

# REFURBISH- MENT OF A BLOCK IN CHIADO 1994-2002, Lisbon – Portugal

**Client** Império Insurance Company

**Engineering** STA, Segadães Tavares (structures), GR Estudos (water, sewage), Joule (electrical installations), José Galvão Teles (mechanical installations), PROAP (landscape)

**Photography** Daniel Malhão

Following the reconstruction of the blocks damaged by the great fire in Chiado of 1988 by the architect Álvaro Siza, a desire to refurbish a set of eight buildings, including their respective patios, belonging to an Insurance Company, was born, allowing a unifying intervention, even without encompass the entire block.

The original set of buildings was from a pre-Pombaline occupation with essentially organic characteristics, despite being included in the “orthogonal” grid that expanded from Bairro Alto to the downtown area of Lisbon.

After the earthquake of 1755, the first proposals pointed to a network of small blocks to maintain the permeability of the previous fabric, however, the final solution resulted from the adaptation to the new grid, originated by the opening of Rua Garrett, the preexistent situations on North that survived to the earthquake and also by the complex adaptation in a difficult topography, that is obvious in the declivity accentuated in the peripheral streets.

At the time of the intervention by our studio, the urban context was mainly characterised by 19th century buildings, forming streets with continuous and uniform fronts. A single public building, the *Igreja do Sacramento*, from 1772, played a strong presence inside the block through its less visible elements, the chevet and the late-Baroque bell tower.

Like Álvaro Siza's operation in the Chiado blocks, we used small-scale urban drilling to generate a new porosity, valuing a micro-environment conducive to more serene uses. At the same time, we sought to recover the memory of pre-Pombaline routes, allowing the crossing of the block interior through a double system (stairs and mechanical paths) to overcome the altimetric gap between Rua Garrett and Travessa do Carmo.

The architectural proposal defines two axis across the block. One, principal, in the direction Travessa do Carmo - Rua Garrett, and another, perpendicular, in the direction of the Rua Serpa Pinto - Rua Almirante Pessanha. Along these, there are several shops, occupying, in a general way, the ground floor along streets and backyards.

A public space and an optional path to the business spaces enjoying the visual relation with the garden and the church elements, which until now were imperceptible, open the block interior to public use.

Above the ground floor, there are apartments and office areas in separate buildings. The parking surface occupies almost all of the basement. The external facades and the original volumes are kept and preserved, with minor redrawing and adjustment operations.

