

PRO MON TORIO

TELHEIRAS HOUSING
LISBON, PORTUGAL
1997–1993

A twin residential block
with duplex units
and double-height
courtyard balconies

The two apartment blocks were designed based on a winning entry for a shortlisted competition organised by Coociclo, an independent non-profit housing cooperative that was established after the revolution of 1974 to provide housing for the middle-classes, thereby cutting out the marketing costs of developers and improving the overall quality of the housing market.

The received volume of the ensemble results from strict compliance with the technical, functional and administrative stipulations of the city's master plan. In the original scheme, the apartments were all proposed as duplex units, the idea being to critically revisit the Corbusian *Immeuble-villa*, with the verandas functioning as double-height suspended gardens.

Set in harsh suburban surroundings, immersed between motorways and a mishmash of postmodernist pastiche, the building was conceived to effectively act as a social condenser — a building where the balconies reinstate a higher degree of inhabitability, as opposed to being mere compositional adornments. By virtue of their sheer size, these balconies can realistically function as suspended patios, wherein, shielded by a system of louvers, people can gather to have lunch and children can play in much the same way as they would in the backyard of a suburban home. To this extent, the concept draws from expectations prefigured in the nostalgic paradigm of the urban single-family house.

Later in development of the scheme, and at the request of various cooperative members, supplementary single-floor apartments were introduced into the duplex typology. The façades, initially conceived as open courtyards exclusively for duplex dwellings, had to accommodate an additional rationale based on single-window units scattered across the elevations. Albeit at first glance perplexing, the apparent randomness is in fact true to the functional needs of what became rather complex typological combinations. The hierarchy of the diverse compositional elements is restrained by the string-course appearance of the floor slabs, while the simplicity of materials — light grey fibre-cement cladding, exposed concrete and aluminium — contrasts with the messy colourfulness of the surroundings.



Telheiras Balconies by Nuno Cera

A photographic essay on Telheiras housing

In the beginning of 2001, shortly after the building had been completed and occupied, artist Nuno Cera began documenting the ways in which the various cooperative members used and furnished the double-height balconies. The images were all taken from exactly the same point, namely the balcony of the master bedroom on the upper floor. What the depictions display is not only the differing personal perceptions of space but also its use, with some residents organising it as an outdoor living room or dining room, while others have purposed it as a kitchen garden.

Location: Rua Fernando Namora (Telheiras district), Lisbon, Portugal

Client: Coociclo, Cooperativa de Habitação, CRL

Scope of services: Architecture

Project brief: 48 units over 13 floors, eight typologies per block in single and duplex apartments

Gross floor area: 15,000 sq. m

Construction cost: EUR 650.00 per sq. m

Total construction cost: EUR 6.5m

Project status: 1993 (competition, 1st prize) – 1997 (built)

Photography: Rui Morais de Sousa, Nuno Cera (balconies)