

## Emblematic Residential Projects that Transformed Santiago

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Residential architecture in Chile is as varied as the country's long and diverse history, culture and geography. Therefore, for this guide to be meaningful and useful, its aim will need to be modest, choosing a narrower focus on the capital city of Santiago, a city that is steadily gaining recognition for its architectural and urban heritage. In addition, there are common criteria used to select the projects discussed here: these are housing developments from the twentieth century (with references to earlier and later influences); these are housing projects that represent the reciprocal relationship with the social history that created them; and these are developments of affordable housing that affected the collective lives of many people, in contrast to residential architecture of houses for individual families.

In Chile, it is the architect's vocation to design beyond the envelope of the building and to influence the shape of the city. To design a housing development project requires a practice that considers the social role and relationship of urbanism and architecture. As such, the housing developments in this article, to varying degrees and in different ways, shaped parts of the city and its urban life. These projects played a large role in creating remarkable residential *barrios*<sup>1</sup>, giving Santiago an exceptional identity that can be experienced by walking. It is important to note that the concept

of *barrio* has no direct equivalent in the English language or urban form, "neighbourhood" being its closest translation. *Barrio* is a sociological and urban phenomenon, involving identity of place and people and a sense of proximity and familiarity at a pedestrian scale. The *barrio* is not necessarily defined by physical boundaries but by its connection to the idea of the city.

In Chile's urban history, the period from the late-nineteenth to the mid-twentieth century was distinguished by large migration from the rural and mining towns to the capital city, Santiago. In this context, the following projects are a response to the pressures placed on the city but within the growing social demands for housing as more than simply shelter. In this way, Chilean architecture for housing developments is the writing of an urban history. This architecture of housing developments (*poblaciones* and *villas*) emerged from several factors, including social movements and struggles for better living conditions, innovations in building technologies and in response to the unforgiving geography of one of the most seismic regions in the world. This is an architecture that every so often has to prove itself in the face of cataclysmic earthquakes. A solid and austere architectural identity emerges from these circumstances, one that does not have the luxury to be too concerned with the superfluous.



The square and building of the Workers' Building Societies promote a barrio identity: Huemul housing development, Santiago. Larraín Bravo (1911).



Community infrastructure built as part of the residential project: Huemul housing development, Santiago. Larraín Bravo (1911).

### Formally addressing the housing situation and the responsibility of the State in 1906

By-laws regulating minimum standards for workers' housing were established in 1843, 1854, 1872 (the Construction Society created by Benjamin Vicuña MacKenna) and 1891 (Society León XII created by Melchor Concha y Toro). These by-laws acted as guidelines and were applied by municipalities and different charitable associations connected to the church and industrialists. Their aim was to regulate and oversee hygiene and establish minimum conditions of habitability for labourers' housing. However, it was not until the enactment in 1906 of the Workers Living Quarters Law that the responsibilities of the State were asserted. The Workers Living Quarters Law regulated the role of charities and defined livable standards of housing for the poorest sectors of the population and also created incentives for labourers' monthly contributions to Workers' Building Societies. These Building Societies were favoured by governments of the time as means to improve the life of workers in an adaptation to an industrialised world<sup>2</sup>.

An emblematic example of the architectural application of these early policy initiatives is Población Huemul (Huemul housing development). Huemul resulted from a combination of the coordination

of State and private assistance, the contribution of the workers' own savings and new housing regulations. Subsequent government policies would regulate and improved the use of new building technologies and enforced standards for living, safety and construction (including earthquakes) that would influence the design and location of housing developments.

### Barrio Huemul

Población Huemul (1911), designed by architect Ricardo Larraín Bravo, originally comprised 166 houses and was located close to the place of work (factories), public transport (trams) and produce markets. Among other infrastructure, the project included a public square, public schools (for male and female students), a children's hospital, a nursery, a sport field, a library, workshops, the Workers' Building Society, a chapel, a bakery, a theatre, and living quarters for single men<sup>3</sup>. Each of these facilities were integrally linked to the concept of designing housing within a barrio as a means for the betterment of urban living conditions. Larraín responded to the concept of a housing development as more than simply a collection of houses. The second stage of the development, designed by Julio Cordero, was inaugurated in 1943, and added another 186 apartments, sixteen new shops, a pergola, and a swimming pool.



A simple continuous façade characterises one of the many housing typologies: Huemul housing development, Santiago. Larraín Bravo (1911).



The central open space in a two-storey cité for middle-class families: Cité el Capitol, Santiago. Parra Flores and O. Galleguillos (1926).

Población Huemul materialised in architectural and urban forms the social aspirations for equity and opportunity. It constituted a model housing development that has not only given the city a historical and architectural legacy but has left something more important — a way to make cities from the making of residential developments. Today it is still possible to visit the square and encounter second generation, elderly residents, friendly and talkative, who share their personal stories of the place. How well people inhabit their houses in Población Huemul can be assumed, even today, from observing the life in its streets. This takes us back to the idea of *barrio* as an urban phenomenon, based on housing and social infrastructure, and draws our attention to the potential role of the architect in the design of current residential developments in the city.

### The Cités: an attractive and resilient housing typology

*Cités* represent one of the first formal approaches to social housing in Chile that offered a dignified way to live for both working-class and, by historical circumstances, impoverished middle-class families of the early and mid-twentieth century. *Cités* are also the first form of housing development to formerly address the rural migration to the industrial cities of Chile. As a housing typology, the design and construction of *cités* extended from the end of the nineteenth century until the mid-twentieth century and its architectural style varied from restrained

to ornate. The first cité built in Chile in the 1880s is attributed to French architect Emilio Doyere and this typology was tested and improved by architects such as Kulczewsky, De La Noi, and the aforementioned Larraín Bravo.

In *cités*, a varying number of houses are arranged with a continuous façade along both sides of the lane that forms a common private central open space. This space has an entrance at one end, opening on to the street that is often marked by an ornate gate. There are many clusters of *cités* situated around the centre and peri-centre of Santiago. The central open space is the common area for each cité that facilitates and protects the social life of residents and provides a secure space for children to play. In other words, the cité is a *barrio* within a *barrio*<sup>4</sup>. A recent study estimates that in Santiago there are around 800 *cités*. This figure includes what are called *pasajes*, or lanes, which are the same morphology but with access to the street from both ends of the central open space.

### Neo-cité San Francisco

As an architectural typology, *cités* have proven to offer a resilient, efficient, aesthetically pleasing, and affordable form of housing that is located in the consolidating areas of the older parts of the city. In the context of urban and housing planning and policy, the upgrade of existing *cités* is actively supported and promoted by the Municipality of Santiago. The intention is to preserve this housing typology as an urban and social heritage while



This cité boasts a contemporary, clean architectural design: Neo-cité San Francisco, Santiago. Iván Theoduloz (2014).

maintaining and improving this housing as a viable form of accommodation for local residents and new migrants and as an attractive housing type for younger generations. Further, this typology has been reappropriated in a pilot project by the Municipality of Santiago where the cité is redesigned to provide social housing that aims to retain low-income residents in the gentrifying city centre. In terms of social housing, the Municipality has excelled in developing a low-rise project named Neo-cité San Francisco (2014), by architect Iván Theoduloz. This housing development adopts and adapts the historical architectural morphology of the cité to accommodate forty-eight social houses, mostly in duplex and triplex apartments ranging from 50 m<sup>2</sup> to 70 m<sup>2</sup> and that are lined along both sides of a common open space.

### **Kulczewski and the right to beauty: housing designed for happiness and well-being**

A significant contribution to the evolution of workers' residential developments was by the architect Luciano Kulczewski García (1892–1972). Kulczewski combined eclecticism with neogothic and art nouveau styles and became one of the pioneers of modernism in Chile. But his work was concerned with more than just style<sup>5</sup>. His active commitment to the improvement of the social conditions of the working class was manifest in his role as a founding member of the Chilean Socialist Party and in conjunction with his architectural projects that were predominantly



Distinctive entrance showcasing gleaming white perforated walls to Neo-cité San Francisco, Santiago. Iván Theoduloz (2014).

concerned with housing for workers. One early example of his architectural work is Población Madrid built in 1927, a housing development that is now heritage listed as Traditional Zone. Other housing projects for workers displaying a modernist style followed, many of these were built in the cities of provinces. The emblematic series of buildings for the Workers' Fund named *El Proceso* was built in Tocopilla, in the north of Chile. This architectural design is recognised as being a bridge between the right to housing and the right to beauty. For Kulczewski these are not mutually exclusive concerns but part of a dignity simultaneously expressed in the design, form, and detail of his architecture<sup>6</sup>. In his pursuit of this combined right for the working class, he states, *"... there is one thing that is important for an architect and this is that the work he produces assist happiness and well-being. This is the most substantial success."*<sup>7</sup>

### **Modern residential developments**

In the design and construction of large-scale housing projects, architecture played a key role in the introduction of modernist principles to Chilean culture at an urban scale. The new pressures to resolve massive housing shortages during the mid- to late twentieth century reasserted the State's role in shaping the city and in the provision of housing. In the design of these developments, teams of architects considered efficiencies and aesthetics that could be achieved in construction through new materials and technologies to imagine different forms



Central open space and continuous façade in this contemporary high-rise cité: Neo-cité San Francisco, Santiago. Iván Theoduloz (2014).



A common housing typology with individual façade treatments: Madrid housing development, Santiago. Luciano Kulczewski García (1927).

of affordable housing which meet the changing social demands and aspirations of the time<sup>8</sup>.

Residential projects such as Población Juan Antonio Rios (1953–1959), Villa Frei (1965–1969), Villa Olímpica (1960–1963), and Torres San Borja (1968–1973) are among the many which were constructed within the promise of equity and improved living standards. Many of these projects were situated in less consolidated areas of the city and as such redefined the urban form from within the development and in relation to the city. These projects symbolise a shared vision for the city through the design of housing and are living statements of an urban history still in the making.

Although the modernist movement is generally contained within the early and mid-twentieth century, in Chile it is rather an intrinsic part of contemporary design culture. Modernist architecture had struck a profound cultural chord. This continues to resonate with a predisposition for solid and austere architectural solutions that are resilient to the pressures of passing trends in style. The various expressions of modernist architecture were embraced by all sectors of society, from low- to upper-class housing and this continues to define the urban and social character of many parts of Santiago.

### Villa Frei: a micro-city housing development

Villa Frei was designed by architects Osvaldo Larraín Echeverría, Jaime Larraín Valdés and Diego Balmaceda as the winners of an architectural competition called by CORVI (the State Housing Corporation)<sup>9</sup>. The architectural brief aimed to provide affordable housing to low- and middle-class families and the project was conceived as a micro-city. This city comprises 1,918 modern apartments of varying and generous sizes in different spatial arrangements, surrounded by extensive open green areas, urban infrastructure, and services.

Santiago has only a few examples of post-modernist architecture and it has been argued that the local political situation of the 1970s and 1980s meant that, by and large, Chilean architecture has escaped, or at least deferred, the influence of this style<sup>10</sup>. However, while agreeing that the political conditions might have hindered postmodernism, it would be fair to say that postmodernism also faced a cultural resistance, particularly to its impersonality, fragmentation of the social space, and the non-functional aspects of the style<sup>11</sup>. The 1972 and 1985 earthquakes came as reminders that the first and foremost concern for buildings in Chile was strength and stability.



Medium-rise walk-up apartment blocks, a high-rise apartment building and open public spaces which provide social and ecological value to inhabitants: Villa Frei, Ñuñoa, Santiago. Larraín Echeverría, Jaime Larraín Valdés and Diego Balmaceda (1969).

From 1973, the reduced role of the State in the delivery of housing was implemented in changes to housing policy that had a detrimental impact on the architectural quality of both social and affordable housing developments in Santiago and across Chile. The main change was in a shift to market forces that refocused the design and construction of social housing from a collective well-being to a focus on individual satisfaction with housing as a product. This shift has not only influenced the quality of the built form but also the architectural typology.

Santiago is a city that demonstrate architecture's historic role in the design of large-scale housing developments with living examples of a continuing legacy to the urban form. Walking through Población Huemul, pausing in the street at one of the cité's entrances of the inner urban area or wandering into and around the open public spaces of Villa Frei, one can appreciate and experience the public interface of an architectural idea for housing and the city. Neo-cité San Francisco represents an exception to the current trend in that it considers the space beyond the building envelope. Unlike individual housing, Neo-Cité San Francisco attempts to rescue integral aspects of the city's local culture and reestablish the role of the State in the design and construction of housing as part of the city.

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