

# Designing with History: Intervention in Preexisting Buildings by Fernando Távora at the Dawn of the Third Way (1945-1962)

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*Fernando Távora, Portuguese Architecture, Adaptive Reuse, Heritage Buildings, Architectural Design*

## /Abstract

The period between 1945 and 1962 was extraordinarily productive for Fernando Távora, both in terms of theoretical reflection and architectural production. It is marked by the formulation and progressive practical implementation of the so-called third way. Despite the numerous studies on Távora's role in the Portuguese architectural scene during this period, the genesis of his thought and first experiences of architectural heritage intervention have not been thoroughly explored. Therefore, this paper aims to investigate a set of built and unbuilt works that were overlooked by previous publications, providing new perspectives on his early professional stages: *Casa de Carapeços* (1948), *Casa das Fidalgas* (1948-1954), *Casa da Foz* (Távora's own house, 1954), *Casa de Além* (1956), the project for *the Convento de Monchique* (1957), and the renovation of the *Casa da Igreja* (1958-1961). These lesser-known seminal designs illustrate the evolution of the new design principles and methodological guidelines that were matured and enhanced in subsequent renovation works, which gained greater attention and pedagogical value. These works also reveal the influence of other contemporary architects, echo the theories of relevant philosophers and demonstrate an attempt to apply the concepts articulated in Fernando Távora's own essays.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. Context

The period between 1945 and 1962 was incredibly fruitful for Fernando Távora, both in terms of theoretical reflection and architectural production, due to his receptivity and ability to synthesise a wide range of stimuli and influences that contributed to his intellectual maturity and professional development. As is well known, during this time he published the booklet *O problema da casa portuguesa* (1945 and 1947); he studied on his own through countless and varied readings; he participated involved in the dissemination of the Modern Movement and attended the *I Congresso Nacional de Arquitectura* (1948); he also attended the CIAM (1951-1959) and other modern architecture conferences (UIA, WoDeCo...); he met and was in contact with members of Team X and other relevant architects (Ernesto Rogers, Lúcio Costa, José A. Coderch, among others); he led one of the groups of the *Inquérito à arquitectura popular em Portugal* (1956-1961); he travelled throughout Portugal and Europe and even the world (1960); shortly after graduating as an architect from the Porto School of Fine Arts (1952), he began teaching at the same institution under the guidance of Carlos Ramos, supporting pedagogical renewal, promoting debate and encouraging his own reflection in texts such as *A lição das constantes* (1952) and *Da organização do espaço* (1962).

All this contributed to the theoretical foundation and, practical realisation of the so-called *third way*, that is, “an evolution of modern architecture with the capacity to identify with the tradition; a position that implied a certain distrust of some paths of modern architecture”<sup>1</sup>, in other words, “a new direction in Portuguese Architecture, quite different from the ‘rationalist’ and ‘outmoded’ paths being debated”.<sup>2</sup> This ambition was expressed in highly influential works such as the *Casa de Ofir* (1957-1958), the park and tennis pavilion at *Quinta da Conceição* (1956-1960) or the *Escola Primária de Cedro* (1957-1959).

In short, this stage encompasses a series of vital, academic and professional milestones of the utmost relevance on the Portuguese scene, which have been studied and disseminated in numerous publications on the architect, especially after his death in 2005. However, there are still some aspects of his multifaceted personality that could be explored in greater depth, namely the development of an approach to built heritage intervention.

The balance between the desire for innovation and the sensitivity to tradition is reflected in paradigmatic new buildings such as those mentioned above, but also in the renovation of old constructions. It is precisely in intervention

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<sup>1</sup> Javier Frechilla, “Fernando Távora. Conversaciones en Oporto”, *Arquitectura*, no. 261 (July-August 1986): 22-28.

<sup>2</sup> Fernando Távora, “Memória de ante-projecto. Escola Primária de Cedro”, in José António Bandeirinha, *Fernando Távora. Modernidade permanente* (Guimarães: Associação Casa da Arquitectura, 2012), 232.

designs that the search for a synthesis between apparently antagonistic concepts – past and present, tradition and avant-garde, local and global – takes on greater force and expressiveness. The ex-novo projects address these issues by evoking tradition through materials, spaces and forms reminiscent of vernacular architecture. In the renovation projects, however, this counterpoint moves from the allegorical level to the concrete experience of manipulating historical material. Therefore, the problem is no longer to build modern architecture sensitive to tradition, but to adapt old buildings to new aesthetics, functions and requirements, while preserving cultural identity.

Távora's aim was to create a dialectical interweaving of the old and the new, break away from the dichotomy between Romantic principles and stylistic restoration, but also from the orthodox postulates of modernism. His intention was to imbricate contemporary creation in the architectural pre-existence, with the support of a profound knowledge of history. In fact, Távora was never interested in the debate on heritage intervention in the terms in which it was being developed. Although he was familiar with the theories of architectural conservation (Ruskin, Viollet-le-Duc, Giovanonni, Boito, etc.) he never felt committed to one position or another, nor he did uncritically accept international charters and recommendations. He chose a heterodox path, perhaps because these positions were based on the notion of heritage management as a kind of autonomous field of architecture, which prevented, directed, or limited the new creation. For him, any design, whether for a new building or a renovation, involved a transformation of a pre-existing context (be it an object or a space). It was therefore always a problem of creation, that had to be addressed on a case-by-case basis. As he stated, "the defence of heritage values is never a passive act of receiving and conserving, but a creative act of conceiving".<sup>3</sup> For this reason, there should not be an *architecture of heritage*, hence his criticism of *specialisms* – paraphrasing Ortega y Gasset<sup>4</sup> – and his firm defence of the architect as a "generalist specialist in architecture",<sup>5</sup> with a broad and integrative vision.

His innovative approach to architectural heritage design has had an enormous impact in Portugal. Works such as the restoration and conversion of the *Santa Marinha da Costa Convent* into a *Pousada* (1972-1985), the refurbishment of the *Casa da Rua Nova* (1983-1985), the renovation and extension of the *Museu Nacional Soares dos Reis* (1987-2001) or the restoration of the *Palácio do Freixo* (1996-2003), among others, are now considered as undisputed benchmarks. These works are guided by solid principles and modus operandi founded on theoretical reflection and experimental practices developed in the 1950s. Before the works with greater recognition and dissemination, there are a number of little-known seminal designs of great interest, as they show the

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3 Fernando Távora, "Memória descritiva", 1982, Plano geral de urbanização de Guimarães, Arquivo Fernando Távora, Fundação Instituto Marques da Silva, FIMS/FT/0207.

4 Távora invoked the Spanish philosopher José Ortega y Gasset, who, in chapter XII of his famous work *The Rebolt of the Masses* (1930), called "The Barbarism of Specialism", also criticised the narrowness of the specialist's field of vision, "who only knows well the small portion in which he is an active researcher".

5 Fernando Távora, "Encontro 'Para a Edifícios', entrevista por Manuel Mendes", in Fernando Távora, *"Minha casa". Uma porta pode ser um romance*, edited by Manuel Mendes (Porto: FIMS/FAUP, 2013), [C]1-24.

development of new principles and methodological guidelines that were later matured and enhanced.

## 1.2. Aims and Methodology

This paper aims to develop investigation on a set of built and unbuilt works designed by Fernando Távora that were overlooked by the previous studies, in order to provide new interpretations on the significance on his approach to architectural renovation. These are barely published or even unpublished projects, which individually may not be of the greatest relevance, but taken together they reveal the roots of his ideas about design in heritage buildings. This article intends to provide new perspectives on his early professional period in the mid-20th century, when the concepts of the third way emerged. It also seeks to highlight the influence of other contemporary architects (such as Le Corbusier, Lúcio Costa, Ernesto N. Rogers), to show the impact of some philosophers (Ortega y Gasset, Benedetto Croce, António Sardinha), and to examine how these works reflect the ideas contained in his own writings.

The period studied is therefore limited by the publication dates of the manifesto *O problema da casa portuguesa* (1945)<sup>6</sup> and the essay *Da organização do espaço* (1962)<sup>7</sup>. It was during this period that Távora was able to resolve his deep crisis of identity and creativity, give tangible form to his proposal for a third way (as an open solution to the crisis) and develop principles for intervention in pre-existing buildings. The selected case studies, presented in chronological order, are considered by the authors to be the most representative and illustrative of this evolution.

The methodology required a review of the literature on the subject, as well as extensive archival research in the architect's professional collection at the José Marques da Silva Foundation Institute (FIMS), complemented in other public archives. One of the main limitations is the scarcity of documentation on these early projects. This gap is filled by the collection of other sources, such as the oral testimonies of Távora's family, friends and collaborators who worked in his studio, which provide unique and original insights. In the case of completed projects, the buildings themselves constitute a fundamental resource, visited and exhaustively documented through architectural surveys, drawings and extensive photographic reports.

The following case studies are located in the broad geographical area of the Douro Litoral and Minho regions – with the exception the *Casa das Fidalgas* – and were developed within the time span between 1948 and 1961. The analysis is based on archival documentation and on the interpretation of the design

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<sup>6</sup> Fernando Távora, "O problema da casa portuguesa", *Aléo*, no. 9 (November 1945). This manifesto was later revised in *Cadernos de Arquitectura*, no. 1 (1947).

<sup>7</sup> Távora submitted the essay *Da Organização do Espaço* for the exams for Associate Professor in 1962. It was published in 1982, becoming a must-read text for incoming students at the FAUP. In this research, the consulted version was the Spanish edition: *Sobre la organización del espacio* (Universitat Politècnica de València / FIMS, 2014).

principles, framed within the wider context of Fernando Távora's personal research and career development. The design process is presented in chronological order, starting with the characterisation of the pre-existence, the interpretation of the design strategy, the examination of some relevant tectonic aspects and, finally, a brief allusion to critical repercussions.

## 2. INTERVENTIONS IN PRE-EXISTING BUILDINGS AT THE DAWN OF THE THIRD WAY

### 2.1. Hesitation and Oscillation in Távora's First Designs

Fernando Távora's last years at the School of Architecture (ESBAP), in the mid-1940s, were marked by the discovery of modern art, Picasso and Pessoa, but especially Le Corbusier, who emerged as a dazzling figure for his personality and extraordinary creative capacity. But the interest in the avant-garde grew just as strongly as a conflict between his antagonistic identities: a solid home culture (classical art, historical architecture, the value of permanence in aristocracy, rurality...) and modern culture (functionalism, technology, the break with the past...). In Távora's own words, it was, "a crisis caused by a certain incompatibility between a rationalist formation and a familiar, ambient one; and also, in a certain way, with a temperament that did not adapt to that formation".<sup>8</sup>

To soothe this conflict of identity, he turned to books, looking for answers to the theoretical concerns that the EBAP neglected. It was not until some years later that this attempt to integrate modernism into ancient buildings was effectively achieved "an inability to express graphically, in terms of space, of Architecture".<sup>9</sup> Moreover, the multiplicity of references and languages provided by the eclectic training at the EBAP – with a solid academicist base, to which was added German and Italian fascist architecture, but also European rationalism and Brazilian modernism – caused great disorientation.<sup>10</sup> He himself stated that modernism in his education was presented from a stylistic point of view.<sup>11</sup> All this is reflected in the ambiguity of his beginnings as a designer, with a succession of projects of very different nature and unequal interest.

The fascination he felt for Le Corbusier is clearly reflected in his first unbuilt proposals, such as the *Casa da Rua do Vilar* (or *Casa de Alcinda Guimarães*, 1946) or the *Creche de Tomar* (1947), which are closely related to the classical principles of the Modern Movement. The preliminary urban plan of Campo Alegre (1949) and the *Unidade Residencial de Ramalde* (1952-1960), developed at the Planning Department of the City Council, followed the Athens Charter as well. Other interesting built projects, such as the *Grupo Residencial*

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<sup>8</sup> Fernando Távora, "Entrevista", *Arquitectura*, no. 123 (1971): 150-154.

<sup>9</sup> Távora, "Entrevista". See translation: Fernando Távora, "O meu caso" [diaristic text, 23/12/1944], in Fernando Távora, *Minha Casa* / *Prólogo*, edited by Manuel Mendes (Porto: FIMS, 2013), [C3]\_16-17.

<sup>10</sup> Távora, "Entrevista", 150-154.

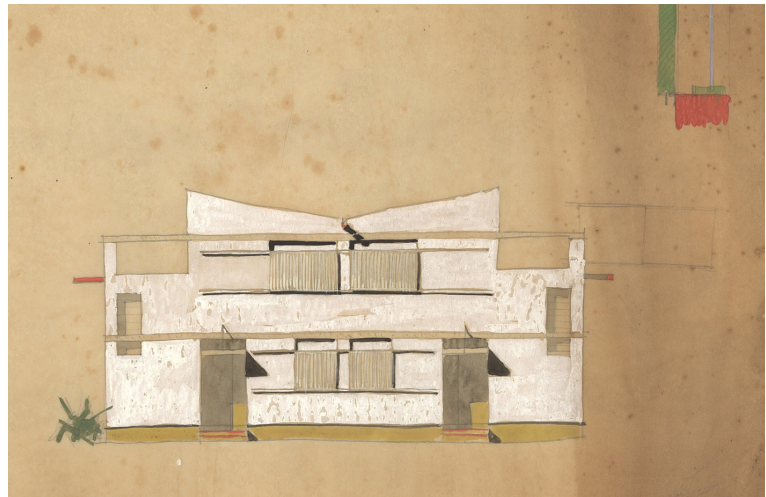
<sup>11</sup> Távora, "Entrevista", *Jornal de Letras* (24/5/1988) at Bernardo José Ferrão, "Tradição e modernidade na obra de Fernando Távora 1947/1987", in Luis Trigueiros, ed., *Fernando Távora* (Lisboa: Blau, 1993), 23-46.

dos Armazenistas de mercearias (1952-1953), the *Bloco de habitações na Avenida de Brasil* (1952-1954) also show a strong attachment to the Modern Movement.

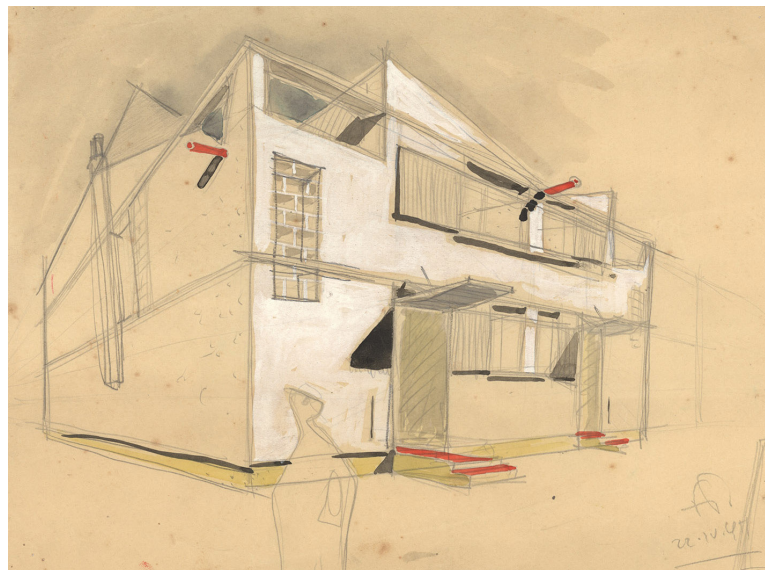
Committed to renewing Portuguese architecture, Távora began to reflect on the application of modern design in pre-existing buildings. This was suggested, albeit experimentally, in the sketches for the *Casa Bernardo Távora* (1951) in Anadia. According to Francesco dal Conte, this unrealised project consisted of the interior remodelling and the reconstruction of a façade of an existing house. In addition to the simplicity of the forms and volumes, Fernando Távora resorted to regulating lines to define the proportions of the new façade.<sup>12</sup> This design approach – as well as the drawing itself – is strongly influenced by the cubist experiences of Le Corbusier.<sup>13</sup> However, it was not until some years later that this attempt to integrate modernism into ancient buildings was effectively achieved. [Fig. 1, 2].

At the same time as these avant-garde projects, he also designed other modest works, without any apparent innovative formal pretensions, using conventional systems and materials from Távora's first documented project in the FIMS archive is the *Casa de Diogo Távora* (1946-1947),<sup>14</sup> a new house of which he himself admitted that its external appearance "do not have any stylistic intention".<sup>15</sup> It certainly does not show any relevant aspects beyond the conventions of the moment.

Shortly afterwards, he was commissioned to renovate and extend a farmhouse in Carapeços (1948), near Barcelos. The scarce documentation shows that the additions reproduce the forms and materials of the old house (built with masonry walls, timber-framed roof, traditional curved roof tiles, wooden joinery, traditional plastering, etc.). Not only did the young architect reject any



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<sup>12</sup> Francesco Dal Conte, "L'archivio Távora", in Antonio Espósito, Giovanni Leoni, *Fernando Távora, opera completa* (Milano: Electa, 2005), 337-339.

<sup>13</sup> Despite some drawings of this project being published in the aforementioned book, no information has been found in the architect's archive.

<sup>14</sup> Although Fernando Távora took on the role of designer, his first projects were developed under the responsibility of his elder brother, the civil engineer Bernardo Ferrão.

<sup>15</sup> Fernando Távora, "Memória descritiva" da Casa Diogo Távora, 1946, Arquivo Fernando Távora, Fundação Instituto Marques da Silva, FIMS/FT/0001-pe, fl.2.

Fig. 1, 2

*Casa Bernardo Távora*. Study drawings by Fernando Távora, 1951, published in: Antonio Espósito and Giovanni Leoni, *Fernando Távora, opera completa* (Milano: Electa, 2005): 290.



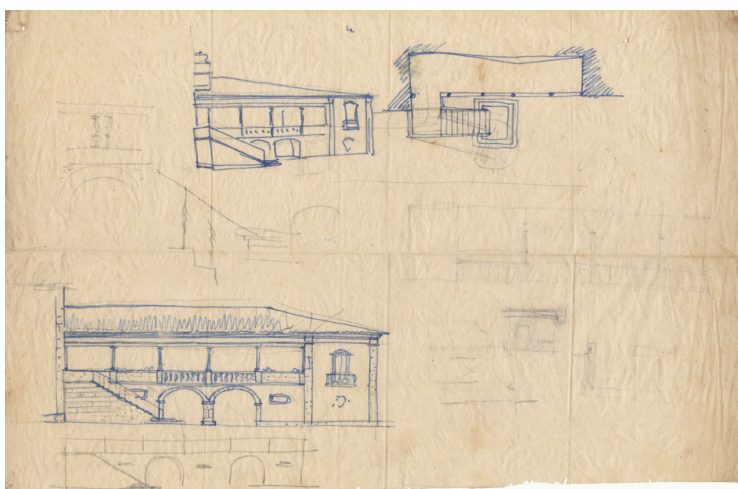
contemporary gesture, but he also intended the extension to mimic the pre-existence, as stipulated in the contract documents (special conditions for the mason):

...the walls and foundations will be built with the dimensions and appearance of the existing ones, so that the new part cannot be distinguished from the existing construction. The greatest care must be taken in the execution of this clause, especially with regard to corners, thresholds, lintels and openings in existing walls.<sup>16</sup>

## 2.2. Permanence in Classicism: Casa das Fidalgas (1948-1954)

The project that perhaps best represents this conservative facet of Fernando Távora's early career is the addition of a new veranda to the *Casa das Fidalgas*. The renovation of this 17th and 18th century manor house was his first significant intervention in historic architecture. However, he was already very used to this type of building, as his family owned several stately homes and he had been interested in discovering their history and forms since childhood.<sup>17</sup>

Much of the documentation on this work consists of the correspondence between the young Távora and the owner of the house, the engineer Pedro Brum da Silveira Pinto, who was probably a friend of the family. The letters reveal a shared interest in Portuguese history, art and architecture,<sup>18</sup> as well as providing information on the chronology and circumstances of the design process. Távora visited the house for a few days in early 1948 to make a schematic survey, and over the course of several years Pedro da Silveira asked him for successive designs and alterations, which the architect followed up by letter [Fig. 3]. The work was extensive: the roof was replaced, some of the interiors were renovated, and a veranda was added to the façade facing the garden.



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<sup>16</sup> Fernando Távora, "Caderno de encargos (condições gerais e condições especiais)", 1948, Casa de Carapeços, Arquivo Fernando Távora, Fundação Instituto Marques da Silva, FIMS/FT/0005-pe, fl. 1-5.

<sup>17</sup> "...my mother had three or four old houses, (...) when I was 12 years old, I used to go to a house in Minho that had a tower, but there was also a house in the south that no had no tower and was a horizontal house. Our house was horizontal. All of that got me hooked on [wondering about] the reason for things". Fernando Agrasar, "Entrevista con Fernando Távora", in Ana Domínguez Laíño (ed.), *Fernando Távora* (Coruña: C.O.A.G., 2002), 12-13. See also: Fernando Távora, "Encontro para a *Edifícios*; entrevista por Manuel Mendes", in Fernando Távora, *"Minha casa"*. *Uma porta pode ser um romance*, edited by Manuel Mendes (Porto: FIMS, 2013), [C]1-24.

The architect's recently published texts and drawings reflect that the architecture of manor houses was a constant theme of research and drawing in the 1940s. Távora sketched typological classifications of the wide variety of solutions according to morphological schemes and based on the composition, decoration and characteristics of their elements. See: Fernando Távora, *As raízes e os frutos, palavra, desenho, obra (1937-2001)*. *'O meu caso' Arquitectura, imperativo ético do ser 1937-1947*, edited by Manuel Mendes, tomo I.I, (Porto: FIMS/FAUP, 2020).

<sup>18</sup> For example, in one of the letters he sent to Távora, Silveira included some drawings of a very specific moulded handrail and a sculptural finial of a 17th century staircase of the *Paço dos Condes-Duques* de Barcelos, which he wanted to reproduce in the house. See: "Correspondence sent by Pedro da Silveira to Fernando Távora", Casa das Fidalgas, Arquivo Fernando Távora, Fundação Instituto Marques da Silva, FIMS/FT/0058-pe.

Fig. 3

*Casa das Fidalgas*. Study drawings for the new veranda, ca. 1948 (FIMS/AFT, ref. 0058-0006).

The correspondence suggests that the owner played a very active role in the design, as evidenced by successive corrections to the sketches: "...I would prefer [the veranda] with only two arches, two side doors, six vaults, seven columns and the central railing replaced by stone".<sup>19</sup> Both Távora's drawings and the client's appraisals reflect that they intended a design inspired by the existing verandas in the area, which they had visited and even surveyed.<sup>20</sup> Indeed, these open-air galleries are found in many 17th and 18th century Baroque palaces in northern Portugal, so this addition would "complete" and "perfect" the existing building, approaching an ideal model and also seeking a dialogue with the veranda of the neighbouring *Palácio de Santar*. The work was still in progress in 1954, when Silveira asked the architect for detailed solutions, questioning for the exact dimensions and proportions of the colonnade with reference to the classical models ("If you have the Vignola there, please see the *vera-efigie* of the Tuscan Order"<sup>21</sup>).

In this work, Fernando Távora adopted a traditionalist position, contrary to the ideas he had recently expressed in the essay *O problema da casa portuguesa* (1945 and 1947). He integrated the veranda into the mannerist aesthetic, refusing to introduce any architectural expression associated with Modernism. It is not clear whether this choice was due to the hesitation at the beginning of his career, or whether it was a deliberate attempt to achieve a homogeneous old image of the building.<sup>22</sup> It is important to bear in mind that the intervention of the owner could also have a strong influence on the design and the result. It should not be ignored that Távora grew up in the context of aristocratic society and was therefore marked by a kind of cult of the past.

Whatever the case, the young Távora assumed the role of a Baroque architect. In a way, this exercise in revivalism anticipates the Violletian approach he would later adopt in some works practised later, which consisted of recreating the forms and atmospheres of historical architecture. The architect himself joked with his colleagues at the *Convento da Costa* when he decided to rebuild an old staircase: "we will be better Baroque architects than the Baroque architects";<sup>23</sup> he also said ironically that "the people who built it didn't know how, and I did it much

<sup>19</sup> Casa das Fidalgas, Arquivo Fernando Távora, Fundação Instituto Marques da Silva, FIMS/FT/0058-pe, 4 July 1948, fl. 67-68.

<sup>20</sup> "We went to see the verandas around here and the beautiful veranda of the Misericórdia of Mangualde, whose spans range from 1.55, 1.82 and 2.15m. I must therefore ask you to please send me another sketch as soon as possible, with seven columns and six spans of 2.5m each". Casa das Fidalgas, Arquivo Fernando Távora, Fundação Instituto Marques da Silva, FIMS/FT/0058-pe, 22 July 1948, fl. 64.

<sup>21</sup> Casa das Fidalgas, Arquivo Fernando Távora, Fundação Instituto Marques da Silva, FIMS/FT/0058-pe, 16 August 1954, fl. 10-11.

<sup>22</sup> The reconstruction of the *Palácio da Bacalhôa* (near Setúbal), which Fernando Távora visited in 1944, may have been a point of reference for this commission. This visit gave him great pleasure: "My impressions are the best. When [Mrs. Scoville] bought it, the house was in a miserable state. The main veranda had fallen down, the low arches were broken and scattered, the roofs and ceilings were all ruined and suffering the attacks of time. (...) The current owner has done a remarkable job there, furnishing the house with great taste, and always taking care to respect what was done by the primitive lords of Bacalhoa. The renovation of the three bathrooms – which the house certainly never had –, the spiral staircases, the kitchens, the oratory, has been very successful". Fernando Távora, diaristic text, 2/1/1944 (AP2-p. Notas/fl. 52v), in Távora, *As raízes e os frutos, palavra*, 369.

<sup>23</sup> Carlos Moura Martins, in conversation with the authors (Porto, 3 September 2019). See: David Ordóñez-Castañón, Eleonora Fantini, "Conversa com Carlos Martins", in Teresa Ferreira, David Ordóñez Castañón, Eleonora Fantini, ed., *Novo/Antigo. Fernando Távora: conversas* (Porto: FAUP/FIMS/Afrontamento, 2023), 84-105.



better”.<sup>24</sup> His friend Sérgio Fernandez tells another similar anecdote, which happened after visiting the palaces of Santar (several years after the project). When Fernandez later met Távora, he said to him: “I went to see a very beautiful manor house, that had a fantastic veranda...”; to which Távora replied: “I appreciate your words very much! That 17th century veranda was made by me!”<sup>25</sup>

This ability to design new classical architecture demonstrates a deep knowledge of history of art and construction. When he began designing the Santar veranda, at the age of 24, he was already an expert on Portuguese art and architecture. At the time, he had a varied and extensive collection of books that he had carefully read, and he had also acquired first-hand knowledge of historical buildings thanks to travelling since childhood with family friends and his father (an art enthusiast who took him to visit churches and palaces all over the country).<sup>26</sup>

This work is certainly not the most representative of Fernando Távora’s best known architecture, as he avoided innovation and designed the new element as it could have been made in the 17th century. Perhaps for that reason this project has not been included in any of the main publications on the architect. It is, however, a great example of his ability to get on with the architectural languages of the past, a skill he would continue to exercise occasionally afterwards.<sup>27</sup>

Pedro da Silveira, a staunch monarchist, died without issue in 1978 and left the *Casa das Fidalgas* to the head of the Portuguese royal house. Dom Duarte de Bragança, Duke of Viseu, lived in the house for many years until he gave it to the Santar Vila Jardim project. The building has recently undergone a major refurbishment to become a luxury hotel and spa.

### 2.3. A Bridge between Past and Future: Casa Fernando Távora (1954)

In the above cases, the commitment to modernity and the continuity in tradition followed separate and unconnected paths. Hence the renovation of the house in Rua Senhora da Luz represents a step forward in achieving a *third way*, a successful attempt to combine in the same building the preservation of the character of the old residence with the introduction of a more contemporary expression. What had to be made anew is neither mimicked in the old forms, nor is it conceived as a modern mask alien to what existed before. Modern design was palpable, but however limited to small, almost surgical operations, since the priority was to maintain the type-morphological matrix of the existing building.

This house, located at the seaside in Foz do Douro, with private access to the beach, was one of the villas built at the end of the 19th century to accommodate

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24 Sérgio Fernandez, in conversation with the authors (Porto, 5 August 2019). See: David Ordóñez-Castañón, “Conversa com Sérgio Fernandez”, in Teresa Ferreira, David Ordóñez Castañón, Eleonora Fantini, ed., *Novo/Antigo. Fernando Távora: conversas* (Porto: FAUP/FIMS/Afrontamento, 2023), 42-59.

25 Ordóñez-Castañón, “Conversa com Sérgio Fernandez”.

26 Numerous youthful drawings and writings on Portugal’s historical architecture have been published in Távora, *As raízes e os frutos, palavra, desenho, obra (tomo I.I)*.

27 Another representative example is the neoclassical gate in Rua da Rainha Dona Estefânia, Porto, designed in 1970-71.



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the bourgeois families of Porto, who went to the coast for sea bathing. This fashion began at that time due to the spread of its medicinal benefits. The building corresponds to the common typology of a holiday rental house, with two floors, a central staircase and a corridor that runs along the building, giving access to several bedrooms. Fernando Távora inherited the house from his “Aunt Maria José”, whom he often visited during his childhood, taking advantage of the peace and inspiration of the sea to read, write and draw, so the building had a great emotional value for him.

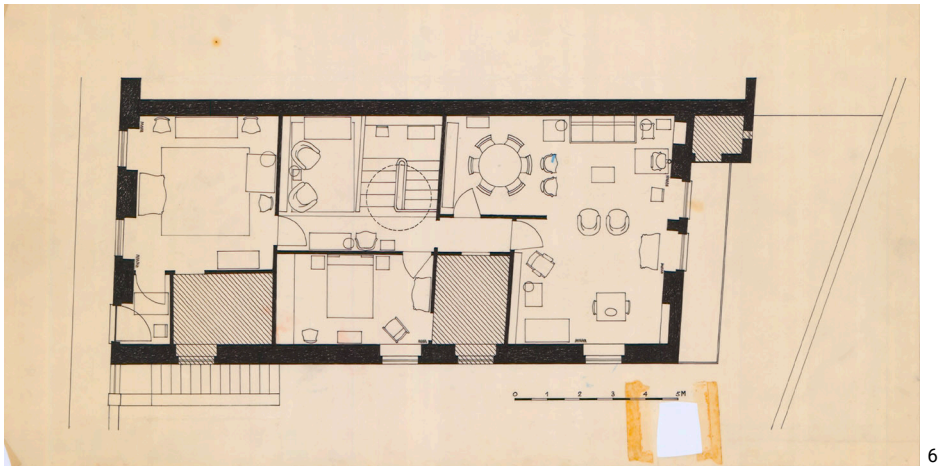
He undertook the first works in the early 1950s, and moved there permanently in 1954, after marrying Maria Luisa Menéres. The house was transformed at different times as new demands and economic possibilities emerged. In this sense, the architect himself considered it a “living organism”, flexible enough to adapt to changes within the family. Works were developed with only a few schematic sketches; instructions were given directly to the workers on site and common building materials and systems were used [Fig. 4, 5]. The aim was to maintain almost everything that existed: “the old windows and shutters,

Fig. 4

*Casa Fernando Távora*. Drawing of the west elevation (FIMS/AFT, ref. 0023-0003).

Fig. 5

*Casa Fernando Távora*. View of the north façade, 2007 (Luís Ferreira Alves, courtesy of José Bernardo Távora).



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the doors and trim, the floors, the staircase with its handrail”,<sup>28</sup> with punctual repairs where necessary, which go unnoticed, promoting a balance between the preservation of the “old meat” and the essential modern solutions.

One of these contemporary updates is the skylight that illuminates the staircase. Moreover, some partitions were removed to create larger rooms and a more open and fluid space, emphasizing a path that goes from the entrance over the street (“cold and noisy”) towards the common room in the back (“warm, bright and opening over the sea”) [Fig. 6]. Fernando Távora installed his first library and workspace in this room, so he designed a new frame for the window next to his desk (“the window of a lifetime”, according to his son), composed of two fixed panes of glass, in order to get more light and a better view. At the same time, he closed one of the windows facing the sea to avoid the unstable light from the west, and placed the showcase displaying his collection of ivoires in the niche thus created.

Indeed, the interior, the architect’s “physical and spiritual refuge”, faithfully reflects his varied vital and intellectual interests. Thus, although the house had only the basics when he arrived, it was gradually filled with a remarkable art collection, which combines ancient pieces (sculptures, tapestries, alabasters, porcelains, etc.) with some more contemporary ones, such as paintings by Júlio Resende. The eclecticism of this collection reflects his strong impulse to reconcile a firm anchorage in traditions and the need to seek a current sense in the avant-garde expressions, “just a bridge between past and future”.<sup>29</sup> In the same way, the furniture is a relaxed mix of old pieces (Renaissance, Baroque, Neoclassical) with others of modern design, such as the lamps by Álvaro Siza and other pieces designed by Távora himself, such as the sofa in the living room, or the dining room table and chairs. This diachronic interior design also demonstrates the architect’s interest and identification with the artistic manifestations of the Portuguese people throughout history, as well as confirming that the value given to the objects is not mainly based on their antiquity, but on their

<sup>28</sup> Fernando Távora, Maria Luísa Menéres, “Uma casa na Foz do Douro”, *Arquitectura & Decoração*, no. 6 (1969): 47-53.

<sup>29</sup> Távora, Menéres, “Uma casa na Foz do Douro”.

Fig. 6

Casa Fernando Távora. Plan (FIMS/AFT, ref. 0023-0001).



“authenticity and quality”, regardless of the as well as in which they were produced (an interpretation that can be directly extrapolated to his way of understanding the intervention in the architectures of the past) [Fig. 7, 8].

In summary, this modest renovation displays some of the characteristics of a personal *modus operandi* that would mature in subsequent renovations with greater impact. This house, in common with the later houses in Briteiros and Pardelhas, reflects: a subtle Modernism manifested in cautious gestures, an interior adapted to new lifestyles, respect for the typology, the use of traditional materials and the slow development of works, performed by local workers almost without any project drawings (what he would later call *cane architecture*<sup>30</sup>). Despite its interest, this work had no significant presence in subsequent monographs and studies on Távora. It is worth mentioning, however, a complete report in an issue of the magazine *Arquitetura & Decoração* in 1969, which focused on the houses of several renowned Portuguese architects<sup>31</sup>. Fernando Távora lived in this house until his death. It has recently undergone significant alterations.



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#### 2.4. “Continuity is Interesting when it is Verified”: Casa de Além (1956)

Shortly after the delicate transformation of his own house, Távora renovated another family house in Santo Estêvão de Barrosas (Lousada) for his in-laws. Although he followed the same guidelines of respect for the old, he carried out some daring modern operations that initially caused astonishment in the family, as they were considered too transgressive.

The *Casa de Além* was a small agricultural complex, comprising a house, a yard and outbuildings (the dryland, the caretaker’s house, the stables). The history of the estate is linked to one of the lineages of the Pachecos of Santo

30 Álvaro Siza explains the meaning of this concept: “In Portugal we use the expression *arquitectura de bengala* (cane architecture) to describe the way in which lines are drawn on the ground with a cane to make something clear. This was a common practice in the past, and I even used it myself to make myself understood in the building site”. Juan Domingo Santos, “El sentido de las cosas (una conversación con Álvaro Siza)”, *El Croquis*, no. 140 (2008): 6-62.

31 Távora, “Uma casa na Foz do Douro”, 47-53.

Fig. 7, 8

*Casa Fernando Távora*. Photographs of the interior of Fernando the house: passage room and living room, respectively (Gustavo Leitão, published in *Arquitetura & Decoração*, no. 6 1969, 47, 51).

Estêvão de Barrosas, whose genealogy is well documented.<sup>32</sup> Although the original construction may date back to 1527, a simple reading of the walls allows us to distinguish several phases. Different landlords commissioned expansions and remodelling along the 17th and 18th centuries, as evidenced by the epigraphic remains.<sup>33</sup>

The house consists of a compact and robust two floor volume, built with large granite blocks in sight and with few openings (of a square proportion and small size). The lower floor housed the cellar and the stables, being now an ample space where the kitchen and the living room are located. The dwelling itself occupied the upper floor, accessed through a porch attached to the east façade [Fig. 9, 10]. The housing includes a main room, two bedrooms and a bathroom. The wooden ceiling of the room, the carved wooden furniture, the façade of the yard, the ornate hardware or the slightly decorated porch columns are signs of social distinction of a humble rural gentry even if proud of its lineage. Were it not for these small ornamental motifs, the *Casa de Além* would be nothing more than a farmhouse dedicated to the cultivation of maize and livestock, similar to many others described in the *Inquérito à Arquitectura Popular em Portugal*, in which “there is not the slightest ostentation, on the contrary, everything is measured by the canons of a sober and dignified life, that extends in gestures, habits and markedly rustic objects”.<sup>34</sup>



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When the works began the house was quite deteriorated, particularly the roof. However, the walls, floors and wooden ceilings had resisted and were in a good condition, so they could be preserved. Thus, the volume, the main structures and the exterior appearance of the house remained almost unchanged, and it was inside that the greatest transformations took place. The desire for continuity – to maintain the environment of a humble but proud nobility – manifests itself in the upper floor, where the old atmosphere of the noble house was preserved

<sup>32</sup> Abílio Pacheco de Carvalho, *Pachecos: subsídios para a sua genealogia* (Lisboa: Editora Gráfica Portuguesa, 1985).

<sup>33</sup> Manuel Nunes & Paulo Lemos, “O livro ‘Pachecos’: contributos genealógicos para a arqueologia de Santo Estêvão de Barrosas (Lousada)”, *Lousada. Revista da Câmara Municipal de Lousada*, no. 133 (2015): 21-25.

<sup>34</sup> Associação dos Arquitectos Portugueses, *Arquitectura Popular em Portugal* (Lisboa: Associação dos Arquitectos Portugueses, 2017 [1961]), 43.

Fig. 9, 10

*Casa de Além*. North façade and veranda (photo by David Ordóñez-Castañón).



and enhanced. Most of the original elements were preserved (such as the floors and wooden ceilings, the old doors and shutters, and even the baroque furniture). The changes made and the new elements, although with simplified lines, maintain the colour and materiality so as not to subvert the character of the space [Fig. 11].

This claim of continuity is manifested in one of the rare comments published on the work. The architect refers, on the one hand, to his awareness of the historical significance of the house and, on the other, to the satisfaction he enjoys from continuing with traditional techniques and labor. Távora is pleased with the fact that the work was carried out by artisans who inherited the knowledge, and even the blood, of those who intervened in the works centuries before:

...Many years ago, I made a house for my in-laws, one of the first things I did after I got married in 1954, which had been built by a mason, called Monteiro [...]. They were houses that had originated in a subdivision of the community in the seventeenth-eighteenth centuries. They were very small houses. Really, the man, the work he did, represented several generations of masons. So I had there as foreman a guy who was probably a great-great-great-grandson of the guy who had built the house. So this is real continuity and it is quite interesting when it happens, is it not? Continuity or even unrecognized capabilities, often even not conscious.<sup>35</sup>

On the other hand, the ground floor underwent a radical transformation to create a domestic space according to the use and way of life of a new time. This is reflected in the unitary conception of space – an indisputable feature of the Modern Movement –, instead of traditional atomization, thus providing a greater sense of amplitude in this limited area, although suggesting fragmentation in various ways. The living area, the dining area and the kitchen are individualized by their topographic treatment, the arrangement of the furniture or their delimitation through low walls [Fig. 12].

In this context, there is an attractive contrast between the old materials and some elements of modern expression that indicate the contemporaneity of the design, such as the white and smooth volumes that define the sofa or delimit the kitchen. The fireplace – which was not executed – would also contribute



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Fig. 11

*Casa de Além*. Main room of the upper floor, which conserves the original shutters and wooden cupboards (photo by David Ordóñez-Castañón).

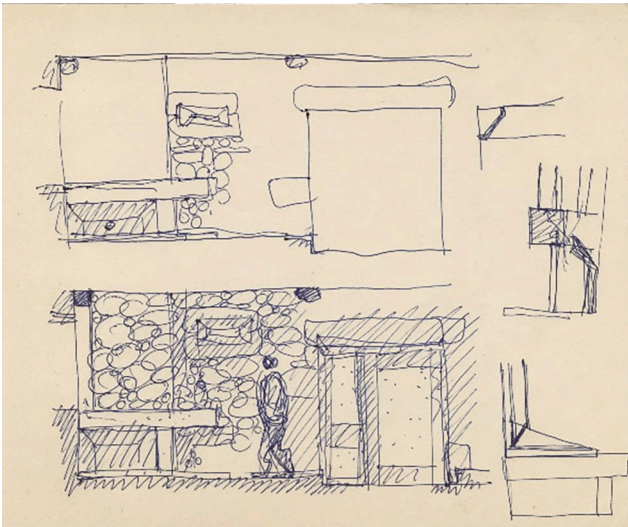
<sup>35</sup> João Leal, "Encontro 'Fernando Távora sobre o Inquérito à Arquitectura Popular em Portugal'", in Fernando Távora, *"Minha casa". Uma porta pode ser um romance*, edited by Manuel Mendes Porto: FIMS/FAUP, 2013): [O]1-20.



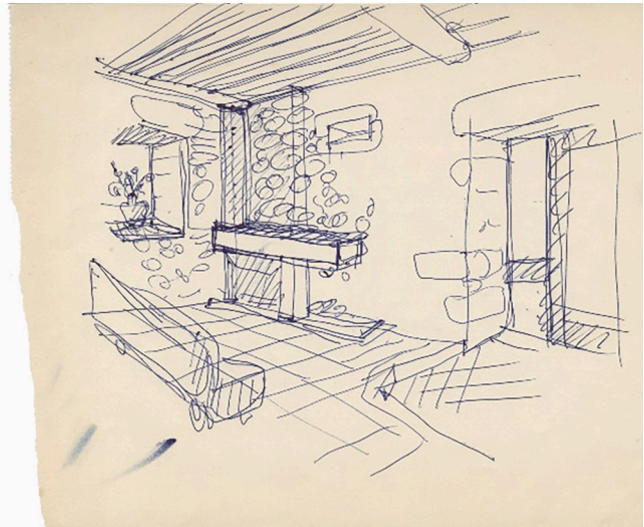


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to this contrapuntal relationship between new and old, as shown in the various sketches in which the architect studies several alternatives, seeking the right proportions and contrast between the white and smooth surfaces of the fireplace and the roughness of the masonry walls [Fig. 12, 13]. Moreover, as we



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have seen in the previous case, there is a relaxed mix of antique furniture with various pieces of avant-garde design – including two chairs of the Diamond series,<sup>36</sup> conceived in 1953 by Harry Bertoia –, as well as a sculptural spiral interior staircase connecting the two floors. Regarding the old doors and shutters, the architect overlapped a new exterior sheet, composed of a single large glazed panel mounted on a sturdy wooden frame painted of an intense red (originally

<sup>36</sup> This iconic chair represented cover of *Domus* magazine in May 1956, when the house was being renovated, and represented an innovation for its lightness and unique shape based on welded steel rods, a technique hitherto unusual in the production of comfort furniture. This piece, ethereal and delicate, contrasts with the heavy solid wooden furniture of the traditional house.

Fig. 12

*Casa de Além*. Casa de Além, ground floor (photo by David Ordóñez-Castañón).

Fig. 13, 14

*Casa de Além*. Fireplace studies, 1956 (FIMS/AFT, ref. 0065-pd0001 and 0065-pd0002).



with white rims). This practical solution enables the interior to be illuminated, protecting the original carpentry from the weather, retaining heat and bringing some freshness to the image of the building. With this eye-catching tonality, Távora manages to highlight the modernity of the intervention [Fig. 15].

In this approach to a “modern vernacular” the reference to Le Corbusier seems to be present again. Recall the set of houses designed in the early 1930s, such as the *Maison Mandrot* (1929-1932) or the *Maison Errazuriz* (1930), in which the rough aspect of traditional materials is combined with the sophistication of modern construction systems, the transparency of the glazed spans and the rationalist compositional grammar. This reference can also be filtered by Alfredo Viana de Lima, the most corbusian of the architects of Porto (with whom Távora went to the CIAM) and who also carried out in this period some intervention works in a rural context, such as the *Casa Dr. Olívio França* (São Pedro, Vila Verde, 1952) or the *Casa das Marinhas* (Marinhas, Esposende, 1953-1957). In fact, the original two-tone treatment of the carpentries of the *Casa de Além* can be related to the play of colours in Viana de Lima’s house.

Despite the introduction of contemporary systems and materials, this work displays careful repair of pre-existing elements, as shown by the delicate grafts performed on the old doors, the introduction of structural reinforcements or the replacement of deteriorated rafters. Thus, this work is halfway between the philological conservation of pre-existence and formal innovation. Távora rehearses here a creative relationship between the new and the old, combining the insertion of modern elements with the preservation of the house’s identity so as to overcome the traditional separation between new construction and restoration. Notwithstanding the undoubted interest of this renovation, it was not reviewed in other publications about the architect, nor did he himself endeavour to disseminate it.

Fig. 15

*Casa de Além*. Photograph taken in August 1972, showing the original colours of the window frames, painted white and red (FIMS/AFT, ref. 0065-foto0002).

## 2.5. Superimposed Modernism: Convento de Monchique (1957)

The bold gestures made in the *Casa de Além* anticipate other intervention projects in which modernity was introduced in a much more assertive manner, but not without profound respect for the spirit of the pre-existence. At the beginning of 1957, Fernando Távora drew up a preliminary project for the reconstruction of a ruined convent in Porto. The *Convento da Madre de Deus de Monchique* was made up of a series of constructions dating from the 15th, 16th and 17th century,<sup>37</sup> distributed around a central courtyard, with some remarkable pieces, such as the chapel portal, a Manueline portal and the main body of the convent, which held the refectory and the monks' cells. Despite its great heritage value, the whole complex was in a poor state of repair and had been converted for industrial use.

The project involved the transformation of the main wing into a group of dwellings for workers of different types and sizes. Távora was faced here with the issue of adaptive reuse of buildings of high significance, a challenge he met with great sensitivity at a time when heritage preservation was not a major priority. The architect himself considered this commission as tempting as it was difficult: "tempting because it is, it can be said, an innovative work in a building that is worthy of the greatest interest; difficult, because it is a matter of adapting an old building, with very specific characteristics that should be preserved, to a new function".<sup>38</sup>

The apartments would be arranged transversely, served by external concrete galleries supported on corbels anchored to the existing walls. The sanitary facilities would be concentrated along the former central corridor of the building, freeing up the external space to facilitate light and views to the outside [Fig. 16, 17]. In this way, most of the existing openings would be preserved, and the few new ones would correspond to old built-in cupboards, (where there were already niches in the wall), with "dimensions that do not in any way detract from the spirit of the existing layout".<sup>39</sup>

Indeed, this project foresees the importance that the comprehensive study of the past of the buildings would have in Fernando Távora's subsequent works. In the project report, the architect states that knowledge of the entire history of the convent was".<sup>40</sup>

This interesting document also reflects his concern to restore the typological clarity of the building complex, removing, if necessary, any spurious construction that prevent a proper appreciation of the whole and the understanding of the historical processes. In this case, the general plan suggested "a dream that the authors could not hide: the reconstruction of the old courtyard of the Convent,

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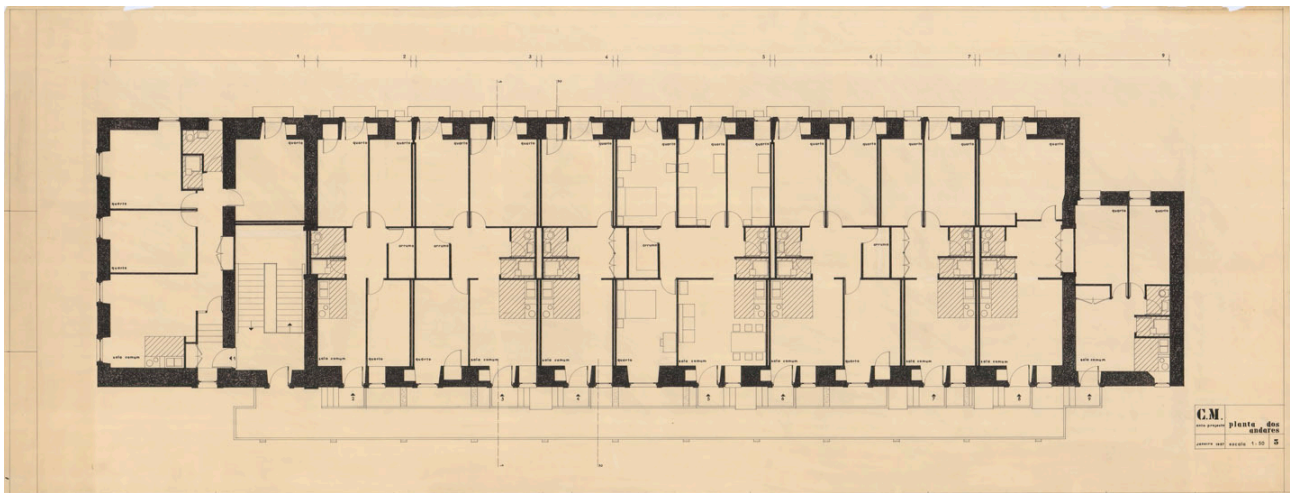
37 Tiago Trindade Cruz, "Património e Desenho Digital Metodologias e abordagens aplicadas ao convento de Monchique no Porto (a ruína, o demolido e o transformado)" (PhD Thesis, Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto, 2022).

38 Fernando Távora, "Memória descritiva", 1957, Anteprojecto de recuperação e adaptação do Convento de Monchique, Arquivo Fernando Távora, Fundação Instituto Marques da Silva, FIMS/FT/0039-pe, fl. 9-13.

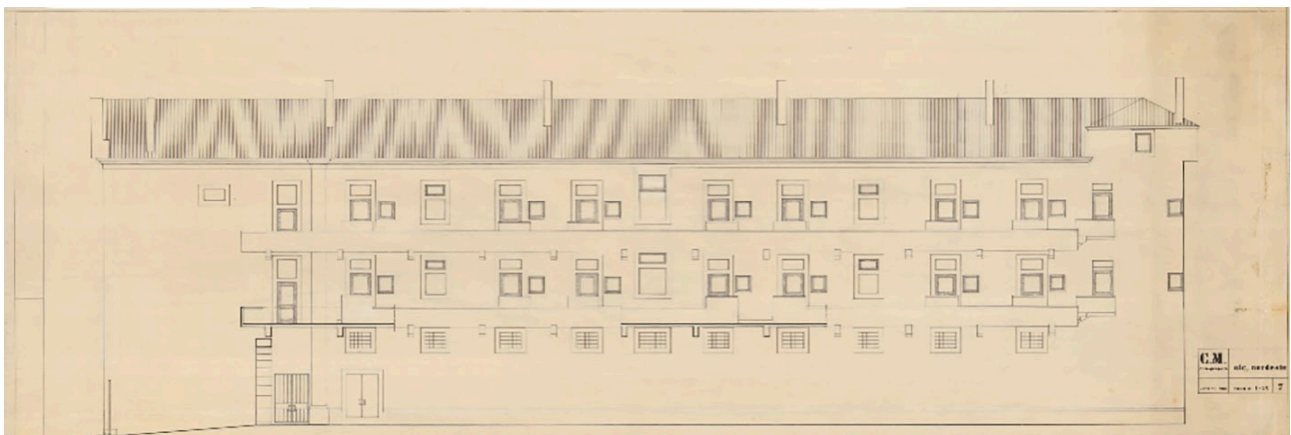
39 Távora, "Memória descritiva".

40 Távora, "Memória descritiva".





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with the Chapel in the background and a fountain in the centre, a reconstruction that poses the main difficulty, but is perfectly solvable, of demolishing the warehouses that currently occupy the surface of the same courtyard”.<sup>41</sup>

Thus, the architect argues that his choices are aimed at restoring the coherence of the monastic complex with the greatest respect for the existing structure, but at the same time, the proposed solutions respond to a language of strong modern affiliation. This is clearly visible in the northeast façade, which is superimposed by the new, markedly horizontal external corridor. In addition, the openings that were formerly covered by square windows would be enclosed by large panes of glass [Fig. 18].

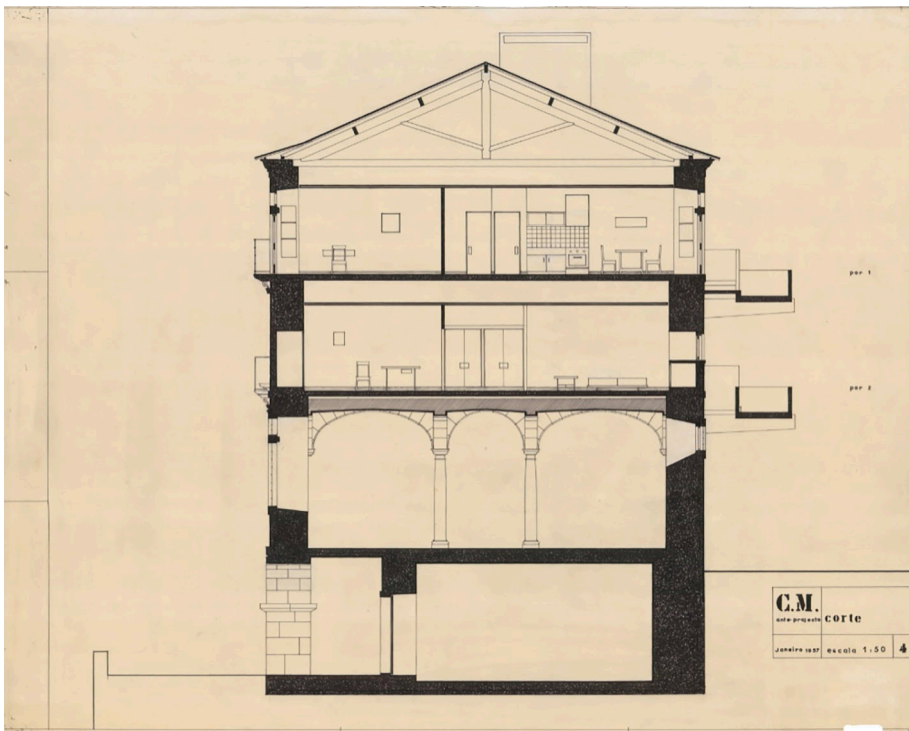
Moreover, while the spatial integrity of the old refectory was to be preserved, the upper floors – where, the old cells had already been lost – were to be deeply renovated. The work was to be extensive due to the state of conservation and the requirements of the new function. This meant that only the outer walls and some of the inner walls could be preserved.

Although this project was never completed and has not been included in any relevant publication on the architect, it represents an interesting precedent for other cases of adaptive reuse of monastic buildings by Fernando Távora, some

Fig. 16, 17

*Convento de Monchique. Plan and elevation of the preliminary project, 1957 (FIMS/AFT, ref. 0039-pd0003 and 0039-pd0007).*

41 Távora, “Memória descritiva”.



of them with such impact and importance and significance as the *Pousada da Costa* (1972-1989) and the *Escola Agrícola de Refóios de Lima* (1986-1993).

## 2.6. “A Healthy Restoration Criterion”: Casa da Igreja (1958-1961)

Following a similar approach, the renovation of the *Casa da Igreja*, in Mondim de Basto, brings together a set of design principles outlined in the previous works. This work, contemporary with other paradigmatic projects by the architect such as the Ofir House and the Cedro School, represents a firm step towards the materialisation of the sought-after third way, which aims to reconcile seemingly opposing concepts. In addition to this, Távora has sought to strike a balance between respect for the identity and main features of the old building with new requirements and an updated image. Even though this work has not been widely disseminated,<sup>42</sup> it represents a valuable experience from an important period in the career of the architect.

The *Casa da Igreja* [House of the Church] is a manorial estate from the last quarter of the eighteenth century, on the site of a previous construction dating back to 1575. The building is organized in an “L” shape, on a sloping plot. It has a partially buried floor and a noble, residential floor, accessible by a staircase from the front garden. In the main façade, the rhythmic arrangement of the spans

<sup>42</sup> This work has received little attention in architectural publications, except for a brief publication in a monographic issue edited by Nuno Portas, “Arquitecto Fernando Távora: 12 anos de actividade profissional”, *Arquitetura*, no. 71 (July 1961): 31. The authors have recently published several studies on this project: David Ordóñez-Castañón, Teresa Cunha Ferreira and Santiago Sánchez-Beitia, “Towards a new approach of architectural heritage intervention in Portugal: Fernando Távora and the refurbishment of the Casa da Igreja of Mondim de Basto (1958-1961)”, *WIT Transactions on the Built Environment*, no. 191 (2019): 187-198. <https://doi.org/10.2495/STR190161> See also David Ordóñez-Castañón, Teresa Cunha Ferreira, Santiago Sánchez-Beitia, “Adaptive reuse of manor houses: modernism and tradition in Fernando Távora’s approach for heritage renovation”, *International Journal of Sustainable Development and Planning*, no. 3 (2021): 569-578 <https://doi.org/10.18280/ijstdp.160318>.

Fig. 18

*Convento de Monchique*. Section of the preliminary project, 1957 (FIMS/AFT, ref. 0039-pd0004).



and the horizontality of the elevation (emphasized by the eaves) are interrupted to the center by the arch of the portal to where the doors to access the three parts in which the residence is divided open: the chapel (to the center), the main house (to the south) and the auxiliary or guest house (to the north). In front of the main elevation there is a small topiary garden, featuring several decorative forms carved in boxwood and camellias [Fig. 19]. This technique was popularized in the noble gardens of the Terras de Basto in the mid-nineteenth century through the influence of the Pinto Basto sisters, raised in England, who introduced the style of vegetable sculptures typical of the English gardens.<sup>43</sup> In contrast, the backyard was a functional space, in which several tasks of domestic service and other agricultural works were carried out.

Távora was well acquainted with the manorial architecture of the area, having spent some seasons there during his youth<sup>44</sup>, since his family maintained multiple bonds of kinship and friendship. In fact, there is a photograph from the 1940s showing a young Távora drawing the house. Years later, in 1958 – perhaps thanks to these bonds –, he was commissioned to renovate it.

The architect acknowledges having explored a model of intervention distinct from the usual, “a healthy criterion: neither denying the past nor intending to continue it by copying its forms”.<sup>45</sup> This statement expresses a resounding rejection of the stylistic restoration, which was still a common practice by the General Directorate of Buildings and National Monuments (which he himself practiced in previous works as shown in the *Casa das Fidalgas*). This sentence also recalls the claims expressed in the manifesto *O problema da Casa Portuguesa*, which refused the banal imitation of the past (the so-called “false architecture”). In this

43 Ilídio Alves de Araújo, “Jardins de Basto”, in *Guia de Portugal*, vol. IV. *Entre Douro e Minho* (Lisboa: Fundação Calouste Gulbenkian, 1964).

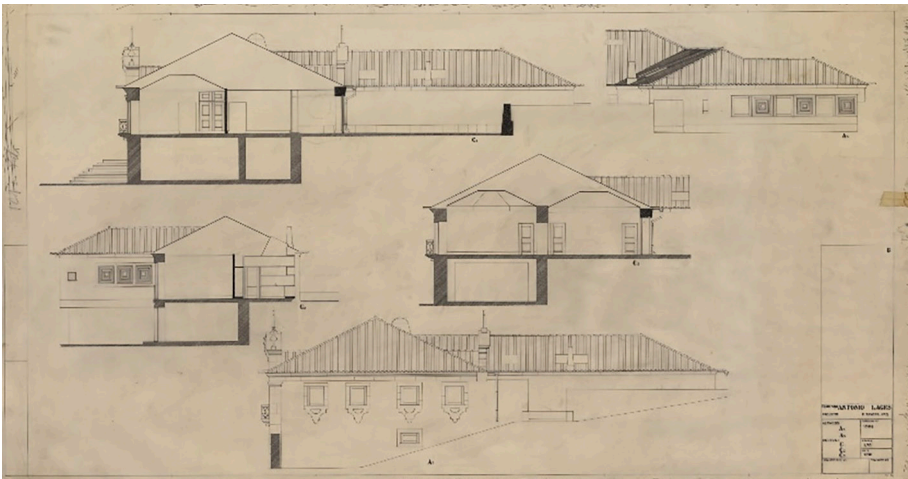
44 In October 1944 Fernando Távora stayed for several days at the *Casa da Boavista* in Celorico de Basto (owned by Manuel Osório de Aragão), where he spent time reading and visiting the area (taking notes and sketches of the ancestral homes in the region).

45 Fernando Távora, “Mondim de Basto: reconstrução da Casa da Igreja (1959-1961)”, *Arquitectura*, no. 71 (July 1961): 31.

Fig. 19

*Casa da Igreja*. Main façade and topiary front garden (photo by David Ordóñez-Castañón).





sense, what was built *ex novo* should express its contemporaneity, while seeking the best possible relationship with the pre-existing parts: "A dialogue was rehearsed in our current language to obtain from this synthesis a fresh and joyful work in which, evidently, the 'romanticism' of the presence of the ancient legacy is not lacking, which was preserved and enhanced".<sup>46</sup> In this way, modern design carpentries (doors and windows with clean lines, painted in white, robust frames and unique glasses) coexist with others from the Baroque era (recovered and reused) and even with elements of historicist design (such as the kitchen and the dining room cabinets) [Fig. 20].

The renovation of the rear façade is another clear reflection of this approach. Távora was aware that the additions of the nineteenth century had deformed the physiognomy of the house.<sup>47</sup> His intention was to recover the original profile, emphasizing the body of the chapel as the heart of the building and endowing this elevation with unity and a strong identity. Thus, the new gallery radically manifests the desire for avant-garde by displaying modern compositional principles (horizontality, formal abstraction, geometric simplicity, spatial fluidity, tectonic honesty, light and shadow contrasts...) [Fig. 21].



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Despite its strong modern expression, the influence of the *Inquérito* also marked the solution of the new porch, which evokes the typological scheme of traditional Minho porticoed spaces. Indeed, in a subtle way, the reference to vernacular models was already present in coeval works such as the *Casa em Ofir*, the *Vila da Feira* Market or the *Quinta da Conceição* tennis pavilion. In those projects the architect creatively reinterpreted the functional and tectonic concept of tradition at the light of a modern grammar and materiality, originating fully up-to-date

46 Távora, "Mondim de Basto: reconstrução da Casa da Igreja (1959-1961)".

47 Fernando Távora, "Memória descritiva e justificativa", 1958, Ante-projecto da Casa da Igreja de Mondim de Basto, Arquivo Fernando Távora, Fundação Instituto Marques da Silva, FIMS/FT/0103-pe.

Fig. 20

*Casa da Igreja*. Execution project (june 1959): elevations and sections (FIMS/AFT, ref. 0103-pd0028).

Fig. 21

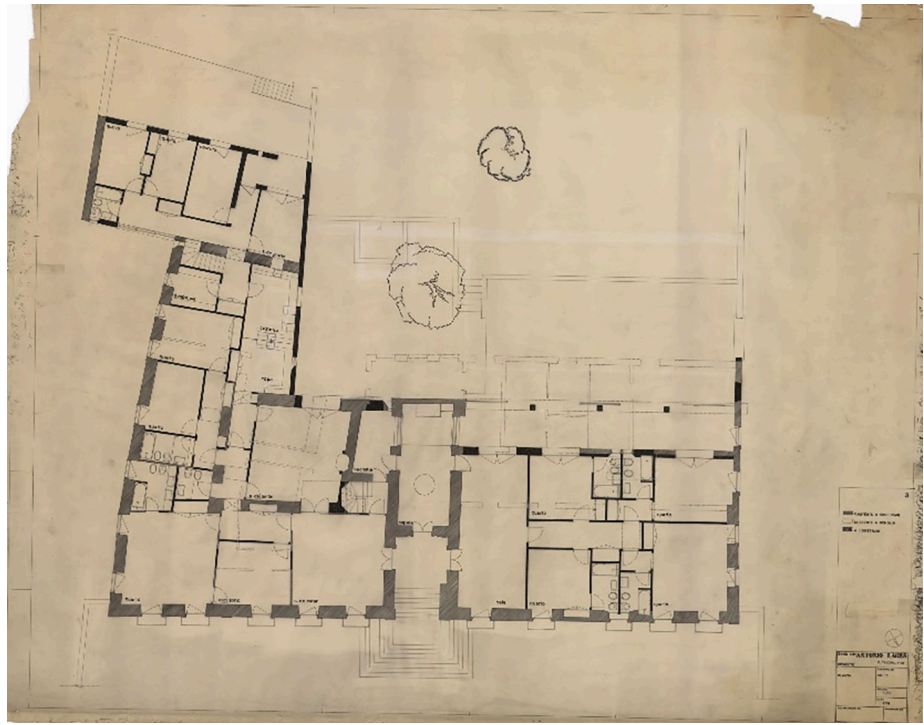
*Casa da Igreja*. Back façade with a new veranda closed by sliding wooden lattices (photo by David Ordóñez-Castañón).

buildings although firmly rooted in ancestral culture.

It is worth examining the system of movable panels that characterizes the new façade. The design of these lattices could be understood as a modern reinterpretation of the light wooden structures present in popular architecture (granaries and cutters). However, this solution could also refer to the lattices that, coming from Islamic culture (*muxarabi* or *mashrabiya*), remained in Portuguese architecture after the Christian recon-

quest, and of which some examples have survived, such as the *Casa dos Crivos*, in Braga, or the *Casa das Rótulas*, in Guimarães. Portuguese builders took these elements with them to Brazil, in colonial times, where they were successfully applied thanks to their functionality as sunscreens and as privacy filters. Later, in the twentieth century, modern Brazilian architects reinterpreted and adapted them to their avant-garde grammar in buildings such as the *Grande Hotel de Ouro Preto* (1940), by Oscar Niemeyer, or the *Casa Barão de Saavedra* (1942), by Lúcio Costa, among others. These references were widely disseminated in Portugal following the publication of the book/catalog *Brazil Builds*,<sup>48</sup> to which architects such as Keil do Amaral, Januário Godinho or Nuno Teotónio Pereira were sensitive. This frame of references has an impact on Fernando Távora's intervention in the *Casa da Igreja* through the new lattice, which is the symbol of the cultural return-journey and syncretism between Portuguese vernacular architecture and modern Brazilian-inspired design.<sup>49</sup>

In addition to the reformulation of the rear façade, other deep structural transformations took place which affected the structure of the floors (rebuilt in reinforced concrete) and the roof (with a new wooden structure and tile covering). Also significantly remodelled was the distribution of the interior in order to achieve a more regular layout with new technical infrastructures (more bathrooms, electricity, telephone, heating, sanitary hot water), in accordance with the call for a contemporary domestic space stated in the essay *O problema da casa portuguesa* [Fig. 22].



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48 Philip L. Goodwin, *Brazil builds: architecture new and old, 1652-1942* (New York: The Museum of Modern Art, 1943).

49 To delve deeper into this issue, see the study by the authors: David Ordóñez-Castañón, Teresa Cunha Ferreira, Jesús de los Ojos Moral, "De la tradición a la modernidad: la reinterpretación de la celosía de madera. Influencias recíprocas entre Brasil y Portugal", in *Anais do 3º Congresso Internacional de História da Construção Luso-Brasileira* (Salvador da Bahia: Núcleo de Tecnologia da Preservação e da Restauração da UFBA, 2019), 899-913.

Fig. 22

*Casa da Igreja*. Execution project (june 1959): plan of the main floor (FIMS/AFT, ref. 0103-pd0026).

On the other hand, another primary premise was the “conservation and appreciation of its entire character”.<sup>50</sup> Although profound changes were made, Távora sought to preserve the fundamental architectural values of the pre-existence. In this sense, the baroque facades were fully preserved and highlighted, as well as the singular disposition of the house around the chapel. Likewise, the noble decorative environment of the representative rooms, especially the main hall and the master bedroom, were preserved; these were the only rooms that still kept the old ornate wooden ceilings.

### 3. CREATION ON EXISTING BUILDINGS: NEXUS BETWEEN PRACTICE AND THEORETICAL REFLECTION

The selected cases reflect a progressive practical implementation of the theoretical intentions first stated in *O problema da casa portuguesa* (1945, 1947). Although this manifesto does not provide a specific reflection on the renovation of the built environment, it reflects the theoretical impact of some relevant writers and philosophers. Hence, ideas on the compatibility of the inheritance from the past with the need for progress are glimpsed in the abovementioned text and may have influenced his approach to heritage intervention.

In short, Távora learned from Oswald Spengler that everything in the present must be interpreted based on the establishment of innumerable relationships between actions and thoughts of the most varied nature throughout history.<sup>51</sup> From Benedetto Croce, he understood the importance of interpreting past events – however distant they may seem – in terms of the needs and situation of the present.<sup>52</sup> Ortega y Gasset’s philosophy was also a fundamental pillar for the young Távora,<sup>53</sup> especially the rejection of either the excess or the absence of the ‘past’ (against over-technicality and historicism), as well as his ideas on memory and oblivion, primitivism and modern art, unity and multiplicity, among others. In addition, the Portuguese architect embraced Gasset’s notion of circumstance and supported the demand for “the right to continuity”, advocating for a “good relationship with the past”, which involved leveraging centuries of acquired knowledge to solve current problems and better face the future.<sup>54</sup>

In this context, it is worth noting how, as early as 1940s, Távora considered historical research to be a fundamental tool for intervening in existing buildings. This approach, however, was not aimed at copying old forms but at better

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50 Távora, “Memória descritiva e justificativa”, 1958, Ante-projecto da Casa da Igreja de Mondim de Basto.

51 Fernando Távora, “Arquitectura, cultura e história”, *Revista Pós, Numero especial: O estudo da história na formação do arquitecto* (1994): 18-21.

52 Benedetto Croce, *La storia come pensiero e come azione* (Bari: Laterza, 1966 [1938]), 183.

53 For a deeper analysis on José Ortega y Gasset’s ideas underlying *O problema da casa portuguesa*, see Patrícia Miguel, “Mapa-mundo é o repertório das nossas possibilidades vitais. Investigações a partir do estudo da biblioteca de Fernando Távora enquanto jovem”, in Manuel Mendes, ed., *Sobre o ‘projeto-de-arquitetura’ de Fernando Távora* (Porto: FIMS/FAUP, 2015), 346-377. See also: Nelson Mota, “Fernando Távora e a rebelião das massas. À procura de uma arquitectura entre memória e esquecimento”, Manuel Mendes, ed., *Sobre o ‘projeto-de-arquitetura’ de Fernando Távora* (Porto: FIMS/FAUP, 2015), 378-399.

54 These ideas are expressed in the most influential work of José Ortega y Gasset, *La rebelión de las masas* (Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1992 [1930]), but also in *¿Qué es filosofía? Unas lecciones de metafísica* (México D.F.: Porrúa, 2004), 143.

understanding inherited architecture as a trigger for solving present-day problems with contemporary resources. A few years later, the architect himself defended a sense of “permanent modernity”, that is, the discovery of design principles in the lessons and constants of history.<sup>55</sup> In line with the concepts of the monarchist essayist António Sardinha (for whom being a traditionalist did not mean “returning to a dead past, inert in its crystallised form”, but the capacity to take from history “a dynamic impulse”), the architect defended a concept of tradition as “permanence in development” or of “permanence in continuity”.<sup>56</sup>

Nevertheless, this conceptual approach is not yet reflected in the projects of the 1940s, which present exclusive approaches in the relation between tradition and modernity. On the one hand, the proposal for the Bernardo Távora’s House, which was inspired by Le Corbusier’s purism. On the other hand, the project for Carapeços and the *Casa das Fidalgas*, which emulated old forms, contradicted his 1945 manifesto. At the time, Távora reflected on the separation of the old architecture from the modern creation, stating that “everything in its place and the past cannot coexist with the present”.<sup>57</sup> This thought, must be seen in the context of his trip to Europe in the post-war period (1947),<sup>58</sup> in which modern architecture and urban planning were seen as fundamental tools for improving the living conditions, while the monuments of the past, although beautiful, did not respond urgent needs. He embarked on a journey across Europe in search of answers to overcome the frustration caused by his own contradictions and his inability to translate intellectual ambitions into practice. In his descriptions he recorded his deep delight in historical monuments, but also in exciting modern architecture. However, his admiration for Modernism should not be misinterpreted, as he also expresses his irritation when, in Genoa, he observed how some fascist large buildings had replaced the medieval plots in the centre of the city.<sup>59</sup> The problematic balance between ancient and modern architecture (both in Italy and Portugal) fostered his distrust of the Athens Charter, which did not promote a harmonious and dialectical relationship between the historic and the contemporary city.

These reflections contribute to shaping Távora’s conceptual framework in the 1950s concerning the relationship between the new and the old. He was committed to expressing the integration of modern creation into pre-existences, as can be seen, in his own house in Foz do Douro, where some delicate gestures

55 Fernando Távora, “Arquitectura e Urbanismo – a lição das constantes”, *Lusiada, Revista Ilustrada de Cultura*, no. 2 (1952).

56 António Sardinha, “Do valor da tradição”, *Na Feira dos Mitos* (Lisboa: Gama, 1942), 11-16.

57 “Museums, cathedrals, palaces, are very beautiful things, but they are admired precisely because they are finished, definitive works, without the great interest, without the life of those others which are born by us and for us, which we ourselves will have to execute and to which we are so attached that our separation will also be our death. That is why I am now much more concerned with the appearance of cities and the way in which their inhabitants live (...). I am more attached to all this than to any old painting or any grand staircase which can only offer me problems of form or sensibility, but which rarely bring me face to face with the harsh realities of the moment, which by their nature should interest us most. Everything in its place and the past cannot coexist with the present” (30-IX-1947). Fernando Távora, “Esteio 2: Viagem pela Europa, 1947”, in Fernando Távora, “*Minha Casa*” / *Uma porta pode ser um romance*, edited by Manuel Mendes (Porto: FIMS, 2013), H 23-24.

58 He travelled through Spain, France, Italy, Switzerland, Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium before returning to Porto, writing down his impressions almost daily.

59 Diaristic text in Genoa, 30/9/1947. Távora, “Viagem pela Europa, 1947”, H<sub>23</sub>.

affirm its contemporaneity without undermining the identity of the bourgeois house. In fact, in the essay *A lição das constantes* (1952) the architect defends a modernity that is not alien to history. According to him, modernity is not defined by a formal language, but by the appropriate solution of problems in coherence with the circumstances.<sup>60</sup> In this essay Távora argues that contemporary architecture should affirm its modernity but also be integrated into the internal logics that govern the pre-existing buildings. Thus, this respectful integration would contribute to a collective and intertemporal process of creation, in which the spirit of intergenerational collaboration prevails over the individual contribution of a specific architect.<sup>61</sup> Therefore, any action on a historic building must respect and prolong the constants that come from the past, in order to preserve its spirit and thus contribute to this long and collective process through a contemporary response.<sup>62</sup>

In 1955, Távora drafted a book, never completed, to be called *A habitação portuguesa* (The Portuguese Home), which was to form part of the educational collection of the Campanha Nacional de Educação de Adultos.<sup>63</sup> The aim was to offer the guidelines for people to follow when building their houses, according to certain functional and aesthetic principles linked to tradition. Although intended as a pedagogical manual – with an indoctrinating pretension – the handwritten notes schematically express the fundamental ideas of his concept of the third way. He defends the need to combine the valorisation of popular Portuguese architecture (“the truth of its simplicity, utility and clarity”) with the need to assimilate modern developments (which, “in a general way, lead to the elevation of the people”<sup>64</sup>), warning that “to follow tradition is neither to copy nor to use it”.<sup>65</sup> But in these notes he also stands “in defence of antiquities”, calling for the conservation of monuments, old houses, country house furniture, altar-pieces, etc. – “there are many examples of these houses that once recovered are transformed into wonderful houses” – and he urges not to destroy “the trees, the permanent symphony of the waters, nor the old furniture...”.<sup>66</sup>

The 1950s were also marked by his attendance at the CIAM meetings, where he witnessed the decline of orthodox modernism, which was criticised by a group of young architects – members of Team X – who were more concerned with social issues and tradition.<sup>67</sup> However, this this new sensitivity was not uniform. Távora felt a strong affinity with Italian architects, such as Ernesto Rogers. His ideas on

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60 “Modernity means the perfect integration of all the elements that can influence the execution of any work, using all the means that best lead to the realisation of a certain end [...]. Great works of architecture and urbanism have always been modern in the sense that they have accurately reflected, in other words, according to a perfect relationship, the conditions of their environment”. Távora, “Arquitectura e Urbanismo – a lição das constantes”.

61 Távora, “Arquitectura e Urbanismo – a lição das constantes”.

62 Távora, “Arquitectura e Urbanismo – a lição das constantes”.

63 Fernando Távora, “Esteio 3: ‘A habitação portuguesa, 1955’”, in Fernando Távora, *“Minha Casa” | Uma porta pode ser um romance*, edited by Manuel Mendes (Porto: FIMS, 2013), L 1-56.

64 Távora, “Esteio 3: ‘A habitação portuguesa, 1955’”, L 18.

65 Távora, “Esteio 3: ‘A habitação portuguesa, 1955’”, L 46.

66 Távora, “Esteio 3: ‘A habitação portuguesa, 1955’”, L 41.

67 For further information on the impact of the ideas developed by Team 10 on the Portuguese architectural context, see: Pedro Baía, *A recepção do Team 10 em Portugal* (Porto: Circo de ideias, 2020).



the architecture of continuity – a word that became the subtitle of the magazine *Casabella* – undoubtedly coincided with the beliefs of the young Távora: “continuity means historical awareness (...); a truly modern work is not one that lacks authentic grounding in tradition, as ancient works hold significance to the extent that they are able to resonate through our voice”.<sup>68</sup> Rogers affirmed that building in a built environment entails an obligation to respect the pre-existence, while injecting new energy to perpetuate its vitality through a creative act:

Conserving and building are two moments of the same act of consciousness, because one and the other are subordinated to the same method: conserving has no meaning if it is not understood in the sense of updating the past, and building has no meaning if it is not understood as a continuation of the historical process.<sup>69</sup>

This complementarity between conservation and creation, which Távora adopted in the mid-1950s, is undoubtedly reflected in the *Casa de Além*. On the one hand, the desire to prolong and emphasise the atmosphere of an aristocratic rural home by preserving the most representative spaces and elements of the highest quality (the main hall with the wooden ceiling, the antique carved furniture, the wooden doors and shutters...); on the other hand, the desire to create something new to update the image and use of the house through a modern language (the striking woodwork, the spiral staircase, the planned fireplace...). In this case, as in the proposal for Monchique and the *Casa da Igreja*, there is a resounding affirmation of modernism, that will be gradually diluted towards a more subtle and less assertive expression. For example, in all these cases, the windows of the old façades are covered with new single-glazed frames, linked to the desire for transparency and luminosity of Modernism and also expressing the contemporaneity of the intervention, whereas in later projects (such as the Pousada da Costa or the houses of Breia, Briteiros and Pardelhas), Távora introduces new frames that follow the design of the traditional windows.

The *Casa da Igreja*, completed in 1961, is a further step in the integration of contemporary creation and conservation. Fernando Távora acknowledges to be exploring different intervention criteria in the search for a common thread between “new” and “old”, ranging from preservation of some old elements and the radical transformation of other parts of the building with a modern language. This work embodies a concept of heritage conservation that the architect wrote down in the essay *Da Organização do Espaço* (1962), in which he calls for a genuine integration of the past and the present, rather than a simple addition of forms. Moreover, according to his concept of space, continuity is a fundamental characteristic of organised space and, since time is one of its dimensions – the “fourth dimension”<sup>70</sup> – it follows that space is irreversible: “a space can

<sup>68</sup> Ernesto N. Rogers, “Continuità”, *Casabella Continuità*, no. 199 (1954): 2-3.

<sup>69</sup> Ernesto N. Rogers, “Verifica culturale dell’azione urbanistica”, VI Convegno nazionale di Urbanistica (9-11 November 1957), in Ernesto N. Rogers, ed., *Esperienza dell’architettura* (Geneva-Milano: Skira, 1997), 291-293.

<sup>70</sup> Fernando Távora, *Sobre la Organización del espacio*, eds. Aitor Varea Oro and Eva Raga i Domingo (Valencia: Universitat Politècnica de València, 2014), 53.



never return to what it was and hence the statement that space is in permanent change".<sup>71</sup> His rejection of "scientific restoration" is based on this reflection, considering that a monument can never return to a previous state. Therefore, the defence of the architectures of the past must be achieved through updating, seeking continuity in a contemporary attitude and avoiding pastiche. This conception is in line with his appeal to a "healthy restoration criterion", based on a dialogue between the existing forms and the current language.

It is therefore possible to identify in these ideas and projects a series of reflections that are vividly manifested in later works. For example, in the 1969 proposal for the renovation of the Ribeira-Barredo urban area, Távora rejected the tabula rasa of Robert Auzelle's Mater Plan for Porto, and established a new criterion based on the preservation of the entire medieval street layout, with as much of the built fabric as possible. However, he did not intend to mummify buildings in order to fossilise an urban image of the past, nor to demolish the old constructions to rebuild them mimetically – a pastiche – with standardised solutions.<sup>72</sup> He proposed an evolution to solve housing problems, carrying out selective demolitions and controlled transformations – decided case by case – as a form of regeneration: "In these few words renovate (or continue to innovate) with a global and open spirit, is contained the whole essence of the option we choose to orientate the proposal".<sup>73</sup> This attitude also guided the project for the renovation of the *Santa Marinha da Costa Convent* (1972-1989), usually considered to be one of Fernando Távora's works that best reflects his *modus operandi* in the field of built heritage. In similar words, the architect explained that "the general criterion adopted (...) was 'to continue innovating' or, in other words, to continue contributing to the long life of the building, by conserving and strengthening its most significant spaces or creating qualified spaces determined by the conditions of their new function. The intention was to create a dialogue, highlighting the affinities and the continuity, rather than the differences and the break from the past".<sup>74</sup>

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

This paper demonstrates that the third way approach – the search for a formula that combines the continuity of tradition with the need for modernisation – is also reflected in the development of a strategy for intervention in existing buildings. Indeed, the cases presented in this paper (carried out in the period between 1945 and 1962, some of them barely known), can be considered as relevant experimental practices. The architect tested design principles and methodological guidelines for intervention in heritage context, which would fully mature in subsequent works with greater impact and dissemination.

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71 Távora, *Sobre la Organización del espacio*, 58.

72 Fernando Távora, "Barredo: Operazione di Rinnovo Urbano", *Lotus International*, no.18 (1978): 95-97.

73 Fernando Távora, *Estudo de Renovação Urbana do Barredo* (Porto: Câmara Municipal do Porto, 1969).

74 Fernando Távora, "Pousada de Santa Marinha: Guimarães", *Boletim da DGEMN*, no. 130 (1985): no page numbers.

The first designs, contextualised in a period of creative and identity crisis for Távora, reflect his difficulties in putting theoretical intentions into practice, failing to incorporate contemporary creation into old buildings. Certainly, the resounding modern *ex novo* projects of this period contrast with the conservative experiences of Carapeços and Santar, which involved the use of forms from the past mimicked in the pre-existence. However, as the 1950s progressed, while assimilating the theories and practices of other architects, Távora moved towards an integration of modern design with the permanence of tradition, as can be seen in the renovation projects of the *Casa de Além* and the *Casa da Igreja*. Both designs display an assertive modernism embedded in the logics and character of the historic building.

Although this vigorous modernism would later become more discreet and subtle, these works from the 1950s already reflect several features that would characterise Távora's his subsequent projects: the search for harmony within the context (environmental pre-existence), the preservation of the historic image of the buildings in relation to the landscape (involving the preservation of the main *façades*), respect for the scale and proportions of pre-existing structures, the recovery of typological coherence and spatial logic, the conservation and emphasis on traditional atmospheres, rigorous conservation and restoration of valuable old elements (ceilings, furniture, altarpieces, doors, fittings, etc.), the careful alteration of less valuable parts of the buildings to incorporate new functions and facilities, the use of geometry as a tool to relate old and new, and the introduction of modern language through the creative reinterpretation of traditional solutions, among other aspects.

All decisions were founded on a case-by-case approach and supported by a deep knowledge of the history and the circumstances of the pre-existing buildings. Thus, the ambition was always – using his own words – “to create a dialogue in the current language to obtain from this synthesis fresh and joyful works in which the ‘romanticism’ of the ancient legacy is not lacking but is preserved and enhanced”.<sup>75</sup>

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75 Távora, “Mondim de Basto: reconstrução da Casa da Igreja (1959-1961)”, 31.

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