



Santiago Cifuentes Barrio
Architect
ETSAM - Universidad Politécnica de Madrid
cifuentes@km0arquitectos.com

Shopfronts. Madrid, 1925-1955

Abstract

Midway between the interior and the exterior, in direct contact with the ebb and flow of the modern metropolis, throughout the 20th century shopfronts have offered us a privileged perspective of the materialisation of avant-garde European architecture, anticipating concepts that would later be incorporated in architecture on a larger scale.

The focus of the present analysis centres around Madrid, capital of Spain and city that during the decade of the 1920s found itself living a demographic and economic explosion. The flourishing commercial activity of its main avenues constituted the perfect foundations on which to import modernity from beyond Spain's borders. A modernity in gestational phase that would take commercial architecture as its test bed for the advances being made since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century. A new Machine Age, one that hadn't yet found a style of its own through which to express the values of a new architecture, overcoming the prevailing historicism.

Keywords: shopfront, Madrid, display window, high street, store

1 Introduction

Midway between the interior and the exterior, in direct contact with the ebb and flow of the modern metropolis, throughout the 20th century shopfronts have offered us a privileged perspective of the materialisation of avant-garde European architecture, anticipating concepts that would later be incorporated in architecture on a larger scale.

The focus of the present analysis centres around Madrid, capital of Spain and city that during the decade of the 1920s found itself living a demographic and economic explosion. The flourishing commercial activity of its main avenues constituted the perfect foundations on which to import modernity from beyond Spain's borders. A modernity in gestational phase that would take commercial architecture as its test bed for the advances being made since the beginning of the Industrial Revolution in the 19th century. A new Machine Age, one that hadn't yet found a style of its own through which to express the values of a new architecture, overcoming the prevailing historicism.

The first to react wholly against this eclectic academicism were the young architects who graduated in the 1920s from the Madrid School of Architecture. Unsatisfied with a methodology that remained completely passive before the profound cultural changes of the time, they had completed their education auto-didactically, using periodicals as a source of knowledge and dissemination for a 'new art', to which they could not gain access from the lecture theatres. They would end up actively participating by founding and editing many of these magazines.

It was here that some of their first projects would appear, modest but ambitious prototypes that carried their novel ideas. Small constructions developed fundamentally around the decorative design of retail and leisure establishments, which thanks to their small scale and reduced budgets, resulted more receptive to less conservative standpoints.

Shopfront design, intermediate place where interior design meets set design, urban design and advertising, would become a true laboratory of ideas during the first half of the 20th century, where architects could experiment with the most avant-garde concepts, which would later be put into practice in their large-scale building projects.

This historic commercial panorama offers us a unique perspective of the beginnings of the careers of those who would later become the masters and fathers of contemporary Spanish architecture.

2 The birth of the modern shopfront

2.1 'Good wine needs no bush'

The origins of the modern shopfront can be directly linked to the commercial paradigmatic shift that originated in the Industrial Revolution. This would bring to an end the traditional vision of the shop as a place where products produced on the same premises would be sold. Up until this moment, each artisan's reputation had been more than enough to draw customers into the shop. This was in accordance with popular wisdom, manifest in the proverb, 'Good wine needs no bush'¹ (Fig. 1). Not only was it unnecessary to display the product in order to convince of its quality, but to do so could even be considered suspicious, given that its true value was demonstrated by maintaining its reputation intact.



FIG. 1. Traditional store. 'Good wine needs no bush' (Photo: Revista Nacional de Arquitectura)

In the 19th century, the advent of new manufacturing techniques boasting extreme efficiency and greater quality, quashed the competitiveness of the small-scale artisan. From that moment on, the public could find the same products in any establishment, and even with an improved quality. For this reason, the shop would

¹ Osorio (2010)

gradually abandon its role as workshop for production and become exclusively a place for sales.

Indeed, in this new frame of competition, marketing strategies to attract the customer could not be limited to the mere disposition of the product. Its display, along with the seduction and alluring of the passer-by, forced a profound rethinking of the principles of shop design.

In Madrid, the wooden doorways that demarcated traditional shops under lock and key, even during the day, would give way to a progressive evolution of the opening up of the shopfront, allowing the pedestrian to see its inside. The new commercial shop window would show off to the world the merits of the merchandise on sale², incorporating bright painted signs, first on wood, then behind glass to protect them from the vapour of the gas lamps that illuminated them³.

The first shop window displays began to flourish, designed to show-off the products, although still within the technical limitations of the lighting and glazing available in the first half of the 19th century.

2.2 Commercial European department stores. Pioneers of the new trade

In the mid 19th century, the main European capitals would be the setting for the birth of the first department stores, true catalysers for the incorporation of the latest architectural technology. These buildings squared up to the traditional highstreet, through the introduction of novel strategies such as advertising campaigns, the reduction of profit margins and diverse and competitive advantages for the customer. Their success with the public was immediate. As a result, Parisian department stores such as the Bon Marché or the Galleries Lafayette (Fig. 2) were quick to introduce the latest and most cutting edge technology as a fundamental part of their design. This would enable them to resolve the complex inner workings involved⁴, whilst absorbing and distributing the huge quantity of customers they would receive. These department stores, integrated within the network of spaces available in cities, would channel hundreds of visitors through their inner streets and atriums, flowing as if within a true urban landscape.

² Morgan (2011)

³ "Tiendas antiguas" (1968)

⁴ Wiener (1911)

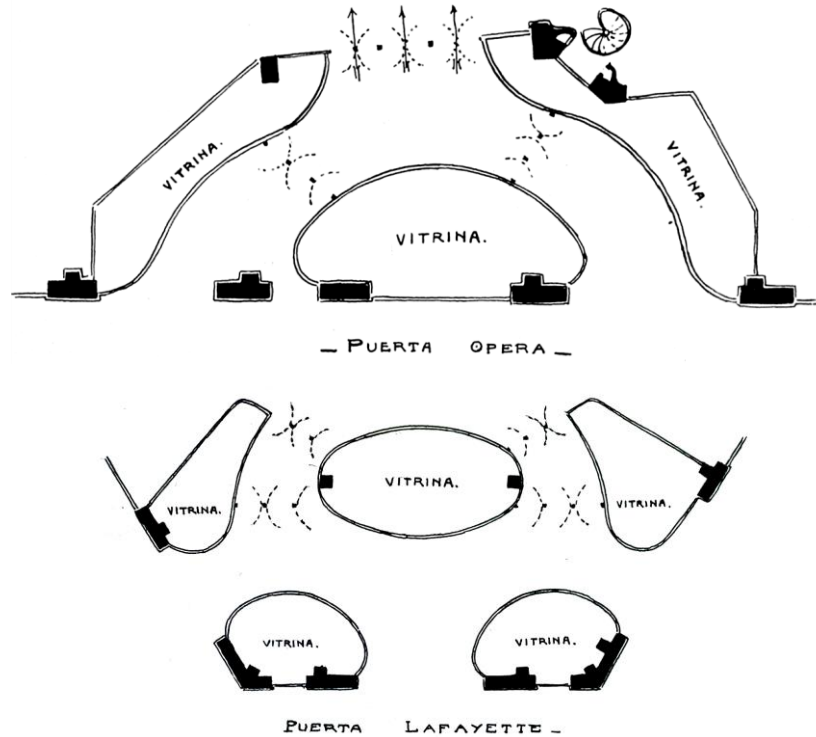


FIG. 2. Galleries Lafayette. Opera and Lafayette gates. Paris, 1912 (Photo: Arquitectura y Construcción)

For this reason, the large department stores would be the first buildings in Europe to incorporate high-capacity lifts, as well as escalators and ramps. These devices would increase the height of covered routes for the visitor and potential customer through ample spaces on an urban scale, bright and shining beneath vaults of glass.

Notwithstanding, the experience of the interior depended entirely on the success of the appeal of the exterior. And so, department stores would turn their frontages into a key element of representation. The facade, conceived as an urban scenography, opened onto the public street with metal signs and ever larger panes of glass, produced in revolutionary cylindrical moulds: a seductive game designed to attract and 'capture' the passer-by, deftly steering them towards the interior.



FIG. 3. Galleries Lafayette. Opera gate. Paris, 1912 (Photo: Arquitectura y Construcción)

Stopping to observe the movements of the passers-by is how the vigour of these excessively curved doors can be understood, designed to attack the customer like the zigzag doors of Oriental palaces, impossible to go through without suffering the action of the defenders situated on either side.⁵ (Fig.3)

2.3 The Madrid high street. Setting for the avant-garde

The arrival of department stores in Madrid would not occur until after the First World War. Spain's neutrality in the conflict had brought relative economic and industrial prosperity, which would re-activate its business and social life, severely damaged after the 1898 disaster.

As a result, high street shops would become the setting for urban regeneration and the incorporation of the new metropolis in the European avant-garde. The urban transformation of the historic city centre, begun in the mid 19th century, had displaced the city centre from the Palacio Real to the Puerta del Sol. This was the new focal point from which radiated the two main axes of the city: Calle Alcalá and Carrera de San Jerónimo, avenues where fundamental elements representative of political and economic powers were concentrated.

⁵ Anasagasti (1913)a

However, it was in the recently opened Gran Vía where the city's retail explosion would take place. The street was a true urban scenography, cutting through the congested historic city centre in the style of Haussmann's grand urban transformations that modernised Paris (Table 1).

Table 1. *Madrid. High streets*



Between 1910 and 1927, along either side of one stretch, the city's first tall buildings were erected. Symbols of power derived from the growing wealth of the emerging

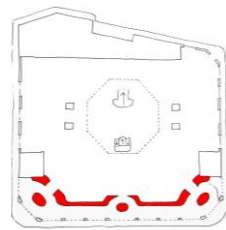
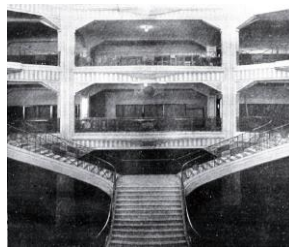
middle classes, their historicist designs were the result of the academic spirit disseminated by the school of architecture.

At the foot of these constructions, the first retail establishments along the Gran Vía manifested a conspicuously contradictory style. Despite remaining faithful to the dominant eclectic tendency, their shop windows displayed a will to innovate through technology, necessary in order to capture the attention of the new social classes, aware of the latest advances being made in Europe.

At the Madrid School by contrast, only a handful of tutors would encourage the search for a 'new art'⁶ in tune with the Machine Age, especially Teodoro de Anasagasti, who from 1907 onwards had written articles in specialist publications⁷ praising the technological and sanitary value of shops and galleries in Europe⁸.

Furthermore, Anasagasti didn't limit his endeavour to theory and education⁹, and was one of the pioneers of putting into practice what he had learned from European retail models in his own architectural commissions.

In 1921 the building designed by Modesto López Otero for Almacenes Rodríguez¹⁰, was the first of its kind to be built in Gran Vía¹¹. Its iron and glass entrance was directly inspired by the Parisian galleries of the Bon Marché or the Samaritaine, faithful to the historicism of the previous century, still valid at the time.



⁶ Torres Balbás (1922)

⁷ Anasagasti (1916)a

⁸ Anasagasti (1913)b

⁹ Anasagasti (1916)b

¹⁰ Throughout this years Madrid saw the rise of many other department stores such as Almacenes Capitol, Simeón, Casa Eleuterio o Almacenes San Mateo

¹¹ Reguero (2011)



Fig 4. Almacenes Madrid Paris. Atrium and ground floor arcade. T. Anasagasti, 1924.

Three years later in his first major commission, the Almacenes Madrid Paris¹² (Fig.4), Teodoro Anasagasti would do the same based on the Galleries Lafayette. On this occasion however, the architect would bring important innovations based on the technology available at the time. Not only would it be one of the first reinforced concrete framed buildings in the capital, but it would also demonstrate an appreciation of public space, establishing a natural relationship between its interior and the city. The building's shop windows occupied almost the entire ground floor frontage, situated behind a portico which ran along three of the building's facades, freeing up space so the pedestrian would feel at ease to stop and contemplate the window displays without blocking the pavement. In this way the passer-by would be lured onto the premises, invited to continue their route within its interior.

However, the building's external appearance would not reveal the technological sophistication of its structure, which was hidden behind a mask of stone pilasters. Although free of ornament, they served to dress a building modern in spirit, in historicism.

¹² Casas (2004)

3 A means of importing and disseminating modernity

3.1 'Generación del 25'. International contact

The Gran Vía, setting for the contradiction between the historicism of its buildings and the avant-garde essence of the retail premises at street level, in contact with the dynamism of the city, perfectly summarises the atmosphere in which architecture students' education was being developed in the 1920s at the Madrid School. The name for the graduates was coined by Carlos Flores as the 'generación del 25' (generation 25)¹³, and featured Arniches and Domínguez, Blanco Soler, García Mercadal, Bergamín, Gutiérrez Soto, Martínez Feduchi...

Restless students who would search through specialised foreign publications and make trips abroad to discover the places where the avant-garde originated, venting their frustration accumulated in the lecture theatres so far removed from the profound changes provoked by the emerging trends occurring on the international architecture scene.

For this reason, these young people largely educated themselves on modernity, and knowledge of retail and leisure architecture would play a key role in symbolising the avant-garde which was being developed from the mid 19th century.

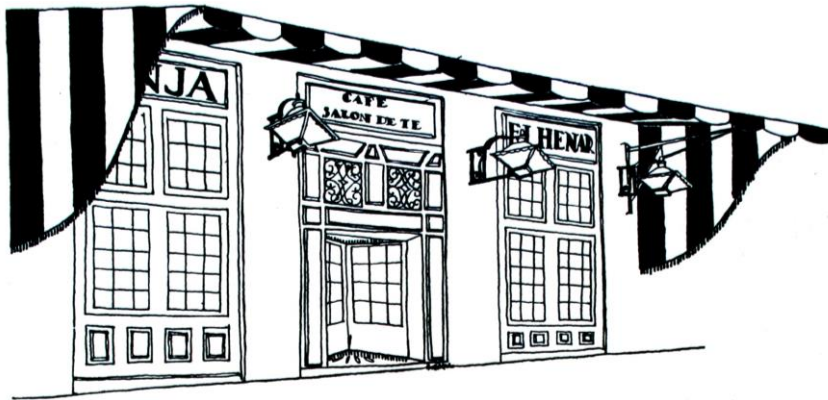


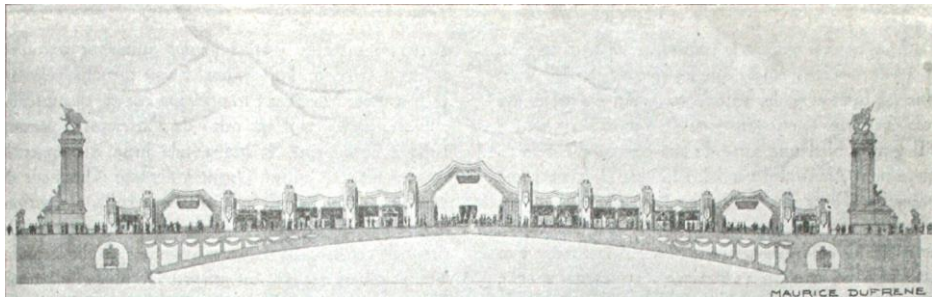
Fig. 5. Granja El Henar, 'The architects cafe'. C. Arniches and M. Domínguez, 1923.

¹³ Flores (1961)

Through field trips, especially to Germany¹⁴, France, Italy, Austria and Holland, the architectural imagination of this generation grew with the visions of Loos¹⁵, Dutch neoplasticism, the Expressionism of Mendelsohn¹⁶ or Poelzig¹⁷... architects and movements concerned with the manifestation of the new aesthetic on the exterior, all of which consolidated the foundations of the first retail and leisure projects that these Madrid architects would build.

After work in the evenings, these young architects would mingle with the members of the cultural avant-garde in the cafés of Madrid, the 'verbal window displays' of the world, where they would share discoveries and thoughts accumulated independently from many varied sources. The architects would meet in the Granja El Henar (Fig.5), designed by Carlos Arniches and Martín Domínguez, and it was here that its members would strive to create a cultural base that was alternative to the school's official stance¹⁸.

Despite the diverse individual concerns of each of the members of this generation of architects, a general consensus would arise from the surprising interest generated by the announcement of the 1925 International Exposition of Modern Industrial and Decorative Arts in Paris¹⁹, to which had been invited the majority of leading European avant-garde architects of the time: the Perret brothers, Mallet Stevens²⁰, Le Corbusier, Hoffmann, Melnikov...



¹⁴ Lacasa (1924)

¹⁵ Stewart (2000)

¹⁶ Blanco Soler (1924)

¹⁷ García Mercadal (1926)

¹⁸ Gómez de la Serna (1948)

¹⁹ Anasagasti (1924)

²⁰ Bergamín (1926)

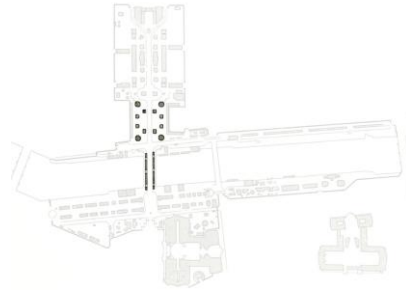


Fig. 6. *International Exposition of Decorative Arts. Pont Alexandre III shopping street. Paris, 1925*

Almost every young architect to graduate that year attended the fair. However, upon arrival in Paris, the Madrid architects would discover that the pavilions designed by their revered masters represented a clearly secondary role in the expo. The most prominent pavilions were those of the major Parisian retail stores, who were the main sponsors of the event, and occupied the central area of the site, on either side of the axis that linked the Place de la Concorde with Les Invalides²¹.

This complex was complimented by the shopping street that would temporarily colonise the Pont Alexandre III (Fig.6), located on the same main axis of the enclosure. Its sides would act as location for the installation of two porticoed galleries that accommodated a display of the most famous Parisian boutiques, transforming this infrastructure into a fabulous collection of window displays for a few weeks. In them a revolutionary catalogue of the aesthetic possibilities of the new materials and construction systems was compiled, inheritors of the technological legacy developed by the military industry during the First World War.

The new large-scale curved glazing, the transformation and improvement of metal properties, mass production and artificial lighting... These were the transformative industries that used this expo as a means of international diffusion, generating a model for business and retail that was ideal for exporting to the rest of the European and North American capitals. The label applied was 'Deco', a term set in stone by the expo itself.

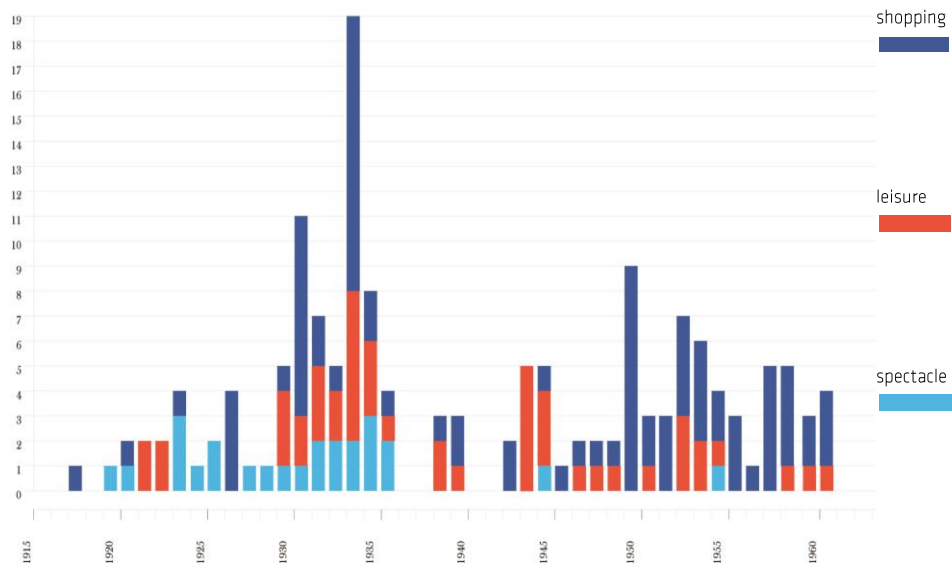
²¹ Yarnoz (1926)

3.2 Periodicals. A means of dissemination for alternatives to the prevailing academicism

The impact this commercial panorama would have on the body of Spanish architects who went to Paris is unquestionable. This was reflected the same year by those who wrote for the magazine *Arquitectura*, a periodical linked to the Madrid Society of Architects. Upon their return to Madrid, most of these young new-generation architects would begin to immediately incorporate these cutting edge revolutionary concepts in their projects.

The Spanish capital, undergoing full social and urban transformation, sought new pastimes for the emerging middle classes. All along the city's main avenues began to appear modern theatres and cinemas²², cocktail bars²³... a new context for urban socialising. Lacking an established model, architects were expected to provide a new aesthetic, resulting in an ideal testing ground for the new style. (Table 2)

Table 2. Periodicals. Articles about leisure and commercial decoration. 1915-1965



A style based on the technological vision of the modern city, advocating the advances of the Industrial Revolution. The metropolis of light, speed and the automobile,

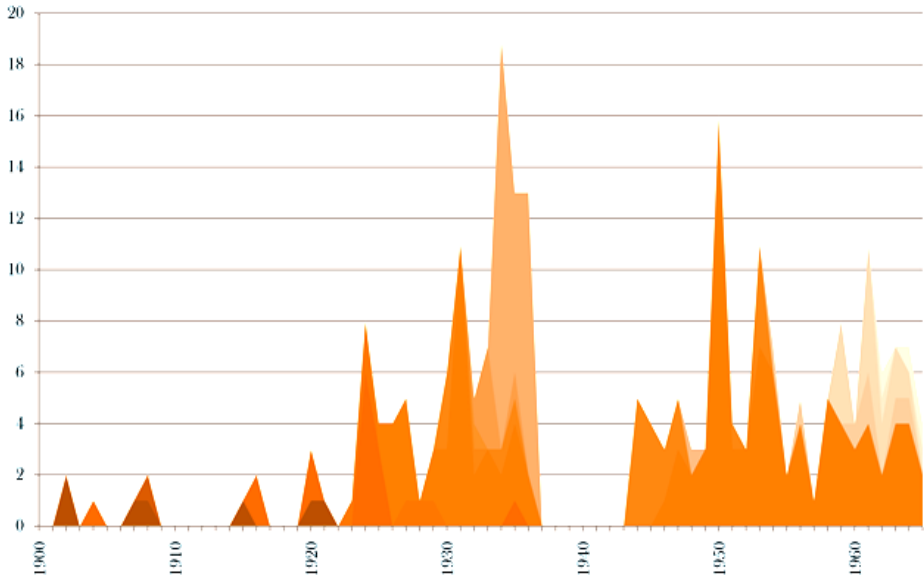
²² "Desarrollo y transformación" (1935-36)

²³ Fernández-Shaw (1930)

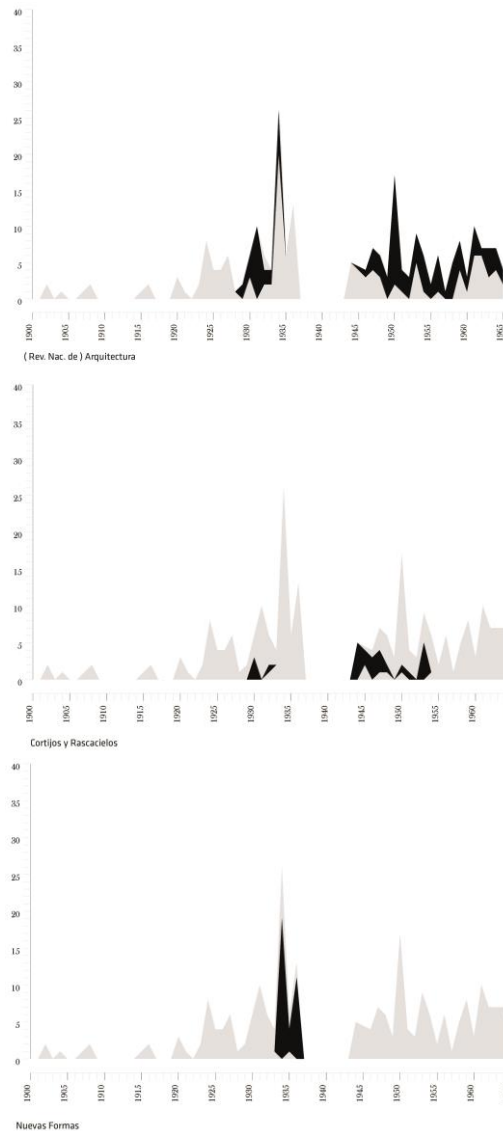
exemplified in all its splendour by night, when the city would transform itself into a true scenography populated by passers-by, both protagonists and spectators of the hustle and bustle, of the fascinating spectacle of the window displays and illuminated signs.

Building design in Madrid would begin to manifest an early reaction to Classicism following the impact of the Paris Expo, adopting the aesthetic values of the city's dynamism, the key foundations of the new Machine Age. The fluid forms of vehicles and the technology underpinning the metal and glass industries were applied in the design of cutting edge shopfronts, making the expressionist dream a reality, as Paul Scherbaart had advocated a decade before in his book *Glass Architecture*²⁴.

Table 3. Decoration in Spanish architectural periodicals.1900-1965



²⁴ Scherbaart (1915)

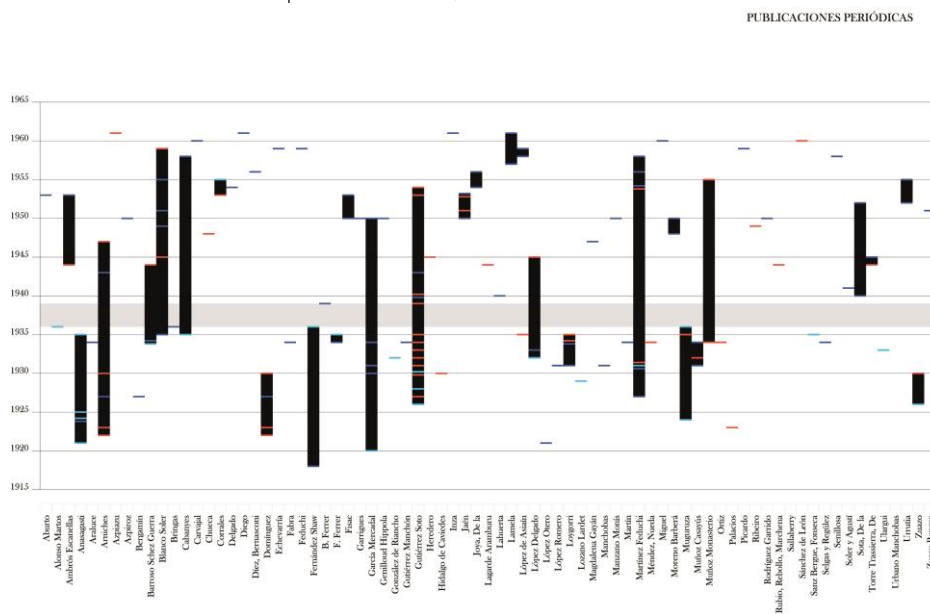


Specialised periodicals would be the fundamental means of diffusion for this new architectural avant-garde. From the beginning of the century, magazines such as '*La Construcción Moderna*' or '*Arquitectura y Construcción*' had been used as forums for debate by Torres Balbás or Teodoro de Anasagasti himself. Through the latter

especially, the architecture of the department stores of Berlin and Paris had made its way into these magazines, introducing the first strokes of modernity to the architectural debate in Madrid, a city still under expansion.

Unfortunately in the mid 1920s, when this first generation of tutors from the school had the opportunity to materialise the cutting edge ideas, that were the subject of their articles, putting them into practice in the grand buildings of the Gran Vía or the Calle de Alcalá, they would opt for remaining faithful to the eclecticism imposed by the fashion of the time, despite previously having reviled it bitterly.

Table 4. Store decoration. Spanish architects, 1915-1965



The champions of the avant-garde revolution would instead be their young students, the so-called 'generación del 25'. As recent graduates, many of them had started to associate themselves rapidly with existing specialised publications or to forge new means of diffusion, always with the intention of championing the emergence of modernity.

First they would do it through the magazine *Arquitectura*, and later through publications such as *Cortijos y Rascacielos*, founded and directed by Casto Fernández-Shaw, *Nuevas Formas* or the magazine *AC*, organ for the dissemination of the rationalist ideas of GATEPAC.

The first to set to work would be Luis Blanco Soler, Rafael Bergamín, Sánchez Arcas and Luis Lacasa. Once they had finished their degrees, they would be admitted by Luis Bellido as members of the editorial department of *Arquitectura*, along with Fernando García Mercadal²⁵, who would use the publication as a means of dissemination for his experiences in Rome²⁶, Vienna, Paris and Berlin.

They would be responsible for discovering and bringing the new styles taking shape to the architectural debate: Van Doesburg's neoplasticism, the first rationalism of Mallet Stevens, or the expressionist culture of Mendelsohn and Poelzig, all without representation in a Madrid that remained anchored to the styles of the past. The representative founders of these new styles had already discovered many years ago the possibilities of commercial decoration as an expressive field for experimentation, and had established a great catalogue of built works of reference in this field.

Nevertheless, aside from establishing a fluid contact with the scene unfolding beyond Spain's borders, the architectural magazines would serve as a showcase for the first avant-garde projects that would be produced in the capital. These would be the first commissions received by the group of graduates, some of whom were members of the *Arquitectura* editorial team itself.

In this way, between 1926 and 1936 these specialised publications would become the privileged witnesses of the birth of a new cultural aesthetic that would arise in the city's streets (Table 3). The diffusion of ground breaking shops, bars and cafés, theatres and cinemas, helped these professionals become aware of the new possibilities within reach, enabling them to connect with the most demanding clients aware of the latest trends.

During the decade prior to the Spanish Civil War (1936-39), the refurbishment and design of interior spaces would be of key importance to these publications. When it came to designing them, their small size and reduced budgets enabled both architects and clients to take risks that they couldn't with larger scale projects, where the conflict of very different economic interests would prevent such a fluid adaptation to the social and cultural changes taking place. It is particularly overwhelming to compare the large number of examples and articles written about retail and leisure interior design, with the small number of large-scale buildings assigned to modernity in the magazines of the same period.

²⁵ Sambricio (1983)

²⁶ García Mercadal (1924)

3.3 The projects

3.3.1 Elements for the new urban stage

In 1926 the young architects of the moment were Arniches and Domínguez²⁷. Precursors of a rationalism, with which they never wished to associate themselves entirely²⁸, they were without doubt the key figures who served to build the bridge between the prevailing historicism and the 'new art'.

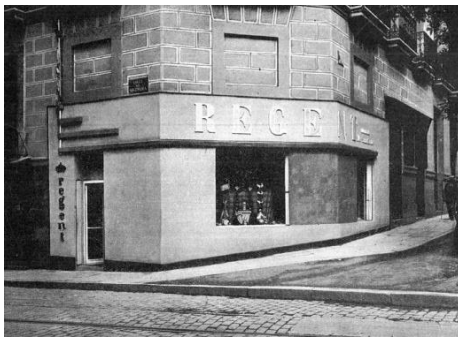


Fig. 7. Regent tailors. Arniches and Domínguez, Madrid, 1927. Magasin Bally. Mallet-Stevens, Paris, 1929. (Photos. Arquitectura / René Herbst)

This transition of style was evidenced when comparing the regionalist air of their first bars for the Hotel Palace or the Granja El Henar²⁹ of 1923, with the avant-garde tendencies they published in *Arquitectura* in 1927, such as the Regent tailors³⁰ (Fig.7), the first project where the direct influence of modernity would manifest itself, oscillating between the rationalism of its facade and the neoplasticism of its interior design. A facade which, differing from traditional storefronts that aimed to maximise the opening onto the street, reduced the size of its openings to attract the pedestrian and add value to the goods on display.

In the same issue, the premises for the firm Ballot³¹ were published. This project was an example that connected a whole new range of establishments around the city for the sale and exhibition of cars. Not only were the cars displayed as a paradigm of modernity, but the new materials of the car industry were incorporated in the

²⁷ Díez-Pastor (2003)

²⁸ García Mercadal (1928)

²⁹ Arniches y Domínguez (1926)

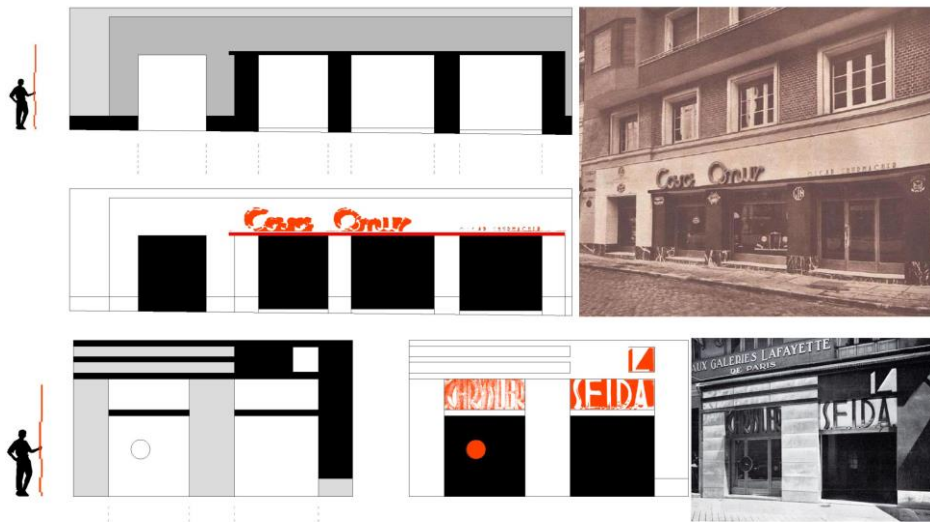
³⁰ Arniches y Domínguez (1927)a

³¹ Arniches y Domínguez (1927)b

showrooms' design and frontage, promoting the value of the new aesthetic; the celebration of industrial technology.

The shopfront as billboard that 'shouted out to the street' the merits of the new style, as Rafael Bergamín outlined in his intervention on the premises of the local car business CEYC-Euskalduna³², where it was made evident the concept of the facade as a superimposed element linked to the public street; an interface that served as transition between exterior and interior.

Table 5. *Automobile companies in Madrid: Casa Osnur and Chrysler-SEIDA, 1925-1927* (Photos: Arquitectura)



Within the large number of establishments of this kind, it's worth noting the project built by Luis Martínez Feduchi in the Gran Vía for Chrysler Seida (Table 5), that in 1926 anticipated the inclusion of metal plating into the architect's vocabulary. This material would appear in 1929 in the spire of the company's iconic New York skyscraper, and would be adopted by Feduchi as a motif present in all of the details of his project for the Carrión building³³ of 1931, symbol of the expressionist triumph³⁴ achieved in Madrid a decade later.

³² Bergamín (1927)

³³ "Arquitectura comercial" (1935)

³⁴ Fullaondo (1971)

Numerous buildings, such as the headquarters of Philips Iberica³⁵ or the perfumery Retra³⁶ (Fig.8), one of the first projects Fernando García Mercadal would carry out upon return from his first trip to Europe, would come to form part of this expressionist tendency.

The shop window, place of contact between the premises and the street, reacted to the horizontal tension of pedestrian flow through the city. Its form became eroded, adopting sinuously smooth profiles, and the composition of the facade responded to urban dynamism, giving preference to the horizontal composition over the vertical rhythm imposed by the structure³⁷.



Fig. 8. Perfumery Retra. Fernando García Mercadal, 1930. (Photo. Arquitectura)

Lighting also played a fundamental role in the design of elements intended to be inserted into the nocturnal scenography³⁸. Window displays, as beacons of light floating in the darkness, shared the labour of capturing people's attention with the new illuminated signs that proliferated around the city.

The same effect was sought after during the day, and the use of dark marble slabs helped make the shiny metal profiles and signage stand out. This was put into effect on the frontage of the premises that belonged to Philips Iberica, or the entrances to

³⁵ "Tiendas nuevas" (1933)a

³⁶ "Una tienda nueva" (1931)

³⁷ García Mercadal (1927)

³⁸ Giralt Casadesús (1932)

the automatic bars Tánger and Ivory³⁹, in which the influence of Loos' commercial projects in Vienna was evident.

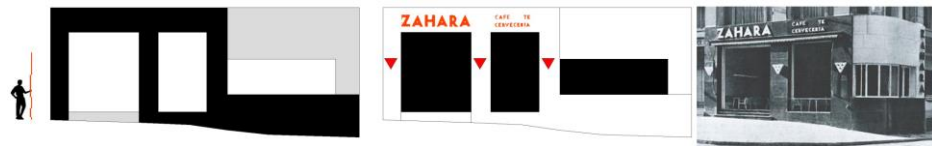
The café Zahara (Table 6) is worthy of special mention, by Arniches and Domínguez, this time in collaboration with Secundino Zuazo. One of the first establishments of its kind to be built in the Gran Vía, it was an example of the arrival in the capital of the novelties of North American functionalism in its catering establishments.

These establishments caused a complete conceptual revolution. As opposed to the pause catered for by the traditional café, these establishments were designed to rapidly attend the highest number of customers possible; busy people dashing quickly from one place to another without having time to spare. In these 'automatic' bars⁴⁰, pioneers of self service, capturing passers-by's attention was fundamental in the authentic sea of signs and light that Madrid's avenues were being transformed into.

Of all of them, the María Cristina (Table 6) bar by Luis Gutiérrez Soto would be the one that best encapsulated this integrated design that made use of the expressive value of the new materials available. Located on the corner of one of the shopping passages off Calle Mayor, its characteristic curved glass frontage supported by slender metal profiles celebrated the stainless steel machinery located inside. The large exterior opening turned this feature into the main display, whilst also compensating the small size of the premises.

This softening of the limits of the premises through the role of intermediate spaces of transition between interior and exterior, would constitute the architect's key design development area, and his ideas would be echoed in similar projects of the same type⁴¹, such as the Café Aquarium, the Dancing Casablanca or the Bar Chicote⁴² (Table 6).

Table 6. *Leisure establishments: Zahara, María Cristina and Chicote, 1930-1931* (Photos: Arquitectura)



³⁹ "Instalación de un bar" (1934)

⁴⁰ "Bar automático" (1935)

⁴¹ Gutiérrez Soto (1933)a

⁴² "Un nuevo bar" (1931)



The new bourgeois social life, a true stage which the customer was art and part of, demanded putting special emphasis on the definition of the café entrance sequence, necessary to achieve the illusory effect sought after in the interior⁴³. The window display hence gained depth. This wasn't about the merely superimposed advertising billboard, but the intermediate, inhabited space it would become; the vestibule as interface between the external reality and the surreal experience of the cocktail bar; the nocturnal spectacle announced on the frontage in captivating bright, colourful neon lights, such as the monumental luminous palm tree that presided over the access to the Casablanca dance hall⁴⁴ from the Plaza del Rey.

3.3.2 The rationalist shop

Despite the undoubtable value of the first expressionist experiences of Madrid's commercial architecture, the concept of modernity as yet another style and as an alternative included in the catalogue of styles offered by history, contributed to maintaining its ties with the eclecticism of the past.

The aesthetic solution didn't respond to its own internal logic, to the integration of the laws of the system within the expressive language, rather it was added afterwards.

Table 7. *Rationalist shop evolution: Rekord, Pizarrita and C.Ara, 1931-1934* (Photos: Arquitectura/ N. Formas)

⁴³ "Casablanca" (1933)

⁴⁴ Gutiérrez Soto (1933)b



In 1924, Robert Mallet Stevens published in *Arquitectura* 'The reasons in architecture'⁴⁵, a theoretical manifesto of rationalism, from the direct link existing between the form of an object and the logic that originated from it as a basic principle of the new aesthetic.

Towards the end of the 1920s, this new rationalism would find a fertile breeding ground in commercial architecture, ideal for putting into practice its functional principles.

In the United States the strategy for encouraging consumerism as a means of overcoming the Crash of 1929 had generated a true engineering of merchandising geared towards the stimulation of sales, the optimisation of mechanisms for

⁴⁵ Mallet Stevens (1926)

attracting the customer, the exhibition of the product and its commercialisation. These theories would arrive in Spain via magazines such as the *Architectural Record*⁴⁶. Meanwhile in Europe, American functionalism had its rationalist equivalent in United Kingdom⁴⁷ and Germany, where the technical manuals for the design of retail spaces originated from a solid tradition dating back to 1912.

The optimisation of visibility from the street, the correct disposition of the different types of merchandise, the design of the different parts of the shopfront, its varied typology, the most appropriate materials and colours⁴⁸...



Fig. 9. *Carco travel agent. Luis Blanco Soler, 1935.* (Photo. Nuevas Formas)

The magazine *Nuevas Formas* would consolidate this bibliography from abroad, enabling Spanish architects to become aware of the new science of merchandising applied to design, including amongst its pages extracts from Bauwelt and the main German text books.

⁴⁶ Strauss (1933)

⁴⁷ Reilly (1935)

⁴⁸ "The lighting" (1933)

Despite the increase in technical publications detected at the beginning of the 1930s, it is problematic to attempt to establish a clear line between the end of the expressionist period and the beginning of the rationalist one. In Madrid however, a key rationalist retail starting point can be made of the appointment of Fernando García Mercadal at the CIAM towards the end of the 1920s⁴⁹.

His projects of the time, published in *Cortijos y Rascacielos* and *Arquitectura*⁵⁰, undergo a clear evolution towards the hypotheses of industrialisation applied to design, defended by amongst others, Walter Gropius in his conference on 'Functional Architecture' given in Madrid in 1931⁵¹. The optimisation of the architectonic object through the detailed study of its function, transferred to the retail project the Corbusian concept of the 'machine for living', turning the shop into the 'machine for selling'.

The industrial aesthetic of the new era broadened the range of materials available, which were used without prejudice on shop fronts and leisure facilities⁵². Corrugated sheet metal, prefabricated parts, metal cladding... materials representative of modern construction that appeared as key motifs in various projects: the tailors Ben-Hur, the car showroom for De Soto-Plymouth, and especially the premises of the cement company Portland-Valderrivas, Pizarrita, on the Paseo de Recoletos, designed by Felipe López Delgado. He also designed the 1932 Fígaro theatre⁵³ and was member delegate of the GATEPAC group along with García Mercadal.

The construction industry advanced at an unparalleled rate. Ever more resistant and increasingly larger in scale, glazing was also becoming available in a variety of types: reinforced, tempered, curved... Shop windows proved an ideal testing ground and showcase for the advances made.

In this way, shop windows that had been framed by thick, dark stone pillars until the early 1930s, gradually gave way to glass, which would occupy ever more surface area in shop frontages. Even the signage and advertising elements would make their way into the interior, such as was exemplified in the designs of Francisco Ferrer for the C. Ara sanitation company⁵⁴ and the fashion shop Cabezón⁵⁵, or by Luis Blanco Soler for

⁴⁹ "Congresos Internacionales" (1932)

⁵⁰ García Mercadal (1930)

⁵¹ Gropius (1931)

⁵² "Dos ejemplos" (1934)

⁵³ "Cine- teatro Fígaro" (1932)

⁵⁴ "Portada de tienda" (1935)

⁵⁵ "Una portada a base" (1934)

the Carco travel agent⁵⁶ (Fig. 9), all of which offered frontages completely open to the Gran Vía.

In turn, scientific advances in other fields in the 1930s, particularly in medicine, transformed traditional pharmacies into true chemical laboratories whereby each establishment would advertise their latest and exclusive products.

Glazed tile lettering and advertising of yesterday gave way to a novel collection of pharmacy frontages that throughout the period prior to the Civil War would come to colonise the streets of Madrid. Javier Barroso⁵⁷, J. Bringas⁵⁸ or Luis Martínez Feduchi himself wouldn't miss the opportunity to successfully intervene in the design of these premises. The entire establishment would be designed as if a window display in itself, modelling the general volume in correlation with the particular requirements of each part.

Bar and café entrances didn't remain on the margins of this revolution. A formal purging and order characterised the compositions of frontages which featured clean, svelte lines, such as the Café Colón⁵⁹ by Manuel Muñoz Monasterio or the Café Negresco⁶⁰ by Jacinto Ortiz (Table 8), which didn't feature any superfluous elements that were not of functional purpose.

The rationalisation of the design of these leisure venues continued the tendency initiated years before by the first American bars, intended to maximise efficiency. Worthy of special attention are the aspects of the comprehensive strategy that José Loygorri implemented for the patisserie chain Hungaria-Viena⁶¹. Aware of the power of the synergy between the different premises belonging to the chain, Loygorri designed a brand image common to each, encompassing everything from architecture to graphic design, typography and even the serviettes.

Table 8. *Leisure establishments: Cafes Colón and Negresco, 1934* (Photos: Arquitectura)

⁵⁶ "Tiendas nuevas" (1935)b

⁵⁷ "Decoración de una farmacia" (1934)

⁵⁸ "Reforma de una farmacia" (1934)

⁵⁹ "Reforma de un café" (1934)

⁶⁰ "Reforma y decoración" (1934)

⁶¹ Loygorri (1934)



4 Conclusion

The repercussion of commercial architecture published in periodicals reached its peak in 1935, the year of its maximum splendour, both commercially and socially. Abruptly cut short by the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War the following year, all productivity was ceased until 1939.

When the conflict ended, the new regime actively reacted against rationalism, which was 'declared guilty' and directly linked to the left-wing ideology of the defeated Republicans.

From the Directorate General of Architecture, a return to a 'national' style was advocated, and in the regionalist tradition those elements characteristic of 'Spanishness' were sought out quite literally.

At a time when speaking out against the regime was unfavourable, the majority of architects who remained in practice after the conflict ended up submitting to these precepts. This included those who had been staunch advocates of rationalism, such as López Delgado or Gutiérrez Soto, who radically switched standpoints.

The Society of Architects' own publication, rechristened as the *Revista Nacional de Arquitectura*, or the magazine *Cortijos y Rascacielos*, which were once champions of redefining Spanish architecture, became mouthpieces for the new slogans of the regime. A whole new generation of post-war architects would graduate in this new context. Having commenced their degrees during the age of splendour, they were aware of modernity but would be unable to put it into practice under the new official stance.

Faced with the impossibility of building avant-garde architecture, many diverse architects such as De la Sota, Aburto, Fernández del Amo... found refuge in official

organisms set up for the reconstruction of devastated regions. It wouldn't be until the mid 1940s that the first manifestations of modernity would appear little by little, again originating in commercial interior design.

In an attempt to elude official prohibition, figures such as Miguel Fisac had begun to trawl the international scene in search of an alternative modernity to rationalism that wouldn't be censored by the regime. And they found it in the empirical organic architecture of Nordic origin, which they had discovered first-hand on their trips to Scandinavia at the end of the 1940s. Taking its inspiration from natural forms, it related to the expressionism already known and accepted by the bourgeoisie, thanks to the retail and leisure establishments from the years before the conflict. At the same time, its reference to Mediterranean vernacular architecture as a source of inspiration ruled out any possible suspicion that could link organic architecture to any subversive modern tendencies.

Throughout the second half of the decade, fundamentally through the two figures Alejandro de la Sota and Miguel Fisac, the representatives of the new generation would work on diverse projects for retail and catering establishments: places for an urban life that hoped to regain its daily routine. In these projects, most of which were never realised, they would put into practice the formal systems learnt from the Scandinavians, shaping counters and window displays into fluid forms, ergonomically adapting space to the movements of the visitor.

In 1949 Javier Lahuerta, De la Sota's partner in various projects for commercial premises such as the tailors Denís, designed by both eight years earlier, was chosen by Carlos de Miguel as technical editor of the magazine *Revista Nacional de Arquitectura*.

The official stance against modernity began to diminish in intensity, and this would be the moment they would seize via the magazine to launch an offensive, using commercial architecture as their horse of Troy.

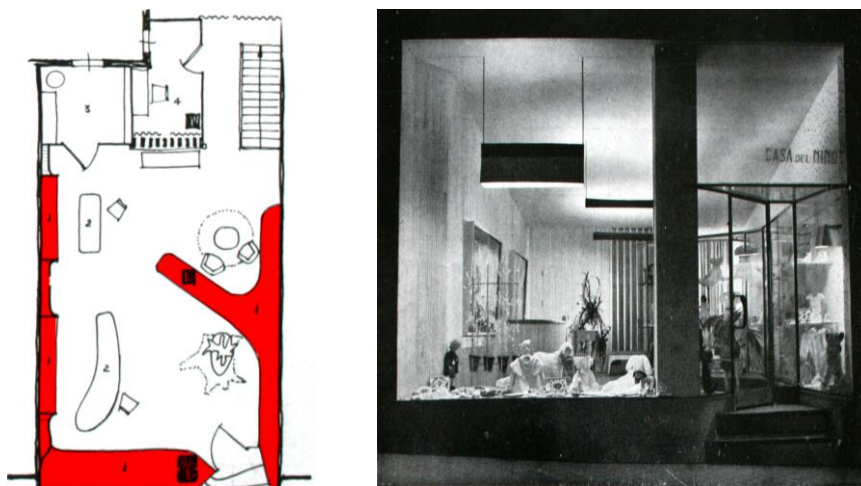


Fig. 10. *Casa del niño*. Alejandro de la Sota, 1952. (Photo. Rev. Nac. de Arquitectura)

And so in the early 1950s they would publish various monographs in which shops influenced by organic architecture would be interspersed with traditional ones. The premises designed by Fisac for the CSIC bookshop, or the two children's clothes shops (Fig.10) by De la Sota would become the first manifestations of a modernity that would soon find itself living a new birth in the Madrid of the 1950s, striving to revive its lost splendour.

In the same way as the tailors Denís had in 1941, in these frontages glass occupied the largest surface area possible, aiming to establish the maximum possible continuity with the urban space beyond. From then on, sheets of glass would be employed as if made of plastic, such as the recently invented Perspex. The strategic folding of the material would enable the achievement of numerous objectives, such as the opening and freeing up of space around the entrance, the formalisation of the window displays themselves - of varying width depending on requirement - and the introduction of the window display inside the shop itself as display case.

These interior design projects would mark the beginning of a commercial revival, through which the Gran Vía as photographed by Catalá Roca, would shine once more as a new symbol of the city's social resurgence.

The street as commercial landscape par excellence would serve again as place for recuperating the lost ties with the international avant-garde. Thanks to the country's adoption of capitalism, it would experience a newfound splendour from the 1950s

onwards, prompted by the development of trade relations with the United States, which resulted from the military pact signed in Madrid in 1953.

It was a recovery that would reap benefits directly from the seeds of this cultural base, sewn by those commercial and leisure projects designed before the Civil War; the projects that populated the pavements of the main avenues of Madrid and that were disseminated by the pioneering architectural periodicals.

References:

- Anasagasti, T. (1913) Los almacenes Lafayette de París. *Arquitectura y Construcción*, 249. Barcelona, pp. 74-82.
- Anasagasti, T. (1916) *Arquitectura moderna, notas de viaje*. La Construcción Moderna. Madrid, p. 88
- Anasagasti, T. (1916) La construcción en Madrid. El mercado de San Miguel. *La Construcción Moderna*, 9. Madrid, pp. 152-154
- Anasagasti, T., 1924. El arte moderno y la Exposición Internacional de Arte Decorativo. *Arquitectura*, 61. Madrid: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, pp. 163-165
- Arniches, C. y Domínguez, M., 1926. Notas sobre el decorado de la Granja El Henar y bar del Palace Hotel. *Arquitectura*, 82. Madrid: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, pp. 45-56
- Arniches, C. y Domínguez, M., 1927. Tiendas nuevas en Madrid, en: *Arquitectura*, 97. Madrid: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, pp. 255-264
- Bergamín, R., 1926. Exposición de Artes Decorativas de París: impresiones de un turista. *Arquitectura*, 78. Madrid: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, pp. 236-239
- Bergamín, R., 1927. Tiendas nuevas en Madrid. *Arquitectura*, 97. Madrid: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, pp. 255-264
- Blanco Soler, L., 1924. Erich Mendelsohn. *Arquitectura*, 67. Madrid: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, p. 171
- Casas Gómez, I., 2004. Anasagasti, obra completa. Madrid: Ministerio de Fomento, pp. 71-77
- Díez-Pastor, C., 2003. Carlos Arniches y Martín Domínguez. Madrid: Ed. Maira, p. 24
- Fernández Shaw, C., 1930. Bar. Cortijos y rascacielos, 1; Madrid
- Flores López, C., 1961. *Arquitectura española contemporánea*. Bilbao: Editorial Aguilar
- Fullaondo, J. D., 1971. Expresionismo. *Nueva Forma*, 70. Madrid, pp. 4-26
- García Mercadal, F., 1924. Clásico renacentista: sus relaciones con la arquitectura moderna. *Arquitectura*. Madrid: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, p. 150-152
- García Mercadal, F., 1926. Capitol, la última obra de Poelzig. *Arquitectura*, 89. Madrid: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, pp. 353-358
- García Mercadal, F., 1927. Horizontalismo o verticalismo. *Arquitectura*. Madrid: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, pp. 19-22
- García Mercadal, F., 1928. Encuesta... *La Gaceta Literaria*, 15 de abril de 1928. Madrid, p. 1

- García Mercadal, F., 1930. Decoración de una tienda de libros y objetos de arte. Cortijos y Rascacielos, 2. Madrid, pp. 40-41
- Giralt Casadesús, R., 1932. Las calles comerciales. Revista del Cuerpo de Arquitectos Municipales de España, 38; Barcelona, pp. 72-75
- Gómez de la Serna, R., 1948. Automuribundia (1888-1948). Buenos Aires: Ed. Sudamericana, pp. 430-434
- Gropius, W., 1931. Arquitectura funcional. Arquitectura, 141. Madrid: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, pp. 51-62
- Gutiérrez Soto, L., 1933. Bares y Cafés. Obras, 16; Madrid
- Gutiérrez Soto, L., 1933. Casablanca. Obras, 24; Madrid
- Lacasa, L., 1924. Un interior expresionista. Arquitectura, 61. Madrid: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, p. 171
- Loygorri, J., 1934. Publicidad y decoración. Nuevas Formas, 9. Madrid, p. 449
- Mallet Stevens, R., 1926. Las razones en arquitectura. Arquitectura, 92; Madrid: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, pp. 470-484
- Morgan, T., 2011. Visual merchandising. Barcelona, Editorial Gustavo Gili. p. 8.
- Osoorio, C., 2010. Tiendas de Madrid. Madrid, Ediciones La Librería.
- Reguero, V., 2011. Madrid, aquel comercio. Madrid: Ediciones La Librería, pp. 108-109
- Reilly, C. H., 1935. Shop fronts. Architectural Review, July. London, p. 27
- Sambricio, C., 1983. Cuando se quiso resucitar la arquitectura. Madrid: COAAT
- Scherbaart, P., 1988. Glassarchitektur. Murcia: COAAT
- Stewart, J., 2000. Fashioning Viena. New York: Ed. Routledge
- Strauss, J. I., 1933. The architecture of merchandising. Architectural Forum, vol. LVIII, 5. Boston, p. 343
- Torres Balbás, L., 1922. El mobiliario de nuestras viviendas. Arquitectura, 42. Madrid: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, pp. 436-445.
- Wiener, A., 1912. Das Warenhaus. Berlin, Alfred Wiener Publisher.
- Yarnoz Larrosa, J., 1926. La arquitectura en la Exposición Internacional de las Artes Decorativas e Industrias Modernas. Arquitectura, 78. Madrid: Sociedad Central de Arquitectos, pp. 225- 235