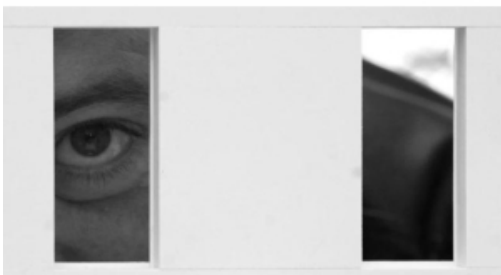


Xavier Claramunt, architect and designer

"Innovation is thinking about something that interests you and doing it"



"We try to work without any complexes and without any prejudices. Not even one. When we consider ideas, which is the basis of our work, there should be no initial limit"

The architect and designer Xavier Claramunt is a tireless worker. He is also a man of action. "Fourteen hours, seven days a week," he says. And considering the huge amount of material and ideas that accumulate in his studio, he couldn't work any other way.

Claramunt still resembles a naughty boy, something which is reflected in the relaxed way he works and which is based on assuming that nothing is impossible. That must be why he can move easily between the meticulous world of jewellery and the impossible volumes of his skyscrapers, as well as working on designs and interior design projects where style is the outstanding feature. He is the driving force and leader of EQUIP XCL, a company which provides a surprise in each new project and which has made permanent innovation its best means of moving on and growing.

Among his projects are the new dealer for the BMW car company in Sabadell (for which he was a finalist in the FAD prizes) the Chic & Basic Born hotel in

Barcelona (the Contractworld 2007 architecture and design prizes), Franki cutlery for Ferran Adrià and futuristic space hotel and underwater hotel projects.

Q.- All your projects are outstanding because of their high level of innovation and creativity. How do you think of these concepts?

Xavier Claramunt (X.C.)- Well! That's very nice ... The truth is that I'm not convinced. For us, everything is part of a way of working that on an almost animal level. I don't know... we don't stop and think, we just act. Innovation is thinking about something that interests you and doing it, that is, starting production. We are people of action. Our work is basically about putting forward ideas, in the sense that our works are answers to the needs of a client or situation. That is why it doesn't matter how big they are. The key is to formulate the right questions, and based on that, to try and find some specific answers to them.

Q.- It sounds very easy put like that. What is the key to your originality?

X.C.- I don't know if there is a key, but in any case, something I am very sure about is that we try to work without complexes and without prejudices. Not even one. When we consider ideas, which is the basis of our work, there should be no initial limit. Anything goes, especially in the initial phase of projects, and then we find the right way and the specialists to make it possible.

Q.- And in this process, what is most important for you, inspiration or the method?

X.C.- The method, always, and systematisation. Our working strategy is very clear and is based on systematisation, processes and discipline. We don't ask anyone here to provide explanations about the work that they are doing, but we take photos of everything that has been produced once a fortnight, so that nothing ends up not being used. What we can't have is a great deal of working hours ending up as a blank screen. You can waste a lot of time doing things, but you can't waste a second looking for them. That is why all the ideas generated are photographed and we have scale models made of them all. The model makers' work is very important. It is all arranged perfectly and is accessible and this gives us an advantage as sometimes, an idea that we developed some time ago and then rejected and filed away suddenly meets a

specific present need. So we already have the architectural resource or design thought out and projected. That is why we produce things here very quickly.

Q.- And what structure do you work with in order to be able to carry out this innovation or "ideas" work?

X.C.- We have achieved a sustainable double structure. We have the agency and the Lab. At the agency we work for specific clients, while you could almost say that the laboratory is not used for anything. Only suggestions, ideas, answers for future questions. However, when you have a lot of accumulated work and answers, you have to sell them, or at least try to.

Q.- I see that you always speak in the plural. You like emphasising that above all, you're a team...

X.C.- Of course. We have always been a team and we have always believed in multidisciplinary work. The best thing is always to be surrounded by more powerful people who make you learn and move you forward. I also think that in certain jobs, when people start talking in the first person singular, they're finished.

Q.- However, the company has grown and now you have international projects which will certainly take you a long way. How do you organise yourselves, and what exactly is your job?

X.C.- My job is increasingly based on finding new working processes, looking for interesting projects, dealing with the company's needs as an organisation... The truth is that sometimes I think that what I really know how to do is to start things up, motivate people and make them get involved in interesting projects.

Q.- But a man like you must still have his "paper and pencil" space? Don't you?

X.C.- I try to, yes, especially at weekends, which is when there is nobody here at Palo Alto and you can have some peace and quiet. Then I do a lot of work. But these days I can't and I don't want to get too involved. If anyone knows how to do it better, then it's up to them.

Q.- In any case, in general, what are your sources of inspiration?

X.C.- The references come from the process itself, and from the situation for which an answer is being sought. That means that we don't look at all at references to other methods, solutions, forms or styles that have already been used. We try to go straight to the essence of situations.

Q.- But on a little more personal level, what type of writers do you read? What music do you listen to?

X.C.- Nothing at all. I don't read, I don't listen to music, and what's more, I can't dance. I haven't got the time! I only work (laughs).

Q.- So going back to the company, you were talking about the agency and the Lab. What percentage of the work does each of them do?

X.C.- 60% of the work is done by the Lab. What's more, we also have what we call an assault team. The people in this team have a licence to think outside the box, in terms of both working processes and working hours. They are our advance guard, the company's James Bonds, and they have to generate any type of input which may be useful to us.

Q.- And how does a business which combines architecture, jewellery and industrial design work?

X.C.- Of the 30 people involved in the company, some specialise more in one thing or another, but in general the basic principles are applicable to all of our areas.

Q.- What is the direct relationship between these three areas?

X.C.- Someone who is working on a building today may be asked to work on a very small piece tomorrow. There are always specialists in charge, but you can find yourself working outside your field at any time. For us, this is a way of working which enhances experience. Mastering the particular features of each specific field gives you answers or ideas for projects in another speciality.

Q.- What does each area give you?

X.C.- Jewellery allows us to study materials, their textures and particular techniques in great depth. Here you can be very much a purist, as you have control over everything, it is as if you were your own client. However, industrial design has shown us how to make ideas feasible - it makes you go into depth in everything concerned with serialised production and the industrial world. Finally, architecture requires systematisation, something which ranges from work processes to bureaucratic and regulatory issues. We always say that all three branches are important to our team, as each one makes its own contributions, but in the end, they all influence the whole.

Q.- So in general terms, what comes first, the project or the commission?

X.C.- Projects always arise from a client's need. But sometimes we anticipate the need, we see that there is a latent issue and we try to provide an answer to it. Even in these cases there is a client, the thing is that they don't know it yet.

Q.- Talking of the client, what type of relationship do you have with them?

X.C.- When we work, we are convinced that there is no possible project without direct communication with them. We begin the process with the client and by means of a good relationship and communication, we can obtain accurate knowledge of their needs. That is why we try to avoid external interference. We must be capable of suggesting solutions to any issue. Even any future question from any future client.

Q.- Finally, I wonder if you could highlight a project that you feel is particularly innovative.

X.C.- Right now we are working on the Galactic Suite project, the space hotel. It is of those projects that came about almost as a joke, but began to gradually take shape, and who knows, perhaps we'll even end up making it feasible! I'm sure we will! The Galactic Suite, as well as being an obviously unusual project, involves working with teams that are very different to those that we are used to. The aerospace industry was something that was still unknown to us.

As well as the Galactic Suite, we also have the Sea Suite project, which is an underground suite, which is being done in a hotel on the coast of Alicante. We also had a very good time with the collection of proposals for skyscrapers, one of which is now being executed in China.