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A Piece of Gaudi

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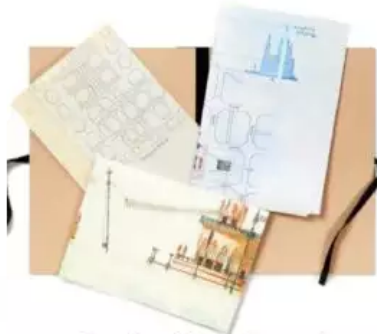


Sahar Zaman

Sahar Zaman has been on the arts beat long enough to know that arts and artists often boggle people's minds. She sees herself as a translator of the creative works in music, d ...
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If there was a world record for the longest work-in-progress building it would be held by Antoni Gaudi. The construction of his Sagrada Familia in Barcelona started in 1882. It is a UNESCO World Heritage Site but it's still under construction. Gaudi, who was recognised as an unparalleled genius in his lifetime, left behind detailed instructions in the form of sketches, plaster moulds and designs for the completion of this church.

There is no confusion on what his vision for the final structure was. Down the years, the delays have been caused by the Spanish Civil War (1936), a brief period of neglect, an arson attack (2011) and now the Covid crisis. Added to that there were also delays due to shortage of funds and the intricate patterns required to be made by sculptors and fabricators. Such commitment and love is not easy for an architect who created designs that were not only avant-garde in his time but remain so even today.



Sketches, blue prints and master plans by Gaudi reprinted in original size

A publishing house has recently released a three-set book on the Catalan architect titled Gaudi – Up Close. A limited edition, hand sewn production for collectors. It took around 10 years of gathering all available sketches, photographs, blue-prints and notings from government offices, private collectors and museums in Spain. The Global Director for Artika, Marc Buil says it was a complicated process. "A lot of Gaudi's archives were burnt down during the Civil War. It was a tedious process to piece together his sketches and photographs from across Spain."



It's an effort that takes you much beyond just the Sagrada, to his other designs and buildings which are equally fascinating. The books come encased in a specially designed box with a cover made up of a marble dust and resin replica of his most-recognised sculptured chimney. The original chimney is at Casa Mila – a residential apartment complex designed by Gaudí.

It's a curated experience of entering the world of a legend who though trained as an architect was at heart a mould-breaking artist. It is almost as if you're sitting in Gaudí's studio and looking at the peculiar way ideas came to him and how he put them to paper. In course of this journey through the pages, you realise that Gaudí was aiming at creating a new language for space. Though outwardly he was working on giving the old Christian faith a whole new iconography, in the depths of his mind he was also creating a new design sensibility that sought not to control nature but collaborate with it. It was a visual chaos which only Gaudí managed to balance and make acceptable. He created a brand new design language where pillars were leaning and walls were curved. Yet they have stood the test of time, both in terms of structural integrity and novelty.

The sketches and blue prints shared in the book have been printed as they were found—giving a feel of the original colour, texture and size. As if you are holding the same sheet on which Gaudí drew and painted. Be it the Jetty project from his student days or the Casa Vicens from his professional practice. Gaudí said, "The logic of my ideas is indisputable. The only thing that makes me doubt is the fact that they have not been applied before." Several such personal quotes of the architect mentioned in the book bring us closer to his personality.

He had already been recognized as an emerging genius in the final year of his architecture school. In 1878, when he graduated from the Barcelona School of Architecture, the Dean said, "I am not sure to whom I present a diploma today, to a madman or to a genius."

Gaudí was one of the few architects who were not daunted by a plethora of mediums. Be it iron, ceramics or stone – they all bent and shaped like clay in his hands. There are various images of his structures in this photo-book that highlight this aspect of his designs. The unmissable use of 'trencadis' (broken pottery sherds), at Park Güell makes it a burst of colour and patterns right out of a fairy tale castle.

To mark the centenary of his death anniversary, it was announced that the Sagrada Família will be completed in 2026. But alas, the pandemic has delayed the deadline once again. In the meantime, youngsters today continue to marvel and discover his designs, newer teams work at the basilica to reinterpret his instructions.

The book set works on the same philosophy of digging into the treasure that he left behind and create a bridge for today's young readers. It's a bridge between artwork and book. And a journey of discovery of Gaudí and his never-seen-before sketches, moments, incidents and photographs.