

ASCER CERAMICS FOR ARCHITECTURE AND INTERIOR DESIGN AWARDS - A TWELVE-YEAR TRACK RECORD

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ABSTRACT

The authors, Ramón Monfort and Jaime Prior, are both architects and members of the Territorial College of Architects of Castellón (CTAC) and have been fully involved in the creation and development of the twelve editions of the ASCER Awards for Ceramics for Architecture, Interior Design and Degree Projects. In this paper, they analytically examine the key factors of the Awards' influence, analysing the make-up of the professional juries that have taken part and critically reviewing the subject matters of the various award winners.

1. INTRODUCTION

With the call for these awards and the commitment to continuity over time, the Spanish Ceramic Tile Manufacturers' Association, ASCER, has achieved what it set out to do: overcome imposed cultural barriers even in its own corporate name.

Offering annual awards for building constructions that had been completed (architecture and interior design) or projected (in the Degree Project state), with the sole condition that they include a significant ceramics component, has had a positive influence on improving the potential use of ceramics. It has also given Spanish architects and designers a wider and more up-to-date perception of ceramic materials, beyond the concept of mere wall and/or floor tiles.

The first edition of the awards in 2002 was born of the institutional collaboration between ASCER and the Territorial College of Architects of Castellón (CTAC), a relationship that continues to the present day and that is renewed in November of each year at the opening speech by the Chairman of the current year's Jury in CTAC's General Assembly Hall. ASCER always invites a member of CTAC to assist the jury. The event also has external sponsors that change from year to year and who consolidate the awards' reputation among the region's business society.

The history of the ASCER Awards is directly connected to the evolution of Spanish Architecture and Interior Design over the past twelve years. From the membership of the various juries to the results of their votes, two categories of analysis can be distinguished that form the base structure of this paper.

It is a well-known fact that Modern Architecture as a cultural product of the 20th century grew up around a very "efficient" mechanism for its development, namely Architectural Tenders. The Awards are a variation on those tender processes, in which the author makes his own proposals and designs. In that sense, competitions, by the mere act of giving a reward, recognise a piece of work, action or proposal that has already been developed. Judgement is passed on the outcome and simply by giving a "prize", the content or message about the item that deserves such distinction is enhanced.

2. PART ONE: THE JURY

It is essential in this case that "the judging entity" be able to properly interpret the most interesting contributions and the ones that have the greatest possibility of influencing or projecting their alternatives with regard to the key objective. We consider it of paramount importance to mention in first place the task of selection required of the members of the Jury in the ASCER Awards, as it is precisely the continued excellence of jury members that somehow explains why the results have been so good and the decisions taken so correct. The fact that they also include a significant monetary reward should not be overlooked as, together with its growing reputation, this event has undoubtedly become one of the most esteemed Architectural Awards in Spain.

Let us take both a quantitative and qualitative look at the different jury members over these last twelve years, and let us do so in a fully diachronic manner, sorting them by categories of recognition of professional excellence:

Pritzker Architecture Awards

In 2007, we had a Pritzker Prize-winning Chairman of the Jury: the Portuguese architect Eduardo Souto de Moura, he had still not won the award - one of the most prestigious in the world of architecture - when he came to Castellón (Pritzker Prize winner 2011). The ability to anticipate when choosing jury members is also a highly valued feature of the contest.

Gold Medal of Architecture:

The Gold Medal of Architecture is the most prestigious award granted by the Higher Council of Colleges of Architects in Spain (CSCAE) in recognition of an architect's entire career. Two winners of such recognition have been Chairmen of the ASCER Award Jury, Juan Navarro Baldeweg, Chairman of the Jury in 2012 and Medal winner in 2008 and Manuel Gallego Jorroto, winner of the Gold Medal in 2010 and also of the National Architecture Prize in 1997, who we were fortunate to have chair the Jury for this year's (2013) Awards.

National Prize for Architecture:

The National Prize, also known as the Spanish Architecture Prize, is awarded by the Spanish Ministry of Development and CSCAE for a particular project, approximately every two years. Nine National Prize-winning architects have been members of ASCER Awards juries: apart from Manolo Gallego as mentioned above, the other eight were as follows:

Benedetta Tagliabue, Chairman in 2011 and continuator of the Enric Miralles studio, awarded the National Prize for Architecture in 1995.

Carme Pinós Desplat, member of the Jury in 2009 and National Prize winner in 1995.

Francisco J. Mangado, Chairman in 2004 and National Prize for Architecture winner in 2009.

Guillermo Vázquez Consuegra, Chairman in 2005 and National Prize winner that same year for his seafront project in Vigo.

Luis Moreno G. Mansilla, Chairman in 2003 and winner of the National Prize for Architecture that same year for the City of Leon Auditorium. Winner of the Mies Van der Rohe prize in 2007 for the same work.

Carlos Ferrater Lambarri, Chairman in 2002 and four-time winner of the National Prize for Architecture in 1987, 1992, 2001 and 2011.

Ángela García de Paredes and Ignacio García Pedrosa, members of the Jury in 2008 and 2013 and winners of the National Prize for Architecture in 2007.

National Awards for Graphic Design and Innovation:

This is a distinction equivalent to the National Prize for Architecture but with regard to the world of Interior Design. Like the Prize for Architecture, it is an official recognition whose result is published in the State Gazette.

Daniel Nebot, who served as a member of the Jury in 2005, received the National Design Award in 1995.

Critics of Art and Architecture::

William J.R. Curtis was Chairman of the ASCER Awards Jury in 2009. A leading international critic in the field of architecture, he has been very belligerent with the new trends of exhibitionism in architecture prior to the financial crisis.

Terence Ridley, ASCER Awards Chairman in 2008 and curator of the ON SITE exhibition of Spanish Architecture at New York's MoMA, 2006. Head of the Department of Architecture and Design at the MoMA.

Anatxu Zabalbeascoa, critic of Architecture for El País newspaper, was a member of the Jury in 2012.

Martha Thorne, Dean of IE School of Architecture and Design and Executive Director of the Pritzker Prize. Deputy Commissioner of the Department of Architecture at the Art Institute of Chicago. Member of the Jury in 2010 and 2009.

Luis Fernández Galiano, editor of Arquitectura Viva or AV, member of the Pritzker Prize Jury and Professor of Projects at ETSAM, formed part of the Jury in the 2008 edition.

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University Professors:

Some of the afore-mentioned professionals hold chairs as Professors at various public Schools of Architecture in Spain: Juan Navarro, Manuel Gallego, Carlos Ferrater, Luis F. Galiano. Nevertheless, the following persons should also be listed within this category:

Alberto Campo Baeza, Chairman of the Jury in 2010.

Ignacio Vicens, member of the Jury in the 2004 and 2003 editions.

Editors of Architecture publications:

Luca Molinari, member of the Jury in 2013 and head of Skira publishing.

Carlos Quintans, an architect who formed part of the Jury in 2011 and 2006, editor and director of Tectónica magazine.

The 2005 edition included the joint participation of Pepe Ballesteros, editor of Pasajes journal; Chris Sullivan, editor of the American magazine Architecture, and Beatriz Pérez de Armiñan, editor of Habitania.

Carmen Llopis, editor of ON, was a member of the ASCER Awards Jury on two occasions, in 2004 and 2002.

Frances Aldrich de Llopis, editor and curator of the Casa Decor awards together with Marcel Benedito, editor of Casa Viva, were members of the Jury in 2002.

Designers:

Tomas Alonso in 2013.

Joseph Grima and Matali Craset in 2012.

Sam Baron in 2011.

Gerard Sanmarti and Frank Barkow in 2010.

Francesc Rife, three-time winner of the Interior Designer Award, in 2009.

Tomas Alia in 2008.

Marti Guixé and Isabel López in 2006.

Ignasi Bonjoch in 2004.

Jorge Romany in 2002.

Architects:

Matias Klotz, a Chilean architect with a brilliant international career, who chaired the ASCER Jury in 2006.

Francisco Aires Mateus and Luis Martinez Santamaria in 2012.

Joao Alvaro Rocha, Andres Jaque and Mikko Haikkinen in 2011.

Antonio Gimenez Turrets and Arturo Franco in 2010.

Ramon Vilalta and Juan Domingo Santos in 2009.

Alfredo Paya in 2008.

Jacob Van Rijs, Felipe Pich-Aguilera, Fernando Menis, Rafael de la Hoz and Merce Berengué in 2007.

Juan Herreros and Pepe Morales in 2006.

Teresa Sapey in 2005.

Jaime Prior in 2004 and 2003.

Javier Garcia Solera, Alberto Burgos and Victor Echarri, current Head of the Ceramics Chair at the University of Alicante, were members of the Jury in 2003.

Ramón Monfort, appointed by the Territorial College of Architects of Castellón, who is the only permanent member of the Jury in all editions of the ASCER Awards.

This list of members must also include the presence in 2002, the opening year of the awards, of Fernando Diago, at the time President of ASCER, on the only occasion when officers of the Association have served on jury panels. Even then and in all other editions, decision-making has been entrusted entirely to the professionals, so that ASCER's role, under the long-standing supervision of Ana Martinez and Eva Pedrajas, is deliberately restricted to organising the event and to offering perfect and proper assistance.

PART TWO: THE WORKS

In the second part of this paper, we will look at and analyse what, in our view, represents the change in the way the discipline has come to perceive ceramic materials throughout this period - a change and evolution that are naturally reflected in the Awards or perhaps, dialectically, have been induced by them.

Let us start with a brief introduction to Modern Architecture's disposition towards ceramic materials. In "Towards An Architecture", in the third of his "warnings to architect overlords": The Plan, Le Corbusier indicates that ceramics will be one of the chosen materials for designing the future: concrete, steel, glass and ceramics. A veritable declaration of principles!

But where can we find ceramics employed in the Swiss maestro's work, apart from as cladding for every kitchen and bathroom? We find little more than the use of extruded tiles in his early works. If anything, he uses ceramics significantly in certain places but always linked to serialised and highly singular elements.

The Germanic branch of the Modern Movement simply ignores ceramics. Although it was included from the outset as a subject of study in the Bauhaus School curriculum, their ceramic workshops tended to focus on understanding and exploring the material's

artistic dimension and neglected its potential for pre-fabrication. For example, Mies chose to recover stonemasonry as a universal solution by introducing an improvement to its installation that helped ease the pain of a tradition that, in theory, should have passed naturally.

Interestingly, it was Alvar Aalto, the third of the great European masters, who made the greatest use of ceramics, albeit always partially, although on many occasions it was given a different meaning and was especially aimed at conditioning the interior appearance of his buildings with a criterion of permanent innovation as far as positioning and chromatism are concerned.

Eventually, it was GATEPAC (Group of Spanish Architects and Technicians for the Progress of Contemporary Architecture) in 1930 who sought such a dimension for ceramics in new architecture, in memory of their Maestro. Perhaps, like the staunch defence of whiteness and Mediterranean rationality, their actions were conditioned by their proximity to the production areas, and by cultural tradition, which by endeavouring so hard to deny it, finally gave it greater continuity. Indeed, in the second issue of AC magazine, strong arguments were put forward in favour of using such an easy-to-apply, "hygienic" and "abstract" material that provided for far longer-lasting conditions of use and maintenance. A review of their works illustrates quite clearly this more pragmatic rather than disciplinary approach. The Anti-Tuberculosis Dispensary of Barcelona or the Spanish Republic Pavilion at the Paris World Fair in 1937 are two epitomic examples.

Nevertheless, the world had to wait for the second Modern generation in order for ceramics to forge an identity and bring true that prediction of the fourth potentially modern material. Disciples of Le Corbusier such as Barkrishna Dorshi or Julien Julian form the first section. At the same time, the seed of European modernity transferred to Brazil was accompanied by extensive use of ceramics in its new architecture. Oscar Niemeyer and Alfonso Eduardo Reydi were unable to omit the indispensable use of ceramics from some of their creations.

However, it was to be the second generation of Spanish modernists who fundamentally standardised its usage beyond artistic touches and endowed it with its "normal" condition of possible construction material. Sostres, De la Sota and Coderch exemplify the incorporation of ceramics as an indissoluble part of new functional and formal features.

The above introduction is relevant because we believe that during the Awards start-up process, a debate, initially unscripted although far more articulated than at first might appear, arose that aimed to provide continuity for the contributions of this second generation of the Modern Movement and to test ways of enhancing the identification of ceramics with the values of modernity.

The main objective of the Ascer Awards has always been to objectively assess and identify quality architecture. Architecture that was required to include a ceramic factor but merely from an intellectual standpoint. The assessments made have never taken quantitative variables or short-sighted commercial initiatives into consideration.

We shall endeavour to systematise society's changing perception in a series of groups and concepts, while also referring to the various award-winning works in which it materialises.

The **FIRST** note to underline is that over these last twelve years, we have come a long way in breaking down the perception of ceramics as a material solely linked to the concept of "cladding".

An unquestionable stance that is obvious in the Awards is that of recovering a third dimension for the industrial tile. It is one of the first and most obvious aspects. The tile has become an entity; it recognises its own plasticity in terms of an industrial material but for the first time stoically assumes other functions:

- It can be turned into a game - a kind of "performance" that recalls Gaudí's collages or the obsessively expressionist forms of Enric Miralles' structures. The Diagonal Mar Park in 2003 represents the incorporation of ceramics in quality urban furniture within a multidisciplinary, artistic "action" framed within architecture, as had always been the case.
- For example, it provides the iconographic reference of the foyer at the conference centre in the Penyíscola project that won the Award in 2004, an example of extreme discretion and simplicity employed as an addition to the formal identity, the forced development of rationalist lattices screened by an architecture in which discretion does not conceal its systematic obsession to solve problems.
- It is able to support the entire formal load of the façade of the Spanish Pavilion at the Aichi Expo in 2005, award-winning design by Alejandro Polo and Farshid Moussavi Zahera. The vessel, the skin and the imagery are the result of a ceramic tile that is geometrically used as an addition apart from having overcome the casuistry of its installation. It is not just a formal explosion but also an intense symphony of colours.
- It can even be transformed into an image of technology and a system of energy efficiency, responsible for dissipating humidity and moisture as part of the building's environmental microclimate, as achieved by Patxi Mangado at the 2008 Zaragoza World Fair.
- Large-scale difficulties can be overcome by inventing small ceramic pieces (three in all) which, given the way they are repeated and assembled, transform it into an urban fixture capable of solving various situations in a unified manner. By using an inexpensive item, a creative solution can be achieved that affords quality and enriches an area in San Feliu de Llobregat, the remodelling of the Riera de la Salut, the latest prize awarded in 2013 and designed by architect Pol Femenias Ureña.

On a **SECOND LEVEL**, due note should be taken of the quantity and quality of industrial ceramics that have become the norm. Ceramic façades are no longer a question of simply cladding the outer wall – CERAMIC ENVELOPES have become an expression of ARTE-FACT, that is 'artefact' in the literal sense of the word - an industrialised scientific mechanism that meets pre-set standards of quality and performance and at the same time provides a polished aesthetic finish.

- The development of the Trombe wall and eco-efficient mechanisms are immediate examples of such implementation, like part of the pioneers of rationalism's early utopia. A choice that can be seen in Jose Pitart's Faculty of Human Sciences at the Jaume I University in Castellon, within the framework of a failed exercise and a lessened formal impulse. That was in 2002 when the ASCER Awards were just starting.
- In this sense, Jaume Bach's 4C house in early 2003 laid down the guidelines for proper ventilated-façade construction in the rehabilitation of one of two bourgeois homes in upper Barcelona. The correctness of their choice does not impede the attainment of a formal result consistent with criteria derived from the purest and most orthodox Modern Movement.
- Similarly, the Casp building by the same Architect and his son, Eugeni Bach, who, assuming the Miesian dictates of modulated and exposed metal latticework, designed the interior walls with a sensitive, smooth skin of extruded ceramic slats that support the formal load of the building. Winner of the 2010 Architecture Award.
- Guillermo Vázquez Consuegra's Archive for the Castilla La Mancha government, winner of the 2006 Architecture Award, follows the same pattern, as does the research project and proposal called 'Versatile Slats' by Vicente Sarrablo, winner of the 2005 Interior Design Award.
- Finally, our review of this impetus by designers to unify interior and exterior designs would not be complete without mention of the excellent results achieved at the Teacher Training College, the work of Ramón Fernández-Alonso Borrajo and winner of the 2012 Interior Design Award.

At the **THIRD LEVEL** of analysis of our journey through the Architecture and Interior Design awards, we are obliged to note that the industry and the specifications drafter have accepted the importance of SHAPE and COLOUR in ceramic tiles, and even texture, or considerations that relate to the most valuable contributions made by plastic artists.

- In this regard, we can start our review with the formal experiment of the fifth façade erected during the rehabilitation of the Santa Caterina Market, which provides a folding backdrop from the square of the Cathedral of Barcelona and which was deemed worthy of the Award in 2004. In it, Enric Miralles and Benedeta Tagliabue designed a number of colour ranges for a hexagonal tile that allow a perception of the undulating world of that spatial entity they use to crown the former market. The oneiric dragon that Gaudí did not build on Casa Batlló could well have come to perch on this central market.

- A similar line of thought led José Durán in 2007 to imagine the central San Vicente Street in the modernist quarter of Burriana as a sequence of colours. The result is a series of categorical colour ranges that divide, perhaps randomly, this complex city street. On this occasion, he used a tiny tile, glazed like in the previous example and with a beautiful non-slip solution but which marked the onset of its slight functional mismatch. The result is a breath of fresh air when viewed from the air, weakly contextualised in a street with significant environmental and historical issues.
- This same theme of fickleness and transitory chromatics is developed by Carlos Ferrater and Xavier Marti (OAB) on the mile-long Promenade in Benidorm, winner of the 2009 Prize for Architecture. On this occasion, they use an ingenious combination of round tiles and intermediate tesserae that enable the tiling to adapt in a flowing, continuous fashion to emulate the undulating and variable nature of the project. ITC ALICER's collaboration in developing the tile is worthy of mention here and a reflection of how such work should be undertaken in the 21st century.
- Similar prior research and coordination led to the iridescent mother-of-pearl MUCA, an auditorium and music hall that the COR studio built in Algueña (Alicante, Spain). Having resolved the ground plan with a resounding solution, the historic building is then topped by a prism coated with this new tiling. The degree of abstraction and low visual impact are a direct result of the wise choice of ceramics that depicts, or rather kinematically blurs, the area under the light.
- On other occasions, formal references of modern architecture can be renewed, such as the building given Special Mention in 2010 by the Mestura Arquitectes team, who in their design of the latticework on the CEIP 2L Martinet in Cornellá de Llobregat, did not hesitate to use colour as a means of building spatial awareness and providing the project with an overall configuration.

These new paths are supplemented by strong historical backing. Ceramic materials are as old as human culture. One should not overlook the uses to which historically ceramics have been most suited. However, it is quite appropriate to enrich them with new techniques and new ways of working. This **FOURTH LEVEL** of analysis deals with more or less CONTINUIST, though no less revolutionary, TRENDS in applying ceramics. Trends that are quietly innovative, and sensible, and efficient – in short Architecture at its highest level of dignity.

- Let us commence with the project worthy of Special Mention in 2006, namely José María Lapuerta Montoya's Centre for the Disabled, an uncompromising exercise that recalls the excellence of the great Spanish modernity of the 1950s. Coderch, De la Sota and García de Paredes appear to be behind this simple and sensible project.
- A further example comes from the Sol 89 Studio (María González and Juanjo López de la Cruz) in their projected Catering & Hospitality School in a former abattoir in Medina Sidonia (Cádiz). The 2012 Architecture Award. Again, the simplicity and humility of the tile is dignified by the architecture, which in turn is enriched by the serene and "genuine" nature of an earth-born material, which, though technologically manipulated, at the end of the day ... will turn to dust. A veritable ode to environmental sustainability.

- Similarly, the runner-up that same year, 2012, the Main Square of Almazan and its surroundings, work of Architects Curtichaga and Quadra-Salcedo. The recovery of its historical past is achieved with such an advanced tile that it withstands the effects of frost in that area of Castile, one of the harshest and most long-suffering regions in Spain.
- An identical spirit of simple reflection and praise of the elementary underlies the interior design work of Luis Martínez Santamaría at the Caja de Arquitectos in Madrid, winner of the 2005 Interior Design award, and the San Blas Health Centre by the Entresitio studio, winner of the Interior Design Award in 2007.
- In our opinion, also worthy of special mention in this section is Tabuenca and Leache's work on the rehabilitation of the Constable's House in Pamplona. A daring and refined exercise that won the Interior Design Award in 2009. An elegant dialogue with the pre-existing structure where it is not used as a "passive" element but rather acts as the most salutary regeneration of a space where the modern spirit brings together in time the different interpretations and perceptions the building has had over the years.

Our **FIFTH LEVEL** of analysis comes as a reminder that the ASCER Awards have also never ignored the MOST RESPECTFUL INTERVENTIONS made on historic buildings, usually linked to modernism and the emerging use of ceramics in construction. Leopoldo Nebot's Restoration of Güell Park, 2002 Architecture Award, and the widely debated, dubious Rehabilitation of Colon Market in Valencia, Special Mention in 2003, are examples to be included under this category.

RE-USAGE could be the heading of our **SIXTH LEVEL** of analysis.

- Re-usage that is encompassed within the most avant-garde poetic reaction and which has been studied in the work presented by Roldan and Berengué under the name of Ceramic Carpets, winner of an Interior Design Award in 2006 for the "aggiornamento" (updating) of this Barcelona paving.
- And it was the leitmotif of the suggestive intervention on the Casa Collage in the Jewish quarter of Girona, a piece of architecture that was only possible after 16 years of patient, consistent and thorough research into the nature of this complex area in the old town of Girona. A true manifesto of how re-construction and re-interpretation give rise to highly privileged habitats within a unique and unrepeatable cultural setting – Europe – that possesses an immense ability to reinvent itself with the techniques at its disposal.
- It is also the organisational factor in the Casa Luz de Cilleros, the 2013 Interior Design Award designed by the Arquitectura G studio. The architectural project opts for a new interior in an existing building, with simple and elegant housing. The quality of the ambience is achieved by using ceramics in very precise and consistent measures to give it warmth.

Finally, it is of interest to take a look at a number of projects that demonstrate how easily ceramic materials can be made artistic. The white city of Saeta Estudi, winner of the 2008 Interior Design award, reveals how the fired sculptural piece can form an addition to an installation in the vanguard fashion of the late 20th century.

We cannot fail to make mention of the section in the Awards devoted to Degree projects, which, being so specific, have their own particular features:

- COMPLEXITY OF SUBJECT MATTER - there is a huge disparity between the projects presented as a result of them originating in different Schools of Architecture, which, in turn, teach a wide range of project subject matters.
- DIFFERENT TECHNOLOGICAL LEVEL - this is where the different teaching methods from the exaggerated number of schools of architecture in Spain are most patently obvious.
- DIFFERENT STAGE OF DEVELOPMENT - depending on the depth of the teaching, Degree projects may be at the basic project stage or may have reached the level of project implementation. It is only in this latter case that the suitability of the solution using ceramics can be affirmed.
- SCARCITY OF SOLUTIONS USING CERAMICS – which leads us to query the actual role of the ceramics chairs with regard to disseminating a technology and lines of research that definitely link ceramics to the disciplines of Architecture and Design in the 21st century.
- SCARCITY OF PROPOSALS regarding possible future alternatives.

All these conditions foreshadow great difficulty in implementing an assessment, albeit superficial, of the contents of award-winning Degree projects. Indeed, by way of an example, we shall merely look at the two latest winners, in 2012 and 2013.

In 2012, M^a Dolores Parilla from the Madrid School of Architecture (ETSAM), presented a project entitled "A meeting of fabrics - l'unité flottante, inhabiting the Alexander". The jury was enchanted by the idea of processing and recovering an old ship as a hostel for pilgrims, with an intervention that uses newly patented textile ceramics. The contrast between the strength and lightness of the proposal is highly suggestive and that ability to be suggestive is evident in the drawings in which the idea was designed.

In 2013, Gohar Manrique San Pedro from the Madrid School of Architecture (ETSA) prepared a project for a "Research centre for promoting and preserving the heritage of New Gourná (Luxor, Egypt)". The jury most appreciated the rigour, development and consistency of the project, which included the difficulty of establishing an interaction with the pre-existing context. And it does so by using construction and structural systems based entirely on ceramic elements