Why is modern Lima built like a fortress

By: Miguel Del Castillo Lozada

Modern Lima is built like a fortress, and it’s not hard to see why. Everyday, the media tells us that Lima is a murder capital, and that “refugees are destroying society, Limeños are bad to the core, and everyone should sleep with one eye open”.

Lima is not like that or at least for most of its history it has not been like that.

During the time Lima was the seat of the Viceroyalty of Peru great homes were built through the historic area of the city. The homes were grandiose and decadent, yet no more than a great heavy door lay between the decadence of the inside and the noise of the city. There was a sense of security and peace for it’s inabitants be it rich or poor.

Less people lived in Lima during the colonial period but even during the time of the Aristocratic republic at the turn of the century the citizens of the capital city felt safe.

At the turn of the century Peru was an attractive destination for Europeans looking for security, fame and fortune and what better place to do this than by moving to the seat of power; the capital. Not only were foreigners populating the by now large City of kings (also known as Lima); the children of the landed Gentry were leaving big regional capitals such as Arequipa, Trujillo and Puno to construct homes in the new avenues of the city. La avenida Leguía (now Arequipa) was *the* place to build a home and with it a narrative that spoke of wealth, wisdom and work well done. It soon became irresistible. A symbol of the grandiose era of urban sprawl is the still standing epitome of Lima’s triumphant past is the Berckemeyer house. It’s gardens of colonial inspiration and walls at the perimeter are a delight and a bastion for Lima’s grand history.

Then came the 60s and with it a dangerous cocktail of terrorism, dictators and mass rural to urban migration. This era of instability deepend the wounds of the Republic. The oppressive Military Junta government led by “president” Ricardo Pérez Godoy was the unlikely catalyst for innovation in Lima; His Junta financed the creation of Brutalist towers throughout the city. These towers were meant to scare the public into submission and to look strong like an actual fortress. One the other hand the wealthy & oppressed in Peru took to modern architecture as a means of expression, a grand example of this great modernist experiment being

Casa Koetzle.

PEE

Peru’s inflation in 80s was astronomical and the poor as predicted were the hardest hit,

In 1989 inflation reached 2.774% this kind of figures deepened a rift between the coastal and provincial elites and their counterparts

On one end the government funded brutalist pieces to show strength and prowess while on the other the in flexed it’s aging muscle and sent malnutritioned soldiers to their death

decade of Out of one of these wounds came out a plethora of terrorist organizations based in the rural, poor and neglected highlands.

One of these groups was “Sendero Luminoso”. Sendero’s inhumane acts in the highlands pushed its victims towards Lima’s unsettled lands north of the borough of Rimac. These invasions destroyed the remnants of the pastoral Lima of an age that is past and caused the southern districts to build walls on their perimeter out of fear of the “other”.

Then came July 16 of 1992; a somber day in recent history. The terrorists of Sendero had grown tired of fighting in the jungle and highlands while the capital ate cake like so many other victims of murder before them and so Sendero bombed the economic heart of a nation just dragging itself out of inflation. The southern districts ( the bombing occured in one of them) decided that they should quite literally rise above the chaos and debris. And so the first luxury residential high rises were built over looking my city’s equivalent of Central park and wouldn you know it; a private golf course and not precisely a park.

the poor became poorer and rich? well as for the rich; they built walls, clubs and highrises with polarized windows.

The recently urbanized and highly planned neighbourhoods to the south of the walled city such as the boroughs of San Isidro and Miraflores were designed by the likes of the sculptor and architect Manuel Piquera y Cotolí. These homes were of every style and charming in their own right be it a grand spire or a pitched roof reminiscent of Hamlin. Then came the big migratory waves of the 60s, 70s and 80s. These waves forced residents to wall their perimeters, build higher towers outfitted with tinted windows and the creation of a multitude of private clubs.

The latter half of the 20th century saw terrorism take hold around Peru and new migrants formed slums creeping upon what the Indiginous of Peru saw as sacred Mountain Spirits.

Looking around San Isidro, the most affluent area of the country and it’s capital, every dwelling is fitted for the revolution. Private homes are gated and have private security lest we forget the peace is armed. We in Lima apparently cannot even trust the police. If it’s not a house then it’s a high rise. these high rises deem gates too constricting and lack visual value which is why the interior designers flown from France or New York usually go for Glass lobbies outfitted with handmade Swarovski crystal chandeliers and one pristinely uniformed private security guard. And how could we forget a few discreet and imported cameras; Of course. Everyone is scared they are going to get murdered, robbed or be the victim of a new unimaginable crime. This; of course is due to the media’s line of “ “Everyone is out to get you”.

In conclusion Lima went from one city with a wall around it’s entire perimeter to one with walled homes in the south and illegal invasions upon native sacred land in the north. This due to many things from the economic boom that called European migrants to the terrorism that pushed rural to urban waves to the City of Kings.