



TOP LEFT: As the Casa Comunal is set into the natural topography of the hill, access can take place on many levels.

TOP RIGHT: The building contains multi-use spaces, classrooms, offices and a volleyball court on the roof. At the back of the hill is the steel skeleton of resettlement housing units that were part of the San Miguel upgrading plan. Designed by the Pintos, the housing has been placed on hold.

FACING PAGE TOP: Axonometric studies of the building envelope. Given the programmatic requirements for openness as well as for security, the Pintos designed a layered and permeable boundary between inside and outside.

FACING PAGE MIDDLE: The building condenses a wide array of activities within its compact section. The Pintos sought to make these activities visible to the surrounding buildings and to integrate them into the life of the neighborhood.

FACING PAGE BOTTOM: Ground floor plan (left), second (middle), and third floor (right) plans.

two pilot neighborhoods of approximately 200,000 residents where initial work would take place.

Estimated at 1.5 billion dollars and twenty years, CAMEBA began in 1999 when the Venezuelan government entered into partnership with the World Bank. The central government, together with other Venezuelan organizations including the National Housing Council (CONAVI) and Hidrocapital, Caracas' water authority, agreed to provide sixty percent of the funds. The World Bank pledged the remaining sixty million dollars in the form of a loan. The project's administration was given to FUNDACOMUN, a public organization with experience in working with local communities. Although the World Bank had been previously involved in barrio improvement projects in Caracas—a 1993 program called Promueba focused on small-scale physical upgrades—this was its largest and most ambitious contribution to date. The World Bank loan did not become effective until 2001, but some programs funded directly by the government began at the end of the 1990s.

Completed in 2000, the Casa Comunal was built as part of the rehabilitation plan for San Miguel, an urban design unit within La Vega. In addition to the community center, the rehabilitation plan included a new road, forty-eight resettlement housing units, and several recreation areas. Developed by planner Federico Villanueva with Matías Pintó and Carolina Tinoco, the work in San Miguel was funded directly by the National Housing Council (CONAVI). The community association of San Miguel was active in both the development of the program and the initial design for the Casa Comunal. The residents asked for a flexible container to accommodate multiple community uses, including meetings, performances, sports,

and recreation. Matías and Mateo Pintó's compact volume condenses spaces of varying size and openness. Approximately 45-ft wide by 90-ft long, the building contains two multi-purpose rooms on the first floor, classrooms and offices on the second floor, and an outdoor volleyball court on the roof. In addition, a small area, carved into the hill at ground level, serves the sports field in front of the building.

The design of the Casa Comunal takes its cues from its physical context. Set against the hillside, the building is partially obscured on three sides by natural topography. Though constrained, the location proves to be an advantage, as the four-story structure reads as informal, non-monumental and in scale with its surroundings. The site also allows the Pintos to create multiple circulation paths and link the building to various levels of the hill. A narrow footbridge connects the street to open-air perimeter walkway that surrounds the classrooms and offices on the second floor. Below the level of the street is an exterior stair that follows the length of the building and links the sports field, the individual floors, and the back of the hill. Inspired by the constructions which, in the absence of streets, enable vertical movement throughout the barrios, the stair is meant to be used not only for movement within the building but also as a shortcut across the site. The building's circulation sequence culminates with a switchback ramp that leads to the volleyball court on the roof. Wrapped in a light wire-mesh, the court is the building's most theatrical and visible space.

One of the difficult requirements of the program was to maximize the openness of the interior while maintaining security, especially afterhours. In answer to this challenge the

