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Field Study 2 Summary/Reflection

The final completed project of Antoni Gaudí, the Casa Milà, was commissioned by Pere Milà i Camps, a Barcelona magnate. After an incredible career and an established reputation, Gaudí created the structure, more commonly known as La Pedrera, which stands on the corner of Passeig de Gràcia and carrer Provença. This centrally-located lot in Barcelona was acquired by Milà and his wife in the Eixample district. Not only was this considered the most desirable area of town, but their plot of land was an astonishing thousand plus square meters.

The construction of La Pedrera is most fascinating, as there are no weight-bearing walls throughout. Instead, Gaudí opted for simple pillars and girders, giving it a modern style. The materials used were stone, cast iron, and cylindrical brick pillars within a framework of iron girders and joists. The structurally magnificent building consists of an apartment house surrounding two large curvilinear courtyards, and as usual, conveyed Gaudí's naturalistic approach and out of the ordinary sculptural concepts. Delivered to the site by engine along the highway, the massive stone blocks made up the principal façade. These stones came together to create a series of porticos, in the form of a colossal arch. Because of the lack of weight-bearing walls, other methods were needed to ensure its stability. An undulating running girder was joined by projecting joists to the structural girders. The fluidity of the design between the structure and the façade is seamless and mimics the natural components of living skin or ivy. The roof however, is arguably the most impressive part of the entire design and implementation. The solution is recognized as being the most original and well executed in all of Catalan architecture. Gaudí ordered construction of several thin partition walls just above the last floor-ceiling framework in a catenary form, moving from façade to façade. These arches were the best choice because of the reduced pressure being absorbed by the framework holding them up. The façade of the courtyard is also in a curved manner and the successive catenary arches have varied heights and widths; the rooftop terrace was constructed on these. There is a graceful set of steps that ultimately made expansion joints unnecessary and rendered the roof to be watertight. A spiral staircase is required to gain access to the staggered roof, which are formed of truncated cones with a partitioned dome on the outside. The visual appeal of these are just beautiful and give the structure a castle-like feel and appearance. These structures were covered in small pieces of ceramic and cut marble, further magnifying their beauty by reflecting light. Surrounding these is a suite of unusually formed chimneys, spiraling in shape, to illustrate smoke spiraling as it rises. They are functional and reflective of Gaudí's imaginative construction.

There was originally intended to be an image of the Virgin Mary on the terraced roof, the studies being entrusted to Carles Mani, who worked alongside Gaudí on the Sagrada Família. Unfortunately the studies were not approved by the owner, Pere Milà, so it was never completed. There was a lot of speculation into the true reason behind construction ending. La Pedrera's construction began in 1906 and came to a close in 1906, although Gaudí was not involved during the final year. Now, the building is declared a national historic and artistic monument as of 1969, as well as a World Heritage Site in 1984. Throughout construction, Gaudí and his team were met with several notices of breaking city ordinances, but in congruence with his stubborn nature, construction went on as planned by Gaudí.

Something I found most intriguing was the mention of the conspiracies and the intentionality of Gaudí's design. Every element of the building carries meaning, from the intricate patterns inspired by nature to the symbolic motifs that reference Gaudí's deep religious beliefs. The conspiracies surrounding La Pedrera add an intriguing layer of fascination to the already captivating architectural masterpiece. This information from the text prompted me to look into more potential theories. From rumors of hidden symbols and secret codes within the building's design to speculations about Gaudí's involvement in secret societies, these conspiracies fuel the imagination and invite speculation about the true intentions behind the creation of the building. There are also theories about the building's alleged connection to Freemasonry and its incorporation of Masonic symbols and principles; as I dug more into that one, I found how prevalent Freemasonry was during Gaudí's time, particularly in Barcelona. While it can't be proved he was a member, apparently he had connections to powerful individuals that were openly involved. Additionally, there are whispers of hidden tunnels beneath La Pedrera, supposedly connecting it to other parts of the city. While lacking concrete evidence, these theories spark curiosity and encourage onlookers to delve deeper into Gaudí's alluring world.