

Slant Garden Design Award 2011

Entry Number: 1440-6957-5948

This Project is located in Covelinhas, near Peso da Régua in the Douro Valley, North Portugal. This magnificent landscape was built through the interaction between man and Nature. The irregular topography of the valley and its succession of hills are enriched by layers of manmade terraces that look as if they represent the contours, creating the feeling of a giant maquette. The irregular topography is generated by the geology of the Douro Valley that alternates between shale and granite, which are responsible for many aspects that define the landscape character, from the vernacular architectural diversity to the distinctiveness of the wine produced on the terraces. That was the reason of the creation of this landscape and is still due to the profitable wine production that these terraces are maintained, supporting a developing touristic industry.

The house belongs to a middle age couple, without children, that have a profound passion for nature and everything related to the environment and the rural world. It was their expressed wish that the design of the house and garden resembles the vernacular textures and features of the remarkable Douro Landscape. Nevertheless, this manifestation should be linked to a contemporary design that answers to their everyday needs.

The project was developed around the main functions intended for the site, but with the greatest deal of respect for the cultural background and for the sustainable design principles regarding water management, vegetation and site grading balance. These functions are:

- a) The use of natural textures of the materials and vegetation to integrate the house in the landscape. The use of native vegetation also provides a water consumption advantage, since these plants are adapted to this climate, harsh and seasonal weather.
- b) A high degree of biodiversity connectivity.
- c) Energetic and water efficiency, including a roof garden capable of water storage and regulate the house temperature.
- d) A big area outdoors where the couple could entertain guests in dinner parties during the warm season.
- e) A cultivation area for the vegetable production or domestic consumption.
- f) Spaces with broad views for the far landscape and enclosed spaces for meditation and privacy.
- g) A Swimming pool integrated in the house design.

The high slope of the terrain makes site grading one of the most important aspects of the sustainability of the proposal. The functions required and their layout needed to be carefully thought to prevent large grading earthworks. To solve this problem, the main areas of the garden and the house are disposed at different heights, following the natural slope of the terrain, with the aid of contention walls and carefully positioned stairs and serpentine paths.

The layout of the garden was generated between two elements: the serpentine path, that links the irregular topography with the house orthogonal morphology and the flat areas; and the visual axis from the windows, including the main axis, that crosses the reception hall of the building.

The overall concept of the integration of these two visual vocabularies was founded in the balance and contrast of features as shade and light, dark shale and light granite, regular and irregular and lower and higher. Examples of this balance can be perceived in the swimming pool walls, that looks very straight from the main axis and sinuous from the lawn and in the access structure to the roof garden which begins as the continuation of the house metrics and develops as a twist on the serpentine-like shapes inspired in the terrace patterns of Douro.