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Best as a Team: Peter Harnden's Big Band Architecture

Julio Garnica

After World War II, the American architect Peter Harnden (1913-1971) directed the Marshall Plan Information Office in Paris, as well as various US Government units aimed at promoting the image of the United States in the midst of the Cold War, organising the work of a large international team of architects, designers and technicians. In 1956 he established *PGHA Associates* in Orgeval, where the Italian architect Lanfranco Bombelli (1921-2008) soon played an important role, and with whom he was responsible for the design of American pavilions in Europe in the following years. In the early sixties they decided to move to Spain, where they founded *Harnden&Bombelli*, a firm in which they combined official commissions with the work of renovating and designing sophisticated vacation houses on the Spanish coast, establishing an unprecedented and enriching dialogue between modernity and Mediterranean tradition. Always working as a team, Harnden and Bombelli's unique way of architecture is a little-known but highly significant episode in the professional practice of modern architecture in the 20th century.



On October the 24th 1971, *The New York Times*¹ reported the death of the American architect Peter Harnden in the Spanish town of Cadaqués. An unusual professional career, as surprising as it was unclassifiable and relatively unknown, centred on architecture, exhibition techniques and visual advertising, was cut short prematurely with his passing. And characteristically, it was always carried out in a work team.

Peter Graham Harnden was born in London in 1913, where his father, a member of the United States diplomatic corps, was stationed. He spent his childhood in Spain, Germany and Switzerland,² where he began his architectural studies, which he continued at Yale and Georgetown Universities.³ In 1933 he travelled to Italy, in 1936 he settled in California and in 1937 in Mexico. When his mother died that same year, he inherited a rich estate that enabled

him to continue travelling and to start a notable collection of modern art. In 1938 he founded the *Group Studio*⁴ in Los Angeles, an office, studio and showroom where he organised a series of exhibitions with works by Vassily Kandinsky, László Moholy-Nagy, Alexander Calder and Man Ray, and also published some of his early works.⁵ In the early 1940s he suffered a series of financial problems, and with the entry of the United States into the Second World War he decided to enlist as a volunteer⁶ in the officer corps of the *US Army Intelligence*,⁷ and was assigned to Europe in the American Information Service. After the end of the war, he married Marie Vassiltchikov in 1946, a Russian aristocrat who had remained as a refugee in Berlin, where she participated with a group of opponents of Nazism in the failed attempt on Hitler's life in 1944, an experience that she recorded, along with other experiences of those years, in a personal diary that remained unreleased until it was published after his death under the title "Berlin Diaries."⁸

In the following years, Harnden joined the *Office of the Military Government in US-occupied Germany* (OMGUS), part of the Information Control Division, in Munich, Berlin and Nuremberg, as head of an "Exhibition Program" aimed at disseminating the cultural, social and scientific life of the United States in post-war Germany, including exhibitions such as "Exhibition of Housing, Architecture and City Planning," "Exhibition of U.S. Architecture 1850-1945" and "US Architecture, Housing and Planning."⁹ From his new position, which he obtained thanks to his fluency in German language, his knowledge of European reality and his experience in staging art exhibitions, he established regular contacts with the American administration in Washington and with figures such as Eero Saarinen, Serge Chermayeff and Alfred Barr, as well as with European figures such as Walter Gropius, Max Bill, Sigfried Giedion or Rudolf Schwarz.

MIXED NATIONALITIES: USA SAVES EUROPE

"It is logical that the United States should do whatever it is able to do to assist in the return of normal economic health in the world, without which there can be no political stability and no assured peace."¹⁰

On June the 5th 1947, General George Marshall, Secretary of State of the United States government, gave a lecture at Harvard University in which he announced a programme aimed at resolving the economic crisis in which Europe had been plunged since the end of World War II, so that the "new world" would be able to save the "old world."¹¹ A few months later, on April the 3rd, 1948, the United States Congress passed the "Foreign Assistance Act of 1948.1",¹² a "plan" for European reconstruction, officially known as the European Recovery Program, which included a set of low-interest loans, grants-in-aid and advantageous trade agreements offered by the United States to Europe, through the Economic Cooperation Administration (ECA), worth approximately 13 billion dollars. Coordinated through the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), the European countries included in the Marshall Plan,¹³ as the programme would become popularly known, must reduce inflation, readjust their balance of payments, and regain economic independence before June the 30th, 1952.

With the aim of coordinating all the actions of the ECA *in situ*, in 1948 the United States Special Representative in Europe (USSRE) installed its headquarters in Paris, in the historic Hôtel Talleyrand building, in front the *Place de la Concorde*, near the American Embassy in the city. Within the ECA'S Visual Information Unit, a unit created in 1949 with the aim of initiating the dissemination of the Marshall Plan through all kinds of audio-visual productions, publications and exhibitions, Harnden was chosen to head the exhibition section¹⁴ as "Chief of Presentations Branch," in order to lead (from various dependencies of the American Embassy located on *avenue Gabriel*) an international team of architects, illustrators and designers in charge to set up the various exhibitions that would tour Europe

in the following years... With what aim? With the mission of promoting the Marshall Plan, stimulating European production, facilitating international trade and, last but not least, promoting the image of the United States.¹⁵ Although Harnden initially tried to involve Max Bill¹⁶ and Peter Blake¹⁷ in the team, for various reasons both declined the offer, and Lanfranco Bombelli, Bill's young collaborator, finally joined the team as "architectural designer" in February 1950. From the outset, as he appears in the official photographs, he was destined to become Harnden's right-hand man (fig. 02).

In April 1950, the travelling exhibition "Europe Builds," promoted by the OEEC, opens, announcing the decisive role of the Marshall Plan in the reconstruction of Europe. The exhibition travelled through France, Belgium, the Netherlands, Denmark, Sweden, Germany and Italy in four extendable trailer trucks carrying the contents of the exhibition, which were displayed in the trucks themselves and spread out in a large circular tent. Although the Marshall Plan technically ended on October 1951, the information programme continued: the ECA became the MSA (Mutual Security Agency), and the Office of Information continued to be headed by the same Harnden team, so that the initial communication campaign became a stable and continuous programme of propaganda – years later, Bombelli himself would admit: "Indeed, propaganda,... that's what we were doing. The government called it 'information,'... but it was clear, it was propaganda..."¹⁸ In February 1952, the exhibition "Caravan of Peace" was launched in Naples, with the aim of spreading awareness of the origins and motives of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Anglo-American military alliance and founding act of the Cold War. The main exhibition is also located in a circular circus-like tent, supported by a metal structure that allows an immense marquee to be erected in a few hours, coloured with flags, flanked by trailers that are transformed into secondary pavilions¹⁹ (fig. 03). In April 1952, the "Train of Europe," a former German military hospital train converted into an exhibition space, opened in Munich. In its carriages,²⁰ the advantages of cooperation between European countries, the commercial and cultural connections between Europe and America, and the need to increase productivity were explained in detail; an exhibition on rails that received 5 million visitors. "Productivity" is also the main theme of another series of rolling exhibitions starting at the Paris Motor Show in 1951, where a truck transports and displays the contents of the exhibition, while in the Netherlands it is displayed on two barges converted into an exhibition space and auditorium under the organisation of the *Dutch Mutual Security Agency*.

Americanisation takes command²¹ by transforming the military means of transport into mobile exhibitions, whose adaptation makes it possible to exhibit, from one city to another, large images on panels, graphs with statistics, three-dimensional illustrations, mobile models, multi-coloured flags... A clear and direct photographic language, much more informative than subtle. From military uniform to civilian suit; from war to peace; as soon as possible and at full speed: the press of the time praises in its comments not only the great success with the public but also the surprise caused by the unexpected transformation of a convoy of lorries into a spectacular exhibition.²²

Under the baton of American Harnden, the responsibility of organizing the visual colonization of the old European continent – whose ruin threatens the collapse of the very roots of Western civilization – falls on a team made up of French, English, Italian, Swiss, Greek professionals..., who collaborate unhindered and with maximum efficiency, exemplifying the ideals that the same exhibitions are transmitting. With an unusual generosity, Harnden ensures that the collective effort – teamwork or not – is rewarded with the express mention of the various collaborators, who are mentioned (with names and surnames) in the pages of prestigious publications such as *Architectural Review*,²³ *Das Werk*²⁴ or *Die Innenarchitektur*.²⁵ The English publication also lists their nationalities: architects Lanfranco Bombelli (Italian), Robert Browning (English),

Athanase Hadjopoulos (Greek) and Peter Yates (English), as well as designers and artists Bernard Pfriem (American), Robert Pontabry (French), Pierre Boucher (French), Adolphe Le Houerf (French), Ernest Scheidegger (Swiss), Rolf Strub (Swiss) and Walter Goetz (English). An international and multidisciplinary team, as required by the varied nature of the media, materials and formats used in the exhibitions. As also stated in the official documentation, the team includes some thirty professionals, among other collaborators and assistants: "Architects and designers of 13 different European nationalities, all working in close harmony to create informative exhibits for 17 Marshall Plan countries."²⁶

The American dissemination strategy also included, always with Harnden at the helm, the mounting of various "fixed" exhibitions, including the significant "Wir bauen ein besseres Leben" – which would be translated as "Building for a better future" – presented in 1952 as part of the Berlin Industrial Fair²⁷ (fig. 04). On this occasion, a rectangular single-family house, consisting of two rooms, living room, bathroom, kitchen, laundry, garden and nursery, was erected inside the Marshall House and displayed at the feet of the visitors, who walked through it from a raised scaffolding. Arranged according to the plans of the German architect Fritz Bornemann, with whom the Harnden team collaborates in an open and natural way, the structure and the divisions are resolved with metallic tube elements and modular panels of aluminium, glass or wood, all of which are commonly used in European countries. In addition, with the advice of the Museum of Modern Art, the furniture selected in modern taste contributes to promoting the free circulation of products in Europe and between Europe and America, through the exhibition of a house built and furnished with products from up to nine countries.²⁸ One might ask: who is ultimately responsible for the exhibition? Bornemann, MoMA, or perhaps the invisible hand of Harnden? Shortly before opening the doors to the public, it was decided – Harnden? – to include in the exhibition the performance of a "model family:" two couples and eight pairs of children, professional actors, who take turns acting out the routines of a normal day, while a narrator from a circular pulpit²⁹ describes the products, so that the visitors become voyeurs of a whole universe of domestic and private consumption that provides "a better life," according to the literal translation. At the press conference prior to the opening, the United Press accuses the State Department of promoting a striptease, on the assumption that the use of the shower would be described literally; an anecdote – who knows if, in the end, intentional – that causes a considerable stir and prompts a long series of official clarifications. The exhibition starts in Berlin not by chance: of the more than half a million visitors, 40 per cent come from the eastern part of the city, as the MSA triumphantly proclaims. Peace in Europe is built by declaring the Cold War: in other locations the exhibition does not allude to a supposedly better life, but much more simply and precisely – and presumably under Harnden's control and mastery of language and, above all, nuance – is entitled "Maison sans frontières" (Paris) or "Casa senza frontiere" (Rome). Next year, in 1953, the task of the MSA was transferred to the United States Information Agency (USIA), where Harnden and his team joined, preparing new exhibitions such as those dedicated to atomic energy: "Mostra atomica" (Rome) and "Exposition atomique" (Paris), presented in 1954.

After the Marshall Plan and the ECA, the MSA, and with the reorganization of the USIA's budget, the Department of Commerce now imposed an alliance with the business world to penetrate directly into the European market. In 1955, the Department of Commerce of the USA organized the Office of International Trade Fairs (OITF) in Paris, with the aim of promoting the direct participation of American companies in international trade fairs. Responsibility for the European Trade Fair Program once again falls to the units on the European front. The Harnden team has been reorganised into three new sections: design, communication and

management, in which some thirty professionals are still working, including architects, designers, assistants, collaborators and administrative staff. According to the new organisation chart drawn up by Harnden (fig. 05), the decisive figure of Yvonne Barbier is incorporated as a trusted executive secretary, and Pfrieder assumes the deputy management of the different areas, in which Bombelli is consolidated as head of the design area, under whose control the specialised designers are grouped: three "Installation and Exhibit Designer" (Le Houerf and two vacancies), a "Model maker and graphics designer" (assigned to Siegfried Schaefer), two "Graphics Designer" (Gerard Ifert and Strub) and a "Technical specialist" (Roland Mureret). A large team (of which 24 members are "local" and only 5 "American"), because the new programme is even more intensive than the Marshall Plan: between March and October 1955, up to twenty exhibitions and fairs,³⁰ including, incidentally, those in Valencia and Barcelona. Spain? Of course. Without the old conditions of the Marshall Plan, Spain is one of the new markets –and not the least– among the potential American interests in Europe. By then, the American and British ambassadors had already returned to Madrid (1951), the Defence and Economic Assistance Agreements had been signed with the USA (1953) and the country had joined the United Nations (1955).

PGHA, OFICINA INTERNACIONAL EN ORGEVAL

At the end of 1955, the Department of Commerce authorities decided to move the OITF to Washington and offered Harnden and his team –after all, employees of the American government– the somewhat unclear possibility of being integrated into

different administrative sections.³¹ Faced with this situation, Harnden hurriedly took numerous steps throughout the autumn, both in Washington and in New York, where he tirelessly proposed different forms of collaboration, swimming through the ever-churning waters of the Administration and negotiating all kinds of bureaucratic obstacles. After much effort, he finally managed to guarantee the continuity of official commissions, but from then on as independent professionals –"as private contractors."³² At the end of 1955 he bought and renovated a ramshackle two-storey house in Orgeval, the village on the outskirts of Paris, where he had lived since 1948, and in February 1956 he founded the PGHA Peter Graham Harnden Associates studio (fig. 01), an "international office of architects and technicians specialising in visual advertising and industrial aesthetics,"³³ in which he enthusiastically involved his closest team, especially Bombelli –"I still fell however that the jump must be taken and only hope you agree"³⁴ – but also Pfrieder, Le Houerf, Strub, Schaefer, Ifert and Mureret, among others.³⁵

The press release stresses that the team is made up of "technicians specialised in the planning, construction and organisation of exhibitions, as well as in the study of projects of interest in industrial design and architecture in general," a core of "architects, graphic designers, publicists and technicians,"³⁶ who, always under Harnden's direction, have successfully completed a large number of works, which have been reviewed in the international press and in specialised publications. Teamwork has a principal –Harnden– with whom the firm identifies and recognizes. However, the term "associates" recognizes the role of the team members, while conveying the advantages of collaborative work and the confidence in a well understood multidisciplinary (fig. 06).

Among the first commissions were the American pavilions for the U.S. Department of Agriculture, including the one presented at the 1956 Barcelona International Trade Fair. For this occasion they planned the design of a large outdoor pavilion (fig. 07), which corresponds to a version of the one already presented for the OITF at the Stockholm Fair the previous year. It is a rectangular building (40x20 m) with a *Mecanotube* structure and a gable roof with an inverted section, a façade of wooden slats and a continuous

glass enclosure on the lower part of the two entrance façades. With huge letters "usa" –in small Bauhausian letters– and the flag raised on a tower more than 30 meters high, placed next to the pavilion and visible from practically the whole Fair. In addition to the exhibition of the benefits of American agriculture, the advantages of organised farming and the presentation of new models of tractors, the visitor on foot in the pavilion –Spain in the mid-1950s– was enraptured by the presentation and handling of the different raw materials (milk, flour, rice, cotton, tobacco), the operation of the electric cookers, the free distribution of liquid milk, ice cream, doughnuts and bison cigarettes, and the fashion shows designed to promote American cotton from elevated catwalks. And all, moreover, with air conditioning... Pure magic in the sticky month of June in Barcelona; the magic of production, consumption and abundance.

As was already the case during the Marshall Plan assemblies, the exhibition also demonstrates the organisational capacity of a coordinated team of professionals envied by the local architects –organised then in a much simpler way– who in any case take good note of the advantages of steel frame, the efficiency of assembly or the visual possibilities of advertising.³⁷ The Harnden team, whose relationship with the world of industry is as fluid as it is flexible, is very familiar with these tools. In the various pavilions they design all over Europe, they use the different standardised tubular steel profile systems, adapting if necessary to the local technology, and so they use indistinctly and depending on the circumstances, from the *Boilot* system of the first pavilions (Ghent 1952) to the aforementioned *Mecanotubo* system (Ghent 1952), to the aforementioned *Mecanotubo* (Barcelona 1956), the *Dexion* (Barcelona, 1957) or the *Mero* (Madrid, 1959), among other systems and to point out the Spanish exhibitions, which are replicated, and in turn replicated, in the rest of the exhibitions.³⁸

Citius, altius, fortius? Of course; especially *citius*...

three days after the opening of the exhibition the American ambassador in Spain wrote a note to Harnden in which he remarked: "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."³⁹ A team effort, but one in which the interlocutor could only be Harnden. Both for official bodies and for the media: in the "Mano a mano" of *La Vanguardia Española*, the journalist Manuel del Arco, along with the amusing caricature of Harnden and Bombelli, also insists on the speed of the construction and the quality and quantity of materials used:⁴⁰ in the *industrial Catalonia*, Harnden points out the efficient collaboration of local professionals, in this case Marcelo Leonori, whose role in the resolution of all kinds of formalities and procedures facilitates the implementation of the project.⁴¹

In the following years, the *Foreign Agriculture Service* continued to be commissioned for various European trade fairs. Although the service was "outsourced," the internal official bidding conditions⁴² required an international team of professionals capable of developing "a demountable construction using a modular system" and also taking care of the photographic selection. The merits accumulated during the years of experience under the Marshall Plan, as well as the knowledge of the techniques developed to stimulate consumption and satisfy companies, were the decisive factors that ensured numerous orders for PGHA Associates in the following years.⁴³ In 1957 the staff consisted of a total of 34 professionals, whose roles were perfectly established, as can be deduced – as can be rethought – from the firm's table of costs and salaries.⁴⁴ Harnden is the top manager (with the highest salary of \$14,400), but Bombelli's role seems increasingly decisive (and this is recognised by his salary of \$9,600, which is almost double than that of the other main members of the team).

At this point, who is exposing whom? It is worth remembering that for the development of the exhibition projects, Harnden has a very large photographic collection with more than 8,000 images⁴⁵ (fig. 08) compiled after his time in various official

administrations, provided by the responsible bodies themselves, and intended to illustrate the American reality. "Background" and safe, the collection is accurately classified into sections as diverse as "agriculture,"⁴⁶ "designers," "medicine," "graphics," "exhibitions," "textiles," "maps," "labels" and "architecture" – a section which includes a colourful collection of images of various buildings and skyscrapers in New York,⁴⁷ works by F.L. Wright,⁴⁸ as well as more anonymous details –, "construction" (construction processes), "industrial design"... And also "people," performing everyday activities, "television," "radio," "theatre," "cinema," "atom," "electricity," "vehicle," "aviation," "nautical," "USA," or "interior" (with images of the Farnsworth House by Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, the Philip Johnson's Glass House, again details of interiors, or images of that exhibition "House without Frontiers"). A very long list, as long and deep as the will to spread –and to continue spreading– "the American way of life" in old Europe, in a task as repetitive as it is effective, between infantry, diplomacy and architecture.⁴⁹

But unfortunately, teamwork does not always work out well. Harnden, obviously "one of us" in Washington, D.C., was commissioned in April 1957 to work with the Austrian-born architect Bernard Rudofsky⁵⁰ to organise the contents of the United States Pavilion at the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels, which, under the slogan "Building a World for a Man,"⁵¹ would be housed in the building designed by Edward Durell Stone.⁵² For this purpose, Harnden and Rudofsky resolved the distribution of the enormous interior space (more than 100 metres in diameter and 25 meters high from the central pool) by means of an orthogonal organisation divided into different sections, fragmenting the spatial power of the pavilion into different volumes, with the aim of showing "The face of America" ... Among the immense content prepared by the Orgeval office, the "Islands for living" section stands out, describing, once again, the American single-family dwelling, that small self-sufficient "island" full of all kinds of products...⁵³

Although appreciated in Europe, the United States questions the effectiveness of a strategy that some consider too soft and fragmentary. The accumulation of commonplaces (both in the photographs and in the objects shown) amounts to an anthropological trivialisation –perhaps attributable to Rudofsky– in which many Americans do not see themselves reflected. Is "This is America" really, they ask? The inadequate result is probably the result of the strange professional partnership between Harnden and Rudofsky; seemingly complementary, in practice a train wreck. Participation in the Brussels exhibition put the studio in a very complicated situation: pressure from the various authorities interfered with the evolution of the exhibition project and its contents; Rudofsky's constant and polemical presence in the Orgeval office made the atmosphere tense... problems ensued, and even Harnden and Bombelli themselves had differences between them that had never been seen before.⁵⁴

After the intensity of Brussels –although, at the end of the exhibition, the general commissioners thanked Harnden for his professionalism and patience⁵⁵– Harnden's studio returned to its usual rhythm: In 1959 the American pavilion was presented at the *Feria de Campo* in Madrid, that same year they presented a proposal to replace the Marshall House building in Berlin with a set of interconnected volumes, which was not realised, although the interior exhibition "Medizin-USA" was, and in 1963 they designed a Miesian pavilion for the OECD, inside which the exhibition contents were arranged; an operational and commercial version of the Farnsworth House, which toured Europe for four years.⁵⁶ And in parallel, the team is involved in the various exhibitions organised at the U.S. Trade Centers, the business and export promotion centres that are permanently established in Frankfurt, Paris, Stockholm and Milan. In this type of commissions, Bombelli took on a leading role and redirected the project towards the graphic art in which he had been trained during the immediate post-war period under Bill's

influence, so that the American products were exhibited under a Bauhaus-style aesthetic, exploring all the possibilities of concrete art, in a sort of laboratory of artistic production that Bombelli would develop more intensely from the seventies onwards.

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"I heard that you are worried about me. It is true that I am worried, but not about me, but about us. I have told you the reasons several times, but perhaps not clearly enough. I know I talk too little and I shut myself off. We'll have to talk about it more. I don't see a future for our business as it is currently organised in France. Either we change the formula or we change the country. We live completely isolated, on the most expensive and hostile island in the world. We are expensive and we don't earn enough."⁵⁷

A very particular feature of the professional relationship between Harnden and Bombelli is the abundant and uninterrupted correspondence they maintained throughout their years of collaboration and partnership (fig. 09). Due to their frequent travels –Harnden generally to the United States for official business; Bombelli generally to European cities to supervise the mounting of the various exhibitions– letters and telegrams became for days and weeks at a time (along with the sporadic and always complicated telephone conferences of the time) the only possible means of communication between the two. From city to city, from hotel to hotel, the letters between the two become the stable handhold that allows the orderly progress of the studio to be maintained in such a dynamic and changing global scenario, a condition generalised in the last quarter of the 20th century and absolutely natural in our age of instantaneous, real-time communications, but at that time developed only by a few. In this correspondence, Harnden and Bombelli refer to meetings with government officials or private clients, organising the calendar and arranging agendas –always at the mercy of the conditions and schedules of the airlines–, agreeing on project criteria and work strategies or analysing the distribution of tasks among the different collaborators.

It is a real "black box," in which general observations on architecture, family matters and even personal confidences are also slipped in, and which logically registers the different character of both figures, who are increasingly complementary. In contrast to the energetic, vital and sometimes chaotic Harnden, who always shows his passionate personal point of view, Bombelli reveals himself as an orderly and methodical professional, capable of organising the growing volume of work and commissions in an aseptic and detached manner. Bombelli's letters to Harnden are in fact a kind of rapports in which he lists, project by project, the progress of the work, the most urgent matters and the most important issues, demonstrating his ability to manage the general running of the studio and to carry the weight of the office, from taking control of the accounts, to hiring the different professionals, to designing all the studio's graphics and stationery. A real right-hand man on whom to rely, as in the premonitory 1950 Paris photo, who reassures and facilitates Harnden's work from a distance, in a particular *modus operandi* which, as the passage from 1959 cited above shows, is at times in danger of being shipwrecked.

In fact, at the end of the fifties, Harnden and Bombelli began to consider the possibility of relocating the studio and reducing the large team of collaborators they were working with during those years. They considered different options: Naples or Malaga (Harnden's proposal); Milan or Zurich (Bombelli's preference). But an apparently chance event suddenly overturned their plans. On their return from the 1959 Madrid Country Fair Exhibition, they stayed for a few days in the house of the architect Alfonso Milà in Cadaqués, following the recommendation, years earlier, of the architect José Antonio Coderch, whom Harnden had met in Barcelona in 1951, after being pleasantly surprised by the assembly of the Spanish Pavilion at the Milan Triennale of the same year.⁵⁸ In 1955

Coderch returned Harnden's visit and stayed at his house in Orgeval. There, in the warmth of the enormous sheet-metal fireplace that presides over the barn of the original building, which Harnden has transformed into a spacious living room, Coderch recommends that on their next trips they visit Cadaqués, "the only beautiful village left in Spain."⁵⁹

Fascinated by the landscape and the atmosphere of this authentic geographical and cultural "island,"⁶⁰ during the same visit they decide to buy *Villa Gloria*, an old house between semi-detached houses in the centre of the village, which they renovate and convert into their own holiday home (fig. 10). An unexpected decision that set a new course for their professional plans: in 1962 they decided to settle in Barcelona and set up the firm *Harnden&Bombelli* (fig. 11), where from then on they alternated commissions for the design of the American Trade Centres in European capitals with projects of various types, among which the refurbishment and design of various houses built on the Spanish coast, especially in Cadaqués but also in other enclaves, soon stood out. The specialised critics⁶¹ immediately recognised his adaptation to his surroundings and his wise reading of popular tradition, codified through modern values and nuanced by the Californian influence of Harnden and the Swiss-rooted Italian influence of Bombelli –based on the practice of the mathematical filter of concrete art– and integrated into the domestic realism of the local architects.⁶² Now, after years of frequenting the great centres of decision, the choice of the town of Cadaqués – like the rest of the coast, an isolated, deserted and punished shore for centuries⁶³ – as well as the city of Barcelona – then on the Spanish periphery, itself a European periphery – seems to be related to that desire for a "Mediterraneaness" which "is not inherited, but achieved," which "is an honour and not an advantage."⁶⁴

From its office in Bach Composer Street, the staff is reduced and the "big band" will perform in perhaps smaller but no less interesting auditoriums, developing an architectural proposal – in the key of westinghouse regionalism – as unexpected as it is sophisticated, between respect for the landscape and traditional construction, and the uninhibited manifestation of a particular sense of comfort.⁶⁵ This unprecedented and enriching dialogue between modernity and Mediterranean tradition takes place, once again, with the overlapping and complementary – and definitive – authorship of our two protagonists. In fact, during those years Harnden – outspoken and public relations – obtained the private commissions (as before, the official ones), while Bombelli – outspoken and silent – was in charge of bringing the projects to a successful conclusion, while maintaining the functioning and administration of the studio.⁶⁶ With no room for interference or overlapping, Harnden's spontaneity, friendliness and generosity win over his clients – almost always at the first time. In the first interviews, Harnden himself indicates, with very brief sketches, how the renovation should be approached, the layout of the programme or the location of the house. From then on, Bombelli, under Harnden's weekly supervision, distributes the work among the studio's collaborators, architects, quantity surveyors and draughtsmen, who are familiar with the most common building techniques and in contact with the best industrialists. The complicity of professional colleagues makes it possible to overcome bureaucratic obstacles – friends such as Marcelo Leonori, José Antonio Coderch, Federico Correa and Alfonso Milà, or collaborators such as Jaime Sanmartí and José Antonio Obregón sign the projects "legally" and obtain the corresponding visas and permits – so that the work becomes a team effort once again. With the hierarchies dissolved – who's in charge in jazz? – Harnden directs the execution of the work on site, so that the orderly and rigorous proposal always prepared by Bombelli also admits, live and direct, almost any improvisation... This is how Harnden's big band architecture sounds and how it is enjoyed, if we pay it the right amount of attention.

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Notes

01. Red., "Peter Graham Harnden Dead; Architect and Designer Was 58," in *The New York Times*, 24.10.1971, p. 83.

02. "Biographical notes," AHCOAC AHB.

03. However, he will never obtain the "official" title of architect.

04. RED., "Group Studio," in *Architectural Forum*, February 1943, pp. 56-57.

05. RED., "Priorities and a small house designed by Peter Graham Harnden and Mario Corbett," in *Arts&Architecture*, 1942, April, pp. 20-21.

06. File Unit: Electronic Army Serial Number Marged File, ca. 1938-1946 (Enlistment Records), Army Serial number: 32981246.

07. During his training period, he coincides with Peter Blake. BLAKE, Peter, *No Place like Utopia. The Modern Architecture and the Company We Kept*, W.W.Norton&Company, INC, New York, 1996, p. 72, p. 74.

08. VASSILTCHIKOV, Marie, *Diarios de Berlín, 1940-1945*, El Acanalado, Barcelona, 2004.

09. PIZZA, Antonio, "Dos extranjeros en la España de los años sesenta. El viaje de Harnden y Bombelli desde París a Cadaqués," A.A.V.V., in *El Cadaqués de Peter Harnden y Lanfranco Bombelli*, Col·legi d'Arquitectes de Catalunya Demarcació de Girona, Girona, 2003, p. 20.

10. MARSHALL, George, *Text of the Marshall Plan Speech (U.S. Department of State, version of 4 June 1947)*, Marshall Museum.

11. George Marshall (1880-1959), Secretary of State between January 1947 and January 1949, and previously US Joint Chief of Staff (1939-1945) during World War II.

12. We quote from the "Foreign Assistance Act of 1948 / Economic Cooperation Act of 1948 / Congress N. 80, Session N. 20, Chapter 169 / April 3, 1948 / To promote world peace and the general welfare, national interest, and foreign policy of the United States through economic, financial, and other measures necessary for the maintenance

of conditions abroad in which free institutions may survive through the maintenance of the strength and stability of the United States. Enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America and passed in the House of Representatives, this Act shall be cited as the "Foreign Assistance Act 1948.1," in MARSHALL PLAN FOUNDATION.

13. Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Great Britain, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Norway, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey and the United Kingdom.

14. MASEY, Jack, MORGAN, Conway Lloyd, *Cold War Confrontations. US Exhibitions and their role in the Cultural War*, Lårs Muller Publishers, Verona, 2008, pp. 27-33.

15. RED., "Foreign-aid Program in Europe: Report of the Investigations Division of the Committee on Appropriations, United States Senate, Relative to Activities of the Foreign-aid Program in France and in the Regional Offices of the MSA in Paris," U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, 1953.

16. "I waited four months and thought nothing would happen when in March 1950 I got a telegram to go to Paris the following week to start work. But in the meantime Max had not come to an agreement with Peter Harnden, and when I went to Paris they had already chosen a replacement for Max: it was an Englishman who ended up leaving, and in the end I took Max Bill's job." BOMBELLI, Lanfranco, "Entrevista a Lanfranco Bombelli," by Manuel Martín, A.A.V.V., in *El Cadaqués de Peter Harnden y Lanfranco Bombelli*, op. cit., pp. 119-121.

17. "In the early 1950s Harnden asked me to join him in Paris to work together in his own studio; I was very tempted but in the end, for family reasons, it was impossible for me to leave New York." BLAKE, Peter, op. cit., p. 85.

18. Interview of the author with L. Bombelli, Cadaqués, 22.04.2007.

19. An introductory pavilion located in one of the trailers, two specific pavilions in two

other trailers, detailing the role of NATO in each country where the exhibition is on display, and finally a trailer with telephone facilities to supposedly answer visitors' questions through the recorded voices of well-known personalities.

20. The train consists of seven carriages, some of which can be dismantled according to the particularities of each city visited. Four of them house the main exhibition (one of these, adapted to the particularities of the country visited), another is fitted out as a cinema, another contains equipment and facilities, and finally the last one has rooms for the crew.

21. For more information on this period we refer to the texts centered directly on Harnden and Bombelli: GARNICA, Julio, "La americanización toma el mando," in *Destino Barcelona, 1911-1991: arquitectos, viajes e intercambios*, Arquia, Barcelona, 2018, pp. 172-187; PIZZA, Antonio, "Peter Graham Harnden y Lanfranco Bombelli en la España de los 60," in *El Mediterráneo inventado. Un archipiélago arquitectónico en la España del siglo XX*, Ediciones Asimétricas, Madrid, 2020, pp. 128-145; as well as to the first reference publication on the subject in general: CARMEL, James H., *Exhibition Techniques Traveling and Temporary*, Reinhold Publishing Corporation, New York, 1962. Finally, among the most recent publications, the following can be highlighted: CECCO, Ascanio, "Mobilité et reproductibilité technique au service de la propagande. Les expositions mobiles du plan Marshall," in *Transbordeur*, 2018, n. 2, pp. 102-113; GARCÍA-DIEGO, Héctor, ALCOLEA, Rubén, "Exposiciones ambulantes: campañas propagandísticas estadounidenses en Europa (1949-1959)," in *Constelaciones*, 2019, n. 7, pp. 155-169; ROSSI, Ugo, "The Best of All Possible Worlds. USA 1949-1959: God's Own Country," in *Histories of Postwar Architecture*, 2019, n. 4, pp. 26-40.

22. RED., "Propaganda for West Europe," in *The Times*, 30.12.1952.

23. RED., "Four Mobile Exhibitions," in *The Architectural Review*, 1953, n. 675, pp. 216-225.

24. SCHEIDEGGER, Von Ernst, "Mobile ausstellungen. Europa baut," in *Das Werk: Architektur und Kunst*, April 1953, pp. 109-119.

25. SEEBACHER, Maria, "Ausstellungen der USA in Europa," in *Die Innenarchitektur*, 1956, n. 7, pp. 399-412.

26. "PAR 1584. Eca Photo. No Rights Reserved." AHCOAC AHB.

27. STEGEE, Paul, *Black Market, Cold War. Every day in Berlin, 1946-49*, Cambridge University Press, Boston, 2008; CASTILLO, Greg, "Domesticating the Cold War: Household consumption as Propaganda in Marshall Plan Germany," in *Journal of Contemporary History*, London, Thousand Oaks, CA and New Delhi, Vol. 40 (2), 261-288, 2005.

28. RED., "La <casa senza frontiere>," in *Domus*, 1954, n. 294, pp. 20-23. We quote the translation of the caption of the article: "The living room: two lamps, one Italian and the other American; an American stool, American chair, Italian and French sofas, American bookcase with shelves. The living room is separated from the bedroom by a French "modernfold" sliding door."

29. CASTILLO, Greg, op. cit., pp. 274-275. The staging of the actors is also cited in TEERDS, Hans, "Lebensraum," A.A.V.V., in *DASH: Stijlkamers / Interiors on display*, Rotterdam, NAI010 Uitgevers, 2014, pp. 4-17.

30. Frankfurt (6-10 March), Verona (13-21 March), Utrecht (22-31 March), Milan (12-28 April), Lyon (16-25 April), Liege (23 April-8 May), Brussels (idem: 23 April-8 May), Hanover (24 April, 3 May), Valencia (1-20 May), London (2-13 May), Paris (14-30 May), Palermo (23 May-10 June), Barcelona (1-20 June). After the summer break: Izmir (20 August-20 September), Stockholm (27 August-11 September), Zagreb (2-13 September), Salonika (5-25 September), Bari (9-27 September), Vienna (11-18 September), Berlin (25 September-10 October). 1955 Schedule of International Fairs: Europe. AHCOAC AHB.

31. Letter from *The Foreign Service of the USA* to L. Bombelli, American Embassy Paris, 30.11.1955, AHCOAC AHB 169.

32. Letter from PH to LB, 27.10.1955, AHCOAC AHB 169.
33. Press release and poster distributed on the occasion of the launch of the office in February 1956, AHCOAC AHB.
34. Letter from PH to LB, 16.10.1955, AHCOAC AHB.
35. Letter from PH to LB, 30.11.1955, AHCOAC AHB.
36. "COMUNICATO STAMPA. Peter G.Harnden Associates. Orgeval. Seines & Oise. Francia." AHCOAC AHB.
37. RED., "Pabellón U.S.A. Arquitecto: Petter G.Hazlen Associates (sic)," in *Cuadernos de Arquitectura*, 1956, n. 27, pp. 18-23.
38. The evolution of the different solutions can be followed in great detail in CARMEL, James H., *op. cit.* The author establishes an agile relationship with Peter Harnden and Rolf Strub, one of the members of his team, who is responsible for providing abundant documentation for the publication.
39. Letter from John Davis Lodge to P. Harnden, Madrid, 4.06.1956, AHCOAC AHB C 1787/1.
40. DEL ARCO, Manuel, "Mano a mano. L. Bombelli - M. Leonori [sic]," in *La Vanguardia Española*, 19.05.1956, p. 23.
41. RED., "Los EE.UU. en la Feria de Muestras," in *Cataluña Industrial*, Barcelona, 1956, pp. 13-15.
42. "United States Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agricultural Services, European Trade Fair Contract," 4.01.1957, AHCOAC HB C 1801/26.
43. As an example: "I think the most important thing to keep in mind in this area is to put special emphasis on the consumer products aspect of poultry, rather than the production or distribution of poultry. Again, specifically, I think it is in the interest of stimulating interest in the cooked product rather than any other individual aspect. Therefore, I propose that you consider and take special account of both the photographic treatment and the cooking demonstrations in the poultry area. Letter of PH to LB, 17.04.1957. AHCOAC AHB 169.
44. "Cost studies PGHA 1957. Analysis of Consolidated Personnel Costs and Name Key." AHCOAC AHB.
45. The architects kept each negative (film or glass) in an envelope, which was identified with a small positive copy attached to the outside.
46. Subdivided in turn ("landscape," "farmer," "chickens," "eggs," "irrigation," ...).
47. Especially the UN headquarters of W.K. Harrison, M. Abramowitz and Le Corbusier?
48. The S.C. Johnson Office and Laboratory Building (1936-39).
49. A strategy that is part of a much broader phenomenon that developed throughout the second half of the 20th century, and which has been extensively described. Among other works: GREENBERG, Clement, *Arte y cultura*, Gustavo Gili, Barcelona, 1979 (*1961); GUELBAUT, Serge, *How New York Stole the Idea of Modern Art*, The University of Chicago, Chicago, 1983; SAUNDERS, Frances Stoner, *La CIA y la guerra fría cultural*, Ed.Debate, Madrid, 2001(*1999); AA.VV., *Bajo la bomba. El jazz de la guerra de imágenes transatlántica. 1946-1956*, MNCARS, Madrid, 2007.
50. ROSSI, Ugo, "Per gli occhi e la mente. La teoria espositiva di Bernard Rudofsky," in *AIS/ Design Storia e Ricerche*, 2015, September, n. 6.
51. It was the first universal exposition organised after World War II, and for the United States to participate, the creation of a special organisational commission was approved, with a very complicated organisational chart involving several departments. SCOT T, Felicity, "Encounters with the face of America," A.A.VV., in *Architecture and the Sciences: Exchanging Metaphors*, Princeton papers on Architecture, New York, 2003, pp. 256-291.
52. The pavilion building was developed by architect E.D. Stone, who designed a grandiloquent circular building with a huge tensile oculus in the roof, which is supported on its perimeter by two rows of metal columns, between which is a latticed metal-framed curtain wall.
53. DEVOS, Rika, "A Cold War Sketch: the Visual Antagonism of the USA vs. the USSR at Expo 58," in *Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire*, 2009, pp. 723-742.
54. The correspondence between Harnden and Bombelli relating to 1957, 1958, and even 1959, contains a number of passages devoted to the difficulties, misunderstandings and discussions surrounding the organisation of the exhibition. AHCOAC AHB.
55. Letter from James S.Plaut to P. Harnden, Washington, 9.05.1958. AHCOAC AHB C 137.
56. Berlin (12-25 October 1963), Vienna (15-22 March 1964), Barcelona (1-15 June 1964), Stockholm (2-13 September / 30 September-11 October 1964), Utrecht (8-16 March), Luxembourg (27 May-6 June 1965), Bari (7-20 September 1965), Trieste (25-30 October 1965), Frankfurt (22-13 March 1966), Brussels (29 April-10 May 1966), Lisbon (8-23 June 1966), Thessaloniki (4-25 September 1966), Strasbourg (22-30 April 1967), Munich (29 May-10 June 1967), Izmir (20 August-20 September 1967), Zagreb (6-21 November 1967).
57. Letter from LB to PH, 26.4.1959. AHCOAC AHB.
58. "An architect friend of mine, Peter Harnden, an American who grew up in Europe, went to Spain [...] Peter saw the Spanish pavilion and as he liked it very much, he asked me if I knew who had made it. [...] He lives in Paris where he is the head of the Marshall Plan department (ECA) in charge of organising exhibitions (fixed and travelling) throughout Europe." Letter from Manuel Jiménez to J.A.Coderch, 7.09.1951. MNCARS.
59. BOMBELLI, Lanfranco, "Entrevista a Lanfranco Bombelli," by Manuel Martín, AA.VV., in *El Cadaqués de Peter Harnden y Lanfranco Bombelli*, *op. cit.* p. 123.
60. "Cadaqués is an island: its history and its way of being can only be understood by considering this country as an island." PLA, Josep, Cadaqués, Destino: Barcelona, 1985, p. 8 (1st edition, published in Catalan in 1947).
61. RED., "Harnden and Bombelli, architects" in *Arts-Architecture*, 1966, n. 75, pp. 18-28.
62. RED., "A Cadaqués. Peter G.Harnden Associates. Federico Correa, Alfonso Milà. J.A.Coderch, Manuel Valls" in *Domus*, 1961, n. 384, pp. 27-50.
63. CORBIN, Alain, *El territorio del vacío. Occidente y la invención de la playa (1750-1840)*, Mondadori: Barcelona, 1993.
64. MATVEJEVIC, Predrag, *Breviario Mediterráneo*, Destino: Barcelona, 2006, p. 131.
65. We refer to GARNICA, Julio, "Harnden y Bombelli: regionalismo westinghouse a orillas del Mediterráneo español," in AA.VV., *Arquitectura y Medio: el Mediterráneo*, Do.co. mo.mo, Madrid, 2021 (in press).
66. This is how Bombelli recalls it, years later, in a statement included in the audiovisual included in AA.VV., *El Cadaqués de Peter Harnden y Lanfranco Bombelli*, *op. cit.*

Images

01. PGHA Associates's studio, Orgeval (France), c. 1956, interior view with members of the staff working at open space area. AHCOAC AHB.

02. Meeting of the ECA's Visual Information Unit, Paris, c. 1950. Harnden (centre), Bombelli (to his right). Photo: ECA, AHCOAC AHB.

03. Working meeting of P. Harnden (right) and L. Bombelli (left), Paris, c. 1950. In the foreground, model and plan of the route of the mobile exhibition "Europe builds." Photo: ECA, AHCOAC AHB.

04. Exhibition "Wir bauen ein neues Leben," OEEC, Marshall house, Berlin, 1952. Interior view from the visitors' walkways. Photo: OEEC, AHCOAC AHB.

05. Organisational chart "1955 Schedule of International Fairs: Europe." AHCOAC AHB.

06. Christmas greeting triptych, PGHA Associates, with photograph of interior view of the Orgeval studio. AHCOAC, AHB.

07. United States Pavilion, U.S. Department of Agriculture, International Trade Fair of Barcelona, 1956. Exterior view. Photo: F.Català-Roca. AHCOAC.

08. "Background" Photographic Collection. AHCOAC AHB.

09. Harnden-Bombelli correspondence. AHCOAC AHB.

10. *Villa Gloria*, Cadaqués (Girona), 1959. Interior view. Photo: Pierre Berdoy, AHCOAC AHB.

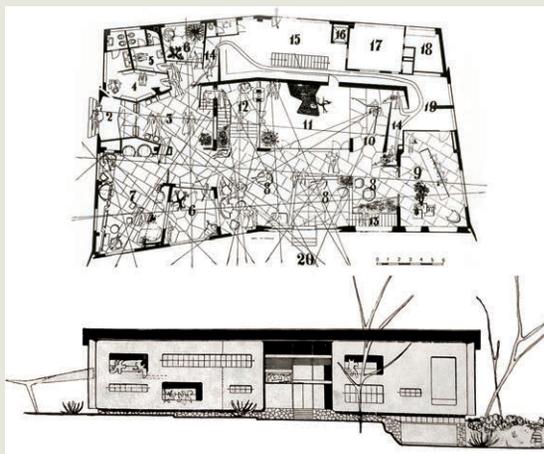
11. Contact sheet for the mounting of portraits by P. Harnden and L. Bombelli. AHCOAC AHB.

07

¿Quién diseñó la Villa Planchart? La arquitectura de Gio Ponti en Caracas entre contaminaciones e influencias

Giorgio Danesi

En 1953, Armando y Anala Planchart le pidieron al arquitecto italiano Gio Ponti que realizara su nueva casa en Caracas. No sabían entonces que se convertiría en una de las obras más emblemáticas de la arquitectura del siglo XX: "¿Puedo ser tu Michelangelo?"¹. Sin embargo, la correspondencia entre el arquitecto y varias de las personas involucradas en la construcción evidencian las múltiples influencias que se pueden reconocer en la casa. Este hecho la convierte en uno de los ejemplos más claros de construcción que involucra a múltiples autores.



Diseñada en Milán por Gio Ponti y construida en Caracas por Mario De Giovanni y Graziano Gasparini entre 1955 y 1957, la Villa Planchart, también conocida como la *Quinta El Cerrito*, nació de un 'diálogo a distancia' entre protagonistas ilustrados: en Venezuela estaban los clientes y los técnicos de la construcción; en Italia el arquitecto y los proveedores de materiales y muebles de alta calidad.

En junio de 1953, Armando y Anala Planchart pidieron al editor de *Domus*, Gio Ponti, que participara en el diseño del proyecto de su nueva casa: una "ambiciosa apuesta venezolana"², que dio vida a una obra arquitectónica icónica del siglo XX, una clara encarnación del estilo de Gio Ponti. Se configuró entonces un "proyecto utópico" diseñado y construido a través de cartas, bocetos, dibujos y visitas breves al lugar de construcción al otro lado del Atlántico para crear una "obra de arte completa"³. Este proyecto representó un desafío geográfico e intelectual. El resultado combinó las ideas de un cliente culto con el estilo personal del arquitecto que realizó el edificio a gran distancia.