Immigrant master builders:
Architecture transfer between Germany and Chile 1852 – 1875, buildings and models

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During the period of immigration of the German settlers in southern Chile organized by the Government between 1852 and 1875, a total of 6952 people settled in unique locations at the shore of Lake Llanquihue and in the cities of Osorno and Valdivia. This led to the construction of a vast architectural heritage, which is recognized in the country as "German" architecture. However, it has not been clearly established to what extent the houses built by the settlers –stemming from regions not limited to Prussia- in southern Chile is influenced by the import of European models.

In this work, we attempt to identify the specific influences developed by these immigrants in southern Chile. Because of the simple design of these houses, the traces of such influences are found in basic elements and building systems, which we document in a number of cases of study - both in Chile in the mentioned areas and in the areas of origin where the emigrants concentrated: Bohemia, Hessen, Silesia, Westfalia and Württemberg.

A variety of building systems and architectural elements, such as the Transverse Gable ("Zwerchhaus"), the use of Massive Timber Construction ("Massivholzbau"), the Joining Marks ("Abbondzeichen"), show striking coincidences with similar procedures and building systems in the areas of origin which we document and discuss.

Salduv Statek, Jilemnice, Czech Republic. Massive timber walls photographed during the process of relocation of the house. Photo: Jan Sucharda.

House Garcés, Puerto Fonck, Lake Llanquihue, Chile. Detail of the caulking in the corner of two perpendicular massive timber walls. Photo: Ma Fernanda Vargas
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Del Río García, L. B. and D’Alençon, R. Reclaiming Heritage Project: the Case of Chanco. de / design exchange, 88 – 93, Summer 2011;

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