



**Building Duration / El Portico de los Huéspedes**

*El Portico de los Huéspedes* is a pedagogical, design-research project that tests the possibility for an architecture of uncertainty and open-endedness where duration functions as a link between past and future. It is a work of architecture as becoming: 'work' meaning the structure, rhythms and strategies of the effort, and 'work' as *El Portico* itself, which, in every instance, calls forth what has taken place towards what could yet be.

The project began in 2014 on arid lands along the Pacific coast of Chile and continues at annual intervals each August. The departure was a volume defined by Gunnar Asplund's Woodland Chapel. This volume acted as a trace that made it possible to measure the landscape and forego certain formal questions; the work became instead a constructive problem of erecting and articulating the volume.

No fixed set of drawings determined the project's development from this outset. Instead, each year, the work begins anew when students encounter *El Portico* and the material traces of time, labor, craft and thought left by those before them. Students are given a task (a plaza, walls, an enclosure, columns, joints, a floor) that leads the project towards some additional possibility of appropriation. They draw, model and build full-scale mock-ups — sometimes in parallel — to test possibilities. They work in spaces nearby or, in recent years, bring drawing tables and tools under the completed roof with the wind and sun.

In the first year of the work, students defined the site and erected a structural frame on wooden piles founded into the sand. The following summer, a brick plaza tied *El Portico* into the landscape; a secondary roof structure, also built that year, was clad the next using inexpensive wooden siding disposed in four waterproof layers. The fourth year, three wall fragments began to suggest enclosure. This past year, a possibility for habitation: an inside defined by a concave wall punctured with lean windows, a locking door, a finished floor of wood and concrete and a brick plaza just outside. In intervals between each of the five Augusts, other student teams led by partners in Chile made their own interventions: a field of concrete columns cast with fabric formwork; wooden ribs and a concrete slab that formed the shell of the wing completed this past year. Each intervention takes place in direct relation to needs determined at that moment without a larger consultation; trust and a certain responsibility towards the work make this possible.

The fixed nature of the tasks, rudimentary tools and the short, three-week period generate an intensity. On-site discussions of tests — in different modes and scales — guide decisions. These decisions are also informed by the students' knowledge that the work will continue in the years to come, by other hands; it is with this knowledge that the project is able to transmit an understanding of architecture that links past to future, bringing into presence the uncertain and open-ended potential of the life of a work and its fragility as a human endeavor.

