



Archive

Lambeth Palace Library
by Wright & Wright

Forum

Ken Shuttleworth, Patrick Lynch,
Holly Lewis, Martyn Evans,
Louis Mayes, Jennifer Beningfield

Works

Sanchez Benton, Caruso St John,
Moxon, Allies and Morrison,
PLP and Peter Barber Architects

Focus

Envelope: Bell Phillips and
Cottrell & Vermeulen



Dirty Drawings

Flores & Prats' work is developed through rough but rich collages and overlays, finds Louis Mayes

Barcelona-based Flores & Prats has developed a method of recording its work through a combination of hand-drawn axonometrics, plans and occasionally animated models that will be familiar to many through the exhibition and publication of the studio's work. Co-founder Eva Prats describes those drawings as palimpsests — “we like that these documents map the path that the project has taken” — and while this process is time consuming, it has produced a distinctive and richly detailed archive of the studio's work.

Less often seen are the drawings Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats call ‘dibujos sucios’, or ‘dirty drawings’. These developmental sketches are often layered on trace and are produced at every stage of the design process. If we look, for example, at the development drawings behind Flores & Prats' winning entry to the competition for the renovation of the ancient Théâtre des Variétés in Brussels (with Owest Architecture), they are often cut to fit together as different areas of the scheme are updated at different times. Repeated pencil lines show areas where there has been more doubt, and those that have received more thought. “Hand drawing is more selective — you can show the important things”, says Prats.

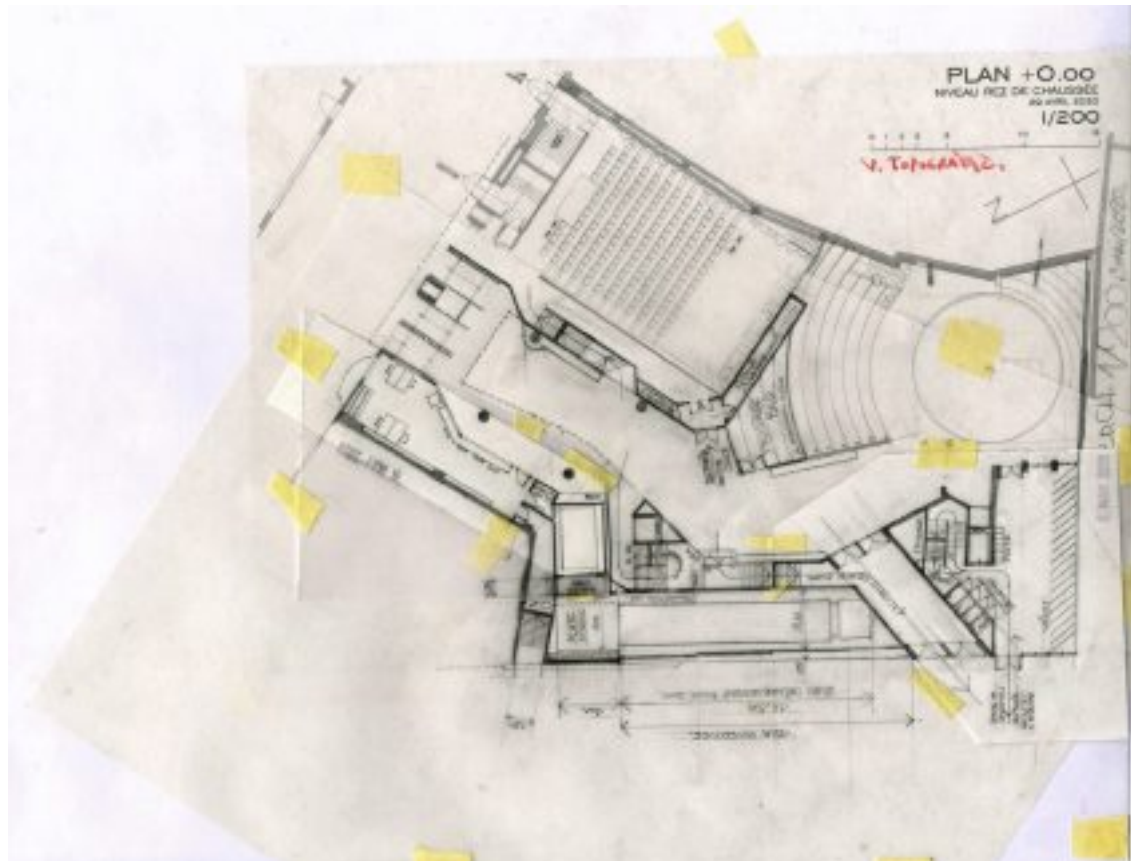
“We have this trust in the hand as a translation of what we're thinking; it also makes it visible for others”, explains Flores. “When that thought is visible we can also criticise it, as if it weren't your own. In this way, the thoughts move forward”. Eva Prats mentions the importance of a drawing being tangible, and able to be returned to as it sits on a desk. It is also open to everyone in the office, making design a participatory process.

Within the practice these drawings act both as developmental tools and as records drawn upon to influence future designs. The ‘dibujos sucios’ are present throughout a project, exploring elements at various scales, and transforming and modifying what has previously been drawn. Some aim to convey where light will reach, others explore the public and private areas, as in studies of the Variétés theatre drawn in wax crayon across neatly delineated plans and sections. And in others the ambiguity of the pencil lines allow for new interpretations of earlier drawings below the trace. “We mainly draw in plan and section but you have in mind the floor above you, so you're also drawing in three dimensions”, explains Prats, showing how their drawings are generally produced in a holistic manner, with each change affecting the rest of the project.

Flores & Prats



Established in 1998 by Ricardo Flores and Eva Prats who had both worked in Enric Miralles' studio, Flores & Prats' work includes housing, public realm and cultural projects, with an emphasis on the reuse of existing buildings. Both partners are associate professors at the Escola Tècnica Superior d'Arquitectura de Barcelona ETSAB-UPC, and have taught and exhibited widely around the world.

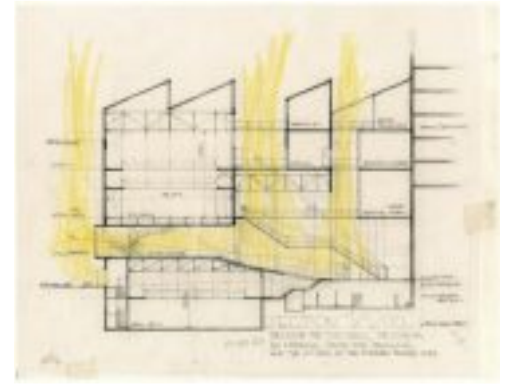
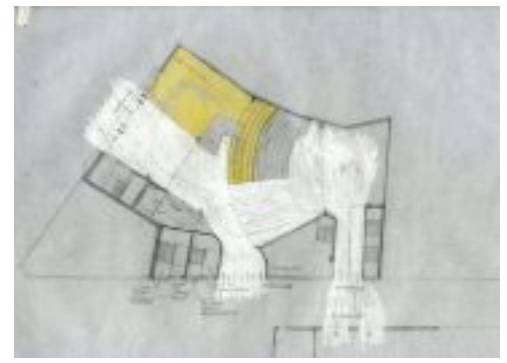


Drawings used for both developmental and representational purposes are supplemented by explorations of the design through physical models. These are often elaborate and highly engaging, but appear to lack the flexibility and ambiguity of the drawings. Flores notes that “models always come after the drawings; they are a test after a certain part of the project”.

As a scheme progresses, the dirty drawings focus on specific areas in more detail. In the latest drawings of the Variétés theatre, for example, a trace overlaid on a computer drawing focusses on the route from the stairs to the external terrace, and how people will use the ticket office or balcony. It explores the extent of what is relevant to the person occupying the space in that instant. As Flores explains, “these particular drawings are representing the fragmentary condition of your thoughts, which are never complete. The visitor doesn’t see the building all at once, they experience it progressively — it arrives in stages”.

The way in which the drawings are presented when the project is being built is key to Flores & Prats’ approach. “Every step is unfinished. You always know that there could be another possibility, another solution”, says Prats. In the final building the eye will move from window to door to floor. Therefore, this should also happen on the page — plans and details are shown alongside one another.

Flores and Prats see hand drawing as a discussion and a way to explore the potential of spaces through the ambiguities contained within their work. Their drawings and models often appear refined, and constructed with an awareness of their aesthetic effects, but they are indispensable when imagining how the space will be occupied once built. “You are focusing on one moment which should be really moving for the people who go there, and you build around that scenario”, explains Flores. “That is really beautiful, in my opinion”. ↗



Top right

Drawings showing routes taken by different users of the Théâtre des Variétés, and the way daylight enters the building.

Left, above, right

Drawings made at different stages of the design process, examining aspects of the main floor at the Théâtre des Variétés.

