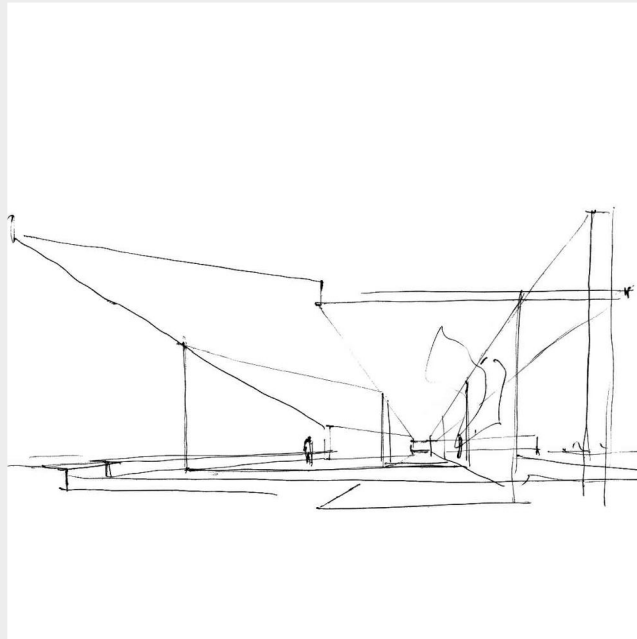


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Casas



Monograph Topos Atelier

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The arts of landscaping are so familiar to André Le Nôtre, Louis XIV landscape architect, that he was treated by the king with intimate friendship for assuming that he was capable of superhuman deeds. Walking through the Vaux-Le-Visconte gardens will suffice to uphold the king's conviction. Mastery in the field of perspective and imagination in concealing and revealing visual bounds, in the dynamic sequence of who is walking, in the sensory perception of surrounding environments, referenced to the dominant building – the Chateau – simultaneously, made the convergence centre and the pole of radiation of the whole experience, whether real, lived or simply suggested.

This persistence and patient skill – fruit of human genius – of the idea transformed into an artefact, departs from nature and returns to it, in another connection which is now suggested by the work and grace of the ability to plan.

This is the fascinating work of architecture which makes the journey of a pre-existence, may it be landscape or construction, recycling it into another presence with the ability of disturbing those who believe that nature or the work of men is final, static and indifferent to whom inhabits it or, simply faces it.

This Braga practice's well publicized and recognized work – symptomatically named *Topos* – has been revealing, particularly on the houses that constitute this monograph, a remarkable landscaping sensibility, somehow inherited from the anthropological sense revealed in the fifties' popular architecture investigation and, in part, influenced by the best traditions of the "School of Porto".

Jean-Pierre Porcher, Margarida Oliveira, Albino de Freitas and their collaborators present in this monograph a fascinating selection of houses placed more or less in outlying rural areas, where the traditional and trivialized pavilion typology gives rise to much more complex constructions, in which their individual microcosm coexist with the landscape hierarchies that range from the intimate domain to the topical representation, staged between one (only) apparent spontaneity and an underlying erudition.

Inhabiting the landscape whilst recycling the pre-existences implies, from the architects' logic, departure from a nature that even though had previously been anthropologically changed still serves as a reference, where the causes for this previous change disappear due to erosion or abandonment and, in such a manner, returning to the natural condition.

However, this pre-existing naturalism reveals anthropological features that will be invoked in the transformation that the project produces.

First of all, the very topographical condition, usually complex in most projects in which a slope plot is transformed by a soil architecture, stratified between retaining walls, whose materiality is carefully selected in a poetic and gravitational tectonics, establishing new relations between parts and predisposing them for other uses, generating diverse visual perspectives, assimilating or circumventing the existing green cover, promoting a genuine rearrangement of the site, where the very built pre-existences, emptied of its founders,

are reused, showing the remaining tectonics, now serving new typologies which will interlace with the additions, adjoining components of a new possibly unified perception in which the desire to create a kind of a new nature is notorious.

This remarkable ability to create artificially and step by step a new site, closing the cycle of an apparent naturalist continuance, as if the new house and its own context had always been there, is only demonstrable when the new typology is organized from the interface / garage, where the peripheral condition reflects the dependence on the car or in the outside of the pool, which, together with other signs, will gradually make the original production cycle landscape disappear in order to establish a strictly residential cycle more or less mediate.

The new house is a convergence microcosm, of assembly, of shelter, of exchanges, although its interiority strongly communicates with the outside world, absorbing and projecting it into another "nature" capable of being formally articulated and without violent ruptures with the precedent, taking a determined and decisive requalification.

An architecture that clearly indicates erudition and contemporaneity, in which the preferred references lay in the reminiscence of an essentialist modern movement, from Mies' transparent boxes to the neo-plastic laminated delimitations which are mitigated in the confrontation with the pre-existences, revealing certain erosion or even a contamination of more archaic materials, sometimes adapted, or even radically opposed.

A paradoxically radical architecture, to some extent in an abstracting reductionism, that coexists with the desire to find and establish roots in a precedent territory, somehow recognizable as a latent and identifiable memory.

It is not a question of exclusivist radicalism, but convergent and inclusive of a strong tectonics and environmental culture, that despite having lost their basis, is seen as a residue with unquestionable cargo of poetic tension.

It is very exciting to see how the house in Costa Nova, Ílhavo, seems to escape this naturalist logic, for specific constraints of the tight condition of a narrow and deep lot, caught between recently inflated and characterless interventions, remaining as an alternative tight void between two parallel streets, one of them with a sea-front, once formed by authentic haystacks of polychrome wood.

Still in this case, the formal effort shows a willingness to transform the land registry assessment of this plot, in its distant relation with the sea, internalizing it in the upper floors and raising the ground floor on pilots in order to make the old barn ubiquitous on this level, restored on both fronts and already integrated into the new group.

A profound consideration should be made in regard to an architecture in which the presence of the matter is decisive and revealing of a strong sensory intensity.

The coexistence of new materials such as simple plaster walls, the huge glass screens or zinc roofing live together with the "new-old" materials such as cor-ten steel or other "old-new" as the cornerstone of drought joint, the tropical wood, converging on a tactile, thermal, shining presence, where the alternation of lighting effects enhances overlapping textures, giving it a delightful, warm,

comfortable and creative density and habitableness.

These are obvious and fascinating places to dwell, an architecture to see and to be seen, to feel; an architecture for walking and measuring, but which is itself as a benchmark in the landscape.

An architecture, especially for the use and the affection for the fullness that is built in contact with the earth and in which the presence of discrete functions, overrides the size of normal life.