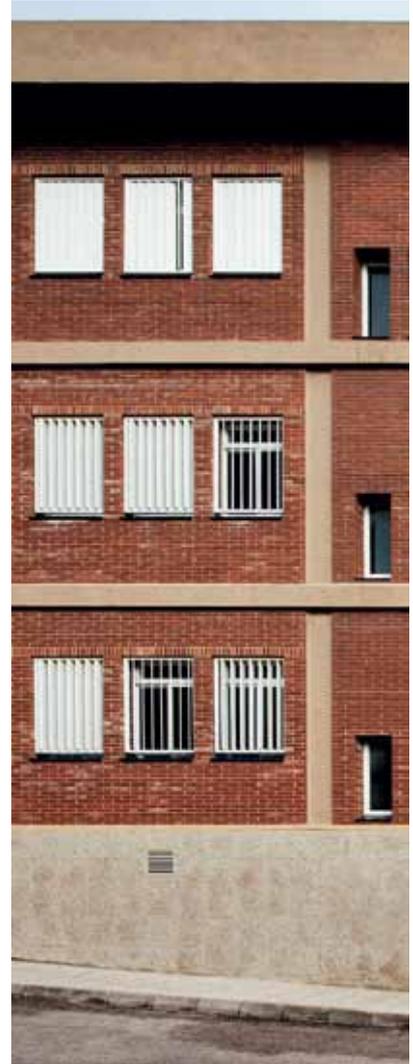


September 2012

Tim Ronalds on Chetham's School of Music

Domestic dimensions: inventive houses on challenging sites by Gort Scott, Rural Studio, Dixon Jones, Alma-nac
Catalan creativity • Reiach & Hall's Forth Valley College
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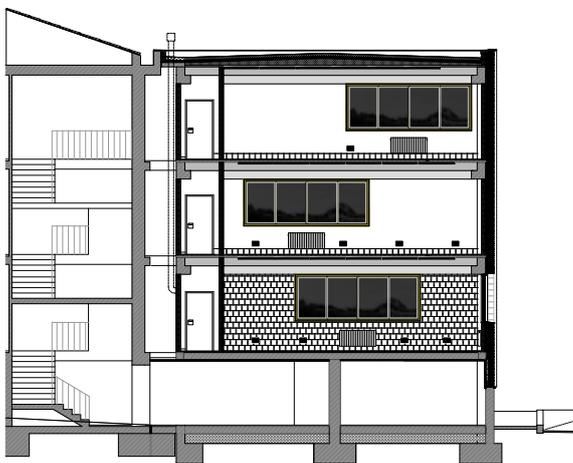
A young generation of architects working in Catalonia and the Balearic Islands provides an antidote to the arid stylistic preoccupations of much mainstream European architecture, says **David Kohn**. Photos: José Hevia.

Despite dire economic conditions, a new generation of young architects from Catalonia and the Balearic Islands is creating architecture that has much to celebrate and commend to the rest of Europe and further afield. Grounded in concerns for local skills, ecologies and contexts and turning limited resources into a poetic economy of means, a consistent architectural language rooted in modernism is emerging that has delight and wit enough to lift the spirits in troubled times.

SMS Arquitectos' extension to Josep Sureda i Blanes School is located at the edge of Palma on the island of Majorca, in a zone of anomalous buildings where the town peters out into fields. The school, which specialises in food technology education, has been one of the social centres of an adjacent neighbourhood that was built in the 1970s primarily to house workers in the tourism industry. The new extension creates five classrooms for the study of pastry-making. SMS has used locally-made decorative precast

concrete blocks – conventionally used to make balconies, garden walls and ventilation screens in local houses – to create the three new facades to the school. The combination of an informal

Above, left Extension to Josep Sureda i Blanes school in Palma, Mallorca, by Mallorca-based SMS Arquitectos (Aina Salvà Tejedor b.1974, Alberto Sanchez Lopez b. 1974, Antonio Marqués b. 1971). The architects' objective was to use the least possible amount of imported materials in the 698 sq m, €440,000 building, both to reduce the ecological footprint and to locate the building in a larger context.





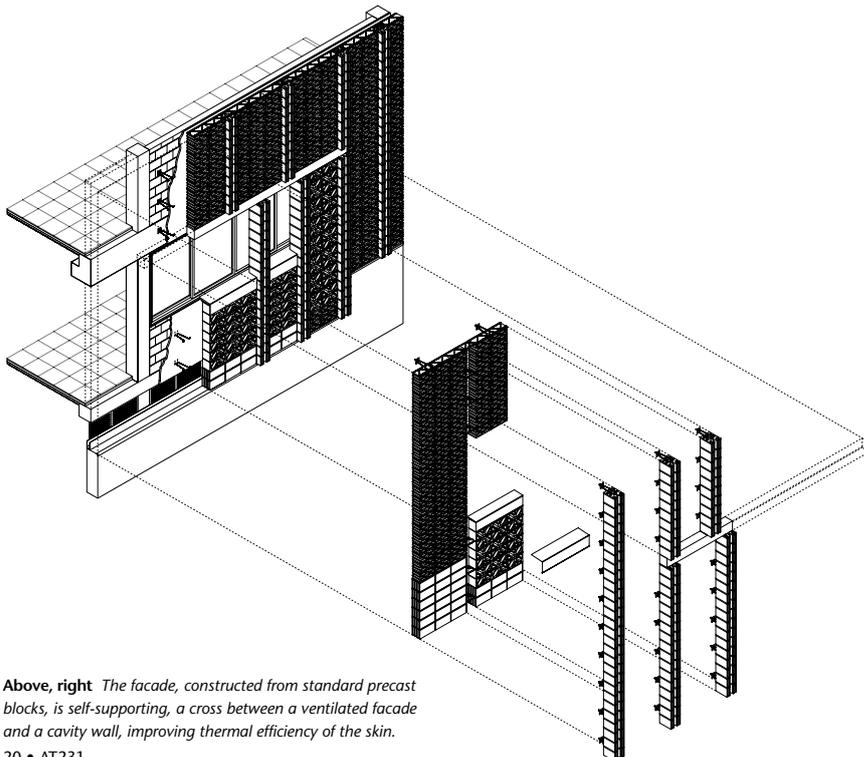
composition, a strict constructional logic and inventive adaptation of a vernacular technology lends the project a gravitas

that far outweighs its apparent lightness. The floral decoration interspersed with large gold-anodised framed windows pro-

vides a playful clue to the confection taking place beyond.

Francisco Cifuentes' house in Bunyola, also on the island,

grows out of its steep mountain site. The living quarters and bedrooms occupy two distinct enclosures that straddle an historic



Above, right The facade, constructed from standard precast blocks, is self-supporting, a cross between a ventilated facade and a cavity wall, improving thermal efficiency of the skin.

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path that climbs from the village up to terraces and fields higher up the valley. A limited palette of locally-sourced clay blocks, concrete pre-stressed beams and pine joinery has been combined in an ingenious variety of configurations to create interior and exterior spaces of a richness that belies their modest scale and simple forms. The hearths and ancillary spaces of entrance lobbies, kitchen and bathrooms cut into the open plan living quarters to create aedicules that address views and the topography of the site. The architecture quietly foregrounds the activity within and celebrates the journeys through the house and out into the landscape.



The Collage House by Bosch Capdeferro Arquitectures, in the Catalan city of Girona an hour's drive north-east of Barcelona, occupies a dense urban site in the old Jewish Quarter, or 'Call'. On a slope that descends to the nearby Onyar River, the project part rehabilitates a gothic house that had suffered over a century of neglect to recreate a home for the architect's family. The plan is arranged around two exterior spaces, a deep stone entrance courtyard housing a beautiful gothic stone staircase and a higher level garden courtyard. These stone excavations form the hubs around which domestic rooms are arranged, each incorporating fragments from the original architecture – portals, windows, disappearing staircases, the remains of chimneys. The architects have deftly added layers of stuccoed walls, encaustic and ceramic tile finishes and fabric sunshades that adjust each space to provide the comfort and character befitting new uses. The strong colours and patterns of the tiles added to the entrance courtyard create a mineral garden to compliment the nature of the higher garden, a space that joyfully celebrates social encounter.

These three projects form part of the current exhibition of Catalan and Balearic Island architecture at the Venice Biennale entitled, 'Vogadors'. They are presented beside six

Above, below *The 167 sq m house in Bunyola, Mallorca, by Francisco Cifuentes (b, 1977) is constructed from standard materials – thermal clay blocks for walls and prestressed joists with ceramic top slabs for floors, topped with a 40mm layer of veneer plaster dusted with white cement.*





further projects by the younger generation of architects and 20 projects by their forebears including Coderch, Torres and Lapeña, Josep Lluís Mateo, Carlos Ferrater and Enric Mirrales. Together they confirm the ongoing vitality of architectural culture in the region and the continuity of concerns both specific to their context and a broader international, modernist project. Furthermore, the presence of a playfulness in the work, a flexibility in the assimilation of different influences, also sets it apart from a straightforward return to critical regionalism and the dangers of parochiality and cultural introversion. As such, the work provides a welcome antidote to the often stylistic preoccupations of much mainstream European architecture and reconfirms the value of research into both the specific and the universal social, tectonic and environmental conditions that surround us.

David Kohn is the principal of David Kohn Architects. He has taught at ETSAV in Barcelona and his current projects include an apartment in the city's Barrio Gótico.

Left, below *Collage House in Girona, designed by Bosch Capdeffero (Ramon Bosch, b. 1970 and Bet Capdeffero, b. 1974). The 1,515 sq m refurbishment and extension of an existing building cost €2m. The house negotiates a large step in the section of the site and is arranged around two internal courts.*

