

The Peñón de Ifach is a rock measuring 332 meters (1,089 feet) high that sits on the northern section of Spain's Costa Blanca. It is a limestone outcrop that juts up out of the sea, joined to the mainland by layers of sediment and debris that have fallen from the rock over centuries. This landmark has been a magnet for humans for thousands of years; human activity on the rock can be traced back to the ancient Iberians and Romans, and, today, the protected site is host to 300 different species of animals and an abundance of plant life, as well as the dozens of hikers who make the journey up to the top. The view from the summit shows the change that this coastline has seen over the course of history: to one side is the Mediterranean Sea and, to the other, the great stretch of hotels, apartment blocks, resorts, and marinas that lines the coast here.

Alicante, the region in which Peñón de Ifach sits, was transformed by the growing tourist industry of the 1950s and 60s. A combination of guaranteed good weather, inexpensive food, accessible airports, an affordable currency, and amazing beaches made the area the perfect package-holiday destination for those starting to travel further afield in the post-war period. Just over 450,000 tourists visited Spain in 1950; within two decades, this figure had bloomed to 20 million. In a relatively short space of time, the area around Alicante, in particular, felt the effect. It went from being a sleepy section of the Spanish coast to the world-renowned Costa Blanca—the name might refer to the concrete buildings that popped up as much as to the white sands that line the coast. The architecture that characterized the new developments was crowd-pleasing and unchallenging.

This is what makes Ricardo Bofill's interventions at Calp, a town sitting in the shadow of the Peñón de Ifach, so special. The architect's activity in the area began in 1966 with the construction of the Plexus housing complex, followed by the Xanadú estate in 1971 (see pages 72–81). It peaked in 1973 with the construction of La Muralla Roja, a pink apartment block that gave Calp a landmark almost as striking and powerful as the Peñón itself.

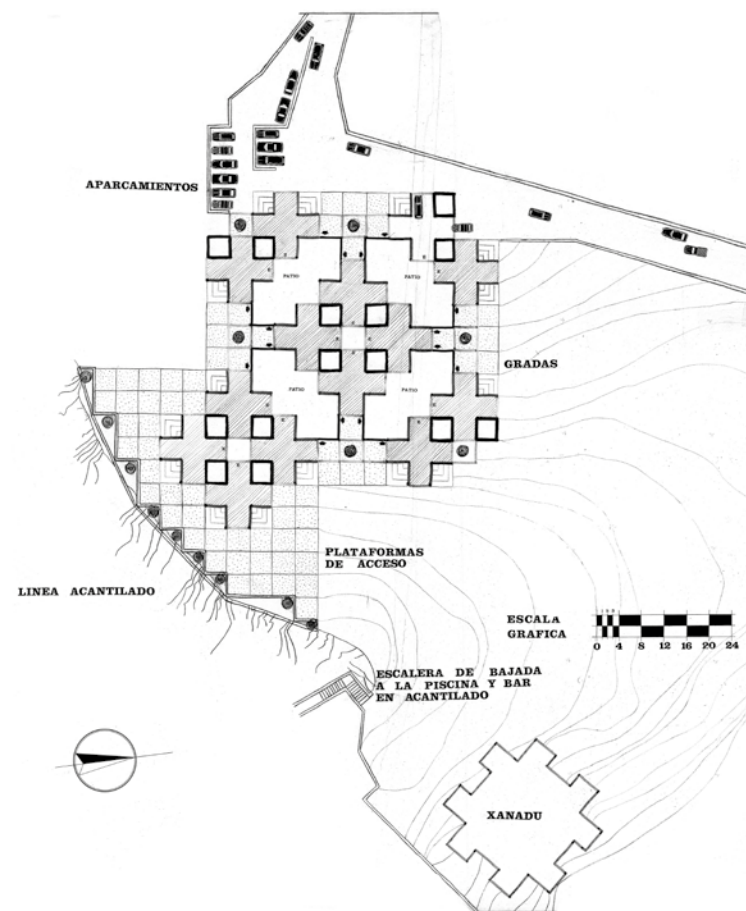
La Muralla Roja houses 50 apartments and rises up confidently on a cliff top above La Manzanera beach, just five kilometers (approximately three miles) along the coast from the Peñón de Ifach peninsula. The pink edifice resembles a castle from which, with its narrow windows, it appears that warriors could look out for pirates or smugglers. While its intended function was to house families and vacationers in a choice of three different apartment sizes, the edifice presents an intimidating and impenetrable face to the outside world. This idea, of an imposing residential development protected from the world outside, was entirely Bofill's and has its roots in the architectural culture of the Mediterranean region.

"The Mediterranean is a beautiful part of the world but it is also where many wars and conflicts have happened," says the architect, referring to centuries of invasions and inland attacks. When one thinks of the many old towns dotted along the Mediterranean coast—taken over every summer by tourists sight-seeing, having dinner, and taking pictures of pretty ruins—it is hard to imagine the violent circumstances under which they were created. Almost every single ancient city along the coast of the Mediterranean—in France and Italy, Lebanon and North Africa—was designed with an eye on the threat from outside forces. They are composed of walls, moats, gates, and imposing

watchtowers. Inside they are labyrinthine, keeping out the sun and simultaneously reinforcing this feeling of hostility to the outside world. The constant threat of invasion and a tumultuous

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history has informed the soul of the region: where would the walled cities of Málaga, Carcassonne, Dubrovnik, Rhodes, or Valletta, or even the Emirate of Granada or the citadel of Tripoli, be without the buildings that were made to protect their citizens? This was the conceptual starting point for La Muralla Roja.



It is no wonder that the name of Bofill's castle translates as "The Red Wall"; its links to the vernacular architecture of the Mediterranean, to North Africa and the citadels of the Arabic-speaking world, are clear. Its closed and protective nature, looking out across the sea, deliberately evokes and reinterprets the Mediterranean typology of the casbah.

Inside, La Muralla Roja is made up of a series of interconnecting staircases and patios, as if it had been created house by house, extension by extension, over the course of a long history. It brings to mind the inner lanes and confusing layouts of the old souks of Morocco and the Middle East. The arrangement

**The plan of the building consists of a series of interlocking units shaped like the Greek cross, with each arm 5 meters (over 16 feet) long.**

