

**Sabbatical October 2009**  
**REPORT** by Linda Pollari  
May 19, 2011

## ***Cultural Hybrids in Spanish Architecture***

While on sabbatical during fall semester 2009, I traveled through Spain to see its recent architecture and was able to visit four cities: Bilbao, Madrid, Sevilla and Barcelona.

This sabbatical trip was inspired by a 2006 exhibit at MOMA, "On-Site: New Architecture in Spain," which included fifty-three projects that were under construction or had been completed since 1998. The national and generational diversity of the architects as well variety in scale of the projects, from single-family homes to the enormous Barajas Airport Terminal in Madrid, instigated their selection by the exhibit's curator, Terence Riley, Philip Johnson Chief Curator of Architecture and Design, The Museum of Modern Art.

The robust evolution and expansion of Spanish architecture, demonstrated by the exhibit, directly reflects the evolution of the country itself, post Franco and Spain's subsequent entrance into the EU in 1986. EU funding supported the construction of numerous civil infrastructure projects (highways, bridges, etc.) that then supported investment in Spain's cultural infrastructure with new building projects (museums, auditoriums, stadiums, etc.).

The accompanying publication to the exhibit served as my initial guidebook.

While I was able to see and appreciate, to varying degrees, several of the buildings that were featured in the exhibit, including

***Barajas Airport Terminals***, Madrid (2006)



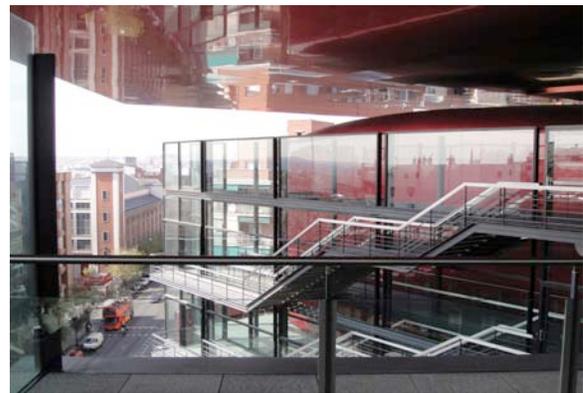
***Barajas Airport Terminals***  
Richard Rogers Partnership and Estudio Lamela

**Metropol Parasol**, Sevilla  
(photographed while under construction,  
completed in 2011)



**Metropol Parasol**  
Juergen Mayer H.  
(A/L/I's 2011 George H. Scanlon Foundation Lecturer)

**Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina  
Sofia Expansion**, Madrid (2005)



**Museo Nacional Centro de Arte Reina Sofia Expansion**  
Jean Nouvel

**Santa Caterina Market**, Barcelona (2005)



**Santa Caterina Market**  
Enric Miralles and Benedetta Tagliabue

**Torre Agbar**, Barcelona (2005)



**Torre Agbar** in distance  
Jean Nouvel

**Gas Natural Headquarters**, Barcelona (under construction at the time of the exhibit, completed in 2007),



**Gas Natural Headquarters**  
Enric Miralles and Benedetta Tagliabue

I became particularly interested in two projects that were built after and not featured in the MOMA exhibit, CaixaForum Madrid and CaixaForum Barcelona, as well as the philanthropic program that produced these buildings.

La Caixa is the largest savings bank in Catalan and the third largest financial institution in Spain. La Caixa also funds a philanthropic wing: la Caixa Foundation, which produced these two extraordinary examples of architectural adaptive reuse, as well as philanthropy.

The **CaixaForums** are part of la Caixa Foundation's Social/Welfare Projects, which include initiatives relating to poverty, social exclusion, health, disease research, culture, diversity and migratory movements. Within the la Caixa's cultural initiatives, the CaixaForums provide permanent building venues where some of their cultural activities such as conferences, seminars, and performing arts may be housed, as well as their ongoing and, typically, permanent exhibits. la Caixa often purchases the art and artifacts that are exhibited in their CaixaForum "museums." Entrance to and all activities at the CaixaForum are free. As advertised by Caixa Foundation: "CaixaForum, a cultural space open to all."

CaixaForum Madrid, Paseo del Prado 36, and CaixaForum, Barcelona Av. de Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia 6-8, are two of five CaixaForums that have been completed to date. The other three, which I did not visit, are in Palma, Tarragona and Lleida. A sixth CaixaForum is being renovated in Girona and there are plans to renovate Las Reales Atarazanas de Sevilla, a 13<sup>th</sup> century building in Sevilla, as a CaixaForum. Additionally, the proposed Caixa Forum Zaragoza will be an exception to the typical practice of locating CaixaForums in historically significant existing structures. The Spanish architectural firm, Estudio Carme Pinós, won an invited competition for a new building for Zaragoza's cultural center. Construction is scheduled for completion in 2012.

All Caixa Forum projects are interesting for their contemporary renovations (in both appearance and function), which also maintain most of the existing historical structures. **CaixaForum Palma** (Mallorca) Plaza de Weyler, formerly the early modern Gran Hotel de Palma, was converted in 1993 into a cultural center. In Tarragona, a 1950's neo-classical structure, designed by a local architect, Pujol i Sevil, (C. de Cristòfor Colom, 2, in the commercial center of the city) was renovated in 2008 as **CaixaForum Tarragona**. An early modern building, the cinema Vinyes, built by the architect Francesc de Palau Morera Gatell in 1915, is now **CaixaForum Lleida**, Av. de Blondel, 3.

The former cultural center Fontana d'Or de Girona is being renovated as the **CaixaForum Girona**. This building was previously property of the Caixa Girona (the bank of Girona), a much smaller, mid-range Catalan savings bank that was absorbed into the much larger la Caixa in early 2010 due to the economic crisis. As the Catalan New Agency stated: it "is a sign of what is to happen in the future: the disappearance of all the smaller banks." While the subject is beyond the scope of this report, it may be interesting, albeit disturbing, to see if la

Caixa's cultural acquisitions are as rapacious as its commercial.

Although I do not have direct knowledge, I believe that the renovations of the Caixa Forums in Palma, Tarragona and Lleida are modest. They, as seen on la Caixa's website, appear to consist of contemporary, but solely functional interiors within undisturbed building shells and surroundings. Alternatively, Madrid's and Barcelona's Caixa Forums are exemplary in the scope of their renovations and fully hybridized appearance and functioning, particularly their entries and relationship to the ground.

The most recently proposed entry in this building program, **CaixaForum Sevilla**, appears as if it could be as fully "hybridized" as in Madrid and Barcelona. The building scheduled to be renovated, Las Reales Atarazanas de Sevilla (The Royal Dockyards of Seville), is a historically important building that was constructed by mandate of Alfonso X el Sabio (Alfonso the Wise) in the 13<sup>th</sup> century. Construction is scheduled for completion in 2015. The architect Guillermo Vázquez Consuegra won a restricted competition (only 10 firms were invited) for a proposal that maintains the existing lower level of seven shipyard naves intact, while opening that level to the city and public entry to become a large gazebo ("un gran mirador"), that will serve as the building's facade. The upper levels will be renovated to provide specific rooms required by the cultural center and connected by a large ramp to the open-plan lower level.

In **Barcelona**, the **CaixaForum** is housed in the renovated Casimir Casaramona i Puigcercós (Casaramona Factory), which initially produced textiles. The original Casaramona Factory building was commissioned by Casimir Casaramona and designed by the then-famous architect Josep Puig i Cadafalch in 1911. It is an example of Barcelona's art-nouveau architecture, which also includes, most notably, work by Antonio Gaudi, although

Puig i Cadafalch was a contemporary and equivalent leader in the art-nouveau movement with Gaudí and Domènech i Montaner.

When completed, the original building was awarded the City Council's prize for the best industrial building. This building was Puig i Cadafalch's last art-nouveau period building. It is constructed out of brick with Catalan vaults supported on castiron columns. The original building is actually a composite of multiple buildings, a series of linear structures topped by battlements that are separated from one another by open-air courtyards.

Prior to the contemporary reconstruction as a CaixaForum, the original factory was refurbished several times, after a period of vacancy just seven years after it opened. It served as a warehouse during the 1929 Barcelona World's Fair and as stables and garages for the National Police Force in 1940. As with other la Caixa properties, it was acquired by la Caixa but not renovated until years later. In this case acquisition was in 1960 and the decision to give the building back to Barcelona, as a CaixaForum, was made in 1992.

The collaborative renovation by Arata Isozaki, Francisco Javier Asarta, Roberto Luna and Robert Brufau was completed in 2002.

CaixaForum Barcelona is located across the street from the reconstruction of the Barcelona Pavilion, which is part of extended grounds in front of le Palau Nacional Museu d'Art de Catalunya.

From the street (Av. de Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia) only the original structure, above grade, and a new metal and glass sculptural awning by the Japanese architect Arata Isozaki are visible.



**CaixaForum Barcelona**  
view from Av. de Francesc Ferrer i Guàrdia



**CaixaForum Barcelona**  
views of Isozaki's awning in front of the renovated building

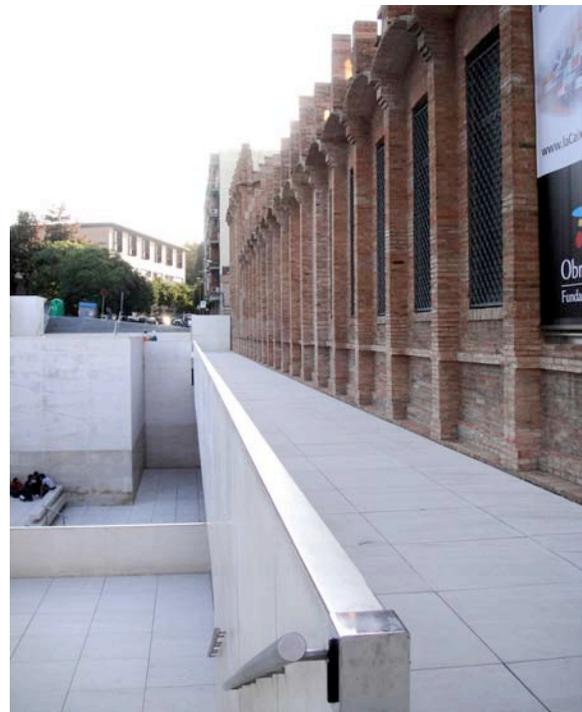
This building's reconstruction is particularly interesting, as is CaixaForum Madrid's, for its relationship to the ground.

Isozaki's awning rests upon grade next to a stair that drops down into a recessed, open-air courtyard. Visitors descend (via the stair, an escalator, or a lift) from grade-level to the below-grade courtyard, which is finished on all surfaces (horizontal, vertical, stairs, decks, fascias, soffits, etc.) with white marble.

In front of the existing building at grade-level, a relatively narrow walkway is finished with the same white marble as the courtyard and framed on the side opposite the building facade with a white marble wall. The wall functions as a guardrail at that (grade) level, but serves as a fascia and soffit for the below-grade, glass-enclosed foyer.



**CaixaForum Barcelona**  
view from courtyard toward Isozaki's awning and entry stair



**CaixaForum Barcelona**  
top: view of marble walkway and guardrail at grade  
bottom: view of marble guardrail appearing as a fascia from the below-grade courtyard

The entry-foyer is an open-plan space, through which one traverses to ascend back to grade-level via an escalator —



**CaixaForum Barcelona**

view into below-grade entry-foyer and existing structure above, at grade

— to access the series of parallel, linear original buildings that have been renovated (interiors only) into white-walled contemporary galleries.



**CaixaForum Barcelona**

typical view of linear courtyard between linear galleries housed in the existing factory structures

**CaixaForum Madrid** (2008), designed by the Swiss architects, Herzog & de Meuron, addresses the ground in the opposite manner to CaixaForum Barcelona.

**While one descends (below grade) to enter in Barcelona, one ascends (above grade) to enter in Madrid.**

CaixaForum Madrid is located in a renovated 1899 power station in the city's cultural district, located on the Paseo del Prado between the Prado and Thyssen-Bornemisza museums to the north, and the Reina Sofia museum to the south. This power station was one of the city's few remaining examples of industrial architecture.

Only the brick façade of the original building was maintained. The building's original windows were filled in with brick of a lighter value, which maintains their legibility.

The base of the building was removed and the existing façade was supported above the ground to create a covered plaza.

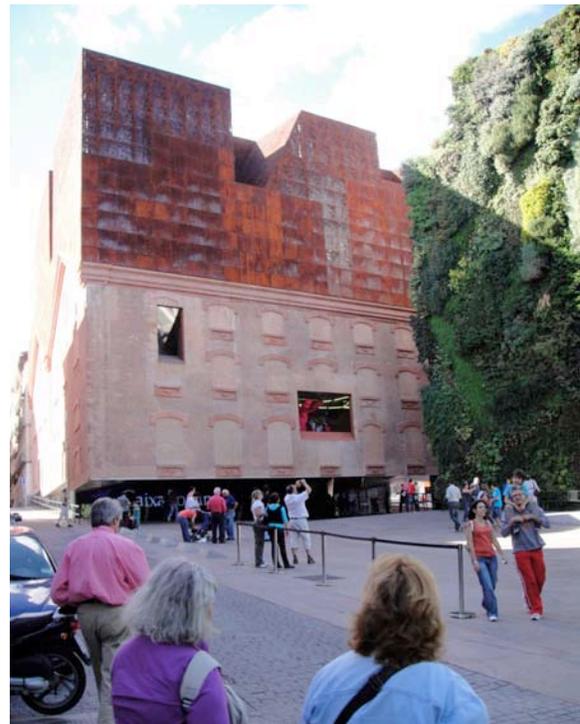
While not fully visible from the exterior, the organization of this new composite building is, essentially, a "sandwich" with a partial filling (of the existing skin). A new top addition and the existing skin are supported above the void of the covered plaza, while a new underground addition includes an auditorium, service spaces and parking.



south-west corner of existing power station before renovation, photographed by Herzog & de Meuron



**CaixaForum Madrid**  
view of infilled facade and metal topper on south facade



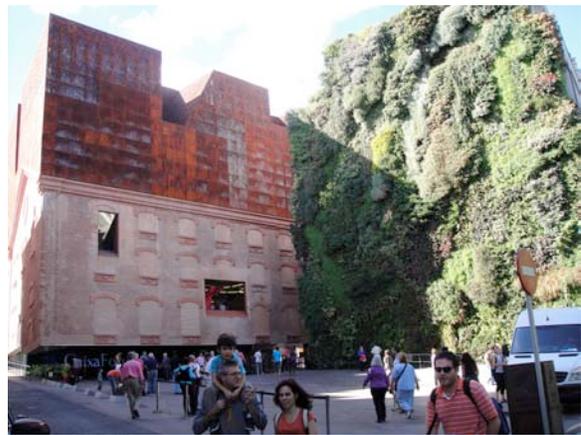
**CaixaForum Madrid**  
view of the renovated building, its open plaza/courtyard and the vertical garden from Paseo del Prado

The extraordinarily condensed, although attracting, plaza immediately below the building was expanded into a partially-bounded courtyard by demolishing a gas station that stood between the power station and Paseo del Prado.

la Caixa Foundation received permission to transform one wall of another building that bordered the new plaza into a twenty-four meter-high vertical garden, designed by the botanist Patrick Blanc.

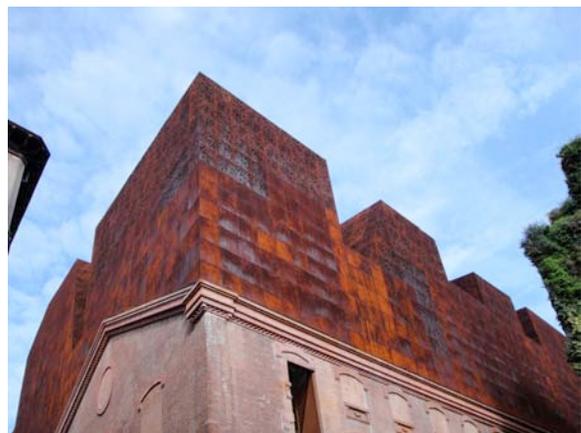
The Paseo del Prado-facing wall of the CaixaForum combined with the vertical garden wall, of approximately the same height, creates a semi-enclosed, open-air courtyard.

Three new glazed windows were carved from and inserted into the existing brick façade, and a metal “topper” was added above the brick facades. This topper was intended to, and does, resemble rooflines of the surrounding buildings.



**CaixaForum Madrid**

top: view of the open plaza/courtyard bounded on one side by the building and on the other by the vertical garden  
bottom: view of the vertical garden



**CaixaForum Madrid**

view of metal topper

Walking south on Paseo del Prado, one first sees a glimpse of the museum's northern façade, which is cut at the bottom in staggered heights to address the sloped, ascending site.



**CaixaForum Madrid**  
view of north facade from Paseo del Prado



**CaixaForum Madrid**  
view of staggered bottom of the north facade

The open space below the raised museum is less than a storey and appears as a building-scale architectural “reveal,” but a reveal that can be occupied.



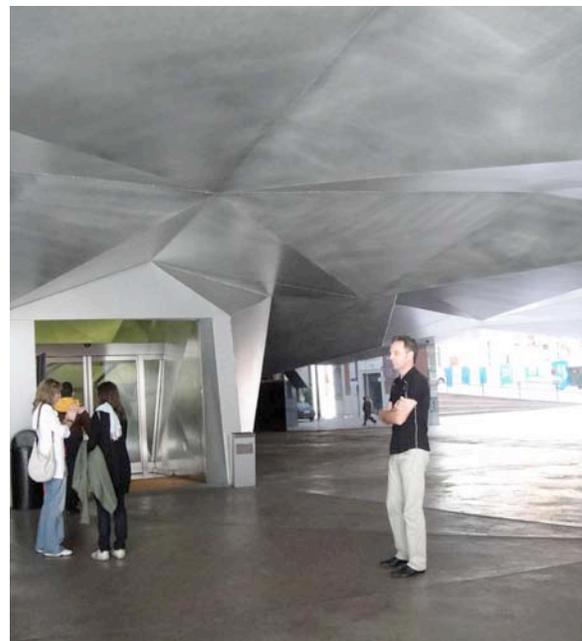
**CaixaForum Madrid**  
view of void/reveal below the building from the courtyard

The museum is entered by crossing the courtyard and going under the building into the “reveal” (covered plaza), where its folded metal soffit becomes visible.



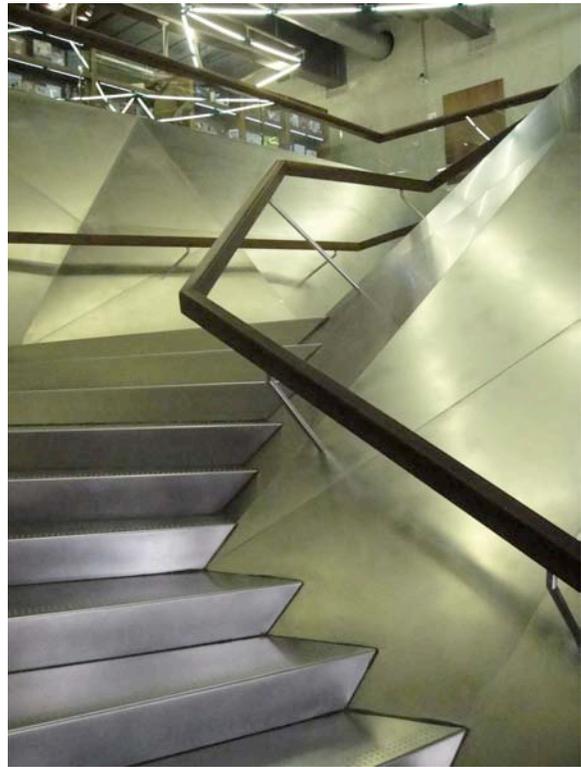
**CaixaForum Madrid**  
view towards Paso del Prado from underneath the building

An entry volume, also finished in metal, continuously folds down from the soffit. This volume holds the entry door and stair to the lobby and masks structure that supports the building above.



**CaixaForum Madrid**  
view of entry volume

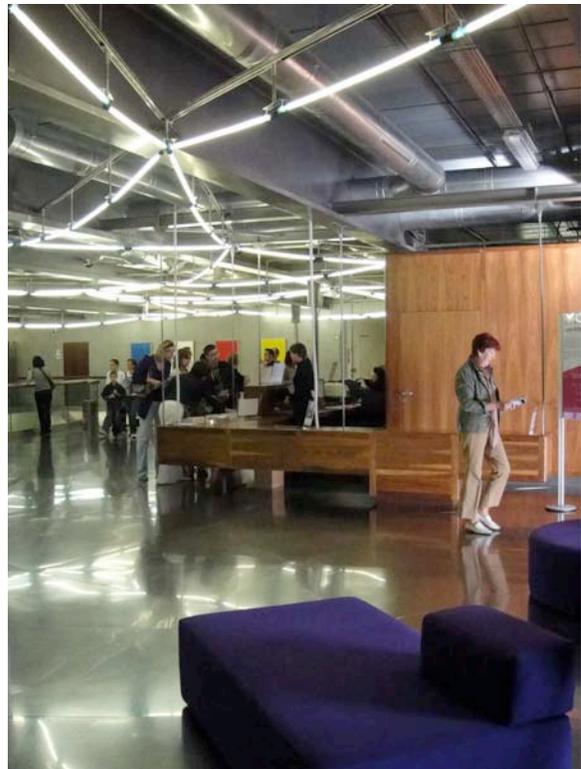
The architectural language of folded metal surfaces continues inside the building on the stair and its surrounding partial walls that function as guardrails.



**CaixaForum Madrid**  
view of/from entry stair

The entry stair is cut and emerges into an open plan lobby, which features a suspended reception desk.

The minor suspension of the desk mimics the suspension of the building itself, whose first floor (lobby) is suspended from structure above.



**CaixaForum Madrid**  
view of lobby and reception desk

As has been typical in Herzog & de Meuron's architecture, the primary focus and effects of this building are in its exterior skin(s).

The beauty of the existing building's roofline and brick facades are pervasively, and wonderfully, maintained by filling them in.

The brick-infilled existing windows are complimented by the "topper," which also can be seen as an infill of metal between the profiles of the existing roofline.

The perforated copper skin of the topper is a signature element in Herzog & de Meuron's architecture, most famously deployed earlier in their design for the de Young Museum in San Francisco (2005).

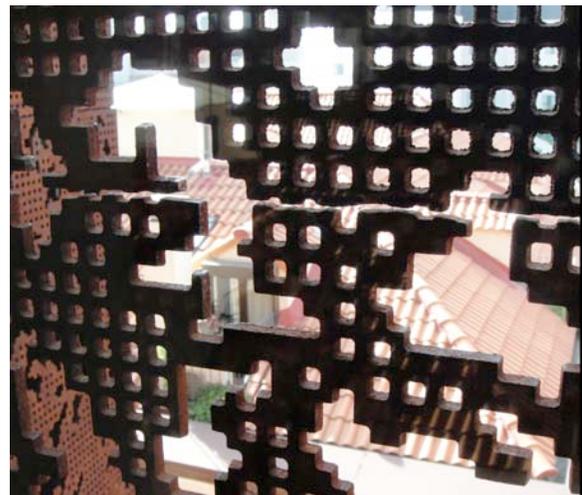
**CaixaForum Madrid** and **CaixaForum Barcelona** are excellent examples of creative solutions to the problems of adaptive reuse and access.

In both cases, the architects were presented with a historically significant structure and the challenge of creating access that maintained legibility of the existing building. Rather than creating new entry volumes that would have obstructed the existing buildings, the architects inserted the entries into voids in two different, opposing manners (in the two buildings), below and above grade. These renovations are instructive examples for students who, prior to their architectural education, typically understand the earth as an immutable and stable base for buildings, rather than as the temporary, shifting plane, which it truly is.

*All photographs were taken by Linda Pollari in October 2009, with the exception of the existing power station in Madrid, as noted. These photographs and others taken during the sabbatical trip have been submitted to OTIS' DID image library for use by the OTIS Community.*



**CaixaForum Madrid**  
view of south-east corner of the building



**CaixaForum Madrid**  
close-up view of the perforated copper skin of the topper, looking out from the top floor restaurant