

Nicolás Quintana:

Architect, Urban Planner and Passionate about Cuba

By Paul Echániz



Nicolás José Braulio del Carmen Quintana Gómez Arango Díaz was born in Havana on March 26, 1925 to Carmen Gómez Díaz and to Nicolás Quintana Arango, a successful architect, founder of the firm Moenck y Quintana. His paternal grandfather, Nicolás Quintana, was a Basque cabinetmaker from whom he inherited his love for wood. His maternal grandfather, Tiburcio Gómez, was a timber warehouseman who sold wood to his paternal grandfather and taught Nicolás the qualities of different woods. During his many visits to his grandfather's wood mill, Nicolás learned at a very early age to identify the various wood types by the odor of the cuttings. From his grandmothers, Celia Arango and Carmen Díaz, he learned the meaning of family values: "to guide and protect".

After a year at the Colegio Marista in La Víbora, Nicolás obtained his elementary education at the Colegio Alemán (later re-named Columbus), and his high school education at Colegio de la La Salle in Vedado. He registered in the School of Architecture at the University of Havana in 1944.

That was the year famous architect Richard Neutra visited Havana to meet with well established Cuban architects, precursors of the "50's Generation." World War II had just ended. The world looked to a future where reconstruction would replace destruction and modernity pointed the path to follow.

In Cuba there was already a numerous group of people in the fields of economics, science and avant-garde art, literature, music, etc., which made the modernist movement possible. Nicolás Quintana lived his early years in Vedado and later in Miramar, in the very heart where that critical mass was developing.

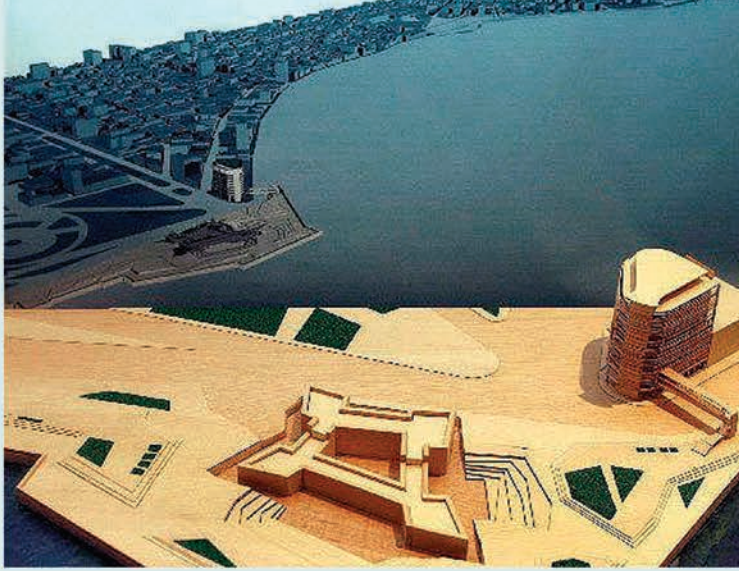
Student Life

Students Nicolás Quintana, Ricardo Porro and Frank Martínez were restless youths searching for modernity and how to develop it within the island's tropical environment.

However, the school of architecture taught a classical curriculum. Nicolás would later say that homework consisted of drawing architectural elements such as details on Corinthian columns, etc. On one occasion, one of the students fell asleep on his drawing, a double scale reproduction of a column published in the Book of Vignola. His right arm fell on the drawing and the still-fresh ink became engraved on his arm. The following day, the student excused himself to the professor for not having the drawing, but showed the reproduction on his arm. The professor was intransigent and accused him of being an "Indianist." It was this incident that aroused Nicolás and his classmates to tie up the librarian at the School of Architecture, take all 36 of the books in question and, with the help of other students who joined in the rebellion, burn the books in the school's inner courtyard (which, as a matter of fact, had been designed by his father). The result was an unprecedented scandal (Students burning books!). It cost Nicolás several days in jail, with his father's approval who had informed the chief of police, a personal friend, when his son was leaving the campus of the autonomous university. Luckily, Nicolás was a tall and strapping young man, and didn't have any problems with common prisoners sharing his cell.

The success of "The Burning of the Vignolas" became known worldwide. Walter Gropius, the German architect who founded the Bauhaus school and is the acknowledged, along with Ludwig Mies van der Rohe and Le Corbusier, pioneer of modern architecture, decided to travel to Havana in 1949 to show support of the Cuban students. This milestone was the driving force behind the modern movement in Cuban architecture, and it was Gropius who spoke to Nicolás about the importance of ecological balance as the essential idea in architectural and urban creations.

Throughout the course of his architectural education he was influenced by, among others, architects Walter Gropius, José Luis Sert, Eugenio Batista, his father Nicolás Quintana and Miguel Angel Moenck, founders of the Moenck and



Quintana firm, and his great teacher Pedro Martínez Inclán, who drove him to explore city planning. He also kept a steady flow of informational exchange with Felipe Préstamo and Mario Romañach, and university fellow students Ricardo Porro and Frank Martínez.

During his formative years, Nicolás read extensively about philosophy, starting with Heraclitus of Ephesus and his thought: “You can bathe twice in the same river, but never twice in the same water”. His library eventually included philosophers Kant, Heidegger, Kierkegaard, and writers and poets such as, Camus, Valéry, Gide, Aragón, Croce, Spengler, García Lorca, Unamuno, Machado, Lezama Lima, Labrador Ruiz, Guillén, researchers Fernando Ortíz and Lydia Cabrera, architects Gropius, Wright, Sullivan, Aalto, historians Burkhardt, Wolfflin, Giedion, Mumford, and many other world known intellectuals. This body of work opened the path for him to become a “Humanist, an Artist, and a Technician, in other words, an Architect”.

Professional Life

In 1950 his father died and Nicolás, upon graduating from the University of Havana with honors in 1951, took his place at the firm Moenck y Quintana. The 50's were Renaissance years for Cuban architecture, preceded by modernist advances in plastic arts, literature and music. Nicolás was already immersed in the culture and in his search for all things Cuban (*cubanía*). He used consistent and distinctly Cuban signs within the context of his architectural designs. In 1955 the National Planning Board is established in Cuba for the purpose of studying orderly growth for urban centers in the island. Nicolás directed the Urban and Regional Master Plans for Varadero and Trinidad over a period of four years, which introduced a firm, guaranteed and protected base for development and conservation.

We should make clear that during the entire time Nicolás worked in this project sponsored by the government of Dictator Fulgencio Batista, he donated his entire salary to La Beneficencia, an institution that housed orphaned children. During his career as an architect in Cuba, Nicolás completed 36 projects. Among the most notable are:

- The Ramírez Corría Residence (1957) – with five different patios that define the volume of the structure.
- The Mardonio Santiago Residence (1957) – where he

created a Cuban environment within a modern context. It has five patios joined to gardens and terraces that add transparency and aid in the “interplay” between the interior and the exterior. Furnishings and receiving areas were designed by the architect.

- The Carlos Quintana Residence (1958)
- The Aida Fundora Residence (1958)
- The Eduardo Rivero Residence (1954)
- The Guillermo Ochoa and Rafael Morales Residences (1959) – with multi-level roofs and a common patio
- The Alicia Blanco Residence (1954)
- The Dr. Curran Residence, Varadero, Matanzas (1957)
- The master plans for Varadero, Club Kawama Hotel and Yacht Club Residencial area.
- He participated as Cuba's representative in the International Congress of Modern Architecture (CIAM) from 1952 through 1960.

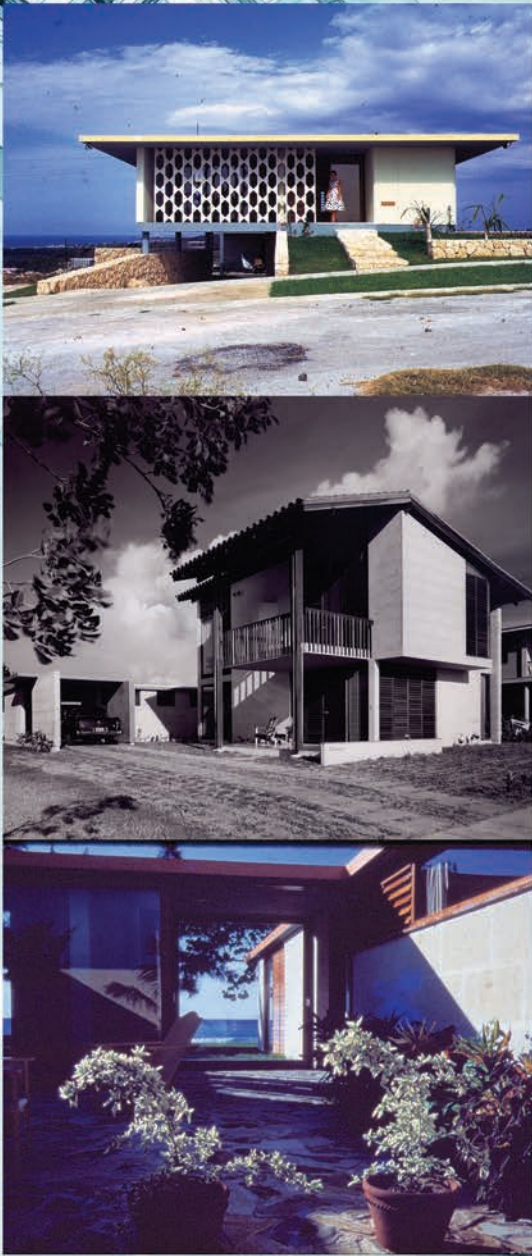
In many of his designs, Nicolás used the concept of dry patio and wet patio (originally conceived by the Arabs), which helped wind circulation and, through the use of louvers and porches, air conditioning was not needed.

In Search of Cubanía

In his passionate search for *cubanía*, Nicolás became friendly with the most distinguished Cubans in arts and humanities of his day. In his essay, *Cuba in its Architecture and Urban Planning*, published in the magazine Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana in the fall of 2000, and in My Memories, *The Journey of a Life with Cuba in the Soul*, Nicolás tells us how certain individuals and friends influenced his life:

The artist Conrado Massaguer and writer and journalist Ramón Vasconcelos were seminal guides in his intellectual upbringing prior to 1948. In those individuals, “who possessed an unfathomable capacity to doubt the apparently obvious and to poke in search of the deep truth, dwelled the poignant joy of constant creativity.”

Since 1948 Fernando Ortíz, the great essayist, ethnic musicologist and scholar of Cuban culture, became his key mentor. He would invite the young Nicolás to his home to “only listen” when he had important visitors, such as composer Igor Stravinsky, as guests. Don Fernando taught him how to organize his knowledge. Lydia Cabrera was his advisor in the Trinidad Plan and a great friend. Both Lydia



Grupo de obras proyectadas por el Arquitecto Nicolás Quintana.

Projects designed by Architect Nicolás Quintana.



and Don Fernando “improved the environment in which they lived, but were a product of it as well, since one would not have been able to exist without the other.”

His doctor, Carlos Ramírez Corría taught him that culture, a product of varied contacts and which encompasses knowledge in multiple disciplines, is essential in achieving excellence in an individual’s chosen profession. He introduced him to painter Domingo Ravenet with whom Nicolás shared many memorable occasions discussing painting, architecture, and the integration of the arts, among many other subjects. Ramírez Corría was the surgeon who operated a spinal disk after Nicolás suffered a serious accident playing football. Later, in 1956, Nicolás obliged by designing and building his doctor’s “house of five patios’.

Author José Lezama Lima is the person who taught him to feel the city as a living being in his meanderings through Old Havana and El Prado. From poet Nicolás Guillén he learned to appreciate the descriptive power of language and its musicality. From philosopher-painter Raúl Milián he learned how anguish could be painted.

Painter René Portocarrero taught him to interpret, to “read” the enveloping cubanía in which he had become immersed and to express it in architectural terms. He also knew painters Mario Carreño and Sandú Darié, sculptors Juan José Sicre and Alfredo Lozano, and sketchers and caricaturists Conrado Massaguer, Juan David and José Luis Díaz de Villegas. His friendship with Wilfredo Lam, although not as close, was important since through his paintings he delved into radical plastic worlds interpreted with genius by Lam.

Composers of his acquaintance include Julián Orbón, a great friend, and Aurelio de la Vega, both from whom he senses an infinite expressive capacity of our cultured music. He learned the polyrhythmic value and creativity of ritualistic and popular music from musicians Julio Collazo and Tata Güines. Papito Cadavieco taught him how to play ritual music on drums.



El Arq. Nicolás Quintana acompañado por Fernando Ortíz, Portocarrero y Luis Gómez Wanguemert.

Architect Nicolás Quintana with Fernando Ortíz, Rene Portocarrero and Luis Gómez Wanguemert.

Nicolás, en una de las carreras de auto en las que el participó en Venezuela, en 1960.

Nicolás in one of the auto races in which he participated in Venezuela, 1960.



Nicolás, tocando las tumbadoras durante un viaje a crucero a Grecia en 1992.. Las imágenes en blanco y negro son cortesía de Eduardo Luis Rodríguez.

Nicolás playing the conga drums during a cruise in Greece, 1992.

The images in black and white are courtesy of Eduardo Luis Rodríguez

Exile

When the revolution triumphed in January 1959, Quintana continued as director of the Varadero and Trinidad Plans, but had several altercations with Ernesto “Ché” Guevara, at the time Director of the National Bank. In his last meeting with Guevara, he was accused of being a conspirator and was given three alternatives: exile, jail or the firing squad. Quintana opted for the first and in January 1960 left his beloved Cuba. He was exiled in Venezuela and, since he did not have a license to practice architecture, at first he made a living as a race car driver. In Cuba he had been involved in amateur car races. In Venezuela he signed a contract with Porsche KG to race their autos until obtaining work in several architectural firms. He also developed a close friendship with Venezuelan president Rómulo Betancourt, “The Father of Venezuelan Democracy”. After a few years he moved to Puerto Rico, where he became involved in various projects – the Roberto Clemente Coliseum, San Juan (1963) and the Ashford Terraces Condominium (1974) among others, and later returned to Venezuela until 1987, when he decided to come to Miami.

In Miami Quintana devoted himself mostly to education. First as Adjunct Professor in the School of Architecture at the University of Miami, and later as a Professor in the School of Architecture at Florida International University (FIU). He also wrote numerous articles and participated in conferences in Miami and other cities. In 2002 FIU granted him the title of “Scholar in Architecture and Urbanism.” In 2010 he retired from FIU for health reasons as Professor Emeritus of the School of Architecture and Arts. He loved to teach. He once told his friend Ricardo Porro that being close to young people gave him the shot of adrenalin that he needed to keep going.



Nicolás, recibiendo premio de la carrera Cumbres de Currecino en Venezuela.

Nicolás accepting the racing trophy Cumbres de Currecino in Venezuela.

Havana and its Landscapes

For over 14 years Nicolás devoted himself to designing a Master Plan for the future of Havana and the rest of the island that would establish the basis for a future reconstruction of the Cuban capital.

In 2004 he was named Project Director of *Havana and its Landscapes* for the purpose of establishing timelines and architectural guidelines for the Cuban capital in its transition toward democracy. His friend and colleague Professor Juan Antonio

Bueno was named Co-Director and Architect Felipe Préstamo Research Associate.

In December 2010 Quintana edited his proposal for the project “Havana and its Landscapes – A City Into the Future: A Sustainable Focus to Urban Design.” It describes a territory with ecological characteristics that are basic and important in providing sustainability in its growth and development. It clearly states the ecological connection among the natural, physical, social and cultural aspects that interplay in the project, while a network of highways and streets, together



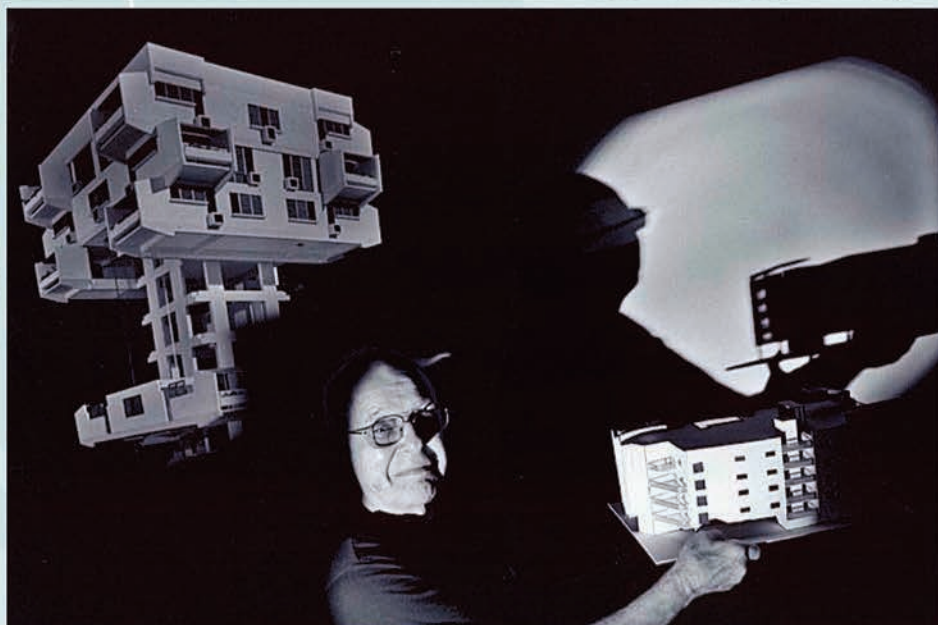
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Arquitecto Nicolás Quintana
Architect Nicolás Quintana.



Grupo de obras proyectadas por el
Arquitecto Nicolás Quintana.
*Projects designed by
Architect Nicolás Quintana.*





Quintana con la Congressista Ileana Ros Lehtinen.

Quintana with Congresswoman Ileana Ros Lehtinen.

with green areas and pathways are intertwined. The project “focuses on recommendations and suggestions of how to visualize the Havana of the future, avoiding a nostalgic vision,

based upon our foundation and permanent urban values”. He thought of it as a useful tool for Cubans on both shores to think and create, together, how the new civil society that would eventually emerge – in a modern and democratic manner – could express itself in urban terms.

Last Trip

On May 15, 2010 Cooper Union University in the city of New York held the Congress of Cuban Architecture, organized by the Cuban Cultural Center of New York and the Society of Cuban-American Engineers and Architects, where Engineer Ysrael Seinuk introduced his great friend Nicolás Quintana as keynote speaker. His presentation explained how “the achievements of the 40’s and 50’s were the result of looking toward the future from a present erected on the shoulders of the past”. Then Quintana masterfully gave a historic retelling of the legacy of Cuban architecture and, after many years, was reunited with his friend Ricardo Porro and his wife Elena. The following day we invited Nicolás, and his dear and devoted wife Isabel to tour of the city. It was organized by Mariano Ros, very knowledgeable of New York city’s architecture, together with architect Josef Asteínza and myself. It is difficult to describe the joy and mirth with which they enjoyed seeing 19th through 21st century structures that “sang,” as Nicolás would say, and the imposing density of the city. We also went by Maria Mantilla’s home on 29th Street, where José Martí lived. It was very emotional for all to see with our own eyes that still-existing relic of our Apostle.

Professor Quintana died on May 31, 2011 due to pulmonary complications. He is survived by his wife Isabel Miniet Ferret de Quintana, four children, Nicolas, Jorge Luis, Pablo José and Miguel Angel, and eight grandchildren.

At the end of his career Quintana had worked in over 200 projects in Cuba, Venezuela, Puerto Rico, the Dominican Republic, Aruba, the Bahamas, Brazil, New York, Los Angeles and Florida. He was co-inventor and developer of famous patents of industrialized construction systems and of his system of repetitive panels of prefabricated concrete. But the most important facet of his work is the vision of the future he has left us for his native city and his beloved Cuba.

Quintana’s legacy not only remains in his works of modern architecture, but in implementing his vision of urban development, and that is the responsibility of all Cubans, in and outside Cuba.

*The author thanks Isabel Miniet Ferret Viuda de Quintana for providing the information and photos included in this article.

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Awards and Prizes

- Honored by the AIA Miami Chapter with the “Urban Design Award”: “...in recognition of your outstanding achievements, leadership and research in the field of urban design & community planning over an extended period of



Quintana junto a José Ignacio Rasco cuando recibieron la Medalla de Excelencia 2006 de San Carlos, acompañándolo Sarita y Aurelio de la Vega.

Quintana, next to José Ignacio Rasco, accepting the San Carlos Medal of Excellence 2006, accompanied by Sarita and Aurelio de la Vega.



Armando Cobelo y Alberto S. Bustamante entregándole el Premio Herencia 2000 al Arq. Nicolás Quintana.

Armando Cobelo and Dr. Alberto S. Bustamante conferring the Premio Herencia 2000 to Arch. Nicolás Quintana.

time.” (1998).

- **Awarded Member Emeritus status by the Cuban National Heritage:** “...in recognition to a continuous dedication to the preservation of Cuban traditions in the field of architecture and urbanism, with a creative vision to the future.” (1998).
- **Member of the Miami Beach Design Review Board** (1998-1999).



Nicolás con uno de sus proyectos en la Escuela de Arquitectura

Nicolás with one of his projects in the School of Architecture.

- **Selected as Design Architect of the Plaza José Martí**, to house the bust of Cuba’s apostle executed by the renowned sculptor Sergio López Mesa. The project to be located in Echo Park, Los Angeles, California (1999).

- **Awarded the “Premio Urbe to Architectural Excellence”**, given by the “Academy of Arts, History, and Archeology of Puerto Rico”, in San Juan, Puerto Rico: “... for lifetime achievements in the professional

practice and academic fields.” (2000).

- **Awarded, by Resolution No. 3158, enacted by the Senate of the Commonwealth of Puerto Rico and signed by its President**, a diploma: “...honoring the Cuban architect Nicolás Quintana for his extraordinary contribution to architecture in Puerto Rico. He has been the designer of important public and private buildings. He also has dictated architectural courses to our country’s youth.” (2000).
- **Awarded a Recognition by the Archbishopric of Metropolitan San Juan** for the same reasons quoted above by the Commonwealth’s Senate (2000).
- **Presented, at the San Carlos Institute in Key West, with the “Herencia 2000” Award** by the Cuban Cultural Heritage Institution: “...for his dedication to the

preservation of the Cuban cultural heritage and Cuba’s architectural legacy.” (2000).

- **Awarded the “Diploma al Mérito” and presented with José Martí’s “Distinción de la Rosa Blanca”:** “...in recognition of his civic, patriotic, cultural and professional merits”, by the Patronato José Martí, in Los Angeles, California. Selected as keynote speaker at the awards presentation. Lecture’s title: “The Paradigmatic Image of José Martí” (2001).
- **Honored by the Journal Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana:** Journal No.18 -Autumn 2000-, in the words of its Director Jesús Díaz, reads as follows: “... includes a dossier dedicated to contemporary Cuban literature in Miami and honors the great architect and urbanist Nicolás Quintana, residing in that city” (2000).
- **Collaborator to the journal “Encuentro de la Cultura Cubana”.** “Encuentro” is a highly recognized publication, dealing with Cuban cultural issues. It is edited in Madrid, Spain. Quintana will advice on architectural and urban design themes (2001).
- **Named Member of the Advisory Board** of the Cuban Research Institute at Florida International University (2002).
- **Position at FIU reevaluated to the title:** Scholar in Architecture and Urbanism “...in recognition to the excellence of lifetime work and depth of knowledge” (2002).
- **Pregones Magazine “Republic” Award**, Architecture category: “... for your great contribution to our Heritage and to our exile” (2003).
- **Honored with the Cintas Foundation Life Achievement Award:** “This award expresses our Foundation’s deep respect and admiration for your many accomplishments” (2004).
- **Awarded a \$325,000 Grant to develop at the School of Architecture at FIU a project titled:** “Havana and its Landscapes”, to study Havana and its urban, rural and natural landscapes and create an urban vision and guidelines that will serve preserve, restore and guide the



Quintana junto al escultor Tony López
Quintana next to sculptor Tony López.



Nicolás con Rafael Rojas.
Nicolás with historian Rafael Rojas.



Nicolás con Agustín Tamargo.
Nicolás with writer, journalist and radio/TV personality Agustín Tamargo

city's reconstruction and development into the future. Quintana will act as Director of the project, working in collaboration with architects Juan A. Bueno (Co-Director) and Felipe Préstamo (Invited Investigator). Grant was given by Century Partners Group (Sergio Pino, Pres.) and Lennar Homes (Anthony Seijas, Pres. Miami Dade Division) (2004).

- **Given the Award: "Educator of the Year 2004"**, by the National Association of Cuban-American Educators (NACAE) for: "His lifetime achievements not only in his profession, but also for his dedication to educate the younger generations and for his defense of the Cuban cultural and artistic values." (2005)
- **Honored with the Medal for National Cuban Excellency**, by the San Carlos Institute, Key West "... given to those persons that enriched the Republic of Cuba until 1958 with their capacity and personal effort, and continued their fruitful labor along their lives." (2006)
- **Honored with the Garza Award**: "For his love to Cuba and for the publication of an extraordinary project for the future reconstruction of the City of Havana." (2007)
- **Invited to speak at the opening of the exhibition: 'Wifredo Lam at the Miami Art Museum'** "... given your close personal connection to the artist." (2008)
- **Invited by FIU's Cuban Research Institute's**: "... to present the project 'Havana and its Landscapes: A Vision for Future Reconstruction in Cuba', at CRI's Annual Convention." (2008)
- **Honored with the "Journey Award"**, by Miami Dade College: "Honoring Your Distinguished Lifetime Achievements in Architecture, Urbanism, and Other Creative Fields." (2008)
- **Invited by the Smithsonian Institute's Wilson International Center for Scholars, in Washington**: "... to present the project 'Havana and its Landscapes: A Vision for Future Reconstruction in Cuba,' at the Center's premises. (2008)
- **Honored by FIU College of Architecture + the Arts**: "In recognition of your contribution in the field of

architecture and your tireless mentoring of your students and colleagues, FIU salutes you on this day November 5, 2009." (2009)

- **Invited by Smithsonian Associates to give two classes**:
Title: "Authentic Havana: 1517 to 1959." (2010)

The Nicolás Quintana Project

Architect Nicolás Quintana was one of the main proponents of modernist architecture in Cuba since his years as a student at the University of Havana. During his career in Cuba, he designed prized buildings and structures and directed the urban plans of Havana, Trinidad and Varadero until he left Cuba in 1960. During his exile he designed projects in the U.S., Puerto Rico and Venezuela. During his last 17 years, Nicolás Quintana was a professor of architecture and urbanism at Florida International University, and last year he was appointed Professor Emeritus of said institution. Professor Quintana had a vast knowledge of architecture, urbanism and history, and during his years as professor at FIU, he dedicated his best efforts to an urban plan for the Cuban capital and other provinces. His ideas and designs shall be compiled in a book "Havana and Its Landscapes – A City Into the Future: A Sustainable Approach to Urban Design."

"The Quintana Project" shall consist of a two-part videographed documentary. The first part will consist of a retrospective of his career, his professional work, his oeuvre and his most recent concepts, documenting the framework of his experience and his vision of the growth and development of Havana and the Island. The second part shall consist of a round table discussion with individuals and colleagues selected by Quintana before his demise to deal with the future of construction and urban planning on the Island. Invitees shall give their own perspectives on conservation, infrastructure, design and construction, taking into account the natural environs of the island in architecture and national urbanism. Filming will take place in Miami, at a place to be determined in Coral Gables. The language will be English with Spanish subtitles. The purpose of the final product shall be to make known the life, works and ideas of distinguished Professor



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Grupo de obras proyectadas por el Arquitecto Nicolás Quintana.

Projects designed by Architect Nicolás Quintana.

Quintana through media, including audiences in Cuba. This documentary will have selections taken from Quintana's conferences and writings and shall include documents, blueprints, digital reproductions, etc. Great importance shall be given to quality, that being the main reason why Tomás Regalado, a professional videographer with vast experience, was chosen for the task. Responsible for production would be the team of Engineer Paul Echániz, cinematographer Mariano Ros and Architect Josef Asteínza. They would donate their time as well as travel and lodging expenses in Miami. Production costs have been calculated at approximately \$10,000. Once production has been completed, editing digital images plus musical enhancements, etc. could be paid by the media committed to distributing the final product, for example, public TV channels, educational institutions, etc.

Contributions to "The Nicolás Quintana Project" are tax deductible and, of course, contributors will be recognized in the credits. We count on your generous contribution to this effort in order to make known the vision of eminent Professor Nicolás Quintana.

Cuban Architecture Round Table PROPOSED PROGRAM

DAY ONE: Round Table Discussions

Format: Round Table Discussion
Moderator: Josef Asteínza (moderator)

First Round Table Circa 40 minutes filmed, edited to 20 minutes

The first conversation will focus on [INFRASTRUCTURE AND THE ENVIRONMENT]

Proposed participants: Manuel Cereijo
Helena Soto-Gabriele

Suggested topics:

- The current physical and environmental challenges affecting urban development in Cuba
- The urban infrastructure needs for economic development
- Natural and human resources: strengths, limitations and potential
- Planning for the unpredictable
- Engaging future stakeholders
- Representation and participation in the planning process

Second Round Table

Circa 40 minutes filmed, edited to 20 minutes

The second conversation will focus on [PRESERVATION]

Proposed participants: Carlos Dunn

David Cabarrocas

Eduardo Luis Rodriguez

Suggested topics:

- Current state of cultural resources: strengths, limitations and potential
- The role of cultural heritage in future development
- The role of cities and towns in a national economy
- The vision of heritage in the nation's identity
- Engaging residents and the workforce in the conservation process
- The challenges of balancing growth and preservation

Third Round Table

Circa 40 minutes filmed, edited to 20 minutes

The third conversation focuses on [ARCHITECTURE AND URBANISM - EDUCATION AND PRACTICE]

Proposed participants: Juan Damas.

Pedro Albizu Campos

- Current teaching system: strengths, limitations and potential
- Generational transitions in professional practice: from Colony to Republic to Revolution
- The role of international exchange programs
- Challenges in the construction sector: training, materials, energy and the environment
- Autonomy and engagement in a globalized practice
- Visions of architecture and urbanism in a future Cuba

DAY TWO: Nicolás Quintana Retrospective

Format: Informal
Interviewees: Friends and colleagues of Nicolás Quintana
Interviewer: Josef Asteínza

Provide the viewer with a portrait of Prof. Quintana in a conversational form that integrates general topics with his personal experience and insights.

Suggested general topics

- History of architecture and urban design of Havana and other Cuban cities



- Various ordinances, developments and plans for Havana and other cities, e.g., Forrestier, Sert.
- Cuban urban development since Independence
- Ideas and movements in architecture in Cuba
- Cultural contexts, artistic exchanges

Suggested personal topics

- Education, professional practice and teaching career
- Projects and completed work in Cuba and outside Cuba
- Modern Movement, CIAM
- Influences, interests and philosophy
- Friends and colleagues, milieu
- Recent projects
- Havana and its Landscape: A Vision for Future Reconstruction in Cuba
- Other projects, publications or studies

Proposed visual footage

- Architectural drawings and models
- Artwork
- Books, magazines, maps
- Photographs, film or video clips

Quoting Nicolás Quintana, taken from various articles and interviews.

(Cuba needs) “a new urban vision which, when implemented, shall again accommodate the joy for life that is so much a part of Cubans, in its cities and towns, restoring the traditional high quality aesthetics of its public spaces and architecture, making it “sing”, after such a long silence.”

“We Cuban architects must prepare ourselves and be ready to be able to work with those who now wait in Cuba, with tied hands but free minds. It’s precisely there, in that symbiotic union, that our creative force lies.”

On the students who participated in “The Burning of the Vignolas”: “Seeking freedom to design. Freedom was the reason, the key – they wanted to seek something that did not necessarily include the classical orders but had a cultural objective, it was a desire for freedom; we were rebels, not troublemakers.”

“The challenge of the future shall be to solve the gigantic problem of a city with a physical size for one million 400 thousand, where two million 100 thousand now live in

cramped quarters. Where can you have that population explosion live while you reconstruct the almost uninhabitable and construct the new?”

“You have to be careful of not falling into the trap of using prefabricated systems without first studying them carefully, their possibilities and limitations, because there are many of the latter.”

“I don’t think we should give solutions without having, previously, a research basis as a foundation.”

“My professional life (50 years) has been devoted to giving others everything I am capable of creating. That work has been done, mainly, outside of Cuba. Why not in my own country?”

“Out of the tragedy of destruction we can achieve the marvel of reconstruction, allowing for a development of Havana in modern codes without renouncing its identity as a great city, at a human scale it hasn’t lost yet.”

His concern for excellence in architectural work went beyond the shape of the design, into the execution of the work and its context. – Architect Felipe Préstamo

(It’s necessary) to divulge the accomplishments of Architect Quintana because of his professional qualities and the humanistic dimension of his life. – Architect Ricardo Porro



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