



Porto princes

After ten years designing luxurious interiors for Portugal's wealthy elite, inimitable duo Oitoemponto are still full of surprises
Photographer Carlos Cezanne. Writer Claudia Saraiva



'We do couture interiors for wealthy people,' says Artur Miranda (left, standing) candidly. He and his partner, Frenchman Jacques Bec (seated), set up the Porto-based Oitoemponto interiors practice (W*67) ten years ago. The pair are holding court at their showroom; among the samples of their favourite Donghia fabrics, massed Nicolas Aubagnac lamps and contemporary art, are pieces from their own label. United only by their quality and attention to detail, these reference everything from 1940s French furniture to Hollywood set designs. 'This is our basic grammar, our starting point,' says Bec. 'From there on, we try to surprise, to do something different every time.' Wallpaper* paid a visit to their best and boldest projects.

CASA 8

Casa 8 (opposite) is Miranda and Bec's own flat, tucked away in a modernist apartment building in central Porto. It's a sort of work in progress, where they experiment with ideas that are later adopted either for clients or for when, as frequently happens, they remodel their showroom. 'The showroom is all about making a strong, modern statement. Our flat is laid bare,' says Bec. The apartment's best feature, which is constantly updated, is the spacious living room (pictured). It has only two permanent elements: the black painted wooden floor, with white carpets (typical of the contrasts the pair employ), and what they refer to as 'the cocktail lamp': the huge table lamp, bought at a flea market in Paris, which seems to have peanut salvers stacked in its brass body.

POP

Pop (above) is a nightclub, created on the site of Porto's second oldest disco. The brief to offer lots of seating was challenging because of Pop's small size. Even so, the space features two distinct areas: the nightclub and a restaurant. The latter's design hinges on the contrast between a red lacquered ceiling and imitation white nappa leather on the chairs. In the nightclub, the same white nappa-like material covers seats and tables (pictured), while the black on black (glossy on matt) pattern on the walls turns greenish golden in the light from the clashing Regency wall lights. Most of the lighting is from below, Bec says, to help make the revellers look more beautiful. Pop, rua Padre Luís Cabral 1090, Porto, Portugal, tel: 351 22 618 39 59

INTERIORS



INTERIORS



CASA LISBOA

Tagged by Miranda and Bec as the most retro interior they have ever created, Casa Lisboa in Lisbon is nevertheless emblematic of the consultancy's approach. The white on white base is contrasted with lilacs, baby blues and water greens, in a house where no dark-wood furniture was allowed. Black, white and lilac flowers bloom from the giant plant in the living room (pictured), beside a photograph by Jean-Baptiste Huyh. Sensuality turns into kinkiness in Jonathan Adler's breast-infested table lamps in the dining room - where a wall was covered with smoked glass to give the impression of a folding screen. Reflected in the glass wall are the white Josef Frank-influenced chairs, which are made more luxurious by a silk rear cushion, while the front cushions are in cotton.

CASA TROFA

"Casa Trofa is about different textures and a really classic modern structure," Miranda explains. At this understated house, in Trofa, northern Portugal, Taupe Donghia silk covers the living room walls. In the bedroom (pictured), the black of the leather-tile floor is continued up the wall behind the bed to show off the key item in the room: a photograph by Graça Sarsfield that the clients fell in love with at the Oitoemponto showroom. The idea was to give the illusion that the image was as big as the wall. The bedroom is completed by two Nicolas Aubagnac table lamps. Casa Trofa, was originally commissioned by a young couple as their first marital home, and subsequently sold with everything in it.



INTERIORS

CASA NA FOZ

The pair call Casa na Foz (right) in Porto 'a penthouse in the classic American way'. A winding staircase is the centrepiece of this two-storey apartment, with white marble floors and white walls. Black walls, a recurrent device for the duo, were saved for cosier areas: the dining room and the TV niche of the living room. The basic furniture is made by Oitoemponto, but the owners also have a vast MoMA-like collection of furniture and art. Miranda and Bec added a customised Veronese chandelier over the dining table and a rare, very politically incorrect pair of elephant-paw stools, bought in a Paris auction, with lilac satin seats. These are placed by a white glossy couch to take advantage of the sea view. The bathroom (right) is a typical mix of lamp, art and Greece revisited.

RAFIA SHOWROOM

The oldest project in this selection, the Trofa showroom for Portuguese fashion label Ráfia (below) was designed in 1995. Nevertheless, it shares with today's Oitoemponto projects a few basic features: a horizontal focus to the display, to enhance the tallness of the space; the abuse of lamps; the oversized furniture; and the attention to detail - seen on the easy chairs' feet. Also evident is the willingness to surprise ('no one would imagine we'd put library easy chairs in a fashion showroom'), the eclecticism - there's everything from a curious chinoiserie low table to classic black chairs and modern lamps - and a self-levelled, black and red glossy concrete floor 'from which emerges the black and red furniture'.

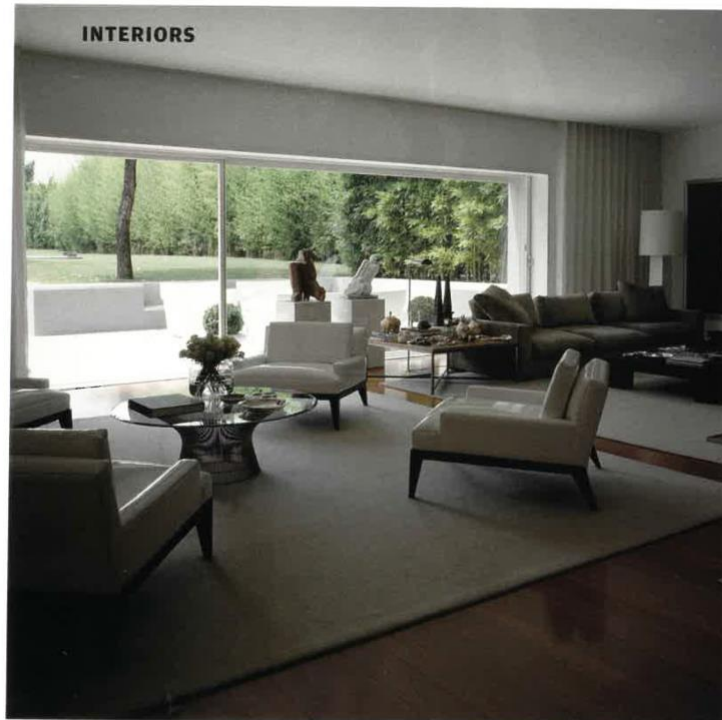


CASA DECOR

Casa Decor (below) started life as Oitoemponto's entry for a Portuguese interior design event. It became the only off-the-shelf interior the company has ever sold. The client wanted a copy of what he had seen at the event in a corner of his new house in Porto. The home that resulted from this unusual start continued the spirit behind the public presentation: 'to clash with what everybody else was doing, which at that time [2001] was chrome', say Bec and Miranda.



INTERIORS



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CASA OLD PORTO

Casa Old Porto (below) is a small duplex in Porto's historic centre. It represented an unusual task for Oitoemponto – to re-do an interior, rather than start something from scratch. The challenge, made more difficult by the practice's tendency to work with extra-large furniture, was to create the impression of space. The living room, which had to incorporate a dining area, was most problematic. Several shades of beige and grey were used to blur boundaries. Chairs around the dining table were replaced with large benches, which could be used in the living area as well. The tall windows were matched by three big picture frames, showcasing work by the client, a photographer. They were placed to create a rhythm, and purposely hung too low on the wall, to make the ivory ceiling appear a little higher. The icing on the cake was covering the fireplace, in-between the windows, with smoked mirror – contrasting with dark grey curtains that can be drawn over it.



CASA NA BOAVISTA

The ensemble of four white Oitoemponto easy chairs, varnished to imitate plastic, ranged around a Warren Platner low table, sums up Miranda and Bec's luxurious use of space at Casa na Boavista (top), in a wealthy Porto neighbourhood. An exquisite house by Francisco Vieira de Campos – now guarded by dogs named Fendi and Gucci – provided a suitably dramatic canvas. The pair then added a relaxing grass and bamboo garden. In a room giving on to this, they teamed red art with red Mies van der Rohe footstools (above), and an Eero Saarinen table with 'Empire' chairs and an extravagant crystal chandelier. To complete this rococo setting they added a diptych of Torben Christensen's paintings of orgasmic women.

