

The use of modern azulejos and panels in Portuguese shop fronts

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SUMMARY: There are several books about the modern tiles (azulejos) in Portugal, often centring in well known cases by renowned artists or more "spectacular" applications.

Spread throughout Portugal (and not only in Lisbon) there is also an important heritage of modern tiled shopfronts that are often neglected and therefore face silent destruction as the shops are passed on to new owners and different branches of business.

This communication presents a wealth of modern shopfronts, survivors from a lost era and now in dire danger of permanent loss.

SUMÁRIO: Existem vários livros sobre os azulejos modernos em Portugal, muitas vezes centrados em casos bem conhecidos por artistas de renome ou aplicações consideradas mais "espetaculares".

Espalhada por Portugal (e não apenas em Lisboa), há também um importante património de lojas com aplicações exteriores de painéis cerâmicos ou de azulejos com padrões modernos que são frequentemente esquecidos e, portanto, enfrentam uma silenciosa destruição à medida que as lojas são passadas para novos proprietários e diferentes ramos de negócio.

Esta comunicação apresenta um conjunto de lojas com aplicações cerâmicas modernas nas fachadas, sobreviventes de uma era perdida e agora em risco de perda.

KEY-WORDS: Modern azulejos / shop fronts / modern decoration / Portuguese azulejos

INTRODUCTION

There are several books and works about modern tiles (azulejos) in Portugal [1-5], often centring in well known cases by renowned artists or more "spectacular" applications.

The close collaboration between Portuguese modern architects and artists resulted in appreciable benefits to the tiles of the modern period and certainly contributed to the resurgence of an artistic industry that was in decline before the 2nd World War.

As discussed by the same authors [6] a particular case of azulejo integration includes those cases in which the lining at the ground floor is either the only one or significantly different from the rest of the building, often connected with a commercial purpose. Aesthetically speaking,

these linings are important also because they are easily perceived, even in narrow streets, where the upper levels will go unnoticed. They are often, as well, creations that project or reflect the intention of an artist or a designer to transmit appreciative emotion.

The case of shopfronts is singular in the fact that their design reflects the style of the time when the shop opened or was refurbished and not that of the building itself which may be much older. In Portugal, there is an important heritage of modern tiled shopfronts that are often forgotten and therefore face-silent loss as the shops are passed on to new owners and different branches of business. This communication presents a wealth of modern shopfronts, survivors from a lost era and now in danger of permanent loss.

PORTUGUESE SHOP FRONTS

In the following sections, we present examples of modern shop fronts with integrated azulejo panels, either artist-designed or simply resulting from the application of pattern tiles. All cases are considered from the point of view of a street walker and some types of azulejos were identified: artistic azulejo panels or ceramic plaques, signed or unsigned; repetitive patterns; small *Tijomel* tiles; and flat or textured monochromatic azulejos. These were found in different localities: Lisboa, Porto, Torres Vedras, Torres Novas, Viseu, Beja and others.

Figure 1 shows an example in Lisbon, where the type used was designed by the well-known artist Maria Keil (1914-2012) [7] who personally identified tiles of the same pattern in the collections of the *Museu Nacional do Azulejo* as her own. However, as far as we know, this particular application was never mentioned in the literature.



Figure 1: *Rua da Portas de Santo Antão N° 77*, Lisbon

Figure 2 shows another example in Lisbon, this time already referred in the bibliography [6] with an artistic panel signed by Lucien Donnat (1920-2013). This is the front of a shop named *Pelaria Pampas* but once it was a tobacco shop (*Havaneza dos Retroseiros*) presumed to have inspired Fernando Pessoa's poem of the same name [8]. Both the uniqueness of the artistic panel and the symbolism of the location are *per se* reasons for conservation.



Figure 2: Shop *Pelaria Pampas* in the *Baixa* area of Lisbon, located at the intersection of *Rua da Conceição N° 65* with *Rua da Prata*

Figure 3 illustrates a case in Torres Vedras of an artistic panel decorating a shop front whose design is only whole with the panel. The panel is signed “Daciano” and dated “1955”. The whole shop must have been designed by Daciano da Costa (1930-2005) Portuguese artist and remarkable designer. One of his works (from 1972) is precisely the congress centre of LNEC where GlazeArt2018 takes/took place, including all the decoration, furniture and lightings. This shop, which we identified, is one of his earliest works and the signed panel one of the very few examples of his art on azulejos. The shop closed and *Museu Nacional do Azulejo* contacted the Municipality to offer information on the heritage value of the shop front.



Figure 3: *Casa Primavera* shop front. *Rua Miguel Bombarda N° 4*, *Torres Vedras*

Another sort of glazed architectural finishing is made with monochromatic azulejos, sometimes shaped or textured or painted in hues of the same colour (figure 4). Since the decoration is not graphic, the aesthetic value is often lower, although it must be remarked that azulejos in shades of the same colour allow the creation of interest on façade areas that otherwise might be simple and uninteresting. The example shown is another case of a closed shop and consequently calling to mind its uncertain fate.



Figure 4: *Rua Ricardo Espírito Santo N° 8A*, Lisbon

The following images demonstrate several modern shop fronts in different towns where the azulejos are integrated. The panels found often present artistic compositions and the beauty of their integration may stem solely from the azulejos, mostly from the integration, or both when the azulejos are harmonized with the rest of the shops or buildings.

Figure 5 is an example of a simple coffee shop made remarkable by a lovely front with an artistic azulejos panel decorating the exterior seating area destined for clients.



Figure 5. Coffee shop in *Avenida Miguel Bombarda N° 133*, Lisbon

Figures 6 and 7 are interesting examples of azulejo panels integrated in shop fronts. In the first, the composition is in blue colours with ocean inspired motifs, such as geometric fish and was once the front of a restaurant specialized in seafood. In the second, the composition is made by azulejos in "warm" colours and with Porto city represented. However, in this case, the design is only perceived from a distance.



Figure 6: Azulejos panel made of ceramic plaques in *Rua da Madalena N° 253*, Lisbon

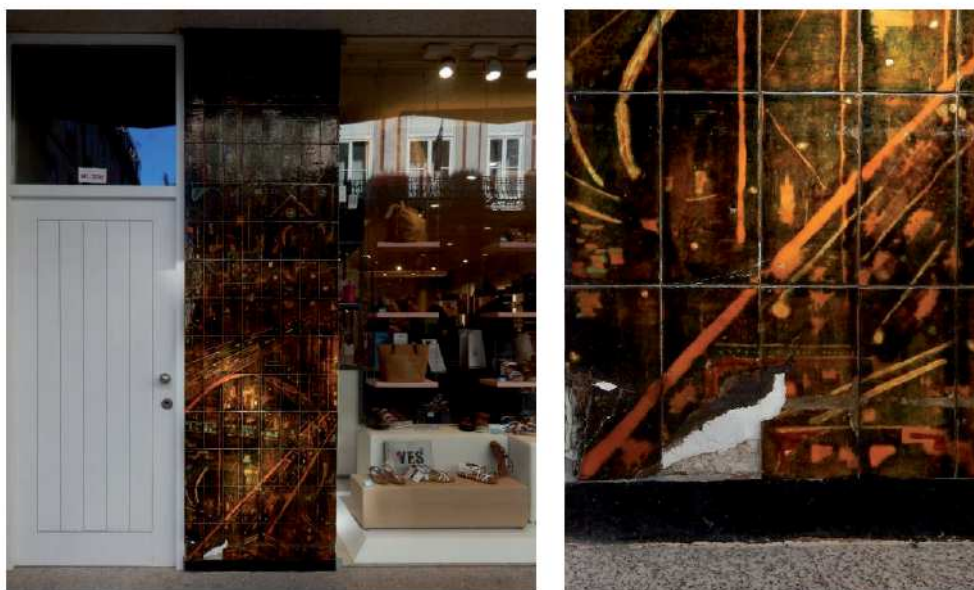


Figure 7: Seaside shop in *Rua de Santa Catarina, Porto*

As discussed by the same authors [9] it is relevant to mention a type of glazed ceramic coating that came recently to their attention, Tijomel azulejos, whose dimensions are different (ca. 18 x 38 mm) from the common Portuguese azulejo (ca. 140 x 140 mm) and which were widely used in Portuguese modern architecture.

The images below show the application of linings with those small tiles in some towns visited, such as Lisbon, Porto and Beja and the type of application, at street level on shops front. These are just examples that were considered worth mentioning but many others, we believe, should be cared for and safeguarded.



Figure 8: Shop in the *Baixa* of Lisbon. *Rua da Prata* N° 269-271



Figure 9: *Rua Gomes Freire* N° 14, Lisbon



Figure 10: Coffee shop in *Rua da Boa Hora N° 2, Porto*



Figure 11: Regional shop in *Rua de Mértola N° 65A, Beja*

A slightly different case often neglected is the example in the figures below, made by using glazed ceramic tiles. The first (figure 12) is an interesting example in Porto, it is a modern bar inspired by the Polynesian tradition. The execution of the shop front albeit recent uses modern azulejos and bears witness to a remarkable technique: the panel composition is made with sets of differently textured azulejos, including designs by Ferreira da Silva for Secla, with fused glass areas and tiles by *Fábrica Constância* of Lisbon (both ca. 1960s), and the striking contrast between them creates an impact on the viewer with an unmistakable *tiki* flavour. The second case (figure 13) is also a panel in Porto, where ceramic plaques used have the same design and colours, white and orange or red. However, the position of application is different, as if it was a "game of position" where the impact on viewers is obtained through texture and position. The third case (figure 14) is that of a shop in the *Baixa* of Lisbon, where the panel is composed by a set of ceramic plaques of different sizes themed on shoes, plants and birds for a shoe shop (an

amusing allegory because in Portuguese the sole is called “planta do pé” - plant of the foot, while the tip of the shoe is called “bico do sapato” – beak of the shoe).



Figure 12: Polynesian Bar in *Rua das Águas Férreas N° 9, Porto*



Figure 13: *Rua de Sá da Bandeira N° 331, Porto*



Figure 14: Shoes shop in *Praça do Rossio*, downtown area of Lisbon

Figure 15 presents an interesting shop located in a little-visited town, Torres Novas, and it is a rare example of single figure tiles from the 1940-50s that due to its smaller dimension (one fourth of the normal size of an azulejo) are called in Portuguese lambrilhas. Another example is shown in figure 16, where glazed ceramics with a protruding face and in shades of the same colour, create texture, variety and interest to areas that would otherwise be rather plain.



Figure 15: Travel agency in the centre of the town of Torres Novas



Figure 16: Rua de João Pedro Ribeiro Nº 595, Porto

CONCLUSION

Integrated azulejos, new or old, must be valued as a national mark but they go often unnoticed possibly because “Portuguese eyes” are so very used to them. Not only in Lisbon but spread throughout Portugal there is an important heritage of modern tiled shopfronts that are often neglected.

This communication presents several examples of modern shopfronts with integrated azulejos, survivors from a lost era.

Although tiled façades are now protected shop fronts are often forgotten because they only pertain to a small part of the façade. But that part is indeed the most readily visible by passers-by. And they are at risk, not only because of the urban expansion but mostly because new shop owners refurbish the fronts often neglecting the tiles that went into the design of the previous avatars of that shop. If their preservation is not specifically assured, modern shopfronts will soon be a dimming memory of the past.

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