

Valencia exudes the fine arts of transformation

By Niecee Regis
GLOBE CORRESPONDENT

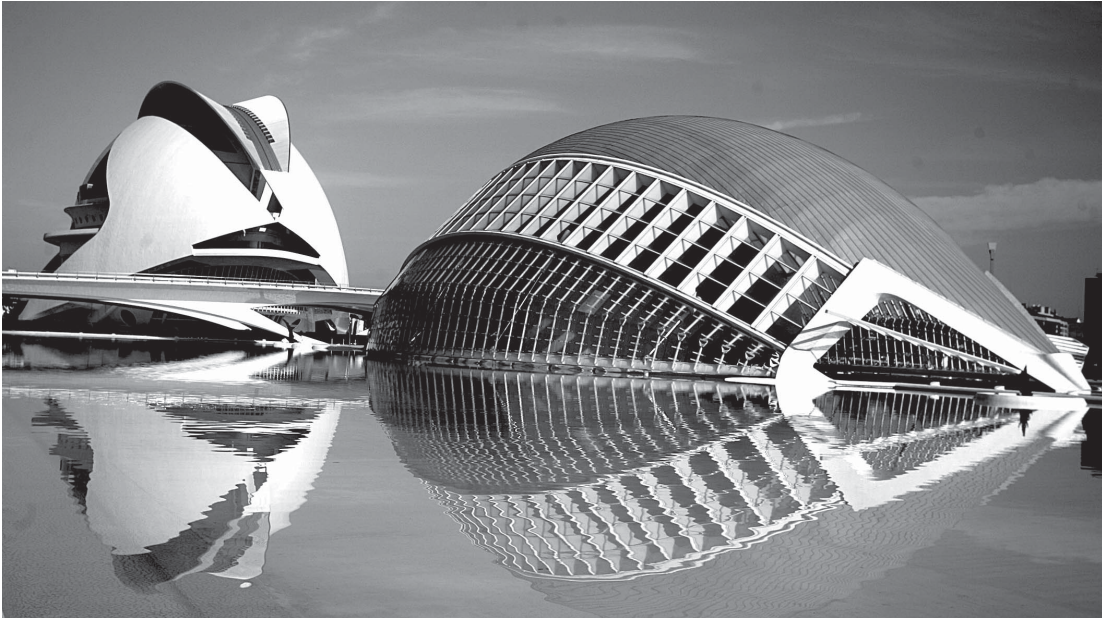
VALENCIA, Spain — If your travels haven't taken you to Valencia recently, you're in for a pleasant surprise. This formerly sleepy city on the Mediterranean coast has transformed itself, literally, through two ambitious and impressive public projects.

First, Valencia found a world-class architect to design a spectacular series of buildings along 86 acres of abandoned riverbed — though calling Santiago Calatrava's sculptural structures "buildings" is a bit like calling Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel ceiling a "painting."

The project Calatrava — a native son — helped develop, the City of Arts and Sciences, is a futuristic vision built in steel, glass, concrete, and white ceramic tiles. This city-within-a-city, designed to combine education with entertainment and leisure, includes Europe's largest aquarium, a 450,000-square-foot science museum, a planetarium and IMAX theater, and a performing arts center with two performance halls where Zubin Mehta and Loren Maazel preside over opera, ballet, and orchestral music.

Walking through the new city is an adventure in itself. Calatrava wanted his creation to represent the sea and sky of the Mediterranean, and the brilliant white structures and reflecting pools do indeed produce intense reflections (on a sunny day, sunglasses and a hat with a brim are advised). Whimsy also plays a role in the architecture: The performing arts center resembles a gigantic white helmet and the planetarium/IMAX structure resembles the world's largest eye surrounded by two huge lakes.

It's a walk of more than a mile from the performing arts building to the aquarium (comfortable shoes also advised), which was de-



Palau de les Arts Reina Sofia, left, the opera house, and L'Hemisfèric, the planetarium, at the City of Arts and Sciences in Valencia. The aquarium, L'Oceanogràfic, has a tunnel for visitors.

signed by the late Félix Candela, a Mexican architect born in Spain. The series of white hyperbolic paraboloid roofs set within a nature reserve fits right into the city's contemporary design. With more than 500 species of marine life housed here, including dolphins, white whales, sea lions, fish, and wetland birds, you could easily spend a day at the aquarium.

Most impressive is the fact that construction on this project began in 1997 and was completed in 2005, although residence towers in the area remain a work in progress.

"Valencia has changed so much in the past 10 years that people here don't recognize their own city," said Patricia Pico, who works at the City of Arts and Sciences.

The city's second large-scale project involves the waterfront where, again, Valencia has taken a downtrodden area and turned it into something remarkable, almost in the blink of an eye.

"Valencia gave its back to the



sea. Now we want to change that — to be open to the sea," said Pico.

Nothing spurs progress like a deadline. In 2003, Switzerland won the America's Cup, bringing the famed sailing competition back to Europe for the first time in 152 years. The landlocked Swiss chose Valencia to host the 2007 event and for the past two years the city has worked feverishly — and successfully — to transform an abandoned section of an active

commercial harbor (one of the largest in Europe) into a viable America's Cup site.

There are 12 new buildings that serve as headquarters for each competing team, including the defender, Alinghi, and the US team, BMW-Oracle Racing from San Francisco. To keep the racing yachts and commercial vessels from getting in each other's way, Valencia carved a new half-mile canal out to the ocean.

The newly developed waterfront is open to the public (once you pass through security) and includes a hall of historic exhibitions with models of all 32 past Cup winners, South Beach-style restaurants, and a harborside promenade. Preliminary regattas have al-

ready been held, and the Louis Vuitton regattas in the spring will determine the Cup challenger.

The beach, just north of the commercial harbor, is a broad sandy expanse and the water is inviting for swimming. A wide walkway, popular among the locals for biking or an evening stroll, separates the beach from a row of popular restaurants and resorts. As part of Valencia's rejuvenation, some of these are being transformed into large luxury and smaller boutique hotels.

Two blocks inland, two- and three-story buildings with Art Deco sensibilities sport signs saying "Rehabilitación Sin Destrucción" (rehabilitate without destruction). With so much growth in Valencia, locals are working to preserve the traditional character and architecture, and to balance the new with the old.

For those who like to explore history, there are many ways to enjoy the cultural heritage of Valencia. Spain's third largest city, with a population of 800,000, has a vibrant city center with cobblestone streets, a medieval gate, Roman ruins, the first bull ring built in Spain, an impressive cathedral, a food market similar to La Boqueria in Barcelona, as well as many museums of art and history. The National Museum of Ceramics is worth seeing for the exterior facade alone, a carved alabaster portal from the 18th century.

Of course, the fresh salt air and lots of walking will make you hungry, which in Valencia is a very good thing because the cuisine reflects the city's seaside location. Its most famous dish, paella, is prepared in many ways, combining saffron-flavored rice with varied ingredients including chicken or rabbit (to represent the land) with snails, fish, and shellfish (to represent the sea). Thirty percent of Spain's rice is produced in the province of Valencia, and one can learn about three distinct varieties (Bahia, Senia, and Bomba) at the Rice Museum, housed in an old rice mill.

In addition to paella, and, of course, tapas, Valencia is known for horchata, a sweet refreshing drink made from the milk of the ti-

.....

If you go . . .

Where to stay
Hotel Astoria Palace
Plaza de Rodrigo Botet, 5
011-34-96-398-10-00
hotelastoriapalace.com
A quiet, elegant hotel in the heart of the old city. \$255-\$455, weekends \$120.

Las Arenas Spa & Hotel
Calle Eugenia Viñes, 22-24
011-34-96-312-06-00
hotel-lasarenas.com
Luxurious and overlooking the beach, \$188-\$285; rates change with the seasons.

Where to eat
El Tridente at Hotel Neptuno
Paseo de Neptuno, 2
011-34-96-356-77-77
hotelneptunovalencia.com
Contemporary and experimental Mediterranean cuisine in a stylish seaside setting. Meals \$50-\$75.

Canyar Restaurant
Segorbe, 5
011-34-96-341-80-82
Dine on traditional rustic Valencian dishes in early-20th-century elegance. Meals \$35-\$55.

La Lola Restaurant
Calle Subida del Toledano, 8
011-34-96-391-80-45
lalolarestaurante.com
Chic decor in a central location, with imaginative Mediterranean cuisine. Meals \$20-\$25.

What to do
National Museum of Ceramics
Rinconada Garcia Sanchiz, 6
011-34-96-351-63-92
mnceramica.mcu.es

Resources
cac.es (City of Arts and Sciences)
americascup.com
turisvalencia.es
spain.info

.....

ger nut. After a day on the go, it's an excellent pick-me-up to carry you through the evening hours. This is Spain, after all, where dinner is late and nightlife even later.

Contact Niecee Regis, a freelance writer in Boston and Miami, at nieceeregis@yahoo.com.



Let their imaginations go overboard.

Enjoy FREE *Park Hopper*® and *Water Park Fun & More* ticket upgrades when you purchase this vacation package!

This winter, come be part of *The Year of a Million Dreams* celebration! With the FREE *Park Hopper* ticket upgrade included in your vacation package, you can experience all the magic in all four Theme Parks, every day of your ticket. Other great rates are also available most nights from February 15–March 8, 2007.

*The number of rooms allocated for this offer is limited. Savings based on non-discounted price for the same package. Tickets and options must be used within 14 days of first use. No group rates or other discounts apply. Water Parks subject to seasonal and weather closures.

4-Night/5-Day Package
Select Disney Value
Resort Hotels and Tickets

\$377*

per adult, based on
adult double occupancy in
a standard room most nights
1/1-1/11/07, 1/15-2/14/07

Save **\$114** per adult

Call 407.939.7619
or your Travel Agent
and ask for booking code ZCM.

Hurry, you must book by
December 16, 2006.
Ask about packages for other
lengths of stay.



Walt Disney Travel Company CST: 1022229-30
©Disney C7287249

ARUBA
SHINE



5 nights from
\$1,139

Save 25% plus receive a 5th night
free at the Renaissance Marina Hotel


1-800-447-7012 **LIBERTY TRAVEL**

ARUBA.COM

Our sunny
weather inspired
this hot deal.



Prices are per person, based on double occupancy accommodations (unless otherwise noted). Air-inclusive packages are based on round-trip midweek coach air from Boston, based on American Airlines "Q" class published air. Prices are valid for new bookings only, subject to availability. Valid for travel 1/2-4/12/07. Blackouts, peak period surcharges, cancellation charges, and other restrictions may apply. Air fuel surcharge is included in pricing. September 11th Security Fee of up to \$10 is additional. U.S. departure taxes for international travel of up to \$95 and PFCs of up to \$16 may be additional and payable prior to departure. Not responsible for errors or omissions in the content of the offers displayed here.



**Call AAA Travel for a
limited-time special offer!**

32 convenient AAA offices • 1-877-WALT-AAA