

IMPECCABLE, IMPLACABLE, PRICELESS

On the house in Lavapiés by Miguel Ciria y Beatriz Alvarez Gómez

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Can a public building for rented social housing situated in Lavapiés, the very heartland of Madrid, and built on a shoestring, be a jewel? Yes it can...

Two very young architects, graduates of the Escuela de Madrid, Miguel Ciria and Beatriz Alvarez Gómez have performed the miracle.

Right in the very centre of Madrid, in the Calle del Olmo, in a narrow and deep site adjacent to traditional, simple blocks of flats they have constructed with limited means a new block of apartments, similarly traditional and simple, but also attractive and striking – a clear demonstration of how new Architecture, appropriately used, can provide the required response to the problems of a historic city.

The building knits into the fabric of the city perfectly thanks to the accurate alignments of facade and cornice.

The intelligent floor-plan, introduces a central band that stretches from the street to the inner patio which is where the public areas, the living-rooms of the apartments, are situated. These are flanked by two strips containing the more private bedroom areas, which are tucked in beside the dividing walls. The apartments, despite being small and relatively compressed, appear large.

The street façade, with its phenol panels of slatted shutters arranged horizontally allowing occupants to see out without being seen, set just the right scale through their dimensions and colour.

The inner patio, very precisely measured to invite the sunlight in, becomes the beating heart of the community, a real corrala or courtyard, which the stairways, balconies and living rooms open onto.

The well designed and beautifully made metallic structure lends an overall air of lightness, which is particularly welcome in a case such as this where the overall dimensions are small.

The project is not only impeccable; it is also implacably logical, and priceless. These buildings, by dint of being logical, are also sustainable in the widest sense of the word.

If only all social housing in the historic quarters of the city were to be so well resolved, things would be quite different.

The housing blocks in the Calle del Olmo designed by Ciria and Alvarez Gómez have the precision of a clockwork device, the beauty of a little gem with which to adorn the city of Madrid. Two first class architects who, in the wake of this first little master project, will be much talked about.