The isolated region of Rincón de Ademuz (Valencia, Spain) is known because it has conserved until recently a great part of its traditional architecture in its original state. This architecture presents very peculiar endogenous features and consists of a general use of gypsum for the supporting structure, slabs, facades and partition walls.

After a twentieth century characterized by massive migration, which emptied the villages of this region, a reverse trend is now beginning. The descendants of these emigrants are coming back to the area, either for holidays or to settle there in search of better quality of life than that in the big industrial cities that once attracted their grandparents. This migration has added to the flow generated by so-called mainland cultural tourism, as city residents, who are not historically related to the region, buy second residences there in which to spend their weekends or holidays. This phenomenon is helping to regenerate this area economically through the construction of new houses and the refurbishing of existing buildings. But, at the same time, it is creating strange mirages in the traditional architecture of the region.

The construction of new houses mainly reflects two tendencies: the creation of would-be urban dwellings and would-be rural dwellings. The would-be urban dwellings seek to transform these rural settlements into little towns, despite their tradition. The would-be rural dwellings try to emulate the local vernacular architecture through scenographic resources, falsifying and spoiling the essence of the built culture. Sometimes, a real traditional building is even demolished, instead of being refurbished, in order to build a would-be rural building that better fits the stereotype of tradition newcomers have in mind. In contrast to these two, there is a third tendency of great anthropological interest. It reflects the mechanisms of local tradition, but uses new industrial building materials. This new architecture of uncomfortable appearance and difficult integration in the environment, which we call the new vernacular dwelling, paradoxically represents the survival and continuity of the constructive tradition.

Finally, the paper will address the refurbishment of existing historic buildings. Rightfully, this aims to bring these up to date with present conditions. But very often during the process it completely transforms the natural appearance of buildings in search of a preconceived image of the vernacular, to the point that it ignores the physical reality of specific buildings. As an alternative, the paper defends the refurbishment of traditional architecture when it preserves both its constructive and structural substance and its built skin and patina. The paper presents examples of traditional buildings that have been refurbished and preserved in their original aspect, avoiding the representation of a fictitious and sometimes nonexistent tradition.