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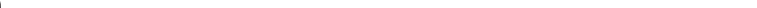
## TOPIC: THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE «CHOLETS»

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## INTRODUCTION

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The history of Latin America is filled with many surprising facts in all the fields, and has brought interest to many researchers through the years because of the different and peculiar things we can just find there.

Recently, on the beginning of 2010's European architects and researchers started to be really interested on Latin America's typical architecture because of its eccentric shapes and forms as well as its colorful facades, something really different than everything we can see in Europe.

As a matter of fact, many big exposition centers like "La Fondation Cartier" in Paris (a contemporary art exposition center), organized an exposition to show the richness and variety of patterns, colours and figures in Latin American art (folk art to abstract art, ceramics etc.) and architecture. This exposition was called "South Geometries, from Mexico to the land of fire". On this exposition, one of the main presentations talked about a really atypical kind of architecture called "Cholet".

A "Cholet" is a type of Architecture created by Freddy Mamani (a Bolivian engineer and architect), that we can only find in Bolivia and whose origin comes from La Paz (the capital). This kind of architecture is really interesting because of its meaning, the social repercussions of it and of course, it's really extravagant and colourful architecture.

This essay will show and analyse the development and origin of the architecture of the "Cholet's" showing the social impact that it had on the Bolivian society, it's meaning, and detailed description of its architecture trough the analysis of a really good documentary made of it and detailed analyses.

**What's the image created by the architectural style of the "Cholets" to the eyes of Bolivian society and the world as well it's social repercussions?**

The first part of the essay will talk about the origins of the architect and this type of architecture then in a second part I will give detailed description about the "Cholet" and it's social repercussion on the Bolivian society trough the analysis of the "Cholet" documentary called "Cholet" and finally, I'll conclude this essay giving my personal opinion.

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## I. THE ORIGINS OF THE ARCHITECT AND HIS ARCHITECTURE

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We are located in one of the main cities of the department of La Paz, Bolivia, called EL ALTO. In this city we can find the condensation of all the historical trials, which find their apogee during the great migrations made up of people who worked in the mines or in rural areas during the 1950s and 1960s. Nowadays El Alto is the most populous city in the department and the second most populous city in Bolivia.

The city was created as an independent municipal entity with the rank of city on March 6, 1985, making it one of the youngest cities in Bolivia. Due to its proximity to the city of La Paz, El Alto is considered part of the Metropolitan Area of La Paz. This area is, is considered the second largest metropolitan city in Bolivia, being surpassed only by the Metropolitan Area of Santa Cruz (another department), with 2.3 million inhabitants.

The city of “El Alto” was not born with an urban plan or with the intention of becoming a big city. As Marco Alberto Quispe, historian and social worker of La Paz, tells us ***“EL Alto is a city that has been seeking from the beginning to create a discourse of autonomy, to create a city with a unique style.”***

With growth of 10% per year, It's because of this rapid economic growth that El Alto was a perfect place of settlement for immigrants from other localities of Bolivia, especially people from the rural area of the country (coming mostly from the departments of La Paz, Oruro and Potosí Cochabamba, Chuquisaca, Santa Cruz and Beni.)

It is during this process that we assist to a historical social cohesion between indigenous miners and peasants, finding similarities at the social, cultural and political level for the first time in history. There is a strong sense of common belonging, creating a new national political pole that will have a great influence in the years to come.

Nowadays, in Bolivia, this social groups suffer a lot of discrimination and racism, making all their traditions, believes, etc. fall apart. Many of them will be considered demeaning and even ugly (esthetic) by a part of the population. Is in this context and because of this reasons that Freddy Mamani an architect, engineer of indigene origin created the type of Architecture called “Cholet”.

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View of EL ALTO 1

Link : <https://www.panamericana.bo/articulo/nacional/panorama-noticia-alto/20200305131935003144.html>



View of EL ALTO 2

<https://www.paho.org/en/stories/one-more-life-saved-story-carla>

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Freddy Mamani is a Bolivian architect born in 1971 in a small village called Catavi in the rural area on a really modest family that leaved very far away from the city.

From his very earlier years, he was initiated to work on construction sites by his well-known mason father, starting working at the age of 14 as a mason's assistant.

After a few years he became a construction worker and built around 100 houses on La Paz before studying engineering and finally architecture.

For Freddy Mamani, being overwhelmed in the indigenous culture of his young age was a turning point in his upbringing and way of perceiving the world.

As stated before, the city of "El Alto" was not born with an urban plan or with the intention of becoming a big city. This has many bad repercussions nowadays like big traffic problems, criminality, etc. And also, with the esthetical aspect of the city.

A big percentage of the population of this city has a low income making the houses and construction poorly build (sometimes even not finished). Creating a hole **monochromatic and dystopian city**. All of this caught the eye of Freddy and influenced his path, vision and objectives creating the architecture of the "Cholet".

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*Freddy Mamani photo*

Link : <https://www.archdaily.com/880450/new-documentary-on-freddy-mamani-explores-the-connection-between-architecture-and-cultural-identity>



*Freddy Mamani's childhood house*

Link : <https://www.archdaily.com/880450/new-documentary-on-freddy-mamani-explores-the-connection-between-architecture-and-cultural-identity>



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Freddy's main objective is to transform this city that in the eyes of many finds itself forgotten and marginalized, from the color to the monotonous aspect of the city of EL ALTO, composed mainly by houses in **adobe, terracotta and brick**.

Freddy Mamani, through his extravagant architecture, seeks not only to beautify the city of EL ALTO, but also to restore and affirm the true indigenous identity by "synthesizing" in its architecture, all the transition processes discussed previously, this cohesion between what is modern and what is very traditional, "building a city in its own conditions".

To create this sense of belonging through architecture. The Cholet is inspired by Aymara culture. The term "Cholet" comes from the contraction of "chalet" and "cholo" which refers to Bolivian indigene.

This project was born in 2002 and then took on a very large scale. Today Freddy is the creator of more than 50 projects and is the inspiration of many other Bolivian architects who take up the idea of "Cholet".

It was in 2014 that he founded his own architectural company describing his type of architecture as **"neo-Andean Architecture"**. Freddy Mamani's architecture is composed by a concrete and brick filling structure, once this frame is installed, he applies on the building the ornamentations and the colors that make his architecture really peculiar, extravagant and different. This type of construction is very popular with the new Aymara bourgeoisie.

In conclusion of this first part, we could see the origins of this type of architecture and Freddy Mamani's ambition of beautifying a city that at the eyes of many seems forgotten, now in this second part we will give a more detailed description of the "Cholet" and it's social repercussion on the Bolivian society trough the analysis of the "Cholet" documentary called "Cholet".

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## II. THE ARCHITECTURE OF THE “CHOLET” AND ITS SOCIAL REPERCUSSIONS

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**The documentary “Cholets”** was directed in 2017, written, edited and directed by Brazilian director **Isaac Niemand**. This book made its world premiere at the Rotterdam Architecture Film Festival in the Netherlands on October 4, 2017.

Niemand, in an interview with “EL PAIS” (a newspaper in Bolivia), explains the origin of the creation of this documentary.

The director has a great fascination with the architecture of the “Cholets” as well as the political, social and economic context that goes around it. Niemand gets to know this architectural style for the first time through photographs taken by Alfredo Zeballos (Bolivian photographer) that can be found in the book entitled “Andean Architecture of Bolivia. Freddy Mamani Silvestre’s work by Elisabetta Andreoli and Ligia d’Andrea.

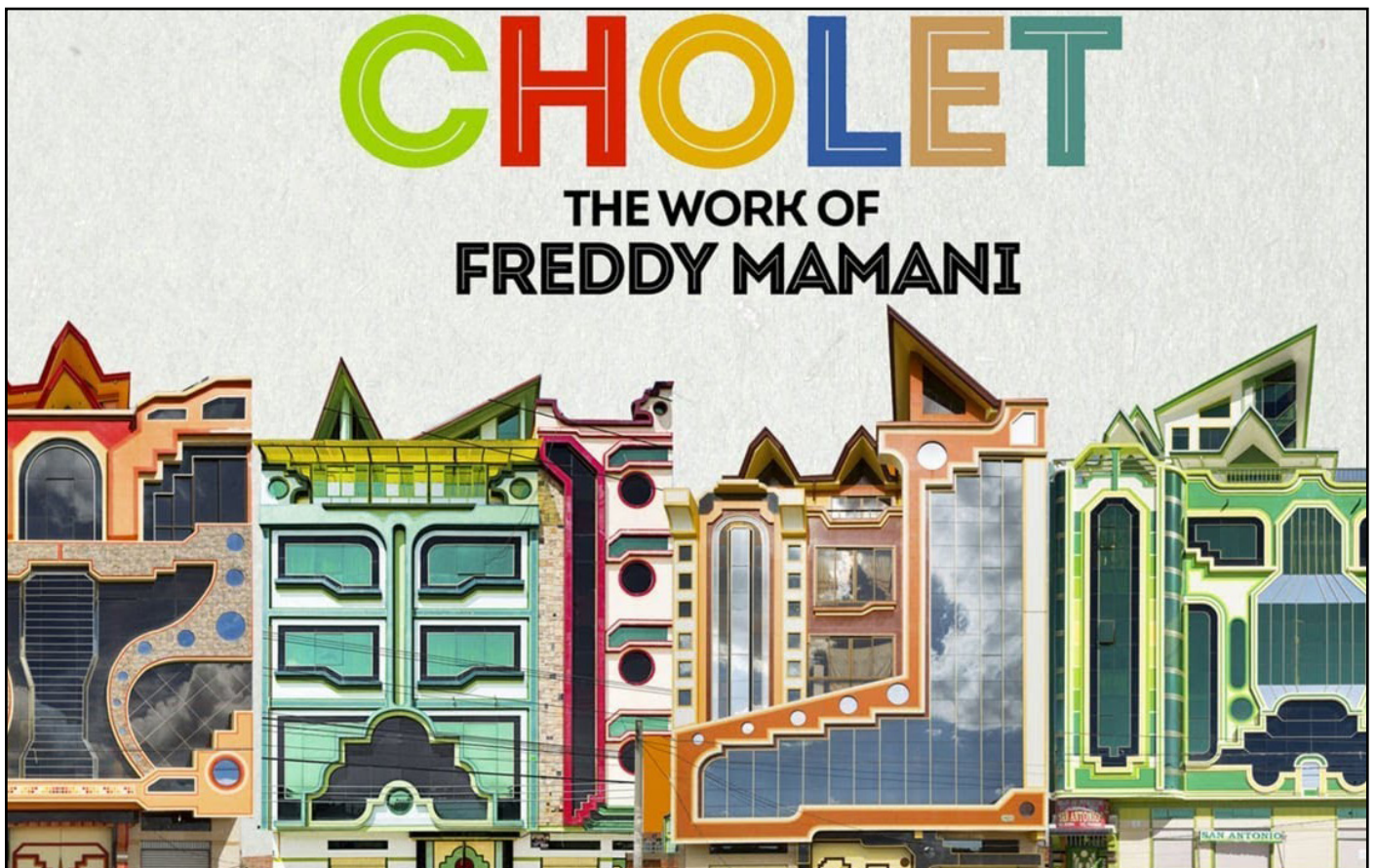
For the director, the conditions for making this documentary were a little complicated due to the environmental conditions that changed radically from Brazil (4000 meters above sea level at EL ALTO) as well as the intense pace of work of the architect Freddy Mamani.

During the interview Niemand tells us his first impression he had when he entered to one of the works of Freddy Mamani : ***“The feeling of entering these works is great, going from the colorless atmosphere of the streets of EL ALTO to one of its salons is like entering a psychedelic garden in the middle of a desert”.***

His documentary is divided into four essential parts: The historical context of EL ALTO (a city where you can find the “Cholets” that we described before, the story of the founding architect of the movement, the origin of the idea of the Cholets and finally the idea of a movement that goes beyond architecture.

The main problem raised by the director is how to establish the link between the architecture of Freddy Mamani and all the social repercussions of it in El Alto.

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Poster of the documentary "Cholet"

Link : 1 <https://lab.org.uk/cholet-the-work-of-freddy-mamani-who-built-salas-de-eventos-in-el-alto-bolivia/>



Poster of the documentary "Cholet"

Link : 1 <https://lab.org.uk/cholet-the-work-of-freddy-mamani-who-built-salas-de-eventos-in-el-alto-bolivia/>

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Through this documentary we trace its history and origin, to understand how it got there today. As we stated on the first part, Freddy comes from a very poor family who lived in the rural area of La Paz, far from the city (One of the greatest features of these places is the feeling of going back in time, with very rustic houses and a very traditional way of life).. This allowed Freddy to be submerged in his indigene culture almost all his life giving him the ambition to spread it and honor it.

As Freddy tells us through an interview conducted by the director, his architecture is based on the Tiwanacota culture (former Inca civilization, where Bolivian indigenous culture originates). Inspired by the set of textiles, ceramics and sculptures that can be found in the temples.

***“The facades of the buildings of Freddy Mamani are really surprising by the bold shapes and the strident colors, superimposed on the large windows, the stylization of figurative elements to which Freddy Mamani is inspired is a tradition of the pre-Hispanic cultures of the Andean region present in the fabrics , ceramics, gold pieces and architecture”***

– “New Andean : A new indigenous architecture” by Elisabetta Andreoli y D’Andrea

This type of architecture will therefore produce a great social impact, allowing people not just to feel identified but also to be proud of their culture and to be indigenous.

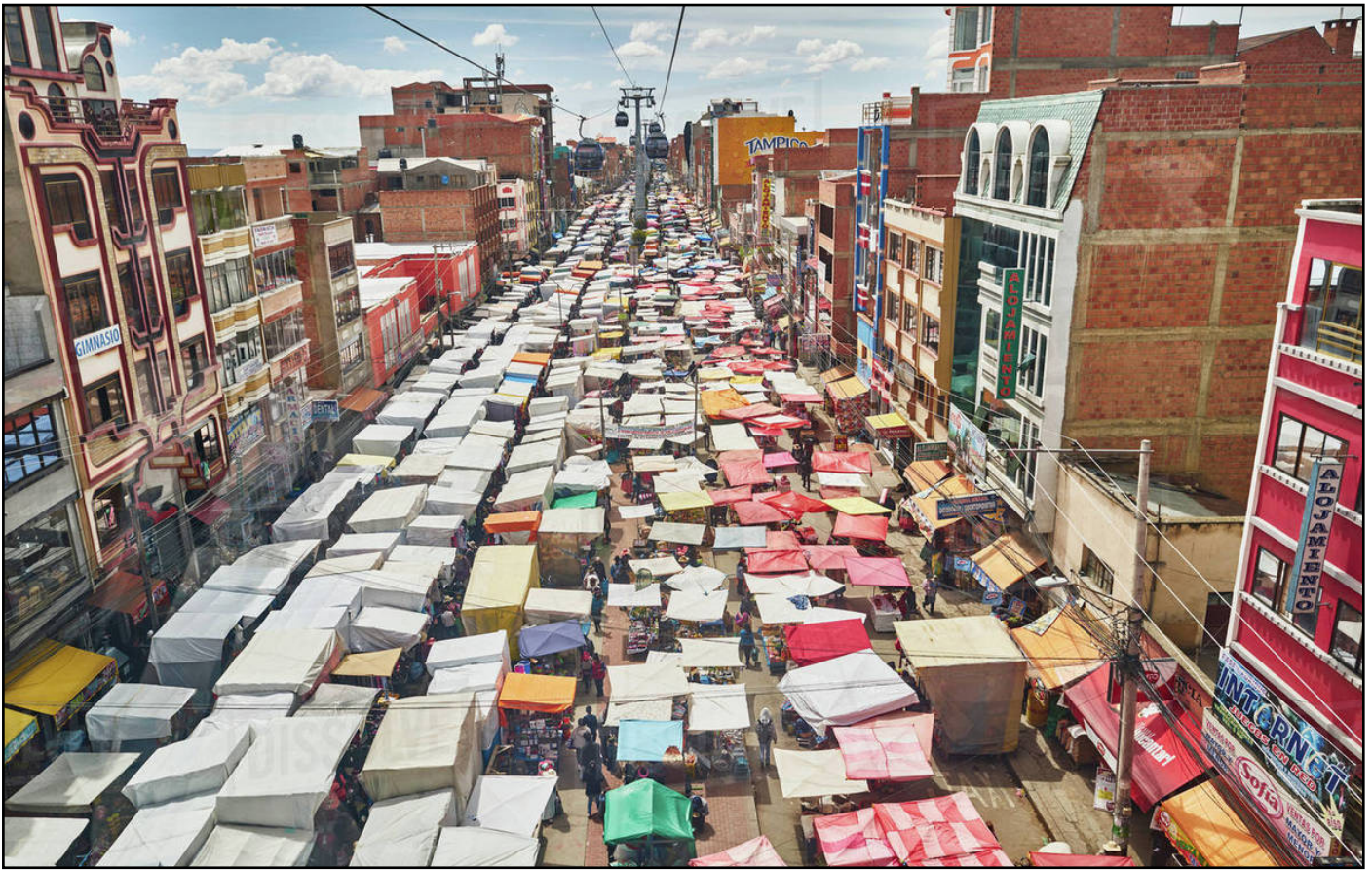
As the architect says on the documentary, in the indigenous culture Aymara, everything is alive, so the buildings all have to have a purpose, that’s why in almost all the buildings in El Alto we can find commercial spaces on the ground floor and then living spaces on the upper floors.

Generally, In the front of the houses, stores are built as a priority, just the upper and rear spaces of the house are used by the family home. The morphology of the houses is adapted to this context. The Ground floors are used for the opening or rental of commercial spaces. The construction process of the houses in the City of El Alto is mostly characterized by the absence of architects, professional architects are generally required just at the end, to carry out the necessary formalities to regularize the legality of it at the eyes of the mayor. Their construction is really rudimentary, quick and simple with materials such as brick, adobe and concrete).

At El Alto people build the entire land leaving only one exit which is the facade. Because of that the facade becomes very important, since it is the only part of the building that the owner has access to show.

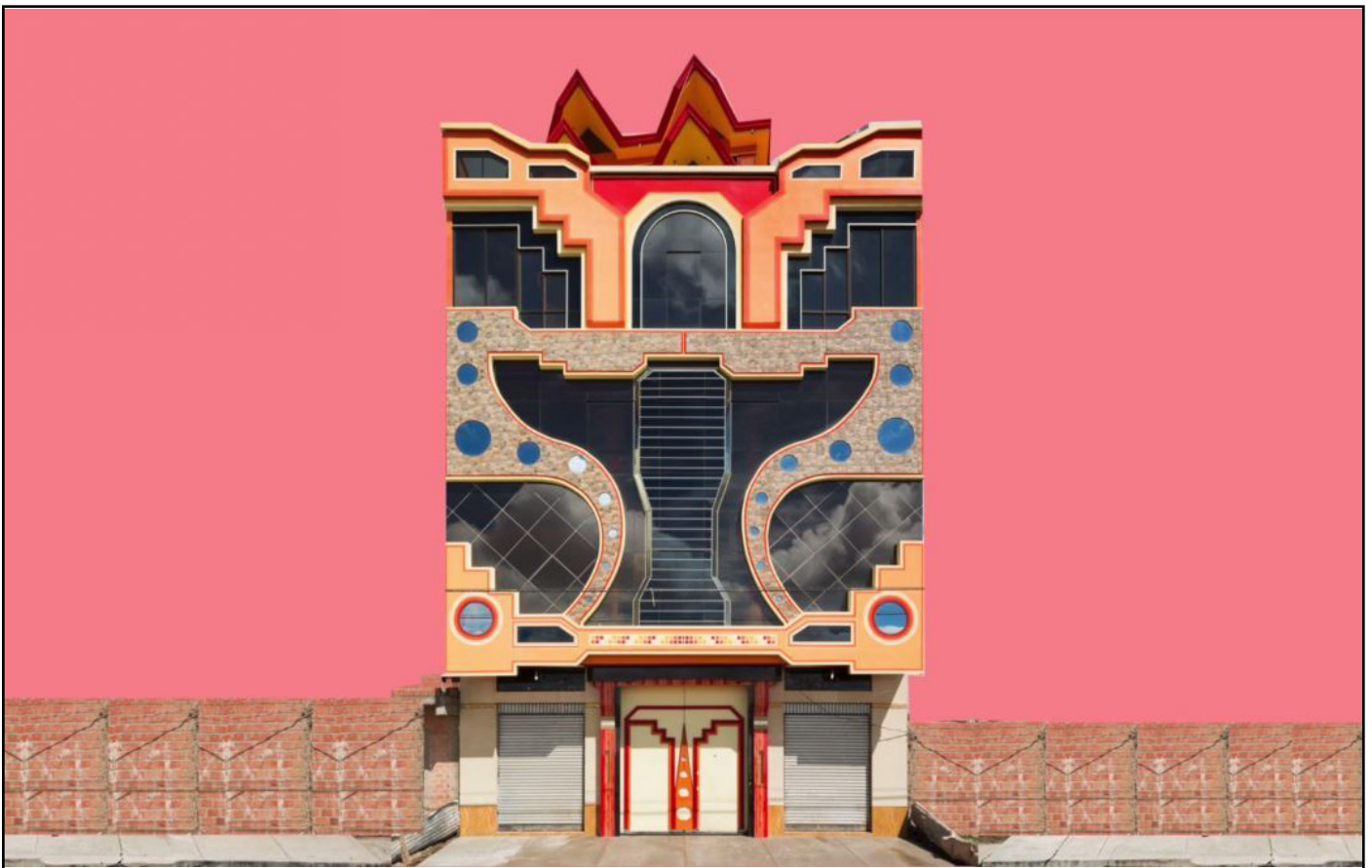
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Commercial avenue of EL ALTO

Link : <https://dissolve.com/stock-photo/Elevated-view-street-market-Alto-Paz-Bolivia-South-royalty-free-image/101-D943-243-116>



Facade of a "Cholet"

Link : <https://www.archdaily.com/880450/new-documentary-on-freddy-mamani-explores-the-connection-between-architecture-and-cultural-identity>

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### **On the “Cholets” we can find this same principle:**

The sector where the construction of “Cholets” began to take place were commercial areas as mentioned above. The owners didn’t build only to live but also to create their own source of income with their home and also leave it as inheritance for their children. That’s how the idea of making several floors in the building was born.

As we said before the building has as really simple structure composed by concrete and bricks, (When the construction is not in a corner, it has windows only on the front or façade).

The visible face of the Cholet is the facade. The designs in it are varied and depend on the architect and the taste of the owners. The designs that were made at first for the in the “party spaces” located on the ground floor and first floor, then moved to the facade. In it, you can see “simple” and more complex designs, but in general you will find windows in the form of circles, rectangular, even in different geometric shapes, which combine to make a complete design as if they were the parts of a mosaic.

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*"Cholet"s facades*

Link : [https://www.reddit.com/r/ATBGE/comments/ewo6ts/bolivias\\_new\\_andean\\_architecture\\_by\\_freddy\\_mamani/](https://www.reddit.com/r/ATBGE/comments/ewo6ts/bolivias_new_andean_architecture_by_freddy_mamani/)



*Construction workers working on the interior spaces of a "Cholet"*

Link : <https://www.archdaily.com/880450/new-documentary-on-freddy-mamani-explores-the-connection-between-architecture-and-cultural-identity>

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## **All the “Cholets” have the same architectural composition:**

- On the Ground floor, there is an event or party halls that continues on two levels (1).

The party halls are the soul of the Cholet. It's where homeowners invest almost all their money and time in the construction. The living rooms are located in two floors, the second floor of the living room is built around, leaving an empty space in the middle that allows “high ceilings” for the dance floor on the first floor.

Around the track we can find wide pillars that maintains the structure of the second floor. The sculptures designs are all over the ceiling and part of the walls. The party rooms usually have a room for the bride and groom, a cellar-style room for storing beer, separate bathrooms for women and men, kitchen and bar.

- On the upper level there are apartments. (2)

- Finally, at the top we find the great peculiarity of the “Cholets”, the “chalet”, a house reserved for the owners of the building on the roof. (3)

The house on the top floor is known as “chalet”. In its design and color, it is different from the rest of the Cholet; there are no sculptured designs or ceilings, it's simple.

Most of the time It's made with a single color, (It doesn't have that color game from the rest of the house). Nevertheless, we can find some details and colors in some outlines and columns. This is an important part of the building, however, shows no connection to the “Aymara identity”. As a matter of fact, the villa was initially ordered as a copy of the houses in the two-story “south area” (wealthy area of La Paz).

However, this architecture, also shows the great inequalities of wealth of the city. The “Cholets” are works that require a very large budget, sometimes exceeding the millions of dollars. That's why they are intended for the few very wealthy families of EL ALTO. That's one of the main reasons why we find a great contrast between these large, colorful and ornate buildings that are mostly right next to a very simple terracotta or brick house.

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Party hall of a "Cholet"

Link : <https://www.archdaily.com/880450/new-documentary-on-freddy-mamani-explores-the-connection-between-architecture-and-cultural-identity>



Freddy Mamani's childhood house

Link : <https://www.archdaily.com/880450/new-documentary-on-freddy-mamani-explores-the-connection-between-architecture-and-cultural-identity>

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Many Bolivian architects such as **Gaston Gallardo** (head of architectural studies at the university UMSA) criticize this type of architecture for being purely aesthetic, concentrated mainly in decoration, work of facades, described as “fachadismo” and not on the interior spaces.

For them Freddy Mamani makes works of decorative art in 2 dimensions, characteristic of Andean architecture, but does not really think about the layout and proper functioning of interior spaces. As the architect Gallardo tells us ***“Freddy a sense of construction with a great sense of belonging. The question is: Can we call it architecture?”***.

This type of architecture is perceived by many as “absurd” and useless. Related only to the indigenous Aymara culture that today is still discriminated. The fact of the so-called “cholets”, which comes from the word “cholo” (person of Aymara origin) will immediately be perceived by some people as popular and inferior.

**However, this phenomenon paradoxically acquires a greater notoriety and prestige than many modern constructions today!**

The documentary “Cholet” by Isaac Niemand addresses the description of this architecture in a global way. A very interesting point of the film is that we are not only talking about the different architectural characteristics of the Cholets but also about the impact of the cholets in the society of EL ALTO in La Paz Bolivia, both socially, economically and architecturally.

As mentioned above, the “Cholet” becomes a symbol for the indigenous Aymara society. People find in this architecture a sense of identification and pride in its culture. The documentary shows us the various projects of “Cholets” directed by Freddy Mamani, both the exterior and interior of the buildings. We can therefore project ourselves more easily and have a better idea of the dimensions of these works, felt that is less strong through images or books.

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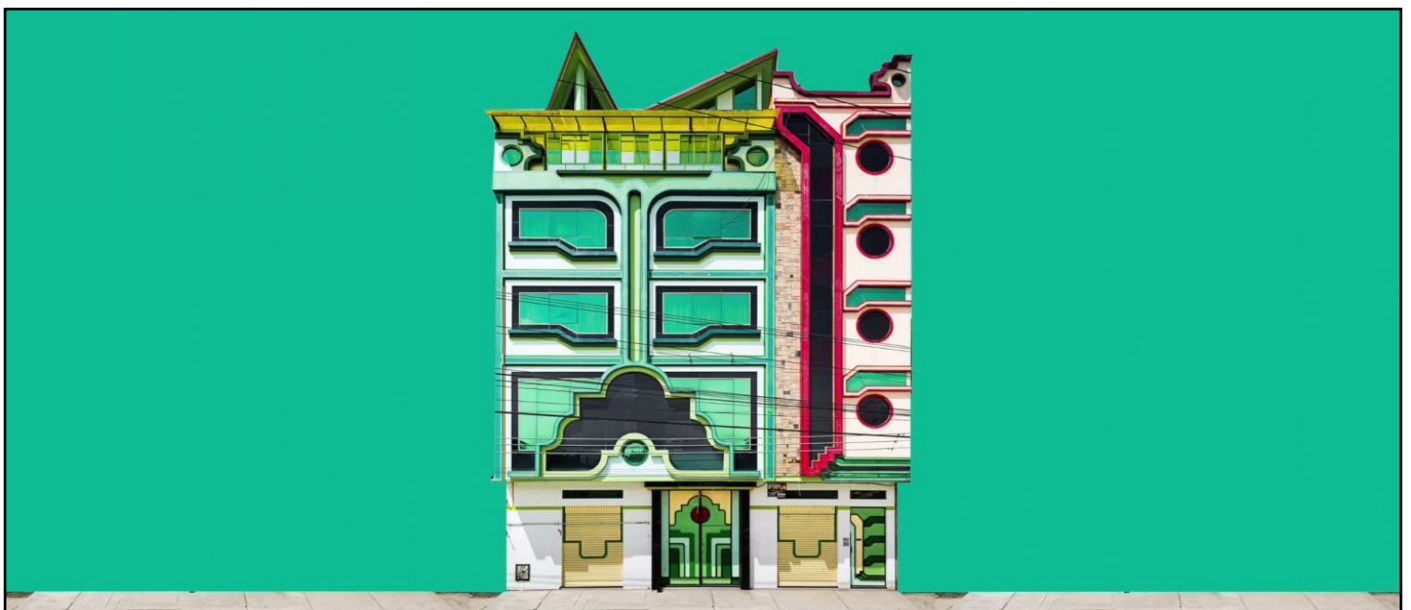
The documentary will also allow us to have a better approach to the context in which these works are built with numerous passages showing the city of EL ALTO, where we can see the standard of living of most people.

We also have a lot of information about the political context of this city and the set of events that built it.

Unlike any other document, the documentary will allow us to have a much stronger vision and "feeling".

A very interesting point that the director addresses through several interviews are the divided opinion of Bolivian architects towards the architecture of Freddy Mamani, with architects more "conventional" and retrograde who question his works by calling it purely aesthetic and not architectural and architects who see it as a symbol of power and identity.

Finally, we observe that the author, in seeking to explain everything about this architecture and its context, addressing many points in a very simple and undeveloped way. However, the documentary is a little short compared to all the information that can be found in relation to the subject. In addition, an interesting point that could have been developed on the interviews, a survey, to find out the opinions of others besides the architects and Freddy opinion in relation to the architecture of the "Cholets".



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# Conclusion

In conclusion, this “new” type of architecture creates a really big impact towards the world and it’s just getting bigger. Creating an architectural movement is really hard, but is harder to make one that has an impact in other fields than architecture such as social, political or economic. The “Cholet” is something that we never saw before and that we can just see in Bolivia.

The power of it is not just on its architecture but in its meaning, creating more than just a building, a symbol of pride for the Aymara indigene culture. Even nowadays, the Aymara indigene culture is really discriminated and criticised. That’s why this architecture, as we said before, is really impressive, because it will give people people a sense of common identification and to be proud about their culture.

However, the question that many architects have about this new movement is if it can be considered architecture or it’s just a new type of decorative art.

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## SOURCES

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## BOOKS :

- *"Arquitectura alteña (Cholet), analisis de su potenvial turistico"*  
by Ruben Carlos Fernandez Gutierrez

- *"CHOLETS: ELEMENTOS SOCIOCULTURALES ANDINOS DE LOS PROPIETARIOS QUE PERMITEN SU CONSTRUCCIÓN EN LA CIUDAD DE EL ALTO"* by JEDILY ISABEL MURILLO PEIRANO

- *"GÉOMÉTRIES SUD, DU MEXIQUE À LA TERRE DE FEU"* by La Fondation Cartier

**Link:** [https://www.fondationcartier.com/uploads/documents/pressD-P\\_G%C3%A9om%C3%A9triesSud\\_num FR BD.pdf](https://www.fondationcartier.com/uploads/documents/pressD-P_G%C3%A9om%C3%A9triesSud_num_FR_BD.pdf)

- Photo report by Elisabetta Andreoli et Ligia D'Andrea : *"La arquitectura de Freddy Mamamani"*

- Article : Fenomeno de Altura, *"Arquitectura Neondina"*

**Link :** Liens : [https://maquispe.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/freddy mamani en somos.pdf](https://maquispe.files.wordpress.com/2015/01/freddy-mamani-en-somos.pdf)

- Analysis by Soledad Guerra *"La arquitectura como práctica cultural, el proyecto como instrumento de crítica"*

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## INTERNET SITES :

Link: [https://www.plataformaarquitectura.cl/cl/02\\_366672/el surgimiento de una nueva arquitectura andina en bolivia](https://www.plataformaarquitectura.cl/cl/02_366672/el_surgimiento_de_una_nueva_arquitectura_andina_en_bolivia)

Link: [https://www.nacion.com/el mundo/conflictos/cholets la nueva arquitectura boliviana simbolo de la opulencia aymara/7WFETMHJ4ZEY5EZVE4JKS6JUMU/story/](https://www.nacion.com/el_mundo/conflictos/cholets_la_nueva_arquitectura_boliviana_simbolo_de_la_opulencia_aymara/7WFETMHJ4ZEY5EZVE4JKS6JUMU/story/)

Link : [https://www.reddit.com/r/ATBGE/comments/ewo6ts/bolivias\\_new\\_andean\\_architecture\\_by\\_freddy\\_mamani/](https://www.reddit.com/r/ATBGE/comments/ewo6ts/bolivias_new_andean_architecture_by_freddy_mamani/)

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Link : <https://www.panamericana.bo/articulo/nacional/panorama-noticia-alto/20200305131935003144.html>

## VIDEOS :

Link : [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=\\_KjPQPQTgZo](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_KjPQPQTgZo)

Link : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ar6yh9hL8UQ>

Link : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LCIw2nJCLXo>

Link : [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VAmfN9oc\\_Gg](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VAmfN9oc_Gg)

Link : <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oyODqqxGQp0>

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