

A Resisting Modern Monument: Huambo Veterinary Academic Hospital



The Huambo (former Nova Lisboa) Veterinary Academic Hospital, designed by Vasco Vieira da Costa in 1970, was never completed. With the independence of Angola in 1975, a civil war started and lasted 27 years, with its main battlefield in the country's central region, where the opposition party was settled. The building has served as a military headquarters since the 80's, becoming extremely damaged in the last three decades. Peace was restored in 2002 but 30 soldiers are still nowadays living in the ruins to defend the building from vandalism. The University is planning the renovation of the Veterinary Academic Hospital, although unawareness about the building's heritage significance may result in the irreversible loss of an Angolan Modern monument.

By Margarida Quintã

Between the end of World War II and Angola's independence in 1975, the former Portuguese colony witnessed great development lead by the ruling fascist political regime. Economic growth was even stronger by the end of 1960, when movements towards independence began and the colonial war started. The *Estado Novo*¹ determined it was imperative to go to Angola 'quickly and strongly'² not only to fight the war but also to develop the country. This way, the final years of the Portuguese domination in Angola were the most vigorous ones, with the astonishingly rapid construction of new buildings and cities (Fernandes, 2002).

'With a Sword in One Hand and a Quill in the Other'

Education was a field in which the regime widely invested at the time, sponsoring the construction of numerous school buildings all over the colony (Milheiro, 2012). "With a sword in one hand and a quill in the other,"³ the government was trying hard to maintain its power over the Angolan territory. Thanks to the new political path, college education was established in 1962,⁴ and the opening of six higher education courses took place in the academic year of 1963-1964.⁵ Veterinary Medicine was amongst those courses and had 15 students in its first year.

In 1965 the Faculty of Veterinary Medicine was transferred from Luanda to Huambo and so were the Faculties of Agronomy and Forestry the following year. Huambo, located in the Angolan central plateau, offered good natural conditions for the development of agriculture and livestock. Moreover, the Central Laboratory of Veterinary Pathology was established there since 1927, so the new Faculty could benefit from its expertise. Besides being the oldest Scientific Research Institute in the country, the

Laboratory had 1200 Ha of land and facilities that included 10 buildings to perform treatments and research.⁶ Initially, the existing buildings were adapted to accommodate the students, but afterwards the University bought more land on the area to create a new campus (Mendes, 2006, 156).

The Veterinary Academic Hospital was part of the campus facilities. The building project was commissioned to Vasco Vieira da Costa in 1970 and its program was established with detailed advice from Professor Ivo Soares, who was a veterinarian and the University director since 1968.⁷ They both went to South Africa, along with the director of the Angola's Veterinary Research Institute (IIVA), to visit The Onderstepoort Veterinary Academic Hospital (OVAH). Onderstepoort campus was the top reference in Africa's Veterinary Medicine, so it should serve as model to the development of the Huambo premises.⁸

Veterinary Academic Hospital: Designing with Climate

The project for the Veterinary Academic Hospital was rather ambitious, designing classrooms, laboratories and surgical rooms in a 7000 m² construction. Besides the main building, there was also a Small-Animal Center, functioning as triage for outpatients, located near the site's main entrance to the north. An Isolation Unit for infectious diseases was positioned south, halfway between the Academic Hospital building and the IIVA premises.

The Veterinary Academic Hospital has northeast-southwest settlement in an H-shaped plan. The 4 wings, with different functions and design, form a horizontal set that spreads along 170 meters of brick and exposed concrete [figure 1]. The main entrance is located in the center, where hospital life revolves around the patio. Several passageways meet and surround a small garden on which a concrete staircase raises from the ground [figure 2].

The wing on the left side of the patio has 2 floors with surgery and recovery rooms; the wing on the right has 1 floor with classrooms along a central corridor.⁹ Due to

< Vasco Vieira da Costa, Exterior passageway.



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the site's topography, the other 2 volumes are located 30 meters to the west, on a lower level. A bricked volume suspended on exposed concrete pillars covers the passageway from the patio to the animal shelters [figure 3].

The wings for animal shelter also have different characters. To the north, large animals (mainly cattle) were housed in 5 identical blocks [figure 4] linked by an open-air corridor. The volume to the south has 7 rooms to house small animals with large-scale skylights on the top. This dashing natural lightning and ventilation system is also an icon of the building's architectural expression [figure 5].

Huambo's climate influenced Vieira da Costa's design. Due to the long rainy season of the Angolan central pla-

teau, he conceived several sheltered outside spaces. From October to April, the daily rains are usually heavy, sudden and thundery, so cover is vital for using the outdoors. For this purpose, the architect designed 4-meter-span cantilevered inverted beams to cover the exterior passageways along the building. Rainwater drainage is camouflaged within the building and designed to work daily.

The architect considered that suitable natural ventilation and solar protection were normally enough to limit the use of air-conditioning systems. However, under demanding circumstances or typological constrains, he chose artificial methods of environmental control to create the necessary comfort conditions.¹⁰ In tropical Luanda, Vieira da Costa used the Modern lexicon to design cre-

ative and efficient systems of shading, natural ventilation and rainwater drainage. These Modern devices were designed to each building's particular circumstances, like typology, climate and site (Quintã, 2007).

Vieira da Costa used the same method in the Veterinary Academic Hospital, but with different results. He exposed the building's structure, highlighting the concrete elements through the large brick surfaces. At the same time, infrastructure and environmental control systems

were concealed within the building. Huambo's moderate climate endorsed simple environmental solutions and limited the use of air-cooling systems.¹¹ This way, the architect could easily develop a building in harmony with the landscape, establishing continuous relationship between inner and outer spaces. The large horizontal slabs, the transparency of concrete grids and the use of raw materials contribute to blending the building into the natural environment [figure 6].



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Figure 1. **Vasco Vieira da Costa**, Veterinary Academic Hospital, Huambo, Angola, 1970-74. View from the south.

Figure 2. View of the building entrance. Figure 3. View of the patio. Figure 4. View from the laboratories. Figure 5. Exterior passageway.

Figure 6. Animal shelters. Figure 7. The skylights.



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Vieira da Costa designed a significant set of buildings in Angola, but the Veterinary Academic Hospital is one of his most ambitious works. At the same time, it is also one of his last designs, as he closed his practice in 1975 due to the sudden lack of commissions resulting from civil war. He then dedicated himself exclusively to teaching at Angola's Engineering Laboratory and committed to the establishment of Angola's Faculty of Architecture.¹²

Vieira da Costa lived in Angola from a very young age and only left the country for ten years while studying architecture. He won a scholarship in 1940 to go to Porto and in 1945 decided to go to Paris. During this period he studied urbanism and worked briefly with Le Corbusier, arriving in Luanda in 1950.

He was part of a generation of young architects that settled in Angola and shaped Modern cities after World War II. Their designs were developed locally, so they could escape the repressive control of the Portuguese central government (Matos, 2010; Tostões, 2010).

Vieira da Costa developed an architectural production based on the Modern Movement premises, using exclusively reinforced concrete structures and developing a plain architecture with a tropical feature [Quintão, 1987]. Most of his buildings are situated in Luanda, but the Veterinary Academic Hospital, adapting to a different climate, opens new readings on his work.

The Veterinary Academic Hospital has never been used as such because the construction was never completed. In 1975 the country finally became independent but the civil war immediately started, opposing MPLA and UNITA on the struggle for power. This war stroke Huambo region more than any other in the country because it was UNITA's resistance stronghold. In the 80s, MPLA started using the abandoned building as military headquarters and until the present day it has served as accommodation for 30 soldiers. A great part of Huambo's buildings and infrastructure were completely ruined, but the Academic Hospital remarkably survived the long civil war.



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Figure 8. View from the terrace.

Figure 9. View of the terrace.

Figure 10. The exterior staircase.

Photos by Margarida Quintã, 2013.

Challenges on Heritage Conservation

Nowadays the building belongs to the José Eduardo dos Santos University, which was established in Huambo in 2009. This public University is the owner of several buildings in the city but at the same time is developing a 2500-Ha campus in the Cambiote suburb, in order to gather students from the provinces of Huambo, Bié and Moxico. The faculties will be placed in the new campus, so the future of the existing buildings is still uncertain. Nonetheless, the Veterinary Hospital should be restored, as has been announced in the country's 2013 Annual Financial Statement [figures 7, 8, 9, 10].

The restoration of Modern buildings is a challenging demand to the Angolan construction industry. Contractors from abroad, especially from China and Portugal, are rebuilding the country's infrastructures and reshaping Angolan cities. However, the urge for development has been promoting the demolition of Modern buildings in city centres, in spite of their historical relevance.¹³

This building activity is based on massive importation of materials and equipment, because the country's manufacturing industries are scarce. Likewise, design solutions are mostly imported and frequently overlooking local conditions. Contemporary demands on interior comfort had led to the progressive abandonment of passive methods of environmental control. Existing buildings are being refurbished to introduce air-conditioning systems but, due to maintenance issues, small domestic packages are frequently chosen over global systems. Either it is an apartment renovation or a large-scale refurbishment,¹⁴ Modern heritage devices designed with passive techniques for environmental control tend to disappear.

In order to reverse the growing damage of the Angolan Modern legacy, it is urgent to assert the buildings' patrimonial value. At the same time, it is also necessary to define an intervention method that guides the renovation of the 20th century architectural heritage in Angola. For this reason, it is mandatory to develop a broad understanding of the Modern construction techniques, materials and passive systems of environmental control.

The major challenge on the table remains how to confront heritage conservation with the Angolan contemporary expectations on comfort, energy and economy. Hopefully, the renovation project of the Veterinary Academic Hospital will prove that such challenge can be met.

Notes

1. *Estado Novo* was the authoritarian regime installed in Portugal by António de Oliveira Salazar in 1933. This dictatorship ruled the country until 1974.
2. Free translation: "Para Angola, rapidamente e em força" – quotation from António de Oliveira Salazar's speech, 13 April 1961.
3. Free translation: "Numa mão a espada e noutra a pena" – chapter

from *História do Ensino em Angola* about the establishment of the University in Angola and the developments from 1960 onwards.

4. On 21 August 1962 the law for the "General University Studies" in Angola and Mozambique was published. The University of Luanda was established later in 1968 (Santos, 1970, 301).
5. The higher education courses established in 1963–64 were: Medicine, Engineering, Pedagogical Sciences, Agronomy, Forestry and Veterinary Medicine (Santos, 1970, 289).
6. João Aguiar (GUC) developed the master plan for the Central Laboratory of Veterinary Pathology, planning 10 buildings: central building; laboratory; bromatology; equine immunization; swine immunization; experimental parasitology; bacteriology; rabies; bovines; autopsies. The construction of the main building was completed in 1953.
7. Prof. José Quintão interviewed on 18 June 2013. Prof. José Quintão worked with Vasco Vieira da Costa from 1970 to 1974 and took part of the Veterinary Academic Hospital design team, along with António Falcão and Paula Alves Pereira.
8. Prof. João Serôdio de Almeida interviewed on 18 July 2013. Prof. João Serôdio de Almeida graduated from the Nova Lisboa's Faculty of Veterinary Medicine in 1972.
9. These volumes were built in the construction's first phase, while the kennels and stables were only built after 1974, according to Prof. José Quintão.
10. See for instance, the use of air conditioning devices in Angola's Engineering Laboratory and Students Residence in Luanda.
11. According to Prof. José Quintão, there were no air conditioning devices except in surgery rooms.
12. The Faculty of Architecture was established in Angola in 1979, three years prior to his death.
13. The Kinaxixe Market's demolition in 2008 embodies the neglect of the country's Modern legacy. The Market was the first work by Vasco Vieira da Costa, from 1951–58, and Modern Luanda's landmark.
14. See, for instance, the new glass envelope of Hotel Presidente in Luanda. The Modern building designed by António Campino in 1960 became unrecognizable after the façade renovation.

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