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# Basque House in Araucanía-Chile: A Reflection from the Importation and Development of Its Regionalist Architecture

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**Abstract:** The study of the Basque House, which was commissioned for construction by Basque-French settlers in the year 1930 in the town of Nehuentúe, Chile, allows us to delve into the value that the residential architectural heritage of Basque settlers brings to the rural area of the La Araucanía region, which was heavily populated by groups of European settlers since the second half of the 19th century. This house features a replica of the neo-Basque style from the French region of the Atlantic Pyrenees, from where rationalist architecture and symbolism in its forms and decorative elements were imported. On the facades of the Basque House in Nehuentúe, we observe a generous number of openings with square windows that are arranged under the asymmetry of the roof, geometric shapes that try to lighten the weight of this large compact volume. Simple construction bodies, organized according to the functionality of natural light and sun exposure of the rooms. Decorative elements that evoke the facades of the farmhouse stand out, overhangs and frameworks of red-garnet painted wood on white walls that transfer the popular origin of the Basque farmhouse structure to a bourgeois architecture that shows them as a decorative trend. This study delves into the history, place, and architecture of the house, comparing it to its origin, to understand how the settler, through architecture and symbols, felt closer to their roots. It is possible to delve into the history, observe the place, carry out a survey, classify and interpret a home, which, together with the analysis of its original architecture, allows it to be valued in a complete way so that it can be preserved. We can understand the territory of colonization through the deep analysis of its architecture. This knowledge of the past leads us to a learning process filled with symbolism, stories, and memory.

**Keywords:** Heritage, Architecture, Colonization, Territory

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## 1. Introduction

The presence of the Chilean state in the occupied territory of indigenous peoples in central-southern Chile from the second half of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th century gave rise to a spontaneous colonization process at its inception. Later, it was recognized by the Chilean state through the Land Colonization Law, mainly linked to agriculture. From this moment on, different cultures with different ways of life began to coexist, a process that involved cultural coexistence that never integrated but rather coexisted in the region of La Araucanía. In the La Araucanía territory, wooden houses built by the inhabitants themselves began to

appear to "survive", which quickly evolved thanks to the mainly agricultural success of the new inhabitants' ventures in the area. Architecture began to reflect the new status of families, who through volumes, colors, and styles gave shape to what is now the settler's house: large wooden or concrete houses that clearly show the architecture of the countries of origin.

If you take the route from Temuco, the capital of the ninth region of La Araucanía towards the coast, between Carahue and Nehuentúe, the Basque House stands imposingly on a hill. Just as in northern Spain and France, houses are located facing

the Mediterranean coast, this house dominates the horizon of the Pacific Ocean, where the characteristic white and red-granate colors of the Basque Country stand out, and the two large waters that remind us of the Basque farmhouse. A perfect neo-Basque architecture house, 11.617 kilometers from its original architecture, surviving 90 years of the passage of time. The physical deterritorialization of the settler who built that house did not alter his cultural plan, did not change his identity, on the contrary, it reinforced it in the design of his housing architecture.

Through architecture, humans relate to their environment and leave their mark on the territory. Building has the goal of inhabiting, at the same time as shaping how we should inhabit. We not only inhabit a house to take refuge but also to make a family life, have a profession, travel, live here and there. We inhabit and experience. The essence of inhabiting is to remain, to refer to a place, to establish places for life [1].

The house prioritizes inhabiting. A house does not fulfill its function if it is not inhabited, and those that have been abandoned retain the traces of those who were their inhabitants. The house is the place where a human group develops, containing its family and social structure. It is the mediator between private life and the outside, situated in a landscape that transforms it, reflecting a group of people that distinguishes it from others. The house shelters, houses, protects, and welcomes its inhabitants.

The Basque House, projected as a solid element of 4 levels, standing alone on the coastal hills of Nehuentúe, contrasting its straight lines with the topography of the ground and the sky, was the settler's attempt to withstand the uprooting and conditions of this southern nature. Its solid walls generated intimate spaces for the family, leaving the rest of the world outside, encapsulating a Basque atmosphere that they missed, becoming a place of trust, security, and memories that show in all its corners the personality of those who inhabit it. This work is conceived as an integrated whole that encompasses from structure and form to decoration and painting. All the elements gain importance in creating a vibrant work, filling the living space with symbols specific to Basque culture. The house was the settler's second skin, which they could design and build according to their own preferences, considering their need for connection with their country and culture of origin.

As the center of the estate's landscape, negotiating its relationship with the location on its own terms, the Basque house carries memory, giving us an account of origins beyond borders and a history in La Araucanía. We can understand the territory of colonization through a deep analysis of its architecture. This knowledge of the past leads us to a learning process filled with symbols, stories, and memory.

Methodology The research proposes that the idealization of the traditional architecture of the colonizer, who supposedly replicated it in an artisanal way with local materials and the help of a few carpenters, as described in the compilation of studies on this subject so far, is a romantic and poetic view of the colonization process. The houses that currently exist in the fields of La Araucanía, inherited generation after generation

from a European settler who arrived in the area, are a residential model typical of an affluent middle class, with similarities to the chalets of various European countries from the first third of the 20th century. While these houses do not adhere to the patterns of vernacular tradition in their countries of origin, there is a clear connection to the regionalist chalets of each country, within the cultural movement of the early 20th century that aimed to recover traditional values. This recovery was limited to wrapping a modern second home for the urban middle class with all the standards of domestic comfort and none of the elements typical of a farmer's or farmstead's house, where the traditional elements were reproduced in the facades, roofs, porches, balconies, and terraces. This vision has lost the functional meaning of all these elements and has turned them into façade decoration. This is the European trend from which the various models we see in La Araucanía originate. Considering this scenario, the case of the Basque House in La Araucanía was contrasted with its vernacular reference, the Basque farmhouse, and with the architecture of the neo-Basque chalet, a reference of early 20th century architecture. The result of comparing the three models, using surveys, photographs, and history, demonstrated that the reference for the settler's house is the coastal Basque chalet from the early 20th century. The outcome is a comparison between the studied house and its roots as a way of revaluing the rural heritage of La Araucanía. To demonstrate the research proposals, a detailed historical reconstruction was necessary, which served as a frame of reference and allowed understanding the territorial importance of the fields of La Araucanía and the reference to the settler's home in their country of origin. Additionally, an investigation of the current situation of the Basque House, located on the coastal area of the ninth region and representative of this territory and its roots, was carried out based on archival information and on-site surveys. This comparison methodology is a contribution towards the revaluation, protection, and rehabilitation of the architectural heritage resulting from the colonization process in La Araucanía through a clear process of analysis of the conditions and circumstances that allowed the different architectural trends present in the rural areas of the ninth region.

## 2. The Basque Settler

Out of the 110 million inhabitants that Europe had during the second half of the 18th century, the population grew to 410 million, leading to an increase in demand for labor and production needed to feed this population. This phenomenon encouraged the search for new places to live, and the unemployed workforce was mainly rural. [2]

In the case of Spain, especially the Basque Country, between 1830 and 1930, there was a massive emigration of Basques to America, from the 7 provinces, with approximately 200.000 people. The main causes were lack of opportunities, economic crisis, Carlist wars, the succession system of the farm to a single heir, and the attractive migration policies of the American countries. [3]

In 1873, as a result of a deep industrial and agricultural crisis, many European countries were forced to seek new opportunities outside the continent. Agriculture faced competition from cheaper products arriving by sea, aboard increasingly cheaper transports. The policies of the time allowed for uncontrolled growth of international trade, which favored supply but threatened to ruin Spanish farmers.

The Spanish migration movement established in Latin America between 1882 and 1958 had its peak in the period between 1901 and 1910, where 823,844 settlers arrived, of which 356,180 returned, and 467,664 stayed in America. The total number of settlers who settled in America between 1882 and 1958 was 1,761,676 people. [4]

The largest Basque population outside Europe is found in Latin America, where they became part of the creole bourgeoisie of the time. Many Basque farmers chose to migrate to a place where they were offered land and opportunities to start a new life, especially in a society that valued their work abilities and strength.

The presence of European immigrants in La Araucanía was conceived as a settlement strategy, but also as a mechanism to train Chileans in new productive technologies. [5] Although the La Araucanía region was a rugged and unexplored territory for settlers, the opportunity to build a new society based on their original model, imposed on the local population with the support of the state, was very attractive to them.

The conquerors occupied the first social rank in the 16th century, with their main objectives being wealth, power, and honor. The local workforce was used for agricultural production. However, the region's climate and its distance from more developed areas of the country gave rise to a certain degree of cooperation between the indigenous people and the settlers. There was mutual protection that allowed them to face difficulties, the rootlessness that settlers felt, and the aftermath of the indigenous people's conquest. Both were victims of circumstances. [6]

In a way, the settler came to erase the bad memories that the people had regarding the conquest, smoothing out the rough edges. Gradually, they began to feel like all children of the same nation, accompanied by a flourishing agriculture that would compensate for the efforts.

### 3. Rural Architecture of La Araucanía and Basque Influence

The rural architecture of the region recognizes the "ruca"(1) as spontaneous architecture, with a strong cultural and spiritual sense that expresses and symbolizes its worldview. Its materiality, straw and wood, comes from nature and disintegrates into it. The location, which responds to the Mapuche people's relationship with the cosmos, allows communication with it through access oriented towards the sunrise, renewal, and good energies. The smoke outlet in the roof above the hearth represents a communication path with

the upper world. Its construction, which lasted between 15 and 20 days, was a cultural family practice led by the Lonko (2), who supervised the works and coordinated the delivery of food and drinks to the builders. It was delivered to the occupants through an occupation ceremony. [7]

We also find in the rural area of the region a subsistence architecture, initially built by the settler and Chileans for shelter needs under the eaves of agricultural work, with a location that responded to functional aspects, and with a material obtained from the environment, which for this area was the wood of the forests and the Araucanian jungle. The latter had a simple, gable roof shape, responding only to shelter without a specific pattern.

But over the years, original European-patterned architecture began to coexist with them, the patron's house, which was located in a privileged place on the property and responded to a residential architecture model of the regionalist style of each site and country of origin. Through this architecture, the settler exercises his power over the territory while maintaining the memory of his roots.

Between 1830 and 1930, there was a massive migration of approximately 200,000 Basques to America, from the Spanish provinces of Álava, Vizcaya, Guipúzcoa, and Navarra, and the French provinces of Baja Navarra, Labort, and Sola. [8] Some of these settlers who arrived in Chile in the late 19th century settled in rural areas, dedicating themselves to agriculture and livestock. For the Basque settler, the most important things were his house, land, family, and surname. Their original architecture was the Basque farmhouse. [9]

The Basque farmhouses, housing units linked to land exploitation dating back to the 17th century [10], respond to a rectangular block-type architecture, compact, with a gable roof whose slope ranges from 24° to 18°. Its materiality, a canal tile roof, stone on the first level, and wood on upper levels, with masonry or brick frameworks. [11] Their location in the Basque Country is spontaneous in open plots, in groups of 7 to 20 family units. The architecture of the farmhouses arises spontaneously, has a strong relationship with the land, and responds to the needs of its users. Although they were designed and built by professional construction masters, often assisted by servants, they correspond to be called vernacular architecture (3). The same builders who constructed local works in the towns built them, which produces a very solid and quality farmhouse. A priest blesses them before they are occupied for the first time. The farmhouses, reflecting their importance to the family, have their own name, unchanged over time.

The most relevant representation of the Basque farmhouse, from which architectural trends are later extracted and incorporated into the neo-Basque regionalist movement, is the large gable roof, the central main entrance, the eaves, and the framing, elements that can be seen in Figure 1, corresponding to a farmhouse of the time.

The Basque settler who established himself in La Araucanía, which is the case study of this research, commissioned in 1930, through the architect Armando Coulon, the construction of a neo-regional style house, which appeared in the Basque

Country at the end of the 19th century with the construction of urbanizations on the Basque coast. This architecture, called neo-Basque, offers urban bourgeoisie the exoticism of popular culture through decorative elements, mixes the architectural references of the farmhouses, such as façade frameworks, cantilevers and gable roofs, in a modern plant, with criteria of modernity and functionality. The architecture of the farmhouse then becomes an inspirational model for this new trend of greater opulence, where elements of the original architectural scheme are reproduced and synthesized into decorative elements that evoke vernacular architecture. At the time, this introduction of elements had the purpose of showing the people the new bourgeois features. It was the new elitist trend. [12]



Figure 1. Igartibeiti farmhouse, 16th century Lagar farmhouse. Basque Country, Spain.



Figure 2. The Basque House on the Nehuentúe estate, Araucanía region.

#### 4. The Landscape Here and There

As of 2017, the La Araucanía region has 121.868 rural households, with traditional crop agriculture being the main economic activity. Recently, forestry and tourism have also been on the rise. [13]

The physical characteristics of the La Araucanía region are defined by various terrains. These can be characterized as the Andes mountain range, the intermediate depression, the

Coastal Range, and coastal plains. The Andes mountain range has elevations exceeding 2.000 meters, with active volcanoes such as Tolhuaca, Lonquimay, Llaima, and Villarrica. The topography consists of gentle slopes, valleys, and lake basins. This area is followed by a foothill zone composed of low hills (between 600 and 1.000 meters) with lakes. The intermediate depression, the region's valley, constitutes 54% of its surface area, with a gentle relief divided by basins separated by hills. It has fertile soils for cultivation thanks to the glacio-fluvial-volcanic materials that compose it. The coastal zone is contained between the sea and a mountain range called the Nahuelbuta or Coastal Range, which acts as a climate barrier. The vegetation is dense and abundant, with two hydrographic basins, the Imperial River and the Toltén River. [13]

The La Araucanía region's coastal plain has an area of 75km long and 25km wide, shaped by the action of the sea and tectonic movements, composed of marine and fluvial deposits. [14] This geographic feature has similar characteristics to the Basque-French coast, the origin of the colonist who comes to live in the Nehuentúe estate.

San Juan de Luz, a well-known resort on the Basque coast and the hometown of the colonist who commissioned the construction of the Basque House in La Araucanía, is a French commune located in the Pyrénées-Atlantiques department in the region of Nouvelle-Aquitaine, at the bottom of the Bay of Biscay, on the shores of the Cantabrian Sea. This area borders Spain to the south, the Bay of Biscay to the west, the departments of Landes and Gers to the north, and the department of Altos to the east.

San Juan de Luz was originally a modest village on the dunes, facing the sea, evolving into a popular holiday destination by the late 19th century. San Juan de Luz is located between the sea and the mountains, facing a large beach.

The Basque House in La Araucanía is located on top of one of the hills of the Nehuentúe estate, a property of almost one thousand hectares that borders the Moncul River to the northwest, the Imperial River to the southeast, and the urban locality of Nehuentúe to the west. If we analyze the coastal landscapes of both localities, San Juan de Luz and Nehuentúe, we can assume that the choice of the land to build the house was not random. Probably, the Basque colonists who settled in the Nehuentúe estate recognized similarities with their own lands in the Araucanian coastal landscapes, which may have inspired the replica of an architecture that clearly imitates neo-Basque chalets.

The physical setting in which people develop their lives plays an important role in shaping their identity. [15] Social identity derives from feelings of belonging, therefore, we can believe that the settler who arrives in La Araucanía did not want to completely detach himself from his identity of origin, so he recreates a physical environment that prevents him from being uprooted from his homeland. *"The objects that shape our world are considered as such when humans are able to give them meaning, and this meaning is a socially elaborated product through symbolic interaction"* [15]

## 5. The Basque House

Throughout history, architecture has been used to exercise power. [16] Whether it's religious, civil, or domestic architecture, it has demonstrated the presence of man. The construction, through its external appearance, is a symbol of the wealth of the owner and exercises territorial domination. What initially begins as a basic form of shelter evolves in its external appearance and functionality towards interests of durability, comfort, and decorative elements. Over time, materials have evolved along with construction techniques, giving architects multiple possibilities to represent what they are commissioned to do. [17]

The colonist's nationalism towards his homeland directly influenced the way the house is inserted into the rurality of the La Araucanía region. Its architectural manifestation reflects its character and roots to this day. The Basque culture can be read on the exterior and interior of the Nehuentúe farm house. Its elevations, clearly rationalist, and its gable roof that evokes the forms of the farmhouse, make it unique for the territory of La Araucanía, but if it were located in the French Basque country, it would go completely unnoticed. If we understand architecture, taking into account the characteristics of each building, we understand its historical memory and value it.

### 5.1. Facade Typology

In the facades of the Basque House of the Nehuentúe farm, we observe a generous amount of openings with square windows that are arranged under the asymmetry of the roof, geometric shapes that try to lighten the weight of this large compact volume. Bodies of simple construction, organized in response to the functionality of natural light and sun exposure of the rooms. The decorative elements that evoke the facades of the farmhouse stand out, overhangs and painted red-maroon wooden frames on white walls that transfer the popular origin of the Basque farmhouse structure to a bourgeois architecture that shows them as a decorative trend. The roof, which in traditional rural housing responded to topographical differences or use for cellars, is now part of a style. A cultural scheme of origin is reinterpreted into vernacular aesthetic forms. In Figure 3, corresponding to the south elevation of the Basque House, where the main entrance is located, the elements mentioned can be recognized. It is striking the high level of conservation of the house, where the forms of the elements and the colors of the original architecture have been preserved, despite the fact that it currently has owners who have no relation to the colonist who commissioned the construction in 1930.



*Figure 3. South elevation. Main facade of the Basque House.*

The stone, a constructive element that we observe on the first level of the Basque farmhouse, also has its representation in the facade of the Basque House in the Nehuentúe estate, as an exterior coronation of the part of the basement that peeks out with small openings towards the outside. The original wooden lintel of the Basque farmhouse, which evolves into a stone arch from the 18th century onwards, can also be seen in the main entrance of the house.

The image projected by the Basque House towards its surroundings is an architecture that assumes the influence of the regionalist neo-Basque style, without any harmony with the landscape or considering that its location is on the other

side of the world from its original reference. If we take as a reference, for example, Villa Arnaga, a neo-Basque style building from the early 20th century in France, built between 1903 and 1906, located in the area of the Atlantic Pyrenees, the region of origin of the settler who arrived at the Nehuentúe estate, we can clearly recognize elements of its facade that are replicated in the study house. Asymmetrical roof with brackets (4) and overhangs (5), stone arches, red-granate wooden frameworks that contrast with the white of the facades, stone masonry, windows, terrace with wooden framing, balconies. In short, a countless number of similarities that we can recognize in the eastern facade of Villa Arnaga in France.

(Figure 4)



Figure 4. Eastern facade of Villa Arnaga in Cambo-les-Bains (Atlantic Pyrenees). Now houses the Edmond Rostand Museum. [18].

## 5.2. The Inside of the Basque House

The vernacular reference of Basque regionalist architecture, the Basque farmhouse, is a compact building with a rectangular floor plan. The rooms on the ground floor were intended for productive work and occasionally for cooking, leaving the upper floors for bedrooms and the granary. The functional character was what prevailed, and its distribution responded to the needs of agricultural and livestock work.

Although neo-Basque architecture takes elements from the farmhouse in facades, it does not incorporate any elements of the farmhouse's distribution. The floor plans of the houses respond to urban residential models. In the Basque House of the Nehuentúe estate, we find a traditional distribution of rooms for the time. We can recognize the importance of the staircase, which organizes the lobby and articulates the circulations that connect the four floors of the house. [19]

Basque culture, as a decorative element, is present in the main living room fireplace of the house: the shield, a graphic expression of the lineage of the inhabitants, the figure of the Basque person, a yearning for ancestors, and a phrase in Basque carved in wood: HEMEN ONGI ETHORRI, which means "welcome here," all symbolizing the Basque region, language, and culture. (Figure 5)

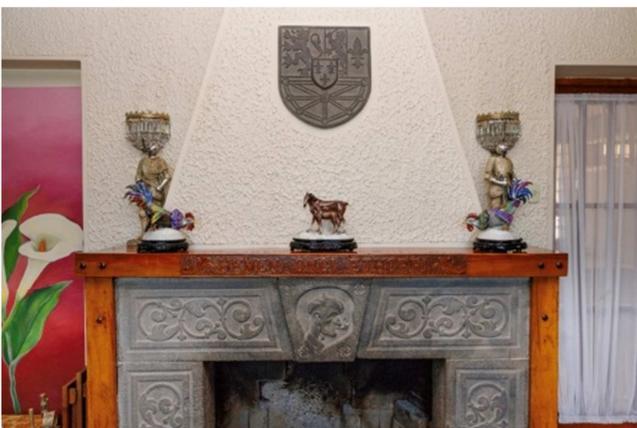


Figure 5. Decoration of the fireplace in the main living room.

If we analyze the detail of the shield above the fireplace, we can see that it contains almost all of the elements of the shield of the department of Pyrénées-Atlantiques. It has a rectangular shape at the top and is rounded downwards. It is divided into four parts: a lion, a lion with a sword, a fleur-de-lis, and beneath them, the bicruciferous flag represented through links, a symbol present in the flag of the Basque Country that symbolizes St. Andrew, the independence of the Basque Country, Basque freedom, and God through its elements. In the center, three fleur-de-lis arranged as a small overlapping shield. The heraldic lion is a symbol of sovereignty, strength, and valor. Its position, called the rampant lion, is presented in profile, upright, with its front legs raised and supported only on one of its hind legs. When this lion also raises a sword or saber, the symbol of power is even greater. The fleur-de-lis, which represents a lily flower, is a symbol of the French monarchy (6). The shield of the Pyrénées-Atlantiques region has many similarities with the elements of the shield on the fireplace of the Basque House.

The architecture and elements of the Basque house evoke in the settler their memories of the past, through the mental association that takes advantage of the natural ability of the brain to remember images. [20] Many Basques, especially those who moved their lives to another continent, developed a collective image based mainly on language and origin. Although it is not the subject of the investigation to delve into the particular meaning of the shield's elements, its components speak of a strong connection to the past. The interest in symbolism that the settler incorporates into their home reinforces their identity and transnationalism in this distant homeland.

## 6. Conclusion

Nations and their identity evolve throughout history. Historical moments experienced as a society leave a mark on the place, contributing to the identity of a territory. The study of the Basque House in Nehuentúe, a locality in the Ninth Region of La Araucanía, was made possible thanks to the collaboration of its owners, who accepted my intrusion into their daily lives. The house was represented in its current state, which despite the time, has not undergone significant changes from the original. The state of preservation of the house is magnificent, with only centimeters of displacement in concrete walls that have withstood earthquakes and climatic aggression for almost 100 years. The forms and colors of the facade were preserved, with care and respect worthy of highlighting. Although a simple architectural description is not enough to account for the cultural and symbolic richness of a particular area and time, it allows us to somehow understand how that architectural expression influenced the character of the rural area of La Araucanía, interpreting its forms in light of history. The knowledge by the inhabitants and owners of these houses of the historical influence behind them, together with an adequate public conservation policy, could possibly halt the deterioration and disappearance that we currently see in the fields of the Ninth Region of La

Araucanía. The houses respond to a need for shelter, but they also shout at us, through their architecture, their history, and their identity. The geographical framework in which this research is inserted is in the Ninth Region of La Araucanía, however, it could be carried out studying the architecture of any place, which will silently account for the history and identity of its inhabitants and territory.

## 7. Notes

- (1) The ruca is the traditional housing of the Mapuche people, developed in a single-story structure made of wood and covered with junquillo or other similar materials obtained locally.
- (2) The meaning of Lonko in Mapudungun is "Head," referring to the head of the society. Authority of the Mapuche people. [21]
- (3) Vernacular architecture is architecture developed without architects, built by the community and characteristic of a territory.
- (4) Brackets: wooden beams that protrude outside.
- (5) Overhangs: inclined wooden pieces that serve as support to reinforce the roof.
- (6) The coat of arms of the Bourbon family, a Spanish royal house originating from Philippe de France, is composed of three golden fleur-de-lis, arranged in the same way as we see in the coat of arms of the Basque House.

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