

Abandoned Spain

Fran Lens - Paco Quiles - Carlos Sanmillán

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The railway clay station

Less than 30 kilometres from Teruel, and far from any urban centre, is Escandón Station. Situated at the top of Port Escandón, the station was inaugurated in 1900 on a line that was intended to unite Calatayud (Zaragoza) with Sagunto (Valencia). At an altitude of 1,218 metres, it is one of the highest above sea level in existence. In the Turolense winter, snow sometimes hides it completely, often covering many of the abandoned freight cars on its 23,000 square metre track bed, lending it a spooky look.

The hoppers once formed part of the cargo terminal for different varieties of clay arriving from all over the province. It was initiated in 2003 to transport material to Almazora, one of the industrial pottery and ceramic factories of Castellon. The project, however, only lasted a couple of years; it didn't prosper and these wagons are now remembered by no one but graffiti artists and photographers.

Just one of its six train lines is in use: a line that connects Valencia with Aragón and the north of Spain in the Cantabrian-Mediterranean corridor. The line was constructed in the 19th century by the Central Railroad Company of Aragón, which was nationalised in the 1840s.

The only passenger rail that stops at the station (initially configured as a logistics space) is the regional service that connects the capitals of Valencia and Teruel. It was originally designed to assist steam locomotives on the steep ascent through the mountain pass.





The ghost ship

In 2000, captain and ship owner Georgios Koumparelis arrived in Puerto de Sagunto with his crew aboard the Lion of Olympia, transporting a shipment of iron and steel, supposedly against a quick schedule. But the ship was beset by financial problems, and on 14 March that year it was confiscated and grounded by the Athens authorities acting through the Greek Embassy.

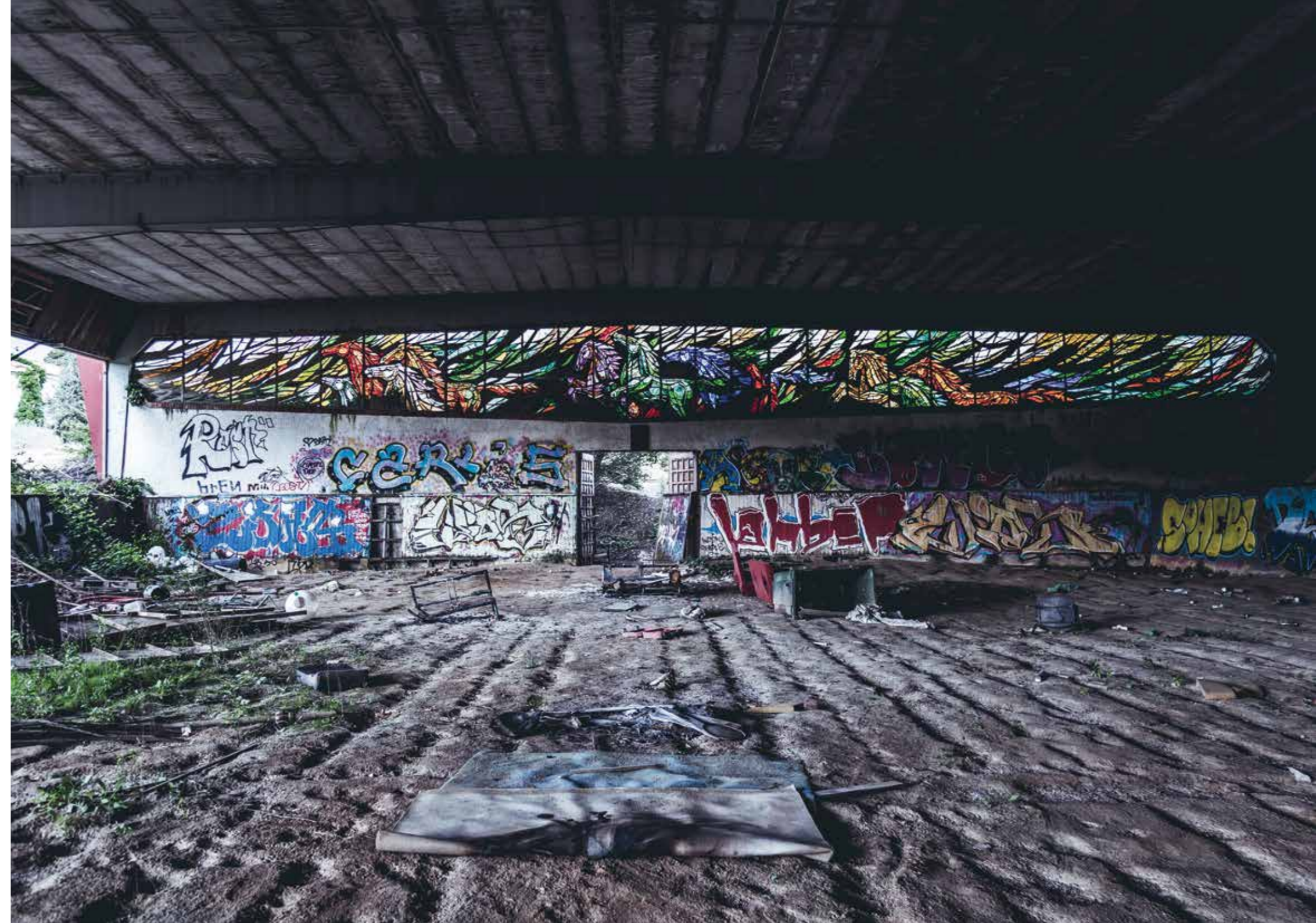
The ship owed over \$1.5 million to a bank, as well as the workers' wages and social security contributions and the charges payable to the port manager for the berth at the dock, which increased every day it was moored there. In total, much more than the ship's estimated value. The crew were left in a precarious position, but in spite of short supplies and adverse living conditions, many of them refused to leave the ship for fear of losing their wage rights.

The crew wiled away the time on deck, but despite the efforts of international organisations and the port authority itself, a solution never came. One by one they abandoned the ship, until only the captain remained; he was 70 years old when the ship docked and now had only the lapping waves and the seagulls inhabiting the rotting decks for company.

Years passed and Koumparelis became just another neighbour, receiving the support of the port manager and the residents of Puerto de Sagunto, where he would do his shopping and occasionally stay over in a guesthouse.

In 2007 the authorities released the ship, but the debt had grown to such an extent that it was unable to set sail again. One day, the captain disappeared; four years later, in 2015, the Lion of Olympia was auctioned to raise funds to cover the costs accrued during its 15 years as a ghost ship moored in the port.







The German's workshop

Nestled between the N-340 and the railway lines on the way into Sagunto from Valencia stands the former *taller del alemán*, or “German's workshop”, as it was known locally. The sign on the building's south façade, however, still displays its real name – Taller Götz. Due to the great variety of rooms and many wings featuring countless frames, it has come to be known among videographers and photographers as the “temple of light painting”. Inside the workshop, one can use any light painting technique employed in nocturnal photography with complete conviction, combining a long exposure with selective light sources: torches, fire, etc.

Little remains of the empire of this German mechanic who brought his expertise and cutting-edge diesel engine repair techniques to Valencian soil. It is believed he could diagnose an engine's ailment purely by listening to its sound, and had all manner of spare parts for cars and trucks alike. Beginning with a small workshop – expanding on several occasions due to customer demand – he forged an impressive professional reputation not only regionally, but also across Europe. However, the railway regulations applied to the easement area near the railway lines next to the premises, coupled with the his own ill health, led him to close the workshop, since when it has remained abandoned.

Almost 30 years later, the building still can not be declared derelict (nor, therefore, can it be demolished) due to its unique German Rationalist architecture. But as yet, it has not been allocated a specific use, and time continues to take its toll on both the structure and interior.

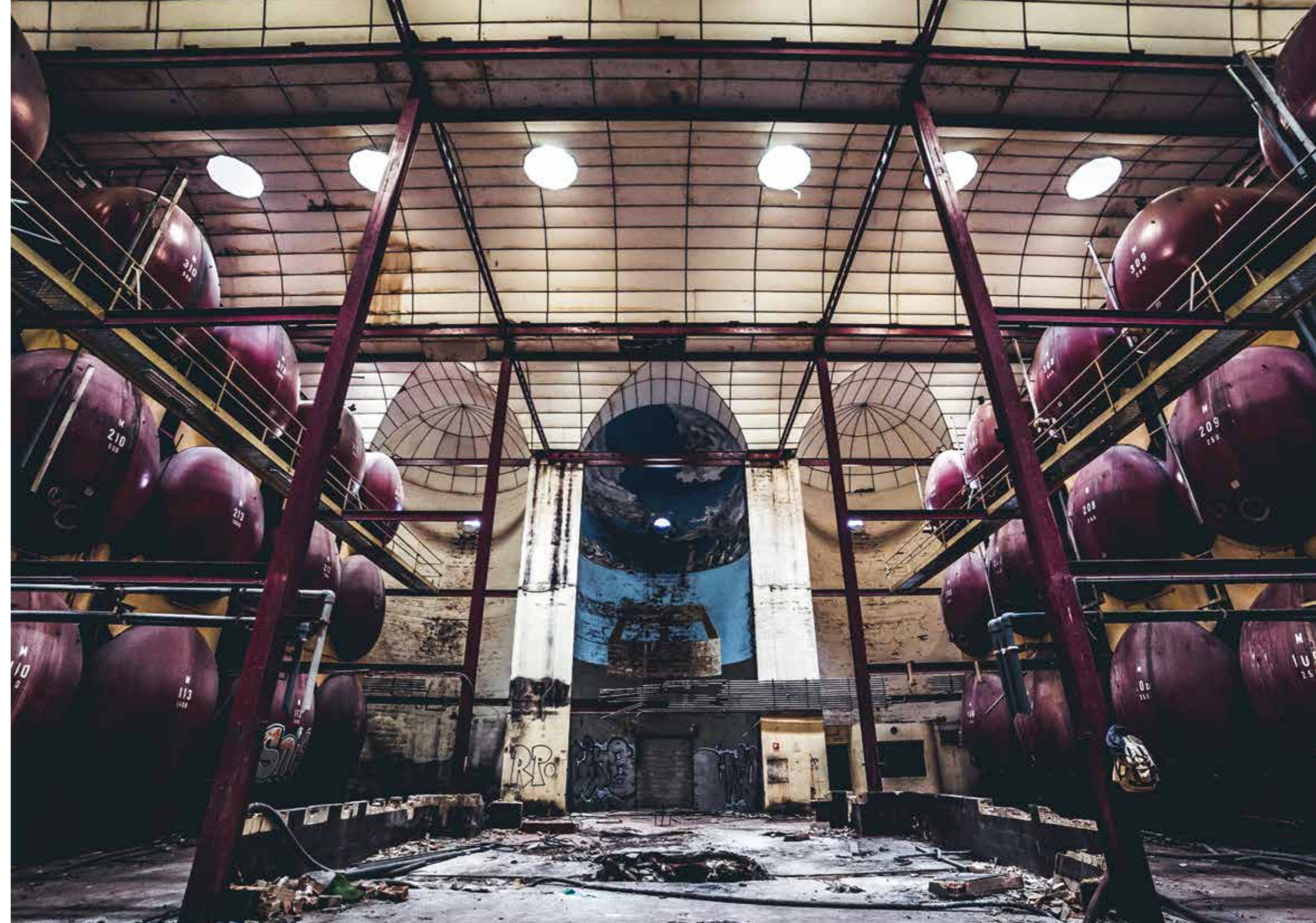


Kremlin Wineries

Constructed close to Valencia in 1969, the Kremlin Wineries, as it is popularly known, boasts a superb location. Its proximity to the port capitol of Turia allowed this firm to develop into one of the Spanish companies most specialised in wine exportation. But with an increase in demand and a need to modernise, the company opened a new facility elsewhere, leaving this one abandoned in 2007.

The spectacular interior of this building – which received a national award for architecture – is peppered with white and burgundy tones. Gigantic barrels line the corridors by the dozen, stacked on top of one another, reaching almost to the cupola-topped ceiling.

Unfortunately, the entrances have all been boarded up and it's not possible to see the interior. This, however, should prove beneficial to the place, as vandalism has begun appearing on the silos.



Segarra reservoir

It all started in 1882 with the construction of a small espadrille factory in a rural area of Castellón. In 1919 the firm's success grew when it began producing another kind of shoe reinforced with leather, as well as specialising in shoe-related accessories; it became the second largest factory in Europe.

When the building suffered serious damage during the Civil War (1936-1939), it was seized and shut down by the state to produce war materials for the army. The owners remained present to a degree, and their allegiance to the new government meant they regained control of the factory at the end of the war, returning production to previous levels.

In the 1990s it was acquired by the public administration and closed shortly thereafter, leaving behind a long history, as well as industrial units and an enormous reservoir atop a mountain, which supplied water through a kilometre-long pipe running down the uneven terrain to the factory.

Now standing empty, the huge basin became the site for a transverse office building, equipped with a kitchen and bathrooms; it also housed a party suite used on many occasions by Francisco Franco.

With a magnificent view of the coast and the interior valleys, the reservoir remains impressive to this day, despite the surrounding gardens and their array of ornaments falling into decay. The party suite, decorated with opulent tiles and timber, is extremely unstable these days and moves with every step – the structure sits on just a few pillars that for decades have been subject to flooding.



Cement factory dome

The Catalan coast is dotted with dozens of cement factories, several of which have been abandoned for various reasons, the most common being complaints from local residents about particle emission, their proximity to towns, or the deposits running out.

One of these disused factories is well known to urban explorers, though its precise location will remain undisclosed. Over the last few years it has been used as a backdrop for various advertising spots and videos. Its large, dome-shaped warehouse stands in stark contrast to the more muted appearance of the other warehouses, kilns, and silos.

In addition to this site, evidence of stone extraction can still be found in the vicinity. Buried in the undergrowth, the rusting remnants of this industry have been sorely neglected, despite the valuable heritage they represent. They are testimony to a bygone era, a time when the mining industry clung on to survival thanks to material extracted from other quarries, until the day it was finally abandoned.



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Villages bombarded during the Spanish Civil War that were not rebuilt after the fighting, a huge international railway station abandoned at the border with France, an old military munitions dump hewn deep within a mountain, the remains of Spain's first fossil-fuelled power plant, a forgotten pharmaceutical laboratory, a ghost ship, a closed blast furnace, the spectacular vestiges of a hydraulic dam, a forbidden sanatorium, a former cement factory ...

For a decade, Fran Lens, Paco Quiles and Carlos Sanmillán have travelled around Spain in search of these abandoned and forgotten places.

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