

Interview with architect João Favila

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To cite this article: RAMALHETE, Filipa; QUINTELA, João – Entrevista ao arquiteto João Favila. **Estudo Prévio** 24. Lisboa: CEACT/UAL - Centro de Estudos de Arquitectura, Cidade e Território da Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, maio 2024, p. 2-18. ISSN: 2182-4339 [Disponível em: www.estudoprévio.net]. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.26619/2182-4339/24.8>

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It is with great pleasure that we welcome the architect and professor João Favila today. We would like to start by asking you about your choice of life as an architect and your journey as a student. What was your experience like? Did you have any teachers or particular exercises, that made an impression on you?

It all started with drawing. I have always had a passion for drawing. Drawing has been a kind of magical process for me since I was very young. I was my parents' first child. I was their only child for five years. Then I had three more sisters. I had to entertain myself a lot on my own. I still have memories of me as a child drawing. My mother was studying Fine Arts, and that for sure also had an impact on me; then, my father was an architect... however, more than architecture, it was drawing that fascinated me. When it came for me to choose my path, I only had one doubt: whether to study Fine Arts, like my mother, or Architecture, like my father. The latter came along afterwards, when, as I got older, rigorous drawing took hold on me, as all my childhood had been spent drawing freely. There was my uncle Nuno who loved cats and he would put cats appearing everywhere on my drawings. I thought that was almost magical. At some point, I went to António Arroio School, which was an important process for me, for I studied Interior Equipment, and object design, something that I have always liked the most, the exploration of objects. Then there was Descriptive Geometry, which, for me, was not even really a course, it was something you could do without any problem. In Descriptive Geometry I discovered that type of drawing that leads to a rigorous representation of spaces and that took me into Architecture.

It is a dilemma I still have. Nowadays I only draw, I do not use AutoCad. The advent of computing was actually sad for me, by then, as I loved rigorous drawing, cleaning up the

rulers, and computers (which are, obviously, unavoidable and fantastic instruments of work that allow a lot of possibilities) were not my cup of tea. I was all about drawing. I still am. I always work directly with drawing on computer drawings. Today I also do a kind of contemplative drawing – looking at a landscape, drawing and forgetting everything. It is more of a standstill.

Do you still have a drawing board in your studio?

I sure do. I still have everything the old-fashioned way. I think I am the only one who still puts the backdrop paper on the drawing board. I still have the caster ruler, the one that goes up and down, I still do the whole process. I was drawing with it this morning. However, it is a difficult practice to maintain in today's work environment, for it requires a completely different relationship with time. Today, we simply do not have time. I remember, for example, that my father, in order to carry out a relatively large execution project, needed a true battalion. Nowadays, we do it with two or three employees at most. A big project is done with three people and that requires a completely different dynamic. And yet, I still have what I think is one of the greatest pleasures of my profession, which is to arrive early in the morning at the studio and have a clean drawing board with a white sheet of paper and a problem to solve. For me, it does not get any better than that.

That was why I chose architecture. Eventually, I went to Porto, and that was wonderful for me. Days began with a presentation class by Fernando Távora, who was an absolutely remarkable person. He welcomed us in an amphitheater, with a lot of protocol, and one would be stunned, since he spoke as if he were doing so for architects with ten years of practice, he really took it to the highest level.



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That period in Porto was some of the best teaching I have ever had, although as an infant I had also been in a school that made a big impression on me: Beiral. It was teaching through art; we would enter a pavilion full of paints, with everyone painting. I still remember drawings by friends of mine from back then, as well as the empathy I had with people through drawing. When I began my education in Porto, drawing was the centre of everything, we would spend hours and hours drawing – I think there were twelve hours of drawing a week, it really was crazy.

There in Porto, I had extraordinary drawing teachers. With Fernando Távora, it was a kind of mental journey: he would come to class with three or four objects. With a pair of glasses, he would travel to unthinkable places, through the drawing of them, the finish, the shape. We never forgot that. There were some very important figures: the drawing teachers, namely Luísa Alves Costa and, perhaps the one who made the biggest impression on me, José Grade, who died not long ago. He was an absolutely extraordinary character. Extremely demanding, almost irascible. At the same time, he was very affectionate and very close to students. It was tension-like. He always told me "I do not fail anyone, but 30% of students give up my course". That was his attitude. We would draw for hours. Then, there was something quite fascinating for me, which was the nude model drawing. We were young adults... we would get to a big room and there would be a naked man or woman there. Even for those who like drawing, it is an absolutely demanding exercise.

Alberto Carneiro was also one of the teachers who made a big impression on me, for the way he looked at things, the way he used drawing itself. In the second grade, with him

and António Quadros, it was more research design of the project, which is another aspect of drawing that is a tool, for me, of everyday life. I have, for each project, an A4 notebook that I use all the time to draw. That habit comes from back then, from those times there.

Subsequently, whilst at Lisbon, other things came. In Porto, it was programmatically very much organized, the faculty very much aligned. In Lisbon, all was more dysfunctional, in the sense that everyone had their own perspective. In there, I also had teachers who impressed me greatly, even under a certain tension-like environment. One of them was João Luís Carrilho da Graça. He was a very intemperate person, but very intelligent, very sharp, always proposing disconcerting things. I still remember "Captain Scarlet's house", which was a house without gravity. For me, coming from Porto, used to reading the territory, gravity, and flat architecture – suddenly, as a student in Lisbon, there was no drawing, there were no models, there was no gravity... that was extremely interesting. João Luís was also a figure that quite impressed me, not only as a teacher, but also as an element in the process itself of architecture, for effectively proposing another type of research, much more linked, for example, to the model as the conception of the project. Not as a presentation, a representation closed in itself, but more as a sketch, in which one works and transforms, and alters, and explores and researches.

There was this exercise that João Luís Carrilho da Graça used to do at FAUL that I found disconcerting at first. He was showing us a film by Pina Bausch, in which puberty kids explore themselves. In the end, they put on an unthinkable spectacle. The movie was as such. The next day, he asked students to bring a sheet of white cardboard so they would use it to produce a mask. For me, that was incredible. The next day they all came wearing masks and black clothing. It was an amazing exercise, as we got to know one another right away on the first day. The way they acted and responded to that was absolutely amazing. When, later on, I began teaching, along with him and practiced that exercise, I became very aware of human nature. It was very beautiful. And aesthetically it was remarkably surprising.

When you chose Porto, was it an intentional choice?

No, I went to Porto because I failed to enter Lisbon school by two tenths! However, in Porto I, in parallel, found a space of freedom. In teaching it is very important for one to feel free and provide that sense of freedom. I come from a large and quite conservative Madeiran family with many cousins. All of a sudden, I find myself in Porto, with all the time in the world to get to know people, to talk. That time I spent in Porto was, at that level, quite incredible.



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As soon as you left university, you started working in your father's studio. How was the transition to the professional world?

I spent two years in Porto. At some point, I had the dilemma of whether to return to Lisbon or not. I love Porto, and at some point, I got myself very involved in there. But eventually I began to realize the city had its limitations. I did not know Lisbon well and I started to wish to come here to get to know the city and I chose to come. The first job I got was to make perspectives and project environments by hand. Then, I started working with my father. He was always very supportive. I have always had, and still have, a very close relationship with my father. He has always given me a lot of space in the studio; that is not very usual amongst parents. He believed in me, and thus gave me a lot of access to the studio. At some point, it was practically mine and I filled it with my friends; it was like partying. Teresa Gois Ferreira, Luis Rosário, Pedro Borges, João Santa Rita, Paulo Fonseca, João Matos, Paulo Palma, Pedro Mota, Miguel Figueira, Pedro Castro Neves, were some of the people that worked with us. The first works I did were commissioned by my father, which I developed. Then, he had a problem at the studio, wanted to leave and I stayed on.

Were they housing projects?

It was diversified. My father worked for a long time for construction companies that made investments and needed architects, and they had a drawing room. For us, it was completely different... nights out at the studio, then we would go to Galeto for dinner at two in the morning, go out for drinks, get some rest, and come straight to the studio to take care of things. The ateliers had a different dynamic back then... I met a lot of people at that time, when I started working, Pedro Domingos, Inês Lobo. Pedro was a friend of

a friend of mine. Once, when I was at university, I was also doing a project with my father and I needed to make a model. Pedro, with that look of his, said: "I will go there". When he came back, I thought "Now he is going to be here for four or five days working on with this". And he arrived at nine o'clock in the evening and only left with the model ready! That is how you start, with small projects. I also decided to keep the name, not least because of my father and our relationship with Madeira, because Bugio is one of the deserted islands of Madeira.



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And when did your relationship with teaching begin?

I taught for many years in Évora, then I came to Lisbon to teach at FAUL and, later on, at UAL also in Lisbon.

Always teaching Design Project?

Yes, although I have an anecdote to tell you, because it was very funny; it happened in Évora. Teachers of architecture usually like to lecture project to last grades. I went to Évora and taught the fifth grade for many years. Then I got to teach third grade, and, at some point, there were several members of faculty wanting to teach Design Project and I said "but there is a problem here about the drawing course, it does not work, there are no instruments, I will lead that unit". I started to think about it, to find out what I was going to do, which exercises to conduct. Of course, I had Porto's memories as references and therefore I thought to simply replicate them. And yet, so many years had gone by, that I wanted to have an opinion, to listen to someone about my wanderings. A friend of mine, then, said to me "João, you should talk to Carlos Nogueira, believe me". So, I did. I called him on the phone; he barely knew me, but he invited me to go to his place. I gladly

accepted the invitation, and there he explained his drawing lessons to me in one afternoon. By the end, I told him "Carlos, I made a big mistake, I should have taken lessons with you". And that did happen. It was a big coincidence that Carlos Nogueira was at the Gulbenkian Foundation with a retrospective of his in 2012. I said to my students "The first class will be with Carlos Nogueira". I came with them from Évora and he lectured them at his exhibition. After that, I quit teaching there. When I came to Lisbon, I got a number of invitations and the first one was from FAUL, where I still teach.

One of the grades I like to teach the most is the first one. Teaching architecture is something that takes its time to construct. But in the first grade, the main thing is for students to experience the fascination of discovering the project. That is really what is most interesting, to be stimulated by something that infects us. First grade teaching is very much linked to this. When I see the models, or the drawings, I immediately see who has already entered this world. Those who are amongst them, get involved, apply themselves, and work and find answers far beyond the questions and objectives. They become infected with the process itself and I think that is the most important thing. Students from first grade are very open to investigating, to seeing, to hearing, to everything. It is highly transformative to watch young adults who know practically nothing, and, suddenly, reveal themselves, become enthusiastic about the performance they do themselves. And that is really the big theme: how do we maintain the fascination after twenty or thirty years? The first grade is always very important. It was for me. One, suddenly, is doing things that never thought would be capable of; it is a process of discovery that I myself continue to experience. That is the decisive theme in first grade.



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At UAL you teach second grade, which, from our experience, is when students really decide if they wish to carry on, is it not?

Yes, because by then they already have a better idea. It is a time of decisions.

What is it like to teach Design Project to the second grade? What strategies do you use?

The second grade, for me, is one that I associate with the fascination of the project; it has a lot to do with our ability and our availability to read things. To read the territory, to read history. I also teach Architecture Technology; I do something a little risky: I bring in an architect who explains the process of designing three windows that he designed. This semestre I brought in Pedro Domingos, Pedro Gameiro, Pedro Oliveira, and Paulo David. Each class comes an architect, who explains the importance of the window in a space. Then he explains the design of such opening. Students get amazed, as if I were teaching in Mandarin! Then, I say "Now let us do an axonometry of this window frame"! That puts them to test and works very well. The architect explains, from the point of view of space, the design, the space of light, the airing. Subsequently, he explains constructively, opens the drawings, the students observe them and ask questions. At first, it is difficult to even answer questions, because they are not prepared for it. They have never looked at a door, they have never looked at a doorway. In second grade, there might not even be a project, in the sense that we understand it; it would be more like redesigning, rereading, look at, taking measurements, redrawing, questioning. That would be almost perfect for the second grade.

I always make an analogy, that I learned from Távora, with cooking. Almost all of them know how to cook, hence I say "You people are in the kitchen now, you have to make some codfish cakes. You cannot do that out of thin air. First, you have to know who does know how to do that well, then you have to go meet them and see how they make it. Then, you have to find out the secrets of codfish cakes and then do codfish cake trials yourselves. Now, get into a kitchen and simply try to do that yourselves with no knowledge at all, forget it, you will not make it! You have to appreciate them, enjoy to eat them, and then figure out who can make them well and learn from all that". And only they get it. I always try to make such comparisons: "Too much salt and the rice gets too salty, too little and it gets insipid". I often try to get them into this universe.

Rui Mendes and I have a certain complicity, we have known each other for a long time. We have always done exercises in the Design Project course that have more to do with territorial systems, which require us to read the landscape, to have time to go and see the place, and then, all combined, to carry out very small processes of transformation related to a system. For example, this year it was through the Costa da Caparica Transpraia, that train that had been dismantled. I always thought that that was a shame, because I could almost leave my studio and go for a swim in Costa da Caparica without having to drive. We do this process of reading the territory and, from there, making small operations linked to that infrastructure.

Somehow, formally, do you two establish a relationship between drawing and the way they design, which is something very intrinsic to you?

For sure. It is a very operative tool, on several levels, in terms of rigor, availability of thought and time. Drawing allows one to control scale, it is very different from Autocad and the computer. Nowadays, I have a healthy relationship with it. It was hard for me to see the first printers firing off drawings, but eventually I accepted that they were more perfect than drawn by hand. Today, I see this process as complementary – 3D and two-dimensional drawing – not least because the computer gives an absolutely unbeatable degree of rigor. Nonetheless, they both complement each other. In the first grades of the degree, I see many students who do not know how to represent a cut. Therefore, I am always forcing them to do it by hand, to better control the scale and understand the construction system of the drawing itself. Then they abandon this more rigorous drawing, which I still force them to do, and move on to research drawing, which is more demanding, the freehand drawing. In Porto, they made us walk throughout the building, all with perspectives, as if we were walking through it. Of course, you also have Siza Vieira, who can make 3D in seconds, it is an essential tool in a certain type of approach. But none of us is him!

I think it is possible to teach Design Project differently. João Luís, for example, teaches practically with no drawing. He was the coordinator during the years I was also a teacher and it worked quite well – but it is a completely different process. Nowadays, what I find most operative is to set up the process in both ways, which is quite demanding. We make models and drawings. The only way I know how to teach is to set up a studio, and a classroom is like to set up a studio. In the studio, what I have set up is a bit like my classrooms. I have several people researching for different projects; I gather with them, I ask them questions, I ask for models, I ask for drawings, for checks and for changes, and I discuss the process with several collaborators. It is not very different from what I do with my students. Their projects are very participatory. They do draw, but I

consistently question them directly. There are teachers who do not like to interfere at all, but I really like to think of it as a team work. At UAL, there are two students for one project. In addition to these two, Rui Mendes and I give input at different and contradictory times! They have doubts and I always ask "But who is the architect? It is up to you. Deciding is the hardest part".



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How do you see the relationship between teaching and research?

I like to think they are pretty close. Basically, each project is an opportunity for us to get to know each other and research. What I have been doing this year, in Architectural Technologies, which is an appendix to Design Project, is to insist on the issue of the widows. I insist on these processes, which are a bit old-fashioned, because it is becoming increasingly difficult for an architect to design a window frame. The window, for me, has always been a decisive issue in architecture. I thus resist to the trivialization of windows; I find it horrifying that such a delicate subject for architecture is trivialized. I know they are not going to have many opportunities to deal with such topic and start looking at things in a different way. From the micro-scale of constructive rigor to the large scale of the landscape is almost the same thing, but there is a moment when they cross paths and generate a more complex and denser project. That is what I try to do later in the second semester, when the courses intersect – even if it is in a constructive cut in which the Design Project exercise increases in scale and the Technologies exercise, at some point, cross one another. It is a very important topic for teaching. One of the great qualities of UAL is that it brings together teachers from various disciplines. We have been able to do that, as well, in terms of drawing, which is a very positive aspect of teaching.



And how do you see the relationship between the teaching of architecture and the practice of the architect with academic research and the various areas of knowledge?

Every year, someone says to me "João, you should get yourself a PhD". I see that as unthinkable; I do not have room for more... I always look at architecture from a very constructive perspective. As soon as I started working, I was able to build things. And that was absolutely transformative in my mind. Suddenly, I am drawing something and, from a white sheet of paper, a wall appears, a house – it is dazzling. When I made my first house, in Funchal, one that I really liked, because of the matter, the weather, that humidity, I felt that there is an alchemical side to it – it is the mixing of variables – and that is the final test. In all the research you can do, your goal is to see how it can positively contaminate what is going to happen. As an architect, I see it a little bit like that.

Now, if we talk about research as something to fulfill a certain type of objective, for me it is not of great interest; if it only has to do with academia, even if with a logic of income, I have never been into that. As a university teacher, I have taught with people who are more academic; they have done more research and I have been more into practicability, and for me, that is fantastic because we contaminate each other. Besides, it is sort of unthinkable for me to have a large family, to have a studio, to teach, to do research... I cannot.

But you certainly value the relationship with disciplines such as history and archaeology!

I have always had that interest – and Távora was the one who influenced me on this. For a long time, at university, for example when I was a student, History was a separate chapter, more for general culture. Now, History, however, is highly operative for our project. In fact, there is no project I do that does not have historical research behind it. In Lisbon, in these last projects, I have always had a historian and an archaeologist. And I love working with them because they give me lots of information, I do learn immensely, and that helps the project immeasurably. It is absolutely decisive, since often you are drawing something, you have doubts and you clarify them. For example, at Martim Moniz, in this competition with Catarina Assis Pacheco and Filipa Cardoso de Menezes, of which I am a member, I am convinced that we won because of the way we read history. There was the pre-existence of the wall, the Garden ends in the wall, where one of the gates of the city was... We, in essence, redesign something that was once there, sewing back something that once existed. Then, all of a sudden, you start to fit together something that once was there, you redraw, you interpret layers of a series of texts that are invisible there. One of the things I realized when I started reading about the walls of Lisbon – at some point, I met an archaeologist, Manuela Leitão, who was an expert and knew well the Moorish wall and the Fernandine wall – we walk around the city and we do not see them. But, once we know they were here and there, we see them everywhere! They are there and it explains everything. You get to see things that you could never understand, and all of a sudden you realize that everything was there.



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The accessibility projects I so far made, for example the staircase to the Castle in the city was a micro operation, but it requires a lot of reading; everything is connected and you start to put together a puzzle. In this sense, research is decisive. We work with very small budgets. If I could, I would have a historian and an archaeologist in every project, it would give me a lot of security. Even on small projects. I designed a house in Costa do Castelo that was fantastic because it required me to do an extreme research, for example into Pombaline and pre-Pombaline windows. The whole project was altered by archaeology, which interfered with everything: the colors, the pavements, the masses. If you look at it as a problem, you are always at war, in conflict; if you look at it as another letter in the equation, it activates incredible processes.

We read in an interview that you considered that house as a tribute to Fernando Távora. Why was that?

Basically, being part of projects means to be contaminated by people who have helped you to see things. Távora helped me to look at heritage as a process of continuity, research and a proposal for the future. The house has a very sophisticated thermal and energy consumption system, but it also has traditional elements – I redid the 18th century St. Andrew's cross wall system, with traditional lime-based plaster, with a plasterer who has been plastering since he was 12 years old. And there was an artist choosing the pigments and the type of lime looking at the samples. Now, there must be conditions. And we often do not have them in Portugal. But when we do – and this depends hugely on the client – the projects evolve. Like with the carpenter of that house, from whom I learned quite much – this is dialoguing; and, suddenly, whoever executes, takes an active part in the process and the work is completely transformed. There is less and less room for that now. There is absolutely no room for that in public works.

For example, I made that kiosk in Graça, all in stainless steel. One day I got to the workshop and the locksmith was a real artist. He was a visionary; half the project was his. Having people like that is fantastic, if you are willing to listen to them. The problem is that you need time for such things. At Casa do Castelo, the clients were two very demanding architects, and they set me absolutely incredible premises. One of them was that they did not want anything white. I had very recently watched a movie, *The Mysteries of Lisbon*, and, truth be told, it is all Lisbon houses and none of them are white.

Projects are living bodies. Távora used to talk about the "walking-stick project": you get to the construction site, go to lunch with the stonemason, in a great discussion about how to assemble the detail of the stone. After the stone comes the carpenter. He is a friend of the family and has some wood there... Nowadays, this does not exist. Some construction sites open a few doors where it is possible to do some things. In public works, with the technical sheets, the guarantees, the Excel, none of this is possible - that more artisanal atmosphere of the work is over.

In fact, this type of relationship with the work and with those who carry it out practically does not exist, it is increasingly difficult. I was thinking about the window drawing exercise that students do at university, but which they will probably find very difficult to implement. How can teaching cope with this confrontation?

There are many ways to do that. I remember two opposite but fascinating figures. António Jimenez Torrecillas once gave a lecture at the University of Évora, which galvanized me. He said "I am from Southern Spain, our material, our *core*, is scarcity". And this is a little bit like the idea of Portuguese architecture: how do we do fantastic things with practically nothing? I always tell my students "the Alentejo soup is made with practically nothing. Some water, some herbs, olive oil... yet, it is fantastic, very tasty". On the other hand, we have Peter Zumthor. He is the tailor! I saw his exhibition here at LxFactory and had dinner twice that day without realizing it! I had dinner at home, then I went to listen to him lecturing, I went to see the exhibition, and when I left, I went back to dinner with my friends again. It was fantastic; he takes matter to an absolutely galvanizing side.

I never relinquish the pleasure of projects. To do something that I am not enjoying is not my thing. I think and act like this since I was very young, I have been reluctant to be and do otherwise. Now, I like challenges. Let us make a cheap house... Great! Let us make a house with no interior openings and fixed glazing. Do we have any more space? Then let us think about something else here. There really are many ways to practice architecture, and that is also the beauty of it, is it not?

Within UAL faculty, practically all of them are people I hold in the highest esteem. I really enjoy following their work. They all are people who do things that have nothing to do with mine, but I feel a great deal of empathy for – and that is fascinating. In fact, I think UAL is very much based on this, a kind of empathetic relationship with their work. There are people I have met because of the work I have done; one of them is Paulo David. We started talking when I did my first works, the Ornelas Monteiro house and Quinta da Casa Branca Inn, and today I talk to him almost every day. He is from Madeira, we always have themes to talk about, it is a way for me to continue connected to the island. There is empathy when you look at something built and recognize yourself in that work, even though it is not yours – that, for me, is very beautiful.

For example, I loved the years I taught with Inês Lobo, to watch her teaching. I think she is one of the great teachers. Very, very demanding, yet very, very human, always discovering each student's talent that will trigger a fantastic project. It takes a great willingness to find out what, student by student, in this fragment, will trigger a discovery. That is pretty much it. But I also enjoy the teaching work of José Adrião, Ricardo Bak Gordon, Ricardo Carvalho. They are absolutely resistant pedagogues, in the sense of not trivializing our scientific area. That is fantastic and it is what I am most interested in.



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It is very interesting the fact that you and Ricardo Bak Gordon were first-grade classmates, you both drew the same influences from the same teachers, yet your paths were completely different.

Ricardo has a strong personality, he is unmistakable. I love his drawings; we look at them and recognize his style – the colors, a great enthusiasm that is very his. Even a certain vertigo, a certain freedom that is inevitably highlighted in the projects he works on. It is absolutely fascinating, and all that has certainly to do with his personality.

In that sense, the teacher's role is also to perceive that in each student, is it not?

In that respect, Inês was perhaps the person I found to be the sharpest, the most precise. She can make people with great difficulties to do amazing things – only great teachers can do that.

I am now wandering again about the way you relate to the landscape... I didn't know you had been to Beiral school and I keep thinking about teaching in contact with nature. Do you think that is something you bring with you from that young age? Or does it have to do with Madeira, the island, the sea, the immensity of the landscape?

There is a very strong theme of Architecture here, which is the question of memory. Our memories are our project heritage. And, indeed, Madeira, at that level, is absolutely irreplaceable in this respect. Because of the topography, the sea, the exoticism. It combines very different things – there is the drama of the topography, the volcanic aspect, and then there is that side of paradise lost, of the idyllic gardens, of the farms, it is a brutal contrast. I have some absolutely incredible memories from there when I was a child. I always recall and like to mention one of the houses that impressed me the most, Quinta do Tile, which belonged to a medical doctor, the grandfather of some of my cousins, where I used to spend a week. It was in the Ribeira Brava valley, there was no power or drinking water and we could not get there by car, we had to carry everything through a canal to get to the farm. Life was completely different there. Conversations were different, the atmosphere was different, at 9 p.m. you could think it was 4 a.m., for there was no power there, we could only have light with oil lamps. The house was made up of objects from another time, we had letters on vinyl records, which we put on a gramophone and heard a person speaking, a voice from a hundred years ago, it was surreal. It was kind of a lost thing. These references obviously interfere. At Beiral there was Monsanto and nature, that fabulous and idyllic landscape. On the other hand, I have that oneiric memory and reference of the sea, which is also overwhelming for us, people from Madeira. This experience of nature and a certain holistic side that Madeira has always had for me was a kind of paradise lost for me when I was an infant; I always went there on vacation, that certainly enthralled me. The question of materiality in architecture is something I attach immense importance to – it is also a theme of Zumthor's, that question of matter.

Beiral had a lot of that as well, to such measure. I have incredible memories from there, like escaping to the formal garden, which had a giant plane tree (that is something I also notice in Madeira: people have a close relationship with botany, everyone knows about

plants,) and there was a leaf dump – and we escaped to the leaf dump, in the middle of the woods, it was fantastic. There was a lot of drawing and painting... those were all things that must have had an influence.

But you do not suffer from island melancholy, do you?

I actually do, a little bit. It decreased when I met my wife. She is hyper luminous; she has a contagious joy. But I do suffer from that, yes. For example, when I travel to Funchal, I suffer immensely from the destruction of the landscape and the cultural territory. My memories from there conflict with what the place looks like today... obviously, we know that Funchal has had many social problems, including poverty, we are all aware of that. I was very young, yet remember that perfectly. But there is another side to what has been done: a true violence to the environment. In terms of mountain management, landscape management, territory management... it is a bit transversal to the whole country – but it is difficult in Madeira.



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Finally, what do you see in this new generation of students that we are training, who live in a different world to the one we grew up in?

Regarding that, on the one hand, I witness enormous enthusiasm because there really are some extraordinary students, who are much better informed than we were, they are much more capable, they are very well prepared, they are attentive, they travel, they read. On the other hand, I witness a large body of pupils who are apathetic, undemanding, without discipline, without resilience, as well. I often say that I have changed the way I educate my children because of my job. One thing that worries me is that many students are always waiting for someone to tell them what to do, they have no



initiative or ability to decide. Additionally, they are inattentive regarding spaces; I ask them where Cais das Colunas, or even Terreiro do Paço, is, and they wonder if they know it or not. It is a little too much... Dwelling through the city center enriches us, enlighten us, it empowers us. No matter how inattentive we are, the city has something to say to us. Some of them attend very unqualified environments and are thus left without such references – and there are more and more students who do not even know the historic centers of their cities. That is why tours are very important... so they can experience the connection to places, and to be able to reflect on shared experiences. At the same time, there are extraordinary students, who are interested and get involved. Back then, in our time, it was more equitable because only a certain type of people would be educated, and today there is a great variety amongst students' population, they come from different backgrounds and have had life experiences that differ from one another at a great level. That is a good thing. But it can be very challenging as well, in an easy and in a difficult way. This due to the fact that there are very capable pupils, who have been encouraged from home, and there are others who are very apathetic. Overall, our job as teachers is to make them more attentive and more enthusiastic. Teaching is always about enthusiasm and a certain empathy, which must be created. Maybe it cannot be created with all the students, as there are so many of them, classes are big, it is quite a difficult task, but every year there are students who have a sparkle in their eyes and thus make us, teachers, very enthusiastic as well. It is like having someone in the studio who is willing and surprises you. After all, this is a sharing experience, that enables us all to learn and that is the most important.