

words & illustration | Oliver Westgarth

I ♥ ARCHITECTURE DIY CATHEDRALS

I'll be honest, I've struggled with this. Trying to combine the topics of architecture and love almost defeated me.

I Googled 'Love + Architecture', 'Love OF Architecture', 'Love IN Architecture', 'Love AN Architect', 'Love IN AN Architect' (?!): (Love in an Elevator? Elevators are architectural and there's an Aerosmith link which is always good!) 'Architecture IN Love' searching mostly unsuccessfully.

'I Love Architecture' was more successful, revealing that Brad Pitt 'loves Architecture' so much that Angelina Jolie has bought him a plot of land replete with waterfall so Brad can take time out from the day job to emulate Frank Lloyd Wright's seminal 'Falling Water' project. Pitt explains "acting is my career, architecture is my passion".

He's not the only surprising Architectural aficionado. This also caught my eye: 'Ice Cube Reveals Love For Architecture In New Documentary'. That's Ice Cube of NWA 1980's hip-hop notoriety revealing his love and, watching the documentary, knowledge of architecture: scaryideas.com/content/26737. Before voicing his views on the US Police Force, Ice Cube trained as a draftsman; he hasn't picked up a set square since but has remained passionate about the subject.

Another lover of Architecture is Jack White of the White Stripes. The White Stripes have always had an obvious link

to architecture and design, in their album art, music videos and lyrics. Wikipedia is on strike so I can't check but I believe White Stripe's first album was 'De Stijl' after the Dutch arts movement which had a massive influence on modernism, and architects like Mies Van de Rohe in particular. In a 6 Music interview I listened to recently Jack White explained that if he'd had the funding he'd have trained as an architect. (Mr White: on the off chance you happen upon a copy of this groovy and splendidly free magazine - I'd be delighted to design a house for you, my email is below.)

"I would love to have been an Architect" is a comment we're privileged often to hear in the profession. Some have a passion for architecture as others do for football, cars, food, shopping, it inspires many and most people have at least been on holiday outings to admire architectural masterpieces.

Before stumbling on the celebrity examples above I considered examining architectural symbols of love, architectural follies (or maybe even 'Les Folies D'Amor' - certainly love connotations aplenty there, although architecturally dubious). I considered 'monuments to love' such as the 'Taj Mahal' (built as a mausoleum for a dead princess) and began analysing the word 'love' (dangerous as I'm dyslexic and prone to over analysis; anyway Plato, Freud and other clever people have already had a go so I doubt I'd be able to add much!).

Luckily, once I began thinking about the word 'Love' I came to 'Love = Passion' (as evidenced above). Passion led me to Religion. Religion and Architecture - now that's easy! There are libraries of information; it's basically the origin of architecture. Historically - Religion, always linked to The State, The State, only people with lots of money, Power, repress/impress the masses, please the gods etc. etc.

Suddenly I remembered an inspiring story of one man's religious (thus loving) architectural endeavour which fits the bill perfectly. His name is Don Justo Gallego Martinez and here's his story in brief.

No-one paid attention for the first 40 years to the site in a town on the outskirts of Madrid where, since the late 1940s, a mountain of construction rubble had grown. Then gradually from the junk, began to emerge something rather special. Like the Phoenix rising from the fire (although a lot slower) a cathedral appeared, gradually it attracted local people's, and, eventually, the world's attention. The 'Cathedral for Our Lady of the Pillar', as it's named, is made entirely of recycled bits'n'bobs, leftovers from other building sites, materials which have been dumped or donated. Since day one it's been designed and built by one man, the ultimate self-builder, now 87, and he's on a serious mission. At current rate of progress the cathedral is still 15-20 years from completion, but this hasn't deterred Don Justo.

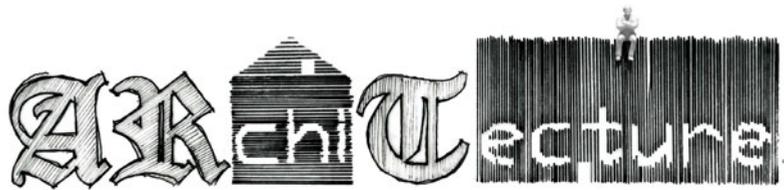
Don Justo, born 1925, began building in 1961, after years collecting supplies. A bullfighter as a young man, Don Justo felt God's calling in his early 20's and joined a Benedictine monastery. After 8 devout years he caught Tuberculosis. His zealous worship, involving excessive fasting had caused concern over his mental health, as such his illness caused him to be expelled. Rejection by the Catholic establishment combined with a full recovery galvanized him to begin building on land he'd inherited as a way of thanking The Lady of the Pillar to whom he had prayed for recovery.

The Cathedral's architectural style is loosely Romanesque (Gothic was too complicated and Baroque was rejected as: "it does not please me"). The locals know Don Justo as 'El Loco della Iglesia' - 'the nutter of the church' but he's impressive. Currently the cathedral stands 40m tall. A staggering 8000sq/m, including the main cruciform cathedral building topped with a (as yet un-clad) domed roof, apparently based on St Peter's Basilica, 2 towers, spires, cloisters, offices, lodgings, a library and beneath a large crypt, hand dug by Don Justo of course.

With only occasional help from nephews and volunteers Don Justo has built it all. He has no training in

design or construction and no regard for formal structural design or planning permissions. He began his project during General Franco's dictatorship so it's unsurprising that many of the materials used are no longer considered safe. The foundations, structure, reinforcing, roofs are questionable and defy logic. The town council tolerates the illicit structure, which lures a trickle of visitors to the nondescript suburb but some fear the chaotic construction will predecease its creator.

The cathedral is un-consecrated and



unrecognised by the Catholic Church, despite Don Justo bequeathing it to them, no planning approvals have been sought and no professional (engineer or architect) is willing to endorse it. "It's difficult to get a licence now," says Pablo Queralto, an Architect with Marjorada Council. "The bricks don't meet minimum standards, either in themselves or the way they've been laid." Yet he described the eccentric edifice as an icon unlikely to be torn down (BBC).

Local priest, Father Rueda, has promised to conduct Don Justo's funeral there, but believes the cathedral could then

be demolished. The value of the land and the danger of the construction conspire against this feat of devotion. Yet the cathedral is now known in Spain and internationally, and Don Justo has become a national treasure. Nobody wants to shatter the dream "the entire country would condemn them" says Father Rueda.

Architecturally and artistically the Cathedral is admirable. I love its mish-mash aesthetic. Detailed construction involves recycled buckets, pieces of wood, plastic tubes, columns made of barrels of concrete piled on top of each other. Worryingly (and completely erroneously) 'strength is ensured by increasing amounts of cement in the concrete mix'.

Gaudi, Wren, Palladio and many other famous Architects throughout history have claimed religious devotion to inspire their architecture. I think Don Justo, the DIY Supremo, takes the biscuit! When asked why he does it he responds only: "I do it for faith. That's clear, no?"

Check out Don Justo online and, if you're so inclined, donate. Not sure there's a website so maybe it's an excuse for that Spanish holiday.

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