

# THALIA THEATRE 2008-2012, Lisbon – Portugal

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**Client** Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science

**Engineering** AFAconsult (structures, installations), Natural Works  
(HVAC, acoustics)

**Contractor** ACF

**Photography** Daniel Malhão

The Thalia Theatre dates from 1840s and it was built for the eccentric aristocrat Count of *Farrobo* as his private venue to perform theatre and opera shows and to throw extravagant parties for his own enjoyment, in the gardens of his palace at the outskirts of Lisbon. In those years, the area was scarcely occupied by palaces and adjacent gardens and farms whereas today it oscillates between a consolidated fabric along *Estrada das Laranjeiras* and the gardens of Lisbon's Zoo.

In 1862, a fire burned down the building with all its luxurious decoration of gilded wood, mirrors, and chandeliers. By then, Count of *Farrobo* was already facing financial difficulties, preventing him from restoring the theatre which remained in ruins until 2008 when the Portuguese Ministry of Education and Science decided to commission a study to transform the ruined building into a multipurpose space.

The design combines old and new into a new urban complex, establishing different relations with the nearby zoo and the city fabric through the creation of a permeable public square that links these two different urban contexts, but also by adding a new glazed wing that breaks the apparent symmetry of the classical composition and projects the building out to the street with a curtain-like façade of glass panes that mirrors the pulsar of the city, its rhythms and movements.

The entrance is made by the original foyer, reconstructed in a Neo-Classical-inspired style including a fluted frieze on the inside built with styrofoam profiles lit by a window at the upper end of the side wall that gives a sense of natural drama and prepares the transition from day light to the dark and intense atmosphere of the interior of the theatre. On the outside, the front portico and marble sphinxes were restored as well as the bronze letters at the tympanum of the main façade where one reads the motto of Thalia, the muse of comedy, in the original Latin inscription: “*Hic Mores Hominum Castigantur*” (“Here the Deeds of Men Shall Be Punished”).

In order to leave untouched the old ruins in the interior with its sense of wonder created by devastation and the passing of time, the exterior was covered by a shell of terracotta concrete forming a massive and monolithic body correspondent to the original volumes of the audience and the stage. Minimum technical fixtures create an arena that can be adjusted to several uses such as exhibitions, summits, concerts, parties or broadcasts. The new single-story glazed wing finally houses additional program such as a reception, services, and a cafeteria, which opens into the square and the gardens.

