

## *disegnare con... RAMÓN ESTEVE*

Ramón Esteve (Ontinyent, 1964) is architect for the Superior Technical School of Architecture of Madrid and PhD in Architecture for the Polytechnic University of Valencia.

Nowadays he's considered among the greatest architects in Spain. He worked in the architecture field as far as in the interior and industrial design one. His career is well-known, having developed several architectural projects, in the housing as well as in cultural and healthcare facilities or space rehabilitations, receiving important awards like the European Hotel Design Awards in 2011 and the International prize CEMEX Building Awards 2018 for the *Refugio en la Viña*.

He also stands out for his work as a designer covering interior and product design projects, being also in this case recognized with international awards like the Red Dot Award in 2015 and 2020, and Wallpaper Design Awards in 2023. He's known for the design of the exterior furni-

ture in the Na Xemena collection, conceived in the starting phase of the architectural planning of the homonym house.

He currently leads a studio founded by himself in 1991 in the *Carmen* neighbourhood of Valencia. There, with the helping of a 26 professionals team, combines residential architecture commissions or public architecture and facilities (House of Monasteries of Puzol, La Finca in Madrid, Oslo Houde in Valencia, Bombas Gens Art Centre, etc.) with interior and industrial design projects for major brands: Vondom, Talenti, Vibia, Colonial, Porcelanosa, etc.

He paginates his studio work with teaching, having taught as professor of Projects in the Superior Technical School of Architecture of Valencia and in the Interior Design of Commercial and Housing Spaces module in the Master's Degree of Interior Design in the CEU Cardenal Herrera University.



Ramón Esteve founded the studio with the conviction that the architecture is a global discipline, as evident in all of his projects. In all his works it's quite clear his concern for the relationship between architecture and furniture, and its importance as a tool for the formalization of the architectural interior space.

Ramón Esteve states that through his studio work "We have been forming a team of professionals connected by the pursuing for a common goal that's generating creative responses in our environment by creating unique places, objects and brands. Today, the studio is a place where architects, designers and creatives work together developing projects with character."

We want to deepen this dual role of Ramón Esteve, as architect and designer. We talked with him about the relationship between his works and the drawing and graphical expression.

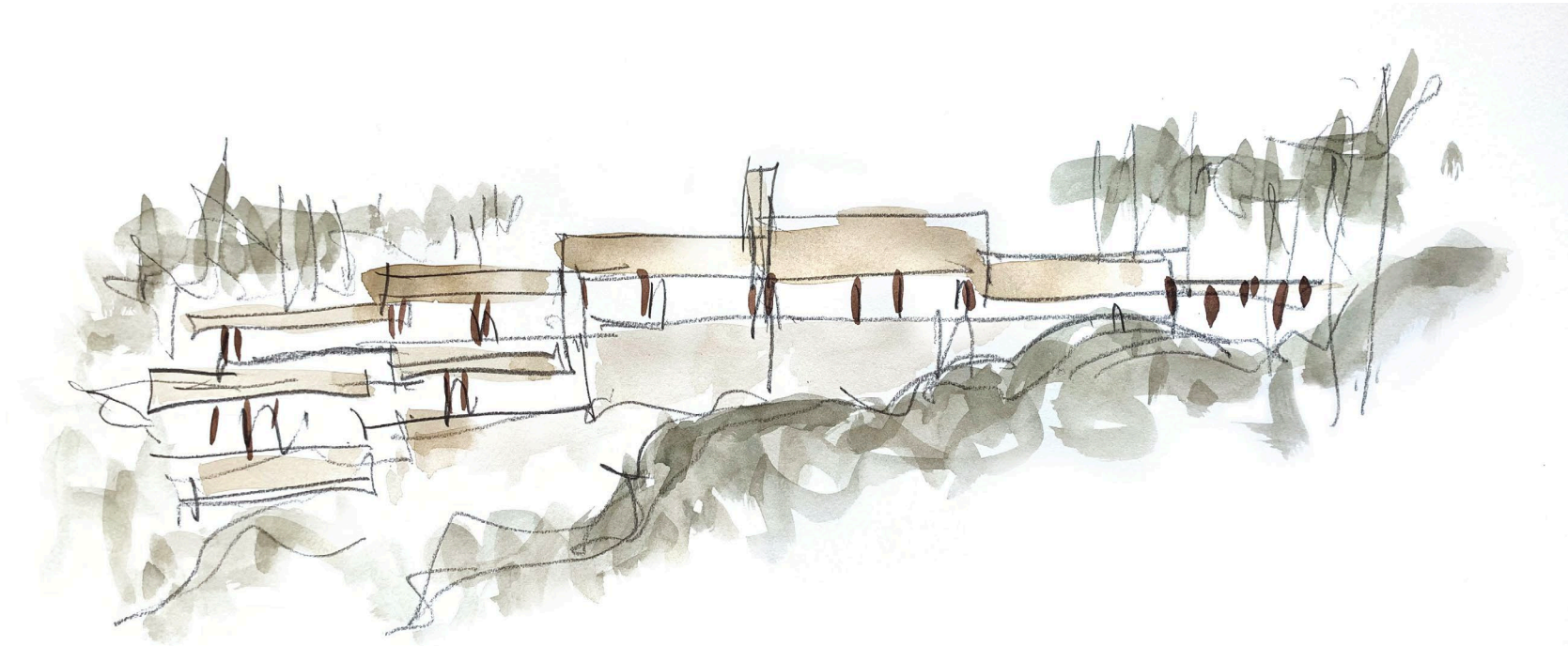


Fig. 1 - Sketching of the project of *casa La Roca*, 2022.

**Marina Sender Contell (MSC):** *In the work carried out in your studio, has the way of working changed from the first projects or design until now? The approach to the project, the idea development, the drawing...*

**Ramón Esteve (RE):** Certainly, on one hand, because this is a profession where one learns every day, and where the drawing tools or the construction methods are constantly changing, thus design evolves with them. On the other hand, in the beginning I was alone, while now I have a team around me.

I'm still the creative director, setting the design routes, inspiring and orienting the direction of the studio, trying to create a tradition, a collec-

tive imagery among the people who have been here for longer. This allows a collaborative effort in which this people working with me participates and contribute through the development of a project, that is a long and demanding process.

**MSC:** *I'd like you to tell a bit more about the development of this creative process. How the studio is intended to be as architectural projects generator lab?*

**RE:** Indeed, the ideas lab is an internal initiative within the studio to constantly innovate. We even have a creative room. However, the creative process is complex and sometimes indecipherable, even to oneself. The creative thinking is never

a linear process starting with an intuition from which rational ideas emerge.

The variables' complexity in a project make it comparable to the parameters of a matrixial system of equations that, once formulated, gives a unique result. So, on the one hand I draw from my own references, the great masters' ones and from the review one realize with current influences and trends, and on the other hand there is again the interaction with all the participants in a project, ranging from the studio's own team of architects to engineers, professionals or the client himself with his desires and inspirations. All of this self-reinforcing and being self-contaminating between different projects, even between the architectural and design aspects.



Fig. 2 - Ramón Esteve working with his team in the studio. Working space.

**MSC:** *Do you still make hand drawings, sketches of ideas and diagrams? How are you able to pass from the original idea to the final development? Hand drawings? Computer sketches? Real or virtual models?*

**RE:** I keep drawing by hand, even with watercolours, that's how I began to represent some ideas when renders didn't exist. Hand drawing still possesses a certain immediacy, it's an idea or thoughts directly drawn. A render, which can be more realistic, lacks that immediacy, although we also use it in some parts of the creative process. Moreover, the sketch is more tempting, open to interpretations, it's an intuition of a search that will be refined and rationalized. As the project progresses, we develop digital models and many images to confirm combinations of materials, matches and spatial solutions. They're outlined from the beginning to the final project, it's an iterative process, always supported by the hand drawing. Even on the construction site, we use it to exchange ideas with craftsmen and manufacturers.

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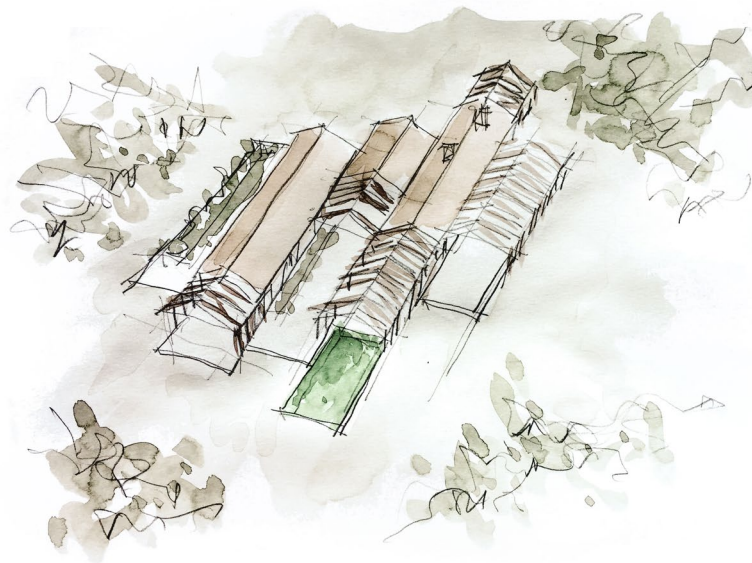


Fig. 3 - Sketching of the project of *Casa Marés*. Project under construction.

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Fig. 4 - Render of the project of *casa Marés*. Execution project.

**MSC:** *Nowadays, computer tools are essential for our work, graphically speaking you are going to express yourself through the computer, but the idea design, the initial sketch... how does the drawing interfere in the creative process?*

**RE:** The hand drawing is the most direct connection between the idea's intangible world and the concrete matter one. It's a drawing evoking the construction site but still not achieving it, and so without limiting it. The initial sketches implicitly contains the building's soul, still without the need of defining it. I think they're necessary while getting closer to the definition of the final work. Indeed, when one looks back to the original sketches some time after the construction, one find the final work in them.

**MSC:** *We'd like to talk about what means the importance of the graphical language and to find your own one for you and your team. Your works are always presented as a reference. We'd like you to tell us about the value that you're giving to the graphic synthetization of ideas in your work.*

**RE:** On the one hand, there is the graphic language hand drawn, which shows an architect's identity and personality. In my case it was a conscious process during my student days, I was fascinated by the graphics of le Corbusier, Mies, Aalto and several of the great masters of architecture, but also of Picasso or Matisse... I spent a long time trying to find my own, using coloured pencils and in many cases the evocative power of watercolours. On the other hand, graphic design also defines the philosophy of your work and reflects certain constants of it. Essentiality is one of them, but also contextualisation. We tend towards a simple and clean graphic representation, able



Fig. 5 - Render of the project of *casa Marés*. Execution project.

to convey ideas in a clear and graphic way. The selection of shades or materials connects with the place and puts the proposal in context while trying to create an atmosphere, a unique materiality for each project. The graphic representations are essentially contextual.

**MSC:** *The way of thinking, of expressing, of awareness and, above all, of explaining architecture and design depends on the different graphic languages we use. How do you consider this language, depending on the audience to be addressed?*

**RE:** Architecture is a technical discipline, and drawings respond to this professional nature. However, it is often difficult for profane people to understand a floor plan or a section, and that's when a render makes the project much more accessible to anyone. As I said before, we make a lot of images internally, as a way of working, but they are also the axis of the dialogue with the client. Graphic representations, however, do not speak for themselves, it is good to combine them with a narrative, otherwise, sometimes, an image is either liked or disliked and becomes an element to be immediately dismissed in case the origin or the references have not been understood. Architecture is a discipline with a long history and there are many references and solutions that we must be able to provide to a client who often lacks this knowledge. It is good to make some of it accessible in order to highlight the value of all the work that's behind an image.

**MSC:** *As teachers of Architectural Graphic Expression, we are constantly facing the problem of coordinating new technologies with manual graphic representation. We think that the importance of sketch drawing, that should be valued as a resource in the design process, as an instrument of dialogue and monologue of the architect with himself. Do you consider drawing as a critical strategy for the development of knowledge or as a tool for the representation of this?*



Fig. 6 - Render of the entrance to the campus of the European University of Valencia.

**RE:** I think it is both. Drawing is very important as it is the tool for transmitting information for the production of a work, but, on the other hand, it defines the identity of an architect and contains the keys to his philosophy expressed in all the elements of graphics and composition.

There are already many tools for creating digital images, in fact, Artificial Intelligence now allows us to create renders from sketches, but that initial stroke remains a most direct relationship between the mind and the hand which draws, between the idea and its spatial materialisation. This is a fundamental skill for any architect. Afterwards, you can deploy as many graphic resources as today's technology allows, although it is good to choose the one best suited to a project in order to adequately communicate its aims. Refining the graphics is also usually part of the corporate identity of a studio, it is a quest to define a coherent architectural proposal.



Fig. 6 - Drone take of *Casa La Roca*. Barcelona 2022.

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