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Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile, Santiago

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Stretching from its arid northerly border with Peru to the filigree geography of Cape Horn some 2,500 miles south, the map of Chile looks like a ribbon: a long, narrow country caught between the Pacific and the Andes mountain spine. Shaping life along its length, a variety of topographic and climatic conditions naturally offer myriad agricultural opportunities and exemplary biodiversity. But the nation's physical geography also tests the resolve of the Chilean people; the geological artefacts of the Andes and its underwater inversion – the Atacama Trench, 100 miles out to sea – bear witness to a turbulent seismic history.

There have already been 14 significant earthquakes since the advent of the millennium, one offshore, in 2010, reaching almost 9.0 on the Richter scale.

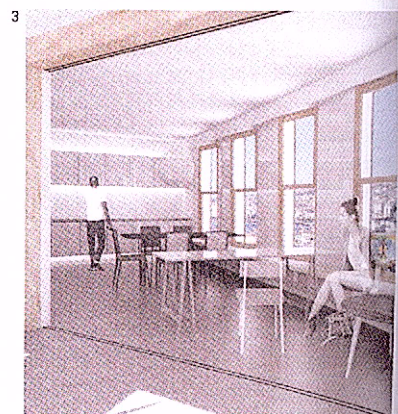
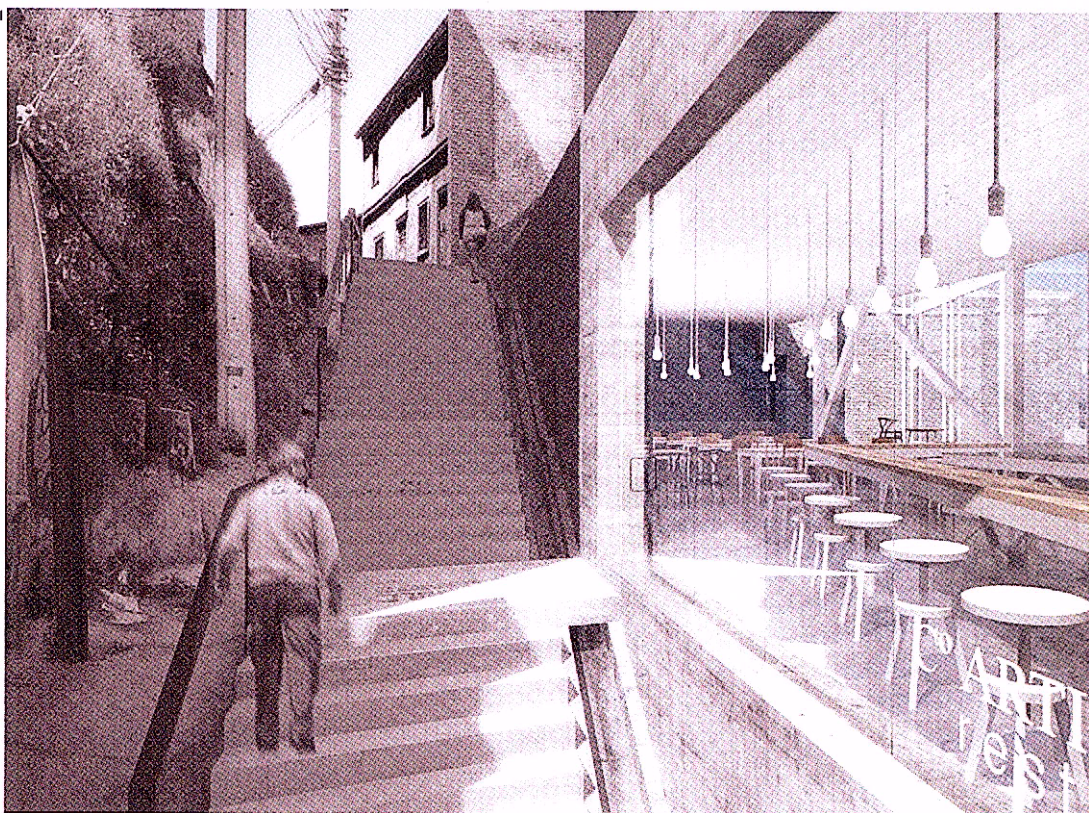
The implications of designing for this challenging environment are embedded within the architectural curriculum at the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile (PUC) in Santiago. Romy Hecht, who coordinates undergraduate affairs at the school, acknowledges the relevance of sensitivity to regional issues. But at the same time she is at pains to emphasise a concern, at PUC, to train students for global practice: 'We believe that responding to such challenges gives us knowledge that is valuable worldwide, as long as we develop it in a universal language.'

A concern for architecture's universal dimension has practical as well as philosophical overtones. Being connected to wider debate

1-3. Final-year student Claudio Viñuela Schweitzer proposes rescuing the heritage of Valparaíso's urban fabric by transforming an abandoned ruin into a hybrid of residential and commercial units

is certainly a practical priority for the school's director, Juan Ignacio Baixas. Faculty members engage actively in research networks and conferences, aspiring to be 'at the forefront of international debate'. But the PUC ethos also builds on the notion of universality: Baixas elucidates the 'school spirit' in relation to two key concepts 'that we have called the "ethics of creativity" and the "will of reality".'

Even the most prosaic of design proposals will respond, at some level, to the uniqueness of its context – to 'a precise time, place and user' explains Baixas. 'As such,' he continues, 'architectural design is necessarily original and belongs to the realm of creativity.' Bound into the practice of design, creativity therefore carries a measure of duty and 'enters the ethical domain'. 'Ethics of creativity' thus serves to remind PUC students that the architect's duty



of care – a duty oriented always to the user – finds expression in the synthetic act of design. Balancing diverse needs and wants, claims and constraints, architecture entails judgement as a matter of course.

At face value the ‘will of reality’ calls us back to the practical demands of realising a building – to bricks and mortar, steel and glass. Yet as a concept it draws attention to the necessary abstraction at the heart of architectural pedagogy; teaching and research prioritise a style of speculation often missing from the world of work. Some schools see such removal from reality as positive and others negative: as critical distance and freedom to dream, or as evidence of a gap between university education and the demands of industry. Acknowledgement, at PUC, of the need for dialogue between these extremes guides the delivery of technical, social and environmental

4-6. Constanza Cabezas and Juan Ignacio Hodali challenge established forms of education and engage with the local community in their proposal for a learning centre in the port of San Antonio

studies, and the ‘will of reality’ captures a play between the conditions that constitute a design proposal in relation to its possibilities – ‘an attribute that’, as Baixas puts it, ‘only the architect can perceive before inhabiting the building’. Moreover, he adds, this concept ‘means that we consider reality sufficiently rich in poetic content as not to need fiction to awaken creativity.’

A scheme for an education unit in San Antonio port, by fourth-year students Constanza Cabezas and Juan Ignacio Hodali, takes the form of a workshop megastructure. Inspired by the visual language of loading cranes and container ships, the proposal articulates an interpretation of the landscape that treats the upper entrance level as a quay. Interwoven with the cascading topography is an educational programme that seeks to question accepted learning models, highlighting intersections between

urban community dynamics and the institutional life of the building.

The challenge of balancing diverse briefing factors, and of responding to competing site conditions to optimise future possibilities, is addressed in a final-year project by Clandio Viñuela Schweitzer. The proposal, in Valparaíso, occupies an abandoned ruin that boasts unexploited heritage character as well as real-estate value. Using the design project as a vehicle for questioning the process of property development, the scheme tests ideas about how best to treat a sensitive site, asking: how can a new building rescue the existing fabric and responsibly bring it into dialogue with the development expectations today? The result is a hybrid building envisaged as a response to commercial prospects, hosting flexible residential units on the upper floors with retail accommodation at street level.

