

Regional Identity:
Architecture in the Algarve
(1940-Present)

How, if at all, has architecture of the Algarve maintained its identity in the face of cultural universalism?

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Preface

Constituting a region of Portugal, full of character, beauty and individuality, the Algarve, during the second half of the 20th century and so far this century, has suffered profound mutations in its architecture and urban landscape.

Through a development very much dependant of international tourism, the natural and built landscape has gradually been altered, quite often in a negative and brutal way. In recent years architects, engineers, landscape designers, town planners and governing entities have showed an improved effort to correct, improve and re-qualify many urban and rural spaces.

It is from this context that my study stems. I aim to discuss, through a combination of writing and photographs, the argument of *Regional Identity*, and how if at all, has the architecture of the Algarve maintained this *identity* in the face of political changes and *cultural universalism*? And should it strive to do so?

Besides the essential aspects of the relationship between architectural and urban dimensions, between the rural and city, and between the expressions of classical and vernacular construction, there is also a concern for evaluating the built evidence of modernism and current trends in the region.

Thus my approach will be to focus on projects of an era which is marked by the clash between the traditional and modernity - from the inauguration of the *Estado Novo* fascist dictatorship in 1933, up until present day. Although this study raises a number of themes, the central theme of the case studies is the potential of *Critical Regionalism* in maintaining *Regional Identity* whilst engaging in modern civilization.



Introduction

Many of those who visit the Algarve, Portuguese or foreign, do so attracted by the sun, the sea, the good climate and the slow pace of life. However, there exists another Algarve which reveals itself at second glance and can be read through the architecture of the region.

My parents moved from England to the Algarve on the South coast of Portugal in 1990 when tourism was still a relatively new concept in Portugal. During the last 21 years, growing up in a region as an “*estrangeiro*” (foreigner, or directly translated as, stranger) I have witnessed first hand, the daunting and rapid growth of a region, which back in the early 90’s was still extremely disconnected from the rest of the country. A country witnessing a very slow process of picking itself up after the revolution of carnations of 25 April 1974, which saw the fall of the fascist regime ruled by Antonio de Oliveira Salazar.

Since the early 90’s tourism has boomed in Portugal, particularly in the Algarve with the emergence of low budget airlines and increased media interest. It is undeniable that this tourism, overall, has been extremely beneficially to the region, which, along with substantial aid from the European Commission and events such as Lisbon Expo 98 and the European football Championships of 2004, has generated a rapid growth rate. Portugal and the Algarve have witnessed a modernisation to what was a predominately rural country and region in particular.

As a non-Portuguese raised on both Portuguese and English culture

I feel I have been able to place myself in a middle ground which has allowed me to observe critically the effect of rapid tourist development on the architectural identity of the region.

The vernacular and the traditional have often been cheaply mimicked / imitated for the aesthetic satisfaction of, initially the traditionalist fascist regime, and more recently tourists and expats dreaming of a Mediterranean holiday or home. Meanwhile those rebelling have often opted for the polar opposite, modernism. Today you see a melting pot of influences producing kitsch architecture with little or no respect for material, detail and place. Quick solutions to satisfy developers needs to accommodate the mass increase in visitors during the summer months. The very same reason that made my parents seek a slower pace of life in a warmer climate, has in recent years brought an onslaught of tourism architecture which has continued to overpower the true identity of the region, and consequently of its people.

The country’s economical growth has also had an influence on the education of architecture. Traditionally, architectural movements in Portugal have largely been nurtured and influenced by the Porto School and the theoretical beliefs of a few prominent figures of Portuguese Architecture, i.e Francisco Keil do Amaral, Fernando Távora and Alvaro Siza. However as the country continues to grow, so does the number of schools of architecture. Without the guidance of the masters, many of these schools continue to produce architects who’s work aspires to their predecessors but fails to address the real intentions of their work. Misreading the work of these figures, I feel has been a large factor in the degradation of the quality of architecture in Portugal and is very much evident in the Algarve.

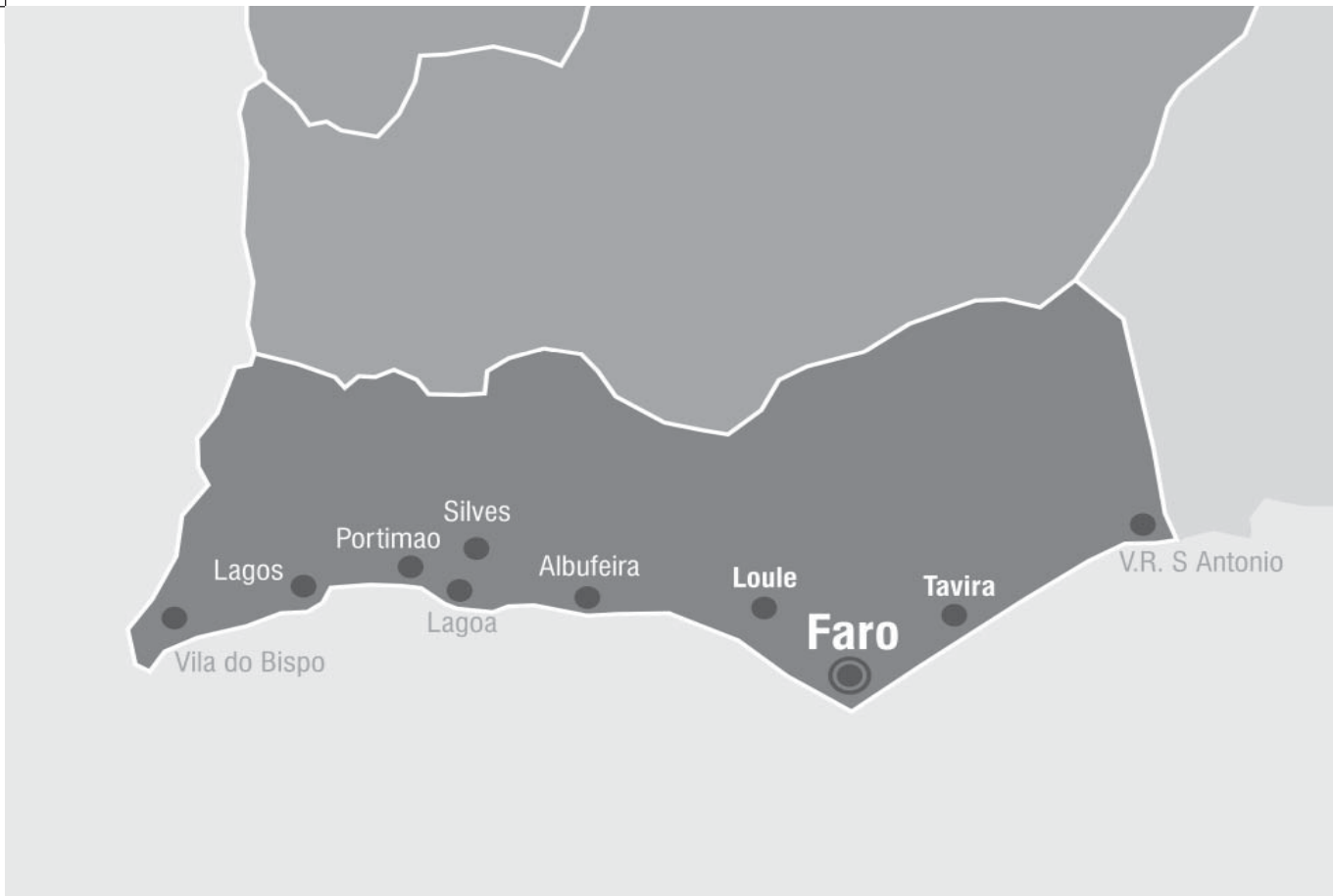
I started this study to interrogate a personal conception that as a result of major political shifts, economic factors, the rise of the international modern movement and of mass tourism, the “*national identity*” of Portuguese architecture, was being lost. In fact I have quickly been educated that this was the very thing many of Portugal’s most notable and influential architects had been resisting during the dictatorship. As a result of reading further into the subject it has refined my topic. It is more a question of, the *identity* of regional architecture in Portugal is being lost. Today Portuguese architecture is a bi-product of this resistance to the dictatorship’s idea of “*national identity*” and the resistance to the international modern movement. In the early 60’s a group of Portuguese architects launched an inquest into the vernacular architecture of each individual region of Portugal and subsequently, what Fernando Távora has named the “*Third Way*”, an application of modernity through a true understanding of the vernacular and of place. This movement has played an instrumental role in defining the way Portuguese architecture is discussed ever since. Alvaro Siza, who’s main influence was Távora himself, has gone on to continue the research through his projects and gained international recognition winning the RIBA Royal Gold Medal Award in 2009 for his achievements throughout his career. Subsequently, he has influenced another generation of young architects. However, the Algarve as a region has long presented a unique situation, making it impossible to liken it to the rest of the country when discussing architecture. The messages from Porto and Lisbon have at times struggled to make their way down to the Algarve, and today, with the phenomena of mass tourism experienced in the region, this uniqueness of situation has been accentuated.

The Algarve:

Context

Vernacular Architecture of the Algarve





1] Map of Portugal showing Faro/Lisbon/Porto relationship

The Algarve

Context

One can not fail to mention the importance of geography and history when discussing the identity of the Algarve. Geographically and historically the Algarve has a clear individuality and personality, distinct from the rest of the country, and it is often its relation with the rest of the country which makes it a topic of interest for Portuguese geographers and historians.

The spacial structure of the Algarve can be defined by three longitudinal strips. The *Serra do Caldeirão* mountain range, [Image 2] made up of shale and greywacke rock (*pedra de xisto*), separates the Algarve from the flat planes of the Alentejo. Its geological structure makes for thin soils and low fertility but has considerable influence on the unique "Mediterranean" climate of the Algarve. With its highest point of 589m it acts as a physical barrier to the cold winds bringing low pressure from the Northwest, and also as a condensation trap for the humid winds from the south.

Below it, the *Barrocal*, [Image 3] consisting of a series of anticlines and limestone (*calcário*) plateaus, is rich in vegetation. Holm Oak trees (*azinheiras*) once dominated this sub-region but years of human cultivation have degraded the land, giving rise to trees with smaller roots such as almond, fig, carob and olive trees. Whereas the rivers in the valleys provided the option of irrigation and citrus fruits have long been cultivated here. Today agricultural production is largely abandoned as generations move to the cities on the coast to find work.

The *Litoral*, [Image 4] is the coastal sub-region which spans from

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Cabo de São Vicente, on the Southwest tip of Portugal and Europe's most westerly point, to the town of Vila Real Do Santo Antonio, which is separated from Spain by the Rio Guadiana river. The coast line also varies significantly, from the rocky cliffs on the West coast to the sandbanks, creating islands and shallow lagoons to the East of Faro (*Ria Formosa*). [Image 4]

Physically separated by the *Serra do Caldeirão* mountains, the Algarve has always, to some extent, been disconnected from the rest of the country. The name Algarve originates from the Arabic *al-Gharb al-Andalus*. The name *al-Andalus* was given to the Iberian Peninsula by the Moors during the Moorish invasions of the 8th century, and *al-Gharb*, meaning *The West* was the name they used for the Western side of the Iberian Peninsula. During the period of *Reconquistas* (The Christian Reconquests of the Iberian peninsula, which began in 722) and the formation of the Kingdom of Portugal, the *al-Gharb* region was the final territory to be regained by the Christians in 1242. However, the neighbouring Kingdom of Castile believed the territory was theirs. This led to a series of wars until the border between Castile and Portugal was determined as the Rio Guadiana in 1267, which remains until today. Its integration with the rest of the Portuguese Kingdom was not as easy as it had been with other territories regained. The lengthy Moorish rule and its physical divide of the *Serra do Caldeirão* mountains had resulted in a relatively autonomous region. Subsequently it was considered a kingdom of its own, united, but not confused with the Kingdom of Portugal. During the *Period of Discoveries* and expansion of the Portuguese Empire between the 15th and 18th centuries, the Algarve "colony" progressively asserted and united itself with the rest of the country. However it was considered the *Kingdom of Portugal and the Algarves* up until the end of the monarchy in 1910 and the birth of the *Republica Portuguesa* (Portuguese Republic).

Portuguese historian José Matoso wrote of this difficult integration of the territory of the Algarve with the Kingdom of Portugal.

*'It's understandable, the difficulties of effective integration of this territory that was, until so late, as a kind of colony. But the economic, political and cultural assimilation of the Algarve ultimately became effective, without giving rise to doubts.(...) What does all this mean in historical terms? That the integration of the Algarve into Portugal was a historic aberration? Not at all. It only means that, in the distribution of economic forces that led to the predominance of the North Atlantic over the Mediterranean, it was natural that the Algarve belonged to the same unit as the Atlantic area, centred in Lisbon. But the dominant forces can not forget the secondary course, nor the cultural affinities or regional conditions that characterise the behaviour of the people. The Prosperity of a country results, I believe, by the ability to unify these realities through an integration that enjoys all the powers and resources without neutralising atrophying or destroying them.'*¹

¹ José Matoso, 'O Algarve: Na Perspectiva da Antropologia Ecológica' [The Algarve: A Perspective of Ecological Anthropology. Instituto Nacional de Investigação Científica, Portugal, Universidade do Algarve, INIC Pub, 1989.



2] Clockwise: Holm Oak tree, producer of Portugal's main export / View towards the coast, from Serra do Caldeirão, Alcaria do Curne / Anticline formations in the local shale rock



3] Barrocal landscape, rich in flora, fauna and limestone plateaus



4] Clockwise: Carboniferous shale cliffs Aljezur - Sagres / Limestone cliffs Sagres - Quarteira / sandy shores and lagoons Quarteira - V R Santo Antonio



1] Shale rock of Serra do Caldeirão / Application in vernacular walls (Alvenarias de xisto azul)



2] Strong limestone used predominately in stonework around the more affluent central Algarve (Alvenarias de calcário)

Vernacular Architecture of the Algarve

The vernacular architecture of the Algarve, or as it is referred to in Portugal, a *arquitectura popular do Algarve* (The Popular Architecture of the Algarve) has a precious legacy, distinct and original and has been studied by several authors in the past.

The first and most notable was the study named *Inquérito a Arquitectura Regional Portuguesa e Arquitectura Popular em Portugal* (Survey of Portuguese Regional Architecture and Popular Architecture in Portugal). [please see chapter: *Resistance & the Survey*]

The result of this study was the establishment of a typology framework for the Algarve region as a whole, through which it became possible to identify the principal techniques of habitat and spatial arrangement determined by adaptation to its particular climate, geography and historic culture.

Due to the Algarve's extremely varied landscape, explained in the previous chapter, the vernacular architecture can be best characterized and localized in relation to its geomorphic characteristics, therefore I will begin by highlighting the predominant raw materials available and used for construction in different parts of the region.

Traditionally the abundance of limestone (*calcário*) and clay (*barro*) - due to a Triassic band running from East to West along the transitional zone of the *Barrocal* and the *Serra do Caldeirão* - meant that lime (*cal*) and ceramics (*cerâmicas*) were commonly used in construction throughout most parts of the region. Cob walls (*taipa*) was the most widely used method of construction, even in limestone areas as the delicacy, durability and high quality of the material meant that it was reserved for the protection of facades of the most valued and noble buildings against the effects of weathering, and decorative elements to express wealth and nobility. In central Algarve North of Faro and across to Loulé it was also largely used as structural and decorative elements on window and door openings with the more decorated

pieces of stone representing greater wealth. In areas where there was no access to high quality mud, the cob walls were substituted for stonework depending on the raw materials specific to particular areas. In the *Serra do Caldeirão* (from Odeceixe on the West coast to Alcoutim on the Spanish border) it was substituted for the abundant and strong blue shale rock (*Alvenarias de xisto azul*); Central Algarve North of Faro and across to the Municipalities of Loulé and inland Olhão, for the strong limestone (*Alvenarias de calcário*) or adobe clay brickwork (*tijolo de adobe*); around Silves and Messines for the distinctive red/orange sandstone (*Alvenarias de grés*); and around Monchique for schist rock (*Alvenaria de foiaite*).

The differentiated typologies of habitation can be clearly related to the geologic conditions of each sub-zone, however some are more localized than others.

The most basic flooring was commonly made from compacted earth (*terra batida*) in most parts of the region but for those who could afford it, in the areas with an abundance of high quality clay and the more affluent central Algarve, they laid terracotta clay tiles (*tijoleira de barro / ladrilhas*) and sometimes slate slabs (*lajes de xisto*) in the case of the *Serra do Caldeirão*.

The roofs were commonly made from strong oak, pine or eucalyptus rafters (*caibros*) placed across the shortest width of the roof no more than about 60cm apart and simply resting on the outer load bearing walls of the building. Canes (*caniço*) from near by river edges were then laid across the wooden supporting rafters forming the characteristic cane lined ceiling. Oleander sticks (*Varas de loendro*), similar to the canes but more flexible, were cut in half lengthwise then nailed to the rafters to secure the cane lining. On top of the canes large flour sacks (*sacas de farinha*) were opened up and laid out as a base to apply the layer of clay aggregate (*argamassa de barro*) which would hold the tiles (*telhas*) and also to provide additional insulation and protection against water leaks. The curved red roof tiles (*telha de canudo*), made from local clay (*barro*) were then placed on top to complete the roof. Roofs in the central Algarve were often a combination of one or two water tiled roof (*telhado de uma ou duas águas*) and a flat roof (*açoteia*) used for drying fish and fruits, in the other regions of the lower Algarve these *açoteias* were much less common and the roofs usually consisted of a two-pitch water tiled roof (*telhado de duas águas*). In the *Serra do Caldeirão* the roof was even more simple, usually a single pitch roof (*telhado de uma água*). In the coastal fishing cities of Olhão and Tavira and surround fishing towns unique roof systems can be seen. In Olhão there is a direct reference to the lengthy Moorish rule, with a maze of flat roofs (*açoteias*) dominating the cityscape. These deep plan buildings had an exterior patio to the rear of the building through which the roof terraces were accessed by steps. The *açoteias* were tiled with terracotta clay tiles (*tijoleira de barro / ladrilhas*) and were used mainly to dry fish and fruits. In Tavira you can see a combination of *açoteias* and the infamous four water tiled roofs (*telhado de tesouro*). These steep pyramidal or trapezoidal roofs generally coincided with the main internal divisions of the buildings, therefore a single house would usually have a series of small multiple roofs. The frame and main structure created by divergent beams is then covered with canes and curved red roof tiles (*telha de canudo*) as in other regions but sometimes it is also boxed off internally by a wooden ceiling for more insulation.

Whilst the eaves on the gable ends (*remates de empena*) of pitched roofs buildings were simple, and often just sealed with lime plaster, special attention was given to the eaves on the facade (*beirados / remates de fachada*). Different levels of decoration was applied depending on the importance of the buildings, its purpose and the social status of its inhabitants. The simple eaves (*beirado simples / beira telha*) had the simple task of distancing as far as possible



3] Terracotta clay tile flooring (tijoleira de barro / ladrilhas)



4] House in Tavira with the infamous four water tiled roof (*telhado de tesouro*), composite eaves (*beirado composto*) are also created by a series of different sizes of protruding terracotta clay tiles which are plastered in a way to form a decorative combination of undulating curves and ridges.



5] Simplified doors and eaves with little ornamentation.



6] In the more affluent central Barrocal region, treatment of eaves became something of a symbol of social status. People began to use parapets (platibandas) as decorative features on the facade of buildings. Used to conceal the eaves along the facade. Acting as an assertive construction feature the parapet heightened the building giving it significant visual importance and expressing the wealth and status of its inhabitants. This photograph also shows the undecorated side of the build simple coated in clay mortar (argamassa de barro)



7] Shale stone wall of the Serra do Caldeirão coated with lime mortar (argamassa de cal). Doorway framed with expensive decorative limestone expressing the importance of the building or the wealth and social status of its inhabitants

from the wall below, the falling waters from the roof, commonly cantilevering around 20cm from the facade with no intention of decoration supported underneath by fragments stone or clay tiles. However by protruding these supports out of the facade they were adopted as the decorative feature below the eaves (*sub-beiras*), forming what is referred to as a double eaves (*beirado duplo*). The double eaves (*beirado duplo*) can be seen with either one or more decorative rows of curved red roof tiles (*telha de canudo*), or with one or more flat ridges of protruding terracotta clay tiles (*tijoleira de barro / ladrilhas*), both fixed and coated with a lime plaster (*reboco de cal*). A more decorative advancement of this are composite eaves (*beirado composto*) are created by a series of different sizes of protruding terracotta clay tiles which are plastered in a way to form a decorative combination of undulating curves and ridges.

Mainly in the more affluent central *Barrocal* region, around Faro / Loulé / Olhão, the treatment of eaves became something of a symbol of social status, coinciding with the increasing industrialization of materials and construction techniques, this resulted in the appearance of parapets (*platibandas*) as decorative features on the facade of buildings. Essentially a small wall or stonework balustrade, stretching the length of the facade and approximately 1m in height, it was used to conceal the eaves along the facade. Acting as an assertive construction feature the parapet heightened the building giving it significant visual importance and expressing the wealth and status of its inhabitants. However the parapets were not purely for ornamental purposes and also served a function. As the use of flat roofs (*açoteias*) for drying fish and fruits was typical of this area of the Algarve, the parapets created a balustrade and defining wall for the treatment of the connection between the facade and the flat roofs. Although these parapets are mainly found in the central Algarve the trend of this decoration spread into the larger urban settlements in other areas.

The buildings were finally coated with mortar (*argamassa*). These mortars were intended to protect the buildings from direct impact of the weathering effects and erosion and also for their bright white colour to keep the buildings cool in the hot summer months. The mortars were predominantly made by a determined quantity of lime (*cal*) combined with aggregates and water. Sometimes clay (*barro*) was used instead of lime for more uneven stone surfaces. The clay and lime were used for their strong ability to agglomerate the aggregates promoting cohesion and binding onto the stonework or cob walls but also for their natural flexibility once they were set, this allowed them to withstand cracking as the building matured. Through time these mortars were improved by the addition of natural additives and strengtheners. The introduction of additives such as clay brick dust (*pó-de-tijolo*) and ashes (*cinzas*) strengthened the lime mortar and improved the durability by reinforcing its bind with the wall - even in humid conditions. For additional cohesion and adherence, vegetation fibres and animal hair was also used to reinforce the mortars.

In the *Serra do Caldeirão* impermeable additives were often used to further reduce their porousness in terms of humidity. This was done by adding natural fats such as vegetable oils, olive oil and pork tallow and lard or even soapy water and beeswax. Although this meant that rain water ran off the walls rather than soaking in as much, it also meant that when it did take to the surface and would run off much more easily. For the very wealthy and on important civic buildings, particularly in coastal towns and cities, glazed ceramic tiles of different patterns and colours (although primarily white and blue) were used on the facade of buildings to keep the damp air from entering the building.

As with the parapets, in the more affluent central *Barrocal* region around Faro, Loulé and along the coastal towns and cities such as

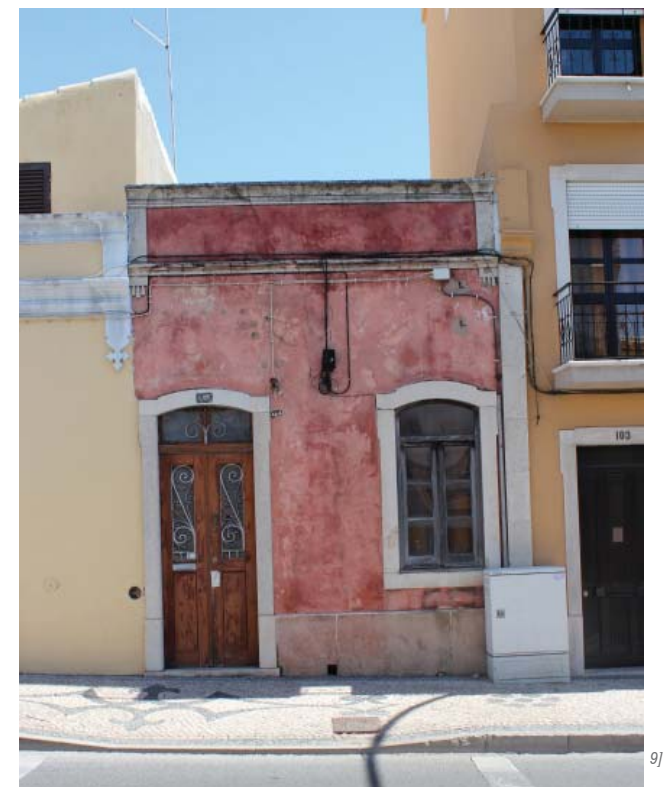
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Tavira and Olhão, there was a trend of decorating the main facade with natural pigments, decorative paintings and mould reliefs. This later spread into other areas such as the *Serra do Caldeirão* to express social status and wealth. By using a lime paste (*pasta de cal*), which was achieved by combining lime with extremely fine sand a smooth surface could be achieved on which to decorate. Natural pigments were added to the lime paste and coloured patterns could be drawn in the surface. These patterns were often the craftsman's or families own signatures and sometimes even represented rock formations in an attempt to simulate more sought after and noble materials. Ornate elements were inscribed onto the surface of the facade using lime aggregates (*agramassas de cal*) to express the architectural language of the building and contribute to the legibility of its construction. These graphics were often organic or geometric motifs which marked parapets and cornices and sometimes suggested the presence of main structural elements such as stone pilasters, cornices and the structure around windows/doors which were often expensive or hard to get hold in certain more rural and impoverished areas such as the *Serra*. These moulded reliefs were therefore used as economical substitutes for expensive and limited limestone decoration.

Although nowadays the Algarve is known for its infamous decorative chimneys (*chaminés*), traditionally these more ornate pieces were mainly found in the lower areas of the Algarve *Barrocal* and were also used to represent economic and social stature that the family occupied in the village, town or city. In the impoverished areas such as the *Serra* the most common was a simple raised tile system (*telha levantada*), which simply allowed the smoke, from a vulgar open fire (*fogo livre*) situated in the corner of buildings, to be drawn out of the room without the use of a flue (*fuga dos fumos*) or chimney stack (*fumeiro*). The more advanced and decorated forms such as the closed fireplace (*chaminés de chupão*) combined with a narrow flue and stack, and the large open fireplaces often incorporating a bread oven and a wide open flue (*chaminés de pano*) supporting a stack, were predominately in wealthier areas such as the *Barrocal*, reserved for more affluent land owners and farmers or added on to buildings when money became more available. The elements of these more advanced types of chimney such as the fireplace, flu, stack and hat, were plastered with lime aggregates, whitewashed, painted with pigments and often decorated with clay moulds and terracotta clay tiles as a signature by the master builder or the family to which the chimney belonged.



8] Reapplying the lime whitewash (caiação de cal)



9] Limestone ornamentation and the use of natural pigments to decorate the facades.



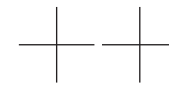
Neo-traditionalism vs Modernism (1940's-70's):

Early Modernism

Architecture of the Estado Novo Regime

Resistance & the Survey





1930's saw an outbreak of innovative architecture in the Algarve, using contemporary construction technologies, in particular the phenomena of reinforced concrete. Smooth, geometric and abstract, this new architecture looked to exhibit the volumetric forms that the new technologies enabled. The historical eclecticism and organic forms of Art Nouveau - of which there are still various examples in the Algarve [Images 1,2] - had been abandoned, however the obsession with surface decoration, and the use of traditional structural element, was still evident only now they were disguised by the purified forms.

Initially, this movement found inspiration in the Neoclassical and Cubist styles. Expressing linear symmetry and decorating facades with volumetric shapes, the architecture of Art Deco in Portugal was not yet rooted in nationalistic ideologies [Images 3,4,7]. However, true Art Deco was short lived in the Algarve and towards the late 30's the focus gradually began to change as the Estado Novo regime's influence became increasingly evident in the architecture and urban planning in the region. There seemed to be a period of transition where architects, inspired by the Art Deco movement began to apply it's smoothness, geometry and linearity to decorative elements which were suggested to be "traditional" and "national". The degree of concern with the national seemed to vary significantly between architects at this point and this can be seen in the range of buildings I photographed. While some began to re-interpret their obsessions with the ornamental into more nationalistic decoration, others minimised the intensity of the ornamental focusing more on re-interpreting "traditional" and national forms and building elements with the new volumetric possibilities of modern techniques - primarily reinforced concrete. [Images 6]

The house on the corner of Rua João Deus and Rua Justino Cumano in Faro [Image 8] serves as a good example of this transition from the early modern movement of Art Deco into a national style. Expressing real symmetry, geometry and the linear possibilities of reinforced concrete in the balcony and parapet which was previously impossible with vernacular techniques. The cornice, eaves and modillion system acts purely for decorative purposes, pasted on to what is essential a very nontraditional facade to the region, in terms of its form.



7] Correios, State Post office / Rua da Liberdade / Tavira



1] 2]
3] 4]

Neo-traditionalism vs Modernism (1940's-70's):

Early Modernism

Portuguese history is greatly defined by its geographical position. Out on the most westerly land of Europe and bordered on three sides by the Atlantic Ocean, it has often looked to further lands for its inspiration. During the Period of Discoveries, in the 15th and 16th centuries, Portugal built up an extensive colonial trading empire and stood amongst England, France and Spain in terms of economic, political and cultural influence.

However, as in other parts of Europe in the early 20th Century, the transition from monarchy to nation state brought a fragile and vulnerable period in Portugal both politically and culturally.

In 1910 an inexperienced and improvised Republican government was installed as a result of the self imposed exile of King Manuel II. However, with democracy still a fragile concept, the new regimes inability to maintain social order led to a heavy reliance on the military, who's role escalated until eventually they took complete control in 1926, brushing aside the Republican government and instating a Fascist military dictatorship.

By 1933 Antonio de Oliveira Salazar had emerged as the absolute ruler of the country and the Estado Novo (New State) was inaugurated. Like many other Fascist dictators, he embarked on the modernisation of what was an undeveloped and predominantly agricultural country. With the political establishment of the Estado Novo, the



5] Art Deco inspired facade, Experimenting with volumetric possibilities of modern techniques and displaying ornamental traditional features / Rua Dr. Candido Guerreiro / Faro
6] Early Estado Novo Transit Police post (Polícia de Viação e Trânsito (P.V.T)), more recently a Youth Information Post / Rua do Reito Teixeira Guedes - Rua Eça de Queiroz / Faro



8] Early nationalist interpretation of Art Deco / Rua João Deus - Rua Justino Cumano / Faro



5]

1] Art Nouveau inspired house / Rua Primeiro de Maio - Rua Silva corner / Tavira
2] Art Nouveau inspired house / Rua Almeida Garrett / Faro
3] Early Art Deco inspired residential / retail building, "Ateneu" / Largo Gago Coutinho / Loule
4] Art Deco inspired house with more "national" expression, particularly on the roof and veranda / Rua Dr. Miguel Bombarda - Rua Piedade Vaz Baganha corner / Tavira





1] Exposição do Mundo Português (Portuguese World Exhibition) / Photo from the event / Lisbon 1940 / The message on the wall translates as 'We give to the old world, new worlds'
2] Promotion posters for the exhibition

Images sourced from www.flickr.com by Biblioteca de Arte-Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian

Architecture of the Estado Novo Regime

Many intellectuals and followers of Salazar believed that, since this *golden era* Portugal had been going through a long period of cultural decline - which had come to its peak with the formation of the Republic in 1910. They shared the belief with Salazar, that the decadent state the country was in, had broken down the sense of *national identity*. The regime therefore utilised history as a way of installing "*Portugueseness*", using historic events, values and symbols in architecture, music, cinema and art.

Despite exorcising the initial support for modernism which was seen in the 30's, the fascist regimes's true cultural policy became clear when the *Exposição do Mundo Português* (Portuguese World Exhibition) was held in 1940, in the capital Lisbon. [Image 2] The exhibition was used by Salazar and his regime as a form of nationalistic propaganda and a showcase for the dictatorship's cultural policies and ideologies. Unlike fellow fascist rulers who enforced mass meetings and political rallies as forms of propaganda, Salazar preferred to hold none participative, state sponsored exhibitions and events. The intention of this was to win over the public by installing a sense of national pride, unity and nostalgia of a golden era, the *Period of Discoveries*. Architecture by the regime's supporting architects such as, Pardal Monteiro, Cassiano Branco, Cottinelli Telmo and Raul Rodrigues Lima were, show-cased on the site. As shown by the picture of the opening ceremony [Image 1], the architecture was - in terms of techniques and construction - modern, but pasted with decorative nationalistic and nostalgic symbols, figures and forms. Phrases were also displayed on the walls to further express Salazar's cultural ideologies. In this particular photograph one phrase reads, '*We give to the old world, new worlds*'.

Although many of the main pavilions and monuments at the exhibition expressed this support for the modernism, the site also included an

exhibition of *national* domestic architecture, which was rooted in much more traditionalist ideologies. For this the Estado Novo drew inspiration from traditionalist architect Raul Lino and his theory of the *Casa Portuguesa* (Portuguese house).

Raul Lino, intent on defending the traditional against the novel threat of the international style in the early 20th century, suggested a house style which was inclusively "*Portuguese*". He used more modern construction and engineering techniques disguised behind an appropriation of ornamental elements and features, borrowed from between the 16th and 18th centuries, and traditional houses of various regions throughout Portugal. [Image 3] Like Raul Lino, Salazar and his regime indulged heavily in the ornamental, with the display of national markers, symbols and traditional building elements which incited historic memories and patriotism.

In the subsequent years to the *Exposição do Mundo Português*, the Estado Novo embarked on a series of public works, modification of infrastructure and urban planning projects in the main urban settlements of the region, such as Faro, Loulé and Tavira.. Despite the obvious regressive language in terms of modernity, the construction and planning was of high quality. Amongst these works was the installation of the regional rail line, and later the intercity line connecting Faro to Lisbon. Starting in the east in Vila Real de Santo Antonio, situated on the Spanish boarder and terminating just short of the west coast in Lagos, it ran - and still does to this day - parallel to the coast connecting the coastal cities with the more rural inland towns. In each city the Estado Novo used the construction of train stations [Image 5] to showcase their cultural policies. Built in a "*Portuguese*" style, inspired by Raul Lino's theory of *Casa Portuguesa*, they express the vernacular architecture of the region through a few sparse indications, albeit surrounded and dominated by elements and features from other parts of Portugal. Today many travelling visitors might assume that what they see is traditional architecture of the Algarve, and some may argue that, decades later it *now* is very much part of the tradition of the region. Although these buildings aren't intrinsic to the Algarve, do they now contribute to the overall identity? Representative of a momentous political influence it has undeniably contributed to moulding the identity of the people and architecture of the Algarve into what it is today.

We see from the examples in Faro, Loulé and Tavira, similar ideologies in other public buildings such as schools, local police stations, post offices built by Salazar's Estado Novo, during their modernisation of the Algarve, Inspired by the nationalistic ideologies of a unified style these buildings are decorated with national flags, symbols and traditional building elements and features from past centuries and different regions of the country. Simultaneously its smooth geometric appearance, acquired by the states manipulation of modern construction techniques, created features which had not been possible using vernacular technique. [Images 4,6]



4] Correios, State Post office / Largo do Carmo / Faro



5] Regional Train station on the Algarve line, Inspired by Raul Lino's Casa Portuguesa (Portuguese House) style, homogenizing various different regional styles into a more "national" interpretation of Algarve architecture / Tavira



6] Typical state primary school, built by Salazar's Estado Novo during their modernisation of the Algarve, inspired by the nationalistic ideologies of a unified national style it is decorated with national flags and other symbols. Simultaneously its smooth geometric appearance, acquired by the states manipulation of modern construction techniques, created features which had not been possible using vernacular techniques / Escola Primária E B 1 Nº 2 Carmo / Largo do Carmo / Faro

3] Raul Lino's Casa dos Patudos, Expressing his traditionalist ideologies in this Casa Portuguesa (Portuguese house) style / Alpiarça / Santarém



7/

7],8] House expressing traditionalist ideologies inspired by Raul Lino's Casa Portuguesa (Portuguese house) style / Avenida José da Costa Mealha / Loulé



8/



7] Caixa Geral de Depósitos / Rua Dr José Pires Padinha / Tavira



8] Caixa Geral de Depósitos / Praça Dr Francisco Gomes / Faro



9] Caixa Geral de Depósitos / Praça da República / Loulé

In larger public buildings, such as cinemas-theatres, apartment blocks, court buildings, municipal buildings and state owned banks (Caixa Geral de Depósitos), there was a greater reference to the international modern movement in terms of form. This architectural movement was named *Novo Estilo* (new style) by the Estado Novo regime but is more commonly referred to (primarily by its critics) as “*Estilo Português Suave*” (Soft Portuguese Style) in reference to a popular national brand of smooth/soft cigarettes. Although there was no requirement in rural Algarve for the grandeur of buildings, which can be found in the capital - Lisbon, and the Portugal’s second city - Porto, this “*Estilo Português Suave*” can still be seen today in many public buildings that make up the urban context of cities such as Faro, Loulé and Tavira.

In all three of these cities the state owned banks branches of Caixa Geral de Depósitos in particular express the regime’s concern for establishing a new *national* style of architecture. [Images 7,8,9] In these buildings there is a much more evident experimentation with modern form and construction techniques, and despite not being as disguised by ornamental nostalgic features as previously, this application of modernity was done extremely conservatively in comparison to the modern movement elsewhere in Europe. The “*traditional*” and the “*modern*” were somewhat juxtaposed, in a gesture of obstruction to cultural universalism. Amongst the common characteristics of this *Novo Estilo* was the excessive use of limestone for decoration of the facades and openings. As discussed previously, traditionally this stone was reserved for the most noble constructions to express wealth, nobility and often to sculpt religious figures. The delicacy and high quality of the material allowed for a high level of detail on the decorative elements of buildings. Architects of the *Novo Estilo* used this stone for the same reasons, but through a more cubist interpretation, expressing linearity and geometry inspired by Art Deco. Other typical features were the red tile roofs with false cornices, and pilasters sometimes to support small balconies, but often purely decorative. The conical turret at the entrance to the bank in Faro was also a common feature used in many buildings of this time designed by *Novo Estilo* architects. Possibly inspired by medieval gables, these turrets (sometimes pyramidal) were topped with an armillary sphere to symbolise the golden era of Portuguese discoveries and extensive empire.

The colonnade style facade of the bank in Tavira [Image 10] was also an important element of “*Português Suave*”. With this repetition of vertical columns along the facade, a stern formal and dominating entrance is created and was therefore primarily used in administrative and judicial buildings such as ministries and courts.



10] Caixa Geral de Depósitos / Praça da República / Loulé

With the desertification of the rural interior as a result of migration to the more populated coastal towns and cities of the Algarve, housing was in high demand in the region and this proved challenging for the states urban planners.

Low-end housing projects like the one photographed in Image 11, began to appear in the main cities of the Algarve using modern concrete column-beam-slab systems, two water pitched roofs of red tiles, and often built in elongated simplified forms with limestone framed openings. High end apartments [Image 12] were more similar to designs seen in other main cities of the country, expressing a greater amount of detail and importance. Although also using modern construction techniques the facades were usually characterised by the excessive use of limestone for modillions, framing the window and door openings, and around the corners and base of the building. In a variety of scales, this type of apartment often included a medieval inspired gable usually pyramidal, and like in the Caixa Geral de Depósitos branch in Faro, this gable was often topped with an armillary sphere.

Single-family homes built at this time were mainly organised in large clusters in and around the larger cities such as Faro as part of state urban planning projects, although many individual houses can be seen dotted around the urban and rural landscape. In these houses there is a much greater expression of the conflict between the “*traditional*” and the modern, even for so called “*supporting architects*” at the time. Whilst some houses were directly influenced by the regimes cultural policies and the writings / works of Raul Lino [Images 13, 14], others stand today as concrete evidence of the architects battle in this conflict. [Images 15, 16] Whether leaning towards one extreme or the other they express, to some degree, the regimes imposed idea of a national style.



11] Social Housing, Rua do Bom Joao / Faro



12] Portuguese Suave apartment / Rua Gen. Humberto Delgado / Faro



13] Typical Estado Novo vision of a “Portuguese House” / Rua Ataíde de Oliveira / Faro



14j

14j Typical Estado Novo vision of a "Portuguese House" / Rua João Deus - Rua Justino Cumano / Faro



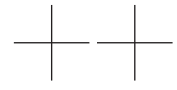
15j

15j Estado Novo vision of a "Portuguese House" leaning towards modernist Art Deco in terms of form / Rua Gen. Humberto Delgado / Faro



16j

16j Estado Novo vision of a "Portuguese House" with a clear reference to the modern movement / Rua Gen. Humberto Delgado / Faro

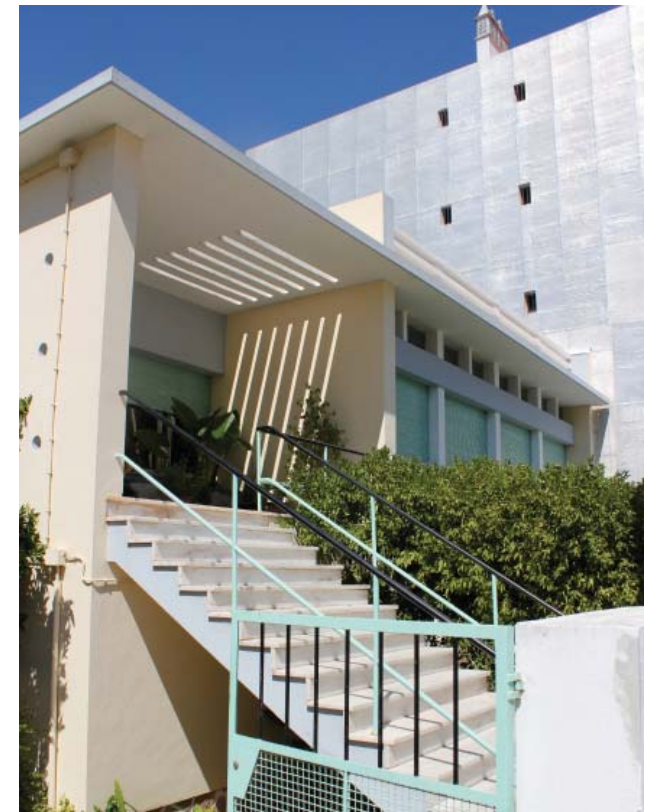


beliefs, these young architects sought to challenge and question the regimes nostalgic and nationalistic obsession with “tradition”. In the Algarve today this opposition is very evident with modernist buildings, closer to the international style, dotted around towns and cities. As the design of public buildings was closely overseen by the regime, these modern expressions of resistance can almost only be found in single family domestic houses and apartment blocks of the time. As can be seen in the three buildings photographed [Images 1,2,3], the focus was in the honesty of materials and the transparency of the building to express the structure. In an antagonistic manner, the ornamental and structural elements associated with traditional or vernacular architecture of the Algarve were neglected. The form of the building was determined by function as a whole and by the function of individual elements. Concrete, glass and steel were the preferred materials portraying an acceptance of industrialized mass-produced techniques.



2] Casa Laurentino Gonçalves / Rua Marcelino Franco - Rua Primeiro de Maio / Tavira

For some, this abandonment of tradition in favour of modernism was not the solution. Apprehensive about the phenomena of universalism and the international style, they expressed concerns for maintaining the identity of regional architecture in Portugal. They felt that despite many architects at the time being aware of the deep-rooted fictitiousness of the *Novo Estilo* movement, there was also a severe lack of knowledge, coupled with an ignorance about the true origins and diversity of vernacular architecture in each individual region of Portugal. In the late 1950's a group of architects set out to provide a systematic and coherent record of public architecture. By splitting up into pairs and dividing the country into six distinct regions they visited almost every city, town and village in Portugal. The aim of this group was to go back to the roots of architecture, documenting different vernacular forms of villages and houses to discover and reflect the reasons behind their “*permanence, dominion and subordination, tradition and innovation*”¹, with a hope of rediscovering creative freedom which had been so repressed by Salazar's Estado Novo regime and the naivety of the international style.



*“We are not very interested whether buildings are “national” or not. We are concerned with the legibility of their poetic force, with a rooted sense of place, and even with the irrationality of built desire. These aspects will provide the basis for new freedom of architectural design.”*²

It was this search for a “*new realism and...revision from within*”³ which strived to unravel the fascist notion of a single national style, relieve the homogenizing pressures of the international modern movement which, so often lacked integrity and depth, and offer architects and students an alternative.

This survey, although carried out in the late 50's, was first published in 1961 and named, *Inquérito a Arquitectura Regional Portuguesa e Arquitectura Popular em Portugal* (Survey of Portuguese Regional Architecture and Popular Architecture in Portugal).

1 [Daniele Vitale, Domus, Vol.655, Nov 1984, p3-32 / Nuno Teotónio Pereira \(From an interview with Jose Manuel Fernandes\)](#)

2 [Daniele Vitale, Domus, Vol.655, Nov 1984, p3-32 / Nuno Teotónio Pereira \(From an interview with Jose Manuel Fernandes\)](#)

3 [Daniele Vitale, Domus, Vol.655, Nov 1984, p3-32 / Nuno Teotónio Pereira \(From an interview with Jose Manuel Fernandes\)](#)

3] Modernist House inspired by the international style / Rua Antero de Quental - Rua Dr. Francisco Sá Carneiro / Loulé

Resistance & the Survey

The Exhibition in 1940, as a whole, represented a glorification of Portuguese history, in which a range of memories from different eras were carefully selected to create a single version of the past. This selective history was also translated into the architecture of the *Novo Estilo* and the *Casa Portuguesa*, in an attempt to unify a pastiche of architectural styles from different eras and regions into a single *national style*. The Estado Novo regime, concerned with demonstrating a *national architecture*, continued to impose its nationalist manipulation of the traditional into the 1950's, using corruption, persuasion and repression to insure a “national” model was followed. Meanwhile, the ideologies exhibited in Lisbon in 1940 and imposed in the subsequent years, began to stir many architects who held an internationalist outlook. Giving rise to a clash within Portuguese architecture. On one side there were those who embraced the traditionalist ideologies of the *Novo Estilo*, and on the other there were the progressive young architects who embraced the international style similar to that in the rest of Europe. The *Novo Estilo* style became increasingly unpopular with these younger architects, who accused it of being too nostalgic and lacking in creativity. In the years following the Portuguese World Exhibition of 1940, the *Sindicato Nacional de Arquitectos* (National Syndicate of Architects) began to challenge the Estado Novo's authority, culminating in the 1st National Congress of Portuguese Architects in 1948. Subsequently, architects began to abandon the *Portuguese Suave* style for the modernist movement around the late 50's. Two architects, incidentally exhibited in 1940, Porfírio Pardal Monteiro and Francisco Keil do Amaral led this movement. Towards the end of the 40's, a new generation of young, talented architects emerged within a completely opposing framework to the constricting and conservative ideologies of the Estado Novo. Whether through the plastic expression of innovative and modern techniques or through there opposing, internationalist, leftist political



1] Modernist House inspired by the international style / Rua Gen. Humberto Delgado / Faro





4] Modernist office block and traditionalist "Português Suave" building stood side by side / Rua de S. Antonio / Faro

4]



5] Modernist apartment framed by nationalistic "Português Suave" houses on either side / Rua Gen. Humberto Delgado Praça Engenheiro Duarte Pacheco / Faro

5]



6] Three nationalistic "Português Suave" apartment blocks, Two of them however have early signs of resistance and inspiration from the international style / Rua Gen. Humberto Delgado Praça Engenheiro Duarte Pacheco / Faro

6]

Critical Regionalism & Fernando Távora's "Third Way":

Theories in Critical Regionalism

The "Third Way": Távora and Influences from Porto





- **Regionalism**

Noun 1 [mass noun] the theory or practice of regional rather than central systems of administration or economic, cultural, or political affiliation: a strong expression of regionalism.

- **Critical**

Adjective 1 Expressing or involving an analysis of the merits and faults of a work of literature, music, or art. Incorporating a detailed and scholarly analysis and commentary.

Oxford English Dictionary online resource [accessed 02/2011]

Critical Regionalism & Fernando Távora's "Third Way"

Theories in Critical Regionalism

By the 1970's, the idea of a resistance to the forces of globalization had become a growing topic amongst scholars and architects alike throughout Europe. Alexander Tzonis, a Greek architect, researcher, author and publisher was one who had become increasingly concerned with the implications of the international style and the post-modern movement.

He believed that the internationalization of architectural style was contributing to the breakdown of traditional cultures and society, and that post-modernism lacked a sense of rootedness, depth and authenticity.

Tzonis suggested an alternative regionalism. One which is critical, not purely used in a confrontational sense, but as a way of describing a regionalism which is *'...self-examining, self-questioning, self-evaluating, that is not only confrontational with regard to the world but to itself. The idea of "critical" in this second sense, originates in the serene essays of Kant and developed in the agitated writings of the frankfurt School. Critical works challenge not only the established actual world as confrontational works do, but the very legitimacy of*

the possible world views which interpret it in mind.'

*'We would like to argue that one contemporary trend of regionalist architecture - Critical Regionalism - is a more original movement which has come about as a response to new problems posed by contemporary global development of which it strongly critical, and that the poetics of this new movement are to a great extent different from it not antithetical to other architectural regionalist techniques of the past.'*²

Critical regionalism was the term coined by Alexander Tzonis and Liane Lefaivre in the late 1970's for this alternative movement to post-modernism, and was first published in 1981 in their study of Greek Architecture, 'The Grid and the Pathway'.

As seen with Novo Estilo architecture of Salazar's regime in Portugal, regionalism in the accustomed term, played on familiarisation and memory. A selection of regional elements linked in memory with bygone eras, slotted into new buildings, to create a familiarised scene. Employing the region / nation as a politically offensive or defensive concept rooted in nationalistic policies.

Critical regionalism, as defined by Tzonis, was not only critical of the international post-modern movement of the time, but also highly critical of regionalism in the in-ward looking nationalistic sense. Despite this it shares with the common use of regionalism, a *'commitment to "placeness"'*³, and even the selection of regional design elements as a way of standing up to the forces of internationalist architecture. However, these place defining elements of a particular region are used in unfamiliar ways, displacing them and making them more difficult to recognise, and therefore questioning *'...the legitimacy of the very regionalist tradition to which they belong.'*³

Despite the term critical regionalism having already been coined by Tzonis and Lefaivre, Kenneth Frampton, a British architect, critic and historian achieved notability within architecture for his essay, *'Towards a Critical Regionalism: Six Points for an Architecture of Resistance'* from his book *'The Anti-Aesthetic. Essays on Post-modern Culture'* published in 1983.

In this essay Frampton takes quite a different stance on the concept of critical regionalism. While he shares Tzonis' and Lefaivre's views on the destructive effect of universalism on traditional cultures and society, he is critical of the aesthetic and ornamental to create memory in architecture. His approach originates in phenomenology as he intends critical regionalism to mediate the impact of universalism with a rooted sense of place, unique to that specific site, drawing inspiration from such elements as topography, climate, light and surrounding materials.

Both theories are critical of regionalist architecture in terms of the reproduction of a pastiche of architectural styles, which are purely nostalgic imitations, but for Tzonis and Lefaivre, memory still plays a significant role in architecture albeit in a defamiliarised form. They emphasise the importance of traditional elements and artefacts in reviving and guarding memory, which in turn helps to *'...maintain the*

*identity of a group, the ethos, its right of existence, and its autonomy as a nation'*⁴. Frampton on the other hand, is not concerned with memory but with the poetic force of the geographical context and a rooted sense of place of a specific region. Frampton believed that this focus, combined with the critical appropriation of cultural universalism, including the Modern movement, was a solution to the paradox described by French philosopher, Paul Ricoeur.

*'There is the paradox: how to become modern and to return to the sources; how to revive an old, dormant civilization and take part in the universal civilization.'*⁵

¹ [Lefaivre L., Tzonis A., A+U Architecture and Urbanism Journal, May 1990, No.236, 'Why Critical Regionalism Today?', p23-31](#)

² [Lefaivre L., Tzonis A., A+U Architecture and Urbanism Journal, May 1990, No.236, 'Why Critical Regionalism Today?', p23-31](#)

³ [Lefaivre L., Tzonis A., A+U Architecture and Urbanism Journal, May 1990, No.236, 'Why Critical Regionalism Today?', p23-31](#)

⁴ [Lefaivre L., Tzonis A., 'Critical Regionalism: Architecture and Identity in a Globalized World', Prestel Publishing 2003 Munich/Berlin/London/New York](#)

⁵ [Ricoeur P. 'Universal Civilizations and National Cultures' in 'History and Truth', trans. Charles A. Kelbley, Evanston: Northwestern University press. 1965 \(1955\).](#)

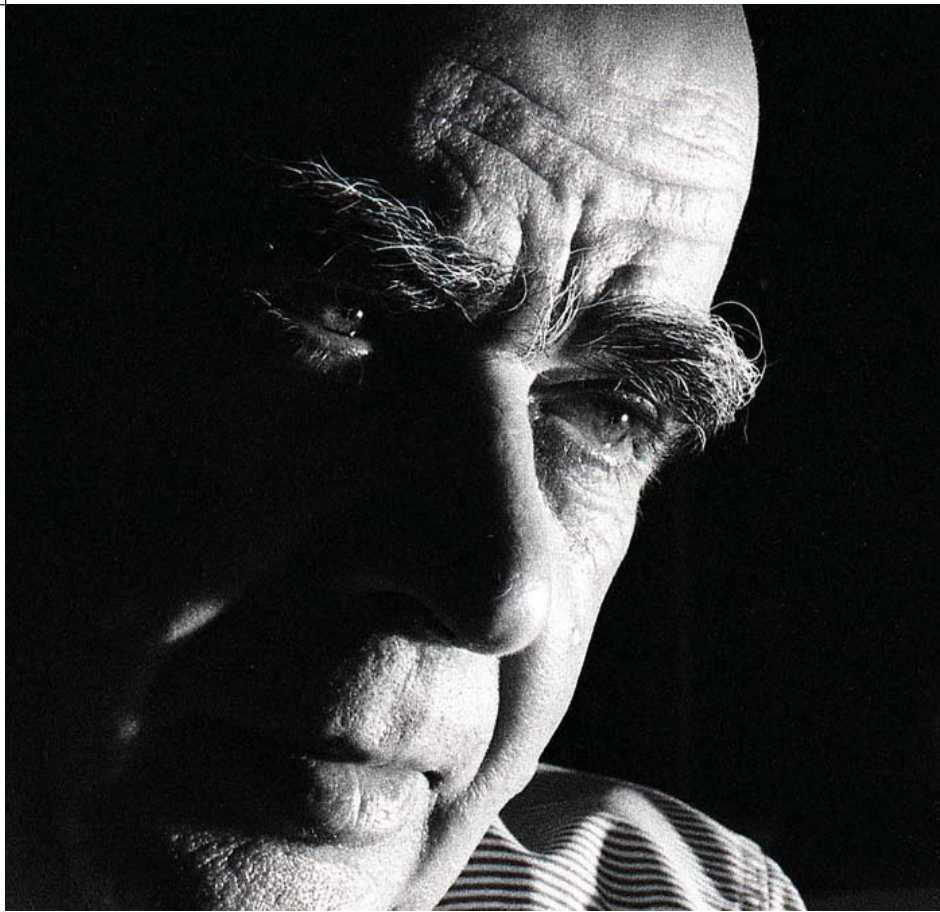


Photo sourced from Patologista (www.diasdeumfotografo.blogspot.com)



1] Fernando Távora's Quinta da Conceição / Matosinhos / 1960

The "Third Way": Távora and Influences from Porto

Fernando Távora, an architect and professor from the Porto School of architecture born in 1923, was central to the historic work of the *Inquerito* in the late 50's. The study, which was essentially an anti-centrist movement to the nationalist Estado Novo regime and its determination to install a single *national style* of architecture, opened the eyes of architects to the complexity of tradition rooted in settlements throughout the different regions of Portugal. Although it revealed an abundance of new architectural forms and elements largely unknown to many architects at that time, its principle lessons were in the embedded reasons of the very existence of tradition.

In the aftermath of the survey there was a shift in the way that architecture was debated in Portugal and Távora emerged as the torchbearer of the new movement. As we saw in the writings of Kenneth Frampton and Alexandre Tzonis in the 70's, Távora before them, sought to find a solution to the crucial problem which confronted a nation rising out of underdevelopment. Whilst supporting modernity and the inclusion in modern civilisation, he felt that modern architecture was in a period of uncertainty, and lacked a real sense of integrity and depth, which resulted in "form for form's sake". He had also become frustrated with the oppressive *Novo Estilo* nationalist movement within Portugal, the "cult of accessory" and the manipulation of history in architecture. He proposed an alternative way, the "Third Way", which without referring directly to the past through the use of selective history, conserved the essential and permanent qualities of architecture proven by history and time. It simultaneously embraced the international modern movement but with a critical approach, using it 'as a reference to intervene at local

level...'

*'I dreamed of a developed, modern country, but only when the modernity guarantees vital continuity and allows a new projection to take root on the existing and real conditions proven by history and time, and which make up the culture of the country.'*²

Távora's "Third Way", which came as the result of a combination of major political changes in Portugal, and the culmination of the idea of cultural universalism, was essentially what Frampton went on to define as his version of critical regionalism in the 70's. Távora, at the time, referred to it as "*realist architecture*" as it embraced the development and progression through modernism but used it to intervene locally, through a consideration and understanding of the uniqueness of the region, the quality of social ties, and the local physical and cultural resources. Like Frampton he believed that history and identity is not identified by an appropriation of images and symbolic elements/features that form a selective memory, but from within, originating in ideas of phenomenology.

Despite passing away in 2005, Fernando Távora remains a symbolic figure in the history of Portuguese architecture. Through his teachings he influenced the formation of younger generations and his work continues to stimulate architects today, instilling in them the concept of a dialect between the local and the international; the crafts and technology; the model and history; and reality and dream. This inclusive approach, '*developed in a broad context of culture and ideas, experience and travel, knowledge and memories...*' demonstrates '*... that the problems of architecture can be approached not only from the inside, but also, starting from afar, from knowledge, reflection and books.*'

Alvaro Siza is the most obvious example of an architect who developed under the influence of Távora. Siza too came through the Porto School. Graduating in 1955, he began his career working directly with Távora and sharing his vision of realism and inclusiveness in architecture, as a way of mediating between regionalism and internationalism. Siza believed that the survey carried out by his predecessors gave way to the possibility of '*a new identity, comprised of continuity and contrast...*' and '*above all, an immersion in reality, a gesture of approximation toward the real condition of the people.*'³ As Távora, Alvaro Siza looked beyond Portuguese borders for inspiration. His readings of '*themes developed in Italian critical writing*'⁴ and the works of architect such as Alvar Aalto, Luis Barragan, Le Corbusier and Adolf Loos were often taken as starting points at different stages in his career. He too took ideas gathered from his international outlook, and through a consideration and understanding of the uniqueness of the region, the quality of social ties, and the physical and cultural resources, he created a sense of rootedness in his projects. A rootedness which he achieves without submitting to the context but

which defines the very environment in which they are placed.

*'For years, I thought of architecture as something different, special, something sublime and other-worldly, something untouchably white and virginal. Years passed. I began to see buildings, and recognise them as architecture. I realised that a building doesn't simply begin with a beautiful plan and end with a beautiful photo. I began to see architecture as an event, like all other events which fill the lives of men, and are subject to the contingencies of life itself. The untouchable white virgin transformed itself into yet another of life's manifestations. And the myth came undone'*⁵



2] Alvaro Siza's Boa Nova Tea House / Leça da Palmeira / Matosinhos / 1956

Image sourced from www.danda.be/gallery/boa_nova_tea_house, by Stijn Rolies

1 [Nuno Grande, A+U Architecture and Urbanism Journal, 2007, No.439, issue 4 'Portugal: News from Far-West', p70-73](#)

2 ['The Portuguese House: An interview with Fernando Távora', Architecture D'Aujourd'hui Vol.295, Oct 1994, p8, 11-13](#)

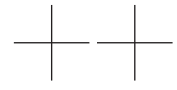
3 [Daniele Vitale, 'Two Buildings by Two Portuguese Architects', Domus, Vol.688, Nov 1987, p32-45](#)

4 [Nuno Portas, 'Alvaro Siza: Poetic Profession', Lotus Documents, Edizioni Electa/ Rizzoli International Publications Inc, 1986](#)

5 [Fernando Távora, comment in 'Escola Primaria do Cerdo', Vila Nova de Gaia, in 'Arquitetura', n.71, 1961/Daniele Vitale, Domus, Vol.655, Nov 1984, p3-32](#)

Tourism & the Algarve (1970's-Present)





and entertainment, brought the re-distribution of land for the potential economic activity. [Image 2, 3] This new form of internationalisation that the region experienced meant that Popular architecture was no longer an exclusively internal, "Portuguese" topic. The architecture of foreign investors, builders, architects and clients was now appearing, at a time when building regulations, as a means of encouraging development and seeking financial gain, were slack and often none existent. Despite the movements from the architecture schools of Lisbon and Porto to the development of the Algarve 'was left in the hands of speculators, real estate agents, and large local businesses, when it was not being run by various urban projects imported by Spanish, Brazilian, American or English companies that emphasised their "savoir-faire" in finding easy solutions for ambitious programmes: enormous office buildings, business complexes, theme parks, and shopping centres'¹

Disgruntled by the mismatch urban landscape brought by touristic development, many people in the late 20th century began to return to more "traditionalist" views, and this movement seems to have continued up until present day. The Algarve (and more recently other parts of the country) has started to see a similar push towards the traditionalist idea of a "Portuguese style" house which was witnessed during the fascist regime. [Image 6] Only this time not rooted in nationalistic nostalgia but as an alternative to what many people believe was an unsuccessful and undesired modernist era in the region. From the planners through to the client, there seems to have been a misunderstanding of the origins of tradition and how to maintain or express the true *identity* of the Algarve. The result is a pastiche of styles and features borrowed from the events within the Algarve of the 20th century and also from other foreign influences brought to the region by tourism. Regional elements naively imitated as add-on features which act solely on an aesthetic and ornamental level. In the same way as I discussed in the chapter 'Vernacular Architecture of the Algarve', people have begun to use ornamental features and elements to express social and economical status, only this time as cheap, industrially produced, plastic misinterpretations. The industrialisation of certain building elements and decorative features made them accessible for almost everyone from the Algarve's rural working class to tourist developers and foreign house builders.

I feel this has been a severely detrimental period for the urban and rural landscape of the Algarve and indeed to the attempt to maintain the identity of the region. It came at a time when the Algarve was wide open to tourism, but also at a time when very few people really understood the origins of the architecture around them and the conditions in which they were rooted. I believe the majority of the buildings built over the last 20 or 30 years are watered down versions of the *Novo estilo* and *Casa Portuguesa*, amalgamated with personal influences from abroad.

As the clash between the *traditional* and the *modern* continues today, more often than not, those who opt for the traditional fail to recognise the true identity of the Algarve amidst the melting pot of influences they see around them. To many it is black or white - traditional or modern.

¹ Nuno Grande, 'La Paradox Portugais: Au-delà du Régionalisme critique', *Architecture D'Aujourd'hui* Vol.366, Sept-Oct 2006

Tourism & the Algarve (1970's-Present)

Simultaneous to the movements coming from Lisbon and Porto in the second half of the 20th century, the Algarve, (like other European coastal regions) began to experience the phenomena of mass tourism. This came as a result of improved standards of living and the reduction of working hours throughout the European community, coupled with the construction of new airports in southern Europe and the introduction of low cost commercial flights. Increasingly, the average working / middle-class European was within a 3 or 4 hour flight from a holiday in the sun. In 1965, Faro International Airport was opened and the Algarve, historically a land of inconsistent occupation, posed little resistance to the new force of tourism.

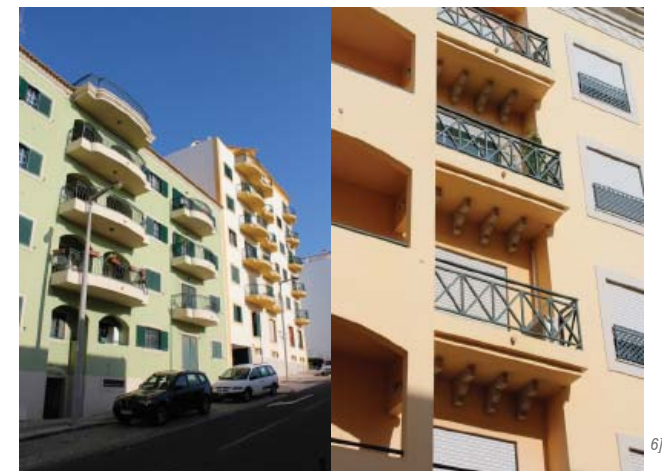
This phenomena not only brought a need for tourist accommodation and facilities, it also created a demand for economical housing for the migrating peasant population, who came from inland rural Algarve and the Alentejo in search of work in industries connected to tourism. Contributing to an increasingly congested coastline and the currently pressing issue of desertification of the interior. [Images 4, 5] Due to a lack of media sources, academia and sharing of resources the findings from the Survey and the movements further north, failed to reach this region tucked away on the southern coast of the country. Rich in a newly revealed and relatively untouched tradition, void of previous development, there was an opportunity for architecture which was both unique and place-defining. Instead the result was an architecture of financial opportunists and the *Novo Estilo* architecture of the regime. The transformation of this region, which at the time was essentially agricultural, into a place of accommodation, leisure



4] Increasing work opportunities in the developing tourist industry along the Algarve's coast has contributed to the abandonment of houses and entire rural villages resulting in the desertification of the interior of the region.



5] 70's High-rise apartment blocks looming over traditional houses in the city centre / Faro. (Built to house migrating workers from more rural areas of the Algarve and the Alentejo).



6] A recent return to an obsession with forms and elements believed to be "traditional" purely for ornamental purposes has produced what I feel is a watered down version of Portuguese Suave.



1] Plane approaching Faro Airport carrying German tourists, flying closely over traditional fishing communities



2] Touristic tradition? / Hotel Vila Gale / Rua 4 de Outubro / Tavira
3] Modern tourist hotel, Eva Hotel / Avenida da República / Faro



The global economic crisis, which is said to have started in 2007, is now being felt heavily in the Portuguese construction industry. For the first time since the construction boom of the 1970's, the Algarve is littered with half built private and public projects which have no expectation of ever being completed, road systems and public areas of private or half built urbanizations still waiting for the initiation or completion of a number of tourist villas, and even newly completed buildings closed up and unused. Over the last 30 or so years private investment has dominated the construction industry in an insensitive and irresponsible way. However, we can take some positives from the economic crisis. The collapsing property market should mean that there will be a new focus of attention on public investment, also 'an opportunity to stop, to think and...' when the time is right, '... invest responsibly, that is, to put the public interest ahead of private interests and the long-term ahead of the short-term.'¹

Map view of one of many incomplete urbanizations. Built by foreign investors predominantly for holiday homes and British expats there is no consideration for local culture and identity, nor is there any regard for integration with town planning of local villages or neighboring abandoned traditional buildings. The main concerns for the architects, planners and investors are commercial ones. "Does it have a sea view?" or "How close is it to the beach?" As real estate agents, developers and investors (Portuguese and foreign) have been getting richer, architects and builders have been unable to refuse the work resulting in cheap, imitated versions of "traditional" houses closer to watered down versions of Novo Estilo than the vernacular. This sprawling effect of tens or even hundreds of these types of tourist urbanizations outside the main cities and towns centres around the Algarve has largely contributed to the degradation of the natural landscape, the abandonment of the city centres and most of all the dilution of regional Identity.

Image sourced from Google Maps

¹ Pedro Bandeira, Catalogue 'Habitar Portugal 2006/2008'.
 Seleção Mapei / Ordem Dos Arquitectos, Caleidoscópico Edição e Artes Gráficas SA., 2009, Lisboa



Regional Identity: Architecture in the Algarve
 (1940-Present)



Tourism & the Algarve (1970's-Present)



Conclusion

Conclusion

With a built environment scarred so dramatically by the political and cultural clashes of the 20th century, I believe many clients, developers, planners and even architects today have lost touch with the true regional identity of the Algarve, especially in the non-Portuguese construction networks which have developed as a result of tourism.

The problem is, not only in Portugal but around the world, that for the general client, who doesn't have a background in architecture or the arts, there is a choice when approaching an architect. Do I want to go for something "traditional" or modern? In my short experience in architectural practice this question is predominantly the clients starting point for generating ideas for their project with the architect. This "one or the other" attitude in the region, and I would suggest, in the rest of Portugal, has meant that the architecture which has so often, throughout different movements, broken with the tradition of the Algarve for "external" influences, has led to a misunderstanding or misinterpretation of the true identity of the region. This in turn has produced reinterpretations of the misinterpretations of the past. This is the danger of regarding the current "regional culture" as something established or inflexible. As it was put so well by Kenneth Frampton, through his reading of Paul Ricoeur.

*'From the point of view of critical theory we have to regard regional culture not as something given and relatively immutable (set in stone/ fixed) but rather as something which has, at least today, to be self-consciously cultivated. Ricoeur suggests that sustaining any kind of authentic culture in the future will depend ultimately on our capacity to generate vital forms of regional culture while appropriating alien influences at the level of both culture and civilization.'*¹

This is where I believe the identity of the Algarve has been sacrificed, I don't believe that regional culture has been "self-consciously cultivated" as suggested in Frampton's writings and consequently I don't believe the Algarve has managed to maintain its identity in the face of cultural universalism. However, I don't suggest that architects in the Algarve (both Portuguese and foreign) should strive to identify and then reproduce the vernacular but, by the physical, environmental and cultural understanding of a particular region, endeavour for an architecture which is simultaneously a product of both the traditional and the modern, the local and the global.

To maintain regional identity I believe it is important for architects to place themselves far from the devolutionary process of searching for a "national style", or even a "regional style" for that matter. New architectural solutions should derive in response to prevailing regional characteristics. The specific context and local resources should act as influential and stabilising forces whilst engaging with the advances in technologies and techniques of contemporary civilization.

¹ Frampton K., 'Modern Architecture: A critical History [3rd Edition: Revised and Enlarged]', Thames and Hudson Ltd 1992, London. Chap 5 / Critical Regionalism: modern architecture and cultural identity.

*'The concept of a local or national culture is a paradoxical proposition not only because of the present obvious antithesis between rooted culture and universal civilization but also because all cultures, both ancient and modern, seem to have depended for their intrinsic development, on a certain cross-fertilization with other cultures. As Ricoeur seems to imply(...) ,(...) regional or national cultures must today, more than ever, be ultimately constituted as locally inflected manifestations of 'world culture'.'*²

Kenneth Frampton suggests here that all cultures and identities, both past and present have depended on a cross-fertilization with other cultures. Sharing this belief with Frampton, I feel that through this study of the past and present conditions which have formed the built environment of the Algarve, we can begin to really understand the true identity of the architecture.

In the following pages I have carried out a series of case studies of recent projects in the Algarve from the last decade, by architects who have shown a deep interest in contributing to the established built environment and cultivating the identity of the region through an understanding of both the contemporary and traditional, the local and the global. The aim of these examples is to provide the reader with a view, subjective to myself, of the ability to design to time and context without submitting to precedent or style. Through this critical view, I believe it is possible to cultivate the identity of the Algarve in way suitable to today's context.

By opening up the possibilities of a vast palette of quality local materials, techniques, colours and forms, I would like to think, that the research I have done can in some way, help to educate the reader of the true origins of architecture in the Algarve, and begin to inform an exciting and progressive exploration of regional architecture into the future.

² Frampton K., 'Modern Architecture: A critical History [3rd Edition: Revised and Enlarged]', Thames and Hudson Ltd 1992, London. Chap 5 / Critical Regionalism: modern architecture and cultural identity.

Case Studies

- 1] Two Houses in Casa Queimada / Tavira, Ricardo Bak Gordon
- 2] Alto de Santana Housing / Tavira, CAN-RAN Arquitectos
- 3] Biblioteca Álvaro De Campos / Tavira, João Luís Carrilho da Graça
- 4] Pousada do Palácio de Estoi / Faro, Gonçalo Byrne



1] Image sourced from Google Maps

1]



2] Image sourced from Google Maps

2]

Case Studies

I have selected the following projects, not for their capacity to maintain a past identity, but for their shared capacity to self-consciously cultivate the regional identity of the Algarve, and more specifically their immediate context. As Kenneth Frampton interpreted from Paul Ricoeur's essay 'Universal Civilizations and National Cultures' from his book 'History and Truth' '(...) sustaining any kind of authentic culture in the future will depend ultimately on our capacity to generate vital forms of regional culture while appropriating alien influences at the level of both culture and civilization.'¹

The reoccurring theme that ties these projects together is that of the architect's engagement with the topography and sensitivity to local materials and craftsmanship. These projects however, despite sharing common ideologies do not subscribe a particular typology or architectural style. Each project avoids succumbing to fashionable styles and are rooted in the individual context of the site.

Climate and light are equally significant emphasising, through design, the ecological advantages of vernacular materials and construction techniques.

Both Távora and Siza sought for architecture which had, as Frampton described, '(...) capacity to condense the artistic potential of the region while interpreting cultural influences coming from outside.'

Each simultaneously embracing a critical approach, using international experiences and modernity as references '(...) to intervene at local level (...)'², they stand as physical evidence that the work by Távora and his counterparts, and later Siza, has not gone unnoticed in Portugal - however, the concern is that projects of this quality are few and far between in the Algarve.

¹ Frampton K., 'Modern Architecture: A critical History [3rd Edition: Revised and Enlarged]', Thames and Hudson Ltd 1992, London. Chap 5 / Critical Regionalism: modern architecture and cultural identity.

² Nuno Grande, A+U Architecture and Urbanism Journal, 2007, No.439, issue 4 'Portugal: News from Far-West', p70-73



3) Image sourced from Google Maps

3]



4) Image sourced from Google Maps

4]



single family houses begin to scatter the natural landscape. His work recovers the “essence” of vernacular architecture, particularly of the South, evidently informed by the infamous survey - *Inquérito a Arquitectura Regional Portuguesa e Arquitectura Popular em Portugal* - carried out by his predecessors in the late 50's. With this as a starting point, his contemporary cubist approach sits rooted in the local topography and culture of the region.

Constantly wrestling with, and against, the tragedies of design quality and characteristics seen in the region - through an understanding of regional cultures, climate and landscapes - his architectural approach searches for the essential materials and forms, in an attempt to avoid the customary clichés of crude consumer exhibitionism, so often seen in Portugal, and even more so in the Algarve over the last 30 or 40 years.

The culmination of this research, so to speak, is the recent *Two Houses* project in Casa Queimada located in the mountains - somewhere between the *Barrocal* and the *Serra do Caldeirão* sub-regions - inland from Tavira.

In an area heavily influenced by the harsh dry natural landscape, consisting of hills and valleys and dense ground vegetation which is so typical of this region in the East Algarve, the two white volumes rise against the surrounding nature crowning the hillside. The simplistic geometric lime wash white forms recreate a series of small individual patios reflecting and revaluing the tradition of the açoteia, for contemporary lifestyles.

Two Houses in Casa Queimada / Tavira, Ricardo Bak Gordon 2005

Ricardo Bak Gordon, graduated in Lisbon in 1990. Throughout his relatively short career his work has developed, project by project, towards an authentic research on the construction, typology and meaning of the house with a fresh understanding of space and the forms of contemporary living. His focus has been on single family rural houses rather than the urban context. However, as I have illustrated in this project, this is currently a hot topic in the Algarve as new build /





the value of the neighbourhood with the introduction of a housing typology which was rooted in regional architecture. Re-qualifying the surrounding Igreja de Santana, planting it firmly as the focal point of the area by enhancing its presence and increasing the public square and viewpoint to the city and the river below.

This relationship is established by the lime white wash which is characteristic of the region, the volume and geometry of the elevations, which are intended to convey a modular sequence, a rhythm of openings, volumes and voids. The selection of materials, the glowing orange of the terracotta ladrilhas (floor tiles) and telhas (roof tiles) produced from local clay in the nearby town of Santa Catarina da Fonte do Bispo, the limestone pavement and iron balustrades.

The housing block consists of a band of 11 individual houses, each with three floors, in a trapezoidal shape creating a defined public space through which the units are accessed.

Each unit has its own roof terrace, thus revaluing the tradition of the açoteia, for contemporary lifestyles. The remainder of the roof is covered by the four water roof system (*telhado de tesouro*), traditional to Tavira and enforced by the Portuguese Institute of Architectural Heritage I.P.P.A.R.

Critics may argue that CAN-RAN's approach is unadventurous and conservative. However, without succumbing to sentimental nostalgia or ornamentation, they manage in very understated fashion, to express the identity of Tavira in a progressive and contemporary way.



Alto de Santana Housing / Tavira, CAN-RAN Arquitectos 2004

Its 2055 m² trapezoidal site, defined by the surrounding roads, is a privileged and significant space to Tavira's profile. Not only because of its topography but also for its proximity to a cluster of buildings of great patrimonial significance - The square, Church and Viewpoint of Alto de Santana.

The project inserts itself into an urban structure currently in a process of consolidation and expansion. The project sought to mark



resisted the “steam rolling” effect of mass tourism of the last few decades. Furthermore it has refrained - unlike many cities and even towns in the Algarve - from the “syndrome” of suburbia whilst there continues to be opportunities for the sustainable development of the inner cities through urban and building renewal projects. It was this attitude, adopted by Tavira Council (Camara Municipal De Tavira), of urban regeneration combined with the cities civic mindfulness, which gave rise to this project.

João Luís Carrilho da Graça’s was commissioned to reconstruct the unused Civic Prison into a new Municipal Library. The axis created between the prison facade and the São Sebastião Catholic church was taken by Carrilho da Graça as a starting point for the project. The old facade, built in a military revivalist style to suggest a battlement, is taken as a ruin with its facade pierced by openings now stands alone to create a courtyard behind it which in turn, defines the successive functions of the new library (offices, conference rooms, archive shelves and reading rooms) in a sequential and legible nature.

Within the walls of the “ruin”, the courtyard, with its original stone paving and water channels recalls thoughts of the past whilst simultaneously acting as a contemporary, tranquil outdoor reading and reflection space. At the main entrance a lobby patio is sculpted by two sharp vertical bright white planes, framing the old facade and creating an opening on the axis of the São Sebastião church, reconnecting the relationship between the two old buildings.

Architecture critic and journalist, Kenneth Powell, once noted that, *‘Working with and transforming existing buildings seems to be a particular strength of a number of present-day Portuguese practitioners’*, and this is no exception.

**Biblioteca Álvaro De Campos / Tavira,
João Luís Carrilho da Graça 2006**

This intimate Municipal Library, also situated in Tavira was designed by well-known Lisbon based architect João Luís Carrilho da Graça. With its strong architectural and landscape identity of the four water roofs (*telhado de tesouro*) and the Ria Arade estuary running through its centre, Tavira is regarded by many as the city which has managed, most successfully and stubbornly, to maintain the urban and traditional values of the region. In doing so it has, to greater extent than most,





the remarkable plaster work of some of the internal spaces.

The recent recovery of the existing spaces and exterior combined with the new extension to house the Pousada (Hotel of historic and heritage interest) accommodation, designed by Gonçalo Byrne, had the intention of revealing the value and heritage of the architecture and surrounding landscape. Dealing with a very old and complex building extraordinarily rich in history, the architect was confronted with the issues of how to deal with the relationship between the different languages, between the old and the new, the modern and the historical, and the building and the territory of the surrounding landscape.

The new elongated extension consisting of 63 rooms, forms a sort of articulated connection to the west of the main body of the existing palace, creating an acute angle between the two. From the North entrance to the Pousada the extension sits discretely in staggered levels (taking advantage of the sloping terrain) with the concrete slab roofs of the rooms treated as landscaped roof garden.

With its simple, modulated and repetitive geometric forms, the architectural expression of the extension is contemporary and within the established lines of modern architecture. It establishes a visual dialogue with the old Palace but in an uncompromising way which, depending on the viewer can be accentuated or diluted.

In many countries in Europe, particularly in Spain and Portugal it is common to 'subject ancient centre and large monuments to the violence of conversion for tourism.'¹ - This is the case with the Pousadas in Portugal. In an anxious attempt to hang on to heritage which is destined to fall to ruin, these buildings are often reconstituted by refining them '(...) within the dimensions of order and use, comfort and convenience, the distinctive and the "characteristic"'.² Through this approach the original building is often '(...) taken as something given, without perceiving in it, tensions and contrasts, incomplete contradictions or features.'³

Byrne's approach in the restoration of the Palacio de Estoi (as in the restoration projects of Fernando Távora), avoids confining to a domesticated and aesthetically pleasing solution. Furthermore the extension refrains from directly referring to the past, taking the old Palace as a '(...) dense reality which sets conditions, suggest certain choices.'⁴

Pousada do Palácio de Estoi / Faro, Gonçalo Byrne 2003

The Pousada de Estoi, situated in the sleepy *Barrocal* village of Estoi, not far from the city of Faro, is again a project designed by another nationally and internationally renowned architect from outside the Algarve, Gonçalo Byrne.

It's originally structure was built in the late 17th century, in a late baroque style, surrounded by corresponding baroque landscaped gardens in the clear geometric fashion of the era. The palace then experienced various modifications, particularly notable is the Fin de Siècle 18th century eclecticism identifiable by the large quantity of decorative sculptures on the roof tops and within the gardens, and by

^{1/2/3/4} Daniele Vitale, 'Two Buildings by Two Portuguese Architects', *Domus*, Vol.688, Nov 1987, p32-45

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