

Ricardo Legorreta

An Architect in Search of Modernity Within Tradition

By Louise Noelle

Ricardo Legorreta is one of the Mexican contemporary architects who have garnered the most recognition; only in 2011 he was distinguished as *Doctor Honoris Causa* by the *Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México*, UNAM, and the *Praemium Imperiale* in Japan. One year before, on August 27 at the **docomomo** Conference held in Mexico City, he gave a memorable Keynote Speech on the main figures of the Modern Movement in Mexico, José Villagrán and Luis Barragán, that the attendants treasured in their memories.

He was born in Mexico City on May 7, 1931, and he studied architecture precisely at the UNAM; he started his professional life working with José Villagrán García, who is considered to be the pioneer of Mexican Modern architecture, and eventually became his partner between 1955 and 1960. His work stemmed from the analysis and comprehension of the values of architecture and the mastery of technique, as well as from the Mexican roots and traditions, drawing near Luis Barragán's proposals. His first personal expression can be seen fully at the Hotel Camino Real in Mexico City (1968), a building that combines an intimate nature with the complex needs of the hotel industry, a genre where he had several successful examples. The main characteristics of his style are shown in a privileged way of using a wall, which enable him to use light sparingly and fitly. The exterior result is of marked and powerful volumes, with a horizontal tendency that protects generous internal spaces, kind and welcoming, with a constant feeling of belonging to the local.

His vast and varied architectural production was developed starting in 1963 where he headed Legorreta Arquitectos,¹ where in the last two decades the works related to culture and education had an important place; in these instances he looked not only for an

adequate urban presence of the buildings but for a solution to the specific requirements that go beyond the technical settings. We are talking about complex problems such as the ones presented by libraries and the relentless growth of their archives, like in the libraries of: *Universidad Autónoma de Nuevo León* (1994) in Monterrey and the *Centro Nacional de las Artes* in Mexico City (1994); the Central Library, in San Antonio, Texas (1995), and the one in Chula Vista, in California (1995).

Regarding institutions of higher education, his designs considered the contemporary means of transmitting knowledge, without leaving behind the quality of student interactions; we can witness this at the *Instituto Tecnológico de Estudios Superiores* in Monterrey, ITESM, with the Graduated School of Business (2001) and the campus "Santa Fe" in Mexico City (2009), as well as the Graduated School of Economy at the UNAM (2010). In the United States he carried out the Schwab Residential Centre at Stanford University (1997), the Max Palevsky Residence Hall at the University of Chicago (2001) and the Community Centre of UCSF in San Francisco (2005). In the Middle East he designed for the Qatar University at Doha, the Texas A&M Engineering College (2007) and the Carnegie Mellon College of Business and Computer Science (2009), as well as the Student Housing and the Campus centre at the American University in El Cairo (2009).

Finally, the museums and exhibition rooms, in various shapes and forms, where part of the challenges he accepted, starting with the Children's Discovery Museum (1989) and the Technological Museum of Innovation (1998) in San José California. In the new century he designed: the *Pabellón de México* (2000) at the Expo-Hannover in Germany; the Museum for Zandra Rhodes in London (2001); the Art Museum of South Texas in Corpus Christi (2006); the *Museo Laberinto de las Ciencias y las Artes* in San Luis Potosí (2008); and the Museum of Science and History at Fort Worth (2010).

With the death of Ricardo Legorreta on December 30, 2011, contemporary architecture has lost one of its main actors and **docomomo** a trusted friend.

1. First he established a society with Noé Castro and Carlos Vargas, which was transformed in 2000 as Legorreta + Legorreta, with Víctor Legorreta, Noé Castro, Carlos Vargas, Adriana Ciclik and Miguel Almaraz

