

# FROM REGIONALISM TO UNIVERSAL: THE PECULIAR EXAMPLE OF BRAZILIAN CONTEMPORARY ARCHITECTURE

**Ruy Ohtake**  
Architect - Brasil

*Graduate from São Paulo University, School of Architecture, 1960*

*Main awards:*

- *First Prize Federal Technique School, National Contest (1965)*
- *I.A.B. - Brazilian Institute of Architects Awarding*
- *Architecture Biennial Award, the Ecological Park of Tietê, IX Brazilian Congress of Architects (1976)*
- *Master Award. São Paulo Renaissance Hotel FIABCI/SECOVI (1996)*

*Ruy Ohtake has presented a great number of Lectures and Expositions. The following are to be particularly highlighted:*

- *Represented Brazil at Architecture Biennial of Venice, 12 projects exhibition / Italy (1991).*
- *Lecture at the Art Museum of the Americas - OAS, Washington, DC, Theme: "Brazilian Contemporary Architecture" (1995).*
- *Lecture in FIABCI'96 World Congress Tokyo, Japan, "The harmony between city and suburb in the next century" (1996).*
- *Lecture at XX Panamerican Congress of Architects, Brasilia: "Brazilian Architecture - contemporary development" (1996).*
- *XV Congreso de Arquitectos Brasileños Oscar Niemeyer, Curitiba / PR (1997)*
- *Represented Brazil at International Hall of Design, Milan / Italy (1998).*

*The following PROJECTS (housing and high-rise residential developments, civic and cultural buildings, hotels, educational facilities, public buildings, banking, sports and leisure facilities, shopping malls, etc.) are particularly noteworthy:*

- *Rosa Okubo's residence, São Paulo / SP (1964).*
- *Brazilian Pavilion Expo'70, Osaka / Japan, 1st Prize - National Contest (1969).*
- *Brazilian Embassy, Tokyo / Japan (1981).*
- *Banco Nacional de Crédito Cooperativo, Paulista Agency (reform), São Paulo / SP (1982).*
- *The São Paulo Pavilion Expo'90, Osaka / Japan (1989).*
- *Brasilia Shopping and Towers Trade Complex, Brasilia / DF (1989).*
- *Ecological Park of Indaiatuba, SP (1989).*
- *São Paulo Renaissance Hotel, São Paulo / SP, FIABCI / SECOVI Master'96 Award (1993).*
- *Open Air Museum, Organization of American States - OAS, Washington, DC / USA (1995).*
- *Brasilia Caesar Park Hotel, Brasilia, (1997).*

The globalization in architecture and its cultural implications have been exhaustively discussed.

Personally, I believe that countless regional manifestations are reaching international value. At the end of this century, we see hundreds of works in cinema, literature, music, architecture, in all artistic and cultural activities, which had taken deep local roots, with contents and dimensions that are universal.

In Brazil, the forties and fifties were very rich culturally. The country went through an improvement phase that brought about a challenging new cultural and social stage. In popular music, we can observe the origin of the "bossa nova" movement, typically Brazilian, which crossed frontiers, achieving prestige and projection in all the musical centres in the world. The Brazilian "cinema novo" produced a range of internationally respected films, some of them awarded prizes in festivals like Cannes and Berlin: national themes based on literature, local habits and traditions, whose social content and cinematography dramatization had an universal vision. In the arts, since 1951, the International Biennial of São Paulo has been taking place; its importance reaching that of Venice and Kassel.

In my opinion, one of the challenges of contemporary architecture is to develop a regional architecture that has content and universal expression. Nowadays Brazilian architecture is very characteristic. It began as one of modernism's exponents in the 40's.

Brazilian Contemporary Architecture is also a peculiar example: it began in the forties and its creativity is unrivalled in the world.

The sixty years of this architecture has probably constituted the longest-lasting Contemporary Architecture style in the world.

Drawing as an idea has never been so important in the achievement of the project. Drawing that looks for beauty and liberty, through shape and spaces.

In the forties and fifties, a group of young architects such as Oscar Niemeyer and Afonso Reidy, headed by Lúcio Costa (who later came to design the city of Brasília), founded the Contemporary Movement. Afterwards, in 1960, the city of Brasília, the new Brazilian capital, was inaugurated. In the following 20 years we went through a period of deep economical and political fluctuations in the sway of the military authorities (1964 to 1982). At that time, government authorities did not recognize the Brazilian culture: the "bossa nova" music was excluded, the Brazilian new movie set was stripped and architecture was left to engineering companies, who looked for consensus. And consensus is the opposite to innovation and boldness, characteristic of our architecture. After pushing the military away, we are gradually getting our democracy back. And as all Latin America, we are facing social difficulties we must overcome.

At each financial crisis that happens somewhere in the world, the manipulator concept of globalization is seriously protested, owing to the great trouble it causes. Culture develops in a broader and maturer way, as it expresses the history of a nation.

The creative power of Brazilian Architecture proceeds despite this turbulence, and I believe it will reach the 21st century maintaining itself as one of the most peculiar in the world.

I try to develop it without worrying about the initial modernism, but dealing with the future step. I use lines and curved forms, to cause lightness and at the same time surprise. All of this inserted in an integrated project concept.

Specifically, some external and internal coverings are very important for expressing this creative force. From colonial times, the ceramic element formerly called tile, which is rich in drawings and colours, has been part of many of our facades.

Because of the climatic conditions we have frequently used ceramics on the floor. Technological development has given ceramics a high level of sophistication permitting these materials to enrich the quality of new constructions.

Of the works that I have been accomplishing are discussed below.

• *Embassy of Brazil in Tokyo, Japan*

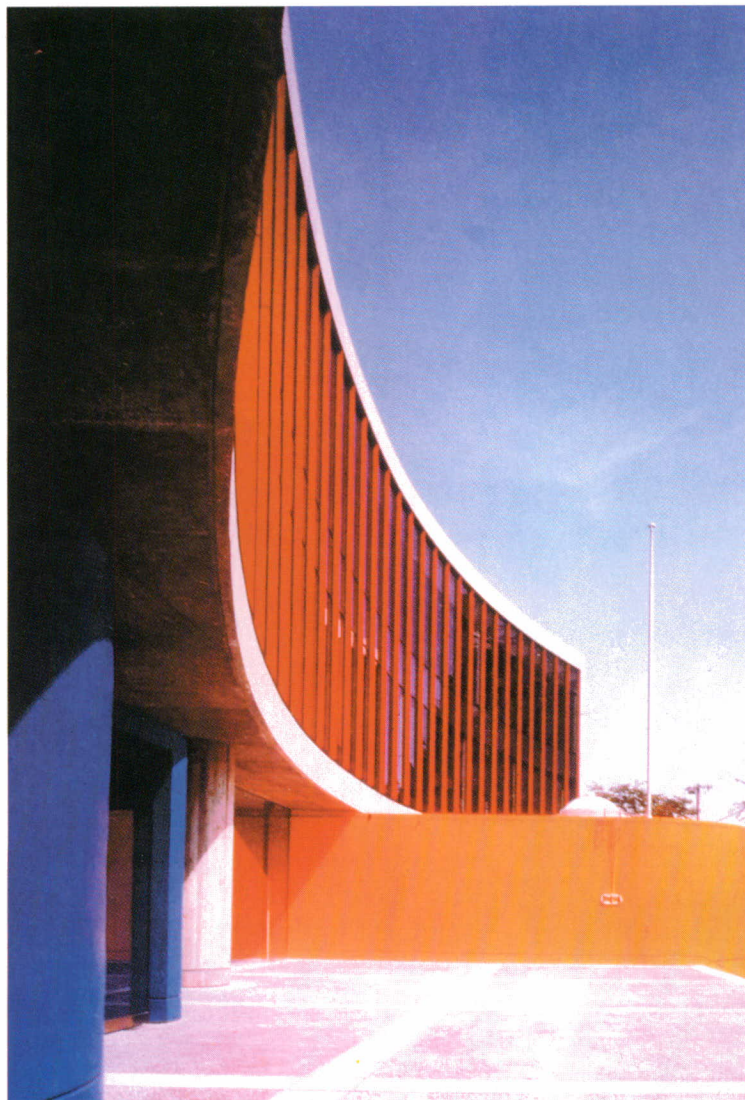
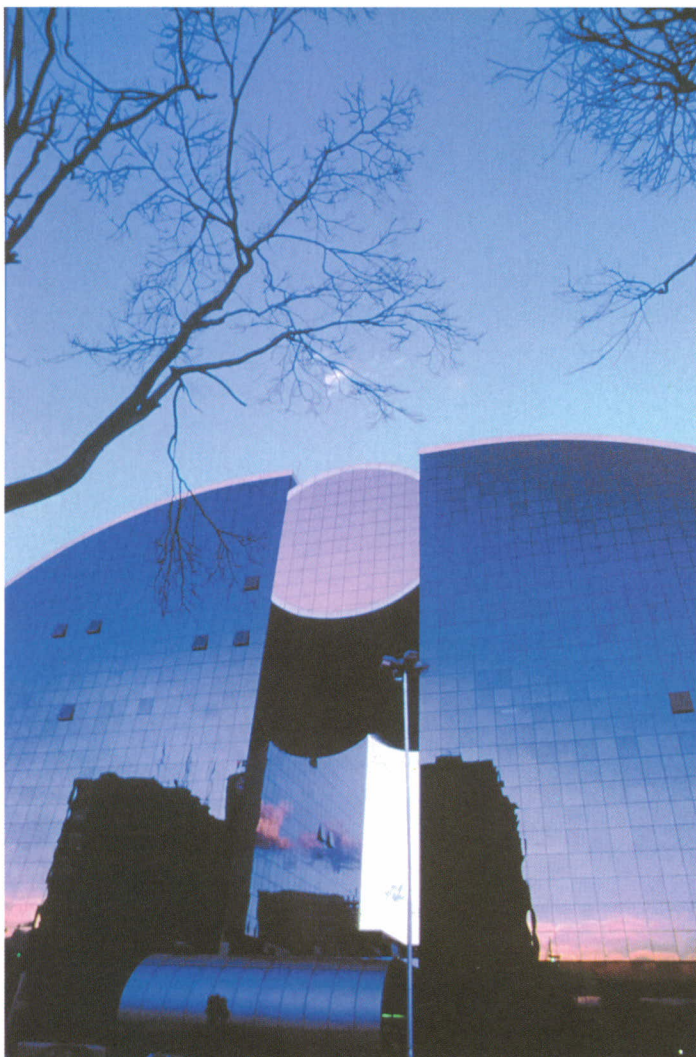


Figure 1. Embassy of Brazil in Tokyo, Japan

- project of 1981
- construction ended in 1982

A curved façade, reinforced by the verticality of the red window sash; as a counterpoint, a curve in the opposite direction accented by egg-yolk yellow. The result is a little city square in the front of this building located on a very narrow street (5.9 meters wide) in a urban setting typical of Tokyo's Aoyama district. The five-storey building was described in an article of The New York Times as one of the most important examples of modern architecture in Tokyo. On the ground level are the reception area and consulate services, while the auditorium and exposition hall are on the lower storeys. The Ambassador's office and the offices for Brazilian commercial representation and general administration are located on the two upper storeys. The service area and garage are underground.



*Figures 2 and 3. Brasilia Shopping and Towers, Brasilia, Brazil*

• ***Brasilia Shopping and Towers, Brasilia, Brazil***

- project of 1992
- construction ended in 1996

Here two towers of office buildings curve as they rise, finally making contact at the top five levels. The complex has a total of 26 levels, the ground and first levels comprising a shopping mall that occupies most of the terrain.

Undertaking of Paulo Octávio Construction.



*Figure 4. The Boy and the Sea, Ubatuba, Brazil*

• *The Boy and the Sea, Ubatuba, Brazil*

- project of 1999
- construction of the Fisherman's Pavilion ended in 1999, the remaining is in construction, with the conclusion foreseen for the year 2000

To grow up and mature, a child has to be loved madly, in order to connect himself with all created beings.

To be the adult we are, we have been children and adolescents. Although it seems obvious, we often forget it. We forget it, as so many children are forgotten. Children from the city, the seaside and the country of that immense and complex Brazil.

75% of the land that shelters us is covered by water. Oceans: source of life and pleasure. As well as the Animal World, the human being can build his habitat in nature, in order to guarantee life and to celebrate it. The impermanence and the incertitude of the world in which we live in, make us look for other answers to the future.

We thus created the project "The Child and the Sea", located in the full Atlantic Forest, destined to abandoned children and also to the ones that live with their families.

Today, a great part of civil society has been mobilizing around the subject. Problems of extreme gravity in the abandoned child's context, such as prostitution, Aids, slave work and drugs have been agglutinating countless works of women - tender and warriors - who try the door for the invisible to become visible.

I hope this project will be a pirate ship to kidnap the heart of you all for the new child, the new being, the new world.

In The Child Fisherman's Pavilion, when I drew the shape of a fish, I looked for the local children's connection with the educational proposal. Located in the pretty landscape of the north coast between São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, it is however, occupied by a population that lives today on the outskirts of the country's economic and social life, so that the educational proposal also tries to reintegrate these people.

The covering of the pavilion is made of bricks and on both sides I drew a braid of bamboo, which the artisans of the area execute very well. The bamboo (4 to 5 cm diameter) has colours, varying from the ochre to the yellow, that allows a very interesting texture and a special transparency. A round plate of blue glass (diameter of 1,50 m) with optic fibre gives it a strong night presence. The internal space is 6 m wide and 23 m long, and the height varies from 2,40 to 5,00 m; that is where multiple activities such as craft exhibitions, dance shows and music, parties and meetings will take place. The floor is made of scraped concrete and treated with wax, which constitutes a prolongation of the sand.

That is The Child Fisherman's Pavilion, I wish to become a space that stimulates the destitute children of today to become the citizens of tomorrow, with a lot of dignity.



*Figure 5. Apartments' Building, Maison de Mouette, São Paulo, Brazil*

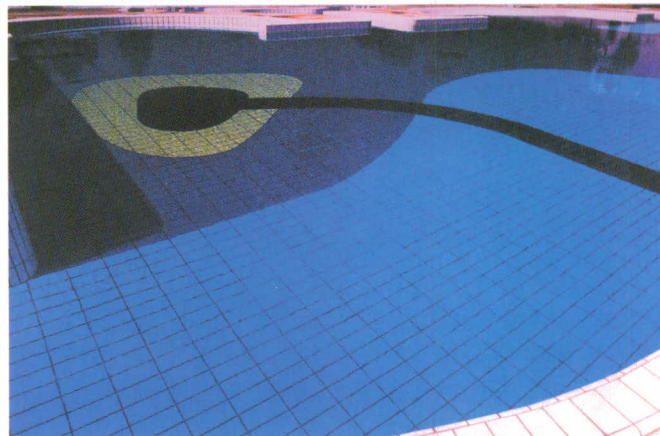
• *Apartments' Building,  
Maison de Mouette, São  
Paulo, Brazil*

- project of 1988
- construction ended in 1990

The curves on the terraces of this building vary from level to level, giving its 8500 m<sup>2</sup> of constructed area an unusual wavy appearance. With its 20 levels, it makes an impact on the surrounding urban landscape.



*Figures 6 and 7. Aquatic park  
The Waves, São Paulo, Brazil.*



• ***Aquatic park The Waves, São Paulo, Brazil***

- project of 1988
- construction ended in 1990.

Swimming pools and toboggans made of coloured tubes up to 150 meters long and 10-, 15- and 20- meter high curving slides are the main attractions at this large recreational complex. The single covering, with its 100-meter span, creates a well-defined, flowing space. It also provides a perfect atmosphere for the swimming pools and connects the outdoor areas to the indoor, air-conditioned areas, where the sauna, artificial tanning salon, luncheonettes and change rooms are located.

The structure of the building consists of an aluminium trestlework, and the covering is made of sheet steel. Curved cuts in the roof tiles provide natural illumination and serve as a counterpoint to the geometric harshness of the industrialized components. The grandstand is a covered by a concrete structure, and affords a broad view of the entire swimming area. The Park has 13,500 m<sup>2</sup> of constructed area, 3000 m<sup>2</sup> of which comprises the swimming pool.

All the swimming pools were covered with ceramics, always with strong drawings, using pieces of several colours. Besides, the court wall is also covered with ceramic: we worked out several outlines that tell the history of that project. Those outlines were drawn by us on the pieces, which went later on to the kiln.



*Figure 8. Building Address, apart-hotel, São Paulo, Brazil*

• *Building Address, apart-hotel, São Paulo, Brazil*

- project of 1992
- construction ended in 1995

17-floor building, in which we sought a drawing for the beams: waving differentiates forms for each floor. That gave it at the same time lightness and interesting dynamics, differentiating the building in the urban space.

The waving beams lean on the two ends on ceramic-covered pillars:  
20 cm x 20 cm in the navy blue colour.

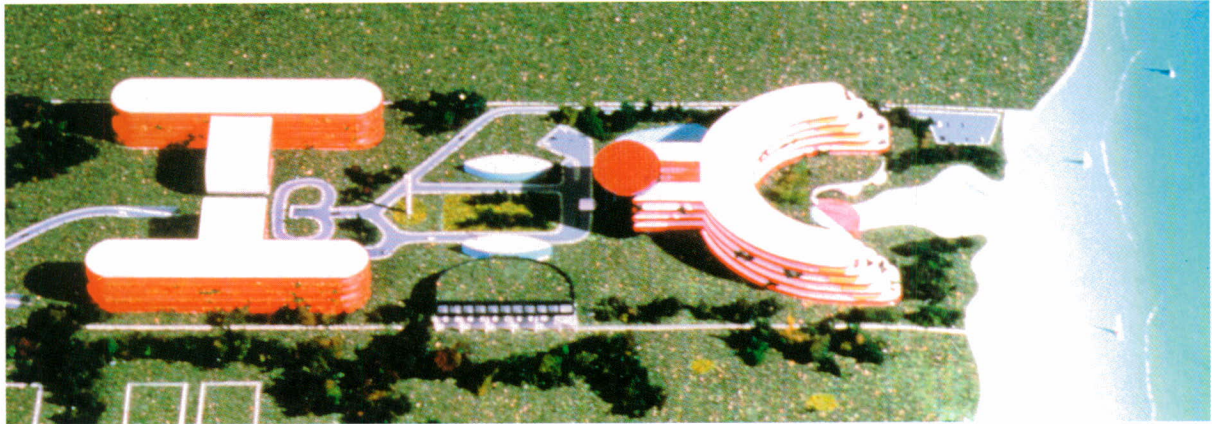


Figure 9. Caesar Park, hotel of Brasília, Brazil

• *Caesar Park, hotel of Brasília, Brazil*

- project of 1997
- work begun in 1998 and conclusion foreseen for the year 2000

Hotel under construction in Brasília, in front of the lake that surrounds the capital. It is a 920-apartment complex, with 4 storeys, in agreement with the local urban legislation. All 5 buildings have rounded forms with a lot of harmony, and the facade has aluminium in the red colour and dark glasses.



Figure 10. Pavilion of São Paulo in the Osaka's Fair, Japan.

• *Pavilion of São Paulo in the Osaka's Fair, Japan*

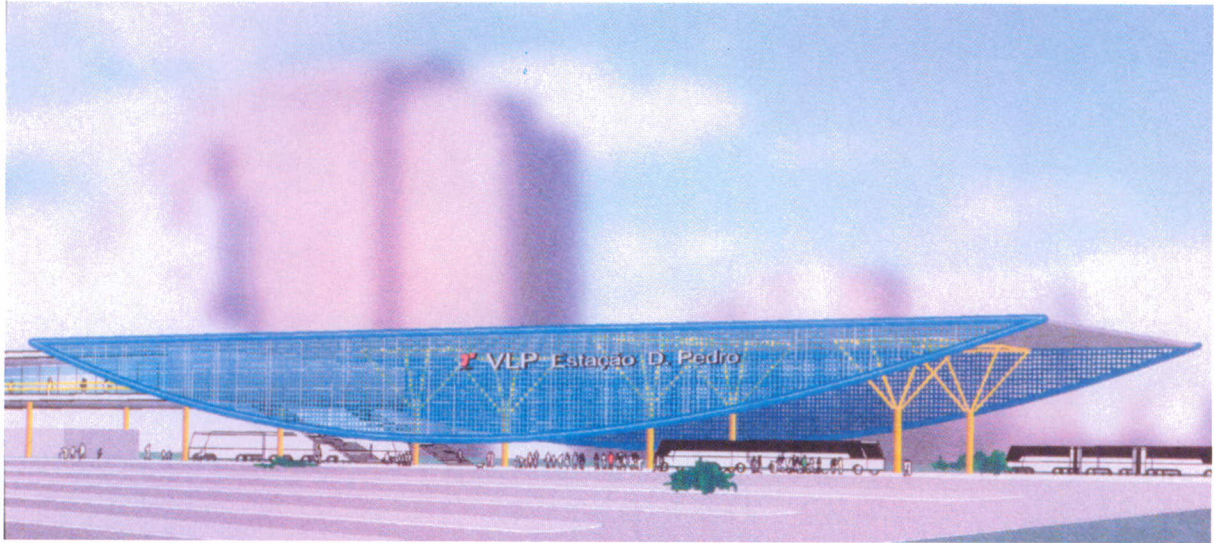
- project of 1989
- construction in 1990

An architectural gesture and two half curves fashioned by a 30 cm thick slab are the basic elements of the São Paulo Pavilion at the 1990 Osaka's International Fair. The curve, which is at the same time floor and covering, defines two

spaces. One is outdoors for shows and expositions and the other is indoors for viewing videotapes and other expositions.

The preliminary draft for the project was drawn up at Ruy's office in São Paulo, but he completed the final details in Osaka. The engineer Mario Franco was responsible for the structural project. After the end of the fair, this was one of the few buildings to be preserved.

This is a São Paulo Town Hall work with construction subsidy of Aoki Corporation.



*Figure 11. Elevated subway - VLP, São Paulo, Brazil*

- *Elevated subway - VLP, São Paulo, Brazil*

- project of 1998
- construction begun in 1999 and conclusion foreseen for 2001

The architectural project to be implemented for the 1st VLP line (Parque D. Pedro / Sacomã), was chosen after a competition organized by the Municipal City hall of São Paulo, through São Paulo Transports, organ of the Municipal Clerkship of the Transports. It is probably one of the most important intervention projects in the urban space of São Paulo. Hence the great importance and meaning of the project for which we propose:

a) Concept

- A simple and very strong drawing for the line, using a curve in metallic plate to cover the 8,5 km of the line. The proportion of that curve was studied carefully; it has a radius of 1,40 m and is painted in the blue colour.
- The 8 intermediary stations are marked with two arches of 12 m in height, showing the cultural commitment of the urban intervention.
- That group (8,5 km of line + stations) is also intended to give the VLP line a strong aesthetic connotation, representing a technology adapted to travelling the streets of São Paulo and also allowing a cultural reach in this urban intervention.

b) Scope of the project

- Plan of the line - part of the line is on the ground and part of it is elevated. The project foresees on each side through which the VLP will run, a metallic curve plate, painted in the blue colour on steel concrete with circular pillars, with empty spaces of 35 meters.

- Stations - the 8 intermediary stations are elevated, even where the plan of the line is on the ground. Those stations are linked to the urban space by catwalks, with almost cylindrical sections and steel covering polycarbonate; the accesses are arranged by ramp and elevator for the handicapped. Areas are foreseen for box office, restrooms and support for operation personnel, besides the blockades for access to the boarding platform.

The boarding platform is reached by moving stairway, stairway and elevator for the handicapped; it has a length of 60 meters and is protected from bad weather by a steel covering polycarbonate.

- Terminals - as it is provisory, the "Terminal Parque D. Pedro" is called "Station of Transfer Parque D. Pedro".

Besides serving the local users, it is also a transfer station integrating the VLP with the buses that already have their own terminal set in a contiguous space.

The accesses (ramps and elevators for handicapped) reach two catwalks, that arrive at the mezzanine. That mezzanine has the blockades, taking users to the VLP, the station exit and to the integrated passage. Small trade, the administrative section of the VLP, with box office control and public restrooms complete the areas of the mezzanine. From there, the users go down to the VLP boarding/disembarking platforms, through fixed and roving stairways, and elevators for the handicapped. An operational block is projected close to the platform, made up of restrooms, deposit for garbage and cleaning material.

"The Sacomã Terminal" is located at the other end of the line. It is set on the basement floor of the bus terminal, with its own operational block. In the mezzanine the users go either to the normal buses - basement floor - or to the VLP - first floor - distinguishing the simple notices from the integrated notices. In this mezzanine there are public restrooms, trade, the administrative block of the VLP with box office and control, drivers' room and Centre of Control. On the second floor there is the boarding/disembarking of the VLP vehicles at their respective platforms and also the maintenance court (small repairs and wash) and parking, besides the escape ramps. A storage area with restrooms gives support to that floor.