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MUSEUM MANIA

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2004

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Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats craft stone and wood elements in converting a windmill to the MILLS MUSEUM OF THE BALEARIC ISLANDS

By David Cohn

In adapting a 17th-century flour windmill for use as the Mills Museum of the Balearic Islands, Barcelona-based architects Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats have drawn out and elaborated upon the modest features of the historic building. In so doing, they have created an intimate itinerary through its interior, which features exhibits on the history of this centuries-old structure integral to the Majorcan landscape.

The former windmill overlooks the waterfront of Palma, the capital of Majorca, and had appeared on a 1644 plan, one of seven such mills lining the escarpment of Es Jonquet. This old fishermen's neighborhood to the west of the medieval city has long been a pocket of poverty despite its prime location, and the 7,534 square-foot, \$493,497 Mills Museum and plaza are part of a city effort to renew the area.

Flores and Prats did not seek to return the windmill to some hypothetical pristine state. Their approach, plus their intuitive and formal vocabulary, had its origins in the work of the late Barcelona architect Enric Miralles, in whose studio the two met while working there in the early 1990s. Accordingly, their orientation to the windmill reuse was a more archaeological one, exposing the cumulative marks of time on the structure: They preserved the uneven, stained patina of the blocks of marés, the local sandstone, on the windmill's cylindrical tower, and the chipped profiles of window lintels. Inside, the stone vaults and walls retain the scars of former partitions and soot stains from demolished chimneys.

The architects have also added new elements of poured-in-place concrete, teak, and marés stone in the same spirit. Outside, the architects placed the ticketing, bar, and bathrooms in a separate kiosk carved from a vaulted secondary structure on the site, and designed a curving concrete bench in front of it to define a small entry plaza of concrete and red ceramic tile. The most notable interventions introduce natural light into the cavelike space of the windmill's base through new or modified openings that are concentrated around existing wall openings. Although the apertures are generally small in response to the powerful Mediterranean sun, Flores and Prats found it necessary to control the haphazard effects caused by their disordered placement and varied sizes. This led to a strat-



egy in which, as Flores explains, "the windows are treated like pieces of furniture that modify the light, focusing it on exhibits and displays."

For small, high openings, the architects carved light chutes out of the thick, 31-inch walls to redirect light into lower openings, which become display cases in their own right. Large openings are partially enclosed in wood and elements made of marés stone. Light spills down chutes, splashes out of framed stone boxes, and cascades from small new skylights down the curving exposed top of the thin stone vaults, changing color and intensity as it does. In addition, fixtures for indirect artificial lighting are integrated into these elements of "light furniture." Nevertheless, in sculpturally modeling the interior volume with natural light, Flores and Prats have kept the primitive, shadowy quality of its cavernlike vaults—a "vague penumbra," in the architects' words.

The horizontal space of the museum is interrupted by the dra-

Project: Mills Museum of the Balearic Islands, Palma, Majorca, Spain

Owner: Patronat Municipal de l'Habitatge; Asociación Amigos de los Molinos, leasee

Architect: Flores + Prats Architects—Richard Flores and Eva

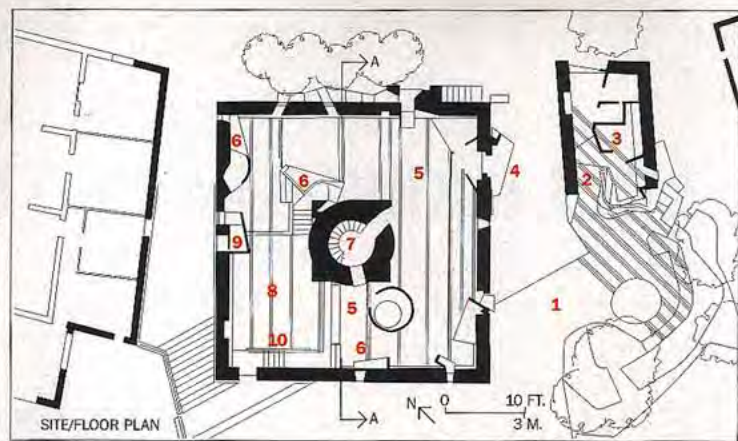
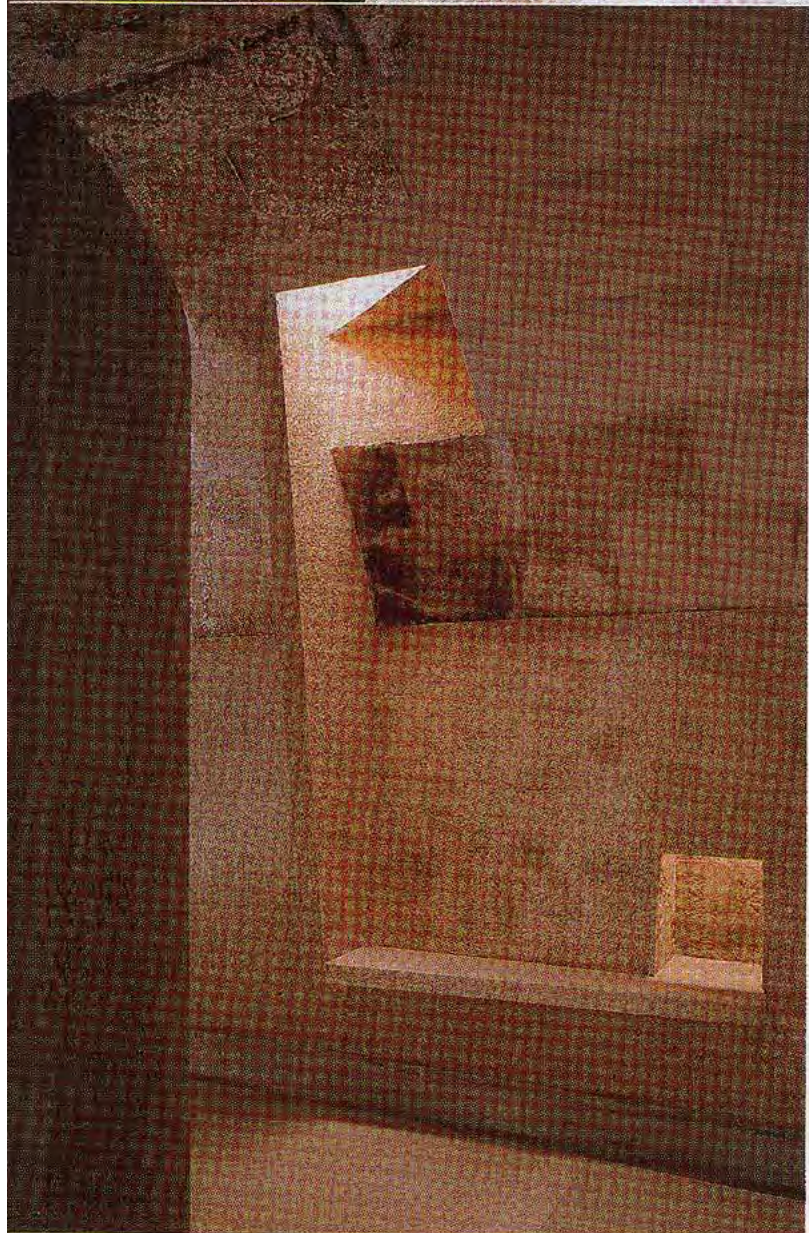
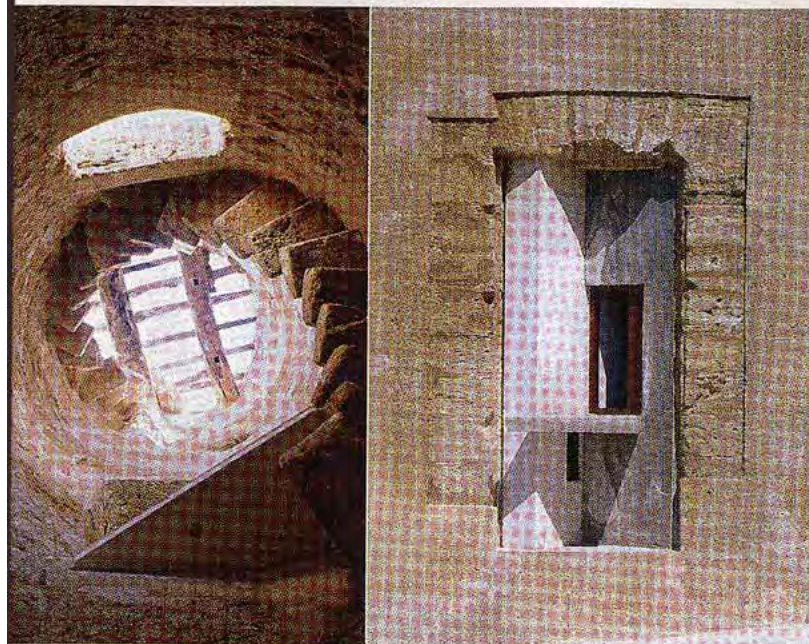
Prats, principals; Maria J. Duch, Francisco Pizá, Paola Vallini, Frank Stahl, Erica Checcucci, Sole Revuelto, Armin Schmidt, Merlin Ellis, Ankur Jain, Michella Mezzavilla and Cristian Zanoni, design team

Engineer: Manuel Arguijo Vila

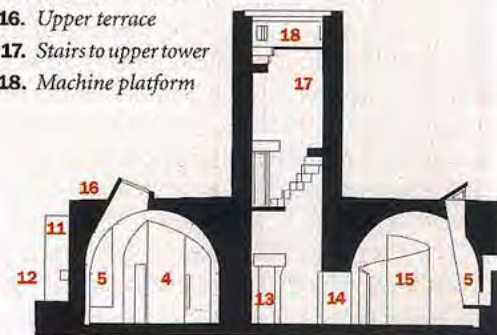
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The 2,422-square-foot interior includes a small auditorium (this page). The built-in furnishings, including the auditorium pulpit and light well, plus the display niches (opposite, bottom left and top right), are impeccably crafted of reinforced concrete, cement, mares stone, and teak. Visitors to the exhibition (opposite, right) can enter the tower and see the old stone spiral stair above (opposite, top left).





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|-------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Access plaza | 10. Projector screen |
| 2. Kiosk | 11. Stairs to roof terrace |
| 3. Office/storage | 12. Upper street |
| 4. Main entrance | 13. Existing tower door |
| 5. Exhibition | 14. New tower door |
| 6. Exhibition pedestals | 15. Display chamber |
| 7. Tower | 16. Upper terrace |
| 8. Auditorium | 17. Stairs to upper tower |
| 9. Speaker podium | 18. Machine platform |



SECTION A-A

matic vertical shaft of the tower, where visitors can look up and see the cantilevered stone blocks of the old stair spiraling above them. A small auditorium nearby is defined by a drop in the floor, creating a double-height space presided over by a speaker's podium.

The rather radical idea of a museum cast into semidarkness requires a special sensibility that the museum's managers, the local Association of the Friends of Windmills, do not seem to share with Flores and Prats. Consequently, the association has added powerful artificial lighting and organized the exhibition in conventional wall-mounted panels, apparently making little effort to work with the architects and their proposed integrated display system. This lack of dialogue or compromise is a pity. It trades the unique and moving spatial experience the architects have created for the kind of mundane institutional installation for which the windmill is completely unsuited. ■



Sources

Teak and glass windows: Poliformas
Metalwork Cerrajería Marcos Pérez
Custom bar, fixed seating, tables
(concrete, teak, marés stone): Juan

Cifre SA—Rafael Colom, supervisor

For more information on this project, go to Projects at www.architecturalrecord.com.



The windmills museum (opposite), minus the original sails and conical roof, is entered from a plaza next to the new kiosk. Inside, walls and vaults are built of marés, a local sandstone (this page). Cement surfaces and concrete architectural display elements and light walls (this page) alternate with teak.