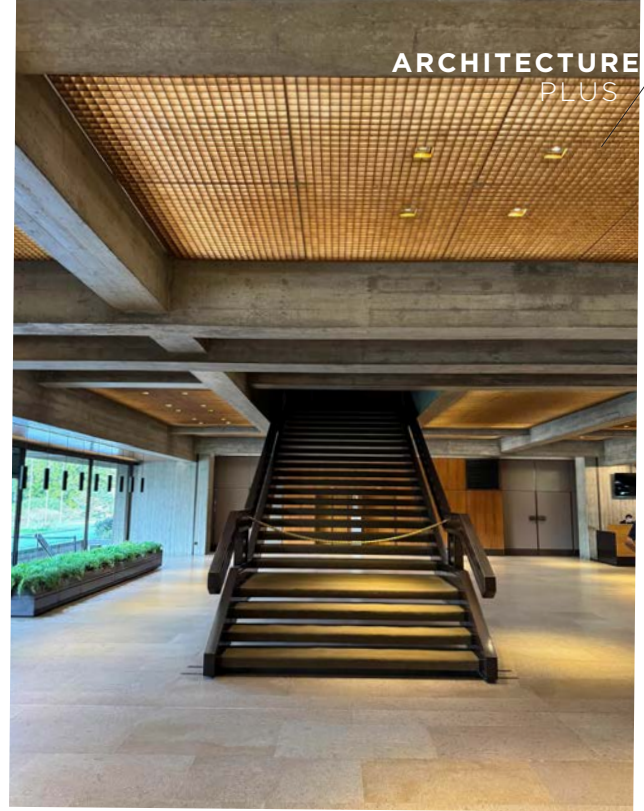


BRUTALISM

BRUTALISM, AN ARCHITECTURAL STYLE OF THE 50S TO THE MID-70S, ONCE CRITICISED FOR BEING IMPERSONAL, HAS EXPERIENCED A REMARKABLE REVIVAL IN RECENT YEARS AND IS NOW HIGHLY APPRECIATED FOR ITS UNIQUENESS AND AESTHETIC VALUE IN AN INCREASINGLY UNIFORM WORLD

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Opposite page: An exterior wall of the Palace of Justice in Lisbon.
This page top and above: The hallways and theatre of the Museum of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation

IN BRUTALISM, the concrete of a building is left unfinished. The term comes from the French term *béton brut* meaning rough, unworked concrete. Often, the imprint of the wooden slats of the formwork is still visible in the surface of the concrete. Fans appreciate Brutalism's sculptural and imposing monument character, others just find it intimidating.

The role of film and games in popularising brutalist architecture cannot be denied. Films like *A Clockwork Orange*, *The Great Lebowski* and *Blade Runner 2049* not only introduced these buildings into popular culture, but also helped create the specific and often futuristic atmosphere and emotion surrounding the distinctive stories they tell.

Some ten years ago, British TV personality Jonathan Meades, pontificating on screen in an outfit reminiscent of the *Blues Brothers*, was one of the first to introduce the general public to Brutalism in the BBC series *Concrete Poetry*.

During his introduction, after dismissing French architect Le Corbusier, the father of Brutalism, as a megalomaniac and opportunistic architect especially good at 'stealing' other people's ideas, Meades emphasised that Le Corbusier's *Unité d'Habitation* was called "the House of the Mad" by the inhabitants of Marseille, setting the tone of the BBC series.

However, it was director Brady Corbet who recently won a Golden Globe for directing, and several other awards and nominations at the Venice International Film Festival with his film *The Brutalist*, about the life of brutalist architect, Laszlo Toth (played by Adrian Brody), a Hungarian architect of Jewish origin who, after surviving several concentration camps, decided to flee the country and the Soviet threat in order to pursue his American dream. The movie tells of his career and the design of one of his most ambitious and extraordinary projects. But don't try to find Laszlo Toth's name in Google – he never existed.

Brutalism in Portugal

Portugal, unlike the more northern countries and the former Eastern Bloc, is not really known for its brutalist buildings. A survey map from the website *sosbrutalism.com* lists the most famous brutalist buildings worldwide. More than 2,000 in total. Portugal has only a modest share with 11. Here are my top three – all of them in Lisbon – that I think most closely approximate the brutalist style.

1 OFFICES AND MUSEUM OF THE CALOUSTE GULBENKIAN FOUNDATION, 1956-1983

The Museum of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation is at the top of my list. In 1959, a competition was held among architects to design a new museum to house the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's extensive collection of ancient and modern art.

It was the team consisting of architects Alberto J. Pessoa, Pedro Cid and Ruy Jervis d'Athouguia that won the competition in collaboration with landscape architects Antonio Viana Barreto and Gonçalo Ribeiro Telles.

The winning architects' design, in a soft brutalist style, met the brief to come up with a sober and dignified building with a uniform architectural appearance. The building complex is grouped around the lake in Gulbenkian Park, surrounded by lush greenery. The horizontally articulated buildings, ►

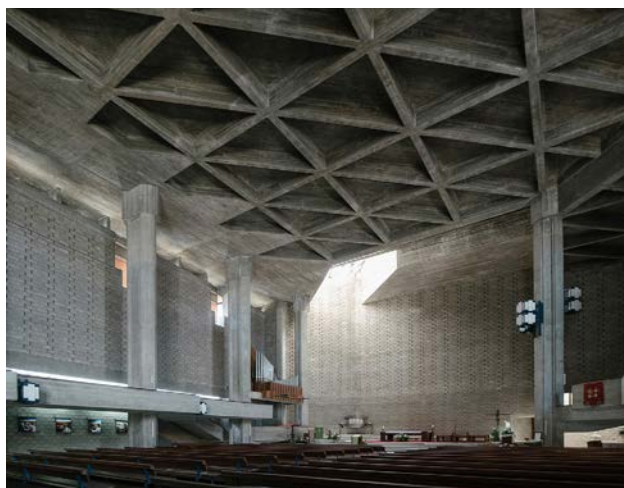
partly due to the planting on the buildings themselves, almost completely blend into their surroundings. Large concrete slabs form paths that wind through the park to connect the buildings. This is an Arcadian whole with the concrete structures, like flattened rock formations, rising out of paradise.

During my stay in Portugal in 1986 to master the Portuguese language at the Instituto da Língua Portuguesa in Lisbon, before working as an architect in Mozambique, the Gulbenkian park was my favourite study spot. Here, sitting on a bench in the shade under a dense tree or lying in the grass, I hammered in my conjugations and irregular verbs, while the ducks crossed the lawn in concerted strides before disappearing again among the reeds of the pond opposite.



Above: One of the buildings in the Gulbenkian Park. Below: Two interiors of the astonishing Igreja do Sagrado Coração de Jesus. Opposite page: The Lisbon Palace of Justice

2 IGREJA DO SAGRADO CORAÇÃO DE JESUS 1961-1970



A surprising religious architecture for its time, the work of architects Nuno Portas and Nuno Teotónio Pereira distinguishes it from the traditional models and historical stigmas that characterised church building in Portugal until then. The church and parish centre combine urbanity and a bespoke urban infill, partly through the public space of connection and access created between the two streets bordering the church on either side – a spatial translation of ideas about community and religious participation, as envisaged in the spirit of the then innovative Second Vatican Council. Not a well-behaved centrepiece with side aisles and a main altar, but a cosmopolitan church in a brutal concrete reality surrounded by surprising light incidences, tall columns and high ceilings.

The Church of the Sacred Heart of Jesus is a unique work within 20th-century Portuguese architecture awarded the Valmor prize (annual Portuguese architecture award) in 1975 and recognised as a National Monument in 2010. The street forms an enclosed integrated open space where architecture and urbanism meet. Refined in terms of spatiality, detail and light, experimenting with raw concrete yields the necessary surprises.

A church that architecturally opens up to the city. You see it in every detail, at every step of the project. Here, the sacred space is integrated into the urban fabric. The concrete illustrates the brutalist language used in the design. It looks refined, almost delicate in places. The rough textures disappear when you see the space as a whole, creating a different backdrop for this place with a spiritual dimension.

During my time studying languages in Lisbon, I met one of the architects of this church. I was kindly received by a somewhat older architect in his modest office on Rua da Alegria. After I told him that I was going to work in Mozambique as an architect for the Council of Churches, he immediately gave me a magazine about the Portuguese architect Pancho Guedes, who realised the most fantastic architectural projects in Mozambique in some 25 different styles until the 1975 revolution. This magazine, with the theme: *The Vitruvius of Mozambique*, has subsequently been my guide in discovering the work and giving various tours of his 'modernist' works in Maputo. Only many years later did I discover that architect Nuno Teotónio Pereira, that old friendly man who had put me on the trail of Pancho Guedes, was himself one of Portugal's most famous architects.



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PALACE OF JUSTICE, LISBON 1970

My third favourite is the Palace of Justice. Inaugurated in 1970, the complex of court buildings on Rua Marquês de Fronteira in Lisbon was designed in 1962 by architects Januário Godinho and João Andresen. Here too, we can argue about the term Brutalism, as it incorporates the necessary natural stone in addition to the rough concrete and typical Portuguese tile tableaux by artist Querubim Lapa. The beauty of this structure lies in the subtle details – the repetitive patterns of squares, rectangles and circles used in both the façade and paving in overlapping circles.

The building was part of a plan for a larger complex, which was not fully built. The set breaks with the tradition of the Palaces of Justice and is characterised by the modern architectural language of the time, which has great conceptual originality. The public spaces have received due attention in the design. The imposing wraparound colonnade in relation to the square is particularly impressive. The alternating play of the transparent COBO-like (Brazilian open brick) façade and the tower-shaped stairwells on both sides in the longitudinal façade, give the building a characteristic appearance. 🏢



THE OTHER BRUTALIST PORTUGUESE PROJECTS



1. **Igreja de Nossa Senhora da Boavista** 1979, Porto, by Agostinho Ricca
2. **Edifício Franjinhas** 1971, Lisbon, by Nuno Teotónio Pereira and João Braula Reis
3. **Mercado de São Sebastião** (facing demolition) 1986, Porto, by António Moura
4. **Edifício Winterthur** (now: Liberty Seguros) 1970, Lisbon, by architects António Gomez Egêa and Lonel Schein
5. **José Gomes Ferreira Secondary School** 1980, Benfica Lisbon, by Raul Hestnes Ferreira and Jorge Gouveia
6. **Church Nossa Senhora da Conceição** 1988, Lisbon, by Pedro Vieira de Almeida
7. **Hotel Monte Palace San Miguel** (abandoned) 1984, Sete Cidades, Azores, by Olivier Clément Cacoub and Yves Roa
8. **Edifício Caleidoscópio** (renovated) 1971, Lisbon, by Nuno San Payo

You won't find any buildings in the Algarve on the various websites on Brutalism. However, there are a number of striking buildings that do have 'characteristics' of Brutalism in certain parts, such as balconies and entrance areas which are made of raw concrete straight out of the box. Sometimes it is the unusual design that makes these buildings stand out, such as this 'green' one in Faro near the bus station.

