

CHAPTER 3

Hotel El Comercio

3.1 Summary

Hotel El Comercio is located in the historic center of Lima, at the corner of an urban block near the Government Palace and Plaza Mayor of Lima (Fig. 3.1). Founded in 1535 and capital of both the Spanish Viceroyalty and present day Peru, the Historic Centre of Lima was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1991 and is home to a collection of highly significant buildings constructed in mud brick masonry and quincha. The site of Hotel El Comercio had been occupied by a number of earlier Spanish colonial and pre-Hispanic structures; however, the current structure dates to the middle of the nineteenth century. Hotel El Comercio is representative of a typical courtyard or patio building, known as a *casana* (Fig. 3.2). The three-story, 4,600 m² building consists of 131 rooms arranged around two interior patios. Several commercial spaces are located at the first floor along Jirón Carabaya, including El Cordano—a historically and socially significant bar. Hotel El Comercio is constructed with rubble stone masonry foundations; a fired brick masonry base course; mud brick and fired brick masonry walls at the first floor; and quincha walls at the second and third floors. The floors are constructed with a raised finish floor over wood sleepers over wood tongue-and-groove boards, joists, and beams. The roof is flat and of similar construction to the floors, but it is finished with layers of mud plaster. The building has been subject to a number of

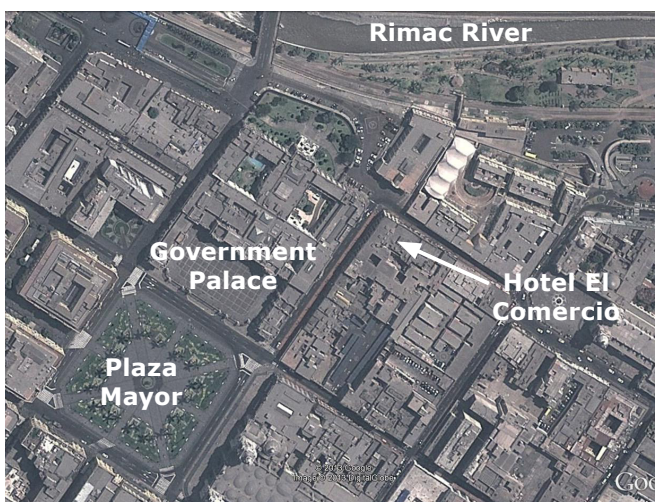


FIGURE 3.1
Satellite image showing the location of Hotel El Comercio in the Historic Centre of Lima.
Image: © 2013 Google. Image © 2013 Digital Globe.



FIGURE 3.2
Hotel El Comercio, as viewed from the northeast.
Image: Amila Ferron.

alterations, particularly in the northeast corner where internal mud brick walls were removed and replaced with columns and openings were enlarged to accommodate the programmatic needs of El Cordano bar. The building is owned by the Ministerio de Cultura del Perú and is largely unoccupied at the present time. The structure is in fair condition overall; and the preliminary findings indicate that the structural performance of the building is compromised by the previously mentioned alterations; the presence of humidity in the base of the mud brick walls; ongoing exposure of the structural elements in the quincha wall frames to termites; insufficient connections between the quincha frames and floor structure; and the insufficient embedment of the quincha frame sole plates into the top of the mud brick walls.

3.2 Historical Background, Context, and Significance

3.2.1 Historical background and context¹

Hotel El Comercio was constructed in the middle of the nineteenth century; however, its site and the area surrounding the Plaza Mayor in Lima had long been occupied by a number of earlier Spanish colonial and pre-Hispanic structures.

When the city of Lima was founded by the Spanish on January 18, 1535, there were already a number of pre-Hispanic buildings in the area of the future Plaza de Armas, which would later become known as Plaza Mayor (Fig. 3.3). The Spaniards built over many of these structures. For example, Governor Don Francisco Pizarro built his own house over the house of Taulichusco, the last indigenous ruler of the area. This house was altered and expanded over the centuries and later became known as the Government Palace of Peru. Today, it is still possible to see some remains of Taulichusco's house below the Government Palace.

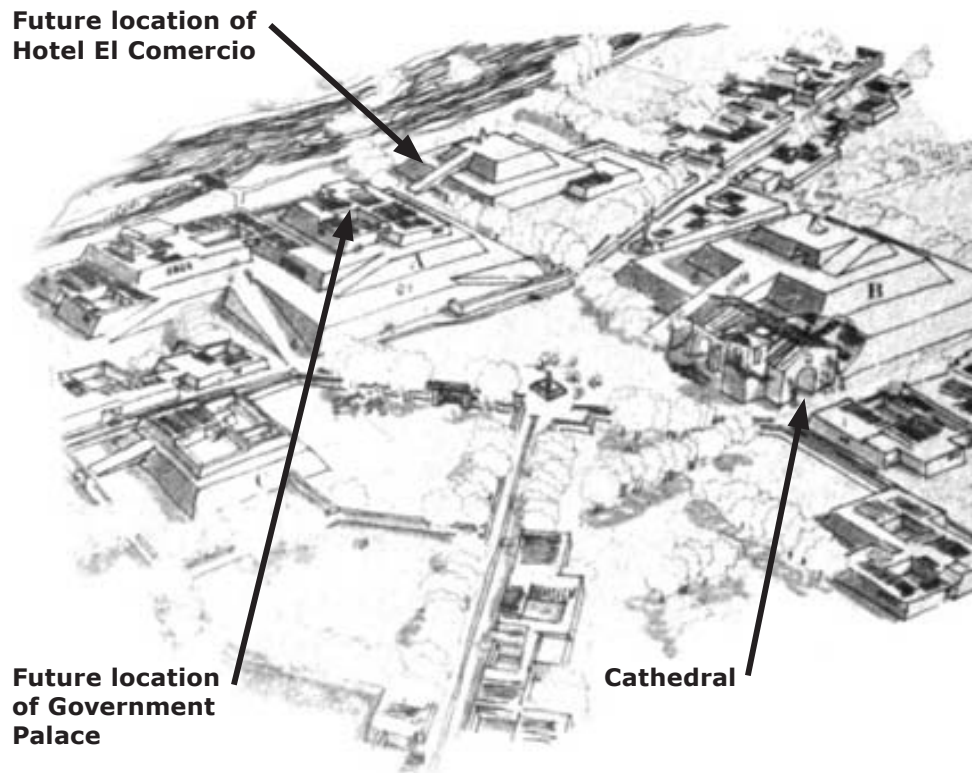


FIGURE 3.3

Hypothetical reconstruction of pre-Hispanic buildings in the area of the future Plaza Mayor, circa 1535.

Image: Juan Günther Doering, Patronato de Lima, with additional annotations by GCI.

The site of Hotel El Comercio was also home to an existing pre-Hispanic structure—a pyramid-shaped structure that functioned as a small sanctuary. The Spanish called this sanctuary *Huaca Riquelme*, as it was located in an area of the city that had been given to Don Alonso de Riquelme, who at the time was secretary to Governor Pizarro and later became the royal treasurer. During the Spanish period, structures such as *Huaca Riquelme* disappeared quickly, as they were disassembled so that their materials could be reused for the construction of new earthen buildings in the new city. Some remains of *Huaca Riquelme* have been found in the area surrounding Hotel El Comercio.

In the sixteenth century, a two-story house was built on the site of Hotel El Comercio. This house appears on Pedro Nolasco Mere's 1685 map of Lima. The house survived for the next two centuries, until 10:30 p.m. on October 28, 1746 when a three-minute earthquake destroyed the city of Lima. Nearly 3,000 houses in Lima collapsed as a result of the earthquake. Only 25 houses survived, but they were severely damaged and were eventually demolished. Following the earthquake, most houses were rebuilt; and, many of the churches, convents, and monasteries were partially or fully rebuilt as well. Most reconstructed and new buildings were generally limited to a height of two stories. In the nineteenth century these restrictions were relaxed to allow for the construction of three-story houses, such as Hotel El Comercio.

Author José Gálvez writes about the current Hotel El Comercio structure in his 1943 publication *Calles de Lima y meses del año*, noting that in 1848, owner José Simeón Ayllón Aramburu "construye 'un gran edificio' en esa calle" (constructed a great building in that street).² He is describing the current three-story structure, which would have been viewed as an enormous building in what was at the time a low-rise city. In 1897, Don Manuel Quimper purchased the three-story building at the corner of Jirón Carabaya and Jirón Ancash. In the legal records, the house was described as having six doors along Jirón Carabaya and two doors facing Jirón Ancash. This transaction confirms that Hotel El Comercio was certainly in existence by the end of the nineteenth century. A *plano panorámico* (bird's eye view) of Lima published in 1924 shows Hotel El Comercio with a mass and volume that is similar to its current appearance (Fig. 3.4).



FIGURE 3.4

The current mass and volume of Hotel El Comercio is shown in this portion of the *Plano panorámico de Lima en homenaje al primer centenario de la Batalla de Ayacucho*, drawn by Julio E. Berrocal in 1924 and edited by the Librería F. y E. Rosay. Image: Juan Günther Doering.

Soon after the construction of Hotel El Comercio, the surrounding neighborhood began to change. On March 2, 1878 a new rail line serving Callao, Lima, and Matucana was inaugurated, with the Lima station located near Hotel El Comercio. The station transformed this part of the city, making it a transit center. In 1912 a new train station opened in front of Hotel El Comercio, further increasing activities in the area. The urban landscape was further modified in the 1930s when the old Jesuit Church of Nuestra Señora de los Desamparados, located on the same street as Hotel El Comercio, was destroyed.

During the 1980s, Hotel El Comercio was converted to an army printing center and heavy machinery installed within the building.

The building is currently owned by the Ministerio de Cultura del Perú and is unoccupied, except for a few commercial spaces at the first floor and the site guards' residences.

3.2.2 Significance

Hotel El Comercio is located within the boundaries of the Historic Centre of Lima, which was inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 1991. The structure was registered as a Peruvian national monument on July 23, 1980. Due to its design and construction details, it is architecturally significant as an example of a casona that is typical of Lima and other historic Viceroyalty cities in South America. As the home of El Cordano bar, where Peruvian presidents dined during the Republican period, the site also possesses historic and social significance (Fig. 3.5).



FIGURE 3.5
El Cordano bar.
Image: Claudia Cancino.

3.3 Architectural Description

Hotel El Comercio is located across the street from the government palace and one block away from Lima's main plaza (Plaza Mayor), cathedral, and city hall. The building is adjacent to a four-story modern concrete structure at Jirón Carabaya and a two-story mud brick and quincha casona at Jirón Ancash (Fig. 3.10). The building has a 1,480 m² footprint and contains three stories, two patios, three stairs, and a total of 131 rooms—27 at the first floor, 51 at the second floor, and 53 at the third floor (Figs. 3.6–3.9). The section adjacent to the construction at Jirón Ancash and the bay between the two patios has collapsed (Fig. 3.11). As the first and second patios have a similar architectural configuration and demonstrate the same construction techniques, this assessment and future structural analyses will only consider the first patio and the northeast section of the building.

Hotel El Comercio is constructed with a fired brick masonry base course and a rubble stone masonry foundation. Above the base course, the first floor walls are constructed of mud brick, with fired brick surrounds at the door openings. The second and third floor walls are made of quincha (Fig. 3.12). All exterior and patio façades are covered with painted plaster that appears to be recently applied. Both the second and third floors are constructed with tongue-and-groove wood floor boards over wood sleepers over wood floor boards over wood joists. The flat roof is of similar construction to the floors, but it is finished with layers of mud plaster.

The three-story northwest façade along Jirón Carabaya has a 1:3 proportion and is comprised of seven openings with brick masonry surrounds set in the adobe walls at the first floor, thirteen openings in the second floor quincha walls, and eight openings in the third floor quincha walls, mostly vertically and horizontally aligned (Fig. 3.13). The northeast façade along Jirón Ancash is of similar construction to the northwest façade, but it has an almost 1:1 proportion with two openings at the first floor, three openings at the second floor, and three openings at the third floor (Fig. 3.15).

The entrance to the building is through a double wooden door at the west end of the Jirón Carabaya façade. The entrance opens directly into the entry hall (*zaguán*), which connects the building entrance with the northwest end of the first patio (Fig. 3.14). The patio is comprised of an elevated gallery at the southeast side of the first floor and wood-framed balconies with steel columns at all four sides of the second and third stories (Fig. 3.16). At the first floor there are seven wooden columns which support the second floor balconies. The steel columns above are vertically and horizontally aligned between the second and third floor balconies but not with the wood columns at the first floor below. The patio façades also have a 1:1 proportion but the openings are not vertically aligned.

A grand wood staircase, to the northeast of the entry hall, provides access to the second floor. A separate staircase, to the east of the grand staircase, provides access between the second and third floors.

The interior rooms are typically finished with tile floors at the first level and wood floors at the second and third levels; painted plaster at the walls; and painted wood board ceilings that are attached to the underside of the floor joists above. Wood doors with glazed lites provide access to the rooms, and the street-facing rooms at the second and third stories also have similar doors providing access to balconies (Fig. 3.17).

FIGURE 3.6

First floor plan of Hotel El Comercio.
Drawing: Base drawing prepared by the Instituto Nacional de Cultura and edited by the GCI.

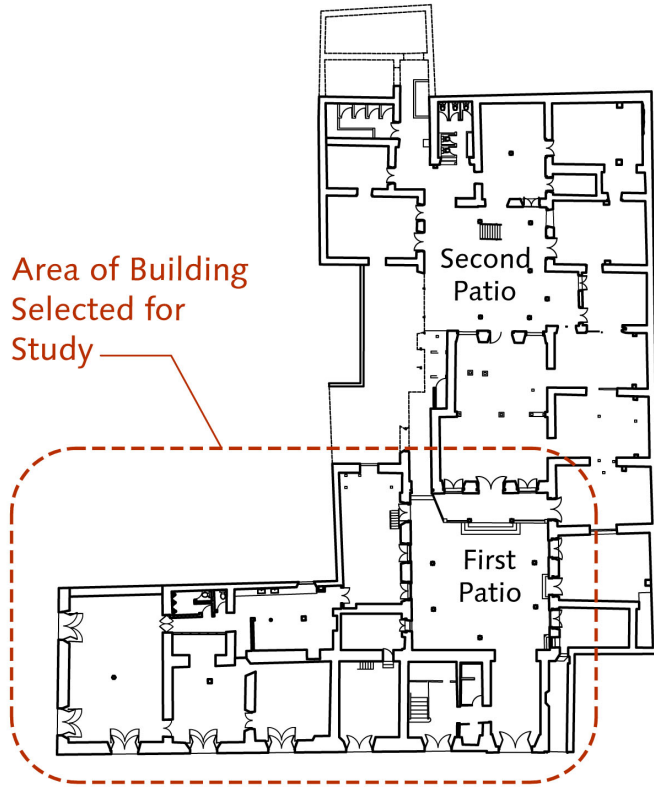


FIGURE 3.7

Detailed first floor plan of Hotel El Comercio, illustrating the area selected for study.
Drawing: Base drawing prepared by the Instituto Nacional de Cultura and edited by the GCI.

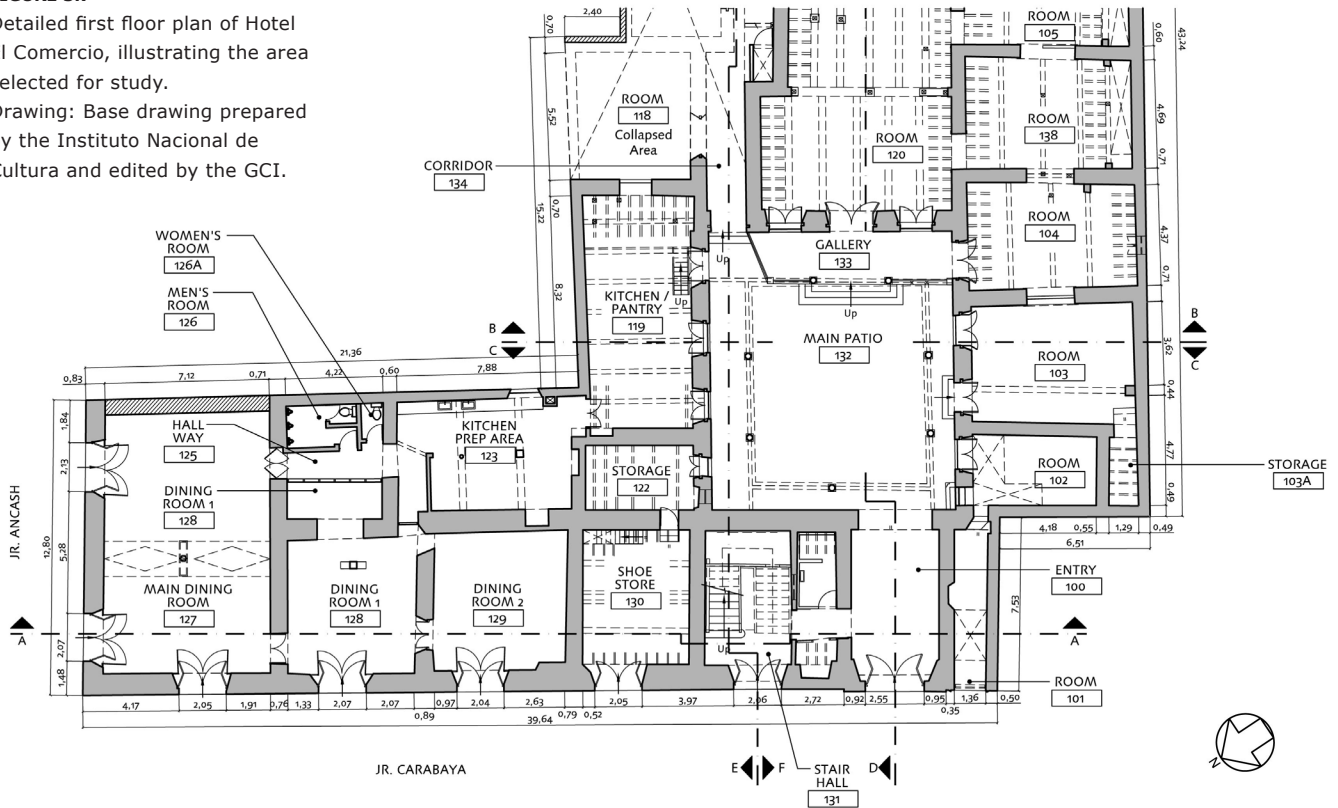


FIGURE 3.8

Detailed second floor plan of Hotel El Comercio, illustrating the area selected for study.

Drawing: Base drawing prepared by the Instituto Nacional de Cultura and edited by the GCI.

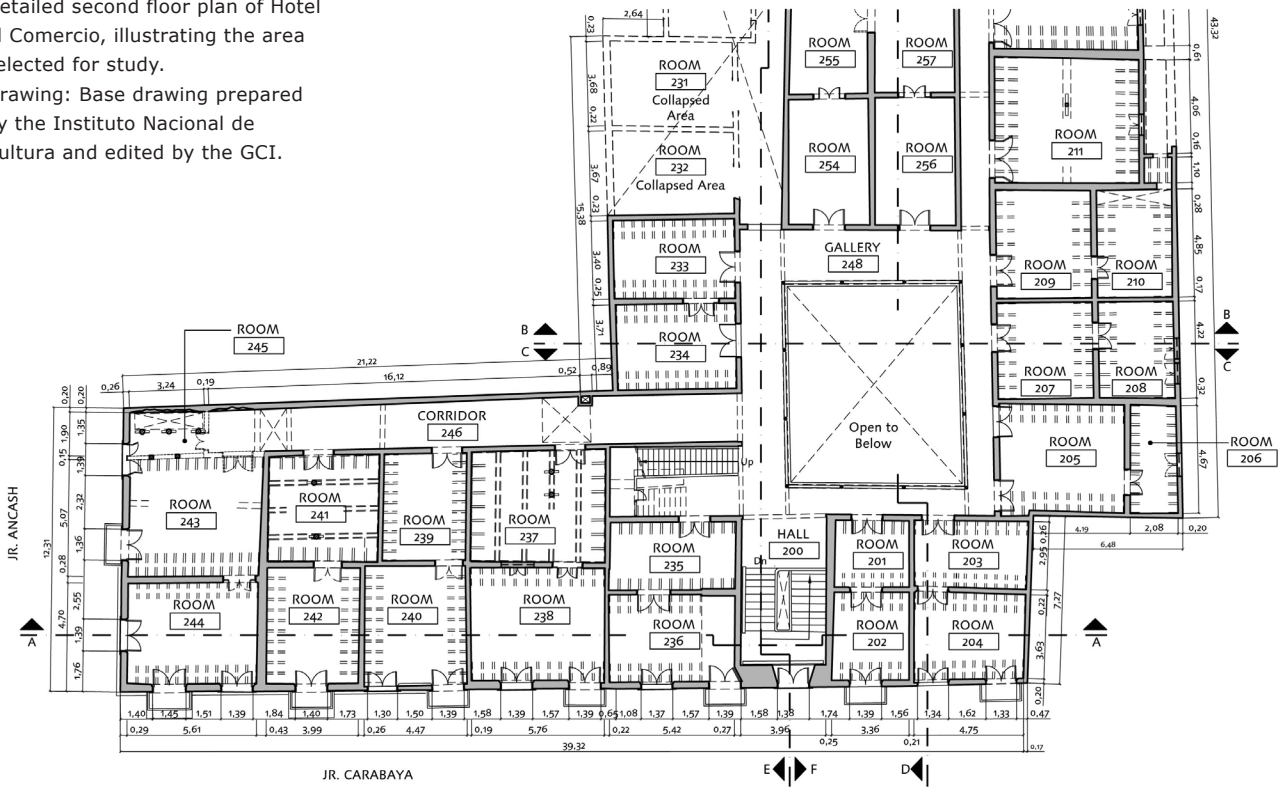


FIGURE 3.9

Detailed third floor plan of Hotel El Comercio, illustrating the area selected for study.

Drawing: Base drawing prepared by the Instituto Nacional de Cultura and edited by the GCI.

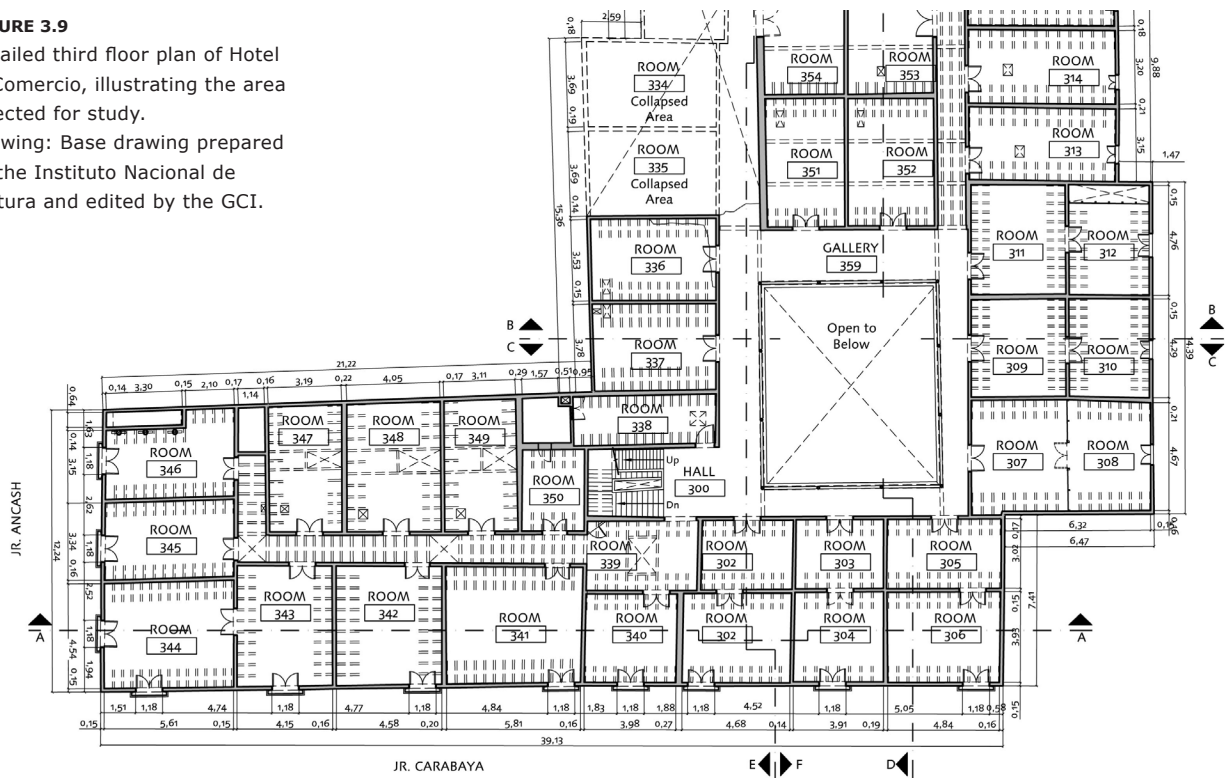




FIGURE 3.10 (LEFT)
Northwest façade of Hotel El Comercio along Jirón Carabaya, and adjacent concrete structure, 2010.
Image: Amila Ferron.

FIGURE 3.11 (RIGHT)
Collapsed bay between the two patios.
Image: Sara Lardinois.

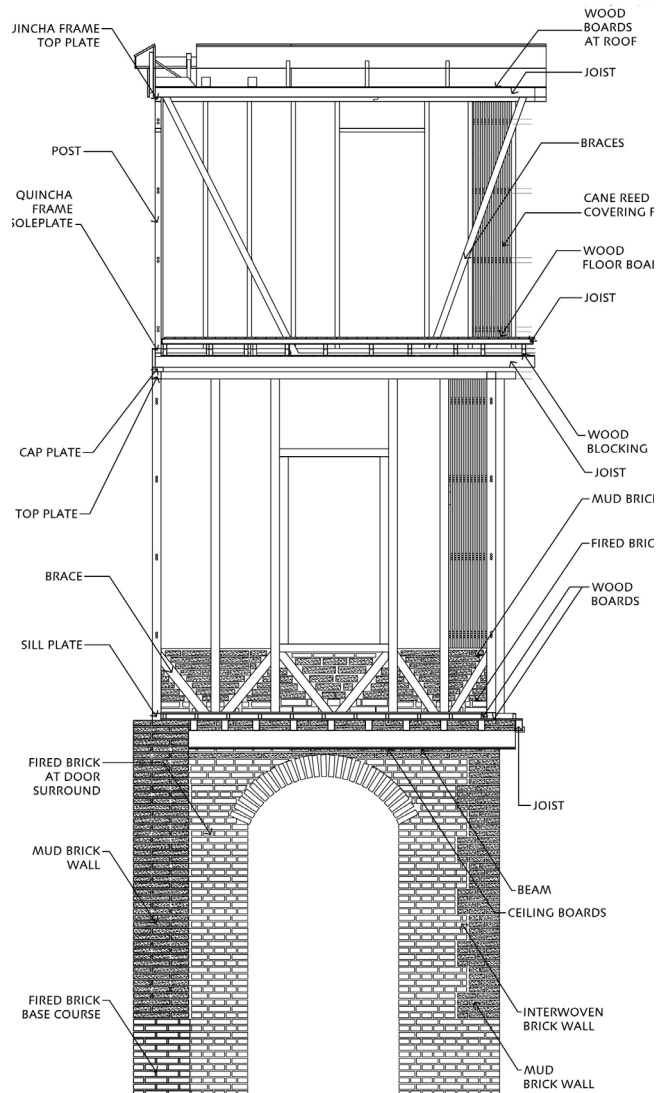


FIGURE 3.12
Elevation showing a typical construction bay at the northeast façade.
Drawing: Mirna Soto, for the GCI.



FIGURE 3.13 (ABOVE LEFT)
Northwest façade of Hotel El Comercio along Jirón Carabaya, 2010.
Image: Sara Lardinois.



FIGURE 3.14 (ABOVE RIGHT)
Entry hall, 2010.
Image: Sara Lardinois.



FIGURE 3.15 (LEFT)
Northeast façade of Hotel El Comercio along Jirón Ancash, 2010.
Image: Amila Ferron.



FIGURE 3.16 (RIGHT)
First patio, 2010.
Image: Sara Lardinois.



FIGURE 3.17
Typical third floor room (room 306), with doors providing access to the balcony.
Image: Mirna Soto, for the GCI.