

Julio Garnica<sup>1</sup>**Peter Harnden.****Between the Cold War and the Mediterranean tradition**

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Abstract

After World War II, the American architect Peter Harnden was appointed director of the United States Information Service in Paris, in charge of promoting the Marshall Plan in Europe with the objective of increasing European production and American trade. To promote the Plan's aims, more than 400 programs and exhibitions were organized throughout Europe taking advantage of dry construction, easy assembly and the possibilities offered by visual advertising. After founding his industrial design studio in Orgeval, where the Italian architect Lanfranco Bombelli soon stood out, Harnden and his team moved to Barcelona in the early 1960s. There, in addition to continuing with institutional commissions, he designed sophisticated private homes on the Mediterranean coast that, camouflaged as "regionalism", looked like exhibitions – with their exacerbated sense of comfort, open and spacious living areas, photogenic furniture and sculptural fireplaces. In grey flannel and with diplomatic poise or in espadrilles and an unbuttoned shirt, before a huge audience or in refined circles, Harnden's big band performed live American architecture throughout the 20-some years of his professional career.

## Key-words

Harnden — Cold War — Mediterranean

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Peter Harnden is still an unknown figure in the international panorama of 20th-century modern architecture, despite the fact that his unusual career, as surprising as it was unique, incites the interest and attention of all those – albeit few – who come into contact with his life story and his work. Thanks to the *Biographical notes*<sup>2</sup> from the Harnden-Bombelli joint archive, in the holdings of the Architects' Association of Catalonia, which were summarized in the obituary published in the *New York Times* (1971) on the occasion of his premature death in Cadaqués in 1971 at the age of 58, after a long illness, we can review the main events in a biography that would otherwise have been very difficult to follow.

Peter Graham Harnden was born in 1913 in London, where his father was assigned as a member of the United States diplomatic corps. He spent his childhood in Spain, Germany and Switzerland, and he began his architecture studies in Lausanne. After his parents' divorce (Nevada State Journal 1929), he returned to the United States, where he continued his studies at Yale University and Georgetown University, although he never "officially" earned a degree in architecture. In 1933 he traveled to Italy, in 1936 he settled in California, and he spent 1937 in Mexico. After the death of his mother that same year (Oakland Tribune 1937), Harnden came into a large inheritance, which allowed him to continue traveling and to begin amassing a remarkable modern art collection. In 1938, he remodeled a colonial-style villa in Los Angeles, transforming it into the "Group Studio": an office, workshop and exhibition space. The building – which appeared in *Architectural Forum* (1943) magazine in 1943 – housed a series of art exhibitions that included work by Kandinsky, Moholy-Nagy, Calder and Man Ray, among others. At the beginning of 1940 he was faced with fi-

nancial difficulties, and when the United States entered World War II he enlisted in the Military Intelligence Corps of the U.S. Army (Blake 1996, p. 72, 74), where he coincided with the future architect Peter Blake. Both were stationed in Europe<sup>3</sup> during the final phase of the War, at the American Information Service in Monaco.

After the end of the War, Harnden married Marie Vassiltchikov, a Russian aristocrat who had fled to Berlin and later the author of the *Berlin Diaries 1940-1945*, an autobiography published posthumously which recounts her adventures with an anti-Nazi group involved in a failed attempt against Hitler's life in 1944 (Vassiltchikov 1987). From 1946, Harnden was employed by the Office of the Military Government in U.S.-occupied Germany (OMGUS), in the Information Control Division in Monaco, Berlin and Nuremberg. He was head of an "Exhibition Program" dedicated to describing the different aspects of cultural, social and scientific life in the United States for a German audience in the immediate postwar period, with the aim of "penetrating" the strategic epicenter of the fragile landscape of European reconstruction (Pizza 2003a, p. 20). Thank to this new position, which he obtained due to his command of the German language, his knowledge of the European context, and his experience organizing art exhibitions, Harnden was in regular contact with the American administration in Washington and with figures such as E. Saarinen, S. Chermayeff and A. Barr, as well as with European personalities like W. Gropius, M. Bill, S. Giedion and P. Schwarz. The exhibitions he organized included: *Exhibition of Housing, Architecture and City Planning*, *Exhibition of U.S. Architecture 1850-1945* and *US Architecture, Housing and Planning*.

### ***Building For A Better Future***

«Actually, propaganda, ... that was our job. The government called it 'information' ... but it was clearly propaganda»<sup>4</sup>.

On June 5, 1947, General George Marshall, the Secretary of State of the United States, delivered a lecture at Harvard University announcing a program aimed at resolving the economic crisis that had been affecting Europe since the end of World War II, so that the "new world" could save the "old world" (Marshall 1947). A few months later, on April 3, 1948, the U.S. Congress approved the European Recovery Program (1948): a series of low-interest loans, non-refundable grants and favorable commercial deals worth approximately \$13 billion, offered to Europe by the United States<sup>5</sup> through the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA) and coordinated by the Organization for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC). The Marshall Plan, as the program became known, contributed decisively to European development, also responding to the needs of the American economy and, of course, pursuing the ideological goal of keeping the threat of communism at bay.

That same year, 1948, the ECA's Visual Information Unit was set up in Berlin. The unit was created with the aim of disseminating information on the Marshall Plan through a variety of communication formats, publications and exhibitions. Peter Harnden was chosen to lead this new section. Following the Soviet Berlin Blockade in 1948 and the corresponding Anglo-American "Berlin airlift" (the first episode of the Cold War), the section was moved to the American Embassy in Paris in 1950. From Paris, at the Office of Information under the United States Special Representative in Europe (USSRE), Harnden organized, as chief of the Presentations Branch, an international team of illustrators, designers and architects who



**Fig. 1**  
Meeting of the ECA's Visual  
Information Unit, Paris, c. 1950.  
Harnden in the center, Bombelli  
on his right.  
Photograph: ECA, AHCOAC.

were responsible for the creation of various exhibitions.

In the following years, those exhibitions travelled through Europe with the mission of promoting the Marshall Plan, but also with the aim of increasing European production, promoting international trade and last – but not least – disseminating the image of the United States. Initially, Harnden tried to round out the team with figures like Max Bill (Martín 2003a, p. 119-121) and Peter Blake. For one reason or another, however, they rejected his offer.

Ultimately, it was Lanfranco Bombelli, one of Max Bill's young collaborators, who joined the team as an architectural designer. It was the beginning of a fruitful professional and personal relationship between Harnden and Bombelli that lasted for more than two decades until Harnden's death in 1971 (The New York Times 1971).

April 1950 marked the beginning of the traveling exhibition *Europe Builds*, developed by the OEEC, which presented the history of the Marshall Plan and its decisive role in European reconstruction. The exhibition, which travelled to France, Belgium, Holland, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Italy, included three expandable trailer trucks that transported the exhibition materials, and which were unfolded for each exhibition along with a large circular tent. Although the Marshall Plan technically ended on December 31, 1951, the informative program was kept in place: the ECA became the MSA (Mutual Security Agency), and Peter Harnden continued to lead the same team at the Office of Information. The initial communication campaign transitioned into a stable and ongoing propaganda program. In February 1952, the *Caravan of Peace* exhibition was launched in Naples. Its goal was to communicate the creation and purpose of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (OTAN), the Anglo-American military alliance that cemented the framework for the Cold War. The main exhibition was also located in a circular tent, like a circus tent, supported by a metal structure that made it possible to set up the immense canvas cover, decorated with flags, in just a few hours. The tent was flanked by trailer trucks that served as secondary pavilions<sup>6</sup>. After Naples, the exhibition caravan toured the rest of Italy, Greece, Turkey, France and northern Europe. In





**Fig. 2**  
Exhibition Caravan of Peace, on  
its way through Athens, 1952.  
Exterior view.  
Photograph: MSA, AHCOAC.

April 1952, another OEEC production, the *Train of Europe*, a former German military hospital train outfitted as an exhibition space, set out from Munich. The train cars<sup>7</sup> were filled with information on the advantages of cooperation between European countries, the commercial and cultural connections between Europe and America, and the need for increases in productivity. This exhibition on rails traveled across Europe and received 5 million visitors – including, according to the organization's press releases, 830,000 visitors in Berlin, «many of whom were from the Russian zone» (The Times 1952).

*Productivity* was the main theme of another series of touring exhibitions that began at the Paris Motor Show in 1952. As in the case of the *Caravan of Peace*, it also involved a series of trucks that carried exhibition materials in increasingly efficient ways<sup>8</sup>. In many cases, there were also additional audiovisual media mounted on exterior panels and using outdoor projection systems. In Holland, *Productivity* was exhibited in 1952 using two converted barges (one as an exhibition space and the other as a cinema) that sailed through the country's canals (Art d'aujourd'hui 1952).

On the whole, all these exhibitions were housed inside the means of transport, largely of military origin, that were used to carry them from one city to another. The adaptation of the interiors and their convertibility made it possible to display large images on panels, charts incorporating statistics, three-dimensional illustrations, movable models, etc. The materials used a clear and direct language, informative rather than subtle, based on a strategy that was more visual than textual (for the purpose of limiting translations – which were nonetheless necessary – into the different languages spoken in the countries on the itinerary). From trucks and military trains to exhibition spaces; from uniforms to civilian dress; from war to peace. As soon as possible and at top speed: at the time, the press not only praised the project's success in terms of the number of visitors but also the surprise elicited by the unexpected transformation – in just a few hours, overnight – of a convoy of trucks into a spectacular exhibition (The Architectural Review 1953).

There is a clear underlying metaphor for the calculated strategy of American propaganda: the pioneers who colonized the West during the 19th cen-





**Fig. 3**  
Exhibition *Wir bauen ein neues Leben*, OEEC, Marshall-Haus, Berlin, 1952. Interior view from the visitors' walkways.  
Photograph: OEEC, AHCOAC.

ture. That myth, with roots that reach back into the foundational stories of the U.S., reemerges in the military, economic and cultural occupation (in that order) of a devastated old continent that was colonized little by little by the instruments of the 20th century. What could have been better, then, than to put this “mission” into the hands of a team of professionals from different countries (Greece, France, England, Italy, Switzerland ...) who – directed from the shadows by the American Harnden – collaborated freely and efficiently, embodying the very ideals transmitted by the exhibitions themselves<sup>9</sup>.

This strategy also included several “fixed” exhibitions, such as the noteworthy *Wir bauen ein besseres Leben*, presented at the Berlin Industrial Fair in 1952 (Steege 2008, Castillo 2005). The exhibition consisted of the reproduction – inside the Marshall-Haus in Berlin – of a single family home built with a metal structure and modular partitions made of aluminum, glass or wood, and furnished (with help from the Museum of Modern Art) with products from as many as nine countries (Domus 1954), which were displayed at the visitors' feet, as they toured the building visually from above, standing on a scaffolding at the height of its hypothetical roof. The exhibition also included performances by a “model family” going through the motions of their daily routines as a narrator described the industrial products that «thanks to technology, increased productivity, economic cooperation and free enterprise are available in Western civilization» (Teerds 2014). Visitors became voyeurs, catching a glimpse of a universe of domestic and private consumption that promised “a better life”... The exhibition began in Berlin, a choice with a clear significance: of the more than half a million visitors, 40% came from the city's eastern sector, as the MSA triumphantly proclaimed. Peace in Europe was cemented by the start of the Cold War; in other locations the exhibition was called more simply *Maison sans frontières* (Paris) or *Casa senza frontiere* (Rome). In 1953, the tasks corresponding to the MSA were transferred over to the United States Information Agency (USIA). Harnden and his team were brought on board, touring the existing exhibitions and preparing some new ones, such as the displays dedicated to atomic energy: the *Mostra atomica* (Rome) and the *Exposition atomique* (Paris), unveiled in 1954.

In 1955, the U.S. Department of Commerce set up the Office of International Trade Fairs (OITF) in Paris, with the aim of promoting the direct participation of American companies in international trade fairs from within the public administration. This marked a change of direction in U.S. policy in Europe: after the era of the Marshall Plan, the ECA, and the MSA, and faced with a restricted USIA budget, there was a shift toward an alliance with the business world to penetrate into the European market directly. The responsibility for the European Trade Fair Program rested, once again, with the leading teams on the vanguard of the European front: in other words, Peter Harnden – who was increasingly specialized in developing commissions for the American administration. This “pigeonholing” on the second line, professionally speaking, undoubtedly had an influence on the subsequent lack of visibility of his work – and the work of his team, which was reorganized into different sections (design, communication and management) and included as many as 30 professionals, ranging from architects and designers to assistants, collaborators and administrators<sup>10</sup>. The new program was as intense as the Marshall Plan, with a frantic schedule: as many as 20 exhibitions just from March to October of that year – from London to Zagreb, and from Stockholm to Barcelona ... Barcelona? Without the old geographical limitations of the Marshall Plan, why shouldn't Spain (although it had been on the periphery of Europe and was still marginalized) be added to the new potential markets for the United States?

### ***International Trade Fairs***

In June 1955, the American pavilion was presented at the Barcelona Trade Fair. It was an indoor installation organized by a series of walls and metal pillars that supported a light canopy, under which the various products were exhibited (cars, agricultural machinery, home appliances), raised slightly on platforms and lit by direct lighting. Contrasting with the simplicity and restraint of the local pavilions, the exhibition stood out for the abstraction of its composition and its large-scale photographic reproductions. A huge panel showing the American flag flanked by the Statue of Liberty presided over the exhibition, framed between oversized images of industrial objects and an aerial view of the Brooklyn Bridge (Cuadernos de Arquitectura 1955a).

It was the perfect symbiosis between trade and propaganda, with the American flag everywhere – the same one, incidentally, that the artist Jasper Johns had painted a year earlier in his piece *Flag*, kicking off the era of a kind of Pop Art that, ultimately, showed more engagement than Duchamp's urinal.

In that same year, 1955, the authorities at the Department of Commerce decided to reorganize and transfer the OITF to Washington (*Interiors* 1955b). Nevertheless, due to continued efforts in Washington and New York, Harnden managed to ensure the continuity of their official commissions «as private contractors»<sup>11</sup>. At the end of 1955 he acquired and renovated a dilapidated two-storey house in Orgeval, a small village on the outskirts of Paris. There, in February 1956, he founded the studio he called Peter Graham Harnden Associates, «an international office of architects and technicians specialized in visual advertising and industrial aesthetics»<sup>12</sup>.

The first commissions included the American pavilions for the International Fairs in 1956 in Lyon, Paris, Milan, Rome, Marseille, Ghent, Hannover, and again Barcelona, with a commission from the U.S. Department of Agriculture to design a large outdoor pavilion (a version of the pavilion



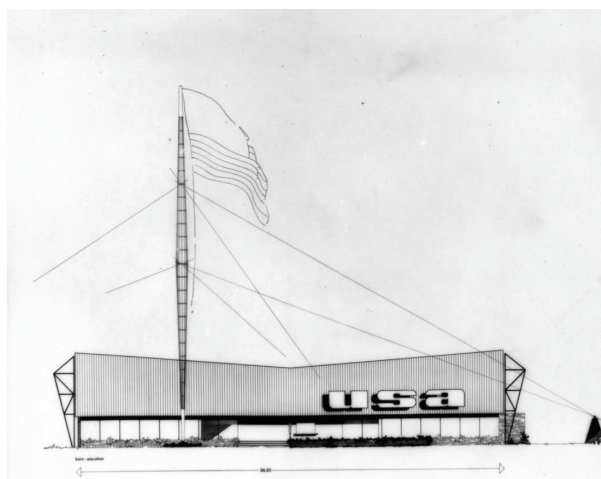


**Fig. 4**  
United States Pavilion, U.S.  
Department of Commerce, Bar-  
celona Trade Fair, 1955. Interior  
view.  
Photograph: Cuadernos de  
Arquitectura.



**Fig. 5**  
United States Pavilion, U.S.  
Department of Commerce, Bar-  
celona Trade Fair, 1955. Interior  
view.  
Photograph: Català-Roca.





**Fig. 6**  
United States Pavilion, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Barcelona Trade Fair, 1957. Perspective drawing of the entrance façade. Photograph: Harnden associates, AHCOAC.



**Fig. 7**  
United States Pavilion, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Barcelona Trade Fair, 1956. Entrance façade, elevation. Photograph: Harnden associates, AHCOAC.

**Fig. 8**  
United States Pavilion, U.S. Department of Agriculture, Casa de Campo Trade Fair, Madrid, 1959. Exterior perspective. Photograph: Harnden associates, AHCOAC.

for the Stockholm Fair in 1955). It was a rectangular building (40x20 m) built using a “Mecanotubo” structure and covered by a gabled roof with an inverted section, a façade of wooden slats and a continuous glass enclosure running along the lower part of the two access façades.

There were also the huge letters “usa” (but in a Bauhausian lower case print), and the flag was hoisted atop a tower more than 30 m. tall that had been erected next to the pavilion and was visible from nearly the entire fair. Inside the pavilion, the exhibition program was dedicated to the presentation of various raw materials and, especially, to the display of their different manipulation processes: there was a milk production plant, “donuts” were manufactured and distributed to the public, there were demonstrations of electric kitchen appliances, cigarettes were rolled using American tobacco... and even fashion shows were held on raised catwalks.

All of it took place in comfortable conditions thanks to the installation of air conditioning, pure magic in Barcelona’s sticky June weather – the very same magic of infinite production and consumption.

As was the case during the years of the Marshall Plan, each exhibition demonstrated the organizational capacity of the team of professionals responsible for putting it together, who were the envy of local architects – who took note of the advantages of dry construction, the efficiency of on-site assembly and the visual possibilities of advertising (Cuadernos de Arquitectura 1956). There was also attention from official sources: a letter to Harnden from the American ambassador in Spain read as follows, « The

design and layout of the entire show are most attractive and in excellent taste. But most spectacular has been the short time in which you were able to do this fine job»<sup>13</sup>.

In 1957 the team designed the American pavilions for the fairs in Verona, Palermo, Barcelona and Cologne. Although the focus was no longer the big capital cities (due to diversification), the goal was still the promotion of trade in U.S. agricultural products. The service was “outsourced”, as we would say today, but there were no real changes in the process since the official conditions of the tender<sup>14</sup> (written specifically to suit Harnden Associates) required the commission to be carried out by an international team of professionals capable of developing «a construction based on a modular system, which can be disassembled», and who would be responsible for the selection of photographs.

Peter Harnden, who was seen in Washington “one of ours”, was also requested to participate in “special missions”. In April 1957 he was commissioned, along with the architect Bernard Rudofsky (Rossi 2015) (another, slightly less “forgotten architect”), to organize the content for the United States Pavilion at the 1958 World’s Fair in Brussels, which was installed in the building designed by E.D. Stone under the slogan “Building a World for a Man” (Scott 2003b). Harnden and Rudofsky<sup>15</sup> designed the distribution of the enormous interior space (more than 100 meters in diameter and 25 meters in height from the central pond) using an orthogonal organization divided into different sections, thus fragmenting the spatial power of the pavilion into various volumes. The different sections were intended to paint a picture of the real American way of life. The aim was for American citizens (who were remembered as soldiers or recognized as tourists) to be associated, in Europe and in the rest of the world, with their way of life: in their natural environment, with their tastes, their streets, their newspapers, their architecture, laws, art, music, etc. It was all meant to come together to help people really get to know “the face of America”. Among the vast amounts of content prepared at the office in Orgeval, the “Islands for Living” section is a notable sample. Once again, it describes the American single-family home: that small-scale self-sufficient “island” full of all kinds of products... (Devos 2009).

After the intensity of Brussels<sup>16</sup>, Harnden’s studio returned to its usual rhythm: in 1959 the American pavilion was presented at the Casa de Campo Trade Fair in Madrid. It was a three-dimensional metal structure articulated through triangulation (and inspired by the Spanish pavilion at the Brussels Exhibition designed by J.A. Corrales and R. Vázquez Molezún)<sup>17</sup>. The team was also responsible for the “Medizin-USA” exhibition, held in the Marshall-Haus building in Berlin. In 1962 there were new exhibitions, again in Berlin, Dusseldorf, Munich and Rome. In 1963 they designed a Miesian-style pavilion for the OECD to house the exhibition contents: an operational and commercial version of the Farnsworth House that traveled around Europe for four years. In parallel, the team handled the various exhibitions that were organized for the U.S. Trade Centers – a series of business and export promotion centers that were set up permanently in Frankfurt, Paris, Stockholm and Milan. In Bombelli’s hands, the project was redirected towards the graphic style he had come of age with during the immediate post-war period, under the influence of M. Bill. Thus, American products were exhibited using a Bauhaus aesthetic, exploring all the possibilities of concrete art, a laboratory for artistic production, of sorts, which Bombelli developed further beginning in 1970s.

An Aalto-inspired pavilion made of wooden slats, or a grid of steel mesh, or a three-dimensional structure on the roof, or a version of a house by Mies van der Rohe, etc. across more than 400 exhibitions, modern architecture, in its different versions, became the vehicle for American ideology, which invaded Europe using all the means at its disposal. This included the principles that had been established just two decades earlier on the old continent, but reinterpreted in an international key, depending on the location, the orchestra and the occasion. It was a lot like what happened in jazz music, although Harnden and Bombelli's "big band" was improvising on top of a clearly defined rhythmic base: a very extensive photographic collection of more than 8,000 images compiled during their collaborations with the various administrations and intended, in the light of the Marshall Plan, to illustrate American reality. "Background" and vault, the collection was precisely classified into sections as varied as "agriculture", "medicine", "textiles" – and "architecture", which included a colorful collection of images of various buildings and skyscrapers in New York, designs by F.L. Wright, as well as partial details of conventional buildings. There was also "construction" (building processes) and "industrial design" (products on display in exhibitions), along with images of furniture from the 18th and 19th centuries, many of which were taken (not surprisingly) from S. Giedion's *Mechanization Takes Command* (Giedion 1948).

Among many other categories, there were also: "people", "television", "atom", and "interior" (with images of the Farnsworth House by Mies van der Rohe and P. Johnson's Glass House, as well as the "house without frontiers"). In the large-scale dissemination strategy characteristic of the American program, it was not enough for the Harvard elite to point to the radical turn that had been taken by the investigations of a prestigious European historian like Giedion: the American laboratory had to communicate its results to the world, in efforts as effective as they were repetitive (Greenberg 1979, Guelbaut 1983, Saunders 2001), somewhere between infancy, diplomacy and architecture. It was all part of a crucial effort that, nonetheless, went unnoticed by the architectural criticism of the time, much more interested in grand projects and big names – and also, ultimately, a victim of the same cultural strategy.

### ***Island for Living***

«Cadaqués is an island: its history, the way of life there can only be understood if you think of it as an island» (Pla J. 1985).

Around 1959, Harnden and Bombelli were faced with the need to move the office somewhere new and reduce the large team<sup>18</sup> they had been working with in previous years. They considered a number of options: the "Anglo-Saxon" Harnden suggested Naples or Málaga, while the "Latin" Bombelli, proposed Milan or Zurich (Pizza 2003, p. 25). Returning from a trip to Spain, at the insistence of the Catalan architect J.A. Coderch, whom they had met years before (Pizza 2000, note 62), they visited the town of Cadaqués, where they stayed at the home of the architect A. Milà. Fascinated by the town, they bought Villa Gloria and arranged to transfer of their office to Barcelona, where it was up and running by 1962. Settling in the 60s in this city on the periphery of the Mediterranean, away from the great decision-making centers that Harnden had frequented until then, was a decision that one cannot help but relate to F. Nietzsche's famous «faith in the south», and the «Mediterraneanity» that «is acquired, not inherited» and which is «a decision, not a privilege» (Matvejevic 1999).





**Fig. 9**  
Harnden and Bombelli and  
associates architecture studio,  
Barcelona, 1962. Interior view of  
the reception area.  
Photograph: Casali, AHCOAC.

At the new office, reduced to a dozen collaborators, the commissions for the American Trade Centers (in Frankfurt, Berlin, Stockholm) – which were generally left to Bombelli – alternated with a variety of other projects: offices, commercial spaces, and especially single-family homes. Many of those homes were located in the town of Cadaqués and were designed according to an architectural language that was outwardly different from the one that characterized the architects up to that point. This style was singled out by specialized critics (*Arts-Architecture* 1966) due to its adaptation to the surroundings, its astute reading of popular tradition (coded through modern values and nuanced by Harnden's Californian influence along with Bombelli's swiss-based Italianizing take, rooted in the use of the mathematical filter of concrete art) and integrated with the domestic realism of local architects like Coderch, Correa-Milà, Terradas, etc.<sup>19</sup>

The architects' work was, in fact, attuned to the local conditions, whether the climate, the orientation, or the materials in the terrain. No doubt, they were well aware of those conditions because of their status as foreigners, based on an almost scientific adaptation to the physical environment. And not only in Cadaqués. When in 1959 they designed a single family home for Ethel de Croisset in the town of El Alhaurín de la Torre in Malaga (*Domus* 1963a, *Informes de la Construcción* 1963b), the courtyard became the leitmotif of the project, although not exactly in the same way as some of the designs by J. L. Sert (for whom Harnden, incidentally, is something of symmetrical image) (Rovira 2000, Rovira 2005); rather, it served as a technical and functional determinant for natural cooling and retaining moisture. The first holiday home built in the town had an outdoor courtyard and three interior courtyards, all with a pond and pergola, like the pergola covered in grape vines from the original construction, which the architects discovered and photographed repeatedly during their first visit to the place<sup>20</sup>.

This ability to read the environment worked in all directions. When they designed the Bordeaux-Groult house in 1961 (*The Architectural Forum* 1965a, 1965b), in Guillola Bay, on the outskirts of Cadaqués where there were no other buildings, they organized a vast program (living room, library, seven bedrooms, etc.) across a series of volumes topped with slop-



**Fig. 10**

Interior renovation of a residence at c. Compositor Bach 7, Barcelona, 1962. Interior view. Photograph: Casali, AHCOAC.

ing tiled roofs on the hillside overlooking the sea, in the canonical “regionalist” style. But it was also the style of Salvador Dalí’s house in a nearby cove in Portlligat (Lahuerta 1996, Granell 1996).

The artist had bought a cabin in 1930 from a woman named Lydia from Cadaqués (who was said to have been the inspiration for *La ben plantada* by Eugeni d’Ors), which he had transformed, with a *fenêtre a longueur* in the façade and furniture made of steel tubing. During the 1950s, the property grew in a series of successive expansions and takeovers to serve as a permanent getaway after his return from the United States in 1948 (another product of the Marshall Plan?). It stood as a model for many renovations by “modern” Catalan architects, who did not always recognize their debt to the controversial artist.

It was a special kind of regionalism, therefore, that was not at odds with the American concept of “comfort” promoted at fairs and exhibitions for so many years. Villa Gloria (Domus 1961a), the house that Harnden and Bombelli bought together, renovated between 1959 and 1960, was one of the first examples of an intervention involving the old fishermen’s row houses in Cadaqués.

They maintained the external appearance of the façade, adding only a terrace with a pond on the top floor, barely visible from the street. They also preserved the existing structure of thick stone walls and respected the materials traditionally used by the craftsmen and industrialists in Cadaqués and the surrounding areas: slate (with its original texture and rustic appearance), plaster on the façades (intensifying the use of white – even white-washing the stones at the base of the façades or inside the houses), the wooden beams (sometimes roughly hewn trunks), and the rough ceramic





**Fig. 11**  
Villa Gloria, Cadaqués (Girona),  
1959. Interior view.  
Photograph: Pierre Berdoy,  
AHCOAC.



**Fig. 12**  
Bombelli House, Cadaqués  
(Girona), 1961. Interior view.  
Photograph: Casali, AHCOAC.





**Fig. 13**

Wyndham Goodden House. Palafrugell (Girona), 1962. Interior view.

Photograph: Casali, AHCOAC.

pavements (from the Empordanese town of La Bisbal), etc.

However, the functional program of the original typology was inverted and the living room was moved to the top floor – the opposite of the old fishermen’s houses – with large openings from floor to ceiling to take in the best views over the bay and the landscape, which both families enjoyed: in the early years, the house was shared by the Harnden and Bombelli families, who made use of the six bedrooms and five (!) bathrooms during their vacations.

The Staempfli house (Domus 1961b), the Bombelli house, the house and studio for Mary Callery (Domus 1965c), the Fasquelle house or the Apezteguía house, among others, all of them in Cadaqués, but also the Goodden house in Mont-ras (Girona) (Sverbeyeff 1966, Domus 1965b), the Parsons house in Benissa (Alicante) (Fortune 1967) – a pop version, of sorts, of the American binuclear design but based on the *riurau* –, the house for the Duke of Cadaval in Estoril (Portugal), the house for Prince Metternich in Zacatena (Ciudad Real), built in 1970, ... are all just different versions adapted to satisfy the exquisite clients who commissioned them, whether a recognized artist, a former director of the MOMA in New York or a European aristocrat.

Architecture for the elite, just like architecture for the Spanish everyman patiently waiting his turn to visit an exhibition pavilion was still, in any case, modern architecture and American architecture. Disguised as “regional”, artificially conventional and with the simple goal of remaining unnoticed, these houses, however, are also exhibitions: there is an exacerbated sense of comfort, spacious and open living rooms that organize the distribution of the house as a whole, and photogenic furniture, just like the



**Fig. 14**

Ethel De Croisset House, El Alhaurín de la Torre (Málaga), 1959. Exterior view.  
Photograph: Casali, AHCOAC.

**Fig. 15**

Bordeaux-Groult House, Cadaqués (Girona), 1961. Exterior view.  
Photograph: Casali, AHCOAC.

“house without frontiers” that was intended to help build a better future... The apparent contradiction between the vernacular and the modern is resolved with a naturalness that perhaps can only be perceived in the direct experience of an in-person visit. At the center of these genuinely “democratic” spaces are the metal fireplaces specially designed by the architects<sup>21</sup>, halfway between exhibition pieces and sculptures – which perhaps amounts to the same thing? – flanked by contemporary works of art that hang from the walls like a promise of personal enrichment. Architecture is, in that sense, the vehicle for an ideology that was expressed at international trade fairs in the reproductions of custom homes, or in particular houses inhabited by a parade of international figures, whose discretion no doubt had an effect on the limited visibility of Harnden’s own work, reserved for specialists, “initiates” and “connoisseurs”... In grey flannel and with diplomatic poise, or in espadrilles and an unbuttoned shirt, before a huge audience or in small elegant circles, for more than 20 years, in the eager

Europe of the mid-20th century, Harnden and Bombelli performed (American?) architecture live and in person: *living, living, living* ... is not just for living rooms. As an adjective it is also «the act, state or condition of being alive» (Morris 1969, p. 764), an attitude that undoubtedly deserves to be brought back, half a century later and none too soon, so that history, in the interest of life, can not only teach us, but also be responsible for «immediately stimulating [our] own activity» (Nietzsche 1995).

## Notes

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<sup>2</sup> “Biographical notes”, AHCOAC HB C 1837/172.

<sup>3</sup> File Unit: Electronic Army Serial Number Marged File, ca.1938-1946 (Enlistment Records), Army Serial number: 32981246.

<sup>4</sup> Personal interview with L. Bombelli, Cadaqués, 22.04.2007 (in attendance: Julio Garnica and Albert Fuster).

<sup>5</sup> Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, West Germany, Great Britain, Greece, Ireland, Iceland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland and Turkey.

<sup>6</sup> An introductory pavilion located in one of the trailers, two specific pavilions in two separate trailers detailing NATO’s role in each country the exhibition travelled to, and finally a trailer outfitted with a series of telephones where visitors could listen to the recorded voices of well-known personalities to resolving any of their remaining doubts.

<sup>7</sup> The train included seven cars: four of them contained the main exhibition, another was equipped as a cinema, and the sixth contained equipment and facility systems. The final car was used as accommodation for the train crew.

<sup>8</sup> An increase in the vehicles’ lateral expansion capacity, the installation of a double staircase for better access, or the introduction of a series of skylights in the roof to provide natural lighting.

<sup>9</sup> The architects: L. Bombelli (Italian), R. Browning (English), A. Hadjopoulos (Greek) and P. Yates (English), as well as the other designers and artists: B. Pfriem (American), R. Pontabry (French), P. Boucher (French), A. Le Houerf (French), E. Scheidegger (Swiss), R. Strub (Swiss) and W. Goetz (English).

<sup>10</sup> “Department of Commerce. European Trade Fair Program. 19 julio 1955”. AHCOAC HB.

<sup>11</sup> Letter from P. Harnden to L. Bombelli, Washington, 27.10.1955, AHCOAC HB 169.

<sup>12</sup> Press release and poster distributed on the occasion of the office’s opening in February 1956, AHCOAC HB.

<sup>13</sup> Letter from John Davis Lodge to P. Harnden, Madrid, 4.06.1956, AHCOAC HB C 1787/1.

<sup>14</sup> “United States Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Services, European Trade Fair Contract”, 4.01.1957, AHCOAC HB C 1801/26.

<sup>15</sup> A strange professional association. The correspondence between Harnden and Bombelli during 1957, 1958, and even 1959, contains a good number of passages devoted to difficulties, misunderstandings and arguments between Harnden and Rudofsky regarding the organization of the exhibition. AHCOAC HB 169.

<sup>16</sup> Given the difficulties of the assignment, at the end of the exhibition, the curators thanked Harnden for his professionalism and his patience. Letter from James S. Plaut to P. Harnden, Washington, 9.05.1958. AHCOAC HB C 137.

<sup>17</sup> Letter from P. Harnden to L. Bombelli, Washington, 17.07.1958, AHCOAC HB 169.

<sup>18</sup> Based on the salary tables from Harnden’s office, we know that in 1957 the team was made up of as many as 37 collaborators, including architects, designers, administration staff, etc. AHCOAC HB.

<sup>19</sup> Suffice it to say that in 1961, issue number 384 of the magazine *Domus* groups together designs by P. Harnden Associates, F. Correa and A. Milà, and J.A. Coderch under the title “A Cadaqués”. A comment by Ignasi Solà-Morales, talking about Ca-



daqués is also telling: «Ernst, Hamilton, Duchamp, Max Bill, along with Coderch, Terradas, Correa and Milà, or Peter Harnden, all arrived at the same time in that isolated, mineral and severe landscape in an unstoppable flight from an urban world they felt removed from. And it was only after a time, a long detour, that they returned to that world with attempts at new sociability through architecture.» SOLÀ-MORALES, I., “José Antonio Coderch en la cultura arquitectónica europea”. in: AA.VV (1989) - *J.A.Coderch de Sentmenat 1913-1984*. Gustavo Gili, Barcelona, 6-7. Although it hardly seems that the cosmopolitan meetings in Cadaqués in the 1960 (except for the dress code) were any less urban than the ones that took place, with the same attendees, in Paris, London, Madrid or New York. Nor was Ava Gardner any less of an urbanite for filming in Tossa de Mar (See: ORDÓÑEZ M. (2004) - *Beberse la vida: Ava Gardner en España*. Santillana, Madrid, 2004).

<sup>20</sup> AHCOAC HB 19.

<sup>21</sup> Like the exposed metal chimney in the living room of Harnden's house in Orgeval, which J.A. Coderch probably took a careful look at during a visit in the early 1950s. MARTIN M. (2003) - “Entrevista a Lanfranco Bombelli,” *cit.*, 127.

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