

Perfect seclusion

What the owners of under-the-radar Portuguese B&B Pensão Agrícola did next

A road junction is not the obvious choice of location for a new hotel, yet Rui Liberato de Sousa and Nuno Ramos saw something special in one particular intersection that they regularly passed near Tavira, a pretty town in Portugal's Algarve region. Bounded by three roads, this triangular plot contained a couple of handsome but run-down buildings dating back to 1917. These abandoned structures looked fairly unassuming, yet they had once been a local hotspot, home to a grocery store, post office and tavern. Liberato de Sousa and Ramos could see bags of potential.

With the help of architect Luís Costa Valente – co-founder of Lisbon studio Atelier Rua, and Liberato de Sousa's long-time friend – the pair have turned the site into a mini oasis of calm, hidden behind white walls. Simply named Hospedaria (Portuguese for "guesthouse") this five-room hotel combines the rustic charm of the region with the kind of effortless cool you're more likely to find in Lisbon or Porto.

Their achievement is more impressive given that Ramos is an ophthalmologist, Liberato de Sousa is an engineer, and until recently neither had any experience in the hospitality industry. That all changed when, five years ago, they opened Pensão Agrícola. What started out as a passion project quickly became a thriving business. Renowned for its casual style and atmosphere, this converted 1920s farmhouse is usually booked out for the entire summer.

Pensão Agrícola is more what you would expect of an Algarve retreat – quiet, secluded and surrounded by nothing but rural landscape.

Hospedaria's site, only a kilometre away, could not have been more different. "People said that we were crazy," says Ramos, "but we were in love with this plot; it was in very bad shape but it was charming and beautiful."

Rising to the challenge, Costa Valente came up with an ingenious solution. He realised that, by transforming the site into something akin to the riads of Morocco, with high walls around the outside and secluded gardens and patios in the centre, it was possible to protect guests from the sights and sounds of the road. At the same time, they could create a rich tapestry of different spaces within.

The two original buildings have been restored, creating a series of homely living and dining spaces as well as two guest rooms. Five new self-contained structures were then added to provide the remaining three rooms and service facilities. The irregular site layout means every room has at least one private patio, in addition to the larger courtyards. "You have lots of different layers, in different scales," explains Costa Valente. "It means you end up with little corners where people can find sanctuary."

Hospedaria's interiors are equally complex, striking a fine balance between minimalism and eclecticism. The architectural details stay true to the traditions of the area: for instance, ceilings are covered in the bamboo canes that grow in most rivers in this part of Portugal. But almost every surface is whitewashed, creating a clean backdrop to a diverse assortment of vintage furniture, mid-century lamps, rattan rugs and contemporary artworks.

Words
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Images
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Facing page
Lisbon architecture
studio Atelier
Rua created
Hospedaria on
an awkward
plot, hiding the
guesthouse behind
high white walls



“You have lots of different layers, in different scales. It means you end up with little corners where people can find sanctuary”



Above
The decor mixes the traditional and the minimal, with concrete floors and bamboo-cane ceilings

Facing page
One of three new guest rooms, constructed away from the original buildings; each has its own patio

