

COLLECTIVE HOUSING “CASAL DAS FIGUEIRAS” (S.A.A.L.) 1975-1979, Setúbal – Portugal

Client S.A.A.L.

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(structures)

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After the Carnation Revolution had deposed the authoritarian and fascist *Estado Novo* regime in 1974 in Portugal, Nuno Portas, Architect and Secretary of State for Housing and Urbanism of the newly constitutional government, founded an office to guarantee access to housing with decent living conditions for people living in slums within a program called S.A.A.L. - *Serviço Ambulatório de Apoio Local* (Local Ambulatory Support Service), a people-powered architectural and community service providing collaborative design.

By that time in Setúbal around 1900 people (580 families) were living without sanitation, electric light and drinking water in a clandestine neighborhood called *Casal das Figueiras* whose inhabitants were mainly fishers and workers of the canning industry. The chosen strategy was to implement a first phase corresponding to 300 houses and a second phase after the slums' vacancy comprehending the vacant area. However, only the first phase was concluded.

The terrain is located in the western fringe of the city of Setúbal in a very rugged area, at the foothills of the *Serra da Arrábida* with views towards the river Sado's bay and the Atlantic Ocean. This situation and the strong inclination of the terrain with minimum flat areas determined the overall design for the single-family row houses, with the ancient mills defining a ridge line and the height of the row which seen from the *Serra da Arrábida's* point of view resembles a continuous wall. From the side of the river, the rows of houses are set perpendicular to the terrain contour lines in order to optimize the strong inclination of the terrain and to reduce excavations for economic reasons, guaranteeing, at the same time, an independent access to each one of the houses, even in those cases where they are superimposed.

There are two different types of lots - square (9,60 m x 9,60 m) and rectangular (4,80 m x 19,20 m) – and all the different types of houses – from one to five rooms – derive from a common module which guarantees the adaption to the terrain's inclination as well, and all have an exterior space as the inhabitants wished for, which may vary accordingly to the position of the house inside the lot (albeit always respecting the overall design alignments). The three, four and five bedroom houses function in two levels.

Nowadays, all the houses exhibit informal transformations by past and current inhabitants, being the color of the façades one of the most common features among the interventions. Nevertheless, the major principles of its design may still be recognised.

