Refurbished National Palace of Sintra store and ticket office

Sintra, 10th August 2015 – This month saw the completion of the modernisation and functional re-organisation of the National Palace of Sintra ticket office and store designed to cope with the rise in visitor numbers and the changing trends in consumption patterns. The project, ongoing since the end of 2014, spanned the renovation of both the palace store and the ticket office as well as recovering the first floor that formerly served as the living quarters of the guards – since unused and run down – and its respective adaptation to a public access area and complementing the store – capitalising on an already existing connection between the two floors. The infrastructures installed in the refurbished zone were also revised to take into account the new layout of the rooms and their respective functional requirements and always striving to maximise energy efficiency.

The reorganisation of these areas constantly took into account the following principles:

- Repositioning the ticket office within a physical space large enough to cater for the forming of queues given that these had otherwise occasionally tended to stretch back out of the door;
- Guaranteeing access exclusively via one entrance with another serving for exiting the ticket office in order to free up public circulation;
- Repositioning the store on a site that does not interfere with the ticket office and correspondingly prioritising improvements to both circulation and functional standards;
- Implementing, on the upper floor, a new interactive area for the holding of workshops and presentations and open daily to the public without any ticket requirements for relaxation and consultation of the publications on sale in the store.

This new open space provides a vantage point for viewing the Palace Courtyard, the town of Sintra and its surrounding hills as well as the Moorish Castle and suitable for resting and passing time and therefore enhancing the overall visit experience.
The intervention project

This restructuring and refurbishment sought to leverage to the maximum the configuration of the various rooms and their respective interconnections within the scope of introducing the minimum possible number of changes to the building. On the ground floor, the project incorporated solutions that did alter the spatial layout even while these in the main involved the replacement of furniture with the new installations designed to be simple and practical. The ticket office was relocated to the site of the former store given this constituted the room with the largest capacity to accommodate the formation of queues while the store itself took over two inner rooms located on the route from the ticket office and the sanitary installations and the open space. The former ticket office was converted into an entrance room and purpose prepared to host two automatic ticket machines that thus enables a reduction in the waiting times that particularly impact during the peak season. The sanitary installations remained in their pre-existing location and with the same configuration but were subject to general improvements that ranged from the substitution of their cubicles and toilets to redecorating the walls and floor surfaces. This also involved the installation of baby changing facilities in both of the sanitary installations.

On the upper floor, the intervention project incorporated the reinforcement of the wooden flooring structures, which were nevertheless maintained, and the fitting of a new flooring identical to that existing on the lower floor due to the advanced state of degradation of the previously existing floor surface. The plaster wall finishings were subject to restoration and including the mural painting that was discovered beneath various layers of white plaster. Two divisions, which served no structural purpose, were also removed and thus endowing a broader spatial environment and better suited to hosting the new programming activities. The bathroom facility on this floor was also re-configured and upgraded and now accommodating a common area along with the two cubicles. The storage space was also restored and adapted to serve both as a catering support facility and a mini-warehouse.
This project falls within the context of the overall plan to improve visitor welcome conditions at the National Palace of Sintra that Parques de Sintra has been developing and implementing ever since being awarded the management of this monument in September 2012.

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Parques de Sintra - Monte da Lua, S.A. (PSML) is an entirely state owned company founded in 2000 in order to meet the challenges arising out of the UNESCO classification of the Sintra 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”.

The PSML shareholders are the General Directorate of the Treasury and Finance (representing the Portuguese state), the Portuguese Institute of Nature and Forestry Conservation, the Portuguese Tourism Board and Sintra Municipal Council.

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