

# Eloquence and symbolism, an architectural language of Jujol

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## *Abstract*

Casa Bofarull, designed by Josep Maria Jujol during the first third of the 20th century –particularly throughout its second decade– is marked by an orderly arrangement of geometric forms distributed across its architectural spaces. This composition suggests an intentional design strategy that transcends meredecoration and points to a symbolic language potentially linked to the identity of the place and its memory.

Jujol's architecture is widely recognized for embedding a precise and creative verbal narrative, sometimes explicit and at other times more implicit, though it is not always clear whether his design decisions stem from a single, fixed interpretative intention.

This research offers an analytical reading of these geometric forms in Casa Bofarull, aiming to compare and contrast their presence and arrangement in order to assess the extent to which they result from a deliberate design intention. It argues that, through symbolic use of geometry, the architect constructs a visual discourse that conveys the site's idiosyncrasy and integrates the house into the life and collective imagination of its setting.

## *Key words*

Narrative, eloquence, geometry, Jujol, Casa Bofarull.



Original drawing by J.M.  
Jujol. Casa Bofarull Project  
Folder: Source: Arxiu Jujol,  
Càtedra Jujol UPC

## A perceptive intuition

"I would like to explain where our interest in this work comes from... where this ability of Jujol to initiate a direct dialogue with those who approach it originates".  
Enric Miralles 1989, p. 53

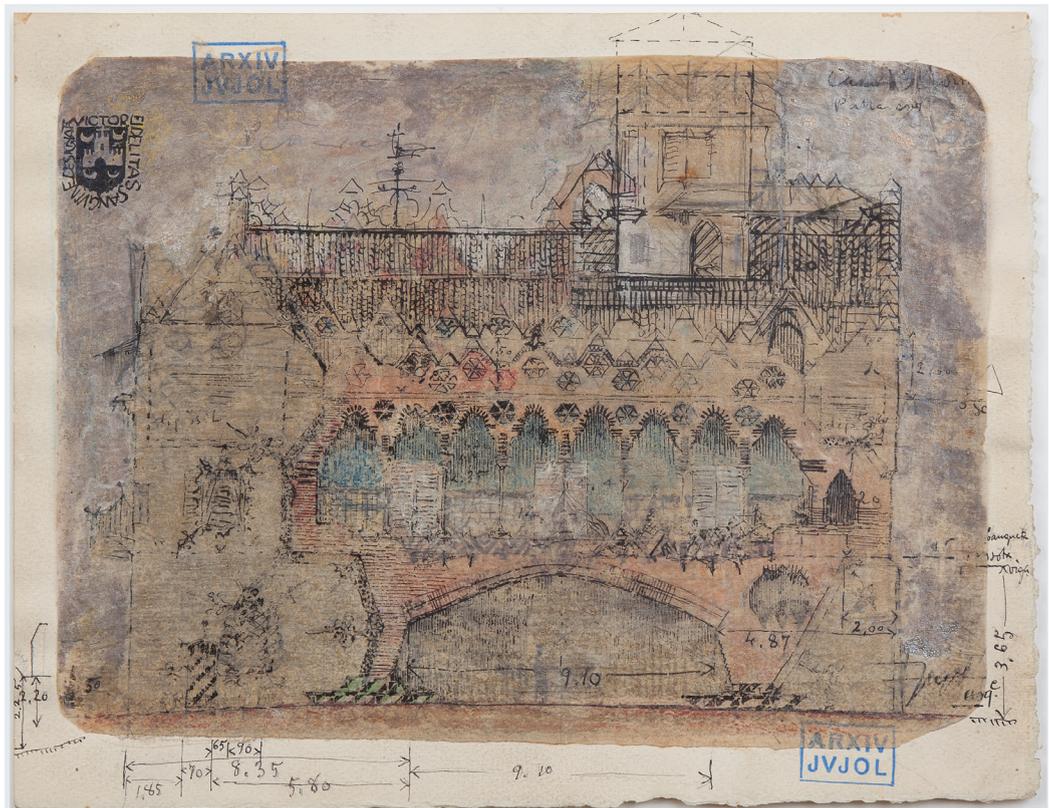


Fig. 1. J.M. Jujol, Elevation project of Casa Bofarull, 1914. Source: Arxiu Jujol, Càtedra Jujol UPC.

Upon approaching Casa Bofarull for the first time, one is struck by the clarity with which certain unusual geometric shapes are perceived. Triangles, rectangles, hexagons, octagons, and finally circles, are easily recognizable. A closer examination reveals that these shapes are not isolated occurrences but are systematically repeated in various architectural elements.

At first glance, it seems that their presence is driven by construction logic. However, the lack of a strong architectural tradition for some of these shapes suggests that this is not the primary reason.

Moreover, these geometric figures appear in clusters and are arranged in an orderly manner along a vertical axis. This raises questions: does this arrangement follow a specific conceptual framework? Is it a form of visual narration? Enric Miralles highlights the communicative intent in Jujol's work, emphasizing how it is deeply rooted in an artistic approach.

Following this initial intuition, a systematic investigation is undertaken to identify geometric figures within the architectural elements of the house.

Simultaneously, research is conducted into the historical symbolism associated with these geometric forms.

Additionally, the traditional process of embellishing rural Catalan homes is explored. Jujol's interest in the Baroque period suggests that he may have drawn inspiration from these historical practices when considering ways to enhance the house's character.

## A geometric gaze on Casa Bofarull

*"Cuadrados con cuadrados, círculos con círculos, giros y desplazamientos, constituyen procedimientos recurrentes en unas obras en las que la temporalidad del acto constructivo desplaza por completo toda ambición de permanencia y de globalidad".*  
Ignasi Sola-Morales, 1989, p. 14

In 1913, Jujol was commissioned by the Bofarull sisters to enhance their old rural house in Els Pallaresos, near Tarragona. Such commissions were common among agricultural estates, often undertaken after prosperous harvests. Jujol was a frequent visitor to the Tarragona countryside, and his reputation as a creative architect had already been established with his first independent work, the renovation of the Metropol Theatre in Tarragona (1908-1913). Although he grew up in Barcelona, his Tarragona roots and stays in nearby villages shaped his artistic sensibility. He studied architecture in Barcelona, where he worked under Antoni Gallisà, whom he regarded as his greatest mentor. Before graduating, he collaborated with Gaudí on emblematic projects such as Casa Batlló and Casa Milà. As an architect, Jujol alternated between collaborating with Gaudí and developing his own projects. Perajaupe describes their joint works from 1905 to 1926 as possessing a "combined personality." During this period of collaborations, Jujol developed his most astonishing architectural designs, including the Metropol Theatre renovation, Casa Negre, and Casa Bofarull. Just before starting work on Casa Bofarull, he had been engaged in projects such as Torre Gibert (1913-1916) and Finca Sansalvador in Barcelona (1909-1910). This work has drawn the attention of scholars across generations. Ignasi de Solà-Morales, for instance, considers Casa Bofarull a paradigm of Jujol's work, comparable to Casa Can Negre (1915-1930). Both are rural interventions carried out over an extended period, with successive commissions adapting to the rhythms of agricultural production. Despite its long development (1914-1933), Jujol reveals a holistic strategy based on intervening in 'key focal points,' transforming the house into a sequence of striking episodes.

Solà-Morales [1989, p. 14] notes that "the geometries Jujol relies on are also open-ended" and that this follows a narrative principle. Josep Llinás [1989, p. 61] observes that "Jujol's work is not distinguished by the desire to create architecture but by the desire to transform it, to take it to another existence, radically beyond reality." Llinás offers an interpretation

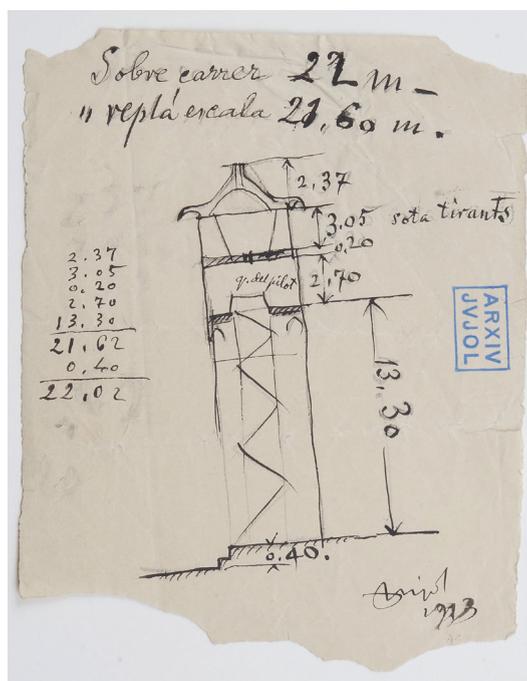


Fig. 2. J.M. Jujol, Casa Bofarull project, Section of the tower, 1914. Source: Arxiu Jujol, Càtedra Jujol.

Fig. 3. Casa Bofarull, View of the interior of the tower; with the hexagonal cutout in the upper slab.



of Jujol's descriptive intent –going beyond the physically visible, pushing the experience of architectural space into the realm of the intangible through eloquent narratives. Carlos Flores (1989) specifies, in this narrative vision, that Jujol's most radical intervention in Casa Bofarull lies in his extension of the existing staircase, continuing it beyond its original height, adding new floors, and crowning it with a pyramidal element developed a surrealist-Dadaist language, topped by a curious guardian angel figure acting as a weather vane. Ultimately, Flores points us toward Jujol's intent to emphasize the vertical dimension of Casa Bofarull (fig. 2). Various authors highlight the rhetorical component in Jujol's architectural narrative, giving coherence to his vision of rural life.

### A geometric gaze on Casa Bofarull

"I believe it is possible to extensively develop an art based on a mathematical conception".

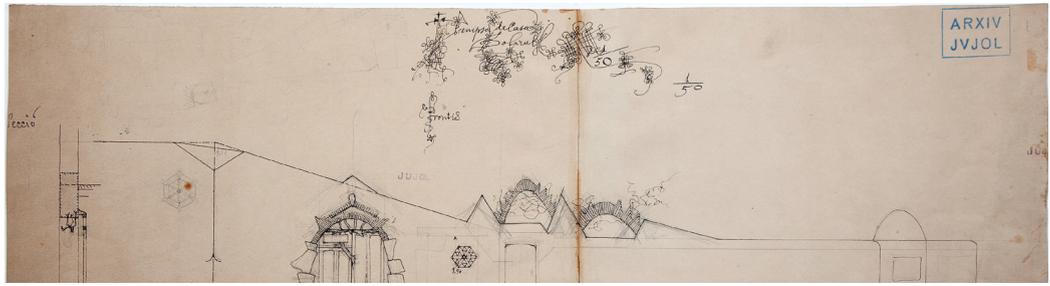
Max Bill 2012, p. 7

Jujol's imagination takes physical form through drawing before materializing in construction, which can be interpreted through the geometrization of the elements that compose his work. A geometric sequence emerges, representing a miniaturized synthe-



Fig. 4. Casa Bofarull, View of the south facade from the field. Source: Josep Maria Jujol a Tarragona. (image post-produced by the authors).

Fig. 5. J.M.Jujol, Casa Bofarull, Elevation of the laundry enclosure, 1916. Source: Arxiu Jujol. Càtedra Jujol.



sis of the rural world: the farmhouse, the fields, and their relationship with the natural environment.

In Casa Bofarull, this geometric organization follows an ascending order, where a predominant regular polygon can be identified on each level (fig. 3). The ground floor is dominated by the triangle; on the first floor, the rectangle becomes the main element. In the tower-viewpoint, the hexagon, octagon, and finally the circle appears on the roof.

This geometric composition connects rural life and construction, reflecting the surrounding landscape. In mountainous terrains, triangular peaks align with the furrows of the fields, symbolizing water management. Jujol incorporates this natural reference into Casa Bofarull. The garden's perimeter wall and the laundry façade feature a series of triangles, while the sloping wall is emphasized by sharp elements and embedded stones from the nearby fields. This design establishes a dialogue between architectural geometry and the landscape (figs. 4, 5). Inside, the door of the reception area incorporates a wooden triangle in its center and glass partitions. On the south façade, the garden's perimeter wall follows the same compositional principle as the laundry area, adapting to the slope of the terrain. The highest points of the wall are accentuated with triangular cut-outs and embedded stones. Aligned with the central axis of Casa Bofarull, a triangular window is framed within an isosceles triangle that protrudes from the wall, incorporating distorted agricultural tools and wrought iron vegetal shapes (fig. 4).

The main door, set beneath a stone arch, is reinforced with the same wrought ironwork as the triangular window. Both elements share an almost symmetrical composition, yet with

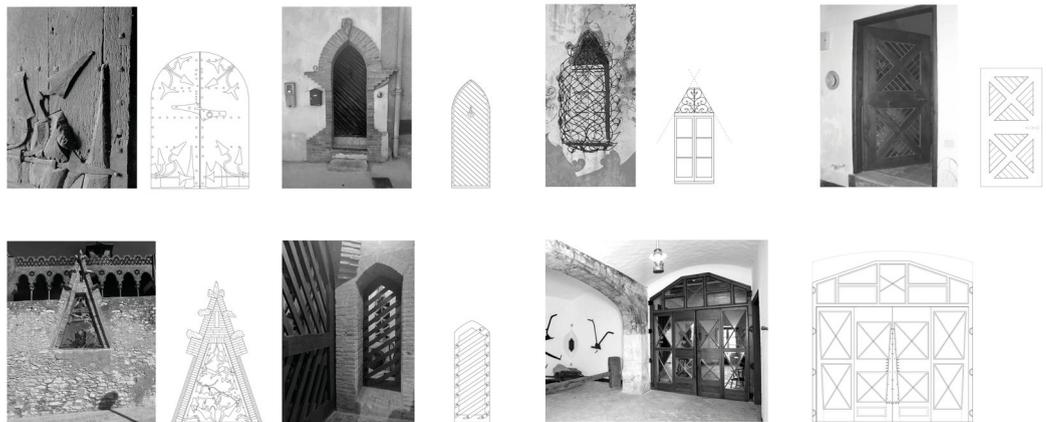


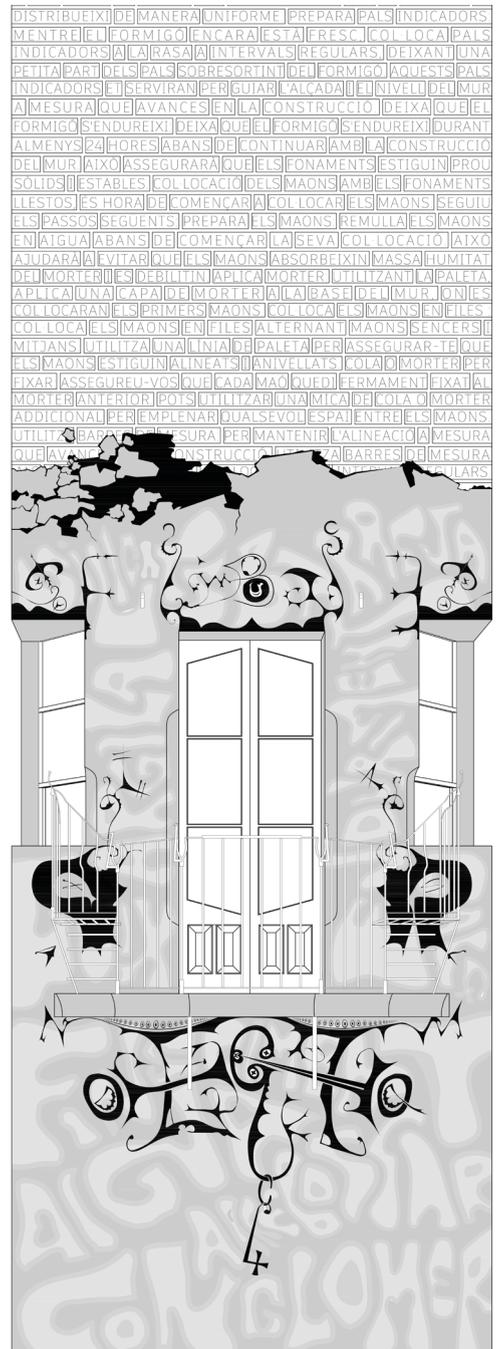
Fig. 6. Geometric figures in the house's woodwork. Drawings by Arnau Hugué.

variations in their curved designs (fig. 6). Inside, the entrance hall door incorporates a lead triangle at its centre and glass partitions in the shape of a St. Andrew's cross, forming small triangles. Through this design, Jujol integrates the geometric language of nature into architecture, creating a play of forms that unites landscape and construction.

On the first level, which is more detached from the ground, rectangular geometries dominate. This is the area where the architect volumetrically expanded the house. At this level, windows and balconies appear, offering distant views of the fields. Both the pre-existing and Jujol's newly incorporated elements maintain an orthogonal geometry. However, Jujol blurs



Fig. 7. Photograph of the west facade balcony of the Bofarull House. Graphic interpretation of the freedom of sgraffito and its ephemeral permanence (variations on the sgraffito of the west facade balcony) (drawings by Arnau Hugué).



the rigid contours of windows and doors with asymmetrical graffito designs that engage in dialogue with the organic forms of the surroundings, visually expanding the enclosures. The access door to the new gallery from the balcony maintains the orthogonal and symmetrical design of the stairwell. The watchtower, Jujol's most notable intervention in Casa Bofarull, rises in the southeast corner of the house, breaking through the original roof and becoming a visual landmark (fig. 7). Divided into three levels, the first connects with the upper floor; the second works as an indoor viewpoint, and the third, completely open, serves as the main observatory. A fourth level, difficult to access, crowns the structure. A hexagonal oculus illuminates the stairwell on the first level, evoking an interior sky. Its slab allows golden light from the upper room to filter through, creating the image of a central sun. In the yellow room, the hexagon reappears

in both the opening of the slab connecting to the lower staircase and in the wooden railing surrounding the oculus (fig. 3). The upper slab, featuring beams arranged at a 45-degree angle to evenly distribute loads, contains another hexagon at its center. This new opening, made of glass blocks, allows light to pass along the tower's central axis. The hexagon is repeated not only in the floor plan but also in elevation: it appears in the parapets of the rooftop terrace, in the arches of the large first floor balcony, and at the ends of the exterior staircases. Built with a pattern of equilateral triangles and ceramic bricks, the centres are decorated with enamelled ceramic pieces in various colours. The exterior stairs on the east façade lead to the observatory, a covered space whose lower part is painted the same blue as the porch on the first floor, visually integrating it with the landscape. The roof approaches a regular octagon, with vertices at the corners and points that create a smooth transition with the surroundings. Curved lines soften the structure, contrasting with its rigid geometry. Steel profiles extend the vertices beyond the square perimeter, stabilizing the roof and giving it a sense of lightness. Jujol shapes the edges, creating the sensation of a floating dome painted in sky blue. Three elements stand out: the red steel profiles, the Bofarull family crest, and an octagonal opening for the shaft of Archangel Saint Gabriel. The octagonal geometry, with curved lines forming an eight-pointed star, reinforces the ascending development of Casa Bofarull (figs. 8, 9). The roof is adorned with fragments of marble and porcelain, incorporating plates, glasses, and cups, evoking a connection to the celestial realm, as suggested by Llinás (2012).



Fig. 8. J.M. Jujol, Casa Bofarull project, Archangel Saint Gabriel. Font: Arxiu Jujol. Càtedra Jujol-UPC.

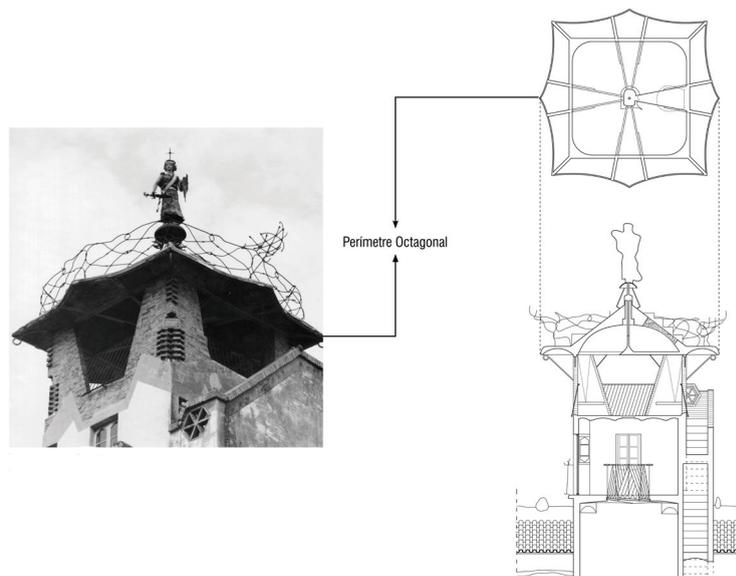


Fig. 9. Casa Bofarull. Photograph and drawings in plan and section of the tower's roof (drawing by Arnau Hugué).

## An order of geometric figures

*"Graphic researchers of architectural representations are to most architecture critics and historians what archaeologists are to collectors of ancient objects."*

Marco Frascari, Jonatham Hale, Bradley Starkey 2007



Fig. 10. J.M. Jujol, Casa Bofarull, Facade of the main entrance, 1916. Source: Arxiu Jujol. Càtedra Jujol-UPC.

After ascending through Casa Bofarull, its design reveals a poetic dimension. The Bofarull sisters commissioned the project to enhance the aesthetic and prestige of the farmhouse by expanding the porch and constructing the tower viewpoint, visible from the surrounding fields. Following his collaboration with Gaudí on the Casa Batlló renovation (1906), Jujol emphasized a highly narrative approach in his architecture. Just as Casa Batlló represents various local legends, Casa Bofarull, in a rural setting, is conceived as a miniaturization of the agricultural world, integrating the earthly and the celestial. Jujol employs geometry as a representation of the world. He assigned each level of the house a regular polygon, creating a symbolic structure that reflects a dialogue between the visible and the invisible, evoking the fertility of the land and the water from the sky.

The Triangle (Base) represents the earthly. It is found in perimeter walls, evoking mountains, and in wrought iron gates and doors. The Rectangle (First Floor) is linked to the human realm. It can be seen in windows, balconies, and door frames, contrasted with sgraffito that softens its rigidity. The Hexagon (Tower Viewpoint) is associated with the Sun.

It appears in skylights that filter golden light and in railings surrounding the terrace. The Octagon (Tower Roof) represents the constellations. It is present in the roof perimeter and in the central opening supporting the Archangel Gabriel. The Circle (Tower Summit) is a symbol of the celestial (sacred) and the infinite. It is found in the final staircase, embedded plates and glasses on the roof, and the hemispherical base of the Archangel.

Bofarull House is an architectural exercise in which geometry and symbolism converge to give meaning to a renovation carried out over an extended period of time. Through the progression of polygons, Jujol constructs a worldview that culminates in the circle, a symbol of perfection, unfolding a subtle visual eloquence that invites reflection from the observer.

## **Conclusion**

Jujol develops at Bofarull House an architectural discourse based on the evolution of simple geometric forms, imbued with strong symbolism to represent rural life and the relationship between humans and nature. His architecture becomes a miniaturization of rural phenomena, where each architectural element takes part in a visual and symbolic narrative (Fig. 10). It is, however, a non-conclusive interpretation of geometry –open to multiple meanings– in a singular architecture that allows for diverse readings and resists any univocal interpretation.

Jujol was a great storyteller, a quality he carried over into his architectural work. Just as he created stories for his children, illustrating them with figures cut from recycled tins, he shaped his architecture by blending abstract methodology with figurative expressiveness. This ability to narrate through surfaces gives his buildings a poetic and communicative dimension. His approach remains relevant in contemporary architecture, where the need for meaningful engagement with users is increasingly essential.

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