



In 1883, Gaudí, then 31, was commissioned by broker Manel Vicens i Montaner to build a four-storey summer home. He began with the vaults and arches typical of 19th-century architecture before adding complex geometric details that played with light and shadow, and the colours and textures more associated with Moorish designs. “Casa Vicens shows us the work of a young architect who, although famous, does not yet have the visibility that he would have later in history,” says Mercedes Mora Guerin, officer of institutional relations at the property. “It is the first time that he faces the design of a house and in it displays all of his talent... [he] deploys a series of techniques that will be the seeds of all his later work.”

While Vicens doesn’t offer the spirals and curves for which Gaudí is famous, it is one of the first examples of his reverence for nature. Visitors will note the French marigold motifs on the chequerboard tiles of the exterior — inspired by ones he saw while measuring the ground in the design phase — and the cast-iron entrance gate, depicting a palm leaf.

Themes of nature continue in the interior murals, wood carvings and wrought-iron, and in how the ground-floor gallery draws breeze and sunshine from the garden. This blending

of Catalan traditions with Orientalist and natural styles is why Casa Vicens is considered an early masterpiece of Modernism. In the words of Gaudí himself, “Originality consists in returning to the origin.” At Casa Vicens, travellers can go back to the start. *Carrer de les Carolines 20–26, Barcelona, Spain; www.casavicens.org.*

## Original Vision

An early masterpiece by Catalan architect Antoni Gaudí is finally open to the public.

Words **SERENA RENNER**

**B**efore there was Park Güell, Casa Batlló and the Sagrada Família, there was Casa Vicens, the first house designed by Catalan visionary Antoni Gaudí. After 130 years as a private residence, and years of painstaking restoration, the ornate home in Barcelona’s Gràcia district is now open to the public. Inside, visitors can see the early inspirations of the man who reinvented Art Nouveau in Catalonia, in so doing becoming one of the most recognised architects in the world. As the last of Barcelona’s eight UNESCO buildings — seven of them Gaudí’s works — to be restored and opened, Casa Vicens is also the culmination of the city’s heritage tour.



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The ornate exterior of the property has Moorish influences; the light-filled interior is equally detailed.