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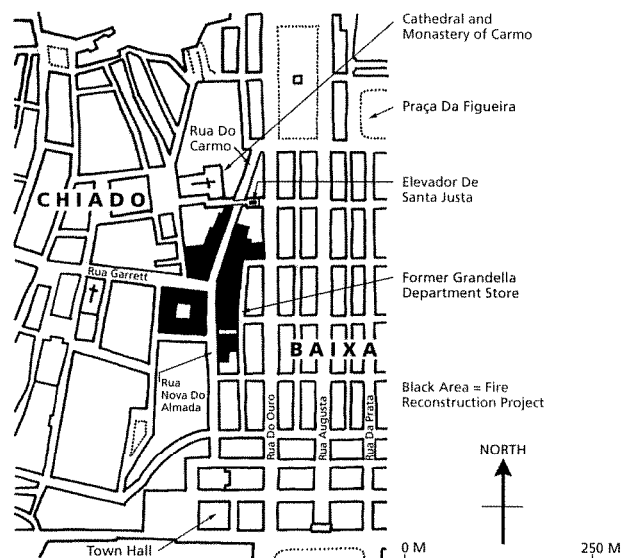


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Lisbon's Chiado: Attentive Restoration, Gentle Innovation

Gregory Tung



Above: Map of Lisbon. Background: Panoramic view, looking west, of Lisbon: Baixa (foreground), Chiado reconstruction (center), Bairro Alto (top center and right). Illustrations courtesy Gregory Tung.

Lisbon's picturesque reputation is a lot like San Francisco's. Streets carpet the hillsides, creating views of charming buildings, turn-of-the-century streetcars ascend steeply into neighborhoods, a spectacular red suspension bridge presides over the harbor and its residents have a penchant for slightly indulgent living.

Like San Francisco, too, Lisbon has known earthquake, fire and reconstruction. After the great earthquake of 1755, which killed 40,000 inhabitants, the Baixa district (Lisbon's center) was given the most extensive urban restructuring Europe had ever seen.

Sadly, both urban areas have had to relearn painful lessons with fire in recent years, Lisbon with the immolation of its beloved Chiado (pronounced key-ah-doo) neighborhood in 1988. Set at the base of the Bairro Alto district and bordering Baixa, the Chiado was a romantic hillside neighborhood containing favorite coffeehouses, old shops, trendy boutiques and two of Europe's oldest department stores, the Chiado and the Grandella. The fire began early on August 25, burning for 10 hours before fire crews prevailed. Altogether, 18 buildings and 40 businesses were lost, though with only two fatalities.

Though the traditional Lisbon architecture of red clay roof tiles and glazed ceramic wall cladding appears deceptively like Mediterranean mason-

ry construction, the structural system of choice since the great earthquake has been flexible timber frames and foundation piles. Consequently, burning floors and interior walls collapsed, leaving only masonry street walls standing. Two of these building shells were demolished for safety, but the remaining 16 provided a basis for reconstruction.

The twisted wreckage left Lisbon residents in shock and anguish, as if New Yorkers were to encounter Fifth Avenue as a smoking ruin. Architect Alvaro Siza was immediately selected to lead the planning and design team. A lengthy sequence of investigations, recriminations, proposals, arguments and revisions eventually resulted in an official reconstruction strategy in January, 1990.

The overwhelming mandate was to mend the city's wound and use the opportunity to strengthen the Chiado's social and economic vitality. Over the decades, it had lost nearly all of its residential population, and former residences and courtyard spaces had been taken by small businesses for expansion and storage. Busy with shoppers by day, the Chiado emptied at night, a factor in the fire's destructiveness.

The planning team concluded that the Chiado functioned as a "hinge" district between the Baixa, the Bairro Alto and Rossio neighborhoods, and its reactivation was essential for the vitali-



Ruined Gothic vaults of the Cathedral of Carmo, destroyed in the 1755 earthquake and left as a monument.

ty of central Lisbon. A restored residential population and new uses would be necessary to diversify and extend the district's cycle of activity.

The reconstruction plan retains all blocks, buildings and ground floor commercial activities. The internal arrangements of buildings will be changed, however, by clearing away accumulated additions from interior passages and courts and reducing the depth of apartments to enlarge the courtyards. The Grandella and the Chiado department stores, whose businesses were weak before the fire, will be converted to new uses (such as a hotel, movie theaters and a supermarket) while retaining their original walls and institutional character. All buildings will have small residences, configured mostly for young singles and couples, on their top two floors. These uses are intended to diversify and extend the district's daily cycle of activity.

The plan combines an ambition to create more public space in the densely built blocks with a reconstitution of formerly embedded or erased streets. All of the reconstructed buildings will have midblock passages with prominent openings centered in their street facades, often leading to interior courts. The passages and courts will comprise a new, secondary network of pedestrian passages to supplement the narrow sidewalks and auto-choked streets.

They also promise to open the hidden block interiors to the life of the city.

The facades of the first reconstructed buildings show subtle manipulations in storefront composition. New shop doors and windows have taller proportions than their undestroyed counterparts up the street. They reveal higher first-floor ceilings, yet retain the pre-existing cadence of storefront openings. While the composition of window lights, door stiles and frames are traditional in spirit, the new elements are spare and simple, as if anticipating the encrustations of returning shopkeepers, window dressers and poster hangers. It appears that in this combination of attentive restoration and gen-

tle innovation, the Chiado is to be healed and rediscovered without denying its immense loss.

Sources

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New shop facades in a reconstructed building on Rua Garrett, with courtyard entrance in center.

