

Celia Gomes

ATELIER CONCEIÇÃO SILVA IN PORTUGAL

Creating as a process

AUTHOR

Celia Gomes, PhD candidate
University of Lisbon, Faculty of Architecture
celiagomes.as@gmail.com

SUPERVISORS

João Sousa Morais and Hugo Farias
(University of Lisbon, Faculty of Architecture
www.fa.ulisboa.pt/
{jgmorais|hfarías}@fa.ulisboa.pt)

KEYWORDS

Atelier Conceição Silva, portuguese architecture, project methodology, multi-disciplinarity, innovation in architecture.

ABSTRACT

The architecture of Atelier Conceição Silva (ACS) was remarkable in the Portuguese panorama in the period from the 60s to the 70s, questioning the thinking and doctrine of Modern Architecture and rationalism experienced during this time in Europe. ACS was characterized as a multidisciplinary workspace - with various authors and participants involved, from ceramists, artists, designers, photographers, writers and filmmakers. What are the main characteristics of ACS's design methodology that made it remarkable in its time? To answer this question, two case studies were considered: i) The Hotel do Mar in Sesimbra (1960-1966); ii) and The Hotel da Balaia in Albufeira (1965-1967/1971-73). The cross-examination, analysis and synthesis of these case studies led us to conclude that the methodological process of ACS was demarcated i) by technical and conceptual experimentation and ii) by an approach to project conception considered as a total design work. The work developed by ACS left a legacy to Portuguese architecture that we believe to be reflected in contemporaneity.

FRANCISCO CONCEIÇÃO SILVA IN HIS CONTEXT

Francisco Conceição Silva (1922-1982) was born in Lisbon. He graduated in Architecture at the Fine Arts School in Lisbon in 1946, during a period in which there was great repression and political confrontation in Portugal, coinciding with the end of World War II.

In opposition to the Portuguese regime politics, the I.C.A.T. group¹ appears in Lisbon in 1946. This was a group formed by several architects of a new generation “in defense of a new architecture” (Fernandez, 1988), among which was the young Francisco Conceição Silva (FCS), and it would have an influential role in the architectural and visual arts debate.

During this period the magazine *Arquitectura* reappears under a new management, with strong connections to I.C.A.T., and becomes an important instrument in the diffusion of a new Portuguese architecture that tries to move away from a language associated with the architecture of the *Estado Novo*². This magazine was also notable by the strong references to international architecture through the publication of several representative works of the Modern Movement.

In 1948, the *1st National Congress of Architecture* was held with the strong presence and participation of the I.C.A.T. and the ODAM³, a group of architects from Oporto. For the first time several themes were discussed by two generations of ideologically distant architects, assuming different positions. Nonetheless, the freedom of their speeches and their contents were guaranteed, and a general contestation of national values emerged (Tostões, 1997). In this context, FCS and Cândido Palma de Melo presented a manifesto on *Teaching in Architecture*, a critique of the architectural panorama in teaching and in practice.

Another initiative of I.C.A.T. was the participation in the organization of the *General Exhibitions of the Arts* (1946-1956). This consisted in a number of controversial exhibitions that became dynamic in the dissemination of Portuguese neorealism and surrealism and clearly against a *regime* architecture. These exhibitions were set to establish a strong connection between architecture and the arts, and it is worth mentioning their multidisciplinary nature, including works of painting, sculpture, architecture, graphic design, decorative arts and photography.

Sensitive to this relationship between architecture and the arts, FCS, with his vast experience in furniture design, proposed to João Alcobia the organization of the exhibition *Exposição de Mobiliário e Decoração Moderna*⁴ at *Casa Jalco*⁵ in Lisbon. Participants in this exhibition included José Bastos, Conceição Silva, the decorator Carlos Ribeiro, the painters Julio Pomar, Querubim Lapa, Sá Nogueira and the sculptors Rocha Correia, Jorge Vieira e Vasco Conceição. With the aim of creating a showcase of works that guar-

1 I.C.A.T. - Cultural Artistic and Technical Initiatives

2 Estado Novo - the ruling fascist regime in Portugal (1933-1974)

3 ODAM - Organization of Modern Architects from Oporto

4 Modern Furniture Design and Decoration Exhibition at Casa Jalco in Lisbon, 1951.

5 Casa Jalco - Furniture Store in Lisbon

anted a modern environment, the exhibition turned out to be a surprise for the public (Vitorino, 1951), “and it was, at least, a scandal at the time” (Silva, 1971).

FCS ended up maintaining a strong connection to *Casa Jalco*, organizing several exhibitions in this store. The exhibition on surrealist art (1952) with Vespeira, Fernando Azevedo and Fernando Lemos was striking and controversial. From this relationship comes the invitation of João Alcobia (owner of *Casa Jalco*) to FCS to design the *Hotel do Mar* in Sesimbra (1960-1966). This is a work that marked the beginning of his atelier in terms of dimension and organized structure, as we will see ahead.

The methodology of integration of various artistic disciplines was evident in the work of *Rampa* store (1955-56). It was a project elaborated with José Daniel Santa-Rita, with the important intervention of Querubim Lapa in the design of the ceramic tiles on the entrance porch. The store went beyond a commercial space, as an exhibition space (Figure 1), and containing art works by Julio Pomar, Hansi Stal, Almada Negreiros, Querubim Lapa, Alice Jorge, Carmo Valente, Sá Nogueira among others.



Figure 1: Rampa Store. Source: Magazine Atrium n1 (September/October 1959).

Another example of his work process was the competition for the *Portuguese Pavilion in Lausanne* in 1957, which FCS won by presenting a multidisciplinary team composed by José Daniel Santa Rita, António Sena da Silva (with experience in ephemeral projects), Manuel Rodrigues in the area of decoration, and artists Almada Negreiros, Querubim Lapa and Jorge Vieira.

“In the field of furniture and objects it has led to something that I consider very important in my profession: that is to dominate, in fact, a project in its totality and to provide a relationship with parallel activities” (Silva, 1971)⁶

In this context and in a strong relationship with the arts, FCS was the director of the *National Society of Fine Arts* between 1957 and 1970, having been its president for the last three years. In 1956 he was also responsible for the creation of the *Egraving Cooperative* and four years later he created the *Portuguese Tapestry Center*. At the same time, he was the director of the *National Syndicate of Architects* (1954-1967).

6 Free Translation from: “(...)no sector do mobiliário e do objecto levou a uma coisa que considero muito importante na minha profissão: é o dominar, de facto, um projecto na sua totalidade e proporcionar uma relação com actividades paralelas.”

THE STUDIO DEVELOPMENT

"I can say that there are three decisive moments in my career: the first was the Rampa, the second the Hotel do Mar, and the third, finally the Hotel da Balaia, in the Algarve" (Silva, 1971)⁷

If in an early period FCS had an important collaboration with Adelino Nunes and José Bastos (1945-1953). It was nevertheless his ambition to start an independent activity. The first atelier in *Rua Nova da Trindade* emerges with mostly single-family housing projects and several shops in downtown Lisbon. A significant relevance came from the work *Rampa* store, which is relevant in its approach to project design in its multidisciplinary components. The space was designed scenographically, with a ramp as the central element (Figure 1). The ramp was the main feature in the overall spatial organization, thus creating a formal richness and intensity that was visible from the street through a big shop window. In turn, this strong interior/exterior relationship was underlined by the portico, covered in ceramic panels by Querubim Lapa, which revealed the entrance to the store.

During the same period, FCS had the opportunity to design the project that represented a decisive moment in the office, because it represented a private work of great dimension and it would have repercussions on the future structure of the company - the *Hotel do Mar* in Sesimbra. The project was developed within a concept of *total design*, from architecture to furniture, with the integration of works of art and ceramics, and also the design of the exterior spaces.

"The Hotel de Sesimbra, in the early 60's, launched the Atelier Conceição Silva and established, through an architecture with good formal quality and easy perception, the standard to be adopted by countless later achievements." (Fernandez, 1985)⁸

This was the work that marked the turning point of the architecture of FCS into the beginning of the great *Atelier Conceição Silva* (ACS). The projects developed afterwards started to have more complex programs, always associated with large scale works. After being invited to develop the project of the *Hotel da Balaia* in Algarve, FCS invites Mauricio de Vasconcelos to be his partner, creating a joint office between 1965 and 1967. In order to guarantee a high quality response, a total control of the design development process and of the completion of the work, FCS with his entrepreneur spirit and awareness of the existing limitations, undertook himself the leading role in the construction of the *Hotel da Balaia*. This is the first example of a *turn-key* project, where the architect is responsible not only for the design of the project but also for its construction.

"Imagining a future that was inclined to ever-growing organizations, he advocated the creation of large companies that would cover all the operations

7 Free Translation from: "Posso dizer que há três momentos decisivos na minha carreira: o primeiro foi a Rampa, o segundo o Hotel do Mar, e o terceiro, finalmente o Hotel da Balaia, no Algarve"

8 Free Translation from: "O Hotel de Sesimbra, no início dos anos 60, lançou o Atelier Conceição Silva e consagrava, através de uma arquitectura do bom nível formal e de fácil percepção, o modelo a adotar por inúmeras realizações posteriores."

of production, in which architects had a more active voice, precisely because they alone would know how to defend the whole process, so necessary to good completion of architectural works.” (Toussaint, 1987)⁹

During this period, the ACS created a large business structure with approximately one hundred and forty employees, located at *Rua D. Pedro V* in Lisbon (from 1965 onwards). It was organized in several departments, maintaining *multidisciplinarity* as the main principle, the one in which FCS had always firmly believed. The company consisted of the departments of architecture, design, urban planning, photography, landscaping, art and engineering. There was a radio station that was managed by the studio itself. Within the architecture department there were several working groups with a clear hierarchy in their organization and output, this being a unique model in the country.

This was a period with an extensive private project demand, with projects of collective housing, offices, and tourism related buildings, such as the *Housing Towers in Alfragide* in 1968, the *Castil office Building* in Lisbon in 1971, the *Avenida de Roma Plan* and the *Tourist Complex of Tróia Peninsula* (1971-1974). The ACS starts to collaborate with companies that will influence the definition of the constructive options of its works, thus ensuring their proper execution. In the case of the Tróia project, the partnership with a precast plant leads the office to realize that the use of pre-fabrication could be an innovative strategy as a constructive system. Both for its effectiveness in terms of construction speed as for the guarantee of the final work quality (Chamberlain, 1987).

CASE STUDIES

In order to answer the set question: What are the main characteristics of the design methodology of ACS that made it stand out in its time? Two case studies were developed: *Hotel do Mar* and *Hotel da Balaia*. The selection criteria were: i) they are outstanding works in the work course of FCS, ii) they are of the same building typology, iii) they are both large scale works.

Hotel do Mar

Following the exhibition at *Casa Jalco* and at the invitation of João Alcobia, FCS had the opportunity to design the *Hotel do Mar* (1960-1966) in Sesimbra. This is a work featuring a very sensitive and delicate insertion in the terrain - the volumes are composed by the sequence and unification of the room modules that accompany and reconstruct the topography of the slope. At one moment, horizontally, by the twists that the bodies of the rooms present, and at another, vertically, through the stepped volumes (Figure 2), creating a

9 Free Translation from: “Imaginando um futuro entregue a organizações cada vez maiores, defendia a criação de grandes empresas que abarcassem a totalidade das operações dessa produção, na qual os arquitectos tivessem voz mais activa, exactamente porque apenas eles saberiam defender a globalidade do processo, tão necessário à boa conclusão dos trabalhos de arquitectura.”

strong relationship between interior and exterior.



Figure 2: Exterior view of Hotel do Mar (1st phase – 1960/1963) (2nd phase – 1963/1966). Source: Atelier Conceição Silva (1), Photography by the autor (2)(3).

On the other hand, it was an innovative project in its time, developed within the concept of a total and integrated design. It aims at the creation of a global environment, where the integration of the arts is clearly developed to the last detail. For instance, the furniture¹⁰ and lighting designed by FCS were developed in the perspective of a continued production, one that would later be used in other of his projects. The intervention of Querubim Lapa also stands out in the collective spaces and circulation areas of the Hotel, with the use of ceramic panels that in a poetic and figurative way identify the various spaces (Figure 3). We can also find works by Sá Nogueira, Maria Velez and António Charrua produced by the *Engraving Cooperative* and the *Portuguese Tapestry Center*¹¹, the lithographs and serigraphs by Tomás de Melo, the sculptures by João Cutileiro and Graça Costa Cabral and the paintings by Pedro Leitão. Within the concept of a global and integrated design, the dinner services and the decorative pieces by the SECLA factory¹², were also designed exclusively for the Hotel do Mar. After the opening of the second phase of the Hotel (1966), FCS maintained his connection with the work and with João Alcobia, and invited the young filmmaker José Fonseca and Costa to shoot a promotional documentary of the Hotel - “*E era o mar*”.

10 Part of the furniture and lighting were designed by FCS. Another part being chosen by FCS and João Alcobia and purchased from Casa Jalco. The designed furniture was also produced by the same store.

11 In 1956 FCS was responsible for the creation of the Engraving Cooperative and in 1960 also created the Portuguese Center of Tapestry.

12 SECLA was a decorative ceramic factory created in 1947 in Caldas da Rainha, with the particularity of having as collaborators renowned designers and artists - Júlio Pomar, José Aurélio, Hansi Stael, António Quadros, Ian Hird e Ferreira da Silva.

Figure 3: Furniture and lighting (FCS) examples in a circulation space within the rooms area, ceramic panel by Querubim Lapa – Hotel do Mar. Source: Photography by the author.



Hotel da Balaia

The *Hotel da Balaia*, located on Maria Luiza beach in the Algarve, is clearly the work that determines the beginning of the great company ACS. It brings to the country the unprecedented concept of a *turnkey* project. FCS thus proposes to take a more active role in the whole design and construction process.

Figure 4: Exterior view of Hotel da Balaia (1st phase – 1965/1967) (2nd phase – 1971/1973). Source: Francisco Conceição Silva Catalog.



13 Free translation from: (...) FCS equated the professional action from a new perspective: in addition to the design of the building, it was the architect's task - for the first time - to create the material conditions for its completion, controlling everything from investment, procedures and construction techniques, to furniture and equipment design, to the decoration and design of the logotype.

14 Construction Company AC - Arquitectura e Construção - founded by Francisco Conceição Silva

(...) FCS equated the professional action from a new perspective: in addition to the design of the building, it was the architect's task - for the first time - to create the material conditions for its completion, controlling everything from investment, procedures and construction techniques, to furniture and equipment design, to the decoration and design of the logotype. (Lobo, 2010)¹³

To meet this new challenge, FCS created the construction company AC¹⁴, which would be responsible for building the *Hotel da Balaia*. The companies SIURBE real estate development and ARP advertising were also created as support structures and guaranteed the success of the venture - these were companies managed directly by FCS in close collaboration with ACS. It would be more valuable for FCS to manage the entire process, given the need to guarantee the architectural quality of the project without compromising the short time for its elaboration, eighteen months. *"This is a great advantage,*

that when we design not only are we familiar with the construction processes, but also that we keep the construction society immediately abreast and following the evolution of the project.” (Silva, 1971).

Similar to the project for the *Hotel do Mar*, several artists and designers were also involved, some as external collaborators and others part of the structure of the ACS company: that was the case of the artist Sá Nogueira responsible for the art department and that would produce pieces in tapestry and painting; The designers Carmo Valente and Carlos Calvet were responsible for furniture design. From furniture design, decoration, artists’ interventions, tapestries, and graphic design (Picture 5), everything was coordinated and managed by FCS.



Figure 5: Common areas room at Hotel da Balaia – featuring equipment and artistic works. Source: Francisco Conceição Silva Catalog.

This business model within architecture was one of the main themes at the *National Congress of Architecture* (1969). With two opposing views: criticized by Nuno Portas and Keil do Amaral that believed the architectural quality was not guaranteed when combined with the economic interests of large companies, and defending the philosophy of the exercise of the liberal profession; On the other hand Carlos Duarte pointed out the process of the *Hotel da Balaia* as an example of success (Fernandez, 1988).

Results

The following table compares the disciplines and authors involved in both case studies. (Figure 6)

After analyzing the comparative table on the collaborations of the projects presented as case studies, we can observe that both have as process the integration of the arts. In both cases various creative areas actively participate in the process, from ceramics, painting, sculpture, engraving, serigraphy, tap-

etry, graphic design and equipment design.

In *Hotel do Mar*, we only find the name of FCS as the author of the architectural project. In *Hotel da Balaia*, two authors and collaborators were already identified as part of the ACS company, organized by departments. In the same way it is in *Hotel da Balaia* that the various companies managed by FCS: ACS (Architecture Office), AC (Building Company), ARP (Communication Company) and SIURPE (Real Estate Developers) appear.

We can also observe the need to manage the whole process even after the completion of the architectural work, through its promotion. In *Hotel do Mar* a documentary was made by the film-maker José Fonseca e Costa and in *Hotel da Balaia* the communication company ARP was created.

CONCLUSION

The case studies developed demonstrate that FCS adopted a multidisciplinary approach in his studio, making the most of his collaborators skills. These collaborators came from different creative areas, and thus contributed to the entire project as a whole composed of many different qualities and angles.

FCS adopted in *Hotel do Mar* the concept of a *total architecture work*, by controlling the design of all the different specialities. This experience and acquired knowledge led him later, on the development of the *Hotel da Balaia*, to constitute a company that would control the full process, from design, to construction, communication and marketing of the building as a whole product. This way, he kept under control the quality of the overall project design.

DISCUSSION

Creating as a process - may be the expression that better defines the architect Francisco Conceição Silva. He had the capacity to constantly adapt his studio and its structure to each project and context's needs.

Given his relationship with the various disciplines in his work process, we are led to think that he was responsible for the dissemination and promotion of some of these artists, as well as some of the associated industries.

Are there in the portuguese context currently offices with the same characteristics as ACS, in regard to design process dimension and methodology?

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The development of this paper was sponsored by FCT - Fundação para a Ciência e Tecnologia and CIAUD - Centro de Investigação em Arquitetura, Urbanismo e Design. Also, it is essential to the development of this research the collaboration of FCS's family by giving full access to the studio's archive.

Hotel do Mar (HM) (1960-1966)		Hotel da Balaia (HB) (1965-1967) (1071-1973)
Casa Jalco - João Alcobia	Client	Sociedade Hoteleira da Balaia Orey & Antunes
Francisco Conceição Silva (FCS)	Architecture	Atelier Conceição Silva (ACS) FCS + Maurício de Vasconcelos team: J. Soares Oliveira + T. Taveira
Francisco Conceição Silva João Alcobia	Furniture and Product Design	Francisco Conceição Silva Carmo Valente (design department) Carlos Calvet (design department)
Querubim Lapa	Ceramic (fine arts)	
Sá Nogueira and Maria Velez (Egraving Cooperative)	Engraving	
Sá Nogueira and António Charrua (Portuguese Tapestry Center)	Tapestry	A. Charrua, Menez, Júlio Pomar Rogério Ribeiro, Sá Nogueira Luísa Bastos, Maria José Pereira
Tomás de Melo	Serigraphy	Espiga Pinto
João Cutileiro Graça Costa Cabral	Sculpture	Fernando Conduto, João Cutileiro Graça Costa Cabral
Pedro Leitão	Painting	Sá Nogueira (fine arts department) A. Charrua, Dintel, Jorge Espiga M. Velez, Menez and Rogério Ribeiro
Manuel Rodrigues	Graphic Design	Espiga Pinto
SECLA	Domestic Ceramics	Vista Alegre
	Engineering	Jaime P. Gomes, José Mendonça Rocha Cabral and JJ Tomé (engineering department)
ERG	Building Company	AC (FCS's company)
	Communication	ARP (FCS's company)
	Real Estate Developer	SIURPE (FCS's company)

Figure 6: The table compares the disciplines and authors involved in both case studies.

REFERENCES

Chamberlain, J 1987, 'Uma perspectiva europeia - antes do tempo', in Silva, JPC and Silva, FMC (eds) 1987, *Francisco Conceição Silva arquitecto*, Sociedade Nacional Belas Artes, Lisboa, pp. 18-19.

Fernandez, S 1988, *Percurso, Arquitectura Portuguesa 1930-1974*, FAUP publicações, Porto.

Lobo, S 2010, 'Sun, Sand, Sea & Bikini. Arquitectura e turismo: Portugal anos 60', *Revista Crítica de Ciências Sociais*, 91, pp. 91-102.

Silva, FC 1971, 'Entrevista', *Arquitectura*, 120, pp. 42-46.

Tostões, A 1997, *Os Verdes Anos na Arquitectura Portuguesa dos Anos 50*, FAUP publicações, Porto.

Toussaint, M 1987, 'O Arquitecto', in Silva, JPC and Silva, FMC (eds) 1987, *Francisco Conceição Silva arquitecto*, Sociedade Nacional Belas Artes, Lisboa, pp. 21-26.

Victorino, JMC 1951, 'Uma exposição de decoração moderna', *A Arquitectura Portuguesa e Cerâmica e Edificação (reunidas)*, 164, pp. 9-10.