



ARCHITECTURAL PECULARITIES
OF FUNCHAL

Introduction



It is not easy to describe the prodigious assortment of colors, architectural details, unexpected nooks and crannies that make us admire and love a city. Every city has, in effect, its urban and architectural peculiarities.

This guide does not intend to carry out the thorny, and probably impossible, task of inventorying all those that exist in the city of Funchal. It is, rather, an attempt to draw your attention to some of them and to try and satisfy the curiosity that they may awaken in the most interested of travellers.

In most cases, these peculiarities are no more than adaptations to a place, to a climate, to a light - or even to a smooth or sturdy stone - of solutions whose origins lie in other geographic and cultural contexts. It is, nonetheless, through this Darwinian process, in which the form adapts

FUNCHAL

Architectural Peculiarities

to the new medium, that the diverse character of cities is, to a large extent, derived from. Funchal, the first city founded outside of Europe by the Portuguese, has all the characteristics of a Portuguese coastal city.

The slow adaptive process, however, gave rise to a number of unique morphological features within the city walls, among which, to mention just two, are the slender coastal watchtowers (*torres avista-navios*), from whence the port movement was observed, or the bread ovens in cantilever of which a few can still be found in the old neighbourhood of *Santa Maria do Calhau*.

These and other singularities are thus presented in these pages, in the hope that, by becoming more acquainted with them, the surprise and seduction they initially exert on the onlooker do not fade away.



FUNCHAL

Index

6	House of Pleasure	
8	Resting Balcony	
10	Lambrequin	
12	Sidewalk	
14	Coastal Watchtower	
16	The <i>Dona Guiomar</i> Gazebo	
18	Bread Oven	
20	<i>D. Manuel</i> Bridge	
22	<i>Francisco Franco</i> Museum	

FUNCHAL

Architectural Peculiarities

	The Poor Souls Chapel	24
	Manueline Door	26
	Pillar of Banger	28
	Balcony of the Palace	30
	Consul's Residence	32
	English Church	34
	Fountain	36
	Princess <i>Dona Amélia</i> Garden	38
	Processional Steps	40

FUNCHAL

CALÇADA DE SANTA CLARA



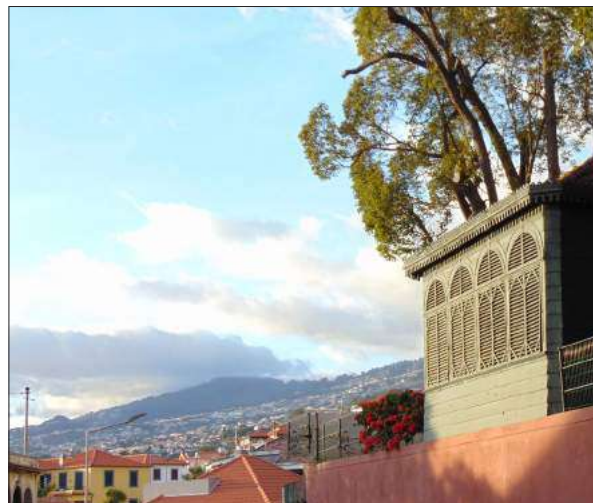
Perched on the high walls of the gardens, leaning over the street and the sea, the “houses of pleasure” (*casinhas de prazer*) are, simultaneously, refuges and lookout points, where that which is close and distant intertwine. It is behind the Venetian blinds, protected from the sun and indiscreet glances, that the melancholy dilemma of the insular soul is consumed: snooping on the neighbours and contemplating far off places. This may be the reason why these houses are the most genuine of the architectural peculiarities of Funchal. One cannot,



6 - Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal

HOUSE OF PLEASURE

of course, discount the influence of the nineteenth-century English garden, with its Chinese style *gazebos* or *kiosks* (small pavilions almost always associated with the contemplation of nature). The presence of an influential British community in Madeira, during the nineteenth century, may explain the origin of these small constructions. The idea that the term “*casinha de prazer*” - which does not exist except in Madeira – is a translation of house of pleasure, used by Marco Polo in the description of the gardens of the Palace of Kubla Kan (disclosed by Coleridge, in his poem with the same name) has even been put forward. In any event, there is no nineteenth century Madeiran house that does not have its own little “house of pleasure”.



Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal - 7

CALÇADA DE SANTA CLARA



This noble eighteenth century building, now holding an old age home and some services of the Regional Government, housed *Reid's Santa Clara*, the most luxurious hotel of Funchal in its time - the second half of the nineteenth century. Like many of its congeners, the hotel had a resting balcony – a spacious porch where guests, sprawled in comfortable wicker chairs, could enjoy the mild climate of Madeira, while taking in the healing properties of the fresh air. Being able to simply gaze out at the landscape from a vantage point was just another of the attractions of this balcony, as those who are lucky enough to get permission



RESTING BALCONY

to visit it will attest to. However, those who do not get permission to do so can always admire it as they climb the *Santa Clara* sidewalk. With its unusual shape of the bow of a ship, the balcony, supported by slender wrought iron pillars and green and white embroidered lambrequins, was one of the finest resting balconies of nineteenth-century Funchal.



RUA DA CARREIRA



The trimmed wood ornament that can be found under the eaves of a roof, as well as under the headers of doors and the outside windows of a house is called lambrequin. In the latter case, the lambrequin is intended to cover the suspension of the latticework screen which, when fully folded, is hidden behind it. There were times when these latticework screens, maneuverable fixtures fashioned from small slender boards that can be lowered and raised at will, were a common feature on the façades of the richest houses in Funchal. Nowadays they are becoming a rarity. Unlike the Venetian blinds, or sunshades (the term that in Madeira is used to designate the exterior horizontal slat shutters), the latticework screen could be maneuvered to allow one to spy on the street without being seen. Lowered down over



LAMBREQUIN

the windows on sunny days, these green slats were “like heavy eyelids filled with languor and slumber” (this is how *Eça de Queiroz* described them in his imaginative prose). More economical and more practical, the sunshade has been replacing the latticework screen since the late nineteenth century. All we have left today, is the lambrequin, this ostentatious trimming in painted wood tracery that bestows such a shine to the eighteenth-century façades of Funchal. All one needs to do is to amble along *Rua da Carreira* on a sunny day to spot them.



PRAÇA DO MUNICÍPIO



Traditionally composed of rolled pebbles of basalt (at times decorated with motifs lighter in color that stem from the sedimentary rocks of local origin), the Madeiran sidewalk has, perhaps, an even more remote origin than the famous Portuguese sidewalk that covers the pavements and squares of Lisbon. Indeed, having reached its zenith in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the pebbled, or rolled pebble sidewalks which can be found in a number of streets in Funchal (and in considerable abundance in the Madeiran public and private gardens) date back to the early centuries of the settlement.



SIDEWALK

The shell motif that the landscape architect *Caldeira Cabral* used in the City Square (*Praça do Município*), in the 40's of the last century, which interweaves the local basalt with the limestone imported from the continent, creates a surprising effect. That same motif, that same shell (whose geometric composition seems to result from how far the arm of the cobblestone paver (calceteiro) could reach), reappears in rolled pebbles of basalt on the *Largo da Capela de Santo António da Mouraria* near the Regional Assembly (*Assembleia Regional*). It is worth comparing one with the other, or comparing them with so many other sidewalks that pave the streets and gardens of Funchal.



RUA DO BISPO



The coastal watchtowers are a fascinating and unique piece of the architecture of Funchal that reached its zenith in the transition from the eighteenth to the nineteenth century, as a result of the wealth generated by the wine trade. Originally, these watchtowers were used as observation points, from whence the port and the movement taking place on it could be viewed, allowing its population that depended entirely on maritime traffic, to gather vital information for its daily trade. These watchtowers could occupy two positions: they could either be positioned further back in relation to the facade, or be coplanar with it and, in this case, become an integral part of its structure. But the coastal watchtower also had



14 - Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal

COASTAL WATCHTOWER

other functions: it was used not only so one could observe the movement on the port, but also to mark the social prominence of its owner. It is therefore not surprising that the engravings and photographs of nineteenth-century Funchal show us the image of a city teeming with towers, of which only some testaments remain in this day and age. Due to its massive and imposing presence, the coastal watchtower of the Palace of the *Ornelas* - influential family of the Madeiran aristocracy residing on *Rua do Bispo* - is one of the most notable examples of this architectural feature, which clearly shows its dual function. It is not always possible to catch sight of these towers from the narrow streets in this ancient city within walls. Columbus Square (*Praça de Colombo*), the outcome of the recent demolition of one of the city blocks, is, however, one of the places where some of these towers can be seen.



Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal - 15

AVENIDA DO INFANTE



Built in the second half of the eighteenth century, the Dona Guiomar watchtower is a clear testament to the austere features of the architecture on the island in that epoch: a compact volume of two floors, square floor plan and a façade whose opening balconies were embellished with basaltic stonework fashioned in a classic contour. But what makes this remarkable piece of architecture noteworthy is the fact that this coastal watchtower is separate from the house of which it should be an integral part. From its balconies, located on the crest of the cliff, one could very effectively see the whole of the Funchal port and witness all its goings-on. It would have been for this reason, incidentally, that its own-



16 - Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal

THE DONA GUIOMAR GAZEBO

er, the “eminent and most excellent Lady” *D. Guiomar Madalena de Sá Vasconcelos Bettencourt Machado e Vilhena*, a powerful landowner and wine merchant of Madeira, owner of the *Quinta das Angústias*, will have had it built on that particular spot. An interesting case of female protagonism in the commercial (and even political) universe of eighteenth-century Madeira, *D. Guiomar* took possession of the *Quinta* (Farm/Estate) in 1766, and had it redesigned, including the construction of the watchtower. In the century that followed, the *Quinta das Angústias* would become the most coveted and most expensive *quinta* for rent on Madeiran island. Some members of the European aristocracy, such as Queen Adelaide of England (1847), Prince Maximilian, the Duke of Leuchtemberg (1850) and the Empress of Brazil, widow, with her daughter, the Princess *D. Maria Amélia* (1852) stayed there.



Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal - 17

TRAVESSA DO PORTÃO



One of the income sources of the Donatary-Captains (or lords proprietary) was the rates they charged on the collective ovens where the population cooked its bread (*pão de poia*). These were used in addition to the domestic bread ovens that the families had in their homes. In Funchal, when the kitchens of the houses were built on the first floor, the home ovens took the shape of interesting cylindrical bulges that stood out from the façade and were supported by cantilever flagstones. These ovens and the home (the place where the food was cooked) made use of the same chimney, and it was not



18 - Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal

BREAD OVEN

rare to find, nestled under the fume hood, in the kitchens of the old houses of Funchal, the small door of the bread oven. This is, thus, a true unique feature of the island house, a charming number of which can still be found in the oldest neighbourhoods of the city.



Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal - 19

RUA 31 DE JANEIRO



Commissioned by *D. Manuel de Portugal e Castro*, Governor of Madeira in the first quarter of the nineteenth century, this is probably the oldest bridge in Funchal. All those who preceded it, be they in wood (as were the first in the 15th Century) or in stonework, would eventually be destroyed by the alluvions that cyclically ravaged the city, or by the rebuilding of the stream walls that succeeded them. The *D. Manuel Bridge* is extremely slender, with a rampant board built over a depressed arch. It is supported by the solid walls conceived by Brigadier *Oudinot* following the



20 - Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal

D. MANUEL BRIDGE

tragic alluvium of 1803. But the uniqueness of this bridge lies fundamentally in the coating and morphology of its deck. Made of basaltic pebble cobblestone, it has bulging steps with a width corresponding to the stride of an ox (the purported "*calçada pé-de-boi*"), in order to adapt to the traction of trailed vehicles, the famous "ox carts" (*corsas*) that were frequently pulled by these animals. Not very comfortable to walk on, this bridge was effective for these old transportation vehicles, which have now disappeared from the streets of Funchal.

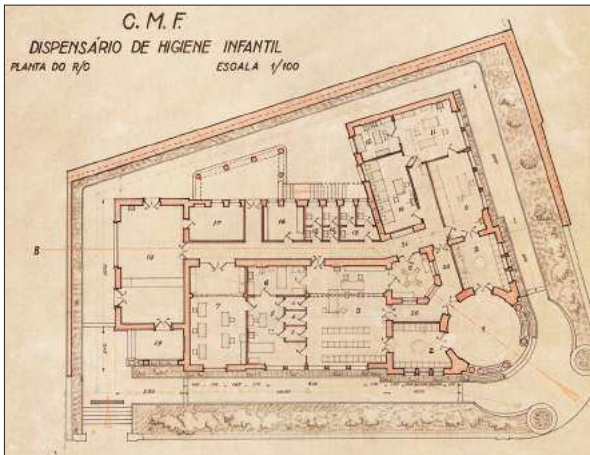


Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal - 21

RUA JOÃO DE DEUS



Designed by engineer *José Nascimento de Sousa* in the beginning of the 40's of the twentieth century, and designed to function as a support equipment for newborns and their mothers, the *Auxílio Materno-Infantil* (Child and Maternal Services) is now a museum dedicated to the artists *Henrique* and *Francisco Franco*. It is an extremely interesting example of an architecture that, within the spirit of its time, proposed to "build in the national Portuguese manner" (words of *Luís Benavente*, the architect who, in 1937, conceived a standard model for a kindergarten). The curious form of the circular porch with a



22 - Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal

FRANCISCO FRANCO MUSEUM

colonnade, inspired by the *Escola-Museu João de Deus* (1917) designed by *Raul Lino*, would eventually become the distinctive element of the kindergartens projected by *Benavente* himself and other Portuguese architects. However, the fact remains that none of these projects ever reached the vitality of the *Auxílio Materno-Infantil*. *José Nascimento de Sousa* did not limit himself to adapting the standard model to the constraints of the location. Making use of the circular porch as a link between the two lower bodies which contain the closed areas of the building, the young engineer achieved the unusual feat of getting the exact balance between all of the volumes that comprise the ensemble, skillfully enclosing them on the corners between *Rua João de Deus* and *Rua Alferes Veiga Pestana*.



Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal - 23

TRAVESSA DAS CAPUCHINHAS



The Poor Souls Chapel was built in 1871 on the corner of *Travessa das Capuchinhas*. Legend has it that, at the initiative of someone, in this same place, thanks to the interference of the souls in Purgatory, somebody escaped an attack. We must, however, bear in mind that, in 1871, this selfsame lane did not have the width that it enjoys in this day and age. Truth be told, it was only a narrow lane, flanked by a rocky cliff and the high wall of the Convent of Our Lady of Mercy (*Convento de Nossa Senhora das Mercês*). It is therefore not difficult to imagine the fear that one would feel while venturing through it late at night. It was probably that fear that gave rise to the legend of the attack. As for the chapel dug into the rock, it is an interesting example of a constructive typology linked to the beginnings of the settlement (not to mention the beginnings of mankind): the caves. In Madeira there are, in fact, two more small chapels dug into the rock: that of Saint Vincent (*São Vicente*) (1692), at the mouth of the river with the same name, and that of Our Lady of *Penha de França* (*Nossa Senhora da Penha de França*) (1685) in the parish of Faial. On the façade of the Poor Souls Chapel, a tile from the mid-eighteenth century, depicting a soul in purgatory enveloped by flames, can be seen. And on the inside, a carved altarpiece painted with oil on canvas from a popu-

THE POOR SOULS CHAPEL

lar workshop is on display. Those who visit it need not fear being attacked; they are, however, advised to look both ways before crossing the lane.



RUA DA ALFÂNDEGA



As part of the campaign of the construction of new public buildings that King *D. Manuel I* carried out in Funchal during his reign, the construction of the new Customs Building (*Alfândega Nova*) was completed in 1519, following, hence, the building of the City Hall (*Câmara*) and the Cathedral (*Sé*). The latter was nearing conclusion when the works of the Customs Building began. The project was entrusted to master builder *Pero Anes*, who had already been responsible for the execution of the sumptuous carved wood ceiling of the Cathedral. In the course of its long existence at the service of the Portuguese crown, the Customs Building has undergone multiple changes, with the purpose of adapting it to the changing needs that have emerged throughout time. So much so that, from the old Manueline core, little has survived up to these days. The 1748 earthquake damaged the building to such an extent that it had to undergo a complete renovation. Finally, when in the 60's of the last century, restoration works on the façades were carried out, adjacent to the north-west corner of the building, opening into *Rua da Alfândega*, a small armored door with a Manueline outline was exposed. It is thought that this door led to the personal chambers of the Purveyor of the Royal Treasury (*Fazenda Real*). The wear and tear that time has inflicted on its walls has not

MANUELINE DOOR

erased the singular relevance of this small opening that reminds us of sixteenth-century Funchal, thriving city of the sugar trade.



AVENIDA DO MAR



Built in 1798 by the English merchant John Light Banger on top of a rocky outcrop on the beach of Funchal, the Pillar of Banger was, during its 141 years of existence, one of the most drawn, painted and photographed distinctive features of the capital of the archipelago. It was almost 30 meters high and was designed to serve as a crane and capstan in the transportation of goods from the ships that set anchor in the Bay of the city. The aim was for these goods to be collected, thus exempting



28 - Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal

PILLAR OF BANGER

the merchants from the customs fees associated with the loading and unloading operations (which in a city, at that time, almost devoid of port infrastructures, certainly made sense). The increase in the wingspan of the vessels and the siltation of the bay would eventually make this practice unfeasible. In the mid-nineteenth century, the pillar came to have more prosaic functions: to indicate which ships were entering the port by raising their commercial flags or to embellish the city on festive days. It was eventually demolished in 1939, when *Avenida do Mar* was opened. Today, the impost block of this singular construction, arranged in a flowerbed that flanks the avenue, can still be seen.

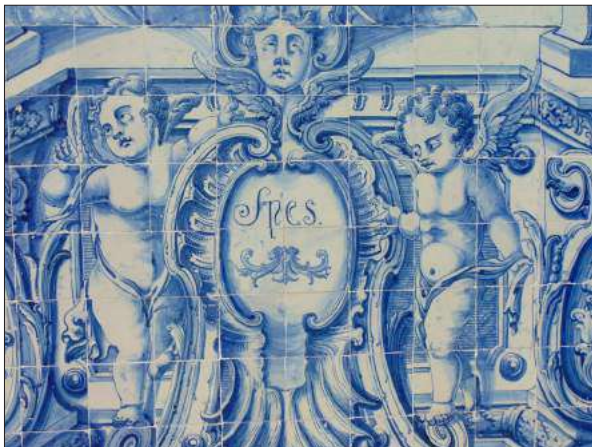


Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal - 29

RUA DO BISPO



Rebuilt after the earthquake of 1748 and designed by the royal master builder *Domingos Rodrigues Martins*, the Episcopal Palace (*Paço Episcopal*) now houses the Diocesan Museum of Sacred Art (*Museu Diocesano de Arte Sacra*). It is an austere urban manor house whose whitewashed plane façades, like many other specimens of the insular architecture of the same period, flaunt luxuriously decorated openings, built in the dark basaltic stonework of the region. Rising above neighbouring constructions, the characteristic coastal watchtower, destined for the observation of the port, can be seen: in this case a large tower with a verandah



30 - Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal

BALCONY OF THE PALACE

porch that opens up onto the sea. The balcony is open to those who visit the Diocesan Museum of Sacred Art (and it is worth going to the trouble to visit it!). Its porch, supported by six slender iron columns that rest on stonework plinths, lends shade to a façade with two openings that outline three panels that are completely covered in tiles. The panels, in "blue and white", represent the three theological virtues: "Faith", "Hope" and "Charity", and have Latin subtitles. According to experts, given the Rocaille frames with "bat wing shaped" and "capitone" motifs, these date back from 1745 to 1750. This is thus, a unique opportunity to "rub shoulders" with the Portuguese tile, the noble 18th Century insular architecture and the magnificent scenery of the ancient Funchal city within walls. A uniqueness that is not to be missed.



Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal - 31

RUA 5 DE OUTUBRO



In addition to being a wealthy wine merchant, Henry Veitch, the influential British consul in Madeira, whose mandate ran from 1809 to 1836, was also an amateur-architect. Several buildings built on the island have been attributed to him, including his own residence in Funchal (current Madeira Institute of Wine, Embroidery and Handicrafts – *Instituto do Vinho, Bordado e Artesanato da Madeira*). Completed at the beginning of the second decade of the nineteenth century, this abode contains, side by side, the house and the cellar, in a compact volume of three floors; an innovative and incomparable solution in the domestic architecture of the island at the time.



32 - Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal

CONSUL'S RESIDENCE

Towering above this bulge, a slender coastal watchtower (perhaps the highest at the time) can be seen. It was from this tower that Bowdich, the English naturalist who visited the island in 1823, made his meteorological observations. Another architectural innovation introduced by the consul was the use of the bow window, a cylindrical projection that appears on the south façade and which would be profusely used in all the buildings that the British built in Madeira. However, what characterizes this house in particular, is the surprising inventiveness of its design, which seems to transcend the mere adaptation of a typical project taken from a pattern-book (a common practice of the British communities scattered throughout the world in that century) and transforms the architecture of Veitch into a singular case in the archipelago.



Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal - 33

RUA DO QUEBRA COSTAS



The decision to build a Protestant church in Madeira took root in 1808, during the English occupation and took off when, in 1810, Portugal signed the Treaty of Friendship and Alliance with England that instituted the freedom of worship. The project was commissioned to the British consul on the island, Henry Veitch, by the British Factory (the representatives of the British Resident community) at a meeting that took place precisely in 1810. The church, which would only be inaugurated in 1822, is a neoclassic building of unusual erudition, which makes us doubt that it was designed by the consul, an amateur-archi-



ENGLISH CHURCH

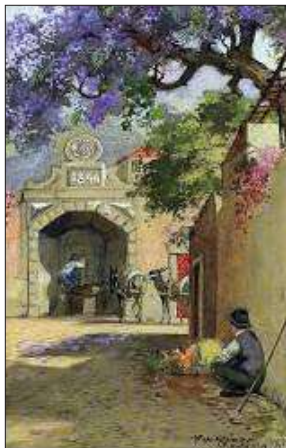
tect. In his words, it was an “handsome building, a square outside with a circular colonnade inside, supporting a gallery from which rises a fine dome and cupola to give light to the church”. But the most interesting facts about this little temple, its truly distinctive characteristics are, firstly, its location: unlike any other church it does not open up onto a street and, much less, to a square. Rather, it is hidden inside a neighbourhood and is surrounded by a small, lovely garden. Secondly, it is not recognisable as a temple due to the fact that it does not have a steeple. The explanation is obvious: It was not advisable for a Protestant community that resides on a predominantly Catholic island, to build a temple whose architecture would compete with that of the churches that existed in Funchal at that time.



LARGO DAS CRUZES



For centuries, fountains have supplied towns with drinking water and they have often been designed by architects or sculptors. Funchal was no exception, and it is possible to find, even today, in its streets and squares, some interesting examples of this urban feature. The sanitization and embellishment campaigns, carried out in the nineteenth century, gave rise to countless fountains. An interesting case was the fountain on *Rua Imperatriz Dona Amélia* initially designed (1817) to serve the future *Cidade das Angústias* (the new Funchal that was going to be built in the area of the Ilhéus, safe from the cyclical alluvions that afflicted the



36 - Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal

FOUNTAIN

city centre). Refurbished in 1842, it would eventually be the only structure from the megalomaniac plan that was never brought to fruition. At the crossroads of *Rua do Favila* and *Largo António Nobre* it is possible to find another example of a nineteenth century (1867) fountain, decorated in 1930 with a magnificent tile overlay alluding to the means of transportation in Madeira. In the 30s of the twentieth century, the city was the object of several urban interventions under the responsibility of the architect *Carlos Ramos*. His studio designed, for this purpose, a new set of fountains and some improvements for the existing ones. His design is characterized by the eclectic combination of some historicist motifs with the monochromatic tile, applied in patterns reminiscent of the geometric style of Art Deco.



Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal - 37

AVENIDA DO INFANTE



Commissioned by Empress *Dona Amélia* in honor of her daughter, who died from tuberculosis in Funchal in 1853, the hospice was the first Portuguese sanatorium, and it is one of the rare specimens, which is still intact, of what was best done in hospital architecture at that time. The small hospital and its garden, constitute, in this day age, a monumental ensemble of great significance in Madeira. It is a pity that this hospice that in the past attracted noblemen due to both the catastrophic proportion of its architecture and the beauty and exuberance of its garden is still not, just like 150 years ago, part of the tourist itinerary for those who visit the island. It is a typically romantic garden in which the irregular, the accidental and the asymmetrical prevail over



38 - Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal

PRINCESS DONA AMÉLIA GARDEN

the geometric patterns of the classical design. The latter appeared primarily at the back of the building, which has, in this day age, been completely transformed. This eclectic coexistence of designs (irregular and geometric), as well as the use of exotic species and ornamental horticulture, have made it a classic result of the theories of Loudon, the famous English landscape artist. The Hospice *Princesa Dona Maria Amélia (Hospício Princesa D. Amélia)* is now a nursing home and the garden has become a place in which its residents go to rest and relax. Its doors however, remain open to visitors. It has beautiful doors, flanked by two majestic dragon trees (*draceana draco*). Those who wish to walk through them, will be able to admire all the floristic diversity and abundance in the garden, the complex and intricate designs of the basalt pebbles and, in August, the lush flowering of the the Red Acacia (*Delonix regia*).



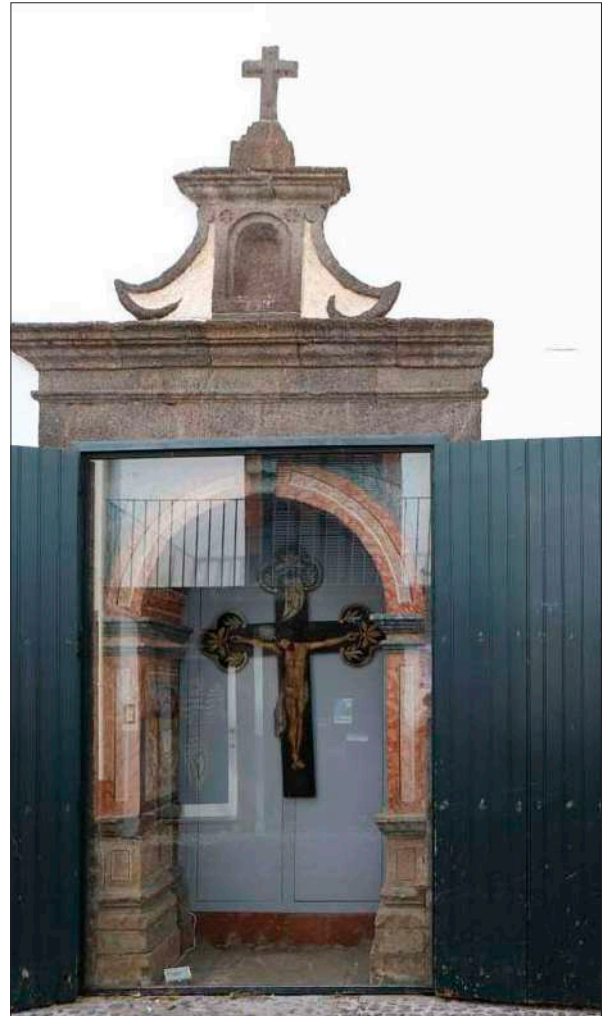
Architectural Peculiarities of Funchal - 39

RUA DE SANTA MARIA



The processional steps, the Footsteps of Jesus or the "footsteps of passion", are oratories built on streets or squares of the city representing the torments of Christ. Next to each one of these, the Procession of our Lord's Steps (Stations of the Cross), which took place on the third Sunday of Lent, would come to a momentary standstill. With its procession of penitents armed with whipping posts or carrying heavy iron bars, this procession epitomized, for many years, one of the instants of utter devotion of the Catholic population of the city. Of the five steps that existed in Funchal, there are now only two: one in *Largo do Pelourinho* and the other in *Rua de Santa Maria*, both built in the first half of the eighteenth century. Shielded by double wooden doors, they were opened only on the days of the procession or when there was some other religious celebration. Placed on the façades of the houses, these wall altars were decorated with frames and lintels in stonework from the region and crowned by a pediment topped with a cross. Constructed according to the Baroque style of the island of the period, the processional step of *Largo do Pelourinho*, with its perfect back arched niche enclosed in red stonework from Cabo Girão and crowned by a pediment that bears the weapons of faith of the Jesuits, IHS (iesus hominum salvator), is the most spectacular of the two processional steps that have survived in Funchal.

PROCESSIONAL STEPS



TECHNICAL FILE

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Illustrations: 19th page - 19b - Frank Dillon's watercolour (1850), "View looking up the Santa Luzia River", from Casa Museu Frederico de Freitas's Collection; 22nd page - 22b - from City Hall of Funchal (CMF)'s archives; 36th page - 36c - Watercolour (1954) by Max Romer.

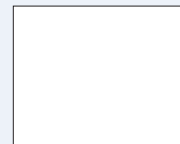
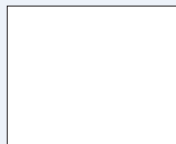
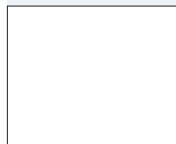
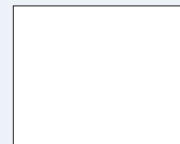
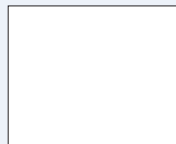
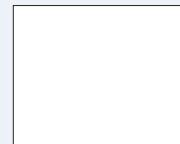
Maps: City map 1910 authored by the brothers Trigo, from CMF - Direção Regional de Cultura-Madeira (DRC-M)'s archives; Contemporary Map of Funchal from CMF's archives.

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MAP BAG



Department of Economics and Culture

Every city has its own urban and architectural adaptations to a place, to a climate or to a light, of certain morphologies that originate in other geographical and cultural contexts.

These result in the diverse character of cities and the strange seduction they exert over those who visit them for the first time.

This book will guide you through the architectural singularities of Funchal, and how this gives it its uniqueness and charm.



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