

Project Portfolio – November 2006
Badajoz Congress Center

Badajoz, Spain
selgascano

Within the fortifications of a remote Spanish city, selgascano inscribes the Badajoz Congress Center into the footprint of a once-bloody bullring

By David Cohn

Although Spanish architects are well acquainted with the intricacies of introducing contemporary buildings into historic urban fabric, the site for the new Congress Center in Badajoz posed unprecedented difficulties.

Here, in the provincial capital of Spain's relatively poor, rural, and isolated Extremadura region, an 1857 bullring once stood. The arena (demolished in the 1980s) had risen within the walls of a five-sided 18th-century bastion, erected to defend the city's strategic position near the Portuguese border. In the two intervening centuries, urban expansion had embedded those elaborate fortifications.



[Click here for slide show.](#)

Photo © Roland Halbe

The painful history associated with the bullring complicated the formal challenge posed by the project's open-competition brief. In August 1936, Badajoz was the site of one of the Spanish Civil War's first major battles and, in this arena, Franco's forces executed hundreds of Republican prisoners. Many in the city still hesitate to dwell on that traumatic past, exhibiting a reluctance shared by the leaders of the region's current Socialist government, this project's clients.

With a scheme that skillfully navigates the conflicts of memory, denial, and the demands of progress, Madrid architects José Selgas and Lucía Cano won the competition—their first important commission. Their firm, selgascano, has since won competitions for congress centers in Placencia, also in Extremadura, and the Spanish coastal city of Cartagena, and is building public housing in Madrid. At Badajoz, they carefully inscribed an innovative structure within the outlines of the original bullring, establishing a fresh and dynamic urban presence that pays homage to the past and the future.

Rendered in translucent plastics, the scheme recreates the concentric volumes of the former bullring: A cylindrical lattice of fiberglass-reinforced polyester-resin tubes encircles a drum clad in translucent Plexiglas tubes over clear glass panes. The inner drum, containing the auditorium, takes its footprint from the former *albero*, or ring of sand, where bullfights once took place, while a roofless circulation path between the layered cylinders occupies the street-level zone of the former grandstands. Much of the 180,000-square-foot congress center lies underground, including its lobby, which visitors reach from the entry plaza via a stair descending beneath the red underside of a curving, cantilevered canopy. The 1,000-seat main auditorium, rising from this lower level to fill the inner drum, can accommodate opera, theater, orchestral music, and conferences.

.

People

Owner

Junta de Extremadura
Regional Government of Extremadura

Architect's firm name:

selgascano
Guecho, 27. 28023
Madrid.Spain. 0034913076481

Special Credit:

José Selgas, Lucía Cano

Engineers

Structural Engineer:

Fehcor

Mechanical Engineer:

JG Asociados

Polyester Structural Engineers:

Pedelta

Consultants

Lighting:

JG Asociados, mechanical engineer

Acoustical:

Higini Arau

Arau Acustic

Auditorium Chair Design:

Mónica Förster

General Contractor:

Joca-Placonsa

Photographer

Roland Halbe