

CONVERSION OF A FORMER HOSPITAL INTO A CHARM HOTEL

2005-2009,
Viseu –
Portugal

Client Grupo Pestana Pousadas – Investimentos Turísticos, S.A.
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Conversion always affects the structure of a building due to the change in use that it presupposes. In spite of the former use of a hospital, the ancient *Hospital de São Teotónio of Santa Casa da Misericórdia*, located in Viseu, revealed an excellent typological adaptability to a charm hotel, owing to its neoclassical composition of a rectangular and modular plan with a cloister at the centre, a structure that was clearly reminiscent of convent typologies, notwithstanding the original plans date from late XVIII and the construction works – extended for almost 50 years – from the beginning of the XIX century.

The conversion of the ancient hospital into a charm hotel constituted an important step towards the rehabilitation of the historical centre of the city of Viseu by redesigning and reactivating the urban tissue around it. Moreover, the building holds a privileged position within the city fabric as it is located at a higher level overlooking the city landscape and its historical buildings, such as the *Sé*, becoming, in turn, a visual element of reference, also reinforcing its new condition in the city. The force of the tectonics and the adaptability of the preexistence allowed maintaining its skeleton, the thick granite structural walls, the main staircases in stone and the entire cloister area, adding for functional reasons and compliance with the safety regulations, four columns of equidistant stairs, two lifts and another one for hotel services only. The design proposed replacing the existent roof (which being extremely inclined puts into question its original existence since it distorts the neoclassical order and the importance of the cornice) with a very horizontal floor creating a line of shadow on the four sides, that acts as a reinforcement of the cornice of the building and of its corporality and compactness when seen from outside. The contemporary addition tries to comply with these important values of the neoclassical architecture.

Another important decision was to cover the cloister following the intuition that in the original building the accesses to the hospital wings were exterior as it was frequent by that time, but for reasons of comfort, they were enclosed (as the windows notice), which turned the patio into a box by the reflection of the glass. By taking away these windows, the openness of the wings that flank the cloister and the sense of depth are recovered at the same time comfort is guaranteed by covering the cloister with a system of skylights. The cloister turns then into a large living room lit from above – the heart of the building – keeping the strong representativeness of a central space. The ground floor contains the social functions (reception, multi-purpose rooms, a bar with the possibility of direct exterior access from *Rua do Hospital*, bathrooms, and the restaurant), while rooms are located at upper floors, as well as a spa and service zones. The rooms in the new wing enjoy of exterior balconies and a privileged view towards the city.

