



PAULO MENDES DA ROCHA

FIFTY YEARS

Paulo Mendes da Rocha

Projects 1957-2007

Book One: 1957-1999

Book Two: 2000-2007

Edited by

Rosa Artigas

Text

Paulo Mendes da Rocha

Project Descriptions

Guilherme Wisnik

RIZZOLI
NEW YORK

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First Published in the United States of America
by Rizzoli International Publications, Inc.
300 Park Ave South, New York, NY 10010
www.rizzoliusa.com

Editor: Ian Luna

Production: Maria Pia Gramaglia Et Kaija Markoe

Editorial Assistants: Joshua D. Jones Et Eugene Lee

Typesetting in English: Ursula Damm

Typeset in Garamond and Rotis

Printed in China

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2006 2007 2008 2009 / 10987654321

Library of Congress Control Number: 2007933618

ISBN-10: 0-8478-2984-7

ISBN-13: 978-0-8478-2984-2

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Foreword

There is no better way than a specially devoted book to get to know the work of Paulo Mendes da Rocha. In addition to giving detailed information on each project, it also transforms the reader into a viewer, as it offers a glimpse of all the art and technique harmonized in his architecture through imagination and poetry. This unadorned architecture finds its base in an unflinching human and plastic ethic.

In 2006, Paulo Mendes da Rocha was awarded the Pritzker, the most prestigious prize in world architecture, conferred by the Hyatt Foundation of Chicago. A deserved tribute to one of the greatest exponents of contemporary architecture.

Also in 2006, the construction company Augusto Velloso, Telar Engineering and the Tejofran Group completed work on the connection

between Luz Train Station and the Pinacoteca do Estado de São Paulo (São Paulo State Gallery), a building whose reform was projected by Paulo and for which he received the Mies van der Rohe Award for Latin-American Architecture in June 2000.

As partners in this project, we are pleased to be able to help make this new edition of the book possible. To promote and facilitate an understanding of Paulo Mendes da Rocha's work is to collaborate toward the development of the city. In himself, Paulo is a symbol of São Paulo and part of a Brazil we would all wish for the generations to come: a Brazil both aware and creative. ■

Ricardo M. F. Velloso

Director

Consórcio Velloso / Telar / Tejofran

Introduction

This is a book of ideas. Opening each chapter, text written by the architect Paulo Mendes da Rocha present the themes that show up time and again throughout his work: territory, technique and the city. The projects illustrate each of these selected subjects, making up a veritable visual narrative. Likewise, brief descriptions transcend the mere classificatory sequence of the projects and complement the narrative.

The first of the texts, "The Americas, architecture and nature," deals with the relationship between architecture and territory. According to Paulo Mendes da Rocha, territory orients the architectural project, while the project humanizes nature. One example of this acting on space is his project for the Library of Alexandria, in Egypt. In it, the architect ventures beyond the limits of the piece of land set aside for the library's structure,

aiming to incorporate the Kings Peninsula into the project and proposing to install the library's gardens there – as if the possibility of the building and its gardens were already contained within the very landscape. In other works, Paulo Mendes goes so far as to conceal his building in order to establish a subtle dialogue with the city already built around it, as in his project for the Rio de Janeiro Public Library, an underground construction, or for the Beaubourg, a complex array of enclosures that accompanies the design of medieval Paris' alleyways.

In the Americas, however, the adventure of the occupation of territory has its peculiarities. The new continent, still under construction, demands new horizons for design as well, an original and clever spatiality. This original character appears in Paulo Mendes da Rocha's plans for the recuperation of Vitória Bay, in the state of

Espírito Santo, and in the feats achieved with the Elevated Reservoir in Urânia and in the City of Tietê, both in the state of São Paulo. The new design proposed by the architect is founded in a critical revision of colonialism, and represents the hand of man in strategically chosen points in nature.

In “The genealogy of imagination,” Paulo Mendes highlights man’s attempt to make viable his own existence by exploring the transforming power of technique. His enchantment with the capacity of human engineering is what made him marvel, as a child, at the construction in the Port of Vitória, and what drives him in the conception of such projects as the gymnasium at the Paulistano Athletic Club – a concrete ring supported by six pillars from whose upper extremes extend the steel cables that hold up the central metal covering.

One of the most beautiful contributions of Paulo Mendes da Rocha’s work lies in its striving for resources that are technically perfect for the consolidation of spaces. This constant exploration can be verified in both his large and small projects, as is the case with Brazil’s pavilion at the Osaka 70 Expo in Japan, in which the articulation of the structure is especially projected to resist seismic shocks, or with the retractable metal staircase in the Forma store, which serves both as access to the upper floor and as the piece with which the building is shut. The architect’s meticulous dedication in his search for a synthesis of a design and form as beautiful as they are technically impeccable serves as an homage to human genius and its drive to find solutions to life’s puzzles.

Paulo Mendes da Rocha believes that architecture must not be seen as a finished object that sits static on the landscape,

nor the city as an assemblage of self-referencing monuments. This tendency to venerate the past results in the praise of representation over realization. As he understands it, architecture is a modifier of space and of landscape. It meets both social and aesthetic human needs. Paulo Mendes sees history as it relates to the future.

This posture is explicit in “The city for all,” the third and final part of the book, in which we find his projects for the Bela Vista Grotto Park, the Poupatempo Public Service Center in São Paulo’s Itaquera district, and the “Zezinho Magalhães Prado” CECAP Housing Project in Guarulhos, a complex whose pre-fabrication principle inspired the Gerassi House. The city must build a structure that is supportive of life and takes its myriad dimensions into account: habitation, commerce, services,

transportation, leisure and work.

The project which closes this book is Paulo Mendes’ proposal for the recuperation of the Bay of Montevideo, the fruit of an international architecture seminar organized for Uruguayan students. Closing this narrative in the context of a classroom is symbolic, as, in addition to his admirable mastery of design and technique, Paulo Mendes da Rocha dedicates himself daily to the task of educating. Not just students, but also small and major clients, friends and colleagues – all of us, in short, still have much to learn from his impassioned discourses. Many of his works sprang up sustained by the enthusiasm of his words. We bring some of them together here. ■

*Rosa Artigas
Geni Sugai*

Paulo Mendes da Rocha