

FOLLY 02

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Nourishing the Soul. Cultivating the Land.

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Alto da Ajuda, in Lisbon, is home to what was for decades the most important house of the Portuguese royal family: the Palácio da Ajuda (Ajuda Palace). It's Jardim das Damas (Ladies' Garden), located to the north of the palace, reflects both the vicissitudes experienced by the built structure and the ever-changing desires of its inhabitants, with a cyclical alternation of uses and purposes observed throughout its existence.

The history of the irregular plot of land known as the Ladies' Garden could be recounted solely from the moment it crosses paths with that of the Ajuda Palace, a building that has remained almost perpetually unfinished as the result of a complex evolution of the project initiated by Manuel Caetano de Sousa (1738-1802) and significantly redesigned by architects José da Costa e Silva (1747–1819) and Francisco Xavier Fabri (1761–1817) in the transition from the 18th to the 19th century.¹

¹ Pinto, Ana Sofia, and Rocha Moreira, Marta. "The 18th Century Project of the Royal Palace of Ajuda: Two Architectural Drawings." *História: Revista da FLUP* 13, no. 1 (2023): 96–114. https://doi.org/10.21747/0871164X/hist13_1e2.

However, the history of this garden is not exhausted within the timeframe of the palace's existence, and to fully convey its richness, one must return to November 1st, 1755. On that Saturday, Lisbon witnessed the greatest tragedy in Portugal's recorded history, as it was struck by a powerful earthquake that triggered widespread fires and a tsunami. The Paço da Ribeira (Ribeira Palace), the principal residence of the crown, at the time under the leadership of King José (1714–1777), was destroyed. Driven by a newfound fear of enclosed spaces, the monarch took refuge in the Belém district, west of Lisbon, where the effects of the disaster had been less severe. There, more specifically on the hill of Ajuda – and following a period during which the king and his court lived in makeshift tents – a wooden palace was built, based on a design by the Italian architect Giovanni Carlo da Bibiena (1717–1760), which, owing to its temporary nature, came to be known as the Real Barraca (Royal Wooden Palace).²

² A literal translation of the term *Real Barraca* might suggest *Royal Stall*, *Royal Shed*, or even *Royal Hut* – a curious blend of regal comfort housed within a structure that, in essence, resembled an oversized tent. We, therefore, chose to use the term *Royal Wooden Palace* when referring to this temporary Portuguese royal house.

It was, then, the construction of this colossal yet ephemeral palace – itself destroyed by fire in November 1794, prompting the construction of the Ajuda Palace – that proved decisive in establishing the adjacent plot of land to the north. Thus began, in earnest, the story of the Ladies' Garden. The earliest known record of this garden – or at least of a design proposal for it – was found in the Torre do Tombo National Archive, and although undated, it was likely produced sometime during the lifespan of the Royal Wooden Palace, perhaps after 1784.³ The boundary of the enclosure encompassed what was intended to be an outdoor space where possibilities for leisure and cultivation coexisted harmoniously, connected to the palace by a suspended passage. The design outlined in this

drawing and its captions would come to shape what became known as the Jardim Novo das Senhoras (Ladies' New Garden) – a Baroque garden composed of boxwood beds with neatly manicured edges dotted with ponds, fountains and cascades, two types of orchard, bird cages, a grove, and a sowing plot – although its precise final configuration remains unknown.⁴

³ Information available at Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo, *Fundo da Casa Real*, cx. 3637, cx. 3641, cx. 3642, cx. 3643, cx. 3644. Abecassis, *Maria Isabel. A Real Barraca. A Residência na Ajuda dos Reis de Portugal após o Terramoto (1756-1794)*. [n.p.]: Tribuna da História – Edição de Livros e Revistas, Unipessoal Lda., 2009, 86.

⁴ Abecassis, *A Real Barraca*, 26.

The destruction of the wooden palace in the fire of 1794, the subsequent construction campaign initiated in 1795 to erect a new royal residence in stone, and the political upheaval that engulfed the country – culminated in the transfer of the Portuguese Royal Family and court to Brazil between late 1807 and 1821 – are likely to have prompted changes in the way the garden was appropriated. These shifts may have helped validate the layout depicted in a second drawing produced around 1827.^{5 6} According to this large-scale map, which portrays the entire city of Lisbon, the plot of land to the north of the new palace was divided into generous plots. Sparsely inhabited, and with its western and northern wings still largely incomplete, the palace had by then lost its connection to the once lush garden, which now served as a visual platform overlooking a monstrous construction site.⁷ Were the depicted plots intended for cultivation? Or were they simply the result of difficult years marked by neglect, disinterest, and economic constraint?

⁵ Dias, Gabriel. "Os primeiros projectos para o Palácio da Ajuda. O desenho e a realização de Manoel Caetano de Souza e imediatos seguidores." Paper presented at Encontro dos Alvores do Barroco à Agonia do Rococó, Fundação das Casas de Fronteira, Lisbon, 20-30 June 1994, 6.

⁶ This transfer was due largely to the climate of instability caused by the Peninsular War, which resulted in three invasions of Portugal by French troops: the first in November 1807, the second in March 1809, and the third in June 1810.

⁷ At the time, only the Infantas D. Isabel Maria (1801-1876) and D. Maria da Assunção (1805-1834), as well as Princess D. Maria Francisca Benedicta (1746-1829), were residing in the palace. Cândia, Francisco. *O Palácio Real da Ajuda*. [n.p.]: Instituto Português de Arqueologia, História e Etnografia, 1955, 200.

Fortunes appear to have changed around 1862, when King Luís (1838–1889), upon marrying Maria Pia of Savoy (1847–1911), decided to make the Ajuda Palace the official residence of the Royal Family in Lisbon.⁸ Though still unfinished, the royal household was infused with new life, ushering in a period of prosperity that would also extend to the northern garden. It was at this time that the garden of the now-vanished Royal Wooden Palace was rehabilitated under the name Ladies' Garden. As evidenced by a third drawing, dated 1869, the new layout shares certain conceptual affinities with the 18th century version, particularly in the geometric design of the plots, the suggested botanical diversity, and the use of water through the creation of three ponds and a cascade. At the north-western most point of the garden, one can also identify a belvedere, possibly built some years earlier. The connection between the Ladies' Garden and the palace appears to have shifted to a lower level, at the ground floor of the building, via two symmetrical straight flights of stairs. Although not especially convenient for those circulating on the palace's main floor, this lower access would have been ideal for transporting foodstuffs cultivated in the garden to the Royal Kitchen. Interestingly, around 1862, this same kitchen had been (rather precariously) installed at the north-western end of the palace, echoing the location of the principal cooking space in the former Royal Wooden Palace. This points to a clear intention, or perhaps even a necessity, to consolidate the link between a refined vegetable garden and the spaces dedicated to food

preparation. The second half of the 19th century and the early decades of the 20th century bear witness to the existence of several manuscripts that attest to this relationship.

⁸ Until then, it had been the *Palácio das Necessidades* (Palace of Necessidades), also located in the capital, that had served as the residence of their immediate predecessors.

In the first manuscript, belonging to the ‘Mordomia Particular de S. M. a Rainha D. Maria Pia’ (Queen Maria Pia’s Private Stewardship), a careful survey was carried out of the fruit tree species found in the Horta das Damas (Ladies’ Vegetable Garden): loquat, sour cherry, fig, and olive trees in the first plot of land on the outer side; apple, pear, apricot, lemon, tangerine, orange, and pomegranate trees in the upper plot; and loquat, quince trees, and vines along the Rampa do Mirante (Mirante Ramp), which provided access to the belvedere.⁹ In the second manuscript, kept in the same archive, a note is found possibly written by Giovanni Gerbi, gardener at the Real Giardino di Moncalieri (Royal Garden of Moncalieri), dated 29 August 1901. It is important to note that, so far from Turin and the Palace of Moncalieri – one of the several residences frequented by the House of Savoy – Queen Maria Pia was still receiving instructions from her native land.¹⁰

⁹ *Nota das árvores de fruto na horta do Jardim das Damas*. Author unknown, date unknown. APNA 4.1.2 (reference number not defined). Manuscript content accessed with the support of the Ceramics Curator at the Royal Palace of Ajuda, Dr. Cristina Neiva Correia.

¹⁰ *Instruções para a sementeira de diversos produtos hortícolas*. Presumed author Giovanni Gerbi, August 1901. APNA 4.2.1 (reference number not defined). Manuscript content accessed with the support of the Ceramics Curator at the Royal Palace of Ajuda, Dr. Cristina Neiva Correia. In this note, Giovanni gives instructions on the best way to cultivate lettuce and rocket, suggesting a salad in which the latter is included at a ratio of one to six: “Cutting lettuce is sown year-round, every eight days; in winter, in a very warm greenhouse; in summer, in any well-shaded greenhouse (...). When the salad reaches a height of three or four centimetres, it should be cut (...).”

¹¹ The Palace of Ajuda was classified as a National Monument by decree on 16 June 1910. *Diário do Governo*, no. 136, 23 June 1910.

¹² This suggestion was made in response to the need felt by the palace administrator at the time, Armando Porfírio Rodrigues, to decorate the building with plant species. Soares, Filipe. *O Palácio Nacional da Ajuda e a sua afirmação como museu* (1910–1981). PhD diss., Universidade Nova de Lisboa, 2016, 139.

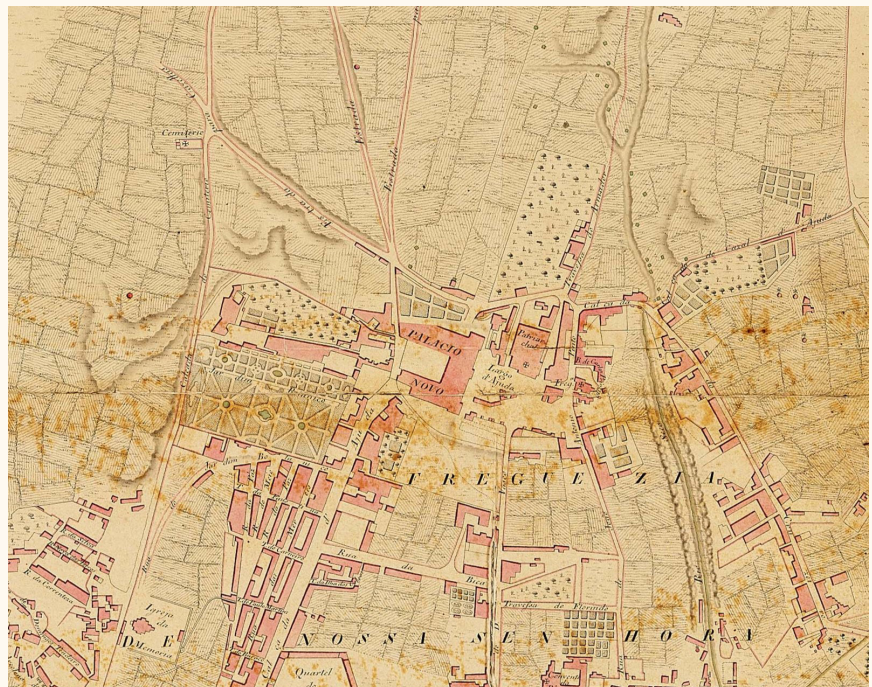
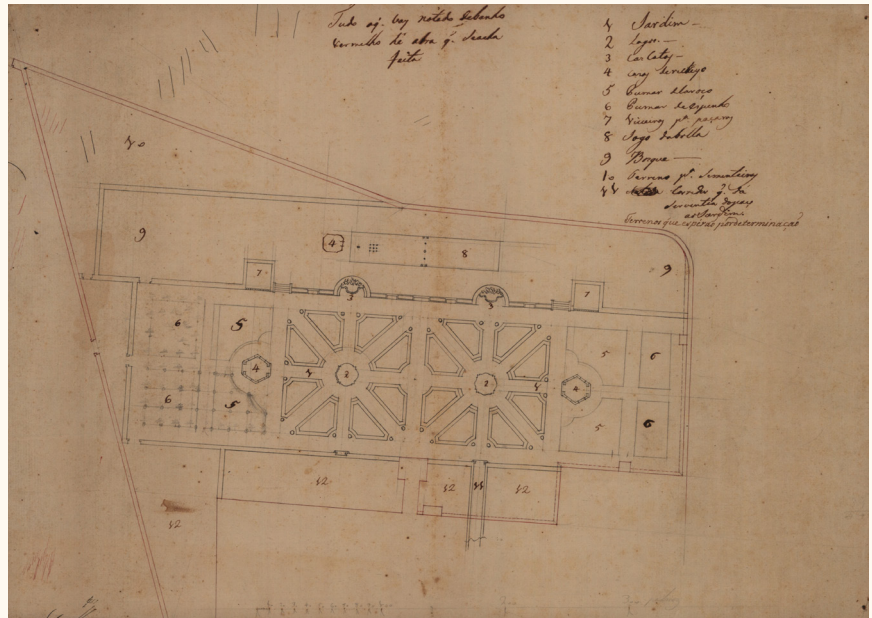
¹³ Property of Public Interest included within the designated area surrounding the National Palace of Ajuda, encompassing the Ladies’ Garden, Physics Hall, Bell Tower, Old Palace and Botanical Garden – Decree no. 33 587, *Diário do Governo*, 1st series, no. 63, 27 March 1944 / ZEP, Ordinance, *Diário do Governo*, 2nd series, no. 253, 29 October 1959.

¹⁴ *Estudo base para a urbanização de Encosta dos Montes Claros*. Raul Lino, 1955. [Typescript], SIPA, DGEMN: DSARH-010/125-0083/197, TXT.01424077.

¹⁵ *Complementamento do Palácio Nacional da Ajuda. Projecto 1.ª Fase*. Raul Lino, December 1955. [Typescript]. Arquivo da Família Raul Lino, Lisbon, Portugal. Armário B: Relatórios, Artigos e Pareceres 1951–1958 (4.ª vol: 617–840), 752B.

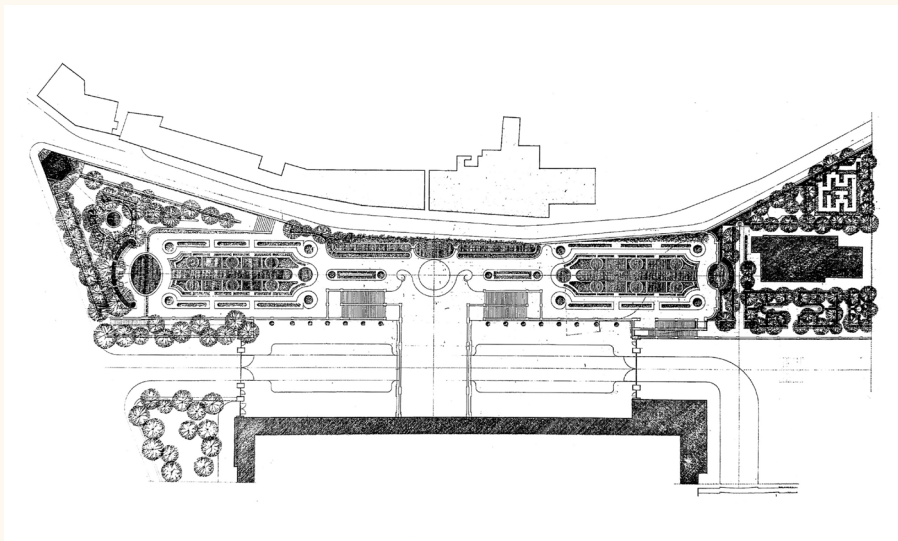
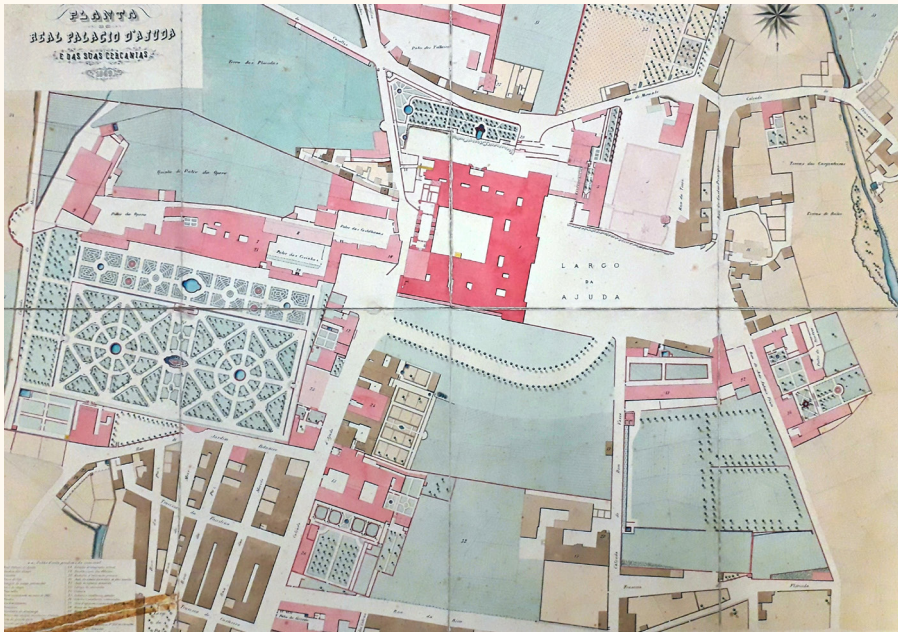
The rise of republican sentiment would ultimately lead to the fall of the Portuguese monarchy on 5 October 1910. From the Ajuda Palace – by then no longer inhabited by the king, who had moved to the *Palácio das Necessidades* (Palace of Necessidades) – Queen Maria Pia departed into exile in Italy. The royal palace was redesignated as a national palace and granted the status of a listed monument in that same year.¹¹ In the tumultuous years that followed, the most notable development in the history of the Ladies’ Garden – for which a transformation into a nursery for ornamental plants had, in the meantime, been proposed – took place between 1936 and the late 1950s, through joint efforts by the Câmara Municipal de Lisboa (Lisbon City Council) and the Direcção-Geral dos Edifícios e Monumentos Nacionais (Directorate-General for Buildings and National Monuments), culminating in an unrealised project by the architect Raul Lino (1879–1974) for the completion of the unfinished palace.^{12 13} A highly detailed plan, part of the set of drawings from this period, reveals the intention to rehabilitate the Ladies’ Garden through a ‘characteristically Portuguese landscaping scheme’, proposing the reinstatement of the connection between the platform and the palace’s main floor.¹⁴ To re-establish this connection was to restore the garden’s recreational character, opening it to the leisure of new occupants: Portuguese statesmen and their distinguished national and international guests. In the architect’s lucid words, this would be ‘the only possibility of one day hosting a “Garden Party”, of the kind in which the main reception rooms [would be] directly and levelly connected with the more secluded gardens’.¹⁵

Nothing unfolded as envisioned by the various government



Above, The Ladies' Garden adjoining the Royal Wooden Palace. Author unknown, presumed date between c. 1784 and 1794. (Planta relativa ao Palácio da Ajuda. Ministério do Reino, Coleção de Plantas do ex-A.H.M.F., cx. 5287, no. 65. PT/TT/MR/2/P-5287-65. 'Image courtesy of ANTT').

Below, Topographic Map of the City of Lisbon and the Belém District up to the Bom Sucesso Battery (detail). Officers of the Royal Corps of Engineers Luís António de Mello, Pedro Duarte Pereira, and João Damasceno da Cunha Pinto, c. 1827. 'Image courtesy of Portugal-Gabinete de Estudos Arqueológicos da Engenharia Militar/ Direção de Infraestruturas do Exército'. (PT-GEAEM/DIE-2305-2-16-22).



Above, Plan of the Royal Palace of Ajuda and its surroundings (photographed detail). J. A. d'Abreu Victal, 1869. (Desenho aguarelado relativo ao Palácio da Ajuda. Ministério do Reino, Coleção de Plantas do ex-A.H.M.F., cx. 5269, no. 39. PT/TT/MR/2/P-5269-39. 'Image courtesy of ANTT').

Below, Project for the Ladies' Garden, presumed authorship by Raul Lino, presumed date from the 1950s. 'Image courtesy of Museus e Monumentos de Portugal/SIPA'. (DES.00021123).

16 *Ofício a propósito da demolição da oficina de canteiro no Jardim das Damas do Palácio da Ajuda, Instituto Português do Património Cultural, 1988. SIPA, DGEMN: DSARH-010/125-0083/207, TXT.01424427.*

bodies involved. Scattered reports indicate that, during the first half of the 20th century, the Ladies' Garden served as a building site for the ongoing works on the still unfinished Ajuda Palace. Photographic records from 1966, taken by Analide Óscar, reveal that, by then, in addition to remaining incomplete, the palace stood alongside a Ladies' Garden fully transformed into intensively farmed land, apparently leased to palace staff. Its ponds and cascade had been repurposed as irrigation tanks, and the original Baroque geometry was entirely obscured by the rigorous parallelism of furrows carved for planting. And yet, in 1988, official documents confirm the need to dismantle yet another building site established there, this time to support the works at the Mosteiro dos Jerónimos (Jerónimos Monastery).¹⁶

This marked the beginning of the most recent chapter in the history of the Ladies' Garden. Once again, the aspiration for pleasurable leisure within an erudite setting reigned, now potentially offered to all, distinguished or anonymous, in the manner of a public garden, surviving in an urban territory that had meanwhile been filled without much order. In that year of 1988, or perhaps even as early as 1987, a multidisciplinary team comprising landscape architects Mário Fortes and Rita Gonçalves, architect Elsa Duarte, historians Graça Mendes Pinto and Francisco Louro, and archaeologists Carlos Jorge Ferreira and Ana Nunes, embarked on a heritage rescue operation grounded in the history and memory of the shapes of 1869. Amidst the rubble of the farmed land and through the interpretation of drawings and other documents, what was possible began to be rediscovered: the orthogonality of the layout, the geometric shapes of the box-hedged beds, the prominence of the belvedere, the centrality of the circular pond, the marine-themed decoration of fountains and cascades, the clarity of the two symmetrical staircases, the gallant scenes depicted on the tile panels, the linear precision of the balustrades and paths now reinforced with newly planted plane trees and magnolias. Also the gap between the garden and palace was consolidated, ignoring the enticing connection between the two at the noble floor level.

The works were carried out between 1994 and 1996. Thereafter, periods of neglect and vandalism, purging and hope followed, until effective public access was finally made possible with the opening of the Museu do Tesouro Real (Royal Treasure Museum) on 1 June 2022, an almost heroic act that marked the viable completion of the west wing of the Ajuda Palace, more than two hundred years after the start of its construction.

In a future almost enticingly uncertain, others may bear witness to the unfolding of new episodes in this undulating narrative: an earthquake (1775), a Royal Wooden Palace and its garden for leisure and cultivation (1756–1794), which



Above, Aerial view of the Ladies' Garden of the Royal Palace of Ajuda. Google Earth, imagery dated 18 February 2024. Accessed 21 May 2025.

Below, The Ladies' Garden of the Royal Palace of Ajuda. Analide Óscar, 1966. 'Image courtesy of Museus e Monumentos de Portugal/SIPA': (FOTO.00515798).

later took the form of generous plots (c.1827), a refined vegetable garden cultivated following Italian precepts (late 19th century), an almost ‘garden party’ with a distinctly Portuguese flair (1936–1959), a building site (first half of the 20th century), intensively farmed land (1960s), a building site once again (until 1988), and finally, in an official return to its origins, a reclaimed Baroque garden (1988–2025), until the next adventures and misadventures of the Ladies’ Garden.

Far from being an intermittent garden, the Ladies’ Garden reveals itself rather as a space of intermittent uses: appropriations that alternate and even overlap, within a timeline that, in a way, oscillates between celestial and earthly, spirit and body, *nourishing the soul* and *cultivating the land*. It is this near-perpetual oscillation that sets the tone for a potential critical rereading, one focused on the *continuum* of meanings and values of the Ladies’ Garden, and on its (in)constant and (un)faithful dialogue with the palatial architecture that casts its shadow over it.

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