

Casa Lis: a modernist symbol in a parochial period in Salamanca

The Casa Lis is the only building in Salamanca with an early twentieth century façade. The construction started the last years of the XIX century and was finished in 1905. So it says the inscription at the small attic of the northern front door.

By then the society in Salamanca was very provincial. Most people were farmers and only upper and lower classes could be distinguished. No middle class existed. This palace was the whimsical desire of a rich entrepreneur in the leather-tanning industry: Miguel de Lis. He was a modern man for the times, used to travel to Paris, Berlín, Brussels and Vienna and wanted to import the modern spirit into his parochial city. The architect Joaquín de Vargas was hired to create a modernist building using iron, ceramic, glass, brick and marble. Joaquín de Vargas's Casa Lis in Salamanca could be compared to the Gaudí's action in Barcelona.

To build the Casa Lis, part of the old wall had to be pulled down (only possible because the status of the owner), because Miguel de Lis wanted to see the river and the roman bridge. Miguel de Lis lived in the house with his wife, one daughter and two sons. They had to sell the house in 1917. The new owner sold it again during the 40's, being rented to a priest congregation as a retirement house. In 1970 was sold again but nobody lived there and the house started to deteriorate. At the end of the 70's the house was a complete ruin. It had to be expropriated by the socialist major of the city Jesús Málaga. The restoration of the building started by the architect Fernando Pulín. In 1995, a coloured, leaded glass representing the Night closed the central patio. The furniture inside the building was donated by an antiquary: Manuel Ramos Andrade, born in Navasfrías (small village in Salamanca) but living in Barcelona. Manuel Ramos Andrade donated his complete collection under three conditions: the collection has to remain as a whole, it has to remain in the Casa Lis and the benefits have to go to elder and children of his natal village: Navasfrías. The 6th of April of 1995 one of the most important art déco museums in Europe is open to the public.

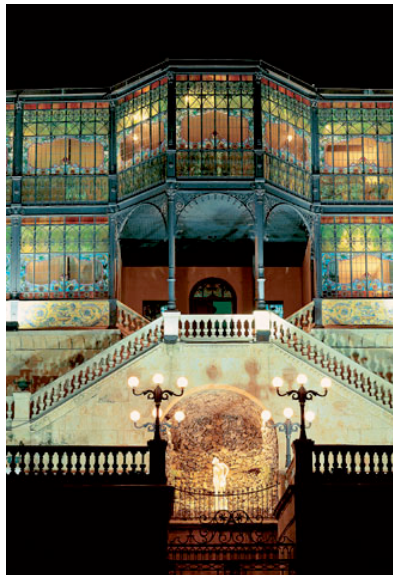
Three main features have to be observed in the building: the north façade, the south façade and the central patio.

The north façade preserves the highest modernist style. It is made up by two bodies façade, a patio and a gate, all of great simplicity. Many Art Nouveau details can be observed, like the highlighted in relief floral and aquatic ornaments on the door.



North façade. Photo: <https://www.latiendadelis.com/index.php?pg=ficha&id=494>

The south façade concentrates the major strength, mixing classicism and modernism. It was considered an architectural audacity for the time. It consists on a central body, opened at the lower level and closed at the upper level by an iron net supporting the stained glass. This chromatism is new, applied in 1992 during the restoration of the house. The original glass was not coloured. The iron introduced an innovative aspect in the building because it did not have an structural function, but ornamental.



South façade. Photo: <https://www.latiendadelis.com/index.php?pg=ficha&id=494>

The central patio was originally opened and around it the different rooms were disposed. This structure remind us of the andalusien patios and in fact it refered to the andalusian origin of the first owner. The decoration in the corridors has been preserved.



Central patio. Photo: <http://misslauraashley.wordpress.com/salamanca/>

The collections:

- **Criselefantinas:** They are miniature sculptures, common in Art Nouveau (at the end of XIX century and beginning of the XX), representing human figures in ivory, gold, bronze, marble, silver and onyx. They are created following the antic tradition of Greeks to represent their divinities. There are 2,400 figures in the museum and a selection of them are exhibited around the world under the exhibition name: “Cabaret: Paris-Berlin in the 30’s”

It is interesting to see how pedestals are described as “marble” in most cases, although we see that they are made of different kind of materials: onyx, serpentine, limestone...



<http://www.museocasalis.org/index.php?pg=galeria&gid=20&fid=04>

- **The Bronze figures:** mostly women are sculpted in bronze representing the femininity importance in the 30's.
- **The Dolls:** 300 porcelain dolls of different nationalities (but mainly from France, Germany and Italy) are exhibited in the upper floor.
- **The Glass collection:** 194 pieces made of glass.
- **Enamel collection.**
- **Porcelain collection**
- **Fan collection:** 45 fans from XIX and XX centuries.
- **The Jewel collection:** the Dragonfly by Lalique
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<http://www.museocasalis.org/index.php?pg=galeria&gid=20&fid=04>

- **Art déco furniture collection**
- **Art collection**