

HOTEL CONVENTO DE SANTO ANTÓNIO
VILA NOVA DE GAIA, PORTUGAL
2025–2019

Renovation and expansion
of a 17th-century convent
into a luxury hotel
on Douro's riverbank overlooking Porto

The site, occupied by a small farm on a slope of the northern bank of the Douro river, overlooking the historical centre of Porto in the municipality of Gaia, is to be developed into a five-star hotel. It includes a dilapidated 16th-century convent and its adjacent agricultural and industrial remnants. The convent was founded in 1569 by the Franciscan order. In 1832, during the Liberal Wars, the building, given its hilltop position facing Porto, was occupied by Royalist troops, who were ultimately expelled by an attack led by the Constitutionalist opposition. Following the violent military confrontation and the assault, the church and the monastery were set on fire. With the dissolution of the religious orders in 1834, the convent was seized by the state and auctioned off in 1843 to the Porto merchant António José de Castro Silva, later made Viscount of Vale da Piedade. In addition to its new secular residential functions, new constructions were built on the property throughout the 19th-century, mainly for industrial use in the form of a distillery and glass and soap factories. Spreading across 3.5 ha, the steep terrain is held by a series of stonewall terraces that cascade down to a narrow road on the river embankment. The river is to be equipped with a small pier that will allow guests to easily cross it.

The three-storey volume of the convent, with its two cloisters, accommodates the main public areas of the hotel, namely the restaurant, bar, lobby lounge and multipurpose rooms. The hotel caters 180 guestrooms, 34 of which are located in the convent. The north cloister will remain an outdoor space in direct relation with main hotel entrance to form a spatial arrival experience. The surrounding galleries are enclosed in glass, creating a new passageway that emerges on the second floor. In the south cloister, the current roof is refitted with a glass and steel skylight. This creates a vertical access core for the hotel and brings natural light into one of the few areas without vaulted ceilings. The central nave of the church — currently filled with different wooden floors — is to be cleared and renovated to recover the grandness of its original height. Stucco works, window frames, coffered ceilings, doors, wainscots and all the carpentry is to be restored as far as possible or built alike based on historical research.

Adapting to the terrain, the guestrooms wings are sited on terraces at five distinct levels that seldom overlap. In addition, the permeability of the ground is safeguarded at all the different levels, allowing for natural drainage and trees to be planted between the levels. The proposed strategy is to simulate the existing retaining stone walls by inserting the new constructions, almost imperceptibly, behind them in massive stonework. Because these wings overlook the Douro river, and to counter the repetitive effect, the spans vary in proportion and distribution, with the glazing receded to create shadow. The wings are connected to the main building by a system of light-steel walkways, glazed and semi-concealed by wooden slats, evocative of the celebrated *espigueiro* structures.

While the spa occupies the old farmhouse adjacent to the main building, the outdoor pool and bar are located on the south-eastern edge of the plot, on the highest point both in terms of views and sun exposure. In order to maintain the prominence of the convent, the design strategy consists of consolidating the ruined walls of the old factory, but in its derelict state, whilst creating two outdoor courtyards for events, at the same time using their basement for parking and a loading bay.





Location: Quinta de Santo António, Vila Nova de Gaia (greater Porto), Portugal

Client: Sniper Capital SA

Scope of services: Architecture and landscape architecture

Project brief: Renovation of a 16th-century convent for a luxury hotel and spa

Plot area: 3.5 ha

Gross floor area: 15,500 sq. m

Parking: 95 places

Project status: 2019 (concept design) – 2025 (estimated completion)

Rendering: 4+Arquitectos