

Tourism and modern architecture in a “Green Hell”: *Hotel Amazonas* (1947-1952)

BY RICARDO PAIVA

The investigation focuses on the relationship between tourism as a modernization strategy towards the integration of the Amazon within Brazil and modern principles adopted in the *Hotel Amazonas* in Manaus, analyzing how the pioneering project, designed by architect Paulo Antunes Ribeiro, aligned the economic, political and symbolic dimensions of the agents involved in the process. There is a growing need for the historical re-evaluation, the documentation and an emergency conservation of the building, which was an icon of tourist development and modernization of Brazil and the Amazon.

Introduction

This paper uses the book *Green Hell* by Alberto Rangel, published in 1908, as a metaphor, which takes the hostile nature of the Amazon Rainforest as the main argument of his narrative, emphasizing that the forest conditions the rhythms of life and imposes resistance to its colonization. After WWII, this idea of a “Green Hell”, including the jungle, the rivers, fauna and flora of the Amazon is appropriated as a resource for the promotion of the region’s tourism.

Although the modernization of the Amazon through industrialization was delayed, an increase and incentive to tourism through the actions of the State was suggested, in addition to market actions in the fields of lodging and aviation. All of this resulted in the construction of an important modern example of the hotel typology: the *Hotel Amazonas* (1947–1952) in Manaus, a project by the architect Paulo Antunes Ribeiro¹ (1905–1973). The hotel represented a symptom of the diffusion of modern architecture’s values in Brazil, demonstrating its acclimatization in different contexts of the most developed centers, also contributing to the modernization and valorization of the tourist image of the Amazon.

The genesis of modern hotels in Brazil: signs of modernity

The construction of hotels in Brazil, in the middle of the 20th century, was increased by the State and the market, according to the stage of urbanization in different corners of the immense country, and contributed to the articulation and displacement of people and goods among the main urban centers, as

well as for the development of tourism as an economic activity.

The “pre-legal-institutional” period of national tourism policies, which began in 1938 with decree-law 406/1938 and extending until 1966, the year of the creation of EMBRATUR (the Brazilian state tourism company), is characterized by the disconnection of the instruments of regulation and institutional fragmentation, concentrating primarily on the control of travel agencies². This period includes the first actions of the “*Estado Novo*” (“*Era Vargas*”) in the field of tourism, bound up in the context of the creation of the *Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda* (DIP) [Press and Propaganda Department], with its

strong ideological appeal in the construction of the country’s image. It “used tourism as a form of social control, because it perceived its benefit in the formation of the image of the New State”³.

Still in the 1940s, two modern hotel projects inaugurated the contribution of “programmatic modernism”⁴, the erudite and theoretical modern branch, to the hotel typology: the Park Hotel São Clemente (1944), located in Nova Friburgo, designed by Lúcio Costa (1902–1998) and the *Grande Hotel de Ouro Preto* (1945) by Oscar Niemeyer (1907–2012). These buildings are significant references not only for understanding the genesis of the modern hotel in Brazil, but also as expressions of the specificities that characterize Brazilian modern architecture.

Hotel Amazonas: icon of hotel architecture in the Amazon.

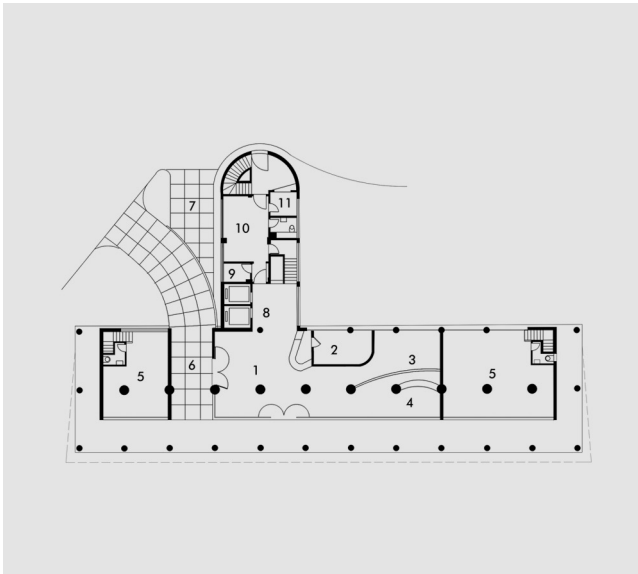
The *Hotel Amazonas* (also known as the *Hotel Ajuricaba*) in Manaus, designed in 1947 by the architect Paulo Antunes Ribeiro was, at the time of its inauguration in 1952, an important example of the modern hotel typology, not only from the Amazon but from Brazil as well, occupying a prominent place in the historiography of modern architecture in the country⁵.

The importance of the *Hotel Amazonas* in the panorama of Brazilian modern architecture was reinforced by Roberto Burle Marx’s landscaping project⁶. He was also responsible for some art works, such as the engravings with fauna and flora themes from the Amazon region, a condition that added significant value to the pioneering and modern character of the building.

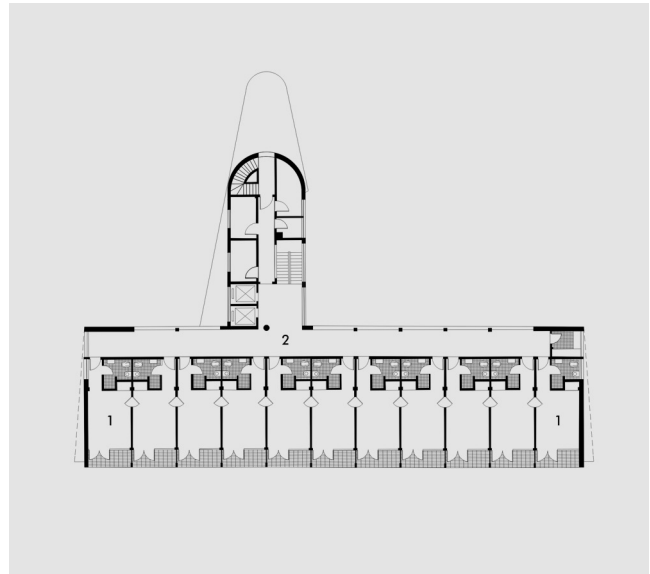


01 Paulo Antunes Ribeiro, *Hotel Amazonas*, Manaus, Brazil, 1947–1952, Aerial View. © Instituto Durango Duarte.

02 Paulo Antunes Ribeiro, *Hotel Amazonas*, Manaus, Brazil, 1947–1952. Ground floor – *Hotel Amazonas*: 1. Reception; 2. Administration; 3. Reading room; 4. Internal counter; 5. Stores; 6. Vehicle circulation; 7. Access ramp; 8. Elevator lobby; 9. Telephone booth; 10. Services; 11. Concierge. © Ricardo Paiva.



03 Paulo Antunes Ribeiro, *Hotel Amazonas*, Manaus, Brazil, 1947–1952. Typical Floor – *Hotel Amazonas*: 1. Hotel room; 2. Corridor. © Ricardo Paiva.



Located on an irregular plot in the center of the Amazonian capital, relatively close to the port area and to the banks of *Rio Negro* (Figure 01), the hotel was owned by *Prudência Capitalização*⁷, a real estate company that undertook the construction of important buildings in several Brazilian state capitals. *Prudência Capitalização*'s performance in Manaus was due to Adalberto Ferreira do Valle (1909–1963)⁸, president of the company, who

*played a decisive role in the revitalization of the Amazonian economy, by investing in the implementation of Hotel Amazonas, Brasília and the Refinaria de Manaus Company*⁹.

The project contributed to the modernization of Manaus and the hotel's image was widely employed for tourism promotion of the Amazon, using the discourse of exuberant nature in harmony with the modernity proposed by the architectural project. In the early 1950s, several publications in *Revista Cruzeiro*, a nationally circulating magazine, brought the discourse of the *Green Hell*, which contradictorily sought to ally the natural potential of the Amazonian Forest with the idea of civilization, a "paradise of comfort" modernity (Figure 06). The political and symbolic dimension in the construction of the hotel was so significant that the inauguration was attended by the then President of the Federal Republic of Brazil, Getúlio Vargas (1882–1954).

The *Hotel Amazonas* also raised the process of verticalization of the central area, where historical buildings and houses of a maxi-

mum of four floors prevailed. It was a very dynamic commercial area, besides the fact that the location allowed views of the *Rio Negro*, being strategic to meet the demands of leisure and business.

As in the *Hotel da Bahia*¹⁰, the solution obeyed the principles of modern architecture advocated by Le Corbusier, expressed in the adoption of the five points proposed by the master (Figure 04–05). The horizontal strip window was reinterpreted with the implementation of balconies in the suites facing the street, which formed a grid. The pilotis were also readapted, since the building was located in a traditional urban structure, with the building built to the boundary of the plot. The alignment of pillars on the ground floor made it possible to create a transition area between the public and the private, which provided a protected and sheltered passageway (Figure 02–03).

The original design consisted of forty-eight apartments distributed on four floors and a single luxury suite on the top floor, forming the garden terrace designed by Roberto Burle Marx. This presidential suite was built especially to host presidents, politicians and famous artists, cooperating to mythologize the modernity desired by the hotel in a still provincial city.

It is interesting to note that the building relied on its own power generators located on an adjacent plot to meet its usage and power demands and to avoid the intermittent electricity supply in the city. Additionally, the hotel featured several innovations, such as air conditioning, imported from the United

States, the incorporation of a bar, a nightclub and a mini zoo on the ground floor, which revealed the hybrid character of the program. These features, the luxury and its modern architectural language qualified it as one of the most important buildings constructed at the time in Manaus. This hotel is a good example of tropical acclimatization¹¹ according to the principles of architectural modernism, through the implantation and orientation of spaces in response to conditioning factors of ventilation and insolation, the use of shutters in the window frames and the use of balconies. These features are passive energy strategies, anticipating sustainable solutions.

In the context of the decline of *Prudência Capitalização*, the *Hotel Amazonas* was auctioned in 1963 to a Portuguese businessman named Vasco Vasques, who had, as guarantor, the *Banco do Estado do Amazonas* [Amazonas State Bank], demonstrating the partnership between the State and the market in the development of tourism and of the hotel industry. In addition, *Panair do Brasil*'s¹² work in the Amazon was a significant stimulus for tourism in the region, facilitating the flow of people and goods and connecting Manaus to the rest of the world. The *Hotel Amazonas* was the base for the airline's crew, who had scheduled flights to the area.

*Its services collaborated with President Getúlio Vargas' project of the rational exploration of the region. Medicines, mail bags and professionals were transported in its Catalina flying boats and they contributed to the integration of the region with the rest of the country*¹³.

04 Paulo Antunes Ribeiro, *Hotel Amazonas*, Manaus, Brazil, 1947-1952. Photo from the 1950s. © Instituto Durango Duarte.



05 Paulo Antunes Ribeiro, *Hotel Amazonas*, Manaus, Brazil, 1947-1952. Posterior View. © Instituto Durango Duarte.



06 Paulo Antunes Ribeiro, *Hotel Amazonas*, Manaus, Brazil, 1947-1952. Advertisement of the *Hotel Amazonas* in the *Revista Cruzeiro*. © Magazine *O Cruzeiro* (15) in 26.01.1952, 67.



07 Paulo Antunes Ribeiro, *Hotel Amazonas*, Manaus, Brazil, 1947-1952. Current state of conservation, 2018. © Photographed by Ricardo Paiva.

Thus, the integration of the Amazon region was a geopolitical issue of national sovereignty.

After a short interval of decline due to the decrease in tourist numbers, the implementation of several policies for the Amazon, such as the creation of the Manaus Free Trade Zone, in 1965, and the policies of EMBRATUR, since 1966, the city reassumed a certain force in domestic tourism. These factors motivated the expansion in the early 1970s of apartment units in the *Hotel Amazonas*, which increased from forty eight to ninety, increasing in height with the addition of three floors. Later, it was extended in length at both ends, totaling 110 apartments, to compete with the *Tropical Hotel* in Manaus. These changes greatly compromised the integrity of the original project and contributed to the de-characterization of its intrinsic modern attributes, impacting on the conservation of its cultural, historical and artistic values. The hotel closed in 1996 and the building currently houses commercial accommodation and residential uses for a more disadvantaged population (Figure 07).

As a conclusion: *Hotel Amazonas* lives its own hell

In summary, the *Hotel Amazonas* is an emblematic example of the first period of tourist development and hospitality in Brazil, also corresponding to the phase of the introduction of the principles of modern architecture in the region. Despite the diversity of solutions for typologies in the country, the modern attitude established itself as an erudite posture, presenting urban inserts of great relevance and raising the creation or reinforcement of new centralities; the management of the program in a more complex way, including the incorporation of new uses, making the hotel a hybrid typology; the wide use of reinforced concrete as a structural and industrialized material system; more abstract formal expressions typical of modernism; and the incorporation of the visual arts and landscaping in the architectural solutions striving for an integration of the arts.

The restitution of the historical and cultural significance of the *Hotel Amazonas* in the development of tourism and modern architecture in the Amazon and Brazil and as an important part of Brazil's patrimony is urgent as it has lost its integrity in the face of contemporary urban dynamics. Such pressures include: the decay of central areas, the opening of new opportunities for real estate and tourist valorization, as well as the weakness of State safeguards for built heritage, especially modern heritage.

Nowadays, the suppression of the old hotel's public areas and the ownership fragmentation of the housing units — still offered as a

means of lodging on platforms such as Airbnb — hamper the restoration of the original characteristics of the project. Nevertheless, a joint action by the preservation agencies, the Academia and the owners could, through documentation and awareness of the heritage value of the building, promote the elaboration of guidelines for a conservation proposal to understand the hotel's history and its transformations through the years, safeguarding the memory for future generations. In order to free *Hotel Amazonas* from hell, conservation actions must also be linked to public tourism policies, including in its agenda the rehabilitation of this meaningful heritage which is worthy of nothing less than a place in heaven.

Notes

- 1 Paulo Antunes Ribeiro was born in the city of Rio de Janeiro and graduated from the National School of Fine Arts in Rio de Janeiro in 1926. The architect is part of the first generation of modern architects in Brazil and he was strongly influenced by the work of Le Corbusier, mainly because he studied between 1928 and 1929 at the Institute of Urbanism of the University of Paris. The architect achieved a relative national and international prestige in the 1950s, having elaborated projects of diverse typologies (hotels, offices, hospitals, residences, banks, clubs and urban plans) and in several Brazilian cities.
- 2 Rita Cruz, *Política de turismo e território*, São Paulo, Contexto, 2000.
- 3 João Santos Filho, "O Turismo na Era Vargas e o Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda — DIP", *Cultur: Revista de Cultura e Turismo*, Vol. 02, 2008, 112.
- 4 Hugo, Segawa, *Arquiteturas no Brasil 1900–1990*. São Paulo, Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 2002.
- 5 Published in magazines: *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, 42–43, ago. 1952; *Habitat* 4, 1951, 68; *Arquitetura e Engenharia* 16, 36–7, mar./abr. 1951.
- 6 "The international projection of modern Brazilian architecture is due to the contributions of Roberto Burle Marx (1909–1994). The importance of the landscape architect to modern Brazilian architecture transcends the supposed subordination and complementation of the landscape design to the building. His large contribution to the artistic, architectural and urban culture places landscaping on a higher plan of importance, when it tries to establish a differentiated relationship between modern man and nature, insofar as the garden responds to a social function, which is based in hygiene, in education and in art" in Ricardo Paiva and Beatriz Diógenes, "Caminhos da Arquitetura Moderna em Fortaleza: a contribuição do paisagista Roberto Burle Marx", in 8^o Seminário *docomomo* Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, 2009, 2.
- 7 *Prudência Capitalização* was responsible for the construction of significant buildings throughout Brazil, such as: Prudência Building (1944–48) in São Paulo, by Rino Levi (1901–1965); the Jangada Building (1948) in Fortaleza, project by Sylvio Jaguaribe Ekman (1900–1978); Caramuru Building (1946) in Salvador, designed by Paulo Antunes Ribeiro. "In Manaus, the 'Hotel Ajuricaba', built in a very modern style, compatible with the tropical climate of the city ... All these commercial buildings, destined to house facilities of the company that,

in 1945, was proud of maintaining a service network comprising 19 branches, 20 auxiliary offices, and 1,045 branches (capitalization agents) spread throughout the country". Paulo Amador, *Capitalização. Uma história de Prosperidade*, São Paulo, Grudriara, 2002, 49.

- 8 He was director of Prudência Capitalização de São Paulo; director of *Banco Sul Americano do Brasil S/A*; vice-president of ItaiSca Real Estate Company of São Paulo; president of the Brazilian Spinning Company of São Paulo; vice-president of PANAM Advertising and Sales Promotion; president of the Society "Friends of Campos de Jordão". Available at: <http://www2.camara.sp.gov.br/projetos/1965/00/00/08/FY/000008FY6.PDF>.
- 9 Accessible from: <http://amordebica.blogspot.com.br/2011/02/nasce-banda-do-mandys-bar.html>.
- 10 Paulo Antunes Ribeiro was also responsible, in partnership with the architect from Bahia Diógenes Rebouças, for the design of the emblematic *Hotel da Bahia* (1947–1951), and it is possible to identify certain architectural similarities between both, for more about this see Nivaldo Andrade Júnior, *Arquitetura Moderna na Bahia, 1947–1951: uma história a contrapelo*, 2012.
- 11 Lauro Cavalcanti, *Quando o Brasil era moderno. Guia de arquitetura 1928–1960*, Rio de Janeiro, Aeroplano, 2001.
- 12 *Panair do Brasil* was created on October 17, 1930 by the powerful aviation company Pan American Airways Inc. of NYRBA do Brasil, an acronym for New York, Rio, Buenos Aires that began its activities in Brazil in 1927. Alejandra Saladino, "O fechamento da Panair do Brasil e a ascensão da VARIG", *Cantareira (UFF)*, Vol. 3, 2005.
- 13 Ibid.

References

- AMADOR, Paulo, *Capitalização. Uma história de Prosperidade*, São Paulo, Grudriara, 2002.
- ANDRADE JUNIOR, Nivaldo, *Arquitetura Moderna na Bahia, 1947–1951: uma história a contrapelo*. Tese (Doutorado em Arquitetura e Urbanismo) — Faculdade de Arquitetura e Urbanismo — Universidade Federal da Bahia, Salvador, 2012.
- CAVALCANTI, Lauro, *Quando o Brasil era moderno. Guia de arquitetura 1928–1960*, Rio de Janeiro, Aeroplano, 2001.
- CRUZ, Rita, *Política de turismo e território*, São Paulo, Contexto, 2000.
- Hotel Amazonas a Manaus, *L'Architecture d'Aujourd'hui*, Paris, n^o 42–43, 54, août 1952.
- PAIVA, Ricardo; DIÓGENES, Beatriz, "Caminhos da Arquitetura Moderna em Fortaleza: a contribuição do paisagista Roberto Burle Marx", in 8^o Seminário *docomomo* Brasil, Rio de Janeiro, 2009.
- SALADINO, Alejandra, "O fechamento da Panair do Brasil e a ascensão da VARIG", *Cantareira (UFF)*, v. 3, 2005, 1–20.
- SANTOS FILHO, João, "O Turismo na Era Vargas e o Departamento de Imprensa e Propaganda — DIP", *Cultur: Revista de Cultura e Turismo*, Vol. 02, 2008, 102–115.
- SEGAWA, Hugo, *Arquiteturas no Brasil 1900–1990*. São Paulo, Editora da Universidade de São Paulo, 2002.

Ricardo Alexandre Paiva

(b. Brazil, 1975) Architect (1997), master's degree (2005) and PhD (2011) from FAU-USP. Pos-doc at IST-UL. He is Associate Professor at the Architecture, Urbanism and Design Department at the Federal University of Ceará. He coordinates the LoCAU (Laboratory of Critics in Architecture, Urbanism and Urbanization). Among other publications, he is the organizer and author of chapters in the books *Turismo, Arquitetura e Cidade* and *Megaeventos e Intervenções urbanas*.