700,000 pesetas.

A plan and a section are capable of transmitting the essential ideas of the project: 100 condominiums constructed in 25 units of 4.2m shifted in plan one to the other; each one of them has four levels and one condominium per floor. Two exterior concrete stairs access a corridor situated on the first floor that connects all the units in the horizontal plane. From it, the appearance of the biased sequence of spiral stairs (one per module) that connect with the condominiums of the upper floors marks a rhythm and a relationship between their curved lines with those of the very interesting zigzagging walls. The condominium on the ground floor is accessed directly from the garden.

The design of Sáenz de Oíza is well known: its interest lies not only in the revolution of the search for a repetitive unit but also of the development of the idea of housing minimums that he had already studied in the mass housing projects (*Poblados de Absorción*) of Madrid and that in Alcúdia are translated into the (minimal) vacation condominium. The interest also lies in the way in which he conceives the project from

the point of view of construction with the use of exposed reinforced concrete, lightweight skins of insulated blocks, interior furniture design and the prefabrication of the access stairs.<sup>ii</sup>

But beyond these aspects and from the point of view of the contribution to tourism architecture, it is worth the effort to consider the importance of the architect's achievement of an intimate lot and the relationship that both the building and each individual condominium have with the setting.

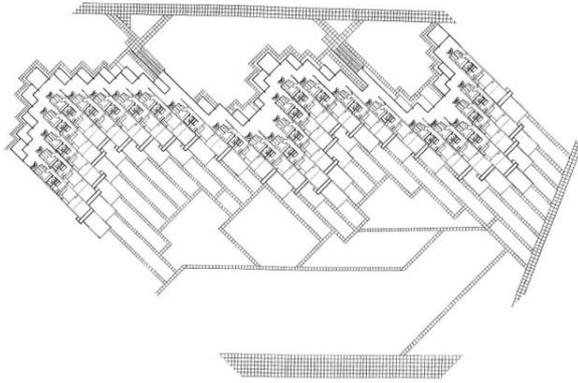


figure 3



figure 4

### *Intimate refuge*

“...There was another series of primordial problems, like the acoustic isolation between neighbors. To make the condominium valid, I would have to isolate myself from the neighbor below and from the neighbor above. This is easy. The neighbor above is avoided with the same solution as the neighbor below, because if I cannot see the neighbor below, the neighbor above cannot see me. The way to avoid seeing the neighbor below is to place, instead of a handrail, a one meter high parapet. If I cannot come close to the edge, I cannot see the terrace below... I learned this in the American skyscrapers...but the problem is not only visual, it is also auditory.[...] I attempted to use the greatest amount of terrace planters and concrete planes in the open area over the house, because these were where the side noises were going to penetrate.”<sup>iii</sup>

The vacation condominium achieves a character of refuge from Oíza's fixation on the auditory and from the study of the housing cell. It was a second permanent home to which one could escape and search for shelter from the intense rhythm of the city and work. The intimacy of each one of the condominiums and the individuality that each one takes in space, led to this same idea. From there came the contribution in a context normally subjected to the high density of the costal urbanizations and their operations of repetition.

### *Relationship with the place*

“This is a type of deck chair in the sun. But instead of deck chairs they are houses-deck chairs... Have you never observed that on the beach when the people go all the deck chairs are parallel because what they searched for was the sun?”<sup>iv</sup>

The place held for Sáenz de Oíza a special value, something that is studied and that should nourish the architectural project knowing, in turn, how to transform the space. As he himself affirmed, “there is no project without place”<sup>v</sup> and the situation along the sea should respond from this same circumstance. The study of the context, the exhaustive collection of data from the place in the concrete case of Alcúdia, brought the Navarrese architect to live in Alcúdia and establish there his own studio, close to the Roman Theater. “And it was from the meditation about the sea of Alcúdia that this project emerged.”<sup>vi</sup>

The northeast-southwest orientation appears in the project of *Ciudad Blanca* with the force of an organizing axis. An unambiguous, generative direction of an urban fabric in the Partial Plan of Alcúdia that Sáenz de Oíza developed together with Juan Daniel Fullaondo. The direction responds to the search for the best orientation towards the views of the Bay of Alcúdia.

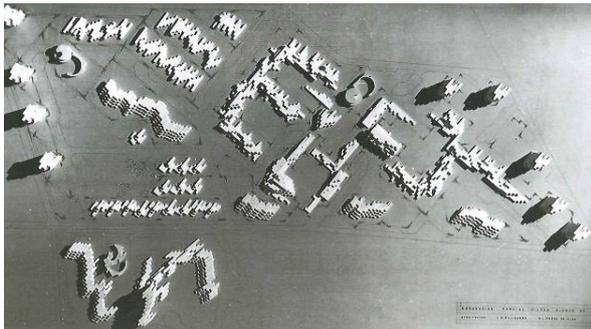


figure 5

In that organization in which the residential units were conceived as an organic structured ensemble, the project of *Ciudad Blanca* was born as one more building of the ensemble. The organizational fabric imposed by the architect from the profound reflection on the relationship between architecture and that specific place was also transferred to the system of streets and public spaces, generating a city of great plastic richness.

Contrary to this ideal of coherence, the project today is almost unrecognizable for those that, for years, have visited the *Ciudad Blanca* of Alcúdia only from the pages of magazines that echoed the project. The building, which was photographed surrounded by nothing and with sufficient space to be seen, admired and photographed, in no time—and with the arrival of touristic development of the area—found itself uncomfortably inserted in a plan that had little to do with the original idea of its authors.

In 1968 Sáenz de Oíza built a hotel in the Bay of Alcúdia. And to make it, he returned to the same generative idea of the initial project; now the hotel rooms are the repetitive cells displaced one over the other, following the same axes of condominium project. We find ourselves with the same response to a repeated problem: the study of the relationship between architecture and the same context, the same place.

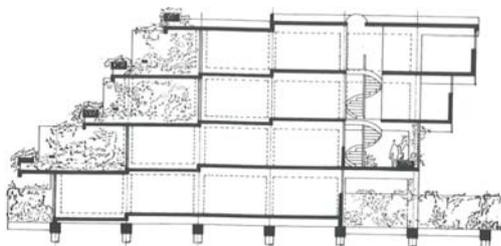


figure 6

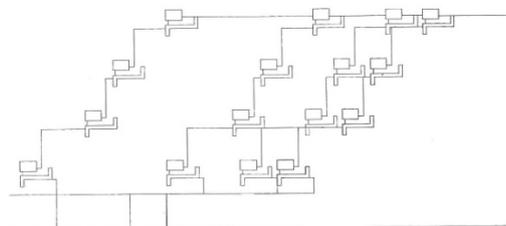


figure 7

The relationship with the sea also goes beyond the design of each of the cells. The architect designs the stepped interior space, delimiting the surroundings of each space and creating a direction of the forced longitudinal path of the condominium, lightly sloping down. As such the architect is also able to design the view of the cell's spectator/inhabitant and flood his or her vision towards the exterior with the blue of the sea.

To the phrase that appeared in the real estate advertisement for the project and that defines the product of sale "all the condominiums with broad garden terrace, living room, dining room, kitchen, toilet, black heat", we should add the ways that the architect gives us an intimate piece of sea in which we can rest our eyes.

### *Tourism and Coast*

To speak of the ways in which tourism has radically transformed the situation of the Spanish coast, we transcribe part of the interview that the editors of the journal *D'A* conducted with Oíza in July 1989.

—"What we are trying to ascertain (...) is why, if architecture arises from man's desire to make the habitat more habitable, that which you normally find in the coastal regions are constructions opposed to the sea... That is to say, we would like to center the reflection on how to translate into architecture the relationship between man and place.

—Yes... But it is that this relationship between man and place already is modified, in part, by the term 'man.' Mankind does not have the same necessities or the same aspirations, in relation to places, in all times nor in all spaces. The man that comes looking for the sun, well what he looks for in the place is the sun, the Nivea cream and the bathhouse. Do not speak to him of historic places or of other aspects that are not what he wants to search for in the place in which he settles... In this way the first term of the relationship is the man, that with his aspirations modifies the reality of the coasts.

—Do you mean to say that this makeshift situation causes people to accept suffering bad architecture because it gives priority to other aspects?

—Neither good nor bad, because architecture does not interest them at all. They want... a building. It is that between poetry and literature and essay there are many verbal terms to express different situations of the word..."<sup>vii</sup>

If we heed these declarations, we can say that in the development of the project of *Ciudad Blanca* in Alcúdia, Sáenz de Oíza insisted on giving, with his Architecture (with a capital A), that which Alejandro de la Sota described as *liebre por gato* (hare for cat). That is to say that he gave much more to the future inhabitants than that which they thought they would find in their purchase. For that the architect found the unconditional support of a client and a friend preoccupied with the idea of the project and its architectural quality: Juan Huarte, one of the most important patrons of architecture and Spanish art of the twentieth century.<sup>viii</sup>

The relationship between Sáenz de Oíza and the Huarte group began with the introduction of Juan and Francisco Javier by a good mutual friend: Jorge Oteiza. From the beginning, the trust deposited in the architect from Cáseda would produce as fruit some of the most important projects of the period; even above the work here studied would be the Torres Blancas building that marked the triumph of rationalism in Spanish architecture with the construction of an ideal residential tower.

Regarding the architecture of tourism, a few years after its activity in Mallorca HISA (Huarte Inmobiliaria S.A.) promoted other touristic buildings in La Manga del Mar Menor. For this project HISA turned to one of the most charismatic pairs of architects of the moment: José Antonio Corrales and Ramón Vázquez Molezún. Under the urban plan of Bonet, the architects faced different touristic typologies such as the hotel, condominiums and bungalows.<sup>ix</sup>

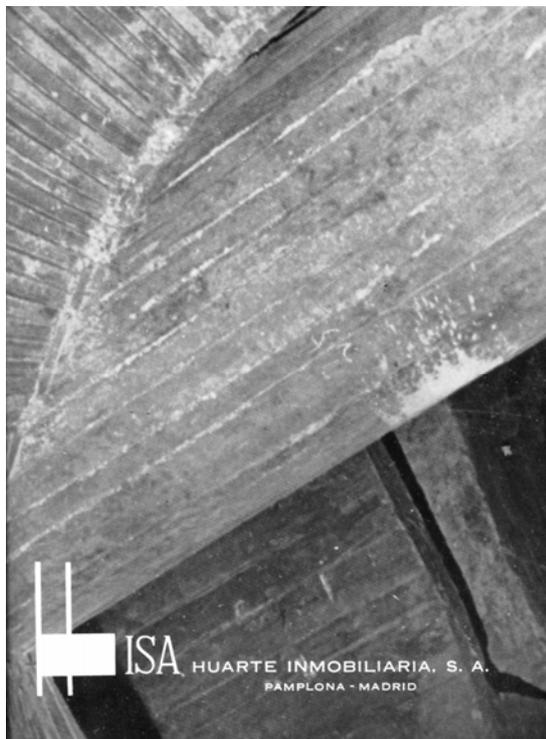


figure 8

Again in Mallorca and a few years later, Juan Huarte commissioned Francisco Javier Sáenz de Oíza with the project for the expansion of his Huarte home on the Bay of Formentor. Close to Alcúdia and with the same sea as a backdrop, the same aspirations that we found behind the project of *Ciudad Blanca* appear again in an insistent way: the architecture now was charged with reserving a new refuge near the sea under the pines and between the already existing buildings.

In the project plans a mass of points represents the thickness of the pine grove; in them it is easy to read the idea of the architect, preoccupied with the construction of one more layer of this natural covering. Below it and in one floor, he resolved the programmatic conditions (living room, study and sleeping area) in addition to creating new interstitial spaces between the pieces (existing and new) of great interest. The control in this incorporation of exterior spaces as well as the total plastic modification of the home are some of the achievements of one of the most unknown projects of the author.

To renew the image of the existing buildings, the architect enhanced the manifestation of the roof beginning with an operation of clothing their perimeter. A modern cornice of curved line that begins in the false ceiling of the ground floor and extends towards the sky, constructed of horizontal slats of wood lacquered in white, were sufficiently subtle and simultaneously weighty so as to achieve the desired effect: the disappearance, before the eyes of the spectator, of all that occurs under its protection.

Beyond the pine grove and this time on a plane of concrete (also curved) over the water, Oíza again leaves his imprint with a cross-braced awning, with the creation of a shadow whose form again surprises us.



figure 9

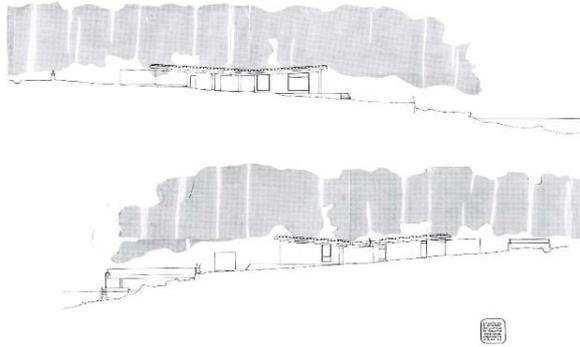


figure 10



figure 11

In an unlikely discourse we have analyzed two examples of touristic architecture, as different typologically and formally as they are coincident upon analyzing the agents of construction and the interest of the results. The modulation and the dimensional adjustment of the minimum housing of the *Ciudad Blanca* of Alcúdia has little to do with the dimension of the Huarte House's floor plan. The context of the touristic development of the urbanization of Alcúdia, in which the condominium project of Oíza lives passionately, has reason to envy the second context, situated in one of the most exclusive and best conserved locations of the island.

Sáenz de Oíza and Juan Huarte are the authors of the project: the former of the creation of the architectural idea and the latter of the most material aspects of its construction (cost, materials, execution...). The harmony and the understanding that appears to have existed between them transcend both projects with two of the most interesting examples of Balearic architecture.

However, forgetting the aspects that make them so different, we can find several points in common, developed as much in one project as in the other. The search for an optimal relationship between Architecture and place is evident. Also, in both we can recognize the recovery of an intimate space for rest in the preoccupation with privacy and the creation of a limited and designed space. Finally, and something for which the two projects are highlighted, their formal and plastic richness is recognized once more for its function as Architecture "in the sun".



figure 12

Figures 1 and 2: Sáenz de Oíza, F.J. Ciudad Blanca en Alcúdia, 1961. Images taken from the publicity section of the journal *Nueva Forma*. *Nueva Forma*, no. 16, June 1967.

Figure 3: Sáenz de Oíza, F.J. Ciudad Blanca en Alcúdia, 1961. First floor: corridor and foot of stairs.

Figure 4: Sáenz de Oíza, F.J. Ciudad Blanca en Alcúdia, 1961. Image of the succession of spiral staircases.

Figure 5: Sáenz de Oíza, F.J. y Fullaondo, J.D., Proposal Plan, 1961.

Figure 6: Sáenz de Oíza, F.J. Ciudad Blanca en Alcúdia, 1961. Unit section.

Figure 7: Sáenz de Oíza, F.J. Ciudad Blanca en Alcúdia, 1961. Side elevation that shows the expressive force of the concrete garden planters.

Figure 8: advertizing page for HISA (Huarte Inmobiliaria S.A)

Figure 9: Promotional ad for HISA in La Manga del Mar Menor, Murcia. *Nueva Forma*, no. 16, June 1967.

Figure 10: Sáenz de Oíza, F.J. Expansion of the Huarte House in Mallorca, 1968. Elevation of the project.

Figure 11: Sáenz de Oíza, F.J. Expansion of the Huarte House in Mallorca, 1968. Entrance space.

Figure 12: Sáenz de Oíza, F.J. Expansion of the Huarte House in Mallorca, 1968. Terrace-solarium and the house in the background seen from the sea.

*Figures 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 10, 11 and 12 are taken from the publication Climent Guimerá F. (2001) F. J. Saénz de Oíza, Mallorca, 1960-2000, Govern Balear, Mallorca.*

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<sup>i</sup> *Nueva Forma* no. 16, June 1967, Madrid. Image taken from the beginning advertizing pages.

<sup>ii</sup> All these aspects have been considered in an extensive way in the publication that came to light in 2001 and that analyzes the intense relationship between the architect Sáenz de Oíza and Mallorca, “La ciudad Blanca” in Climent Guimerá F. (2001) F. J. Saénz de Oíza, Mallorca, 1960-2000, Govern Balear, Mallorca, pp 12-43.

<sup>iii</sup> “Entrevista a Oíza” Equipo revista *D’A* in Climent Guimerá F. (2001) , pp. 148-153.

<sup>iv</sup> “Entrevista a Oíza” Equipo revista *D’A* in Climent Guimerá F. (2001) , pp. 148-153.

<sup>v</sup> “To locate a building in front of the sea or in any other place is, above all, a problem of decorum in classical terms, that is to say of adequacy. The response, in large part, comes dictated by the place. There is no project without place. For this, when I made the *Ciudad Blanca* of Alcúdia, as when I constructed the Basilica of Aránzazu, I lived and dwelt in those places. I met my wife in Aránzazu, and because of the *Ciudad Blanca* of Alcúdia, two of my daughters are Mallorcans.” “Entrevista a Oíza” Equipo revista *D’A* in Climent Guimerá F. (2001) , p. 150.

<sup>vi</sup> “Entrevista a Oíza” Equipo revista *D’A* in Climent Guimerá F. (2001) , p. 150.

<sup>vii</sup> “Entrevista a Oíza” Equipo revista *D’A* in Climent Guimerá F. (2001) , p. 148.

<sup>viii</sup> Today the investigation of “Huarte, patrons of architecture and Spanish art of the twentieth century” is a multidisciplinary research project of the University of Navarra in which Marta García Alonso and Javier Martínez González, authors of this paper, participate as principal researcher and researcher, respectively.

<sup>ix</sup> Hotel Galúa, group of thirteen bungalows on the beach, Torre Navarra, the village are some of these buildings. More information in García Alonso, M. 2006, “Edificios de viviendas y otros alojamientos” in “Ramón Vázquez Molezún, arquitecto”, doctoral dissertation (unpublished).