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CAN LIS

Essays

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# Arkipelaget

## Pamflet nr. 8 2015

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## CAUGHT IN A MASTERPIECE

The man in the photograph is Danish artist Nikolaj Recke and the image is one of several documenting his conceptual work *Caught in a Corner Piece* from 2007.<sup>—1</sup>

The textual pun, using the typology of the corner piece, a well-known category in minimal art, in the title contextualises his personal situation of being unable to break free from the power of inspiration, or to process it into his own production: as if the act of naming the problem releases the spell of inhibition.

Turning inspiration into new and personal work is a challenge faced by all artistic fields. However, this task is often rendered more difficult when the inspiration is closely linked with admiration for its author. It often leads to the creation of omnipotent, mythological idols, as opposed to human beings with artistic abilities and methods we can learn from. Such is the case with Jørn Utzon and his many works, both built and un-built. Can Lis is no exception.

The conceptual framework or guideline for the material presented here is concentration on the subject in question: Can Lis. It restricts its focus to specific discoveries about the house, its creation and occupation. As a dogmatic paradigm, we refrain from writing about the person, his artistic integrity, genius or other value judgements and claims, which so often take centre stage at the expense of the actual built work, and which only confuse our collective understanding of it.

The aim is to write about a building by Jørn Utzon: a building that just happens to be his own house, with all the qualities, challenges and time-induced incoherencies. Like the above-mentioned corner piece, they add up to what can almost be called an architectural category: the architect's own house.

It is our intention to describe what is there, to separate fact from fiction and to tell an unadulterated story about Can Lis. We believe that this will result in a more tangible story of how Jørn Utzon actually worked as an architect and subsequently enable us to enter the work by getting out of the corner piece, crossing the floor, and thereby stepping out of the inspirational paralysis onto a path, where fascination is channelled into production.

The fact that Utzon was profoundly interested in principles, whether from nature or foreign cultures, is well known. We have all seen images of Utzon with a palm leaf in his hand and heard him speak about the principles of growth in nature. This, however, does not help us understand how he transformed this inspiration into some of the most significant buildings of the 20th century. Utzon had a method of activating his prior experiences by importing them into the context of a specific, but not necessarily directly related project, combining principles, often from various cultures, with the pragmatic task confronting him.—<sup>2</sup>

Many people have written about his methods or about what Lin Utzon calls his “key-finding” ability. But Utzon’s silence or reluctance to speak to scholars about his work and design methods—<sup>3</sup> is to some extent to blame for the more speculative and myth-inflating stories. This has resulted in the exact opposite of what Richard Weston claims was Utzon’s reason for not speaking: that he wanted to avoid “falling prey to overly academic art history.”—<sup>4</sup>

With the opening of Can Lis to the public or, in Utzon’s eyes maybe even worse, to “scholars of art and architecture”, we can expect a renewed interest, not only in this house, but also in other works by Jørn Utzon. With this renewed interest and the still relatively limited access to the house, the risk of building on previously conceived writings and myths is imminent, thereby missing what the house really is.

We can visit the house and, as all good architecture deserves, experience it, instead of studying it at a distance. However, the recent renovation with its series of questionable alterations from the original scheme and original principles of its architect, may lead to misunderstandings, which, if published, would form an incorrect basis for future academic writing.

This is exactly the kind of academic writing, which Utzon tried to avoid his work being subjected to. That is why this essay will aim to avoid drawing on writings about the house, instead basing itself on observations made *in* the house and its context: the island of Majorca.

The intention is merely to unearth something that is already there, something that can be experienced by everyone prepared to see it, something that will provide an understanding of a certain aspect of Utzon’s design methods, freeing us from the mythological shackles or creative paralysis of the masterpiece, and letting us take away some genuine inspiration as a token of our pilgrimage.

The drive to Can Lis is an introduction to the rural landscape of southeast Majorca: olive trees, farmhouses, tool sheds and stone walls lining the narrow lanes between fields. There is no way around this experience and anyone with a tiny bit of curiosity will at some point end up randomly exploring the immediate surroundings. A trip from Can Lis and through the rural landscape between the nearby towns of S’Alqueria Blanca, Cas Concos and Felanitx, is like a catalogue of materials, building elements and details easily recognisable in Can Lis. Time and time again one is rewarded with first-hand experience of Utzon’s references for the design of the house.

The *marés*, a soft local limestone, is the most obvious. According to Jan Utzon, the *marés* stone was chosen for its low cost and the ease of adaptation on site. The stone blocks measuring 800x400x200 or 800x400x100

millimetres could, while still fresh from the quarry, be cut with a regular hand saw, thus enabling workers to cut each individual block as needed to turn corners or adapt to certain features such as apertures etc.

To ease the process of building and to obtain the most efficient use of materials, Utzon and his oldest son Jan had made construction drawings of every wall, internally and externally, but, as documented in interviews with Utzon's children, the builder did not follow the drawings. Instead of building in the specified quarter-bond, he built with the simpler half-bond, resulting in the corner details having to be solved as a deviation from, rather than a continuation of the façade.

Whereas the simpler half-bond links nicely to the vernacular tradition of using the simplest possible system, the proposed quarter-bond would probably have given the volumes of Can Lis a more refined sense of material continuation, lifting them from their rural precedence and clearly underlining the use of a local inexpensive material as an aesthetic choice and the projection of an idea; not just as the historical use of a local material and building tradition.

Whether due to Utzon's methodological approach, the "we-don't-give-a-damn" attitude of the original builder, the technical issues that were to influence the appearance of the house over time, or all of the above, Can Lis does indeed come across as rooted in a local building tradition, in a way which any local architect would rarely dream of pursuing.

Manuel Cabellos, a local architect who from 1983-2003 was Director of Urban Planning and Municipal Architect of Palma de Mallorca has said:

*"Utzon has here [in Can Lis, ed.] understood the 'spirit' of the Mediterranean, the light, the landscape and the local materials. Even better than any other architect from Majorca".—<sup>5</sup>*



How is this possible, you might ask? And how do we avoid the constant trap of hyperbole when discussing this masterpiece?

Utzon was fascinated by the Mediterranean and by the island of Majorca in particular. According to interviews, Utzon and his family visited the island a number of times, the first time as early as in 1957, and later on invitation from Hagen and Tata Hasselbalch (whose house happens to be just a few hundred metres up the road from Can Lis), before commencing on the first built project. As a natural part of these visits, Utzon toured the island and, to a much larger extent than possible today, discovered the vernacular tradition of the island's pre-touristic era. During their first visit to Majorca, Utzon and his wife bought several pieces of land in the hills above S'Horta, the future site of Can Feliz. Much later, in 1967, after failing to get building permission for the first purchase, they bought the land on the coast, where they would eventually build Can Lis.

By this time Utzon had been visually saturated by the local building culture, something that was to be highly visible in the project. However, he had not yet "gone native" and still had the ability to see things that had been missed or disregarded by the local eye. In this respect, Utzon presents evidence of the power of the external gaze and the ability to introduce particular qualities of a culture to the local population. It also indicates a certain degree of methodological consistency based on his educational background.

Awareness of the qualities inherent in the vernacular or traditional buildings of a region played an important role in the education of architects at the Royal Danish Academy in the late '30s and early '40s. It was a period under the administrative and artistic leadership of Kay Fisker and Steen Eiler Rasmussen, who were both influenced and inspired by P.V. Jensen-Klint and Carl Petersen. Their work and their studies of local and traditional building culture had great impact on the teaching in the Academy.

Utzon, who studied at the Royal Danish Academy from 1937-1942, was trained to see, and methodically identify key aspects of a historic building culture and put these into renewed use, projecting them from the past into an idea of the future under the cultural influence of today.

Hagen and Tata Hasselbalch's house in Majorca from 1964 is another example of this approach. From Utzon's youngest son Kim, we know that Can Geroni, as this house is named, had some impact on the choices made for the design of Can Lis. In its original version, Can Geroni, like most other residential houses in Majorca at the time, had rendered outer walls. However, due to the harsh coastal climate, the rendering had to be redone every second year. This prompted Utzon to look for another local material.

Utzon had seen marés stone used in rural buildings and stone walls throughout the countryside and admired it for its colour, its tactile qualities and the direct traces of production sometimes left by the large circular saws used to cut it from the cliffs. As Kim Utzon explains, his father was a *machinist*, celebrating the traces of the particular tools of production and dismissing the erasure of these traces by post-production finishes. As far as Utzon was concerned, showing the mode of production clearly and uncompromisingly on the surface was the highest level of cultural expression an object could hold, and the marés possessed this in abundance.

At the same time, its porous character and its tendency to absorb moisture made the marés problematic when used untreated in residential buildings: especially buildings placed on the coast. As a pragmatic answer to this, Utzon introduced the cavity wall, so familiar in his home country, but uncommon on Majorca.

Here, the practical aspects of a technique based in the colder climate of the Scandinavian countries merged with a material used in the warm and relatively dry climate of inland Majorca. As time would show, Utzon

unfortunately underestimated both the impact of the wind, salt and humidity and the importance of the quality of the specific stones, when he decided to use the inexpensive marés on the exposed site of Can Lis.

When you compare the early images published of Can Lis with the images of today, there is one physical feature, other than the marés, which adds to the local appearance of the house.

Originally the four volumes of Can Lis had an almost non-existing detail capping the walls. The top edges of the outer walls were sharply defined against the sky, with the upward-facing surfaces of marés only being capped by flat, glazed ceramic roofing tiles, placed flush with the edges of the façade and hardly visible from below. Technically this solution rendered the upper part of the wall vulnerable to water seeping into the porous stone and into the cavity walls. When the roof, due to excessive leaks as described elsewhere, was refurbished around ten years after the completion of the house, this capping was changed to a tried and tested detail: a detail to be found in most masonry-based building cultures and also in Majorca. Curved roof tiles were placed on top of the now extended wall at an angle and with an overhang large enough to keep the water from running down the façade. According to Lin Utzon, this solution and detail, however local it might seem at first, was for Jørn Utzon, as for so many others, the logical solution to a problem. This testimony is supported by looking at other Utzon projects: for example, the houses in Fredensborg, the Kingo Houses in Elsinore or his second house in Majorca, Can Feliz, where the same detail is found. This indicates that it had nothing to do with imitation of a local style and everything to do with sound building practice.

Other directly linked vernacular parallels would be: the general use of *bovedillas* for the roof structure and ceilings; the off-the-shelf concrete beams also found throughout the countryside; the overall typology of the fixed furniture in the courtyards, recognisable from

nearby town squares; and the triangular chimneys, commonly known as Catalan chimneys. The list continues and every excursion from Can Lis into the surrounding landscape, its villages and towns adds fresh examples.

What you experience in Can Lis is a catalogue of vernacular motifs, some used directly, some translated, combined to form a strong architectural solution. Thus Can Lis captures the local identity without becoming trivial, and succeeds in being both rooted in, and unique to the local context. This is expressed by the praise from respected architects such as Manuel Cabello, Antoni Alomar and Raphael Moneo.<sup>—6</sup> But what led Utzon to this point?

For a twenty-year period, starting in the early 1950s, Jørn Utzon travelled extensively, even by the standards of today. The buildings and cultural artefacts he discovered during his trips became an integral part of his way of creating. Utzon is said not to have photographed much, but his personal library, now divided between his children, testifies to a way of keeping the specific buildings, particularly the building culture of the countries he visited, alive in his memories.

A large number of books from China, Japan, the Middle East and North Africa (many in the native languages) line the shelves in Kim Utzon's Copenhagen office, confirming stories from former Utzon employees about the exact references that inspired him, and how he used them both as inspiration and to exemplify his ideas and principles to the people around him<sup>—7</sup>. Flipping through these volumes, one witnesses Utzon's pragmatic way of categorising what he saw on the pages: the corner of the page folded once = *good*; the corner of the page folded twice = *very good*. The pages are naturally filled with notes and comments, even sketches overlaying the illustrations. What they all have in common is that they are examples of principles turned into architectural solutions: something that had lasting qualities and could be built on. Even though Utzon's reference

library is dominated by architectural wonders such as Mayan temples in Mexico, Buddhist temples in Asia and the great mosques of the Middle East and India, the grandeur of these references never seems to have become a creative inhibition.

The reason might lie in the fact that the same library contains almost as many volumes documenting the vernacular building culture of the same regions. In the spectrum between the sacred and the profane, the monumental and the vernacular, Utzon seems to have found a key to understanding and extracting the principles of each individual building culture. It appears as if Utzon tried to understand a building culture by looking at its religious buildings and the conditions of climate and everyday life by looking at its vernacular architecture. This approach was not so different from that which was taught at the Royal Academy and to which I referred earlier. While Utzon may have replaced the regional map of Scandinavia with a map of the world, his ability to understand, not just to see, a building culture, and to use that understanding as the basis for creating contemporary architecture, is directly linked to the method he was taught during his studies many years earlier.

Utzon was beyond any doubt a rare and talented architect or, as Kim Dirckinck-Holmfeld writes, *"in possession of a strongly receptive mind"*<sup>—8</sup>, but this is no excuse not to learn from his methodological approach.

The fact that the recent restoration of Can Lis makes this task more difficult than it should be is a shame. It unfortunately adds yet another example of misunderstood sanctification and results in a less nuanced image of Utzon and his work as an architect.

It is too easy to get caught in the masterpiece, to explain the quality of a building or artwork through myths or stories and to fabricate heroic images, which prevent us from discovering a building in a productive way. In a small quotation in Henrik Sten Møller and

Vibe Udsen's book, *Jørn Utzon Houses*, Utzon himself reveals a key to looking at, and ultimately understanding architecture. This also provides a key for us to look at his architecture today.

*"If you view architecture in yet another way, evaluating a building purely from the sensation of joy it gives, you experience it alone through your senses and thus become a user in terms of the architect's original notion. You are then experiencing the building as the architect intended".*<sup>—9</sup>

Knowing that masterpieces are seldom created by people who set out to do so, we can free ourselves from unproductive sanctification and allow ourselves to understand Utzon's way of importing, translating and projecting architectural inspiration, while we patiently wait for the paint to dry.

#### Notes

- 1  
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## THE STONES OF CARRER MEDIA LUNA

Niels Park Nygaard  
Aida Espanyol Vilanova

### Post Titanic

A Danish professor of architecture has asserted that:

*... there is only one quality that is fundamental in architecture: the quality of the 'work'. Architecture is constituted by its works. The realisation of Jørn Utzon's Sydney Opera was a 'Titanic' for contemporary architects. Here the hope of a grand, unfolding coherence of building and society was shipwrecked. When the public client demanded competitive bidding instead of allowing Utzon to continue with his collaborating builders, they violated the integrating force that carries a work. The work was rejected by the network of power.*

(Juel-Christiansen, Carsten, 1995: "Arkitekturværkets Sted", in Arkitekten vol. 97, #16. Our translation, NPN/AEV).

The point here is not whether or not the quote presents a feasible account of the events in Sydney that caused Utzon to retreat. The points are merely that this 'Titanic' moment was, inevitably, the psychological and professional, not just the chronological background, against which Can Lis was designed and built, and that Juel-Christiansen on very few lines asserts a normative version of the architect and of architecture quite far from the facilitating process consultant and the easy, market fitting commodity. Rather, Juel-Christiansen's stance seems to point back in time, as we are presented with a version of Utzon as the medieval master builder: first, there is the idea of the master builder or architect as the guarantor of a grand coherence of architecture and society; second there is a continuum from genial master builder to the simplest worker, where architect



and craftsman form an organic unity. When mundane, blunt, insensitive power wedges in and breaks this bond, there can, asserts Juel-Christiansen, no longer be a grand coherence between the built and society or culture, and hence there can be no true work of architecture.

#### Pre Modern

If one compares the longitudinal section of the temple of Solomon (as redrawn based on descriptions in the Tanakh) with a north-south section of one of the private compartments of Can Lis, the similarity is striking. At one end, where the opening is, there is a zone or articulation with a lowered ceiling height, but the floor flush with the middle part, as a kind of funnel between interior and exterior. In the middle, the ceiling is very high up, and in the rear it ends with a kind of alcove (from Spanish: *alcoba*; from Arabic: *al-qobbah*: (the) vaulted chamber) with a lowered ceiling and elevated floor height. Even the little window high up in the south-western corner of the living room of Can Lis has a parallel in the reconstructed drawings of the Bet HaMikdash in Jerusalem.

There is nothing mysterious about this. The formative principles of the world are finite, limited. Consequently, so are the ideas and inventions of men, not least in architecture. Hence the same forms will occur again and again, and under quite different circumstances. One can also find the ancient Chinese moon gate, the Greco-Roman stoa and other architectural archetypes in Can Lis, if one wishes.

Nevertheless there is something solemnly archaic about Can Lis, a touch of what one also experiences in Lewerentz's churches of St. Mark and St. Peter from the 1960's, which undoubtedly wielded inspiration on Utzon around the time he designed his first house on Mallorca, at least in terms of the serene roughness and characteristic apertures. But perhaps more like La Seu, the Gothic cathedral in Palma than the churches of

Lewerentz, the apertures in Can Lis modulate a sense of the outer world through extensive and intricate spatial manipulations – to the extent where the south-facing perimeters are no longer mere walls, but a complex fibrous system of mass, cavities, niches and apertures. Another difference from Lewerentz's work that makes Can Lis point more to Gothic architecture than to 1960's Swedish architecture, is its orderliness. Though pristine and rough around the edges, there is a cosmological order and seriality at play in Can Lis, a reflection of bonds in floor and ceiling etc., features not to be found in the late works of Lewerentz. This is not to suggest that Utzon's work is apocryphally Neo-Gothic. However a digression to Gothic architecture seems worthwhile; not only the built itself, but the ways in which ideas of 'the Gothic' have been handed down to us, particularly when it comes to ideas of the role of the architect.

Within the realm of architecture we seem to have inherited two versions of 'Gothic': one, the romanticist, historicist, Ruskinian, is Gothic as the style organic, as the results of the free imagination and spontaneous creativity of the individual worker; another, as colported by e.g. Gottfried Semper and later Erwin Panofski, is Gothic as a scholastic, thoroughly intellectually conceived art of reflections and repetitions, of rationality and order – cosmos – from the whole to its minute details.

The two versions, let us call them the immanent and emergent versus the transcendental and projecting, seem mutually exclusive, yet they seem to co-exist or even merge as concepts. The antinomy is overruled by the fact that both versions are about an idea of architecture, not as a mere cultural discourse, a mode of expression or a reflection of philosophical or religious ideas, but an architecture that profoundly is culture and society, materialised in the concrete work. And 'work' in this concrete, real sense is still an element in contemporary architectural discourse, as Carsten Juel-Christiansen exemplifies. Thus both points are echoed in Antoni Alomar's statements: "And he [the builder]

says 'I am your hands''': the architect and the builder as literally one body. And Alomar continues:

*And [the importance of] being present... I was going to the building sites a lot. Utzon was there the entire day. I know this for sure. He was there to stack stones with them [the masons]. Of course he was coming from the problems he had at Sydney. He was burnt from what I have heard. He was badly burnt. However here the opposite happened... and this is how we have always been doing it here. It is architecture in contact with construction and about deciding things according to day-to-day requirements and conditions on site - in enjoyable collaboration with a good builder...*

#### **Nature of Error**

We know from Utzon's children that it is not entirely true that Jørn Utzon was there most of the time on the scaffolding working with the masons. On the contrary, Utzon's absence from the construction site was why and when the first errors, or deviations from the drawings, occurred. When building the first, eastern part, the masons apparently only followed the plan drawings, not the sections and elevations. Not necessarily because they were unable to understand architectural drawings. Maybe they misunderstood the task as building a functional, practical holiday home on the coast, and not as serving someone from the pantheon of architecture in realising his grand idea. Anyway let us make a digression to errors and deviations from the plans, since this seems to be an important part of the history of Can Lis.

Since the beginning of industrialisation, a fear of what is uniform and perfect, and an embrace of the incidental, the 'imperfect', the erroneous, has been a moment in ideas on architectural creation. And in fact this is a very salient aspect of Gothic architecture as presented by Ruskin:



*It seems a fantastic paradox, but is nevertheless a most important truth, that no architecture can be truly noble which is not imperfect. ... and the demand for perfection is always a sign of a misunderstanding of the ends of art. This for two reasons, both based on everlasting laws. The first, that no great man ever stops working till he has reached his point of failure: that is to say, his mind is always far in advance of his powers of execution, and the latter will now and then give way in trying to follow it ... I believe there has been only one man who would not acknowledge this necessity, and strove always to reach perfection, Leonardo; the end of his vain effort being merely that he would take ten years to a picture and leave it unfinished. Of human work none but what is bad can be perfect, in its own bad way.*

*The second reason is, that imperfection is in some sort essential to all that we know of life. It is the sign of life in a mortal body, that is to say, of a state of progress and change. Nothing that lives is, or can be, rigidly perfect; part of it is decaying, part nascent. ... And in all things that live there are certain irregularities and deficiencies which are not only signs of life, but sources of beauty. ...*

*Accept this then for a universal law, that neither architecture nor any other noble work of man can be good unless it be imperfect; and let us be prepared for the otherwise strange fact, which we shall discern clearly as we approach the period of the Renaissance, that the first cause of the fall of the arts of Europe was a relentless requirement of perfection, incapable alike either of being silenced by veneration for greatness, or softened into forgiveness of simplicity.*

(Ruskin, 1852: *The Stones of Venice*)

This repulsion for perfection existed as an aesthetic norm before the 19th century (one should not dare compete with God), and subtle errors were deliberately built into timepieces, buildings etc. In the 19th and

20th centuries shunning the perfect was about something else (- or was it?): It was about what was machine-made and mass-produced, and hence perfectly uniform, causing estrangement from the natural world and thus from ourselves. Apart from the references to Nature, as he mentions Leonardo, we can glimpse another version of the 'Titanic' moment of art in Ruskin's writing. Here it is not an external force: a mundane, insensitive, instrumental rationality that kills off the work. It is the artist's own (or perhaps rather that of the culture he is embedded in) striving for perfection. It is arguable that this is just as feasible an explanation of the 'Titanic' in Sydney as Juel-Christiansen's.

*We can hear an echo of Ruskin and the 19th century in the statements and lectures of Alvar Aalto, in whose Helsinki office Utzon worked briefly in 1945. In contrast to Ruskin, Morris and others, Aalto considered mechanisation and standardisation as part of democracy, and he approved of technology as having the potential to liberate mankind. However, the same technology could also enslave us and impoverish our culture and lives. Late in his life, Aalto formulated a norm of 'anti-perfectionism' that referred both to religious traditions and to nature - in the quotation below even in one and the same sentence!*

We can say that architecture always contains a human error, and in a deeper view, it is necessary; without it, the richness of life and its positive qualities cannot be expressed.

*... In most religions, no attempt is made to eliminate human error, or even to correct it, but to discover means, by which to be able to live with error, just as a good gardener manages in his work to turn mistakes into positive results.*

(Aalto, ca. 1974: *Human Error*)

In 1948, a few years after returning to Denmark from Helsinki and Aalto, and probably influenced by Aalto's earlier parables of architecture and nature, Utzon addressed natural growth as a means of understanding how architectural design should be conceived. In a way, Utzon was more radical, or perhaps more concise than both Ruskin and Aalto, since he avoided speaking of errors and imperfection, but simply of difficulties, absorbed into the development of the project as new factors, not as Ruskin's "imperfect" or Aalto's "errors" one has to "live with":

It [architectural design] requires an ability to create harmony from all the demands made by the undertaking, an ability to persuade them to grow together to form a new whole – as in nature; nature knows of no compromise, it accepts all difficulties, not as difficulties but merely as new factors which with no sign of conflict evolve into a whole.

(Utzon, 1948: *The Innermost Being of Architecture*)

Inasmuch as bureaucratic insensitivity and instrumental rationality can be considered as yet more 'difficulties' and 'new factors', it could be argued that Utzon did not comply with his own professional stance as formulated in 1948 when leaving Sydney. He contributed to the myth and the Howard Roarke-like image of the unimpeachable professional and personal integrity of the true architect, whereas he perhaps really 'made a Leonardo', to transpose Ruskin to contemporary lingo.

On Carrer Media Luna the conditions were different: it was not possible to walk out on the client, as the client was himself, so he was forced to stay on the job. It can even be argued that he was forced to stand by, and even thoroughly unfold and develop, his own stance and approach to architecture and to being an architect.

## Synthesis

These juxtapositions and discussions somehow came up during our stays in Can Lis. There could be many other and probably more appropriate literary and historic sources, with which to enrich and underpin a discussion of this house. However, the statements of Ruskin, Aalto, Alomar and the built and written work of Utzon seem to have a profound intellectual consistency. They share a concept of 'Nature', not merely as a metaphor, but as a concern with architecture as emergence rather than projection. They share an interest in the vernacular or, as Alomar puts it, 'anti-architecture', where 'anti' should be understood in its original Greek meaning as 'other', not as 'counter' (see interview with Alomar in *Quaderns #256*). They share an embrace of the incidental, the 'imperfect', the erroneous, the 'difficulties'.

Can Lis itself, as a house and a work of architecture, seems to integrate contingencies, errors, imperfections or difficulties with a projection of order and rigour: an organic integration that undoubtedly caused frustration during, and after the construction process, but nevertheless feels natural and effortless to the visitor.

It all points to aspects of Utzon's work that transcend modern architecture and even modernity: aspects that arguably had their 'Titanic' moment in Sydney, but found a fruitful environment for expression in the social, cultural and material conditions of a Mediterranean island around 1970.

UNDERMINING ARCHITECTURE:  
REDRESSING THE MYTHOLOGIES OF CAN LIS

Gerard Reinmuth

Given Utzon is so revered, it is strange that a full and reliable account of his mode of practice is so evasive. The accounts we do have are mostly a commentary around his inspirations and conceptual ideas (the story of a creative genius) and little about how he actually practiced and about the processes he used to arrive at design decisions. The gap between these two has given rise to some of the strangest writing in recent architectural history and design theory<sup>1</sup> as former colleagues and others have attempted to explain Utzon in practice without a professional detachment.

Studying Can Lis has provided an opportunity to address some of these dilemmas. A small building with effectively half a dozen details, the house can be easily described and understood, both in documents and as experienced on site. Further, the purpose of the house – as a home for Utzon, his wife Lis and their youngest son Kim – clarifies the authority of Utzon’s surviving family members as witnesses of his work methods in this particular case.

Yet writings about Can Lis have tended to significantly misrepresent Utzon’s processes of design and the procurement of the buildings. For example, the conjecture that Utzon worked directly with builders from sketches<sup>2</sup> has become orthodoxy – contributing to a heroic image of Utzon as artist-creator on the cliff tops of Mallorca forming the house with his own hands. Yet our research shows this is only part of the story and ignores the completeness of practice of which he was capable. Subsequently the discipline is undermined as generations of students are led to believe that all you need are some good ideas rendered in soft pencil abstractions and the rest will follow.

Can Lis is a story of a conceptually ruthless architect insistent on fastidious working drawings that are constantly updated and redrawn to incorporate adjustments made on site.<sup>3</sup> Every stone is laid out, every piece of structure drawn, every opening precisely located, every door and window fully detailed.



Fig. 1

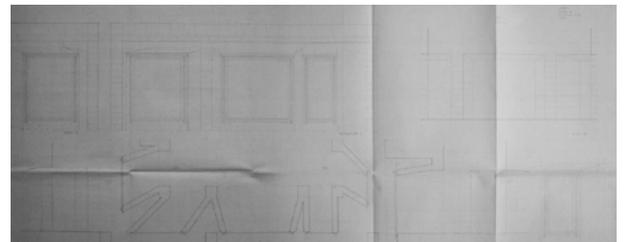


Fig. 2

These working drawings also address the contingencies and constraints one normally finds in the professional realm: council boundary setbacks (determining the general orientation of each block to fit inside these setback lines); thermal and other environmental performances (the use of northern European cavity wall construction); materials detailing and buildability; and economy (the use of a local material palette and construction methodology). Changes were made on site but this process was, in many ways, no different from any architect working with a contractor to solve problems created by either the design, new site information and discoveries or incorrectly built parts of the project. For a practitioner who has been fortunate enough to visit Can Lis on several occasions, questions arose as to how Utzon managed to deliver one of the most breathtaking architectural experiences despite the contingencies of the local conditions and builders that were evident from a range of unexpected details on site.

#### Can Lis: Principles and Conditions

We must remember that Can Lis has given us one of the best-known conceptual sketches in 20th century architecture – a sketch completed some 10 years after the project and to accompany an article written for a Denis Lasdyn anthology.<sup>4</sup> Utzon’s humorous side led him to title two thick pencil sketches as “working drawings” – resulting in significant subsequent misunderstanding. It is a common assumption that these drawings, or something like them, were in fact the principal documents from which the house was built when in fact they were completed much later.<sup>5</sup>

What Utzon was saying in titling these as “working drawings” was that, contained within them, was all the knowledge required to develop and detail the house.<sup>6</sup> The *actual* working drawings are easily recognizable for their conventional appearance and role in the procurement of the building.

Mogens Prip-Buus recently articulated his understanding of Utzon’s diagrammatic approach noting that he worked not with “rules” but with “*principles and conditions*”<sup>7</sup>. That is, Utzon developed a series of principles for each project that were described in conceptual diagrams. The “conditions” of site, building and so on were understood as contingent in nature and thus were allowed to inform how the key principles were deployed. This is not to say that the principles were non-negotiable – if adjustments to the principles were unavoidable, they would be abandoned and a new strategy developed that was more appropriate to their task. Rather, the conditions or contingencies faced in practice were accepted as part of the context. A picture starts to emerge of Utzon not as a heroic creator but a practitioner who worked back and forth between the principles he evolved for a project and the conditions of their deployment, conditions that led in part to the creation of the principles, thus completing the circle.

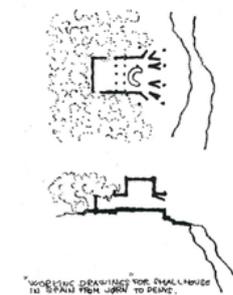


Fig. 3

### Can Lis: The organization of Utzon's private world

Like most of Utzon's sketches, the Can Lis drawings are underpinned by an emphasis on organization - not so much a radical rethinking of the domestic condition but rather a hyper amplification of it. The amplification was not done in service of a larger abstract idea about the housing type but was a response to Jørn Utzon's personal requirements for his own home<sup>8</sup>.

These requirements emanated from extremely specific personal needs. It is well documented that Utzon had a great preference for privacy - remembering that although his house at Hellebaek is located 500 metres away from a spectacular coastal view, he preferred the isolation of the forest. In Mallorca this led to the selection of the site, where the curvature of the cliff top road in plan isolates a pair of adjacent sites with no neighbours. Utzon subsequently purchased one of the sites (the other was a national park) and then purchased large areas of vacant land across the road so he would never have street neighbours either<sup>9</sup>. Utzon's insomnia<sup>10</sup> makes sense of his design of separate bedrooms for he and his wife and their location in a separate pavilion, one of the five that comprise the house. The Utzons' lack of interest in cooking - they preferred to eat lunch and dinner at local restaurants<sup>11</sup> - resulted in a minimal kitchen arrangement and the resolution of appliances and so on.

### Can Lis: In Construction

Despite the existence of a set of working drawings, the first pavilion completed on site contained a number of errors made by a builder working remotely and not used to the demands inherent in Utzon's working drawings - and who was used to building in the so-called "Ibiza style" where exact tectonic decisions were less relevant under their outer coat of cement render. The impact of these errors was felt not only in the significant redrawing required but also in the way the remainder of the house was procured.

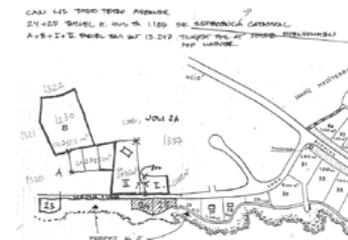


Fig. 4



Fig. 5

### Kim's room

As outlined in the MYSTERIES, in 1972 Utzon arrived in Mallorca to inspect work on the first completed part of Can Lis, the northernmost pavilion of the building – only to find that the builder had simply elected not to build the high part of the volume as they had determined it would be too difficult<sup>12</sup>. Instead the builders showed Utzon his perfectly measured working drawing with an “x” (confirming their independent decision to delete an entire space from the room) written in ballpoint pen through the high volume in the cross section. As a result of this change, the structural setout was also adjusted, leaving a beam going through the centre of the entry door. To cap it off, the block bonding had also been changed from  $\frac{3}{4}$  to standard bond and a drawing of the in-ground desk had been misunderstood and built as a hole in the floor.

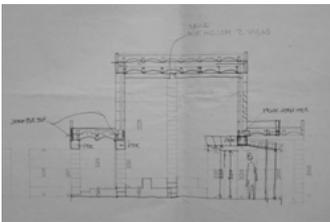


Fig. 6



Fig. 7

The outcome of this ambivalent site visit – Kim Utzon vividly remembers his father's excitement at the material qualities of the stone but frustration at the errors made<sup>13</sup> – resulted in the need for the house to be completely re-documented to ensure that the mistakes from Kim's room were repeated in the later areas to achieve consistency. The inelegant quoin details at the external corners and which result from the incorrect stone bonding is one of many aspects of the house that still jars today (Fig. 7). Other hidden problems were not to reveal themselves for months or years later, such as the substitution of waterproofing membrane in the roof planes with used paper bags that had contained the cement used in the mortar.<sup>14</sup>

To avoid further errors, Utzon also decreed at this time that the builders could no longer undertake building work unless he, his wife Lis, or his eldest son Jan, was on site. This requirement to control and manage the building process as a reaction to site errors is a far cry from the legends of architect as master-builder working from sketches and, from a practitioners' point of view, is far more believable. Despite these further controls, mistakes were still often made, yet also because of it, positive collaborations arose.

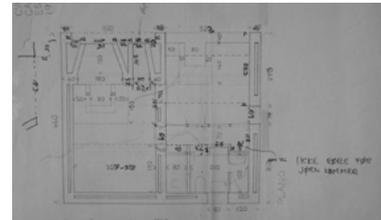


Fig. 8

### The Apertures

The most positive adjustment that came from this peculiar dialogue between an often remote Danish architect and Spanish builder on site was the idea of a stone soffit to complete the monumental apertures in the main living and sleeping areas. Originally these were documented according to the diagrammatic logic underpinning the section: stone walls topped by a soffit of tile *bovedillas*. The original sections show this system with the *bovedillas* on a rake approximating the current soffit. The builder suggested that stone soffits would be easier to build as permanent formwork and would also delete a number of clumsy details that would have appeared if cutting the *bovedillas* at an angle. So, at the suggestion of the builder<sup>15</sup> we have been gifted one of the most profound apertures in 20th century architecture.

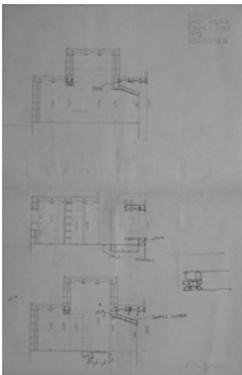


Fig. 9

### Jørn and Lis' bedrooms

Utzon's appreciation for the natural colour of the *mares* stone was not matched by a love of the terracotta *bovedillas*<sup>16</sup>. Their colour ranged widely, from a dark pink to a salmon colour that is tonally closer to the stone. Subsequently the *bovedillas* are painted white throughout the house to eradicate their varying colour palette and, with the concrete beams also painted white, visually eliminated additional systems. These bedrooms were notable as the only place originally where the *bovedillas* are used in their natural state, as a block of lighter tiles in the high space.

The decision to paint the all other *bovedillas* throughout included those in the bedroom alcoves where Utzon took this as an opportunity to continue the white paint down and over the stone surface adjacent to the bed. This is the only place in the house where the stone was painted, a departure from the overall logic but prompted by the constant dust settling from the cut stone surfaces. Painting effectively sealed the alcoves and created surfaces that could be easily cleaned.



Fig. 10

### The Living Room

If the bedrooms are notable for their surface effects, a series of irregularities exist in the living room that emanate from structural issues. A key principle of the house is a structural one - that each room is a stone cell with no internal supports. We have already discussed how this was not achieved in Kim's room due to builder errors. In the living room, an internal column also appeared, but in this case to satisfy Utzon's requirement only standard concrete beam lengths were used (Fig. 15). Typical of most architectural diagrams, two or more principles will, at certain points in the project, create a contradiction that requires an overriding decision or change of rules.



Fig. 11

The second structural irregularity in the dining room is the main lintel spanning the opening of the stone apertures. In a building where structural logic and the capacity of different structural members that is so fundamental to the spatial solution, Utzon inserted a concrete beam clad in stone facing: so rather than follow a structural logic, Utzon let a spatial concept override it. The pragmatism of this decision to preserve the diagrammatic idea of the building as a stereotomic stone mass gives great insight into Utzon's pragmatic approach and questions the often dogmatic tendencies of his acolytes who often present his work in moralistic terms underpinned by claims of "purity" in the structural and material resolution. Utzon's dogmatism would appear to be in the preservation of the diagram, not in the means of bringing it into the world.

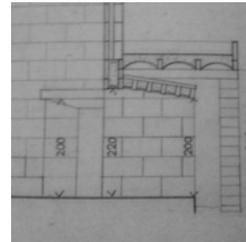


Fig. 12

## Two phases of alternation

### 1976-79, Extensions and Alternations

Having lived in the house for a few years, Utzon made a series of changes between 1976 and 1979 in response to continuing structural issues and also an unsatisfactory resolution of the dining room and kitchen areas. Various MYSTERIES now revealed included the floor in the dining room was raised, the room extended and the circular table moved to the drying court.—<sup>17</sup>

These changes led to their own problems, most particularly with the extended dining room where the use of a glazing detail never intended for location in a loggia results in people regularly walking into the window as the glass is completely undetectable from the interior when installed between columns and without the clues to its existence provided by deep stone apertures elsewhere.

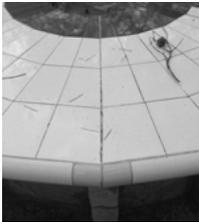


Fig. 13



Fig. 14

In the courtyards, adjustments were also required (to the low wall at their outer edge) as waves unexpectedly came up and over the 20-metre high cliff face in bad weather turning the courtyards into unintended reflection ponds.—<sup>18</sup>



Fig. 15



Fig. 16



Fig. 17

### 1992, Roof and Stone Repairs

By 1992, construction had started on Can Feliz and Jose Monserrat who was builder for the new project was bought in to assist with addressing water ingress problems between the wall and roof junctions at Can Lis. The porosity of the stone meant that at the top of the walls water was getting into the cavity and down throughout the house. To address this, the flat roof edge was abandoned in favour of a more traditional wall capping detail used in Mallorca and of course also used by Utzon previously in the Kingo and Fredensborg housing complexes. A whole new half-course with angled tile capping was added to most of the house, transforming its external appearance. The result is a slightly incongruous hybrid between the original solution with minimal eaves (retained in some areas) and the new cappings. That Utzon could make such radical changes to the house is almost inconceivable, although interviewees have hinted that Utzon became less interested in Can Lis once the move to Can Feliz commenced. At this time, and continuously since, ongoing repairs to the stone and mortar have been made by the builder, by Utzon himself and his sons, Jan and Kim. The result is a range of mortar colours and standards of finish.



Fig. 18

### 2012: The Renovation

With a series of adjustments already made over 40 years - all by or involving the original author - the refurbishment of the house for its new owner, the Obel Family Foundation, came with significant responsibilities for the architect responsible, Atelier Lise Juel.

The view Juel took to the renovation was that she could "optimize"<sup>19</sup> the house beyond the version(s) completed by Utzon. This is obviously a substantial claim by any architect in the context of the historic and pedagogic value of Utzon's masterwork - and a project so directly informed by his own personal concerns and mode of occupation. Given the layering of changes made by Utzon and his family over 40 years, Juel's stance is highly problematic in my view, given the potential to further confuse authorship, to cloud the sequence of changes made - the softness of the *mares* stone means that changes become undetectable - and to obscure the hierarchy of decisions made by Utzon in his own house as the constellation of personal and practical requirements and the contingencies of process were negotiated over time.

The renovation demonstrates serious failings in addressing these issues and the use of the renovating architect's personal attempts to optimize the house's spatial qualities rather than a frame such as ICOMOS<sup>20</sup> whose charters guide architects in the renovation of historic buildings. We are left now with a series of adjustments responding to a very personal opinion as to how the house might be best transformed without any strategic approach to conservation. For example, the column in Kim's room has been removed (returning the room to an "ideal" state as originally drawn but never as the room existed); the bathrooms are now stone volumes with minimal details and Vola taps<sup>21</sup> (Utzon changed the bathrooms from stone due to mould problems and inserted a tiled layer that is consistent with materials logics in his other projects); the kitchen-dining wall is raised to a never previously used  $\frac{3}{4}$  height;

and a new side table is built for the scullery from timber and detailed to match the dining room furniture built in the late 1970s. In other areas, standard conservation practices are used, for example in the repair of timber window frames with new pieces of timber spliced into the old frame sections.

That these interventions are based on an inconsistent approach to conservation compromises attempts to trace the story of Can Lis and undermines the sense of it as Utzon's house. By using similar materials and detailing to Utzon but departing from his solutions, real confusion is possible in regard to the chronology of changes to the house and its authorship. If one use of the house is to enable a further understanding of Utzon's work the renovations compromise this aim. In terms of conservation practice, one can argue that it is a questionable piece of work and in our view situates the relevance of this project and in particular the trio of interviews with Utzon's children who, to varying degrees, also express their dissatisfaction with the renovation.

#### Unfinished Masterpiece

*"To position architecture's place in our society would be to describe it on the one hand as an individual artistic intent based on self-willed expression, or on the other hand, to place it within the framework of public order we recognize as a social system, the latter based on mere commonplace habits that have become the established archetype. When you stop to think about it, the fact that almost all architecture has emerged from the confines of these two antagonistic, completely opposite poles is virtually incomprehensible".—<sup>22</sup>*

Can Lis is perfect evidence of Toyo Ito's sense of incomprehensibility. Utzon's diagram of five stone pavilions atop a stone cliff face resulted in one of the key residential works of the 20th century despite the fact that numerous building errors and site decisions

required significant adjustments from the drawings and constant negotiation of the various contingencies which challenged an ideal realisation of the house. That these adjustments have not diminished the fundamental power and poetic impact of the building is due to Utzon's method of addressing these contingencies in the context of his conceptual idea on the one hand, and his insistence on incredibly precise and constantly revised working drawings on the other.

What lessons emanate from this brief record of the construction and renovation of Can Lis? Firstly, questions arise regarding the role of narrative historiography in the architectural discipline and particularly in the realm of design pedagogy. Utzon's legacy has suffered from a reliance on sometimes wildly inaccurate narrative based upon scant evidence to explain design processes that can be more fully substantiated by archival research and first person interviews with those involved. In the case of this project it is surprising that few scholars have engaged with Utzon's children, who, as two architects and a visual artist, were not only present in a personal capacity but also have the disciplinary skills to engage fully with and understand his methods. Here, simply recording a clear account of the many transformations to Can Lis, insights into Utzon's method of working toward the realization of his conceptual diagrams have emerged which, if applied beyond Can Lis, may lead us to a greater understanding of his entire oeuvre.

This project reminds us of the challenges posed by the autonomy-heteronomy paradox in architecture and the way that this paradox can work to distort account of architects' work. In Utzon we are constantly left with the mythology of a creative genius working through sketches, which is a misunderstanding of how architectural practice works. The discipline has been subsequently denied knowledge of the substantial effort and expertise involved in seeing these sketches to fruition. The value of architectural practice as the space where this paradox is played out has become evident

and in this context it is hoped this project will contribute to the ongoing debate about what constitutes architectural research. In regard to Utzon's legacy, we suggest that without more accurate analyses of Utzon's practices we will only be left with various attempts at mythology. And mythology will not furnish us with the capacity to make propositions about what Utzon might do now.

#### Notes

—1 Perhaps of the strangest of these are the essays contained in the book "Utzon" Mallorca" by Christian Norberg-Schulz and Tobias Faber. Faber's article in particular is peculiar given his scholarly role as Head of the Royal Danish Academy of Fine Arts. More travel diary than scholarly assessment, Faber complements Utzon's wife, the hospitality and writes a romantic assessment of a personal experience.

—2 Numerous authors, including Weston, Faber, Pardey and others have written of Utzon's involvement on site without properly qualifying the relation of this involvement to the significant documentation of the house to which he always returned and thus has given a misleading impression that Utzon's virtually built the house himself from sketches. Our interviews revealed that great emphasis was placed by Utzon on fully solving his projects by drawing and redrawing.

—3 Jeppe Utzon, who has watched his father Jan draw for Utzon throughout his life, notes that Utzon was obsessive about the quality of the drawings. A change made on site resulted in revisions to working drawings or the production of more drawings (conversation, February 7, 2014).

—4 Lasdyn, Architecture in the age of skepticism, p. 226.

—5 This myth is perpetuated in comments nearly everyone who has written about the house, from Faber to Weston and Pardey, both of whom fail to qualify their discussion of Utzon working with builders.

—6 Utzon's two sons and Richard Johnson (who worked for a decade with Utzon on the Opera House) all talk of Utzon's conceptual sketches as containing everything within them to complete the project.

—7 Buus at the recent symposium - "The Sydney Opera House - Jørn Utzon's unfinished masterpiece" - held at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts, Copenhagen, on the occasion of the 40th birthday of the Opera House.

—8 Kim Utzon in particular has stressed the importance of understanding Can Lis as an "own house" and containing a number of decisions that were specific and particular to his way of living (draft corrections, Friday, February 7, 2014).

—9 In addition, Utzon purchased all the land across the road from the house so he would never have street neighbours either.

—10 Interview with Kim Utzon, December 8, 2013

—11 Interview with Kim Utzon, December 8, 2013

—12 Conversation with Kim Utzon, late September, 2012

—13 Interview with Kim Utzon, December 8, 2013.

—14 Conversation with Kim Utzon, late September, 2012.

—15 Interview with Kim Utzon, December 8, 2013.

—16 *Bovedilla* is the local name for the terracotta tiles that form the ceilings

—17 Kim Utzon has suggested that his father's intensely practical focus on the use of the space as a study would have meant that he was always seated in the room and thus not concerned with the height of the front bay.

—18 Interview with Kim Utzon, December 8, 2013

—19 Lise Juel in Yoshida, Nobuyuki, ed. A+U Architecture and Urbanism: March 2013 Special Issue: Can Lis, p. 74.

—20 In Australia, the Burra Charter (ICOMOS) outlines these principles.

—21 Interviewees have commented that the last hardware that Utzon would have been like to specify would be that designed by Arne Jacobsen.

—22 Toyo Ito in Allen, Diagrams Matter

#### Figures

Fig. 1 This drawing shows adjustments to the length of the apertures made on site (over an accurate working drawing). Reproduced with permission of Jan Utzon. Photograph of drawing by Gerard Reinmuth

Fig. 2 Drawn in 1973, this drawing takes into account the revisions to the apertures made after 1972 as illustrated in Figure 1 and develops the drawing further to enable the measuring of glazing sizes and to clarify the timber framing details. Reproduced with permission of Jan Utzon. Photograph of drawing by Rasmus Grønbaek Hansen.

Fig. 3 The sketches Utzon sent to Lasdyn with the annotation regarding their status as "working drawings".

Fig. 4 Drawing from Kim Utzon's collection of Jørn Utzon's sketch of the site location of Can Lis site (24 and 26), the adjacent land he purchased and the nature reserves abutting either end of the house on the cliff face.

Fig. 5 Roof above the dining and kitchen areas. Note the zig zag "Swedish" tile water dispersal system to left. Photograph by Gerard Reinmuth.

Fig. 6

Sketches done on site by Utzon over a working drawing of the living room. The stone soffits to the apertures are being tested and the new height of living room (one course lower) is being confirmed. Reproduced with permission of Jan Utzon. Photograph of drawing by Rasmus Grønbaek Hansen.

Fig. 7

To the right of the tree one can see the extra blocks required before the corner to re-align the system intended in  $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{3}{4}$  bond but was built as standard stretcher bond. Photograph by Gerard Reinmuth.

Fig. 8

Sketches over 1972 working drawing of the apertures to Lis and Jørn's bedrooms. To the bottom right a note says not to proceed before Jørn arrives. Reproduced with permission of Jan Utzon. Photograph of drawing by Rasmus Grønbaek Hansen.

Fig. 9

Sketches over a 1972 working drawing of the apertures in Utzon's bedroom, testing the idea of stone soffits. Reproduced with permission of Jan Utzon. Photograph of drawing by Rasmus Grønbaek Hansen.

Fig. 10

Jørn Utzon's room. Higher area with unpainted *bovedillas* and concrete beams, adjacent to the bed alcove where they were painted, along with the adjacent walls. Photograph by Gerard Reinmuth.

Fig. 11

Living room., showing the central column supporting two beams Photograph by Gerard Reinmuth.

Fig. 12

Living room section, showing a concrete lintel supporting the stone elements that surround the apertures (this early drawing also shows tile soffits to the apertures). Image, Utzon Archives.

Fig. 13

Round table with split tile edges where it had been cut for the relocation to the courtyard. Photograph by Gerard Reinmuth.

Fig. 14

Photograph of columns that originally defined the outer façade of the dining room, with patched holes where door-frames had been attached. Photograph by Rasmus Grønbeck Hansen

Fig. 15

Photograph of the dining room from November 2013 showing the externally fixed glazing and bifold door that negotiates the dining room column and kitchen servery. Photograph by Gerard Reinmuth.

Fig. 16

Photograph of the dining room from November 2013 showing the additional grid and internal *bovedillas* running opposite to the main system of the room, and unpainted. Photograph by Gerard Reinmuth.

Fig. 17

Photograph of the living room interior November 2013 illustrating the way that the aperture assists in the anticipation of the glass even though it is not visible. Photograph by Gerard Reinmuth.

Fig. 18

Photograph of one of many stone removals in the courtyard wall to let water out. Photograph by Gerard Reinmuth.

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CAN LIS

Interviews

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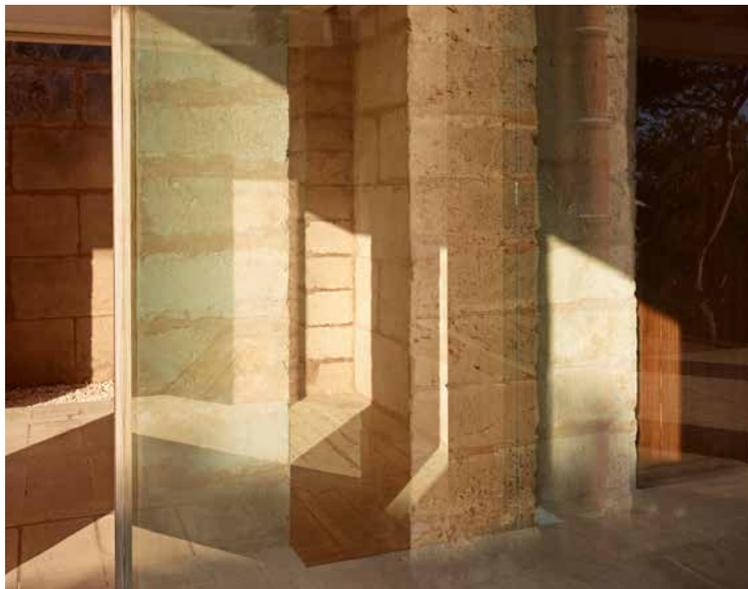
## Pamflet nr. 9 2015

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INTERVIEW WITH KIM UTZON,  
COPENHAGEN 10. SEPTEMBER 2013

KU: Kim Utzon  
GR: Gerard Reinmuth  
RH: Rasmus G. Hansen  
LH: Lars Holt  
AE: Aida Espanyol



KU: The new house was drawn by my office in Hellebæk, while correspondingly, my brother helped my father with all the drawings for Can Lis. But from the age of 10-15, I was basically on every vacation when my parents went down to Can Lis, so it's a 10-15 year old's memory we are talking about.

As you know I had the experience of going down to Mallorca with my parents' friends, and one of their best friends had a house done by Erik Christian Sørensen – the courtyard house with the tower – and basically we came there the first summer after Sydney, '67 or '68, as they invited my parents and some others down to see the house as it had just been finished. And if you deduct the last 45 years, nothing was there.

But it wasn't as bad as some other places. In the beginning it was a failed urbanization, because it was too far away and there were no beaches connected to the urbanization, as the beaches had been bought by a Club Med, and so they were shut off to the public. Well, you could walk there, but you couldn't lie there.

So it was a failed urbanisation, so there were many lots, no water and no electricity, and no sewerage. For that and other reasons, my father did not want to stay on the coast. He thought it might become touristy. So my parents drove around and asked at all sorts of places and asked a peasant one day in the field, and asked if he knew a real estate agent and he said "yes, it's me, I have just become a real estate agent" – which he had!

My parents asked if he had any nice land, and he said he had a wonderful one and "paradise". My parents ended up buying paradise, which is the site of house number 2.

They never intended building down near the water, as my father was very private, as you have seen with the house at Hellebæk. My father has always had trouble sleeping, so no neighbours, no sound, no nothing. I remember once we stayed at Heron Island and he ended up taking some plastic bags and sleeping at the furthest corner of the hotel grounds as the room had a fridge and we could hear a generator that started at all times of the night. He actually went out into nature and made his own nest, so that's how difficult he was on this. The house in Hellebæk – you can't see or hear anybody, and so it was the same idea with the Mallorca site up the hill, but he couldn't get a building permit for zoning reasons even though he submitted a number of applications, so he was forced to buy a piece of land down the coast.

The sites on the coast were mostly rectangular, but he saw on the plan this piece of land where Can Lis is now placed. The site was narrow, so you could not put a narrow villa there. So my father located the separate functions all next to each other – the courtyard and kitchen, the living room, my parents' house and my house, and these functions were split over two lots. Then to the east of my room is a natural reserve, because it's too narrow and below is a big grotto that goes under the street. And on the other side the cliff narrows in close to the road for 200 or 300 metres, so in all it's a 500m zone with no neighbours which the house is in the middle of. Then they bought the house behind – 20,000 square metres, maybe 15,000 – to safeguard the site. And so he bought two lots here on the coast – 24 and 25 – and the lots over the road.

My parents would not have left Sydney by choice so this was a case of "feels like home." And this house also has of course many references to the Bayview House which went through many phases of development while we were in Sydney.

You had the Ibiza style, where you had the natural stone in the fields and it was assembled and plaster put on it, but they had seen from Sørensen's house that they basically had to go over the render every year as the seawater just washed it away, and so now its covered in the harder Santanyi version of the natural stone.

But that is not in keeping with my father's way of doing architecture – to have plaster with random holes in – so he was looking for a way to do it, he looked at an enormous amount of these dry stone walls, there were some very beautiful ones around, some with a very precise topping stone for example. So all these stone houses were looked at, these houses with thick stone walls and rocks around the window openings.

And then my father found the marès stone, very cheap and used only for barns, or even for stone walls in the fields, but it's actually so porous they knew it wasn't healthy to live in a house made of that stone. And if you stand there with a hose, the water just goes in. So it's very humid also, but then he introduced the Danish double wall, which we have had here in brick, and he could put a 20cm outer wall, 10cm of air cavity and a 10cm inner wall, which comes to a 40cm module which suits the house.

The entrance is a place where there is a single wall, because it's just outside-outside. And then he found a technique with the high beams in concrete and the *bovedillas*.

So the whole house is a 2.4 metre module, then you can have the stone and structure in 20, 40 or 80cm modules. And then what happened which is very stupid is that even though every stone had been drawn by Jan in a ¼ bond, the builder had just built a standard bond. This meant that the stones cannot join to the corners correctly, so that's why you sometimes see a ¼ or ¾ stone, to make the bonding work around the corners.

I don't remember that there is concrete in the columns, I think they just stand. The new house is different, as there they get so tall so there are holes in them and reinforcement. There was an actual engineer [laughs].

So here, everything with the bond was drawn, everything was measured, but they didn't follow the drawings. If you look around you will see other foundations made for these things as well. Because at that time the people who made this could not fathom that was the finished product. They were used to just placing it and it being painted so it didn't matter if the measure was incorrect. But the second you are plotting everything out the measure is very important.

So you can see how the living room and my parents' rooms had a high piece, and so did mine. Now my house was the trial house so we arrived and went down one evening, because the builders had said they had put the roof on, and so we passed and we said "oh, they haven't finished the roof". And so we went to another house and left our baggage and went down with candles and yes they had finished it but with a flat roof.

And the niches had been planned as desks, so you would go down, and sit and work at the floor level, and instead they had made a hole, a rectangular hole, in that general area. They had just made a dumb hole, where in the drawings there was a special niche located so the desk would work. So that also just vanished. And in regard to the roof, the builder had just made an "x" in a ballpoint pen, on my father's drawings. They didn't know who he was, which you could say is good at the same time.

The whole house was the two types of stone, the beams and the *bovedillas*, and these terracotta tiles that were 20 x 20, and these water guides, that were Swedish - they have them on both the metal and stone roofs, so you don't have a gutter, you just have these. So it was very clean, almost nothing, compared to the house that it is today.

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All these changes were done at a period after the new house was built. Because there had always been problems with this house, particularly the tiled roofs, as the stone was so porous the water just went into the cavities. So when they refurbished the house they pulled the tiles off, and where there should have been a waterproofing membrane the builders had just laid cement sacks. But when you look at photos of the old house it was very, very clean, and all these new details have been added.

Now to the round table: this is one of these things that if they really wanted to be original they would have put it back in the dining room, as the round table was not originally in the courtyard. But the room as originally designed was just too small for this big table. So it was cut into sections, 3 or 4, which you can see when you are down there.

GR: This logic within the house is then interesting when you have situations such as here [points at dining room windows] where the same logic was used but not in the original condition the logic came from, so you run into the windows all the time.

KU: Well this was an addition, and he actually had to lift the floor of the living room to get the possibility of the window on the outside. There is another floor on the same level as the terrace beneath it. So the table was taken out in connection with that renovation and then replaced with these wooden chairs and tables, which as far as I remember are rip-offs of some restaurant tables in Zurich, designed by a Swiss interior architect who I lived with for three months when finishing my high school exam. With the I-beam legs, it was a very nice restaurant in Zurich.

RH: And so before this you had the doors to the dining room

KU: Yes, you had the double doors in timber frames, and the table that was too big, and it didn't work.

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GR: While talking about changes, the paint in the bed niches, is that original?

KU: Yes that's original, because the sandstone is so porous and if you rubbed against it, it comes on your clothes. But my father was very precise with what was to be chalked and what was not. So now it's painted but originally it was chalked.

LH: There is another thing about the extension in the living room here with the *bovedillas*, and they are not painted, whereas the other ones are white.

KU: Because the reason they were painted white in the dining room is because they were ugly. They were red. He couldn't get the right colour.

AE: But the red, weren't they the more common ones to use?

KU: Yes, and he just couldn't find enough of the ones with the more yellow colour.

So as for the furniture. All the furniture was done in an Easter holiday, two weeks when my father was down there. He had a fantastically talented bricklayer, his name was Santiago as I remember, and they made this furniture in two week. All of the furniture in the house, the sofa, sofa table, the outdoor benches, everything, and I have never met a mason as talented as this guy.

GR: In this earlier photo there are no holes in the courtyard walls

KU: Yes, that was later, as they turned into swimming pools. When the storms are too big, the waves hit the cliff and the water just sprays up over the top. So you could swim in the terrace, in a saltwater pool. My parents have a picture of one of them wading in there. So all the plants and trees always died, killed by the saltwater. The planters would just be full of salt.

RH: We talked earlier about the columns and the meaning of the columns.

KU: That's the whole elemental construction system idea.

And then there are the irregularities such as this column in my room. A beam had cracked so an extra column was put in, I clearly remember it was there in the late 70s.

It was quite handy to put your wallet and cameras in as it was hollow. Then, we hid everything, because you could just kick the doors in if you wanted.

This column in the living room is because the I-beams only had a certain span, and the living room was bigger. So that's why it's there and designates the entrance and the placement of the sofa. And this is like many of my father's inspirations, particularly from Sweden, who work more asymmetrically than the Danes. So it was just a maximum span and a column was put in that was used to then designate the entrance.

RH: There is something about Lewerentz being a big inspiration and when we visited *Klippan* in the spring, there is the same sort of feeling as the column in the middle of the room.

KU: Yes and it's this very un-Danish way of thinking. At school my father's professor was Klint, and so he was taught in this very classic Danish way. Then he comes to Hedqvist who was a contemporary of Asplund and Lewerentz in Stockholm.

And as he draws this school and the comment was "couldn't the architect be more playful around the corner" and that's what they do. Those guys, the first generation Swedish modernists had this twist. If you go to Sweden you see it all over the place. And they really pulled it off then, as they had craftsmanship. You can't do that kind of detailing without it. And it's about being unafraid of how weird it looks on the drawing, as it has

something to do with the way you use the house. And if it's right from the inside I don't care how it looks on the outside – and that's been a mantra for Dad, always.

Well, to start with you have the building line. So you have the road which is a straight line, and the *zona maritima*, and a distance in from that a line designated that within this you can build.

And so you have the building line and of course the view. You can see in earlier drawings here there were two bedrooms for them and two others, and I think at some point they just came to the conclusion that I was the only one. So it's just these pieces, and if Jan and Lin, if they wanted to stay they could just stay in the guest house. My parents didn't believe in live-in guests.

That was the program, and if you look at the new house on the hill, it's even more hard core. So if you look at this, quite enormous house, built on the hill, its built so my parents are alone, so there are two bedrooms.

Some of the furniture work and some of it don't. The benches in the small courtyard at the living room are for drinking tea in the afternoon, while the morning bench is difficult if you are a normal family, because half of the people have to sit on the other side and that's not nice also because it has this reinforcement that goes down and you can't get your legs underneath.

The round table in the dining room was located with the big curve toward the back wall and this hole was meant to be a grill so someone could stand in the centre and grill. But it didn't really happen for a number of reasons then as my parents got older they couldn't be bothered cooking so they would go down to the restaurant anyway. So before the table, the courtyard was just empty, with gravel in it. So when it moved the idea was to have your own private sunny courtyard but it was never used, it's just to dry clothes and the table is where you put your clean laundry before you hang it.

One of the only things I did out there was cut out the ram's head, it was a present to my parents after my wife and I spent three months there for our honeymoon. There was just this piece of stone and I started cutting and it turned into a ram's head, and it was only after I did it that I realized that was both their sign.

GR: Thanks for your time

KU: No problem. If you do this [shows a triangulation] with what Jan and Lin tell you, if you ask the same questions, you will get a different version. I mean, Lin and Jan were in their 20's when this happened, so they will have different recollections. For example, they were not there on the earlier trips, I was in the car when they talked to this guy about buying land.

(Transcribed and edited by Gerard Reinmuth)

INTERVIEW WITH JAN UTZON,  
HELLEBÆK 08. OCTOBER 2013

JU: Jan Utzon  
GR: Gerard Reinmuth  
RH: Rasmus G. Hansen  
AV: Aida Espanyol Vilanova  
LH: Lars Holt



RH: Last year when we were visiting Can Lis it had just been open for 4-5 months, we thought what's going to happen now that the house is accessible to the public? Of course people will start discussing, thinking and speculating. So we thought instead of creating this new myth about the house, it would be interesting to tell a straight story about the pragmatism of the house but also somehow pay homage to the fact that the house is such a strong architectural entity that it can actually still live on as a fantastic house even though it has been subject to changes over the years...

JU: ...hasn't really been changed a lot.

When my father looked at the different sites in that area – because some of my parents' friends lived and had a house there – he thought the plots of land were unrealistically expensive and they were just plots of land. But then there was this little area in the centre – where the coast and the road were so close together that you could not build anything on either side...and he saw this as an opportunity for this house...free of other buildings. Otherwise he would have a neighbour on both sides but because of the narrowness of the land they had this little peninsula almost, sticking out, he bought that. But it was still so narrow that he couldn't build, if you will, a normal house so he had to break it up into smaller units and spread them along the road. There is a zone called *zona marítima* – a setback from the edge of the rocks – about 6 or 8 meters – on which you are not allowed to build, so the plot was even

shallower. Nobody had even thought of buying this piece of land.

Then he had ideas, made sketches and I made working drawings. But they were more like guidelines because as it turned out the contractor didn't really know how to read the drawings. But my father used a system with the *marès* blocks of a certain size and thickness, a roof construction with standard concrete beams and *bovedillas*, these curved ceramic tiles which were quite normal for mostly non-residential buildings. And then realizing that the limestone is very porous and when it absorbs water it becomes very moist, he just introduced the Danish cavity wall. Everybody was saying "you can't build a house with those stones." But of course houses had been built with these stones earlier on though generally a harder, a more dense stone was used but these very soft ones could be cut with a saw and then they become harder over the years but in the ground they are like *gasbeton* [lightweight concrete]. There are beautiful areas where they cut them - big cuts into the hillsides.

LH: At the time was the limestone affordable?

JU: Quite inexpensive.

LH: Was that a reason for doing it in that material?

JU: It was also because of the texture of the material. Because of course he could have also done it in concrete and rendered it but they say in Mallorca all the new houses that they call Mallorcan style are not Mallorcan style, they're Ibiza style. Ibiza has these houses that are whitewashed. It is not normal in Mallorca, if you look at the old villages and little towns - they all have this sandstone feeling even if they are painted.

Using this system it was easy to make the drawings, you just follow the module - 40 by 80. And the builders didn't use a crane; they just lifted these blocks in place. Once you go above chest height they had scaffolding.

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The blocks were pulled up by rope and set in place. Then these concrete beams, which were rather heavy, were put on top. At the time they couldn't span very far, so in the living room and some of the other rooms there's an extra column to shorten the distance.

Also if you noticed both of the other two bedrooms have different ceiling heights, which was also intended for Kim's bedroom but the roof is flat there. My father was explaining on the drawing to the contractor and while pointing with his pencil made a mark. Later on the contractor thought 'oh there's a mark on that, he doesn't want it' so he just built the roof straight across.

My father built in furniture because it was cheap. Woodwork was expensive at the time. Brickwork was cheap. Costs nothing to put up beds, tables, seats - so that was all built in. And my father thought 'well it's nice.' But he forgot to find the size of a mattress so when there is a mattress lying in the bed there is a gap between the mattress and the end of the wall, which you had to fill up with cushions.

We had the drawings of each building, but it was much easier to set out the plan and put in the columns on site. The builders could then take measure from here and then say OK go from here and 5 or 6 courses up and put the roof on. They did it in the way that if they had the first stone let's say here - they would place 3 small pieces of stone and set the next stone on top. Then they could sort of tilt it so it becomes aligned and fill in mortar on the sides. When the mortar has dried - for half a day or so - they take out a stone creating kind of a funnel, which they then pour liquid mortar into, filling out the remaining space between the stones. Next day they come with a trowel and just cut off all the excess and continue onto the next ones.

RH: Because it's too heavy to just set it in the mortar itself.

JU: Yes. So every block sits on top of the other one and little stones. They're not particular stones, just off the

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ground. They just found something that worked or just chipped one off the blocks. Nothing fancy. But works well.

RH: But clearly something they had been doing for generations.

JU: Yes that's the way they did it.

And below this area [points to the dining room] - at the time there was no water supply in the street so every house had its own water tank - there is a big water tank installed. It was never used because as the house was completed they put in a water main. So that was just a hole. Later my father built an additional floor on top - assuring that the initial floor, due to the risk of rust weakening the concrete beams, would not suddenly collapse. That's why you have the step-up. It wasn't about to collapse but it's a security measure.

The initial dining room was only to here [points to the row of columns aligned with the kitchen wall]. When they put the new floor in they extended to here so these columns have been put in later. If you can imagine this covered area - loggia if you will - it's the same way all the way around but that did make for a very squished dining room. On the other hand it was just my parents and Kim at the time, so there was room enough. It's never been a big house actually.

Also, there wasn't very much vegetation at the time so from the rooms you only had the view of the sea and this patio was like an outside dining area and the cut-outs in the walls were so that you could see the Mediterranean like wine in a glass. Which you cannot now because it's all grown - overgrown.

LH: What was the use of the patio?

JU: It was meant for you to sit out here; eat, work, make a sculpture...It was really to close off the courtyard. At the time people could look directly in this way. Of course

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now with all the vegetation you can't, but at the time you could just look right in because there's no wall here. And my father of course wanted to retain the view that way [points towards west of the courtyard] which has also gone because of the vegetation.

The water is 18 meters down but the waves are such that when they hit the rocks they come up and the wind takes it over the house. That was why my parents decided that it was a bit too moist and not so pleasant during winter and that they'd rather live up in the dry area. And traditionally no one has ever lived along the coast anyway.

RH: But this is also the clash between the traditional building techniques using this stone and the place, which is not a traditional dwelling location.

JU: Limestone comes in different qualities. You cannot really tell beforehand. Some limestone became harder and harder as time went by, while others withered away and had to be replaced. Also the reinforcement in the concrete beams rusted, the concrete itself was not dense enough to prevent moisture and salt to seep into the steel. Some had to be replaced as well. So it's a harsh climate down here as opposed to further inland where nothing happens. It's like parking your car by the sea or parking it inland.

AV: And is the reason why the windows are fixed and not operable an economical issue?

JU: No. My father preferred doors to open - the rest is for the view and the light and he didn't want to see the frames. He just wanted to see the stone, nothing else.

GR: Back to the concrete beams. They're all painted. Were they originally painted as well?

JU: Yes, simply to protect them.

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GR: A few places there are two beams, not one – for example over the masonry beds...

JU: Some places it's the strength – put two beams together, flat tiles between instead of the curved and add some reinforcement and that becomes a stronger beam.

RH: But the funny thing is that here we have two beams on top of each other but here there's only one?

JU: That's probably the contractor.

RH: Which is also a part of the story of the house.

JU: We went to Mallorca in the early 60s. I remember we went to Ibiza in 1954, and my father talking about the architecture there which was different from Mallorca – but we hadn't been to Mallorca at that time but he took photos of the walls between the fields and around the stables where the animals were kept and around the houses. And they were pretty much the same but treated with different degrees of consideration and then the church of course with the finest surfaces. It's like your hand where the top of your hand has one kind of skin and the underside of your hand has another kind of skin, nails are different but they are all of a coherent whole but they have a variation and that's also what he wanted in the building.

GR: In the floor, is that the same stone?

JU: It is limestone but it is a more dense stone, a more expensive stone, but it has a quality that it is slightly porous so as opposed to ceramic tile it is warm to walk on with bare feet.

RH: Another thing is the placement of the volumes. How much did that have to do with certain specific views towards the sea?

JU: Only a little bit. It is just as much when you are there you see the view and nothing else, you don't see the rest

of the buildings. In here you see the view but you don't see these buildings. So in that sense you separate them. It's about not looking at anything other than the view. And then there is the fixed furniture - these benches... you could also argue that this type of furnishing, it determines how you use the space and it restricts you to that particular way of using it. I mean if it hadn't been there you would probably be sitting all over the place – different furniture, bookshelves and so on. But by placing that – of course it was his and my mother's house so he wanted to do it this way.

LH: While the unity of the material, the modularity of the marès stone and the directionality towards the sea suggest certain coherence, the looser layout of the individual volumes and the spaces between suggest playfulness?

JU: I think when you are turning these volumes a little bit, the sun will hit them differently and you get a slightly different feeling from this and I think my father saw this early on in Morocco and later on in various other places. The little irregularities are the ones that make this place special. Like in Spanish and Greek mountain villages where the architecture itself perhaps is not all that exciting because they are simple little houses but the way they sit at different levels creating little squares with trees that you can sit under, and the sun comes from this side and the view is that way – they are the ones that create the wonderful atmosphere that we like so much to be a part of when we travel to these places.

My father's time in Sweden, during the war, I think influenced him into a more free way of thinking because Swedes at that time had more 'OK here we have this situation we do something special and here we have this situation we do something...'' and one of my father's employers in Sweden said when he was doing a project 'Let's have some fun in this corner.'

AV: All this vegetation, was that there when it was planned?

JU: The pine trees they were there in some shape but they were quite low and during construction there was nothing in front of the house...and of course if some tree had been in the way it would have been cut down... And these walls [the perimeter walls along the road], they were not there initially. But there were so many people running in and out that they put them up.

RH: We can't talk about this house without talking about the small opening where the light comes in and hits the wall.

JU: Yes. Initially there was no glass in it. It was open to the sky.

RH: Because it's a fantastic way of getting this indication of the time of day into the building. But it also has this other effect of actually getting air in through the space if there was no glass in it. Do you know if that was also part of the purpose of that opening or was it just the light?

JU: I couldn't tell you.

AV: And the reason why he decided to separate the wall from the structure covering the windows in the living room and bedrooms, leaving the columns outside...?

JU: Well he wanted to create a small roof covering the glass...I mean it's not entirely logical but also the top of the niches are not really structurally correct because it's just slabs of stone sort of hanging up there...

GR: Of course it's not structural but as we looked at it we were saying 'surely he didn't cheat!' but of course when you look at the section there's a concrete beam. It's funny though you can almost see there was some indication of structural intent - the marking of a keystone.

JU: I think you shouldn't put too much logic into that. The builder's done it, so okay, that's it. My father was

relatively relaxed about it. And also relatively relaxed about modifying and changing things.

GR: One perspective worth getting back, when we were first there, there was this whole fact that Can Lis is a masterpiece, but it's this funny masterpiece. It's almost you would say unique in a way - in the history of architecture there are buildings that are pure and those that are renovated, so while I heard you say there aren't many changes it still has been changed if you are being a purist - some columns are removed, some tiles added or whatever and had it been another building it would have probably been ruined. But actually something about this house is just very particular.

JU: Because it's so strong in its architecture...if it had been one of these sort of Miesian houses, seeing everything you can't do very much...

RH: It has a robustness...

JU: if you look at some of the ancient architecture, Egypt, Middle East - all these structures that are really heavy, you have all sorts of things going on but it doesn't really matter because they're so heavy and they're so robust in their expression - so nothing can really shake them. Also my father often said to me what Alvar Aalto had said about 'the houses should be placed like flowers on a cherry branch', where the flowers sit on a stick essentially, but they all turn towards the sun to maximize their connection to the sun and thereby creating a small variation in their position. It's not an engineering light pole where they all sit like this but they all adjust a little bit and that creates something which is more lively - human.

RH: It's so much valuable information, thank you.

(Transcribed and edited by Lars Ho)

INTERVIEW WITH LIN UTZON,  
CAN FELIZ 07. OCTOBER 2014

LU: Lin Utzon  
HdM: Hugues de Montalembert  
GR: Gerard Reinmuth  
RH: Rasmus G. Hansen



GR: We have noticed when we have been in the house with other architects, that there is so much speculation about how Utzon must have thought about this or wanted that, but now we know that there is almost always a pragmatic story to the irregular elements in the house...

LU: There were changes to the odd bits and pieces, and you probably also know from Mika, Kim and Jan that my father had no vanity or problem about changing things – it was his working method – if he wanted to change something, he changed it. He didn't have a lot of complicated thoughts about it, it was a working thing.

The dining room was originally very narrow, and the colonnade that goes around the terrace was the same dimension all around the perimeter of the terrace.

When my parents went to live there permanently, there was both a problem with the water tank and they wanted to be able to see more of the sea, and so he elevated the floor of the dining room. But when it was a summer house, and you could open the doors to the courtyard, and the semi-circular table was there in the room, and you could sit around it and grill your fish... it was wonderful.

RH: ...so the semi-circular table was IN the dining room, and the facade had doors you could open to the courtyard?

LU: Yes, like traditional doors, and the semi-circular table was like that (drawing with her finger on the table top showing how the curved side faced inwards) facing the sea so you could have a little grill in the middle there.

I have an image of Mika and Naja sitting at the table with the doors of the dining room open.

When he changed the dining room and moved the semi-circular table to the courtyard, the benches and the regular tables were installed instead.

RH: For us this project is of course done out of interest in the work done by your father, but also out of an interest in the conception of architecture. Can Lis is, in this respect, a fantastic example of how you can have a very clear architectural idea, and the resistance that then comes when you live in the house or even during the process of building, is allowed to change the project and in some cases perhaps even make it better... the column in Kim's room could be a specific example that we have been discussing in this respect.

LU: The column was not originally meant to be there, and that is why it has now been taken away. But the thing is that the house is a piece of architecture that was intensely thought about and experimented with. My father sat on site thinking about the house and had cardboard boxes on his head to see where he would like to see what, and how to protect himself from the light, which is terribly sharp by the sea. How to take away the sun, without taking away the light, so to speak.

He worked very much with the installation of himself, his soul and his family in that specific place. How to acquire the most intense feeling of where you are, your place in the world.

When you arrive to Can Lis it is as if you are stripped bare of everything that was behind you and you are sitting naked at the edge of the universe – it is a very overwhelming and strong thing that he has achieved.

All the other stuff, the bath room, the kitchen etc. were minor things that just had to come, but the sense of being, the experience of this miraculous moment, that you are alive on the planet and here on the cliff, was very important for him to amplify, so when you are in the house the experience is much stronger than when you go and sit on the rocks next to the house...

RH: If we are to talk a little about the life of Can Lis and look at the timeline, we know when the house was built, but when did your parents move into the house and how was the house used before this point?

LU: They lived in Hawaii before they moved in and during this period, the house was used by Alex (Popov ed.) and me for a few years. Then Kim used it, but Jan never used it much – he preferred Scandinavian summers.

When my parents came to live there permanently – I really don't remember when they moved in, but Kim would remember that – they lived there incredibly gracefully. They filled the house with flowers and books and stones they had found. The house was not a representational house. It was a marvellous living and life-giving organisation of spaces. Living there, they discovered all the faults such as the courtyards leaning the wrong way so when it rained the water would run into the house, and the roof had all of these water problems too so putting the roofing tiles on the edges helped, but originally the house was without these.

In Kim's room originally there was no column, but because of the leaking from the roof and consequent rusting of the I-beams in the ceiling, a column was put there. I think it's wonderful that it is gone. However I think it is a great pity that the bed in Kim's house is gone.

Kim's house was thought as an independent little house for him or for anybody – and there was a structure when you entered the house, that could hold a fridge and some shelves and you could put a small stove there and

have a little kitchen in the house. This structure has also been removed but it functioned fantastically well as it very elegantly hid the boiler on the wall, allowing you not to see that element. It was beautifully made in blue and white tiles and is certainly missing now.

RH: We discussed how Can Lis sits fantastically between what you can call a temple or something that seems to transcend time but also that it is extremely inhabitable – that you can find places to sit, places to live throughout the day, which gives it a sense of being a fantastic dwelling as well as sacred place...

LU: Yes, it gives you the feeling of living in the Acropolis while at the same time being in a home.

RH: But now the use of the house has changed and it might be looked at primarily as a sacred place, maybe even a temple for Jørn Utzon. Do you think people forget to think of it as a home?

LU: I understand the feeling of respect because it is linked to that confrontation you have when you walk in and say: "this is the world and I am part of it". I absolutely loved living there - I know that it is a stark place, but that is the beauty of it.

But I do think that for instance the removal of the bed in Kim's room has added to that stark feeling in a negative way and hopefully they will put it back and people will use the house as a home to think and reflect in, as it always was. Since 1975 a home for our summer holidays, and then as our permanent home from 1995 when my parents moved to Can Feliz and Hugues and I moved in and lived there up until 2005.

When my parents left the house – they simply turned the key and left the house with everything in it and started fresh here in Can Feliz.

RH: So your parents did not use Can Lis for the summer and Can Feliz for the winter periods?

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LU: No, they left the house for good with no desire to bring anything with them – and when they moved back to Denmark it was because my mother got very ill, and once again they just turned the key and brought only their passports and toothbrushes – my father had a fantastic detachment to, as well as a deep engagement in, things, so it didn't mean anything to him to have the house presented as this or that result. For him it was the voyage, the creative voyage that was a tool for all his thoughts, so he would change things, or leave it to start doing something new and wonderful.

For instance the lights put in the living room; what was there before was relaxed – just a few electrical wires and light bulbs tied together in a cluster to have light – it wasn't neatly arranged, but actually very beautiful, but it was just there because the lighting had not yet been solved and this was the best for the moment, but it was to be changed eventually....

The same goes for the bathrooms: They were very simple because it was a practical thing. My father didn't have an attitude about a bathroom, that it should be fancy or have expensive fittings or have a Style. Everything was local so it was a local stone table, local tiles, shuttered doors for the cabinets and a showerhead bought in the local hardware store.

RH: It seems to be the general concept of the restoration, to strip these practical solutions from the house and to extend the sacred atmosphere of the main spaces into the smaller servicing spaces

LU: Yes and it is a strange approach that has nothing to do with my father's approach. It is very understandable that someone working on something as miraculous as Can Lis, would like to leave their fingerprint or improve things, but in fact it hasn't been improved.

The new bathrooms haven't improved the house – they are at odds with the house, for me anyway. So is the turquoise ceramic range in the kitchen – my father

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would not have chosen this– he would have gone to the local store, bought something very pragmatic, very local and simple.

There is this small vertical opening high up in the living room – I remember the swallows or bats flying in because it was open and in the wintertime it was quite annoying with the cold and wind coming in, so my father just put some foam in the opening, a square piece of foam and just pushed it in, so there was this piece of green foam sticking out of the opening. When Hugues and I moved in, my father was explaining the house to Hugues who is blind, and he said, "this window and the ray of light is a poetic illustration of the passing of time" – so drily I said to Hugues, "But he does not tell you there is a big sponge in the window"

So Hugues was like: "what! We have to fix this immediately and get some glass", and I, as I was in the middle of dealing with blocked toilets and generally moving in, I said "can we just wait a minute?" and he said "Absolutely not!". So I went to get the glass, climb up on the roof and fix it with nails without any frame and my father said: "I thought about doing it a bit differently but it does work..."

RH: Can you tell us a little bit about when your parents came to Majorca for the first time and found out they would like to buy a piece of land – when was that and how did they go about it.

LU: They bought this piece of land (Can Feliz) first, in 1957 and later the one by the coast, but my father had looked at land in Morocco and had worked on a project there that didn't happen. His brother lived in Paris and they were both very attracted to the Mediterranean, so they made trips and looked for a place. They looked at land in Sardinia on Costa Esmeralda that later became the famous Aga Khan Village and he liked the land very much but thought "something is going to happen here" and decided not to go on with it.

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My parents had some friends, Tata and Hagen Hasselbalch, who were living here and they encouraged them to come and have a look. While they were here they met a girl who had a grandmother that owned some land, and they also met a family who lived up here and had the rest of the land, so they bought it all for nothing, five or ten Danish kroner per square meter, but could not get a building permission. Tata and Hagen told them there was another piece of land on the coast which they bought very cheaply and started developing the idea for the house.

RH: So when did they buy the land on the coast?

LU: They must have bought that when we came back from Sydney so let's say 1967 or 68.

RH: When we look at Can Lis we recognize so many details and solutions that can also be found in the local building culture, in the farmhouses and stables scattered throughout the countryside in this part of Majorca.

LU: My father was a key finder – he was fantastic at identifying the essentials of a specific place and then pick out the nerve of the construction principles and transform them into his new creation.

When I say a key finder, it is the reason why his architecture is always so varied but still the same, because every time he would find a key to a problem, allowing him an enormous freedom. It could be an element of construction, like Bagsvaerd Church or the Espansiva Houses – he always found a key to create a piece of modern architecture that was rooted in the local environment. What interested my father was space and finding the key to the spatial and structural solution. He was brilliant at it. I don't think it has been totally understood.

GR: Can you tell us when the column in Kim's room was put in?

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LU: The column was put in while they lived in the house – I can't remember what year, but it was put in much later, about ten years after the house was finished. I just remember that they moved in and had problems with the roof leaking and discovering that it was sealed with cement bags and as a consequence the roof was sinking and they decided to place the column.

GR: And when was the semi-circular table moved from the dining room?

LU: That was moved out when my parents moved in from Hawaii, so it was a while after they built the house, probably the eighties.

RH: Was that also the point where they extended the dining room and exchanged the doors to the courtyard with the large windows?

LU: Yes, it was done at the same time when they did the construction of the new floor. To me it was a great pity because I loved it as it was – in the summer it was so nice to be able to open the doors to the courtyard and walk out.

GR: So all these changes were made around the same time; the column, the edge detail of the roof, the dining room floor and facade...

LU: Yes. Originally the house did not have a continuous wall towards the street, so between the individual buildings and courtyards the house was open to the street.

The small pieces of wall between the houses creating a continuous wall were established shortly after the house was finished. My parents came and stayed in the house for a holiday and discovered that it was absolutely impossible to keep people out when it was open, but the initial thought was to have the individual blocks lying freely in the landscape.

[Hugues de Montalembert joins the conversation]

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HdM: Another small thing: the cabinet that is placed instead of the kitchenette was originally built for the bedroom on the right. It was made for the wall on your left hand when you enter the room. It is made for this place, fits it perfectly and could be moved back...

LU: The kitchenette would actually not be difficult to reconstruct either. It was white with some blue tiles and had the rounded detail from the other tables. On top of the table it had open shelves and a wall hiding the boiler. It did what everything in my father's architecture does – it solves a problem, very elegantly.

And the bathroom in Kim's house had a bathtub under the window towards the street and a table under the other window, so you could look out at the sea.

HdM: It was my bathroom for ten years and it was absolutely marvelous.

The autonomous character of this part of the house with the bathroom, the kitchenette, the table outside where you could work – all of this has been lost completely.

LU: There is a jarring contrast of the 'stylism' applied in the restoration and the pragmatism applied by my father...

One could say in the most positive way that he had a fantastic disrespect for his own work – he would find the solution that worked best for the building, the space, the function etc. every time there was a problem. Not be attached to previous solutions if they did not work.

You can see it in the doors where he just digs into the marès to make room for the door handle – it was always about solving a practical issue.

(Transcribed and edited by Rasmus G. Hansen)

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Arkipelaget

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CAN LIS

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Bagatelles

# Arkipelaget

## Pamflet nr. 10 2015

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### A bigger dining room

If you look closely at the three interior columns in the dining room, two of which are directly connected to the walls at either end and therefore appear as half-columns or pilasters, it is possible to see the traces of its erased past. What today appears as an interior row of columns used to be part of the façade facing the central courtyard. In every column a number of holes, which are now filled with mortar, are visible. Depending on the light, they can be easy or difficult to detect, but they are there, consistently positioned at the same distance from the edges of the column at both top, centre and bottom. With the hooks, which used to hold the curtain rods, they testify to a different, and smaller dining room.

We do not know whether Utzon wanted the dining room to be bigger, or whether its extension into the courtyard was merely part of solving an issue of cross ventilation or access. What we do know is that the alteration took place at the same time that the floor was raised to secure the structural stability of the floor, which Utzon saw as a necessary precaution at the time. Enlarging the dining room, however, must have seemed less urgent.

This logic is only supported by the fact that the added area does not add any more usable floor space: for example, room for a bigger table or more chairs. It merely adds a threshold space between the main part of the room and the colonnade surrounding the courtyard: at this specific point a rather odd concentration of columns, clearly visible in the plan.



### A different ceiling

The interior colonnade in the dining room, created by pushing the new façade halfway into the original colonnade and thereby reducing its width by half, is unique in several ways. The main point is that it is the only space in Can Lis that has no apparent function.

As an extension of the dining room, it contributes no extra usable space, while, as a space in its own right, it seems oddly malproportioned. It could be argued that Utzon also felt slightly ambivalent or unwilling to decide whether the room should be part of the interior, the exterior or none of the above. It is an ambiguous space: not quite in the sense of the Japanese “am-I-inside-or-am-I-outside” sensation of the *engawa*, but with more of a “neither-nor” attitude.

This ambivalence or lack of belonging emanates from the odd presence of a different ceiling. In the dining room space, the *bovedillas*, typical Catalan curved tile vaults spanning the short distance between the beams of the roof, run perpendicular to the general orientation of the room as a natural consequence of seeking the shortest span. The *bovedillas* in the dining room space are painted white.

In the outside colonnade the same pattern is used, and the ceiling height, direction and colour is identical to those of the dining room. Between these two spaces we have the interior colonnade. Here, the lowered ceiling of unpainted *bovedillas* runs in the opposite direction, creating a space that clearly communicates its individuality. One can rightfully argue that the logic of the tectonic system dictates both height and direction, but the fact of the matter is that there is a white painted ceiling above the untreated *bovedillas*, running in the same direction and at the same height as the spaces on either side, so the question is: why was this different ceiling installed?



### **A hole in the floor**

In the north-east corner of the dining room, underneath the bench, there is a hole in the floor. The hole is 19.5-cm wide, 62.5-cm long and 21-cm deep. The reason why this hole exists today is unknown both to the authors and to the Utzon family, but it documents a specific alteration, related to a number of other changes in this part of the house.

When Can Lis was conceived, there was no municipal water supply in this part of Porto Petro. So the house was designed and built with a water tank concealed below the dining room. The floor of the dining room spanned the underground space on concrete l-beams like the ones seen everywhere else in the house. In the late '80s, the house started showing wear. In particular, the exposed concrete beams had reacted to the sea air and the steel reinforcements had begun to rust. There was no access to the underground water tank and Utzon, seeing the state of the other concrete beams, worried about the condition of the beams supporting the dining room floor. As a "better-safe-than-sorry response", a new layer of concrete beams was added to the existing Santanyi stone floor, seen at the bottom of the hole, and concrete was poured between the new beams, doubling the thickness of the floor slab covering the water tank. A new Santanyi floor was laid, and the process resulted in the raised floor visible today as one walks from the kitchen to the dining room or enters the dining room from the central courtyard.



### A new façade

In the mid-1980s, when the floor of the dining room was reinforced and thereby raised 21cm above the level of the courtyard, a new façade was also constructed. The old façade, which consisted of two sets of wooden double doors, larger than the ones seen in the living room, and with small inserted windows that could be opened independently of the doors, had to be altered due to the new lowered height between the floor and lintel.

The fact that the floor of the dining room and the courtyard were no longer at the same height must have made Utzon reconsider the façade. The consistency of the spatial transition from inside to outside, shared by both the dining room and the living room, was gone and a new solution had to be found. As it turned out, once again the living room provided the solution, but this time from the opposite side: the façade facing the Mediterranean. The raised floor made it possible to use the same type of window detail as in the living room and, by placing the frame on the outside of the wall, to make the physical boundary of the glass almost invisible from the inside.

The new façade was installed around the same time that Utzon and his wife Lis decided to make Can Lis their permanent home. Changing the façade from a solution of either open or closed, which might have worked beautifully in a summerhouse, to the climatically independent panorama of the new façade, seemed to be a logical step.

The challenge of entering the dining room without having to go through the kitchen may have led Utzon to offset the new façade into the existing colonnade, reducing its width by half to create two narrow openings at either end, allowing entry directly from the courtyard as in the earlier version.



### The petrified footsteps

Shuffling around in the gravel outside the living room you notice a number of unused foundations, six to be exact, which correspond in size to the built columns. First you come to think of the many stories about Utzon visiting the building site after the workers had left. You almost see him marking changes in the work done by leaving bottles of wine or, as his daughter Lin Utzon recounts, bottles of juice next to anything he wants to be changed. Lin's stories are about Can Feliz, where Utzon actually was on site every day, but with Can Lis things were done differently, so why these extra foundations?

In a special issue of the magazine A+U dedicated to Can Lis, John Pardey adds to the above-mentioned myth by claiming that the stone blocks left on the ground represent evidence of Utzon changing his mind during the process. This might be true in the case of two of the six unused foundations. The last four are less glamorous, but nevertheless important to understanding the degree of authenticity in the present version of Can Lis. A measured survey made by students from the Royal Academy in Copenhagen show a different configuration of columns from that which is visible today. The survey documents what the house looked like prior to the restoration, and the columns seen here correspond to the unused foundations, while the columns one sees today have been reduced in size to correspond to the original drawings. Four of the original columns were at some point enlarged to accommodate the installation of extra concrete lintels to support the existing lintels, which had started showing structural weakness. Older photographs document the crude repair, and one cannot help wondering if it would not have been easier to replace the weakened lintel with a new one, instead of establishing four new foundations and building three and a half new columns.

The last two, oddly-placed foundations must be the petrified footsteps of Utzon...



### Thermal insulation

In a photo published in the Spanish magazine *Arquitectura* soon after the house was completed, one can see a pillow, protruding strangely from the famous slot in the upper living room wall, through which a beam of sunlight brushes the interior every afternoon.

Despite the absolute certainty of the basic diagram of the house and its structure, the hole, like much else at Can Lis, was an experimental afterthought. Having observed the light on the stone at different times of the day, Utzon came to realize that the afternoon light would graze the inside of the living room's south wall, if he provided an opening.

The house is incredibly systematic in its conception with the glass arranged only in the famous external frame detail and only occurring at the chamfered openings. All other openings had timber shutters or solid timber doors. Hence, the idea of making a late adjustment in the form of a tall slot for light presented something of a problem. He decided that it should remain open.

Feeling the heat in the living room on a hot autumn afternoon, one can imagine the cooling effect this unintended ventilation system may have had. However, in winter, the opening naturally led to excessive cooling of the room, making it unpleasant to be in.

The solution? Every year in late autumn, Utzon climbed a ladder to stuff a foam pillow in the opening, to be removed again in early spring.



### The table that wasn't there

One of the most celebrated, frequently photographed parts of Can Lis, after the living room, is the western courtyard, which features a semi-circular opening to the south, a semi-circular window to the west, and a semi-circular table in the centre. This composition of semi-circular elements became an icon in 20th-century architecture. It has also invested Utzon with a reputation as a mystic, given the perfect geometries, lunar references and tile patterns on the table that suggest a compass. Originally however, the table was not there.

The semi-circular table started life in the dining room. The original dining room was smaller than its current form, and this "indoor-outdoor" room contained the tiled semi-circular table, which almost completely filled the room. The logic of the table made sense:— a one-way seating arrangement facing the view, most often used by two to three people, and a table finished in the same resilient surface as the other exterior furniture. Utzon found the arrangement in the dining room too constrained so, as part of the remodelling of this area, he decided to move the table to the exterior courtyard. There is still some dispute about this, given the perfection of the current courtyard arrangement and memories replaced by the lived experience of the table in its current location. However, confirmed accounts and original photographs suggest this was indeed the case. A close inspection of the table reveals irregularities in the tiling, mortar and stonework at two equidistant locations, confirming Kim Utzon's account of the table having been cut into three pieces and relocated.

All of this does not necessarily mean that Utzon was any less of a mystic, but it does confirm that the round table did not start life in the courtyard. It was simply too big for its original location, and so was moved out of the way.



### Shadow of a phantom column

Entering the last pavilion in Can Lis, you will still find markings on the floor that suggest the former existence of a column just inside the door. Earlier drawings show this column in place, uncomfortably located between the door openings and “off grid”, in a house where the grid drives everything. Three questions emerge: why was it there, and why and when was it removed?

The column was required as part of a number of “adjustments”, which had to be made due to a range of building errors. Originally designed like the others, with a high roof void over the central space and the first to be built, it was used as a prototype for the rest. Kim Utzon still recalls the day he arrived at the site with his parents to view the completed pavilion, including Utzon’s remarks as they drove past that the high roof was strangely not visible and perhaps the work was not completed after all. It turned out that, in an act of independence, the builders had elected not to build the high space. So what appears to be a sensitive lowering of scale of the house adjacent to the cliff reserve was not by design, but the result of a building error. By not building the higher void area, a double beam, which was meant to be located under each of the higher walls, was not built. The builders built “straight through”. Consequently, the doors were not located between beams, but with a beam intersecting the middle of the door opening. Preliminary sagging pointed to what would surely happen over time, so the column was introduced to support the beams above the doors.

There is no doubt that this column interrupted the spatial intention of Utzon’s original design, but it also told a story about the building process and the conditions, out of which this masterpiece emerged.

The recent restoration led to the removal of the column, but the wrongly positioned beams still exist.



### **The desk that wasn't there**

This photo is all that remains of a study desk for Kim's bedroom.

Utzon's teenage son was to live in Can Lis, and the end pavilion was designed as his bedroom and study. This first pavilion was built without any supervision by Utzon, who visited the pavilion once the builders had sent word of its completion.

A desk was to be provided and was indicated on the drawings. Upon arrival at the site, Utzon found that the rectangle of the desk had been built as a perfect, stone-lined hole in the floor.



### Mathematics or pragmatics?

Sitting in the courtyard watching the sun set, one's attention is inevitably drawn to the low courtyard walls and the enigmatic slots cut out at irregular intervals. Numerous speculations arise regarding the meaning of the slots, the mathematics of their location, or of some "truth" Utzon was trying to uncover.

Yet, as in most Utzon projects, an incredible pragmatism works in harmony with a poetic approach. A detailed inspection of the slots reveals saw cuts on the inside faces of the openings in the low stone wall, suggesting that they were once complete and the slots created at a later point. Questioning the family about the slots reveals that they were in fact cut out in the early years of the house.

It is hard to imagine, when sitting in the courtyard on a sunny day, just how ferocious the winter winds and waves can be here. From a perch, some 20 metres above sea level, the house seems isolated from the abstract blue or shining mirror of the sea below. Yet in winter the house can be subject to extreme weather. The inclination of the trees at the cliff edge is witness to the intensity and persistence of the prevailing winds. In winter, these winds can add to large swells and the creation of enormous force in the sea as it crashes against the cliffs below. The power of these waves can send water up over the cliff, resulting in occasional damage to, and the withering of the trees in the street. The volume of water is also enough to make swimming pools out of any contained outdoor space.

The cutting out of the slots in the courtyard wall is not based on any mathematical premise. The number and location of the openings is pragmatic: the need to drain water from the courtyards.



## Modular

Can Lis is based on a series of modules: the 80x40x20-cm stone blocks, the 70-cm-wide terracotta bovedillas resting between concrete beams placed at 80-cm intervals, and a column grid set at 240cm. Given this, the inelegant way that the stone blocks turn the corner, particularly visible in the high parts of the bedroom and living room wings, seems like an afterthought. Small vertical blocks have been used to infill where needed, as the geometry is not fully integrated.

Of course, the geometry was fully integrated in the original drawings. To get the 80x40x20-cm blocks to turn a corner seamlessly, a staggered block bond was used, which arranged the blocks in a  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{4}$  split. This means that the last block would stop 20cm before the corner, allowing a perfect junction as the 20cm wide block turned the corner.

One of the outcomes of the fateful first visit to the site, when Utzon discovered that the builders had decided not to build the high void in Kim's room and had completely changed the structural module as a result, was that they had also decided to build the house in standard bond as they normally did with these blocks. In other words, a perfectly centred bond so two blocks met in the middle of the full block above or below.

With the first pavilion completed, Utzon had no choice but to demolish or to accept the bond and re-draw, and thus reorganize, the rest of the house accordingly. The standard bond was used throughout, resulting in 20-cm block inserts on every second course to compensate for the disjunction between the block dimension and the bond used.



INTERVIEW WITH ANTONI ALOMAR,  
AT HIS HOUSE NEAR MURO. 01. NOVEMBER 2013

TA: Antoni (Toni) Alomar  
AEV: Aida Espanyol Vilanova



AEV: I have never been here before. Previously we went directly to the quarry, so we didn't see the house.

TA: This house is a *casal* (country house). The first part dates from the 14th century. It was inhabited for 2 centuries by Jesuits. We have expanded it to double what it was then. After the Jesuits came my family: 7 generations. We made an inquiry with a historian, going through the archives of Mallorca. He found all the owners since the 14th century. I have lived here for 23 years. I came here when there was no electricity and no water. I installed some sun panels and I washed myself with a bucket and water from a well. And little by little I have built it over these 23 years. And now, my sons and daughters have built, let's say, their own apartments. I am now restoring this one. Before, I was working on the other side of the house. I am restoring it little by little. And then the gardens... I have been doing them very slowly. Very, very slowly. I love trees. Above all, I love gardening. What I like are the trees. They move me a lot. And so I have been helping... I have planted some and looked after the ones that were already here. So ... we were talking about Utzon.

AEV: About Can Lis, yes. Earlier you were mentioning Jaume Vidal.

TA: Not... Vidal: Paridet! The *mal nom* here works as an alias. The official family names are not useful at all, because in the villages there was a lot of inbreeding, and the family names are all the same. All people are relatives, however distant, so the *mal nom* exists to designate people properly. It is not an insult. Jaume's family name is Vidal, but he was named after Can Paridet.

Then there are 'can Patro', 'can Sopa', 'can Fideu', 'can Trull'. Here we use these names. Otherwise we wouldn't know who is who. If I say Miquel... Perelló: which Perelló? Because there are Perellós in Muro, in Manacor,... Which Perelló? I find it amusing too.

I have an extraordinary master builder. I also worked with his father. We made a workshop school in Manacor in the '80s. We taught old restoration techniques with his father, my master builder's father who is dead now. Miquel is that tennis player's father-in-law, Nadal's father-in-law, Xisca's father. He is the one that comes and does everything. I trust him completely. We understand each other very well. He understands what he has to respect from the architect and you understand what you have to respect: what comes strictly from the technique. And he says 'I am your hands', and it is true, it is like this – theoretically. In reality it is often not like this, but it should be like this: 'I am your hands'. The architect says: you have to make this in this and that way. And he [the master builder] has to understand it. He has to know what to ask you and what not to ask you. Because he should not bother you by asking things he should already know, since he knows you. But he should also know that if he is in doubt he should ask you. Because then you are the one that has to decide. And this was how it was, working with Paridet. Also with Guillem Oliver, an architect who died young.

AEV: I haven't heard about Guillem Oliver.

TA: Guillem Oliver were architects, a couple. She is still alive. They lived in S'Alqueria Blanca close to...

AEV: ...Can Lis.

TA: Yes, yes... They knew and worked with Jaume. They always made very interesting things. And they got to know Utzon, I didn't. I never got to know him. They were very interesting people. Very good architects. They worked a lot with *marès*, as I did. I really like *marès*. I lived in Soller at that time, but I was often at their

place, spending the whole day, so I was aware of what was happening there. And I got to know Jaume, who worked with Utzon. And he was the one that told us more about Utzon. Utzon was lucky because he found a person that respected the architect. I have been working in Mallorca for 50-some years, and I have only found 2 or 3 good builders. All the rest are shit. And to deal with incompetent builders is terrible. But I have been lucky. I have only built a few things, maybe because I have rejected many projects. Having seen the conditions, I have said "no". I preferred to do very few things and do them well. And to enjoy doing them... it is really important to enjoy! An architect's work... because it has a creative side, it is necessary to enjoy doing it. And to be present... I was going to the building sites a lot. Utzon was there the entire day. I know this for sure. He was there to stack stones with them [the masons]. Of course he was coming from the problems he had at Sydney. He was burnt from what I have heard. He was badly burnt. However here the opposite happened... and this is how we have always been doing it here. It is architecture in contact with construction and about deciding things according to day-to-day requirements and conditions on site - in enjoyable collaboration with a good builder.

AEV: I would like to hear about your works. One that I know of is the Llobards Church.

TA: This is from that same area. Do you want to visit it? At the bar opposite they will tell you who has the key.

This project with pictures and drawings went to the Venice Biennale.

AEV: Was it together with the Catalan pavilion?

TA: With the Ramon Llull Institute. They were offered a pavilion to exhibit Catalan and Balearic building culture. I don't know what else was shown since I didn't go there. But there is a catalogue. The curators chose the church from Els Llobards. Quetglas also took part in

the decision. He is one of few people who are interested in this church.

AEV: The church reminds me somewhat of Nordic architecture.

TA: Yes, some people have said so... You see... I didn't study only in Barcelona. When I was 19 years old and I had finished school, I commenced architecture studies in Barcelona, at the main public university. The school was on the top floor, where Gaudi had studied also. It had a certain fame... But once I was accepted, we decided I had to go abroad, out of Spain. Spain was very isolated at that moment, very closed off from the world. My father was a close friend of Sert, who wanted to send me to Boston. But my mother said: this is too far away. So that is why we finally decided that I should go to Brussels. However, in Brussels the school was the same... I don't believe that much in schools. It all depends on the tutors you have and on you. I studied there for 5 years and came back. Then I did a Ph.D. I had a Ph.D. from Brussels and did a Ph.D. here too. We didn't have internet, but there were magazines, and students started to get information about Aalto, Saarinen, Jacobsen... all those who became legends for us. And as I had been in Brussels I felt even closer. And, maybe as a consequence of having lived there, Nordic architecture influenced me.

Anyway, the church in Llobards is the opposite of a monument. It is a church, but I wanted to make a house. The town's big house. And this is the quality it has: a piece of architecture close to what is around you and close to people. And because of this there is a connection with Aalto, for instance.

AEV: Yes. I noticed the materials... For example, the diagonally divided glazed tiles, similar to the ones in Can Lis.

TA: The tile is a medieval Catalan tradition brought to Mallorca. It is called *Rajola de Vela* [sail's tile].



In Catalonia they have it in green. In Mallorca, people wanted to be different, so we made it in blue. However, this tradition was lost in Mallorca and I reintroduced it. For me this was fantastic! Since I came to work in Mallorca I had the opportunity to work together with manufacturers of materials. And I had the chance to develop new materials. I found an old school friend who had a tile factory, and I suggested we made some experiments. Afterwards he would commercialise it.

AEV: You had him produce it for a specific project, but after he could sell it to others?

TA: Yes, of course. After the Llobards Church I made the one for La Colonia Sant' Jordi, and they said: we don't want the same tile as in Llobards. There is a bit of rivalry between the two towns. So in Sant' Jordi we made them in yellow.

AEV: Then it was you who reintroduced this tile.

TA: Yes. And I think I have used it somewhere else. There is an apartment block in Palma where the entrance is also made with this tile.

AEV: Let us talk about marès, the stone that the walls of Can Lis are made of.

TA: There is an architect from Mallorca who works in Barcelona. Cifu [Francisco Cifuentes] has her contact info. She is the one that knows most about marès. Her father was a marès cutter. He had a quarry and when she was a child she would spend the whole day playing inside the quarry. Now she has the architect's point of view, and this combination is perfect. For many people marès is something new. There is also marès in Sicily and other places in the Mediterranean, but here in Mallorca and Menorca we extract most of it. Have you been to Menorca? In Ciutadella there is something called *Lítica*, a foundation that owns quarries, and you can visit them. In summer time they organise concerts and plays inside the quarries. It is very good.

AEV: The sound must be perfect there.

TA: Yes, yes. It is great sound.

AEV: Would you use marès for housing?

TA: For everything. Where there is marès all houses are made of it.

AEV: Cifu told me that the houses are plastered on top of the marès.

TA: Well yes, but the ones that are plastered are the ones made with *trossos*.

AEV: Yes, he [Cifu] called them *bolos* [uncut, naturally rounded stones].

TA: Here we call it *trossam*. Sometimes it is plastered and sometimes not. Generally the marès area is the south-east part of the island. In the mountains they use only stone. Santanyi is very local. It has the best marès. Here in our quarry we have a very good quality of marès, close to that of Santanyi.

AEV: But here it is not common to use the double cavity wall as in Can Lis.

TA: Here it is only a wall of one layer. I guess that in Can Lis Utzon made it because he didn't know this stone that well. There is an architect, Tono Vila, who calculated the thermal transmission at his place. He built a house using 40 cm marès blocks. And he says that it meets the thermal insulation requirements.

AEV: And why is it that people are not using it now?

TA: Because they don't know it. Now there are no builders who know how to stack marès. In Mallorca there are only 3 or 4 of them. Miquel and two or three more. The young ones don't have a clue about it. They say it is too heavy. But you should know how to deal with it using

your head, not your bodily strength. Do you understand? If you mention mares, they get scared. It is a pity. What is used now is what is brought in from outside the island.

It is so difficult this thing about the ancient knowledge of construction. It is lost. I think the problem is that architects are not taught about this. If someone taught them, they would realise that there are old technical solutions that are still useful nowadays. But no one is telling them.

During the 80's Jaume Vidal, Bernat who was Miquel's father, another one from Bunyola, another one from Soller, plus Guillem Oliver and myself founded something we called the *cofraria* [brotherhood, fellowship]. We called ourselves masons! Now [free-] masonry has become something suspicious, but originally masonry was the same as what we did. It was people who knew a trade, meeting to exchange knowledge, but in secret. Masonry comes from here. It means to know how to cut stones to build the big cathedrals.

We made this *cofraria* based on this idea. We would meet up every 15 days. We had lunch together and we shared techniques in order to protect and maintain them. Miquel, Bernat's son, still knows these secrets. For example Mallorcan Stucco, which is not like the Venetian. Ours is very simple and no water can go through the *façade*. This is what is used in Llobards.

I have made very few things, but I have always worked with clients who had confidence in me. At Llobards it was a priest from Almeria. He said: I don't know about this so I give you my confidence. I told him that I wasn't a believer. He said: I don't need a good Christian; I need a good architect. This is common sense. Catholic people sometimes argue against this. But if they were right, you would have to be ill in order to build a good hospital. With the Toni Maura Institute [school building in Palma] Fisac, who was employed by the government called me.

He said to me: all secondary schools are built the same way in Spain, which is not ideal since climate, context and materials are different in every place. So we have decided to make examples of 10 secondary schools in different parts of Spain to give an idea of how they should be. I asked him to send me the programme. And he said no: "you did go to school, right? think!" This is freedom.

(translated from a mix of Castellán, Catalan and Mallorquin and edited by Niels Park Nygaard and Aida Espanyol Vilanova)