The front of the Z. Cordova Mansion (Valenzuela) in Vigan.
Chapter VI

Zaragoza Mansion – First Restoration Project in Vigan

The first restoration project in Vigan transpired by accident. In 1997, while on his Christmas vacation in Vigan, architect Ramón Ma. Zaragoza inquired of a tricycle driver where there might be an ancestral house for sale, and the fellow brought him to a set of beautiful ruins in the center of town. By the time he moved into the zaguan, the house, with its impressive twenty-foot high ceilings and its stately rooms, had taken possession of him. The occupant/caretakers of the house were friendly but refused to provide him with so much as the names of its owners. Eventually succeeding in extracting that piece of information from a neighbor, the search began for the Encarnacion family, heirs to the estate. The owners proved to be very kind and accommodating, even considering it to be the house’s “manifest destiny” to revert back to an Apo, or person of marked Spanish ancestry, such as Architect Zaragoza, was. So on February 24, 1998, the ownership of the house passed on to architect Zaragoza who, on the day it was blessed, dedicated it to Our Lady of Peace and Good Voyage, La Virgen de la Paz, patroness of the galleons, under whose protection countless conquistadores, personages, merchants, and soldiers had made it safely to this country. In March, 1998, the restoration work, the first of its kind to be undertaken in Vigan and the Ilocos Region, began.

The exterior façade of Villa Paz is a massive, two-story, plastered brick structure, painted white, with a pair of pilasters crowned with beautiful, wide moldings, and decorated with metal eaves pierced in a floral pattern. Its ground floor brick walls, averaging three feet in thickness, were designed to serve as ramparts; they gradually taper as they run up to the second floor. The columns of the structure provide support to the arches found throughout the house, including some very high ones in the loggia directly behind a pair of 15-foot high doors, and even higher ones (three 20-foot high ones) in the stable, an extremely rare feature in Vigan architecture.

Made to conform to an “L” shaped floor plan, the house boasts of a central patio and a formal dining room. The absence of a service tower and its unusually small doors on the second floor, make it typical of a
1790 house. The second floor azotea, kitchen, and bathroom flooring had completely collapsed and required complete reconstruction. The 12-inch wide narra floorboards on the second floor were termite eaten and half of the boards had to be replaced. The 14-inch molave ceiling boards were eighty percent rotten and had to be replaced. The trompe l'oeil paintings on the ballroom ceiling were completely restored to their original condition. Sixty percent of the capiz and shutter windows remained intact; however, the rest of the windows in the house were replaced with windows taken from the ancestral home of the Zaragozas in Quiapo, Manila. Ninety percent of the doors were in excellent condition, needing only minor repairs and re-varnishing. An interesting feature of these doors is that, built into their panels, which are carved in reed design, is a smaller door opening, measuring six feet high by four feet wide. Steel and glass storm windows were installed at the rear of the house, also known as the typhoon side of the house, for conservation and preventative maintenance. In 1910, the original terracotta roof tiles were replaced with galvanized iron sheets made in England. At the time of the restoration work, only thirty percent of this roofing remained. New, thickly-gauged, typhoon-resistant metal roofing sheets (pre-colored and anti-rust) were installed.

In floor area, the mansion is approximately 1,000 square meters in size, averaging 500 square meters per floor on a 642 square meter lot. Located at a corner, it boasts of two zaguanos or carriage passageways. On the ground floor as well are two enormous bodegas or storage rooms. The exterior bodega bears traces of Chinese writing on the walls and columns, while the interior bodega held bamboo racks along the walls for hanging tobacco leaves. Many musket balls were found inside this bodega, embedded in the walls and window panels. These bodegas were used to store tobacco, rice, corn and other produce.

The main stairway landing leads to the entresuelo, that at one time housed an office and living quarters. A pair of fifteen foot high doors opens to the loggia or waiting area. It overlooks the rear kitchen garden and orchard. That garden has been named El Jardín de la Señora Doña Pilar de Zaragoza, to honor the owner's mother. The back garden is filled with fruit trees, rare herbs, ornamental plants and flowers typical of the region. The rare Biga (alocasia indica), from India, as well as an edible variety of the gabi plant, grow abundantly in the garden,
making it something of a tourist attraction. Embedded in the garden walls are 10th century excavated sherds; these sherds were typical of the merchandise that Vigan traded with its Asian neighbors in pre-Hispanic times.

The central patio, a rare feature in a Vigan home, is called *El Patio de los Angeles*. Facing the family chapel, a seven foot high, nineteenth century stone angel dominates the patio. The stone angel bears a dedication to His Excellency Jose Ma. Zaragoza, Ambassador of the Sovereign Military Order of Malta to the Philippines. The simple family chapel, *Capilla de la Virgen del Pilar*, is often host to beautifully romantic weddings and baptisms, while receptions are held in the front garden.

The stable area beside the patio has been converted into the servants’ dining room, kitchen and bathroom. The original cooking vat and chimney, once used for soap making in the Spanish Period, has been fully restored, complete with an old wooden Spanish bucket and German milk can. The front garden has a beautiful tiled fountain, filled with flowering plants. The mango and guava trees provide the perfect shade for an afternoon *merienda* or snack. Ancestral homes are full of surprises. The second floor of the house is furnished with furniture designed by Architect Zaragoza in the old, Spanish colonial country style, each piece blending in perfectly with the height and proportions of each of the individual rooms. The ante-sala is decorated in a minimalist style, with long, balustered *credenzas*, *bauls* or chests, and antique jars filled with foliage or flowers from the garden. A dramatic accent is provided by pair of high processional chairs, backlit by fifteen foot high capiz windows.

The ballroom is the largest room in the house and is approximately 150 square meters in size. The walls are decorated with modern 8-foot high murals painted by Architect Zaragoza and with students at the University of Northern Philippines depicting sunrise and sunset at Mundoro Beach. A collection of ancestral paintings and photographs are displayed on tables set up on the otherwise empty dance floor. The formal dining room can comfortably seat thirty persons. It is decorated with Oriental trading wares of blue and white. The azotea and kitchen are decorated in typical Ilocano style with bamboo and *sawali*. In the pantry are stored ethnic kitchen implements, baskets, food trays, terracotta *palayoks* and wooden bateas or wash basins. The
outdoor azotea is also used for cooking and grilling and includes an outdoor dining and laundry yard. The sole bathroom on the second floor, approximately forty-two square meters in size, is reputed to be the largest and cleanest bathroom in Vigan. It boasts a lounging window ledge that serves as an excellent spot for a massage. The four bedrooms, of varying sizes, are blessed with excellent cross ventilation, courtesy of eight foot high capiz windows. The master bedroom, with its twenty foot high ceiling, is decorated with a modern four-poster canopy bed, made from old wooden posts taken from a farm house.

The restoration-conservation program of Villa Paz was completed in phases over a span of two years (1998-2000). In 2001, it received a nomination for the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) Asia-Pacific Heritage Award for Culture and Heritage Conservation. In December, 1999, Vigan was declared a World Heritage Site by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The restoration of Villa Paz greatly contributed to the accrual to the city of this great honor.
Detail of the door and cornice molding of the Zaragoza Mansion
The façade of the Zaragoza Mansion, showing formal, balanced architecture.
▲ The front yard before its restoration.

▼ The front yard following its restoration.
The front yard with its restored fountain.
View of the front yard, as seen from the stables.
A silver desk set used during the Spanish Period.
The main portal of the Zaragoza Mansion, decorated for Holy Week.
Forty foot high scaffolding, erected for the restoration of the exterior mouldings and painting work.

Bamboo scaffolding for the re-painting of the exterior of the Mansion.
▲ The entrance to the Mansion along V. de los Reyes Street.

▼ The entrance to the Mansion along General Luna Street.
The main zaguan entrance, prior to its restoration.

The zaguan or carriage passageway, following its restoration.
The restored *zuguan*, as seen from the loggia.
The restored main stairway.
The stairway, as seen from the zaguan.
A mason installing the original San Esteban stone flooring in the zaguan. Each stone was numbered and documented before removal.

The restoration of the original fifteen foot high doors of the zaguan.
Clearing the debris from the main patio.

The debris-strewn main patio, prior to restoration.
Holy week at Villa Paz with the Donato Family *carroza* of the Pieta being venerated in front of the Zaragoza Mansion on Palm Sunday.
The restored patio and chapel.
The debris of La Capilla de Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Zaragoza, prior to restoration.

La Capilla de Nuestra Señora del Pilar after restoration.
The main altar of La capilla de Nuestra Señora del Pilar de Zaragoza.
- The statue of a broken angel, in the process of restoration.

- The waiting room at the loggia.
The ruins of the second floor kitchen.

The ruins of the ground floor chapel and the second floor kitchen.
The restored kitchen on the second floor.
An Ilocano kitchen with bamboo and sawali ceiling.