

Architecture in São Paulo never adhered to the 'Brazilian Style', the appropriation of European Modernism of Lucio Costa and Oscar Niemeyer in Rio de Janeiro so strongly identified with Getúlio Vargas and the Estado Novo in the 1930s, and with Juscelino Kubitschek and the 'Brazilian miracle' in the 1950s. If it did not share in the glory of its international success in the 1940s and 1950s, neither did it share in its total collapse in the 1960s. On the contrary, the insurrection of Team X in Europe - Aldo van Eyck, Giancarlo de Carlo, Alison & Peter Smithson, Jakob Bakema - and the demise of the International Style could easily have included the main practitioners in São Paulo - Lina Bo Bardi (1914-92), architect of the Museu de Arte de São Paulo [Museum of Art of São Paulo] (1957-68) and SESC-Pompéia [Pompéia Cultural Centre] (1977) and João Vilanova Artigas (1915-1985), architect and Professor of the Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo da Universidade de São Paulo [Faculty of Architecture and Urbanism of the University of São Paulo] (1961). Their emphasis on 'place' not 'space' led to a reconciliation with the urban fabric to which the International Style was ideologically and aesthetically opposed.



Anhangabaú looking towards the bairro de Santa Ifigênia, São Paulo  
Photograph © Michael Frantzis 2003

# REVISITING BRAZIL

## Architecture in São Paulo:

### Photographs by Michael Frantzis

With the growth and development of São Paulo in the early 20th century the historic centre became an exclusively business district like the City of London and the *bairro de Santa Ifigênia* became a mixed-use district like the West End. This was fuelled, as in Britain and the United States, by increased car ownership, and Anhangabaú gradually became a car park during the 1920s and 1930s. The middle classes commuted from what was then an utopian suburb far from the centre: the Jardims [Gardens]. The Jardims, originally laid out by the English Garden City architects Barry Parker & Raymond Unwin, are now, much altered and expanded, the prime residential districts of the centre of São Paulo. This low-rise development serves as a model for an enormous swathe of central São Paulo which co-exists equally with high-rise blocks of apartments.

While the work of the outstanding architects of the post-war period - Bardi in particular - has become quite well known outside Brazil, the work of the later generations is so little known that it is a common assumption that there is currently a total vacuum in architectural production in Brazil. It is interesting to trace the work of one architect, Joaquim Guedes (b. 1932), from the 1970s, with his preoccupation with Team X and the later work of Le Corbusier and Alvar Aalto, to his most recent work rooted in the abstractions of site and the reticence of form strongly identified with 'critical regionalism' but, more rewardingly, with the specifics of place and light.

These photographs by Michael Frantzis ask us to look at recent work in Brazil not only as serious architectural objects but as ones rooted in their urban context. The intensity of his vision and the technical perfection of their execution begs us to consider these works as fully the equal of any in Europe.

São Paulo grew through industry and European and Japanese immigration, in contrast to the official and self-consciously Brazilian Rio de Janeiro. As in North America, Modernity was not a political or cultural discourse but the result of industrialisation and expansion. Railways and suburbs figure prominently in the development of the city. The core of the early-20th-century city is the *bairro de Santa Ifigênia*, north of Anhangabaú, originally a river valley and subsequently a public park, which separates it from the historic centre to the south. It is one of the most complex and heterogeneous areas in the city, a mixture of historical buildings, offices, middle class apartments and *cortiços* [urban slums] at phenomenal densities. It contains many significant works of architecture such as the Teatro Municipal [Municipal Theatre] (1911), the Estação da Luz [Luz Railway Station] (1901), the Estação Julio Prestes [Julio Prestes Railway Station] (1926-38) and the Pinacoteca do Estado [Art Gallery of the State of São Paulo] (1905) - to name only the most prominent.

Since the beginning of the 20th century the population of São Paulo has grown from 200,000 to 16,000,000. It has become an orthodoxy in planning studies that the resulting problems are intractable and insoluble. The separate physical spaces of the upper and lower classes, in particular, is felt to reflect their different political spaces. Such attitudes have been thrown into doubt by the success of architecture in providing a conduit for urban regeneration, from the Centre Pompidou in Paris in 1978 to the Guggenheim Museum in Bilbao in 2001. While Brazil was late in confronting the issues raised by the massive increase in urban population, mainly due to the military dictatorship from 1964 to 1984, there has been, since the return to democracy, an increasing drive to catch up.



The centro adjacent to Anhangabaú, São Paulo  
Photograph © Michael Frantzis 2003

The critical test of urban regeneration is, of course, is that the amenities and infrastructure be upgraded for the use of all the inhabitants without suffocating the vitality and variety of urban life, an unfortunate and often actually desired result of much urban regeneration in Europe and North America. The picturesque *camelôs* [street vendors] are rightly regarded by *paulistas* as symptoms of urban decay and their number is declining. Fortunately the *bairro de Santa Ifigênia* continues to have a broad mix of social classes and to be full of excellent and popular restaurants and bars in a city renowned anyway for its excellent food and nightlife. The recovery of buildings in the *bairro de Santa Ifigênia* is more than just a re-establishment of architecture: it is a recovery of historical and political space. The excellence of the architecture in some way insulates the inhabitants from the full force of the populist developments which would otherwise constitute almost the entire built fabric of the city.



São Paulo  
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