

Casa Batlló

Returning to the Origins

A dragon, a cathedral, plant life, a mosque, the sea, skeletons, a castle, a mastodon.... Casa Batlló, by architect Antoni Gaudí, presents a remarkable world.

The building's structure emerges from the Neo-Gothic. Its balconies and rooms seem to multiply organically, like cells. The curving forms suggest Modernismo (Spanish Art Nouveau), but their melting shapes make one think of Surrealism. The colorful mosaics hint at Abstract Expressionism. A Christian cross tops the turret, but the patterned brickwork and tilework have a Moslem flavor. Is this Medieval, Modern, or Postmodern? Animal, vegetable, or mineral? A building or a sculpture?

The answer to all these questions is: Gaudí.

Antoni Gaudí i Cornet was born on June 25, 1852, in a small town near Barcelona. Sickly as a boy, he developed extraordinary powers of observation and concentration. He grew acutely sensitive to nature.

Later, Gaudí became a dandy and a socialite. Occasionally he flirted with socialism. He studied in Barcelona, apprenticing there too as an architect. Barcelona was expanding, then, as a port and commercial center. The people of Catalonia were proud of their economic progress; some favored political separatism. This cultural ferment also produced Salvador Dalí and Pablo Picasso.

Gaudí, one of the first graduates of the new Barcelona School of Architecture, was influenced in the 1870s by the Catalan Renaixença (Renaissance). This movement was dedicated to reinventing Catalan culture. It imported elements of the Baroque architecture of Andalusia. That intensified Moslem stylistic influences on Gaudí's secular and even religious architecture.

An increasingly devout Catholic, Gaudí is best known for the church of the Holy Family, in Barcelona: "Sagrada Família." He labored on it from 1883 until his tragic death in 1926, after being hit by a streetcar. Since the Second World War, others have resumed Gaudí's work. When will it be finished? As Gaudí once remarked, the client is not in a hurry.

Among Gaudí's earliest patrons was Eusebio Güell, a brick manufacturer.