

CASA DA VOLTA
GRÂNDOLA, PORTUGAL
2021–2016

A white-walled courtyard villa
set in the Alentejo landscape

The house is located in the south-west of Alentejo, deep in the Grândola hills. The gently undulating topography contrasts with the harsh dryness of the landscape and its bare vegetation of cork and holm oaks with sparse bushes creeping from the calcareous soil. Given its remoteness and isolation, the house echoes the tradition of the Portuguese *alcáçova* — or *qasbah*, to use its Arab etymology — which functioned as a defensive citadel, or compound, with its constructions built within and protected by a high-walled perimeter. Poetically, it summons the Heideggerian notion of ‘bounded space’, of the human need to define a place of dwelling amidst the endlessness of the landscape. In fact, this typology of a fortified farm is the dominant form of occupation across the Maghreb and the Mediterranean, from Roman antiquity and Arab settlements to Fernand Pouillon's and Le Corbusier's excursus in Algiers.

The house is devised as a walled courtyard, against which a series of inner volumes are set. The positioning of the courtyard in the landscape was actually dictated by a regulatory distancing from the property limits. Sited on a line in the dale, seen from the south-eastern corner it appears half sunken, progressively revealing itself towards the north-east. Other than a corner gateway and the small entrance door, the exterior walls are practically devoid of openings. An exception is made in the east elevation, where it opens up to a large terrace overlooking the vastness of the landscape and a small creek below.

Inside the courtyard, three rectangular volumes are situated on the north, east and west elevations, respectively comprising the bedroom suites, the living room and kitchen, and the garage-*cum*-staff bedroom, while the void facing southwards is occupied by an orchard. The shared areas function in a classic sequence of unfolding rooms, from the kitchen to the living room and to the library, all of them separated by symmetrical pocket doors. The dining area is divided from the living room by a large fireplace with a suspended metal chimney. The ceiling is made of structural, whitewashed wooden beams and boarding, with white stuccoed walls and cement floors.

Clad from the outside in whitewashed stone masonry, the thick walls are capped by an elusive line of pantiles — suggestive of a pitched roof that in fact does not exist — and an identically lime-painted concrete lintel. The roughness of these burnt-lime surfaces evokes a vernacular and quasi-archaic existence, which is nonetheless dismissed by its sheer scale and abstraction.



Location: Grândola (Alentejo), Portugal
Client: Pedro do Carmo Costa
Associate architect: João Cravo
Scope of services: Architecture and landscape architecture
Project brief: Six-bedroom house
Plot area: 7.7 ha
Gross floor area: 500 sq. m
Construction cost: EUR 1,350.00 per sq. m
Project status: 2016 (concept design) – 2021 (built)
Illustration: Promontorio
Photography: Alexandre Ramos, Luís Viegas (aerial)