

Another Architecture N°70 October — November 2017

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Arrival

SelgasCano's Conference Centre has landed in Plasencia

Productora
Bringing the Aztecs
back to life

Dennis Gassner
Designing
Blade Runner 2049

MVRDV
Colonising Seoul with
232 plant species

Social Construct

In his latest LA housing complex, Lorcan O'Herlihy adds a bit of public space to a disparate city.

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Only a few interesting buildings line South Mariposa Avenue between West Olympic Boulevard and West 11th Street.

Someday

soon, maybe Los Angeles won't be a fragmented, uneven suburb trapped in the infrastructure of a promising urban metropolis. New initiatives for high-density housing, car-free living options and the development of connective public transport are visibly changing the way this city operates, where its new businesses open, where young renters seek (relatively) affordable places, and where cafés and restaurants see a future filled with regular patrons.

Koreatown, the densest neighbourhood in Los Angeles, appeals to a large population of young renters who are drawn by its great variety of food and nightlife, its access to a lengthening

subway line and its proximity to a burgeoning downtown. Like other rapidly developing urban zones in LA, Koreatown tends to attract newcomers of a certain philosophy: people uninterested in white picket fences and lawns to mow, who would rather walk, bike, rideshare or use public transport than own a car – at least in theory. We're not quite there yet.

Mariposa1038, a 32-unit housing complex by Lorcan O'Herlihy Architects located on a residential street in Koreatown, embodies and promotes that philosophy. What immediately separates it from neighbouring homes and apartment buildings is, surprisingly, not a fence

but the *lack* of one. At 6,300 m², Mariposa1038 assumes an unusual concave shape, embracing its neighbourhood and functioning foremost as an outline for the 'untitled' outdoor space between building and pavement. 'Right now, we're engaging in the third space between public and private,' says O'Herlihy, when I meet him at Mariposa1038 and pass the threshold from the pavement to a narrow landscaped area just outside the building.

The untitled space has large planters and some built-in seating options that could serve the social utility of what Americans call a 'stoop' – a place for neighbours to

spontaneously stop and make small talk, with a connection to passers-by on the street. 'People don't move to the city to hide,' says O'Herlihy, 'A person who rents a unit in this building does so knowing there will be engagement.' He argues that 'expanding the bandwidth' of public pavements makes for better cities.

The building's white plaster façade is punctuated by protruding black balconies and window frames. They cast shadows across the surface and provide shade throughout the day. The result is a building in motion, deceptively minimalistic in appearance but



Some window frames include French balconies.

'If you let the social aspect drive your architecture, you're going to make a good place to live'

alive with the different patterns created by those shadows throughout the day. Although required to comply with 'strict economic parameters', O'Herlihy wanted to experiment with bold materiality. The balconies are yet another 'untitled' outdoor space. They are private extensions of the home that emerge into the shared outdoor world, allowing for unscripted interaction.

Mariposa1038's residents also connect via a shared interior courtyard and a rooftop with a view of the surrounding city. 'This is a very democratic building,' says O'Herlihy. 'There's no front and back. All four sides are dealt with equally.' At its centre, the building's focal point is an oval outdoor courtyard bathed in natural light from an open roof, which also helps cool the space. All units are organized elliptically around the courtyard, so that people can see one another moving in and out of their private homes. An integrated seating area in the courtyard doubles as a rainwater collection system. Most people see it simply as a nice place to relax or gather for a barbeque – a place where they feel cocooned within a cohesive

sculptural 'interior' open to the sky. 'The design provides ample opportunities for neighbours to meet,' says O'Herlihy. 'What's nice is that when you create these kinds of environments, people want to hang out with each other.'

As the architect and I make our way to the rooftop deck, the highest point of public interaction at Mariposa1038, he recalls flying into Los Angeles on the first morning of the year 2000. Having just returned from London, where he saw millennium celebrations at Trafalgar Square (and having watched televised celebrations taking place worldwide, from Times Square to Tiananmen Square), he wondered out loud where the communal gathering had taken place in LA. A flight attendant told him that 'they lit up the Hollywood Sign'. O'Herlihy was taken aback by the lack of available public space and public experience in a city so big and consequential. Although he's definitely seen an improvement and an increase in LA's public spaces since then, he is still on a mission to generate better opportunities, at every scale, for people to come together in this disparate city. >

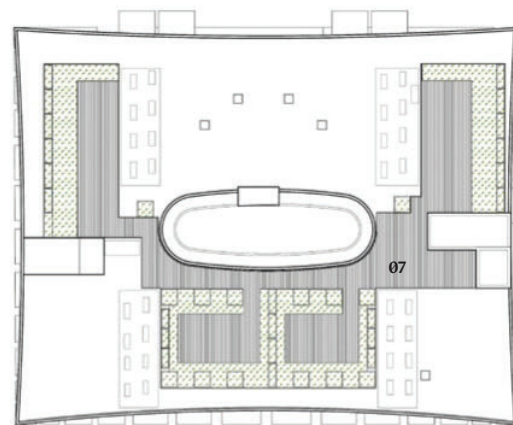


The rooftop offers communal facilities for Mariposa1038's residents.

+ 2/+ 4



Roof



- 01 Parking garage
- 02 Ramp to basement
- 03 Entrance
- 04 Apartment
- 05 Interior courtyard
- 06 Void
- 07 Roof terrace

+ 1



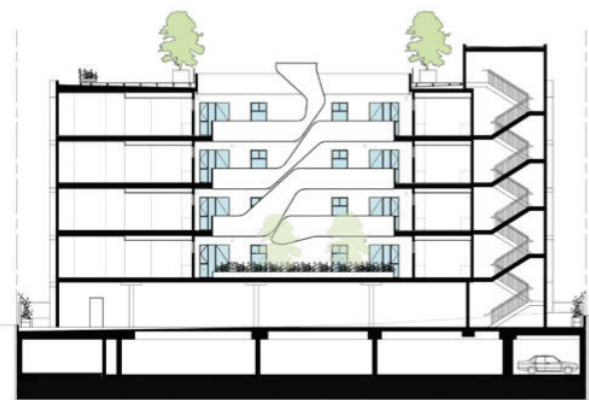
+ 3



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Long Section



'One of the nicest experiences an architect can have is going back to a building and meeting the people who live there'



As we open the door to the roof, marvelling at the skyline view and noting the untapped potential of surrounding rooftops, O'Herlihy tells me: 'In a small way, this project is one way of creating a public realm. The social aspect of our buildings is very important to me.' Throughout our conversation he underscores the methodology of 'amplified urbanism' that he and his studio of 28 people instil into every one of their projects – from a prominent urban complex to a series of bus stops or a single-family home. The guiding principles of Lorcan O'Herlihy Architects are to establish a 'fluid interaction between public and private spaces, to emphasize social and civic connections, and to harness existing ecological and infrastructural patterns'.

'I think architecture is a social act,' he says. 'The role of an architect is to do work with consequence and to recognize that social civic connections, engagement and experiences like this matter.' Yes, like this – like our taking a seat together at a table, under a sunshade, on a pleasant rooftop, where we might see neighbours and have a visual and spiritual sense of connection to the city surrounding us. O'Herlihy is a big proponent of being part of the networks he achieves. An important aspect of practising what he preaches is meeting with members of the community well before a project begins and being available after its completion. The reality is that 'there's always opposition. People don't like development. They don't like density.' So he makes a point of getting acquainted with neighbourhood groups and community activists in order to open up lines of communication and to find good solutions. 'Look, most people are reasonable. They appreciate our efforts.' The proof, he says, is the number of people who call him after they've moved into one of his buildings, just to talk about their lives there.

'One of the nicest experiences an architect can have is going back to a building and meeting the people who live there. If it's good architecture, they're really happy, and they're excited to talk and chat with the architect. They come to a building like this for a reason,' he says. 'If you let the social aspect drive your architecture, you're going to make a good place to live.' —

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An oval courtyard allows for cross ventilation that also benefits the apartments.