

# MARITIME CONTROL TOWER – PORT OF LISBON 1997-2001, Lisboa – Portugal

**Client** APL – Authority of the Port of Lisbon

**Engineering** A2P Consult (structure), Galvão Teles (mechanics), Joule (electricity), Grade Ribeiro (services), CONSULMAR, Projectistas e Consultores (supervision)

**Contractor** ENSUL, Empreendimentos Norte Sul, S. A.

**Photography** Daniel Malhão

Due to its function and its geographical position, the Maritime Traffic Coordination and Control Center of the Port of Lisbon assumes an exceptional presence in the river, operating in the transition between land and water. Aimed at controlling the traffic of a vast maritime and river area, the new architectural structure seeks its symbolic meaning, similar to other constructions that, throughout history, have been built on the riverfront.

When entering the port through the river, the new tower marks the starting point of a dialogue with several historical landmarks of the riverfront: the *Belém* Tower, a symbol of the golden period of the Portuguese Discoveries; the *Padrão dos Descobrimentos* Monument built during *Estado Novo* (the Portuguese fascist regime) dedicated to the Discoveries as well; the city open doors or Commerce Square, created during the era of *Marquês de Pombal* and *D. José* after the 1755 Lisbon earthquake; and, finally, the Expo 98 park, with the presence of the Oceanarium and the new “piazza”, which interiorises the river in the Pavilion of Portugal, designed by Álvaro Siza. All these buildings translate into the architectural form the representative values of the historical period in which they were designed and built, associated with the function and performance expected of them.

From the connotation to “power” to its military and strategic derivations, the tower’s verticality suggests control and ritualises the relationship between earth and sky. On the other hand, the horizon line, the marginal front and the jetty of the port, in their panoramic approximation, constitute conceptual references of horizontality. The plane of water also expresses fluidity, containing, in addition to its own movement, the movement of traffic that “slides” on its surface, acquiring a dynamic valence that is confronted with the immobility of the earth and the tower. These two ideas, horizontality and movement, are found in the image of the building sliding in its support (the jetty), a suggestion of near-suspension stimulated by the oblique rise of the volume, imparting the tension of an (apparent) imbalance.

Following the classical order of architecture with a base in stone, a shaft covered with copper, and a capital of “light” and transparent glass, illuminated by night like a lighthouse, that virtually dissolves in the air while emitting radio and radar waves, of “VHF” and “GPS”, 24 hours a day.

The building consists of a concrete nucleus founded on piles in the riverbed. A central and vertical duct contains staircase, elevators and technical services. The technical installations are located in the lower part of the building and on the fourth floor, to free the roof from technical equipment that might interfere with the radar system.

