

Ciudad Maya

Calle 84 #510 x 63 y 61. Merida, Yucatan, Mexico.

The owner was Rubén González Aguilar, they called him “El Bono”. He was one of the troublemakers from Santiago neighbourhood. He had an entrepreneurial spirit. He noticed how traditional stuff attracted people and everything started like that. He began selling *panuchos* and other typical food. Then he got the big piece of land behind the Zoo. He bought many houses and demolished them little by little while he prepared the construction. One day he called me and I said: “But I’m not an architect, I can only do drawings and give you some ideas, but you need to get a real architect”. He told me we would manage. He said: “We are going to build a great Mayan City. It’s going to be a amazing, and we will catch a lot of tourists”.



We started to make reproductions of ancient Mayan buildings from Chichen-Itzá but with some small changes. I stretched the facades to cover the whole front of the property for example. It was a building called “Chichán-Chop”, or “Casa colorada” It had some niches where the Maya had put sculptures of the Turtle God, the Snail God and two other more. All the stairs were built with carved stones exactly in the same way as the originals. I was doing all the drawings and a master mason interpreted them and directed all the other workers. It took some time. Months. Some months. Many months. Labor was cheaper at that time so it was possible to do it. They all worked very hard.

After we finished the front, we started with the back part. At the center we made an artificial *cenote*. It didn’t exist before, it was created by us. Around

40 to 60 people excavated it. It was 20 meters wide. They carved the rock for months down to the groundwater layer 8 meters deep. We found archeological pieces like some vases, bones and other Pre-Columbian things . We also found a lot of petrified giant sea shells.

For the observatory, we went to Chichen-Itzá to take measurements from the original. It had exactly the same form. The spiral staircase and the windows were identical



and orientated to the same stars. We found ourselves on a very special adventure. We were so faithful to reality and maybe that was the cause of the strange things that started to happen. Workers got scared, they were sure that there was some kind of presence during the night. Someone was moving their stuff from it’s original place. I never stayed late so I never saw anything.

It was a huge thing Ciudad Maya. Something I can assure you is that everything was as precise as possible. I did all the designs for the iron work, all the fences had



Mayan motifs, they were based on real images. Why invent something if it already exists? Of course I could have created something new, but that was not the point. Tourists like authentic things not fake ones.



Later on we built the pyramid called “El Castillo”, It was a perfect reproduction in scale. We cut every little stone with the same shape as the real one. I don't know what became of it. It would be a shame if they destroyed it or sold it. They used a spotlight to reproduce the effect of the equinox on the pyramid. You could see the shadow of the snake descending the stairs. That was part of the show they were doing every night for the visitors. They also simulated a human sacrifice by throwing a maiden into the *cenote*.

The last thing he did was to start building the hotel. All the rooms were Maya style. The doors and the windows had the so called Mayan “fake arch”. He also wanted to host those big trucks the americans use to



travel, but he never finished that part. He wanted to do so many things.

He promised me a lot my *compadre*. He told me: “You will get at least a million from this”, then he died and I never saw a cent. But I really enjoyed the project and we had a great time there. Sometimes he lent me



the place for my family's parties. We ate, we drank and we had fun. But time is ruthless. I didn't think Ciudad Maya still existed. I'm glad that someone got interest in it. I thought it had fallen apart or been demolished or something. It's still standing there like the Mayan pyramids.

In January 24th 2016 I interviewed Emilio Vera Granados (b.1921) the artist who created Ciudad Maya in the early 80's. The touristic restaurant in downtown Merida was opened in 1982 and operated for almost twenty years first as a restaurant and then as a cabaret.

Andrés Padilla Domene - July 2017