

Alcázar of Seville



The Alcázar of Seville, officially called Royal Alcázar of Seville (Spanish: Real Alcázar de Sevilla or Reales Alcázares de Sevilla),^[1] is a historic royal palace in Seville, Spain. It was formerly the site of the Islamic-era citadel of the city, begun in the 10th century and then developed into a larger palace complex by the Abbadid dynasty (11th century) and the Almohads (12th to early 13th centuries). After the Castilian conquest of the city in 1248, the site was progressively rebuilt and replaced by new palaces and gardens. Among the most important of these is a richly-decorated Mudéjar-style palace built by Pedro I during the 1360s.^[2]^[3]

The palace is a preeminent example of Mudéjar style in the Iberian Peninsula and also includes sections with Gothic and Renaissance elements. The upper stories of the Alcázar are still occupied by the royal family when they visit Seville and are administered by the Patrimonio Nacional. It was registered in 1987 by UNESCO as a World Heritage Site, along with the adjoining Seville Cathedral and the General Archive of the Indies.[4]

History

In the year 712, Seville was conquered by the Umayyad Caliphate. In the year 913–914, after a revolt against Cordoba's government, the first caliph of Al-Andalus Abd al-Rahman III built a fortified construction in place of a Visigothic Christian basilica.[9] It was a quadrangular, roughly square enclosure about 100 meters long on each side, fortified with walls and rectangular towers, and annexed to the city walls.[10][11] In the 11th century, during the Taifa period, the Abbadid king Al-Mu'tamid expanded the complex southwards and eastwards,[10] with a new southern enclosure measuring approximately 70 by 80 meters.[11] This new palace was called Al Mubarak (Arabic: المبارك).[2] Various additions to the construction such as stables and warehouses were also carried out.[9]

Towards 1150, the Almohad Caliphs began to develop Seville as their capital in Al-Andalus. The Almohad governor extended the fortified complex to the west, nearly doubling its size. At least six new courtyard palaces were constructed in the old enclosures and nine palaces were added in the western extensions.[11] In 1163 the caliph Abu Ya'qub Yusuf

made the Alcazar his main residence in the region.[9][11] He further expanded and embellished the palace complex in 1169, adding six new enclosures to the north, south, and west sides of the existing palaces. The works were carried out by architects Ahmad ibn Baso and 'Ali al-Ghumari.[11] With the exception of the walls, nearly all previous buildings were demolished, and a total of approximately twelve palaces were built.[10] Among the new structures was a very large garden courtyard, now known as the Patio del Crucero, which stood in the old Abbadid enclosure. Between 1171 and 1198 an enormous new congregational mosque was built on the north side of the Alcazar (later transformed into the current Cathedral of Seville). A shipyard was also built nearby in 1184 and a textiles market in 1196.[11]

Christian era

Seville was conquered in 1248 by Ferdinand III of Castile. The former Moorish palace-citadel was taken over by the Castilian monarchs and underwent significant reconstruction and modification, such that most of the Islamic-era structure has since disappeared.[12]

A Gothic-style palace was built on the site in 1258 for Alfonso X (Ferdinand's successor).[3] It stood on the site of the present-day Patio del Crucero, incorporating and preserving parts of the Almohad-era courtyard that was found here, including the Islamic-style garden divided into quadrants by two intersecting paths. Over these paths and around the courtyard, Gothic-style vaults and pointed arches were added, along with a hall divided into several naves. Corners towers containing spiral staircases granted

access to an upper terrace.[13] Of the Gothic palace today, only the upstairs Sala de las Bóvedas and the Baños de María de Padilla, with their Gothic cross-ribbed vaults, have been preserved or partially preserved.[13]

In the mid-14th century, Alfonso XI commissioned the construction of a new throne hall known as the Hall of Justice, which commemorated his victory at the Battle of Río Salado (1340).[2] It is attached to the Patio del Yeso, an Almohad-era courtyard, and also serves as its antechamber. This new addition was made in a Mudéjar style, with stucco decoration and an overall arrangement of elements directly based on contemporary Islamic Andalusí architecture.[2]

The palace

The palace is known for its tile decoration. The two tile types used are majolica and arista tiles. In the arista technique, the green body is stamped and each tile segment has raised ridges. This technique produces tiles with transparent glazes that are not flat. The art of majolica ceramics was developed later in the 15th–16th centuries. The innovation made it possible to "paint" directly on ceramics covered with white opaque glazes. Being a trade center, Seville had access to large scale production of these tiles. They were mainly of geometric design inspired by arabesque ornamentation.[15]

In the 16th century, the Catholic Monarchs commissioned an Italian artist from Pisa, Francisco Niculoso (called Pisano) to make two majolica tile altarpieces for their private chapel in the palace.[16] One still exists in the oratory of the royal apartments, the other one is missing. Later, the artist Cristóbal de Augusta created a tile-work in the Palacio Gótico. It features animals, cherubs and floral designs and gives the palace a bright tapestry look.[17]

Puerta del León

The Puerta del León (Gate of the Lion), located in the outer wall of the complex, is the main access to the enclosure. Between the lintel of this gate and under a machicolation there was a painting of a lion, whose origin is unknown, although it appears in the drawings made by Richard Ford in 1832.[18][19] Until 1876 the medieval painting of the lion with the cross had been preserved, but that year, Joaquín

Domínguez Bécquer being the director of the painting and gilding of the whole and being probably in very bad condition, he repainted it completely.[20][21] In 1892 this painting was replaced by a panel of azulejo designed by Manuel Tortosa y Fernández, with the historical advice of José Gestoso. The azulejo was made in the Mensaque factory[22][23] and also represents a lion,[22] in Gothic style, which appears holding a crucifix with its right claw and with a flag under its left claw. On the chest there is a tefillin reading in Latin Ad utrumque, which means "for one thing and for another", the word 'paratus' would be missing; Ad utrumque paratus,[20] thus meaning "prepared for one thing and for another".