

# Antoni Gaudí

Antoni Gaudí was a Barcelona-based Spanish architect whose free-flowing works were greatly influenced by nature.



The son of a coppersmith, Antoni Gaudí was born on June 25, 1852, and took to architecture at a young age. He attended school in Barcelona, the city that would become home to most of his great works. Gaudí was part of the Catalan Modernista movement, eventually transcending it with his nature-based organic style. Gaudí died on June 10, 1926, in Barcelona, Spain.

## Early Years

Architect Antoni Gaudí was born in Catalonia on the Mediterranean coast of Spain on June 25, 1852. He showed an early interest in architecture, and went to study in Barcelona—Spain's most modern city at the time—circa 1870. After his studies were interrupted by military service, Gaudí graduated

from the Provincial School of Architecture in 1878.

## Development as a Professional Architect

Upon graduation, Gaudí initially worked in the artistic vein of his Victorian predecessors, but he soon developed his own style, composing his works with juxtapositions of geometric masses and animating the surfaces with patterned brick or stone, bright ceramic tiles and floral or reptilian metalwork. The salamander in Park Güell, for instance, is representative of Gaudí's work.

During his early period, at the Paris World's Fair of 1878, Gaudí displayed a showcase he had produced, which impressed one patron enough to lead to Gaudí's working on the Güell Estate and Güell Palace, among others. In 1883, Gaudí was charged with the construction of a Barcelona cathedral called *Basilica i Temple Expiatori de la Sagrada Família* (Basilica and Expiatory Church of the Holy Family). The plans had been drawn up earlier, and construction had already begun, but Gaudí completely changed the design, stamping it with his own distinctive style.

Gaudí also soon experimented with various permutations of historic styles: the Episcopal Palace (1887–'93) and the Casa de los Botines (1892–'94), both Gothic, and the Casa Calvet (1898–

1904), which was done in the Baroque style. Some of these commissions were the result of the 1888 World's Fair, at which Gaudí once again staged an impressive showcase.

## **The Mature Artist**

After 1902, Antoni Gaudí's designs began to defy conventional stylistic classification, and he created a type of structure known as equilibrated—that is, it could stand on its own without internal bracing, external buttressing, etc. The primary functional elements of this system were columns that tilted to employ diagonal thrusts and lightweight tile vaults. Notably, Gaudí used his equilibrated system to construct two Barcelona apartment buildings: the Casa Batlló (1904–06) and the Casa Milà (1905–10), whose floors were structured like clusters of tile lily pads. Both projects are considered to be characteristic of Gaudí's style.

## **Final Work and Death**

Increasingly pious, after 1910, Gaudí abandoned nearly all other work to focus on the Sagrada Família, which he had begun in 1883, cloistering himself onsite and living in its workshop. While employing Gaudí's equilibrated methods, the church would borrow from the cathedral-Gothic and Art Nouveau styles but present them in a form beyond recognition.

Gaudí died while still working on the Sagrada Família on June 10, 1926, in Barcelona, Spain. He died after getting hit by a trolley car in Barcelona, only a few weeks shy of his 75th birthday. While the structure remained unfinished at his death in 1926—only one transept with one of four towers was built—the extraordinary structure has a final completion target date of 2026, to mark the 100th anniversary of his passing.

# The Crypt in Güell's Colony

1909

This church is part of an ambitious industrial complex, in the town of Santa Coloma de Cervello (Barcelona). There was a large textile (fabric) factory outside of the city. The owner (Güell) of the factory wanted to build workers' houses beside the factory. The factory would essentially be the center of a small village of the factory workers. As a distinctive feature of this colony, Güell wanted to give it cultural and sports facilities and, although initially not regarding building a church, a small existing chapel was used. When this chapel became too small for the growing population of the colony, **Güell decided to instruct Gaudí to build a new church** that could accommodate all the inhabitants. However, little did Güell imagine that Gaudí would make a proposal as sober, stern and radical. The architecture was based on the task of making Güell a place of worship, that harmonized with the unconventional architecture of the workers homes in Güell's Colony, and with the nearby forest and the slope of the hill where it would be projected.

Although it is commonly called "Crypt Güell" actually there is none of the church that goes underground, since all the windows are facing the street. It is therefore the lower nave of the church, which remained unfinished, as reflected in the side porch stairs, that although currently do not lead anywhere, if the project had

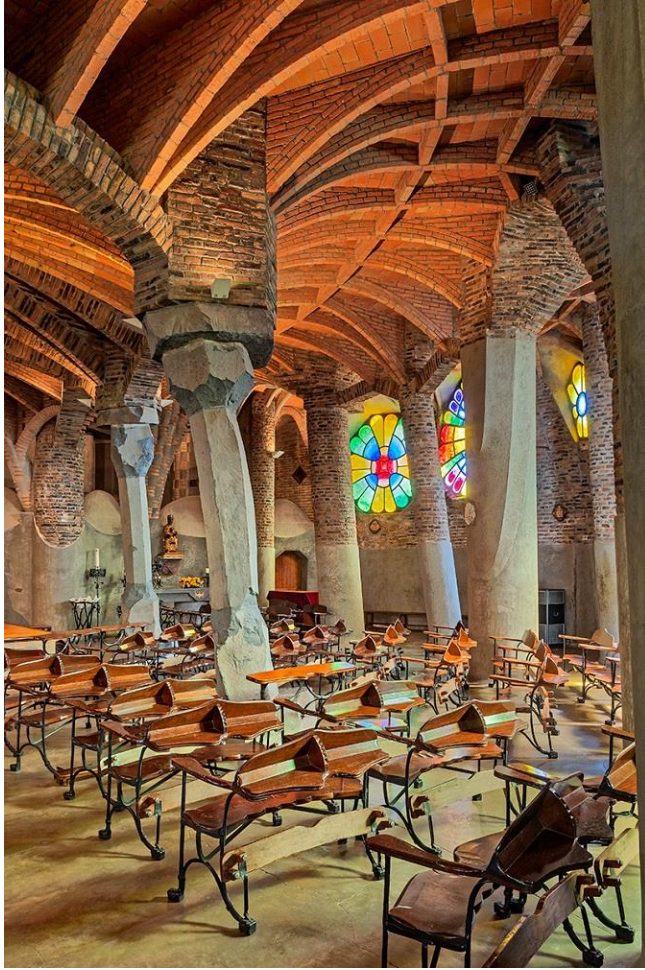


been completed, they would allow access to the upper part of the church. In 1909, ten years after the project began and the first stone of the church was put in place, they continued to build despite constant interruptions. Until various economic problems stalked Mr. Güell and the construction of the Güell's Crypt was paralyzed. In 1915, when the tempo was consecrated, they had only built the "crypt" or lower part of the church and the porch.

Unfortunately we cannot get an idea of how the church would be if it had been completed, because in the sketches of his work Gaudí had only presented a general idea and he frequently changed and matured his ideas during construction.

The lower church, the starry polygonal floor, features a large central dome and it is supported by four hewn basalt columns. The ambulatory, where the altar is located, has the Catalan vaults on columns of brick and stone, from a quarry owned by Güell in the region near Garraf. A very rustic and monochrome interior that is only interrupted by the colours of the large windows that are in the shape of flower petals or butterfly wings. This is the evocative and colourful stained glass work of Josep M. Jujol and it allows light to enter, very subdued into the dark interior. The inside of Güell's Crypt seems more like a natural grotto than a construction of the fruit of human hands. This effect is achieved by having dark colours on the floor and walls that evoke the darkness of the woods, either by fallen leaves or by the shadow cast by the trees. Walls are interrupted by small polychromatic clearings of light, that would be represented by the windows. In the church on the top floor, the idea was that it was to be painted blue, gold and white, symbolizing the sun and sky above the trees. To set it all off nicely, the towers would be topped with white doves, alluding to the name of the town (Coloma = dove in Catalan). With this complete symbology, Gaudí shows the attendees **the way of salvation from the**





**darkness**, to the golden, white and blue glory of the upper part of the church.

Apart from the natural look that Gaudí reflected in Güell's Crypt, respect is also perceived by nature from the entrance porch, with stairs to the upper floor diverted to respect the presence of pine that, sources say Gaudí said "a ladder is made in a short time, but a pine take a long time to grow." Merging this work with its wooded setting is complete, harmonious presence, complete with porch columns at the entrance that visually seem like an extension of the nearby pine forest, not only for the texture but also because each column is different one from another just like trees are in nature. Gaudí did not forget the incorporation of Christian elements in the porch by the *trencadís* technique, some fish, the alpha and omega, the crosses and the monograms of Christ in Greek (XP) were ordered to be included.

One of the most characteristic features of this construction is undoubtedly its structure. A way that comes from a study model that retains, called "stereotactic model or polifunicular model" by which Gaudí calculated the structure of the future church. A model of the church at 1:10 that grew to more than 4.5 meters high and hung by string from the ceiling by two points and the suspending weights were bags of pellets. In this way he could draw an inverted bow in the air and Gaudí spent

time photographing and he then put his drawings of the future arches onto paper, forming the profile of the church. Again the modernist genius, whose rule was "with two rulers and a ball of string all the architecture is generated", demonstrated in Güell's colony's own physical knowledge of gravity and pressure, along with his intuition and experience, helped to create a unique structure which was formed as an "experiment" of architectural solutions that were then also incorporated into the [Sagrada Familia](#).

Güell's Crypt was declared of high Cultural-Historical Interest in 1990 and incorporated in 2005 as a [World Heritage by UNESCO](#), highlighting without a shadow of a doubt the constructive and poetic talent that Gaudí made clear in this work, becoming an example of original architecture, expressive and risky that defined much of its subsequent history.

Güell's Colony, went into decline when the crisis began in the textile industry, bringing a halt to its activity in 1973. Gradually the various land and equipment of Güell's Colony were sold to public institutions.

Images: courtesy David Cardelús.

# Casa Batlló

1904



In the middle of **Passeig de Gràcia**, the avenue in which all the most prestigious bourgeois families were settling, **Josep Batlló** acquired in 1903 a sombre building which **Gaudí**, in the prime of his professional life, would transform into one of his most original works.

It is a house full to the brim with joy and energy, in which undulating shapes and shades of blue predominate. Clearly inspired by nature and the Mediterranean Sea, it is a perfect expression of the creative

freedom enjoyed by **Gaudí**.

**Gaudí** carried out a total refurbishment. He added two new storeys; he designed a new undulating skin for the facade, in spectacular polychrome composed of a mosaic of fragments of glass and ceramic discs, and culminating in an immense dragon's back; and he unified the building wells, bathing the whole house in light and providing ventilation.

The main floor was home to the **Batlló** family. They occupied the whole floor, which contains the large lounge, with views over **Passeig de Gràcia**, and which is characterised by a long gallery with leaded windows and by the fine woodwork in its interior.

Another area which was added as part of the restoration and which stands out for its unusualness is the loft, which is a perfect combination of beauty and functionality, inspired by Mediterranean construction, and created using a series of catenary arches which support the vaults of the ceiling.



Although **Gaudí** did not write anything specific in this respect, the spectacular facade has given rise to many interpretations. For some people, it reminds them of an oil painting, or of Monet's *Water Lilies*; for others it represents a carnival, in which the mosaic tiling is confetti, the wrought-iron balconies are masks, and the pinnacle of the facade is a Harlequin's hat.

For many, the outside of Casa Batlló represents the legend of **Sant Jordi** (Saint George), the patron saint of Catalonia, and they interpret the tower with its four arms as the hilt of his sword cleaving the dragon's back, the balconies as the skulls of the

dragon's victims, and the stone columns as their bones.

**Casa Batlló** was declared a UNESCO world Heritage Site in 2005.



# Sagrada Família

1882

The Templo Expiatorio de la **Sagrada Família** (the Expiatory Church of the Holy Family), construction on which was begun in 1882, is today one of the identifying icons of **Barcelona**, and is known all over the world. The project is expected to be completed in 2026, to mark the 100th anniversary of **Gaudí's** death.

The project was initially entrusted to another architect, Francesc de Paula Villar. Gaudí inherited it towards the



end of 1883. His new plan was much more ambitious, involving the construction of a church with 5 naves, a transept, an apse, an exterior ambulatory, 3 facades and 18 towers.

This is the most complex and unusual of all of the projects that **Gaudí** undertook throughout his professional career, and he dedicated 43 years of his life to it.

Wishing to create the perfect church, he presented the life of Jesus and the history of

faith. The towers symbolise Jesus Christ, the Virgin Mary, the twelve disciples and the four evangelists. The facades portray the three key moments in the life of Jesus: the Birth, Passion and Resurrection of Christ.



As for the structure of the church, it is remarkable for its height and its lightness. It is revolutionary in terms of the building resources used, which characterise **Gaudí's** entire life's work: the catenary arch, sloping columns and hyperboloid vaults.

**Gaudí** passed away in 1923 without having been able to complete the construction, but various architects have planned and keep working to finish it following the documents left by the genius.

On 7<sup>th</sup> November 2010, Pope Benedict

XVI visited **Sagrada Família**, conceded his blessing and consecrated it as a Basilica.