

CASA EM PARDELHAS

O Desenho de Fernando Távora na Arquitectura Popular

HOUSE IN PARDELHAS

The Design of Fernando Távora in Traditional Architecture

Ana Berkeley Cotter



At a time when the work of architect Fernando Távora, for many years now acclaimed internationally, has become the focus of an increasing number of studies (with a prominent example being the recent and significant event which was the exhibition "Fernando Távora, Permanent Modernity," coordinated by Álvaro Siza as part of Guimarães 2012 European Capital of Culture), a similar trend is underway in academia, where it is noteworthy to draw attention to the constancy and the interest placed in both the work of Fernando Távora and the man himself, as is seen in the selection of Távora as an object of study for Research Projects required to obtain a university degree.

The publication of this type of research project, in terms of what is commonly produced in Portugal in the field of Essays on Architecture, is a rare occurrence as room in the publishing world for such publications is quite limited, even amongst specialized publishers affiliated with universities and academic research centers.

In southern Europe, and only to mention our closest geographical neighbors, the publication of this type of material is, all things considered, more common and relatively established – with this being a firm tradition in the main academic research centers in Italy and Spain.

The carrying out of academic research, namely for students pursuing their first university degree, does not necessarily imply the introduction of new material which goes out in search of new sources or means of interpretation; instead, it represents a significant contribution to the affirmation of a unique space for encountering the theme.

Focusing on the career of the great figure who was Fernando Távora effectively constitutes a consolidation of the interest currently being paid to his work and demonstrates a more mature way of dealing with his legacy. The reflections that are produced are not presented as absolute novelty, yet on the other hand they are equally not cloaked in some nostalgic attitude. Finally, by moving to this level, a space is opened up for a closer perspective on Távora.

Once the idea of the work taken as a whole has been generally acknowledged, the possibilities are opened up for a more profound look into specific aspects, such as putting in doubt certain questions taken from thematic readings and studying projects in detail which are lesser known or deemed less remarkable along the subject's career but which can nevertheless contribute to understanding the whole of that person's life work.

It is within this scope that the work of Ana Cotter is placed; it is the result of research she conducted while at the University of Évora, in the category of studies which seek to discern the exemplary contributions of prominent figures in Portugal.

The work is worthwhile and one in which scholarship is present that corresponds to the requirements that represent the culmination of an academic degree.

The present work indeed goes farther than what is required – it is an impetus to pique the curiosity and encourage the sincere search for understanding the thought processes and building processes involved, by systematically searching through the records.

The project focuses on a house in Pardelhas (outside Vila Nova de Cerveira) as the basis for the research, looking at the understanding taking place between 'conducting a project' and 'constructing architecture.' The project involved poring over the drawings in their various forms and types, reading the statements of those who worked on the Pardelhas project, and naturally, experiencing the spaces of the house, the silence of its forms, but also hearing the words of those who live in the house and recount their experiences. (Of note are the original series of drawings for the house as well as the statements made by Fernando Barroso and Pedro Pacheco.) Finally, the present work constitutes a record of the performance-oriented questions, which, as it so happens on occasion, are left at the doorstep forgotten when an analysis of architecture is being done.

Above all, this is research done focusing on a house, thus the underlying reason for its publication. It might then be said, in this case, that its worth is in the circumstantial, if it is true that "a man is himself and his circumstances." Among the rest, perhaps this is one of Fernando Távora's strengths in his way of doing things – always operating with a greater feeling, and inscribing this appreciation in and amongst other things: other places and other times. This movement brings something concrete to the world of ideas, and elevates it from the force of matter (in physics, this process is called *sublimation*) and takes it to the level where it encounters clarity of coherence and the logic of ideas.

It is not without some dread that one makes inferences on logic or makes conclusions on Fernando Távora's gestures and thinking because their apparent naturalness seems to be independent of any type of more complicated wild thoughts going through the mind. Távora, in the fullness of his erudition, always operated as well within a register of supreme clarity, as in one who confronts a question and resolves it in the most obvious and economical manner, who takes what is natural in it and transforms it – in the disarming technique as seen in the romantic image of 'walking-stick architecture.' This supreme clarity does not lead to the banal nor does it remove the strength of the radicalness of the positions that it assumes.

Marx said that "to be radical is to grasp things by the root. For man, however, the root is man himself." Radicalness, marking the extremes, also describes the middle space where the gentler gestures fit in. Pardelhas House is in the middle, but it is special because it is one of Távora's last journeys dealing with a home project, one between a sense of modernity and a revisiting the search for truth. It is one of his final works, one which serves as a first act of seeking, which is now made real in the present book.

Évora, June 2013

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