

# Museo de Las Casas Reales – Santo Domingo

Organization of the American States and the Museum of Modern Art of Latin America

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The architecture of the Museo de las Casas Reales, Santo Domingo's oldest structure and the first in the Americas, has been called a hybrid style which was typical of the same period in Spain. One sees forms reproduced or adapted from medieval Gothic, the Italian Renaissance, and the Classical Greek and Roman styles, together with the Spanish Plateresque and Moorish elements. There are very few monuments that we may classify within a specific, pure architectural style. One influence follows another or intermingled with it. Thus, we may observe in buildings such as the Cathedral that a Gothic interior has a purely Plateresque façade. This happens again and again in most of the monuments, where the Medieval coexists with the Renaissance and where perhaps a Mudejar arch may open onto a Classical façade.

Santo Domingo tended to copy the Gothic style from Spain during the Renaissance period when their mother country adopted it from Italy. Those who came to these new lands could not avoid bringing with them this familiar style with its medieval roots. However, rather than the pure Gothic, the buildings of the old city followed more the so-called Isabelline style in which the Gothic repertoire and moldings combined with purely Mudejar elements. Baroque architecture in Santo Domingo is timidly presented, always within a more sober and modest line. It is only in the altar pieces that it attains the richness so characteristic of this style which developed in other American countries.

The Museo de las Casas Reales (the Royal Houses Museum) is one of the most outstanding examples of Santo Domingo's architecture. This museum visually reflects all aspects of life in the country during more than three centuries. It is composed of the Old Palace of Governors and Captains General, and the Palace of the Royal Court of Appeals, where the Royal Accounting House also was located. The style, uses stone as the predominant construction material. Contiguous and intercommunicating, the buildings were known during colonial times by the generic name of the Royal Houses.

## Images

The public entrance to the Museum on Las Damas Street.

This beautiful doorway of sculpted stone is an example of the late Gothic and Plateresque styles. There is a window with vases of flowers between two balustrade columns and, above that, a heraldic shield of the Emperor Charles the fifth of Germany and first of Spain. The coat of arms granted by Royal Decree in 1508 to the island of Hispaniola and to the city of Santo Domingo is also prominent in this façade.

The museum has a beautiful patio articulated with Renaissance depressed arches supported by classical columns. The bronze statue represents Fray Nicholas de Ovando.

A different view of the patio shows the two-storied Renaissance articulation and the beautiful balustrade.

The Castilian severity of forms and perfect balance of architectonic elements play an important role in the configuration of the interior corridors.

Another view of the same corridor in which the play of different materials – stone, wood, and tiles – attains a delicate harmony and austerity.

Overall view of the Hall of the Governor's Throne.

Close-up view of the throne itself and the Royal Coat of Castile above.

View of the interior courtyard in which Renaissance and Moorish elements are intermingled.

The idea of placing a fountain in the middle of a patio may be traced back to Andalucia (southern Spain). The commemorating statue represents Fray Alonso de Zuazo.

A detail of one of the corridors showing the beautiful stone balustrade.