

quired the removal of only one tree, was designed to incorporate the other trees inside the cabaret. The design itself was a soaring open space enclosed by nothing more than a framework of six concrete arches with sheets of glass hung in between them. The arches (or vaults, as they are more aptly called) were to be slender, two-and-a-half-inch-thick ribbons of concrete, set off center from each other and decreasing in height as they approached the stage. This would create a telescopic effect, drawing attention to the cabaret's focal point. During the day, the cabaret would look like not much more than a giant dusky cave with many windows; but at night, when it was meant to be seen, the dark paint of the ceiling, the pinpoint lights, the illumination of the outdoor trees, and the presence of those incorporated trees, their trunks and branches piercing the framework, would create the illusion of being out in the open.

The day Borges came to Tropicana to present initial perspective drawings for *Arcos de Cristal*, or "Arches of Glass," the name eventually given to the building by Oscar Echemendia, he was more than a little nervous. Though initially the idea for using arches had "popped into [his] head one day," as it came to life in color pencil, the young architect became more and more excited by it. Using parabolic concrete arches and glass walls was the perfect complement for this garden setting, the perfect marriage of form and function—the credo of contemporary modernism. It was also a completely Cuban adaptation of the style, a space designed for the luxuriance of the tropics. But how would the Guajiro react to something this unusual?

As it turns out, he loved it. "Martín's excitement was instant," recalled Borges. Martín pored over the documents, as fascinated as a child with a new toy. Nonetheless, even someone as decisive as Martín knew the importance of a second opinion. He called in Tropicana's general manager, Oscar Echemendia, to see the drawing. "Oye, Max, te la comiste," said Echemendia, which means, roughly, "You outdid yourself."

Now there was the question of cost. The design was basically quite simple, but Borges foresaw some tricky technical issues in the construction: pouring the concrete arches in place, hanging the glass, installing a stage that rose up from the level of the dance floor. Martín also wanted the project completed as quickly as possible, and though Borges and his father worked with an excellent crew (at the time architects in both Cuba and the United States doubled as contractors), this project would require hiring extra people from among the best construction workers in Havana. Borges laid the bad news on the table: 82,000 pesos for their fee and the basic construction, equivalent to \$630,000 today. There would be additional costs: for carpeting, which Martín sent Borges and his wife to purchase in New York; for lighting, which was done by a team of engineers from Broadway; for the specially designed furniture; and for additional theatre technology, including what Olga Guillot remembered were the first wireless microphones in Cuba. The total cost of Arcos de Cristal would come in at around 300,000 pesos—roughly what Martín had paid for the entire property.

Martín did not even take a moment to think about it. He slapped the table. "*Métele mano*, Borges!" he said, which means, roughly, "Go for it." The young architect stood rigidly without speaking, not sure he had heard correctly. Then he asked if he might use the telephone. He still remembers trembling as he dialed his office and spoke with his father.

Within the month, the Borges team was ready to break ground. The elder Borges made the engineering calculations for the sweeping arches, and the younger Borges arrived with a battalion of workers who prepared the terrain, poured the foundation, and set up thick-walled wooden molds for the concrete pour on what had once been Villa Mina's tennis courts. The casting went quickly. In less than two months, the arches began to grow up from each end of the foundation, looking like curved coconut palms as they joined up in the middle.