

## Casablanca Chandigarh: Modern Planning

Exhibition at the Canadian  
Centre for Architecture, Montreal

In the editorial of *docomomo Journal* 28, published in March 2003 and inaugurating her tenure — as editor-in-chief of the magazine, Maristella Casciato undertook to consider “modernism outside the West” and to encourage “new cultures and new histories”, whilst simultaneously enriching the *docomomo* International network. She brought this intellectual endeavor with her to the position as Associate Director, Research at the Canadian Centre for Architecture (CCA) in Montreal. Working alongside Tom Avermaete, she co-curated the exhibition: *How Architects, Experts, Politicians, International Agencies and Citizens Negotiate Modern Planning: Casablanca Chandigarh*, presented at CCA during the Winter 2013–2014 season. They also co-authored *Casablanca Chandigarh: A Report on Modernization*, the book published to coincide with the exhibition. A preamble to these projects lies in the CCA’s acquisition, in 2010, of architect Pierre Jeanneret’s personal archives, mainly pertaining to projects developed during the period from 1951 to 1965 when he renewed his association with his cousin, Le Corbusier, for the planning and construction of a new capital for the Indian Punjab following the Partition (1947).

Both the exhibition and the book scrutinize the history of the two cities that, in very different ways, experienced the weight of colonial rule in the 20<sup>th</sup> century: Casablanca, still under the French Protectorate, and Chandigarh, born from the ashes of the British Raj, at the end of colonization. Tom Avermaete examined French architect Michel Écochard’s plan for urban development of Morocco’s economic nerve center, which faced massive rural migration following World War 2. In 1946, the French government-appointed architect was appointed official in charge of the *Services d’Urbanisme* (urban planning) for the entire region. Maristella Casciato, meanwhile, retraced the creation of the Punjab’s new capital, whose urban and architectural planning was entrusted to Le Corbusier in December 1950 by Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru.

All too often, whether in the eyes of the general public or in historical studies, big

names in architecture are given sole credit for their constructions, ignoring the fact that architecture is a collaborative endeavor. Here, both Casciato and Avermaete emphasized the teams Écochard and Le Corbusier surrounded themselves with, not only colleagues operating in metropolitan centers, but also local architects, engineers, and urban planners. Moreover, the exhibition’s curators highlighted the appreciation these designers showed for local and traditional builders.

Unwilling to leave his Paris *atelier* for an extended period, in 1951, Le Corbusier had three colleagues jointly appointed “senior architects” in residence. These were E. Maxwell Fry and Jane B. Drew, both British, in addition to his former partner, Pierre Jeanneret, who was to bear sole responsibility after the departure of Fry and Drew in 1954, until 1965. Together, the three assembled a group of twelve or so Indian professionals, each of whom was entrusted with a specific set of tasks. This strict, although not particularly hierarchical, division of labor was to take concrete shape in the plan distribution of the Architects’ Office, the Chandigarh headquarters of the ambitious Punjab Capital Project. Another singular feature of the exhibition lies in how the curators/authors situated the planning of these two cities within the new geopolitical context that emerged from World War 2. A strategic equilibrium had been redefined by the rise to power of the United States and the USSR, a situation from which a number of countries, fiercely jealous of their independence, sought to escape by forming the Non-Aligned Movement. India was one. Meanwhile, the League of Nations, that legacy of World War 1, which had failed to ensure peace in the world, was replaced in June 1945 by the United Nations (UN). The new international institution was much more than a platform for diplomacy. Many departments were created under its umbrella, including the Technical Assistance Administration (TAA), conceived to promote the economic development of newly independent nations by sending teams of experts to consult with their governments. Architects and urban planners from the North found

this context provided new, transnational opportunities to exercise their professions, and forums for the exchange of ideas.

This double transnational and disciplinary perspective structures both the book and the exhibition, albeit in different ways, as the limitations and opportunities of each medium afford. The core of the publication consists of the in-depth study of these urban projects, alternating between the two, and framed by an international perspective, both geopolitical and professional. In its pages, the planning process is examined in detail, alongside governance and the design of housing and service facilities for each of the cities as well as their deployment. The organization of the book’s content into fragmented segments makes it possible to read discontinuously. The exhibition began with a presentation of the new world order in the museum’s central gallery, which is surrounded by five other rooms, a restrictive arrangement of gallery space. However, Japanese architects *atelier* Bow-Bow successfully made creative use of the special environment in collaboration with FEED, a graphic design firm based in Montreal. Thanks to the design of ad hoc furniture, the color choices and the staging of certain exhibits, visitors could easily follow the twin threads of the exhibition, which appeared immediately in the second room of the show. Furthermore, the unusual framing of the documents showed off even the smallest and most technical objects to best effect, and harmonized the heterogeneous corpus made up of works in various sizes and media: original drawings, reproductions of blueprints, photographs, models, publications and reports. These materials were drawn from a number of archival sources, including the Fondation Le Corbusier in Paris, the Agha Khan Trust for Culture in Geneva, the gta Archives/ETH in Zurich, the School of Architecture in Rabat and the Government Museum and Art Gallery of Chandigarh.

On the walls of the central gallery, three large world maps illustrated the new transnational environment. The first of these summarized the syncopated dynamics of the decolonization that took place from 1945 to 1970. The second depicted the scope of activities conducted by international aid organizations from the Western and Soviet blocs, while the third presented the new amplitude and reach of certain urban planners and architects such as Michel Écochard, the American Jacob L. Crane, the German Otto H. Koenigsberger, Constantinos A. Doxiadis of Greece, and the British Mary Jaqueline Tyrwhitt. On a table in the center of the room, visitors



01 View of Gallery 1, "Transnational Urbanism". © Franco Panzini.

could leaf through reports and publications from the many consulting missions in the "Third World". Through the two openings at the back of the room, visitors caught a first glimpse of two documents invested with tremendous display and historiographical value: The CIAM grids elaborated by the India and Morocco workgroups for CIAM's 9<sup>th</sup> Modern Architecture Congress (CIAM9) held in Aix-en-Provence during the summer of 1953.

These grids reveal very different approaches. The CIAM grid for Chandigarh, created by a group of young architects at the Architects' Office known as the Association of Indian Modernists (AIM), was reconstructed for the exhibition on the basis of snapshots, as the original document no longer exists. The grid adheres strictly to the format and categories established at the urging of Le Corbusier by ASCORAL, based on the Athens Charter. The grid produced by GAMMA, the Moroccan group, however, deviates from the model. It is more analytical than normative, more concrete than prospective. Photographs of the existing country and people outnumber sketches and plans. Its aim was to make sense of an anarchic built environment, the shanty towns that had sprung up in Casablanca's suburbs, and to explain the principles underlying organization of the new neighborhoods that were to replace them. This approach is a result of the methods adopted by the urban planning department, the *Services d'Urbanisme*, under the aegis of Écochard, who was

an architect, archeologist and urban planner rolled into one, attentive to the morphological, cultural, and technical dimensions of human settlements, be they antique or contemporary, monumental or haphazard. The photographs he took of both the ground and sky bear witness to his interest in local peculiarities, which a team of sociologists and ethnologists attached to the project, helped him to recognize.

The CIAM grids, striking for their large size, are each installed straddling two of the three galleries at the back of the museum space. Their narrative serves as referral into the rooms specifically dedicated to each associated city. Starting with the theme "Exploring", under which umbrella the various means used to apprehend unique site conditions were exhibited, the exhibition unfolds on to two additional themes, "Planning," and "Designing the Civic Fabric". The former offered an opportunity to get acquainted with the teams and urban development projects, whereas the latter presented specific plans for housing and facilities.

The exhibition offered a unique opportunity to appreciate, in its full-scale, the Chandigarh master plan, later reproduced in *l'Oeuvre Complète*. The plan was drawn up in Paris, shortly after Le Corbusier and Pierre Jeanneret's first stay of about two months in Chandigarh, during the winter of 1951. Several rough sketches made on-site were exhibited alongside the plan, as well as Le Corbusier's



02 Le Corbusier, The Chandigarh family, © FLC/SPA, April 8, 1952.

*Album Punjab* (Punjab Sketch book), visible for the first time ever and complemented by a digital version. This sort of diary in the form of both writing and drawings contains observations, accounts of exchanges with administrative officials, passing thoughts and ideas. It allowed the architect to record his first impressions and trace the project's development during the first weeks of work on site. Le Corbusier, like Pierre Jeanneret, was struck by the beauty of the landscapes he encountered. Photographs taken by the latter capture the bucolic quality of the setting and rusticity of villages, lingering on scenes of daily life. The *Album Punjab* includes observations on the urban fabric of Bogota, where the concept of "sectors" was first implemented. But in Chandigarh, the plan has more green and is more organic; its conception embraces the natural landscape, a backbone following the verdant valley that cuts across the plains, and coming to a head at the Capitol Complex, designed to stand out against the foothills of the Himalayas.

Less visually compelling, but by no means less effective, the Master Plan for Casablanca also dates from 1951. A mosaic of blue prints, it depicts the old city, surrounded with the newly planned neighborhoods and their transportation infrastructure, all based on the renowned Écochard 8x8 meter grid. The grid provided both technical and functional integration, and its standardization determines both the shape of the city and that of





03 Detail of the GAMMA Grid of Casablanca. © Franco Panzini.



04 Detail of the Chandigarh Grid with the listing of the four key words of the Athens Charter. © Franco Panzini.



05 View of the Gallery 4, "Designing the Civic Fabric of the New Casablanca". In the centre of the room, the model of the "beehive building" in the *cit  verticale* at *Carri res Centrales*, signed by Georges Candilis, Shadrach Woods and Vladimir Bodiansky. On the wall, photos by Yto Barrada. © Franco Panzini.



06 Aerial view of a neighborhood center in Casablanca, c. 1950. © Archive  cole Nationale d'Architecture, Robot.



07 Punjab Capital Project (PCP), Master plan for the new capital at Chandigarh after the design submitted by Le Corbusier, © FLC/SPA, April 1951



**08** View of the Gallery 6, “Designing Chandigarh’s Civic Fabric”. In the center of the room, models of housing typologies designed by Pierre Jeanneret, Jane Drew, and Maxwell Fry. On the wall, photos by Takashi Homma. © Franco Panzini.

its buildings. The public spaces are defined by subtraction, while construction is achieved through addition, horizontal in the case of private houses, and vertical for the collective dwellings interspersed throughout the neighborhoods.

Particularly attractive exhibits include the original model for the “beehive building” in the *cit  verticale* (vertical city) at *Carri res Centrales*, signed by Georges Candilis, Shadrach Woods and Vladimir Bodiansky, and that for housing types in the *cit  verticale* at Sidi Othman, designed by Swiss architects Andr  Studer and Jean Hentsch.

Casablanca’s suburbs were planned for “*le plus grand nombre*” (the greatest number), as largely similar neighborhood clusters. Chandigarh, on the other hand, carries the social hierarchy of an administrative center, and provides public facilities serving the entire state such as the university, the research hospital, and the bus station. Documentation on this aspect makes it possible to grasp for the first time in real detail the scope of Pierre Jeanneret’s participation in building the city, which is much less famous than Le Corbusier’s monumental contributions. To illustrate his achievement, specifically in designing residential premises, six models of various housing projects, from the home of the chief justice to the modest row houses of ordinary people, were displayed in gallery six. These models were constructed as part of a class taught at the University of Bologna in 2012.

The contemporary photographs shot on site by the French-Moroccan artist Yto Barrada in Casablanca and the Japanese photographer Takashi Homma in Chandigarh are an essential complement to both the book and the exhibition. Large-scale prints occupy one entire wall of the exhibition gallery, under the title “Designing Chandigarh’s Civic Fabric”. These views bring to light contrasting contemporary urban realities accentuated by the unique perspective of each artist. Homma’s shots are more conventional, showcasing the architecture, its residential spaces and its details. Barrada, on the other hand, shows us an empty city, where human presence is hinted at by modifications added to the built environment. Her work shows us the ponderous public spaces with their planted beds, the fa ades of residential buildings in washed-out colors, rendered identical by the enclosure of their hanging courtyards and bristling with satellite dishes. She closes on the silhouette of *Carri res Centrales*, rising above the city.

As the last segment of the exhibition, these documents invited visitors to question the current cultural value of these modern neighborhoods, independent of the undeniable historical significance that Casciato and Avermaete successfully demonstrate. Preserving architectural integrity in Chandigarh, substantially altering the built environment in Casablanca, are these contrasting patterns of appropriation indicative of the success or failure of their models?

Are the differences, large or small, between these cities at completion and their contemporary shapes important to their standing as heritage sites? ■

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Chair of **docomomo** Qu bec

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