

Architectural Design and the Relationship Between Architecture and Landscape: Relevant Cases in Modern and Contemporary Portuguese Architecture

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ABSTRACT

Modern and contemporary Portuguese architecture tends to establish an intentional dynamic relationship between the building, the landscape, and the territory, with the latter constituting a central pillar of its architectural culture. However, the design strategies that give shape to this relationship remain scientifically under-systematized, even within the broader context of Mediterranean cultural landscapes. This article aims to analyze architectural practice based on an understanding of the design process and architectural design choices, taking into account intervention strategies and their implementation on-site, as well as their relationship with the landscape. Based on a selection of architectural works by five Portuguese architects of recognized merit—who demonstrate shared sensibilities in their approach to place and landscape—an integrated analysis was conducted that included the interpretation of drawings, photographs, and project documents. The results highlight common strategies for integration into the site, reinforcing a persistent cultural approach to designing with the landscape. The study contributes to architectural theory by systematizing place-oriented design principles relevant to contemporary practices in architecture and urban design.

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1. Introduction

The relationship between architecture and landscape has been widely recognized as a defining element of Portuguese architectural culture. However, despite the extensive theoretical literature on place, identities, and memory, little research has been conducted into how Portuguese architects operationalize this relationship during the design process, particularly through drawing as a tool for interpreting and constructing place. This gap becomes even more significant when viewed within the context of Mediterranean cultural landscapes, where the interaction between topography, climate, and building traditions shapes the ways in which people inhabit and build the territory.

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The landscape has always played a fundamental role in shaping local, regional, and national identity. Human beings, as an integral part of it, continually intervene and add utilitarian, symbolic, and artistic dimensions, transforming it over time, whilst also recording memories and defining identities. The landscape is in constant motion and transformation; "it is an expression of existence and a form of representation (...). It is not simply an expression of a single era, but a manifestation of all eras" (Carapinha, 2015, p. 14), which makes it complex. This relationship between human beings and the landscape, as well as the way in which they relate to it, is the result of an emotional connection, of feelings, which creates a bond with the place.

Just like the landscape, architectural works are also complex, stemming from an interpretation of the ways in which the landscape is used and occupied, giving rise to unique places where landscape and architecture complement each other harmoniously. This emotional connection to the landscape finds expression not only in contemporary architecture but also in architectural structures that shape the territory, notably the Renaissance-style suburban villas and the Portuguese "Quintas de Recreio".

These typologies, deeply rooted in Mediterranean culture, represent some of the earliest models in which architecture and landscape are integrated. The "Quintas de Recreio", in particular, embody "a spatial program for vacation living, characterized by an intentionally direct relationship with the landscape" and reveal "a rationalized organization of space, where leisure and production share the same territory" (Pires & Frutuoso, 2024:2). Their layout on terraces, the use of topography as a compositional structure, the presence of gardens, orchards, woodlands, and paths, and the interplay between house, water, vegetation, and views constitute a cultural legacy. This has profoundly shaped the way the relationship between architecture and place is conceived in Portugal.

Thus, contemporary Portuguese architecture does not emerge from a conceptual vacuum: it inherits and reinterprets principles that span centuries—adaptation to the terrain, continuity between interior and exterior, the emphasis on local materials, the creation of pathways, and the integration of the landscape as a structuring element. These principles, present in Portuguese "Quintas de Recreio" and Renaissance-style suburban villas, reappear in a transformed form in the works of architects Fernando Távora, Álvaro Siza Vieira, Eduardo Souto de Moura, João Lus Carrilho da Graça, and João Álvaro Rocha. This reveals a cultural continuity that fits within the broader context of Mediterranean landscapes.

Over the years, concepts such as *genius loci* (Norberg-Schulz), the phenomenology of space (J. Pallasmaa, M. Heidegger), critical regionalism (K. Frampton), and landscape urbanism (Corner, Waldheim) have been explored. These concepts and contributions are rarely discussed hastily with regard to Portuguese architectural practices. These practices exhibit a unique relationship with the territory, characterized by topographical adaptation, the selection of local materials, and the creation of spatial sequences that intensify the experience of the landscape. Thus, this study aims to provide a cross-sectional analysis that identifies common principles and recurring strategies among different generations of architects. It seeks to answer the question: What spatial, material, and conceptual strategies emerge from the selected case studies to articulate a specific cultural relationship between architecture, place, and landscape?

To this end, we analyze drawings, photographs, descriptive accounts, and project documents by five contemporary Portuguese architects—Fernando Távora, Álvaro Siza Vieira, Eduardo Souto de Moura, João Lus Carrilho da Graça, and João Álvaro Rocha—whose works highlight the strategies employed in the design process. These stem from an interpretation of and relationship with the site, demonstrating respect for nature—whether through layout and articulation or even through the use of materials. Through a comparative analysis, the study seeks to identify patterns of landscape integration, understand how design guides conceptual and constructive decisions, and situate these practices within the framework of Mediterranean architectural cultures.

This paper aims, on the one hand, to systematize place-oriented design principles that characterize contemporary Portuguese architecture. On the other hand, it proposes a comparative analysis that allows for an understanding of continuities, differences, and evolutions, offering relevant insights for contemporary practices in architecture and urban design.

The paper is organized as follows: the second section provides the theoretical framework; the third section describes the method and analytical framework adopted; the fourth section presents the results of the comparative analysis; the fifth section discusses the contributions and implications; and the final section summarizes the conclusions and suggests avenues for future research.

2. Methodology

Given that the creative process of architectural design can be based on the perspective that the landscape comprises a set of dimensions and memories created by human beings—whether through the interpretation of visible and invisible traces over time. It is possible to establish a sense of continuity between the past and the present when designing a particular space. This places the concept of the character of the place at the heart of the project's development.

An architectural project draws on both theoretical and practical aspects, which help to develop methods and references for shaping a concept. The drawings indicate design intentions, thoughts, and ideas, fundamental from the earliest sketches right through to the construction details. They are a representation of the gaze, a means of expression, and a means of conveying thought, which, according to Siza Vieira, "The project is to the architect as the character in a novel is to the author: it constantly surpasses him. One must not lose sight of it. The drawing pursues it. But the project is a character with many authors, and it becomes intelligent only when this is acknowledged; otherwise, it is obsessive and impertinent. The drawing is the desire for intelligence" (Siza, 2019, p. 21). A process in which the body participates in the construction of thought and ideas. Drawing thus becomes an extension of perception; it does not merely record what is seen in the present but also translates what the body has already experienced and recognizes, with memory being inseparable from this process. A synthesis between the architect's external and internal worlds.

Here, drawing is not merely a tool for representation but a means of reconstructing the experience—of re-inscribing on paper the way the body inhabits space, how light was perceived, and how the place was experienced.

The selected works go beyond the pursuit of their own ideal of landscape; they are not merely structures that sculpt the territory, but rather structures that organize a space, creating conditions for inhabiting it, defining its character and spatiality, without negating the character of that place. To this end, a qualitative, interpretive approach was adopted, centered on the comparative analysis of the case studies.

2.1. Selection of Architects and Case Studies

Five contemporary Portuguese architects—Fernando Távora, Álvaro Siza Vieira, Eduardo Souto de Moura, João Luís Carrilho da Graça, and João Álvaro Rocha—were selected due to the recognized significance of their work in exploring the relationship between architecture, place, and landscape. The selection was based on three criteria:

1. Consistency in their approach to the territory and contexts;
2. Availability of graphic and written documentation;
3. Representativeness within the landscape of contemporary Portuguese architecture.

The selected case studies correspond to emblematic works in which integration with the landscape constitutes a structuring element of the entire design process.

2.2. Sources and Materials Analyzed

The analysis focused primarily on drawings, plans, sections, perspectives, and sketches, as well as photographs of the construction site, descriptive accounts, texts by the authors, and supplementary documentation. These sources were treated as records that reveal design intentions, spatial decisions, and the relationships established with the site.

2.3. Comparative Analysis

A framework consisting of five dimensions was developed, drawn from the literature on landscape, place, and architectural design:

1. Strategies for topographic integration and adaptation—methods of site placement and relationship with the terrain;
2. Interior–exterior relationship—openings, transitions, and spatial sequences;
3. Materiality and its integration—use of natural materials, textures, and structural continuity;
4. Visual relationships—frames, views, orientation, and light;
5. Cultural identity and memory—cultural references, building traditions (craftsmanship), and interpretation of the territory.

These dimensions made it possible to structure a cross-cutting analysis of the cases, linking phenomenological and constructive aspects. The analysis took place in three stages: the first involved an individual review of each case study to identify relevant elements within each dimension; the second involved grouping recurring patterns among works and architects; and finally, a comparative synthesis highlighted convergences, differences, and developments.

The validity of the analysis was reinforced by cross-referencing different types of sources (drawings, photographs, and texts). The interpretive nature of the study, however, entails limitations inherent to qualitative analysis, namely reliance on available documentation and the inability to make statistical generalizations. Nevertheless, the consistency of the identified patterns supports conclusions relevant to the debate on architecture, landscape, and territory.

3. Case Studies

The analysis of case studies begins with the works of architects Fernando Távora and Álvaro Siza Vieira, focusing on the reinterpretation of their contemporary architectural concepts, which place great emphasis on place, tradition, and culture.

The Santa Maria da Feira Municipal Market (1953–1959) and the Dr. Ribeiro da Silva House (1956–1958) in Ofir, Esposende, are examples of projects by the architect Fernando Távora. Here, a fully modern understanding of space is evident, incorporating distinctive aspects of the landscape and local tradition. This heralds a new way of understanding architecture. It embraces various architectural influences, trends, and concerns, such as the functional and the organic, but primarily Portuguese vernacular architecture. The connection with the place and the landscape is clear.

In these architectural design projects, the relationship with the landscape is evident: the clean, simple lines do not detract from the view of the landscape. The choice of materials, the colors, and the way the house is integrated into its surroundings are all aspects that contribute to a design approach that works in harmony with the landscape.

A disciple of the architect Fernando Távora, the architect Alvaro Siza Vieira's career is also characterized by and evidenced through a focus on and relationship with nature and on integration and dialogue with the site and the landscape. He never loses sight of his commitment to modernity. For Siza, '(...) architecture has no meaning unless it relates to nature' (Siza, 2019, p.34).

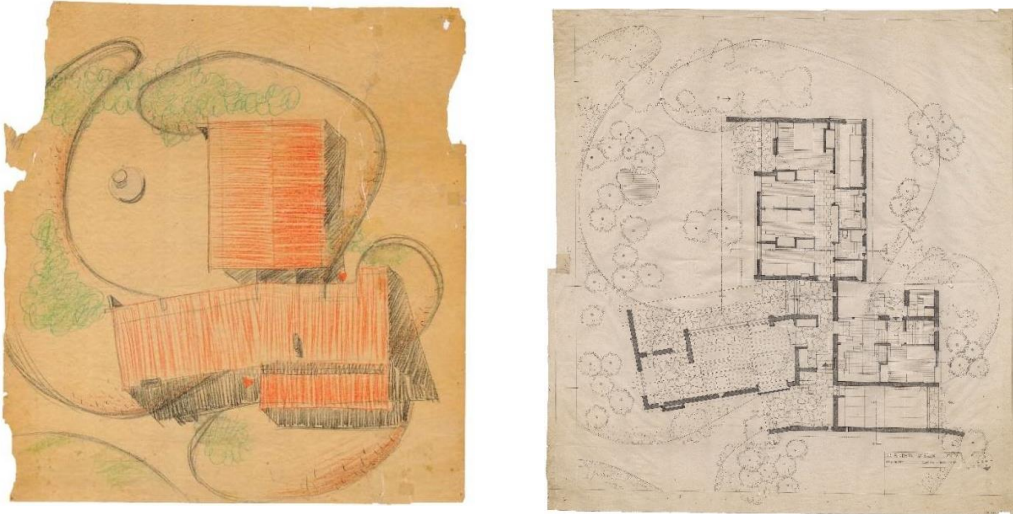


Figure 1. Dr Ribeiro da Silva House, Fernando Távora – drawings (roof plan and ground floor plan) showing the importance attached to the existing natural features. Source: Távora100 (2023)



Figure 2. Dr Ribeiro da Silva House, Fernando Távora – the house's relationship with the surrounding landscape. Source: Távora100 (2023)

The Boa Nova Tea House (1958–1963) in Leça da Palmeira is in harmony with its natural and cultural surroundings, blending various elements that straddle the rational and the organic. Respect for nature is evident; the rock is recognized as an integral part of the structure, the building being "like a great rock, partly clad, partly exposed, rising from the land, the sea, and the beach" (Távora, 1958, p.125). Designed to reward those who enjoy the space with carefully studied views from each level, all the way to the entrance. The project was influenced "(...) by the extreme attention paid to the existing and

tangible balance between nature, a chapel, and, a little further away, a lighthouse. It is no coincidence that the restaurant is low-rise: it could not tower over the chapel for sentimental reasons, but also because the building's design itself would not allow it. The main objective was, therefore, to allow the chapel to take precedence, without the restaurant becoming a building devoid of character: it was necessary to reconcile the building's autonomy with what already existed." (Siza, 2012, p.23).



Figure 3. Boa Nova Tea House, Álvaro Siza Vieira – a structure facing the beach.
Source: V. Frutuoso (2022)

The Piscinas de Marés [Tidal Pools] (1961–1966), on Leça beach, are situated to the south of the Tea House. As with the Tea House, the architect explores a profound sensitivity and a strict '(...) symbiotic relationship with the natural characteristics of the site, articulating a geometric layout with the irregularity of the rocky elements upon which they rest.' (Silva, 2011, p.33). The pools blend into the landscape, the building's presence being diluted as it sinks to the level of the walkway, thus not becoming a physical or visual obstacle in the landscape. The building is nothing more than the transition between the human scale and the immensity of the ocean.

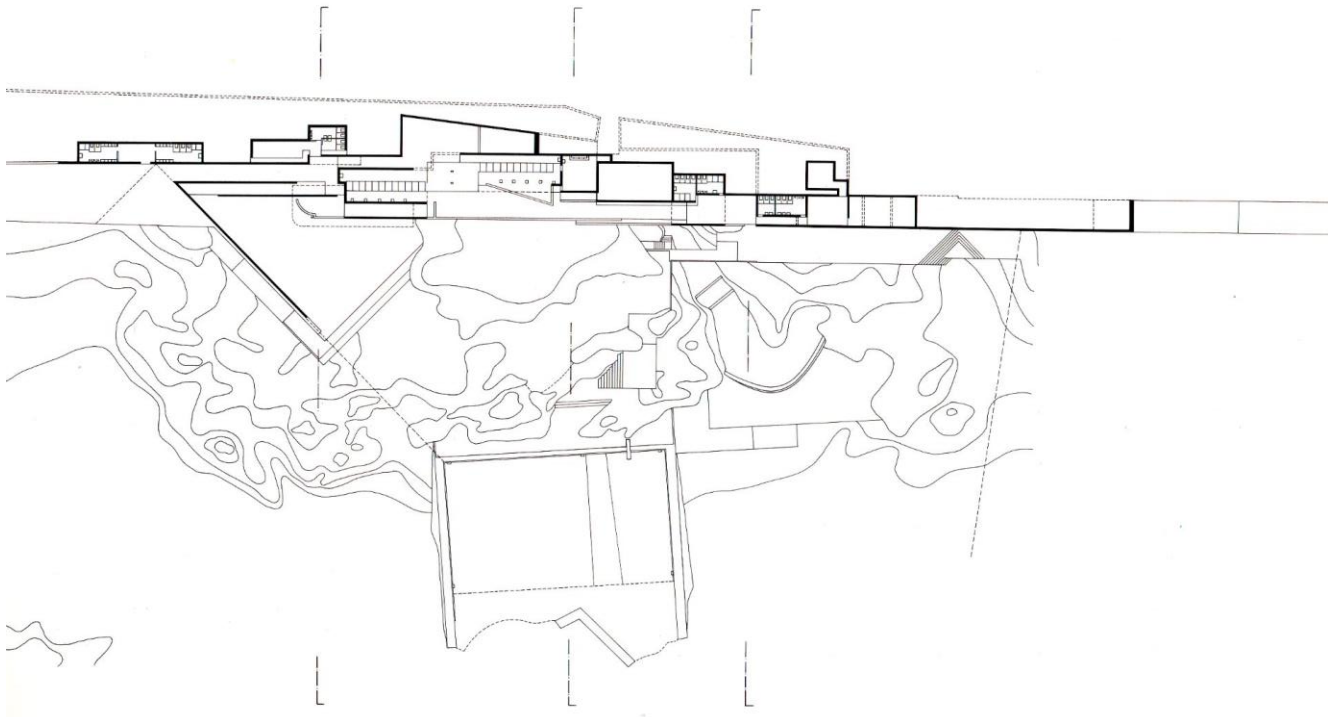


Figure 4. *Piscinas de Marés* [Tidal Pools], Álvaro Siza Vieira – floor plan.
Source: Fundación Docomomo Ibérico

Rooted in a deep appreciation of the landscape, this is a prime example of the balance and harmony achieved with the site, as well as of the proportions of the architecture. It serves as a model of cultural heritage and the continuity of the landscape. It was within this context of respect for and connection with the site that, in the 1980s, the architect Eduardo Souto de Moura began his own architectural projects.

For the Casa de Moledo (1991–1997) in Viana do Castelo, the starting point was the intention to integrate the house into the existing terraced landscape, making the most of the site's topography. As it was not possible to make use of the terraces due to their narrow width, he began designing based on the topographical reorganization and the granite walls; the site layout solution involved excavating the slope, removing some terraces, thereby creating a larger space with the necessary elevation for construction. In addition to adapting the house's construction to the site's characteristics, priority was also given to visual connections with the surrounding area.

The building is immersed in nature; the use of natural materials in its construction and its integration with the landscape create a sense of continuity in which there is virtually no distinction between inside and outside—only landscape.



Figure 5. Moledo House – Set in the Landscape. Source: Divisare

Another striking project designed by Souto de Moura, due to its seamless integration into the landscape, was the Braga Municipal Stadium (1997–2004), where he made use of the existing undulations in the terrain to ensure the landscape's continuity (Souto de Moura, 2008, p. 45). Situated on the site of a disused quarry, it was designed to blend harmoniously into the landscape, occupying the slope of Monte Crasto. The natural amphitheater formed by the slope was cleverly utilized, opening out onto the landscape.

Methodologically, the architect critically engages with the brief and the site; although the project is successful, the solution often involves reconstructing both. Drawing is his way of thinking, an essential working tool, not so much as a graphic exercise but as a study of proportions (Correia, 2016, pp. 10–11). "Portuguese cities seek out very rugged sites so that the very characteristics of the terrain can aid in the construction. Thus, it is the layout that must adapt to the topography, whilst the architecture, which is quite simple, finds itself in a difficult relationship with the terrain and its extraordinary character (...)" (Siza, 2012, p. 89).



Figure 6. Braga Municipal Stadium, Eduardo Souto de Moura – built on the site of a former quarry. Source: A. G. Pires (2004)

Another leading figure in the field of contemporary Portuguese architecture, João Luís Carrilho da Graça, "(...) embraces the legacy of the modern movement, not in a uniform, narrow, and dogmatic sense, but in its diverse expressions—critical, fragmentary, and open to new meanings—in the empirical process through which he seeks, for each project, its internal coherence in the essence of the respective program and in the construction of relationships with the site" (Byrne, 1995, p.8).



Figure 7. School of Media Studies, Lisbon, J. L. Carrilho da Graça – relationship with the landscape.
Source: A. G. Pires (2019)

Carrilho da Graça, whilst its design is strongly characterized by formal aesthetics, manages at the same time to demonstrate a deep sensitivity to the site and to break down barriers between popular and high culture. The architect regards the site as a starting point, for it is from the existing material that he begins his intervention, and it is within this that he constructs the guiding principles of the project's concept. Analyzing the particularities of the territory, "The simple observation of the imagined stark relief, revealed by the contour lines, allows us to create a space for contemplation. It allows us to think of the territory as an initial supporting skeletal structure (...)" (Graça, 2002, p.9), establishing a methodology of intervention based on reading the site, identifying its natural and built characteristics, and articulating a program and its functional and constructive singularities. These are organized according to an idea capable of intensifying the experience and relationship with the place (Byrne, 1995, p.8).

Among his early works, the Campo Maior Municipal Swimming Pools (1985–1990) exemplify the interplay between interior and exterior. Organized around a courtyard—a recurring feature in his work—a pergola defines the boundaries of the space, where one can both observe and be observed. "The buildings (...) stand out as landmarks in the landscape. As places of convergence or absorption, they invite contemplation. The belvedere becomes the object of contemplation in a duality that is now merely a remnant of the relationship that Palladian towns establish with the territory—simultaneously the dominant center and the structuring core of the territorial system." (Byrne, 1995, p. 10).

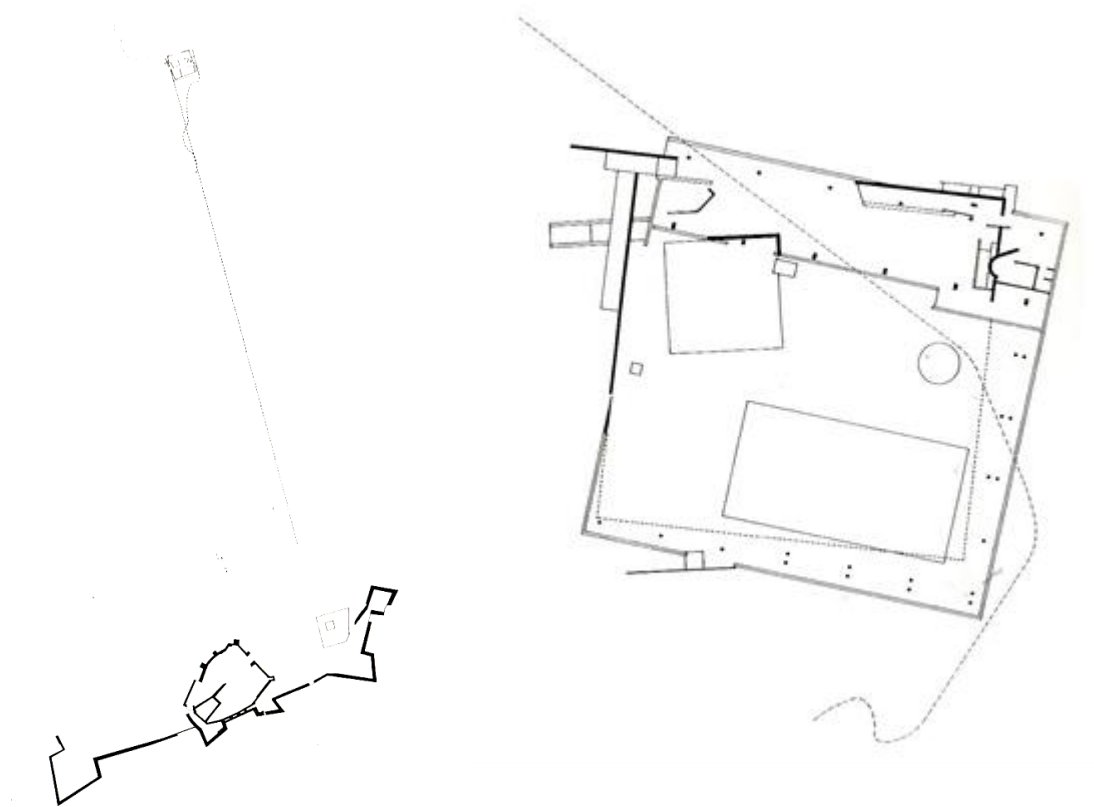


Figure 8. Campo Maior Swimming Pools, J. L. Carrilho da Graça – site plans and concept drawings.
Source: Graça (1995:26)

His reflections on the landscape are revealed in his designs: "The buildings (...) stand as landmarks in the landscape. Places of convergence or absorption invite contemplation. The belvedere becomes the object of contemplation in a duality that is now merely a remnant of the relationship that Palladian towns establish with the territory, simultaneously the dominant center and the structuring nucleus of the territorial system." (Byrne, 1995, p.10).

João Álvaro Rocha (1959–2014), another prominent contemporary architect, used drawing as a tool for conceptual research and as a fundamental element in the realization of his projects. Proof of this can be seen in his projects; one such example is the design and construction of Quinta da Gruta (1998–2001) in Castêlo da Maia, Maia. This site saw the estate's grounds adapted and expanded into an urban park, involving various interventions, from the renovation of the mansion to the construction of the environmental school and landscaped areas, "(...) as well as representing an attempt to preserve the perception of the extent of the agricultural land still in existence, it seeks to position itself within the defined strategy as a fundamental and indispensable agent in the transformation of the territory of which it forms part." (João Álvaro Rocha, Arquitectos, S.A., 2010).

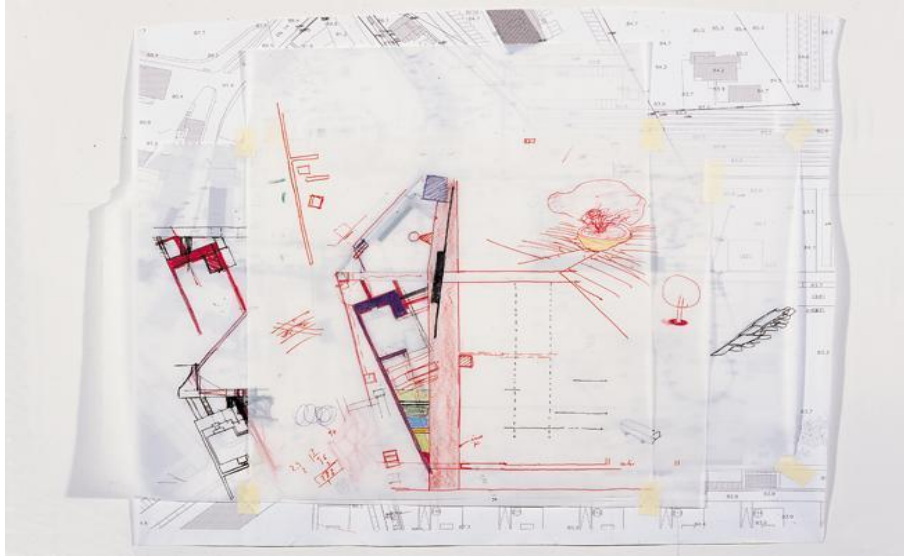


Figure 9. Quinta da Gruta, João Álvaro Rocha – conceptual drawings.

Source: João Álvaro Rocha, Arquitectos, S.A. (2010)

"To transform, in this case, means having the ability to look further back, to go back to the origin to find foundations and reasons, so that everything can be established in the wake of a memory. Memory is relevant here both as an affirmation of contemporaneity and as an unmistakable sign of the connection between past and present." (João Álvaro Rocha, Arquitectos, S.A., 2010).

4. Results

A comparative analysis of the case studies identified a set of strategies that characterize this relationship between architecture and landscape in the work of the five selected contemporary Portuguese architects. In all the cases analyzed, topography is not treated as a constraint but as an active element of the design. Topographical adaptation emerges as a cross-cutting principle that guides spatial and structural decisions.

The relationship between interior and exterior spaces is another common element, reinforcing the idea that architecture does not close in on itself; it goes beyond its interior and expands outward into the landscape.

The choice of natural materials reveals a shared concern for continuity between the building and the landscape. The creation of visual frames and pathways is central to all the works, which allows us to affirm that the landscape is an active element of the composition.

The memory of place emerges as a cross-cutting dimension, in which Portuguese cultural identity manifests itself through strategies that reconcile modernity and tradition.

This analysis reveals five common principles:

1. Topography as a generator of form and space;
2. Spatial continuity between interior and exterior;
3. Materiality as an extension of the landscape;
4. The creation of pathways and visual frames;

5. Memory and identity as the foundations of the project.

These principles shape an architectural culture that designs in harmony with the place, reinforcing the continuity between architecture, territory, and landscape. An analysis of the works of the five architects revealed common patterns and significant differences in the way each one articulates the relationship between architecture, place, and landscape. A comparative matrix is presented below:

Table 1. Table 1. Comparative matrix. Source: Authors, 2026

Analytical Dimension	Fernando Távora	Álvaro Siza Vieira	E. Souto de Moura	J. L. Carrilho da Graça	João Álvaro Rocha
1. Strategies for integration and topographical adaptation	- Integration with the existing landscape; - Preservation of existing natural features; - Site-specific layout.	- A layout that adapts to the irregularities of the terrain; - interaction with natural elements (e.g., rock) and the topography.	- Uses the topography as infrastructure; - cuts, slopes, and platforms as form-generating elements.	- Interpreting the landscape as a foundational structure - Morphology-guided planning.	- Coordination of elevations, routes, and platforms; - preservation of the existing landscape view.
2. Relationship between interior and exterior	- Direct connection to the outdoors through patios, balconies, and windows;	- Alternating spatial sequences; - Carefully designed views and openings.	- Horizontal planes and continuous materials that extend the living space outward.	- Courtyards and galleries as mediating devices.	- Pathways that gradually reveal the site; - Subtle transitions between interior and exterior.
3. Materiality and its integration	- Use of local materials while drawing on vernacular tradition;	- Materials that interact with the site, sometimes contrasting with it, sometimes blending into it.	- Use of stone and concrete as structural elements.	- Materiality that interacts with the interpretation of the territory.	- Materials associated with the site's memory and identity.
4. Visual relationships	- Framing and orientation that reinforce the connection to the place;	- The creation of views and pathways that enhance the experience of the landscape.	- Structures that reveal different depths within and toward the landscape.	- Territory used as a setting and a framework for contemplation.	- Pathways that reveal the site in a sequential and sensory way.
5. Cultural identity and memory	- Reinterpretation of vernacular tradition.	- Cultural continuity through contemporary design elements rooted in the site.	- The permanence and transformation of the built landscape.	- Territory as a historical and cultural framework.	- Memory as the foundation of the contemporary intervention.

5. Discussion

The results confirm that the relationship between architecture and landscape in Portugal has historically been shaped by a particular sensitivity to place. This sensitivity manifests itself both in the interpretation of the territory's natural and cultural conditions and in the way architects translate that interpretation into their designs, seeking continuity, respect, and dialogue with the landscape and the place.

This exercise allows us to deepen the dialogue with international literature and situate these practices within the broader context of Mediterranean cultural landscapes, where topography, climate, and building traditions have historically shaped ways of living.

The analysis confirms, first and foremost, the centrality of place as the foundation of the project, in line with the phenomenology of Norberg-Schulz (1984), for whom the *genius loci* emerges from the interaction between built form, memory, and experience. This relationship is clearly evident in Fernando Távora's Casa de Ofir, where the site layout respects the existing vegetation and the building's volume adapts to the topography, revealing a sensitive interpretation of the site. Similarly, in the Boa Nova Tea House, architect Siza Vieira shapes the building around the rocky outcrop, allowing the architecture to become an extension of the landscape. These examples demonstrate how design functions as a tool for interpreting the territory, as advocated by architect Siza Vieira (2019), who views the act of designing as a way of thinking and of building relationships with the place.

Topographic adaptation, identified as one of the cross-cutting principles, takes on different forms among architects. At the Braga Municipal Stadium, architect Souto de Moura transforms the former quarry into a monumental structure, using cuts and slopes as architectural elements. This approach contrasts with that of architect Carrilho da Graça, whose School of Media Studies is designed as a volume that interacts with the slope through platforms and horizontal planes, revealing a more abstract interpretation of the terrain. At Quinta da Gruta, architect João Álvaro Rocha demonstrates a simultaneous focus on both the memory and the transformation of the site. These differences show that, although topography is a defining element, each architect has their own interpretation, guided by their own logic.

Another significant finding concerns the spatial continuity between interior and exterior, which is consistently evident in the work of the five architects discussed here. In the works of architect Fernando Távora, courtyards and balconies extend the living space outward, as seen in the Santa Maria da Feira Market. In the work of architect Siza Vieira, the sequence of spaces in the Casa de Chá—from the narrow entrance to the opening overlooking the sea—creates a spatial narrative that intensifies the experience of the landscape. Architect Souto de Moura employs continuous horizontal planes, as in the Casa de Moledo, where the interior extends to the terrace and the terrace to the valley, dissolving boundaries. Architect Carrilho da Graça uses courtyards and galleries as mediating devices, while João Álvaro Rocha constructs pathways that gradually reveal the site, alternating moments of compression and expansion. This spatial continuity, combined with the temperate climate and the Mediterranean tradition of outdoor living, reinforces the relevance of situating these practices within the context of the cultural landscapes of southern Europe.

Materiality also serves as a tool for integrating into the landscape. Architect Fernando Távora uses local materials that engage with vernacular tradition, while architect Siza Vieira combines wood, stone, and concrete to establish subtle connections with the site. Architect Souto de Moura explores the rough texture of stone and the neutrality of concrete as extensions of the topography—as seen in the Braga Stadium. Architect Carrilho da Graça, on the other hand, uses materials that reinforce the geometric reading of the territory, and architect João Álvaro Rocha articulates materials that evoke the memory of the place. This diversity confirms Frampton's (1983) idea that critical regionalism is not limited to the reproduction of tradition but rather to its critical reinterpretation through materiality. In this sense, these architects do not seek a nostalgic return to the vernacular but rather construct a modernity rooted in the territory, where technique—understood as a material and constructive expression—plays a central role between local culture and contemporary language. Examples such as the Boa Nova Tea House, where concrete conforms to the rocks, or the Moledo House, where stone extends the topography, demonstrate how materiality becomes a vehicle for cultural and landscape continuity. Thus, Portuguese architecture adopts a stance of critical resistance, integrating climate, territory, and tradition without relinquishing the formal and conceptual autonomy of modernity.

Visual relationships are another fundamental element. At the Casa de Chá, architect Siza Vieira creates carefully studied views that frame the sea; at the Piscinas de Marés, the horizon line becomes a compositional element; with architect Souto de Moura, the cross-sections of the Braga Stadium reveal

different depths of the landscape; with architect Carrilho da Graça, the territory is treated as a backdrop; and, with architect João Álvaro Rocha, the pathways reveal the site in a sequential and sensory manner. These examples show that the landscape is not merely a backdrop but an active element of the project.

Finally, memory and identity emerge as defining dimensions. Architect Fernando Távora reinterprets vernacular tradition; architect Siza Vieira articulates modernity and cultural continuity; architect Souto de Moura explores the permanence and transformation of the built landscape; architect Carrilho da Graça draws on a historical reading of the territory; and architect João Álvaro Rocha integrates memory and contemporaneity as driving forces of the project. This diversity confirms that Portuguese architecture designs with the landscape, rather than over it, articulating tradition and modernity.

In summary, the results reveal that, although significant differences exist, there is a shared culture of place-oriented design that is linked to broader Mediterranean practices. They demonstrate how essential it is to understand the territory and the dynamics intrinsic to the space, with the concepts of landscape and nature in Portuguese culture being an integral part of the process. This culture values topography, spatial continuity, natural materiality, the creation of pathways, and memory as the fundamental foundations of design. These principles offer relevant insights for contemporary practice, suggesting that sustainability can be understood as continuity with the territory and not merely as technology.

6. Conclusions

This study identified a set of principles that characterize the relationship between architecture and place, as well as the landscape, in contemporary Portuguese architectural culture. A comparative analysis of the five selected architects demonstrated that, despite their differences, there is a common approach to designing in harmony with the site, integrating topography, materials, pathways, and memory as the foundations of the design process. This approach confirms the continuity of a tradition in Portuguese architectural culture, whose origins can be traced back to the Renaissance-style suburban villas and “Quintas de Recreio”. The relationship between architecture, gardens, territory, and landscape was already established as a defining element.

The research question—What spatial, material, and conceptual strategies emerge from the selected case studies to articulate a specific cultural relationship between architecture, place, and landscape?—can be answered through the following five cross-cutting principles: (1) topography as a structure that generates form; (2) spatial continuity between interior and exterior; (3) materiality as an extension of the landscape; (4) the creation of pathways and visual frames; (5) memory and identity as the foundation of the project.

These principles reveal an architectural culture that values the interpretation of the territory and its continuity with the landscape, critically articulating tradition and modernity. A comparison of specific works—the Boa Nova Tea House, the Braga Municipal Stadium, the School of Media Studies, and Quinta da Gruta—shows that the landscape is treated as an active element of the project. Just as was the case with Renaissance-style suburban villas and recreational estates—spaces where architecture, gardens, water, vegetation, and the landscape came together in a unified composition—contemporary architects also critically reinterpret this heritage, adapting it to the languages, programs, and challenges of the present.

The findings contribute to architectural theory by systematizing place-oriented design strategies, offering a conceptual framework applicable to other Mediterranean regions where climate, topography, and building traditions play fundamental roles. For contemporary practice, the study reinforces the importance of drawing as a research tool and of landscape integration as an essential component of a sustainable and culturally rooted approach. A historical analysis of suburban villas and recreational

estates reinforces this perspective, demonstrating that landscape integration is not merely a contemporary concern but a persistent defining feature of Portuguese and Mediterranean architectural culture.

The study does, however, have limitations inherent to its qualitative nature: its reliance on available documentation, its focus on five architects, and the absence of interviews or direct observation. Future research could extend to other Mediterranean regions, explore participatory methodologies, or delve deeper into the role of drawing as a research method in architecture.

In summary, the study demonstrates that contemporary Portuguese architecture forges a unique relationship with the landscape, based on a sensitive reading of the territory, cultural continuity, and the capacity of drawing to transform a place. These contributions reinforce the importance of understanding architecture as a territorial and cultural practice, capable of generating new ways of inhabiting that are rooted in the landscape.

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Data availability statement

No new data were created or analysed in this study; all sources are cited within the article.

Ethics statements

Studies involving animal subjects: No animal studies are presented in this manuscript.

Studies involving human subjects: No human studies are presented in this manuscript.

Inclusion of identifiable human data: No potentially identifiable human images or data is presented in this study.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

Contribution to the Field statement

This research explores, from both theoretical and methodological perspectives, the relationship between architecture, place, and landscape in the Portuguese and Mediterranean contexts, systematizing place-oriented design principles. It demonstrates how different generations of architects construct cultural continuities through design, materiality, and the interpretation of the territory. An analysis of works by Fernando Távora, Álvaro Siza, Souto de Moura, Carrilho da Graça, and João Álvaro Rocha reveals cultural continuities that trace back to the Quintas de Recreio, the Renaissance-style suburban villas, and Mediterranean practices, where architecture, gardens, water, and topography interplay. Five common principles are identified: topographical adaptation, interior-exterior continuity, integrated materiality, pathways, visual frames, and memory as the basis of the design.

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