

REHABILITATION OF THE SURROUNDINGS OF SANTA MARIA DE ALCOBAÇA MONASTERY 1998-2009, Alcobaça – Portugal

Coauthor João Pedro Falcão de Campos

Client Alcobaça Municipality

Promotor Housing Development Funds

Engineering A2P Estudos, Projectos e Consultadoria (structures), G.R. Estudos, Projectos e Consultadoria, Lda. (hydraulics), Joule, Projectos, Estudos e Coordenação, Lda (electricity), José Galvão Teles, Engenheiros, Lda (mechanics), Grafermonte - Consultadoria, Projecto e Investigação, Lda (security), Marta Byrne (landscape)

Contractor Edifer / Costa Carvalho

Photography Duccio Malagamba

The morphology of the City of Alcobaça is inseparable of the Cistercian Abbey's genesis around the XII century. The territory was shaped after the abbey's location and foundation at the cross of the two existent rivers: the Alcôa and the Baça rivers. Throughout the centuries and several modifications on the Abbey, it continued to determine the city's development in its surroundings.

The architectural design aimed to promote and encourage a contemporary relationship of complementariness and harmony between the City and the Monastery, once the area of intervention implies three different elements all linked to the abbey's history and, consequently, to the city's own development: the South wing of the Monastery (converted into a Museum) and the barn; the public main square and the adjacent side square and streets; and, finally, the area of the confluence of the two rivers Alcôa and Baça (including a support building of a cafe).

Celebrating the water and sensing the presence of the rivers is decisive in this context, whereas the project restores the inclination of the square, and creating a surface gutters network both enhance and display the draining of the water running to the river (a system known and used by the monks). A gutter for running water reveals the alignment of the Church with the Castle and the presence of the river Baça.

The fountain at D. Afonso Henriques Square is enhanced and restored to its original height. In the East, the path of the old bridge over the river Alcôa is reinstated and its presence emphasized. D. Pedro V Street is lowered to its original height, thereby freeing the corner and the openings of the Monastery. And, finally, the gravel surrounding the Abbey evokes the ancient yard.

The new materials used were chosen in order to accentuate a certain hieratic detachment, so underlying to the Cistercian architecture, where the way of working the natural light is, per system, decisive. It is in light, par excellence, the raw material of architecture, and in its revealing capacity that lays the main temporal bond of space. It is mainly the light that introduces the alternation, the diachrony of time.

The signs left along the passage of the centuries allowed to reveal in that magnificent space some lost coherences and even intrusive processes that were being targeted and that the project dared to counter.

