

# Global Design Schools in Portugal

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Since its very beginning, the design of educational spaces is strongly connected with issues on pedagogy, hygiene, order and discipline, collective identity (hence with history, traditions, modernity and innovation). To materialize the concept of global design, seeking formal coherence and a close functional and ideological articulation between all components, furniture design is fundamental as is the role of fine arts. Addressing the relationship with the context implies considering the links established with all other objects which form the school system in its several degrees (nursery, primary, secondary, superior) and scales (the neighbourhood, the city, the country).

By João Paulo Martins

The issue of educational spaces became a recurrent subject among the Portuguese elites from the 60s onwards. The growing awareness over this topic was supported by up-to-date information and participation in the international debate on education, pedagogy and hygiene. The official initiatives followed one another: survey and analysis of existing conditions, theoretical reflection, projects and construction. Since the first initiatives aimed at promoting the construction of schools in a systematic way and based on rational and functional premises, doctors, educators and legislators enunciated the appropriate conditions for the performance of teaching and learning under the form of rules set. The functional program of spaces was defined in accordance with the number of pupils and the teaching methods adopted. In addition, lighting, ventilation and isolation from the surroundings were considered fundamental. Furniture should enable pupils to maintain contact with the teacher and promote proper physical posture (a succession of standard measures corresponding to different age levels was given). These were to achieve efficiency and order, discipline and control. The architects were expected to translate these constraints in an architectural way, as type-projects to be actually applied.

A project competition, held in 1898, for primary school buildings, with a brief made by the Association of Civil Engineers, advocated regional characterization by adopting local materials and techniques. The selected proposal, by architect Adães Bermudes, identified schools clearly as civic buildings: a bell upon the front door, some ornamental ceramic tiles on the façades, a volume with two levels for the teacher's house. Meanwhile, the existence of legal rules supports the industrialization of school furniture production by specialized companies, such as the one founded by professor Albino de Matos, around 1899, in Paços de Ferreira.

The first Fröebel school in Portugal, in Lisbon (by architect José Luís Monteiro, inaugurated in 1882), was a wooden *chalet* wide open to its surrounding nature. It included furniture designed to match the scale of the children in accordance with the Fröebel system. The law that was to regulate buildings for kindergartens (1911) would also prescribe that the classroom walls should be covered with slate, to encourage the practice of drawing. Since its first implementation in Coimbra (1911), the network of *João de Deus* kindergartens was linked to architect Raul Lino, who always gave special attention to ornamentation, often including tile panels and mural painting in his works, as he did in the primary school for Alcântara neighborhood, Lisbon (1916-17). In *Escola Camões*, Entroncamento (1923-28), architects Cottinelli Telmo and Luís Cunha made a similar exercise of extending project to *azulejos*, mural painting and sculpture.

The facilities for secondary and technical education deserved less attention to early legislative and normative agents. Given the lack of previous examples, the few cases actually built ought to interpret this unprecedented typology and demanded projects to extend to all equipment and specific functional elements. In Lisbon, *Escola Industrial Marquês de Pombal* (1886-88, by architect L. C. Pedro d'Ávila) preceded the construction of *Liceu Passos Manuel* (1882-1911, by architects J. L. Monteiro, and R. Carvalheira). In this city, architect Ventura Terra designed *Camões* (1907-09), Pedro Nunes (1908-11) and Maria Amália (1913-33) high schools in a strict, sober formal language that one can see as a standard to Alexandre Herculano (1914-1931) and Rodrigues de Freitas (1918-32) high schools, in Oporto, by architect Marques da Silva.

The Medical-Surgical School of Lisbon (1890-1905, by architects J. M. Nepomuceno and Leonel Gaia) is the ultimate expression of the Beaux-Arts academic conventions regarding the articulation between the arts, with an iconographic program that was subject to extensive collaboration by artists. Quite differently, the Normal Primary School of Lisbon (1913-19, by architect A. Bermudes),

< The complex of the *Instituto Superior Técnico*, in Lisbon by architect **Pardal Monteiro**, 1927-41.





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already built under the republican regime, sought to re-interpret national traditions (the baroque period) on an academic compositional base.

The authoritarian nationalist and conservative regime that came out of the political coup of 1926—the “Estado Novo”—developed the systematic building of civic facilities all over the country, centralizing official production in the Ministry of Public Works. At first, primary schools had a wide range of projects, specially designed for each location, some adopting a regional characterization, others following the Modern lexicon. The high schools of Beja (1930–37, by architect Cristino da Silva) and Coimbra (1930–36, by architects Carlos Ramos, Jorge Segurado and Adelino Nunes) result from competitions launched in 1930. They reflect the Modernity contained in their program and are extraordinary examples of adherence to the international Modern Movement (and

criticized as such by the more conservative wing of the Portuguese society of that time), including some furniture that was specially designed for that purpose. The complex of the *Instituto Superior Técnico*, in Lisbon (1927–41, by architect Pardal Monteiro), also responds to Modern principles, despite its more evident debt to the formal conventions of *Art Déco*. An exceptional case of formal coherence in all scales in the scope of the international style was the *Ninho dos Pequenininos*, a nursery school in Coimbra (project from 1934 by architect Luis Benavente), with furniture built in steel tube, adapted from central Europe examples and produced by local industries (a kind of Modern object that would spread all over the country, from healthcare facilities to shops, cafés and hotels).

From 1935 on, primary schools had type-projects with different regional characterizations (by architect Rogério de Azevedo for the districts in the north and center

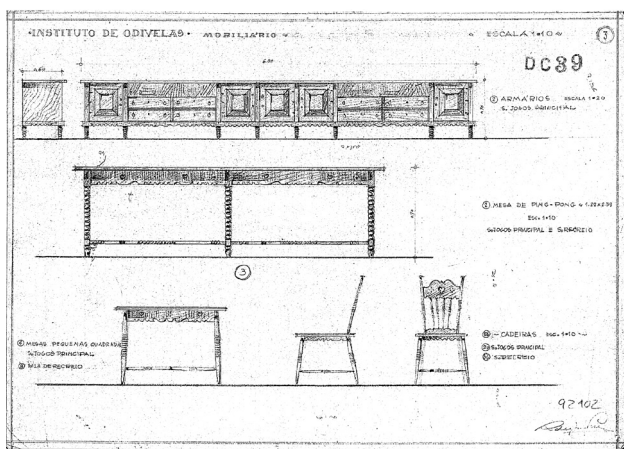
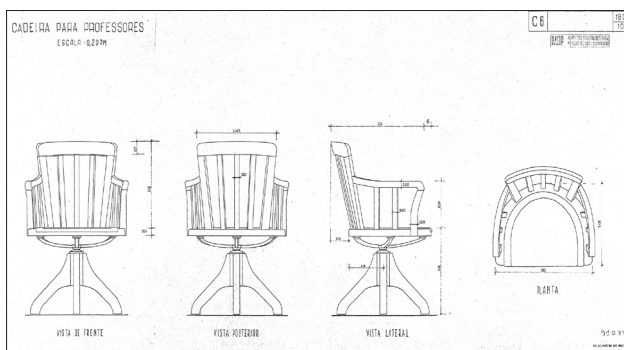


Figure 1. High school by **Pedro Nunes**, 1908–11.

Figure 2. The *Ninho dos Pequenininhos*, a nursery school in Coimbra by architect **Luis Benavente**, 1934.

Figure 3. The high school of Beja by architect **Cristino da Silva**, 1930–37.

Figure 4. Drawing of professor chair.

Figure 5. The *Instituto de Odivelas*, a school for girls by architect **Rodrigues Lima**, 1950–51.

of the country; by architect Raul Lino, for the south), that the government planned to build in large numbers but the application of which was unsystematic. The 'Plano dos Centenários' for large-scale construction of typified primary schools, was launched in 1941 and followed without breaks or significant innovations until 1969. The wooden benches designed to furnish those several thousands of classrooms under construction were based on a careful anthropometric study (1943–46). This centralized policy also allowed that, between 1934 and the late 60s, 29 buildings for secondary schools and 69 for technical ones (for industrial, commercial and agricultural teaching) were designed and built, including their furnishings and equipment, rigorously systematized and standardized. The monumental rhetoric, characteristic of authoritarian regimes of the time, was a dominant feature in the projects of the University of Coimbra (1941, coordinated by archi-

tecs Cottinelli Telmo and Cristino da Silva), with extensive use of academic statuary and painting, but allowing, exceptionally, some Modern interiors, as in the General Library (1950–54, by architect Alberto Pessoa). In the University of Lisbon (1935–61, coordinated by architect Pardal Monteiro) however, the global project was decidedly more Modern in all the engaged scales and disciplines (urban planning, architecture, furniture, fine arts).

Two exceptional cases may serve as an illustration for some opposite orientations existing prior to the profound transformations that the 60s would bring (in architecture and the arts as well as in pedagogics). At the *Instituto de Odivelas*, a school for girls in the realm of military institutions (1950–51, by architect Rodrigues Lima), one seeks to recreate an imaginary rural past through the use of reinvented traditional furniture. At the same time, primary schools promoted by the municipality of Lisbon (1948–56, various authors) claim to be part of international Modernity through its geometric and strict architecture with a close integration of the arts.

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