The Casablanca summer theatre by Baume & Marpent

_Le théâtre d'été de Casablanca par Baume & Marpent l’artisanat d’art_

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Among the theatre schemes designed by Baume & Marpent, that of Casablanca, dating from December 1933, constitutes an interesting case. On the one hand, from a structural and decorative point of view, it proposes a new variation in this type of building, explored by Baume & Marpent since the end of the 19th century. On the other hand, from the historical viewpoint, the project is the tangible result of efforts by Baume & Marpent to penetrate the Moroccan market.

Baume & Marpent supplied all of the elements of the theatre's steel framework, designed by Pierre Jabin, a French architect settled in Casablanca. The simple, functional composition of the whole strives to adapt the edifice to the local climate. It is a rectangular building, combining three essential functions: lobby, auditorium, and stage. Each of these spaces has a distinct area. As Denise Gonçalves points out, the particularity of the scheme is in the configuration of the entrance and the lateral walkways, which are open to the outdoors in order to solve the problem of ventilation, obviously necessary in a country with a hot climate. However, in the wintertime, these areas could be closed by frames that interlock with the structure, as the architect shows. The gable roofs are supported by lattice pillars decorated with a floral motif.

Conglomerate concrete blocks are suggested as filler for the panels of the steel frame, which is especially light, while corrugated asbestos cement is preferred for the roofing. It should be noted that corrugated asbestos cement is not especially appropriate for the hot climate. However, it is generally associated with utilitarian or industrial construction. Choosing it for a theatre was especially bold, a marked deviation from the eclectic theater models often used by Baume & Marpent.

Finally, this project shows the relations between Baume & Marpent and Morocco, during the first half of the 20th century, while the company was trying to increase its influence in North Africa. The minutes of the board of directors' meetings are evidence of these efforts. Thus, in September 1932, the engineer Edmond Bossut, head of the Egyptian division, was sent to lead an "inspection tour" to Morocco in search of new opportunities. In parallel, the managing director, Henri Fauquel, created a partnership with Marcel Lebascle, a French industrialist based in Casablanca, to supply materials to the Moroccan Public Works. The nature of this "material" is not specified. However, a month later, reference is made to a major order for frameworks. Is this the Casablanca summer theatre? We cannot confirm this, although from a chronological point of view, the administrative archives and plans correspond perfectly.
Summer Theatre, Casablanca (1933),
Pierre Jabin, arch; Baume & Marpent cont.:
Architect's plan, longitudinal and
cross sections
Overall plan of the metal structure,
drawn up by Baume & Marpent