

A pinnacle of artistic creativity

The new Palacio do Gelo – a Portuguese masterpiece

The actress and TV presenter Catarina Furtado is not only one of Portugal's top stars, but has now also become the face of Portugal's latest architectural and commercial masterpiece: The Palacio do Gelo, a subtle indicator of the significance this new shopping and entertainment centre holds for its creators, the Grupo Visabeira.

The city of Viseu, in Northern Portugal, is not only known for its wines and hospitality, but also as extremely popular with a number of Portuguese painters during the 16th and 18th century that is why she is called the town of the artists. Modern day has this city make a name for itself for an entirely different reason: The Palacio do Gelo, the new arts complex.

A record-breaking centre

The Palacio do Gelo was already quite unique and way ahead of its time when it first opened its doors in the 90's because of the way it combined sports, health, culture and entertainment. However, its recent extension and refurbishment has now seen it move up into a totally different order of dimensions – one that includes 164 shops, six cinemas, a large number of restaurants, fitness studios and an ice rink, as well as several swimming pools and gyms, all inside this huge shopping centre. The area inside the Palacio do Gelo dedicated to sports and leisure alone amounts to 20 000 m². This is topped only by the huge outside seating area of 9 000 m², which offers magnificent views of the Serra da Estrela and Serra da Caramulo mountains and represents just one of the building's many unique touches.

The ice rink, and the sports and leisure centre, are the largest in the country. The 5 000 m² restaurant area with its huge outside seating areas, the multiplex cinema and supermarket are also the largest of their kind in this region. One of the Palacio do Gelo's quirkiest new highlights must be its "minus5" bar, which is furnished entirely of ice in its interior and is one of a kind within Europe.

The owners of the building, the Grupo Visabeira, spent as much as 120 million Euros on the Palacio do Gelo's refurbishment and extension, which involved a total area of 175 000 m² distributed over 9 floors, and was implemented over the period from January 2005 to April 2008. Of particular interest with respect to this project is also that all of the people and companies involved in the refurbishment and extension – from those who drew up the first plans to those who marketed the finished complex – are part of the Grupo Visabeira.

Uniting features

One of the questions architects all over the world are constantly being faced with is how to integrate a building such as this with its surroundings. This is an issue in particular not only with respect to heavily built-up areas, but also those featuring a great number of historical buildings, such as inner cities.

The strategy pursued with the Palacio do Gelo, however, is rather unique in its character: Rather than compromising its external design in order to make it fit in with its surroundings, the architects of the Palacio do Gelo's opted to totally go the other way, and created an extremely modern and contemporary exterior, giving little allowance to its historical neighbours. The few allowances they did incorporate into the Palacio do Gelo's design in order to create a link to the historical buildings surrounding it comprised individual features such as the use of, aluminium composite panel in wood imitation.

The original plans for the Palacio do Gelo's exterior involved the use of real wood. However, this subsequently proved impractical. Reynobond® Wood Design panels not only presented a viable alternative to HPL panels, but also featured a range of advantages that finally moved the Palacio's architects to settle for Reynobond® Architecture panels as their chosen material for the centre's exterior cladding. These advantages include ease of installation, an extremely realistic wood-imitation surface and outstanding weather resistance.

To create highlights around both the entrance and roof, the architects chose Colonial Red Reynobond® Wood Design panels. The façade combined iridescent shade in Steel Violet from the Reynobond® Chameleon range together with Anodic Silver and Dark Titanium.

This is a particularly beautiful example of how different colours and surface textures can be used with extraordinary effect. These days, the importance and use of aluminium façades in the creation of highly original exteriors is constantly increasing. This is not only due to the simple fact that – with Reynobond® Architecture panels – one can create highly individual and unique exteriors, but also because the type of surfaces that can now be realistically imitated is nearly unlimited. Reynobond® Architecture is thus turning what used to be simply termed “aluminium panel exteriors” into a field of creative expression limited only by a designer's scope of imagination – hinting at a depth of potential whose full exploration is yet to come.

Glitter and Glitz

The Palacio do Gelo's formal opening in April 2008 was attended by a number of important persons, including Catarina Furtado. Since then, the huge Shopping and Leisure Centre has received a number of notable guests, such as Portugal's

national team's former trainer Mr. Scolari, and of course hundreds of thousands of visitors simply out to enjoy a meal, a drink, shopping, and the many leisure and sports activities the centre has on offer.

Facts in brief:

Project:	Palacio do Gelo, Viseu, Portugal
Owner:	Grupo Visabeira / Movidia
Architects:	Edivisa Arquitectura, Viseu
Construction company:	Edivisa, Empresa de Construções, as
Fabricator:	Inor Iberica
Surface:	175 000 m ²
Products:	11 000 m ² Reynobond® Wood Design (Colonial Red), Reynobond® Chameleon Colours (Steel Violet), Reynobond® Anodic Silver and Reynobond® Dark Titanium.

Alcoa Architectural Products in Merxheim / France is a subsidiary of ALCOA, the market leader in aluminium. Alcoa Architectural Products employs 97,000 in 34 different countries, and produces and sells products ranging from composite panels to household foil.

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