

New Embassy Compound
Asunción, Paraguay



The Embassy Grounds: A Historical Context

The United States established diplomatic relations with Paraguay in 1861 and today is one of its largest foreign direct investors. The U.S.–Paraguay partnership is founded upon a long history of cooperation, common interests, bilateral trade relations, and mutual respect between our governments and people. From the establishment of the first U.S.–Paraguay Binational Center in 1942 and the arrival of the Peace Corps in 1967, the spirit of partnership and community continue to deepen with renewed commitments to advancing democratic values, security, and mutual inclusive economic growth for both our countries.





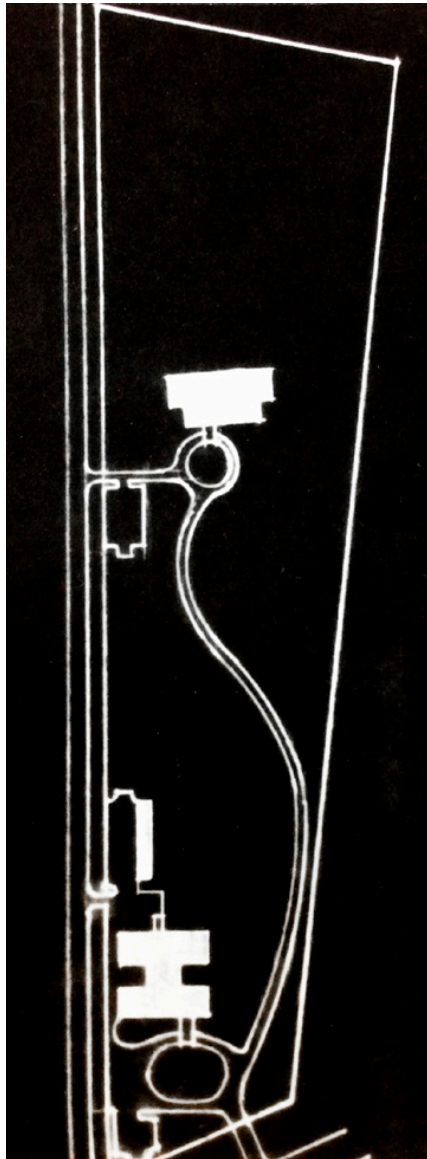
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The Embassy grounds are prominently located at 1776 Avenida Mariscal Lopez between the Presidential and Vatican residences in the city of Asunción. Before the first chancery was constructed in the 1950s, the site was virtually an open field without much of the incredible landscape that grows there today. The chancery was placed low on the gently sloping site to the north with the previous ambassador's residence further south and up the hill, connected by a winding road.



The cobble-lined road curves through the site, providing a pedestrian path through the landscape and connecting zones of the site to each other.



"This new embassy building in Asunción represents the U.S. government's commitment to the future of our bilateral relationship. It is a celebration of our longstanding ties and an opportunity to further strengthen the strong and positive relationship between the United States and Paraguay."

-Marc Ostfield, U.S. Ambassador to Paraguay

This original drawing shows the ambassador's residence connected to the chancery with the now-pedestrian roadway.

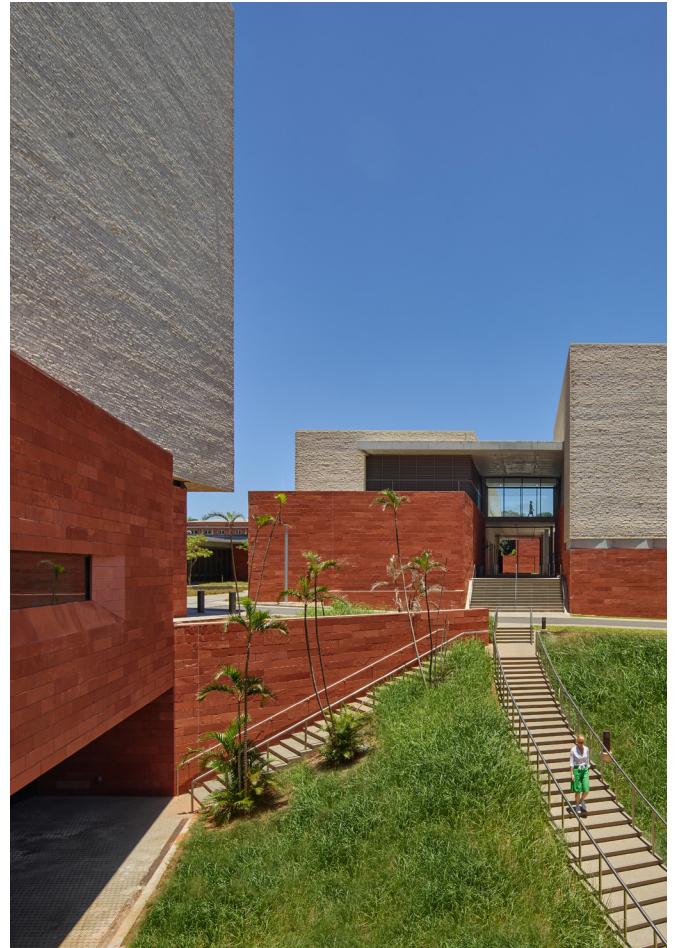
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The New Embassy Compound: A Place for Community

The new U.S. Embassy in Asunción is a multi-faceted statement of U.S. diplomacy and tribute to Paraguayan culture and its beautiful natural environment. The new chancery celebrates the landscape with gardens and outbuildings that become a park in the city. The design embraces the State Department's Overseas Buildings Operations goals for secure, resilient, and sustainable campuses that are beacons of democracy. The buildings' simple forms and the site's sloping ground create consistent connections to nature, using a rich palette of local colors and materials that draw from Paraguay's traditional buildings and crafts.

This subtropical setting has been home to the U.S. diplomatic mission since the 1950s, giving the trees and plantings decades to establish and grow. In the 20th century, the grounds functioned as a de facto arboretum and botanical garden open to the citizens of Asunción. The design and construction team were able to preserve this legacy landscape as much as possible, working to ensure healthy plantings remained so and failing ones were replaced. Throughout the landscape, a new community of plazas, gardens, buildings, and breezeways are woven to truly connect visitors and staff to nature.



Service and warehouse buildings—previously off-site—define the higher, southern edge of the site and define edges of the landscape.

The existing landscape's integrity and significance are underpinned with five themes that informed the locations of the buildings and gardens:

1. The Curve

The road that connects the north and south of the site, now a pedestrian path, defines open spaces as it curves around groves of trees and gardens.

2. Balance of Open Lawn and Shading Canopies

The extensive informal lawn and shade canopy landscape create a rhythm of the vertical canopy and the wide lawns, nestling the new chancery into the site.

3. Contrast of Organic and Linear Shapes

Gardens and site walls are defined by curving edges that bring organic shapes to the site, augmented with trees, shrubs, and perennials, that contrast with the rigorous, linear geometry of the buildings.

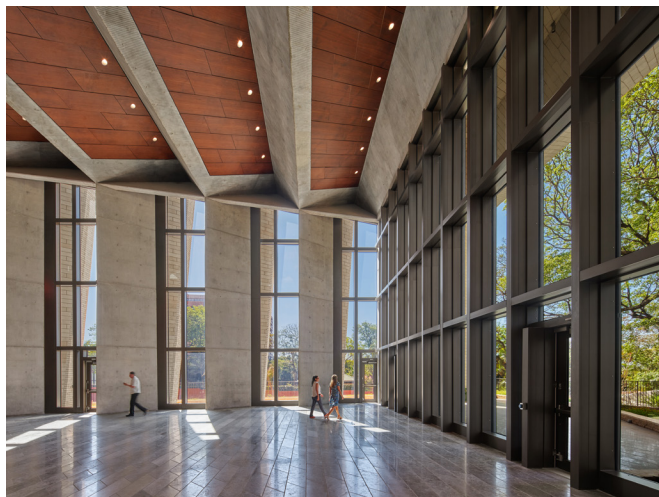
4. Shading and Screening

Small groves of shade trees, situated along the east side of the chancery, provide cover for the access pavilions and other ancillary buildings, ensuring the focus is on the chancery and larger public landscape to the northwest.

5. Terracing

Amongst the groves, the land has been terraced to provide platforms for improved accessibility and help situate the ancillary buildings. At the site's edge, these terraces reach out to Mariscal Lopez and serve as the entries to the embassy grounds. As one moves into the site, these terraces mitigate the sizes of the buildings, letting them nestle into the site.





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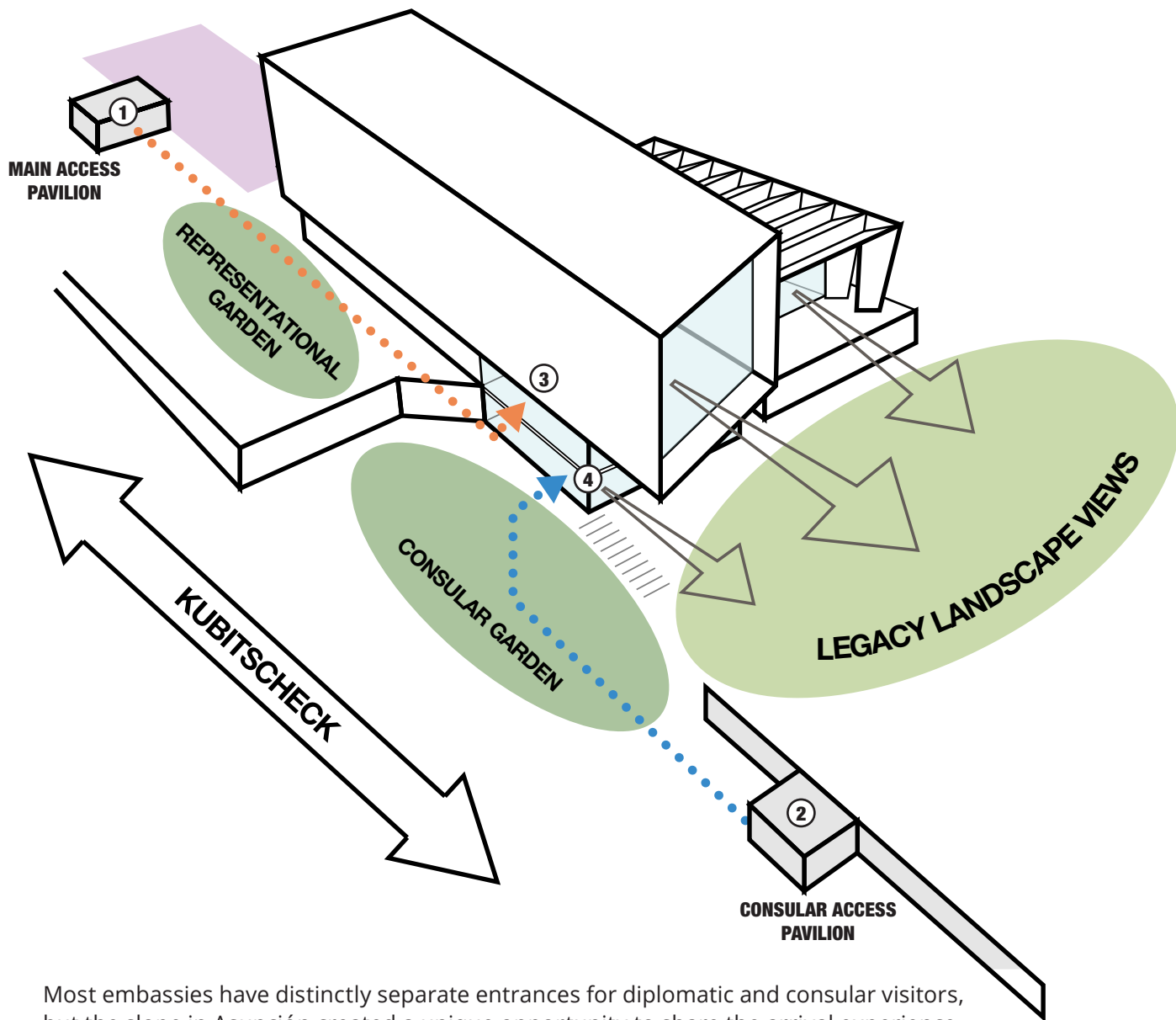




Creating a Shared Experience: Buildings & Landscape

The embassy site features a slope starting at the southern edge, where the new chancery sits, and sloping down to the staff residence to the north. Almost a quarter of a mile long, it is a narrow plot that continues narrowing as it approaches the northern edge. Existing and new terracing mitigates the slope and creates natural zones for different activities. Some of the terraces provide opportunities to look out across Asunción, while others are ideal for the placement of landscapes or buildings.

The over-arching design concept takes cues from all five design themes and reimagines the original dynamically curving roadway as a pedestrian path that passes through an extensive informal landscape with new building forms. The large number of healthy, mature trees on the site is impressive, providing shade, beauty, and an animal habitat that would have taken decades to create with new plantings. The location of the trees helped define the location of new buildings, becoming a driving force in the site organization. The programming of the chancery enables easy communication among teams, and with the relocation of USAID into the embassy, a whole-of-mission approach is taken to create a cohesive and collaborative community.



Most embassies have distinctly separate entrances for diplomatic and consular visitors, but the slope in Asunción created a unique opportunity to share the arrival experience. A long concrete canopy shelters the diplomatic visitors and staff on their procession down from the main access pavilion (1) to the chancery entrance (3), while consular visitors move under a similar canopy on their journey up from the consular access pavilion (2) to the consular section (4). Everyone entering the campus is greeted by a view of the legacy landscape, and both building entries share the same double height canopy that ultimately terminates at a stair leading down into the historic landscape.

The double-height canopy serves as the shared entry point for diplomatic and consular visitors, with terracotta-colored stone defining the gardens' edges.



Facilitating Community: Gather & Belong

As it has for decades, the landscape is the heart of the embassy site—whether as the location for July 4th celebrations or the ideal place for embassy staff to teach their children how to ride a bike. Preserving this landscape was critical to the continuation of the sense of a community in a garden setting, so the design team looked back to the original 1950's site plan for inspiration. The original Ambassador's residence was placed high on the site overlooking what the team coined as the legacy landscape. With the demolition of the residence, this empty footprint became the ideal front porch to the new chancery. It meant the landscape could be preserved and the incredible views of landscape and bucolic city were now an amenity shared by all visitors and staff. Here, the gallery opens onto the front port to offer space for events or a meal, enjoying the shade and views of the lapacho trees. Implementation of universal design principals ensures the embassy is accessible to all, with terraced pathways that can be traversed via wheelchair and Guarani signage that welcomes native speakers.



*The size of the chancery is mitigated by nestling it into the legacy landscape, creating an approachable scale.
Using a palette inspired by the Paraguayan culture, the color and materials join with the building shape to project a handcrafted image to the local community.*



An architecture of transparency and openness reinforces the representational quality of the chancery, projecting the ideals of democracy to visitors and staff. From the perimeter walls into the buildings, a cohesive vocabulary of forms and materials tie the many functions together into a unified platform for © Halkin Mason Photography diplomacy.





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Accentuating Connections: Canopies & Breezeways

In the sub-tropical environment, shading is a vital tool to make outside spaces usable year-round. Elongating the shade into breezeways helps capture wind to keep air moving, and are used through the region and integrated into the original chancery and ambassador's residence. The new breezeways also define clear paths across the site and from building to building, taking advantage of the adjacent verdant landscape to further reduce the temperature and create comfortable microclimates.

The breezeways, plus deep overhangs and porches, shade the building façades and protect them from solar heat gain. Solar mapping and digital models were used to define the ideal size and locations of these passive features. Canopy structures, articulated in a manner similar to the breezeways, define the main circulation paths while providing shade where people traverse the site.



The concept of cooling breezeways, appropriate to the sub-tropical environment and used in the previous chancery and ambassador's residence (as shown in the historic photograph below-left), defines a clear procession from building to building within the lush landscape.





Concrete canopies provide shaded paths parallel with the length of the site, queuing up breezeways that lead to courtyards and provide open views to the landscapes beyond, which was used in the original chancery (below) design as well.







Playing with Shadows: Massing & Articulation

The chancery sets the architectural direction for the whole campus, defining the building massing and material palette used throughout. Particular care was taken with the expression of materials and forms—setting the ways different parts meet each other in a careful articulation rendered in stone, transparent glazing, and board-formed concrete that adds texture. Drawing from examples in the city (such as the Teletón Children's Rehabilitation Center and Centro de Salud shown below), the treatment of building materials will feel familiar to Paraguayans. Highly visible along Kubitschek Avenue, the chancery is a bold composition of simple forms that reimagine details from local architecture, like the two examples below.

Solar orientation and control are a major concern in Asunción, and the passive control of sun and glare is a key design driver. The four-floor tube above the lobby level is encased in sandstone on the east and west while the north elevation is glazed and fully open to landscape views, with the glass face set back to block direct sunlight. The south façade uses simple shading devices to deflect sun, and openings on the east and west appear carved into the massing to control the amount of direct sunlight into work areas. The play of light and shadows across the east and west facades animate the building, changing where the shadows fall throughout the day and as the seasons change.



*Gabinete de Arquitectura,
Teletón Children's Rehabilitation Center*



Estudio Elgue & Asociados, Centro de Salud



Passive control of sun and glare is a key driver in the design of the massing and how the materials are expressed.





Celebrating the Context: Materials & Craft

Much of the memorable architecture in Paraguay uses local clay brick. The craft and innovation developed over time inspired an appropriate materiality for the new Embassy. Local brick ranges in color from red orange to light buff following the natural hues of the earth. Dense sandstone formations are typical of the region and run beyond borders. Arenisca Roja (red sandstone) and Arenisca Blanca (buff sandstone) locally and regionally quarried were the inspiration for sandstone and limestone selected for the project. Reminiscent of local craft tradition, the stone was handset, similar to brick in a flagstone pattern, allowing local artisans to participate in the construction. The gallery roof and terraces are clad in naturally weathering copper shingles and standing seam.

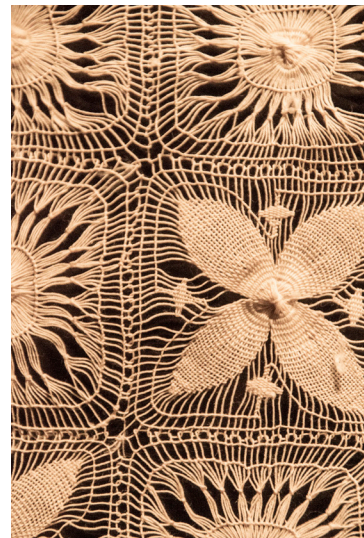




The material palette of board-formed concrete, local stone, and transparent glazing aspire to evoke architectural language that is "strangely familiar."

Art in Embassies commissioned Donna Rhae Marder to create the monumental wall hanging for the stairwell, shown here. In May of 2019, Marder conducted a week-long artist exchange in Asunción, meeting with established Paraguayan weavers, attending workshops with local artisans, and visiting museums and cultural centers. The ensuing dialogue explored a diversity of weaving techniques in Paraguay, and in particular, the established ñanduti lace tradition. Characterized by a web of threads resembling a wheel spoke, ñanduti embroidery represents an important aspect of Paraguayan cultural production. Marder was also able to view and connect several historic and contemporary examples of ñanduti to her own artistic practice. A more traditional ñanduti is shown opposite on the bottom right.





Both interior and exterior expressions were heavily influenced by local craft traditions of brickmaking and the ñanduti shown here.





Preserving the Views: Interior & Exterior

Views to the legacy landscape are celebrated in all buildings, providing the embassy personnel with visual connections to the surrounding environment. Where appropriate, courtyards, covered terraces, and balconies provide an additional connections from the interior directly to the outdoor environment.



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The preservation of the legacy landscape formed a core part of sustainable design goals. The mature trees cast shade on the buildings and gardens, while the plantings provide permeable havens that lessen the heat island effect and support stormwater retention goals. The buildings' envelopes, designed to respond to solar orientation to reduce cooling requirements and to provide connections to nature from the interior, learn from vernacular architecture traditions to create a building that fits into Asunción and will see through the next one hundred years. The buildings and landscape are tightly integrated, preserving and leveraging the historic tree canopy, while enhancing stormwater and water use on site.

Key sustainable design features include:

- Collection and storage of rainwater on site, meeting the Department of State's stringent stormwater detention and retention guidelines while achieving 100% non-potable water for irrigation.
- Preserving existing trees that will continue to function as habitat for birds migrating across the South American continent.
- Abundant daylight and views available from the interiors reinforce a biophilic design approach that emphasizes connection to nature and the surrounding landscape, providing healthy work environments and a constant connection back to the city and nation.





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United States of America Department of State

Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations

The planning, design, and construction of a U.S. diplomatic facility happens only with the contributions of many. We extend particular thanks to the OBO staff and leadership from real estate through operations and to our partners in Diplomatic Security, the Bureau of Western Hemisphere Affairs, and Embassy Ascunión who contributed to making this safe, secure, functional, and resilient platform a reality. This collective team has ensured that this new U.S. diplomatic campus represents American values and the best in American architecture, design, engineering, technology, sustainability, art, culture, and construction execution. Without their diligent work and expert advice, this project would have not been possible.

Ambassador William H. Moser

Director, Overseas Buildings Operations

J. Douglas Dykhouse

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