

## APPENDIX IV

### Interview with **Andres Estruve** *Architect and landscape designer*

Plaza de las Madre, Maracaibo, Venezuela

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What was your experience in renovating the Plaza de la Madre? How did the renovation process develop?  
Who hired you for this job?

This Plaza initially was not going to be renovated. The problem was that the trees were dying, due to a gas filtration. Very close to the plaza was a major gas pipe from FIME, and the trees were dying. Subsequently, I was hired to do this renovation because some other designers and engineers knew that I have worked in landscape design and also knew me as an architect, with some experience in plant material. The president of FIME in that moment, Prof Angel Larreal, recommended me for the project. To find the gas pipe a demolition of the plaza floor was necessary. We had to break a few walkways, eliminate trees and therefore excavate. The plaza had certain level changes, it was in very bad conditions; the walkways were very damaged and cracked. The Plaza was in very bad conditions and he decided with the Major's permission, to proceed doing the renovation. This renovation consisted in a landscape project because it was necessary to remove all the existing vegetation, which were already dying or close to it. Most existing palm trees were drying out, they were also bad planted and growing in inappropriate way. There was a very small ceiba that had raised the ground where the Mother monument was standing; this had to be removed in order to preserve the statue. We had to choose between preserving the tree, which was already bad planted or the statue, and since several works had to be done, we all decided to proceed doing a complete renovation. When the neighbors knew that a complete renovation was going to take place, they approached us and they created a neighbor association very well structured and represented. They determined that a lot of people walked there at the external sidewalks because in the middle there were no space to walk through and it was arranged in an unstructured way with an almost wild-forested environment. Plaza de la Madre pretty much used to be like the Plaza Reina Guillermina, very dark, a lot of trees and shrubs. The vegetation had no structure and its appearance was unaesthetic. There used to reside two indigents that had a cave-like habitat around the central space made with cardboards and boxes. We communicated the neighbors our intentions to remove everything from the plaza and the work we were supposed to do. There was nothing else to do but a complete renovation because the underground soil and layer were polluted with gas infiltrations. We had to extract 70 centimeters of soil layers that were damaged and we proceeded to remove all the vegetation. Initially when we communicated this, the neighbors reacted quite impressed because they were used to seeing the palms and the existing trees that provide a lot of shade to the plaza, but those trees were condemned to die. Some specialist studied the plants and they said that those trees were not going to live long due to the soil conditions, so we needed to take advantage of the ongoing work and our presence there and do the big task at once. All the gas installations were removed, a new irrigation system was incorporated and I did the landscape design.

His task consisted of improving the walkways and arranges the level changes of the plaza. He kept the general structure, the statue; opened the entrances towards the fountain and statue, and widened all the

entrances, even at the corners that were very small. So the intension was to incorporate more amplitude, wideness and improve the existing vegetation. The way the plaza was before did not allow viewing the Mother Statue, now it does. Plaza Ruben Darío, nobody ever noticed that it existed and that it had a statue. Both statues from Plaza de la Madre and Plaza Ruben Darío were renovated and restored. In Plaza de la Madre, the idea was to recover the central space, which was originally an oval, but it was full of vegetation and misused. The plaza use needed to be more for people interactive and that is why he widen it. Plaza de la Madre before was more green and vegetated and only the external walkways were used but now people are able to use the central space and the space is wider, you have know views of the whole plaza. So his proposal intended to optimize the usable space for people, now the central space can protect even more the children that use the plaza.

Another design intention was to replant trees and initially was to work with ground covers, incorporate different species with different colors, trying to keep horizontality and transparency, but this intention was not respected. A lot of people intervened in the plaza construction, the Major did not like the species that were proposed, so most species were changed. People from IMA who were supervising the work and the contractor in charge of the construction changed the species that he proposed. Everybody did whatever he or she wanted. We agreed that I was going to be the supervisor of the civil work; somebody else settled the construction and species at the end. There was a conflict of interests and my original design approach was not respected. At the last moment he was called again and worked with another construction company and we tried to keep most of the design I proposed. Vegetation was arranged according to spatial effects and the design intentions: he wanted to use most ground covers, but the Major office did not accept that.

### **Description of the renovation project**

The type of floor is hard surfaced which is made of concrete with brick texture; he wanted to use a rustic finish. The benches were recovered and re-used: they were scraped, cleaned and were left with a rustic finish. Most of my work was developed with the cement rustic finish. The pedestal where the statue of the Mother stands was also recovered. This pedestal was made with granite coating, which was done in the 50's. The renovation process began in May of the 1999, and finished a year later. They had many construction and installations contretemps. We felt really under pressure, the plaza location and therefore viewed everyday by all the neighbors since it is a busy corridor; everybody was expecting to see the improvements once the works finished. The pressure over us made us have a lot of mistakes. The plaza has two slopes, in order to generate different views. The space available and the physical form of the Plaza did not give capacity to be used for spectacles. I was against of placing an amphitheatre in the plaza. This is a road separator and the scale of the plaza and its urban condition are not convenient for this amenity. What I did was take advantage of the central space as the focal point of the plaza. One of the criteria was to give more light since it was very dark and dangerous.

Once the construction work was concluded, the project was inaugurated for the community, the local newspapers came and also the Mayor. Initially when the project was exposed to the community they were very aggressive because they considered that we were removing and destroying all the plant material capriciously. This meeting helped them understand what was being made and the reasons for the actions

that were needed. The neighbors participated in the design process but when we asked for economic support for the further maintenance, nobody but returned to the meetings. This shows a lack of commitment and sense of belonging of the people. The first establishments that were most interested in the renovation were the Memorial Chapel SERCOMPRECA and the bakery, because they were expecting to see what economic impact they were going to have. This is how community is.

Before the renovation most of the people park to over the sidewalk of the plaza, not caring much about what they were doing. The curbstones were very short. During the constructive process people parked upon the curbstone of the plaza obstructing many times the construction works. Now people do not park over the curb because the plaza currently has another value for them. This type of plaza is more of a contemplative and social gathering space. There was no way to incorporate a parking space. Now people use Plaza de la Madre during more hours of the day. Previously, the plaza was attractive for undesirables, the forested like environment allow robbers to hide very easily and assault people.

Another design criteria were to create transparency, visuals of the whole plaza and the sensation of amplitude. When one arrives at the plaza one must have the perception of all the space, this allows seeing the place, to visualize the people in it, to have vision of the entire context. For this type of urban Plazas, the circulation structure is very important as well as the pavement design. Another idea was to create a virtual ceiling with the proposed vegetation. At the moment Plaza de la Madre was re-inaugurated many of the trees were very small, subsequently a lot of sun incidence will initially disturb people, but it is expected this situation to change. When the trees grow it is hope to see people using the plaza during more hours of the day, because it is located in an area where there is much commerce, offices and it is expected to see this situation improve. The trees location was located according to the benches location, so they are expected to provide enough shelter for users. The corners of the Plaza were extended, the central space which initially was covered by vegetation, now is paved and has enough space to be the central point that people can use to make her activities, to talk to take to its children.

The day of the inauguration, a chronicler who lived in the neighborhood sector made a presentation of the history of the plaza. According to the evidences the Plaza de la Madre was originally part of an old horse race track. The plaza was part of the Santa Maria Horse race track, which was the first in our city. The oval shape used in the plaza seems to make reference to that horse track. According to this neighbor, Avenue Dr. Portillo initially passed over where the Plaza. The plaza was initially a road island or separator and later ended up being a Plaza for the sector. This Interview took place on January 16<sup>th</sup>

**Interview with Andreína Hernández. Agronomist Engineer. Professional in charge of Renovation Processes in Plaza de la República**

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What was your experience in renovating the Plaza de la Madre? How did the renovation process develop? Who hired you for this job?

She is a construction inspector affiliated to the Maintenance Department of IMA (Instituto Municipal del Ambiente), which is the Environmental Municipal Institute, institution in charge of the maintenance and management processes of Plaza de la República.

According to Engineer Hernández, Plaza de la República was practically abandoned until a foundation was created and coordinated by the Public Service Director's Office and conformed by different municipal entities and private companies with the purpose of doing the first Plaza renovation. Approximately during 1996, a clock was incorporated over the acoustic shell, the fountain was activated and the Plaza re-vegetated. During this period two Plaza workmen were assigned to work daily for the Plaza maintenance. The Plaza de la República is one of the most visited plazas in Maracaibo due to its location characteristics. It is located between the 5 de Julio Avenue and Dr. Portillo Street and also 3H and 3J (San Martin) streets. The location at proximities to CUNIBE, which has high young population, is very attractive for them. The plaza is used primarily as a sport – recreational area and for social activities. Plaza de la Republica is used by CUNIBE as a sport facility, which I do not agree because it causes more damage and wear to the Plaza. The sport teacher is not able to control from damaging some vegetated species and making a mess in the Plaza. It is a public space that is for all but everybody must take of the plaza.

Every year the plaza needs to be invested for maintenance after “Feria de la Chinita”, which is the most important regional holiday in Zulia State that commemorates the apparition of Virgin of Chiquinquirá in Lake Maracaibo and which also remarks the begging of the Christmas Holidays. During this regional holiday, which is celebrated every November 18<sup>th</sup>, the plaza is filled with life and traditional music (called gaita), in the acoustic Shell. After this festivity the Plaza is completely devastated and requires an almost complete re-vegetation and maintenance. Almost 30 to 40 % of the vegetation requires replacement after this period, and there is no way to control this, because it is the most visited time of the year. The plaza is a people condenser in Maracaibo, people like to be in the plaza.

1000 people visit the plaza at a daily basis and this rate increases during the Virgin of Chiquinquirá Fair. We control the presence of informal vendors in the plaza, which is not allowed, but lately Amigos de la plaza, seems to be a new association that will control the presence of informal vendor inside the plaza. They will control the presence of informal vendors in the plaza, which is not allowed by municipal ordinances but somehow exist. The children car rental may need to be removed from the plaza as well, thanks to an ordinance that soon will be effective. A lot of people have been against the children's car rental because

they have been run over by them. This amenity has been a matter of conflict between people and regulations about this rental activity will also be considered in the new laws.

The last renovation process that the plaza had been during October - November 2000, the renovation and maintenance lasted two months. The last re-inauguration has drawn 30% more people to the plaza. The renovation processes was more of an engineering one than a design orientated process. Most of the professionals were agronomic engineers and construction management. Peak hours consist of 6:00 to 7:00 am in the morning, beginning 8:00 am people start to leave the plaza for several reasons maybe work or because the plaza starts to heat up a bit. Beginning 5:00 pm the plaza starts to be concurred again and 8:00 pm is the peak hour during nighttime. The maintenance of the fountain is very hard because people don't care about throwing trash inside it. Most plazas that we manage have the same problem, people do not take care of these public spaces, throwing litter for example and this attitude does not help us a lot. In Plaza del Angel, children constantly are found inside the fountain bathing in it and playing to put bottle caps in the fountains water's outlet. And then we have to go with a motor compressor to take away all the bottle caps from the water nozzles. The fountain works controlled by a timer. The irrigation systems of the green spaces are also controlled by a timer and are turned on during one hour every morning, from 8:00 to 9:00 am generally. The fountain is turned on from 7:00 am to 10:00 am, and then from 5:00 to 6:00 pm to late night. At noon the fountain is not on due to evaporative transpiration process. We needed to coordinate the existing architectonic structure with the existing ground cover and vegetation and the new species. External flowerpots are replanted every year with Trinitarian and people always sit over them and we need to replace the existing flowers. Maintenance is very expensive and the environmental police help us to keep the plaza well preserved and neat.

A neighbor of the Plaza de la Madre said that the plaza was completely changed. He affirmed not being happy with the deforestation being made. But did considered that the new image of the plaza has brought people to it and a perception of more safety. When asked about the previous image that the plaza had, he said that it was very similar to the existing conditions of Plaza Reina Guillermina, it was a forest like environment, with no maintenance, it looked insecure and dirty. He agreed the plaza now had a better appearance but did not agree with the textured pavement that was incorporated, which makes it difficult to walk through and it becomes very unsafe for children and the elderly because water sinks in it and it is creating cracks and stains in the pavement. The neighbor stated that there has always been people walking and jogging around the plaza before it was renovated. Barrio Primero de Mayo, which is located close to the Plaza, is very dangerous. The renovation, helped to have better views, better lighting and less attractive to undesirables. People are very afraid of Plaza Reina Guillermina, thieves can hide in any spot. I have friends who have been assaulted in that plaza. At night Plaza de la Madre was really dark and scary. But during the day it is very uncomfortable because it is to hot. The undesirable filled the mother statue with graffiti's, and fortunately was recovered.

## APPENDIX V

### VITA Monica I. Montero Avila

<i>Education</i>	2001	Master of Landscape Architecture
	1997 -1999	Programa de Formación Académica para personal Docente y de Investigación de la Universidad del Zulia (LUZ). Facultad de Arquitectura y Diseño. Departamento de Diseño Arquitectónico
	1996	Architect. Universidad del Zulia
<i>Academic experience</i>	2000 - 2001	Graduate teaching assistant. Landscape Architecture Department VT
	1995 - 1996	Teaching assistant. Graphic Communication Department. Facultad de Arquitectura y Diseño. LUZ
	1993 - 1996	Research Assistant. IFA. LUZ
	Since 1997	Professor of Design Department. Facultad de Arquitectura y Diseño. LUZ
	1999	Research entitled: La expresión humana – ambiental en el diseño arquitectónico. Algunas reflexiones. Caso de estudio: Diseño Arquitectónico IV. Facultad de Arquitectura y Diseño. LUZ
<i>Awards</i>	2001	Graduate Honor Award. Excellence in Landscape Architecture Studies. American Society of Landscape Architect
	2001	Outstanding teaching assistant. Landscape Architecture Department. VT
	2001	Member of Sigma Lambda Alpha honor society. Landscape Architecture Program VT
	1999 - 2001	LASPAU - Fulbright Scholarship
	1997 - 1999	Becario Docente. Departamento de Diseño Arquitectónico. Facultad de Arquitectura y Diseño. LUZ
	1996	Premio Summa Cum Laude. LUZ
	1995	Premio MARAVEN Excelencia Estudiantil. LUZ-MARAVEN
	1994	Premio Simón Rodríguez. LUZ
	1992 - 1995	Dean List. Facultad de Arquitectura y Diseño. LUZ