

CENTRE FOR INTERPRE- TATION OF JEWISH CULTURE ISAAC CARDOSO 2006-2013, Trancoso – Portugal

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Client Câmara Municipal de Trancoso

Engineering Afaconsult, Lda.

Photography Fernando Guerra - FG+SG Photography

The Centre for Interpretation of Jewish Culture Isaac Cardoso was commissioned after several works in the city of Trancoso by our studio, which started with a broader understanding of the history of this territory included in the so-called “Historical Villages” due to the unique characteristics of its morphology and buildings.

The city of Trancoso is divided between three zones: the castle, located at a high altitude (where we refurbished by our studio; the historic centre, delimited by the remained circular; and the area outside the walls of more recent expansion, punctuated, still, by a few religious buildings.

The Interpretation Centre occupies a small-sized triangular block in ruins, in the dense urban fabric of the medieval fortified village, in an area once referred to as the Jewish quarter of Trancoso. The building is dedicated to preserving the memory of the Jewish presence in this territory, which dates back to the 14th century (paying homage directly to Isaac Cardoso, a Jewish doctor born in the early 17th century in Trancoso, having been Chief Physician of the Court of Madrid, and obliged to refuge in Verona due to religious persecutions).

Reinforcing the corner geometry, the building displays an acute angle on the intersection of two narrow streets - Rua do Poço dos Mestres and Travessa do Poço do Mestre - opening the field of vision for both streets, while subtly insinuating its presence in the public space.

The building's exterior surfaces feature an irregular stereotomy of granite stones and few openings, preserving the intimate character of the interior while reinforcing the impression of a solid stone mass, which echoes the materiality of the adjacent buildings.

This massive character is also assumed in the sequence of the interior spaces, which are revealed similarly to voids carved inside a large stone prism.

The main room - the centre's heart - refers to the sacred space of the Sephardic Synagogue, whose most obvious inspiration is the Synagogue of Tomar, rising to the full height of the building. The ceiling design presents a complex geometry, created with several skylights that filter the sunlight that, when reflected by the wooden panels that line the interior of the room, create a golden light, delicately enveloping the sacred space.

