

# BCN – Alongside Pere IV

54 Students – 4 Teachers – 16 Weeks – Summer 2009

**carte blanche**

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# Introduction

The topic for the semester assignment was “Living in the Context of the City”. As we wanted the students to immerse themselves in issues of urban development, public spaces and urban living, we chose Barcelona as a city characterised by important urban planning developments, metropolitan expansion on a large scale and audacious transformations. Our work focused on the centrally-located industrial district on the Carre de Pere IV, in the eastern part of Cerda's extension of Barcelona. This area is undergoing a process of change. Under the terms of our concept, the district was to keep its own specific character although its buildings were being gradually renewed as it was refashioned into a mixed-use city district.

The 22@BCN urban development programme is proposing a radical rework of the area; in contrast, we chose the path of converting and continuing its existing detailed structure. We felt that the area along Carre de Pere IV was perfect for working on individual buildings in an urban context. For one thing, the Cerda Plan divides the district up into distinct, manageable units and, furthermore, the concentration and heterogeneity that are typical of the district provided motivation for the students' projects.

We started by carrying out a brief urban planning analysis of the area. Then each block was examined by a group of four students, who formulated concepts and strategies for renovating the blocks and increasing their density. The students went on to draw up master plans on the basis of their concepts and strategies. Each student used the

perimeter



master plan as a basis for his or her own individual project proposals. The emphasis was on living, as set out in our curriculum.

In developing their strategies, we wanted the students to recognise the existing structure of the block, so that they would be able to use it intelligently for their own projects. The students did not limit their interventions to the edges of the blocks: instead, they aimed to open up the inner depths of the “manzana” with their residential buildings. Where existing buildings prevented any concentration, single structures – mostly empty factory buildings – were torn down or included in the new project as public, roofed, exterior spaces. What resulted were new structures consisting of existing and new, usually four- to six-storey, residential buildings that formulated a rich fabric of inner alleyways, open spaces and courtyards.

The coordination of the projects was mainly concentrated within the “manzana”, as many of the residential buildings occupied the interior of the block and the outer edges of each block were defined by the Cerda Plan. The various teams had to work together to define the street and square spaces outside the blocks. The students also worked together to agree where the high rises should be placed: almost all of them were located on the Carre de Pere IV in order to trace the axis of this road, with its Roman origins, as it runs diagonally across the right-angled grid.

As we worked on the renewal and rebuilding of the area along the Carre de Pere IV were able to benefit from a rich stock of existing structures, forms and materials, which provided a great deal of inspiration for the projects on display here. However, as we wanted to ward off any danger

of limiting ourselves to what we encountered, and because we wanted to open up the design process, we looked for an additional source of stimulation. We found one that ultimately proved to be the driving force behind the development of the projects. Knowing that Spain's tradition of building contains Moorish elements gave us the impetus to pay closer attention to the tradition of the Arabic courtyard house. We discovered a great wealth of spatial differentiation between the public and the private – the principle of gradual equilibrium between opposite poles.

Thomas Schregenberger  
School of Architecture, Design and Civil Engineering  
Zurich University of Applied Sciences

