

# ARCHITECTURAL RECORD

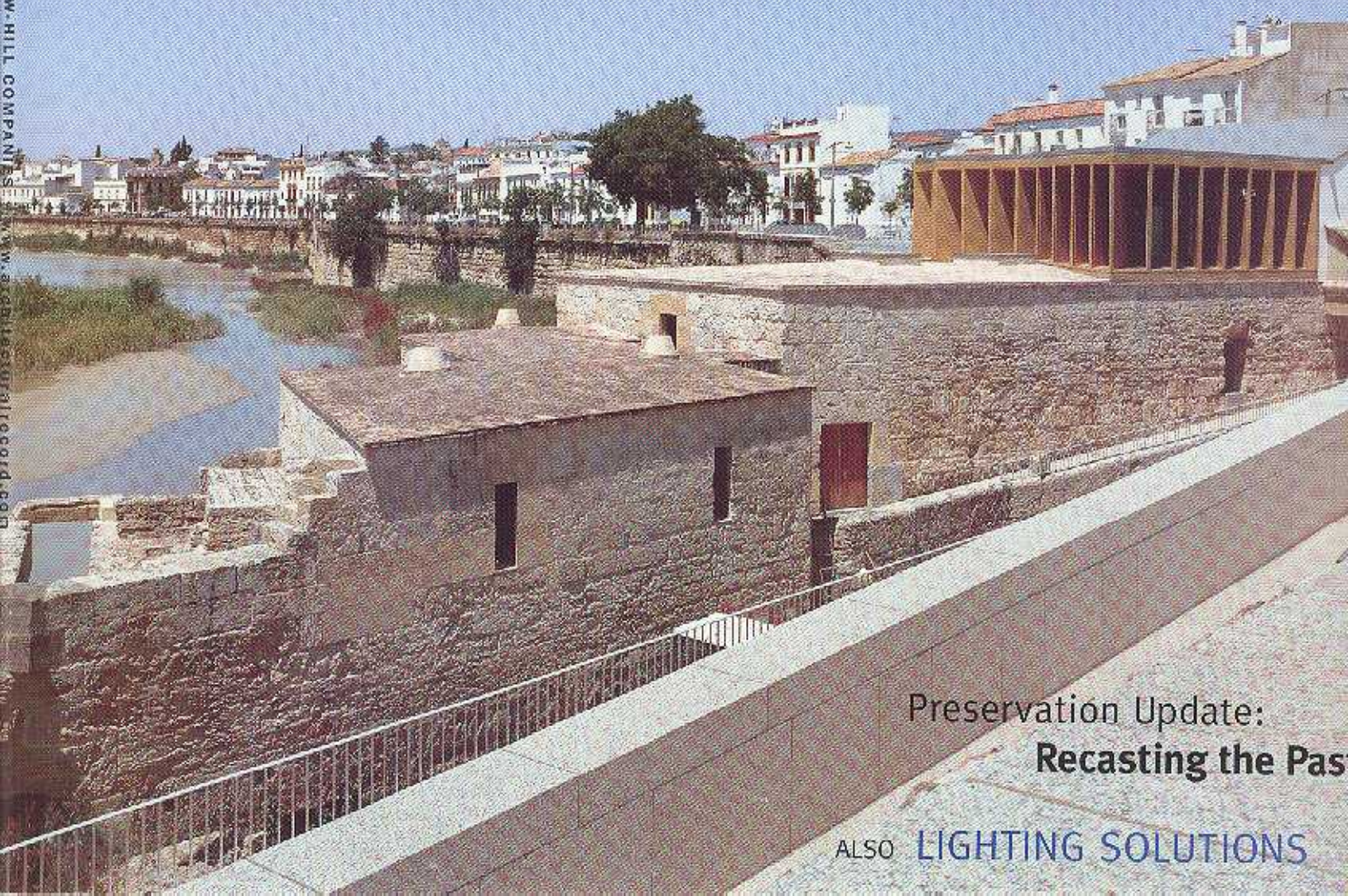
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## Modernism's Reign in Spain



Preservation Update:  
Recasting the Past

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# AN EXHIBITION SPACE by Jesús Aparicio and Héctor Fernández Elorza expresses the possibility that architecture is never finished

By Jorge Otero-Pallos

The exhibition gallery and lecture hall by the Madrid architects Jesús Aparicio and Héctor Fernández Elorza relates contemporary architecture to a historic environment without falling into the worn duality of either imitating or negating the past. Their design methodology frankly accentuates the fact that the existing structure must be transformed to receive the new. This modest alteration expresses both what is added and what is subtracted. By surgical means, it opens the past to current perception and interpretation. It suggests a new rapprochement of historic preservation and contemporary design concerns.

The project extends exhibition space operated by the Ministerio de Obras Públicas y Urbanismo (the Spanish Ministry of Public Works and Urbanism) in Madrid, and is nestled within a monumental arcade that fronts the massive Nuevos Ministerios building of 1933, which was designed by Secundino Zuazo. Aparicio and Fernández Elorza knew they would have to remove some of the Neoclassically styled arcade's masonry fabric to make room for the lecture hall and exhibition space. They decided to leave traces of the removed elements visible as a testament to the necessary process of "unbuilding" the past to accommodate the future.

By happenstance, exploratory probes punctured through the floor revealed a demapped subway train tunnel. Though the tunnel existed, it was not part of the building's understood history because it had remained invisible. The architects removed the entire floor of the arcade and pared its supporting barrel vault to the imposts, cutting them cleanly but leaving them exposed. This created a new double-height rectangular volume in which the interior plane of the arcade wall continues downward uninterrupted to the floor of the tunnel. The tunnel is now offered in a new relationship to the historic fabric above.

The visitor enters from the street across a new steel catwalk, which offers a vertiginous downward view before it proceeds behind a control booth and cascades down a steel stair to the tunnel level. There one finds a massive extruded U shape in concrete inserted within the old walls, which replaces the lateral bracing once supplied by the vault. The gap between new concrete and old walls contains services.

Jorge Otero-Pallos is professor of historic preservation at Columbia University.

**Project:** Archive and exhibition space at the arcade of the Nuevos Ministerios, Madrid  
**Architect:** Jesús Aparicio and Héctor Fernández Elorza  
**Technical architect:** Joaquín

Goyenechea  
**Engineers:** AEPO Ingenieros (structural); AGM Técnicos e Ingenieros de Proyectos (services)  
**Contractor:** DRACE - Construcciones Especiales y Dragados

By adding chairs and extending a sound-absorbing drapery around an oval track, the space becomes suitable for lectures. Left open, it can be used for exhibitions. No finishes were applied to either new or old surfaces, no plaster or veneers. As a result, the existing masonry structure's visible subtractions and the contrasting concrete insert share a common aesthetic of incompleteness—neither old nor new, but an intrinsic and unifying aspect of both.

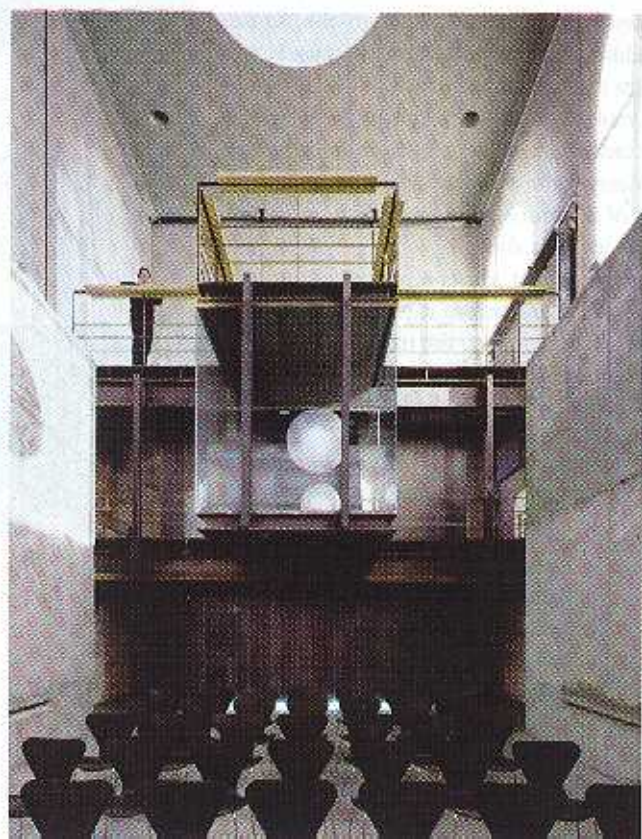
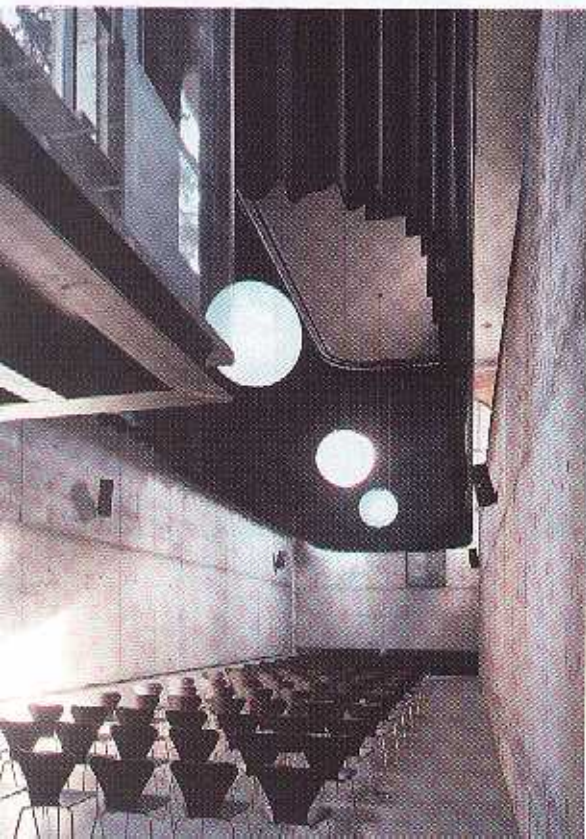
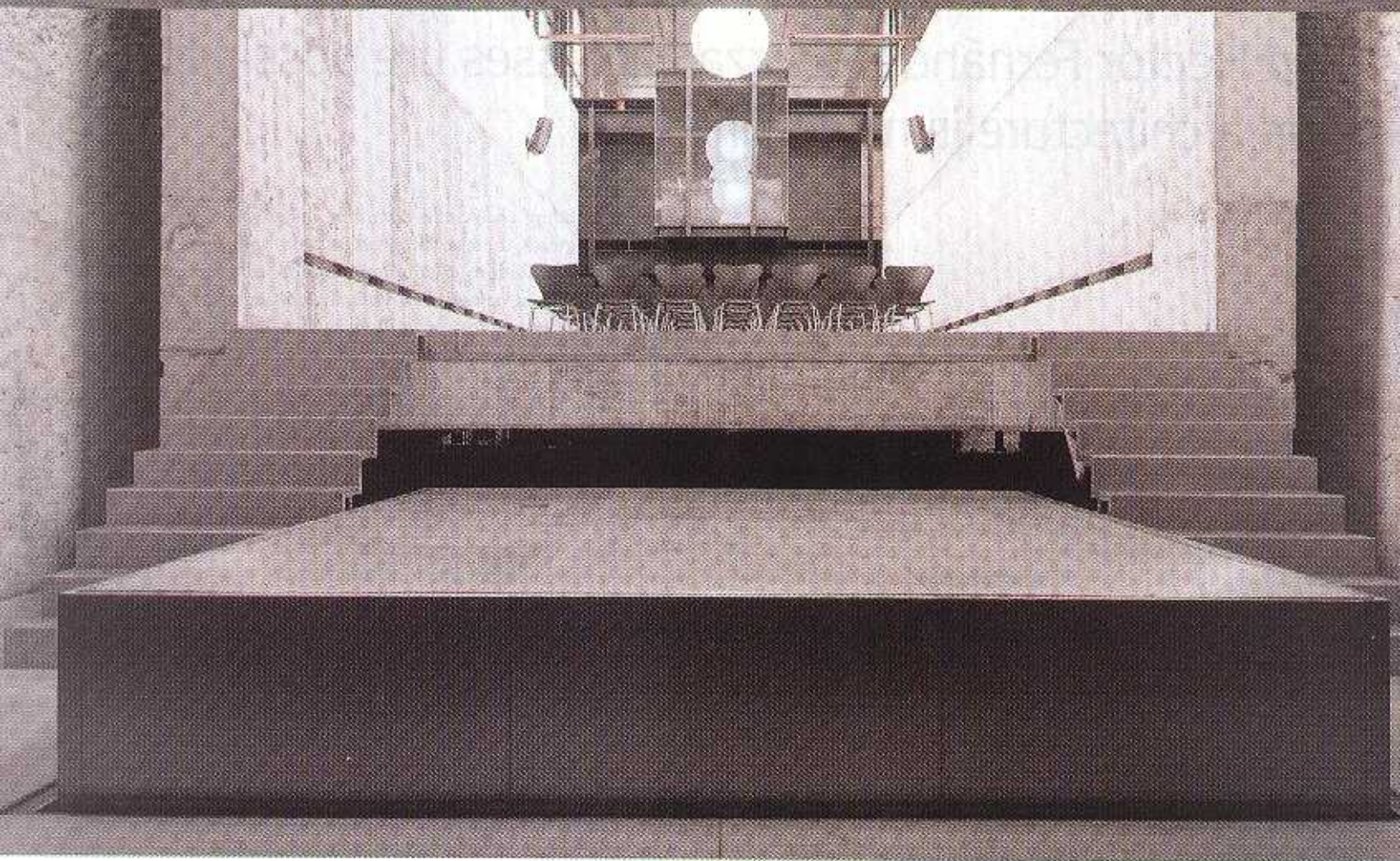
The lecture-hall space has been set to match an entrance to the adjacent rail station. A large lift platform conveys exhibition materials from the tunnel level several feet below (served from the street by a freight elevator) to the lecture-hall level. (Portable stairs may also be set in place.) Otherwise the end of the U remains open at the front of the hall (not, it seems, a code violation, as it would be in the U.S.), making explicit its nature as a new insertion. The long tunnel space, used now for exhibitions, may eventually house archives. Its deteriorated finish was removed, but not replaced, so the marks of power hammers texture its surface. A metal stair, suspended from steel rods, returns visitors to an older exhibition space above.

Aparicio and Fernández Elorza's gesture involves the visitor in the process of creating new relationships and building mental associations. As in the best historic preservation, its aesthetic is its design methodology, a process of keeping the old open for interpretation through careful transformation, and of holding out the possibility that architecture is never finished, indeed cannot be finished. ■

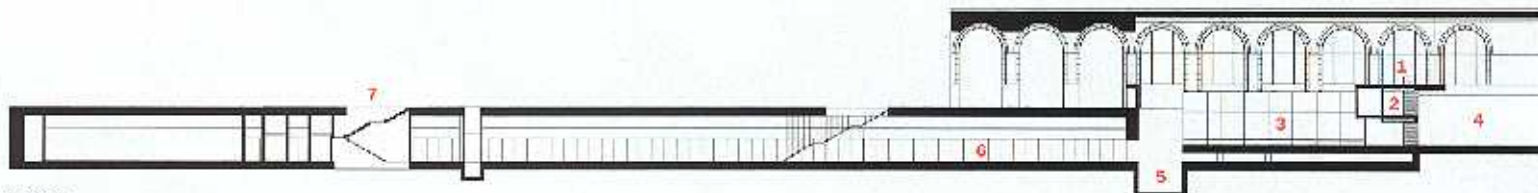




The lecture/exhibition space (this photo) was carved out of a long, monumental arcade. New metal door frames and a catwalk (opposite) express the new as an insertion into the old.



Steel beams support an access catwalk and projection booth (near left). Drapes cut light and improve acoustics (far left). Portable stairs and a lectern lift (above) reconcile the offset levels. In the long archive space (opposite), a deep beam supports the arcade above; concrete walls conceal services.



SECTION



FLOOR PLAN

0 20 Ft.  
0 6 m

1. Entry
2. Control booth
3. Lecture/exhibition
4. Existing rail station
5. Lectern/lift
6. Exhibit/archive
7. Existing exhibit