

# BANK BRANCH OFFICE 1982-1992, Arraiolos – Portugal

**Client** Caixa Geral de Depósitos  
**Engineering** Ferreira Crespo, Saldanha Palhoto (structures),  
Ruben Sobral (electricity), José Roque (installations), João  
Barrento (water and sewage)  
**Inspection** Franco da Costa  
**Contractor** HCI

The morphology of the small town of Arraiolos in Northern Alentejo has its origin in the location of its castle in a preeminent hill resulting in the development of the principal streets parallel to the contour lines and another system of perpendicular streets with origin at the castle.

The bank office is located at the historical centre, occupying a very deep and narrow plot between *Praça Lima e Brito*, the main village's major square, and *Rua da Misericórdia*. The proposed design intended thus to solve two major problems that arose immediately: to guarantee the continuity of the urban front facing the square and to create different solutions to illuminate the interior of the resulting from the straight and long building.

The square contained a wide range of façades, “chromatic vibrations of light under the lime” (in the words of Ana Vaz Milheiro), creating a game of very subtle curves, of small advances and retreats, made possible by the solution of a deconstructed double wall. An opaque plane, separated from the body of the building, interconnects with the plane of the urban façade, assuming the transition between an archaic and traditional architectural language and a contemporary one. It was important to understand how the place could be transformed starting from the pre-existing conditions while simultaneously ensuring the contemporaneity of the proposed transformation. A transparent plane at the back allows light to enter and illuminate the entrance foyer and building's interior to its full depth. This architectural device endows the building with a vital luminosity under the effect of reflected sunlight, standing out in the square without breaking the continuity of the urban façade. The complexity of life that occupies the square is suggested by the interior activity that can be guessed at by the differentiated character of the quality of light.

The internal dynamic develops taking advantage of its depth. The lower-ceilinged entrance precedes the long double-ceilinged space, marked by the curved volume (where archives, vaults, work areas are) suspended above the counter, ripped along virtually the entire length. A pure and autonomous cube (a sculptural element), which contains the manager's working area, acts as a point of convergence for the formal game and the lines of force of the composition. The interplay between these elements is reinforced by the tension created by the divergences between the longitudinal planes of the walls, balconies, lighting, and by the static opposite presence between the void and the inner cube.

The light sculpts the space, defining its different appropriations: in the public area, a lantern accompanies the longitudinal axis, while in the centre, a skylight emphasises the punctual situation of the cube, illuminating the waiting room of the manager's office.

