



Location: Almería, Spain. Climate: Semi-arid Mediterranean.
 Included in the buffer zone of the listed monument Alcazaba and San Cristobal Walls.
 Archeological reserve area.
 Protected fauna: *Chamaleo chamaleon* Protected flora: *Maytenus senegalensis*
 Area: 4,26 Ha. Budget: 2.671.648,55 €



THE PLACE IS EVERYTHING

This landscape intervention reclaims the unique heritage site of La Hoya for the city of Almería.

La Hoya is a gorge located on the edge of the historic quarter, between the hills of the Alcazaba and San Cristóbal, and crossed by the 11th-Century Wall of Jayrān. During the High Middle Ages, it was occupied by a neighborhood that was later abandoned, becoming an agricultural space that over the centuries evolved until its decline, turning into a forgotten and expectant vacant lot.

Historic landscape restoration, environmental regeneration and spatial reimagination are intertwined to define this proposal which aims at the rediscovery and reinvention of this place. The act of revealing the story of this landscape in order to become part of the palimpsest of its evolution has been the main premise of this project.

The design was already there. Our task was merely to tend to the features that we found, accentuating them by means of a soft intervention that is both minimal in its impact and highly specific. Specific to the history of La Hoya in order to preserve its timeless values, to tell its story and to enable future research and exploration into its rich past.

La Hoya's location, shape and orientation have led, overtime, to the establishment of multiple environmental units and heritage elements which has created a valuable biocultural ecosystem. The project turns La Hoya into a space shared by agents, a habitat for the mere enjoyment of such an exceptional place, all while considering what a park should be, both physically and symbolically, in the context of the current environmental crisis, in a heritage site such as this one, and in a dry climate like Almería's.

The structure of the park reflects the components that have made it unique. The system of 19th-Century agricultural terraces contained by dry stone walls which sits at the foot of the hill of San Cristóbal has been entirely restored preserving their topographical levels and restoring their walls with additional stones originating, like all the natural materials employed in this project, from leftover stockpiles from nearby quarries.

Stairs and ramps, also of a massive stone nature, have been implemented onto to these walls to define itineraries and provide access to the different levels. These itineraries are accompanied by a restored network of water channels that once provided irrigation to the different crops that were cultivated on the terraces. The two pools that served as reservoirs for this system have once again been put to use and the project includes intermediate diversion boxes and basins that help regulate the flow of water.

The different ways water circulates, falls, pools and turns also contributes to the atmosphere of the park with sound and humidity. The restored agricultural water network has become an integral part of the park's contemporary irrigation system.

In the same way that the presence and absence of water determined the history of La Hoya, its current management through sustainable rainwater drainage and catchment systems defines, among other elements, the use of a water-bound pavement made of a locally supplied aggregated mixed with lime, or the natural stone slabs for the stairs and ramps, materials which in addition to allowing the ground to transpire, underscore the natural and chromatic characteristics of the place.

Almería's desert climate has determined how such a precious asset as water is used. The climate here is characterized by its generalized aridness, long periods of drought and elevated sun exposure. The park adapts to these conditions through the selection of plants. The plant palette comprises trees used traditionally in the agriculture of the area specially those linked with *Andalusí* culture, along with native shrubs and herbaceous plants as well as cosmopolitan species also from the semi-arid Mediterranean spectrum.

The valley of La Hoya, originally the dry river bed at the base of the gorge, is conceived as continuous plane with large groupings of vegetation, traversed by multidirectional winding paths that enhance the perceptive experience of the space. These groupings are an abstraction of the forms that water leaves behind when it sporadically flows and where plants tend to group in these kinds of environments in arid climates, while in the park they serve as infrastructural elements to manage the water from the occasional rains of this area. The plantation scheme harmonizes with the preservation of the unexcavated underground archeological remains.

In the center of the valley a large esplanade can be found, an open and empty space outlined by a subtle ring of stone slabs where both spontaneous and organized collective activities can take place. Programatically, the park is an invitation to be discovered.

The park which has been imagined, the Mediterranean Gardens of La Hoya, is therefore a landscape that integrates a contemporary public space, a monumental setting, an archeological reserve, a sanctuary for flora and fauna in the center of the city, a celebration of the semi-arid Mediterranean climate and a reflection of the culture of water.