

# Islamic Influences On Spanish Architecture

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Catalonia is one of Spain's richest tourist areas, with splendid beaches as well as architecture which reveals its glorious past and prestigious present.

Antonio Gaudi is regarded as one of the famous representatives of the modern classical movement, and one of the most brilliant architects of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century. Since the 50's critics started to regard his architecture as a significant period index of the development of modern architecture in Europe.

Gaudi is an artist and architect from Catalonia. He studied Islamic art, in particular Andalusian and Moorish architecture, as well as certain works comprising drawings and plans of ancient architecture. Analysts of Gaudi's work state that Islamic, Gothic and baroque architectures are the base of his creations. These influences are particularly manifest in three of his works: the Guell Palace, El-Cabricho and Pabellones de la Finca Guell. Gaudi's work in Barcelona and its impact on the architects who came after him, transformed the city into a historical and artistic museum, visited by millions of tourists annually. Every street corner, balcony, window, and the even chimneys are influenced by the architect's style.

One of the masterpieces of this artist is undoubtedly the church La Sagrada Familia of Barcelona. This mythical work was the quintessence of his experimentation and genius. Even if this work was started in 1883, it is still continuing. One finds in this church the richness of the beautiful Gothic style with some elements of Baroque. Thousands of tourists, who love architecture and heritage sites stand in awe of the unique building.

El-Cabricho is also one of Gaudi's (1883), great achievements, where the Islamic architectural influences are apparent. The minaret at the entrance resembles Eastern minarets, characterized by their round form with a crown and a decorated balcony. ➤



The Holy Family church in Barcelona

كنيسة العائلة المقدسة الواقعة في برشلونة



Vicens house in Barcelona

منزل بيشنس في برشلونة

The minaret is decorated with ceramic squares with paintings of sunflowers. Gaudi gathered several influences of civilizations of the East and Occident, and modernism, classicism and realism, when he designed this building. He succeeded remarkably in using these styles, by amalgamating them in one architectural structure.

Gaudi took the form of the tops of minarets and used it in the tops of the chimneys and decorated the terraces of the houses with them as in Pabellones of the Finca Guell of Barcelona. One finds there red bricks, ceramics and cascading arcades, characteristic of the Moorish style.

The house of Vicens of Barcelona is also one of Gaudi's achievements. Ceramics cover all the walls as if the building is wearing an Islamic fabric decorated with floral and geometrical forms with beautiful bright colors. It is well known that the ceramic is an old material which was used by the Babylonians in Ishtar Gate, in Assyrian palaces etc; and that the Moslems brought it to Spain. The Moors used it in their architecture in Spain, for example in the town of Teruel, particularly in the temples, palaces, streets and other infrastructure. On entering the town visitors see a large sign: "Teruel El-Mudejar" (Teruel of the Moors).

In the house of Vicens, one notices the intricate ends and various arcades with multiple and varied, floral and geometrical decorations, as if one is in the Alhambra Palace in Grenada. Gaudi shares with the Islamic Andalusian artist the important tendency of covering all spaces with decorations - what Arab historians describe as "the horror of the vacuum". However, Gaudi used floral and geometrical decorative elements in realistic style, whereas Moslem artists used them in the abstract.

Gaudi was more attracted by the Moorish architecture which started to spread during the 12th century in Spain, and continued until the 19th century. Even certain 20th century buildings were produced in Moorish style, as it appears in the arena of Vicens in Madrid. This style was regarded as part of the Spanish national heritage, and capable of playing a fundamental role in solving the architectural crisis of Europe. In spite of ➤



Amateller Castle

قصر أماتيير



Batillo Castle

قصر باتيو



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Batillo Castle

قصر باتيو

these Islamic influences, Gaudi has a great capacity for creativity and imagination. He has his own style of modern architecture developing a more contained arcade, such as the Torino coffee of Barcelona. He was also interested in the internal space of the houses, such as the Guell Palace, marked by the Andalusian model with an internal court and fountain.

Gaudi used sharp bright colors as one finds in Islamic art, in mosques and other places. He exploited Arab calligraphy as an element of decoration, as well as the star with eight branches, which one can see in the Figuera Palace in Barcelona. Gaudi was also influenced by the patterns of Moslem carpets and the decorative relief in the structure of mosques.

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Gaudi was not the only architect to be influenced by Islamic art. Other Catalan architects, such as Josep Puig, who created Casa Amateller were similarly influenced. One finds windows with arcades of various forms, as well as frontages with the pyramidal form resembling the projecting elements at the tops of the walls and Moroccan and Andalusian minarets, decorated with beautiful colored ceramics.

Two years ago, Spain celebrated the 150th anniversary of Gaudi, a genius of world architecture with The International Year Of Gaudi: a year of publishing books about his life, conferences and exhibitions of his paintings and designs and documentary films about this immortal architect. ■