

Arana Palace



Town:

Izurtza.

Location:

Barrio Elizalde, 23.

Access:

The palacio is on the left on the Durango-Urkiola road, within the Izurtza municipal boundary.

Opening hours:

Private property. Exterior views only.

Other places of interest nearby:

Church of St. Nicholas.
Izurtza.Bekotorre or Izurza tower.
Izurtza.Azpazar windmill.
Izurtza.Solar de Zabala.
Izurtza.Ferrería (old smithy) Aranekoa.
Izurtza.

Just a stone's throw from the church of St. Nicholas in Izurtza, half-hidden by the trees in an overgrown garden, stands the palacio built in 1852 by Juan Ramón de Arana. The house and its setting have long caught the attention of observers and experts; in 1864 the Delmás Guide devoted a paragraph to it.

The differences between this palace and any other town or country dwelling in Vizcaya are fairly evident. To begin with, the house's exotic formal features and the residential area tend to set it apart.

A passage from an unpublished document describes the palacio as a "*grandiose possession that Arana had commanded to be built with the greatest commodity for his ease and that of his family, a place where he spent long periods in the summer and kindly seasons...*" Indeed, Arana is to all intents and purposes a country villa in the manner of the Italian Renaissance. Clearly, it was not the only one of its kind in Vizcaya, nor was it the first, but it is certainly one of the most important.

Juan Ramón de Arana, chevalier of the Order of Charles III, began work on the palace when his first wife, Cornelia de Ampuero, died. When Juan Ramón died in 1860, his oldest son, Tomás José de Arana Ampuero, acquired the house and paid the other heirs 2,500 reales each in compensation. Antonio de Goycoechea, from Bermeo, then the best architect in practice in Vizcaya, was responsible for the valuation and report. It is quite possible that Goycoechea was ultimately responsible for the mansion we know today, considered as a luxury leisure country house.

The cultured idiom of the building is, perhaps, what most attracts the observer's attention. Arana's neo-classicism is decadent, most unlike the usual kind to be found in the province. Different, for instance, from the farmhouse with bodega that Arana built for himself in 1846 elsewhere in Izurtza. The language evokes more the style of the II French Empire (the attic reminiscent of the mansard roof) than the Isabeline period in Spain, although it is true that the formula of the balcony-doorway was very much an accepted device, having been current in the Spanish classical style since the beginning of the 17th century.

The building is dated on a wrought iron panel above the door: *Rebuilt by Juan Ramón de Arana / Year 1852.*

Arana's façade is an east facing, clearly hierarchised three-storey affair in five span sections. From the outside it is clear the middle one is the main floor, with its lintelled, beautifully proportioned windows set into a carefully worked ashlar sandstone wall. In fact, the windows are probably better described as balconies with low wrought iron parapets and covered with short horizontal pediments.

Windows are slightly wider on the ground floor, while the top floor, clearly differentiated by the cornice with straight mouldings, has low windows topped by pediments that are crowned by graceful, upward-aspiring volutes. The line of the undereave cornice, comprising sequences of four rosettes of five lugs, gives the zone added character.

The main entrance is centred under a plain lintel which is aggrandised by a kind of doorway-balcony with two free-standing Tuscan columns that support a sill projecting outwards a metre or more to take the balcony.

The stables are in a separate, much more modest building by the palacio's service entrance at the back. Access from the street is direct and independent, leading to a doorway wide and tall enough to take carriages.

A stone wall topped by iron railings runs around the tree-lined garden, full of old magnolia trees. The old fish pond can still be identified, as can the avenue of trees and other additions and complements.

The Arana place became a farmhouse many years ago, which unfortunately has not helped towards the preservation of its quite considerable charms.

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