

THE ARCHITECTURAL LEGACY OF THE PANAMA CANAL: A CHALLENGE FOR THE CONSTRUCTION IN THE TROPICS

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The Panama Canal is well-known as an engineering feat, yet its consequences are rarely reminisced nowadays, at least outside of Panama.⁽¹⁾ In fact, the construction of the Canal produced a wide and ingenious range of architectonic styles adapted to the humid Tropic, where Frenchmen, US citizens, Panamanians, Caribbean's, and people from different nationalities participated. The most original creative and adjustable process prevailed in the Isthmus up until the arrival of the air condition and the ever growing globalization of the patterns of design which were able to oust the climate –as the determining architectural factor.

Today, the future of the “Canal Architecture” – as its referred to in Panama regarding the architectural patrimony of the former Canal Zone and its nearby areas (See Map – Fig. #1)- is at a turning point because of the final reversion of the waterway to Panama, which culminates on December 31, 1999 ⁽²⁾ This reversion includes a great quantity of buildings, infrastructure, and green areas. Such deed represents a tremendous challenge for the space planning of all the Trans-isthmus area. In view of the generosity of the architecture surrounding the area of the Panama Canal in relationship to its natural environment (most of all when compared with the crowded and disorganized architecture of Panama City, which –besides that is very insensitive to the weather), an issue has been raised regarding the importance and possible conservation of this architectural patrimony.

Beyond this conservation program, the historical architecture of the canal area (which dates mostly from the period between 1910 and 1940), even today it can still be a paradigm for every architect and academic professional interested in the construction in the tropic. In that sense, the following essay summarizes the evolution of this architectural legacy starting in the 19th century, including its multiple echoes in the cities of Panama and Colon. (3)

Prelude: The Construction of the Trans-isthmus Railroad.

In Panama, the canal architecture did not come out of the clear blue sky, since it's a consequence of the country's historical role as traffic zone.

The Panamanian Isthmus has been the crossroads since the Spaniard presence was consolidated in America during the 19th century. During the colonial period, the Isthmus monopolized this role, -that entailed mostly people and trading between the Pacific Coast of South America and Europe- even up to the 18th century. Its two key ports were Panama and Portobelo, and the Trans-isthmus Road had two ways: one by land, and the other a combination of water and land, which ran on mainland between Panama and Cruces and after that it became a waterway up to the Atlantic Ocean.

Starting on the decade of 1730, the Isthmus suffered an economic crack which lasted over a century: the Spanish Crown promoted a Management Restructuring in all the region, which had negative effects on Panama. By and by, the traffic zone lost priority over the other European routes. Even so, in 1786 the Frenchman Defer de le Nourre proposed the construction of a canal through Panama (4), but in those days the conditions were not favorable for such enterprising endeavors, at least not in Spain.

However, on the first half of the 19th century, the industrial and trading advancements of the world powers made them reconsider a possibility of a canal.

Nevertheless, the Trans-isthmus railway was first to be built instead of the canal (1850-55). This railway was a U.S. businessmen' achievement, that took advantage of the famous Gold Rush, the wave of fortune-seekers that pounce upon California after 1848.⁽⁵⁾ The railroad, nonetheless, did not come out of Portobelo, but instead of a new port established by the Railway Company in the diseased-ridden island of Manzanillo, 30 kilometers west (see map, fig. #1). The original name of this port was Aspinwall which honored the President of the company, William H. Aspinwall. Yet when the city was formally established in 1852 with the government's financial guarantee, it was named Colon. Thus was established the present Trans-isthmus route.

The railroad deeply changed the architectural panorama in Panama, which even in 1850 was a sort of posthumous sequel of the colonial scenario. The three centuries of Hispanic presence had produced a similar architecture to the one found in other hot American lands, with two-story balcony houses in the cities of Panama and Portobelo; and one-story porch houses in the rural areas. The houses were not autonomous units, moreover, they were built with middling walls, seeking to create enclosed fronts which clearly defined the streets and other public space. Undoubtedly, the balconies and the porches blocked the sunlight so that it wouldn't heat the walls excessively; as in the urban periphery vegetation was scarce.

With this background in mind, it's easier to understand the impact of the first modernizing wave during the decade of 1850, whose effects were primarily noticed in Panama and in the new port of Colon. The railway construction brought a wave of

foreigners, mostly US citizens, as well as, British, and from diverse European countries that arrived to profit from the boom. Such immigrants bought lands, built houses, and developed service economy. They were also representative of other building traditions, that significantly differed from the Spanish point of view, such as they urban concept and the attitude towards the climate. The globalization - which at that time meant better railway and maritime communications, without forgetting the incipient employ of banking credits - allowed the importation of construction materials from abroad.

Even though the Panamanian architecture before 1850 was eminently “Hispanic”, especially in contrast to the so-called “Caribbean Architecture” (i.e. the bungalows, the rural house mounted on pillars, perimeter verandas, and the Dutch kind of covers ⁽⁶⁾). Beginning in 1850, a kind of “Hybridation” experience took place, similar that of other warm humid climate zones, from the Southern part of the United States down to the Northern Coast of South America, including the British, French, and Dutch islands in the Caribbean.

The main influences came from the United States. The U.S. was the heir of the British colonial tradition and had developed a vernacular architecture around states of the Gulf of Mexico –where in certain months of the year, the weather can be as warm and humid as in Central America. In New Orleans, which had been both a French and Spanish possession , (and was one of the main maritime contact points with Panama) the urban and architectural frame was very similar to the Panamanian Capital City, with houses decorated with patios and balconies.

Consequently, the modernization of Panama City, led to similar results ⁽⁷⁾. The houses which were built during the period of 1850-80 had balconies and a great deal of

them had traditional rubble work, but they also had shutter doors with lights, industrial manufactured decoration, imported wood from the U.S. or Canada and French tiled roofs or canalized sheets as they were cooler for the undeniable heat. There are still streets left on the historical downtown where this synthesis can be observed in a nearly pristine condition (fig. #2). There were also traces of monumental architecture in the European academic sense: the first attempt was the Great Hotel in Plaza Mayor (1874-75 –today it is the Inter-Oceanic Canal Museum, which was built with a showy French roof and huge ionic pillars (fig. #3)

It is worth discussing what took place in Colon, since it represents the first U.S. raid into Panama. The land of this Atlantic port, belonged almost entirely to the Railway Co., so they designed the city according to their own concepts, that still echo the U.S. railroad experience. The starting point was not a plaza or a church, but instead the railways, which resulted in a very lineal and uneven development. During a long time, the only spot worth seeing was the Front Street (as it was originally called) with its rows of narrowed-front houses, with large backyards, and wide porches facing the street (fig. #4). During the 19th century, indeed, Colon was a “camping-city” with a very stressed country character. Thus, explaining the light constructions, made of imported materials, after the many fires (1863, 1885, and 1890), which made it possible to reconstruct that which had been burned down within a few months. On the other hand, what is known today shows very typical traces; giving clear evidence that the camp grounds were mostly standard barracks of easy construction.

A good example is a house for 4 employees, whose plan was published in 1887 in the *Semaine des Constructeurs* (fig. #5) It dealt with a wood building with four units,

each one with two rooms of 4 x 5 meters. The house was built sitting over large pillars, having a wide perimeter veranda surrounding it. It had a “Dutch” cover of galvanized sheet, as well as a panel to diminish the heat. Pinewood was primarily used, and double layers were laid on the walls. Indeed, such architecture fits accurately with the typical portray of the Non-Hispanic colonies in the Caribbean Sea. The well-known residential area of Christophe-Colomb located adjacent to Colon City, which had been originally planned for high-hierarchy employees (fig.#6).⁽¹⁰⁾ The houses that followed the same pattern, were clustered forming an arch in front of the railway web. Yet not all the camp constructions were made out of wood; we are reminded here of the pre-fabricated metallic houses done by the famous Gustav Eiffel, which technically speaking were similar to the well-known Central American samples, such as the “*Escuelas Graduadas*” in San Jose and the *Hospital Rosales* in San Salvador.

The Architecture of the U.S. Canal (1904-1940)

The architectural cluster that is appreciated today, throughout the whole area of the Panama Canal, is due to the U.S. presence since 1904. The period of time in which we are interested includes, not only the definite construction with locks (1904-14), but also the years between the two World Wars, when the military apparatus was consolidated and increased considerably for defense purposes. The architectural patrimony of these four decades is pretty heterogeneous and had important changes throughout the years.

Now we ought to outline its most highlighting features. The U.S. presence in the isthmus, that started officially with the handing over of the canal area to the U.S. by the newly-created Republic of Panama ⁽¹¹⁾ which entailed great political and administrative

changes, all unthinkable during the French era, nevertheless, essential to grasp the kind of architecture that settled in. First, the Canal Zone was created as a U.S. *de facto* territory (see map, fig.#1), which had its own government dependent of Washington. As a result, there was a separation between the Canal Zone and the Republic of Panama, even though, both Panama City and Colon bordered the “**Zone**” (the popular term used in reference to the Canal Zone). It could be reached crossing a street: the 4th of July Avenue in Panama City, and the Front Avenue in Colon. This border had a lot of traffic (it did not have a fence) up until the end of the decade of 1950.

At the beginning, the “Zonian” society relied on a military and civil service, but the military had the control. It is not by chance, that the governors were usually men majored in military careers. The first one to be appointed, was the Colonel George W. Goethals, military and head engineer in the construction. Neither would it be surprising, that the Corps of Military Engineers of the U.S. had always a meddling action which was decisive in all the design and space structuring process within the Canal Zone. Even though, whatever was built depended entirely on the corresponding governmental agency, whether it was the Isthmian Canal Commission (ICC), or the very Department of War – today Dept. of Defense. Through it all, the Zonian architecture of that era can be compared with Filipino, Hawaiian, and Puerto Rican Armed Forces built by the U.S. (as these are all tropical climates, although Panama was a much larger scale.

In the Canal Zone, they reached an absolute control swiftly regarding the use of the soil, with a very rigorous designation of the plots of land for the administrative and military functions; as well as, the handling and maintenance of the waterway. Regarding the rest, on diverse camps the notorious Gold Roll and Silver Roll were

rooted, terms that at first only dealt with the type of salary and earnings, yet in the daily practice it implied a strict system of defined lineage because of rank and race of the personnel (e.g. single or married white U.S. employee, European employee, Hindu employee, or Black employee, etc.). The race and salary classification were very rigorous in the Canal Zone, situation that was kept until the Proclamation of the Civil Rights Law in the U.S. in 1964. This separation had important effects on the norm and quality construction, which were distributed according to the ranks.

When the properties were officially handed over to the ICC in 1904, the initial zonian policy (while they decided what kind of canal would be built) was to run an inventory and employ the buildings and camp grounds as much as possible. There were over two thousand buildings left from the French period. Out of these, about a thousand five hundred were repaired and reused. ⁽¹²⁾ Regarding the architecture, the first major change with respect to the French legacy came about through a health campaign that began in 1905. In 1900, the Cuban doctor Carlos Finlay discovered that yellow fever and malaria were not what was known in English as filth diseases; but rather mosquito transmitted illnesses. Even though, this discovery was not universally accepted for a while, the Colonel William C. Gorgas, who was the head of the Health Department in the Canal Zone, decided to eradicate the mosquito, and sealed-screen all the premises. These metallic nets, applied to the windows, doors, and mostly on the porches, changed the houses' appearance, since the architecture seemed to oscillate between the solid and the ethereal. The net was like a sieve enveloping the whole building.

In 1906, a housing shortage was experienced due to the great number of employees and workers coming into the Isthmus –the number reached 65,000 in 1913-

The construction of new barracks was started on the camp grounds of the Canal Zone. By 1906, there were seventeen types of houses developed already, and the following year there were twenty-four types but only for white personnel.⁽¹³⁾ In 1907, specific construction regulations were enacted, ⁽¹⁴⁾ which were improved and amended during the subsequent years. These rules regulated the size of the street, the rooms, balconies, and porches. They also compelled every new construction to either be attached to the adjacent building, or separated by a strip of 15 or 50 ft. depending on the situation. If it was a wood building, the floor had to be 3 ft. above the ground.

As a general rule, the buildings were independent units, separated from the neighboring buildings. As a sample of these prime times, we could take the original camp grounds of Pedro Miguel (fig. #7), located at one of the sides of the canal locks. In the photograph, which was taken in 1911, you can see the buildings of the French era, mostly one-story building, as well as the ones built after 1906; they are all isolated buildings. Unfortunately, all of this is gone. (Pedro Miguel, Gorgona, Emperador, or Gatun, which were the first main communities of the Canal Zone were all dismantled. The U.S. personnel stationed in Panama, indeed came to appreciate the green tropical environment once they defeated the calamity of the sicknesses which had been like hell. Panama became a paradise on earth. The artist, Joseph Pennell, who visited the works of the canal in 1912 and published a collection of drawings in a beautiful book⁽¹⁵⁾, gives us an idea of this idyllic vision in one of his sketches (fig. #8), where he claims: “I never saw a man who wanted to ‘go home’ –and some hadn’t been home for seven years, and dreaded going- and rightly. The Canal Zone is the best-governed section of the United States.”⁽¹⁶⁾

Soon there was evidence of the principles of the academic monumental architecture –with its strict symmetry and hierarchy of volumes-, still keeping with the lightness of the wood architecture. The first architectural landmark of this type in the Canal Zone was undoubtedly the Tivoli Hotel (fig.#9), which was built as official guests house in Ancon, just in front of the border with Panama City. The work started in 1905 and was finished completely in 1907; the architect P.O. Wright Jr., who also developed housing type for the camp grounds. The plastic characteristics of the Tivoli Hotel were pointing toward the future: symmetric composition, hierarchy, classical inspiration, a large roof, and of course, the metallic net overall. The location of this white structure over the top of the hill, precisely overlooking one of the poorest areas of the Panamanian capital, slightly reminded the faraway architecture of the plantations of the south of the U.S.. It has recently been demonstrated that such points of reference were part of power conscience symbolism.⁽¹⁷⁾ During subsequent years, other important buildings were built with similar structure, mostly hotels and club houses on the main camp grounds. One of the most interesting was Corozal Hotel (fig.#10), which had a perimeter gallery in three levels, and a central element with frontispiece. There was a time when this building was also shielded with metallic net.

The architectural and urban official policy changed towards 1912, when they first glanced an strategy of permanent occupation within the Canal Zone. There was a glimmer of the successful end of the works, and the “Zone” was starting to become more of a permanent political entity, and not some fleeting overnight campground. This intention can be reflected in the Panama Canal Act promulgated by the U.S. Congress on August 24, 1912.

A Presidential decree on December 5, 1912, declared that all the land in the Canal Zone was necessary for the canal handling. The Colonel Goethals received the order to take possession of all this land in the name of the United States. The population that was not required for the canal handling was thrown out, including the old inhabitants, “the people living on the edge”, even the owner of rural farms; they received a compensation instead. A great deal of the working population moved to the Panama City and Colon, where they occupied rented neighborhoods. It was at this point that the total control of the “Zonian” territory was established, and all private property rights disappear in that zone. A clear occupation policy was instituted with a definite reduced number of settlements. Each one –as explained previously- with specific functions. A few settlements were designed to substitute the former camps that got immersed into the Gatun Lake. Indeed, the idea that Colonel Goethals had, was leaving most of the land of the Canal Zone for a great forest reserve, which he justified for strategic reasons.⁽¹⁸⁾

The Panama Canal Act also created the Commission of Arts for the beautifying of the canal. The commission had to give recommendations in relation to the “artistic character” of the waterway; so in 1913 the sculptor, Daniel C. French, and the famous architect and landscape painter, Frederick Law Olmsted. Nonetheless, both of them advised that they should not try to embellish the engineering work, for the canal, -as the pyramids of Egypt- “is impressive from its scale, simplicity, and directness”.⁽¹⁹⁾ In that sense, the new monumental architecture, which was proposed after 1913, was characterized for its austerity, which reflected not only the utilitarian character of the canal, but also the North-American Protestant traditions. Parallel to all this, landscape

painting was strongly developed which could profit from the great extensions of vacant lots.

The star project from the Canal Zone was the new government center in Balboa, that was designed in 1913 and built in 1914-15, but we would have to mention here the Hospital Gorgas (1915-19), located very close to Balboa, on the other side of the Ancon Mount. The main frame of reference for the “Zonian” monumental urbanism was clearly the “City Beautiful Movement”, which had been developed in the U.S. as a result of the famous World’s Columbia Exposition from Chicago (1893). In addition to the Greek-Roman, and Palladian references in public architecture; the Neo-Gothic was employed on the religious architecture, and the Neo-Colonial on houses. Naturally, such eclecticism was common in the architectural cultured scene of the U.S. The countryside Renascent villa in Italy, with its fascination for Nature, was another important point of reference that allowed the integration of the architectural classicism and the landscape art.

Now let’s talk about the Administration Building and the Avenue right across, originally called “El Prado”. The huge building (fig. #11 that reminds us of a royal palace, was designed by the New Yorker, Austin W. Lord. It was built over an embankment overlooking the canal entrance. It is “E” shaped, with a steel skeleton, and cement block walls. Originally it had an open gallery –sort of a balcony- for its circulation. In the middle, it has a rotunda with paintings that reminds the saga of the construction of the canal. In order to understand the design concept, it is necessary to pause and think over the diverse possible sources. The rotunda, of course, hints the Capitol in Washington, which surely was a reference point, but on the outside there is no

dome so the language departs greatly from the usual Palladianism in the public North-American architecture: the most outstanding element is the large tile roof. According to the magazine, *Canal Record*, the building “adapts the Renaissance of the fifteenth century in Italy to modern building conditions and materials”⁽²⁰⁾ a very enigmatic comment if you think about Brunelleschi or Alberti’s architecture that does not fit this description. On the other hand, recalling a work like Villa Medici in Poggio a Caiano near Florence (c.1485) built for Lorenzo de Medici, - according to the design of Giuliano da Sangallo (fig.#12) . It has a large roof with eaves, an elevation over the ground and a harmonious relationship with the natural environment: the “tropical” side of the Zonian architecture, does indeed has a European taste after all. This is not the only work in the Canal Zone where the Italian villa shows direct fruits: part of the Gorgas Hospital echoes Villa Medici in Rome, and the Elementary School built at the bottom of the Administration Building (at one side of the Goethals monument), also looks like a villa.

The Prado Avenue (fig.#13) , which led to the real center of the Zonian civilian life, a plaza where the white population met at the Club House, a “supermarket”, the post office, and other government facilities. This avenue traces a real symmetry axis, where the Administration Building can be observed in all its splendor: the royal touch are highlight by the monumental flight of steps, that is truly baroque. The buildings on both sides of the avenue, indeed, are all alike.

When talking about styles in the Zonian area, we have to mention the Neo-Colonial , which was called back then Mission style o Spanish-colonial style according to the points of reference. Bear in mind, that the interest in the U.S. for Hispanic Colonial architecture, could be echoed both in the Franciscan missions of the 18th century in

California- that are truly simple- or in the luxurious Mexican baroque. (21) In Panama, the first Neo-Colonial work was the Washington Hotel (1911-13), it belonged to the Railroad Co., hence owned by the U.S. The architect was none other than Bertram G. Goodhue, the Spanish-Colonial style paladin in the U.S. Surprisingly enough, this project is prior to his Neo-Colonial masterwork , the Exposition Panama-California in San Diego (1915). It is known, in fact, that the Hispanic allusion and not classicist, was made because of a direct suggestion from the government in Washington.

The Neo-Colonial was established immediately within certain contexts. The plans of the military facilities presented by the Secretary of War to the Congress in 1913, for example (which we will discuss later), include a hospital with a clear reference to the Mission style (fig. #14). Even though, he quotes it as “Hispanic” it is confined mostly to the mixed-line of central top profile. The remainder follows the restful classicists pauses established. This type of focus became the rule, in subsequent years a barrack with Neo-Colonial design was typically very similar to the preceding ones, except that it had roof and perimeter tile eaves, of mixed-line profile and of somewhat elaborated shapes.

During this whole time the construction techniques became modernized. With this plan, it was instituted the need for bricklaying or concrete instead of wood. The latter one, becoming less popular and only used in buildings of less hierarchy. The construction in concrete and blocks, developed in great plan starting in 1915, can be appreciated in the buildings on both sides in El Prado (fig.#13). Wood can still be seeing in the clusters in Diablo, which dates back to the 30’s (fig.#15). Despite the fact that it was the phasing-out of wood, throughout the 30’s there were still some lovely

constructions done with it. One of the most beautiful samples, due to its horizontal and pure line, is the School for Black Children in La Boca, which was built in 1939. The classical reminiscence, naturally, can still be perceived, yet without the porches.

The completion of the canal in 1914, whose inauguration occurred 2 weeks after the beginning of the First World War, the need to defend the waterway against any possible invaders became evident. Thus, started the last great constructive and urban phase of the canal negotiation. In Panama, there was a U.S. military presence since 1903. Although at the beginning, there were few troops stationed permanently in the country. In 1913, the U.S. Congress assigned the first important financial sum for the defense of the canal. They proposed for the first time the creation of large military bases in the Isthmus. At first, they thought of a 3,000 men army. The plans for the corresponding facilities were formally presented by the Secretary of War in November of that year. (22) These plans show buildings of diverse type (living quarters for officers, barracks for troops, administrative offices, and the previously mentioned hospital, etc.) with a skeleton of concrete and cement brick walls. Here the Colonel Goethals' suggestions were followed (23). In 1914, \$12 million dollars were additionally assigned for defense. (24)

As soon as the First World War was ended, the War Department enhanced their facilities and created a protective ring of military bases around Panama City and Colon, all within the Zonian territory (25). The barracks bore the traditional type models, although after the 20's the fore mentioned Neo-Colonial details were spread (of arcs, mixed-line profile of all type, tiled roof). The resulting urban concept, both for the civilian and the military areas, can be described as low-density suburban, with the

Gaillard Highway running parallel to the canal route, sort of a stem from which comes out several branches (fig. #1). Much has been said of the concept “city garden”- maybe somewhat misinterpreted in this context- even though the landscape art became very important and is probably the only human quality found in an architecture that was extraordinarily grim.

Finally with the development of the military architecture of the 20's and 30's arrives the “Golden Age” of the Zonian architecture. The tropical architecture dealt with up to here – with large roofs, unique verandas and images- which stayed unchangeable until the arrival of the air condition. As soon as the technological character arrived, this feature was lost since crossed ventilation became obsolete. The Zonian authorities started to enclosure porches and windows, destroying the original character of the constructions. One of the problems that presents the preservation of the architectonic patrimony in the Canal Zone, is that most of the main buildings from the period of 1910-40 were disfigured by the modernizing process. Anyway beginning the 50's, the Canal Zone architecture became anodyne and what was established was a kind of diluted International Style.

Zonian Echoes in Panama City and Colon.

In spite of the territorial separation there was a great U.S. influence in both of these cities, and what was happening in the Canal Zone could not be passed unnoticed, mostly because the Panamanian economy depended on the U.S. Furthermore, the U.S. authorities had certain prerogatives in Panama, the Zonian Health Office –for example, controlled the construction permits, the water supply, and the trash collection. Both cities

also became the entertainment spots for the U.S. population, since Zonian environment was always restrictive for all type of nightlife.

The architectonic production in Panama City and Colon reflected this dependence in multiple ways, some of them very creative. Regarding the U.S. interference, one of the first effects was the construction of rental houses for the canal workers that had to abandon the Canal Zone after 1912. Thus, arose extensive neighborhoods of tenants bordering Panama City and Colon.⁽²⁶⁾ The “classical” tenant house followed the narrow front and wide back model developed in Colon during the 19th century. Usually, it was a two-story building, made out of wood, with rooms set in rows and a running balcony-frontal or perimeter- in the top floor. These constructions were regulated by norms inspired by Zonian Codes, which really emphasized sanitation; therefore, they had to comply with a 3 ft. minimum between houses, and every cubicle had to have a minimum surface of 10 sq. ft., with enough lighting and well-ventilated in theory.

Here is a view of 10th Street in 1908 (fig.#17) gives a good idea about the above mentioned architecture whose peak was reached around 1920 and its similarity with the Zonian camps cannot be denied. Just like in the 19th century, here worked artificers from all over the world.

While there emerged the great rental neighborhoods, the Panamanian government was sponsoring monumental architecture for the main public buildings.⁽²⁷⁾ The reference points were either European or U.S., just like in the other countries of the region. Following the sample of the close neighbors, the Zonians, the weather became a very important aspect in the design. Looking at the public facilities that had Zonian

inspiration, the most important is undoubtedly the enormous Santo Tomas Hospital in Panama City, whose construction started in 1920. The concept was motivated evidently in the Gorgas Hospital complex located in the Canal Zone. The design was the work of the U.S. architect, James C. Wright, who planned a historical type of architecture – similar to the one in the Administration Building in Balboa. Likewise, there are colossal pillars, and tiled roofs with great eaves. From the urban viewpoint, the cluster is based in the hierarchical and symmetrical grouping of the different buildings, in such a way, that the main building (1920-24) (fig.#18) that occupies the center of the composition, visually dominates over the others. The great garden, strategically located towards the seawall, allows a general view of the set.

The suburban residential architecture also received a strong Zonian influence.⁽²⁸⁾ Anyhow, the new upper class suburbs, in Panama as in the rest of Latin America, were based in the U.S. experience of picturesque houses, with irregular volume, and well-developed garden, which was broadly publicized through magazines, books, and films. The effects of the Mission style and the Spanish-Colonial Revival style, which conquered California, Texas, and Florida starting the decade of 1910, were soon appreciated in Panama through the monumental projects like the fore mentioned Washington Hotel in Colon. The mixed-line finishing, white walls, and tiled roofs Mission style, which were widely employed in the Zonian residential architecture since 1915, they made their appearance in Panama City in the early 20's, as the country was a real architect and clients' melting pot, many combinations were possible.

An unexpected mixture resulted between the Neo-colonial luxurious residence – that could be located in Beverly Hills, Pasadena, or Coral Gables- and the Zonian military

barrack.. Since many contractors of the “Zone” were working in Panama at the same time- it turned out “natural”- to apply the concepts of the massive housing of a military base to an apartment building. Certain details of the Zonian architecture of the 20’s, such as the perimeter tiled eaves supported by a wood turning point or concrete canes of mixed-line profile, which were so functional that spread out immediately throughout the country. The same for the porch sheltered with metallic screen. The German Residence in the Bella Vista suburb (c.1940), which was designed by the Hungarian architect Gustav Schay (fig. #19), is a good example of a total hybrid. Even though, the term Neo-Colonial can be used generically to describe this building, we are actually before a synthesis that goes beyond the stylistic established terms. And this house was not unique. There were whole sectors of Panama City (e.g. Bella Vista, Campo Alegre) that followed this trend. Unfortunately, the real state speculation in the 80’s and 90’s has destroyed a great deal of this particular legacy, which today can only be reconstructed with the help of historical pictures (fig.#20).

In a way, the architects that worked in Panama City enjoyed some advantages over working in the Canal Zone. For example, and upper class section like Campo Alegre, which had a plastic wealth could surpass the monotony of the Zonian urban landscapes. We must not forget that the attractiveness of the architectural and urban legacy of the Canal Zone, beyond its evident adaptation to the tropical environment, it is a product of nostalgia. In front of the disorganized Panamanian urban culture of today, the Canal Zone seems like a paradise of order, calmness, and space broadness. Its reality, truly, was different: the Zonian society was acutely hierarchic and regulated.

The ambiguity of this Zonian legacy, is what makes it difficult to integrate it effectively to the Panamanian reality of today. We must not forget that the monumental clusters and the Zonian residential areas were all constructed behind Panama and Colon's back, with a conditioning of control that can not be repeated in a land where the private property reigns. Fortunately, the echoes of the Zonian architecture in Panama lack this problem: a Neo-Colonial residence in Bella Vista or Campo Alegre is very far from being a barrack in a military base.