National Palace of Pena: Study of Queen Amélia now restored

- Restoration commemorates the 150th anniversary of Queen Amélia
- Reconstruction in keeping with the three historical eras of the Palace
- Restored furniture and works of art now on display

Sintra, 5th January 2016 – Parques de Sintra completed the restoration of the Study of Queen Amélia in the National Palace of Pena in December following total investment of around €35,000 spread over four years. The restoration project came to an end following profound study, restoration and reorganisation within the scope of ensuring the best possible reconstruction of the interiors in accordance with the history of the Palace and especially focusing on the period of Ferdinand II in order to obtain an equilibrium between the objects and the architectural context. The furniture and the decorative pieces on display correspondingly underwent restoration as did the mural painting. The flooring was subject to thorough cleaning that extended to include its stabilisation. This also involved repairs to the ceiling and the paving and the installation of a new electricity system.

The reorganisation of the study strives to convey a summary of three determinant periods for the National Palace of Pena: that of the residence of Ferdinand II and the Countess of Edla between around 1860 and 1890; the period from 1890 to 1910, which spans the occupation of these chambers by Queen Amélia; and, finally, the period of the First Republic, justified by the mural painting in this room dating to 1917.

The layout and scale of the former Study of Queen Amélia result from the conversion of the previous Manueline convent, built in 1511, and carried out by King Ferdinand II after 1839. The floor in question contained 14 cells according to a layout published by José Teixeira in 1986. During this transformation process, the room was restructured and divided by fake rib vaulted beams simulating a stone construction even while actually built in a plastered wooden structure.

The organisational design of the interior of the Study of Queen Amélia featured several challenges interrelated with the need to balance the three different periods and with some pieces having in the meanwhile gone missing.
On the one hand, the whereabouts of the original furniture, which was removed following the death of Ferdinand II, remains unknown. On the other hand, the furniture from the time of the monarchy did not combine with the mural painting, finished as recently as 1917. Thus, an interior design project was proposed that conjugated options over the reintroduction of historical objects into the room, alongside the others existing, in order to replace the missing originals.

Within the scope of this reorganisation of the study, we would highlight the restoration of the desk bearing the crest of the queen as well as the rosewood bookstands, a 19th century Hispano-Arabic timepiece, which had been transferred to the National Palace of Sintra in 1939 but was now restored to its original location. The queen’s drawing easel was not previously located in this room but which not only demonstrates the artistic activities of Amélia but also here completes the set.

The Countess of Edla also represents a fundamental influence on the history of this environment and emerges here reflected by a series of pieces that were kept in the study by Queen Amélia: an open and worked table and two Solomonic columns along with her Meissen porcelain collection.

One of the two carved cupboards that the Countess of Edla had in this room, recently acquired, is now on exhibition even while later, during the reign of Queen Amélia, this did not belong to this specific room.

The depiction of the Republic period features here primarily in the 1917 mural painting by Eugénio Cotrim. We do know that President Sidónio Pais invested in the National Palace of Pena, which he made recourse to for purposes of national tourism promotion and social events, celebrating Children’s Day here, for example.

The aforementioned mural painting was subject to intervention with the stabilisation of its surfaces, a profound cleaning removing all the remains of glue - utilised in an earlier project to re-cover the walls in cloth drapes -, the filling of cracks and missing pieces and as well as the repositioning of the decorative scheme, absent from a substantial part of the ceiling.

The works in question did not at any time imply interruptions to visitor access in keeping with the regular Parques de Sintra “Open for Works” policy that enables visitors to accompany and survey progress with such projects.
Functions of the Study of Queen Amélia

The room served a series of functions over the period of royal domestic occupation of the National Palace of Pena. On an invoice dated 1866 from Casa Barbosa e Costa, referring to purchases made by Ferdinand II, the study gets listed as the “Music Room”, whilst in the posthumous inventory for Ferdinand II (listing all the assets that constituted the legacy of the monarch at the time of his passing), drafted some two decades later, the title becomes the “Room of the Lady Countess”. As from 1890, both the functions and the title of the room changed with the latter becoming the “Working study of Queen Amélia”, the designation that remained in effect through to the mid-1980s when the space became known as the “Living Room of the Royal Family” and sometimes informally referred to as the “Intimate Room”.

In keeping with its diverse functions, the now Study of the Queen was also subject to a range of different configurations. A historical photograph by Carlos Relvas displays cloth drapes covering walls, vaults, ribs, the fireplace and also including all the seating furniture. Another photograph, from a 1905 publication, in turn, reveals a room given over to study and design with its walls finished in cloth or patterned wallpaper. The objects on display – silvers, weaponry and even the desk of Queen Amélia – enable the recognition of the study of the last Queen of Portugal in accordance with inventories drafted in 1897, 1907 and 1910. The current mural painting was completed in 1917 by Eugénio Cotrim according to his signature up in the left hand corner of the north wall, next to the entrance door. Little further is known about the context surrounding this mural painting, with the Republic already in full effect and at a time when the Palace was already open to the public.

According to the Director of the National Palace of Pena, the architect António Nunes Pereira, “the Study of Queen Amélia stands as a witness to the different generations that left their own respective legacies on the Palace whilst nevertheless maintaining the overriding figure of Queen Amélia, whose 150th anniversary was celebrated in 2015 and duly commemorated with this restoration project”.

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Cultural Landscape as a World Heritage site. The entity does not resort to the State Budget and the restoration and maintenance of the heritage in its care are ensured by the revenues resulting from sales at its ticket offices, stores, cafeterias and the rental of facilities for the hosting of events.

In 2014, the sites managed by PSML (the Park and National Palace of Pena, the National Palaces of Sintra and Queluz, the Chalet of the Countess of Edla, the Moorish Castle, the Palace and Gardens of Monserrate, the Convent of the Capuchos and the Portuguese School of Equestrian Art) welcomed approximately 1,928,000 visits, around 86% of whom were international in origin. In 2013, 2014 and 2015, PSML was distinguished with the World Travel Award for the “World's Leading Conservation Company”.

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