

First prize in the Interior Design Category

Living in a Coderch (Barcelona)

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Photographs: Jordi Folch

REPORT

The full refurbishment of a housing unit in Barcelona's emblematic Banco Urquijo building, recapturing the original essence of Coderch in contemporary style

THE BUILDING

In 1967, José Antonio Coderch was commissioned by Banco Urquijo to design a housing development on a plot located between the Raset, Modolell, Vico and Freixa streets. Work on the building was completed in 1973.

The development consisted of six freestanding blocks featuring a series of highly characteristic elements, including large planters on the ground floor, façades covered with vertically laid ceramic tiles, corner windows and vertical wooden strips to control the entrance of light and avoid direct vision between the housing units. The setback between the floors ensures constant excellent natural light from the exterior.

THE INTERIOR ARCHITECTURE PROJECT

Recapturing the essence of Coderch

Estudio Vilablanch received the commission for the refurbishment of a housing unit in the emblematic Banco Urquijo building, characterised by its highly ornamental appearance, more in keeping with an apartment in the Eixample district than with a work by Coderch. The clients' brief was to transform it into a contemporary home for a family with three children whilst complying with the clear premise of recapturing the original essence of Coderch's project.

Layout

In terms of the layout, the refurbishment work had to comply with two key requirements: the creation of a daytime zone with spaces that were well connected but also equally easy to "unconnect", and to include four bedrooms and three bathrooms in the night zone.

In order to remain true to Coderch's project, the first step was to locate the original plans in the city's History Archives. The final distribution of the housing unit is the result of the study and understanding of the original nature and layout of the building.

According to the original project, there were two 205 m² symmetrical units per floor. In the interior, a hall articulated three differentiated areas: the day zone in the central section, the night zone with several bedrooms and a third zone for the domestic service.

The refurbishment work conserves the original layout in the day zone, conditioned by elements such as the terraces and openings on the façade, yet at the same time creates a strong visual and spatial connection with the three areas – living room, dining room and kitchen – through the use of three sliding doors. This practical resource allows the spaces to be fully connected or divided for a greater privacy, as required. The fireplace and fitted bookcase included in the original plans have been recovered, and a customised bench, another of Cordech's hallmarks has been included.

Both the layout and appearance of the kitchen recall the original design, and the gallery with its natural light has been conserved. The layout of the bedrooms – all facing the front of the house - is intended to make maximum use of the exterior light, one of Corderch's great concerns. The interior sections, with no natural light, are used for the bathrooms.

The principal changes to the layout include the disappearance of the domestic service zone (the bedroom now forms part of the dining room and the bathroom has been converted into the laundry room) and the transformation of a bathroom into a bedroom.

Materials

The architectural volume is both neutral and clear-cut, setting off Corderch's original carpentry. Soothing tones were chosen to instil a sense of warmth to the various spaces and bring out the play of light and shade – one of the hallmarks of this architect's work - to full effect.

The clients were eager to add touches of colour to the housing unit and the solution was to include them in the ceramic coverings in the bathrooms and kitchen. There was a deliberate decision to choose ceramic tiles whose format recalls the pressed ones on the façade. Rectangular tiles in four different tones: more restrained in the kitchen; more soothing for the ensuite bathroom; and two brighter colours for the children's bathrooms.