

Guide

# Park Güell

Gaudí  
Barcelona

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# Park Güell

## The origins

### A housing development for healthy living

The powerful industrialist and patron of the arts, Eusebi Güell, commissioned Gaudí to design a housing project on land he had purchased in 1899 on the side of the hill known as the Muntanya Pelada (Bald Mountain), in an area of the former village of Gràcia called La Salut ('health' in Catalan). The name tied in perfectly with Güell's mission to build an estate whose fortunate residents (just 40 families) could escape from the more unpleasant aspects of daily life in the industrial Barcelona of the day (overcrowding, unsanitary conditions, social unrest...), and live a more leisurely, healthy life. It is important to bear in mind that, at the time, Barcelona had a population density of 1,000 inhabitants per hectare, and cholera, typhus and other contagious diseases were rife in certain parts of the city, earning it the reputation as the city with the worst health conditions after Saint Petersburg.

### Few residents, many amenities

The land covered an area of just over 15 hectares and was divided into 60 triangular plots of equal size (about 2,500 m<sup>2</sup> each). The shape of the plots was perfectly suited to building on the steeply sloping terrain. The buyers could only purchase two plots each and were only allowed to build on a sixth of the total area to preserve the balance between buildings and planting. The developer also imposed height and width restrictions to ensure each house was exposed to natural light and had views over the park and city. The owners were not permitted to use the land for industrial activities and had to pay a maintenance fee towards the upkeep of the communal areas.



Eusebi Güell inside the colonnade, c. 1906.

### Safe living conditions, poor transport links

Safety inside Park Güell was guaranteed as it was to be placed within a walled perimeter and a barracks housing the Civil Guard would be located just a few metres away from the main entrance. However, neither Güell nor Gaudí considered ease of access a priority. Quite the contrary: it would seem that Güell refused to allow a tram connection between the park and the city centre. After Gaudí's death in Barcelona in 1926, the heir of the lawyer Trias, the park's only resident at the time, remarked, not without irony, that the tram had wrought its revenge on the architect as he had died after had run him over.

Building work went on apace and by 1903 Gaudí had already completed most of

the communal areas: the perimeter wall, the gatehouses, the grottoes, the main staircase and the portico-viaducts, by applying innovations, such as modular units and prefab structures built in situ. This made it possible to carry out work on surfaces and structures at the same time. Moreover, in 1902, Francesc Berenguer, Gaudí's right-hand man, had begun work on the show home, which would be completed in 1904. And two plots had been sold to one buyer, the lawyer Trias. Another of Gaudí's associates, Juli Batlleu, and the designer of the Civil Guard barracks, had begun work on Trias's house.

Postcard dating from 1914.





## The main figures behind Park Güell



**Antoni Gaudí i Cornet**

Antoni Gaudí i Cornet was born in Reus in 1852. At the age of 20, he enrolled at Barcelona's Higher School of Architecture, from where he graduated in 1878, the year he met Eusebi Güell, the patron and friend who commissioned him to design most of his works: Palau Güell (1886-1888), the gatehouses of the Güell Estate (1884-1887), the crypt of the Colònia Güell (1908-1915) and Park Güell (1900-1914). In 1884, Gaudí was appointed project manager for the Sagrada Família, which he worked on until his death in 1926. In the interim, Gaudí designed a number of buildings for eminent figures from Barcelona's upper-middle classes: the Casa Calvet (1898-1900), Casa Batlló (1904-1907) and Casa Milà, also known as La Pedrera (1906-1912). Throughout Gaudí's life, his work was mired in controversy and its sheer genius didn't gain the recognition it was due until the 1970s. Since 1984, Park Güell and many of Gaudí's landmarks have been awarded World Heritage status.



**Eusebi Güell i Bacigalupi**

His father, Joan Güell (1800-1872) emigrated to Cuba where he made his fortune. Upon his return to Barcelona, he founded and co-founded many of the businesses and institutions that contributed to the industrialisation of the region, including the steam mill, the Vapor Vell; the heavy machinery company, La Maquinista Terrestre y Marítima; the Instituto Industrial de Cataluña; and the organisation designed to boost domestic production, the Fomento de la Producción Nacional. Born in Barcelona in 1846, Eusebi Güell took the reins of his father's businesses and set up new ones: the Compañía General de Asfaltos and Portland Asland, the first cement manufacturer in Catalonia. He married Isabel López, the heiress of the Marquises of Comillas and grandee of Spain, and was granted the title of count in 1908. He was a well-known patron of musicians, writers and, in particular, Gaudí, and a sponsor of institutions and initiatives designed to promote Catalan culture and language: the music and poetry competition, the Jocs Florals de Barcelona; the field trip association, the Associació Catalanista d'Excursions Científiques; and the magazine *La Renaixença*. He died at his home in Park Güell in 1918.



**Josep Maria Jujol**

Born in Tarragona in 1879, Jujol moved to Barcelona with his family at the age of nine. It was there that he obtained his degree in architecture in 1906. He was a lecturer (1910) and senior professor (1919) at Barcelona's School of Architecture. His projects were mostly private dwellings and religious buildings and revealed his personal universe steeped in fantasy and symbolism: Casa Bofarull, the Masia Negre, the church of Vistabella and the unfinished shrine of Montserrat in Montferri. However, it was his collaborations with Gaudí, who trusted him implicitly, that gave free rein to his creativity, starting with the Casa Batlló in 1906, followed by the Casa Milà, the restoration of Mallorca Cathedral, the Sagrada Família and, particularly, the Park Güell. Jujol died in Barcelona in 1949.



**Francesc Berenguer**

Born in Reus in 1866, Berenguer was the son of a schoolmaster, who counted Gaudí among his pupils. At the age of 15 he moved to Barcelona, where he studied fine art and architecture, combining his studies with collaborations with professional architectural practices. From 1887 onwards, despite failing to obtain his architecture degree, Berenguer became full-time assistant to Gaudí and the municipal architect for Barcelona's Gràcia district, Miquel Pascual i Tintorer. Although his lack of qualifications prevented him from signing his projects, both architects placed their absolute trust in him, to such an extent that, on Berenguer's untimely death in 1914, Gaudí said that he had lost his right-hand man. In addition to the show house in the Park Güell - the Torre Rosa - his other major works include the Casa Cama, the Casa Rubinat and his collaborations with Gaudí at the Colònia Güell, the Güell winery and Palau Güell.



**Joan Rubió i Bellver**

Like Gaudí and Berenguer, Rubió hailed from Reus where he was born in 1871 and lived until he was fifteen. After obtaining his degree in architecture from Barcelona University, Rubió began working as Gaudí's assistant. The influence of the latter can be seen in his main works: Barcelona Industrial University, the Casa Rialp, the Casa Golferichs, the Casa Roviralta, or Frare Blanc (all of them in Barcelona), the Old People's Home in Igualada and the Bank of Sóller, in Mallorca. He worked on many projects with Gaudí (the Colònia Güell, the Teresian School, the Casa Calvet, the Bellesguard Tower, Mallorca Cathedral, the Sagrada Família and Park Güell) in which he played a vital role working out structural problems.



## The main entrance

### A walled precinct

At the main entrance to Park Güell, we see that it was designed as a walled precinct to emphasise its isolation from the rest of the city.

It has a masonry wall built with stone from the site and surmounted by a cornice clad in *trencadís* broken tile mosaic. The wall has two different textures: the base is smooth while the area directly beneath the mosaic cornice is more rough-hewn and features protruding stones. The mosaic on the cornice consists of vertical white and red strips broken up at intervals by fourteen oval medallions which curve in at the base and curve out at the top. Each medallion contains a circle bearing the words 'Park' and 'Güell' in sequence.

On the right, the masonry wall with the *trencadís* ceramic cornice.



Medallions bearing the words 'Park' and 'Güell'.

### A fascinating setting

When visitors step through the gates, they feel they are entering a world of fantastic shapes and unknown symbols.





## The administration gatehouse

The gatehouse on the left, which is now used as the shop and bookstore, was originally designed as the park's administration building. It had space for the reception area and visitors' waiting rooms. It has a distinctive tall tower: 12 metres to the crenellated terrace and a further 17 metres to the top of the cross. A white and blue chequerboard motif covers the hollow hyperboloid with its undulating outer facings that forms the central section of the tower.

The chequerboard hyperboloid is surmounted by a more lightweight metal structure resembling the wire cages that hold champagne corks in place. It underpins the four-armed cross which is frequently found in many of Gaudí's buildings. In this instance, the cross is an ambiguous element as it is both a Christian symbol and wind rose.



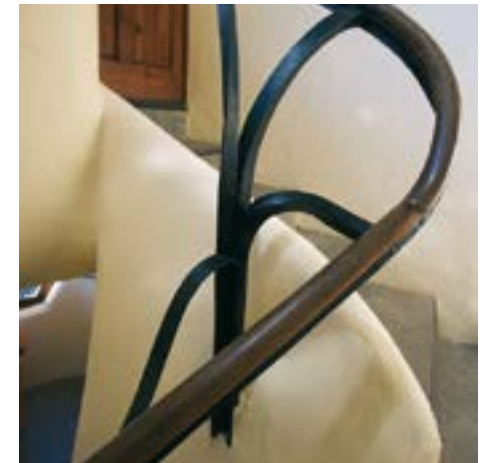
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1 Ventilation shaft with a mushroom-shaped cowl.

2 Window combining tile, glass and iron.

3 The large windows flood the gatehouse with light.

4 Banister reminiscent of a plant.

Another eye-catching element on the gatehouse roof is the mushroom-shaped cowl encircled by another crenellated terrace, which actually covers a ventilation shaft that runs through the stairwell.

There are two large windows in the sides of the walls which skilfully combine stone, tile, glass and stone forming a smooth continuous surface that brings opposites together: warm and cold, concave and convex, light and shadow.

Gaudí took great pains over the design of the more modest spaces and used a wide variety of resources. This can be seen in the interior of this gatehouse with its ridged vault made from variable-cross section beams, and the luminous stained glass in the windows with their spiral designs that make the space even more dynamic. The organic forms are present in every detail, like the banister leading to the first floor that is reminiscent of a plant.

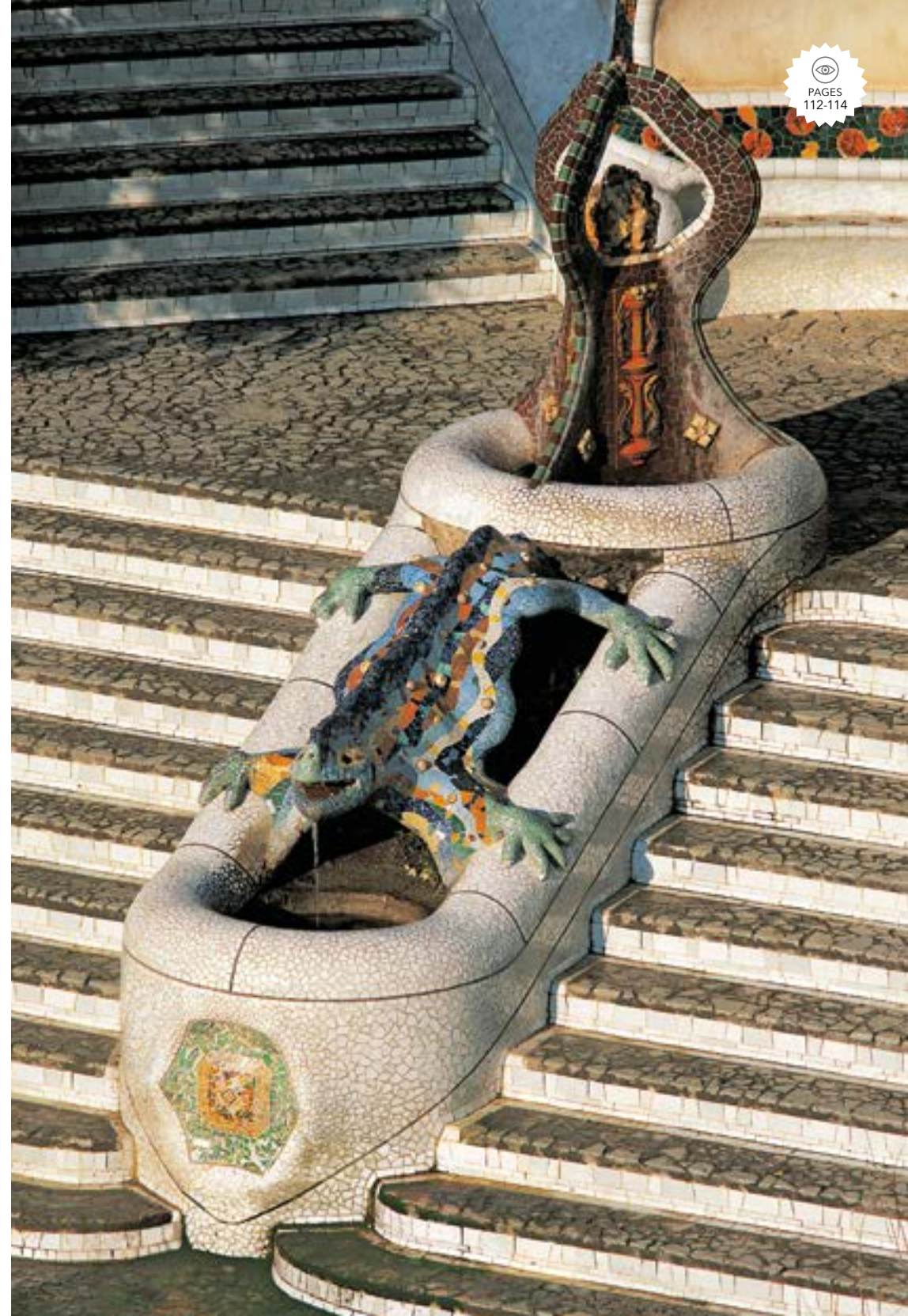




**The dragon** This is certainly the best-known and most widely admired pool of the three as it provides the backdrop for one of the most popular figures in Park Güell. We are talking about the eye-catching dragon, or salamander, whose mouth spouts the water which flows down to the pools below. Apparently Gaudí designed the dragon – which was also prefabricated – by jumping on a pile of wire mesh (or bed bases, according to some witnesses) until he achieved the desired shape. Like so many elements in Park Güell, this wonderful figure has been the subject of countless symbolic interpretations. Eusebi Güell was one of the cornerstones of the *Renaixença*, Catalonia's nationalist, cultural movement, which had as its main point of reference classical Graeco-Roman culture. He was also aware of the archaeological digs being carried out at Delphi by the archaeologist and Hellenist, Théophile Homolle. This means that the figure of the dragon, whose mouth spouts water from the overflow of the reservoir built below the hypostyle hall, may reference the Python, the dragon Apollo killed and buried below the Doric temple at Delphi, making it the guardian of subterranean waters.



Detail of the dragon's scales.





## The hypostyle hall

### The Doric marketplace

The staircase leads up to the hypostyle hall, which is also known as the colonnade or Doric temple. This is the only time Gaudí used the Doric style in his work, perhaps due to the influence of Güell and the Greek style he wanted to recreate in his housing project. And although Gaudí stated that he had “designed the ancient Doric colonnade as the Greeks from a Mediterranean colony would have done”, the architect’s personal touch is much in evidence, as we shall see later on.

The colonnade was designed for a much more prosaic purpose than its solemn appearance would suggest: a fortnightly market selling provisions to the Park Güell residents. However, it was never used as such because the plots of land failed to sell.

The roof of this marketplace is underpinned by sturdy, fluted columns. The bases of the columns are clad in white mosaic panels that contrast with the rustic stone of the body of the columns, thereby repeating the combination of materials (stone-mosaic) we have seen so far.

Unlike classical Doric temples – the Parthenon in Athens is perhaps the best-known example – the columns inside the hypostyle hall are distributed irregularly because the floor plan of the marketplace is a rectangle with chamfered corners and ten rows of columns. As you can see in the drawing on page 45, the columns were distributed as follows: three columns on the first row, five on the second, seven on the third, nine on the fourth, and eleven from the fifth to the tenth. However, Gaudí replaced one of the columns on the fourth row, one on the fifth row, and two on the sixth row, with soffits, bringing the total number of columns to eighty-six rather than ninety. The columns around the perimeter also differ from the classical style, and are steeply sloping to act as buttresses.



#### Sloping columns

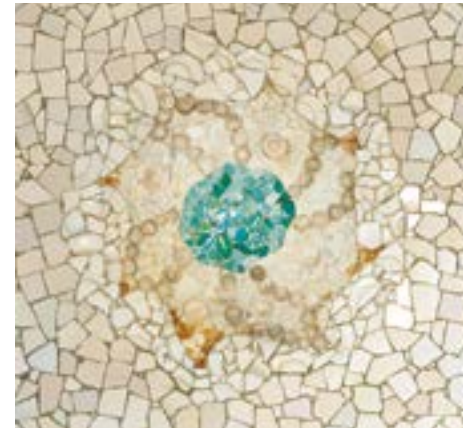
The columns around the perimeter are steeply sloping to act as buttresses.







**Suns and moons** The fourteen roundels depict the moon around four suns, symbolising Apollo and Artemis respectively. They are spiral shaped and wonderful examples of the collage technique Jujol introduced to the park.











## The “hidden secrets” of Park Güell

This chapter tells you about the park’s “hidden secrets”: the areas that usually go unnoticed by visitors, and curious anecdotes about this wonderful project. It includes photos and drawings that complement the texts so the reader can enjoy to the full the unique experience of exploring Park Güell.



### Stars and pentagons inside the medallions

Inside the loop of each letter ‘P’, we find a five-pointed star with a regular pentagon in the centre. These symbols are open to manifold interpretations. These medallions can also be seen on the walls of the gate-houses, set out vertically on the one on the left and horizontally on the one on the right.

### Undulations

In this period photograph, we can see that the pavement designed by Gaudí – now vanished – follows a winding course that he reproduced in other areas of Park Güell and with similar designs, based on a combination of concave and convex curves: the pavement inside the wall, the bench around the plaza, the viaducts...





## Dragon or salamander?

Other interpretations associate this figure with the alchemical salamander due to its shape and colour. Remember that the Ancient Greeks thought salamanders were beneficial creatures, as they brought fire from the depths to the Earth's surface where Prometheus gave it to humankind; or that Aristotle believed they were able to put out fires by walking over the flames. Curiously enough, the water flowing out of the salamander's mouth was to be used for irrigation and putting out any potential fires on the estate.



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Alchemical salamander (M. Maier, *Atalanta Fugiens*)



## A fiercer dragon

When it was first put in place, the dragon looked a little fiercer than it does today. Its talons and teeth were much more pronounced. These features have deteriorated over the years through wear and tear and the effects of high visitor numbers.



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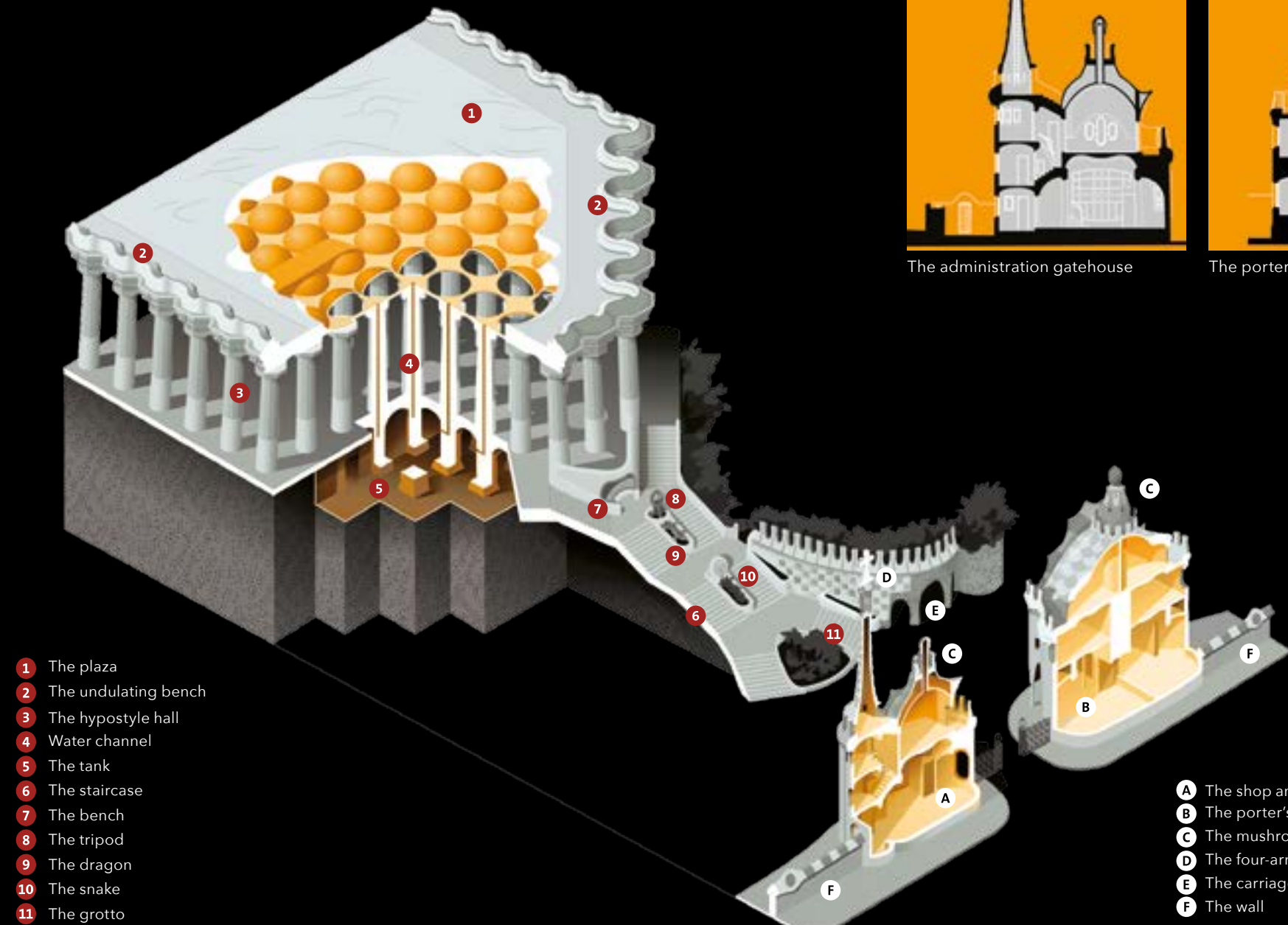


## Park Güell

**Developer, 1900-1912 | Built, 1900-1914**

Developer: Eusebi Güell i Bacigalupí

Associates: Joan Rubió, Francesc Berenguer and Josep Maria Jujol (architects);  
Hermanos Badia (ironsmiths); Peris de Onda, Hijo de Jaume Pujol i Bausis and  
Sebastià Ribó (ceramicists); Agustí Masip, José Pardo and Juliano Bardier (builders).



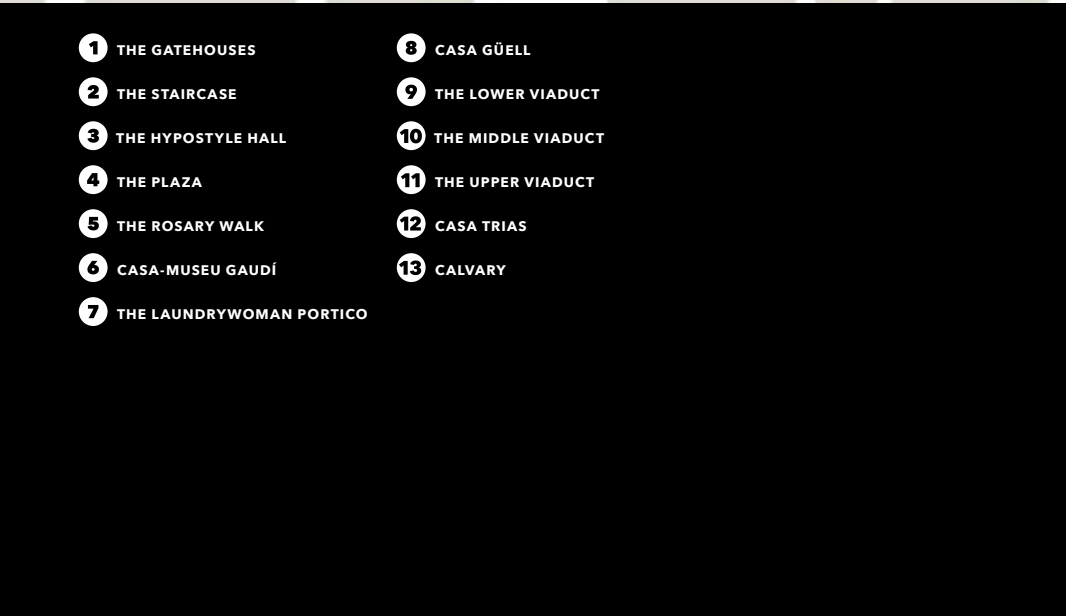
The administration gatehouse



The porter's lodge



# Gaudí Barcelona



- 1 THE GATEHOUSES
- 2 THE STAIRCASE
- 3 THE HYPOSTYLE HALL
- 4 THE PLAZA
- 5 THE ROSARY WALK
- 6 CASA-MUSEU GAUDÍ
- 7 THE LAUNDRYWOMAN PORTICO
- 8 CASA GÜELL
- 9 THE LOWER VIADUCT
- 10 THE MIDDLE VIADUCT
- 11 THE UPPER VIADUCT
- 12 CASA TRIAS
- 13 CALVARY