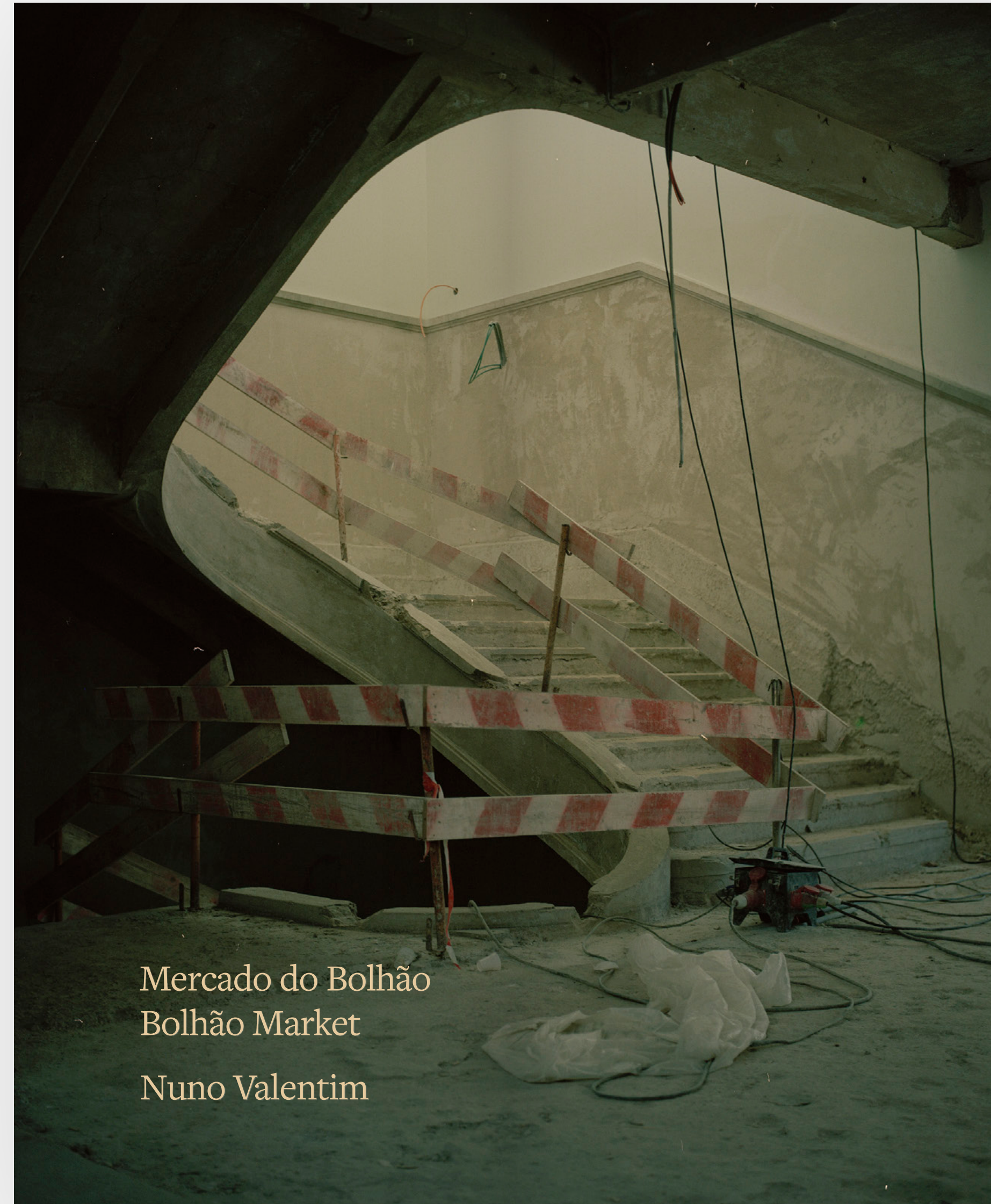




Mercado do Bolhão
Bolhão Market
Nuno Valentim





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Sim. O Luís Mendonça escolheu tons frios para as cortinas do interior, reforçando a ideia de mercado de frescos, enquanto os toldos do exterior têm uma paleta de cores quentes, vermelhos, ocre. Esta diferença na escolha de cores tem que ver com o lado mais asceta do interior, pintado de branco, por contraste com a cor mais quente e granítica do exterior.

Como é o cais de carga?

O cais de cargas e descargas tem cerca de 17 lugares, onde podem estacionar os vendedores e os clientes que tenham um protocolo de abastecimento com o Bolhão—e têm direito a ter um carimbo do Bolhão na montra do seu restaurante. É este espaço que permite que o Bolhão tenha um nível de higiene e de funcionalidade que um mercado hoje em dia tem de ter, até por força legal. Pelo túnel, entram os camiões DAF de 19 toneladas e os camiões do lixo de 25 toneladas. Os famosos resíduos M3 (vísceras animais), que têm de estar refrigerados, vêm cá para baixo e ficam condicionados numa câmara própria. Há ainda as câmaras frigoríficas, frio negativo, frio positivo, produção de gelo industrial, porque, por exemplo, as floristas têm aqui boxes para poderem guardar as flores que necessitam de frio. Podem pagar uma pequena taxa e utilizam estas infra-estruturas do mercado. É uma zona de apoio. Nesta zona, também existem agora dezenas de balneários com duches e cacifos e salas com a parte funcional, com centenas e centenas de contadores eléctricos, com água e comunicações—está a três metros da colunata de ferro fundido e foi possível porque foi escavado o miolo do terrado. O túnel logístico entra por baixo da Rua Formosa, contorna o edifício e vem acabar a meio do cais. Porque quando se entra a meio, a facilidade de arrumar programas nos topos é muito maior, e salvaguarda-se o acesso sul. A entrada central é sempre mais eficaz do que as entradas laterais.

Quanto tempo é que demorou a desenhar este projecto?

A primeira versão do projecto de execução foi cerca de dois anos. Seguiram-se dois anos de licenciamento, revisão de projecto, burocracias, concurso público; a seguir, quatro anos de obra. O processo total foi cerca de oito anos, e ainda continuamos a resolver questões pontuais que surgem de quando a quando.

Este é o Bolhão que imaginou no início do projecto?

É melhor do que eu alguma vez imaginei. Estou muito contente. A realidade é sempre melhor do que o projecto.

Nuno Valentim Interview

Nuno Miguel Borges

How well did you know Bolhão Market before the rehabilitation project?

I think everyone from Porto has a connection with Bolhão. While I was studying, and during my first few years of practice, my studio was in Rua do Bolhão. So I knew it well, and I often went to the market for lunch, to do some shopping, etc. The whole ambience was extremely powerful.

At the time, did you like the building as a piece of architecture?

At the time, as a young architect, I was a little indifferent to it. It was mainly the atmosphere in the market that appealed to me. I never attached much importance to the building. When I had to study the Bolhão project in depth, I was astonished to see how masterfully Correia da Silva had managed to bring unity to the block, the elevation and the streets, with such a steep slope running down Rua Sá da Bandeira.

What stands out about Correia da Silva’s project?

It’s remarkable how he managed to maintain the geometry, scale and rhythm, which on the one hand is very classical and beaux-arts, but on the other blends in nicely with the rhythm created by the façades of Porto’s bourgeois houses. This is particularly apparent in the surrounding streets, which were created when Bolhão was designed. There’s a unity there, an overarching urban force, and he managed to do this with that really steep slope in the street, connecting various access points and elevations. The way he organised the four access points is remarkable: at a higher level via Rua Fernandes Tomás, at a lower level via Rua Formosa, and at intermediate levels via Rua de Alexandre Braga and Rua Sá da Bandeira. When you study the building’s façade and section, you realise how difficult it is to get the elevations right, with the continuous variation in the floors and intermediate floors throughout the market. It’s extraordinary actually. I’m not going to say that I think it’s a beautifully constructed building, because I think that, halfway through the Bolhão process, Correia da Silva started paying more attention to the Porto City Hall building. So it’s a building with a certain harshness as regards its construction and tectonic choices: basically, it’s stone in the load-bearing walls, concrete in the floor slabs, and wood in the slate-lined roof (somewhat in keeping with the beaux-arts style of the time); all the façades are finished in mortar, so there are lots of decorative elements, but there are no large areas of granite visible. So that hardness can also be seen on the outside.

Then we discovered some really interesting things about the modifications that had been made to the building over the years. Originally, the building was extremely transparent. All the window frames, even on the upper level, had a permeability that was lost because of all the hammered glass that was added; it had a coherent relationship with the street, where all the shopfronts were in meticulously designed cast iron. The corrugated shutters subsequently covered up all the openings, and they practically disappeared (there were only two or three shops outside that had preserved the original arrangement). But on top of all this, there’s the extraordinary impact when you enter the market, whether at a higher or lower level, and see the uncovered inner square, which, despite its humble, austere design (it pales in comparison to the care afforded to the exterior), has an impact and scale all its own. The square, the actual market where people do their shopping, has the sky overhead framed by the top of the building, which is also beaux-arts in style, with its steeply sloping roofs and turrets, with the Rua Sá da Bandeira skyline and the angles of the modernist buildings still visible. It’s a very rare thing indeed and from the outset it seemed like something that should be left untouched. It’s a unique sensation to enter that centre of the block, into that big open square.

What state did you find the Bolhão Market building in?

The building was, as everyone knows, extremely dilapidated, and borderline unhealthy, unhygienic and uninhabitable for the very people using it. The conditions in which the market was operating were wholly unsustainable and undignified.

In terms of its structural elements, its primary and secondary structure, it was fine overall, but with localised problems. On the south side, the structure was subsiding, perhaps due to the nature of the terrain, which was marshy from the very beginning as we know, or possibly a certain stiffness on the north side that may have been caused by the metro. What’s certain is that there was some structural movement. Then there was a second level of degradation, which was related to usage or adaptation to usage, since there had been some big changes and transformations, and that’s where the problems began. Firstly, on the outside, where there were very few shop windows left with the original wrought iron solution, because everything had been distorted, with new shop windows, air conditioning units, urban infrastructure, discordant advertising, awnings in a thousand and one shapes, new floors and intermediate floors, external technical cabinets for anything and everything, telephone booths, and so on. The inside of the market had also been vastly altered compared to its original intention and in terms of what had been done with the central stalls designed by Teixeira Lopes. These changes came about because, from the beginning, these stalls proved wholly unsuitable for selling fresh produce. Interestingly, the stalls that survived and were well preserved had very specific uses: a café, a bakery, the olive lady, a flower shop and a pharmacy. Those who sold fresh produce ended up closing the original stalls and moving outside to the five streets that have shaped Bolhão’s commerce since its inception — because the stalls prevented an interior/exterior relationship, the possibility of the vendors moving between the inside and the outside. Later, we also began to realise that although the design of the central stalls was interesting and different from the rest of the market, the side stalls all had design flaws from the outset; it’s a little incomprehensible why they intersect the metal pilasters that support the Bolhão’s entire peripheral gallery. I’d go as far as to say it’s quite unacceptable given the care that António Correia da Silva put into the design of the building. They’re clearly the result of a need to increase the area, because Bolhão grew steadily in terms of the number of traders — there were between 300 and 400 in its heyday —, so much so that they had to build the concrete central walkway in the 1950s. Finally, the city council and the vendors were forced to cover the five interior shopping aisles with plastic and tarpaulins, because it must have been impossible in Porto’s climate, with its rain, to go shopping without these routes being covered, but it was done in a rather makeshift and anachronistic way.

What programme were you asked to implement when you were commissioned to rehabilitate Bolhão Market?

The programme I was asked for was a municipal fresh produce market, but with two major variations on the previous programmes. One was that it should remain uncovered: the city council didn’t agree with the need to completely cover the space. Then there was the other major difference, which had to do with parking: given that there was a car park nearby with a few hundred spaces, it didn’t make sense for Bolhão to have a public car park. These were the two big differences compared to the previous proposals, which also led to doubts about the need to build a basement...







