Lisbon's Chiado: Attentive Restoration, Gentle Innovation

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Lisbon's picturesque reputation is a lot like San Francisco's. Streets carpet the hillside, creating views of charming buildings, turn-of-the-century streets, and sidewalks to neighbor-hoods, 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 reconstruc tion. 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 annihilation of its beloved Chiado (an upcoming key-ado) neighborhood in 1988. Six at the base of the Baixa 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 Grandele. 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 Dolphin appears deceptively like Mediterranean maus-
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 courtyards and reducing the depth of apartments to enlarge the courtyards. The Gravada 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 residencies, 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 reorientation of formerly embedded or erased streets. All of the reconstructed buildings will have midblock passages with prominent openings centered in their street façades, 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-blocked 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 sills and frames are traditional in spirit, the new elements are sparse and simple, as if anticipating the «»
cortis de talha dos séculos XVII e XVIII, assentes nas fachadas das casas da Baixa até a Praça da Figueira, e nas fachadas dos edifícios da Rua da Praça de São Roque, com os seus portais de pedra, e nas fachadas dos edifícios da Rua da Praça de São Roque, com os seus portais de pedra.

Sources

Giannattasio Burnelli and Emeranto Rastani, "Progetto di recupero per l'area del Chiado, Lisbona," Donna 714 (March, 1990), 46-51, 335.


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