PROFILE
EDUARDO SOUTO DE MOURA

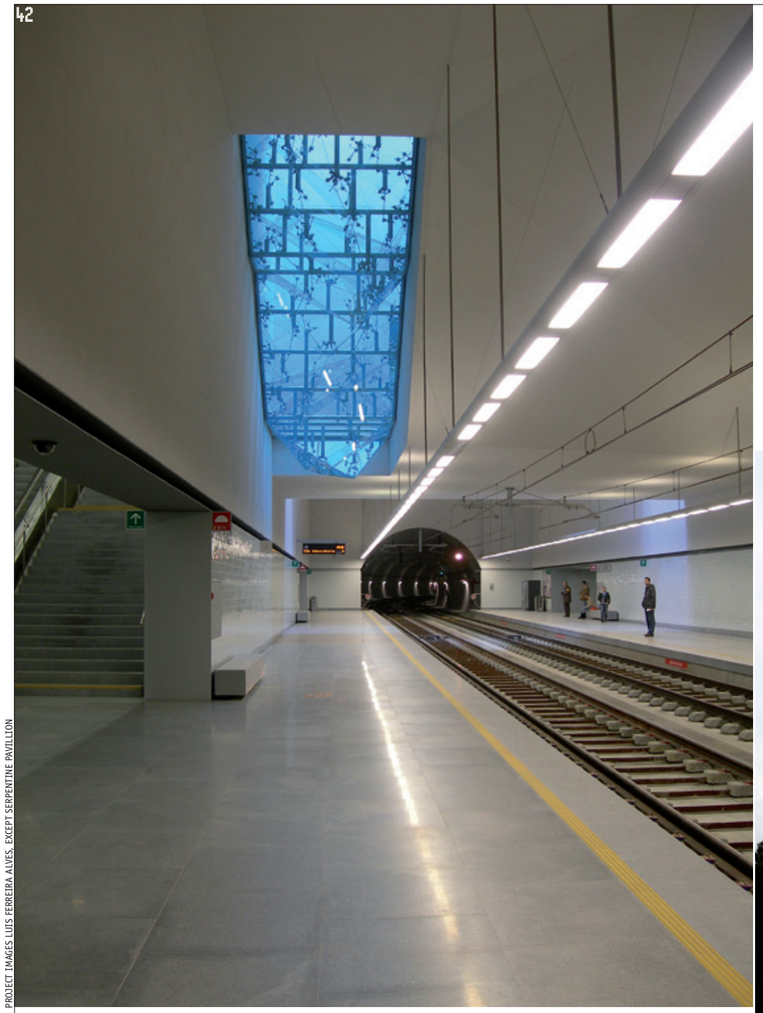
PORTUGUESE PRITZKER LAUREATE, **EDUARDO SOUTO DE MOURA**, DENIES HE IS A PURIST AND CALLS HIMSELF 'POSTMODERN USING THE LANGUAGE OF THE MODERNIST'. *HERBERT WRIGHT* FINDS THAT THE FORMER SCULPTURE STUDENT IS ALWAYS LEARNING, AND REMAINS A BELIEVER THAT 'ARCHITECTURE IS SOMETHING LINKED TO LIFE'

Eduardo Souto de Moura's Pritzker Prize in 2011 was Portugal's second after Alvaro Siza's in 1992. It's extraordinary for such a small country to win twice. More extraordinary still, the two laureates actually work in the same building. It's located behind a long wall that slopes up from a sleepy square beside the river Douro, towards some of the city of Porto's dodgier social housing estates. A door in it opens to stairs beneath a rusty pump-wheel, and above, a nondescript post-war block. It doesn't feel like a global epicentre of architectural inspiration.

Souta de Moura's meeting room, however, is full of inspiration and clues about the man. A Miles Davis CD set sits on a small stereo, and around the walls, photographs of industrial silos by Bernd and Hilla Becher lean against architectural plans, facing big images of the Flatiron and Mies van der Rohe. Enter the man himself, with the physique and beard of a tenor. He immediately surprises by speaking English, a language he is competent in but rarely deploys. His practice is busy with competition work, so he's tired. His manner suggests a wise but weary uncle.

'Portugal is a strange country because it is outside of Europe,' he declares, 'a little bit out of step.' As he was studying sculpture, then architecture, in the Seventies at Porto's School of Fine Arts, it was finally emerging from the right-wing Estado Novo dictatorship, which had obliged architects to design postmodern columns rather than piloti, which were deemed 'modernist, linked with socialism and communist ideas'. He worked for Siza and 'decided it was intelligent to take something of the ideas of Mies van der Rohe, because it was simple, clean, it was like fresh air against the postmodernism.' He started his own practice in 1980 and worked with stone, not because it was 'neo-vernacular' but 'because it was cheaper than concrete'. His first competition win, Porto's Casa des Artes (designed 1981 but finished 1991), »

TELMO FERREIRA



PROJECT IMAGES LUÍS FERREIRA ALVES, EXCEPT SERPENTINE PAVILLION

HE HAD BEEN IN TROUBLE OVER TREES BEFORE, WHEN STATION BOXES FOR THE PORTO METRO CALLED FOR SOME TO BE LOST. 'YOU CUT ONE TREE, IT'S IN THE NEWSPAPERS. YOU PUT 200 TREES IN A BOULEVARD AND NOBODY KNOWS,' HE OBSERVES

SYLVAIN DEEGI COURTESY SERPENTINE PAVILLION

includes a medieval-like stone wall facing a low modernist volume, in which copper and wood meet glass and steel. But local materials 'are finished... Chinese marble is cheaper than Portuguese marble'.

The Pritzker Jury said his early works were 'brave' to resist postmodernism, but he says: 'No, it's not true. I think that when I started with proposing minimalism, Mies van der Rohe, it was an idealogic comfort. I could work in a new culture with this grammar.' But it was the formal language of modernism rather than Corbusian ideals that held him. 'I like piloti!' he confesses. 'I think I am postmodern, using the language of the modernist.'

In 1994, while teaching at the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology (ETH), Souto de Moura encounterd the seminal minimalist Donald Judd (who refuted the label) in Zurich. He recognised Judd's multicoloured coat and overheard him talking about Siza and a visit to his Serralves museum in Porto. Souto de Moura introduced himself and Judd wrote a contact address in a book: Marfa, Texas, where he was amassing a vast collection of contemporary sculptures. 'Three weeks later, Judd was dead,' recalls Souto de Moura. 'So I said, the minimum is to go there... It was incredible, this land, these boxes by Judd in the landscape – something very strong. A lot of people say I have a link, some similarities, I don't know...'

One similarity could be in Souto de Moura's Burgo Tower in Porto, an office complex completed in 2006 that is actually two volumes, one a square-plan 20-storey tower and the other a three-storey long block, set in a plaza. The tower's facades alternate between solid and glass, the latter grids of metal beams with each floor horizontally divided into three. It chimes with Judd's stack sculptures, but Souto de Moura says that 'this is more influenced by Jacques Herzog than Donald Judd'. The effect he wanted was stacked pallets. The supremely rationalist tower, the plaza and a great colourful sculpture by Ângelo de Sousa recall Mies' Seagram Building and Alexander Calder sculpture. But, Souto de Moura wanted a sculpture to link the tower and lower volume, 'like a knee', and unlike Mies, he's happy if people clutter his plaza: 'I think that architecture is something linked with life, and I'm not a purist, saying "don't touch!"'

Clockwise from above left: Porto Metro; the 2005 Serpentine Pavilion, London; the Burgo Tower, Porto; Casa das Histórias Paula Rego, Cascais; La Pallerasa, Barcelona, designed with Terrados Arquitectos

When commissioned in 1991, the Burgo Tower was Souto de Moura's first multistorey design, and he is still learning. The Complejo La Pallaresa (2011), Barcelona, designed with Spanish practice Terradas Arquitectos, is three residential blocks with different orientations; the highest is 25 storeys. Reading Venturi helped him 'rediscover windows'.

Porto's often grey light is very different from that of the south. 'When I design something to the south or to the north, it is completely different', he says. 'The light is very strong and very hot in the south, I have to protect. Also, in the south I use much flatter materials, painted white or grey'.

His most celebrated southern work, the sublime Casa das Histórias Paula Rego (Blueprint, November 2009) in Cascais, near Lisbon, actually has a deep red exterior, to contrast with the surrounding trees. It has signature pyramid towers because otherwise trees, which he insisted were all retained, would have hidden the building. He had been in trouble about trees before, when he worked on the Porto Metro and station box excavations involved some loss of trees. If you cut one tree, it's in the newspapers,' he observes. 'If you put 200 trees in a boulevard, nobody knows.'

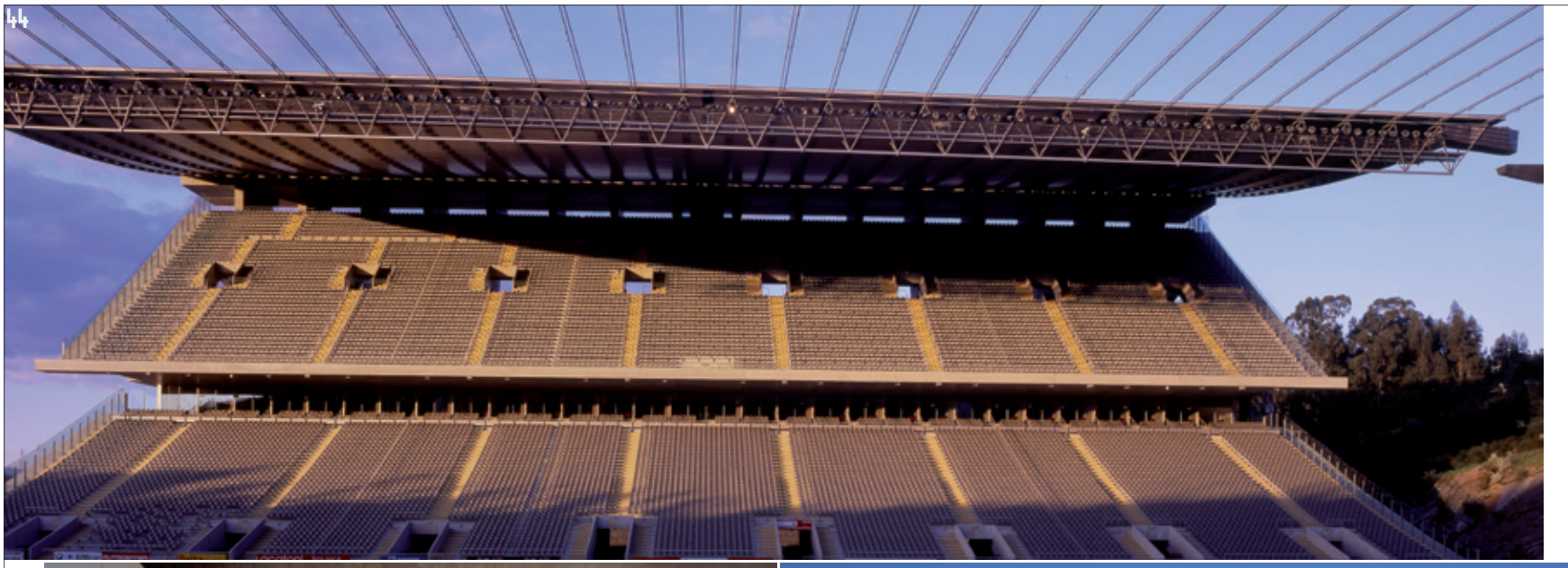
The London-based artist Rego wrote personally to Souto de Moura to design the Cascais gallery, because she had been impressed by his work on the 2005 Serpentine Pavilion, a collaboration with Siza and Cecil Balmond. Souto de Moura made sketches when he visited the London site and started sending them to Siza, who was too ill to travel at the time. 'There is a mad story with the evolution of the sketches,' he says. When Souto de Moura sent a concept drawing, Siza faxed back with big letters saying: 'The animal must walk.' That is the origin of the legs supporting the wooden structure, detaching it from the ground (evoking perhaps a turtle shell). It also makes it possible that 'when you have a beer at the bar, you can see Hyde Park'. That human functionality relates to 'the Le Corbusier thing that the house is a machine for living,' to which he adds mysteriously: 'The astronauts like to return home.'

Above: The artist Paula Rego commissioned the gallery that bears her name after seeing the architect's joint design for the Serpentine Pavilion

Asked what building he wishes to be most remembered for, Souto de Moura immediately names the Braga Stadium, built for the Euro 2004 soccer competition. In 2011 at Columbia University, New York, Souto de Moura told a story of its commission. The deputy mayor of Braga called to ask if he had Calatrava's number, to which he replied: 'Siza works above my office, I'll go ask him. They worked together with pavilion and railway station' [for Lisbon's Expo 98]. Apparently, Foster's proposal was too expensive and looked like Wembley Stadium, so Braga wanted Calatrava. Hearing he might be even more expensive, the deputy mayor reportedly asked: 'What about yourself, do you want to do it?'

It's a stadium of two halves, each a vast 15,000 capacity terrace, one built into the face of a disused quarry and the other formed of great sculptural fins, with a solid, cable-strung roof between them inspired by Siza's Portugal Pavilion but open along and above the field, revealing the adjacent city and forests. Souto de Moura says: 'The top of architecture is Greece for me, the Parthenon.' Braga was 'confirmation that there exists a continuity in architecture' here, not just typologically with Greek and Roman amphitheatres, but with 'the landscape, the natural material, the artificial material, the way they are linked and calibrated'.

Braga is the most complex structure Souto de Moura has designed, even more so than the Porto Metro, a 70km super-tram system below ground in the central city, which required him to divide the work up between several practices. He jokes that »



> **ARCHITECTURE SHOULD BE SIMPLE TO RECEIVE COMPLEXITY... YOU CANNOT DESIGN A UNIVERSAL ARCHITECTURE WITHOUT A CULTURE AND SITE AND MATERIALS. IT'S LOCAL AND UNIVERSAL**

Eduardo Souto de Moura *is giving the Royal Academy of Arts Annual Architecture Lecture with Blueprint on Monday 8 July. For more information and to book tickets, visit: www.royalacademy.org.uk/architecture*

the design rule book was like the Portuguese military manual that allowed any colour of gloves as long as they were white. What's striking in his Metro stations is the clarity and simplicity of the design, which used just five materials, including granite. 'Architecture should be simple to receive complexity,' he says. He laments that 'nowadays details are not designed, they're from a catalogue', but on some platforms, curvy metal lettering gives station names. The style detail, often used by Souto de Moura, was designed by Siza.

Souto de Moura's last project in Portugal was a hydro-electric plant, but it was cancelled because of UNESCO objections. He says that France is the 'last country in Europe where they pay', and he is working on a mixed social-private residential project there. But he has also been jetting to Colombia, and at the invitation of Arata Isozaki has proposed 120m-high towers for Zhengzhou in China, that conically expand with height around a hollow axis: 'a negative core of light'.

So, what is behind the mystery of Porto's Pritzker winners? Both Siza and Souto de Moura took modernism and found new directions with it, producing buildings with tranquility, clarity and a strong sense of materiality that springs from the local. To Souto de Moura, Siza is 'the key... who changed the architecture in Portugal'.

Crucially, explains Souto de Moura, good Lisbon architects worked on public projects, and were called in when 'something important' was needed in Porto. 'So', he continues, Porto's 'good architects were in the School of Fine Arts, from which architecture was only separated after the revolution, and it mixed painters and sculptors. The tradition was that these people went to Paris to study painters, sculpture, architecture... They introduce the avant-garde in the school.' Souto de Moura singles out one teacher, Fernando Távora, who knew Le Corbusier and attended CIAM meetings across Europe in the Fifties. It is he who stands behind Porto's extraordinary architectural impact. Távora died in 2005. Souto de Moura consulted with him on the Burgo Tower. From him, Siza and Alvar Aalto, he has learnt 'You cannot design a universal architecture without a culture and site and materials. It's local and universal.'

Despite the meeting room's 'fumadores' (smokers) notice, there's no whiff of tobacco. Souta de Moura, who used to get through two or three packs a day, was told late last year he didn't have long to live if he continued, and he quit. He muses that 'when God designed Earth, he rested on the seventh day. He forgot to do a lot of things...' Hopefully, we can now expect this architectural giant to tackle yet a few more of them. ■

Above: The Estádio Municipal de Braga, also known as the The Quarry, is Souto de Moura's favourite project