

Fernando Salas was born in 1950 in Santa Cruz de Mudela, Ciudad Real. His father worked on the railways and the family moved to Andalucía and Barcelona as his career progressed. Salas' childhood was a mixture of influences from the wild countryside of the south of Spain to the Barrio of Barcelona. He had a natural talent for draughtsmanship and the luck to be noticed by an observant high school teacher who recognized his potential and guided him in the right direction. Salas had no formal architectural training, serving an apprenticeship from the age of 15 with MBM Architects under Oriol Bohigas, Jose Maria Martorell and David Mackay. He opened his own company, Salas Studio, in 1975 since when he has built up an international reputation for his atmospheric, simple and down to earth designs, making him the leading interior architect working in Spain today.

He has completed a number of commercial, retail, hospitality and restaurant designs including fashion boutiques (Ekseption, Torremilinos; Zastwo, Barcelona and Zas Barcelona), franchises (Robert Verino; Love Store and Custo), offices (Silver Sanz, Barcelona; Barcelona Empren and Twenti showroom and office, Barcelona), bars restaurants and hotels in collaboration with Javier Mariscal (Calle 54, Madrid; Ikea restaurant, Vitoria; Domina Hotel, Bilbao and a floor in the Hotel Puerta América, Madrid). 'Mariscal is a great friend and I think the world of him as a professional and a person. His creative genius and freshness is unmatched. I have a knowledge of construc-

tion but he always has his creative pot boiling which excites and encourages me. We complement one another.'

Salas' influences are varied: his love of Bauhaus which he considers the 'father' of modern architecture; his respect for the Mediterranean vernacular which creates spaces specific to the geographic and climatic needs of the user; the functionalism of the 1950s – architecture which liberated Spain from the 'grey, boring and formal architecture of Franco's rule; but above all his love and respect for nature which he says is fundamental to his work, instructing as it does his choice of colours, textures, atmosphere and aesthetics.

Salas believes that architecture should be intuitive and not be too concerned with stylistic artifice. 'A plastic result can be achieved without being opportunistic. An interior can be beautiful without having a signature style. An intrinsic sublime value can be created by harnessing, for example, natural light, using it to add brilliance and texture. We have a wealth of "materials" in sensation and experiences which we should employ to come up with a solution which will work well for the end user. Natural comfort is important. Often these days architecture has become too modified and has lost touch with the human element. For example, the climatic elements of a building are often missing; the consideration of air currents and the aroma that a gardenia from the back porch might give to the interior of your house. The Romans and the Arabs had this sensibility and knew how to live. I think it is important to re-learn some of these basic

3. **Hotel Domine (in collaboration with Javier Mariscal), Bilbao (2002)** The interior of the hotel is a gathering of different styles. The main atrium is dominated by a giant sculpture of stones.



4. **Hotel Puerta América (in collaboration with Javier Mariscal) Madrid (2005)** Eighteen architects and designers were invited to create inspirational spaces. Salas' floor takes its theme from the functionalism of the 1950s. The rooms are designed to look long; the view over the city reinforcing the deception.



2. **Silver Sanz offices, Barcelona (1993)** The construction of the stairway is made from one single piece of metal covered in the same marble as the floor. The concept for the interior was to be as simple as possible without showing excessive design intervention.



1. **Twenti showroom, Barcelona (1986)** Twenti is the showroom for Marithe Francois Girbaud and remains the project of which Salas is most proud. Located in a dingy basement, the interior was opened up by placing a glass panel at entrance level, allowing daylight to pour into the space below. The offices are entered by way of glass doors. The reception desk sits in front of a stone wall which is a continuation from the floor above.



6. **Restaurant Formica, Barcelona (2004)** The bar and restaurant were created for the company Formica for Casadecor. The idea was to use the classic material in as many innovative ways as possible. The walls of the restaurant are covered by different panels of Formica. Solid and Digitform. A translucent celosia (Formica Solid, Birch) allows light to shine through creating a warm and pleasant atmosphere.

qualities. Sometimes I feel that architects have the wrong sense of progress and have lost the knowledge of what “proper” architecture is all about.’

Salas’ design is understated. He does not intervene unnecessarily and has lost projects because for some his work is over-simple. ‘Clients have told me this is very poor in the sense that it is lacking or missing something that appears to make it plain. I don’t feel my approach has changed much from the start of my career. I keep fresh by exploring the properties of new materials, but the way of understanding things is still the same – sincere and first hand. I don’t put cherries on top. If you make a great cake, why decorate it?’

Proof of his success, however, has come

in countless citations and awards including many FAD prizes, the latest given in 2005 for the interior of the Formica restaurant in Barcelona. Peer recognition is important to Salas: ‘It means so much to me as I work and have created a style; an attitude which has remained coherent for the last 35 years. It is important to be given the reassurance that I haven’t been wrong and that I haven’t been making stabs in the dark.’

As well as architecture, Salas is active in exhibition and graphic design. He paints and recently held an exhibition of his own photographs. Current projects include a series of warehouses for wine merchants Ribera del Duero, and hotels in southern Spain and in Canada.



8. **Calle 54, Madrid (in collaboration with Javier Mariscal) (2002)**
 A thematic restaurant inspired by the world of Latin Music. The idea was to create a dark authentic space with references from the streets of Havana. The floor and bar is in black granite. The space is dominated by a graphic mural showcasing the names of famous jazz artists.

7. **Custo, Barcelona (2001)**
 Located in an historic building, the interior is lined with light and transparent materials (aluminium, transparent glass and methacrylate) to emphasize the products.

5. **Restaurant Ikea, Vitoria (2005)**
 Not to be confused with the Swedish brand, 'ikea' in Spanish means small hill. The restaurant was conceived as a small country house surrounded by oak and beech trees. Salas brought the forest inside, using natural woods for the floor and a branch-like wooden construction on the ceiling which allows artificial light to filter through.

