

# **IN-SIGHTSEEING HERITAGE VS TOURISTING**

***Madalena Folgado, MA***

Lusíada University of Lisbon/CITAD, Research Centre in Territory,  
Architecture and Design, Portugal

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## **Abstract**

Instead of a destination, this article aims to draw an approach path to meaning. In this sense, we will build up our answer through five senses, with the intention of emphasizing architectural experience formative effect; paradoxically, focusing on *re*-placing what could be ephemeral for something more permanent and powerful for our everyday lives. The chosen place is Santa Bárbara Inn, at Oliveira do Hospital, designed by Manuel Tainha, about to be reopened after being renovated under contemporary hospitality requirements. Time will be challenged through landscape contemplation; as a result, we will share several instants – *in*-sights of embodied affection. We believe that, in opposite to the flash shots from tourists cameras, capturing the instant during the architectural experience – *in*-sightseeing – allows us to expand consciousness and *re*-create new bonds; from this particular place to other places. By fulfilling our baggage with a strengthened consciousness, hopefully, we decrease heritage burden, after all, all we need is to develop simple and sustainable strategies to move forward.

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**Keywords:** Architectural experience, Contemplation, Instant, *In*-sight, Strengthened consciousness

## ***In*-Sight**

Manuel Tainha, Santa Bárbara Inn’s architect, tells us that: “Architecture is an act in which the present extends into the past and into the future”. (Tainha, 2002, p. 46). True architecture masterpieces extend our existential understanding; but, of course, we have to take action. Architectural experience can be *human being* formative when considered as an intentional – volunteer – act; an act of seeing, touching, smelling, hearing, and, sometimes, tasting, when experienced through a synaesthetic or kinaesthetic process. In other words, by being as present as possible – *human being present* – and, consequently, by allowing five senses to be the paths which lead us *in*-to meaning. Yet, we are not talking about pursuing a

particular scent, texture or sight. Pursuing would take us away from the present – the architectural experience time. Therefore, architecture experience leads us *in-to* meaning, likewise, *in-to* the past and *in-to* the future, yet by staying anchored in the present, as the time we can make decisions, and see the unlimited possibilities open gate – the instant gate, or the *in-sight* gate. Furthermore, we regard that this gate is preceded by the five senses paths, or, in an existential sense, a sense path. Thus, it does not appear instantly.

Paradoxically, to overcome time we have to stop pursuing it; instead, we have to feel it. In a world in which time dictates our agenda, this last affirmation could be *presented* as irresponsible, however, we rather believe that we have the *response-ability* to feel, otherwise, if we are not already felling lost, we will become. It is urgent to create an *in-sightseeing* route.

Concerning contemplation, and its relation with History, particularly, with the moment which precedes the discursive formulation, the Portuguese historian José Mattoso tells us about the instant where the subject of knowledge realizes his bonds with the human past (Cf. 2002, p. 46)<sup>1</sup>. Somehow, *in-sightseeing* is to discern about what is meaningful; to discern, in its turn, means judging through senses, therefore, is to decide, and take action – is to move forward.

Consequently, we are considering heritage as the result of a discerning process, as something that establishes meaningful bonds with the human past, and because of that, it is something culturally valuable. On the other hand, as we know, culture is something that we experience; effortlessly, today steps are drawing the bonds to future, through some sort of *topo-graphy*. Manuel Tainha says that: “O discurso arquitectónico é sinónimo de percurso.”<sup>2</sup> (2006, p. 26).

Santa Bárbara Inn, was launched in 1971, although, its designing process started in 1957. In 2012 this signature architectural work was officially classified by the Portuguese heritage main authority – IGESPAR – as a Monument of Public Interest. We last visited it under construction and rehabilitation work, the present owner Mrs Susana Caetano assured us that it is about to be reopened, as soon as possible, with a new spa. Manuel Tainha passed away before he could finish the spa’s design; it was one of his last works. However, we believe that the Inn is and will be in good hands. Yet, as

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<sup>1</sup> “A atitude contemplativa parece-me a mais adequada da parte de quem se propõe a escrever História, porque o objecto que ele pretende conhecer e do qual quer dar conta está de tal modo inserido num todo tão complexo que só se pode apreender e compreender de forma intuitiva. Quando falo de ‘História contemplativa’, faço obviamente prevalecer o momento em que o sujeito se apercebe da sua relação com o passado humano, momento esse que antecede a formulação discursiva.” (Mattoso, 2002, p. 46).

<sup>2</sup> “Architectural discourse is a synonym for path.” (Author’s translation).

we will see, from the beginning of the design process to its end, Manuel Tainha attempt to overcome time. He bequeathed us an embodied narrative of affection, revealed through architecture experience. We will *present* it, literally and metaphorically as a work-in-progress.

### **Human Being Present Sight**

Santa Barbara Inn is a Manuel Tainha's masterpiece and well-known architectural work; the fact that this building has a touristic program puts itself on web sites, outdoors, rotaries, leaflets, all around the world. This architectural project is, perhaps, best known as a touristic object, being often presented through publicity. Regarding what we said about *human being present* as possible, in order to create bonds with the past and the future, through architectural experience, we remember the art critic John Berger's words about publicity, on his essay "Ways of Seeing": "Publicity, situated in a future continually deferred excludes the present and so eliminates all becoming, all development. Experience is impossible within it. All that happens, happens outside it."

As we all know, tourism as a commercial purpose, obviously, has to rely on publicity, and there is nothing wrong with it. But, are we not all tourists and masters of our own destiny, *at the same time*? Can we, as tourists, literally, afford to give up on *becoming*?

Choosing a *destination* can *be at the same time – human being present* – the process of being aware of our own destiny. We shall not be afraid of using the word *destiny*; we conceive destiny as path, as something, continually, presented as work-in-progress, in which we have the possibility to draw, and redraw our *in-sightseeing* route. Architectural experience, placed at the present, allows us to visit those *places of interest*; from the past and from the future, strengthening our conscience. As we saw, if we give up deciding, publicity can, inexorably, determine an unhappy future. We say unhappy because it would happen *outside* of our personal route, far away from the things that we personally care about, love, and recognise as meaningful. Furthermore, by far away, we mean not creating bonds to return. Instead of restraining the *becoming*, publicity could use its imperative tone in order to motivate us to *come* and, simply, *be*.

Having in mind drawing routes and creating bonds, we now regard Manuel Tainha's design process. In his first sketches, when exploring the Inn's surroundings – mountain's natural environment – the architect took note not only of the pine trees placement, but also of small-impact bushes as rosemary<sup>3</sup>. The rosemary perfume, we believe, would have allowed him to create his own bonds with his past and future. As we now, a scent can drive

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<sup>3</sup> This information was provided by the researcher and architect Teresa Rodeia.

us to one of those personal *places of interest*. At the present, on foot, by taking a walk around the Inn we still can feel it, and *re-place* that experience on our own baggage, although, establishing new bonds with other times and experiences. As experiencing nature – natural environment – architectural experience allows us to achieve many layers of personal depth. The most profound they are, the closer we get to the place where we all feel sheltered. In this case, this place of meaning is embodied in an Inn. The Finnish professor and architect Juhani Pallasmaa says:

An architectural project is not only a result of a problem-solving process, as it is also a metaphysical proposition that expresses the maker's mental world and his/her understanding of the human life world. The design process simultaneously scans the inner and the outer worlds and intertwines the two universes. (2009, p. 108).

Therefore, we can extend this proposition to other creative processes, from the most prosaic, to the most complex; after all, we all are creators. Sometimes the creative process coincides with the interpretive process; it can arise from a personal approach to something. In her documentary about Manuel Tainha, the film-maker Luciana Fina films Santa Bárbara Inn, and despite the beautiful and careful plans – the visual aspects – she also *re-replaces* us at the Inn through a particular sound: the ravens caw. (Cf. Fina, 2013).

Concerning art, in an essay entitled *The Sight of a Man*, Jonh Berger, says:

The distinction between works produced according to an abstract schema and those rare works which extend, as distinct from transposing, the experience of the spectator, is that the latter never remove appearances from the essential and specific body of meaning behind them. (They never flay their objects). They deny the validity of any outside prize. (2001, p. 224).

*In-sightseeing* is *to deny the validity of any outside prize*. In this sense, heritage is an inner prize, kept inside our baggage, which does not increase its weight, rather, *enlightens* it. As we have been seeing, through this work of art – Santa Bárbara Inn – that we can extend and *re-unite* time; in the course of experience, ultimately, through several instants: *in-sights* of deep understanding. Time read as *kairos*, as distinct from *chronos*.

This continuity sense is valid not only for the tourist or the visitor, but also for the staff. This building does not have unqualified spaces. The visitor can experience outside and inner space as one, and at different levels of intimacy. Under a different purpose and circumstances, an inn's worker has to move through different spaces, from the most prosaic space as the kitchen or the laundry, to visitor's rooms or living room. In order to create the same sense of continuity, all spaces are qualified – *human being*

developed. After all, there are no spaces, but only space – architecture’s basis material. From one hand, experience is continuous, from another hand, our *response-ability* to discern space attributes can design different categories of space. The more ambiguous space can get, the better it is; the further we *insight-see*, the better we know ourselves. Furthermore, we could use the architect own words: “Procurar o significado ‘na’ forma é como procurar o objecto perdido não onde ele se perdeu mas onde há luz para ver.”<sup>4</sup>(Tainha, p. 14, 2006).

Despite using different materials; from noble woods as rosewood to simple 10x10cm square ceramic tiles, Manuel Tainha did not lower his architectural space standards. Space quality can arise from the same *body of meaning*, using John Berger words. From the *reflection on* and *in* Santa Bárbara Inn’s kitchen tiles, we were able to *recognise* reflected inner light on another building; we *in-sighted* the late 15<sup>th</sup> century Church of Jesus at Setúbal, particularly, its altar window. Manuel Tainha knew very well this church, in his opinion, tiles should only be applied at inside spaces, as a light reproduction material. (2006, p. 51). The church’s sense of interiority is strengthened by the tiles application inside; the light movement as something intimately enlightening. In our *in-sightseeing* route, sacred and profane coincide. However, as far as we know, Manuel Tainha never related publicly these two buildings.

Once again at Oliveira do Hospital, in the inn’s living room, we regard another *coincidence*: the stone masonry coincides with the light masonry. More than ever, space and time is us. The building *extended our experience, as those rare works* that John Berger talked us about.

Regarding the two architecture’s primary concepts of open and closed, Manuel Tainha says:

The former renders the sense of inwardness, of a space of welcome, shelter and cloister that the inn should offer the passing traveller. The latter embodies these atmospheric qualities that characterize the distant landscape of the Serra da Estrela, not forgetting that in architecture relating to the landscape sometimes involves negating it: this is the case of the interior patio.

The feeling of grandeur and austerity awakened by this place inspired the design of the building and, in turn, the choice of materials influenced the design of the interiors and furniture: wood, stone, leather, copper, mirrors, wool, etc.

The chosen materials work as *in-sights* from the outside; through senses, they convey the sense of continuity that we have been referring all

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<sup>4</sup> “Searching for meaning ‘on’ shape is like searching for the lost object not where it got lost but where there is light to see.”(Author’s translation).

along. Although, as we know, mother nature is not always pleasant to human beings; the inn reminds us our *relative* human scale, and how humble we have to remain, in other to, slowly, achieve a bigger understanding from the surroundings. In this sense, materials build and represent our *comfort zone*.

We can only freely *sightsee* the landscape – the mountain slope – at the end, inside the room; until that moment, starting from the main entrance to the dining room, we get into some sort of learning process. Regarding two spaces, the patio and the dining room, we can say that the former brings up the landscape through evocation; the fact that we are not able to see, allows us to be more awareness of sounds, scents and flavours – metaphorically, the intertwined ribs of wood partake of our *re-union* aim, in order to get the *two universes intertwined*, as Juhani Pallasmaa says. Now considering the late, we can say that the schist columns, interposed between the dining room and the landscape, create a slightly tense atmosphere. As we previously said, the more ambiguous space can get, the better it is. This space teaches us that great sights seek for intention; landscape is something that cannot be served in a tray. At the end, after all these lessons had been learned, the architect offers us a prize: a thoughtfully designed handrail, where we can lay our arms and, freely, without any object between, *in-sightsee* the mountains. Heritage is something that as to be learnt, in order to remain meaningful. Would you thought that you would come into Santa Bárbara Inn to *spend* your time *touristing*? Time is too much precious to be spent in flash shots.

### **Mirror Sight**

Our final considerations would not take too long. We will, simply, tell part of the current owner's story with the inn, particularly, the way she kept this classified building in her personal baggage. Till her early twenties, she often visited the inn, but only as a bar costumer, because by that time, she was too young to afford staying. As she told us, she kept inside her every instant from while she was there. Despite living nearby, the inn awakened her to a sense of peace and understanding of her own life that she could not get in any other place. For years, it was the only place that, truly, sheltered her. From the inn, her living environment, as she lived nearby, seemed to be clearer; balanced. Years passed, and her life totally changed. A couple of years ago she bought Santa Bárbara Inn, and met the inn's architect. She was overwhelmed by his character; a gentle e noble man, interested in her point of view, memories an insights about the inn, even knowing that she was not an architecture expertise – or, particularly, because she is an architecture expertise, we personally believe.

In one of their pleasant conversations, she told him about how meaningful the mirror of the top of the living room was to her. There is a bar behind it; the purpose of the mirror was simply to guarantee that the barman

could oversee the costumers without being seen. However, she share with him that by looking in to the mirror as she was leaving, she would never say goodbye to the inn. After several instants of landscape contemplation, its reflection in the mirror as the inn’s last sight, made her felt, endlessly, hopeful. Yet, she felt that she was taking with her peace, and a piece of the inn, and that she would never turn her back to that sheltering place. And she did not. One of her aims is to share her acknowledge of architecture’s formative effect. As we are about to see, when Santa Bárbara Inn reopens, what Susana kept in her baggage was something more powerful and permanent than a mirror reflection: her past turned into her future, and she was *presented* with the understanding of her personal story.



**Illustration 1** – Santa Bárbara Inn; view of the living room’s top mirror. (Author’s illustration, 2013).



**Illustration 2** – From the left to the right and from the top to the bottom: Santa Bárbara Inn’s reception, dining room, and patio.

When the visitor gets into the inn, faces a small scale space, from that point, slightly to the left, he can go upstairs, directly to the rooms or, a few steps down, he can find the living and dining room. From the same point, at left, there is also an entrance to the patio. The schist columns can start to be seen from that corner.

From this view, in the patio, below the wood porch, we can see the three entrances; from left to right, dining room, living room and reception. The patio is a physical central space, which *intertwines the two worlds*; inside and outside worlds. (Author’s illustration, 2013, 2014).



**Illustration 3** – From left to right: Santa Bárbara Inn, room door’s handle and handrail of the room’s balcony. View of Serra da Estrela. (Author’s illustration, 2013, 2014).





**Illustration 4** – From the left to the right: Altar’s window of the Jesus Church at Setúbal and kitchen’s window of Santa Bárbara Inn. (Author’s illustration, 2013).



**Illustration 5** – Windows of Santa Bárbara Inn’s living room: when the stone masonry coincides with the light masonry. (Author’s illustration, 2013).

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