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Casa de la Vall

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CASA DE LA VALL
PRINCIPAT D'ANDORRA



Govern d'Andorra

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Museus i
Monuments
Nacionals
d'Andorra

Ground floor

1. The entrance

We are at the Casa de la Vall ("House of the valley"), the most iconic historic building in Andorra. Engraved on the lintel of its entrance arch are these words: *DOMUS CONCILII ET JUSTITIAE SEDS* ("House of the Council and Seat of Justice").

In 1702, it became the seat of one of the oldest parliaments in Europe, and for more than three centuries, it was the heart of parliamentary life and the home of the country's courts.

Beyond its symbolic and representative meaning, the Casa de la Vall has been a witness to the changes and transformations in Andorra's political and social history. The traces of the many modifications it has undergone are written in the walls and the furniture.

Understanding its history enlightens us on the fascinating, albeit small-scale, story of a house that has become one of the most cherished symbols of the Andorran people and a must-see for anyone who wishes to engage with the country's reality and enjoy a dialogue with our past.

In our predominantly rural Pyrenean environment, it is no coincidence that the most representative building of the Principality is a house and not a palace, as a testament to the deep-rooted connection of the institutions that have inhabited it since it became a public building. A rural parliament in a rural world.

2. The symbols of the state

Andorra is an independent state, and its form of government is a parliamentary co-principality. The territory is organized into seven parishes, with an approximate population of ninety thousand inhabitants. With an area of 468 km², it is a European microstate, bordering France to the north and Spain to the south. The official language is Catalan.

The symbols of the state are the flag, the coat of arms, and the anthem.

The flag in front of you is made of linen and dates back to the late 19th century. It is the oldest known flag of Andorra. Finding a definitive explanation for the flag's colours is tricky. What is more certain is the origin of the blue: it was adopted in the 19th century, likely in reference to France. The yellow and red could be linked to the colours of Foix and/or Catalonia.

In the centre of the flag, we see the coat of arms. This is the oldest state symbol, and although it has evolved over the centuries, the current form originated in the 18th century.¹ It is divided into four parts. On the left, we find the mitre and crozier, the insignia

¹ The current composition of the coat of arms is the result of the political context of the time and is described in the *Manual Digest* by Antoni Fiter Rossell. Along with the traditional symbols (mitre, crozier, the bars of Foix, and the cows of Béarn), it adds the four red bars of Catalonia. P. CHICA, "L'escut d'Andorra", *Relat històric d'Andorra*, 2025.

of the Bishop of Urgell, and the four red bars of Catalonia. On the right, we have the arms of the Count of Foix: the three bars of the County of Foix, and the cows of the Viscounty of Béarn.

The lower part bears the motto *VIRTUS UNITA FORTIOR* ("Virtue united is stronger" or "Unity is strength").

The origin of the Co-principality

In the mid-12th century, the lords of the Andorran valleys, the Bishops of Urgell, ceded part of the benefits from the feudal rights over the valleys to the Caboet family, in exchange for protection from the Viscounts of Castellbò. However, later, when the Caboet and Castellbò families united through marriage, these rights passed to the bishops' old enemies.

When, once again through a marriage alliance, the Castellbò family merged with the House of Foix, they embarked on a fierce battle against the Church of Urgell in the hope of diminishing the bishops' rights over Andorra.

To put an end to the significant and violent military conflicts between them, the two feudal lords signed the documents known as "paréages," the first in 1278 and the second in 1288.

The *paréages*, apart from ending the hostilities, marked the future of the Andorran valleys, making them a territory under the shared dominion of the two feudal lords: The Bishop of Urgell and the Count of Foix. When the latter was crowned King of France in 1589, the co-sovereignty of Andorra passed to the French monarchy and later to the President of the French Republic.

Today, the heads of state are the co-princes of Andorra: The Bishop of Urgell and the President of the French Republic.

First floor

3. The Hall of the Lost Steps

In 1702, the ancestral home of the Busquets family became the headquarters of the Consell de la Terra (“Consell de la Terra”) and the Tribunal de Corts (the court of Justice), meaning the centre of political and judicial life. From that moment on, the building was gradually modified to adapt to the new circumstances. This adaptation to the changing needs of the political institutions has been a continuous and ongoing process.²

We are now in the *soler* (the first floor of mountain houses). This was the main living space: it was where the family lived, with the kitchen, bedrooms, and living room. This was the most noble room in the house, where meetings and business took place, as well as large meals and family and neighbourhood celebrations.

For the councillors, it was a space for reflection and exchanging impressions, both before and after sessions; a prelude to political debate, where the actors wandered around, dialoguing and sharpening their arguments. For this reason, it is called the Hall of the Lost Steps.

At the back of the wide and solemn room of the Busquets house, you can see a 16th-century oak chest, which was used to store household clothing or other items.

On top of the chest, two key documents in the history of Andorra are displayed: a facsimile of the 13th-century *Paréages*, and a modern edition of the 1993 Constitution.

The murals that decorate the room, arranged like medieval tapestries, depict the Passion of Christ and were painted in the 16th century. In 1956, they were moved to this room from the adjoining room, which is now the *síndic general*’s (the president of the parliament) honorary office.

The murals

It begins with the prayer in the Garden of Gethsemane, which represents Christ’s anguish during the night He was arrested: Jesus is afraid of death, but ultimately accepts God’s will and the necessity of His sacrifice for the redemption of humanity.

Next, we find the kiss of Judas and the arrest of Christ. The betrayal of the disciple Judas Iscariot, the treasurer of the group of twelve apostles, is depicted with his kiss to the Master, a kiss that serves as a signal to the soldiers to arrest Him. The scene includes the episode of Saint Peter cutting off the ear of Malchus.

The following painting begins with the flagellation, one of the torments ordered by Pilate, with Christ bound to a column; it continues with the crowning with thorns, a painful mockery, which is the second torment, and ends with the Way of the Cross: the ascent

² The latest renovation was very recent, in 2025, carried out by architect Enric Dilmé and restoration expert Eudald Guillaumet. A series of improvements were made to adapt the space to the current needs, both in terms of parliamentary activities and visits to the monument.

to Golgotha carrying the cross, with the various stops or stations, also known as the Via Crucis.

Beside it is a Pietà, depicting the Virgin Mary with the dead Jesus in her arms, after the descent from the cross. This scene, which was made by a different hand, should actually be seen after the crucifixion that follows, as it is, in fact, the last episode.

Finally, the crucifixion, with Christ nailed to the cross, the two thieves, the Virgin Mary, and Saint John. On the small white tablet above Jesus' head, where the name of the criminal and the reason for the condemnation were written, we read "INRI," meaning "Jesus of Nazareth, King of the Jews." The Roman soldiers are also depicted gambling for the Master's clothes.

4. The office of the Síndic general

Due to its rich religious decoration, this room was called "the bishop's room". In fact, this does not mean it was a room dedicated to the bishop, but it is known that, during his stays in Andorra, the bishop would lodge in private homes, and probably the wealthier houses would decorate a room in case the occasion required it.

It was also the meeting room of the Comú d'Andorra la Vella (the city hall), and later, when divided into two areas, it housed the French School and the library.

Currently, it serves as the office of the Síndic general during parliamentary sessions at the Casa de la Vall, as well as for official visits.

The 16th-century murals, depicting the Trinity and the Last Supper, come from Sant Romà dels Vilars.

5. The kitchen

The kitchen, with its fireplace, was the heart of mountain homes, especially during the cold and long winter. The one in the Casa de la Vall has a floor-level fire at the center of the room, beneath a huge hood from which hang large chains.

To the left, we can see the *escudeller*, a traditional piece of furniture from the Pyrenees where dishes and various utensils were stored such as cheese molds or salt shakers.

The kitchen also had a bread oven and a dough mixer, essential in a house of this size.

It was here that the councillors ate during the days they stayed at the house, which could be several, whether because the deliberations went on for too long or due to inclement weather. In fact, almost all of the councils were held in the fall and winter, the coldest months but also when there was less work in the fields.

The abundant dinners held here are attested by a 19th-century French adventurer: "enormous fires, apparently designed to roast whole sheep and oxen, giant cauldrons

suspended by solid iron hooks, stoves, and other luxuries, completely foreign to the general simplicity of Andorra”.



Installation of the Appeal Judge in Andorra. The Consell's Kitchen.
Engraving by Eugène Burnand (1850-1921).

The top floor of the Busquets house was adapted to accommodate the necessary bedrooms for the councillors' stay, which were kept warm thanks to the large chimney in the kitchen.

The kitchen and the top floor were used until the 1930s. Changes in communication, the modernization of infrastructure, and technological developments meant that the councillors gradually stayed less often to eat and sleep.

The top floor is a space with a particular place in the history of Andorra, as in 1991 and 1992, the long and intense meetings of the Tripartite Commission, responsible for drafting the Constitution, were held here. The Commission was made up of representatives of the co-princes and a delegation from the Consell General.

6. The council chamber

We are in the council chamber, the nerve centre of the building.

Originally, this was where the bedrooms of the Busquets house were located. The first image we have of it shows it as an austere room, with a row of chairs running along the entire perimeter of the room and hangers for the capes and tricorne hats of the councillors.



Council chamber (1902-1930). Guillem de Plandolit. ANA

Until the renovation in the 1960s, this room was shared by the Consell General and the Court of Justice. The latter was then moved to the ground floor, and the space was rearranged to accommodate the councillors' seats, arranged in a semicircle, simulating an ecclesiastical choir.

At the back, presiding over the assembly, sit the Síndic general, the Deputy Syndic, and the General Secretary.

Until 1978, there were twenty-four seats, but with the creation of the parish of Escaldes-Engordany, four more were added. The parish is the territorial division of Andorra, dating back to the feudal era and of ecclesiastical origin.

Starting in 1982, the executive and legislative powers were separated, and the positions of Head of Government and Ministers were created. These officials then began to occupy the central table.

In 2011, the Consell moved to its new headquarters, built across the square. Today, the traditional sessions, the Constitution Day session, and the Saint Thomas session are held here.

The general councillors wear traditional attire, the cloak and tricorne hat, while the síndics wear the cape and bicorn hat.

From the right angle hangs the bell that was used to call the councillors to sessions. Traditionally, the oldest councillor of the parish of Canillo, the first in the protocol order, rings the bell.

Since the creation of the Consell de la Terra, the institution has evolved, and with the Constitution of 1993, it became the parliament of a state governed by the rule of law, defined by a political regime with unique characteristics: the parliamentary co-principality.

At the back of the room are portraits of the current co-princes, Josep Lluís Serrano, Bishop of Urgell, and Emmanuel Macron, President of the French Republic. Together, they form the Head of State. Legislative power rests with the Consell General, executive power with the Government, and judicial power with the Higher Council of Justice, along with the Constitutional Court.

The origin of the Consell General

In medieval times, the heads of households from the villages would meet in assemblies to discuss matters concerning the communities of the Andorran valleys. Over time, those large assemblies were reduced and became composed of a few representatives, known as “consuls” and “councillors.” They were the interlocutors with the seigniorial power.

The decisions they made were usually ratified by privileges granted by the lords. From the 13th century onwards, we have evidence of various privileges that formalized these assemblies.³

They were responsible for matters of general interest, both at the local and parish levels, as well as for the entire territory. They oversaw the management of communal goods — roads, forests, pastures, fishing — as well as transhumance, land ownership, trade, fairs, and markets. They also took care of relations between the communities and neighbouring regions.

The Consell de la Terra represented the entire territory, its members were elected,⁴ and it met regularly to resolve internal and external issues and to defend the rights and interests of the valleys.

³ One of these privileges is from 1419, a date that was long considered the founding date of the Consell de la Terra.

⁴ The evolution of suffrage in Andorra went from a vote reserved for the heads of the most prominent families – known as *prohoms* or “good men” – to all heads of households (1866), then to universal male suffrage (1933), and finally, to universal suffrage (1970).

The modern-day Consell General

The Consell General represents the people of Andorra, exercises legislative power, approves budgets and regulates and pushes forward governmental action.

It is made up of twenty-eight councillors,⁵ half of whom are elected by parish, and the other half by national constituency. They are elected by universal suffrage for a term of four years. The Consell meets in traditional, ordinary, and extraordinary sessions, which are public.

The Sindicatura, composed of the síndics, who preside over it, is the governing body of the Consell General. The síndic general represents the institution, ensures its work, organizes and directs the debates in the chamber, and enforces the Consell's regulations.

7. The Cabinet of the Seven Keys and the chapel

When the Consell de la Terra did not yet have a fixed headquarters, it met in the porch of the church, in the cemetery, or in the town square of Andorra la Vella, and kept its documentation in the chest with six locks.

The chest, made of pine wood, was the predecessor of the six-lock cabinet of the Casa de la Vall. This cabinet is one of the most iconic pieces of furniture in Andorra.

When the Consell de la Terra moved into the house, six locks were added, and the names of the six parishes were engraved on it. With the inclusion of Escaldes-Engordany, the Cabinet of the Six keys became the Cabinet of the Seven keys.

Thanks to meticulous locksmithing, it is impossible to open the cabinet without the seven keys, one for each parish.

It was the archive where the Consell's documentation was kept: correspondence, minutes and account books, privileges, judgments...

The chapel is dedicated to Saint Ermengol, Bishop of Urgell from the 11th century. Religious services were held there on special occasions and dates, and it was also used for prayers at the start of sessions. The room is presided over by the severe Baroque image of Bishop Ermengol and by the so-called triptych of the councillors, dating from the late 17th century. In the center, the crucifixion is depicted, and on the sides, the symbols of the co-princes.

⁵ The Constitution establishes that the minimum number of councillors is 28, as is the case today, and the maximum is forty-two.

Ground floor

8. The entrance

On the ground floor were the stables, where the livestock was kept, and the cellars, cool and ventilated places where food was stored. When the house became the headquarters of the Consell, a large space had to be dedicated to the mules and horses of the councillors, and thus the entrance was converted into the stables.

Over the years, this floor has hosted a variety of occupants. In the 18th century, the prison was located here, with a room under the stairs to accommodate the executioner when his services were needed.

In the renovation of the 1960s, the prison was moved to a new building attached to the rock, connected to the house by an underground passage. This passage occupies the space of the former notary's office and the notarial archive. At the top of the stairs, we can see fragments of 17th-century murals, depicting scenes of the crucifixion and the earthly paradise. The penitentiary institutions were relocated to their new site in 2005.

Next, following the unique floral tapestry made of pebbles, we will head to the last room of the tour.

9. The courtroom

The ground floor of the Casa de la Vall was the headquarters of the country's judicial institutions, from the 1962 renovation until 1993, when they began to move to other locations.

It housed the *Cúria*, which dealt with civil cases, and the Court of Justice, responsible for criminal cases.

Before the Casa de la Vall became the seat of justice, meetings of the Court of Justice were itinerant, like those of the Consell: they were held in the porch of a church or in a private home.

10. A living symbol

In a country that has transformed so radically, the Casa de la Vall, firmly anchored to the rock of the valley, stands as a living and present reminder of its origins. Nearly four centuries after the institutions moved into the house that once belonged to the Busquets family, it remains a cornerstone of Andorra's collective identity, with numerous generations of Andorrans having played key roles within it.

It has also always been of interest to travellers; all the romantics and curious 19th-century visitors, precursors to today's tourists, dedicated a few paragraphs to it.

Travellers' tales

At the beginning of the 19th century, as the first curious travelers and scholars of Andorra's uniqueness began to appear, the country offered them splendid nature and a multitude of small, beautiful Romanesque churches. Civil monuments, on the other hand, were scarce: a few bridges and some ancestral houses of rather limited interest.

For the romantics, the early deserters of 19th-century cities, and all those who followed, the main attraction of this society lay in its ancestral institutions, the peculiarities of its customs and traditions, the robust health of the Catalan language, and its political wisdom, which allowed it to maintain its independence. And all of this was sheltered within the Casa de la Vall.

Those who were able to visit it or who were invited to a council meeting (which was not always easy, as the *síndics* or *nuncios* were busy with farm work) were eager to recount it as one of the best experiences of their stay in Andorra.

Thus, they left us a wealth of literature, ranging from the most accurate descriptions to small sketches not without exaggerations and distortions, typical of the era that bridged the two centuries.

Often coming from large cities, where palaces and grand mansions abounded, most travellers were moved by the austerity of the government headquarters of a true republic, as the Principality was known.

Beyond this romantic view of the travellers, if the Casa de la Vall is the most emblematic building in the country, it is because for generations and centuries, it concentrated much of the public life. Today, the three branches of government –judicial, executive, and legislative– are separated, and this can be seen physically from the *Plaça del Consell* ("square of the Council").

The exteriors

11. The south-facing façade

The building is a typical manor house adapted to the mountain environment. It is large in size compared to contemporary buildings, with the interior divided into three main sections, a construction typology characteristic of the large farmhouses of the 16th century. The main façade faces south to maximize the light and warmth of the sun.

From the rocky outcrop, known today as the "roc de la Vall," all visible areas could be monitored. The house overlooked the valley and the access points: it was a visual landmark in the landscape.

One of the distinctive features of this house is the presence of defensive elements. Some of these include the surveillance loopholes with narrow slits at the corners, the slits also opening in the walls of the second floor, and the machicolations on each façade—overhanging parapets from which enemies could be harassed as they approached the house.

Attached to the rear is a defensive tower that commanded the access to Andorra la Vella from the main road.

In the 1962 renovation mentioned earlier, a right-hand loophole was added to provide symmetry, and the plastering of the façade was removed.

12. The front entrance

On the keystone of the entrance arch, we can see the coat of arms of the Busquets family, with the year of construction of the building, 1580, the abbreviated name of Antoni Busquets, the last owner, and the tree, the family's symbol.

To the right, a primitive version of the coat of arms of Andorra, in a stone bas-relief, was installed when the building became the headquarters of the Consell to commemorate the purchase of the house and indicate the public nature of the building. The bishop's insignia at the center, the crosier and the mitre, the three bars of the County of Foix to the right, and the cows of the Viscounty of Béarn to the left.

The most recent coat of arms, located above the door, adds the four red bars of the Catalan comital houses to the symbols of the old coat of arms.

The coat of arms is accompanied by a poetic inscription in Latin, which highlights the virtues of the system of co-principality: "House of the Council, seat of Justice. Behold: these are the emblems of a neutral valley, with which the noblest kingdoms enjoy protection. If they have made other people happy on their own, together, will they not bring, Andorra, centuries of gold?"

13. The new parliament headquarters

In addition to the main building, the Busquets House included a barn, the rector's residence, gardens, courtyards, and a dovecote. The latter can be seen to the right of the house. In the former front courtyard, the square constructed in 2011 opens up, as part of the new building project.

The Casa de la Vall, a national monument, could not be expanded to accommodate the forty-two general councillors provided for in the 1993 Constitution. For this reason, and due to new parliamentary needs, not forgetting technological requirements, the decision was made to build a new and more functional building that could house the legislators envisioned in the Constitution, as well as all the activities required by the new legal framework.

The architects faced the challenge of designing an iconic and symbolic building on a very rugged terrain and in a complex environment, while also highlighting another building—a monument with great historical and symbolic weight, such as the Casa de la Vall. They also had to resolve the integration of the new building into the two existing urban fabrics: the historic district and the modern city of Andorra la Vella. The goal was, therefore, to create a hinge between the past and present, between history and modernity.

Several sculptures offer us a journey through time and the history of Andorra. To the left of the Casa de la Vall are the sculptures of the *paréage* and the New Reform, and to the right of the new headquarters, the sculpture of the Constitution.

14. The *Paréage* sculpture

On September 8th, 1278, the co-lords of the Andorran valleys, in the presence of the King of Aragon, put an end to the hostilities they had been engaged in, with an agreement known as the *paréage*. It is one of the most important documents in Andorra, upon which the political system of the co-principality is based.

Seven hundred years later, in 1978, the 700th anniversary of the signing was celebrated, and the Consell General commissioned a sculpture from the Italian artist Luigi Terruggi to commemorate that date.

At the top, we can see the Bishop of Urgell, Pere d'Urtx, and Roger Bernat III, Count of Foix and Viscount of Béarn, as well as King Peter III of Aragon, known as "the Great." At the bottom, we find Joan Martí i Alanís, Bishop of Urgell, and Valéry Giscard d'Estaing, President of the French Republic, who were the co-princes of Andorra at the time.

15. The New Reform sculpture

Facing the valley, a pair of dancers perform the *Contrapàs*, a traditional dance of Andorra. The sculpture, by Josep Viladomat, is a tribute to the New Reform of 1866, which modernized the political institutions and expanded suffrage, granting the right to vote and to stand for election to all heads of household. The house of one of the promoters of this reform, Don Guillem d'Areny-Plandolit, is today an iconic museum, located in Ordino.

16. The Constitution sculpture

In the referendum held on 14 March, 1993, the people of Andorra expressed their desire for the country to become a democratic and social state abiding by the rule of law, as set forth in Article 1 of the Constitution. The sculpture by Emili Armengol is dedicated to the men and women of Andorra who put their support behind the Constitution.

17. The Seven Poets sculpture

At the vantage point of the square, built on top of a rocky cliff, offering magnificent views of the valleys, is the piece by Jaume Plensa, the *Seven Poets*. Our tour thus concludes with a few words by the artist himself: 'Poets are an integral part of society. They are condemned to failure, because they know they won't even sell three books, but they are a source of fertility, like a light drizzle that penetrates the earth. In my opinion, this long process, akin to that of a farmer, is highly courageous'.