

2023 FRIEND REUNIONS IN PORTO, BARCELONA, BASEL AND LUND

My friends are on the move, traveling again, and that means they are coming my way and I have an excuse for small excursions to have reunions. Porto in April, Barcelona in May, Basel/Weil am Rhein in June and Lund, Sweden in August. Time out for a trip to Africa in July but that will be another story.

My Porto visit was a two-for, one a Chicago/Paris friend who now lives outside Lisbon took the train up for a day visit and the other a Peace Corps friend now living in Hawaii who was visiting family in Europe.

Those of you who know Porto know that it is very steep. Our 9-room boutique hotel (Maison



Cabral, a lovely restoration of a 19thC merchant's home) was in upper town, very convenient to the tram from the airport. My Chicago friend was staying in Ribeiro on the river and we

were meeting for breakfast. All downhill, right? Wrong. After passing the beautiful Azulejos-tiled Carmelite churches and going through the University square I got us hopelessly lost.

Somehow, we ended up in the very steep Parque des Virtudes that we could see went almost all the way down to the river. We asked a local couple if it was open all the way down and they said yes. But about two thirds of the way down there was a locked gate. So, up we went, my lungs protesting, and by now very late for the hotel breakfast buffet.





Once we reached the street, we were unable to get any taxis to stop for us but, fortunately, my friend had an Uber account, a driver quickly arrived, and we made the last few minutes of the breakfast. The Uber driver nicely reminded us not to forget our umbrellas as we got out – it had been and was raining.

After our breakfast visit, where I discovered I was without my camera, one friend took her train back to Lisbon and we decided to go to the Serralves Museum of Contemporary Art which I had not visited on my 2018 trip. My friend is a big fan of Joan Miro, eighty-five of whose works are located in the pink Art Deco Villa

in the sculpture garden.



There were also excellent temporary exhibits of Cindy Sherman, Paula Rego, Carla Filipe and Agustina Bessa-Luís. The rain had let up enough for us to enjoy some of the sculptures including this one by Claes Oldenberg.



It turns out that the Uber app has a function you can notify that you have left something behind during your ride. And, lo and behold, we received a response a couple hours later that the driver had indeed found my camera and brought it to where we were having dinner. I planned to pay him for the ride to bring the camera across town and he declined! I paid him anyway. We had such a good dinner experience at 1858 bb gourmet restaurant that we dined there again the next evening.

The next day, fortunately, was beautiful as we had reserved a 10-hour small group trip to the Douro Valley. The Douro River runs 350 miles through the northern Portuguese heartland, and the 17 miles between Régua and Pinhao is the heart of Port wine production. In fact, this was the first “demarcated” region in Europe when it was created in 1756. The valley has many microclimates which vintners have exploited to make much more wide-ranging aromas and flavors of Port than I ever imagined. Traditionally the vines are harvested by hand due to the steep terraces and the wine with brandy additives were stored in



casks on site through one “cold” winter before being floated downriver (8 casks per Rabelo boat) to age in the warehouses in Gaia. See the boats with Pont Dom Luis I beyond.

Since the building of dams in the 1970s the wine is stored in vats before traveling by tanker trucks. These days the vintners are also making good table wines from their grapes although the vinho verde which I enjoy is made on the milder coastal side of the Serra do Marão 5000’ high mountain range. Further upriver vineyards run all the way to Spain.



It was a great tour, 8 passengers, one family group, my friend and I and one other woman. En route we stopped in Amarante to see the old Roman bridge and the church and convent of Sao Gonçales followed by a wine tasting at Quinto do Tedo, and then lunch in Pinhao. The tiled murals on Pinhao’s train station illustrate the region’s story.



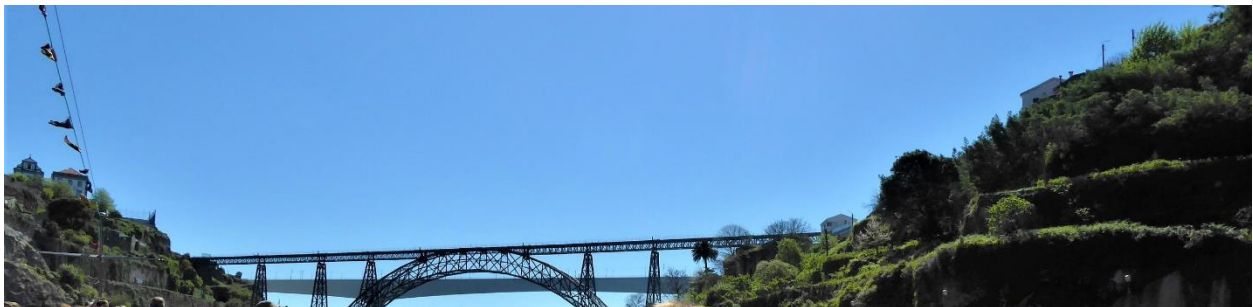


During an hour-long cruise on the river, we could appreciate “close up” the terrain and we had a dramatic view back down the valley from our final tasting at Obeiro before returning to Porto.



Another tour that I like in Porto is the 6 Bridges and my friend who originally trained as a civil engineer liked it too! In the 10 km from the river’s exit into the Atlantic, to just upriver from Porto, are six very interesting bridges. The oldest,

Ponte Dona Maria by Théophile Seyrig, a student of Gustav Eiffel, was built in 1877 for trains. It was only replaced in 1991 by Pont de São João of reinforced concrete design by Edgar Cardovo, both shown here.



His second, and revered, Pont Dom Luis I, 1886, stretches Eiffel-tower-like 500’ across the river. At the time it was the longest span of any metallic arch bridge in the world. Its two levels serve trains and (now) only pedestrians on the lower level. The bridge connects the funicular running along the remains of the Porto city wall across to upper and lower Gaia. The furthest downriver,

Pont Arrábida had the widest concrete arch span in the world when it was built (1963) and carries six lanes of traffic plus sidewalks.



The furthest upstream, Pont do Freixo (1995) carries 8 lanes of through traffic around Porto.



The most recent, 2003, Pont de Infante is also reinforced concrete with one of the shallowest arches in the world.



Since I am a fan of urban art, I also took photos of some impressive works. Ribeira Negra by Júlio Resende, is a tile reproduction of his 30m x 6m painting at the Rebeira tunnel entrance. Next is the piece at the top of our fateful park, and typical alley scenes





Steak 'n Shake was commissioned by the restaurant chain and is composed of

8000 hand-painted tiles by Joana Vasconcelos, 2016.

There is a great deal more to Porto than what we tasted in this couple of days, some of which can be sampled in my 2018 trip write-up "Porto to Lisbon A Twelve Day Ramble Through Portugal".



My second visit, this time four days, was to Barcelona where I had never been. A friend from Peace Corps years was spending a couple of days together with her husband after their Mediterranean cruise and we agreed to meet for dinner at Restaurant 7 Portes where they had eaten more than 50 years ago when first working in Barcelona.

Barcelona lodging is quite expensive and I was happy to find a very clean and quiet single room/shared bath in a hostel for €150 per night near the waterfront at Metro Drassanes. The location was great. Other than meeting up with my friend, the objective was to gorge on Gaudi and other Modernists which I did. I had reserved ahead for Sagrada Familia and Casa Batillo tours which is necessary as they sell out. I arrived early afternoon Friday and after checking in took both Barcelona City Tours, the East Route primarily in the historic city and the West Route covering sites further afield including MontJuic and the Football Club of Barcelona. After completing the second tour I found outstanding tapas at Gastropub Obama very near the central Placa de Catalunya. Two of my favorite buildings from the bus tours were the former bull rings, Las Arenas dating from 1900 now a shopping center and Plaza de Toros Monumental.



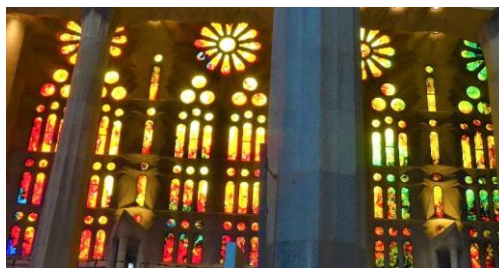
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Jean Nouvel's Torre Glories, meant to represent a geyser sprouting out of the surrounding city, is home to the city's water provider. Its external panels store energy during the day permitting its 4500 LED colored panels to shine nightly for just 6€ per hour.



First thing Saturday morning was my Sagrada Familia tour which was too bad because it overlapped with the only time an English (or French)-language Picasso walking tour was scheduled. I had bought a two-day city tour pass, including the catamaran harbor tour so it was helpful for visiting some of my planned sites. However, the Barcelona metro was fantastic. It was always accessible, with either an escalator or an elevator. I was quite spoiled by the end of the four days. There are also excellent buses which I used for a couple of routes.

What can one say about Sagrada Familia? It is awe inspiring and my photos certainly don't capture the feeling. I made notes of a few of the symbolism I remembered from my tour. The stained-glass windows on the Nativity façade which faces east are in blues and greens and symbolize birth, nature and water. There are Murano glass symbols of each of the four



evangelists at the top of columns in the interior and a statue of each of their symbols atop their exterior tower (two are completed). The pink porphyry stone, used since Roman times for its durability, on the floor and the four main columns comes from Iran. The stained-glass windows on the west side are yellow, orange, red symbolizing sunset and the end of life.

The doors which will be the main entrance on the Glory façade (not yet completed) are the Lord's Prayer in Catalan with key phrases in 70 other languages. The statues on the tops of the



towers are 22.2 meters tall but don't look very big! The plaster eagle model at 2 meters is for the statue on the tower of the Evangelist John. The pillars are meant to feel like being in a forest with the filtered light.

In 2010 when Pope Benedict XVI consecrated the Temple (as it is called) the second story choir loft held



1000 voices! The sanctuary holds 13,000 and is never closed for private ceremonies such as weddings, baptisms and funerals.



This photo shows the overall design. When Gaudi died in 1926 after being hit by a tram, only the crypt and apse were completed.

At the end of 2022 the Mary tower, topped with a star and circled by twelve stars, was completed.

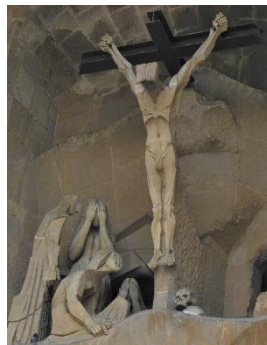


The towers of Luke and Mark have been completed and work is progressing on Matthew and John plus the central Jesus Christ tower. It will top out at 172.5 meters because “Man’s work should never upstage God’s” and Montjuic is 173 meters in elevation.

The sculptures on the two completed facades are very different. The Nativity is full of angels, joy and softness.



By contrast the Passion façade the carvings are very angular.



(a different sculptor) shows anger and

A couple of curiosities are that Star Wars copied from the two military men, but they are copied from the helmet shape on Gaudi’s La Pedrera. The man to the left of the soldiers has Gaudi’s

face taken from the only known photo of him. Even the turtles at the bottom of the current entrance doors have symbolism, one a land turtle and one a sea turtle.

When looking up on the exterior there are lots of examples of Gaudi's familiar decorative touches.



Another fantastic fact is that Gaudi designed and had built and operated a school for the children of the artisans and construction workers. This in an era when most children were already working in Barcelona's factories by the age of 9 or 10.



I was able to take the City Tour bus to my next stop, Hospital Saint Pau. Although I Modernist



was visiting for the Architecture – the name used in Spain for what we call Art Nouveau – I learned that it was very advanced medically for its era. Different buildings were for different medical specialties and all were connected by tunnels underground to move patients and materials. (See photo of the model.) The gardens were meant to help the healing of the patients and there was a special solarium created where patients could meet with their visitors. The exterior is decorated with mosaics telling stories.



Since rain was predicted I decided to head to the harbor and take my catamaran harbor tour. I always love seeing cities from their water side. MSC's WORLD

EUROPA, their version of the new super class that carry more than 7,000 passengers, was in port. The 3,000 plus capacity ships on which I took two MSC cruises had seemed very large but



this ship looks to me like two of the others attached lengthwise. I realized if stood on end it would be twice as tall as the 54 story-

building I lived in in Chicago. There are a handful of high-rise buildings near the waterfront plus nearby Torre Glories.



In the mid 1800's fishermen lived in the narrow streets of Barcelonita. The newer promenade running four km north from the old Customs House, features the Mirador de Colomb, built for the 1888 Barcelona Universal Exposition, the 1918 3-masted Schooner Santa Eulalia, sculptures Cap de Barcelona by Roy Lichtenstein for the 1992 Olympics, and Poella by Chilean sculpture Lautaro Diaz Silva. The area is rich with seafood restaurants, museums and cultural centers.



Sunday morning I toured Gaudi's Casa Batillo. In addition to the colorful stained glass, recycled-tile mosaics, non-linear design and details such as brass name plates for each bedroom created by Gaudi himself, I was impressed with the engineering of the building. Two airshafts provide ventilation with open grills in each door, and windows that are smaller on the upper floors where there is more light and air. The blue mosaics in the shaft have a deeper hue at the higher levels.

Sixteen chimneys on the roof are part of the ventilation system, with those in plain brick coming from the kitchen.



Casa Amatler by Puig i Cadalalch is the next-door neighbor built for a chocolatier. The street is nicknamed Disaccord because of the competition among the architects creating these “homes” for their wealthy clients.

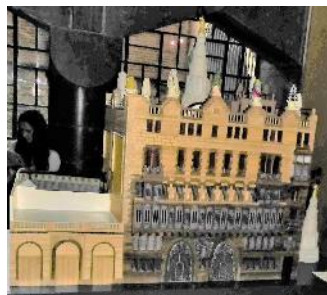
Following the visit, I took a self-guided walking tour in the nearby Eixample neighborhood, filled with lesser-known Modernist buildings. While following the route I happened upon a parade, perhaps related to it being Ascension weekend. At an intersection auto club members were displaying their historic vehicles while dressed in period costume.



For a change of pace, I finished the afternoon with a visit to the Picasso Museum housed in five contiguous 14th C stone mansions. The collection focuses on Picasso’s early creative years in Barcelona prior to 1904 and therefore was almost entirely new to me.

Gaudi’s rooftop playfulness perhaps began in the late 1880’s on the roof at Palau Güell,

an otherwise elegant mansion with handsome woods from around the world. A very musical family, both piano and organ concerts provided entertainment for the wealthy textile industrialist’s family and guests. Covering 30,000 square feet on seven floors from the basement stables to the 14-staff housing it is located in an area of Barcelona at the time considered almost insalubrious. My adjective to describe it is sumptuous without an ounce of gold.

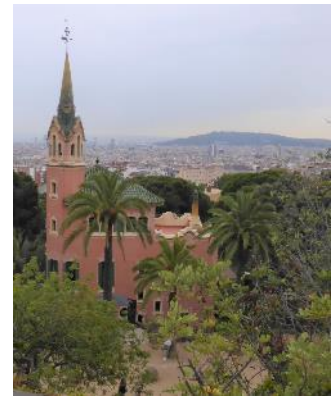


Park Güell (now requiring advance reservation to visit the “developed” part of the park) originated in 1900 when Count Güell bought the forested hillside above Barcelona and commissioned Gaudi to create a miniature city for the wealthy surrounded by landscaped grounds. Steps, a plaza, two gate houses, 3 km of roads and a model house were designed by



Gaudi and built. But the project was a commercial flop, primarily due to its remoteness, and was abandoned in 1914. The city bought the whole property as a public park in 1922. Gaudi lived in the pink house the last 20 years of his life and the dragon fountain is a popular feature. The wall that surrounds

the property resembles a dragon’s tail.



I had time to pay short visits to the Cathedral, the Basilica de Santa Maria del Mar (see the beautiful contemporary pews) and the very handsome 19th C Mercat del Born, now an archeological museum with local remains of Roman and Islamic times, unfortunately closed the day I was there.



No visit would be complete without sharing some of the local street art. Most of the photos were taken on early morning walks when the business’s shutters were down.



Barcelona obviously merits many more visits!

My next reunion was with a former colleague and friend from Peace Corps Thailand. She and her husband were visiting Switzerland and wanted to go to the Vitra Campus, just across the river from Basel. A three-hour TGV train ride from Paris had me in Basel late morning and back home late the same evening.

I was not aware of the company. Vitra – founded by Willi and Erika Fehlbaum, the owner of a shopfitting business – entered the furniture market in 1957 with the licensed production of furniture from the Herman Miller Collection for the European market - primarily designs by Charles and Ray Eames and George Nelson. In 1967 the company introduced the Panton Chair by Verner Panton – the first cantilever chair out of plastic, and subsequently obtained the rights to designs by Charles and Ray Eames and George Nelson for Europe and the Middle East. Today, Vitra's product line consists of designer furniture for use in offices, homes and public areas.

After a major fire destroyed a large part of the Vitra production facilities in Weil am Rhein in 1981, and inspired by their introduction to Frank Gehry in the mid-1980s, Vitra embarked upon a program of erecting buildings by a wide-ranging group of architects, including Frank Gehry (Vitra Design Museum and Factory Building, 1989), Tadao Ando (Conference Pavilion, 1993), Zaha Hadid (Fire Station, 1993), Alvaro Siza (Factory Building, Passage Cover, Car Parking, 1994), Herzog & de Meuron (VitraHaus, 2010), and SANAA (Factory Building, 2011).



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For Gehry and Ando, these were their first constructions in Europe and for Dame Hadid, her first major built work, which only served its original purpose for a few years as the town finally created a fire department and the building is now used as an exhibition space.

The campus also includes gardens of self-regenerating plants, shrubs, grasses, bushes and wildflowers by Dutch designer Piet Oudolf and a 38-meter slide tunnel by Carsten Höller.



My friends had registered us for the architectural tour of the campus which includes visits to the buildings not normally accessible to the public. Most of the furniture components are manufactured elsewhere and final assembly and delivery are accomplished here. With my logistics career back ground I was particularly fascinated by the oval-shaped factory/warehouse, a shape chosen because of its prominent location viewed when approaching the campus.



Vitra's collection of 7000 pieces of furniture and 1,000 lighting objects are displayed in periodic temporary exhibits in the design museum. The exhibit during our visit was entitled "Color Rush" and features color-themed displays of furniture designs.

VitraHaus showcases Vitra's products and architecturally is fascinating as each wing level is oriented towards different views, from the Black Forest to the Rhine.





My final reunion was a quick trip to Lund, Sweden via a 1 ½ hour flight to Copenhagen and 40- minute direct train to Lund. This was the 50th anniversary of the first meeting of friends Lars Hector and Abelardo Gonzalez who have been together ever since. A decade ago, I attended their 40th anniversary celebration in Malmo, where they live.

The party was held at the Grand Hotel and featured a full evening of entertainment, dining, dancing, and of course numerous speeches and toasts from the (120) guests to the honorees.

I was happy to reconnect with many of my Swedish friends whose annual visits to Agadir have coincided with mine over the years. The dress was white tie and tails for the men, gowns for the ladies. I knew I would be the only woman in a short dress! Here I am with friends artist Susanne Strandanger, and Gunilla Bernadotte.

