During the refurbishment of the old Bombas Gens factory, an underground shelter built during the Spanish Civil War was discovered on the premises.

The shelter was used to protect factory workers from potential bomb attacks that might be carried out by the National Army’s watercrafts or planes. The reason the factory was a potential target was because, during the war, Bombas Gens’s furnace stopped producing hydraulic machinery in order to manufacture weapons such as mortar shells.

In the course of the conflict, the factory was seized and handed over to a commissary assigned by the Republic. Following the guidance of the Junta de Defensa Pasiva (Board of Passive Protection) of Valencia, founded in July 1937, the commissary’s goals included management of the factory’s production and defence of those who worked on it. Because of this, there was a clear threat to the factory. In fact, according to oral histories, there were bombings in the immediate vicinity that mainly affected the adjacent Huerto de la Estrella (current expansion of Colegio Hermanas Mantellate and opening to Avenida Portugal). The factory was among the targets of the National Party; this is

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2 News about the air-raid shelter at Bombas Gens

3 Information about the Huerto de La Estrella in: *El País* 2010/05/15; *El Levante* 2012/08/16; *El Levante* 2012/11/27; *La Valencia Desaparecida*
reflected in the *Mapa de objetivos a bombardear* (Map of Targets to Bombard) from the General Militar de Ávila Archive, which was shown in the Sala Municipal exhibition at the City Hall of Valencia between April and July 2017.  

There are three enclaves in this detail of the map. The point labelled with the letter ‘F’ is for an anti-aircraft defence, and the other two, labelled ‘C’, show the locations of factories and workshops where war gear was produced. One of them is undoubtedly Bombas Gens, whereas the other is difficult to identify. It could have been Marxalenes’s station and garage, which had a shelter, or any of the workshops nearby such as the foundry, located at the current street Dr. Olóriz nº 3, or Los Alonso’s oil factory, which is by the Alquería de Barrinto. However, the location seems to indicate that this other point could have been the paper mill in front of Bombas Gens. This mill, situated on the same Camino Burjassot, and whose owners were Monllor, Crespo and Compañía, was known as ‘La Papelera Levantina’.  

The point showing anti-aircraft defence seems to be situated in the triangle formed by the avenues Campanar and Burjassot, and the street Dr. Nicasio Benlloch.

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THE AIR-RAID SHELTER AT BOMBAS GENS

TYPOLOGY AND CONSTRUCTION FEATURES OF THE SHELTER

The construction of the shelter at Bombas Gens has to be understood within the context of the war; even if we do not have the building report, we can estimate its date of construction to be between the end of 1937 and 1938, which, particularly in its later stages, coincided with a period of intense attacks on the city of Valencia and its vicinity.1

The structure corresponds to a factory or company-type shelter, in a gallery. Consequently, its features are those of this type of defensive structure.

First of all, the shelter is small in size, with an approximate capacity of 30 or 40 people, and it does not include any of the elements that were usually found in other bigger refuges, such as latrines or continuous benches to sit on while inside.

Secondly, as it was intended for the factory’s workers, there are a series of signs on the walls of the sitting room with hygienic recommendations such as “do not smoke”, “do not spit”, and “do not throw garbage away”. These were intended for the adult workers who, possibly, did not follow these sanitary suggestions in other work areas of the factory, or even outside of it.

Being a military defensive structure, it is a solid construction of reinforced concrete that complies with the norms of this type of structure, and is therefore underground. It has a separate entrance and exit, situated at opposite poles, and contains elements that protect its interiors from blast damage and shrapnel from exploding bombs nearby, such as zigzagging direct accesses and the thickness of its walls and deck.

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PARTS OF THE SHELTER

The shelter is a construction with a simple floor plan. It includes a main access located in the internal yard of the factory, a sitting room or shelter, and the exit corridor that connects the structure with one of the galleries of the production facilities.

The main access to the shelter is formed by a staircase of 7.25 m in length x 1.13 m in width. It has a total amount of 24 steps, and the bay from which this staircase is accessible is a funnel-shaped brick-on-brick bulkhead.

This access leads to a setback that resembles a small anteroom of 3.57 m in length and 1.21 m in width—in which, as indicated by the signage in front of the door, workers were not allowed to stay. This part of the shelter was intended to receive the impact of the blast or the shrapnel in the hypothetical case that the shelter’s door would be bombed.

The shelter’s interior takes the form of a vaulted rectangular room of 22 m². It remains almost intact and barely unchanged since its construction.

The walls are decorated with a grey-coloured skirting board, which includes an ornamental band comprised of alternating yellow and white stripes. The upper side of the wall and the ceiling were painted in white.

This same decoration can be found along the staircase access.

A peculiar set of signs can be seen on the walls. They consist of hygienic recommendations such as “do not smoke”, “do not spit”, and “do not throw garbage”. These signs were intended for the workers to do as they were told while inside of the room. At the entrance’s landing there is another sign indicating that staying in that area was not safe.
These signs are some of the most distinctive features of the shelter. They are painted in azulete (indigo) and composed of capital letters in a sign-making typography that was typical at the time. Under these signs one can identify the previous ones underneath, slightly smaller, with the same text but made by a different hand. These earlier signs have not completely disappeared and allow us to see a typeface which is much more elaborate, sinuous and decorated. These original charcoal drawings were however replaced by the blue signs, more visible and easy to read.

Looking closely, there are other strokes inside: a group of small letters also drawn with charcoal, and made when this space was used as a coalbunker after the war.

Remnants of the shelter’s interior lighting were also preserved during the refurbishment. In the upper section of the walls, the nails securing the cables are original, as are the tubes housing them. The lighting was created with cables assembled inside a plumb-laminated tube.

Likewise, the light bulb holders left square traces that have been re-used for the current lighting system. The wooden holders of the light switches have been maintained as well.

The ceiling also preserves the vent holes and the ventilation system, which can be seen in the corners of the shelter.

The exit or secondary access is located in a section less carefully preserved than the areas described so far. It does not include a staircase such as the one at the entrance, but an almost-straight corridor with two small zigzags. This starts at the centre of the northern wall, creating a pronounced ramp that ends with several steps and leads to the western gallery of the factory.
DEFENSIVE ELEMENTS INSIDE THE AIR-RAID SHELTER

To provide workers in the shelter with the best possible protection, a thick concrete wall of 2.30 m in width was built between the stairs and the sitting room. This thick wall was used as a protective shield against blast damage and shrapnel from bombs that might explode near the door.

Meanwhile the exit, which is a corridor connecting the main hall with the interior of one of the galleries, also required some sort of shield. Since this corridor did not have the same protective thick wall as the entrance, it was endowed with two very different elements – but with identical barrier functionality. The first element is inside the corridor: a sturdy octagonal column of 1.10 m thick placed in the centre, allaying the impact of an explosion. For further defense, the second protective element was a metal plate that fit onto the wall’s groove situated at the front of the corridor, which can be easily seen from inside the room.
ARMAMENTS

A weapon manufactured at Bombas Gens during the Civil War period is exhibited in this same exit corridor. It is an empty mortar shell with some missing parts, such as the fuse, which indicates that it was never used.

Being a short or medium-range weapon, mortar shells such as this were used by frontline combatants. Bomb releases or grenade launchers were needed to fire these kinds of shells from the trenches. They have an approximate weight of 250 grams of explosive material and a range of up to 300 m.¹

¹ For further information visit the following website: Lanzabombas modelo español

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How to arrive

Bus EMT: 28, 29, 60, 64, 90, 89, 1, 80, 79, 95
Tramway: 4 Reus
Subway: 1, 2 Túria

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An organisation dedicated to art, research and social support, and promoter of this project.