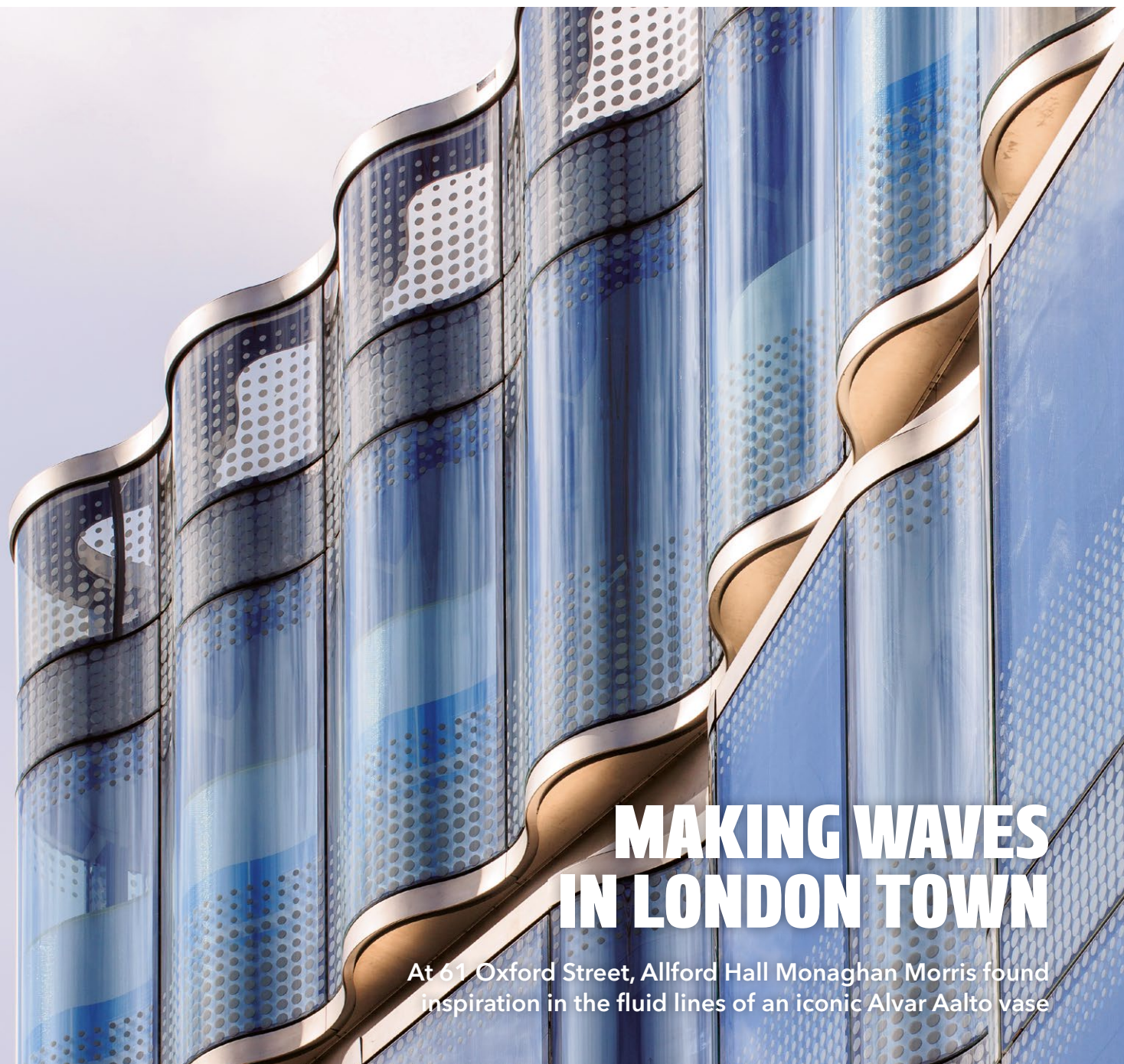


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At 61 Oxford Street, Allford Hall Monaghan Morris found inspiration in the fluid lines of an iconic Alvar Aalto vase

+ THE GREEN AGE OF ASIA

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HK\$48
US\$18
€15

Confronting the physicality of history

The new Cultural Centre Casal Balaguer, designed by Flores & Prats Architects + Duch-Pizá Arquitectes, saw the renovation of a heritage house in the centre of Palma de Mallorca after a two decade-long process

TEXT:
Suzanne Miao
PHOTOGRAPHY:
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www.floresprats.com + www.duchpiza.com

Casal Balaguer is a palace in the historical centre of Palma de Mallorca in the Spanish Balearic archipelago. A large aristocratic house dating back to the 14th century, it was renovated and enlarged extensively over the years.. Late last century, the City Council of Palma decided to turn Casal Balaguer into a cultural centre, heralding a new era in the life of the building.

Tasked with converting what had once been a family home into a public building open to all were Flores & Prats Architects and Duch-Pizá Arquitectes.

The traces left by time in the various construction phases and in the subsequent uses of the building were the object of a meticulous survey that permitted the architects to instil new life into this complex by means of a project that is respectful of all pre-existing conditions while at the same time capable of triggering fascinating transformations and possibilities for new uses.

“We worked with everything we inherited [simultaneously], without granting one period priority over another,” say Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats, founders of Flores & Prats Architects. “We valued the whole as a new presence which, for us, is contemporary; and which we approached in order to decipher its rules to design its own future.

“Accepting the accumulation of history in an existing building requires

discipline; it means accepting the ghost that manifests itself in the building’s past as a physical quality imbued in things by time.”

Flores & Prats took into consideration the need to access areas that were previously closed off, re-activating rooms and designing a circulation through the building to adapt it for its new public use. As part of the transformation, the architects also sought to prevent the palace from losing its spatial complexity and mystery which has defined its extensions to this day.

- Architect:
Flores & Prats Architects + Duch-Pizá Arquitectes
- Collaborators:
Caterina Anastasia, Ankur Jain, Els van Meerbeek, Cristian Zanoni, Carlos Bedoya, Guido Fiszson, Ellen Halupczok, Julia Taubinguer, Paula Ávila, Nicolás Chara, Eugenia Troncoso, Israel Hernando, Hernán Barbalace, Benedikte Mikkelsen, Mar Garrido, Celia Carroll, Jorge Casajús, Juan Membrive, Oriol Valls, Tanja Dietsch, Sergi Madrid, Sergio Muiños, Lucas Wilson, Anna Reidy, Maria Amat Busquets, Fabrizia Cortellini, Veronica Baroni, Elvire Thouvenot, Carlotta Bonura, Francesca Tassi-Carboni
- Archaeological survey:
Grupo Arqueotaller
(Roser Pérez, Margalida Munar, Magdalena Salas)
- Historical research:
Dolores Ladaria
- Material analysis:
Lend Consulting
- Structural engineering:
Fernando Purroy
- Supplies engineering:
Joan Perelló
- Contractor:
Contratas Bartolomé Ramón SA /
phase 1 and phase 2; Cyrespa / phase 3

The use of light is one of the elements that enabled the most significant transformation. Daylight guides visitors through the building, clearly marking their passage from one part of the house





One of the first works at the Casal Balaguer was to appraise the building's accumulated history, its various chapters, materialised in adjacent, non-continuous sections. This growth in fits and starts reveal themselves via different interventions which make little attempt to connect with former epochs, as if designed only for the immediate present while ignoring previous phases.

In the new programme, the ground floor is the entrance to the new cultural centre, with the reception, cafeteria, and exhibition gallery spread out over two floors. The change to this level involved reopening the arches that had been closed in the last century in order to recover the patio's original, continuous space, with the complete vision of the 13 arches that seem to hold up the house in midair.

The *piano nobile* – the first floor containing the principal rooms – has become the house museum, which can be visited on a route through the rooms that used to be part of Josep Balaguer's former music building. The 'Porxos' or attic floor is now the documentation centre for the Espai de les Arts Foundation and the Círculo de Bellas Artes centre. On the roof, an open-air terrace and a room for book presentations can be found.

The 18th-century extensions were the most important place for the family, while the 14th-century house became used for the service rooms. These two areas have very distinct geometries and sizes, on different levels, and are interconnected through small doors and stairs: "We worked between these different periods on the house's growth, connecting them to the new interventions for them all to work as a new unit," says Flores.



From top

The building's roof was previously unstable, with a geometry that failed to channel rain water to the outer perimeter, leaving it trapped at different points and thus damaging the palace's interior. Today, it houses an open-air terrace and a room for book presentations. New wooden beams replaced the old roof trusses – of the original trusses dating back to 1700, the only reusable portions were the moulded ends that jugged out over the street, which had been made with the highest quality wood and were therefore able to withstand the ravages of time.



Sharp corners and angles identify the newer additions, providing a contrast to the smooth, rounded curves of the original architecture as can be seen here in this staircase, with its new windows.



From top

The ground floor is the entrance to the new cultural centre, where the renovation involved reopening the arches that had been closed in the last century in order to recover the patio's original, continuous space • Eva Prats and Ricardo Flores

"In that way, the several, different-sized windows – part of the former service rooms, kitchens, bathrooms, storage areas – are now connected to recessed reliefs which make them larger units, to produce generously-sized windows that can match the scale of a single room, the new cultural centre's art storeroom."

In the section view, two types of sunlight can be seen to direct the new circulations through the palace. The light falls vertically against the partition wall, filling up the spaces that it finds on its route to the ground, whereas above the dome, the light is horizontal. "Before reaching the oculus, it 'floats' above the dome, and is distributed in the different rooms around it," Prat explains.

"Although the project ultimately alters the entire building, there are moments of greater intensity at the intersections of the building's different phases, and these are the ones that are outlined in the axonometry." ●

