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**Latin American Collaborators at Le
Corbusier's Studio: The Case of Rogelio
Salmona**

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Latin American Collaborators at Le Corbusier's Studio: The Case of Rogelio Salmona

Ingrid Quintana Guerrero

Abstract

This text explores the role of the Colombian (French-born) Rogelio Salmona, preeminent architect of the second half of 20th century, as the draftsman of Le Corbusier's Parisian atelier. Based on primary resources, we will reconstruct Salmona's internship and his later professional collaboration, between April 1948 and July 1954. It was one of longest periods of participation in the atelier among his Latino coworkers, involving the largest number of projects (29). Beyond the known differences between Salmona and his mentor, this presentation will highlight his contribution to those projects, not as an individual phenomenon, but in consideration of the influence of his fellow Latin American colleagues. Our general aim is to position them as key characters in the history of Modern Architecture and not as peripheral witnesses, even while they were still young and naïve.

Keywords: Formative process, Latin-American architects, Postwar Modern Architecture.

Introduction

Rogelio Salmona moved to Colombia in his childhood, with his Sephardi family. He attended the French High School and began his architectural studies at *Universidad Nacional* (National University of Colombia; Mosseri, 2008) in 1947. He was on his third semester when Le Corbusier arrived for the first time in Bogota, invited by local authorities. Because of being a native French speaker, Salmona was his translator. Rogelio's father invited Le Corbusier to have dinner at their home, where the architect offered the young student an internship at his Parisian studio. Violent political events in the capital on April 9, 1948, forced Salmona's parents to send him back to France (Figure 1).

Figure 1. *Salmona in Paris with Le Corbusier and his Latin American coworkers, circa 1949*



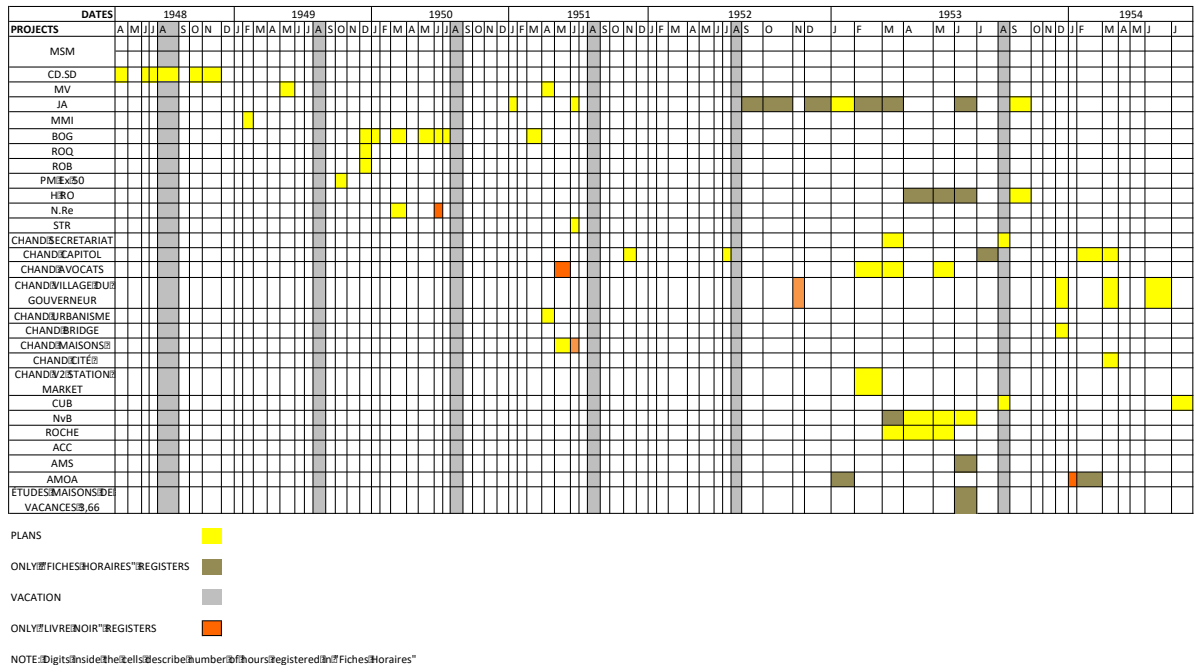
Source: German Samper's Personal Archive (Modified by the Author).

Once in France, Roger (his French name that he used in the studio, Choay, 2007, p. 90) realized that the master had forgotten his father and the promise made, being that he was rejected because of his youth and inexperience. He was finally admitted as an intern without payment. His first tasks at the studio were simple, allowing him to attend the *École des Beaux Arts* (Fine Arts School). But the rhythm of daily work became harder, forcing Salmona to quit school. Still interested in academic matters, he began to attend Pierre Francastel's seminars on sociology of the arts, at the *École Pratique des Hautes Études* (Faculty of High Studies in Social Sciences), where Salmona became critical of Corbusian works. Because of this and his temperament, "Corb" nicknamed his disciple "the gazelle" and dismissed him temporarily, after an unofficial delay of his summer vacation¹.

¹ After dismissing Salmona, Le Corbusier expected to see his intern again at the office after his return from Chandigarh. But it did not happen and the master was forced to send him a telegram requesting his presence at the atelier.

Three main focuses of Corbusian works in the *Grand Atelier* (Big Studio) period link Salmona's contributions to the studio (Figure 2): social housing and urban planning for reconstruction areas; high-class dwellings; and projects for Chandigarh.

Figure 2. *Projects and Dates of Documents Signed by Salmona at Rue de Sèvres (Sèvres Street, the Address of the Studio in Paris)*



Source: The author, based on FLC Archives.

The HBM Laboratories

Salmona briefly participated in the Marseille Housing Unit project (SALMONA in an interview by EDELMAN, 1981), drawing the plan of its roof-garden in February 1949 (FLC 25244)². Germán Samper—another Colombian intern who arrived later—recounts that they were given these minor tasks in exchange for accommodations at the building camp. Both visited it in April 1949 and September 1950, with Uruguayan collaborator Justino Serralta, who was in charge of the roof-garden development. He also was Salmona's partner during the conception of the *Pavillon Synthèse des Arts* (Synthesis of Arts Pavilion) for the Parisian Arts Fair in 1950 (FLC 18157).

² This paper uses the FLC code (plan, letter, note, etc.) to refer to an item, introducing the cypher from the atelier's *Livre Noir* (subsequently explained) only when existent and necessary. Because of reasons of edition formats and author rights, few images of those documents were included, all being consultable at the FLC Archive or the DVD set *Le Corbusier Plans* (Paris: Echelle 1 – Fondation Le Corbusier, 2010).

Figure 3. *Plan of Marseille-Sud-Michellet (Marseille-South-Michelet) Plan, Drawn by Samper and Salmona*



Source: FLC 30202.

Salmona and Samper also contributed to two urban plans for Marseille in May 1949 and February 1951: *Marseille-Veyre* (FLC 23108) and *Marseille-Sud-Michelet*, the name of which is due to the new axial boulevard (FLC 30203; FLC 23114; FLC 30202, Figure 3). The second one was a detail of the Marseille-Veyre operation—the hill where the Housing Unit was being raised—as shown from a bird's-eye perspective (FLC 23110)³. Other units were proposed at the same boulevard, contrasting with green belts for leisure, *à redent* (protrusion) blocks and low-density housing. Those items would give to Marseille the three *joies essentielles* (essential happiness) proposed by Le Corbusier: light, space, and vegetation. This was an idea derived from sixth CIAM discussions (Bergamo, 1949, followed by a visit to the Housing Unity building camp; Figure 4), attended by Salmona and Samper—they helped in the creation of CIAM grids for La Rochelle-Pallice project).

Through his first trip to Colombia, Le Corbusier was commissioned to create a Master Plan for Bogotá, the downtown of which was almost destroyed after the events of April 1948. It opened the door of the *Rue de Sévres* to more Colombian interns, like Reinaldo Valencia and Alberto Peña. Another Latin American, Carlos Clémot (Uruguay), arrived before them and joined this specific team. Besides urban guidelines for the city, “Corb” proposed a reformed downtown: the *Centro Cívico*⁴. Roger elaborated its blueprints between January and May 1950, including new horizontal volumes for the Main Square (Administrative and Ministries

³ Salmona (in an interview by ALBORNOZ 2011, p. 52; quoted by URREA, 2014, p. 204) was very critical of this project, because of its disrespect for the landscape of the city.

⁴ The *Livre Noir* includes several entries by Salmona, original of which items were not found. Plans # 4177 (“*Circulations Ech. 1:2000*”); # 4178; # 4179 and # 4180 (pictures of *Centro Cívico* – City Centre); and # 4181 – # 4186 series (pictures of the *Centro Cívico*). # 4195 (“*Plan regional arte urbain*”); 4196 (“*Plan regional arte regional*”) and # 4200 (“*détail habitation*”).

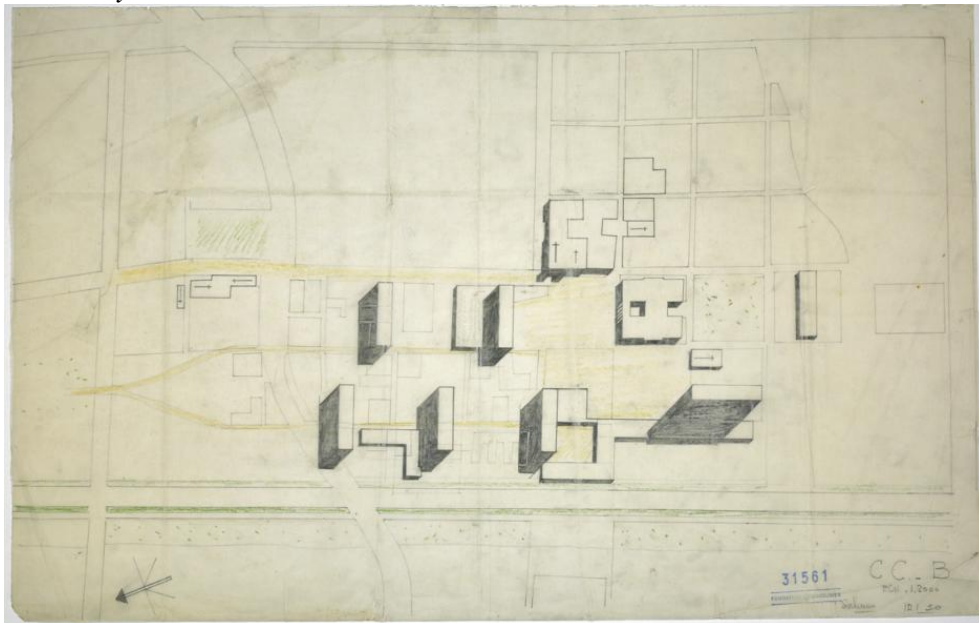
buildings; FLC 31561, Fig. 5). He also traced the general plan of the area on the 21st and 30th of March 1950, showing *unités* rotated 45 degrees from the main axes of the Spanish grid (FLC 31560; FLC 63156; FLC 63167).

Figure 4. *Salmona Visiting the Marseille Housing Unit, 1950*



Source: FLC 31561.

Figure 5. *Plan of the Main Square of Centro Cívico Proposed for Bogota, Drawn by Salmona*



Source: Justino Serralta's Personal Archive.

Those drawings describe features of the street system, which include the hypothetical creation of a new category by the Colombian: the V8, exclusive for bicycles (Tarchopulos, 2010, p. 138). Salmona and Samper worked on drawings of the V3 (sectorial main avenue) and on the study of functions in a neighborhood (abstract schemes between March 23 and April 1, 1950; FLC 33686). The whole team finally converted those sketches into

a Technical Report. Presented to Colombian authorities in September 1950 (FLC H3-4-5), it illustrated new peripheral areas with housing blocks *à redent* and single-family houses, which reproduced former experiments from Barcelona and La Rochelle-Pallice plans.

The Bogota Plan was crucial for subsequent urban projects, like an experimental neighborhood for the city of Roubaix, HEM (not built). It would include housing units and types of single-family houses perfected in the Bogota Plan, such as the La Rochelle type—an evolution of the “Mesopotamian” houses that Le Corbusier conceived in 1939. Moreover, the architect proposed a new type of single-family house: the *Rez-de-Chaussée* (Ground Floor), a one-story house (81.65 m²) with living and dining rooms, kitchen, one bedroom, one bathroom, a garden and a courtyard. This proposal was directly linked to *La Citadelle* (The Citadel), another experimental neighborhood, where Le Corbusier delved into his research of the La Rochelle housing type. For Roubaix, Salmona had drafted the sketches for two-story houses and rare slanted roofs (FLC 20829A/B, Figure 6); bird’s-eye perspectives; plans and sections of the whole complex; and tables comparing the surfaces of the program types (FLC 20828) F3.I (45 m², 3 rooms); F4.II; F5.I and II. The internal distribution of the houses in *La Citadelle* is very close to the duplex cells of the units. Salmona drew, in the same sheet, two plans and the longitudinal section for each typology (F3.I; FLC 20762 and F5.I; FLC 20763), besides the internal perspectives of the bedrooms (FLC 20767; FLC 20768; FLC 20771).

Figure 6. *Experimental Neighborhood HEM in Roubaix, Bird’s-eye Perspective by Salmona*



Source: FLC 20829A.

Exact images were also used for illustrating the *Neuve Ville Briey* (New City of Briey), a new suburb for the French mining town of Briey-en-Forêt, the master plan of which was made by Georges-Henri Pinguissou. Between March and April, “Corb” also proposed houses with a 49.58 and 55.84 m² surface area for Briey (*habitation individuelle*, individual housing), inspired

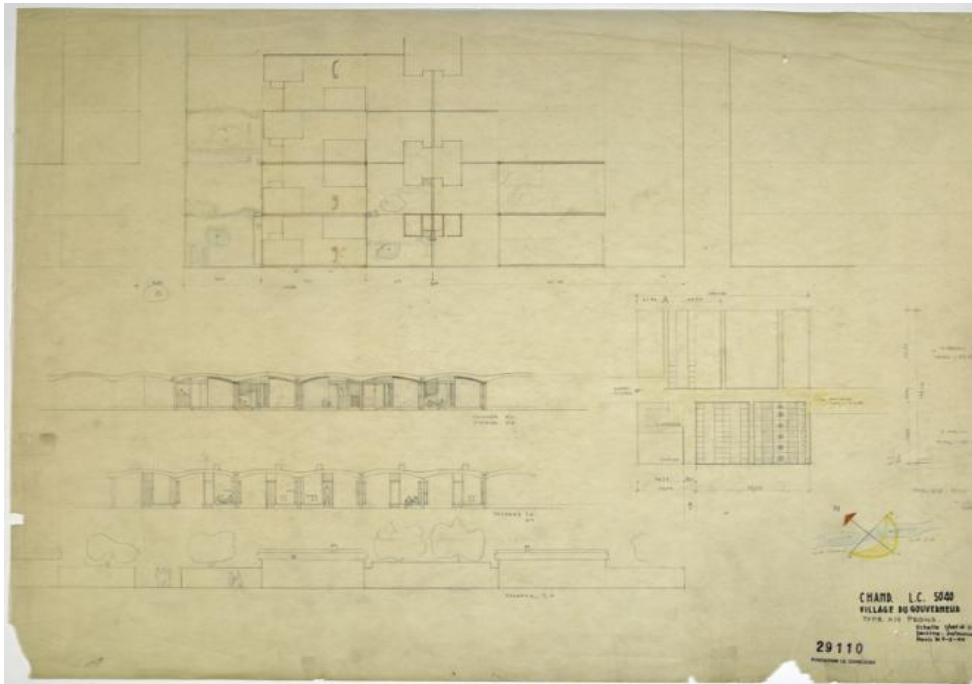
by *La Citadelle* studies. Salmona prepared their plans (FLC 33212; FLC 33232) and main sections (FLC 33213A/B; FLC 33217) in April 1953. He also made external perspectives of the complex (southern area; FLC 20770, Figure 7, and FLC 33216), including the shape of several housing units, with 12 and 17 stories.

Figure 7. *Neuve-Ville-Briey, Bird's-eye Perspective by Salmona*



Source: FLC 20770.

Figure 8. *Governor's Village in Chandigarh, Plan of Two Rows of Worker Houses*



Source: FLC 29110.

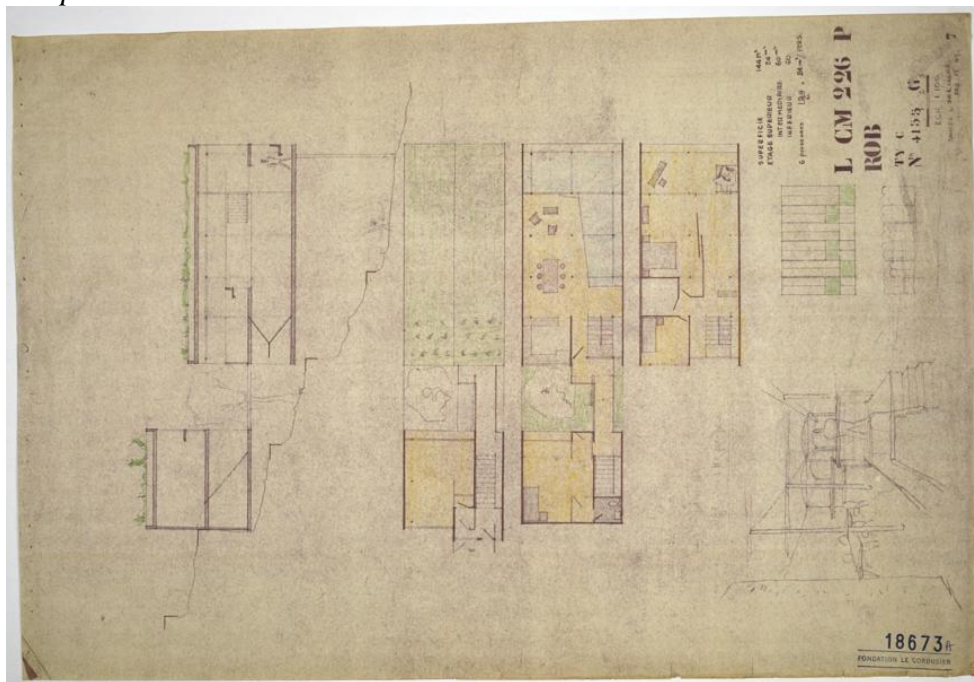
Le Corbusier had already proposed social housing for Chandigarh, the new capital of the Indian state of Punjab, in June 1951: worker houses with three floors at the Governor's Village, whose inception and general elevation were drawn by Salmona (FLC 29110, Figure 8), besides sections

and facades of two rows of houses in 1:100 scale (FLC 29113; FLC 05444; FLC 05564). Prefabricated concrete vaults, supported by structural brick walls, would provide the roof of those dwellings. A final drawing of Salmona's detailed kitchen furniture (the Venezuelan Augusto Tobito finished this project. FLC 05565).

Elite Housing

Roq and Rob

Figure 9. Plan # 4155G: ROB House Type C, Plans and Sections by Samper and Salmona



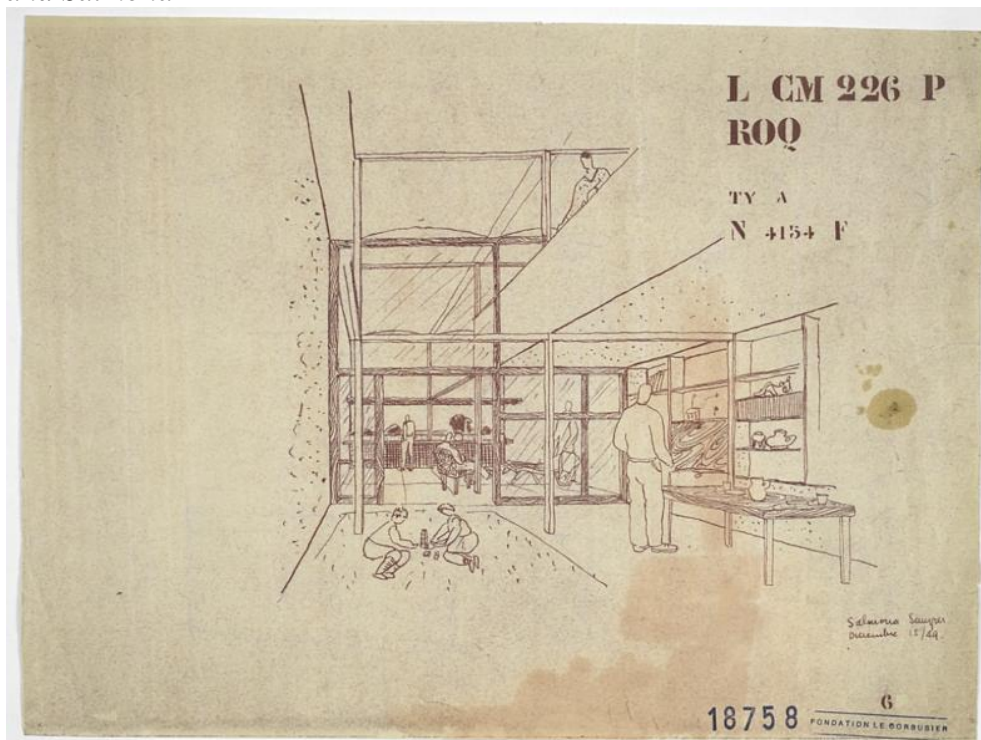
Source: FLC 18673A.

In November 1949, while drafting the Plan of Bogota, Roger also faced the *Roq et Rob* (Roq and Rob) vacation housing project, in Roquebrune-Cap-Martin, following the linear scheme of La Rochelle and *Rez-de-Chaussée* prototypes. There, his master experimented with a structural metallic system based on one of Modulor's patterns (2.26 m): *Le Brevet* (The Patent), registered in 1953. Samper and Salmona made all the plans and longitudinal sections of every alternative type of ROB houses, with three floors and areas of 192 and 204 m² (with colored and black and white versions), over a sloped terrain (FLC 18669, FLC 18668A/B; FLC 18666A/B), as well as inception schemes, for types of houses developed in two stories: F (FLC 18670A/B/C), E (FLC 18671A/B) and D (FLC 18672A/B). An internal perspective shows the vaulted space of the living room (FLC 18673A/B, Figure 9) while a facade that illustrates the houses standing on thin *pilotis* pillars (FLC 18676; FLC 18983).

The other main type of Cap-Martin houses, ROQ, was organized in compact blocks, crossed by a pedestrian path. Salmona and Samper drew

two alternatives: in the first one, houses would be arranged in zigzag (FLC 18764), contrasting with the four rows of houses in a longitudinal section (FLC 18767). A Colombian draftsman's perspective emphasizes the relationship between inside and outside through the huge window and its veranda (which used to contribute for having "grid facades" on housing units; MEJIA VALLEJO 2014, p. 90), for both type of houses. It also permits one to contemplate the view from the internal balcony over the living room (FLC 18776; FLC 18758, Figure 10). In a general section of the block, Salmona and his partner made a little internal view, reproducing concrete vaults from Monol houses (FLC 18768; FLC 18667). Other plans from the ROQ folder, signed on December 15, are related to alternatives B (FLC 18763), F (FLC 18759), H (FLC 18760; FLC 18765) and I (FLC 18761). Types A and F (FLC 18766; FLC 18986), with 110 m² of surface area, only had two levels. Their distribution and representation display are the same as that of ROB.

Figure 10. Plan # 4134F: ROQ House Type A, Internal View by Samper and Salmona



Source: FLC18758.

Maisons Jaoul

Former clients of Le Corbusier, the Jaouls, requested two urban houses in Neuilly-sur-Seine, in June of 1951. This was one of Salmona's biggest contributions to *Rue de Sèvres*, between January 1952 and September 1953,

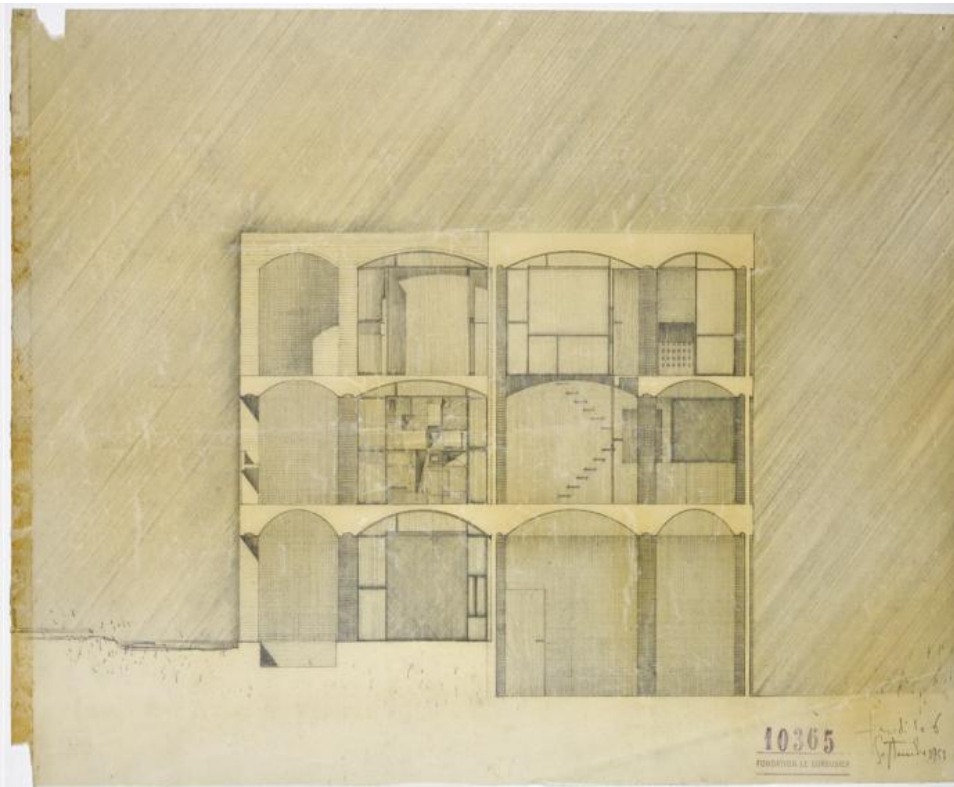
adjusting the executive project⁵. He also verified several drawings by his compatriot, Alberto Peña, and by Panamanian Efraín Pérez Chanis. Low-arc vault and wooden wickets seen in Bogota by Le Corbusier inspired Jaoul's vaults, calculated by Catalanian engineer Domenec Escorsa. The final solution displays one single row of bricks over a plaster layer. Gallery arcs, similar to Roman architecture, were one of the shapes adopted by Le Corbusier for Jaoul houses, as shown by one of Salmona's initial charcoal sketches of the transversal section, with the houses paired (FLC 10365, Figure 11)—a scheme that Samper subsequently changed.

During the later phase of the project, wooden furniture and carpentry, following *Modulor*'s patterns and materialized by Georges Barberis, were illustrated in Salmona's colored perspectives, in September 1952 (FLC 10128A). He also drew views of a hearth under the stairs, requested on February 9 1953, by Le Corbusier (FLC J1-14-554), who expected to include a fireplace similar to Errázuriz' house project (1930). Salmona designed two solutions: a fireplace with curved edges (FLC 10128C/D) and a traditional one, fixed to the wall (FLC 10128B). On March 8, 1953, four months before the beginning of the construction, Salmona co-worked with Chum Up Kim and Georges Sachi on plans of the first and second floors in scale 1:20. The sections and facades were included in definitive version of the houses⁶. Finally, Salmona signed some details for *pans-de-verre* (glass screens) on the second (FLC 09964; FLC 09977) and first floor (FLC 09965; FLC 4560) in scale 1:8.

⁵ Salmona's *Fiches Horaires* register 436 hours for Project JA, distributed this way: (1952) 94 in September; 130 in October; 158 in December. (1953) 40 in January; 32 in February; 1 in March and 8 in June. The largest part of the documents found is dated January 1953.

⁶ # 4554 (FLC 09972); # 4537 (FLC 09955); # 4538 (FLC 09956); # 4539 (FLC 09957); # 4541 (FLC 09959); # 4542 (FLC 09960) and # 4555 (FLC 10018).

Figure 11. *Salmona's Initial Charcoal Sketch of the Transversal Section Jaoul Houses*



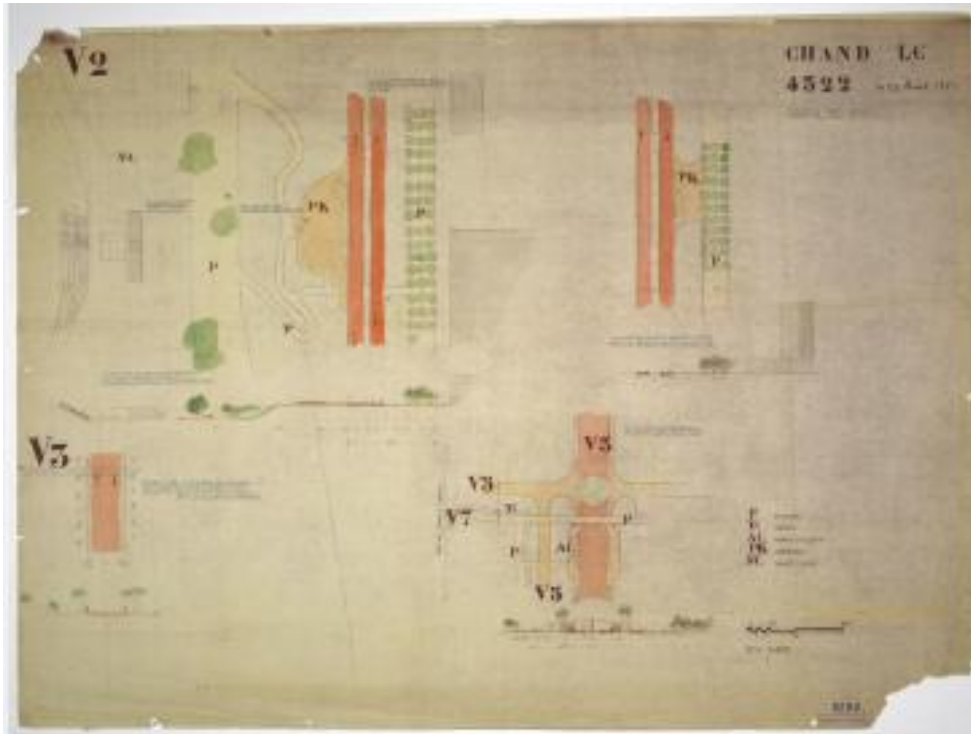
Source: FLC 10365.

Urbanism in Chandigarh

After Samper's departure in September 1953, Salmona stayed for three more years at Le Corbusier's studio. His contribution was mainly related to Indian projects, between them the mentioned Governor's Village in Chandigarh, for which he drew housing for high-level officers: government secretary and military secretary ("type V"); assistants ("type X"); senior employees ("type XI"); superintendents and doctors ("type IX"). Following the research conducted for the *Roq et Rob* and Jaoul projects, these typologies employed vaults covering the second story of the house, wider than former proposals. Secretaries' houses, the most unique type (two volumes, one with one story and the other with two, roofed by a 3 or 4 vaults sequence; FLC 29093 and FLC 05557), include a large number of Salmona's documents⁷. Type IX, sketched by him on June 28, 1954 (FLC 05566; FLC 29104; FLC 05567), has a one-story scheme and curved internal walls (a strategy derived from 1920's villas). Finally, Salmona designed the assistants' houses (FLC 4892 Bis; FLC 29098-99), with a form directly linked to Jaoul houses. On March 7, 1954, he drafted an inception plan of those houses and of the club of Governor's Village (FLC 29108A/B). His boss finally changed this version, replacing buildings in the north area with a forest (FLC 05569).

⁷ Salmona registered 184 working hours for *Village du Gouverneur*.

Figure 12. *Salmona's Plans of Several Types of Ways for Chandigarh, from the 7 Voies Rule*



Source: FLC 05289.

With Samper, Salmona had contributed to the first guidelines of Chandigarh, at the beginning of the 1950s (by then, he was no longer an intern but an *architecte projeteur* (junior architect) (Papillault 2011, p. 80). It received a better reception from local authorities than the plan for Bogota, which influenced this new project (FLC 29052). A Cartesian grid and the implementation of the *Règle des 7 Voies* (7 Ways Rule) were also proposed. On April 23th, 1951, Salmona sketched sections and profiles of several types of street networks⁸ (FLC 29085; FLC 05285; FLC 05289, Figure 12) including Samper's Vegetation Grid⁹.

A Civic Center, far from downtown, was projected for Chandigarh. Salmona's contribution for its Esplanade, December 1953, modified the existing topography, creating "geometrical hills"¹⁰ that dialogue with the dramatic landscape and the picturesque profile of the new Corbusian buildings¹¹. Roger made several versions of the blueprint # 4891 Bis for the Capitol, on December 20, 1953 (FLC 05158; FLC 05159; FLC 02949), showing the definitive inception of the main buildings. He also was involved in the design process of the Secretariat headquarters, whose architect in chief was Samper. On August 18, 1953, Salmona signed one

⁸ Salmona also drew parking lots (*Station Market*) in FLC 29184 ("V2 Station development scheme"; drawing missing), on February 23th, 1953.

⁹ In November 1953, Salmona had to draw the intersection between V2s, after the request of Pierre Jeanneret (FLC P1 12 221).

¹⁰ According to a note from Le Corbusier to Tobito and Salmona (FLC P2 4 106; February 12nd 1954).

¹¹ Salmona (quoted by ARCILA, 2007, pp. 129-130) wrote a poetical description of the conception of the skyline of the complex.

facade (northwest; FLC 02685) and a colored section of that building (Papillault, 2002, P. 82-83), detailing the frames of windows in the 1st and 2nd levels (FLC 02703). He had collaborated in the design of an annexed building for the Palace of Justice (not built), with Olek and Sachi, in February and March 1953¹². It would stand on an excavated level, linked to the main platform by a single staircase (FLC 04751). A garden would separate the building from the parking lot (FLC 04746; FLC 04754). “Roger” detailed plans and sections of the offices for six junior judges (FLC 06047; FLC 04750), as well as big sun-breakers at the southern facade (FLC 04742; FLC 04743; FLC 04756) and a floating roof (FLC 04744; FLC 04745; FLC 04746), recalling the Palace of Justice.

In the final weeks of his internship, Salmona was involved in two minor projects: a bridge at the top of the Leisure Valley, and the Industrial City. Both related to the sectoring of cities according to the four basic functions of modern life and to the spatial and economical scheme presented by Le Corbusier in the “Three Human Establishments”. For the first project, on February 23, 1953, Salmona made sketches of the bridge linking the athletic zone, near the airport, to a market station (a V2 passing over a V3; FLC 05472). The Industrial City folder has two plans signed by Salmona on March 3, 1954, with regional (FLC 29124) and urban (FLC 29139) guidelines, based on a study begun by Samper (a trapezoid frame and organized by a Cartesian grid).

The Departure

Besides his discrepancies with his master, Salmona believed that his experience at Rue de Sèvres was extremely theoretical. With the help of Jean Prouvé, he sent his candidature to Bernard Zehrffuss’ architectural office, where CNIT and UNESCO Headquarters were being projected (the second one, with Marcel Breuer and Pierre Luigi Nervi). After being admitted, Salmona quit his job at “Corb’s” studio. Indifferent about those projects, but satisfied with Salmona’s notable new employers, Le Corbusier accepted his abdication. As a goodbye gift, he allowed Salmona to choose one piece of artwork from his own production and collection, stored at Rue de Sèvres basement. Roger chose a Juan Gris canvas (Angulo, 2006)—the disciple’s final rebellious act of before his master.

¹² Equivalent to 163 working hours in February 1953, registered in the *Fiches Horaires* (Schedule files).

Final Considerations

As it was his first professional experience, Salmona did not introduce strong transformations into the methods and formal structures of Le Corbusier's projects. In fact, he only started to get creative tasks in initial phases of some projects for Chandigarh because of his lack of experience at the beginning of the internship. Nevertheless, his permanent criticism and his role as articulator for the takeover of other Latin American collaborators (who stayed less time than him at the studio) established Salmona as an important member of Le Corbusier's team. Salmona never reached the status of the last three Latinos at Rue de Sèvres: Samper, Tobito and Chilean Guillermo Jullian. However, his closeness and partnership with two of them allowed him to be involved in typological explorations about massive housing, the main focus of the first years of his career in Colombia. Corbusian influence in Salmona's architecture went beyond his revolt against the master: one cannot deny that Salmona's own explorations, indeed ideologically distant from "Corb," are strongly linked to the three main lines exposed above, that Rue de Sèvres addressed intensely since the decade of the 1930s.

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