

CASA BATLLÓ: A JOURNEY TO INSPIRATION

CHARACTERS:

NARRATOR- CASA BATLLÓ

CB_01

NARRATOR: Hello. We are about to embark on an inspiring journey through reality and fantasy... An adventure through modernist art, accompanied by the voice of Casa Batlló. A voice that, through its memories, will help us to dive into the House's past, its architecture and design and the brilliance of its creator: Antoni Gaudí.

Take a deep breath: welcome to this enchanting journey, welcome to Casa Batlló.

CB_02

NARRATOR: Look up. You are in the hall of Casa Batlló, underneath the patio of lights. (pause)... This is the port of dreams... You are about to start your journey through one of Gaudí's masterpieces, a gem of Catalan modernism, built between 1904 and 1906. You are about to experience the House of light and colour, or, as some say: Gaudí's most cheerful work.

Formerly, this stunning entrance gave access to the apartments located within the building, through the marble staircase and wooden lift, one of the first of its time. Access to the building was supervised by the porter, an essential profession at the time... the very best keeper of the House's secrets.

In 1903 Mr and Mrs Batlló wanted to take up residence on Paseo de Gracia, which, in those days, was the preferred avenue of many bourgeois families. They bought a neoclassic building with the idea of living on the main floor and renting out the other apartments, standard practice among the bourgeoisie during this period.

But the family did not like the property's formal style, so they decided to hire an architect who was very much in vogue at that moment: Antoni Gaudí. Mr Batlló's idea was to tear down the House and build a new one, but Gaudí managed to change his mind, instead opting for a full renovation, turning the House into a whole new building, one that is unique in the world: the greatest challenge of engineering and architecture of its times.

Welcome to the work of a Genius, which evokes the beauty of nature in each and every one of its corners. Thanks to everything that surrounds you and what you are about to discover, Casa Batlló was named a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2005.

CASA BATLLÓ: *Enjoy this moment: the beauty belongs to us all.*

CB_03

NARRATOR: You are now in the private hall of the Batlló family, an underwater grotto bathed in a faraway light, surrounded by a seemingly petrified aquatic universe. In this area, as in the rest of the house, Gaudí masterfully combined architecture and nature. As he himself said:

GAUDÍ VOICE: *The purpose of art is not to emulate nature, but to express it.*

CASA BATLLÓ: *Hello! How lovely to see you here. Before we begin, pause for a moment. Close your eyes, take a deep breath, and open them again. In my silence, you can discover your own. Let your imagination take you deep under the surface of the ocean. You are on board the Nautilus submarine; if you look through one of the portholes you may even see some gigantic tentacles, slowly moving away from you.*

NARRATOR: As you continue on your path, observe the structure of the staircase. It resembles the spine of a prehistoric animal, each and every vertebra carved in oak.... The banister of this authentic sculpture, the shape of which provides a master class in ergonomics, will lead you to the next stop. Don't be afraid to touch it... Really feel it and see how it adapts to the shape of your hand. With every step you take, you will discover that this House truly arouses the five senses.

CB_04

NARRATOR: We are now coming to the first-floor entrance hall, where the Batlló family used to live. Can you imagine greeting your guests in a place like this?

CASA BATLLÓ: *No matter how much I watched him, I never knew what he was thinking: Gaudí was so quiet... but when I looked into his eyes, I could see flashes of intertwining shapes and colours...*

NARRATOR: The architect, at his artistic peak, was given complete freedom by Mr Batlló, creating a work of art full of fantasy and with two main focuses: light and colour.

CASA BATLLÓ: *It seems like only yesterday, but it was over one hundred years ago! I remember the first day so clearly, dressed up to the nines in my new attire. The whole of Paseo de Gracia was eagerly awaiting my arrival. It was like walking into a dance where all eyes are on you.*

NARRATOR: Gaudí brought light to each and every corner of the House thanks to a system of skylights that resemble turtle shells, transporting us once again to the aquatic environment that will accompany us throughout this journey. The walls, coated in lime stucco of the highest quality, are also a true reflection of nature. The pattern resembles the skin of an animal, changing as we move forward, merging into the light and creating a unique setting.

As you continue, you will see how the skin of this vibrant House changes.

CB_05

NARRATOR: We are now in Mr Batlló's study, where the change in the skin bestows the room with an air of distinction. The pattern on the stucco has been created with 24 carat gold leaf, a true reflection of the important matters that were handled in this room: from business negotiations to conversations with illustrious characters of the era.

Gaudí, considered by some as a precursor of surrealism, gives us a glimpse of his style in this room. Have you ever seen such a chimney? This gigantic mushroom was built with refractory ceramics to better conserve the heat, once again reminding us of the *raison d'être* of this total work of art: mother nature.

CASA BATLLÓ: *The heat of my curved seats embraced those who wanted to warm up by the fire... I always had a weakness for couples in love, who, using the cold as an excuse, would hide by the chimney, making me a silent witness to their stolen kisses.*

NARRATOR: As we continue into the next room, observe the stained glass above the door. It embraces the daylight, enhancing the colour of each room: pink, blue, ochre... This enabled Gaudí to mould the ambience of each room, making each and every one unique.

CB_06

NARRATOR: We have just entered the main floor living room, which some call “*The Sistine Chapel of Modernism*”. This room demonstrates the collective work that Gaudí orchestrated alongside some of the best craftsmen of the time, experts in materials such as wood, glass, iron and ceramics. In the United Kingdom, the modernist style was known as Modern Style, the Glasgow School being of particular significance.

Note how the living room has three different areas that can be converted into one. This modular space could be used as a large, open-plan area, or as an intimate and cosy room, depending on the specific needs. Note also how the colours on the walls give each space its own personality.

The main door reveals yet another masterpiece: a 20-centimetre-thick piece of oak that folds open. Can you see how it adapts to the curved shape of the ceiling? Or is it the other way around? The different volumes of wood enhance the door’s three-dimensional aspect and, if you let your imagination run wild, you will notice how the stained glass, in watery shades, is shaped in the form of molluscs, transporting you to the depths of the sea.

CASA BATLLÓ: *I feel a certain sadness when I think about the Mediterranean. Does that not happen to you? Fortunately, my creator left a small piece of the Mediterranean waters in me... Let me tell you a secret: sometimes, when I am alone and the wind blows, the glass shells sing to me with the voice of the sea.*

NARRATOR: In the central space, we can enjoy a privileged view over Paseo de Gracia. From the Gallery that overlooks the street, the largest on the whole of Paseo de Gracia, the family could watch the world go by, while also being seen by passers-by... Meetings, luncheons, dances... Everything that happened here could be seen from the outside. With Mr and Mrs Batlló’s permission, of course.

The enormous picture window is yet another wonder of craftsmanship and innovation. It can be opened through a complex system of weights and counterweights, hidden at each end. Thanks to this intelligent solution, the Gallery can be opened fully, turning it into a balcony. The handles are just calling out to be touched, like golden flowers.

Have you seen the leaded stained glass that crowns the window? It sifts the light from the outside and compensates for possible excess light, once again demonstrating how Gaudí was the creator of perfect ambiances.

Formerly, there was an oratory opposite the picture window, including a wooden altarpiece and altar. By simply opening up its doors, the living room was transformed into a Chapel, a demonstration of the Batlló family’s devotion to the Catholic church, which was commonplace

in early 20th century society. It is ironic how this piece, a symbol of faith and devotion, was placed in a space that was most often used to host moments of leisure.

CASA BATLLÓ: *Gaudí's imagination knew no limits, and woe betide those who tried to hold him back! His conflicts with the bourgeoisie of the time were notorious. His ideas towards architecture only embraced the inspiration of nature and of its creator: God. He would answer to nobody but God!*

NARRATOR: If you look towards the ceiling you will be amazed by the way that it coils, creating an absorbing spiral effect. In the middle of this fantasy whirlpool you will find the original lamp, which was hidden for over a century in a mysterious suitcase. Today, it sparkles before your eyes with its 3,000 glass gems.

CASA BATLLÓ: *I remember how Gaudí used to speak of Jules Verne. I'm sure that he was inspired by his novels... I would sometimes dream that they were travelling together on a submarine, exploring the depths of the oceans...*

CB_07

NARRATOR: We are now in the hallway that leads to the House's private rooms, namely the family's dining room and bedrooms. The hallway marks the transition between the public life of the living room and the private life of the rooms overlooking the patio.

CASA BATLLÓ: *Mr and Mrs Batlló had 5 children! I can still hear their happy footsteps and their cheerful voices...*

CB_08

NARRATOR: The dining room was where the Batlló family would get together to eat as a family. In this room, originally flanked by two bedrooms, you will see how Gaudí's most creative side takes on a whole new dimension. Put yourself in the shoes of a child living in a house like this... surrounded by magic and fantasy. It is easy to imagine a child sat on the floor, listening open-eyed to a story about magical creatures, while maids served the needs of the family in a silent choreographed dance.

CASA BATLLÓ: *I sometimes feel like the world is upside down... Have you seen the lamp and the shapes that surround it? If a droplet were to spring out of the floor, falling onto the ceiling, it would produce the same effect...*

NARRATOR: You may also be surprised by the two columns located in front of the door leading to the patio. They are not the result of madness or brilliance; they are simply there for structural reasons. Nevertheless, Gaudí filled them with colour and fantasy, lending creativity to a formal and necessary solution. The soft pastel shades mirror a beautiful sunset. Very few columns are as joyful as these... They are flanked by two enormous picture windows, which capture the light and beckon you out to the patio, where you will find yet a new burst of colour.

CB_09

NARRATOR: The modernist patio was created so that the family could enjoy an outdoor space. Designed as a garden, from the patio you can admire the gardens of adjacent buildings, designed by other renowned modernist architects, such as Domènech i Montaner and Puig i Cadafalch. The group of buildings formed by these houses, along with Casa Batlló, is known as the “*Block of Discord*”, so-called because of the rivalry between the architects.

Here we can find one of the architect’s hallmarks: *trencadís*, an ornamental formula created by himself and one of his most characteristic decorative offerings.

CASA BATLLÓ: *Oh how this patio takes me back to times when the family would relax here, enjoying my company, free from their bourgeois appearance. I can still see Mrs Batlló sat in her chair, relaxing, sheltered from the sun under a thatched pergola, smiling as she watched her children play...*

NARRATOR: Made from fragments of glass and ceramics, *trencadís* is different to a mosaic as it is arranged in apparent chaos. If you look at the flowerpots built into the rear wall, you will see how they burst into an improvised world of colour, formed by imperfect, diverse and sensorial tiles and ceramics. To create this effect, as he also did on the façade, Gaudí recycled broken pieces from collapsed buildings, making him ahead of his time in terms of sustainability and recycling, principles that are so important today. Even 100 years ago, Gaudí was already showing us how to look after our environment.

Before you go back into the building, observe the 2 skylights located underneath the dining room picture windows. They let natural light travel down to the lower floor where the building’s former garages were located, which we will see at the end of the visit. Also adorned with *trencadís*, they are a reminder of where we are: the House of light and colour.

CB_10

NARRATOR: Antoni Gaudí was born in 1852 in Riudoms, a village in Tarragona, approximately 100 km from Barcelona. As a child, he suffered from health problems, but he was

surrounded by nature, helping him to see the world from a different perspective. Both this, and his father, who worked as a boilermaker, and who could handle iron with the mastery of a ceramist moulding clay, played a decisive role in his artistic creation...

CASA BATLLÓ: *When he used to come to visit me, despite his ginger beard, I was able to see the innocent boy that he once was. As a boy, Gaudí learned to fly with the birds on the farm, to listen to the whisper of the streams and to dance with the swaying of the leaves. Where would he get such an imagination if it weren't for this?*

NARRATOR: There is something else that makes Casa Batlló an authentic touchstone of intelligent architecture: its ventilation and airing system. With his engineering mastery, Gaudí was well ahead of his time by studying the movement of air. Combining form and function, he was able to design an exemplary system to ensure sustainability and quality of life within the House, enabling the perfect air to reach each and every one of its corners.

CASA BATLLÓ (inhaling): *I breathe to the beat of those who dwell within me, to the rhythm of the four seasons...*

NARRATOR: In this room, the air originates from the window. There are rotating panels on the lower part of the window, which regulate air inlet and outlet, keeping the room either warm or cool as needed. They are shaped like the gills of a fish, once again reminding us that our journey today is inspired by nature. Here, Gaudí's words ring truer than ever...

GAUDÍ VOICE: *The most important requirement for an object to be considered beautiful, is that it fulfils its purpose.*

NARRATOR: Behind the window is the interior patio of lights, which absorbs the natural light from the roof terrace. You will soon discover it in all its splendour. It is a sea of dreams, where air, light and colour become one.

NARRATOR: Since its construction and to this day, the façade of Casa Batlló, its most distinctive element worldwide, captivates all the attention of onlookers.

CASA BATLLÓ: *On my most visible face, Gaudí acted both as a painter and a sculptor, adorning me with infinite colours to the whim of his imagination. He directed the work from the outside, without plans, using a plaster model that he modelled with his own hands, an artist guided solely by his creative instinct...*

NARRATOR: The façade of Casa Batlló is an ode to fantasy and imagination, full of myths and legends. Created from 5 different materials, many can see masks, bones, real and imaginary animals and a whole aquatic universe on this façade... What about you? What can you see? What does this explosion of colours and materials evoke in you?

NARRATOR: We are now leaving the main floor to visit one of the most iconic spaces of our journey: the patio of lights, a gigantic blue cascade full of marine symbolism. Can you hear a distant murmur?

NARRATOR: As we enter the staircase, we start our climb through an inverted sea, surrounded by one of the most beautiful backdrops of modern architecture: Casa Batlló's patio of lights.

Gaudí created two patios instead of one, something that was very uncommon at the time, true to his idea of bringing together art and function. This patio act as the lungs of the House, enabling the light and the air to circulate flawlessly through the building.

NARRATOR: Here, Gaudí moulded the ceramics to the variations of the space, creating a second skin in blue tones that will accompany us until the end of the staircase.

As we ascend, the colour of the tiles changes continually: white, sky blue, indigo, cobalt, and so on, before ultimately reaching an ultramarine blue. Why do you think Gaudí designed this sequence of colours?

If you look at the windows, you will see that they change size, becoming smaller the higher we climb. The varied colours and sizes respond to the same need: to regulate the light. Gaudí's aim was to distribute light evenly throughout the building, ensuring that it would reach the main floor, where the family lived, with the same intensity.

This is yet another example of how eccentric and innovative Gaudí was, an architect who was able to invert the colours of the sea and the size of the windows to generate the perfect lighting. Is it not incredible?

NARRATOR: I now propose that you pause on one of the landings and look through the glass out to the patio... Does it remind you of anything?

CASA BATLLÓ: *It reminds me of a summer afternoon in the Mediterranean sea. You plunge your head into the water, and, through a somewhat disconcerting haze, you watch the fish swim by...*

NARRATOR: It is interesting how this glass, known as “cathedral glass”, can produce such a surreal effect... To build this fascinating House, Gaudí worked with the very best craftsmen of the era: cabinetmakers, ceramists, blacksmiths, glassmakers... By doing so, he was able to combine the different decorative and artisanal traditions of the time, creating a unique and innovative work. That is why you will discover unique designs in each and every corner, serving people and the imagination.

CASA BATLLÓ: *Pause for a moment at one of my doors.... Choose whichever one you wish... In the place of numbers, you will see letters designed by my creator, a unique calligraphy born from his own hand...*

NARRATOR: These doors, that appear to have been sculpted by the ocean waves, are the fruit of master carpentry. The spyholes, designed both for viewing and for ventilation, are the result of painstaking metal work. The brass handles were moulded in clay by the architect himself. This is an example of Gaudí's most gentle side: the architect who designed objects with his own hands for the hands of others. You can touch them. On this staircase, the doorknobs, the banister and other countless details give us continual lessons in beauty and functionality.

As we come to the peak of this “vertical tour” full of art, we discover the greenhouse-type skylight, yet another innovation created by Gaudí that you will later be able to admire from the roof terrace. An exuberant cascade of light passes through this skylight, expanding throughout the whole building.

If you look down now, the windows may appear to be small boats, because everything is water, everything is Mediterranean, everything is surreal.

Sometimes, happiness is a matter of the imagination.

CB_17

NARRATOR: We have now reached the attic, intended as a service area, a space enveloped in white architecture, quite different to the explosion of colour that you have experienced so far.

Here, for the first time, we will discover one of Gaudí's most outstanding architectural innovations: "The catenary arch", a fundamental structure of his work, here in its purest and most minimal form.

CASA BATLLÓ: *These arches let me rest and bestow me with such lightness! Without their support I would probably not stand the test of time...*

NARRATOR: As the arches frame our path forward, you will notice how the walls open up like the gills of a fish, flooding the space with light and making it possible for air to circulate, facilitating ventilation.

Certain domestic duties, such as washing and ironing clothes, were carried out in the rooms adjacent to this hallway. Demonstrating his most humble side, our architect reserved this bright corner for the tasks of the working class, for whom he had great respect.

As you can see, this House was designed with everybody in mind.

CB_18

NARRATOR: You are about to go out into the open. Get ready to take a big breath of air on one of the city's most magical roof terraces.

CB_19

NARRATOR: Welcome to the Casa Batlló roof terrace, an open space where Gaudí's art becomes one with the Barcelona sky.

The first thing you might notice are the 27 ceramic and glass chimneys that surround us. Instead of positioning them at random, Gaudí grouped them together so they would be a sight to behold, rather than an obstacle. The architect transformed these smoke outlets into artistic pieces, abiding by his principle of merging beauty and function. Did you know that they are crowned by a screen that facilitates the extraction of smoke?

CASA BATLLÓ: *On the roof terrace I am protected by 27 brave knights, clad in a trencadís armour. Who better than them to guard the land and the sky, watching over the heart of my beloved Barcelona from up above.*

NARRATOR: If you look at the structure that covers the patio of lights, you will discover the greenhouse-type skylight that we saw earlier from the inside. From close up, you will see the drainage and ventilation elements that protect the building from the accumulation of water and damp. This solution, often used on industrial premises at the time, was an unparalleled innovation for a residential building.

However, the most surprising element of this roof terrace has a life of its own: the roof that crowns the façade, known as “the dragon's back”. Look closely at the ceramic tiles: their unique pattern resembles the scales of a huge reptile, while the winding colours give it movement.

Some interpretations link this roof to the legend of Saint George, the most important legend in Catalan culture, involving a knight, a dragon and a princess. Do you know what the four-armed cross symbolises? It represents the sword that Saint George plunged into the animal's back, to free the princess and the people from its wrath.

CASA BATLLÓ: *On 23 April, Saint George's Day, the people of Barcelona take to the streets, awash with roses and books, to celebrate the day of love in Catalan tradition. Many come to see me, and I put on my very best attire, decorating my façade with roses. I love to be the soul of the party!*

NARRATOR: This terrace brings together some of the most characteristic features of the architect's work. From the use of *trencadís*, which has become a hallmark of Barcelona, to an architecture full of colours and symbolism. His devotion to the Catholic church is also reflected. The cross that crowns the façade bears letters referring to Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

CASA BATLLÓ: *From my summit I see the city and the sea, and in those days, I could also see other works designed by my creator, such as La Pedrera and the Sagrada Família. The architect did not want to leave anything to chance.*

CB_20

NARRATOR: Have you ever wondered how water was supplied to residential buildings before the creation of the current supply networks?

The answer can be found in this room: the water tank. Water was stored here in large barrels, to be distributed between the different dwellings.

Water, the architect's true elixir, rested at the summit of the House.

CB_21-22

NARRATOR: We will now head down towards the attic, to continue our adventure. You are about to experience the most eagerly awaited part of our journey: “the dragon’s belly”

CB_23

GAUDÍ VOICE: *Some have compared this attic to a large rib cage, the gigantic rib cage of an imaginary animal, and they are not wrong, because it all stems from the great book of nature, nature that is always my teacher.*

NARRATOR: This room is held up thanks to the interlinking catenary arches, an architectural formula that we saw earlier. By using these arches, Gaudí was able to eliminate buttresses and load-bearing walls, typical in Gothic architecture. These arches minimise costs and make spaces appear bigger.

This skeleton of plastered brick supports the roof terrace, but it bears much more than you might think...

CASA BATLLÓ: *Now I want to ask you a favour. I want to hear your silence; I want you to give me your full attention. Listen to me..., can you hear it? My soul resides in this room... Right here, where you can hear the beat of my heart..., because in this attic is where my heart lies.*

CB_25

NARRATOR: We are now reaching the final stretch of this inspiring journey, and we begin our descent down a stairway that has been converted into a work of art thanks to the Japanese architect, Kengo Kuma. This contemporary creator, a master of organic architecture, has given the House a new skin, a century after its creation, amazing us with light, texture and tones, just like Gaudí did over 100 years ago.

The moment is yours. In this limbo, time stands still, and the absence of colour gives us an intangible gift: a moment just for you, a moment to reflect, a moment to digest everything that you have seen and felt on the way...

CASA BATLLÓ: *Before I say goodbye, I have a confession to make: behind my skin, my doors and my windows, there is still life in the House. The people who look after me.*

NARRATOR: Today, around one hundred people conserve this World Heritage site, collaborating in the dissemination of one of the Catalan architect's greatest masterpieces. From day to day, they apply sustainability principles that have led us to becoming Biosphere certified. It is our way of inviting the world to promote a tourism that is respectful of our surroundings, from the House to the city.

CASA BATLLÓ: *The time has come to say goodbye. From today, I would like to rest in your memory and, should our paths cross again, I hope you remember me with affection, as an old friend who accompanied you on an exciting journey.... See you soon!*

NARRATOR: From today you are part of the history of this House, which is unique in the world. Thanks to your ticket purchase, you have helped us to ensure that this heritage can be passed on to future generations. This magical House will forever remain in your memory, and it will stay with you, so that you never forget how a blue-eyed architect was able to paint a rainbow in the Barcelona sky.

Before we say goodbye, we have a final surprise for you, from another contemporary artist, Refik Anadol. A return trip to the beauty of nature that can be found at Casa Batlló.

We hope that this inspiring journey will spur you to change the world around you, just like Gaudí did, and never forget: the beauty belongs to us all.

We hope you have a fantastic day. Casa Batlló, today and always: Your House.