

# Bullfighting Ring Arena “La Petatera” of Villa de Alvarez, structure and description

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## Introduction

Throughout history, the monumental architecture is associated with power. In general one of its characteristics is the search for a total stay through time and the identification of a culture that obtains heritage like an inheritance from the ancestors. This example of the monumental structure holds a special characteristic, it is denominated Plaza de toros “La Petatera” it is a wooden structure and *petates* o *tanates*<sup>7</sup> that is built up and unbuilt every year, as part of a tradition, of a town, now a city, located in the western part of Mexico.

“La Petatera” of Villa de Álvarez originally has a religious end and with the passing of the years it has combined itself with culture reaching a point of being part of Colima’s identity, the popular folklore of the Charrotaurinas festivities for people of Villa de Alvarez shows a particular pleasure that is lived every year in the month of February. “La Petatera”, las cabalgatas<sup>8</sup>, los mojigangos<sup>9</sup>, the bullfighting, horseback riding, the dance and music concerts, and all the of the other cultural events are essential of a secular tradition that dates back from 1857 are in honor of the Saint San Felipe de Jesus.



Picture 1. “View arena Villarvareense”, Ortiz Iris, Villa de Álvarez, Colima, Febrero 2016.

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Picture 2. Outside view “La Petatera”, Ivonne Calvillo, Villa de Álvarez, Colima, Febrero 2016.

## Background of La Plaza de Toros “La petatera”

There are various documents that describe the background of the festivities in the city of Villa de Alvarez where the Plaza de Toros “La Petatera” is located, the majority of them, coincide that the beginnings of the festivities of the town date back to the XVII century due to the continuous “forest fires and earthquakes that left forty of the fifty-two houses in ruins that existed back then”<sup>10</sup>.

In the need to search for a “magical cure against the batter of the land, gives a simple and mystic formula that is related to the nowadays tradition and social organization”<sup>11</sup>.

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<sup>7</sup> Mats made of palm leaves

<sup>8</sup> A group of people in a parade horseback riding

<sup>9</sup> Gigant costume puppets

<sup>10</sup> Mijares Bracho Carlos, La Petatera de la Villa de Álvarez en Colima Sabiduría decantada, Universidad de Colima, 2000, pág. 16)

<sup>11</sup> Idem 7

The towns people of the time gathered to choose the future patron saint, like costume they did not agree and was decided by: “a hand of luck”, some people that now about this subject say that the names of the possible known and miraculous saints were written. Just then “appeared a mysterious Franciscan monk that no one had ever seen, this character recommended them that they should include the name of the Franciscan and first Mexican martyr, Felipe de Jesus, who died in Japan, crucified with other members of the same order and that’s how they did it and after they shuffled the cards they took out the first one and his name showed up, they did it again and it happened again, and finally it happened once more... When they looked for the monk to tell him the good news, he had disappeared the same way he had shown up.”<sup>12</sup>



Picture 3. “San Felipe de Jesús Officer Mass”, Ortiz Iris, Villa de Álvarez, Colima, Febrero 2016.

From these events on it has been done year after year the promise of taking the patron saint through various counties in procession, sermons and mass.

The Plaza de Toros “La Petatera” monument has had various constructors that have the responsibility to build it up, transmitting the knowledge and technique of its manufacturing to generations of families of Villa de Alvarez, highlighting names of men like, Higinio Campos, J. Jesús Banda, Severo Urzúa “El bule”, Maximino Dueñas, Rafael Carrillo “El tigre”, Ramón Cervantes and the one that recently has being upfront Desiderio Contreras “El pájaro”.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>12</sup> Idem 7

<sup>13</sup> Ramírez Cobian J. Inés, Olvera Cruz Salvador. Historia de los Festejos Charro-Taurinos de Villa de Álvarez. H. Ayuntamiento de Villa de Álvarez, Villa de Álvarez, Colima. 2001 pág. 70

<sup>14</sup> passed the baton

Mr. Desiderio Contreras, tells us the beginnings of the construction of the plaza and how it has become a tradition. According to predecessors, that some Martinez gentlemen began to make bullrings, and gave indications of feeding the visitors, ranchmen, livestock men, to the event calling it a greeting, they began making “the plaza” where nowadays the main plaza kiosk is in La Villa and that is how it became custom the making of formal bullfight rings and adapting the space according to the needs reaching the point of what we know nowadays like “La Petatera” of Villa de Alvarez.

Severo Urzúa, Constantino Rodríguez y Chico Gudiño are some of the the first builder and founders of this tradition. Severo Urzúa “le paso el oate”<sup>14</sup> to Rafael Carrillo, being a “mozo”<sup>15</sup> until becoming an expert in the construction based on the empirical knowledge, at the same time Mr. Desiderio helped Rafael becoming his successor and nowadays is the main protagonist in the construction of “La Petatera”.

At the beginning the bullfighting ring was a small construction and without any sittings which first registry of execution was in the main plaza in la Villa. Around the 1930’s, it was located in the fields of that belonged to the Enrique Andrade School and in 1940 the festivities were celebrated in the “La frontera”<sup>16</sup>, on the north side where it was held for two years in a row.

In 1943 Mrs. Isabel Toscano widow of Gutierrez, donated land property that were on the north part that led to the town of Minatitlan, in front of the farm yards of the “Haciendita” in what was the casino, now casa de la cultura<sup>17</sup> and DIF Municipal<sup>18</sup>. One year prior to that sittings where installed with boards: built by Mr. Severo Urzua. This place was walled, with the purpose of making it durable, even though it was removed by orders of the state governor, Mr. Noriega Pizano, in this place the plaza was around for about 35 years.

Later on it was moved to the fields of the sports unit, 200 meters west of the Villa de Alvarez downtown, which lasted for 25 years. In 2001 it was moved once again 300 meters west of the sports unit on the street of Merced Cabrera, one of the main streets of

<sup>15</sup> young worker

<sup>16</sup> the frontier, that was the name of the fields/ pastures a few meters from the main plaza

<sup>17</sup> municipal arts center

<sup>18</sup> municipal office of family development

the city, it was built in this place by Mr. Ramon Cervantes Gomez; he had participated in the construction for 8 years. Until 2002 Desiderio Contreras intervenes once more.<sup>19</sup>

Nowadays the plaza is built a couple of hundred meters west of the city maintaining its form, structure and same number of sittings that year after year are built, also the use of wooden rolls, prop support and cans that serve to withstand the weight and the boards for the sitting and the silver plating.

### **Formal Description of The Plaza de Toros “La Petatera”**

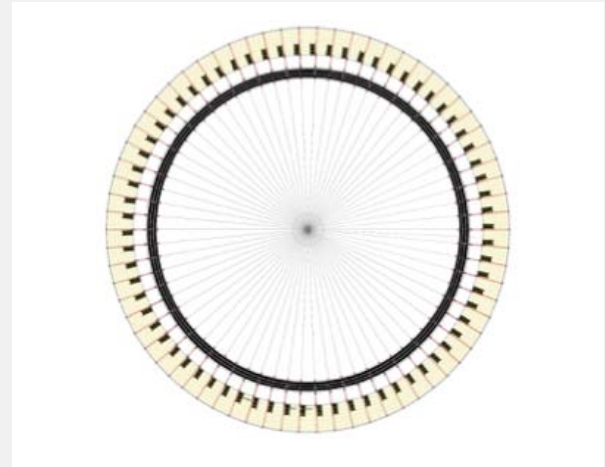
La Plaza de Toros “La Petera” is an example of monumental architecture that looks to give a religious, political, and economic significance to Villa de Alvarez society through its permanence and usage of natural material through time. Its main feature is that it can be built and unbuilt time after time, a unique architecture and that has lasted with these characteristics for more than 175 years. Made up with at least ten different types of wood and covered with petates, hence the reason why it is called the Petatera.

The structure formally corresponds to a circumference of 175.87 meters making up a circle of 56 meters of diameter. Sectioned with 70 boards or sitting arrangements that belong to the licensees.

The circular structure stands by “pies derechos” (right side footing) that confine or hold the structure with cans tied or held with ixtle (fiber) ropes in a way that the structure is united without making the structure rigid, additionally a chain is formed that serves as a union with all the right footings tied up with ixtle (fiber) ropes that permits the existence of flexible confinement of hold up to transmit weight and movement without falling or separating the wooden elements. This handcrafted constructive system can hold up a weight of up to 5,000 people.

The design and dimensions that the arena of Villa de Alvarez has nowadays started sin the year 1944 when by the initiative of the Mr. Felipe Ahumada and

Mr. J. Ines Ramirez Cobian made up a model or mockup of the arena based on boarded sittings, adapting itself to the final proposal by the community after a couple of years<sup>20</sup>.



Architectural plant of Plaza de Toros “La Petatera”, Zamora Christian, Ortiz Iris Villa de Álvarez, Colima, 2016

The chain is the main element for the support holding of the monument, it is made up of the circular form supported by prop supports, transmitting the weight and the structure itself, it unites longitudinally speaking all the wooden elements and on top of it, section of stands, aisles, and stalls or seats.

Seven prop supports are needed, to support the small stall, these are situated in different sections to divide the weight that are transmitted beginning form the third row that hold the boards.

The experience that some of the builders that for years have used this handcrafted constructive system in the monument like: Desiderio Contreras<sup>21</sup>, Julio Solorio<sup>22</sup> y Daniel Guerrero<sup>23</sup>; amongst others, agree that “a variety of wood should be used... in the skeleton. Some of the most resistant according to the criteria of each staller like the black guayabillo for the wooden posts, the stalls of rosewood, huesillo, and white cedar. For the squares, supports, boards, and platforms strapping wood like pine are used”

<sup>19</sup> Tortajada Rodriguez, Plaza de Toros de Villa de Álvarez, La Petatera 1940-2001. Universidad de Colima2003, p. 63).

<sup>20</sup> Idem 10

<sup>21</sup> Actual constructor de la Plaza de Toros “La Petatera”

<sup>22</sup> Propietario de un tablado de la Plaza de Toros “La Petatera”

<sup>23</sup> Propietario de un tablado de la Plaza de Toros “La Petatera”



Picture 4. "Amarre de la trancas", Zamora Christian, Villa de Álvarez, Colima, February 2016.

The wooden structure is covered with natural textile fibers, forming a covering with *petates* o *tenates* (mats of palm leaves), made in the town of Gómez Farias Jalisco, brought each year to replace, just the ones that are not in good conditions.

*Petates* are also used to cover the bamboo structure and *otate* (reed) is used like shades and like draping of the stands, on the aisles between the boxes and the stands.

Each platform measures 2.5 meters front and 3.5 meters in depth 36 *petates* are needed: six in the skirt, three in the support, four or five in the stall, twelve or thirteen in the shade, two in the stair, and 2 more in the outside parte where the number of the stall is put.



Picture 5. "Roundwood view of a mooring area and shadow", Ivonne Calvillo, Villa de Álvarez, Colima February 2016.

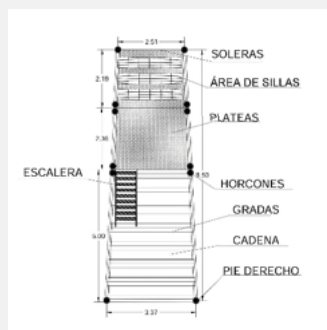


Figure 1. platform plant

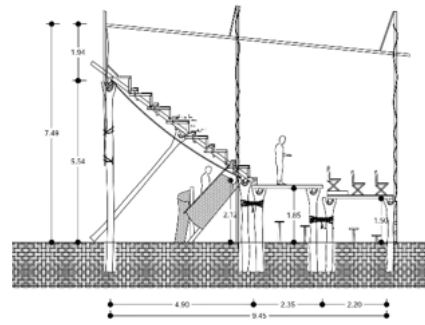


Figure 2. Section of the platform

Architectural plans, Ortiz Iris, Zamora Christian, Villa de Álvarez, Colima

## Construction Process of The Plaza de Toros "La Petatera"

Describing a construction process of a monument that by its construction characteristics is considered demountable, is a magic experience. Being in the field where there is no evidence that a construction existed, accompanying Mr. Desiderio Contreras "Don Yeyo" with family and friends who walks toward the central part and "midiendo a ojo"<sup>24</sup> identifies where the center of what will be the bullring of this magnum handcraft, and when it is built, it is incredible to see its monumental character. The most splendid part of all this is to know and to demonstrate that the labor was done with the hands of handcrafters that for years have dedicated themselves in transmitting the knowledge.



Picture 6. "El pajarito" in prayer to God, Ortiz Iris, Villa de Álvarez, Colima, February 2016.

Once the sign is found, of a year ago of the construction site, the young workers dig to extract a piece of hose that is hidden underground to be able to identify it as a guide line. Later on a metal rod is nailed which will support a ring that holds a wire with the

<sup>24</sup> calculating by sight

exact measurement of the radius of the bullring. In that moment you can just perceive a silence in that place, and the words of Mr. Desiderio Contreras, who initiates a ritual drawing in the ground with a stick of oate a cross saying the following words:

*“Jesus of Nazareth in the name of your heavenly father a ask, that this cross that I draw helps us build up this construction that everything is done right, take care of this plaza it is yours let it never be destroyed by the hand of men and take care of all of us that work here, in the name of the Lord and let us begin”*

*After this act the people present applaud with joy as a symbol of happiness that is how the guide line starts of the majestic arena of the Petates.*

With the oate (reed) as a unit of measurement, wooden stakes and tighten wire at hand heads up is given to the guide line of the 70 platforms. Beginning in the direction to the north with the platform number 35 a wooden stake is nailed, after clockwise and with the oate (reed) with a longitude of 2.5 meters is posted as reference on the ground and another wooden stake is nailed with the number 36, repeating the same procedure until reaching half of the circumference of the platform with the number 70 after that the counting begins with number 1, 2 which are called *official platforms*. At the end of the line the numbering stops at the platform with number 34. There for the line resides in the pointing out of digging to put the *horcones portantes*<sup>25</sup>, once the platforms have been identified the wire is tightened and in the same direction to the right circles are drawn with *calhidra*<sup>26</sup> where the isolated digging site for each post will go.

The digging labor is done the following morning, during 38 days of work is done to build up the 70 platforms and the yards for the bulls. Each platform counts with 4 dug holes with manual tools like bars, shovels, picks. Each platform has designated workers although team work is always present in each activity, since everyone helps each other out forming a big team. The digging sites are supervised by someone who is in charge of revising the correct dimensions, for that to be done an oate is used which previously was signaled measuring 1 meter.

<sup>25</sup> wooden posts

<sup>26</sup> white like material such as chalk

<sup>27</sup> just by sight

Once the excavation points are done, the arrival of trucks loads with wood and petates (mats made of palm leaves) that correspond to each platform and that year by year have been stored to be used exclusively to build the Plaza de Toros “La Petatera”. The unloading begins with the right footings and posts which are the ones that are posted in each hole. The workers put the wood next to each platform making piles of wood that later will make the structure. As the days go by Mr. Desiderio Contreras lines up the posts in a way that they are radially aligned to the center of the bullring, this is done a “*puro ojo*”<sup>27</sup> with the end post that will serve as axes to align the ones in the middle. In each platform the same alignment procedure is done fitting the fork support to receive the support or milestone.



Picture 7. The process of construction, Ivonne Calvillo, Iris Ortiz. Villa de Álvarez, Colima, february 2016.



Picture 8. The structure in process, Ivonne Calvillo, Villa de Álvarez, Colima, february 2016.

The work is organized in crews, while some rest others continue the following tasks. Ones the majority of the post are aligned and dug in the sills are risen using system pulleys with ropes. The work must be done in a group of work since each platform is a complement of a whole and there cannot be any error of leveling, tying or dig in because it can harm the whole structure. Mr. Desiderio Contreras has been responsible for 24 years of the handcraft monument.

The construction system and the type of materials used, allows for a certain dimensional flexibility that readjusts simultaneously in the moment of replanting the plaza as a whole. With the material used, in the way that they are handled, and the way that they are joined to create the structure, as well as the usage of the petates to close it in and cover it (shades), it is possible to detect ancestral practices maintained by the farmers and craftsmen of Villa de Alvarez that maybe since Pre-Hispanic times have been transmitted and makes that into cultural heritage.

## Final Comments

For people of Colima the traditional festivities of la Villa, mean the folklore of a culture full of diverse events that enrich the town year by year, La Petatera, giant puppets mojigangos, the parade of people and horses, the bullfights, the farewell of the clowns, and the rest of the events are a symbol of identity and tradition that characterizes and forms part of the history of Villa de Alvarez, we are born and raised with that love to the culture of a society we belong to and joins us a town, braking paradigms of any political state, it is more like the experience that characterizes living such experience of being part of a tradition that is celebrated each February, celebrating our patron saint "San Felipe de Jesús". Began by the promise of protecting its citizen and families.

The experience of gathering with the people that make possible this construction with love and compromise like people of Villa de Alvarez allows for this tradition to transcend like part of work that represents the efforts of each family that has participated for more than 175 years, it is a master piece of art made up of first hand material and techniques, work that should be recognized.

The organization and the solidarity in the work allows that this monument should maintain itself standing and not lose its strength, here it is not possible to work in an isolated form, it is essential team work, each element depends on the other creating a strong union that holds itself.

With that skill, knowledge of each of the people that form part of this construction form a piece of art, it goes far beyond a simple construction, it is made with passion to keep a tradition alive which is taught to be able to live it, love it, respect it; appreciate the effort, no matter how small it might be, everything that it means from the guideline of the petatera, considering a ritual full of faith, having an importance for the State of Colima and its government declaring it "Patrimonio Cultural Intangible del Estado"(Intangible Cultural Heritage of the State of Colima)<sup>28</sup>

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