

Interview

Interview transcript with architect Jordi Faulí

Jordi Faulí joined the Sagrada Familia team at the age of 31, the same age Antoni Gaudí was when he took on the project. At that time, the basilica did not yet have a roof. Since then, you have been closely involved in the construction of the Sagrada Familia, taking over as Chief Architect in 2012, and have been responsible for bringing to life the iconic central naves and leading the construction of the monumental central towers.

- **What has been the greatest challenge in continuing Gaudí's work without him, and how do you strike a balance between staying true to his vision and making your own decisions?**

The main challenge in the construction project of the Sagrada Familia is to remain faithful to all the information Gaudí left behind, which is extensive. This involves studying his project in depth, including his writings, the large-scale models he created, and the drawings that were published before the fire in his workshop. From there, it is about continuously learning from Gaudí in order to interpret his work ever more accurately and to build with quality, using the technologies available at any given time.

Gaudí knew he would never see the Sagrada Familia completed, yet he conceived and created it with future generations in mind.

- **What do you think today's world can learn from this kind of long-term vision?**

There are projects that are long-term, and they need to be so. When we undertake something, we must think about those who will come after us and those who have contributed before us. It is a project based on continuity over the years.

- **This project has developed across several generations. What does that continuity mean to you as an architect?**

Today we are aware that we are continuing a story that began with the laying of the first stone in 1882 and that will continue into the future. There are two factors that unite all those who

have worked on the Sagrada Familia. First and foremost, Gaudí's project, which is extraordinary and which he developed in great detail in certain key areas for the future, knowing that he would not see it built. And secondly, the will of an entire people who laid the first stone and have continued building according to Gaudí's project to this day, with the intention of carrying it through to completion.

The completion of the Tower of Jesus Christ has marked a turning point, positioning the Sagrada Familia as a new benchmark in the global architectural landscape and definitively transforming the skyline of Barcelona, one of the most visited and attractive cities in the world.

- **What makes this moment so significant from an architectural perspective?**

The cross atop the Tower of Jesus Christ marks the completion of the construction phase of the six central towers. It is also the highest element of the Sagrada Familia and carries very significant symbolic and technological meaning, as it is the cross of Jesus Christ crowning his tower. From an architectural perspective, it is highly significant because it represents the culmination of the entire pyramidal growth that Gaudí envisioned, leading up to the cross at the center of the building and the church, expressing what the Sagrada Familia and the Christian faith represent.

- **What have been the greatest challenges in reaching this point?**

There have been many. The Sagrada Familia is always a challenge, and its construction is a constant undertaking. We know where we need to get to, but sometimes the "how" requires research. In the case of the central towers, for example, we believed it was the right moment to give stone a structural role, while complying with today's regulations, such as gravitational, seismic and wind requirements. Ultimately, together with engineers and collaborating architects, we found an extraordinary solution: courses of stone with stainless steel bars inside that prestress them and turn them into a single construction panel. This is complemented by a structure of reinforced concrete and laminated steel at the corners of the towers.

- **With the completion of the Tower of Jesus Christ, the Sagrada Familia has reached 172.5 metres, becoming the tallest church in the world. However, its height has**

been deliberately kept below Barcelona's natural surroundings. What lies behind this decision, and what does it represent symbolically and architecturally?

The height Gaudí decided for the central tower evolved and increased over the years. However, all the heights he proposed, between 160 and 176 metres, were lower than the actual height of Montjuïc hill. There is also an oral tradition that explains that Gaudí's intention was that the work of man, especially in the case of a building that is a praise to God, should not exceed the height of the mountain that God created in the ancient city of Barcelona, Montjuïc.

With its 172.5 metres, which equals 23 times the distance between the columns of the nave, the basic module for all dimensions, we do not reach the height of Montjuïc, which is around 178 metres.

The project involves many partners working closely together.

- **What role have modern technologies played in ensuring the structural integrity of the towers, such as adhesive solutions, making what once seemed architecturally impossible achievable?**

This system of prestressed stone panels at this scale was something new, so it was necessary not only to calculate it or make it structurally viable, but also to develop the entire construction process so that it could be executed with relative ease and in a practical way.

This involved designing every detail: the joints between panels, the connections between panels and the corner structure, and also selecting materials that would allow for a perfect bond in the joint work between the stainless steel structure and the stone. To achieve this, it was essential to find suitable adhesives and resins that would make this perfect bond possible.

Beyond the construction milestones, the Sagrada Familia is also a story deeply connected to the people who have dedicated their lives to making it possible. In your case, your career has been closely linked to this project for decades.

- **On a personal level, how do you remember the moment you took over as Chief Architect in 2012, and what did that step mean to you?**

At that time, I had already spent many years working on the Sagrada Familia, and I knew the project well and what we had to do. I also knew that the team we had, both in the technical office with the architects and on site in construction, as well as our external collaborators, was highly capable, highly committed and well prepared to move forward together. That is what I remember telling the architects on the day I was appointed Chief Architect: that together we would be able to continue building the Sagrada Familia with the fidelity to Gaudí that we were aiming for.

- **After so many years connected to the Sagrada Familia, how has this project influenced your understanding of architecture and your own career?**

My professional career has been almost entirely focused on the Sagrada Familia, and it is here that you come to understand how Gaudí conceived architecture, especially in this project. For him, architecture was above all a way of communicating the Christian faith, as well as life, to those who would visit the Sagrada Familia in the future or attend its liturgical celebrations. He wanted to convey a sense of elevation, upwards, and it is clear that his architecture, both exterior and interior, communicates that sense of elevation, as well as intimacy and closeness to God.

Gaudí achieved this through a highly studied architecture and structure, with a carefully conceived construction system and the use of geometric forms that he found suitable for architecture, inspired by nature, and which he knew would allow his successors to correctly interpret his project.

Today, the Sagrada Familia is one of the most visited monuments in Europe and the world, with nearly 90% of visitors coming from abroad, mainly from the United States, China, Italy and France. After more than three centuries of history, the involvement of several generations and a profound technological evolution, it has become one of the great milestones of contemporary engineering.

- **In this context, what key steps are still needed to complete the Sagrada Familia, and what challenges remain?**

The most important part yet to be built, which we will begin this year, is the Glory façade, which includes four towers. In these, we will take a step forward in the prestressed stone technology that we have already used in the central towers.



On the other hand, the other major challenge will be the construction of the monumental portico that Gaudí designed in front of these four towers as the main entrance to the basilica. This portico will feature a set of 16 large stone lanterns that will rise towards the center, and we will have to find the best system to build them, most likely also using the prestressed stone technique.