

Integration of the baroque and modern architecture

[Design](#), [Architecture](#)



How magnificent a structure like La Havana Vieja that is over 500 years of old graciously towered over the straits of Florida. From Colonial to art deco until modernism, tourists wondered around the antiquated city and they were drawn with the old cars lining and architectural gems that can be found in every corner of the city. In fact in 1982, it has earned the UNESCO Heritage List. A year after, a preservation campaign was launched in order to protect and restore the authenticity of the buildings.

But as years gone by, Cuba became engrossed on tourism. In 1990 it has brought them large foreign revenue, majority of the buildings followed the bland design of the modern architecture to satisfy customers. How sad it is to see the exquisite square highlighted by the 18th century baroque “ Columbus Cathedral” incrementally depleted by economic and tourism goals. Personally, I find it very careless to redesign the building and to change the old architecture that has stood there for long and has remained unchanged through time.

The existing challenge thereby to current architectural design within the aforementioned region lies in the necessity of formulating a design that enables the fusion of the modern with what Carpentier refers to as Havana’s strange baroquism in order to balance the city. The necessity of such is evident if one considers that the path of globalization has been determined for Cuba by the regionalistic character of its architecture. Tourism is a form of globalism that relies upon the interdependence of a global culture and that of a regional and cultural identity.

The difficulty faced by architectural design thereby lies in the necessity of encapsulating modern design with the regionalism and the marketing image of the culture that serves as the unique proposition that underlies the continuous globalization of Havana. It is thereby necessary to enable the rapid reconfiguration of Havana, in order to “ un-fracture” the results of the modern urban changes that have transformed and destroyed the city’s spirit.

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This dilemma faced by architectural designers is best stated by Paul Ricoeur as he states that the challenge lies in “ how to become modern and to return to sources (while) reviving an old, dormant civilization (in order for it to) take part in a universal civilization”.[2]

This is a difficult task since the two kinds of architecture contrast each other. Baroque architecture which is reflected by the Havana structures emphasizes on the unity among arts. The architecture, sculpture, and painting made by the baroque artist were remarkable traits of spatial relationships which may be illusionary or real. One cannot resist the physical and emotional attraction that baroque arts once they get to glance on them. The buildings were amassed of great curving which poster rising and falling facades and grounds with extraordinary complexity and size.

Various shapes and domes are also vivid in baroque architecture. On the other hand, modern architecture depicts to the removal of ornament and to the simplification of form. For many, modern architecture is a result of

modern advancement in technology and engineering and of course by the emergence of new building materials such as concrete, steel, iron and glass.

Generally, it is all about functionality- the application of the principles of functionalism reflected in the use of materials, quantity and size. In short it is the rational engineering. The attempt to integrate the two by not salvaging the old architecture was overlooked by the Cuban government when the investments rise to tourism. There has also been a disparity between locals and the tourism facilities.

Preservation and revitalization of Habana entails a number of restorations and cooperation from the citizens and from the local government. The goal should be to prevent social and economic exclusion that was created by the restructuring and revitalization in historic district outside Cuba. Since, modernization is inevitable, as it has already diffused and reached the city, application of modern architecture should be done with thorough planning, wise mapping, and careful infrastructure building without damaging the old ones.

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[1] Anthony Tung, *Preserving the World's Great Cities: The Destruction and Renewal of the Historic Metropolis*, (New York: Random House, 2001), 430.

[2] Paul Ricoeur, *History and Truth*, Trans. Charles Kelbley (Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1965).