

## CONSERVATION OF AN URBAN CENTRE OF HISTORICAL AND ARTISTIC INTEREST : THE TOWN OF CHINCHON (MADRID)

Renovation of the Plaza Mayor and its immediate surroundings

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Situated in mountainous country south of the River Tajuña, 32 miles from Madrid, the town of Chinchon covers the summit and one slope of a hill overlooking a valley of vineyards and olive-groves.

As is shown by its general lay-out and by the existence of the 11th-century hermitage of St. Anthony and of the castle (unfortunately now somewhat disfigured), the

town, owing to its nearness to the capital, was a resort of the nobility and members of the Court. In 1475 it was raised to the status of an earldom and presented by the Catholic kings to Don Andrés Cabrera as a reward for his services; in 1738 it became the property of the Infante Don Felipe de Bourbon-Farnese.

The original church, dedicated to Our Lady of the Assumption, was the chapel of the Counts of Chinchon; its was rebuilt in 1589. In 1808, during the Peninsular War, it was set on fire by French troops, and its Goya paintings were all destroyed. It was subsequently rebuilt once again in 1840.

Chinchon is a beautiful place, both in surroundings and in lay-out, and it still retains a strongly Castilian flavour, though most of it now dates from the 18th and 19th

Fig. 1. — The Plaza after renovation.







Fig. 4. — The drinking fountain.



Fig. 5. — The Plaza seen from the bottom of the way up to the church, with detail of colonnade.

centuries, with a number of 16th- and 17th-century buildings still surviving, however. Its most interesting buildings are the former Convent of the Augustins — which now houses the Law Courts — with its church still used for regular worship, the “House of the Chain”, where Philip V stayed, and the parish church. The *Plaza Mayor*, with the streets leading into it and the way up from it to the parish church, is in itself a place much in favour with the population, with a special value of its own and its own peculiar beauty. Situated in the lower part of the town, it is highly irregular in shape, and is surrounded by an uninterrupted series of wooden buildings with wooden balconies, with the parish church looking down on it from high above. The houses have undergone so many successive changes that it is hard to find any which date from earlier than the 19th century; they nevertheless retain an artistic unity which is truly admirable.

Fig. 2. — Balconies of homes the townspeople of with bridged entry into the Plaza.

Fig. 3. — Town Hall and adjacent houses after restoration, showing new paving system.

This unity, preserved in the teeth of such repeated changes, may be said to result from the regular use of the place as a bull-ring. Bull-fighting is a tradition so strongly entrenched in Chinchon that the buildings have in fact been so designed as to provide the accommodation for the public, and continuous galleries project above the street on the first-floor and sometimes also the second-floor levels. The roads leading into the square — with the exception of the one in which the public drinking fountain stands — are all bridged by the upper floors of the buildings, and the bull-fight “arena” is elliptical in shape, fitting as well as possible into the picturesque surroundings afforded it by the town; its levels, too, were originally those of the site, with a steep downwards slope from east to west, the lowest point being reached at the foot of the Town Hall.

The *Plaza* itself was originally surrounded by a colonnade, but only one side of this is still complete.

The buildings materials traditionally used in the town are wood, rubble infill and hewn granite blocks, with white lime for stuccoes, Moorish roof-tiles, and cobbles or slabs for paving. The itineraries intended for pedestrians are distinguished by their fine-laid “carpets” made of fragments of red pottery jars set perpendicularly.

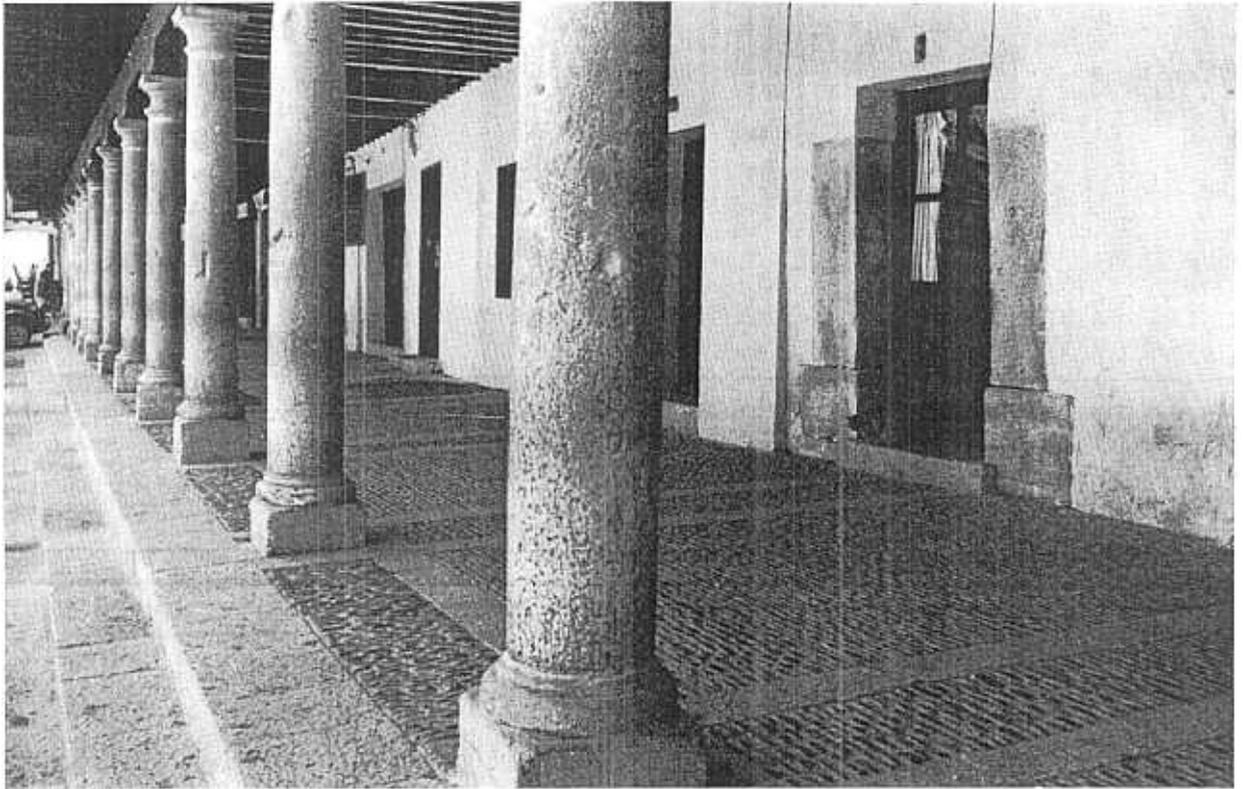
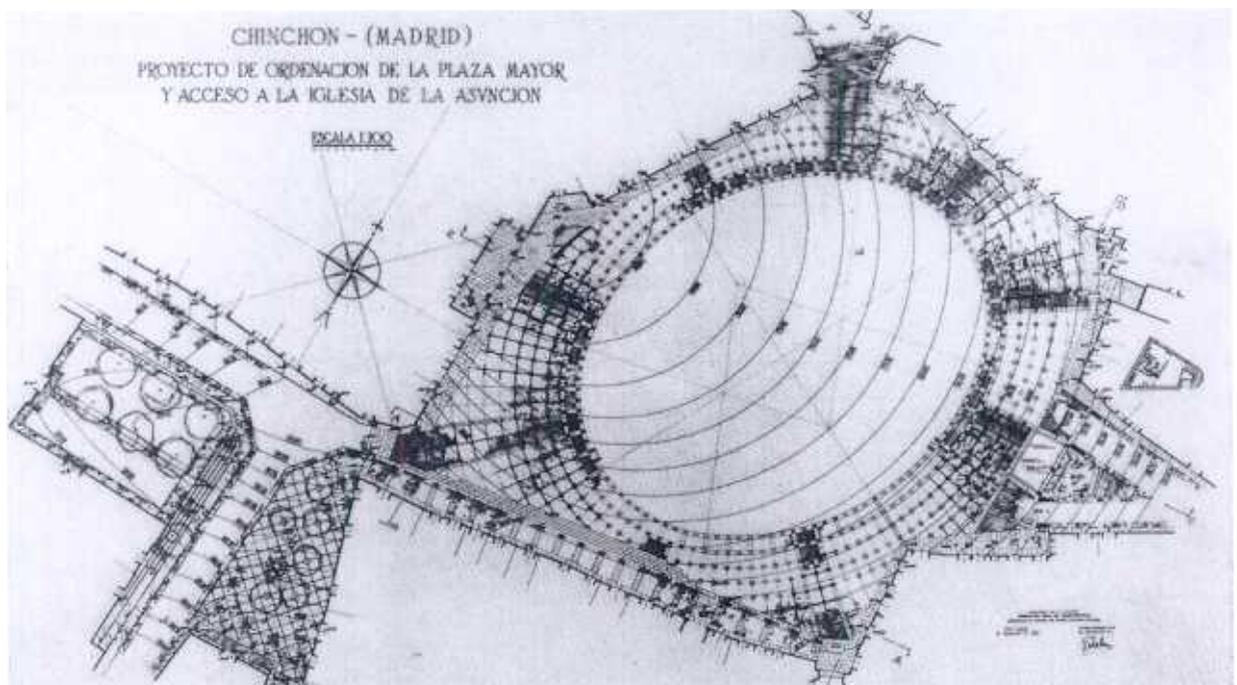


Fig. 6. — Details of colonnade, with restored paving.

Fig. 7. — Renovation scheme — general lay-out.



## RENOVATION AND CONSERVATION WORK

This work was carried out between 1967 and 1971, with the aid of investments amounting to eleven million pesetas (\$ U.S. 157,000).

The renovation work began with the little squares through which the *Plaza Mayor* can be reached from the west, where the *Avenida del Generalísimo* joins the *Calle Zurita*. Their shapes have been slightly altered to suit the new lay-out and the raised terrace porch has been re-paved, while the retaining wall for the earth embankment has been given a more regular outline, as has the staircase.

In the space at the point where the *Calle Zurita* begins, a broad strip has been planned with a paving design following the line of the façade of the convent opening on to it; this will consist in a chequer-work of rectangular stones and ceramic slabs, with cobbles to fill up the squares thus marked out. Trees are being planted to give increased greenery, and it is also planned to replace the present fountain — which is of no great interest — by a new one with two basins on opposite sides.

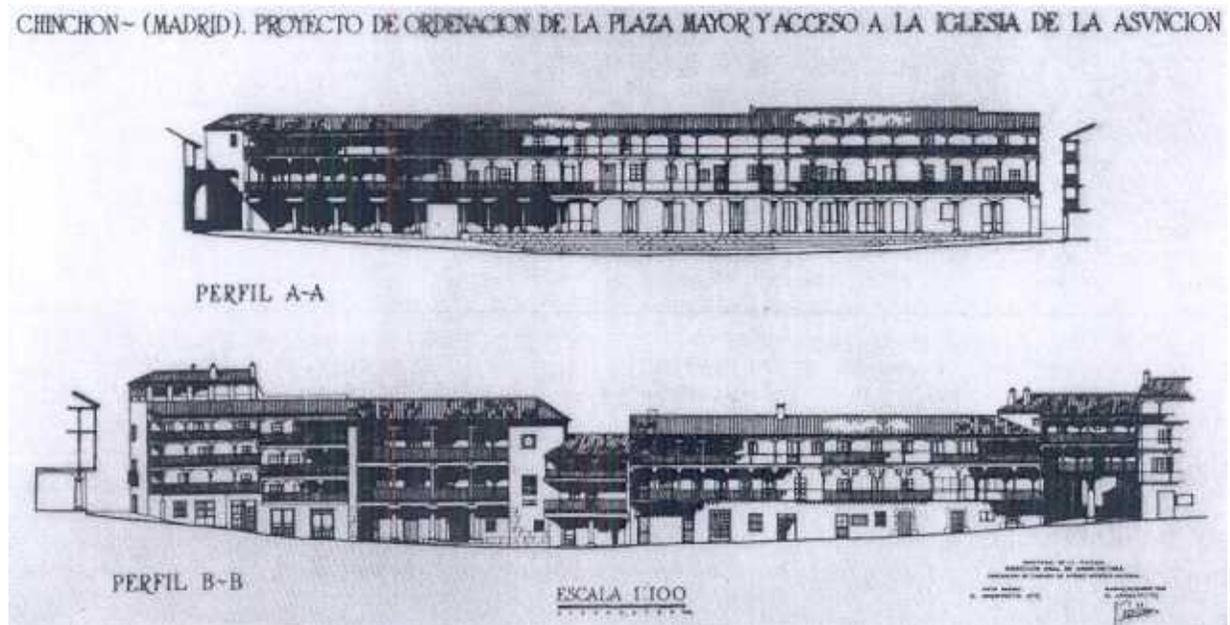
The principle adopted for the whole area consists in the retention of the existing types of paving, though with a better and more regular arrangement, while keeping the un-paved roads as they are to avoid too sharp a difference between the renovated area and the rest,

since a sudden change in the paving system will invariably give the impression of recent construction work. The problem of the alignment of the façades has assumed major importance in the *Plaza Mayor*, for the whole design is subordinated to the need to be able to continue to hold the bull-fights and other traditional public celebrations which have made the town so famous. Improvements have therefore been made in the irregular outline of the *Plaza*, which has at the same time been given a concave cross-section; the centre has been hollowed out and the slope has been accentuated to the east and north, so as to do away with differences in level and obtain an almost horizontal surface in the central area.

Unavoidably, the portion serving as the actual arena retains its unpaved surface but has been given a metallated foundation for drainage purposes. The outer limits of the arena — which as we said is elliptical in shape — have been indicated by giving the “passage” surrounding it a paving whose design is drawn out with fragments of big pottery jars set on end.

The design for the paving of the *Plaza itself*, radiating outwards from the arena, has been determined by the position of the future wooden barrier and possible tiers of removable wooden seats. A radial pattern has been worked out, as has also an oval design concentric with the ellipse, both of them using continuous bands of

Fig. 8. — Alignment of the walls surrounding the *Plaza* and façades of the houses.



CHINCHON - (MADRID). PROYECTO DE ORDENACION DE LA PLAZA MAYOR Y ACCESO A LA IGLESIA DE LA ASUNCION

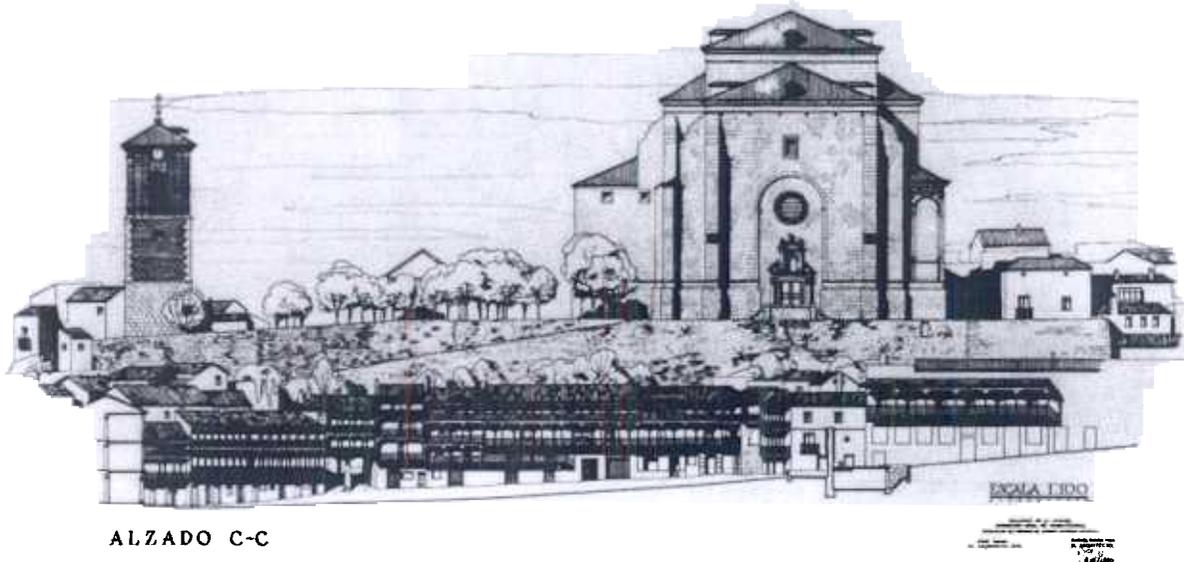
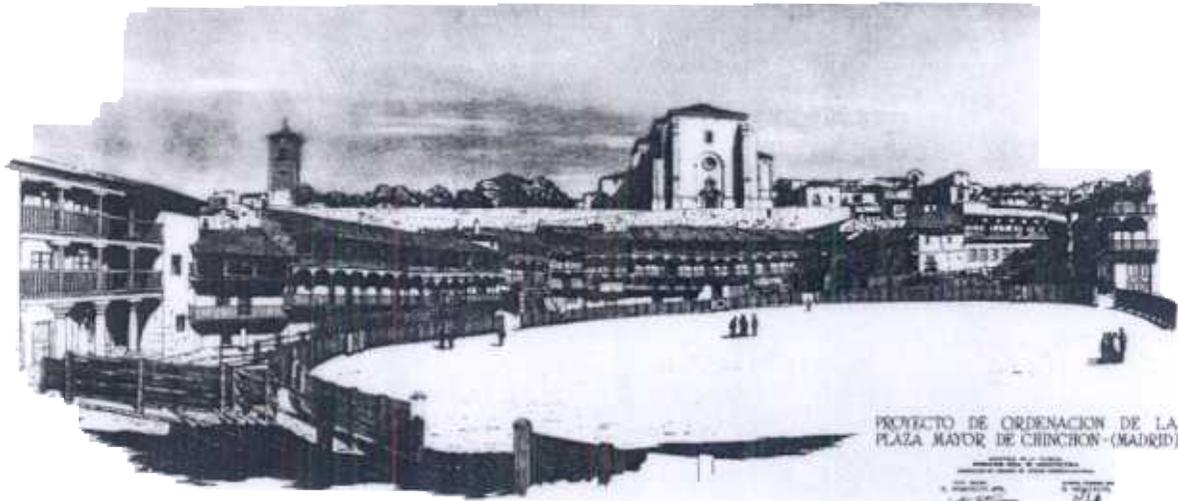


Fig. 9. Section through the fountain showing front elevation of the church.

Fig. 10. - The Plaza arranged for a bull-fight.



stone; at the points where these cross, solid stone courses have been laid below the surface, and in these the housings have been hollowed out to accommodate the perpendicular feet of the wooden structure.

The spaces between the rows of stones are paved with crushed stone fragments buried in cement mortar resting on a concrete foundation, except for the above-mentioned "passage" and the main paths leading from the bull-ring to the outskirts of the Plaza, which have ceramic paving stones.

A pavement for pedestrians has been laid along the façades of the houses; this will remedy the irregularity of their alignment and make walking more comfortable.

The ancient fountain and drinking-trough, which had become disfigured and necessarily altered with the passing of time, has been replaced by a new one retaining the same basin but with a front more in keeping with the whole, made of stone instead of rubble masonry. Concurrently with the renovation of the Plaza, the most urgent work has been done on the houses surrounding it, which have been cleaned and repainted; in many cases thorough consolidation has been necessary, owing to the precarious condition of the wooden balcony structures. These have been given their original design, with projecting beams and joists and plaster bays.

The Town Hall, whose interior at ground-floor level is

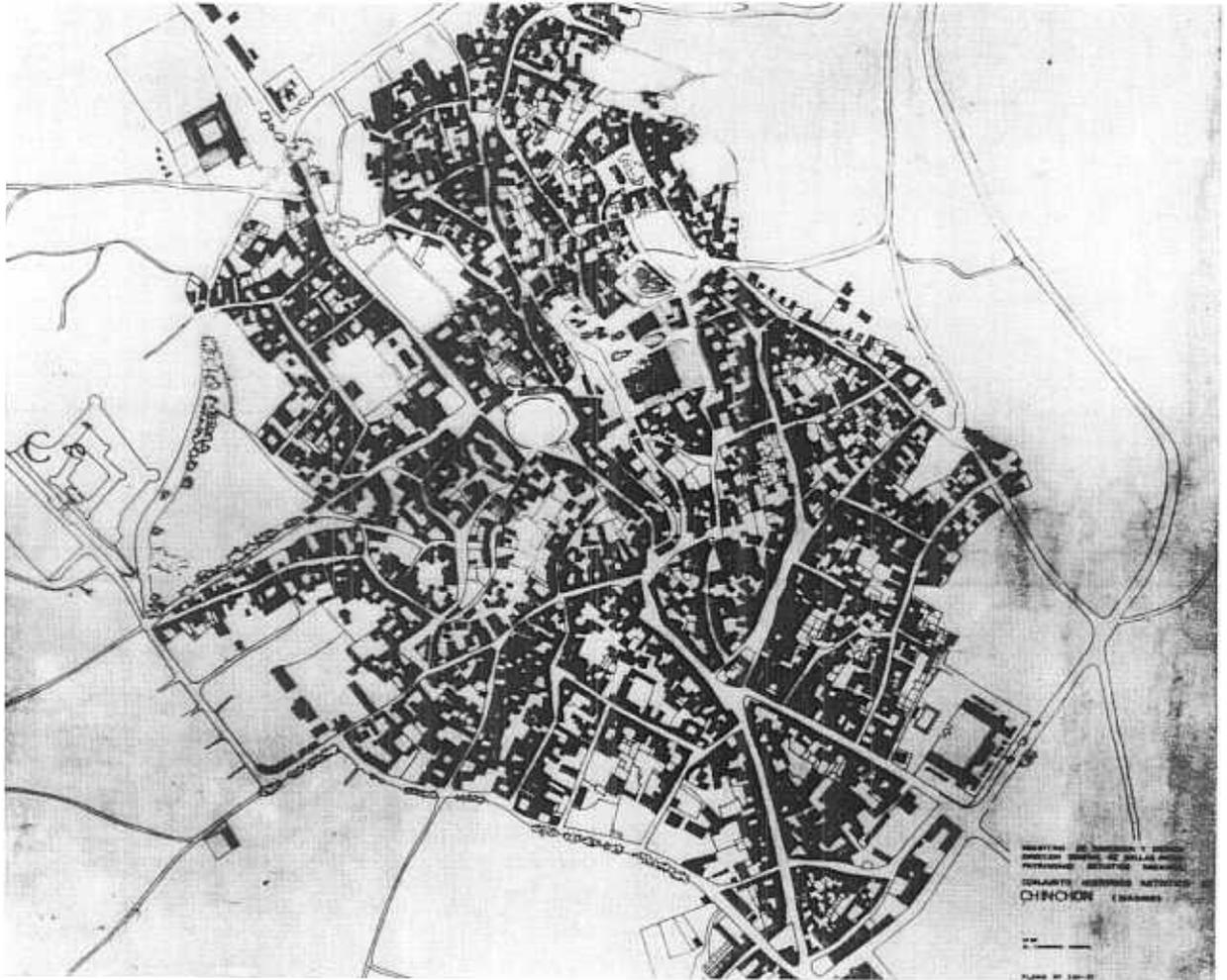


Fig. 11. — Overall plan of the ancient centre of Chinchon.

Fig. 12. — The castle (see C, fig. 11).



of the greatest interest, had a modern façade totally out of keeping with the character of the *Plaza*. A new façade has therefore been designed and built; it has a stone colonnade along the ground floor and half-timbering on the first floor, whose columns, supports, joists and canopy roofs are all wooden.

The essential work on the Church of the Assumption has been confined to the façade, the view of which dominates the *Plaza*. The big arch which is the basic feature of its design has been restored, and a huge carved stone oculus has been cut in the wall to let in the daylight and improve the general aspect of the whole.

*Note :*

The castle dating from the end of the 15th Century, one of the earliest to be built in Spain to resist attacks by artillery, has been most tastefully converted into a factory making the famous Chinchón anisette. The factory, which is open to visitors, provides a most interesting example of revitalization. (See C on plan.)

## RESUME

Chinchon est située dans la province de Madrid en pays montagneux. La ville constitue un très bel ensemble historico-artistique, tant par son tracé que par son aspect architectural qui a conservé avec vigueur les caractéristiques du style castillan des XVII<sup>e</sup> et XIX<sup>e</sup> siècles, tout en comptant des édifices datant des XVI<sup>e</sup> et XVII<sup>e</sup> siècles.

Son ordonnance urbaine a pour axe la Plaza Mayor, qui se trouve dans la partie basse de la ville et qui est, elle-même, dominée par la masse de l'Eglise Paroissiale. L'ensemble des maisons qui ferment la place a une belle unité esthétique, par les structures et les balcons de bois qui accusent sa fonction principale, qui a été, à travers les siècles, et demeure toujours : c'est la Plaza de Toros de la ville. Tous les accès qui la desservent sont couverts pour permettre leur fermeture lors des

corridas. L'espace, ainsi encerclé, est de forme elliptique pour devenir une arène adaptée aux pentes du terrain. La restauration et l'aménagement de cette place, et de ses accès, ont été faits entre 1967 et 1971 et sont revenus à 157.000 dollars.

Les travaux ont eu pour objet de lui rendre son aspect ancien, en ce qui concerne les niveaux et pavements, la restauration des maisons et la reconstruction de certaines parties de l'Hôtel de Ville, qui avaient disparu. Les matériaux employés ont été ceux de la tradition locale : maçonnerie et pierre de taille granitique, crépis de chaux au blanc, bois à nu ou peints dans les tons vert ou ocre, toits de tuiles arabes, pavements de galets et dallage, combinés avec des bandes de céramique rouge constituées par des fragments de jarres cassées et dressées sur champ.

Fig. 1. — La Plaza Mayor rénovée.

Fig. 2. — Balcons de maisons populaires enjambant l'un des accès de la Plaza.

Fig. 3. — L'hôtel de ville et les maisons avoisinantes après restauration, avec le nouveau tracé des pavements.

Fig. 4. — La fontaine-abreuvoir.

Fig. 5. — La Plaza vue du départ de la voie d'accès à l'église, avec détail de la colonnade.

Fig. 6. — Détail de la colonnade, avec pavement réfectionné.

Fig. 7. — Plan de rénovation de l'ensemble.

Fig. 8. — Alignement des murs entourant la Plaza et façades des maisons.

Fig. 9. — Coupe verticale à travers la fontaine, avec façade de l'église.

Fig. 10. — La Plaza aménagée en arènes pour le déroulement d'une corrida.

Fig. 11. — Plan général de l'ensemble historique du Chinchón

Fig. 12. — Le château de Chinchón (voir C, fig. 11).