

DREAMS AND MANIFESTOS: AN ARCHITECTURAL VISION



From the desert to the city, from critical regionalism to classical post-modernism, Ricardo Bofill's career has spanned a vast and ambitious trajectory. What has remained constant throughout is his confident, singular vision of how buildings can better human behaviour.

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If theatricality is the term most often used in relation to the dramatic and daring buildings of Ricardo Bofill, then it is fitting he has played so many different characters throughout his career: the rebel, the nomad, the genius, the master. His persona has slipped and slid over the course of almost eight decades, elusively avoiding definition. So too has the work of his practice, the Ricardo Bofill Taller de Arquitectura, which has long resisted a recognizable style. Since a 23-year-old Bofill established the workshop with a troop of like-minded architects, sociologists, poets, and writers in the 1960s, it has authored more than 100 projects in approximately 50 countries around the world. From its early beginnings creating madcap housing projects inspired by vernacular architecture and critical regionalism in Spain to its postmodern period in the 1980s in France, through to the high-tech glass-and-steel modernity of the 1990s and 2000s, practiced internationally, the Taller has also moved, developed, and grown. It has done so with one constant: its home at La Fàbrica (see pages 236–72), the iconic castle that Bofill and his peers created out of a disused cement factory on the outskirts of Barcelona in the early 1970s. Like the studio, the factory has grown and matured, mellowed by planting and surrounded comfortably by new buildings. Like the Taller, the germ of the avant-garde is still easily detectable in its epic proportions, bold sculptural shapes, and the multi-disciplinary functions it serves. Designed as a manifesto, La Fàbrica is still symbolic of Bofill's resolutely pioneering persona: boldly forward thinking and resolutely ever changing.

THE REBEL

To understand the profoundly unique nature of the Taller, it is necessary to study Bofill's highly formative upbringing. The environment he was raised in was far from ordinary. In fact, rebellion was a family tradition, according to Bofill.

The architect was born in 1939. It was a time of tumult across Europe, as the Second World War began and, with the rise of Franco, the Spanish Civil War closed. Despite the oppressive politics flaring up across the continent, the Bofill family was an antiestablishment and liberal unit, and part of a wide bourgeois set. Ricardo's father, Emilio Bofill, was an architect and builder from Catalonia. His mother, María Levi, was Jewish and from Venice. While the rest of Spain suffered from the dullness and stiffness of life under Franco, the Bofill household was a colorful one, full of languages, ideas, and personalities. His mother, especially, encouraged a caravan of thinkers to come through the Bofill house, and would regularly entertain the best writers, filmmakers, and poets. The young Bofill was pushed to think deeply and to be highly responsive to the world around him. The matriarchal power of his mother was hugely influential in shaping Bofill. "She pushed people to be better and more special—to think higher," he admits.

María Levi was also energetically encouraging of her progeny, which perhaps explains the bravura that characterized Bofill even in the early stages of his career, when he first took to architecture. Architecture is a profession that relies on a certain level of precocity—arrogance even. Introverts lacking self-esteem do not tend to want to mark the world around them on such a large and long-term scale. Bofill was,